

“At Fourteen in Rome . . .”

If ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love.

— Song of Songs 5:8

At fourteen in Rome from Tennessee, I practiced
the twist and heavy droop of grapes.

In line for dinner, I slid, a steady weight, to the floor.

Yes, readers, you could say: dehydration, August, unconscious
only for a moment.

But I say: swoon,

drafting my practice of desire,

flinging myself into flowery glades.

After all, we had walked that day

from the center of the city

to the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla and back.

Oh, I was surely white as a sheet.

As treatment: dinner, aqua minerale, Coca-Cola,

and then to the gelateria across the square.

All the fuss was sweet fruit to my taste.

The shop served rose.

I had not known it was a flavor.

I had allowed only a flower, a color, a scent.

The world was breaking open.

My heart ran, unbound, a hart across the steps of my ribs.

I looked to see if the shop served cedar or fir.

In San Terenzo, early in Mary Shelley’s fifth pregnancy,
little red foxes ran down her legs.

There would have been so much blood that I cannot see it
though my mind returns to skirt its far spread edges.

Too many poems describe such stains as a rose — a wide, new
bloom on the sheets.

This is ridiculous.

Its petals have limits.

Its thorns do no more than what you can lick off the tip of your
finger.

Kudzu, maybe.

A single tendril, but then in a moment it has covered the Subaru

Justy on blocks, smothered
the hillside, killed everything it covered,
and made no wine.

The doctor was delayed.

Her friends tried vinegar massages, brandy, and eau de cologne.

Percy demanded ice.

The others did not believe, but he lifted Mary up
and placed her in a tub of it

till she was but the frost of heaven.

Her journal says he used the ice *unsparingly*;

that he was the only one who saved her,

without mercy, without restraint.

Mary and Percy Shelley weren't even getting along,
but still kept getting pregnant.

That can happen.

We want all kinds of things.

So, readers, can you tell? Can you guess?

Marry me.

Yes, may this be my shotgun honeymoon on the Continent.

My blood, my busy bee, thick as if from a broken honeycomb.

I will dangle, a damsel in distress.

I will offer no helpful tightening, no resistance.

I want to feel the lift, the heave.

I will cover myself in red as with a garment.

I will stretch my insides out, unhide my heavens.

I do not want to be spared.

Did they not love this lily among thorns?

Did they not love the apple tree among the trees of the wood,
the wood for burning?

I want to be spoiled, to be ruined.

Did it not bear its fruit? Its fine taste? Its red fire?