

POEMS BY MAYA GANESAN

Wash Day

She lays her wet hands in her lap,
smiles vacantly into the camera.
Film doesn't capture the
sticky air or her stinging skin,
raw and cold.

She turns and sinks rag into bucket,
soap plunging over thirsty fingers.
Scrub, then wring it out.
Shake loose the rain clouds hiding in its folds.

There they lie, rags
like tulips,
opening into bloom
as they bake beneath the sun.

Streetcorner

Four girls are waiting
outside Orson Wiley's bar
in their Sunday best.
No one is here to stare
or ask why they linger
near the telephone pole with its too-high street signs,
near the Livery Stable and carriages outside.
No one is here to brush the dust
off their dresses and say,
"Go, hurry home."
No one to tell them the story of the bank
next door,
the one that was only robbed once.
No one is here
to escort them home.
Perhaps they are waiting for something they'll never have.

Eagle Bar

The lamps hum of secrets.
Your fingers run along
the dusty glass neck—
learn what it's like to taste recklessness
on your lips,
feel freedom bubbling under your crisp collar.
Every brim, every polished shoe
is an act,
a show,
a mask to hide vulnerability.
Outside, fireflies pool light
and half-full bottles shatter on the steps.
The air runs warm and sweet—
too sweet, perhaps.
Raise the glass to your lips.
Let go.

Summer Derby

I am too warm
in my plaid dress and Mary Janes.
Everything about this moment
is uncomfortable:
the way the street sign is too far
above my head,
the jumble of telephone wires
crisscrossing out to nowhere.
They call it progress,
I call it messy work.
It's not polite to complain,
says my mother.
I must be polite,
lady-in-training,
prepped and primed for finishing school.
I press my lips together
and rock back and forth
on the brink of the curb.
The sun beats down on my back.

Dart

Sun glimmers on trembling water
and we wait,
anxiously.

Lean over the soggy bridge.

This morning's rain still lingers
in the way the air creeps,
slithery,
onto your tongue.
Still lingers in the listless clouds
drifting apart.

Any second now,
people whisper.
The rumor swishes around the crowd.

Any second now,
we might see boat sizzle across slough,
fanning white water behind.

They come,
and so do the shouts from our lips.
They come
in vests and jackets,
but we are too far up to know who's who
so we pretend we know who's in the lad.

They go too quickly,
a parade of rafts skimming the river.

Come, we say,
picking up our coats.
We turn.
Let's go.