

Ruth Wiggins

a handful of string

the knot, fraying
but softened with grease
out of which, I try to teach
cat's cradle
to Nyambuu's grandson
his small face saying
like this?
mine – *nearly, like this*
we need a second interpreter
for this work
one for the body
my mind too slow
for fingers that know
the steps on instinct
but why a cradle for a cat?
hard to explain
old cat caught in a boa of string
rock-a-bye kitty cat
high in the tree
but here the cat isn't really
a thing
I've seen only one
slinking in on the wind
hard to untangle
the translator gets that look
she is bored with the conversation
it's turned to my hair again
everywhere an archetype
that won't translate
back home
fingers lost
in a rope of keratin
the boy's handsome grandmother
is the local curd queen
her petals, hubcaps, mandalas
sweet and blue
with blackcurrant
as I slip my fingers, pinch
and drop then flare back up
she says

without the string
it is a mudra
she says she once had hair like mine
that it would river
 about her hips (she signs)
 could be wrangled into a braid
 this thick
but a monk had said
 it drew bad feeling
 and so she had
 let go of it
the curd wheel in her palm
 is an eye of Tara
 bodhisattva
but there is some
 mischief going on
the seven eyes, the lotus plinth
 the monumental
 shining buttocks
I look down, pinch and slip
nuh-uh, I say, *like this*

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