

HIBAKUSHA

Cynthia Lowen

I.

Sardines

was the one game
the missionaries brought

for some higher
purpose

evincing the little coffin
—shaped can

and the church key
with which they exhumed

the neat rows of bodies
lined up fin
to fin

as if a whole school
had neatly
and with perfect order

swam in there
of their own
volition.

We counted to 100
while the boy we all loved most
was designated *It*,

sent off to find a coffin
we could join him in

and we arrived
one by one
a whole school of us.

II.

Not corn but husk, our bed. I slip between
the paper sheets. The hair on my skin like cornsilk.
The hair that was hers. That I peeled back from the kernel
of her face every morning and kissed. Her body
of little seeds, bursting between my teeth.
Tore off the husk and said, *this is the best thing
about summer*. Roasted on coals, steamed from inside.
And the cornsilk burned black as our hair. We said,
this is the best thing about losing our bodies. We were big
as the cloud of smoke, finally as big as we felt.
If you have ever left the body, you know you didn't want to
return. We burned our fingers picking ears from the fire.
Every summer I said, *this is the best crop*. Until it was.
We chose the right day to go down to the field and harvest.
She said the rows made a prison. I said, a cradle.
Once she had left the body I knew she wouldn't return.
Hot high summer. Sweet kernels. Picked just in time.