

He has eaten so much duck that he cannot talk to his wife
the memory of the duck skin slips past his tongue
to catch and clutch in his throat while a small bit
of duck meat is stuck in the back molar of his closed mouth
and the scent of Chinese spices and sweet fruit
sauce clings to his clothes.

They sit in a corner of the bookstore with cups of coffee
before them while a waitress wanders between she offers tiny paper
cups of the latest grind from Tanzania.

The coffee is dark and strong and hot.

How many years have they been married? He knows it is one
of the years that should be celebrated. He looks at his wife and sees
her blouse spattered with soy sauce and grease. She wears a jacket
on top to hide the marks.

Oh that Chinese duck could mean so many things. A living thing made dead?
A dead thing made delicious? He could leave her
now among the coffee ruins and take a piece of her with him, like
that wedge of duck stuck in the back molar of his mouth, like
a memory, like desire, like nothing he really wants or knows.

That duck. His wife. She sits now among the millions of words encased
in the bookcases around them, he is speechless. His tongue roams his mouth,
the lip of his coffee cup, the hard smooth backs of his coffee-drenched teeth.

I love you. He thinks he could say. I need you. Is another. I don't know you.
Something to say to her or himself.

This woman. He remembers her from the hospital. Her legs wide open while he counted ten, nine, eight down to one and push. The sight of his son's wet head summoned through her messy crotch. Her breasts dripped milk, or not. Her hand with a wedding band, her feet in the air, her hair when she bends her head, her head in his crotch, their legs twined together in sleep, the shape of her ear, her elbow, her shin or instep.

He shakes his head and looks at his wife. I'm full, he says to her. I'm just so very full.