

On a hill, a bland brick building in the upper Bronx, my old apartment  
*Imani Congdon*

I went back home on my own, when I was old enough,  
found the brick building where my family lived  
and listened, night after night,  
to the *Chicano* family of nine upstairs, as the littlest of the two sisters,  
Selena, turned *comunista*,  
because one day  
she read three pages of Marx in the library  
and saw Frida Kahlo's *Vogue* cover  
and decided the decadence of food stamps,  
of her parent's backbreaking five jobs  
to support  
six kids,  
an ailing *abuela*,  
and the three-bedroom apartment  
they all shared  
were too bourgeoisie for her.

So she left home  
to sneak into NYU lectures on communism  
and slept with the visiting communist scholars  
in their suites at the Ritz,  
and saw absolutely no irony in that.

The rest of the family grew away eventually,  
dependent to the ever-fluxing rent rates, they left,  
and the *Rajasthani* family moved in with their one son, Samrat,  
whose mother cooked with her mother-in-law and her sister  
every other day—

We knew because  
we would always hear  
about the missing cardamom  
when she screamed at the cabinets  
to “give up her fucking spices”—  
her mother-in-law stole it every time  
and chewed the citrusy seeds in the hallway—  
and because she sent Samrat down every time with the surplus;

a full pot of *dal* and a little plastic tub of *gulab jamun*—  
with extra almond slices in the rose syrup,  
because I always begged for extra almond slices—  
and he would smile at me as I pressed his payment,

two loaves of cornbread, into his palms.

And now, all these years later,  
there is a little blonde boy playing on the walkway,  
his father,

    tie loosened for the specific purpose  
    of playing with his son,  
sits, glances up now and again  
from the papers  
that he brought downstairs  
to make sure his son hasn't run into the street  
and been hit by a cab.

There is a shiny new ten-speed bike strapped  
to the rack outside of the glass doors,  
    which a young woman in creaseless yoga pants  
    unlocks to coast down the hill,  
    all the while on her phone  
    "I'll be there in a minute, Rebecca—  
    Rebecca? Can you hear me?"

    I almost don't notice,  
    but every unfamiliar voice  
    drifting in and out of earshot  
    speaks perfect, unaffected English.

And there I stand,  
a small fragment of what used to be,  
    a poor example of what this building was once,  
    staring at my old eighth-floor window  
    and having no idea  
        who lives in the apartment where I grew up.