



Memoir Mixtapes

Vol. 8: A Hazy Shade of Winter

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Special thanks to our reader, Benjamin Selesnick

Letters from the Editors



Hello again, MM friends and readers,

When we put up the call for submissions for this winter-themed volume, we didn't anticipate how rough of a winter we were really in for, or that we'd come up against as many roadblocks and delays as we did.

But here we are, about two and a half months later, with a wonderful volume of new work to share with you. I'd say that the final product is definitely worth the wait, and I hope that once you start reading through these pieces, you'll agree. Each of our contributors took this prompt and made it their own. The result is a collection of personal essays and poetry that provides a multifaceted view of winter, and the multitude of experiences, emotions, and—of course—the music we human beings associate with the season. We want to thank each of them for sharing these profound pieces of their lives with us.

I also want to thank my partners in crime, whose hard work makes the Memoir Mixtapes project possible. To Benj, the best reader a lit mag could ask for—thank you for your keen eye and sharp insights. To Emery, our new assistant editor—thank you for reaching out and offering your help precisely when we needed it. Your help has been a game changer. To Kevin, thank you for all the work (and love!) you've put into this project since day 1. I'm so grateful that we've been able to accomplish so much with MM in the past 18 months, and it definitely wouldn't have been possible (or fun) without you.

And to you, our readers. Thank you for coming back and joining us for another issue. Your readership is what keeps this project moving forward.

As winter melts into spring, we invite you to join us for one last celebration of the season. So snuggle up in your favorite chair, wrap yourself in a cozy blanket, get the Vol.8 playlist queued up, and enjoy the read.

Samantha Lamph/Len
CREATOR & CO-CURATOR



Hi everyone.

It's been a few months now since I sat down and wrote the prompt for this volume, as the first snow blanketed the frozen sub-arctic lands of the far north where I reside. Today, the snow has begun to melt here, the sun is shining, and life is feeling better.

To say that winter can be hard might be an understatement. Depending on where you live in the world, its unrelenting cold, grey, short days can break you. Winter isn't just hard—it can be devastating. But it's not without its joys. During no other time of year can you experience sitting under a cozy blanket, warm beverage nestled firmly between your hands, safely inside while watching the peaceful stillness of the world as snow lazily drifts down from the sky. Winter can be devastating, but it can be joyful, and that's what we were hoping to show with this Volume.

Within these pages, you'll find it all—sadness, awakening, heartbreak, joy, whimsy, warmth on cold days. I say it every time, but once again, I'm incredibly proud of this Volume, and our contributors, and I hope that you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

This time around, I would like to thank the newest member of our team, Emery Ross. Emery reached out to us to see if we needed help at the perfect time. She has been an invaluable addition to the team, and we're incredibly lucky to have her. As well, I'd like to thank Benj, our reader, for his always valuable insights on our contributions. And finally, I'd like to thank Sam, our glorious creator, for her patience and understanding. I'm very grateful that she asked me, a year and a half ago, to be her partner on this excellent project.

And now, please snuggle in, get the Spotify playlist going, and enjoy *A Hazy Shade of Winter*.

Kevin D. Woodall
EDITOR / CO-CURATOR

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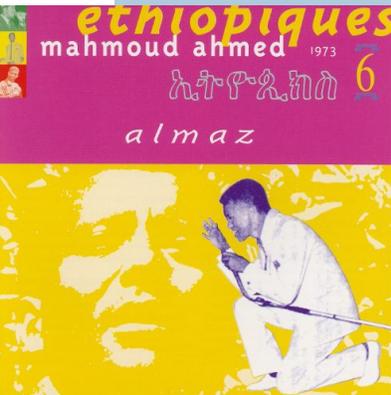
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On “Almaz Men Eda New” by Mahmoud Ahmed

Margarita Serafimova

Winter was smiling.
So much blue
was making her go weak at the knees.



Mahmoud Ahmed
“Almaz Men Eda New”
Ethiopiquest, Vol. 6:
Almaz 1973
1999
Buda Musique

That Weekend We Listened to The Clinks on a Loft Bed

Alex Clark

Summer, 2004

"You'll like them. the lead singer reminds me of you." says B. There is so much power in a closed bedroom door when you are fourteen. It makes the two of us seem so separate from the small trailer she shares with her mother and two older brothers. I'm picking pieces off of her popcorn ceiling, surrounded by a sea of empty coffee mugs, spiral notebooks, drawing pencils, the stapled pages of Arts & Culture section of the *Chicago Tribune*. We are just beginning to dream of cityscapes and apartments with framed wall art, wood floors, and good lighting. We don't describe it that way. We just know that New York, Chicago, San Francisco, are places where things like that, and a life like that, exists. We just know that's where we want to be.

Where we are is a trailer park in Central Michigan, surrounded by flat land, soy bean fields, and so many people who will vote George Bush into a second term. B. is wearing her "my vote counts" t-shirt as a sign of silent protest and because it's ironic. She discovered irony far before I did, but now I'm finding it everywhere. I find irony around the same time I start drinking coffee. I'm sipping coffee now, made from a big tub her mother bought at Sam's club, and an ancient and wheezing laptop is flipped open and balanced on B.'s legs. We've been slowly scrolling through the new music section of "Afterellen.com." B. is big words and long hair, sketchbooks and sad love songs. I am YA books and emo bands, enamored by the things about her that are so different from me. Last week, she helped me dye my hair black with a box of chemicals we bought at Family Dollar. The light hangs hazy and afternoon-like, but we just woke up an hour ago. Two best girlfriends can sleep in the same bed, so long as they hide just how close they are to one another.

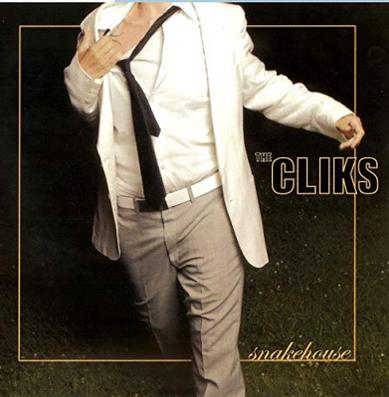
It's a small bed, so there's little about how we feel that we have to hide, at least when we sleep together on the weekends at her house. We aren't allowed to close the door or sleep in the same bad anymore at mine. My parents will voice their fear of us, of our closeness and what it means, someday, but for now, they only demand the space to make sure we're not doing what we most definitely are.

I lean in to get a better look at the picture of the band from the article: four snarls in suit jackets and edgy dress shirts stare back. Big belt buckles and tattooed forearms, clad in ties and ascots, posed in a way that makes them loom cool, even from this distant perspective, this future keyboard clicking away. I think, in this moment, I feel them as a presence I desperately want to find in my reflection.

And then, the music starts up.

The guitar is electric, distorted and growling in before the first drumbeat.

Oh yeah, oh yeah, I've fallen down, but I can get up.



The Clinks

"Oh Yeah"

Snakehouse

04/2007

Warner Music

I am jealous of her room, how she doesn't have to share it with anyone. I am jealous of her lofted bed and her desk. Most of all, I am jealous of the ethernet cord plugging us into a world other than our own.

What are we doing? I have no idea, but I think it must be love. I love the way her hand on my bare stomach sends lyrics running wild and fast through my head when I think about it later. I love when she draws intricate designs on my forearms, how her pen tip gives my skin a glimpse of what the word *simmer* sounds like. We are the type to write love notes on the front of mix CDs, to scribble rainbows on the toes of our Chuck Taylors in black sharpie marker. We do not mourn when they inevitably wash off. We just re-draw them.

I notice she's cleared most of the plaster-covered foam from the space above our heads; she's told me this is what she does with her hands when we're on the phone together, late in the night. This is what she's doing when her voice gets all scratchy, when she's describing how the skyline will shimmer from our perch on the cold steps of our future apartment building's fire escape stairs. Her words make up what I imagine, as my eyes start to involuntarily shut, quieting the melodrama of my adolescent mind, letting me softly give in to sleep with her promise of somewhere else.

We live ten miles and three freeway exits away from each other. That distance feels impossible when we're apart, on the weekdays when the last bell rings and we say bye without kissing on our way out of the high school. Her mother picks her up, drives her back here, taking the overpass to the southernmost side of town where the freeway runs past the Walmart and the Strip Mall, and the bus takes me out of the city. The small farming village of Rosebush, my hometown, is only seven miles north, but it's an hour and a half of stop and starts as all of the other rural kids get dropped off.

I want, I want, I want my baby

We know that Central Michigan is not a place for people like us. I had never heard of the website before this afternoon, but B. is finding out about how many people like us there are via the internet. She found this site on some blog and it's made for people like us, she says. *Lesbian* still feels like a strange word in my mouth, but if it means knowing her lips, then it must be true.

I want, I want, I want my baby

I want, I want, I want

But right now, we're together and that's what matters. My dad dropped me off for the weekend. B.'s mother is sound asleep on the couch, the cats moving shadow-like over stacks of newspapers and magazines, tubes of caulking, paint cans, and piles of 2x4s left over from unfinished home improvement projects. Someday, B. will call me from her grandmother's trailer next door, where she will have to shower because the water has been turned off and they're running the electricity off of the battery of her mother's jeep, but it's a slightly more stable situation now.

The man writing this down, so far away from the girl on the loft bed, will still have questions. He will wonder why his parents let him go over so much. But then he'll remember his habit of slamming doors and storming around when they didn't and add it to the other things he will have to both apologize and say thank you for. Although, maybe letting them know that they were right might backfire. Instead, he'll stick to writing it down.

We don't yet know words like *recession*, don't know anyone who pays too much attention to the stock market reports on the radio or the nightly news. There is food in the fridge, coffee on the counter. We are two fourteen-year-olds leaning in to watch a pixelated music video on Real Player. The band members arm wrestle each other and lick love notes and do a lot of dramatic scowling, which is the one thing I can relate to. I am dressed in a badly-fitted Pink Floyd t-shirt and boot cut blue jeans. B. is five pants sizes smaller than me, and we will break each other in ways we can't imagine in the magic of this moment, just a few months after our first kiss.

He's not listening

Someday, I will go by a different name and lesbian will still feel strange, not as a word I feel in my mouth, but as an indicator of a time in my life, a beginning mistaken for an end. But recognized beginnings aren't a thing when you're a queer teenager in a rust-belt town, and you're a teenager, so you feel alone, and you're a queer teenager in the Midwest, so there is the added bonus of having no visible evidence of anyone like you who has made it through. Maybe on a website, maybe on thousands of websites, but not here. Maybe they are here, the queers, or lesbians (you don't know the word queer as a reclamation, not yet), but you can't seem to find them in the pews of the small Catholic country church. Not on the metal stadium seats at the high school football games. Not reflected in the parents of your friends, no matter how with-it and liberal some of them who work at the college appear to be.

What there is right now, though, is this girl and the label that comes with liking the way she says your name. Right now, there's a band called The Cliks, made up of women who love women. Women like us.

He's not listening

Someday, the lead singer of The Cliks will come out as transgender, but right now, Lucas is a sneering, androgynous dreamboat with a cherry red electric, strumming away like he's fighting to be heard and I want so badly to be him. Someday, I will change my name and B. and I will live such separate lives, in separate cities, mine far north on the shores of Lake Superior and hers far west on the Puget Sound. Olympia and Marquette, two cities that have the most overcast days in the United States.

Of course, we don't know any of this. We are still so young. We are still just two girls in love on a loft bed in a college town. There is still so much Saturday left. And we just woke up.

“Something On” by The Tragically Hip: A Canadian Winter Road Trip Fairy Tale

Amy Spurway

*“Your imagination's having puppies
It could be a video for new recruits
Just stare into the camera
And pretend that you got the flu
Or dream of impossible vacations
And get all teary from the wind
Look as though you're standing at the station
Long after the train came in.”*

It would take some magic—and by *magic*, I mean *lies*—to make it happen, but I was desperate. Late-January in the university town of Fredericton, New Brunswick, circa 1999 was something akin to Dante’s ninth circle of Hell. A frozen wasteland, teeming with a few thousand slick sinners, fresh from Christmas break with student-loan stuffed bank accounts and many a treacherous winter itch to scratch. Under ordinary circumstances, I’d have been right there with them, like the proper 22-year-old Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, girl-gone-wild that I was. Pissing away my newfound borrowed fortune on weather-inappropriate pick-up artist outfits, assorted intoxicants, and greasy food to mop up the poisons in my blood. All done, of course, with the ubiquitous Gen X understanding that Y2K was gonna save us all from ever having to pay one red cent of that money back. But this winter was different. I was in love. An all-consuming, soul-searing kind of love that didn’t jive with the myriad ways this town—this university student life imbued with such bleak debauchery—persuaded me to soften my morals and harden my heart. And now, the object of my desire was far, far away from this place and space of cold, white monotony that I was beginning to despise.

I called all my professors, stifling fake sobs. *There’s been a death in the family. I won’t be in class for a few days.* I conducted role play exercises with my roommates, to make sure they knew what to say under a variety of circumstances, should anyone call looking for me. Turns out that minoring in Theatre was not completely useless after all. I packed a wad of cash, a pack of smokes, a flask of vodka, my fanciest undergarments, and my little rainbow Fimo-covered pipe loaded up with skunk weed. Then, I headed to the bus station.

The bus ride to Toronto was a 20-odd-hour trip. In the parking lot of a greasy spoon on the outskirts of Riviere Du Loup, Quebec, me and some Newfoundlander-buddy-on-his-way-out-West huddled together to keep my pipe lit in the face of a frigid night wind. Despite the plunging mercury, we stood outside long after the weed was gone to blow the stink off us. Right courteous like that, we were. Leaning against the road-salt crusted bus, up to our sneaker-clad ankles in dirty parking lot snow, passing the flask back and forth, chain smoking, making stoned small talk in the moonlight. Mostly about music, but a bit about love. *The Tragically Hip, man. Heard the new stuff? Pretty wicked. Love The Hip...and this guy in Toronto. I think I love him too.*



The Tragically Hip

“Something On”

Phantom Power

07/1998

Universal Music Canada

*"And see how the space tautens
Like there's something on
And you're never more hot than
When you've got something on."*

The bus crawled along on roads smeared with ice, both black and white. Sleep ebbed and flowed with the degrees of darkness and silence, and in those waxing and waning moments of consciousness, I dreamt about him. The guy. The one I eyed in a Fredericton bar the winter before this one. He had a scuffed-up jean jacket, big black boots, and a pager. A sharp glint in his green eyes and a playful smirk of a smile as he studied the lay of the land on the pool table, making shot after shot after shot. I had a belly full of vodka and lime, and a well-honed flirty hair toss as I studied him. I elbowed my friend. *See that guy? I'm gonna marry him. And by marry I meant fuck.* Which I did. Until one day, he just couldn't take the claustrophobia, the stagnation of the limited life on offer in this little university town any longer, and he bolted off to a new world, a bigger world, far away. He left at the tail-end of summer, but it wasn't until the long, dark nights of that winter set in that it really dawned on me: I loved *that* guy. And I needed to see him, come hell or high water.

I called my mother from a payphone somewhere in Ontario. Told her about how I'd gone shopping for a new semester's worth of books. Went on at great lengths about how cold and snowy it was in Fredericton. Bought a coffee at Tim Horton's, jazzed it up with the last splash of my vodka, then I called the guy in Toronto to tell him I was on my way.

*"Outside there's hectic action
The ice is covering the trees
And one of 'em's interconnecting
With my Chevrolet Caprice"*

I arrived in Toronto, Uptown, on the 11th floor of a glossy, glassy high-rise apartment building, the way Atticus hopes to arrive at death: "late, in love, and a little drunk." Pleasantly surprised that winter wasn't a *thing* in this city like it was out East. From his sprawling bedroom window I watched the snow fall, white and crystalline, only to be reduced to grey slush and icy water by the frenetic hum of life on the streets and sidewalks below. Too much heat, too much movement for winter to ever really get a solid grip on a place like this. Meanwhile, back home was getting buried by a Nor' Easter. I called my mother in Cape Breton with the Fredericton weather report. Good ol' star-sixty-seven hiding the fact that I was in an area code that I wasn't supposed to be in. *Nearly froze to death walking to class this morning, Ma. Two feet of snow. Gotta go buy boots and mitts, I guess. I hear the storm's headed your way. Yep, 'tis the season.* Then, calls to my professors to say I was storm-stayed in Nova Scotia and wouldn't be back for a few more days. I hung up the phone, laughing hysterically. Toasty warm under the blankets with the guy I knew I loved. Hadn't been outside in days. Passing a joint back and forth, sipping too-sweet, too-creamy instant coffee, listening to the big city rock radio stations. *This is a new Tragically Hip song. "Something On." It's my favourite. Listen.*

*"Black out to phantom power
And like there's nothing on
And hammering the tower
And now there's nothing on"*

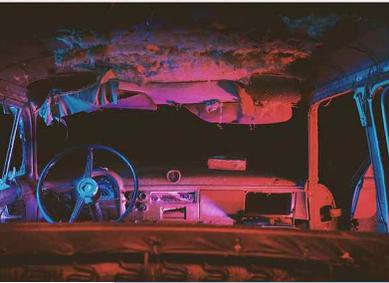
*We'll ride the monorail
Rocking gently home on the trail
You want to show me the moon."*

On the days when he had no choice but to show up for work, I hung out in his bedroom alone. Smoking. Dreaming. Listening to the radio. Writhing and dancing around the room in my fanciest undergarments every time my favourite new Hip song played. To hell with pulling the blinds, nobody knows me here. Nobody cares. I thought about staying forever, in this liminal space where my skin was warm and the world was fluid. Where reputations and winter had no real teeth. Where this guy and I could play house in the glossy, glassy high-rise. Be who we were meant to be: a slightly burnt-out dancing princess and her green-eyed pool shark prince. But there wasn't enough magic to hold me there much longer than a week. And by *magic*, I mean *foolish drive to drop out of university four months before graduation*. On my last day in the city, we went shopping. He took me to a record store, told me to pick any CD I wanted, thinking I'd take some time browsing, deciding. *This one. The Tragically Hip, Phantom Power. It's got my favourite song. "Something On." The lyrics are kinda cryptic, but Gord Downie's a poet and it's got a winter day vibe. I'll pretend it's a sad but sexy love song. About us.*

*"I know you're standing at the station
I know there's nothing on
I know that alienation
I know the train's long gone
I can see how your face tautens
Like you've got something on
It makes me feel just rotten
But you've got something on."*

Back on the bus, Fredericton-bound, face plastered with a look that compelled other passengers to sit absolutely anywhere but near me. I didn't talk to a single soul. No flask, no pipe, no payphone calls. Just silent, tearful prayers to a host of random phantoms and hypothetical powers-that-be. *Don't let me get stuck back in the cold clutches of that ninth circle of Hell for much longer, ok?* In the hours that would carry me back to the freshly blizzarded east, I closed my eyes to dream about the big city that winter didn't quite touch. About *the guy* there. About the two of us, wrapped in the cryptic beauty of "Something On," happily ever after. And by *something on*, I mean *love*.

Editor's note: make sure you read Amy's bio in the Contributors section (page 39) for the epilogue to this piece.



Field Report

“Blind Spot”

Summertime Songs

03/2018

Verve Records

Coyote Tracks

(after Chris Porterfield)

Oak Ayling

Have you forgiven you
The coyote you were
The trouble you were in
The day you found my
Eyes were brimming blind
& with four paws led me to the spot

I have forgiven you
The child you were
& wilderness burrowed in
You were, are still, my
Favourite creature to love blind
I wait, still, in this same spot.

On Marianne Faithfull: Diary of a Lesbian Spinster in Winter

Tanya Pearson

November 6th

I do two things, religiously, every winter: I listen to Marianne Faithfull and google stories about hermits who die in their homes without being discovered for weeks. Years ago, somewhere in Europe, a recluse decomposed into her floor. Her body wasn't discovered until it began dripping into the downstairs neighbor's apartment. Last year, I considered adopting a small dog with a misshapen body and protruding fangs. The disclaimer on the adoption website read, "He did eat his owner." The owner died at home and the dog ate the corpse instead of starving to death, which seems reasonable enough. He has since been adopted and renamed "Rumplestiltskin."

On November 6th, 2018, I drive to campus for an evening seminar and play Marianne Faithfull's newest album, *Negative Capability*. I have my period and I feel hormonal and weepy. I rarely cry and I am confident about my suppression techniques until "In My Own Particular Way" begins and I promptly burst into tears for the first time in a little over two years, which, coincidentally, also occurred in the same campus parking lot. I blame the parking lot, reapply my mascara, and head into class.

November 17th

As a closeted teenage homosexual, I spent a lot of time alone in my room, avoiding high school boys and their aggressive penises, playing music, drawing, adventuring in a homemade spy belt, and recording music videos and live performances on VHS tape—before the dawn of the internet and when MTV still lived up to its name. I watched Marianne Faithfull sing with Metallica on *Saturday Night Live* in 1997. I thought she was interesting because she was old, and I've always had an affinity for "women of a certain age," but I didn't care for Metallica and failed to investigate their mysterious backup singer.

In my late 20s, having played in bands, and procured a sizable music library out of a nucleus of "best of" albums, I considered myself well-versed in rock history. But, I invented spectacular stories about how I arrived at a particular artist or album, which, for the record, is a gender-induced phenomenon. Growing up female, just outside of Guyville,¹ with no viable source of music knowledge, you tend to discover things in "un-cool" ways. The road to good taste, whatever that is, is a bit longer for girls than it is for, say, a teen-age boy who was, perhaps, encouraged to play drums in a shitty death metal band, or who had the privilege of living with older, cooler siblings.

The truth is, one December in the early 2000s, I picked up Marianne Faithfull's "Greatest Hits" out of a bargain bin at a record store and that's when she hit me. I have disliked almost all of my favorite artists at some point, but there comes a day when my emotional maturation meets their artistic genius and the two coalesce to form a successful relationship. Soon after my foray into the greatest hits, I was the proud owner of her

¹ Great line from "Harvest Spoon," by Free Kitten. 1995. Has nothing to do with Marianne Faithfull, but it is clever.



Marianne Faithfull

"In My Own Particular Way"

Negative Capability

11/2018

Panta Rei

entire discography. I preferred her *Broken English*,² cigarette-ravaged, post-heroin voice. I still do. A weathered heel on cool snowy-blue gravel, aged and imperfect. A cup of tea that's just a little too hot and burns when it goes down.

November 28th

I started smoking in the sixth grade, after I got my first electric guitar. It was hard to smoke regularly at 12, with a mother who singlehandedly made every school in our district smoke free. In the 90s, I bought packs of Marlboros from a vending machine at Bickford's Restaurant and smoked in the woods with friends. I chain smoked from 18 to 31. I can't say it was Marianne Faithfull's fault, but I can say that she was a very beautiful smoker and I didn't hit puberty until my senior year of high school. Correlation is not causation, but it is something.³

November 29th

In 2007, I admitted myself to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. One surprising thing about rehab is that they confiscate books and music that are not "recovery-based." I was prepared for the strip searches and sleepless nights on a cot in a room with other detoxing women; to be handed toiletries and razors that had to be returned after showering; for barred windows and no exercise; but I was not prepared to give up my music. I was admitted to the facility as a vagrant which meant I was awarded a coveted state bed, an extended stay, and visitation privileges. Most of the other women had visitors who smuggled in makeup or drugs, but I insisted on burned compact discs that I would shove down my pants before exiting the visitation room. There were certain things my family wouldn't provide—anything too "depressing," and no Judy Garland because she was also too depressing and an alcoholic. But an acquaintance visited once—I think he was curious about the place. He wrote vacuous short stories about the trials and tribulations of white, college-educated, redheaded young men, and he was a redhead and a Brown University graduate. He brought me a Marianne Faithfull mix and I never saw him again.

December 5th

Romantic love is a social construct, but the rush of oxytocin that comes with the honeymoon period is nice. Despite my ambivalence, I reboot my dating site profile and choose a series of flattering, candid photos that I hope will attract like-minded individuals. I link my Spotify account and choose "Why'd Ya Do it" as my Tinder Anthem.⁴ I do not receive any matches.

December 19th

A French reporter interviewed me about the status of women in music over Skype. We discussed oral history and the always subjective art of curation. She asked who my dream interview would be, and I answered, "Marianne Faithfull." When she asked why, I said, "I love her."

² *Broken English* is Marianne Faithfull's 7th studio album, released in November, 1979. It is considered her "comeback."

³ Marianne Faithfull started smoking again but will quit when she goes in for shoulder surgery, according to an interview with Jude Rogers for *The Guardian*. I still do not smoke and it's not Marianne Faithfull's fault that I was an impressionable and insecure teen who didn't hit puberty until my senior year of high school.

⁴ "Why'd Ya Do It" is the 8th track on *Broken English*, about infidelity: "Why'd ya do it, she screamed, after all we've said/ Every time I see your dick I see her cunt in my bed." Not a great choice for a dating site anthem.

As a functioning and, arguably, productive member of society (how productive is a Ph.D. in a capitalist economy?), I maintain the gift of having once been a total disaster. It is a gift to have lived a million lives, and I am predisposed to obsessions with artists who possess similarly disastrous, yet multifaceted pasts, and who have lived long enough to offer perspective. Not necessarily a happy ending, but the comfort of similarity.

December 23rd

There is something about being a 37-year-old, perpetually single lesbian that makes me feel like I missed an important lesson during my formative years; the years of indoctrination into the heterosexual American ideal. In elementary school, we were asked to illustrate our futures using white paper and colored markers. I drew myself, a successful marine biologist, in a red Saab convertible parked outside of my condo, gazing adoringly at pet whales and dolphins in their large, well-maintained pools. I realized the error of my ways when the rest of the girls in class presented caricatures of weddings, husbands and bald infants. Twenty-seven years after that failed class assignment, I have managed to avoid any semblance of a normal romantic relationship. I procured a beard in high school, Brian Doolin, after a mean girl called me a lesbian in art class; from 18 to 20 I suffered massive crushes on my best friends, which is an unfortunate but totally normal predicament to be in at that age; in my 30s I dated a younger woman who had a boyfriend but liked my attention on and off for a couple of years until she got bored and later engaged; and one cross-country romance with a turtleneck-wearing art curator from Los Angeles who moved in with someone else while we were dating and I didn't even notice.

On bad days, I feel like a failure. Like everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, at some point participates in the Wedding Industrial Complex. They cohabitate, marry, and trade in personal aesthetics for stark, mid-century modern chic, potted plants, and sparsely decorated white walls. For small, tasteful barn weddings, Ikea trips, dinner parties, and compromise. On good days, I feel like a relationship renegade. I relish my solitude. I am passionate about my work. I can hang as much art on my walls as I please and bathe behind the comfort of an uncouth Jeff Goldblum shower curtain. I leave the door open when I go to the bathroom so I can talk to my dog. I am not a failure, I am an enigma.

I travel often for work—I interview musicians—usually in Los Angeles because that's where many of them live. Marianne Faithfull lives in Paris. Of course she does. I remember the first time I flew home to Massachusetts after visiting the turtleneck-wearing, curator girlfriend. My phone rang as soon as my plane landed, and it was her. "Just wanted to make sure you made it back." I thought, *this is why people partner up*. I listened to "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" on the drive home, but I didn't recognize it as a premonition at the time.⁵

December 26th

I don't know why ageism is a thing that exists in pop culture, because women over age the age of fifty are inherently more interesting artists and performers. I would rather listen to Marianne Faithfull at 71, a woman who shares her bed with an assortment of books (and if that's not a mutually beneficial relationship worth striving for, I don't know what is), than be subjected to another trendy 20-something-year-old cog in the revolving door of streaming music garbage. I would rather be alone forever than lose myself in a relationship. I wonder if that's why Marianne sleeps with books. I would rather be a book on Marianne Faithfull's bed than be in love.

⁵ I first heard this version of the song on the "Greatest Hits" bargain bin album.

December 27th

I listen to Marianne Faithfull in the winter, obsessively, because it's purging music in a purging season. The cold, diminished daylight, the holidays, that voice—the combination begs for catharsis. Winter is the Saturn Return of the seasons and you can either absolve your shit or continue on your merry, unevolving way.

I have a tendency to disregard what I call "pedestrian emotions"—love, loneliness, longing, regret—as weakness in order to maintain the illusion of someone confident, unwavering, and self-reliant. Because I am incapable of expressing true vulnerability—or more specifically, to vocalize my desire for "someone to love, who could love me back...in our own particular way"⁶—Marianne Faithfull is my conduit. And because she refuses to discuss her songs in any detail, she does us all the great favor of allowing for translation. I translate them in my private spinster universe, which, for the most part is a 2009 Toyota Matrix, in the dead of winter. Or sometimes in my living room with my old dog watching, and in those moments, that is "love, more or less."⁷

⁶ "In My Own Particular Way," the 4th track on *Negative Capability*, is beautifully sad, vulnerable, and relatable. It's about love, loss and aging. The most curmudgeonly of curmudgeons would cry in a parking lot over this one.
⁷ "Love More or Less," from *Give My Love to London*, released September 2014.

Dan Fogelberg

The Innocent
Age

Dan Fogelberg

"Same Old Lang
Syne"

The Innocent Age

08/1981

Full Moon / Epic

A Toast to Innocence

Erin Cork

*"Met my old lover in the grocery store
The snow was falling Christmas Eve..."*

I loved a girl who loved Dan Fogelberg. She had a crooked smile. Eyes that glacier-blued and sparkled when she was angry and right before she'd cry. Like the lake that we jumped into on the 4th of July and realized that our friendship had changed.

We'd met through mutual friends a couple of years before at the county fair under ferris wheel lights, surrounded by screams, beer garden slurring, and midway games of chance. It smelled like livestock, fried food, and cotton candy. My first girlfriend had just dumped me, and I wasn't in the mood to meet this person "I'd heard so much about."

Still, she was around, and I found that I enjoyed her quick wit and her voice. That girl could sing. She went back to college and wrote me to me from a graveyard where she ate Pickle Barrel sandwiches and drank six packs of Tab. She said she was lonely but liked the quiet time between the stones, names of people she'd never known.

When she returned home that summer I was involved with one of the friends who had introduced us. We invited her to join us on a holiday camping trip. She was adorable, brought a makeup case along. She stole my baseball cap, wore it all weekend. She swam next to me. Went under. When she came up, she looked at me. You know, really looked at me. She wiped the water from her eyes and laughed with her entire body then pushed me away. She said, "I like your letters."

She transferred to the local university, which meant we'd go to the same school in September. She met me outside of my classes and left funny notes on my windshield. My girlfriend went to Minnesota for three weeks and asked her to look after me while she was away.

There was regret but it was already too late. Even if my girlfriend had stayed I was already gone. Their friendship was over. We spent a rainy fall listening to albums, talking—a master's seminar in the history of each other in stereo light. She read epic love stories. I read short fiction. We went to movies, shared Tower Pizza and Mystic Mints. I held her hair while she threw up the Riunite on ice that hadn't been nice.

We walked the streets of our town after dark. The air was crisp, the sound of fall beneath our feet and the whisper of leaves as they let go behind us. We lay down on a baseball diamond and dared the moon to look away. Streetlights flickered when our fingers brushed, and clocks unwound when we kissed.

One soggy night she crawled across the carpet, laid her head in my lap, and swore she couldn't do this. She was confused. Her mother was worried about how much time we were spending together. She was afraid that people would talk. It was just a matter of time before her daughter would meet a nice boy. But her daughter had not been led into temptation. She'd dove in headfirst.

She sang "Souvenirs," "Longer," and "Since You've Asked" into my ear. My skin would rise, and I was certain that we were writing the book, no words of longing had been written before. Not like this.

Winter came. Snow fell heavy enough to measure in inches and feet. We made a snowman with Jelly Belly eyes and a red Twizzler smile. She ate half of the carrot before giving him a nose. I jump-started her Mazda with my old Ford. We'd skip class and stay in bed. She'd study anatomy, talk about the smell and scalpel drag of cadavers. I searched for words, pencil and eraser shavings spilling onto pages and tabletops.

I read her Yeats and Sexton. We watched *The Thornbirds*, listened to Steve Winwood and the new Police album. She sang, "Every Little Thing She Does is Magic," running her fingers along my shoulders. She wept, her back tucked into me. Her mother had become obsessed with our destruction.

She made me gasp and laugh. God, she was wicked smart and sharp. She made me cry. The breath-taking sobs of, "I never want to feel this way again."

She accepted a job in the mid-west. I looked for Chicago somewhere between Saturn and Pluto then found it on the map. I have no idea how we paid those phone bills or managed to see each other that first year. Her mother prayed that the distance would break us. The pressure was temporarily relieved when her brother started dating a black girl.

I quit school and my job, drove a million miles to be with her. I tried to sell vacuum cleaners in Gary, Indiana. I found that they just wanted the free knives that came with the demonstration. She bought the only vacuum I ever sold. Last I heard she still has it, lifetime guarantee.

I got sick, really sick, the almost died kind, more than a week in the hospital and tail-tucked move back home kind. That didn't break us. She moved west. I recovered, moved to Seattle to be with her. We made it to the five-year mark, but the family and her need to not disappoint finally fractured us beyond repair.

Decades later we are both married to other people. She never met the nice boy, but her mother came around. At least she wasn't with the one who dragged her down. We're both warm and safe and dry.

I loved a girl who loved Dan Fogelberg. We hurt each other in the way that leaves scars and tattoos. We tried to be friends a couple of times but that got messy. Messy in the way of the 5th of July or New Year's Day. Messy in the way of old growth and wild fire.

*"Just for a moment I was back at school
And felt that old familiar pain
And as I turned to make my way back home
The snow turned into rain"*

Chic Cheer

Patrick Williams

For Fatman Scoop + Kylie

Promise me you'll never forget
what was big in Iceland

in December 2003, when we
wandered the buslines in a glimpse

of twilight, on near-dawn horseback,
in a minivan all day. *Come on & dance*

with me.

Yeah.

Slow.

When we saw the night sky untie itself
& we didn't yet know

the warmth in which we washed our faces
was runoff from the powerplant.

We kept quiet in the locker rooms, moving
slowly in soft construction.

Here we go now.

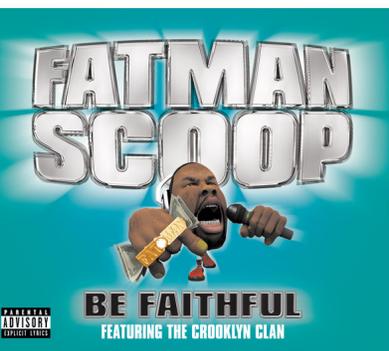
Here we go now.

The Reykjavik streets erupt at midnight, once
the home liquor is consumed, geothermal

blood & breath abound. Maybe language
doesn't matter much for us beyond the sound.

Here we go now.

Make noise.



Fatman Scoop

"Be Faithful"

Be Faithful

03/1999

AV8 · Def Jam · Mercury



Kylie Minogue

"Slow"

Body Language

11/2003

Parlophone

On “The Holly and the Ivy” by George Winston

keef

When it snows in New Mexico, soft wet mush blankets everything, muting traffic and amplifying birdsong. The sun doesn't stop shining until nightfall, when the darkness is softened by the moonlight reflecting off the snow. At Christmastime, sidewalks are lined with farolitos: small brown paper bags weighted with sand and lit from within by votive candles. The sharp smell of burning piñon wood—earthier and smoother than burning leaves—carries on the wind forever.

Every year at Christmas, starting when I was four in 1982, my parents played George Winston's album *December* all month long. It's a masterpiece, a solo piano record of sparse, beautiful interpretations and improvisations, featuring new compositions alongside reworkings of traditional Christmas carols. It went triple platinum and put Windham Hill on the map.

I had just turned seven when Christmas came in 1985. My parents hadn't divorced yet, but I could tell that something was wrong. My first-grade teacher loathed me: the kid who couldn't sit still, who couldn't shut up, who wouldn't stop making inappropriate jokes. She promised me the role of Bastian in our class production of *The Neverending Story*, my favorite movie, and after weeks of rehearsal she yanked it away and gave me the role of the knight who walks through the gates of the Oracle and gets roasted to ash. I was being treated for ADD, but not yet for depression.

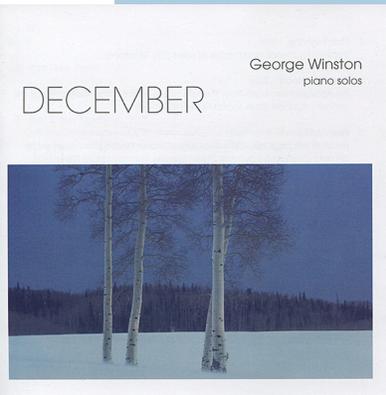
My first suicide attempt was less than a year away.

"The Holly and the Ivy" is a very old song. There are versions dating back to the early 1700s, and writings about those refer back to even older songs. It's overtly Christian in the middle verses, with lyrics like "The holly bears a berry / As red as any blood / And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ / For to do us sinners good."

I had no idea, of course. Winston's version was instrumental.

The album is flawless, front to back. Winston, influenced by Reich and Glass, isn't afraid to leave space between the notes, evoking the sparseness of winter: a flock of birds in a line against a blue sky, staggered footprints in otherwise unbroken snow. It's impossible to listen to the opening of "Thanksgiving," the first track, without feeling a hitch in the chest.

I've made a deliberate effort not to think about anything before about 1993. There was no point, I told myself: the bright spots shone bright, and the dark spots slid into the background, where they couldn't cause trouble. But a quarter-century of avoidance has left me with very few concrete memories of my childhood. My memories are still images, smells, feelings. I have stories others have told me. I have photographs and videotapes, and those prompt emotions and bright chains of images, like a string of Black Cat firecrackers. I don't have a strong timeline. My childhood shifts and rolls in my memories, like the shimmering oil swirling on top of a bowl of soup.



George Winston

“The Holly and the Ivy”

December

1982

Windham Hill

The sparsity of *December* is the throughline, but the songs vary tremendously. Most are cozy. Some, in addition, are sad. Some are eerie—his version of "Carol of the Bells" still gives me the morbs and evokes the spookiness of another childhood favorite, a haunting round of "The Ghost of John" that I played endlessly on my Fisher-Price turntable in a cupboard in the dark, shivering and giving myself the creeps.

"The Holly and the Ivy," traditionally, is a very repetitive song. It's the same four bars, over and over again. Winston starts simple, then expands; keeps the bones of the song, adding flourish and flair, for a little more than a minute, and then takes flight in the upper register, and then just keeps flying for more than two minutes, a rollicking sleighride. It's sad and it's full of joy. It's so playful—you can tell he's having so much fun. Then, a minute before the song ends, it comes back to the bones of the original, slows down; Winston puts it to bed and tucks it in.

Here is my memory; or, here is what my memories have coalesced into; or, here is an amalgamation of memories; or, here is what feels true.

On Christmas Eve of 1985, I went to sleep excited for Santa and presents. Visions of sugarplums, the whole deal. My bedroom was a small open alcove in the basement. My parents' bedroom was across the hall. The actual living space was upstairs.

I woke up because someone was shouting and then a door slammed. I got out of bed, walked up the stairs, and crept through the kitchen and the hallway to the living room. I stopped at the end of the hallway. I could see the shadows cast by the fireplace shining on the wall. I pressed my back against the wall and slid down and sat. I could hear the turntable: George Winston's "The Holly and the Ivy."

After a few minutes I realized that there was no one else in the house. The record ended and I could hear the needle tapping against the center label as it spun, and the popping of the piñon logs in the fireplace. I slowly lay down on my side on the carpet. I felt lonely and cozy and sparse and sad and joyful.

I woke up in my bed. Someone, when they came home, must have scooped me up and carried me down and tucked me in. We never talked about it.

Some music elevates, pumping up the mood and providing optimism and joy. Some music promotes thought and concentration. Other music promotes other moods—I have a "Late-Night Driving" playlist full of instrumental dark jazz and post-rock, for feeling sly and sleek and mysterious.

Some music hurts.

There are pieces of music that I can never revisit. All of Pearl Jam's *Ten*, the soundtrack to my intensely angsty junior high years, which let me vent frustrated rage and outsider fury. Anything by Bright Eyes, my emo soundtrack in college. I used to ride the bus to class, listening to it on headphones and crying. Listening to that music was like salting a wound, or biting my tongue; it was pain and sadness, but it was on my terms, and that was invaluable.

But George Winston's *December* isn't like that. It's sad, but it's also cozy and joyful and playful and welcoming. It feels like a cold wind blowing through snowflakes. It feels like a flickering votive candle in a brown paper bag, in the snow, in the dark. It's painful and it's comforting and it's sparse and it's perfect, and I'll listen to it every year until there aren't any more Decembers.

January 2003

Emily Costa

When I was fifteen, I took the serrated edge of a tape dispenser to my wrists. I didn't seriously injure myself—the plastic teeth weren't sharp enough, plus my mom caught me—but it was a desperate attempt to, at the very least, get the hell out of the current version of my life. I was depressed, paranoid, terrified all the time. I was dealing with debilitating obsessive-compulsive disorder: hours-long rituals and intrusive, violent thoughts. My parents' marriage had been falling apart for years but just wouldn't, you know... *fall apart*. I rarely went to school because I couldn't get out of bed, so they were going to kick me out of the advanced program I was in. There was another girl in my class who had the same number of absences, but they didn't try to kick her out. She was bitten by a spider. That was the rumor. There was also a rumor that one time she did a backflip at a party while wearing a skirt with no underwear. I guess that doesn't matter now, but it really did then.

It was a January morning. I was dressed for school. My mom didn't know what to do, so she put me in the car and drove me to New Haven because that's where my doctor was. The Doobie Brothers were playing on the radio, but it seemed weird to do something as calm and decisive as change the dial. "Black Water" jangled infuriatingly in my head for hours. We went to the ER and they admitted me. I rode in a cop car without sirens and without my mom to the Yale Psych Hospital adolescent unit.

I roomed with a cutter obsessed with Sonic Youth. I don't remember crying much because I was mostly numb. I remember eating a big cheeseburger my first day. I remember nurses saying I needed to drink all these Ensures because I didn't weigh enough. I had group therapy and art therapy and one-on-one therapy. I had a boyfriend a half-hour away.

During the week I was there, my mom brought me a new copy of *Slaughterhouse-Five* because it was important to her when she read it as a teenager. I don't know how she thought of such a thing, but I'm glad she did. She also brought me schoolwork. I had a big CliffsNotes on *Romeo and Juliet*. I had notebooks without the metal spirals because they weren't allowed. I had notes from friends pressed into my work. They said to cheer up. I was so angry then at this stupid platitude, at the idea they'd tell a suicidal person to cheer up. But now, I think: they were fifteen. Now I give them a pass.

I got word from my friends that my boyfriend didn't understand what was happening. He was thinking maybe we should break up. This should have devastated me, but there were so many other things breaking my heart.

My mom brought me my Discman and my CDs. In early 2003, mostly everyone around me was listening to pop-punk or emo, which was shape-shifting from something like Sunny Day Real Estate to something like Brand New but hadn't yet morphed into MySpace scene-kid territory. I asked my mom to bring me my happy CDs. Or at least the ones that sounded happy, which meant catchy things, which meant power pop, or maybe lots of synth or keyboards. I got most of my Weezer albums, Ozma's *Rock and Roll Part Three*. I think maybe some Ramones best-of. I listened to Ozma over and over. I listened to "Baseball," mostly.

Ozma

"Baseball"

Rock and Roll Part Three

08/2001

Kung Fu Records

To write this feels as obvious and cliché as the well-wishing notes from my friends felt to me in 2003, but when you're fifteen and everything in your life is terrifying and beyond your control, music is the thing that's going to save you. Like, yes, of course, therapy and maybe medication and hopefully your parents figuring out their own shit and you not living in fear anymore will actually save you, but odds are you're not going to come to those conclusions until you're older. So in reality, the thing that will save you immediately—save you in moments when you feel like someone's piling bricks on your chest, save you in moments when you're home alone and it's too quiet—is going to be putting on headphones.

I think I had some inkling of this, as most of us probably do when we're young, because I wanted to learn about and consume every band's discography immediately. I was mad at my parents for innumerable things, but super-low on that list was the fact that the music they liked in high school was lame, so I had no one to guide me except *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* and MTV and a (compared to what it is now) fairly primitive version of the internet. There were two real record stores in my hometown. Both are gone now. One was Phoenix Records, which seemed to be staffed by that exact type of cool, skinny, early-2000s emo guy with good sideburns that made me feel shaky, so I rarely went in. The other was Brass City Records. The owner was a guy named Walter. He was patient when I asked for recommendations my first time in at thirteen. He suggested I get *The Velvet Underground and Nico* because I liked The Strokes. He suggested I get a Big Star album because I liked Weezer. Walter was a smart dude.

But those albums sat in my CD tower for a few years. Although I wanted to learn, I also really just wanted an exact copy of what I liked; this is coming from someone who couldn't understand why people complained that *Room on Fire* sounded exactly like *Is This It*. So I think that's how I first found out about Ozma. I was on Weezer messageboards. They'd selected Ozma as an opener twice. Bradley Torreano's review of *Rock and Roll Part Three* on AllMusic claimed that "Ozma may have arguably written the best Weezer album of 2001 (and yes, the real thing also had an album come out the same year)."

I wanted, above all things, in all things, constancy. No surprises. Unless of course change could come to me in the form of health, happiness, and/or guaranteed safety forever and ever and ever; then, hell yeah I wanted that. But even with my irrational brain, and despite my efforts, I knew that wasn't going to happen. So I continued to live in a musical fantasy.

We only went outside once during my week at YPH. I think there was snow on the ground, or else there was that kind of reflective, shiny whiteness in the air. It was freezing. The staff made us play basketball on the little patch of blacktop even though no one wanted to, and a boy, one that had puked all over the hallway on my second day, asked if I believed in God. I don't remember what I said to him.

I did puzzles with one kid, and talked about music with my roommate. The first night, everyone started screaming when someone shit all over one of the bathrooms. When my family came for therapy, it went terribly. I didn't want to leave Yale because I knew nothing at home would change. Every atom of my being seemed ready to explode. I put on my headphones.

We watched *Eight Legged Freaks* and *The Adventures of Pluto Nash*. I shared Doritos and gummy bears with my puzzle friend. He read *Jurassic Park*. My sisters cried when they

visited me, and the youngest one was ten so she probably shouldn't have come at all. I put on my headphones.

They checked my vitals. One night, a schizophrenic boy cried as he talked on the phone. He was all folded in on himself. You could almost see him wrestling with his brain. I ate okra for the first time in my life, in a gray gumbo from the cafeteria. I wore pajamas. I put on my headphones.

They put me on different medications. I had a schedule and an early wake-up time. They checked on us in the middle of the night. A doctor said I'd need to attend out-patient therapy in my hometown. I was to take a van there after the school day ended. My roommate got discharged while I was in group, so I didn't get to say goodbye. I cried and wrote in my spiral-less notebook and put on my headphones and rolled the dial with my thumb to as loud as it would go.

"Baseball" is about a romantic relationship ending, and although that was surely going to happen to me once I left the limbo of YPH, I didn't clutch to the song for that. (For what it's worth, when he did finally break up with me, it was Finch's "Letters to You," a song from a band I didn't even like, that got me good.)

The pre-chorus from "Baseball" tore through me during each listen. I didn't want to be the sacrificial lamb in my family, the one navigating all of this, the one calling them out on their bullshit, doing *something* because no one else would. I wanted to go to the mall. I wanted to go to punk shows at the VFW. I just wanted to be fifteen again.

*Every time I think I've finished being young
I catch myself having fun*

*But the moment passes as the sun moves on
So I turn myself back to you*

Then, the chorus starts, driving home the inevitable ending of the relationship, unfolding the baseball metaphor. It's winter. It's freezing. It's over. But *can you still remember, April to November?* Can you keep alive floating on that memory of warmth?

Then, the bridge. Ryen Slegre's voice cracks a bit at the culmination:

*And so I drive
Straight up I-5
To let you know I'm still alive*

The falsetto in the last line warmed itself around my brain every time I played the song. It's a quiet moment after the desperate, cracking scream a second before—a moment that could only be followed by a break, a pleading guitar solo. That falsetto held everything for me: complete vulnerability while mustering up something, using the last bit of air squeezed out of your lungs, to claim your goddamn life.

That's what I was reaching for, that line. I couldn't yet parse out its complicated meaning (for me now, it's one of survival, of managing illness and living day-by-day), but back then I only understood the feeling, felt it in my gut. It seemed like such a *fuck you* in a lot of ways to be able to say I was still alive. But I just couldn't get there yet. There wasn't enough air in my lungs.

The cover of *Rock and Roll Part Three* looks like a Lite-Brite version of the band. Neon against a black background, boxed off like it's made with a Day-Glo Etch A Sketch. But the image still hits me in some unhealed nerve when I see it, reminds me of the dark New Haven streets I could see from the lone window in my room, the cord of the blinds hidden behind Plexiglas, the bad yellow glow from streetlights. Cars slushing by on wet pavement. The kind of winter you really have in Connecticut—wet, dirty snow, cracks on your knuckles.

I never play the album during any other season but winter. Something carved deep into my memory must alert my body to play it at least once after the first snow fall, and more and more as the days get shorter and bleaker. I tend to retreat back into my high school soundtrack during the winter, settle into the aching memories as well as the good ones. I can't tell if it's self-flagellation or what, but I'll probably always do this. I think I'm still sifting through everything over fifteen years later.

Because the album is so deeply entrenched in this part of my existence, it's hard to view it objectively, but I guess I see it kind of like those high school memories themselves: pretty fun, with pockets of melancholy. Now, I listen to it when driving alone, leaving it loud so I can feel the buzz of the opening guitars in my back teeth. I listen to it alone, and I scream the words. I remember all of them, all the wordplay, the metaphors. I scream the words alone in the car, existing as a thirty-one-year-old woman with a family and a job and the ability, despite mental illness, despite the past, to etch out a version of normalcy, to create some worth, and I think I scream those lyrics in my car because I never thought I would be *able* to scream those lyrics in my car. I didn't think I'd be here to do it, I mean.

And when I sing "Baseball," when I get to that bridge falsetto, I feel fifteen again. Only this time, I feel like I have enough air in my lungs to belt out the words.

Modern Mary

Tyler Anne Whichard

When driving two hours from Fuquay-Varina to Wilmington, North Carolina after a weekend of skipped church services, I don't think about God. Most times, as I go eighty-five miles per hour down I-40, too conscious of the fact that one wrong twitch of the wrist could end everything—or, just my everything—I imagine what I'd do if my mother called to tell me my little sister died in a wreck back home. I let my mind spiral with every bend in the Interstate.

The fear of death by car accident, or fear of death at all, doesn't make theological sense in Christianity. I hear my pastor's voice every time my thoughts start to speed down dark roads.

"For a Christian," he says, "Earth is the closest thing to Hell we will ever face. Death is always sad, but we can rejoice in the fact that the souls of our brothers find a much better place waiting for them than the one they leave behind. Death is a celebration."

So, when I catch myself picturing Josie dying, I try to shut it down, turn it off. Every Christian part of me screams that the world is temporary—that if she did die, it'd be okay in the end, because Josie belongs Not Here anyway.

But I can't imagine a world that continues to spin with her Not Here while I Am.

I think God agrees with me, just a little. For a Christian, Josie does pretty well at belonging on Earth. If Jesus Christ had decided to take the form of man in the twenty-first century, God would have chosen Josie to be Virgin Mary. No one else is pure enough to carry the Actual Messiah inside of them. And I don't mean *pure* as an equivalent to innocence, naivety. I mean the *pure* that blinded Saul with its light on the road to Damascus and taught him how to see. *Pure* as in, a standard for goodness. As in, a seventeen-year-old girl who wants to be a medic in the military. A girl who hasn't even lived a full two decades on Earth and already wants to give herself to it, reversing the worst parts of humanity, healing the wounds we rip into each other, saving lives that were forfeited by everyone else.

Josie makes people better.

I got saved in the winter of 2015—that's when I felt Josie's power in its truest form. I remember because it's so easy in winter to need saving. Everything is gray, and gray is the heaviest color on the spectrum; I know people think it's blue, but they're kidding themselves.

I slid into my car in the coldest part of the year and held the wheel the way I hold everything: too tightly. The alarm on my phone rang to let me know Josie needed to be picked up from school. I let it play as I drove until it turned itself off, exhausted. Before university, when I had to drive the same route every morning at 7:15 a.m., I took care to follow the rules while speeding down country backroads. But the consequences of recklessness didn't seem so bad that day. I welcomed them, unable to picture the red of a crash anymore: only my gray Mazda, crumpled on the side of the road next to other gray things.

JONGHYUN

“우린 봄이 오기 전에
(Before Our Spring)”

Poet / Artist

01/2018

SM · Genie

I imagined my options as a list:

- 1) The brick wall of a restaurant too close to the road, no ditch in front of it. Not ideal.
- 2) The sharp turn with no railing and a fall too deep for my car to handle. Possible.
- 3) The tree where others died before me, unexpectedly, in the middle of a drunken night.

Tried and true.

But none of the spots on my list were on the way to the high school, and it felt too dramatic to go out of my way. Too obvious. I could see the accident playing out like an attraction: painted horses dipping in endless, up-and-down circles; clown faces reflecting at horrid angles in fun-house mirrors; and my accident at the heart of it all, a carnival barker next to the wreckage.

"Come one, come all! Step right up! See the girl that gave up!"

The colors would whir together in blurs of pinks and yellows and reds. Mothers wouldn't let their children get too close. They'd stay on the periphery, in the safe zone of gray.

The thought of it was too flashy. Not me.

It occurred to me that I should be thankful. Maybe it was a sign from above that none of the options on my list were stops along the way to the high school. I thought a quick, "Dear God," before giving up and adding an empty, "Amen." Nothing in the middle to make it worthwhile. Because I wasn't thankful, not really, and I would pass the curve with no railing going to my boyfriend's house later, anyway.

No flashy carnival lights. Just an accident. A one-woman show in disguise.

When I made it to the carpool line outside the high school, my head turned, searching for her before my heart could catch up with it. I scanned for Josie's blue bookbag in the throng of high schoolers waiting to pile into mini-vans. She always stood in the same place: off to the side, alone but not lonely. As someone continually stuck in the reverse, it amazed me every time I saw it. She bounced on her feet in the cold, waiting for me. She hadn't seen me yet, but she was smiling.

Have you ever watched springtime breathe life back into the earth after winter? All the bright shades of green pull up through the dead things. Trees blossom and rivers run and daffodils bloom, and you feel like everything is better just because spring exists. I like to think I felt something similar that day; the ice that had crept into every nook of me thawed at the sight of her, and the displaced water released itself in heavy sobs.

By the time Josie spotted my car, I had my circle shades in place to hide dark smudges of mascara, and K-Pop blared out my windows. I rolled to a stop, and she ran in little penguin steps toward me, leaning side to side with her knees locked and legs straight. She pulled her chin toward her neck and gave me a square smile that was all teeth. I laughed when she opened the door, and she looked at me with a simple, clueless joy that broke my damn heart.

Sometimes on I-40, when I'm not picturing the absence of her in my everything, I wonder what she would have said to me then, if she were omniscient like God: able to tell when she saved a life.

On “Doll Parts” by Hole

Jennifer Wilson

orphans watch from the stands
with ribbons tied, hands open,
fingers working the knots
like plastic.

babies take the shape of us,

they hold up the whole room;
caryatids cast from grace
& naked, glass-eyed

& staring. dolls imperfect
in their colours collect
upon the shelves, jostling
dead poets for their places.

they sit uncomfortably in dust
& it troubles you to look at them.

martyrs to their make, they're saintly
bodies incorrupt of feeling
& they're mine, a thousand
frozen pieces of something
broken & they know

your eyes are only closed when you're lying,

when you let your liquids escape
as you harden, hydrophobic
to the point of solids with a sheen
that, should you touch them,
it would take only minutes
to desiccate and hollow,
becoming only air & ache.

and babies become us, crying
from their made in china faces,
their mouths made in smiles
meaning 'i want this
or i don't'
fat-limbed and hardened,
keeping the roof afloat.



Hole

“Doll Parts”

Live Through This

04/1994

DGC

On “Winter Song” by Sara Bareilles and Ingrid Michaelson

Kyra Leroux

It’s like when you go to middle school and you finally get to re-decorate your childhood bedroom. When you’re a kid, your bedroom is the one thing that’s all yours, and when you re-decorate it, you become a new person.

When I turned eleven, I was finally allowed to cover up the mellow yellow paint, butterflies, and flowers that matched the purple and pink patch quilt on my bed. I wanted to travel the world, so I painted my walls grey-blue and splattered ideas of Paris and London everywhere I looked. I even changed the direction of my bed, from being in the middle, parallel to my big open window, to against the wall, perpendicular.

The thing about that first night in a re-decorated bedroom is that, although I knew I was still in the safety of those four childhood walls, my room felt unfamiliar. I never had a view of the light that peered under my bedroom door before, never felt the cold draft against the window pane. I got scared of the feeling that somewhere so close to my heart could be so strange. Everything all of a sudden felt too grown up. A bedroom that looked like it belonged to a girl who might fall in love one day. In that moment, I wished I’d never changed my room in the first place, that I could have stayed in that childhood sanctuary forever. But there was no turning back.

This is what I feel like during winter.

I get so excited for Christmas, the holiday season bringing ecstatic encounters, parties with friends and get-togethers with family. Until I remember what happens when the world freezes over. The cold weather chills my soul, and it’s something I can’t control. All of a sudden, I feel unfamiliar to myself, like this body that I know so well and this brain that lives within me has shifted. Like pending heartbreak on the horizon, gleaming only short hours during winter days.

The storm is coming soon

It rolls in from the sea

That imminent storm scares me. My brain turns on itself. Like my bedroom, a familiar place feels eerie and unknown. Leaving me longing for love, someone to keep me warm, someone to depend on when I feel I can’t depend on myself.

It’s funny how winter can be both the saddest time and the happiest time all at once. Love is funny in the same way. There’s something about the winter season that is constantly bringing me back to that longing for love. I try to snap myself out of it, because I’ve always wanted to believe the cold hard facts, that love is about the biochemistry in your brain, releasing chemicals like dopamine and serotonin that lead to long-term attachment. But there’s something inside me that wants it to be so much more than that. The glorified idea of love portrayed in the media we consume begs the question:

Is love alive?



Sara Bareilles and
Ingrid Michaelson

“Winter Song”

The Hotel Café
Presents Winter Songs

12/2008

Epic

Is it a living breathing entity that inhibits our bodies, or is it just a feeling that sits within us?

How does a simple word, a simple idea, contrast the ice-cold snow and fill me with eternal warmth?

Listening to this melancholy song and writing about my winter doubt makes me sound like some pathetic girl just waiting for a guy to come and sweep me off my feet. In reality, I've never been the girl who dreams of her future as a wife with little kids running around. In fact, I've hardly thought about having a family when I'm older; those thoughts of future usually consist of me dreaming about an incredible career or an epic adventure. To other people, I come off as so put together; so confident some call me perfect. But during this season, I need to sit in my childhood bedroom, listen to winter songs, and think about how much I really do need to be loved by someone.

My love: a beacon in the night

My words will be your light

To carry you to me

Sometimes I'm so busy trying to be the perfect person I expect myself to be, I don't know if I've ever truly been in love or if I just thought I was at the time. When I'm with someone, I get so obsessed, so invested in making our relationship the greatest experience possible, thinking up so many adventures we could go on together, all the things we could learn about each other. The amount of time I spend thinking is greater than the amount of time I spend loving. So after December, I wake up in my new room and realize I've fallen in love with the idea of this person inside my head instead of seeing them or who they truly are.

December never felt so wrong

'Cause you're not where you belong

Inside my arms

In truth, I am a hopeless romantic. Though I try to deny myself the pleasures of dreaming, in the winter it becomes harder to suppress my little secret. I want to have an epic love story, one that changes me in a way that shifts my perspective on the world. I want to find the one person who will satisfy my need for adventure, and who loves learning about life and all of its wonders as much as I do. When it comes winter, I want to find the person who will lie in the fresh snow and look up at the stars with me, no matter how cold it is outside. The person who understands what it feels like to lose yourself in the snowstorm that precedes the winter wonderland.

I want to believe I have a soulmate somewhere in the world. Someone who understands all of me, not just the parts I expose. Someone to remind me that my childhood bedroom is still my bedroom, although it appears different from the outside. Someone who makes me feel like I never needed to re-decorate my bedroom in the first place. Someone who makes me believe that love is, in fact, alive.

The month of December amplifies these feelings like tremors through my veins. Blood coursing through my body, pulsing, perseverating over its true purpose.

Is my purpose a person?

Sun Beholds Me

(after Hand Habits)

Lucas Bailor

I look to the trees in their yellow-green
fervor,

not the full mark of dehydration
but

the beginning, or perhaps
perennial—

I can't pretend there's a thirst
quenched

in California, in 2018, as we all
wait

for the next fire, the next
scorching

of forest, of home, of just
it all.

I look back on a childhood of occasional
ash,

the hills above school burnt, the gray drifting
down.

I consider my hometown's one
snow,

each drop hitting the pavement,
immediately

disappearing, my brother & I
molding

what little we could into oblong
globes.



Hand Habits

"Sun Beholds Me"

*Wildly Idle (Humble
Before the Void)*

02/2017

Woodsist

I'll look back on such a moment,
surrounded

by contextual snow in one of my few Midwest
winters,

& I'll laugh. Here, there is no winter, only
the sun,

& I revel. A reverse-Jonah, I let the sun behold
me,

as it always appears to do.

Garden Interlude V

Jordan E. Franklin

In the Bronx in February 2017, it is every word you associate with winter: *frigid, quiet, cruel.*

There's a cemetery across the street from Dad's nursing home and your favorite way to pass it is across the street in near sub-zero temperatures so that when you make the human error of shivering, you can blame it on the wind chill and not your twenty-six-year-old mind traipsing over the bitter irony of it all.

That your father—your athletic, strong, huge old man—is a tetraplegic, and from a fall of all things, and there's a cemetery a block long-covered in snow just a street away from your bundled, head-phoned form. Whenever you chance a glance down that path in your head, you focus on the melodic morphine beating away in your earlobes.

Today's a Muse day, after all: "Stockholm Syndrome."

But, the glance inside becomes a stare, then finally footprints through your mind and, for a beat, you wonder when your Pop has last seen roses or even sunlight since moving here. You shift the pizza box between hands. Although simple, it is a minor solution to the cravings and whims he gave you before this visit.

It's hot over your gloved hand and the delicious fusion of the chill in your coat, the warmth bleeding into the glove and the luscious "Stockholm Syndrome" is enough to erase the map upstairs.

Snow is absence: an absence of color, of warmth, of ground and sidewalks. You don't remember the last time you saw koi or a rose, but they're out there somewhere and so is April.



Muse

"Stockholm Syndrome"

Absolution

09/2003

East West · Taste ·
Warner Bros

When Called

Leslie Haynes

A busker starts. Melt with You. Modern English. Transports you to a crowded room with sticky floors. A glass in hand. Swaying. Spilling. Yelling out lyrics to faces yelling those lyrics back to you. *I saw the world crashing all around your face.* Spinning possibilities. With everyone. With no one. Caught in a time riff that is heavy, heavy, heavy on the drums. This is what the spirit wants. Abandon. Stomping. Free fall. Never mind the ruined dress and pounding head. It's synchronicity. Volume cranked.

Your name is called for a passport check. The last-minute flight. You, still humming the chorus. Undercover punk to the rescue. *A pilgrimage to save this human's race.* You told your sisters that it is not sustainable. None of it. Stating the obvious. This here-and-gone life. So you must take a good, long look. Right now the Olympics are clear on your left across the Sound. Over the Cascades. Mount Baker straight on. The long stretch of the Okanagan before you drop down into Kelowna.

He's asleep when you find him. Noble head. Shaggy halo of hair. The curve of cheekbone. You gentle to him, a quick caress of his arm. His surprise. You! The blue of his eyes. Wet grief of gratitude. Here. Now. Right now. Pain and relief. If you could just get that cup. Move a pillow. Adjust the blanket. You reach and pour and shift. It's all you can do. Too little. But everything. Eyes on him. Beholding. He drifts. Remember Gabriola? The tide pools. We never could keep track of you. He sleeps with you perched at his feet. Still holding your hand. You find his pulse. Watch over him. Frozen in place. That knitted brow, furrowed. Just like your own. *Trapped in the state of imaginary grace.*

Days later, when he's using a walker, you make a ritual of sitting outside after dinner. From the benches, you catch a thin sliver of lake and a sail or two. He names the park where he wants his ashes spread. Kalamoir. Talks about walking Reggie and Vip and Gus and Willy along the path. When was the last time? Oh, yes. Before the move. He waited on the beach with the dogs while you swam. Now he exaggerates your distance in miles. Says that you have the build and drive to be an Olympian. Present tense. You gaze at all that water and see you will always be his potential. *The future. Open. Wide.*



Modern English

"I Melt With You"

After the Snow

05/1982

4AD

A Quiet Full of Longing

Claire Dockery

The densest darkness I have ever felt grew out of a rural Michigan winter. The star-prickled night had turned starless; a snowstorm made the wind visible. Our high-beams formed a small, inadequate knife. Inside the sputtering 2000 Honda Odyssey, we all felt swallowed, I imagined, by the thickness of it: the winter, the night, our quiet stares out the windows. I had set Covenant's "Call the Ships to Port" to loop on my iPod and Grandpa was dying.

When I think of that New Year's visit to my grandparents' house near Traverse City, buried among the naked and skeletal cherry orchards, I can't separate the images from that song—the almost-kitsch of its early 2000s four-on-the-floor kick drum, the ambiguously European accent of the vocalist, the swirling howl of the synths. And, of course, the lyrics: *A billion words ago / the sailors disappeared / a story for the children / to rock them back to sleep.* My grandfather was already a story, the strong, gentle, stoic man who had lost his sense of self to dementia. The World War II vet, the only one who pretended to enjoy the dubious pies we'd made from orchard-picked cherries in summers before, had vanished into the darkness of an earlier rural winter. On the long, quiet drive to the nursing home, listening to Covenant, I knew Grandpa to be a story, and, perhaps for the first time, I realized that we were too—the altogether typical family lost for words, unsure how to digest phrases like "aspiration pneumonia" and "very weak" and, of course, the pressing dark. In my own headphone-wreathed uncertainty, I listened on: *a thousand generations / the soil on which we walk.*

If someone had asked me, at that time, to name an anthem for my life, "Call the Ships to Port" may well have been it. To me, it was a song of loneliness, a song I stumbled across via one of my internet friends. They outnumbered my "IRL" friends those first few years of high school, following a cross-country move and the 2006-2010 awkward phase, featuring tight graphic tees, ill-fitting Vans, and a bad attitude I was afraid to properly substantiate with poor academic performance. "Call the Ships to Port" stood for a manifold search for one's likeness—for people online who liked the same music, for a kindred spirit among anonymous faces, for people who shared the same story. For years, I misheard the first lines of the chorus as *a quiet full of longing / we call our ships to port*, referring to the far-flung ships of lost familiarity. And suddenly, here were the ships, in the Odyssey in the dark, setting sail towards the unspoken question of how we should react to the news about Grandpa. *A brother and a sister / for better or for worse*—here, the family I had clashed with time and time again, united in fear.

The clashes had begun in an altogether typical fashion, when I fell away from the Catholic conservatism espoused by my father and by his parents before him, including the man dying in a nursing home in Traverse City, Michigan. Different generations, different worldviews—in the face of the densest winter we had ever weathered, it all felt superficial. *A billion words ago / they sang a song of leaving / an echo from the chorus / will call them back again.* The echo from the chorus, in this case, came in the form of a late-night phone call. Then, together again, in such a mundane, anonymous room, in a nursing home in Traverse City, we dropped anchors in a port of countless families, in a grief that suddenly lost its facelessness. Three generations, three lifestyles standing side by side, and meanwhile, I watched my dad become a childhood memory. He knelt at his weak, sleeping father's bedside and stroked his thin hair the same way he had once stroked mine and my sisters' when he sang us to sleep, in comfort, in reverence. I thought back to



Covenant

"Call the Ships to Port"

Northern Light

10/2002

Sony KA2 · Metropolis

a black and white photo of Grandpa, then a broad-shouldered silhouette against Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes, holding hands with the child version of my father. How my dad had led me up Sleeping Bear the same way. And again, *Covenant*. *A hundred clocks are ticking / the line becomes a circle*. We stood solemnly, fumbling with our hands, afraid of making Grandpa's end more real by speaking of it. No one spoke, save for a sentence from Grandma: "You're not alone."

As it turned out, the circle stayed still that night. We never learned if Grandpa was conscious to our presence there, or if he remembered any of us by then, but his sheer will to live prevailed, for better or worse. We called it a New Year's miracle. *Tonight we walk on water / and tomorrow we'll be gone*. He died on a sunny March morning a little over a year later, some distance from the song and the winter and the night, the single light left on too late in a Michigan snowstorm. At his funeral, though, "Call the Ships to Port" returned to me, the brief survivor of a story too large to grasp. By then, I had learned the correct verses to the chorus: *a choir full of longing / will call our ships to port*. It felt significant to replace "quiet" with "choir," even just in my head in a pew of a half-empty chapel. We came forward to put voice to a grief that had called us together. We spoke of our own fragments of my grandfather's life, and acknowledged that his passing made us more aware of our own. Like the speaker of the *Covenant* song, we were moved and summoned by longing—for the vanished man, for a chance to unravel the wasted moments of needless silence.

The densest darkness of that darkest winter was a blanket of our own creation, one we finally aired out that March to pull apart between us. We had all sat quietly in the *Odyssey* and feared. Feared death, feared isolation, feared the aloneness we had let fester by (fittingly enough) sharing in Grandpa's stoicism. Disjointed, we had joined not the choir, but *the countless lonely voices / like whispers in the dark*. The last time I saw Grandpa's face, a spring sunbeam made him look almost alive again. At the cemetery near Elk Lake where he and my grandmother now both spend their age of silence, a ceremonial guard performed "Taps" as he was lowered into the earth. Finally, for the first time since his death—for the first time since realizing he no longer remembered us—I cried openly, and joined my family in doing so.

A confused timeline for Scott Hutchison, prophet

Luke Larkin

Ten years ago, you prophesied:

*Fully clothed, I float away
Down the Forth, into the sea*

Seven months ago, I got the same tattoo you had: the double-barred cross that meant nothing.

Seven months minus two days, they pulled your body from the frigid brine downstream of the Forth Road Bridge, right where you said you'd be.

Seven months minus ten days, I wound my station wagon through the frosted Rockies and looked for a Forth of my own, not of currents and salt, but of pavement and black ice and a short fall into pine trees. The tattoo was infected, scabbing and leaking from my neglect.

Eight years ago, you uttered another prophecy with your frantic, untidy voice:

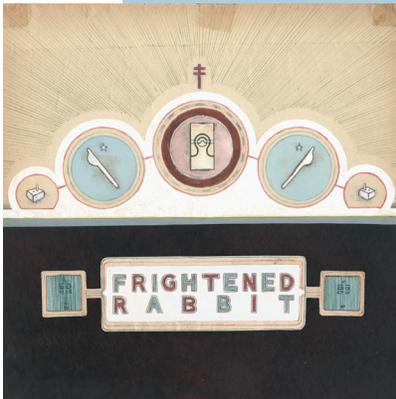
*By day I hope to rapidly die
And have my organs laid on ice
Wait for somebody that would treat them right*

And you uttered it again, in those mountains, over the car stereo, seven months minus ten days ago, at about 1:25 a.m. as I let the station wagon roll quietly into a rest stop and stared into the Clark Fork as it wound its way through the valley, black and bodiless.

Four minutes later, I turned around and drove into town with more care, as you, full of wonders, sang:

*First it bleeds then it scabs
I feel like a haemophilic
Would I change if you carried me back?
Oh, yes I would*

Last week, I took the tattoo off ice, had it retouched and redrawn. I'm treating it right.



Frightened Rabbit

"Living in Colour"

The Winter of Mixed Drinks

03/2010

Fat Cat



Frightened Rabbit

"Floating in the Forth"

The Midnight Organ Fight

04/2008

Fat Cat

The Last Ice Age

Samuel J Fox

It is raining everywhere: on Western Boulevard and sloshing down Varsity. Pools of chilled rainwater surround Mission Valley. Neon signs blaze in the downpour, somewhat angelic with probable warmth. It's a good night to disappear. It's a good night to become a fog and float through the campus, under street lamps orange like glowing sulfur. The wind moves like a glacier: almost solid, but so slow if it weren't for the way it cut through hoodies and coats when it did move, no one would ever realize it was there.

And where is God in all of this? With sirens and wailing, an ambulance nearly hydroplanes to get around and through an intersection of stopped cars. Pedestrians huddle as they walk, heads bent down as though in prayer or fear for the rain. Where is God? I wish I could say; I haven't prayed for anything but to survive the coming winter and find a better paying wage. Homeless winters are harsh, slow, and often, even when spring does arrive, begrudgingly but constant, the chill inside the bones stays long up until summer.

I haven't seen snow since last year. It is mid-November and the world is an icicle waiting to descend. All I can think about the past twelve hours: why do we suffer so gracelessly? I don't tell my friends I'm struggling to pay rent. I owe so much to people and not enough to the world. No one owes me anything but company. It gets so lonely living a life where an art consumes you from the inside out, like blossoming or escaping so weak a cocoon, but not many acknowledge, at least in your close circle, what it's like to struggle against depression.

In New York, I suppose, it is colder. Windier. The love I thought would last me my life is there, happy, I hope, bundled up next to a radiator with her cat, maybe the new love of her life, and sleeps soundlessly as the dark bleats against the window. I haven't thought of her in a month or three and it's becoming easier to forget. That she loved me. That we loved each other. Either way, neither of us talk to one another anymore. There's long been a frozen lake between us and the bridge has just recently burnt down.

I am, at this point, soaked. I've been walking for what seems like thirty minutes in the rain, socks drenched to my toe bones. Phalanges is such a funny word for tiny bones. My toes are becoming infinitesimal glaciers. And my feelings floating through my body and face and outward like an aurora borealis.

I've fucked up more than enough times in my life to know when a storm is brewing. My life: a holocaust of ice—you can only see ten percent of its entirety. So cold it burns at times. But, still, I keep sloshing through this air. Still, I admit to my mistakes. I admit that some things could not have been prevented either: my depression over not being good enough; my having been taken advantage of by a soft-faced boy at a party who roofied my drink; my relationship with my family, having not told them why I was so angry all these years. At them. At God. At love.

It begins to sleet. I can hear it, a near-plastic ping as it hits the leaves: more solid, more thrush than thrash. My life is one alike: more aflush with cold and timidity than I'd like to admit. They say the last ice age only lasted nine and a half thousand years. Mine is only nineteen years long.



Bon Iver

"Holocene"

Bon Iver, Bon Iver

06/2011

4AD

It will end tonight. I am lighting a bonfire in a backyard now. With friends and cigarettes and whiskey. We call this ritual. The first solid, frozen precipitation concludes with fire. The embers are so hot and warm it feels like a homecoming. It feels like, not burning, but comfort during all conclusive loneliness. There goes Matt making a joke about dying as though death were all there is to be worried about. There goes JS singing a song only they know the full lyrics too. There goes Katrina, laughing and cajoling over the latest tragedy that is not a tragedy but a setback so trivial she's laughing now. Even the ghosts in our shadows are dancing.

It ends tonight, this ice age, this slow, tumultuous churning through permafrost, the hunting for fire, the salvaging for anything but meaning to our lives. We are not special in our belonging. We are not special in our suffering. We are individual heirs to what comes after. Whatever that may be. Not magnificent; but you can see it coming from the horizon as the sun dawns and the fire stays lit into the morning. I will find meaning in the cigarettes scattered into a pattern like an arrowhead. It will point toward true north or wherever the soul seeks to forget suffering. I will put down my smoldering butt. I will go home. Home is where I make it, somewhere on this earth. Somewhere not far and where spring is bleeding into the landscape its color and the frost is all but remaining.

for winter

Angela Caravan

Three winters ago
we went to the mountain
to play in the snow

That decade where we didn't have cold
so we created our own

Bringing it in bundles to our faces
when we touch-downed off gondolas

You were 8 and had never seen such pillows
couldn't imagine the feeling of melted ice in your underwear
as you rolled untucked down a hill

The three of us gluttons for adventure
with stiff figures of snowshoers
the bystanders in our film

My gloves were unfit for snowballs
your shoes were buckets for moisture
captured and held for days and days onward

Even after warming up over hot drinks
and a candlelit record-player
turning three winter albums on rotation

*The world is so loud
keep falling and I'll find you
climbing a mountain for winter
in a city built for rain*



Kate Bush

"Snowflake"

50 Words for Snow

11/2011

Fish People

The Flux of Wintry Stillness

Jeffrey Yamaguchi

*Days of coldest
winter will leave its mark
roots of shiver laid*

It was cold, it was serene, I was in awe, I was miserable.

Such as it always is with a long winter's run. I remember them all, and they all bleed together into a solitary memory, of feeling free in the burrowed deep, because I know that the clouds will break, the sun will come out, and the snow will melt. A new day shines bright, in the offing. But not yet.

In the lonesome of a snow-filled field, a bitter cold slamming itself into your exposed face, you lay yourself bare to the rawness of the moment. The why of you, the wails of yesteryear, the disarray of right now, the unsettledness of what may or may not come next—it swirls about like the blur of snow that is falling all about and laying the foundation of the ground you are traversing. And in just that moment, where you realize none of the dots are connecting, a rabbit stirs from the bushes and darts across the path, pausing ever so briefly to notice you, this creature in the snow. Your eyes lock and it is just you and the rabbit. Then, it jumps away and into the distance. You are the only witness to this moment, and this moment is now gone. Later you will have the urge to tell someone about the encounter, but you decide not to. It is just for you.

This could be the fall of a last leaf. The remains of a tree's last stand. The final ripples on water that, come morning, will be solid ice. It is just you and the wind on these coldest of days, making your way from here to there, as you have done so many times before.

On any given run, I listen to all manner of music. And, of course, a running playlist is absolved from any and all judgement, no matter what songs it may contain. Whatever gets you going, and keeps you going, until you cross the finish line, imagined or real. But in winter, I find myself cycling, on repeat, one piece of music in particular: "Metamorphosis Two" by Philip Glass. Why? Because you get to go places in your mind when you are going the long way around in the frighteningly frigid cold, and this music takes you further, where time and space collapse and extract the infinity of change. There is a rise, and a fall, and a repetitive structure to the piece. The solo piano notes slow to a crawl, then speed up in a furious crescendo, faltering at the precipice of an ear tingling height. Unleashed in the come-down is a cascade of memories that drift away with the windswept snow across a frozen lake. It is melancholy, but also hopeful. It is music that befits the desolation of an empty expanse under dark, wintry clouds, a solitary figure cutting across the landscape. That is me, from another time. I remember the memory of it, right as I am doing it in the here and now.

*Beyond the furthest
where the sun's burn turns its back
tempt the air and fly*

Winter encapsulates the brink of change. We hunker down for it, and while hunkered down, we are tested. If you cannot feel your toes, or your fingers, or your face, are you even really there? The answer is in the heart, which beats a hardier warmth with each



Philip Glass

"Metamorphosis
Two"

Solo Piano

08/1989

Sony BMG Music

foot forward. When the time comes, and there is no mistaking it, for we will breathe it in on the very morning in which it arrives, we burst out of the bunker and see the day anew. How we managed in the shorter and darker days determines the path of this new dawn.

Snow falling off a lone statue and landing at the base with a quiet thud. A red bird landing on a branch, collapsing an icicle castle. The remnants of a snow angel disappearing back into the landscape.

There are the other seasons, of course, and with every season by nature comes the stir of lessons and change. Spring is the shimmer of the green grass. Summer is for sweating. Fall offers up the colors of beautiful decay.

And yet, when winter comes, and the worst of its weather arrives, that's when I think it is the best time to go for the longest of runs. You'll end up feeling the bitter cold down to the bone. Your lungs may not forgive you. Towards the end of the run, your frozen feet may actually turn on you, no longer willing to take the pounding you are giving them. Extra effort is required to make less and less progress, and yet, you are still moving forward.

But you will carry on, and by doing so you will find yourself in the stretch of a landscape with no one in sight, an entire expanse of snow without a single footprint in it, the thunderous hum of wind against the backdrop of a piano hitting all the right notes under an unwieldy winter sky. There's too much room for your thoughts to coalesce, swirling about in the fast-moving clouds, and it provides a welcome moment of seeing what matters most in the nothingness of a cold day laid bare. There is simply no denying that you are a beacon of beating heart heat, trudging your way along a path that, at least in this singular moment, no one has ever forged before.

*Wind whipped freezing cold
all the way to rattled bone
next bend, and again*

Contributors

Margarita Serafimova was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017, Summer Literary Seminars Poetry Contest 2018 and the University Centre Grimsby International Literary Prize 2018; long-listed for the Erbacce Press Poetry Prize 2018 and the Red Wheelbarrow 2018 Prize, and nominated for Best of the Net 2018. She has three collections in Bulgarian. Her work appears in *Agenda Poetry*, *London Grip*, *Waxwing*, *Trafika Europe*, *European Literature Network*, *A-Minor*, *Poetry South*, *Great Weather for Media*, *Orbis*, *Nixes Mate*, *StepAway*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Mookychick*, *HeadStuff*, *Minor Literatures*, *Writing Disorder*, *Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Orbis*, *Chronogram*, *Noble/ Gas*, *Origins*, *The Journal*, *millers pond*, *Obra/ Artifact*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Califragile*, *TAYO*, *Squawk Back*, *Guttural*, *Punch*, *Tuck*, *Ginosko*, etc. Visit: https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaSerafimova/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel.

Alex Clark is a trans-masculine essayist, poet, performer, and visual artist who lives in Marquette, Michigan. His non-fiction image/text hybrid, *A Fractured Atlas*, was selected as runner up in Booth's 2018 non-fiction pop-up contest. His work also received an honorable mention in Storm Cellar's 2016 Force Majeure flash contest, and was selected for *Crab Fat Magazine's* Best of Year Four Anthology (print). Other essays and poetry can be found or are forthcoming in *Booth* (print and online), *Crab Fat* online, *Awkward Mermaid*, *Foliate Oak*, and *Barking Sycamores*.

Amy Spurway is a writer based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of New Brunswick, and a degree in Radio and Television Arts from Ryerson University in Toronto. She has been married to the guy for 18 years, despite the fact that ten years ago he revealed a deep, dark secret: he doesn't really like The Tragically Hip. She still dances around their house blasting "Something On," but does so clean and sober and always in weather-appropriate clothing in order to be a good role model for their three kids. Amy's debut novel, *Crow*, is being released by Goose Lane Editions in March 2019.

Oak Ayling is an English poet whose work, both current & forthcoming, can be found in the literary magazines *Anti Heroin Chic*, *From Whispers to Roars*, *Foxglove Journal*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Furious Gazelle*, & in print anthologies *For the Silent* from Indigo Dreams Publishing & *Light Through the Mist* from author Helen Cox.

Tanya Pearson is a Ph.D. student, oral historian, and Director of the *Women of Rock Oral History Project*, a collection of digital interviews and written transcripts documenting the lives and careers of women-identified rock musicians. She is a proponent of lesbianism, aging, vegetarianism, senior dog adoption, and Joan Didion. When she's not working she enjoys rock climbing, playing in bands, and watching *The Golden Girls* with her dog, Andrew. Her work has been published in *Bust Magazine* and "I've Got My Equalizer": *An Oral History of Rock Music* will be published by University of Massachusetts Press in 2021. Follow *Women Of Rock Oral History Project* on Twitter, Instagram @womenofrockohp, or visit www.womenofrock.org.

Erin Cork lives in Missoula, MT. She writes and hikes in the mornings with her two rescue mutts. She works the swing shift as a train dispatcher, drinks a lot of coffee, and uses foul language. Her work has been featured in *X-R-A-Y Lit*, *Hypnopomp*, *Image OutWrite* and *Memoir Mixtapes*. She has other pieces about to drop elsewhere. She is working on another draft of her first novel and an essay collection.

Patrick Williams is a poet and academic librarian living in Central New York. His recent work appears or is forthcoming in publications including *Vinyl*, *Bennington Review*, *Nine Mile Magazine*, and *Posit*. His chapbook *Hygiene in Reading* (Publishing Genius, 2016) was awarded the 2015 Chris Toll Memorial Prize. He edits *Really System*,

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Jordan E. Franklin is a Black poet from Brooklyn, NY. An alumna of Brooklyn College, she recently earned her MFA from Stony Brook Southampton. Her work has appeared in the *Southampton Review*, *Breadcrumbs*, *easy paradise*, *the Ekphrastic Review*, and elsewhere. She is the winner of the 2017 James Hearst Poetry Prize offered by the *North American Review*, and a finalist of the 2018 Nightjar Poetry Contest. Currently, she is the poetry editor for *Suffragette City Zine* and is working on her first poetry collection.

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Luke Larkin lives, studies, and listens to sad music in Missoula, Montana. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Firewords Quarterly*, *Popshot*, on *MTPR*, and others. In his free time, he helps out with the magazines *Visual Verse* and *unstamatic*.

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Angela Caravan lives in Vancouver, BC. She is the author of the micro-chapbook *Landing* (post ghost press) and was 2nd runner-up for *Pulp Literature's* 2018 Magpie Poetry Award. Her work has also appeared in *Cascadia Rising Review*, *Sad Mag*, and *Longleaf Review*. You can find her on Twitter at @a_caravan.

Jeffrey Yamaguchi creates projects with words, photos, and video as art explorations, as well as through his work in the publishing industry. His writing has been published by *formercactus*, *Vamp Cat Magazine*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Spork Press*, *Quick Fiction*, *Pindeldyboz*, *Eyeshot*, *Word Riot* and more. His first book was *52 Projects*, and he recently released the short film *Body of Water*. @jeffiyamaguchi (<https://twitter.com/jeffiyamaguchi>) | jeffreyyamaguchi.com

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