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MOLLY CROSS-BLANCHARD

FIRST TIME SMUDGE

It takes eight matches, a burnt thumb, and a quick Google search
to light the sweetgrass braid Mom scored for me from an elder
at work. Always use matches, she said. Spirit likes matches.
I don’t have the abalone shell or eagle feather —
water and air — so I just hold them in my mind, cup the smoke
to my face, my left chest, down the fronts of my calves
to my feet. I notice too late I forgot to change the Spotify playlist
to something more traditional. Hopefully Spirit likes
Jimmy Eat World. I think about the word smudge
while I coax the smoke into each corner of my bedroom, the way
it might mean a smeared mark, like how the message from him
apologizing for the women in my bed was a smudge
on my inbox today. The way I felt when I read it, a smudging of my cool
front. I want to think of the word smudge as wiping away but
to soil is simpler than to cleanse and I’m afraid all this smoke
can’t smudge his spirit from the air here. I open the window, cough
an acrid cough into the dark. I notice too late: the Google article said
to keep it open from the very beginning.