

She gnaws her lip with the absent-minded
determination of the quietly distracted -
she'll bite straight through her pale pink mouth
with the worry of her teeth
and the cleft of her palette.

She is soft-spoken in her pain,
whispered words and hushed laughs,
giggling in a breathy rush,
another quiet distraction
as she cradles the peach-blossom bruise of her calf.

Her gaze streams in falling abstraction
beneath lowered lashes fixed, so surely, opaquely,
on the mess of her ankle
and the break in the graceful line of her tattered soleus.

She lifts long nails to the shadowed grooves
that line long feet,
the remnants of her dancer's shoes,
and her teeth that wear at bitten pink lips
break free of their heavy curtain
and draw the crimson corps to centre stage.