

"The Matter"

Some men break your heart in two...--Dorothy Parker, "Experience"

Some men carry you to bed with your boots on.
Some men say your name like a verbal tic.
Some men slap on an emotional surcharge for every erotic encounter.
Some men are slightly mentally ill, and thinking of joining a gym.
Some men have moved on and can't be seduced even in the dream bars you meet them in.
Some men who were younger are now the age you were then.
Some men aren't content with mere breakage, they've got to burn you to the ground.
Some men you've reduced to ashes are finally dusting themselves off.
Some men are made of fiberglass.
Some men have deep holes drilled in by a war, you can't fill them.
Some men are delicate and torn.
Some men will steal your bracelet if you let them spend the night.
Some men will want to fuck your poems, and instead they will find you.
Some men will say, "I'd like to see how you look when you come," and then hail a cab.
Some men are a list of ingredients with no recipe.
Some men never see you.
Some men will blindfold you during sex, then secretly put on high heels.
Some men will try on your black fishnet stockings in a hotel in Rome, or Saran Wrap you to a bedpost in New Orleans.
Some of these men will be worth trying to keep.
Some men will write smugly condescending reviews of your work, making you remember these lines by Frank O'Hara:
I cannot possibly think of you/other than you are: the assassin/of my orchards.
Some men, let's face it, really are too small.
Some men are too large, but it's not usually a deal breaker.
Some men don't have one at all.
Some men will slap you in a way you'll like.
Some men will want to crawl inside you to die.
Some men never clean up the matter.
Some men hand you their hearts like leaflets, and some men's hearts seem to circle forever: you catch sight of them on clear nights, bright dots among the stars, and wait for their orbits to decay, for them to fall to earth.

—Kim Addonizio

Augury

That girl in the stilettos and tight dress
is my girl, parading back and forth
before my closet

in the precarious shoes she bought for the prom.
She thinks she has to practice being sexy. She can't
imagine the future

I can see so clearly: over the calm sea
of the mirror, a thousand warriors set out,
ready to kill

or die for the sake of her beauty.
I can see how the tiny sails will disappear
into the distance,

looking like they're going under, swallowed
by some jealous god or other. She stares intently
at the mirror

but still she can't see the ships foundering,
the hearts being dashed on the rocks. Now
she smoothes glittery

shadow over her eyelids, dark lipstick
on her mouth. When she blows a kiss
a wind drags

the waves up to a great height, before
they topple over and crush any man
who's still alive.

—Kim Addonizio

MUSE

When I walk in,
men buy me drinks before I even reach the bar.

They fall in love with me after one night,
even if we never touch.

I tell you I've got this shit down to a science.

They sweat with my memory,
alone in cheap rooms they listen

to moans through the wall
and wonder if that's me,

letting out a scream as the train whines by.

But I'm already two states away, lying with a boy
I let drink rain from the pulse at my throat.

No one leaves me, I'm the one that chooses.
I show up like money on the sidewalk.

Listen, baby. Those are my high heels dangling from the
phone wire.

I'm the crow flapping down,
that's my black slip

you catch sight of when the pain
twists into you so deep

you have to close your eyes and weep like a goddamned
woman.

DEAD GIRLS

show up often in the movies, facedown
in the weeds beside the highway.
Kids find them by the river, or in the woods,
under leaves, one pink-nailed hand thrust up.
Detectives stand over them in studio apartments
or lift their photos off pianos
in the houses they almost grew up in.
A dead girl can kick a movie into gear
better than a saloon brawl, better
than a factory explosion, just
by lying there. Anyone can play her,
any child off the street
can be hog-tied and dumped from a van
or strangled blue in a kitchen, a bathroom,
an alley, a school. That's the beauty

of a dead girl. Even a plain one
who feels worthless
as a clod of dirt, broken

by the sorrow of gazing all day
at a fashion magazine,
can be made whole, redeemed

by what she finally can't help being,
the center of attention, the special,
desirable, dead, dead girl.

HUMAN NATURE

When I hear of how he kept one girl alive
after disposing of the friend and mother,
and about the next one he found

and killed and cut apart,
I try to imagine him hooking his fingers
through the plastic rings of a six-pack,

lifting a nozzle from its cradle
to gas up a truck, flicking
the dead end of a cigarette into the weeds,

and I don't want him to be human—
shaking water from a comb,
jiggling the handle of a toilet, fishing

for a quarter to drop into the slot
of a meter. I want him tentacled
and eyeless, like some

creature from a star so far away
it's not charted anywhere, its light
stopping short of earth.

I want him to be a shapeless
lump of matter that is not
our matter, not carbon-based,

maybe I don't even want him
to be alive—silicon, circuitry,
inert mass of material. Then

he'd be no more capable of evil
than a rock or stick—rock brought down
hard on a skull, stick whittled

to a fine point and tipped with poison—
there still would be someone,
a god to work the levers, to set him

in motion. Better not to think
of a god like that, better to believe
there's nothing; nothing, and the human.

31-YEAR-OLD LOVER

When he takes off his clothes
I think of a stick of butter being unwrapped,
the milky, lubricious smoothness of it
when it's taken from the fridge still hard
the way his body is hard, the high
tight pectorals, the new dimes of the nipples pressed
into his chest, the fanning of the muscles underneath.
I look at his arms, shaped as though a knife
has slid along the curves to carve them out,
deltoids, biceps, triceps, I almost can't believe
that he is human—latissimus dorsi, hip flexors,
gluteals, gastrocnemius—he is so perfectly made.
He stands naked in my bedroom and nothing
has harmed him yet, though he is going
to be harmed. He is going to have a gut one day,
and wiry gray hairs where the soft dark filaments
flow out of him, the cream of his skin is going
to loosen and separate slowly, over a low steady flame
and he has no idea, as I had no idea,
and I am not going to speak of this to him ever,
I am going to let him stretch out on my bed
so I can take the heavy richness of him in
and in, I am going to have it back the only way I can.

FUCK

There are people who will tell you
that using the word *fuck* in a poem
indicates a serious lapse
of taste, or imagination,

or both. It's vulgar,
indecorous, an obscenity
that crashes down like an anvil
falling through a skylight

to land on a restaurant table,
on the white linen, the cut-glass vase of lilacs.
But if you were sitting
over coffee when the metal

hit your saucer like a missile,
wouldn't that be the first thing
you'd say? Wouldn't you leap back
shouting, or at least thinking it,

over and over, bell-note riotously clanging
in the church of your brain

Fuck (cont.)

while the solicitous waiter
led you away, wouldn't you prop

your shaking elbows on the bar
and order your first drink in months,
telling yourself you were lucky
to be alive? And if you wouldn't

say anything but *Mercy* or *Oh my*
or *Land sakes*, well then
I don't want to know you anyway
and I don't give a fuck what you think

of my poem. The world is divided
into those whose opinions matter
and those who will never have
a clue, and if you knew

which one you were I could talk
to you, and tell you that sometimes
there's only one word that means
what you need it to mean, the way

there's only one person
when you first fall in love,
or one infant's cry that calls forth
the burning milk, one name

that you pray to when prayer
is what's left to you. I'm saying
in the beginning was the word
and it was good, it meant one human

entering another and it's still
what I love, the word made
flesh. *Fuck me*, I say to the one
whose lovely body I want close,

and as we fuck I know it's holy,
a psalm, a hymn, a hammer
ringing down on an anvil,
forging a whole new world.

'ROUND MIDNIGHT

In the book I'm reading: hard rain,
spike heels on pavement,
a man waiting in a rented room

to draw a woman down onto his bed.
She's the wrong woman,
she's a car wreck in a silk dress

and he can't wait to touch her.
No plot without desire,
the more desperate the better.

I look up to find that here, too,
it's raining. And now that I'm back
in my own quiet life

I feel like a character who's barely
been imagined yet, just a name
wearing a faded T-shirt,

reaching for her glass of cold wine.
If only the river would surge into the streets,
if only a tree would uproot itself

or the roof fly off in a funnel of black wind.
Such is my life: A minute ago I was happy,
immersed in a book. Now I feel a misery

only violence could cure. Now
I have to invent a story
to drag me out into the city,

toward music and grainy light
and the wrong men, I have to discover
what it is I want

and who I'm going to have to hurt to get it.

EATING TOGETHER

I know my friend is going,
though she still sits there
across from me in the restaurant,
and leans over the table to dip
her bread in the oil on my plate; I know
how thick her hair used to be,
and what it takes for her to discard
her man's cap partway through our meal,
to look straight at the young waiter
and smile when he asks
how we are liking it. She eats
as though starving—chicken, dolmata,
the buttery flakes of filo—
and what's killing her
eats, too. I watch her lift
a glistening black olive and peel
the meat from the pit, watch
her fine long fingers, and her face,
puffy from medication. She lowers
her eyes to the food, pretending
not to know what I know. She's going.
And we go on eating.

THE WORK

I can't bear anymore what happens to the body,
how it begins to get ready, the skin drawing back
just slightly from the bones, the bones not
brittle yet but starting to abrade, the blood
slowing down in its thickening tunnels and sewers.
I don't want to see how the glossy hairs are leached
of their color, one strand at a time—
I think of how, after rain, ants get into the house,
how I first notice one or two veering toward
the dish sponge, then several behind the toaster
until I find a long line of them seething up
the pantry wall, pulsing on a jar lid, frantic
to get at the honey. What happens to
the sweet cave of the mouth, I don't want to see that.
Mottled roots of the cuspids exposed, the pocked
molars coming loose—lately I can't help noticing
how tired I look in the mornings, how ready
to return to the bed I've just risen from.
I make myself get dressed, I stand up and feel it
coming from beneath the earth, from the hulls
of their ribs and their weedy skulls, up through
the basement, the mildew and silverfish,
working steadily and humming, happy,
in love with its job of building an old woman.

EX-BOYFRIENDS

They hang around, hitting on your friends
or else you never hear from them again.
They call when they're drunk, or finally get sober,

they're passing through town and want dinner,
they take your hand across the table, kiss you
when you come back from the bathroom.

They were your loves, your victims,
your good dogs or bad boys, and they're over
you now. One writes a book in which a woman

who sounds suspiciously like you
is the first to be sadistically dismembered
by a serial killer. They're getting married

and want you to be the first to know,
or they've been fired and need a loan,
their new girlfriend hates you,

they say they don't miss you but show up
in your dreams, calling to you from the shoeboxes
where they're buried in rows in your basement.

Some nights you find one floating into bed with you,
propped on an elbow, giving you a look
of fascination, a look that says *I can't believe*

I've found you. It's the same way
your current boyfriend gazed at you last night,
before he pulled the plug on the tiny white lights

above the bed, and moved against you in the dark
broken occasionally by the faint restless arcs
of headlights from the freeway's passing trucks,

the big rigs that travel and travel,
hauling their loads between cities, warehouses,
following the familiar routes of their loneliness.

BLUES FOR DANTE ALIGHIERI

... without hope we live on in desire . . .

Inferno, IV

Our room was too small, the sheets scratchy and hot—
Our room was a kind of hell, we thought,
and killed a half-liter of Drambuie we'd bought.

We walked over the Arno and back across.
We walked all day, and in the evening, lost,
argued and wandered in circles. At last

we found our hotel. The next day we left for Rome.
We found the Intercontinental, and a church full of bones,
and ate takeout Chinese in our suite, alone.

It wasn't a great journey, only a side trip.
It wasn't love for eternity, or any such crap;
it was just something that happened . . .

We packed suitcases, returned the rental car.
We packed souvenirs, repaired to the airport bar
and talked about pornography, and movie stars.

SONNENIZIO ON A LINE FROM DRAYTON

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part;
or kiss anyway, let's start with that, with the kissing part,
because it's better than the parting part, isn't it—
we're good at kissing, we like how that part goes:
we part our lips, our mouths get near and nearer,
then we're close, my breasts, your chest, our bodies partway
to making love, so we might as well, part of me thinks—
the wrong part, I know, the bad part, but still
let's pretend we're at that party where we met
and scandalized everyone, remember that part? Hold me
like that again, unbutton my shirt, part of you
wants to I can tell, I'm touching that part and it says
yes, the ardent partisan, let it win you over,
it's hopeless, come, we'll kiss and part forever.

note: The sonnenizio was invented in Florence in the thirteenth century by Vanni Fucci as an irreverent form whose subject was usually the impossibility of everlasting love. Dante retaliated by putting Fucci into the seventh chasm of the Inferno as a thief. Originally composed in hendecasyllabics, the sonnenizio gradually moved away from metrical constraints and began to tackle a wider variety of subject matter. The sonnenizio is fourteen lines long. It opens with a line from someone else's sonnet, repeats a word from that line in each succeeding line of the poem, and closes with a rhymed couplet.

Bad Girl

She's the one sleeping all day, in a room
at the back of your brain. She wakes up
at the sound of a cork twisted free
of a bottle, a stabbed olive

popped into gin. She's prettier than you
and right now you bore the shit out of her,
sitting there sipping when she wants
to stand on the rim of the glass, naked,

dive straight to the bottom and lie there
looking up, amazed at how the world
wavers and then comes clear. You're not
going to let her. You've locked her in

with her perfume and cheap novels,
her deep need for trouble. She's the one
calling to you through the keyhole,
then sneaking away to squirm out

a window and tear her silk dress.
You can't guess where she's going,
or who you'll wake up with
when you finally wake up,

your head throbbing like a heart.
She's the one you're scared of,
the one who dares you to go ahead
and completely disappear. It's not

you the boys are noticing, not you
turning toward them and throwing off light.
You're crouched in a corner, coming undone.
She's in love with you now. She's the one.

—Kim Addonizio

"What Do Women Want?"

by Kim Addonizio

I want a red dress.

I want it flimsy and cheap,

I want it too tight, I want to wear it

until someone tears it off me.

I want it sleeveless and backless,

this dress, so no one has to guess

what's underneath. I want to walk down

the street past Thrifty's and the hardware store

with all those keys glittering in the window,

past Mr. and Mrs. Wong selling day-old

donuts in their café, past the Guerra brothers

slinging pigs from the truck and onto the dolly,

hoisting the slick snouts over their shoulders.

I want to walk like I'm the only

woman on earth and I can have my pick.

I want that red dress bad.

I want it to confirm

your worst fears about me,

to show you how little I care about you

or anything except what

I want. When I find it, I'll pull that garment

from its hanger like I'm choosing a body

to carry me into this world, through

the birth-cries and the love-cries too,

and I'll wear it like bones, like skin,

it'll be the goddamned

dress they bury me in.