

To Lesley

I have met the witches, and
They are burning.
They move with a cat's velvet grace,
void silhouettes with diamond eyes
and brilliant fingertips,
and burning, burning
with all the memories
of all the human conflagrations.
Burning, milky
luminous around the old ones,
opal fire around the young ones,
the weak ones burn in wanting,
the strong ones like the center of the
sun;
the hurt ones burn in self-pity;
the angry burn in bitterness.
Behind their shoulders, within the
flame,
I can see the other lives, chained back,
screaming pain,
screaming ecstasy.
They do not forget.
Sometimes behind a man's shoulder I
will see a woman's white throat;
sometimes behind a woman the
blistered body of a man: but
the soul-feeling is the same.
These are
The souls that dared,
that turned their faces from the
well-lit world of men
and walked straight into fear,
though not always without trembling.
The ones who remember with hatred
can

lead you to that sad, dark land
and leave you stranded.
The ones in whom even hatred had
been burned away
can lead you out
with one, sure hand.
And the best ones burn in love,
having burned through nervous tissue
and personality

to make of flesh a viaduct
for Himalayan waters,
cool and burning.
You cannot face such eyes:
Within them is the Name Abraxas,
eternal death and life.
The hand holding the ritual cup
is white with flame.
And should you drink, you yourself
will burn,
burning in the furnaces of Shiva,
till every tear is shed, every fear passed
through,
released in a different morning,
on an unknown Earth,
with diamond eyes,
burnt away with the seeing
of other worlds.
And I took the cup.
And, Oh! my backbone is being pressed
against
something dry and wooden;
And Oh! my body is burning!
And every move is met
with searing chains!

And there is only this time left
to tell you what I can see
through eyes not yet consumed.

They tell me
The Craftsman is fashioning new ones
for me,
and that they are jewels.

Joan Carruth
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