

### *THREE POEMS BY JENNY SADRE-ORAFAI*

#### OCCUPATION INTERVIEW

A quiz at school interviews us, tells us who we'll be when we grow up. We both get astronaut. And when we go so far out in the water, we're sure that one day a real and willing astronaut will land in our arms and teach us gravity and floating. We catch ourselves with our chins in the air, the water choppy and lapped against our necks, looking out for a wilted parachute to land on the crest of our waves. And then we play the game where the ocean is our dress, and we slip anchors on our feet while we watch the lifeguards wheel out their wooden stands where they lord over.

#### TRAGEDY LESSON

Describe drown. We don't say it too loud when it happens. It's not for the hotel people, people who pay for symmetrical shells. They walk out so far that they can't tell which place is theirs on the way back. We're sure there's nothing that could keep them away anyway. Not the burns. Not even if we told all the jellies to wait outside their do not disturb doors. We know them by the color of their towels. Orange is the fanciest resort. Blue is the motel without water views. They line their balconies with them—flags to countries they'll never belong to. The body is rescued and buried because it didn't swim at 45 degrees to shore. There aren't long talks over dinners. We're so sorry and that's enough.

## SOUVENIRS FOR LOCALS

dirty clothes in a laundry bag the size of a sitting ten-year-old / orange sunglasses with GUARD on the arms / braided nylon flip flops / keys to electric cars / keys to houses on mountains / keys to fireproof safes / steel credit cards / a stuffed brown horse with a saddle stitched onto its body / a warped passport with no stamps / a bag of cash / a remote / two red plastic shovels / a yellow gold chain / an army survival manual

“Occupation Interview,” “Tragedy Lesson,” and “Souvenirs for Locals” are from *Dear Outsiders* (University of Akron Press, 2023). Copyright © 2023 by University of Akron Press. Reprinted by permission of University of Akron Press.