

Cancer

ANGELA CHEN

(i. CANCER, AS MY FATHER)

At a point, the industry became an ailment. At 18 you won a scholarship to Germany,
and as your head disappeared into the static burn
of foreign years and crannies,
a ghost—a new dark heirloom—was made on the drive home this afternoon. My

first word was not no; it was why.

I let the idea track into a lightless wooden room in me, in the hinterland.
I track bodies of insects into my dorm,
plastic carcasses, crushed baby teeth and cheap milk jade, sediment
from the heavy sick.

What would I let
happen to me if you were destroyed?

Circle of a coreless working body in kneel, hollow and all.
Baba, get up, let me help you up. Please, please, please. Hooves, machinery, dug in.
I feel my fovea pinching as I don't touch you; wide punctures on the unhappy earth.
My skin flipping,
pruned and hell-swollen. My soul a moonpowder precipitant.

My fossil, year-blind on a desecrated ear—the organic, blank-fleshed chemistry of it all.

Let it ride with the mudslide, lay deep in a crying ravine forever. There is a world of punishment mouthless
behind this one and I already promised it to myself—
a quiet, broken dowry.

Soaked bark. A rot of wisdom amasses behind my eyes: it smells like me.

I, I leave space here to lie down and wait for something to eat
me away, I, a decomposing enemy of myself, giving into an empty bargain for your body, back.

(ii. CANCER, AS SCIENCE FICTION)

Culture nursed us on concept, labor—the machinery of the flesh.
Medical-grade mouth,
steel-clean anterograde forgetfulness, and a
soapy mass-produced soul. Geared down into the deep white.

They ate your mother's mind. Ate your shelves and fruits, your child. You take the reminder
like the pill: morningly. You die like you die: nightly.

Don't be facile, culture says—

Anything can eat within the limits of its form

But you could not listen at all when you were taught form. God, my god,
you grew yourself up on visions that screamed.

Chill of all that future. Dark of your interiority, hiding half a
glassine p(un/i)cture of you.

What if the circle breaks? If the wound waters? If the incline becomes eternal?

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Now and then, a molten dream or so.

The nursery you secrete
at the back of your throat scathes into a circus—you are kneeling there, suffering. I

do not and can not tell you that I see you.

Your glitt-quick imagination.

Your flesh: a secret crying frenzy.

Your lashes stung with the influx of memory, a thousand hard drugs.

Your greatest friend is suspended in a comb deep of your moonless, raining body.

Womb, a hearse of loss.

Rilke curls up by your rib, but he weeps. Kafka

walks in your shadow, but he sings.

And you

open up another hot-lipped bedside prayer, against all this fate, because in a complex of the most perfect empty, you reek of love.

(iii. CANCER, AS A QUESTION)

Spring is rotten this year, an old sad beauty about it.

Low-lying steam of foresight.

I saw reasons for this in March's thorough-dead whorls,

descent—sight—unwrung grape-memory—and

nine weeping legions of witnesses who knelt on your tatami and saw you sick.

The dead rosaries still crack; so does the body; a held slosh of pale blood-rheum—sleet, a landscape of rained-on circuses—water clouded over with bone.

Why does the feather burn?

The holy click—the empty body—the glassine life—the dirt-young star— at

what point is separation a matter of heredity?

at which stop do eyes crush inwards?

at how hot does the wrath expand?

Century questions with infant answers,

Firechill of the future's mystery—fall in, overshoot the seeable, and it becomes death.

My father's wet charred hands signal a wreck-scape of ventriloquisms,

and in the interim we waver, equalized, in

the soundless smoothover of the rain.