

Becoming a Saint

After Pope Benedict XVI slid the rings from his fingers, draped his white simar over the bedside, and left his red shoes by the door. And after he'd caught a plane or train to what I imagined was a villa in the Swiss alps: lavender fields, fat lowing cattle, snow-capped mountains, but was really the Mater Ecclesiae, I thought I'd be Pope Poetess.

Over my head I'd slip the simar, shuffle my feet into his red shoes, stack the rings on my fingers. Prayers of the people accented by bells—each day I'd send these out before the birds. Poems would be groups of people, each a word or phrase, each newborn syllable—string them together as they walk the earth breaking in the garden to rearrange their syntax.

This job isn't for me, though. It's my friend who's on her way to sainthood. No one doubts her holiness. She writes and heals, writes and heals. Her golden locks tied in a knot atop her head are pure angel, pure Popess. She is a goddess of Rubenesque beauty. On her feast day, there's nothing but croissants and elderberry jam. In her five years of writing, two more miracles: cures for worrywarts and closed eyes. Only thing is—it's true—she has to die.

For Calder because I see you at the Pittsburgh Airport
baggy trousers, red flannel shirt, dusty work shoes

Mechanical trains lit by candlelight carried five suitcases past the patisserie to the Paris Planetarium for you. For you a little private celebration, *Cirque Calder*, in miniature (I would). You watched the unfolding kinetic sequences; as a child taps his fingers along the table's edge, I am thinking of you. (of you) Bending, bend box and wire, a tiny woman emerges bowed and barefoot wrapped in yellow, blue, and mountains. Josephine Baker dances with the constable. In your hand clutch a clay elephant. Sleeping within your walls a single firefly rounds the silence of night, outlines twenty-three snowflakes. A skeleton of thought is a chandelier, spider-like scatters light across a room—when lying flat, cool shadows. A kind of chemistry, like the particulates of snowfall that clatter as steel discs, dresses you in cosmic questions and a penchant for dancing. On the cusp of the infinite a red ball, a silvery moon are detached bodies floating in space. Sail across the Atlantic, breathe something like a sponge, you are spirited at ocean's floor where once one drew diagrams, the other sat for tea and four white petals. In no particular order I am filigree of coffee tins, sardine cans, matchboxes, pieces of colored glass collapsing about wonderful things. I will wear a suit lined in red, carry dewy Venus to your grave.

Watching Ashbery via Live Stream

In the basement.
No. It only seems like one
Dark and clammy, but where the lamp
Lights the soft corners of people.
Where I am,
I grab a bag of Cheetos.
Upholstery fades to soft. Behind him
Colored spines and lost titles
I squint to recognize.
I imagine a round table covered in newspapers,
The funnies, even though I almost wrote *obituaries*.
His breath amplifies in the mic.
He seems relaxed
If not for difficult breathing.
He reads his poems.
They are his childhood stories.
They flutter from his lips
The way my dad tells of quicksand, charging bulls,
The goat in the tree.
He delights in their antics, rounds every "O."
Like sex between older bodies:
To know every freckle
Every fold of skin. It is enough to lick
The cheese from my fingers. It is enough to find this.
When Ashbery describes a line too little understood
I know the ones who will laugh with me.
I am what grows beneath a basement floor.

The Hat Lady Equation

I. Ladies' Brunch

Mother said the flounced frock looked more like a brunch dress
born of the dewiness of mid-March, mid-morning
when yellow tulips open in a glass vase.

At the Court of Two Sisters all legs crossed
beneath a round table. The room lit by refracting
diamonds depicted seven separate lives.

This girl had learned it's better to be coy
than to ask for things. I'd practiced
while brushing my teeth that morning.
Then the hall of mirrors engulfed me.

With April came the thought of dead
and tarnished, the lost luster of a tulip.
Never it sank, the changeless thought.
And to anyone who tricks a dayworker
and by awful coda, *pourquoi voudriez-vous?*

II. With Maria

On the night in which I and she (she and she)
together eat a nine dollar sandwich: it was duck confit.

She cast a sly glance. She pretended to be coy.
We practiced while braiding our hair in the mirror.
She took a chance on a sandwich-maker.
Oh, everybody wants everything!
(gluttony of duck confit)
And here coldness of water helps.

One thousand years of gods and demons
owned by Arthropods—we learned to identify
compound eyes, and yes and still
a writer we admired—
the thought that she hadn't noticed,
for she hadn't had the thought, our whispers
billowed. *Masquerade the ought to all-knowing.*
Jah-jah-gah-ack.

III. Imagining the Unsung of Fathers in View of Berryman at Sea

Fathers delivering philosophies with martinis and Mussolinis:
it is intolerably painful, exultingly patriotic. Patriarchally: a word
beneath which histories gather, wait.

Any artist and not a saint, stand with me,
and in choral incantations sing of shedding
light when finding *free from longing* in view of lovers.
Aboard a French liner Berryman delights one kind, beautiful figure
offering the rosiest cheeks (I am)
always in danger of turning to ashes.

Where is the starling and when her song?
Do I tell her this time, this time,
this time I will listen better?
Most days I wish to be less about me.
Check the map, walk the distance.
I stand ankle deep in the Mississippi
pants rolled-up. Torn boots lie sunken in muck.
The carnival lights silhouette two lovers pinned.

IV. The Ending

What is the cost I see you wear?
Is it enough to endure this history?
Sacrificed bodies in shrouds of Dutch tulips
awaken a stilted blue of garnished fame.
Can we bear it?

*Get along you. He talkin' so good
in rum drenched revelry an' beard
appears a connoisseur of certainty.*

This figure's absence in the end I know.