

Palm Reading

Poetry

BY ARIELLE JOHNSTON


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It's like reading a palm,
these valleys on my legs,
objectively there and subject to supposition.
Telling a history or telling a fortune?
High on the left, these five atrophic scars
a trophy for a hard-fought marathon,
that journey of no running.
Two craters have borne witness to both
the mistake and the repair,
holding in their twisted butterfly lines
the somber knowledge of iatrogenesis.
Triumphant, they sink,
deep into the tunnels
through flesh
to the strongest tether in the body.
I stole it from another man.

There is a J branded on my knee,
sunken when I extend,
the final piece to the puzzle of my late teens.
Two knobs on either heel,
not from pumps but the friction
of trying, moving, walking,
protuberances of the things I love.

And though I treasure these marks,
these white-peach tattoos I never asked for,
my favorite lines are the ones on my right leg:
The shadow of a vastus medialis silently hauling the slack,
a thankless maintenance of the upright position,
and even more its twin,
the arcing transverse sections slicing across my thigh,
tracing the wooden body of my guitar, agent of unphysical motion,
the dents fresh from revival and new sounds.

I feel the marks I chose worn into the fascia just the same—
like the wounds sometimes red and purple,
sometimes tangible only in embodiment.
Music, the only bone deep memory carved into my right leg.
It's the only one I asked for,
a clear playing of favorites,
but commendable as the partner, the
voice behind all the bones,
the tracks of finding another addiction, another love.
There are so many things to love.



a b o u t • p o e t

JOHNSTON

Arielle Johnston is a second-year medical student at UNC Chapel Hill. She received her B.S. in Psychology and B.A. in Exercise Science at UNC as well and has experience working in emergency medicine. At UNC School of Medicine, she is a Contributing Editor for *Iris*, a student of the CAMPOS medical Spanish program, and an aspiring Humanities and Social Sciences scholar. She is most interested in research on communication in medicine, particularly with respect to linguistic code-switching, time limitations, and language barriers. Arielle has written for as long as she can remember but has only recently begun sharing her work, and she is excited to continue writing about life on both sides of the line between provider and patient.