

Sext to Absalom

In an attempt to look regal I lopped
off the head of a black snake

The small tissues in my chest tore
& patterned more beautifully

The sparkle of my boyhood
rose, in my throat, & sang

When asked *why* I will say someone
told me I am an ugly bag of bones

I will say yes, I split the snake
against the promise of my own becoming

Let me explain: somewhere a boy
swallows his own monstrous tongue

Somewhere a boy shatters another boy
then kisses his knuckles, one by one

He is named the most beautiful boy
in the whole goddamn country

He is more beautiful than the snake
unwound in black on crabgrass

More beautiful than me: sweat
& scales blessing my skin, Father

More beautiful than a thing
that starts & ends broken

Look, I am jealous
because you had a life

& I had two bodies, neither
of which I knew how to use

Bildungsroman with Distant Nation
--after Cathy Linh Che

In summer, my father spoke German with Ms. Elka.
I learned the word for dream, *traume*,

slept clumsy in my white bed before the mirror.
& the word for love: Elka's son

with his tongue in my mouth. Perfect blonde boy
from the city, skin flashlit with all his summers.

When Ms. Elka visited, I poured her water
& brought her cookies on a plastic tray.

I greeted her in what little I knew,
mouth searching for the wounding language.

I didn't know how to say that I took her son
into my mouth like a river, or that I held

a small lightbox in my chest that flashed
when he touched my hairy inner thigh.

All I knew was escape: to sleep facedown,
dream in a language I could not speak:

a land with no homes, no fathers or women:
a lush swath of forest, its wrens nesting like wrens.

Field Notes on Rough Trade

Before I knew anything

My chest became a mirror in which men saw themselves.

A lush bolt of blue silk braided with chest hair.

I called it fate: head bent like a broken king.

I called it fear: sweat & semen blessing me.

I had nothing to throw onto the sheets except myself.

My wound leapt, like a doe, from my back.

All this to say I knew nothing but this sad skin—

Or, in the small space after one man finishes,

Another can begin—a window unlocked after a storm—

Where is thaw? & who will hold me when it comes?

Where are our shirts, one folded within the other?

It's impossible to tell what I said as men left me: