

Memoir Mixtapes

Vol. 6: Guilty Pleasures

September 12, 2018

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Special thanks to our reader, Benjamin Selesnick

Letters from the Editors



Hello again,

Welcome to *Memoir Mixtapes Vol.6: Guilty Pleasures*. This time, we asked our contributors to share the stories inspired by those songs we'll only listen to after switching to private mode in Spotify—the songs we love to hate (or hate to love): our guilty pleasures.

The pieces in Vol.6 are inspired by the likes of Céline Dion, Uncle Kracker, and of course, the ultimate guilty pleasure: Nickelback. Suffice to say, we hope you're ready to experience one of the most off-the-wall playlists of your life.

Each of the stories shared in this volume grapple with guilty pleasures in unique ways, and while some have higher stakes than others, each one of them made us reflect on some aspect of the human experience in ways we hadn't before.

As always, I'm incredibly honored to provide a home to these wonderful pieces. Thank you to all of our contributors—past, present, and future—for making the *Memoir Mixtapes* project possible. And thanks to you, our readers, for spending time with these stories and the songs at their centers.

We hope you enjoy them as much as we do. No guilt necessary.

Until next time,

Samantha Lamph/Len
CREATOR & CO-CURATOR



Hi everyone.

If you're new here, welcome! If you're returning, we're always thrilled to have you! Thank you so much for joining us, and welcome to *Memoir Mixtapes Vol.6: Guilty Pleasures*.

For this Volume we wanted your guilt and shame, and we wanted the songs that best captured those feelings. While I unabashedly love a number of these songs, I have to say, some of them made me roll my eyes. In at least one case I groaned, "Oh come on, I wasn't serious about wanting a piece on Nickelback." But I'm so glad we did get that piece on Nickelback, along with each of the pieces in this Volume.

We've woven for you a collection of stories and poems that aren't afraid to dive into those difficult feelings of guilt and shame. We've got tragedy, laughs, regret, joy, sadness—it's all here. I love these pieces, and I'm never going to listen to their accompanying songs the same way again.

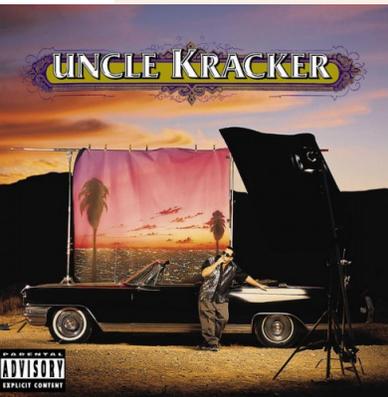
As always, we wouldn't be here without our contributors, or you, our readers, so thank you all. And once again I'd like to give a special thanks to our reader, Benjamin Selesnick, who helps keep us on track when life gets overwhelming. Dude's a lifesaver.

Okay, I'm starting to feel guilty for keeping you here, so I won't take any more of your time. Please, carry on and enjoy *Memoir Mixtapes Vol.6: Guilty Pleasures*!

Kevin D. Woodall
CO-CURATOR / EDITOR

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Uncle Kracker

"Follow Me"

Double Wide

06/2000

Lava · Top Dog

"Follow Me" Through the Years

Sam Frost

I was the youngest and the smallest, so I just followed the group. My feet hurt. Jean shorts were wet from water rides I never wanted to go on. They were fun, but I was small and cold. We did it for Dave. I was always Dave's little buddy. His hurt back and my legs, still waiting for a growth spurt, made us the perfect amusement park pair. My mom and his wife and kids (older, taller) ran off to roller coasters and we stayed back, carried the bags and rode the ferris wheel or racing horses. But Dave loved the boat ride. This circle float with eight seats that dives in and out of tiny waterfalls, gushing water. People on bridges squirt water guns. There's no way to stay dry, and we always went in the evening. When the line was shortest. So it was after—shoes squeaking and legs chafing—that we walked towards the center of the park as the sky began to darken. I heard the woman before I saw her. *"Follow me, everything is alright. I'll be the one to tuck you in at night."*

Her voice was screechy. Not a natural singer, but one that appeared after several beers and a chorus of "get up there!" from friends. Long, tan legs and short shorts. The kind of woman that magazines tell little girls to worship. People were cheering. I was mesmerized, couldn't look away. Little feet slowed down. Mom slowed for a second, dancing to the music. Then tugged on my hand, hurried me along to the next ride. *"And if you want to leave, I can guarantee, you won't find nobody else like me."*

Maybe I wanted to be her, standing up there with so much confidence. I whispered those lyrics to myself for the rest of the night. Staring at my feet, teeth chattering. As we watched the late-night dance show and ate soft pretzels. Back at the hotel, wrapped up in Mom's sweatshirt, as everyone shouted over board games. Still sang them the next day as we ate Long John Silver's, and I felt the grease from chicken strips stick to the roof of my mouth, form a coating. The road trip home. Squished in the middle seat. The words sounded like hope. Or longing. Some kind of emotion that I couldn't pinpoint but knew I wanted to feel. *"I'll swim through your veins like a fish in the sea."*

Sometime during the car ride I got distracted. I didn't know what the song was, forgot to sing the lyrics, and they slipped from my mind. Jumbled. I could hear the tune but couldn't replicate it. We got home, and I had toys to play with, neighborhood games to join. The woman and her voice and the words were pushed away. But they resurfaced once in a while *"I'll be the one to tuck you in at night,"* or *"you won't find nobody, else like me."* The words turned into gentle hums. I asked Mom about the song, but it must have been weeks later. She didn't remember. Didn't know what I meant by the "follow the fish" song. So I let it enter that place between knowing and not knowing, intangible but present.

Later that summer my friends and I bought Kidz Bop CDs. The first two that started a long trend of tiny voices singing censored words they didn't understand. The first CD spun and spun through "Oops...I Did It Again" and "Bye Bye Bye," moved through "Livin' La Vida Loca." Then we moved onto the next disc. "Kryptonite." "Hangin' By a Moment." We shouted *"This is the story of a girl, who cried a river and drowned the whole woorld!!"* Small voices squeaking. Then that pause between songs. What's coming next? We'd never heard of "Follow Me."

Track 8. The music started. Guitar strokes, *"You don't know how you met me, you don't know why, you can't turn around and say goodbye."* We liked the sound. Kept listening. Then

I heard the chorus. The familiar words found me. I screamed and turned up the volume. My friends stared at me. I sang along with the lines I knew, the ones I pulled up from the back of my memory. The song ended, and I hit the rewind button. Played the whole song again. Rewound. And again. Took in the lyrics. They sounded so different. So harsh. *"I'm not worried 'bout the ring you wear, 'cause as long as no one knows, then nobody can care."* I tried to explain what I was feeling, how the song let me down. Nobody else was interested, so we moved on to Britney's "Lucky." Danced, pumped arms to *"She's so lucky, she's a star, but she cries cries cries in the lonely night."* I knew all those words and the words that came on in the next track. My lips moved with my friends', but I was distracted. Stuck on different lyrics.

I thought it was a love song. But each time I listened new lines jumped out. *"I'm not the reason that you go astray."* He's talking about cheating, right? *"We'll be alright if you don't ask me to stay."* Why is he singing about this? Isn't he ashamed? I thought cheating was something bad, so why'd he make it sound so good? I told Mom about it, and she said it wasn't a very nice song. That made it more irresistible. I listened and listened and listened. It felt like a trap. One that I was quickly falling into. I told myself it was okay to like parts of it and not others. That I didn't have to like the cheating to like the way the song sounded. But it felt dirty. I felt dirty. But like sandy feet during a drive home from the beach.

Don't we all want something we can't have? A married woman. Our parents' attention and support. The whole chocolate cake. I didn't know anything about relationships, but I assumed dear, sweet Uncle Kracker knew something I didn't. That the woman he sang about was lucky. They felt something for each other, and aren't we all just trying to feel something?

But what if the woman in the song wasn't? It wasn't until I was older that I let myself wonder: what if she didn't want his love?

I'm twenty-three and sitting on my bed. Legs curled under myself. While the guy I've been seeing sits at my desk chair. "Well what is this?" Uh... "I care about you." Me too, but... "I've never felt like this before." I'm not feeling anything. I didn't know I was supposed to. Didn't think a few dinner and party invitations meant I was trapped. This guy is staring at me, wants to know what I'm thinking and not saying.

How do I tell him I want to be the woman at the amusement park, laughing and singing while her friends cheer her on. Not a care in the world. Not wrapped up in some man's fantasy. So I give him something. My own version of the lyrics. He doesn't understand. "You'll go on dates but not date me?" He must not have heard the song. He shouldn't have asked me to stay.

I can't pinpoint what it is about this song, but it's stuck with me. I always find ways to relate to it. I still find myself drawn to it, humming it at random. But it's never felt the way it did at that amusement park. The lyrics make sense now. Simply state the situation. Maybe it was the chase, not the find. Had to have it, know it. But it was all wrong. Like an unrequited love finally knocking at your door—lips too rough but you wanna make it work. I used to wonder what it said about me. The love for the song. This attraction to disloyalty. This willingness to accept pretty words. How they chase me back to childhood. The way they swim through my veins. Have these lyrics become my excuse?

Coming back to a childhood obsession with a matured mind almost feels wrong. Like trying to play make-believe with the same kind of enthusiasm. I can't transform into

dragons anymore. The seven-year-old version of myself would have never thought I'd grow to understand the affair. That I'd sing along and wonder about the details. What's the whole story, who are these people? But seven-year-old me once cried and cried and cried because a little girl kept whispering to me during a school assembly. My teacher thought I was talking too, and I had to move my Behavior Frog from green to yellow. I couldn't believe I'd broken a rule, my perfect streak of green frogs.

As I've grown, my heart has too. Stronger. Wider. More room for mistakes and questions. A gray area between right and wrong. Life does that. Creates messes and webs that we have to survive. Glitter wears off. Love is less pretty when you learn about lust.



Mel McDaniel

"Louisiana Saturday Night"

I'm Countryfied

11/1980

Capitol

Elegy featuring "Louisiana Saturday Night" and The Weathervane Theater

Brianna Pike

You played Mel McDaniel's hit so often during long car rides that I took to studying the cassette case while reclining

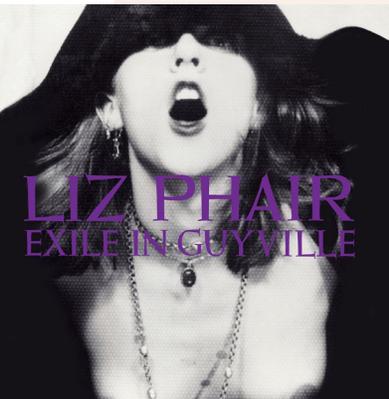
on your plush maroon backseat. My favorite outings were to a stifling barn converted to a theater where we once watched

Peter Pan fly among the rafters. Afterwards, you pushed cold washcloths to my wrists and I sucked iced grape juice through a straw.

For me, the trips ended at horses, baby doll dresses and lip gloss, even though my younger sister kept going, kept listening to you sing

about single shot rifles, opossums in a sack, and fiddles and bows for a few more years. Then you died and I lost your song until today,

when, before I even realize I am singing, the words spring from my lips, as if they have always lived deep beneath blood and bone.



Liz Phair

“Flower”

Exile in Guyville

06/1993

Matador

On Hearing Liz Phair's “Flower” For the First Time

Megan Pillow Davis

Every time I see your face

I think of things unpure unchaste

I want to fuck you like a dog

I'll take you home and make you like it

I am 16, sitting in the middle of the bench seat of a Dodge Aries between two boys on the way to a basketball game. The backseat is full too, three people across, but girl boy girl back there. As I listen to them chatter, the driver, a boy who is cut like marble all over, puts a tape into the deck and whispers in my ear: *listen to this.*

From the crackling car speakers comes the electric echo of a distorted guitar, a girl's high, reedy voice, and then another voice that swings like a pendulum between girl and boy. This voice says all the things we are told never bring to our lips, to cover them over instead, no matter how much it hurts. But when I hear this voice, I'm a geode that's been struck open to the crystal inside, sharp and glimmering.

Who is this? I say. He hands me the box. On the cover is a girl, her eyes in shadow, her mouth open, the small dark arc of her nipple edging its way into the frame. I want to put my tongue inside her mouth. I want to run my tongue along the edge of her nipple. I've been told the first thing I should feel about that is shame, but I don't. All I know is the glorious feeling of breaking open, of bringing all the sharp glimmering things to the surface, and that the pain I'm feeling isn't the pain of shame but the pain of desire, pure and pointed.

In the rearview mirror, I can see one of the girls and the boy making out in the backseat. The boy is one I've already had. The girl is lovely, but she's not the one I dream about. Still, because I remember what the boy tasted like, I can feel their kiss like a phantom on the lips of my own mouth, and it makes me feel like I'm kissing them, too. The boy cut like marble next to me is pressing his leg into mine. This is the boy that I want most, the boy I dream about, but on the other side of me is the other boy, the one with the pretty face who once told me he hugs me because he likes pressing my breasts against his chest, and I kind of hate him for it. In that moment, though, that moment of being sixteen and having my ears full of that miraculous song, in that brief moment of breaking open, I want him too.

Here we are, all of us, young and high on the freedom of getting out of school to watch our team play in the state championship. Here we are, barreling down the road with this song filling our heads with the thing our parents have lectured against. And then my desire softens and wings out of me, flutters its way into every crevice of the car, touching the surface of every inch of skin like a feathery plumose antenna and me, the polyphemus moth: I want them all. Every one of these beautiful people with their young bodies and their glowing skin that I know is really just translucent, that I know is just a sheer cover over the sharp, glimmering things underneath. I want to pull the car over into a field somewhere. I want all of us to put our mouths on each other everywhere, everywhere, again and again and again.

And I can see the desire fluttering up out of them too, but I can also see it's different. It has form, direction. That boy to my right wants the girl in the back. The girl in the back wants the boy next to her. The beautiful marble-cut boy next to me, he wants me, and the other girls too. But these desires flutter back and forth in isolation. They only pollinate each other. Mine is the only one that spreads its reach to everyone. Then all of the sharp glimmering of my want returns and the lovely winged transformation disintegrates, and so I cover that want over again with stone.

I hand the tape back to the boy. *I like this*, I say.

It's these three words that I always come back to. It's these three words that I repeat for years when I don't know how to explain my desires, when I don't know how to tell people why it took me so long to come out. At 16, with "Flower" in my ears and the photo of Liz Phair in my hands, I knew that my desire wasn't for men or for women or for the lovely people in between but for all of them, for people in every incarnation. But for years, I didn't know how to say that so people would understand. For years, it was these three words that I used when I saw a person that I was attracted to because I didn't know the word for what I am.

For years, I also had this recurring dream that I'd been hired to direct all of Liz Phair's music videos. My dreams weren't elaborate productions. In each one, Liz was performing on the same stage that Michael J. Fox played on as Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*. In every single song, she was playing to that same audience of 1950s teens. Before filming each song, I would slowly undress Liz (each time, the bliss of uncovering her body was almost unbearable) and then dress her again in something new. For each song, I would position her body on the stage and hand her a guitar. The clothes were always different. Sometimes she'd wear a 1970s white glitter Elvis jumpsuit, complete with pompadour. Sometimes I'd put her in Madonna's lacy corset and gloves from "Like a Virgin" or the white dress that Jennifer Connelly wore in *The Rocketeer*. Sometimes it was Tim Curry's leather corset and stockings from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Sometimes it was Brad's suit or Janet's dress instead. For so long, when I thought of that dream, I agonized over what Liz was supposed to be wearing on that stage. Who was she was supposed to be? What was she supposed to look like? I never had an answer. It wasn't until a few years ago, right after I finally found the word for what I am—pansexual—that my dream changed. Instead of only looking at what Liz was wearing, for the first time, I turned and looked at the audience. For the first time, I saw that no matter what she had on, the audience still danced to her music and threw glitter on the stage so that it rained down over her hair.

The first woman I ever kissed broke my heart open. I was so, so young when it happened that the rupture was quick, the repair mostly easy. The glittery sharpness closed up on its own, and it didn't leave a scar. But for a time, it did leave an echo of that first crack of pain: I remember she had a mouth just like Liz Phair, sharp along one lip and soft along the other, the kind of mouth that you dream about, the kind of mouth that when you watch it kiss someone else, you can feel the phantom of it against your own mouth for days. I've never told that story to anyone else. It's easier now than when I was 16 to tell those kinds of secrets. But I'll still always have a few. All of us do. And yes, some secrets are terrible. But not all of them are. Some of them—even the sharp ones—are delicate things, and if you try to pry them open, you crush them and leave all the brilliant parts in pieces. I tell myself now that it's okay to treat some of my secrets with silent reverence. Sometimes secrets are the sharp, glimmering things that keep you from sealing completely over to rock inside. Sometimes secrets are the things that teach you how to refract the love you have, or even to compound it.

I still love *Exile in Guyville*. I still dream sometimes of dressing and undressing Liz Phair. I still listen to "Flower" because of its raw articulation of female desire, because it's the song that broke me open, because it's the song that, before I had the name for what I am, made me knowable to myself. Here's another secret: the boy who introduced it to me never knew what an impact that song had on me. I never told him. I hope he'll read this. Maybe it will help him understand, like I do, that sometimes it's the dirtiest things that tell us the cleanest truths, even if those truths are the kinds of things that, for a time, magnify our pain. Maybe he'll realize that there's an immeasurable gift in knowing that you were there at the beginning of somebody's transformation, even more important, in some ways, than being there at the end.



Red Hot Chili Peppers

"Can't Stop"

By the Way

07/2002

Warner Bros.



Red Hot Chili Peppers

"Breaking the Girl"

Blood Sugar Sex Magik

09/1991

Warner Bros.

Can't Stop

Sarah Layden

At the museum we become statues
for one minute. Artist's orders.
TV screen atop podium,
the Red Hot Chili Peppers demonstrate
pencils up noses, buckets atop heads.
Penis-shaped objects between legs, thrusting.
"Can't Stop," goes the band's song and dance,
though of course you can.

Art upon art: video inspired by Erwin Wurm,
the sculptor of *Banana Man*, fruit-phallused,
and the straightjacketed *Telekinetic Masturbator*,
both pedestaled nearby. Insert joke here,
men I grew up with went to school with
once loved barely knew passed on the street.
(She said insert.)

Sophomore year the radio made addicts of us,
replaying "Breaking the Girl." I misheard the lyrics
as terror manual from shirtless soothsayers:
Twisting and turning, you're feeling the burning.
Who feels? In the girls' locker room,
we whispered about the one who can't stop
himself. Won't. A voice from an open car window
sings: *You're breaking the girl/She meant you no harm*

The band made me wary, the way women
get when men's love and hate burbles in one pot.
Rock stars humping their instruments
as if they were you. The museum says Look.
Now they are art.

O aged musicians on museum video loop.
Still shirtless and fit. This song, it's catchy.
Inside I am dancing despite myself; no one can see.
The bassist-as-statue stares with sad eyes.
If I am moved, it passes. His expression says
Help me. Like he owns his regret, the very least
I require. And another thing. Meet my gaze
in these lines where I've catalogued you. Look.
Now you are art.

weezer



Weezer

"No One Else"

Weezer

05/1994

DGC

Someone Else

Kevin D. Woodall

I'm at a house party. Music hums under the loud drone of the crowd. At one point I hear a familiar guitar wend its way through the buzzing chatter, and I immediately recognize the opening of Weezer's "Say It Ain't So."

I haven't listened to Weezer in about eight years, but something inside me sparks at hearing those notes. I remark to those nearby that "it's still a good-ass song, in spite of Weezer sucking for the entire last forever," and I bend my ear to it, letting nostalgia wash over me.

The day after the party I indulge myself in a trip back to my angsty pre-teen and teen years, and I listen to the *Blue Album*. When the second track, "No One Else," comes up, I start singing along—I still know all of the album's lyrics by heart. But then the chorus comes, and I pause. I stop the track and take out my earbuds. I re-read the lyrics, just to be sure, because I can't believe what I'm hearing. It's like I've never truly understood this song before.

I'm feeling guilt and shame for having loved this song.

Weezer had been a cornerstone of my life—"No One Else" especially—but I'm realizing in this moment, with the clear perspective of time and distance, that by idolizing them for so long I may have actually made things worse for myself back in the day.

I'm in middle school.

It's a miserable time. I get chairs broken across my back by boys who hit puberty before me. They routinely smash me face-first into searing hot asphalt. They dump milk on my head, and no matter how much I wash it out I can always smell it curdling in my hair thanks to the blistering southern California heat. I spend most days feeling down on myself, wishing my small group of friends had my back, and fighting chronic depression I won't understand for another twenty years.

On top of this I'm also struggling with the unreasonable expectation among most male middle schoolers that every "real man" has to have a girlfriend. The prevailing logic dictates that if you're without a girlfriend, then you must be "a total fucking pussy."

A part of me knows these expectations are idiotic (and homophobic). We're twelve, we shouldn't be thinking about any kind of real, committed relationships—we can't even drive for another four years. I'm young, but I can see the abject stupidity of this expectation.

Even as I fall in line with it.

When you're an awkward, lonely kid it can be all too easy to buy into the expectations of your peers, however idiotic they may be, and so I think that if I can get a girlfriend then I'll stop getting bullied, and maybe I'll be accepted as a normal kid.

I try to talk to girls, but I have no clue what I'm doing. At this point I'm only thinking of girls as means to an end, so I follow cues that I learn from listening to music and

watching movies and TV. I come to think of girls as Other—some mystery creature to be solved and tamed. My attempts to talk to, or even approach them are usually met with laughter, which further erodes any sense of confidence I have. I give in to self-loathing, and I resent all the girls who won't see how lonely I am, who won't help me fit in.

In my pre-teen angst I frequently turn to music for comfort. One of my mainstays is Weezer's first release, the *Blue Album*.

In spite of how pop-laced much of it is, almost every song on the album conveys some kind of resentment. The lead singer, Rivers, is obviously a guy like me—socially awkward, has a hard time fitting in, prone to jealousy, tired of girls not seeing what a good guy he is. These are all things I deal with on a daily basis.

I latch onto "No One Else," wherein Rivers sings about how his girl "blabbers a lot" and "looks around and around," presumably at guys who aren't him. He's uncomfortable with that. He wants a girl "who will laugh for no one else." A girl who, when he's away, "puts the makeup on the shelf." A girl who "never leaves the house." He feels so unappreciated by her that he can't even break up with her himself, directing his friends to "tell her it's over." He wants girls to do what they're supposed to do—just like me.

I don't yet see everything wrong with the lyrics in "No One Else." Instead, I feel like Rivers is writing specifically about my life. The fact that he's a grown man singing about self-involved issues that a twelve-year-old child is struggling with doesn't seem weird—it feels like he gets me. He understands what it's like to be a nice guy who wants a girl to reward him with devotion for having put in some effort. That doesn't seem too unreasonable to a lonely child who wants to feel loved and accepted.

I'm in high school.

At this point I've undergone some growth. Literal growth, in that I hit a growth spurt and shoot from five-foot-five to six-foot-two over one summer (which halts most of the bullying), but also in my thinking and general attitude.

I'm attending a different school from the kids I'd been with for years, and this affords me a chance to reinvent myself. I carve out a niche as a music kid—one of those kids that you can talk to about any band or artist, who has probably already heard whatever it is you want to talk about, who can recommend other, similar stuff if you want. I write album reviews for my school paper and random people stop me in-between classes to tell me how much they enjoy what I write. I start to fit in, and I feel better about myself.

I also feel better about talking to girls, mainly because I've started to undo my backwards thinking that they're creatures of mystery. I start to see them as flawed human beings, like me, complete with their own sets of insecurities and self-confidence issues. I learn how to listen, which in turn teaches me how to care, and to be genuinely sympathetic. This isn't particularly revelatory, but for a teenager prone to embittered loneliness and resentment it's a pretty big step.

I'm developing a new sense of confidence, but it's small, and held back because I'm still struggling with jealousy.

There are a few girls I take on dates, and a couple others that I date enough to call girlfriends. I exercise great care in curating mixtapes and CDs for the girls I'm with. I call and talk to them nightly. I even pick-up tampons for one girlfriend (which draws

horrified looks from guys who are uncomfortable with the idea that women *bleed*, but scores me major points with her and her friends). As far as high school goes, I'm generally pretty okay at being a boyfriend.

But in each relationship, I hit a point where I turn jealous and things break apart. Afraid of losing someone I care about, and afraid of being lonely again, I get paranoid. I say things like "I don't like how much time you spend with the guys on the soccer team—why don't you want to spend time with me?" or "Oh, if he's so fucking funny, why don't you date him instead?"

I can't get over the words of "No One Else." I still want a girl who will "laugh for no one else."

It's in my junior year that Weezer drops "Hash Pipe," their first single in five years. Like a good fanboy I instantly latch onto the song, and I buy the *Green Album* the day it comes out. I listen to it constantly, but something about it feels off. I don't want to admit it, but the album doesn't grab me.

After Weezer's second album, *Pinkerton*, in which Rivers seemed to have matured a bit, attempting to grapple with his personal failings, the *Green Album* sounds like a step backwards. There are a couple of songs that I like, but for the most part I'd been expecting something else. Something more. And on some level I understand that it signals a stagnation in Rivers' growth. The album is stale, despite being brand new, because it's a retread of the ground broken by the *Blue Album*.

I don't dwell on this gut feeling for long, though, because I'm more preoccupied by the feeling of guilt I have for daring to question the quality of the *Green Album*. I don't want to betray the band that validates me, that provides me solace—I want to be loyal to them. So I write a glowing review of the album for the school paper, and when people question my taste I go to bat for the band.

"No, it's a direct response to everyone who hated on *Pinkerton*. Rivers was betrayed by critics and fake fans for opening his heart on *Pinkerton*, so now he's hitting back by giving them what they think they want in the form of cheap pop. It's fucking genius."

I don't want to admit it yet, but deep down I know his behavior isn't genius. It's petulant. It's childish. It comes from a sense of entitlement. It's the sign of someone who refuses to grow as a person, someone content to blame the world for their problems, who willingly wallows in a never-ending sea of their own misery. I can see and recognize it for what it is, but I ignore it, because again it's easier to fall in line than to admit how I'm failing in my own similar ways.

But the cracks of doubt are there, and the guilt is trickling in.

A year after Weezer put out the *Green Album*, they followed up with *Maladroit*, and I could no longer stomach being an apologist. I'd stood up for the *Green Album*, but *Maladroit* had delivered more of the same poppy, vapid, already-done music. In retribution, I'd sworn Weezer off. I convinced myself that I had been betrayed by them, and eagerly told other people Weezer had sold out for easy money—which, if I'm being honest, is likely true and okay to an extent. I'm older these days, and I understand that everyone has bills to pay.

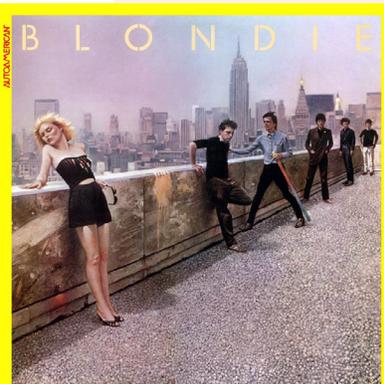
I went on for years insisting that was the sole reason I no longer cared for them.

But now I realize that the real reason I stopped liking Weezer was because I'd been growing and becoming better on my own; meanwhile, Weezer, or more accurately, Rivers, was stagnant, unwilling or unable to change for the better—stuck writing songs that sat in the emotional range of a prepubescent child. His lyrics validate all those men who, while being victims of toxic masculinity, continue to perpetuate its damage by choosing to remain under its shackles, spouting messages of control to compensate for their own fear of self-improvement. It's easy to look back on the years of my life when I idolized Weezer and feel regret and shame for how I behaved, but I can't live my life that way. Staying stuck in the past is exactly how you wind up like Rivers, and all the men like him. I resolved years ago that I wouldn't be that person anymore.

I'm more at peace with the band's first album today. I'm back to listening to it every so often, though I still haven't listened to any new Weezer releases since swearing them off sixteen years ago. I can listen to "No One Else," and appreciate how catchy it is, but these days it serves more as a cautionary tale—a depiction of what toxic masculinity can breed, even in guys like me who aren't overtly masculine. It's a reminder of what not to be in order to be a better man.

I've worked hard to grow, and I've had relationships that were far more successful than those in the past. It took some doing, but eventually I realized that jealousy isn't attractive or helpful. I've understood for years now that expecting women to devote themselves to you entirely is akin to asking them to commit themselves to a cage. I can't do that to anyone, ever. I can't be that selfish. I won't be that selfish.

I'm far from perfect, and I'm learning every day; there's always room to grow and do better. But I'm trying. Accepting that I was once a bitter, resentful teenager is an important step in recognizing how far I've come, and how far I have yet to go.



Blondie

"The Tide is High"

Autoamerican

11/1980

Chrysalis

Fossiling

Amy Alexander

To the foothills,
hammer at my side,
silver,
a seven-year-old ready to find dust,
ready to pulverize
but gentle,
gentle,
like the teacher,
hair
in the wind,
who tells me
that I must
seek precision
with my mind
chisel, don't chop,
she says this
without even having to say it,
and I listen,
and one lime rock
after another
comes unremarkable
and then,
coined by hammer
a very old Aspen leaf
and entire schools of fish
swimming in the dust
flashing micah where scales were before.

This gives me an idea:
Within the year,
my own sediments
settle
over a story
I decide I don't have to tell anymore.

Once we leave this place,
I can go a long time without
mentioning it,
so long,
they might name another era after it,
and when I feel the spines

pressing up,
the need to share,
I focus on the leaves alive this year,
the fish swimming today in
Colorado and Roaring Fork waters,
I talk about my favorite records,
Olivia Newton John's
Xanadu
or Blondie,
The Tide is High
and I'm moving on.

I wanted the coast,
not the mountains,
just like I wanted
another life,
dancing on my bed,
comb for a microphone,
my body still owned by stone,
belonging
to a history
I buried
or made up,
as I willed it toward tomorrow.

I found making it new,
like Ezra Pound said,
made it easier.
An artist lives on the edge of time,
and it's a place I'm more comfortable with,
which is why
I've been called stupid behind my back,
and also why I forget a lot,
hence the low standardized test scores
and the never being considered for
gifted and talented.
At the risk of
being found out,
I was willing to
live lower,
a trilobite
talking trivia,
a tipsy chick tracking the latest trends.



Spice Girls

“Wannabe”

Spice

09/1996

Virgin

Wannabe

Em Mitchell

All week they’d been teasing the release. Trailer spots every few hours informed us “Friday, 5pm,” with brief flickers of images, snatches of distant half-swallowed music: some unknown video presentation imminent. Gather ‘round the fire, children, this was 1996—year of a Royal divorce and IRA bombs, Mad Cow Disease, Dolly the sheep, Take That’s sad end, and Blair in the wings for “Cool Britannia” to rise. The only good way to premiere a music video then was television, of course.

I was curious. Christ knows now I didn’t realise just how much. I was fascinated in the pure mathematic choice of the trailers, and counted the timings between spots—every three hours, I measured. Sat in wait to test my theorem for when it would appear next, my sister beside me with a brighter anticipation in mind. And then there it was, 5 o’clock. And then again, at 8. Again, 11. And in the strange, marbled thinking of a child, it felt as if I’d conjured it up.

My sister was visibly shaken—and why not? Every inch of this promotion was primed to mainline endorphins in her like psychic Benzedrine. All week I heard her talk about it, her and her friends—on the phone, in the street, from the car as she splintered off from me (the clean, naïve, blonde round thing I was) to the front gate of the high school, to watch her collapse into her cluster of friends like a frazzled bouquet—in mime from behind the car window, with their poses and their smoky eyes, their frayed blazer cuffs with a hole for the thumb, socks and skirts rigged two inches higher than school regulation. Their ties strangled into a heart-shaped knot at their necks, each of one of them had two greasy strands of hair (on-trend that decade) hanging in front of their faces like limp lotus feelers, from their cinched-back ponytailed scalps.

The way they appeared, performed for one another, they were the nearest thing to aliens I knew.

But what *did* I know? I was eight. Eight-year-olds held a dimmer view, then. We had no easy route to desire, no relation to the concept of that desire, no language, no mirror in nature or in glass for it, but for maybe seeing dogs hump in alleyways once in a while, which was, of course, always hilarious. We buoyed, me and my peers, in a soft, androgynous puppy world, but what I glimpsed from the crack in the door of my sister’s fleshly universe sent my sinuses throbbing. My mind reeled with incomprehension at their sensational exhibition.

So *these* were girls. And I was a boy—

I was the boy who left it too late to go piss one night
and toddled ‘cross the landing like
the Pink Panther: put up the seat slid PJs down to knees
and with my backside on show and door open failed to recall
my sister’s sleepover—so
mid-piss, the steady trickle of giggles behind me sound
and over-shoulder I see those same
High School Girls in pyjama mode themselves
their beehived heads peer round the door

with their hands to their mouths
the purest shame!

I was the boy
whose two best friends in primary school
were Stephanie and Racheal—
I called Stephanie my girl-friend, and we held hands
and hoped the hyphenate would not be found.
I called Racheal “Stephanie’s friend” and felt safe
in the lie I didn’t know it was.

I was the boy who
danced ballet on the football pitch
when I got bored of playing, which was often, and often
instant.

I was the boy who drew nude Barbie dolls
to understand some semblance of myself and who
when caught, was accused of something else I couldn’t
even then conceive of.

I was the boy who I was the boy who
I was the boy who I was.

All week they’d been teasing the release, and then: Friday, 5pm.

My sister, sensing the specialness of this event, like a lunar phenomenon, didn’t sit
but stood before the telly, remote in hand, and rocked from foot to foot as if readying
herself to catch something coming toward her at great speed. Which it was—it was her
entire life.

I had the privilege to observe. I sat on the carpet, cross-legged behind her, enough of
a view to absorb her, her expression, and the screen too—I wanted to know what sort of
peculiar magic compelled her so.

And then the announcer incanted: *And now, a special presentation.* I heard the muffled
scream of joy from my sister’s clenched throat, distant, quiet, as if from another room. It
was the sound her poor tight ponytail might make if it could talk. The screen went black.

We all know the song. Know the video. For three minutes 57 seconds I watched, eyes
darting, scrolling, between the screen and my sister, my sister, the screen. The coughing
keyboard riff, the high kicks, the backflips. The struts, the sudden paused catwalk poses,
the sarcastic coy mouths. And the interplays, the Girls tossing *bon mots* between them
like a ball, the chaos, the spilled champagne, the clattering high heels across posh
lamine floors. The snooty extras utterly shocked, the stiff butlers. The mounting of
tables, the hops, the jigged hips, their faces up in the camera gurning one moment,
cooing the next; the sense of identity and iconography stamped so hard into the screen it
was yet another universe splayed open to me—a sanitised version of adulthood, the
whole thing a single unbroken take, inside some Platonic Ideal of wealth and pomp, now
shred open by these fun, unfussy, *real* women—and my sister!

My sister was ecstatic. I could see it was everything, everything, everything she
thought she would get, and more—every syllable and intonation, every swish of limb and
choreographic glottal stop, cheeky wink, each chant and drumbeat, in the presence of
men, the preening, stuffy men and the women, the preening, stuffy women; in the setting,

in the Girls, in each strand of their hair, every pore, their dress, their dance, their pose, swagger or remoteness, sweetness, dexterity or growl—my sister tried to replicate, as she shook her hips side to side, improvising in these moments a copy of the orderly madness before her. Never have I seen someone since who so badly wanted to be a part of the thing they were seeing; trying to enact her way into it, as if she could dance her way to become part of the video itself.

I was the boy who thought it was pronounced
wan-á-bee, like “wasabi”
for far too long.

And it was *catchy as fuck*. Even at eight, I was a posturing, self-conscious child, and there, on the carpet, had to restrain my ankle which so desperately wanted to tap in-time to the song, restrain the ache in my hips which wanted so badly to sway, restrain the smile from alighting on my face in any obvious way.

I could assure anyone who came in, I was just waiting for *Art Attack*.

Ah! And the chorus.

In years to come you will hear men complain
when “Wannabe” comes on the speaker system
of the “nonsense” of its Zig-a-zig ah!
With pretension to critique, they’ll whine
But it doesn’t mean anything—these, the same
men who’ll laud whatever French Theory
can justify their own
erasures of emotion—the zig-a-zig
like a zipper flipped down, up, down
and the Ah—nearly, not quite, an O—
The O, the well of one all-becoming
O—of course they could never hope
to understand. Unskillful lovers
are often quick to pedant.

And it’s brash, and it’s swaggerful in a ganglier, carefree way—totally unlike the slow, testicular swagger of the men I observed in my life—a confidence earned from the inside, tumbling out; not predicated on what flesh that flesh could boss about, but what its own flesh could express from an inner sense of itself.

All this, more or less, occurred to my sister then, wordless. Parcelled down into nearly four minutes of 90s Sugarpop, it must have felt like being hit by a train. And it occurred to me, too. I learned something, then, that would take me decades to understand. Because I couldn’t feel it for myself. Not yet.

Because all the while, the Eye of God observes
cold and remote—we were told
in Sunday School, how when the Rapture came
for each of us, we would go before God.
How, in a crowd, we would be asked to stand
before him, and be judged
for our earthly actions.

The teacher described it like a VHS
shown on a large screen for all to see.
*Would you be pleased with what you saw
if you were there now?* she asked us,
implicating our death
implicating our entire lives
under the Eye, my entire life
I lived, and watched, and watched
the Eye of God watching too.
I was three: actor, observer, judge.
Who would not feel shame?
This is how we are made unfree.

I was the boy who
was taught to hold himself
in guilt, apart from the joy.

But the sheer *velocity*, the propulsion evident in every single line of every Girl, delivered in their individuated voices—they were a mythos of temperaments: like the furies, like archetypes, like Roman idols—The Lion, The Athlete, The Aesthete, The Child, The Rebel.

And when the chorus burst in, close-harmony'd, like a sonic metaphor for intimacy, it meant so much to my sister—as a replication of the relationships of her own life, her own friends. My sister could see The Lion of *her* group, The Rebel; or see herself in The Child or The Athlete; note The Aesthete of her circle. The joy was in its silliness, its lightness, but above all else the *fellowship* it represented—literally arm-in-arm, their havoc-causing, chaotic togetherness an inviolable bond that was equal parts fun and blood pact.

It was a relation I only glimpsed the surface of, in my own life: a coterie, a coven, a protectorate that did not exist for little boys with soft supple eyes.

I was the boy
who wanted this, wanted more
the boy who saw in that mirror plain
in the ecstatic sway of his sister
the missing part
saw in the strange, the alien law
of the Other myself—an alien too
a wish embodied, half a soul
in search for the instant
sisterhood the mystic
the myth ritual of acceptance.

Because however ditsy and cheap, however manufactured, however focus-grouped or laundered, however gaudily Girl Power has aged; however complex and knotted beyond its scope the world now feels—now is, now yet will be; however yet more dark and bloody it seems every year has become since, from the simpler time of that song; however many dystopias and fascists and terrible terrible monstrous things yet to come, what it holds, high above all this, is pure unadulterated JOY—a joy unflinching, a joy empowered, a joy that quite simply, more than all else, will *not take your shit anymore*.

Love me right, or fuck right off.

But don't worry, this is a happy story.
God got put away. The actor, observer, judge
dissolve—I'm simply *me* now, more or less.

And years later, early on in these new ladydays
as we get ready, sincerely,
offhand, you call me "one of the girls"—
one of the girls!—and my heart
or more, the heart of my
entire life, leaps, near explodes—ah!

And I find a beating heart
a boo who wants for me
the equal of their own need
and I to theirs, and so
together we discover
we laugh and collapse
turn the clock back beyond
the insistence of past
to reclaim our now.

No longer a *want* but a *be*.



Florida Georgia Line

"Cruise"

Here's to the Good Times

12/2012

Republic Nashville

Windows Down, Radio Up

Diana Hurlburt

I'm not a country girl.

Brackish water, the near-Atlantic, Floridian conservatism, skateboards: that's my soil. A teenagehood in the dreadful space where grunge had given way to nu-metal, never even as cool as the pop-punk girls with bleached chunks of hair and Atticus patches on their messenger bags. Plenty of disdain to go around, though: unappreciative of sterling pop music as it appeared in real-time, uninterested in the twangy strains of ballads beloved by the teen DJs ruling Mormon church dances. The latter blared out of jacked-up trucks in the high school parking lot, F-150s and Rams owned by boys who wore camouflage like they'd ever even seen a deer in coastal suburbia, let alone shot one and turned it into venison.

Florida isn't the South, my sister used to sneer. She had a film-snobby name for boys like that and their girlfriends, blondes who invariably lived either very far south on our island-in-name-only, or very far north. Either direction meant money. *Nouvelle Redneck*.

When "Cruise" dropped in 2012, I loved it immediately—probably because the first version I heard was the inarguably superior "Remix," featuring Nelly. The Florida Georgia Line original is so bad as to be nearly unlistenable; its music video suggests that neither Florida nor Georgia knows how to play a guitar, their strumming and bobbing not emphatic enough to jar moussed chin-length haircuts or dislodge post-post-post-ironic trucker hats. They look about as authentic as musicians as Bill Nighy's backup band in *Love Actually*. There is nothing in the lyrics or music to compel me, a daughter of fragmented cities and little genuine cultural identity, to do anything but switch the radio station when the song comes on.

I never do.

Instead I roll my windows down, as commanded. It's a foreign country, this land of summer romance, Marshall Tucker karaoke, wholesome American heterosexuality. It looks nothing like the space between Cleveland and Bowling Green—my favorite in Ohio for speeding—rows of corn and glimmering water on the horizon, flat flat flat. The border driving north from my part of America's wang is a nondescript one; I flip off the sign that says *Governor Rick Scott* and sing *whipping 'cross the border, Florida into Georgia* even if there's something else playing on the radio, something less embarrassing and more me.

I've only run a stop sign once, on accident. *I totally paused!* Nineteen years old, lost in east Tampa at night. Scrabbling for license and registration in a goddamn Nine Inch Nails t-shirt. The cop didn't give me a ticket.

Nelly has always been a comforting presence. Misplaced Band-Aids, awkward middle school innocence and the knowing giggles of girls who understand what "Country Grammar" is about, part of the contingent of pre-9/11 hip-hop that now feels like a warm blanket. On "Cruise" he's a miracle worker, turning hellish Autotune and cookie-cutter lyrical imagery into a true bop. From the jump, the mere promise of Nelly as the song progresses sews a skip and wink into the verses. They shift from lazy and hackneyed to earnest, uncomplicated. Nothing serious, not even anything to write home about, the way

the romance depicted won't last past Labor Day... but for now all you can think of is that country girl's legs on the dashboard.

Conspiracy theory: Daveed Diggs is calling to Nelly's lines when he sings *but she got her legs up on the dash*.

Once I tried to reference the muddin' lyric in "Cruise" to my friend K, an inveterate Clevelander and true music fan. *Fire it up, let's go get this thing stuck*. I'm maybe too harsh on the unadorned FGL original edit; if it didn't exist, there would be nothing for Nelly to fix. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Thus, every piece of art has some pearl of truth in it, however buried, obscured, or defaced—otherwise no space would exist for the listener, no plain where creator and consumer meet to do battle. Those boys in high schools with their trucks, their girlfriends in their trucks, their tires streaked with dried gray mud as badges of badassitude and down-home masculinity. Mudding. Mud-bogging, sometimes. Muddin'. There was a lot I didn't understand about those boys—their fashion taste, their inherited jingoist regressivism—and this was a big one. How much did a Chevy Silverado cost in 2004? Why would you then go and attempt to lose your dad's investment in a marsh, or at least not bother to hit the car-wash on the way home? I didn't understand status symbols then. I watched my stepfather carefully wash his 10-year-old Saturn in the driveway. I went to those marshes too, to conduct science projects for AP classes—no shrieking or admiring or kissing required—avoided the worst of the water-filled potholes with my Honda's bald tires.

"Cruise" is a checklist of things I've never done, never wanted, never been. Maybe our purest relationships are to those pieces of art which bear no resemblance to our reality.



Kesha
"Crazy Kids"
Warrior
11/2012
Kemosabe · RCA

A Machine of Iron and Sap (a golden shovel after Kesha)

E. Kristin Anderson

I hear the whisper of pretty death between my thighs tonight—
birds roost on my belly, wearing my prayers like fancy lace. We
have seen this before; the highway is just like a bedroom. Do

you remember how far I fell that February? How on the floor it
was like a garden of nettle and primrose and I lay there, eyes big
like a war, pulling serotonin back to my guts? I've had honey and

bread, found words I'd forgotten, slipped that guttermouth shine
into my voice and on my teeth. Another phone call—maybe I like
genuflecting toward medicine. I know when to run with my stars,

ringing the bell with my tongue. I bite down, take your fingers and
(just to hear my breath) I speak to the birds. Again, I'm sorry, we
can't make room for anyone else in such a narrow space. I don't

carry an axe for fun. I cleave hearts like fruit. I leave and give
it all away before it can rot. I dare you to find me, dressed in a
gown of velvet and feathers. There's no one here and so I fuck

starlight, let the sky carry my secrets into dawn with a kiss 'cause
that's all I need to consider art as truth. Outside, remember that's
the way of things. I seal you in amber and I am home now, just

waiting in the dark with an armful of foxglove; a woman who
knows the blade is only as valuable as its bearer. So who are we
to resist? I carry this whisper on my lips, as bright as they are.



Magnolia Electric Co.

"Hold On Magnolia"

The Magnolia Electric Co.

03/2003

Secretly Canadian

Elegy for Jason Molina

Andrew Jones

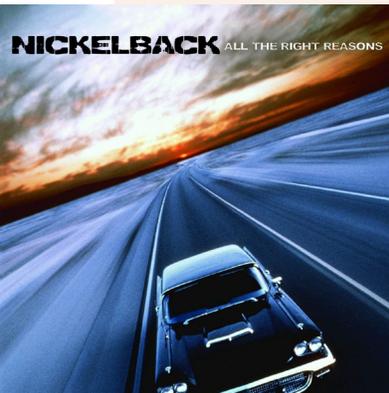
You might be holding the last light I see

—Magnolia Electric Co.

You unfolded those old gas-station maps
in basement bars, carried me over highways,
& past lies waiting to trip me up. Songs lifted the moon
like a lantern & passed it over our secrets
giving shape to the tenuous fibers of recognition.
You charted a course of fallen stars toward home.

You hinted at leaving: silence in the songs
like deep valleys vanquishing the North Star.
Yet departure, like the moment beyond a flash
of lightning, only deepened the darkness & rocked
the whippoorwills from their night branches.
Who would walk the midnight bridges with me now?

My guilt: wanting to keep you for myself.
I'd forgotten others navigate your catalogue
of verses. But this summer, between thunder & rain,
another voice lifted one of your melodies from a stage
in a barn. I remembered to hold on to the ghosts
I know, and look for the ghosts who know we'll be coming.

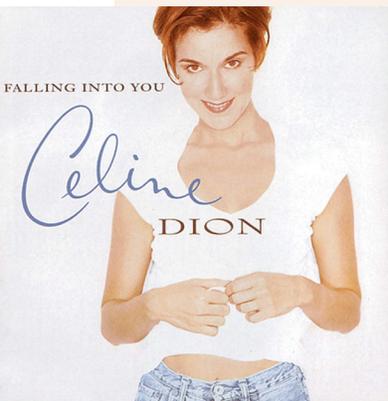


Nickelback
"Far Away"
All the Right Reasons
10/2005
Roadrunner · EMI

when i am fourteen i Google "why do people hate Nickelback so much"

Stefani Tran

because this is the year my dog dies, and "Far Away" is the song i loop for weeks
her name is Coco she is a labrador retriever which means she gives me back things
i think i've lost in summer we split orange popsicles and she goes running
through the sampaloc trees brings me love as dirty tennis balls
and whole hens still breathing carried gently in her mouth
when i am depressed she sits next to me hooks her paw around my arm trying
to hold my hand my freshman year of high school she gets sick
goes on a steel table before i can say goodbye cardboard box in the backyard
i am not allowed to stay home and the teacher marks me down for not following
instructions: *write a poem about a member of your family*
i kick my locker door again and again and again until my instep is black and blue
Google's answer is their music is generic, but when Chad sings *and i forgive you*
for being away for far too long it's a little less sharp the arriving at the clinic
five minutes too late so i guess i've chained my grief to this voice
like a tuba full of gravel but what can you do
so i guess now my grief is generic which Google says means either *not specific*
or *universal* sounds about right



Céline Dion

"It's All Coming Back to Me Now"

Falling into You

03/1996

Columbia · Epic

If You Whisper Like That

Katharine Coldiron

Céline on stage is quite a sight. She has these bizarre gestures, these tightly controlled flourishes, these odd steps and sweeps and stops. It's all highly engineered, based on many years of knowing exactly what her voice sounds like, exactly what she traffics in as a performer. Her every gesture, her still body and elastic face, all point toward the same especial range of emotion.

Melodrama is what she traffics in as a performer. No other singer is so melodramatic. And no song expresses her melodrama as well as "It's All Coming Back to Me Now," which, let's get this out of the way, might have been written for Meat Loaf, sort of, but people who say he sings it better are fooling themselves. If you are one of them, stop reading now, because I'm never going to convince you that "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" is a genuinely great song. But it is.

I was 17 when this song came out and I had no interest in anything so stupid. Beck claimed most of my heart, and whatever was left over belonged to ska, pop-punk, and early Sarah McLachlan (Ani didn't make herself known to me till college). Céline's romantic nonsense was too much for me to admit even to myself, let alone anyone else. I remember local radio DJs making a version of "My Heart Will Go On" that featured them howling in pain, because everyone was that tired of hearing the goddamn thing. I remember telling my best friend, whose heart-shaped box belonged to Courtney, that I kind of liked U2, and the chilly silence that followed in the car.

The video. A mansion and candles and flowing dressing-gowns and relentless mirrors. Céline reaching for the sky and the ground and the man and the fire. I've made fun of it many times, and I can do so again, because it's so ripe, it's a melodramatic apple wailing like a siren before it falls, perfectly formed and ready to eat, from the tree. But none of this is telling you why I love the song so much.

Because I do. I'll listen to it three or four times in a row, happily; I'm listening to it on repeat as I type this. And I keep stopping to gesture wildly at the air. The song is so powerful, so full of its own potency, that it spills into my cells whether I want it to or not. I croon "forever" with the choir, but even alone in the car I usually just listen to Céline, rather than spoiling the ductile textures of her voice with my own. She lets herself break and bellow and whisper in this one song, which is so big in its seven and a half minutes that playing it just once feels incomplete.

I know it's silly. There are dramatic violins, and a disconsolate wind blows when the music is quiet. The "story" is about some kind of bad love, a difficult past full of softcore sex and suffering (*Wuthering Heights*, says the songwriter). It's all too evocative to be specific. But this is the genius of sad pop: it makes heartbreak intrinsically vague, so when we listen and cry, we can stretch our situations over the generalities and believe the song really is about us.

Yet the silliness is so sincere. And it's good. Poking fun at sincerity, at dead-serious attempts to say something, is much easier when the work isn't very good. See *The Room*, for instance. Céline, even if she is generally Way Too Much, has a muscular and unforgettable voice, and "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" is exceptionally well-crafted

melodrama; the words are well-chosen, the music is sensuous and dynamic, and the production is grand, its priorities beautifully proportioned.

Bad melodrama, seen daily on soap operas, is much easier to laugh at and dismiss. Still, I challenge you to absorb a week of soap operas and not wind up emotionally involved by Thursday. Melodrama appeals to the side of us that believes in happy endings, that yearns for a time before we knew about moral relativity and the sourness of bottled resentment. It makes us feel something urgent and uncomplicated. It's a yank under the solar plexus: emotion without paradox. Simple barriers stand in the way of a woman getting what she wants instead of systemic political pressure or internal error. For instance: I had this lover and, even though we fought, the sex was amazing, but then he died in a motorcycle wreck. Now I must writhe in my satin-sheeted bed, and my inadequate health insurance and the uncertain future of *Roe v. Wade* have no claws at the moment.

Yes, I'm aiming toward women in this analysis, but women are the traditional audience for melodramatic art. Romance novels, Douglas Sirk movies, Céline Dion albums. Soap operas. Reality TV. Stuff where women are the subjects of their own lives, and their lives are generally narrow and lovelorn, full of tiny conflicts and enormous emotions. A bad relationship is huge, all-encompassing. Ask the best friend of someone in one. And "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" brings that alive beautifully, ideally, leading the listener by the hand through a house of mirrors, showing her every bad relationship she has ever lived through, experiencing years of turmoil in seven and a half minutes. Moments of gold. Flashes of light. I can barely recall, thank God, because being in a healthy relationship is much better than being in a sick one, even if it's much more boring.

When Céline's voice touches me like that, though, it all comes back to me. The dude who barely talked to me, but whose smile made me feel like a goddess. The guy who breathlessly called me a pale English rose when I undressed, and later coaxed me into having sex with porn playing in the background. The time my lover and I were fighting and I ran outside and got in the car and drove away, hyperventilating, and he thought I might have driven off a bridge, because that's how intensely the air between us had vibrated. Then we fucked in that same car, so passionately that I hung on for another year. All of this was terrible at the time, and lost long ago, but the melodrama of it endures. I can visit it (*melo*, from the Greek for music) without the unpleasantness of living it (*drama*, from the Greek for...drama).

Living vicariously through Céline for those minutes, again and again, gives me the kind of satisfaction I can't get from rolling my eyes at her. I can't listen to "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" every day, or even every month, and I can't listen to it with other people around, because I do preserve some outward dignity about my taste in music. But every time I listen, I am totally swept away by the song. I can't hold back any part of me when I hear it, can't close any emotional doors and smirk at her earnest vibrato. There's too much truth in it, too much genuine feeling. If it takes such pageantry to whisk me into a state of mind where my emotions are bigger than Alaska, I'll take it. On repeat, enthralled, gesturing for no reason, I'll take it.

Contributors

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