

## 1. JOAN-TANGLE

The burning morning. It was I who brought the message of the crown to my king. I was the angel and there was no other. My terror of being burnt. Better to be beheaded seven times. Difficult to know a person who stands alone in her history. Saying *her, she* because she called herself la Pucelle, the Maid. But maybe now, things would be different. Maybe now, a different word. Or, not. Impossible to know. In that moment though. To be so bereft. So utterly abandoned. Not to be ransomed, although under normal circumstances, a prisoner of her rank. Captain. However she felt, she walked straight toward her burning. Wouldn't wear the clothes. The women's clothes. Recanted the recantation. A teenager before there were teenagers, she left home shortly after a broken engagement. Who, according to her squire, ate very little and never menstruated. The body at times such a trap. To shed limbs, flesh, muscle, bone altogether. But what is, after all, a body in body-history-light? Within this chorus rising up? How I couldn't tell anyone about the tight collar of *she* until after I got divorced, but then how *they* doesn't fit either because part of my living through a world's conception of me has been me deciding that world has no right to conceive. She / *they*. She / they. This reflects. My own history of rubbing up against what a wor/l/d is and then opposing it with how I would prefer wor/l/d to be. I don't know if that makes sense. By which I mean, I don't know if *I* make sense. That Sunday at the brewery. Meeting the first person I was with post-divorce who I am still with to this day. Telling him as off-handedly as I could: *I don't pretend to understand gender, but had non-binary existed as a term while I was going through puberty, that might have been useful to me*. How good it felt to relay this fact. For this fact to be absorbed and accepted.

There in the early summer heat with our sweaty-glassed grapefruit IPAs, getting to know each other. Later that same evening, he told me about the octopus he knew as a child and that was also a good story. So much so that I can no longer bring myself to eat octopus. Even though there was a really good sale at the market where I work and I have a few recipes, NOPE, I walked right by. I like when people make allowances for each other in this way. How it's one hundred percent fine with him that I'm never going to dress up in garters because though my gender may be a series of corridors, doors swinging open into rooms both large and small, furnished in a variety of ways, not a single one of those rooms contains garters. Instead, I'm mostly peeling my body out of boxer briefs and sports bras. Okay. A lot to unpack at this moment. She was the angel and there was no other. I have always been the angel and there has never been another. The thing about voices, I actually heard them as if coming from outside, but they originated from a place inside me all the same. Scaring me, haunting me, but sometimes also telling me what I needed to hear right then. Like, what if the thing with Joan was: GIRL RUN GRAB THAT SWORD GET OUT OF TOWN YOUR FAMILY SUCKS YOU DON'T WANT TO MARRY THAT GUY TAKE THE CROWN TO YOUR KING BLOW THIS BACKWATER POPSTAND DOMREMY. For good and for ill. That my clean body, never yet defiled, must this day be burnt and turn to ashes. Ha! Ha! Then that's when she said the part about preferring to be beheaded seven times. The record we have of her in her own words. The thing about my voices, they were hard to bear but have also saved my life. How once I almost ran straight into flame except for the voice stopping me. Warm, eerie timbre carrying all the pull of the world. Yes. The velvet of the world. Telling me: Where I was, where I'd been, but also all

the places I still might have left to go. All those years ago. *No. No. No.* Cajoling me: Step back from the shallow plane of muffled gray shadow you're running to, a place devoid of light and air. That *no*, yanking me back. Getting me to this moment in the here-now of this-place. And to a different question altogether. What is a world anyways? More truths pile up. A number of centuries later, long past the last day of her life. As *world* crumbles all around me to the point that I'm half making contingency plans, a road trip out of the city to somewhere safe when the civil war breaks out, robbing pharmacies along the way for my meds. In the meantime, slowly weaning down. The process going better than expected. Now I spray blue cleanser on the mirror and wipe the smooth glass surface clean with a paper towel. How a person is also always doing something with their body. And bring me the cross and hold it up level with my eyes until I am dead. Jesus, Jesus! In our contemporary iteration. Soon, soon! Now, now! But instead of our bodies burning, the world burns, but then what is a world if not a collection of bodies? Doing things to other bodies. Because that's it, isn't it? Nobody lives in a vacuum, and that's how I arrived here. At the current state of affairs. Whatever that is by the time I finish cleaning this apartment and stop composing this other world in my head. The way time runs out when we're in a hurry –

[ *Wishing* ]

What she found in her

: ravaged : countryside :

could not abandon herself : insistence as proof

: our sense of Joan, true-ing herself into oblivion