

The Crab

We hunt for mud crabs
at the night markets, old women
peddle their prices, shouting
in swift Cantonese over gurgling tanks
of sea spawn: snails, young eels born
for smoke, coal, skewers. We pass blood
clams with tongues lolling over their lips of shell.
We buy a bag of cockles and three crabs, all females
sweet with egg, and their claws beg against plastic,
puncture holes in the cheery, red *Please Come Again*.
At home, the women crack them open
cleaver corner at the lip's hem, plunge and snap.
The men watch game shows, as we wreck the girl bodies
for roe, and I don't know why. *The girls are always sweeter,*
more pricey, Halmeoni says pulling the last claw
from the last crab, the stumps still writhing in the sink.
She dismantles the breast next and what pulsates inside
is all gully and wet. *It's always the girls, for everything.*
When was the last time you've heard of a rooster soup?
We put them to boil in salt and broth.
Outside, the winter interrogates, our windows doused
in a sea of frost, and in our bodies, we are always lost.
If the feast ever happens, and time has not misplaced us
may the girls rise violet from the pot, untangle their legs
from perilla and leek and make for the sea
with their limbs in their teeth.

My Mother Undressing

Look, she says and lifts her shirt
her bare body a vision of myself
in thirty years or so, back bent
like a question mark, riddled
with scars, thick with picking.
mostly burns, or bug bites, but
of what origin are these? The long
stretches of gnarled skin, catching
lamplight like the inside
of an abalone shell, running up
and down her thighs. I'm surprised
I've never known them, but then again
she withholds so many things. She's a little
beside herself, pulling her breasts aside
observing her belly and legs. *Look*
at my body, what the fever did, so I look
and see her, a mottled gosling
thing, covered completely with blood red
blooming she calls in Korean: *yeol-kott*, flowers
of fever. Flowers of ill health, flowers
of contagion, that have rendered her
grotesque. *That bastard, that bastard*
she says as I draw her oatmeal bath
and I have to remember she means the fever.

Sundays for the Faithful II

They tear into the face of the gape mouthed mackerel,
dislodging the eyes and sharing them, unhinging the jaw so it hangs,
a flap of skin after a potato peeler mishap. I wonder about the assaulting
nature of winter. The way it comes and comes,
and seduction is a violence all its own. Did you drink
from the fountain you weren't supposed to yet? Even the dumbest
of birds are struck with the same madness that send them all careening south
balding the horizon in winter when the first snow falls
when the bud first bursts or is first burst.

When I was young I couldn't outrun my lisp or gap toothed whistle.
Outside the sky is curdling over, masking daddy's view of us,
and the stragglers with their frostbitten wings are thrown down
as if they were born for that. Inside, the boys corral the quiet ones
into the closet, undress them, prick bloodied initials on their flush pink skin.
Tells them hush, *Daddy's too busy spying on the neighbors to hear you anyhow.*

Yesenia (The Jane Doe of Castro Valley)

Nine years old, we nose the gully's edge for flowers
to eat, pant legs rolled to tufts on our bug bitten calves.
Here, we fancy ourselves deer,

and like any good prey, we cringe away from noise,
the mere suggestion of headlights groping the fog
at a distance we can't quite see over the creek's open mouth.

We feign fear, but only for the fun of it. For whatever reason,
feeling hunted and liking it. When we come across a vine
of purple flowers, we heel.

Look, honeysuckles, I say, wrong though I don't know it yet,
and we pull the stems off the violet's head, lick the nectar
from the apex where the petals gather, suck until we are sated

and leave the gully as humans again, proud for having wrecked
so many flowerbeds. Now forget us. Enter the girl
being lead to our creek by a man who once housed her

She will lie with the violets for weeks before she's found,
nestled in a canvas bag like a chrysalis with a throatful of rags,
beautiful in the police composite sketch,

she won't own a name for ten years. But the butterfly clip
in her hair confesses much. Clinging to her despite mud,
despite winter, despite rough hands committing her body to earth,

its ornate, girly adornments insist *She was a child, she was a child.*
While the bust made from a study of her bones smiles
hopeful through the static right before we change the channel.

I Revisit Age Four

I imagine myself a child
and suddenly
I am a child again
as I was as a child
English has just begun
to bruise my tongue
but I am all Korean.
Sometimes I wish I was blonde
I live in California
but on a street called Washington
so I think I live in Washington state
and dream of California weather
all sun all the time, but at night
when God throws stars like darts
he punctures the ground sometimes
and it can't feel nice.
Despite funerals, I still don't know
what it is to die.
Which is why I hope ghosts are real
Who would rather be gone than a ghost?
Whoever says they, are liars.
They are liars.
But enough of this.
I am a child
I live close to birth than death.
Sometimes I dream of being a mother,
pluck picked clean ham hocks
from trash cans.
I go outside
I part the soil like a small red sea
I've seen Halmeoni erect enough garlic shoots
and carrot roots to know how this works.
I cover the bones in soil.
And wait for pigs to grow.