

St. Kateri Tekakwitha

They said it was June.
I said it was day after day
when cottonwood seeds invaded
lithe with potential.

You know the way cottonwood
seeds sail arrow-thin wishing to be web
or dust, or anything other than a body
with weight enough to gravitate, but
when they do, they colonize like snowdrifts?

That was how it happened; how I lost my mother
and all her mothers. How the wind blew one pock
to the base of my spine and I flowered into a white star.

They called it God. I called it Spine

— the ability to live inside and outside,

the ability to yield to the wind,

the ability to bend
my prayers into dreams

of spines drifting
back over water.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha is the first Native American to be ordained a saint after converting to Catholicism in 1677. She was the daughter to a Catholic mother and a Mohawk chief. At a young age she was blinded by and orphaned by smallpox. When Jesuit Missionaries later settled by her Algonquin-Mohawk tribe, she recalled her mother's prayers. Eventually, through the wilderness, with limited vision, she left her tribe, journeying to the missionaries where she made a vow of perpetual virginity. She is remembered as "Lily of the Mohawks".