Serena—

> Πυθιάς, εἰ μὲν ἔχει τιν', ἀπέρχομαι: εἰ δὲ καθεύδει
> ὧδε μόνη, μικρόν, πρὸς Διός, ἐσκαλέσαις. […]
>
> If Pythias has someone in her bed, I will be off—
> but, if she is sleeping alone, God—
> let her call me in, if only for a moment.

Forgive me; my Greek has decayed. I certainly stretched the meaning of ἐσκαλέσαις, among other things. Still, I prefer form over function—and if a looser translation strikes better at what I perceive to be the feeling of the lines, where is the harm? *Homage*, in the end.

I realized that, if you will not write me back, I will suffer an eternity without writing you again. Thus I write, in part because you are the sort of person to whom my letters will not be horrible—I was writing a letter to a friend (with even more digressions in Greek, though she also cannot read it) and penned vague, pithy, cruel things like:

> Beauty is the only thing worth having—and youth makes beauty all the more potent, though a youth without beauty is wasted in longing. At least it ought to be. Ugliness is a sin, and to be penitent one ought to suffer for a sin—

At least the target of my derision was myself, but it doesn't make my words any less acerbic. (Can you imagine if I could speak so poisonously out loud? It is my ultimate dream.)

But writing you is different. I cannot be so terrible. And things are quite different now, since the last time I wrote you. For instance, I certainly am no longer afraid it would be unforgivable to wax more like Joyce.

And I can still be awful in this letter, though I will at least clothe it with beauty. I told you I had stories to tell you—they are not in this letter, alas (they are too long)—and I should have cautioned that they are largely unpleasant. I keep pieces of each one in my solander. I hide the ugly and the awful inside a beautiful container. That is the only way to overcome the darkness. It works for people, too—I find it easier to love a beautiful monster than an ugly saint.

I forget which night it was, but you were laying on my lap on my roommate's couch. I narrated the story of Jason and Medea for you, in preparation for a poem I had written; you fell asleep long before I got to the poem. But I think it is precisely the sort of awfulness, expressed (I think) beautifully, that I mean:

> i would have killed our sons for you;
> i would have held the blade upon their throats.
> i know i had not revenue
> to keep you clad in stunning foxskin coats.
>
> but really, now, a princess bride?
> how sad, pathetic, and cliché, my love.
> though i suppose i ought not chide
> your creativity—or lack thereof.

See, Jason was a worthless hero—to accomplish his great quest, he essentially assembled the Avengers: he got Heracles, Orpheus, and a slew of other, better heroes. On the return trip, he still didn't do any of the work; it was largely done by his newfound lover, Medea. Eventually they settled and had two sons. Jason decided that he would rather leave Medea to marry a princess. In revenge, Medea killed the princess, the king, and her and Jason's own two sons. But surely she should have expected it—a worthy man he was not.

You have not the cruelty of Medea, but I have the stupidity of Jason—am I worthy? I do not know. But it does not matter in this fatal case—there is nothing long on the line. *Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus*, after all. I have actually just realized that this line evokes the sense of the "Passionate Shepherd"—compare "let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love" to "come live with me and be my love" (the latter is another beautiful line from Marlowe, found within a poem full of extraordinarily clumsy lines, as in the elegy I quoted previously—I still haven't given you my rant about him). But Marlowe does not really ask for something agapeic—he seeks a (im)measured, hedonistic romance. The living and loving are only to the end that they may "all the pleasures prove." So let us prove pleasures; that, I have said, is what I think life really ought to be. *Vivamus*.

Let us eat too much chocolate. Let us kiss too much (from that same Catullus: *da mi basia mille, deinde centum, / dein mille altera, dein secunda centum, / deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum* – give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred, / then another thousand, then a second hundred, / then another thousand right away, then a hundred). Let me tease you and tease you until it is finally too much.

Indeed, it is curious to me that you do not like to tease more. I grant that it is partly about power, and thus perhaps unpalatable to you—but it is also wonderfully practical. It is fruitless to strike at the iron when it is cold. You must place it in the furnace, stoke the coals beneath, work and pump the bellows until it flares. When you are thus glowing hot, it is the right moment to reach and grab and pull you from the heat and lay you upon the anvil—to begin pounding, hammering—each touch eliciting a rain of sparks that covers the room—to induce the metal to bend with each thrust, glowing and arching—the slag falling off, molten, with each contact, revealing the burning form beneath. How I long to work the metal, craft with my hands and body, create something beautiful and scorching.

And how I long to touch it—you—though I would be burned. Your lips are coals, and I long for them on mine (and be as Isaiah, a seraph pressing the coal against my lips, blotting out my sins?). Will you burn me? Will you press your heat against me, sear me with your flames and blind me with your radiance? Pray drag your metal across my chest and leave your marks. And when you have done to me as I have done to you—heated me—rod, hammer, flesh, eyes—quench me. Fill the room with the steam.

In true fashion, I think this is where to end it. I will let you decide what has been made in this smithy—perhaps a blade that awaits the grindstone. Whet it, if you are so charitable.

— Matthew / John Donne?