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## **“Lie #4: That Frances Osgood Slept with E.A. Poe” and “Lie #6: That Hart Crane Crawled in Bed between the Cowleys” (poems)**

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*JOHN GERY*

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LIE #4: THAT FRANCES OSGOOD  
SLEPT WITH E. A. POE

They say it isn't sex that you remember.  
I disagree. I think of Edgar's frown  
that night we lay in bed till after five  
talking about the future as the ember  
beneath the grate flickered, burning down  
to nothing. I had never felt alive

like that, I thought—he so preoccupied,  
imagining every variant of death  
he could, and I determined to give birth  
to one of our ideas before I died,  
the “curse of poetry” our shibboleth.  
But poetry does not disturb the earth:

I can't agree with all that talk of spirit  
he made. It's opening my legs, I swear,  
ever so slightly while he sucked my breast,  
then took my thigh in his left hand to steer it  
over his own, coming inside to bear  
my hips on his hips, I remember best.

I wouldn't scribble this, were not my eyes  
so bleary from the pills and tea, like blood  
flushed through a drain, my nurse pours down my throat.  
She blinds my body so my soul might rise  
invisibly, like smoke, above the flood  
of longing that slaps against this burning boat,

but I am sinking faster than their hope.  
I sense a swirling sea surround me. Hate  
I couldn't call it, but despair's the thing

that slowly starts to tighten like a rope,  
as fastened to the mainmast of my fate,  
I feel its spar inside me still. And still I cling.

## LIE #6: THAT HART CRANE CRAWLED IN BED BETWEEN THE COWLEYS

“Exhaustion has become its own reward,”  
I said, plopping onto their sheets, as gray  
as grebes too filled with ennui to attack.  
My life a lark compared to theirs, yet bored  
from cruising sailors who drooled like dogs to play  
at paradise, I flung across her back

one outstretched arm, then cupped her breast, then drew  
the fingers of my right hand down his spine,  
who turned to face me, angry though not vexed,  
asking, “Now what are we supposed to do?”  
“You can’t take her alone, I’ve come for mine,”  
I answered, then spread out, not oversexed,

as she claimed later, but in love with them  
both. Coupled with responsibilities  
to nest all longing in a solo voice,  
still, aching that *un homme* might be *une femme*,  
I thought of nothing but my urge to please:  
Things weren’t the way I’d hoped. I had no choice

but to forage the private dreams of friends  
for my dreams. Like a mockingbird stealing  
the songs it loves, I faked theirs as my own.  
Yet theirs could never justify my ends  
until, defeated by a lack of feeling,  
scrubbing their bone with skin, their skin with bone,

I wore down what they were with what I seemed,  
fitting behind my poetry and thin,  
belabored schemes. By dropping wings out there  
in West Connecticut, as Malcolm squirmed,