

## air in the brain

JJ PEÑA

**m**y mother swears she had air in her brain when she was young—that explains why she left us. the first time, she didn't notice. her boyfriend was weed she kept between her lips. he'd take her on adventures & us kids would run around our apartment complex, hoping to find someone to hear us. after she rammed her car into her boyfriend's mercedes & burned bags of his drugs, she found us in a ditch, playing with electric wires in the dirt. she promised she'd never leave us that close to danger again. the second time my mother left, she sent postcards from a boat in alaska. she often sent small baggies of fishing hooks she designed, which i kept under my pillow until i poked my eye bloody. i used to wish she sent snowballs, so my siblings & i could know snow, learn how to live with the cold. the last time she disappeared, her ex-husband put a gun to her forehead & she fled back home, sofa-ed herself into her mother's arms to heal. my mom never told me how she let out all the trapped air in her head or how it even got in there. i imagine it comes from lovers, from breathing them in. & when they leave, the air rises inside equal to the tears shed over them, until you're a thick-headed balloon, overheated & ready to burst.

