

ORANGE



Kondo



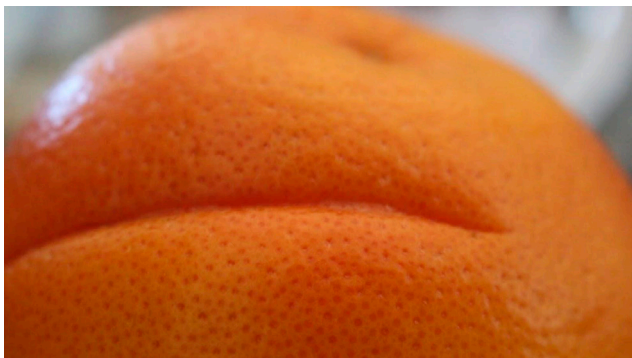
I part the blood orange and give her one half. She peels the thick pith layer off the flesh. The translucent case that covered each fabric of flesh becomes richer/deeper in colour. I eat the pith—there is no part of the insides that I peel off. My nails are stained blood orange and yellow from the skin that I peeled. The peel coils inwards on the table.

A visual artist tells me that if you beat someone with a sack of oranges the skin does not bruise. It is a torturing technique used to cause internal pain without leaving any physical traces of the beating. The oranges absorb some of the shocks when the sack touches the skin of the person being beaten—this absorption is what keeps the person from being beaten to death.

“I want to capture you, let me shoot you here by the tree.”

She takes my picture, I walk away with no visible marks.





*This orange is bruised—she places her finger on the skin and traces a cut that resembles a healed scar. It looks like a mouth. I dig my nails into the scar and peel the orange. The orange announces: I am here every w(here) in your nostrils, there in your lungs—even before the flesh and juice has been swallowed. In swa(II)owing, I a(II)ow a trave(II)ing. There in the middle can you see my throat in the words stressing, relaxing, expanding and contracting, in three syllables then two then three again 3-2-3. In coming together a sound is made/heard. In the language that I spit out—reincarnate English or German on my tongue, someone died for that, but here I am speaking. When my mother was dying she spoke*

English—it was her dying language. She did not want me to understand what she was saying on her deathbed, she spoke English—I did not speak English yet. My father would say to my mama, *You know she can understand you, they have English lessons now, show your mama some of your English—*

*Hello, how are you? My name is...*

*I love you*

*I love you*

*I love you*

*I love you*

*I l... you*


*I love you*

My mama would mutter things in English but I remember only a single utterance,

No...No...No...No...No...

[silence]

In linguistics, utterances are units of speech that are followed by silence. When she died all I said was nothing...*What is wrong?* Nothing, I (mutter)ed. In the word mutter, there is at once my mother and her silence, together. Mut-ter \*Clap your hands twice\*




Maybe this is part of speaking more than one language, you hear/see multiples in one. Choir: \*Clap your hands once\* Renee Gladman tells her students “Poetry comes out of nothing,” and writes that perhaps to read poetry was to read through a sieve. I read everything around me and there were no words, only stones that I grind with my teeth to ash, squeeze an orange into juice and have clay, there is something being shaped out of dust.


Clapping. ing.  
Clapping.  
Clapping.  
Clapping.  
Clapping.  
Clapping.  
Clapping.

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Sometimes in summer in different countries when it is humid and raining, the rain becomes a static sound that tunes my memory and I remember the rainy season when I was 14 or so and lying on my dead mother's sofa, in the living room with beads of sweat rolling down my face. My sweat smells like the antibiotics that I have to take after every meal. The rain sound moves in a cross-rhythm with the buzzing of swarms of flying ants that are trying to get through the net screen on the window. I hear a high-pitched whining sound reverberate in my brain, as I imagine mosquitos multiplying in these humid conditions. K said that this was the time when most people got malaria because the mosquitos were mating in the puddles that were all around us. I peel the orange and put a peg in my mouth then another, I fall asleep while chewing. The next time I wake up I am on my knees and watch the orange flesh float on the surface of the toilet bowl. It is translucent but tells me nothing of where it has been.

I recently dreamt about my mother's rattan sofa. She spent days lying on the sofa covered in a blanket





too sick to move but still living. Cancer made her spit a lot, as it was drying her out slowly. She would spit in this dark blue metal camping cup that was speckled with white dots. In my dream, I was alone with the sofa and I took it apart, I tore through the rattan and broke it down, I did not say any words. In the end, the sofa was broken down into a pile of bones, I picked up the pieces and stormed into a closed room where my father was having a meeting, his eyes wide, I threw the pile of bones at him and walked away. I was resting on top of a truck and then went to a classroom that had bench pews, a white child was singing a racist German children's song, I walked up to him and told him to *please stop singing that* and if he had any other songs that were not racist. But this amused him and he repeated only one part of the song. His mother walked up to me. I asked her, *Have you heard what your child is singing?* She picked up her child and said "Yes, but you should not have destroyed the sofa like that, under no condition is that kind of behaviour ever acceptable, I mean the sofa..." I turned and said, *People, do you hear this? I am telling her that what her son is singing is harmful and she is talking about a sofa!* There was muttering—

"Yes, but the sofa..."

"Yes, but the sofa..."

"Yes, but the sofa..."

"Yes, but the sofa..."


"Yes, but the sofa..."

"The sofa the way you just...it is just not right...proper."

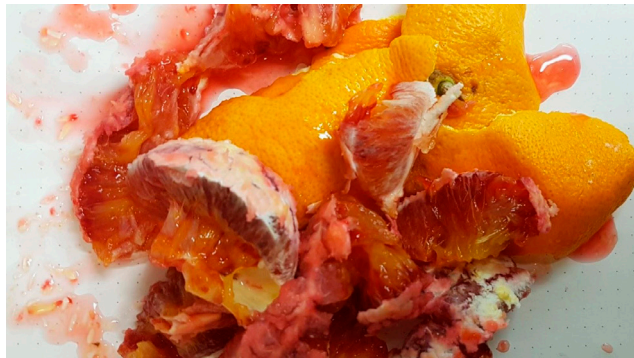
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There was this other orange growing inside this one. I like peeling my oranges with my fingers, I do not cut them open. Does that orange have a dent that looks like a C, or is it a smile?

When my mother gave birth to me it was a difficult birth—she was in a lot of pain, she told the doctors but they told her to lie down, so she told my father and he asked her *if she was sure?* Her pain was unbelievable because of the colour of her skin, perceived as hard to peel, so hard her flesh couldn't possibly feel pain. I throw an orange down from the 9th floor, it does not smash open. My mother's hands by the window she is ready for us to jump she wants to jump...



They suture a C across her abdomen where I was cut out abruptly. Nothing was broken open, she was cut open, separated and held together by the threads of that C that bore the absence of care.



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I pull the flesh and suck on the juice, I separate the pulp from juice in the jug of my mouth. Teeth ripping into the centre of the orange, not separating it into pieces, I eat it whole like a stone fruit, although it is a Valencia orange, while walking in Kufürstendamm.

There was this time some other time in another city, even before I was born, when my mother went to New York City. She travelled with my dad and his colleagues, who all also brought along their partners. The company that my dad worked for was having a conference there. At JFK everyone was let through, except for my mum who was told that she needed to step aside for extra screening. The officer that profiled my mother asked her what she was doing with a bunch of Germans, and patted her down, then said *This is sketchy to me* and *How did you obtain that passport?* The other colleagues had already gone ahead and left for the hotel. My mother told the officer that she was on this trip with her boyfriend. My dad waited outside, the officer stepped out, and my mother heard her ask my

father *Are you sure?* After more questioning, the officer let them go. A picture, that is now burnt, shows my mother holding her belly, behind her a building made entirely of windows is the negative space that holds her, and my flesh that is forming in her womb.

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There is an orange that I never peeled in the attic, its flesh no longer solid with fluid. It is all dried up but round and intact with no suture. When I knock, the echo lets me know that a whole empty space is a possibility for sound.

I tap my finger on the skin and listen, remember Philadelphia. We were all walking on the busy pavement. To our left was an office building where the conference was taking place. We had left, because we wanted to eat rice. Is the stained rice in Biryani orange, yellow or marigold? Is a marigold yellow or orange? On the phone today, you say both. They pick out the rice and say these bits are orange, others are fading to yellow, like this one...

On another walk, he said “Keyshia Cole makes me want to fight and kiss someone at the same time.”



I want to hear more but say that I want to eat an orange with you.

Back in Philadelphia, we are walking after having eaten rice and fish curry. On our left is the massive building with all the windows. We are walking on the pavement and to the right is the rush hour traffic (when is rush hour?).

The cityscape is bustling with sound but I hear clearly “Eyyyyy!” My head turns to the sound and I see a



shiny orange flashing in the masses of people that are walking in all directions. We continue to walk, “Eyy yyy yyyy!” I look and see the orange again above all hair, fabric, flesh, hats, scarves—an orange perched up by a Black hand. The man holding the orange is chuckling, “Eyyyyy Eyyyy!”

“Is he...”

“No no no thanks,” I say, and shake my head, continuing to walk.

“Eyy Eyyy,” he chuckles and is walking along the steps of the building. We reach a crossing, the light turns red and the man comes down from the steps. He walks over to me and stretches out his arm offering me the orange, I say *no*. He opens his mouth and laughs, all his teeth are gone, his mouth is empty but his laughter rings bells in my ears. At the time I did not think of this but in remembering I want to know about his teeth. My friend takes the orange and says “Thanks man!” The man laughs and pats me on the back three times like a drum, my body does not make any sounds, I am filled with rice. He points to the orange then to me the light goes green, my friend and I cross and the Black laughing man with the blue jacket who gave me the orange that is dried with no cuts and still whole in my attic glitches away in the masses.



I eat another orange—not the one that I hope to eat with you—while walking down the street. I make sure that no juice drips down, by sucking out the juice slowly. I eat the whole orange, including the seeds that my hands have peeled. I tell them that I think that maybe we should make zest together. They ask me if they can look at my hands. My nails are stained yellow from peeling—dry, ashy, fragrant and lingering. They stroke the skin while telling me that they have an orange tree, as well as a hedge full of rosemary—I say nothing.



