

Justin Vicari

From *Astarte My Goddess, Astarte My Ghost: Sonnets*

What hubris to imagine her,
goddess Astarte, waiting for *you*
like a never-kissed wallflower
clutching the promise of an egg-blue

brooch. Can you picture Astarte
girly, naïve, without the armor
she hammered from bronze, that Carta
she wrested from kings of lore?

She will not wait, no -- but send
psychic vibe of a radio hit, mix-tape
of songs whose auras rend

your spine and crush your nape
in quandaries of paranoid,
untranslatable entendres of the void.

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A regimented life becomes the dead.
The living can never compete with their
sober order and diet, their head-
less deficit of pleasure and of despair.

I have been blob, I have been bone,
poking for ingress and egress aggressive,
with soul I imagined cased in chrome,
but mulched changes like moth rot. Sieve

survives the boiled broth poured through
its mesh. I could not make myself stone
enough to negate what I knew I knew:

calm is death, peace hell. Pain alone
flows savor through the veins,
makes me feel the sweet dissolving of my chains.

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Tall lovely woman with her game-leg limp
hops along the Heroes' Avenue at dawn,
using the gutter as a mirror to primp
the curls that conceal her ears of a fawn.

The birds inside the buildings wheeze
louder as she passes. They see with one eye.
Their cages are paid for with rent subsidies
from the relief-aid department of the sky.

Who is the man I see hobbling beside,
bone fingers clutching her Bakelite hand?
In tandem they almost glide

two good legs between them. I understand
her need for him, and why he loves her most,
that tall lovely woman: Astarte: my ghost.

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Astarte's in the shop, sipping watery coffee,
plugged into Wi-Fi, yawning, now and then
barking at a clumsy busboy, "Get off me,"
sighing for Frankie Blue Eyes on the system.

-- But what are you doing here, Astarte? Unrecognizable,
incognito, demanding no better
service than the rest, leaving no worse tip. Full
of foreboding I hug the seat across from her

like a life raft. She says the dove is on the move,
love spread so thin it's forced to bottom-feed
mud like Beluga. The downwards dove

tidies her portfolio, "Want what you already need,"
pragmatic as the waves that once beat the hours.
A couple in the sand -- a prospect of flowers.

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The morning subway is a cattle car
and all the headsets' muffled blares are lowing.
We sleep standing up. We lean, too far,
against each other. Apathy is growing

between what we planned to earn and the prudence
we hope to deserve. And scraps come
spilling, like the beats blowing from the student's
earphones, the copper coins leaking from

the working mother's tote bag, looking for eyelids
to settle. But not enough for all these eyes, shut
dead. Our ferryman is friendly to the kids,

noshing poppy seeds to ace the corporate
piss tests. Some nights he drives Miss Suburban Prose
to the end of the line, where she sucks his toes.

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My goddess Astarte -- is that you? My ghost?
Did you really think I would forget your birthday,
you heart attack! Have some toast
glazed with triple butter. Come, come this way,

for your divine lips I will spread
marmalades with a tiny silver spoon --
once used by a baroness to sniff her head-
ache powder. No one keeps track of years on the moon

and this is where we find each other
somewhere between lune and nook
as you are somewhere between friend and mother,

radiant if I give you a look,
if I think of you. Astarte, why didn't you ever smile on my loves
with such sweet knuckles as to need no gloves?