

GOOD FOR HER

Freya Turnbull

medusa, by caravaggio

dear medusa

you seem taken aback by it. the insolence of death. your mouth a blistering wound, your skin scored with shock, your eyes hissing as hot coals and serpents do. there's girlishness in your lips, a woman in the curve of your brow, a child in the row of little pearls that threaten to roll from your mouth, heads will roll, your head an enjambment clause. dying. dead. in this depiction, the killer does not hold your head. i prefer this. your death an amulet of refuge, your death a weapon. in all the debates, nobody asks about your attacker. he is a sea mist that hovers in better stories, the ones where he is hero. that is what gods do. they do not hang around to see the aftermath.

judith slaying holofernes, by artemisia gentileschi

dear judith

blood and spit and gutting fish. the shadows mottle that flat line of a mouth as you flatline his heart. you dressed up for this, both hook and bait, melted his mouth with wine. you cannot ignore the blood. it drapes like the tendrils of a lover's hair over the bed. you don't hide in shadow, the waxing moon of your cheek rises out from it. it takes the eye and drags it to you and your battle, your execution. you, brave biography of a woman with broken fingers sticking to a story. the scream stuck in his throat. it is your turn to talk.

herodias with the head of john the baptist, by elisabetta sirani

dear herodias

your eyes are luminescent black as the platter on which his head rests and they meet mine like a blade meets a neck, in one smooth swing. in art of this era, women do not make eye contact. not so with you. if you kill a holy man does it count more? he gets his title, but what of yours? queen herodias. address me as such, you ask, do not forget my blood runs blue as

yours runs into the sand. you still look soft, swathed in silk, a young girl's face still breathing over the slab of saint you slapped onto a platter. van gogh cut off his ear for love - just because it was not your body which you directed violence to does not make it less art.

medea, by euripedes

dear medea

you know sacrifice, don't you? cutting off the rotten pieces of the fruit, forcing them down someone else's throat. deadbeat dads clean up nice in golden fleece gotten only by your hand. you were sick of being a wife and mother and woman and not being a person. be a god in elysium with your divine rage because mount olympus ain't got shit on you, you break the hand that feeds you when it demands you chew mouth closed and crack your own skull just to watch someone wince. you cut your teeth on his half-measures. you are helpless in nothing and barren in goodwill but you shall split your nails crafting your revenge and mold the world into a wasteland to ruin a single man.

self

dear diary

i get tired of watching slasher films. stripper #5 in the credits remembered for her two-minute strip scene and her five-minute butchering. every girl is made a dull blade, a toothless maw, a god's slab of meat, a man's meal. i'm fourteen and if you lay a hand on me i will summon every static volt of anger in me and make you take that hand back. i'm fifteen and i am sick of moving out of the way. i'm sixteen and you're dead to me. i'm seventeen and all the art of downcast eyes doesn't do it anymore, meet my gaze so i can see my own rage reflected in the roll of your eyeball. to be a girl is to watch your emotions in a mirror around a corner to see if they are consumable enough. i will not be a voyeur of my venom, my sadness is not tragically beautiful, i am a girl and a woman and i will eat my rage until i vomit.