

Sharan Strange

O, To Hold the Spirit In!

for Eric Garner and George Floyd

...who tried to say, *I can't
breathe anymore, can't
breathe*...as days accrued
in moments of flailing,
and the Self thrashed in a
dense web of hungers.
Or accrued in a long-night's
hurtling through dreams,
arms bolting the chest,
as if to hold the Spirit in, to stop
the wandering that might
prevent its return to the flesh.

But...too much! The sharp
blow, gasp and freefall,
sense skittering off the precipice
of dear life...not dream.
Those are real monsters. And you
always walked among graves.
The biting edge to existence

is that it resists being abandoned.
With the battering in your lungs—
the stomp of pain signaling
death's first gesture—you yielded
to the mind, which said cry,
or shout...or sleep. Told your body
to rock and howl, wrest
and stack its anger
against surrender,
refuse surrender.

But, the breath...
O, the Breath!

Spectral

for Sandra Bland

Clouds come down to drape everything
in humid embrace, settling around you
like a shroud...fog swaddling the world—
traffic's cries, buildings, trees, other bodies—
props cocooned until another season.
You can't decide whether you're here.
Here meaning a field that lends you
presence, fixes you—wandering self—
into your life... where waxy leaves sweat,
roots fracture sidewalks, and this grainy
swirling light takes everything in its maw.

Another Black woman

has been handled and made to die, and clouds,
too, make their judgment—a parallel erasure.
She had been driving, no clouds in sight. Around her,
trees hunkered in summer heat, then the day's
cellophane sheen turned murky as the cop's dash-cam...
and, later, the clotted newsfeeds...the spectacle
of her as victim, a pattern feeding us....

An adult's head weighs as much as a newborn.
Yet an infant dropped repeatedly, mercilessly
to the ground remains beyond our tolerance
to witness, a loop from which even the trees recoil.

If only the world could be brought to justice—
meaning, answer for her over upon over...
meaning, stop killing her over upon over...
meaning, burn away its cobwebbed hideousness...
meaning, ultimately, come to love her... Then what?

Even as you passed there, before you blinked or
stumbled, didn't you see her—vast self,
daring to reach still, head right through clouds...
Not yet undone by fear and malice

or a vaporous American-ness...
not unlike your own spectral life?