

## UNDER "ENTOMOPHILIA"

After *The Encyclopedia of Unusual Sexual Practices*

The last pharaoh, they say, filled a gourd  
with bees and held it against herself  
and if this is so (evidence suggests no)  
but if it is so

the worst job in the palace  
must have been Royal Vibrator Maker.  
Finding in the pharaoh's nightstand a dead husk,  
you'd hustle the gourd-dryer  
and the apiary—

imagine the incensed honey-makers  
losing their buzziest stock—the gourd's incision—  
the excavation with a long-handled spoon  
—bees individually selected  
for their anger—

if it is so  
how do you even fill a gourd with bees?  
Poured down a funnel—plucked by their wings—  
lured by sweetness inside—Or, you  
kidnap the queen.

If it is only another lie  
told about a woman to make her a whore-monster  
insatiable consort to be usurped—Octavian's eyes  
on her sex—his hands around her son's throat—

I can still hear in this lie the hum  
of the dying queen in the well  
of a gourd's dark belly,  
the one with a goddess's face  
who sings even through history's quiet veil.

Hail, Cleopatra, if this life offered you any pleasure  
I hope you took it and took it and took it  
the music of your voice rotating in its socket like a wing  
above the constant, low drone of the day.

## MARRIAGE IN THE FACE OF IMPENDING DISASTER

J. — We may lose our grip on the moon,  
our coastal cities, our desire  
for ice. The last frog may peep  
in our decades together; the last lioness  
may make her last footprint  
in the last mud.

In my favorite nightmare, the end  
comes for us as a giant wave.  
I wake in the night  
sweating after a wall of water  
becomes my horizon, inevitable;

and you, raised a few blocks  
from the ocean, dream of the tornadoes  
that I have seen,  
pinging between the mountains like pinballs  
in a machine  
(and even now, when they test the tornado sirens,  
the coyotes sing).

Once a therapist said,  
“There are two options  
for every relationship:  
You’ll either break up  
or you’ll stay together  
until one of you dies.”

I give “I will” without the why;  
and still I choose you, my home,  
a force spinning forward,  
hope a bird singing in the corners of our rooms  
in this fight, the last fight, of our lives.

## UNDER “SPECTROPHILIA”

*After The Encyclopedia of Unusual Sexual Practices*

### 1. *Ghostbusters*

There's that blowjob in *Ghostbusters*  
where Dan Aykroyd's belt undoes itself,  
then the button on his khakis pops, the zipper  
unfurls and his mouth opens in shock, eyes cross  
and roll back into his head ~ defending it, Aykroyd said,

“I have a friend who had three women  
visit him in a haunted house in Louisiana,  
and it was one of the greatest nights of his life.”

And I picture this “friend” in some gothic  
tear-down, a spectre-riddled bordello,  
and wonder: are foursomes with ghosts  
as boring as orgies with bodies ~ always  
someone lingering on the edge, like a game  
of double-dutch, wondering where  
they should jump in? Are even the dead  
forced to diddle themselves and wait?

### 2. The Annunciation

God is the mouth of Gabriel in her ear.  
God is the holy dove breaking  
through an arch of flying babies.  
She inhales the spirit like a lily's fragrance,

heavy and immaculate. In Murillo's,  
she crosses her hands over her heart.  
There is a basket of folded laundry  
at her knee. In Da Vinci's, I can't read her face,  
but a book is open on the lectern.  
She seems at peace, one hand raised  
as if to ask if the archangel would like a cup of tea.  
I like that her knees are open, her ankles uncrossed.  
Mary is manspreading. The best Annunciation

is Simone Martini's in the Uffizi:  
a 1333 gold on gold confection  
where Mary pulls away from the kneeling angel  
and familiar lily spray. Her lip is curled,  
as though the angel stinks,  
as though she wants to say,  
"God wants to do what, now? To me?"

"The Lord is with you," he repeats. "And when I say  
'with you' I mean . . ."

## UNDER “TRIPSOPHILIA”

*After The Encyclopedia of Unusual Sexual Practices*

For years, at work in the mall,  
I curved my hands up  
a customer’s forearm,  
scooped around her elbow  
and pulled, as on a rope,  
down the muscles leading  
to her palm. Pressure applied  
To the mount-of-venus,  
which lies at the base of the thumb,

*Don’t make love*, I was told  
when being trained for the job,  
my ministrations too light.  
There’s nothing worse  
than a limp massage.  
She grabbed me hard. *Fuck it.*

Pinching, firmly, you could watch  
your customer’s shoulders drop.  
I’d stand there pinching,  
my mouth spinning, weaving sensuous  
ingredients like a weird sister  
above a cauldron:  
orange blossom honey,  
bladderwrack, and  
Queen of Hungary water.

Hen’s teeth, horse toes,  
and fern seeds. Green-tinted sugar,  
lemon, salt; I performed  
an “arm treat” and then a “face treat”  
with my hands sliding in prayer position  
across the bridge of a woman’s nose.

“This feels so good,” she purred.  
“I could just take you home with me.”  
“Yes,” I said. “I could sleep under your bed.”

## BUYING LIPSTICK FOR ZIPPORAH

"I'm basically a volunteer," says the *Sephos* at the counter  
crowned in the latest magic blond: homebrewed highlights in his tidy pomp.  
Nametag: Matte. More cheek than chic, "Will work for food and lipstick." He has trompe  
l'oeil contours, claims his paychecks dissolve into aerosol and powder.

Mine, too. I drown from aisle to aisle in this year's Pantone color  
and touch as much as possible, swab my lips with every *cru classé*: *Noir*  
cream liners; slim doefooted glosses in cabernet, and *fleurie beaujolais*.  
I look for *Blocked Heart*, the signature shade of Zipporah the flint-cutter

who circumcised her son to save her man. Though the story's unclear, now,  
If she sacrificed her own "*Understanding*." (Clit?) Translation's detritus:  
is she named "bird" or "beauty"?; God's wrath at the inn in Exodus;  
"Just once" ~ once! ~ "in her whole married life" she spit on godliness.

Matte says, "She did what she had to do. Her man was up to his waist in snake, child."  
I pay, *Blood* on my mouth for my bridegroom; my teeth smudged dark with smile.

## EILEEN RUSH

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