

Lynn, MA

I said nothing
the second time
because I was bored
with my body, and you
were disinterested with Holly's
softness, her roundness, hungry
for firmer fruit, the crunch
of an apple, not the pop
of pearl-cluster raspberries.
I let you touch
what was not yours,
a child violating
a butterfly's wings.

I let you steal my body.
It was easy, peeling back
the sheets, harder
to pretend
I didn't want the prick
of your lashes pressing
behind my ear. You moaned,
and I received your weight
like grains on a millstone:
passive, awaiting impact.

With the snap
of a twig, my mind
reeled, leapt. I pressed
back against the thickness
of your chest, uprooting you,
but you clung to. The guilt
of awareness howled
in prickling waves
across my naked body.

Thank you for stopping
me from jumping out
the window with your lips.
Fuck you for letting me pluck
the pomegranate seeds
of your nipples between my teeth.

We should have known better:
the living don't eat food
in the halls of the dead.

Because I don't want this to be about us

I.

You're at a Diner with the man you love, although you don't love these fluorescents. You and he share an omelet because neither can commit to an entire meal punctured by awkward silences. You've just admitted that he's carved rings into your coffee table, but you've only yourself to blame for forgetting the coasters. As he butters his toast, you butter him up by adding that he's a dog-eared passage in your favorite book from childhood, the first footfall on a beach after five years of city-living, the missing lyric to a lullaby your mother sang.

He retorts that you're a runner in an otherwise pristine stocking. The homeless man in the next booth over is suturing a gash in his thigh with teal thread. You want to ask him to repair the tearing silence, but the metaphorical stocking is white, so the thread would shock too harshly. Between forkfuls and toast-slatherings, the boy you love asks you to entertain him, so you fairytale it.

II.

You're at a crossroads and the signpost reads "Start digging," and the Sun's shadow on the Moon is the left drooping eyelid of an insomniac Giant. It's snowing, the first of the year, the kind that sends pins and needles skittering down your inner thighs, but you're the monster in this tale; you feel nothing (yet).

You're at a crossroads to petition a Goddess to make you a princess, but a carnival Fortuneteller arrives in her place, screaming with jewels and toothless, and half her deck

shoots into the sky like premature ejaculate
as she shuffles, so she scrambles, botches
the reading, convinces you
you're not the beast but the soon-to-be-
betrothed, and look
here comes your Prince! Sure

enough, a knight in armor
that hasn't been polished in a few months
and hair that could scrub a toilet
and teeth like the planks of a weathered picket fence
appears. Despite his appearance,
he's *your* Prince, charmed
to meet you under different circumstances.
And his voice crackles like a hearth, warming
you until you forget your own ugliness.

So you kiss the hollows
behind his knees,
but he draws his cudgel, demands
your sequined hide for some twink pillowed away in some tower.
After you've de-rined yourself, skin spooled at his feel,
he crushes your skull like a spoiled milk carton.

III.

The reality is, I'm in the David Rubenstein Atrium on 62nd Street.
This isn't a rom-com, it's a B-horror flick.
This isn't a fairytale, it's a Wednesday night.
The man who doesn't love me back sits across a sterile white table.
He wears a sage-green shirt
and vacant expression.
My stomach hurts because
I've glutted myself on his company far too long, but
my father taught me to clean my plate
or else
so I keep shoveling
the silence and
shoulder knots and
quick glances down my gullet,
like some beast who only wants to be seen
as beautiful.

To delay the bridge-burning, the man
who doesn't love me back
reads a random passage from the only book in his knapsack,
but I don't pay attention, instead daydream

of nesting my head in his chest hair, the distant thunder
of his voice lullabying me to sleep. But no,
it's the rattle of the train rolling out of the station, or
the pack growl before the pounce
and I'm too doe-eyed to survive this one.

And I'm preoccupied with the riverbank
of my stomach, into which
drop stone after
stone, each engraved with each
hope slipping
from my grip, and each
hope is spelled with the letters of the name of
the man who doesn't love me back.

And the man who doesn't me back snaps
the spine of his book,
pulling me like the kiss of a sour-breathed Prince from slumber.
He presses fore- and middlefingers into lidded eyes,
as if grasping for foresight or
preparing to play hide-and-seek with a tiresome child or
blotting me out.

The man who doesn't love me back
tells me he'd respect me more if I got up and left,
so I do. I don't
even throw on my coat as I leave him
to await the Waitress or
Goddess or
Gypsy or
Gravedigger or
Prince who might finally make the cut
my blade was too dull to make.

Everything I Thought You Knew But Should've Said Anyway

When you asked me if I was alright, I should have said:

No.

It feels as though

*a thousand slick, phantom hairs are
slithering along my shoulders, as though
even if I were to unzip and slip
out of my skin, they'd still
cling and hiss, hot-and-cold
shame*

dribbling

*along the skin. It feels
as though I could*

*scour my belly with a paint scraper until the sun resurfaced and still feel
the suck*

of our mingled seed eddying through the thick, curled hairs.

And even though

—or perhaps, especially because—

*so many have written so
poetically, romantically, and rhapsodically
about such mingling, I can't help but feel
as though a great, chapping wind is sucking
me worlds away from you,*

*even as I huddle against your ribs in this
twisted bed. Because it's not*

*this bed, it's the one rooted in the spring
of 2014, gnawing*

through the floorboards

in that room

in that house

in Lynn, Massachusetts,

and it's not my

*sidetable sidled up beside it, but that other one, dark and sleek,
tiered and holding*

a lamp,

a box of Kleenex, and

my glasses, folded chastely even as

he chased me to the window

that jammed firmly three inches above the sill and

wouldn't grant this Icarus passage to

plummet onto the wrought-iron release five stories below.

*Because that's how it felt: as though I'd flown, gasping
yet groping for the heat*

smoldering from the chapped palms of his hands,

leaping from that great jugular

serpent coiled in his neck, just to see

*if I could survive the flight, too tempting
not to touch,
or, a Lucifer,
ricochet from the godless prize and into
the pit below. I wanted a taste of flame, a tongue—even his—
to lap against my skin, the shore
at high tide, swallow me down and extinguish the roiling need—or prove me
saintlike and above the gleam of the pomegranate's skin.
And when the window failed, when I trembled
at the thought of yielding, finding myself
snapping along the unmarked forest path and without breadcrumbs—
my body jettisoned my self
—useless, dead weight—
which crammed into the highest, farthest corner and peered, foolish
child,
between the woven screen of fingers until
curiosity killed one
or the other pussy tussling below.
And that's why, silent
and rigid as those enviable virgins Ovid granted freedom in the form of trees
and weeds, but spent and shamed
as a sinner, I clung, face down,
to your chest, embarrassed to even
breathe, thinking
I could trick the trauma into
forgetting its own existence if
I, doe-eyed and dumb, played dead.
And only when I could no longer bear the soft sighing
of your wrists as they whispered
dulcetly along my shoulder did I pull
away, twisting as Daphne
must have when bark bit up from bone, and planted
myself on the bed's edge.
And instead of
creaking open the pink,
spackled bud of my mouth, instead of
spilling it all out, all
I could manage was,
*I just cleaned these damn sheets.**

Watercolor of the Shoreline on the Morning of Aeneas' Departure

As for me, I am a watercolor.

I wash off.

--Anne Sexton, "For My Lover, Returning to His Wife"

You were supposed to be my picture-that-comes-with-the-frame love

You were supposed to be the final petal that I cheated to name *he loves me*

You were supposed to be the electroshock tongue down my throat,

scour the napalm from my nerves and teach me trust

But all you became were four poems poured from the stigmata in my palms, souvenirs

of a foolish faith in outdated romance, and I

I was always just another name in your datebook

I was always just a Hershey's wrapper on the kitchen floor, you missed

the wastebasket

I was always just a crook of Camel smoke spat from your mouth,

nasty habit

And all I'd ever amount to was a stain on the bedsheets,

the sheets I just washed and won't stomach

washing again until I feel

the press of your silence like

I once felt

the nuzzle of your palm,

plaintive and patient as a spaniel's snout in my lap

But we're just people after all, aren't we?

We're not poetry.

No one is

anymore. I can't love

correctly, fashionably. I am old

babushka, still burning

the fat for the Old God,

stoking the altar flame and choking

infatuation through my chest.

I think I know better, but all I know

are old dirt paths that have been

paved over and gnarled

strands of truelove

poems no one has the patience to

untangle, or

maybe I'm still the child, discovering

the comfort of touch

with a best friend beneath

forted sheets, sparkler-chested

before the purity of bodies

was snatched away like

my comfort blanket. You were supposed to be
this Lazarus' Christ-hand, win the tug-o-war with the grave

I was always just a dead-end brick wall for you to jam your toes on

And we're just two people that I've jammed into tight lines, overstuffed
suitcase, old polaroids chewed through
the shredder—

*He's a man, not
a monument
He's a man
not a
monument
He is
a man not
a monument*

Repeat
anything enough times and you start
believing

That should've been
my answer when you asked
why I wasn't trying harder to heal

—because I've worn down the record playing
I don't deserve happiness

But that wasn't
my answer.

Because the last truth
I gave—that the dissociation that accompanies sex
felt like I was a washing dragged
too soon
from the suds-crowned bucket by
muddy hands—

made you look at me
as though I were one of those
cleft-palate kids plastered on billboards
between Ohio and Indiana—

Same reason
I lied when you asked if I'd been with anyone since you.
You wouldn't have understood, how
I let a stranger choke me, bend
me like a supple twig over the slick railing at Chelsea Piers,

my body a bow, fully cocked,
because I wanted
to dip my toe in Lethe, wanted
to force the feeling—*zing*—but still
it felt like I was weighted to the bottom of Styx,
that sensationless stillness
slipping around me,
straining toward a shadow
flitting in silvers and greens and yellows far above,
craning toward a muffling—I knew

you wouldn't understand how it feels
when your body jettisons itself like rubbish,
the scramble
to return, the heaving
toward sensation

*He's a man, not
a monument
He's a man
not a
monument
He is
a man not
a monument*

Repeat
Believe
I didn't
ask what I meant
to you—I wanted
to, but didn't
because I was afraid I'd open
 the box
 and discover that
 the cat's been dead this whole time
because your mind's always already been on a distant lover, a promised
 land for you to conquer

I wanted to
kiss you good
bye but
was afraid of playing the fool,
 afraid of being sloppy,
 afraid of your lips
 the same fear
 I felt at 11 when
 I heard the ocean singing to me

Everything I Thought You Knew But Should've Said Anyway

like a tubful of knives and
wanted nothing more
than for every fleck of foam
to macerate me.