

Joe Gianotti

## Ceuta

She strides into the House of the Dragons,  
fire brimming from below,  
but she does not burn.  
Her bare feet saunter across hot coals.  
The charms around her ankles  
sizzle into dust,  
but the flames only lap her legs.

She controls the sun.  
It orbits her right iris,  
red around brown,  
like the the Arab baths,  
where Medina women  
alternated cold water with warm.

Blocked by her Royal Walls,  
she gazes down on us from the Marinid Towers,  
bronze tipped arrows aimed  
at our privileged hearts.

She is like the Pillars of Hercules,  
flanked by Gibraltar,  
attended to by Cleopatra,  
Caligula, Claudius.

To know her is to feel her choke point.

If she opens her palm to you,  
take refuge in its creases.

If she wraps you around her finger,  
clasp it and don't let go.

If she feasts on you,  
sacrifice yourself  
and swim in her waters,  
a mediterranean of siren and song.

## Control

A rubber band stretched  
until beige fractures to vanilla,  
a Baltimore Bulls-Eye ready to flash.

You spread me between  
your index finger  
and your thumb,  
twist me for accuracy,  
shoot me across the room  
with childlike whimsy.

In a museum,  
look but don't touch,  
cross a line,  
sound an alarm,  
the cold stare of a docent.

You choose the galleries we visit.  
Post-impressionists, surrealists,  
Seurat and Ernst,  
throbbing with blues,  
sometimes a merciful brush,  
sometimes a harsh stroke.

The midnight conversation,  
waiting  
for delivered  
to switch to read.  
Calculating the seconds  
between gray thought bubbles.

You define sleep,  
the unremembered dreams  
of an insomniac heart.  
I twist beneath linens,  
first a jack  
with rapid responses,

then a knave  
who knows you're elsewhere.

You strike my keyboard  
from miles away.  
You seek synonyms,  
and metastasize metaphors,  
but,  
from a distance,  
like the goddess Eris,  
offering her golden apple,  
causing delightful mischief.

## Renaissance girl

Michelangelo would have carved your profile in marble.  
The detail of your black-tie affair,  
the gingham dress,  
silken white blouse underneath,  
sleeves that rest on the radius and ulna.

DaVinci blended your eye makeup,  
the upper lids in sfumato  
like the Lady with Ermine.  
Tintoretto curled your hair,  
the right side dropping into your face.

Lorenzo de Medici couldn't have ordered your lips  
that make men lean into their cameras  
to ponder hidden tongue, teeth, and throat.  
You blow chiaroscuro smoke,  
back up, bend one leg at the knee,  
sing the funk, and blaze a smile  
worthy of the Sistine Chapel  
that I pretend is only for me.

You are Vittoria Colonna.  
You own the last two weeks of my Renaissance,  
Boccaccio's dream teleported to the 21st century,  
sent images,  
poetry before I ever write it down.

This text is easy, too simple,  
a poem that oozes from my fingertips  
like Botticelli's oils.  
You are the birth of Venus,  
my prosperity, my desire,  
the fertility of the River Tiber.

Hold me like sand in your palm.  
Tighten your fingers. Don't let me slip through,  
back to the Amalfi beaches, unidentifiable  
amidst the trillions of grains  
that want to cling to your sun-soaked skin.  
Put me on a pedestal, sculpt me,  
excise my heart and make me live without it.  
Place it in the caverns beneath  
the duomo di Siena,  
retrieve it at your pleasure,  
buried along with wine and whiskey.  
Remove my cap, drink,  
smile with me in your mouth,  
and swallow me  
so that I crash against the pit of your stomach,  
Verrocchio's David, at your beck and call.