

PRELUDE TO BECOMING HOLY

She kept this virtue alive within her by seeking always
to abase herself, submitting to everyone

The visions begin at six,
the lime bitter in your mouth,
the elegy for all
you once wanted to become
breaking across the water
like a storm.

The sight, they called it.

This is how a girl becomes
holy: first she becomes empty.

To be a girl is to be an opening,
something to be filled,
so at fourteen you fucked the neighborhood girls,
sugar thick on your tongue,
but all you are still
is wet and absent,
mouth open, stoned hole.

Catherine, your throat flushed
with mint and salt water
to cure your desire for softness.

The women you knew in the dark,
as if you could ever be anything
more than afterwound.

Catherine, at night,
you know, the air holds
a place for girls like you.

Stars are beautiful only because
of their absence in the rest of the sky,
because of that stretch of new emptiness.

So you think you'll let the dusk
turn, like a rotting pear,
until it's as soft and full as teeth?

AS A GIRL I BELIEVED IN

The crook of my sister's empty belly
each space between a girl's ribs
bruises on her thighs I tongued
as if that could make them sweet
matrimonio bianco the girl who played husband
my hairless thigh between her legs
the softness something neither of us would ever know
the thyme we grew in the courtyard
turning my teeth dark with its blood
the dirt stuck under my tongue.

PRELUDE TO STARDUST

Before, as a child, I collected flowers,
Dried them in the sun, their faded beauty.
How I saved each petal, pressed it between
My fingers until it fell apart. Already,
We knew I'd never be anything.

BONAVENTURA

After Bonaventura, Catherine of Siena's oldest living sister, dies in childbirth, Catherine's parents arrange for her to marry the widower. Catherine sets herself on fire during a church service and claims to have seen a sign from God.

In another life, your sister's lips aren't blue with rot,
her stomach curved full, the pale center
of her palm gone limp. In another life, you don't wake up
with a new sadness carved into your stomach,
the wound of your vision darkening at the edges,
your hands, for once, not holding onto anything.

In another life, you don't spend your days
teaching the neighborhood girls how to kiss with tongue,
your heart a breakable thing you think they could hold.

Your sister's body in an unmarked grave, the dirt hasn't settled.

In another life, you don't brush your broken fingers over a match,
don't lean back to see what happens to your body in the flames,
if you'll go up, or if you'll stay.

LAPA

Catherine of Siena's mother, Lapa, gave birth to 22 children in her lifetime, half of whom died.

In another world, my mother's fingers don't shake
at the sight of stars, their brightness,
my own stomach gutted with the ghosts of:
moonlight, each unborn sun, my own drawn desire
a thing held only in the dark. My blood,
I measured it, the dampening.
My mother's blue scarf,
my sister's body on the street,
how the girl unbuttoned my dress in the snow,
how we already knew the cold.
The salt on her thighs that I traced to the core.
My secret that turned to gilded dust,
pale wings. The salt of the girl.
God, why do I always wish my body was an ocean?

INTRODUCTION TO SAINTHOOD

Salt is often used as a part of ritual exorcisms.

The blood so red on your fingers you almost could love it.

Who are you, to turn yourself into nothing?

The sweetness of your own undoing, the vetiver

Dark and hot in our mouths. The petals

We swallowed, we thought, to beautify ourselves,

The roots wet with earth. We never recognize our own bodies

In the water, our limbs for once weightless, brushing

Into each other. The strange flesh that never belonged to anyone.

The slick of our girlhood, how we were covered with mud,

Purged with the sea's tepid water, our mothers praying

For us to be all that we swore to become more than.

ABSOLVEMENT

I turned to the sky, that soft nameless dark,
the saline drying on my skin,
the lemon juice I swallowed to stave off want,
the salt I rubbed on my gums until they burned,
sun reddening my skin into something else,
my body, yes, how I hoped
not to recognize it in the morning.

The hurt was a thing we swallowed until it corroded,
in the night, we think to be something more
than tinny stars. But all we ever do is turn our bodies
inwards to the copper dirt.

Though saints would wrap their own breasts with thorns,
I would give up my safe ruin for when her hands were on me,
but only in the dark, where we don't have to see what we've become.