

Angel of the Abyss

by Michael Symmons Roberts

She does not like the details, and for that deserves
no blame. She hangs back at the edge of woods
where men line up on the brinks of pits they had to dig,
or on the fire escape as the doors are broken down.

She smokes, not to be blasé, but to offer it as prayer.
She wears a high-viz jacket, no thick cloak or hood,
For fear of turning into her own tribute act.
At home alone lit by the TV screen she watches

sports and stand-ups, skips the news, then paces
out her empty rooms, laments the allocations,
how she wound up ushering the sick or shot when
the healer, or angel of the perfumes would have suited.

Nevertheless, she goes where she is sent,
in trust that each last word, inaudible to all but her,
will hold together as a testament, to learn by rote.

From *Drysalter* (Jonathan Cape, 2013)