

The Calling

The Portable Walt Whitman was my bible
then, and whatever habits I possessed
were in service to myself.

It may have been the name,
Sisters of the Precious Blood, that called
me to them, an order of midwifing nuns.

I had been to a Catholic mass once
with a 5th-grade friend, the same friend
ordained into motherhood in

high school. Here was a cosmology
of lust and love and a grave beyond
the cloister walls, where babies born

still or too soon were placed by Sisters
on pillows of placentas, to dream up
apple-blossomed earth—

masses of crimson flowers—
petals that fell, and that now fall, and
will always fall like veils.

Psalms

i.

Not frosting, slathered
promiscuously
and consumed in regret.

Rather, pure sweetness,
rounded, deliberate,
swirling over swells like

sugar over my mother's Bundt cake,
like Botticelli's Venus
floating up on her pearly shell

or Vermeer's girl with the pearl
earring: lips parted in aspiration
and fulfillment.

ii.

Don't engage with them,
they said, referring to
a clot of protesters.

Like arriving in a strange
country visited before,
or at my own strange

trial, I notice details:
a long man wrapped
in a long scarf, hand-knit

apparently by a child,
an old woman wizened
as a Kollwitz woodcut,

a young woman I recognize—
her miscarriage after miscarriage.
When our eyes meet, I want to go to her.

iii.

On our first in-person date,
the palpable galloping of his heart
overrode the distance

to my diaphragm—on a breath
is how life rides in!
Next day, I kid you not,

he de-limed my gargling
coffeemaker, then the toilet,
plumbed Romantics on my shelves,

Psalms, page 2, new stanza

Masters on my walls—scrubbed
from some stubborn scrim is how
four pearls now dissolve

in clammy pain, release
a choking hold, and I find myself
on my knees on my bathroom

floor, rehearsing birth and singing.

Illegal, except to save the life of the mother

Asked on The Morning Show to define it,
I could play their game, spin

their terms: when does life begin, end?
What qualifies as *dying*?

Or I could speak my mind: it means that some place
in Wisconsin today, a mother and child will drown.

Opioids will be easier to find than health care,
and I wouldn't blame a person for seeking

a state of feeling loved: state *personhood* laws
aren't made for mothers. I could go on.

Mothers will be confined again
like puppy-mill mothers (called *bitches* here)

to farmhouse beds, in pain, incontinence—
walls, floors of their weight-bearing bodies collapsed.

My office flooding with words, I could
defer: *My husband says I don't have to be a factory,*

*he's saving for a vasectomy, our pastor says
it's allowed, but Medicaid only pays for births....*

I could tell them how fathers, after work,
cling to a car's girthing warmth: *What mood is Mommy in?*

I could tell them how children cling to a father's
tied neck the way Old Spice clings

to an ironed shirt. Or I could answer
like any born child:

it means that all the mothers should be saved!

The Divorce

At the door, you take pains to tell
me how *good* I am, how *loved*.
I have studied the bulging veins
that map your obedient legs,
your protesting pelvic floor.
I study them now, in the niche
of your bowed neck as you confide
that you discovered my *other* work.

I have been here before—
from this day forth, you will call me
betrayer of hearts, fallen angel
of birth, and I will try in vain
to divine a bridge to your own
pounding heart. Listen: isn't that
what Brigid did, saint of poets,
midwives, nuns and children
who are abused? Wasn't Brigid
the one who released a so-called
fallen Sister from untold suffering?

Still, you could have ghosted me
or worse, and here we are
in the breach on the porch,
our children playing in the yard.

Pseudobulbar Affect

Surrealism runs through the streets.

-Gabriel García Márquez

When SCOTUS flashes across my inbox
for a second, I see SCROTUM.

It happened again, just now:
We're in deep SCROTUM focus.

It began in 2020 with the death
of RBG and has grown so bad

that today, while examining
a newborn boy, I laughed out loud—

Supreme is what it is!—
engorged and red with female

hormones coursing through his system.
Giggling even now, forgive me

for comparing it to the condition
said to have afflicted the young

wife of Gabriel Garcia Márquez,
giggling like a girl

through all the funerals.