The Enviable Blues

Wish I weighed 275 with a scar across my eye
And I was old and getting bald and mean
Cause my woman left me, got no job, rent late
Standing on the corner, with nowhere to go.

Wish I was born with a guitar in my hand
And I’d seen the devil when I shot a man
Down in Memphis, and now I’m leaving town,
With no luck but bad and a matchbox full of clothes,

Wish my parents named me Willie or Johnny or Eddie
But people called me Dirty or Fast or Hand Luck
They’d shake their heads when I hitched down the road
Thumb out, not smiling, and the never minding the rain

Wish I were low enough to get justified and never cried
At all, sweet and lowdown instead of sweet n’ low
Not scurrilous or bitter either, but could leave a crowd
With the taste of ashes and smoke and they’d feel satisfied.

Wish it didn’t look like this: me walking home in the rain
Neck craned over, face imploding with a scowl, slumping past
Old Harmonica, be all weather-beat and lean, sees my face
Says, "Whatever it is, man, can’t that bad."

-Jesse Stanchak
Lies

Dancing, she perpetually is. (was)
Laughing, I always am. (was)
Happy, we truly are. (were)

I don’t remember the girl in the bar.
(She wore blue vinyl)

But weeping she was, (is)
And sorry I was, (am)
Though lovers we are. (were)

--Pamela Mellen

The Muse

Sit down at the computer; in a coffee bar; at a restaurant; in the park. Relax on the beach; in a lounge chair; on a couch. Fingers hang over the keyboard; sit poised over a notebook; grip a pencil, a pen. Wait. Fingers move over the keys; cause the pen to scribble across the page; press so hard the lead breaks. Delete; crumple; erase; Wait. Pace the room; kick the sand; watch the ceiling; count the tiles. Stare and stare and stare and stare. At the waves breaking on the shore; at the fat man who just spilled coffee on himself; at the two lovers playing footsie under the table; at the birds flying in formation, giant V’s each written by a new hand; at your face reflected in the 20 inch LCD screen; at incompetence; at failure; at uselessness. Scribble again; no one will see it – first drafts can be shitty. Not this shitty. There is no plot; no character; no development; no idea; no point; no purpose; no paper. Delete; crumple; erase. Grab a glass of water, soda, beer, wine, gin, vodka, moonshine, absinthe. Whatever. Find the computer; the paper; the pen behind the couch, where it lays after its battle with the fingers; the pencil stuck in the ceiling; just like in high school. Write. Scribble. Type anything, everything. Words; sentences; paragraphs; letters. Nothing. Grab a cigarette; a joint; acid; mushrooms; ecstasy; cocaine; heroin. Anything. Look in the general direction of the paper. Pound in the general vicinity of the keyboard. Scribble; type; write; scribble; copy. Anything. Nothing. Fall asleep on the couch; on the beach; in the park; in a lounge chair; in a restaurant; on a table, until someone kicks you off and out into the night. Walk; drive; run; canter; gallop; tromp. Stumble. She’s out there somewhere, and tomorrow is another day.

--Adam Waks
Campfire

Campfire a thousand hills from nowhere
I script a note to you, then burn it still,
but send it through my heart — watch emotions
Phoenix-born, on charred tree-petals, fluttering
Evening breeze: soon right, now sunrise lancing.
A thousand hearts from me ash-words adorn
your hair, sleeping peaceful sentinel-sown.

--Yasmeen Mandour-Brakin.

--Kristen Mallia
Fully Drained

I.
"I need something," she says, candle-fire hair rushing from her warm neck's nape.

He nods.

II.
Curved rapture, to squeeze, to wring, to embrace and shriek at, to flinch from, and to exhaust. Growing in crystallized hardness, fountaining out sweetness. Shivering questions and exhaling colors, frothing that thing you call your soul and carousel with fate because there is no fate so why not take it out for a drink? No standing, pausing, praying but fullness of shades and noise and jazz and justice. Grappling, fumbling—hands cracked and clumsy but sweet and full while seconds are sucked dry. Whispers drain into ear-creaking, lobe-wetting shouts and gasps and a shake shake shock. Diving into cathedral-swelling/bursting music, lifting your ribs up and through your torso—like a bird thrusting itself into the bluesness of the sky—tumbling around and aerating your chest with the lightness of clouds, turning it sideways and backwards to bud and blossom in full magnolia sweetness, in perfumed caresses of a Gauvain woman, hair finger-combed and thick, draped on an arched fist, waiting shuttered-eyed for the room to grow.

III.
There was a woman, eighty-years-old, who ran every day, mile or two, I don’t know, but ran with the sun and wind and clouds under trees, heart-beating, lung-breathing running, nails dug into fists, cruising—just cruising—downhill, hair flying from her face in glistening strips, sweaty but spilling out of her head, flowing down and free.

The police, drained, utterly drained, by their gilded badges thought she had run from one of those homes, homes where they infuse people with forgetting and choke them with infantilizing tablets. They couldn’t make her out in the light—no, not through their tint tainted sunglasses. She was full but they emptied her of herself.

IV.
"Can’t you see?" she asks, grabbing at his cold hand.
Can’t you see me?

— Erin Gamble
Nika's Ascent

Nika looked up when she heard a cracking sound coming from the roof. The tiles were missing across half of the ceiling, and tin sheets were ridge in their place with nails to cover the holes. The tin worked perfectly against rain and ice, but against the cold it was useless. On the inside of the building, Nika was as cold as she would have been outside and only kept warm by the wool coat her captors had provided her for when no customers were around. Underneath all she had on was a skintight black dress with a slight tear on the left arm strap. She was lucky that they were letting her keep the coat on even though there weren't any customers. Sometimes, the officers forced her to take it off for their own amusement, but they were distracted, she assumed, because it was two weeks from Christmas and they were missing their own homes.

The building itself had had its final days before the Kozovo War against NATO, which destroyed most of Lezovac city. After the war, it was abandoned until a few of the Serbian officers took advantage of the location to start a brothel. Lezovac was positioned directly at the center of the main highway leading to Kozovo, the main highway leading to Macedonia, and the south Serbian railroad. Every week, new units moved through on their way to yearlong tours at border outposts without permission to go home to families on the weekends.

Colonel Radić found the hotel on a routine scouting mission of the destroyed sectors of the city. Since there still wasn't a local city government, there was no enforcement against crime. The closest thing to law after the war was military authority and Colonel Radić took advantage of governmental absence to establish a stronghold in the city. By the time elections were set up, Radić had control over the city police and since he had funded most of the first businesses to come back in, he had control over the cash flow. Large sums of money didn't change hands unless he approved of it. He had established his own miniature field office with absolute control. Belgrade politicians didn't even bother trying to remove Radić from his position or clean the city up for fear of provoking an internal power struggle. Belgrade had already accepted cynical circuits as a part of life that a rebuilding country could not afford to stand up against.

Belgrade found most of its girls in Moldova, some within Serbia, and a few from the Ukraine. He served as a Russian linguist his first three years as an officer giving him the ability to traverse Moldovan and Ukrainian borders with only a few soldiers at a time and easily slip the girls back across the borders by bribing the customs officials. Customs officials in Moldova made less than two hundred Moldovan Leu per month roughly equal to American dollars. He usually only needed fifty American dollars per girl, which was pocket change compared to the profit he made on them. The tall, slender, soft-skinned girls brought as much as three hundred in per night, while the less fair-skinned girls still brought in an average of two hundred per night. There weren't any chunky girls and none of them had acne scars since they had all been poor and couldn't afford junk food. At first, Radić took his time tricking new girls by forcing the girls he already held captive to testify how much better their life was under threat of killing their families back home. He also made everything seem more legitimate by pretending to require a two-dollar deposit for their trip, but after realizing how desperate they all were to leave their countries at a chance for a better life, all he had to do was promise an American husband and tell them that they could pay for their trip once they left. The country and found a new home. He took advantage of their desperation and then forced them into slavery to earn their supposed freedom at his discretion.

Even though his soldiers were afraid to cross him, he still preferred to run his operation personally and checked in on his brothels twice a week. It was Tuesday, so Nika knew he was due for a visit and was already dreading it. She was standing in the corner smoking a cigarette when Radić showed up. He stood at the entrance for ten seconds sizing up the room before walking forward towards the bar. Sanja, a new girl, was sitting at the bar next to one of the Lieutenant's trying to flirt her way to better treatment. She hoped that being native Serbian would help her gain some favor and foolishly hadn't noticed Radić enter. Everyone else in the room was focused on him as Sanja kept talking to the Lieutenant that had already turned his attention to his commander and stood up. Radić saw that there weren't any customers and grabbed Sanja by the shoulder, pushing her into a rotted wooden table. The chair around the table screeched as her body pushed them away.

Radić clanked his boots heavily as he marched toward her, picked her up from the floor with his left hand, and tore her coat off with his right. He dropped her without care back onto the floor, yelling. "What kind of crap is this? Do you think we are selling jackets here? Do you fools think you are so lucky that you are working in fancy coat store? Last I checked we are selling bodies. How do you sell bodies that are covered up? I don't know! Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think this works if customers can't see whether or not your bodies are nice."

Nika let her coat fall off her shoulders onto the floor. She preferred the cold to a beating.

Radić slapped Sanja on the cheek and told her to get up, while tossing the coat at the Lieutenant she had been flirting with.

"You should know better soldier. I want that you should do what you are told from now on."

Once Sanja stood and gathered her, a customer walked in. Radić widened his eyes at the bartender to indicate that she should do her job. The customers weren't meant to appear as if they were running the show, but to pose as customers at the bar, so Radić used older, less attractive women as in-between to prod customers. "What you like?"

Vadim cautiously sat on a bar stool, choosing to ease into his request to prevent appearing too anxious. "Stolichnaya shot."

"Store."

Vadim looked around until he saw Nika and focused on her. He'd found who he was looking for and kept staring shocked for a second before looking back toward the bartender. The bar was mostly dark except for mild lighting over the bar and two tables in the middle of the room. He could see that the roof was patched together and that the tables were worn down and rotting. The glass the bartender put in front of him looked like it hadn't been washed properly and had brown spots on the side. He felt uncomfortable and afraid about what he was about to do, but had already made up his mind and didn't intend to turn back.

He downed his drink in one gulp before asking the bartender, "Say, why do people usually do for fun here in Lezovac?"

The bartender replied, "I don't know. Maybe it depends on what you like, you know. Are you tourist? You look Russian."

Vadim answered, "I'm only passing through. I'm deliverman on my way to Macedonia tomorrow. I wanted to have little fun before getting back to work, you know."

At that point, the bartender was ready to make her pitch. "Look around, Russian. If you see something you like, maybe you can have it."

Vadim pretended to look at the other girls strung around the tables as if he didn't already know whom he was there for, then focused in on Nika again. "Do you have any Russian girls? I like Russian girls best."

"Of course. Blonde and pale as snow like you."

"Do this, works for me."

"Walk around and let me know when you find what you like."

Vadim finished his second shot and shoved his stool back while standing. He walked toward the middle of the tables to pretend again like he was getting a good look at all of the girls and then made his way over to Nika in the corner. She was shorter than the other girls. Moldovan and Serbian women in general tended to be taller and more slender than Russian girls. She was only twenty-two, so her body hadn't fully matured yet, but she had rounded, very feminine hips with soft shoulders. Her skin was pale as he had requested and her hair was naturally blonde. She fit the bill of his description perfectly as he had planned. He hadn't been certain that her hair would still be pristine blonde as she got older but he guessed that it would at least be similar to before. He found her striking and breathed a heavy sigh when he reached her. "May I?"

She handed her cigarette to him without saying a word. He continued putting on a show as if her beauty had suddenly taken him.

"You're called?"

"Nika."

He hadn't expected her to keep her birth name in a place like this causing a surprised look on his face. He chose not to give his name yet out of not wanting to lie and sound nervous and unsure of what to do next. He had played this meeting out in his head every night for a year but was lost for words. Nika could see him getting nervous, so she asked, "Would you like that we should go to my room, maybe?"

"I think so, yes."

Vadim was unable to take his eyes off of Nika, so she turned to the bartender herself and nodded for approval. As they left the bar and walked toward the back of the hotel, Colonel Radić turned to the Lieutenant he had previously sold and said:

"Now see, we are not only in the business of making money. We are in the business of bringing people their dreams. Now you know why I like what I do so much."

Radovic motioned to the bartender to pour his Lieutenant a drink. He was not only one of the most violently expressive Serbian officers; he was also, contradictorily, one of the most forgiving and rewarding commanders. His units expected harsh punishment for mistakes and equal rewards for successes. Mostly, they were subject to his mood at the moment, though.

In the background, Nika led Vadim into one of the corner rooms facing east. When she did her job, she preferred to be facing east to imagine that one day she might return home to her family in Moscow. She frowned to herself surprised that she longed to go back to living the way she did before when she didn't know if there was going to be food for dinner or not. The feeling of hunger was less painful to her when she felt tired...
drift into a daydream, though keeping her eyes open when each one of them took her, trying to not remember their faces as best she could. This one looked innocent to her, meaning that it was probably his first time, not with a woman, but with a sex slave. Guessing that he needed kindness, she touched the side of his face softly without moving too quickly. Then, he stopped her and put her hand back, at her side saying, “No, please. You don’t need to do that with me. I’m not here for that. I want to ask you something, Nika. Is it okay?”

“Okay.”

“How long have you been here?”
She was confused by his interest in her, but answered, “Four years. Why?”

“Did you have a family where you were from?” She was upset that he was prying deeper than she wanted but continued answering, “Da.” “Do you think they still think about you? Do you still think about them?”

“I think they have forgotten me by now, but I think of them everyday.”

“So you’re not here because you chose to be here?”

Afraid of someone hearing through the door, she looked over her shoulder before responding, “Nyet. I only wanted that I should go to America and send money home, but I could not tell them or they would have said I would end up someplace like this and not let me go. But I had to find money.”

Even though she was angry that he was prying into her past, she couldn’t help but share because she had bottled it inside for the past four years, wondering what had happened to her family. She folded her arms and sat on the bed in anger. Vadim then said, “You are wrong, Nika.”

His words only angered her more and she replied, “What do you mean, I’m wrong?”
Her words were less of a question than a statement.

“You’re wrong about your family. They haven’t forgotten you. I’m here, Nika. I came because mama and papa sent me. It’s me, Vadim.”

Her eyes widened and her mouth opened slightly as she tried to say it wasn’t true, but couldn’t. Liquid started filling her eyes and she couldn’t keep it in anymore. Single streams fell down her face, as she remained motionless on the bed. “Vadim?”

“Da.”

“But you were only thirteen when I left.”

“I’m seventeen now and as much a man as I need to be.”

“How?”

Vadim wasn’t sure he could explain everything he wanted to in a short amount of time but tried to summarize it for her. “Mama and papa put the money they had left together to find out what happened to you. They went to the American embassy, hoping that you had made it to America. At the embassy, they found a woman that said she knew where you were. She was looking for us, but she didn’t say why. It felt random at first and we didn’t believe her, but she had no reason to lie to us, so we trusted her and she told us what we had to do to get you back. She said that I had to come here to speak to you myself and bring you home.”

“Why? Why would an American want to help a Russian slave?”

“I can’t answer that, Nika. She wouldn’t tell us why, only that you could help her in some way. She said it was important though and that she was willing to do anything to help you if you do what she wants when you are back home.”

“This isn’t possible. I can’t believe it’s you, Vadim. How do I know it’s you? It’s been four years.”

“Look at my eyes, Nika, it’s me.” She wiped away her tears and stared at him directly. When he blanked her, his older age disappeared and all she could see was Vadim’s eyes opening back up. His eyes took her back to her youth and for a second, she felt like she was home again.

She unfolded her arms and wrapped them around him, “My baby brother, it’s real. I’m finally not dreaming it.”
She stopped herself when she realized again where she was and asked, “What should we do, Vadim? If I leave, they will hunt me and kill me.”

“They say they will protect us if we can make it to the American Embassy in Macedonia by ourselves. That’s all we have to do, is get there.”

“But we will have to cross the Serbian border to get into Macedonia. The soldiers, at the border, work for Radevic. He will tell them to look for me and they will expect me.”
"They already thought of that. We just have to go through Kosovo. NATO put the Serbians at the Kosovo border under Russian command. We can go through close to Pristina and then move south toward Macedonia, where we will meet the American woman."

"Maybe, it will work. I don't know, but who is this American woman? How do you know we can trust her?"

"She found you and now I have seen you for the first time in four years. That is enough to earn my trust. She said she is called Ashley Bryce and that she is in the military, so I think she can protect us if we make it to her. You will see again, and papa again, Nika if you just trust me."

Vadim saw goose bumps on Nika's arms and pulled his own coat off to wrap around her. Nika blinked away her tears and said, "Come, there is a vent under the bed. We can crawl out and run in the woods toward the railroad." Vadim followed his sister through the vent and crawled behind her through weeds until they made their way to the treeline. Once the branches covered them, they stood, looking back to see if anyone had seen them. Then, Vadim grabbed Nika's hand and they started running. The first hundred yards, Vadim kept looking over his shoulder to see if they were following, but still no one had seen them. When they were out of sight of the hotel, Nika tripped over a fallen branch and her grip tightened around Vadim's hand.

Vadim kneeled down to check her knees and said, "They're not going to look here, first and it's hard to breathe in the cold. We might as well sit for a minute." She nodded her head, while trying to catch her breath.

After a minute, Nika rubbed her knees and stood giving Vadim a smile. "Yet you thought I would cry when I felt like when we were kids. Life in Leskovac is tougher than you think, little brother. A little knee scrape isn't going to hurt enough to slow me down."

Vadim grinned back and stood with her starting out at a slower pace than before.

After thirty minutes of shifting back and forth between swift walking and running, they reached an opening surrounding the railroad tracks. They hid behind a pile of branches waiting for the train. Both of them didn't know exactly when the train passed through the woods, and they were holding their breath hoping that it came before Radovic discovered that Nika was missing and thought to stop the train. They kept waiting in silence until finally, they could hear a rumbling in the distance. They didn't see through the woods, but they knew it was the train and Nika starting getting excited. Vadim put his hand on her shoulder and pushed back down toward the ground while putting a finger over his lips motioning for her to stay quiet.

In less than a minute the train caught up to them and they waited until half of the boxcars passed coming out from the branch pile and grabbing onto a car-rail to climb up. It was only going at twenty miles an hour, so neither one needed help grabbing on, but once they were on the back of the car, Vadim had to pull Nika up to the roof. They jumped from the car they were on to the one behind when they saw a shaft opening on its roof. Vadim crawled through first and looked around to make sure it was safe before catching Nika's legs and lowering her down.

Once inside, they began moving the crates around to make an opening towards the back for them to hide in. Nika slipped in between two stacks of crates as Vadim pulled another stack behind him to block their opening. He then stacked one more at an angle above to block the opening between the two stacks on each side. Vadim then positioned himself so that Nika could place her own body next to him on the floor. They were snug and uncomfortable, but Nika felt safer than she had in four years. She laid her head down, and despite the threat that they could be discovered at any moment, she fell asleep in her brother's arms. Vadim stayed awake for the first few hours keeping his eyes focused on the crack between the crates to watch the door, but as the night continued passing, he fell asleep as well. Two hours later, Vadim woke up angry with himself for having fallen asleep and moved the crates out of the way to get a look at where they were. The plan was to go halfway to the Macedon border, leave the train before reaching the Serbian border guard, and then starting hiking west toward Kosovo. When he pushed the hatch on the roof open and looked out he could see small outlines of men in front of large fences far off. He wasn't sure of what he was looking at until the train moved closer and the Serbian flag came into view. It was flapping violently in the wind and made Vadim cringe in his stomach at the sight. He let the hatch drop and stepped back down to shake Nika awake. He put his finger over his mouth again to keep her quiet and whispered, "We're almost at the Macedon border, Nika. I'm sorry, but I fell asleep. We have to get off before the train gets any closer."

She hurried up and followed him to the roof. They each stayed crouched down as they edged toward the side of the train. Vadim motioned for her to jump first, but she was afraid and couldn't, so he grabbed her arm and pulled her with him as he jumped. They landed on their sides and Vadim immediately to check to see if she had broken anything. Except for a bruise on her shin, she was fine, but his right arm had snapped under the pressure of the fall. He grimaced and pulled it in closer to his body as they crawled into the woods. They waited for the rear of the train to pass to get a look at the border guards. Once they saw that no one had noticed their jump, they turned northwest and crawled, gaining less than a mile an hour until they far enough away from the border for any patrolling guards to see them. After they were clear of the guards' line of sight they stood and ran to rest their knees and arms. When night caught up to them, they were able to hear dogs barking close by, so they fell back towards the ground and scurried until they found a stream. It had rained that night while they were in the train, so the ground was soft and muddy around the stream. Vadim pulled Nika into the water and began covering her face and arms with mud. "What are you doing?" "Shhh, we have to cover our smell. The dogs won't be able to smell us if we're covered in mud." Nika had been through worse things, but batting in mud still repulsed her. She almost vomited when she tasted it on her lips, but knew that it wasn't a time for niceties. After initially resisting, she began helping her brother by picking up mud and smearing it on his face. To calm herself, she tried pretending that it was a game, but it didn't work and she couldn't help but breathe heavily.

Once they finished covering each other's full bodies, they crawled up underneath a tree's roots hanging over the stream and waited for the dogs. Vadim could feel his sister's heart beating rapidly through her arm as they saw the dogs coming in their direction along the stream. Nika's eyes were fixed on the dogs and he became worried that the fear was going to make her panic, so he covered her eyes with his left hand and said, "It's just the neighbor's dog. We're just hiding from mama and papa, okay." She forced a response, "Okay." The barks became louder until they ringed in their ears. Nika's heart beat faster, but Vadim remained calm watching patiently as the dogs and guarded passed by them pausing only for a second before continuing their hunt. After they could no longer hear the barking, they crawled out from under the roots and started crawling west in the direction of Kosovo again.

--Kyle Noc
Teshuvah

I woke up six times
during the course of some restless sleep.
Out of bed,
turned the light on in the bathroom.
The deadened figure in the mirror
had purple-black sockets under his eyes.
They looked like canyons.
Back in bed
contemplated masturbating
to get to sleep faster.
My hand always feels
like some disappointment
afterwards. By then
it never works. It didn’t work.

Two days later I’m holding a braided piece of corn husk.
I concentrate more on the falling staircase of
the braid than the open book of Billy Collins
and Bukowski sitting in my lap,
pages flapping in the wind of the AC.

It reminds me of the tiny yellow and white papers
so many people left
in the cracks of the Western Wall,
of the hundreds of women crying
and praying inside the tomb of some ancient rabbi
I wasn’t familiar with,
of the Friday night service I led –
I told people I never knew
God won’t mind if you pray in English.

It’s Rosh Hashanah tonight.
I might sleep better knowing that.

--Andrew Ratner
Appreciating Feroicity

I want fangs, need curved dagger-teeth,
Long knives, razor cleavers, sickening sharp
For tearing into this world of meat,
For slipping all the things I know from their bones
And leaving them to dry in the sun, bleached out
Arid hulls of former selves, great signifying dinosaurs
Museum fit, now that I have seen them through to the end,
Judged their weight and shape and taste, and wiped them dribbling
From my chin, overcome with indigestion now, clutching
My sides and moaning like Oedipus, knives to the eyes,
That knowing does not go down smooth, that I never
Should have had that second helping, miserable glutton—

That I do not do these things, not letting blood hit the floor
Or touch my tongue, not pretending that I like the taste, or saying
I want to grow up Big and Strong, full of proteins, iron or
The hearts of my enemies, or even waiting in line in shops for it
Neatly doled out in turn, not rationalizing it healthier this way,
Distracted from the splatter and the gore, from the eyes
Of twitching animals, and it claws at me, mouth aching for want
Of cowardice, an abundance of frustrated compassion—

That I can live even a day without slicing open the world only shows
How tired I must be, how sad to live next to checkerboard tablecloths
And the toothless shattered men who love them—sad bastards who’ve forgotten
The hearts that drove their ancestors far, the desperate lunge
Of the first fish to hurl itself onto the beach, gasping raw air for the first time,
Half mad with oxygen.

--Jesse Stanchak

Brian loves
to honk his
girlfriend’s boobs
in public he
treats them like
horns on a clown’s
unicycle but
we all know
they are
his gods.

--Sam Goldblatt

July 19, 2003

Today is the day
I start a poem a day
a nice endeavor but
with dim expectations
a gimmick
perhaps, I copy the idea
and the style from a man
a poet what was
his name featured on NPR
he writes lines broken
into fragments composing
a beautiful run-on that
runs you from line to line
with small phrases
lovingly stitched together
a downy quilt
each square patch
a noun threaded
with verb it’s
a humble offering it’s
not meant for hanging
on walls but
for sleeping
with, wrinkled and
warm each crevice
a different
eight’s dream.

--Sam Goldblatt
Part I
One fine morning,
She left for Heaven.

We argued the intentionality
Of slipping from the bank,

But the river undoubtedly provided
An excellent means of transportation.

We didn’t find the vessel
For over a week.

By which time the traveler
Had long escaped.

Part II
The pearly gates were not as she expected.
Saint Peter would not look her in the eye
As he explained:

The elect had already been chosen
(Or wheeled their way in)
And he had no vacancies.

So she joined the line of refugees
Waiting for a place below.

Part III
We tossed heavy flowers
To accompany her down,

They will perfume or labors
Or increase her Sisyphean load,

--Pamela Mellen

--Gaby Schaefer
Ian Hunsberger Builds the World

The cold pre-dawn hours live a life of their own virility,
biblical hours, before alpha and the creation,
the fledgling sun peaking over row homes, light running close behind footsteps, disappearing into alley ways.

Ian Hunsberger watches the city awaken,
out of focus, tenderly working towards night.
It's all he knows. Callused hands running over brick, never participating in the world he creates.

He has lived his whole life in this north Philadelphia neighborhood,
just as his father and his father before him,
a third generation bricklayer.

He leaves his front door swinging close behind
with sleep still fresh in his sinuses, coffee stale on his breath, and his mind stales in its place.

His day exists already, a series of pounding:
pulse against his forehead,
feet on the cold pavement stamping the frozen ground,
hands against the world boxing him in, searching desperately for space.

His life is a nexus of familiar corners.
Walking down Cotton Ave., watching each lazy face pass, some going, others coming, past billboards advertising Coca-cola and Pizza Hut, acknowledging the McDonalds, a picture of the new Egg McMuffin in the window, and traffic on its way towards the Boulevard.

He walks past Woodrow Wilson Middle and Eastern High, the schools he once attended,
sitting in desks too small for his frame,
his mind always wandering during science class,
dreaming of far off lands he must have read about in a book.

These dreams of desert lakes and island women have faded into the reds and blues of morning,
into shadows of sleepless nights, and he, corrupted by the reality of the world.

It was in his senior year of high school that his father taught him all he had ever learned:
that the world is a cruel and definitive place.

That "you are who you are, boy!"
And that is all you can ever hope for,"
a life of construction, "not because you love it, but because you need it..."

and it needs him,
to build the world,
not because he loves it, but because he needs it,...
and it needs him!

--Drew Silow

White Lines

My father bends low
over mountain fists
gripping thick wood.
His knuckles flex,
letting shadows curl
into their shallow valleys.
The saw curses black,
while papered strands fall.
Dark hair veined
with narrow white paths
shifts across a blunt forehead,
scarred on the right
during a wrestling match
when he was eighteen.
His thumb carries
the white line
from a kitchen knife slipping
out of control,
when he was making breakfast
each Christmas morning.
But there is no blemish
showing on either hand
in the lemon-colored light,
nothing carved in them
what I saw
when those hands
touched a woman
who was not my mother.

--Erin Gamble
Charmless Women with Unusual Features

Beautiful is just being
Pretty without comparison,

Sunshine and Rain

I always was pictured love
Like two people with an umbrella
Walking home in the rain:
Everything in proportion
Or someone ends up wet.

I dated a short girl who bent me over
Stooping for compliments
Till I ended up soaked
With overcompensation.

Hunting Season

I loved a ferocious woman once.
I recommend it highly:
The feeling of an antelope-under-tiger
Looking up surprised to find itself
Already half devoured.

She had a hawk’s face, uncompromised
And yeildless. Yet I was still surprised
When her hunt moved on, me pointing
To my ribs, protesting that the carcass
Wasn’t picked completely clean.

Don’t Get out Much

Kathleen began to upset me.
We’re too much alike
And kept stealing the words
Out of each other’s mouths.
I don’t like talking about myself
So I wished she’d shut up.

I was afraid to kiss her in case
We canceled each other out of the cosmos
Or absorbed each other
Or it was too perfect for words.
Or it was nothing at all.

Same Old Story

Please, don’t end with silence, but listen—
And let that pause be the end of all things:
Like two bodies damp with love, feeling
Their pulses wind down, collapsing numb
Into sleep, are still aware of the fading beat
Rushing forth like air escaping.

--Seza Bali

--Jesse Stanchak
The Teeth.
They chatter like boxed winos in winter. When they were babies, Mom told you they would drop out one at a time. More told you there was a Tooth Fairy who—if you put your teeth under your pillow before you went to bed—would put money under there in exchange for them. So when the first one fell out (an incisor), you held it fast. You tucked it secretly into an envelope, fastened it under your pillow, and it became your first bout with insomnia: that night, instead of sheep being shaved naked one by one as they gallivanted over a wire fence, all you could count were just how many dentures this Tooth Fairy could manufacture from all the children in the world: "There must be more than one Tooth Fairy," you thought.

The Tongue.
bittersweet worm-our buds bloom like hyacinths taste like absinthes

The tastebuds say, "rain eh terrain, mi lawn put size into Dios... chew yew and soy milkjig... feel even and drey and cold... gin and chagrin... numb, Dull, numb... quean cost... come in, come in" 

The Chin.
a knob-like extension of the underface; the mandible, or, an unsatisfied customer’s gripping mandible

The Nape.
Vertebræ go here to become cervical vertebrae. The flesh here is like a newborn’s forearm.

The Curvatures That We Sometimes Call Breasts.
Touch me where the Sun don’t shine...
The Spermum.

the breastplate

The Belly-Button.

access into U.S. Domestic Affairs, access into the State Department, on-track to become an ambassador to France, on-track to become French:

hairy... bellied... little... vortex...

The Hips.

Have I told you, lately, that I want to squeeze you?

The Knees.

Patient: I have had bad knees since I was young.

WetNurse: What happened when you were a child?

Patient: Gravity.

The Shins.

a sculptor couldn’t have tamed them better: a glass wouldn’t make them appeal more: a plus-side to the touch, a gleam to the sheen:

for it
for it is
under
stood
for M.G,

The Soleus.

beneath the leg, a foot, every step math beneath the walk, a path every choice, an epi tap beneath the foot, a graph, every step footstent beneath the walk, flint every choice is hinted at

"In The Mouth A Desert"

-Pavement

The Sun beats loud and hot. The Sun a volcano Sun. The burn makes photons, UV, pure conjecture on our part. Mother-Naturefire Sun, get the Hell out of our construction site. Stifling the roach and the roach coach is on its way: it shreds its megaphone and the union gathers around with dollarbills. But Massive-Photofire Sun. Nothing but a heliocentric guilt. Nobody cares about radiance and nobody’s favorite color: ultraviolet.

The Toes.

These little
piggies
enjoy
hotstepping,
32nd-notes,
warm sand.

Up To The Vagina,

Smells like sex is here.
Not by the hairs of my chinny chin chin:
don’t look at me I just came for the free food.

The Cervix.

SELF-SERVICE.

Citrinous, a New Adjective.
readily available and likely to be— maintained—

The G-Spot.

"There is no use there is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual.

A wet cup means a vacation. A strong cup means an especial regulation. A single cup means a capital arrangement between the drawer and the place that is open.

Just as it is suffering, just as it is succeeded, just as it is moist so is there no countering.

Tender colds, seen eye holders, all work, the best of change, the meaning, the dark red, all this and bitten, really bitten.

a little beneath so that necessity is a silk under wear.
That is best wet."

Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons

--Jeremy Gardner
Metal

Steel from World Trade Center to be Used in Warship

—AP News

I read, “Metal has no memory.”
How metal, being mindless, cannot separate,
The years spent in the sky from scrap yard days.

“In metal we value utility.”
But in its affinity for conversion,
I can see a cycle of ploughshares and swords,

The blade of my disposable razor,
   Once parted the oceans of the world--
   Plunging hard at the bow of a destroyer,
After three reheat, your first bicycle,
   Now rumbles across the desert,
   Rolled into armor.

What if like wood, cutting metal revealed a chronology?
   We could search for circles of fire and growth.
The scars on our hands,
   Reintroduced to the costly, broken tools of our past.

What if metal had a voice?
Our everyday stainless would drive us from the table.
Telling tales to rival the Illiad.

Reaching further back--
What would metal say of the quiet peaceful time?
Before we dug it up,
   Devised a purpose,
   Formed it in fire,
   And pressed it to serve.

--William F. Rutkowski

--Gaby Schaefer
Seth Ball has recently graduated from GWU with a fine arts degree, and is planning to pursue a career in the art field and keep creating work.

Artwork by Alexandra Dolan-Mescal can be found on page 16.

Erin Gamble’s work can be found on pages 8 and 23.

Jeremy Gardner is most recently the author of the poem-a-day manuscript, “pop-bomb”. He is currently writing a critical thesis on Upton Sinclair, and a novel entitled, “crumb rubber”, a reverse chronicle of his 4-summer experience working as a laborer and machine operator. Last summer he collaborated with producer Jason Asdourian to create Thom Yorke’s “and their currency”, a CD of experimental hip-hop, available for $5 at Bridge Street Books or at www.geocities.com/thepunkrock/home where he is self-published.

Sam Goldblatt sleeps naked.

Elise A. Kahl is a sophomore majoring in Fine Arts with a concentration in Design. She is from Toledo, Ohio, and is currently interested in the mediums of pencil, acrylic, video, and the computer.

Pamela Meleen’s poetry can be found on pages 4 and 20.

Kristen Mallia has a fetish for all things rusty and old. She bought this antique yellow lantern at a yard sale off Telegraph Road in the summer of 2003. She has been doing studies of it ever since.

Yasmeen Mandour-Brakinn’s poetry can be found on page 7.

Kyle Noe is a former Marine who is currently majoring in international affairs and minoring in history. His interest in writing stems from making up stories to entertain his nephew, Anakin

Andrew Ratner is a sophomore from western Mass. He passes the time listening to music, writing poetry, and thinking of witty 1-2 line bobs for himself in case he ever gets published.

William Rutkowski is the Staff Instrument Maker for Physics, Chemistry, and Engineering. He would like everyone to know that while metal makes a great deal of noise when you cut it, he has never actually heard it speak.

Cathy Schaefer is a senior majoring in Art History and Fine Arts. She is graduating this semester and will be heading back to the midwest to begin graduate work in Art History. She’s gonna miss all of the kick ass people she’s met at GW in the last few years...so you all better keep in touch! Auf Wiedersehen!

Our apologies to Drew Silow. His piece, Ian Hunsberger Builds the World, was misprinted in the Spring 2004 issue. It is reprinted on page 22.

Because Jesse Stanchak did not submit a bio this semester, the Editorial Board suspects he has something to hide.

“The Muse” by Adam Waks can be found on page 5.

A photograph by Zeke McKee Williams can be found on the facing page.

--Zeke McKee Williams