

EVEN AFTER, THOSE ROSES BLOOM

BY LUCIEN DARJEUN MEADOWS

Each morning, I open Elisi's curtains, unshutter windows,
Give breeze to her house still heavy with death—
Six months ago my uncle, nine months ago my grandfather. Each morning,
My aunt crosses the field between our houses, barefoot and bearing wildflowers
From the hollow by the woods where her husband's Cabrio still sits,
Untouched, submerged in violets.
Sweet tea on the back porch, and we watch Elisi's Bourbon roses
Trellis up the laststanding section of a horse fence
Dismantled two decades ago, when the horses were sold. Each year, these buds
Open a bright coral, constant
Since her mother's first planting—the spring of her marriage,
Year of Elisi's birth, outside a bungalow by a wide river—
But this summer, her roses are stained
A dark maroon.
First blooming since last summer ended a union
Held since she was sixteen, blush of grief into a disappearing
Body: body once of love,
Body now dissolving into light, body of rose, of Susquehanna
And Allegheny, body who always woke before dawn,
Body now in the back room until noon, dreaming—body longing
To pour time's molasses backward, unpack bags
Of his clothes, back past hospital bed and morphine, back to bringing out root beer
And gingersnaps to this porch, where she knows
He will come, driving the Deere
Across the pasture, past his gardens of tomato, spinach, cucumber,
To hold her on this porch
Where we sit, stirring the hours with her mother's long spoons
As each rose opens a strange darkness, then tips
Their duskheavy head toward the earth.

Lucien Darjeun Meadows is an English, German, and Cherokee writer born and raised in the Appalachian Mountains. His debut poetry collection, In the Hands of the River, is forthcoming from Hub City Press in September 2022.

