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
STORY 2:

conscious escape
art parades

artists not only

slightly

masturbatory and lurking
but also

embracing
the narcissism of

a poem

digression

nothing

parallel

using white as normal as

that, even if shouted
from rooftops, would do

about it

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 desire 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 that 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 died and
it’s not that I don’t like him

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

& 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\textsuperscript{17} as still
oh my people
as still life\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{17} Portrait 97
\textsuperscript{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
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 I.26
summing things up\textsuperscript{26}—

sex unlike / the house\textsuperscript{27}
recycled children, third
who walks among you\textsuperscript{28}

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

\begin{center}
\textbf{November 16:} Sibyl’s room.
\end{center}

Symbol of departure or loneliness?\textsuperscript{29}
She flings herself on the couch that he left empty.\textsuperscript{30}

I live quite nicely for someone
told, three days ago

that psychotherapy’s not doing you much good,
is it?\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} Cf. “Glass Essay”
\textsuperscript{27} Myles, “An American Poem”
\textsuperscript{28} Cf. \textit{Waste Land} V.360
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Portrait} 165
\textsuperscript{30} Vergil, \textit{Aeneid} IV.102
\textsuperscript{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.”  \(^{32}\)

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 jar\(^ {34}\)

(He assaults at once,  
makes a welcome  
of indifference\(^ {35}\)

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 say\(^ {39}\)

Your arms full, and your hair wet\(^ {40}\)  
(Henry said)

Failure  
one conceals.\(^ {41}\)

---

\(^{32}\) 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
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

\begin{quote}
You needn’t be afraid of me
I say, turning
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I don’t love you,\textsuperscript{53}
and I didn’t want to keep you.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I’m not going on again, am I?
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
You were wonderful…\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. 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.*
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

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 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._

This isn’t something that goes away—

---

_Our Life is a Camera Obscura, said Isaiah, do you know what that is?_

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

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._

_A view of a body on a floor._

_The thrust of a sword in her softly-opened body._

_When there’s nothing left to burn._

---

59 Cf. “Female Pain”
60 Carson, “Book of Isaiah II”
61 Cf. “Female Pain”
62 Notley, “The Islanders Remember That There Are No Women and No Men”
63 Chatterley 184
64 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,"

the bodies going meaningless, dull roots, spring rain.
Million year old Sibyl sitting in a leaky jar, eternity

a shoddy lid. 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. (men to talk to) (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
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?  

---

80 Ref. Notley, “There Isn’t Much To Do If You Aren’t Geology”
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.

\[\text{A LOVELY UNCONCERN}^{85}\]

She defined for herself miracle as the following:

honesty, would only cause nausea,

or suicide\(^{86}\)

she won every game she played against most decent hearts

\(^{85}\) Levertov, “The Gypsy’s Widow”

\(^{86}\) Cf. Nietzsche, \textit{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.
scrape my fault lines,  
dizzy with escape

by flight he meant
flying and I mean
being flown\textsuperscript{87}

(downy owlets shivering\textsuperscript{88}
who will, who will be fed?\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{I thought the universe felt love,} \textit{I say,}
\textit{hurry, you're so strong,} \textit{I say, thinking:}
when

living

resembles airplane food\textsuperscript{92}
even at knife point, I

have never
been willing to be
or become
a man\textsuperscript{93}

he
seduces you for hire\textsuperscript{94}
and
you cannot ignore
that

death\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{87} Cf. Piercy, “Night Flight”
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., “The Great Horned Owl”
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., “Complaint of the exhausted author”
\textsuperscript{90} Inferno XII.41
\textsuperscript{91} Piercy, “For strong women”
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., “Memo”
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., “The Moon is Always Female”
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., “Memo”
suave

reptilian glitter\textsuperscript{96} and you have to like it,

better than being loved.\textsuperscript{97}

\textbf{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”
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

\textit{(the only one}
\textit{with bleeding gums tonight?)\textsuperscript{101}

\textit{yes)}

\hline

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}

\footnotesize
\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
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 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  
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  

\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  
\textsuperscript{115} Cf. \textit{Waste Land} II.152  
\textsuperscript{116} 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…\textsuperscript{117}

A marvelous, poignant death\textsuperscript{118} or I had not thought death had undone so many\textsuperscript{119}

Why did you say that name?

You’d have to kill me to get rid of\textsuperscript{120} Heroin is a door always opened by white women\textsuperscript{121}

You have forgotten how I love her\textsuperscript{122}—or: I thought the universe felt, love\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{115} “Glass Essay”
\textsuperscript{116} Waste Land II.152
\textsuperscript{117} Notley, “Circorpse”
\textsuperscript{118} Cf. Chatterley 267
\textsuperscript{119} Waste Land I.63; Cf. Inferno III.55-7
\textsuperscript{120} Cf. Pabst and Vajda, “Pandora’s Box” (1929)
\textsuperscript{121} Lamantia, “Hypodermic Light”
\textsuperscript{122} O’Hara, “Poem About Jane”
\textsuperscript{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"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 places\(^{137}\) —

\(^{134}\) 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*
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 inwit\(^{139}\) 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\(^{140}\) 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 you\(^{141}\) & 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

\(^{140}\) 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

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
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}

\footnotesize
\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

maybe
just like seeing my name on so many bottles
mistaking Machiavelli for a saint

you kiss me.
I will try

to get so very good I trick myself

you, non-Jew with colorful eyes—

next question

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153 Cf. Taxi Driver (1976)
154 Cf. Room With a View 19, 191
How much do you love me?
Let me count the corpses.\textsuperscript{155}

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

\textit{(Told her so and asked for sixpence.}
\textit{Got threepence.}
\textit{Mother indulgent.)}\textsuperscript{156}

To have and not to hold.\textsuperscript{157}
Love is a downer we take.\textsuperscript{158}

Plaintive,
as if
you seduced your prey.\textsuperscript{159}

\textit{(Memory a minefield—}
men scouting mothers through
\textit{my womb.)}\textsuperscript{161}

This petty pace.\textsuperscript{162}
Elbows spiky with scruples.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{155} Piercy, “The purge”
\textsuperscript{156} Cf. \textit{Portrait} 165, 182
\textsuperscript{157} Piercy, “To have without holding”
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., “Shadows of the burning”
\textsuperscript{159} Cf. Ibid., “The Great Horned Owl”
\textsuperscript{160} Cf. Ibid., “Night Flight”
\textsuperscript{161} Cf. “Shadows of the burning”
\textsuperscript{162} Shakespeare, \textit{Macbeth V.V.20}
\textsuperscript{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}

(Would you say that this is going well?)

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

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{167} Cf. Notley, “The Usual and Most Tenuous of Goodbyes”
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**Plays**


**Prose**


*Music*


*Television*


