

# Idylls

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The Idylls is about ghosts.

The form owes itself to Theocritus, who pioneered the literary genre in 3rd-century BCE Sicily. His idylls were fragments of agrarian life—goatherds, rival singers, the rough textures and small dramas of the countryside. Quiet, earthy, often mournful.

To him I owe the form. And only spiritually, the content. Most of these are reimaginings – adaptations in a different key. Where he had the pastoral, I have the post-modern. His hills are my boroughs.

We differ geographically. These idylls are about New York City.

They're about some of my friends. Or versions of them. Or strangers I've invented as I walk past them on the street, or long to know them. They're attempts to grasp at a version of the city I always dreamed of but never quite found – a city humming with memory and meaning, late-night heartbreaks and overheard monologues, half-finished songs and subway revelations.

A city full of ghosts, and the people who try to love them.



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## Idyll I

"Funny seeing you here"  
Ted lumbers over the terraced steps  
Stops and drops onto one knee  
Undoing the clasps of his guitar case,  
"Ah, look, the man with the blue guitar,"  
Says the busker,  
"Play us a tune beyond ourselves',  
I'm done for the day,  
And it's not my usual spot anyway."  
Shutting the saxophone case with a stomp.

Ted sits down on the worn park bench  
The August afternoon fading into Autumn evening  
"What do you want to hear?"  
The busker –  
"Whatever happened to Danny?  
Haven't seen him around  
The last few weeks.  
His spot over there,  
By the obelisk,  
You know –"  
"Yeah,"  
Ted sucked his teeth,  
"He, uhh,"  
His capo in his left hand

He caps the neck on the fifth fret  
"He overdosed."  
A bird chirps on a branch overhead  
"Huh. Jesus."  
The busker straightens up  
Sobered up by the news  
"Huh."  
A narrowed look  
A little more somber, this time  
"He was young."  
"Yep."  
A couple of joggers pass by  
Skimming the tension off the conversation  
The clock on the skyline of 14th street  
A digital plexus, ticks away  
Somewhere down Broadway the sun is sinking  
"Sing something for him, then,"  
Ted wipes his brow with the back of his hand  
Loosens up  
Begins to strum  
Something hollow  
Something hallow  
A melody somewhere distant  
Like a face or name you see in passing  
Tapping his foot  
Keeping time  
Humming beneath his breath

"There was this one song  
Danny was working on  
Back in May  
'I'll be done by the end of the summer,'  
He said  
You remember that riff?"  
The busker's eyes draw the vacant space by the obelisk,  
"D minor..  
B flat..  
F–  
something like that,"  
"He said he'd put lyrics to it  
It had that – that –"  
He picks the strings with his right hand  
As his left slides up and down the neck  
"Yeah, it did,"  
"And it was about that girl,  
Brunette, 5'2",  
Cooper Union MFA –  
He'd watch her walk down Broadway,  
Day in, day out  
Back up, take the L to Brooklyn –  
what was her name?"  
The busker squints, imagining her silhouette  
In the distance,  
"Faye?"



## Idyll II

Faye pinches the phone between her ear  
And the crook of her neck,  
"Did I tell you I tried to hire an Etsy witch?"  
An uncomfortable laugh on the other line,  
"Like, a witch off of Etsy?"  
– "Ya."  
A little incredulous, with a hint of gravity –  
"Huh."  
A drawn out inhale –  
"Did it work?"  
– "You know, I saw the price,  
And I thought:  
'Fuck it, we'll do it live.'"

\*

Faye scrolls down the page,  
A heading  
"Binding Spell to Get Back Your Ex"  
On Pinterest  
The text  
Advises working within the planetary hours  
When the moon waxes  
When it is full  
Venus well-aspected  
Pluto in transit

"On a piece of paper  
Write a letter  
Address it to yourself  
Put on the voice of  
The one who left  
Say all of the things they would say  
Were they in the room with you  
Say they're sorry, say they're sad  
Say the words that bind them to you."

Faye digs through her backpack for a Muji pen  
And an unchristened moleskine.  
She musters most of her concentration  
On the page (not very much)  
In her mind's eye, Aidan, there  
In front of her  
Standing  
His arms hang limp at his sides  
In his clueless way of carrying himself  
"Hey, Faye.  
I'm really sorry."  
Aidan (a Sagittarius, Faye, a Pisces)  
Even in her mind  
Was never very eloquent –  
"I didn't mean to hurt you when I said, like,  
You should move to Brooklyn

Get a better job  
Stop being so stuck on your family  
Like, I really need someone who's mature  
Like, career-oriented (he has a finance job),  
Wears more make-up  
Like, you really let yourself go  
But I love you  
And I want to come back  
And make this work."

She gets up, letter in hand, bisects the room and  
Sitting across from the shell of herself she reads  
A deluded, hopeless confession aloud  
In an alto, slightly caricatured  
San Diego vocal fry –  
"Hey, Faye,  
I'm really sorry,  
I didn't mean to hurt you..."  
It is, suddenly, all too human  
And like that Faye begins to sob  
Robbed of her years, dazed,  
Wounded,  
Sifting simultaneously through the words  
Looking for something to make worthwhile  
The tit-for-tat months-long death knell  
She never knew was unfolding  
And every other sentence she chokes up on

The geometry of his face  
The melody of his voice  
And at once she is a beam of light shining through  
The surface of  
A pail of water shaken through  
Splashing this way, that way  
Pale in the face of  
His glowing apparition  
She overflows

And all at once  
She is composed  
Stuffs herself back in at the seams  
Douses the letter with  
The cologne he bought before he left  
She gets up, goes over to the kitchen window where the fire escape is  
Climbs out and sits atop the rusting skyline  
Of the November evening  
Sparks a lighter  
Lights the corner of the letter  
Aflame in the electric-glow evening of BedStuy  
Watching in a remorseful panic  
As it burns all the way down  
A molten blossom  
To the sidewalk below

There is a long pause on the phone –

"Faye? Did it work?"

A blue note

– "Not exactly."

### Idyll III

The phone rings out  
As he walks along the Brooklyn Bridge  
Below the East River shimmers  
And kicks up petulant waves beneath  
The lone light of the moon above  
A beep  
"Hey, Amara!  
I was just calling to, uhh..."  
He tugs the collar of his coat up  
Looks down at the water  
Shoves his hands deeper into  
His pockets as if  
To fish out –  
"Call me back!"

\*

He walks along MacDougal Street  
Leaving behind the long-stretched shadow  
Of the arch in Washington Square  
That supports the weight of the sky  
The heat breaks as the sun  
Abandons its aestival course  
He dials her number  
It rings

And rings  
And rings  
And  
A beep –  
"Amara, hey...  
Listen.  
Can we talk?  
I haven't heard from you in weeks  
And I keep  
Thinking like we didn't really get  
The chance  
To talk about us..."  
He pauses  
"All you had to do was say the word  
If you'd said  
Something  
At least  
Then I'd understand  
Like all you had to say  
That night in Washington Square was  
'Hey,  
I'm not in a place  
Where I can give you what you want  
Or really what you need  
I like you  
I like this  
But it's becoming too much for me

Right now  
And I'm not  
Saying 'Never'  
Just 'Not now'  
'Not like this'  
Okay?'  
And it'd be okay  
And I'd be okay..."

He passes Cafe Reggio and sees  
The silhouette of himself and her  
The auburn of her hair  
In a bun as she talks about her time  
Translating Ming Dynasty poetry  
For her MA at Bard

"And I wouldn't be thinking  
'I moved to FiDi to look at fucking  
Spreadsheets bursting with  
Fund umbrellas  
Shareclasses  
Because a girl I met upstate  
Lured me down here  
Into the central circle of  
White-collar Hell  
And then  
Ghosted me"



And she leans in and asks  
"Are you still reading that  
Anne Carson book I got you?  
*'Autobiography of Red'*?  
Or do you not like women  
Who don't think you're smart  
And interesting?"

\*

On the corner of Metropolitan  
He sits on a ledge in the back patio of  
A pool-supply store turned haven to  
Indie musicians who never made it  
Finance-bros who've become sentient  
The odd art student who got lost  
On their way back to the East Village

The crowd surges at 2 AM on a Saturday  
He surveys the room  
And after the fourth or fifth drink  
Amara walks in  
They lock eyes in the tumult  
And he is seen right through  
He doesn't call out  
Doesn't say 'Hello'

But smiles a sheepish half-small  
And looks away

Outside  
As he stumbles away from the bar  
He dials a number  
It rings  
And rings –  
"Hey," he says.  
"Hey?"  
Says a voice  
"What's up?"  
Half-asleep on the other end  
"You good?"  
"Yeah," he says,  
"You were right, Rowan."  
Rowan scoffs  
"You gave it your best shot  
But it's time to let go –  
You owe yourself as much"

## Idyll IV

"It always begins  
And ends  
With long walks  
The kind where you walk  
The length of Central Park  
Or Riverside Drive,"  
Says Danny

"That's right", says Ted  
His guitar case rocks to and fro  
On his back with every step  
"Is this it?"

"I... think... so..."  
Danny, checking his phone  
Squinting into the whitewash blindness  
His pupils the heads of pins

They ascend the steps to the manor house  
Rick greets them at the door  
He is dressed in a white button down  
The felt on the lapel of his suit jacket indicates  
That Ted and Danny are  
Wildly underdressed  
In their black turtlenecks

"Hey, good to see you, man,  
Hey, nice to meet you,  
Come in – there's wine in the back"  
Past the cocktail dresses  
Charcoal suits with no ties  
They shuffle disoriented  
Surrounded by international heirlooms  
"That's a Vermeer,"  
Someone whispers loudly over a pinot noir  
They smear the marble floors of the kitchen  
With the cuffs of their grass-bleached khakis

"Red or white?" Asks the waiter  
"Wh-red..." fumbles Danny  
Ted asks if the vintage is from southern France  
"It's from Northern Spain"  
"Oh"  
They both begin drinking for effect  
"Thank you all for coming"

Rick who can cast a spell on a room  
Herds the cats in their midtown suits to their seats  
"Tonight I have here Anna  
She curates  
The Medici stringed instrument collection  
Currently on display  
At the Met  
On loan

From the Uffizi Gallery  
In Florence"

Anna discourses on  
The evolution of stringed instruments  
From the middle ages through  
The Italian Renaissance

"Is that a lute?" whispers Danny  
Following the discourse Rick  
Sits at a baby Grand  
In the center of the room  
Around which are seated  
Students from Juilliard  
Lawyers  
Doctors  
This AI researcher at  
[Big Name Tech Company]  
This guy who is a portfolio manager at  
[Big Name Investment Firm]  
The several Tinder dates he's been on  
That he's been trying to keep apart  
All night  
That guy or this girl whom you recognize  
But are loathe to say the wrong name  
So you linger on questions and wait  
For them to be addressed  
By someone else

"Get this," Danny says in Ted's ear

Danny was once blinded by Rick  
In a TriBeca loft  
When he lay waste  
To the room  
With his performance of Mad Rush  
The long soporific repetition punctuated  
By bursts of airy assonance circles  
Back to delay and relay swirls  
Haste with tedium  
Breathless  
In the light of the evening sun

And now Rick  
No longer blinds  
but curates  
Adjusts the light  
His performance is the room itself  
As he weaves through  
*Venetian Boat Song*  
*Op. 19, No. 6*  
You see yourself looking through  
A slit  
In the wall of  
The Bridge of Sighs  
At the waterfront of  
The Palazzo Ducale

He plays the guests  
Like oscillating arpeggios

Ted watches from the periphery  
Still rocking slightly  
His guitar case creaking  
Like a guilty conscience

Danny has stopped checking his phone  
The battery died hours ago  
So did his hope of  
whatever he was hoping for

In the aftermath of the performance  
The guests linger on the walls  
Like salamanders

"What do you do?"  
"Oh how do you know Rick?"  
"Do you play anything?"  
Ted begins to introduce himself as Rick

The juxtaposition of  
The broke Juilliard student  
And the CEO of a well-known fitness company  
Class disparity in miniscule  
Is overturned  
By her relative finesse on the piano

Chiaroscuro is obscured  
By a common bond  
Of quiet devotion

Restless internal  
To Euterpe  
The Juilliard girl—  
Yes, she plays the closing piece  
A short, clipped étude  
By a forgotten student of Scarlatti  
Which somehow says more  
Than the long lecture  
Or the wine  
Or the Vermeer looking down at you  
Or Rick himself

A pause  
As she lays flat  
The final keys

Then scattered clapping  
Like a breeze that scatters  
Dying leaves  
And then erupts  
Into a whirlwind

"Did you see her hands?"  
Danny says, finally  
"Like spiders. Or angels."



It is long after the performance  
Everyone's collars are unbuttoned  
Ties undone  
Sleeves rolled up  
Empty wine bottles scattered  
Atop the kitchen counters  
Danny is performing smalltalk  
With a waifish cocktail dress  
Mentioning "scordatura"  
As if he knows what that means  
As Ted  
Stares at the shrubs in the garden  
Through puffs of cigarette smoke

There is a knock on the door  
"Rick? Where's Rick?"  
Demands a voice

It is suddenly pandemonium  
As a band of ten or fifteen storm the house  
Led by Alex  
With violets in her hair

"Rick get the fuck out here!"  
They crowd about the drawing room  
And the scene collapses in on itself  
As they laugh and cajole about the tables

And the late hours are consumed  
By foment and argument  
And sudden riffing off  
Each others lines or notes  
As they play and sing and yell

Someone spills wine on the Vermeer  
(Which is fine  
It wasn't real anyway)

Alex kicks off her shoes  
And lobs Ted's guitar  
Into someone's lap

"Play something real," she says  
"None of this 'classical' shit."  
She kisses one of Rick's exes  
Someone cheers  
Rick appears, finally  
The spell broken  
Shirt half-unbuttoned  
Barefoot like a penitent  
The Juilliard girl is on the floor now  
Playing something feral on the violin  
Her bow splitting in the fray

Someone knocks over a table  
Shatters a vase  
Rick is unfazed

All the tidy distinctions—  
Artist and patron  
Host and guest  
Performer and observer—  
Collapse in crescendo

And for a moment  
The night is tuned  
In perfect scordatura

\*

Back on Riverside Drive  
The sky is a lavender blended  
With streaks of gold  
The air is crisp as it folds  
The grass in sheets  
They walk  
Along the Hudson  
Watch the water run downstream  
Past the morning dog walkers

"It always begins  
And ends

With long walks..."

Says Danny

## Idyll VI

*"Your eyes are as  
The brackish waters  
Of Cefalu  
Beneath your gaze  
Green fear seizes me"*

She reads  
Almost turns green herself  
Not with fear but from  
The second-hand embarrassment of  
The naive audacity inhabiting  
Her hopeless amator –  
Amateur poet that he is:

*"Yours, yours, yours,  
Polyphemus"*

"Cefalu," she scoffs  
They went to Rockaway once –  
He got sunburned on the boardwalk  
And whined the whole way back

Her cursor lingers on the screen  
She clicks below the body and writes:

"You loved a girl who never existed.  
Sometimes I miss her."

The cursor blinks  
She lingers there, for a second,  
Trying to recall a line he wrote once  
Then spills out

"Your prettiest remorse,  
Galatea"

She hits 'Send'  
Imagining him  
White-collared  
Maybe shirtless  
Untrimmed in grey  
Sweltering in an aging co-op  
Romanticising Werther  
Retaliating Theocritus  
At thirty-seven

Outside her window the N train  
Rumbles into the station

There was a time when she lived  
On 48th and Broadway  
A few blocks away from Schoenfeld theatre

Wishful thinking in hindsight  
She got her break  
On an off-Broadway production of  
*The Last Five Years*  
(Not that it ever belonged on-Broadway)  
Cathy, of course  
Of course, Cathy  
Manic hope in a whiny vessel Cathy  
Spiral-bound backwards as she sings  
The audience falls in love with  
An image of her  
A story that only makes sense in hindsight

It's a sad song  
But we still sing it;  
The best stories are not always  
Those that end happily

It happened that  
Outside there was a man with flowers  
And a box of letters addressed to her

They gather dust in the supply closet of  
Her one-bed in Astoria

Over the water by the park hangs  
The Hell's Gate bridge

In summer sometimes she lounges there

In a pink floral dress

And takes her students out to sing

On the green grass seas of the evening



## Idyll VII

I think I might die  
Ascending the orange stairwell  
A pigeon flies into me  
"Jesus fucking Christ!"  
On the side of the overpass  
Down the flow of traffic  
It's just warehouses out here  
With some residential buildings  
A pizzeria  
A deli  
Not a soul in sight save  
The Greenpointers  
Spilling out of their Ubers  
A rusted door swings open  
This must be it

This warehouse is a Silenus statue  
The outside is industrial decay  
On the inside there is the alternate reality of  
The edge-case  
East village  
Not-Dimes-Square  
Greenpoint  
Fantasy for which I had longed  
A band on the first floor

Hypnotic handrums  
Stirrs something ancient in my blood  
Smooth jazz on the second  
The walls of the adjoining rooms are splattered  
With paintings and photographs for sale

Margot finds me in the midst of the din  
Out of place, my hands in my pockets as I sip  
Water from a paper cup  
We lock eyes  
"Hey! It's been a while!"  
I am suddenly at ease  
We catch up  
It *has* been a while

We talk around subjects  
Epitomize the last several months  
I defrost under the red-light lamplight  
I ask to see her work, she ushers me into  
The adjoining room, into the far right corner  
Where four framed photographs are stacked  
"It's titanium palladium."  
"What's that?"

I watch her greet and be greeted by  
Names and faces  
It is nice

*They* are nice  
This poet, that photographer  
Something about the Vietnam War  
I feel like an anthropologist  
I am self-conscious  
But happy to lurk in her orbit  
An unassuming awkward  
I am a cardboard silhouette of myself  
Shake hands  
Smile  
Exchange pleasantries  
Like tokens or  
Micro-transactions

When Nick is there  
I sneak a polaroid of them  
I keep it in my coat pocket  
Watching them is like seeing a negative  
They wear matching beanies

"I feel like I can't really be honest about how I feel at these things."  
We trade existential ennui  
Like men in their thirties  
"Which one do you like?"

A girl looks down a concrete staircase  
A white dress, navy bow around her waist

Her feet feel tacked on  
Two-dimensional  
Stuck on at wrong angles

A blonde in her twenties is gorging herself  
In a Chinatown loft  
Photo-realistic  
About to burst into tears or puke  
I am embarrassed in the third person  
It is spaghetti (he is the spaghetti guy)  
But I am ashamed of being in a body

A woman poses half-naked in a white button down  
She strikes something seductive on the bed of  
A Marriott or generic middle class hotel chain  
There are several schizophrenic  
Talentless pieces which  
I am too bored to describe

"Chaos is the hypokeimenon of existence!"  
I crack  
In my Jordan Peterson voice  
As we three lounge on a couch in the corner  
And peoplewatch for a while

The second floor is a different kind of same  
"The vibe is totally different up here."

Someone's beat up Fender warps  
As a saxophone croons  
And the evanescent patrons mill about  
"This is my wife's first show."  
"Are you an artist?"  
"I work in sales  
But I dabble in watercolour."  
He offers me a hit from his wax pen  
I regret not taking him up on it

After some time we  
Walk to the G  
On Greenpoint Ave  
"I think I'll shuffle on a while"  
We exchange our goodbyes  
I watch them descend the steps to the G  
Back towards civilization  
In the East Village  
Waiting street-level for the fading rumble  
And I then stumble on  
Along Greenpoint Ave  
Greenpoint is a Silenus statue

## Idyll X

8:15 at the WeWork on Varick Street

Milo taps away at his Macbook

Dark mode

Neon lines

Arcane characters

Fill the screen

His headphones clamped around his ears

They block out the world out while he

Churns through his

Spotify playlist

A clap on the shoulder –

Alex.

"Alex, man!"

Milo tugs the headphones off and

Lets them hang around his neck

"Jeez. You look wrecked."

Alex pulls up a chair next to Milo

At the dinner table turned hotdesk

White collar purgatory

They are the only ones in the railroad style

Workspace

The early morning light floods through

The wall to ceiling windows

Alex lifts his laptop out of his (Nomatic) backpack  
Then lets out a sigh beneath his ribs

"Yeah, I was up pretty late.  
I need to get a grip.  
Weekend was shot.  
Client demo's at noon.  
And I have like ten Pull Requests  
I have to review  
Merge  
Maybe rewrite  
Because there's no time for pushback  
And no one seems to get that  
We should have these things called  
'standards'"

Milo baits him  
"Just don't write bugs, man,  
No unit tests  
No documentation  
No containerization  
(Docker scares the shit out of me)  
Hell, all of my code is self-documenting  
Open to interpretation  
Closed for modification  
Close to improvisation  
At least we have a staging site

Not that we need it"

Alex takes it

"You're the reason why we have standards

Someone's going to hate you in five years

Some junior dev

Fresh out of college

When we've had our IPO

Or been acquired by some bigger fish"

Milo snorts

"Then it's Tinder for dog owners"

Turns back to his screen

"Dana okay?"

"She left."

"Shit, what?"

Alex has stopped typing

It is a trickle

He clicks mindlessly through the

Red and green minefield

Of forking paths

"Uhh, yeah,

She left a note



Said it didn't work  
Couldn't work  
Wanted more  
Or something else--  
It's not the first time"

"And if it's the last?"

"She wanted Tuscany  
Not Williamsburg  
Said I'm always here  
Never \*here\*"

"Not Brooklyn Heights?"

"That's not the point--  
It's all WiFi in a shoebox."

"Well, look,  
You never were very good at your job  
Engineer  
Boyfriend..."

"But the code won't ship itself  
So maybe we should build something else  
Two devs and dream, right?"

"Yeah.

And then we sell for forty mill."

## Idyll XI

There is no cure for love, Iakobus--  
No pill nor potion nor oil nor salve,  
Save the Muses,  
But a sweet and gentle cure it is,  
Albeit hard for mortal men to find,  
As you know well, I trow, being a physician,  
Knowing what it is that they know,  
And you being as dear to them as I myself,  
Twas this much my countryman the Cyclops  
Polyphemus gleaned,  
When he was in love with the nymph Galatea,  
Being about the age you are now;  
His love was no matter of poems, or gifts,  
Or apples,  
But an unbridled frenzy--  
He thought little of anything else,  
And time and time again would cast his longing  
Into the sea,  
Neglecting his work at the MTA,  
Which long would sit piled on his desk,  
Amidst gripe and jeer and jest,  
He languished under an irate, bureaucratic glare,  
As long as the slender barb of the Cyprian  
Stood fixed in his breast,  
Though he found a cure eventually,  
And so stood on the on the shore of Battery Park,  
Where the 5 train rests at the edge of the world,

And there alone at the rails above the waters,  
Sang of her some such thing as this:

"O Galatea,  
Girl with springtime eyes,  
As fair as shore to storm-tossed sailors is,  
And cool water in August's heat,  
You, a shining star of this island,  
There will never be another  
maid such as you.

What is it that keeps you from me?  
Whither do you go when the sun sets?  
What drives you forth from my bed?  
I sleep alone in a studio enough for two,  
Off of Broadway and 12th St.,  
When the Pleiades have set, and you  
Nowhere to be seen.

I have loved you, girl, since that first day  
We met for coffee uptown  
at a hole in the wall diner,  
And since that day have never ceased to love—  
O Zeus, what does it matter?

I know why it is you flee.

I've got a long shag brow stretched from ear to ear,  
And one large eye that sits beneath,  
And a broad nose for good measure,  
Upon my lip,  
A limp,  
A wretch,  
But just as I am I make a good salary,  
With benefits to boot,

And have a respectable living,  
Serving the citizens of this city.  
Wealth isn't more, but less, more or less,  
And with what I earn, I make do,  
And of all my needs, natural and necessary,  
Though there are so few,  
What needs have I, really?  
What need have I--save you?  
My garden yields a feast,  
Of table greens and nightshades and legumes,  
My pantry ever overflows,  
My almond milk I make myself,  
My labor feeds me through winter,  
And I've got a few grand saved up,  
For any expense ahead--  
And I play the lyre like none of the other Cyclopes,  
And oftentimes at night I sing of you,  
Sweet apple, and myself,  
But if my singing won't do,  
I'll get us a couple of mezzanine seats,  
For a Broadway musical,  
Any you wish will do--  
One about New York, I hear, is playing,  
And isn't that fitting?

But come away to me and you'll have no less,  
Just come and see what this island can offer--  
Sleeping beneath the starless sky,  
In a room with peeling wallpaper,  
Where the rent is high,  
The expectations higher,

But so will be your fame,  
Prithee, girl, come hither,  
Leave that swamp behind.  
If only some stranger would sail here  
On some black ship,  
With white-splashing oars,  
And teach me how to swim,  
I'd swim to you, then, from here  
Around Brooklyn's bend, Bay Ridge,  
Past Canarsie, and straight to that  
Provincial town of yours  
On stilts over the water.  
It would be faster than the A train, anyway,  
And who takes the Qm15, anyhow?

Ah, κυκλωψ κυκλωψ ποι πεπετασαι τας φρένας?  
Ah, only myself to blame,  
I, here, a noone on land,  
What purpose have I but sunrise and sunset?  
No art, no craft,  
Clock in, clock out;  
I wander this city in a daze,  
Like a wounded deer on slender tracks--  
I get no rest,  
Vexed coming, vexed going,  
The subway rattles along still  
On rusty tracks,  
There is no joy in my life,  
No pleasure in sight or sound,  
And everything a shade of grey,

To this monoptic view.  
If only I were a skilled physician,  
I would treat this raging fever,  
Or a sorcerer,  
I would burn some sage,  
And cast some such spell,  
'Wryneck, wryneck, draw her hither,'  
But what am I  
But a bucolic bore with a desk-job  
And a Muse?  
Cyclops, listen here, Cyclops,  
Can't you see you're daft?  
Don't you know you've got the girl?  
And don't stand in need of the draft,  
Of a fine tail-wind to send you adrift,  
Or the hull of a black ship, stranger-sent,  
To carry you to her,  
There are much stranger things  
To have happened in this city,  
Than to have loved and to have got,  
So waste not a second at the seashore,  
Take a bus or train, ferry even,  
Walk if need be,  
Your love can carry you anywhere,  
Or heaven forbid you drive,  
Contrive something, anything,  
It doesn't matter what,  
You've got your lot, Cyclops."

So it was that Polyphemus consoled his love-sickness,  
In the end,  
By realizing he had the very thing  
He thought he lacked,  
And in truth, he fared better than if he had paid  
A co-pay to some such as yourself,  
Iakobus.



## Idyll XII

### Subway Stromata

[0:00]

"Stand clear of the closing doors, please."

[0:16]

(A man gets on at Fulton st. on the uptown A train)

"This ain't no downtown train

This is an uptown train

We're going uptown

Uptown A-train y'all!"

(A woman gets on at 14th st.)

"Sup?

\*Uptown train\*."

[0:33]

(Guy gets on with a Bluetooth speaker blaring)

"Alright everybody you know

What time it is"

\*

(Turns it off)

\*

"Yo do you know how pissed I would be

If someone got on and starting dancing

Around the fucking subway car"

[0:45]

"If the train's delayed,  
That's just the universe  
Telling you to chill."

[0:53]

"Ladies and gentlemen,  
I'm not here to bother you.  
I'm just a man with socks.  
Clean socks.  
3 for \$5.  
More cushion than your last relationship."

[1:35]

"Support local entrepreneurship.  
That's me.  
I'm the local."

[2:12]

"Y'all women out here  
Manifesting a man  
Like y'all ordering off Seamless."

[2:30]

"The government don't care about you. But I do.  
Here's a mixtape."

[3:00]

"You ain't mad at me,  
You mad at your childhood.  
Don't project that on the F train."

[3:43]

(Woman talking on phone)

"I'm at 125th  
I don't care what time it is  
f you say come over  
I'm on the train."

[4:00]

"Only real New Yorkers  
Puke in yellow cabs"

[4:31]

"Stand clear of the closing doors, please."

## Idyll XIII

It looked like a desolate parking lot  
Save the thin tin-roof shack at street-level  
"Play it cool,  
My friend's DJ-ing."  
The bouncers dig in their usual way  
'Who-are-you-here-to-see',  
'Have-you-ever-been-here-before',  
Adonis is squeamish when sober  
But after a few drinks he forgets  
That he is awkward and timid

He had only just met Hercules  
When Hercules and his friends picked him up  
At a bar in Bushwick  
And what did it matter?

Reagan was busy  
Collaborating with a Pratt professor  
On some personal project  
That didn't require her to answer  
Adonis' texts  
And he was out  
On his own

One drink became two became four  
An indefinite dyad  
Logarithmic in consumption

"We're going to Basement if you want to come"  
Half an invitation was all Adonis needed  
They were older  
Ten years his senior at least  
But he'd always wanted to go  
And he had nowhere to be  
There was nowhere to be

He was never allowed in his father's bedroom;  
In his father's bedroom there was an altar  
To Elegua  
His father was the kind of man  
Who wore only white  
Did not drink  
Only during cleansing rituals  
Would he smoke a dark cigar

They wait in line for half an hour  
Walk across a silent courtyard  
The bunker door swings open  
And it is suddenly all  
Smoke  
Red light

A pulse  
That comes from

Nowhere but circulates about the room  
Packed to the brim with sweating bodies  
Even in January the atmosphere is oppressive  
Hercules takes his hand

And  
Along with the rest of the band  
They weave through the crush  
A throughline through the waves  
Of leather straps  
Tanktops  
Bare skin  
Too hot down there for clothes

The club is an EDM catacomb  
"You really have to let yourself feel it"  
Hercules shouts muffled in his ear  
Waving his arms and twisting his torso  
Adonis scans the room

The closest you could come to  
Berghain on the East coast

The center is a vortex of limbs  
Into which Adonis is led by the hand

Stumbling  
Somewhat hazy  
Like a deer startled on a mountain track  
Unaware of its own footing  
As the ground gives way  
Underneath  
But Hercules leads him firm

The adjacent room is the "Play Room"  
It smells of fear and longing  
Proteins coagulating  
And someone in need of a shower  
Or a confessional

But Adonis is too bashful  
He shoots a sidelong glance to see  
If he might catch a glimpse  
But  
The Play Room door swings shut  
And suddenly he thinks back  
To his first encounter  
Backstage

The opening night of his  
Sophomore drama club production of  
The Bacchae  
Back then he did not know what bodies did

He did not know masculine  
Could mean also mean tender

It was the sort of thing that  
Lingered in a longing way  
As if there were truths about himself that  
He did not realize

No better place than in darkness  
Safe in the haven of  
These cavernous confines  
All eyes down here were friendly  
He takes his shirt off  
Scrawny he smiles  
His chest slackens  
He can breathe again  
And he contorts in that way he used to  
Around the sprinklers at the center of the park

Hercules and his friends roar  
A proud erastes in these rites

The miasma that was  
The atmosphere of the club  
Gives way to a chill that runs  
Along his shoulders  
His chest



His hair stands on end  
He can feel  
The molten lead rivulets  
Of the longful gaze

Hercules grabs the scruff of his neck  
Like a pup  
Holds Adonis' head to his chest  
He listens to the drumbeat in 3/4  
That says  
"You are mine –  
Not to hold  
But to shield."

Outside in polyester tents  
They smoke cigarettes  
On picnic benches  
"So, what do you think?"

When his older brother Luis  
Came out as gay  
Their father cut him off like a limb  
Hardly old enough to have his own roots

"It's a really good time!"  
Says Adonis an octave too high  
His voice is thin

When he needs to shout  
It betrays his youth

Adonis sits next him  
And as they talk about nothing at all  
Adonis' polaroids  
Hercules' advertising firm  
The way gay men only need to lock eyes  
He feels himself fracture  
Into a beloved  
Into an object of unrealised affection  
Like when Hercules laughs and puts his arm  
Around Adonis' waist  
Or clasps his knees like a suppliant

He had never known what it was to  
Be attracted to  
Be attractive to  
Someone who could break him if he wanted  
There are flecks of grey in Hercules' beard  
But his eyes betray a youth  
That never lost its shimmer

"Let's go get a drink."  
Hercules holds the vertex of his shoulder  
And they go off alone

Inside

Adonis blinks

Red

Black

Red

Black

His head is heavy as

He stands outside the women's bathroom

Catching his breath, hand against the wall

Which is damp with condensation

Or something more intimate

He blinks

And the crowd collapses in on itself –

A folding of limbs into shadow

Music into tremor

A boy into blur

Someone brushes past him –

A stranger, or maybe Hercules,

Or maybe the first boy

Who ever looked at him too long

And called it a joke

He opens his mouth to say something –

His name?

A word?

– but the bass swallows it whole

The strobe light catches his cheekbone

His shoulder

The place where a hand might've been

"Hey, are you okay?"

Several hands drag him into

The women's bathroom

And he lets himself sink

Into the dark

Hercules tears through the nameless multiplicity

Torn in two

"Adonis!

Adonis!"

But he's nowhere to be found

As Adonis is cradled

In the lap of a mini-skirt

His after-hours daimon

Halfway between Brooklyn and 5 AM

"Are you okay?"

She asks, faintly

And he closes his eyes

## Idyll XV

Tess holds her phone to her face.  
Presses the buzzer three or four times.  
Looks up at the fire escape on the second floor.

“Faye! Faye!”  
She shouts in this shrill, playful tone.

Faye pushes past the inner door,  
Swings out the heavy wooden one  
That guards the brownstone.

“Shut the fuck up!”  
She grins in an equally exuberant cry—  
That long, drawn-out,  
Somewhat whiny noise  
You find from girls in their early (to mid) twenties.

Faye lunges into an embrace,  
Practically tackles Tess.  
Tess can smell the alcohol on her breath;  
Her hair is slightly damp but warm.  
They nearly stumble off the stoop  
And saunter down the steps to the L  
On Jefferson Street,  
Right around the corner.

Tess hides a glass bottle  
In a brown bag  
Under her trench coat.  
As they swipe,  
Slide down the stairwells,  
Waiting for Godot on the uptown platform,  
They pass it back and forth  
In silent communion.

The semester is ending soon.  
Faye is working on a master copy of The Kiss.  
She talks about the dissolution of boundaries,  
Spirituality and ecstasy –  
That gold cannot be painted,  
Only implied.

Tess thinks Klimt is decadent.  
Prefers Las Meninas.  
Velázquez refuses illusion.  
Flesh is flesh, light is light.  
She is iconoclastic in her devotion to  
The Gaze.

They both long to be seen in their own right.

“You never really knew Adonis, did you?”

Tess asks.

Faye squints, a little askew.

“Uhh... I met him once at a party...

In some Chinatown loft.

And we talked about photography –

He was nice –

I think he was hitting on me.”

Tess:

“We were in each other’s orbit a while.

‘Oh-you-know-Adonis-too.’

The gallery openings.

The social clubs.

You show up, you get seen.

You experiment...”

\*

Through the single-paned white saloon doors,

The room pulses as people

Wind their way through the spotlights

Around pedestals of gnarled metalwork,

Seashells in Pompeian mosaics,

Terrariums preserved in epoxy.

A fragmented self-portrait

Disintegrates at the vertices.

On a side wall,  
A series of oversaturated black and white photographs:  
Mott Haven or Kingsbridge –  
Some obscure province of the Bronx.

In the back,  
A projector beams an image  
Of a shirtless teen  
Doing hula-hoops.  
He smiles through his braces.

LONG LIVE ADONIS

Flashes,  
Then dissolves into the iMovie scenscape.

“Did all these people really know him?”

“I think he managed to get around.  
Or the word got out.  
But it doesn’t really matter.”

“They fill in the space he left behind.”

“Ya.”



“So much untapped potential.

Like – it’s not good.

Like, it’s hardly art.

It’s just, like... interesting.”

“Ya – but it could have been great.

It’s interesting.

Like – the materials and the novelty.

And it’s got elements of composition”

On a neighboring table,

There’s a series of Polaroids

Laid out in a polymer tapestry,

Scattered helter-skelter:

The same smile.

Graffiti murals.

Red brick projects.

A circle gathers around Adonis

As he contorts and flails

In a graceful, misdirected frenzy

Around the sprinkler

At the center of an asphalt park.

His twenty-first birthday party

In the living room of his

Two-bedroom, first-generation apartment.

“His death is curated better than my fucking life.”

“Oh, hey, Reagan!”

Tess and Faye now kiss and coo:

“Oh-my-God-hey,  
So-good-to-see-you,  
So-glad-you-showed-up.”

Reagan:

“I’m really glad we  
Were able to put this on for him.  
You know, he always wanted to be in a show.  
We were going to do a salon series...”

Faye:

“Ya, ya. He deserves it. Really, ya.”

Tess:

“Yeah, he really matured in his form.  
Like—you can see the evolution in his thought.  
The way he changes materials over time...  
Nothing feels out of place.”

Reagan:

“Yeah, I remember when he started

‘Switching it up.’

Getting more ‘crafty.’

Playing with memory and preservation.

And epoxy.

Pictures to metalworks to terrariums.

Urban decay, you know.

Like when we were dating...

He really influenced me as an artist.”

\*

Of course, not everyone is an enthusiast.

“Yo, the women out here are crazy.”

Tess overhears some stupefied leer.

Nearly crushes the plastic wine cup in her hand.

“Ya, mhm, uh-huh, ya.”

\*

“Reagan’s so full of shit,”

Says Tess, grinding her cigarette into a ledge.

“They only dated for like a month  
Before she slept with some professor from Pratt.”

“Ya, mhm...”

Says Faye,

Looking down at her shoes.

## Idyll XVI

"The poet has the curse  
Of never being able to say  
Exactly what he wants

Even these idylls  
Are painted in muted colours  
No one exists anywhere  
And yet the city somewhere has  
The multiplicity of archetypes  
And I want to say  
'Shall I say I have gone at dusk  
Through narrow streets  
And watched the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt sleeves  
Leaning out of windows'  
I should have died in a rain-soaked  
November trench in Belgium  
A century ago  
But now I write code for a living  
From a WeWork  
In lower Manhattan  
And defer to my betters

To say that once I ran a circuit of  
St. Mark's place

Shaking bystanders by their shoulders  
Lingered on the steps of Union Square  
Loitered Grand Central littered  
With the conversations of strangers  
Where I watched people board trains  
I wish I could run after

That Fort Tryon  
And Riverside Drive  
And Battery Park  
Are full of youthful ghosts  
And patches of grass  
Where you watch the summer sun  
Sink below the Hudson

There is no substance in this city  
Only light and form  
A nexus of tenuous thinks  
Nebulous  
The veins of the subway or  
The grid lines of the avenues  
But there is nowhere to go

'February House'  
'The Chelsea Hotel'  
Only exist in our cultural subconscious  
And I lay here dreaming

To say  
'I am Lazarus come from the dead  
Come back to tell you all  
I shall tell you all'  
And that I invent  
Because of a chronic loneliness  
In a city full of millions"

A pause  
The stage light gives texture  
To the contours of his face  
As he waits for a slow and uncertain  
But then courteous  
And only sometimes if it is actually good  
Raucous  
Applause  
The floorboards creak  
Beneath the weight of his embarrassment  
Offstage he gets a pat on the back  
Outside KGB Bar  
"Oh hey that was great!"  
"Ya really loved it ya!  
Really loved like ya  
That one line  
'Lonely men in shirt sleeves'"  
And then later when he is alone  
In his bedroom in the Bronx twilight thinks:  
'No  
That is not it at all  
That is not what I meant at all'

