

Child

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1 You finger the birdnest rim of my eye
2 in the closet like a child
3 praying for a doll's life:
4 I wake and mistake
5 my whisper: *forgive me*: for the
6 gag in my mother's feet
7 running from daddy
 for life: hers and mine: which
8 is to say I grow two doors
9 like a cathedral, like any good
10 daughter must have two
11 exits: one for those
 living, and one for those died,
12 but, here, on my spine,
13 I grew just one handle
14 which you twisted open with your
 teeth like any bad child, and/
 you cried

¹⁵ for me. I can not speak as you,
lift the kitchen knife, carve two
moon-wounds in my black ceiling
for a tongue of glittered light:
Boys, you whisper, can now
look into us, naked and praying,
with both open eyes.

I am a small animal in the godhead ravine

Running in a monsoon of howl-shots arching
from dawn-spelled mountain-peaks like
drool glistening out a baby's mouth back
when I could not speak. In a language of violence, deafness
is a disease. The patchwork of bullets falling
through the gullet of earth turning every exit
sound into the crinkling of dollar-store cellophane – there,
and then not. Like asking your teacher to repeat
the English but slowly. And the bird-bound backyard
in your mouth. An eye in your cheek reminding you
of what was not. Or the bird-witted word – *leave*.
Like this lily eye mama turns to me, her skin
a grammar of eternal lesions. And my sentence ending.

无 (*wu*, nothing).

On his deathbed. My grandfather's wrist. Lay like a willow.
Reaching. For the pen beside his pillow. He wrote.
furiously. On the white hospital napkins. A flower in the white pollen
of death. Spread up his throat. Even when. He could no longer.
Speak. He exhausted. Himself for words. I watched the stack.
Of napkins fill with blue ink. Illegible Chinese characters.
His diseased limbs would not grip. When he passed, I desperately.
Held those napkins to the little lightbulb in our kitchen, searching
for words for years. The layers of blue ink bled into
a river without language. In my dreams these days, I am holding
my child by his feet, waiting for the words to fall
out of his mouth since neither of us can speak. My mute
son's lips blubber, up and down like a fish pulled out of water yet
no sounds come out. I know what he feels like. I can remember
my legs under a man's body with my mouth open, just forcing
my throat to speak, and yet, nothing.