

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Eric Morago: Three Poems

Eric Morago · Wednesday, October 31st, 2018

LETTERS TO GIRLS, NEVER SENT

Dear, I cannot recall your name, but when you took my hand, raised it to your four-year-old grin like a cookie and bit down hard—those tiny teeth marks pressed into the chubby flesh of my palm; I thought they'd never fade

and at only four and a half, believed it was love. *Katie M*, back in fifth grade you broke your arm and I sat with you a full week of recess drawing dinosaurs on your cast—remember? That summer you moved to Idaho.

Before you left, I wanted to tell you how you made my eleven-year-old heart kick. Instead I teased you about potatoes. *To Samantha my first kiss*, you were all country and cinnamon gum the first time our tongues

slow danced in the gymnasium of our teenage mouths, Garth Brooks playing, crooning about fire and women. For six months, I found myself listening to country songs and chewing Big Red. I'd like you to know I no longer listen

to that crap, but I still buy a pack of your favorite gum when I want to remember fifteen. *Dear Born Again who didn't act like it*, you could make a boy dizzy every time you took off your top, and confused

every time you'd put it back on, crying. *To Katie M (again)*, my last night in Idaho we found a cornfield maze; spent the evening getting lost. The next morning, I tried to write this letter but couldn't. Rather, by your bed I left

a potato. I haven't heard from you since. *To the girl I lost my virginity to (whose name I cannot repeat because her now-husband is much larger than I, has anger issues and a gun collection)*, thank you.

It was awesome. *To the girls in all the bars*, I'm sorry.
 I know none of you were interested in me, but when
 I drink *that* much, I think *everyone* is interested in me.
Katie W, you had eyes like violins and a smile like gravity.

I fell. You didn't. *Sascha*, your reckless driving reminded
 me how when the right two people meet, they crash.
To the ex, your name "Krystal," implied you were delicate.
 You were not. I was the one to shatter, to break.

In your own way, you made me a poet, taught me
 the company of good metaphor, how the chest
 is full of them, how when we hurt they rally and rise
 up the spine to the brain to speak lightning, so hope

sparks behind tear ducts when we need it. When you left,
 I cried a lot of lightning. *Dear future falling partner*,
 you will know me by my mailbag full of letters to girls,
 never sent. Together we will take it, scatter the contents

above our heads—a ritual I usually practice alone—
 and watch the letters stick in the air like constellations.
 Sitting under them, you may ask, *Why are there so many?*
 And I'll say, *Because the nights were so dark*,

I needed them all up there, to find my way to you.
 You will call me three types of cheese, before I feel
 a pang in my left hand and find an impression of teeth
 you tell me this time will not fade.

(previously published in *What We Ache For*, Moon Tide Press, 2010)

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FROM NANCY, TO FREDDY

How many years has it been since I'd burn skin to stay awake—
 to keep from sleep and you? The nightmare ended a lifetime ago;

my bed is no longer a fist of knives, and yet at times, I miss their threat
 and tingle along my spine—the hero you made of me. But now, without you,

my monster, *what am I?* I drink soy decaf lattes with girlfriends, gossiping
 over Instagram posts and Twitter feeds. I have too much red wine with dinner,

enough to promise I fall fast asleep. I don't dream. Remember the boiler room?
 How you'd chase me—a ballet of flames reflecting in your eyes. Your blistered

face, a bouquet of scars. Your smile, a snake. How do I get back *there*?
 I want to feel fear in my mouth again, swallow its electricity until I glow

courage. Give me your cackle and taunts—your wolf’s breath at my door,
all huff and puff. Play me a song of razors scraping metal pipes like

the strumming of synthesized guitar. I need a soundtrack for my comeback,
something that builds and builds and builds. *God*, I am so bored these days,

I swipe right for every man in a striped sweater, hoping their fingers,
on my flesh, are just as sharp as yours. When I ask if, in their bedroom,

they hide a furnace that I can fight my way out of, I am disappointed
when they always say no—relieved when they never call again.

Don’t you feel it’s about time for a sequel? I think tonight I’ll brew
a pot of dark roast and draw myself a hot bath. I’ll let down my guard,

enough to make things interesting. I can see it now—the struggle
to stay alert that only pulls one closer to sleep—the drip and sizzle,

your hand creeping out of the water like a secret, the faint hum
of children singing a lullaby: *one, two, Freddy’s coming for...*

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HOW TO LIE ON A BED OF NAILS

*What we are practicing is suffering,
which everybody practices, but
strangely few of us grow graceful in.*

—Tony Hoagland

It looks impossible—flesh pressed
against a thousand reasons to hurt.
Don’t fool yourself into thinking this.
It is not magic, just pressure

divided across a body. Go slow.
Ease onto the bed with purpose.
Know what it is you suffer for, then
ask your nerve endings to stretch

over rows of tiny sharp reminders.
You may fear they will sink inches
deep, but the surface tension of each
being so close together will keep skin

from breaking. But to grow graceful
at it, you must practice. Rehearse.
Let it become dance, a soft waltz.
Trace a hand over the nails, feel

each slight scrape tingle your palm,
like static. Imagine this electricity
is not from waiting metal teeth, but
from taut dress fabric hugging the

small of a lover's back you have yet
to meet. Convince yourself of this,
until you forget the teeth altogether
so when you must finally perform

for a crowd, all anxious and rowdy,
they will be hushed, awestricken
by your daring act—by just how
effortless you make suffering appear.

(previously published in *What We Ache For*, Moon Tide Press 2010)

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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