The Service

A Life of the Virgin Mary
In God's house
I stood
in the temple
my body
to be sown
like a field
in furrows
of earth.

In God's house
I bent
asking
the ground
tasting
the acrid
sweepings
of slaughter.

Shall I
be opened
by this
grace
received
and greeted
with
a kiss?

Jerusalem
reaps
a harvest
of rue
counts
the signs
for new
arrivals
scans
billboards
above
houses.
On the steps
of the city
a blind man
watches.

To God's house
I brought her
temple
to temple
a nubile
line
drawing
eyes.

For God's house
I reared her
the temple's
consent
a servant
with hair
wrapped
in cloth.

Run
to God's house
the vaulted
estate.

I am
emptied
of weight
and sweetness.
II

For this
my trousseau
they send
twelve rods
from which
I kiss
the one
that flowers.

The fountain
took me
wellspring
and envoy
with cold
water
brought
to bed.

Apple
without star
her fruit
is seed-less.

Bending
doubled
we saw her
kneel

Twelve rods
for the years
and lines
of blood.

It tinkled
playing
a caper
of sound
tell them
she has lain
in daylight
with the dirt.

Come
take this
sign
of love
unwrapping
the cloth
to fold
and fall.

We saw her
rise
smash
the jars

lead me
down
to the place
by the sea
The light
quickened
I rose
and grew
water
mixing
earth
and clay.

make me
the mother
of the many
I was shown.
stepping
on shards
of broken
pitchers.

Tell them
she sings
laughing
destroying.
III

I watch the flower bloom and seed.

I hear events like mine uncanny.

I rise and mount the aging ass.

In God's house the old man does not believe.

this favour that comes without receipt.

Counts the days for words to loosen.

this grace that comes to wreck and ravage.

On the steps the blind man cocks an ear.

Cousin wait he stops and slows.

Stop feel the kick and yield.

cousin the two still inside.

running like horses down a track.

they trade head-starts grow and shrink.

Stop feel my life laboured.

for the sake of yours the younger one.
They have gone to the house of bread

left the nephew to guard the shop.

Outside he sits and draws in sawdust

circles lines sceptres orbs

a crown and cloak spear and sword.

How will they reckon that prognosis?

Cousin I lay crouched saw water

and blood parting my body saw him

twist free a warm weight at my side.

In the lean-to I slept in recompense for grace.

Am I restored made myself again?

I am disgorged of the sweet weight.

In cities glory travels faster than truth

in streets stories increase details

because here things need mending.

Small things like sheep-pens big things like kingdoms.

On roads traders pick at scars

selling swapping giving without mercy.
Carried
to God’s house
scourge
to temple

seedless
apple
without
star.

The first
wound
cut
with care

first
and last
scoring
of oaths.

His black eyes
bulge
the mouth
howls.

On the steps
the blind man
rises
to stand.

Jerusalem
is broken
rent
by a cry

a name
peeling
behind
billboards.

On the steps
the blind man
fumbles
and sings

for field
and fruit
the streets
of Jerusalem.

Let him
assume
the sweet
weight

regardless
grace
that wrecks
to save.

Received
by God’s house
destruction
by temple.

Go
tie the birds
lover’s nest
with a string.

They wait
with silver
to redeem
his rights

to settle
accounts
now
in advance.

Go
tell them
the name
I heard

the name
that suckles
my aching
breasts.
VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For this our sake the streets are quiet</th>
<th>The sands retrace pathways stories</th>
<th>There goes Rachel large again</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the house of bread disgorged emptied</td>
<td>how once lead out lead in we grew</td>
<td>how quickly restored by another comfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Rachel mourns her reaching child.</td>
<td>how once straying fleeing we shrank.</td>
<td>The city is sated Jerusalem rebuilds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For this our sake black eyes accuse.</td>
<td>The desert rears him he crawls and walks</td>
<td>the temple gleams the steps shine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come hide us keep us out of sight</td>
<td>running to doors of rural shrines</td>
<td>Each day knives cut a small piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lead us to flee this requisite affair.</td>
<td>I lift him to the heads of foreign gods.</td>
<td>wearing the steel bit by bit to the bone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mother, why build nests so near to heaven?

In God's house birds weave through rafters

pigeons in niches rustling their feathers

a cooing that jumbles the muttered prayers.

Mother, to whom do they speak and sing?

The birds do not stop their swooping to listen.

In God's house he sits the temple's teacher speaking and cocking his ear for answers.

Three days living on butcher's offcuts he stays and hides leaves us walking.

Come, turn the beasts again to Jerusalem to the gates and steps of polished stone.

Mother, why build like men not birds?

At night the house was cold and dark the moon playing behind the clouds.

Mother why did you rush ahead?

I told them our home is beyond the vaults

I told them your stories as if they were mine.
Behind a veil she sits and smiles
her hand tied to another's wrist.
I would touch that knot and bless it
borrow some of its life for mine
this mother who bears the stone with the flesh
who laughs and loves and pours her vintage.

Where is my vagabond dazzling the crowd?
Scans and flicks his eyes away
Turning he speaks dazzling the crowd?

her hand tied
tied
to another's
wrists.

I would touch
touch
that knot
and bless it

turning one thing into another
a knack he picked up in foreign places.

Always late but still surrounded by chatter
Do you force me to act is this
magic a play do you not see?

Turning he speaks like blades his words
turn and leave the breath short.

Do you force me to act is this
Run my son and mask your face

there are so many others to choose.
To the place
of skulls
I ran
and saw
that point
where death
is not
ashamed.

In the place
of skulls
I stood
below
watched
the body
buckle
and bend.

He is
disgorged
of water
and blood
it spilled
and made
the earth
a clay.

The city
watches
holds
her breath
that point
counts
the cries
and mans
her gates.

On half-built
sites
awaiting
orders
tarps
flaps
in a strong
breeze.

The steps
of Jerusalem
are emptied
and quiet
its pigeons
and soldiers
asleep
in the streets.

Like blades
his words
turn
and speak.

But what
am I
without
his weight
forced
to walk
into
a lightness
forced
to leave
his body
behind?

Mother
look
I found you
another
son better
than I
a temper
less short.
Where is my son?
He crawls walks

trips
tries
a straight line

staggers falls
laughs in the dirt.

Where is my son?
Faint fluttering

quickening leap
of my consent
talking pointing
black eyes on mine.

They come in groups of two or three
all told (but one) they stand and sing
for the heap of rags a widow breathing
They fade and slump and cease and snore
resting on a smaller heap of rags.

There he turns and speaks leaves
the breath short the life shorter.
Mother why did you stay behind?
I went ahead to another house

grey and lined face to the wall.

tell them it was just as you said.
XI

In God's house
I stand
my body
a temple
closed
to the seed
like a sated
furrow.

In God's house
I rise
touching
the vaults
my fingers
brushing
a ribbed
arch.

I am
resolved
ravaged
by strength
every inch
of skin
covered
in kisses.

The city
above
decks
her streets
prepares
her guards
for this
arrival.

Sceptres
and orbs
a crown
of stars
nightly
glinting
ghosts
of peace

To God's house
I bring
the temple's
living
my arms
an open
frame
of love.

For God's house
they pray
assent
of the temple

hair tied
and hidden
wrapped
in cloth.

Run
derpose
the guards
steal back

Her arms
a gesture
sketched
embrace.

the sweet
weight
of your
consent.

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