

Tomato
by Jia Flynn

Father comes home. We're sitting down together
in the kitchen around our weathered wooden table
with a second-hand tablecloth marked with marker stains.

We say grace in the kitchen, praying to God that
the next paycheck doesn't bounce. In the kitchen,
with its grungy cabinets and scuffed linoleum.
With its leaking General Electric fridge that's never made ice.
With its old chrome sink that always backs up,
vomiting last night's leftovers.

This house, this filthy, brown carpet stinks of cat piss
and dog piss and mildew and mold and the remnants
of someone else's life, and the ceiling's falling in
and roaches are in my bed, and...

And my brother's yelling.

And my father's
yelling at my mother's
screaming at my brother's
yelling; everyone's
shouting car alarms and five seconds
until the bomb,
except me.

I'm staring at this bloody mass of spaghetti,
trying not to listen.
My mother throws the insolent piece
Of shit against the wall, and screams and screams,
and she's got him by the collar, oh god and now,
the ceiling fan is swinging. Will it fall on my head?
The pasta worms squirm in my stomach, the rusting sink
whispers, let it up, let it up, let it all up.
Fear and panic as acrid as garlic, as sick as tomato sauce.
She's thrown him against the wall.

Mother turns to me, with her bony hands wrapped
around his plaid button-up shirt and shrieks,
"What are you looking at?"
I am eight years old. I swallow and say,
"There's a crack in the wall."