

A Prisoner's Negotiation

Patricia Graham

I.  
What the Missionary harvests  
does not affect anyone  
because he sees with  
eyes rolled back in his head.

II.  
He feeds on  
a limber Esther  
folded at the table with the silverware,  
a rehearsal of objects  
missing the knives  
she saved under their mattress  
and in his drawers  
she finds notes from Older Esther  
about the Missionary,

"He hasn't touched me in ten years,"  
as punishment.  
Offend, re-offend,  
guilt would be good  
for his patients  
and just

what we're doing in the lab  
is developing  
a matter of negotiation.

III.  
Esther's tongue became too big for his mouth,

when she said she wanted  
all of his acid to come up  
and erode his esophagus.

His reflexes  
unhinge from accumulation.  
Older Esther understood,  
  
cooperate.

IV.  
The sirens begin  
beyond her periphery.  
*Whose car should I stop in the night,*

as her instincts  
lead her to leave her mark,  
or her scent  
behind for better interests

so she saved residue  
for Older Esther to find  
in a house  
where gravity stows  
the elongated bodies  
into one bed.

V.  
I decided that I don't want to see  
The Missionary's hair turn gray.

His hand disappears  
and in the night Esther will find it  
*I've seen you*

*now walk home naked*  
dead leaves that skitter across  
the smell of fall,

I leave early enough to  
never witness  
his eyes resting for the  
first time, before his uprightness  
learned to lay  
horizontal and heavy.

VI.  
We have been moved from moving.

VII.  
Look to your mothers --  
a viewing as I find the fragment to be reoccurring.  
Older Esther fills me with finding stillness  
since lightness is no longer amusing to her,  
it was the first time I felt her warmth.

VIII.  
From the view of her balcony  
she coordinates time.  
When the storm hits, it disperses into  
a thin veil and a chill.

On this shiver,  
she's ready to leave  
off of whom she can no longer feed.  
Her luggage always packed,  
and since I don't have weight in my youth,  
there's a softness when  
she leaves me quietly.