

CHARIF SHANAHAN

## Inner Children

In Asilah I walk for a while  
alone, along  
the ancient wall, trying

to find a place to have lunch.  
I can't decide,  
the choice feels so vital

as though my entire trip  
depends on this meal. I flew  
here to find something out

about my mother, to find  
something out about  
myself & stay in a riad

owned by a Dutch woman.  
Showing me my room,  
a narrow box with two

perpendicular beds  
& a triangular bathroom  
tiled in blue,

she turned to me & said  
*I came here just one time: I was  
so enamored I could not leave.*

On one of the beds two  
leather bracelets,  
their woven straps bound

by white thread stitched  
around the fabric clasp  
& a note: *One for you, the other*

*for the one close to you.*  
I spend the day  
indoors on Facebook

& having FaceTime  
sex with my boyfriend  
of nine volatile months:

*I cannot love you if you do not  
show yourself to me*  
I plead.

When my mother left this country  
for the country I call *mine*,  
she had no intention of coming back:

*La panthère*  
as her track mates called her  
not just for her speed,

her own mother joking  
she must have shat the baby out  
for it to be that dark.

Surely she was running—  
& who could blame her  
even if the rest of her story

stays hidden: “*My business,*” she says  
as though my story is not inside  
her story, as though

when she hides, she does not hide  
my face with hers. I look now  
at the man I call *mine*

who looks at his half-naked self  
on the screen & says  
*Damn I look good*

which disgusts me  
though I won't know it  
for at least another year

so I reach for a bracelet  
& slide it on,  
the rich leather coiled

around my wrist in a little  
square in the corner. He is  
*stroking*, as he likes to call it,

& *working up a good load*  
of at least four thick ropes  
if history repeats itself

& when it does and does and does and does,  
he will sigh and say,  
*Thank you, baby. I love you, baby.*

calmly, momentarily again  
a seven-year-old boy in Brooklyn  
first meeting the woman

who'd left him on his first day of life—  
& so I wait until he finishes  
to speak, to ask

for a single orienting truth:  
some admission, some  
glimmer of access I crave

only because denied:  
*la panthère* set running  
to a man in a feverish city

*the concrete jungle*

as it had come to be called  
where she could bury

the rest of her story in the form  
of my literal body, a story  
I bring my body to Asilah

to unearth. On the screen  
he is closer still & says  
*Baby I miss your hole*

which is, ironically,  
here & now,  
the one unaccepting part of me

as I see him & refuse to see  
what I know I see, refuse  
to know what I see I know:

a panther-shaped hole  
in my black tank  
undershirt

my olive skin filling in  
the figure  
into a kind of tattoo

so that I can see its shape  
even after he asks me  
to expose the nipples he loves

to suck, even then, my torso  
bare, I see the shape  
above my navel & slightly

to the right,  
the same direction  
his dick leans, his hand glides

& behind him I see again  
the wall I walked along  
at morning, I felt

I could walk it without end,  
half of the present  
world so close to me & still

out of reach,  
so close there on the other  
side of the hot stone.

# Psychotherapy

For all the years                      you have yourself                      submitted

To this process                      energetically, at first, then

Incredulously, exhausted —

It may be

All you needed to hear

You heard in the very first office, the one

With the plastic gladiola                      flanked by coiling plants

On the table beneath the light switch:

“*Abandoned* is not a feeling,  
It’s an interpretation of events.”