The Story of Bonnie Parker
Ashley Gabbert

I.
Now when I first met you there was fire in your eyes.
With the world sick and blue you told me what we’d do;
“See, we’ll shoot up this town ‘cuz they’re all full of lies,
then we’ll take all the money ‘cuz we need some bread too.”
When we slept in the shantytown I still felt protected,
well our guns did the talkin’ whenever I wasn’t,
but with us bein’ small I guess no one suspected.
You said, “we’ve gotta survive here, and baby who doesn’t?”
When you spoke the word that became my decree.
I was ready to listen and I’d have your back,
and I lived the new way ‘cuz it just had to be.
When you said, “let’s go”, I was already packed
‘cuz Clyde I believed every word that you said-
when I thought revolution it was you in my head

II.
Now we’ve killed 13 people- our guns, me, and you.
Not that anyone really could say who did what,
‘cuz the way I see it there’s just no tellin’ who-
we’ve both got the same spunk and we’ve got the same gut.
What I wish is that you’d finally let me be yours.
I’m just sick of the gang and the boys you chase after,
it’s like smoochin’ on me became some kinda chore
and you’d rather drink whiskey up on some roof rafter.
You say, “Baby I love ya but let’s not tonight,”
which means there’s a better plan somewhere in your mind
and there’s someone who’s waitin’ just outta my sight.
Like I don’t kill for you, like I’m not love-struck blind.
There’s just somethin’ about you I can’t turn away from,
since I can’t I’ll just follow behind you and pray some.
III.
I still don’t quite know what or how we did wrong.
I was with you as always and ready to fight
for the life that we made and how we get along,
but somethin’ about that ride just wasn’t right.
Now we’d brought all our guns out just like we had planned,
all hundred and fifty or however many.
But a thousand don’t help if they’re not in our hand,
besides, far as our chances we didn’t have any.
So now our dead bodies, shot up and displayed,
show the young grade-school kids how we didn’t do right.
Left sunk in our car we’re put on a parade
and our legend begins with our dead bloody sight.
“See, it’s Bonnie and Clyde- gangster kids from the south!
They got shot up in Texas, at least that’s word of mouth.”
Stones to Stars

Morgan Hines

To you, whose face has been lost from the ever-draining bowl
Of sea-colored memories I stowed back with me of that day
In which my life became a movie and we, the conscious actors,
Fresh from the molds of bromidic perfection that seeps
From dreams dreamed by more than just romantics and little girls.
In the place named Ravello, where you ran every morning,
A last vestige of old Italy soared loftily over teeming coasts.
It was just the villagers, and you, and me, on that late afternoon in early spring.

I still wonder, now even more, if perfection is beautiful or even pleasing.

To you, whose stare roved over the small of my back
And followed me up the path that wound round above gorges and pastel visions
On a breath’s edge of the plunge. Caught in the dust kicked up on the heel
Of one backward glance, you rose and pursued the novelty of the reddish tangles
That you had stared at with your friends before I even saw you looking.
My pulse echoed off the ancient stones of the piazza, creamy and soft and undying,
When I heard your steps mingle with the distant laughter of the bambini.
In the shadow of their duomo you told me your name.

Yet even now, when I smell the sweet air of lemons, my cheeks burst like the sunset
on cool marble.

To you, who drove me down hair-pin roads when the bus didn’t come,
Whose tongue tasted of limoncello’s sour-sweetness in the last light against the
mountainside,
Who asked me to return with you for pizza and birre, but settled
For fogging up the cramped spaces in your little European car,
As the black expanse of Amalfi water watched us translate feelings into feeling
And needing and wanting, and then bashful whispers of goodbye,
“Quando si ama, anche i sassi diventano stelle,”
When there was no more time.

Is it true, then, that when you love the stones also become stars?
Her Hips
Amanda Flores

with my shape still fresh on your hands
tell me how it feels—
her hips, so soon.

For the Women
Amanda Flores

Leaves in the fall
are like a man’s ego:
fun to crush.

Sonnet: of the Mexican marketplace
Brianna Young

The drums they beat, the heart of Coyoacán.
A call they beckon breath to stop and heed,
the mocking, rocking dare from voice is drawn;
for body splits from soul and takes the lead.

Inspired now, two girls must find these drums:
With skirts a-swish they roam through marketplace
and push to look, as darker crowd stands mum,
to watch the centers movement’s change in haste.

Soon two fair heads find freedom dancing there.
They seize the taunt and step to steady drum.
Eyes closed, with buzzing ears, they forget fear
and taste the gypsy rhythms sultry hum.

Both hearts beat one with drum, they run away--
their giggles rupture sky where pulsing stays.
Everything is so dark. The sky is deep, deep blue, like an ocean or the churning, acrid emotions that are running through me right now. I imagine them surging through my body. It’s a good thing emotions aren’t blood, cause if they were, I bet lots of people would die. Not counting the ones that die from emotions already: suicides and guys who pull out guns when they come home and find their girlfriends in bed with other men and stuff like that. If hearts actually broke and blood could really boil, we’d all drop like flies.

Driving has always been therapeutic to me. I guess that’s a reason to be thankful that Eliza lives near the coast, two and a half hours down the interstate. If I were the type of guy who got violently angry, the distance would be useful to help me calm down, and regain my composure enough so that she wouldn’t be making trips to the drug store to buy make up for covering bruises.

Driving at night is different than driving during the day. In the daylight, the journey is easy to track. Trees and grass and cows and old farmhouses whir past, cataloguing what exists between where I was and where I am going. Driving at night is being taken somewhere blindfolded. No cows and farmhouses to make me understand the reality between my home and Eliza. Just the headlights of other cars, the snaking paint of lanes, and the broken bodies of small animals along those lanes, nothing more than surprised misshapen clumps of fur and bone caked with dried rivulets of sun-bleached blood. If it weren’t for road signs, I could just as well be going in circles.

Despite my contained view of the road, curtained in darkness, I’m seeing a lot. In my mind, images are appearing, like dead bodies that will float to the surface of a lake without invitation. Her arms wrapped around someone’s neck, while they kissed silently. Fingers resting flipantly on the curve of her lower back. She is lamblike, and with hesitant, pensive eyes, being led by large sturdy hands over to the bed. She is full of remorse, from the moment it starts, but somehow feels powerless to make it stop, like an observer watching through thick glass. And as I watch the scene unfold from behind an even thicker pane of glass, I’m not angry with her. I understand how desperately she regrets it now, how it is all just a weird fluke in the big scheme of our relationship, and flukes happen sometimes, of course. I can see her, filled with remorse, after it is over. I see her face smudged with Tuesday’s makeup, and framed with unkempt, greasy hair, because obviously she would be too distraught to shower. People filled with self loathing and remorse can’t bring themselves to do things like shower and take out the trash. They just wander around the apartment in their tattered
lilac colored bathrobes, biting their nails and practicing apologies with shadowy, dark semicircles under their eyes, cause people filled with self loathing and remorse don’t sleep, either. They don’t sleep because of the guilt. They want to be redeemed for their wrongs, so what they do is they just pace around not taking out the trash, looking haunted and remorseful, waiting for me to arrive so they can throw themselves at my feet, crying silently and apologizing over and over and promising to never do it again. And then I pull them back up to standing, and look into their eyes, and gently use my thumb to rub away the mascara tears streaked across their tormented face, and tell them it’s okay, I understand, and then kiss them softly to let them know I mean it. And then they are redeemed, but even though they are redeemed, which means they can finally sleep, they don’t want to sleep, they just want to be with me, so what we do is we order Chinese food and rent Forrest Gump cause it used to be our favorite and its the first movie we ever saw together but then instead of watching it we just talk late into the night until you start getting really sleepy on account of having not slept out of guilt in four days so I say its okay, Forrest Gump can wait, you should go to sleep my sweet, sweet girl and then you fall asleep in my arms, and gazing down at your lovely sleeping face, I know that everything will be alright.

As I pull into the parking lot, the frosty white dawn is beginning to crawl up from the edges of darkness. I knock and I wait, peering at the shiny gilded 94 on the door. I know she will look beautiful, even with Tuesday’s makeup and stringy unkempt hair. It takes longer than expected for the door to creak open, and then it does, and she’s standing there, and I’m standing across from her, and here we both finally are, in this moment that I have been imagining for the last two and a half hours.

Hey, you made good time, she observes, leaning against the doorway.

Yeah, its always faster at night cause there’s less traffic.

Her face is clean and creamy with a halo of shiny, soft hair that I know smells like Herbal Essences. She yawns and waves me in, clicking the door shut behind me. It will not be necessary to wipe the mascara tears off of her face. It will not be necessary to navigate my way carefully in the dark through a minefield of trash.

Baby...What happened? My voice was caught high in my throat, and it refused to come back down.

Why did it happen…?

Her eyes and teeth shined in the dark as she slowly spoke, and it made me feel scared. She breathed out the entire time she was answering, like a big sigh. Like she was tired, or bored.

I only heard pieces.
Sometimes... Heat of the moment... hope you don’t dwell...

These words that she spoke so slowly, lazily even, roared past me. All I could think about were those furry mangled bodies rotting on the interstate, patiently watching as the whole world rushed by, unnoticing and unapologetic.

**Illuminant**

*Brianna Young*

They sit on the porch
in the blackness of the night
to watch the world flicker on
and off like a dying light bulb.

The beauty of the night
is in those things that are
illuminated.

With each crack
in the sky there appears
an outline of the apple tree
whose harvest lies fermenting
melting
into the earth.

Without prelude the old man sighs
and gradually grabs hold
of his lover’s wrinkled hand.

Giving familiar
now fragile
fingers a squeeze –
they themselves grow luminous.
a smell of loneliness
Jacki Welsh

I remember her smile, barely something alive on her face. the air, clean, dissected; made to last a lifetime she was never able to live.

the thinness of her bones, how they softly spoke, when she sat all day hanging on a line to breathe in.

have a smell of loneliness: the garden by the porch, the empty chair, the vase with fresh water where the yellow roses wilt.

where the yellow roses wilt with fresh water, the empty chair, the vase, the garden by the porch, have a smell of loneliness.

in hanging on a line to breathe when she sat all day, how they softly spoke, the thinness of her bones.

never able to live, to last a lifetime. she was the air, clean, dissected, made. something alive on her face. I remember her smile, barely.
To Cradle
Adan Gonzalez

Threw my coins to the sea, making a wish
That they’ll travel the world for me
Leave a trail of crumbs
Outlining every detail
With a time and place to meet

Told the wind all my problems
She took them and ran
Over the highest of walls
She was spreading them all
Saving me all the trouble
By telling them wrong

And the women with their eyes
Make men make their lies
Turning thinkers into altar boys
With dangerous lives
Crying to a fire
Demon’s eyes in the flames
Catching mine just in time
Had I not blinked, I’d have stayed
Oh, the monsters I dreamed of
All took human form
In the depths of my mirrors
In the eye of the storm

The Sweet Earth let me bury
My songs in her palms
Sang me to sleep before the
Night was too long
The flames dance and they hurt
While the sea moves in circles
And the wind tears the whole truth apart
The sweet Earth is my place
Shifting only to breathe
And to silence my eyes and my scars

I’ll throw all the coins for the ocean to have
Give my soul to the flames
And my truth to the wind
But the Earth has my heart
For it cradles my nights
To rest and become better days
Nuns and Ales
Jacki Welsh

Within a noun sleeps a nun,
separated from the “o” she’ll never know
by the confines of her convent,
arches curved and strong.

And in those images of a god,
mystified behind stained glass windows
she’ll find the wingless flies,
bodies broken and dead.

That’s when fables read like ales,
drunk and dumb of miracles
and the only pub that’s open is
in the friar’s basement.

And all that sipping from a cup,
the body filled with thicker blood,
that’s when language doesn’t talk.
It’s all wrapped up in bad habits.

While every nun is like a noun
without a satisfying lover,
Every ale is like a fable,
a tryst sleeping on the tongue.

Transitory Assurance
Brett Shaw

carpe diem

Does the cicada,
Its brief hours above the dirt,
Live with a passion we cannot possess?
Our length of days
Making us grey, with paralytic thoughts.
We last and last, but hardly act
In ways true to ourselves.
Like leaves letting unfelt drops of dew
Fall away unfeeling
We raise our protection,
Instead of letting the rain
Blaze against our wind-blushed faces.
So follow desire,
Then we will make music
Through the night
For all the world to hear.
You were born to a small town couple,
Though your momma’s the one who raised you,
And she named you Esperanza,
   Hope.
   Baby, you were her hope,
Sitting on the front step in a sweaty cotton t-shirt and white Nike’s,
   A Jimi Hendrix tune on the busted radio.
Two disagreeing crows in the walnut tree named you over and over,
   Esperanza,
   Hope.
Your godmommomma’s southern drawl sheltered you,
Stretching in the morning to the smell of a chocolate cake in the oven,
   Momma on the stoop shellin’ green peas,
   With a new baby yawnin’ beside her.
You were sixteen when you first met your daddy.
   He sent you a package in the mail,
A plane ticket, a meal ticket and an ancient, unopened book.
   Those tickets were your esperanza.
So you drank effervescent lemonade and left that Wednesday,
   With a half-melted chocolate bar in your back pocket.
   He met you at the airport,
Smelling of cheap cologne and day-old chrysanthemums.
   His fridge was stocked with red wine bought in bulk,
   Which you drank from an old teacup with a rose on the side.
The first time you saw waves breaking on the sand,
You cupped and cradled a sand piper hatchling in your hands,
   And when you let that baby go you named it Esperanza,
   Your hope.
Unlocking my front door, I walked into my apartment, which was dark and empty except for my orange tabby cat, Ziggy. He trotted toward me with a vibrato-ridden meow as I crossed the threshold and I told him I’d feed him in a few minutes, I was tired after my Torts final. I pulled my scarf from around my neck and shrugged out of the shoulders of my pea coat. Flicking on a lamp, I dropped my keys into the bowl where I always left them. I crossed the room to the pantry, where I opened Ziggy a can of cat food and put it in his bowl. This was my routine. I did not stray from it. I liked order. Order could not be violated. Order and control. I had grown friendly with these concepts, like lovers or friends.

Sluggishly, I moved about the kitchen, making myself ravioli for dinner and thinking all the while. I wondered how I was going to broach the topic with my boyfriend. I was not going to call it adultery—we were not married. I would not call it straying, because no one had been lost. I didn’t know what I was going to call it. I pulled the lid off the pot of boiling water, and earned a nasty burn on my knuckles as I turned the lid over to set it on the counter. I didn’t tend to it. I couldn’t right then. My hands were like maps: 24 years of a regimented lifestyle played out in burn scars like valleys, knife cuts like mountain ridges, scratch marks like rivers, and veins like intrusive highways. They were good hands. Neat.

I remembered finding my boyfriend’s shoe boxes pulled out from under where I let him hang a few pairs of pants for when he was over. He never left those boxes out because he knew it upset me. He hadn’t shaved for three days straight a few weeks week. He always shaved for me. Of course, he could have been tired, but he knew that these things mattered to me. He knew. I knew.

Ben had graduated from art school two-and-a-half years ago, and had started a photography studio after two months off. His best friend from college, Alexander Travis, had helped him get the place off the ground and helped with the business angle of the studio. While Ben had been at RISD, Alexander had been working at Brown toward a B.A. in business. When Ben started the studio, he and I had been together a year, and had just moved in. The night I had offered for him to move in, he had been reticent, telling me that he worked odd hours and that it would be hard to schedule my life around his. I told him it wasn’t a problem, kissed him on the nose, and got in my car to return to my apartment and law school homework.
I added my ravioli to the boiling water, and began stirring it. Fifteen times clockwise, fifteen counter-clockwise. Each 360° stir was a line in my head: five stirs to a star, three stars, reverse, repeat. One, two, three, four, five, and one two three four five and onetwothreefourfive. I always had to count. Counting was calming. I keep counting.

I had attended the studio opening with Ben, wearing a black cocktail dress and heels. I held his hand and felt proud, I told him how excited I was for him, whispered in his ear that I thought he was a genius. In turn, he would nuzzle my neck and pose with fellow artists, eyes bright and hopeful. I had picked out his tie, but didn’t point out that fact to anyone. He was beautiful in front of flashbulbs. Alexander sneaked into a few of the photos; he had a face like a rock guitarist and hair to match—it lay just below his shoulder blades in auburn waves. Tonight it was pulled back, but I recall telling him he should wear it down more often.

I drank champagne and strolled around the studio. Ben introduced me to a few people, an athletic brunette with hair that barely touched her shoulders—this was Michelle, a girl who had done some technical work on his last shoot; she had a laugh that sounded like bells. Next, there was Marshall, an old friend from high school who had gone on to become a music professor at a university. These people forgot my names as soon as they could, allowing for more time near Ben, to soak up his genius. In an odd way, this made me proud of him.

I added salt to the pot, kept stirring. One star, two stars, three stars. Ziggy slipped around my legs, begging for a bit more food. I whistled at him, telling him he wasn’t getting any more. He slinked away, pseudo-angry and just a bit pompous. I wanted to laugh, didn’t. Couldn’t? No. Glancing at the clock, I realized I had around ten minutes before Ben arrived.

Ben had started calling from work to tell me a shoot was going late. First thirty minutes, then forty-five, then an hour, two, three. While I was on the phone, Michelle or Alexander might call my name loudly in greeting; Ben would laugh and I would smile.

I told myself his genius was keeping him away on the weekends, that he had more clients than he knew what to do with. During these times, I often spent my nights organizing my shirts by color and sleeve length. I’d then move on to my pants. Then shoes. Methodical. Orderly. Clean. I had only met a handful of his models, but
once they left, he often slipped a hand around my wrist and told me I was beautiful. Ben seemed to enjoy the apartment more when it was organized. He told me it was easier to find things. The night he told me that, he woke up early the next morning—Dawn had barely broken—to head to the studio for an ad shoot. He kissed me on the cheek and told me not to wait up. I told him I would miss him and that I loved him. I don’t think he heard me.

Ziggy jumped up on the counter, ignoring my protests. I took the pasta pot over to the sink and drained it, leaving nothing but mushroom ravioli and steam in the pot. I placed it on the counter, and got pre-made sauce out of the refrigerator. I took off the metal top, and put the sauce in the microwave to warm. I noticed that the time that the clock read was off by three minutes. That would need to be fixed after warming the food. As the microwave worked, I opened the freezer and freed a bottle of vodka I had bought a long time ago. I mixed myself a screwdriver and sipped it while watching the glass sauce bottle rotate in the microwave.

One night after he had been working late, I decided to make some of his favorite vegetarian chili and take it by the studio to make him feel better during the long night he was planning to spend there. I pulled up to the studio and parked my car on the curb, picking up the chili with two washcloths to protect my hands from the Crock-Pot heated meal. The weather had turned cold, and I was wrapped up in warm clothing and a brightly-colored scarf Ben had bought me the year previous. As I made my way up the sidewalk, I grew excited to see him. I hadn’t had a chance to be with him in a little over two weeks, and couldn’t wait to surprise him. The thrill of adrenaline made my stomach feel heavy and light at the same time. I had to rest the chili bowl on one hip to pull open the glass studio door that had Ben’s name emblazoned on it.

The door pushed open, and I made my way back to the dark room, where I knocked on the door. I heard no response, and assumed the room was empty—Ben must have been in the back, so I decided to sneak in and have dinner ready for him when he returned.

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Ben’s name was off my lips before I even realized I had spoken it. The two bodies ceased moving, and Ben’s and Alexander’s faces met mine with shock. In one sane moment, I placed the chili on the table that held his prints, and pushed out of the room. I moved swiftly to my car, and had slammed the door shut and pulled away before Ben even made it to the door of his studio.

Afterward, he had sent me several emails, tried to text me, called my cell phone dozens of times. It wasn’t until ten days later that I picked up his call and told him to meet me at my apartment two days later. I told him I knew they had been at my apartment. I told him that I knew that’s why all of his shoeboxes and sweaters were astray, his chin now home to a five o’clock shadow that I had always hated. I wanted to tell him it didn’t hurt, but I couldn’t, so I didn’t mention it at all.

I kept the deadbolt locked so he couldn’t get in. I was grateful to have already completed my exams and now I had no need to leave my apartment until at least January. I finally turned my phone off after speaking to him and ignored his emails. I knew I had to cut this off, like a limb dying of frostbite, making all tissue necrotic. I had to excise it. Had to. Had to.

I poured the warm sauce over the ravioli in a big bowl I inherited from my grandmother, then sprinkled basil over the top. Ben should have arrived at any minute. Ziggy mewed softly from the corner of the counter, and I scratched his head, then under his chin for good measure. I sat on the couch that Ben and I had picked out at Anthropologie a year ago. I continued nursing my drink, and watched as the second hand sped around the clock like a mouse that Ziggy might have once been able to catch, years ago.

I am still waiting for a knock on the door, that fast rattattat that he always offers. I curl up on the couch, and Ziggy lies next to me. It’s a cold winter.
Hello? Are you there?
There you are. Hello!
I wrote you a story,
Or did my story write you?

Regardless, it starts
With a question which regards
Less the start than the end
Of the quest you shun.

The question is this:
(Is this the question?)
To go to sleep
Or sleep to go
To a lovely friend -
A friendly love?

Whom I may embrace
with outstretched arms;
Or without whom I,
Armed, may stretch
To embrace the battles
Between sleep and awake.
Awake! The battle sleeps,
For now.

But now for you, my pretty friend
A petty fiend you are
(you stole my r’s)
But hours stole you
When they were ours.
When were they ours?
When they were.
Were they ours?

They were hours.

Enough! Said you.
You said enough
To make me want more.
To make more, want me.

When my clothes are done with the dryer
I take them out slowly, avoiding the but-
tons on fire.
Into my laundry bag they go,
Then I hoist her up, nice and slow.

I hold her close as I climb the stairs,
Showing her nobody else compares.
She’s so soft, so warm,
I take her back to my dorm.

Fumble for the keys, turn the lock,
Kick aside a stray sock.
Gently, I lay her on my bed,
Stroke a loose thread.

We snuggle up together tight,
flick off the light.
She lets out a moan.
I wake up alone.
you’re alright
Clint Robertson

kicked one
once
prehistoric
in the dim
with dark fins
of my own.

fed two garbage
behind the
dinghy
pepperoni, string cheese,
and canned spaghetti O’s.

twenty domesticated
vanishing chum from salt
safely watched
behind dying coral.

singing into the glass
hundreds
in the air conditioned water.

flickering frequencies
of thousands on TV screens.

one naked.

beneath me
jaws so mean,
tearing through
water with
rows of teeth
cutting clouds,
but I guess

you bleed
like the rest.
sorry sharks.
Beatrice D’Autry sits outside a café on East Avenue. Her dark hair, hanging in silky, thick spirals down her back, blends with her black tailored coat, tied around her small waist to reveal the perfect curves of her hips. She feels invisible here - invisible and weightless. She is not actually sitting in the chair, but hovering slightly above it. Her right hand is wrapped around a black coffee mug, her left rests on an open newspaper, but she is neither drinking nor reading. Her black-hole eyes hide behind large, dark, movie star shades and a shroud of swirling cigarette smoke, watching passersby - first a large man, balding on top, wispy brown hairs form a ring around the back of his head, wearing a coat too small but buttoned snugly around his prominent waist anyway, also wearing a notably disgruntled grimace; then a tall, thin woman, too thin but not in a sickly way, just in a way that makes her seem hard, inhuman, a totem pole comprised of cold dry bones, smooth blanched skin stretched taut over them, a face painted on with harsh, severe strokes, thin red lips, cheeks of a paler rouge, a pointed nose, though small, and two startling green eyes fixed on something far ahead; across the street, a short woman with tired brown hair, a few frazzled strands escaping the loosely wrapped hair tie at the back of her neck, the skin under her eyes a grayish-blue shade, like heavy rain clouds before a storm, breasts sagging beneath a baggy t-shirt which fails to conceal the slight bulge of her midsection, a small child trailing lackadaisically behind, having to take every third or fourth step as a gallop in order to keep up; now a young, good-looking couple in matching floral-print shirts, khaki shorts made of pockets, Velcro sandals, backpacks and water bottles, an athletic pair, with magnetic eyes, hers the positive charge, his negative, arms wrapped around each other’s waists - nauseating, like greeting cards with dewy-eyed cartoon dogs, picnic lunches in the park, or tandem bicycles.

Beatrice stays at the café until dusk. No one seems to notice her, nor does she seem to notice anyone else, and in fact she never looks at people – instead her abysmal black eyes gaze straight through them, stripping each of them bare. At the end of East Avenue, a crimson sun bleeds into the horizon. The few clouds remaining in the sky are stained a pinkish, washed-out red, unable to rid themselves of some guilty deed. Beatrice shivers, ties her coat tighter, though the evening air is stuffy and warm. Uncrossing and then re-crossing her legs, she reaches into her coat pocket for a cigarette, strikes a match, and out of habit cups her hand to shield the wind, though the night is still. Over the top of her hand, she notices a handsome, swarthy man in a suit. Although the onyx sky provides no light, she is still wearing sunglasses, so she
knows the man can’t see her eyes. Still, his penetrating stare feels intrusive. She has been invaded, violated, broken, by the man’s unyielding gaze. Quickly she averts her eyes, redirecting her attention to the inside of her purse as she pretends to search for something important in the empty bag. Finally the man has passed and disappeared around a corner. Beatrice stands up too suddenly, falters on her high heeled shoes, then walks in the opposite direction of the man. Her heels click on the pavement, tick tick tick, sounding important and urgent. The café is empty now, as are the streets. A cup of cold coffee sits on the table. Newspaper pages are lifted by a slight breeze and carried down the street.

The following day, a body is found floating in the river below the East Avenue bridge. She is a slight woman, beautiful even with swollen face and icy blue lips. It appears she fell from the bridge, which has no railing in one place, and the cause of death is ruled accidental drowning. No one is able to identify the body, except for a handsome man in a suit who says he recognizes her, feels almost like he knew her, but can’t think of who she is. The investigator thanks the man for his troubles and bids him farewell. Now left alone with the body, two ebon eyes stare up at the investigator from the mortuary table. He closes her eyelids gently with his thumbs, shivers, and returns to work.
From a Sanctuary for Waiting

Kaitlin Hill

The nights parted by lips and minutes and mountains and sleep
I lay washed over
Each night beside city lights
Watching reflections waves between curtains
Eyes heavy on the window
Knuckles white clenching capsules
Never able to sleep.
I remember our park off Ryewater Drive
Skipping class hair mussed we’d slide
We lived in love made love
You left I stayed eighteen
I wore green our friends’ wedding
You didn’t come four years
I don’t regret staying
The seasons evolve cityscape intimacy
But there are times sleeping alone
I think back when I had you.

Turtle of my discontent

David McFarlane

Well, turtle, you have eaten all my cabbage,
and my children think it’s time to catch you.
I could. I have this wire birdcage. But you
would want something glassier and I
have no money to buy a terrarium.

You are peeing and unhappy and diseased
with salmonella. I still hold you hissing
near my garden. I don’t care about cabbage;
there is only this matter of injustice, this fact
that when I set you down, you will ravage
my fields again.
Sun
Christopher Dix

The buffalo stop walking an hour after the sun falls. A few minutes later they will be asleep. Out here in the hills, they are vulnerable, and they are alert, and often a herd will have one or two buffalo still awake, almost as if they know we are watching them.

Yearly they descend from the mountains, into the valley, from the misty slopes near the sky to the wet plains below; the hilltops wrapped in briars, the troughs damp and rife with fungi. In the flat spaces in these hills, lichen covers the ground, the plains’ scented carpet. Black, ugly trees grow from the moist clay hidden under the lichen. In the summer, they grow needles. We take these needles from the trees to make a bed for our rye to grow from. We take needles only from the largest trees, because they need them to live, and if we take too many from a tree too small, it will die.

In the winter, when the trees are full with their needles and when they have spread their seed, the wind comes, and brings with it the sleets that kill these strongest trees. The wind comes with such violence that it would seem angry if it were not so cold. Through the winter, these winds cut and ravage the trees that have so boldly stood up, and in the nights when the wind stops, the moonlight shows the gashes in the wood, the wounds in their quiet, dignified trunks. Even then they stand. But the wind comes again in the morning, blocks out the sun with the sleet and strips the trees of their beauty. Beneath the sad remains of the trees, the lichen bathes in the frost that forms tiny crystals that cover the fields. On the brightest nights when the gales do not come, the moon shows us the wind’s own beauty, the glittering fields of ice made only in the winter. The wind wishes to impress us, for the buffalo do not understand beauty; the ice is only an obstacle to their food, the lichen. We appreciate the spectacle, but it was not our choice. The wind likes to change things, and it thinks we approve. In this way we pacify the wind, for if it thinks we do not approve of it, it will change other things, things that are difficult to repair. In past times the wind would destroy our homes and kill our animals. But we learned that it blusters so loudly because it wants attention, and it wants attention because it is lonely, and it is lonely because no one can follow the wind on its restless path. So we built benches in the hills, so that we can come out on the clear nights and let the wind know that we are the audience to its spectacle, so when we go out when the wind is blowing, it knows to skirt around us and spare us its ferocity. The winter is not so dangerous when the wind does not make it colder.

The buffalo must suffer the wind because they are ignorant of the wind’s emo-
tions, and cannot please it as we do. So when the sleet comes, they are covered with frost. They wear beards of ice and coats of snow, and only their hides protect them from the cold of the world. That is one solution. To wrap yourself in so much fur that the cold no longer reaches you. That is the buffalo’s solution. Our solution is better. When it is cold, we come closer to each other, and keep each other warm. Our solution is better, but it does not work if everyone is not together. So when one of us must leave the rest, and is alone, he or she wears the furs of the buffalo. In this way they are protected from the cold and the wind, but their hearts still will be cold without us.

It is strange, I think, that both the wind and the buffalo come from the mountains. Perhaps they are old enemies, and the buffalo flee from the wind. Or perhaps they were once lovers, the buffalo and the wind, and when they separated, the buffalo donned the coats that would keep the lonely wind at bay, and ever since the wind has followed them, hoping for forgiveness for a careless mistake it made in the mountains to hurt the buffalo’s feelings. Perhaps the ice and the sleet are the tears of the wind, and the wind avoids us now because it believes we understand its loss. Or perhaps the cold winds were a punishment on us, for hunting its beloved buffalo, and now that the wind believes we understand its loss, it allows us to hunt in peace.

We are watching the buffalo now, waiting for them to sleep. We whisper lullabies and ask the wind to carry our voices to the herd. When the buffalo are all asleep, we sneak in, kill as many as we can without rousing the whole herd, then, when they are all awake, we make a diversion such that the buffalo run in the other direction instead of attacking us, and throw spears at them as they flee. Soon the buffalo are gone. They will be back. Buffalo always come in the winter, usually several herds, one after another.

We also trap buffalo. We dig large holes in the wet troughs of the hills, and cover the holes with grass and sticks and mud, and put our best mushrooms in the middle to entice the buffalo. We must disguise it very well, or we will only get rid of the gullible buffalo, and leave the shrewd ones left.

We and the buffalo eat the lichen that is abundant in the hills but is scarce in the mountains. Both of us love mushrooms as well, and many grow in the troughs. Sometimes they break into our rye houses and eat our rye. We eat as the buffalo do, only we eat them as well.

We make our huts with dead tree trunks and buffalo hide, and in the summer, we decorate them with lichens of red and orange and yellow. If we use enough, and if it is a good summer, the lichen can grow and cover the entire hut and make it look like a hill. If the winter is cold enough, our homes can be completely covered in snow, and if you look at one from the right angle, it looks like a giant hailstone.
We protect our rye with houses too. We grow our mushrooms in dark holes, to shield them from the wind, but rye needs sunlight and space and must be planted in ground that has been cleared of lichen. Because the rye is not protected from the wind as we are, a tree trunk and buffalo hide house for it would be blown over in the winter and have to be rebuilt every year. So we make our rye houses out of bricks of fired clay, with pine wood for the door. We build the walls high, but far enough from the crops inside so they do not put the rye in shadow. Briars are planted in front to discourage buffalo from breaking in.

There are others like us that live in the mountains, although we have never met them, nor have we ever seen them. They probably do not know we exist. But we know they are there because we hear their songs sometimes.

On sunny days, and not just sunny like when there is no rain, but sunny like when the sky is all blue and the mists of the mountains glow silver in the sunlight- on those days, if you listen close enough, you can hear the distant music of those who live in the mountains. They do not speak our language, but their voices sound familiar. We do not sing as they do, but I think if we sang, we would sound like that. The sound is hard to describe.

It is a call, I think, a call to the sun, of joy, of the inescapable brilliance of light, and, however transient the light may be, how it seems to glow like it will never fade, how it gives light to everything, every shadowy corner, how it makes the buffalo seem real; more real than the dark and indistinct forms that flee from us in the night, how the light brings color to the lichen, color like no one has ever known existed, color to the grass, color to the needles, how the lights fills the blue sky and the world began to glow the sun becomes more than a source of light but a skyfire encircling all-encompassing, a white flame across the blue the rye is brighter than before, the skyscape has spun; the stars have fled from the sun and found their way in the earth, suffusing the atmosphere with the incomprehensible gleaming of sunshine overwhelming, gasp of breath this all the dizziness we fall into the standing water is where we see the reflection of the sun, the gift of a sacred horizon, this globe is ours our glittering celestial embassy, we are there beyond the ground in the center of the sun where the golden water swirls, our eyes turn up and the music fills us, the song, the living dream, the call from the mountains where the sun is born each morning where the sun goes to rest every night and the moon rises; the sun’s reflection off the silver seas where the stars bathe daily to glow so bright…

Then we feel the light that falls from the blue, the song implores and we respond; we raise our heads and cry out, raise our voices and give them our call, the call of joy and the wolves.
there’s a buffalo
in the dining room,
that I saw on a billboard
last fall.

she’s eating a bowl of ice cream
&
half-frozen blueberry pie
sitting in an unfamiliar wheel chair
at a round metal table.

fenced in
&
fed pills
preserved
at west ridge
retirement village.

choked by words
she cannot find
anymore.

white coats teaching
her domesticated tongue
how to roam free
again
&
waiting on that boy.

but those
flash cards float
so she
takes her remote
and puts on a
baseball game
which
she never
watched
before.

but does now,
because she
misses
that boy.

who never calls.

&
she complains
to her granddaughter
about the ghost
who sneaks into
her room at night,
in the Kansas winter,
to turn on
the air conditioner.
they say I loved her once,

but
my memory
is worse than hers
when she talks.

Alchemy
Rachael Podd

Little Abandonments
  Seep from her pores
Bruising skin without contact.

Pressure on porcelain
  And fault lines widen
Kiss pavement and parchment
  Little suicides

A life reduced to snapshots
  And the steel bed where the baby was born

Crush, he thinks
Their breaths intermingle, like smoky tendrils and unreturned glances.

Little explosions
  Behind closed doors.
Shattering teacups and quiet.
Lunch at the Glasshouse

Amy Taffet

In flowing skirts and chattering heels, hungry girls wait in
The bustling café. Hot coffee, toasted sandwiches, desserts
And lemonades take their seats, mingling among six tables
Shoved together. Napkins unfold, glasses clink, knives, forks slip.
The sighs, the laughter, the hushed whispers of gossip
Begin to circle, stirring as do the iced teas, and we hear.

Last night there was this party; I wasn’t there, but we hear
Who talked with whom, who danced with whom, who went in-
Side the yellow room. Ladling her soup, smooth, warm gossip
Burns as she swallows. Breaking two crumbly desserts
And two friends into a hushed conversation, out slip
Two stories about him and the girl at the last table.

Translucent words dance on the table
As she tells how this girl -but I’m not supposed to hear-
Left the yellow room with this boy who slipped
Back into her room because his roommate had this girl in,
All’s heard from the friend who reaches for the dessert
Plate holding two moist brownies, caked together in gossip.

Please pass a napkin I say as the purr of gossip
Drops to an exclusive whisper: RRrr was with her at the last table,
The roommate RRRrrrobrrrr- I swallow whole my dessert.
Did she say Robert? Voices hush, the mixing I hear
Clink of spoon against cup, adding sugar to sweetin’
Milk to thicken, an impure concoction I sip.

I’m dining with whispers and glances. It slips,
Crash! The never filled cup falls, the glass
Shatters. I can sense the jagged words within
These girls, united or divided at these tables?
I ask Julia, she says Robert she did hear.
Sickening feeling, maybe I ate too many desserts?
Robert, he did not- he cannot- desert
Me. No, not my Robert, so out I slip
To find him in the next room. His laugh I hear
Growing fainter, as words clang louder inside me; ‘ssip
I drink from the fountain, hide by the bathroom. Table
This rumor, I tell myself, but I lose courage to go in.

Can it be true? I look back at those chatting girls. Oh God –sip,
Sipping, swallowing these words casually over the table:
Draining me of my happiness when it’s Robin not Robert in the end.

Conservation
David McFarlane

Your hands come into the sand
through which I am born, your
scooping hands quick like a gull
and a burlap sack for a stomach.
I am preserved for tanks from
the children, the raccoons, the
Costa Ricans and their exotic
soups. I have never been boiled
but in our eggs we learn to
expect these things, where a
voice has warned us to wear
our home like a coffin.
The first time I heard “Meet Me in the Bathroom” by the Strokes, I was at the downtown Hilton with my friend Krista and we were taking turns washing our hair in the sink. We had both decided to dye our hair colors found only in cheap candy and sex shops.

We had fled school two days ago. Our grand plans were to stay one night at the nicest hotel we could find before crossing the country and hooking up with as many band members—any band, any instrument—as we could in six months. Both Krista and I had decided to take incompletes for the semester. In truth, we wouldn’t be back at college if this thing went as we had planned. We’d placed bets on how many we could each score: I had pegged her at eighteen; she bet on my making it with twenty-one.

The music was loud, and the water frigid and pink from the dye in my hair. Krista was dripping blue on the tile floor and was busy ruining towel after towel as she dried her hair. Krista lit a cigarette: the incessant sound of a lighter low on fluid seemed to accompany her every move.

My feet were cold and wet. From this angle, with my head shoved under the faucet, I could see that my knees were bruised. My toenail polish was chipping, one black flake at a time.

Cold water was in my eyes and nose, trailing down my sternum and dyeing my tank top pink in furious streaks. I considered mending the hole on the side seam, then decided I liked it better that way. My phone was ringing somewhere, but I couldn’t tell just where and Krista didn’t care enough to go get it. I wondered what color her cigarette smoke was. I returned to thinking about our bet numbers—eighteen and twenty-one, lucky, lucky. Words like “age of consent” and “blackjack” crossed my mind.

My scalp was freezing.

Krista filled the room with a sweet smoke that lay heavy within the humidity of the air. I pulled my head from under the tap and squeezed excess water from my hair. The water was a ballet pink as it flowed down my hands and down the drain. I remembered the color from years of dance as a younger girl.

Times change.

Flipping my head back, I tried to push as many of the wet strands toward the back of my head as possible. The water was cold on my spine. I could envision the backbone of pink I would soon be sporting. A She Wants Revenge song replaced The
Strokes on the stereo.

I was dizzy—we hadn’t eaten today. We were saving money so that we could actually afford to drive around after the bands we were chasing. I ached a bit inside and tried to will it away as strength. I leaned against the bathroom wall and looked in the mirror. I liked being 19. I liked the way the number had looked when I wrote it on paper. It was slender but feminine. I found beauty in the oddest of places, it seems. I’ve been told many times that I’m too self-aware.

Krista’s phone rang, and she moved to answer it in a quick, stuttering movement. It was like watching her move under a strobe light. She answered the phone with a harsh bark of a word, and began pacing the room.

Krista was beautiful. I knew that. I don’t think I measured up. I leaned closer to the mirror to examine my skin, wondering where my control had gone and when I had lost it. Was it some time during school? During the summer? During my parents’ divorce? I couldn’t tell. The time was nebulous and far away, and it seemed I might never pinpoint it.

Still talking, “I don’t know; why the fuck would I know?” Krista said to her ex—I was sure it was him from her tone. She loved him, probably would never get over him; same tale we all lived through everyday.

I hoped never to live through that tale. Not after my first semester of college had gone so poorly.

Snapping her phone shut: “You will not fucking believe what he just said to me,” she said, walking toward me with blue dye dripping along her corated artery. I looked at her, quiet, receptive. I was glad she hadn’t used his name. I hate that name.

I could hear what she was saying, but my thoughts were miles away. I responded correctly, I offered affection and sweet, measured words, but I felt my conscious slipping away along the smoke of Krista’s Camel Menthols.

I wondered at the state of her car and how long the thing would last us as we crossed the country. Our first band was The Pea Coats Too Many, followed by Seven Sins, then the Attorneys. After that, it was open road and whatever band happened to take a liking to our faces, mouths, or legs.

It sounded like escape.

“Son of a bitch actually wants me to stay with him, not you. . .” Krista continued.

I crossed my arms over my chest, nodding as is acceptable. I wondered what it felt like to be alone. I thought I’d like it. I had heard the word “peaceful” too many times to count, but didn’t think I’d ever actually experienced it. What was “Zen” like?
My fingernail polish needed touching up, the bright pink had worn off the tips of my fingers. I felt like humming, thought better of it, looked Krista in the eye. Her hair and her eyes were now the same color.

She had left me at a party that night. I wasn’t sure why I trusted her now, but the fact remained that I let her bleach out my hair and dye it after she had abandoned me at a frat house. I think I wanted her to make it right, this time, to save me from something—anything—and prove that I was worth it.

People figured out what happened that night. I realized their thoughts were never quite graphic enough, but they got the general idea pretty quickly. I never told Krista what happened. She and Rob were so happy together. They were meant for each other. In my eyes, they deserved each other.

I remembered the bruises shaped like fingers on the soft portion of my inner arm, they looked guilty as track marks.

I remembered seeing the power trip in their eyes—it was just two of them. I wanted to know what that felt like to own someone like that.

Krista was still talking, gesturing with her cigarette as the ash lengthened and lengthened, watched as she forgot to tap it into the sink. It finally fell to the floor, she cursed, rubbing it out with her foot, spreading charcoal grey over the pale blue tile. “I mean, what sort of. . .” She made an ugly sound, like gagging against a hand on the throat.

I remembered how he felt inside me.

Sex was a pastime for me now. More and more, I was willing to meet with a man to sleep with him and leave him—maybe I just wished that the acts that occurred had not meant anything. Maybe I hoped to devalue it entirely. I wondered what it would feel like to be loosed from the bonds of intimacy.

I hated the word.

“Okay girl, when do we hit the trail tomorrow?” she asked.

For a moment, I wasn’t sure what to tell her. It had been my idea to go on this trip, to become that ever-criticized breed of woman: the groupie. That was a word that felt good in my mouth, on my tongue. It meant freedom. It meant escape. It meant namelessness. It felt good. It removed me.

“Sometime between dawn and dusk, Krista,” I said it and meant it, my eyes glancing off her face.

I considered the plans Krista and I had made, the bands we had planned to follow. I had a soft spot for the lead singer/guitarist for The Pea Coats Too Many. His name was Branden Redwood. He was tall and slender, with eyes that never seemed to
meet those of his audience members. If one were lucky enough to catch his eyes, one would be rewarded with a deep green, like sea glass under water. After that, I wanted to go after the guitarist for Seven Sins, Travis Alcott, a long haired brunette with white teeth and long fingers.

I was tired and my hair was still wet. I pulled off my newly-striped tank top and got under the plush Hilton comforter to go to bed, thinking of how beautiful distance could make the world.

As usual, I was awakened by Krista attempting to light her first cigarette of the day. She was cursing at her lighter and shaking it. I decided not to tell her that all she needed to do was either buy lighter fluid or buy a new lighter. We couldn’t have afforded it anyway. It was 9:07 am.

Sitting up, I glanced around the room. I had effectively destroyed the pillow I had been sleeping on. It looked like someone had been shot neatly in the head, expelling curiously pink brain matter. I was starving.

“Krista, when are we gong to eat?”

“Dunno,” she muttered, taking a healthy drag on her cigarette. I shut my eyes, sighed.

“When are we leaving?”

“Whenever you’re done getting ready, lazy ass.”

I swung my feet from under the comforter and walked to the bathroom. I showered quickly, out of collegiate habit. I suppose I wouldn’t be needing those anymore. I dressed under Krista’s gaze, and we picked up the bag we had each brought and walked to her car—a silver coupe she had gotten three years prior. The car itself was eight years old, but pretty nice, all in all. To save gas money, we had each packed only a single bag and had agreed never to pick up strays.

Clicking away at her lighter, Krista finally lit her second cigarette of the day and we were off, just an hour after I had awakened.

Her hands were a flurry of motion: she flicked on the radio, scanned the stations, adjusted the volume; she smoked feverishly, ashing occasionally out her open window, then lighting another on straight stretches of road when she could spare her two hands.

We would be driving four hundred miles today to catch The Pea Coats Too Many on their first cross-country tour. This was my first cross-country tour, as well, and it wouldn’t be my last.
I fell asleep around mile one hundred-forty, mostly because I had been running on zero for too long. I dreamt about jell-o shots and bruises and eyes grey like cigarette ashes.

Krista woke me with a shake, then thrust a tiny bag of pretzels in front of my face. I ate them eagerly. We had covered half of that day’s trip. I had offered to drive the night before and she had told me that no one drove her baby except for her. I didn’t argue after that. She had bought an energy drink in the convenience store, which was fine with me.

The miles passed more quickly than I expected; mostly, I think because Krista never let the speedometer get under 90. During the drive, as my eyes caught sight of rows between peach trees, I considered telling her about that night, but decided against it, realizing that nothing good comes from such honesty. We arrived at the tour venue just over two hours later.

It was still quiet; it wasn’t even three in the afternoon. Krista and I decided to acquaint ourselves with the tour staff and see if we could make a few friends to make this evening’s events just a little easier.

Krista managed to catch the eye of a roadie, while I charmed the sound manager, Josh. I felt a bit of pride over my accomplishment. I wasn’t bitter that the sound tech fully believed that I had plans to sleep with him; I just considered it a hazard of the job. I had no plans to fulfill this belief. He was a bit old for my tastes, not old enough to be thick through the middle, but edging on it. His eyes were too small, but that was a fault of genetics, not of his.

“So, when’s sound check?” I asked.

Josh looked at his watch. “About an hour, do you want to hang around until then?” I nodded and offered the sweetest smile I could manage.

Krista wandered over to me as Josh walked off. She tilted her head, a silent question. I nodded in response. She smiled. Her interests lay with the drummer, a blond with dark eyes whose name was Chris. He was the wild one of the group, and that was just Krista’s flavor. When I had worn bruises, she had worn tourniquet marks.

Her phone rang, and she answered. Her speech hardened: it was her ex. Expletives and jeering names spouted from her lips. I knew she loved him because of the cruelty in her voice. In her mind, love an hate were inextricably linked. Where she had come up with such a theory, I didn’t know, nor did I want to know. I assumed it came from something between her parents, but would never be sure. I listened to them talk for a good forty-five minutes. She lit three cigarettes during the conversa-
tion and told him to fuck off twice. Finally, Josh touched my shoulder and pointed to the stage.

The Pea Coats Too Many were getting ready for sound check. I followed the sound tech up the stairs to the side of the stage.

The band played two songs: a cover of “Hey Man Nice Shot” and “Underneath,” the latter an alt-rock anthem to sex. I approved.

Branden and Chris left the stage first, Josh called them over and introduced me. I smiled, offered my hand to Branden. He raised his shy eyes to mine. They were just as beautiful as I had thought they’d be. Chris walked off, headed to do God only knows what or who. I wasn’t worried about him.

My hand trembled a bit, from too little for too long. I remembered, belatedly, that my shirt had a tear along the back, the result of a tree branch pulling through the fabric months ago. It made me nervous, and I placed my hands on my hips to make myself feel steadier. Arms akimbo, I imagined I looked confident and powerful and as if I knew what I was doing.

“Do you wanna, uh, come back and check out the, uh, bus?” Branden said, meeting my eyes. I smiled.

“Sure.”

I followed him, and he led me to the bus, offering his hand as I climbed the steps. I was given the grand tour: back room meant for playing; a Wii, HD TV, and bar all installed; the bunks (his was the neatest) and the tiny kitchen.

“I like your hair,” he said, eyes on the floor. I thanked him, and wasn’t sure what to say next. I wondered how to go about seducing a rock star. I now had doubts. Branden seemed like a good guy. He placed his hand on my arm and turned it over, exposing the soft flesh. “No track marks, no bruises, nothing,” he mused. “This isn’t your usual scene, is it?”

There was no stammer in his speech because he wasn’t looking me in the eye. He traced his thumb over the pale skin of my inner arm, almost tracing the blue veins just visible below the flesh. There was a tenderness to the motion. Breathing shallowly, I was infinitely aware of the feel of his touch. Branden took a cautious step toward me, and lifted his eyes to mine. Just the motion itself seemed to be difficult for him—I could feel his grip on my forearm waver as he did so.

It wasn’t my scene. I didn’t belong here, as much as I wanted to belong.

I thought about running, but didn’t.
My twisted prophet’s tongue
David McFarlane

Unu.
I received a prophet’s tongue that I twisted into hiding; and with the rooster I would crow
I never knew Him.

Doi.
I have seen Emma’s immunity nailed to a tree in the center of her Roma town.
She is not a savior.
She is not a thief.
Her crime was vaccination by a doctor who never learned her name.

Trei.
My sister beats in waves, green slopes fading on the EKG. There is my mother’s womb. There the vultures will gather.

Patru.
Across the ocean rests a haven where figs and milk and honey flow,

Cinci.
In the ashes I pound my clean blood into circulation: Redeem us! Redeem us!
You know my torment. You made my sackcloth. I cannot resolve myself.

Sase.
In his bag are a Bible and a shirt and a pen. Florín, where are your shoes?
He smiles toothlessly, though his gypsy parents steal from his feet.

Sapte.
There are clinics here for men,
the promiscuous/unlucky ones.

Oh Sodom! The walls are white,
and the end’s pain is equal,
and we have demonized you all.

Opt.

We each deserve this;
unjust is our health.

I ask to bear their pain

like an ancient Carpenter,
but my love is less.

Noua.

I know Faith is sometimes acceptance.

I know God does not resolve Himself.
I use it to death
Crave and satisfy in short puffs and long drags
new habits that
die hard
I use it all
Torture it with flames and suck
the by-product of its pain
In between my ashen breaths (longs inhales, long exhales)
it idles, waits, rests, burns with anticipation
until I bring it back to life
rekindle brimming flame with lips, lungs and tongue
Agitating from flicking finger tip to tip
Pause and repeat
I use it hard
Frantic or nauseas when the end nears
When fingertips move closer to heat
And undoubtedly the end nears
as if I’m rushing towards the ease of that I accomplished, conquered;
because when I do
I press its small head into the ground
Suffocate it
Ground the glowing warmth when I’m ready
and press the final life out of its shortened body
confident in the ease it takes to extinguish a flame
With my final necessary release
I use it to death
We are not sick men,
You said as we drove on a road in northern California with a full tank of gas and nothing, really to say.
And we stopped and devoured tiramisu with too much liquor and not enough crust, And made camp with nothing but a bone-handled knife.

We are not sick men,
I repeated while rolling cigarettes with scraps of an essay I busted ass to write, And we fell asleep to F16’s landing on the tarmac and the repeated “kathunk” of falling down stairs.
You shook me awake and out of a nightmare and into another hot embarrassed blush while screaming about Jimi Hendrix and the squalid cities we’d left behind. “You light my fire, girl” you said and I inhaled The sulfurous wraiths of the lit match you offered.

We are not sick men,
You bawled into the wind and in all probability you were right, But we left behind broken time-release capsules and dry ash and drove on, To feast on cheesecake with out sugar and we wore only t-shirts And unraveling shorts and unwashed unloved striped socks.

We are not sick men,
I conceded, after a bird hit our windshield traveling at exactly 86 miles per hour, And we cried in time to some heady disposable pop tune from Sweden, Cried in sweat and tears and earth and blood, And when I grew tired of crying I silenced you With a well-placed roundabout kick to the stomach.

We are not sick men,
You screamed unbidden, Unwrapping yourself like a lost child at a mall, “And we didn’t ask for any of this to happen,” You say, crumbling into the velvety-soft texture of a basset hound’s ears. And we walk away, Inhaling and ignoring the last fumes of our once-full tank of gasoline.
We don’t know who is killing the poetry but the survivors have been crawling out and away for generations. They surface on the other side of the world, books, plane, train tickets askew. That fresh feeling of beginnings, it’s not always lovely when it’s new. Old is memory, old is school, tree, fence, rain. The new now is wordless, silent, waiting for a move. The new noise of old is jarring, different across the phone line from the sweet steam wafting through open doorways. The new sight of old is distasteful, pixilated, uncomfortable. Three, four weeks, a slight of hand reveals existence without a community is an existence of grueling labor—there is nowhere else to throw oneself. Five, six months, and there is the amusing preoccupation of new sparkling winter. Soon learn that winter white gets old, too. Seven, eight years, and what does she look like? They haven’t spoken. Not since the day the phone cord wound its choke hold and said that some things don’t belong here. Nine, ten o’clock news announcer doesn’t quite butcher the name of his hometown, but it’s enough to elicit a chuckle, anyway.
I had a friend named Daniel Morvars

David McFarlane

I took Jody to a movie and the mall and the cemetery. I told her she couldn’t tell her mother after she refused to stay in the car. “I can go. I won’t tell her.” She held my hand as we walked beside the graves. She had never been near one before. When Janice’s mother died Jody was only three—too young, Janice said, to confront death. She stayed with a babysitter and didn’t know why her mother was crying and wearing black.

Up ahead I saw the loose dirt and gleaming tombstone of a recent burial. I held Jody’s hand tightly and asked if she was sure she could keep going. She nodded and continued walking. I slowed with her as we drew closer.

The tombstone was small and discreet: Daniel Morvars 1965-2007. Someone had written obscenities above the name with a black marker; I pulled Jody back so she couldn’t read them. We sat on a bench a few yards away and I stared at the patch of dirt. Jody watched me for a while.

“Did you know him, Dad?” she asked eventually.

“Yeah, I did,” I said.

“Did I ever get to meet him?”

“No,” I said. “We moved right after you were born. I never saw him again.”

“How did he die?”

“Poison,” I said. I looked around for anything alive but there was just the grass. The city hadn’t planted any trees in this section. It bordered an old apartment building and all of the graves were nestled against each other. I wondered if all of the bodies were people like Dan.

Jody swung her feet as she sat on the bench. I glanced at her. “Where is he now?” she turned to me and asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I hadn’t heard from him in a long time.”

“Is he with God?” she asked.

“Maybe,” I said. I looked at the grave and knew grass wouldn’t cover it for many months. “When I knew him I think he was afraid of God.” She didn’t say anything.

After a few more minutes I took up her hand again and we walked back to the car. I felt like the place hadn’t hurt Jody but I still warned her not to tell her mother.

“Okay,” she said. “Dad, what’s ‘rapist’ mean?”

I looked down at her then forward at the car. “It’s just a name you call some people. It’s just another name.”
“Oh,” she said. We were almost to the car. “A boy in my class called our teacher a rapist one time.”


“She gave him a discipline for leaving his books at home,” she said. “And she gave him another one when he called her a rapist.”

“Okay,” I said, straightening up. We started walking again. “Don’t call anyone a rapist. It’s not a name that suits most people.”

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Check out

John Luciano

One day,
you’ll reach across the register,
grab her by her
over-sized pastel lapels,
and knock her on her fucking face
for the mere suggestion
that you’d steal her identity
by asking to see her driver’s license
to confirm the check’s signature.
That paranoid,
out of touch,
early senile hag.

For now,
smile,
and start by remembering
her routing number.
Alexander Ross stepped through the rusty gate of the graveyard, slipped slightly on the mossy flagstones, and took in a slow account of who was attending his wife’s funeral. His eyes skimmed above the red cedar casket as he acknowledged his father and aunt. Mourners patted him on the back as he moved through the crowd, murmuring condolences. Alexander didn’t like funerals—who did?—and this one, this extraordinary, ridiculous funeral, was no exception. He stared at the back of a woman dressed in a purple glittering mumu and a yellow hat. How could he ever have agreed to a themed funeral? Nadia loved anything with a theme (he once threw her a Halloween party for her February birthday) and her very last party was no exception.

He thought about the day Nadia decided her own funeral arrangements four years after their wedding. They were strolling down Alhambra Street close to their apartment in San Francisco on a clear summer day eating ice cream, and Alexander was too distracted licking strawberry ice cream off his hand to notice that she had halted in front of a funeral being held in a small graveyard. Every member of the party was dressed in traditional black, clutching red roses to toss onto the grave. Alexander back-tracked to join Nadia at the gate, her forgotten ice cream melting all over her fingers.

“Please don’t let me be buried like that” she whispered, as if her words would ruin the loud sermon. “I want to leave this planet exactly the opposite I entered it. Happy.” Alexander mumbled a few things about how she wasn’t going to die anytime soon, and he didn’t want to think about losing her, but she continued. “I want my funeral to be a party, a real celebration. I want to be surrounded by color and light… like the birds at the zoo we saw last week, all the different kinds. I want a Birds of Paradise funeral. Yes! That’s exactly what I want. Please do it for me, Alex? If you die first, I’ll do whatever you want too.” She said all of this in rapid succession; he knew she had already made up her mind. By that point, Alexander’s stomach was in a knot. He hated talking about death; he hated even thinking about his loved ones dying. It was a sore spot for him, ever since the funeral of his favorite cocker spaniel and best friend, Bandit, when he was nine. He didn’t have many friends because his family moved constantly for the military, but Bandit was always there, especially when his father was deployed. He never admitted that to anybody. He looked back at his wife. When he saw the pleading look she gave him, he quickly acquiesced and tugged her sleeve to move her along the street. She followed and ended her chatter
about the color-filled funeral, but he knew that’s where her thoughts remained the rest of that day.

Moving through the small crowd of acquaintances, Alexander saw their best friends, Jake and Chloe. Chloe had taken charge of Nadia’s idea and saw to it that everyone dressed as brightly as possible, herself clad in Nadia’s favorite colors—teal and purple. Her husband, Jake, obliged by wearing a matching tie with his deep purple trousers. Every color of the rainbow was represented by the crowd, as well as plaids, polka dots, stripes and stars. Women carried spangled purses and wore feather boas and tiaras. Any casual passer-by would have thought this was a funeral fit for a clown. But instead, it was to honor a twenty-eight year old woman whose life was certainly no child’s circus.

The only color Alexander allowed on his person was Nadia’s favorite pink Gerber daisy; its stark contrast to his severe black suit and tie was almost comical amongst the throng of “birds”. He wore a black suit and tie to every funeral he ever attended starting with Bandit’s, the last being his mother the year before. When Chloe handed him a pair of blue pants and a green shirt and tie, his hands began to sweat, and when he brought them to his face to stop his brimming tears, he could smell the melting strawberry ice cream on his fingers. He was suddenly blinded by the memory of her brilliant green eyes, begging him for something he never thought he would need to think about, let alone participate in. Chloe, always perceptive, knew at that moment to reach into Alexander’s wardrobe and hand him the black suit instead. She was the one who insisted on abiding by her best friend’s wishes, but she had no intention on forcing them upon him.

Alexander took a seat in the front while his father, Colonel William Ross, stood to tell his memories of his daughter-in-law to the crowd. He was recounting the first time he and his wife met the girl Alexander wanted to marry. A beautiful, proud girl who tried so desperately to impress the Ross’ that she burned most of their first Thanksgiving dinner together and they ended up dining on Chinese takeout and Stovetop stuffing. He then spoke a few words that his wife Denise might have mentioned, God rest her soul. Denise always liked how her son looked so different from his wife, standing at over six feet tall, with wild blonde hair and jet-blue eyes. They physically defined “opposites attract.” When William finished, Chloe stood up and spoke about Nadia’s insistence on being her midwife (that idea did not last for very long after Nadia saw a few birthing tapes). Nadia and Alexander were not religious people. He felt it foolish to bring in a pastor or rabbi to the ceremony, preferring to handle the affair himself. The crowd had grown quiet, a tale of Nadia winding down.
Alexander sensed it was his turn to speak if he wanted to. He suddenly felt one hundred pounds heavier, unable to lift himself from the metal chair. He had nothing specifically prepared, just pictures and her voice dancing through his mind. He hated to be unprepared, especially at his own wife’s funeral. She was probably watching the whole scene and laughing. With great exertion, he stood up and clasped his hands together, prepared to thank everyone and sit down quickly. Instead he found his legs rooted to the spot. He choked on “thank you” and paused to collect himself. He heard a loud squawk from above and turned his head upwards to see what was interrupting his thoughts. A white seagull drifted down from the sky and landed on the casket. It sat there, staring at Alexander for a few moments until it took off, but not without snatching a feather from an old woman’s hat. Some people would take this as a sign. Alexander did not believe in signs.

On the night of their nine-months of dating anniversary, Alexander waited patiently while Nadia applied her eye-liner with the precision of a master painter, even though they were an hour late for dinner. She wielded the brush of black liquid like a professional, deftly circling her eyes in a matter of seconds with no need of touching up her work. She dipped her right middle finger into a palette of pale purple eye shadow and swept it across her eyelid. She whipped on mascara in a matter of seconds and quickly turned around to look at Alexander, who was perched on the bathroom counter, staring at his girlfriend in a trance. He wondered where she learned to do those things. Her mother never taught her how to do hair and makeup, she had no sisters, and lived alone in college. She had only a few female friends in her life, and none were the slumber-party, girl-time sort of friends. Was this just another skill women inherently had? He could tell she was waiting for his response to her transformed look. As she tilted her head to one side her long black curls shifted and fell to rest on her slanting shoulder. She angled her face to him, glaring down her nose with smiling eyes, hands on hips, a smile bursting from behind her puckered lips, silently taunting him to say something. Alexander stared back at Nadia, wondering if he could say anything differently than he normally did. “You’re gorgeous, you’re the most beautiful woman in the world”. All of that must surely get old for her. She always seemed to like hearing it, but tonight she deserved something different.

“Well sir?” Nadia giggled, unable to hold her model pose any longer. She pulled him down off the counter and stood on her toes to wrap her arms around his neck, pressing her nose to his. “Don’t my eyes look lovely?” she said in a low growling voice, demanding his attention with the demeanor of a kitten.
“Yes, they do. I don’t know where you learned to do that. You look beautiful.”
“Thank you! What time was the dinner reservation?”
“An hour ago. It’s ok.”
“No! Oh, no, I’m sorry Alex! Can we still try? Do you want me to make you something?”
“No, I don’t. Please don’t apologize. How about I just give you my gift?”

She nodded fervently and shouted, “Me first!”, racing out of the bathroom to her purse in the kitchen and back. She handed him a brown-paper wrapped bundle. He knew what it was before he opened it, which didn’t matter, because Nadia was never able to contain herself around gifts.

“It’s a scarf!” she squealed, “I made it, and it’s blue, because it matches your eyes and it’s my favorite color on you!” He smiled down at her excited face, brimming with pride at her own creativity. “It’s getting so cold outside, and you know I lost my old one. It’s perfect!” he said, while swooping the scratchy wool scarf around his neck.

“Do you want yours?” She nodded. “Well,” he began, “for the first part, I was going to buy us a fancy dinner, but it looks like that won’t happen. But that doesn’t matter. Because your real present will arrive in three months. When I have it, I will take it home from the store and bring it straight to you.”

She didn’t want to let him off that easily. She pressed on- “What is it?”

He placed his hands on either side of her smooth face, tilting her chin upwards to make sure she could see the honesty in his eyes. “It’s a ring. I have money saved, and if I keep saving, I can get you a ring by May. In three months, I’m going to propose to you. I love you.”

She stared right back into his eyes, searching deep to make sure he wasn’t lying. She knew within a minute he was not. She bit her lip, her face still locked by his sturdy hands, and broke the gaze.

Alexander immediately realized his mistake. Unless he could make this an absolute certainty, he never should have brought it up, despite how romantic it sounded.

“Thank you sweetie. But would you mind not bringing that up again until it actually happens? I don’t want to think about it until it does.”

“I promise you, I promise that I will keep my word. It might not be exactly three months. But it will happen. I would never lie.”

“I know you wouldn’t. But…I’d rather just wait until then to smile?”

“Of course.” Nadia gave him a quick hug and pulled on the ends of his scarf.

“How about we grab some dinner? I know Antonio’s is probably full, but how
“About some orange chicken at Tien Hong’s?”

“As long as I can pay. I owe you a present.” Alex slid his arm around her thin shoulders and pulled her close. “In fact, for this lovely scarf, I’ll throw in some fried rice and an egg roll.”

Alexander stood for a long time after the seagull flew away, watching after it and then watching nothing. His eyes drifted around the crowd once more, looking for faces to draw inspiration from. Jake gave him a goofy grin and thumbs up. Inappropriate, yes, but it reminded him of his wedding day, as he stood waiting to see Nadia in the dress she kept a secret for the past four months. She told him he would be surprised. He didn’t know if this meant she kept a traditional white gown for his sake, or adopted some peach-colored poufy thing. He hoped fervently it was the former. Alexander didn’t remember the procession order, so when he thought Nadia was finally coming down the aisle with his father, he was annoyed to see Jake escorting Chloe. When Jake could see the look on his friend’s face, he flashed him the thumbs up, breaking the tension and bringing a true grin to Alexander’s face. After that, all he could remember was Nadia, who was not in peach after all.

A quick fluttering motion in the corner of his right eye caught Alexander’s attention. He thought it was the seagull again, but turned his head to see Ms. Louise, their upstairs neighbor, cooling herself with a purple-feathered fan. For every major holiday- and on most months in general- Nadia brought Mr. Louise a plate full of the cookies or brownies, or whatever sugary concoction Nadia felt like whipping up. The woman was kind to the couple when they moved in to the building five years ago, giving them tips on which local takeout places were the quickest, and what to tell the super when the water was on the fritz. She was a lovely woman. A few days after Nadia’s death, she came down stairs and entered their apartment without asking, arms loaded with enough kugel and casserole dishes to feed him for several weeks. “I’m not a baker like our Nadia, but I’ll be damned if I can’t put a little more meat on your bones”, she said with a wink, placing the dishes in the freezer and doling out a good-sized portion for Alexander’s lunch. Ms. Louise saw Alexander watching her fan, and nodded to him in encouragement. He wondered how long he had been standing up. The small crowd seemed to understand he wanted to speak, so he allowed himself a few more moments of reflection, trying to summon words to match his memories.

In their second year of marriage, Alexander took Nadia to the hospital. She was not sick or hurt, nor did she know where they were going when he asked her to
go for a drive with him. She weaved her hand through the wind as they drove along the coastal highway toward the treatment center he knew by reputation. She didn’t utter a word when he took the exits clearly marked “hospital” and got out of the car when he pulled up to the psychiatric wing. She took his hand as he led her inside the building, placed her in a chair and began to speak to a nurse.

It was exactly three weeks since word reached the Ross’ of the death of Art and Corrine Moore, Nadia’s parents. A fire had spread through their trailer while they were both asleep, slumped over at the little breakfast table from a long night of drinking and god knows what. Alexander had difficulty hoping they were taken by the fumes before the flames. The police could barely identify the remains and cited the fire as an accident, most likely caused by an over-turned candle. It wasn’t a nice area, and the police had better cases to attend to than to figure out the exact cause of death. Alexander and Nadia both knew it was probably a combination of stove burners, hot plates, beakers of unknown substances, pipes, candles, bottles of liquor with a shot’s worth left in each, and at least a year’s worth of newspapers littering the filthy tile of the trailer.

Alexander felt a sense of relief to hear of their death; maybe now, he thought, Nadia could feel like she was free of their influence. They were the worst kind of parents - the kind that actually loves their child but has no means of raising them or supporting them. They tried their best, but Nadia raised herself. Luckily she had the sense to keep away from all of her parents kitchen “experiments.” Three weeks later, Nadia had barely said a word about their deaths. Alexander considered it unusual when she didn’t say anything for more than forty minutes. She was the only person who could hold a service for them, but chose not to. She barely ate but slept thirteen hours a day when she wasn’t lying in bed, nearly catatonic. She never put on makeup and rarely looked Alexander in the eye. Chloe called him concerned when Nadia showed up to her house unexpectedly, pulling down the black sleeves of her top to cover her arms. Nadia had screeched in pain when Chloe grabbed her forearm to see what she was hiding, but when the sleeve was pushed back, Chloe found no marks, no source of pain. Alexander told all of this to the red-haired nurse, in more or less detail, and went back to sit by his wife. She turned her head to face him. The sense of calm on her face was unnerving.

“I’m sorry” was all he could mumble to her lap.

“What for? You just don’t want me turning out like them. Or worse. I get it.”

“I don’t think that.”

“It’s fine if you do. This is my first trip to the hospital. I’m almost 25 and I’ve never been to the hospital.”
Alexander didn’t know this. He thought about her birth certificate, and how he was glad that they removed it from the trailer when they applied for their marriage license. The nurse was wheeling a chair towards them. He forced himself to look his wife in the face.

“It won’t be long. I’ll stay here. I’m staying here. I have all of your things…they are running some tests…I’ll stay here.”

Nadia stood up and sat down in the wheelchair like it was a jeweled throne. The nurse turned her around towards the door. Nadia looked at her husband over her shoulder.

“You don’t take someone to the hospital if you don’t love them. I love you too.” He didn’t know if she heard his reply as she was pushed through the double-doors, sitting as properly as a queen.
My Best Friend
Jennifer Clark

oh, how you comfort me
on those long nights
alone, we have so much fun;

in the shower,
i’m dripping
wet, so moist, so
stimulatingly soaking—
we run through fields
of flesh,
embracing, reaching, almost
there, your soothing
voice eases me through the night.

You make my babies,
baby,
you are my left and right,

you are my folds, my flaps,
my lily pad for prince right
to hop, hop, hop,
all fairytale long.

When I see you
under my side, I
can’t believe the quality
companion you are to my thighs.
Those lucky bastards.

If only I could get down there
more often;
what a party we’d have.