

## Poetry

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her lips split at the edges  
like overripe fruit  
the corners crusted/not just dry,  
but caked with old lemon glycerin  
and days without appetite  
someone says “just a quick swab,”  
but i’ve learned this is the one ritual  
to not rush

the pink sponge squeaks  
against her back molars  
she winces  
not from pain  
but from memory  
grapejuice, communion wine,  
a mouthful of coins for the river

morphine lingers like a film not a flavor  
i clean her teeth like a daughter would  
not sterile, not gentle  
but right  
the way you wipe lipstick  
from someone you love  
after they’ve fallen asleep in it

she hasn’t spoken in days  
but when i finish,  
she swallows

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