

TIANA CLARK

Queer Miracle

If I touch her there everything about me will be true.

—*Nikky Finney*

I've often wondered why Elizabeth Bishop
deleted Alice's blue eyes from the final draft
of her infamous villanelle,

until I was whacked by the bright milky slate
hue of your irises, your petite pitch-black
pupils. They terrified me, not in horror,

but in extreme delight, burning like the talking
bush of God's all-consuming presence, but
without the usual shame I attach to that kind

of precise and piquant glory. I gazed at your
stillness for seconds, because I didn't want
to be destroyed by that simmering node of desire.

I didn't want to be known like that—not yet,
exactly. I didn't want you to see the hidden
pearl of joy in me squished inside the slit

of gooey-oyster darkness, locked with all
my damp and folded expectations. Shuck me.
I've been waiting for the cut, longing for it

actually—I licked your soft knife, cupped
the intricate lace in your lavender lingerie.
Everything was delicate. Everything pierced

was in repetition: Bishop's iridescent rainbows,
Hass' blackberries, and you. You, the queer
miracle on my couch. It took me awhile

to enjoy the revision process, to see that what's
been cut is never lost but found in another
gorgeous form. I once heard Ocean Vuong

say that everything you write is part of the same tree.
I think I know now what led Bishop to this obsessive
fixed form. I milk the tip of that same need and needle,
to slash and then repeat.



Anyway, what I think I'm saying is that most of poem
is just taking out the sopping wet bay leaf.