

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.