

NINA C. PELÁEZ

Doubt

At the cattle farm, I fell in love with a boy
 who thought he was a god. I too, believed
 this sometimes. Like the morning he jumped
 into the pen with the biggest bull and nothing
 came of it. Sometimes, I believed he loved me
 too. In the way I thought God might love.
 Which is to say, from a distance, or through
 small gestures: the dusty fist of thistle he snatched
 me from the path or how he hauled a mattress
 from the big house to where the workers slept—
 clapboard chipped and mossy, floors beneath
 our bare feet soft with sag.

In the sweltering upstairs, we found the room
 black with crumpled husks of dying flies
 and when the boy told me to find a broom, I did
 as I was told, sweeping the menacing confetti
 of them, thick and twitching on the floor.
 We laid the wilted mattress by the window
 where, that night, I tried to turn away
 from the man next door watching us have sex:
 our scrawny bodies suntanned, sticky
 with lake mud and sweat. *Let him look,*
 he said, pushing harder against me then,
 laughing through his perfect teeth.

For so long, I tried to write about that time.
 Describing so tenderly the wildflowers
 and the lake, the deer along the path

we passed each day, glassy eyes still gazing
upward to an empty sky. Exit wound blistering
her velvet neck. For so long, I was dumb
with devotion. It was much later I learned:
when flies get stuck inside a house,
it isn't starvation that kills them.
It's the stress of believing there's no way out.