

Martini

Could've never raised my eyes—
head bowed to your prying gaze.

You catch them—chipped paint
on the cliff of my fingernails;
brows raised
before I tuck them away.

What must you think of me?

“Nigga, pour me a drink.”
The phrase is empowering,
tells me I'm no different.

Last man asked for an AIDS cocktail.
I spat
before my face learned
the groove of his knuckles—
blood lining the rim
of his martini.

Liquor burns hot,
keeper of men's secrets.
The tongue has never been one
to stay quiet,
least of all about the different ways
a man can say **Nigga**—

each shot a transposition,
something primal,
something needy.

So I keep pouring,
just to hear you say it;
just to make my eyes lift,
feel your palms,
learn their groove—

callused,
restrained,
unsure.

I have to ask:
“Got a lady at home,
don't you?”