

REBECCA DUNHAM

Catalyst

Carolyn Moore Layton, Peoples Temple,
Ukiah, California, 1969

I am that which unties a man's
very substance from itself, that which
annuls. He drapes his dark

handkerchief over a woman's
face & I wait until her knuckles whiten
on each of the wheelchair's rests.
He commands her: *Walk.*
His own legs buckle as she rises

until I lay my hands
on his, & he can deliver her—
all of them—disease dislodged

from deep within their bowels.
Freed of the paralysis of capitalism!
he pronounces, straightening with
my fingertips. Marcelline may be
his white moon, but I am his Venus,
impenetrable as her clouds,

the only one he can't spit
back up, another bloody chicken
gizzard to pull from their mouths
like a cancer. I hiss, boiling,
my touch saltpeter & steam, vanadium,
transforming him like a god
to oil of vitriol. He devours me

whole, a poisoned orange.
Mouth to my skin, he tastes me,

his lips on mine. Each time
we fuck, his sheet's starch turns
to black beneath us—soot in a fire—
& my sugar smokes columnar
hard, dark, & caramel-sweet. I am

consumed & then remade,
the one who has passed through death
to emerge on the other side.

It is simple chemistry. I am
the one left to pick up the pieces,
to arrange them as I see fit.