

disciple

If I was anything, I was a piece of chewed gum stuck under a church pew— knocked around by a mouth I so wished to claim as mine, your fingerprints seared into my skin. If your lips spoke sermons, mine spoke prayers. I'd clasped my hands together, rivers of my palm forming tiny tunnels you'd seemed to have slipped out of, and prayed to your statue. That ideation of love, of salvation, standing above me with that adoring gaze, eyes downturned like looking upon a plunging star. I'd pressed my sore, broken knees into the redwood ground as if the bruises and circular dents would show you the proof of my worthy love. If I was anything, I was caught in a web of faith woven from rosaries and blood.

I might as well have climbed upon the altar. If Christ was hung for blasphemy then let me lie at his feet in solidarity, for the obscenity of my reckless devotion. Feet slit on stained glass of saints and foes, I walked to you. Three days tangled in ribbon and ash and you fell from heaven with that wicked grin, that boyish arrogance. You didn't so much *fall* as you did *flee*, but even then I couldn't have merely watched if I wanted to, couldn't have grasped the simple concept of *you left*. Like the true devotee I am, I followed.

There was a time within those three impetuous dusks that I thought *this was it*. I thought love was devotion. I thought love was to be consumed so whole that conviction would be the only guiding light I needed. I thought love was to look at you and know that I'd been saved, that I was desirable, that I was enough. And I thought I'd found that eternal warmth, small but as stark as a tealight candle. Your touch was a whisper of flame that gave me a taste of destruction; your gaze was a sacrificial knife, tucked away after a single use for safekeeping. I'd lain in your arms and thought *you'd chosen me!* Out of all the other pilgrims, trekking across oceans and deserts to find deliverance, you'd plucked me from the clutch. Out of all the other lovers, even the tender Greeks and feverous Romans, you'd taken my hand and kissed each knuckle like a secret. If I'd clutched at you and thought I'd never let go, you took that meaning between your teeth and swallowed it.

Then you left, and I only fell. I tumbled down and down until you found shelter and I was left stripped bare. It was easy to pray, to cry to you, a guiding hand on my nape like a collar. If you were a saint, I was a follower, tilting a wet nose to the sky as salt tears dripped to you below. The ignorant saint, an uncaring god, a watcher, a glarer, a seer: many things, but never mine. You were always too large to cup in my hands, and I, a follower, a devotee— grasping at fraying tendrils of kisses you tossed away, tearing at them until the threads told me all about you— if anything, was always too scrappy for you to consider holy.