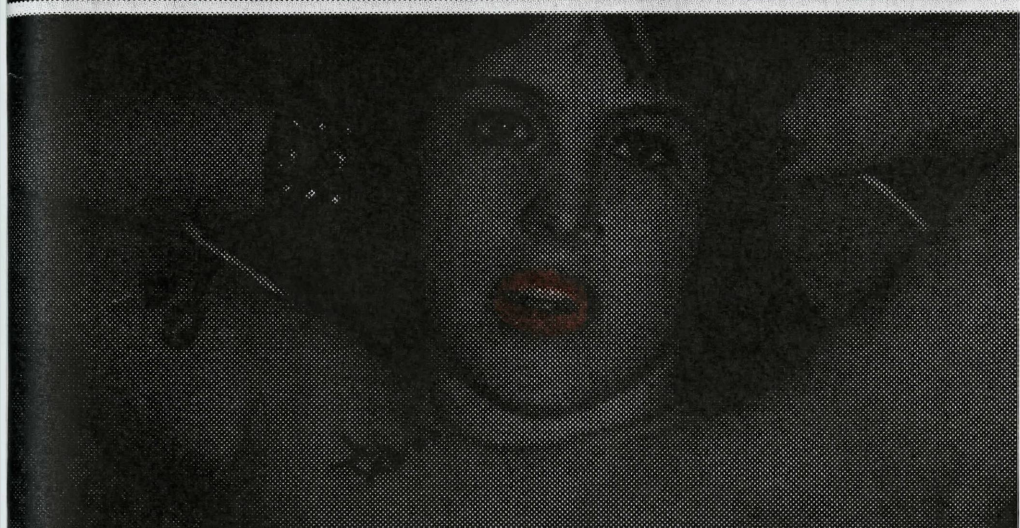


# SAFETY PIN GIRL NO. 22



SHE WAS A DANGEROUS HEART  
BREAKER WITH A TASTE FOR  
BLOOD AND WHISKEY!

by Jessica Drobbedence



Here's a copy of my zine  
for review. One copy is \$3, postage  
paid. Address is:

Jessica Wilber/Disobedience  
410 18th St.  
Racine, WI 53403

A skinny rockerboy with a bandana around his neck  
once told this chick that half the reason he wanted to  
fuck her was that she had a tattoo of an anarchy  
symbol over one of her tits, and he thought that was  
like, the punk rockest thing ever. Which, well, it  
kinda was.

And did she fuck the boy? Of course. He left a  
bruise in the shape of a handprint on her left arm.

It wasn't that she was an immoral broad, exactly.  
She never smeared her lipstick across her mouth and  
said: "Tonight I'm gonna raise hell. I'm gonna go  
leave bootmarks all over some new boy and then  
laugh in his sad face." This chick was simply amor-  
-unconcerned with wrong and right. She did what  
felt good, not worrying about the consequences until  
it was too damn late. So she'd go and raise hell, and  
if someone fell in love with her or some poor sap got  
his nose busted because of her, what could she do but  
say "Oh Well" and knock back another tumbler fulla  
whiskey.





This is the last issue ever of *Safety Pin Girl*. Many of you already know that by now. For some of you, maybe, this is the first issue of *SPG* you've ever looked at, and if you really like it, I'm sure you'll be sorely disappointed. On the other hand, if you think it's the worst tripe you've ever read in your life, you'll probably be glad that I'm no longer killing trees in order to produce it. In any case, whether you're elated or depressed by the thought, this is the last issue.

I've been doing this zine for over seven years, now. It started as *geek u.s.a.*, way back in September of 1997, and I produced four issues before changing the name to *Safety Pin Girl* in April of 1999. I've produced twenty two issues and I'm twenty two years old and it just seems like a good place to stop.

I've kind of been using the zine as a cop-out for a while. I haven't been trying very hard to get my writing published other places because I always think: "Oh, I can just put it in the next issue of *SPG*." No more of that. As ridiculous as it may sound, as much as it may make people think of me as a sell-out – if I really want to make it as a writer, I'm going to have to get more stuff published in more places. It's as simple as that.

Don't worry, I'm not giving up on zines all together. I'm sure I'll be doing one-shots occasionally, self-publishing my novellas, things like that. I'm also starting a punk rock literary magazine called *A Shout In the Street*. I'm just done with the perzine gig.

Although I think this will be a good thing in the long run, it will feel kind of like I'm chopping off a limb. I'm sure I'll have phantom pains for a while. Something will happen and I'll think – "I can't wait to write about that for *Safety Pin Girl*!" And then – "Oh, wait. She's dead."

Yeah, I'm chopping off a limb, killing a part of myself. Why don't you join me in having a wake for her. We'll all sing Pogues songs and drink a lot of whiskey. Rest in peace, girl.

thanks to: Jim Munroe. Dr. Wred Fright. More or Les. Allison Calamari. Krystle Platonic. The Underground Literary Alliance. the kindness of strangers. *Bail Magazine*. Clarke's. Paddy O's. Billy Roberts. Puppy Dave. the Chicago Public Library. Kelly. Lissa. Conrad. CT Staples. Bruce. A. Duggins. Kara. Molly. Jack. James. Tya. Toaster. Chris.



zinesters that write to me. Metra. my parents. everyone who has ever read *Safety Pin Girl*. all the god damn nice people in the world, even if yr just someone who smiled at me as we passed on the street. if I'm forgetting you, don't be hurt. there are just too many things and people I love for me to possibly remember you all.

xoxo,  
Jessica Disobedience

## CREDITS

The top photograph on the front cover, the centerfold photo, the blurry photo of me smoking, and the photo of me holding a bottle of SoCo, were all taken by Billy Roberts. He *writes Proof I Exist* zine and runs Loop Distro. The Loop Distro website is at: <http://www.loopdistro.com/>.

The map of Montreal was stolen from Yahoo! maps and then fucked with by me.

The photograph of me and the boy with the Dropkick Murphys t-shirt was taken by Toaster, and then fucked with by me. You can e-mail her at [GuitarPikk@aol.com](mailto:GuitarPikk@aol.com), but she'll never respond.

The Polaroid<sup>was</sup> of me at the Mercury Lounge ~~was~~ taken by Ruth.

The photograph of me in front of ~~the Chelsea Hotel~~ was taken by Tya Kagamas. E-mail her at [kagamas@yahoo.com](mailto:kagamas@yahoo.com).

The map of the Metra Union Pacific North Line route was stolen from the Metra website.

The bottom photograph on the front cover was taken by my ex-boyfriend, Dan. You could e-mail him, but I'm not sure why you'd want to, unless you'd also like to thank him for setting me free.

The photo of: me at Quimby's, courtesy of Dr. Wred Fright. His website is at <http://www.worldwidewred.com/>.



The photo of the mountain was taken by Les. His website is at <http://www.moreorles.com/>.

Credit for the "you might be a punk rocker if" idea goes to Cynthia Gould.

The lyrics on the centerfold are from the song "Bad Liver and a Broken Heart" by Tom Waits. The lyrics that start with "Drinking when I should be. . ." are from the song "18 Wheels" by the Murder City Devils. The lyrics that start with "I'm back. . ." are from the song "Left and Leaving" by The Weakerthans. The lyrics that start with "This is the story. . ." are by The Decemberists, from the song "Red Right Ankle." And the lyrics that start with "You said you wanted. . ." are from the song "Hall of Mirrors" by The Distillers.

The poem "Tequila Mockingbird," is by CT Staples. His website is at <http://www.pregnantembryo.com>.

The rest, other than a few pieces of clip art and labels from cigarettes and beer bottles, is all by me. Don't fucking steal. If you'd like to use something, please ask me first.

## ETC.

Further copies of this issue are \$3-\$5, sliding scale. Copies of my novella, *Hearts Don't Break*, are \$3-\$6, sliding scale. Copies of the first issue of *A Shout In the Street* are \$3.50.

Send all love letters and well-concealed cash to:  
Jessica Wilber  
410 18<sup>th</sup> St.  
Racine, WI 53403

To read more of my writing and be updated on future projects, visit <http://safetypinggirl.com/>. You can e-mail me, too, if you'd like - [bluevalentines@safetypinggirl.com](mailto:bluevalentines@safetypinggirl.com).

# ZINES



## *A Two-Bean Theory, #1*

(Ocean Capewell, 134 Radcliff Dr., East Norwich, NY, 11732, USA; [escape\\_well@yahoo.com](mailto:escape_well@yahoo.com))

i have been talking with women about tattoos, and listening. c said she gets tattooed because her life is so unstable, because tattoos are the only thing that she can count on to stick around forever. m says that people who say, "you'll regret that when you're 80!" are dumb, because there's no way a tattoo can be relevant forever. all a tattoo is is a documentation of what you were when you got it; with no guarantees that you'd remain that way. i believe in both of those statements, and i don't think that they necessarily have to contradict each other.

## *A Way Seeking Mind, #1*

(Steven Kelly, 3 Jacobs Path, Melville, NY, 11747-4109, USA; [mayallhavepeace@hotmail.com](mailto:mayallhavepeace@hotmail.com))

## *American't, #5*

(\$3; [americant@peoplepc.com](mailto:americant@peoplepc.com))

## *Arthur, #6 and #7*

(<http://www.arthurmag.com/>)

## *Bitch, #22*

(<http://www.bitchmagazine.com/>)

## *Bleach, #7 - "Friend of the Friendless"*

(The Dapper Skank Krystle, 3135 N. Oakley Ave. #2-F, Chicago, IL, 60654, USA;

[the\\_dapper\\_skank@safetypingirl.com](mailto:the_dapper_skank@safetypingirl.com))

## *Buffalo*

(an excerpt from the soon-to-be-published novel *Grrrl*, by Jennifer Whiteford)

(Matilda, 12 Spruce St., Ottawa, ON, K1R, 6N7, CANADA; [matilda@bust.com](mailto:matilda@bust.com))

I wanted to hold her hand so badly! I wanted to make out with her like all the other girls were doing and like Brianna and I did during the concerts in Seattle. But I totally couldn't because I was with Nettie and what would she have said? She doesn't even know that I'm maybe a lesbian. I don't even know if she thinks being a lesbian is okay. So I pulled my hand away from the girl and shook my head.



She just shrugged her shoulders and smiled a little bit and then disappeared into the crowd. All of a sudden I felt really lonely and like I was going to cry.

*Bust*, winter 2003

(<http://www.bust.com>)

*Cultor-Sore*, #15

(\$2; Cultor-Sore 'zine, PO Box 68711, Virginia Beach, VA, 23471, USA; [SOREzine@aol.com](mailto:SOREzine@aol.com))

*Doris*, #21

(\$1.50 or \$1 + 2 stamps; Cindy, PO Box 1734, Asheville, NC, 28802, USA)

*The East Village Inky*, #21

(\$2; The East Village Inky, Ayun Halliday, PO Box 22754, Brooklyn, NY, 11202, USA)

*Epson Energy* (compilation of #3, #5, and #7)

([epson\\_energy@yahoo.com](mailto:epson_energy@yahoo.com))

*Fierce*, #2

(<http://www.fiercemag.com>)

*Flirtations for Ladies and Gentlemen*

(Monastiraki, 5478 Boul. St-Laurent, Montréal, QC, CANADA)

*Gunmoll*, #4

(Terra, 7009 N. Glenwood, Chicago, IL, 60626, USA)

*Kiss Off* fanzine, #8

(Chris Kiss, 7-306 Frank St., Ottawa, ON, K2P OX8, CANADA)

*Literary Fan*, #1

(\$1; c/o King Wencelas, PO Box 42077, Philadelphia, PA, 19101, USA)

super special exclusive interview with ME in it!

*Local 58*, #1

(Jeska Casualty, 323 Hill St., Petoskey, MI, 49770, USA; [dirtymagazines@hotmail.com](mailto:dirtymagazines@hotmail.com))

*Matilda* – Spring 2001 and Autumn 2003

(Matilda, 12 Spruce St., Ottawa, ON, K1R, 6N7, CANADA; [matilda@bust.com](mailto:matilda@bust.com))

*Milk Milk Lemonaid*, #1 and #2

(The Dapper Skank Krystle, 3135 N. Oakley Ave. #2-F, Chicago, IL, 60654, USA;

the\_dapper\_skank@safetypingirl.com)

*Murder Ballads*, #1

(\$2; Meredith, PO Box 160, Slaton, TX, 79364, USA)

*My Life As a Liar*

(Gabrielle Moss, Hampshire College, PO Box 971, Amherst, MA, 01002, USA)

...when "gifted" kids grow up, their capacity to be good at everything seems to almost always be exceeded by their capacity for self-destruction.

*One Fine Mess*, Spring 2002

(2 stamps or trade; One Fine Mess c/o Dan & Erin Q., 71 Storm St., Apt. 2C, Tarrytown, NY, 10591, USA; dananderingq@aol.com)

*The Pornographic Flabbergasted Emus*, #7

(\$3 or trade; Wred Fright, PO Box 770332, Lakewood, OH, 44107, USA; wredfright@yahoo.com)

*Proof I Exist*, #4

(zines@fastworks.com)

*Querencia*, #2

(\$2; Querencia c/o Otaku, 114 Canter Blvd., Nepean, ON, K2G 2M7, CANADA; jbs@magma.ca)

*Rated Rookie*, #5

(Rated Rookie, 562 Park Place #3, Brooklyn, NY, 11238, USA; www.ratedrookie.com)

*Root*, #1 and #2

(\$1; Sarah Evans, PO Box 33129, Halifax, NS, B3L 4T6, CANADA; sevans@ziplip.com)

*The Scorpio Conspiracy*, #3

(\$2; Jene Vive N., PO Box 4943, 222 Church St., Middletown, CT, 06459, USA)

*Sleepwalk*, volume 3, issue 1

*Slush Pile*, #2



(\$5; Slush Pile, PO Box 42077, Philadelphia, PA,  
19101-2077, USA; [www.literaryrevolution.com](http://www.literaryrevolution.com))

*Songs About Ghosts*, #1 and #2

(Jasmine Dreame Wagner, 252 Norman Ave., #203,  
Brooklyn, NY, 11222, USA;

[songsaboutghosts@hotmail.com](mailto:songsaboutghosts@hotmail.com);

<http://www.songsaboutghosts.com>)

It's sad, the way I allow myself to slip into the dreamlike state that wavers at the edge of my mind. It's a dangerous line, the gray area between illusion and reality. If I think about these people often enough, they become real to me. I'll be eating alone at my favorite Thai restaurant, imaging someone's face across the table, estimating their opinions, inventing new stories for them to share. I have a list of favorite memories, but even greater is the array of fantasies that stem from them. When I feel particularly lonely, I catch myself envisioning the company of people I've dated, people I've kissed or slept with, old crushes, unrequited loves. In my daydreams they've come back, though I know, objectively, that none of them are in love with me anymore, or that they never loved me in the first place.

*Speed Hump*, #3

([filfofepitomy@hotmail.com](mailto:filfofepitomy@hotmail.com) - subject line it "speed hump")

*Tightrope Laboratory*, #2 and #3

([submit2tightrope@aol.com](mailto:submit2tightrope@aol.com))

*Vinyl A Go Go*, #2

(\$1; Lew Houston, 100 W. High St., Apt 1A, Topton,  
PA, 19562, USA; [www.vinylagogo.com](http://www.vinylagogo.com))

*Vitaphobia*, #8

(sliding scale: \$3 + 3 stamps or \$4, to \$6, add \$1 for  
out-of-U.S. orders; [ensurance\\_trap@hotmail.com](mailto:ensurance_trap@hotmail.com))

*War Against the Idiots* #28 split with *Loitering is  
Good* #10

(\$1; Liam Idiot, 1731 Cleveland St., Evanston, IL,  
60202, USA)

*Words Like Thieves*, #6

(Krystina, 63 Coburn Rd., Manchester, CT, 06040,  
USA; [go\\_out\\_and\\_play@msn.com](mailto:go_out_and_play@msn.com))

# DIG IT

leaves changing color. the Perpetual Motion Roadshow. Beehive and the Barracudas - *In Dark Love*. Cincinnati. Halloween. Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros - *Streetcore*. *Siddhartha*, by Herman Hesse. writing children's books. skipping class to wander around Chicago. The Distillers - *Coral Fang*. Montréal. skull and skeleton-related stuff. French press coffee. carving hearts and crosses into my flesh. The Decemberists - *Her Majesty*. . . "The Diner as Muse" on NPR. giant O'Henry bars. *Loba*, by Diane Di Prima. falling in love. my room, painted blue. *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, by H.P. Lovecraft. Tim Horton's. Tom Waits. tarot cards. The Weakerthans. *Carnivale*. The Soviettes. Paddy O's, as always. The Frisk. *Black Coffee Night*, by Emily Schultz. Suspect Device. The Pogues. Clarke's. the Chicago Public Library. The Veros - *Glory Boys*. Bikini Kill. the Lawrence Arms. Delilah's. *The Long Haul*, by Amanda Stern. Schuba's. The Underground Literary Alliance. Irish whiskey. clove-scented candles. writing murder ballads. Trailer Bride. Jack Kerouac. peppermint tea with milk & honey. Philadelphia. stripy shirts & sweaters. Zipperhead. Po'Girl. blue valentines. *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*, by Ulrike Klausman. Murder City Devils. old pulp novels. Johnny Cash. Nick Cave. etc.

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## YOU MIGHT BE A PUNK ROCKER IF. . .

you know why safety pins are a symbol of punk rock.

The safety pin is a symbol of the industrial revolution. It was the first item to be made by assembly line. Making one safety pin on an assembly line is a seventeen-step process.





You said you wanted

a revelation.



You're free, at liberty.

Is this what you wanted?

Sometimes I wonder.

# DEAR DAN -

The truth is, I hadn't been happy with you for a long time. I was actually talking to Ali about breaking up with you a few weeks before you broke up with me.

I loved you very much, though. You have been a huge, mostly positive part of my life, and I can't ever forget that. But, see, in the past year or so, we started drifting apart. We didn't enjoy doing the same things. I was tired of you making fun of me for listening to those generic punk bands (your words) I love like the GC5 and others. It seemed like the only times we saw each other anymore, you were bitching about work and I was washing dishes and it felt like some tired sitcom plot about some married couple.

I was ready for change, but I clung to you because I was scared of being alone. I haven't been single in four years. I have been with someone (with only a month break in between) since I was 17 fucking years old. I'm 22 now. I'm still young, but I've grown up a lot, and this is the time in my life when I need to be single.

I didn't want to be in the relationship anymore, and now that I think about it, I did push you away. I spent less and less time with you, I spent more and more time with (and talking to you about) other lovers. Maybe I wasn't always so considerate of your feelings during the last few months of our relationship, and I'm sorry for that. I pushed you away, but when you tried to leave I would freak out and say: "No no no you can't leave me I love you we are supposed to be together forever!" I was so afraid of being alone.

Since we've broken up, I've figured out that although I'm technically alone - I have no "significant other" - I'm not lonely. I've got great friends, I've got lovers, and I don't panic when I'm by myself. I am free.

You said to me, toward the end of our relationship, that you were tired of never being able to make me happy. That wasn't your fault. It was because I didn't know myself well enough to know what would make me happy. In the last five months, so much has changed. I've grown exponentially. I know how to make myself happy a lot of the time; and I also



know what I would want someone else to give me. Someday, I'll probably find someone (or lots of someones) who can give me those things.

But I'm not looking too hard right now. I like who I am and where my life is.

We both made mistakes. I realize that I may have been somewhat emotionally manipulative of you in the past – always without meaning to, but that's no excuse. It's a trait I need to work on getting rid of. On the other hand, a lot of the pressures you felt I was putting on you (you not having time for your music, you always having to be the "stable one," etc.) were pressures you were putting on yourself and then blaming on me. And you broke up with me in such a shitty, cowardly way, and that hurt.

But I've forgiven you. This is a letter of thanks. Thank you for setting me free.

Love,  
Jessica

# **"I MISS THE COFFEE MAKER MORE THAN I MISS HIM."**



On their first date – well, maybe you couldn't really call it a date, they just decided to skip class together and hang out in the student union – they had coffee. This gross "mocha" crap that was really just half coffee and half hot chocolate from a machine. She had been so nervous that she hadn't been able to figure out how to make the coffee come out of the machine. She had pushed the "mocha" button, put her paper cup under the spigot, and waited.

"The machine is broken!" she said, until he pointed out to her that she had forgotten to push the square white button that said PUSH on it in big black letters.

She was still blushing as they sat on a bench in the union, drinking their coffee and talking about bands they liked.

\*\*\*

On their first real date, the day they officially became a couple, she took him for coffee. It was one of her favorite places, too – this tiny hot room that was full of smoke, and you couldn't hear what the person next to you was saying over the thumping bass of the shitty dance music coming from the stereo.

She drank her coffee black, and she was grossed out when he put honey in his instead of sugar.

"Just to see what it's like," he said.

Later, his hand coming across the table to rest on hers, he told her that he never drank decaf. That was a good sign.

\*\*\*



They'd always go out for coffee. He would have been content to just sit in his dorm room and watch movies with her all night, but she was too fidgety for movies, she preferred talking. She had a car and he didn't, so she got to choose where they went. And they'd go to a diner or a coffee shop.

They'd go to diners with yellow lights and yellow countertops, swiveling vinyl stools, '80s pop songs playing on the radio. Diners where they'd drink bottomless cups of cheap, generic coffee, and they'd share an order of French fries.

They'd go to coffeehouses with ratty couches and modern art on the walls; kids playing chess or having discussions about people like Jean Paul Sartre and Jean Genet. At coffeehouses they'd get espresso and she'd smoke clove cigarettes. He'd brush his shaggy hair out of his eyes as he listened to her talk.

She did most of the talking, he'd interject here and there. She'd have too much caffeine and get worked up about some subject she just had to tell him about, he'd stare at her and she really thought he was fascinated, just captivated by her beauty and the intelligent conversation that spewed from her lips. But every time she really looked into his eyes, she'd see that they weren't focused. They were absolutely vacant. And all those kids dressed in black, talking philosophy, drinking coffee, they didn't know anything either. They were all just caffeine junkies trying to seem superior to everyone else.

\*\*\*

She was way more into coffee than he ever was. She talked about it a lot, about her favorite mugs to drink it from, her favorite flavors, her favorite places to drink it. She once did a photography series of mugs of coffee from various diners and coffee shops.

"And I'll admit," he'd say to his friends, "it suits her."

She looked right, he thought, in her tight black sweaters and cat's-eye frame glasses (she didn't even need glasses, they were all for effect), with a curvy white coffee mug clenched in one hand and a burning cigarette perched between the fingers of the other.

Still – coffee was just a beverage for him. For her it was a lifestyle.

\*\*\*

They shackled up together and he brought his coffee maker with him – it had been a gift from his parents. She used it more often than he did. In the morning, to make strong, black coffee to wake her up. In the afternoon, to make hazelnut coffee as a reward to herself for making it through another shitty day. She'd make coffee at night, too, and it would keep her up and fuel her through any project she might be working on.

Sometimes, he would come home from work, and find three or four dirty coffee mugs in the sink, but no other dishes. She'd be shaking and pacing and chattering and he'd find out that she hadn't eaten anything that day, only made four pots of coffee.

Sometimes, he thought she might drink too much coffee. It made her hyperactive, it stained her teeth and often made her breath smell bad. But he never said anything to her about it. It would have hurt her feelings too badly.

Once, when he did want to hurt her feelings, during a fight they were having, he threw her favorite coffee mug (a yellow one that said "More Coffee, Please" on it) against the wall. It shattered into hundreds of tiny, dusty pieces, and she actually started to cry.

\*\*\*

It was coffee that brought them together, but was it coffee that took them apart again? She was never sure. She should have known it wouldn't work out when he told her he didn't even like coffee that much anymore. He didn't have any addictions, except for his addiction to work. He was an absolute workaholic. She, on the other hand, did anything possible to avoid real work – but she had many other addictions. She was addicted to cigarettes, to beer, to sex, and to coffee most of all.



One day she came home from the coffee shop where she had gotten a job to find that he was gone, along with all of his stuff. To tell the truth, she was a little relieved. Things hadn't been working between them for a long time. She told her friends:

"I miss the coffee maker more than I miss him."



Drinking when I should be sleeping,

sleeping

when I should be waking up.



Either wide awake

or way too drunk.



# END-OF-SUMMER BURN

The end of the summer. Scorching days filled with the electrical buzz of cicadas; cold night huddled under the yellow September moon. I'm feeling the end-of-summer burn. The sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, wondering if I accomplished everything this summer that I wanted to. Wondering if any of it matters, if I'll ever accomplish anything. Cicadas live for seven, ten, seventeen years underground, then break their way to the surface. To the sunlight, to the air. Where they eat & hum & mate & die. The ground is littered with their hollow skins, they crunch under my feet. I think I lived for twelve years underground, and the air was too much of a shock. It killed me.

These days, I live out of my car. It's littered with too many empty cigarette packets and cigarette ashes, empty water bottles and to-go coffee cups, cases to mixtapes. Used Kleenex. Even some condom wrappers. These days, I don't know where home is. I divide my time between Chicago and Racine - and when I'm in Wisconsin, I'm actually usually in Kenosha. I've been to Milwaukee numerous times, to Door County and back twice, to Ohio. Soon I'm hitting the road again. I am rootless. But this is the way I've always wanted to live. It's not as glamorous as I had made it out to be. Car fumes make me dizzy and I'm tired of yellow lines.


I'm getting the end-of-summer burn again. I'm wanting to say "Fuck everyone. Fuck my friends, my family, that guy crossing the street. None of 'em get it. I DON'T NEED ANYONE." And then, y'know, I'd crank up The Adolescents or something. But that would be a lie. I do need people.





Im back with scars to show.

Back with the



streets I know

will never take me anywhere

but here.



# LEFT AND LEAVING



Going on the Perpetual Motion Roadshow was probably one of the scariest things I've done in my entire life. It wasn't the thought of traveling to places I've never been before or sleeping on people's couches that scared me – I've done both of those plenty of times before. It was the idea of going around schlepping my writing to people. The idea of spilling my guts to a new audience every night, trying to wirt them over, to maybe even get them to buy some of my stuff. Was I good enough?

I was filled with nervous energy on my first leg of the trip – from Chicago to Cleveland, where I would get Fred, then the two of us would head to Toronto together. I had a cup of Dunkin' Donuts coffee and a sesame bagel with cream cheese on the seat next to me. I put on some tunes and headed off into the gray, drizzly day. Rain spit down on my windshield the whole way, and poured on me somewhere in Indiana. I got a little lost, missed my exit, drove around the outskirts of downtown Cleveland a couple times, seeing the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame looming in the distance. I got to Fred's home in Lakewood, Ohio in late afternoon. It had stopped raining at that point, and steam rose off the warm streets. Fred and his roommate live on the bottom floor of a charming house with a big porch. There's a big flowering Russian olive tree out front. It doesn't produce olives in Cleveland, though, just provides shade.

That evening, Fred and I walked around Lakewood. We had organic coffee in this great little coffee shop where a man played stomp-yer-feet bluegrass guitar in a corner. Fred told me about Cleveland – its neighborhoods, the Cuyahoga River catching on fire, the types of music that are popular there (death metal and dirtrock), and how it was Cleveland's fault that the blackouts happened.

Back at Fred's house, we ate spaghetti, listened to The Pogues, and drank Killian's.

Before I went to sleep that night, I had a cigarette out on the front porch. There was a chill in the air and it started raining again. I smoked, thought things over and relaxed, listening to the rain pour down all around me.

Fred and I drove up I-90 toward Buffalo and Niagara. We took turns picking music, and Fred drove us through the pounding rain. I watched Buffalo loom out of the fog. We got nearer to Niagara Falls and I started talking about geology:

"See, man, there's this big mass of rock that starts at Niagara Falls and runs all the way down through northern Michigan and northern Wisconsin. It's called the Niagara Escarpment. Millions of years ago, all that rock was down at the equator, but it slowly got pushed up. . ."

I stopped myself.

"Holy fuck. No one can ever again say that I'm cool. I am talking about the geological history of the great lakes region."

Somewhere in New York state we ate at a rest-stop Denny's. We walked over an indoor bridge from one end of the rest stop to the other, looking out the windows down at cars zooming past on I-90. Someone had spilled out tar in the shape of a smiley face.

I had a cigarette in the drizzle and we got back in the car.

We took the QEW into Toronto. We weren't sure where to go, we hadn't gotten a hold of Jim yet and didn't know how to get to his house. Fred was excited:

"We're in Canada! They have Tim Horton's here, and great candy bars!"

I was just trying to find my way.

Eventually, we pulled off the QEW, Lake Ontario was to one side of us, huge and gray in the late afternoon light. We pulled over at a Tim Horton's. Donuts, coffee, looking at a few local papers to see if they had written anything about us. Waiting for Jim to call. Then to a Loblaws, this giant grocery-store-warehouse thing. We put up our umbrellas and trekked across the parking lot to go inside. I bought some giant O'Henry bars and a nice postman helped us with directions to a bank where we could get our currency exchanged and everyone seemed so much friendlier than in the States, but that coulda just been because I was stoned on freeway flying and the buzz of fluorescent lights. Or maybe the damp Canadian air.

Fred was right – Canada has much better candy bars than we do here. A wider variety, and they taste better, and they're bigger. I imagined protesting out front of a U.S. candy shop:



"What do we want? Canadian candy bars! When do we want them low!"

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That night, we walked around Jim's neighborhood in Toronto, with Jim and his wife Susan. They are two of the nicest people you would ever care to meet. The night was bustling, full of shaggy-haired skinny hipsters and smells of food and car horns honking. We ate Korean food and then saw Honest Ed's. Honest Ed's looks like a carnival funhouse, all the lights blinking and twirling, mesmerizing you with messages of "step right up! deals! bargains! savings at Honest Ed's!" I bet you can find anything you might need there, as well as many things you don't: boxes of off-brand salt crackers, plaster busts of Elvis. Although, they didn't have any toy accordions there. No one did. My search was fruitless.

Jim and Susan took us to this cozy little bar called the Green Room, cos it was attached to a tiny theatre. The bar was lit only by candles, hundreds of them, and there was mysterious graffiti in the bathroom. They played Neutral Milk Hotel over the sound system. We sat on a saggy black velvet couch, drank pitchers of Andrew Keith's India Pale Ale (a crisp, airy beer from Nova Scotia), and gossiped about indie rock and zinesters until the candles were only puddles of soft, smoky-smelling wax.

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We woke up slow and lazy the next morning, Fred stretching up from the sofa and me from the futon. It had been chilly when we went to sleep, I had been huddled beneath blankets and warm pajamas and music on my headphones. But now, it was Indian summer morning-hot, I threw the covers off me and through the tiny window of that room I could hear traffic whooshes and I swear the air smelled like maple syrup. I showered and Fred and I stepped out in the Toronto morning, ready to see things we'd never seen before. I was wearing a flowered cap-sleeve dress, the sun was warm on my bare arms. We had breakfast at an all-day breakfast place (eggs smothered in spinach and yellow hollandaise sauce, coffee) across the street from Jim's apartment, we sat outside watching pigeons fight over toast, and swatting away yellowjackets that buzzed angrily round our heads. We wandered around some, got lost in a maze of dusty shelves at Honest Ed's,

hen back to Jim's to ask him about places we should check out. Jim drew a map and we went on the Jim Munroe tour of Toronto.

We wound through side-streets past houses with pretty green and purple front gardens and marmalade cats sunning themselves on the pavement; through Kensington Market with smells of oily fish and cucumber sandwiches; hipsters browsing through racks of swanky vintage clothing and vinyl records; the sounds of a man playing sitar.

In bustling Chinatown, all redgold and decorated with statues of mean-faced foo dogs and slithering dragons, we had bubble tea in a tiny shop. We read about Toronto politics in the newspapers, and watched the purple tapioca bubbles bob in the milky tea.

At a great bookstore I bought books by Canadian authors, browsed through their small press section, and laughed at how the zine section was called "really small press."

Back at Jim's, no one was home, so we sat on the steps of his little back porch to wait. I flipped through the books I had purchased, and watched a blonde-curled woman across the street talk on a payphone. She musta been on that phone for near an hour, gesticulating wildly the whole time. Lover's problems, I surmised. Nothing breaks my heart more than seeing someone's relationship fall to pieces in the middle of the street, but at the same time I was glad it wasn't me. Oh no, I'm done with all that shit.

Jim got home, let us inside. I got ready for the show and tried to calm my jangly caffinated nerves by crawling out their kitchen window to roll cigs on the tiny balcony. I squinted my eyes against the dying sunlight, tried to keep the papers from blowing away like leaves. The smoke was so thick and strong I could hardly breathe and thought I might have a heart attack.

And then off to the show –

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At the Victory Cafe, we had the top floor all to ourselves, with our own personal bartender. I got a Corona with lime to try and calm myself, but nothing was working. My nerves were on fire, my eyes stung, my hands shook. We met Les for the first time, and I knew immediately that the three of us would be great travel companions, friends on the great North American road, all packed together in my car. And Cynthia Gould showed up, I was



excited, I love her poetry and have great respect for her as a person. We talked about safety pins and she told me that I should eat poutine in Quebec.

Reid Jameson was our local act that night – just him and his acoustic guitar singing songs about love. He had an angelic voice that reminded me of Jeff Buckley and he apologized that none of his songs were political, except a song that had the words: "the television lies." Truer words were never spoken.

"And why are you drinking Corona?" Cynthia asked me. "You should be drinking a good Canadian beer." She suggest Cremore and so that's what I drank for the rest of the night. And it was. Smooth and creamy.

That was the first night Fred donned his wrestling mask, the first night Les showed the audience how to make pipes out of apples. And I got on stage in front of the fairly full room and the Book TV cameras and read this story of mine, "Treehouse."

And when all the performances were done, we hung around, talking, drinking.

"Hey, Jessica Disobedience," someone said, and I smiled to finally be addressed by my true deepdown soul-name.

I guess my story had put every one in a bumner, too, several people said it nearly made them cry. Jim said that what really got him was the part where the narrator puts the Ramones on his mix tape. Reid said:

"After a while of listening to the story, it got to the point where I was no longer aware of my surroundings. And it made my girlfriend say: 'You're not going to cheat on me, are you?'"

"I hope I didn't cause relationship trouble," I said, but really I was awed that my words could have that profound an effect on people.

I sold enough merch that night to feed myself for the next day. We hauled our boxes of stuff back to my car and went to Les and his girlfriend's apartment.

I sat that night on Les and Jill's balcony to roll a smoke. Then I crawled into the bed their roommate had so kindly offered up, put Hem on my headphones, and wrote in my journal.

*there's something great about living out of your car. there's something magic about crashing at the houses of people you've only just met. there's something so beautiful about cigarette smoke reflected in the haze of a streetlamp at one a.m. eastern time. there's something so right about sitting*

on a balcony, looking up at the moon, when there's a september-heading-to-october chill in the air and you're feeling ultra-bohemian smoking a hand-rolled cigarette. and you're buzzed from a few cremore beers and wiped from exploring a city all day and you've just finished yanking yr guts out in front of a crowd of strangers and you realize. . .that you are happy. truly happy. and you realize that you are way fucking cooler than any of the **boys** you've ever dated, loved, had a crush on, or fucked. you're cooler than all of them **combined**. and you don't need anything but this moment you have now.

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In the early morning, back on the balcony, I had my first cigarette of the day. We ate breakfast, eggs and potatoes, with Jill at a neighborhood cafe. Les and Jill live in a Portuguese neighborhood where they laugh and talk loud and at all hours of the day you can find leather-faced old men sitting in bars talking about soccer. Then it was time for Fred, Les, and I to get on our way to Ottawa.



Not too far outside of Ottawa, we stopped at a Tim Horton's/rest stop. We bought copies of local newspapers. There was a half page on us in *The Ottawa Sun*, which was nice, except the journalist called More or Les 'Les is More' and he called me a punk poetess. Ack, no! First of all, don't call me a poet. That just conjures up images of me being some pretentious fuck who wears black turtle-necks and writes abstract, confusing verse about how *tortured* I am. Second of all, if you're gonna call me a poet, call me a fucking poet, don't make it even lamer by tacking the "ess" on the end. A poet is a poet is a poet, gender don't mean shit.

At Tim Horton's, Les ordered Timbits – which is their equivalent of donut holes – and he asked me if he could borrow a loonie. That's what they call their dollar coins, cos, well, they have loons on them.

"Wow," I laughed. "We learned about Timbits and donut holes, and I learned about loonies. We're bridging the cultural gap!"

Ottawa felt like a large college town. Everyone had told me it was boring, but I liked it. The outdoor market, with people selling blueberries and fish. The hip young kids walking around dirty sidewalks past shopping centers and hole-in-the-wall record stores. We wandered past various



restaurants, finally deciding on a pub and grill in Ottawa's Irishtown. The Heart and Crown, it was called. It felt like home. Dark wood and noisy chatter, the sounds of mandolins and tin whistles making me want to dance. I ate a thick, juicy burger and drank more Andrew Keith's India Pale Ale.

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The show that night was right in the midst of the market, at a place called the Mercury Lounge. It was so swanky, I felt like some fuckin rockstar or an old torch singer, like I should be wearing a sequined dress, an orchid in my hair, laying across the top of a piano, smoking my cigarette out of a foot-long holder. Instead, I was wearing camouflage pants and a smelly Clash t-shirt, smoking handrolled cigarettes. The ceilings were tall and there were red couches and colored lights, art on the walls. The best part was the disco ball twinkling above the stage.

I was a little worried that we wouldn't go over so well there, the crowd was older and arty, I was afraid they might think we were too loud and weird. But our opening act – this jazzy funky band called Straight No Chaser – got them mellowed out. So did all the drinks that were flowing. I was drinking rum and Cokes. People laughed at Fred's act, roared with hilarity at Les'. An adorable skinny shy boy in a Napalm Death t-shirt was there. He looked like a stick bug, and he was clutching his bike helmet the whole time. And there were two girls who approached me when I was working the merch table, one with a pink shirt and short hair and thick-framed glasses. She told me she had been going through her stuff the other day, and had found a really old issue of my zine. She also showed me her typewriter tattoo, because she had read a piece I wrote saying I wanted one. I thought she must have gotten my zine through a distro, cos I couldn't for the life of me figure out who she was. But I have since discovered that she was Sarah Evans, who does the zine *root* and, back when I traded with her, did *in morning clouds*.

Between acts, when they were playing Meesoo Lee's videos, and Straight No Chaser was jamming another set, I would go outside to smoke. The night was chilly, definitely fall, but it felt good to have the sweat evaporate off me, it was hot and desert-dry in the Mercury Lounge.

I sat on the platform of one of the market stalls, careful not to get blueberry stains on my ass. I listened to all the people stepping outside from other bars to light up – you can't smoke in bars there – a group of boisterous fratboys from the bar next door, sophisticated looking women with well-

defined cheekbones who were hanging out at the Mercury, including one with a French accent who asked me for a light. And a group of sketchy-looking dudes with shaved heads who I'm pretty sure had a drug deal goin' down. It was like a big party in the street.

As I sat there having my cigarette right before I went on stage, the stick bug Napalm Death boy came outside and approached me.

"I have to leave," he near-whispered, "so I won't get to hear you read."

He looked down at his feet.

"But would you accept a copy of my zine?"

"Of course! Thank you. I'll run upstairs and get one of mine if you'd like to trade."

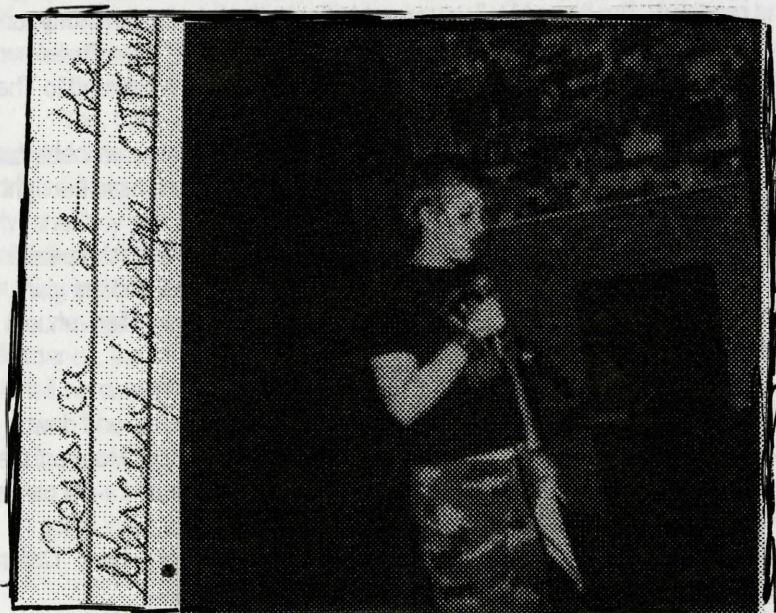
"Thanks. I already bought your stuff, though."

Then he got on his bike and disappeared around the corner.

The piece I was reading that night was about "how to make a mix tape (for someone you have a crush on)." I have some semi-obscure musical references in it, and not to be an indie snob, but I was a little worried that the crowd there that night just wouldn't get it. But they did. They laughed at the mention of certain songs, and even if they didn't get all the references, they at least understood the *feeling* behind the piece, which is the most important thing, anyway. I guess it was unfair of me to judge the crowd as squares before I gave them a chance.

Afterward, as Straight No Chaser was playing their final set, I had a woman come up to me and say: "I loved what you read. That Smiths reference was perfect."

And the girl who was bartending that night, a girl with long blonde hair and many silver necklaces, told me she loved my stuff and gave me a free rum and Coke.





The boys went to stay at Ruth's house (I couldn't because of her cat), and I stayed on Louisa's couch in her office, said I'd meet up with the boys the next morning. I cuddled up under puffy blankets, felt the night breeze tickling through the window screen, and read myself to sleep with a Raymond Carver book I had found while snooping on Louisa's bookshelf.

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I was awakened by the incessant drilling of jack-hammers and other construction sounds nearby. I took a shower, then got in my car and drove to Ruth's house to have breakfast with her and Fred and Les.

Ruth made us French press coffee with real cream, and bismarks (this spongy, eggy, fluffy pancake thing) with syrup and fresh fruit. We bonded over the strong coffee and I told them all about my recent break-up.

On the way out of town, we stopped at an internet cafe so I could send off a couple pieces for the first issue of *Bail* magazine.

We drove past parliament, all the stately spired buildings looking like castles, and out of town on our way to Montreal.

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The drive from Ottawa to Montreal is only a couple of hours long. My anticipation grew as we entered Quebec. All the signs were in French first, the St. Laurentian mountains out past the St. Lawrence seaway were looming up in the distance. The license plates read "Je Me Souviens" and I asked Les what it meant. It roughly translates to "I will remember/I will not forget" (like the word *souvenir*), and I like that, I think it's important to remember your history.

We noticed that the road signs seemed to be posted haphazardly and randomly, like it would tell you to get in the right (à droite) lane for your exit, then an eighth of a mile (how many kilometers is that?) later it would switch you to the left (à gauche) lane. It was okay, we were listening to The Weakerthans and joking:

"Oh, those Quebecois people," said Fred. "They were probably too busy drinking red wine and smoking Galouises to post the signs in the right place."

"Or maybe they just wanted to confuse the stupid English-speakers."

On the way into the city, we could see Mount Royal and the giant white cross on top of the hill, beckoning us. Saying "Bonjour. Bienvenue à Montreal."

We parked my car near Zeke's Gallery and walked up and down Boulevard St.-Laurent. And this is when it began to get crazy. Montreal feels like Europe. Like so bohemian. Girls in skirts so short their polka-dot panties peek out. People gabbing in French, English, Spanish, about any other language you could imagine. Smells of food and coffee everywhere. Cafes

and pubs and art galleries, boutiques. Crowded streets, people tucking and fighting in public. In Montreal they are poor but beautiful, like maybe they only have one loaf of bread to eat for the entire week but they will spend their money on a piece of art, or a book, or a stylish striped shirt. They might live in a squat with rotted wood and rats, but they will decorate it to look like a cathedral, angels flying across the caved-in ceilings.

As we were standing outside a recordshop to get our bearings, a voluptuous woman in a flowered dress walked up to Fred, Les, and myself.

"Hello," she said. "See that apartment up there above that shop?" She pointed to a flat with flowerboxes in the windows. We nodded.

"There's this great little balcony up there. We're going to go smoke up in about twenty minutes. We have some very good weed, you should come join us."

And she walked away.

We didn't join them, but I grinned – this is the kind of city Montreal is!

"We're not even here a half hour and we get invited to smoke up with some complete strangers!"

We walked past a little park filled with crusty-looking kids and others. There was a tent set up, and a rally going on for the Mohawk Nation, we watched while they drummed, thum thum, and said a prayer to the four winds.

We found a newsstand to see if we were mentioned in any of the newspapers. We were in a couple, French and English both. Then, I was looking through another one, and alternative weekly type, and it didn't seem we were in there. And then I freaked out:

"Ohmygod! That's a picture of me!"

Yes, there was a blurb about us, they called my writing "urban fairy tales," and there was a picture of me, one they had taken from my web site, a favorite of mine. It's me smoking and looking at the camera all shocked and guilty, and they put a caption under it – "Bad Behaviour: Jessica Disobedience." Oh how rock and roll – and our blurb was next to a blurb about David Bowie, no less!

In a grocery store where Les was buying apples for his performance, the man that worked there was getting mad at us because he could tell we couldn't speak much French.



"C'est combien? Combien pour les pommes?" We were asking, pointing at the apples, trying to get him to tell us how much they cost.

And he would rattle off something in French, very quickly, and get annoyed when we would say:

"Repetez, s'il vous plait?"

We were starving and then we stumbled into this little neighborhood just off St.-Laurent, and I felt even more like I was in Europe, there. Like I was in Paris. The streets were bricked and cobble-stoned, people milling around, but no cars driving through. Just people and pigeons, little children running around yelling in French. Cafes everywhere and old stone buildings, third-floor apartments with tiny wrought-iron balconies covered in vines. And we found Cafe Jose. The tiny cafe was filled with old men and young hippie types and families, reading books, laughing. Our waitress was sweet with pixie-cut hair and she smiled as she brought me my food – empanadas, a raspberry smoothie with grenadine, and a huge bowl of tomato and blue cheese soup. And it was all so cheap, too. I sat outside to smoke while Les and Fred were finishing up, and the air smelled like poppies.



The show at Zeke's was small and intimate. It was a loft art gallery, dusty, filled with ugly orange couches. It was smoky cos Zeke was a chainsmoker; he sold Canadian beer and vodka mixed drinks from behind his messy desk. I met Jesse, one of the Montreal agents, he was hyper and weird and had a red pompadour. We talked about Chicago:

"I don't like Chicago," he said. "I've only been there once. I went by myself to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1968 Democratic convention shootings, and I got really sick. And I saw a hearse, which kinda freaked me out."

"What, you don't have hearses in Canada?"

"No, it's not that, it's just it seemed kinda ominous considering the reason I was there, and the fact that I was feverish. Plus hearses always make me think of that song. . ."

Jesse and I belted out in unison:

"Don't ever laugh when the hearse goes by, for you may be the next to die. They'll put you in a big black box and cover it up with dirt and rocks. The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play pinochle on your snout. The ones that crawl in are lean and thin, the ones that crawl out are fat and stout. Your eyes fall in and your teeth fall out, your brains go tumbling all about. Your stomach turns a slimy green, and pus pours out like whipping cream. You spread it on a slice of bread, and that's what you eat when you are dead. Be merry, my friends, be merry."

We were interviewed by Joanna and Nick from the *McGill Daily*. Joanna was a girl with two brown braids, bright and bubbly, she snapped constant photos of us. And Nick was soft-spoken, with black hair and sandals on his feet. He asked me all about zines, and life on the road, and I was happy because I could answer that question. *I know what life on the road is like!*

And there was Sasha, a girl with a heavy Quebecois accent and an anarchy symbol on her shirt. And there was Shelley Sharp, our opening act that night, who with her commanding voice spoke poems that conjured up visions of prairie towns, and she wore a bra with pig's heads on it. But when Corey walked in – tho I didn't know his name was Corey at the time – things got blurry and the night began to explode. He walked in, a tall, lanky boy, button-down shirt, corduroy pants, dark hair and a small beard and glasses that betrayed the sly glint in his eyes. When I read that night, I shook, my limbs and voice vibrated, I shook out my stories about being a fucked-up punkrock teen. All my stories are about that, but that night everyone could see my heart glowing like a neonsign inside my chest. Corey and I were eyeing each other the whole time, flirting silently, batting eyelashes, grinning sly. And when it was all over, he introduced himself –

"I'm Corey. But everyone calls me CT Staples."

"Do you want me to call you Corey or CT?"

"Whatever you want. I felt a real affinity with your work. I feel like I lived that, too. So ♫ are you reformed?"



"Huh?"

"Are you still a punk rocker, or are you reformed?"

"Oh, very much still a punk rocker?"

"I'm kind of reformed, I guess. I still listen to the music – the Sex Pistols, The Clash, Nomeansno, those are still some of my favorite bands – but I can't live that way anymore. Punk nearly killed me."

"Punk saved *my* life. How did it nearly kill you?"

"Just the whole idea of living with no rules. . ."

"But it doesn't mean you destroy yourself. That's what saved me – no rules. The beauty of punk is you make your *own* rules, live the way you want to."

And there was a mad rush of voices, of people, more questions from Nick, trading zines with Jesse – "You're bad-ass! You lived in Flint and now

Chicago!" – "I could kick all your peaceful Canadian asses!" – bumming cigarettes off Sasha – figuring out where we were going to stay that night – last sips of beer being taken – Corey said:

"Hey, what're you guys doing tonight? Do you want to see Montreal? I can give you the CT Staples tour."

So it was decided that Les would go with his friends and Fred and I would go with Corey and we'd meet back up at my car in the morning.

Corey and I waited on the street for Fred, I rolled Corey a cigarette, an olive-skinned man with curly black hair hit on Corey, asked for his phone number, Corey said:

"I love Montreal, man, it's the most overtly sexual city in North America."

And somehow Kerouac was brought up, Tom Waits too, and I looked down, saw that Corey's leanly muscled forearm had a barcode tattoo and I knew I wanted him. I thought maybe he was into me, too, the way he had been looking at me all night, how he said:

"The whole reason I came to this thing was because I read about it in the paper and your name intrigued me. Disobedience. I like that."

I thought he liked me but then for various reasons, I started to think he was gay. I'm not even exactly sure why, just a few comments he made had me thinking he wasn't into pussy. Oh well. I could still hang with him. I still wanted the CT Staples tour. We walked through the warm, night-crowded sidewalks of Boulevard St.-Laurent and I wanted to drink, I wanted to fuck, I wanted to break bottles in the street watch them shatter and explode like fireworks.

"Are you Bukowski fans?" Corey asked us. We are, so he took us to this dive run by a Buko fan, named after a very Buko sentiment – Barfly. Yes, and you could see Bukowski sitting in one of the dark corners, his feet sticking to the piss blood beer spit encrusted floor, a shroud of smoke hanging around his head. He would have hated the music they played there, it was hard rock, guitar growl heavy, but he would've sat there anyway, scowling at everyone.

We talked about Tom Waits some more, about Johnny Cash and how we were all mourning him.

"My friends and I had a wake for him," said Corey.

Johnny Cash was the man. I'm sure he's up in heaven wearing a black shirt, smoking a cigarette. He's up there with Joey and Dee Dee and Joe, and Elliott now, too.

We talked about Allen Ginsberg, about Sonic Youth, we drank big bottles of Belle Guelle.

A man walked up to us, started speaking to us in a mix of Spanish and broken English. He grinned at us with a mouth full of half-rotted teeth. Fred was able to carry on a brief conversation with him, but the man kept saying: "Cheers!" "Cheers!" we would all say, and take a drink.

Corey asked if he could recite one of his poems for us. He leaned in close, squinted his eyes shut, got so into it I was sure the room had disappeared for him. This is what he spoke for us –

## TEQUILA MOCKINGBIRD BY CT STAPLES

just reach inta' yer empty pocket  
if ya want me, ah'll be there –  
a sqwackin'  
tequila mockin'bird  
with tumbleweed in ma hair –

oh ah've bin' tryin'  
ta' get drunk on jesus,  
but that blood has got no bite –  
an' who goes to church on sunday  
when they ain't slept saturday night?

well ma' mailbox ain't seen a letter  
since the one that said you was gone.  
no, ma' ford ain't seen a mechanic.  
no, ma' mower ain't seen the lawn.

an' ma' sheets ain't seen a washer –  
tho' ma' pillows seen some tears.  
ma' belly ain't seen no porkchops –  
just the bottoms of bottles of beer.

well, ma' heart ain't seen no lovin'  
tho' ma' eyes have seen some skin.  
these hands ain't done no good deeds –  
just got me a whole lotta sin.



an' ma' bankbook ain't seen no deposits.  
an' ma' phonebill ain't been paid yet.  
ma' coats all full of cigarette holes.  
ma' clothes are all stained'n'faded.

well, the milk in th' fridge  
was th' last thing you bought –  
still sits on th' very same shelf.  
sometimes ah' stare at the expiration date –  
'cause it's th' same one ah' got on m'self.

an' m'friends all said  
ah'd forget ya' in time –  
fact is: ah' forgot 'em all first.  
now there's no around t'buy me a drink  
on th' nights that ah'm dyin' of thirst.

well, yer pichers all framed,  
right next t'ma' bed,  
so yer eyes are th' first thing ah' see.  
each night on ma' knees,  
ah'm a'prayin' t'jesus:  
"o bring back ma' bonnie t'me."

well, all th' letters ah' send ya –  
they come on right back;  
yer phone ain't the number i knew.  
an' if ah' dinnet know  
that we was in love  
ah'd think you was sayin' we're thru'.

so just reach inta' yer empty pocket  
if ya' want me, ah'll be there –  
a sqwackin'  
tequila mockin'bird,  
with tumbleweed in ma' hair –

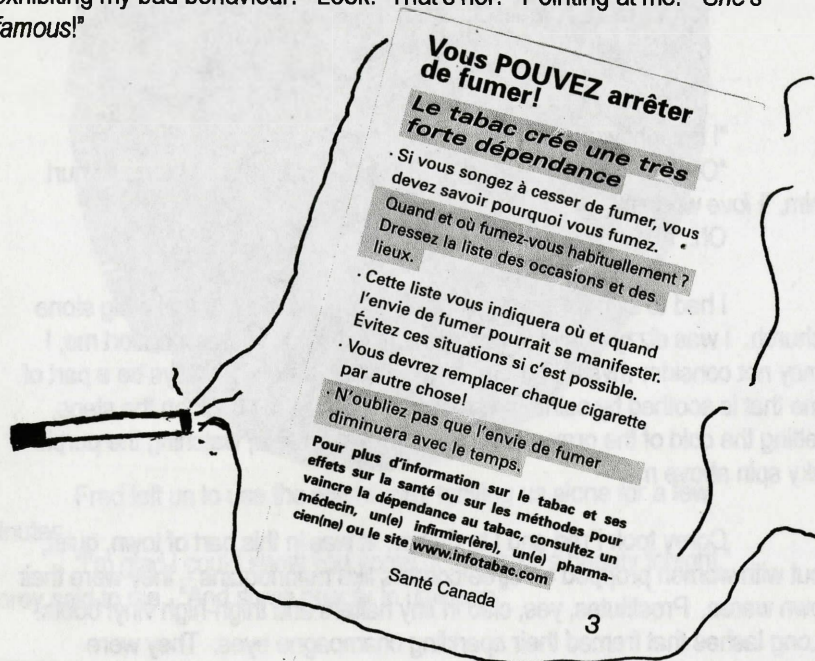
o ah've bin tryin'  
t'get drunk on jesus,  
but that blood has got no bite –  
an' who goes t'church on sunday

---

when they ain't slept saturday night?

When he was done, he looked at me, and I was sure I was in love. Oh I have known you in another life, CT Staples.

We left Barfly and the streets of Montreal were spinning around me – drunkenness, druggies, thin women on spike heels like supermodels, sailors on shore leave, everyone in the streets. I stopped in a drugstore to buy a pack of Galouises, Corey followed behind me. "Look!" he was saying to the woman behind the counter, pointing at the picture of me in the paper, exhibiting my bad behaviour. "Look! That's her!" Pointing at me. "She's famous!"



"Stop!" I laughed at him, stumbling out of the store. "You're embarrassing me. Although, if you're so keen on showing my picture to people. . . maybe you could pimp me out to someone cute so I can get laid tonight."

Every man we passed after that, he would point and say:  
"What about him?"

And I'd have to say "No! No I don't want to fuck one of the sullen greasy-haired boys milling around outside the Turbonegro show! No I don't want to sleep with a sailor, I've done that already, I'm done with those Navy boys."

Then we passed this punk rock couple, boy with black hair black jeans black jacket, girl with white-blonde curls and red lips, fishnet stockings creeping up her legs, both with pale powder skin.

"How about *them*," I said.

"Both of them?" he asked.



I nodded.

Corey squinted at me, tilting his head like a confused puppy. He raised an eyebrow.

"Are you bisexual?"

"Yep."

"Do you like boys or girls more?"

I hate when people ask me that, it trivializes me, makes my sexuality seem like a phase or a game, so I said:

"It depends on the person."

"Yeah, me too," said Corey.

Oh. Oh my.

"I thought you only liked guys."

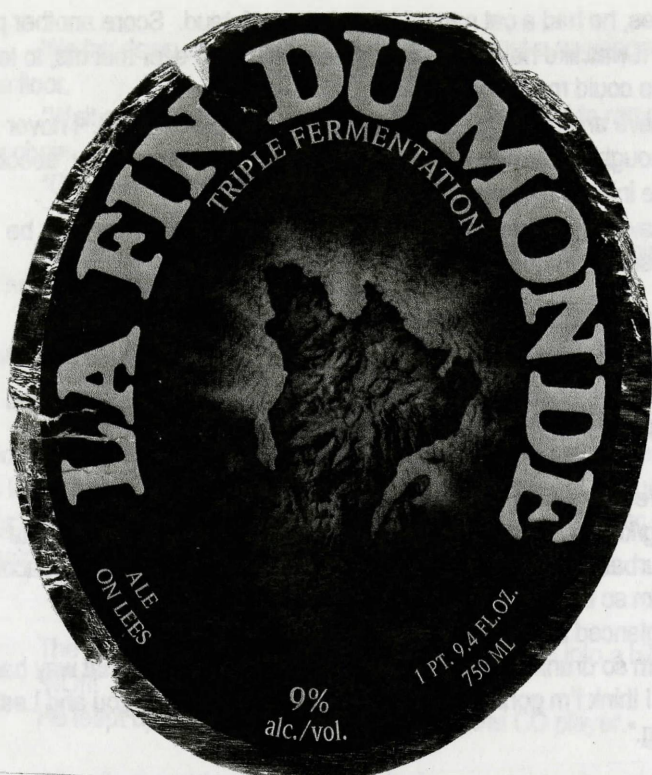
"Oh, man," Corey said, clutching at his stomach as though it hurt him, "I love women."

Oh. Fuck.

I had to stop for a few minutes, resting on the steps of a big stone church. I was dizzy with love and booze, Catholic churches comfort me, I may not consider myself Catholic anymore but there will always be a part of me that is soothed by saints and rosaries. I lay on my back on the steps, letting the cold of the gray stone cool my feverish skin, watching the purple sky spin above me.

Corey took Fred and I to Citibar. It was in this part of town, quiet, but with women propped on streetcorners like mannequins – they were their own wares. Prostitutes, yes, clad in tiny halters and thigh-high vinyl boots. Long lashes that framed their sparkling champagne eyes. They were beautiful. I couldn't tell which ones were bio-women and which ones were trannies and drag queens and that made them all the more beautiful. I saw a john hop out of a sleek black car and approach a prostitute with long brown hair, dressed all in blue. I thought this one must be a boy, because of her flat chest and lean muscled legs.

And Citibar itself, full of more drag queens, all of them more woman than I could ever hope to be. They called Corey "honey" and "baby doll" and they hung off the arms of tired sad-eyed old men with cracked leather faces and sweaters that drooped off their hunched shoulders. It was my turn to buy us drinks, so we all had bottles of La Fin Du Monde – the end of the world. It's strong, nine percent alcohol by volume, and has a smoky woodsy taste, and when you pull the cork off, it makes a loud pop! and steam rises out, just like champagne. And if you're sitting in the beer garden of a bar in a foreign country, letting the late night dew collect in your hair, the bubbles and steam go straight to your head and soon you are bubbling out your life story, spilling over with secrets, to anyone who will listen. "One a.m. drunken truth," CT Staples announced. One a.m. drunken truth.



Fred left us to use the washroom, leaving us alone for a few minutes.

"I'm glad I could show you some of Montreal's beauty tonight," Corey said to me. "And some beauty in ugliness."

My stomach was beginning to feel choppy, waves of beer and my feelings for Corey. I had to tell him.

"Hey, um, since I'll probably never see you again, there's no reason not to tell you this. I think you're an amazing person and I find you very attractive."

His eyes got wide and shone from the bar lights. I could see my reflection swimming in them.

"I'm very attracted to you, too."

"I would have flirted with you earlier, but I thought you were gay."

He put his hand on top of mine and said:

"If you thought I was gay, why didn't you try to change my mind?"

Melt. What a stupid girl I am.

Fred came back and was tired, wanted to go crash at Zeke's.

"My apartment is on the way," Corey said. "You guys should stop by real quick and see some of my art, and meet my kittens, Mookie and Artaud."



Yes, he had a cat named after Antonin Artaud. Score another point for Corey. It was like he read a book about me before ever met me, to learn the ways he could make me swoon:

- Have an accent (check – just a Canadian one, but still. I never thought my knees would get weak hearing someone say “about.”)
- Be into Tom Waits and Jack Kerouac (check)
- Have a barcode tattoo, be skinny, be an artist of some kind, be bisexual, name yr cat after a Dadaist . .

How did he manage to get all of it so right?

As we tripped down the streets to his apartment, Corey slipped his warm hand inside of mine, and gripped so so tightly.

We saw his art; his apartment – one long room that was living/dining/kitchen all in one, plus a bedroom and a bathroom; his cats – little gray furballs who pounced and mewed and chewed on my bootlaces.

“I’m so tired,” Fred yawned. “I need to leave.”

I glanced at Corey, and made my decision.

“I’m so drunk and tired there’s no way I can walk all that way back right now. I think I’m gonna crash here and I’ll meet up with you and Les in the morning.”

---

“Goodnight,” said Fred, and he was gone, and Corey and I were alone.

Corey put Tom Waits’ *Black Rider* on the stereo, and the two of us waltzed crazy and off-beat around the tiny apartment, bumping our shins into furniture, trying not to trip on Mookie and Artaud.

“Come on in, it ain’t no sin, take off your skin and dance around in your bones.”

Swiftly, he pulled me toward him, and we were kissing hard and mad and with a fierceness I had not known in a long time. It wasn’t violent, it was a gentle fierceness, a feeling of: “I want to fit a whole relationship’s worth of love into this one night.”

We tumbled onto his couch, fumbled with buttons, brushed hands over smooth skin, placed kisses on jutting collarbones. He changed the music, put on Leonard Cohen this time, and we moved to his dark bedroom. The only light was seeping in through his blinds, I could see a cheekbone here, the slope of his nose there, black shadows pooling between his neck and shoulders. Blue shadows of wings on the wall, gray shadows of ghosts in my palms. Corey clasped me tight to him, encircling me with skinny arms like parentheses. He whispered into my neck, making me shiver: “So. Do you manage to find a man in every town?”

“I haven’t really been looking. You just happened to appear.”

We lay down on his bed, which was really just a sagging mattress on the floor.

"Wait a sec," I said. "I gotta take this off." I started to remove my wallet chain.

"Oh, me too," he said.

Then he giggled:

"You know, our grandparents never had to go through this. 'Wait, I can't neck with you until I take off my keys.'"

"You're right," I laughed, too. "They might have had to remove their pocket watches, though."

More clothes were removed among the dusty moonlight and heavy shadows of that room. His tongue was lapping gently at my nipples, sending out a tingle that ran through all my veins and nerves and out through my hands until my fingers in his short hair made it stand up with static electricity. He looked up at me, his face a faded photograph.

"You're so —"

---

The CD started skipping, turning Leonard's voice into a hiccup.

"NO!!!"

He leapt up out of the bed, ran to turn off the CD player.

When he came back, I was laughing so hard that tears were streaming down my cheeks.

"Do you have any idea how disconcerting it is to be fooling around with someone and have them scream NO! and run out of the room?"

He stroked his thumb across my cheek.

"I was about to tell you how amazing and beautiful you are, but the CD had to go and fuck up my romantic moment."

He grinned, I kissed his eyelids.

And yes we made love, for, I don't know how long, I wasn't paying attention, I was all body, no brain, just folding in and out of him, wrapping myself in boysmell and boyskin, grabbing his hipbones that jutted out perfect like a sculpture. He laid himself out at my feet, and I accepted the offering.

"Thank you," I said.

"C'est ma plaisir," he replied.

Laying there afterward, we shared a Galouise, touched each other shyly like children. He asked me to say a poem for him, so I recited Ferlinghetti, and then Yeats. We talked about relationships failed and hearts broken and when he talked about heartless girls I knew what he meant, I could shake my head and say "women." In the same way that when I talked about stupid boys he could shake his head and say "men."



"I'm hungry," he said, and we sat at his kitchen table in our underwear. And he fed me tea and oranges, and my heart seized at how perfect the night had been. He fed me tea and oranges.

And this made me wonder –

Which one of us was Tom? Which one of us was Jack? Which one of us was Leonard? He'd be the obvious choice for Tom and Jack, him being all angular, all smooth, a boy. He'd be the obvious choice for Leonard, being Canadian, being a poet. But there I was having adventures like Tom and Jack, there I was writing about them all. And I am a poet, I guess, as much as I balked at being called one by that journalist. I'm a poet inasmuch as I see the beauty in a dead pigeon's wing and a boy's hips, and I try to live like my life itself is the poem. Most importantly of all? I was the one leaving the next day, getting on that highway and taking off for another town I'd never been to before.

It was four in the morning by then, and I had to get up early, to take a long trek across the city and meet Les and Fred at my car, and then there was going to be a very long drive ahead of us down through upstate New York to NYC.

Corey set his alarm and we lay in each other's arms, talked some more.

"I'm so jealous that you're going to New York City tomorrow."

"I'd rather stay in Montreal."

"But you'll get to see the Chelsea Hotel."

"That's true."

"Think of me."

"I will."

As we kissed and held on to each other, we fell into each other, melted, made love again. Like we had all the time in the world.

Eventually, about four hours before I was supposed to meet up with the guys, Corey and I feel asleep, spooned naked and warm against each other like tender old friends. I drifted away from him in my sleep, but I would wake up periodically to him grasping my hips and pulling me toward him.

When I woke up, I could hear rain dripping outside, elves dancing on the roofs and windowsills of Montreal. The sky was purpled with morning light filtered through the cloud cover. I rolled over and looked at the clock. 10:00 it read, in pixilated green letters.

"Shit! Corey, I was supposed to meet them a half hour ago!"

He opened his sleep-heavy eyes and looked at me, at the clock.

"Jessica, I have some bad news. My clock is an hour behind. It's really eleven."

"Fuck. They're going to wonder what the hell happened to me."

I threw my clothes on, wrinkled from the night they had spend in a heap on the dirty floor.

"I'll walk with you," said Corey.

He let me borrow a sweater, I burrowed myself into the smell of boy and cats, cigarettes and cinnamon. We walked hand-in-hand through the park, over soggy yellow leaves, in the soft drizzle that landed in our eyelashes. Past totem poles, fountains, ducks bobbing on the pond. All the couples were in love that morning, even pairs of seventy year old men and women were kissing.

"Under what strange circumstances will I ever get to see you again?"

Corey asked.

"I don't know. But we will see each other."

We have to, or I will die. You're the closest I've ever come to finding my ideal person.

I stared at him.

"What?"

"It's nothing. It's corny."

"Tell me."

"I was just thinking about how incredibly beautiful you are."

"I already *knew* you were beautiful."

Freeze frame: both of us looking down at our feet.

Les and Fred were waiting at my car. They weren't pissed off.

"It's okay," they said. "There's no rush to get to New York. And it's not like we've been waiting by the car the whole time. We walked around, had breakfast."

"Oh, breakfast. Is it cool if I grab something before we head out?"

"Sure."

We walked to a nearby bakery, Corey loped behind us, head down. I bought Corey coffee, I drank coffee and ate a pastry that was a mass of butter and sugar and dark chocolate that smeared all over my lips.

Then Fred and Les went into a drugstore, to stock up on a few things for the trip, like Canadian candy bars.

Corey and I stood outside, trying to get up the nerve to say goodbye.

I handed him his sweater. He pulled something out his backpack, said:

"Something to remember me by," and handed me a book of Canadian poetry. Like I needed something in order to remember him.

We hugged and kissed again, I tried to memorize how he felt, then said:

"I really do have to go now."

Then I walked away and left him there, my Neal Cassady, digging on everything in the softly drizzling rain.

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The Perpetual Motion Roadshow was back on the road. We drove out of town through the old part, down by the water, and once again it felt like Europe, only less like young hip Europe, more old and haunted. Gray stone,



gray water, gray sky. Narrow streets sandwiched between ornate buildings, made for horses, not cars. French saints wandered the docks, leading us out of Montreal.

The guys teased me.

"Check you out! Fuckin rockstar! You've got groupies!"

"Yeah," Fred said, "I bet he didn't come to the show because of your *name*, I bet he was there cos of that sexy picture of you they put in the paper!"

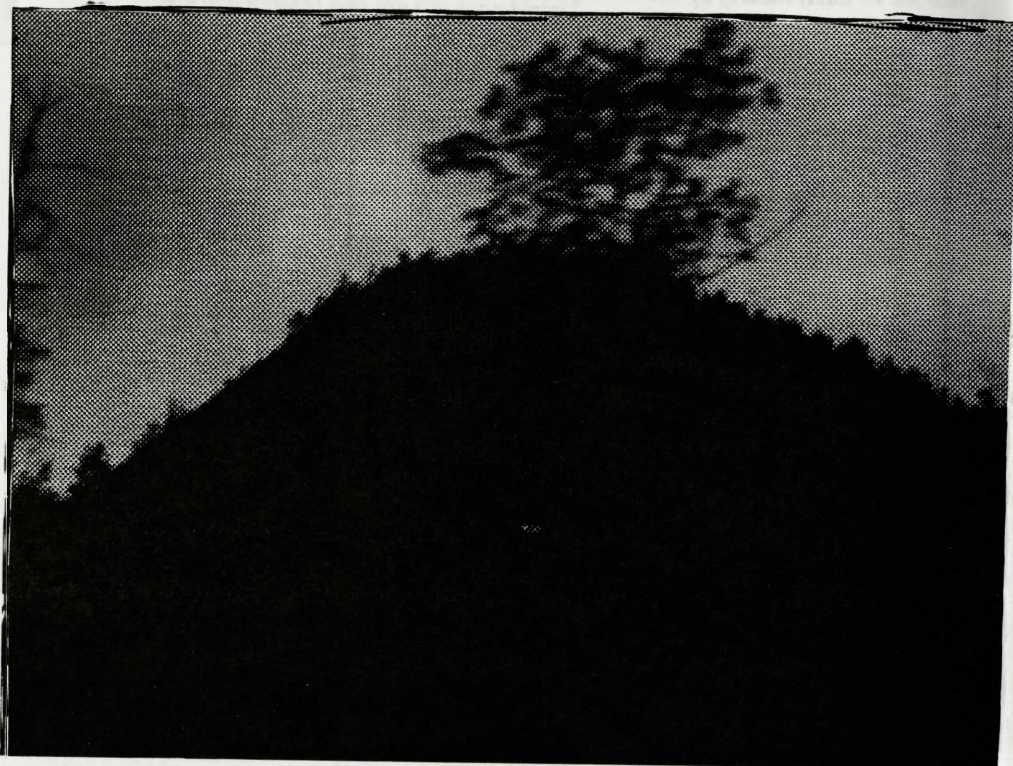
"I love Montreal," I sighed.

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I drove the first half of the trip. I should have been dead tired, but I was buzzed from my adventure, ready for more – CT had made me promise I would write and tell him of my adventures.

I blasted The GC5, Fred and I discussed how we, the PMR folks, how we are soldiers in the culture war. Like, fuck you, we're bored with the culture you force-feed us, we'll make our own.

The Adirondacks took my breath away, whether it was the thin air up that high or just the fact that loopy, windy roads and mountains stretching to the sky with the clouds above and the spindly trees at the top always make my head hurt with awe, is hard to say. All I know is, I was constantly saying: "Yes! Get a load of that mountain! Dig the tree at the top of that one! Take a photo! Film it!"



In a tiny town in the Adirondacks, a town called Loon Lake, we stopped at a ramshackle clap-board store to ask where the nearest gas station was. As I got back in the car and was about to pull out of the dirt lot and head to the gas station, a car pulled up alongside mine. This car was almost completely rusted through, and the backseat was piled high with every kind of junk you could think of – torn clothes, broken laptop computers, probably chicken bones and tree branches. The men that sat in the front seat were old, burnt-out hippies with long, scraggly, thinning hair. One of them was wearing a Red Man t-shirt he had spray-painted himself, freehand. They motioned for me to roll down the window. I looked at the guys, and back at the old hippies. I rolled my window down.

"Yarr! Ahoy tharr, ya hansom' lass! Today is Nat'l Talk Like a Pyrrrate Day! Yarr!"

They waved their fists in pirate salutes, scrunched up their faces into grotesque sneers.

"Arn't ya all goin to talk like pyrrrates?"

And so, Fred, Les and I raised our fists in the air and all growled:

"Yarrrr!"

"Now have a safe voyage," the pirates said. "We're off ta drink some rum."

They winked at me and sped away.

"Those guys were the real thing," I said. "Imagine meeting pirates way up in the mountains."



We ate dinner at a diner in Albany, bland food in a bland town. Then Fred took over driving, and it poured with rain all the way through the Catskills, streams of water blurring the red of tail-lights in front of us. And of course there was traffic on our way into New York City, though it was late at night, because it was New York! We dropped Les off to stay with his friends in Manhattan, and Fred and I continued to Brooklyn to stay with our friends.

"No! Sleep! Till! Brooklyn!" I shouted.

And it was eerie and odd to drive past ground zero, all lit up with bright stadium lights, like there should've been some night-time baseball game going on.

When we drove across the Brooklyn Bridge, all old and stone and just standing tall there, I wanted to fly out of the car and say: "I am on the Brooklyn Bridge. Oh dear God." Go dancing on the rails, hanging from the suspension cords.

We parked my car, Fred got on the MTA to Mike's apartment, and there I was with Tya.



I hadn't seen Tya in over a year, and it was a warm, sticky night after the rains had stopped. Everyone in her neighborhood was out on their front stoops. Tya and I took a walk to Sunset Park. Sunset Park is up on a hill, we sat on a big stone wall and caught up on each other's lives. To my right, I could see the water, all the lights twinkling, and off in the distance, the Statue of Liberty was waving at me.

New York.

Back at Tya's apartment, I fell asleep on the tiny couch, my feet up over the end, listening to the Velvet Underground.



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New York City makes me think of ghosts. I see all those dead rockers and tragic poets and starlets darting around corners, standing in the doorways of buildings.

Tya humored me that day, took me around the East Village and the Lower East Side. We started out just wandering around in the heat, I bitched about my ex-boyfriend.

"He made fun of me for liking The Smiths."

"He didn't like The *Smiths*?"

"Nope."

"How could you date anyone who doesn't like The Smiths?"

"I'll never make that mistake again."

And then, at the top of our lungs, we sang:

"What she asked of me at the end of the day, Caligula would have blushed. 'Oh, you've been in the house too long,' she said, and I naturally fled."

I watched people buy hot dogs, smothered in onions and mustard and relish, from street vendors; listened to boys that only come up to my waist play one-on-one basketball in empty lots; smelled latkes being cooked in authentic Jewish delis.

We had bubble tea, ate Thai food, hung out in Washington Square Park. Tya took a picture of me in front of CBGB's, and I tell you, when I stepped into the entryway of the Chelsea Hotel, I nearly cried. Thinking of Corey, thinking of all the doomed lives and love affairs that had breathed their last smoke-stale breaths within its walls.

We finished our day, before it was time for the show, at a dim Italian restaurant where the flirtatious waiter didn't even card me for the Italian beer I ordered.



i've got a bad liver & a broken heart.



i've cried me a river since you tore me apart...





i remember you well, in the chelsea  
hotel. you were talking so brave and  
so sweet.

The show was at a tiny "radical" bookstore on the Lower East Side. Right away, walking in, I felt uncomfortable. Unwelcome. Not revolutionary enough. The people that worked there (well, barring one kick-ass dude with a poufy blonde 'hawk and a Pink Bloque t-shirt) was so uptight and P.C. that I felt like shit cos my boots were leather. I felt strange cos I just write about *lurve* and shit. Love, music, sex, drinking, this is what I write about.

Fred noticed the weirdness, too:

"What's with these people and the fuckin sticks up their asses? Punk used to be decadent! It used to be a "fuck you" to everyone, it was about just doin your own thing. We could dress all in leather and shoot smack in the bathroom if we wanted, or we could be sXe or whatever but it would be *our personal choice*. When did punk become about shoving your views down other people's throats?"

We discussed how when we're told we shouldn't do something, god damn it, we wanna do it even more.

"I want to go get a big bloody steak and eat it right in front of them," Fred said.

"I want to talk about women's place being in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant," I replied.

So the reading was a little weird, a little stifled. You could tell the revolutionaries were looking down their stuffy noses at us –

Cos Les rapped about weed, Fred pretended to be a wrestler (such a misogynistic sport!) and read stories about being in a rock'n'roll band, I read pieces where I mentioned such superficial things as – gasp! – *the way people were dressed*.

But it was okay, all in all, the audience was good, and responsive. Our agent and MC was awesome, his name was Corey and he was from Montreal (!), he looked like John Cusack's skinny brother, and when he introduced me, he said:

"I don't know what to say about her, but. . .she has great hair."

When I read, I introduced the first piece:

"This is the first time I've ever been to NYC, and I dragged my friend Tya around with me all day, making her take me to different places. We went to CBGB's, and the Chelsea Hotel, and New York City makes me think of ghosts."

Then I launched into my memorial to Joey Ramone.

I felt good knowing that if his ghost had been sitting in the overly air-conditioned bookstore in one of those plastic chairs that night, he would've gotten what I was trying to do.

Gabba gabba hey.

And I also realized that what we do, us PMR people, is inherently political. No matter what we write or sing or make films about – we are creating our own media, telling the truths of our own lives, and that is revolutionary in and of itself. We are telling our stories instead of letting others speak for us.



We hung out at the store for a while longer, drinking a piss-tasting Brooklyn microbrew.

Then back on the subway to get my car and stuff from Tya's, saying goodbye, driving fast down the BQE with the most breath-taking view of the night-time city spread out before me.

I slept on top of a towel on the dusty hardwood floor of Mike's loft apartment; so we could all wake up early and drive to Cleveland.

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We got on the road in the morning, got out of the city, stopped for a greasy junk food breakfast in a tiny town somewhere. We stared out the window at all the cars and boarded up strip-malls, and that town was so much the same as any other little American town that I don't even remember whether it was in New Jersey or Pennsylvania.

The drive to Cleveland was more mountains, all the way through Pennsylvania, the Pochanos, trees and trees and trees. A little black bear ran across the road, darting in front of us on I-80, I saw him and I was startled awake from my half-asleep daze.

Fred and I talked about Pennsylvania – we have both lived there, I on the eastern side and he on the western. We talked about Wa-Wa's, and about the strangeness of loving such a fucked-up state.

At a rest stop, we got sludgy vending machine coffee that came in patriotic cups. Les was a little afraid.

"Wow. So many American flags everywhere, and even your rest stop coffee cups say 'God Bless America' on them."

Yes, it is a scary country.

We tried to sit outside and enjoy the fresh autumn air for a while, but we were attacked by ladybugs.

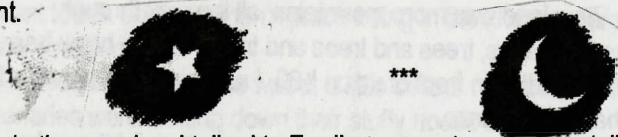
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By the time we got to Cleveland, we were all shaky and dizzy from lack of sleep and lack of food. We didn't have time to eat before the show, but it ended up being our best show. Not as far as the turnout – in fact, the audience was tiny. But in that bookstore basement with ceilings so low you

had to stoop not to hit your head on the buzzing fluorescent lights, even though it was our "hungry and delirious" show, we were spot-on. I guess we had been doing it long enough that we had it down, but not so long that complete and utter fatigue had set in yet. Our jokes were funny ("So," I said before I read, "the question everyone wants to know the answer to: does Cleveland actually rock?"), our timing was perfect, and it all just clicked. I wish I had a tape of that show.

Afterward, we went to eat with Crazy Carl, and I stood outside to smoke. I rocked out, bobbing my head and stamping my feet, to the dirtrock that I could hear pounding out of The Grog Shop.

That night, Fred's cats were making it difficult for me to breathe, so I slept on a rollaway bed on the front porch. I fell asleep easily, to the chilly breeze and the smells of car fumes and the sound of cats yowling in the night.



In the morning, I talked to Fred's roommate, Bob. We talked about Borges and Marquez, and about writer action figures.

"What writers would make good action figures?" Bob asked.

We decided Oscar Wilde would be a good one.

"And Sylvia Plath," I said. "The box would say: 'Oven Not Included.'"

The rest of the trip, we were split into two cars. On the way to Cincinnati, Les rode with me, and Fred took his car. It was pouring with rain almost the whole way, waves crashing against the car. Les and I listened to my pirate mix CD and ate fishbowl snack food, and with the water all around like we were lost at sea, I thought maybe we really were pirates. Land-locked pirates.

And in Cincinnati, you don't feel like you're in Ohio, anymore. You feel like you're in the south. There's all sorts of steep hills that your car chugs as it tries to climb, then zips back down the other side. And there's the river, all dark and weedy, trash bobbing along on the oil slick surface, the water making the air humid. And the houses are falling down big paintchipped with soggy couches and beer cans and purple trumpet flowers littering the porches. Some of the folks speak with drawls, there, all molasses-slow and



soft and tangy-sugary. And they have Waffle Houses. No, this isn't the midwestern part of Ohio, this is Ohio-tucky.

We parked our cars in front of the Buzz Coffeeshop, the place where the show was being held that night. I had to make sure my parking brake was on, so my car would not start rolling down the steep hill, mowing people down. We were going to take our shit into Buzz, and then wander around for a while, explore the town, get something to eat. We ended up talking to a dude in a Hawaiian shirt, who was one of the guitarists for The Maladroits – one of our local acts that night. And then this boy, this *man* walked up to us, talked to the guy from The Maladroits. I thought he was just some friend of his. I was immediately smitten with him. I'm not even sure what it was. He didn't appear to be anything extraordinary. He was tall, average build, with messy blondebrown hair and crooked teeth. He was wearing jeans and a half-unbuttoned plaid shirt with a wifebeater peeking out from under it. Maybe it was his sleepy-stoned eyes, or the way he slouched, or his almost-sneer. It was something, anyway. Who can explain how attraction works? It's like two magnets pulling at each other and sometimes you're pushed away from someone you think should be perfect for you, and sometimes you're pulled so strong toward someone you don't even like. He needed a light and so I lit his cigarette for him.

And then he left, and we walked around Cinci, looking for food.

Cincinnati has had a long history of racial tension between blacks and whites, culminating recently in race riots that lasted for five days in April of 2001. There were horrible, violent actions on both sides of it (not the least of which came from the police), many people were killed or badly injured, much property was damaged. People on both sides were opening fire on innocent bystanders, although I guess no one is an innocent bystander when you're dealing with that kind of hatred.

In the part of town we were wandering around in, you could really see that tension and destruction. There were a lot of buildings that couldn't have been more than five years old, yet their windows were boarded up and they stood there vacant and sad. And everyone eyed each other suspiciously, they could not tell who was an enemy and who was an ally.

Two scruffy punk kids who were sitting on the sidewalk and playing with a mangy dog asked me for money and a smoke. I gave them a smoke, but told them I didn't have any money to give them. I was running out and had to

make it for not only the rest of the tour, but another week after that. They were clearly pissed off at me.

"You like Crass?" the girl asked, noting the logo on the back of my jacket.

"Yeah."

"Hah. Like you're so *political punk rock*."

We found a copy of the *Cincinnati Citybeat*, with a fairly extensive article about us, where it said the PMR was the writer's equivalent of running away with the circus. This made me happy – that's what I had thought, too. We were a traveling sideshow, carnival, of words. That's why I had chosen to call myself the "freakish and bizarre zinester."

We stumbled onto a hip-hop shop run by an old white woman with blue-tinted hair and a gold cross necklace, and that was Cincinnati in a nutshell.

And we searched desperately for some place to eat. Fred and Les were willing to brave the five-layer chili, but I refused, knowing that a mixture of spaghetti, chili, onions, cheese, and French fries would not be a good thing to have in my nervous stomach before I preformed.

We were about to give up, to have another "hungry and delirious" show, and then we saw someone running down the street toward us, shouting: "Hey! Guys!" It was the slouchy, sexy boy whose cigarette I had lit.

Turned out he was Bruce, one of the Cincinnati PMR agents, the other being his old sister, Faith.

"I had no idea it was you," he said. "Faith was all pissed at me when she heard I letcha get away."

"We were just looking for a place to eat," I said. "I voted no on the chili."

"Theah's a great pizza place just up tha road," he nodded his head in that direction. "Let's go theah. I'll eat with ya."

So we all ate pizza, drank beer, I sat next to Bruce and was increasingly into him – the way he crinkled up his eyes at me when I spoke. And his voice. I could have listened to him talk for hours. I wish I could describe his voice, capture sonic waves on paper so you could hold this page up to your ear and hear him speak. He had this low, throaty rumble that seemed to come not so much from his vocal cords as from his Adam's apple, and I could feel it in my toes. The way he pronounced things, too – it didn't sound like he was from Cincinnati, or even Nebraska (which is where he grew up), but some sort of big city that was everywhere and nowhere at once.



"Theah's this licka store down tha street," he was telling me. "It's cahllid Staggah Lee's."

Stagger Lee's is a fucking excellent name for a liquor store anyway, but he way *he* said it, good *Lord*. Staggah Lee's.

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And then the show.

A rush of excitement. You walk into Buzz and you're afraid you might trip over something, because it is so dim-yellow lit and so smoky and dusty in there that it takes your eyes several minutes to adjust. And when they do adjust, you notice all the freaky punkrock hiskool and university kids, all talking and laughing, sitting on cigarette-burnt green chairs and old gray couches. The air smells like cloves and dark, rich coffee. Just the kind of place I like to hang out.

The turnout was great, so many people, the biggest crowd we had on the whole tour. And I felt kinda rockstarish, we were on this tall upper level seating area-cum-stage, high above everyone else.

The Maladroits were first, surf rock, so good that, as Fred put it: "They make me wanna go surf on the Ohio River." Yes, and their bass player had a stand-up bass and I love that thrum-thrum sound of the giant bass strings being plucked. Makes my hips twitch.

In between acts, I talked to Bruce, and when I read, I said:

"I don't have any fancy props. No wrestling mask like Fred, no apple pipes like Les. But I dressed up fancy just for you, Cincinnati!"

Everyone cheered and it was true, I was dressed for rock&roll that night – fishnet zipper top, leopard print bondage skirt, fishnet stockings, tall boots black eyeliner red lipstick.

I read my mix tape piece again, and everyone laughed, and I read a piece about Waffle House, and when I was done everyone was clamoring to buy my stuff. Incredible.

"Hey," Bruce said to me. "You like Tom Waits?"

(I had mentioned him in my mixtape piece.)

"Are you kidding? I love Tom Waits."

"I thought girls didn't like Tom. I've never met any women who like his music."

"Maybe you've been hanging out with the wrong women."

Then, we all went back to Faith's house to get fucked up.

\*\*\*

Her house was a big Cincinnati house, a punk house, a fallingdown house that looked like a dowdy old woman in a flowered muumuu. It was just off a street called Coon Street and I'm sure it was just short for raccoon, I'm sure it was, but with the whole history of the tensions in Cincinnati, it made me shudder.

We all smoked pot, Bruce went to get beer, he came back, I shared his honey-toasted cigarettes.

"Which is stupid," he said. "They don't taste anything like honey."

He mentioned something casually about his girlfriend, but he kept flirting with me, and I wondered – what is it about me? Why do all these men go astray? I thought it must be the way I looked that night, the tight shirt and short skirt, my body. Which is funny, cos I've never been very confident in the way I looked, but it had to be that, there's no way anyone could just be interested in me. I think everything is sex, anyway, I think it's bullshit when people tell you they're "just interested in your *brain*, your *soul*." Yeah, sure.

So, anyway, he brought up having a girlfriend, but he kept flirting with me, and it didn't stop me from flirting with him, either.

Yes, we all moved upstairs to hang out in Faith's room, a bunch of us crowded in there among bottles of beer ashtrays action figures and we listened to bluegrass. Bruce and I sat on the futon, and tho there was plenty of space for us to spread apart, we were right next to each other, legs touching. I placed the cigarettes and beer strategically so he'd have to reach over me, brush against me, to get to them. And we talked.

"Intense" conversations, as Bruce called them. Poetry, literature, Tom Waits, drugs, God – these were all brought up that night. I recited poetry to impress him, he told me about physics theories and I was so impressed. "Distance equals rate times time" would be like a poem coming from his mouth.

And then, and then, he started touching my foot. My legs were curled up under me on the futon, my boots were off and I was wearing fishnets. He



started running his fingers along the side of my foot, lightly but insistently. I looked at him. He raised an eyebrow. I rested my hand on top of his hand. Then he twined his fingers with mine, and started running his thumb back and forth over the back of my hand, and I did the same to his. We sat like that for maybe ten minutes, touching each other's hands, not talking, just staring at each other and smiling all dopey and drugged.

And then, Faith looked at us – and noticed what we were doing.

"Bruce!" she shouted, startling us out of our haze. "I need to talk to you."

He made no move to get up or move away from me, just smiled all slow at his sister.

"NOW!" she yelled.

He jumped up and they walked down the stairs. They had to have been down there for at least a half hour. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but every once in a while the soft murmurs drifting up through the floorboards were punctuated by shouts.

Faith came back upstairs, sat down like nothing had happened. After a few minutes, Bruce came up:

"Hey, everyone, it's late. I should get going. I have to work tomorrow."

He shook our hands, walked down the stairs, and I heard the front door close behind him. I was disappointed and upset. Faith kept talking to me all fake-sweet, but looking at me with daggers. "Fucking bitch sister. Girls never like me. Just cos. . ." Grrr.

A few minutes later, I decided to go downstairs:

"I need to see if I have any more cigarettes."

I sat on the couch in the living room, sad that I'd never talk to Bruce again. And then the front door opened. It was the man.

"Hey, you," he said. "Whatcha doin' down heah?"

"Lookin for cigarettes."

"Ya got any?"

"No, I'm out."

"Heah."

He handed me a half-full pack.

"Thanks."

"No problem. I actually came back cos I had fahgatten the book ya gave me."

He picked up a copy of *Like Burned Out Bulbs On a Ferris Wheel* that was lying on the table.

"Gimme your e-mail address," he said. "I'll write to ya."

I scribbled it on the back of my book.

"Get up," he said.

I stood up, walked over to him. He grabbed me in a tight, tight hug, so tight. I buried my face in his neck, inhaled his smell.

"It was shahkinly good talking to ya," he said. "Shahkinly."

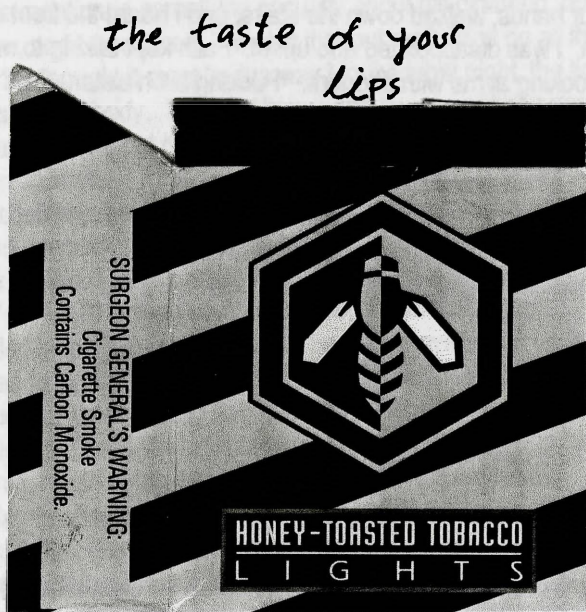
We hugged for a few beats longer, kinda staring at each other, knowing this was as far as things could go.

He said "bye" again and was gone, this time for real.

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In the morning, I read out on the porch, on a soggy old couch, smoking the honey-toasted cigarettes which didn't taste like honey, but at least now I could imagine they tasted like Bruce's lips. Yum yum.

I soaked in the butter-sun, felt the warmth of September's last heatwave teasing me before the chill of autumn set in. I watched the bumblebees bzzz lazily in and out of purple trumpet flowers.



*on a half-finished cigarette is the  
closest to kissing you i was  
allowed to get.*



Before we left Ohio-tucky, Fred and Les and I ate breakfast at Waffle House, they humored my obsession.

"Besides," I said, "Les needs to eat at Waffle House. It's a southern U.S. institution."

Our waiter had a heavy drawl. I sighed about how rock'n'roll Cincinnati was, I ate a slidy, greasy egg and gooey orange cheese sandwich, mounds of hashbrowns, coffee. Fred embarrassed us by playing Waffle House country tunes on the jukebox.

\*\*\*

And when we stopped at a rest stop, I had so many ideas percolating like cowboy coffee in my head that I had to get out my notebook and scribble them all down. Fred was filming me for our Book TV tour diary.

"*Safety Pin Girl* number 22 in progress!" he said.

He was right.

We got stuck in rush hour on the way into Chicago. But we got to my apartment with plenty of time to spare, time to consolidate our stuff into one car, head to Wicker Park, grab a bite at Earwax, and then go set up at Quimby's.

I was designated to go run over to the liquor store and get us beer so we could all get sufficiently boozed up.

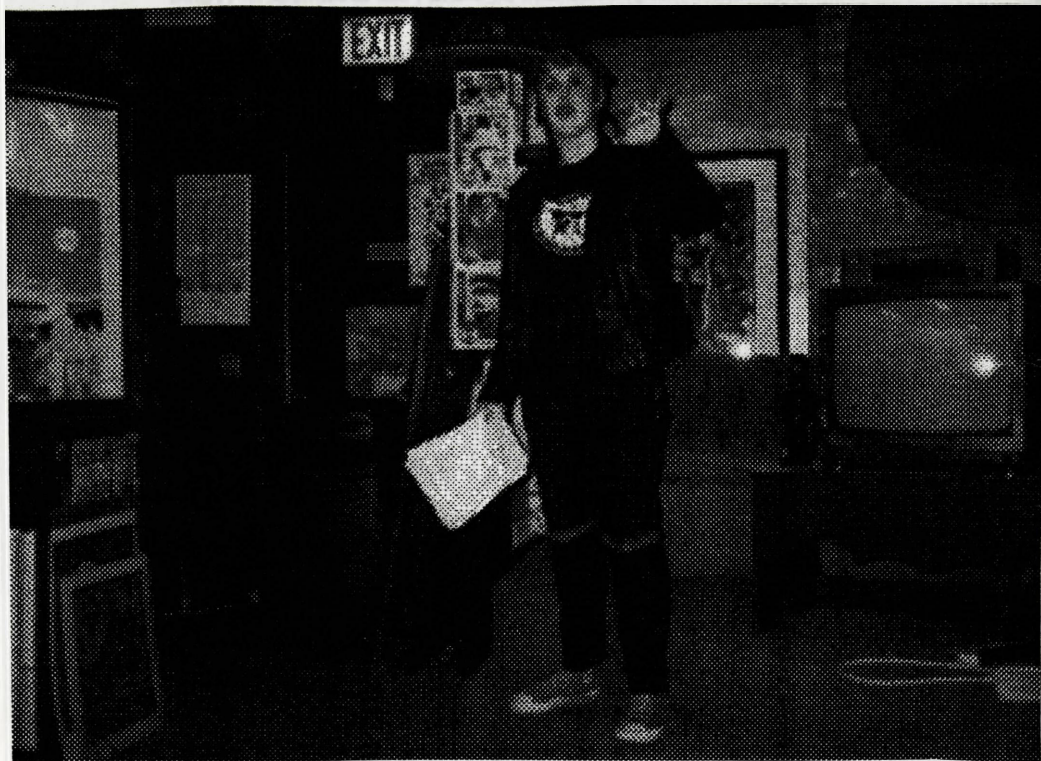
I bought some Goose Island for them, and imagine my happy surprise when I discovered that this particular liquor store sold bottles of La Fin Du Monde. I hauled it all back to Quimby's, and we started to drink, waited for the crowd to arrive. I listened to the satisfying pop! as the cork exploded out of my bottle, tasted its smoky woodfire sweetness, thought of Montreal.

The crowd was very small, even smaller than the one in Cleveland, and I was angry. I mean, what the fuck? My own city, and hardly anyone was there. Todd Dills, the Chicago agent at the time, had kind of fucked it up. He hadn't promoted it at all, and he had set up a reading/party for his own zine, *The 2nd Hand*, just the night before. He even admitted that most people won't come to a reading two nights in a row. I felt like he sabotaged it on purpose. When I'm the Chicago agent, I will get asses in the seats. Beyond Todd's sabotage, I was pissed that none of my friends showed up. None of them. I had expected about ten or fifteen people to be there, but not one of them showed. Motherfuckers.

It turned out okay, I guess. The tiny crowd we *did* have was lovely, and Greg Gillam, our opening dude, read a hilarious story about the "disco ass."

And afterward, I took the guys to Delilah's, my favorite Chicago bar.

Then we crashed in my filthy apartment on what was one of my very last nights living there.



\*\*\*

In the morning, we cut around the corner and had a Dunkin' Donuts breakfast. Then we said our goodbyes and I watched them get into Fred's car and drive away, these two guys who had become two of my best friends in the past ten days. I was almost starting to think of them as my brothers.

I walked back into my apartment to start packing up my shit.

Going on the Perpetual Motion Roadshow had irrevocably changed my life. I knew, after that, that I am going to make it as a writer. I knew that I didn't need anyone but myself.

It was time to end one chapter of my life and start right on with writin' a new one.



# WAY DOWN HERE ON CANAL STREET

way down here on canal street  
the bike messengers stare you down  
and businessmen brush right past you  
in their rush to get out of town

above the ferris wheel on navy pier  
the golden light is fadin  
and when you're standin on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor  
you can always feel a building swayin

i had no trouble crossin the border  
though i hoped that they'd turn me away  
cos then i'd've found myself back at yr door  
and stayed there an extra day

i already wrote a song about you  
and now i'm writin this verse  
the fact that i miss you, the fact that i love you  
well, i can't decide which is worse

i met two pirates in the adirondacks  
they called me a handsome lass  
i drank too much coffee and saw dead animals  
splayed on the interstate overpass

in new york city i went to cbgb's,  
spent my day on the lower east side  
and when i got to the chelsea hotel,  
well, i sang leonard cohen and cried

cincinnati is full of hills  
and purple trumpet flowers on vines  
all the fallin-down houses have porches  
and railings for the flowers to climb

i met a boy in cincinnati

---

with dirtyblonde hair and a habit of smoke  
he had a girlfriend, he told me  
but still we held hands as we spoke

and i don't know what it is about me  
that makes men go astray  
i thought that i'd like being wanted  
but i just feel whorish this way

i've been drinkin even more than i used to  
la fin du monde, rum or whiskey & coke  
and i'm always waitin for somethin  
and i suck on my cigs til i choke

which means there's no fetus, no embryo,  
no fishes swimmin in my belly  
as a souvenir of my night in montreal

this means i won't be a mother  
and, i guess, you won't be a dad  
we'll never have a child together  
and i'm not sure if i'm relieved or if i'm sad

now i'm waitin for the train to take me home  
i'm tired and it's gettin pretty late  
i'm sittin here on a wooden bench  
they're boardin track seven, track eight

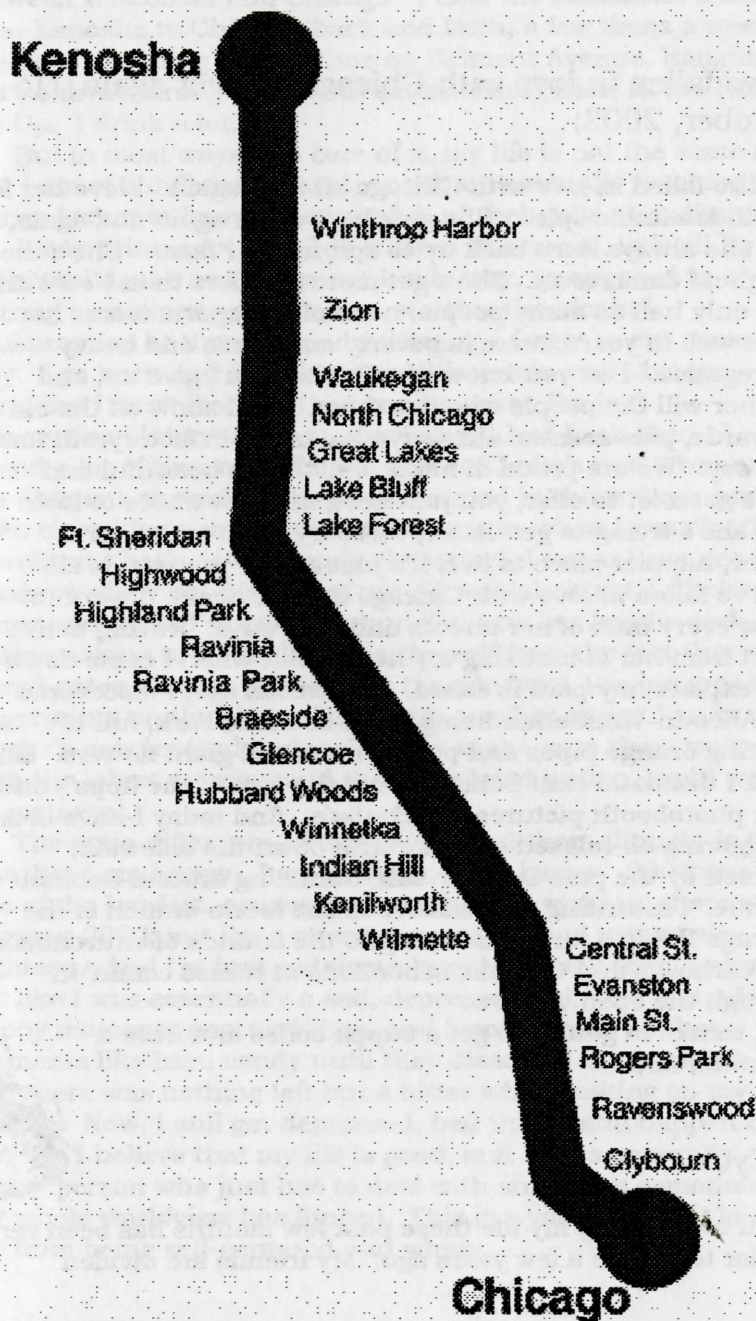
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and way down here on canal street  
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above the ferris wheel on navy pier  
the golden light is fadin  
and when you're standin on the fourteenth floor,  
you can always feel a building swayin.



# CHICAGO STORIES



## I. I've fallen in love with Chicago all over again. (15 October, 2003)

I've fallen in love with Chicago all over again. I love her for her indomitable spirit. She gets beat down again and again, but she always rises back up to spit in your face. She's the toughest damn town. She's got more murders than New York and only half as many people, none of her sports teams have done well in years, there is poverty and crime and heavy segregation. But you know what? She won't give up, and neither will the people who live there. We'll show off the old railyards, piss-scented alleyways, smashed-in factory windows, and say: "We are proud of her scars." She's beautiful and she's got a lot to offer, you just need to know where to look. And she's trying to get better, we're trying to make her a better, happier place to live, it's just a slow process, is all.

I've fallen in love with Chicago all over again. I want to know every inch of her streets and alleyways. Having to live apart from her is breaking my heart. But when I come down and explore, my pain is eased. Two weeks ago, I discovered the Alice-in-Wonderlandish garden in Grant Park, full of twisting orange pipes and purple trees and giant flowers. Last week I drank 25 cent Schlitz ("Just the kiss of the hops") and took photobooth pictures at Schuba's. And today I have been swaggering all relaxed and powerful down the sidewalk, warmed by the pale October sun, bumming around Belmont Avenue. I'm writing this missive in the Merlo branch of the Chicago Public Library, listening to the sounds of churchbells and carhorns and Catholic schoolkids at recess comin' in through the open window.

I think I'm gonna go get a cuppa coffee and have a cigarette, now.



## II. Cycles

In some ways, my life these past few months has been very similar to my life a few years ago. My friends are divided



between Wisconsin and Chicago. I take the commuter train from Kenosha to Chicago, back and forth, a few times a week. I've been spending a lot of time on Belmont Avenue, hanging out (to drink strong coffee and eat seasoned fries) at the Pick Me Up. I drink a lot, too.

But in most ways, the core of it, my life is not the same at all. I am at a different school, one that is actually teaching me things I want to know, one that I don't feel quite so suffocated at. I may drink a lot, but I do it more in a social, let's all be crazy and dance and make out kinda way, as opposed to a "sitting alone in my dorm room, starting the alcohol consumption at three p.m., drinking so I forget to cut myself" way. I go back and forth between Wisconsin and Chicago, sure, but I don't feel like I'm running away, I'm just commuting. I don't have the boyfriend I had back then. I spend a lot of time on Belmont, but at Clarke's now - because the Kokomo, the coffee shop I frequented in those days, has been closed for a couple years. Of course, when I pass by the storefront (that's now a trendy shoestore), I swear I can see the shadows of my old friends, of my old self (she's got a Chelsea fringe and a plaid skirt; she's huddled into her hoodie and chain smoking to try and distract herself from the fact that she hasn't eaten all day) peering out the windows, leaving greasy fingerprints on the glass. But that's another story. I go to Clarke's now instead and make eyes at the cute short waiter with the labret piercing and the Radiohead button, and I work on my novel.

The main difference between now and then, though, is the fact that I am happy. I am actually, truly happy. 2003 was one of the hardest, craziest years of my life, right up there with the year 2000, but I'm a stronger person than I was at age eighteen. And I'm just god damn happier. Back then, I always felt like I was essentially a sad, depressed girl, who had a few happy moments now and then, and I would suck on those moments like hard candy until they dissolved in my mouth and there was nothing left but a bitter white coating on my tongue. Now, I still get depressed, bad things still happen to me, but I believe that my life is good, and I am a generally happy person who just has to deal with shittiness sometimes. My whole worldview has flipped. This is a good thing. It keeps me from being self-centered and whiny.

Right now I work and go to school in Chicago and live in Wisconsin. The commute between Kenosha and Ogilvie Transportation Center can be stressful, especially on Monday mornings when I have to be at the train station before it's even light out. I'd do anything for just a few more minutes in bed. Instead I pour coffee into my Fuel mug, grab a handful of roasted almonds or some such thing, get in my car and drive to the train. It's a little strange, the only other people on the roads are other commuters, or people who have to work early in the factories. The sky is just beginning to be tinted with orange at the very edges, above Lake Michigan, the rest of the sky is still navy blue, the moon is still hanging on for another hour. It's strange because, most other nights, I don't even get home and go to sleep until a couple hours before I have to get up on Mondays. Once I'm on the train, I put my headphones on, and make some sort of pathetic attempt to do some college-related reading. But usually I end up falling asleep before we even get to Waukegan.

On Wednesday mornings, when I don't have to wake up quite so early, I don't always fall asleep on the train. Sometimes I actually get writing done, or I'll just listen to my headphones and look out the window, watching all the towns fly past. Some of the towns are fancy, full of large houses made of brown stones, downtowns sprinkled with expensive boutiques and cafes. Many of the towns are run-down, dirty, I see downtowns littered with dive bars and strip clubs; peer into backyards where the wet clothes on the clotheslines are flapping in the breeze, backyards decorated with broken toys and the rusted-out shells of cars. The train blasts its whistle as we fly through the dawn light.

By the time I get on the train to come back home, I'm usually so exhausted I'm ready to drop, only I can't sleep, because my brain is buzzing with everything I've done in the last couple days and I have to write or forget it all. On Thursday evenings, I'm delirious, cos I stay with Krystle and Allison on Wednesday nights and we are crazy girls, we don't sleep, we prefer to stay up late in the warm, dry apartment that's all decorated with Mexican folkart and mutilated dolls, smoking cigarettes and drinking cheap champagne and dancing to World/Inferno. And when there is no room left in the front of the train that's about to travel the Metra Union Pacific North Line, I have to sit in the back with all the stuck-



up businessmen and women, where the seats are softer and blue instead of orange, and the bathrooms don't have quite as strong a stench. They mostly look at me like I'm the scum of the earth, when one of them has to squeeze in next to me, they keep their bodies clenched as close to the other side of the seat as possible. They must think I have cooties. Sometimes, there will be some businessman in Brooks Brothers suit and spit-shined shoes who thinks, "Oh, punk rock chick, she must be freaky in bed," and I think, "Yeah, maybe I am, but *you'll* never fuckin find out, mister." He rubs his leg against mine gently, so gently that I am almost left thinking it's my imagination, I must be crazy. He tries to make small talk with me, ask me: "So, what're you writing, dollface?" "A story." "A story about what?" "A story about this girl who chops a guy's cock off, steals it, and holds it hostage." I watch his face turn purple and then he does what they all do, slide himself as far away from me as possible.

Once, I was sitting in one of those fancy blue seats, and my period had started that day. I hadn't been prepared for it, and I was bleeding right through my black skirt, blood pouring out between my thighs all hot and sticky and brown. It was very satisfying, bleeding on that train.

I've been staying with Krystle and Allison every Wednesday night, and I have become so close to them. I love those girls, they're two of my favorite people in the whole world, and soon I will be moving in with them. I can't wait. As it is, we already spend so many hours together that we've started bleeding at the same time.

### III. Beer, Disobedience, and Curses

One particular Wednesday night in mid-October, October fifteenth to be exact, I decided to skip class so I could go to Quimby's and catch the October leg of the Perpetual Motion Roadshow. Sean Carswell was on it, and I love his stories, and I write for his magazine, and I thought I would go meet him.

I got to Wicker Park too early, decided to go to Filter and write a little, if I was gonna skip class, well, at least I could get some work done. Filter has become one of my favorite cafes over these last few months, pretty much every time I'm in Wicker Park I go there. It's huge and full of ratty, sagging

couches with the stuffing popping out, where you crowd in next to everyone from bike messengers with four-gauge piercings in their earlobes to yuppies-in-training surfing the web on their brand new laptops. Plus, you can smoke there, and there aren't so many cafes around these days where people who partake in the smoking of tobacco&tar can enjoy their nasty habit without getting yelled at. Yes, I went to Filter. I decided to drink herbal tea, not coffee or even black tea, I had too much coffee that day already and was jittery and hyper. The girl behind the counter was hott and lithe, all leopard muscles rippling under her skin, black hair that sparked with blue static electricity, and she was absolutely covered in sailor tattoos. Anchors, sparrows, stars, curvy ladies clad in bikinis and winking seductively. I decided I was getting honeybush tea, I love things that taste like honey, and, well, how could I pass up something with a name like honeybush? I was feeling all lustful and dyke-y from staring at that girl's ass sitting in her tight pants, gazing at her sailor tattoos, so when she asked:

"So, what kinda tea do you want?" I said:

"Honey, just give me some of your bush."

She pulled me by the collar of my jacket, across the counter toward her, and kissed me with those crimson lips.

No. That didn't really happen, I didn't really say that, I'm not that kind of girl.

Um. That's a lie, too. I *am* that kind of girl. I've said things like that before, and usually they've worked, but I was feeling shy that night. I just asked for the honeybush tea and smiled at her, then sat quietly on one of the sofas, writing and smoking and sipping the hot tea.

I saw the show and afterward, I hung out for a while with Sean and Jennifer Whiteford and John Beer, they were hungry and so we went to Earwax to eat. We talked about Wesley Willis.

"It's really sad that he's gone," said Sean. "I think he kept the music scene from taking itself too seriously. We're gonna put a little tribute to him in the next issue of *Razorcake*."



"You know there's a Burger King down the street here with a drawing Wesley did of the neighborhood. I'll show it to you on the way back to my car."

"Everyone's dying lately, what's with that? I mean, in the past couple years - Joey Ramone, Dee Dee Ramone, Joe Strummer, Nina Simone, the guys from the Exploding Hearts, Johnny Cash, Wesley Willis. . ."

He trailed off and all four of us sat there, kinda absent-mindedly sipping our drinks, thinking about all the ghosts that crackled like static in the grooves of our favorite records.

We changed the subject, talked about happier things.

"Hey," said Sean, "it's pretty damn cool to be sitting here with John Beer and Jessica Disobedience. Those have got to be two of the best last names I have ever heard."

And before we went back to the car, Jessica Disobedience stopped at a nearby liquor store to get a bottle of her favorite Quebec beer.

I drove Jennifer to the Greyhound station, 630 W. Harrison. Afterward, trying to get to Allison and Krystle's place, I went the wrong way and ended up getting lost in Pilsen. After driving around for about an hour, cursing my stupidity and lack of map, I finally found my way to I-94 and took that back north. I saw the skyscrapers downtown, all with windows lit up in patterns, all saying something like "GO CUBS!" or with a giant "C" for the Cubs' logo.

You see, that was the night of the Cubs' last chance. They had been doing well all season, better than they had in a long time, despite Sammy Sosa's cheating, and then that crazy fan had to go and catch that foul ball. Or maybe they just believed that they wouldn't make it, and so it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. In any case, that was the night of their last chance. If they won that game, they'd go on to the World Series for the first time in 58 years, and if they lost, well, they'd have to wait until next season to try again. I really wanted them to win, to at least get to the World Series. Not for the fans (I hate drunk Cubs fans in Wrigleyville), not even for the team, but for the whole damn city. The Cubs are an underdog team and Chicago is an underdog city and we needed that. Sometimes it feels like Chicago just gets beaten down and beaten down and if the Cubs had won that night, it

would have been like saying: "See? We didn't give up, and we fucking won!" But they didn't win. I felt it before I knew it. The disappointment hung in the air, the streets were silent, there was no shouting or partying coming out of the bars. And when I turned on the radio, sure enough, I found out they had lost.

The god damn curse of the Billy Goat.

There's this place on lower Michigan Avenue called the Billy Goat Tavern. It's this real divey-dive, was probably once a hangout for gangsters, is now a hangout for dirty old men and hardened journalists. It was made famous in that *Saturday Night Live* sketch, you know, the one where they said: "Cheezeborger cheezeborger cheezeborger. No Pepsi. .Coke." I like to go there sometimes, beyond the novelty of going to a dirty dive that's actually underground, it's usually pretty quiet there so I can get some writing done, and the coffee is incredibly cheap - fifty cents, and only a quarter for refills.

Anyway, back in 1945 was the last time the Cubs were in the World Series. William Sianis, the guy who owned the Billy Goat Tavern in those days, decided he'd like to advertise his tavern. So he tried to bring his pet goat with him into Wrigley Field. Well, they wouldn't let the goat in. Sianis cursed the team, and they remain cursed to this day.

When I arrived at Allison's and Krystle's, Allison was gone and Krystle was asleep. I popped open my bottle of La Fin Du Monde, took a swig, and made a toast to the Cubbies: "There's always next year, boys."

#### IV. My body is a canvas.

Billy came over one night and we brought out giant rolls of paper and lots of paints; we drank a little bit of apple wine. We started out just painting, whatever came into our heads, my head that night was filled with Celtic crosses and broken hearts. Then Billy got crazy, started smearing paint all over his body, rubbing himself on the white butcher paper. It looked like he had been bleeding, his blood was orange and purple and green. He rubbed paint on his lips, made kiss



marks on Allison's neck and my cheek and the paper. He poured paint on his tongue and started licking things.

"I don't think you're supposed to put that in your mouth, Billy."

"It says it's non-toxic."

"That just means it won't kill you. It doesn't mean it's a good idea to ingest it."

But we put lots of things in our mouths that probably shouldn't be there.

I wasn't even drunk that night, not really even tipsy.

Krystle and I took our shirts off. I didn't want to get paint on my shirt, instead I ended up with paint on my bra.

Billy, Krystle and myself took what was left of the apple wine and all the bottles of paint, and we sat in the middle of north Oakley, painting on each other's backs. I stared at an icy-blue streetlamp until its image had burned itself into my retinas, Krystle glopped the cold, slimy paint onto my back. She painted a burning heart, a sacred heart, it seemed appropriate.

Afterward, as the paint dried on our bodies, Billy climbed a tree, monkey-boy. I took the empty bottle of apple wine and threw it across the street. I could feel the shatter in my bones. It sparkled in the icy-blue streetlamp light.



All four of us took a shower together, trying to rub the paint off each other, but I still woke up with crusted paint everywhere.

## V. His kissy kissy mouth.

When I got an e-mail at the beginning of November from a man I hadn't seen since June, a man I had told I had a crush on him who had never responded and I feared I had scared him off, I was ecstatic.

"Come to the *Bail Magazine* release party," I told him. "It's at Delilah's."

I knew he liked that bar, hung out there sometimes, and I also knew that it wouldn't really matter what bar it was at. He's a drunk. But then, so am I.

I didn't really think he'd show up. I made myself pretty, just in case. Donned my "Everyone Loves an Irish Girl" t-shirt, because it's true, because he's an Irish *boy*, because I feel sexy in that shirt. Because it had gotten me lucky before.

I got to Delilah's at 9:30, an hour and a half after the whole shindig had started. The place was packed and loud and sweaty, skate videos on the television screens, multi-colored crazy hairdos bobbing along to the Social Distortion song playing on the stereo. I squeezed myself through the bodies and found Joe, my editor.

"Hey," he said. "I was just leaving."

We talked for a few moments, he introduced me to some of the other magazine people. I was looking for the boy, but trying to be discreet for him.

Oh, I forgot to mention. Joe knows him. Their bands have played many shows together.

"Are you looking for someone?" Joe asked.

"Um. . .no. . ."

"He's sitting back there."

He jerked his head in the direction of the bar.

I could feel my face grow hot, suddenly shy that someone had caught me.

Joe just smirked and shook his head at me, like: "What am I going to do with you."

I squeezed my way through more people, back to the bar. Sure enough the boy was sitting there, his face propped on his hand, looking melancholy and drunk. He was wearing a black suit that was much too big for him, and his brown hair was messy. When he saw me walking toward him, he grinned and jumped off his stool. He hugged me.

"Jess! I was just about to leave, I didn't think you were going to show up!"

"How long have you been here?"

"Since eight."

Christ. He had been there the whole time, waiting for me. He realized how desperate that sounded, of course I didn't think it was desperate, I thought it was wonderful, but he quickly added:

"I mean it was no big deal. My band practices three blocks from here, so I just walked over here after practice was done with."



Sure. You managed to time it so that you'd arrive at exactly eight. Silly boy.

He bought me a whiskey and Coke and he insisted that I sit down, even though he wobbled a little as he tried to stand there. We talked for a few minutes, and then we decided to head upstairs, where it might be a little less crowded.

Upstairs wasn't much better, still only one of us was able to sit down (he insisted that I did, again), but at least there was more room for him to stand and he wasn't in any danger of falling on anyone. We talked some more, he asked what I had been doing with my life. When he lit my cigarette, he cupped his hands so close to my face that the palm of his left hand brushed my cheek, and the match flared so dangerously near my nose that all I could smell for a few moments afterward was sulfur. Every couple minutes, he would look at me, say "I . . ." and then look away and say "nevermind."



After we had been there about an hour, he said:

"Jess, I have to go. I haven't gotten much sleep lately, I haven't eaten anything today, and I just feel really out of it. I'm not the best conversationalist right now, anyway. Give me a call next time you're going to be down here, all right?"

I nodded.

I got up off my stool to give him a goodbye hug, and he reached toward me as though to hug me. But then he pulled me toward him by my waist, and kissed me. Then he kissed me again, such a soft kiss, in the little hollow between my neck and collarbone.

He started to walk away, but after a few steps he turned to me again, grinned his lop-sided smile, and tilted: "Cheers, love."

My heart melted into a puddle of goo.

## VI. Tango 'til they're sore.

One particularly windy night, as I walked up the subway steps to head to my fiction class, my favorite hat was

blown right off my head and whipped into the middle of the street.

If my life were a movie, it would have landed on a beautiful someone's head, and they would have come to return it to me, and it would have been love at first hat.

My life isn't a movie.

I watched the hat get run over by an SUV.

Later that night, at Allison and Krystle's, I told them my sob story.

"Wait," said Allison. "I have a hat that would be perfect for you."

She ran into her bedroom and then emerged carrying a lovely hat. A porkpie hat. A Tom Waits hat. A Frank Sinatra hat. Brown with a black band around it.

"Are you sure you don't want it? It's such a great hat!"

"It's too big for me, and anyway, it will suit you better. Put it on."

I set the hat on my head, went to look at myself in the mirror, and smiled at my reflection. What a great fucking hat, man, I looked like some 1940s journalist or a member of the Rat Pack or something.

Krystle had a hat much like mine that she was borrowing from a friend. So we put on our hats and grabbed a bunch of change off the dining room table, stepped out into the blustery Chicago night to go buy some whiskey.

"Hey, you two goddesses!" some guy shouted at us, and then several moments later:

"Are you guys gangsters?"

We're gangster goddesses, don't you know.

At the liquor store, we bought a bottle of Southern Comfort and a pack of smokes. Back at the apartment, safe from the howling wind, we put Tom Waits on the stereo, cracked open the bottle of SoCo, and started drinking.

"I get worried about myself sometimes," Krystle stated. "No matter what kind of mood I'm in, I imagine throwing myself onto the el tracks and being electrocuted, or stabbing



myself to death with a cold, steel knife. I worry that someday I'll actually go through with it."

"I'm the same way, though," I said. "Death scares me and fascinates me. I don't want to ever die, but I want to kill myself. Sometimes I think that I want to commit suicide just so I won't have to wonder when death is coming. This way, I get to decide."

We sat silently for a while, passing the bottle back and forth, lighting up fresh cigs.

"If I were going to kill myself, I know where I'd do it," I told her. "I'd jump off the pedestrian bridge in Grant Park, right into the railyard. Even if the fall didn't kill me, I'd time it just right, so my breath would be squished out when I got run over by a train."

The two of us kept drinking all night, until we passed out on the floor.

## VII. Death march of progress

My cousin Kara and her mom came to Chicago so Kara could visit some college she might want to go to. I stayed with them one night, at a hotel downtown.

I took them for dinner at Clarke's, walked them around Clark and Belmont. I knew Kara would appreciate the crowded streets and record shops and the boys with three-foot-tall orange mohicans.

"This is the Punkin' Donuts," I said, pointing to the Dunkin' Donuts on the corner of Belmont and Clark. "Well, it used to be the Punkin' Donuts, anyway."

It isn't really, not anymore. The outside is painted all bubblegum pink, and it's now a Dunkin' Donuts and Baskin Robbins combined. The attendants that patrol the parking lot now really pay attention, they kick punk rock kids and homeless men out for loitering. The whole thing is so clean and brightly lit.

Everyone says new is better, fancier is better. But it isn't, always, especially when it comes to the death march of progress. Sure, the new "improved" versions of things may be more upscale, cleaner, but they also don't have the same character the old places did. It takes a while for a place to

build up character, years, and when they go and remodel it like that, they suck it all out.

Punkin' Donuts was a Chicago landmark, a place to be even way back in the eighties, and they fucking killed it.

## VIII. Three other brief moments

One: At Allison's Dia De Los Muertos party, a bunch of us really drunken kids (and a few straight-edgers) sat in a big circle in the living room. While one boy pounded out chords on his beat-up acoustic guitar, the rest of us screamed the words to "Beat On the Brat."



Two: Billy took photographs of me all fake passed-out in Allison's bathtub, holding a half-smoked cigarette and a half-full bottle of SoCo, wearing nothing but smeared red lipstick and my porkpie hat.

Three: Krystle and I sat in the bathroom, carving symbols into our flesh with sterilized scalpels she had stolen from her job, until the blood poured out all warm and red. She carved hearts into herself, I carved a Celtic cross into my ankle. My blood is not something that just anyone gets to see.

Later, Krystle and Allison and I all walked around the apartment, dressed in just sweaters and panties, listening to Weezer and drinking hot chocolate with butterscotch Schnapps.



# IF THESE SCARS COULD TALK.

Merely scarred. That was the demand when it was  
demanded that I beguile the world with my flesh to  
beetle and mental control. I wonder what they'd say if they



scars. I needed a way to speak of my body.  
A language, physical, powerful, of scars as a internal.  
If these scars could talk.



could go character, years, and when they go and recorded it  
like that, they work it all out.

Phantom Dancers was a Chicago landmark, a place to be  
even way back in the eighties, and they fucking killed it.

VIII. Three other brief moments

I smoked weed and listened to The Cure. I lay on my bed for  
a while, listening to the blood rush through my veins. I had lit some  
candles, and this one particular pillar was fascinating me. I watched  
the flame dance and twist, changing from gold to orange and back  
again, puffing out little smoke signals. I must have watched that  
flame for at least twenty minutes. I had a glimpse of a memory, a  
memory from someone else's life. Being stoned in a bedroom,  
listening to The Cure, suddenly it was 1985 and I saw myself in the  
mirror with dramatic slashes of white eyeshadow and hair too full of  
Aquanet. Things really haven't changed so much, in some ways. It  
could be twenty years ago and we're all the same and that's good,  
that's good.



# IF THESE SCARS COULD TALK.

Mentally disturbed. That was the diagnosis when it was discovered that I frequently slashed or carved things into my flesh to relieve emotional and mental anguish. I wonder what they'd say if they found out that I still do it sometimes, only now it's not always about relieving internal pain. Sometimes it's a ritual. A way to mark a rite of passage.

\*\*\*

I put a mix tape in my stereo and pressed "play." I lit cinnamon-scented candles as I heard the first notes to "Left and Leaving" come jangling out of my speakers. Then I sat down on my bedroom floor with a pocketknife in my hand, took a deep breath, and proceeded to carve a heart with an arrow through it in my left ankle.

It's not so much pain just a warm tingling sensation the blood seeps out bright lipstickred trickling down splattering on the floor. It's fucking beautiful.

Why a heart with an arrow through it? I've just closed one chapter in my life and started on a new one. I've gotten out of a long relationship and learned some important lessons about love and myself. I needed a way to mark it on my body.

A tangible, physical reminder of something internal.

If these scars could talk.



This is the story

of the boys who loved you,



who love you now

and loved you then.



# I SEE YOU EVERY TIME I TURN MY BACK.

Halloween was a strange night. I guess it is supposed to be strange, spooky, but all it did was leave me feeling icky. My skin covered with sin and bruises. I was wild, out of it, head full of rum, lungs full of nicotine and marijuana. Appropriate that I was dressed as a fallen angel – all black wings, torn dress, flames crawling up my legs, bloodied bandages on my wrists. I remember that the moon was blue.

At one point in the night, I was standing outside, making out with a pirate girl and a boy who was dressed up like another one of our friends. The only one of them I wanted to be making out with was the pirate girl, I think she felt the same way, but the boy gets jealous easily and so we had to include him, had to make him part of it if we wanted to be kissing each other at all.

\*\*\*

Trying to have a *serious relationship talk* while listening to Tom Waits' *Blue Valentines* was a bad idea. I realized it as soon as I put the record on my turntable. "I'm really falling in love with you," he told me, "harder than I've fallen for anyone in a very long time. I don't want to be with anyone else."

"I don't want to hurt you, but I just don't feel the same way. I like you, but, that's as far as it goes."

And in the background the whole time, was Tom crooning: "There's a time for us. Someday a time for us."

\*\*\*

I am tired of it. I am tired of boys who think they own me, who give me dirty looks if they even see me talking to anyone else. I am tired of boys who say they are okay with having an open relationship, are okay with not being my boyfriend, but when it comes down to it, they are not okay. And you know what I am the most tired of? People who think that I don't get hurt. They know that I don't want monogamy, and that I am usually in love with many people at once, or at

least in like with many people at once, and they think that means they can just walk all over my heart. I obviously don't have any emotions invested in the relationship, because if I did, I would *want* to be tied down. Oh bullshit. My heart is just as tender as you monogamous people's. It is just as easy for me to get hurt. Don't act like you're the only one affected by the relationship.

Stop making me feel guilty, begging me to come home with you when I've already said no, giving me those injured puppydog eyes. I wish I wanted what you want, it would make things so much easier. I wish I felt for you what you do for me, because I don't want to hurt you. But I can't make myself feel that way. I just can't, and it's not fair of you to ask me to. Please. Either take what I can give you, what I choose to give you, and don't ask me for any more, or don't take any of it and just leave me alone.



# HOW TO KILL THE BITCH

Get a doll that looks somewhat like her. Same color hair, same color eyes. Hold that doll and think hard about the damn bitch. Think about everything she did to hurt you. Imagine her never being able to hurt anyone again.

Think of the number four – the death number. Take four candles and glue them to the doll. Light them. Let them burn and drip and melt her life away. Watch them die. Watch them turn into pools of wax. Think hard about the candles dying.

When the last flicker of the last flame goes out . . . out goes her life. In a puff of smoke.



# IN LOVE WITH YOUR GHOST.

Recently, I have heard from two friends I hadn't seen in years. Both of them are people that I was at one time in love with, but it ended up not working out for whatever reason, so we were simply good friends.

First, in October, not long after I had moved back to Racine, I was running an errand for my mom, and in the Target parking lot I heard someone call: "Jessica?!"

I turned around and it took me a few puzzled seconds to realize it was Ash.

When I first knew Ash, he was the best friend of Bennett, the boy I was dating at the time. From the first day I met him, I liked Ash more than I liked Bennett. He was sweeter, more considerate of how I felt. He was bisexual, like me. We had more intense conversations. When the three of us would get stoned in the woods, sitting on an old log next to the river, Bennett would zone out. Ash and I would talk to each other. We'd go out for coffee, too, sometimes, just the two of us, we'd chainsmoke and shred napkins in nervousness and frustration. Even though I was in love with him, nothing could happen. I didn't want to be that girl, the girl who came between best friends. I couldn't have lived with myself I had.

Bennett knew I had a crush on Ash, I had told him one drugged-up night, and I always regretted that I had done that. Bennett would tease me about the crush, and try to get me over it by saying "Ash has a really small cock." As if that mattered to me. Maybe he had a small cock (not that I ever saw it in order to corroborate), but he also had strong bass-player fingers.



Ash, then, was a tall, medium-build guy, with shaggy redbrown hair and a scruffy beard. He wore a lot of anime t-shirts and baggy skateboarder pants. That was another thing – Bennett claimed to be a skater, but he prefer playing Tony Hawk video games to actually skating. Ash would go out with me sometimes, we'd skate around campus.

Ash wasn't even his real name. His real name was Brian, but he started calling himself Ash cos of his love for *Army of Darkness*, and it stuck.

That was Ash, then. I hadn't seen him in two years, not since I had moved to Chicago. Then I ran into him in the Target parking lot. Ash now. . .

He's gained a lot of weight. Not that gaining weight is a bad thing, if you're healthy, only I could tell he wasn't. He was uncomfortable in his skin. His whole body drooped, his hair was almost grown into a mullet, his clothes were dirty. And he was wearing a gold band on his left ring finger.

"We've been married for a month," he said, trying to smile. I thought his face might crack with the effort.

"Congratulations."

He married Nicole, a girl who I knew, too. She was also one of Bennett's best friends. Ash was carrying her small daughter that day I saw him in the parking lot. Not *their* small daughter – Nicole gave birth to her before they were even dating.

I did not know what to say to him, except "congratulations." Congrats, you poor bastard. Why the fuck did you get married, when clearly, that's not what you wanted to do.

\*\*\*

Second was Sondra. I was in love with her for all of high school, and part of junior high, if I'm being honest. She was this long-haired hippiegrunge girl, long blonde hair (sometimes with pink streaks), she played amazing guitar. The strings sang under her bony

fingers. She loved Bikini Kill and Nirvana and Weezer, she also loved Bob Dylan and the Mamas and the Papas. She was straight, I guess, tho she always held hands with me while we ran up and down the beach at night, our feet slipping in the cool sand. She shared sleeping bags with me at youth group overnights, and I would wake up to find us curled around each other, and I'd really have to pee but I would hold it as long as possible just so I could be close to her. Maybe she wasn't straight, maybe she liked me, too, but didn't know how to deal with it because she only dated people who treated her like shit. She is one of the most beautiful, smart, talented people I have ever met – and she had no confidence in herself.

I wanted to save her. I wanted to marry her. To take her away from our dead-end town, a town where she was nothing. I wanted to show her how fucking incredible she was. I wanted to start a band with her. I would have even given up my dream of being a singer just to let her sing. Her voice sounded like mourning doves and dust. I'm pretty sure she was a visionary.

I had not seen her since we graduated from high school.

Sondra now. She's five months pregnant with the child of one of the boys who treated her like shit way back in high school. This is why I wanted to save her. She talked about getting out, but I knew she wouldn't do it on her own. She needed someone like me to take her away from here, to show her she was perfect. Oh, Sondra, I should have told you how I felt. I'm sorry I failed you.

She'll be stuck here forever, now.

\*\*\*

When you haven't seen a friend in a long time, and haven't even talked to them, it's not really *them* that you miss. It's this idea of them, the way they used to be. When you see them again, they're strangers, they're no longer the person you knew. The thing is, you're not who they knew, either. Both of you just end up standing there, awkward, trying to talk to a complete stranger who looks sorta like someone you once loved.





# BEER AND A SHOT

As Tim lay bleeding on the floor of Captain Ray's, he thought about the girl he kissed the night before.

\*\*\*

It had started out a quiet night. Tim had felt a complete sense of boredom and dullness pervading everything. His movements felt sluggish and the beer he was drinking tasted like cardboard.

This band he loved, Compulsive Adult, was supposed to play at Captain Ray's that night. Most music was boring to him these days, but he loved all of Compulsive Adult's records. And they were driving all the way from New York City to play in Tim's sleepy, midwestern town. But they had called at the last minute, after all their fans had already squeezed themselves into the tiny bar. Their van had broken down in Indiana, and they wouldn't be able to make it.

"Fuck this man, fuck this," Tim muttered. "Nothing ever happens here. I'm sick to death of it."

He finished his now-warm beer and got up to leave Captain Ray's. And then he noticed this girl sitting on one of the broken vinyl stools at the other end of the bar. She had messy red hair and a tight t-shirt. And she was smiling at him.

What the hell.

He walked over to her.

"Hi," she said.

"Hey."

"I'm Donna."

"Tim." He stuck his hand out, and they shook hands.

"Here, Tim, sit down."

She gestured to the stool next to hers. He plopped himself down on it with a sigh. He motioned to the bartender and ordered another beer.

"Sucks that Compulsive Adult canceled, don't it?" he asked her.

"Sure does," she smiled again. "But I don't mind just sitting here."

"Yeah, I . . ." Tim was about to say he *did* mind just sitting there, but then thought better of it. "Neither do I."

"So what do you do, Tim?"

"I drink a lot and I read a lot, and listen to some records. As far as paying the bills? I'm one of the night managers at that Jewel Osco over on 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Boring as hell, but like I said, it pays the bills. What about you, Donna?"

"I, um, actually I'm in grad school right now. I'm getting my masters in English. But actually I'm planning on being a first grade teacher. I love kids. They're so much more. . . *real* than adults, you know?"

Tim nodded. Donna grinned. Her smile was so infectious that it made that run-down dirty bar glow. Tim grinned, too.

They talked some more, drank more beer. They talked about the brilliance of Compulsive Adult. Tim couldn't help but smile when Donna said:

"Ohmygod. Not only is the lead singer's voice phenomenal, but she's fucking gorgeous!"

They talked about Kurt Vonnegut, who was a favorite author of both.

"Most people think he's a cynic, but actually, he's real romantic a lot of the time," said Tim.

The night was looking promising. Certainly better than it had looked before. When Tim leaned in close to Donna to light her cigarette, he could smell her – baby powder and violets. And then Donna kissed him, soft and perfect, and he thought about how he hadn't been with a girl in so long and this girl was *so great*. . .

And then Tim felt a very large, very strong hand squeezing his shoulder. He stopped kissing Donna and looked behind him, right into the face of a scowling, muscular man with a lot of tattoos. Tattoos of things like bleeding skulls and barbed wire.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?"

"Uh. . . kissing this girl," Tim responded.

"Yeah. I noticed that. But *why* are you kissing her?"

"What's it to you?"

Donna, who had been biting her lip and staring intently at her beer since their kiss was interrupted, spoke:



"Tim. This is Brock. He's my. . . boyfriend."

Tim's eyes got wide and he sputtered:

"Dude. I am so sorry! I didn't know she had a boyfriend. I wouldna kissed her if I did."

"I guess you should have checked on that first, man," Brock growled, slightly baring his extremely white teeth.

"But. . ." Tim started to protest. Wouldn't it be her responsibility to tell him? Brock didn't let him finish.

"Why don't you come outside with me, pal, and we'll settle this."

"Look, man, can't we just call this a misunderstanding? I'm really sorry."

Tim didn't consider himself a fighter, and even if he had - Brock had at least three inches and forty pounds on Tim.

"Tell ya what," Brock said, running a hand through his slicked-back hair. "There's something I want you to do for me. If you do it, we'll forget this whole thing. If you don't, I'll make your face look like it was run over by a truck."

Tim tried to imagine what it could be. Did Brock want him to make a drug run? Suck his cock? Go on a date with his ugly sister? Tim looked frantically around the smoky bar, but none of his friends were there to back him up. He had no choice.

"Okay. What is it?"

Brock leaned over and spoke in Tim's ear:

"Tomorrow night, around eleven p.m., you come in here. Wear a mask. Any kind of mask you want. Bring a cap gun - one of the silver ones that looks real. Bring a bag of some kind. Then, you make the bartender give you all the money in the register, and a bottle of Jameson. You put it all in the bag, and you meet me by the payphone behind Flo's Diner. Got it?"

Tim shook his head "yes," and swallowed hard.

"Mask. Cap gun. Eleven p.m. Flo's Diner. Yup."

\*\*\*

Tim had spent the whole morning and afternoon wondering what he was going to wear for a mask. Finding a cap gun that looked real enough was no problem. But what to wear for a mask? Ski masks were too cliché. He didn't want

to wear a hockey mask, he didn't want to make the whole thing seem like a scene out of a cheesy horror film. Then he remembered the wolf mask in the back of his closet – a grotesque, furry, rubber thing he had worn when he was a werewolf for Halloween a couple years back.

"Sweet! I bet no one's ever seen a wolf rob a bar before!" He laughed at the absurdness of the whole situation. And he realized that he was actually kind of excited about it. At least it wasn't part of the same old boring routine he lived every day.

At eleven p.m. on the dot, Tim walked in the front door of Captain Ray's, wearing the wolf mask and holding the silver cap gun. He tried to keep his hands and voice from shaking, even though his heart was pounding so hard in his ears that he couldn't hear the din of the pool players and the Top 40 hits coming from the jukebox.

"Everyone just remain calm!" he shouted. "If everyone just stays cool, none of you will get hurt."

He waved the shiny gun at the bartender.

"I want you to give me all the money in the register, and a bottle of Jameson. A *full* bottle. None of that half-empty shit."

"Put the gun down," the bartender stated calmly.

"No. Not until you give me what I asked for."

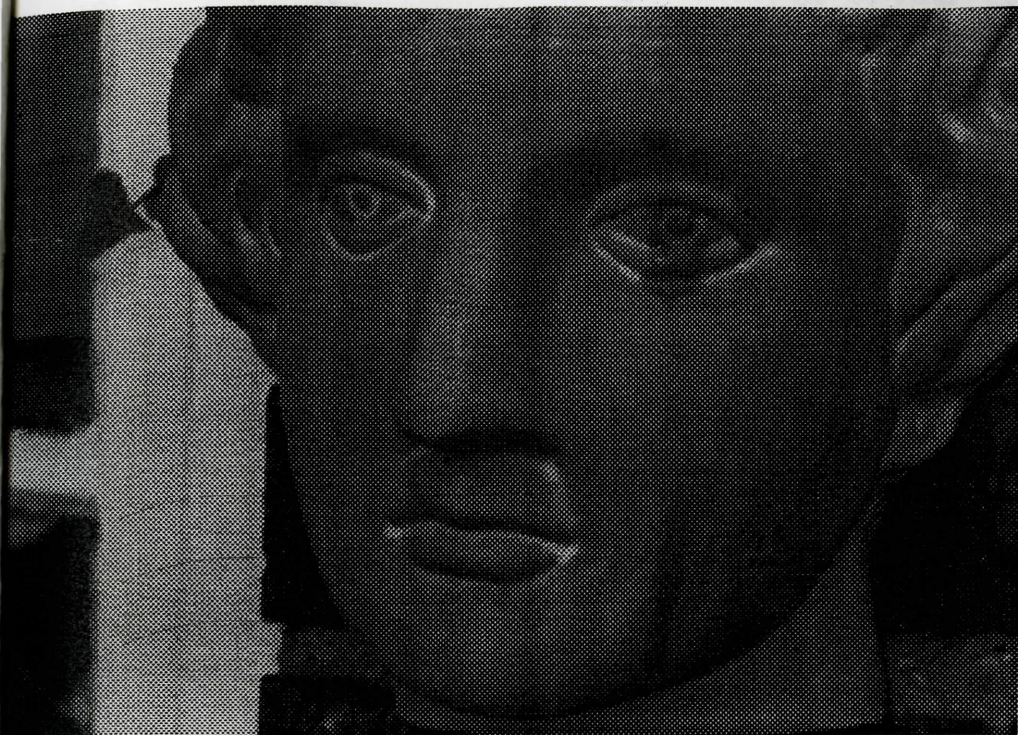
"I'm telling you. Put the motherfucking gun down."

"And I'm telling you I won't."

Tim didn't notice the bartender pulling a gun of his own out from under the counter. He felt it before he heard or saw anything. A searing pain his left shoulder. Bang. He fell to the floor, clutching his shoulder and howling.

And as Tim heard the Saturday night drunks screaming and stampeding out the back door, and while he waited for the ambulance and police to arrive, all he could think about was how it would be a long time before he wished again for an exciting life. It would be a long time before his limbs felt stiff with boredom and his beer tasted like cardboard.





*holy! the tollbooths in indiana with band stickers stuck on them  
half-rubbed off. holy! trains and greasy diner food, the open  
road, tarot cards. finding strange robotics books in old file  
drawers. my bed smelling like boys and cigarettes. heavy  
snow, wet across vineyards in southwestern michigan in  
november and a grove of pine trees shrouding a tiny graveyard  
that looks like it hasn't been stepped in for a hundred years.  
non-filtered cigarettes! watching the sun set over a cornfield!  
swiggin' cheap beer! baseball! sex! beautiful tough grl's with  
bloodred lipstick who spit words like venom! boys who can  
recite poetry or fix broken cigarettes or talk to me about  
calculus!*

*i don't care that i'm too weird to be a regular all-american girl  
i don't care that i'm not revolutionary enough for those damn  
revolutionary kids i won't apologize for the music i listen to, the  
things i eat, who i love i am me and that is holy.*

*people tell me i'm a romantic. they say: "you're like that guy in  
american beauty. i bet you could romanticize a plastic bag."  
maybe it's true. maybe it's wrong that i can romanticize the  
dirt of chicago, or alcoholism, or a dead pigeon. but i'd rather  
be a fucking romantic than someone who is dead to all the  
beauty in the world. cos seriously – when i happen to be  
listening to tom waits sing "he left waukegan at the slamming of  
the door" on my headphones just as the train is pulling out of  
waukegan; or when the moonlight looks like blue dust on the  
sidewalk. . .the world is so beautiful it damn near breaks my  
heart.*





fin.