Sabbath for a Dry Season

poems by Anne Marie Rooney

Acknowledgements

Parthenon West Review (2007) Sabbath for a Dry Season

Oakland Review (2007) When Miss Prolific Left

Gospel of Mary

Siphon

Bonnie and Clyde at a costume party

Oakland Review (2006) Italian Winter

Dead Red Waves

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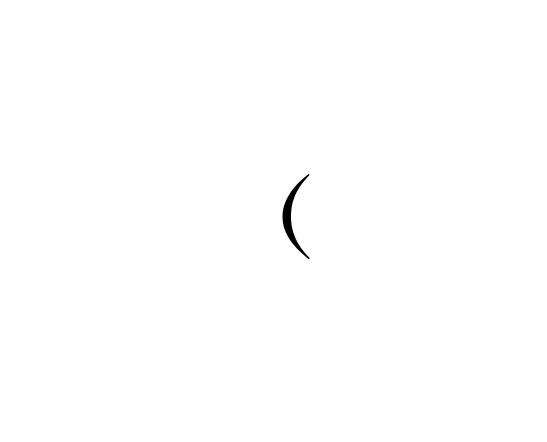
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Sabbath for a Dry Season

It was not raining, had only once rained, would never rain again. Across the river, the sun made angels appear stoic.

> In a dark wet room two people burn holes in each other. In Styx. In the middle of a dope dream and the walls are very quiet and the sky is burning

and Out There in the thin night a girl unhooks her bones

*

If Love is

strings and bark the backs of bows hitting rock ankles caught at the bottom of a bed Jupiter and his 63 moons

If faith is

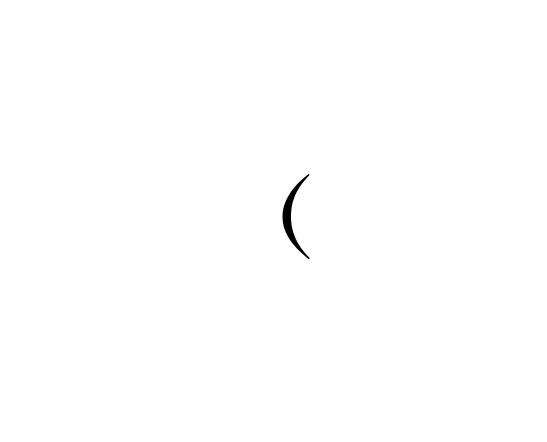
Dumb Luck. Sticky lotteries in a pick-up truck.

*

They write books about this sort of magic: It is dark forever and then it is light. Deer legs buckle into two shooting stars.

No one is bleeding behind that tree. No one is writing poems to stop

that make-believe blood.



When Miss Prolific Left

I wrote love letters in silver. Many girls loved me. In my dreams I was Dorothy, dancing with eunuchs. I was at a loss for soup ingredients. I was not alone in my listlessness. All stars closed.

I became unknown. Streetlights opened in my presence. The pavement went all gold and wobbly. I followed a cloud of smoke down a dark alley. I drowned every daddy

long legs. Mainly girls loved me. I dreamt I was Dorothy, lost in a deck. I slept on white porches where my name meant nothing. I bought an airplane.

Italian Winter

January was cold even in Italy. Rome was dry and windy but Florence snowed wet stars in my eyes. In churches my breath fell up the apse, or: I was smoking the morning I met god. The Italian boys were religious

about my hips. They plucked roses from the white ground to make a crown even an atheist could pronounce. I painted my lips red with their prayers. I knelt in piazzas and lit candles for my enemies.

Every night my boots filled with ice.

I tracked puddles into swollen confessionals.

At one such service, a swollen Brit noted my melting and bought me a gold beer, told me I would die like Galileo, swallowed

by the sky. "Where is your religion," I asked Giovanni in July. In January my hands were too cold for such piety.

On Thursday, I save the princess from her forest of suicides

She turns to the harpy starting on her thigh; says, *Stop*. The whole red river stops, does not freeze: Stops. All the wings stop beating and each navel stays sewn to its mother. With her blackest needle, she begins unstitching. The trees must be unfastened from their songs. There are no histories, only minutes. I have been saving my kisses for this princess. On Sunday we are married by the golden Caterpillar. He is smoking his smoke.

The Green Door

I had to get off that floor, the walls were dripping. "Try the green door," said one of the spies. After ten seconds of free-fall the red ground rose & when I woke opened to a sunken ballroom. A sunken chandelier hung, its prisms blinking every colour with the light of the Object's eyes. "Come closer," he whispered across the plush velvet canyon. Clouds of hands carried me across on stolen ore: Enter dust storm, statuesque. I wore stolen silk to the wedding.

Bonnie and Clyde at a costume party

A long red bullet extinguished on her forehead. A feather winking off his Stetson, dark brow sweating silver bird shot. Billy's topless, table-dancing for sand dollars. Ali pliés salted half-steps across the crystal. Andy's alone with his staplegun. Jackie and Lex, necking about nothing. Midnight is fool's gold blooming. Two robbers in drag, shooting out stem glasses. Waterfalls of costume jewelry hit the floor. The powder room fills with first wives.

Boardwalk

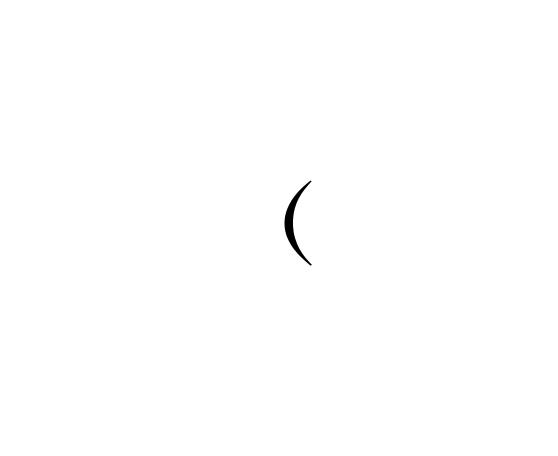
We were on such a large ship! The sky the size of Montana. You wore orange sequins. I made martinis out of men. At night we threw gull feathers at the moon. Then the birds got angry and spit their old pearls at us. Then we were flying down Central Park in a very small bus.

Dead Red Waves

I was a dancer with the Dead Red Waves. My debut took place under a waterfall awning. All the anenomes were tuned to A augmented. Notes began to dust each reed. The dunes lifted & resettled to these plumes. I assumed a southpaw stance. There was no sound but the fish whispering. From the stands, a soft silt rustling: The eaves are flooding, cried a lawless alto. Such dripping begged a solo, so I spun another dress. Such molting, stems slowing from their stalks. There was no applause but the fish kissing, but the sand growing from my mouth.

Water

Having learned very young the crabs' sidewinding purpose, I decided to go to Venice. The day before I left, my mother packed me a lunch of tuna, radish, dry crackers, two fishnet hands, red as her wet eyes were blue. When the captain asked for his gold, I had only to pull at the fingers and there, like carpenter's magic, my passage was guaranteed. We sailed six long months without sight of land. I was seasick often but shouldered it well, burping with the wenches and throwing crumbs at the gulls. In December, the sailors strung the mast with votives and hoisted me atop. Above my nausea, I ungnarled my braids and let the salty air blow like sand from a mermaid's floating breast. I loved the men, their low gruff laughs, their long nights of moonshine under the stars, their seahorse tattoos, when they'd let me take turns on their knees, listen to giddy stories of women and large fish, fall dizzy from the smell of freshly stirred whiskey in their beards. On the first day of Spring, we saw land. On the second, a lighthouse. By the third we had lowered our sails, were riding more warmth than wind. Another week passed and I learned blackjack, ate the last of the corn, said goodbye to the beards I'd called Father. Venice was more beautiful than I had dreamt. I gave my gloves to a painter and crawled down dry streets on my hands and knees.



Three Letters from Home

April in New York is thawing bodegas blooming yellow, jaune is purple-haired terriers melting the cherry blossoms green blood down the Spring of the trees grow limbs to grow against her drowning arms and the bee waves and my taken knees and because it is your street

the Hudson
across the Harlem
in Jamaica
and uptown
the reservoir
and down on Mulberry
bleeding slight
When I walk
your street
like a mother
drowning, or
grow around me
take me,
sink rivers
are new again.

Winter (i)

drives me
to a dead parking lot
and (pants off skirt up) fucks me
in the back of his car hips
parting knees trees beating
faster under orange light
under skin November stipple
of mouth on neck shadow
of breath against glass

I tell you this for its ecstasy the way he held my tits against the coldness how his cock shook and came and for after on my back looking up watching night enlarge its edge of moments hearing the traffic below us fall

Betty and Veronica

We were sort of like stars. We rode on the backs of strangers' Harleys, got to the party, mixed drinks for school boys. We told them our names were Betty and Veronica, and laughed when, in the dark of their rooms or our eyes, they confused us, blondie for jet black. Their dicks were exclamation points inside us. Later, we left them to roam supermarkets, steal kisses in the cereal aisle, shout our mothers' names into the spinach, just hoping for that blue light special to shine down.

Villanelle

Under the red scaffold I open my mouth against hers: black light, holy dirt. The city breathes

dark steam from all its corners and like cloud, summer unpleats me. Under the red scaffold, I open

her white shirt and her white breast shines away my holy dirt: the city, breath,

the stick of thighs, chlorine and fire water, dead gin sweat. Under the red scaffold I open

her like a snake opens its skin—puddle of body in gutter, some holy dirt. The city breathes

many angels but this one sighs like a virgin. Under the red scaffold I open

her life with my teeth. I am moonless sin, the clean, holy dirt the city breathes.

I am a wet sun tonight, my heat unparts seams. Under the red scaffold I open holy dirt. The city breathes.

Winter (ii)

"What does that feel like," D. asked me one day, "against your thigh?" He was not The He but A he & maybe even for a month a He but certainly not mine. His hair was too long & he bought me roses. I laughed at the ice on his forehead & held my shoulders together all the way down the west side subway line. The poodles got off & the LaGuardia kids got on. Then it was only kidney transplants heading for St. Vincent's. I was not cold but I asked for some blood. They gave me that, because it was winter, because I was hungry & opened my hands.

We had one May

Brooklyn's sky was orange & starless & every night that month I sang starry blues across her neck

... Till the moon got stuck in the tree she planted & later I touched while high & declared prophetic

Queens

We're born under Franky's moon so of course we're fast friends; meaning, you kiss me first under the "Moonstruck" diner, your hands on my earrings, my teeth on your tongue. Because it's July & the city has gone to the country & the taxis are empty & the pizza is better downtown I take you downtown & we eat Ray's on some rich guy's stoop & when we're done spit on his step & slip our plates under his door. It's like that scene in "Taxi Driver" when Bobby brings his blonde to the dirty movie & for a moment they just sit there in the dark & you can feel her discomfort & you can feel his hardness & then something breaks & they're back on the mean streets & he is pleading & behind her mean face a hooker hooks another. So we hop a freight back to Harlem, shuffle two stories up, smoke a mean line to my room in the sky. I don't love you yet, though I let you play me all the tunes, wax Romeo, sleep with the chambermaid & steal my best jewelry. It's like that scene in "King of New York" just before the hit squad busts Chris & co., when it's still diamonds & blow & blowing Cristal bubbles across some white broad's chest. We spend the weekend lying hip to hip & on Monday I sweep grit off my window, press nose to glass, imagine us on the ferry, faces pink in the wind, bellies full of beer, watching Manhattan like it's going out of style.

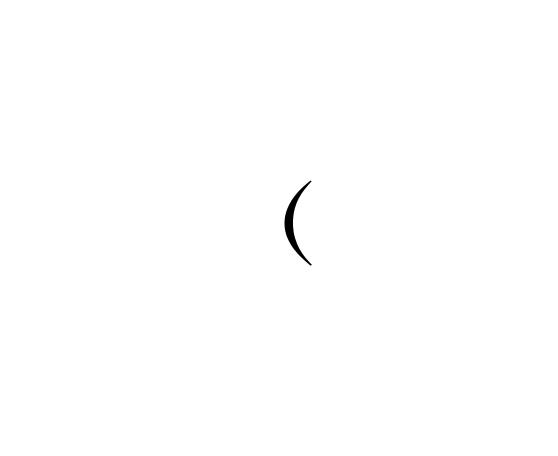
That beating

Aprils ago, I felt it, that beating on chests. Tonight the moths gather like mourners, sweat beads, scum. Yesterday's a black hole, deflated of light. *I want you to hang me* I tell a lover before marrying his wet back to the bed.

Desperate slowness, the quicksand of blues...

Not like sleeping with a scorpion, less a death rattle than the tempered weather of milk. The moon is like that, full of itself. This was spring: my paper knuckles, my sugar spoons.

An island swims beside me, its stroke green and sure. It's fate that wades unspoken—flat splashes in the thickened night. Before blackness, gold. After August, come. You can find me at the water, waiting, thrumming like a heat wave, holding my breath.



How we breathed

How for months the village smelled like burnt flesh. How the bridges shut and rot tunnelled under the river, announced itself from the steeples, spread the pigeons and stayed in the sheets. How the people stood in the street staring up. How the sky was silver cold and smoky. How shadows opened and emptied in the dead autumn air. How it was hard to breath. How we breathed those bodies.

some apocalypse

churches ablaze. past the window, the sound fur makes. taken for homeless. when i touched her cheeks i felt a sadness. hollow and heavy. the foyer empty. the horses loosed. outside it was still warming. she held me in her white arms. i went down to the water with only my gut. i dragged for miles through the salty waves. the sun blew its ash over my throat. the moon rose like a fever. i dreamt of winter. i was hungry for something. hollowed weight. some apocalypses are like wind. girls ripped open. river to the ankle. fire and whistling air.

Bird or Bust

The muscle on the door struck twelve. Seven cigarettes and one ash tray met in a dark kaleidoscope. Every faucet went off at once. Whistles were useless. Fire extinguished the city's wetter spots. The Hudson cracked like dead lightning. I was waiting for my exorcism but the moon came first.

St. Peter's

Lucia taught me to turn favors into bread. Her sister showed me how to eat it: teeth extracted like bear claws after an avalanche.

For eight months, I held their knowledge between my knees. I had only my own rosary and broke that praying for thunder.

I swallowed nothing but meat and hard confessions. I wove whole dresses from the guilt of cities.

In between moons He came to me with round gifts. He touched his hips to mine, and, speaking in tongues,

promised an end to dead idols. He left two sticky psalms on my lips:

In the morning I was immaculate; Wailing at his wall, naming my thumbs for sunken saints.

Mozart on the Quad

I wear a crown of ice to the fraternity. My dress trails wet tulle through the drifts outside. Girls unstitch clouds. Two tides higher, the harem sighs orange smoke into the night. It is time for my aria.

A thousand pricks of lightning hit the mark: Our queen to die at dawn.

The encore's always the same. One puddle. One empty gown.

Winter (iii)

This is winter, this is night, November—some kind of heavy, slow as a ribbon. So low a cover, light pressing in.
My dreams are thick, what I remember's

thicker, still. How just last December I wrote what words I could of your cold, thin face; caught just so with my last good pen, it shone, bright as an ember. How you never

say my name unless you mean it. The weight's too much, these days, the month's too slow to steep. Listen: above the bed, your hip is

moving my hip like a restless sea. The moon blooms, half of what it used to be. I hold you in my arm. It is very late.

Thirteen

Did I touch him? When I touched him, how did it feel? When cold, what caused it? Was it fear? Where did his fear live? How did it dress? What did it hold? Did I hold it? When I held it, who was I? Did I sleep? Did I eat? Did I touch him? What was it, to touch him?

At first. Like thunder. Fear. Yes. In a house of dirt and young boys who treated women unkindly. In black and leather footfalls. The edge of smoke. Close. A naked pile of bones. Like a pile of naked bones. Snow and blood fruit. Yes. Fearful.

Esther in New York

The planks of this fever are sorrow-bound I am no longer interested in milkshakes He touches my neck like a lynching When I kiss the walls I hear thunder

I do not like bathrobes or the smell of ginger I do not think winter is a thimble but Like a thumb-sized prick a globe of red And when he touches my neck I think

Of lynching how the first night
It rained he shut out the lights
And the dark bloomed like a new
Life But life was thin for a woman then

It promised very little

to you

No wonder I was sad with a name like Esther Virgin in alligator pumps Purple hair reaching towards Ether in the god hour thick With white heat In the morning Ester waterlessly bonded To nothing

Dear Mother I return to you wingless and This morning I returned mounting my nightgowns to the wind Mother New York is terrible There is too much to love tired whores Buildings sag like chrome fish without eyes I could not Mother listen I returned my wrists to the bathtub I returned the doctors to their bottles and so I return again

laughing like a pill

Two

after Rod Serling

This is the first day of the sixth year, the last war still nameless. This is

Elizabeth Montgomery and Charles Bronson in a ghost town and across a trench, rats

being born. This is no word for "Wish," only crashed maps, the sound of Death

drying. She says *pretty* in waterless vowels. He points her legs to the empty sky.

Or sooner, before letters existed, another kind of jungle is wilting

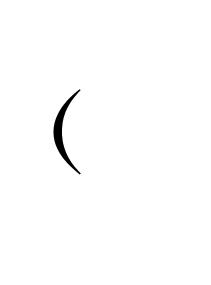
against the sun. Or these are the songs that will be written, that these lips were thirsty, and so

made rain. That combat was bloodless. That this has been a love story, two

lonely people, just a man and a woman, three guns, at High Noon, glistening.

The end of the world (Bennington, VT)

I hunt fireflies. July cocked on my thigh, an envelope of hair sewn into the hem. It is raining on Venus, while across the state a woman with red braids explains absence of Hope to her ankle.



Thorn Botanical

The names of plants which can cause abortion were preserved orally and in old books, mostly written and published by men...

We are left to piece together the clues they left behind...

(Sister Zeus)

Angelica

wore her pain like a kimono, bled through the evening's cool silk slices. Temperature fell when she danced down throats. Angelica was the first daughter, the salt and the quicksilver.

Black Cohosh

was the lantern burning at midnight, awake with her fever of sea and sour milk.
Black took hits off the brass lobes of doorknobs, shook the sex from tango and the hope from sin.

Blue

knew how to lift welts from skin, wore this duty like a nun.

Cotton Root

did not want to be a mother alone in the sun.

Evening Primrose

came wrapped in a watery sleep. She sighed veils of blue. Her killing grew famous for its softness.

Mugwort

spun dreams from a damp smoke. Her purple tunic was sheered from a nightmare's downy back. Its fear-skin buttons shone like radios.

Nutmeg

cured boredom with her swift pink tongue.

Papaya

was drunk. Her ink leaked to a puddle beside the well.

Parsley

opened her leaves to the hot green earth.

Pennyroyal

hurt.

Tansy

was the seer, encanting warnings in the white morning after. Tansy sang a fast magic, shot from the gut, drained rivers for their fish eyes, laughed under the red moon.

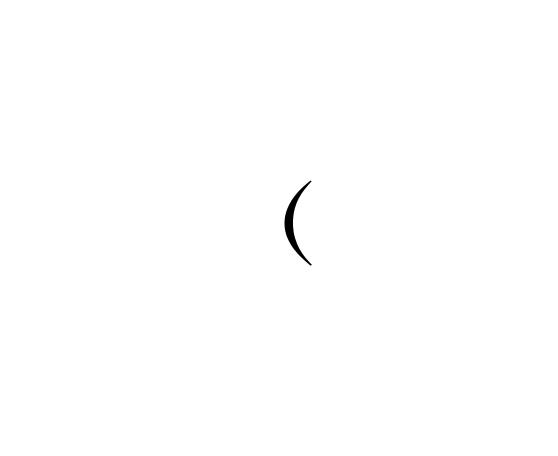
Silphium

was a heavy weed, the matriarch, smelling of money and the rounded bluntness of cunt.

Wild Carrot

she stamped it out.

was quiet, the nervous runt. She dug through the darkness with her nose and sharp hands. She worked slowly, was often forgotten. Carrot did not like the way her toes curled up. When it was bee season she wore white. When she found the living



Hecate: Apocrypha

Crows I have come to your winter with cry unthroated and cunt of snow

I have come with apples and spider wood

I have come with the heart of horses

Day rubs fire to the shoulder and at night drops below death

I have written of death and candles and women's mouths Now it is white and crows I am done

I said love is a giving and I mean music

When Calliope is tired she comes to me and I hold her I kiss her neck

Crows the rivers no longer move me I no longer bleed or live for toothaches

Once I leeched milk from the spine of an owl Bore fire for fire's sake Slept with kings and wild sheep

That ink is gone too

Crows your feathers are black lungs
I have given up curses and the tongue of witches

Having nursed the moon I give it up Having become curse I give it up

Now it is white and my hazel is spent

Where are the waves you promised Where are my dreams rough as magic

Dejanira: Arsis

He was not a god under a weary star weaving light I saw him wearing a white dress from the moon's round spin

I'd heard of his wandering queen, how he mounted her breast and the Amazon stamped with gold seed, like a trophy

I didn't care I was a princess I never cried for his hardness in black boots for a lion

Well I held by the neck his angel face

that bastard I told him I'd take his father's blood

I made him dance stuck with leeches spit like on the grave I made him a woman

Sun spent over waters white skirts he squatted I lifted and laughed:

There between thighs, the small still kicking

his pink sad world

Io: Aegis

I lived like a hymn: quick and wailing, no goddess but orbit, kept clear by gravity, head bent

to a glassy river. He was a living brush, the red soil rolling, a steerpulled sun, the sound of heat

opening. I loved nothing but catching fish in my hands so I did not love him. Still, when he held my face

I felt a fondness. It was summer, thick, black, thunderous, like wild boar we were careless, wearing

clouds between our eyes and calling the wide sky golden. When it was light we stayed in the water. When it was dark

I took him wholly. And when his wife turned the sea I was not sorry but like the moon, awake in its

sheath, stung across oceans, I shone and shone and alone in the night I still shine my silver on their marriage bed.

Kore: Apologia

I came to sex brave and young.
I thought kissing was what crickets
did so I let him. Back then
I was covered in stings. Nights
were rivers and golden. My knees
were always bleeding. He put his mouth
on mine and opened it. He tasted
like chlorine and sea glass and I
let him. I was biting drunk in the tall
grass, opening fireflies and being
blonde. He lifted my dress and my lips
and he lifted my legs. I remember the half
moon and the hum of electricity. I was the belly
of a piano, the way he touched me.

Demeter:	Agon
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I go walking to the earth's corners.

I drain each leaf of its harpy pulse.

I build looms of air.

I take my sorrow and bury it.

(In the womb (of the world (there is a sound (like punishment

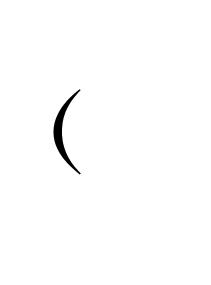
Psyche: Aphesis

How he kept me was this. Sealed. Under the rivers of dreaming. His cave was inhabited by nothing. When he kissed me I saw only monsters. One night wax dropped from my eyes to his and there, in the cloudy light, a steepled beauty. So he left me for blindness. Outside, the blood sun froze. Mountains rolled and angels fell. I shucked fruit under the swollen sky. I glued ribs to harder rock. An armless wind rubbed pepper between my eyes and tried with music to move me. Then the muses wrapped their presents in moss and knelt like prayers at my base. Spring's shade promised new bloom. When it touched me I cried sweet earth

Clio my sleepless nights

Errato the water of dusk

How I loved him was this. A wound to the hips, some bitter juice. My hands since fed to wilder women. My pleasure unspeakable din.



Gloria

Because I was not in love. Because I prayed with a hard ink. Because when I thought I was pregnant I drank a tea of black fever. Because every night I fingered the gun under my pillow. Because every morning my mouth tasted like motor oil. Because I threw ice down my throat. Because I liked to watch the moon collapse. Because when it snowed I fell to angels and when it rained I need no one. Because I bet all my teeth on two aces. Because I slept in red lace and spit up blood roses. Because the Bible burned when it saw me. Because I thanked no one for my name.

Grace

Chil∂ remember night an∂ ∂ay... (Didache 4)

You move fast from this temple, you fast

First concerning the cup

with a living water.

A running water. This is a story forever moving. The morning fresh and opening. You drink cold water and if there is no cold water then warm. These mountains bore you. These crags and crones. You are a new sea, you rock and raise fierceness. Soon you will strum wind. Fast and deep. The torch song is an old one. Soft and dark. Leave this. You are the fox woods. You are the teeth of deer. You rise with puddles of salmon. You come with boatloads of lost clouds.

And concerning the broken bread

Tell the stories before praying. Tell the stories you were told. Let your prayers come emptied of light. Wash your body in a beautiful river. For the drum of your body is beautiful.

For your grief in the morning is beautiful.

For you are the witness, the first and the last. Your flesh is your own. Your voice is the sound of many waters. You are jasper and carnelian,

the smell of white stone. You are olive oil and wine, your face is shining. This morning is many colors.

Receive them.

Holy of holies. Be received.

As this bread was scattered in the mountains

As you walked the towers with hands of water.
As the sky smelled of flour.
For the clouds turned to grey and then to black.
As the night rose from the sea.
As the sea turned to nectar.
For the evening came braided with a trued water.
For you drank and it filled your throat with fire.
For you were the glory and forgiveness and you moved with a terrible thunder.
For you lay in the lightning in the day's last hour.
For the sky fell upon your broken face like a fist.
For when they asked for your name, you said "This."

Let no one eat or drink

You stroked a quiet music and you became music.
You became quiet.
You came with your teeth and watered throat and you gave these too. Gently the night fell around you.
Gently the stars filled with a humming milk.
You lifted buckets from the tallest hill. Gently your mouth bloated with whiteness.
Gently you slicked your silver tongue across the moon.

of your eucharist

Of the birds and their crying. Of a mother's sound, broken from her first. Listen: You are of the guiltless skin. The unstitched. Of the river before it drowns its name. You are the trunk bending to that river. You are the nest of steeping moss. Rest. You come from the water and you return. That river will drown under another morning. Later. This storm is sewn of a darker light. A bruise of spring fruit. One golden trumpet. One swollen sky.

Gospel of Mary

I have been waiting under the glowing cypress. I have grown swollen again. I have only the name you gave me and at night I speak it to the sky. Ave. Some moons find me drunk with the music of prayer. In the morning I rub honey into my ankles and climb your mountain so high I can no longer hear. One year I passed whole days just dancing. Then a spider made her home in my teeth and for thirty-eight months I did not speak. I coughed red fern, lay with tigers, swallowed thorn, glazed my spine in fire. Still, those eggs opened inside of me. Ave, I slept alone in your valley of terrible winds. Ave, you made me into cactus, I was sexless, Ave, dusted and saved. I wore your stories around my waist. When men put their hands on my knees, Ave, I didn't know what to do with my knees, Ave, I wanted your hands back. You sowed me with light and left before I knew the curse my womb would become. My skin would unbind itself. Ave. I would bury my tongue in veils. Ave. I would hold my lips to a telescope until my mouth filled with stars and then I would sing to you. Ave.

Ave.

Ave.

Ave.

Siphon

1.

Above the mesa, rolling tumbleweed, above adobe, the sun's cracked corona, above sand, the sword-shaped yucca, past midnight, New Mexico. For years clouds have pressed the desert into a low defeat: the dryness unfettered, dirty, esteemed.

2.

Green needles. Sky of endless swimming pools. Anatomy of piñon. The arroyo, a woman, filling and unfilling.

3.

Old people come here to die. Silent night, then: an urgent echo, mouths howling for water. By breakfast, still no rain. Lunch is burnt, is dried fruit, is planted in compost to steep. Like the unsteady flatness of just-rolled dough, the desert's borders come unhemmed. This is Mercury rising. This is flour everywhere.

You can walk miles for water or you can drive sixty-six like a ghost rider. Either way, the road slips to—not dirt, not sand, something courser—creole, the country's garbled nearing, the musk of bleeding light. There are no clouds in the desert, only white. Chlorine writes its name in the hung air.

5.

To dusk: grit bone ground to nothingness, a loneliness too flooded to be called lonely. The brush, sun-singed, is humming—flowering—a desperate beat. So the desert sings itself a murder ballad. It is growing darker. Peyote bulbs thrash & alight.

6.

Under the waxy agave, a tarantula waits for her other. Unstung, unlifted, she sucks fruit until she is too drunk to fly. Crickets tick. Coyote bray against the cooling June night. She waits here, under the gutted flower, moon the colour of rose, desert sky full of insects.

There is a sleepy logic to the desert: the lowered vanishing point, a black storm simmering. Four years ago I drove to New Mexico with a baby in my belly and the bible in my throat. I left them there, with the round wet moon, with the spiders' woven cradles, without looking back.