

Joan Colby


John the Baptist of the Summer Solstice

John of Fires
Head sacrificed to passion.
Every doorframe holds
Fennel, green birch, white lilies,
The burning lamps of glass.

St. John's Wort, gold flowers
Spotted with blood
To drive out witches,
Protect the house from lightning.

If a barren woman walks
Naked at midnight
She will conceive. A virgin
Sleeps with one bloom
Beneath her pillow
To dream her bridegroom.

Dig up the root
Of St. John's Hand,
Smoke it over a bonfire
On Midsummer's Eve.



The evil eye will never
Gaze upon you.
Sprinkle its seed
In your shoe to become
Invisible as mercy.
Risk your soul
These practices are forbidden.

A ghostly coffin will follow you
Through the garden. At the church door
All marked to die in the coming year
Will enter, you may be among them.

John, precursor,
A cry in the wilderness
The voice of mugwort, plantain, yarrow.