is evidence of the offenses I now plead guilty to, 
a list of felonies counting since my infancy. 
I can criticize the Latin lords 
and the fault of cartographers 
but it cannot change the fact that my voice is American 
without a trace of my grandmother’s accent, 
without a single phrase I can redeem in Vietnamese. 
There is shame like 
epistrophe 
that repeats at every family gathering where I run 
into the bathroom 
because I can only offer silence 
to the Great Aunts and Uncles that gave up everything for me. 
Lại ăn chiều! my Má screeches 
and I don’t argue. I don’t need to 
when my body finds rhythm with 
the cacophony of metal chopsticks 
and the syncopation of our loud conversations. 
The unspoken upholds our promise 
when I am reminded of a bond, an in-between 
that is free of burden 
where our heritage is in the hands of a chef and 
our family is in the fold of a napkin, 
where our food is every bridge and shortcut and ship, 
the chè held forever in the 
pocket of our stomachs, 
in the Eden of our liver. 
Reminiscent of a love deeper than the words I don’t have, 
there are stories that wake in the salty wonders of 
nước chậm where an ocean and her tears 
are at the center of every table, 
where voices rebirth in every spoon of bún bò hué 
that scalds my throat and 
I know that 
with immigrant 
comes dismemberment 
comes the mar of a diaspora’s dialogue 
comes my distant English on some end of the escape. 
There was always 
a reverence for what only hands could create but our whole bodies remember. 
No matter what words I use 
they cannot say all there is to be said 
and all there is to be held, 
but I can taste them for myself, 
take them into my very being. 

This is the love I know
that no language can even begin to translate.