

KELLY COPOLO

# COMMON MILKWORT : SENECA SNAKEROOT :: A GOOD WOMAN : AN ANGRY ONE

## I. MILKWORT | *POLYGALA VULGARIS*

deep blue, like a mother, like the Madonna's robes.  
low to the earth and unspeaking, like a good woman.  
its rosette-borne keel petals bud tender,  
the rosette like a mouth. a nipple.  
velvet blooms reduced to mouth,  
to nipple. blue-born in the grass,  
the alkaline heath, the dunes.  
a cracked earth perennial.  
flush and thick-veined from stone,  
roots tapping whatever softness there may be,  
and called *galactagogue* for it. named  
for what the body broken can give.  
no longer seen for lanceolate leaves  
or long sepals—only round-tipped,  
full mammary lobes, how they can be  
mashed and fed. how they can feed.  
the traditional adorer of the garland  
of rogation, its hunger, its blessing  
of the labor. the prayer for it.  
the priest, blue-robed like a mother,  
sings ascension spruced with the cut stems,  
petals bloodied between fingertips.  
all good women know ascension.  
know birth and all the deaths after it.  
know that sweet milk only comes  
to the mortar with the cut, the pestle.

## II. SNAKEROOT | *POLYGALA SENEGA*

either made palatable by being called *milkwort*  
or imagined to have no relation to it at all.  
to be nowhere close to it. its white-lanced,  
spiked raceme almost the same body, but now  
a body that impolitely bites back. called *poisonous*.  
call it an echo. call it the body that remembers,  
an impression fossil of the rattlesnake's tail.  
petals grown to be scales. to be long, pale,  
tubular fangs tinged green. if it was not named  
because it looked like a warning, maybe  
it was its color. white like milk. like milked teeth.  
puddled venom. its twisted, conical root  
pungent enough to be venom. pretty, but bitter.  
like no good woman. angry like a wound.  
given to the wound. named for it.  
for being angrier than it.  
for the roots ground into a paste,  
the sharp antivenom they make  
that stills the viper's tooth.