

## WAS IT NIGHT AGAIN?

Only by him  
saying so and so  
it was. Did he  
have me by the hair  
again? The failed light  
named me nothing-  
more. It cloaked  
me. I woke  
in my tyrant's  
bed. I left  
out the open door  
dreaming was. I wore  
a gown of mirrors  
there, shone out  
and briefly in an excess  
of mind then vanished  
like the swift collapse  
of a phoenix  
driven to ash by fact.  
Dressed in robes  
woven from rags  
of someone  
else's history, I was  
more Bathsheba  
and less Penelope.  
Was it reasonable? Was it love?  
With a bleeding tongue I blessed  
him, ruined talisman.  
I'll tell you all  
when the morning comes,  
but

## ACROSS

My father cried before it. My mother did.  
Family history. Sex and centuries.  
It's simple: I said yes  
and a man brought wine to my lips.  
My cousins did it. My sisters did. My brother  
in arms, an old friend once called me, before taking off  
his pants and pressing his chest to the bed.  
But that was years ago.  
I saw. I came. I touched the idols  
I was told to touch and when.  
I loved in the regional style,  
taking merely minor pleasure  
in voyeurism, like I'd been taught to,  
in a scene where there was always  
another myth in which to place a man,  
a man to make into a myth, and beautiful things  
that hailed the faithful into prayer.

On our walks by the harbor, his cross  
glitters amid thick black hair in the sun.  
He wears it for protection, he told me, a gift  
from his grandmother. He keeps it on  
even during sex, and later, after I flush  
the soiled condom, I watch him suck  
on its chain while I make a tajine for us in the kitchen.  
I fell so completely for the story,  
its characters, its details, its many plausible plots.  
Those nights the apartment held us imperfectly  
like a woolen heirloom I'd never asked for  
but still inherited. And when I dreamt I dreamt  
only of his face, in the room where a vase of plastic lilacs  
flourished in artificial light and where my limbs were bound  
and I played dead for a mock savior on the bed.  
And I woke. And I thought,  
now it's time to cut your chain from my neck.

## MONTAGE :: WITH YOU AND WITHOUT

We're only here for a minute.

The city was cinema. I was smoking a cigarette.

Below Ludlow with J., I watched us grow older that way.

Counting change in the bodega. Drinking tonic and drinking more.

That night we taped R.'s face to the bar's dart board.

Weeknight. Late night. Late July. Later.

All my nights in a car alone or with strangers...

what an all-night circus they amounted to after all.

But in August the moon's eclipsed face was all I needed.

Awe. Awful. You.

In bed you were a sheared lamb clothed in a crown of fire.

Close your eyes. Close your mouth. Turn around. Don't move closer.

Every movie is a movie. Is a life of differently.

If I told you the day, would you know where or with whom?

Blazing ginkgoes through the window. Clean knives in the drawer.

Every thought was a door to the other world (where you weren't).

It's years later and I can't get the taste of your blanket out my mouth.

Leaving my life, I thought I'd trade mine for another.

I prefer the outside weather to the weather that's within.

*I love when you're difficult. I love when you're right.*

On time, at the mark, I'm going, going...

Gone: the years mining for answers.

A phone booth's phone breaks the silence. The audience bursts to applause.

And though I left the show hours ago the performance goes on.

Bathed in dim apartment-light, your face could be mine.

The moonlit street is a dream or a smear or a secret.

Your skin was a question. Your eyes were like gems.

Light's on, light's off. Best shot, then made better.

And in the credits, where I love you, no one lingers to see who you'll be.

I remember the nights, pressing your jeans to my face,

searching for versions that I wouldn't see...

GEMINI :: AN APOLOGY

Through dinner they sat  
and said nothing, one studying

the other, the other  
studying the wall.

He opened the window  
to let the winter in.

One said, *I won't be sorry.*  
*I'm sorry*, said the other.

\*

The faint light shining through our purple curtains  
forms an argument with the floor lamp.

Your black hair glitters. The chandelier shines—

Forgive me, James.

Let me place my lips on your cold, anonymous eyes.

## FRENCH QUARTER :: AN OMEN

It was winter in New Orleans. I was alone  
and at a threshold, which looked like a balcony  
enclosed by wrought-iron railings  
lined with bored tourists who reeked  
of cheap beer, their occasional laughter  
a patronizing music in the atmosphere.  
It was raining. Then a voice—  
*If you're so smart, shouldn't you know to keep  
a marriage from falling apart?*  
Now that love has finally failed you,  
you can finally live!  
a street witch shouted, pointing  
at a crowd of women across the square.  
I stood in the headlights of the sentence, searching.  
A wine glass broke. A woman started weeping.  
Someone handed the witch a twenty.

## A HEROINE OR, MORNING SUN

She lies in bed where she'd played dead for weeks,  
the sheets impossibly bleach-white, the white room whitening  
in the morning sunlight. Who is she looking for?

The clouds become a clot in the sky. Then animalesque. Then gone.  
It's Sunday, which means a croissant on a plate and yesterday's coffee  
like a dread you can drink on the desk.

The sun is a government that cuts rigid lines  
across the room like so many shadowy no-go zones  
telling her where she can be: not here, there, or anywhere.

Her black eyes blacken and confect a vatic vision.  
Lie down, she thinks. Make a dream.  
What I want is what's in excess of the frame.

## LAKESHORE SCENE

Could you imagine loving someone like that?  
my grandfather said, gesturing at two canoe-boys  
kissing, as they glided over the water, ordinary desire  
casting a quiet love, I thought, across the lake like falling snow.  
He was not a nice man. He sucked his teeth and spat. No...  
I thought, though I could and did and would.  
On the shore with him, imagination was the weather  
of a better world. I carried my mind to invent  
another body in which I could hide my life.  
The wind picked up. The canoe-boys docked.  
All the good men went home to kiss their wives and daughters.  
The air was wild with summer. We sat in the silence awhile.  
His brutal brow twitched. He thumbed the slits on his linen shirt.  
Like this, I learned to love by watching. My shadow  
on the lakewater is a little man  
obscured by the shadow that swallows it whole.