

Dog Years

the sheer veil of this hour—hides my bared teeth—
and lips licked raw—behind the eye sit stars—
undeclared like the dirt-filled hole beneath—
where your friends are buried—so look here—your
attention is mine—don't forget—to dog
ear my leg—and give me my bone—love you—
human—keep calling me—good boy—let's walk—
until you yawn—my mouth open—for new
treats to explore—the accents of the tongue—
咬我¹—留我²—who do i think i am—
my ancestors' feral hunger—or rogue—
like by your feet—lies the perfect love poem—
dog-tired—on seeing meat—the lone hound fucks—
but on seeing flesh—my two legs curl up—

¹ bite me, pronounced *yǎo wǒ* (in Mandarin)

² keep me/leave me, pronounced *liú wǒ* (in Mandarin)

中秋奏鸣曲 / Mid-Autumn Sonata

Inspired by the Chinese myth of Chang'e

I.

It is dark out, and the Moon trails our car.
We wash across the veins of this country like
a brushstroke of calligraphy never taught to us.
Still, we are headed home. Dad has one hand on
the wheel and the other rolling down the window
to spit a scalding pot of expensive tea, or a morsel
of forgettable history, into traffic, leaving potholes
everywhere. From the phone lying in Mom's lap, a
tenor's tessitura climbs out, the brief silence sawed
through by his vibrato. She is rebirthing into 嫦娥¹
with every new night, and her head against the
window drifts closer to the Moon. Again, I listen
to Dad clear his throat, finding more past to spit out.
He turns up the radio's volume, sharpening
the Chinese dubstep playing. It has surrendered
itself in 美国², no 二胡³s or 古筝⁴s to be found in
its violent pulses. *No beauty*, my grandfather would
say, and we love it. I look in the rearview mirror to
see Mom's waxing crescent smile as she sits up.
The raspy silence crescendos, and gazes at the end.

II.

It starts with Mom's soft rage, a river of jagged
丑话⁵s flowing upstream to Dad with laughter
swimming above, below. He would dip his feet in
like he was still that village boy, emerging from the
muddy waters with both feet bloodied. Like tears by
the night's end, there are falsities of feeling after
卑鄙⁶ instead of baby. He listens to her grievances,
eyes making a new lover of the black horizon, and
like a son, balloons the car with his cigarette voice,

phlegm, ashes, and all, slamming his palms, which
 once held the American phone as he called for Mom
 in Macau, against the sweat-stained steering wheel.
 Outside, the cold night folding into us. Unlike an
 American, I crack open the lotus of my mouth,
 only to find—in its place—my grandmother’s lectures
 on being the good son. Back in China, I might have
 turned out the dragon I was supposed to be. Here,
 in this blurry mass of violence and all the roads
 unrooted, we started selling jade spines for survival.

III.

They are a watercolor wash of mountains at the
 intersection—awaiting silence and its birds—our
 tires sticky with flattened 初心⁷s, which flew out
 of the open window a few red lights back. I turn
 to the rearview mirror once more and find Mom
 staring at the Moon, imagining it to be me or this
 country. Her throat now shot by 后羿⁸, there are
 not many moons left of this. Back when she was a
 lotus in Macau and moonless, she would listen to
 Dad recite poems at the pond’s edge. So much has
 waned. They were in love once, and I was not
 here. I was not here, and they were in love. In the
 beginning, there is always love. With the radio
 still playing dubstep, the Chinese star in Mom’s
 phone straining for a note out of his reach—
 muddying his tone raspy—we pull into our
 driveway with morning chirps, the Moon fighting
 for more sky. In China, there is still Sun.

¹ *Cháng'é* - Chang'e (in Mandarin) Chang'e is the Chinese goddess of the Moon

² *Měiguó* - America (in Mandarin) The direct translation is “beautiful country.”

³ *Èrhú* - Erhu (in Mandarin) A Chinese instrument

⁴ *Gǔzhēng* - Guzheng (in Mandarin) A Chinese instrument

⁵ *Chǒuhuà* - Ugly words (in Mandarin)

⁶ *Bēibǐ* - Mean (in Mandarin) *Bēibǐ* is a harsher form of mean

⁷ *Chūxīn* - Initial heart (in Mandarin)

⁸ *Hòu yì* - Hou Yi (in Mandarin) Hou Yi is a mythological Chinese archer and Chang'e's husband.

BREAKING NEWS: GHOST OF MICHELLE GO HAUNTS THE AFTERIMAGES

last night / the neighbor stumbled back / with red wedding
wax / on his face / & sister crawled / out of the train tracks /
into the beaks of eagles / talk about revival // she doesn't
want to / hound milk skin / with a head on fire / or has she
not been made / aware / of the possibility // it's raining cats
& dogs / it's a feast // the old man beaten to a fetal position
/ the protest down the street // times bleed red & red again /
like nails / every good asian's gun // talk about a rude
awakening // she doesn't want to / re-enter the living / hell /
in a handbasket / but she's returning home now // tuned to
the chatter of a policeman's radio / the livelong song /
tuned to the rattling of bones / when the freight train cuts
down the street / or the lack thereof / tuned to the pulses of
marching bodies / chanting a name // *who is she* // *who has
gone* // in this yellowing night / even the upper west side
churns out / an apology // but like every good ghost / she
swallows it / & chews it into a scene / of closed shop doors
/ marked with cat blood graffiti // she's going back to where
she belonged / is she not // she's being good / but why is
her face on the news // why are the ghosts brought in / for
interviews // she's trying to get home / without the subway /
without corpses on the sidewalk / without seeing the pushes
/ & shoves / & fires / & bent knives / & broken canes //
even in the dark / there are not enough lifetimes / for mercy
// she is tripping her way / down the street / as an augury /
full of contradictions // while dragging her feet / future
scar-bodies / calabasas-heavy / skin themselves / around
her dinner table / waiting for her / to come home //