

What Omma Never Taught

She left me a fistful of food
but I don't know

How to carry water—
How to test for ripeness—
How to not leave bruises—

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I overheard a woman at the Museum of Broken
Sentences tell her daughter
something in an argot, I, too, should know.

Something like: yes to pleasure
no to an invasion of the body.

*

I am too young. Boys ridicule my reflection
as they press my face to the lake's thick skin.

When they soldier into men, they march their affections
over the wide fields of my cheeks, try to conquer me
in a game of catch-&-release.

*

My penchant for taking risks, for taking leave
gathers momentum
the farther I am from the eye of a mother—
each year, another frosted pane,
thick cataract of haze.

*

She bathed in ice-cold moonlit lakes—
flesh the color of milky peach
 like the prized spheres from a distant orchard
where she once hid, smooth belly swelling
 with the secret
 stone of me.

*

The shape of praise & curse—

This thing shadowless inside her feeding
 on her last nutrients & nerve.

*

Some days, I'm sure of it, she splintered
 into solo, wept arias
 into the arteries
 of my own starter heart.

*

So strangers steal my song, hold me,
 lie to & against me

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To soothe the self
 steal lullabies wherever I can—
 even from the throat
 of the last purple crocus.

*

Keep your wings. I'll take

leftover talon, a beak still tender
but persistent, testing
 its own reflection.
 The strength of glass.

*

Some people know when their mothers die,
how they lived & maybe even who they loved.

Some of us know leaving
is also an act of love.

Some of us are just half-steps
a street show tap-and-go—