

*The Pact*

SAMPLER

ALSO BY JENNIFER MILITELLO

POETRY

*A Camouflage of Specimens and Garments*

*Body Thesaurus*

*Flinch of Song*

*Anchor Chain, Open Sail*

NONFICTION

*Knock Wood*

SAMPLER

Jennifer Militello

*The Perfectionist*  
SAMPLE

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*For TL*

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*Love is all you need.*

—The Beatles

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## Agape Feast

What is love but the bruise or the abrasion,  
the fruitlessness, the deep incision. What  
is love if it isn't on stage or placed  
between two sonnets' turns. What is love  
nerving down the spine. Just now I thought  
I felt it stir, or heard it, like the wall's  
small nest of baby mice. Like chemicals  
set to preserve imported furs. Its complaint  
got in, rain astringent at its end.  
Fat as a blackberry, thin as a stick,  
stationed overseas at the vein-itch  
or artery-strap. Bubble, flutter of pain.  
An emptiness pinned to its lapel.  
It is an aftermath at best. *Shhh* is  
what it says. *Dear, diagram yourself.*  
Its pigeons shuttle like the imbalance  
of a hat. Pores seen. Lips curled.  
It is not the documents correct. Stamps  
are streaked away with bleach. Bags  
are searched. The fingers of government  
workers black with ink. Its ribs  
grate like gnashed teeth. It sings like  
the polished floors of a bank. It reads  
all the lines in your palm as the equivalent  
of death. Carrier of diseases and lice,  
wool blanket stink. Fire beneath the bridge.  
Its past is a chasm. Its past is a lid. Let it  
catch at the latch of your throat and body bag  
your want and infinity your need. Its Jesus  
is the noose at your neck. Its Jesus is  
the blue slits veins seem at your wrist.  
Its mercy is electric, it is storied, it is rank.  
Its mercy is a tablet dissolved in a glass,  
more invisible the more you drink.

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## Species

We come from three generations of gunsmiths  
and armourers. Our pride name is Swahili for dust.  
We sew necklaces together from doorknobs

and knucklebones and eye sockets and teeth.  
We weep at the sight of sugar cane cut.  
Our headlamps reveal the skull of a jaguar,

precise stone men, staircases hollowed, a two-edged  
knife. Sacrifices seem another form of astronomy.  
Pyramids predict the face of the earth. Our gardens

grow fructose. Our hands fill with cake. We emulate  
the rasps of frogs. What we eat is processed in the liver.  
Legally hunted lions hang, wilted to bone.

We poison livestock. We rescue rafts. We patrol borders  
marked by marooned populations. Our spines  
are the spokes of motorcycle wheels. Our longships

empty. Our rodents stow. Our goldenrod produce toxin.  
Our gallflies perch. Our offspring hatch. Our onslaughts  
happen. Our coral reefs pulse. We exit through fences

we then repair. We survive the dry season. We crave meat.  
Our dark manes correlate with robustness. Our Asian carp  
are tenacious. Our wildebeest rank high as prey.

## Lineage Is Its Own Religion

I was an apostle to the group of you, strangers  
who had known me since I was born. I ate  
of your flesh. I drank of your blood. Sipped  
the elixir of your moods. Put the remainders  
in the tabernacle, wiped the goblet clean with  
a cloth. The crosses branded into the wafers  
were your voices branded onto my heart.  
I heard you live forever. I heard you rise.  
The bones of you yield to the memory of flesh,  
and we count our blessings and also bless.  
We are bright in anticipation of death,  
we are living like fissures and set against waste,  
and the taste is bitter, left in our mouths.  
I am dying, I am dead, lord of the losses, lord  
of the faith. I take each breath and my chest  
expands. Now I stand knee deep in the muck  
unable to move, and if I dip my hands in,  
they will fill with bracken and all the thickness  
of each formless face, kicking up stones,  
until you are gone, mythic lips the lips  
shape. One day, you vanish like a flash.  
Confessions in a dark room. Firmaments to read  
and spin like dice. I genuflect twice at the edge  
of your pews. I kiss the book for you. This is what  
the word of family can do. Sit at the round table.  
Break bread. In the beginning, the loveless  
made the world and saw that it was good.

## Sibling Medusa

In the pictures, the hair snakes all look the same,  
though I know better. Every snake is a different  
persona, though all are out for murder.

Every hiss is a criticism unfettered. Every  
head is a hatred on its leash. Every slither is  
a movement toward hurting me further

like our mother. I learned long ago to only  
approach you from the mirror. Your scales  
overlap; they have the phalanx of your heart.

All my shields crumble, all my winged shoes fail.  
You are my sister. My love for you is a ladder  
I climb until I fall. There is a Red Sea in my blood

and it is your mood, venomous at root, ever-changing  
as a god. There is a Red Sea in my blood and  
I must keep it still as its tides would drown us,

as our parents still hope we will break bread.  
We believed you were a priestess. We put you  
on the urns, we lifted you up and loved you alone.

Now you are a monster and want me gone. Were I  
to carry it as a weapon, your head would turn on me.  
I am only one of the statues that surround your lair.

All of our family is there, posed and still, paralysed  
by your punishment, your scathe, your skill.  
Where I had my home, I am no longer at home.

I was closest. I was in your crib. I was in your bed.  
I wore your clothes. I shared your name. Is this  
why you hate me? Is this why I now see the deadly

inside red of a thousand stretched-open mouths?  
Your serpents control me. Your eyes are voiced over.  
I don't know you. Where is my sister.

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