

## Mejdulene Shomali

### Chicken

is how my nephew Jacob said “kitchen”  
before speech therapy taught him  
to distinguish “polluter”  
from “computer.”  
My mother can’t work  
a computer, but kitchens and

chickens are her strength.  
At the farmer’s market, she  
buys two, brings them home  
to gut them; soaked in lemon juice  
and vinegar, the fragrant  
carcasses scare me, and I’m no

chicken but their pimpled  
skin reminds me of naked  
bodies in cold air, goose-  
bumped and pale. In winter  
I dress in layers, because  
my body overheats, each hot  
flash makes me feel I’m no spring

chicken. This is what I tell  
my mother while we stuff  
the carcasses, rescued  
from their bath and rubbed raw  
with Arab seven spice  
and garlic. She shakes her head  
at my grin, *Ya stupid*,  
she says, *thummik bisa’*

*jajain ib reesh*. She threads  
the needle with thick string,  
binds the flaps of flesh  
together to close each gaping  
bird. When I was 10, I got 10  
stitches on my left knee, after playing

chicken on my bike with  
the neighborhood kids.  
At the ER, they cleaned my  
wound with iodine, plucked  
debris to expose pink flesh,  
white bones. The needle swung  
black thread in and out;  
my mother paled, her  
hand holding mine still.

## Occupied

Under house arrest, my sisters often  
snuck out to play pinochle with cousins.  
Creeping through alleys and back yards, barely  
hidden in climbing grape vines that litter  
Palestinian soil like bubble gum  
and cigarette butts mar U.S. sidewalks.

Too young to tag along, I waited scared  
with my brother. Israeli soldiers would  
gun down anyone in plain sight: even  
boys like Rami sitting in their living  
rooms watching cartoons while their mothers made  
french fries and falafel in the kitchen.

Those nights were so hot I'd hallucinate,  
thinking birds sang about suffocation  
by tear-gassed pillow, imagining rice  
writhed like worms or bruised like rubber bullets  
in my gut. Each every scream I muffled,  
lest it sound a call for execution. *m*