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The Roman Exile Recalls...

“Once I stumbled upon the forest god’s
feast with the nymphs,
as snakes invited me to sit by their side.

The first night, seventy-seven times we invoked
for a harvest of grapes and wine,
the second night, I slept amongst scales.

The third night, seventy-seven times we invoked
for friendship amongst men and gods,
the fourth night, I wept and froze, stomping by the fire,
trying to shake off an illness onto death.

The fifth night, seventy-seven times we invoked,
until the sky turned pale,
the sixth night, we fell into a long silence,
suspitations grew faint...”

Listen. “A decree draws near, Caesar is the master of speech,
I must leave tonight.

This is the last night of my stay in the forest,
one by one, friends, roll up the proud sleeves,
pin on a fresh fragrant leaf.

If the moment of parting comes truly here,
cease the neighing, my heart.

If you stuff me with misery, gold, and grain,
I shall fear never again hearing these fateful endearments.”

A Lover Left Behind Sighs...

“Upon the parting hour, a sombre water that lives
runs through leaves that rustle;
a shepherd’s staff knocks stone, so out leaps
an arm’s length of
lovely gold,
braiding
a narrow path; while it twice bypasses
a spring tree of rites.

“Wayside,
your forehead is smooth, so
with unwearied joy,
yet your face mourns so.

“My lover leaves tonight! —
if her heart is filled only with gladness,
why should I let my own wither in vain?
Friend, go to the town’s edge,
buy me a honey-jar,
for a marker,

for you’re going to that side of beauty and sweetness,
while I am left with your heavy name on the chest!

“Animals, O how they chatter! And woods echo,
with lightning — thunderous blue —
sometimes close, sometimes remote.
They will caress my ears
with many a sound glorious, covering my earlobes
far and near
on both sides —
two grape leaves woven into a shell, concealing
a moon hewn inward.”

One Citizen Recounts:

“I nailed my ear
onto the high wall of Rome,
my eyes, I threw into a dark ditch.
That ear shriveled, in hot air,
drying up alongside some politic chatter;
those eyes, glaring in toxic water,
were picked up by a woman.
Let those with eyes see, let those with ears hear.
A melancholy heart roams the valley;
through acanthuses dense, planets convene
within the earth’s
belly.”

So Speaks the Traveler:

“I ask, with what heart I do weep?
O heavenly daughters,
over the brazier knowing my gloom,
send me artichokes,
marjoram.

“I gather,
darkness underfoot.
I depart.

“Where feral birds murmurate,
I harvest gregarious tongues;
to the whetted knife,
ash-groves proffer as many falls;

from entrails opened, I hear prayers, spasms
from inside foreigners’ tombs;
from sunlit interiors,
my friend,
my soundboard,
do new shadows riddle you?

“Yet I’ve resolved
to abjure
my plea for light,
eyelids kissed by a gentleness, gently dissolving
light.

“Salt-water over parched caves.
See, happiness endures.”

So She Relates Her Dream...

“Last night, we fell
to the two ends of sleep.

“One end,
nymphs tickled you,
rustling, shaking thorny shades.

“One end,
it was my flame drenched;
the razor of dawn, sacrosanct,
a half-inch from mercy,
claimed abundance of rain.

“On that very hour,
whiteness would’ve dipped
thirty-three times,
announcing this day festive.
To celebrate, we’d gather flowers from the icy seas,
and from the depth of a mirror,
we’d smear the glass with fresh salts.

“How clear were those words, seen from within!
‘No one has ever perished in the tremor of a daydream’ —
yes, no one dies,
unless she endures
just this golden kiss
you bestowed upon morning departure.”

But the Faithful Friend Delivers Her Own Assessment:

“Wait till I awake! A second stroll in death’s shaded woods.

I, a child, forever cling to you:

as I impinge on your sad pensées tonight,

stars seem poised to strike the cold lake.

“What brought you to the ground?

Were you dissatisfied with your airy dwell?

Or did you grow hot in your revolutions, so that

you burned through night’s silk wear, falling to her feet?

“Gazing at you, I think of

lofty Mount Ida,

or that topaz wreath some beasts offered to the nymphs:

arbutus leaves. I mean,

tear away that damaged page, my heart;

for I have lost my belief,

as you have

your disbelief.”

There Goes the Desperate Tryster's Last Word:

“She reclines on the spring couch, composed,
I cannot utter love.

Ruin! Why are you ever my bedfellow?

You urge me to the courtyard, with blood
to slit silver shards, with bones to kindle iron brambles.

However fierce this fire burns,
or however keen that blade,
night remains bleak! Even the moon veils herself,
like a sloe forgotten by the brook,
picked only by my lone, craving eye.

Outside the temple, rich, windy foliage swishes,
inscribed with wisdom:

‘Give those fruits time, each
has its season.’ Yet, gods!

Why does my love not extinguish? When will death ripen?

Where is the autumn of my life delivered?
As dawn draws near, willows dance with poppies,
the traveler, strapping on sandals, beats a castanet;
my cries fall into a benighted lap.

Bearing thus a most sacred stillness, before dissolving,
she utters not a word, granting me very brief rest.”

Innocence

There was once a time
I'd still let myself go.
Instead of gathering minerals,
I'd run past, over the noontide,
those trees and fences,
till my heart was pumping at high,
heated up and relentless.

So lovers would hide
in hay tufts, where they had sex
and then laughed.
The girl had commotions tipping in her breasts,
as the boy flipped over his legs
to fall from the tree crown,
suckling at the congested sunset.

I've been all learning to forgive
all that clandestinity love's requiring.
We'd talked so much about everything
as wintry days were expiring,
that when confronting springtime,
we are confronted instead
with a silence underwhelming.

As we're passing by the forest yet again,
leaves will have flooded the space all around us.
No more metaphors insinuating things vicious, poisonous!
It's been broken,
down in somewhere dark and mute,
a variegated heart.

In the Clouds

At dawn, a serpent drew near
to my bitter roots, as clouds
fell into the crown, torn open at sacs.
Pure whiteness of your hands
cupped the brimming rain, moistening
dark recesses
through sutures of my skull.

Our hair pressed close,
each drooping from a guilty conscience.
Our blood tasted sweet of autumnal grapes —
Dog Star blinked, sticking out its tongue,
so as to lick ice darkly lit.

In this land, mandrakes grow,
bandits sail, bearing torches.
We aim for the center of circles,
to pin there an olive core.
But we nudged, inadvertently,
the other's nudge; to little tremors,
we sprinkled onto bed
a foliage of pilfered laughs.

So you arose. Put on a string of arms,
speckled in green, pearly,
moss-burnt: how your arms embraced me;
how they took me away.

Along the way, we taunted love
but spoke in whispers.
I gestured above, as time passed, witnessing death
hanging from the branch of the other's death;
while you, you tied your tongue

up to the side of a
cloud, ready to depart
with dawn.

I had to leap,

trying to catch at the moon, at your ankle,
only to brush against a gilded star.

Forget, then.

I fall and never rise again.

You rise to your firmament, while I fall,
fall, and fall...

If I were to fall into a fresh March,

I weave you a garland, bind my hair.

If I were to fall into the burning May,

I become flames, prostrate at your feet.

Yet, I fall into the drooping September.

By September, I can only weep,

can only kiss various shades of the earth.

In September, I die, and breathe freely in death...

Tiger Teeth

Mystery I knew not
wore day away in the heat.
You twice stopped the silver bullet of revenge
while waving, passing it me by a kiss.
I watched you, grapes in the autumnal boil.
You kissed me, tiger teeth,
dainty,
clear.

Greetings, fugitives,
branch-to-branch climbing.
I invite a second nature to these banquets.
As a child, having knocked down in a daze
antlers of a far buck, I covered my light-simmered scar
with butterfly sails;
tears ran dry, you flung insults and taunts at me,
as I stood back into silence
at this tableau silently kept.
I whipped with songs this angry piece of cloth.

Skies. Clouds. Rain about to fall.
I hum, a moon billows, brims.

In virgin gardens, tendrils uncurl, glisten.
Rain vortices.

Red Bird, fine, delicate,
alights in the swirl,
peck at summer's unopened heart.

And you kiss, and kiss me,
while furies waver.
You tether me under a tree of laughters,

where kisses perch; bird fiestas.

“In fires, in tears, I burn.”

Lips shelled in porcelain,

I’ve paid the full price, for

my looking at you, that took off your mask; and kiss,

tiger teeth,

grain

by

grain. Distinct.

Lotus

Tonight, I turned from men,
relishing the mystery of summer.

Clutching two drops of gold,
I paced the harbor

to its ragged misty edge.
Overhead: the moon, rusted.

By the dull light, I scaled the reef,
lifted death out of a bird

dredging tears from its crop:
A scent. A fragrance. Asia.

I recalled,
under the wind-bell,

you were the lotus,
heavy with rain.

Olives

If I could forget you,
it would be tomorrow.
Tonight adds four new names for you.
I've barely erased half of one.

O Childhood:
Greek texts, foreign scripts —
I forgot them fast.
Promises to others
I discarded in a blink.

But first I saw you: that talent was lost.
I then do not see you: your name drops from my tongue tip,
unwatched, faster than the apple trembling in autumn air,
faster than the snow-crust, sun-dried,
to fall from a high twig.

O Panic! I spread the white cloth under,
stumbling to catch them all —
lest some might hear the echo,
lest they guessed at the season of my heart.
Love, you runner: is this how you drill me?

Enough!
If I speak,
why this chest, pained with silence?
If I speak not,
who breathes this word to the ear?
In the mirror: who bit her tongue?
O spirit, you smokey eyes.

Ha! To force love out of my lips,
bring Vulcanic Iron! —

Dragon-tooth! — Witch-poison! —
to extract the name from my tongue is harder,
to extract nails from hand-flesh, easier.
I see you blinking, horrified.
Olive-eyes, you have things teeming inside,

as if to say:
in that vast living water of your love,
I have only seen my own hideous face.
Salt-cured eyes, olive-eyes,
barnacle-crusteds rocks.
Such gaze from the inside cannot be dug out.
So, love, close your eyes, these olives —
let us try, first, to forget
or to forgive!

The Flame

Overshadowed by the vastness of death,
I feed on ferns; I feed on muteness.
How have my lips become so bitter?
How many tears I drop have become iron!
O tables, chairs, cabinets — they know the grief.
One by one they crowd near, nuzzling my hand;
how riotous were they in those days, wagging tails
at your knees, gnawing at your apron hems;
just a whistle from you would make the flower-plates take flight,
candle-flames rise, silver cups flash and spill;
while the guts of the house divined your daily moods,
your dreams were stitched tight into every pillow,
and mirrors were etched by the heat-fog of your gaze.
Even the old clock would forget days from nights,
wheezing and panting, geared only to your breath.
But they died, lowered by the first light of dawn,
buried now in my iron tears. Stars unquoted on the horizon,
they knew my regrets, as my mouth touched the flower-base,
seeming to taste, for the time to come, a nectar sweetness.
They wanted to receive me, perhaps to take me across.
But I was on the balcony unable to go through the rail,
that row of wind, interlocked with teeth; instead,
it was the rail that went through me —
a pond,
my shallow heart.

H. D.

suddenly, death
is no void to me.

I suspect summery fires must have
nourished my imagination:
hell knots in sea-winds
 a bud
of opened rose.

17 petals piled,
wrapped, stiff, dyed so.
I did see grains
quinoa
heavy, ripening in the fire:
many suffering souls
suspended by a l o n g c o r d
kicking, treading grapes.

if I could leap, I would bathe.
if I am thirstier than water,
I am hungrier than bread.

so tear the throat.
snap the dark thread in the dome.
I suspect
summer came too early.
I woke up too late.

The Collection of 17 Short Poems

I.

If there is a tomorrow,
I'd sure forget you.
Tomorrow, maybe spring,
I'd find an empty house: iron, moss, nothing else.
In spring, I'm a heart caught in the skin-sack.
It drives me — tongueless — to graze
ten mouths that won't meet my eye.
Count them, love, count that row of fruit trees
low on the shore:
how many bloom with flowers, bitter?
how many of them wither?

II.

You — girl like an apple tree —
cast down light, sweet kisses
in clusters:
they weigh down the branch.
If these roll, scattered,
falling into shade, torch-fire, or spring-water,
let those do the chase!
Those swift-footed children,
if they tense their legs, if they leap,
they sure can catch you.
But I, love? I'm in my last throes,
in the mud, beneath the roots.
I'm forgetting a tinge of the sky.

III.

At dusk, love,
I hush my voice
on my walk to the sea,
to the orchard.
I breathe there with fruits;
there, I watch the sky in profile,
seeing sunset paper-thin.
I fear, love, that I speak a left-handed tongue,
poking open unawares
many holes of pain,
from which hollows
an earthful of golden narcissi
blow out.
She plows the sky: a tear-track.
In the hour she falls,
night grows over us
as heavy sleep.

IV.

As you lead
the glum moon
into the valley, into the shade;
love, listen. High up,
you tied water, wheat, with vine-fuls of grapes,
to the moon's long horn;
you tied my lowly heart
to the other, lower horn.
But if, by mercy of the good hour,
taken pumice, you've cut moonlight alone for your triumph —
your white hand softer than wool —
why open me then?
why lower me in acanthus?
why block your ears to my blood,
low blood,
that mourned still
even as sighs of love?

V.

Love, on the platform tonight,
I feel a long-lost quiet.
I listen to the tree-shadows.
They are silent,
waiting for thunder to pass.
The night train is loaded with laborers.
I see: he reads a paper;
he drinks hot, bitter tea.
And two children
kissing outside the carriage,
passing, very swift,
as if they don't know
in the rain, love, I have once again
forgotten to mail
this unnamed letter.

VI.

Love, if you doubt,
if you suspect your eyes,
I give you my eyes.
You will see me:
I am myself hewn by an axe,
I'm wood piled up.
I am the sleeper-beam beneath your rain-boots,
sprouting fallen leaves:
between death, death's eternity,
shudders of the same flame separate.
Love, if my heart were not broken into pieces,
you would not pick them up.
If my heart were still trapped in the mirror,
forgetting its edge,
you would not bleed.

VII.

And the wax-comb bled dry of honey.

Night, saturnic night,

pass no more.

Yet who's afraid of eternity?

You stand still, not unlike dawns, treetops, a mercy too pale.

You ask those buskers for some loose change;

your pockets are deep, they load silver like narcissus.

Your hand-sweat, I think, wipe away the president's fallen brow;

you grind away flowers, as you grind away rocks.

Yet who's afraid of eternity?

Now, love, you don't know this: but I'm also wearied of partings.

Perhaps I am a heart that suffers only at dawn;

by night, the two questions of my tears

mark your bluer eyes.

VIII.

At dawn, I saw crows roost,
pecking the white at God's lip-corner.
That same white: magnificent as ever,
as if had never died;
but as I attended to sighs from its eternal shore —
how desolate!
Your tears, my tears, heaven wafted through,
would always hang, those little plots of small, silverly skulls.
Love, remember the day roses were sent with a silver chain,
remember who it was to have opened the wardrobe
a fourth time was soon forgotten?
But open it, love, open it anyway,
it was a night of many sorrows, the body,
I do wish to sin. I do wish to stand in
every one of your garments, to flee from
the gold machine.
Morn starts it, steam closing in from four corners of the earth.
A sundial divides us,
when you will have forgotten what fire is,
and I slept in, as time would tuck me
into a quilt that burned.

IX.

All those dreams you spoke of, love,
I used to dream them too:
the hearth, winter, its golden fire,
that fox-fur pouch falling
into a pocket watch.

There, you held me, standing in the fields, in-between the barns;
kissed me, like an apple softened in pine-wood smoke.

Was I touching burning lead?

It was harvest, love, harvests, conflagrations.

Burnt, while you watched,
burnt the chaff through the wheat, it was always flame,
like you telling me with one word
to have all dreams chafed away.

That shattering moment, you were the only symbol
of my speech.

X.

Last night, the hounds you keep
surrounded me — girlish gossips! —
recounting how, during the last winter hunt,
I left footprints in the snow,
like a row of olives.
Several times they found me, observing me sip the melted snow.
Mine eyes, they said, were almondy and bitter.
That afternoon, they said,
with the acrimony of sunsteel,
it was your hand that threw me at them.
Threw me high, love, high, that
the earth be swept away by the wind
— a white handkerchief.

That winter made such a
such a fall
a beautiful thing.

XI.

Harvest. I had got drunk, love.
I had leaned back, against the tall rick,
on its burly sigh from fattened grains.
The banquet happened last night,
we did washing this morning.
Scrubbing silver from the plates,
you left them their round shapes;
scrubbing glass from the glasswares,
you left them their lean forms.
You scrubbed me, likewise, from my self,
leaving only a gentle trace of your touch
from last night.
I had been drunk, love, if only you could hear these
many deaths sloshing inside me,
like chaff shaken off the sieve;
rustling, seething, bereaved.

XII.

Love, I am a fruit hanging
from this mountain tree,
almost overripe.

The wind
pushes me, back and forth;
the noose,
washed white by rain.

Others creak beside me, in twos and threes;
I am the highest. The most lush.
Stand beneath my feet, love. Reach. Pluck me.

You will see inside the gray flesh
worms in sound sleep, front to back.

That seed-eye, uncracked like a walnut by birds,
they suck quietly; it overlooks
a cinnamon-hued twilight, in whose light the church spire
nails to earth a snake-knot pained
at the market center,
like a trembling spear.

Love, my heart is about to burst with happiness,
because, having gained this high ground,
I am the first to see the morning star;
and as for bidding farewell to the evening star,
I am the last.

XIII.

Clutch me, Love, like dead sedge.
With you, I'd play Dido forever,
How many tears I've shed for her,
This Queen of Carthage!

Or Phaedra of Troezen; she swallowed fire,
Like a throat troubled by verses and weeps
Swallows a rhyme feminine. Seven-gated Thebes,
Or the Isle of Lesbos — I'd go anywhere, Sire.

But me out this banquet — a flute girl “brunette”! — you drove;
Still, you cannot but hearken from afar, as I sang of many things of love.

What now, Love? Clutch me. Clutch this bitter reed.
With a silver wire drain the fat from my chest.
Wring me dry, Love. Blow air to this cleft:
Do you hear within, the sea, or the reef?

XIV.

From Verrières, you brought me
a handful of gooseberries.
So, love, I heard
that summer's arriving.
We talked all night of agony,
of a desperate love,
fiddling with the radio now and then, to confirm the event.
Occasionally, we embraced, like a pair of clinking glass.
But night, night, that summer we spoke of
was only a rumor, a lie, though I wept for it, too.
From the beech tree, catching
that flower dress you threw down the window —
since that day, love, I saw summer
as the substance of tears.

XV.

I saw the sun from afar
leaving phenomena: it was dawn,
love, an evil hour.
I bared my back, arching it like a dog,
barking madly at the martial and the bright. Terror
ripped my stomach.
Belt me, love, beat the dog. Scold me.
Let me know no friendship
besides you;
let my flesh knot into the world's
freshest wound.
For love is a harsh mistress,
she gives me kisses: pales of heady laughter.
That is, love, besides you,
I seek no other night.

XVI.

Love, we here produce a person
full of pain.

You know her pace:

slight, cramped,

her toe a kisser of furniture

now and then.

Today, she's only paced her studio,

yet she yearns to step into the garden.

Do you remember her breaths?

Remember her drying us,

like salt-cured figs

rolling down the sand? By the afternoon,

a window opens — crowding acacias howl

duskily.

But she freshens herself. In the mirror

a clock loses its place: a distant bolt

of lightning,

blue and serene,

is seen on the slow rise.

Love, wearing these faces, we can weep for her.

Love, her hand wrote us and had once held yours.

It had always covered the same aching heart,

had wiped away those same bitter tears.

XVII.

Love, my childhood was always
accompanied by thunder.

One day, I remember, the bees and I
rushed to pick acacias,
to lick nectar at their flower-base.

Love, we were each
children of our own moments,
“months are our sisters,
showing us forth great and small.”

If I could have the mind of a horse,
toward future I'd gallop.

And then, in love. The view is infinite.

Secrets

Seizing a goodly winter night,
I wrote down secrets scalding.
I commanded them: Stand!
Submit to the divine neutrality
of poetry!
while heedless to its wilderness —
its shame.

So they curled up, tired
as teary down,
fronds crawling underneath.
So, in that snow, I showed you boundless fury.
A wounded spirit clamped its jaws on its pangs:
answer me,
who should face gods,
yet show no resentment, no mercy?

The Blue Hour

Snow melts. Here?

Or there?

Under your suede boots.

The blanket is damp, too,

because blue, my friend-blue,

for you, three nights straight I wept.

You are in that hollow, on the door,

keeping your silence.

Are you asleep?

If you will wake, I stay loyal. I will wait

for that blue hour before sunset,

only to resume our discourse by the firelight.

Look. A gray salamander: fat. splayed feet.

I whisper: run the earth across,

partner! cross the chessboard,

for you have blue ears, too!

You will hear the empty wind leap away from an empty roof,

believing, underneath, a tree catches it.

Blood Debt

Countryside stones
hold an open nimbus.
Though it's not winter,
and no rain tonight,
yet wet birds,
finding rest,
stand onto a well-curb
crumbling underfoot.
They recall
a heart, once ravaged,
has such a ring of tiny shades.
Like a silver bowl,
lying before us,
steeped in old stains.

Still Life

Seal these windows
with blue cloth.
To talk in this pale,
I won't be ashamed.

We try to speak of art,
New York winters, pets.
We avoid the self.

So you happen to press
the sugar cube
to the center of the table.

So between us emerges
a riot
of daisies.

If we were to take the right pause (out of the blue),
I'd call your name,
cut short by the solidity of a syllable
in my throat:

but we were both too ashamed of words.
No one not in rain
has the right posture.

Angel

Three years back,
we last met,
I could not hold back weeping.
That day, the eye held
lead-colored fatigue,
though you remained, as always,
a blue woman.

You brought me flowers.
A touching excuse.
But I couldn't distinguish:
was your fingernail advancing?
or my flesh retreat?

But since you passed away,
we've outgrown you.
I vowed
to live these days with full honesty.
But you came back from the washroom,
wearing your hair loose,
drenched in tears
and sleep.

Lacerations

We'd take the bus, Boston-bound,
to see Cézanne.

Yes.

You'd lean against the window,
sitting far out at the edge of sunlight,
like a cracked walnut.

Yes.

There'd be more,
far more stones.

You'd want us to stand — further — away;
I'd want us up close.

For that moment, we'd both be willing to believe
that behind the patches of color,
there is still a newer blue to open up,
a blue only we can see.

By afternoon, we would naturally begin to discuss
each other's bodies, their disease.

One day,
I will face your heart athwart —
but faces are heart's lacerations.

Hand

We stood, in display windows, exiled,
disguising, spoiled:
I suspected your tears were real.

But your body was as bared as the streets.
Shattered days reflected off your knees,
so as to rise, iridescent, at last, piece by piece.

We picked used needles from the deserted lane.
We injected moons, syringe after syringe.
Were it not for the twenty-two daughters who arranged

for us
in this sweet, white, glossy night,
I suppose we'd be staying, till dawn,

like beasts sporting on the lawn,
exchanging at times a blue, furry bite.
There, pebbles spoke to us, burning definition.

There, festivals left no trace on hearts of contrition.
Yet you gripped my left hand, with your solid hand,
covered with needle marks and flesh —

and it ruled my fate.

Woman I

You enter once again
one of the many kitchens,
not without bringing your own fare.
Wiping hands clean on the apron,
you spread a meaty horror in the sink:
I like to watch you use knives and fire.

Okra blood, bean blood, oxen blood —
they do flow.
You tie back your hair, lest it flow,
lest it block your sight;
but certainty of flux conquers the certainty of death.
With all your dicing, mincing, pressing for the juice —
tongue, eye, bone, shrubs on myriad isles —
we well up, incessantly.

Yes, you ordered today I must snip off many dozens of puny heads;
livid-black, elongated heads, dead transparencies.
Cut out their slants from their bodies still twitching,
fraught with the joy of a slaughtered thing.

In the evening, we sit around the hearth god,
each baring our own face, aglow,
like a flock of suns feeding.

“Quand Vous Serez Bien Vieille”

When you are old, in white memories drenched,
Hearths warm you not; but you — my glowing bars
In shudders hummed — regret a love once ours.
Though by your cold disdain my fire's quenched,

Its embers scorch, delighting servants' lips;
Your daughters, taught, recite your poet's verse
— Whose minds a like despair shall like disperse —
“This love of his deserves the cruelest whips!”

Thus, I gave you all my bitter vengeance;
For such revenge is sweet if prevented.
In rain or weeds our bones lay contented,
If you'd spare God now a future penance.

Develop, then envelop; years unknown
With threads eternal by our hands are sewn.

Dispute

Dead grass had us defeated,
dust settled our disputes.
Into the cave we crawled, hearts depleted,
weeping as we tasted tears, our own evil fruits.
So we stared, long and hard, through dimness,
knowing not how love should fall like this.

And you hurled your hands, against the wall,
like two pitted potsherds.
How come I still tremble at your kiss, scented of orchards,
our sins already sweetened by fall?

So let me die inside your death,
we are of one grape.
Let me drink from your sweet breath,
if your soul truly bestows such grace.

Sunday

dead meat of the wild, sour wild pear,
you are the gray eyes of wilderness.
i lie down beside you,
ready as a corpse for your second life.

she's almost as young:
she's lean, hard, chest still bearing hope,
with a voice blacker than night;
as if a passenger flight is cruising
from her navel to her thorax.

you walked far, far beyond, to the roadside
to feed an antelope.
i sat in the car, wasting my time
on a dull, very dull, book.

clouds are forming. we strum the guitar.

Fever Dream

you hid in your blood,
like metal sinking into
red velvet.

seas, tides, waves —
this dream was hotter than dark.

your thoughts were as soft:
“i woke, i saw her fingers
within me. with...”in me, your fingers.

that moment, “i felt she was me.” that moment,
you were my body, my sensing,
opening unto the dark:
an enormous, white flower.

The Swan

The swan. We adore her.
Sometimes, she preens her feathers

like a sable banker
as she glides through the lake. (A glass sail.

Marbles that have never endured dawn,
offerings, bouquets, twos, threes.) Of lilies.

“Our life sure started badly,
it ended even worse.”

So I beg you, don't look at us with scorn,
you eye-like child.

You don't know how darkness once shook us,
as if shaking a sunset.

You don't know how we used to walk alone at night,
quarreling like water.

And the swan, she pushes us aside.
She's indifferent, it seems, to the human wish
to reaffirm a right to live.

The Bedroom

My life gets confined to the bedroom,
a corner of the house.
Sometimes, fog surges outside my window,
like I'm sailing out to sea.
No mast, no rudder,
no ropes or sails —
still I know, my heart is a slave ship.

Dark wall-clocks hang
upside down on all sides,
making one leg the minute hand,
the other, the second hand.
Hands, pendulums, they are darknesses
cast in bronze.

Still I see fish rot
in creamy seawater;
I smell the algae: it rises
in a mist of the sea-lost.
I wish to catch, leaning out the window,
the tenebrosity with hands,
to cure it with spiced suns;
cradling it, like a young god,
glum skin rubbing skin.

By sunset, I like to hear the marooned lamps talk
in a cavern-whisper
like crabs over my pillow.
They talk about fetid gold in the ceiling,
doubloons interlaid between closet-boards.
Still, I wish to write so many letters sometimes, all unaddressed.
Many burnt memories have since been fed to the spider under bed:
as I dream of love, it might learn to cast its net.

Night Safari

Hurt me no more, Night,
this body is tired of weeping.
Fold me up the way you fold
those massive, silent marsh-beasts.
They have spine-arches
in the obsidian hue.
We saw them in pairs, at the zoo,
behind the glass,
like the Sun's Legion: three-hundred Theban Lovers.
Sun, a stone chewing moss.
Sun, stupider than stones,
you can see it in their eyes.
For they do not know night confounds all,
as we had searched every part of the night
in the hope of sighting rhinos,
but through the reeds we saw no trace of them.
Only sweet insects pricked the pond.
Moss withered behind the dark.

Cheese

Spring softens glass,
leaning all rays unto me.
I have a talent to let things rot.
The heart, for instance, never breaks so easily,
but as I beat it, striking its rain-filled drum,
it lets out the thin, sharp cries of a fox.

You have white ankles. You hold me spinning.
Immer zu, immer zu,
I can never keep the beat.
I know you look above. You say, Azure.
But sky is leaden enough for me to carve an epitaph.
Beneath me, you don't feel it, the ground is giving.
It is porous, maggoty. It eats me.

Gloom

I return as a bird.
You are pine needles washing ashore.

Plug our ears, like everyone —

Pine surge scours the stone line.
The valley swallows our soul.

As all come to spectate at the mountain's darkness, its southern side,
a concept of infinity crosses each individual mind.

Swimming out of infinity,
swept up against the shore like pine needles.

Infinity makes us feel all things diminish,
or that childhood must end, but it deserves something different.

The Poplar

Poplar, you are the heaviest tenon
and mortise under heaven.
Rooted deep in summer stones,
your branches still bear the snowy opinion.

I never wanted to do harm.
Nor be harmed.
Arrowheads biting into core,
I stroked your mass of dry thoughts.

To approach you is to crave destruction.
The stream circlet by your feet entraps mine.
It fells me, pressing ears to earth that are unable to hear
whether, underneath, it is dark or azure.

Laugh, poplar. Let laughter flash at your leaf tips.
Gulp down the blood of an enemy.
You topple me, for your anger's satisfaction,
or for an insatiable gold-lust.

Salty, Bitter

Salt. Salt like pillars.

It seals my tongue, turns the wine bitter.

Shell-like, water-like salt.

It dries my eyes.

Especially, when the sea was ironed flat by waves,
the gravel looked so pale and dull.

For a moment, I even indulged the thought
that a moon had exploded in these shallows.

I had long ceased saving tears,
while depth vanished.

You and I — houses verging to collide,
like neighboring pomegranates,
curve obstructing curve,
each swollen with blood juice.

It gave me a new perspective on love.

Pomegranate and pomegranate,
you were both so salty, so bitter of the moon,
like the severed breasts of my feral mother,
whose feral child I promised to be.

Woman II

1

Sun Autumnal, destroy summer's
azure regime —
rule us by your deeds.
You lead us to break from the old hell:
this won't be the first you call us daughters.

2

After that picnic, you stayed in my car.
Looking out each window, we'd each held some light hopes,
just to see them hop like starlings in-between the tree sprays.
And I'd pace by the window, as we'd be home, then went down to the
garden,
as though staying alive were much of the inconvenience;
And you'd go, barefoot to the bath, leaving
a line of footprints on cold, moist tiles:
gReY-whIte-yeLloW, Cerberus, YellOw-wHiTe-GREy,
they rang the bells in order, bringing champagne, raspberry biscuits,
wanting to get acquainted with us once more; I took the raincheck.
Then the messenger came, the lover of many rumors.
That sturdy-armed Trinidadian
brought us a whole crate of milk.

3

Lampshades, bottles. I have darkness in every shape.
My heart plows green leather, sinking into rent foam.
At dusk, the sofa is softer, more fragrant than the earth;
yet I feel held by you as you turn on your side;
for the first time, I feel the *stasis*, heavy with fire.
But you reach the remote at last, you turn on the set:
for me, to play the birthday tape, out of love, not kindness.
I see on screen you close your eyes, your palms press the candle flame;
with that darkness of your palms you fire a new hell for me.

Plunge me into that void, encircled by clay,
handle me, decorate, I wish to have faced you from across.
I have always wanted to be a silent, blind flower by your hearth.
I watch you blow out, without a tear.
But before me, you always weep:
this disciplines my heart, often.

4

You say if one day you are gone —
tired of marriage.

Midnight

star of the black-gate, separate
the stiff short grass
from long grass.
by your pale light, i see only wilderness
dyed lily-of-the-valley for me.

YOU ARE NEVER LIKE THAT SUMPTUOUS WHEEL OF SPRING
GRINDING HEAVENS UP TILL IT FROTHS AND OOZES,
SEIZING WINGÈD THOUGHTS FROM THEIR GRAND TOURS,
AS IF YOU WERE THE ONLY REFULGENCE ABOVE EARTH;

*nor do you share, with narcissus perfidus,
rape of lilies, canker of lilacs,
so many seas washing away pears unripe and mints,
leaving so many briny eyes on sand.*

star of the black-gate, you
always
l a
 e p
between things we call great;

not living in front of all,
you use the hidden to speak of the hidden.
separating the long grass from the short,
your pale light shrouds wilderness.

Van Gogh

Van Gogh in the museum is finite in particular,
allowing me to stand to one side, while you occupy the middle.
You and I face each only certain colors
which separate you from me, once again:

silence is a collective endeavor.

In particular, I love to view Van Gogh's paintings from the side,
allowing my gaze to unfold the protrusions, scabs and coils,
caressing the willow dents, the fleshy screens heaped like moss,
as a fresh blue cuts through the deeper, elder blue beneath,

bleeding gold.

But the eye in particular has a heavy frame:
it delineates the seen from the unseen,
allowing these silences in conversations,
interrupted now and then by just a look.

The look — the deafening roar of the brush.

Jeans

Heavy fog makes all landscapes familiar.

Soon, all tall trees and bird songs will melt away,
and I'll drop back into being alone, with thoughts about living beside
you.

I figure that you must still be fixing your Chevy right now,
wearing those faded-white jeans of yours,
worn from nineteen, till now, like a flag of sorts.

I used to love every wrinkle on it.

I used to feel each one against my finger had its own firm resistance.

I knew those few synthesized horn buttons, too, two lost
after we rolled down the lawn with the sun setting;
after that, our first kiss; after that, you took me to the drive-in.

From the pocket of those jeans, I once pulled out car keys,
chapstick, women's cigarettes, a switchblade;
to my left hand, its roughened inside felt like an equally thick right hand,
or, palm lines, or, ripples.

Then, I think, even if it were hell, and I should see you in there,
even if you were grieving just as much as I,
you'd still be grieving in those jeans.

You'd still stroll on that riverbank much the same way,
shifting foot, mindlessly, leaving small darknesses of varying depths
onto the dark;

crocuses crushed beneath your feet squeezed out of their moody juice,
brighter than myriad luminaries, brighter than that sunset,
because they each had their own ancient hearts.

If the final moment should come,
the ferry about to arrive, you'd still nervously thrust your hand
into that pocket we'd both fitted so well, clutching the coin —
your hand had never been this cold, covered in salt and fine sweat;
clutching tightly, the way you once clutched my lambent ambition.

Living with you, neither of us will be free.

Those jeans, you'd keep wearing them,
until death has fattened you, crumpling their bones.

Conspirators

August shells the town
with cutting blasts;
if not for my farewell to language,
I would treat of this
opening to a new war.

Still, these shrills are harsh!
issuing from hearts of a tortured dusk.
Out of the boys
darts forth a girlèd night —
Mothers perch, at crossroads, darker than night.

Motherless, we should have known,
in the end only you and I would be left on the lawn,
where the most bored of us toy with limbs.
Occupying a green like this,
our shadows loom ponderous.

And we shall be masters of the greens.

Having bid farewell to language, in July already, or June,
I bid an early farewell to every thunder ever publicized.
In the dark, we discharge grapeshots,
plotting to execute pears, purge the oak and partisans.
Our conspiracy rings the ether with bemooned vultures.

May we somberly utter words we once cherished in every way.
May we keep the pledge, so we be gods on this earth forever.

Tree

1

The room is boundless,
mine alone.
But I cannot possess the window's limit,
the sun and all the view.
Only one tree really belongs to me.
I watch her cast her shade upon the window-pane,
effortless and fair.
How small this green flame,
yet she shakes the resolve of so many words.

2

How many times I will pace to and fro
along the white road,
now recalling her, only to presently forget,
as if in crossing, between a traitorous motherland
and her brooding neighbor.
Her branches then stood wind-fraught,
lowering toward me,
to glance at my amorous papers.

3

A heart, from upright to prone,
needs but a puff;
I fall, no longer, in his muzzle's aim.
I crawl in summer-heat's earthy shimmer.
Or should I lie supine, to meet his demand —
a summery kiss, that tug of war,
we lay our lives down the line.

“Back to No-Man’s-Land” —

A sally of osculation.

When was a border ever this soft?

Never was a border so held in humiliation.

The Drunken Centaurs Disturb the Wedding, and War with the Lapiths

I was once as honest
as a wine-cask
unbroached.
Scented of oak,
a heart round and heavy.

That is to say,
my heart was once full of omens.
It imagined itself of weight:
cedars conversing, in the dark;
and words. Grapes like tear-filled eyes.

That is to say,
this whole heart was memory,
settling, rising, descending, fermenting —
the wine-dark seas. A bride swan-white. Laughters —
roses, then, a wedding. Roses. Luminous feasts —

O, no more, no more,
unbroken horses draw their bowstrings taut,
stones take fright at their hooves.
They trample the stones dead. They snuff out the ants.
Their bows circumscribe a pious ring.

Soon blood runs as plentiful as wine,
spilling from the silver cups, spilling from the gold,
the living lie as weary as the dead.
We are like tables and chairs heaped over the floor.
Old or young, bottles strewn in drifts.

The heart, thus trampled — this whole heart

shrieks, on and on, drunk on malice.

O, in vain, my sister.

O, in vain, these tears.

We with tears inter languishing mother tongues.

Leo Strauss

Leo Strauss,
a jewish philosopher (not a rabbi),
buried in the jewish cemetery in annapolis,
with his wife.

one night we gathered at his grave and smoked weed.

יהודה ליב בר אלחנן

from our weak hollow mouths
we blew out smoke, purple as the moon.

שמיני עצרת תשל"ד

in weeds we dug around for dew, mushrooms.

but nothing — dusk was long gone,
that magic hour.

there'd been fireflies on the lawn then, like star-bits.

but noon was long gone too, when shadows were shorter than mind.

at noon we sat by the harbor, mouths smeared with hotdog chili.

we tallied ducks going back and forth on the water.

summer, 1972, Leo Strauss pulled his soul together,
trying to describe his impression of the eternal recurrence.

in that impression, we didn't yet exist,

language had not tallied our faces.

but presently, the circle's enormity about to close;

dizzy over the past, we dragged our feet among the graves,
us dybbuks who can't find a body to possess.

maybe we'd get to see after all this long summer end.

but the sun is eternal, it's coruscated since antiquity,
its long rising whip scatters us young ghosts:

by the end of summer, two of us will go to new york,
one ford the west,
and one to singapore.

The Night Sparta Hunts Down Helots

The earth: narcissi-ballasted.
This candid heart,
I will smear with blood.

Face besmirched with mud,
mud besmirched with mud.
O, darkness wears a face like mine.

Crouched low in the dark, I'm still lower.
The fox paws at my entrails,
tunneling a hole inside the hole.

Still, my dagger is raised:
downwind, olives take fright,
figs offer up their heads;

like a wine-cask chiseled open,
or a wheat-sack torn,
from void you surge into void.

Your body lies on inverse; it makes night seem vaster.
In your hair, I smell burning warships;
the tongue is silent as a pine stripped of every needle.

O, I'd always wanted to peel off this darkness of yours,
to tan it long on the stake's tip,
till it ripens, moistens, wind-lifted: riverbed sweetens.

Sometimes, I'd liked to drink from your skull.
I had wished to see wine gush from the eye-sockets,
flushing out the last dregs — of curse — of benediction.

So as it runs dry, I'd keep watching,

as if through the two hollows
I could now spy on eternity:

Many fields this tiny cranium shades,
many autumns, cool-night serenades,
much iron and many vintages;

many high towers it envisages,
many streets, subways, pools, factories; many a tear,
with that pair of eyes unspeaking, queer.

Samsara

The soul, insolent and huge,
kisses her own scent.
She makes body puny.

The soul, cooking bones till they bend:
her eyes hold fire, unruly.
Even gold she leadens.

Who has not seen — impregnable, superb — the souls?
Who has not seen skies bleed their haloes at the far poles?
Who has not seen dawn-scuds — nectar? ichor? — glut dim loopholes?

But crimson grass-blades by an easterly thrown
scrape our oxhide greaves,
till pale scores have shown.
Like hacking down masts, to caulk at the seams,
we fell the city's idols for stone
to repair our rampart's breach.
O city walls, now with eyes of the gods overgrown.

But a soul sails the homeward reach,
as the noon-bell resounds through the deep grove;
where a mother plucks the bloody crickets, each
chirp-dropped into her crucible, simmering low;
in the thick of which a virgin heart, thrashing in gore, screams:
“O mother, you boiled my brain — will you eat my liver, too?”
O living one, this potion will hatch you ghosts in your dreams.

Who has not heard the soul, limpid and clear?
Who has not heard that souls for eternities persevere?
Who has not heard what sings like no flute to a defiled ear?

If my tears well,

it must be from the bottom of the heart, deeper inside.
Such gloom of mine never desires to plumb hell:
not unless a mole grubbing in that pyre,
or the snake's dead calm, desires to lap my heart's salty shell.

If at last a night will rise
and round the moon to its full swell,
then I can shut my eyes.
Assured that a thing still endures outside the mind's cell,
I no longer fear these flustered breaths of mine.

Who has not scented — so morbid and sweet — the nightfall?
Who has not scented — even as brief as happiness is — a soul oozing gall?
Who has not felt the censer puny: as it consumes its body in its own scented pall?

Sapphics

Spring uncasks its wine — it's the season where our
golden frocks in sun are yet turning golder.

Wine is ripe for weddings, in sweet and warm breeze,
under such cool shades;

under shades of crocuses, shades of green grass
kiss the bridegroom's paces of haste to kiss his
bride, a virgin, softened by wine and melting
into undreamt joys.

Hymen, raise the torch at your shrine, of spruces
built, to light the way to unending wedlock
for the newlyweds whom the changing moonlight
softly adumbrates.

I'm astir in air with narcissus purple
slow to loose my wings, now bedecked by sunlight
heavy, gold-like, weighing these wings down earthwards,
caught in the bird-net.

Sunset gathered rivers and rocks in one hue,
so vermillion, silent on all the colors
unassociated with fire, rose, gold...

Ox-bells in valleys

rang, as all things darkened as one, together,
lowered all in silence; with whispered growths of
night, whose lordly presence subdued the red to
memories tinged red.

Come to me, Selene, your mellow silver
 spurs your white mares, chariot snow-white — whiter
 you descend, Hyperion's daughter, into
 lovers' concealment.

There you'd find Endymion, boyish sleep's game,
 who in weeds lay beautiful, cast in silver,
 likeness of eternity time would envy,
 ever so tranquil.

I've observed the rings of your chaste affection
 orbit, taking reeds in embrace with marsh-light;
 ever since that night was dispersed my childhood
 — darkness of Pan, the

God of music. I used to roam the valleys,
 playing bird-songs better than birds on reed-flutes,
 singing lovers' serenades, outperforming
 shepherds in tryst-woods;

I, before horns even protruded, used to
 dance in fields where irises bloomed in summer,
 cooling shades supporting my treads, as if a
 pair of cothurni.

Not the sweetest warble, or shepherds' cooing,
 nor my hooves on rhythm, however, lure you,
 who adore that silence of dolls alone, which
 charms you to *his* side.

That's how I developed this trick: I wrapped some
 wool around me, whiter than snow, while lying
 still in *his* stead, so in these moonless nights, a

moon pays me visits.

Children often whisper their secrets into
deep and green tree-hollows, where ghosts enjoy sleep
— still, these ghosts stay reticent, roused while trains quell
thundering sleepers.

If this poet lies with regard to truths seen,
may her eyes be taken, may gods desert her
after confiscating her voice to sing songs.

Perish her base soul.

Cronus, guardian hoary with years and wisdom,
from your seas of memories stored, have you tears?
Anguish, woes, pangs, aches and regrets in my soul
breed just as flies do.

Answer if you can your apprentice still young,
whether old age hounds you, or liberates your
corpse from dead sensations infested, spirit
ransomed from lead dreams?

One day she'll have need to convert this gangue, this
pus, this bile of agony into bright gold;
she will have to practice her Midas touch on
sulfur with black tears.

John the clerk this earlier morning browsed the
bank as dawn flushed halls and its foyers, large with
lurid crabs on fluxes of stilt-legged Arabs
 prodding the floor-wood,

young cigar industrialists mixed like heroin.
While the dog-faced Mary complained her check'd bounced
at the town's emporium to John the clerk who
eyed her and eyed her

up and down, up and again explored the spotty history that was recorded on her balance sheets since March the 15th this year of revenue increase,

Peter swam in like in pellucid shine a
shark returns to tropical realms of water.
Shoals of old sons darted away in canter,
fearing his presence;

Simon saw this parvenu, hasting to him
introduced him into the VIP's room,
golden room with tropical vibes throughout, in
luscious, chambré growths.

Outside, Jane the Beatrice, secretary
personal for Mr. Kazan, did also
furnish stenographical ciphers for his
loan-plea to go through;

as she entered, swans of untimely thoughts seized John the clerk who now for his life could not move, neck unwound to stare but to stare alone, no,

he had a girlfriend.

“Girlfriend had a rosy, unhealthy body.

Fervent, sometimes even obscene, was John in
summer days. That’s gone. An untold, but strong still,
tension began to

build. She therefore started to do the night-shifts,
whereas he preferred to have breakfast quiet,
knowing she had all her affairs with Peter,
client of Simon’s.”

Chestnuts fall in autumn. The park is quiet.
How I used to wander these lanes left fallow,
bucket in hand, busy collecting teal heats
that they preserved then.

Winter nurtures women's complaint, house-bound in melancholy,
since familial hearths are alight — still, are unfit for standing
blizzards, winds and frosts of the woods — less to restore the startled
huntsmen to husbands.

Glass has learned to drink the unseen sun that enraptured poets,
so much so it starts to ferment air as enclosed within it.
Air to wine it turned, yet to them still unrevealed, that dark shine,
blearily staring.

Tinge of red smears telephone-poles, pylons and giant structures
over fields of hyacinth, great silhouettes gleaming darkly,
fraught with irate fumes of electricity shooting up their
serpentine lattice

pulse-juice via sympathy-wrought alloy, annealed with copper,
till it reaches, merrily, ears meant to receive it, on this
other side of velvety screen parting a room. We talk in
vespertine shadows.

Weep, then, you Athenians, know Alcibiades leave you.
If, to slander, gods you'd deface, mutilate — who can save you?
Who can chase those triremes away, avarice goading sails strong —
will they subdue you?

Did you give meek Nicias charge? Cavalries? Hoplites? O, doom!
Better leave Sicilian white shores to the dogs and black crows!
All esteemed his reverence — still, piety spares no conflict.
Fate has eclipsed him!

Thebans had Lysander dispatched, so say those ghosts arrived late;
Pericles has messengers sent, bidding requital from him;
Persia guards Themistocles, shrewd fox, in some empty palace,
counseling dead kings.

In there, see Pausanias, too? Sequined in Persian raiments,
now he's truly Spartan the way he has desired. Then there's
Tissaphernes, juggling between bondage beneath the princes,
Xerxes and Cyrus.

Hades still has politics, death seems to have troubled no one.
I have since defected a good myriad of times below, as
Persian, Spartan, Greek, and still more shapes I've become, an ally
equal to ambush;

yet in vain I've searched for the man Socrates, gold that glitters.
I'd have long before had him sniffed out if he'd come to Hades.
Soul of gold pure, where do you hide? No. But unless he'd tarried —
he should be down here.

How a city cries in my heart! How, as I sleep, young symbols
rush my head: like dogs at the tracks sweaty below the racing
pillow-clouds. Decrepit, my head feels like a hippodrome: there,
ice-cream is hotdog.

Populations — different speech-patterns — dislodge the tongue, where
walks of life, of tenements, newsstands and cafés converge to
tip. Unlit trains tram at my veins, arteries. Parleys take place
silent behind them.

Then it came: rancidity; rust, sanguine-cakes, sludge... A lot of
hands are mending man-holes where seeps sewage on lees at rainfall.
Hands are weak, in systole, diastole; words show shark rings.
Hands, give me water,

quench my heart; scrub. It's like a burnt building. There char-bones gather
onto char-bones; creepers there eavesdrop in a charcoaled ribcage,
waiting on a heart-beat to drop — as if this silence echoes
silence of real hearts.

Window's stare is quick to disclose secrets of many, turning
men to many desolate landscapes, to morasses, cliffs and
ant-hills; women — tropics, desert-houses and strands — are often
lovelier bone-hides.

Voice and tears, attend, this here vainglorious heart is noisy.
I want henceforth rid of it. Snatch up — it's a dagger — through this
throat exert; assassinate — push! slit! into cesspool dump it,
let it in piss croak!

Still, it won't cease. Still in the night, whiffs of its rot around the
corner seize me, mingling high odors with cockroach chirp-sounds.
Sullied virgin! — maggots persist, singing your alto part of
Alma Redemptoris!

Only greater miseries force miseries' counterpoints — may
music drown the heart that cannot stop! It's by this I'm urged to
write, besides those seventeen short poems already, equal
number of sapphics.

Beatnik sister frolics on Howl Street; out its corner flies a
golden arrow, piercing her tits, bosom, while honey trickles.
She contracts, as small as the dry-nut of a trice, and arcs. Time
marches ahead. Stop.