MIRROR

POEM

## I: CHOKE ME, DADDY.

"Brightheart loops a quick knot around doubt and strangles it." — Akwaeke Emezi, Deity | Dear Eloghosa

both MISSING & founding fathers set the terms of this place. this is what I know:

a death-mask unhinged its jaw & gave us the men. the men gave their bricks to the pavement, death-jawed.

betting surely on the blood-colour of black anger. knowing to twist our fury, bloodly:

(scale-glittered as the stars are, surely). until we gave up

that strange fruit-throated song: *i can't breathe. i can't breathe.* 

can *you* breathe, babe? how are you breathing

in this fucking air? is the forked tongue *still* lapping up your skirt? the road forks

up ahead. either way,

doubt binds the heart with dull rope. give me the noose's careful glitter instead:

blooded sparkling. blood-soaked kisses are sweetest, wouldn't you agree?

all of us feathered things, finally. held in the maw of the scaly systemic: death-jawed.

sweetheart, open your beak for the question now: are you starting to remember?

# II: GOOD BOY, MY GIRL

"Bask in the summer of fathers dying." —Jason Purcell, swollening

cinnamon crusted, sugar smile on her. fresh fruit in the book-bowl, an offering

from the islands. jillian sings to me & the sky opens. our laughter so honey-soaked

the table collapses weak at the knees. island fruit

> spilling all over the balcony. soft-tumbling as the story you make of me, true out your mouth.

I point the lens at you, watch you mime *I love you* in the air,

make the video fifteen seconds

(just so I can post it on my IG) an un//segmented story

already pinning a song to your smile. my mirror makes more of you, in all your many-minded magic.

> you string my fear up by its feet, hanging him stem-skyward, like a dried-out bouquet.

#### III: MORE, MORE, MORE

We know the wrong ontologies of beauty. The Beholders, The Beheaded at the Behest, the Best of Beyond. The Lack of Complaint." — jay dodd (jzl jmz), La Belle Dame sans Merci

draw me a line from: of diana ross eating a rib in alabama (the one in the morgan parker poem)

to: of nkuley, hip-swaying. venus as a babe: cat-eyed in a kangol sportie, crop-topped &

sucking all the eyes in the room toward her, like a bone.

the streets are heaving under

((the wait//the weight))

of red & yellow roses, dead girls blue-gemmed & gleaming

singing throat songs from the street. is sinew-soaked in lipgloss.

this line

wrap me up in it, then. bind me. is this what it'll take for us to remember ourselves? I mean, I'll ask

the question another way: who wouldn't want to suck the rib that made her?

that photo

that clip

## IV: ON YOUR KNEES, PET.

"What makes them hands at all?" —Kemi Alabi, 44 Questions to Ask While Bingeing

Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: Why would you even decrease the value of my lobola below what we agreed on, bhuti? all I did was *talk* to her! *she* took a bite of an apple & now I'm *fucked* forever?

### V: MOMMY? SORRY. MOMMY?

"My mother is almost my mother now, darker colour of the noontime sun." —Safia Elhillo, Girls That Never Die

under the surface of the green water, I begin to remember

my handlessness. all limb instead, my scales gleaming

darkly, ancient again. K and I swim, instead of speaking.

everyman in me submits to the authority of the land,

& the water. each guardian makes way for mother: utopic

com/promise. I don't feel my brown brass-belled chest

in the water, my mass suspended for me. floating, I let myself

dream about the knife. the one that visits our dreams & whispers

its edge-doubled song: *let me cut you, baby. aren't you a boy?* 

dark fins underwater swaying in response: *no, mama. but I am* 

asking for it.