

Winged Victory

When he held her by her hips,
the warm air from below
pressed against her dress,
showing the shape of her thigh.

Her arms spread wide like wings,
reaching behind her from either side
to grab hold of something, anything.
For a moment, she was Winged Victory

on the bow of a Greek ship.
Then he felt the push from behind
and dropped her. Other women
quickly took her place. Several

held hands and leapt together. Flapping
fabric of black and brown covered their eyes.
He helped each one up onto the window
sill as the fire raged behind them.

He turned to help the next seamstress
and found his wife waiting for him.
The heat made beads bubble
on his reddened face. The long white sleeves

she'd sewn for him were wet.
He extended his hand,
and she came forward into the light.
He saw how beautiful she still was,

her pale skin, black hair, and eyes
with cinnamon centers.
He remembered the night
they made their lives together.

He'd taken the bale of hay from her father's
barn, placed it under her window,
and said, *Aim for the haystack.*
She had flown down to him in the only dress she owned.

They had sailed to America feeling
the breeze of the gray sea. He had held
her hips in his hands to keep her
safe and close. He squeezed her hand now

as they stepped out onto the ledge. He kissed her
with a smile. *Aim for the haystack*, he said,
as they jumped into the open arms
of air and broken bones.

by Teresa Méndez-Quigley