

POLYDIPSIA

Annika Le

Vietnamese words taste
pickled in my mouth—
saliva pools out from glands like
rain gutters in a Saigon monsoon

When I attempt to backbend
my tongue into unfamiliar tones,
my grandmother's forehead furls
into a question mark, and the
uncles burst into contractions of
synchronized laughter

To me, the glyphs on letters look like
ranges of mountains or falling tides
that mimic the moon's loop— they taste
meaningless against my teeth

On the Lunar holiday, we must wish
New Year blessings in Vietnamese
before she bestows the lucky red parcels—
they sit under her elbow and
against her ribs like armor:

Chúc mừng năm mới

What leaves my lips is a windstorm
of whispers, misspelled mush,
a lotus flower without its seeds,
my jaw now severed like
the lost string of a guitar

Again, the contractions of
laughter, this time from the aunts
and cousins, too— it descends
from lips and pools on the tile

I grab a sponge from the belly
of the kitchen sink, and attempt
to extract my mispronunciations
from the floorboards