By the Bedside

Ellen Zhang

Passing time, I imagine myself a fish. Unable to move, risking entanglement. Perhaps, only my imagination, but sometimes, it’s hard to breathe. I wake in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat. Gasping. Reminders of rise and fall of ribs, beating of lungs.

When you come visit, I feel the lack of something. Memory snags on banks, drifting in shallows. Almost tangible. Completely unreachable. You grasp my hand until I feel stirrings of was & has been’s. I withdraw to dive back into drowning—world more manageable when lost.

You sit beside me, waiting as the air thins, shoulders unwind, every breath of mine becomes confession. Inside this four walls, perhaps even within me—sterility and fragility. The cost of diving deep, you remind me, is acclimated ascent. You take my hands. This time, I squeeze them tightly.