They told me it’s impossible to swallow your tongue, but sometimes I try.
I don’t think it’d hurt all that much to just let it slide back behind that little flap in the throat and allow it to simmer. At most, I expect a tickle, like a cough but with less hacking.

Clear phlegm means you’re healthy.
I.

She lies in my bed for most of the day surrounded by

nudie magazines,

stained clothes,

ancient Tupperware,

and used Band-Aids.

When she tires of flipping through my eight TV channels, she leaves.
No warning. Just gone.
I’m lucky if I hear the door click behind the ass swaddled in my only clean pair of jeans.

Today, I decide to catch her before she flies, finding her in my bathroom, balancing on a foot, tongue between teeth, painting her toes vagina pink.
Her eyes don’t even flutter when I send the door crashing against the half-disintegrated cinder block we use as a lock.
Her tongue does dance, though-- a small come-hither jive with lips acting as the jealous partners.
Look at me.

“Need something?” She asks as she places her perfectly spaced toes on the edge of the sink, makes her hand act as a fan to dry them.

You. “Where to today?” I can be nonchalant too: Arms entangled,

Foot on cinder block,

Lips like granite.

A shrug of a straggly shoulder that makes me ache to nip and expose the protruding bone.
“Can I come along?” I wish I had nails too so I could dig them into my muscle, let her see the red she leeches.
“Mmm.” She switches to the other foot much too soon.

Pink has gone where it shouldn’t. Let me peel those eyelids open.

I always have to work to see the jade branded inside her skull, visible only as flickers. Always. From the very beginning.
II.

She was leaning up against a telephone pole when I found her. Red dress in thirty degree weather, long, black hair whipping her face with each gust of wind, heels sunk two inches into the soft earth. A car with a smoking hood sat ten feet away, ass still out in the road. I had to stop to avoid giving my ancient piece of shit another dent to match all of its brothers.

Like her car, she was smoking. Her drags lasted so long, I waited for her to pass out.

She didn’t. Not even a cough.

Her eyes closed with each inhale; I liked to believe that was her orgasm face.

I leaned outside my window, nearly falling to get a glimpse beneath the flapping, red fabric.

“Need help?”

Nothing. Another drag.

“Is someone coming for you?”

A smile across caterpillar plump lips. “You might be… later.”

I almost broke my foot kicking my sluggish passenger door open. “Want a lift?”

Jade green orbs made a point of looking in every direction but me. Her cig fell to the mud.

“Looks like you don’t have any other choice.” I made the door creak wider.

I had earned another smile, but the eyes still looked beyond my extended, quivering hand.

I wondered if she noticed the patterns crisscrossing my forearm, saw the symmetry in the raised flesh like I did.

“There’re always other rides.” Her hips began to slither away from their perch.
III.

I tend to run up my electricity bill when I’m alone:

- Television blaring corny game show reruns—CONGRATULATIONS!
- Hair Dryer set to ionic cool to not melt the cheap countertop
- Microwave reheating the same bowl of tomato soup as the last three days
- Vibrator set on max and laid on hardwood for ultimate sound
- Sandpaper rhythmically chafing against inner thighs

Anything—*anything*—to keep the silence from asking what hole *she* fell into this time.

When the (my?) screams get to be too numbing, I walk my coffee jar filled with cat food two blocks down the road, counting the dead patches of grass in order to keep from staring into the sun too long.

Various forms of skeletal felines disappear into their equally emaciated building upon my arrival. They mimic their own fleas the way they leech off of the rotting bricks.

I dump cat food in various piles, sheltering it from the elements. Hope the stupid fleabags don’t scatter it as they waste all their strength on useless fighting.

Yellow and green eyes watch from behind upturned garbage bins. I sit on a crumbling stair and whistle, watching fur disappear further into the tomb. Sometimes those cats get brave and venture out to join my presence.

I feel warmth brush my wrist, vibration in my skin.

- A
  - pretty,
  - new
  - calico.

The tiny ball of black and orange fur places her face in my palm.

My whistle is drowned out by her purr; it crawls up my skin and stabs at my earlobes.
The cat sashays to the kibbles by my boot and eats daintily, each rumble complemented by a crunch.

Her flimsy body is launched into the air by the flick of an ankle; she lands next to an overturned wheelbarrow, which becomes her hiding place.
Wide amber eyes stare out.
“You can wait like everyone else.” I rub at the itch her softness left on my arm.
IV.

I come home some nights to see my human charity case plucking the fluff out of my tangerine couch. Electronics sufficiently tamed. She is a clunky sweater. Three sizes too big and the color of acid. What makes anyone want to wear it? To crawl inside and make a home?
I must have terrible fashion sense.
I rub the fabric to see if it feels as rough as it looks.
Rougher.

She catches my wrist before it retracts; I feel the same sensation as when that calico rubbed against me but

lower.
Deeper.

At least there’s no itch...

That clunky sweater deliciously chafes my nipples when she finally wrestles off my shirt. The couch does a good job of rubbing my spine raw too. She has a way of leaving behind abrasions—marks I can look at later and try to lick away or tear further if need be. We always end up playing a rough game of king of the mountain; I’ve grown accustomed to being the shuddering, murmuring, salivating runner up.

The bonus in this game is that I still get a prize:
Split second, heart numbing, salt licking, tongue swallowing, chest heaving satisfaction.

This is all our lovemaking is:
scraped skin
and
compressed coughs.

CONGRATULATIONS!
I like to pluck the hair off her legs, the ones she misses after her shower. 
She never seems to notice no matter how slow or fast I pull. 
She just lies there on the mattress, the sheets melding into flesh. 
Maybe I could pluck them too.

“Tell me a story,” she says. “A good one.”

Dad would never shoot dogs. Cats, sure, but not dogs. Man’s best friend and all that. 
Even when the neighbor dogs would come and piss on our grass or shit in our flowerbeds. 
Even when that Boxer with saliva hanging from jowls to chest (like reins) would growl at me. 
Nothing.  

The Boxer got my boot one time, snatched it right off my foot. When Dad wasn’t busy 
having his tears season his coffee, he swore I lost it in the mud. 
The bruise was harder for him to wash away with his clouded sponge of a brain that was 
always too preoccupied with counting our suitcases. 
It was nice to dream that the Boxer choked to death on the leather. 
Not enough oil or blood to wash it down. All of its drool dried up.

He shot that Boxer on November 3rd. It gave the stink eye to our own mutt.

The mound of dirt looks taller every year. When I walk past, the grubs cling to my soles. 
The fucking beast still wants my shoes and sends his minions to get them. 
One day they’ll grab the rest of me, drag me down to Boxer’s bones to be suffocated by the
mud all of his spittle made.
Make Dad’s story finally true.

She doesn’t squirm when I run ice cubes down her spine. Her giggle scrapes my brain.
My tongue traces the water trail. It ends tangled in her hair. I wonder how long it’d take to clean vomit from the tresses.
Would the smell ever stop hovering? Would that make her mine?
It’s got to be better than dog piss.

“Does he know?”
“What?”
“That you want to take his gun? Aim it at his face?”

She never was very good at subtlety, and I was never very good at sewing my lips shut.
I give her hip a pinch for good luck and grip harder when there’s no flinch.

“Do you know?” I’m cutting off blood supply.
“How?”
“You were making eyes at the bartender last night.”
“You gonna shoot me, Daddy?”

I wonder if that’d wake her nerves
if I disintegrated her chest
instead of my own.
I’ve always been one in support of the “fuck ‘em and chuck ‘em” mentality:

Find the girl
Woo her in a night
Enjoy bodies slicked with oil, sweat, and alcohol
Crawl away before sunrise

With her the same formula had failed. It had come back and bitch slapped me across the jaw to be more precise, breaking some bones and popping some blood vessels in the process:

Find the girl
She woos me in a night
Enjoy bodies tinged with saline not our own
Let her crawl into me

That’s where she is now: inside me. She is always there even when she’s in my arms. She likes to sit at the back of my skull, lounging naked on my brain stem. She occasionally strokes my spinal cord gently, sends me shuddering with aching crotch and furious brain. Mostly she just prods me with her long fingernails, painted the color of okra this time. It almost matches the eyes that smirk at my pain. She’s grown adept at dodging me when I try to rub, scratch, peel her away, which is why I find noise to be the best fix.

But there can’t be any noise when I sleep. That’s when she really has fun punching and kicking and body slamming my cranium. That’s when she takes my white flag and tears it up to settle into my whirling gut. We both know my tongue will force it back up later once I’m awake. And I’ll willingly swallow again when she presses her palm against my chewed lips.
VII.

Her snore doesn’t wake me as usual, and I don’t find her hanging off the edge of the bed with a foot across my thigh to keep her from falling.
I don’t have to roll from underneath the leg to grab an arm and drag her back onto the moldy mattress.
I no longer have to listen to how

her wheezing

grows louder

when she’s

on her back.

Six days.
6.
1-2-3-4-5-6.

Days.

No chafing, coughing, peeling, scraping, choking.

Just silence.

They tell me it’s impossible to swallow your tongue.
Maybe you just have to cut it off first.