

## **i. honorata**

my *lola* ends each call with the same farewell:

'be good, remember to pray'.

my goodbyes are mechanic affirmatives that don't bear truth

because i haven't been inside a church since the last time she was home.

and honesty on my lips: if she was with me, i wouldn't mind.

but the thick, hazy air; the heat and stick of waxed wooden pews against my sweaty skin;

the oversharpe sibilants hissing like knives through

old buzzing speakers as the old priest proselytizes;

a sensory nightmare, a green headache born in between my brows that only dies

when i bury my head in her stomach and press my forehead against her chest.

i want to be eight again, i want to kneel by the blankets we called a bed,

i want her hands, too cold, thin and dry, to guide mine through the rosary.

my mouth shaping the automatic 'i believe in god, the father almighty...'

before she leads us through the glorious mysteries.

her eyes were always sharp as my little fingers fumbled through the beads

hoping its colors could catch my attention longer than the monotonous red in hers.

*"I am with you all days"* she would say before making me mumble out

a slurred 'hail mary' three beats too late.

it was like suffering once, reciting words i didn't understand or believe -

promising myself in between the countdown that i could never do this again.

and like she could read the growing vow on my face, she would slap my calf

to stop my slouching and continue when my back straightened.

my ire would fade by the fourth iteration and we would settle into a

call and response, her words sure and reverent echoed by my clumsy lips.

*"Blessed are you, daughter, above all women on earth"*

*"Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee..."*

she must've known i never prayed - that my servile days bedside

contemplating the mysteries of mother mary's life were long over.

she witnessed the birth and death of my beliefs, cultivating most with her bare hands,  
but this eden fell each time i waved goodbye to her plane floating back home.

the last call i had with my *lola* was tragic in its normalcy;

her mind going through tangents i couldn't follow,

her slips and mistakes, unable to recognize my voice even after

years of choral repartee, weeks of midnight masses, and hours of passing

a worn bible between the two of us.

but this i was frightfully comfortable with, accustomed to my *lola's* wandering mind;

oceans away, i tease and correct her, she laughs – still the call ends with

'be good, remember to pray'.

and i hold onto that familiar sentence, careful and loving,

like she once cradled my face after i fell and scarred my knees,

young blood blessing her blue peas and wax plants.

when the corpse was buried, the body was stiff and wrong, an imitation of the cogent reality.

but in its hands, her rosary was red.

## ii. quiricus

they say a child martyr was perfected today,  
a reward for cracking his head across the final steps.

for his love, for his mother, for the god who let him die,  
for the men who stepped in red as they threw his body out.

but i heard his bird bones splinter and watched rigor mortis  
set among the remains of murderers and thieves.

his eyes were open and held wide, leaving brands of guilt  
to everyone who met its sightless gaze.

he laid like a small reminder as his mother sobbed with  
hooks in her sides and the tip of a sword in her collarbone.

he died in the snap of a broken neck and she died  
with a cut off choke, gurgling and begging.

one stroke and her head rolled to rest at our feet.  
we looked into her eyes and held our lips firm.

that night, there are no angels, no forces of benevolence;  
only bloodless faces and missing limbs.

we carried him with his mother's head on his chest,  
a last comfort we scarcely afforded in the morning light.

we kissed his eyelids before tucking him into the earth

and closed his mother's screaming mouth.

"good night," she said into his hair.

"goodbye," i said into his palms.

### **iii. mama, give me time - i can make more space**

mama goes to work, and i do too, with a pail and knife in hand.

i don't go into her room until they're gone,  
a dodging look over my shoulder i learned young,  
and start filling the holes in the wall.

sheetrock breaks with eighteen pounds of pressure,  
the momentum cracking drywall into neat divots,  
into patterns of dust and paint chip polka dots,  
and i've perfected the art of fixing these mistakes in less than a day.

i did this for my father too - slipped into the garage and took  
from his supply of sandpaper to perfect the look.  
it was easy then to match the grain of the wall with the shade of the paint,  
creating invisibility with tiny competent hands.

spackle would stick under my nails and dry out my fingertips,  
and i would cough dust into pillowcases before i slept.  
but it was a price paid for penny silence, gossamer peace for another week.  
only, i was happy to stop smelling old paint and ammonia.

when the nausea subsided, when my eyes stopped its paranoid track  
through the dark corners of my room,  
i would sleep with the belief that this was a good deed.  
at least, at least, at least, i fixed the break.

he isn't my father but the holes are about the same.  
and i cannot provide the same quality my mother expects,

i'm older now, my limbs are tired of the rote.

i'm sadder now, my lungs can't handle the work.

but i can't stop in the middle, not when the spackle takes an hour to dry and  
the paint won't apply, smooth and even, on an unsanded surface.

only once, i asked why.

"at least it wasn't me," she said. "at least it wasn't me."

**iv. MOON KILLER**

*A CONVERSATION I NEVER HAD WITH MY FATHER:*

i see me.

**i see you.**

but also i see you.

**yes, i do too.**

i don't want to see it.

**i've seen it since you were a child.**

even then?

**i knew it early too, saw it when you threw your tantrums, heaving rocks into the pond – your eyes were gleaming as you watched the carps struggle for their lives.**

no, that doesn't sound like me.

**and yet, i can still hear your screaming; high and whetted, digging your fingers into the flesh of unripe mangoes. ripping, ripping, ripping.**

i don't remember that.

**or maybe you wanted to forget.**

no. i would remember. i loved that mango tree, i loved eating its fruitful harvests right at the base, safe in the twisted roots. i named those carps, knew their spots and speckles better than my own face, i fed them, touched their scales, i loved them.

**your love guided them under, i buried three by your mango tree.**

you're lying to me, you're lying. i loved them, i loved them.

**you did and it wasn't enough and it was immense and it was unrestrained.  
don't you trust me?**

not really, not anymore.

**i see me again; we are like overlapping waves, back and forth, push and pull, crash and covet, returning into blue. i am my father's child, anak.**

then, he too -

**yes.**

then. me too?

**yes.**

then i will be alone. then i will be empty. then i will be barren.

**you would stop the movement of the ocean?**

i'll kill the moon. i'll kill it and the night sky will be dark, yes, but the ocean will rest while the world sleeps.



**violent.**

it's all our family knows.

**and selfish.**

i don't want to hear that from you.

**it is your birthright, passed through fingers of the blood who came before  
me, we are a banking fire. your stone must be next.**

i will die cold and stiff then, let the maggots eat my eyes and carrion birds pick through my  
chest. let the sun bleach my bones – it will be the only warmth i need.

**stubborn. i see me again.**

i see you too.

**i see my father. bullheaded. obstinate.**

i see my sisters. i see my brother. i see me.

**perhaps they will –**

you don't exist in them.

**and thus the line ends with you?**

no, it will end with you.