

*Raquel Vasquez Gilliland*

**I KNOW ALL MOTHERS SAY THEIR CHILDREN ARE SWEET,**

but Ansel is sweet like raw raspberry pie.  
He hugs and kisses my breast before latching  
for his morning milk. When we last left  
New York City, he whispered goodbye  
to it as though he wished it would  
remember him kindly, sticky on my lap at  
Columbus Circle, delighted with each  
of the hundreds of vehicles.

I think to when I was sixteen: walking my  
dog down the street. A man angled his  
white truck at us, stomped on the gas  
and charged. Headlights ablaze like  
orbed torches. I ran, pulled the leash  
and screamed for my mother. He stopped,  
backed up and laughed so hard as he sped off.

Now I wonder if he went home to children.  
Did he cradle them with the same hands  
that gripped the steering wheel, read  
*Green Eggs and Ham* to them with  
the same voice that cackled at my terror?

Then there's me at eighteen, walking to  
the grocery store in Kansas City for  
navel oranges. A man grabbed my  
shoulder and waist, pressed his erection  
into my hip. My spine became stone and  
stayed that way for so long I couldn't  
cry or it would shatter.

Now I wonder if this man was ever sweet.  
Did he hug his mother with the same body  
he assaulted me with. Did he nurse while  
looking at her as though she were all  
that's good and wonderful in this universe?

As I watch footage of men whose faces  
curl in smiles at violence, who believe  
power can only come from subjugation,  
I feel desperate.

*How do I get my baby to remember his  
sweetness. How do I get my baby to remember  
his sweetness?*