Above My Mouth

—after Leonard Cohen's "Beneath My Hands"

Above my mouth your soft lips are the faintly-fanning wings of a fluttering Monarch.

Whenever you exhale I feel the heat of silent words, of fledgling words.

I am breathless because you have perched upon me, because your hands are the burning brands of a blacksmith.

I relish the time when your eyes begin to fetter my body.

When you hover over me to tease my restless flesh I want to teach ascetic trees and stoic mountains the sweet secrets of hidden desires.

I want you to renounce to me your capacity for flight.

When you soar in close to brush my body with your sensitive setae I want my fingertips to be the slender pins fastening your frame against mine forever.

Non-sonant

I don't remember the labor that slid into fetal distress, or the nitwit OB-GYN who just had to finish his office hours before heading to the hospital to usher me into tactility.

I don't remember pounding against my mother's uterus, begging to be liberated, or slowly suffocating—a gazelle subdued in a lion's jaws—exhausted, my pleas for oxygen unheeded.

I don't remember almost asphyxiating, don't remember the bright light that blistered my eyes as they sliced into her womb to extract me like a wrinkled peach pit from overripened flesh.

I don't remember shivering naked in an algid, antiseptic room, struggling for those first few breaths; straining to find the voice that still falls like dust motes in an abandoned house.

In St. Therese's Memory Care Unit

Like dried persimmons, ears droop from their skulls: flesh tired of gravity's pull, listening only to the memories replaying in their minds flicker shows from decades departed.

Glaucous eyes wander behind Coke-bottle glasses; wheel chairs twirl in repetitive circles, every rotation a new adventure.

Their lips twitch—chanting monks mouthing the same phrases over and over: "Come here Sister!" "Can you help me?" "Chicken and garlic..."—as torsos, like portly pendulums, sway back and forth to tunes only they can hear.

Grandma shuffles her feet, even now unable to keep still, body remembering industrious days. Conversations are circinate: sometimes she parrots phrases, other times random sentences fly from her fine-lined lips, concentration a fickle visitor.

Leaving, I kiss her blue Q-tip head and her pupils slide sideways, my vaguely familiar face already fading into obscurity.

Phrenology

- How tightly he holds her head in his hands as it moves beneath him in wordless passion, his fingers following cranial fissures while she fills his hollowness with her body.
- She knows what he seeks when they slide down her neck, knows what question his lips phrase as they brush her forehead with the sweeps of a long willow broom.
- Her fontanel has frozen well, solid as the breastbone caging his pounding heart. She will give only what he can take, take everything he can give.

It is a game of peek-a-boo, this dance in the dark; she keeps the back of her head hard against the pillow.

These Curves

The jigsaw pieces of our bodies fit nowhere everywhere—all sinuous lines of *Cs* and *Ss* seeking similar curves of skin across Earth's topography.

The Ls of your hands have no 90° angles; elbows and knees swoop back in fleshy ski slopes.

The bony knobs of knuckles are arched over with dermis like stones rolled spherical by lapping tides.

See the anatomical snuffbox below the thumb, scooped shallow like a worry stone;

the mortar of palm, empty of pestle; the scallops of ears;

the mountainous swell of hip and breast searching for the softer foothills of their counterparts.

And beneath it all the bones held snugly by curving ball-and-socket, saddle, hinge, & pivot joints

worn smooth, even the *V*s of ribs ending quietly in blunted arrowheads— appendicular and axial skeletons holding it all together until we find the hollow spaces we know we're meant to fill.