May 24th, [This Year]

 God help me. I don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t know what to believe. Is it wrong? Technically the marriage vows are void – Elizabeth’s death has parted us until I meet her again in Heaven. If I even end up there. I know she did; she was the sweetest, purest, most wonderful woman I may ever know. She deserves it. But see, that’s just it: if I see her again in Heaven, would she be angry with me for being with another woman? Would she be angry for my even wanting to be?

 If she were still here with me, I wouldn’t give Lily a second glance. I wouldn’t need to. I’d still have Elizabeth. I told her that I wanted to spend my life with her, that I wanted her to have and raise my children, and that was true. It still is true, for part of me. But it can’t happen now. That reality can never be now. Is it selfish of me to move on…or is it necessary? I don’t know.

 Part of me says she’d want me to be happy and part of me…God, part of me still thinks if I just wish enough, pray enough, if I’m good and pure and virtuous enough, she’ll somehow come back to me. I’ll find out this is some nightmare and wake up with her next to me again. I just don’t want to face a reality that doesn’t include her.

 It’s been three years though. Three years, lived day by day, night by night. This can’t be a dream. Anna’s growing up, and doing so well, and…and what am I doing? I’ve been trying to live the same life I always had. Except there’s this Elizabeth-shaped hole in it – it’s incomplete. I’m incomplete. And I’m keeping the hole open. I know I am.

 It doesn’t happen as often now, the disorientation of waking up and not having her next to me, or in the kitchen making breakfast, or just coming out of Anna’s room. That weird twisting of the world is a rare event now. Mostly I’m glad, because it took so much out of me every time it happened. It was like she’d died all over again. But part of me thinks that maybe every day should be like that.

 Someone good and decent and loving and kind is gone from this world, and there ought to be a scar. There ought to be a hole.

 In the end though: there is no Elizabeth. Not for me. Not anymore. No matter how much I want there to be.

 But there is a Lily. Maybe. If my actions haven’t traumatized her, broken who she was. If my *existence* hasn’t fundamentally altered her. It’s my fault. Do I make it up to her by giving her what she wants? Is she the only one who wants it? I don’t even know. Sometimes I think I do and then it all changes. This sort of disorientation happens a lot now.

 I’m used to women throwing themselves at me. What is it about Lily that I couldn’t just brush her off like all the others? Is it simply that she won’t let herself be brushed off? I sometimes feel like she’s laying siege. Well, she was…until the article.

 It eats at me. Like an ulcer, like acid. Father says I couldn’t have done anything had I been there; Mother says I couldn’t have orphaned Anna like that. But God, she was *raped* and I sat at home and did nothing. She was beaten and drained and used and it’s all my fault in the first place.

 And if I tell her, she’ll hate me. And maybe that’s for the best. When she’s well enough, and things have died down in the city, I’ll tell her, she’ll hate me, she’ll go back to her life and never think of me again. They’ll leave her alone then, I hope. Let her be and come after me, like they’re supposed to. And Lily will live her life hating me. She’ll never forgive me for failing her like that.

 Elizabeth – have you forgiven me yet? I got on my knees in front of an empty coffin and begged you for it, even though I know I don’t deserve it. I swore to love, honor, and protect you, and I failed you in the most important of those. I can protect utter strangers better than my own wife, apparently. It’s horrible. I deserve Hell for that alone, to have let that happen to you. There is no way for me to earn your forgiveness and I know that. But it doesn’t stop me from begging. Every night.

 Forgive me, my love, for failing to protect you.

Forgive me, Anna, for letting your mother be taken from you.
 Forgive me, Lily, for sitting by and allowing that happen to you.

 Forgive me, God and Christ Jesus, for the terrible things I have done.