

TEJA SUDHAKAR

Mercy Kill

Amma wets the soil, says
blood feeds the next life. She curves my small hand
around the hilt, dirt behind each of our nail beds.
The rooster's eyes, upside down, pulse out
their sides. This is how death hangs:
pushed through a plastic cone, muzzle
aimed to the floor. Amma says I must look fear
in its face, the way all girls do.
I swift-pull the knife's end—learn
how a throat ribbons open,
how the eyes become
two black marbles. Learn
to collect them like stones.
Look, Amma says,
rivering the blade
down my own
guilt-bit palm, a wound
opening there, like a secret.
It happens to each of us.