

Serena—

I hesitate to look at you for too long, because it is like looking at the sun. I fear I would fall to the ground blind, as if journeying to Damascus (and perhaps be forever saved by the sight?). Maybe I would die to look upon the glory directly (though a big or little death?) and thus, like Moses, must take you in from only a passing glance.

A friend asked me to describe you; I said

a ball of lightning—crackling, plasmaic (I realized after that this is not (yet) a word), bright; sharp, with clearly defined edges—streaking like lightning

—like the lightning that veined the sky that night in the park.

In fact, I tried to use that phrase for a poem. I have not given up on the ghazal, though the form is tricky. The mechanics are difficult to work with, and I have no idea what I'm doing. I managed this poor hexameter couplet:

The moon in bronze, as lightning veined the sky above
and rendered small the world below, and me beside.

But that hardly stands on its own. I went with “me” for the rhyming word so that I could later rhyme it with “sea”—the original impetus for the poem, given your love of it. The unifying theme was to be “vastness”—the stretching of the sea, the hugeness of the stormy cosmos, the depth of your eyes—but still it does not come.

So I continue to fail in writing you poetry. Everything thus far is prose—the purple description above, this letter—prose, prose, prose. It is because, I think, I am afraid (or unable). How can I contain in words what far exceeds language? How can I write a dull, frozen verse that approaches a living, moving poem? You are living poetry, and I know no poem from my hand or tongue can relate, so instead it spills into spinning paragraphs. My poetry against you is prose, so I surrender to it immediately.

Indeed, you are *too* interesting. I have too much to take in and say—it sets me buzzing and overwhelms me to muteness. “Buzzing”—perhaps I am a bee—a drone to serve a queen, if you’d like. (The Greeks had a saying—one of the few I know by heart in Greek—reported alliteratively by Sappho as μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα, “neither honey nor bee for me.” It was used whenever someone would avoid a good thing because of a pain associated with it, that, because they would be stung by the bee to obtain the honey, they would refuse the honey altogether. If you are honey (though you are rather more sweet) I think I would fully risk being stung).

But in time it will come, I suppose, the boldness and the poetry and the focus. I simply have to work out the rhythms of it all. I am afraid of a great many things. The other day, you seemed dismayed that I said I was not fully candid around you. Indeed, I am not (yet), because of nerves—I am, after all, prose beside poetry, an unguarded eye staring at the sun. I practice my singing for fear that I should have to sing for you, just the same as I mull over my words even as they are about to fall from my lips unchecked. Even when I have the time to write them out, I am afraid. I have rewritten this letter so many times and am still entirely displeased with it.

My letters used to be horrific things. They would spin and twist to the point of incomprehensibility. My letters were the children of a wretched style, bastardized descendants of pre-imprisonment Oscar Wilde and James Joyce (and, to the latter, if I were still so bold, I could

well have made an image above of reaching into a honeycomb and tasting its golden flavor). Yet I have become more measured. It seems I found my Reading Gaol.

In Sheboygan, there is a road that runs along the lake. It's not quite on a cliff—we don't have cliffs—but it *does* run along a steep hill that terminates at the shore. In the daytime it's beautiful. It offers a clear view of the endless expanse of water. I have often nearly driven over the edge because I was distracted by looking.

At night, however, it is something different and terrifying. There is the edge, and beyond it nothing but blackness. Even in the country, there is rarely complete darkness around you—there is always the odd barn light shining or a car crawling across a backroad. But on the lake, at night, there is nothing. It is a void. The avenue on that brink is well-lit with warm sodium lamps, making the sudden transition to nothingness, at the precipice of the drop, all the more terrifying. There is something eldritch in seeing it; it is the very edge of the world.

I found myself, some months ago, in such a darkness, though the streetlights to my left had long been shorn away. Occasionally it was pierced by the sign outside my window, illuminating my pale body in flashing blue light. But even those momentary digital spasms did not persist. I could barely even write, and I am still recovering—Earl Sweatshirt said “I ain't been to prison, but the feeling's the same, / a shared sentiment, when and if the pen hits the page / as of late”—perhaps a Reading Gaol.

I am not one to believe in lights at the ends of tunnels—I think it is perfectly real to be forever in the darkness. Nevertheless, I do think that my tunnel is finally opening to fresh air. Perhaps it is coincidence that I, now, should find myself looking upon the sun.

— Matt