

**“I Feel Most Like Myself With Painted Nails” by Brandon Melendez**

Rouge sunset battered  
atop each finger

a small galaxy  
of comet & solar flare,

I am a god  
of these two hands

& today let there be  
unapologetic light.

Let there be an origin  
story that is not bruised

fruit lodged in the throat  
like a knife with no hilt.

When someone says  
man [    ] up, they mean

what breathing thing  
have you made

into a wound? What wounds  
have you worn as trophy?

I try to name  
a masculinity

that is not a wolf  
masked in the body

of a wolf  
& I end up howling

at the white fist pressed

into the night's soft cheek.

I'm sorry I'm not  
sorry I undressed

myself of knuckles today.  
I imagined a universe

not dipped in blood  
& made myself drip

with starlight.  
I walked out

the front door  
& marveled

at the way everything I touch  
shines.