

First Aspen

written for a young woman painter, Alexandra

A sensuous Latin poet, now I will go off with a thermos
of coffee, and book of Virgil.
Laugh suddenly, strike a match but the flame's blown

out by desert wind.
Then I hold my head in my hands
with the ridiculous joy of the whole thing:

Young girl, you have made life
joyful again.
(From silence one comes—to it, returns.)

The aspens! each trembling branch
undone
by halo around the young leaves in the year's mature sun.

All artists
are aged
in compassion.

I am not so capable of Platonic love as it seems
especially now they are suddenly burning piñon
in New Mexico evenings.

Oh love that *sustains!*
for which I burn: Love that draws the tiredness from,
strong hands on a back, to sleep without pain.

So I turned mean
said you were young:
it was the earthy gutsy mark of longing.

Salt, the sweat: THE TRUE MARK.
And she will not die whom I loved. I'm unstrung:
It's dirty luck, that old bird.

But some night I'll creep up in dark old raincoat
lay hands on you
and wheeling round you'll suddenly know

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I'd pass thru dark train windows;
I'd press the monkish curls back from your cheek
molding a statue, instead of hacking poems out of love.

Van Gogh love!
young Russian! What are we to become who are
idealized even in passion?

I kiss lips paler than.
I touch a forehead in dream, thought springs from.
I hold hands—nervous and young. First aspen.

This is where sorrow begins.



Apology. Hands shaping air;
holy smell of wood, the mathematical certainty
in your studio-kitchen:

balance of numbers,
beatitude of oil,
steady adding

steady breathing in marriage in your home.
As to mine? feet moving thru memory.
Life is infinite subtraction.

I can bite the orange rind
well as the next man.
But my palms shine.

I cannot wait till the aspens fall,
leave off being gold
we may grind them underfoot like crushing out cigarettes.

Not cry
how we might have held
the cup more to our lips.

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Sweetheart there is a brown wind here.
It will sink with the monotony of the passing year.
The words choke in my mouth

as if my hair were blown backward by that wind
which drove you to me
which drove you to find me.

Neither by my poems nor your art will anyone ever be
quite able to explain our affair.
But it glows (like the little hounds

released from hunt):
It is warm, it is here—
stretched out, relaxed by the fire.

You will rise at night
to brush back your monkish hair
and perhaps tone down the color of the girl's cheek

in the picture. I may temper my poem, not so tender.
But today I would have struck
the first aspen from earth to bring you in its original flame:

Passion—Has it any other name?



Sapphic Love. Sculptress of more than stone. Alex.
“I love everything about women.”
I love to watch water receding from stone, after the storm

leaving the pure form:
Nervous earthly woman, you are reaching now
to the marrow of my bone.