

## 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.