

EMMA BOLDEN

Portrait of the Woman as Blood

He could never trust a thing, he says,
that bleeds for seven days and doesn't
die. Ha. Just a joke, he says. Lighten up.
Ha. By this red he tries to read me right

between the eyes. But as a woman, I take
no issue with blood. It's the way I order
my moons. It's the way I remind myself
to be careful of men who hold their teeth

like animals, eager to beast against her
whatever, eager to speak until her reds leak.
It's the way I know to take care of the life
inside of me and us and even he, all as fragile,

after all, as an unshelled yolk. Let my eyes cry
red. Let blood seep badly from the chin I tried to
keep up even I watched the dimple centered
in his chin climb the ladder, his heels hitting

the bell of my head until inside of it I heard
my own truth ring out, redly clear. Understand.
Blood is my birthright, my looned joy, my glad
tiding me closer to a shore where I can see:

it is the blood inside that humans us, that seas
us all into a we.

The Blood and the Lamb

Listen. The choirboy builds with each sweet
and silvered light of a note a cathedral, hymning
the savior who once, his song says, stood as the boy
stands now, in a body beneath belled robes.

On the cross behind him hangs the bloodied slab
of a man with the god not yet drained from his body,
a reminder that God sent his only son only to see
him suffer. In Aleppo, a boy is dying. A boy is dying.

A hundred boys and a hundred girls are dying.
The bullets hit their high notes, the bombs bass thunder,
and the stubborn, stupid world gathers all its arguments
for beauty—a crimson smear of sunset, a bird's song, a boy's

song obscene in its safety, its sweetness—to drop
outside the windows of Aleppo. They are not windows
but craters, holes, the once-was of walls surrendered
to absence, to exposure, to all of the unfathomable

eyes deep with dark watching. No words
can beauty this. Could I give him my safety.
I stand in the temple built by choir and voice,
in the temple that is the sacred space contained

in every child's voice, asking what there is to Gloria,
to Alleluia, what god is there in a shepherd who turns
his cheek to see the sweetest lambs slaughtered
before they can grow up into sheep.