

LAURA VITCOVA

BLACK BAG

Back then we didn't know lips were more prone
than tips of fingers, but it was a child's game
we played, putting hands into a black mystery
bag, trying to decipher what we were touching,
using fingers like antennae to feel into the dark.
Was it a pearl, a marble or maybe some teeth?
Was it jagged like eggshells or cruel like cut shards?
We were feeling around in the dark hoping we wouldn't find
our fingers moist before we knew our skin had been sliced.
We took the risk. Maybe we were brave
maybe we didn't know any better than to be lured into a hole.

Now that I'm older, when I'm lost reaching for a thought, and
have forgotten that I have a body and you touch me unexpectedly
it's like being hit by the jolt of an electrified hot stick
and for a moment I die a little. Sometimes I wonder
if it's an old branch or a dead snake I'm touching
when I put my hand on your thigh or when the bristles
of your chest press on my breastbone. I was always a little afraid
when it was my turn to put my hand into the mystery bag,
now I'm afraid I cannot tell what lies in the crevice between
us, where your breath meets my mouth and I wonder
if I'll ever figure out exactly who I'm touching.