

BY ANY OTHER NAME

Hands and feet tied, hostage to love,  
knees bent to my chest,  
the rope circles my neck  
and I'm flat-backed to the floor  
ridiculous and helpless, a cockroach flipped,  
squirming.  
The voice that hisses threats,  
the hand that tosses lighted matches to my skin.  
Your voice, your hand,  
cruel to know, I cannot see your eyes,  
blind, you wrap my eyes and mouth closed.  
Swallowing is hard, my thirst fills me, consumes fear,  
focused, I free my tongue against the trap of cloth,  
I can swallow.  
Saliva rushes up  
and for a moment my own taste is sweet, washing, wetting.  
Tears slip along the creases of my clothed eyes,  
to pool beneath my head and still you taunt,  
drip boiling water on me.  
A still point of light speaks one clear mantra in my brain,  
A song, a call, a tolling bell:  
"Never will my son have to hear his mother died like this."  
My mantra sends concentric circles, round the numbing pain.  
Hands and feet, cut off from blood, I feel nothing in my edges;  
only in the deep of my back which meets the floor can I feel,  
and my bowed neck, the noose,  
love captures and holds, love chains.  
A hand closes possessively around the wrist,  
commanding tone.  
The casual remark denudes the rose,  
love embracing, strangles, suffocates with lips.  
Never will my son say, "She died of love; madness took her."  
By turning my sad head, from moments when you're gone,

I loosen the gag, and once I smell you near, I speak,  
A grace pours words from deep within my mantra,  
you untie me.  
Today, I fear all love,  
and know that it can come to this: a mummified death,  
a voice that says, "you're mine."