

RISHMA DUNLOP

Psalm

Estelle unbuttons her blouse, lays my hand on the jagged scar where her breast used to be. She wants me to tell her she is still beautiful.

I feel her heart beneath the ribbed wall milk-veined softness knifed into a cavern. She tells me her husband has not been able to look at it yet, this place on a woman's body, nuzzled and suckled and cupped by infants and lovers.

Her gesture recalls my first lover, his teenage body, long six-foot stretch, lean limbs, every rib visible, the surgical scar after the mending of a collapsed lung. I used to breathe into that curved mark above his heart, lay my head against its pulse.

Three decades later, I realize my lover has that same six-foot stretch of bones, that tender ribcage.

How we return, full cycle, to first love.
While ashes that rise meet ashes that fall
we become the world for a while, the rose
of each lung blooming inside.

All this contained in the memory of my hand
on Estelle's heart, her absent breast, sweet flesh
excised into terrible beauty. I tell her she is beautiful,
despite her husband's averted gaze, that she will continue
to be loved.

It can not be otherwise.
For her mother has named her with human faith.
Estelle, her name a star.