The Perfect Mango

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The Body

These words are written on my body. They are twenty-five-year-old words and sometimes they have lived a thousand years. I have been waiting to write this book, waiting all my life for it to stop long enough so that I can transpose these words aching, marking, devouring me. Today I write my body.

I know I have written this before, that it has been written before me and in the thousand years and twenty-five I will write it many more times. Today I write my story, written among the maze of paint and vomit that is my life today, a story of love and desire and fear and weakness.

Often I wonder whether my teeth are rotting. Is that the mark of my story on my body? My story ravages my body every time I try to read it, exposing the traces of time left behind, the unfinished fantasies and dreams come true.

On Tuesday I had my hair cut. I had curls. I cut them off. I wanted my face exposed, open to the world. No more curls and perhaps they will never come back. They liked my curls, as they like the painting of the street in Barcelona. It soothes them and they feel understood. When they don’t understand they turn away. When I don’t understand, I throw up.
I’m throwing up today. It seems strange to be throwing up the day I finally begin to write the book that has been waiting for so long, but I am. It’s a slow process. It takes almost as long as eating. Perhaps it’s rotting my teeth.

Once I wrote another book. It was about a sea that disappeared, about a boy who believed in a beautiful purple sea, about parents who didn’t see, about a sea that disappeared. There were pictures as well, painted in watercolour. I don’t have the book anymore. It was stolen. Perhaps it is the mark on my left thigh, the one that looks like cellulite. It’s not cellulite at all. It’s my lost story, waiting to be read again. But I can’t read it because every time I open a magazine I read about the new magical cure to eliminate cellulite. They don’t want to read my book. They want to unwrite the writing on my body and make me whole again. They want to polish me up and make me smooth, nice to look at, appealing and unthreatening. In my book the sea disappeared because they couldn’t see. Perhaps my book was smeared by their creams and not stolen at all. Perhaps they will make this one invisible with their magic wrinkle creams. This book is full of wrinkles.

Throwing up isn’t easy today. There is too much to throw up and my body is tired. I have a painting in my head, an angry painting red and yellow and gold bright, a woman lying, a body ravaged and vulnerable. My hair looks funny red and thick and straight and short. I thought it might look harsh. But my face is soft.

What story can I tell you that is my own? What story can I tell you without losing my body as I borrow the writing from it? What will you do with my story once it is told? Will you iron it out as well? Do you like my story?

I would like to write a love story, a story about love. It would be easier to write if I had purged everything but it’s hard to throw up today. I would like to tell you a love story and I promise to tell it with a happy ending. I prom-
ise not to talk too much about throwing up. I promise not to make you uncomfortable. I promise not to tell.

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In the bathroom I kill a cockroach as it tries to run past me. Your touch is familiar and always new. I have known your touch forever. One night you hold me very tight after replacing the telephone receiver in its cradle. My body is shaking I can’t feel myself feeling you. I am crying and screaming. My voice is foreign and distant. I am curled into a ball. I cannot speak, the words on my body are in another language I cannot read I cannot see I am not there I am not coming back. Hold on you say I am here hold on tight. My hands reach out but not at you at myself trying to be rid of his words I pull my hair I scratch my face I draw blood his words are invading me taking over my body.

My fingers explore your body as I invent you with my touch. Your strong hands on my face your body soft and hard and close. You touch my breast carefully to see if your touch is welcome my nipple reaches for you I long to feel more of your closeness your stomach your chest your smile your eyes. My breasts hurt I am pregnant perhaps. Your touch is gentle. For a moment my sorrow fades and we are close and together.

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I met you not so long ago. I meant to tell you that soon you would exist among the other marks on my body but the marks became noticeable and you did not need to be told. You are quiet sometimes you talk like an avalanche sometimes I look for words you do not have. I haven’t told you that I am writing our love story. It is already written.

When I met you my body thin still not fully recovered from the anorexia you so different from him so quiet, ob-
serving me while I danced. I danced in your gaze, every move a result of the slow shifting of your eyes hesitating on my body. You sat all evening and I longed to sit close to you but my body fought to create distance. Your leg brushing against mine our eyes meeting I got up and danced until there was no more music and the dancers had found their places once more. You talked with me of mirrors, a conversation already deeply engraved in my memory as my body screamed out to yours. I have no mirrors. My reflection scares me like medusa, the recognition of myself my existence my pain and my joy. You saw the joy in my face because you saw me dancing.

I don’t know when we first made love. Our bodies mould together. We have been making love ever since.

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With you my anorexic body purged itself and grew and grew until I was so enormous I could no longer get through the door and I longed to know please tell me and lie if you want that you will be with me beside me together forever tell me you won’t hurt me please don’t leave.

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Today I am lying on the couch. I have told my story before and I will tell it again and again until the pain subsides I will not throw up today I’m scared. I dream of a man in a red car a small car you run and chase me I am small and scared you catch me your hair bright red you empty me into a Glad garbage bag you throw me on the back of a truck I can’t breathe I wake up my eyes are open I can see you I can’t breathe I want to scream but the scream doesn’t come here it is AAAAAAAAHHHHH I hear maman enter my room she holds me close shhhhh.

I long to turn around and look at you my analyst the one who is translating me into monsters and babies and
mothers I want to know are you sleeping do you care are you listening? I am giving you my soul my spirit my body but I can’t see you can I turn my head am I allowed? I want to be good. I am a good girl. I will be a success. The perfect analysand. I am afraid alone looking at the painting of the sea blue in front of me telling you about my dream, the dream with the doctors dressed all in blue. I am in maman’s new apartment. The rooms are big with high ceilings, wood floors. A woman is there. She invites me to her friend’s house that evening she leaves me the address. I go to the kitchen to get some food I don’t want maman to see me. I leave maman’s house I am looking for the friend’s place. It is in a factory-like building, on the second floor. We enter a room. There is a door on either side. It looks like a psychiatric ward the doctors are dressed in blue. They let the other woman through but observe me for a long time. I am told to sit on a metal disk in an enclosure on the wall. I am naked under the hospital robe. The disk I am sitting on feels hot. I’m scared. The hall is like a pre-school with paintings and children’s desks but there are no televisions.

Are you asleep? Do you sleep when I talk to you? Do you listen to me while I speak? Do you care? Do you want to hear my story? If you don’t listen I will tell you a story about hatred and pain, not a love story. Please listen to me.

Analysis ends I pick up the pieces of myself that have fallen, the words left lying on the floor as they were discarded. I put my shoes on and walk into the slush outside. Summer will never come and you weren’t listening I know I will throw up I need food I am scared. But you are there my lover waiting for me with the door open welcoming me your arms strong your heart open. Listen I say. Yes, you say. You listen as we drive in silence.

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I am three years old living far away imagining Canada and dreaming about that place we have left behind and will return to one day. I am four years old we have returned but there is no red car in the driveway like the one I invented in my imagination and the people speak another language and maman is not there. Grandma tells me maman will be here soon and then you come and take me back to that place we left when I was big but you say I can’t be big before I am small you don’t know. The other girl my cousin is prettier blue eyes blond hair smiling I want my hair like hers short no braids. Papa says yes and we cut it but I am not as pretty always so slow says my aunt like a turtle says maman. I listen I can hear them but they don’t hear me. Maman spells the words you talk for hours on the telephone it is not polite to interrupt you say but I want to say I know the words you spell o-n-i-o-n I don’t like them you will put them in the sauce you don’t think I have understood but I know and they remind me of snakes.

I am not pretty short red-blond hair straight-curly so serious and slow I can’t run fast I always get caught first when we play hide-and-seek. I got ten dollars you tell me you have a good report card I am sad no dollars for me papa tells me one of the faces on my report was not smiling you had ten smiling ones nine for me. I cry but you don’t see because I am big and I hide my tears.

Today I am big no longer five or four or three and I have many smiling faces when I walk in the street and greet those who look at me. Then I come home and take off my face and throw up. I have no mirrors. The music moves inside me I can feel the cello as Charpentier holds open the door to the cathedral. The stained-glass windows glimmer in the sliver of sunlight that enters with me. Your voice envelops me you sing to me and my face softens falls to the ground and then I am there me.

I am six today and papa has left but I don’t ask. Every morning my little brother looks for him I see tears in
maman’s eyes. I look at her hands. They always shake now. I don’t ask. It is my birthday and I see there is a gift from you. I want to be alone, open it slowly find you again papa où es-tu? A xylophone a book a card I read it again and again a picture on the front of a man in pencil climbing papa où es-tu? Maman cries and I hold her. I am seven today.

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You come to see me in my apartment the one I share with maman. You arrive late sorry to be late to pick up shirts. I see you come before you are there I feel your body next to mine starved. You sit in front of me on the floor your legs extended watching. I talk always so many stories in my head you do not know me. Through the window on top of the bed I can see the office buildings. With every hour a new floor lights up sometimes goes dark and disappears. You come to look and I move away. Our bodies long to touch but I have forgotten how to touch to feel I move away. Sometimes you are quiet and we listen to one-another breathe and then I talk again because the silence exposes me I am vulnerable are you leaving? I’m cold you are still here the sun has not yet come up you must work in the morning are we falling in love? All of the floors are lit now there is a grey tint to the October sky it will snow soon I think. I am cold the floor is hard I want to take a bath hot water against my skin I walk down the stairs with you and you leans against the light pink walls I am perched on the last step the sun is rising I can see it from the window in the hall we don’t know how to say goodbye. We still don’t know how to say goodbye.

Last night we slept next to one-another and when I had a nightmare you tried to wake me. I couldn’t wake up my sleep ravaged by memories my body shaking. Last night I fell asleep first I woke the light still on you were holding me tight your arms strong around me folding
my body into yours. I can feel time printing you onto my skin. Our bodies entwined we fit you are close you do not know my memories but you cry.

I am scared in analysis. I am facing her I want to run do you find me interesting will you stay do you care? You listen and interrupt sometimes your conversation involved and enthusiastic I think you understand. I come home and throw up.

My painting is eating me up. I have tried to swallow the world but instead it is devouring me leaving impenetrable scars. The canvas is large big as my wall the paint goes on thickly red, black, skin. The painting skin is being dripped on erased my body is disappearing. On the balcony my hibiscus tree is blooming three flowers fourteen blooms beautiful alive. I watch the flowers feel the sun hot on my head my shoulders my legs the rest of me covered because I am enormous so big full. From my window I look into their apartments I watch the television they are cooking dinner making love. I am alone in my apartment a place of my own no longer with maman but not always alone because you come sometimes and we lie on the bed red and yellow and orange we make love our bodies fit together writing a language of our own.

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