

if you wanna live a dream
I ain't coming bitch I told you
— Lil Peep



*that strange-eyed girl
you met at the circus
who poses with tigers
her name is Aster
and she's so in love
but you will leave her
tomorrow the latest
she's too odd, too needy
for you to bring home*

*Aster disaster
Aster catastrophe
Aster who asks
will you stay?
but he'd rather leave
especially after
she made that request*

I know my waist is slender, my fingers they are small
but it would not make me tremble
to see ten thousand fall
— "Jack-A-Roe"

*Aster who masters
the rank smell of cages
the ones she escaped –
couldn't flee faster –
and ones with strong bars
for the monsters she raises*

*always purring and stalking
she does their dances
so they do her talking*

as a, a reminder
ready when you find her
I repress the iridescence of a fire
and won't you mind him?
steady when you find him
I confess the incandescence of a dying light
consume me through the night
— Gus Dapperton

race against the sunlight
wanna have a long night
night mysteries, night mysteries
under spotlight, don't let me out of your sight
two energies, two energies
— BENEÉ

*then and now ought not forget each other
the tinker would tamper with time
just enough to connect the ages*

*he too felt strong fingers, gentle in his hair
caressing, tender treatment
and utmost devotion*

*syrup soaking
into bread
until it crumbles
dissolves*

*Aster disaster, muse derelict
the girl with blazing tiger eyes
wandered through his sleeping mind
to ask, plaintively,
did he think she was pretty?*

*now he longs for her scent
of strawberry leaves:
rough, green, earthy
hiding what's luscious*

*she only touches you in your sleep
and sweeter dreams you have yet to curse*

Aster the tiger-tamer works in the tawdry brocade big-top situated on a triangular dirt courtyard wedged between two pubs and a tailor's workshop (the latter always barred at night). This neighborhood is perpetually crumbling, grimy — but nonetheless it bustles at all hours.

She's called Aster Disaster on the posters, which aren't as ragged as the dusty tent. Aster acts as her own sideshow, shimmying in fishnets, fur trim, and fringe. The real draw is her pair of immense, uneasy panthers. Male and female, all russet and midnight, silk and muscle — truly, neither animal as gaunt as it could be. And by torchlight, glorious.

She guides the cats through their routine of tricks, assisted by a burly "clown." Aster herself does have a certain touch. A way of beguiling the beasts. It is distinct from her fellow handler's gruff camaraderie with their feline charges.

*the hungry queen beckoned Aster
toward refuge in the woods
singing along the streams
calling even in the warbling of birds
Elkatron's tears flow everywhere,
finding swiftly any maiden
who weeps for a heart bereft*

*then and now
ought not forget each other*

» The events in his memory no longer correlated with time. They quietly spread through his life, falling into a distinct order unconnected with time. Some events surfaced from the depths of what had been lived, some had submerged into those depths forever because the experiences had led nowhere.

» Arseny grew frightened when he looked at the chief Mamluk. The Mamluk's smile had transformed to a grimace. This grimace expressed neither laughter, nor hatred, nor even disdain. A hunter's unbridled passion for his victim pulsed in time with a swelled vein on his temple. Even when sated, a cat will pounce on a bird with a broken wing because that is how the cat and all her ancestors were made: the bird acts like a victim and the sweetness of harsh punishment for the victim is, for the hunter, stronger than hunger and more demanding than lust.

» Our death will be so stupid, Ambrogio said to Arseny in a quiet voice. But what death is not stupid? asked Arseny. Is it not stupid that coarse iron enters the flesh, violating its perfection? He who is not capable of creating even a fingernail on a little finger is destroying a most complex mechanism, something inaccessible to human comprehension.

— *Laurus* by Eugene Vodolazkin,
translated by Lisa C. Hayden

» The three men walked on and were met by ever more new saints. The saints were not exactly moving or even speaking, but the silence and immobility of the dead were not absolute. There was, under the ground, a motion that was not completely usual, and a particular sort of voices rang out without disturbing the sternness and repose. The saints spoke using words from psalms and lines from the lives of saints that Arseny remembered well from childhood. When they drew the candles closer, shadows shifted along dried faces and brown, half-bent hands. The saints seemed to raise their heads, smile, and beckon, barely perceptibly, with their hands. A city of saints, whispered Ambrogio, following the play of the shadow. They present us the illusion of life. No, objected Arseny, also in a whisper. They disprove the illusion of death.