

DIAMOND FORDE

What I Have to Give

The speculum, spread apart
like knees, opens
a curtain off my cervix cinema.

She swipes the film
with a cotton swab, thin as memory,
then tucked in a jar, gone.

I'm here because I've forgotten
how to walk without pain
for a partner.

The gynecologist drags a swab
through my wet below,
samples what hurts

inside me, asks me to assess
my ache—I'm flightless,
pinned to the plastic slab. I shift

my feet in the stirrups
while she prods parts
I'll never touch.

My periods are bad.
I do not tell her
I worship a heating pad,

my womb like a false god.
I throw up. I do not
mention the smells that till

the earth in me: the rally of wild
berries at the curbside, ground beef,
my dog's sweet, powdery neck.

She scrapes—
reminds me of my walls.
The ones I've built

from stones of mom's voice.
Your body is a temple,
and she means my body is God's

house but the doctor
isn't here for worship.
Beneath the sheet's horizon

my doctor nods, *you black girls*
tend to suffer more
then shrugs, homing the last leg

of cotton in a tube.
My doctor has said enough
to wrap her voice's noose

on night's neck. Her voice
will break silence like a laugh
track left in utero.

I will quiver on pain's needle,
a phonograph
of ceaseless screaming.

Why didn't I say something?
Like, *some nights I bleed*
more than even a savior should.

I am too much like my body.
Every visitor leaves bones
at my altar. And now

the sterile scent of lubricant
slick between my thighs.
I pinch the sheet

and wipe myself, convinced
this is what I have
to give for answers.