

Janine Joseph

FIRST LESSON (Pressure Position)



At nine, I threw a pair of scissors at my brother.

My mother dragged me by my hair, my left ear
listening to nothing in the shell of her hand.
On my knees, in the kitchen, on her orders,
I lifted my torso.

Elbows pointed at the ground, my hands snapped open
in the air like static. My knees shook after five minutes,
my arms at ten, and at the passing of twelve minutes,
my eyelids, beneath the chattering florescent lights,
were the color of clams.

She set the timer to an hour. *Don't make tampo*, she warned.

Tampo, to sulk quiet as an anchor.
Make, to prayer my hands
and cleave a hull of myself. And *don't*.

Mother,

my legs will be masts.
My body will plunge stiff as a boat and cut through
any sea on its spine.