Poetry Packet B:
Selections for Week 12

Well-Meant
by Chris Abani

Twenty-five hundred tins of tuna,
no can opener.

Powdered milk that loosened unfamiliar
stomachs speeding death.

Three thousand Bibles dropped into
Mujahudden children.

One thousand blankets and sweaters,
sent to tropical hot zone.

Crates of suturing thread and no needles.
Thousands of candles and no matches.

Tubes of toothpaste and no toothbrushes.
Boxes of high heeled shoes.

Brothers

by Edgar Kunz

Yawgoog Scout Camp
Rockville, Rhode Island

Lift the lid of Rico Flores's trunk
at the foot of the bunk beds we shared
and it was all laid out, unhidden.
My glove signed by Juan Peña.
My hip-hop tapes. The headlamp
I made out of a bandana and a bike light.
The *Hustler* I stole from my uncle.
Mornings I'd take back what was mine
and each night more would go missing.
Wool socks and a monkey fist. A roll
of camo duct tape. We worked the dining hall,
sweeping up food and bleaching tables.
He told me he was from Worcester
and pulled up his shirt to show the crease
in his belly where he said he was stabbed
by his brother on Farrar Avenue.
Said it didn't even hurt until later.
Told the cops it was a stranger that did it.
It went like that for the rest of the summer,
him stealing and me stealing back
when he wasn't around. When I found
the cashbox from the front office
stuffed in with his underwear—told him
I knew about it, told him it wasn't right—
he called me *family*. Called me *brother*.
Said he knew he didn't have to worry about me.
Gripped my hand and pulled me close.

It Was My First Nursing Job

by Belle Waring

and I was stupid in it. I thought a doctor would not be unkind.
One wouldn't wait for a laboring woman to dilate to ten cm.

He'd brace one hand up his patient's vagina,
clamp the other on her pregnant belly, and force the fetus

through an eight-centimeter cervix.
She tore, of course. Bled.

Stellate lacerations extend from the cervix
like an asterisk. The staff nurses stormed and hissed

but the head nurse shrugged, *He doesn't like to wait around.*
No other doctor witnessed what he did. The man was an elder

in his church. He chattered and smiled broadly as he worked.
He wore the biggest gloves we could stock.

It was my first real job and I was scared in it.
One night a patient of his was admitted

bleeding. The charge nurse said, *He won't rip her.*
You take this one.

So I took her.
She quickly delivered a dead baby boy.

Not long dead — you could tell by the skin, intact.
But long enough.

When I wrapped him in a blanket, the doctor flipped open the cover
to let the mother view the body, according to custom.

The baby lay beside her.
He lay stretched out and still.

What a pity, the doctor said.
He seized the baby's penis between his own forefinger and thumb.

It was the first time I had ever seen a male not circumcised
and I was taken aback by the beauty of it.

Look, said the doctor, *A little boy. Just what we wanted.*
His hand, huge on the child, held the penis as if he'd found

a love charm hidden in his grandmother's linen.
And then he dropped it.

The mother didn't make a sound.
When the doctor left, she said to me in a far flat voice

I called and told him I was bleeding bad.
He told me not to worry.

I don't remember what I said. Just that
when I escorted her husband from the lobby

the doctor had already gone home. The new father followed me
with a joyful strut. I thought *Sweet Jesus Christ*

—Did the doctor speak to you?
— No ma'am, the father said.

I said as quick-as-I-could-so-I-wouldn't-have-to-think–
The baby didn't make it.

The man doubled over. I told him all wrong.
I would do it all over again.

Say–
Please, sir. Sit down. I'm so very sorry to tell you–

No. It's been sixteen years.
I would say, *I am your witness.*

No. I have never told the whole truth.
Forgive me.

It was my first job
and I was lost in it.