

Upon Reading His Journal

Allison Eir Jenks

Such sin it is to learn your stress
is not from the bankrupt dogs
bawling in the vacant dark,

the bastard's hair clogging the sink,
or the mute man creeping in the walkway,
fattening all the beasts around us.

It's not the men who wronged your blood—
the floggers and toilers who stayed out
too late or died too young. It is not my body,

or the chore of it, or of any other.
And no one you wanted to please more.
I am surely your demon for reading this,

how you simply cannot manage love
any longer, not the sort that makes you feel
more than you feel worthy of, that makes you wonder

what all this happiness is going to cost you later.
So, summon me to the sleep where virgins
and martyrs still call themselves your lovers.

But write my elegy gracefully. Have the mercy
to ignore anything I wouldn't have done
if not drunk, bored, or trying to amuse you.

Leave room for change,
for the sun to split the world in two
spaces large enough for us to love one.

Leave out spilt drinks, the defensive rhetoric,
or any small lie I told to save you.
This time, I will erase the scripts.

I will not hide under the bed and listen
to your secrets. I'll take a crowded bus to Chicago.
I will not be selfish. I'll entertain everyone I know

despite the strange, biased air you have left for me.
And I will try again to find the glamorous woman
you dared to love, the one you stayed up all night for,

and stole the neighbor's gardens for,
and turned the music down for,
so she could sleep more than she needed to,

and from her distant, generous eyes, I will try
to examine you as if the eyes I have grown
into are graveyards, and I will ask her

what she thought she could save you from.
She might remember the broken bones
you cradled yourself in, the obscene stories

meant to prepare her, the large ladies who paid you
with cocaine, the mangled cars, the rooftops
and the horses you fell from. Or the delicacies
of infertile men carelessly fondling you,
their beastly beards and fingers
between your legs, how the awkward novelty

was far more perfect than the wife
you never fucked on weekends, her bad English.
You tried to warn me

that no one had forgiven you yet, how impossible
it would be to love an unforgiven man.
But I could find a way to get you out of it.

I had a clear conscience. I had room,
and you filled it. Now you will pack my life away
in the same boxes it came in. You will buy new lamps

to keep yourself from drowning in you,
and pin the walls back up as simple as a man
knows he can get away with.

How tidy the memories can be,
bottled up like dream's austere sins or muses
trained to ban you from the truth's beginnings.

You don't have to let anyone know
how much time you'll waste pacing the rooms
in which strands of my papers and hairs are knotted.

And you can sleep without Rumi's orders
to stay awake in slots of night reserved only for deities
who hold the fruits of the land. But I will wake as I please,
and carry the fruit while sleepwalking.
I will chain angels to every grand doorway.
Their halos might stir

while I'm borrowing their hands and wings,
but unlike Icarus, I will feed the sun water,
and they (unlike you) will surely forgive me.

You will holler more often at the devoted dog,
and try your hand at new lovers
who might even be impressed by her obedience.

I will stand at your door without any keys,
but I won't collapse in the yard with strips of gold hair
in my hands when there are still toy ships

to dream with and God's bodiless snow,
and the phantoms of the same mind
you tricked yourself with. They will take you

back to the dock in Mexico
when every strand of star was drinkable
as God when he heard my prayer

to freeze our bodies' clocks, and wake us
in another century when we can be more tolerant.
I prayed for all the time spent with you on earth

to not be vexed by lovelier men and women,
and that after years of sleep I wouldn't forget
a place we'd been, a wall you painted for me;
a cup of your laughter, or the odd hours
you'd wake me to smell the tea olive's wintry scent.
The heart is repentitive. It will conquer logic's nonsense.

When new lovers fail, then try to love you too selfishly,
it will swell up and sting you, and every tireless bird will
slap you with her wings. Every stupid storm will beg

for me to put you to sleep. The coins clanking
in a stranger's pockets will ask what good a man can do
with all that space. Every noise in the house,

every passing car will scold you, and every capable God
will order you to surrender your ego. It won't be long.
You beautiful, arrogant fool. You balding, pitiful angel.