

In Persian, “I miss you” is said *jaat khaaliyeh* — “your place is empty.” Your place isn’t empty from my life; I talk about books with other people, celebrate my accomplishments with other friends, do all the other things in my life like I’ve always done — alone. Your place isn’t empty, but I miss you. I feel bad for the people who want to say “I miss you” but can only say “your place is empty,” the people forced to be poets who don’t want to be. Whenever we examine the beauty of other languages, we don’t stop to think how much pressure it must be, to be beautiful all the time. To only have beautiful words at your disposal when all you want is to rip the bandaid off, to *hurt*, to heal. To cough up flowers instead of blood.

I’m lucky that I speak the language of the blunt, the uncivilized, the hurt. I speak beautiful languages too — I speak Chinese and French and Japanese — but I speak them brokenly, even my mother tongue, the words don’t roll off right. Once, I used to be ashamed of how I eject clashing consonants out of my mouth: without grace, without care. I tried to make my words curl, make them nicer, prettier, but that didn’t please you, didn’t please Madame, anybody. Now I feel the friction between tongue and teeth — a surefire sign that a wrong word is about to come out — and I think of the hurt of always, always swallowing my words, and simply let the plosives pop out. I feel schooled around you, by you, like I’m six again and in grammar school learning English and I’m getting a slap on the wrist because I can’t separate my vowels from consonants. To be poetic, to be blunt, or to be silent?