

**IMAGE BURN**

*5 poems*

*How to peel an orange with a broken wing*

*Theories of Non-Attachment*

*Private*

*Anatomy of a Lavender Wand*

*Disappearing Objects*

### *How to peel an orange with a broken wing*

Pack your leather boots and plan to drive seven hours to kiss a woman molded out of dark chocolate and Armagnac who has a bed for you in Brooklyn. Pack your paper and ink, your Victorian novels, and a list of two dozen restaurants intended to make you drool and weep.

Before you leave, crash your bike and land on your chin. Land with the full weight of this month's rain flung above you as you balance on the tip of your face with the finesse of a Canadian acrobat. Feel the gravel tickle your jawbone. Stain your dress with this new red paint, and walk to the nearest familiar house.

Here is your ex-lover's apartment. Knock on his door and ask to bloody his towels with your new red paint. Dip your head into his bathroom sink while he watches. Roar from your gut like a beast giving birth. Rattle his dishes.

Here you are in the mirror with a blood goatee. Here you are with a patch of facial hair that drips down your collarbone and swells like a bulbous blue tuber.

At the hospital they will give you a smile made of tape and decorate your chin with a cotton pom pom. They will glue your wounds and send you home with a broken wing like a crow that mistook a windowpane for a tunnel of flight.

Here, at home, your dinner is one yellow pill and an orange that you pierce with your left thumb. You peel its skin in small bits that fall like the scales of a fish to the floor.

### *Anatomy of a Lavender Wand*

The play breaks for intermission. Gray heads spill like marbles from an old tin into the lobby. Grandma Helen fell asleep halfway through the act of-- Fiddler on the Roof? Little Shop of Horrors? Mozart's Requiem Mass? Our fingers bleed from handling sewing needles and crochet hooks in the dark. I dig her out of a mound of lavender buds and tear through a cocoon of wool and ribbons with my teeth. Once she has risen, we walk arm-in-arm, but she begins to shrink and wobble until she is a wooden marionette, limbs dangling from my fingers. We push through the bodies in the lobby towards dusk. I fight through a swarm of locusts towards a bench on the bank of the the Great Salt Lake-- all we want is to sit down, to rest-- but the bench-ladder towers high above the buoyant water. I heave the weight of two beings rung by rung to the top where I lift Helen-- now a little boy who scrapes his knees and weeps, now a sick rabbit-- into my lap, and feed her lettuce into the morning while salt drops from our eyes into the lake.

## **Theories of Non-Attachment**

He permits her to stroke the arch of his foot  
with a pencil while he reclines on a bed  
of palette boards and black rabbit fur,  
reading Kant with his eyebrows gabled  
like dormer-windows.

She may pinch his thumb while they march  
across the Williamsburg bridge,  
but she may not hold his elbow with her arm.

Blindfolded, she may smell his bottled oils:  
essence of pepper for the wrists,  
agar wood for the neck, vetiver  
for the temples, but she may not kiss  
his wrists, neck, or temples  
until after dinner.

She may ask for lessons in unicycling,  
speculative realism, banjo plucking, tattooing,  
or bagua martial arts, but she may not  
mention the painted nude  
hanging from his doorframe.

He tells her not to hope for more  
than accidental overlaps of their desire:  
watching the market man juice a ginger root,  
devouring scallion pancakes at the wonton shop,  
finding synchrony in breath and step,  
succumbing to blindness by sunlight.

*Private*

The nose of her black Cadillac  
blocks a private footpath that cuts  
through a field, past a marsh  
guarded by cottonwood trees,  
through a grove of maple saplings  
to the stone-lined lip of the lake.

Several time zones apart, two bodies  
simultaneously breathe the same dream  
of skin on skin and wake sweating  
in a stripe of light: for her, a streetlamp,  
for him, the moon. In the desert, a little girl

builds a play-house out of tumbleweeds.  
She cuts through the school grounds  
where the neighbor boy pushes her against brick  
and spits down her skirt.

A note on the windshield of the Cadillac  
warns: *you are trespassing, go away.*  
The girl watches her naked mother jump  
from a railroad bridge. The railroad leads  
to a wild strawberry patch where geese  
chase toads into a ditch. As the sun sets

a spot of red rips through a veil of grey  
and expands. Two figures wade  
up to their waists in wet black.

## *Disappearing Objects*

Don't look at your hands while juggling;  
they should appear blurred, gesticulating skyward  
as if rearranging the heavens. The Pleiades constellation  
disappears the longer you stare.

I have been told to study my hands in the daytime;  
Memorize their warmth, arrange each finger's position.  
In my dream they flicker, drained of color and temperature,  
but if I hold them steady they follow me through the night.

I grow accustomed to the habits of a body.  
The lower lip bitten in concentration, the eager feet.  
When I squint, shadows under his chin, nose, and brow  
separate from three planes of light: forehead  
like a plum freshly polished by shirt-sleeve,  
and two cheeks singing under a lamp.

Behind eyelids, I see my hands  
on the concave plane below his ribs,  
imprinted in reverse color like the after-image  
of a bulb. In the body's absence, the vision of skin  
pulses and fades.