

Pause.

Let me paint you.

Lizaveta Okay.

They look at each other.

As long as it won't take too long.

Vitalik I promise it won't.

He goes over to his easel.

I only need you here for the early work, so we can probably go straight through, but let me know anytime if you need to stop. I've plenty of food and you can rest in the bed anytime if you're tired.

Lizaveta I thank you.

Vitalik No need to thank me. We're both doing things for each other.

Lizaveta I'm thanking you anyway.

Vitalik Well I'll thank you too, then, in that case.

Pause.

Lizaveta So who am I to be, then?

Vitalik I think St Catherine. She was martyred in the early fourth century.

He puts a thin piece of cedar wood on the easel and starts to arrange his brushes.

It'll be a hagiographic icon, so there'll be scenes from Catherine's life around the outside: when she was tortured on the breaking wheel, for instance, or when she baptised the wife of the emperor Maxentius. There'll be a main portrait in the centre though, a portrait of her: of you, so that's what I need you to sit for. The scenes will show us some of the things she did, but the portrait will tell us who she really was.

Lizaveta Do you want me to wear something?

Vitalik There's some clothes I use for models on the side. And take that stick, too. St Catherine is supposed to have a sword, but I don't have a sword, so I'll have to imagine one. The stick will be useful, though, to see how your hands clasp an object. I'll wait outside for you to change.

Lizaveta Thanks.

He goes. She looks around. She picks up a small icon and puts it into her pocket. She changes into the St Catherine clothes: a long, blue tunic and a belt. She waits. Vitalik comes back.

Vitalik Ready?

She picks up the stick.

Lizaveta How should I hold this?

Vitalik Like you would a sword.

She holds the stick awkwardly.

Don't think about the way you're doing it, just do it.

Lizaveta What?

Vitalik Just try and clear your mind.

Lizaveta Yes. Just. Okay.

She looks sad for a moment but then relaxes slightly.

Good.

He takes a piece of paper and puts it over the wood on the easel. He starts to sketch.

Tell me something.

Lizaveta What?

Vitalik Something about you.

Lizaveta Erm...

Vitalik Tell me about your life. If I understand your life, it will help me to understand you, and I can try and put it in the painting.

Pause.

Anything, just start with the smallest things.

Pause.

Lizaveta Okay. *(The speech has a pace of its own, and she starts slowly.)* I was born on a farmstead about four days' walk from here. I don't know how long ago. For some reason, no one told me it was important to keep count. I don't remember too much about my parents, except that my mother was tall and my father was short. I from my childhood I remember lying outside in the shade in the forest, looking up at some branches above my head. I remember throwing a ball. I remember running down a track. I remember falling, cutting my leg and the palms of my hands, crying. I remember nights when I was scared of the dark and I couldn't sleep. I remember thinking it was darker in the room than when I closed my eyes. I remember a bull, a big one, snorting at me as I passed its field on the way to the well. I remember my baby brother dying and helping my father to dig a hole at the far end of our field. I remember my mother crying in the night. I remember thinking it might be selfish of me to be reassured by her crying but it stopped me being scared of the dark. I remember a man coming to the house and talking to my parents. I remember he smelled of potatoes and that he left. I remember he came back again and took me with him to a farm on the other side of the valley. I remember the farm on the other side of the valley was exactly the same as mine except smaller and on the other side of the valley. I remember he picked me up in his arms threw me up up and down onto the bed. I remember he promised not to touch me until I was older. I remember he kept his promise, and I was glad. I remember he showed me how to chop vegetables and to feed the chickens. I remember he watched me milking the cows. I remember he told me my parents were dead now and I only had him, but that felt okay. I remember eventually he did touch me in the night and it hurt at first and then it didn't

and then it did again. I didn't bleed and then I did and then I didn't. I remember my feet started to hurt all the time and I was worried I was getting fat. I remember I went to an old woman a few valleys over and she told me what was happening. She told me that I should rest a lot, that I shouldn't drink vodka, and that I should be wary of losing my footing in places with sharp jagged rocks. I was tired all the time but couldn't sleep. I ate all the time but was always hungry. I spent my days sitting down while my husband did all the work and I remember I spent a lot of time staring out of the window at the trees on the ridge line opposite, holding my arm across my breasts because they were rubbing and wishing that time would pass a bit quicker so my husband could come inside and massage my feet for an hour or two. I remember I walked very slowly, and I was careful. I remember I lay on my back every night terrified I would roll onto my front in my sleep. I remember one afternoon I went outside to fetch in the milk pails after my husband had gone to the market. I remember I felt something split and push inside me and I bent forward suddenly and dropped my pail, and the dregs of the milk ran down the path and mingled with the mud at the edge of the grass. I remember I called out several times for my husband but then I remember I remembered he was out at the market. I remember I went inside slowly, and took a sheet off the bed and spread it on the floor. I remember I straightened it out with my feet, before I squatted down and that when I squatted down my knees hurt because I hadn't done it for a while. I remember my knees were up round my ears and I scrutinised the doorframe very hard. I felt something push inside and I pushed back against it. I remember I pushed and it started to hurt. I remember I pushed and it hurt more than ever before but I knew it was worth it. I remember I pushed and I looked through the window at the sun on the trees on the ridge line. I remember I pushed and I felt opened up from my crown to my toes. I remember I pushed and the doorframe swam in the sweat that crunched up my eyes, I remember I pushed and my toes made a fist on the

[illegible]

Pause.

I remember I was told it's supposed to cry, I remember I was told it's supposed to move.

Pause.

It's supposed to breathe, at least. I remember that.

Pause.

It's isn't a child if it isn't alive. It isn't a son, or a daughter. So what is it, then? A blob? A hulk of meat? A rock? A rock? A rock. A rock. A rock. A rock. I looked out of the window.

Pause.

When my husband came back he didn't say anything, he just cut the rock away from between my legs and look it down to the end of the field to bury it. He didn't ask me to come with him which was fine because I didn't want to. I remember not crying in the night afterwards. I remember we went on and he told me he loved me whatever I did and he promised but I didn't believe him: the swelling in my stomach was a promise from God, God promised me a child and He gave me a rock, so if He can't even keep his promises then how on Earth can we ever, ever keep ours? But we kept going, anyway, my husband and I. I remember he told me I spring from the sole of my foot, I remember I washed my hair and he watched me. I remember I skinned a sheep and he

watched me wipe the blood from my face. I remember I cut the carrots into odd little shapes then a man came and shot him dead so I stabbed the man in the heart. I met a soldier and told him I was one too. We burned down my house and my stable and then we ate a badger. He fell asleep drunk and I walked away and didn't stop walking till I nearly collapsed. I met an old woman who thought I wanted to kill her and I stayed with her until I thought she wanted to kill me. I met a man whose parents were dead and I called him a fool and then washed his face when he was injured. I met a man with one eye who asked if he could paint me so I stood in his studio and changed into St Catherine and told him my life. Which is now. Which is here. Which is us. Which is this.

Pause.

Vitalik Good. That's good.

Pause.

Lizaveta And will you put that all into your portrait? When people come to see Saint Catherine will they see my whole life in her face?

Vitalik That's my intention.

Lizaveta Okay.

Time passes. He continues with the portrait.

Vitalik Do you want to rest? I can bring you some water.

Lizaveta I'm fine to carry on if you are.

Time passes. He continues with the portrait.

Vitalik Do you want to sit down?

Lizaveta No.

Time passes. He continues with the portrait.

It gets dark outside. He lights some candles.

Vitalik Shall we stop for the day, Lizaveta?

Placing the chair softly. No one is there. M and J prep the stage, moving around and shifting props.

J: *[To no one]* Would you please join us?

M: Are you sure?

J: Me? Yes of course.

M: It's just...

J: What?

M: Nothing, it's just... It's just...

J: What.

M: How do you know they are right for it?

J: I think that's the whole thing. A special relation to language. People who, maybe, mistrust it in some big ways, but also know that it's all they really have. There's a sound to that kind of relation. You hear it almost instantly. It's just a good balance of fear and need. Like, a kind of quavering, with authority. Probably, also, I think you have to be honest. Honest and humble. I think you have to say to yourself, here are the rules, here are the boundaries, and, within these limits, I will do everything I can to create an effect of infinity. *[to the volunteer]* And you are that. All of that, the whole thing.

OK?

M: ...and I don't have that?

[J lifts her eyebrows]

M: Let me paint you

J: Okay

They look at each other

As long as it won't take too long.

M: I promise it won't. I only need you for the early work, so we can probably go straight through, but let me know anytime if you need to stop. I've plenty of food and you can rest in the bed anytime if you're tired.

OK...Now you sit.

J: Please sit.

M: Sit.

J: Thank you. For... Thank you.

M: No need to thank me. We're both doing things for each other.

is what it was, earth and heaven interpenetrating one another, feeding one another and feeding me myself with vital sap. But alas, what that earth may be, what that light may be, that's something I still don't know, or rather something I...we no longer feel -

I have so much difficulty expressing myself...

It's gone now. The light, the earth. I *feel*. I just don't colour it as well as I used to. I've lost that. And I don't know if I can get it back. Or perhaps they were never there. I...we'll never know.

Silence

J: Do you want me to wear something?

M: There's some clothes I use for models on the side. And take that stick, too. St Catherine is supposed to have a sword, but I don't have a sword, so I'll have to imagine one. The stick will be useful, though, to see how your hands clasp an object. I'll wait outside for you to change. He goes. She looks around. She picks up a small icon and puts it into her pocket. She changes into the St Catherine clothes: a long, blue tunic and a belt. She waits.

J: And for the first time I...we hear human noises from the invisible crowd: bursts of laughter, muttering 'shush'ing, ironic coughing. Faint at first, these sounds will grow before dying away. But ignore them. It's passed.

M: Ready? She picks up the stick.

J: How should I hold this?

M: Like you would a sword. She holds the stick awkwardly. Don't think about the way you're doing it, just do it.

J: What?

M: Just try and clear your mind.

J: Yes. Just. Okay.

M: Do you feel it?

J: That was impressive. The dream, the way you told it. I listened and you told me...us.

M: You were impressive too. It is not mine, well it was. Not anymore.

J: Are you comfortable? That's great. That's really good. I'm doing really well. I was -

M: Inspired.

J: Considering we didn't have time to finish before...*[the audience]*

Silence

Thank you for listening.

short

From my childhood, you remember lying outside in the shade in the forest looking up at some branches above my head.

You remember throwing a ball

You remember running down a track

You remember falling and cutting my leg on the palms of my hands, crying.

You remember night when I was scared of the dark and I couldn't sleep.

you remember thinking it was darker in the room than when I close my eyes.

I remember a bull, a big one, snorting at me as I passed it field.

You remember my mother crying in the night.

You remember my baby brother dying and helping my father to dig a hole at the far end of our field.

You remember thinking it might be selfish of me to be reassured by her crying but it stopped me being scared of the dark.

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You remember he kept his promise and I was glad.

You remember he showed me how to chop vegetables and to feed the chickens.

You remember he was the milk the cows.

You remember he told me my parents are dead now and I only had him but that felt ok.

You remember he did touch me in the night and it hurt at first but then it didn't and then I did again.

I didn't bleed and then I did and then I didn't.

I rub my feet. To hurt all the time and I was worried I was getting fat.

You remember I went to an old woman at the valleys over and she told me what was happening.

She told me that I should rest a lot and that I shouldn't drink vodka and that I should be wary of losing my footing in places with sharp jagged rocks.

You remember I lay on my back every night terrified I would roll onto my front in my sleep

You remember one afternoon I went outside to fetch the milk pail after my husband had gone to the market

You remember I felt something split and push inside me and I bent forward suddenly and dropped my pail and the milk ran down the path and mingled with the mud at the edge of the grass.

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[Lights fade out.]

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1 *They look at each other*

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J: Thank you.

M: No need to thank me. We're both doing things for each other.

2 J: I'm thanking you anyway.

M: Well I'll thank you too, then, in that case.

Pause.

J: So who am I to be, then?

3 M: I think St Catherine. She was martyred in the early fourth century.

M goes to the computer and brings up googled examples of St Catherine. These can be wrong or incoherent choices. These are all live decisions.

It'll be a hagiographic icon, so there'll be scenes from Catherine's life around the outside: when she was tortured on the breaking wheel, for instance, or when she baptised the wife of the emperor Maxentius. There'll be a main portrait in the centre through, a portrait of her, of you, so that's what I need you to sit for. The scenes will show us some of the things she did, but the portrait will tell us who she really was.

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