

**made without hands****i. altar**

groom until a form emerges  
 and I bride wore this dress for you  
 to rip I ate the stones stitched  
 the wounds avoided mirrors for seven  
 moons because I know you like skin  
 untouched by eyes unmade by hands  
 I spun a dowry of spidersilk  
 but swallow this too hold my breath  
 become my own something blue  
 borrowed as in used and left  
 behind oh how the guests whisper  
 stare my pale and bandless hand honey-  
 séance unused candle-strewn moon suite  
 no wonder you can't see me

**ii. look**

No wonder you can't see me / with your two silly eyes. I  
 / am all eye, girl aperture, / a hundred slits shuttered in /  
 my skin. I comb the earth / to find your hide. Try. I split  
 / before but now hold the knife. I / inside your gut lining,  
 reclaim / what is mine. You hide. My hide. I / turn rocks,  
 twine the worm round my / finger, a ring. Once fair maid  
 / without hands, I sprout limb / from each pore, all  
 growth and sight. / The house was always mine.

**iii. dregs**

The house was always mine.  
 Mine before you were. Will stay  
  
 mine when I die. The house, mine  
 to haunt. The cupboards, mine  
  
 to gut and cobweb. The table

mine to set for feast. The candles

mine to light. The souls mine  
to summon. I invite my mother

and her mother and her mother's  
ghost for tea we drink from cracked

cups never returned from our  
registry. I wear my veil, moths

chewing holes through tissue like  
eyes unhinged. No one this can't see—

## **My daughter inherits my mouth and my fear of everything**

By *mouth* I mean one born  
from self-refusal and always confused by the bodies  
that enter it—the same way, after eight years

a vegetarian, my teeth must relearn how to work meat  
off the bone. My daughter and I are so good  
at forgetting unfavorable traits. Example:

eating or being alive. Example: my daughter  
does not remember how to take air through her nose  
and submerges herself in the bath. The gills

come naturally. She breathes easiest  
in these spaces she shares with no one. Or:  
my daughter no longer knows how to speak

anything but stutter. Boys take to her. Her tongue  
hits the back of her teeth and sprays a soft spittle,  
her tongue forks and fits through the cracks.

She speaks clicks and whistles. She knows exactly  
what the boys want to hear. She makes them feel  
pretty. My daughter forgets like a mother

tongue. My daughter like her mother's tongue:  
fat and apologetic. My daughter and I stick together.  
Literally. It's something in our skin—all these years

never touched have taught our bodies to cling tight  
to any surface that claims us. Stitched to me, my daughter  
loves our seam but it attracts an unsavory gaze. Taking

the train is a nightmare. We shy from crowded lines  
at the Co-op and shop only at 2 am. Blue light  
is my daughter's best light. For years I thought

she'd never surface in the sun. Hers a home birth  
candlelit like bedroom vigil, I introduced her first  
to shadow and now she hates being seen. My daughter,

untethered, is a visitor to me. I dig through her trash:  
chapstick she accidentally ran through the wash. Cotton  
balls wet with red nail polish. A tampon wrapper. Cut

hair. Fruit skin. I imagine the pulp stings her burnt  
palate or split lip and for a minute I feel her phantom  
pain in our shared mouth. My phantom daughter

leaving traces everywhere—her trash scattered around  
me like séance. I drink alternative milk from her favorite mug  
and I weep. She is afraid of the moments when, no one

watching, she flickers. I am afraid of my daughter. I am afraid  
of my daughter. Her many mouths like open wounds.  
She is so porous. She is so much like her mother.

## Things Without Mouths: An Index

### A

ASTOMI, in Greek and Roman myth, a mouthless people. Live by smelling. Fruits, roots, flowers. A foul scent, if caught, kills them. Theirs a body born to fill with air, to suckle a hint of sweetness and claim itself full. What they must consume hosts a constant threat—how easy to breathe, to not realize they are dying until they are dead.

### B

#### BATHROOM

bookstore, where I study each evening  
and kneel over the toilet, touch two fingers  
to the back of my throat. When nothing  
emerges, I sit against the wall and unwrap  
a stick of gum. A vestigial organ, my mouth  
does not swallow nor expel. I am always  
trying to forget the taste of my own skin.

high school, where I empty my packed lunch  
to the trash every morning, dip my spoon  
once in the yogurt and suck. Later  
my mother will study the traces of spit  
left on the metal. (See also: BREATHER)

BAUBO, 4th century B.C.E. terracotta statue  
with a face displaced, whose lips slit  
where her legs meet, genital mouth  
extending from the top of her head.  
Not one opening but two. So often  
she must bleed. (See also: ME)

BIVALVIA, class of molluscs, hinged bodies  
made only of muscle. Oyster all tongue  
no teeth. All swallow no chew. Tongue

only external muscle only body worn  
outward only organ unskinned as pink  
as it comes. When all belly and boneless,  
shell is necessity. We force fit in the space given.

#### BREATHER

mouth-, insult: stupid, dumb, expressing inability  
to quiet that which keeps you alive, to thread  
dead clavicle through a needle's eye.

#### D

#### DAUGHTER

my imagined, inherits my stomach and its impulse  
to chew anything but food—fingernails, gum,  
the tissue between her thighs. When I say  
I don't want kids I mean I am afraid of her  
aperture, all the ways she will split open  
and remain closed. Though if thin, if only  
limb like I always wished I was—is she mine?  
I don't know how to speak with someone  
who never turned her mouth inward.  
Our tongues confuse the words.

my mother's, I am. (See also: MONSTER)  
that I might not have, sometimes I hold  
a hand on my gut and consider  
the ones lost. (See also: ME)

DOG, that summer our house is lined with bile.

My mother boils chicken breast and watches  
his bones move beneath his skin. She grabs  
the thin folds of his neck, pulls him into  
the yard. Not a mouth but an exit,  
a wound. He is so hungry. Our carpet  
still stained. When the vet puts him  
down we pay extra for her to do  
something—anything—with the body.

DROSOPHILA MELANOGASTER, commonly called

fruit fly. With taste receptors along the legs,  
wings, and stomach, to be touched is to be  
entered. I have never felt another's hands  
but at night, sometimes, I rest a palm  
on my belly or trace a finger along  
the back of my ear. This is as far as I go.  
(See also: BATHROOM)

## M

### ME

c. 2014 - 2016, like phantom limb or tongue stuck  
through the gap of a loose tooth: presence  
by absence. Each month I don't bleed, the root  
of my thighs calcifies itself a cavity. For two  
years, smooth and sexless like a doll. Silent  
in the most secret of ways. When the sheets  
bloom red, body no longer mine, I shed  
my skin and hold her shell, thin like vellum.  
How waif. How moonless. How unbound  
to any tide but her own—I press the skin  
to the light and look through her. I read her  
to myself like a bedtime story. I dismember  
her, remember her, touch her and imagine  
how it feels to be touched. (See also:  
DROSOPHILA MELANOGASTER)

now, I spent half of my life a vegetarian. My teeth  
forget how to pull meat from the bone. I pick  
scabs, sometimes, just to bleed.

then, midnight: I sneak. Slip into the kitchen  
and fill my pockets. Our stairs creak  
but I've been gagging myself  
for years. Back in my room, I turn  
the folds of my skirts, unhinge, feed.

MONSTER, what she calls herself, crying  
in the kitchen. She holds my sister  
and me tight by her body. The clothes  
pile in her room, ripe with sweat. She guts

her closet. She turns in the mirror,  
 turns and turns. She eats raw. The shame  
 of my big dog, my big mother. I teach  
 myself to speak less. (See also: MOTH)

## MOTH

Luna, as caterpillars, they feast until plump,  
 spin a chrysalis and emerge lipless. Adult  
 Luna moths live for one week. The mouth  
 as something grown out of, evolved to forget.  
 proboscis, lithe and curled into itself, suckling, sucked.

## W

WANING, of the moon: not actually smaller but lit  
 to look that way. Illuminate only the quietest  
 part of anything and it will appear easier  
 to swallow. My too-big clothes fall  
 from my body in ribbons. Soon I swell  
 back into them, through them. Soon  
 so large nothing will ever fit.

## WOMAN

you are growing into such a, as in: you're so big  
 now. We used to see you as girl or gutter  
 but at last! Your body fills enough space  
 for us to claim it our own. You bleed again  
 from every pore. We pry you open  
 with our thumbs. (See also: BAUBO)

## WORM

zombie, bone-sucking species who latch to the ribs  
 of dead creatures and feast. Without mouths,  
 zombie worms secrete acid through the skin  
 and digest what remains. Only a female worm  
 may gorge—male zombies never grow past  
 the larval stage and live, pocketed, within  
 her. I, too, know what it's like to chew bone  
 until porous, to hold many bodies under my skin.