

JANE WONG

**WHEN YOU DIED
BEAR TRAP
THE CACTUS**

WHEN YOU DIED

Half a century later,
I check and recheck
an egg to make sure
it's still good. I press
my nose against the rotten
planet, cold as a half-sung
song. Halved, I am
more than your weight,
still. When you died,
where were your teeth?
Where was your breath?
Breathe on this window for me;
let me draw feathers on it.
Half a century later, geese tap
at my yard as if checking
for solid ground. Do you
think about twisting its fat
neck? Why do I think about
twisting its fat neck, about
that lowly puncture?
When you died, the guards
shouted industry and agriculture
into the air, their breath humid
enough to grow a mole.
When you died, you gulped
at the air, you slept with both
eyes open. You dreamt of
the fattening dough of the sky,
of geese singing in the future.
Loss sat in a living room
you didn't have. Loss settled in
like heavy whipping cream,

like a new kind of mud.
Over half a century later,
I buy lettuce from the grocery
store and wash nothing.
And yet, my teeth keep sharpening
for something to come.
I eat and eat and eat again.
Year after year, I leave eggs
by your grave, by ground
I can't seem to find.

BEAR TRAP

The seeds of a watermelon
freckle the yard. I swing

a broom into the air,
clearing the sky of dust.

What instruments are used
to open the throat and

speak? For years, I was mute
and mistaken for others.

My jaw: a bear trap good
enough for any wild man.

My mother rubs ginger
along my gums, burning

from the root of it all.
Say something now,

she demands. Where
will you go, who do

you love anyhow?

THE CACTUS

I've never planned on being weak.
(I thought of myself as a cactus,
flooded with sun and armor that
could strike an arm or eye. I know
how to hold my own arm, to hold
my breath when spirits pass, as they do,
trailing after a desert rat. Or at least
I thought such things.) I think of
your fear of losing me, I think
of a seal who can't make it back
to water, its stupid whistling cry
(the leaving, most of all, a shimmering
plague). Who would dare to admit it:
the buckling over, the cold bones
of some other man's hands,
the sleep for sleep's sake,
(for no reason but to wilt each spike,
my armor plucked, how vulgar –
a naked porcupine). Here, at this gutting
hour, I ask myself: what have you done?
Do you even know? I know I am not
a sight to see. (Even deer move around
me, not looking.) Plums from a tree
fall and hit me straight on the head
(the deer keep on not looking).
That wobble, that wreck: I have
tried again. I let down my hair.
I lugged out my terror. The exhaustion,
ad infinitum: throw everything you
know into the ocean (and watch
it come back to you, different).