

Larry Duncan

Bone-Yard Romance

To S.L.

We were young.
I swear.

Your hair like gauze
Frayed and flaxen
In the harsh halo
of the porch light.

It was an anniversary
Or your cousin's birthday
And I danced with your mother
As your father watched
Through the guard rails
Of the porch he'd built.
His eyes like steel diamonds,
His dog biting at the coils
Of his cage set back
Along the skeletal range
Of September trees.

And you were beautiful
You were always beautiful
With your pock marked skin
And your frail fingers
And the way you laughed
Like forever
Like the echo of a wooden bat against a sheet metal sign.

The last time I saw you
You kept losing track
Mid-sentence
Staring off to the treeline
Where the Rottweiler was caged.

You said it was because of the pills
Or the blow
Your head leading the way
When you struck the other cars
Crossing the intersection.

There were pink,
Ragged scars
Up and down your limbs
From where the asphalt ate your skin
And the shards of fiberglass
Had torn,
Like chromatic teeth,
Down to the bone.

We had this idea
Kerouac and Cassidy
On the cover of a Penguin Classic
Their hands in their pockets
Smirking at the camera
Young and beautiful forever.
And Ginsberg on a stage
Visible only
through the rents
Of cigarette smoke
and waving hands
And the bottle passing
His body contorted
To form a some kind of sign
And everyone crying "holy, holy, holy!"

We wanted to be holy.
Beaten Down and holy, too.
Only we didn't know the rest.
That there were cars crossing the intersection.
The Long days in between
Calling us to the kiss and scream of metal,
To the ragged shapes of blood colored glass
Strewn around the wreckage.

We were drawn in to the rhythm
Of “angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the
starry dynamo in the machinery of night”
of angels burning so hard and so fast that they simply exploded into light
Here.
Flash.
Gone.

Lifted up and scattered like so much stardust.

But not Jack bent over the toilet vomiting blood,
crying through the torrent of alcohol induced hemorrhages
not “Holy!” but “Help me!
Help me, Stella. I’m bleeding.”
Not Neal, his last bit of potential burned
out on a few beautiful letters,
staggering off from a wedding party
in a Second haze
to die in the wet dark
like a wounded animal.
Like a dog.

“Against the ruin of the world there is only one defense—the creative act.”

Kenneth Rexroth wrote that.
You were always trying to get me to read Rexroth.
And I did.
And I believe that.
It might be the only thing I believe.

Like faith.

Since I read that line I’ve been repeating it.

Like a mantra.

(Holy! Holy! Holy!...)

And you’re gone now
And I’m still here
36
And half a bottle of whiskey
And half a pack of cigarettes
And the next day like a pebble in the hand.

There's no anniversary anymore
No days to mark
Nothing but the dog
And his cage
His face hanging
Like a Daikjin
Mask amid the chains.

And I hear him
Like a voice
Some other chant
Voice like smoke
Teeth like grates
On the oven

And I think of all those years
Caught in that ridiculous pose,
Too drunk to write,
Too caught up in my own beatific gaze
To hear the hounds,
To feel the heat of the furnace wall.

Always running,

Running,

Running.

And for what,

Towards what,

Three DUI's in three states,
A possession charge,
A broken marriage and half-a-dozen broken relationships besides,
And not even a handful of beautiful letters to show for it.

I see you now
As you were
And as you are
Saint Veronica of the Vera Icon
Imposed on the shroud of my sight
And I watch the clock
And I count my coughs,

And I forgo sleep,
Not to howl mad at the moon,
But to pound the keys,
To catch up to the clock.
Especially on nights like tonight,
When the house is asleep
And it's cold enough to make parts of me ache
And there's so much work to be done
And it feels so very, very late.

Larry Duncan lives and writes in Fullerton, California. He graduated from Chapman University with a BFA in Creative Writing and received his MFA from California State University, Long Beach. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Bank-Heavy Press's Don't Forget the Chapstick* and *Robo-Book*.