

Nadra Mabrouk

Crooked

When I take my sister down
to see the Nile in December, she will close
her hands, clench her fingers, whisper
her closed breath down onto her wrists
in the air billowing through the hour.

And there, I will hold her the way only
an older sibling can,
want to push her into it : slowly
whispering something like *don't look back,*
you are here,
remembering our mother in the bathroom,
pearl-mouthed, separating her own thinning hair
into sections for the red dye,
(the color of flesh, a brain split in half)
say while her gloved hands dug into her bald spot,
when someone is bipolar
it means a part of their brain is crooked.
Her voice — a merciless blue current.
And my sister looked at me, gap in teeth,
not understanding, lopsided.

By the river, we will step on the soil like mesh,
thick pockets of fertility, unpacked bodies of plume thistles,
imagining still slender dead fish lining the riverbank
rolling back into the water when we accidentally kick them.



My hands will press on her upper arms,
Her thick hair will weigh less here, float, the torn
ends, split in twos and threes, will fall
away, set free from her scratched scalp.
And when the tilapia swim past her once heavy body,
moving together and never parting – one grey body,
fringed gold and pink at the tips,
her shriveling body : yellow, effusive, will spread out.
She will empty
into the Mediterranean — something larger
encompassing her body, her spine slightly curved,
her head : waterlogged.

