

Under the knife blade,
my mother's broken hand in a sling,
purple peel strips off
over the face of the counter.

Her cheek, swollen, is marked
by a bruise, the shape of an eggplant.
She tilts over to check if the meat
is soft. The oil leaps up, scalds.
She pulls back, leans on a crutch hidden
under the torn wing of her white chador.
I see the scratches on her neck
as she turns her head. The wooden spoon
slips from her fingers onto the floor.

She bends to pick it up, but I reach out first,
snap up the spoon, flinging it into the basin.
Who are you cooking for? Do you know?
I yell, shoving her aside,
taking her place at the stove.
He loves his deep-fried eggplant,
she whispers, pursing her lips.

The stew simmers slowly.
But I turn my head away and hold
onto the image from the week past
swirling around, again, in my head—

Feet tangled in the hem of her chador;
my father, leaning over the banister,
slips his hands back in his pockets,
watching as she rolls down the stairs,

still alive.