

# Though Our Mouths be Taken from Us

by Ken White

Though our mouths be taken from us, the center  
comes first, circumference follows. That shall be the whole  
of the law. Listen, glassblower. Listen, pendulum.  
Though our faces have been smoothed

of feature and our ears stopped fast we have these  
our hands—though sense of touch has forsaken us  
in foreseeable collapse—on which to shift and stand  
and buffet the brunt of the law. If not hands

we have these our remnant stumps. Listen, corn-  
flower. Listen, saffron. Though our tongues  
swell thick as roots, have dived. Though our skins  
unmake their tiny orders of integument

and release. Though the centrifuge. Though spindrift  
our blood this suspended sheet  
separates into sallow smoke and spiraled winging  
of spiraled insects dashed against rock, though bodies

shape like seeds we cannot hope to overcome it  
wholly. We must meet with lust for bruising  
the whole of the bristling law behemoth in the jagged breach.  
Listen, lull-in-lathe. Listen well you bi-valved hinge, let us shatter

on the charge. Let us fragment and combine and let  
our cracked bicuspid mark the crater and the sty.  
Though the whole of the law shall be unwritten  
we must speak our remnant tendons, bunched and flat

and dried. Our sinews must cluster like rushes  
on the marsh and in the slightest stir of wind  
must whisper milked the whole of it  
and chant it where they touch, choir it

ringing from our lashes smoldering  
and singed. Though razed. Though scoured  
and sealed we must brush, we must rub. Though iron  
smacks louder than pulse we must—*listen,*

*sower. Listen, reaver*—though hammer flattens, folded  
and damasked we must—*listen, besom. Listen*  
*transom*—speak it though all has been dismembered  
and our stolen mouths! Our molecules summarily

dismissed, capillaries driven over cliffs, cells ruptured  
with borrowed pin, atoms heedlessly compressed until the fabric  
of our voices, our voices which have no bodies, has been unraveled  
and unwritten and still we must speak it aloud, speak it

together or in part. *Our mouths have been taken from us.* Listen,  
bosun. Listen, tiercel. Listen delvers in the deep—as frightened hares  
our tongues have gone to ground; root them out—our voices  
we must braid though banished and remiss. We must *speak*.

Listen, direction. Listen, come-forth. Listen cufflink  
of quilted sky, of painted, wavering north. We must  
speak. We must speak. We must because everything  
can be—*everything* that can be taken from us

will be taken from us—speak for it. This law  
is the only law, that the voice must live. That the voice must  
live shall be the whole of it. At the center is the voice  
and will be invented next circumference and all

will be restored to us though there is no promise  
as to the form of it. That is the body of the, the corpus  
of the, the only of the law—that this voice must live  
and that we speak it is the imperative entire, the

floor of the, the seat of the, the voice the  
heart and ember, inner chamber at the center  
of the only law that matters  
but we must speak it aloud to make it whole.