

Music for Torching (2023)
To Billie

Honey, how he still your man so low in his high pants
yellow stripes slick shoes tipping in drunk covered

in some heffa's lipstick. Baby, you begging this strand of a man
to let you keep him talking how you rather he beat you than quit

you better he black your face than leave your bed. Cigarettes & gin
don't hide the heft of your hurt or the slope of your want Shame

that blisters but never bursts hope that ambles when he calls you
babe & coos your name so brazen he don't even pretend to change

I know that falling. Been knowing that *hush now don't explain* I've mistaken
time for loyalty & longevity for love I've cursed a man while fixing his plate

Fixed my hair special candles & birthday cake waiting for a love
who never came I still miss tasting that mean man some days his sweetness

diversion as he broke me & gently hid the pieces I see the same fissures
in you, girl that matchbox in your pocket tinder sorrow waiting to be convinced

& pissed enough to bend down to help me gather him cradle him prop him
up & drag this fine & mellow bastard away from your wanting door

In the Absence of Human Parthenogenesis :: Please Listen to Auntie (2025)

Baby, these high-value men don't have
time for blood
no cycle to their internal machinery
their reproduction is mainly for delivery always
only with or exiting never having or keeping
without room for waiting no
planning space for patient gestation
girl damn the table
remember this even their deposits
are temporary
& must first
at least be held

Remains (2022)

Ma prayed I'd never know the prickle & cloy of fresh & violent
blood & matter clung to walls pooled
carpets to be scrubbed
but never clean no never gone
of Gary his despair & a pistol of her mama & the baseball bat
from behind the front door

Instead I know the bitter singe
of shit bagged & measured mucus & prayer-scrubbed hands
lingering disinfectant
of terminal
of life receding of her dissolution preserved
clung to nostrils never clean no
never gone

Strange Fruit

She is slumped her gaze
distant, downcast
simple ponytail sparkling knit gown—
her only accompaniment
the pianist & her rage

Her twisted mouth is spit acid
her voice clangs & scrapes each clipped line
all wail & grimace
she leans into the southern wind
& suspends herself there
until the piano's final sudden pluck

Billie is singing "Strange Fruit"
& I am breathing the burning flesh
as my daddy hangs there

I know it is him by
the sole of his one shoe tatters of a once-
starched work-shirt
the simple wedding band embedded
in the purpled meat of his left hand

but not by his face
gnarled &
blackened by boots & flames

I have seen it—
wretched
char & ruin; what
was lovely
is now pulp carcass
peculiar wretched crop

After she has sung me sorrowful
& fit to kill
Billie the crows & I wait
for the sweet, disgusting fruit
to drop

In Response to *TIME Magazine's* Photographic Elegy, "The Remains of Detroit"

"And when the groove is dead & gone,
you know that love survives & we can rock forever..."
—"Rock with You" recorded by Michael Jackson on Epic Records

Though now the motown sound is dirge
& the smoking dragons
have ceased
even
to sputter
& the creature beautiful, horrible that only snacked
itself for decades has begun to eat its tail
in earnest smaller smaller
gorging collapsing starving
& the ground is poison now
perhaps
choked by soot & fumes
from earth to sky

My mama is buried there
& the migrations have begun
again, all has gone to seed
perhaps as god intended
swallowed up in grief
& the city ruined, wounded lay gaping
the firebombed storefronts still smolder
from the white-hot combustion
of black rage turned inward
& the grapevine swears there is no chorus no doo-wop
no tambourine, handclap
no soulful croon
no wonder

only the mournful taps of
shined black shoes
steeling for the inevitable weight that
only the pallbearer knows

My mama is buried there
& we who continue to keep the time
the pulse in our pockets
the beat in our soles who live our days
ever under the groove
we know deep in our funky
& battered hearts that
sometimes
the miracles don't really get cooking
until after the second bridge