

who are you?

A three-poem collection

Styx

there she is, Tuesday, in late evening, floating flat and incorporeal. with her eyes wide she is flying, with them shut she is swallowed. every night she trails like this, smoke softened smile and heavy hands leading her to sleep. she is standing at the river styx, speaking with the ferryman. he is trying to bite the hand that feeds he is trying to swim he is trying to be absolutely useless and she is tiptoeing to the water's edge. she is extending a flame as an olive branch. Cerberus howls out a warning, an exclamation, and a eulogy. there are so many things she has killed with no intention of resurrecting. at the bank of the river styx she is laughing out curses at Olympus. she denounced them long ago with the first inhalation when she made herself a god.

Effigy

I built an effigy of myself. It looms,
stares with expectant eyes. When I'm quiet she talks to me,
asks all the impossible questions.

I built it so long ago I don't recognize her as myself.
I tell her my accomplishments and she doesn't respond.
I ask her for providence and she stands, unwavering.

I pull out her teeth with vengeful fingers
I have to see if she bleeds like me,
if we have congruent nightmares,
if her tongue is the strongest muscle in her body.

When the house was bigger I kept an altar for her.
In the confines of the insect-ridden apartment,
I trip over her feet,
scrape my knees for her.
By now I have forgotten every prayer I wrote in her name.

At night, her silhouette commands the dark.
Her questions are persistent.
My prayers are forgotten, and in their place a mantra.
Burn her, burn her, burn her.

I make my partner hide the matches again.

VACANCY

the mouth wears a neon vacancy sign. it is less an invitation for occupants, and more a statement of identity. sleep is insinuated by the incessant buzzing of the neon tubes but there is no one to occupy the beds. the body is a place for things to visit, but never stay. the groundskeeper is home sick for days at a time. beds stay unmade lights stay out lungs are boarded shut. the missing guests speculate the secrets hidden in the sternum. someone buried the bones beneath the floorboards long ago and the dust calls for someone else to unearth them. behind the teeth of heavy curtains lies the disgusted truthfulness of solitude. sun-faded and crying, the NO TRESPASSING sign wishes for someone to disobey it and break the curse of lonesome. through the cracks in the skin of the parking lot the ferns arrive and die. the melancholy of this place is housed in the potential left untouched and forgotten. a house for anyone but a home for no one too much charity has made this place decrepit has left this body empty. VACANCY screams the buzzing, but the body chases away the guests.