

LIMP SAINTS

**ANDREA
O'ROURKE**

Croatia, Eary War Years

He undid her coat, talked, snaked about
while rain dripped from the recessed doorway.

Vaffanculo, she swore, looking over her shoulder
at cork oaks weathered into still black worms.

He poured *mirto*, clean as baby breath,
into frosted glasses, talked until his words

were streaming schools of fish. She edged back—
No, cazzo, tu resti qui—and slammed the door.

His lip twitched, the glass spilled, his body stiff
like a Pompeian. That was an old movie on channel two.

Meanwhile, our open windows let the clouds in—
muscular, fibrous—and the air reeked of ox dung.

An angel hung on a clear fishing line, limp
over the kitchen sill, above a soup bowl

filled with lake water and a floating lotus.

At the window, the pond-eyed gypsy

begged for coffee and sugar, her fingernails
clogged black with dried squid ink. She'd hum

Delem delem, and it seemed as if the melody
was the pulse of makeshift shanties—

scraps of ridged vinyl and burlap—her people
squatting around the ashes, horses roaming,

grubby children slingshotting tin cans distant as boats,
and a bull that saunters by, swings his massive bullhood.

Later, in the city, after we mastered the curfews,
taping blankets to windows, the hysterical air raids,

we'd run out, strain our eyes guessing where the planes
were coming from. Men couldn't throw *boće* in the basement,

so they sat on beer crates, played *briškula* instead,
listened to the radio. Kids flocked to a pinball machine,

an old toy, learned how to flip-slam until their palms ached
and the worn metal ball was beat to a shade of dull lead.

The soccer field gaped vacant and stubbly, a derelict,
the sea tight-lipped like a thug. I'm not sure during

which blackout the old woman pulled the rosary out,
but there it was, on top of the folk music of patriotism,

more drama—thumbing beads—each tiny skull
at a time: one knot at its neck, another at its crown.