THREE POEMS BY KATHLEEN McCracken

Note to Chris

The skeleton in my closet jostles her bones together, offers her sister-skin for your night-light.

A rictus floats in the kitchen mirror. Framed in a wimple of discontent I recognise the familiar violet irises.

Like Kafka’s hunger artist I am insatiable, rapacious but simply cannot find the right food, saintlike keep waiting for a voice to say ‘you have fasted long enough and are forgiven’

It is dark here. Cloistered with the abandoned nests of night-birds I write to you letters from the damp

and I want to slide somehow out of myself romantically rise to you through its intensifying, into imagined cruelty, your eyeballs burning and surely burning lungs and viscera, where we could be fire swallowers, my mouth finally blistered to your mouth, where you might even begin to peel off sections of your basted skin, and lay them sizzling across me.

Arm, belly, breast, why you’d be my armour then, your tactile harm closing around me, I can smell incisions, flesh going up in steam, in sweetness, like god food, prophecying —

HEATHER SPEARS

Sauna*

So warm in here I lie low; one arm at rest up the grainy wood reaches into deliberate, real heat where my fingers smoke like candles. Tough, you’re grinning, up in the thick of it, legs swinging off the platform, blurred demon. From your body sweat leaks, runs down in big, loose drops that spread along my sides warm as let wounds.

Infernal surgeon, you’re untouchable in the cowl of sulphurous heat —

no good. You’ll have to come down. Closeup, your eyes lose focus, the lines around your mouth define some region I have not yet travelled on; you’re soaking, as if you were turned inside out. Nothing deified here. This kind of light is only found internally, its scope is the scarred heart’s wet, moving chambers, looked at not with proper wonder but pryingly, by the wrong eyes.

* Editor’s Note: When we first published this poem in our “Nordic Women” issue (Vol. 9, No. 2), p. 110, we omitted the last 8 lines. The poem appears here in its entirety. Our apologies to the author.