

THE TORTURED POEMS



aaron's notebook

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Fortnight

In the rain, in the violent storming, I
leave the door unlocked. A porchlight flickers
over puddles; I wait for the storm to pass. Ever
vindictive, ever volatile, I chase each feeling,
each reminder that maybe this, maybe
you, are my meant-to-be ending and,
of course, that's not true. It can't be,
unless love and loss are synonyms and unless the bleeding
is the point. But I'll take you for now. I'll
take the burning, the blisters bubbling up on my
skin and tongue, the I-love-yous I know to be
riotous ruses, misguided muses for the next poem, more
useless words I will beautify you into and
inflict on the cold and callous masses; friends
now roll their eyes at your name. The same refrain, lower
impact each time I repeat that you are a
narcissist with a chain around my neck and
groin, sex and synergy you have long since held a
monopoly over and we are in some unknown city in Europe when
you say *'of course I
love you'* and I say *'of course
it doesn't matter. You need not lie to me. These
feelings can be as fleeting as my teen years dying and
each time you've said it before.'*

The Tortured Poets Department

Flawed dysfunctional artist I
will go to war for, bleeding out and breathing
on my kitchen counter, swearing
so I know you are alive. Your art is
mediocre and your eyes are
half-closed, half-aware of the ways I
protect you and better you and
we can idolise this demise forever but the facts never
change;

we will both die unknown.
Your work will go unnoted, as will
the way you planted your lips on mine;
the seeding sprouts of an ivy plant destined
to wither before it ever learns to climb.

My Boy Only Breaks His Favourite Toys

I was in the shiniest box -
wrapped up in shimmering cellophane, I
made the best of myself first. I made myself
up and out, red lips on white teeth, so
he really had something to rip to shreds.
Bruises on my neck and thighs and lower
back and broken tear ducts, red raw and
wiry, cobwebs under irises like
reminders of the way I have been left to go
desolate and disarrayed. How kind can a man be?
How loving has it been, the way his soft palms have
come down hard on this fleshy form and
left a mark so lingering it has lasted for the years
since? Every man after has seen him in
the shadows on my skin. And I said thank you.

Reader, I said *thank you*.
Over and over again.

Down Bad

Fuck it, fine, make me a
mess, make a mess of
things. Make me mental, make a
mental asylum of my
bedroom, make me tie together
the bedsheets you have graced before my
great escape, make me scale
the building to feel concrete on my feet for
the first time in weeks, make me
desperate. Make me defend you.
Make me defensive. Make me defend
myself, fuck it, I might just
die, it would make no difference if
I can't have us. Why should I bother
with calm? Why shouldn't I just
climb to the rooftop, rant and rave in
the rain and, once the city knows
every inch of you, jump?

So Long, London

My body aches and blushes;
Archway, Waterloo. Daily commute
from Paddington to you. Years of
running home from home, running
to the last-ditch-attempt at joy that
tasted of whiskey over ice you had let
melt for too long and looked like that
shit view of the park from your window, the
view I'd wake up to before you, fleeting
moment of clarity before I was dragged back
down. *Come, kiss me quickly.*

We are running out of time. And I
said *fine*, said *how much longer*, said
please and *thank you* and *no* but
more often *yes* and never, under any circumstances,
why? Why would I ever want that answer?
You could never present the evidence, explain
why I should keep returning, so I could never
bring myself to stop. I could never trust
my fight or flight response enough to know
you were a body with a bargain and I
was the chips on the table. And when you were all in I
was happy. And it was enough. And it was
miraculous, the way you would touch me and say
you are everything I will ever need and I believed you.

There is a gravestone on your doorstep.
I fucking believed you.

But Daddy I Love Him

And you will call me crazy and you will speak to me like a child. You will make me small to make yourself feel helpful. You will tell me I do not know a fire ablaze when I see it, promise me my nerve endings couldn't know the flickering heat well enough to know to run. You will stand upon a pedestal. Anything to make it easier to look down at me, eyes pierced by the nose you are staring down. You won't call me stupid but you will mean it when you say 'I expect far better. You should know far better.' And it's not to protect me. It's the prologue.

It's the chapter that starts a story which ends with you smiling at my sadness, assuring me that you will sew back together my frayed and broken heart, but only once you have been allowed to say three things;

I warned you.

I told you so.

I know best.

(The afterword, not that it matters to you, is that the story does not end that way. But even with your lips sealed, your eyes will get the words out.)

Fresh Out The Slammer

Reliable reprobate, recreate
the safety of your bed each
time I run back to it when
I am free from this month's
engagement, temporary
containment behind bars I
know all too well, men I
crucify myself over and for,
but you stay waiting. You
remain, reprobate, happy
to keep me warm in the
middle ground, middle man to
the next way I will break
my own heart, but not so soon
that you can't first kiss
every inch of my body and
promise that this time, yes,
this time I won't want to go.

Florida!!!

When they line the streets with my face on
posters, first time being wanted, I will
return to the city. Miles away from home, I
will set up shop in some dusty corner, leave
brief clues in the shape of my name and never stay
put for too long. They will chase my footsteps.
Florida. Home of the recent runaways. Safer cage than
the cell they've put me down for; I will not give them
the satisfaction of
sending me down. Shape of my name;
I will become local folklore and the posters
will be pasted over before the next week arrives.
Yesterday's news.

Guilty as Sin?

icanrestituteandlightintheknowledgethat
th eywi llneverk nowtheway
ir e tu r ntoyoue achdaywhen
st ir r in ginthes econdsbefore
sl eep ifin dyouin myheadand
pl aceyouin mybedr oomonceagain
overandoverasifiwantyousomehowonloop

andidoandicansparemyselfthisrepeat
r eturnto thepl acesyou
t o uche dwith yourlipsandthe
s oft fin gersm ademe
s oma l leable mademeyetmore
a livean dmade mekeep
moaningyournameoverandover.onloop.

Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?

They like me best loud and
kind; shiny, shimmering beautiful
in my best dress and face, yes,
but kind. Kind first; soft first.

Embroidered handkerchiefs blot
the blood from the gums where they have
pulled out my canines and the burned
surface where they have blunted my
tongue. They put me in front of a
microphone. I sing a happier song.

They do not want to hear these unedited
manuscripts of mine. They lay awake thinking
of the places I have laid their name in verse,
laid it out for public consumption, laid our
languid love affair to rest but not before
writing a eulogy so scathing that the mourning masses
could only start the wake once I had been
exiled or, depending on which version of the story you're telling,
burned at the stake.

I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)

Call him the project of the week.
Call him the next unfinished anthology,
the papers barely scraping the cutting room floor or
call him baby. Call him loverboy. Call him
flawed and stunning, sharp on every edge and
I will show you the ways I can draw a constellation
between the cuts on my hand. He can't be bad if I
can make art of him. He can't be the same boy who
is crucified by every friend who has forbidden him
from the dinner table, from the topic of conversation, from
my inbox and doorhandle. I know better. I know best

intentions don't teach any good lessons, I only learn by
breaking. What is growing up if not becoming big enough
to make yourself small for a man? Why should he be
perfect? Why should I? Why must I make every decision
right the first time, when I could just do the stupid thing,
play the victim and pour him out?

l o m l

I can be your happy ending that you
will never follow through on, repeat
over and over again words you have
heard from your colleagues; *soulmate*.

*Twin flame. Kindred spirit. Once-in-a-lifetime
meant-to-be love-at-first-sight*, just once you might
mean it. You will swear, in some dive bar
in my hometown, that I will one day wear
a wedding ring with your name engraved on its band
so that the shape of you will always be pressed against
my skin and I will do my best to believe you but

I have lost you. Of course, I had to lose you.

I Can Do It With a Broken Heart

Oh, I can show you a success story.
I can be the poster child for recovery;
traumatised beyond belief by seventeen,
almost dead again at twenty, still kicking
another four years later only, really, kicking
much higher than before. Look at that smile.
Look at those eyes. Behind them, I must be
thriving, more alive than ever despite
the failed attempts at the death of me and
aren't I good? Isn't it brilliant?

I am a glutton for standing ovation and
self-flagellation, running my own back red
raw for the reminder that, yes, my heart is
beating and, yes, I am still good. Aren't I
good? Isn't this enough? Couldn't you just
die? Watching me climb to new and loftier heights
just to look down each time and think -

what if I fell from up here?
That would definitely get the job done.

The Smallest Man Who Ever Lived

Never man enough to want me, nor to spare me
the lying as you insisted the opposite to be true;

Aaron, I need you.

Aaron, I want you.

Aaron, I miss you.

Aaron, you're enough.

No, Aaron, not quite.

No, almost, but why not this?

No, Aaron, I prefer you smiling.

No, stop smiling, you're fitter when you're just fine.

No, Aaron, stop crying.

Yes, Aaron, you like that?

Yes, good job, like that.

Yes, Aaron, good girl.

Yes, Aaron, bitch. Slut. Good job. Go home.

And did it make you taller? You reveled, rolled back your eyes,
as you made me small enough to fit in your palm and
squeezed, waiting for the pop of my heart coming detached from
my head so I would keep begging you to bruise me in
locked bedrooms and always, without fail, return to you in the morning.
When did I get written out of my story? When did I become
just a body, just the form they will trace out with chalk when you
inevitably leave me bleeding out on your bathroom floor; the same

white tiles that watched me throw up into your sink the first time you
told me I would be better if I whispered sweet nothings in your ear
in the voice of a girl you know because she - *seriously Aaron, it's
crazy* - she

is everything to you and I am just a hobby. Forbidden plaything set
free from the toybox once a night to make you sleep easier with my
words, mouth and hands and I hate myself for letting you but I hate you
for being every single man who came before, and after.

I cannot get your shadows out of my bedsheets.

The Alchemy

I make my love selective to account for its largeness, the rapturous way it is consuming, so I have closed many doors. I have left many avenues unexplored, promised myself it is not how many loves I have, but how much I trust my heart in the hands of those I give it to. Then there's you. There's the crack in the door that you slipped through, proved yourself to be pre-determined, destined to make a home in my head, my stomach (where you live as butterflies), my chest, these pages. I make my love selective but I am too smart to deny fate. Even when it comes delayed. Even when it arrives late. You have already wiped your feet on the mat and hung your hat on my bedpost, though we are not staying here long.

You want to venture out.

You say I am more beautiful in the daylight.

Clara Bow

Reduce the brightest light in the room to their
comparative titles; if you love Ginsberg, you'll
love me. It's like if Whitman learned how to use
Twitter. Never linger too long on the thought that maybe,
just maybe, they will be big enough one day to be
their own genre. One day they
will write a title so standout it
will come up each time you speak
about art, and you'll know the first
time you laid eyes on them, you called them
by a dead poet's name and swore it was a compliment.

They will outlive each name they have had thrown in their face.

The Black Dog

Outside of The Black Dog there are three tables, quickly filled when summer heat trips over paving stones and arrives in the sun trap, bleeds through hanging plants, their vines erupting downward, and lands shimmering on the surface of our pints.

Make this city mine. Make my name the city, make it impossible to sever me from each memory of this long and soaking summer, the August that almost drove us mad and wild, make me irreparably tied up in the tragedy we were just begging to play out, players on a stage waiting to cry at the curtain call.

Why aren't you crying?
Miss me. Need me. Curse me, kill me, why aren't you crying? How could my name not be the first and last thing on your lips each night and morning, pint going lukewarm on your tongue because the sun, yes, that fucking sun, cannot be as beautiful if I am not there to say
What a day. I love you.

im gonnaget you back

You will be back in my life one day, one way or another, and I will wear a suit.

I will walk down an aisle to you or I will face a jury, justify why they found your

body in my basement, the prints of my lips found pressed to your cheeks and my

hands around your neck or, the ring around your finger as I read vows I have meticulously

written. Our families will cry. In both stories, our families will cry. And you will be all mine.

The Albatross

Years without touching the
unholy ground, wingspan wider
than I have ever seen and you
circle, swoop into me with a crash as
your beak twists into my
ribcage; find my thoughtless heart.

Harbinger. Only in passing, only
ever staying long enough to leave
knowing feathers in my path, that
cruel and certain reminder; *I
have been, and I have come to pass.
There are more hearts to swallow
whole. I'll see you soon.*

Only lovers anoint you.

Chloe or Sam or Sophia or Marcus

Ghost of things and people you
didn't do, no, not
yet, but you
will, you will
sate yourself by
making me into sweet
fiction and that will
justify the ways you
fill our bed with new
names and bodies, touch
them the way you
have always touched me and
that will not kill me.

Playing those stories out
in my little mind, that
is not what will kill me.

The deaths will come when
you turn around. When you
sense the shadow of me in
the corner of that room and
think; *maybe they were real.*
Maybe, in this light, I miss them.

How Did It End?

How did it happen?

Prod at my body on the slab, find
the teeth marks, clues to ways he
took chunks from my flesh before
leaving me for dead and-

Did you see it coming?

Pennies over my eyes, toll for
the way down, but I have kept those
closed for far longer, ignored the
steps he took towards the door and-

It just seems so sudden!

All hearts are stopping slowly. No
thing alive is undying and I
am no different, the paleness of my
skin now slick with rotting and-

End.

So High School

Spin me, mirrorball at
the prom, and we both go from
crashing to crowned, liquor we
snuck in with a hip flask burning
up on our tongue and, fuck, am I
too old to be so young?

Your thumb finds my bottom lip,
parts the distance, places to plant your
secrets in a game of truth or dare and

Dare; kiss me again. Slower this time.
Truth; do you love me? Slower this time.

I Hate It Here

Another train station, another
'any excuse to run', the locks
in my vertebrae that stop me from
ever looking back long enough and
wherever I land, it's the same.

Reader, it's the same, wherever
I land. I get sick quickly.
I drive the small towns mad.
And I will flee again, run against
blistering winds, screaming
that I have never known worse bleeding,
and sometimes there will be pitchforks.

Any excuse to run.
Hammerhead sharks will suffocate to death
if they stop moving.

thank you aIMee

Punches wrapped up in presentation paper, bouquets to celebrate my slow descent into madness, tight and clinging arms dragging me down with a sickly smile. God forbid I shake free.

God forbid you let me, leave me be as I turn and leave civilly, take ownership of the broken pieces of me; you have to set ablaze each path you catch me walking on.

Thank you. Hate me so much you love me, thank you. Your insatiable wind resistance against me has broadened my shoulders, widened my gait against you and now I smile more. I have never known love so closely.

I Look in People's Windows

Pick a passer-by; make him personal.
Take it personally, the distant and brief
eye contact that smatters paint along
my clean high ground, blurs the view through
binoculars I have focused into

your friend's flat, man I never knew but
loose and careful connection to you, hope
in my broken breathing that you will be there,
sipping Zinfandel (I have never liked Zinfandel
but I am not a character anymore so-) and smiling.

Your eyes might find me.
You might be reminded, figure in that
outside darkness, that the shape of my body and the
bright behind my eyes is burned into your
brain and fingertips.

Surely you could recognise me,
even at this distance.

The Prophecy

Thought I caught lightning in
a bottle, mason jar wrapped in
twine, your body on mine and
the little promises we shared over
wine in the dining room; I thought
of magic and made it you.

Cut to the grieving. Cut to the
simmering, the bubbling over, the
stars that unscrew from their jambs,
constellations skipping steps in a story
I swore I was writing and starring in;
you are gone before morning.

Each and every time, every name and
face and outfit you wear; you are
gone before morning. I pour love out
from overflowing jugs, ice spilling over,
and whatever I do or say returns at last
to me but never for long. Never

long enough to call it miraculous, call it
mythology, call it predestined to peak above
mountains and their clouds; each time, we
fall from grace. A new knock at the door,
each time a new face.

But it's gone again.

Cassandra

Trust my turbulent and unpredictable gut
instinct - ignore the ways my face writhes
in uncertain shapes, do not discount me for
the overcoming emotions I am a fool to, just
trust my turbulent heart. I am on to something.

Return to me when the burning starts.
When the churches fall, steeple-first, into
bustling crowds, do not reach to me for songs of
heartbreak and fire. I have been writing since

the first day, that first sunrise, I know
a red sky when I see one and any change in
any breeze destroys me. I know the taste of
a storm. I can recall the first time I

felt the lingering tip of a knife against my
feeble spine and since, I have come to count
footsteps. I will spare you the screaming.
My I-told-you-sos will be etched on the inside
of the box they bury me in.

Peter

We write love stories in wooden blocks and
Lego bricks - yes, pose those two figures there
together. If you squint, they are holding
hands. If you suspend disbelief, they are
flying. And they will grow

dusty in a toybox, our own infant hands long
separated from those lives of plastic and wood but
I will remember the story. I will remember the
careful posing, posturing in private like
we were some inevitable ending - if you squint, we
are holding hands. Time is no plaything.

We grow old, and apart, and we
are buried in different cemeteries.
I will not recognise you as the same boy who
once skipped with me across the grass and asked
can't we do this forever?
Even when we're grown ups?

The Bolter

Some Casanova offers me flowers in
the darkness of his living room, candlelight, he
has never known a love like this. He wants me
in mouthfuls and handfuls and promises.

And then I leave again.

An athlete, the sort who wears shorts in
winter, musters up the courage to kiss me, he
has never known love like this. He needs me
to tell him he is good, he is brave, he is kind.

And then I leave again.

The academic, the sweet eyes that peer over
towers of books, promises me the Earth, he
has never known love like this. He thinks we
can conquer the world together in words.

And then I leave again.

If the starman plays his cards right, he could
stick around a while, stay on the table, he
has never known love like this. Nor have I.
I want to chase the feeling into every chasm and
the chaos awaiting me, just to touch him but-

And then I leave again.

Robin

They will paint the horizon larger for you;
they have no idea what you will go on to
do or see. It is beyond our wildest
fantasies, the biggerring of you by each
day, details of this fantastic thing. I
will waste my years trying to trap you in
words, my moving target, my little
miracle who sees each treasure and plucks it,
pockets it, passes quietly onto the next like
there is no cerebral skill in making even
the stars come down to see you.

The Manuscript

I bleed into a quill.

My veins have long since been
ink and fire. I am writing my
eulogy each day, before bed, I
itemise time passing. I tell tales of
boys in heat, youth ever fleeting,
death and its chasing, and I find
the blurry line between fiction and
reality. I dance on it. I tangle it
between my dancing fingers, pull it
tightly. Golden, fine woven string.

I tell stories in blood.

I write the words trapped in my lungs.
And yes, I lie. Do I? I must lie.
But when I send it out, paper
airplanes against the blue sky, you
will get long lost looking for your
voice in each rhyme, whispers of
truth between meter and verse,
the murderer hidden in the underscore,
so you tear it up. And just like that -

the story isn't mine anymore.

