

The Last Time I Saw Bonnie Blue
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from He Was Like the Blank Sky. . .

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ensemble jourine
vol. 1, no. 4 may 2007
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by Robyn Art

The Last Time I Saw Bonnie Blue

*But let it never be said she wasn't a rare one, our girl,
good-hearted, broke-hearted, she was never one
for niceties but she was kind, the few days she makes it
out of the house intact, de facto, that is to say,
whole, not trailing parts of her hitherto unrecognizable
self in shower drains, automatic doors (her eyes,
her hair, his indefatigable hands) yes, let it be said
she was one of the good ones, regardless of the body's
claptrap of lies, O the poor beleaguered body, light
of her loins, horror of horrors*

I wish I could tell you everything, she said, but I'm
not nearly wasted enough it was almost dark, the sky
the color of gum stuck a long time
on a shoe her laugh was like a crowd
of horses breaking clear from the pen her eyes
were a nest of blotted stars I'm in trouble
again, she said, Guess you could say
I've got a nose for it she had that
way about her, wanted me to drive her clear
past the state line, said that bastard would run her
out past the far side of a heifer's ass or die
trying I loved him, she said, but his love
is like a town I left a long time
ago like I said it was nearly dark her face
was a nest of stars she had the smell of the highway
on her and rain

DEAR SERIAL MONOGAMIST

DEAR WOULD-BE COMMON-LAW SPOUSE

DEAR HABITUAL ABSCONDER

DEAR COLD-FOOTED DISBELIEVER

DEAR ETERNAL PROMISE-RING GIVER

DEAR PERPETUAL BURN-OUT

DEAR INADVERTANT S.O.B.

DEAR ILLEGAL NON-CITIZEN IN THE LAND OF MATRIMONY

DEAR GRUDGINLY BETROTHED

DEAR YELLOW-BELLIED HOSS THIEF

DEAR BAIT-AND-SWITCHER

DEAR BACKER-OUTER

YOURS,

RESPECTFULLY DISALLUSIONED

I was going to be a wife, she said
but my fiancé didn't believe in marriage
one finger looped through his belt one
on the buttons of his fly Do you know
how you want something so bad she
said Like your tongue's all swole up in your
mouth hours of sifted lust he can smell
on you one mile off Let's get the hell
outta Dodge, she said, meaning I have to sit
on my hands around you the last
thing she'll remember: The warmth of his
hip, the dirty-fingered light, snow
blowing all around

Dear Honorary Lover,
I think you should know I'm not averse
to much, so long as it won't interfere
with my single Long-Term Plan: That is,
to remain warm to the touch
and beating. What else is my life
thus far but a series
of narrow escapes. Half our boys
are in the pen; half our girls,
spoken for. Some of us eternal roadies
by now on that big ol' tour bus
in the sky. My past cut so deep,
it left tracks. Love washes over
and leaves you cold like brushfire
over stone. If the Savior
is really coming, is He ever
taking the scenic route. Still,
I can't recall ever having had such fun
this side of the abyss. . .

That round-cut-one-carat-diamond solitaire-and-platinum-band-kind a love

That Pay-per-View-and-Schlitz kind a love

That knock-down-drag-out-blood-on-the-tracks kind a love

That joint account-joint return-tax-bracket-wet-dream kind a love

That forsake-all-others kind a love

That dumb-ass-motherfucker kind a love

That choice-of-well-done-medium-rare-or-rare kind a love

That shaken-not-stirred kind a love

That broke-down-busted-up-plastic-over-the-windows-wrapped-in-duct-tape kind a love

That temperature-charting-missionary-every-other-day-fertility-software kind a love

That Oh-Shit-shotgun vow kind a love

That sweetheart neckline kind a love

That grope-by-the-stairs kind a love

That woulda-coulda-shoulda kind a love

That finger-on-the-button kind a love

It seemed she couldn't hold on to anything
jobs, men, money
it all ran through her fingers
like sand no quicker than sand
like water
sometimes she'd watch daytime TV
eat take-out straight from the box
think about studying HVAC
or Medical Transcription
she already knew
the world was a small place
to her Forever was just another name
for that famous river in Egypt
on Court TV the judge asks the woman
does her husband love her
Yes, Your Honor, she says, So much
he tried to kill me

Last thing I remember her standing
in my kitchen hand closed around the bottle
Didn't I know you in a past life, I said, meaning
let's get out of here go someplace they make
the drinks so strong you see stars It's
getting late, she said, meaning, We're not
getting any younger I believe we can out walk
the past's dry-rot deadfall if I only
stay drunk enough, said she believed
in traveling light through this world
and the next Can I drive you, I said, meaning
I would lay down in traffic for her, Are you
asking, she said, meaning, Who
wants to know

*He was nothing so much as a road trip to her,
dangerous, bedeviled, affixed at random
with falling rocks,
fair-haired, fair-eyed,
broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped,
in short, the Lord's own Good Work,
she didn't know his blood type, just
that it was there, definitely and irrevocably
there, when she laid her head in his lap
she could almost hear it rushing through*

(Excerpts from Missing Persons Report filed on behalf of one Blue, Bonnie)

HAIR: BROWN

EYES: INDETERMINATE

WEIGHT: POSSIBLY

FINGERNAILS: RED

OCCUPATION: OTHER

DESIRES: YES

HOMETOWN: VERNAL

AGE: LEGAL

ASPIRATIONS: YOU BET

LAST SEEN: YOU WISH

I'm in love again, she said,
otherwise known as a born-again sucker
God is great, sure, but last
I heard, He won't make you coffee
in the morning
said her vows did nothing but leave her
a massive case of buyer's remorse
this was then, April, spring coming
with its chewed-up face
she'd always be telling me other weird stuff,
namely, the squid has three hearts
and a surprising intellect and there's mercury
in those state-funded kiddie vaccines
when I think of the future
I get vertigo, when I think
of the past, whiplash who knows
maybe I'll settle down have a whole
passel a kids
in the event of a drought,
I could feed triplets off my thigh fat for months
I can't drive stick
can't type worth half a damn
swear sometimes I'll end up all by my lonesome

in a A-frame with a half-blind dog
waiting out the Almighty shitstorm
of this world and the next
like everything else it's mostly
all machines now and Time's omnivorous hands
have what you'd call designs on my honor
the houses I want are sold
the men I want, spoken for
if I had to I could live on Corn Nuts
for the rest of my God-given years

She wished she could outsource her longing for him to China

get her days pro-rated for the times without him there

all he had to do was show those cursed blue eyes

if he'd so much as touch her, she'd go half

around the bend

she knew she'd be left with naught but recollections

cheap thrills reruns half-bent trinkets from that old

dredged river

her eyes gone wet and shimmery like gasoline poured on the road

the smoke trailing in her face she never minded

when it was his

somethin' like quittin' the team
like pullin' outta the station
like jumpin' ship on the slow boat to China
somthin' like gunning the engine
like hangin' the washed-up sheets out to dry
like returning the gospel to Sender like razing
the bombed-out slag heap of the past
somthin' like burying the beaten horse
somthin' like waitin' for the other
shitkicker to drop like hightailin' it out
past yonder hills on the far side
of too damn late, somthin' like hittin' Delete,
watchin' the face through the cracked rearview

That whiskey-on-the-rocks kind a guy

That seven-and-seven kind a guy

That roses-on-your-birthday kind a guy

That don't-ask-don't-tell kind a guy

That hold-your-hand-on-the-metal-table kind a guy

That late-night-tanked-up-backhand-to-the-jaw kind a guy

That twenty-bucks-full-contact-lap-dance-in-Vegas kind a guy

That rub-your-feet-on-the-couch kind a guy

That shower-with-your-friend kind a guy

That Nascar-and-ATV kind a guy

That middle-management kind a guy

That take-my-business-card kind a guy

That business-end-of-a-.38 kind a guy

That buy-you-breakfast kind a guy

That hightail-it-on-out kind a guy

You can't hold me, she said,
always did have a way of talking
never could get a read on her
the last time he hurt her she said
something in her just
went cold, said What I feel for him now is just
a whole lotta nothin' Guess you could call it
an out-of-body experience she had a way
of touching me sometimes
made me forget my job, my
girl, the time of day Don't take
any of this down, I always
told her, didn't want to turn up in one
of her poems a clubfooted stranger
in a cut-rate suit one of her hands
under my shirt one
on the hollow of my hip made me
forget. I ever said. Don't remember me
to no one.

*She just wanted to lean on him in the dark
always joked she loved him
like a brother, just not one of hers
she wanted to meet him at chain motels
off the interstate, wearing stilettos
and a credit card dress
afterwards watch talk shows together
and Court TV drink Jamison's straight
from plastic motel cups
still she'd had those chapel-train dreams
never planned on being Little Miss Runaround
most of her kind got hitched
at two-bit affairs in the hotel lounge
she just wanted to lean on him in the dark
knew she couldn't be getting any funny ideas
his smell already gone from where
he's sponged her with his shirt
her fingers already there
to wipe her lipstick from his cheek*

*Lord, let it be then held hostage, not gone but merely absconded, the means by which
the sky clenches, then breaks apart, the means by which it all comes through; allow it
Yes: consummation and regret, Yes: a nice fork in the eye; lead us on now past the
foreseeable Whatever, to hunker down at the forged and terrible ends of things while
somewhere the dark grows teeth like the business end of a chainsaw and somewhere
the hogtied creature of love: panting, askew, getting blood on the wall-to-wall*

He Was Like The Blank Sky. . .

[he had a little bit of the everywhere in him—]

He had a little bit of the everywhere
in him—wood smoke, fog, the smell of stars
in the desert, his voice a dissonant hum
in a town he left a long time ago.
When she pulls him to her what issues
forth: each long-gone and truncated haunt,
isolate and bereft as a tract home
in the exurbs, the sun a closed fist,
pixilated and beating. What she has
of him: wavy and confused, nubby light
through a warped pane. His everywhere
runs through her like milk.

[his ambivalence]

a ghost, not murderous
but muddled, a train, not wayward
but waiting, a bulb in the cold
and unhatched ground
above which a hunchbacked
winter sun throws its grudging
curvature of light

[he was like the blank sky]

(He was like)	He was like the blank sky, a place
(a field of broken glass)	where a tooth used to be; in a field
(a door standing open)	of broken glass, the last wildflower standing;
(the slowness of his hands)	she had him now in the way
(things that sound like <i>gone</i>)	she'd always had him, that is, like a door
(things that sound like <i>I do</i>)	standing open to the rain; still, there was
(the many broken things)	the incredible slowness of his hands, what
(things that get lost)	he left behind, the things that sound
(the dream of falling bodies)	like <i>gone</i> — <i>song</i> , <i>con</i> —and in the spaces
(silvered in frost)	between, things that sound like <i>I do</i> — <i>adieu</i> ,
(the clutch of splintered rock)	<i>and you</i> —among the many broken things
(like rain)	she could recall, once again, the front yard
	after a storm, a muddle of fallen limbs and saplings
	knock-kneed in the wind, among more things
	that get lost, waking to him in the night from
	the dream of falling bodies, the withered
	architecture of corn-stripped fields and
	the pumpkins silvered in frost,
	taking the dog for hikes among the clutch
	of splintered rock—How quickly
	the seasons turn here on the coast
	how the fruit-rot slides from the branches
	like rain

him, sleeping

(what she sees: his open hands, ghostly aperture of moonlight,
the closed yet fathomless net of his eyes, suspended,
hibernatory, between loneliness, between the daily massacres
of light, the calm, between the tongue's agonized proclamations,
the waiting, the key wound deep in the body, flowers not
yet ripped from the dirt, without loneliness, without
the wind's phantom departures, before the fragmentary husks
of stars, the half-gone parabola of his voice, before loneliness,
before breaking, warblers perched on the wrecking-site wall)

[he was not so much the rain]

he was not so much the rain
as the silent passage of water,
not so much the music
as the spaces between notes,
he was not so much the dreaming
as the battened hatches of sleep,
not so much the passing,
as the passing through

[his anger]

was a riderless horse
a sinew of leafless branch
a gutted and treeless
neighborhood in a full-
throttle Oregon spring
the hurtling unstoppable glassed-over
bodies of passing trains
a smug moon rising above the first
hushed tenterhooks of snow

[that something]

Before the end there is always

the pre-end, before the sky's clouded black
the half-hidden luminaria of stars,

after the first unloosening but before the unfathomable
hereafter there are the body's choreographed failings,

superfluities of mouths on skin, of one body
in another, the whole fleshy, blooming, globular world

fully-formed yet not yet sprung toward the arc
of our torn and deciduous loves like the image

on the ultrasound we saw in my twentieth week—inevitable,
imminent, suspended and nearly weightless,

like the spaces between notes, that something between us
hovering there

[he was neither here nor there]

And so she began the gradual shift of allegiance

Because he was neither here nor there

from the body, his body, to the non-body

neither fixture nor firmament, wanting

already stirring within her,

to be alone yet not irrevocably so,

to distinguish between form and non-form, place and non-place,

tied but not tethered, held but not had,

the unloosening, the fog,

his heart was a wilderness and

the after

a closed fist

[he thought he could be like water...]

He thought he could be like water, alone,
not bereft, the distance between two
fixed points, dead air on the radio dial,
he wanted to live un-named as the far-flung,
impenetrable stars, yet sometimes near
sleep, near waking or right before, he just
wanted to fold into her in the dark
with that un-named stirring
in his chest like a flower waiting out
the passing hoof beats of rain

[the last time he touched her:]

a wildness, a call, the attenuated badlands
of sleep, drawn to him like lightening to a light-
skinned horse, the deliquescing boundaries of hands,
sometimes I have these dreams, smell of rain, the duplicitous,
unloosening sky, the touch of him both like loneliness
and like never having to be lonely again, dirty glass, giant rose
in a tiny room, rapturous, only mortal, snow in an empty
field, the first lurched kick they could feel with their hands
like wings on a stunned bird, trembling