Barring Tenderness
by Laurel McLaughlin

A bar. One. It divides into two—bartender and drinker or is it guest?
Bartender, as in a tender of the bar. Or, are they, tender? And
drinker-guest,
who are you? How did you find this stool, this hour in the before-after noon?

A bar. Three. What is mixed in between us? Unseeded and dropped in the middle, smushed to a pulp.

A bar. Five. Stools around us, other voices ordering, listening to our spirited social contract, wondering if they too can order, ask, join, sip, check.

A bar. Six. Order of operations. Without an end. Volley and exchange, kick-ball change, new work and old project. Circling back again.

A bar. Four. Drinker-guest, what could go amiss? Nothing and everything, depends on your level of anxiety.

A bar. Two. Of one mind about the need for a drink, but multiple outcomes.
You thought it was *niro* or *soro*, I thought about the shape of a cashew. Around your mouth as we cited the menu—we agreed.