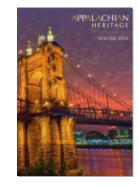


On Being Tongue-Tied, and Nothing Else

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Then, there was language you could taste. Words printed on every lingual papilla—Welcomed in by pursed plum lips Mouthing *O*'s.

It was language that had a breathy flavor that stuck Like dew
On the titillating sound waves of
A sweet-talking drawl.
Curse it, that language
That wedged itself between my teeth—
A braille for a swirling tongue to read,
Le tchip, le tchip, curse it.

At first, it tasted
Of muscadine raindrops, pitter-pattering
On the bitten insides of my cheeks.
At last—of bitter collarbone gnawed raw.

It was prose that couldn't be savored— The synergy of his soft-spoken la-di-das, His viscous laughter— O, toothsome tongue-tying language, *O*!

LUJAIN ALMULLA