

Mary Martyr

You'd see her everyday downtown
restaurant to restaurant
hotel lobby to lobby
refugee borrowing her nesting place
She smiled sometimes and spoke
voice low and breathless
wishing good morning
good fortune to a window mannequin
She said she was a writer
and it was hard
to get it down exact,
more often she was silent
head cocked to one side, listening,
or bent down, furtive,
scratching in a thick orange scribbler
with wide lines.

She was writing documentary—
a plot to corrupt the world
She'd had to have the operation
nothing serious—a lump—benign
one swift cut across her abdomen
except
They'd Taken All Her Insides OUT
and stuffed her full of radio parts.
Now they ran her,
guinea sow
scrambling round their wheels,
wires throbbing hot
issuing orders in her gut
telling dirty stories.

She fought Them
urgently
sneaking from place to place all day
confusing their frequencies
hiding in a vacant smile,
Her fate could save the world
if only she could write it.

When the work was almost done
three scribblers full
she showed it to a waitress
who was kind
bringing fresh lemon for her tea,
that day the pulses in her belly
warned her to flee
but relaxing over the second cup
she ignored them
and so the ambulance
and police cars screaming
and blonde men in white coats and faces
twisting her arms, legs, hair,
buckling the rough tearing restrainers too tight
caught her by surprise.

Marsha Mitchell