



THE  
SERPENT  
WILL EAT  
WHATEVER IS IN  
THE BELLY OF THE BEAST



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It's not about other people knowing.  
We don't even tell the victims.  
We just whisper to him,  
Your Day has come.

~ Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

diēs hebdomadis

diēs Sōlis

diēs Lūnae

diēs Martis

diēs Mercuriī

diēs Iovis

diēs Veneris

diēs Saturnī



now you have to harvest our humanity to send it to the laboratory, a small piece from this vertebrate brain, to be transferred in formalin, to harden, as was harvested from every organ cut away and weighed *when I was just a little girl*, from the heart, the lungs, and all the visceral rest *I asked my mother what will I be*, from the liver *will I be pretty*, from the kidneys *will I be rich*, for once the ventral and cranial cavities are empty, *here's what's she said to me*, the decedent looks like a canoe: *qué será, será*,\* it's gone out, you've got to believe in something it's gone, *no qué será, será*, because unless you have an unquenchable curiosity to solve puzzles you would surely need to believe in some bliss or rebirth or requital or else dealing with this *damn song in my head* all day every day you would not be able to deal with it, so now you're only remembering it because it has gone out and smells a bit, briefly, because of the beeswax or the still-hot paraffin that was encasing the wick and in kind these small tissue samples will be encased in paraffin too to be sliced by razors for microscopic slides, smell it despite the dulled, sickly sweet stupefying stink of the cadaverine and the blood black in the bowl, the piss and the late shit, the devil's cake batter you've been told your face is shielded, you are masked, gowned and gloved and have been standing and studying the decedent on this slab with a gutter under a downdraft in this room of brightdead fluorescents and have fucking forgotten about it, about why *why does it only smell when it goes out* are you even doing this, your scrotum's tightened, it's cold, *a cream-colored candle lit out of respect* and yet you are used to it,

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\* *Que Sera, Sera*, written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, 1955, Columbia Records.

*my life is ripe for suicide* so you don't need the fable of coffee-scented snuff or the peppermint oil or the camphoric, eucalyptic, methylated liniment to snuff out the noise or make the terrible smells tolerable, no, they would only open you, you just need to stay in the downdraft of this first-floor room with its air coming down from the ceiling vents to the vents above the floor, sweeping the smells down and not up into your face, you need to stay in here to inundate the receptors since every time you'd leave the room and return you would just be assaulted all over again, so you keep the receptors flooded *I don't want to die in this country* that's kind of like snow blindness, *I don't want to die in a room full of people who are afraid to touch me, before executing me*, just like acoustic trauma or a callus or the inability to taste sweets due to the overconsumption of sugar you simply smell what you smell and discern yourself smelling the smell since none of them no longer nag you anymore, *I long to miss this*, no longer triggers the reflex of retch or spew or enervates you, *I long to miss this place*, you just do the work

let me see, let me see, let me see

you Sōlis said, four hours ago and just before the dictation, as you're working without an assistant today, and then you were speaking our existence into the tape recorder Sunday

June the eighteenth, nineteen ninety-five, eight twenty-eight ante

meridiem: the postmortem examination of one Lucy Anarcha

Westcott

and now it has guttered out, for you're almost finished with us, a candle lit like a riot out of respect and rot and ensured to burn for us for hours, and it did, yet over a year from now the city will be lit, because the necropsy will impeach the police report and will fail to justify the future adjudication, the verdict which will ignite our uprising at night, over a year from now on the Fourth of July, nineteen ninety-six, with fireworks cascading like nightmares in the sky, above

the rioters and the outliers, the reactionary angels *I know the long tale of your soul what it would say to this dissolution of flesh, this monstrous smell ratted me out since you didn't want to be found out, no not like this, not like this, what you were wearing, doing, the smell the unbearable noise of it amping up from the grassy, drainage ditch, facedown underwater with your skirt biked up and you mooning the moon the fat officer laughed, on the morgue telephone, as if I wasn't standing to the side of him talking to the investigator overlooking you in your sleeping bag before being gurneyed into a room the florescent colorlessness and temperature of your father's refrigerator, or as if or as if the fat white fuck wouldn't even be able to see this forensic niggernurse in front of him let alone in his periphery despite the fact that I am not another niggernurse but a forensic pathologist summoned again to examine another nigger, that white pig fuck, laughing over the dead*

darkskinned black female: fifteen years old, height: five feet and six inches, weight: one hundred and eighteen pounds, eyes: brown, hair: black, shoulder-length and relaxed and

*laughing over the dead darkskinned girl: I will have the last laugh now that I am no longer and long after now you the salesman said, Sōlis, deep inside yourself, even then trying to sell yourself on the assignment, instinctually, during the dictation of the external examination, before you even knew of the color of our killer, before you even knew of the color of the cop, that we were one of the children of the plantation, droit du seigneur,\* yes yes a salesman, Sōlis, for each knife has taken a life, all seven of them, all seven of them and if, one day, someone were to want to use one of these knives against you, the first knife, you would take out your wears and spread them across this adjoining table, as you would need to have everything out on the table, and you would tell them to make a selection, and then they would tell you the price, and then they would tell you the price, and then they would tell you *your forehead felt dead your father said, lifeless and unlovable, neither warm nor cool like cardboard a hardcover, because when he came to identify your face**

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\* the right of the lord (French)

*you were an open hymnal to him and you knew it, the once-mobile face of his only motherless offspring, after closing his eyes once you began whispering and whimpering to hear what you were truly trying to say to him, what, like an animal that eats teeth, what, smelling the bones in the dirt down deep, his jaw's an archeologist's dream, before he broke face and started whispering and whimpering ladybug ladybug as if he would forever see, no takebacks, but then he sweetly reached over and touched your forehead as if expecting a fever or to wipe away the mark of some very evil memory your father the priest, and not the Jheri-curved confectioner who always licked your legs with his lashes or those brown bodega boys who would hail asses, the punani on the Jamaican liver lips as the clouds scudded the sky, me a go put me hand ina yuh pocket, what, can I put my hand into your pocket, no, you didn't want him to find you like this, no not like this, but he treated you so much like a child, motherless, yet had he not written down the number in the jacket of a fifteen-year-old girl what were you thinking girl, what were you wearing, but what does it matter what you were wearing, you were human, and I shouldn't blame you for my finger thoughts, were you waylaid on your way to some towered project party where all the flygirls were way past the age of menarche, pudenda means to be ashamed of in Latin but most of them knew that you were not, dressed for skin and veined labia to bloom into the satanized door of a confessional, unknow, unload it said the price, yes yes the salesman, Sōlis, but for now you have not been betrayed or discovered or destroyed and everything is as it always is so that this morning, after eating a chocolate croissant, you just gurneyed us from a refrigerated room to this autopsy station, leveled us down to this slab, unbagged us, releasing the odiferous puff of released bladder most likely done from when we were throttled because this happens quite a bit with females with short little urethras, and then slid us onto this slab supinely as if we were just anybody, unaware of our killer's civic commitment and color, with a sheet under us to collect any trace evidence you may miss, which along with the clothes will be rolled up after we've been rolled back into that refrigerated room the size of a charter bus, and then bagged for the slow process of the deoxyribonucleic acid analysis to be*



begun by some obscure alcoholic academic with a special interest, as for now with a camera and some interchangeable lens, some stainless steel tools, a reciprocating saw, a transparent plastic speculum and anoscope to avoid obscuring any potential site of injury, and other specialized items needed for homicides and sexual assaults on the adjoining table at the ready, for the transcription to be done later, with the use of diagrams and clockface position references to avoid any ambiguity when relating to a genital injury, you were dictating into a cordless headset while photographing

the decedent's eyeballs were bulged out and softened...her mouth was open, tongue protruding out, hemorrhagic bite marks around the tongue, due to hypoxic seizure, the teeth are still intact...her face has been disfigured by massive contusions on the left side, due to blunt force trauma...a burn scar near her hairline, perhaps from a hot comb...a continuous ligature furrow and some bruising around the cervix, the embroidered imprint of a belt is neatly imprinted upon the epidermis, tiny abrasions from where a knife blade was pressed against it...moving along the body...the decedent is partially dressed in the athletic fashion of the day, a pink, tight-fitting, hooded sweat jacket with many diamond simulat studs, an opened front zipper, and a torn yellow crop top with some vomitus...fingernail abrasions around the breasts...a soiled black miniskirt...postmortem lividity was present on the dorsal part of the body when it was found lying prone, facedown, the mini skirt hiked up, nude from the waist down...circumferential bruising to the wrists and to the ankles...abrasions on the patellae...blood on the inner thighs and around the vaginal area...multiple genital lacerations, abrasions, and bruises...radially oriented, split-type lacerations of the

hymenal tissue, the labia minora, the posterior fourchette, the fossa navicularis...some insect activity in the vagina...perianal, anal, and rectal lacerations, also due to forced penetration...her perineum is ruptured

and photographing as if you were the investigator at the crime scene who had covered our hands with these oven-mitt-sized paper bags and taped them around our wrists which we often wanted to slit to preserve any evidence in case we might've struggled and scratched our attacker or our attackers since it would've taken at least one of them to hold us down while the other attacked, but for now in this municipal morgue, before sliding the sweat jacket sleeves over these hands, you removed the paper bags which will also be kept in case any trace evidence has fallen into them and then you lifted the inky fingerprints, swabbed underneath our nails, cut nails and plucked pubic hair, you swabbed our mouth, our vagina, our rectum, our broken perineum and once the femoral blood sample for toxicological analysis was drawn, by the hypodermic syringe just below the groin, our skirt, jacket, and crop top were removed

there is a row of horizontal keloidal scars going across the left antebrachium, the left forearm like the fretboard of a guitar, or notches, possibly self-inflicted

and laid across another adjoining table for the lights to be flipped off and for the blacklight to fluoresce any fructose-filled seminal stains and blood on the body and clothes, some saliva no semen, lots of blood and something else, then the lights were flipped on and our breasts and buttocks were swabbed because they were clutched, brushed, and licked, our teats sucked by the self-begotten sick, men who could be uncle-like not white, news will be gleaned from these swabs as well as from these articles of clothing that will be cataloged and bagged in paper instead of plastic to avoid any development of mold: now, as if being violated it all over again, and again, we are still seeing you placing the rubber

block under our shoulders blades so that our head can drop back to expose the neck and to protrude the chest, you select a stainless steel scalpel, sanitized to avoid any cross-contamination, and with the belly of the blade

initiating the internal examination of the torso

you incise an oblique line from each shoulder, from the tip of each acromion, conjoining them at the sternum and above the budding breasts since we won't be wearing any lowcut dress, and then you finish with a single line, making a little twist around our umbilicus, to the pubis, slicing midnight to reveal a buttery midday, creating a crude Y, you then begin to undermine and reflect the skin and the subcutaneous tissue and underlining musculature from the chest wall with the scalpel, releasing a puff of blood, an iron rose, cutting the fat to begin to peel back the side flaps with the top flap flown back like a bib above the underjaw, the inverted V over our visage, from the neck down to expose yellow fat and red muscle over white bone but around the stem of the Y you go steadily, incising the serous membrane lining the abdominal cavity, and then you lift the abdominal wall away from the organs with the V-shape of your two upturned fingers to guide the scalpel between them and deeper down the stem, avoiding the impetuous nicking of any organs, our bowels, which is why the face shield is worn and then you reflect the rest of the skin and underlining tissue to expose the viscera and since our fifteen-year-old body had not had the chance to fully ossify yet, no broken ribs, you cut through the sternoclavicular joints and the costal cartilages with the scalpel instead of the cartilage knife or the saw or the beaklike bolt cutters, the decisive snaps that would've been needed on an adult, and while removing the shieldlike breast plate for another puff of blood you cut away more underlining tissue, the unique, atavistic smell of organs and meat like the meat you thawed out from your refrigerator last week, for the barbeque, forever hankering for a rack of ribs as you rake and appraise the thoracic and abdominal organs in situ, all the organs that once

composed the ballet of our bodily functions, our fluids, but no need for the ladle and the graduated cup, no fluids in the cavities, no fluids and so since it's a strangulation you start emptying and weighing and cataloging the contents from this coffer of fear from just the top of the thorax to leave the dissection of the cervix for later, for last, and this part is the boring part because everything appears to be perfect: on a sanitized table near a sink, to avoid any cross-contamination, you rinsed and studied the harvestable heart, the thoracic aorta, the lungs and diaphragm, the liver and spleen, the abdominal aorta and the guts with the pancreas all the way down cut off at the pelvic brim because of the rape dissection that's to be done, on the genital tract, not even leaving the kidneys and the adrenal glands in the back and yes yes this is all very boring, because everything appears to be perfect, but along with the blood sample for toxicological analysis, with syringe aspiration, you extract urine from the bladder and bile from the gall bladder, because any drugs that might've been in the blood and urine five days ago would still be in the bile today, and vitreous fluid from the eye, because unlike the blood and bile the humor in the highly protective eye would remain untouched by even a puncture of the gastrointestinal tract, and because glucose skyrockets after death and especially after an agonal death when the liver breaks down glycogen and floods the system with the simple sugar, so take a vitreous sample not a blood sample to estimate the antemortem blood sugar level of a girl who might've been a diabetic, you slice open the stomach and the duodenum and fish out the gastric contents as sometimes you can see where someone has been due to the sad contents of the stomach, because the stomach becomes a gastronomic time capsule of someone's final moments, so then these signature finger foods, the undigested chunks of flamed-broiled hamburger meat and thick-cut fries with their skins still attached will place us at the new fast food place not far from where we were found, in that grassy, drainage ditch, outside our neighborhood and show that we had

died in under two hours of eating this malnutritious shit as you wring out the malnutritious shit we ate earlier from the colon into a bowl, the devil's cake batter you've been told, once, by our lead investigator: the drive-thru video camera that captured our off-duty policeman will have him and his friend apprehended, both in their mid-forties and married, because we were poor and so proud to be sitting in the plush upholstery of his passenger seat and then back in an apartment applying the lipstick straight from the bullet instead of the brush, just him and us, that we didn't see his friend coming in or even know that he was coming, but for now, for now you are conclusively dissecting out our rectum and genital tract to study the uterus and such and find fistulas in the anal and vaginal canals, more bruises and lacerations, our stanchied menstruation, you save the ovaries and slice off samples from every other organ and place them into stock jars separately, to harden in formalin, but due to the good health the cause of death will have nothing to do with any naturally occurring disease in any of these, and due to the sheaths no pregnancy, no sperm: the microscopy will be grossly unremarkable, the histology won't tell you a thing, not a damn thing, notshit, it is merely routine in case a killing goes to court and the defense speculates something else other than the cause of death as the cause of death you take a deep breath, you take a deep breath and place a rubber headrest under our neck and then study the head for any injury, satisfied, you part the chemically straightened hair from ear to ear as if you were about to treat it, a bit frizzy behind the crown of our head, especially the kitchenette, the naps at the nape of the neck the niggerknots, and while using our scrunchie to create a topknot pushed forward over our face like a quiet quail's you see the beautiful five-year-old you dissected yesteryear and the seventeen plastic barrettes in her poorly plaited hair, dry as hell, so many in her big little hair that you see her getting ready the day before yesterday and grabbing our scrunchie out of a drawer to pull back the long relaxed hair like a

white girl into a pony, with no way of knowing as to what the rest of the night would bring or as to how that pink little scrunchie would be utilized today: a biparietal incision is made between the part on the head, where our headphones ought to be, so it can be hid by a pillow later, then you flay the scalp by gripping the scrunchie, peeling our hair and skin forward and over the top chest flap over our face, exposing that thick fibrous membrane attached to the little muscles in our forehead that made us frown and then the back flap is peeled down, you check for bruising and, satisfied, you clip a portable air pump to your belt, don a pullover ventilated hood, and reach for the hooded, vacuum-affixed, reciprocating saw

initiating the internal examination of the cranium

circling the greatest diameter of the skull recalls that saw wielded to cut away casts, from the padded limbs of adolescence, without cutting skin and now without cutting the brain, you carefully cut the connections and remove the skullcap with part of the dural membrane still attached, a particularly godly experience, and examine the encephalon in situ: despite the downdraft of this ventilation system, the saw's vacuum and hood, the sawing still kicked up some bone dust that is harmful within itself without being a carrier of the new human immunodeficiency virus, still, wearing the ventilated hood and the battery-operated air pump, you sever the cranial nerves and the meninges and the spinal cord and from the cranial vault you remove the most complex known structure in the cosmos, gingerly, to weigh it: the forebrain, the midbrain, and the hindbrain with the wrinkled ball of the cerebellum, a three-pound mass of fats and tissues the consistency and texture of tofu, which at one time contained many human imaginations and hundreds of billions of cells interlinked through trillions of communications, and on the sanitized table you section and section it, photograph and photograph it, and after finding nothing wrong *when I was just a little girl* with it, a perfect specimen that could go on a tour, *I asked my mother*

*what will I be*, you harvest my humanity to send it to the laboratory, *will I be pretty*, placing the sample in formalin, *will I be rich*, for once the ventral and cranial cavities are empty, *here's what she said to me*, the decedent looks like a canoe

concluding the postmortem with the internal examination of the  
cervix

concomitant with strangulation, having flickered in agonal respiration, in the end that candle was only noticeable when it went out, that small little light underneath all this deadlight, if only briefly *but how could I have even smelled it and so deeply being so inundated and disembodied by all this stench and disembowelment*, you take pictures of my scrawny chicken neck, performing a layer by layer dissection of my anterior muscle straps, the sternocleidomastoids you dissect those, looking for signs of any injury and then carefully peel out the midline structures of the birdlike neck: you cut out my teenage tongue with its truth still attached, the submandibular salivary glands, the almond-shaped, sublingual salivary glands on either side of the undertongue, the hyoid bone most important at the base that anchored it, that kept it from rolling up into a ball whenever I contracted it, the only bone that does not articulate with any other bone, the trachea, the esophagus, the thyroid in front of the larynx the birdbox atop the tracheal totem, leaving the carotid sheaths with their vessels and nerves uncut for the mortician to embalm the head with them, looking for any bruising anywhere in the midline structures after finding the unfused horseshoe-shaped hyoid bone that was so vital in what was swallowed and said so thin and flexible like a wishbone, as opposed to in an older person whose hyoid would be inflexible and broken, *I've never met a closed-minded flexible person* at least in a manual strangulation *or an openminded broken person*, but not always with a ligature strangulation and with a broad ligature like a belt, some prevertebral hemorrhage, some bruising between the esophagus and the vertebral column since the midline structures had been squeezed back against the vertebral

column, yet unlike a manual strangulation where you have deep, finger-size bruises the best evidence of a broad ligature strangulation are on the outside of the skin, as tool mark evidence: the wear pattern on a belt is as sui generis as the wear pattern on a boot and you can pair it with the pattern on the neck, if you can find the belt: but the belt will never be found in this incident, for now, for now you're just checking for any inner bruising in case we were manually strangled as well, so then conclusively satisfied, since strangulation was the cause of death the whole midline structures of the neck are then sealed in their own separate stock jar, filled with formalin, we announce the completion of the postmortem into the dictation device and place the brain and all the other organs that reciprocally serviced it into the red hermetically-sealed plastic bag, to prevent any leakage, we line the canoe with cotton and replace the parceled hodgepodge of parts therein, replace the breastplate and with a baseball stitch sew up the suit of skin, cut notches in the back of the skull so that now the cap doesn't slip as we peel back the scalp to sew it up, sew it up, and then we roll up the clothes and the sheet and place them into the paper bag after we wash the body and roll the bodied bag back into that refrigerated room, the size a charter bus, to wait until it is picked up by the mortician tomorrow morning the way that bullet-riddled body was, that black transman mechanic who had a gritty divinity, who was picked up under a month ago after allegedly brandishing a knife for a traffic stop on a morning Monday and is still stumbling around today, trying to find his way home to his wife without any auto or body just feet, just fucking feet like the pile of feet we saw on the side of the road in the Middle East: we dissected him, we traced and studied the slugs that were inside of him, his secret uterus, his secret garden, so we won't rethink the way in which we will honor him *at the funeral, lying down in the minister's study, I thought I was at my own funeral after fainting, I hadn't eaten in days and now* we go towards the morgue telephone, ungloved, pick up the receiver and decide against it, re-cradling it:



we never rung you or any of you from here or anywhere else associated with us so why the impulse now *my life was ripe for suicide*, why so sloppy, *my body was eating itself* so we take off the rest of our wear and wash and change and go across the street towards our car and drive away a mile in over-eight-minute-old daylight to a different diner and wolf a flame-broiled burger, and thick-cut fries with their skins still attached, lots of ketchup *and I don't want to be touched* and why not have another chocolate croissant on the way out go towards the telephone and insert the quarter coin, dial the pager, then the payphone's number, hang up and wait in the over-eight-minute-old daylight while *thinking of the hereafter as here, of course here, because there is no when else than now, and no who else than me* eating this chocolate croissant, and then it rings and we pick up the receiver to be received

no me, Lūnae...yes...tomorrow's good?...no no, do it the same way okay?...did you pick up the layaway?...good good, so dress accordingly...and remember what we taught you

to listen to the silence in her voice, on the other end, on the other side *I missept, the service still outside, recommenced because the son is still the star, the minister growing monstrous in the pulpit, throwing shade over the chancel and the tiny casket, the police report, in the over-eight-minute-old daylight the grievors grafted to their pews inside the nave as babes while angrily amening amening and me seeing my midwife entering the minister's study, upside down, to see her darkskinned doula from way back in the day, her beautiful black sister lying on an armless avocado couch with her head towards the door, unpilled and unpillowed, looking over her own head towards hers, but only after she enters the study and voices herself do I discern her as a familiar since she's wearing a black burqa and looking like a womanized, woman-sized raven, squawking her own name or rather the raven mimicking it, after she had taught it to echo it, but although Muslim modesty concerns her gaze gait and garments, without thinking to kneel or sit aside me so that I can see her somewhat upright, she lifts the black mesh so that her beautiful black sister can see her beautiful black sister, upside down, and even now as the only other ones in the room my father and mother are looking and thinking*

*that their daughter the radical could never become a Christian or a Muslim or any kind of convert, not even after this unthinkable, not even after their own most sedulous deaths, someday, my mind would never wear a uniform: this woman's genitalia would tell you it's hot and July and I'm not even wearing any goddamn panties and out comes the condescending chuckle: most in the faith would say that the burqa is worn for full-fledged modesty, maybe it's because I'm an infidel, a westerner a woman maybe not, but in that minister's study I thought of a bandage covering a self-inflicted wound: the man has the self-inflicted wound, but it is the woman who must wear the bandage all over her body, because as long as he keeps flagellating himself for his fucking finger thoughts she will forever have to keep looking like a motherfucking raven in the middle of July, she needs to stay away from the sun anyway like myself the fucking sun is too sunny so why not turn her clothes into a closet, into a fucking walking closet, as he finds a second wife half his age and just out of high school when I had my son whose last breath's now knocked up another woman*

uhibuki, uhibuki, uhibuki\*

*she said, and then I just started bawling and bawling you cradle the receiver in the study, your life is ripe for suicide now embracing north-south the two of us, cheek to cheek, with her head lying next to mine and her knees killing her, kneeling at the end of an armless avocado couch, my feet hanging off the other end and I can't even imagine being alone at home, Om\*, in the past duplex of your parents you're paining, your belly your uterus hurts, so you leave the living room and move through the hall and into the spare bedroom to*

remember, Lūnae, remember what we taught you...this is perfect

for you...I love you

*start tossing out our clothes from the closet, our imaginarium, our place devoted to the imagination so that all our clothes come out, all our toys and shoes and shoeboxes come out until it is empty except for us, and then you crawl into the*

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\* I love you, I love you, I love you (Arabic)

\* Mom (Arabic)

closet like a queening cat and close it, as we used to crawl in and close it, sitting Indian style in the dark, in the midnight of a buttery midday with a polymer-framed, short recoil-operated, locked-breech, semi-automatic pistol suppressed in your lap: come Monday morning, tomorrow, you have all day to do it, or even next Monday as long as on a Monday it's done, but done soon since that bullet-riddled brother had a mother, Om, that black transman mechanic, oh Om, we were wasted as he was, yet we were only over eight years old over a year ago, popping out of a closet with a plastic pistol as no-knocks were serving an arrest warrant on the wrong house, on the wrong duplex and *I can't even imagine doing anything differently, because I didn't do anything dumb, I can't even blame myself* since we were in our own home on a Saturday night, safe and sound, you let us stay up late to play and now the duplex for God's sake keeps killing and killing you every day you decide to stay, here, of course here *I can't stay here, but I wanted an unmedicated birth and a care provider who was going to follow my birth vision to a degree and I got that, I got that, but I long to miss this place*

go...go over it again girl...talk it over to yourself...check off the

list like the last...just as Sōlis said

*the forces black mothers face in this hospital system was very much a part of the decision to have you here and we had you here, because there is nowhere else than here, they were with us, 'yoon 'yooni,\* the clinical midwife and the homebirth midwife, the homebirth midwife was the one who would come to your cradle as a Christian, instead of as a Muslim to your casket: I still see the slight ghastliness of the makeup, your face, or the nightmarish mirror of: she was the first one to see your face at birth and before birth she had talks with us about it, she had one at home herself so there was an understanding of what our experience was like and a knowledge to speak to your grandma and grandpapa about it was like we were all in it together, in this duplex, my mother had told me about sex when I was six, I knew where babies came from but I didn't know how they were made, so she said when a man puts his*

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\* eyes of my eyes (Arabic)

*hard pecker into a woman's wet hole, and they enjoy it, his seeds swim toward her egg, and when one of them enters the egg the woman starts growing a baby in her belly, but what if his pecker isn't hard I said, then you put it in your mouth she said, and now here I was just out of high school and ten lunar months now not nine and I needed to have you here as there's nowhere else than here, because you know how hospitals can be, you know how you can be ignored and dismissed and out of all the births you experienced, Om, being raised around the wolves of midwives and the fierceness of their tendernesses, in that little hospital you never saw anybody so suited and booted for birth, in full-epidemic gear a getup, it was very strange and you were just allowed into that sacred space almost like you bombarded it, Om, not you per se but by the way you weren't introduced or anything as an intern no, it was just like come on in to the parturition, you almost fainted, an observer just out of high school and pregnant, or maybe it was because of the anxiety of coming into that sacred space without any acknowledgement of your presence at the very moment that that child was being born, or simply because you never saw someone so sterile in all your life this surgeon and his nurses in a room the small size of his office and with this second wind just shouting and pushing and ready to have this winning Olympian, whether they were ready to have it or not, and as the baby's head was crowning the surgeon cleaned it and all around it with cotton steeped in iodine pinched by forceps, between the lady's legs with her feet in stirrups as if riding some invisible bronco in the red which was ripping her apart, already, the bill, and neither you nor her know whether it smelled of iodine or blood or banknotes as it's hard to discern between the smell of that and blood and bleach and ugh*

wear gloves while wiping off the pistol and the suppressor...wipe off the bullets and the cartridges and the clip...the serial number is filed off, so just toss it straightaway afterward...keep the

gloves...you picked up the layaway...so just burn it later with the  
gloves in the griller

but your very first experience of seeing a birth was across the country and you were much younger than us, Om, five, you saw a birth before knowing how babies were made, your earliest memory was of your aunt pregnant with her first son and those midwives were walking you and your mother to a room in the middle of the night right pass your aunt, who was as naked as the moon with her bellyfruit before you, just sitting on the edge of her bed and throwing up air, every sound associated with throwing up was in that room, dry retching and everything, she had a silver bowl she was holding and nothing just nothing was coming up and you were wide awake and just stood there for the rest of the night at the edge of her bed, wiping and blowing on her sweaty lunar face, like a little five-year-old fan a darkskinned doula, your fingers entwined with her blood smelling heavy and aquatic and you don't know whether the smell of iron is like dirt or beach or not but feces, yeah feces, because that's all down there and all that pushing and pushing might've been what was holding up the head, being constipated *a lot of times in a hospital where someone else is taking control lying on your back on a bed with your feet in stirrups is one of the worst positions to give birth in, it's all up hill, like pushing through a close circle that can be much bigger if you*

get there early but not too early

*were on your hands and knees since shifting to all-fours is instinctual and gravitational and can decrease the ache in your back, shifting the shapeshifting pelvis would remedy a malpresentation of the head or a trapped shoulder by allowing the maneuver of the infant, avoiding a stillborn because of a neck that's twisted, a position quite natural but very difficult to get in if given an epidural: squatting or standing or kneeling, on all-fours or even in sequence with assistance: our midwives would do whatever we wanted to do, wherever we wanted to do it, in a bed a portable pool a tub, or even in a walk-in closet, we're doing whatever mom wants us to do they told us son, we will watch you with the most sedulous care, in a hospital it's never*

*fucking like this, midwives do some pretreatment or may not it's mostly monitoring: American medicine has pathologized pregnancy and birth but it's something that would happen anyway, it's so natural, if you don't do anything it's gonna happen, I mean it's gonna happen, it's like when a queening cat goes into a closet or some safe space you don't disturb it, you leave it the hell alone because its instinctual and gravitational and if you disturb it, you're gonna fuck shit up, well we don't respect woman that way and so we go on in and fuck shit up, it's not a sickness an illness a disease, something to be scared of or worried about but we do, but we're not gonna do that they told us son, we're not gonna do that I didn't do that, no not when*

you don't want to be singled out by loitering outside without any cigarettes, Lūnae, by not sitting in emergency...it's a parking lot but it'll still be about two o'clock in the morning and quiet and your car will be parked away from any camera, downhill...that security guard will drive around and make his rounds about thirty minutes before

*I would become one, a midwolf, when your grandparents moved out and into the suburbs you were five when a mom a Mexican mom came to me and I was so full of love and information to share and create a nonjudgmental space that she recommended me to family, I learned about her stress, about her medical and nutritional history, about the father's medical history, I learned about more than I wanted to learn, I took her blood pressure and weight, measured her big belly, I gave her an antiseptic wipe and a plastic cup and asked her for a clean catch, a midstream sample untainted by bacteria on the skin, keep your labia spread apart, pee a bit into the bowl, stop the flow and hold the cup a few inches from your urethra and pee until the cup is either half empty or half full whichever you prefer, she grinned, and then finish doing your business into the bowl, I checked her pee by dipping a stick in it, searching for sugar and proteins and tested for iron in her life, after pricking her finger for blood, it was her first child so I gave her my number at home, we hugged and I left her home: that was my first visit, just a few hours of us, but her labor lasted twenty-six hours, she was at least forty weeks, ten lunar months is a pregnancy's length, forty to forty-two weeks, thirty-eight to forty is what's*

*normalized in the hospital but I went to her house and sat with her and talked with her and rubbed her back shoulders and feet, I got pillows and got down on the floor with her sitting behind her to support her, but there were times when I didn't dare to touch her, when she was in so much pain I would*

get there early but not too early, after the guard drives by...and when your white girl gets off fifteen minutes later she likes to sit in her hatchback for a while, smoking under a streetlight...maybe no one to go home to anymore...no man or maybe no woman, no camera where she is no...she likes to be left alone to smoke and

*watch to see what she's trying to do to find comfort, because at times she was in such a heightened state of awareness that when I was silent, quiet as a tick, she might've not even known I was present, because every part of her mindbody was concentrating on the great expense of torment: the sorrow of the veil: low lights, candles of incense, silence or soothing music her mewling went from bed to tub to toilet looking for some relief, because I had ran some warm water and she was sitting on the toilet naked because she thought she had to defecate, whatever mom wanted to do her husband or I supported her physically, just us three, doing the work of labor, trabajo, she was now planning to have her baby in the hospital but was very early in labor so*

since she's an emergency nurse, a white girl who would help you, she won't be thinking anything when you come up to her, of what you'll be wearing, over your body, your face, at night

*she was sent home from the hospital, at first the nurse was all excited like you're two to three centimeters and that got her all excited but in reality when you look at what two to three centimeters look like you'd be like, bitch, I could've been two to three centimeters before I got pregnant, given the variations of our bodies and so we went home and she ate a hamburger or two and some fries and a slice of apple pie, I mean she ate she ate she ate, you're at home so there ain't anybody here to say you can't eat shit, it was like she ate duality, the literal delusion*

*of delineation since she wanted to return to the hospital but was too scared she'd be turned away and was now so split in two that I just went into the other room and let her and her husband do what they needed do, I had told him to go lay down and rub on her and help her feel good I mean help her feel good, I told her you try to rest between contractions, drink water, tea, because like a queening cat if a woman is so worked up where she doesn't feel safe she will not have the infant it may take a long time and you may never know what that safe space was or might've meant for her since she sat with us over the course of our pregnancy and still didn't know because I didn't know what time what hour it was, it could've been morning, she's quiet, attentive, anticipating what my every need or move may be, and what and what I remember was was waitaminute waitaminute: I'm mixing two births son, this is your birth at home in the morning when our water broke, Om, our midwives were in the bathroom watching over us and had been watching over us throughout our day of labor, trabajo, our midwives sat with us and talked with us and rubbed our back shoulders and feet, they got pillows and got down on the floor with us sitting behind us to support us in this duplex with our parents*

because sisters go through there all the time, all types all kinds,  
since it's outside the city, small and suburban, less people  
low lights, candles of incense, soothing music or silence our mewling went from bed to tub to toilet looking for some relief, one ran warm water while we sat on the toilet naked because we thought we had to defecate, they didn't touch us because the pain was so sacred and great that we couldn't even talk, because we were pissing and thinking we were constipated, our midwives were watching us while well we thought we were pissing but we really weren't pissing, because when we put our hand down there and lifted it to our face we didn't smell like piss but blood aquatic, so now we're standing up and peering into the bowl and seeing the bloody plug in it, because when we were pushing and thinking we were constipated that sticky gelatinous glob of mucus had plopped into the toilet, unplugging the cervix and soon the bloody show: this blessed sac



preserving us in us is the double bag of waters with our twisted cord connecting us to our flat circular pouch in the outer sac as a sore-like patch, a pancake-like organ, meat to meat adhering to our uterine wall where our oxygen-enriched blood sugar still drifts from us to us once suspended in thumping thalassic space but now away our water breaks: we want to be everybody, the veil wants the veil, we want the feel and the crucifix of the flesh

and the mesh of the baby blue burqa, glowing in the dark like a ghost, approaching the streetlight, won't alert her as you come up to her even if it's past two o'clock in the morning and oh yeah maybe even carry a baby and a woven tote bag too, to stuff the baby and the burqa in later...downhill...the baby will explain the black latex gloves...or maybe you're just afraid of touching a non-family member by mistake, at that point you'll be at point-blank range, the mesh won't be an issue, and she'll just be thinking you're desperate and broke and about to beg

to be beyond the flip-flopped bosc pear with its neck now widening and ripening, thinning with all sorts of muscle striations crisscrossing throughout and at the top or the butt pushing down on us towards the oculus and the warm electric touch, oh Om, the once-hard lip of the neck now opens up like an eye until all of it is so soft and paper-thin that the midwife who will come to our funeral is not even able to feel it as the flip-flopped pear appears as purely rounded fruit, but with the mass of a watermelon because there is no neck now and the eye is ten-centimeters wide: the great expanse is so inseparable from everything else that we think

she's as good as anyone else...she's as good as any man

this is all there is: the neck having been pulled up and up by the great expanse of torment to the top or the butt of the pear by the clenching of the interlacing muscles, by the unseen hands of the t'ai-chi-ch'üan contractions, pulling qi up

from the floor and the neck up along the pear until the hands turn at the top or the butt to push back down in one red rhythmical wave, creating a thickening of the muscles at the fundus of the uterus and a push action on us since the uterus wants to hug us: the strongest muscle in the body for its weight being two-point-two pounds and able to push down with pressure up to one hundred pounds, *boil water boil water someone shouts, like in the movies* as the waves keep coming and

what was it that you read?...what was it that it said?

and coming *and then the clinical midwife not the homebirth midwife who will come to your funeral but the clinical one is the one who checks me and is like I feel balllls, I feel balllls, in a sing-songy way, so that now in the world of midwifery you would be thinking two things, one: you now know the sex of the baby since you didn't do an ultrasound and two: when you're checking the mom you don't usually feel balls because the head's down first so that this is an indication of a breech birth, she calls the homebirth midwife the primary midwife the one who will come to your funeral from the kitchen where she's reading, while boiling water, she calls her to let her know that the baby is coming in a breech position, not a footling birth but when the ass comes first, so now I'm faced with whether I want to continue here or at the hospital but at the hospital*

you read an article...or was the archipelago hypothetical? there's this colonized country somewhere in the South Pacific that sentences its citizens to death, with no crime or date, and then releases them back into the open population from a prison, because they can't leave the archipelago, they can't leave their given island...the regime imprisons a person, convicts her, releases and leaves her alone for months, maybe even years, like life back to normal and shit

*it's always a surgical birth because the art of breech birth is being lost, they're no longer learning it, so I choose to have a vaginal homebirth and your grandma and grandpapa are here and*

*I'm laboring in a tub while our midwives are now both reading in the kitchen, your grandpapa's holding my hand and your grandma's at the doorway because she has a cold and doesn't want to bring any sickness into the room, but not knowing this now I figure her fear of what will happen is preventing her from being near enough to see it, she's at the doorway saying to me they in the kitchen they in the kitchen readin a book on how to deliver a breech birth and I'm like yo Mama Mama look, because the contractions have subsided a bit, they're reading *Spiritual Midwifery*\* because it has some considerations in it, some directions, but I'm gonna say this caveat son: many white women have written books on midwifery that we use and follow but what they have done was taken the knowledge from black and indigenous women and crafted it in a way that is meant for them to be in the forefront of midwifery: a white woman would take the knowledge from you and feed it back to you, because you forgot about it, she would sell it back to you, since this is what the white man would do*

and then one day someone just shoots her in the face

*your grandma is worried*

it's really psychological...every law enforcement uniform would make your stomach turn, whether your number is up or not...it just sits behind the forehead...beforehand...ready to pop

*because their noses are buried in a book in the kitchen instead of being in the bathroom where here I am in active labor and just out of high school and like yo Mama Mama look*

you could be shot by anybody, at any time...because the arms change faces and even outfits and skin...you could be killed by any one of them while walking or sitting and smoking and shit

*it's all good, it's normal, it's not a high normal but it's normal, they haven't attended many so they're just going back and catching themselves up to speed, making sure their memory is connected to their understanding, but before I get beside myself they're back in here again and at ten-centimeters wide the water helps me release you from gravity, it ain't a factor, water memory gives you buoyancy, full-body support and a warm compress for an aching back as my*

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\* ritten by Ina May Guskin

*body alters the atmospheric pressure of the room, makes it muggy, my breathing expands and contracts it like a lung with the wall tiles clicking and clanking, clicking and clanking and I don't even feel it a bit, as you're being born ass-first I don't feel the urge to push the way most women would, no not at all, your butt doesn't give the signal that would've been received if your head was down first, that pushing reflex for*

you've been told you're guilty when you're really not guilty...and

you've been living with that in your head for a long fucking time:

guilty

*they keep telling me, push like you're constipated, curb your body into a C-shape so I get on my knees and lean my titties over the side of the tub with my father's help and then squat into the tub again, because I'm tired, but soon they're saying you're being born now almost to your chin before I really feel the urge to push, but nothing I do gives an effective push on their end and I'm like this next contraction I'm gonna just let the body do what it do I'm not gonna do a thing, then they're like yes yes yes that's the push we need we need a push like that so that I do just that: nothing*

hahahaha...she's as good as any man

*my body's like I know what I know until it gets to the point when the midwife has to insert her hand in me to find your chin and tuck it, you're facing the floor with your butt up and the midwife who will come to your funeral has the first two fingers of her bottom hand in your mouth pulling your chin down and her top hand at the back of your head pushing at the same time, that's the most dangerous part when*

you begin to believe it...whether you're good or great or a

goddamn supercitizen...once you take the stance that you're

guilty

*the neck can be broken, but she's cautiously ushering you out with very little vernix on your skin, that creamy substance that defended your flesh from my aquatic environment, because the longer the gestation the less vernix and the shorter the more it smells like baby beach in here,*

*the bathroom a blood aquatic, an earthy metallic like when you cook in a cast iron pan over time it rusts, there's a smell that comes from that*

and only from that, that stance, can you begin berating yourself for being beaten and imprisoned in the first place, for being stopped on any street, for being pulled over in any car, only then can you accept your dessert, because you can't walk across dirt without kicking up dust...you get dirt on you that you don't even know...because you are oblivious skin

*when you are born, when you emerge from water coughing and coughing the air soon shapes the lungs, the hospital would've used pitocin to induce the labor, that make-me-hurt-more medicine, but I am sufficient unto myself, I am self-begotten, self-born, as you're centered on my chest I release more of my own love hormone, the oxytocin that the transmission of touch releases in me, although we are not really touching as there really is no you or me, we won't do a lotus birth by not cutting the cord and letting it fall off by itself, we will use a sterilized cooking string for a turkey, boiled in water, as a tourniquet to cut the cord ourselves, though the cord is not clamped and cut right away: the placenta itself so nutrient-dense could be refrigerated and eaten for later, hospitals use it too for its tremendous value, we embrace you, we whisper 'yoon 'yooni as you resurface from the closet: you blink and blink in the over-eight-minute-old daylight now scouring our room like a pot, as loud and bright as a backhand, a flashbang, oh Om, the midnight sun of a stun grenade on a Saturday night still suspended by everything, by your broken window of ego, reappearing and weeping from a manmade womb with a polymer-framed, short recoil-operated, locked-breech, semi-automatic pistol suppressed in your grip, aiming at air or at the white girl's hair, her bangs, as we're shot once through the belly and the back, it just went off she says, it just went off and your lips tremble in the courtroom, at this circus of power, she went for my gun and one got off, only one since our tactical units use the MP5, a 9-millimeter parabellum submachine gun, for close-quarters combat, because it's a pistol-caliber weapon*

that's easy to control and less likely to overpenetrate a person as you shut your eyes and fall backward onto the carpet, becoming the bloodstain in our room, shocked by the stun grenade, the sun melting your closed darkskinned eyelids while witnessing the floating meaningless lint of her words in the bloody tangerine dream of your jellylike dark, oh Om oh Om it hurts, our belly hurts as we lie on the ground gurling like running water out of a bottle, glugging like a guppy on the ground around the discards of our closet, our unmanipulated policemen, our cars and motortrucks, our shoes and shoeboxes, our clothes having all been discarded from it before entering it, so then now that we've left it we lie as empty as a shoebox with its own shadow in it, like a dead invisible pet, but mama tried mama tried, please, please look up at me, please speak up says the attorney, we know it's really hard, but we need to hear what you have to say so you say it: you tell the court how you were deafened and blinded by the flashbang, the stun grenade they shattered the living room window with, a shard, like a sniper, almost taking out an eye you're off-kilter, the smell, the stench of the burnt ottoman, you tell the court how they had you prone with a knee deep into your back and then double-chicken-winged and zip-tied so that you couldn't get to him, you swear on your eyes you couldn't get to him, I swear on my eyes I couldn't get to him, your own mother screaming for someone to help him, because they were holding her as well, her back thrown out you got the wrong house you got the wrong house, and then you nod across the courtroom to that female officer over there shot him through the belly with a bullet through his back, having ripped through a lung and his lunch and they're not letting me get to him, I couldn't I couldn't but I knew, oh I knew, I'm zip-tied and lying in the hall because I was trying to get to him before that man over there tackled me and zip-tied my wrists so tight that I couldn't even feel my fingers, and for weeks this one was so numb that I couldn't even point can you point today to the man in the courtroom who tackled you over there let the

record show that the witness is pointing to Officer Duncan who should've shot me, I'm surprised he didn't shoot me, shoot me shoot me and he kept telling me to shut the fuck up, stop crying stop crying, everything's alright, but I knew and you and your mother just wanted to get to him with your father away working at the airport, as security, you were afraid he would've been shot too protecting his family and now this officer is lying objection objection and saying that your mother tried to grab her gun and that made it go off objection objection your honor I'll rephrase it then that cracker cop, with her face all blank and bloodless throughout these proceedings, finally cracks the grin, as grotesque as a scrotum, loped off into disuse, the bitch cracks a grin and then goes stonefaced again with your son still lying there bleeding on the nappy carpet, for what must've been an eternity before you saw any paramedic rushing by right, objection objection, of course you couldn't have known exactly how long it took for them to tend to him but it must've been a long time objection objection speculation, and then next your mother on the witness stand shouting you shot my grandbaby and now you tryin to blame me and that stoneface as blank and bloodless as a vampire as your mother is being escorted now off the stand, pass the vampire, and out the courtroom crying you blamin me you blamin me but you know you wrong you know you wrong, oh Jesus oh Jesus, what did you do, what did you doooooo, pleeeeeease tell me why you come into my house like that, you kilt my grandbaby and now you tryin to blame meeeeee, you know I never touched you Missus Weekly you know I never touched you, you know you wrong, he was only eight years old, only eight years old Missus Weekly, I gets no sleep because of the flashbacks, I wouldn't wish them on no one in the world, on no one, not even you: but the outburst gave the vampire nothing to make him human with, your blood, and that stoneface gave you nothing to make her human with, your mark, she didn't even try to attack you with your heart, by breaking character, and then that black woman judge just

reminded the jury that they were not to judge the case based on any sympathy, and that we will be reconvening in the morning Monday in hopes that the weekend can clear out any cloud here hovering today, however, as a choked-up Officer Weekly took the witness stand that morning Monday she talked about her husband and sons, about SWAT for Tots and a Christmas party for foster children, as you swear you saw a juror smear away a tear, and you knew, oh you knew

so many people are expressing so much sadness today  
you ask your father, who has the slow wrath of a turtle, who doesn't even know the day, has sympathy ever helped you

over the tragic death of an emergency nurse...the police say her body was found at dawn, lying in her hatchback, in the emergency parking lot of her hospital...she was shot once in the forehead and twice in the torso...she was three weeks pregnant

and his lips tremble in the spare bedroom, in my room, sympathy's for those who ain't got no humanity, just God

her father, her mother, and her two older brothers are understandably stunned

but he used to follow me everywhere Daddy, and now I don't even dream about him anymore: oh Om oh Om it hurts

but her colleagues understand that the work has to go on, dream: dream about the wolves of midwives and the fierceness of their tendernesses, dream about those wolves skeletonizing that closet alcoholic, the growls over bloodied jowls, over her face, or the nightmarish mirror of, but don't dream about me: oh Daddy, what happens when your shadow stops following you



(Frontispiece: “La Familia” by Belkis Ayón, collagraph 1991)