
POETRY | SPRING 2015

Fear of Causing Pain

By Irène Mathieu

I am afraid of needles
 not of being pricked
I am afraid
of plunging the steel
 into a stranger
 into a stranger's veins
 into strange veins that will
wince and curl away.

I am afraid to harvest
 a person's blood
to separate the chaff of pain
from the possible grain of
something strange growing
there.
to transmute into a steel-wielder
 a needle plunger
 a stranger stirring blood
 with steel –
what transmutation would
let me do this with
a straight face?

at six years old
 unsmiling
I told my mother
my tongue sometimes
turned blue.

she flickered
I froze.
my mother flickered
who smelled ferrous blood
pushing me out with no
steel in her spine to plunge
away pain, my mother who

went home the same morning
 who walks around with
a stone face, who grits like steel
hard and blue as midday

I wanted to see her surface buckle.
my mother

suspended in a firstborn's
possible
 steel-beckoning wound
unwelcome stranger
I was ashamed of the power
 to conjure pain,
quickly turned up my tongue
to show her blue veins
spanning its belly –
normal, I knew.

wielding a needle over someone's
 fluvial vessels
stirring blood in search of
strange fish
I freeze again
 each time the vein
rolls away to protect itself.

Irène Mathieu is a writer and medical student at Vanderbilt University. She has studied International Relations at the College of William and Mary and completed a Fulbright Fellowship in the Dominican Republic. Mathieu's poetry, prose, and photography can be found in The Caribbean Writer, the Lindenwood Review, Muzzle Magazine, qarrtsiluni, Extract(s), So to Speak, Diverse Voices Quarterly, Journal of General Internal Medicine, Love Insha'Allah, Los Angeles Review, Callaloo Journal, and HEArt Journal. She has been a Pushcart Prize nominee and a Callaloo fellow.