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 curried 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.