

## **Mid Day**

**Victoria Chang**

A square table put out just for me. In Emily Dickinson's bedroom. My back to her dead mother in the other room. My front to her bed. Lace curtains remind me of women before me. She lived until 55. Anne Truitt until 83. I am 52, prowling at the edge of revelation. How Truitt painted the bright red horizontally, then vertically to smooth out the eyes. Then sanded down the tears that came through. How she wanted what was left to be even, burnished alive. I imagine her head on the bed, tilted past death, her dashes in my direction. Who gets to speak, who gets to brush. Whose tendons of mind are visible. Who gets to scratch. Who gets to sand. Who gets to spend our days inside thinking, gnashing our lives into 10-foot tall rectangular thoughts. I run my hands through my hair hoping to leave behind a black strand. An unquestionable strand. Ineligible split end. How strange to be in this room demanding awe. To sit down and write a poem where I could never have been. On the other side of the country, at the same time, Chinatowns were burned down. What am I to do with all these seams. The world that keeps growing back. The women who are adjuncts to the world. The world that is unfaithful. What if I am no longer in awe of the stiff light. Expiring rims of time, smoothing only itself. I had an hour and now my time is up. She's gone and she's gone. Still I am here pressed between her and hurt, between the cross-talking ghosts. Taking what they'll give. Her dead mother behind me. My dead mother beyond me. All the beheaded love mixing at noon in red. After others die, where do we put our sadness? After we die, where does our sadness go?