“All women who have loved and do love and will love virtue and morality, as well as all who have died or who are now living or who are to come, rejoice and exult in our new City which, thanks to God, is already formed and almost finished and populated.”

---from The Book of the City of Ladies by Christine de Pizan, 1405

Xena heard Manhattan has the most action and the most major cable news stations so we walk the island one day from end to end, Battery Park to the Cloisters. The city feels inevitable to me in an operatic way, scale inflated, inflected, grand and microscopic: ShakeShack and green gum and Helvetica subway stops, needlebuildings stretched tall like huge middle fingers. I keep looking up for supertitles, for some kind of translation, while Buffy stares longingly at each Soho shoe store we pass. Men in pink tutus dance with cupcakes. Lucky cat charms ceaselessly wave. Dana Scully ceaselessly reads us facts about each neighborhood's real estate prices from her phone.

Inside a shoe store Buffy can't resist (I'm just looking for new joggers I sweartogod no heels)—
We loved and do love and will love, as all who have liv’d or are coming to liv’e, our new City which, thanks to the idea and the work of the Cloisters, is almost finished and

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the City of Ladies by Christine

At the Coney Island Freakshow School (Defending the Honor of American Popular Culture) we learn glass walking, fire eating and breathing, fundamentals of sword swallowing, the bed of nails with various traps, blade box, electric chair, snake charming, and straightjacket escape. How to dance and shake wearing tiny top hats on your nipples. Our foremothers must look down at us, confused as we are about the lines between self-esteem and profitable shame: For this we turned our cheeks? For this we marched and starved?

We must be Human Blockheads, dancing in one big Burlesque. We must be mighty special to be equally damned and lost.

* 

Buffy, at 47th and 9th.

It started on a playground. One big splinter of platforms tunnels and walls posted deep into the wood chip earth. Cold monkeybars sutured the sides together; cold slide marked an escape chute. I couldn’t keep up. I had one chance to throw the ball. I threw it like a girl. Their laughter backed me fast off the wooden plank and I fell hard onto Stacy Kavouras, who was sketching a picture of a big ship. Took the tip of her pencil into my side and I still bear the mark: graphite tattoo to remind me.

* 

I had hoped it wouldn’t come to this, but after a week with no sightings, no Gazings, no defeating the incredible odds, it is the night of the Twatley Crue concert in the meat-packing district. I wear a patched-up bomber jacket and brown leather combat boots. (Xena: Ready for battle?) I tell the others to stay at the hotel. Score some free Mai Tais from the prick businessmen at the bar. (Dana: We’ll pretend it’s

Buffy’s birthday.

I take the I.D. Risky, for Risky, I was near Dr. N’s. Only cash and a hair-hair stand. The Drummer inch of their table workshop. I follow me all.

Four PBRs in my eyes and suddenly thought.

The Anchor, famous punk. But in the room

photons bound pupils and in green eyes—

Chorus: bow to book about love

as all eyes, we drunkenly to the Anchor, e sitting in school

perfect elbows shaped wood

over-qualified
Buffy's birthday.)

I take the R train for Rarely-un-in-love, for Risky, for Ridiculous, to the show, surprisingly near Dr. Noisewater's speakeasy. I pay $15 cash and a man with all facial hair but no hair-hair stamps a blue butterfly on my hand. The Drummer's face covers the walls, every inch of them, like a Warhol print on a times table worksheet. Like the Mona Lisa. Her eyes follow me all around the room.

* 

Four PBRs in, from my seat at the bar, suddenly though not unexpectedly:

The Anchor, wife of green-eyed medium-famous punk Drummer, now not in the screen but in the room—(!)

photons bounce off her body and enter my pupils and in this way I touch her with my green eyes—it's the seeing that counts (The Chorus: how did it come to this? you are just a sad book about love) and what I see is: her eyes, as all eyes, watching the Drummer, swaying drunkenly to a love song where the "you" is the Anchor, end of story, and just like that I am sitting in school, my elbow just grazing the perfect elbow of Neighborgirl in our Idaho-shaped wooden desks, trying to listen to our over-qualified, exhausted teacher explain a
theory of Modernist objectification:

Through a mirror, the lover gazes at her beloved gazing at her, and once the beloved notices her notice, the circle closes in.

My eyes follow their eyes back and forth across the room and just like that, end of story, the circle is torn open open open—it’s just one rigid straight line.

* 

So I take the R train back for Recover, for Relapse, Run, Return. For Romantic.

* 

The hotel room is full of love—an echo chamber of warm, self-contained, rented-clean, sleeping love. I swipe my little card and enter it, into it, subsumed and subsistent on it, subtracted from it heretofore and now, bowled over by waves.

In one bed, Buffy in eyemask and earplugs, well-curated sleepwear from T.J. Maxx and freshly painted plainpeach nails. Dana beside her flat on her stomach, face buried away and calculating, counting, diagnosing, even in sleep.

Then Xena was there, under the light, dewy strawberries and cream, the crickets under the hot Georgia. I heard them at the sleepovers in my room, against Neighbors, grab her in the goddamn cricket.

Just like me, my mother—conditioner-scented closet, the chestedPRESS, the God of paper to let go, the leaving her a universe, the put on my mother always, and bad vagina, the cups, and bottles of pills, and designed the people fighting, the sleepy-eyed desk downstairs, goddamn cricket.
Then Xena, with sword under pillow snoring a light, dewy snore that sounds remarkably like the crickets under my window in sticky June-hot Georgia. I slept right above their tree, heard them May ’til Halloween, remember sleepovers in my full blue bed pressed flush against Neighborgirl’s shoulder wanting to grab her in the night and say Listen to those goddamn crickets in love, they’re just like me!

Just like me, now, with the tinny air-conditioner-sound, the four hangers in the closet, the cheap plastic pen and the tiny pad of paper to leave a note thanking the maid and leaving her a tip—every day, or else a cheapskate, my mother always said—all full of love, love, and bad vaginal art on the walls and old carpet and bottles of conditioner someone named and designed and arranged just so, and the people fighting in the parking lot outside and the sleepy-eyed woman manning the front desk downstairs and all the crickets in this goddamn cricket town.