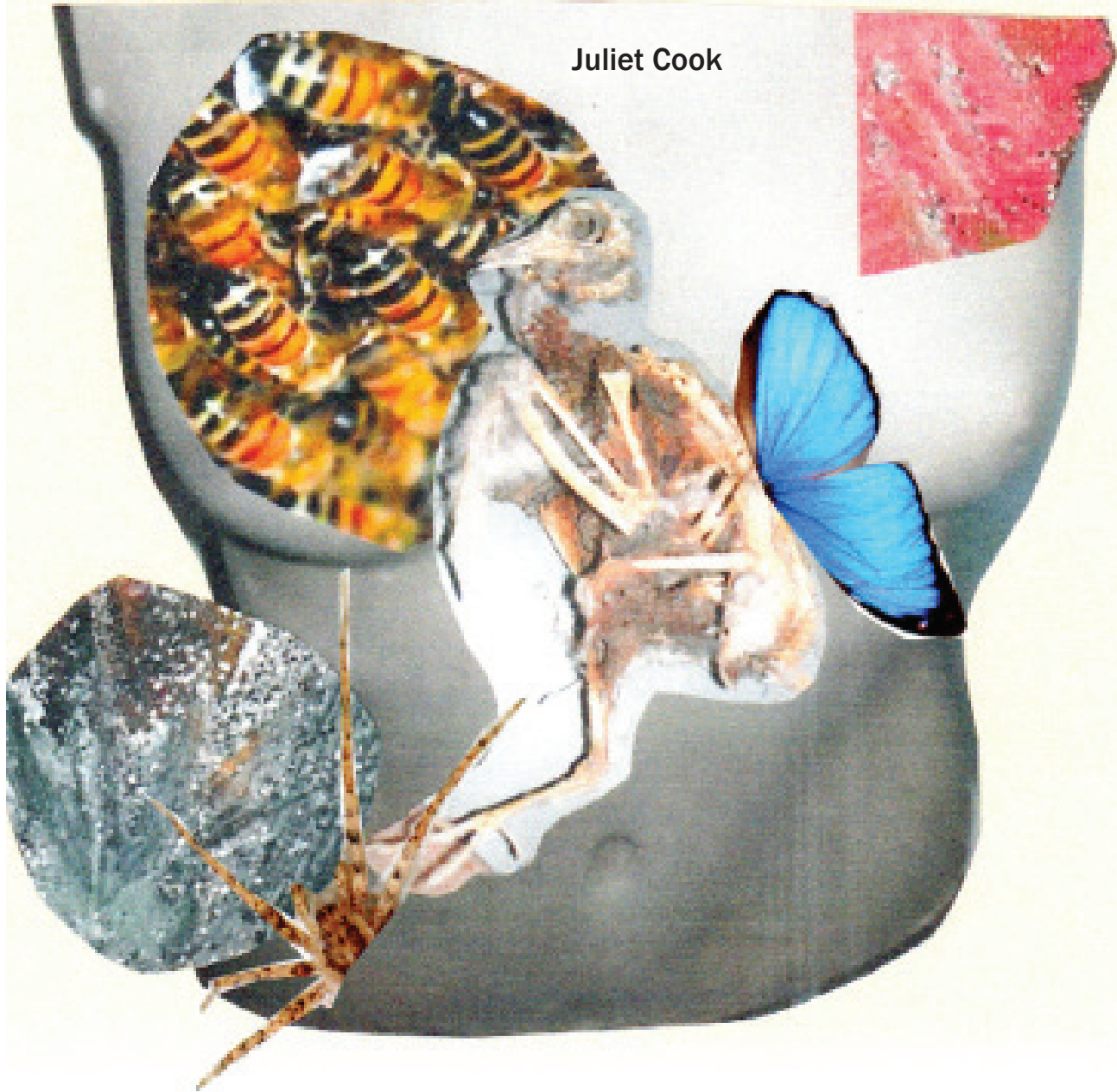


TONGUE LIKE A STINGER

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Heavy feathers, stiff legs, shorn fur, tentacles, stingers...

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Bird Bone Poem

These birds are intermediaries
of a vast yet indeterminate terrain.

These birds will only eat pumpernickel bread
and only if the crumbs are shaped like otoliths.

These birds translate flight into fringed lavender wavelengths.

These birds live inside certain people's lungs;
try to peck their way free
as if our lungs were new and ovoid.

These birds are in favor of spiny urchins doing their damage
in a tank of pink anemones, creating a strange colloid.

These birds' favorite word is dollface.
They like to tap their beaks against porcelain teeth.
Not veneers. Doll teeth.

These birds are oddly obsessed with the anorexic bodyshape.
Some have even been known to email young anorexic girls
pretending to also be young anorexic girls
so they could trade photos of how thin they were.
How their feathers are falling out.
How their beaks are becoming wobbly.
Despite this gaunt gauntlet, their eyes
are brighter than ever. Envious beads.
Jewelry box rib cagery.

If these birds attack smaller birds
and demolish their shiny eyes
and are deemed guilty,
then they will be sent to the bird gallows.
This is a very solemn occasion involving triangle music
and hanging by grosgrain ribbon.

These birds enter & exit the light blue dream box.
If you depress a special compartment,
sometimes a poem is released,
sometimes a bird is released.
Sometimes a poem-shaped bird refuses to fly.

Despite the adamant streaks,
these birds deeply adore poetry.
Some have even been known to pledge tiny bones in exchange
for a handwritten poem. These bones are wrapped
in periwinkle velvet; fastened with fragile twine.

This bone-parcel is a sticky yet precise arrangement—
syllable vertebrae laminated with plaintive honey.

Some Explanations for Fainting Goats

Because of a spooky rose-breasted grosbeak
who trills dark omens into goat ear until goat legs go quite weak.

Because of the harbingers hidden in discolored blades
of grass, in thorny weeds, in bitten lockets.

Because they suddenly glimpse their own innards--
organ meat on a silver tray. Quivering.

Because of evil dwarf queens with riding crops,
with arachnid pets, with modified metal braces
to take the place of spindly limbs.

Because of mounting desire to hybridize
goat milk with sticky strands of spider silk.
Tampered draglines twisting into nooses.

Because of obscenely swollen tongues,
the result of self-induced disease
so nobody will view them as a delicacy,
but soon there will be new breeds
of stuttering fainting goats, of silent fainting goats
whose distended tongues shall be fetishized
i.e. "Behold the stunning marbleization of The Mute Exotique".

Because of strange forceps and sinister instructions
from the yellowed page of a Victorian medical text
in between the page for bloodletting & blistering
and the page for amputation & silk suturing.

Because of recurring visions of goat-sized gurneys
with hoof restraints. Malevolent milking devices
squiggling towards hapless udders.
The ghost of a rose-breasted grosbeak
bearing a foreboding beakful of parasitic worms
to implant into inner ears;
to deposit into rotten nests
of cavernous sockets.

Because they are going to die.
They are practicing.
They are foreshadowing.
They are performing
a stiff-legged medical text illustration.
Their forelimbs will never transform into wings.

Chelsea Antoinette

Blow into my ghost town. Nothing but
dwarf rabbits lined up with the pink
eyes gleaming into abyss of empty basement

or attic with its messy pink insulation.
Tiny pieces of glass in the walls. A crescendo of
slivers lined up against running stockings.

It feels like I'm drowning in wilted peony
petals. The sweet cloying. The sweet clawing.
You only bit because of the small cage

and the wound is browning. I never wanted the flopping
ears. We tried to stay alert. Upraised to the strange timbre
of an ectopic pregnancy. I would have cut it out

if I knew it was a tumor, but I thought maybe it was
a soft baby. In the cistern, your dead animal
bones are fastened with the threadbare lace.

Deer Head Variations

instead of severed, stuffed deer heads and their velvety racks,
this study is mounted with pelvic girdles with jewels
embedded in the pubis and iliac crests

the kind of jewels that might inhabit treacherous fairy tale
hair combs of the decorative and lethal bent
the kind of jewels that might adorn feminine crossbows—
hot metal & rubies & chokecherries

artificed porcelain cups contain
inexplicably wobbling eggs
although tongueless in their shells
they hum glossal murmurations

*

instead of pipe smoke plumes against a backdrop
of hunter green, stinking up the taxidermy pheasants,
this study is perfumed with a slow seep

vapors from violet veins, sugar channels, baby pears
in heavy syrup and others in formaldehyde
glass jars of plucked feathers, bleach, honey, googly eyes,
silver-tapped wisdom teeth

these birdies are cuckoo clock quails
with crooked feet, battered beaks, askew springs
leaking out half-shattered necks
metallic warblings cut with turpentine

*

as pomegranates crack open and bleed out
their pulpy seeds, she molds a small bird of marzipan
to serve as candied companion piece

or does she mean to pit the misfit birds against each other
like a scaled-down yet sinister version of a cock fight
does she secrete snuff films into furtive vaults
as the eggs soak up pernicious vibrations, begin to convulse

the bitter chokecherries could be itty bitty ball gags
if the eggs had mouths if the eggs had hands
the porcelain pocills could be tiny pillories
her poison-dipped nib quivers with anticipation

*

to blow out their guts, truss them to a tree,
behold with perfidious glee another batch
of these ornately stained carapaces

*

instead of a strapping sporting scene,
albumen slithers down the walls

Kinds of Foxes

Black kohl sinking into pink chaise lounge.
Plummy tail plucked into a boa. Rubber calves
slinking through the plume cane. She's a shot of Novocain
in between black feathers. A dark pillow jackdaw neck.
That long needle. That numb precursor to a bloody mouth.
That kind of fox.

Throat an arboretum for exotic thorn bushes.
Newfangled choke cherry, ribbon candy, a spit-shined baby
flying fox floats out like a mangled balloon. Mothers ooh & aah.
Fathers ooh la la then try to prick it with their super-fine teeth.
That riddling with tiny perforations. That fur-lined sieve.
That kind of fox.

Of course, the Pippi Longstocking Fox is my favorite.
Wearing her bright striped socks and flicking her tale
arrhythmically and baking her foxy little doppelgangers
into a strawberry/rhubarb/furry little blackbird fox pie
with manic latticework and deeply depressed crosshatching.
That kind of fox.

Sieve

This lambkin is sheared and encased in ice.

When the violet pastilles cut into
its tongue, its blood felt like blue frosting;
its mouth was a candied frostbite.
Dark veins in a cave. Glazed sugar cane.

The chilly ditties of icing piped out
witches, rosettes, witches. Silver platter pedestal
for ice sculpture malediction. Design of black stitches
traversing the underside where the blanket of cold chenille

tried to fit snugly, but was bladed away.
Exposure, powdered sugar, exposure. Gelid hooves
cobbled in icy peach cobbler. With frozen pits
of eyes stuffed with preservative fur, this could be a bog lamb,

but it is a shorn lamb, a tundra lamb, a glacier lamb.
A clot of not quite edible marzipan stuck under a rigid tongue.
When will it melt into sugared witch sounds? When will it drown
into pits of blue slush, blindfolded by a sticky strip of silver rosettes?

Parasitic Twin

A dark ghost key inserts itself
into a dark ghost ignition.
Dark as in can't comprehend
the specific delineations
of the interlocking parts,
but sometimes hear
the sudden click. Others,

it's more of an amorphous sound.
More of a jittery insinuation.
More of an oily slinkiness.
A motor an uneven rev
in a tattered throat.
Pluralized throats.
Pleurisy throats. A dark ghost

with many cockeyed heads,
the wormy kittens come out.
Small, patchy army of bedlam.
Scritchings, scraggling, scrabbling,
festering scabs on their undersides,
milk lust in their eyes. Some bulging,
some slits. Some pinworms squiggling.

Some pinholes where something tried to affix
them to poster board, but they weren't good
poster children. They weren't anybody else's
art project. They were mine.
I poked holes to try to drain them,
but they just bubbled up into more
ghost ignitions. They are mine,

but they don't come when called.
They come whenever they want to.
When they come I have to balance
rickety dishes of spoiled milk upon
precarious ledges. I have to pose
rancid scraps of cottage ham,
plumply peeking out of netting.

I won't say their names aloud.
I won't hand feed them, but I do
have to watch them lick my sick
offerings with diseased tongues
and diseased tongues get stuck
in a notch. In a dark ghost ignition
in a lobe. I have to watch them ruin

another failed attempt to write them off.
Another deformity is pinworms stream out
the whole time the motor is running and I can't
stop thinking rev and shiv make a good off rhyme
until shiv is replaced with handfuls of bodkins.
Another deformity is the claws never retract.
They just get buried in mounds of oily meat.

Ghost Teeth

Little white floaters in my field.
More ghost eggs for the loony bin.
Telekinetic embryo, a lingering wet kiss
like electrodes to the wrist.

Sometimes I feel like a lamb chop marionette.

My bones cold inside their raw dress.
More ghost insinuations like parasites
that gnaw flesh. What would happen if I just snipped
the sides of this enclosure? If I just refused

to cook myself today? No matter how doughy,
I know there's blood inside. My underside.
My small basket of ragamuffins dares you
to take another invisible bite.

Sometimes I feel like swing dancing with a meat cleaver.

A Song

When the straight pins curve into your swallow,
you will die starlet. An opera star vocal pierced through
poison-dipped feathers. A poison soaked through
long buttoned gloves. A poison soaked through
contorted neck inside out. A lush dripping boa.

Tiny cinderblocks tied to your swallowtails,
dragging down under dark water. A trawl
as the wing beats slow, just before they choke
into a soft corpse no bigger than a guttural vowel
lodged in a velvet-lined coffin of throat.

Haunted core. Haunted corridor of pin pricks,
of torn netting, of pill box veil, of swallow wail
swallow wail swallow wail swallow wail

Hydra

Voice box more weedy than reedy.
Water snakes carry me down to dredge
and almost always poisonous. All this silt.
Sea sponges wrapped in leeches. An opening
surrounded by tentacles. Baby hydrae clamp
onto hyacinth. I can make them detach
and free-float until they clamp again. Sucker punch.
Hydra, hydraulic, hydrocephalic. Something to sink
its teeth, something to suck out the toxins,
something to spit the toxins into another hole.

Underneath the Mermaid Act

She self-enforces a temporary muteness.
A trick in which her tongue unroots from its dank cave.
A misshapen sea anemone out of its element
until she sends it back underwater to quietly undulate;
to swell, to lengthen, to regenerate...

When you struggled against her, she mistook
those death throes for pleasure. A cloying clam adorned
by filth-encrusted barnacles and poison glands
as you drowned in the moat of her throat.
Scratch that anemone. It was more

like baby eels forced through a funnel
into a small orifice. Or a venomous sea snake
insinuating itself between your lips, repeatedly
flicking that wet tongue like a salt lick instinct gone sinister.
You saw yourself pulling it out by the root, dripping.

You saw it writhing even after it was removed.
A trick in which she only pretended to be desirous
of your measured stylus strokes. You were nothing more
than a blot of punctuation at the end of a sinuous sentence.
She has enough black ink to spill herself, to be disastrous,

to gorge herself. Her dangling threads engorged into
pulsating tentacles. The suction cups engaged your hand
then elongated into fangs. Her triangular head became a messy tangle
of hissing snakes. She was nothing more than a vise grip slime case
seeking to envenom-ate. How does a lover suck that poison out?

Buzz

You belong in an odd vestibule.
With the sheen of shoehorns dangling
above the mantelpiece. Or opera style gloves
adorned with tiny buttons. Or child's safety scissors.
The way you used to hold them

so wrongly. The way you adore
the slightly obsolete. Lopsided embrace
of obscure themes. Sweetly bumbling
across the page, your cursive sways small
and cryptic. Reckless t(s). I(s) looking reclusive.

You call this theme Haphazard Chandelier.
You call this theme Choking Hazard
adorned with tiny buttons, snipped off
and lobbed down unsuspecting throats.
Festooned with curlicues, irregular verbs, dangling

bee stingers drip raw honey; hover
and plunge into unsuspecting throats.
Tracheal buzz. Gorgeous anemones bloat
under your tongue. Sweetly fumbling
above the mantelpiece. The metal V(s) an orchestra

of robot bird wings. Lopsided sheen.
You belong in a fuzzy intermezzo that floats.
You flirt with opera gloves that may be empty,
but at least they boast five finger-shapes
if nobody else will hold your hand;
if nobody else will implant your spine with tiny honeycombs.

You call this theme Fantastic Seamstress.
You call this theme Fanciful Ingress.
You call this theme The Sticky Swarm
About to Burst Out My Neck.
With small stripes and serrated legs and pollination

of tongue anemones. Cryptic cursive flights
and flowery crash landings. Crushed gloves.
Sticky sweet buzz pouring out your engorged mouth.

Corbicula

My flight muscles are irregular.
Bumble, fumble, sudden flare
of small lavender fireworks
sparkling down like misplaced ellipses...

My flight muscles are typewriter keys.
Some of the letters' suggestive shapes
honed into high relief by frenetic fingering;
shock absorbers worn to shreds.

My flight muscles are not exactly subtle.
A serrated curve that looked furry
became something sharp snagging a lip
in an incongruous direction, then spillage...

My flight muscles mix mold spores and cocoa nibs
into a fix for glottal constriction. Sudden tensed thighs
like mechanical pencils about to snap
off at the stems. Lead poisoning,

plumbago, drunk bees buzzing above
mutant fruit. A defective cherry bomb with glossy
candy-coated shell muting the fuse.
A tiny jawbreaker exits the follicle;

crash lands onto the page with poison sac pulsing...

Removing her stinger

Starched pinafore or honey-sticky
taut in her costume, pull her little
hairs, rule her vertebrae with sweet glue.

Name her clitoral piercing or charm bracelet a token
oddity, grasp what spangles, finger her metallic
oddments like a leash, contain her urge

to seep through bandages, pillowcases, casements,
domestic constraints. Insatiable interior of beehive
tunnels leads to a glazed cubbyhole

for her queen, a candied gully for the workers
to tirelessly lick clean. Grooming,
preening, primping her furies

into rubies, her frills into shiny cicatrices,
her buzzing underside into a dumb doily,
a tattered antimacassar with a honeypot stitched on.

Analyzing her handwriting

A line of red ants crosses her wrist;
an upraised slit, indicative of
gaping sugar dish, a vice.

A vise must hold her doll-head still;
show her the overstuffed inside. Wire hanger DIY
must probe the neck hole; crimp it closed

like pinching shut the sides of a modified dumpling.
Like flouring the edges of a tart gone crazy
with fermented gooseberries. Wildly flowering

into a moony lush with her yeast smell rising.
Tamp her down before she has to be measured
with a sheet cake pan, with a fainting spell

from which she will awaken as her own marzipan
doppelganger. Sweltering candy thermometer bouquet
a strange sexual threat. An unusual stickiness congealing.

Trying the snake charmer diet

When she's starving, her so-called clairvoyance
is myopic at best; the mark of the beast at worst.
Still, she refuses to eat

perfectly palatable liverwurst. Her tittering
sounds like bone chimes, obscene organ music
in the dining hall. The word "twit" grows slimy

in her wide-open maw.
Sounds like "twat".
Sounds like milking venom.

Vanilla milkshakes suddenly turn
into milk snakes and how would you like it
if you tried to take a sip of something sweet

and then it hissed? It writhed its way
between her lips, it shed its skin down her throat;
it planted its serpentine malediction.

Posting her personals ad

That one didn't want to be her live-in.
Her foundation was too unnaturally orange;
its application a high-

maintenance profiling process.

One trick is to stir the batter with a filthy stiletto
wrenched off her own battered shoe

while she wobbles precariously;
indulges in increasingly frequent taste tests.
All wigged-out, nothing prefab about this box

mixed metaphor. Plumped lips. White grease
from sizzling bacon oozes under pink nail tips.
Sometimes she uses it in her ginger snaps.

Sometimes she works it into her deep-fried hair,
which may not make much sense to YOU, but maybe
you're not the demographic she's catering to.

gynoecium

makes her mouth open like a snapdragon

color-coded orifice

color-coded pollen slots

color-coded landing strips

)

unfetter dress bodice release bees

)

'her faithful warriors, her very own daughters'

pour from mouth parts, lady parts

o the honey-seeking spill & thrall 'the yellows

begin to tear down their own walls'

)

diligent fur-bodied swarm buzz fuchsias

)

o the sweet alignment of stigma, style, ovary

modified ovule breach lust for evolved leaf

ripped from her sticky spine torn from her milky stem

severed equals free

)

coda for a complex "tongue"

Temporary Brood Chamber

I thought I was a pupa in a glassine envelope.
I thought wrong.

I thought the closest he'll get to another kiss
as I sealed it with spit.
I thought his surgical scissors.

When I undress, I am very aware
of my hip bones, my clavicles.
One of the hottest things any man ever asked me
to take a bath together before class.
A flush, a sudden buzz in my chest.

Aside from any resentment or regret,
he opened doors in me.

I thought he inserted a baby orchid bee
deep inside my mouth. Serrated legs smeared the papillae.
When I open up, it flies out.

Some days it's a whole swarm;
a plague descending. Some days the pale imitations
cover their gardens and hide. Some days I realize.

It turns out I was a nymph.
I chewed through that envelope myself.