

## **Inventing zero**

Each Wednesday, I pinch the shoulder blades of my elderly cat and insert the IV needle to prolong her life. I practiced on oranges and ate them after, pulling apart the fruit to survey

its punctures. In her immediate forgiveness, she curls into herself like a warping memory. I am still calculating the speed at which we travel from loss and the horrific parabola of falling, unsure

if I trust my memory, which at times I see suddenly and clearly like the first punch in a televised fight, the reason for the bright lights and the vendors, the promise of physical pain: my mother

and the bucket in the center of the room that she returned to time and time again as she wallpapered a stranger's house for a living. She was competing with time as she rolled the glue and smoothed

the wallpaper, craning on a ladder to reach the corners before the whole world went dry. I loved her as if she were the only thing I knew, wobbling up there doing work I could not understand,

placing me in the middle of an emptied kitchen with a magazine, in and through the narrow houses spanning Baltimore. It conjures the simple fact that zero has been invented several times:

Mayans used an oyster shell as the number's symbol. More than an acknowledgment of nothing, but as proof of what's missing. How the oyster produces layer upon slow layer of its hard material

to trap anything that enters, making a jewel of its enemies. But to understand absence, you only need to hold the knife in your dominant hand and feel the briny meat, alone in its closeable world.