

Burning Women

by

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(1) SIBYL

STORY 1:

*What follows occurs on a campus not unlike your own.
Four students were told they had four years
to find themselves: they accepted the part
and, naturally, overdid it a little.¹*

November 27 4 AM: Sibyl is walking the perimeter of campus and working through a pack of cigarettes. Talking, incoherent, to herself. Metal drip heavy down her throat, she is mourning the loss of her heart & the last of her drugs. She had come to the party to buy and go, but the boys shuffling through fraternity-basement mud had caught her eye and twisted it: horrified, she had watched them shrink down into pigs. Rolling in filth, swatting at her hip with clumsy hooves—

One in particular had stared, licking his lips. *Got a light? Wetted ashes.²*
Stop looking for ways to burn down the house. *No*, she had said. *And anyway, you ought to pick up a better bad habit.*

¹ Cf. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 33

² Joyce, *Ulysses* I.272

³ Cf. Eliot, *The Waste Land* I.3

STORY 2:

conscious escape
art parades

artists not only

slightly

masturbatory and lurking
but also

embracing
the narcissism of

a poem

using white as normal as

digression

that, even if shouted
from rooftops,
would do

nothing

about it

parallel

being so very

to all
real hurt

The Cumaean Sibyl sits at the gates of Hell. Aeneas visits her to gain passage. Apollo once desired her, and she refused him. She asked him for immortality, not eternal youth.

T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* begins with the following quotation from Petronius's *Satyricon*: "I have seen with my own eyes the Sibyl hanging in the jar, and when the boys asked her, "What do you want?" she answered, "I want to die."

SIBYL TRIES TO FORGET: VARIATIONS

saw you in person so short
with the bad teeth you with the love and
we with numb little smiles, adjusting the upper lip—

You can be difficult
to the point of

explosion

mixing memory with desire³ or
confusing the two altogether.

We took off all our clothes and you laughed at us,
us being a relative term but

I felt laughed at // I left laughed at

playing dead in my own house
now:

just the thing about contradictions,
you are that⁴ and

if I am going to feel all the time like combusting
there are prettier ways
packing a coin purse, exhaling loudly

I did not realize I was trying to take up so little space.

it isn't exactly that a man has died⁵ and
it's not that I don't like him⁶

³ Cf. Eliot, *The Waste Land* I.3

⁴ Schrader, *Taxi Driver* (1976)

⁵ Cf. Forster, *A Room With a View* 41

⁶ *Taxi Driver* (1976)

SIBYL (18) was a quiet & conscientious girl. SIBYL (20) is too thin with tired eyes and a graduation date increasingly in question following relationship with HENRY (22) and subsequent re-allocation of all strength & resource into her own abuses.

October:

SIBYL THINKS WHILE HENRY IS TALKING

(I would like to think you can start small fires with a flick of your pen. If anyone could—)

I can get a light installation, Sibyl says. Neon letters.

Henry:

Ok. But only
if it's white. A blank line

does not say

nothing.⁷

(you know)

It should

spell

white

noise.

A blank (or empty

sheet of paper—

I say more than

I mean I

stumble, as I always do
when scraping at real issue

like running one's face against a granite wall

in darkness...⁸

October 9: Henry's room.

He has the merit, if it is one, of saying exactly what he means.

She smiles, thinks: if you don't give it him, there's others will.

Strategic candles exaggerate the shadow of his arms, settling around her neck.

⁷ Cf. Carson, "Glass Essay"

⁸ *Dalloway* 225

JUST FALL ASLEEP IN NEW GRASS: SIBYL THINKS WHILE HENRY—

you weigh my worth
 in language
 my body
 never learned
 little raw soul⁹

& laughable candyhands

clear the *dry-erase* throat:
 gesture of refusal?¹⁰

(O you
 who present a smooth smiling face¹¹

grasshopper legs on trial,
 ok— dirt on my back
 sadly
 proud¹²

He recalls the taste of accidental perfume in an air-conditioned motel room in Tucson.

He leaves in the morning.
 I see the lines harden.
*What meat is it, Emily, we need?*¹³

I'm not
 a person of demonstrative character,¹⁴ just attached to the idea
 of skin.¹⁵ I'm not tired

of being told
 I'm beautiful
 yet...¹⁶

⁹ “Glass Essay”

¹⁰ Cf. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 70

¹¹ Ibid. 81

¹² Ibid. 70

¹³ Cf. “Glass Essay”

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁵ O’Hara, “Poem [Ann Arbor, November 1950]

¹⁶ O’Hara, “A Byzantine Place”

Please

endeavor to
 try to induce yourself¹⁷ as still
 oh my people
 as still life¹⁸ —

sunlight minute dreamed out.
 nightvision, needle still unclear

October 10 - November 15: Henry's room.

The cold has begun to come in through the windows.
 She reluctantly pulls off her skin.

November 28 6 PM: Sibyl sits on bleachers in the dark, lighting matches and putting them out on her arm, head bowed so low it nearly meets her knees. Elissa joins her quietly. She puts a tentative hand on Sibyl's back: (whispers) Tell me what happened.

¹⁷ *Portrait 97*

¹⁸ "A Byzantine Place"

TO ELISSA:

pay attention
rain beating down your elevator back

see his hand
playing with the frame

I can receive it as assaulted flesh.
The feeling is transferrable
if suffered even once,

the very vivid horror
discovered dormant in the every day
the

accidental mimicry

This is a dark you cannot trip the wires for.
Put your my teeth between my vertebrae,
shake awareness
of the beating given foreign hands—
dropping, hitting the ground

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

it slips
in blood,
it is uncomfortable

unsheathed

and *you*—

he asked me
what I even wanted
from him, once

but he had to beg me
to be less specific

*TAXES ON THE BACK LOT*¹⁹

Descent—

Penance

admit...²⁰

a pleasant haze, this one

you live quite nicely for someone
told, three days ago

that psychotherapy's not doing you much good,
is it?

silver and necessary:²¹
a girl's / interest and regard²²
am out of milk,
eggs,

woman

I was saying: Laugh,²³
sorry

as though
it were not my own saying:
Bury me

*in the old churchyard*²⁴—
be careful. Come

in under the shadow of this
red rock,²⁵ pinned
to nothing. Wind-picked bones.

My mother

¹⁹ "Glass Essay"

²⁰ Cf. *Portrait* 54

²¹ "Glass Essay"

²² *Portrait* 53

²³ Cf. "Glass Essay"

²⁴ Cf. *Portrait* 34, 16

²⁵ *Waste Land* I.26

summing things up²⁶—

sex unlike / the house²⁷
 recycled children, third
 who walks among you²⁸

nodding dimly, hard up
 like a handshake alone in a room

November 16: Sibyl's room.

*Symbol of departure or loneliness?*²⁹
 She flings herself on the couch that he left empty.³⁰

I live quite nicely for someone
 told, three days ago

that psychotherapy's not doing you much good,
 is it?³¹

²⁶ Cf. "Glass Essay"

²⁷ Myles, "An American Poem"

²⁸ Cf. *Waste Land* V.360

²⁹ *Portrait* 165

³⁰ Vergil, *Aeneid* IV.102

³¹ "Glass Essay;" Ballhaus, "Taxes"

ELISSA (21) slept with Henry two years ago but would never tell Sibyl. Best efforts aside, she has to date never felt anything quite so high or so low as she does in the presence of a THOM (20). As numbness takes hold of Sibyl, Elissa finds pure range of feeling seems an increasingly valid excuse to return to Thom's disinterested gaze.

ELISSA DROVE HER HOME

Sibyl answered, "I want to die."³²

*well,
now that's done: and I'm glad
it's over*³³

I have seen with my own eyes the Sibyl hanging in a jar³⁴

(He assaults at once,
makes a welcome
of indifference³⁵

and when the boys asked her "What do you want?"³⁶

Stay with me.³⁷
She always feels alone.³⁸

I will kill myself
an awful thing to say³⁹

Your arms full, and your hair wet⁴⁰
(Henry said)

Failure
one conceals.⁴¹

They nod discreetly.
Elissa drives away.

³² Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon*

³³ *Waste Land* III.252

³⁴ Cf. *Satyricon*

³⁵ *Waste Land* III.239,242

³⁶ Cf. *Satyricon*

³⁷ *Waste Land* II.112

³⁸ *Aeneid* IV.585

³⁹ *Dalloway* 207

⁴⁰ *Waste Land* I.38

⁴¹ *Dalloway* 207

DECEMBER: *SIBYL WITH SOME COLOR RETURNED TO HER CHEEKS*

Female pain is still news. It's always news.⁴²
 You see my battered face. Then I fall back.⁴³

*What do you mean Creation? God circled her. (Fire. Time. Fire.)
 Choose, said God.*⁴⁴

So, suffer.
 So, reason speaks.⁴⁵
 The week has wandered off.
 The death will not change⁴⁶

*I'm still
 in the forest*⁴⁷

Cancel all the great words for my generation.⁴⁸
 Discrimination self-taught.
 Fate, giving us a

*checkmate.*⁴⁹

*us, despite it.)*⁵⁰

⁴² Jamison, "Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain" (2014)

⁴³ Carson, "TV Men: Artaud"

⁴⁴ Ibid., "The Truth About God: God's Woman"

⁴⁵ Cf. Notley, "...I Thought She Was Going To Be a Ghost Story;" Ref. Dante, *Inferno* V.39

⁴⁶ Cf. O, Hara, "[It Is a Cold Weak Morning and I Roll]"

⁴⁷ Cf. Notley, "Have Made Earth As The Mirror of Heaven"

⁴⁸ Cf. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 63

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid. 45

⁵⁰ Notley, "Particle Doll"

*THIS SEX BUSINESS:*⁵¹

poets
 who glorified it
 were mostly men⁵²

says a man

You needn't be afraid of me

I say, turning

*I don't love you,⁵³
 and I didn't want to keep you.*

I'm not going on again, am I?

You were
 wonderful...⁵⁴

⁵¹ Cf. *Chatterley* 3

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Cf. O'Hara, "Prose for the Times"

⁵⁴ Coyne, "Slings and Arrows" S2E5

(2) DIDO

Dido is Aeneas' brief lover on his way to Rome.
When he leaves, she runs herself through with his sword
on a lit funeral pyre for his effigy. He can see the smoke
rise as he sails away.

Dido flips
through a copy of *Inferno*,
laughs in your face.

You call this flame?

*You
have never been in love.*

WHAT WOULD I, IN THE END, KNOW BETTER?

you associate with *Dido*??

my mother's face wrinkles
at too many things I say
for me to continue
taking her at her word
as I would like

oh certainly mother

if my overly explicit wine-fed dinners haven't shared as much
let me make it plain
I am
the poster child for scorned women everywhere, even
trying to start a club of it but

no one seems

too attached
to the title

*THE TROOP WHERE DIDO IS*⁵⁵

Dante, you confuse me

or

Dante, you seem confused.⁵⁶

Yes, Aeneas, *duty-bound*, leaves Dido's side:

Vergil couldn't. Vergil stayed for the funeral.

You chase her to the afterlife.

And do you think this shame, Dante?

To point her out among the flames?

Dido set *herself* on fire.

That she made reason subject to desire is quite correct:

she took all reason
and forced it to its knees
before the queen—

And you stand transfixed before it, Dante.

She didn't want to be left alone: you praise Aeneas,
but linger in her presence. Dido

is the flame the moths keep circling,
a horizon Icarus
couldn't resist. She is
the hope that hurts,
the new that's ancient.⁵⁷ Dante, you are

Odysseus in a desk chair,
ears stuffed with wax as you shout
REASON REASON REASON

past
the vision of desire
one more time.

⁵⁵ *Inferno* V.85

⁵⁶ Ref. Notley, *Disobedience*

⁵⁷ Piercy, "At the well"

Certain mythologies name Dido as Elissa, a rendering of the Phoenician name Elishat. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, Dido has the epithet of *infelix*, meaning unhappy, unlucky, unfruitful. Aeneas has the epithet of *pius*, duty-bound.

WHAT WORK FOR THE GODS WHO LIVE ON HIGH⁵⁸

Every time an academic spits out
female hysteria
 Dido rolls over in Hell,
 pornographic pain.

Thom puts out a cigarette on his chest and screams.
 Elissa doesn't bother showing her burns.

^

Like they can relegate to history,
 like these facts carry equal no-weight:

Rome wasn't built in a day and
 Dido wasn't wifing material

girls read this
 see Venus swoop, turn the heartrates up
 they get the fear of God

boys get the fear of Dido and
 the message: men have empires to build, women
 are *tragic relief*

let's not be so quick to call hysteria irrational
 the fear created
 unintentional

instead, call Dido queen of fire, cold

in the face of Aeneas, drifting past stony.

She whispers:
 once you got into my bed,
you should have been too afraid to leave.

⁵⁸ *Aeneid* IV.475

I am not going to wake up one day and forgive you.

*The accusation of wound-dwelling.*⁵⁹

This isn't something that goes away—

*OUR LIFE IS A CAMERA OBSCURA, SAID ISAIAH, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS?*⁶⁰

The posture, like most, is claustrophobic.
 Jadedness, aching gone implicit.⁶¹
 Your shadow at morning
 striding behind you.⁶²

I am ready to start
 something that doesn't hurt.
 Post-wounded okays the wound,
 the burning out of shames.

*She had to be a passive,
 consenting thing.*⁶³
*A view of a body on a floor.*⁶⁴
*The thrust of a sword
 in her softly-opened body.*⁶⁵

*When there's nothing
 left to burn...*⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Cf. "Female Pain"

⁶⁰ Carson, "Book of Isaiah II"

⁶¹ Cf. "Female Pain"

⁶² *Waste Land* I.28

⁶³ *Chatterley* 267

⁶⁴ Notley, "The Islanders Remember That There Are No Women and No Men"

⁶⁵ *Chatterley* 184

⁶⁶ Stars, "Your Ex-Lover is Dead"

In 2000 years, one woman's death
 becomes another woman's orgasm.
 History is men who aren't careful
 with their phrasing. *Post-wounded* is

Dido, unforgiving in the afterlife.
 Me putting out matches on my arm
 when you leave. Ambition
 making you an Icarus, sarcasm

quick on the heels
 of anything resembling self-pity.⁶⁷

*THE NEXT PERSON TO OFFER ME PITY WILL BE MENTIONED, BY NAME, IN MY SUICIDE NOTE.
 YOU SET FIRE TO HER HAYSTACK ALL RIGHT.*⁶⁸

Whether it's sex or death, women
 should stay away from fire.
 I find the threat of implication
 most effective in making this

a male concern. Hearth & home,
 men finding fire & asking women
 to keep it alive, every day.
 Tell me again about the sensual flame of it—⁶⁹

SEX OR DEATH?

Don't go,
 she whispers in blind frenzy.⁷⁰
*All I ask is time, blank time.*⁷¹
 Two paper women, 2000 years

apart. Did DH Lawrence forget
 that Dido dies? Or didn't he care.
 900 years after him, you still

⁶⁷ Cf. "Female Pain"

⁶⁸ Cf. Harmon and Pomerantz, "Community," S1E8

⁶⁹ *Chatterley* 307

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 184

⁷¹ *Aeneid* IV.544-5

*have to set yourself on fire,*⁷²

the bodies going meaningless,⁷³

dull roots, spring rain.⁷⁴

Million year old Sibyl sitting

in a leaky jar,⁷⁵ eternity

a shoddy lid.⁷⁶ Solution:

Sex or death?

She had to give herself. I want to

be kept and you don't

want to keep me. Either way,

the paradisaal promise.

(men to talk to)⁷⁷

(fire)

⁷² “Your Ex-Lover is Dead”

⁷³ Cf. *Chatterley* 73

⁷⁴ Cf. *Waste Land* I.4

⁷⁵ Cf. Carson, “The Gender of Sound”

⁷⁶ Cf. *Chatterley* 173

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 124, 228, 4

QUOTIDIAN

a suicide bomber
hands out detonators to all
potential future lovers

I stand in front of a loaded gun
across the street, smiling

*You can put it
anywhere you want*

How many times
have you heard a woman say that
and really mean it?

go home: this day, alone
 or not at all—
 how do you

prefer to be woken?

(This is

a nose-dive
 into the fire-breathing dayadhvum⁷⁸

a tired recollection
 of the most electric feelings

LEGACY

I briefly consider setting myself on fire each time you leave this is
 not normal. I should like to love
 myself⁷⁹ to

sudden venom
 of a

poorly transmuted,
 penniless

besides

he is
 fear incarnate

making this choice

⁷⁸ *Waste Land* V.433

⁷⁹ Ref. "Glass Essay"

*THIS DAY DID NOT BRING ME YOU*⁸⁰

I walked here and burned my feet
Uncertain, over-fed

I like watching others
not laugh at my jokes
You do me one better

You misunderstand me
completely—wing
recently fused, my shoulder

blade twitches
with extra weight
still. Do you know

when you are someone else's

pressure
point?⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ref. Notley, "There Isn't Much To Do If You Aren't Geology"

⁸¹ Moffat and Gatiss, "Sherlock" (2010) S3E3

ALL (DID YOU KNOW THAT?) WHO ENTER

I.

I've been taking my pills at face value
 just like you said
 Doctor
 but feelings & emotions, (so decidedly bourgeois)⁸²
 continue to elude me.

II.

He
 represented a certain crude barrier:
 an armed guard
 with broken feet. The rule was simple:
 I help him up, he offers me free passage.
 Destination of my choice.

I had his thick metallic arm
 around my neck, I tried to stand up
 with his weight on my back
 but we both collapsed

laughing.
 That was twenty years ago.⁸³

Yesterday, he rolled into the river.
 I keep receiving letters of congratulation.
 I have the postman read them to me

flashlight, when all other noise
 has ceased. At times, wind
 picks up, and leaves of paper slip
 through knotted hands.

I do not care to pick them up.⁸⁴

⁸² Cf. *Chatterley* 38

⁸³ Cf. Notley, "The Big Slip on the Dead Woman is Pink"

⁸⁴ Ref. *Aeneid* III.528

III.

You ask me why I am late
to our next appointment.
He didn't walk me to the gates
of Hell, Doctor.

I only met him there.

*A LOVELY UNCONCERN*⁸⁵

She defined for herself miracle as the following:

honesty, would only cause nausea,

or suicide⁸⁶

she won every game she played

against
most decent hearts

⁸⁵ Levertov, "The Gypsy's Widow"

⁸⁶ Cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 163

(3) ELISSA

SEX IN COLLEGE, ACCORDING TO ELISSA

I tell myself love is lying myself to orgasm three times a week
and not asking where you spend weekends. Work
is a suitable excuse for the times when I don't hear from you
so long I catch myself wondering if you'd come to my funeral.

Love is the hobby I've picked
up not eating after seeing your ex in a psychology class, love is the sick fact
of that actually working, love is only getting close
anymore I imagine you looking down at the ribs in my back
while you mutter lines I can only assume you found in 70s porn

but I'll moan accordingly—
love is never giving you a reason to say no
when I ask to come over, not wondering if you notice that
I have trouble faking it even

since I lost weight, that when I say your name
it sounds like a call with a bad connection. don't.

Elissa considers her relationship with THOM (20) to have started a full year before the date he would give if asked, & more likely he wouldn't give a date at all. Thom would be surprised by the implication that his narrative is entangled with the others. He's deeply invested in proving his own importance: whether objectively or just to his father, Elissa has never quite figured out. Her appeal for him is cyclical, inversely rising and falling as Thom considers his flaws to be more or less visible. She finds him at least half as interesting as he finds himself, and twice as good.

DECEMBER: *THE FIFTH (OR MAYBE THE EIGHTH) RETURN TO THOM*

scrape my fault lines,
dizzy with escape

by flight *he* meant
flying and I mean
being flown⁸⁷

(downy owlets shivering⁸⁸
who will, who will be fed?⁸⁹)

*I thought the universe felt love,*⁹⁰ I say,
*hurry, you're so strong,*⁹¹ I say, thinking:
when

living

resembles airplane food⁹²
even at knife point, I

have never
been willing to be
or become
a man⁹³

he
seduces you for hire⁹⁴
and
you cannot ignore
that

death⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Cf. Piercy, "Night Flight"

⁸⁸ Ibid., "The Great Horned Owl"

⁸⁹ Ibid., "Complaint of the exhausted author"

⁹⁰ *Inferno* XII.41

⁹¹ Piercy, "For strong women"

⁹² Ibid., "Memo"

⁹³ Ibid., "The Moon is Always Female"

⁹⁴ Ibid., "Memo"

that
suave

reptilian glitter⁹⁶

and

you have to
like it,

better
than being
loved.⁹⁷

January 25 2 AM: Thom does too much cocaine. He falls down and chips his tooth, then calls Elissa. She says no for two hours and then yes. She gets out of bed, puts on perfume, and greets him with Xanax in one hand and ice wrapped in a dishtowel her parents gave her in the other.

⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., "Attack of the squash people"

⁹⁷ Ibid., "For The Young Who Want To"

*THE ICE MELTS INTO POOLS OF SURPRISING COLD WATER ALL OVER THE
BED*

Because I say so little,
you think I don't feel, I

care a lot, you for me
a little bit but

how could
I hang a life on waiting,⁹⁸
consign my lone left self as

widow black and
killed with pleasure.

Do I
contradict myself?⁹⁹
I know
I contradict you—
insisting presence
as life support, small
wonder that you run
from this.

Turning the lights out,
I showed all
the blacklight strings
of having me.

I only mean
to re-arrange blame
to myself: women,
even bleeding out,
can't help but try

to make it all ok..

⁹⁸ Cf. Forster, *Maurice* 245

⁹⁹ Whitman, "Song of Myself"

February 17: Elissa's room, stoic attempt at conversation

Thom: *you're tapping in*
to some of my worst fears here

change the subject: Am I alone tonight?¹⁰⁰

Elissa: *everybody says*
they wouldn't cheat

(the only one
with bleeding gums tonight?¹⁰¹

yes)

but with some certainty— spring opens

like a blade here¹⁰²
 breeding ground,
 the unsubstantial image¹⁰³

(He pulls her head into his chest.
 She begins to lose focus.)

She shifted to a question about

Napoleon,
 timidity and inexperience.¹⁰⁴

Thom twitches (5'8").
 Elissa throws herself across the bed,
 away from him, demands

*vague speech*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ "An American Poem"

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Cf. "Glass Essay"

¹⁰³ *Portrait* 44

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Portrait* 31, 45

¹⁰⁵ *Portrait* 71

higher eagles....¹⁰⁶

Has this corpse
begun to sprout?¹⁰⁷

Do you want me to leave you alone?
he asks in the morning.

She can't say

Elissa thinks:

kill him
the dog in his white silken fur¹⁰⁸

scattered and
child-
like skin

¹⁰⁶ O'Hara, "A Byzantine Place"

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Waste Land* I.71-2

¹⁰⁸ Sartre, *The Flies*

FEBRUARY 18-MARCH 1: *I FEEL KICKED TODAY, LONELY, AWARE OF THE
HOURLASS.*

Cigarettes confuse me, I thought people smoked them
when they wanted to die. But the world is full
of a brown-haired boy with laughing eyes who tells me
I am too serious, ducks his head down for a light.

I don't want you to die, she whispers,
smoking past
his house.

March 1-6 2015: Elissa's room

She doesn't leave.
She waits anxious for Thom to return, replaying the last.

TOP DOG PULLED CLOSER BY HER TAIL: PRETENDING TO BE OKAY

hurry up now it's time¹⁰⁹

metal wrists like
auto-tune *fine* like
apologetic
justice

ranking smallness over strength (hurry up now¹¹⁰

sustain

my panic,

my grope¹¹¹
Thou

as awake as myself, all night
unsociable

watching

it's time)¹¹²

the year repeat
its days

cauterization

of took longer
snow falling on it...¹¹³

barking orders into desktop secretaries tired of other satisfactions (you

(sucking gold
foil wrappers

hurry up now)¹¹⁴

loosen your tie to coffee I didn't make but take credit for

cold
in the high blue room¹¹⁵ I think

*it's time*¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Waste Land* II.152

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ "A Byzantine Place"

¹¹² Cf. *Waste Land* II.152

¹¹³ Cf. "Glass Essay"

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Waste Land* II.152

nothing

not below the skin, just

just
outside it

SIBYL FINDS HER VOICE IN SARCASTIC LOADED HYPOTHETICALS

How can you catch the bad guys if you like them?

I only want to yell at them...¹¹⁷

A marvelous, poignant death¹¹⁸ *or* I had not thought death
had undone so
many¹¹⁹

Why did you say that name?

You'd have to kill me to get rid of¹²⁰ Heroin is a door always opened
by white women¹²¹

You have forgotten how I love her¹²²—*or*: I thought the universe felt,
love¹²³

¹¹⁵ “Glass Essay”

¹¹⁶ *Waste Land* II.152

¹¹⁷ Notley, “Circorpse”

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Chatterley* 267

¹¹⁹ *Waste Land* I.63; Cf. *Inferno* III.55-7

¹²⁰ Cf. Pabst and Vajda, “Pandora’s Box” (1929)

¹²¹ Lamantia, “Hypodermic Light”

¹²² O’Hara, “Poem About Jane”

¹²³ Cf. *Inferno* XII.41

You missed /
the love of a lifetime.

“OUR MOTHER!” “I SAID AUTO-” “MATICALLY”¹³²

The truth
is like poetry, and most people
fucking hate poetry.¹³³

THAT YOU SHOULD BE MY FOREST FIRE

how frightening

¹³² Notley, *Descent of Alette* 6

¹³³ Randolph and McKay, *The Big Short* (2015)

APRIL: FIRE OUT, BEGIN.

You do not get to choose
if I still call you home—with

holes
in the stairs and a harem
of ghosts
 unmaking the bed you

would hammer FOR SALE
in the lawn
with my head you

hired a realtor, she
lights down hardwood floors,
a bridal smile—

(Helen)

I fear the Greeks, especially bearing
 gifts.¹³⁴ I am not waiting

for a house to call my own.
I think it would pain me
as much to do
 as to be
 robbed.¹³⁵
This is my curse, war between all.¹³⁶

Remembering thoughts
in connection with places¹³⁷—

¹³⁴ Cf. *Aeneid* II.62

¹³⁵ *Portrait* 180

¹³⁶ Cf. *Aeneid* IV.783

¹³⁷ Cf. *Portrait* 180

Midwife to your agonies.¹³⁸
I choose to ruin
yours.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Aeneid* IV.760

(4) LB, *BURNING WOMEN*

HD, HELEN IN EGYPT
POUND, CANTOS

I CLOSED MY EYES AND PICTURED US TWO LIZARDS IN A DESERT

You turn your head and flick your tongue,
I am humming with joy for the sand under my webfeet
but it's a nice night so I put one on yours: *be a doll honey*.
I can hear your silly lizard whisper; darling, life is simple when
your skin's so dry and my head is tucked into your chest.
In the desert there's a God and he might let you be my brother.

VISITING HOURS

imparsable possible of who who who & yes you were talking have you ever had
 anything removed & do you think the surgeon felt guilt you inwit¹³⁹ nitwit how do
 you know / what doesn't hurt / vases rolling down altarpieces well / yes I pushed
 them does that / break enough for you now? GET AWAY FROM THERE¹⁴⁰
 what's wrong? shards on naked feet me sobbing crawling / over to the pieces

care now care now call now come home ghost got bored
 and left me / all this dustbin

to do

not ever /

I won't

lying down...

Be my friend help me
 care again The house
 is breathing down my
 neck I forgot which
 story we're in Forgot
 the third who walks
 beside you¹⁴¹ & the I
 in we Rolling half-
 naked half-corpses
 in bed asking *what*
*do you mean*¹⁴² when did

I
 find
 out?

¹³⁹ Joyce, *Ulysses* 16

¹⁴⁰ Nasser, "Frozen Flowers" (2016)

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Waste Land* V.360

¹⁴² Bieber, "What Do You Mean"

*WRITING SIBYL: I HAVE BEEN INTO THE DARK AND I AM GOING BACK*¹⁴³

he made me
split the abortion
even though
the only mother I wanted to be
was his

and that guy's who you think might have been David
I add uncomfortable
staring it in the face, focusing
on faded afterlife—

Ah for a little directness to liberate the soul!¹⁴⁴
basically

he was not
acidic, just
a mouthing-off motherfucker
who I'd ask to dry
salty, wet tongue
on pleasure
remembered in detail

we'd rather you think us passive than walk away, certainly

aspiring to be the photo-edited inscription of transgression
wind-blown enough for the *you* to stay lost in it—

You is never one to entertain
anything so subtle,

you marches to destiny
by catchwords,
ignoring the poet's insistence:
love is eternal¹⁴⁵

poetry, an escape from emotion,¹⁴⁶ and I,

¹⁴³ *Room With a View* 155

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 189

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Room With a View* 23, 162, 189

forty fox holes away

unconventional image of
this particular grey area

demure and honest when I say
behind the smoke: I've never liked to disappoint

ELISSA CONCESSION #1: THE FIRST ONE AFTER

I can't look at mirrors in the dark, I say

do you have that problem? I don't

think about mirrors
as often as you do, he says I love you he
responds incorrectly, loud
and often
and mean
enough to distract

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Hastings, *Tom & Viv* (1994)

*ELISSA CONCESSION #2: ALLOWING HERSELF TO BE REMOVED
FROM THE RIVER*

Fat and bloody on the
 Wrong kind of love
 Spoon-fed metal
On millennial blues
That age you don't yet have
An image for

New waters
Filled with

Same enticing teeth, speak
 From borrowed mouths
 Asking

Which of all your oceans
Could connect to you?

 Mind you—
 Feet quite caught

 You hauling rope with six other young men dressed in khaki I have

 Little time left to win—

I cede
individual claws.

THE FIFTH (OR MAYBE THE EIGHTH) RETURN: ELISSA'S 3RD
CONCESSION¹⁴⁷

when I skip between the tricked-up
keyed-up wanting of you and the
want to spend more time with you
if only
so the heavy-lidded apathy could stick right now I
—not that
I'm an enemy to speed (the keyed-up, tricked-up) no
I'd play my
heartrate like a metronome
if I could beat out *after* but
what goes up must
(fall
into your arms
the hundredth time
defined as
the packing of reluctant romantics

(Elissa

¹⁴⁷ *Burning Women* 34

into snow or
my favorite way of lying I have left

HATED JEW OF TOO MANY QUESTIONS

we're going to have to talk about things

we've never done that have we¹⁴⁸

maybe you have a virus or something
24 hour (virus)
it happens¹⁴⁹

what have they done with
my kind, familiar

self?

(what will I do tomorrow;
what will I ever do?)¹⁵⁰

idle hands...

ok ok
did you get

you didn't but
I sent some flowers, well
tomorrow
or the next day
you know
who lives there¹⁵¹

why do you like me?
when am I good?

she said she trusted I should never live a duet¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *Tom & Viv* (1994)

¹⁴⁹ *Taxi Driver* (1976)

¹⁵⁰ *Waste Land* II.33-4; *Tom & Viv* (1994)

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Taxi Driver* (1976)

¹⁵² *Room With a View* 22

what do you think of that

I said

what do you think of that don't answer

right

you must think

I bet you think

I'm really sick,
right?

you think I'm sick? / / / /

it'll be no more pills
it'll be no more bad foods
it'll be no more destruction of my body¹⁵³

maybe
just like seeing my name on so many bottles

mistaking Machiavelli for a saint

you kiss me. I will try¹⁵⁴

to get so very good I trick myself

you, non-Jew with colorful eyes—

next question

¹⁵³ Cf. *Taxi Driver* (1976)

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Room With a View* 19, 191

How much do you love me?
 Let me count the
 corpses.¹⁵⁵

I want no amateur atheist, no
 budding Buddhist.
 Cannot repent.

*(Told her so and asked for sixpence.
 Got threepence.
 Mother indulgent.)¹⁵⁶*

To have and not to hold.¹⁵⁷
 Love is a downer we take.¹⁵⁸

Plaintive,
 as if
 you seduced your
 prey.¹⁵⁹

*(Memory a minefield¹⁶⁰—
 men scouting mothers
 through
 my womb.)¹⁶¹*

This petty pace.¹⁶²
 Elbows spiky with scruples.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ Piercy, "The purge"

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Portrait* 165, 182

¹⁵⁷ Piercy, "To have without holding"

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, "Shadows of the burning"

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, "The Great Horned Owl"

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, "Night Flight"

¹⁶¹ Cf. "Shadows of the burning"

¹⁶² Shakespeare, *Macbeth* V.V.20

¹⁶³ Cf. "Shadows of the burning"

That's still

your problem,

isn't it?
Bone chip sharp.¹⁶⁴

Power

to feel scraped.

A child coming to her parents holding her life in her arms.
Saying "this is what I made of it! This!"¹⁶⁵

(Would you say that this is going well?)

¹⁶⁴ Piercy, "Complaint of the exhausted author"

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Dalloway* 204

I THREW AN ARROW

At breakfast I told you
I didn't miss you anymore

nothing but sand and pigs on leashes
down to anybody's wire

Antigua helped a little
historically speaking

Were we, by the way?
Historically, speaking.

POST MORTEM

How about this?

Doesn't work.
We try everything, everything but
trying it.

Didn't work.

Where are you? I don't
have a thing to look for

anymore.

lost

all the tiny choices—

Is it ok to say I've been missing you,
etc? 20 years of You, Etc? I hadn't
quite thought
the game was over...¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ "Sherlock" (2009) S2E3

WHEN PEOPLE LOOK AT EACH OTHER & SMILE & I DON'T KNOW WHY

I need to be around and near myself & you / a circle not quite closed / strapped to the
 wheel of shoot the golden sunshine in at just that just that dark / back down / you said
 this was a carnival no / I said / a calendar / oh well / much worse / as gift / by the way
 / couldn't you / have just / cleaned my ears out like a cat instead?

melting out *all* the golden wax
 for symmetry, hey! I am just trying to be like
 those girls you like

(so balanced

THE ONLY THING YOU CAN EFFECT IS CHANGE

They use the word "effecting," when
 A) you're a woman.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Notley, "The Usual and Most Tenuous of Goodbyes"

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