Body/Prose

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Abstract

Body/Prose is a collection of prose exploring the body, with a particular focus on the throat, as well as gender, queerness, sweetness, hauntings, ghosts, consumption, senses/sensations, transformation, the house/home, family dynamics, health, illness, violence, and abuse. The piece occupies, haunts, resists, and destabilizes multiple “spaces” and structures.
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Honey Lips

The Characters:

*The (Human) Family*
Mother
Father
The Oldest Sister
The Second Oldest Sister
The Child

*The Honey Bees*
The Queen
The Worker Bees
The Drones

*The Wasps*
The Yellowjackets
In a honey bee community, worker bees and the queen are female, and drones are male. A drone does not have the ability to sting. A honey bee doesn’t sting unless it is being threatened. If it does sting, it will most likely die. Their intestines ripped out. A queen bee can sting multiple times and not die, though the sting is not as lethal as a worker bee sting. But she can sting more than once. Without the queen, the hive cannot survive and dies.
In The (Human) Family, Mother collects the buttons. Father mows the lawn. Oldest Sister orchestrates. Second Oldest Sister swats. Child follows and takes out the buttons. To dizzy the structure. The needle is in the honey jar.
The summer air smelled of mulch-like grass, nose-stinging. The Child stepped onto the patio of the house. Father mowed the lawn, the lawn mower chopping up and sucking in blades of grass with its metal teeth. The Second Oldest Sister, who sat on the grass on the other side, swatted bees. A swarm of The Yellowjackets swerved in circles like a globe of yellow-black arcs, an acrobatics of little insects, buzzing like the whir of the lawn mower.

The Child walked off the patio steps and made their way to The Second Oldest Sister. The Child sat down next to her and mimicked her by swinging their hands at the little insects. The stingers were unknown to the child. Another swat at another Yellowjacket, and sweet, stinging pain, like curdled blood, melted in The Child’s lips.

The Child squealed. The lawn mower chomped off more grass. The pain swelled. The Child ran for the house. Bee sting, like fresh pollen, sweet and fresh and raw. So much like honey. Inside, The Child, spun and spindled, found Mother, cradled in her arms. Mother laid her silky eyes on The Child’s face, on their mouth—a strip of puffy crimson, like a mushed berry. Almost pop. Pour out juice and spit, and honey. Sweet, red, pulpy honey.

Mother went to retrieve ointment. The Child cried. The Oldest Sister, in the kitchen—duck lips, she said. Bleeding. The Second Oldest Sister came inside, untouched by The Yellowjackets.

The pain in The Child’s lips was as dizzying as the drone of The Yellowjackets, the mind-numbing summer heat. Inside their head, a disarray, a hive of its own. The brain, a pink, fleshy honeycomb. It spun and spun. Nausea circulated in their stomach, spiraling
up their throat. When The Child touched their lips, a string of honey wrapped around their finger. Did tears fall from their eyes. Was it sticky and slow.

The Child looked at The Second Oldest Sister, who stood, vacantly, at the front door, in case The Child fell to the floor. The Child and The Second Oldest Sister breathed together, eyes wide, steady like holding hands. The world seemed hazy, like murky swamp air. Steam. A summer dream. Was she stung? Was she there. Was she spinning—... So dizzy so dizzy.

..
The summer air smelled like pungent mulch. A little boy came out into the courtyard of the house. Father cut the grass and the mower cut the blades of grass with his metal teeth and sucked them up. A young girl sitting on the opposite lawn shot the bee. The flocks of yellow jackets circled around like spheres of yellow-black arcs, and the little insect acrobatics buzzed like the buzz of a lawnmower.

The little boy descended the patio stairs to his older sister. They sat next to him, waving and imitating the little bugs. The boy did not know about the needle. Another slap on another yellowjacket melted on the boy's lips, a burning pain sweet as coagulated blood.

The child screamed. The lawnmower mowed more grass. The pain increased, and the boy ran home. Sweet, fresh, and raw bee stings, like fresh pollen. Inside, a small spinning, spindle-shaped boy found his mother in his arms. Their mothers put silky eyes on their faces and mouths. It could almost explode. Pour juice and spit; pour honey. Sweet, red-fleshed honey.

A little boy cried, so the mother went to get the ointment. “The biggest sister in the kitchen is duck-lipped,” she said. They looked like they were bleeding. A sister came from outside. She called her brother.

The pain on his lips was as dizzying as a yellowjacket drone in the blazing summer heat. Confusion in their heads, a hive in itself. Brain—honeycomb with pink flesh. I turned around. Nausea swept through their stomachs, running down their throats. Honey threads tangled in their fingers as they touched their lips. Did tears fall from your eyes? It was sticky and slow.
They saw my sister standing absently at the front door—at eye level but I was worried my brother would fall to the ground. The two brothers were breathing together, eyes wide and motionless as if they were holding hands. The world looked hazy, like muddy swamp air. Steam. Summer dreams. Was he stabbed? Was he there? Would it rotate ...

Vertigo is so dizzying.

...
The Characters:

*The (Human) Family*
- Mother
- Father
- The Oldest Sister
- The Second Oldest Sister
- The Child

*The Honey Bees*
- The Queen
- The Worker Bees
- The Drones

*The Wasps*
- The Yellowjackets
The summer air smelled of grass, pungent mulch, blood. The Child stumbled onto the patio of the house. Father mowed the lawn, the lawn mower chopping up and sucking in blades of grass with its metal teeth, and Father lost all his toes, swallowed into the vacuum stomach of the lawn mower, and all that was left was his silent screeching. The honey bees shot The Second Oldest Sister (she is not dead—she is curious. Honey splat). A swarm of The Yellowjackets swerved in circles like a globe of yellow-black arcs, an acrobatics of little insects, buzzing like the hungry whir of the lawn mower. They hum and hum, and hum.

The Child slipped off the patio steps and wandered to The Second Oldest Sister, who was in a daze, and unpresent. (A jar of silky honey shatters.) (Vengeance.) Sweet, stinging pain, like curdled blood, like memories, melted in The Child’s lips. (Where does it come from?)

The Child squealed. The lawn mower chomped off more grass, and toes. The pain swelled, like spores. The Child ran for the house. Bee sting, like fresh pollen, sweet and fresh and raw. So much like honey. Inside, The Child, spun and spindled, found ... no one. No mother. No Mother. Their lips—a strip of puffy crimson, like a mushed berry. Out it pops, like a severed vessel. The juice, spit, honey—sweet, red, pulpy honey—pour out, outpour, slow, a thick, sticky stream; a syrupy collection of black seeds, sugar clumps, insect wings, to which The Child attempts to wipe clean with the back of their hand. It keeps running and running.

(ointment; duck lips; hive; brain; pink, fleshy honeycomb).

Did tears fall from their eyes. Was it sticky and slow.

(murky swamp air; steam; a summer dream).
Were you stung? Were you there. Were you spinning—...

So dizzy so dizzy.

.. Now. Into The Yellow House.
In The Yellow House, The Child sprawled on a cold surface. Sepia air. The lips stopped bleeding; a hardened honey blob. Dusty yellow, beige wallpaper, like pageantry, like dead skin. Fluttering wings in the ear. (Rampant.) The glass of silk honey shatters.

Trapped in a black metal cage. On the floor, a half-filled sippy cup of milk with a yellow lid. The Child grabs it, unscrews the lid, spills the milk from the container onto the floor. The cage door opens, and The Child crawls out.

The Child stands up on the wooden floor. The Child looks above. The owl stares down.

(My stomach, a hive for the bees).

An old chest, the top an oblong, oval shape, a dark bronze strip peeling off, in the middle of the room. Inside, soap bars, ladybug buttons, old coins, a vial of honey, a small glass dome—the size of The Child’s palm—with a cork, a string of brown leather tied around its neck. A dandelion sits inside the sphere.

Wear it around the neck, or throw and shatter it?

The Child wraps the leather string with the glass dome around the neck, then takes it off, and throws it at the wall—

The shattering—

(Cinnamon rolls are poison. So is bubbly milk. I see the screams and I see the bees too.)
In pieces, glass shards surround the tiny dandelion, and the leather string stays wrapped around the severed neck. The Child squats to inspect the flower, then grabs the vial of honey—it shines like gold, and pours it onto the flower. Burst, exponential—taller than The Child, the dandelion grows, miraculous splendor, and a honey bee flies out from the seeds. Flitters.

(Squeeze my lips and out comes honey. Fill it up in one mason jar. Take it outside where the trees are. Go where the bees sing. Hold the glass object up. Here you go.)

Past and across the room, the checkered wallpaper, with pastel-colored heart shapes. The honey bee flies to a small door and lands inside the lock opening, waits, then goes to the other side. The Child kneels down and looks through the hole, and the honey bee returns, lands on their lips, takes honey (it is ticklish), and flies back through the lock. The door opens.

(The bees have all the secrets, all the truths, all the wisdoms—they are the most destroyed, burnt, squished, spun to death. Their translucent wings like dusted, forgotten petals.)

The Child crawls through and enters another room. Moth-skin air. The honey bee is nowhere to be found. Only the distant buzzing; rhythms in the canals. In the corner, a splattering of blackberry bushes. Outstretched in their sharp limbs, like thorned, leafy fingers, beckoning, welcoming, taunting. A set of boulders provides an opening through
the bushes. The Child wanders over to the entrance, but steps on two thorns, flinches, and 
this is when The Child realizes their feet are bare. They stumble, fall backwards, then pull 
the two thorns out from their soles, one-by-one, and toss them away.

Onto the boulders, like sleeping nubs, turtle shells—hop, hop, from one to 
another, hop, the blackberry bush vines, like probing noses, cloaked figures, watching and 
following, only as far as their rooted position allows them to. A thorn end brushes the back 
of their shirt. A sharp caressing. The Child reaches the end and enters another room.


The shattering—

(Yellow dust. Parental neglect. A bee sting. Sister’s hands. Mother and her arms 
and scent.)

(Was she lucky. Did the bees like her. Like the swatting.)

A splurge of several long sunflowers blooms from underneath a wall. The Child 
wanders over, wraps their hands around one of the stems, pulling and yanking out the 
sunflower from underneath, its wide open face showering out a thousand seeds, like sun 
tears or rain, clattering and clanking against the wooden surface like shark teeth, The 
Child falling backwards onto the floor. All of the seeds are emptied out from the sunflower 
head, and the interior is hollow like a trombone. The Child reaches their hand into this 
new mouth and feels something sharp and cold, then pulls it out. An obsidian rock. A
purple streak across the middle. The Child takes a bite. It crumbles and gets stuck in between their teeth. It tastes like crystallized taffy.

On the wall, a family portrait—mother, father, child. The child in the photo looks unrecognizable. The Child watches its collapse.

(Sizzling pans. Burnt lips. Mother, stunned, watched. Wet towel.)

(Is that my baby ___? Is ___ spinning? My sweet child, ___. Is my child spinning away from me? Did I do enough for ___? I hear bees.)

The Child blinks several times before honey starts to leak out from their lips. They wipe it with the back of their hand, then again, and again, and again, and again, and the honey keeps oozing. The Child is covered in golden stickiness, and drops the obsidian rock. It shatters. The lips and the searing. What is this burning sensation? As the honey drips and seeps, the hotter their lips become. It feels like fire. A sharp, scorching needle. Punishment. This is when the child starts crying.

(A photo, enclosed in a bundle, like dead insects stretched out to its limits, pinned under sheets for human eyes.)

(Swollen, like fungi.)
The honey bees and their return. The yellowjackets. The body and unknown discomfort.

The stinging, the stabbing, the shattering—

(I wake up and purple grapes swirl in my stomach. Ruins my appetite. Eating seems impossible. I roll over, slivers of sunlight through the crystal maroon curtains. Think my eyes are glimmering.)

(The drone’s phallus is ripped off. The separated body parts fall to the ground, like sawdust. I cut off my genitalia—blood flows out like a rush of red honey—the sweet bees are coming—a glass of silky honey shatters.)

(Torrid ocean pulsations. My waves of unleashing blood below are vibrations, cycling up in dull arcs up my throat. Tunneling half circles.)

(I wish to remain nameless.)

(I’m so (un)bodied.)

(Heavy breathing—mechanical teeth—palpitations—

I’m trembling—
I’m catching my breath, I’m funneling, my heart is hot pulsating rings, I’m so porous, I’m boundless, a void, the harpooning, my below is a bloody netting and outpouring, the shredding, the ripping is the uncapturing (save me from my imprisonment), like uncaverning grapefruit, ribcages, this pain, this pain, what have I done, I’m adrift at sea, I’m choking, I’m drowning, I’m shivering, I’m a vessel of liquid, I’m afraid to look down, my below is a blood lake, my openings, my wounding, the knife is thrown to the side, the sticks and rocks and soil are my grippings, my heart is in my head, a tossing, my body disassembling, the unnurturing, the punishing, the affliction, I don’t know what my body is, this is the feeling, after committing a wounding, the always unsettling, I’m reaching, I’m reaching, there is nothing, I have nothing to hold onto, I have no one.

What is there left for me?

And then, the bees, I hear them—their buzzing, their delightful frequencies, like pond tappings. The bees, harmonious like lavender sugars, buzz and drift over, in their cadences, in their flutters, and fly down, hovering, a crowd of them, nibbling, kissing, sucking, my below, all the blood, all the crimson liquid, the tickling, the stinging, I’m being nourished, eaten, caressed, and this is when my neck bends backwards, when I sink my fingers into the clay-soft soil, I press my tongue at the back of my teeth, my breath is hoarse, I catch my breath, my breath in trembles, I’m wavering, I’m rivulets, and soon my heart contains and radiates and calms, my lungs swell, I’m hot and expansive, I’m scalding, and when I look below, I see a collection of yellow, of black; translucent wings; like flowers, and I think what did I do to deserve this, all this love, all my unlove.
I gently bite my bottom lip, out comes honey, which I taste, then bring up my index finger, wipe off a string of honey, and hover my finger like a tree branch—trembling, and all the bees roam to and circulate around, this honey-ing, a gift, a return, for all the bees.

When I look at my below again, it is dried blood, a slit.

I’m pulsing.

I’m in breaths, and the air circulates in my below.

This is where I stand. This is where I get up. Trickles of blood seep down my legs. I realize I am naked. If I am being watched, what do they think of me? What will they do? What will they do to me? I’m dizzied. I nearly fall, but the bees keep me up, under my arms, behind my lower back. I feel every pulse beneath me. My limbs are weak. I’m grasping—the bees are there for me. I look around. What is there left for me?

I’m surrounded by trees. I put one of my hands over my abdomen, the other over my throat. I’m pulsing. The bees, and their frequent buzzing, the soft caresses along my skin. I’m being moved, carried. The nudges of the honey insects against my back. The circles around my wrists. Every step, a sting below. I fall, and a streak of blood spurts out of me. I cry out. The bees aviate to my below and suckle the blood. I’m struck by guilt, and I’m coated in the bees’ suckling.
I’m on course for collapse. And yes, in this moment, in my continued bloody-ing, the question, *what they will think of me*, is what comes to mind—that I’m only a bloody, torn-up splotch of flesh; I’m strange, cut fruit; a sexless object.

When the bees carry me, I’m wrought, the tears incinerate—this is all I have.

My body, a harboring of pain.

The lucidity. A clearing. Where do the bees lead me? Where does my memory lead me?

Where.

In the distance.

A yellow house.
Home Invasion

(This is what you need to know:


I can’t promise you that it will be a good story.

Be sure to know that the house walls are cold.)

* 

The throat glints. On either side, to be exact. Rose gold, two circular glints, almost unseen, unless you look close, catch the glimmers in the stale sunrays. Reflecting off the teeth walls. The smirks in the paint.

The house is an organ. Lives and breathes. The throat is a house, too. Holds the basement, the arteries, the collections (dust, sounds, acid from coffee or keeping down bile).

I don’t remember when the man entered the house (the house didn’t let him in—it cowered, hissed, growled, shivered. He did not notice). I did nothing about it. (I couldn’t). My eyes look for the floor and my hands reach for the screws in my throat. I know he will screw the house and I know my screws undo.

I know I watch and he watches. The watching watches. The glints watch you, too. Something echoes in my throat. Like rib bones.

*
I know no stories like me, and no stories like this know me. I am hollowed. I am unheard. I have my jewels, my untold geometries. I am not unravishing. I am an unsettled house because this house unsettles/ed me and all my rooms are open for piling and filling. My throat is a fin, strumming gold. My shoulder is my clipped wing, and I’m afraid to have any more cut.

If I am going to be deceased, I might as well patch myself together through the scraps and metals that’ve been scraped from me.

* 

The man wanders into the kitchen as I sit on a stool. He looks at me and says hi. I say the same. My eyes are on his movements, on the floor. My throat vibrates, like a heater.

He then looks at my mother inside the glass-framed shelf.

— What’s that?
— A kokeshi doll.
— It’s very pretty.
I say nothing.
— Where’d you get it?
— I don’t know.
— How much is it worth?
— I don’t know.
— Can I touch it?
— No.
— I want to hold it.

— No.

He stares, marinates his eyes on the kokeshi doll, a little irritation in his nose, like he sniffed pepper.

— What are those specks? He’s looking at my throat.

— Nothing. And I cover it with my hand.

His eyes linger for a moment, then he looks back at the kokeshi doll and wanders somewhere else in the house. My heart is like hot pulp.

(Place your attention to your throat and listen to the thrums. Hum a few long, long notes and then suddenly stop by gasping (just a brief, quiet gasp, almost unheard, but enough to stimulate you). Let the air still, and haunt.)

*

My parents want me to get married. Some day. No, just my father wants me to. My mother stopped wishing.

I do not want to get married. Or have kids. Who wants to get married with someone who has parents made of wood?

We never have dinner at a table in a dining room. If we do, the table is oval-shaped. There are white marks from glass bowls which were too hot with soup and left circular burns. Like static puffs of smoke, or chalk. Stained wicked breaths. The chairs are tall, shouldered. They tense when we sit on them, like they’re holding their breaths. They
might have secrets, too. Screws like rusted bones poke out from underneath some of the chairs. Some chairs have lost their cushioning.

I sit in one chair. I made curry rice for my mother and I. I set her on the table next to me, in front of a chair. Her presence radiates. I miss my mother’s cooking.

My father. I (don’t) know where he is. But he’s there.

My mother whispers to me as we eat. I listen.

*

The man has been in the house for a couple days now. He has touched and groped every door knob, cabinet knob piece, run his hands and glazed his fingers along the walls. The house shutters, grumbles. I swear I heard/felt the house spit. I’ve tried to lock every door. He sometimes leaves the house and comes back.

— How long have you had that doll?
— I don’t know. For as long as I can remember.
— How long have you had those specks in your throat?
— I don’t know.

I cover my throat. He lingers for a moment. I feel his staring. I stare at the floor.

— I can fix you. I can fix your throat, he says.
— There is nothing to fix, I say.

But I always dream about what my life would be like without the screws and metal. I scrape the circular glints, gently. Like they’re scabs.

He’s gone now.
I look at the walls. When I try to touch it, I feel as though I’m about to be burned. Or I might scare it and it will shrivel away, like plants fearing flames.

*

I have a theory that my mother made me, patched me. From the wires and scraps. I have no basis, no evidence for this, but this is what I think.

Maybe she herself has/had screws in her throat, just like me. And maybe her mother did, too.

Where did she come from? She came far. Came from somewhere far away.

Maybe when she had the screws in her throat, she slowly became metal and metallic, slowly morphing into wood, and became smaller. Maybe this happened when she was dragged into this house like a vicious vacuum sucking up papers and pennies, dust and secrets.

Does this mean I will turn into wood, at some point? And will I turn smaller?

Who’s listening?

Oh—

*

One night, my throat feels loose, as though it is about to go undone. I cover my throat to prevent it from falling out, the screws loosening and unraveling.

Before I can reassemble my throat, it’s too late. It opens. Like loosened clavicles. Out they come, all the pieces. Rose gold wires, screws, clock pieces. All scattered on the floor, enmeshed, in glittering metal. The clinks, little touches, like hollow tea cups that sit.
I gather all the items (some scratch and poke my skin) and carefully stuff them back into my throat (it hurts). I lock them up with the screws.

One end of a screw, loose, sticks out, like a fish bone sliver.

(If/when you unlatch the throat, be sure to clean the insides. Don’t let the edges and corners rust. Your throat might lead to infection, which might lead to serious pain, which might lead to death. If it opens without warning, let the sounds and breeze rush out, like an opened attic door, like a mouth, and make yourself sound like a ghost.)

* 

My mother told me, when I was child, that if you whistle at night, snakes will come. It is a Japanese legend. She told me this after I tried whistling when the dark finally came. I started crying. It’s not true, she said.

One night, I hear whistling. I’m not sure whose it is, or what, is whistling. It might be inside or outside. It might be the house. I cannot whistle, so it couldn’t be me. It is quiet, like fresh ink.

I wonder if the snakes will come.

* 

In the kitchen, I am cutting carrots. The man undoes one of the dining room chairs. The cuts against the board are loud. Every crack of the chair legs strikes me through the heart. Then there is a humming. It is not mine. It is not the house’s. I look at my mother.
She’s humming. Long drones, with a couple shifts in notes. Like a bird’s singing. Like a remedy. Like a warning.

The man knows nothing.

I keep my lips sealed (as you always do).

(When you’re asleep at night, pay attention to the moment just before you fall asleep. Where your heart is a slow beat, like the pulse underneath the earth. Then jerk up, eyes on the darkened ceiling. Beat.)

* 

It is the middle of the night. When I wake up, I find a pile of screws lying on the floor next to my bed. They look scrunched up, like arms pulled inward. My throat feels heavy and empty, like a bag once filled with sand. I’m not sure if these screws are mine or not.

I feel so opened, unearthed, excavated, it hurts, and my throat floods with materials and liquids and metals I choke down. I hurry to the bathroom. I carefully unscrew the screws, unlatch the throat, and take out the gunk. I throw them in the trash and cover it all with some paper towels.

I swear I saw a bone in the mess.

* 

In a dream, my mother says, He’s not a nice man, he’s not a nice man, he’s not a nice man.
I wake up, in a dizzy state. I don’t know who she is talking to, who she’s talking about. I don’t know if it really was a dream.

My mother/the kokeshi doll whispers, her/the voice coiling up the stairs to my room, through the walls, He’s not a nice man, he’s not a nice man, he’s not a nice man. My father is made of wood.

I take one, no two, melatonin pills, five milligrams each, because I can never sleep. The pills leave me dizzy. The house doesn’t want me to sleep either. I (don’t) know why. I listen to the aches in the walls, like they’re cracks in limbs.

And the house is listening, listening, listening.

*

The man speaks and speaks, as we sit in the living room, the fireplace crackling and snapping. We’re both at either end of the brown couch, which sits against a wall. It is nighttime. The curtains are closed. He says he would enjoy capturing my voice and inserting it into a cassette tape and recording it, letting the sound wash over him as he lies in his sleep. I imagine my voice is like short circuits, like electrical breaks.

His voice is low and guttural. I want to tell him his voice is not that deep. You’re a liar.

But I say nothing.

He looks around, looks at me, startled, when he hears the humming.

(Hum very low. Hum very high. Hum at different frequencies. Unsettle the structure. The house listens. There is no such thing as a male or female voice.)
I can’t always predict when my throat will react or do something I do not expect. Sometimes I can. I click the tip of my tongue in the quietness of the house, and something wet and thick gurgles up in my throat. When drips of blood seep out from the edges of my throat, I go to the bathroom, kneel down on the floor, and hover my face over the toilet. I open up my throat and out pours the blood. Swaths of it. It takes a minute or two for all the blood to come out. I rip off a few pieces of toilet paper and wipe off the insides, the edges, of my throat. The toilet is bloody liquid and dissolving red paper. I flush the contents. There are some dried blood stains on my throat, which I wash off at the sink. I leave the bathroom and say nothing.

I walk through the hall one day and my eyes drift to the side, downwards. On the floor lie a collection of closet door knobs, fake light gold with white paint specks, their screws undone, exposed and separated, the rose around the screw like a disc. All loose and unhinged like joints. They look like flower bulbs. Doll elbows. Someone took them out and left them in a pile, or they pulled themselves out from the closet doors and fell out and collected together. What isn’t known: their motives.

I imagine taking the end of the screw and then putting the knob in my mouth like a lollipop. It would taste like rust and aged metal. If I bit down, my teeth would disintegrate. Or I would swallow liquid gold.
I leave the closet door knobs alone. I hear them clanking, like wrists. Or like keys that stop moving when you try to listen closely.

*

I remember the lake in Japan my mother told me about when I was a child. A lake so large it makes you think it is the ocean. You can’t see the other side. Sailing or swimming across seems unrealistic, impossible. I have never been there but it feels like I have. My mother has been there. Through her, I see the glimmers in the waves. I see the edges of the beach next to the water. I see the potential of the other side. But I am okay that I do not know—what is on the other side, or how to get there. This ocean is so open. This is perception. This is deception. This is potential. It’s time to swim. When did my mother turn into a doll? I don’t know. I don’t remember—

I’m sorry. I’ll stop.

*

I catch the man using bits of metal, maybe a paperclip, to open one of the doors upstairs. He fiddles with it in irritation, the door knob violently shaking.

— It’s locked, I say.

— I need to go in, he says.

— You can’t.

— Give me the keys to open this.

— No.

He gets up. He’s grown angry. He looks at my screws.
— You must have something locked up in there. In your throat. Open it up and give me a key.

— No.

— Give me something.

— I have nothing to give you.

— You’re hiding something.

— I hide nothing.

In anger, he turns around and gives the door a few kicks. It slams down and lets out a painful cry.

He enters. I stand. My heart wants out of my chest. The house agitates, writhes.

I am not paying attention to the man, to him entering, to the sounds inside. I pay attention to my throat, as it is also a room. The clicks in the small body canal, the strumming, the ticks like dulled, sharp heartbeats, like dragonfly wings, and something unravels, unspools inside, and you come to understand that the throat is clockwork.

*

I walk into the room. The altar sits not in the center of the room, but just slightly to the left. On top, prayer beads, a small white vase filled with ash, two sticks of incense, lit, slowly dying out. In the middle, though not quite, a picture frame, though no picture (it faded over the years) under the glass sheet. Eventually, it splits (you know this very well). The incense tip flames go out. A whisper hush. You shut the door. Your throat is like hardened clay, and it cracks.
(Tonight, when you unlatch your throat, sit in a dark room, light an incense stick, and rub the tip against the inside of your throat. Taste the particle incinerations. Forget the burn of the house, of your heart. Long the escape.)

*

I enter the kitchen. I see the man open the glass-framed corner shelf with glass plates and cups, figurines and the kokeshi doll.

He touches, caresses, gawks at, strokes, my mother/the kokeshi doll. Like a feasting.

When you come to shout, I scream nothing.

I feel my throat. It has grown empty.

I look at my mother. The glass reflection.

In my eyes, watery saturns.

(Listen to the heartbeats of the house. Listen to what it’s telling you. Be wary of the footsteps. You may not be sure whose it is. Stay silent. If you must.)

*

In a dream, or maybe it’s a daze or early morning, I am not sure, I am in the dining room. I walk to and stand in front of the glass-framed shelf where the kokeshi doll resides, with the blue dinner plates and salt and pepper shakers and fruit-imprinted glass bowls. I open the glass door quietly.
I place my hands carefully, gently around the kokeshi doll. I flinch, retract my hands instantly. My mother burned me. The skin on my hands shrivel, like singed cobwebs. My hands are red. They shake. The tears come soon, and drip, but I understand, and do not notice the flow.

I want to tell her we must go. I do.

She wants to tell me we/she cannot. She does.

I want to tell her I understand. I do not.

I close the glass door and sneak back to my room, slip in the sheets, hold my burned hands close to my throat. They keep it warm.

(The house is listening—he’s not a nice man—shake shake shake—escape is the collapse—)

*

When I was a child, my mother told me about the crows in Japan. They are large and black—blacker than olives or caves, obsidian. They screech. They scream, and they sound like humans.

(Look up the sound of a Siberian Eagle Owl and absorb the screech it makes as it swoops down to an aged tree trunk. Or when it catches prey. Mimic the howl in the depths of the house. Hope the growl will confuse the man, or scare him away.)

*
It is when the outside is gray and the curtain is slightly shifted the man asks me to open my throat. It is a sudden demand, and I knew a demand like this would eventually come.

— I’m trying to figure you out, he says. So remove it. Now. I want to know.

I cover my throat, caught between the fringes of frightful and inflamed.

— I’m not sure you want to know, I say.

— I do.

— If I do, will you leave the house? For good?

— Yes, yes.

— And never come back?

— Yes.

— Okay, then. I will.

I place my fingers around the sides of my throat, feeling the glints, unmoving my gaze, and unscrew the screws. I undo my throat like I strip myself.

And suddenly, I feel my heart emptying, like a body losing its sand.

I tell him this is what it feels like to be unknown and desired.

I pour and pour.

His eyes dilate, become far universes.

Do you see me now?

(This is a dream. If you’re upset with this, gather a handful of sand from the nearest beach with a cup—a plastic cup is fine—and pour it down your throat, slowly, your chin angled up the sky, and know that it feels real too.)
There is the legend of kuchisake onna, the slit-mouthed woman of Japan. She is said to be a vengeful spirit, who looks to find lone travelers, typically men, at night and slit their mouths open, just like hers.

This is an urban legend. There are many speculations as to what actually happened to her and why she does what she does.

One is that a woman, jealous of her beauty, attacks her. One is that a medical procedure or cosmetic surgery goes terribly wrong. Another is that her mouth is full of extremely sharp teeth and this presumably leaves her mouth to rip open in a long, horizontal strip.

What seems to be the most accepted version is the version in which the wife of a samurai is caught being unfaithful to the samurai, her husband, and because of this, he mutilates and murders her by slicing her mouth open, ear to ear.

This is how she becomes a vengeful ghost, unable to rest.

I don’t believe she was unfaithful. Whatever she did to the samurai, I do not care.

Is she unable to rest? Yes, maybe she is. Maybe she is not.

Whenever she tries to confront someone, she holds a fan to cover her face or wears a surgical face mask (in more modern retellings), and carries something sharp to attack or mutilate them, either with what is described as medical scissors or maybe a butcher’s knife, maybe a scythe.

Then she asks them, her face covered: Watashi, kirei? / Am I beautiful?

If they say no, she attacks and kills them.
If they say yes, she then asks, revealing her bloody, slit-opened mouth: Kore demo?

/Even now?

If they still say yes, she might leave them alone. Though, during the night, she will come back and murder them in their homes.

If they say no or scream in fear, she slices their mouth open, from ear to ear, just like hers was, leaving them to bleed out and die.

Whatever the case, there is almost no possibility of survival.

Why does she ask these yes/no questions? Why does she give no room for survival?

Why is escape not a possibility?

I wonder.

But, what is to be believed? Legends are legends. Of course.

(if you wish to escape kuchisake onna, here are some possible solutions:

- tell her she looks average or give an ambiguous answer (she will leave you alone)
- throw bekkō-ame, a hard candy, at her (she will leave you alone)
- mention the word pomādo / pomade three times or run into a record shop (she will leave you alone)

Or: tell her __________ and she will smile slowly and tell you a secret. And you know you will meet her again.)

*
I hear the man grumbling, holding some curses, something steaming, under his throat. I hear him washing his hands at the kitchen sink. When he walks by me, I notice what looks like burn marks on his palms. The innermost parts. The kokeshi doll stares so deeply, into the kitchen, at him, the room radiates. Walls shake.

I rub my throat, feel the fissures.

(Remove the cassette tape in your throat by tapping it and out it’ll open like an unhinged jaw. Replace it with another cassette tape, one that makes your voice sound like something that rumbles underneath. The throat is only a voice box.)

*

In a dream, the man comes close to me as I’m lying on the floor and hovers his mouth and teeth over my throat, bites it off and chews it like soiling fruit cores and I’m dripping, I’m dripping.

In another dream, the man comes close and my scissors are concealed and I run the blade tip into the side of his throat and open it up like an epiglottis and it dangles like flower tongues and I’m running off to the edges, where my throat hums bright like sharpened knives and my mother/the kokeshi doll is guiding me away in the darkness like a lantern.

In many dreams, I am ripping out throats.

*

I am in the kitchen, and so is the man.
He has collected screws in his fingers. I don’t know where he got them. He looks at me. I’m self-conscious to touch my throat—if he had touched the screws in the night and pulled them out of me. He sits in a chair, as do I. I take glances. He shifts them around in his palm and fingers, and they clink like taunts and bones. I’m not looking. He has a mild disturbing glare. He looks at me with disgust and slick pleasure. And he seems unmatched.

But I feel so soft and hardened all of a sudden, like re-forming lava, and fever is my throat.

I stare back. It comes through the strains in the neck, the clavicles, the slight upping of shoulders. Narrow eyes (only slight). The tense in the edges of the jaw. Like heated rivulets. Like hot rods. Like they may break his glass eyes. My tears hot.

He blinks. Twice. Maybe three times. And seems to sink.

I walk away, fix shaken paintings, with certain fingers.

*

I’m not sure what happens next.

I come back. The man sits there in languid form. His pupils grow dark like blackberries, or stomachs. And he seems limp and overturned, like a scarecrow taking a strange rest. He might wake up, sometime. I don’t know. I’m not sure.

I stand arrested.

My mother. Her geometries. Something is unsettled.

The house shifts, turns. The front door. So tempting.

Escape seems so good, like licorice.
I grab my mother/the kokeshi doll from the shelf and run out from the house to the nearby pond (or is it a lake?). The cold cuts me. I sit on the edges. It’s winter. I’m out of breath. I’m shaking.

The house collapses. Almost instantly. It lets out a sigh of relief and anguish.

I hold the kokeshi doll in my hands. There is a hum. I touch my throat.

When I look at my mother, I say, “I speak.”

And we say, “we speak.”
Licorice Theft

If I were a fly, the red licorice sticks, and I am the seed.
I am the seed. If I am the thief, then the house is the abode in which I reside, in which I destruct and in which it destructs in me. It is not my choice. Licorice is the key, and it is the mouth that is the lock, which it is that I will unlock. The licorice—I do not possess; I do not have; I do not contain. And so the thievery begins.
And so the thievery begins. There is the door, the closed door, the door which keeps me inside. The horror. The ambulance. The humiliation. It is white, so white, pasty white, unwell white, the white that untwists, the writhing, I’m possessed to look at in its pale allure and unclosed eyes; the suspension; the condemnation; the punishment; I’m scared of the plaque-ness, its entrapment, its dried-ness and stickiness, the glitch. This door, the closed door, its perpetual locked-ness—it confines me, and I’m swallowing the cages, the wires. If the door unlocks, if the door becomes unclosed, then I am in match with the door’s unclosed-ness, and the unclosed-ness unravels me. This unspooling, the cords; my vocal cords; my ventriculars, undoing, ordains my attention, and I will be in arrestment. I’m disintegrating into this foreboding, and that is when I realize the door is watching me. It knows my whereabouts.
My whereabouts. The untelling. The secrets which I now possess, and I’m in the door’s grasp. The distance between us is measurable in magnitudes, and it is flavorless. On my tongue I’m without the decadence of taste, and this tastelessness agonizes me to banish my trapped position, to banish what lies between me and my potential, my escape, the space which leaves me lingered and stagnant, to abandon the insipid, and it is only through taste, the taste of licorice, the taste of sweetness, is my escape possible. Crawling—my agonizing inching, like tonsil scratching, and the oppressive shortening of distance between the door and I persists, and this is when the skin on my hand touches cold, this is when I touch the door, the doorknob—the horror, the ordination, the electrocution; the feeling of abomination is in my hands.
The feeling of abomination is in my hands, and I am ravenous. Oh this is my inclination, my disposition, my pretension, these episodics, and the turning of the knob (my hand movement is out of my control) unfolds before me and the unclicking is the tongue snaps, and my throat dislodges. The door opens its mouth—its black expanse presents to me, and I’m enraptured, and threatened, into stillness, and I’m returned into my stationary impingement, my eternal statuedness; the suffering. If I crawl into the black throat, get up, and take a step forward, will I be swallowed? Imbibed? Or spat up—after being tasted—and left on the floor, like sun-melted flies? The ooze; the speckled tar; the wasted. I’m like the wasted. The tarnished. The thrown-up. Do I dare enter the black tube or do I stay in this room, my room of entrapment, with the single light, with the windowless walls? Yes, I touch the floor of the black tunnel—it groans; the aches; I only place my fingers down, delicately, like brushing against fresh paint; blood. Wet interiors. The floor meets my fingers, and my breath trembles. The touch—is it wet? It is wet. It might not be wet. I’m discovering what cannot be touched by me; the forbidden; it forbids me from touching, yet I am touching. The rubbing at the fingertips, the discerning. This is where I must walk, where I must traverse, where I must venture; into the unknown, the dilapidated throat, into the forbidden; swallowed.
Swallowed, and digested. The releasing of the contact of my fingers with the floor of uncertain wetness, and on my knees I shift to my feet; quivering. The border, the framework, the edging, the between, I stand at, the punishing lingering, and the harsh darkness consumes my breath (I no longer have lungs) and suddenly I’m drowning, in the insurmountable, in the asphyxiation; there is no breathing in the dark throat; there is no holding on. My foot moves forward, and I’m in spite, in resistance; magnetic pulses, to be drawn back, into the blandness, into my locked-ness, where I have nothing, and in my internal resistance, my other foot moves forward, into the throat’s watching, its sensitivities, and touches the beneath, which is wet, and it may not be. I step further, grasping the walls, which may or may not be wet, too. Who or what is growling? It is my stomach. The echoes are carried throughout the throat tunnels, and carry endlessly, and I’m cavernous. The caverns—the saliva; the trenches; the dampness. I’m enveloped in dampness, in moistness, and the monstrous darkness stares, and I cannot go any further, and I retreat. I retreat into the recesses of my mind, and in my mind, I’m returned to my dreams, to the dream about the sense of killing, of the oncoming of being killed, the calmness, the anticipation, the horror, of the killingness, of being killed, the potential, the sweetness of not being found, and the sweetness, which I’m deprived of, is at the tips, the overture, the overhang, and the growling of my stomach returns me to the stickiness, the moist halls, the sodden. The moistened-ness makes me swallow, the dryness, the arid, in the throat; the disgust and the hotness. My hot breaths, and the hall’s throating. I’m embroiled when I take another step further, and the throat halls sense my move, the skin on my feet, the pulsing. Oh, the disgust. It senses my disgust, and I’m liquid, the delectable melting.
It senses my disgust, and I’m liquid, the delectable melting. My throat—the flaps of flesh, the puckering, the uvular sputtering. If I make my next move, my next movement, for I am only sensation, the hall throat will flinch, pucker, recoil, and its noticings will vibrate in sharp domes up and throughout my body. I’m pulsing, and the throat retracts. I make my move—another step, and this time, in this second, in this moment, I’m met with indecision—what if the licorice cannot be found? Where do I look? The looking—the throat is looking, and I’m being ingested. Its stomach rattles and chews; I’m guzzled. Gargled, the salty abyss; this saltiness and wetness, its thickness swarming in the pockets of my throat. The collection of saline pulp. I’m being eaten, and looked at. To refuse its looking—the desire to be upchucked is fervent, and now, in my fixation, I’m swallowed by its looking, its ogling, and to this, I swallow the looking—the thickness, the sopping; its syrup and gunk—oh this heat, this harboring—my body is the vessel, the abode of salty thickness, and there, yes, I make another step forward, and to this, I grasp tightly to the walls, to whatever I can grab onto, and the uncertainty invigorates the throat’s listening, the growls. My growling stomach; we are both vibrations. The lower is the passage, the tunnel, and I hear the wailings in my insides—the whispers, the gaspings, the scrapings; clinging to the walls, making etches, bleeding imprints; an unknown history—and another step forward I take, listening to the lower, where the roots are, and I’m seeking history, in the engravings of the lower, the pried roots; I’m seeking this history, the sweetness, the history of sweetness, this sweet history, its drippings, its salt-filled droplets, it is found in my lower, and I’m following it, I’m tasting it—my sweetness swallows and engulfs me.
I’m following it, I’m tasting it—my sweetness swallows and engulfs me. I’m desire, and history is in my throat. This history—its forgottenness and its capturings. I’m moleculars from the licorice, and its histories are being etched in the valves of the throat, the lining of the stomach. Where is my destination? Where am I led to? I’m swallowed further into the throat hollows, and the wetness below remains a mystery. I cannot forget this sweetness. I cannot let it go. It is my attachment to history, and without the sweetness, there can be no history, and the history, the composition of sweetness, is in the licorice, the licorice itself, and the licorice is my destination. Oh, the licorice. I’m filled with bitterness, and I’m in need of sweetness. The bitter—the feeding, the teething, the granulation, sticking to my teeth; the feasting. I’m further into the black void, the black tunnel, the light from the room a globe behind me, and I realize I’m bitter history. A walking embitterment, searching for sweetness, yet the sweetness is also in me. I’m searching for the sweetness further in front of me and further down inside me, within me—to discover its origins. Where does sweetness come from? I am sweetness, and bitterness. The sweetness is my potential, my possession, and the release. The darkness deluges me, and I swallow to expel. The expelling—of the darkness I consume, and I’m expelled from history: my twisteds and unwanted sweetnees, my bitters. They do not want, and leave me in this darkness, these caverns, these unlit hollows. I am to loiter. I am to wander endlessly. The banishment—I banish. The sweetness I crave, and the sweetness craves me, and in this craving, I’m born; I’m born from craving. I take another step forward, toward my unlocated desire, toward a birth, in the tunnel of darkness, and my senses are stimulated, the molecular level, the underneath, my throat aroused like gills, and I’m invigorated—I’m provoking the throat, and it quivers. The hotness of my heightened-ness, and there, I
sense, the redness, the red shapes, the reddening, the continuous reddening; the shortening of distance between us is craving, and I’m coated in desirous closeness. Oh the delectable, oh the delicious. The tasteful collapse. I’ve been without for so long—the continual stripping, the ripping; this etching, this coming together, this stitching. I’m crumbling; the disintegration. Oh the loveliness, the enamoring. My breath is sap, and the soiled. There, the red cylindrics, the red tubes—there they are, their redness like tongues, skinless flesh. I’m sugared and waxing. The salivation, the salivary glands—their salts and confessions. Oh the reaching, it is infinite, extenuating, and I’m extending, the implosion of ribs and heavy lungs, the swelling, the loss of limbs, the planetary explosions, cell reformations, and I’m reaching for the licorice, for this, for this moment, for this capturing, and its taste is in reach, the reaching is sweet, profusive succulence, bursting fruit; the plentiful, the coatings. Oh this moment, this reaping. The licorice is the decadent, and I am its offspring.
The licorice is the decadent, and I am its offspring. I’m born, succulent, and the throat is undulating. The sweetness is within my grasp, and I’m met with abnegation. Do I take? Do I possess? Is it mine to take? The gulping, the palpitating—I’m soaking in denial and uncertainty. Do I take? Yes, I must take. It is mine. It must be mine. All mine. I’m taken. I take. This taking is mine. My hand extends and reaches. I feel myself being pulled back like plaster, yet the licorice magnets pull me in. The licorice is the gravitation. The distance between the licorice and I shorten, and the darkness listens, enshrouding me. If I take it, the licorice, I will be possessed, and I will possess, and I will be at completion—the interstices of possession. This moment is mutable, and the contact between finger and licorice is prolific—the slick, the infinity, and it is left in my fingertips, which meets my lips and tongue and teeth, and this meeting is detonation, solar collapse, bodily decomposition. The entrance of the licorice. In this entrance, and the passing of this entrance, is the taste, the sweetness; an overwhelming sensation and stasis. I’m swelling—the puffing; my throat is the tympanum, the recurrent stretching. The closing of teeth, the biting, the cutting of the red wax, the contact of bone, and the sweetness in the mouth, on the tongue—the thickness. My tongue is the bed, and I’m chewing and swallowing the licorice for its sleep. The viscous, coating my teeth, and I’m gelatinous. The wetness, the viscid chunks. The swallowing; a possession. I’m possessing this swallowing, and I’m swallowed by this possession. I’ve taken the licorice. The licorice has taken me. This taken-ness, this sweltering. And I see, yes, my history, this history of sweetness, this sweet history, and it is only through taste is this known, is this foreseen, is this held. In the splits of biting, the compressed sparks, the flashings, on the tongue, between teeth, the sweltering sweetness, I see my history, and this history sees me. The darknesses, the
sweetnesses, and the forgotten. The sweetnesses in the glimpses, in the severences, in the pockets. The history only found in the sweetness, and the sweetness that is resisting the bitterness of history. This bitterness that consumes our sweetnesses. Are we not also bitter? Who is the bitter? The monsters of history, the monsters in history. Who are the monsters? The sweetness tells me. I know, and I cannot be known. Whose history lets me be known? I’m hidden from history. The monstrosity of history, and I am made a monster.

Oh this eating—am I the despicable? Am I the distrusted? I’m capsized by this throat’s darkness, and this is when I realize the tunnel is the history. The history is the throat, the swallowing, the watching, the consumption. The history consumes me, and I shall consume it. But, oh, what is this? What is this feeling? In my lower—the bubbling, the gutting, the tearing. Oh goodness, what is in my below? This is not right. This cannot be—is this not my escape? Is licorice not the escape? History is invading me. The bitter. Oh, goodness, the twisting. I’m being writhed and eaten. My knees meet the wetness below. I am only a groan. The darkness’ throat grins. The throat regurgitates; the spitting. The darkness is gulping me, and I’m insipid.
The darkness is gulping me, and I’m insipid. I’m tasteless and tasted. The licorice, the deceiver—who is the deceiver? Like many times, many histories, many centuries, I’ve been deceived. My stomach, my below, groans and cries out—the rippling, the shredding. The evaporation of the redness, the red glow. I’m struggling. I feel the wetness below and grasp onto the table in which the licorice resided. I’m vast and full of sharpness. I cannot fathom this deception. The sweetness—the deception? What am I deceived by? I cannot ask the “why” because I know the “why.” I’ve seen it before. The asking of the “why” is the bitter. The “why” is the bitter. But maybe I have missed something, and the “why” must be asked. Why am I deceived? This question sits on my tongue—oh it is so bitter. I spit. The sputum. The horror of the “why.” I see the deception in the spit, which blends with the potential wetness beneath me. The liquid deception. The poison cuts me, in my below, and I’m surrounded by darkness, and deception. The darkness deceives me. I’m its spitting, and its adoration. To be deceived is my history, the history of sweetness—to be tossed out and spat. Inside me is ache. The monstrous is inside me. Do I contain the monstrous? Does it contain me? The monstrous—is it the deception? Do I deceive the deception, which then may be the monstrous? Do I then deceive the monstrous? And does the monstrous deceive me? The pain strikes me in my lower. I stumble. I struggle to lift myself up. The poisoning—I’m poisoned by the sweetness, in which I trusted. Where do I go now? What is my destination? What is my escape? I sense the opening of the universes, the explosion of planets, orgasmic pleasures. I’m an unearthly being. I’m undestined. I cannot face this truth. I’m made the poison, and I’m poison. The hall throat snickers, its bites eating into my shoulders and throat, my stomach unraveling in its clawed contortions. Its laughter is hideous. What is this torture? I absorb the hideousness, the
wetness below, the sweetness of poison. In my standing up, I’m struck by a hideous thought—what if there is no escape? What if my existence, which is an existence of sweetness, is torture? Who has tortured me? Oh the hideousness. This I swallow, and I’m saturated in the hall throat’s presence—its growing wetness, its encroaching dark. I grip the table with my wet hands, the slickness of an amphibian, and I’ve come to realize I am in total darkness. The light has disappeared. The darkness inundates. How far have I traveled? And for how long? I’ve lost the knowledge of my position. I’m senseless. I’m all hunger and I harbor the sweetness’ hunger. The hunger of loss and what cannot be mine; what is not made mine. What I cannot have. The darkness is making me hideous. I cannot stare at it. What is in this hideousness? What is its disguise? In this disguise, is there the sweetness? Is this the hidden history? The hideousness has taken the sweetness in captivity. The hideousness’ torment. It is ugly and monstrous. How do I retrieve the sweetness from its captivity? The sweetness has been taken away from me, and I’m left with the residue. That licorice, which I had taken a bite of, a half of it, moments ago—that shock of sweetness, that glimpse into what is known. What must I do? The pain slashes in my lower, and I struggle to breath. Yes, I must swallow it. I must swallow the hideousness. Swallowing is the possession. I’m only a funnel. The funneling—I’m the funnel for the transportation of hideousness. The excretion, the passing, the releasing. This is correct. This is my fortitude. This is the sense. And there it is, presented to me. Its lucent red. The half-bitten. I steal the licorice, and history is mine.
I steal the licorice, and history is mine. Or is it? Do I have it now? Or does it have me? This stealing, this thievery. I’m stealing. But am I stealing, if it is mine? If it was mine before? If it was taken from me? What is mine? Oh this redness is in my hands. The redness is stealing me. I’m stolen by its sweetness. The licorice, stolen from the plate, from the table, in the throat darkness, from me, from my hands. Is this stealing? Is this thievery? If not thievery, then must it be just taking? Did I not take this licorice just moments ago? Did I not realize about my stealing? The sweetness I tasted moments ago—or maybe it was years?—and its return. Before I swallow the hideousness, I eat and swallow the licorice, and centuries pass before me, and after. I’m a vessel of visions and the hideousness vanishes. Or has my perception of the hideousness vanished? Am I vanishing? The licorice and its sweetness reaches my stomach, and I’m a witness to the passing of centuries. The witnessing of thieveeries. The seed has been planted in my lower. I harbor the secrets, my fingers left in the stickiness. I witness all of what has been stolen. The darkness’ throat watches me, waits. I sense its prowling, open my mouth, and the throat retracts like it’s been burned. A coiled snake. Oh. Whose body is that? Is it mine? In the shadows. In the corners. I see its slanting. Its fixed position. Its molecular movements, the slightness. Its presence is sharp. The angulars. It’s looking at me. I cannot see all of it. Can it see all of me? It has been watching me for a long time. I know this. This darkness, this shape. What is my shape? I cannot look at what I’ve become, what I will become, what I became. I don’t know if I can find the relinquishing. I don’t know if I can understand it. The body, which breathes and does not breathe, is made of stone, and bits crumble from its headlessness. The bits meet the wetness below and the wetness suckles the bits. It does not move, but its presence is wavering. How much of its body is my body, how much of my body is its. Do I
dare move, to unsettle? The licorice, the escape, which I have eaten. Do I have my escape? What is the escape? The body and its chipped-ness, its specks. The magnitudes between us; the swallowing. In this moment, this convergence, are our bodies meeting collapse? Are our bodies stolen? Is the collapsing the stolen-ness? The stolen-ness, of our bodies, the collapse? And who rebuilds this collapse? The body has a message, and it transmits. I understand and foresee, and I look back. The collapse of the body, which is the disassemblage, the falling apart, of history. I cannot cope with this collapsing, this collapsing of history, yet whose history is it? The body tells me its secrets, the secrets of the collapse of history. What is my beginning and my end—my beginnings and ends. The swallowing of the licorice is the collapsing of history, and its seeding. The throat witnesses and knows nothing, and I know all. I’m surrendering. In the aftertaste of the licorice, of the sweetness, I surrender into the collapsing. The collapsing is the openings. The universes implode in my throat and my chest—history is collapsing within me. I witness its openings. The explosions—of this moment, the space between the body and I, historical collapse. The body and I are closer together. I sense its vibrations and kinetics. The armlessness. The fillings and the emptiness. The want. I wish to be released. I’m entranced by its cut-off-ness, its severed-ness, its unspoken disposition. This body is not mine, nor am I its. What is this mine-ness? I’m captured in its watching. Oh this body—the crispness, the crumbling. The chipping away—of its body, of time, of my etchings. The closeness of us. Our histories merging. My melting, and my solidification. I’m coarse. The sharpness, the cutting, slicing through the dark air. The decapitation; I’m a headless statue—oh the deliciousness.
Kamisuki | 紙漉き

1. papermaking; paper-making; paper making
doko

watashi?
dokoni mo nai

nai

nai
papermaking

mienai

kikoenai

hanasenai

ugokenai
しくしく泣く
It was when the sunlight glistened on my face through the slips of my bedroom curtains I noticed the skin on my left arm had turned into a yellow sheath—thick, sleek, like reptilian skin. I stared at it. I tapped it. Scraped it. The lemon grazes nuzzled under my fingernails, like pollen. I stuck the ends of my fingers under the edge of the lemon. I ripped and peeled off layers of skin, and they collected on the floor, like bird wings. Underneath, on the carpet, my skin. The problem seemed to have ended there. But the next day, the lemon skin grew back, thicker and yellower and sleeker than before. I peeled another layer off again, it hurt a little bit, and yet again, they fell to the floor.

I haven’t told anyone about it. I should soon. I’m not sure what will happen. What will people think? I can’t tell. The sun feels nice.

* 

I buy a lemon tree today.

Well, I buy a lemon tree seed, and I take it home, the feeling of the small seed inside the package, like a bean or weird button, along and in between my fingers. I also gather a large pot, a forest green color, and soil from the store. Once I get home, in the kitchen, like dropping into the inside of a mouth, I dump the soil in and drop the one lovely little lemon seed inside. I collect a cup of water. Then I pour. Like a slow stream. Downwards.
I water this plant, this lovely plant. It will grow so nicely.

... this feeling ... this heart ... like rotated cabbage ...

*

The next day, the lemon plant grew to a sapling. I kneel down. Two little leaves, like green ears. Or flattened, curved tongues. I swear I saw the leaves flap, just a little, like wings, like a soft whisper or blow of air made them flutter.

When I lift myself up, I remember the pain in my body. The electrics. The two little leaves ponder me.

*

My skin has gotten worse.

Initially, the lemon skin seemed to have only grown on my left arm, on the top side, and now it has grown my right arm as well; the yellow sheath, with a few dents and light bruises and knobs, wrapping and creeping around like fluffless moss, the smell of citrus fragrance and thickened pulp and pollination, I peel. The thick, yellowing skin—wet, tendril-like strands stick to me as I peel it off. It’s sticky underneath. Cobwebs. Thickened spit. Mouthed tissue paper. My heart pummels.

I’m disturbed, and venomous, and enticed.
I turn on the kitchen sink faucet and put my arms under the water, moving back and forth to let the water run over every part. I grab a sponge with dish soap, then scrub my skin roughly. To remove the strings, the pulps.

When I’m finished, I dry myself off with a towel. I feel renewed, and emptied, like scrubbed fruit. I rub my arms—reddened and soft and fresh. Gratered.

*

The tree hadn’t grown much before a full, luscious lemon appeared, hanging, like a giant, swollen yellow tear. The lemon tree is maybe a foot tall now, and harbors this lovely lemon, which I smile at. I kneel down to cup the yellow fruit in my hand. It feels sleek, like bird wings or marble stone. When the sunlight envelopes my body behind me, a network of electric shocks courses through me—stops me—and I catch myself with my hands on the edges of the pot, which shakes. I take a deep breath. Several breaths. Take in the view of this lemon.

*

I’ve had my blood drawn out three times in the past year.

I’m constantly dizzy, I don’t know why, and there is a certain strangeness I feel in my body, and so I’ve gone to the doctors many times. No one else knows about my condition. The results have always come out as “normal.” I wonder why I need to have my blood drawn, and I still wonder why my body still feels this way. Then I hand off more

Before I leave for my doctor’s appointment, to avoid the fear of being looked at with yellow skin, I unsheath another layer, which had grown overnight like bamboo shoots, from my arms, the back side of my right calf, in between two fingers, and throw them away. I take a quick shower to rinse off my body, scrub my skin hard, trickles of blood going down the drain like pomegranate grains. My skin stings. I don’t move for few seconds. Afterwards, I dry myself off and apply a layer of lotion and I hope no lemon skin grows while I’m at the doctor’s. I wear clothing that covers most of my body.

The medical professional sticks the short needle into the inside curve of my elbow and draws blood. The pinch is temporarily painful, and recedes, though the needle remains stiff and stuck in my arm, and the pain is like a rock implanted in sand floors, underwater. I look away as the blood is sucked out into the tube.

The medical professional collects three plastic containers of my blood. She shows it to me, verifying my name and date of birth on the pasted label. I nod.

My vials of blood, tinted with yellow flakes.

The medical professional takes a sneaky glance at the vials, at me, back at the vials, pretends to look away. I’m too dizzy and hungry to say anything. I leave, bandaged and taped.

* 

I wake up dizzy and my back aches and nausea permeates and I feel a sensation,
like a cherry pit, somewhere in my abdomen. I go to the kitchen and the lemon tree is now half my height, and now it has a few more lemons, which hang delightfully, and I absentmindedly rub my skin. The loveliness. The lemons like planets. This plant is growing so fast. I haven't watered it much. I gather a cup of water and pour some more into the soil, which the dirt and the lemon roots happily soak in.

I'm full of ache. I'm disappointed—maybe sad too, to see another layer of skin has formed on my arms. This time, I peel from the elbow. My skins stick to each other like tendons, and I rip and rip. There are tints of blood. Which speckle the floor like confetti. My skin is reddening, wounding. In little slits, like a line of blood on a canvas. I wipe away the lines of blood on my skin and the floor with a wet towel, like wiping away red paint, though the imprints remain, like its stain wants to be remembered.

My heart is a lemon in a cage, and it pulses. I hold my hand over my chest. I tell myself it is okay and that this perpetual lemon growth is only temporary. It will go away.

* 

I'm unable to look at my food. My body doesn't want it and I'm hungry. I swallow the sunlight. Orange.

... What is wrong with my body? ... Every morning ... I wake up with nausea ... The nausea lingers

(Periphery: Bites. All over their back. Bugs. Nibbling. Teeth marks. Skin all blotchy, red. I'm fuller and taller, profusive like the moon. Sun's breath.)
like oil at the bottom of a pot ... or liquified grapes ... It’s hard to swallow food ... I hold things down
... I don’t eat ... Every time I eat I gag ... Every time I look at food I gag ... Every time I think about
eating I gag ... It is like my body is playing tricks with me ... My body wants nothing ... My body likes
nothing ... My body wants everything ... My body wants to strip itself apart ... I want to strip
everything off ... My skin ... My clothes ... When my stomach is a puddle of sickness ... I think of rice
... I dream of rice ... some rice porridge ... That is always nice ... It is something my mother makes me
when I’m sick ... rice porridge ... with seaweed ... with egg ... Water ... the pot rusted with ash at the
bottom ... the savory smell of warm rice ... Oh yes ... My lemon tree ... My sweet lemon tree ... I water
... to keep it alive ... Water me ... I’m so thirsty ... Oh little lemon tree ... Tell me how you live ...

*

When I wake up this morning, I am covered in wetness. A sticky wetness, like

glaze. I lift myself up. Liquid leaks down my back, around my neck, along my stomach and

legs. It is hot, like summer storm rain, or sweat. I push my blanket off of me. Every part of

me is wet. Yellow-red stains. Like sunset lemonade. Like alcohol, dizzied. Thinned honey.

Dripping down. Piping leakage. Faucet drops. I’m leaking juice.

I hurry to the bathroom and dry myself off with a bath towel. On my arms the

yellow skin returned with another sheath during the night, and I peel my skin off like

they’re band-aids. I throw them in the trash.

When I return to my room and open the curtains to let the sunlight in, I look at my

bed. The saturated sheets. The faint smell of lemons, like aired honey, or the cusp of

(Periphery: Shedding. My leaves meet the ceiling. The wanderer below. Shedding their skin. Bathing in the sun rays,
grow. Decay. Decomposing. Unable to move.)
spring. My secretions, my liquids, all over the fabrics.

*  

When I was a child, my mother bought me Japanese pears. They were in a bundle of four. She cut up one into a few slices on a cutting board, and handed a few to me in a small bowl. I took a bite. It was the sweetest thing I had ever tasted. Thick sweetness. Granular. Syrup. I felt no worries. We ate together in the kitchen.

*  

I started collecting my lemon skin in buckets in the garage. Something felt wrong to throw the sheaths of yellow skin into the garbage or outside in the backyard. It felt like throwing away pieces of myself. It felt like waste. I have three buckets of my lemon skin now.

As the sunlight shimmers through clouds, I take a couple pieces of my lemon skin, fresh ones I peeled off from this morning, and look at them in my hands. I set them on the counter. I collect bundles of lemon skin from one of the buckets and scatter them across the kitchen table. An assemblage of dried, yellow scraps, like scattered leaves. From a cabinet near the floor, I gather a bag of sugar and a cutting board. I cut some of the peels that are very wide into thinner pieces. I grab a saucepan, put the lemon peels inside, and fill it with a few cups of water. I turn on the stove. I bring it to a boil and let the peels boil for a few minutes. This is to blanch the peels—the process to remove the bitterness from

the peels.

I pour the water out into the sink. I repeat the process two more times. My lemon peels boiling, growing soft. Each time my peels becoming less bitter. I get a bowl made of metal and pour my hot-soaked peels inside. I scoop two cups of sugar into the saucepan, as well as two cups of water. I stir everything over the heat, until the sugar dissolves. Then I drop my hot-soaked peels inside. To syrup and candy my peels. I wait for the water to boil, then bring down the heat.

Now, I wait.

As my lemon peels simmer, an odd sensation materializes around my achilles and on my lower right back. I sigh. Like removing a star from its constellation, an electric pulse like sharpened tongues at my heart, the peel I rip off from my back. I do the same for my achilles. They become one with the scraps and peels and shells and mold in the garbage. An hour passes. I return to the kitchen. The bubbles of fruit peels. Like foam. I get a drying rack with tin foil splayed out beneath and pour all my syruped peels onto it in order to let them cool down. These glowing, translucent pieces, like lanterns.

Again, I wait.

A few hours pass. I return. The lemon peels have hardened and crystallized. I blink. Pulse in the heart. The sun waits. My lemon tree. I blink again. So does my heart.

I grab one piece from the rack and stick the end into my mouth. I take a bite. It crunches. It tastes so sweet and dissolves on my tongue. I move it around my mouth and I swallow. It goes down my throat, down to my stomach. I do not gag. I do not feel

(Periphery: ... To eat yourself during death ... The juice is running ... and the lemons ... are falling ...)
nauseous. I do not throw up. I feel warm and sugared. And I am suddenly crying, the tears leaking slowly, because it is the only thing that I can eat, because it is strange that the only thing I can digest is myself.

... I’m so naturally sweet ... My sugars, my sweetesses, my salts, my bitters ... To be candied and crystallized, and eaten ... Am I naturally so sweet ... or are my peels bitter? ...

* 

Peeling is my ritual. Is my day. 

I’m ever-stripping. I’m stripping forever. 

When I peel, sometimes it is painful. Sometimes it is stimulating, erotic. Sometimes it is somber, like morning fog.

* 

Today I wake up with circles of nausea, like bowels of spinning insects, and the lemon tree grows another foot. Their shimmering glands, their shining yellow bells, so sweet, so sweet, an infinite sweetness, this lovely tree, and the skin, the yellow, thick skin, like chewed-ness, my skin, laboring me. On my ankle, like a wide needle or overlapping, enwrapping tongue, my finger I put under my lemon skin and pull, slowly, the connection between my layers of skin, my multiple skins, coming undone and apart, like ripping a flat heap of soil, and little seeds fall and clatter on the floor, like hard tears or shards of buttons the color of dead sand dollars, and in between the skins, my skins, are little cries, little rips, like the mouths in soap bubbles, or earthquakes, the crevices, the openings, the
slits in caverned earth, like opened bird beaks, frozen in hungry pose, because something is always being undone, in me, on my skin, in my lungs, and the acidic tears, which burn like detergent, roll down my cheeks, and the lemon tree grows and grows.

*

It is sunset. On my right arm, the layer is thick, like a layer of grapefruit skin. I begin to peel the layer off, wincing. White particles sprinkle to the floor. I stop peeling to look down. A collection of what looks like snow or salt. I look under my lemon skin and see a collection, adhering to the line between my lemon skin and my normal skin. I scrape the white particles, like dust from the mouth of crystals. Some stick to the end of my finger. I bring my finger to my mouth. I taste it. It is sugar. I’m sugaring.

*

Another earthquake strikes somewhere. I’m too far away to feel it. I feel the rumbles underneath my feet. The devastation. The ripples in my skin, the peelings, the earthquakes in my body. The pain in my back, like hardened, fractured dirt. I am an earth and I am shattered, shattering. I water my lemon plant, who is thirsty.

*

I make tea and I realize I’ve run out of sugar. Only particles on the interior edges of the paper bag remain.
I haven’t peeled yet, today. Nor have I watered my lemon tree. The tree seems to grow without much of my help, though. A layer of lemon skin waits on my lower leg, just up to my knee. Does it have sugar?

I kneel down—my back aches like bug bites—and stick my thumb under the lemon skin. A couple particles, like ice dust, fall to the floor. I swear they blink. I grab a large bowl and a spoon. I stick my feet at the bottom of the bowl, then strip off the layer of lemon skin with my delicate fingers, from top to bottom. It comes off in one piece and I hold it up. I scoop and drag and scrape the sugar from the lemon peel. The sugar collects at the bottom. When I’m brought back up to my feet, I feel the lemon tree’s presence. Then I scoop the sugar into a container, wiping off my sugar-stained skin with a wet towel and drying it off with another.

I sit down at the table and I think of many things: my allergies to fruit, how warm the sun is, when will this suffering end, why are bells ringing, what does love mean. I gather a clump of sugar, like white sand lining a glistening shell, collected from my lemon peels and drop it into my tea. I stir. I take a sip. (Stimulation). I taste so sweet. Like plant secretions, sticky, yellow tears trickle down my face. The sickness, the sickness.

... *drink me ... and eat me, too ... the sickness ... the sickness ...

*  

Morning.

Gasp, I wake up.

Ice.
My back is the map of the electrical.

The ceiling holds their breath—

... My pain is like star constellations ... like scattered plots ... and they pulse ... across my back ... the little stars ... with a pencil or knife ... connect them together ... draw blood ... draw the lines ...

*

Mother.

The pain is too much.

Some days it feels like I can’t breathe. Some days I’m struck by a shock of pain so strong, so sudden, so startling, my back arches and my neck bends backwards, and I’m caught in a pose. It feels like my spine, my trunk, my roots, have been yanked out from a force. Some days, I’m staring mindlessly at a wall, out the window, and all I feel is the slow tempo of my heart, and my vision blurs, like peach horizons.

I’m spitting up lemon seeds. Sometimes they come out in clumps—a collection of slimy seeds. Sometimes it is just one seed. Glimmering. Slick. Like a solidified tear. Like a tooth. I throw them outside in the grass. Later, more come, out from my lungs or stomach, I don’t know, and my heart stings with lemon liquid.

I don’t know what to do. I’ve stopped trying to peel. It’s no use. The rate in which the lemon skin grows is exponential to the rate I’m able to peel them off and discard them. It is tiring, exhausting. And every peeling, every stripping, feels like I’m tearing off a bit of myself, and I can never get it back.
There was one day. However. I gathered a collection of my lemon peels, my skin, my discards. My back ached so much. I saw stars. I felt the sleek, smooth skin on the outside, the wet, soft inside. I took off my shirt and knelt down to my knees. I pasted the interior of a lemon peel onto my back. Then I put another, then several more. The wet, succulent, soft insides. Suckling. Moist. Lovely, sodden fruit.

Mother. It was so warm. Heat radiating my body. The electrical pain subsided. I was a warm ocean. I breathed. I inhaled, exhaled. For once, I felt relief.

Mom.

I think I’m dying.

Is this how I’m supposed to feel everyday?

I think I’m reaching my end.

*

The sun is sick. The sunlight is sick. So sick. It is weeping, too. My tears, like hot tangerine oil. The walls covered in the sun’s orange malaise, the sun’s marmalade, the sun’s knowing cries.

I feel the devastation’s house. My heart feels strange, like fruit pulp, or hyperactive butterfly wings, or still, aged water. My limbs feel tired. I feel soft and mushy and overturned. The lemon skin is still growing. I haven’t peeled since yesterday. Or maybe it was the day before. I’m not sure. It’s morning, right now, I’m sure of it.

And my lemon tree. The tall trunk. I am by now. The broken pieces of wood. On the floor. The many leaves. I struggle to look up. When did the tree grow to be so tall?
I’m so tired. I think rest is for the better, right now. My legs are shaking. My vision is strange. I spit out a lemon seed. Am I blossoming? I feel every plant’s end and beginning. The gravity. Planetary pulls. The sunlight takes me in and I take in it.

I find myself falling to the floor in slow exhaustion. The floor reaching my palms. I roll over and lie on the floor on my back. I see the lemon tree, high above me. Such a lovely tree. Those lemons, hanging, those yellow bells. My heart, a stringy wad of flesh, drips yellow liquid. I grab a knife next to me. I plunge it into my thigh, then let go. It makes a metallic noise. I grab a lemon seed and drop it inside me. I fall, into a deep sleep. And I hope I grow.
Periphery: A tree broke through the house and down the house came, like an earthquake had happened only inside the space of the house, though much of the structure remains. Twenty years later. There are rocks and stones and grass blades. The air smells of lemons. I am witness to the ripping of their roots. Before they became a tree. The electrical shocks. How can something ripped from their own birth grow again? Our yellow tears. Down below, our roots entwined. Now. We harbor lemons. Those yellow bells, chiming, ringing sweet.
It is seven in the morning. In this morning the seven is the earth's opening mouth. Like crows and their deepnesses. Seven is the now. Untiring the body and the mouth is like the seven, opening at the corners. It is purple like abused fruits. Purple thumbing. In the thumbing is the seven. The seven in the morning. And in the morning is the thumbing, where the purple lies. It is fullness, like the expansive in the swelling of a bruise. What does a shy shadow mean? It is its purpleness that is the answer, and in its corners. Which the seven in the morning, in this morning, ticks and resides and accumulates, and it is the purple itself. A shy shadow must be like the slight corner of the seven, and it must not be, too, in order to not offend itself. Seven is the bruise, and the bruise is the seven. And the bruising is continuing as the abused fruits continue to diminish in its seven delicacy. Now is the seven, and soon seven will become its past bruising, its past purple-ness, and will become the purpleness of the after seven. If I am like the seven, the seven in this morning, then I too will shed my past bruising, my past purple-ness, and that purple-ness, its own bruising, will shed in its numerations. I am only delicacy. And a delicacy only in the soft mushes of the seven, in this morning, which is dark and light. The recession of the seven of this moment is merging with the completion of the seven in which it will be past. I can only savor the seven if it means the abused fruits relinquish their bruising, and who is to relinquish this bruising? I am abused fruits. And the seven, and it will take. In these bits, like the thumbing, and I will reach past the seven and the seven will reach past me, and the purple diffusion will reach its completion.
On my side, finding the floor with my forearms and my hands, gripping the softness below me, in the dim space, the thin blanket dressed around me, I am waking up to the lemon’s watching (the lemon is the curtailing and the wishing), their leaves like tuned-in ears, blissful attention, the sunset and sunrise are in ache, and their magnetisms are in tandem. Inside my mouth, the granular, powder behind the teeth, hand-crunched chalk—the lemon tree whispers, this is the delight—my thirst is succulence, parched flower mouths and caverns, cacti, opened up to receive the rain, the throat is the drought, the peeling, the stripping, my back coming undone in droves of yellow sheets, I’m stripping, I’m stripping, to look behind me, over my shoulder, overhearing the murmurs, like mountain drones, the lemon tree, its transfixed illumination, watches me. The lemon is the seduction, and I am its embrace.

To be noticed in the periphery, in the outskirts, like the rims of a can or the side view of a flying hawk, in the backdrop of almost dark, of patient sunset, is the elongation, like a yawn, like streaks of light. The line of ants circling on the windowsill, next to the feather duster and dolls, the lemon notices me, in this room of almost darkness, waiting, like a vulture, a held water droplet, in suspension, and to this I look forward, to this my eyes angled to the side, the left side, my chin just at the reaches of my left shoulder, to this I look back, behind me, I look at the lemon, the lemon tree, and their presence breaths like
lungs, like hushes, unmoving—*spinal the cord*, the lemon tree says—which rings in the
valves of my heart and chest, like soft gurgles, its whispers my own delight and intricacies,
like in the un-sticky webs of spider silk interlocked in skeletal fingers, I am in its waiting,
though I am not caught, I am not captured, and my waiting makes the lemon shiver, and
pause, and nearby an ant crawling over a razor or a bathtub edge, or up a leg, around a
water bubble—we are both unmatched and we are lovely tellers of our dooms.

In the about-to, in the black aches of opening eyes, in the dulled taps toward sunrise, I
awaken. Like the dropping of enfolded papers to the floor, like feathers, like eyelashes, like
charcoaled whispers, like caressing: the scrawling on and the sleek flinging of sheets of
canvas paper, to which I am being drawn, *who is drawing, is it the lemon tree?*, I am not sure,
the fingers are gracing the pencil which is gracing the slick pages, the act is its tapestry,
like dry, golden streaks; and this is the etching, and this is the scratching, and this is the
marking on the parchment, in which my pain is being drawn, my back a canvas, and
whoever or whatever draws the blue electric pulses, the web of biting bugs, the pulsating
stars, the cracks like the cracks in earthquakes, the lightning strikes, and the papers let go
and fade, like ashes, on its own accord, like light essence. Out from my back, which is a
web of electrical shocks, is the siphoning, the drawing out, the sucking, and this is the
release, the needle removed from the inside of the elbow, the sputtering, the clavicle, the
loosening, the pain being pulled out from me in streaks like lengths of smoke, aromatics,
and my pain is drawn out in angles, like wings, to see the layers and the secrencies, to
loosen the muscles. I am their transfixion, and their transfixion is my captivation.
The lemon behind me is a lantern, and I am total eclipse. Its drawl is the hypnotism, and
tastes like honey and melting peaches, and in that sweetness—"Pulse is my
embellishment"—is what I hear, is what I hear the lemon say, at the bottom of my throat
(my little hive), under the drums of my chest and ribcage, the pulses are rivulets and run
under the floor, in the bumps in the lemon, which are dimples and meteorites, at the tips
of its leaves, in my sugar veins, and this is the embellishing, this is the embellishment, an
everasking, and it is mine, it is the lemon’s, it is symphony, it is cartilage, it is fervor, like
heated iron, like scalding discord, wasp stings, gelling strawberries, lips.

The silky blanket drops down and exposes my mostly naked body, though it covers my
lower half, and in the dimness, I am enshrouded, and the lemon and I continue our
looking. This is our hypnotics, our silent dance of devotion, our sultry. Umoving, planted
on this circular, soft surface, a few inches off the cold ground, the gentle touches of the
blanket wrapped around me, the leaves on the lemon tree flicker and whisper, and wisp,
like being brushed by the wind, yet there is no wind inside here, only our vibrating
infatuations, our plantedness, our profusive temptations, and this windlessness is the
gentleness between us, the gravitational attention, and to this I wonder if I am in death, if
I am in the process of dying, of being in death, and when the pain in my back, in my body,
breaks me even more, I ask, Please bring me relief, and relief, I hope, I wish, shall come.
The figure in front of me has their back to me, their gaze to me in temporary transfixion. Their back, a canvas, a plot of earth, a sheet of stone, fabrics, illuminates in blue streaks, and each streak pulses, and pulsates, and with every pulse, and with every pulsation, is like a pulse in the hive of a migraine, for which gave no relief to them, and to this they hold their gaze as an asking for relief, and the pulses and the pulsations rhythm like rivers in my roots, in the lava lakes at the bottom of their throat, and carries across their body, and our bodies, which are connected and voluminous like marmalade and snake venom; do our delights lend us relief? is our question, which hangs in the air, in tangible suspension, like bloated throats, in this room of almost dark, soon-to-be dark, the not-quite dark, the to-happen dark, and is in question with our lovely dooms, like a hive without a queen bee, to pull the wood column from its structure and let it fall, a removal of the toe or the finger, and as the figure with their stripes of blue electrics sits, their throat might crumble like blocks, in their asking, in their quiet pleas, and in our intimate gaze, the vibrance, the giving, the sharing, our connective tissues, is the nourishment, like candle light, like wax, like bloodless honey.

I am wishing for the relief, for alleviation (crocodilian desire)—for the pains, and the light bulb above flickers on the ceiling. At the top, at the crevice, at the brink of overflow, the flap of skin, the volcanic, the eruptive, the undulation, is the upcoming water, the dome of emotions, of the unresolved and the unnourished, hitting up against the covering, the upmost, the lid, the sloshes and the remembrance of pain loosening the cap, in which it
cannot be contained, in which it cannot be held down, in which it cannot be closed, and that is when the tear falls, a single tear, a soft droplet, a watery ant, a trickle of liquid light, down the left side of my cheek, releasing and unreleasing, in slow, in painful passion, the digression, my mouth opened just a little, asking for relief, eyes unblinking, and my question, *Am I loved?*, which emerges in suddenness, like a body nudging to be unearthed, like a knob in the throat, like unknown hurt, hangs at the tip, at the palpable, at the fingernails, at the merging of tongue and teeth, and the question, unlike the tear, evaporates like quiet mist, like listlessness, and I grasp for it, the heat and steam circling through my caverns.

In the unmaking, I am being made, and to be looked at is to undress, to mesmerize. In calm trepidation, blinking slowly, another tear, in the resting, between the arresting exchange of our looking, in our onlooking, falls, and collides with the first tear, which is reaching the edge of the left side of my chin, the cliff, the facial perimeter, and together they merge, and become one, and hang off the margin, and to this I do not blink, I do not crumble, and what is asked is unanswered—the lemon tree is unmoving and poised, and the desire to fall back asleep erupts, like fissures, calamities, like spores at the trunks of trees, and I am in invitation.

Soon, in the teeth-size moments, in the space between fingernail and skin, like the anticipations before lightning strikes, the tear, composed moments before in two separate
tears, though the distinction now is impossible, trembles off the brim, the bone curvature, the rounded crest of the face, and falls down, gossamer explosion, surrendering into the veins of the blanket fabrics, into the floor, into the web of vibrations of the below, of the ground, of the underneath, and travels in indecipherable speed to the roots of the lemon tree, soaked in and soaked up, a thaumaturgical entrance, and the lemon takes a part of me in, and I take in it, our perishing is our nourishing, and this is window netting, this is the relinquishing, an unraveling. Simultaneity is in our grasp.

Riveting is my hand placement on my thigh, then to the soft surface below me, a stamping, a momentary implantation, and this is the grounding, in which my eyes stabilize within the devoted fixation with the lemon, my hand is the extension, and the holding, the grasping, the reaching, and my possession of this moment of prolonging heightens the venomous intensity throughout my veins, like liquified hyacinths; it is vibrations, is what is whispered, in unspoken breaths, and yet it is our possession together, the lemon and I, that carries this force of attraction, like sine waves, like boiled figs, and in our nourishings of each other, this moment keeps and takes, and gives; mutuality; multiplying attraction; acrobatics; and a discovery happens, like volcanic eruption, a porous pearl: I am their predilection.

The frogs are croaking outside, and I wonder how much time has passed. Lemon seeds fall to the floor, and crackling is the sound, to which my ears flinch, my heart bites its tongue
and hums in sharpness, to which my fingers curl in as if to clench and take hold of shells, and to my mind I wonder where the seeds are falling from (I do not know), and in the incessant choir of frog screeching, the slow falling of seeds rupture the stillness of the room’s dark, the lemon’s and my gaze of delicacy, our transfixed calm, and I am no longer the grounded figure but a trembling flesh, a statue waiting to teeter to collapse to shatter in fragments, an assemblage of blocks, an ice shard in its splitting—*I am opened*—and this is where the lemon truly sees me, in the openings, and where I truly see the lemon, in the openings, and yet the sounds clear out the pulps and strands and twigs from my throat, and the sound, this sound—the sound is levity, the sound is salvage, the sound is nurture; fingernail taps; distant orchestra; oceanic tapestry; it is love, oval love, like harp strings.

To touch my throat, which is my current action, is to center, to gravitate, to nourish, to stabilize, and as I touch my throat, the bottom of my throat, the bowl of vibrations, a cylindrical purr, we maintain our alluring stare, our fervent lure, our kaleidoscopic watching, and the fruit flies flitter around, black star dust, like specks of ash, pepper flakes, to which on one of the lemon tree’s leaves a single fruit fly lands, contemplates, and moments later, flies away, and in this noticing, in this touching, in this glimpse of a touch, of a delicacy, my question, a saturated oncoming, is, *who ripped out my roots, who silenced me?*, and you, the lemon, the lemon tree, this constellatory light, this body of breath and symphony, say nothing, and say so much, all the time, everywhere, leave me in details, and linger me in depths, and harbor this warmth, this inkling, this savory petrification,
this channeling, all of which is golden, earnest, glorious, like a bed, like earth’s hums, like wings.
this is the delight
spinal the cord
who is drawing, is it the lemon tree?
“Pulse is my embellishment”
Please bring me relief
do our delights lend us relief?
Am I loved?
...
our perishing is our nourishing
it is vibrations
I am opened
who ripped out my roots, who silenced me?