

two poems

by Arah Ko

*I KILLED A PLANT ONCE  
BECAUSE I GAVE IT  
TOO MUCH WATER*

*after José Olivarez*

truthfully, more than once. cacti withered  
on my windowsill. orchids hungered for love  
and neglect. they say we find ingredients  
for every antidote nearby its venom: healing  
herb by poison seed, miracle cure from the mouth  
of the viper. i have lived my life  
straddling between desperation and danger. a kiss  
on my forehead scalded like hot water.  
the shape of men in the dark made me  
frantic for sun. lord, i worry that love  
is violence. how many times did i shy away  
from the touch i craved? oscillate between  
overwatering and drought. a man made  
me lock every door in the house each night  
since i was a child. a man, also, sucked  
the grief, wet, from my aching skin.

*QUALIA*

Because how would you know that your blue is my blue, or if your head notes smelled like my body describes? What if your vanilla orchid is my cedarwood, and that's why the bruise on my thigh looks good to only one of us? I heard that we never know the truth of our own voice, the way it echoes in our throats and skulls. How excruciating to rely on one another. Sometimes I fear your cerulean is just my peridot, your ovaline eclipsing my magenta. Suddenly, I'm jealous of the mantis shrimp's eyes and every artist who glimpsed the full spectrum of whatever we call kissing rods and cones. Light moving through time vibrates in every crystal cell. Darling, I confess I don't recall names for every shade, but did you know? The color of your eyes changes when you look at me.