

Non/Heritage Speaker

Lauren Nolan

You should know these things, you know,
the way the syllable sits in your mouth,
the way the tone spills from your tongue.

Why were you never taught? Why
can't you hear the way the words fall?
It's sunlight striking the dust cover on a tv remote,
sliced persimmon offered mid-afternoon.

Hold your tongue
tight with all the words you never learned
clinging to the tip, coax them out:
xue like snow and blood,
wang like hope and forgetting.

Even when you patiently unspool
each sound from your throat,
they unravel inherently wrong, in
edges too sharp and contours too flat,
can't you tell? Can't you hear?
Instead, you should

leave your words caught behind your teeth,
everything unspoken slivered
into some rich black ache singing
bitter against your tongue.