

poetry by ***Sofia Stephenson***

Song

God gifted the world with bells.
Space swallowed our symphony.

There is a song you sang
When her lips bloomed like hollyhocks.

Then your mouth was a bell
And you rang like a church.

That was before you had ears,
Before she called it "song."

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Sky

Did you ever think it is was your eyes
That sparkled the stars,
Fist-like eyes that milk that black cow of a sky?

But the cow is not the sky,
And it is.

And with that, we've milked it.
We took infinity and yanked its nipples
To make a cow. Just a cow.

A cow can fit under a roof, in a pen, a conveyer belt, and seran wrap.
Your mouth.

Imagine putting a cow in your mouth! They're enormous.

It's a backwards cow, of course.
Black with white sparkles.
And milk that spills over our heads in a Way
Like a mother and her bathing baby, tipping a pale over his head. The baby's sitting in it, drinking
it, doesn't even know what to do with it.

Was the cow always domesticated?
Did it always take naps on your tongue?
Of course.

poetry by ***Brandon Burdette***

Charm

An itch and a bore; a room full of people who couldn't understand.
What is difficult is to be crude and trivial.
Moments like candies, blown away in wind.
People, plain and guarded.
A blend of vagrant and unique personas!
Attractive trees of stagnant fruit; feasts below, in dirt.
Blatant, masculine, and dumb.
Primitive red men pounding fists on chests.
A temporary ticket; a token at a carnival.
Anatomy and passion, blown away in wind.
Squeeze-toy heart; cheap and replaceable.
Everything sacred has passed.
Rainbows seeping in dark shades.
Cultivations like ingrown hairs.
A once tropical landscape.
Swooning moons.
Death, the terrible acquaintance, on her way to sheathe.
The modest sky, the absent sky;
Weeping from a grey, wasted canvas.
The song of the storm!
An earnest churn.
Rubber tires on wet streets.
A threshold of mind, refused.
Automatic images of disturbing natures.
Exposed truths! Reflections of an accurate subconscious!
Consistent inconsistencies.
Jesters, jackals, and idiots.

poetry by ***Adam Hughes***

Streaking in the Garden of Gethsemane

Mark 14:51-52

I run

like Joseph before Potiphar's
wife. I leave my clothes in their
accusing hands, skin now open
to thorn assault. Through olive
groves I glimpse torch-light
swaying like temple prostitutes
before the fires of Baal. Gentile

might displayed at the cost
of an ear, soon replaced, sword
scabbard-sheathed. What could
I have done against the imperial
eagle? His eyes practically begged
me to flee. So through the veiled
night and the Kidron

I run.

poetry by ***William L. Alton***

Lies and Separation

There isn't a thing here for you.
You can stand there all you want
and ask if I've been drinking again
and I'll tell you no, I'm sober
as a stone, but it'll be a lie
because I'm six beers into
a half rack. You can ask if I know
how important it is that we trust one another.
You can tell me you love me
and want me around but I'll
always wonder why you don't just cut me loose.

poetry by ***Amanda England***

Envy

I stubbornly refuse to believe it at first,
considering it the overactive imagination
of my already wounded heart.

But as the Other changes,
I begin to see how far
his lies went.

She is merely a child herself—
surely too excitable, too unpredictable...

I begin to realize I'm utterly empty,
as the Other blossoms, so vivid, so full of life
in the most literal sense—
so pure, so completely unprepared,
and suddenly the reality dawns:
my loss is her promise.

I cradle broken dreams as she
haphazardly
learns the art of swaddling,
the science of mixing formula.
This jealousy that aches is septic,
and yet,
more of a comfort than the deep sorrow
that lurks behind.

poetry by ***Terry Miller***

Wise Geese

The pines divine the coming winter,
rotating needles due north,
the opposite direction of adjourning geese,
who know how to read trees.

poetry by ***Adam Moorad***

parrots

inside the holes on their faces
are stacks of rusted hubcaps
that keep them from seeing

poetry by ***Adam Moorad***

the process of smiling

my therapist is my nemesis
i clean my shoes with her skirt

i try to extract
just something

the answers are always the same
i dont know

it's my own journey
to figure it out

history before history
sleeping like a city
in a warehouse.
an empty one.

poetry by ***Thane R. Thompson***

Watching Boys Watch Girls

Her perfume muddles through our menthol smoke;
a bartender working out his limited aggressions
on the mint and sugared ice of race-day juleps.
My back is to the parking lot. I only have the
stereoscopic flick of both their eyes as an appraisal
of her slim yet curving hips, her silken hair.

From my perch upon the battered gulag benches
of the cancer ward, I watch their feral gazes
slink across the pressure mat and through the
sliding black-framed doors. If gawking were religion
teenage boys would all hold stations of elect.

Four blinded bloodhound eyes flick back to me;
I don't exist. Six months into layoffs, anchored
down with wife and kids, make me a mascot
not a friend. I sure don't hold a candle to their
dreams of perfumed sheets and sweaty blankets.

Inside she even graces Evan's lane with her
sweet smile. But he never says a word--just
bagging bread, avoiding eyes, and making sure
he never thinks to crack an egg. Then she's
gone, and minutes crawl, until it's time to venture
out to watch more girls and smoke our lunch.

poetry by ***Ariel Child***

First time sex

You pulled a gun, sorry
Stuck gum on my jeans
Between my legs
Called it foreplay

You called me cow, sorry
It then goes
I lay on the bed
Legs tightly spread

My little panties on
Upper body undressed
Now let's have sex
He took the wine

Spilled on my chest
Took a taste
And I let him play
Veterinarian

The end.
The sex you spilled
The so-called love you poured
Never made me more ignored

You should have pulled the trigger
It would have satisfied me more
You selfish
prick.

poetry by ***D.J. Morris (pen name)***
D.J. Morris (pen name)

Jewelry Collection

i.

A bracelet – a thick silver band nearly worn smooth.
A gift from a woman with a time engraved face.
Perhaps time had simply moved the lines from her bracelet to her face.

She had received the bracelet as a young tattooed Berber,
perhaps at the very age I was when she offered it to me.

Her daughter offered a new bracelet instead,
perhaps embarrassed by the used gift.

But to take it would have been to reject this mother.
She is entwined with the bracelet, so,
unknown and unseen by anyone else,
I wear her on my arm.

ii.

A rhinestone holly pin that I bring out at the holidays.
My mother ruefully comments on its gaudiness.
She would like me to have better taste,
like hers.
So I will not tell her why I wear it, unless
she asks me nicely.

An elderly woman in a small flat
outside of Edinburgh
gave the pin to me.
The building was dreary, the weather dreary, and the people tried not to be
but were.
Yet her flat was warm,
Doilies on small tables, tea in the afternoon.
The only sunshine I saw during my visit to that city
was that which shone through her lace curtains.

I met her only the one time.
She was cordial and shy, revealing in her distance
a genuine kindness.
Before I left, she opened a drawer,
took out a little box,
and showed me the small collection of trinkets. I smiled,

not knowing why she showed them.
She picked one up and gave it to me.

My mother may have better taste
but the flavors I prefer linger.

iii.

An antique locket dangling from a pin
in the shape of an arrow. My mother,
who insisted she had to schedule her only visit to me in Boston
around her spring housecleaning,
bought it for me in a vintage shop in Marblehead.

Fifty dollars was a lot for any family member
to spend on another.

I know my mother liked her visit with me.

iv.

Ahh, I almost forgot.
The bracelets.
The narrow, silver colored, inexpensive, jangly bracelets.

My memory of my mother before special occasions.
Perfumed and lotioned
she brushed her hair after setting it,
the bracelets tinkling like delicate bells around her wrists.

It was all she could afford, back then.

She gave them to me
when she had moved on to nicer things.

I could probably afford nicer things now myself.
But I wear them proudly, luxuriously, on special occasions.

They remind me that I am my mother's daughter.

poetry by ***D.J. Morris (pen name)***
D.J. Morris (pen name)

A Desert Place

Desolate
Isolated
Beige barren

Relieved by any presence
Someone to share the heat waves

Dancing swirling wisps of sand
Intricate, nearly invisible
traces of lines and prints
and dehydrated rivulets

Solo
but not alone
The air itself is company

poetry by **Bryce Milligan**

Three Songs

Mirror and Veil

Claire was weaving songs among
the cholla and the cedar,
high in the desert mountains
where you alone could see her
through the veils her spiders
from melodies had woven,
and you wonder why she called you
to be among the chosen
who after this will find her
in the edge of every mirror
yet still the wind will whisper
that only you can hear her
desert song.

Claire was weaving songs along
a green and distant shoreline,
dancing among mosses hung
like shredded webs of dream-time,

and the midnight cafés glistened
as she listened to the ocean
pounding, but she chose to lash
her future to her freedom.

And you wonder why you've been called
to see her transformation:
the Siren becomes Ulysses
to hear her own creation
and sail on.

There's nothing that you wouldn't do
to keep her songs inside you,
but every shattered mirror cuts
and lets them run like blood
into the sea.

Now her city's drowned around her
as she draws another cold one –
she feeds the thirsts of artists,
both the timid and the bold ones.
And you watch her from your desert:
in the photographs she poses
in a bridal veil her spiders weave
to tunes that she composes.
And you wonder if you'll ever touch
the girl inside the mirror,

or if her webs will keep you
from coming any nearer
than the past.

Margot's Fog

Margot is the painter
on midnight's bridge alone:
she wraps herself in a poet's shawl
and dreams that she would own
of her Morpheus who's beckoning
to her Orpheus who's here,
singing in this painted air
and playing through his tears.

For tonight the lights of Austin
have been captured in a cloud,
and the painter hugs the yellow fog
that whispers to her how
she can embrace
the voice in the night
and dip her brush
in wells of light.

Margot's on her balcony
with her sycamores and her owl
waiting for the singing trains

and the midnight cats to yowl
but instead she hears her Romeo
stumbling down below,
mumbling on the phone the words
that only she can know.

And the painter in her knows
that death comes with the light:
her Romeo can only be
a Capulet at night.

Margot's on the bridge again
waiting for the hour,
waiting for the transitory
veritable power
that her poet's promised her
but only if she can hear
his truth inside this yellow fog
that hides the gulf of years.

For tonight the lights of Austin
have been captured in a cloud,
and the painter hugs the yellow fog
that whispers to her how
she can embrace
the voice in the night
and dip her brush

in wells of light.

L a s t S o n g

The walls of the city are filled with graffiti
where lovers and gangsters have painted their histories
that read like the shorthand of Lorca and Franco
dripping red screams by Pablo Picasso.

Upstairs from these nightmares a poet is listening
to voices now silent that once held the glistening
promise of poetry's dreams never ending
and he gawks at the silence that sounds like the rending
of all that he held
sacred for so long
but all that he wonders is:

Is this
the last song?

Her echoes are everywhere through the apartment,
her words fill his books, her scent all his garments,
and out in the street her absence still staggers
like Juliet's ghost with twin silver daggers.

When neon explosions dispel all the shadows
and drive all the ghosts back to graveyards or barrows.

Then Dickens walks by with his Little Miss Hood
and Romeo's certain he's misunderstood
all that he held

sacred for so long

but all that he wonders is:

Is this

the last song?

Now Vanity's castle's a place to retreat to

says Cadillac Jack, if only you see through

the fact that the back is where Nabakov's carving

taboos into tea cakes to sell to the starving.

But Romeo's heartstrings are yanked by a memory

who drags him away past the watchtower sentries

and he wonders why every bell in town's ringing

as down by the river Suzanne is still singing

of all that he held

sacred for so long

but all that he wonders is:

Is this

the last song?

The last time he saw her she stepped from his history

and called from the end of the street like a mystery

that has no conclusion, no end but illusion:

she'd resolved to vanish like salt in solution

so she twisted the daggers with a surgeon's perfection

and tried in all kindness to cut out the infection;

she burned incandescent, a falling white flame

then fled when he reached out to touch her again:

All that he'd held

sacred for so long

but all that he wonders is:

Is this

the last song?

