

New Poetry by Saramanda Swigart: “Reckoning” and “The Small I”



BY THE ROOTS / *image by Amalie Flynn*
RECKONING

don't worry about me
i am not well but you've worried enough
my prosperity has a body

count—

this shielded flesh
conspicuous & allowed to be
balks at being back-

ground—

this mouth taught (without being taught)
it is clearest & loudest & purest
squirms when it must shut up & become

ears—

i do not know how to be ears
i know how to open my mouth monstrously
wide to spew & eat

words—

words are my birthright & we the
authors bulldoze other stories to rubble
so the Other trips over each foregone

conclusion—

i am trained to make murder invisible
but understories cling, bloody mine
with the dragged, sullied

bodies—

of those disappeared beneath my
own soft landing
we need other & better

stories—

speak please, whatever you have to say—
pull out this blighted story by the roots
& plant a new one, green, tender, & worth

loving—

THE SMALL I

this is my country

look

i overturn the junk

drawer of my

white/middle-class

life and take stock

rifling

i find i am not a capital letter anymore

first person singular has shrunk

wizened down

to that apple core i found beneath the car seat

last month

or that ivy there, brown and dead

because i killed it

the waxy leaf tree outside

the front door

(the city said we were its stewards

in a single-page note

in our mail-

box) my heart

brimming then

with the largesse of new motherhood

i thought i could

take on the health

of every tree

in California but

over the course of six

years the ivy became a cloak around

its trunk

then an embrace

then a stranglehold

until tree leaves thinned

i spent a long time

tearing up the roots

of that ivy

now it browns—

saved the tree but
ivy clings
a flammable bolus
around its midsection

and the small i-
how to locate i
when i
am both tree
and ivy?