

## More Praise for *Saint X*

Beginning with the question “Do I / in bed in the/ dark matter?” and veering between star matter and flesh, Caroline Cabrera interrogates the surrealism of ontology, revealing insight into how displaced we can be as women and as people learning how we are of the world. In *Saint X*, Cabrera pulls us in from underwater or out of the heavens, and we are left gulping for air, grateful and unafraid.

—Carmen Gimenez Smith

In Caroline Cabrera’s terrific new *Saint X*, marked by graphic diamonds, appropriated questions hang quasi-scientifically in what becomes a remarkable, full-length staging of a high-stakes relationship. The results are wry (“Plants are dicks!”) or casual as sleepy bedtime talk (“How much more of this do you have in you?” the poet soon asks her non-stop interlocutor). Most often, though, the replies are signaturely and sweetly akilter (Do I / in bed in the/ dark matter? ) As this beautiful poem is also a self-exam by a hyper-intelligent, truly lyric conscience, X marks the untouched hotspot—needed, as Cabrera confidently demos here, because as the comet-questions shower overhead “To an animal, closeness can mean death/ I mean you, human.”

—Terri Witek

The questions Caroline Cabrera asks have answers that are not answers, that are personal and not, intimate and not, shared and not, and all parts of “our real concern.” The voice in *Saint X* is confident, vulnerable, wounded, doubtful, awed, courageous, and soft and kind and tough and honest and responsible. The voice says that our lives on this planet are ridiculous and remarkable and everything should be considered. Cabrera considers how mattering matters, what it’s like to live as a thinking girl and a wise woman, how the answers are badly needed and impossible, and how “A valley too likes to be held.” Cabrera says so much without saying so much. What’s difficult here becomes a flower seed, a need, which becomes a necessary bloom.

—Lesle Lewis



**CAROLINE CABRERA**



Black  
Lawrence  
Press

*For my sisters*

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*The proof that the little prince existed is that he was charming, that he laughed, and that he was looking for a sheep. If anybody wants a sheep, that is a proof that he exists.*

*What existed before the Big Bang?*

Rocks and bigger rocks and lots of rushing air. Does the truth matter more than a vivid picture in my head? I know vacuum means stillness but I hear clatter. Several moons in our solar system are larger than Pluto. I was pulling for the little guy but got exhausted. Got news the multiverse doesn't follow our established rules.

Start again.

Little puddles of star juice floating like a Pepsi exploded in a spaceship, a thermometer broken on a tile countertop, rolling balls of mercury between my finger and thumb. A plane with its roof peeled off like a tuna can. Debris, by nature, should be smaller than a human. That is how self-centered we made our words. I send my friends stickers over the internet. I imagine us clashing, though, in a physical way.

*What is dark matter?*

Does the dark matter?

Do I  
in bed in the  
dark matter?

*What is dark energy?*

No one needs for eyes. No eyes at all. The new moon, too, is a phase, though utterly dark. I learned from Kit. Black moon. Dark moon. A sky of nothing. We wake and wander sooty-footed down the hall, night-blind like fish who live inside light-less caves. We picture in the night a thick black fog around the face and eyes or a jellied darkness in the chest. Nothing hurts like a howl in the head. Sometimes it seems as if the dark will go on and on. Sometimes the dark does.

*Can anything escape a black hole?*

Of course not.  
I told you once before  
to forget salvation.

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[I was a child and you were a child once, too. Our parents prayed the devil away at night. I dreamed the devil was in my closet. The next night, at the foot of my bed. My mother, she hung a crucifix. Together we said a rosary. The devil retreated. I dreamed, too, a man was following me. In waking life he slowed his van and took a photograph while I cartwheeled in the front yard. I knew to run inside. Later, he would holler at me on streets, corner me at parties. I could not learn him away from me. Could learn my legs covered, my blonde hair un-bobbed. I could not learn enough the danger that I was: a girl, a pretty girl. I don't know whether to blame his body or his god.]

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*What is antimatter?*

What happens when you swing so furiously  
you fall back on your thick head? A bee flying  
backwards, a shadow stain in a library book.  
When you shave the hairs push back out  
almost immediately. Don't take it personally.  
On the psychopath test I showed high marks  
for leadership and intelligence but incompetence  
in the lack-of-empathy department. I'm bragging  
here. My results, essentially, were: *moderately  
psychopathic, but in a good way*. Like, a real good  
way. Would I lie to you? Could I even?

*Are there more than three dimensions?*

That is how I sweat  
while you hunker for winter  
  
hunger for a little more  
time

I can be apart  
and a part

if you want to say  
*loosey goosey*  
say it out

loud

buy some more  
asparagus

did you think  
I would say  
*time*  
again

*What happens to time as you approach the speed of light?*

You shed all your flesh  
and time cannot inhibit you.

*What is the origin of the moon?*

O, giant O,  
the hours already spent

if you smash your head against a window  
and break your head  
and the window  
and pieces of your head stay with you  
and pieces  
of glass stay with the window

those are moons

those are mild

you circle and I  
circle

and around us are yards for miles

if the multiverse is this city  
the moon  
is a lit parking lot  
we wander the wormhole streets like space guts

there is a first light at dawn  
and another and another

it is us and everyone we know  
it is a woman  
tugging at the ocean

in the ocean  
a fortune of loose change  
a battery of pilings

one moon-faced child  
with salt in her eyes

our city spills its bowels

*What triggers reversals of Earth's polarity?*

Everyone falls out of love at once.

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[When I think of Voyager 1 turning back to take one last photograph before going dark—when I think of that photograph, that last portrait of us all—I imagine a friend turning to wave a final ‘so long.’ I know the people I love will never live together again. Will never get ready for parties together or share an office. How hard it is to say goodbye.

I cry and it is a burden to no one.]

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*What is Earth's hum?*

I cry when I hear cello.

Infants have no wings to flap.

A sizzle. A box of light bulbs bursting.

*Could climate change cause ocean currents to shift?*

For too long I believed I still had time to become a kid wonder.

*Do rogue waves exist?*

You try telling the ocean what to do.  
I went under in a heavy break  
and came up to bait fish jumping  
at my face and body. Salt-blinded,  
I screamed. They felt sharp like slick  
arrowheads. My husband laughed.  
I have endured greater abandonments.  
And I can appreciate the comedy  
of the scene, though in the moment,  
I would have said I was dying.



*What is the structure of water?*

Could you break *me* down into sugars  
and proteins? Do you know my mitochondria  
are invaders I made the most of? I am every  
patient zero, wandering symptom free,  
making you peach melba. I spend  
very lovely days inside. And inside  
and on me, an unseen biosphere grows  
and cultivates a living for us all. What parts  
of me scare you and are you justified?  
What reaches us by river from the city?  
To an animal, closeness can mean death.  
I mean you, human.

*Why is each snowflake unique?*

Is this about you again?

*Why is the world green?*

I had something else in mind. I planned  
a cat with pink fur. A rainbow of pastel smoke.  
Shoot anything from the back of a plane  
and it will be part spectacle part threat.  
Plants I let die last year: the bromeliad,  
the succulents. Plants still holding on:  
Sade, the desert rose. My new succulents,  
Liz and Cal, write letters to each other  
but they still need attention from me. A lot  
rides on their survival. Mostly my self-worth.  
It is hard to be anything's sun. I try to burn  
but just pulse. I spend a lot of time setting.  
I say *my dears, I've spent eons becoming for you.*  
*I need I need a rest.* But they reach up  
expectantly. They stare, to be honest.  
I know, I am no sun. No mother.

*Where did life come from?*

If you want  
some impressive  
origin story  
you're going  
to have  
to write it