

Excerpts from The Book of Saints

Shane Rhodes

St. D'Accord, Baby

Giotto puts down his pen. He has had enough today. The Campanile has proved more difficult than he ever imagined. It is 1336, a year before his death, and he knows it. Soon the cathedral will be handed off to Talenti as it was handed to him from Arnolfo. The Campanile will be finished, he is sure, by Pisano. He thinks himself an unfortunate man of details; few things will take his name but he thinks that, yes, maybe, someday, he will be attached to the Campanile adding filler to a 1966 guidebook purchased by a priest's brother and given by the priest (beside a catalogue advertising Monk Brand Famous Incense ["Your incense has worked wonders! Ever since changing brands, my congregation has not once complained of nausea!"]) to me. But it is late in the morning, 1966, middle of the Vietnam War, and seven years before my birth. The man who writes guide books is fretful. It is summer and soon everything will again become art and life will be unmaintainable. He jots a note in his scribbler: *The rain was as cold as tears from Felice*. He tries to sleep but it is so late, so late. On the table beside him, there is a guidebook to Florence in which there are no women.

St. Just This One Last Time, I Promise

Emily Dickinson was fascinated by the moment before death. As a child, her parents found it necessary to send her away for a month "after Emily had been permitted to witness for a few moments, at her own insistence, the approaching death of a girl of her own age." About James D. Clark, she writes his brother in 1883: "I hope he was able to speak with you in his closing moment ... I am eager to know all you may tell me of those final Days." She

writes William S. Jackson soon after the death of his wife: “if you will tell me a very little of her Life’s close?” Little is written of the circumstances of her own death—sister-in-law finding the body and later the boxes of poems beneath her bed. A friend tells me of waking from sleep unable to move. She felt a presence on the bed beside her. Then a shadow on the ceiling pushed towards the open window. As it left, she could stir again. She could cry out. But she lay there, silent, sweat pooling on her body.

St. Tea in the Morning is so Civilized

Miniature croissants the size of curled toes. Marmalade. Her grandmother spoke little English and I spoke little French. We knew each other in the civil distance between *Bonjour* and *Bien*. Montreal is thesaurus for the lonely. Men in shirtsleeves leaning out of windows, smoke curdling like cream in coffee in the sunlight. Behind her apartment, men with walkers sat beside a pond with wing-clipped swans. As she started to lose her mind, she saw the neighbours upstairs sinking through the windows. I remember those days, coming and going, always to find my need in a different pose of ease. The muses will come but with faces blank as tv screens.

St. Stolen Time

Glenn Gould, rough coughs, snorts, humms, articulations on the edge of sense. If we were
listening to opera, the baritone would be singing his grocery list,
tenderly. It reminds me
of hearing Mozart at Notre Dame the summer I moved to
Montreal to study French. Halfway
through, a woman fainted—moved more by heat and pregnancy
than passion—and four men
rose to drag her out. The mound of her belly floating
down the centre isle, dark patches of

sweat on her dress. I remember little of what was
 played that night, yet the peripheries are
 unforgettable. I sat beside a woman I would sleep with a
 year later and never hear from
 again. I remember how even music at the time bombarded my
 head like a foreign
 language. And maybe the message is, listening to Gould,
 that its not all about music but
 about the potential of silence. How rests are written
 as notes with their own octaves and
 harmonics and this is memory's space. The lungs
 and mind can't stop, they say, even if
 they wanted to but we, we can at least pause in our gambling.
 It is as if somebody has
 gotten into the music and keeps the door open and we
 see the engine room of a great machine.
 It is about panic about pain. I am preparing you
 for death, the music whispers, here and
 here and here and here.

*There and there and there and there. Nothing is so good that we
 cannot sadden it.*

Ste. No, This is Not The Bat Cave

At the entrance to the cave, Eurydice half-smiles for the cameras,
 fixing her hair. "I don't know what happened," she says, grimacing
 from the tv screen, "but the next thing I know, I turn around and
 he's not there." She cries a little showing the bruise on her arm,
 "He was always like that, strung out to the far edges. You know,
 loving him was like renting land." She pauses to breathe and
 wipes mascara from her cheek.

"I'm real sorry," she says, looking at her watch, "but
 I have to leave now. Apparently, the quick brown fox is again
 jumping over the lazy dog and I'm expected to do something."

She mutters something under her breath then turns back to the microphone, “The godly are stretched to the limit out here. I haven’t slept in three days—look at me,” she crowds her face toward the camera, “I could carry hell under these eyes.”

“But one last thing,” she says, half turning away, “those rumours, ignore them. I still miss him and his fancy plucking, like any girl would.”

St. The End of This Section

I think of you every day, Felice, as I descend to sleep and words break down into the sounds I knew before anyone taught me meaning. If you disintegrate fast enough into slumber, you will become the parts of Sappho we are missing. If you fall there because of a woman, you will become the parts of Sappho we already have. Clear crisp lines of May. It is the start of summer and in poems even the boy whores wear flowers, but out there they don’t. Only needle-tracked arms and dirty jeans. There is nothing left of the night now but me and them and silence. Red corpse of the night. Red branches of dogwood and rain sluiced paths, actually. Browning grasses. People walk by my window and the darkness they disappear into, gladly.