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beloved
사랑하는

when my father was a boy his world was made of crumpled postage stamps and broken seals, a sunken
tangled mess of what-is-nots & could-have-beens. you were stolen by a diagnosis,
six letters that spelled his father's early grave, a destination on the ticket that his sister
shoved into his pocket at the train (from *Seoul* to *sold* to the myth of western education),
and the faded ink of tongues that should have burned. I found you in the eyes of the boy that I met six times
across the room, the name of the girl he was thinking of when he kissed me as a dare
the summer before I moved away. you became the fibers of my wilting nails, gnawed to shards but growing back
because even my incisors can't discern the irony of time from what is simply meant to be,
the reading that the scale spits out the same every day, ten pounds too high—
since each of the one-eleven is my skin & blood & bones & thoughts, and in the end you know
that all my thoughts must be made of you. at the back of my itching cavern of a throat
you are still caught as an endless knot because I'm asking why everything has to end so soon?
and the buried story of my mother's cousin who died on his thirteenth birthday
while everyone was waiting for him to change out of his bright blue *hanbok*, the smile on his face
when he snuck away to take a nap and never woke up. you are all the paper cuts, the dizzy rush, the *gijesa*¹
we lay out for our hearts; but you are also the takeout that my best friend left for me when I was sick.
her knock, insistent, at the door because I hadn't called her back for seven days.
you are all that was but also all that is to come: my older sister's drunken late-night texts,
the trembling ghost, his fingers in my hair, starving my skin, because there are still some things
about the world that we just can't explain. you showed me all your hidden sounds & shapes
how *na*² can be *me* and *you* could be *mine*, but I don't know really who is whose, or what is infinite
and what I have to choose to leave behind. I want to say that I've forgotten how it feels
to be a child, small and weak and unafraid.
but I'm sitting in the palm of your hand, curled up like a stone,
waiting for you to teach me how to love again.

¹The Korean name for mourning rites held the night before or morning of a death anniversary, by setting a table of food and wine as an offering for the passed and sharing it with the living.

²나, the Korean word for "me" or "I."