Mouth Sounds Ligero

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I feel like my mouth has been lost. When I woke my mouth is where it’s been meant to be and it still makes mouth sounds, but it’s direction is lost to me. When I speak it’s a whistle. When I shout there is a hum. When I am quiet there is quiet.

The rain falls and my body is lost to me. It’s where it’s supposed to be, but it is no longer mine. It lies in bed, flat on its stomach. I call out its name, but there is only a whistle where my mouth used to be. It is a coaching whistle and there is no ball, no mechanism to give it any strength or attention. The whistle is hollow. It stops calling, because I’ve asked it to. When the whistle, hung from my neck, hits my chest it makes a mouth sound. A groan or a murmur.

The body wakes up and rouses itself from the bed. I try to watch its movement, its routine, to see if it’s one that I know. It goes, undressed, from the room and the bathroom and sink make sounds.

I’m left to watch the bed, it’s unkempt and the sheets are scrunched in ripples in wake of that lost body. I call the body LB, but it sounds more like a hum because I’m shouting.

For a moment, I think LB hears me and comes back to the bed, but LB is only pulling the sheets back in their place. And the comforter. The pillows lean on one another and the comforter is folded in the corner.

Downstairs, LB is in the cupboard, is grinding coffee, is pulling a chair in and out from the table. Then there is quiet, but quiet that LB is making and not me. I wonder what he’s having for breakfast. I get angry, I can recall a routine, but the details of the previous day are lost to me.

Then my sense returns and I’m certain it is a dream. The medication I was given. Their symptoms. Vivid dreams. This is all this is, I’m certain. My hands, at the wrists, are able to rotate and I try to pinch my skin, and I’m unclothed, but there is no strength in my fingers. I wiggle my toes and hold my breath. It feels like minutes go by, but my diaphragm fails to sputter and kickstart my lungs. My lungs, for that
matter, never lose their comfortable place in my ribcage.

As a kid, I was drowned. Or not drowned, but held under water. It was the ocean and all of its malice. When I was a kid, I was standing in the shore line where waves lose their might and crash into the beach. The waves were to my waist, I was a child. My favorite was to try and run back to shore as the wave and its dregs were pulled back to the rest of the ocean. Sometimes I would lie on my own belly and pretend to crawl back to shore only to be sucked back out to the ocean. I’d scream, and I had a mouth then so I could scream with all the shrillness of a five year old.

But when you’re really pulled under there is no time for any noise. A wave, it must have been large though I didn’t see, collapsed me into the shore and its rocks. I was pulled out in the undertow. A dreg. It was peaceful being pulled out. The rocks and the sand orbited my body and I was still—my body rotated and I remember feeling the bottom, but I know I didn’t flail. Though I lost up and lost down and lost left and lost right, I was calm.

Until the undertow stopped, until I tasted the salt water, until sand filled the vacated space of a tooth lost in gummy candy. Then I panicked, then I filled my lungs with water, then I shouted and made no sound.

That was the first time I lost my voice.

This is the first time I’ve lost my body.

There is a whistle and it is full. It comes from the kitchen, the warble of a kettle singing.

My knees gain their movement and I bend, the same with the elbows. It is smooth and I feel like I am able to glide. Up and down, there is none of the stiffness of the morning. The sun is beginning to rise and I don’t cast a shadow.

Cast in a reflection, the clouds are dark and thin and there are colors surrounding them. When the sun emerges in its fullness I see how round it is and I can hear it. It whistles.

When LB is back there are clothes on its body and then a back pack and then LB is gone. I try and follow; my body is warmed enough that it has movement again. Though my steps are awkward even if the movement is not. My legs, arms, and hips are smooth and move with ease, but there is a newness and it lacks
coordination. Though when I fall on the stairs I am caught by my own body—not LB—but this new body in its nakedness and lack of shadow. At the bottom of the stairs I become intensely aware of my vulnerability and my body is warm all over and I am coated in sweat, but my hand is dry when pressed to my stomach.

Out in the world, it is perfect. The sun is behind clouds and it is quiet. A bus goes by and it hums. There is the whir of a bike chain and I’m gliding along the street. Though I am slow, though I am methodical, though I am unorthodox, I move forward.

When I get to LB’s work I try the handle, but I lack the strength. I can see LB inside through the big glass windows. LB is in the kitchen and the new one is at the counter. The opener is on break, flour and white cover their arms.

LB does the dishes and I feel my own fingers pruning at the thought. LB is new, but not newest. LB is learning. LB is eager. LB is doing its best.

The day is slow and a slight rain begins to fall. It isn’t until the new one leaves for a cigarette that I get inside the bakery. There is no smell and I am angry. I should smell pastry, bread, and coffee.

I go back to the kitchen and LB is forming loaves. When I see LB in all its fullness I freeze again. I can see myself grabbing it and pulling its body back into myself. I know my hands will grab first from the neck and I will approach LB from behind. It is clear this is the only way.

Time passes before my body moves again and I am not nearly as angry. LB has a strange control of motion that I am jealous of, but I admire too. LB crooks at the hip and the elbow follows suit. The body has coordination mine lacks. I want to smother it. I can see, with an inhale, my own body expanding to envelop all of LB and to hold LB there until there is quiet. I will grind LB through to his bone, dry him out, and turn him to flour. I can see the way its body will form loaves. Too dense for pastries. Too dense. I will save the flour and turn LB into soda bread. I will save the flour and will turn LB into gingerbread. I will save the flour and turn LB into sourdough. I will save the flour and turn LB into fruit cake so LB is thrown into the garbage. I will save the flour and leave it open on the counter so moths will make larvae in LB. I won’t save the flour so LB will be discarded.

I move toward LB, but when I press my hands to it there is nothing. I can feel my hands, but they have no strength. I am unable to wrap my fingers into LB’s throat.
and I am unable to pull him to me. I am unable to smother LB. I am unable to grind him to powder. I am unable to put our bodies back together. I am unable to be LB.

But I try.

LB is unbothered. LB moves in the kitchen as though I am not there, as though I have not clung to LB hoping we become the same. I decide to leave LB to see if I have reflection, but I can’t open the door to the bathroom. I decide to wait at the counter, unsure if I want to be in or out.

The rain becomes heavy and as it falls there are flashes of thunder that illuminate the sky. Each bolt, unseen in shape, illustrates the rain and there is a crack of thunder. I am drawn to it and I go to the window. It is full length and I press my whole person to the window and try to be closer to the rain. I want to feel rain and the way each drop disperses and is lost to my skin. I want to feel skin.

The sky is illustrated by lightning and I count thirty three rain drops. Really I count two before the lightning is gone. I count five in wait for the thunder. When it claps its ugly throat I feel the glass tremble and I am excited. That is what I want to be. I count thirty-three.

I go to LB and I say, let me illuminate you. I will illustrate your hands, especially your hands. The way they buckle and display veins. I will call out your fingers, all ten. And be sure to know where they bend and are crooked. I will be certain to celebrate the hands and the way they are lost in flour. I will be certain to. I will be. I will. I.

As I had spoke to LB my eyes closed and I hold my breath—I hold my breath! We are one and I know I’ve done it and that I have my body back. That I am LB, that we are together, that we are that we, that I. I can feel the warmth of dough and nails scrubbing it from my fingers, wrists, and forearms, but when I open my eyes I see me and then I see LB. Except I hear me. I press both ears to me and I hear the words in my left and I hear the whistle in my right.

LB goes to wash his hands and I am clung to its neck, but me, the newest one, cannot move. The other me is milk white and shapeless and hideous and beautiful and awesome. In that I feel awed by the mass of body clung to LB and then it lets go and drifts behind LB. The milk white me—MW—shuffles its mass behind LB as LB goes through the motions of closing up the bakery. On LB’s clothes are smeared white shapes from flour. My body feels a dull warmth, when I cease
thought or motion I feel warmth, but when I try and shift my body or think of that warmth it is gone and there is nothing. I am slow. Slower than MW and LB. I try to call their names, but instead of a whistle my mouth groans. I try again, but my mouth feels full.

In my mouth there is flour. It is coarse, like sand, and there are clumps of brown sugar that are hardened and old and sharp. I try and swallow, but all I can taste is salt and when I make noise it is as a groan—as though I can't help but attest to the deliciousness of what I’ve consumed and this makes me angry and helpless. My words won’t fit out around what’s filled my mouth. I move to the counter. The salt makes me thirsty and I can’t help but gulp at the contents of my mouth. I can hear LB and MW moving to leave. At the threshold of kitchen and front of house the lights click off, I try and shout and I sound as a whale.

MW has elongated as it moves to keep up with LB, it grows and lengthens and looks to me like a slug. I shout again and my noise is drowned by a clap of thunder and then there is the light that precedes thunder. LB has a jacket pulled around his neck and his face and is hidden to me, but MW is exposed in its shape.

They leave through the shop door and MW is barely able to slide through as LB is quick to shut the door and bend to lock it in place. I am inside, in the dark, my movements are slow and I feel a pull against me—it comes from the kitchen. Something is clicking and there is the beep of the alarm system.

LB and MW turn from me and as they do I am painfully aware of all the noise out of doors. I hear every raindrop collide with the earth and the groaning of the bus as its brakes slow its progress. There is a car horn, there are footsteps. I close my eyes and steady myself on the counter, I feel light and the warmth has left me and I struggle to open my eyes. Unsure of my feet and hands and up and down and body and counter and left and right and there is fire in my lungs and it escapes as the gruel in my mouth drips down and out and my eyes open and are stung and they only want to close, but—

LB walks across the rain slicked avenida and—where the curb met pavement—a toothless mouth opens three car lengths wide and, in language dipped in sea water, says, Well, so much for that.

There are sounds and they are my body. I feel them in my feet and it swallows me in warmth from the bottom up. Outside, a rain is falling and makes the world hazy gray lines that intertwine with the stop light’s indecisive color.
The door seems to open for me, I am drawn out as though I am being pushed and my feet are moving too fast for me to keep up. Crossing the street, the stoplight flicks gold. Between two parked cars, the wide toothless mouth opens—smiles. I start to cry and the tears warm me and drop into my mouth. Hello, the mouth says. I taste the ocean and gulp it down. If you have a moment, the mouth says, could you tell me when *Thriller* was released?

Bathed in light, I say, Of course, but it is a mouth sound.

Su is fascinated by soups, bread, and humans. He is a special education teacher and MFA candidate at Columbia College Chicago. Su’s work can be found in *Entropy Magazine, Green Mountain Review, Timber Journal, Literary Orphans*, and elsewhere.