

Susan Ayres

First Psychosis, Then The Aneurysms

My dead mother spoke to me
in a waking dream. She
said, *You are fat*—
without judgment, without
affect, like *Let's have an
egg for breakfast*,
which she often would say
as she figured the crossword puzzle.

ii.

One time she told me
what had always been a secret—
how she practiced shooting a handgun
in the bedroom after her father died,
after her brain betrayed her—directing
her to kill herself and maybe
the girls, too. No one noticed
bullet-holes lacing the wall
until she calmly confessed
to my father
as psychotics sometimes will.

iii.

When she told me
I pretended not to be startled,
nodded while she explained
her then-psychosis. Now that
her brain aneurysms had been clipped
like a leaky garden hose, she
no longer knew what was polite
or what was secret. After years of fork
on the left, knife and spoon
on the right, polished sterling,
steam-ironed linen—dinner
was now a scattered
pile of forks and knives
in the center of the table.

iv.

Untuned to the loud clatter
of cutlery, she listened
to voices inside her head.
Forgetting the secrets, she opened the door
and speared her quiche, startling me
with how lucky I was to be alive.

Susan Ayres is a poet, lawyer, and translator. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing with a Concentration in Translation from Vermont College of Fine Arts and a PhD in Literature from Texas Christian University. Her work has appeared in *Sycamore Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Fort Worth and teaches at Texas A&M University School of Law.