

## Jewess

i.

Don't call me Jewess. Call me hellfire and fish hooks,  
the moon as it violets the earth with its blood-crescent shadow,

papered with envelopes and wheat. Call me pale skins  
stretched into back-lit sails. Call me opium, milk-rose, a comet's

saliva-trail spitting the blue globe. Call me abacus. Call me  
the bespoke noose you wind in loops around your fingers,

the tangerine light that shimmies through vertical blinds  
as evening sidles in steady advance toward you, the burnished apple's

high-scarlet gloss, the gullet of a windpipe's hollow  
moan. Call me newsreel, hollyhock, sundial, astrolabe,

the peacock's shimmering cyanide blues and gangrene greens,  
the rusted latch from the outhouse door that claws open

and warms to your calloused clasps, a sunset of iodine  
swelling across the border of a wound.

ii.

Jewess, the feminine *-ess*, the *s* doubled: two snakes, brandished  
like the iron daggers in each hand of the Minoan goddess.

Add a final *e* to make *Jewesse*, if you like, for an extra Chaucerian  
besmearing. The *Jewesse* is insolent as Lilith, seditious as Eve:

murky, dark, hairy, hook-nosed, her boulder breasts leaking  
venom and ink. She throws the evil eye, turning men

into writhing eels. Between her legs, the mouth of the bear's cave,  
musky as wintered sleep, matted, slick and deadly as the excretions

of iridescent insects, lurking for their prey. Beneath her crude  
leather shoes, worn from treading the stone paths around peasants'

cottages and hexing them, devil's horn bunions extrude from the sides  
of her feet. She crows for blood, aches for tissue and tendon.

She, not the Jew himself, is the true threat, the real enemy:  
dream-thief, genius of treason, corrupter of Gentile children,

the forger, the smuggler. Pain-bringer, wart-giver. Assassin of crops,  
beguiler of horses. She-wolf. Bulbous, vicious destroyer of villages,

greedy temptress of husbands. Beware her crooked teeth,  
her spindly legs, her manly arms, her mustachioed upper lip,

the stubs of dry grass poking from her wobbly chin. Her raucous  
dethroning of popes and kings, stripping veils from laws and guilt

from lust. She will do everything you have feared  
you wanted, everything you have wanted to fear.

iii.

Hang me on your boudoir wall in a frame of nautilus and bone.  
Shadow-box me for your velvet-lined safe.

Take me in your philandering arms. It's a small world  
reflected in the reflecting-pool sky of your monocle.

On your command, we will tarantella, glaze our lips with crimson wax.  
Beneath your gaze, my hands grow heavy with the weight

of rubies bedecking my willow-switch fingers.  
Watch me now as I machete my own hair, lavish my skin

with tattoos, peel away strips of language you have adhered  
to my body in the drape of night. When you ask me my name,

where I come from, I will unhook my tongue, unfurl the snow-sheathed  
steppes rippling in my mind's phantasmagoria, and say to you:

I was born on a jutting arm extending over the volcano's mouth  
and raised in the succulent cumulus of heaven.

## Flâneuse

*The female club-lounger, the flâneuse of St. James Street, latchkey in pocket and eyeglasses on the nose, remains a creature of the imagination.*

—Amy Levy, British poet, essayist, and novelist, 1888

East Broadway, 1907. Hush, do you hear the frogs' tenor chorus?  
A pantomime squeezes a tiny accordion.  
Three carousing drunks share a single pair of pants.

Little girl selling paper flowers for ladies' hats,  
you have your face on wrong. Quick! No one is looking!  
Take it off and put it on again.

A newsboy fishes for his childhood off the Williamsburg Bridge.  
It comes up with a half-drowned swan, a soggy pair  
of bloomers, a human thumb with a red lacquered nail.

My wet hair comes undone, wraps tentacles around men  
it hauls to me at my bidding. Each one weeps  
when I set him free. Can you blame me for breaking curfew?

I come home to Aunt Lena's house on Rodney Street  
after twirling all night in a storm of lightning and wine,  
brush the twigs and crushed diamonds from my rosy feet.

What's this behind my ear? An ancient book  
of spells for the intoxication of prospective suitors?  
Two tender, egg-size bumps swell beneath my scalp,

equal distance from my part's white furrow.  
In the dark, I feel their soft protrusions,  
two velvet-fuzzed antlers, slowly beginning to sprout.

## Landscape With Woman's Neck and Phoenix Feathers, Paris, 1910

I dream of crow skulls, cat skulls, child-angels grinning eyeless  
in the Catacombs. I traverse too many bridges to name,  
spider-vein streets craning their necks for a glimpse

the lines I scribble in a jotter's rain-spat pages.  
Amadeo's studio, Rue Caulaincourt, Montmartre:  
I disrobe behind a Japanese screen, dismounting

the palomino on whose bare back I gallop naked  
but for my hair's necessary tumbling veil. Goose-fleshed  
I shiver beneath the eyes of watchful nudes,

women with Doric columns for necks, peephole eyes.  
faces elongated into wooden masks, mirrors in which  
the artist looks but only sees himself. The purity of imagined

sweet-bitter dark. Knowing I am a Jewess, he speaks  
of his boyhood days in *la sinagoga* in Livorno,  
the sacred Talmudic texts his ancestors studied, kosher wine

from local vineyards – much like my ancestors, I tell him,  
but Amadeo can't hear from within his shroud of oil paint  
and turpentine, absinthe, hashish, cloying bouquet

of smut and rose. I am a phoenix many men have tried to mount  
on their walls, grind my bones into a powder they'll drink  
for potency in vain. I arrange my limbs on the divan

countless women have straddled before me, skewered  
by his bayonet gaze. Brushstrokes berate  
a drape of canvas, a hailstorm of pelting pigment,

furious as wings of a ghost-crow flapping  
the bars of its ghost-cage, its eyeless sockets so dark  
no one can see it is begging to be loved.