

## THE RIND

I thought I'd be afraid at night.  
I thought I'd lay awake,  
watching headlights rise from the street  
and dance a death-waltz  
on the walls of my bedroom.  
Waiting for the doorknob to rattle,  
or footsteps to clang on the fire escape.  
But nothing climbs to my window now  
but vines, lank in the smothering heat.  
As summer wanes they put forth berries  
and the starlings flock to eat them.  
Small incessant things,  
holding the night safe in their feathers  
until the light fades and it's time  
to give the stars back to the sky  
and find somewhere to roost.  
September: she'd be turning one.  
And none of this would exist  
if she existed. The starlings, the heat,  
the leaky faucet and the books.  
The protesters in the street  
outside the clinic  
with their hand-painted signs  
couldn't touch me.  
Inside myself there was a room,  
a doorway sealed and painted over.  
And gold rings on the windowsill  
where mugs of tea would rest.  
Deep beneath the surface,  
the impenetrable rind.

MORNING

Woke to the sound of my own pulse  
like two fists pounding on the walls of my skull.  
Stumbled to the toilet and retched.  
Nothing left in my stomach to spew up,  
and the light hurt my eyes. Fell asleep again  
for who knows how long  
and woke up kneeling on the checkered tiles,  
elbows resting on the toilet seat, thinking  
how good it is to be alive  
with last night's whiskey  
soured in my mouth, with vomit caked  
on the front of my shirt, good to be alive  
with my palms scraped raw  
from some unaccountable wreck, and stinging  
when I run cool water over them.

## INHERITING THE EARTH

Pennyroyal, motherwort. Hellebore and savin.  
 Vigorous exercise, applied pressure to the abdomen,  
 and the use of instruments. Coat hangers and knitting  
 needles, curtain rods and knives. Copper wire  
 and Queen Anne's lace. Saffron and vervain.  
 Thousands of women falling down the stairs and out of trees  
 on purpose. Silphium, so essential to the Cyrenian economy  
 that they embossed its image on a coin. A nineteen-year-old  
 dying in a motel room on a bed of bloody towels. Alone.  
 She'd tried to teach herself how to do it from a secondhand  
 medical textbook. For the lucky ones, two pills:  
 mifepristone on the first day, misoprostol on the second.

The Stoics believed that the fetus was alive  
 in the way that a plant is alive—hypogeal  
 and senseless. When it exits the womb  
 and draws its first breath with its own lungs,  
 the animal spirit floods into it. Aristotle argued  
 that the male embryo acquires a soul after forty days,  
 the female after ninety. Abortion was illegal  
 because it could result in the dearth of a son,  
 the rightful heir to his father's property.

Mifepristone on the first day. Two women in white coats,  
 brisk but gentle, watched me put the pill on my tongue  
 and swallow it. Ritual sobbing in the stairwell. On the wall,  
 of all things, a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. Misoprostol  
 on the second. I sat on the couch all afternoon in sweatpants  
 and a super winged maxi pad, watching *Barbarella*:  
*Princess of the Galaxy*. I remember the pain, bracing  
 but not unbearable. And when I stood up from the toilet  
 and looked down, how the knot of dread  
 in my stomach unraveled at the sight  
 of what had left me: blood,  
 just blood,  
 and a pale clump of cells  
 no bigger than a raspberry.

CHIMERA

Only pigment, only light,  
the substance through which  
the light travels, and the optic nerve.  
The twice-inverted image  
and the interrupting limits  
and the shuttered machinations  
of the heart. Not a crescent,  
only sunlight. And the face of the moon  
half-turned. The planets only seeming  
to drift, our perception distorted  
by their magnitude.  
Like looking at the painting  
of the cliffs at Etretat  
with your forehead almost pressed to it.  
Step back and the image sharpens,  
grows ever clearer and more full,  
until one fine morning  
you step backwards over the edge of your life  
and fall. And even that an illusion.

ICON OF THE VIRGIN

An old man approached me in the station  
over breakfast and offered me this icon of the virgin.  
He said that it would protect me on my journey.  
When he was young, it must have been unseemly  
for a woman to travel such a distance alone.  
I held it in my sweaty palm, admired the places  
where the gilt had flaked off, the dull tin underneath. Later  
I strung it on a piece of thread and tied it around my throat.  
A pretty thing to believe, that it could've been charmed somehow.  
Some object to blame for my extraordinary luck.  
But now she just watches disapprovingly  
from in between my breasts  
when I undress with the curtains open.