

MEDITATION AT CHELSEA FLEA

after Robert Hass

All of this is about willing herself to speak.
In this way she is working towards freedom.
She holds up an antique diagram of a larynx,
says, *This part looks like the head of an elephant,*
but it's essential for human speech. I nod
and say nothing, walk to the next booth.
There's a bone collector in the corner,
mounds of brass and silver jewelry,
seashells scattered among porcelain, all too hot
from the sun to touch. Girls and women
sell our grandmothers' underthings, and as I pass by,
one seller says to another, *I'm from Brooklyn—*
grew up on a street I call God's Block. Once
I slept with a man with a tattoo of the word *blackberry.*
He referred to himself as my last lover— as in latest,
not final. He placed his face in the middle of my chest
and said, *I've never realized until now.*
This entire apartment smells just like you.
I looked around at my place filled with furniture,
trinkets, clothing that have all belonged to other people.
And I imagine us, those other people and I
sitting in my living room, laughing in the dark,
the street blaring by, muttering,
belonging, belonging, belonging.

THIS IS HOW IT MUST BE DEATH

Today in class we talked about
the trope of the “unfinished woman.”
Emma, Anaïs, Sylvia.
When I get home, I am undone
by the evening shadows thrown
by the black locust tree. It blooms one week
each year, blossoms like
chewed gum and white tongues.
I throw rosemary oil on its roots
and count on my fingers
the people that love me,
those that hate me, and the rest
that are shatteringly indifferent.
It’s the indifference I don’t know
how to forgive. When the professor
wasn’t looking, my friend whispered,
Have you ever experienced an ambiguous loss?
Like a loss without closure, unresolved grief.
I told her I might have.
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha
wrote an autobiography
about herself and everyone,
then was strangled by a man
in a parking garage on Lafayette Street.
For the first time in my life
I’m afraid of dying young. Already I grieve
the years I have lived— slaughtered
under the black locust tree in its only bloom.
I always knew it would be our blood.

MIRACLE WORK

¹ After the floods last year, I was taken in an abandoned car under the overpass. In the floating nettle and milkweed. In the mold growing like amaranth. ² When I was seven, everyone got the day off school to build the barricade in front of the river. ³ Regardless, it still took the theater and the farm store and the geese ponds.

⁴ When I was twelve, I touched the cloak of Jesus. He asked the crowd, *Who has touched my cloak?* ⁵ And then I began to bleed for the rest of my life.

⁶ At eighteen, my body was made into twenty loaves of bonebread. ⁷ They said, "Give it to the people to eat." And they laid it in the muddy trough. ⁸ There was even a little left over for me and my knees begging to pray.

⁹ And in the night, at the peak of my joy, I shook violently and a shriek came out of me. He hovered over me and said, *Finally, I have cleansed you of the unclean spirit living inside you.*

¹⁰ Then Jesus's stomach was rumbling. He came upon a woman standing like a fig tree. ¹¹ When he touched her, he felt her shrivel away, so he exclaimed, *May you never bear fruit again!* ¹² Immediately, the woman was barren. The rest of the disciples gathered around him, *If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer,* He said, grinning. ¹³ *Go, throw yourself into the sea, and it will be done.*

¹⁴ At twenty-one, I sat on the curb clinking bottles together like bells. I said, *This is my decadent feast—the*

vodka, the dirt, the mosquito on my tongue. ¹⁵ Suddenly, a hand appeared in front of my feet, etching four words into the silt on the pavement: *pigeon, pigeon, wedding, throat.* ¹⁶*Pigeon*, meaning, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. ¹⁷ *Wedding*, meaning, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ¹⁸ *Throat*, meaning, your kingdom is divided and given to Him and Him and Him and Him.

¹⁹ In winter, we drove to the glass lake. ²⁰ Listen, as I tell you of the time I walked onto the water and the water bore me. ²¹ I whispered, "Do not be afraid. It is I." And He screamed holy from the shore.