

Eurydice

EURYDICE

22722 words

85 pages

I

The news spreads like winded fire through the vast realms of Hades that Persephone, his child bride consort, whom he kidnapped out of her mother's garden, raped and married, has against all odds remained a true romantic and has agreed to give me back to my newlywed whose songs of longing and unrequited lust melted her youthful heart, along with having melted rocks and darkened the sun and broken the hearts and balls of every Greek with a sense of hearing. My best friend Cassandra brings me the odd news of my return. I am to go back!

The gods need us for their entertainment, and my husband is their prime time. He's always performing to an adoring audience, real or imaginary. Women and men throw themselves at him. He has thousands of cult followers. He was famous even before he went on the Argo with Jason who only invited him along so he would sing of his exploits. He held the golden fleece on the sail home, the only idle man aboard, and stared at Medea horrified. Cassandra compares Hera to Medea, even though it's blasphemy; she says if even Hera the strongest goddess and even Medea the strongest witch couldn't undo the patriarchal order, we must accept that we women are going to be out of our element for some centuries to come. We can't appeal to men because

Eurydice

we are pariahs or mere decor in a man's world. The only rebellion we have access to is our self-sabotage: killing like Hera and Medea women competitors and children. Cassandra is the only person who has explained to me why Orpheus chose me out of all womankind to be his bride: 'Because you're the opposite of Medea and she terrified him to bits.'

Cassandra now tells me that I am the only mortal given a second chance at a long and happy life and I should take that chance and be grateful, for I will be the most famous woman alive because my husband's superhuman love for me has succeeded in restoring me to him. He defied death and he reclaimed me through the mystical power of his love songs.

Cassandra who has been in deep, existence-long depression since Apollo force-kissed her and spat a curse into her mouth when she repelled his advances, is trying on a tentative smile. I don't believe she knows joy. My husband croons a winding song about his mentor Apollo offering Cassandra the gift of prophecy to win her heart; her promising to be his lover in return for the gift of seeing the future, and, after receiving it, refusing him; of Apollo, angry that a Trojan princess lied and deceived him, the sun god, unable to take back the powers he had bestowed on her, because, once granted, divine powers may not be revoked, stealing a last deep throat kiss and leaving in her mouth the counter-curse that no one would ever believe her accurate prophecies and warnings and she would have no effect on history. Cassandra says that's

Eurydice

a patriarchal myth. She says she fell asleep in the temple of the hundred-breasted Artemis in Ephesus on a day trip to it from Troy and the resident prophesying snakes licked her ears and whispered spells into them so that when she woke up she could hear the future. She says hers is not a vision but an enhanced hearing; she can translate the electric transmissions from the gods into human language. She doesn't know why her predictions are never believed, actually; but she blames it on patriarchy which has made everyone of us deaf to signs and meanings outside its confines and defines. I am the first human to ever believe her, she says, and it's because I, as a nymph, am mostly tree.

I think it's because I am gullible; the girl who by any other name would be just as sweet.

I was, until Orpheus turned and looked at me.

I first knew he had noticed me when I heard my name in a song of his that people had picked up and were singing. I was flattered and terrified. He couldn't have waited a few minutes till I had passed to look? He had to look at modest to a fault me? After that first gaze of Orpheus, there was no other. I wasn't me any longer. I was a footnote to his myth-making machine.

We dryads are decorative plants, babes in the woods incapable of rising to the dramatic heights of passion that led Klytemnestra, at the head of the crowd of souls levitating my way

Eurydice

now, to kill her king and husband and be killed by her son. That is why the gods and demis are forever deflowering and dropping us or transforming us in the course of a lazy afternoon.

I am now flashbacking to the serpent who liberated me. It came up to me in the garden of my wedding party when I had run away from my love-besotted husband who was on stage wearing a tiara of laurel leaves on his scented, oiled curls, entertaining his thousand closest friends and fans, run to my beloved elm tree, my best friend in the world, whom I had been born to tend, as the wood nymph I was, until the day Orpheus, the most celebrated of our vegetation demigods, saw me embracing my elm and whispering tender little I love yous to it and desired me for himself and oozed all his overwhelming superhero charisma over me until both my elm and I knew that I had no choice and no way out. He sang to me for hours so melodiously and loudly that everyone knew about it for thousands of meters; his serenading made me the center of attention which I couldn't stand a minute longer. I looked at my elm for forgiveness and my beloved nodded its leaves with self-abnegating wisdom. We recognized destiny as it crashed down on the gates of our idyllic garden. The man had no respect for harmony unless he made it, no respect for boundaries or solitude or peace. He lovebombed me, and he would not be denied. Chatty sister nymphs in my clan used to tell me, 'Nothing gets to you, Eury, you're impenetrable, you live in your own world, Eury.' I wanted to say, 'Well, my name does mean equanimity,

Eurydice

fairness, wide unlimited justice,' but I couldn't tell if they were complaining about me or complimenting me, advising me or resenting me, so I would smile and give them each a long, warm, firm hug, which was how I dealt with all things human. I hugged the body and held it in embrace until everything raging inside it righted itself. That's what I eventually did with hormonally-mad Orpheus, who was determined to marry me and now is determined to rescue me. Hugging reassured him and he had gone to sleep in my cradling arms (ah silence).

So I was hugging my elm, crying burning separation-anxiety tears, sniffing into the smooth silver bark that I loved, 'I am sorry, sweets, I must say goodbye, I hope not forever, I will find a way to come back, hold on tight,' when I saw the sun-reflecting serpent crawl toward me with single-minded purpose and regal bearing; my heart jumped up to my face, recognizing that he was an infernal messenger from the underworld and I wouldn't be finding a way back to my elm. I tightened the squeeze, and let my body go with the flow which is all I know to do. I let the serpent bite me in the shin and breathed the poison in. 'I die of snakebite in the garden, and I die a virgin,' I thought, 'that's good.' I was surprised to feel relieved. I realized as I was dying that I had been dreading the consummation. I did think then the snake in the garden had come for a greater purpose than to just kill little me. It looked like it had a greater calling. It looked divine.

Eurydice

Hold on, I am forgetting my rapist. ‘What was his name, Cassandra? My rapist? The cheesemaker? Artilochus?’ Poor Cassandra remembers everything. I wouldn’t want to be inside her head. I am blessed I don’t have an eidetic memory for past and future! I am happy to listen and help relieve her burden, since I forget pretty much everything anyway.

‘Maybe she’s a rebel goddess, our child-bride mistress Persephone, and you’re part of a divine plan to overthrow the Olympian patriarchal order and return us to matriarchy. You, my dearest trusting Eurydice, are giving me my first ever hope. You have believed in me despite the collective mocking disbelief.’ So Cassandra says to prop me up to face my fate with the same faith as we are being swarmed by unhappy once-female souls trapped in eternity who like her and me long to see the blinding Hellenic sun and bask in its healing warmth until our skin gets sunburned (ah skin, ah sunburn). Schools of souls gather round so that for a moment it feels like they’re preparing me to be my husband’s bride again, and I am flashbacking back to the circle of nymphs massaging my olive skin with essential oils and dressing me in diaphanous drapes and fiddling with the precise folds falling from the golden, bee-shaped brooch on my shoulder and the crown of jasmine and olive flowers on my towering braids. Luckily, we have no aromatic flowers, shiny ornaments and prized possessions down here, no material trophies to stand us apart and above our fellow human, so I don’t get all decked up this time. Nothing ever in the

Eurydice

underworld is celebratory, except of course for my husband's rising song which I hear in the cavernous distance. My man is rocking the underworld and getting his way, as usual. The gates that open only one way swing both ways for him. Me too. Oh God, he's coming. There's no escaping him. He can hack the underworld. Here we go again, dancing the choros of eros. He's going to deflower me after all. For all the horror stories I have heard from the famous Greek women I have met in the underworld, I didn't once ask them what to do the first time so it won't feel like rape. Now it's too late. It would sound inappropriate.

'He's coming for you, Eury!' one soul says.

'No pun intended!' another chimes in.

What is a pun? I want to ask.

'You'll be going and coming. There's no denying his big dick energy!'

'He's singing for you, blessed woman. I should be so lucky. No man would ever come for me even if he could just waltz in.'

'He compelled Persephone to let you be the only mortal to live a second life!'

'He stepped on the death of deaths. He proved the greatest mystery of all: that man is immortal.'

Eurydice

‘And this unprecedented miracle of life over death has come to you, first of all mortals!’

‘You luckiest woman of all, Eurydice.’

‘No woman has been loved this much.’

‘No woman alive will know what you will.’

Is this migraine-inducing cacophony what a chorus sounds like? Haven’t all these dead women suffered dying as the lesser loss than their loss of dignity, honor, physical sanctity, mental ease? Haven’t they told me how blessed I was to have died a virgin before I was struck and corrupted by Eros, my loins possessed by longing and inner burn? Didn’t they assure me that desire is pure catastrophe for women, that it drives us against ourselves and leads us to put the pleasure of a man over our families, craving to be possessed by one man or another like cattle? Didn’t they say they would rather be dead than married to a man? Why are they now roused to unison by my brand-new bridal fate? Death has taken off my blinders and so has poor, all-knowing Cassandra. Why would I want to rise and then die again, if I am already dead?

His song draws nearer and all souls go quiet, mesmerized like the birds and the bees, the winds and the trees that stop, briefly dead, hypnotized in his passage. Is the singer ever sincere? Is every song propaganda? Even I know that it’s not love he deals in, it’s enchantment!

Eurydice

‘You, the chosen bride of Orpheus, son of Apollo, greatest musician ever born! Divine, irrevocable permission has been granted you to live again. Ascend!’ Persephone’s hooded messenger ceremoniously announces to us all. ‘Your husband is here to lead you.’

The underworld has been my sentimental education. An eternity of learning has made me suspicious. Eternal life’s school of tough love taught me that the full cost of womanhood. My award is not as tantalizing as they now make it. I have just lost the right to be free beyond the grave. The disordered mind of a delusional, ego-driven man is the plague of both hell and earth. I have not missed the lack of self-control, the emotional agony, the uncertainty, the anxiety of being his lesser half. I don’t want to go, I want to whisper to Cassandra, who’s the only one in Hell who’d believe me, used as she is to people refusing to believe her truth, treating her womanly wisdom as white noise, but I silence myself.

I wish my uberman hadn’t picked me as his main love-supply source. He has too much power. He can seduce Death. He seduced Persephone and the entire world of the living the same way he seduced me. How did he seduce Persephone and how did he buy my freedom from her? If even immortal Persephone got mesmerized by him, what chance do I stand? Is this Persephone’s way to get back at Hades? Am I caught up in her marital spat? Was it all a divine

Eurydice

plan, his plan, his and hers and the serpent's plan to use me as the mortal foil, innocent and unthinking that would allow him to be the world-famous deathslayer?

They must know I am nervous because I am a nature girl, a treehugger, a dead flower girl, I do not know who to be before all this attention. I am so uncomfortable I want to die again.

'All you have to do is follow him back on the hidden, secret path he took to come down,' Circe says, 'he'll be singing all the way, his song is his shield and his weapon. He'll be singing to make sure all the Hades functions continue to forget their functions. He knows that the gods are fickle, the gods betray us, that it could be a ruse. He knows the terms of his test. All you have to do is follow close behind him. He is the hero of the human race! He is about to prove that this, you, Eurydice 2.0, can be done. He proved that the living can go in and out of the underworld. He is about to prove that we can rise from the dead! Have no fear, he will see it through.'

'Halleorpiclujah!' the crowd chants.

What are the terms of his deal? I want to ask but I won't be heard over the hurrahs.

The news of my release from Hades is the happiest news ever shared in eternity. What the seasonal, moody Queen is giving me is nothing less than resurrection!

Resurorpicrection!

Eurydice

‘He’ll turn back to make sure you’re following him. he’ll turn back to make sure you’re you and not an impostor or an ideal in his head. He’ll turn back to be sure he’s not looking at a corpse. He’ll turn back in hybris and triumph just as he crosses the riverbank but before you do. He’ll have to be killed for it. All this celebration will come to naught.’ So Cassandra says; in my ear; as the serpents did in her ear. I am shocked. She just heard this news from her spirit guides?

Why does Orpheus have to be killed? I ask Cassandra, whispering soul to soul.

‘Because he will look back.’ And so? ‘That is the condition of Persephone’s offer. He can’t look back at you until you’ve crossed the river Styx that separates the worlds of the living and the dead. He can’t look at you in your dead aspect.’ And he will? He will be so stupid? He will have no self control? Despite how much this journey means to him? He will face death to win me back and he will cheat? ‘His gaze will kill you, my dear. That’s the book of destiny I’m reading, the shit that comes out of my mouth. There’s always hope that he won’t.’

There is no hope where there is no life. The dead have no hope. The dead have wisdom.

He will let me die a second time. It’s his classic superstar routine.

What’s going to happen to him if he fails? I ask Cassandra.

Eurydice

‘He’s going to be torn apart. When he first goes back from the underworld, he won’t sing to women any more. He won’t sign of love ever again. He will only sing to men and tell them to leave their wives and lovers because love will betray them and break their spirits and hearts. He will tell men to be celibate and they will follow him and be his students and they will be called his apostles. He will never touch a woman or look at a woman. He will be venerated as holy, and he will perform miracles. And he will be dismembered by angry women, maenads. He will be martyred. He will be decapitated and his head will wash off on Lesbos, the island where women live without husbands, and it will still be singing. His lyre will wash up on the shores of Egypt.’

Stop! I shout. It’s unbearably tragic. I’d rather live it than speak of it. Tragedy is like sex.

I begin to comprehend why everyone else refuses to believe her. Truth is a horror.

My story begins with Orpheus’ expert and irresistible love-bombing. He loves like a wolf. Against his magical powers, my silence seems only natural and enhances his myth. He is protected by the gods and his charisma. He will not be denied. He is the Voice. The Song of Hellas. He stands out in every crowd, he sucks the oxygen out of every room, he sucks the self out of you when you are in his presence. You say anything he wants so he will move on and you

Eurydice

can breathe again. I was holding my breath the whole time I was with him, even when he proposed. I feared his magnet's control over my somatic responses. I didn't want to get too close, but he liked how my silence augmented his presence. He sang that he was under the spell of Eros and I had become his talisman, that he could not live without me and my embrace. I did embrace everyone. I did no harm and I did not judge. I wanted to run and free myself from his melodrama of love and pain but all of Greece was his stage. So I accepted, I endured, I survived. I played my part that he chose for me, even though it made me want to jump out of my skin. And I died.

My history begins with my sexual assault. His name is Aristarchus, I now remember, he is the demigod of cheese and a guest at our sprawling wedding party, and he is the satyr I am fleeing when I get bitten by the garden snake. Thankfully the snake standing guard by my side scared him, and he did not desecrate, I mean rape, my dead body. I was blessed: I died a virgin.

That is the reason for Orpheus' unbearable longing, isn't it? I am the one who got away. I am the Girl he didn't deflower, which has transformed me into the elusive ideal of his dreams, his one and only unrequited love (he could sing his way into the embrace of any woman alive, after all), the Golden Fleece Girl who has been denied him. And the Muse for his love songs that literally move the world. He is the greatest superstar of our time, adored by fans worldwide all over the living world, and now the underworld too. He is Apollo's mortal alter-

Eurydice

ego. I was chosen for him by Apollo, he told me. Ours was a match made in heaven ordained by the prettiest god.

That's my cup-half-full Orpheus. He always put the best sing-songy spin on things and I always believed him just like I believed my elm. I hadn't met Cassandra and these powerful talented educated women in Hades who had been raped and murdered, sold as slaves, cuckolded, abandoned, traded, even decapitated like a stag on the altar. I took everything at face value and on cyclical time. He was Orpheus Theologos and I was Eurydice whom no one had heard of until my name graced his melodies. Huge power imbalance between us, but he was the man and man does the choosing and the mating in our time.

My only other man was my would-be rapist who, led by some male competitive compulsion, was determined to have me before Orpheus did. I can't imagine what would have happened to me if the serpent, my slithering slippery deus ex machina, hadn't liberated me from my intolerable dramatic impasse. I would have been found naked and vaginally torn, dirt-encrusted and bleeding by our impeccably comported guests who would have strolled by in all their Ionic finery and would have screamed to alert the song-ruptured crowd that higher drama than song was at hand. They would have come to gawk and comment. He ss the leader of the chorus of the curious would have most mellifluously bemoaned my ravaging. He would have

Eurydice

sworn revenge against the deviant cheesemaker, and being the annually reborn godlet of vegetation, he would have unrooted my assaulter in caustic songs that he and the lesser bards would have recited into Hellenic eternity. His dilemma would have been what to do with me, his damaged bride. Would he want me as a cheese god's spoiled seconds? Would he deign to plant his seed in my bloodied, wounded womb? Would he have left me there to lick my wounds and heal myself and spend the rest of my days in the hermitage of my blissful garden? Would he have dragged me to his fancy house and kept me in one of the bedrooms as the first wife, a token of the well-sung drama of our wedding? Would I have longed for death?

Death has given me all the worldly knowledge I missed in life. My fellow dead women have shown me the past and Cassandra has shown me the future. Cassandra knows every destiny - past, present, future. She is pure genius. And I believe her. I know she loves me, because I believe her. Like him, who loves me because I make him look smarter, kinder, more romantic.

So now he has made me the oddest human ever born. He has made me say goodbye to my best friend again, my underworld elm Cassandra, in order to follow his grand vision to which I am perennially sacrificed. He has not asked himself what it will be like for him to be having sex with a revived corpse and for me to be known as the dead girl, the living dead, the one who got

Eurydice

away from death, who is no longer a part of nature, the warmed over outcast. Our kids will be the dead womb kids. People who have not died will be for the rest of my next life asking to smell me, touch me, tell them how it is. And I hate to talk. I don't even say I hate this and I love that. I won't be me as my elm knows me. I will no longer be I. I will be a mythic function; in his myth.

II

Kypris, goddess of night, who gives dreams to the dying

Nomas, who draws puzzles in the night sky with stars

Notos, who rains from the sky night and day stars or none

Dawn, whose sight no living thing escapes

We light frankincense to intone this, we light myrrh to sing of the singer, my husband, who even here now, according to our father Apollo, and to all the gods there and forever whom we cannot see, walks ahead of me out of the dead land that grows nothing but rock and dust and sadness, walks ahead of me that I might live in his shadow, and so I see his shoulder undraped (the right) where his cyther rests, his satin black hair shining even here that spends no light.

Eurydice

Over the chlamys that hides his nudity a comb gathers the hair the long of his back till there, where the curve of his buttocks begins, these that I have not seen, neither buttocks nor phallus seen, and so I see his thighs, the crease behind his knees, the long sturdy calves of his travels, the heels (not fatally flawed like Achilles'), and the hard crust of the half sole of one foot. It is all I see of my husband who walks ahead to spare me my death.

I hear my husband hum softly and sweetly, since he is never not sweet and soft in his magic, or I hear him whistle as if to calm the big dog at the mouth of the entrance far far away still, a long dog call, or whistling past the graveyard.

It is all I hear or see of my husband, the first rhapsodos, father of lays, of Homer, son to the muse Kalliope raped by Oiagros, the river god, he who leads me from the death I did not deserve, by his song soothing first Cerberus that he might enter death undead, then soothing the Furies that they do not rend him limb from limb, then soothing the goddess herself of her desire to see all who enter be first dead, then ceasing Ixion's wheel (time, that would be) to turn – all by my husband's music forgetting themselves, going to sleep, losing memory, amnesiacs one and all, and this to spare the woman he loves her undeserved, unnatural death, all these things that serve my husband's conjugal motive.

Eurydice

What of the snake that bit me? I ask the back of his head.

Hebe, goddess of youth

Selene, mother of time

Hecate, goddess of fertility, of childbirth therefore, of moonlight thereby

Nyx, goddess of night, sister wife to Erebus, mother of his children, of her brother's children therefore, mother of deep slumber thereby

We light frankincense to intone this, we light myrrh to sing of the singer, my husband, to sing of the love feast that was our wedding, what slaughtered me while still a virgin, what yet protected me from my rapist who could not ravage my corpse – that is the good news.

After death, a shade in the undertow, I met other raped women, and murdered women not raped, and sacrificed women, and sacrificed children, met suicides, patricides, matricides, pederasts, bestialists, among these headless warriors, blind kings, tortured martyrs, poisoned priests, heretics across thousands of years burnt in public squares across every country of every language – all these among deathless gods and goddesses overseeing the misery and moaning, the agonies for all those mortals who insulted a god, invoked the wrong god in the wrong venue,

Eurydice

who poisoned progeny or strangled a parent, a sibling, a spouse, and there in the undertow from the moment of my end neath the torso of my rapist cheated of his rape I suffered the truth of the world as I bore witness to the atonement of those doomed even before they died, atoning for the cursed who did nothing but live so as to earn their fates, those like me and my husband who beautified mortality, who drew from nature the good and peace of a quiet afterlife yet surrounded by kin killing kin, seed crushing seed, men of insight blinded by the awe of their crimes, women stunned by the crimes of their husbands and brothers and sons, and that says nothing of lifelong warriors or the blood they churned among sandy beaches on foreign shores.

I, who embraced the elm, nurtured it and trimmed it, as Apollo fated me to do, saw and saw again, heard and heard again the history of the world that had been before my life began, so as to end, and the world that would be, so Cassandra's shade said to my shade in the undertow, of her history. Cassandra said that Ajax had raped her, and Agamemnon had raped her, again and again, that she bore him children to prove it, only to be murdered with him, her rapist, by his wife and her lover, whom Cassandra pointed out in the distant dark of the undertow, those two lovers-murderers embracing as their punishment, breathing together for eternity as their punishment, Clytemnestra proclaiming I never escaped my murders, for eternity while showing to all who saw her there the wounds that pained and would pain her for all time, there in the stab

Eurydice

wounds where she felt regret and remorse that bled forever, so Cassandra said to the shade of me I had become.

You're better off, Cassandra said to me.

The wrath of Eurydice I sing, goddess Persephone, queen of the undertow, mistress to Cerberus, wife to the god of death who raped her and dragged her underground for all time, mother of the Furies by Hades her husband-rapist, those who revenged their mother by renting men asunder, who made the mold by which Thracian women rent my husband asunder, chucking his limbs one by one into the sea, saving for last his singing head to chuck till all sank but the head, all returned to his father the sea, the sea his father driving the head that flowed and floated to Lesbos, island of women who built a temple to it, the head an altar for, that then they guarded against women like themselves who had murdered my husband in my name. My wrath is my theme, goddess, with neither shield nor sword to slay by, I bear witness rather to the fate of rapists and raped alike in the undertow, to women suicides across the black terrain who knew too well all that I would come to know, that each could not become the subject of her life without first ending it since the world wanted of them what they were not, and so each chose to be herself in the undertow, damned or praised for her choice, refusing to be enslaved, ensnared, tortured unto death by one cut or ten thousand, weightless shapeless shadows nonetheless while as dead

Eurydice

as dead gets, murdering themselves by rock cliffs, by sea, by poison, by hanging, and by knife or sword or dagger or knitting needle, some too devoured by beasts and wild dogs, some too bitten by serpents they held by the head, others by vipers they took to their breasts, but all choosing death before life.

Whichever anthropology it might be when humans address the beautiful mystery of trees mine is not it, no, since we are of them who tend all that is verdant as far as the eye can see, we are them who serve tree limbs like lovers or even sawbones, grooming leaves into ringlets, combing climbing vines that would strangle the necks of our master's crown, we who spread our master's roots far and wet from one end to the other of forests from one language to another. We live on, in and for them, we are the arborers of the world, the morphs of human, god and verdant, not one or another, and all these, my sisters, because of the music of my husband, doomed by love and loss and the wisdom of such to sever body from soul.

I was in life the elm, the elm in life was me, so said my father Apollo, so sang my husband Orpheus. I was of the genus elm, of *ulmus* (I know the exact word), and so I am among spruce growing to ninety feet high (taller than Polyphemos) and yet we weep too and umbrella the wanderer from the pain of the sun at high noon, and when we are cedar we resist the sea that we may sail it – why we are the world over – and so we are what ships are made of because we

Eurydice

do not drown, in other words. I tended that till I died by snakebite. She who admires the tree (elm), who embraces the trunk of the tree by its bark (elm) as if it is her lover, who mates with it till she and tree (elm) are one, till the tree (elm) thinks only of her day in day out. That is to be a nymph of the wood born to it by Apollo, my husband's father and destined so to be mine even in death.

In Hades no black blood flows, not from the breast of Iphigenia or from the foot of Achilles or from the bowels of Agamemnon. Hades is as bloodless as it is boneless and shreds of skin, awash in wraiths of the dead by millions and millions, all as dead as dead gets, so that by this I bore witness to the history of the world from the first day of creation, the gods' majority stretching sunless and starless for as far as the eye can see, some silent, some not, those groaning, those not, most sobbing or moaning, all bent and brought low, crook-backed and scalded by the oil of death, yet none more than a reflection of a reflection, the shadow of dead people where there is no moon or sun to cast shadows, no, since this nation is a nation of shadows wherein the apparition of I saw the place for myself among them, the heroes and cowards, the women raped and murdered by both cowards and heroes, women tossed from high cliffs onto rocks or stormy seas either by their own hands or by the hands of their slayers, themselves later slain by other slayers, now all slain, the women of Troy as dark here as a sun's

Eurydice

eclipse, and the single-breasted Amazons with bows yet slung across the scars on their chests, and too generation after generation of Thracian women tattooed, scalded, branded, and maimed for the death of Orpheus, my husband, not yet dead for walking as always ahead of me, according to the gods.

Your husband will die of grief for you, so Cassandra said, and in his grief he will blame you and yours for it, blame women for the suffering of men, so Cassandra said, and in his grief for the suffering of men he will sing never again before women, and will sing only before men who will never again know women, so Cassandra said, and in his grief for the suffering of men the women of Thrace will rend him limb from limb in their grief for their suffering at the loss of their men, so Cassandra said, and that is why Thracian women are branded, beaten and tattooed such as servants are and are prisoners of war. So Cassandra said to me that I did not say to my husband as he led me out of the undertow, passing near now to the seat of Persephone, Queen of death, who looks but does not move or speak or seem to see, since this is the only path to the surface of things and the surface of things is the only space of conjugal life. So Cassandra said when she pointed, there, where blind Ajax, her rapist, wandered so to fall again and again in the undertow eternally, and there she pointed to eyeless Oedipus, grimmest of kings, and there, to eyeless Samson of the Gaza slaves she pointed, he too among the heroes and cowards among the

Eurydice

cursed and blessed dead Cassandra said even of herself, the knower become what she knows, and she knows all, from incarnation to reincarnation, and what she knows, has known and will know no man will believe.

The tree of my embrace formed a bridal bower when my sisters laced its limbs with hyacinth, monkshood and poppy, these now I memorialize for the asphodels I saw at the mouth of the undertow when first I entered knowing nothing of my fall, only that I had fallen into the grasp of Hades, lord and master of the place. My husband's sleek hair in the sun curled as dark as the far end of the sea and one bare shoulder held his cyther under a garland of ivy circling his head. As soon as he woke to our wedding day the music began, the wind stilled, birds perched mute, a river nearby ceased to flow, the sea no longer raged – that my husband could do with barely a yawn. Burn herbs and incense and storax, oh my sisters, light the woods with aromatic gifts of our gods, invoke Phereyades of Syros, seer who gathered my husband's songs like twigs and leaves to make of them a tree of wisdom under which we married before I died, so said Cassandra of it that it was to be the bond of wood nymph to verdant god, that at one solstice nature died like I died only to rebirth by another solstice like Apollo decreed for me to be reborn, those among us nymphs of land who in winter knew death and in spring resurrection – that was the good news.

Eurydice

Neither Asklepios, nurse of sickness nor Hygeia, who vanishes affliction and distress, could spare my husband his grief after I died so that his rhapsodies and revelations under Zeus, Apollo, Thoth, Osiris, Ra, Phanes, Kronos, kings and gods across the arc of the world, sang only of death and misery, as later he would sing only of the soul that knows no misery and no death, singing at my death and disappearance that being was the same as not, that one death is all deaths, that the knowledge of life after death is but memory, and that memory alone is the cause of sorrow and regret till all we know or need to know is that our human form is not who we are meant to be, no, but a mistaken form we must cast off by living the length of our lives till we are formless. My husband sang that the purpose of life was to be rid of it, so Cassandra said to me of my husband's music after I died, and for this alone Apollo wept, as trees bent their boughs to weep, and skies wept day in day out after I died because my husband wept day out day in after I died, singing all day and night every day and night of fallen humanity (that would be me), the divine wraith among millions of wraiths since the day of creation and so the purveyor of destruction, the day that first man and first woman learned they were not immortal like the gods that made them, no, and this then the first fall was the most terrible fall of all – we were made by our gods to die. And I did.

Eurydice

He walks before me blocking the distant daylight with his shoulders and the black cloak that warms the one blade (the left) so that he alone sees the light of the surface that burns like a candle, that intimates the life of mortals across the earth of things, walking softly so as to let the managers of Hades rest in the peace and magic of his music whether he hums or whistles or plays the cyther or sings while playing the cyther, one or another one after another to soothe the savage beasts and tenders of death and its despair while we violate nature over and over with every footfall on the stony path that is the only way out of the undertow my husband has made of what is and has been and will be again the only way into it. I follow in his footsteps who does not yet know his fate as I know mine, does not know yet that soon he will lose his head to his body, his body rent to pieces by Thracian women bearing swords, knives and the edges of shovels to disarticulate him, some by their hands alone twisting one bone ball from another till it falls like the parts of birds we dined on, and so he does not know on his mission to save me from myself that soon there will be a shrine to him, statues to his memory, paintings on pottery and walls to the memory of him and to the memory of the statues of him. He does not know that he will be as a priest to his people after death, a mystic and a messiah, the bringer of beauty and truth, a deliverer, when now he is only a man in love with his bride who cannot bear the loss of her. He knows only this and the ways of death, and these are enough he thinks as he sings, hums,

Eurydice

whistles, and plays his way out of the undertow and into the daylight that is far far away. What of my rapist? I ask.

My husband hums at the thought of Aristaeus, the demigod of cheeses, yes, who waited till I had married my husband to ply his troth since in the manner of all demi and semi and whole gods he wanted to ravage me, neither woo me nor win me, no, vanquish me, even as I lay dying, snakebit as I was on the buttocks I fell back on, assaulted before snakebit, wood chased before assaulted, married to Orpheus before wood chased by the dean of cheeses -- chased, assaulted, snakebit to death on my wedding day. I did not know my husband's phallus to worship since I died before I saw or touched or felt it within me, and yet because I died I did not see or touch or feel my rapist's phallus either, but that is because the god of cheese no longer had a breathing squirming living creature neath him to conquer, no, nothing but corpse breathless and silent and sullen. That is the good news.

Goddess Dike, my husband's disciple, bringer of justice, deliverer of punishments, of Osiris and Ra in Egypt, of Assyrian kings as dead as dead gets, of the griefs of Persephone, ravaged and kidnapped by Hades into the forever of his dark mind and doomed thereby to wifehood even in death, even Dike my husband put to forgetfulness so as to escort me step by step from darkness to light that he alone saw and yet saw as no more than a pinprick in the roof

Eurydice

of the undertow we walked the steep path of at a stone's pace. No chariot of truth for us, no, since Orpheus, my husband, makes of music a divine mystery, a suspicion of the godhead Olympus, nothing to hold in the hand or account for, no arithmetic or science or wordiness so that on the surface of things we might spawn wood nymphs and verdant growers, my demi-divine lover and I, the gods' tongue, so Cassandra named him, charmer of snakes as well as rivers and seas, even those wherein his dismembered self would hurl before washing into Antissa or the Hebrus unto Lesvos where yet he does not know as he walks ahead of me out of the death den his severed head will be enshrined, its mouth open for eternity that sang in life and will prophesy after death the death of the gods, among these Apollo, his mentor and protector and enabler in the quest to undo nature and raise the dead.

The wraith of desolate Herakles I saw in the undertow, immortal mortal, mortally immortal, to whom my husband spoke winter in and out every winter he visited Hades since together in life they had sailed the Argo with Jason wherein my husband played to silence the sirens and calm the raging sea and soothe the winds to a whisper, tasks so needed that the entire crew could not move the ship into the water till Orpheus strummed his cyther and Argo moved herself into it when he did. Cassandra said of Herakles that his was the saddest immortality of all and so he chose self-immolation like a mad mortal, driven out of mind by jealous Hera, Zeus'

Eurydice

wife and his father by Leda, made mad in a dream Hera blew into his sleep whereby he rose to murder his wife and children, only waking caked in blood and smelling the stench of rotting corpse in the heat of the day. My husband sang to him in the dead of winter among the eternal dead, hoping to quiet his despair, and millions came to hear and to behold a living creature among them, a miracle of nature or a mistake of it, millions relentlessly weary yet never to rest or sleep or forget all that they had lost by dying till my husband sang to them and played his cyther whose music filled the largest house in the world, up to the brown crust of the roof of the widest house anywhere, the house with the largest family, all mortal before immortal in death, none brooding more than Herakles, but all brooding, though few there had slain their families, and those that did were the famous dead like Medea who slew hers in jealousy, but few as mad as Herakles, my husband's friend, all doomed who sailed the Argo like thieves in the night.

And so my husband sang in Hades before I died, at the depths of the undertow in winter sang and played the melody that all things are one thing, becoming the oracle to death's darkness as surely as he mystified the sun to soften its heat on the surface of things, easing the loss of the world among deaths made visible each to each, saving them by his sounds from their human endeavors and desires, all that they knew of themselves, remembering in death the gods who put them there. Walking at his back where it is forbidden he see the shade of me, I am more

Eurydice

than ever the object of my husband's desire and would have borne his children had I not been poisoned by a snake in the grass, and I would not have fallen onto the grass where the snake lay if I had not been pursued by the rapist of my wedding day, and he would not have pursued me to rape if I had not married Orpheus, and Orpheus would not have married me if Apollo had not willed it, and Apollo would not have willed it if Zeus had not willed him to will it – gods all who know neither yearning nor regret, and that is because they know neither death nor the dread of it.

My murder did not end the world, so Cassandra informed me, though later many will say that my husband's murder did, that he was the gods' first messenger and his death promised the death of the gods, yes, so that after my husband was rent asunder, headless and flayed and hurled like pig parts into the sea (the Aegean that would be), war and violence shaped all human history ever after, so Cassandra informed me, one shade to another, first destroying much of creation before destroying the gods of creation, and this before destroying the mortal engines by intellect and reason and commerce, of which Orpheus knew nothing to sing, and only then, after gods were dead and humans wept to nothing and no one over the memory of fallen humanity till all creation fell silent where divine sound had been, or so Cassandra's wraith told mine when I dwelt in the undertow not knowing that even then my husband was subduing the harrowing hound, transfixing its mistress on her throne, by shadows narrowly passing the god of death

Eurydice

himself, himself forbidden to intervene in this divine intervention that Orpheus, beloved of all gods save one (that would be Dionysos) might enter the vestibule to eternity and therefore to eternal regret.

My goddesses and gods, the god Ouranos (sky) and his force Physis that moves the stars of the Kosmos, and my husband's imagos Protagoras, Phares, Metis, Euboleus, Eros, Bromios, and even unto his nemesis Dionysos – all these and more who inhabit my husband's Olympian world shall not save him from the rage for revenge of the Thracian wives, breasts bare like Furies and Amazons though with none removed to steady the bow that hums the arrow into the air, that drawn by its string of hog gut across the scar of the lost breast so as to slay this before that enemy a thousand paces away, no, but Thracian wives poised like gray ancient Furies never touched by man, like Furies who rent Pentheus asunder, lopping his head to avenge the dead Theban princess, and like Furies lopping my husband's head, rending his limbs asunder by sword and knife and axe, if only to make his body as dead as mine, eternal virgin that I am, these Thracian wives outraged by husbands unbound from them at my husband's song and cyther and mystery of a higher worship than between the knees of their women, ignoring their duties inside the thighs of their women, inside the vestibule that opens to the space of copulation, conception and birthing that foretells more life and so more death, so Cassandra said my husband sang to the

Eurydice

husbands of Thrace after I died. Oh, Leukothea, who saves sailors from death at sea, mistress of dark waters in the green ocean deep, even you could not save Orpheus, my husband, but will gather his limbs one by one to feed fish by, yet steadying the dismembered head on its way from the Thracian sea to the isle of Lesbos by the river Hebrus, the head of that man, there, who walks before me to save me from an early bitter end.

Fennec, our smallest forest fox, lifted a limb to piddle on the bark of my tree, on me therefore since I knew myself to have become the tree (elm of the species) when I felt as well an inner self devoted to my husband so that on our wedding day I coated the door of me I found between my thighs with honey from a hive that hung from a branch of the self I was when I was tree, only tree and nobody's bride, to say nothing of nobody's lust. As for the honey I slathered across my inner self, salting the mine I thought of it. I was not my husband's lover that day, no, but neither was I raped or imprisoned or impregnated or sacrificed by a husband, lover, father, mother, brother, son, stranger or beast, no, nor seduced by a god shaped like a bird or a horse or a bull or a ram, no, and when I died I saw in the undertow Tecmessa whom Ajax impregnated against her will, as he had raped Cassandra before her, and I saw in the undertow Deiania, wife to Herakles, who killed himself for killing her and her children, and I said to Cassandra, the wraith of I mean, what would lead a man to murder his family? What lead a wife to murder her

Eurydice

husband? Why would sibling kill sibling? Why do gods eat their young? Where was Apollo when I was snakebit?

Even as my husband walks before me blotting out the sun at the end of the tunnel, muttering or singing or playing as he steps one careful footfall after another, as if fearful of waking yet further serpents, or waking the dead, or waking the gods and demigods he has put to slumber by his songs, all but he and the I I was once and would be again thanks to his love for me and the I I once was, he inspires the uninspired, appearing even to me more mad than genius.

His greater gifts spread him further from the rest of humanity, blessed by Apollo and despised by Dionysos, who would be him, and whose minion Bacchus will be a lesser him sooner rather than later, and so my husband sings and plays like a madman to the rest of the world, but that is because the blessed are blessed of gods who know neither madness nor genius since being gods they have no need of gods, nor need of wisdom, medicine or religion – they are religion of which day in day out my husband sings the praise of. Only those not gods can be enchanted by the madness or genius of the madness of genius gods impart to the fallen, and all not gods are the fallen, doomed to possess souls that will fall and fall till they endure forever in the undertow, remembering lost love, lost life, regretting death till they regret life and love and the memory of both. Amid all that trumpets death my husband's art persuades the living that Apollo is beautiful

Eurydice

and that beauty is truth and that truth is god-like – hearing my husband’s music, we feel as gods feel therefore.

Even here where only death exists, where the idea of death existing exists, who is more pious than Orpheus, my husband? And being more pious who is more mad in his genius? And who is more genius on behalf of Apollo? His song bends us to our memory of the divine, that we are born, live and die by the will of gods with no moral compass, that once we were the nameless gut of an egg, the darkness inside the shell, beings without gender or names or knowledge of life or death, nothing but the perfect mind before thoughts of a world driven by need, desire, jealousy, war – all that persists in us as a consequence of our dread of death. When my husband has seen such in the hands of men, he has broken tablets with writing on them, scripts that corrupt the mind with thoughts rather than a musical ecstasy that transforms the world’s living things till we transcend as one soul in concord with Apollo – trees and rivers, women, men, horses, dogs. Who is more pious than such a madman, my husband, who walks before me not ten paces in the shadow among shadows whistling, humming, strumming to keep Hades from being Hades?

Being of the ancient world that I did not consider the ancient world, a world older than the bible of the Jews whom I did not know existed, older even than the stories of the Jews in

Eurydice

their book, I am a mythic ruminant, so Cassandra said while I assumed I was going to be forever dead, ruminating rather than acting, so Cassandra said, or saving myself for one act only like so many of my sex in the undertow, other ruminants who kill but once or are but once killed, who suicide or go as mad as mad gets, none having a husband like my husband, with the mystical power to peel the skin of the moon with a pluck of a string of his cythere. From Cassandra I learned the fates of Persephone and Medea and Philomena and Clytemnestra and Antigone and Electra and Andromache and Hecuba and Alcinoe, on and on and over and over women who died by violence, none of whom knew the love of a hero who could resurrect them, no, such women as I saw by thousands in the miasma of the undertow would be forever dead, as if they had never been loved or loved not enough or loved by the wrong men, faithless warriors and faithless kings, men driven by swords and torture and ravage and rape, none like the husband sheltering my shade from the glare of the sun that would strike me blind from my timeless time in the death orchard, no, but men who invaded foreign shores so as to invade the kingdoms on it, this to invade the homes of the people who peopled them, and this to invade the women who were the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the men they killed to invade the women they enslaved, murdered, caged, branded, and beat for being the women they could not help but be.

Eurydice

Apate, goddess of flowers and swamps and marshes

Zephyros, whose whispers move leaves, clouds and birds alike

Atropos, she who chooses the way of every mortal end

Clothos, who spins the thread of fate that Atropos unwinds

We light frankincense to intone this, we light myrrh to sing of the singer, my husband, here before me walking apace to disturb nothing of the eternal night shared by millions and millions across thousands and thousands of years of creation, prelude to destruction, so Cassandra said and said again while the shades of raped, enslaved and murdered women stared amazed that look, there, the living Orpheus come to retrieve his dead wife from her death mystifies eternity into forgetting itself, suspends the time of gods for human time to resurrect his bride in the name of Apollo. The wraiths of the famous dead cried out or moaned or sobbed that no man came for them, no man husband or son or father or brother dared death out of love and grief and memory. And each of the dead women famous and infamous looked at me with the same gaze, that of a mystery unfolding before them, something more mysterious than death so that even after death new knowledge existed for these famous and infamous women who for being dead believed they had known all that there was to know, such women who slaughtered

Eurydice

and were slaughtered, and now would have touched me if they could, embraced me or kissed me or killed me again if they could because I was the most beloved of all the dead who had ever lived. Born to a world not of our creation, the rhapsodist miracle worker and the wood nymph, mortal goddess whose spirit inhabited one elm tree across the short span of her life so as to tend it and protect it, to succor its wounds, fell in love under the calm of my tree at the sound of music till my elm did not breeze or lose leaf or scrape bark, and neither did it creak when it heard Orpheus sing.

I married Orpheus, master musician one day to become mystical messiah the next, on this day only become a husband in a marriage neither consummated nor conjugated, no, since after we wed under the bower my sisters made of the sturdiest limbs of the elm I tended I walked alone to the deeper woods filled by the brothers and sisters of the tree I had nurtured till now, this to say farewell. My duty was hereafter to follow my husband on his travels to distant lands thereto playing and singing and mystifying the world as he found it, making music that defied language as he found it, language that separated one from the other peoples of the world as he found it, that fed fear and hatred and violence as they led to blood and blood guilt, singing and playing music of the spheres that spoke no language but what the gods might speak if they spoke at all. By this my husband could never belong to me as he belonged to Apollo, but Apollo is a

Eurydice

god, and he could never belong to me as he belonged to the Muses, being their rhapsodist who enchants the world wherever he finds the world, enchanting living things and dead things alike till stones forget to be stony, rivers cease to run, trees to breeze, gods forget they are gods when he hymns to Apollo, the priest on earth of therefore, to remind the human world and the world of nature that gods exist, and so to remind the gods that they are gods even when they forget what it is to be gods.

I watched the sky that roofed treetops for signs of mischief on Olympus since it was my wedding day and my husband suffered enemies by his devotion to Apollo, by Apollo's devotion to Zeus, by Aphrodite's jealousy of Apollo's devotion to Zeus, by Hera's hatred of Zeus and Apollo and Herakles, and therefore of my husband who traveled with Herakles, soothed his mad grief with music, celebrated the beautiful wisdom of Apollo and sang of the eternity Zeus embodied, if embodied is the word. I felt footfalls behind mine and I smelt the steam of a lesser god's breath on my neck, and so I ran, she who never needed to run, running from the demi or semi god who milked goats for to make cheeses, but never before needing to run I did not run fast, not like lesser gods who hunt chaste girls, since I had never needed to run from anything. He caught the ends of my hair the color of tree bark not far from the river my husband had stilled to celebrate our wedding, and so I fell though I had never fallen before, and so I did not know

Eurydice

how to fall, falling on the ground my husband, the verdant god, husbanded into flowers and grasses and twigs and even nearby the burrows of moles and mice.

I fell backside down so that the beast above tore my tunic and was the first and last male of the species or any of the lesser or greater gods to behold my breast and the nipple of it that would have suckled my husband's child. The beast above spread the thighs of me by his knees that otherwise knelt to milk the teats of his goats, and with the same fingers he used to milk the teats he perforated the hymen inside me till my thighs and inner self smelt of honey, fresh blood and old cheese, but as he unsheathed a large phallus from his tunic, drawing back the skin that hid the eye of it, I suffered the serpent's twice-toothed bite and felt the flow of the venom delivered into my flesh. For the mark of a sigh I believed I had been violated but saw the phallus in his hand awaiting my body and still growing, more the size of a horse than a man, the size therefore of a lesser god, or so I memorialized as the final memory of my natural life and unnatural death. What next I knew described darkness, weeping and the absence of all things living, instead the existence of all things dead, a site of woe for as far as my eyes could see, and yet the sounds were as human as a funeral.

Mine is the great legend of love found and lost and found again, and yet my husband and I never lay under the same sheet embraced by sweet night, no, for my wedding night was

Eurydice

bitter death whereby I moved to the music of misery and to wordless songs of sadness, here in the depths of despair that saw nothing human, no, but saw the absence of human that was nature's way of ending human, what human was born to undergo according to the gods, the being and all of human therefore. Of the curse Apollo placed on Cassandra when he spat into her mouth, giving her the blessing to foretell and the curse to be disbelieved, I alone trusted every word Cassandra said for as long as she spoke surrounded by the chorus of writhing shades gathered across thousands of years of death so that I was as a child robbed of its cradle or stolen like a calf from its mother to be slaughtered. Because I was the freshest dead I believed every word, as I believe the eldest dead believed every word of Cassandra's dark future. We were dead, were we not? I might as well have been Iphigenia sacrificed for fair wind to Troy by her father, the king who won wealth and fame and raped Cassandra, my guide and my fortune teller, herself slaughtered in the palace at Mycenae along with her rapist, then who met her slaughterer herself slaughtered by her son, himself slaughtered by the Furies till the family of Atreus had been swallowed whole by Hades, the giant fish with the biggest belly and greatest hunger.

Look where he strides, my husband, my one and only, his hair to the small of his back swaying left to right and back again, the doeskin strap of his cythere carping the blade of his shoulder till he takes it in hand to strum the cat gut strings so that rocks the size of human heads

Eurydice

do not fall to block our path and stones the size of ants do not slow my husband's pace or see him fall, hear the music cease thereby, prevent him from sparing me my death from the poison fangs of a snake in the grass. He has calmed seas to make war possible, put dragons to sleep so as to steal the famous fleece of Colchis, has caused ships to right themselves in storms, sent the Sirens into deep sleep, and none of these is as this journey on behalf of love, the only love he will ever know, the singer who does not share the mystery of his music because he is the maker of it. He does not know that the surface of things, that light at the end of the tunnel, has not changed because I am dead, no, but is as before I was born, or after I was born but before I was assaulted, is as it was even while I was assaulted so that not a tree differs or a stream or a goat, no, only my husband differs from my husband before I died. His curls belong to Apollo, his music salutes the curls on Apollo's head, conveys the serenity Apollo's curls inspire, calls serenity wisdom and the curls of Apollo wise therefore, and so to be wise is to be godly, to be like Apollo as Orpheus, my husband, resembles Apollo in that he is who he is without enjoying it. Where did you bury my body? Nothing.

Now that I am dead the man I loved when I was alive occupies all thinking all the time, if time is the word, unless I am thinking of death, if I can think and be dead at the same time, if time is the word. Unless I think of death I think of falling into love with Orpheus, thinking of

Eurydice

each moment I fell into it, collecting images of when, how, and where we would have dwelt after marrying, traveling from tent to bedroll to yurt from one land to another, and whether if we had dwelt elsewhere or not dwelt elsewhere we would have remained beloved to beloved enrapt in the throes of desire so that our love would have overwhelmed whatever was not it wherever we were, just as the venom of the serpent overwhelmed whatever was not it wherever it was found.

Limning personal disaster in the undertow, I am ashamed to confess that losing the man I love I consider to be a more insurmountable unfathomable loss than losing life itself. Now that I am dead and think only of love and of death I dwell on the only man for whom I possess undying love, whatever undying measures now that I am dead, when I do not dwell on the rapist or the poisonous serpent or the assassins lurking everywhere in the vast expanse of death, those men and women and sons and daughters and brothers and sisters and husbands and wives who slaughtered each other year in year out. Now that I am dead I am neither naked nor dressed and will never be nude before my husband, no, but I might have been naked as a cadaver is naked, as a cadaver is never nude therefore, if my husband planted it in the nature for which he is almost as famous as he is for his music so that my corpse might nourish the agrapanthus that grows after the equinox. I appeared here as if waking from a nightmare, wherever here is, where no bell

Eurydice

peals the hour, where no hour exists, where the memory of time breaks hearts and minds eternally, what would be day in day out on the surface of things therefore, memory of that ilk.

Since it is too late for love as well as too late for love to fail I am persuaded that the man I loved when I was alive to love confirmed my existence as the thought of lost love confirms my nonexistence, Orpheus confirming my existence less when he fell into love with me than when he grieved over its loss because I died, and so after I died I understood the man I love and will continue to love better in his absence than in his presence. I know Orpheus better now that I am dead than I knew him when I was not, and perhaps I would know him better if he too were dead than I knew him or know him while we were both alive or now that I alone am dead. Who knows but that I am dead only because the man I love loved me back or that I lived only because the man I love had to lose me to love me perfectly so that when not plunging me into undying love death has plunged me into undying despair and the solitude wherein to suffer it. Where better to suffer than Hades, where all who persist here have abandoned hope? After the slaughter of love and the onslaught of despair Orpheus appears to me more perfect than he had been when we met, courted, sparked, and plied truth neath the bower of my lifelong elm. Each missing moment of life Orpheus arrives as the man I desired most across the rainbow of a life of innocence before becoming the man I loved most across the rainbow of a life of desire, these

Eurydice

before becoming the man I dreaded losing most across the rainbow of a life of need so that he was from the onslaught the man I most needed, desired and loved, and therefore the man I feared would desert me from one day to the next even though there is no way for anyone to desert anyone other than from one day to the next unless it is from one moment to the next. Love aspires to timelessness, does it not, to eternal passion and enduring harmony, endeavoring to violate the physical universe so as to conceal the fruitlessness of all human endeavor for everyone everywhere by attempting to occupy the same space at the same time, to say nothing of doing so day in day out year after year decade after decade while spanning the abyss of otherness across a copula of passionate love?

Now that I am dead I have given thought to the conundrums of love, have I not, such as falling out of it for no discernible reason after falling into it for no discernible reason or out of it with one beloved because of falling into it with another beloved, to say nothing of never falling out of it for no discernible reason after having fallen into it for no discernible reason? During the eternity that consists of being dead, the more I perceive the end of everything in the surround of me the more I perceive absence everywhere and the more I perceive absence the less I consider time as a measure till death is a fugitive present consisting only of absent pasts, forbidden futures and the despair whereby to dwell on them. As a consequence of death I do not grow weary of

Eurydice

my fear that Orpheus would weary of me, as so many of his mythic brothers have wearied of their wives and lovers, and among those who did not weary none remained faithful, no, no sooner were their ships out of sight than one after another of my husband's immortal mates bedded down with sea nymphs, goddesses, witches, and queens and princesses from any island anywhere for as far the eye could see.

Being dead, if being is the word, I never weary of suffering my husband's absence, and in suffering his absence I never weary of fearing that he would have deserted me if I had not died, and so by dying I made our love undying eternal love without the living urge to observe my husband's sleep to see if he slept restless or as peaceful as a lamb even though I have yet to observe a sleeping lamb and under the circumstance am not likely to. Since I awaited my husband's desertion of me even before we were married, assuming a lifetime of waiting and waiting for him to desert me until he deserted me, I could not rest, and who can blame me since all, absolutely all of his friends, the blessed and the cursed, either deserted their beloveds or betrayed them in far off countries. Now that I am dead, I no longer dread deceit and desertion, no, nor does my fear of them obliterate my rest till I am weary of fear and dread even more than I am of desertion and deceit. In Hades there is no dread, deceit, betrayal, or desertion. Instead there is nothing that lasts forever. Since falling into love, I invited slaughter into my existence,

Eurydice

deserting the nature of nature for the nature of passion wherein mystical musicians could fill my heart and raping cheesemakers could rupture it. Now that I am dead it occurs to me that love is more perfect in the eternal nowhere than it could have been inside the daily somewhere wherein we would have dwelt day after day and night after night year after year.

Now that I am dead only the dead people the world where I vow undying love, if people is the word, whatever undying measures now that I am dead, where there is no time like the past for brooding in the nonexistent present on the eternal future. Now that my end has arrived the thought of death is the thought to end all thought because the death was mine. I did not witness it as my rapist did or my serpent did, being in one instant alive, in the next not, and so I bear witness only to the afterlife, that fiasco the gods invented, as if death was not enough of an insult to mind and body. And still he strides dutifully in front, my eternal beloved, the man of mystery I married to reveal the mystery of his heart as a man, not a demigod adored by Apollo, loathed by Dionysos, feared by all and sundry who corrupt the world as we find it so that we embrace migration, a word I did not know could gather humans to it, only birds and creatures of deserts and savannas in search of water, food and safety, such as fish eagles I have seen that gulp the booby or the noddy forked by their talons from wave crests and shoals, turkey fowl too whose wing span unfolds wider than the shoulders of an oarsman. My husband would migrate,

Eurydice

and I with him, to spread the music's good news about our gods, and yet here we are in the dark stepping upward and outward from the bowels of nowhere by the throat of it.

I shuddered at the onslaught of desire because instantly I could not consider myself without considering Orpheus and then I shuddered because I could not consider myself without considering Orpheus first. An exhausting process, is it not, falling into love, loving a beloved and being loved day in day out year after year forever, whatever forever measures before you busy yourself being dead? Let us speculate from bostryx and bulrush at the edge of a stormy sea, such as the one where my husband and I first pressed lips. Shrubbery strewed to the shore's edge stage left where the sea began unless this is where the sea ended, if began is the word or if ended is the word though I do not think seas begin and end the way existence begins and ends, the way love begins and ends, the way days begin because they end, the way a moon rises before it falls even though there is always a moon neither falling nor rising and a sun neither setting nor dawning, to say nothing of thoughts that begin before they end in the sentences they beget.

Exhausting, is it not, to love and to be loved?

No sooner had I fallen into love with the man I loved than I could have done nothing other than fall into love with him. Despite the slaughterhouse love has made of the onslaught of love I could have done nothing other than suffer the consequence of loving and being loved so

Eurydice

that after I died I underwent one episode of despair after another -- despair, despair and despair until I did nothing other than think that there must have been to my love for Orpheus an essence informing my existence that I failed to understand while I existed, and so this failure was the origin of my despair. Essence and existence go foot in sandal, do they not, leaning on each other as drunks do tree trunks, do they not, and so how could I imagine an essence to me other than my love for Orpheus, and yet when I began to dread and to fear that one day Orpheus would deceive and desert me for another of the species how could I not imagine that loving someone other than me had been the essence of my husband's existence? Again and again at the end of the end during the forever of death I scrutinize the inscrutable, waiting to undergo the thoughtlessness of nonexistence, my nonexistence, if my is the word, if undergo is the word. And yet no matter my thinking or of what my thoughts consist there is no thought that does not include the man I love unless it is death as a consequence of loving him. If not thoughtful after death, when?

Thinking such thoughts at high noon or at silent night, I observe that night and noon are wasted on me, that whether I think of a blazing sky or moonshine shattering the surface of a sea does not matter in the least, no, since death and only death is not wasted on me unless I am dreaming, comatose or someone named Lazarus waiting to be quickened, so Cassandra has said.

I am aware that everything has happened to me that is going to happen and I am aware that

Eurydice

when the worst happened to me I was unaware, that I was even the last to know what happened to me, and yet all that happened to me on my wedding day is being undone by order of the gods who love my husband's songs more than they love the natural order of things, if rape and snakebite are part of the natural order of things, and if not, why not, since war and murder and vengeance are as rampant as nature in a world overgrown with murderous intent and insidious plots? My husband caused chaos in the afterlife till the dead hooped and hollered to behold a living being walk among them, at the last cheering for me as he led me with a gesture of his hand, that without looking at me – the only violation of Apollo's violation of nature that would ruin the gift my husband and I were given. No greater love did my husband express than by expressing nothing of his love for me.

As soon as I professed my love for the man I love I risked oblivion since I believed I had one existence only in which to love and to be loved, not two existences as my husband and Apollo have created, not the way eyes and breasts and buttocks arrive two by two. During the obdurate solitude of my despair I thought and thought of nothing but the man I loved, love and will continue to love even through eternity, thinking of him eternally only because here there is neither night nor day, but it would be both day and night that I thought of my husband's absence if they measured anything where we know neither sun nor moon, and yet we know the memory

Eurydice

of each, that curse. Let it be memorialized though that Orpheus kissed the mouth of me seaside the bostryx and bulrushes under a moon as pale and as full as my breast and my heart. We murmured into each other's ears so as to memorize each other's breath till when I whispered Orpheus into his ear he whispered Eurydice into mine, inhaling and exhaling whispered names for the first time. We whispered each other's name over and over until we had memorized each other's name because we had already begun dwelling together in the imagination. Below an unseen moon the storm lashing an invisible sea unleashed between us the barbaric urges without which there would be no civilization, one of the conundrums for which civilization is famous.

While we kissed as deeply as we had yet kissed our kisses were not as deep as they would have been across song after song on one wet beach after another, nor did we kiss as deeply as we would have kissed when kissing again and again year after year while conjugating again and again within one dwelling before another across song after song of the future when there remained a future before eternity. Once I kissed Orpheus on the mouth, I forgot who I had been before I kissed him, becoming someone else that I did not know I wanted to be till I became her. Till I kissed Orpheus and he kissed me I did not know that I fell into love to escape the despair of enduring existence alone in an indifferent world of betrayal, deceit and despair, and yet before he kissed me and I kissed him I did not think of the world that way and believed I knew nothing of

Eurydice

loneliness or despair or endurance, no, instead I thought of my elm and my sisters of the wood, and yet at the first touch of the lips of my husband as he whispered my name into my ear for the first time, the world without him would have been unbearable. There was a sea, a beach, a moon, its light – so much for the state of the world when, as it turned out, Orpheus and I fell into love forever.

My death overwhelmed my husband more than life itself, and so I assume my death meant more than my life to him, my absence more painful than my presence was pleasurable, and yet no sooner did I die than my husband wallowed in myth and magic to undo the undoable. And so, evoking my undying love, my truly undying love, I see in my husband, who cannot see me, a dishevelment and despair from head to toe, and I observe in him, who cannot observe me, the loss of his beauty derived from Apollo, as if his favorite god has exacted a price for his blasphemy that even my gifted mad husband is not prepared to pay. Love after death is stronger than death, and if it is stronger than death it may be stronger than life. I bear witness, as my husband cannot in me bear witness, to a change in the aura of him, in his bearing and character, as if for the first time his journey to Hades has transformed him, darkened his world as death has darkened mine, made of the undertow not merely the annual site of verdant death, no, but death

Eurydice

that cannot and should not be renewed. I think your husband is inventing sin, Cassandra said when she beheld him living among the dead.

Not only did he undergo grief and despair at my death, but appeared to me to be a man deceived and even deserted, as if love had destroyed him and his gods had deserted him, and as if despite his momentous effort to retrieve me from the horror of eternal sadness, he could not love me as he had since now that I knew what it was to be dead I knew more of the world than he did, knew more of it than his gods did, knew as Cassandra did and said she did that the dead could not love the living because death is the end of being human. The dead suffer immortality of the darkest sort, a black trick devised by gods to make fools of mortals before they murder them, and before they murder the mortals they fear most the gods drive them mad, as my husband appeared mad, no more a genius or beloved of Apollo, no, but a pitiful demented soul on a mission doomed from the onslaught. Now that I was dead, I could only be mourned, not loved since I was no longer loveable, or I could be loved for my absence, the absence that makes me more perfect than I was in life. Not yet dead, Orpheus looked dead, neither loveable nor absent, and yet my husband continued to desire the living object love had made of me, and so the husband who defied nature and worked his magic to retrieve my shade and vivify my corpse wore the look of everyone on the surface of things who knows love to be suffering and only suffering.

Eurydice

The world was no more the world wherein we fell into love, but the world wherein I died and my husband did not. Our love and its slaughter, like my life and its slaughter, he did not understand as the next thing to happen if only because everything cannot happen at once even on Olympus.

Hebe, goddess of youth

Eirene, of peace

Theia, of the bright sky

Iris, goddess of rainbows

We light frankincense to intone this, we light myrrh to sing of the singer, my husband, who even here now walks as if there is nothing but time, that his powers and allies can make the world believe that it is never too late even when it is too late, even inside the truest nowhere where the only truth remains that forever is not what living lovers believe is forever. Driven by a need to overcome the monotony of existence I fell into love with the only man I would ever love even though I did not know existence was monotonous till I fell into it. Now that I am dead it is too late for love, too late for the failure of love, too late for deceit and desertion, too late for

Eurydice

music, too late for gods and their mischief, and it is too late for everything that time measures since it is too late even to think it is too late. The more thoughts come the more they go, hunting companions to experience the emptiness of nonexistence, forever of that ilk. So long as I think, my husband exists, though he is unaware of this truth that is not among the truths known to him, and he does not know that when I think of him I think of myself and then I can only think of myself dead, and so I think of what it is to be thinking and to be dead, that death is thinking forever of all that has been lost or never was. I always think, and yet I know that thought will never end, that thought would not end on the surface of things any more than inside the bowels of things. Do not fear, Cassandra said, the world above remains flat.

Love of my life and of my death, how it is is this, so I thought to say to the back of my husband's head, to his drapery, to his cythere, to the bare heel of one of his feet, just as Cassandra said it to me while we awaited his arrival in the caverns of the dead from the mouth of it that from our place was impossible to see because no light crept in, no sky either, no stars or moon or shadow of a roc swooping to seize a rabbit. We remembered all these but saw none.

Burn herbs and incense and storax, light the tunnel with aromatic gifts of our gods while Orpheus, my husband, hymns Persephone, Demeter's only daughter, she out of Zeus, god of gods, Persephone the queen of the undertow, Hades wife slash victim, kidnapped to his bed

Eurydice

against her will, mother to the Furies therefore, guardian of the doorway that for my husband and for her alone swings both ways, each the way of the verdant and of the dead, of solstice to solstice, and yet for my sake Apollo blinded nature, Zeus let him do it, together speaking of injustice and infamy when, alas, my fate was not even to be raped or even murdered, but to be spared both by one of the slithering creatures Zeus let live.

And Orpheus, my husband, hymned Hestia whose eternal flame at our wedding burst the beauty of the flowers and plants of nature surrounding us, and to Morpheus my played a lay that the flames of Hestia turned the oppies in the nearby into smoke that eased both joy and sorrow that we might slouch into oblivion, the preview of death but with thoughts asleep instead of awake, and so my husband hymned dreams too at our wedding, wherein the gods whisper to us of what is to be and of why it is to be, yes, and he sang to my tree and to every living thing in the surround of it, yes. Only to death did my husband fail to sing, and so death was dishonored since my dear and devoted new husband withheld the truth imbedded in life that death is as close to divinity as mortals can ever achieve. In death alone do we become immortal, and so Orpheus, my husband, sang to death in Hades to make amends and ask forgiveness, and so at the instant of his greatest triumph in both the natural and divine worlds – retrieving his beloved from both in the name of love – his fate began to unfold, as Cassandra said it would, and I alone believed her,

Eurydice

seeing my husband's fate in his walk ten paces ahead of me, by his long ringlets of dark satin hair fallen across the bare shoulder where his cythere rested safely and at the ready to tame fear and its tempests by his musical madness.

Love of my life and of my death, how it is is this, so I wanted to say to the back of his head, to his drapery, his bare shoulder, cythere: in Thrace you will urge husbands to set down their swords against invaders that the foreigners may take their wives for slaves and concubines, and you will hypnotize these husbands into laying down their swords in your name, and so the wives will raise them instead and will defeat the invaders to protect their homes, children, selves, and their husbands who had forgot themselves in your name. And then, so I thought to say to Orpheus but could not do it, the wives will turn on you with swords, axes, pitchforks, kitchen knives even, and they will stab you while they dismember your hands, arms, legs, disemboweling you, castrating you, and only at the last will they sever your head from your torso, where your heart no longer beats. This done, the women of Thrace will hurl your parts into the sea for your father to devour, as gods have eternally eaten their children, and the head they will hurl still farther that the current will carry it to the island Lesvos, whereat other women, those who shun husbands, will enshrine you in an altar that men only can enter so as to worship. And that, my husband, is just the beginning.

Eurydice

Falling into love, I thought that I was more than I was when I was not in love, whoever I was at the onslaught of love, because I was not only myself but the object of someone's desire. Love was different when I was in it from when I was not, just as the world as I found it was different when I was loved from when I was not. I avoided people in love when I was not, preferring my tree and my sisters, presuming that people in love avoided me when I was not because I was not, and who could blame them? Because of my love for the man I loved I confused my desires with his desires because Orpheus desired me and so I confused myself with the man I loved by assuming that he thought and sensed as I did, undergoing my existence as I underwent his existence, even when it was tormented and tortured as eventually, that curse, his was, as are most who undergo existence. From the instant Orpheus put his lips to mine I believed that I knew him as well as I knew myself though I did not know then what I know now, whatever now means since I am dead, that I confused him with myself, his needs and urges and intentions I gathered to myself to make them mine till I considered Orpheus the self of myself, whoever I was other than tender of the elm as the elm tended me.

I think I know who I am now that I am dead better than I did when I was not dead, though this does not mean that who I think I am even in death is who I was, and yet this is the curse shared by all of us who have ever existed, the curse that most of us who have ever existed

Eurydice

will die not knowing whether who we have thought we were throughout our lives has been who we were, suspecting that since everyone we have ever known we have known for years and years to have been nothing like they believed they were, it remains likely that we have been nothing like we believed we were and more like everyone else believed we were. I have seen the dead and celebrated their deaths among mourners, knowing that in each instance the dead were nothing in life that they thought they were. Jocasta, mother of Oedipus, wife of Oedipus, mother of her son's children, did not know till she hanged herself that she committed incest with her child. Helen, wife to Menelaus, did not choose to start war, no, war was chosen for her by the goddess Aphrodite. As to who I am and who I am not or who I have been and who I have not been nothing permutes without the man I loved, love and will continue to love, apparently for eternity.

Once I fell into love, I never knew myself to be other than what Orpheus desired of me, even though because I loved Orpheus, I desired it of myself as well. I have shed thousands of thoughts in the undertow concerning the man I love, agonizing during my eternal solitude to think them one after another, agonizing as my eternal solitude to think of love and the loss of love, even though Orpheus has not stopped loving me, loving me as if I did not die, not mourning me so much as desiring me in the flesh, which I never underwent at the death of a tree,

Eurydice

for instance, or of a flower, for another. My husband does not look the part of grieving husband, does not speak husband to me, no, but as if soon to howl like a feral creature that has lost its way in the forest, and by that learns its destiny, and that is to mourn past mourning, turning grief into revenge, blaming his beloved dead for being dead and so beyond loving because being beyond loveable. I agonize on the path to the surface among thoughts of love, lost love, failed love, betrayed love, and eternal love, loves and losses that have excoriated my thinking since the instant of my death.

I have witnessed death, witnessing corpses dressed for death in shrouds that will never wrinkle, that will come asunder but will never wrinkle, and yet none of these deaths matter now that I am dead. As soon as I think of nothing but death and then think of nothing but my death thoughts of the man I love interrupt me and yet if I had lived instead of died, I might have lost the man I love eventually, that curse, since one after another women have famously or infamously lost the love of the men they have loved – Clytemnestra, Medea, Hera even, Gaia even, Aphrodite even, even Jocasta, though hers is an unusual instance of losing the man she loved, but everywhere here in Hades, everywhere I have looked, women have lost the loves of their lives, have only always lost them, have never not lost them so that no sooner was I dead than I thought of losing Orpheus and of not losing Orpheus because I had died instead. When I

Eurydice

think of the women who have lost the men they have loved, I think of kisses and touches and conjugations inside and outside this and that flesh as they consoled them for the death that such intimacy both thwarts and foresees, but until I was dead among the dead ruined women of the world as I found it, I never thought of deceit and desertion. Love, I have believed till I was dead, dramatizes the desire for an absolute eternal intimacy that endures extinction, one of the conundrums for which eternity is famous, so Cassandra has told me more than once.

Love turns nothing into something till togetherness forms into forever out of confusing pleasure with harmony, confusing harmony with perfection, perfection with destiny, and destiny with truth. Everyone here knows know what I am thinking. They have been there. After falling into love with Orpheus, I could not conceive a future without him and so when I died I despaired, unable or unwilling to discern between the despair of loving with the despair of losing loving and neither of those with the despair of death. At the loss of Orpheus, I knew instantly that my despair would be bottomless, endless and unfathomable, and this was not ponder the reality of my death itself, and so I knew instantly that losing Orpheus would be the irredeemable fact of my existence, of how I would be remembered on the surface of things, of what would be said and sung and played concerning the life of my husband, that he sang and played of his dead

Eurydice

wife till he brought her back from death, after which he sang and played of his resurrected wife, her vivified corpse and the gods to whom he was grateful for undoing nature on behalf of love.

Among the dead there are those aware of death more than others who continue to dread death even though they have already undergone it. Some ask what is next after death and when there is no reply they believe there will be a surprise concerning the next thing that happens, but others despair instantly to realize that this is all there is of an afterlife, and yet even among these only a few fail to grasp that without an eventual death existence would have been unbearable.

Without an end to everything that constitutes all that exists existence would have been as deep a source of despair as love and love has been the unbearable loss of my life, the theme inside of which my death unfolds among solitude, despair and thinking of despair and solitude as a consequence of loving the man I love, loved and will continue to love apparently for eternity.

Now that the end of life spread through my small young beautiful body as venom as a consequence of an attempt to rape me at my wedding by one of the guests, I am persuaded that I have been driven to die so as to abbreviate my existence and now that I am dead I think of the men who have abbreviated it. Lingered in the despair of my final solitude I am persuaded that I fell into love to be ruined by love, and so eternity forms while I suffer the memory of being ruined by love, that eternity embraces ruined love as firmly as love embraced me before I died

Eurydice

from a snake in the grass, unless eternity is still more cruel so that eternity consists in suffering ruined love till I yearn to fall into love again, even after the end of all human time suffering the yearning for the fall into love despite the slaughter in the slaughterhouse love makes not only of love, but of the desire to fall into it.

I think only of my husband until I cannot bear to think of him and then I remember him instead till I cannot bear the memory and then I miss him instead till I cannot bear to miss him and then I cannot wait to see him again and then I see him as he is, where now that I am dead he does not belong as he has belonged here when it is winter and the world's vegetation is brown and dead and dug up and turned over, here where he hibernates like a bear with Persephone till the solstice, the green one rather than the brown one, but he has no beloved here in the winter, no great love of his life become only a shade of herself, neither dressed nor not. The world is not only everything in it but everything missing from it. I am missing from it and now my husband is missing from it, and so there might as well be no world. Eurydice wants her breast on your lips, I murmured to Orpheus after he kissed me on the beach below a moon as round and full as my heart and the breast I offered. I loved Orpheus the instant he sang and played and so I offered myself to him, but Apollo demanded a wedding first, a celebration less of our love than of his matchmaking, and so I feared Apollo as much as I loved Orpheus. I love and loved

Eurydice

Orpheus as I could not have loved others not only because Apollo ordained it, as Zeus ordained Apollo to ordain it, but only Orpheus did not take me as he could have, as all, absolutely all, of his mates did and would have, and so instantly Orpheus pervaded my existence as the lover who did not need to take a woman by force or to barter for her or to buy her from her family, no, since he persuaded me to love him by his song that soothed me and mine and all in our surround. That is why I offered him my body and why he did not take it, and now he never would.

As soon as I was dead, I shamelessly suffered the absence of Orpheus, confessing to Cassandra that the shame would outlive me on the surface of things since that is the song of my death my husband will sing. Now that I was dead my husband would hear of my suffering in the sound of his voice and he would conceal the sound of my voice, a voice too painful for him to share with the world of the living. As for idlers and malingerers who gather to my husband's side to hear of his woe, they would hear of my suffering more in their own voices than even my husband's voice since each of them suffers lost love, since to love is always to lose love whether in life or in death, for love is always already lost. The voice of my husband reciting the throes of my death mourns me even as in the undertow I mourn the loss of the man I loved on the surface of things, as if we have both died or as if neither of us has died, as if I will go on and on mourning in a voice hidden within me before birth, a voice that has lingered among millions of

Eurydice

women's voices that interrupt my lamentations with memories and visitations of their own, and who can blame them?

When I am not beset by the voice of mourning inside myself, I am beset by the voice of the man I love, beset less by his voice at the onslaught of love than beset by it now that I have been slaughtered. The voice of the man I love I hear from a distance now farther and farther away as I fall farther and farther back since his is the voice of a man broken by grief and I cannot bear to hear it. When I hear it and I think of life on the surface of things, I think that is the only voice he will ever use, that of mourning, melancholy and the terrible burden of bearing them.

My husband lost his voice in the undertow, forgot the song of songs he played and sang when we fell into love, remembers only the ode to death he has sung and played to quiet death and his and her minions, suffering by every note the loss of the woman he loves, she whom he is retrieving, if retrieve is the word. It disturbs my death to hear my husband's mournful tones over and over, the noise professing irrepressible impulses and unspeakable urges before lifting pitch, timbre and register to confess their antipathy toward what I have become, becoming it on our wedding day. I barely speak to the back of his head, so far off has he gone. To whom does he sing or speak now that I am languishing?

Eurydice

I identify the voice of the man I love as it vilifies me and curses the mistaken identity by which he fell into love with me. It is the voice of misunderstanding and confusion I hear from him in the distance, of a man misunderstood worst when he most believes he is not, the voice I hear and will hear inside my eternal thoughts not as the sound of one man wailing but as a chorus that hectors and bemoans inside both my ears where I hear as if goddesses are chanting as they chanted night after night when I tended my elm, chanting morning, night and noon while I dwelt inside, on and under my elm year after year because neither tree nor I could imagine life without each other. If I imagined it, life was a wasteland.

All that remains of existence is the memory clinging to my skin of my husband's touch that created disaster, invited disaster or emboldened disaster, and so I have endured disaster to become immortal, unless I am comatose, dreaming or the Lazarus in his shroud of which Cassandra has spoken more often than I would like to hear of it. Not everything has been disastrous but what has not ended in disaster has borne no fruit that was not hanging from my tree, bearing instead anguish, despair and the solitude to undergo them. I think now that I daily witnessed the slaughter of the sun by the moon or the moon by the sun while overhearing the voice of grief within me because my existence was already ending, a voice that rose in me when I fell into love, love whose fears speak of the death of love to come. It is the voice of

Eurydice

lamentation, the same mournful voice that spoke for me as the man I love stood shielding his gaze from my gaze in the heart of the undertow before we began our ascent to the surface of things.

When I sense the man I love in the man who walks farther and farther ahead of me, I sense the sight of him before he descended, the sound of him before he descended and the touch of him before, a touch that suddenly seems blasphemous even among our gods who do not even worship or respect each other. Now that I am dead and Orpheus is here among the dead those are the senses I remember unless anguish is one of the senses since I cannot forget anguish. When I consider sight I see him I have touched and I hear sounds my touch invited after which I sense the touch of him that now seems impossible to have felt since there remains of me no flesh to massage or rub or entice, nothing to remind either of us that once I was as human as my husband.

I remember his lips on mine and the smell of his skin, and I remember the ears into which I whispered as he remembers my ears into which he whispered, but these are senses in memory only that gather lost sensations to make death an eternity of senseless yearning and grief. I suffer lost sensation now that I am dead, and yet I am afflicted by the memory of sense, mercilessly and relentlessly unable to forget love, loss and despair as if the memory of them interrupts my death after which love, loss, despair, and death itself will lie beyond interruption,

Eurydice

and then that will be eternity. With thoughts of hope comes dread since the more I summon them the more the man I love distances me, or I distance him, but this is the undertow where there are no excuses, no delusions and nothing but disappointment and despair as a consequence.

I have failed at existence, and my husband has failed at becoming dead, and so each of us failed the other even though neither of us has only failed, and yet what other than fail we did I do not know, and under the circumstance am not likely to know. If he loved me as much as he told Apollo he loved me, why does he still live? So Cassandra wondered while awaiting his descent.

When Orpheus told me that he loved me for who I was, I felt loved for who I was even if I did not know who I was, or if Orpheus knew who I was that I did not know how did he know it other than by divine intervention. I tended one elm tree in my life, and that is all I did, and yet when Orpheus kissed me and I offered him my breast, I did so persuaded that he knew me better than I knew myself since he drew from me my darkest desires, some would say depravities because we kissed and rubbed skin to skin on the beach in the moonlight after midnight – how else do humans find undying love and eternal harmony?

Eurydice

Was Jokasta guilty for every death in Thebes? Was Helen guilty for every death in Troy? Was Penelope guilty for every death in Ithaca? Will I be guilty for every death in Thrace? Will I be guilty of my husband's murder and dismemberment?

Assaulted by a lesser god on the day I was wed, poisoned unto death by a serpent sent by one or another god either to spare me or dispatch me to the undertow, I died not yet raped, barely married, virginal beyond marriage, motherhood and old age, left with love a fading memory for its dreadful outcome, nothing to the undertow for me but longing for the never had, facing an eternity of yearning for the never was, suffering eternal sadness over nothing to hold in the mind, nothing worth remembering forever and ever, not a night to cohabit with my husband, born and died pure as sunlight instead but for the bite of the glistening viper where my tail would have been had I been born a lizard.

Philoctetes too was snake bit, he on his way to war, in Aulis, the Trojan one, but he did not die, no, he lived seven years in a cave on an island and sailed to Troy after Odysseus retrieved him because the gods willed it that only Philoctetes could kill Paris to end the war to end all wars, and so he died fulfilling his destiny while it is my destiny not fulfill my destiny, all nature to be overthrown not by my death, no, but by my resurrection at the hands of Orpheus, Apollo and Zeus, making the corpse live again. In my husband's grief and unrequited lust, he

Eurydice

stilled all Hades as he stilled all nature when it suited him or the gods lesser and greater. He soothed seas for war, silenced snapping limbs, calmed thunder and dulled lightning, all in all turning human beings into their best selves, dragging out of them the divine within that wrote the world large. Then I came along.

His thoughts I thought I knew and there were thoughts I thought I thought while I continued to think that he could not think without thinking of me because the sensations we shared were sensations that made his the flesh of my flesh, even though we consummated nothing. He may not regret his existence as I do mine, regretting not existence qua existence as I do mine, but he will regret that I am dead and he remains mired in urges and impulses about the end of the world, mired in the darkest desire to span the abyss of otherness by remaining inside and outside each other's flesh day in day whether we are dead or we are not. While I am convinced that my husband loves me and only me, I am persuaded that he loved me more after I died than before, as if I had deserted him since he found the loss unbearable, and yet I bore it, bearing yearning, despair and the solitude in which to suffer them not only because I thought of them during what would have been day in day out if I was alive but because I could not cease thinking of them. Now that I am as dead as dead gets I am persuaded that while I loved the man

Eurydice

with whom I fell into love I am more myself absent from him than when he was present to me since I did not think of him as a man to quicken the dead. Sad, is it not?

Now that I am dead and my husband waits at the mouth of the undertow, where the light of day brightens the sky and the beings under it, and the birds in it, all that has come to be called the world therefore, my suffering comes to an end even as the absence of the man I love will not end, no, and the world will not end, and Hades will not end either. Since love has been punishing, it has spared me indifferent fate. I have been punished and I have been spared indifference -- what more can I expect of love now that I am dead? I dreaded the worst from the onslaught of love without knowing what the worst might be, and now that the worst arrived when the man I loved came to rescue me that became the worst even though I could not have imagined in life that death would not be the worst next thing to happen. Here nothing rises, but also nothing sets, nothing breathes but my husband huffing his way back to the world where in his own gruesome death he will be no more the singer but the sung, worshipped wherever the world persists, his cloak and hair and cythere shown from Egypt to China while his divine interventions by music into the lives of living beings will create numbers, religion, philosophy, poetry, and prayer in every language that is not dead.

Eurydice

Look at me, I said quietly at first, calmly so as not to alarm Orpheus, but he did not turn, instead played his instrument, humming the hymn to death he had not played at our wedding, playing it now here to put death to sleep. And so I described to the back of his head the assault in the woods that killed me, how the lesser god pulled me to the ground by my hair the color of tree bark, laid me out against nutgrass, tore my tunic, bit my breast, hiked my legs above my shoulders so as to display the innermost of me, licked my innermost with a mouth breathing cheese, unsheathed the phallus of a lesser god that was nonetheless a god's phallus, massaged it till it grew as great as a horse's pizzle, and then, only then, parted the lower lips of me so as to ravage my virginity like any other god, Olympian or not. Look at me, I cried out in the voice of all the outraged violated women I had heard in the undertow among the raped and murdered and enslaved, the children of incest who committed incest, these among the great famous and infamous mortals that singers like my husband would sing of for thousands of years. And so it was that Orpheus forgot himself, lulled himself by his song into disobeying his god, horrified by his wife's tale of woe and death into turning to face her so that no sooner did our eyes meet than he vanished, even though to him I did the disappearing, he to the sunny surface of things of the world so as to preach, sing and be murdered and I to the dark chaos below, there to be as dead as

Eurydice

dead gets forever and ever once and for all, another shade among the shades of the donkeys for love, all dead because of the because of love.

I sang my refusal to return to life in the world as I found it, revolting not against the man I love but against the god he loved more and the god who ruled the god he loved more, gods of that ilk who blessed some and cursed others, blessing my husband before cursing him, then blessing him again after death, though he never came here, no, because his body had been disassembled in death, yes, but while the head lived in Lesvos to prophesy the death of the gods his cythere, made from the back of a tortoise, traveled with Terpander to Egypt, played there by Thamirys and after Thamirys played by Linus who had taught Herakles to play while Herakles had taught Amplion to play, the same Amplion who built the walls around Thebes with seven gates to it, each gate for each string of the Orphic cythere that traveled from Thrace to Lesvos to Egypt to Thebes and then to Olympus, where all the gods played it, none as well as Orpheus, so Cassandra told me while we waited for my husband to rescue me from myself.

EURYDICE

Look back at me, like you deep

down want to, Orpheus,

see me and set yourself free

to embrace your destiny

which is not my virginity

but your martyrdom —dom, dom—

and leave me my eternal sanity

— oh I am at home

in the underworld —

and do not console me with

your daily chirpy bops,

your narc lovebombing,

your coy rhymes, your boyish boasts

about the hollowness of fame,

Eurydice

the burden of your hypermasculinity,
spare me the Greek melodrama,
do not sext me any more clips of you
playing your homemade cythar,
which is neither sitar nor guitar
but the due instrument of your doom,
because your fingers will always reach
just below the truth, Orpheus.

So, O, let me go.

ORPHEUS

In death you are the infinite
eternal, my exquisitely immune

Love.

EURYDICE

My goddesses who dream of eating their gods,
come to my aid and break him

into as many pieces as
his lies and excuses to me have been
—stupor is his main juice, his bread and butter—
as many as his fits of uncalled for jealousy
and his drama feeds have been,
oh God, and we haven't even fucked yet,
please I beg of you, goddesses, touch this man
who is so touched by Apollo
that he inspires everyone alive
without being inspired himself,
this Mozart of antiquity, this superstar
suffering artist who dumps
his loneliness on me,
who loves to study his effect on his audience,
many of whom believe he has created the Gods,
who inspires everyone else's emotions
while his sole emotion is inspired by me and mine,

in this flesh that I am in, please believe me,

he just wants to get laid.

THE SPHINX

Orpheus inherited his divination of the soul
tools from Egyptians who, thousands of years ago,
from Babylonians who, thousands of years ago,
invented the sum zero just to be able to count
to the number one.

PYRRHA

Picture the scene: Eurydice
mopping clean the scraped-skin floor
with a horsehair brush, round a paltry cether player
who strings layers of salt scribed with semen
into a cyther;
twenty hundred open music scrolls
mark the words: honest, beloved;

bending over in the kitchen, she sees him
in the looking-glass and waves;
his answer a sudden swelling of his heavy lids
into something akin to plaster;
Pygmalion? she calls to him.

She breathes harder
struggling to free herself from her want
for devotion, and walks out, stage left,
dropping in her haste a wet skull
she was using as bucket
of the type the natives use for a pot;
feeling her own strings yanked,
she glances back for his watchful
eyes resembling frozen iridescent cum
arrows in the night; she breaks
into tears then because, without her scrolls,
she can no longer recall.

PERSEPHONE

I came here from my garden

in the abandoned quarries.

I will let you see Her, hear

the rustling of her resurrecting sinews

and her bone structure rattle

through the forest of souls and frost.

I will show you the raging heroes,

the blind cherubs,

the dishonored anthropophagi,

the green babies stuffed in bottles,

the piled holy skulls,

the midwives and witches

who call the mind a heavy jewel

and hang from the ground up like bats,

past the intricate web of the silence

of grave-robbers,

needle-makers, fire-circlers,
past the ruins and traces of souls
who only show themselves
in a well-remembered odor of rot
like when I was a virgin
and was raped
by the Barbarians
who come at our gates till the time of rupture.

I will give you the woman I envy,
so you can lead her and lunge at her
under my hungry godly gaze.

MEDEA

I came from a far and foreign home
to the Aegean-spewed sands.
I felt pairs of eyes made of onyx
dance on my exoticized body
all day long, until every night

the numbness in me was complete
and I burned his bride and his kids.

Those who die,

die with the sun, Jason.

From within our common sacrifice,
the Phoenix only survives in its passion

that makes the stems of water flowers

tremble with eager youth

and sends every moon to revive

the nightly colors

with the demand that they laugh

when life smells of heavy sweat

from rusty glowing men in heat

and of the red jasmine and excited lilies

that grow out of the shipwrecked seaweed.

Every dusk a green and orange peacock comes

when I am no longer the frugal mother,

when I am my dusty lost homeland,

where, without sounds,

the church bells

whip the sky still,

and without water, the sharp light resounds

in everyone's actions

as Orpheus moves deeper inside Himself

with a definite loss for words

on His face

and as his music measures the sacrifice

of His sacral flesh

•

hero and gravedigger become one -

as He sings out loud:

In the middle of the dead woman and the dead man

opens a black magnetic hole

through which

boys and girls

will go back and forth

forever.

PHAEDRA

Words destroy what's in here

but it's all we have

because by the end of the story

anyone's touch

is impossible for anyone else,

and the objects are only objects,

nothing weightless;

history is not intelligent:

we play in a world that's kept together

with a wet slippery string,

knowing we can never escape

because details are only metaphors.

The other minute a boy fell

from the sky, for example,
just the moment I found
a man's black hair in my underwear,
a memory of my carnal brutalization.
when I was forced to lie down and be his street.

We live in these ruins,
and worship a castrated hero,
saggy and breathless and torn.

We live in language
as we actually live:
in a fallen world.

Some of us want to die up.

PHILOMENE

His song will take us to see the rising sky
the twelve thousand windmills of the plateau
the seven nibbling elohim intangibly tempted
the girls on the conveyor belts who watch

their dead friends behind the glass partitions
wear hard hats with small red lights on
as they are pulled to be rung up.

ANDROMACHE

If I was a nightingale in the oak
fed pomegranate by the prophets
who wouldn't look in any eye past the sun,

no dazzling bolt would be
hurled down on me like a lesser

Ariadne but now,
forgotten by the forgotten,

I have become
a stone being thrown.

A stone too light to kill you
when it hits you. Long ago Mama said:

No one can see a woman's life
before her death.

EURYDICE

Was I his amulet?

if I were only walking slowly

against the Aegean sea breeze,

remembering the purl of the waves on the pebbles

was I his blunted weapon?

CASSANDRA

Was the stone of Moses' tablets

the nymph turned to stone

the stone under Iphigenia's neck

the stone chasing Orpheus

when he first kissed a girl

named Eurydice

on the hills of Lesbos

until he found refuge in a chapel

made of pumice which is a stone

pretending to be stone,
and was it set in my wedding ring?

ELECTRA

The seagulls mate on the rock
the girls in blue school-uniforms
with round white collars
bend over in the light-blue forest
and rock back and forth,
"Come and rape me!"
before the setting of the sun
love is a scarlet bird
caged inside the adorant's torso
but at night it becomes
a field of swaying boys
lusting for
the most unreasonable devotion and hate,
the clearest knifley love

the nights can take,
shining black scarabs studded with silver.

EURYCLEIA

I sucked my nursemaid's milk
through the words "Take revenge

on Kronos"

tattooed on her nips

but I misread "Chronos"

and instead of killing god

I have been killing time;

how early I was deceived.

CIRCE

The stone that you throw and don't see it fall

becomes a bird and disappears.

The stone on which the hunted stumbles

and laughs

at the irony.

The stone on which the hunter stumbles

and becomes the hunted.

CALLIOPE

Eurydice has quiet cliffs in her eyes

of lit ember which reflected

the sainted souls who dance

for St John the female

through the midsummer fires

waiting for an unmarried maiden

who has to be called Mary

to leap over the cinders

into the treasure jars

and grasp the fortune

that would be our future.

The women wore red and white threads

around their middle fingers

to enchant the sun of March
and their bodies, painted gold,
shivered as they passed
in and out of the flames
whose sensual dancing light
twinkled in her eyes as she listened
to His voice that turned
the living into open graves
and held the world between two opposite
parentheses
(‘the essence of objects more real
than the objects,’ O sang).
He crystallized Nothingness with every word,
He marked the beginnings of the end
with every purple verbal arc.
He could hear her deep inner laugh
that echoed in every pebblestone

Eurydice

in the empty streets under her feet
(‘Wife, I say unto you that the source
of names comes from within,’ He sang)
as Eurydice smiled at the thought
that no one can tell which face is the moon,
which the woman.

PASIPHAE

I will gather secretions from eager girl glands
steamed on these rigid rocks by the sun
and I will give you silver scissors,
which the Cretans place piously
every March as is their custom
under the pillows of young women
for fertility.

We will use them to cut the cords -
the silver umbilical cords
you will be lacing

the stone bodies together with.

CALLISTHENE

Medea's womb breaks,

and reveals itself

not as a frothy sea glimpsed at night

through a breach in a whitewashed wall,

but as a thick black juice

dripping from her leaky innards.

That is the inky fluid

that men use to record their history.

SAPPHO

Men call this history?

They just don't know

how to keep a woman.

HELEN

Blue girls like Eurydice rise

up the frothy river at dawn
and at dusk hear the heart
that beats under the land
and thinks it's Purgatorium,
while I roll, out of breath,
silver-coated with sperm,
inside an anonymous boy's dreams.
No wonder men are scared of us.

ERANNA

Herein lies

the infernal secret:

Sense is made in the mouth

like so much saliva.

MEDEA

You out of my body is the miracle -

of love. Everything else

is the bloody vengeance with which
men makes us devour our children.

PHILA

My mother Stratonice moved to the East
of the empire when she married Antiochus I,
her father's son and her co-ruler.
When my father Antiochus succeeded
her father, my mother arranged
for me to marry her uncle Antigonus,
who had become the new ruler of Macedonia,
and my marriage allowed my father Antiochus
to surrender all claim to Macedonia.
We stayed married for 37 years
until Antigonus died and my son
Demetrius became ruler of Macedonia
and married Stratonice
who was my half sister and niece,

Eurydice

and drank and womanized
and formed an alliance with Ptolemy's son
in Egypt, divorced his wife
and married Eurydice, the daughter of
Eurydice
who had married Ptolemy I Soter
who was the fourth or fifth
Eurydice to rule Macedonia,
starting with Eurydice, mother of Philip
grandmother of Alexander the Great and of Cleopatra.

Like the earlier Eurydices,

she liked power.

EURYDICE

And all these centuries I thought

I was only a mute wood nymph

of unknown lineage

on the verge of dying.

OLYMPIAS

Eurydice is the name of a woman

born to experience turns of fortune.

I raised an army against one Eurydice once.

She was my stepdaughter

Who on the day Alexander died

married Philip Arrhidaeus,

son of Philip II, Macedonia's king,

and made herself

Macedonia's ruler,

along with Alexander's infant son

Born in Persia.

I imprisoned that Eurydice.

I sent her a noose in jail, a sword,

and a cup of hemlock

and ordered her to die.

Eurydice

Eurydice damned me to die within

the year before

she hanged herself

with the silk straps of her blue gown.

She had not reached 20 when she died

in the year 317.

In 316 her ally Cassander had me murdered.

He gave Eurydice

a belated royal burial at Aegae.

THEOXENA

The next Eurydice inflamed the troops

against Antipater. But Eurydice, daughter of

Antipater, who claimed Alexander's empire

in 323 by marrying his three daughters to Alexander's three

Generals, fought the next Eurydice in battle.

Eurydice had married Ptolemy I,

who ruled Egypt, and bore him four children.

Eurydice

When Ptolemy left her for her young cousin,

Eurydice never remarried

and moved to Miletus, across the straits

from Lesbos, where she was honored

with an annual festival

called Eurydicea.

THESSALONICE

Don't even get me started

with the Eurydices.

They all fought and killed and died

for Macedonia's throne

Without them, we might not be now

digitally connected globalists.

CHLOE

Your push and shove and cry,

your running blind back and forth

between birth and suicide,
your drunken siren song,
won't absolve your original sin,
won't solve your original crime,
so long as the life-ends-in-death law
cannot be broken.

MEROPE

From tit to tit to tit
a rousing trilogy
of healing consistency.

POLYXENIA

Was Menelaus one of the suitors of Helen?
Was Agamemnon one of the suitors of Helen?
Was Ajax one of the suitors of Helen?
Was Ajax the Lesser one of the suitors of Helen?
Was Odysseus? Was Patroclus?

Was Phemius? Was Megistus? Was Phemes?

THEMIS

And so we can no longer trust

words to express what the organ

that utters them

desires.

EURYDICE

Wait,

wasn't Orpheus one

of the suitors of Helen? \

HELEN

Yes. I only learned

to say Yes.

MINTHE

And if it wasn't death, another cause

would have given you struggle.

Because youth, like the sea,

boils up all by itself.

PSYCHE

In ecstasy, we become

first golden bolts

hurled down by the gods

at the world, then stones

ardently being thrown

at a sacred scapegoat.

EURYDICE

Speaking of scapegoats,

I loved him.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Iphigenia, willingly slaughtered

for a fair wind

toward Troy in Aulis,

was tricked not by love--
for Achilles, Paris, Agamemnon,
or any mortal war-ravaged man--
but by - for the lack of a better word -

her fate.

She was born to marry
some hero. Her father said

he asked her.

What woman willingly

gives her consent

to marriage?

PANDORA

Every night

the owl's hoot

springs out of

my left wrist.

HELEN

Was Jokasta guilty for every death

in Thebes?

Was Penelope guilty for every death

in Ithaca?

Was Helen guilty for every death

in Troy?

Was Iphigenia guilty for every death

in Thrace?

EURYDICE

Not the maenads'.

Not Orpheus's.

SAPPHO

When will you stop believing

that it could be any different?

GYRINNO

Eurydice

Was Orpheus of Assyrian

Babylonian Kassite Hittite

Accadian Summerian Hamite

or Hebrew descent? All cultures claim him

to this day.

EURYDICE

My psyche is a Greek chorus.

PSYCHE

Death takes you

just like a lover

by the womb

where Zeus' sperms swirl up

like drunken silver boats

on nights when your hands

smell of pussy juice and tobacco

and you like to lick them.

EURYDICE

In the beginning was Orpheus.

Not Logos, but Tonos. Orpheus.

Long before Yahweh, Orpheus
made sense of the wind, the waves,
the stars, the leaves, the flowers,
the living creatures of night and day.

I Am

is the shortest sentence
in every language. In some,
a single word. Even 'I am'

came long after

Orpheus.

THE HEAD OF ORPHEUS

Women of Lesbos,

put a wreath (stephanus)

on my severed head (cephalus)

I never believed in words,

just in music, and yet now

I am dying,

Lesbos,

I am dying.