

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,