In Which My Mother Asks When the Hell I’m Getting Baptized

All our arguments take place at traffic lights, float the border between breath & steel. How intersections always form

the most dangerous geometries. Red neon throwing passenger’s mouths ajar. Last Sunday, the lights decided
to flirt with physics, tore apart a pair of brakes: my mother’s Lexus barrelled down Robinson Road & granted a wild boar

flight. It trotted out from nowhere, skin coated with smoke. Silver fur shredding fire onto pavement. We were on the way back from church, sun still scraping onto the sky. The car radio crackled, bones waiting to strike a path out. That week another

batch of Sunday school graduates dipped in a bathtub, melted away their faces in white bouquets. & the congregation snapped to attention, tears spilling through pockets. I grew up fisting prayers into tongue for my mother’s pride,
gouged a newborn wound in my leg for every confession. My body turned open testimony. My body just enough. Perfect image of a girl more girl than others, pores gripping onto survival. So I keep saying maybe, maybe, another day. Eyes ahead like the boar before

the crash. And I sever a family tree, axe the thread between lineage and future Thanksgivings. My jaw flickers, milk-white teeth spewing alternate creation myths:
in another life, I outrun the questions. In another
life, the boar strikes against our windshield again

& again, flinging at a god's embrace.
Etymology of Paternity

At the hospital, a doctor’s questions dig at my chest like scalpels. So I confess

my lineage. I confess the shortcomings of my blood. Yes—all the men

in my family hook their brains to the skylight, shoot synapses around Mao-tais.

Their faces round as wasted moons. Cardinal rule: the world must be consumed. The men dust flour on their hands and knead their wives’ shoulders into dough, split their arms like orange peels. Women made a spit-shined source of food. The men move like knives: always absent, except at the dinner table. Mouths flippant, shaving denial from styrofoam takeout boxes. As if they were raised to only leave and forget. In Chinese, amnesia and poetry are homophones of each other. Not much of a difference: to lose grip over memory is to make each word more precious.

Language our economy. Leave more room in the mouth for flesh—pork wonton and desire.

So my fathers’s forefathers became mired in delirium, started sinewing their vocabularies after fifty. Watches turned handclock. Names inexplicable. At night, they’d hollow trust from their ears, force the biting silence close. Just last year, my great uncle was chased down by the paranoia. Each day he kneels by the bed in cheap prayer, eyes locked onto the safe like worship. After his diagnosis, I dissected my family
tree limb-by-limb, posted hazard signs
for future daughters. Held memory’s axis

against a razor blade. How a girl will do anything
to cork these open mouths. To stop the men from

slipping, the way a moon wanes
into its own crooked jaw.
Bible Study Ghazal

at dinner, my father's prayers demand a synonym for escape. door
tugged around his finger. my tongue empties, mouth hinging like a door

loose with dread. obedient. i getaway car: machine slipping oil-slick letters. all
past tense verbs exhausted as excess, knuckled against the door

knob. i want to say omission. or better yet, denial. my greatest ambition
is to turn satellite, barrel infinitely towards incinerating. arrive at god's door-

step and leap straight into a bonfire, holes tunneled through every blessed
hazard thrown my way. nothing more than to unseam my eyes, endure,

for once, ritual as spectator. unpiece hands clasped close since birth. haul
questions towards the boundary of belief. so i steal a key and take the backdoor

out, grow a new spine with the etymology of exodus. sew
a vigil for the root of my fleeing. at six, i stood at a door

barely ajar, learned the trick to testimony. cleaving miracles
onto fear, i claimed encounters with beheaded voices at my bedroom door.

my parents showed teeth, bit bait. i started knocking on anything that would
come unlatched: bones, eyes, orthodoxy. the body a houseful of incarnated doors.