

Passagio

by [Kathleen Wakefield](#) in the [October 2022](#) issue

*—from the Italian: passage; passing;
a crossing/the transition between vocal registers*

Every singer finds that rift in their voice,
let's say B for you, D-flat for me, that refuses
breath passage, forced to a rasp. You have to find a way
to get where you're going as if nothing difficult is going on.

In Purcell's song "The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation"
Mary discovers the adolescent Jesus has disappeared
to who knows where in the Temple,
her anxiety too large for her heart to hold.

Her voice climbs to that place where all hell breaks loose—
*"Where is Gabriel that visited my cell?
Where is Gabriel? Gabriel? Gabriel?"* she shrieks,
wild declamation that could at any moment

tear her voice into shreds. Of course
she settles down to a kind of modest wonderment,
passages of exquisite ornamentation, but it is
her unbeautiful cries we remember.

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[Jon Mathieu](#), the *Century's* community engagement editor, engages [Kathleen Wakefield](#) in conversation about her poem and about her process for writing poetry.