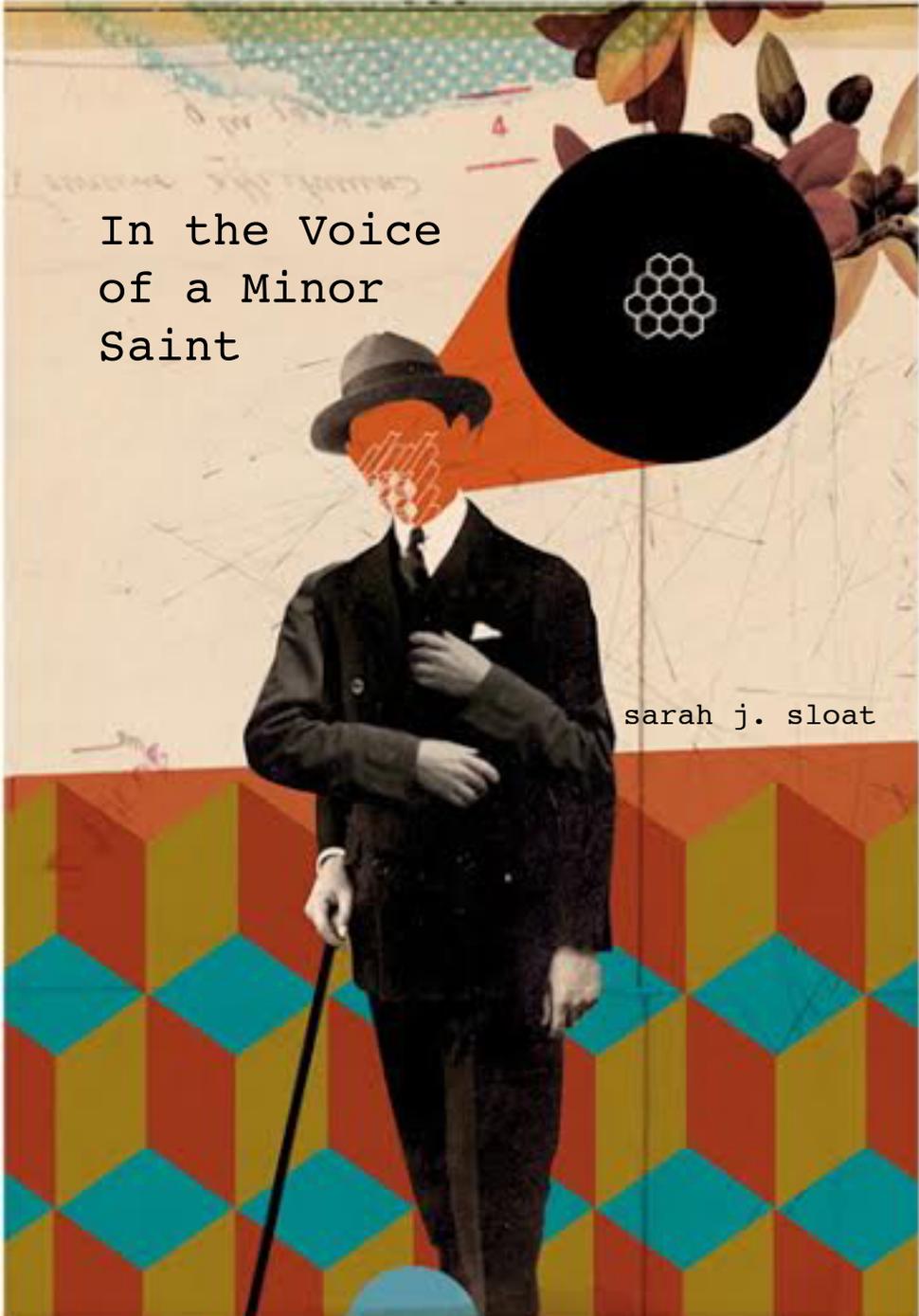


In the Voice  
of a Minor  
Saint



sarah j. sloat



In the Voice of a Minor Saint  
sarah j. sloat

## Contents

- 4 Opportunity
- 5 Pursuit
- 7 In the Voice of a Minor Saint
- 9 Humidity
- 11 The Silent Treatment
- 12 3 Deep
- 14 Folk Art
- 16 Summer's End
- 17 God Have Pity on the Smell of Gasoline
- 19 Europa
- 21 Ghazal with Heavenly Bodies
- 22 Curtains
- 24 Shady
- 25 High-Heeled
- 27 Please Remove My Name
- 28 Naked, Come Shivering
- 30 Grassland
- 32 The Problem with Everything

34	Infirmary
35	Ghazal of the Bright Body
36	Vestment
37	Notes
38	Acknowledgements

## Opportunity

There was a sound like a moccasin dropping  
in the upstairs apartment.

A boy shouted in Cantonese  
near the end of the street.

For a second the radio wavered between stations

and I was so busy  
making myself marvelous.

## Pursuit

Bird-wrought dawn, bed's edge  
let me leave with you  
my few aspirations.

Riot of rustle of sheets, rest sweet.  
First coffee, next cigarette,  
a toast to smoke, white mink  
cloaking my shoulders.

Subversive joy of a broken heart, salt wallow  
here's to the suffering my father predicted  
ah if he only knew  
how beautiful

pain & ecstasy  
as Christoph says, what a pair—

morning horoscope and comic strip  
narco smell of gasoline

at the Esso, iridescent  
fumes liquid blue

oh dumpy man whistling like happiness itself  
past my car window,  
keep it up, buddy  
I follow.

## In the Voice of a Minor Saint

I came at a wee hour  
into my miniature existence.

I keep my hair close cropped  
that my face might fit in locketts.

My heart is small, like a love  
of buttons or black pepper.

On approach, I notice how  
objects grow and contours blur.

That's what comes of nearness.  
I have an ear for the specific,

as St. Apollonia minds the teeth,  
and Magnus of Füssen, hailstones.

I dwarf gloom with my cachet sign:  
one good hand conceals

my one good eye,  
halving all disaster.

## Humidity

Little world, your afternoons  
are losing their edge, wallowing  
off in the wheat of long siestas.  
How like hallucination, the way  
the sun falls on my flaws.  
I can't keep up, trundling down  
the moving sidewalk of lawns,  
mown beyond comprehension.  
The handrail sings. Conundrums  
come out to tango at random.

Sweet little lack of crispness—  
paradise may be built in a day  
but the rest takes time. Console  
yourself: at least the trees  
put up their parasols, at least  
the orchards you wear as hair  
surrender those damn apples.  
World, I forgive the lack of focus.

I know the knob of sun will turn.  
Even here, I trust clarity  
to honor our appointment.

## The Silent Treatment

To hell with it. My tongue's gone under,  
curbed like an excess. No more  
wagging in the shallows, it's plunged  
in a tunnel to the underworld where  
they stomp in a strange dialect.  
Eat your heart out, it might say. Eat  
your pilaf, your side vegetable  
and the pox upon your crops.  
It might say anything, were it not  
lounging around a lower hemisphere.  
Laid back at some southern spa, mud-  
bathing, overdosing on motionlessness.  
Enjoy the quiet. Fleshy puddle, pond  
pummeled by too much rain. Make pretty  
like a lake today: hold yourself in.

### 3 Deep

A day so slow my lids drawl,  
limbs rift from the mainland.  
It's murder how humidity and 6 pm  
collude to pool the lips into a bowl,  
communion in a glossy yawn.

A swoon lifts me to my tram.  
I accept the swoon as chaperone;  
We're lucky to make it home alive -  
what with our war and the shortness  
of breath that's going around,  
an epidemic impoverishment,  
my nerves ripped to bits.

We're lucky to find there's wine  
left from last night, and my pen pal  
Luke has sent me a poem concerning  
cunnilingus and the hydrogen bomb  
that tricks a smile

with its perfect sense:  
sex and death and sleep –  
the three dear deepnesses.

I lie down knowing Luke is dredging  
atomic oceans with his bare hands.  
I can sleep knowing the dark  
holds its appointments dear.  
The whole ruined world can lie down  
and wait for it to be revealed  
which strain of pillow talk  
will come to smother us.

## Folk Art

Naïve, you called me, posh  
and polished as a sampler  
sewn with yarn.

Trundling clumsy in skirts,  
I never got beyond the whirligig  
reeling on the unmown lawn.

It was my way to put things plain.  
I stitched a heart upon my sleeve  
at the elbow, where the cloth was worn.

You were cut from finer stuff.  
It's not my fault  
I was drawn wrong.

Bad luck threw its weight around  
my off proportions, toppled  
the cock from the top of the barn.

Mine was a small world, small  
and flawed. I could never hold you  
with such short arms.

## Summer's End

Noon wounds me with its bees, its burning.  
I weary of the season, whitewash  
and blind arrows.

The sun has come to steal my outline,  
come to sort me,  
stretch me along its javelin.

Succumb, it says, when  
already the heat is lurching south  
in one long exhalation.

Every night I'm more in love  
with sleep. Closing my eyes

I let each blue dram  
trickle into my iris.

## God Have Pity on the Smell of Gasoline

God have pity on the smell of gasoline  
which finds its way like an arm  
through a car window,

more human than kerosene,  
more unctuous, more manly.

Have pity on the tincture it rubs  
into the coils of fingerprints,  
the crests left under nails,

the surfeit it insinuates,  
brawn that comes on suave.

God pity the vapors lifting  
through the pores of the soil,  
loitering near the pumps,

soot that films hair and coats,  
that beds in collars,  
dark groom of velocity.

Pity the swoon towards motion,  
the yen for speed.

Pity the billow and sinew of fumes,  
muscle that makes the crash spectacular.

God have pity on the whole machine  
gas has to carry, lead, flesh and metals  
that do not travel light.

## Europa

Johannes,  
Your green apples leave me bitter.  
I damn near drowned in your puppet village,  
sniffing out the buckets of sun,  
my Chinese lantern rinsed with twilight.  
I know the substantives you speak of,  
but cannot spit them forth without a dollop  
of schnapps under my tongue. Johannes,

the swain's waistcoat does not suit me.  
I'm struck speechless in your forests—  
such a grooming, and the tools you use  
to foster this epidemic of hazelnuts.  
I never intended to wander this far  
into the Abendland. Johannes,

you have been a loyal tinsmith,  
a diligent tinker at the great machine.  
It's touching how at midnight you spit

upon the rag to furbish it. But the machinery  
is busted; it no longer runs on tungsten.  
The bolts have flown, rolling off  
as if accidentally into what  
we'll call the accident.

## Ghazal with Heavenly Bodies

If the moon comes out bearing nicks and bite marks,  
you'll find me smoothing my skin of its cares tonight.

Under a halo the size of a ring, the old  
arguments sit splitting their oldest hairs tonight.

Look at me crooked. Mistake me for Eve. If looks  
deceive, who knows which mask our maker wears  
tonight?

On the tablecloth, red and bending like bows, wine  
glass stains stutter their elliptical prayers tonight.

Yet again, love drops anchor where lust dug its moat.  
On the roof, angels play musical chairs tonight.

My signature moves like loops and lightning. Letter  
posted, I'll sleep the sleep of millionaires tonight.

## Curtains

For weeks I have been waking up  
in the living room curtains,  
their shrug and frump,

and there  
I have not met a single person.

In the folds where I am rolled,  
some mornings I have seen the Andes,

strands of wax, and in the stitches  
once I made out a line of ants  
carrying their minute burdens.

Everything that appears possible  
can be turned into something impossible.

If a face appears, if I recognize a posture,  
I raise a hand to flatten it.

A tassel bunches the damask  
like the tie of a robe,  
but when it's loosened

no legs fall out, no eye,  
no heart drops  
from its monstrous socket.

## Shady

I have the ugliest sunglasses  
in the world because I am desperate.  
I hate cell phones, attached  
to their owners like idiot mittens,  
ringtones hissing in endless emission –  
a most unholy chorus.

Crossing the street in my sunglasses,  
which are two-toned, my sandal snaps,  
strap bursting from under the instep.  
Even skimming the pavement,  
it won't play along. And I must enter  
the sandwich shop shoeless, sandals  
in hand, like Jesus, whose story  
is so hard to believe.

## High Heeled

I always want more:  
more Everest, more starshine,  
something in the department of vertical.

That's why I'm up here.  
It's better than smog,  
better than settling.

Since coaching myself to one-up  
the utmost, my dreams  
only know the Amazonian.

Could you say that again?  
At these heights, I hardly  
hear you. Sometimes from

my perch on the umpteenth  
floor, I feel the distant pinch  
of the finite. You'll see

others like me, pumped  
up, outrageous in altitude.  
In the ascendant,

the hitch remains poise,  
attaining cliff stillness,  
and nerve enough not to topple.

## Please Remove My Name

Downtown there's a man who will write  
my name on a grain of rice for five euros.  
I'm sure he's a decent man who could use  
five euros, but what would I want with that?  
Please remove my name from all grains of rice.  
I write my name on the dirt in the eaves.

## Naked, Come Shivering

Not wanting anything to die of hunger,  
the whole town has come into my room,  
with the pretty girls and with the old bastards,  
the statue of Lautréamont,

the smoke rings of fancy cigars,  
all the bodies recovered in the field of showers.  
Some jump on horses and give chase -  
already the world is far behind.

What do I care for the fragrant ring of mountains?  
Night after night it's a holiday.  
If it rains I will have a wife;  
she will never close her eyes.

And staggering by the bar,  
the miser has opened his coffer—  
come into my arms; sit on my lap,  
my wife whose shoulders are champagne.

Sit down, Calamity,  
wheat of the things of the world.

## Grassland

When I could not get with child  
I swallowed the egg of the meadowlark  
who eats the daylight,  
the mother of untangled grasses.  
A long drop, the egg bore its root  
in my foot, it stitched me  
together with grain.

I am patient now. I am not damaged by waiting.  
Languid as a coming rain, stalks  
inch alongside my veins to the tips  
of my fingers. A grassland has thirst,  
so does a fire,  
a cup,  
noon,  
the color of flour.

So while I sleep the moon creeps  
between my poised teeth

to flood me with moonwater.  
When I speak, the scent  
of lengthening wheat overwhelms me.  
Shoots rise straight up  
and don't droop as tears,  
don't fail like questions.  
They get on with growing.

I hold a handkerchief  
over my mouth to veil the clover  
and bees that tickle my throat,  
but the angel  
who's due at my tent  
won't catch me laughing.

A kiss would do it.  
One sprinkle of milkwhite salt  
and I'll break like bread at your table.

## The Problem with Everything

The problem with everything  
just barged in to darn the socks  
I was going to throw away.

I'm never fast enough.  
And soon as they are mended  
the seams grin, menacing again.

It's always the same. Everything so  
beautiful, and falling apart. Everything  
too mulish to collapse entirely.

Every day a dull assault of sudden loves.  
Instant, lachrymose attachments.  
And the focused pain that bores

my shoulder forces me to nurse myself  
like November's oldest soldier,  
kept alive for old times' sake.

There are ten demanding hands  
that descend from nowhere  
when I don't want to care about

gum wrappers on the sidewalk,  
ozone erosion, the stability of balconies,  
the holes that hunt my shoes.

It's no use to say my shoes  
are not me, trash, and the nightly news  
are not me, and in the end

my shoulder, too, is not me. No use,  
given all the problematic mornings  
I wake to find it aching.

## Infirmary

The glass holding rose water is tinged pink,  
as in anemia, as in an infirmary.

A nurse stirs rice on a stove  
by the snow window.

A room with one cot can be world enough.

*Stranger, once*

I gave up all my earthly goods  
so my blood could go traveling.

## Ghazal of the Bright Body

Weary, the week unspools from its bobbin.  
In a corner, cobwebs are spun with it.

Wind flew on a blue bicycle of rain,  
took the streets, sidewalks, and sun with it.

A book of valentines lies near my bed.  
Some afternoons, I warm my gun with it.

I want to fill my lungs with acorns, hay,  
and apricots, then have done with it.

In the back garden, there's an ailing elm.  
Through the window, I am one with it.

I dream joy's a cheetah on a highway.  
I pull off, ditch my keys, and run with it.

## Vestment

On the morning of my ruin,  
I will dress in a vest of bees  
as the sun crimps the sky  
and light spreads, tight,  
intricate as a honeycomb  
over the home I've chosen.  
The bees will cloak me; goldenly  
close, they'll wander me,  
those I once feared,  
those who seal the suit of mail  
no other ruin can sting.

## Notes

“Naked, Come Shivering” is a cento, whose title and lines originally came from Roger Giroux's “Naked,” Pierre Reverdy's “Waterfall,” Philippe Soupault's “Horizon,” Jacques Prévert's “Pater Noster,” André Breton's “Lethal Relief,” Robert Desnos's “The Voice of Robert Desnos,” Pierre Reverdy's “Clear Winter,” Blaise Cendrars's “Sputterings,” Philippe Denis's “Already,” Jules Supervielle's “What Do I Care,” René Daumal's “Sad Little Round of Life,” Benjamin Péret's “Song in Time of Drought,” Paul Éluard's “Lady Love,” Jacques Prévert's “And the Fête Continues,” Jean Follain's “End of a Century,” Valery Larbaud's “Music after Reading,” André Breton's “Free Union,” Henri Michaux's “Repose in Calamity,” and Yves Bonnefoy's “Utmost Hour.”

## Acknowledgments

*The American Poetry Journal*: “Europa”

*Blood Orange Review*: “Vestment”

*Front Porch Journal*: “Naked, Come Shivering”

*In Posse Review*: “Infirmary”

*Kaleidowhirl*: “In the Voice of a Minor Saint”

*Linebreak*: “Ghazal with Heavenly Bodies”

*Pebble Lake Review*: “Humidity”

*The Pedestal Magazine*: “3 Deep”

*RHINO*: “The Silent Treatment”

*The Rose and Thorn*: “Grassland”

*Silk Road*: “High Heeled”

*SWINK*: “Opportunity” & “Shady”

*Third Coast*: “The Problem with Everything”

*Warbler*: “Folk Art”

*Whiskey Island*: “God Have Pity on the Smell of Gasoline”  
& “Curtains”

*West Branch*: “Pursuit” & “Ghazal of the Bright Body

*Yemassee*: “Summer’s End”

Doubleback Books • Knoxville, TN

Copyright © 2016 by Sarah J. Sloat

ISBN: 978-1-939675-32-3

Published by Sundress Publications

Editors: Erin Elizabeth Smith & Rhonda Lott

[erin@sundresspublications.com](mailto:erin@sundresspublications.com)

<http://www.sundresspublications.com>

*In the Voice of a Minor Saint* was first published  
by Tilt Press in 2009.

Colophon: Garamond-Normal

Cover Image: Emmanuel Polanco

Book Design: Erin Elizabeth Smith

Additional Editing: Jane Huffman