

Fasting, Self-Flagellating

how to separate our hearts
- Mariana Alcoforado

1

Fasting, self-flagellating
solitary for weeks to months
they entered they said an altered state

like ecstasy or love incarnate
burning sensations in the flesh
their spirits released transported

beyond their ordinary cells
surrounded by walls ornamented
with crouching grotesques of themselves —

habits gathered around their ankles
heads thrown back silently screaming
as if they might be giving birth.

2

If a man looked into a woman's eyes
he silently asked to be her lover.
If she met his gaze it meant Yes.

The day you left she wrote I faced
the rest of my life walking in silence
through cloisters to chapels emptied of their meaning.

3

Who would not have been deceived
by so many attentions she asked.
Consumed by your assiduities

Fascinated by your kindnesses
Enflamed by your exuberance
Won over by your vows

Seduced by my own inclinations
you appeared loving before
telling me you loved me.

You protested great passion.

I was charmed and I succumbed.
You were not as blinded as I.

4

Why have you poisoned my life?
I come to know the extent of my love
only now that I have tried

in vain to cure myself of it.
I prefer suffering to forgetting you,
I detest the tranquillity I knew

before you. From the bottom of my heart
I thank you. I love you as one
ought to love: desperately.

I defy you to forget me.
Without me you can know
only imperfect pleasure.