



Memoir Mixtapes

Vol. 11: The Long & Winding Road

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Special thanks as always to our reader, Benjamin Selesnick

Letters from the Editors



Hey everyone,

I know that I promised the wait wouldn't be as long this time. I know. I wish I could have seen what was coming. I optimistically—*foolishly*—proclaimed that this year was going to be my year. Many of us did. But the writhing, pus-laden shitpile that is 2020 CE had other ideas.

Between divorce, major moves, the pandemic, and the all-around-horror of the world these days, the MM team has been pretty beaten and kicked around. We hope that you'll forgive us for our tardiness. The Quarantimes of 2020 are a fucking misery for all of us.

But it isn't *entirely* miserable around these parts. Eagle-eyed readers may note that our glorious creator Sam isn't here this go around—that's because she's probably looking after her sweet little cherub of a daughter! It ain't news to anyone that having a newborn baby requires a major life adjustment, so Sam is focusing on her wee bairn, and working hard to be the badass mom I know she'll be. I hope that you all can take comfort knowing that, despite the rough days we find ourselves in, good things are still happening in the world.

Speaking of good things happening, we have here one fantastic and timely Vol. for you kind and beautiful folks. We asked for your travel stories, and boy, we had no idea how badly we'd hunger for travel over the coming year.

Being able to safely leave home—such a simple, stupid thing—seems like a hazy and luxurious dream to me these days. When I do leave the house, my usual anxiety is ratcheted up through the stratosphere. But when reading through this Vol., I found that my brain grew quiet. I took a trip out of my head, away from the stress, the worry, the fear, the anxiety. This collection of excellent writing has brought me peace and calm, and it reminds me that—trite as it might be to say—we aren't alone, no matter how isolated we may be. It is my earnest hope that within the pages of *Memoir Mixtapes Vol. 11: The Long & Winding Road*, you may be able to take a little trip out of your heads for some respite, too.

I know I speak for the whole team when I say that we are incredibly grateful to you, our little community of readers and writers, for your patience. It's been a long and winding road getting here, but I hope you'll find the wait worth it.

Be excellent to each other,

Kevin D. Woodall
EDITOR / CO-CURATOR



Hi friends,

In the tarot, the Tower card represents destruction, unexpected change, upheaval, catastrophe. It's probably the most terrifying card to pull, because it also represents external forces causing the devastation. You have no control over it. I had my tower moment earlier this year, right alongside this tiny little pandemic and the ongoing shitshow that is 'Merica 2020. I don't know if the rest of the MM team would say this year was their tower year, but I know each of us has been Going Through It. And, from my occasional Twitter lurking, I know a lot of our extended MM community is as well.

It feels like an eternity ago that we put out the call for pieces inspired by road trips and travel. And it was at least five years ago, I think, when we closed the submission window and started reading the most submissions we've ever had. Then March 2020 rolled around, and you know the rest.

As such, the timing of this theme couldn't be weirder. Many of us have barely left the house in months, let alone taken a vacation or road trip. But maybe it's actually great timing—you can live vicariously through all of our featured writers' essays and poems. They'll take you on airplanes, in cars, to Paris, to California. You can stay inside. You don't even have to wear a mask.

We are grateful to you all, and especially to all our contributors, for your patience as we worked through challenging personal stuff, in addition to, you know, the world being on fire and everything. The country may be going through its own tower moment, which I think most of us will agree is much needed. The fall of the tower is necessary for transformation. Let's burn this fucker down and rebuild something better.

But the intensity of all of that doesn't diminish the work in this volume and any of the work all of us are doing. We need stories. We need poems. We need vulnerability and celebrations of triumphs and personal reckonings. Which is to say, thank you for writing, thank you for submitting to and reading our little musical lit mag, and thank you for continuing to put words together, whether you grace the world with them or keep them in secret, close to your heart.

With love,

Emery Ross
EDITOR / CO-CURATOR

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Free Fallin'

Lily Crooks

Your parents are driving so they pick the music. For hours it's Steely Dan and Basia and Sade. Years later you will astound your twelve-year-old self as you come to appreciate these artists, but for now it's insufferable. You read *Mad Magazine* in the back seat and argue with your brother. It is 1994. You do not have headphones; there are 12 hours of travel ahead of you. You wait for them to put on the good stuff.

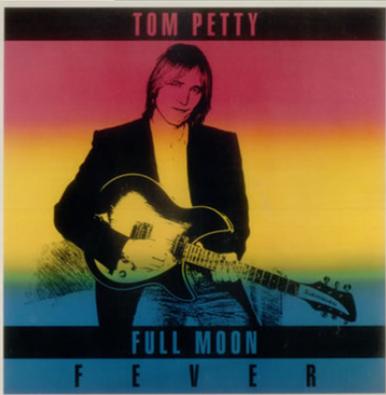
You have been to the Black Hills of South Dakota every year since you were in utero. If the state bird is the buffalo chip, then the state flower is a tattered green sign declaring "X Many Miles to Wall Drug." When you drive from Minneapolis to the cabin it is I-90 direct to Cheyenne Crossing; do not stop at the Corn Palace, do not collect arrowheads at 1880's Town. Your parents teach you the term "kid trap" as you pass the small-town prairie sideshows. There is nothing to see in Minnesota and less to see when you cross the border. To an uninitiated traveler crossing the state line might seem like a milestone, but you know it is just the beginning. It is flat now, and hot. You might stop in Highmore to hear about Grandpa's high school girlfriends. You might stop in Doland where there is one bar and a gas station with a bathroom. It is flat, it is hot. You do not have air conditioning so sometimes you hang wet towels in the back windows of the white Ford Taurus wagon and you try to sleep through the bright roar of wheels on the road. The parents listen to Manhattan Transfer, Matt Bianco, and perhaps most egregiously, *the news*.

But something changes at Chamberlain.

Chamberlain is where the flat yellow-white plains suddenly dip and curve. The bluffs and vistas of Chamberlain are made for sunrises. The Black Hills are still hours away, but you can see hints of what is to come here along the Missouri River. There is green, there are trees. The landscape changes, becomes more nuanced and complex. The prairie on the west side of Chamberlain has antelope and bison. Cross the river into the new time zone, and it's close now. The Wall Drug signs are frantic, you are *almost there*. And as if to celebrate this change in circumstance, this final leg of the journey, your parents finally, finally put on *Full Moon Fever*.

As your car dips down to cross the river, and then climbs up out of the valley into the new world, the opening chords to "Free Fallin'" make you feel like you're in a movie. You're in the West now. The words to the song don't matter, though you are a good girl who loves her mama. The song creates momentum, the car moves faster and with purpose. You love the way Tom Petty says she's crazy about Elvis—it sounds wistful, and hopeful. You imagine being crazy about Tom Petty and decide that you are. By the time the final repetitions of the chorus start, you can feel it; it's happening, the drive is nearing its end. The whole family knows this album by heart. You listen to it twice through. You are running down a dream, falling out into nothing, you won't back down. You watch your own reflection in the car window as you sing along. This is where the camera zooms in, this album makes your life a film in forty-minute increments.

The stops become more frequent. The Badlands are an acceptable break from being in the car. You've seen *Moonraker* and try to imagine you are on the surface of another planet. *Moonraker* was not filmed in the Badlands but *Dances With Wolves* was—Kevin Costner



Tom Petty

"Free Fallin'"

Full Moon Fever

04/1989

MCA

loves South Dakota, maybe not as much as you do, but in a way that seems sincere. At Cedar Pass you count Mennonites. Buffalo Gap is not a place to stop for ice cream and just because it's on the map doesn't mean they have a bathroom. No music in Badlands. "Look out the window," they tell you.

So close to your destination, but still over two hours to go. You avoid Rapid City altogether and head north, the dark and comforting hills on your left, dominating the horizon. You stay on the highway and head up to the mouth of Spearfish Canyon, where the roads will wind and the temperature will drop. You're so ready. You can smell the pines now. But first, the butcher shop in Sturgis is better than the one in Hill City. Stop. Gas is cheaper here than in Deadwood. Stop. Spearfish has the only organic grocer between Minneapolis and maybe Denver. Stop. But finally, finally, you abandon I-90. After 620 miles of driving in a straight line, the bends of the canyon's scenic byway force the car to a comfortable 35 miles per hour. You beg your mom to cue it up and *Free Fallin'* starts again; the opening chords ache. You begin the ascent into the Hills. Driving up an ancient gorge, Paha Sapa limestone cathedrals and coal black pines fill you up with their familiar beauty. The music makes it home. You've heard this song one hundred times, one thousand times, but it means something different now that you're here. Maybe the song is about California, maybe it's about nothing. It doesn't matter. You'll write your name in the sky. Leave your world for this one, at least for a little while.

Listening to Purple Mountains on the Way to My Parents' House

Lucas Bailor

David Berman has died & I think about him every day. We put his new album on, a little before everyone's mourning, through Southern California's landscape across an hour & a half, no breaks: desert, poppy blooms, the blue sky, my yearning again for the coast, our bloom's heart.

The songs let us into DB's broken heart, the ways in which he works every day: *I'll have to learn to like my -self*; but, in the moment, I hear little, first listens always full of stops & starts, breaks to joke with you, breaks to take in details of the landscape,

& only rarely do I catch a stray lyric, or reconcile a familiar landscape. In Southern California, something of my heart still resides, although my familiarity breaks on each new return, each street under new shade, yet every housing tract still running monolithic. & it's a little broken for me. DB opens "All My Happiness is Gone" with the work of keeping friends, my own weakness. *Friends are warmer than gold*, & the landscape of Moreno Valley, the local flood control & other little, local markers remind me of the proverb about absence & heart & other related bullshit. My parents are the reason for every new visit, & there's longer & longer breaks

in between. For now, we're headed to see breaks in action, an awkward lunch in a new home. My excitement on the road wanes into indifference, every moment anchored by you. Across the landscape of us is this mutual anchoring, a holding of each other's heart *in all things huge / and their requiring*, in all things little

PURPLE MOUNTAINS



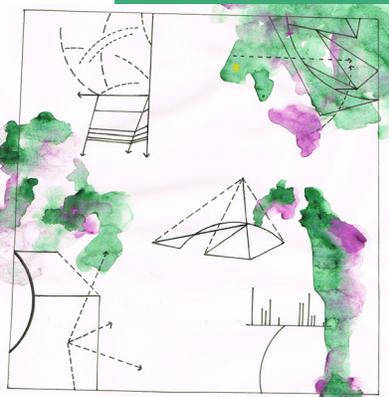
Purple Mountains

Various

Purple Mountains

07/2019

Drag City



Young Jesus

"Desert"

S/T

09/2017

Saddle Creek

& their handling. So we try to handle each little thing, *just letting the day be what it is*, & take breaks from letting tragedy be held too close to each other's heart, to say which is our new new favorite Purple Mountains track, my first: "Nights That Won't Happen," though across the landscape DB created you also suggest "Snow is Falling in Manhattan," each & every song getting its due, little or not. In "I Loved Being My Mother's Son," DB breaks me with *I loved her to the maximum*. This landscape holds our maximum, & in each moment we have our heart, each & every.

Author's note: This poem contains a lyric from Young Jesus' "Desert," lyrics from the self-titled Purple Mountains album, a line from Linda Gregg's "We Manage Most When We Manage Small," and a line from David Berman's "Self-Portrait at 28."

When Larkspurs and Saltwater's in the Air

DW McKinney

1995

A day trip to Jalama Beach.

By way of the flower fields.

It's the original or a remix—the trip or the song.

But the vibe is always the same.

Lompoc, California

Today is the last day I will smell the purples and creamy whites, all the shades of red passing by the backseat window. There's nothing in the sky to signal that this is my last time relishing the scent of a rainbow. Nothing telling me to inhale so deeply that my nose grabs hold of the fragrance, storing it inside me so I can recall it on days brimming with remembrance and melancholy. Though we've driven down this road before, we only take these trips when my [step]sister's in town. They are delectable treats that dampen a gnawing hunger that grows steadily inside me on such rare weekends.

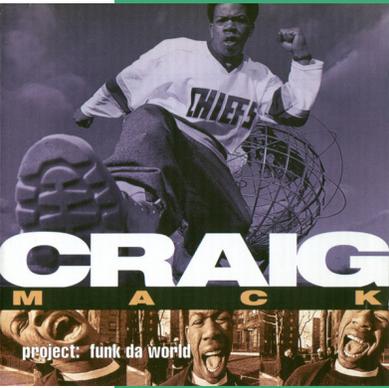
Today my sister sits across from me in the backseat, behind Daddy. Our parents whisper to each other up front. It's a habit they maintain throughout long drives in subsequent years. Leaning and whispering. Daddy's brown eyes checking over his wide shoulder to make sure we aren't listening, right before he raises the music's volume to ensure we can't hear them. Sometimes, when I look back on this memory, I imagine my parents are discussing the brother they have yet to tell my sister and me about. Forming his presence out of the surrounding Queen Anne's lace and fog until there's nothing left for me to enjoy in the days after.

Today is the last day I give myself to the blooms and tides.

I'd like to break it down, down-breaking forsaken

My breath fogs up the window. Each exhalation presses a cloud onto the pane before it dissolves into nothing. I lean closer to the window and *hah haaah* until another cloud forms. I run my finger through it, drawing a smiley face into the glass. It's not enough to embrace the well-worn comfort wrapped around me. It's not enough that my brown cheeks ache, joy digging into the corners of my mouth. It's not enough to sit here in this moment, letting the day unfold petal by petal, beat by beat. I want every molecule in my ten-year-old body to blend with my surroundings. I want to be the dirt and slate sky, the perfumed scents swirling on the seawater breeze and the flow spitting from the radio.

I mumble the lyrics and bob my head. Tiny clouds rhythmically burst onto the window. I am vibrating at a frequency that threatens to explode in the space around me. Maybe Daddy senses this too, or maybe he's trying to be what he calls *funny*. So, when Mom asks him to roll down the window, he rolls down mine too. Air smacks my face, rushing up my nostrils and filling my open mouth. I turn my head to dislodge the wind's sharp fist jammed into the back of my throat. No one realizes I almost died, choking on my own joy.



Craig Mack

"Flava in Ya Ear"

Project: Funk da World

09/1994

Bad Boy · Arista

We cruise along in silence until my father sighs. Then he sighs again while dramatically rolling his head around in the seat and slapping his hands on his thighs. The Volvo drifts to the left, threatening to crash into the field, as he pretends to die from boredom.

"Fine, boo. I'm done," Mom says.

Daddy corrects the car and the Volvo lurches as we pick up speed. He turns the music back on while smirking at Mom. He's the driver. He can do what he wants. I tip my mouth to the open window and continue rapping to the wind. Depending on how I place my face, the wind gives my voice a cool effect like when I sing R&B ballads to the standing fan in my parents' bedroom. But since Daddy's now playing the "Flava in Ya Ear" remix, I instead use the wind to my advantage. It rips away the curse words, the *niggas* and hard lines about packing gats and TEC-9s, grabbing dicks—stuff I really don't understand yet, but I know it's bad because Daddy's sharp eyes watch me from the rearview mirror. Usually I'd just keep quiet during these verses and stare pointedly at my father while doing so. But today I'm feeling bold, golden and flowing with power. "Flava in Ya Ear" makes me feel indestructible.

You'll be on your knees, and you'll be burning, begging please

The previous year, my parents and I lived in Pennsylvania while my sister stayed behind with her mother. I made my first snowman and ate my first venison burger, and I was called n*gger for the first time. As the only Black kid in school, racism's blunt hand left me ostracized in the classroom and on the playground. *Family Matters* was popular at the time, so when other students did extend a welcoming hand it was right before asking me to perform a Steve Urkel impression. I was often deflated by the time my parents picked me up in the afternoon. I existed in a transient space, outside the borderlines of acceptability, until I buckled myself in the Volvo and I heard *click* then—

Time for new flava in ya ear

I'm kickin' new flava in ya ear

Mack's the brand new flava in ya ear

Daddy mumble-rapped alongside Craig Mack and thumped his fingers against the steering wheel as we wound our way down the frozen mountainside. I just listened, watching the way the words and beat transformed my father. Saw them settle his six-foot frame into the driver's seat. Watched him be at ease. I eventually tapped my fingers against the burgundy leather seats and let the words rock inside me and burrow into my bones. I siphoned Mack's flow directly into my blood. When Daddy popped the cassette in and the beat started, it felt like a complete restoration of what I'd lost during the day. Just as I was learning the lyrics, we moved back to the West Coast and Craig Mack became the freedom anthem that sounded when the smell of larkspurs and saltwater permeated the air.

The Volvo lurches forward as we exit the flower fields, away from the poppies of Oz on our own yellow brick road. Daddy changes out the cassette for a different rapper and after one song, the music's off and my parents mutter quietly to themselves. It is dystopic when we finally arrive to Jalama Beach forty minutes later. Overcast and gray. No one is around for miles. Faded driftwood and seaweed litter the shore. The wind chips across the sand unimpeded by umbrellas, towels, or bodies glistening with lotions. Daddy pulls out a ragged yellow blanket—our only provision—from the grimy trunk. Mom climbs slowly out of the car, her petite frame barely reaches the top of the door. She gazes at the beach as if assessing her life in that moment. It is good. My sister and I look toward Daddy and he shouts—

"Go!"

We sprint down the beach, kicking off our shoes right before we reach the water. We don't have bathing suits. Just the jeans and t-shirts we would otherwise wear to school. I never understood why we always wore our regular clothes to the beach, why we never had bathing suits, but it didn't matter. It's time to live.

Our parents cuddle together on the blanket. We are too far away to hear them talking. Too busy running in and out of the waves, trying not to be pulled under since Daddy is the only one of us who knows how to swim. When my sister and I tire of the water beating us, we dig in the compact sand or search for seashells, racing from one glistening shell to the next in hopes to be the one who ends up with the best one, a whole one, the prettiest one.

The coast leaves us windblown and after a few hours, Daddy barks at us from the blanket. He picks it up and shakes out the sand. Some blows back in his face through the holes worn through the blanket from age. We all trudge up the middling dune pocked with sea grass to the car. Daddy tosses the blanket in the trunk. He pulls out his old camouflage jacket from the Marine Corps and lays it across the backseat for my sister and me to sit on. We climb in and my sister pulls the jacket so that it covers most of her seat. It's either mess up Daddy's backseat or sit in middle on the remaining square of available jacket, so I pull myself onto the middle hump and buckle in. Realizing we don't have towels, Daddy grabs the blanket from the trunk and tosses it over us. My sister cozies up to her door and snuggles into her arm for a nap. The tides have worn us out and our wet clothes pull us gently down into the seats readying us for slumber.

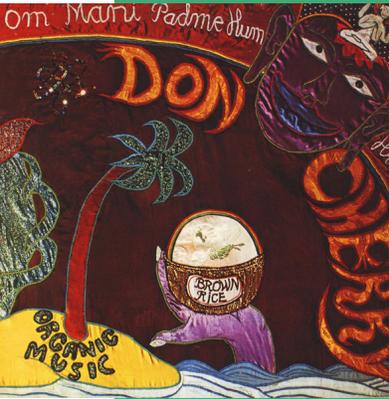
I rest my head back and close my eyes. My fingers spread across the seat and when they find a crack, I pick at it, releasing waves of pungent, old leather into the thick air. I don't hear the *click* and rattle of a cassette. But my eyes pop open when I hear Puff Daddy clinking two bottles together. It's time for the remix. I clear my throat and smile, turning my face to the nearest open window.

Morning Tapestry

Michael Garrigan

River dark, road reaches
across the rust gray lip of night
into the mouth of dawn, its orange
tongue horizon creeps easily into the next
wah wah bass line, a trumpet in the left speaker,
the hypnotic "oooo aaaa oooo aaaa" drives me into the hazy
in-between of night and day, of jazz and psychedelic,
of water and land, of abstract and physical.

Spirituals tapped out on my steering wheel
sing me down dirt roads cleaving the Kittatinny Ridge
falling into freestone streams full of wild trout and cosmic chants.
Here I no longer am I but am we, a cacophony of orchestral
rhythms and ancient mantras. Here we
swim with water shamans, crayfish,
pebbles, mountain laurel, minnow
until we eddy into a wordless
endless harmony.



Don Cherry

"Brown Rice"

Brown Rice

1975

EMI

California

M.M. Carrigan

Rolling Stone once dubbed Joni Mitchell the Queen of El Lay, in a sexist jab at her legendary sexual conquests in 1960s California. It's the first thought I had when I came out of my Xanax coma, the morning after, waking up in a hotel in Los Angeles. As I came to in the stiff bed, the yellow California sunlight poked through the sides of the industrial-strength hotel blinds. A Xanax hangover is plain and gentle. The brain hums and restructures its dopamine release system like a busy bee, no industrial-strength Ibuprofen needed.

If someone had given me the choice between flying on a plane or cutting off an arm, I would have asked which arm they preferred. My wife's brother lives in Los Angeles, and ever since he had announced his engagement the prior year, I began dreading the cross-country flight to his wedding. It's not so much a fear of flying as it is a fear of plummeting from the sky while being trapped in a narrow tube with everyone screaming. And it's not just the people screaming, it's the explosive decompression when the windows blow out, the oxygen masks dangling uselessly, the flight attendants who were calmly distributing cans of Coke just minutes prior now reciting the mantra words Brace Brace Brace, head down, legs tucked. We booked our plane tickets and I booked a psychiatric appointment. *California, I'm gonna see the folks I dig.*

The psychiatrist told me she hates flying, too, like it was an extra tidbit she threw in with my prescription. The way she said it made me think she must gobble a bucket full of the pills before boarding the plane. I imagine her strung out at LAX or BOS or DLH. Probably DLH. Something about her strikes me as "family in Duluth, Minnesota." I pictured her stoned in Duluth and it didn't make me feel better.

I asked her for a dosage that would make me black out. I said it dryly, with an injection of sarcasm to make her smile. But she didn't. Instead she mussed with her tight ponytail and swiveled slightly in her chair to face me for the first time, maybe ever. And she gave me directions on how to responsibly black myself out. I repeated the directions back like a responsible adult, but I knew I was going to take double the amount because the screaming people never shut up.

I wish I could feel simplistic and free, as Joni does when she sings, *California, I'm coming home*, but I have a feeling Joni has never felt simple and free.

I have a body that handles its shit. I don't burn red in the sun. I eat spicy food. I've been tattooed and pierced multiple times; it didn't hurt. I can handle alcohol without acting stupid. I've never gotten a migraine in my life. I don't even know what an ice cream headache feels like. I've never been stung by a jellyfish. Once a bee flew into my forehead and stung me, and I felt a little disappointed that a bee sting wasn't more painful. I mean, I expected to die. I've seen *My Girl* starring Macauley Culkin, and I have an anxiety disorder. That's my basic reference point for everything in life.

I could handle Xanax. Before arriving at the airport, I popped one, and then to make sure it worked, I popped two.

I found myself enjoying the airport. There's stuff here. And not just planes spontaneously combusting on the runway. Good people watching. *Lots of pretty people here, reading Rolling Stone, reading Vogue.* I wanted to know everything. I wanted to explore. There



Joni Mitchell

"California"

Blue

06/1971

Reprise

were gift shops with magnets, magazines, and neck pillows. I felt like I was studying exotic birds in the field. I wandered and marveled at the strange, abridged menus in these miniature versions of restaurants. I'll get my shoes shined! I'll get smoothies! Maybe *I'll even kiss a sunset pig*, as Joni sang.

I composed myself and got smoothies. I gleefully ordered a strawberry one, a mango one, and a Caribbean medley one. I strut back to the boarding/waiting area, where everyone looked miserable and bored. What is wrong with you people? It's the airport! I want to have my birthday party here!

I presented the smoothies to my wife and son with triumph. Smoothies! Babe. Baby. My wife raised her eyebrow at the odd gesture from me.

"Thanks? I didn't ask for one?"

My son accepted the neon cup of sugar and fruit without question. Good kid.

I'm not even a "smoothie person" in real life. But suddenly I was. This is the new me. I'm trying on travelling. I'm trying on blended fruit drinks. I was trying on drugs is what I was really doing. *Will you take me as I am?* Lit up, strung out, and handing out smoothies like I was the magical smoothie Santa Claus of BWI.

Then I looked out those wall-length windows and saw the planes on the tarmac. I started to hear the screaming, again. Go away, you terrible people afraid of dying. I took a third pill before getting on the plane. The psychiatrist had said something in her directions about three in four hours, and I was only an hour in.

We boarded and took off. The Brace Brace Brace attendant came by, but this time she was saying Snacks Snacks Snacks. She encouraged me to take as many bags as I wanted because the ride was very long. She was like a Potato Chip Jesus. I took a small bag of Fritos, which joined the pre-packed snack comrades in my bag, Pop Tarts and Twizzlers. Together they were like the Super Friends of Snacks. Potato Chip Jesus also brought me the most delicious Diet Coke I have ever tasted upon mine lips, as though it was poured straight from the fountain of heaven.

Time passed. My feelings began to flatten out, no longer euphoric, just long and forever as the Midwest plained below us. Nearby I had the vague sense that my wife was struggling to keep our three-year-old buckled in his seat during severe turbulence, and that her parents were trying to get our baby daughter to nap. But I don't remember severe turbulence or tantrums or anything. I just remember my Frito Feelings of Flatness.

At some point I came back and overheard that there were still two more hours in the air. I started to hear the screaming again, very distant and muffled, as though they were shoved in trunks in the back of my brain. I took my last pill. I might as well have gotten stung by a billion bees and died. It finally shut the screaming people up, but it shut just about everything else up, too. So that's where you pesky screaming people live in my brain—right next door to perception of self, memory, and existence.

It gets so lonely when you're walking, and the streets are full of strangers. I've decided I quite like those screaming people. The next day I came back in El Lay and dreaming / sighing / buzzing of Joni Mitchell. California.

Ojo Caliente

Katie Manning

Out the window, the desert mountains and Chama River look like a painting of themselves, too majestic to be real. The three of us cruise beside them in an SUV, singing along to *The Joshua Tree* and talking about our kids. Our bodies have been marked by those children like the landscape has been marked by moving water. We reach the resort, pay a fee, and gain access to the sacred springs. Before I enter the water, I read every sign—arsenic, lithia, soda, and iron—each supposed to help in some way with arthritis, indigestion, or fatigue. I wonder who first touched these waters, long before informative signs and mineral knowledge. Who first decided it was worth the risk to submerge a bit of skin into the heat and hope for healing? I lower myself into a pool and think of the man whose friends lowered him through a roof to be healed. I wish for a sign that says this water can wash away the grief and fear that have come with a year marked by colliding cars and cancer cells, but I know this can't be. I lie back and float on the water, arms wide. The clouds are dark as distant mountains. To them, my body must appear to be a small star in a clear sky.

Editors' note: This piece was first published in American Journal of Nursing, January 2019, Volume 119, Issue 1.

T H E J O S H U A T R E E U 2



U2

“Where the Streets
Have No Name”

The Joshua Tree

03/1987

Island

Matala

Ellen Austin-Li

We blew in on the morning ferry,
slipped into the northern port of Heraklion
in Crete, grabbed a taxicab
and motored two hours south
to Matala—*Arigato*—I thanked
the cabbie in perfect Japanese,
handing him too many drachmas.
My Canadian girlfriends giggled
at my international faux-pas.
Joni sang *the wind was in from Africa,*
last night, I didn't sleep; so, we went
looking for the Mermaid Cafe
in that crazy tourist town.

Matala—twenty years after
Joni and Carey, but I thought
I could hear a sweet dulcimer's
zithered strings ringing the cove, singing
the caves of honeycombed sandstone.
We climbed the cliff face, wove in and out,
cell to cell, searching cool walls
for Joni's name carved in a heart
alongside her *mean old daddy*.
We looked out stone eyes
onto the azure sea, kicked charred wood
leftovers from hippie fires.
Our fingernails were filthy,
we got beach tar on our feet.

We descended with the dusk
into town to drink bottles of wine,
got smashed on shots of ouzo—
Yasou—a round for each one
free on this Greek isle.
I thanked the bartender—*efkharistó*—
in Greek this time, bowed out
alone to the rocks, monoliths
at the Mediterranean's edge.
Supine, the night's starry dome
spun a kaleidoscope overhead;
I didn't want to leave there,
where the stars shone so bright,
as if light had punched giant holes
in the fabric of night. But, like Joni,
it was really not my home.

Author's note: Woven with a few lines from Joni Mitchell's "Carey."



Joni Mitchell

"Carey"

Blue

06/1971

Reprise



Jonas Kaufmann

"Nessun Dorma"

Nessun Dorma –
The Puccini Album

2015

Sony

Chasing the Voice

Sheila Sharpe

"Please, please let us in," I pleaded. "We've come all the way from California." Over the past three years I've crossed one ocean and two continents in hapless pursuit of Jonas Kaufmann, the world's greatest and most elusive tenor. The trail led here, to Munich's National Theater, where he was due to sing in a few minutes.

My husband Michael and I slipped through the opening doors and squeezed by the other members of our group seated in row four of the orchestra section. There were fifteen people on this high-end tour to the Munich Opera Festival, and we'd paid the big bucks on the gamble of catching Kaufmann in his hometown.

"Has he bailed yet?" I asked Michele, the most fervent Jonas fan.

"No cancellation on his website, but..." She shrugged. We knew Kaufmann could pull out right before the performance if he detected the slightest vocal problem.

Sitting down between Michael and my friend Mary, I felt close to passing out in the stifling theater. My clothes were all wrong for August in Munich, and without air-conditioning, I was sweltering in my exotic Serbian sweater, feeling the colors bleed.

"Isn't this exciting?" Mary said. "Do you believe we actually got here and Jonas is going to sing to us right there?" She pointed to the stage a few yards away.

I grunted, checking the time. Four minutes past the seven o'clock curtain. This did not bode well. Germans were punctual. Was Jonas melting down backstage? Was he even there?

"We're in Bavaria," Mary reminded me. "It's much less anal than the rest of Germany. Besides Jonas would not dare fail us a third time."

"Right. Hell hath no fury like women thrice scorned." I said, only half in jest.

The women in our group—a Voltaire scholar, a German teacher, a Viennese jewelry designer, a music professor, a lawyer (Mary), and me, a psychologist—were all accomplished grown-ups old enough to be wise. Yet, here we were panting after this singer like a gaggle of groupies. We even called him Jonas, as if he were an intimate. At least this madness was not just a female condition. There were an equal number of male fans in our group, including my math-genius husband.

I eyed the closed red and gold curtains, squirmed in the uncomfortable seat, and sweated. Blotting my damp face with a handkerchief, I conjured up the cool, air-conditioned movie theater where I first heard Kaufmann sing in a filmed Met production of *Faust*.

Jonas appeared onscreen as the old decrepit scientist, so there was no falling in love at first sight. Rather, it was love at first sound when I heard his voice soar up to full volume, cursing God and crying out, "Come to me, Satan!" My heart was thumping, and I tingled all over, his voice flowing into my body like the Devil's elixir of youth.

How could a singer have such power? Researchers call these tingling reactions "frisson" or "aesthetic chills" or a "skin orgasm." According to recent research, music activates the pleasure center of the brain, releasing dopamine, as does good sex, food, and drugs like

cocaine. Of course not all music excites everyone. Important memories influence what turns you on. My love of opera came from my father, who played the Met Opera broadcasts on the radio when I was growing up. I hated that god-awful music back then and didn't find my potential love for it until friends dragged me to an opera as an adult.

Now I wondered why Kaufmann's voice moved me more than any other tenor's. His voice was darker, heavier, and more masculine than the voices of other greats like Pavarotti and Domingo. Kaufmann also had an exceptional range from ringing high notes full of color to an unusually rich, velvety lower register that extended down to reverberating bass notes. This remarkable range allowed him to sing almost any role from Mozart to Wagner. These unique abilities plus his precision and passionate delivery must hit more pleasure points in my brain than other beautiful voices did. His voice was also addictive.

The sound of Michael blowing his nose brought me back to the sweatbox theater and the view of closed curtains. No Jonas Kaufmann. It was 7:12. I glanced at Mary who sat ramrod straight, hands folded, her British stiff upper lip in place. We'd been through this routine before, and the angst of the first time came roaring back.

In 2015, one of the coldest winters in New York's history, Mary and I flew from balmy San Diego to see Jonas in *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera. Michael stayed home. He hated the cold more than he loved Kaufmann. I'd rented a light-filled apartment overlooking the Hudson River and close to Lincoln Center. Two days later, Kaufmann cancelled his first of only two performances because of the flu. He planned to make it for the Saturday matinee, for which we had lousy overpriced tickets from an online broker.

Saturday morning, a ferocious storm struck New York. The snow was so thick I saw only swirling white outside the windows. We could get no news about Kaufmann. It was 14 degrees outside when we left for the matinee wrapped in layers of clothes. A few steps down the street, a fierce gust off the Hudson threw us against the wall, knocking me breathless. The gale kept our bodies plastered there and we could only inch sideways, palms against the wall. Around the corner, the wind lashing our backs, we staggered down 66th Street. Three interminable blocks later, we pushed through the glass doors of the Met and straight into another storm.

Clusters of people were milling around, ranting in loud voices. Others looked stunned or devastated. A pale young woman was sobbing.

"Isn't Kaufmann singing?" I asked the distraught lady next to me.

She snorted. "No, and we drove six hours in the storm to get here."

"I flew in from Virginia," a dapper gent chimed in.

"I came from California and paid two hundred dollars for a nosebleed seat right under the ceiling," chirped a pint-sized lady, taking the prize.

"Who's replacing Jonas?" Mary asked.

"A young Korean tenor," said the Virginian.

A novice, I feared, the dismal reality sinking in, as we watched all the angry, disappointed people leaving or trying to unload their tickets.

I lost track of Mary in the bathroom, then found our seats did not exist. The online brokers had screwed us. Across the theater, I saw Mary waving at me with two tickets in her hand. After discovering the scam, she'd hustled to buy two of the turned-in tickets. Now we had ringside seats to see a bloodthirsty audience slaughter Kaufmann's baby-faced replacement. Somehow, the young tenor rose to the challenge. In the last act, he unleashed a powerful voice and murdered Carmen in a spine-tingling explosion of jealousy and rage. The crowd cheered.

People exited the theater in high spirits. Mary and I, now forever bonded by our trials, had a fine time at good restaurants, plays, and museums for the rest of the week.

Screw you, Jonas.

In March 2016, Kaufmann was scheduled to sing in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Surely, he would not stand up the Met, or us, a second time. Confirmed groupies, we committed to the trip.

The blow came about two weeks before *Manon* was to open. Jonas cancelled all nine performances for mysterious reasons. Much gnashing of teeth followed as Mary and I pushed around the salad on our plates at Il Fornaio in Del Mar.

"How could he fail us again?" I said. "Now we'll be stuck with a tenor who won't quite hit the high notes. Mr. Perfection never misses a note."

"True." Mary sipped her Pellegrino. "Jonas just misses his performances."

I laughed. "Right, he's an unreliable, ego-centric, entitled cad, totally undeserving of our devotion."

"A typical arrogant male," Mary said. "Perhaps that's his draw."

I thought of the book *Smart Women, Foolish Choices*, a helpful read for my clients addicted to asshole men. "I'd like to think the hook is the uplifting power of his once-in-a-lifetime voice."

"That too, but I don't believe women throw their lingerie all over him and weep when he comes onstage just because of his terrific voice. With those Byronic curls and smoldering dark eyes, he inspires fantasies." Mary looked dreamy-eyed.

"Go on, say more."

She speared a cherry tomato. "After you."

"Coward," I said. "Okay, my favorite Jonas fantasy is the one of him chained to the end of my bed, lusting to sing to me every night."

"Ah, bondage and domination. Brilliant." She grinned. "Is he singing anything special in this fantasy?"

Nessun Dorma (*Nobody Sleeps*). I can't get enough of hearing that Puccini aria. The song is so beautiful and wrenching, and Kaufmann sings of his love for the ice princess with such passion. Even though Pavarotti made *Nessun Dorma* world famous and Arethra Franklin made it her signature song, too, Kaufmann's rendition moves me the most. It's heart-stopping at the end, when he sings, "*Vincerò, Vincerò*," ("I will win, I will win"), then shoots

up the scale and roars out that magnificent high B. Gives me tingles, chills, tears, a delicious skin orgasm.

"Come now, a chaste skin orgasm is the only sex?" Mary looked incredulous.

"Sorry to disappoint, but I think this fantasy probably comes from memories of my mother singing me to sleep. Those were the best times I had with her."

"So Jonas is your mother in disguise," she said.

"Jesus, what a frightful thought. Suddenly I have no interest in seeing him live."

"Well, that seems to be our destiny," Mary said. "Perhaps Jonas is not that important. Maybe he's just an excuse to go on a grand adventure with a good friend."

"Bingo."

The Munich theater lights dimmed, and the orchestra started to play the stirring overture to Verdi's *La Forza Del Destino*. I gripped the arms of my seat as the parting curtains revealed two women and a man seated at a long table in a dining room. The striking soprano in black was waiting for her secret lover to come and spirit her away. A dark figure burst through the filmy white curtains draped across the back windows. He had long black hair and wore a leather jacket and jeans. I could hardly believe my eyes, but I did not doubt my ears. The thrilling blast that lifted me up and soared to the back of the house could be none other than the voice I'd been pursuing for years. To hear this glorious sound now seemed worth every minute of the long, arduous journey.

Tingles of frisson ran up my back and neck. I no longer felt the stifling heat or any aches and pains from the body-breaking chair. I was soaring with Kaufmann's voice—blooming in full color at the highs, vibrating with the rich burnished lows, caressed by the silken pianissimos. Vitality and youth were flowing into my bloodstream and old age no longer loomed on the horizon. I was euphoric, out of my body, young forever.



Pink Floyd

“Wish You Were Here”

Wish You Were Here

09/1975

Harvest

Two Lost Souls

A Maternal Legacy to the Tune of Pink Floyd’s “Wish You Were Here”

Rachel Villa

Rolling farmland speckled with windmills like giant specters in the distance gave way, after seven or so hours, to hills and rock. Through a raging thunderstorm that hurled rain at my car in sheets, my mom guided us up the highway, splitting from I-70 near Denver to head towards Boulder, Colorado. This was our third day on the road, my black Infiniti packed to the bursting with every possession to my name, and, in the front, the vessel’s captains: my mom and me, alternating driving, and my cat, Rooney, resting on the center console between us, paws curling over the edge as if holding on for dear life. Our little trio of adventurous souls had spent the past few days trekking across the country from our home in Mechanicsville, Maryland. Our hometown, I should say, because it isn’t home anymore—not for me. This was my great western migration, the quintessential American road trip. Call it late-term manifest destiny, call it a quarter-life crisis, call it an attempt at recreating myself—whatever. I was going to see the country with my mom, visit her friend in Boulder, stay in Las Vegas with an old friend for a bit, then move on to one of the coastal states, California, maybe, or Oregon. The first day’s journey took us from southern Maryland to Lexington, Kentucky and the next day we ventured on to Topeka, Kansas, aided by podcasts and playlists and a British murder mystery on tape.

On the third day we cruised through midwestern farmland and crossed the state line into Colorado, the West no longer a wish but a reality. Something beautiful happened as we took our exit for Boulder. We tired of the podcast that was playing and decided to scan the radio for stations—there had to be some good music playing here, in this undeniably cool place. As the radio sifted through static buzz, the gray thunderheads above us parted, downpour slowing to a drizzle, and ahead the silhouette of the Rocky Mountains appeared through the mist. A station picked up and the car’s speakers emanated the first few soft notes of a song we both knew and loved. My mom and I laughed with glee, giddy at the natural giants in front of us and at the timing of the radio, and when David Gilmour started singing, we were both right on time:

*So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from hell
Blue skies from pain
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil?
Do you think you can tell?*

It felt like fate or magic, some beautiful ritual designed for and because of us, our love for each other, for this song, for travel and exploration and the fucking mountains. When I originally brought this road trip up, my mom didn’t think she was going to come with me. She had spent days and even weeks in a van in her twenties, travelling around North America with friends, but now she was in her sixties and, despite her good health, concerned that her body wouldn’t be able to handle it. I asked her to consider it and let it go, but brought it up to her again later, asking her again if she would come with me.

"Okay!" She replied immediately, her face lighting up.

I suppose she had thought it over and changed her mind. Partially I think she was just happy that I wanted her, instead of a friend my age, to go with me so badly. And I did—this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for the two of us to deepen an already wonderful bond. The travelling went smoothly. Mom said she felt great every day, that this trip had made her gain a confidence in herself and her body that she had been missing for quite some time. She gave me a confidence in myself, too, through her pride and trust in me.

Pink Floyd is my mom's favorite band. She saw them quite a few times in the '70s and has imparted that love for them to me. My mom and my dad and I have watched live Pink Floyd DVDs together, have played silly games in their living room or cleaned the whole house with Pink Floyd albums playing loudly over the outdated but awesome sound system. "Wish You Were Here" is my mom's favorite song of all time and I understand why. The song's fuzzy opening guitar greets the listener, grainy and distant like an out of focus memory. After a brief chord progression, it's joined by a clearer, closer acoustic guitar, shaky at first, like the player is trying something on for size, attempting to recreate the electric chords and reconcile the past with the present. The opening measures act as a summons, beckoning listeners closer so that David Gilmour can, with a tired desperation, deliver the first few questioning lines. Drums come in, and along with the vocals and guitar they build into an incredible sonic force, dripping with an ache that's palpable through weathered speakers.

*Did they get you to trade
Your heroes for ghosts?
Hot ashes for trees?
Hot air for a cool breeze?
Cold comfort for change?
Did you exchange
A walk on part in the war
For a lead role in a cage?*

In Colorado my mom and I sang, staring out at a landscape comfortably familiar to her and stimulatingly foreign to me. Between us, Pink Floyd raged in careful construction, coming to a climax for the song's final verse.

*How I wish, how I wish you were here
We're just two lost souls swimming in a fish bowl
Year after year
Running over the same old ground
How we found
The same old fears
Wish you were here.*

The lyrics, the distant guitar that bookends the song, the tone of aching nostalgia—they all establish the notion of absence so prevalent in the song and on the entirety of the album for which it's the titular track. *Wish You Were Here* was a turning point for Pink Floyd. They were riding the massive global success of *Dark Side of the Moon* and still dealing with their split from original vocalist Syd Barrett. *Wish You Were Here* is about Barrett, but it's also about who Pink Floyd was as a band when they were starting out, about the fear of losing themselves in fame. And here we were, my mother and I, halfway across the country, both half-wondering when we would see each other next. Both alike

and wholly different from Pink Floyd, this was my turning point. I was starting a new life and leaving the east coast, my family, my friends, and who I used to be behind.

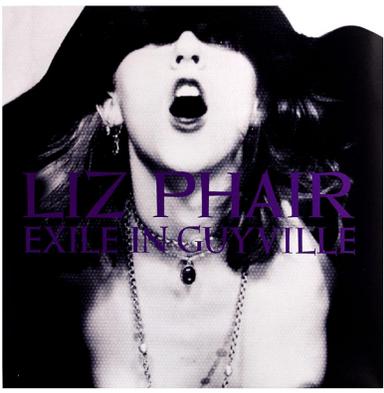
The few minutes "Wish You Were Here" played felt monumental. As we cruised into my mom's favorite city with her favorite song playing on an unknown radio station, the legacy of love was tangible between us—love for travel, for music, for family, for constantly discovering ourselves. I knew that as I started and settled into a new life out west there would be a lot of times when I would miss my old home, my friends, and my family. There would be a lot of times that people on the east coast would wish I was there, and a lot of times when I would wish they were out west with me. There would be an equal amount of times that I would be glad to be alone in this new place, separate from everything and everyone I used to know. But in that moment, with my mom and I singing along off-key to a song we've sung countless times before, the Rocky Mountains rising in front of us, I was just glad we were both there.

MESMERIZING

(after Liz Phair's *Exile in Guyville*)

Katherine Fallon

On the bus in eighth grade, headed to D.C. because I was bright,
my older sister, who had just pierced her own ear with a safety pin,
sent me off with a Walkman and Liz Phair. I felt grown on the bus ride,
daring, imagining anyone's face if they only knew I'd just heard
cunt in spring and choked a little on my spit—*those eyes you get*
when your circumstance is move-size. Karen Graczyk was one seat
behind me reading *Helter Skelter* from behind a magazine, smut-style.
On the cover within the cover: the family, nascent swastikas carved
into their foreheads. Karen would grow up to look like one of them.
Everyone else was acting their age. Next day, we went to a brilliant
white mall, to the Disney Store, where I bought a mug wrapped
with the pride of the Lion King—the re-animated dead, the ladies'
insinuated kohl—challenging me upon desert rocks beneath a sex-
reveal blue sky. I tried to look good for the boys in the carpeted seats,
but I sensed even then I was more like *Exile from Guyville*,
getting away with *what the girls call murder*. Too close,
noise canceled: *I'll take you home and make you like it—*



Liz Phair

Various

Exile in Guyville

06/1993

Matador

On *Born in the U.S.A.* by Bruce Springsteen

Alina Stefanescu

"Born in the U.S.A."

He has dark curly hair, a flirt in his laugh, a flag on his mantle, two conservative parents waiting for him back in Atlanta, a family of Limbaugh-lovers and born-again Christians. Born in the U.S.A. Eating it from the inside with their wars and armchair crusades. He is the all-American boy I can't stop watching.

"Cover Me"

Bombs fall on Baghdad. We kiss like rockets, ready to burn. We are eager to stay free, running from the last time we lied, the last time we failed. He's not looking for a lover. I'm a single mother 24 years into finding my voice, learning to use it against the war. I'm a wild card, a Romanian-Alabamian. "I'm a shitty girlfriend," I tell him, "but you will never meet a better cover." He shuts the door.

"Darlington County"

We sit on stools at Jay's and argue about the Iraq war. It's our favorite bar in Arlington, the only place where the owner wears a mullet, offers three-dollar pitchers after work, reminds us of being Southern. The mounted television offers drum-rolls, small-town parades, a diorama of mediated patriotism. He says he can't question the President. Not about war. Not about national security. He was raised a patriot. I relish impugning him, love watching his face fall when I compare him to a missile. But then he kisses me and I don't know anything anymore.

"Working on the Highway"

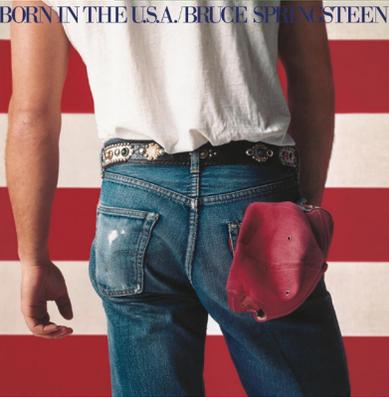
He takes me for drives along the blacktop, going nowhere, fills my head with Bruce Springsteen, shows me how to taste the parts of America I've missed. He introduces me to Walker Percy, convinces me to re-read Tocqueville, describes working two summers on a fishing boat in Alaska, learning Spanish while framing houses on pick-up construction crews. He uses his hands like someone who knows what hands can do. I wave my pen, say *Vaclav Havel*. He grabs my wrist.

"Downbound Train"

He left a pregnant girlfriend. I had an abortion. We sink into conversations we try to stay drunk enough to forget, and I don't regret anything, any morning. But it's all there in the morning.

"I'm On Fire"

Nobody at work knows he's leaving, except for me, who has learned the importance of keeping a man's secrets when they are tied to her own. He stands on a teeny stage at Red Robin for karaoke night, mic in one hand, cigarette in the other. Our friends laugh as his lips brush the mic. "This song is for Trooper," he says.



Bruce Springsteen

Various

Born in the U.S.A.

06/1984

Columbia

Our friends shrug—must be someone back home. But I know his home is shaky, and Trooper can't stop moving, can't stop watching him. *Oh oh oh I'm on fire...*

"No Surrender"

We swear to end things. We erase each other's numbers from our phones. We get drunk and call each other from friends' cell phones. He is back in Atlanta. I am in DC, watching exceptional arrogance turn into laws passed against Muslims by Congress.

"Bobby Jean"

- ▶ Aren't you afraid of breaking things?
- ▶ No. Everything I know has already been broken.
- ▶ That's a lie. Your parents are still married. Mine defected to America, chased the American dream, wound up with the great American divorce.
- ▶ You think married people aren't broken, Alina? They are.
- ▶ I don't ever want to marry. I don't want to hurt anyone. I don't want to break something I swore to make beautiful.
- ▶ We don't have to break this. We can love it and live it and let it go. Maybe that's the best way to preserve it. Come here, Alina...
- ▶ But—
- ▶ Chase this with me. Show me.

"I'm Goin' Down"

I hear this song for the first time on a mix CD he burns for me. The one labelled *Trooper*.

"Dancing in the Dark"

The man I married was also the man I left at least twice before accepting his proposal at a truck stop somewhere along a highway in Kentucky, between towns, between families, between places. He wrapped a piece of twine around my wrist. I thought we were tough enough to let love go.

He laughs: "That's where the Boss was wrong. Tough doesn't ride off on a motorcycle into the sunset. Tough is hanging around for the boring part, waiting, living on that cusp of discontent, not ever getting enough—but holding out for her anyway."

"My Hometown"

We've been married for over a decade. He still sings the Boss at the top of his lungs in the shower. The other night, we listened to *Born in the U.S.A.* together, foraging, feeling the breath of old moonlight on our backs. I hear an anthem against the wars, a paean to some imagined nation, a series of collages and erasures, an unfinished story we follow into neon sunset, fingers crossed.

When we got to this song—the last song, the end-note—I had to walk away. He wanted to know why. I told him the truth every immigrant knows—*it's not my song*. My hometown is an impossible construction. I grew up in Tuscaloosa only to be reminded that where you live is not the same thing as a home. I wasn't born in the U.S.A., but I still know all your lyrics by heart.

For Jim Dine's *Green picture in my meadow*

Jill Bergantz

A heart too big too verdant, made of all feed & just
as I didn't plan to think of you & the
best sex we ever had sitting over the orchestra silent & barely touching
Michael Tilson Thomas conducted Rachmaninoff's third aural orgasm my hand bruised
by your clench of delight.

It was only one gallery.

It was only one concert.

It was only one summer your great grandmother read my future in Turkish coffee
grounds leaned into me said aloud,

Beauty, run.

I didn't expect it in this place hemlock-hemmed

I brought myself alone to stand at the steeled edge & face out from the sun & I can see
through the mileage & the years straight back to you;

peering down from height that cold summer you dangled your affections and your car
over a cliff and panted as strangers formed a human chain to pull me to safety.

This is not a metaphor.

This is not hyperbole.

This is the truth going down easier; you mixed strong White Russians while I waited on
your mother's creamy leather couch for your return.

I don't know if it really is these tracks my patron saint of the piano passed upon exactly
but I've placed a treasure

of quarters awaiting not inevitable disaster all the same, death polish underwheel.

I woke up in Tijuana.

I woke up in your childhood bedroom.

I woke up on the Carquinez Bridge your brother foisting his body between us
a great lunge to twist the wheel & send us down—

Editors' note: This piece first appeared in 24Hr Neon Mag on March 19, 2019.



Sergei Rachmaninoff

"Piano Concerto No. 3"

Composed: 1909

Version by Khatia

Buniatishvili courtesy of

Sony Classical, 2017

Bigger than my Bones

Jessica Nirvana Ram

The flight from Athens to Philadelphia was ten hours long. Ten hours of tight seats, airplane food, and breathing the same air as the boy who only saw me as body two nights ago. Was it two nights? Time's linearity ceased when he let my *I should go* cascade over the balcony railing and into the street. It made a shattering sound as it hit the concrete, I'm almost certain.

I couldn't see him from where I sat in my middle row. But that didn't matter much. There was a film of his skin plastered over my own. I could smell his sweat, the oiliness of his hair, the tequila on his breath. I let Halsey's "Control" play in my ears on repeat for ten hours. It started with the entirety of the *Badlands* album, the haunting cadence of her tracklist sitting comfortably in the tightness of my chest. But there was something about "Control." About hearing *I'm bigger than my body*. About believing *I'm bigger than my bones*. If I could convince myself he wasn't seeping into my pores, maybe I could get over this.

Somewhere in the middle of this flight, somewhere along the Atlantic, all the windows are pulled shut. Most of the lights have succumbed to shadows, blending with the silhouettes of passengers. The couple beside me who couldn't quite figure out how to work their headphone jacks earlier are asleep, leaning on each other comfortably. I hoped my light wasn't bothering them, but I couldn't close my eyes. Not here. Not so close to him. Not while he lingered.

I'm well acquainted with the villains that live in my head, echoes in the hollow of my thoughts. It made sense, the idea of reacquainting myself with the nightmare who set up camp in my head. I run my fingers along the spine of my journal. When I bought this blue-gray notebook to use as a travel journal I knew it would hold names of wine, of Greek food, of the language I'd learn. This international escapade I was embarking on with strangers felt noteworthy, the idea of friendships forming out of this shared experience of going abroad—even for such a short time—it left me hopeful. I wanted these pages to hold them, to hold me. I didn't think it would hold him, not like this. The pages fill fast, the space between my thumb and wrist aching as the pen slid from line to line. I'm trying desperately to document it all, to analyze what I did, to pinpoint what I missed. Hotel room wine, red lipstick, his eyes, beer, his hands, shot, his voice, beer, haziness, hands, hands, hands.

There were signs pointing to the conclusion that he'd been planning to get me alone later that night. It had been a death anniversary of a friend, I was hazier than usual. And he saw it, I let him see it. I let him see me. I scrutinized the details before me, I wanted to prove somehow that he'd orchestrated it all. That he'd picked me out of the lineup of vulnerable girls, that he'd groomed me to want his company, that he put his hands on me because he knew I'd be scared to scream. But see, it wasn't clear. I wanted to cast him as calculated, as cold, as the boy I trusted because he wanted me to trust him not because I should. Wouldn't it be easier that way? For him to be precise? There's too much gray area in "It just happened, I'm sorry." There's too much to unpack if he simply decided to jump at the opportunity. Be evil. Be my villain. Be easy to mark as rapist.



Halsey

"Control"

Badlands

08/2015

Astralwerks

I know better. I know the best evils don't look like evil. They don't carry darkness in their step. It would be too easy that way. They carry it tucked behind their ears, folded under their tongues, gathered beneath their fingernails. It only moves to their eyes after it's too late.

He's wearing his red sweatshirt during the flight. I watch him walk through the aisle to the bathroom in the middle of our aircraft's simulated night and find myself short of breath. He wore a pink shirt that night, a button down. It matched the color of the wine he'd bought from the street cart outside the hotel. Four euros for a two-liter bottle of wine. By the time we'd all maneuvered to his room to head out together, he'd drunk more than half by himself. He liked liquor too much, this I knew from the two weeks we'd spent together. He liked liquor and attention and the air of carelessness. He had a heavy laugh. He was a cutout of every boy I'd ever turned my eyes towards the sidewalk for. He said we were alike, him and I. *I couldn't stand the person inside me, I turned all the mirrors around*, the lyrics are searing themselves into my skin on every play through. They make me wonder what kind of darkness now lives inside my bones.

He doesn't see me when he walks back to his seat even though I'm the only one for four rows with a light on. I find it both relieving and insulting. How dare he ignore me. But what would I do if I had to look him in the eyes again? There's water in my lungs just thinking about it. Water in my lungs, spilling over into my chest, trickling out of the corners of my mouth. He makes me want to split my skin open, as if a steady enough hand could remove all the pieces of him clinging to my organs.

I write him letters. Letters I never send. I want to tell him that for the next year, I cower at every approaching red sweatshirt. I drown in the empty air. I want to tell him I dream of bringing my fist to his face a thousand times over until the red matches his clothes. I want to tell him I've never dreamt of violence before him.

He bought me a water that night. At some point between separation from the group and returning to the hotel, he bought me a bottle of water. I bought him another shot of tequila because I felt guilty for making him watch over me. I remember the way I sifted through my wallet for three single euros. The way his smile was crooked. The way he smelled like lime and tobacco.

The other girls, they tried to tell me. Tried to warn me. Tried to get me to go with them, not him. But he overheard and stormed off and in the city of Athens we were five thousand some miles from home and we weren't supposed to let each other run off alone. There was so much alcohol in my body I went after him, because I was supposed to. I stood there in the overly fluorescent alley convincing him that I believed he wouldn't do what they said he'd do. That he wouldn't do exactly what he did. I kept my head down the next day when whispers of "what happened, why is she so quiet" came from the lips of the girls who'd walked away from us.

The lights flicker back on and passengers start to wake up. The woman beside me lifts her head off of her husband's shoulder and stretches vertically. *Wow, look at all that writing*, she says in awe at the pages and pages of black ink. I smile and shut the book. What would have happened if he had let me go that night? If, after we'd talked and sat and talked on the balcony of his hotel room, after the look in his eyes shifted and I jolted forward to say *I should go*, he let me go? I think Athens would hold a different place in my heart. I think it would have let me fixate on the emptiness of the cobblestone streets at

three in the morning, at the surreal feeling of having a whole city to ourselves. That's what it was like. Our universe. Ours.

The lights were few, the moon was full, the stars were bright. My vision was cloudy but I remember the stars. I remember stopping to sit on the brick wall by the church we'd used as a landmark. I remember swinging my feet like a child, head back and gazing. I had cotton ball brains and paper limbs, like the right breeze could come by at any moment and sweep me away into the night. Imagine if it had.

A Darkened Sky

(after Jewel)

E. Kristin Anderson

I never learned to drive. I tried and tried and twenty years later my head spins just sitting in the back of a car, sweating, explaining to the driver that I can't chat because I'm having a panic attack. So every set of tail lights appearing outside my window red and shining past my blinds is a wonder. I prefer to walk, even as my knees buckle, my vision blurring in the evening heat. Was that you, taking me to a dead end or the devil at the end of this road? My heart is still fluttering when I turn on the news and I take to bed with me another perfect storm—how many Americas will pass me by while the fight in me is stripped from my body? And tonight, friend, you delivered another slice of truth and I'm carrying it into the witching hour—here I am, lying awake, medicated and queasy. Bring me headlights floating over the hill, shining past my window, past my pills like sirens—all night the dark holds out her hand to me—if I take it she'll call me all day tomorrow. I want to throw away every dish in my sink so I might forgive my kitchen. I want to throw away my bones so I might forgive my body. I lean against the tiles while the shower runs hot as if tiles can hold me up. I survived strangerhood in my hometown but even in the solace of Texas I know I'm drowning. I reach into the inky sky and write my ache onto this brick building. Was that you in every dream where the house is flooding, where twilight slices through, moonless? Every day I collect memories on my tongue like ash, forget to eat, ask my country to break me down again because I can't stand still for another minute and you, America, always deliver on this request. Tomorrow another man will tell me that art is the silver lining of suffering and I will curse him from the corner of my eye, biting my tongue. Every hot summer night ends the same, scenes like this so familiar flying by. I can't drive away from the television delivering you into my home and I hold back my sorrow like feathers in my throat, sweet and soft. This is how we lose ourselves. And I wish I knew how you sing sweet but sour my stomach and even as the brush burns I bear this weight for you. Tonight I open a window for the dark, as if it might provide a chill while we drive through the flame. As if you might need me, too.



Jewel
"Standing Still"

This Way

11/2001

Atlantic

Pilgrimage to the Lizard King

Jody Kennedy

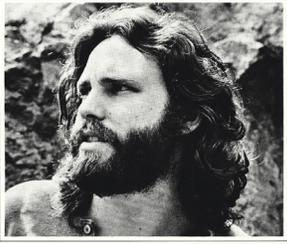
I had been in Paris a few times already but always seemed to find an excuse for not visiting Père Lachaise Cemetery where one of my old imaginary flames, Jim Morrison, the lead singer from The Doors, was buried. *Paris, France.* The hotel where I was staying was in the Marais neighborhood, just off of Rue Saint-Antoine and not far from 17 Rue Beautreillis where Jim had been found dead in the bathtub at his then girlfriend's apartment. He was twenty-seven. His once beautiful skin turned pale blue Krishna, Rama, Shiva. Overdose at the time reported as heart failure. In the months leading up to that last breath in that bathtub in the apartment on Rue Beautreillis, there had been long walks alone in Paris, there had been the losing of his beer and mashed potato belly, and the shaving off of his beard. It had been like a partial rebirth, a new dawn, except for what seemed to be a continuing struggle between abstinence and not, between booze and air, creation and destruction.

Leaving the hotel, I started in the direction of the Bastille. I was thirty-six, thirteen years sober, and trying to get over a love affair that had begun doomed and ended impossible. He was French (born in Versailles not far from the Sun King's palace), a decade older, a madman, a drunk, and a genius, who lived 500 kilometers east of Paris in Strasbourg, France. *Paris.* The weather that day in Paris was mild and the metro didn't feel like a hellscape the way it sometimes felt like a hellscape especially on hot, rush hour days going down at stations like Châtelet-Les Halles, the Gare du Nord or the Gare de l'Est. There was a train change at the République and onto another line that took me closer to Père LaChaise Cemetery. *Père Lachaise.* Père Lachaise (actual name, François d'Aix de la Chaize) was the confessor of King Louis XIV, the infamous Sun King. François d'Aix de la Chaize, I would later learn, wasn't even buried at Père Lachaise but was interred at the Church of Saint-Paul Saint-Louis not far from Jim's then girlfriend's apartment on Rue Beautreillis.

At Père Lachaise Cemetery, on a map near the entrance, I find you: James Douglas Morrison, Division 6. I wander narrow cobblestone alleys. I lose my way. I turn in circles. I pass tombs old as sin, mausoleums with clouded windows, gorgeous tarnished bronze angels side-ways glancing, plane trees, and moss, abundant green moss. I'm nervous, if I wasn't so nervous I'm certain my intuition would lead me straight to you. Finally. Voilà. There you are. A uniformed guard stands watch over your grave. I didn't bring flowers. I didn't bring any childish keepsakes or souvenirs. I only brought myself and my hard-earned sobriety. When I was fourteen, I would have knelt at your grave, stayed more than an hour, stolen a handful of dirt, mixed it with spit and rubbed it across my eyes, my cheeks, my belly. When I was fifteen, I would have left love poems, cut up my arms with my grandmother's broken plates, chain-smoked cigarettes, drank beer and cried (I was a melancholy drunk, the one you always found sitting at the far picnic table during clandestine parties in the neighborhood park on Friday nights).

At fourteen, I found a copy of the Jim Morrison biography *No One Here Gets Out Alive* by Jerry Hopkins and Danny Sugerman and fell in love. I called Jim James though, not the Lizard King, and not any of the other names any of the other women called him. James: complicated, mystical, and broken (*like my father*). I'd never met anyone like him, not in my Madison, Wisconsin suburb anyway. I became his cohort even though he'd been gone already nine years, even though he was old enough to be my father. I conjured his ghost. We stayed up late into the night and I would steal his dream about the accident on the highway, Native Americans scattered on the ground, bleeding, and he would say things to

AN AMERICAN PRAYER
JIM MORRISON
MUSIC BY
THE DOORS



The Doors

"Ghost Song"

An American Prayer

11/1978

Elektra / Asylum Records

me like, "Awake / Shake dreams from your hair / My pretty child, my sweet one / Choose the day and choose the sign of your day / The day's divinity / First thing you see,"¹ and "I pressed her thigh and death smiled,"² and I knew what he meant about death smiling because I had said those same words to Adam when I was Eve in the garden long ago.

I wanted it both ways. Drunk and sober, sexual and mystical. I wanted roses in my garden. I wanted my veins to explode. (Death makes angels of us all and gives us wings where we had shoulders smooth as raven's claws.)³ I wanted you to plunge me into the abyss and pull me out fresh. I didn't want you fallen. I didn't want you lifting the skirts of strippers at your favorite go-go bar. I wanted you for me.

James and I planned to be together forever, riding it out like some kind of Romeo and Juliet, all the way to the end, destruction, death, oblivion. But I started to fall out when he gained weight and grew a big beard. It was too much for my adolescent sensibilities. Greek gods weren't supposed to gain weight and grow big beards. They were supposed to stay fresh and fuckable. So, I ended up leaving James for more ordinary boys in popular rock bands all the while still trying to stay one step ahead of my darkness. As it was, Jim never could have led me out of the darkness. He could have only taken me deeper into confusion and madness. (*Be careful what you pray for, O Lovely One.*)

I managed to live past twenty-seven (the famous 27 Club), didn't die at thirty like predicted, and finally, after hitting the skids some time into sober, stopped planning my exit. The only way out of the darkness is through it, a friend said. That. Was. It. I didn't want to have to come back and do it all over again.

It wasn't until sixteen, after having obsessively looped *An American Prayer* (especially "Ghost Song") for so long, that I finally realized Jim was gone, that not even a flicker of his flame remained. *What other dreams died with you, James? Would you have set your An American Prayer poems to different music?⁴ Do you ever miss Paris? Or are you back, reincarnated, and doing it over again?* Sadly, at thirty-six, I would have loved Jim overweight and bearded, an imperfect god, and I could have told him that, yes, death does make angels of all us, but addiction makes us orphans.

James Douglas Morrison, Division 6, Père Lachaise Cemetery. There seemed to be people everywhere, coming and going, milling around, curiosity seekers and worshippers, a real transatlantic (et al.) highway. *I just wanted to be alone with you one last time and now it seems so obvious that you never belonged to me. Maybe love means letting every last illusion go, yes (come what may).* "Godspeed, James," I whispered and blew a kiss heavenward, then wandered off to meet Guillaume Apollinaire (I was still a fickle girlfriend sometimes) and take a picture of the heart-shaped calligram (one of my favorites) inscribed on his gravestone that read, "*Mon cœur pareil à une flamme renversée.*"⁵

1 "The Ghost Song," *An American Prayer* (Elektra/Asylum Records 1978 LP).

2 "Lament," *An American Prayer*.

3 "A Feast of Friends," *An American Prayer* (Rhino, 1995 CD).

4 *An American Prayer*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_American_Prayer (last modified 26 July 2020).

5 "My heart like an upside-down flame."



Snow Patrol
"Chasing Cars"

Eyes Open

05/2006

Fiction · Polydor · A&M

2007

on stars & snow patrol & feeling alive

Savannah Slone

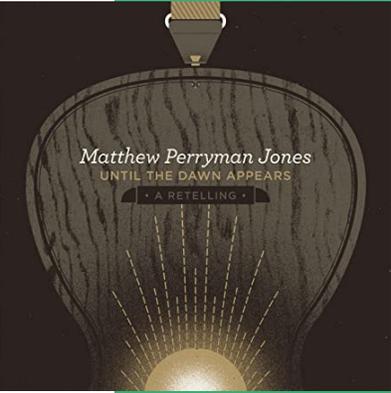
the year my mom's boyfriend ended his life. the year before i was molested by a teacher. the year i saw my first therapist. the year of developing breasts and clinical depression and reading a lot of ellen hopkins and longing to be as hot as gaby from desperate housewives. i remember the night my dad, who has always lived a handful of hours away, drove his honda goldwing to pick me up. it was his weekend to take me, he was late, they fought about him driving me to his house on a motorcycle, i slipped my sparkly red helmet onto my twelve-year-old head. the stars were unlike any night sky i've seen since. flares for stars. we didn't talk. mourning pockets of light. the speedometer's crimson hand hovered over 90. i leaned my head back. the constellations all i see and this is what it means to be a sailor when there's no land in sight. my feral loneliness, myself a vessel. he turns on the radio. *forget what we're told before we get too old show me a garden that's bursting into life* i can only see in orbs through plum fog, weighted breath, everyone around me, vacant vases, and i am nowhere at all times, for a moment i felt something resembling hope or at least acceptance that this life was my own. my unknowns a therapeutic ooze. *if i lay here if i just lay here would you lie with me and just forget the world* i don't remember getting to his house or taking off my helmet or what we did or didn't do that weekend. i didn't yet know that, seven years later, that same motorcycle's breaks would give out on black ice and send him into multiple surgeries and months in a nursing home. i didn't yet know that we would have to put our dog down, the day after his accident, because he had been needing to do it but couldn't bring himself to do it because he was everything to him. i didn't know that i would kiss his forehead and sob in the car instead of going in with my mom. he didn't respond to the shot, he wouldn't die, my dad couldn't do it. he couldn't be there as he drowsily tried to escape the room. he wouldn't die. i was in the car, my mom, inside, forming irreparable trauma, in a situation she shouldn't have had to endure. i didn't yet know that i would soon meet my best friend and she would tell me how she was suicidal and the only thing that made her feel better was the song that played that night on the road with my dad. sometimes, all i have is the sky, and i know too well that cloud shifts are sped up when you're empty.

Vase with cloudy water

(after Matthew Perryman Jones)

Rebecca Otter

Driving to the seawall when it's windy, I
bought you pink carnations, girl. I wanna
grab your hand and twirl you up this rock
that says no climbing cause climbing and
twirling aren't quite the same, now. Roll
that window down to show you off but when I
kiss you, they'll stare. They wanna
know who wears the pants and if I'd give
you a child or the other way round. See, my
mama taught me a quiet soul
doesn't like attention, even when I'm
the wide gray sky lonely and wanting
and you're the little slice of moon to
tiptoe across, burn me slow. Believe
my shivering wingtips for now. I'm
streaming out the sunroof and you're not
thinking about next year, well me too,
girl. We're only growing old.



Matthew Perryman Jones

UNTIL THE DAWN APPEARS

• A RETELLING •

Matthew Perryman
Jones

"Save You"

Until the Dawn Appears

2011

Entertainment One

After Sunrise

Brian A. Salmons

The dawn of adolescence is a Scooby-Doo-scented twilight really. You didn't know it then. The mystifying orbits of every shining thing in your backseat stuffystill world weren't fixed tracks, just dust motes' slowfloating in a speeding car. The mountains rocked up, in and back outside, forewash on a beach of your parents' darkening marriage. When the sun rose, mothermountainblack and fatherskyblue stood apart and you stopped to pee. Uriah Heep at the cash register cassette curio piqued your interest oddly, let you breathedream thru Tennessee: red swells of rock, homes roosting on a pile of seafloor, and a hayseed wizard with a sword named melody.



Uriah Heep

"Sunrise"

The Magician's Birthday

11/1972

Bronze / Island

On “Miserable” by Lit

Lisa Mangini

For Diane and Todd

I am fourteen when my parents decide that it’s imperative for us to take a two-week road trip in the ‘91 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera from our home in Connecticut across the country. Well, not *all* the way across, omitting states I actually wanted to see, like California and Washington, where all my favorite musicians were from. Instead, we’d stop just short of the Idaho border, going as west as the edge of Wyoming, visiting nearly every National Park and major geologic formation on the way once we crossed the Mississippi. We had done this already, as family vacations when I was 2 and 3 and 4, driving around in a huge RV. But it had been ten years, and the combination of watching me prepare to enter high school and the longing for a vacation more extravagant than the annual 3-day weekends we’d spend in New Hampshire must’ve been the perfect conditions for my parents to act on what probably started as a fleeting pang of nostalgia.

None of this plan appeals to me: cell phones are only for celebrities in 1999, so I will have to spend two whole weeks truly away from my friends. *We’ll still be driving back through Illinois the day of the Semi-Formal! It’s not even possible to make up two weeks of work when school is done nine days after we get home!*

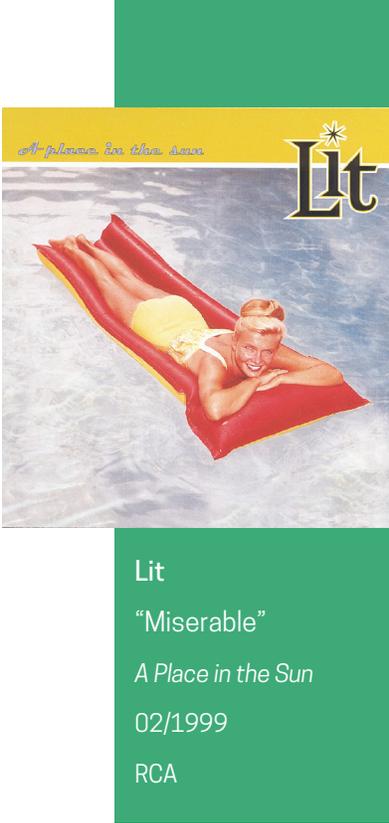
My parents looked up from the dining room table covered in maps and a handwritten itinerary, and compromised to calm me. We’d get some phone cards, and I could call friends in the evening, much like I did at home. They’d shift a few days here and there, aim to drive a longer stretch before stopping, and we’d get home Friday morning, in time for me to get ready and make it to the dance on time.

When tasked with packing, which my parents handled deliberately with care and a checklist, I didn’t have to think that hard. I knew exactly everything I needed: JNCOs, band t-shirts, metallic hair mascara, and as many packages of double-A batteries as I could stockpile, in order to fuel my Discman.

The two 8-packs of batteries still weren’t enough: I was submerged in my headphones for hours a day, as my parents took turns driving. Sometimes, if we were near a major metro area, they’d turn around and alert me that I could probably conserve some power by listening to the radio with them for a while, but mostly we were in isolated areas that offered weak signals of oldies, religious programs, or unending static.

I listened to every disc I brought at least ten times. But I listened to Lit’s *A Place in the Sun* the most, and “Miserable,” naturally, was the go-to track of the whole trip. I doubt I even understood the full extent of the lyrics’ wordplay, but I latched on hard to the unabashed wallowing of it. “Miserable” was the perfect soundtrack, really: one-chord verses, simple, a performance of emotional nakedness in exactly the way I was at 14: trying hard to be edgier and cleverer and more serious than anyone could possibly take me. Expressions of enthusiasm for anything other than music or meeting up with my friends were a sign of immaturity, a violation.

I sat in the backseat, carving out my own little world, looking out the window for as long as I could without getting car sick. I saw an Amish family on a buggy in Ohio, along with farm after farm. There was an enormous brush fire at one of them, close enough to the road to feel its heat. It was mid-sunset, and the flames and the long, extended



midwestern horizon were drenched in smoke and every kind of pink and orange light. I had never seen a fire ungoverned like that; it scared and dazzled me, a reaction I kept to myself.

Earlier in Ohio, my parents had a misunderstanding—a kind of totally ordinary snippy exchange that can easily escalate when one is trapped in a sedan for 18 hours a day surrounded by family. My mother had recently undergone an elaborate oral surgery, and was likely in a lot of pain, another probable factor in facilitating this rare fight. (Looking back, I think we left the day after her procedure, so we could return in time for my school dance: a detail I'm sure I neglected to notice as a kid.) Their voices continued to raise over the volume of my headphones. These are not the contouring silicone of today's earbuds, but the chintzy foam-covered speakers on an adjustable headband, so it doesn't take much to interfere. But I slid them away, and listened to their animated exchange grow heated. We pulled into the empty parking lot of a drive-thru car wash in the middle of the afternoon. We stayed there until their shouts softened into conversation, apology, and eventual laughter. It impressed me how artfully everything was resolved—and how quickly, having spent the last few years steeped in the often-unresolved drama of my adolescent friend groups. I returned my headphones to my ears as we drove towards Indiana, and a hotel room that offered each of us a little more space.

I acted totally disaffected at every major sight: the Badlands' yawning rust-red formations, the vista of the Grand Tetons, the awe of Devil's Tower, my Discman serving as my defense in the big back pocket of my giant wide-leg jeans. Despite my shrug at every sight, out here I was a kind of Schrodinger's Teenager: both apathetic and not, until someone could observe otherwise. My parents would be the only ones observing it, but just in case, I would tamp down my wonder anyway, in fear of someone discovering my uncool enthusiasm. Enjoying a family road trip would be the biggest betrayal of the young identity I'd curated.

Twenty years later, Lit is now mostly based in Nashville, trading in distortion pedals for pedal steel guitar. 14-year-old me wants to call them sell-outs, taking the bait of a re-brand because country is more lucrative than whatever late-90s genre wore long goatees with bowling shirts and studded belts. But 34-year-old me knows better, and kind of understands. I live in a place where I see sprawling fields draped in the sunset's pink light almost daily, Amish farms on rolling hills with mountains as their backdrop, where every car ride is filled with contented sighs of wonder, with a shriek of joy at a cow scratching her ear against a fence post or a red tailed hawk circling overhead: an act unrecognizable to my late-90s self.

None of the friends I'd been so worried about leaving for two weeks even knew what to say whenever I called from our hotel. I went to that semi-formal without a date, and can't remember anything else about it beyond a hazy outline of the cafeteria with dimmed lights, a DJ in one corner. To be fair, I don't remember a lot about Yellowstone Park or Mount Rushmore, either. But I remember, from the vantage point of the back seat, surrounded by the blue plush interior of the Oldsmobile, the way my parents looked at each other, even when they were shouting: a falseness, a defense mechanism, a kind of acting miserable, when it was so clear it wasn't what they really felt.

Hope Might Break Through

Rachel Tanner

I am not in love but I am *in love*
in the sense that it finally feels

like fall in Alabama & it is 5 AM
& I am driving through town

with my windows down,
music on shuffle. "Touch the Sky"

starts playing & the streets
dance along with their pre-dawn

gleam, existing in a universe
away from the bake of the day.

Alabama sun isn't forgiving, even
in autumn. I am not forgiving. I am

tough to please & tough to love,
but somewhere in this song is

the clarity that comes from seeing
the world around you & opening

yourself up to it. From noticing
the new flowers in front of

your ex-girlfriend's neighborhood.
From loving the dark sky right before

it dares to drop through into day.
I am thankful for the sky. I am

thankful for music that helps me
love the sky. This song is worship.

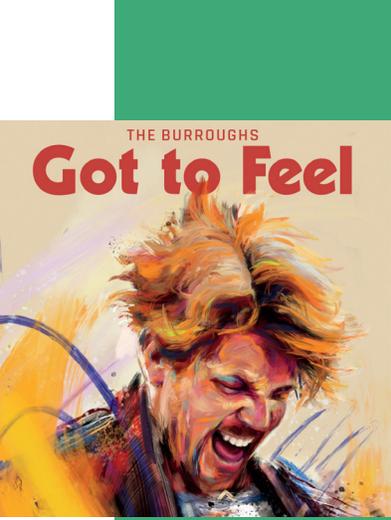
This song is a hallelujah call-to-action
from the god I see

when I look in a mirror.

My praise hands on the steering wheel,

soul in my throat singing. Yelling lyrics
against the quiet. Shoes off. Eyes up.

Heart healed.



THE BURROUGHS
Got to Feel

The Burroughs

"Touch the Sky"

Got to Feel

01/2018

Self-Released

Contributors

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Lucas Bailor is from Moreno Valley, California, and is an MFA candidate at UC San Diego. His long poem, "Love's Refrain," appeared in *Ghost City Press'* 2018 micro-chapbook summer series, and his poems have appeared in *HVTN*, *SHARKPACK Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently a poetry reader for *Gigantic Sequins* and *Bodega Magazine*, and occasionally tweets @lucasbailor.

DW McKinney is a writer and reviewer whose work has been featured in *Narratively*, *Bitch*, *Road Grays*, *Boston Accent Lit*, *peculiar magazine*, and *Stoneboat* among others. She currently serves as the reviews editor for *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*. She lives in the desert.

Michael Garrigan writes and teaches along the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. He loves exploring the riverlands with a fly rod and believes that every watershed should have a Poet Laureate. He is the author of two poetry collections—*Robbing the Pillars* and the chapbook *What I Know [How to Do]*. His poetry and essays have appeared in *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *The Flyfish Journal*, *Split Rock Review*, and *The Hopper Magazine*. You can find more of his writing at www.mgarrigan.com.

M.M. Carrigan is a weirdo from the Baltimore area, the writer of the blog *The Surfing Pizza*, grande editor supreme of *Taco Bell Quarterly*, the literary magazine for the Taco Bell Arts and Letters, and enjoys staring directly into the sun.

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