

GLORI SIMMONS

Graft

i

The third way of grafting—

Go to a smooth apple or pear in April

When the trees get liquor

& seek a branch

Which has green eyes of less than a finger.

& tear it from the tree.

(Notes from The Expert Gardener, 1640)

(

I am forgetting the body's female liquor. Once I poured it into pear contours, starched bowls, lighting my face red. Now I plant it inside an architecture of trellis and trouser like an old woman who separates her toes with cotton—her toes refigured by a century of pointed boots.

What narrow roads did she balance herself upon? What hills did she climb?

She will become small in the end, the scar of light that ripples across walls and wakes the awake. She is the molecule in the pill that teaches my body to take its new wooden shape.

(

Pear.

In the lover's hand, a pear.

In the hysteric's hand, a pear.

In the Virgin's hand, sometimes a pear beside the angel and olive leaf.

Beside the son.

We've named them Bartlett and d'Anjou—
names that speak of the incision of their limbs and the healing that
followed.

The perfect cut and lace of two opposites to make it right.

They've taken on lover's names, father's names, the botanists' names.
The fruit reminds me of running until I could not breathe among the
leaves.
The pear in my father's hand was a trophy.

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ii

(The grafts have been named as well,
determined by the cut,
the angle, the union.)

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I am searching for a silent place, a quiet stretch of skin with no sex
mark—the stomach flesh that pulls to bandage burned limbs or form a
penis where there was none.

In a hillside orchard, a girl water fills each moat. Sun freckles her
back, tightening the flesh around her bones. She becomes more than
fair, other than girl.

Not knowing which fruit will bulge from the random blossoms, she
reads their tags—their latinate titles—to speak to them. They become
what she calls them.

(

This is not a dream. It is the end
of the French dynasty,
a foggy morning

and woman's husband is her malady.
She hides his list beneath
her cloak, then steps

from the convent room
for what he calls *her idiotic ramblings*.
His request: a prune-colored redingote,

→

salmon pate, madeleines.
And a dildo
of dark mahogany,

waxed smooth as a child's arm.
The more real, the better,
he tells her. *Test it in your mouth.*

(

Margaret on men.

When I touched the male body, it felt wooden.
Like a puppet, the fingers were pinned to fold.

The torso was a tailor's mannequin draped in white oak.
They lay across my body like sleep.

Mostly I closed my eyes.

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iii

The fourth way of grafting is—

How buds are transported
& bound upon another tree
Like a plaster is tied

To a man's body:
This sort of grafting is called
In Latin *Emplastrum*.

(

Always the old woman's deformed toes brought me to ask: *what is perfection?*

I imagine how my body would feel if I could touch it once as a stranger
or a god, if I could touch it as male: my cheek, my thigh. *In what form,*
I ask myself.

(

Still life.

A pine table set inside Rembrandt black.
Someone has left unexpectedly, spilling the silver platter
of fruit. The candle almost burned out.

The lives are still illuminated:
a grape cluster, trout's head, dewy mum.
And two pears.

One standing, the other on its beckoning side.
The knife blade just there.
The pear reflects the shades of Holland's

deciduous regions, a late bruise—
the tint of repair and wound. Cold lips.
I am searching for a silent place.

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Myself on dressing.

Sometimes when I pour myself
into the fabric, I spill.

This is my other self:
a nude woman
dancing in front of a window.

I desire her.

(((

iv

(Cleft graft, whip graft, bud graft.

They are names of beauty marks, small tattoos.
Games played in dominance
and submission.)

(

The Marquis finds so many reasons
to slap her cherry tart face. Still she returns
with the key to her room, her orifice.

Mythology's sad helper, she is a tattered
book to be read with one hand. Her pain
is dog-eared, a placeholder

to find her way back to love's
core, delivering gifts to fulfill him
in his prince's cell, his stone turret.

(

My body will become a house
Margaret cannot enter.

I will like beside her
like a puppet she cannot move.

I love her body beside mine,
yet not mine beside hers.

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In the orchard, the girl folds up her sleeves, takes off her boots, freeing
her ripening toes. She runs her lips along her arms, sucking in the
warmth of her cheeks like a hard kiss. She calls herself Boy.

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v

How apples & other fruits are made red—

If you graft upon a wild stump
Put the sprouts in a Pike's blood prior.

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The mahogany stalk
was once a single tree
in a Rouen field.

Then the ax came down
to cut it into a gentle thumb.
The carpenter polished it

into a smooth root.
She understands its thirst,
its hollowed vein

that could contain a map.
She is the ridiculous shopper
scarf covering her basket of bounty.

The Marquis, writing that
the stoic holder
is once again too narrow

for his continents,
will accuse her of spending
too much on herself.

(

I will take from the inner thigh, hip, abdomen and wrap my skin
around itself, grooming it into a new limb, ordering doctors to do what
nature did not. I will wake inside my father's trophy form.

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The garden.

So often I return to the garden, the orchard tree
and stand beneath it.

A woman is offering up a fruit
botanists have yet to name, painters have yet to paint.

Does it have thick, pocked skin or is it varnished smooth—
what trees would you graft to create the forbidden?

I am searching for a silent place.