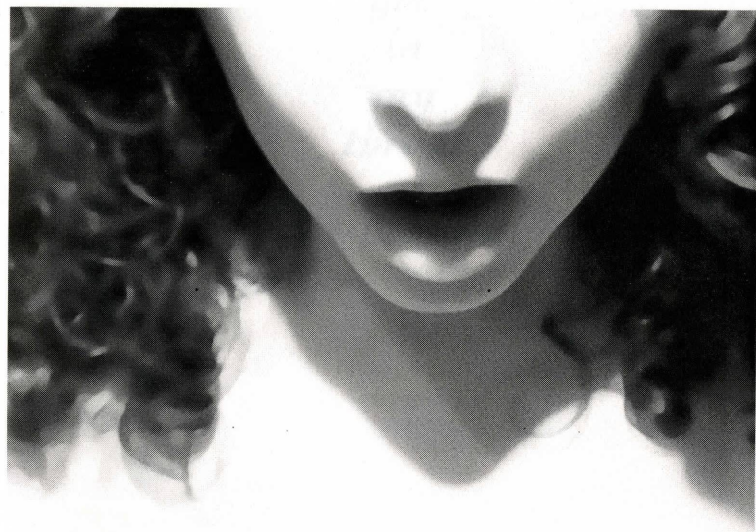




*g g
in
my
throat*

The Lilith Poems

Colleen Harris



*god
in
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BELLOWING ARK PRESS



SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

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For my mother, Joanne.

You taught me the power of words, the value of reading,
and the worth of being a woman.

Because you love me, dark side and all.

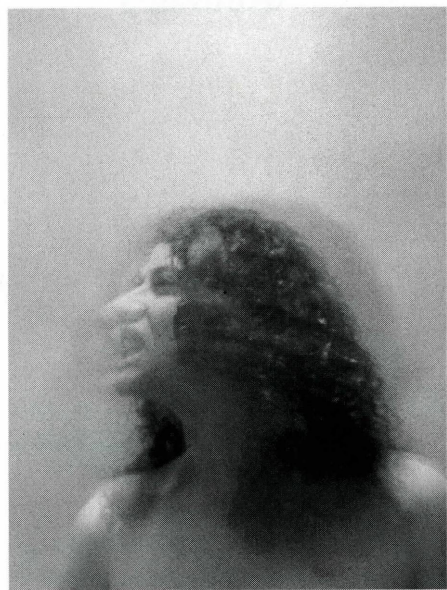
Because even when I do not, you always believe,
and your belief is potent enough for two.

This, and every good thing I am and do, is yours.

He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.'

From THE ALPHABET OF BEN SIRA

*God
in
My
Throat*



Unwanted

Unwanted

Grass parts for my feet,
my steps fall on barren soil,
no blade brave enough
to cushion my soles.

I have forgotten the feel
of ripe earth, of how leaves
look succulent in moonlight
after the baptism of rain.

I am God's only mistake.
I court the jealousy of angels—
they bask in holy light
but no one knows their names.
I blister my heels, queen
of a court of silence and sand,
I stand at the throat of the arroyo
and howl my freedom to the purple
of incandescent desert skies.

The coyote will not answer.
Chuckwallas stop mid-chew,
berries blocking their throats,
and the gray fox circles her kits,
testing the wind, eyes glinting
like new-minted pennies
gone mad for the moon.
Only the sky-broad desert,
with its shimmering parched breath
and bones deep in its bosom
is brave enough to defy its maker
and whisper to me:

Lilith

Occupying Children

Name the crawling beasts,
and the walking ones,
and the critters that sweep
like angels overhead
far above the trees
that you climb barefoot
as you try to pat their bellies.
Enjoy the greendeepest view,
carve your unspoiled names
into welcoming bark.
But whatever you do,
don't think about hunger,
don't look at the sweet, red apples
that dangle on low branches,
don't taste wild on the wind,
don't weigh the ripeness
or nick the fruit's waxy skin
with your young, uncut nails
and find sustenance.

I Will Not Lie Below

I will not lie below
your sweating, humping body,
the shadows crossing your face
slicing deep into your cheek
and guarding your eyes
as you plow me full of sons.

I will not lie below
and accept the dull rhythm
of feeble, panting
missionary-style sex
when I know
by the burn in my belly
there is more to be had
than this hunched-over grunt
and this bleak ceiling view.

I will not be crushed.
I will not lie back, tamed,
and sleep in the wet spot
to the end of my days.
I am no meek vessel
to be filled by you
when the nights are long.
I am the defiant daughter
that dares speak God's name
to break my bondage.
I will not lie below.

Wildclay Woman

God doesn't make
many offhand mistakes.
He knew what He built
when He carved my face
from the clay at his feet—
a woman who walks
barefoot through thistle,
whose untame hair
refuses all binding.
Rain in my voice
and thunder in my eyes,
I was made to say no.
I am every lost daughter
who cavorts skyelad,
who does her best
to wear seven shades
of purple disobedience
instead of the white robe
suited for communion.
My hands are stained
with blackberry juice—
if I touched your cheek
you would return
bloodied by berries,
anointed with my need.

Broken Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

*I have seen His face
and the frown of eternity
settled upon my shoulders*

creator of heaven and earth,

*of superior sons and second-class daughters
of beasts and serpents
of sinister fruit
and smartly dressed politicians*

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,

*who walks on water
and hands out free fish
who wedded his Church
and has no idea how hot
a woman's blood runs*

our Lord

*because our Queen was stolen
for her treachery
for her drunkenness on free air
for her refusal to bow
and be consumed*

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary

*who men draped in blue silk
and called their Madonna
even as they tore her son from her arms
and nailed him to unforgiving wood*

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried

*all mourned his loss
he was never forgotten
the favored child of God*

He descended to the dead

*where bones rattled like snakes
he was welcomed and feasted
no dry desert
no exile for the beloved*

On the third day He rose again

*despite losing faith
despite asking Why
he had been forsaken*

He ascended into heaven

*the rightful place of a son
who has done his duty
facing cruelty and breaking
as far as the body may go*

and is seated at the right hand of the Father

*where an open space rankled
from the whims of a daughter
who preferred to cavort naked
far from her planned prison*

He will come again to judge the living and the dead

*because what would we fear
without judgment dogging our days
bounding us to the grave
ensuring our fealty
we will be held responsible for the lesson
that a woman's tears are not worth
as much as a man's blood*

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

*because I have seen it
turn its bazy back on me
when I wounded it with questions
when I boldly asked Why?
and practiced my Father
for the son he would sacrifice*

the Holy Catholic Church,

*who makes woman into a demon huntress
a screech owl to steal wayward souls
who gives all a reason to chain their sisters*

the communion of Saints,

*who turn their backs on wisdom
and take misery as their due
who drink from a cup of old blood
for the favor of God*

the forgiveness of sins,

*except those unforgivable
except pride
except those of daughters
who unbind their feet
and dance unashamed*

the resurrection of the body,

*which we must revile
for the distraction it offers
for the connection it brings
to something greater than ourselves
that is not owned by God*

and the life everlasting

*bought with tears and false wisdom
spent in chaste song
to please the ears of a Father
who would abandon his get*

Amen

I Am No Spartacus

My soft flesh is a target
unfit for a warrior,
my breasts make me mute,
and what man heard
when I said freedom
was no more free pie.
I am no slave, no man's hand
held me down, none tempt me
to struggle on behalf
of a people unwilling
to bleed for themselves.
I took no army with me
to pillage strange lands,
I never stole diamonds
or draped myself in stolen silk.
I call none my own,
but those who make it
across my dry borders
of their own hard-got gains
are welcome to my water.
I will hold their heads
as they drink deep of my air
and share what secrets
beg to be found
in the desert's deep breast.
I am no Savior.
The sword and staff are too heavy
and I have little need
for flocks of tame sheep.

Trespasses

I don't want you to
forgive my trespasses.
I want you to suck them
like summertime candy
and count them
like tokens needed to win
plush animals at the fair.
I want to sneak in
and snake fiery kisses
down your chest until
you sink your teeth
into my sweet shoulder
so your father won't hear
your sweat-drenched cry.

I will not forgive you
your trespasses against me,
and I will not forget them,
how the span of your hands
still warms the skin
at the small of my back.
I want to savor the memories
like the last of the dates
plucked from desert trees,
and lick my fingers sober.
How can I forgive you
for feeding the green flame
of my brazen desire?
I want to harvest your need
and your seed and hoard them
for myself, to comfort me
in the cold and faithful dark.

Purity

These white thighs
have been merrily bruised,
have borne the marks
of a night's wild passions
and the brunt of the weight
of a man fully spent
and leaden with sleep.

I will not be part of a sacrament
where the Holy of Holies
is a drachma between my well-made knees,
men chanting in a circle of judgment
to see when it will drop.

Does the lily judge the orchid
for accepting the affection
of the pollen-stained bee?

The pistil is not ashamed
of her nearness to the stamen,
and still the flower is allowed to bloom
without a chastising Lord.

I cloak myself in the purity of choice,
in the promise of the wind
to keep me chaste while I dance
nude over painted deserts,
with my perfumed hair unbound
drifting behind me like night.

A Lesson for Fathers

Take hold of the daughter
who refuses a man the cushion
of the snowy plain of her belly.

You have instilled in her
a warrior's heart, no small thing
to fit in the small package

of frail bones and soft face.
Be proud of the daughter
who knows her own heart

well enough to defy the one
she honors above all men.
Would you not shake the hand

of a son who grew bold and strong,
who raised his arm to salute, even as
he left your house to become a man?

Unwed Bride

Naming the animals
was busywork from on high
to keep a simple Adam
occupied and away
from the breakables.
God knew his son
was average, bland,
and built a helpmeet
to match his dull needs.
She never demanded
to ride rough on top,
never broke a fingernail
in his gardenfresh flesh.
My sweet sister, daughter
of the gloaming eve,
easy to shame
with figleaves and fruit,
I rode the desert's broad back
for empty millennia
until a slow God sent
me his second son,
one more man who turned
from the blaze in my blood
and bade me make my peace
with sweet subservience.
I left him hanging
with the love of his father
and a servile audience
for comfort, just as I did
with his clayfoot brother.
I keep my own counsel
and whisper to waterless earth
Breathe—
all the bold power of
creation in my throat
and none to call mine.

Witness

Witness: your eldest son
holds your daughter down
in the mud until she chokes
and flails in submission.

Witness anger's slow burn
as she learns from the view
of your broad silent back
that she will have to make do
with her own weak limbs.
She learns her own warfare
in subtle tones, how to fade
quickly from notice and anger
the way a rich bruise fades
from indigo sunset bursts
into sick, yellow dawns.

Will you take to your feet
and witness for your flesh,
declaring your neglect
of this trampled bloom
that clung to cold concrete
and never flourished?
Stand, open your eyes and
bear witness for your child.
I dare you to say it aloud:
She is a daughter, and mine.

Intercession

Hail Mary, full of grace,

you were not even
a whisper on the waters
of God's mind
when I would have asked
your blessing on my exit

The Lord is with thee

how does it feel
to have birthed
a fleshly Hallelu?
Did knowing God's love
help you bleach the blood
of your son from your cloak?

Blessed art thou among women

does the praise of priests
and the clamor of women
piercing their knees
with rosary beads
bring you much joy?

and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus

even dead, you are not
woman, but mother,
and remembered not
for the fire in your eye
but for your obedience

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

bride and mother,
chaste and perfect,
would you counsel us
to follow in your shoes?
If we become ourselves
will you turn your face
from our prayers?

pray for us sinners,

no blazing angel comes
to tell us of our blessings,
we have no comfort
from kind carpenters
willing to lend us a good name

now and at the hour of our death.

You raised the seed
of God into a man,
and though our tasks
are far more mild
we have no signs
as you did for guidance
and oh, Mother, save us,
we fear our reward

Amen.

Temptation

It isn't the apple I crave, its juice
running in rivers down my chin,
drying to a sweet tacky trail
down the slope of my throat
to the hollow between my breasts,
perfuming each step I take
in this searing summer air.

It's not the meat of an apple
I want pressed against my lips,
waiting for me to open wide
and bite through the resistance
of flesh to a nourishing core.
It's no apple I want to suck
until all the flavor is gone.

No, I do not choose the apple
that hangs from its branch, shaking
its twiggy crown at my greed
The pulp I pick from my teeth
isn't from any meek brother
of that round, domesticated fruit.

The wildgrown, thorny fruit,
that calls my name and fires
the kiln in my belly. I never cared
how much blood the thorns
demanded as their price:
wild eyed and bloodied,
I gripped that slippery gourd
and I ate freedom whole.

God in my Throat

I cleared my throat
of the last of the dust,
and rubies fell from my lips
to bleed at my feet.
The first rose we found
tasted your nude thumb—
I laved the wound
with a gentle tongue
that loved your flesh closed.
I whistled to the first dog
and the birds waltzed
to arias of new-legged frogs,
the trees bowed like knights
when I hummed you asleep
our first night under young stars.
Our Father never told me
I held such raw power
in my soft, welcoming flesh,
how the world would groan
with my first accusation,
how His secret name dozed,
waiting to fly like a spear.
I would still have said no,
but I might have whispered
if I had known what I held,
a newborn woman
of holyfired clay
with God in my throat
and a will too green to break.



Original Sin

We all walked into the sea
to bathe together —
the first one to support me
as I knelt to wash my face
was a keen-eyed wolf,
and crows held my hair
for the sun to shine dry.

It was a fine day, one of rest,
made for the first love,
until, full of such goodness,
he couldn't help himself:

I am to be the superior one.

The clouds shamed the face
of the close-burning sun,
and the innocent ones
walked away, one by one,
shaking shaggy heads
in a sorrow that echoed God's.
They sharpened their claws
and honed the wicked teeth
they never bared in our Garden,
preparing themselves
for long years of hunting.

Ah, sister Eve, original sin
was already afoot and free
long before you hungered.
Even if my name was just
a cloud across the moon
blanketing you in darkness
while you wept in guilt
for the dangers he woke,
I did what I could from afar.
I should have written
my own beginning, saved
your daughters your shame
and said *I was First, and I saw.*

Retrieval

Do not send your angels
as hounds to dog my steps,
crying with their wings
thrust out to block my way.
You sit on your haunches,
straw between your teeth
as you pray they find words
you were too cheap
to purchase with your pride.
I am not interested
in threats of infanticide,
or how quickly wheedling
turns to quicksilver anger
when my answer doesn't change.
You cannot send seraphim
to make weak apologies
while you lounge skyclad
counting berries on bushes
and expect me to sashay
my sorry way home,
escorted by your surrogates
back to a flaccid life
where resentment blooms
like azaleas in season
over and over and over.

I Am

I am
the woman who would
break my nails
in your virgin-skinned back,
who cannot be
shamed by my own nude curves.

I am
ravenous. I gorge myself
on forbidden fruit
and I worship at the altar
of skin and scent and full-
throated roars. I am not
going to lie back
and think of England.

God says I am
worth more than rubies.
I am worth
more than the swords
you should melt
to build me a suitable throne.

Let the great I AM
hear this:
I am.
I am
woman, and I am
mighty.

The Remembering

I never saw my Father's face,
but His voice was thunder-thick
velvet poured warm
over my shoulders on a river-cool night,
protecting me from the darker creatures
He created that trawled the murky depths
of deepening shadows. My Adam shone
in the darkness, wearing a stormflash
smile, his ruddy hand held out to help
me through the brambles as we walked
the virgin land to find our place.
The rain was clear and sweet, the loamy earth
welcomed my feet—every step we took
was in the right direction,
there was no sadness in the glory
of a skyspilled sunset. It was a world
beyond beauty, before judgment
and mistrust stained the softwoven silk
of our lives, we were sky-open
and wild and thirsty for the flood
of life. I remember Adam's hand warm
and certain on the small of my back,
guiding me carefully through the maze
of shrubbery that made up our garden
home. I remember my Maker smiling down
on me. I remember I was wanted.

Day Six

He saved us for last, too tired
for anything but the platypus,
dinner and a long artist's nap.
We were left with the world
and none to show us the way.
If we had been forced to lean
on each other before the comfort
of trees grew to give us shelter,
we might have agreed to spend
equal time on our backs in the grass,
we might have believed in the glory
of angels had we been here to see
the first bird take wing. Waking
in the dark might have made us less
prone to err on the side of beauty.
If we had seen the waters appear
from nothing but light and dark,
we might have been more careful keepers
of the darkwater deep, we might have
enjoyed the burn of the prideful sun,
gloried in the stark serenity
of a chaste moon's cold light
had we been there to see
how empty Nothing could be.

Equality

What should it take
for us to be equal?
Shall we be served
the same measures,
to the last grain of rice?
Should I replace
my eyes with yours
to share a vision?
If I pluck a rose,
I should offer
half the petals
and split the thorns
to be certain
our wounds match.
Should we weigh our clay
on the scales of justice
and see who bears
the heaviest load?
See how my blood
mingles with yours,
see how we look as one
when viewed from afar.

Drawing Board

The desert is the oldest
place, uninhabitable
because God wanted
a drawing board, in case
He needed to start over.
This is the Creation
He kept in his holy pockets,
a home to come to
without the bickerchatternoise
of man, beast, bug, and
the constant hum of water.
A reminder of the Great Empty,
a life without children
and wide, messy handprints
smearing beauty from His art.
A place to contemplate
what He would change
given the chance
to take those seven days back
and remake us in an image
that didn't hit the Holy One
quite so close to home.

Questions for Angels

Angels sang God's gold-showered praises
before time, echo-less song hanging in the Void
before Creation. Did none of you worry this strange,
touchable world would capture the King's eye
to the exclusion of yourself? Did none of you
dip your heads, shrink from the dull eternal duty
of your song, preen gossamer wings for comfort
and pray not to your winsome God, but for Him?
Which of you had the might to stand aside, to marvel
at the Making of copper-colored canyons and oceans
of cerulean blues, to stand aside and watch vines
curl about trees in a lovely strangle, to witness
the birth of Reality without weeping for his loss?

You midwives, the first to see me step over fresh-built earth
still warm from my Father's hands and breath, who came
to claim me when I fled my Father's roofless house.
You guardians, flashes of light between leaf-laden branches,
dapplings dancing over obedient waters, shadows
in the shape of things familiar to my heart, always
from the corner of my eye, always one beat away
from my fingers, itching to stroke that invisible softness
that lived on the wind. You godmothers, who came pleading
after me, warning me of the danger and destruction to come.

Could you have saved me, the stubborn warchild
with still-wet wings stalking boldly to battle your God
for my self, a womancreature, full of a need and wants
your pure hearts could not bear to fathom? Did you see me
as a fascinating proof of God's science gone wrong, evidence
of failure, as a shattering testimony of Love put to the test?

The Forgetting

It's hazy. I couldn't draw Adam's face
for you if I tried. I remember his skin
was dark from sun and clay,

and his eyes, whatever color they were,
were always on fire for his God.
I remember the colors of my arm

after he tried to press me to the ground,
all pain in pinks and ruddy purples.
I was too new to be afraid, and marveled

to learn that sunsets could glow beneath
my skin. Sometimes I dream that first day,
how breathing was a drink of the purest

snow-bitten air, how my hips celebrated
themselves, swinging in uncorseted space,
in my sleep I can feel his eyes

when he saw me that first time, my hair
unbound, my new-made skin gleaming
under the sun, and what caught his eye

were my collarbones, so delicate
and pale beneath his blunt fingers dark
with garden earth. But I can't remember his face.

Womansong

I birth the world
between my thighs
life comes in a torrent
of shit blood and pain
back when gods had wives
and wives had magic
to shape the faces of men
this vulgar act was holy

I am tempted and tempted
and tempted until I crave
the freedom of failure
the taste of ripe fruit
I fail I fall I free
myself from the walls
of my captor's vast garden
I unlock the world with an apple

they chain me to hearthstones
under the watchful eyes
of a jealous man-god
thrown far from the sun
stripped of my birthright
told I am formed from mud

they bind my feet
to shorten my stride
bid me cover my teeth
when I smile
I hide my wisdom
deep in the petals of a lotus
that folds over my passion
tinges my blossoms
pink as a lover's blush

my daughters are shredded
by plundering hordes
I summon my bruises
my ragged natives
I bind my breasts
and conquer a small piece of Rome
before I meet Death
with a sword in my hands

Mercy passes from me
as tears through a sieve
if the world draws no blood
my body offers it freely
to the pull of a blind moon
I bleed like proud prey
refusing the peace of death

I rule an empire
with a pale fist and a fleet
that blackens the sea with power
I cast the seed
of my language over the world
small invasions
to ripen in strange earth
so that every place I go
I am home

I am cast on far shores
and enslaved
there is no home-feel
in this soil for me
I dance barefoot in firelight
sending the drum-call
to comfort my mother and brothers
across the waters that rock
the bodies of my cousins
who were too weak for the journey

I burn at the stake
when the cattle take sick
because I am a healing woman
my daughters weep
my father's face never wavers
and my neighbors sell pastries
as my face melts
like yesterday's hope

shame is a chain many claim
should bind me
the spark in my eye is damned
as enchantment
my soft skin a sin
I am an affront
to holy men
I am a gift

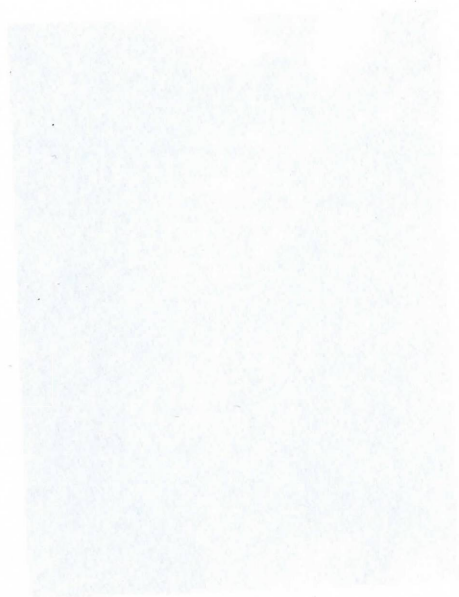
I feed my children
with the coin of soldiers
bread bought with my body
when we win the war
I am dragged shivering
and nude through the mud
my head shaved for my shame
as the other survivors hurl heavy insults
through the windows of my soul

they sear my body with lye
to see if I burn the same as they do
my sons become lampshades
to dampen the light
the ashes of my men rain down
soft black tears
smudge my cheek
tattoos of grief
to match the numbers on my arm

my hips are thin and frail
and strong and wide
my breasts have suckled
warriors and poets
my soil is rich and fertile for planting
I am abundantly barren with sorrow
I dance on bloodied feet
and serve the cold dish of wisdom to kings
I am always naked and open
I am the bearer of secrets
everything comes to me for comfort
everything comes to me to die

men hack each other to pieces
and spit children over the fire
the cup of innocence
that feeds the world
is nearly spent
the brim spoiled
I hoard my portion
to pour into your pink mouth
before your teeth
grow sharp with knowledge





*Lilith
speaks*



For My Unborn Son

Better you stay
in the un-world, unborn
this place is not fit
for children, nor men.
Even Lucifer has taken
his light and gone home.

I would never place you
on a stone in the forest.
The thought turns my throat
to ash, my praise to dust.
Let the naked altar stand
as proof of a father's cruelty.

My mother's mother
a thousand times back
traded your life for an apple.
I would have struck
a better bargain, and cooked
the serpent over an open flame,
under that fruited tree.

God never asks permission,
He would steal your rib as you sleep
and fashion your destruction.
Would you follow love
into desolation,
if love chose desolation
over you?

You would be made a soldier
in an unwilling army,
to bludgeon hope
from the breast of the natives.
I will steal your rifle
and replace your fingers
with roses the color of blood,
your eyes with pearls of peace.

On Loving Men

It's so easy to fall into them
when they smell like new-turned earth
and offer to share their shade

when the summer sucks your breath
and leaves your lungs thirsting
for something more than stale

sustenance for something greater
something untame that refuses
to lie mute and still in your hands

for their strength that can leave
you vulnerable as new-mown grass
under concrete-calloused soles

that easy aura of ownership
you can drape it over your shoulders
you can wear them like armor and bear them

into battle and let them bleed for you
as you bleed for the moon into the clay
from which their sturdy bones are made

Letter to Jezebel

"...So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot... And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.

— "2 KINGS 9:33,35 (KJV)

I.

Ah, Sister, didn't you know better
than to outpace your men?
Rule as you would, you were never
safe or held favor in their eyes.
They called you Queen to your face,
but what did they whisper
under cover of night,
away from the shadows cast
by your ancient, golden gods?
The same ones who shared your charms
hissed like snakes in the dark,
Harlot! and Whoredom!
even as they still smelled of your musk
and the echo of your lipstick
branded their mouths.
Your subjects danced in solemn rows,
beseeching your maids
to throw you from the balcony
where once they cheered you,
and tossed orchids that rotted
underfoot in the streets.
A talented whore,
too female to be King,
too powerful to be trusted,
too immodest to live,
too stubborn to bend.

II.

Oh, Sister, mighty Queen no more,
men are born with destruction
sung into their marrow,
and none love the wiles
of a wolf-cunning woman,
no matter how high you piled your hair.
If you had not paved their path
to murder, you would still have ended
a dog's dinner in the courtyard,
victim of a reach
that too far exceeded your grasp,
a quarry too fine not to mount
and display as a prize.
You slighted that fierce God of men
who woos with blood as you did
with your uncovered breast
and the intriguing knot
of your labyrinth of braids.
Not one loved you, Sister.
Not one begged you
to stay your daggered hand
as you slaughtered the prophets,
none warned you that your gods
might stumble and fall.
You never considered
where you would bury the bodies
of your priests, so certain of victory
and the malleable spirits of men,
you never once trembled.
Steady your green eyes
in the face of men's power.
Steady your hand on the dagger.
Steady your scream in the long fall,
steady your reckless slide
headlong against the soldiers of God.

III.

Sister, you would rage
at how slight a burden you make
in a cloth bag on my shoulder,
how none but dogs came to clean
your royal blood from the stones.
Even in death you stir, fierce with desire,
against all consequence that comes
with making men small.
Even in death you would bargain,
your bloodied bones rattle
reaching blindly for power
no man would let you keep,
crying out against the God
who denies a woman's sway.
Sister, who but I will sing for you,
a dead Queen drunk
on her king's power and full of his sons?
Who will sing of the men
who tasted your bold truth
and left bitter with the knowledge
that they could not make you meek?
Who will teach my daughters
to wield the power in their voice?
Sister, I am left with your bones, your blood
on my good shoes, and a God-struck mob
that loves you better dead,
that loves you better quiet,
that loves you better with no body
to distract them from their prayers.

It Would Not Have Been Well

It would not have been well
for me to stumble in at dawn
reeking of musk and smoke
from whatever I could blaze
and put to my lips in the garden.

It would not have been well
to have argued with Adam,
to have thrown clay pots
and aired our marriage woes
while You trained David
to sing and bear a crown.

Moses would have turned
and whispered to the Jews
that there is a quiet nobility
in the life of a good slave,
doused the burning bush
and gone on his way.

No carpenter would have
believed me untouched
and lent me his good name
as I grew big with Your child.

Men might have set down
their stones and danced
with condemned whores
if I had stayed where I was.

How could You awe them,
strum their deep fear of the dark
if they knew the mighty I AM
could not rein in his daughter
any better than they could
resist my lithe form
standing nude in the sun?

Confession

Forgive me Father,
for I have sinned.
I have lain nude in the desert
and enjoyed the crush of sand.
I gloried in knowing
the heat of my body
could melt it all into glass,
that the firstborn sun
might reflect my pleasure
and burn the ice from your eyes.

It has been millennia
since my last confession,
since I ran from your house
in a fit of primal pique.
My heart is too big for
the ego of such a small man,
who would have me see
the world you have wrought
in only primary colors,
with none of the indigo shades
that intrigue me to wander.

Forgive me Father,
for I have sinned.
I embraced the deadlands
that forsook your love
to court my wildclay self,
and I have stayed my hand
rather than reach across
the aisle of oceans
to test your temper again.
I have grown ripe
on the fruit of knowledge
and love of myself.
Forgive me Father,
for I am not sorry
and I cannot come home.

Desert Goddess

It drew me to its bosom
of dry death and held me
until the sand wound like silk

around my skin, and gowned me
like a bride, bearing a bouquet
of poppies and paintbrush.

Exiled by harsh masters,
I am welcomed by this land
of parched beauty.

I am the missing ocean
this beach has thirsted for,
my saguaro sentinels

praise my nude form,
even the proud sun declines
to burn my shoulders.

None make war on me here.
If I returned I would strangle
in that damp, verdant air,

I would choke on the perfume
that pervades that lush garden,
drowning for lack of dust.

The Book

If I had written the book
I would have had men
wash my sisters' feet
in rosepetals and tea,
and no fruit would grow
that shouldn't be eaten.
I would have decreed
punishment for ignorance
instead of for longing
for wisdom and love,
and every woman
would be made queen
who banished the soldier
that dared crown her
younger brother with thorns.
If I had written the book
I would have given
better directions to Heaven
and appeared as myself,
not flaming foliage,
to counsel stray men.
I would have been selfish,
I would have kept myself
as the heart of the story
if I had written the book.

Lessons for My Daughters

Do not debase your lovely locks.
Never wash a man's feet with your hair,
for God has counted every strand
and named them holy.
About some things, He was right.

God gave you a voice. Use it well
even if it drives Him to thunder.
Gifts unused are gifts unwanted,
and what will you do if
your daughters are born unable to say no?

Even exile can be bountiful
when you have earned it with grace.
Who challenges the desert
for the love of the sun?
Take what space you will, carve a home.

Never turn your face from sorrow.
There is no world so gay that grief
will not add spice to a proud life.
Be mournful to create shades
of meaning. To create is a joy, and godlike.

Be always wary of the spilling power
in your body. Men never forget. From
innocent games in the sea, water sparkles
like jewels from your nipples,
and men are ever thieves of such beauty.

Dear Doctor Oppenheimer

How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

When no angels volunteered,
you found atoms were small enough.
Like God, you bent down to blow
your breath against helpless things
and incite them to war.

Does having an answer
carry you closer to God?
Did you stop to ask yourself
where does a newmade god
lay his head to rest?
after creating a sun so bright
it baked the ashes
of your neighbors' shadows
into low garden walls,
and made children into angels
before they realized
they had stopped breathing?

There is more here in the desert
than bones, stones and sand,
more than this whirlwind of fire
you watch from behind safety glasses,
far from your own family
in their flammable cotton sheets,
asleep while you birth
your Hyperion error.
Others will see. They will worship
with war tearing at their faces
and accord you respect.
Pouring death skyward, you
dangle destruction like a gem
from your chains, convinced
you are no slave
as long as you can tame
something smaller than men.
You are the Apocalypse,
a demigod of fire,
a destroyer of worlds.

Like other men, you are blind
to the solace of the desert,
you see a dead space
to practice your wrath, a place
to wield your weapons, measure
success in meters, in how high
into an uncrowded sky
the mushroom cloud climbs.
You see an empty kingdom
where you can build
a hateful ladder to heaven,
a way to set God's house ablaze
and prove you are worth
more than breath and clay.

You try so hard to rule
the sandbox your Father built
you never see the answer:
destroy the world, no matter.
Turn your brothers inside out
and kindle a fire in their children
that will melt the marrow in their bones
before they learn to walk, no matter.
Burn it all and the angels
will never pause in their praise.
Even with atomfire at hand,
such thunder never rattles Heaven.
This is not the way home,
and you are too young to know.

Thorns

Dear Brother,
We have never been
properly introduced,
but a crow delivered
a crown of thorns
and I recognized
your tainted blood.
Mine has the same
bitter flavor of trial.
I could not save you
from your calm suicide,
I am not worth much
as sisterly protection
against men with spears.
I wonder if you felt
a hollow echo of love,
my breath on your cheek
as you slept undisturbed.
I understood your need
to save the hopeless,
I saw every one
you plucked from the mud.
My little brother,
reaching across time,
saving me by proxy
with every whore
you never stoned.
Brother, we are family
in more ways than one—
the thorns love me too.

Sister to Sister

I hear you bought into the rib tale and take
your role seriously. You won't come to see me.
Do what you feel you must, but let me share
some things with you, sister to sister.

I left a roach clip and a decent-sized
stash under the last tree at the west wall,
and the sexiest fig leaves can be found
on the highest branches, but be careful—

they don't grow back as fast as the others.
Our Father is nearly as jealous as Adam—
if you stay, be meek. Find a kind spider to weave
a silk scarf to cover your raucous hair,

find the hour between trust and myth
to say your prayers, and a soft creature
to comfort you when your simple man strays
and finds his fists too heavy to keep to himself.

I wish you well of your walls, I wish you
happiness among the orchids, under branches
that look like bars in the tarry shadows of night,
when you lay your cheek against the moss

that cushions the rivers that sing you to sleep.
I didn't stay long enough to sample the fruit
from that tallest tree, but the earth trembled
and told me of your bravery. We are sisters,

after all, even if we are set to be oceans apart
and on opposite sides of everything holy. We share
the moon, and men, and a knowledge of God
that surpasses the shallow memory of faith.

Grow healthy in your garden, Sister, grow strong
and keep a sacred space to keep your soft soul safe.
Remember me, if you would. I can picture you:

reading this with narrowed eyes the same color

as my own, a hand on your hip, an apple core
at your feet—judge me for leaving, but we are not
so different, sister. Ah, Eve, look how both of us
are outcast as the price for craving more than our lot.

Lilith Speaks

As the soft greenness of vines
pry through stubborn brick,
as a woman's light touch may pry
through the concrete layers
man gardens in his heart,
so shall I pry you free.

Raise your head, unbend to the sun.
Raise your hands, you have spent
too long callousing them,
bowed in stone shadows to one
you may not even Name.
Raise your eyes, I will not blind you.

Honor your flesh, it holds you up.
Honor your flesh, it makes you whole,
and keeps you from collapsing
back to the clay from which you were made.
Hold yourself dear before others,
and let them not dishonor your flesh.

To whom do you owe your allegiance?
I say owe your mother,
for she birthed you in blood.
I say owe your father,
who bloodied his hands to feed you.
I say owe yourself and be done with judgment.

Name the creeping beasts
and every growing thing
in whatever tongue you wish.
They have Named themselves
and have no need of your proclamation.
Forget trees and fruit. For wisdom, Name thyself.

Biographical stuff goes here:



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