

KERATIN

Malcolm Bradley

Keratin

2019

Start by bringing your attention to the back of your hands.

Notice the thinness of the skin.

The space that the veins have to occupy.

How they squash together while blood, your blood, flows through them.

Flex your fingers and picture how, for all this to remain inside your skin, your veins will need to roll over your bones.

Sit with this image.

Let any fixations drift.

Force the skin on the tip of the thumb into your front teeth so the nail protrudes underneath. Bite down hard, jerk your head to the side and tear the nail away from your hand.

Roll the strip of nail between your index finger and thumb and form a ‘C’ shape so that it resembles a waning crescent moon.

Raise your index finger to your mouth and begin to chew the nail. The whole nail.

Feel how your eye lids are trembling.

Exhale deeply, and again, rip the nail off by jerking your head to the side.

Open your eyes and throw your head back with the nail and strips of pulpy skin hanging from your teeth.

Feel the tendril shape of your tongue grow out of your mouth and draw the nail back in.

Swallow slowly.

Feel the nail as if it were in someone else’s mouth.

They roll their tongue and edge a new nail between their back teeth. They bite down hard and chew until it feels like crushed, oily plastic. Hear the sound of their teeth biting together as a tremor that carries

through their jaw and up through the back of their skull.

Return to find you are making your way through the nail on your little finger. Which is also the last one left on your hand.

At some point you were able to feel them as if these hands were yours but now, they are not *yours*: they have come loose from you.

One is resting next to you while the other, with the little nail still intact, hangs in front of you, separate from the arm.

Look at the gauzy marks that have been pressed between your mouth and palm made from a pale mix of saliva and blood.

You stare back at the hand and finish chewing.

Breathe, open mouthed, and let your voice creep onto your breath as a low murmured grunt.

When you're ready close your eyes.

The hands begin to paw at the soft hairs along your forearm.

They tug them out and put them in your mouth straight onto the tongue.

Close your mouth and begin moving your cheeks in and out to roll spit through the ball of hair.

Be aware of your eyelids dimming as you swallow.

You close your eyes. You direct the fingers to massage your tear duct and let the side of the index finger stray into your eyeball so that patches of deep red bloom across your vision.

The index finger brushes your eyelashes side to side.

Open your eyes and direct three of your fingers to brush the lashes up and down.

The index finger and thumb rub together and tilt towards you again.

They pinch an eyelash and pull.

Your eyelid lurches forward as it's tugged then smacks back against the eyeball when it comes loose.

The index finger and thumb bring the eyelash down to your mouth straight onto your tongue and you swallow. No spit.

You open your eyes to see your mouth hovering in front of your face.

You are viewing it from the front as if there is a face around it looking back at you. But there is no face, only a mouth.

“Go on” the mouth says to you with resolute calm.

Direct the fingers to pull at the eyelash that you have drawn out of the follicle until it comes loose completely.

Hear the wet clap of the lid hitting the eye ball.

Command the tongue out of the mouth, place the hair onto it and eat it.

The hair enters the hovering mouth but still appears

in your throat as its swallowed.

Feel the bottom of the hair slip against the wall of your gullet.

Direct a hand to continue pulling the hairs and collect them on the tongue.

Once each hair has been plucked, direct the mouth to drain any excess spit and condense the pellet of hair.

The tongue sticks out and you command the hand to peel the hair (now one mass) off the tongue.

The hand flicks this onto the ground without a command.

The hair, sagging into the floor as the spit runs out from the strands, seems to be exhaling.

The hand raises itself to the mouth and holds still for a moment.

“aaahh”

The mouth opens and loosely holds the base of the

thumb between its teeth.

Feel the mouth biting the hand and the hand inside the mouth even though neither are attached to you or each other.

The mouth bites around the joint at the base of the thumb and feels the sinew roll beneath the skin.

The hand tries to turn, to prod fingers into the lips but the mouth withdraws and the fingers only catch the side of the lip, flicking it up.

The mouth moves the teeth over the joint and pinches the skin between the front teeth.

Feel the sting deepen as the teeth bite down harder.

The hand wriggles briefly but yields at the point when the teeth touch.

The lips drop down over the teeth to cover the laceration.

The mouth pulls away.

Lips stretch across the etiolated skin, spit and blood lashing at the gums and the sepal like teeth reveal the mouth at work.

Hear the wet sound of chewing and then the expected lump of skin appears in your throat.

Swallow the lump.

Picture the movement of sensations as it travels into your stomach.

Imagine the gestation of nail, hair and skin in your belly.

Something excites the bitten hand and it hovers in front of the mouth without any command to do so.

The mouth grins, also without command, and bares its teeth.

The bitten hand knocks at the teeth with a knuckle and mouth opens wide.

The bitten hand climbs inside the mouth and wriggles toward the back.

The fingers overlap the now ambiguous space between the root of the tongue and your throat.

The mouth edges the hand in completely with its tongue then closes behind it.

Emily Perry
Huawei Notepad
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I went into my tea with a spoon from the drying board to remove the teabag but realized I'd already done it. I wonder what would happen if we were all conscious of all we did. I register the tight nagging knots in my upper back and adopt the downward facing dog pose in my kitchen. I forgot to breath then realised I wasn't breathing and stood up breathing, disappointed that I wasn't aware of my breathing.

I did 17 sit ups while listening to the *A Star is Born* soundtrack, then stood on my shoulders with my legs in the air for the rest of the time that I was meant to be doing sit ups. I looked at my stomach and breasts bunching towards my face. I felt compelled to use “breasts” as I felt I was looking at a foreign creature’s anatomy that should be studied with interest and respect. I remember being told to be interested in things that scare me, as a coping mechanism. I tried to lick my left boob but couldn’t reach the nipple, as was the challenge. I sat up and sang the powerful bit of the song. I posted something on Instagram and considered telling my followers about my naked performance in my bedroom this evening.

I'm naked and partially dry after my shower and lying on a towel on a blanket on my duvet on my bed. There's loads of crap on my bed, dozens of notes and scraps of paper waiting to become notes, envelopes, some clothes and card ready to make Christmas cards 'coz I'm a good girl. I'm laying here in the wrong bit of the bed, horizontally across it, pillows to my left and all the crap snuggled up to my right. I'm looking at my ceiling watching the dramatic shadows create many versions of white, the work of my bedside lamp. There's a tiny thread hanging from the ceiling, perhaps part of an old spider's web or just a long string of dust dancing. I often watch it, it's always dancing even when the air feels still and warm. It seems to be moving as if I'm blowing it. As I say some things out loud - I occasionally use the voice recognition software to make notes on my phone but it often makes me feel more stressed as I feel a time pressure and become more aware of articulating myself - I imagine my room as full and thick, tracking my breath, picturing it move the air around me like my words are a finger dipping in a bath of still water. Sometimes I can't tell which is the string and which is the shadow.

My dating app asked me what I'm looking for and I wrote "an interesting feminist". I receive 5 unsolicited comments, ranging from the archaic "the best thing women can do for themselves and society is raise children", to the tedious "fuck feminism", "yawn". I screenshot the comments and post them to my Instagram story, later this emboldened, reactive energy will be replaced with a tired air of malaise. I am also sent one ambiguous emoji but I consider its decoding unpaid labour and so turn my phone on its belly and decide not to date at all.