



TRAUMA MOUTH

poems from *The Daybooks*

Jessica Smith

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You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity. They comment upon your inability or ability to speak.

//

You leave you come back to the shell left empty all this time. To claim to reclaim, the space. Into the mouth the wound the entry is reverse and back each organ artery gland pace element, implanted, housed skin upon skin, membrane, vessel, waters, dams, ducts, canals, bridges.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

TRAUMA MOUTH

Lorraine, before the ends
 one after another relational deaths
we walked home in the moonlight between our stalked youths
sparkling and haunted adulthoods
 how to arrive wiser but undamaged
 before you sent me pink heart-healing stones
before I sent you aqua heart-healing stones
 before magic rabbits before families and babies
blonde liability two girls alone in the dark,
 together
 have the same amount of “fun”
 the gridded pale concrete of D.C.
(statistically less)
child in the dark

3 January 2015 / Birmingham

all the Januaries flatten
into the dark cold space
the people little mirrors into self
round like sequins
years later, full moon in Cancer mania
after everything that should have happened
it comes:
the ragged sawtooth edge
but now the sharp relief of old objects
knowing it will not come again the happiness
never again quite like this I revel in the misery
waiting
patiently for Spring

the first in three years
my new pink coat
they let us out at eleven
never sticks
an inch, maybe two
(half inch)
language patterns too unpredictable
by two stuck
the cars spun around
have been lost
the first flurries beautiful
how many words for snow
in the ice
my library covered with powder
we
I took the chance
sat
in traffic for three hours
you
slowly
an inch
inching
also three, cried
like the drifts
wanting to go home
danger to danger
of snow over
down the iced ramp
to flat ground
coating the road
risk our lives
enough ice to skate on
to save our lives

10 February 2005 / Vienna

how to flee
“I am walking along the Danube” unlikely, here,
likelier at home
perhaps jump *but he adds: in bodies*
reflecting *you are walking through it*
magic golden sunset
“I have no protection”
“I am alone”
at twenty-five,
danger the bridge in the water
“hypervigilance” almost out of statistical range
the man walks *if I fell over a cliff*
with his dog out after dark
“know your surroundings”
I cross the canal
“be invisible” “better than the enemy”
howsomeever
a stride at a time “search escape routes”
comfort myself with numbers “remind myself”
alone
magic
hiding in heavy winter coat
swallowed in pink wool scarf
to walk by myself after dark

23 March 2012 / Buffalo

I said, the shape of you in my mind

you said, a drink like water

I said, as long as I have you

I dream

I give you an orange rose
and you furtively eat it

in green grass and white flowers

but by the time I see you again,
you are gone

I go ahead alone
always looking back
at you where you're

that record could with a backward look

irretrievable

no one knows their way back
or perhaps no one wants to return

frozen outside
like a spirit crossed over
and disallowed back

I dream

you hold a treasure chest
of broken jewels

in reserve (for me)

there is no music for this
only the silence
where nothing more can happen

ascent

*the high one was my nervous system in operation
the low one my blood in circulation*

but life

30 March 2005 / Stockholm

underground wet with melted snow
I see you in my madness, I think,
 mounting the stairs in front of me why not Stockholm
into the light above the tunnels if no heaven
 perhaps just relocation
 days after learning of your death, you arrive in
 my memory garden
 I still see your face, feel
 I have summoned you
 with love
 after you watched me grow up
what the memory of a handshake of equals,
can we do against the vision of you carries the character of echo
it, your words a golem spell
 to cast you back
 I didn't see you grow old
 "But you will all grow old,
your death is at least if you have any luck"
 an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
my lungs fill and I think of your lungs manifest my new life
 and anyway the spring comes with its petals

2 April 2005 / Stockholm

on the way to the hospital we try to remember
by bus who
I have lost interest St. Göran was
in everything your explanation involves dragons
dragons, swords,
I identify with the ones called “witches”
who hear voices
and would like to lead armies
there are no saviors here; we collapse in hysteric tears
we pound fervently at doors on pale lineoleum floors
but no one hears the strength to seek care
much more saint-like than the caregivers but
We cannot treat you
because we cannot do follow-ups they sentence me to the flames
and the medicine may kill you
we ride the bus back
with nothing, to nothing
no one can save us there are no swords
just dragons

5 April 2005 / Stockholm

they told us they could not help me
as I mourned for the self I was losing, might lose forever
resigned to a fate no one would abort
first do no harm we
rode the bus out of Stockholm to Solna
to Karolinska
to old wooden houses in the woods
to lineoleum covered steps
to an office barely big enough for three
with shelves full of books on lobotomy
there: the one who stood up against my death
exiled you from the room his name, Rück, back
zurück ins Leben
prescribed the highest dosage
to restart my brain like a computer asked
about the voices
and the nightmares
ignited the pathways in a brain shutting itself down to sleep
sutured the dissociated parts together
tenderly, with hope like fixing a rag doll for a child
methodically gave myself back to me
created a way where there was no way

6 May 2011 / Birmingham

you move on quickly, tell me you don't like resolution,
tell her it was always already over,

"you step into the stream and then step out"

the eddies curled around you

fingers in your hair

nothing

for twenty million years, evolving

a love of the temporary

furrows to be sowed and left to seed

little plants to grow alone

"it's a gender thing"

but we evolved too

know how to tend to the seedlings

trim the tender tendrils

and ourselves

cup the hands for water

raise our beds with our sisters,

understand the expendable

and when to stay

like Tesla's utopic vision:

buzz for the hive,

let the drones die

21 May 2009 / Manhattan

couldn't hold:
across from St. Mark's (skip the reading)
hands on the table carpaccio and cantaloupe
after months of living with you, in the dark
falsely skipping steps the church light
white
from friends to a kind of
strained marriage, your late nights
washing your dirty dishes your eleven hour workdays
unemployed things you said to me that still bolster me
drugs you slipped me that still haunt me I can
amino acids over broccoli
cheeseless thin pizza and *Twin Peaks* still feel the muscle memory
your particular arms embrace
after the Park (where you would later marry)
gin and tonics by the boats aisles of thick green
after I moved out
after my violent tantrums in the night
after leaving you for a half dozen other men
watching you bring home a bevy of younger women
dinner with wine

31 May 2001 / Birmingham

in the long hot shower alone like an animal washing off scent
scalding every crevice
later it flashes I did not die that night:
a different reality before
my mind's eye not an image but a memory in the place of an image
these thoughts flashing before my eyes
for years after
it cannot be made good the death that didn't come
I could never say no: *not ever* huddled for a bear
the nightmate of death on the ground
my lover, my friend: my enemy forever
as I outlived it I split
all the stories of your abuse from the air I looked
down upon myself
on the bed, alone, helpless
worked like a threat I saved her
in the fire of your
privileged anger I wished
for myself

21 June 2005 / Dalarna / Sweden

in alpine landscape
for miles, nothing flat
smallest brush takes years to grow
still offers only pale grey-green to the snow
begin to see gradations still unmelted in June
instead of the fantastic the color-subtlety of slow life
lichen and pale gold cloudberry
the blues, Nabokov, your eyes the cold
imagine him high in the hills
to study chloroforming butterflies
a naturalist of the dead
Lolitas everywhere arrested
the pale tiny wings beating near the ground
in isolation
the killing jar effective without poison
signal flashing wings
to escape

28 June 2014 / Birmingham

at thirty-four,
major depressive episodes different
than I know
at twenty-five how to get help
that there are things worth seeing
the shadowed passion
of my youth not riding busses through half of Stockholm,
reignited in the phasal light
of neurons firing into blank white space knocking at doors with no answer
in the numbness, my ardor my brain will never be as true
the time I did not love myself—
I visited your shoveled walks; you held my glove
I sleep to heal and dream of you
offstage in theatres I don't acknowledge I return
I want to return

19 September 2004 / New York City

he went on as if nothing happened

he invited her in what started as mutual attraction
and respect spiralled

in the same place

who read dressed not for you
Zukofsky in heart-red a dark valentine whispered

unabashedly	makes moves	the narrative
	ill-advised	you began to believe
		was not mine
like her,	bloody and alone	
	lost	and found

wiped from the official history

his happy marriage your career

she and I dropped out
too risky to be relevant

years later, in the same city

with all the arrogance you

of a man in love with poems with unattended erection and
said goodbye forever
without understanding

13 October 2014 / D.C.

strategy for grief:

where is the station?

imagine a wound

like some planned hysteria

each day, prepare the bandage

where is the station?

at a moment of rest,

where is the station?

take the bandage off

Ich frage etwa ein hundert mal

and

check the wound

where is the station?

prod it, caress it, dress it

where is the station?

put the new bandage on

where is der Bahnhof?

wo ist der Bahnhof?

take it off; put it on again

wo ist der Bahnhof?

take the bandage off,

wo ist der Bahnhof?

put it on

wo ist der Bahnhof?

check the wound

wo ist der Bahnhof?

imagine the wound

till it closes

Ich gehe in einer Stadt, die ich nicht kenne

spazieren,

sehe Strassen und Plätze, die mir fremd sind.

... Ich lehne ab und gehe allein

31 October 2002 / Buffalo

heard the *clink* of ice in crystal
again

my only memory of you counting the drinks
by the sound of the ice

I said, "like a rabbit" later, when I spoke of it

heart beating then, I had no words

gathered a change of clothes just the fog of terror
in an errant plastic grocery bag and clarity of mission

and ran

ran
down the stairs

you heard the door close softly hissed my name
called my name

I knew you could kill me

six years of small threats
and sad-smile reprieves
as you caught up

I slipped my key in the car door turned the key in the ignition
shifted gear, pressed the gas

17 November 2014 / Birmingham

the ducts blocked we write about your “mice”

try to find the poetry statistically, you’re

I, thirteen: of cancer

a cyst not yet thirty too young

“it’s a boy!” I want to hold onto this number

he said take you home your youth

taking it out brush your hair

 keep you warm

 hold your hand

under local our lives entwined again

mortified, I

my young breasts clearly defined edges

already broken

 I open up your side

 like a refrigerator door

 pull out the mice upright by their necks

tiny jugs of milk

28 November 2001 / Buffalo

unsubstantial undergraduate, small, blonde
perpetually overdressed I
over dinner with graduate students
and poets
long admired visiting poet-professor
these stereotypes persist: I dress for respect,
you, respected, put on clothes
acting polite hostess for guest yet to acknowledge me
poured forth frothy white head sitting across
from communal pitcher
Bruce, I swore
then never to write
about your poems
every time we meet, as for the first time
my name again the same handshake
my imperceptible nausea
“you pour a great beer”

13 December 2006 / Charlottesville

memory of the photograph of the sign
that assured me Charlottesville could be home:
a hundred students holding hands in solidarity against rape:

		false
	a culture of rape	
afraid of the catcalls		
from strangers,		I learned “gimlet”
unprepared	for the real thing	
	not the first rape, but the last	
dark December		
		I let you buy drinks
remember falling		
	remember the train tracks	
unlit	“friend”	you
	(illegal to cross)	walked me home
the	to	
	“protect”	
undergraduate on t.v.	(false)	
with no “case”		
	my last	you said, with awe, “beautiful”
		but
		I could not say
		anything

21 December 2004 / Stockholm

Östermalms Saluhall

alone, the first Christmas in Stockholm,
foreign,
to away from my family
walking the aisles din music of talk becomes this instead
protect myself with bright jellied fruits
camera
commerce down the grey haze of winter
tourist poet, documenter haze of separation
the witness apart in the butcher case
necessarily made-empty
to be filled a line of dead grey doves

returning home,
fell into a deep slumber

31 December 2005 / Washington, D.C.

are you afraid of your secret impulses?

the odd architecture,
the toilet and shower in separate rooms

Mel and Rod in the shower-room
applause as they emerged after twenty minutes
older writer offered to hypnotize me

(no) a giant white cake shaped like a clock

with blue icing dials

tight black silk dress Kaplan cut 1 to 3

jumping on the bed with you among the coats

you comforted me as I vomited

half a bottle of champagne and two hours of cake
we toasted to

unremembered things, a sip at a time,

a bottle of champagne between two young women

in the ten minutes after midnight Rod's Elvis mixtape

plastic *clunk* of Solo cups together the sounds of happy poets

I remember you said:

To all sentient beings Lorraine

Dedication

The Daybooks project in all its iterations, including this one, is for Lorraine.

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To read more about *The Daybooks* project, please visit
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About the Author

Jessica Smith, Founding Editor of *Foursquare* and *name* magazines and Coven Press, serves as the Librarian for Indian Springs School, where she curates the Indian Springs School Visiting Writers Series. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, she received her B.A. in English and Comparative Literature: Language Theory, M.A. in Comparative Literature, and M.L.S. from SUNY Buffalo, where she participated in the Poetics Program. She is the author of numerous chapbooks including *mnemotechnics* (above/ground 2013) and two full-length books of poetry, *Organic Furniture Cellar* (Outside Voices 2006) and *Life-List* (Chax Press 2015).

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