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_Ruined by beauty_ you could mutter if you weren’t so damn material, could lie belly-down, snake in the mud like you’d like but you can’t, you’re full of matter, you’re mammalian like all species with milk, you’re closed by these million pod-like black petals chiming _mother_, you’re a rattled cage, a viper basket.

Damaged at every cross-hatch. Skin tagged and marked with skin at all the body’s fractious queries, stretched like a meat-hound, swoll, purple, lumped, hard-boiled, yes, and devoid of your beautiful square-cut diamond and your plain gold band because so plumped with that mewling life you’re practically unmarried.

There could be weeks yet to go. Two more moons, could be, this rounded lug. Enough to make you drown, want to drown crushed in the waves of your flesh. Pins. Needles. Pins with plastic duck heads. Needles with a beautiful medicine. Drink more water. Eat more eggs. These snaky rules, these rules are Not for you. Nestle the kitten; keep it from snakes. If she is a girl she will ruin your beauty. If he is a boy he’ll lodge like a bullet. In neither case will you sleep on your belly, or on your heartless side, or on your crushed-down spine, will you sleep again deeply, they say, like it’s ha-ha, you’ll never sleep again. And then they remind you _This is a form of actual torture._

You half-remember a life with texture: the flat wool of your best camel skirt, the slip inside a snakeskin purse, the flick of your shiny hair, your face when it felt. Oh, now colorless, and striated, _it will all be joy with kitten soon_
they say but they lie and you lie on the mat with the dog—
on just the thankless right side, for just minutes, before everything goes numb
again—
and try to remember what came before
this basket of heaving pounds and all this beauty.

(You once read a story that might not exist called The Glassblower’s
Children
who might not exist who go to a fair that might not exist
and buy a ring set with a raven’s blinked eye
that carries them, napped, kidded, across a river that m.n.e.
to a glittering castle that might not exist where they become slaves
to a thankless queen who has everything and even these foster children
do not make her smile but to keep themselves company
they find their twins in the hallway mirrors until these, too,
are banned and blank and do not exist.

And do you remember that the river is Forgetful
and wipes them clean of their glassblowing parents
and the fair and the village and leaves them alone
with only that sideways eye of the raven?
And where are you in this story, this hallway?
My little boat? My booth? My half-empty glass?)