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Vol. 3

Whole Lotta Love



Memor Mixtapes

Vol.3: Whole Lotta Love

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Letters from the Editors



Dear friends & lovers of Memoir Mixtapes,

It seems like just yesterday I was writing our first call for submissions, hoping that at least a few people would respond to it so I wouldn't feel like a total loser.

As you've seen, the response to MM has been way better than I initially anticipated, and we've received more submissions for each call we've put out. We hope that trend continues because we love getting to know you all through your musically-inspired personal stories and poems.

As you may be aware if you follow us on Twitter, this last submission period was a tumultuous time for both of your editors. I was unexpectedly laid off at the end of January, and I'd be lying if I said my ego wasn't a bit bruised by the whole affair. However, I have been surprised at how well I've handled this period in my life thus far, and I think I owe my optimistic outlook on the sense of purpose and fulfillment Memoir Mixtapes continues to bestow upon me.

My good friend and brilliant co-editor, Kevin, had an even worse experience this past week when he lost his best furry friend, Franklin, to an unexpected illness. Franklin was the best damn co-co-editor the world has ever seen, and he will be greatly missed. I want to dedicate this issue to Franklin, as one of his last acts on this earth before falling ill was sitting alongside Kevin as we nailed down the tracklist for Vol.3. We'll let you judge for yourself, but we think we did a fine job with his help.

We hope you enjoy the pieces and songs you'll find here in Memoir Mixtapes Vol.3: Whole Lotta Love. While each piece explores a different facet of love, or a different kind of love, we were profoundly moved by each and every one of them. Fair warning: while some of these pieces will fill you with a blissed-out and giddy delight, others will have you reaching for the nearest box of Kleenex, so maybe you should go ahead and grab that box now before you hop into it.

Thank you, as always, for being the amazing, attentive readers our contributors deserve. We can't tell you how much we appreciate you.

XOXO,

Samantha Lamph/Len

CREATOR & CO-CURATOR



As Roy Orbison put it so eloquently, "Love hurts."

These words became painfully true for me a week ago, as I had to say goodbye to one of my best friends, Franklin—the sweetest pug to ever live. He was damn near perfect, and now he's gone, leaving a gaping, raw, pug-shaped wound in my heart where he used to live.

Love hurts. It hurts bad. And sometimes love destroys. It leaves you broken and shattered and wondering how you're going to go on.

But it also brings joy. It brings laughter. It reaffirms and bolsters us. It gives us a purpose.

This was never more evident to me than when we were reading all of the fantastic submissions we received for Memoir Mixtapes Vol.3: Whole Lotta Love. If you, like Lou Gramm of Foreigner, have found yourself wanting "to know what love is," I think this Volume is going to help show you. Our contributors have brought so much to the table this time: first love, true love, heartbreak, love for family, even self-love. I feel confident in saying that our contributors have helped us capture most of, if not all, the aspects of that complex feeling we call "love." I say it every time, but I'm exceptionally proud of this Volume, and I dearly hope you enjoy it.

I'd like to thank my wife Elise, once again, for being tirelessly supportive of Memoir Mixtapes, and for pushing me to write something after we had to say goodbye to our best little roommate. I'd also like to thank my co-editor/our glorious creator, Sam, who has also endured some trying weeks of her own recently. The sudden loss of her job (after uprooting and moving to be able to better commit to it) didn't stop her at all, and she's been a true champion in the face of defeat.

But lastly, I'd like to thank you, dear reader, for liking us enough to read our publication. The world can feel cold and heartless sometimes, but it's good to know that there are people out there who care. We love you all.

Kevin D. Woodall

CO-CURATOR / EDITOR

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Townes Van Zandt

"If I Needed You"

*The Late Great Townes
Van Zandt*

1972

Tomato

A Love Poem for Past & Future Squeezed Tightly into Now

Sam Rasnake

"a treasure for the poor to find"

– Townes Van Zandt, "If I Needed You"

Winter is here with its bitter, prophetic rage.
The cattle, huddled under trees, know what to do.
Smoke rises along the road to the lake.
At the bottom of the well, cool water over dark.
And the years blur past us, a streak of frames
in motion telling yet another story.

I've heard your voice

If I needed you

showing the muscle in my chest the way – your eyes a window,
your hands a truth as you talk me through the night.

Birds are stirring. Sunrise over the ridge colors the wind –
the field an easel, the fence a brush, your words are mountains,
a tremble of leaves over the ground

Would you come to me

in the whatever of the whenever – *if* is a lonely place.

I know pain waits for me, and silence will open its beautiful head.
Before the room empties, before the bits of talk fall to the floor
then disappear, before these walls echo dreams
under rocks in the river east of here,
you can tell me – you can tell me one more time
the hole inside of everything – your breath on my cheek
to keep my eyes from closing.

You'll touch my hand

I would swim the sea

and the stars at midnight will be my only map.

Reflecting the Surface of You: A Relationship set to “Finally, Peace”

Kolleen Carney-Hoepfner

*With glittering hands
On collapsible land*

The first song you ever sent to me after we admitted we were in love with each other and spent days learning the topography of each other's bodies, as you dropped me off at LAX and drove back to your house that would be our house, was “Saved” by Swans. This is not “Saved” but that was the song you sent. You told me once Swans was the first band that made you feel something maybe hot and electric in your sternum. I sobbed as I listened to it, looking up the lyrics, sitting in the JetBlue terminal, feeling foolish. I already missed the way your hand held my hand, your big hands, your long fingers.

Sometimes now we wake up and if I turn to face you the sun does peek through the slits of the blinds and you say to me “You look like a creature from heaven”. Anyway, that was the first Swans song I ever heard.
But this isn't it.

*We're praising the sun
For the damage he's done*

In Massachusetts, I miss the always-sun of California, where every day feels and smells like fall or summer. Even if it is snowing and I love the snow so much and the cold and how sometimes it is so cold it makes me cough and my cheeks burn red, even if it's like that I don't feel ok. I stand on my three-season porch and look out to the dead-end street and it's two a.m. and everything is quiet.

I bought this house because I thought that was what I was supposed to do but even though I fell in love with it, this little bungalow, even though Aidan could rest his head in his own room every day and feel safe, I am not happy.

I am afraid to admit this. I try to lie to myself and say I wanted this, the kind neighbors and the cat that comes from next door and hangs out with me— his name is George— but I know I don't want this and instead of just admitting it I fall deep into depression. Though we talk every day and you're the only one I talk to now I don't want to tell you that every night I stare at my bottle of 90 Klonopin wondering if I should just die.

*A ruinous eyesore
Oh, what is the world for?*

Once you took me to a bar and I wore my black dress that's now your favorite dress, the one with the low neckline, and I wore my best bra and black tights and maybe even heels. I don't remember what I wore for shoes. My hands were shaking

Swans

“Finally, Peace”

The Gate

10/2015

Young God Records

waiting for you to get me. I don't remember what I drank. I don't remember what bar it was. I know I was trying to flirt while not flirting, and I wanted so badly for you to press me up against the hood of your ancient Jeep, leaking transmission fluid, sputtering loud when you drive it, I wanted you to push me up against the hood and kiss me but you didn't. Instead we went back to your place and watched *Marwencol*, a war zone in a back yard, a damaged mind, and I laid next to you on the couch and played with your hair. You didn't understand and went to bed alone and I slept on the couch alone. The next morning I wrote in my journal that I wished there were two "me"s, one for Massachusetts and one for California, and then I masturbated, wishing you would wake up, wishing I was brave enough to wake you up.

*Just a knife in a lake
Just an arrow in space.*

I got drunk at a bar that only served beer; I snuck in vodka in two Polar seltzer bottles and I should not have drank so much, but I did. I didn't have insurance yet and I was cutting my meds in half. My bipolar was out of control. You always say my friends tell you how bad I was before we became a thing. You always say you don't understand what they're talking about because you've never seen me desperate and wild and broken the way they have told you. I can get very dark, and you said you could handle it. So I went to this bar with my contraband vodka and I went to a dark place, a place where I want to be dead and take everyone with me, and to get even with you for the anger I felt—this anger of you loving me, this anger that comes from nowhere and makes no sense— I sat on the edge of the tub and carved four even lines in the space above my right knee, and then I came out to show you and I think you were slightly panicked but you bandaged me up. Even to this day I do not know where you hid the pocketknife I used. The scars faded, my medication situation got fixed, my manic episode ended, and now we don't talk about it, maybe we've even forgotten about it.

*All creation is hollow
And a picture's a shadow*

You tell me Michael Gira has been accused of rape. I am not even as big a Swans fan as you are but I still struggle with this information. We saw him in concert in Boston and he was very greasy, like he hadn't washed his hair in weeks, and I thought to myself later, yeah, maybe I could see that. Not that a rapist looks specific in a way, but I think by now I can trust the gut feelings that come from sizing someone up as a predator. I don't like supporting rapists and I know that if I am struggling with this as a casual Swans fan, you must be torn with the knowledge that someone who has meant so much to you is probably a monster.

I don't tell you that I just assume everyone's a monster. It's easier that way.

*Just a symptom of love
With a lack of a cause*

I hate the thought of you with anyone else, that hitch-hitch of your breath in someone else's ear, your mouth on someone else's mouth. I hate the thought

of me with anyone else, even though you never ask about it and I bet
you never think about it. I don't know why I feel this way; it's a feeling I haven't had
in the better part of twenty years. I'm like a jealous teenager.

To make things easier, we agree to pretend our lives started with each other,
and we rarely talk about our pasts, even though truthfully
I can't help but think about yours.

In bed some nights, we listen to Swans. It is louder than we are.
I am sure the neighbors appreciate this kindness. In bed is the only time
my brain doesn't get carried away with self- sabotage. I need you
crushing me to block out all the bad things.

*Now the city's dissolving
And heaven's inhaling*

Los Angeles is folding in on itself. It is self-destructing.
Everyone is on edge here, trying to keep a straight face,
grimacing through their teeth.

Still, I can't help but feel a warmth in my chest
when I drive home and see the city blanketed before me,
an ocean of lights. I know the first time I thought of California as home
was when I first flew back to Massachusetts, before I met you.
I wouldn't want to be in this city without you, though. You're what makes it home.

I know the first time you thought of California as home you were standing
on that one marble square at the Grove that is darker than the rest, watching
the people coming and going, their shoulders jostling you
as they squeezed by you. This was before you met me.
You shared this memory with me, and now when we go to the Grove
we always stop there, even for a moment, to kiss.

*While the ocean is thinking
Of the surface reflecting*

The first time I stood at the ocean with you we were cold
and tipsy and I told you I was afraid. Afraid of what being in love with you meant,
afraid of how to face the world back home without you. Now, we take weekend afternoons
and drive to Leo Carillo and have a picnic and look at the tide pools. We get sunburned
because we are lazy about sunscreen. We go as often as we can. And, because
it's California, because of heat waves that seem never ending,
Aidan can swim in the Pacific even in early fall while back east
everyone is already putting plastic on the windows and turning on thermostats.
You and he wrestle in the sand. He has become a son to you so quickly.

In October we got married on the beach. The breeze blew your hair
so in every picture outdoors you look goofy, like a member
of Flock of Seagulls, which, I guess, is appropriate. The waves crashed
and crashed again, bearing witness, and when you read your vows your voice shook.

Your glorious mind
Your glorious mind

Sometimes
I like to put my hands on either side of your face and put my forehead to your forehead.
I think of how I love you, how complete you've made me.
How safe I am with you. I think of how brilliant you are.
How your loud laugh intoxicates me just as much as that first day. How
every time we fuck it's like the first time, so perfect no one would believe
us if we told them. How my head on your chest comforts me. I think
of how you look when you're sleeping, your hand cradling your shoulder
and your little twitches. I think, I love you, I love you, I love you.

I hope, in these moments, that you can read my thoughts.
I think it's the only way you'll really know the extent of what you are to me.

Your glorious mind
Your glorious mind

There is, finally, peace.

Lyrics: "Finally Peace", Michael Gira 2016
For Fritz, naturally



The Decemberists

"California One/Youth and
Beauty Brigade"

Castaways and Cutouts

05/2002

Hush Records

places you'll sleep your first week in california

Taylor Gates

*"And the sky, it stretches deep/Will we rest our heads to slumber/Neath the vines/Of California
wine/Neath the sun/Of California One?"*

i. a popped air mattress
whose open mouth hisses
no matter how much duct tape
you band-aid onto green rubber.
put your ear to your pillow
and it's a conch shell.

dream of stirring
pacific tides
into a can of la croix.

ii. a brown mat
like the one your father bought
at a garage sale to pad
your sister's somersaults.
wake up with aching hips
and sore shoulders.

dream of floating
down rodeo drive
on a hollywood star.

iii. your friend's pull-out couch
wearing wine-stained jeans,
a borrowed OSU sweatshirt,
last night's makeup.
no sheets on this bed,
but no cockroaches under.

dream of filling
a salt-shaker with sand,
sprinkling it on avocado toast.

iv. the back of an uber
at one in the morning.
count streetlights,
not sheep.
let a korean pop lullaby
lull you to sleep.

dream of tattooing
a map of the 405
onto your veins.



David Bowie

“Fashion”

*Scary Monsters
(and Super Creeps)*

09/1980

RCA Records

On “Fashion” by David Bowie

Sarah Skiles

Sassy, free-flowing trumpet weaves its way around jangling jazz-funk-fusion guitar. A bottle of bottom shelf gin rests on the coffee table. My parents are listening to *Bitches Brew*, yet again. An evening of Miles Davis and cheap booze is pretty unremarkable for them, apart from the fact that they are about to get busy and my mom hasn't taken the Pill for several days.

When I learn about the moment of my conception as a teenager, I am at first aghast and grossed out by my mom's unrequested oversharing, but then I am grateful to have been told the story. It makes utter sense. Music played a prominent role in my life from the very start.

I am named after two songs from my mom's favorite musician: Bob Dylan. It's the only time she contributes to my musical education. The rest is left to my dad, who is obsessed with music.

This extends well beyond his favorite musician, Miles Davis. In our home, the names of the jazz greats are uttered with the same reverence that the religious refer to their saints. Coltrane, Davis, Mingus, Evans, Dolphy, and Parker. *Hallelujah*. Monk, Ayler, Bley, Taylor and Roach. *Amen*. When, as a three-year old, I sing along to the Sun-Ra classic, “Rocket Number Nine,” he rewards me with a new dress. My mom takes to hiding money so that he won't blow the rent on records. He acquires thousands of albums which constantly blast on his stereo. Most days are jazz days, but sometimes I am surprised by a weeklong rotation of Parliament Funkadelic, Phillip Glass, or The Rolling Stones. Silence is a veritable unknown in our home. I learn to sleep through just about anything.

A selection of music is curated for me. Rock and pop singles from the sixties, seventies, and eighties are placed into an old jukebox that my parents buy at a thrift shop and set up in our basement. I spend hours down there not just listening, but dancing, to music. I combine steps from ballet class with moves I've seen on MTV to create strange dances for my favorite songs and perform them for an imaginary audience.

Choreography requires repeated playing of the same song to get the routine just right. This burns me bad when it comes to Warren Zevon's repetitious blues-inflected ditty “Werewolves of London,” and DEVO's synthy new wave “Whip It,” which disappear from the jukebox one night under mysterious circumstances. The song that I play the most is never removed, though, because my parents also love David Bowie. All of the singles from *Scary Monsters* are on the jukebox, but “Fashion” is by far my favorite.

I get this song. The underlying tune is funky, but a bit martial. It's life's unrelenting beat forcing you ever onward. (Even as a kid, I'm prone to ennui.) But then Robert Fripp's guitar kicks in. Chaos. It grinds. It grates. It's simultaneously ugly and beautiful. It expresses my need for individuality, my need to be wild. The nonsensical chorus of BEEP! BEEP! Isn't something I get until I'm older, but it's terribly fun to shout out. When I dance to “Fashion,” I don't care what I look like because I am too busy filling out every moment of the song with my body. I experience it with the same kind of ecstasy my dad feels about a Miles Davis bootleg.

The teachers at my elementary school call me dreamy. I'm the kid who stares out the window, watching clouds, while the rest of the class is engaged. Under the desk, my feet are tapping. I've recently learned about rain dances and have convinced myself that I can in fact control the weather through the power of my footwork.

Years pass. I get older and figure out that I'm just living in a town plagued by lake-effect precipitation and have not been blessed with comic book superpowers. But then another type of cloud descends upon me, one no amount of dancing can lift.

In the year after graduating from college, I transform from a snarky force of nature intent on kicking down doors as an artist, into a walking, barely talking zombie. It starts with anxiety, which creeps into despair, and finally sinks into a state of utter numbness. At some point in the middle of this, I stop dancing. Instead of listening to music, I watch hours of television every day. I don't enjoy it, but I really don't enjoy anything. The world and my place in it seem pretty damned useless. I loathe myself.

Eventually I move back in with my parents, who after watching me for a few weeks, say I need to see a doctor. Twenty minutes into my intake exam, I am diagnosed with clinical depression. I ask the doctor if there's a cure for falling out of love with yourself and life. I'm prescribed drugs to lift me out of it.

Weeks pass. I go to therapy. My psychiatrist ups the dosage of my anti-depressant. But I'm still lost in the void of depression. I'm beginning to wonder if life will ever get better.

One afternoon I'm in my parents' kitchen. Sun shines through the windows, but outside it's the type of bitter Midwestern cold that leeches every ounce of warmth from your bones. The house is old and too drafty to properly heat, so I'm wearing ridiculous, fuzzy red socks and am making potato soup. The television drones from its perch on top of the refrigerator, but I'm not paying attention to it as I slide the stainless-steel peeler across mottled brown potato skin. I feel a sense of satisfaction as I pile pale peeled potatoes into a tall soup pot. It's a recipe from my Great-Aunt Ginya that I found in my mother's battered recipe box, and I just know my family is going to love it.

I am feeling.

Much like its arrival, the departure of my depression is as slow as molasses running down a spoon. It doesn't immediately occur to me that this is a significant moment.

If this was my bio-pic, the score would swell to clue the audience in on the transformation going on inside of me, but since this is real life, the event is scored by the music coming from the television set.

What I hear is a chorus of voices singing BEEP BEEP! And as the raucous Robert Fripp guitar kicks in, I'm sliding across the kitchen floor, following the choreography I invented when I was a kid. I know this song all too well. Potato soup forgotten, I twirl and stomp to David Bowie's "Fashion." I whip my hair and fling my body, feeling for the first time in ages like I am fully inhabiting it and am not a walking ghost. I run to the stereo and rifle through the CDs until I find my dad's copy of *Scary Monsters*, put track five on repeat, and turn up the volume until the music rattles my bones. I pirouette and strut in my parents' living room until I'm exhausted and covered in sweat.

This is when I begin to love myself again, just a little bit.

This is the moment when I know I'll make it through.



Iron Butterfly

"In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida"

In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida

06/1968

Atco

After Iron Butterfly

Jim Zola

a voice spoken through a box fan
saying hello hello or singing
In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida Baby
the initial itch of poison
ivy before you know not to scratch
the telephone buzz
when you answer
and no one speaks
not any color found in a crayon box
even the big ones with 64
my son makes me read the names
sepia
electric lime
bittersweet
as he draws a picture
of a tree eating monster
more beautiful
than any sky
I'm thinking christ
my leg itches
and the phone nagging
reminds me of loss
I want to whisper into the ozone
Don't you know that I'm lovin' you



Earth, Wind, & Fire

"September"

The Best of Earth, Wind
& Fire, Vol. 1

11/1978

ARC/Columbia Legacy

On "September" by Earth, Wind & Fire

Jon Johnson

My dad croaked two weeks shy of my 26th birthday. It was hard. But it wasn't unexpected.

Robert Harris Johnson was sitting next to his ten year old son in a golf cart, looking out at the 7th tee. "Now remember boy," he said, handing him a new ball and tee. "I know, I know," Jon sighed. "Swing the club and let the ball get in the way."

Bob smiled, knowing full well what would happen next. He watched his son tee up the ball, settle his stance, take a deep, relaxing breath, and then grip the club with all his strength and try to whack the crap out of it. It sailed all of 50 yards. To the right. Hit a tree, and bounced back to settle some 20 yards in front of the tee box. Jon hung his head in defeat. Bob started cracking up.

"Well, you know what they say, forward is forward!" Jon sulked back to the cart and slammed his club into the bag as he watched his father tee up.

I'll never be able to hit the ball like him until I'm older and stronger. He is just stronger than me is all. And has more practice. And his clubs are great; mine stink. While Jon was thinking to himself, he was watching the dance of his father. Bob teed up his ball, took five steps back, and watched the course. The way the tips of the trees moved. The sound of someone putting on the green behind him. The sunlight dancing shadows on each blade of the fairway.

He breathed the same air the ball would breathe on its flight. He watched the grass caress its glistening skin. He felt the cup take him in, longing to accept its destiny.

Bob felt himself settle into the shot. He took a deep breath into the backswing, letting himself vanish as the club head led him towards the light. The sound rippled off the trees lining the fairway, sending a curious hawk up and out of harm's way. The ball disappeared into the sky for a few seconds and reappeared with a gentle thud, some three yards from the hole.

"That'll work," Bob smiled, picking up his tee. "Now, let's see if we can't get you to knock it in the hole this time."

For all his shortcomings, of which there were many, Robert had a few things going for him. First, he remembered Woodstock. That is to say, he remembers a lot of mud and good music. The rest was a bit hazy. Acid will do that to you. As he put it, it was just "better living through chemistry" in those days.

Secondly, Bob may have been one of the luckiest son-of-a-bitches alive. Surviving multiple car crashes, drug overdoses, suicide attempts, and falling from a 30-foot cliff with a motorcycle on top of him make the list.

Diagnosed with a heart condition at six, Bob had multiple open heart surgeries throughout his life, the last of which lasted 8 extra hours. During this time, the man was, for all intents and purposes, dead.

When he miraculously woke back up from the surgery, the doctors worried he would have brain damage or be unable to move. The first thing Bob noticed was that the nurses had chopped off his moustache to fit the anaesthesia mask on. He utilized more than a few four-letter words to tell them how he felt. He was right as rain.

Finally, Bob had a very simple way of looking at life. This simplicity lent itself well to golf, where he was unparalleled.

When he was younger, Robert loved a few things: drugs, alcohol, and his no-good mother. By the time his daughter popped out, Bob had changed a bit. He now loved golf, learning, and her crystal blue eyes. Not in that order.

He gladly gave up his spot on the PGA tour the first time he heard his daughter cry. But his love for the game never went away. Now, some 14 years later, Bob is having the time of his life watching his second child struggle to make a ten-foot putt.

They headed to the clubhouse for lunch before the back nine. "You know why golf is the greatest game in the world son?" He asked through a bite of his tuna sandwich.

"Cuz you are good at it," came the sarcastic reply. Bob laughed a bit of tuna onto the table, which he picked up and popped back in his mouth before continuing. "Golf is the greatest game in the world because there is no one to beat. There is no one to blame. There is nothing else holding you back. It's just you. Golf is the ultimate representation of life. You can walk around the course, complaining about the number of hazards, or how you would do better with nicer clubs, or how slow the group in front of you is, or how the sun was in your eyes. But in the end, your score won't get any better."

"Is that why you play?" Jon was pulling bits of grass from his shoes with a tee.

"Me? Nah, I play so my wife doesn't bitch at me to do something else." He laughed a bit too hard, and went into a coughing fit.

After lunch, Bob lit up a cigarette and watched Jon practice the one thing he was good at—chipping.

There was something in the gracefulness of a wedge that just fit with Jon. He couldn't drive the ball for shit. He could read the green, but executing a putt was another story. But put the kid within 70 yards and he would pop that sucker on the green every time. Jon would think "If I can just get better with the wedge, I'll never have to putt, I can just hole in every time."

So here he sat, chipping shots onto the practice green at the course, each one closer and closer to the hole. His dad watched for a bit and then cut in. "You know boy, if you only practice what you are good at, you'll never get any better. Come on, we're up."

Jon laced up his shoes, preparing for another disaster on the tee. His dad got out of the cart with him, walking him to the tee box.

"Now remember boy,"

"I know dad—" he started, but Bob cut in.

"Yeah, I know you know, but the trees cant take anymore abuse from you 'knowing.' Now stand right here. I want you to look at the course. What are you looking at?"

"The flag."

"Why?"

"Cuz that's the goal."

"When was the last time you hit the green?"

"I can't remember."

"So why is the flag the goal?"

"Cuz that's how you win."

"There's no winning in golf."

"You know what I mean."

"Sure. Here, stay there."

Bob ran and grabbed the towel from his bag and tied it around Jon's face. Jon started in sarcastically. "Aawh, Yoda. With the blast shield down I can't even see. How am I supposed to fight?"

"Shut up, smartass. Now stay there and hold the club. What are you looking at now?"

"The inside of a towel."

"Got it. What else can you see?"

"Nothing."

"OK, so if you can't see what you think is the goal, what else do you have to go on? What can you hear?"

"Your fake heart valve ticking."

"Good, what else?"

"The grill at the clubhouse."

"Keep going."

Jon sighed. "The cars on Bradley road, the guy on his telephone over there, the wind in the palm tree. The flag is flapping too."

"Great, now what can you feel?"

"The towel on my face."

"Yes, genius, and?"

"The sun is warm I guess. And there is wind on my arm hair. And I feel like I may have to poop soon."

"Good, now what are you aiming at?"

"What do you mean? There is nothing to aim at. I'm just hearing and feeling stuff."

"Exactly. Now hit the ball."

Jon pulled the towel up to uncover one eye and look at his dad in disbelief. "You really are doing some Luke Skywalker stuff here, you know?"

Bob slapped the towel back down and guided his son over to the ball. "Take a quick peak to see where the ball is. See it? Now I'm setting up your stance here, move your hips with your shoulders. Good. Now, just hear and feel everything going on inside and outside of you again. Whenever you feel ready, swing the club..."

"...and let the ball get in the way" Jon answered. He felt the club in his hands. He felt a stiffness in his shoulders. He let them relax. He heard a squirrel in the trash can on 18 eating crumbs. He heard his dad's ticking heart, felt the breath going in his lungs, smelled the pork on the clubhouse grill. He thought about doing all this work and then still failing, but he let that thought go. *It can't get any worse*, he thought.

Jon took a deep breath, and gently lifted the club into the sky. He let himself go as the club dropped, ringing a gong through him as the ball went skyward. He felt himself flying through the air, kissed by the wind, destined for the hole. He followed the ball in his mind, heard it rattle in the cup.

The sound of his dad's laughter shook him from his bliss. He ripped off the towel and looked for his ball. It was buried in the bunker just off the green. Jon threw his hands up in the air, defeated yet again. He let the club fall to the ground as he headed to the cart.

"Boy, get back here." Bob had contained his laughter by now. "What does that card say, how far is the green from here?"

"190 yards."

"So you mean to tell me you just drove a shot 180 yards, and you are moping about it because you landed in the bunker?"

Jon laughed in spite of himself. It was true. It was the first time he had ever hit the ball this far. He started feeling proud of his shot, of how easy it felt. He couldn't stop smiling as he watched his dad knock his tee shot on the far edge of the green. Bob tossed his club in the bag and patted Jon on the back. "Now, grab that magic wedge and see if you can't show me the way to the hole."

As they put their clubs in the trunk of the car that day, Bob was beaming. "I'm so proud of you, boy. You stopped trying to dominate the ball and just let it be, and look what happened." Jon really was happy with himself. He wouldn't stop talking about that shot for a week, at least.

On the ride home, Bob popped in a CD. The first track was "September" by Earth, Wind & Fire. He cranked it up, and sang off key as he bobbed side to side to the beat. Jon shook his head at how silly this guy looked, but joined in for the chorus.

Bob had another coughing fit as they were putting the clubs back into the garage. Jon rubbed his back. He knew 40 years of cigarettes could do that, but he wished it wouldn't be happening to his dad.

"Son, I ain't gonna be around forever. None of us are." This was Bob's favorite message. It was never meant in a foreboding way; he just really liked to remind himself and everyone he loved what a blink this life is compared to the infinity that comes before and after it.

As the years went on, his health got progressively worse. His heart condition took its toll on his body, and Bob's smoking habit added fuel to the fire. The heart attacks scared everyone shitless, but the COPD diagnosis was no surprise to anyone.

The last time Jon saw him alive, they went out for a round of golf. Bob was complaining of a hernia, but still wanted to play. Jon told him he was a fuckin' idiot if he thought he was playing with a hernia, that he needed to see the doctor. He shrugged and said he would drive the cart.

Bob rode along in the cart as Jon, his partner Barbara, and his nephew Tegan went through nine holes in the cold December wind. Tegan was ten now and wanted so bad to hit the ball as far as uncle Jon could. Jon and Bob smiled at each other knowingly.

While Tegan was on the 4th green, Bob took Jon's wedge out and hit a few balls onto the green for Tegan to tap in with his putter.

"You know, pop," Jon started. "If you only practice what you are good at, you'll never get any better."

Bob dropped the club laughing. "Smartass," he said when he finally gained his composure.

They dropped Bob off at his house when the wind got too cold to keep playing. "What you guys doing tomorrow, want to go out for another round?" Jon laughed at his dad's stubbornness.

"Dad, no. Please go get your hernia checked out."

Bob shrugged, tapping his sore hernia. "Maybe I should though."

They hugged.

"I love you, boy."

"I love you, pop."

My dad croaked two weeks shy of my 26th birthday. It was hard. Even if it wasn't unexpected.

Here Comes the Sun: A Story of Love, Motherhood and Milk

Ryane Granados

He came early. It wasn't time yet. I hadn't even shaved my legs. Keeping with the tradition of the second child treatment, we also hadn't purchased a thing. What size would he be anyway? Thirty-three weeks was too soon. Too small. Too tempting to traverse the torture chamber of Google and find out all the worst case scenarios that lay before us. Maybe if I held my breath and squeezed my thighs together like that soft pretzel I had just eaten I could hold him in a little longer.

I wanted my husband. I needed my mommy. I left the house a mess. I was impatient with my 6-year-old when I dropped him off to school. I had yet to even crack open the book that was supposed to explain to him how awesome being a big brother would be. And now the time had come.

When I entered the hospital for a check-up, I never imagined I'd be gifted a backless gown, a windowless room, and a new doctor. She was a perinatologist with a kind smile, but her pearly whites couldn't soften the news that the back pain I had been feeling was, in fact, labor. What's worse, I was having eight-minute long contractions that would intermittently cause my son's heartbeat to decelerate. It was at that point that he and I had our first, of I'm sure to be many, heart-to-hearts.

"Noah Alexander. This is your mother speaking. You will eventually learn when I use your first and middle name I mean business. Daddy and I need you to stay put for a few more weeks. I'll promise you the world in exchange for a little while longer."

In response, Noah gave me a firm kick, which I took to mean, "Yes, Mommy."

Prevailing parenting strategies advise against bribes as a way to motivate children. Nonetheless, I needed immediate results. As I cradled my belly for what ended up being a 13-day adventure, I went on to barter with my soon-to-be newborn. For every contraction he successfully survived, I waged anything from toys to trips to the Magic Kingdom all in an effort to will him to stay inside. Consequently, he endured countless bags of IV fluid and his heartbeat commendably withstood the waves of beeping monitors. His chosen name of Noah became the punch line for hospital staff and each shift change marked a new face peeking in the door offering the rally cry of "Hold On Noah" or "Hang Loose!"

The doctors feared that at any moment his heart rate could drop, so we weren't allowed to stay in one of the lovely suites we viewed on the hospital tour. Instead we had to remain in the triage room mere inches away from the OR. The specialist even calculated the minutes it would take from crash, to cut, to get Noah to NICU. Our beachside California kid was set to make a splash of an entrance.

Meanwhile, Mommy was going mad. There were no windows in the triage room, and it was so small that, with arms outstretched, my husband could more or less high five all sides of the poorly painted walls. For a change of scenery, we would open the curtain and watch the chaos of screaming mothers, panting fathers, and running nurses. I'd join in as



The Beatles

"Here Comes the Sun"

Abbey Road

09/1969

Apple

they counted down each push, and then I'd wait. Their baby's first cry made my own eyes well up with tears.

Eleven days in, the requisite bed rest began to take its toll. Childbirth can cause shame in the most dignified of women, yet the bedpans and even the vomit my husband witnessed could not compare to the day I finally snapped. Tear-stained, I implored him to go outside and take pictures of the sun. The inability to differentiate between day and night marred my mental faculties and confirmed I could never survive above the Arctic Circle. I began to recall a commercial I had seen about Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD). I was convinced I had developed the condition ironically in the confines of a place that was supposed to keep me well. By the time my husband returned with shots of trees, blue sky, and the sun, I was singing at the top my lungs. In a tribute anthem to the panel ceiling above, I belted out and butchered The Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun."

Two days later, and with far less fanfare than I envisioned, the doctor came in and said, "we're taking him." At 35 weeks and four days, Noah was born to "Let it Be."

He was perfect. Still early, still small, but he weathered the storm and he survived.

The days that followed found my husband and I in a hotel suite near the hospital because we were discharged before Noah was. With round-the-clock feeding times and an unwavering commitment to breastfeeding I pumped and fed and pumped and fed, obsessing over every ounce of milk I could provide my child in his first days of life. In this case, I had indeed given birth to the milkman's baby; my husband was transformed into an overnight delivery service, racing milk to the NICU during the few hours I carved out to sleep.

He was in the middle of a late night milk run when he noticed the swollen bulge in my calf. Like shame, pain is a part of pregnancy, and of postpartum. So while my leg had been hurting, it wasn't going to stop me from being by my little one's bedside. It took two nurses, a social worker, and a phone call to my mom to convince me to have my leg scanned. Thankfully I did—it turns out I had developed a blood clot, and, if not treated, it could have moved to my lungs or worse my heart. I would need to take injections and medication until the clot absorbed. On the other hand, Noah was gaining by the day and was soon discharged home.

After a few more health setbacks on my behalf, the milk factory had to be shut down. Once again, Google offered up the grim news of all the things that could happen to my child if I didn't breastfeed him. What fate would befall him? What college would he attend? The probable doom was unthinkable. Unsolicited advice poured down like hail pelting my parental confidence. I couldn't shake the feeling of inadequacy. I couldn't shake the formula bottle. I, too, championed the Breast is Best philosophy, but what happens when what's best for most isn't an option for some?

As fate would have it I also began to find myself surrounded by what I liked to call the "lollapaBOOBza lineup." From doctor's appointments to playgrounds and shopping center food courts, lactating mothers were bearing their breast with revolutionary satisfaction. One woman went as far as to share with me how she breastfed all four of her children. She did so until they were four years old and even breastfed the last two in tandem because they are only three years apart. I couldn't help but picture her body as a fast food soda fountain, but instead of dispensing Sprite it spewed milk in all directions. While sitting next to the Olympic champion of breast feeders, I was handed the task of making my son a bottle of formula.

As I shuffled through the diaper bag, I almost began to retell our saga: "He came early. It wasn't time yet. I hadn't even shaved," but before I made excuses for something that needed no explanation at all, once again my liberation was found in a song. The radio station on the mall's loudspeaker bellowed my mother/son love story. "Here comes the sun..." The comforting lyrics reminded me how far we had come and admonished me for shrouding my bottle in secrecy. "Here comes the sun..." While she scooped up her 3-year-old, I boldly shook my powdered sustenance. In tandem, we sang to our little darlings, "It's all right" as the smell of soft pretzels wafted through the air.

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Future Islands

“Little Dreamer”

Wave Like Home

08/2008

Upset The Rhythm

Three Little Dreams – after “Little Dreamer” by Future Islands

Sarah Shields

I dream for you, small girl, hair a soft sheet of butterscotch. I go straight home and paint you, dress flecked with red and green and yellow, your back forever to my eyes. I am a daughter with no daughter. I am a mother. I am not your mother. When I was young, I was sure I had killed you inside me. Then I made two songs, two sons, two hearts—my heart all theirs. I still paint you. All blossoms. All colors. Sometimes, I catch only your ghost.

I dream in you, my lovely fig tree. I say goodnight and goodnight and goodnight, and I climb from my bedroom window, into your gray spotted arms and legs. Necklace of solar-powered bulbs, I hold them as tiny moons in my tiny hands. Once a hummingbird came, once a thousand fig beetles, once a rat. I pray inside you and you hold me close without injury, never let me fall. In the morning, we are still here—leaves or not, figs or not, birdsong or not.

I think too much of you, caretaker of dreams. Once, you found me approach, when I ran wild in this child's place. I could not help but bloom a different shade than I'd promised. Now this is loving you, not knowing you. Husband of a wife. I am no wife. I wrap my ceramic body in a rosy blanket of wool. Here I do not sleep. I do not eat. I stay silent as a small death. Though I will not break, though I am not yet broken, it is you I keep to myself or cannot keep still. Everything grows here. Everything sings here. There is no end—only this I repeat and sow.



Bob Dylan

"Don't Think Twice,
it's All Right"

*The Freewheelin' Bob
Dylan*

05/1963

Columbia

On "Don't Think Twice, it's All Right" by Bob Dylan

Nora Seilheimer

Bob Dylan (a young Bob Dylan, anyway) believed in the first thought. He obeyed the impulse to leave a relationship that no longer served one or both people involved. *Don't think twice*, he sang. *It's all right*. When I discovered my ex, Chad, was engaged, I leaned on Bob for reassurance that my first thought to leave Chad was the right one. That my choice not to work through both our counts of infidelity was the right one. That my choice to respond to his engagement by blowing two weeks' worth of tips on five pairs of shoes from Zappo's was the right one. That my choice to retrieve said shoes from the UPS Customer Center in the South Loop of Chicago in the middle of a blizzard was the right one.

Regardless of the outcome, the woman behind the counter promised me warmth.

When I call your number, you can head on back. A long red acrylic nail stretched out of her fingerless glove and pointed to the automatic sliding door scraped with scuffmarks behind her. *They got the heat on in there.*

I nodded, pressed play on my cell, and let Bob sing to me through one of my ear buds for the hundredth time about his breakup with Suze Rotolo. The first few finger-picked notes trickled past my eardrums and tapped the underside of my breastbone as I slumped against the colorless cinder block wall trying not to cry. In front of strangers. Again. I knew he'd soon tell me I should keep travelin' on like he did. A man who put Suze on the cover of his sophomore album.

Easier said than done.

Other frigid and bundled Chicagoans slouched in tattered chairs with loose legs that whimpered under their weight. Soaked floor mats drew a path to the heated room while melted snow and ice seeped from underneath their black rubber bottoms. No one spoke. Everyone was waiting for something. And my thoughts drifted to the engagement ring Chad bought me but never used. Did he offer her the same ring?

Bob chimed in.

Well it ain't no use to sit and wonder why, babe, if you don't know by now.

So did the woman behind the counter.

Six-seventy-three...Six-seventy three!

I removed my ear bud and waved my slip in the air for her to see. She nodded and pressed a button on the wall behind her. I imagined a burst of warmth wrapping around my bare face and neck, but when the door slid open I entered another space just as cold as the first. Tricky red-nails must have told us the heat was on to keep us from complaining while we huddled in what we thought was the only freezing room. I had to hand it to her, though. It worked. Sometimes the thought of something is all we need to be content, to resist reconsideration.

I passed a man carrying a large box out in front of him. My eyes landed on his for a split second; just long enough to offer the good ol' Midwestern closed-mouth smile before darting to the wet rubber floor. My brain messaged my feet to keep walking, but they refused. They stopped.

So did his.

He called out my name like he'd never done before. "Nora?"

Chad's fearful tone sounded foreign wrapped around my name. Even though I hadn't heard his voice in over a year I had grown accustomed to him enveloping "Nora" in love, lust, the casual check-in, or *where are you come here I have to show you something*.

But never fear.

"Nora, hey, uh, how are you, um..." He motioned his box at me. "Let me just...just hold on a sec."

Chad walked back to the counter. I studied him through the circular window on the sliding door. Frozen. I barely recognized him in his glasses: brown plastic, full-rimmed, rectangular. He almost never wore them when we were together. His backwards baseball cap rang familiar though, so did the brown curls looping around its edge. I used to call those curls his wings. In that moment they looked more like hooks.

He balanced his box on the edge of the counter and asked the woman with red nails something, presumably to guard his package while we talked. She waved her hand at the box, coloring the air between them crimson, and shook her head. Chad asked again flipping his palms up toward the ceiling for emphasis. She pointed at the door and turned away from him.

I turned away from him too, not wanting him to realize I'd been watching, and hurtled my awakened senses at a second set of frigid and bundled Chicagoans. A folding wall isolated them from the rest of the warehouse where our packages sat in numerical order. A *Christmas Story* played on a TV perched on a cart. No one spoke. Everyone was still waiting on something. Still holding out for warmth.

Chad walked back through the sliding door. Black letters soldiering across the box's side told me it housed a Kitchen Aid mixer.

A gift that didn't make it to our wedding shower.

Oh, right. Congratulations.

We exchanged updates while Chad held on to the box. His knuckles turned white as he gripped its corners and asked how my parents were doing. *Tell them I said hello*. I nodded, *sure*. But I wouldn't remember to do this since I wasn't really listening. Instead I was captivated by a thin strip of fog growing at the top of his lenses. It wasn't big enough to block his vision, but it was noticeable enough to raise questions about his increasing body temperature in a room that could have kept corpses fresh.

The woman behind the counter did promise heat.

I told him about my new apartment on the north side. My mouth unmoored from my mind, and I wondered if he thought of me when he proposed to her. For her sake, I hoped not. For my sake, I hoped yes. It didn't need to be anything big, no movie-like montage of

our greatest hits. Just a glimmer, his mind's eye coasting by his memory of me at five miles per hour.

And even though Bob told me not to, I've thought about this moment a million times since. Even my husband knows the story. Each time I tell it, each time I resurrect it from my mind's graveyard of failed loves, that strip of fog becomes increasingly significant. Over the past eight years its role has expanded from a minor detail to the protagonist, the star of the show, and I want to give it a body. I want to give it a name.

I've crafted complete conversations with that strip of fog like it's seized a message from Chad's uninhibited response system destined to let me know he's thought about it more than twice, too. And when he does, it makes him sweat. That even though we both knew it would never have worked, even though we'd both marry wonderful partners we'd undoubtedly choose over each other, the love we had is worth remembering. Our memory of the other is worth bearing the weight of so that we can recall it as much as we like and then decide, again, to not think twice about it.

Sometimes the anticipation of a memory resurfacing is all a heart needs.

Sometimes being that memory is all you need to say *fare thee well*.

Before Chad stumbled through his goodbye, his eyes peeped at the fog collecting above them. He didn't set the box down to wipe it away. He didn't say anything about its presence.

He just let it be. Without a second thought.

A soldier of fortune is the man called Paladin

She drives me over eight hundred miles home multiple times. She spends time with my family. She lets me sing in the car to "Grace Kelly" by Mika and the soundtrack to The Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*. We can both admit that I don't have a future in singing. But she likes my singing voice. And she's the only audience I need.

Ride – after Nicole Blackman

Allie Marini

the golden palominos
dead inside

The Golden Palominos

“Ride”

Dead Inside

10/1996

Restless

i.

Welcome to the land of pointless & destructive

this is not the love story you think it should be. this is only tangentially a love story at all. the love in this story isn't between two people. it's a love story between five entities: a man & the bottles he hides inside of; a girl & the grief she can't quite peel from her skin, & the marriage they both made with their demon disguised as each other. the marriage is at alternate times a ghost, a thorn, a devil, a bomb, a pillow, or broken glass. sometimes the marriage is a broken door. jaw. arm. ankle. this is a love story like Romeo & Juliet & by that I mean: the major players die at the end & those left behind can't understand how nobody saw it coming. no one sees their own complicity. no one really mourns because this is how not-quite-love-stories end:

obliteration.

ii.

Who do you call for help when all your friends are dead?

this is not the love story you want it to be, either. this is a love story, yes—but here the love is different: this is a love story about the powder keg love that exists in the friendships of teenage girls at college, alone in the world for the first time together. it is about the loves they discover: virginities lost, Major British Romantic Poets, squares of LSD on Friday nights dancing in the sultry Sarasota heat, David Bowie, Modernism & Madness, Trainspotting, 72-hour Baker Act psych ward hold, goth clubs, pill bottles, Andy Warhol, red wine & clove cigarettes twisting oily curls of smoke into the midnight moon, Lou Reed, doomed artists, Siouxsie & the Banshees eyeliner, The 27 Club, loss. the girl whose shoulder you cry on when another girl dies is the same girl whose death you will grieve alone, years later. one by one you bury them, each leaving you guardian of memories only you are alive to remember.

keep them all like secrets.

iii.

Things only feel true when someone's abusing you

You are sometimes startled, you are never surprised

this is the only love story I've written & edited & revised & written over & over so many times that you'd think by now I'd have gotten the ending right. this, too, is not the love story you want it to be. but it's written in my native tongue & every time I transliterate the text, I'm convinced the ending will reveal itself in an altogether different way than the last time I wrestled with the landing lines. this is a love story about a girl who isn't a girl anymore but lives forever in her girlhood traumas, cutting the same scar open over & over again to see how long it takes for her scar tissue to stop bleeding entirely. every bloodletting expected, somehow. I want so badly to be surprised, I can nearly taste it on the tip of my tongue.

a burn as sweet as hot candy.

iv.

If you love something, chances are you can't afford it

Finally, the love story you want to hear.

but not the way you wanted to hear it.

The Gardener

Michael Prihoda

I sense a runner in the garden / Although my judgment's known to fail

Pretend I'm Adam. You're Eve. No snake. No apple. No tree. No god? Well, we need something to remind us it's not just about us.

As much as we try to find the bottom in the crook of each other's shoulders, we rise in the morning.

Erase our names.

Let's not be anything except ourselves, pure in human form.

Dissolve a wall. Pretend no walls exist. Walk through. Call this intimacy. Know that it is or can be if we allow it to become so.

Don't turn around, don't dare look back to see if there's an angel guarding our entrance with a flaming sword.

Once built a steamboat in a meadow / Cos I'd forgotten how to sail

All the schemes. Just, I mean, all of it. From both ends. The dreamed of and the undreamed of and the never planned and the already-capitulating. We watched *Seinfeld* to remind us how we were not as alien as we might yet become.

I know the runner's going to tell you / There ain't no cowboy in my hat

Will it happen someday? You wake up, realize the farce of committing yourself until actual, residual death does us part and one of us finds the stare of a coffin lid before the other. One person. Basically an eternity when we stretch for our first, seeing my grandparents past their sixtieth. Still clocking the odometer despite the sputter in my grandma's arthritic wrists, the way she upchucked at my grandfather because the boots he bought for Christmas were the wrong size. Beautiful, gorgeous even, but, you know, the wrong size.

So now he's buried by the daisies / So I could stay the tallest man in your eyes, babe

That fight and the other one. I've always wanted to visit my grandmother's grave in Marathon. But, I think, why? She never obeyed a boundary in death. And so it feels vapid when I go to cordon our grievances behind stones etched with dates, a question mark after clemency. They cannot be contained or dissolved in a bathtub with acid, an admixture of underwhelming self-grace.

But I shuffle, push the dirt one way, the other, make a mound, smooth it out. Walk away. Hope you haven't noticed the dirt beneath my fingers when I come to bed, eager to turn out the lamp, to hide behind the natural soap, the non-toxic hand lotion.

I sense a spy up in the chimney / From all the evidence I've burned

It becomes everyone's job to comment. In actual person. Requiring actual response.

How is it being married? Oh such a lovely couple.

The Tallest Man On Earth
debut album shallow grave

cat no. gra038 / code 456605791221
rky Gravitation, Knoxville 2008

The Tallest Man on
Earth

"The Gardener"

Shallow Grave

03/2008

Gravitation

At least they look our roving eyes in the pupils, checking for dilation, any signs of malcontent. I take to wearing sunglasses even when it's just you around. Always turning to ask, how do I look? By which I mean, how am I able to look at you?

I guess he'll read it in the smoke now / And soon to ashes I'll return

We know where this is going. Can one person do this for another person until the expiration date? To say you love a thing is not to say you dis-love me so why does it feel that way? Why the desperate need? Why the attachment from any distance? Why the sickness without your home?

I know the spy is going to tell you / It's not my flag up in the pole

Will I be the same then? Buried in memory. All that I've done for you or anything else faded into the fabric of an unlined journal. I find a pressed leaf in the back pages of a used book I got in the mail. Wondered if somehow this was your book, your leaf, your pressing.

In another life. Reincarnations crossing.

It seems like the type of thing you'd do. I discard the leaf. Read the book. Discard the book. Keep you just the way you are in just the life we have.

So now he's buried by the lilies / So I could stay forever more in your eyes, babe

I am all shovel some days. Running out of earth. Hitting the limestone and coming up for air. All those little things I hope you'll forgive, know you already have, know that what we really agreed to as the breeze lifted your hair and that man, voice crackling with interference, asked if I would receive you as my wife, was that we'd do our damndest to assume nothing.

To conceptualize, to believe in something better. And not just for ourselves.

I sense a leak inside my phone now / From all the lies I have told

Each dot in the lights an eye. I am always being watched. That's how it is. When not you, I watch myself, wonder what you'd think. Pack away the little bits I'm not proud of. Worry if I'll have enough postage to keep up the charade.

To convince you I'm better than human. Not superhuman. Just, you know, above.

I know he has your private number / And soon he'll make that vicious call

Will your mind wake up? I think I've mentioned this. Because I'm not going anywhere, what else am I supposed to worry about?

I don't have the legs to leave. They wouldn't know the steps of any other tune.

But I've seen yours. They are long. They carry me through myriad days and I know they could carry you out if you wrote a different map, discovered there was no x in our bedroom, no spot on the walls for this treasure. No gold in my chest. Just a heart beating out your name in Morse code.

Tell me I won't need to fire that flare. Tell me I won't need to rearrange the furniture, break off chair legs to spell three letters and hope someone can see them through our southern window.

I know the leak is going to tell you / There ain't no puppy in your leash

Our apartment doesn't allow cats just like it doesn't allow Christmas trees. Live ones, that is. So we fill our moments otherwise.

This commitment is not a leash.

I am not rooted and growing outward and dropping acorns for when you come around with your watering can. How many plants do you need to call this a garden? Is one enough? I mean, am I?

So now he'll fertilize the roses / So I could stay the king you see / In your eyes, babe

Wake me with a crown. I admit, the temperature means we need these sheets.

An island in the dark can barely recall the sun.

So I tread the ocean between isolation and the continent. I am the buoy with arms of rope. Point me to land, I'll sail you wherever you'd like to call home.

So now we're dancing through the garden / And what a garden I have made

Why wait? It's beautiful already, knowing what I know of you, knowing the names of all that I might still learn have been translated into a language I can speak, feel, repeat. But not translate. I would never betray you like that.

And now that death will grow my jasmine / I find it soothing I'm afraid

Who will go first? We go before each other in a way. What that day gave us was one lantern each, a length of rope, an endless supply of flint. Striking just so always produces a spark that, if drawn close enough, bursts any wick into flame. And it will burn and it will keep burning in that glass illuminarium.

It will not be my hands to undo the clasp, approach with an army of wind, and hush out that glow.

Now there is no need for suspicion / There ain't no frog kissing your hand

It will always be my teeth. Smiling at you. No others. I shut all their mouths, turned their advances against a different clock, the spin of another hemisphere and altitude altogether.

In dreams of a library, I always find your book, by which I mean I always find books with your addendum. By which I mean I always find you.

I won't be lying when I tell you / That I'm a gardener I'm a man / In your eyes babe

Is it over? No. Never. There's no ending when I roll, pause, stretch a hand, find you, meet your eyes. See that we're the same height. We are as tall as we've ever been. We can scent what we've nurtured, even through the palest light, the faintest glimmer.

Remind me, am I Adam? Are you Eve? No.

It's just that we made a garden. It's just that we bothered the soil enough to make it remember we loved at length and without regret.

On “Chandelier” by Sia

Nicole McCarthy

1-2-3, DRINK

The word ‘divorce’ soured taste buds all summer. I only ever consumed your words & by August my body was malnourished. 7 years rot from the bone; your name a copper penny on my tongue. It was a quiet, slow process falling out of love. My fingertips have forgotten what the hair on your arms feel like. Your laugh no longer echoes in memory. My heart beats began to match how it feels when I look at any body.



Sia

“Chandelier”

1000 Forms of Fear

07/2014

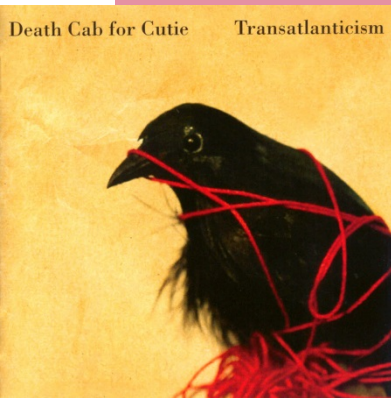
Monkey Puzzle / RCA

I lick salt from my fingers
then from your fingers
the tequila tonight tastes
like blood and ash

I lick salt from my fingers
then from your lips
the tequila tonight tastes
like the promise of sex

I lick salt from my fingers
then from your neck
the tequila tonight tastes
like the inevitability of loss

I lick salt from my fingers
then from my wrists
the tequila tonight tastes
like an empty twin bed
like a one way ticket
like a single glass on the dresser
a sliver of moon hangs
in my teeth like lime
cause I’m just holding on for tonight



Death Cab for Cutie

"Transatlanticism"

Transatlanticism

10/2003

Barsuk

Love and "Transatlanticism"

Katie Darby Mullins

I knew I loved my husband before it made any logical sense. He was twelve years older than me, divorced, and had a beautiful young daughter. I was 22— "almost 23," as I tried to tell him to reassure him. (It did not.) But from the moment we met, there was this connection that seemed almost supernatural. His smooth pick-up line ("Oh these? These are my old divorced guy socks") did little to deter me. Sometimes your life unfurls in front of you like a red carpet: I knew, somehow, that we were meant for each other. And there were songs that littered the way.

There was the first night he played guitar for me. I'd been teaching myself, and about all I knew was a very basic version of Josh Ritter's "Wolves." He played a song he learned in high school to woo the ladies— Extreme's "More Than Words," and I cracked up the whole time. We played songs on old iPods for each other, sometimes with the same one cued up. I played Ryan Adams's "This Is It," begging him in my heart *don't waste my time, this is it, this is really happening*. He took the acoustic guitar back to play me a "sweet song he'd remembered," and played a heartbreakingly beautiful fingerpicked version of Guns 'n' Roses' "Mr. Brownstone," which made me laugh until I cried. We both played "A Long December" by the Counting Crows—my favorite band, and he said a line from it—"All at once, you look across a crowded room to see the way that light attaches to a girl!"—was the first thing he thought when we met.

I was in love. As Warren Zevon would say, "Mad love, shadow love, random love, abandoned love." Every strong adjective, verb, noun, or adverb you could slap in front of "love," that was me. I had never felt like that before, and it was so loud. My brain buzzed with the excitement of waiting to see if I had another email from him. A text message. A picture of his daughter. I might have actually been addicted to him. I've never fully understood why I lost all of my composure, all of the things that made me *me*— my logic, my ability to survive without a man. I even preferred living alone! And all the sudden, I had a new sun in my sky.

How do you come up with one song to explain that in your early twenties, you lost your mind and decided on date one that you'd found a forever love? Do you talk about the song you shared after one of his surgeries? After your stroke? Alone, on the hotel bed after a house fire? Something he wrote you? What you listened to on the way to get married? How can I tell you that I was right, it was real? That it's been seven years married, that the little girl with the big brown eyes—she's thirteen now, and she's funny and sassy?

But music has always been our language. So it is the only way I can tell you what happened, how I knew.

Three or four months into dating, neither of us had said, "I love you." I knew it already, but I also knew that, since he was coming out of a divorce, I had to allow him to say it first. We had fallen into that weird season in southern Indiana that falls between winter and spring, where depending on the day, it could be 50 degrees and sunny, or -4 and sleeting. We found ourselves with a rare day off—nothing to do, nowhere to be.

One of the strangest aspects of this part of southern Indiana is that we live about 45 minutes from an honest-to-God Utopian community, New Harmony. There's a beautiful outdoor church, beds and breakfasts, a concert venue, a movie theater that only

shows one movie, a labyrinth, an actor's studio in the summer: it's basically like skipping back in time into a place where art means everything. When Andy and I first started to date, I told him I liked to drive around and listen to music. I generally meant things that were too loud for my apartment—my Dallas cow punk bands, The Old 97s, something where I could scream along and feel less homesick. But he grabbed a few CDs and said, "Let's go for a drive."

It must have been an hour or so in by the time we got to New Harmony. We'd listened to a lot of Ryan Adams and I think the *Magnolia* soundtrack, but after we'd gotten through the little hamlet, we turned around and were surrounded by the pale blonde color of corn when it's not sure whether or not to grow back. Indiana is full of little roads like this in winter-spring, but it was so much more gorgeous in New Harmony. There were birds overhead: mostly hawks, but the occasional giant crow. We swapped family stories about our grandparents (one of our grandfathers cut part of a man's ear off with a golf club when he threw it angrily; one of our grandfathers was horribly difficult and cruel until he had a stroke, which made him very pleasant. I'll never say which). I kept thinking of how solid the landscape was: ground, brown, sprinkled with small ponds and lakes reflecting the clouds. Middle ground, pale yellow. Sky, light blue, so, so pale. And then he put on Death Cab for Cutie's *Transatlanticism*.

My best friend Eryn and I used to drive around with coffee and listen to that record in high school. I could see him wince: he'd just remembered how young I was. He listened to it during a time in his life where he wasn't sure if his marriage was going to make it. He was in his late twenties. I looked out the window again. I'd said the wrong thing, I was sure of it.

"Are you OK?" he asked.

"I'm fine," I promised. "I love this record. Sometimes I feel like a kid around you."

He nodded and put his hand on my leg. "I don't want you to feel that way," he said. "It's a reflex. These songs mean such different things to us." And he was right. I remembered buoyantly screaming the lyrics to even the most tranquil songs with Eryn, her clutching her Chai, driving backroads in Dallas suburbs in her silver Nissan Sentra. This wasn't a record of independence and celebration for him. It was a record of growing up. Maybe it was for me, too.

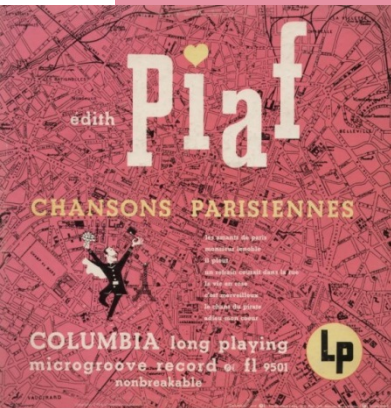
And now it was for me, too. Here I was, a man who shared my Chinese zodiac, exactly twelve years apart, and I was learning about real heartbreak to a soundtrack that used to symbolize something completely different. In that moment, I knew a few things: first, I somehow loved him more. Second, I would never get to go home to Dallas, not as my home. It would always be "back home," a distant geographic reality I could only access in my memory. And third: I was home now. This weird, bleak landscape, the one I'd had a love/hate relationship for years, was the only place I wanted to be.

The beauty in the title track "*Transatlanticism*" is that you have to wait for the payoff. There's a rhythmic pattern behind the sparse piano that seems to echo voices in your head more than it does a drum. Ben Gibbard's voice sweetly comes on nearly a minute into the seven-minute track and it describes such a similar landscape to the one we were driving through, I think the song took over any conversation we'd been having just moments before. When the electric guitar started ringing in, it was little more than atmosphere. It was the slight melancholy of my new home, the lovely melodicism of knowing it would be worth it.

And then of course it happens: "The distance is quite simply too much for me to row/ It seems farther than every before," and at almost three minutes in, the instruments all start picking up in intensity. If you are listening to this in complete silence, it is reverent, nearly hymn-like. But if you are listening to it with the man you are going to marry in a little over a year, completely silent, in the starkness of a place that belongs to his ex-wife, not to him or to you, then when Gibbard starts begging, "I need you so much closer, I need you so much closer," maybe it's a prayer. Maybe it's something bigger than that. What I do know is that the atmosphere was such that I don't remember being able to breathe—or whether or not it even seemed important. But Andy reached over and squeezed my thigh and we both sat there in complete, absolute sacred quiet, waiting as the instruments kept growing in intensity, for Gibbard's vocalizations: "Well come on, well come on." It always goes back to that refrain though: there are four minutes left in the song, and the only words are "I need you so much closer," and "well, come on."

For that four minutes, I would have sworn to you we'd already said our vows. We were married in my mind. Andy told me later, he never considered that we wouldn't get married. And that even though the record symbolized a very different kind of growing up for both of us—me, the first joyful yawp at independence, his, the last dying grasp of a vow of dependence he took very seriously—"Transatlanticism" has never meant anything more or different to me since that day out in Utopia, with his hand growing tighter around my thigh, while Ben Gibbard said, "So come on—I need you so much closer."

It's been more than seven years—probably closer to nine—since that day. We've been married for seven years. And still, every night, when I listen for the rise and the fall of his chest, when I feel his sweet weight and warmth next to me, when I get just a slight smell of his hair product, sometimes it makes me near tears still to think, inside of me, there is a constant yearning: I need him so much closer. Still. I need him so much closer.



Edith Piaf

“La Vie en rose”

Chansons parisiennes

1947

Columbia

Votre Chanson

Reynold Junker

Paris isn't usually this cold at Christmas, but this had been a record-breaking winter for cold and snow. It had snowed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day but now the snow, the midnight mass services, the New Years Eve fireworks, and my two-week stay on the Ile Saint Louis were over and done. All that was left was the bitter wind off the Seine and a forecast for freezing rain.

For any number of reasons, weather included, I'd tried to talk myself out of this trip to Paris, a city where I knew no one and where my French consisted largely of *Parlez Vous Anglais?* and stumbling through menu choices. And this time I'd been alone, without her. I'd be returning to California tomorrow, but for now I had a promise to keep.

I'd spent my two weeks in Paris wandering, doing things and visiting places we, she and I, had done and visited so many times in the past. Down the Boulevard Saint Germain, into Les Deux Magots, Café de Flore and Le Procope, not having her to help with the language; through the courtyard and past I.M. Pei's Pyramide at the Louvre; into the gardens at the Tuileries and Luxembourg, reaching for her hand and not finding it; through the Marais and the square at the Place des Vosges and into the cafes Ma Bourgogne and Hugo, sitting and listening for her voice and not hearing it; through the streets of Les Halles and its café Au Pied de Cochon. In at least one guidebook I knew of, Au Pied de Cochon is cited as the heart of Paris. For us, she and I, Paris had many hearts, Au Pied de Cochon's being just one of them.

Now I was crossing the bridge over the Seine between Notre Dame and Ile Saint Louis, returning late from dinner at a little Latin Quarter brasserie. Despite my truss-belted and fleece lined raincoat, tweed cap, gloved hands and scarf pulled up against my chin, the cold cut through me as I hurried along while the stars and street lamps, which always seem to fill the Paris night, shone through and against what otherwise would have been empty darkness. I heard music coming from the other side.

The accordionist sat on a small wooden stool, muffled and hood-bundled against the cold. He wore fingerless gloves and was key-fingering seemingly random scale bellows chords. There were several small coins in the cloth cap at his feet—not much for a long night's work. I reached into my pocket, pulled out two two-euro pieces and dropped them into the cap; they dwarfed the rest of the coins.

“*Votre chanson?*” he said, in a hoarse muffled voice barely above a whisper.

“*Pardon?*” I asked. “*Je ne parle pas bien le Francais.*” Sorry, I don't speak French very well. My words came out in short frosted gasps.

“*Votre chanson?*” he repeated. “Your song?”

Without hesitation, almost by reflex, “*Hier Encore,*” I responded. “*Charles Aznavour.*”

Even by French standards, *Hier Encore* is a sad song. It tells the story of a man recalling his youth, recalling waste, selfishness, foolishness, and loss. It begins, “Yesterday when I was young, the taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue.” It ends, “and only I am left on stage to end the play. I feel the bitter taste of tears upon my tongue.” I couldn't tell

when *Hier Encore* had become my song, but I could tell why—it reminded me of my life before her.

The accordionist shook his head, "Non."

"Oui," I insisted. "*Hier Encore. Charles Aznavour.*"

"Non," he countered. "*Piaf, Edith, la mome piaf, the little sparrow.*"

"*Piaf, Edith Piaf,*" I hesitated, memory searching, before, the words tumbled out. "*La Vie en rose. Alors.*" Edith Piaf, *La Vie en rose*, then.

La Vie en rose begins with the plea, "Hold me close and hold me fast," and ends with the final plea, "Give your heart and soul to me." *La Vie en rose* is a prayer.

He nodded, shift-settled his keyboard into his chest, embracing it, smiled, and treble and bass fingered keys and tabs.

I waited through the first verse, then, footsteps echoing against the stone walls of the bridge, headed down the steep shadowed steps to the moss wet footpath that winds alongside the Seine. I'd be able to hear the rest from down there.

From the bottom of the steps I listened first to him finish *La Vie en rose*, then to the silence of the Paris night and my own breathing. I could feel the chill of that empty night surround me and the cold damp of the wet cobblestones push up into and through the soles of my shoes. I pulled off my gloves, blew into my hands and reached into my raincoat pocket for the small container I'd carried to Paris—the reason I'd come to Paris. Fingers cold, stiff-aching, I removed the screw top, held the container at arm's length, tilted it outward and, keeping my promise, spilled her ashes into the Seine. Now, as promised, she'd be part of Paris and the Seine and Paris and the Seine would be part of her.

"Give your heart and soul to me," I whispered, praying into the empty night. Then I turned away from the river and retraced my path back up the steps to the bridge.



Troy, Sacked (and its Embers from the Stereo)

C.C. Russell

I remember it. (I swear)

I remember/ the idea of burning,
of burning as a return.

In particular, I remember one summer when I watched my sister's house while she was on vacation. (Your house was a couple of blocks from hers.) I listened to the song on repeat at full volume, part of me hoping that you would hear these words from so close, that you would feel the ache emanating from within your own neighborhood. This strange mix of angry defense and utter collapse. That you would hear it and know.

That you would know that I was burning.

I was this close to you and I was burning, coming back.

It was summer. I was a city burning.

I held soldiers
within me.
you were the face
that launched the ships,
you were the dying
light.

We were so young then. We thought

Well,
we thought
we were right.

It's so simple, isn't it?

There are parts that are maybe better left out of the story. The anger, the rainstorms. All of the Wouldn't haves and should haves and the begging in the first place. The restless nights. The lies on our lips. Oh, but every look that you threw...

Flames,
flames.

I was never quite sure
which of us
would return
through this. Which Phoenix
would rise.

We were so
very young.

But still

There was no other
for me to burn.



Smashing Pumpkins

"Daydream"

Gish

05/1991

Caroline / Hut

On "Daydream" by Smashing Pumpkins

Neil Clark

Dear D'arcy Wretzky of Smashing Pumpkins fame,

You know when you bump into someone from the past? An old flame, maybe. Someone who at one time consumed every fibre of your conscience, but someone you hadn't thought about in a very long time. The present, colliding blindly with the past. The adrenaline from it. The pulses of nervous energy.

"Daydream" came up on my Spotify today. That's how it felt. Stopped me right in my tracks. Made me put the headphones on and sit and listen to it back-to-back another six times.

Allow me to indulge in a terrible analogy here, D'arcy. Sitting and listening to it another six times with the headphones on—it felt like agreeing to go for coffee together after the initial adrenaline rush wore off, after the nervous pleasantries were exchanged. It felt like swapping stories about the past and only the past, being completely at ease, without a mention of the mundanity of the years (the *decades*) that seem to have somehow occurred since.

Just the past. Just the highlights and the low points.

Highlights, like the time I discovered Smashing Pumpkins.

"Today, I'm going to listen to *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*." My classmate John used to go home every lunch hour, on his own. I had asked him what he got up to and that's what he said. Said it with such pride that I thought "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness" might be some kind of cult.

Cult or no cult, those words – "Mellon Collie", "Infinite Sadness." Just those words. They were enough to get me curious. It was the late nineties. I was thirteen. Early symptoms of teenage angst were starting to simmer below the surface. I liked the big bands in the UK at the time (Oasis being the main one, though they were past their prime). But lyrics were becoming important to me, and I just couldn't relate to Oasis's "Champagne Supernova" and "Rock N' Roll Stars" any more. I wanted something deeper than "All Around the World." I wanted words that could make you bleed. I wanted more of where REM's "Everybody Hurts" came from, but different, somehow. Edgier. Something my mother would hate. I wanted Mellon Collie. I longed for Infinite Sadness.

This was before Spotify or YouTube were a thing, D'Arcy. However, there was a small up-and-coming website that sold things. Books, predominantly, but also any CD you could think of. It was called "Amazon". I hear those Amazon guys are still just about managing to stay afloat these days. Good for them. Wish they paid their taxes. But that is to digress to the present. And we're here to talk about the past.

Back to the past.

When I typed "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness" into this Amazon site, you and your band had me at the album art. It's a great album cover. The Dream Girl, floating in space, hatching out of a star with her eyeballs rolled back. Who knows what's going on in Dream Girl's head - what she's doing there, who/what she represents. I'm not an art critic. I just know that it blew me away. To this day, it's still my favourite album cover. But, nothing—not that album art, not the moody words of your album title—could have prepared me for what happened five to eight days later, when I hit play on the CD player.

The hypnotic piano of the opening title track. The piercing strings on track two, "Tonight, Tonight". It put me on a cloud. Floated me into the sky. Rolled my eyeballs back. Handed me over to Dream Girl, who took me by the hand and waltzed me around in the school disco of my dreams in outer space. Two CDs and twenty-eight tracks later, I understood why John always went home for lunch. I, too, had drank the Smashing Pumpkins Kool-Aid.

That was one highlight. Another was posting a cringe-worthily enthusiastic buyer's review of your second album, *Siamese Dream* up on that website that sells things and doesn't pay taxes. Someone commented on it and might have changed my life. They said I should think about becoming a writer. They probably posted it, forgot all about posting it within an hour and got on with their life. But I didn't get on with my life. I took their advice on board, for better or for worse...

Yep. Many highlights.

But, low points.

Low points, too. Low points, like my high school breakdown, Valentine's Day, 2001.

If you're popular at school, I'm guessing Valentine's Cards are like... pink, fluffy sugar clouds landing on people's knees. Something like that. For someone like me, though...Someone all scrawny and hunched shouldered like me. All greasy haired and acne faced. Painfully shy. Eczema on my cheeks. Someone like me, for whom eye contact with another human felt like a dagger through the pupils. Shit, D'Arcy, for someone like me, those Valentine's Card things are like heart-shaped hand grenades flying around overhead.

I'll spare you the minute details—it's actually a pretty boring story. Basically, I received my first ever Valentine's Card. It landed on my lap at lunchtime. I got excited. Things were finally looking up. Someone had the seen hidden goodness in my heart. I had a secret admirer—someone who dug the weird uneasiness that emitted off me at the time like cartoon stink-rays. But, who? A shortlist was already forming in my head.

You can probably see where this one's going.

Within seconds, I found out the card was never intended for me. There had been a clerical error in the admin department of Popular Kids HQ, and the returns policy was to snatch it back off me whilst laughing.

My unexpected sugar cloud had turned into a live grenade and blown up in my face.

My mouth quivered. People stared. People giggled. Tears formed, trickled down, stung my eczemic cheeks. People giggled some more. Then, worse, they went all "Aw, bless. What a shame." Talking about me as if I wasn't in the room. As if I was some orphan boy on some charity appeal TV advert, flies buzzing around my face.

Seems so stupid now, over something so trivial. But this was 2001. That simmer of teenage angst had developed into a spilling, rolling, boiling cauldron of despair. Dark thoughts formed in that moment, D'Arcy. Dark, violent thoughts. "I'm gonna wipe those looks off all your faces. With a meat cleaver," type thoughts. The sort of thoughts kids are encouraged to talk about these days, but not so much back then.

Despite my shell shock and ringing ears, everyone did get home safe after school. In reality, I wouldn't know how to cleave my way out of a wet paper bag. In reality, I just wanted to go to bed and listen to music.

By this point, I had acquired your whole back catalogue. I had your B-Sides collection. I was the one person in the world who bought James Iha's solo album (if you're still in touch, tell him "You're Welcome").

Something compelled me to put your underrated debut album *Gish* on and skip to track ten, "Daydream". It's the track you sang the lead vocals on, D'arcy. But you probably knew that already.

Headphones on, head under pillow, trying to calm my breathing, I listened to it on constant repeat—way more than six times. The repetition of that chorus... the soothing repetition... the absence of any verses to interrupt it... Your voice, tempering my rolling waves of angst... quelling the pain like rhythmic intakes of nitrous oxide. You were lying next to me that afternoon, stroking my hair, singing into my ear directly... telling me not to worry... banishing the dark thoughts.

"My daydream seems as one inside of you; Though it seems hard to reach through this life; Your blue and hopeless life"

That's what I meant. That's what I meant when I said words that could make me bleed.

Thanks to you, it turned out to be a not bad Valentine's Day. I mean don't get me wrong, I've had better. But it could have been far worse.

So thanks, D'arcy. You'll never read this, but thanks. Thanks to you and your band for getting me through a tough day. Other tough days, too. Other low points. A couple of years later, the Iraq War on the news and the song "Disarm" spring to mind.

So, that was our past.

Now let's talk about the less romantic bit—the present day.

The bit today where my thirty-one-year-old self—all grown up, angst completely cooled—stopped listening to "Daydream" on Spotify, took the headphones off and got on with the rest of my day. The bit (back to my coffee analogy. I know you love the coffee analogy) where we stopped talking about the past and started finding out about each other's lives now.

We don't actually know each other, so I can't look you up on Facebook. I can't scroll through all your photos and observe your figure changing, or your face slowly drooping over time.

However, because you were in a band called Smashing Pumpkins and they were quite big, I was able to look you up on Wikipedia.

You couldn't have known this when you were slaying bass in your Smashing Pumpkins heyday, but that's what people can do now. They can look you up on Wikipedia. They can

see what you've been up to. They can scroll down to the juicy headings. Headings like "Personal Life" and "[Insert Whatever] Controversy/ Misdemeanour".

Your page has a heading "Life After the Smashing Pumpkins". It says that you like Star Trek. It says space travel and aliens are a recurring influence on your creative ideas.

It says that you, D'arcy Wretzky, spent six days in jail for "failing to control her horses". This is one of my favourite sentences (no pun intended) in the whole of Wikipedia. I have images of you skipping down a busy urban street alongside a stable of wild horses, letting them run free. Letting them shit on cop cars and trot merrily down subway station steps. Encouraging them to neigh into the night sky with gay abandon. You set fire to bales of hay and threw them at anyone who would dare to accuse you and your wild horses of disturbing the peace.

I hope this was the case, D'Arcy. I could easily find out what really happened by clicking on the cited article. But it's 2018. Your President addresses your nation in two hundred and forty characters or less. He gets his briefings about complex foreign policy in single page documents, 24 font size. It's just not the done thing any more, to seek out truth and context.

But I digress, again.

I don't have a Wikipedia page myself. But if did, my "Life After Teenage Angst" section wouldn't be as interesting. Don't get me wrong—I've lived and all that. One time I failed to control my kid cousin's pet gerbil. It escaped from my hands, ran around the house and eventually shat on an iPad. But no arrest warrants were issued, no jail time served.

Anyway, enough about me. I thought I'd write this down while I still could. World's a messed-up place right now. Looks like Mr. 24 Font might plunge us all into a nuclear apocalypse and blow us all into outer space at any minute.

There I go, digressing again. Must be time to go.

Good luck to you, D'Arcy. Follow your dreams. Go to Star Trek conventions. Do the aliens and space travel thing. Let more of your wild horses run loose and free.

One day you and I will bump into each other again, and we'll definitely go for another coffee. I'm looking forward to it already—whether it happens on CD or on Spotify or on some other medium. Whether it takes place on this planet or the next.

Peace out.



High School Reunion

Jen Rouse

Now twenty years have passed, and I know
I should've kissed you in the rain, turned
your head to meet mine, tucked the wisp
of your fine hair behind your delicate ear.
Always those gold hoop earrings, glistening
and forbidden, the sunroof open to Prince's
"The Arms of Orion." Slicing the night
and the shivering fields of corn with
our cries of "I'd cross the stars for you."

I remember the cadmium color caked
underneath your nails, your fingers underneath
my chin. *Listen. Listen.* What words
should we have used then—two girls
in love. So many things stopped
us—the ice that threw us on
the road to New Orleans, the men
you paraded through our dorm room only
to abandon. How I learned to console
them and never myself. And when you
called from the middle of nowhere
anywhere to say you just didn't
love him, I always knew why.

You had a shearling-lined coat.
You took me to your backroom studio
and put it down. "In the heart of a
sleepless moon," he cried through
his cloud guitar, as you pointed
out a bowtie of stars through
the skylight. I have never forgotten
how to find that constellation,
or a whisper of you against
a starry starry night.



Queen
A Night At The Opera

Queen

"You're My Best
Friend"

A Night at the Opera

11/1975

EMI

My Best Friend

Kevin D. Woodall

It's the absences you notice first.

You sit in your apartment working because you need the distraction, and the steady breathing from your best friend right next to you, punctuated by the occasional grunt or dream-driven whimper, is no longer there—it's a silence that screams.

You run to get food you will eat mechanically out of instinct, and buy beer and cigarettes you will use to dull the pain, and you come back expecting that yowling when you come in, (a yowling borne of "you were gone forever and you've starved me you monster how could you,") but the only sound is the bathroom fan you forgot to turn off before you left.

You open the fridge but you don't hear the flump of 18 pounds of fur hitting the floor from the chair to come investigate and beg in futility for handouts; the expected *click-clack-tip-tap* of claws clattering across hardwood floor never comes.

You sit down and reach over to pat or massage his strangely dense and soft body and find only cold cushions.

As night falls, you feel the minor annoyance and dread of knowing that you're going to have to bundle up to go outside, because he can't use a toilet like a person, and he has to go outside into the cold and the snow, and you know that both of you hate that shit, only then you realize that you won't be going outside together again.

And then as you climb into bed you shiver and shake because it's so cold, even though there's two of you under the covers, because your third, small little hot water bottle of a roommate isn't under there with you.

And you try not to cry but you can't help it because you feel hollow and the world feels darker and more evil today.

And then you start thinking about all the missed futures together.

It's stupid, but you're thinking of deleting Pokémon Go from your phone, because there won't be any more walks with him, and that was the whole reason you still had the game.

And you won't be taking anymore walks along the river to the off-leash park for him to run around and assert his authority over all the idiotic, inferior, low-class dogs who don't recognize their One-True King (how dare they not play with him how dare they).

There will be no more mountain hikes, or cries of joy and wonder from other hikers on the trail who can't get over the sight of your best friend climbing boulders so effortlessly, his face wide in a huge smile.

There won't even be quick outside walks to the park, and sure, you won't have to try to dissuade him from pissing on the war memorials anymore, but you'd let him piss anywhere he wanted if you could just have even those brief walks with him again.

He won't be there, resting his head on your arm for hours and hours on cross-country drives anymore.

He won't be joining you this May when you go home for the first time in two years, and you know your family, who love him almost as much as you do, will be heartbroken that he isn't there.

You won't get to see him grow old, even as your wife was just saying (the day of the first seizure) that she was looking forward to seeing him become a "fat little old white-face" as his greys came in; he will never get the chance to live the life of a spoiled old-man you fully intended on giving him.

And you won't be able to take any more stupid photographs of him, with even more stupid captions about him being a goblin (because really, you can't believe how cute he is, and how lucky you are to have him in your life) to share with all your friends.

And somehow, strangely, that last one hurts more than most.

Then, inevitably, (as they always do and always will in your life), the what-ifs creep in.

What if you'd gone to the neurologist immediately after the first two seizures brought on by the latent encephalitis; would he have inhaled the fluid that brought him the pneumonia that sealed his fate?

And what if that stupid fucking receptionist hadn't made you wait an hour and a half to see the doctor to get him in for an MRI, because she forgot that you and your wife were there sitting in front of her in her lobby; could that have been the time they needed to save him?

What if you could make him understand, every time you had to leave him in the room with all the other scared and sick animals, that you were coming back, that you'd always come back, and you loved him more than anything, and to just be brave and try to fight; would that have helped him recover?

And what if you didn't spend enough time with him in the room at the end, where he sat curled up on you one last time, wrapped in his Gryffindor blanket, wheezing and whimpering and sedated and struggling to breathe?

What if, by some miracle, he could have beaten the encephalitis in his brain as well as the pneumonia in his lungs? You know that to treat one life-threatening illness they'd have to stop treating the other, but what if...

What if you did the wrong thing?

But what-ifs don't help.

They only make it worse and you know this.

You know you did everything you could to help your little prince, and you'd do it again in an instant, because to do otherwise would be a soul-rending betrayal of your best friend.

One of the best friends you ever had.

He didn't get to be with you such a long a time as you'd hoped, but for those four years he was your sunshine.

You knew you'd never be lonely with him around, because he helped you to make it through and to live in the face of your almost-suicide attempt in your darkest hours just months ago.

His dumb face—right eye never quite looking straight-on, occasionally snaggle-toothed—sticks as a constant presence in your mind, reminding you that there's good in this world worth fighting for.

When the world was cruel he stood by you.

And you made sure to stand by him when the world turned cruel.

Because he was your best friend.

Goodbye, my sweet boy.

I really love you.



BLOC PARTY.
INTIMACY

Bloc Party

"Signs"

Intimacy

08/2008

Wichita

Signs Now All the Time

Cathy Ulrich

I used to be in love. He was the boy at the gas station when my friends and I walked there from getting stoned at the park, the boy sitting on the curb. My friends wanted cigarettes, went in with their fake IDs, left me outside. The boy on the curb had cool sneakers.

I like your shoes, I said.

I can't remember his answer. I want to remember, so badly, what he said, *thanks, maybe, or nice hair*, or something, this time, the first time I heard his voice.

There's this song by Bloc Party, this song, *Signs*. It's a love song about a dead girl. Or I think it is.

Two ravens in the old oak tree, one for you and one for me.

Bluebells in the late December, I see signs now all the time.

He liked to meet me downtown, hung out on the courthouse lawn with his friends. There was a water fountain no one ever drank from. We'd sit on the curb beside it. Went to the movies, sometimes, the 24-hour diner up the street.

The first time he kissed me, we were sitting on the curb by the water fountain. He grabbed my hair, pulled me toward him. He did it in this gentle way, kept his hands in my hair the whole time we kissed. All these cars going past when the lights changed; drunks stumbling round from bar to bar, and they seemed so old to me then, catcalling us sitting on the curb; girls in torn jeans and black eyeliner, looking at us, at him mostly, wondering what he was doing with someone like me.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, he was looking at me.

One night, I went to his place, lay down in his bed with him. Rested my head on his chest, listened to the sound of his heartbeat.

There'd been another girl there before me. He told her to leave when I came, said: *Leave, you're bugging me.*

The girl laughed, stayed on his couch with the television playing.

I didn't know who she was. Took his hand, followed him to his bedroom. I could hear the sound of the television through the wall.

He said: *You have these eyes. You always look like you're about to cry.*

He got married. It was this girl I met at college. We'd dated all the same guys in high school, dark-haired girls who cried easy, had wrists thin as toothpicks, wore shirts too big. She smelled like apples. It was her shampoo, she said, played with her hair in class.

He got married to her and they moved to Portland.

Then he died.

You never wanted to alarm me

But I'm the one that's drowning now.

I didn't know he was dead at first. No one knew. People kept telling his parents they saw him, *just the other day, on the street*. Saying that he was in hiding, saying he didn't want to be found.

He's fine, they said. He's fine.

Then I had this dream about him. He was sitting on the curb outside the door of the comic book store I'd just gotten a job at, boy always sitting on the curb. I was so happy to see him, so relieved, so angry.

Where have you been? Everyone's been so worried about you.

He said: *You don't have to worry about me anymore.*

It took them four months.

They found his body in the river.

I could sleep forever these days because in my dreams I see you again....

It was so like you to visit me, to let me know you were okay.

The last time I saw him, he was about to get married. He was engaged, *can you believe that?*, and I couldn't, not someone like him.

He needed a ride; I gave him a ride. Dropped him off by the courthouse water fountain. Kissed him there again. I didn't care that he was getting married to that girl who looked like me, kissed him on the sidewalk where anyone could see us, let him tug my hair.

Don't tell, okay? he said when he left.

I said: *Who would I tell?*

I can't even remember his face anymore. Pretend I do when I look at his obituary photo. He is flat, in my memory; he is a newspaper page. Yellowing and ancient. I am always trying to put him together from these pieces I've kept, the things he'd given me that I've lost. Always hoping he will come to visit me again in my dreams, to tell me, just one more time, I don't need to worry about him. Not anymore.

I see signs now all the time, that you're not dead, you're sleeping.

I believe in anything that brings you back home to me.



Otis Redding
"That's How Strong
my Love Is"
*The Great Otis Redding
Sings Soul Ballads*
03/1965
Volt / Atco

The First Five Notes of Otis Redding's "That's How Strong my Love Is"

Andrew Hachey

sound out
of tune under
the needle that floats
up & down with sun
warped hills in black
vinyl

because sun heat forces
impurities to the surface
that's how strong it catches
the dust & willow

I want to hold our history
so much that I tattoo it under
three layers of flesh

scrub it each morning
with pink salt whose crystals
I know every edge

for you that's how strong
these notes sound out
of tune while you drag me
like a cigarette through the loss
particulate filters rolled into a ball

stuffed into my chest
pocket because toxins
are made to be carried



Moby

"I'm Not Worried at All"

18

05/2002

Mute / V2 / EMI

I'm Not Worried at All

Ben Niespodziany

I barrel rolled into your garage and climbed up the ladder to the attic above. I crawled over loose floorboards and opened the cold door handle into your bedroom. I didn't startle you in the slightest. You hardly looked over your shoulder as you threw more black paint against your wall. You were playing Moby's "I'm Not Worried at All" on repeat and you would be for the next three weeks to follow. I reclined in your marshmallow bed and watched you roll more dark against the walls. "Okay," you called out during the three seconds of silence in between music loops, "I'm finished turning my walls into a chalkboard." You threw me some chalk and I painted nothing but clouds while Moby featured The Shining Light Gospel Choir and sampled The Greater Harvest Back Home Choir for four relaxed minutes at a time. Clouds and more white clouds fought the new darkness all around. You fell asleep as I held your hand, the music skipping with the lyrics "seem to fall" over and over, neither of us doing anything about fixing the record on the other side of the room. With one hand holding you, I used the other to continue painting, coloring it all as white as I could. It was the only color I had to work with. When you woke, you rose frustrated, asking me why I just covered the entirety of the four walls in white. "Why did you chalk all of it? I wanted it black." I didn't know what to say. "I thought it would be magical to wake up inside of a cloud." She paused and said, "That's cute," kissing me on the cheek, "but I like being caught inside a storm cloud when I wake from my naps. A big fluffy white cloud just isn't doing it for me." I left your place shortly after you filled a bucket with warm water and threw it all on the walls, returning the cloud back to night as I stumbled back through your attic, down your ladder, into your garage, and out your door. I hurried to the art supplies store and waited for you to send me a message asking me to come over and create more clouds. This time around, I thought, I'll bring grey and black chalk. This time around, I'll bring yellow for all of the lightning bolts your bedroom demands.



Black Sabbath

“Warning”

Black Sabbath

02/1970

Vertigo

There’s Iron in My Heart

Samantha Lamph/Len

*I was warned about you, baby,
but my feelings were a little bit too strong.*

I didn’t need other voices
(though they did warn me.)

The one in my head told me first.

But I ignored it &
learned a lesson about
gut feelings, the gift
of fear.

So I want you to know
the only reason

it took so long
(getting over you):

I needed
a more palatable crisis,

to believe
it was just my heart
held hostage

and by someone I loved.

Yes, that would be better.
To pretend the worse thing never happened.

The worst thing happened,
and I never told you,

because you never asked me
another question again.

*It’s not your fault,
I remind myself,
you couldn’t have prevented it.*

But you could have,
and I could have
died
that night,

and you still had the nerve to say *goodbye*.



P!nk

"U + Ur Hand"

I'm Not Dead

04/2006

LaFace

The Night I Found Love in Times Square

Juliette van der Molen

New York City, 2014

Dating in my 40's was the equivalent of being shot out of a cannon, a breathless surprise that tested my courage and left me staggering and claiming that I'd never do it again. It tested my mettle in more ways than one. Coming out of a rough time in my life I'd made certain deals with myself. I wasn't going to let anyone do anything to me that I didn't want. I loved myself, and I'd stand up for myself, no matter what. I had value to add to any relationship, even if that relationship only lasted one afternoon, or one date. I wasn't wasting my time on urban cave men.

I was a Midwestern girl, finally living a dream in New York City. I wasn't completely naive, but nothing ever really prepares you for New York. Still, I found my way. Subway navigation wasn't anything an app couldn't solve. I ducked into the village, slid through the Met and lolled around Central Park. Once, I even went to the Bronx—though that was a mistake. Express trains are tricky like that.

I met a guy on OK Cupid. Ok, not the brightest move maybe, but we'd been out for coffee and chatted on the phone and he seemed decent. He was professional, funny, nice looking and he was a big admirer of mine. When he mentioned that he'd like to take me to dinner in the city, I thought that sounded great. I spent a lot of time getting ready, and I'll admit, I was feeling flirty. I turned up P!nk's greatest hits and curled up my eyelashes. Tattoo waterproof eyeliner and a lipstick that promised to stay 24 hours—at least!— were my staples. I slid on a mini skirt that made me feel sexy and a pair of glittery heels that would likely make me taller than my date. The beat thrummed through me as I brushed through my hair and checked my purse for all of the last minute things I would need. I plucked a metro card from the mirror of my vanity.

Better safe than sorry, right?

P!nk is reminding me that I'm perfect, even if I don't think so and I sing along and keep it going on my phone while I go out to my car.

Made a wrong turn

Once or twice

Dug my way out

Blood and Fire

Bad decisions

That's alright

Welcome to my silly life.

She always sang the things I felt or the things I wanted to feel. She was a resonant reminder of where I came from and where I was headed. Yes, this is why I was still following my rules. Even though he'd seemed a bit put out that I had them. He wanted me to relax. Maybe I was being paranoid. Still, I met him in a train station parking lot in New Jersey. I didn't know him well enough to invite him to my house.

We crept along the stop and go traffic in Times Square. I still had no idea where he was taking me, some restaurant, some surprise. I don't mind surprises; in fact, it was kind of nice to have someone care enough to do that. He'd dressed for it, I would give him that. He was hot as hell in his suit and tie. I wanted to reach over and loosen it. I had to remind myself we were just on a second date. I squeezed my thighs together the way I do when I'm trying to behave myself. My skirt inched up my thigh a little, and I tugged at the hem.

That was when it happened.

His hand reached over casually, as if it had a memory of me, and rested on my knee. I looked at his long fingers, his manicured nails. I was turned on, without a doubt. But, I wanted this to go slow. We talked about that. His thumb caressed the outside of my knee, and I sat up a little straighter, pulling my purse into my lap.

"Relax, baby." He smiled and flashed his teeth while his hand slid up under the hem of my skirt.

This was the moment. The one I'd told myself I would stand up for, the one that I swore I would do something about. I would just say no, and I'd be nice about it. I took a deep breath.

"Not ready for it yet." I shook my head and pushed his hand away.

His hand flew back to the wheel and he punched the horn, jerking us into another lane. I could see the muscle in his jaw working and it tensed up tight. Immediately, I looked out the window. We were barely moving there were so many cars. People were honking and yelling and nudging each other in typical New York fashion. I relaxed a little, feeling safer, it wasn't like we were somewhere secluded.

He puts his hand back on my thigh, further up to start this time. I tell myself maybe he didn't hear me, maybe he didn't understand. I'm pissed at myself already for giving him the benefit of the doubt and the anger starts to bubble up in my chest, growing like a large balloon.

*Check it out goin' out on the late night
Lookin' tight feeling nice, it's a cock fight I can tell
I just know that it's going down, tonight
At the door we don't wait 'cause we know them
At the bar six shots just beginnin'
That's when dickhead put his hands on me*

"Well," He chuckled. "I am paying for dinner."

"Are you fucking serious?" I whispered to myself.

His laugh ricocheted off the windshield and pressed me tight against the seat and raised the hair on the back of my neck. My anger rose up like a mother bear defending her young. I felt the need to protect myself. It was a protection borne out of love. My hand didn't shake when I covered his and yanked it off my leg.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" He yelled.

His outrage made me laugh this time. He didn't look scary to me, or intimidating. He shrank before my eyes as I unfastened my seatbelt. I curled my fingers around the door latch and watched the traffic.

"Enjoy your dinner... alone." I said as I stole my moment when we stopped and hopped out into the busy street.

*I'm not here for your entertainment
You don't really wanna mess with me tonight
Just stop and take a second I was fine before you walked into my life
'Cause you know it's over, before it began
Keep your drink just give me the money
It's just you and your hand tonight*

I wove in and out of traffic, humming the song in my head, giddy with delight. Cars honked at me and cab drivers yelled out the window.

"Hey lady, what the fuck!"

I ended up giving the bird to one particularly insolent guy that pushed his bumper too close. Not my finest moment, but probably one of my more honest ones. Once on the sidewalk, I turned back to see if he was still there. But, he'd moved on. I imagined him seething and clutching the wheel. I had a whole mouthful for him now and I wished I had a better come back in the moment. I would have told him that my glitter heels and mini skirt weren't an invitation. My 'no' wasn't a play for pursuit. Instead, I left him in the Times Square traffic to figure it out for himself.

Enjoy your hand tonight.

I walked then. No, not just walked. Strutted. I'd done it. I'd cared enough about myself, hell, I could say it—I'd loved myself enough to defend myself. Now it was time to go on a real date, one that was about me, for me and with me.

*Midnight I'm drunk, I don't give a fuck
Wanna dance by myself guess you're out of luck
Don't touch, back up, I'm not the one
Buh-bye
Listen up it's just not happenin'
You can say what you want to your boyfriends
Just let me have my fun tonight aight*

I looked up at all the bright pulsing lights on the square and let the colors wash over me. Red, blue, green—

And P!nk.



Natalie Green

"Orange"

*Natalie Green is my
Lover*

06/2017

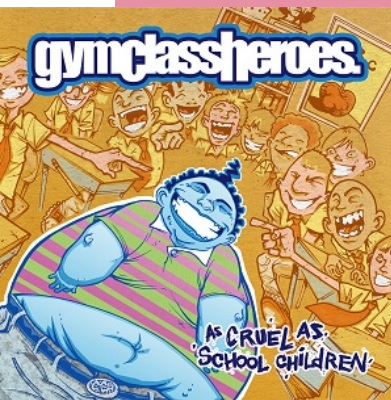
Independent - Bandcamp

I think I'll take my time

Mateo Lara

I'm trying, but,
There's a lot of 'No' in this mood,
No me odies.
No empieces una pelea.
No me culpes.
I'll swing arms in crying place, this liting and buzzing,
Split my yearning in half, brown hand tried not to hate,
I've got vantage point in this ascetic sky,
estaré contigo esta noche.
Vices are hungering for uneasy tongue,
To say what you really mean, I'm waiting on,
The final string, to wrap around suffocate,
This brown hand seducing slow violence out of you.

Boy, we went shivering under our breath, I only wanted your love,
But this is not the place tonight, just embrace me, count dying light before we fade.
What blood is contained in our mouths, don't silence me now,
I'm learning about bad habits, growing erratically in your insides,
This isn't an easy fix when you're gloom on my mind.
It's not up to me now, I'm loving the way we dance around holding on,
So, just keep holding on, I promise not to cry, if you be with me tonight,
Por favor, sólo tómate tu tiempo.



Gym Class Heroes

"New Friend Request"

As Cruel as School
Children

07/2006

Fueled by Ramen/Atlantic

Myspace Memories to the Tune of "New Friend Request"

N. Alysha Lewis

I grew up at just the right time for online communication to integrate into my life naturally while still managing to completely confuse me. A child of 1990, I had prime seats for all the major social switches of the early aughts: Xanga to MySpace to Facebook. I was in (and out) of college by the time I joined Twitter and Instagram—already too old to really "get it," even though I love both platforms. Plus, by then, I'd already met my husband—IRL—so I didn't even use these newer forms of interaction for what my generation supposedly perfected: hooking up.

"It's a sad situation when we have to resort to keyboards as a means of making relations." But as a lonely sophomore in high school, one who'd been recently dumped by both her boyfriend and her best friend, the online world was the only place I could turn for connection. So, like an idiot, it's where I fell in love. The heartbreaker in question is named Matt, though I called him Matty at the time.

Because I'm both a romantic and a choir kid, I frequently associate people, places, and things with music. For Matt, and the time he came into my life, Gym Class Heroes loom large, and "New Friend Request," the third track off *As Cruel as School Children*, hits too close to home.

Even back then, I feel like I had a fair bit of self-awareness about my situation when I listened to this song and thought about my unfortunate love life. Chronicling lead singer Travis McCoy's attempts to connect with a girl on Myspace who never reciprocated, the song resonated in a "You might want to take a look at yourself" way. As much as I wanted to be the unattainable girl, imagining that Matt (a spoken-word rapper whose early style reminded me a little of Travis) was aching to get in touch with me, I knew better.

I was Travis—sad, desperate, and in need of a life.

The first four years of my friendship with Matt were...unhealthy in a lot of ways. After meeting in a random MySpace group, our earliest communications were simple enough. Then he started asking to see my boobs—I'm sorry: "boobz." I'd log into AIM, seek him out, and mere minutes of small talk would pass before such a request popped up on my screen.

To my credit, I never sent *actual* naked shots. I wasn't that stupid. But, because my sad little heart needed someone to be in my life, and it decided Matt was that someone, I did what I thought was enough to keep him around and interested. (When I introduced him to a friend of mine because she and I were going to start a music zine and I wanted to interview him, I was equal parts embarrassed and jealous when she told me that he'd asked her for some sexy selfies as well. Was I really not that special?!) I shudder to think of what might've happened if I'd had access to a webcam in those years...

In the deep recesses of my mind—which I can easily access, thanks to low self-esteem, horrible depression, and crippling anxiety—I wondered whether he knew how

desperately I craved his approval and affection. And, if he knew, was he withholding it just to see what would happen? As the song goes, *"It's kinda obvious that you're either occupied or playin' a game."*

Complicating things further: We lived in different time zones, ensuring that, as broke, car-less teenagers, we could never meet. So, after about a year of "knowing" each other, I started dating someone else—Jay. He already had a point in his favor by being in the same state as me. On top of that, we were good friends, and while he'd probably made a joke or two about my boobs, he never asked to see them (not seriously, anyway). Good enough for me!

But despite getting coupled up, I kept returning to Matt, like an irritated gum that you can't stop poking with the tip of your tongue. Consulting my newfound habit for self-analysis, I can say it's probably because I knew Jay and I weren't built to last. (And yet, I dated him for two years.) I couldn't stop wondering: "How different would life be if Matt could be a viable romantic option?"

As a result, I frequently used my relationship to try and push Matt's buttons. What does Travis rap? *"It's hard for me to not hate when I'm on MySpace / I never see my face in your Top 8."* Yeah, I was overly motivated by that sentiment. As the person who typically expressed her emotions widely and with abandon in relationships, I was frustrated by the fact that I couldn't just say "Hey, I wish we could date," so I got mad at Matt for not saying it either. The only way to retaliate was to flaunt my relative happiness in my real relationship and hope to illicit some sort of response.

I do think this led to the few times when Matt became more of the protagonist in the Travis-MySpace Girl story. (Because, spoiler alert, he did actually have a crush on me, buried underneath the nudity pleas and silence.) When I inevitably began to lament the cracks as they formed in my relationship, Matt was quick to take a jackhammer to them—*"I'll be here when your man ain't fully down as he used to be."* He thought it was hilarious that Jay hated him (because Jay knew about my "old crush" on Matt and was, understandably, not his biggest fan) and frequently joked about how I should break up with Jay.

And I just laughed it all off. Because this was what I wanted. I thought I might have loved Matt, if things had lined up the right way, and his reaction to my prodding felt like it was proving my point. *"Show me some kind of sign, and let me know it's time to make my move."*

So, when I went to college and things really began to deteriorate with Jay, I stepped it up. I crossed as much of the impropriety line that a girl can cross while keeping her clothes on. I practically ran to my computer screen for validation that there was someone out there who wanted me in a way that wasn't weighed down by the emotional baggage Jay and I had managed to rack up. But of course, what would you call what I had with Matt? The guy with whom I actively initiated conversations about the likelihood of our having sex just because I was bored—and, let's face it, horny.

I didn't care. I couldn't—wouldn't—stop myself.

After the break-up, I spiraled most spectacularly. I'd been growing into a subtle case of agoraphobia rather nicely in the weeks prior, so other than class and quick, anxious trips to the McDonald's behind my dorm, I stopped leaving my room. I dropped off the social calendar for the friends I'd brought with me from high school, and barely interacted with the new friends I made.

What I did instead was think about Matt, trying to figure out if I could force a future there. After all, I'd put nearly as much time and energy into that relationship as the one that had just imploded, so why couldn't I make it work? *"It was plain to see we were meant to lock lips."* In what was probably an episode of low-level mania, I convinced myself that I'd travel all by my lonesome to his hometown and... That's as far as I got.

Even in my wildest fantasy, I couldn't imagine truly being with Matt. I could call up some of the raunchier conversations we'd had, but I knew in my heart, I wouldn't be able to follow through on anything we'd said or anything I thought I wanted. Besides, my life wasn't a movie. I couldn't just show up on Matt's doorstep, declare my love for him, and then spend an undefined amount of time in romantic bliss before returning to my regular life with a promise that we'd "make it work."

(Plus, what if he was secretly a murderer this entire time?!)

So, I had to put an end to it. Not our friendship, necessarily. But I couldn't sustain a life where I felt like my heart was, to no avail, beating against the walls of another's for permission to enter. I needed to let go. *"It's time to sign out; my vision's getting blurry / This is madness."*

I wish I could say that life was an instant triumph once I made that decision, but of course it wasn't. I developed other, unsustainable crushes and retreated further into my depression. I was actively battling a particularly dark period of feeling worthless the night I met my husband. Because THAT is how love happens in my life—it claws its way from under a disgusting pile of misery and smacks me in the face.

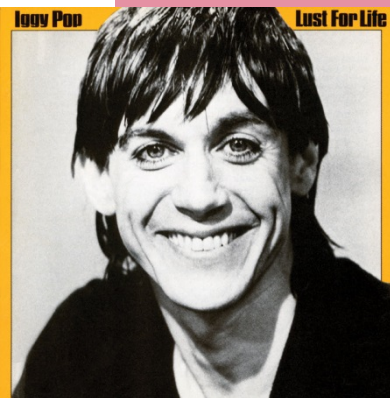
I don't miss what I had with Matt. We've managed to piece together a more legitimate friendship these days, and while it's not where I thought we'd be after 12 years, it's better. Though I often struggle to determine what's appropriate for friends with our history to talk about, because I just naturally talk about inappropriate things with most of the people I hang with, I'm happy. And at least now Matt occasionally initiates our chats.

Still...

I can't help but feel like this whole experience must've meant something. After all, Matt *"caught me at my most pivotal moments,"* so it has to add up to more than just extra nostalgia when I listen to Gym Class Heroes...

Or maybe we were just two kids who wanted to explore the boundaries of platonic and romantic relationships from the safety of the internet's semi-anonymity, and then moved on once we grew out of it.

From the other side of things, and for the sake of my sanity, I'm going to say, yeah, that's it.



Iggy Pop

"Lust for Life"

Lust for Life

08/1977

RCA Records

On "Lust for Life" by Iggy Pop

Thomas L. Winters

"I been hurting / Since I bought the gimmick / About something called love / Yeah something called love / That's like hypnotizing chickens"

I've awoken in a hospital bed twice
plastic tubes jammed in my forearms
the whir of jumpy vitals in my ear
both times forgetting how I got there
Once I awoke on the wet grass
next to the public transit and the ATM
All three times I overdosed on bunk pills
and almost survived with class
My romance with poison is well documented
I can't help but smile
I'm a black-out legend
Goddamn
I think about grinding my teeth
to the rhythm of transistor opera
the time I sprung out of my chest
tectonic plates consuming the dance floor
I was bugged out like hot spots and cold spies
I'm just a machinist in a tub of gold
surfing low nights on a new wave
I'm an expert on synthetic love
passing artificial soul through tongues high
I get it on only when my heart's on turbo
threatening to pop on the rave
I think about all the rocks I downed
reds, whites, blues, yellows, browns
Hell I almost ate the rainbow
I think about dry swimming pools
the genie with the bad penance
my DNA rotten with potholes
I think about the times I pissed on the heavens
When do I play at the Ritz
Mr. Bill Collector
I've been flushing all the good I get
I can't help but smile
I've been battered, bruised, dead
dreading my own bed, used
and almost always by my own hand
Tell me what's a man

The day I got skeletal burns
maybe it's all in my head
Jury
The day I fell out of love
is the day my lust for life returned

This Look is Love

Eleanor Whitney

When the phone rang that night after dinner I raced to answer it before my mom, my sock-clad feet slipping on the hardwood floor as I bellowed, "It's for me!" I ran up the grey carpeted stairs, cordless phone in hand, and slammed the door to my room.

"Hi, is Eleanor there?" a boy's voice awkwardly cracked on the other end.

My heart pounded. I already knew it was Link, a lanky sophomore with chin-length, shaggy dark hair, who had declared his intent earlier that day by pressing a handwritten note into my hand declaring "I like you Eleanor Whitney" as I had ducked into my freshman biology class.

"This is she speaking," I stumbled out, oddly formal as my mother had taught me to respond to phone inquiries.

I'd noticed him lurking around school before. He wore dark jeans above purple Converse high top sneakers, long t-shirts with band names printed on them, and flannel shirts that hung off his spindly frame. An air of mystery hung about him and he was so gaunt and his skin was so pale that some of the girls whispered that he must "do drugs."

"Thanks for your note," I squeaked. My surprise that a boy liked me, and an older one at that, stunned me into silence. This something even the pretty, preppy girls, the ones who made the varsity soccer and lacrosse teams their freshman year, dreamed about.

"So, what bands do you like?" I asked, figuring this was a safe bet.

"Nirvana. But like, tons of other stuff. Some of it's obscure. I'll make you a mixtape."

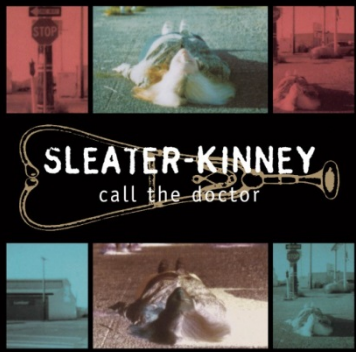
I bristled at the implied fact that I wouldn't know "obscure" bands. I'd been listening to WMPG, the college radio station, since middle school. I brushed it off, trying to be attractively nonchalant. "Yeah, cool."

"I'll bring it to school tomorrow."

The next day I ran up the granite steps to school feeling weightless despite my Timbuk2 messenger bag laden with textbooks. I was floating into a new reality. Link was waiting for me outside the door to my homeroom. A pleasant electric shock ran through me.

"Here's the tape I made you," he said by way of good morning, handing over a cassette tape with a black and white printed J-card, with "To Eleanor, From Link, Spring 1997" written on it by hand.

They Might Be Giants, Steely Dan, PJ Harvey, Sonic Youth, Liz Phair, REM, Cub, Juliana Hatfield. Songs written by Link himself. Some of the bands I had read about in the school library's battered copies of *Spin* and *Rolling Stone*, but I had to admit he knew bands I didn't. And he played guitar and recorded his own songs, something that I felt was out of my reach, despite having taken piano and clarinet lessons for years. That night, when I popped it into my tape deck, the fuzzy, jangly guitars and slightly nasally vocals made me feel at home. This was going to be my music now.



Sleater-Kinney

"Call the Doctor"

Call the Doctor

03/1996

Chainsaw

That Sunday afternoon I begged my parents to drive me to downtown Portland, Maine to meet up with Link. We spent the afternoon aimlessly wandering around the brick sidewalks as he gave me a tour of places around the refurbished fishing port where he and his friends liked to gather. They had given them their own names: A sunken brick and shrub lined courtyard in front of a hair salon was christened "Strawberry Fields." A parking garage where you could take a glass walled elevator to the roof and look out over the harbor towards the Casco Bay Islands was dubbed "Um." I followed him breathlessly, like the city I had known all my life was a brand new place to be discovered.

We first made out on the top of Um. As his tongue pushed too urgently into mine, I felt the cold, rough concrete under my back. I looked past Link's dark hair to the gray March sky as I felt a disorienting warmth and giddy nausea run through me, exhilarated yet paranoid about getting caught.

Sundays became our regular hangout, and we'd often meet up with Link's friends, who he referred to simply as "the group." They were an odd assortment of nerds, theatre kids, and hippies who had met in the poetry chat room of One Net Falmouth, a local dial up bulletin board service. They often called each other by their screen names: Blink, Wheels, and, of course, Link.

Sometimes Link and I would break away from the group and walk together, shyly holding hands until they got too sweaty. Then we'd laugh awkwardly and separate them, wiping our palms on our jeans. As we wandered in front of brick buildings housing quaint boutiques, or down to the fishy smelling docks, we talked about how after high school we'd move to Seattle and follow in the footsteps of our grunge rock idols. We'd go to University of Washington. He'd be a guitarist, and I'd be a writer, and we'd live in small bungalow overlooking the foggy sound.

In middle school, during Friday night sleepovers with my friend Angie, I would sit around and dream of someday having a boyfriend. Simultaneously, as Ani DiFranco or the Indigo Girls played in the background, we reminded ourselves that a boyfriend was not necessary for us to be happy. But now I had a boyfriend. And with that simple fact, I felt a sense of validation I hadn't known I'd craved acutely. It was as if my presence in his life bestowed a kind of worthiness on my own.

One night, as I tried to hide the fact I was still talking after my mother's newly imposed 10 pm phone curfew, Link mumbled, "I feel like my best songwriting is already behind me. I haven't written a song in months. You're the only thing in my life that has any meaning."

I heard my mother's footsteps approaching from down the hall, "I have to go," I whispered, "but I'll never leave you. I'll see you tomorrow."

I felt needed, important, like I was his rock. Maybe this was what love felt like.

Cassie was also part of "the group." A junior at our school, she stood out from the other girls with their long, flaxen blonde or glossy brunette hair and Lands' End coats. I'd noticed her wild, dark curly hair, rainbow-striped knee socks, John Fluevog boots, thrifted lime colored wool winter coat, and purple corduroy pants. Once she wore a bright lavender wig, cut into a swingy, chin length bob, and I had silently admired her, wishing I could be as bravely cool.

During the school week, I started spending my free periods with Cassie and Link, hanging out on a stairwell landing where someone (not us) had graffitied "NIN" on the

carpet in black sharpie. I found out that Cassie was born within a few days of me, but had skipped a grade in elementary school, where I had stayed back. That year, in late May, we were both turning sixteen and both planned to take our driver's tests. We listed out the adventures we could take together during the summer: the beach in Scarborough, Red's Dairy Freeze in South Portland, a trip to Boston.

Link, already sixteen, had yet to get his learner's permit.

The night of my birthday I received the *Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock* from my beaming parents. The next day, I meticulously navigated through the road test, including a very precise parallel parking job, in my Mom's forest green, standard transmission Saab.

At school I excitedly showed Link my ticket to adulthood, my laminated-plastic driver's license, and exclaimed, "Now I can pick you up and we can go to Portland together on the weekends! We could even take a road trip!"

"My mother says I'm not allowed to get rides from friends," he said flatly.

Cassie passed her driver's test a few days later, and that night, defying my own mother's rule, she and I flew up the highway in her mother's bright blue Ford Escort with a MS WHO vanity plate. I watched the sunset over the salt marsh that was rushing past and felt the thrill of freedom as the sharp spring air whistled into the car through the half-open windows.

That weekend, sitting on the floor of my room, I eagerly showed Link *The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*. I was especially excited to share the photos of the "girl bands" hailing from the Pacific Northwest.

"Maybe we should move to Olympia instead," I suggested excitedly.

I gazed longingly at a black and white photo of two women in a band, standing at side by side mic stands, mid-song, clutching guitars. One, clad in a dark sweater and collared shirt, leaned into the microphone conspiratorially, her dark eyes like slits, as if she was murmuring a secret to the girls in the audience. The other, in a checked dress, leaned back, as if wailing, eyes closed, a kind of angry joy coursing through her as she sang. The caption identified them as Carrie Brownstein and Corin Tucker of the band Sleater-Kinney. There was a power in the photo that mesmerized me.

"Whatever," Link scoffed, "Kurt Cobain liked all that stuff, but those labels in Olympia didn't even want to put out his records."

"Oh." I shook my head, not quite understanding what Kurt Cobain had to do with it. I decided to change the subject. "So," I began with a forced cheeriness, "the prom is coming up. Cassie and I were thinking of going, you know, to wear crazy outfits and make fun of all the soccer jocks. Do you want to come with us?"

Link recoiled with a look of horror. "I am never, never going to go to such a thing."

He paused, with a scoffing shrug, curling his lips as he spat out, "You can go, I guess."

I knew prom was stupid, but thought he'd be in on the joke. My throat and my chest started to contract with panic. Did he think I was stupid for wanting to go? Was I rejecting him?

"What will you do instead?" I managed to weeze out.

"Play Zelda."

"Well, you can change your mind."

"I'm never going to change my mind."

Later that week I sat in the school library, half-heartedly studying for my advanced algebra final, when a battered copy of *Spin* caught my eye. "Inside the Riot Grrrl Revolution!" trumpeted the headline. My breath quickened; how had I overlooked this? Not only did it have interviews with real live riot grrrls, but it included a list of "must have" Riot Grrrl albums. Sleater-Kinney's *Call the Doctor*, released a year before in 1996, topped the list.

Hastily, I copied down the names of the artists and albums and that Sunday, list in hand, I scoured the used CD bins at Bullmoose Music, a basement level store Link frequented. The musty, patchouli scent of the store mixed with pizza fumes from the Italian restaurant next door as I hastily grabbed albums by Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, Excuse 17, and Team Dresch. I came up empty when it came to Sleater-Kinney, however.

"Hm," sniffed Link, as he shrugged his shoulders while reviewing my purchases over a post-record store slice of pizza. "None of these bands ever signed to a major label. This movement is really just a footnote to grunge."

I recoiled, stung. "Spin magazine said these bands are good," I said half-heartedly.

From a postcard order form I found shut inside my Bikini Kill CD, I sent away for *Call The Doctor* from Sleater-Kinney's record label in Olympia, carefully wrapping a piece of notebook paper around a handwritten check from my parents. Then I waited.

The CD arrived in a cardboard package stuffed with flyers for shows, albums and zines, which fluttered onto my carpet as I giddily tore off the shrink wrap. I picked off the stubborn tape that sealed the case shut and dropped the CD into the player of my boxy stereo, a gift on my 12th birthday that I had recently covered with sparkly stickers. My fingers shook as I pushed the play button.

Would I like it?

It was really important that I like it.

"They want to socialize you
They want to purify you
They want to dignify and analyze and terrorize you..."

The music blasted out was like a missive from an alien world. The menacing tone of the detuned guitars and the warbling, searing vocals were frightening. There was an urgency to the women's voices that was unlike any of the "women in rock" Link had included on mixed tapes for me.

The song lurched forward, leaving me breathless as it barrelled into the chorus,

"This is love and you can't make it
In a formula or shake me
I'm your monster, I'm not like you

All your life is written for you..."

Raw and tempestuousness, the track burned into me. I flopped onto my purple bean bag chair, my worn out Converse, tarot cards, and mixtape cases strewn around me, staring at the ceiling, listening. I wanted nothing more than to become the women in this band. I wanted to "mess with what was sacred," like Corin and Carrie sang about.

A wave of guilt crashed through me. What would happen to me and Link?

True to his word, Link didn't budge on going to the prom. He refused to talk about it, but nursed a hurt at my defiance that caused anxiety to gnaw at the pit of my stomach. I tried to talk myself out of it: why did I insist on going to something that upset him so much? Sleater-Kinney rang in my ears, and I reassured myself: Cassie was my friend and I could do whatever I wanted with her, no matter what he thought. I just hoped Link would forgive me.

Cassie and I had work to do to get ready. To find the perfect prom dresses, we went to our favorite Goodwill in a fading strip mall in front of disused railroad tracks, next to a dusty Dollar Tree and a Payless shoe store. I swallowed my guilt about Link as I sorted through various poofy, teal taffeta creations, and discarded late-80s bridesmaids dresses that the wearers had finally realized they would not, in fact, be able to wear again.

Then I saw it: black and adorned with black sequins and bright green silken roses, a black and forest green skirt flaring out at the bottom, just above the knee. It was hideous and beautiful. I grabbed it off the rack, as if there was a crowd beside me clamoring for just this dress. I winced slightly at the \$30 price tag, but promised myself it would be worth it.

"\$15," said the cashier, disinterested, as she rang up my treasure, "Everything with the yellow tag is 50 percent off today."

Prom night arrived and Cassie and I met up at her house. I paired my dress with black fishnets, black strappy heels from Payless, and a vintage silver choker that had belonged to my grandmother. Cassie wore a bright green silk shift dress and a fuzzy black choker. We looked perfect. I tried not to think about Link at home in his room, hunched over the video game controller for his Nintendo.

The prom, held at the Elk's Hall across from the airport, was as boring as we expected. We laughed and tried to dance to songs like "YMCA" and "Sweet Dreams," the same songs I had heard last year at my eighth grade dance.

At 11 pm, we took a cab to Denny's and slid into a booth, ordering coffees, Moons Over My Hammy, and a Grand Slam breakfast.

"My field hockey teammates told me someone got stabbed here," I whispered.

"We should stay up all night and watch the sun rise," suggested Cassie.

And we did, slipping up to the top of Um at 4:30 am still dressed in our prom attire. My dress was starting to itch and the poofy sleeves dug into my shoulders, but I felt subversive and slightly dangerous as we leaned over the railing side by side as the sun rose, bright red and shimmering over the harbor as the first lobster boat chugged out to sea. I felt like I was soaring, invincible being there with Cassie. Later we collapsed, woozy from lack of sleep and too much coffee, on a blanket on her bedroom floor. As I felt her steady, sleeping breath against my forearm, I realized I was relieved Link wasn't with us.

Summer arrived and I stock piled the cash I earned from mowing neighbors' lawns to send away for more Sleater-Kinney albums and fanzines made by other girls my age that

sang their praises, gossiped about other Riot Grrrl bands, and talked deeply about their own lives. They were "messing with what was sacred" by disclosing secrets, like boyfriends who had tried to control the type of music they listened to, where they went, who they hung out with, threatening to spread nasty rumors about them or even kill themselves if they didn't comply. Link and my relationship was different I reassured myself, trying to push away the growing feeling of recognition as I read.

I continued to slip over to Link's house in the afternoons after I finished mowing lawns and before his parents came home. He'd pause the Final Fantasy or Zelda game he was playing, and we'd lay on his dark brown wooden floor. I'd count to 100, then 200, to distract myself while he slipped his hands under my sports bra. Afterwards, I kept trying to talk with him about the bands I was listening to or how other girls I had met through the mail were recording their own music, just like he was recording his. I wanted to convince him there was nothing to be threatened by, that the scene I was discovering held as much opportunity for him as it did for me. He got agitated, then silent and resentful. Fearful to lose him entirely, I continued to makeout with him, heart pounding, sweaty and silent.

Cassie got a job at a hippie pizza restaurant near the Portland ferry terminal, and on nights she didn't have to work, I would sleep over. One night, after arguing about the virtues of punk versus jam bands, I played her "Call the Doctor," silently begging that she would like it.

"Yeah," she agreed, nodding along, "This is cool."

The next day she presented me with a gift: a pair of hot pink vinyl Converse. The shoes gleamed in their newness. Her mother had picked up them up at the outlet mall in Kittery and had given Cassie a bright green vinyl pair to match. We had a friends uniform. I was humbled.

Excited about matching sneakers and girl love, I giddily told her about how, inspired by Sleater-Kinney, I wanted nothing more than to start a band or a zine with other girls.

"Would you start a zine with me?" I asked timidly, fearing the worst.

"Of course!" she exclaimed, delighted. I was relieved and felt my nervousness slip away as we began making a list of what could be in our first issue in my yellow spiral notebook.

One late summer afternoon Link and I sat on my beige bedroom carpet, talking with strained voices. Piles of my CDs, zines, and notebooks containing zine ideas and lyrics to songs I had started to write were stacked near my stereo.

Link began to plead with me, "Why do you keep listening to this music? Why do you hang out with Cassie so much? I want to go back to before you knew about any of this."

"You introduced me to Cassie. You introduced me to this music. You were the one who put Sonic Youth and Riot Grrrl-inspired bands on mixtapes for me!"

"What did Riot Grrrl ever do besides put bands like L7 and Hole on the map?" he shot back.

"Listen," I said, exasperated, trying to explain again, "Just because I like music made by women doesn't mean I don't like you. It's not an insult to you."

"Can't you see that it's taking you away from me!" he yelled, lunging at my notebooks, grabbing it and trying to tear it in half.

"Stop! Stop! Stoppit!" I shrieked, grabbing at my notebooks where I'd been collecting writing for my first zine. I hugged it to my chest protectively, adrenaline coursing through me, tears running hot down my face.

He flailed towards the pile of CDs, their plastic cases scattering all over my rug. He gathered them up and flung them at me, their sharp edges glancing off my folded arms.

I was more terrified of him finding what I had been writing or destroying my CDs than anything else. With a muffled cry, he stormed out, and rode his bike home.

Later that night the phone rang. He always called at 8:30, after dinner, and as usual I scrambled to answer the phone before my mom did.

"Hello?"

Muffled sobs came out of the receiver. "If you didn't listen to this music and didn't want make zines or be in bands I wouldn't be so mad. You are making me act like this. I can't lose you."

"You introduced me to this. This is the stuff you like. I don't understand why you don't like it."

"It wasn't supposed to be for you! Without you I don't know what I'll do with my life. I don't want to lose you. I'll kill myself. Please just stop listening to those CDs I promise I will stop being upset. Everything will go back to the way it was."

I sat on my bed, wiping my sweating hands on my taupe bedspread. His ragged breathing surged through my tangled phone cord. Exhausted nausea swept over me. If he wasn't in my life who was I going to move to the Pacific Northwest and play in rock bands with? Who would I spend my Sunday afternoons with? Who would stick sweet notes in my messenger bag during my free periods at school? What would I become?

I stared at the pink vinyl Converse Cassie had given to me, the piles of CDs, Sleater-Kinney at the top. I thought about the songs I was writing, the zine Cassie and I were going to make. I timidly hit play on the CD player. "I'm your monster, I'm not like you... I'm your monster, I'm just like you, all my life is right before you."

From here on, I thought, I would always be his monster.

My life hung before me, unwritten.

"Call the doctor! Call the doctor!" Corin Tucker wailed.

I took a deep breath, "Don't call me anymore."

Hands shaking, I placed the plastic phone onto the receiver.



Kamelot

"Temples of Gold"

Karma

07/2001

Noise Records

On "Temples of Gold" by Kamelot

Diana Hurlburt

It's as your mother always feared: heavy metal leads to promiscuity and Satanism.

- *promiscuity*: **noun**
 1. Having sexual relations with a number of partners on a casual basis;
 2. Having one's eye caught by a boy—just one: black-haired, reserved, serious about music. Lapsed Catholic. Cannot take you to any temple except that of Syrinx, probably.
- *Satanism*: **noun**
 1. The worship of Satan or the powers of evil;
 2. Anthropology classes, apparently. The university library. Everything you're beginning to love about your own mind.

Heavy metal will eventually lead to witchcraft, too, but for now you are content to revel in the small new witcheries of your body in a (black) mass of bodies, your fingers laced around with someone else's, a pair of eyes on your face when previously there has been only the unforgiving mirror. That voice through your headphones like no male vocalist you've ever heard, and the lyrics that seem like they were made for you, all Arthuriana and ache. He likes the songs with the guitar solos that are just long enough to be interesting without descending into wank, but he also likes the ballads. It must mean something, that he likes the ballads... even if it's "Abandoned" and "Don't You Cry" on repeat instead of your favorite, "Temples of Gold." All your life you've been told what it feels like when the Holy Spirit moves you: like a concert. All your life you've been waiting for love to appear, each criterion ticked off in heart's blood.

You are eighteen years old and nobody should've let you have your own bank account, because you will use that money to buy concert tickets.

(Larisa Oleynik in *10 Things I Hate About You*: Concert tickets... concert tickets...)

The concert tickets are a mistake: the next decade will be a thousand dollars' worth of concert tickets that are simultaneously the worst mistake you keep making and the most sublime experiences of your life. But in heady Florida spring they feel like freedom. This music, complex and histrionic and powerful, like freedom. This boy, who might just be at that show—who isn't, but is charmed when you bring it up afterwards, all cool, you *missed out*—who is at every show after that, until he isn't.

You have always suspected if you liked the right music, you would be cool. If there was some organic way of relating to the student body of your high school that you bought *De-loused in the Comatorium* used for \$12 and it's so great. If you could grind up the nerve to ask the girl in economics about her Crass t-shirt. College rolls around and all bets are off; you could be cool, no one is the wiser, you have always been cool, and here's the perfect opportunity, this band not even your older sister, in her infinite musical sagacity, has heard of. This band a boy likes.

You should already know better, you who wisely sees the red flags when Rolf sings to Liesl at the beginning of "Sixteen Going On Seventeen." *An empty page that men will want to write on.*

Ten years and never once will he watch *The Sound of Music* with you.

Kamelot in St. Petersburg, autumn 2006: screaming to every song, Khan at the height of his vocal prowess, a voice in your ear *they're a Tampa band, they're ours*. Long kisses on a couch afterward, picking over each detail of the set, every song you still wish they'd play live.

(They've never played "Temples of Gold" live, not in your era. They rarely did on the tour for its album. People never bring it up as a stellar example of a ballad, like Khan's voice isn't right there, heartbreaking vibrato and endless depth.)

Kamelot in Columbus, spring 2014: a very bad (road) trip. Crying beforehand in a Subway because goddamn, by now you can draw a map of northeastern Ohio in your tears. The new singer sounds so good but it's not enjoyable. It's emotion you have to drag onto your face like a mask, your heart exhausted, the vein mined out and yielding only fools' gold.

There's a new album coming, the first you will ever listen to outside the context of him. There will be more concerts, more live DVDs, more fresh music played on anachronistic media—because it might have begun with him but it didn't end with him and that, my ducks, is the meaning of love.



Goldfrapp

"Strict Machine"

Black Cherry

04/2003

Mute

On "Strict Machine" by Goldfrapp

Sam Jowett

Four months, fifteen days in. Honeymoon Phase meant to mellow out. Passion ought to neutralize. But how fucking wrong is that. Chrysalis shredding—not just clothes—but those thoughts. True selves emerge. Polyester veneer of politeness is now scraped clean.

The culprit: a single nail, obsidian sharp. Goldfrapp's satin clad, ebony-gloved fingers. Needle digs into vinyl. You dig into my skin. "Wonderful Electricccccc." The lyric sashays over the bridge. We saunter past discarded inhibitions. The chorus awaits, an eruption with a single revelation:

I'm in love!

I'm in love!

I'm in love!

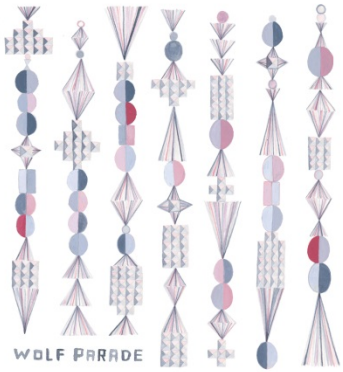
"Felt Mountain," their debut, was the bait. But just like us, hints flirted beneath the cabaret instrument gloss. Even masquerades can only hide appearances for so long. A truth awaited. Not to be whispered, but rather gasped aloud.

"Strict Machine" dictates: *Dressed in white noise*. Little else. This is the inverse of a sophomore slump. Former trip-hop ambience is usurped by electroclash riptide. Siren synths draw us closer. Entrapping me to you. Lyrics our parents warned us about. Trent Reznor wishes he could be this lethal.

Dance. It does not ask. It demands. Sitting is heresy. Head thrashing, body sweating. This is not some damn waltz. Hands do not clasp in graceful arcs. Rather, bodies meet perpendicular. Entwine inversely. Arms twist. Disorientation until we can't tell each other apart.

You tell me you can tie cherry stems with your tongue. I tell you I can whisper "Black Cherry" nothings into your ear. Mutual smirks. Our talents, shaken together. Add a splash of kick drum. A stir of neon glam. Serve in the heat of the moment.

Drink until lightheaded. Dance until giddy without remorse. Make it crescendo until the speaker blisters, until everything else is drowned out. Because this—because you—are the only thing that quenches.



On “I’ll Believe in Anything” by Wolf Parade

Derek Madden

I met her in June. I was wearing a soccer jersey, shouting obscenities at coworkers I barely knew and had only recently met, and generally having the time of my life. She was wearing a white sundress, and I’ve always insisted that that was something I remember. The truth is I had no idea, and that “memory” is based on the fact that when I tell our story she reminds me that I didn’t even notice her in that dress.

I didn’t. I met her in June, but the first day that I “saw” her was February of the following year. We’d worked together since, and I remember her wearing black-rimmed glasses and having short, small conversations with her about how the day was going or her schooling or the ridiculous shorts I would wear as part of my uniform. There was a night that she was going to get ice cream with a larger group of coworkers, and I remember being disappointed that I missed that invite. I expressed my love for breakfast burritos, and she asked for recommendations. But the day, or evening, rather, that she was truly in my sight and that feeling was returned was my last day at my old job. A good friend of mine put together a going away party for myself and two others, and she was there. She was a member of the crowd for most of the party, but eventually the party began to wind down. Around 9 or 10, it was me, her, and three others who were considering what their next move was. They chose a hockey game, I demurred, and she joined me. She said I’d drunk too much to drive, and I’d drunk too much to argue. So we sat in her car and talked until the effects wore off and we realized, eventually, we’d have to leave each other’s company.

This is the moment that the keyboard comes in. This is the moment that the secret soundtrack to our “first” meeting begins.

There’s something gloriously unhinged about “I’ll Believe in Anything.” Part of that is the yelp of Spencer Krug. Part of it is the crashing drum hits. Part of it is the way every part of the instrumentation builds, and builds, and builds until you can’t believe that anything other than a total collapse is imminent. Another part is the ambiguous lyrics, where it’s impossible to tell if having “your ghost” is good or bad or indifferent.

We were in her car. I’m not at all sure how the conversation started (she could probably recite it from memory), but I offered up the narrative of the past three years. The event, the unfeeling bullet fired from a carelessly secured gun by an irresponsible uncle, that rendered my mother quadriplegic, the way I’d cast about for purpose in the years since, my hopes and fears and doubts and dreams and everything else. Somewhere around here the drums start.

Somewhere around here I looked from the passenger seat to the driver seat; seeing her turned towards me with these ballet-flat-style shoes with ribbons that snaked up her calves. I looked into her eyes and saw a look that I’d never seen from anyone before; a look of understanding and compassion and absolution offered freely and without judgment. I saw a woman who, until that point, I’d seen but never really *seen*, and realized that she saw me. This is where the lyrics begin.

Wolf Parade

“I’ll Believe in Anything”

Apologies to the Queen

Mary

09/2005

Sub Pop

This was the start. My interactions with her until this point had been surface level at most, laughing about coworkers or talking about what was for lunch. It was this moment that it became clear. Yes, it was possible to offer myself in its entirety, with all of my deficiencies, and be met with forgiveness for every transgression I felt like I'd committed via my own frailty and deficits.

Some of this is projection. I don't believe in "soul mates." At best, the *absolute* best, you find someone who requires the minimum effort to connect with and you hope you bond and it all comes together. Sometimes that's harder and sometimes that's easier. That night was easy as breathing. She reacted with compassion, yes, but the idea that her gaze offered anything more than sympathy is a comforting fiction. It was a form of sympathy that I so sorely needed that I didn't realize I lacked it, but it was sympathy nonetheless.

"If I could take the fire out from the wire/I'd share a life and you'd share a life."

And as I spilled my guts into the center console of her Suzuki, she picked them up and offered forgiveness for what I saw and portrayed as my shortcomings. For my failings as a son. For every time I didn't answer a phone call from my mother or I begged off a trip up to see her or my inability to help her beyond offering a sip of water or a bite of food when I was there. For my failings as a partner. For every time I let a relationship fade because I was bored or too comfortable or too lazy. I was done. Destroyed. Every part of the self I'd projected for years was dismantled and repurposed into who I was all along. And it was all there in the eyes she gave me in the moment. The moment that lasted for probably a couple hours (I had some issues, let me tell you). In those eyes, I saw my pain reflected and accepted and the weight that I'd carried for years sloughed off and into the ether. It was put up into the trees and into the sea and away from here.

For hours we talked in her car, and we talked in her car until our cars were the last two in the parking lot. I'd been more honest than I'd been with any other person on the planet. She'd talked about her next steps of beginning a life as a teacher and the path that led her there. There were tears in both our eyes. Then I opened the door, embraced her in the parking lot, kissed her forehead, and promised this wouldn't be our last conversation.

Our first date, the following Saturday, stretched into the entire weekend. After the first month, I was in love. I gave voice to that shortly after. Not long after that my mother passed and she was there for me, as a distraction and a companion and a friend, as she was there for me at the beginning and has been there for me since.

She offers me a calm. She also, from time to time, is the storm. That's the reason this song is my soundtrack to the love of my life. There are times it soars as the melody builds and the drums crash and Krug's voice seems like it can barely keep up. There are other times where it builds unsustainably and Krug's voice *can't* keep up and the end of the song feels like it comes crashing down rather than ends with a triumphant flourish of guitar. The lyrics are simultaneously about a new love or a true love or a doomed love or a lost love.

That's ultimately the way I came to understand love. Before I'd looked for something that was good, preferably great, but always that way and that way only. I had it in my head that anything that wasn't 100% perfect wasn't real. I think coming to that realization with her that it can come and go, and those ebbs don't mean anything other than that there's a peak to look forward to, was when I finally understood love. Sometimes it's an exultation and sometimes it's untenable and sometimes it's somewhere in between all of that.

All of that rolled together is, to me, love, and is something I'd never truly felt before and have felt every day of the past five years. There are days where I get "her blood, her bones, and her voice." Other days all I have is her ghost. Sometimes, when the song hits about 2:20, it feels like coming home and, other times, it feels like watching home shrink in the rearview mirror. Sometimes the stretch from 3:40 to the end of the song feels like the lead-up to a victory lap; heads leaning in for a kiss; looking into someone's eyes and seeing your feelings mirrored, completely. Other times it feels like footage of a plane hurtling toward the ground; nights on the couch; stony silences.

The day I first met her was in June. The day I first saw her was in February. The day I first loved her was in March, and every day since. And each day has held the potential for that soaring crescendo or that inevitable crash, and I hold on for both because that is love and I'll believe in anything.

Love Song for No Regrets

M. M. Kaufman

I was twenty-five and living with my sixty-eight year old Aunt Marian following a break up when we learned that her breast cancer was back. Tragic as the news was, I was grateful for the timing. She didn't have children, and I was her namesake after all. I went by May May, after my middle name, to avoid confusion. She was not far along into her chemo treatments when her hair, which had grown back soft like a chick's feathers, started to fall out.

Every day of that year I lived with her began the same way. We started talking from our neighboring rooms before we were even out of bed. Our conversations, that ranged from anything from our dreams, an interview on NPR, the best flavor in the sampler pie at Costco, or which dog had peed in the hallway this time, would travel down the stairs to the kitchen and continue over breakfast. She was a retired schoolteacher working one day a week in an antique store, and I was an after-school nanny. We spent nearly all of our copious free time together going to thrift stores, reading from adjacent couches, listening to Edith Piaf, and watching anything that starred Idris Elba.

One of these mornings she said in a bright voice, "Hey, would you mind buzzing my hair off?" And then with a chuckle, "It's a little depressing to see it fall in my cornflakes, if you know what I mean."

Her boyfriend Pat had cut it off when it had fallen out nine years before, but he told her he didn't have the nerve to do it again. I knew what he meant. My stomach had flipped when she asked me. I put it off until the next day. I didn't know if I had the nerve either.

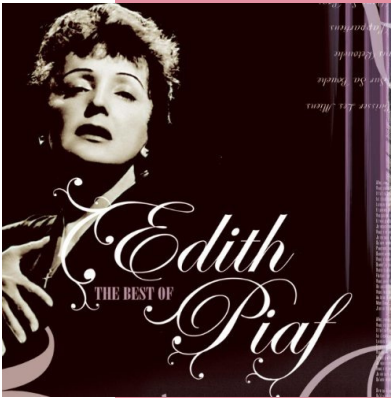
I had always known Aunt Marian as an independent person with an iron clad sense of humor. She had traveled to places like Mexico, hung up beaded curtains in the doorways of her house, and there was not a square inch of wall space without art on it, a lot of it her of own making. She was fearless and wholly herself.

It was only a few weeks earlier, when she was on her way to the doctor visit where she would learn that the cancer was back, that she turned in the doorway and said to me, "May May, I'm scared." I had never heard her say anything like that before, and nothing in such a small voice.

The morning after she first asked me to shave her head, we took our coffee, mine black and hers with lots of cream, out onto the back deck that we had fixed up earlier in the summer. We were always threatening to sit out there to appreciate the sloping backyard, giant mimosa tree, and the muscadine vines that grew on the lattice roof, but that was the first day we actually did. I brought out my speaker and put on Edith Piaf's "Non, je ne regrette rien," our favorite song of hers, and started shaving with Uncle Pat's electric razor.

It felt wrong at first. It was uncomfortable, surreal. But just a few bars into the song and we were warbling along in our garbled French. Her curls peeled off into the wind like loose petals.

I buzzed the sides of her head first so she had a blonde, curly mohawk. I made her go to the mirror to see it before I shaved off the rest. When she returned, I could tell by her wide eyes and loose grin that she was surprised at how much fun she was having.



Edith Piaf

"Non, je ne regrette rien"

The Best of Edith Piaf

06/1991

Capitol Records

She sat back down and we continued.

Women in our family develop necks with an unfortunate sag like a turkey's gobbler when they age. Mine has the potential to droop that way too, so at the chorus I pushed my head back, pinched the skin on my neck, and shook it so my voice mimicked Edith's vibrato. Marian laughed, deep from the belly.

The sun was bright, our coffee was strong and dotted with wisps of golden hair, and Edith was telling us not to regret anything. How much I would have regretted saying no to my aunt's request, to not making her laugh. This morning, this song, was ours. And from then on I would always think of Edith's declaration as a love song for the way Aunt Marian taught me to live.



Santana

"Samba Pa Ti"

Abraxas

09/1970

CBS

Witness to Love

Cory Funk

We pick up what is in the air when we are young. One of the things that filled the air of my childhood was music. My dad loves music. He always had the radio on in the house. Being a natural night owl, it was standard that if we got out of bed before midnight we could always find him sitting in the green easy chair wearing his Sennheisers with the yellow foam earpieces listening to something indistinct but audible in the silent house, the glow of the analog tuning dial and VU meters softly illuminating the living room.

Once in a while Dad would be tickled by something in his mind, and he would dig through small pleather cassette holder, and then play something rare and fascinating for my sister and me. This is how I first heard Gordon Lightfoot's "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald", which he played on the anniversary of the ship sinking. Near Christmas he would play "We Three Kings" and we would sing along but with the alternate lyrics involving an exploding cigar that he had taught us when we were elementary school aged. My mom would shake her head in bemusement. His sharing brought us all closer together.

I asked him how he got these songs. He said, "from the radio" and he showed me how to make my own mixed tapes. I had to stand on a stepstool to reach the JVC tape deck when I started following in his footsteps. I scrounged in the toy box and found some derelict audio book cassettes, put scotch tape over the corner tabs, and off I went! I never thought to ask Dad for one of his blank ones. They seemed to be off limits being kept in the bottom of a hutch and we weren't supposed to touch stuff in there, like Mom's seasonal "Precious Moments" figures. It added to the mystery at the time. It felt like he and I were doing something unique and on the sly.

Though he had fully embraced cassettes (CDs were still a few years off from being readily available), my dad still had a turntable hooked up back then. It was an Onkyo CP 1010A. Dad would tell me occasionally "Your mom bought me this when you were little" and she would reply from the kitchen "It was radio grade, the salesman said", and they would smile at each other. There were a few records that continued to live a vagabond life on the thin metal bookshelf in the living room. Huddled together on the bottom shelf where the first two Boston albums; a budget version of "Best Of Cream," which had sketches of various kinds of fruit on it; a copy of "In A Gadda Da Vida" that he bought off a guy on his dorm floor his sophomore year of college; and the first four Santana albums.

Those Boston and Santana albums fascinated me because of their covers. I used to stare at them in a vain attempt to understand what was going on with the artwork and how it related to the music contained therein, as if they were gatefold Rosetta stones and if I could decipher them I would be able to understand a New Realm of Things. They weren't. They were just art to catch the eye when people flipped through the bins at the Sam Goody or Musicland. Art for buyer's sake. My dad mistook this fascination with intent, and since I was standing there holding the jacket, he would put the record on.

Though I didn't know it at the time, I was learning about love right then. And all the times listed above. These were demonstrations of caring, compassion, and a sharing of interests. It was a subtle code.

There is a specific calculus that young people can't do which is the math of figuring out the years in a person's life who is older than they are. I don't mean doing the simple arithmetic to figure out the calendar years between two people. We know our uncles' and aunts' ages by a single significant digit that reads "Older" and we leave it at that. Every one of us has this natural blind spot. When I was standing in the living room with the two-tone green shag rug recording over my Peter Pan audio book cassettes in favor of the week's "Funny Five" on Dr. Demento, I didn't know (nor could I reason out) just how old my parents were right then, either by number or by position in time. By extension I didn't know how old they were on their wedding day, or how old when my sister came along, or when I rounded out the family. It wasn't until many years later that I was old enough to understand this equation and what brought about my understanding was the song "Samba Pa Ti" by Santana.

On the second Santana album, *AbraXas*, halfway through the second side, there is a slow instrumental track called "Samba Pa Ti". I recall that Dad would play this record when I would take it out to stare at the cover. He would usually start on the B side, and when "Samba Pa Ti" was about to play, he would get a grin on his face, impish, and go to the kitchen. There, he and Mom would dance together, like a couple in high school. Sometimes they would giggle (GIGGLE! Parents don't giggle!) and always, at the end of the song, they would kiss. My sister and I would of course object to this. "Eww! Gross! No smooching in the kitchen!" and then we would all go about our day as the record played on.

This look, this dance, and this kiss happened every single time the song played. Throughout my childhood and up until I moved out of the house after college. It still happens to this day as far as I know.

It's a shame it took me so long to realize that this is my parent's song. My dad bought this album when it came out, which was a year before my sister came along. This is what they danced to when they were just past being kids themselves, what they danced to when they were newlyweds, when they were young adults still finishing college now with a family. Every time "Samba Pa Ti" came on, we were witness, for four and a half minutes, to our parents as they were then: young lovers. We were also witness to their still being very much in love with each other. For those few minutes, it wasn't about undone dishes, unpaid bills, Dad having to travel again for work, my sister's grades, the disaster area that was my room, or who had to mow the lawn. The world was on pause while two married folks slipped out of time, danced and smooched in the kitchen, and the house filled with love.



Dalida

“Je me sens vivre”

*Garde-moi la dernière
danse*

1961

Barclay

Causerie

Athena Melliar

For you are unlooked-for magnetic force
two times countless years older than chaos,
inchoate for true love—excuse my hoarse

voice, out of choice

I have not spoken my mind for too long—

I look for you to hypnotize me more.

Our causerie, core insight into our need
to feel loved, transmutes into all silence
and gaze until ones eye color will bleed

into another’s eyes.

How frightened I am of you.

You hue my eyes.

And as we wander, we streak—we enter—
across each other’s eyes. A cosmos is
four holding hands with no chasm. We want—dare—

to curl them together.

They swirl one perfect sphere.

For love.



On “The Weather” by Built to Spill

Daniel Elder

On the first day of the second semester of my sophomore year of college, I walked into Intermediate Italian II and fell in love at first sight. Her name was Lucy Beach, and her name really summed her up. Lucy, like luce, from lux, which is light. Beach, where the waves kiss the shore, where life rises up from the depths and walks at last on land. Lucy Beach. Her eyes were potent, and her t-shirts sported names of bands I’d never heard of.

Over the course of the semester we’d often chat before and after class, but it wasn’t until the day of our final exam that I finally worked up the guts to ask for her number. I finished the final first, and paced outside until she was done. Finally, the classroom door opened, and out walked Lucy with a searching look on her face. Then she saw me, and she looked...happy. She was holding a stack of CDs in her hands. Gifts, for me.

In high school I had often been angry, usually sad, wore all black—including a trenchcoat—and typically had headphones on blasting Nine Inch Nails, TOOL, Marilyn Manson, VNV Nation, White Zombie, and a bunch of other bands who seemed to grok my misfit angst. Once I got to college, I began transforming. I started wearing colors. I started smoking pot, and stopped getting haircuts. I walked into my first psychedelic experience and, walking out, I largely left my nihilism behind.

But, for whatever reason, whatever inertia, I still clung to my old taste in bands and songs, though their overall tone was increasingly at odds with my growing sense of joy and wonder. Those songs were a security blanket. I knew who I was when they defined me and, as exciting as transformation was, it was also scary.

Lucy Beach had burnt three albums for me, albums by bands I’d never listened to that she thought I needed to hear. *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots* by The Flaming Lips. *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* by Wilco. And *Keep It Like A Secret* by Built to Spill. Taking them home that night, along with the ten magic digits of her phone number, they felt like sacred totems in my hands. I listened to them again and again, along with every other scrap of music Lucy gave me over the coming months. And meanwhile I molted, sloughed off my old angsty skin for a new one made of the same stuff as Lucy Beach: light and waves.

She blew my musical universe wide open. I’d grown up in New York City and lived there my whole life, but she showed me corners of it I’d never explored—venues of all shapes and sizes where, every night, bands performed rites of passage on stage with guitar, bass, vox, and drums. Her brother booked New York City’s Bowery Ballroom, a rock mecca, and she shared his sonic DNA. They were both magnets for good music, and I counted myself incredibly lucky, since seemingly overnight she and I had become inseparable best friends adventuring through it all together.

Of course, I felt like more than just a friend to Lucy. I’d written the story of our love since the moment I’d first laid eyes on her. It was at the end of one of our earliest hangs that I tried to kiss her. I’m a word guy; making moves isn’t my strength. But I went for it, and she dodged, deftly giving her cheek to my lips instead of her mouth. And we never really talked about it. It just sort of happened, and didn’t happen.

But I was persistent. Over the next three months, that storied summer of 2003, I courted Lucy Beach. We were spending four or five days out of the week together, gallivanting all over New York City, catching as many concerts as we could, scheming, dreaming, eating mushrooms and walking over the Brooklyn Bridge with a boombox blasting The White Stripes and laughing ourselves to the sky with the freedom of our youth.

I wrote her typewritten poems, leaving them folded up on her pillow when I left her dorm at two in the morning, stoned and dazzled with adoration. We made each other mix CDs. Hers, I was sure, were layered with all sorts of secret messages to me, and mine, I knew, were filled with not so secret messages to her, nestled into the lyrics of carefully chosen songs of love and devotion.

Then, on August 14th of 2003, I was sitting in an office in the financial district when the power cut out and my computer died. I walked outside to find that office buildings all around were emptying out. New York City, along with much of the Eastern seaboard, had lost all power. At the time, I was living at home in Queens with my family until the next semester began, but Lucy called and invited me to walk all the way to her dorm room in the East Village and crash there for the night.

This is it, I thought. This is what our story has been building towards. The mixes, the music, the poems, the late night bong hits...this is it. The blackout that will give birth to us.

A blackout during summer in New York City is an urban fairytale. Lucy and I bought ice cream and as much beer as we could carry while the freezers at the local bodegas slowly died. We drank Presidentes that quickly grew lukewarm and wandered the streets of the East Village, where parties had broken out on every street corner, and police patrolled through roving gangs of Roman candle wielding hipsters, ignoring countless episodes of public intoxication.

It was swelteringly hot, and when we got back to her dorm room, I sat outside the bathroom talking to Lucy through the door while she shrieked her way through an ice cold shower. Then we moved into her bedroom, smoking copious amounts of pot and sweating as we listened to Radiohead and played with Lite Brite. Lucy and I, we were kids like that. Ever playful. Ever young. The night wore on and we wound up laying side by side, stoned, our bodies sheened with sweat. The air conditioner was dead and silent. Candlelight flickered shadows on the walls.

"Lucy?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you. You know that, right?"

Lucy'd never been much of one for words. She tried to answer, tried again, stopped, and at some point, I think both of us started crying a little, sniffing. We'd been inseparable for three months. Something beautiful bound us together and both of us felt it, however differently. It was as if we were each the north end of different magnets. Cut from the same cloth, yet unable to come together, pushing apart even at our closest moments.

After a long and pregnant silence, she sat up and went over to her CD tower, the library from which I'd learned so much. She told me she wanted to play me a song. She took a CD and put it in her DiscMan, then lay beside me and headphones on my ears. Listen, she said. I lay with my back to her, my eyes wet, a little spoon whose big spoon felt an eternity apart, though she was just a few inches away.

I knew the voice right away. It belonged to Doug Martsch, the lead singer of Built to Spill, one of the bands in the stack of CDs she'd first given me. This song was new to me, though. And it carried me off, into images of clouds and the vast expanses of space and time that stretch between two human beings, no matter how close their hearts may feel.

The thing about songs is this: we think they understand us, because they seem to complete us. Even though they are born in the eyes of other humans, from their own experiences. We take the songs we love and we mold them into the cracks and fissures in our hearts, to help hold those fragile organs together, since they seem like they could fall apart at any moment. The song that Lucy played for me that night, "The Weather" by Built to Spill, it fit a fissure once, a crack that represented the space between me and her. It was her way of saying wait, not yet, I want to relish this distance, and the beauty that exists in it. It was her way of telling me that there was no one else like me in the universe, and that only made her want to keep her distance even more. The song summed up what would become our entire dance.

It took a few more weeks, but eventually, I got the girl. Lucy and I wound up dating for almost five years, but they were such young years, from 19 to 24. That childlike closeness always remained, but so did that distance, and when we broke up, it wasn't because of any sort of enmity; it just felt like we were hurtling towards forever together and we weren't sure that we were ready for that, or right for that. So we spiraled off from one another. And in the near decade since then, "The Weather" has stayed in my heart, slithering like a liquid medicine to fill a crack wider and deeper than the one that separated me and Lucy ever was.

We are such small and fragile things in a world whose physical existence is an eternal storm. That night, that song was a bridge between us. Lucy held the song in her heart as she played it into my ears. She knew every word, every moment, and though we were apart, we were together. And I worry sometimes; I worry that the distance between two minds, two hearts, two bodies, is ultimately unbridgeable.

In a way, the closer I get to anyone, the more far away I feel from everyone, the more I fear we are all truly alone. Surrounded by wind and rain and snow, complicated landscapes across which we can see, like silhouettes, the loves and lovers that we long for. Music is medicine, though. It helps me stay connected. It gives me hope. I wait, and search, patiently but hungrily, for someone to talk to about the weather. Not just anyone will do.

Contributors

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Kolleen Carney-Hoepfner is the Editor-In-Chief for [Drunk Monkeys](#) and the Managing Editor for [Zoetic Press](#). She has an MFA in poetry which, I mean, come on. All she does is eat pasta, drink vodka, and watch *Vanderpump Rules*. She lives in Burbank, CA, tweets [@KolleenCarney](#), and blogs...poorly... at [kolleencarney.com](#).

Taylor Gates earned a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of Evansville and spends her days writing a little fiction, a little poetry, and a lot of tweets. Though an Indiana native, she recently moved to California to become a screenwriter, mostly because she likes the idea of binge-watching Netflix and telling people it's for research. You can find her work on websites like *Starry Constellation Magazine*, *AfterBuzz TV*, and *BuzzFeed*. You can also find her crying over television shows on Twitter at [@Elphaba_Anne](#).

Sarah Skiles is a writer and storyteller living in Los Angeles. Her day jobs in the entertainment industry have included: food styling for blender infomercials, tumbleweed wrangling, red carpet interviews, and producing episodes of reality television. Thanks to a father who worked backstage in arenas, her family's first microwave was a hand-me-down from the Grateful Dead. Her favorite song at the moment is *Memory*, by Preoccupations.

Jim Zola has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook -- *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) -- and a full length poetry collection -- *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, NC

For the most part, Jon Johnson has no clue what is going on. Time not spent scratching his head is typically spent writing, eating, and trying to figure himself out. He enjoys creation and expression in all forms, and finds his personal expression best through whichever medium pops out at the moment. Jon has a personal weakness for the smell of old books and questions that make you go "hmmm". Check out [Jon's other adventures](#), or visit him in Mallorca.

Ryane Nicole Granados is a Los Angeles native and she earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her work has been featured in various publications including *The Manifest-Station*, *Mutha Magazine*, *The Good Men Project*, *Expressing Motherhood*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Scary Mommy* and *LA Parent Magazine*. Ryane is best described as a wife, writer, professor and devoted mom who laughs loud and hard, even in the most difficult of circumstances. When not managing her house full of sons, she can be found working on her novel, grading student essays, or binge watching reality TV shows while eating her children's leftover Halloween candy.

Sarah Shields is a writer, illustrator, and mother of two living in dreamy California. Recent work appears in *Figroot Press* and *Gigantic Sequins*. More about her can be found here: www.sarahshields.com. She is going to see *Cigarettes After Sex* soon and is pretty excited about it (!!!!!), can you tell.

Nora Seilheimer is a Michigander and nonfiction MFA candidate at University of New Orleans. She lives in New Orleans with her husband and two cats where she is the Associate Editor of *Bayou Magazine* and teaches a weekly yoga class to female inmates at Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office. She is a proud double Scorpio with a figure skating past that she writes about often. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Longleaf Review*, and *Chicago Athlete Magazine*. You can also find her on Twitter [@nslhmr](https://twitter.com/nslhmr).

Zack Peercy is a playwright based out of Chicago. He's been published by Occulum, Chicago Literati, Toasted Cheese, Every Day Fiction, The Sandy River Review, and others. He's on Twitter ([@zackpeercy](https://twitter.com/zackpeercy)) and just wants strangers to say "hey, nice writing" even if it's sarcastic.

Allie Marini is a cross-genre writer holding degrees from both Antioch University of Los Angeles & New College of Florida. She has been a finalist for Best of the Net and nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her masthead credits include Lucky Bastard Press, Lunch Ticket, Spry Literary Journal, The Weekenders Magazine, Mojave River Press, & The Bookshelf Bombshells. She has published a number of chapbooks, including *Pictures from the Center of The Universe* (Paper Nautilus, winner of the Vella Prize) and *Southern Cryptozoology: A Field Guide to Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Hyacinth Girl Press, finalist for the SPPA's Elgin Award for 2 consecutive years.) In addition to her work on the page, Allie was a member of Oakland's 2017 National Slam Team. A native Floridian now freezing to death in the Bay Area, Allie writes poetry, fiction, and essays. She can be found online [@kiddeternity](https://twitter.com/kiddeternity) or to book, contact Sugar Booking Entertainment, sugarbookingentertainment@gmail.com.

Michael Prihoda is a poet, editor, and teacher living in central Indiana. He is the editor of *After the Pause*, an experimental literary magazine and small press. In addition, he is the author of five poetry collections, the most recent of which is *The First Breath You Take After You Give Up* (Weasel Press, 2016).

Nicole McCarthy is an experimental writer who earned her MFA from the University of Washington Bothell. Her work has appeared in *Glass: a Journal of Poetry*, *The Shallow Ends*, *Dream Pop Press*, *B(o)ink*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *Ghost Proposal*, *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *Tinderbox Poetry*, *The Fem*, *Civil Coping Mechanism's A Shadow Map* anthology, and forthcoming in the 2018 *Best American Experimental Writing* anthology. Her work has also been performed and encountered as projection installation pieces throughout Tacoma and Seattle. She can be found on Twitter [@GarbytheSass](https://twitter.com/GarbytheSass) and her work can be found at nicolemccarthypoet.com.

Katie Darby Mullins teaches creative writing at the University of Evansville. In addition to being nominated for a Pushcart Prize and editing a rock 'n roll crossover edition of the metrical poetry journal *Measure*, she's been published or has work forthcoming in journals like *Iron Horse*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *BOAAT Press*, *Harpur Palate*, *Prime Number*, *Big Lucks*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Evansville Review*, and she was a semifinalist in the Ropewalk Press Fiction Chapbook competition and in the Casey Shay Press poetry chapbook competition. She's also a frequent contributor to *The Song Show* on NPR in southern Indiana.

Reynold Junker's writing credits include, among others, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Narrative*, *Maxim*, *America*, *Crannog*, *U.S. Catholic* and *The Bookends Review*. His *U.S. Catholic* story, *Dancing With The Jesuits*, was awarded first place in the Catholic Press Association's Best Short Story category for 2008. His story, *The Accordionist and the Sparrow*, was awarded first place in the Marin California Writers Group's fiction competition for 2012. *Subway Music*, his memoir about growing up Italian and Catholic in Brooklyn, New York, was awarded first prize in the Life Stories category of the 16th Annual *Writer's Digest* International Self-Published Book Awards competition. He was born in Brooklyn, New York and graduated from the United States Naval Academy. He is currently retired and living alone at the top of a very steep hill in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles, California.

C.C. Russell lives in Wyoming with his wife and daughter. His writing has recently appeared in such places as *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Word Riot*, *Rattle*, *The Meadow*, and *The Colorado Review*. His short fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and Best of the Net. He has held jobs in a wide range of vocations – everything from graveyard shift convenience store clerk to retail management with stops along the way as dive bar dj and swimming pool maintenance. He has also lived in New York and Ohio. He can be found on Twitter @c_c_russell.

Neil Clark lives and works in Edinburgh, Scotland. His work has previously been showcased alongside other Scottish writers as part of Book Week Scotland, and at fiftywordstories.com. He has short stories in forthcoming issues of *Cabinet Of Heed* and *Riggwelter Press*. On Twitter, he regularly posts very short stories in Tweet form. Find him there @NeilRClark.

Jen Rouse's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Poet Lore*, *Pretty Owl*, *The Tishman Review*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Sinister Wisdom*, the *Plath Poetry Project*, *Occulum*, *Lavender Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic* and elsewhere. She has work forthcoming in *Up the Staircase's* 10th anniversary issue and *Sliver of Stone*. She's the 2017 winner of *Gulf Stream's* summer poetry contest. Rouse's chapbook, *Acid and Tender*, was published in 2016 by *Headmistress Press*. Find her at jen-rouse.com and on Twitter @jrouse.

Kevin D. Woodall grew up in Riverside, California, and now lives in Calgary, Alberta with his wife, Elise. Chances are you haven't read anything else by him because he's a hermit who amounts to little and shares even less. He's the co-curator/editor for *Memoir Mixtapes*, which he sincerely hopes you've heard of if you're reading this now. You can find his poorly executed photography on Instagram at @KDWoodall and a few dumb tweets from him on Twitter at @Kevin_D_Woodall. He's just so very tired.

Cathy Ulrich has always had very vivid dreams. She can't tell, sometimes, when she's awake and when she's not. Her work has been published in various journals, including *Longleaf Review*, *Corium* and *Former Cactus*.

Andrew Hachey is a poet from Toronto, whose work has appeared in *Quiet Lunch*, *Occulum*, *Atlantis*, *North Carolina's Best Emerging Poets* (Z Publishing), and is forthcoming in *Fjords Review*. He is the editor of *Carbon Culture Review*, and an assistant editor at *C&R Press*. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with his son, Abbott.

Benjamin Niespodziany is a left-handed librarian at the University of Chicago who runs a multimedia art blog known as *neonpajamas*. He self-released a chapbook of poems in December known as *Dress Code Aquarium* and has had work published in *The Occulum*, *formercactus*, *tenderness*, *yea*, *Water Soup Press*, and *1833.fm*.

Samantha Lamph/Len is a recently laid-off writer and still-working cat masseuse in Los Angeles. You can read more of her work in *Luna Luna Magazine*, *OCCULUM*, and *Queen Mob's Teahouse*. She is also the creator and co-editor of *Memoir Mixtapes*, the publication you are currently reading. Her Twitter handle, @quandoparamucho, is taken from The Beatles' "Sun King." Thanks for asking.

Juliette van der Molen is a writer living in the Greater NYC area. She writes completely unladylike erotica and other sundry things. Her work has appeared in *Lit Up*, *P.S. I Love You*, *My Erotica.com*, and *The Junction*. You can find more of her work at *Medium.com* and connect with her on Twitter @j_vandermolen.

Mateo Lara is twenty-four years old, working toward a degree in English Literature from California State University, Bakersfield. He is proud to be Latinx and Queer, learning to embrace who he is inside of all the experience, history, language, and culture. His collection of poetry, *X, Marks the Spot*, is available on Amazon, and some of his poems have been featured in *The New Engagement*, *EOAGH*, and *Orpheus*.

N. Alysha Lewis is a writer and editor who just wants to live in a world where she can eat fries for every meal and not feel guilty about it. She is a regular contributor to the online magazine *The Prompt*, and her work has also appeared in *East Coast Ink* magazine and *Drunk Monkeys*. You can find her on Twitter @bibliOpHage, where she's probably complaining about her husband's awful cat.

Thomas L. Winters is a writer from Ontario currently developing a chapbook of dark, surrealist poetry. After dropping out of University he struggled for a while to find a fulfilling path on which to excel creatively, but has recently devoted himself to writing the stories and poems he once only imagined. You can read his work in *Grotesque Quarterly*, *Occulum*, *Figroot Press*, and *The River*. He also records music in his spare time.

Eleanor Whitney is a writer, editor, community builder, content strategist, and sometimes guitarist living in Brooklyn. She is the author of *Grow*, a practical field guide for managing your creative business. She is currently the Managing Editor for *All Hands*, a publication about life at work from *Managed by Q*. Her next book, a feminist memoir, will be released by *Microcosm Publishing* in 2019.

Diana Hurlburt is a librarian and writer in Florida. Selections of her short work can be found at *The Toast*, *Body Parts*, *cahoodaloodaling*, and *The Hanging Garden*, and in the collections *Beyond the Pillars* and *Equus*. Her debut novella is forthcoming from *Riptide* in 2018. Talk to her [on Twitter](#) about power metal and ponies!

Sam Jowett lives with their wonderful fiancée and more than a few sly reptiles, who serve as editors for most of the work you see here, bringing it up to snuff for human eyes. Their work has appeared in *Moonchild Magazine*, *Crabfat Magazine*, scribbled in dive bar bathrooms and underneath knock off soda bottle caps. You can follow them on Twitter @samuel_jowett.

Derek Madden is an office drone at the Happiest Place on Earth. He writes daily but his writing is only used to train teenagers to operate heavy machinery. The more important thing is that he is a husband and he loves his two cats, his wife, and breakfast burritos in roughly that order (depending on how good the burrito is).

M. M. Kaufman calls New Orleans home. She is pursuing a MFA in the University of New Orleans' Creative Writing Workshop and has fiction published with Slush Pile Magazine.

Cory Funk is a music junkie who lives in St Paul, Minnesota. He has built many sets of stereo speakers for fun. His photography and part of his record collection has been displayed at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. He has a short story in the recent collection *Killing Malmon* published by Down & Out Books. He can be found online at funkomatic.wordpress.com.

Athena Melliar is a freelance poet, writer and essayist. Her work has appeared in Literary Magazines and journals (*So to Speak*, *Moonchild Magazine*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, *The Mystic Blue Review*, *Frear*, *Stachtes*) and newspapers in Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and England (*Pontos News*, *OffsiteCy*, *Hellenic Community of Alexandria*). She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Humanities. Find her on Twitter: @AthenaMelliar

Daniel Elder was born and raised in Jackson Heights, Queens. He lives and writes in Portland, Oregon, with his cat, Terence. His work appears in *Portland Review*, *Gertrude Press Maudlin House*, and more, and is forthcoming from *The Rumpus*. He misses his mom.

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