



The time it takes to  
restore an artifact is twice as  
long as it usually stays on display—

You bring him home that night from the gift shop  
and wrap him in your finest silks;

you start by ruining his life  
simply because it's the easiest  
out of all the options there.

II.

So, you think Van Gogh was queer?

[he lays with his head in my lap,  
hangs his arms around my neck... ]

I think, he says, Van Gogh understands what it means  
to be queer, regardless.

There's a difference?

Sometimes. Maybe I just want to grant him a shred  
of privacy that the modern age would leap at to take away.

That's chivalrous. He's only been dead  
a hundred and thirty years, or so.

Or so.

[lilacs, he has lips like lilac petals....]

I mean, I guess I get it— is it  
because of all the suffering?

Sometimes—

[unfurling, his smile

blossoms—]

Sometimes?

He says *'I was most of all touched by Giotto,  
always suffering, and always full of benevolence and zeal,  
as though he were already living in another world.'*

He also loved the letters of Botticelli,  
Boccaccio, Petrarch and Dante.

Right. And he didn't need to read those  
to learn to paint, either.

Maybe he did, though.

He thinks 'now Petrarch lived very near here at Avignon and I  
see the same cypresses and oleanders— I have tried to put  
something of that into one of the gardens painted in a thick  
impasto of lemon yellow and lime green—'

He paints a poem...  
words

Because he doesn't see it as incorrect. He reflects the  
back into the image. He opens his mind to all teachers.

There are no rules to his form.

There's no image touched by human hands  
that isn't a poem, transmogrified...

[He kisses up the sharp  
angles of my neck;

pulls petals apart; wants, wants, wants...]

There's no model for Longing more than that of  
wanting a teacher?

Plato and Socrates, Dante and Virgil,  
Bears and Twinks etc., it's really  
coded into that language...

...All of ancient Greek and Rome?

[I brush his hair from his eyes.

Trail my mouth over his forehead, his curls,  
his *soft* where I was made of *thorns*...]

Mhm. And for what it's worth, I've always liked the one  
about being a proverbial shaggy black dog—

...Of the family?

Of the world! Wandering aimlessly, a little

blue and unlovable, yet filled with desire  
to know the marvels of

Nature and Beauty and Truth?

And Love.

It seems he loved his art  
more than anything.

That I hardly believe.

Really?

Love isn't a steady partner. Instead, he loves the whole world.  
He had an excess of love; he writes to his brother and  
like Whitman every man becomes his brother, a comrade of the  
homosocial sphere of wanderlust, suffering, and desire...

He's also disabled and mentally ill  
and neurodivergent. And dreadfully poor.

[He laughs into the kiss; the vibration ripples  
through my skin, into my blood...]

Yes, which can resonate with a queer audience, too.

And an excess of love,  
isn't that just an excess of suffering?

[Our bodies fold, fumble,  
plummet  
in the winds of Spring; *were we happy, then?*]

Sometimes.

Sometimes, it's a miracle.

III.

He has such delicate hair. More luxurious than anything else you've ever been allowed  
to hold—the scraps of baroque manuscripts and japanese silks, all alone behind glass; the  
unrepaired paintings and crumbling sculptures and plaster shards, stunning, unable to be  
fixed; like all those years of History, who's allowed to reach out and touch? Who's allowed

to destroy in an attempt to restore? How hard do you pull when he says *Harder; fold on fold, deliciously scattered that fine gold*; the ground is a slow moving

fragment

you

record

his sighs, inside you

burning;

your chest

pressed to his back  
rocking your hips,  
too slowly,  
too softly,  
too slowly;

rocking that bureau mazarin,  
clawfoot bathtub, window *shudder*  
too slowly,  
too softly,  
too slowly;

heat and lightning,

languid then Wild,

make him hard again

and then make him scream

*Harder,*

*Harder,*

*Harder,*

*amidst the ashes we changed this earth*

*to some celestial isle—*

Skip the train terminal

before the hotel can find a number

to tell you

Everywhere,

the room was set on fire.

IV.

After Amsterdam,

we keep in touch,  
a couple moonlit walking paths here,  
a few hotel bars there;

longer than I expect,

but shorter than

I find myself wanting

to know more about that one, he says.

We stop by the department of sculptures,

Richelieu,

lower ground floor,  
Cour Puget:

...Exhibited at the 1822 salon...

...Depicts Virgil's tragedy of...

...refugees, something in common...

...Euryalus misses his mother...

...Does he? Where did they record that?  
And is that why everyone thinks he's younger?

...We don't know if the sculpture was

queer,

we just never thought to...

...Doesn't tragedy make everyone younger?

...please, feel free to contact the archives across the city...

The next statue, over here...

Let him argue with the curators. It's kind of fun, mostly. He's never stuck up about it.

Worse, he's usually right.

Later, in the blue-grey surge of midnight, we watch the waves from  
the back of a bistro on a pier,

he asks Do you think it's a crime to not call home for years?

I shrug.

I wouldn't know, I breathe into his shoulder.

But you,  
you could find out.

V.

If you leave your mother  
then you go to war for me,  
If you leave your mother  
then you throw over your  
sisters mistresses brides

that will twist you into  
a lame animal to be shot  
and buried

without a grave if you leave your mother  
you leave behind  
the lashes and the lashes and the lashes  
that will never soften

with all your tears; if you leave your mother

then you fight with me,  
grit your teeth and grunt with me;  
flirt and punch and fuck with me;  
wrap me in your tourniquet and puncture me

with your arrows, too; practice your aim  
and strike the bargain from the high beam,

kiss open mouth after open mouth,  
gasping the unlanded, gasping the wounds,  
gasping the target, gasping the bow, taught, strung,

and waiting

you make a man out of what you Love;  
So I take your hands

and show you

how to make me cry.

VI.

In the dark, his voice glows,

cool and gentle, a weightless teal shimmer:

Baby? He whispers.

He wraps his legs tighter around mine.

W-what?

You don't remember?

My body tenses. My legs shake.

*Something* of me remembers, even when *I* don't.

Then, he slots his calves under;

pressure, sweet and firm...

Breathe.

[The night has too many teeth;  
what did Dreaming ever spit back out but a mess?]

Breathe. Please.

I do, eventually.  
Not well, though.

Again. Long and deep.

His legs and mine, his stomach and my spine,  
fold and fold and fold; the colours mix;

*Who are you, if not me? I wanted to ask.*

*And if not you, then who will I become?*

All lavender and grey pearls,

Indistinguishable—

*Breathe.*

I do,

but only because  
he wants me

[what is war but a memory,  
that refuses to belong to the Past?]

That's... a bit better.

The sweat on my forehead  
drips into my eyes.

Good.

Good boy.

I reach for his lips as he speaks:

Just, just so you know,  
it's been a few months, I haven't—

I'm not your keeper.

..All dead to me. Promise. But how do you—

I was built alone.  
Like it that way and you know it, too.

Where will I go?

One day, where everyone I've loved  
goes—somewhere else, hopefully  
somewhere they belong...

he moves forward,  
the grind of his hips,  
the laurels of his fingertips  
around my shoulders—

Kiss him anyways, taste how

Push down whatever resurfaces,  
the sphere-head of R.E.M.  
dripping,  
unable to dislodge:

[rows and rows of them,  
sharpening, sinking in;  
the night, his mouth,  
the spheres covered in blood;  
*but together, could we really have more than anyone?*

Who invented hunger,  
if not the ravenous?]

And what about you? He asks.

What about me?

Where do you belong?

I press into him. *Harder*, I whisper  
until he takes my tears in his closed fists,  
all salt and watercolours and fragments, evaporating...

He does not say *I will always be with you.*

I do not say *When I refuse, follow me still,  
haunt me, please.*

[Were we Autumn's lost children,  
                    season's changing  
in each other's grasp, all the same  
                    so that we were  
                                eternally dying  
in the arms of a friend;

Were we happy, then?]

VII.

This must work in reverse.  
                    Somehow, I've always believed

Virgil was trying to paint  
                                a picture

of what it's like to be a refugee  
                                and accidentally gives us a

a plethora of modern palettes  
                    to decipher  
                                our pasts

and lack of them,  
                                ravaged by worlds that force us to choose;  
*run or stay, run or stay,*  
                                *or run again and again and again?*

My brushes are dirty;  
                    the pink berries of  
  beggars and sailors  
  and runawayrough hands,  
crushed  
                    to stroke,

*[sweet man,  
so unheard of, it becomes your Infamy...]*

that I can only tell them

*Tenderness is what we seek—*

If there is Violence,  
he never caused it;  
if there is flames everywhere,  
he only did the damnable thing,

the noble thing,  
the buried-forgotten thing,  
the footnote attached to an otherwise  
uninterested Epic,

at times,  
such mercurial, antiquated creatures

fade from view,  
(this is true...)

the footprints  
lost to ash,

(it takes time,  
it takes time,

it takes time,)

always remerge,  
resplendent in their Blaze,

*now and sometimes,  
here and forever,*

perfectly winged.

VII.

Go to your wars

and I'll go fight mine;  
alone and captured,

surrounded by

so many strangers,

[reaching...]

in the husk of a pomegranate,  
in the heart of a Myth,

Weeping;

After Amsterdam,

After France

and Italy, too,

I'll meet you by the tombs,

take off your binder

and I'll take off mine,

[reaching...]

show me your scars

and I'll put my lips along

all the bruises

we made

[reaching...]

to be Free:

It scared me when it would  
happen—

*I* scared you.

No, I was so scared *for* you,  
I couldn't reach you,  
I couldn't know if you were safe or not,

I called out for you,  
so many times,

[reaching...]

I thought I killed you, again.

You only do that when you leave, he takes my hands.

[His touch swims

So I guess you did.

same as always,

lilac and gold,  
above me, *Protecting—*]

His touch,

months from now,

or years...

I'll feel it again,  
maybe we'll be

running;

Darling, maybe you'll be

my tragic letter in the dark,  
my sacred messenger

torn from Demise, [reaching...]

[reaching...]

my shield of  
clay and ivory

pleading; If there is such a thing as History,  
then *You need to tell Ours;*

[If there is such a thing as History,  
it's not something that should be allowed  
to eat you up, until you're starving blind...]

the plastered frame,  
that keeps our heads  
from hanging

in a gallery  
for the gluttoned world  
to gaze upon;

Your body fated

as mine,

[reaching...]

your body and my body,

forever their question

[reaching...]

[he picks me up, again and again, and...]

our lovegrief without end;

*Were we,*

*were we,*

your body over mine:  
*'Torture,' 'Passion,' or 'In-Vain?'*

connected in the

knot of our hands;

to contend;

amidst the six-thousand soldiers,

torrential javelins and arrows

of scholarly debate

weighing down

the poppy's head

of these nine billowing circles,

flames roaring

*were we happy, then?*