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Sweet as Honey

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Lipstick Stains

ELISA KLAASSEN

I remember the red lipstick stains
of the kiss marks on the mirror of
my high school bathroom.
Shaped like pistachio shells—
ready to be cracked
and consumed.

I think of the girl I barely knew—
fresh-faced and quiet in my geometry class.
The whispers about the baby she conceived
in that high school bathroom.
Smudged lip marks on the mirror
ready to bare their teeth at her
as she kissed the chapped lips of the boy
who would make her happy
this time.

A symbol of love left by one of her friends
who would ruin her reputation—
a friend who had learned her own botched-up form of love
from her daddy
when he crept in her room in the dark—
where no mirrors could reflect the truth.

In the hallway,
quiet whispers that she heard and tried to ignore
as she stumbled by—clutching her textbooks—
belly swelling like a tumor that she wanted to cut out.
Now, remembering the rounded shapes of those lipstick marks,
I recall the leaves on my little plant cutting in its brown bowl
shaped just like the bloodred lipstick stains,
curved on each side, coming to two points,
with a crease where a mouth can open
to speak or scream or kiss.

Green this time—fresh and new, with no smudges.
Only two leaves have sprouted from the stem,
vulnerable amidst a world that moves to crush them.
With each new day, the two leaves stretch
towards the light of the sun on my balcony,
like that girl whose name I don't remember
and her little baby, who sprang up out of that not-love.
The leaves reach out in hopes of a heaven
and a love that lasts longer than the
lipstick stains that the janitor washed away
in the morning.



Sweet as Honey | Marcella Axelrad | Photograph