

# CATCALLING

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*Translated from the Korean by Soje*

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*Surely they'll go to hell  
for making us sad.*

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## **COHABITATION**

I was born but somehow you were born too. From one to two. We crumple ourselves into the cramped stroller.

We use the same uniform, man, room.

Unni, the doctor says I should do whatever I want. So Unni, I'm not going to call you Unni anymore. Because I love you, I'm going to call you by your name. Let's be real, you don't deserve to be called a big sister, my little sister says, peeling the apple with a knife. It's the last apple, so you better finish it. Little sister points the knife at me as she peels the apple. Crunchcrunch I eat the apple.

I slit little sister's wrist for her. Mom says you slept inside her like it was your grave. I slit little sister's wrist again. Hush little baby. You're prettiest when you sleep. I put her to sleep on her stomach. I put her to sleep, pulling the blanket to the top of her head. How cramped how cramped the night is. From one to two. From one to two.

## DAY WITHOUT REDUCTION

At night I thought of day  
I thought of the moth dead inside the fluorescent lamp  
A faint and faraway life  
Before the innumerable 0 we

count the corpses of the monkfish lying diagonally,  
discarded on our dining table

I carve out the eye of the souring monkfish We make a  
broth with all the right and wrong doings of the monkfish  
and drink it up for dinner We spread them wide open and dig  
around and  
close them I

debone the moldy monkfish and eat its tender flesh In the  
kitchen Mom removes the skin and dresses me in it I become  
a bag and a bank account

and a husband too Mom holds my hand only after putting  
on rubber gloves on top of cotton gloves

Finish your food You should eat the bones too Mom  
opens my mouth and feeds me her teat to wash it all down I  
spill a mouthful of milk and wear my milk-splashed panties  
and shove my milk-splashed finger down my throat What  
floatfloats unswallowed is my  
tongue

Mom weeps like a roll of toilet paper

I thought about Mom  
and the spoonfuls of monkfish  
I thought about the day without any  
reduction

Without fail  
at night I thought of day  
At the table we recalled  
growing kinder in unfamiliar places

## FEARING THE GAZE OF STRANGERS WE [ . . . ] EACH OTHER\*

Hey big sis let's live together just the two of us Don't even bother calling Mom and Dad I think it's really cool to play dead sometimes 'Cause you only look at me when I resort to this The doctor says violence is a good thing Violence is proof that I'm not sick Look! Look at my body I've got athlete's foot The doctor says I'm this red because I'm letting out my anger I want you to be religious I want you to save all your moaning and groaning for that god you like So let's never get married and live together just the two of us Let's lean on each other until we die It'd be super great if we're sisters again in our next life huh? Don't forget I'm the only one who could ever love something like you We're family When I hit your head with the frying pan the other day I did it because I love you Now you know how much I love you Umni I think I have to hit you for you to understand what I'm saying If we can't live together I think we should disappear together Let's die on the same day at the same time Promise your god right now that you'll live and die with me forever Is this something you have to think about? Really you're so weird! You have a knack for pissing me off It's like you don't even know how to have a conversation Don't try to patch everything up with a sorry I don't know how you went to college You're so stupid! I mean I have to hit you for you to understand what I'm saying Like a little bitch

---

\* November 21, 2014: the day Sijin beat me with a frying pan. As a result of those strikes I had the strange experience of briefly seeing double.

## A CHURCH WE ERECT TOGETHER

We went to the island

Father always prayed

He slept with a sister at the broken church and donned his pulpit robe over his already committed sins and bestowed a blessing upon us

In the name of Sunday, Father forgave his own secret

Following His will, we brought our hands together and thought about roofless secrets

We enjoyed eating dead animals on the rooftop after prayer

Halal, in the name of Allah,

we thought about the IUD loop inside the sister's uterus

We hung a loop even around the sound of her breaths

We could not keep our promise

to protect everything we hung a loop around

Mom and I clipped our fingernails short Flicking misclippings here and there while like a folktale Father's thing turned into a rat as big as a

forearm Night was day and day was shrouded by night and Father squeaked quietly under the covers He believed Squeaksqueak When I lay in the lower bunk Father shook the bed from up top When Father was shaken the church was

shaken Verse of the day Squeaksqueak No one carried the  
cross yet sins were committed

The spangled sins shone even in darkness

I sharpened charcoal and wrote Father's secret I sharpened  
the words that are visible here but invisible there I stabbed  
Mom with them

Invisible lights shone like spoken words

## **KYUNGJIN'S HOME – A STUDIO APARTMENT**

My lover wears old sweats with baggy knees and with  
even baggier knees I crawl on the floor and cry like spilled  
milk My thirtieth year like beer I've popped one bottle more  
than him so when I hold the night in my mouth like a dick  
it dwindles and when I blow it becomes infinite and when I  
cry yet again I become a woman Like a woman I become the  
shadow of an offspring The offspring sticks to the callus of  
my heels and sucks on me and screeches like a goddamn bird  
My lover sucked me off then said my poems suck Said he  
heard them and they're  
disgusting

I rewrite my fully grown lover as Husband

So I'm telling you Husband  
You should die when you're old

If you're lucky, you might die of old age  
A fistful of Husband frozen hard in the fridge I try pound-  
ing Husband's cheeks against the sink I bang him on the floor

Why haven't we changed at all?

Because you keep taking bites out of me you bitch  
Stop shoving food in your big fat mouth  
or stop yapping

Lies  
It's because you bastard  
keep chomping away at me and everything else in this  
apartment

I cut and sell my hair to buy Husband's mouth Husband pokes  
through the plastic bag and bites my calf No matter how he  
attacks me I  
curl my spine while Husband's teeth force my head down Since  
his mouth was left open Husband uses it to say my poems  
suck To say he's heard them and they're  
disgusting I'm chewchewed out like squid while  
the bitch  
in my stead pops another beer at my husband

## **KYUNGJIN'S HOME** **– MAY 8, PARENTS' DAY**

That day it rained like Grandma and  
Grandma who tied and cut off her breasts with Dad's tie  
became Grandpa and Grandpa  
put on the wedding dress cut from a rain poncho and  
simply waited for Dad to come

Whether that day brought peaceful death or agonized life

Mom waited for Dad and Dad shaved every head in the  
family and offered our hair on the ancestral table It needs to  
be an odd number but we're two two four What do we do?  
Dad picked up some woman off the street and shaved her  
head and sat her down at our table Now we've all gathered  
here As Father's Father had become before us we became  
baldies with the open mind of bodhisattvas Every time we  
sinned the head of the table the head of a ship a head of  
lettuce a head of steam ahead of the curve he shaved all heads  
Until he reached an odd number he kept chopchopping and  
offering it on the table

Someone was always lonely

Father placed all of our palms on the ceremonial tableware  
then hammerhammered the nails in Now we can never  
ever part Because we're family Lastly Dad chopped off the  
nailhead so it could never be pulled back out



Now you and I have become us

We mixed cooked rice with cold water and ate it up We wrote  
our names on hanji paper, slashslashed it up with a fruit knife  
to eat, and became written words We embraced each other with  
crumpled paper and blackly blackly filled the paper

We were most beautiful when we remained sentences

## **WITH MOM HANGING FROM MY CROTCH**

I covered my carved-up stomach with boxers  
I was caught with a crown of bare scalp  
Wearing a wig over my frayed hair  
I hid Mom in my stomach behind Dad's back

One day Two days with Mom hanging from my crotch  
I counted numbers Three days Four days Through the  
bladder I stepstepped on for ten months I birthed Mom  
leakleaking I raised Mom and fed her and clothed her, while  
Dad put his penis in his yellowed boxers and played with  
the elastic every night One month Two months

Swelllling

The penis burst open the bladder then the stomach then  
what's between the legs

Hush little Mommy

I put burrs of night in Mom's mouth and marinated  
Dad's rib in sleep You know it's all for you right Mom? So  
don't even make a squeak We were born from Dad's rib  
You dozed off on Sunday and missed it again huh? Dad is  
sky We are ground Sky ground Star ground

Spitspit

Crumpled like a jujube, I sewed my privates with silk  
thread and applied ointment and One month Two months  
Ten months Swellling  
I waited for myself

Hey Mom, it's really gross to carry someone  
in your stomach  
It's grossss so don't tell Dad  
I'm still a woman

I ripped off all my goose bumps  
I asked Mom  
Tell me the truth Do I look like a virgin now?

## **MEDITATION ON FAMILY 1**

We  
skipskipped  
like stones  
on water  
The chunk of us we couldn't flush  
rose  
to the surface