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
conscious escape
art parades
artists not only
slightly

masturbatory and lurking
but also

embracing
the narcissism of

using white as normal as

that, even if shouted
from rooftops,
would do

about it

being so very

to all
real hurt

a poem
digression
nothing
parallel

STORY 2:
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 desire\(^3\) or
confusing the two altogether.

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

\textit{I felt laughed at} // \textit{I left laughed at}

playing dead in my own house
now:

just the thing about contradictions,
you are that\(^4\) 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.

\[\text{it isn’t exactly that a man has died}\] \(^5\) and
\[\text{it’s not that I don’t like him}\] \(^6\)

---

\(^3\) Cf. Eliot, \textit{The Waste Land I.3}
\(^4\) Schrader, \textit{Taxi Driver} (1976)
\(^5\) Cf. Forster, \textit{A Room With a View} 41
\(^6\) \textit{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:
(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
you weigh my worth
in language
   my body
   never learned
   little raw soul\(^9\)

& laughable candyhands

clear the *dry-erase* throat:
gesture of refusal?\(^{10}\)

(O you
   who present a smooth smiling face\(^{11}\)

   grasshopper legs on trial,
  ok— dirt on my back
  sadly
  proud\(^{12}\)

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 yourself\(^ {17} \) as still
    oh my people
    as still life\(^ {18} \) —

    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

Descent—

Penance

admit…

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:

a girl’s / interest and regard

am out of milk,

eggs,

woman

I was saying: Laugh,
sorry

as though

it were not my own saying:

Bury me

in the old churchyard—

be careful. Come

in under the shadow of this
red rock, 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 1.26
summing things up—

sex unlike / the house
recycled children, third
who walks among you

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

November 16: Sibyl’s room.

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

I live quite nicely for someone
told, three days ago

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

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.
Sibyl answered, “I want to die.”

well,
now that’s done: and I’m glad
it’s over

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

(He assaults at once,
    makes a welcome
    of indifference

and when the boys asked her “What do you want?”

    Stay with me.
    She always feels alone.

I will kill myself
an awful thing to say

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

Failure
one conceals.

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.  
You see my battered face. Then I fall back.

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

So, suffer.  
So, reason speaks.

The week has wandered off.  
The death will not change

I’m still  
in the forest

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

---

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”
poets
who glorified it
were mostly men\textsuperscript{52} says a man

\textit{You needn't be afraid of me} I say, turning
\textit{I don't love you,}\textsuperscript{53}
\textit{and I didn't want to keep you.}

\textit{I'm not going on again, am I?}

You were
wonderful…\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. \textit{Chatterley} 3
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Cf. O’Hara, “Prose for the Times”
\textsuperscript{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
Dante, you confuse me

or

Dante, you seem confused.  

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.  

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.
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 heart rates 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—

\(\text{Our life is a camera obscura, said Isaiah, do you know what that is?}^{60}\)

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.

\(She\ \text{had to be a passive,}
\text{consenting thing.}^{63}\)
\(A\ \text{view of a body on a floor.}^{64}\)
\(The\ \text{thrust of a sword}
\text{in her softly-opened body.}^{65}\)

\(When\ \text{there’s nothing}
\text{left to burn...}^{66}\)

\(^{59}\) 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

have to set yourself on fire,\textsuperscript{72}

the bodies going meaningless,\textsuperscript{73}
dull roots, spring rain.\textsuperscript{74}
Million year old Sibyl sitting
in a leaky jar,\textsuperscript{75} eternity

a shoddy lid.\textsuperscript{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 paradisal promise. \quad \text{(men to talk to)}\textsuperscript{77}

\text{(fire)}

\textsuperscript{72} “Your Ex-Lover is Dead”
\textsuperscript{73} Cf. Chatterley 73
\textsuperscript{74} Cf. Waste Land I.4
\textsuperscript{75} Cf. Carson, “The Gender of Sound”
\textsuperscript{76} Cf. Chatterley 173
\textsuperscript{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 dayadhvum

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 myself 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”
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?\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Ref. Notley, “There Isn’t Much To Do If You Aren’t Geology”
\textsuperscript{81} Moffat and Gatiss, “Sherlock” (2010) S3E3
I.

I’ve been taking my pills at face value
   just like you said
   Doctor
but feelings & emotions, (so decidedly bourgeois)\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Chatterley 38
\textsuperscript{83} Cf. Notley, “The Big Slip on the Dead Woman is Pink”
\textsuperscript{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_\textsuperscript{85}

She defined for herself miracle as the following:

honesty, would only cause nausea,

or suicide\textsuperscript{86}

she won every game she played

against

most decent hearts

\textsuperscript{85} Levertov, “The Gypsy’s Widow”

\textsuperscript{86} Cf. Nietzsche, _The Gay Science_ 163
(3) 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.
scrape my fault lines,
dizzy with escape

by flight he meant
flying and I mean
being flown

(downy owlets shivering
who will, who will be fed)

I thought the universe felt love, I say,
hurry, you’re so strong, I say, thinking:
when

living

resembles airplane food
even at knife point, I

have never
been willing to be
or become
a man

he
seduces you for hire
and
you cannot ignore
that

death

---

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 glitter\textsuperscript{96} and you have to like it, better than being loved.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{95} Cf. Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., “Attack of the squash people”  
\textsuperscript{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?\textsuperscript{100}

Elissa: everybody says
they wouldn’t cheat

\begin{quote}
(the only one
with bleeding gums tonight?\textsuperscript{101}

yes)
\end{quote}

but with some certainty— spring opens

like a blade here\textsuperscript{102}

breeding ground,

the unsubstantial image\textsuperscript{103}

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

She shifted to a question about

Napoleon,
timidity and inexperience.\textsuperscript{104}

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

\textit{vague speech}\textsuperscript{105}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{100} “An American Poem”
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Cf. “Glass Essay”
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Portrait} 44
\textsuperscript{104} Cf. \textit{Portrait} 31, 45
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Portrait} 71
\end{flushright}
higher eagles….\textsuperscript{106}

Has this corpse begun to sprout?\textsuperscript{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 fur\textsuperscript{108}

scattered and child-

like skin

\textsuperscript{106} O’Hara, “A Byzantine Place”
\textsuperscript{107} Cf. *Waste Land* I.71-2
\textsuperscript{108} Sartre, *The Flies*
February 18-March 1: I feel kicked today, lonely, aware of the hourglass.

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.
hurry up now it’s time\textsuperscript{109}  
metal wrists like  
auto-tune \textit{fine} like  
apologetic  
justice

ranking smallness over strength (hurry up now\textsuperscript{110})

sustain

my panic,

my grope\textsuperscript{111}

Thou

as awake as myself, all night
unsociable

watching

it’s time\textsuperscript{112}

the year repeat
its days

cauterization

of took longer
snow falling on it…\textsuperscript{113}

barking orders into desktop secretaries tired of other satisfactions (you

(sucking gold
foil wrappers
}

hurry up now\textsuperscript{114}

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

cold
in the high blue room\textsuperscript{115} I think

it’s time\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{109} Cf. \textit{Waste Land} II.152
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} “A Byzantine Place”
\textsuperscript{112} Cf. \textit{Waste Land} II.152
\textsuperscript{113} Cf. “Glass Essay”
\textsuperscript{114} Cf. \textit{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…

A marvelous, poignant death or I had not thought death had undone so many

Why did you say that name?

You’d have to kill me to get rid of Heroin is a door always opened by white women

You have forgotten how I love her— or: I thought the universe felt, love

---

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
HOW IT FELT WHEN YOU LEFT

I’d give anything to get you out
the first thing sorry
person
no
second who
I’ve stayed with
despite obvious discomfort
do you know how carefully
I’ve had to choose my words
can you
even imagine?
what it is like
when you touch me
let alone
if you ever want to know how it felt when you left

it was not /
a fertile
death

in fact
was unsexed very black no joke-death, wondering
what dreams could come—
to bed,
to bed…

124 Cf. Wakefield, “Hurling Crowbirds at Mockingbars (Hope is Not a Course of Action)”
125 Bendis and Gaydos, “Jessica Jones” (2015) S1E18
126 Ibid.
127 Cf. “Crowbirds”
128 Cf. Notley, “Dante’s Ass a Noble Prize”
129 Cf. Ibid., “Dancing into the Shadows of the Hideous Future City We Don’t Think So During This Strike”
130 Cf. Shakespeare, Hamlet III.1.67
131 Ibid., Macbeth V.180
You missed /  
the love of a lifetime.

"OUR MOTHER!" "I SAID AUTO-" "MATICALLY"\textsuperscript{132}

The truth  
is like poetry, and most people  
fucking hate poetry.\textsuperscript{133}

\textit{THAT YOU SHOULD BE MY FOREST FIRE}

how frightening

\textsuperscript{132} Notley, \textit{Descent of Alette} 6
\textsuperscript{133} Randolph and McKay, \textit{The Big Short} (2015)
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. 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.
This is my curse, war between all.\textsuperscript{136}

Remembering thoughts
in connection with places—

\textsuperscript{134} Cf. \textit{Aeneid} II.62
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Portrait} 180
\textsuperscript{136} Cf. \textit{Aeneid} IV.783
\textsuperscript{137} Cf. \textit{Portrait} 180
Midwife to your agonies.\textsuperscript{138}
I choose to ruin
yours.

\textsuperscript{138} Cf. \textit{Aeneid} IV.760
(4) LB, *Burning Women*
I CLOSSED 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 inwit 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 THERE 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

I won’t

not ever /

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 mean142 when did

I

find

out?

139 Joyce, Ulysses 16
140 Nasseri, “Frozen Flowers” (2016)
141 Cf. Waste Land V.360
142 Bieber, “What Do You Mean”
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!  
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 eternal  

poetry, an escape from emotion, 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)
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
CONCESSION

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

heart rate 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
we’re going to have to talk about things

we’ve never done that have we\textsuperscript{148}

maybe you have a virus or something
24 hour (virus)
it happens\textsuperscript{149}

what have they done with
my kind, familiar

self?

(what will I do tomorrow;
what will I ever do?)\textsuperscript{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 there\textsuperscript{151}

why do you like me?
when am I good?

she said she trusted I should never live a duet\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{148} Tom & Viv (1994)
\textsuperscript{149} Taxi Driver (1976)
\textsuperscript{150} Waste Land II.33-4; Tom & Viv (1994)
\textsuperscript{151} Cf. Taxi Driver (1976)
\textsuperscript{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 body.\textsuperscript{153}

maybe
just like seeing my name on so many bottles

mistaking Machiavelli for a saint

you kiss me. \hspace{1cm} I will try\textsuperscript{154}

to get so very good I trick myself

you, non-Jew with colorful eyes—

next question

\textsuperscript{153} Cf. \textit{Taxi Driver} (1976)
\textsuperscript{154} Cf. \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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!”\textsuperscript{165}

\textit{(Would you say that this is going well?)}

\textsuperscript{164} Piercy, “Complaint of the exhausted author”

\textsuperscript{165} Cf. \textit{Dalloway} 204
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.

---

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 “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

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