

*Scarab with device of kneeling fertility figure before obelisk*

The figure is carved from glazed steatite and the woman is kneeling, stomach bulging so wide it's unholy, in front of an obelisk. Her knees look worn down and knobby, and she wears a bent paper crown

Once I went feral, broke myself inside of myself  
so all that was left was shards. At night I'd pray  
to small faceless stones I'd collected, worry them until my fingers  
carved them small with age and turned them wizened,  
splitting at their seams. When I stopped praying I started eating  
then I stopped eating and that was better than praying,  
I started eating again and then stopped saying no  
so I was always on my knees  
hunched underneath some girl's shuddering hand,  
salt filling the spaces under my tongue  
like a baptism, like something pure,  
like something a girl can call clean

Whenever I want to cry  
I make myself laugh, so my laughter always sounds like the ragged inhale  
before screaming

I might be a slut but I don't spend much time in bed, prefer the ground  
or underneath a bed, on the floor of that girl's attic, dust gathering  
in the folds of my skin, pressing into my mouth like a communion wafer.  
All I need to be pretty is salt and old bruises

I let them grind my body down until all that's left is bone,  
small and sore underneath. Beauty is destruction so  
she calls me a broken animal, a shard of glass, a child  
before a barrel is placed against her head, a mouth  
worn down until it is nothing

*Portrait of a female figure with puncture marks & frayed rope*

Because a man is taught that his anger is A: a god  
B: a burning house, a burning church, a girl with a phone cord  
wrapped around her neck, broken capillaries like swarmed fish

*Dear man:*

Once I would call a kiss a bruise because they all bruised me with them,  
girls biting into me until I was nothing, until my veins shifted under their teeth,  
until the breath knocked out of me and I sat there dumb and dead at 15

The victim was wearing a wedding dress, a house coat, purple cotton underwear,  
her lips were shell pink but by the time he was done they were the blue of  
burning cities, lapis lazuli, oxygen deficiency pigmenting her mouth like an old-  
time Hollywood girl's eyelids, always flickering like electric lights

Her hands were:

1. On her chest
2. Held up as if in prayer, as if begging, palms making a small temple
3. Splayed out behind her

The evidence points to: a stranger, a serial, a small man  
who everyone says  
is gentle  
A man everyone believes

That she must have pushed him over the edge somehow,  
with her girlness  
or with her smallness

A girl is something to be consumed, a girl is prey, a small flickering light  
held in an open throat

The violations: handing me a bottle and whispering *drink*  
*until you can't speak/get on your hands & knees for me/waking up to a body not my*  
own/waking up unto blood

I learned early that beauty is violence so I always opened myself up to it.  
In bed I'd tell her to use her fist even when we both knew I couldn't take it.  
When I wear lipstick I match it to the same dirty shade of my first blood.

When I cry it is only for others' benefit.  
Everyone likes to see a pretty girl with her face crumpled  
into a hurt beyond recognition or, better yet,  
dead somewhere with her legs open.

*Self-portrait as a woman with a bullet wound*

capillaries like small fish  
because men are taught that their fear is a god we are all dying  
by the time I turned thirteen I learned how to hide from the men who had  
started following me like blood insects through streets/how to still yourself when  
men  
brush up against you and whisper *bitch*  
once a girl asked *but what would you let me do*  
and I said *everything but a loaded gun*

sometimes, I dream that I know the taste of bullets  
like flint, river stones  
I used to cover my body with jasmine oil to hide the stench of  
menstruation/like iron and death on my skin  
once I learned what it means to have hands around your neck  
but I already knew what it's like to be almost dead, already knew to open  
my mouth to swallow the bullet, how to become nothing but an exit hole