

After she said, “You can work around me”

somehow he knew

*(his side)*

she kept peeling carrots like nothing had changed—

I kept soaping and rinsing the restaurant plates

like it was all the same,

but I had to stand so near her

to share the hot jetting water

I almost felt her inhale,

and she felt my exhales down her back

like warm waterfalls—

leaning on the deep sink

she’d asked me to work behind her,

my long arms encircling her

as though she were much smaller

and clasped in a tango only we could hear—

the fresh ribbons shooting down

and the dishes oozing suds

made the rhythm of her hands stammer—

her carrot grew wobbly,

her peeling stopped,

and my arms swam through air like honey

and forgot themselves all around her.

*(her side)*

then it was as if

my whole body

was standing by

a shower door

that had just opened

with cascading steam

flowing out

around me like

a subtler body,

touching all of me

down my sides,

then my back and front—

it was more than his warmth

breathing on me

or his torso almost

grazing me—

it was how he’d refrained

from touching me

that broke me open,

and somehow he knew—