

Verbal Claustrophobia

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Mouths opening to shout blank lists, puff stale smoke into my face by the latched window, tongues peeling back in mute condescension, my diaphragm balloon-swollen into my throat. Air can't escape from behind white-sealed lips over a vacuum-tornado of the sharp breaths push-pinned to my breasts, my collarbone, my ribs. Latex ribboning off from: not helium—radon, and half-questions, and infinities of swirling rejections. My fish half is out of water and no one offers any here, but drink stoically, latticing their disdain into daisy chains. I burn higher in autumn, while the leaves fall to death.