A Bed of White Flowers
Karen Holmberg

Famished for the world, I’m drawn back
to the window’s cyanotype glow,
though I’ve just returned
from the public gardens, where bees butt
the ghost globes of allium
even at midnight.

On my shirt, disks of dried milk stiffen
the fabric; I smell of lanolin,
my animal musk.
Leaning over the sink, I take a breast
in my hand. It weeps, insane, an ocean away
from the tender mouth

that can unlatch it, suckle it soft
and give it peace.
A droplet rolls, glazing a path
on matte porcelain.
But when I see the milk I begin
to cry, confined to one meaning

yet unmoored from it too, wrenched
from my colony, borne
along on some current
to this foreign shore.
Outside the hotel, sobs and retching.
I draw the sheer curtain.

A woman staggers along
the river’s rich dream. She stumbles
and collapses onto a bed
of white flowers, moaning
nej, nej. No, the word
my body must be forced to say.
Karen Holmberg is the author of two collections of poetry, The Perseids and Axis Mundi. Slate Magazine named Axis Mundi one of the top ten poetry books of 2013. Her essays and poems have appeared in Black Warrior Review, New England Review, Southern Poetry Review, and many other journals.