

Self-Portrait with Curses at 35,000 Feet

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TALIA BLOCH

Laundry Day

*Where will the refugees wash their clothes, you said,
with no water, only a bundle each, and snow on the way?*

We were in the Laundromat,
half-watching the dryers spin their mini-globes, half-watching
the T.V. mounted high on the wall as it dampened the air with news.

*Thirty-nine drowned at sea today, said the anchor, capsized by the wind.
Hundreds more have arrived on foot at the camp near the border.*

A stream of faces, brightly-colored coats,
and scarves cut gullies into the landscape.

Then a young man stopped to stand by a family,
swept the ground with his shoe, and lowered his boy to sit,
as the cameras looked on.

Their sheets would make great tents, I said, white and stiff like sails.

Someone shouted off-screen. Then we heard a dog.

The buzzer sounded. You pulled our sheets
from the machine as a warm scent filled the air and the January night
lowered itself to the street outside.

*Where are they, you said, as you surveyed
our bags, calculating how to carry them all home. I don't know, I said.*

Someone had strung up a clothesline by his tent. A few shirts strained
in the wind like flags of an unnamed country.

And in the background: more tents,
more people, and an orange vest.

A snow began to fall, streaking the camera's lens with tiny hands.

HAYAN CHARARA

Self-Portrait
with Curses
at 35,000 Feet

On a flight to Detroit
the guy next to me
told me
about his shitty job,
his dumb,
slobbering dog,
his good-for-nothing
kids, two of them—
assholes—and his lying,
cheating wife.
Moving
at 500mph
above the earth without
feeling it,
I listened to him go on
and on, his pain
bad to worse—

I wondered
to what wisdom
does suffering
give birth?
—and must we always
learn from it?
Earlier
that morning,
my mother had died,
and going back to her,
once
and for all,
I would find out.
But first
I had to suffer
Bob—
fucking Bob.