The Perfect Mango
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You trace the outline of my face with your index finger. The red of my hair leaves a slight tint of colour on the tip of your finger. You use the colour to draw my eyes. You paint them wide open. You find it difficult to draw my nose, first you make it broad, then pointed, then a mixture of the two. My mouth emerges on its own already bursting with words.

You place the first wrinkle of our journey between the palms of your hands. You hold it tightly making sure not to apply too much pressure making sure not to iron it out. You place the wrinkle where you think my body should be. You watch as the wrinkle grows. You watch as my body takes form.

You take my body into your arms. You caress the skin already wrinkled with time. We begin our journey.

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As I walk away I leave a trail of small white pills a trail of nurses of unfinished paintings a trail of care and love my trail longer and longer as the distance thickens between my body and the palm trees that surround the building with the white walls and the programmed days. Outside in the bright glare of the sun the world watches me as I reenter it the ground sagging beneath my feet.
The days pass the world grows every day the battles more eloquent the joys more intense the violence more brutal. Today a thousand years have passed since that day when the ground seemed new to the tread of my shoes. Today my shoes are worn down. Today the smells of life are mingled smells of fresh bread smells of late night conversations smells of vomit smells of triumph. The day I left the hospital it was the smell of the world I noticed. I was accosted by the smell of complications by the smell of uncertainty. As I walked through streets in my new shoes I gathered in my small bag all of the smells I had grown accustomed to ignoring all of the smells that distinguished the world from the safe place of my confinement. And I learned to breathe.

Today my apartment is dark with the smell of vomit. Today my life is dark with the smell of memory. Today the world is dark with the smell of confusion. On my body I see the mark of last night’s dream in which I was the tyrant in which my lover was the abuser in which I raped myself in which my lover raped me. From my dream I woke with the dingy smell of misery I woke with the knowledge that I make the choice to live I woke with the terror of possibility and I could not go back to sleep.

My fingers are slow on the keys my mind dimmer than the screen. The words I pluck from my skin are not the words I want to write not the sentences I thought I would compose. I am appalled by my choices I want to change my words I want to reach to the thesaurus and couch the intensity of my self-destruction I want to stop writing my body I want to walk off the path I have chosen I want a ticket to leave my journey behind.

Please sir I say to the train conductor if I could only leave the train of thought for a few days I would surely long to return. He looks at my ticket pulls out his magnifying glass and solemnly shakes his head. I’m afraid you have a one-way ticket ma’am he says and I want to destroy him to erase him from my vocabulary. Smell my hands I
scream can’t you smell the rancid vomit still clinging to the fingers with which I type my manuscript? Can’t you smell the rotting flesh of my body? But he is already busy with another customer a woman crying holding a child in her arms a woman holding her own body small and vulnerable between trembling hands pleading with the conductor to hold the child for just a moment. I watch as he refuses his face made of stone.

My bathroom is daunting the smell of vomit hanging in the air the smell of past experience the smell of your hands on my body the smell of your laughter the smell of your sarcasm the smell of your destruction the smell of life undigested. I know I must clean it up I know I can’t let you see the state of my insides spread on the toilet on the floor I know I must retain the illusion that I am empty. My emptiness preserves your life allows you to continue to live in your fantasy the illusion of calm and comfort and fullness. Teeth marks on my hand the taste of blood lingering in my mouth you do not know that I have revealed myself disgusting to you that I am the monster you hide inside your body that I am the breath you breathe that I am choking in my vomit.

This is my journey. These are the contours of life on my body the redness that interrupts our communication the pointed spears of my soul you never lean against the quills that would puncture you if you had the courage to approach me. My body still sore from throwing up I wait for you to contact me I wait for you to tell me my next move. I remove the receiver from its cradle. This journey has already lasted too long. Today I will not hear your voice.

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This a love story, a story about a love. How can I write a love story when all I feel is the pain in my stomach? How can I tell you about love when I long to find a love that doesn’t make my heart quiver? How can I admit to lov-
ing when my body is frozen in a state of self-destruction? How can I speak of a journey of the body when there is an eternal return of the same terror of the same death a nihilistic eternal return of the same?

Hanging on my window I see the watch my talisman it reads two-thirty the same time it stopped at yesterday. Hanging in my closet I see the twenty-shirts waiting for you unsullied by life. Written on my heart broken and bleeding I hear your name I listen to the memory of you I smell you the smell of vomit still hanging on my skin.

I want to tell you a love story but every word I write today leaves a burning sensation in my body. I feel the churning of my ulcer I feel sleep descending into my eyes denying your presence I hear my ears listening for your step I feel your body assaulting mine.

In the intersection of moment and place I search for a door. I want to open it and find myself. When I find myself I will pull from the inside to find the words to speak. In the intersection of moment and place I will find my voice and with my voice I will speak of my journey.

My journey began seventeen chapters ago seventeen days ago seventeen years ago seventeen centuries ago. My journey began the first time I reached for the handle on the door that opened to a question mark. My journey began with the first question that stopped frozen in my throat. My journey began with the first word I was unable to speak.

As my feet hit the pavement after the soft carpets of the hospital ward I begin the journey I have already begun. With every new step I hear another word. In the pad I keep in my front pocket I record the words I find. In the pack I wear on my back I try to keep them in order. One by one I add them to my story. Beside the words I keep the punctuation. I want to use these newfound words I want to ask you why I want to say why weren’t you there I want to say why didn’t you tell me I could say no? Madly I scratch away words you taught me words that mean
nothing words that say give me what you think I deserve
words that say I am not worth anything words that say
nothing. On top of my old words I scribble new words
that gather as medleys of the smells and tastes of the
world around me. For the first time in weeks I am out-
side. For the first time in weeks noise surrounds me that
is more than the screams inside my head.

I am lost in the maze of the world. I have nowhere to
turn the streets all look the same every question mark
still unanswered every exclamation lacks a voice. I walk
until my feet are too tired to carry me. I long to be carried
I long to find a soft space where I will be safe. I miss the
walls of my confinement.

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In the middle of the labyrinth I gasp for air and find you.
You are my lover. With you I retrace my steps. Together
we look for the door that will open to the next maze from
which we will escape again. Our journey is incomplete.
Together we trace and retrace one-another. To you I tell
my story. Side by side we walk creating many sets of foot-
prints. Sometimes we lie together and hold the world at
bay sometimes I tell you secrets that cause avalanches. It
is you I find today in the middle of the labyrinth.

From my front pocket from the pack on my back from
behind my knee I pull out the words I have captured. In
order to read them you close your eyes and extend your
hand. I feel you as your skin touches mine. I feel your
body warm against the thickness of place and moment
as they meet.

You come to me today as you have many times before.
You come to me in the middle of a memory. You lend me
your feet and together we scrape across the pavement on
the first day of my freedom. Together we smell the fresh
bread. Together we clean up the vomit I don’t want you to
see. Your tongue reaches out to catch my uneven sobs and
you listen to my despair. You listen to the words I have
learned today you listen to failure. You have not failed
you say look at the word the one in red the first one on
your list the one you learned somewhere in that other
memory. Rape. I see the red I cannot see the word I am
afraid to look. I am tired it is easier to carry the pain in
my body easier than to extend it to you the one for whom
I have had to learn this word. In bold letters you retrace
the word onto my body. Again and again I feel the stark
letters against my skin my body echoing its pain as it re-
members. You hold me your arms tight around me you
tell me that I have not failed you say that failure is one
word we will not write down you are angry at the world
I can hear the anger in the hardness of the silence that
surrounds us.

We lie together on my bed our bodies entwined you
trace a box on my left breast and name it anger. One by
one you brush away the sobs already hardened on my
body your fingers lightly stroking my skin as you soften
the tears in order to place them in the box you have just
created. The tears are flowing I can feel the wetness of my
body as I approach you. My lips press against yours you
close the box hold the anger you say and direct it out-
ward. I feel your hands your grip hardening our bodies
quickenning with desire.

My body tender my stomach sore my throat aching
with self-destruction I long for you. You are my lover we
make love careful not to seal the box you traced on my
left breast careful not to erase the anger I am learning to
speak. I am confused by my desire for you confused by my
nipples erect by the urgency I feel I am confused by the
doors we have opened together in the intersection of place
and moment I am confused by the diversity of emotions
love creates I am confused by love.

The hospital rooms white and square did not prepare
me for a journey in which you would inspire desire beside
tears closeness beside anger vulnerability beside terror.
They did not warn me that with you I would create a language in which I would include the words of our creation as well as the words of our destruction. Together we write rape into my life in bright red letters together we travel the anger I am discovering together we experience the tender moments of love.

I make love to you my lover and I know I am sharing with you the darkest secret of my soul. With you I am sharing my desire unleashed and vulnerable. You do not ask me to be close to you you do not tell me who I am you do not tell me how to feel you listen when I speak you listen to the music of my words you listen to the screams still frozen in my body. With you I speak my failure with you I hear my defeat with you I fight the battle to undo the words that hold me prisoner with you I find the words to love with you I find the words to hate.

Today my journey is long. The door I open is bursting with ghosts I cannot see beyond. With you my lover I find the courage to touch the ghosts to feel them dissolve under my skin. Behind the door we stand together. We see ourselves reflected in a room full of mirrors we watch our love as it grows and changes with every distortion of the mirrors as we step forward. Like the walls that surround us in this hall of mirrors our journey is not linear. Our bodies reflected in the mirrors we approach one another our bodies moulded by our gaze shaped by our journey.

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