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Jeanne D'Arc Thinks of Her Virginity

The calf won't get born.
The cow moans and Father

unbends the leg
stuck in her flesh.

I pretend not to know
that he told my brothers

to drown me
if I left.

A child is heavy on the feet,
clinging with

an open mouth. A virgin
can prophesy for God, but once

a mother,
nothing else.

Isabelle D'Arc: To My Daughter Jeanne

When you broke the marriage contract
you were my lanky girl.
I dressed your torso by the fire,
picked grasses off your hair.
I hear your humming while I work
as if you left it in the timbers of our home.
The shifting of the heat and cold
coax it out and you are here.
I had to hold your father back.
He dreamed you left with soldiers
for the war. I put my hands on him,
held in our loss: You were not ours.
We all knew what you'd seen.
We'd seen it too: village burnt, cattle gone.

The Bishops Turn on Jeanne D'Arc

It was not vanity—
the certainty in my voice.

The sword, the horse—
three of us moving

without a seam. Two years,
the sweetness of a path

always sure. God
in my ear.

*The English out,
the English out.*

Jeanne D'Arc's Triolet

I do not know A from B.
More than the sword,
the lilies sown on ivory.
I can't tell A or B.
Fringed with silk, a field
where our Lord holds the world.
I can't read A or B.
I loved my banner more.

Jeanne D'Arc: In My Cell

A French clerk
writes down my words—not all.

Miles away
my mother spins new wool for spring.

They bleed my side. I'm sick
with fish the warden sent.

I would not tell
if my saints no longer comfort me

and shackled to the wall at night
I dream in silence of Lorraine.

The fields are wide. I hold
my left hand in

my right and kiss
my fingers like a mother.

Midwife

The afterbirth was red and worn.
Then I sewed her
and she was empty.
Nearby the baby was curled
and breathing—with nothing—
severed. Eyes not seeing
and light is much more
than we want. Much more
abrasive than we knew.
All of us began in a room.
From water. From the silk and iron.
What room is she?
Walls that go
when they hold no one.

Girl at the Midwife's Door

She ran to say we're ready—the men
have left the house. I uncrossed my arms
from my sleeping chest. The stars were low.
A sheepdog scratched beneath the door—
to be where we were. As if our panting
for winter's end was here, condensed
into a single hour, hungry for the violent
spikes that push through earth and shake hard dirt.
I breathed with the mother, with the dog's pushing paw.
Like touch against a pod of seeds: the silk gives way inside.

Limbo: Witch Trial, 1580

I wait with unsaved babies. Threads lit,
unlit. Thieves. Faltering.
Whispered pronouns beneath the door.
Everyone else rises.
Everyone else is already there
through the blackhole,
in the sweet frame.
I said His name
but at arm's length.
I sinned.
They found the marks.
How familiar: I won't belong
to the face that made me.
I won't belong by living.

Glass Eye at the Witch Trial: 1580

The torturer's glass eye
wanders as I speak,

twice the wrongs
to find.

The circle of a childhood burn
is pale with age below my wrist:

A Mark. The twisting of griefs
is a snapping rag.

The eye is off-kilter,
knows no humeur,

to forgive it is to forgive
a thing—a rock

that opened your knee, the table edge
that put a hole in your head.

Witch Trial 1580: The Cat

A delay each time they speak
my given name:
Marguerite, Marguerite.

I'm called The Cat,
I say. Law in the blood,
stopped by a thread.

Law in the breasts before
they break with watermilk,
the silver food.

God's law twisted,
God's law of small gums.
They asked

about the little tooth,
tiny grey that broke and dropped
into the dirt. Why did I have it in a tin?

For seventeen years she slept
against my thighs, purred on my chest
when a child died.

The Castaway: Moby Dick Chapter 93

The sea keeps his body up
and his mind
spills a liquid way
into the dark
and his face with the blue
where the earth falls off
where God is not—only faceless
angels slither, gilled.

Worth less than the whale lost

but born. To a mother, casket-dark.
He woke to who was there.
No one. Who was ripped
from him. A boy. Or who the sea.
Why must he invisible
his feet turned white
too white. Like sugar
in water, receding

Worth less than the whale lost

but born and took up space.
A hand, pinprick.
Next, I.

The Right Whale's Head Speaks

O Captor, my captor,
I'm fastened to the boat

and hands dive in my satin mouth.
The cutting-in. I am two parts.

My body over there.
My head a sulking sphinx,

a shoe-shape, an obedient.
Pour me out

to light, to burn,
to flicker in a human

eye. Animal blink,
the quiet code. I give

the riddled answer
of a thing. The wind

vibrates the blinds
that line my mouth: a hundred

bones with fringe
and useless now.