

the arm in the case

my one true blooming blue bruise. when I fell as a girl under the cypress tree and papa scooped me up, saying Barbara, stop crying, you're fine, you're a girl who will build three windows into a tower, but not yet, not now, that's years in the future, that's when you leave me. saying, sweet girl, come into our house.

Dioscorus, her father, locked
her away in a Tower but she put in :
three windows : three for the Trinity :
in so doing defies : Dioscorus, the
pagan : Barbara, put away in a tower :
to be kept safe :
she peels off her body :
leaves : and goes away

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why I did it, maybe out of boredom, to feel something, or to leave, anywhere at all. to push the cypress tree all the way to the bottom of whatever vein my body drew. blue chalk. papery skin. I didn't think all bodies were one. my head slamming toward the shelf, then my head stopped from slamming against the shelf. through his power. my head held by force. not gently. floating above itself. the way a single incident can stand in for an entire history. why. skin peels away from a soft pink scab.

(without actually talking about this) : watching
: in the kitchen : the color of the table :
put your eyes here : all the bones

in our bodies : maybe we don't talk about it but I can tell
: when I left, I really *left*, I moved far away :
he wants to but also *not this specifically* : we're conversing in
purely general terms : why we're not closer
: I'm always close and that's a real problem :
perhaps we can
order out tonight and bring the steamy
dishes *home* but is this
still *home* because : it's never only about one place :
: or one leaving, having left :
about all of us, always, breathing fire : licks of
history, hagiography,
the source of : who remains

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my one true body painted bright, pigmented. the medieval recreation of the folds of my
green dress falling from the medieval recreation of my waist.

I arc : move somewhere else : I look at art,
old with gilt : safety is this room in my space :
I've got all this bone and skin : the dermatologist
is kind to me about my scars : maybe I
live in a tiny room : I wear a green
dress, a golden crown : she's a saint or every
woman : leaving and returning :
or a saint or just myself : I below : peering from
the third window of her tower : I above : I
spinning : DNA and narrative :
ever-dividing : I watch :
her horizon : he runs up a
cresting hill

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why I look at unknown old art and why I buy the book later in the museum shop. I think it's because I want to touch trajectory. this may be the first stop toward understanding how to survive being a daughter. we get along now. he said that one time in the kitchen that it's a pity we're not closer. *closer*. at the Cloister of Saint Agnes in Prague, my then-husband wants to take a picture of the reliquary but photos aren't allowed. that's the bone of Saint Barbara. an arm in a case. the case all jewels and paint. my brother and I get along now too. siblings can protect each other. Saint Barbara didn't have brothers or sisters and may not have existed at all. I may not exist either.

there were only supposed to be two windows : but Barbara
made three to represent the Trinity : she eats her
golden crown : prays away her father's : swinging
sword : prayer opens walls : the way every
other thing that happens doesn't : the third window as this
pane in her stomach : look, now she's in a mountain
gorge : fresh air here : the third window as the path to
the gorge : opening inside her :
widening out : I arc

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my one true taste in this moment is papa feeding me dates to comfort me, then my teeth chewing the dates. years before I left, or, floated away. but falling under the cypress tree is tripping on roots, then fingering the gash in my skirt, crying a bit, then papa brushing off blood and dirt where the skin tore. having ripped away from the frame of my body. leaving. I like my head on its neck where it is. but that's the future, papa says. that's years away. don't leave, he says. here, he says. have another date. a very specific

sweetness floods my tongue. to be alive. caution overwhelms my mouth, knowing and staying.

I don't know how to be a daughter : never did :
or if it's worth it to work the body toward : remaining
: in this arcane : century I'm every
: every daughter instead

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the body as anti-documentary. leaving and returning and leaving again. I can't eat after looking at bones. bones like fishing hooks, catching us, holding us to one place. in Prague, the vegetarian option is fried cheese with tartar sauce, a side of French fries. we drive here from Bonn on the E5. my bones leaving one place with this body. moving five times in the last six years. my shifting in space as one bruise spreading blue but this time on the inside. I don't belong anywhere. I always have an accent. the body, a constant story of departure and arrival. muscles in our faces, speaking languages not our own. the fried cheese doesn't sit right in my stomach but I don't think the upset is just because of bones but also because of leaving, then coming to this fried cheese but definitely also bones. reliquaries disgust me. little cabinets full of fish hooks, pulling. but the body insists. stay. stay here with me. tell me everything you remember. this is me being very specific about one sort of never having seen a cypress tree. art is a mirror and a long, old tower. towers keep us in a space. often, there's a way out through an underground tunnel. find the tunnel. under rock weight. in damp. damp makes my leaving ache.

because I am my own : mystery play :
how to stay : *that's* the mystery

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my one true example is maybe not being here at all but meaning something about leaving behind this lightning all the same. if I don't exist, neither does the future in which papa swings his sword and cuts off my head. then gets struck dead while running down a hill dotted with trees. zig-zag, running down. but he wasn't the tallest point. he was chosen. had arrived at the end of his journey. what I mean about lightning is that the sky has yellow-white fingers and I am several fingers. at once. the future tells me how ancient this leaving is. electricity doesn't cut down bad people. not on purpose. you know, may god strike him down. but I'm no longer leaving on my knees, hands folded in prayer, waiting for a sword to strike. no I'm bursting through the edge of a tower. I've become the right-here.

in the mystery play, there's : a story arc :
swelling with story : I arc :
tortured but the torches : wouldn't burn
her paper fine skin : so, flame leaves back : I
mention
this now : because some-
times when pain comes, there exists : that's
what all those
fine red slits : were about, faded into
fine white : scars
: but the dermatologist was kind : it's okay
to be kind : I swallow this
fire, not knowing how to
: be okay : or how to : he sends me

these weird, chatty emails
about my nieces, my nephews :
(his grandkids) : that's how
you do it, I guess : neutral topics, time
limits : that's how we
: stay now :
how we try to be : kind

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my one true sheer halo with the solid gold rim isn't leaving. my one true blood spilling
ruby on my willowy neck isn't coming.

painting as anti-
documentary : we all know :
I arc : anecdotal evidence
more powerful than statistical
evidence : how I fall behind : the
picture really
gets
in our heads :

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my one true appearance in *Altarpiece with the Execution of St Barbara, called the St Barbara
Altarpiece from Osek*. Monogrammist IW (northern Bohemia, after 1546). the green dress
I come to appears to be velvet. no more sweet, chewy dates or being comforted, but this
time our moving into the scene is us on this hill rushing out of the scene into this
kitchen table scenario. getting sad about other things. sometimes I have to. my one true
sadness is me not allowing myself to feel sad about what I'm actually sad about. he very
awkwardly leaving near the kitchen table arriving here in this kitchen. saying what a
pity we're not closer. *remain here*. then we order stir fry from the take-out menu. months

later, in Prague, I buy the book in the museum gift shop. for all those glossy photos of paintings. I always want to take something with me.

I don't like power : so I spill some power out of my
hands : maybe I don't make the decision right away :
the stir fry was salty : can we all
leave up and down
these hills through our lightning : zig zag : zag
zig : or if that tower could arrive : that tower
over there, near the
horizon : rising out of the
firmament
: the stir fry was leaving for
tall glasses of water : I don't like
being
overpowered

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also, getting through this. this anti-documentary of anecdotes. in this grove. that walnut tree in the front yard where I tripped over a root and skinned my knees.

[: staying here with that, as if in a grove :]

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no more fadings are ever not coming. no more true appearances. no more leaving. end stop. leaving proves impossible. sometimes you have to stay. what marks papa in several paintings as the man who cuts off my head are his raised arm and his hovering sword. I don't want to ruin my meal, but I want to know whose arm that is in the reliquary case. the same way I want to come alive. to be real. well, as myself, not as

someone else. it's not a whole arm in the case. not flesh, but the bone. the same way I
always want to know where I am. as a person arriving into this space.

arriving : the next
room,
sitting down on the
museum bench
under the long wooden
ceiling : arriving :
you're right, the
stir-fry was salty

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salt is this mineral taking us back to the body, proven by sweat, that we're staying.

under the long,
wooden ceiling : one of
gazillions of
daughters : time,
throughout
history and space : here,
here :
always leaving and remaining
in my green dress