

VANESHA PRAVIN

Latex

Sir, the city went up in flames and
In the drift of ash, I was home,
Still sheathed in latex as the
State had ordered, with only
A slit for my eyes. Yes, the spires were
Severed, the smoke tunneled into the sky,
The olive trees charred, and the winged
Bulls pulverized, but I was working
My way through a state-sanctioned
Cookbook with detailed recipes for
Tex-Mex fajitas, honey ribs,
Casseroles with crushed potato chips,
Pancakes with bourbon caramel sauce.
You see, our warriors came with appetites
So I tried to get a nice sear on the meat
But my face broke into a sweat from the
Latex flush against my face. Once
I was told that widows will be rewarded
In the afterlife. So I prepare each dish
With the utmost care, hammering chips
In their bag so the crust will be
Evenly textured. It is warm underneath.
I must train myself to love heat,
To love the tug, squeak, snap of latex.
Sometimes I disappoint myself—so
Tiresome to cry for snow, to cry
For frozen dinners and a microwave.

In a Country Afraid of Aging

In the orange sky, oak blackens and
black and blacker, the grazing cattle.

They know the figures are odd.
They stop to consider and stare
politely. Maybe even they know.

No one taught us how to adapt
to the momentum of time—
summers once achingly slow and

now we look out the window to
see the sun. Look again and
it's the moon, blinding us.
Hurry carefully but still enjoy life.

Once, younger, I couldn't imagine
how five years could ever feel like
five hours until five years
passed, then another five and
another five plus five more and
now we're in a field with cows.

Old, older, oldest – pressure, daily pricks
to show something of your life.

Though the ways of measuring keep
changing, the body blackens
into the orange, the oak splinters.

The cows chivalrous, patient,
waiting for us to pass
before they resume.