

Cave-smell

by Shweta Narayan

*My mother was a brown bear
honey-lover, heavy paw
cave-smelling warm*

You say I am a girl
though my fur hangs heavy
and my claws click, stumbling careful
on your keyboard

*You smelled breath and fur
leavings and closed spaces
set me down, kicked away
tranq gun raised*

I ask: [What will I be?]
A celebrity, you say. A triumph of neuroscience
and philanthropy.

Words too long to type. I say: [No,
go to school.]
You laugh and pet me.
Bright girl, brown girl,
bears don't do that.

*I smelled home
but she worried that implant plate with her rough tongue
licked shaved skin raw*

*and if she spoke
I did not know the words.
↑*

And there's a laugh in your smile
when I eat honey or sashimi
And fear in your anger
when I snarl

though you do these things too.

*When you called
in my new tongue
I did not look back at her*

So I click, heavy-clawed
and write my halting
small-word
cave-smell stories
in the tongue you taught

And wonder if my daughters will read them
or if they will be brown bears.