Fiction and Poetry

The Service
A Life of the Virgin Mary

by Simone Kotva
I

In God’s house
I stood
in the temple
my body
to be sown
like a field
in furrows
of earth.

Jerusalem
reaps
a harvest
of rue

to be sown
counts
the signs
for new
arrivals

tasting
the acrid
sweepings
of slaughter.

On the steps
of the city
a blind man
watches.

For certain
cause
to leave
this post

received
and greeted
with
a kiss?

To God’s house
I brought her
temple
to temple

Jerusalem
reaps
a nubile
line
drawing
eyes.

scans
billboards
above
houses.

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.

he marks
the fields
ploughed
and sown.

I am
emptied
of weight
and sweetness.
II

For this my trousseau they send twelve rods from which I kiss the one that flowers. Twelve rods for the years and lines of blood. Come take this sign lead me down to the place by the sea make me the mother of the many I was shown.

The fountain took me wellspring and envoy with cold water brought to bed. It tinkled playing a caper of sound unwrapping the cloth to fold and fall. The light quickened I rose and grew stepping on shards of broken pitchers. Apple without star her fruit is seed-less.

Bending doubled we saw her kneel tell them she has lain in daylight with the dirt. We saw her rise smash the jars. Tell them she sings laughing destroying.
III

I watch the flower bloom and seed petal by leaf for a green fruit.

In God’s house the old man does not believe this favour that comes without receipt.

I hear events like mine uncanny. Counts the days for words to loosen.

I rise and mount the aging hinny. Counts this grace that comes to wreck and ravage.

the sun beating down the road. On the steps the blind man cocks an ear.

Cousin wait he stops and slows. listens for a high pitch and tenor.

Stop feel the kick and yield cousin the two still inside.

Counts running like horses down a track.

Stop feel my life laboured for the sake of yours the younger one.
IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They have gone to the house of bread</th>
<th>Cousin I lay crouched saw water</th>
<th>In cities glory travels faster than truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>left the nephew to guard the shop.</td>
<td>and blood parting my body saw him</td>
<td>in streets stories increase details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside he sits and draws in sawdust</td>
<td>twist free a warm weight at my side.</td>
<td>because here things need mending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circles lines sceptres orbs</td>
<td>In the lean-to I slept in recompense for grace.</td>
<td>Small things like sheep-pens big things like kingdoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a crown and cloak spear and sword.</td>
<td>Am I restored made myself again?</td>
<td>On roads traders pick at scars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will they reckon that prognosis?</td>
<td>I am diseorged of the sweet weight.</td>
<td>selling swapping giving without mercy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carried to God’s house</th>
<th>Jerusalem is broken</th>
<th>Received by God’s house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scourge</td>
<td>rent</td>
<td>destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to temple</td>
<td>by a cry</td>
<td>by temple.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| seedless apple without star. | a name peeling behind billboards. | Go tie the birds lover’s nest with a string. |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The first wound cut with care</th>
<th>On the steps the blind man fumbles and sings</th>
<th>They wait with silver to redeem his rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first and last scoring of oaths.</td>
<td>for field and fruit the streets of Jerusalem.</td>
<td>to settle accounts now in advance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>His black eyes bulge the mouth howls.</th>
<th>Let him assume the sweet weight</th>
<th>Go tell them the name I heard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| On the steps the blind man rises to stand. | regardless grace that wrecks to save. | the name that suckles my aching breasts. |
VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For this our sake</th>
<th>The sands retrace</th>
<th>There goes Rachel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the streets are quiet</td>
<td>pathways stories</td>
<td>large again</td>
</tr>
<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>
VII

Mother, why build nests so near to heaven?

In God’s house he sits the temple’s teacher

Mother, why build like men not birds?

In God’s house speaking and cocking his ear for answers.

At night the house was cold and dark

pigeons speaking through rafters

Three days living on butcher’s offcuts

and and cocking for answers.

Mother, why build like men not birds?

The birds do not stop their swooping to listen.

In God’s house bird wise to the temple’s teacher

At night the house was cold and dark

the moon playing behind the clouds.

Three days living on butcher’s offcuts

he stays and hides leaves us walking.

Mother, why build like men not birds?

Come, turn the beasts again to Jerusalem

I told them our home is beyond the vaults

The birds do not stop their swooping to listen.

I told them your stories as if they were mine.
VIII

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? Turning he speaks like blades his words

her hand tied to another’s wrist. Seans and flicks his eyes away

I would touch that knot and bless it turning one thing into another a knack he picked up in foreign places.

Do you force me to act is this magic a play do you not see?

Always late but still surrounded by chatter

Run my son and mask your face there are so many others to choose.
IX

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 her breath that counts the cries and mans her gates. In the place of skulls the city holds the body and bends. He is disgorged of water and blood it spilled and made the earth a clay.

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Where is my son?
He crawls walks trips falls laughs in the dirt.
trips tries a straight line stagers falls laughs in the dirt.
They come in groups of two or three all told (but one) they stand and sing for the heap of rags a widow breathing.
Where is my son? Faint fluttering quickening leap of my consent talking pointing black eyes on mine.
There he turns and speaks he turns short the life shorter. Mother why did you stay behind?
I went ahead to another house ribbed vaults without roof.
They fade and slump and cease and snore resting on a smaller heap of rags. 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.

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

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

For God’s house
they pray
assent
of the temple

my fingers
brushing
a ribbed
arch.

I am
resolved
ravaged
by strength

Run
depose
steal back

Her arms
a gesture
sketched
embrace.

To God’s house
I bring
the temple’s
living

my arms
an open
frame
of love.

to the seed
like a sated
furrow.

To God’s house
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