

TRADITION By Ojo Taiye

after Enrique Villasis

& to give weight to the meaning of charity
i return to my childhood's black and white,

inside the unfinished body of an old district
building; a homeless golden retriever,

with dark eyes, set widely apart, exposed to
the cold, already wounded & scored— its tousled

skin and the low percussion of its arteries scissoring
to the rhythms of distant feet. *not as a multitude*

but as one—my sister caught in the flush of her own
humanity, chases through the broken window not

minding the prickling thorns. to the direction of this
fevered animal. like how one recognizes *suffering*

& there is no one to beg or ask for pity. kneeling
at the bath, she pours warm soapy water on his skin,

sponge his face, brushing from head to tail. & over the
kitchen table my mother & i stitching together the bruises

with no other motive than mercy— all night long i watch
my sister give life to this newborn, lolling in the crook

of her elbow. the warmth in her voice as she sets him down
on her flowery bed. maybe i love the joy in her finest—

the night purring so deep until it matched the scale of
their snore. today staring at the sky & thinking for a moment—

what would have happened if my sister hadn't picked up tradition?
as a child, how was she to know whom to call a neighbor?

**LESSONS FROM THE PARABLE
OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

after Sui-Yun

everything is compassion
the great parable teaches me

& there is no border or race:
save this love my eyes apple

flavored filled with petals & the
sprawl of refugee children extracting

drop by drop the fruits every currency
of my body— shows me how great

my joy grows the delight dawn furrows
my veins the tender tickle of my dreams

my gaze over my knees tattooing my roots
whole like an oyster in the river

WHAT DOES BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR MEAN?

as a child, my father taught me the meaning.
called *neighbors* kith & kin because what else

could a neighbor be if not *beloved*?
i have never seen anyone feed the poor like

my mother. i couldn't for the life of me know
a world of compassion if she didn't wear it

like a tradition. the key is to love again & again:
another metaphor for caregivers & a jar of benevolence

that means there are many children crying in the street,
go and be with them— make your love yield. & i am

reminded too, of how generosity dips its warm hand
into my nest. we are made of the joy we share.

this garlic bulbs of hope— a light that stains my ovaries.
we all need a hand every now & then— this simple act

of breathing is now the language of compassion— an
avocado slice with the world. a good neighbor only

means i have more wonton for myself & you too.