

## MARTINA CROUCH

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### Lettering

Do you know the weight of a word?

The heft, the feel, the way

it fits like an egg

in the center of the palm –

a translucent yolk of backlit veins, pregnant

with half-formed syllables?

(Words, like a shock of hair-strand

pencil marks, an unborn sound with nostril holes

and the beginnings of ears,

words gathering to one day become

a creature of ink black sinews

that consumes

the muted whites and grays

of paper.)

Do you know how a word shudders

in the dark, moist cave of a mouth –

curling against the palate's soft ribbing

before it lunges into the light of conversation,

sharp, fast, hot as a burn that sears understanding

into the space between us and strips possibility down

to the cold, hard bones of specifics:

from

“that's not what I meant”

to

“there's no way

out.”

All I know about words

are the things I can't do with them.

I cannot bind them with thick ropes

and herd them into moleskin notebooks, preserve

the texture of them, the luster, the scent –

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or pick them up like dull pennies  
and rub them clean  
with my thumb.

I cannot keep them fresh

in a jar somewhere, or pressed neatly

between the pages

of a book.

I cannot smooth words

between the cotton-blue lines

of college-ruled sheets, fold each sentence,

cup each clause

to hold my grief. And

I cannot force words back down your throat, or swallow mine

only to lie awake at night, listening to them gnaw away

at flesh when

the words were burrowing into the buds of my tongue

all along, festering

between the pink crevices

so that they are all I can taste

when morning comes, undressing

my silence

with the honesty

of the sun –

You and I

are just letters.

We are clasped to each others' chests, gripping painfully

like desperate lovers,

realizing that, for some things,

there will never be

any words.

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