

AMIE IRWIN

king of vessels

I.

large-leaf spearmint in the clay cup.
make no tea of this.

it will carry you to a terrible
inward, where your mother knots

your veins for quilt making
and your daughters

weave baskets of skin. your skin.
make no tea

of morning glories.
those hallucinatory stars.

you will find yourself believing
in the Christ child once more.

you will offer your tongue
to the blind man's nail

and the knight of vessels will say—
you crave blindness much too much.

2.

my brother was blind you'll tell the knight.

and he was. died before his second year.

you know
no tea can save you

from mother melancholy
that dress she made for you.

you know no tea can save you
from the whale's belly. that darkness

with a single eye.

3.

but Ninevah
is no wicked country. it is the hunger

of your children, their mouths
still aching for milk. Ninevah

is not the fear
of being swallowed, it's the trouble

of being filled. of brimming.
of becoming

what holds you. quiver & water &
breath doesn't spill

but grows. mounts. brother, daughters, mother,
all her stitches ripping,

dark and dark expelling, Christ—

4.

again the dry land
of the afternoon. light cupped

in the hands. her light in the seep. mother was
good enough. you are

good enough. you are a king
of this kind. you fill to

empty slow. empty small.
water poured over leaves.

palm-sized vessel.
let the steep speak. let the herb

do its singing—breathing breathing brother
may I walk into your mouth