



they say hallelujah lives up in the mouth

by Ivy Raff

Empty cicada shell:

as we come

we go back naked.

–Enryo, 1800-1855

1.

mouths hold heaven: our words

– clouds. our tongues – sun. velvet inner cheek – spun silver
surface of twin moons. sh'khina pulls down hallelujah
from sky into soil. in morelos cicadas slice tender
branches of plum trees, lay eggs inside. nymphs drop,
burrow underground for seventeen years, emerge when ready
to mate at the start of the seca – no rain
to drown the generation to come.

2.

i, too, know waiting is an action.

when my body refuses to release its blood i deep
stretch on the floor, unravel thick strings inside my thighs
over infinite earth. this is how bowls inside me know to tilt,
to spill. this is how my body pulls down a hallelujah.

3.

in this late september of life, each month that bleeds
is blessing. leaves turn gold to orange on branches.
one of them will be last to fall. science:
by the time you're forty, three percent of viable eggs remain.
but all my body is viable – i've always felt i'm just getting started.
in spiritualist groups of my loud, exploratory youth
leaders lectured on *the descending path*. some try to transcend
the body, exist on high, numb planes. others come down
into thigh, thumb, lung. lately i can feel
an electric twinge spark awake in the little pocket inside my
left hip three days before blood comes. i can feel the abrupt death
of a single cicada in the drought-chorus of cicadas: one less soul
belts riled, continuous song before it shrivels in its shell.