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AN ANIMAL LEARNING

Nisha Atalie

Nature wavers in between the divine and the material. Far from being something “natural” itself, nature hovers over things like a ghost.

–Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature*

A boy is dead: people everywhere
gathered to pull his body from
the water when the waves
wouldn't let him go.

Let me tell you about the dead cicadas
everywhere I walk, not the husks
but the brown-grey bodies, thick
parts facing up, eyes closed.

I went in and out of “nature” and
cracked my body in half. Out
of me burst hundreds of sprouts,
some fragile green

and others already starting to rot.
I started treating the
sea like a god and now animals
everywhere make eye contact.

I am going to slice this nectarine
from Michigan and lick the juice
off my fingers. I am going to let
the world harvest me limb

from limb, hair and honey
and bone. I come back
from nature into flesh. Nothing surges
like the water inside.

Nisha Atalie is a poet, editor, and doctoral student in literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She loves reading and writing about animals, ecology, and how our relationships to the nonhuman are shaped by colonialism. Her work has been published in *Poem-A-Day*, *Blood Orange Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, and elsewhere. Her work has received the Eileen Lannan Poetry prize and placed third for the 2022 Treehouse Climate Action Poem Prize from the *Academy of American Poets*.

