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Pieces

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Pieces

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English Language and Literature

PIECES

By

Amanda Slater

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coffee and mascara

curling irons and mascara I'm pressed
up against the mirror when
you appear by my
side. You never
knock unless the door
is locked
but then the dog barks
so sanity
wins over safety.
You watch me
with that smile that says I'm cute even during especially during
routine things like
taking out the trash or
putting baking sheets away
and drinking out of water bottles.
We go to the all-night diner
where the owner knows us by name
and after drinking my fourth coffee
I wax philosophical
about love and life and God
and society today
and you play along,
not saying much because
you always say we share
the same thoughts and
you'd say the same things anyway.
And as I look up from my mug
I catch my reflection in your eyes.

(a perfect day to run away to Mexico)

melancholy muddled streams
comb out my tangled thoughts
my mind – so full and so blank.
(you told me investments never pay
in the end)
let's leave this place.
roll the windows down.
all I want is to feel the fresh sun and warm air
on my face, in my lungs.
(I told you that head over heart never wins.)

menagerie of poppy silk
(civil union square)

I was alone and
 ripe with ambition
when you found me
by the train station,
 a commodity for the
hungry, bereft of
 feeling in my numb limbs
as I waited by the
 platform,
 ticket in hand
and boarded too late to
 be apprehended by your
pleading gaze.

skin

in my white underwear i used to
fill out i look like
a grandmother frail and
brittle rather than a pin
up it bags in the thighs and
waist i remember watching my
grandmother change in the
sears' fitting room with her
underwear up to her waist
bagging and i thought of how
bare she seemed
& that skin is too
thin a barrier and no great
protection

untitled no. 1

we are boxed and strewn so
unshapely, mud forced
into our cracks and
pores (we are an unsightly bunch
-- to be sure).
who will take our selves still
filled with blood and soot?
and who will take them from
their alabaster chairs
back to the smell of earth?

in a simpler day

i spend my days eating plastic
grapes in front of my plastic box.
in a simpler day i would have carried my
green in a quart-berry-basket to the
market and returned with cabbages,
but instead i carry my plastic like
small silver bells in my
pocket, screaming “look at me!”
as i brandish them – platinum and
gold – half ashamed they’re not
black, and return with a bundle of
plastic bags encasing all-bearing brands, screaming
“look at me. i can do this!” and it’s all
plastic.

but in a simpler day i would be lost because
you can’t teach a hen to tell the truth (and you
can’t fake an egg).
even if i grew a tail i’d be tempted to travel around
with it stuffed in my
pocket – or would i just throw it over my
shoulder?

maybe in a simpler day i’d wash my hair with
oatmeal, and even if i shrank to the size of a
pea, I’d just wash my feet, roll over and go
back to sleep.

fresh

time to start fresh
(empty your burdened hands)

(You make) all things
new and
today is so
perfect we are

free

(love)

i think it's strange
our minds are
ever-ready
ever-searching,
eyes wide
open for love but
once it
comes, we're
so unprepared
and we have no idea
what to do with
it.

untitled no. 2

red, gold
i'm told
vodka receipts and
family meetings
still the little girl in the
bunk bed, now am
i?

you became mine

you became mine
it was in a moment when you
leaned in close and spoke
breathily at the
show and it was not quite the same
anymore you became
mine it was in brushes of hands
in the theatre my head on your
shoulder your fingers caressing
my hand you
became mine it was on the couch
watching tv in
silence until you said
what i did not want to hope/hoped
you would say (because it was in me
too) and you became
mine in that moment in spain
note in pocket calls on payphones
tears and too many miles to bear
with memories of my
head on your shoulder in the
metro and brushes of
hands and leaning in close all
over again (you became
mine) in a quiet moment
in goodnight hugs no longer
desperate but no less
urgent and deep enough
to drown even the
best at staying afloat

boxes and ball point pens

boxes and ball point pens,
plastic bottles and the soft padding of my moccasins –
there are other things like these.
there are things like bowling balls and baking sheets.
you didn't care (you cared)
and i remember i didn't care
to vote
happily unregistered,
there was a time walking on the concrete
on my way to class.
throw on clothes, walk to
t shirts and buckles that jingle as i
yarn
as i pull at sweaters and strain at
(you?)

burst

blood pumping through
veins tight and woven in a
body that might
burst (push and pull)
tight sweater knits and
caramel highlights
pilled navy cable-knits
and scarves and scarves and
scarves. i need to tan
i need a sweater.
i need new shoes.
i need to sleep.
i need a scarf.
i need a moment.

poem written on the back of a page of Robinson Crusoe

return to who we are
the songs that made us alive
in your old living room with its
hardwood floors and
my head on your shoulder
my favorite bracelet
and skipping for no reason or just
because we never were very good at studying
and were always too smart anyway
my head on your shoulder
in the metro
you met me at the train station
and I was glad the ATM didn't eat my card
like it did yours last week
(you told me in a postcard)
and we eat our doughnuts,
watching the statues
making plans to become statues ourselves
and never have to leave

pollution

i am a conglomeration of
seven-second commercials, five-dollar
words, one-dollar tabloid headlines and
bad late-night tv mixed with
fifty-minute lectures and the
fifteen minutes of those lectures i
let set in. my pores are filled with the
obtrusion of a million different
voices, the musk of the city and
secondhand poolhall smoke
twisting its way up into my lungs,
making its home within and tangled
up in you.

saying goodnight/saying goodbye

we would laugh, our voices straining together
blending into one
our legs dangling over the stage
as we'd watch the bands
and each other
in our never ending (though now it's over)
wait-and-see.
your eyes were the brightest – the brightest of all.
i could watch them for hours as they sparked and shone
illuminating the darkness
only to fade into the night as another stranger,
cohabitating the dim pavement.

Ophelia

slowly sinking auburn hair in
waves melting into the
ripples of the
stream she is
carried by its
current pulled into its
depths into the
darkness silently and
without protest.
rest.
a love too pure to give
to its careless receiver
but so it goes. no one knows
the tenacity of their feelings
until they
drown.

what love told me over coffee yesterday afternoon

I am a beating heart and blood
that warms the veins giving them
shape and substance
and reason to keep
going.

I am a shiver that runs down the
spine and a day when the rain doesn't
care to drench hair into
strings and shoes don't give way to
leaks.

I am an abstract, a painting, a feeling,
a song in the
throat and a feeling in the
gut and a realization that this
is all going to come out
wrong as the thoughts bottleneck in your
brain and words tangle in your
mouth and you go ahead with it
anyway.

I go by many names but I
prefer to just be called Susan,
for now anyway.

for the record

you are all the pieces that just don't fit made
of the same things as infomercials, dirty
politics and every
celebrity, every powerful person who is washed up and
strung out and
has been around too many times for anyone to care
anymore your words like late-night commercials promising
silicone injected dreams at your
disposal sugar-coated and
deadly

this is what it looks like when the expiration date has
passed and no one is falling for your lines
anymore and the candy covered poison you've been passing
out comes back around and does you
in you've always dug your own grave so
take another
hit

tonight

tonight the world is heavy on me
and i'm not feeling so strong anymore
as I stare glazed eyed straight ahead
from my usual booth
with my usual company
(table for one please)
at the usual time
(1 am)
i've been here with person after person.
they've all come and gone, and still I remain.
but tonight, for the first time,
i can't get you out of my mind
and my greatest aspiration
is to be held, to bury my face in your shoulder.
nothing more.
if only your fingers would never have caressed my hair.

how long

how long have we numbly traversed tree canopied sidewalks,
blind to their webs and sinews of branches,
deaf to their brilliant whispers:

(the world is beautiful. the world is beautiful.)

you

do you remember when you were little and didn't know how to spell --
upon asking your father for spellings, his scripted reply was "look it up..."
and you wondered how you could look up a word
that you didn't know how to spell in the first place?

that's how I feel about you.

glazed eyes

we were meant for more than hollow classrooms --
stale with traces of cigarette smoke,
throbbing with glazed eyes
and empty stares.

our lives don't have to be this way.
they could be any other way
(if we'd only take the chance)

I Was Born of Blood and Sweat

I was born of blood and sweat in a world of inconsistency. I was planted as a root and uprooted only to be thrust into fresh soil again and again. I was born of water and chemicals seasoned with cucumber and rosemary. I am cut open by softness of words and bleed Novocain onto those around me. I dwell in rooms of grey shale and black slate where my work is to write on the walls and ceilings all day and night without rest. I write all that is within me, and it never ends. We all do this, and it is our job. There are no specifications. No one checks up on us. Yet there we can be found always writing, always climbing to the very tops of rooms until nothing can be written anymore and it is time for a new room, a new slate.

I am a teacher and my pupils are black chairs of various sizes. I am a lover and my lover is the blanket that surrounds me as I sleep. I am a dreamer and my dreams are the things I do while I am still awake. I am a fighter and my fights are with the walls on which I write. I am a revolutionary and my army is every thought that has ever touched my mind.

addiction

I never quite knew how to describe how I felt about you. It was something like the feeling of finally, after a day without drinking anything, feeling the sharp shiver of shock then bulging and swelling of veins that accompany a much-anticipated drink of water. At first there was always the shock: The call. The text message. The IM conversation. The face to face confrontation. Then the nerves and nausea and increased heart-rate would set in. And I'd find myself on some extreme end of the spectrum of emotions – ranging from terror to deep, yearning melancholy, to extreme anger to blissful happiness. The shock was always short lived, though. Then my system would begin to adjust to your presence. My heart's swelling and bulging would eventually fall in sync with your advances. And I would realize that this is it. You are it. I would crave you like a cocaine addict needs another fix, all the while denying I cared at all. Yet I did. And I needed you to keep coming back again and again.

untitled no. 3

What you have heard is true: I was there.

I was working on the fifteenth floor of a building next to the World Trade Center. At the time the first plane hit I was looking down (I'd just spilled soup on my tie), so I can't tell you if anything really happened differently than how the government told us. But I heard a loud noise and our building shook. First I thought it might be an earthquake or an explosion, but then I looked out the window and saw flames and a hole in the tower facing our building. My coworkers started making phone calls and turning on the tv, some panicking. But I wasn't panicked. I wasn't afraid. I just stood there, staring out the window, watching the flames. Then something strange happened. A woman jumped from the tower. I saw her floating downward – almost in slow motion. She had long, dark hair and a silky grey skirt that rippled like waves as she glided downward. Her eyes were the deepest blue and for one moment they met mine.

An American in Paris

Ten AM in a Paris hotel room, summertime. Shadows of alone echo off the blank walls. Sitting back in an uncomfortable armchair, cappuccino by my side, I stretch out my legs in front of me and take in their many scars of no consequence – scars that delivered themselves anonymously, nameless faces in a sea of brown. The fan in the window offers promise of relief to the day's impending warmth. The fleeting thought that maybe I shouldn't wear long sleeves crosses my mind, but I'm too lost in my own melancholy to think of such things. However, my stare across the room has come up with its own game. (Flip flops or flats?) It repeats the question over and over as my eyes examine both options from a distance. I resign myself to flats as to feel more Parisian. I resign myself to some kind of makeshift happiness that maybe, perhaps, for just once will help me find a way to just *be* instead of always wanting, always waiting. And what of love?

untitled No. 4

The lecturer asks me if I remember Bobby Sands. I don't. In fact, I never knew who Bobby Sands was. I think of this as I sit back in my uncomfortable desk listening to her explain how Bobby Sands led a hunger strike in the 80s, ultimately starving himself to create a lasting legacy. Yet I don't remember him. And I think of how that's how we all are. We all do these things to be remembered when the sad thing is that no matter how much we try to make sure certain people know who we are, in the end they might turn out as strangers anyways.

The other day I went to a basketball game and I saw a man in a wheelchair. He is the dad of two of the players, and there he was sitting in a wheelchair with a patch over his eye because he has cancer; and now he lives in a nursing home. His wife was there beside him and she was smiling and looking happy, but all I could think to do was cry because in that moment I understood that there is so much more out there than all this. I thought of how there is so much more to be living for and of how this world is hard and tragic and I have no easy answers for anyone anymore and I'm finally starting to realize that I am not the cause or the solution to all of the things I used to think I was anymore. And in that moment I started to realize that life isn't really up to me. None of it, really. And when I thought about it, I thought of how dumb I'd been to think that I ever had much control over anything. I thought of this and my lack of ability to change anything about the future and wondered why I hadn't given God more credit this whole time -- because honestly, I gave him very little. I've tried to do it all myself -- everything. And it really doesn't work because in the end, you can't *do* anything. You can't make anything happen or not happen and you don't know the future. You aren't as big and as amazing as you want to make yourself believe. But the other thing I realized is that it's okay. It's okay if I don't have it all under control. And that's what I'm finally starting to understand. I'm also finally starting to understand that Jesus has been there all along just walking next to me, but if I never let him take the lead I shouldn't wonder why it feels like I'm walking down all of the wrong paths.

So in the end I guess it doesn't really matter so much to me whether or not I remember or know who Bobby Sands was and maybe it's not that important if people know who I am either -- because there's a lot out there that's bigger than me. And, you know, that's okay.

O'Malley's

“Well, boys, what do you say we call it a game?” Jack Tegan asks as he tosses his ball to his caddy on the eighteenth green. Clarence and Steve laugh as they slide their clubs back into their bags and begin their stroll back to the clubhouse. Ever since Jack Tegan retired, his typical days have included eighteen holes of golf, lunch and a swim at the country club with his nights consisting of playing bridge over a Grey Goose Martini or two. He lives in a gated community, in a beautiful house that he shares with Cassie, his wife of twenty-seven years and their seventeen year old daughter, Michelle. Jack has it made. As the owner of a successful accounting firm, he has more money than he and his family will ever need and lives a life that is the end goal of all who are still trying to climb their way up the ladder, so to speak.

As the men are seated at their usual table, Clarence says,

“It’s my Vivienne’s birthday tomorrow. I’m taking her to see “Les Miserables” over at The Clempton Theater. It’s her favorite musical. I also bought her a couple of shiny things for her jewelry box, so she should be pretty happy.” He smiles.

“Yes, the Clempton,” says Steve in his British accent. “That’s my favorite theater. I’m so glad we have a box over there, though. The service is horrendous otherwise during large productions. What are you up to this weekend, old boy?” he asks Jack.

But Jack is starting, glassy eyed, towards the front door where a woman in a light blue pea coat stands talking on her cell phone, back turned to where the three are seated. Jack strains to get a glimpse of her face, but when she finally looks in his direction, Jack turns away, disappointed.

“Jack?” Steve asks for the third time. “Jack?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” says Jack. “I just thought... for a second...”

He looks back over at the woman with the blue coat.

“It just reminded me of her,” he says.

Jack has never been married to anyone but Cassie, but he had his time of fooling around before he settled down (as he likes to tell the guys at the country club). Often he tells them of his former loves – there was Stacie, then Suzanne, then Cassie’s sister, and then ...well, Cassie. Jack's favorite to talk about, however, is Stacie. He has told the story countless times before, often over a game of golf -- usually beginning his story at about the seventh hole, and after experiencing all the interruptions that golf naturally brings, finishes a little after the eighteenth (more because everyone leaves than because he is actually finished with the story). The guys usually just shake their heads and give a good-humored chuckle as they make their way to their cars. They've heard Jack tell the same old story over and over again. But Jack can't let it go.

He was twenty-two with the emotional maturity of a sixteen year old -- just out of college and employed as a bartender at an up-and-coming joint called O'Malley's in New York City. Jet black hair and blue eyes, Jack was as Irish as they come. He got around a lot back in the day – usually had slept with every new waitress in the place (and many of the pretty female patrons) before they'd even been there two weeks. He was also a big fan of one night stands – no responsibility, no obligations. Jack was something of a ladies' man.

Then She walked through the door. She wore a light blue pea coat with white gloves and black heels. She was petite and brunette with huge brown eyes, and without the heels he guessed her to be about five feet tall. As she made her way over to the bar, he

caught the scent of her perfume. And as she looked up at him with those big brown eyes and ordered an Amaretto Sour, he knew that this wasn't just going to be another day at work – and that this was not just some other girl.

“Is Vicky here today?” she asked. Vicky was one of the waitresses.

“Not today,” Jack replied. “You know her?”

“Ya, we went to high school together,” she said. “She’s always telling me to come visit, so I thought I’d come today.” She paused then added, “I was hoping maybe she could give me a discount or something because I definitely need a drink.” She flashed Jack a big smile.

“Why’s that?” asked Jack.

“I just had a really stressful interview,” she said. “It was just for this secretarial position at this little place down the road. I mean, I think it went well. I’m just still really tense and need something to help me loosen up.”

“I might be able to arrange that,” said Jack as he set down an Amaretto Sour in front of her. As she began to reach into her purse, Jack stopped her.

“No worries. It’s on the house.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Ya, it’s the top five special,” he said.

“What’s that?”

“You see, the top five prettiest girls to enter this place since I’ve started working here get their drinks free,”

“Oh really?” she asked. “And how long have you been working here?”

“Four years – and in four years no other girl has made that list yet,” he said, smiling. “What’s your name?”

“Stacie,” she said. “And you are...?”

“Jack.”

“Jack...” she said with a coy smile playing on her lips. “I’ve heard about you. I’ve heard that you’re the love ‘em and leave ‘em type.”

“Well I don’t know about that. Usually I love them and they leave me,” he said with a smile.

She stayed late, chatting with Jack about growing up in Manhattan, about what it was like being youngest of six children and about her Yorkie dog, Carlee who she had just gotten two months ago. The more she talked, the more Jack knew that there was something different about her. When his shift was over, he took a seat beside her at the bar and poured himself a drink. She had already had a few too many, but Jack couldn't help but notice how cute she was when she was slurring her speech. She admitted to having a fiancé that was in the army, but he was over in Vietnam at the time and she was getting bored. The two exchanged numbers.

Jack called her the following weekend. He took her out to dinner at a new Italian restaurant that had just opened in the area. She wore a bright red, satin dress and confirmed Jack’s suspicions that she was indeed the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The conversation flowed naturally, and he felt that they shared amazing chemistry - not that he knew entirely ...but he hoped to find out. His wish was granted when she invited him back to her place. It was a tiny one bedroom apartment – nothing fancy. But needless to say, Jack didn't come home that night.

He began seeing Stacie frequently. For a while he felt guilty, seeing as she was engaged to someone else – and at that, someone in the service. But eventually his heart won out, and he cleared whatever twinge his conscience had formerly given him regarding the matter. He brought her to his friend's wedding. It was an outdoor wedding, and he would never forget how she wore black hot-pants and her hair in cute long pigtailed fastened at the top of her head. All the guys at the wedding patted him on the back for snagging such a beauty. However, she had him hooked. Not only were his days of dating around over, but slowly he began to think that he actually truly loved her.

They had only been seeing each other for a couple of months when he got the phone call. Stacie was pregnant and the baby was Jack's. She'd been on birth control on and off so Jack thought they had their bases covered, but come to find out, she was more off than on usually. Although Jack plead with her to keep the baby, in the end she made the decision to have an abortion. Jack took out a loan for the money to have it done. He made some phone calls and found the name of the best (and most expensive) clinic. It was in Long Island. The two planned a day trip for the following Friday. And when Friday came, they took a cab, she went in, had the abortion, and that was that.

Jack waited out in the lobby and walked in silence beside her down the stairs and back to the taxi waiting outside.

The two sat in silence for the duration of the cab ride, with Stacie just staring out the window. Jack knew it was over. Something deep within him knew it for whatever reason. He couldn't bear the thought of it, but he felt helpless to do anything to stop it.

“Take the tunnel, not the bridge,” he said to the cabbie. Stacie glanced over at him, admiration hidden somewhere deep in her eyes. She had always been impressed with how world-wise Jack was.

She gave him a quick peck on the cheek when Jack let her out at home and told him to go on home because she didn't feel well and wanted to sleep.

Jack never saw her again.

She called once later that week to let him know that everything turned out all right and she was doing fine, but after that she never returned any of his calls. Eventually her fiancé came back from Vietnam and the two married. Jack heard from a friend a year later that they had divorced and that she had married a wealthy businessman. Jack was heartbroken.

Eventually he re-entered the dating game. He dated Suzanne for a little while. She was pretty and outgoing and looked a little like Belinda from the Go-Gos. They would go out for coffee after he got off work at night and would have the best conversations for hours. However, once she began spending the night something changed and their relationship was never the same again. Slowly they drifted apart and his ever-wandering eye next landed on Sophie, a new waitress at O'Malleys. She was uncommonly pretty, and had a quick wit. However, she was dating someone at the time. However, her sister, Cassie was not. Cassie had set her eyes on Jack the first time she visited her sister at O'Malley's. Eventually word got around that Cassie was interested in Jack. The two dated for awhile. Jack felt that it was getting to be about time to settle down, so finally he popped the question.

“The thing is,” Jack would say, “I wouldn't have even cared that much if she had said 'no.'”

But she said yes. She said yes as she broke down in tears, telling Jack, “I would be honored to be your wife.”

So Jack and Cassie were married. Then came Michelle and then the success of Jack's business. Jack and Cassie's marriage, however, was all but successful. It was as if they were two strangers that merely occupied the same living space and occasionally had to discuss practical things such as schedules and meal plans. Of course on holidays they would buy the obligatory gifts for each other – but nothing over the top.

Sometimes Jack would drive by Stacie's old apartment “for old time's sake,” until one day it was torn down and made into a parking lot.

But he worked hard and retired. And here he is now – big house, beautiful daughter and wife, country club membership and driving a Jaguar. He has it all, but he can't help but feel like something's missing even though he could never name exactly what it is.

After lunch with Clarence and Steve, he drives over to the accounting firm he owns to see how the managers are doing. He'll usually stay there for an hour or so, re-sharing a few stories of his glory days back at O'Malley's with whichever secretary happens to be on at the time. Then he will tell everyone to, “Keep up the good work,” and leave with a joking remark. Today his remark will be, “How come all the young, pretty secretaries always get here right as I'm leaving?” And the young, pretty secretary will sit and wonder what will become of her when she is no longer young and pretty.

Then he will go home to Cassie – Cassie who is too concerned with re-designing their living room to notice that when Jack says he is in his study reading, he is really online. He's online searching for Stacie, wondering what became of her, wondering what would have happened if he hadn't paid for the abortion, wondering what would happen if they met again.

Blue

The bottle was blue. It was some kind of vodka. She hadn't looked very closely. She just knew that she needed something so she opened the cabinet and grabbed the first thing her hand was drawn to. That's all she really remembered thinking as she drifted in and out of consciousness. She had woken up on the kitchen floor. Of course she had had too much. That was probably the point.

The day had started out all right. She slipped out of bed as He snored beside her. He was the heaviest sleeper she had ever known, so she didn't have to be too careful not to wake him. She loosely pulled back her black hair and slid into her light green dress and black sweater along with her brown leather flip flops. She headed out, being careful to latch the door behind her, and walked to the bakery on the corner where she bought some bread (wheat). She carried it along with her book, pen and notepad a few doors down to her favorite coffee shop. It was called Mugs Not Drugs and was a popular hippie hangout – although it was a more politically correct kind of hippie hangout considering most of the people she'd have classified as “hippies” in her past were pretty steady drug users. Still, she liked it partly because she could smoke there and partly because she was kind of a hippie of sorts – the modern, more politically correct kind. Or at least that's what she liked to think.

So the day started out like a normal Monday. She wrote a few poems and eavesdropped on everyone's conversations, making them into lines that appeared in her rambling prose. She went through three cigarettes. She knew she smoked too much, but she was trying to stop. And she'd gotten better. For the most part she told herself that she could only smoke while she was writing since it helped her writer's block. And then

sometimes she'd smoke after dinner – but that was only when her friends came over. Or when she was stressed.

After her time at Mugs Not Drugs she would usually go grocery shopping, opting for the whole foods market or organic grocery store rather than any of the chain stores. The food was a little more expensive and the shopping took a while longer, but it was kind of therapeutic. The whole experience gave her a feeling of being one with nature, of doing something good. She wasn't sure why, but she liked it. She would wander the aisles, concocting meals in her head that He would like – and He would foot the bill. She was lucky for that. He made a good deal of money somehow – both from good investments and from his job as a photographer. He used to only take artistic photos – opting for abstract angles and colors, mostly still life shots. However, he later got some bigger jobs and began taking photos for fashion magazines and advertisements. Actually, that's how they met. One day she was minding her own business, wandering along the streets of a figurative Haight and Ashbury, long necklaces and soft waves of hair streaming down her shoulders and back when she was approached by a man wondering how she felt about modeling an off-beat line of clothing? She was broke at the time, homeless and sleeping on a friend's couch, so she eagerly complied. She was a natural on camera, a beauty who hadn't thought much of her looks until then. The job turned into several subsequent jobs – many with a certain photographer who won her over with his messy, black hair, dark eyes, natural charm and affinity for wearing torn up blue jeans with no shirt or shoes while doing all of his shoots. She was 18 and he was 24. They dated for three months, moved in together and were destined to live happily ever after.

Or so she thought. Now here she was eight years later with him snoring in bed while she wandered about on her own. They used to do everything together, but he'd grown distant and had started working more and more – and coming home less and less. And she would be lying if she said that his work with countless beautiful, young models didn't bother her just a little. Still, she trusted him – or tried her best to, at the very least. And he always made sure that they had everything they needed. He didn't want to have children, but she told herself that she was okay with that because they didn't have time for children and they were such big responsibilities anyway.

Still, there was something missing, something not quite right, but nothing she'd be willing to investigate too intricately for fear that she might find something she didn't want to find out because in the end she loved him – wholly and deeply – and knew that she would be lost without him.

But things have a way of coming out in the most terrible ways. And when she came home from the grocery store she noticed a pair of hot pink stilettos lying limp on the living room floor. And her bathrobe that was always on the hook on the bathroom door was strangely missing. And, as she approached the bedroom, breath held, heart clenched in her chest, she heard talking. It was Him – along with a female voice she didn't recognize. And just as her hand reached for the doorknob, it turned on its own and out came a tall, skinny brunette, with tanned skin wearing nothing but a bra and underwear. The brunette stopped suddenly and looked her straight in the eye. But she didn't say a word. Neither said a word.

And neither did He. The brunette moved towards the door, slipping on her dress, kicking on her pink stilettos and closing the door behind her with a crisp, cold bang.

Then she was left alone with him. She was again the woman of the house. But all she could think to say was, “Go.”

And he left. And as soon as she slammed the door behind him, she cried. She cried and slunk down to the cold tile in the foyer. She cried there for almost an hour, tried to get up the courage to call her mother but decided against it considering she knew full well that her mother didn't entirely approve of her lifestyle and never had approved of Him.

“He'll leave you,” she had said. “You watch.”

When she finally had the energy to boost herself from the floor, she crawled to the liquor cabinet. She had never been the drinking type, but he had. Well, she would show him. She would drink up all his expensive liquor. She'd become a fucking alcoholic even. (And she wasn't the swearing type either.) She hated the taste, too, but she didn't even notice it tonight as she drank a tumbler. And another. And another. And as the liquor started to take effect, she leaned back against the wall and looked out the window. It was January in Boston and the landscape was paved with snow. As she began to drift out of consciousness, she looked out the sliding glass door from where she was slumped on the kitchen floor and noticed that the neighbors had lit a fire in their backyard. Or at least that's what it looked like. And as she watched the red flames shimmer against the white snow and watched the black carbon fragments ascend she thought, *How beautiful*. And in the last few moments that she could keep her eyes open she glanced down at the blue bottle in her hand and thought of its cool feel against her skin and saw, for the first time, a shade of blue that she didn't know existed. Or maybe it was just in her mind.

Night Driving/My Grandmother's House

Changing lanes, she rolls the windows down to the warm night and its promises of summer and stars and walks downtown or by the beach at two a.m. She looks over at him as he sleeps beside her in the passenger seat. She looks over at him as she has countless times, yet tonight it is as if for the first time – noticing all the complexities of his jawline and cheekbones, the depth of his eyes. She reaches over and pulls him close to her, kissing his forehead, fingers lost in his wavy hair. She thinks of all that is contained inside his head, inside his ribcage – all the life and beauty and untied loose endings and of how strange it seems that it is only fragile bones that encase our bodies and only thin sheets that encase our heads. We are all just one small sliver between life and death.

She thinks these things every so often, usually while driving or during quiet nights (or both), often while listening to some song that she used to listen to long ago – long ago when she wasn't quite so afraid to feel alive. Long ago when she had nothing to lose, and cutting her bleeding heart open for the world to see meant putting little on the figurative table.

But now here is that Thing – that Thing she has searched for all her life. The end of the journey that all those songs had inspired deep within her heart. And it is here – sitting in the passenger seat, head on her shoulder; and it is strong and bold and demands to be treated with care. She would be lying if she said it didn't frighten her at least a little – because it terrified her a lot. She was terrified to be without it, yet terrified to need it – terrified to cut her heart open only to waste its contents, only for him to look back at her with eyes saying, "Is this all you've got?" while he turns his back, hands full of everything.

Yet “they” always say there is no love without risk. And thus she has mustered up all that is within her to somehow be strong and soft all at once – and occasionally she tips the balance a little too far one way or the other because she’s still working on getting it right. But she is learning how to deal with love, to deal with life. And she knows that it’s worth it at times like these – times like these that are almost impossible to savor for the reason alone that nothing ever stands still and no one ever appreciates what they have until it’s gone, which in turn makes her wonder terrible things about death (since if she does feel this way now, surely it’s about to be snatched away and then she’ll have to learn how to deal with that, too).

She continues driving, lights and signs and houses flashing by. Sometimes she wishes that she lived in an old person’s house. Not one actually owned by an old person, but one in which an old person might live. She would spend her afternoons seated on its broad front porch, framed by red brick and frosted with frilly white wrought iron. Inside, it would look like the house her grandmother used to own. It would have a large, old front window that was almost impossible to open, and brown, thick carpet throughout the living room. The bedrooms and hallway would have yellowing hardwood floors and the bathroom and kitchen would wear a light shade of linoleum that she would consider changing, but in the end would always decide against. She would keep it mostly empty – save for a big, white couch in the living room, an old, yellowing desk and bedroom set in the back left bedroom and a large mirror and some end tables in the other bedroom. She would keep it mostly empty and let the sunshine stream in as she lay on the floor in the living room, as she lay against the soft, brown carpet like she used to when she was a

little girl and would color in the coloring books that her grandmother would keep under the coffee table just for her.

She still remembers when her grandmother died. She was five years old and her mother had her stay over at a friend's house that night. His sister let her borrow an old pair of Little Mermaid underwear and T shirt to sleep in and she almost wet the bed. She knew something was wrong and prayed for her grandmother as she drifted in and out of sleep, waiting to hear from her mother and never very good at sleeping away from home. When she saw her parents the next day and they told her that her grandmother was dead, she already knew and her tears were ready. Her mother would write poems about it. They weren't very good – not because her mother wasn't a good writer, but because they were too simple and they did not say the vast spider webs of things that were in her mother's head, bottlenecked somewhere in her brain and unable to be released.

She wanted the white china ballet dancer figurine. When her mother asked what she wanted from her grandmother's estate, saying that she could have one nice thing, that was what she wanted. The figurine used to be on the bottom shelf of her grandmother's curio cabinet, and she would stare at it as she played with her dolls on the living room floor. It was the figure of a girl ballet dancer, reaching towards the sky, perfect and untouched like His strong back.

Appendix B

Analysis of My Work In Relation to Other Works

I was first inspired to write – and actually invest in writing -- after listening to Jewel's music and moreso after reading her written work. Jewel's book *Chasing Down the Dawn* was quite inspirational to me because not only did it include a mixed approach to writing (including shorts, memoir, stories, poetry, songs, photography and drawings), but it was written in a style that at last I could identify with. For once I read something written in a voice that sounded like my voice, yet it was thought provoking and opened a wide arena of questions. Jewel's poetry – including that in her poetry book *A Night Without Armor*, has (for me) long served as a model of free verse and of being true to one's self within writing. Thus, in many ways I think my style is still influenced by her work -- including the pieces that I included in this project.

Another body of work that has long inspired me is that of Ben Gibbard (of Death Cab for Cutie). Although the band does interesting and excellent things with actual music, I think that its real strength is lyrics. Gibbard's lyrics could easily be simply poetry if divorced from the context of song.

“Left uninspired by the crust of railroad earth, it touched the lead to the pages in your manuscript. ... It wasn't quite what it seemed, a lack of pleasantries. My able body isn't what it used to be. I must admit that I was charmed by your advances. Your advantage left me helplessly into you. Talking how the group had begun to splinter and I could taste your lipstick on the filter... Lushing with the hallway congregation, my best judgment signed its resignation. I rushed this. We moved too fast. Trips into the guest room.”

This is a portion from their song “Title Track” which exhibits not only the vivid language Gibbard employs, but also the fragmented yet effective nature of his prose. In my writing,

I strive to work towards a similar style of poetry and language. Each album created by Gibbard and his band features haunting themes such as death, the meaning of life, searching for one true love – and the reality of perhaps losing that one love, artificial and/or fading love and a myriad of complex and often difficult themes that are layered intricately and profoundly but expressed poetically in each track. Thus, Gibbard has long been an inspiration and influence on my writing.

Along a similar line, I really appreciate what the band Brand New is doing lyrically (and also musically, especially when juxtaposed with their poignant lyrics) – particularly in their last two albums. While their album “Deja Entendu” focuses on themes of death, loss, insincerity and compromise in intricate ways, I especially appreciate their newest album “The Devil and God are Raging Inside of Me.” This album deals a great deal with themes of God, the afterlife and seems to be a searching album that not only questions the meaning of life but of how life is lived – and leaves the listener with no concrete conclusion. The album is littered with theological and Biblical references, although the band is by no means a “Christian” band. Along with addressing some of these topics in some of my own work, the searching and inconclusive nature of their work is a general approach that I like to use myself.

Another artist I identify with is Jenny Lewis of Rilo Kiley. Lewis’ voice of feminine individuality and freedom does not shy away from the harsh realities of life. I’ve long appreciated her excellent storytelling which has influenced my thought and work, although my form often differs from hers in various ways. I think my work is similar to some of her work, particularly off the albums “The Execution of All Things” and “Takeoffs and “Landings” because she tends to speak in the first person and it seems

that many of her even fictional accounts have elements of memoir in them from her time growing up in Alaska, etc. -- such as in the haunting melody that is at the end of many of her songs during this time which, strung together, makes an entire song: “Mom she cried about money and time, and how she got older. I didn’t understand much. She left, I stayed. My dad played in the bar. And I wondered if I looked like him...” Likewise, most of my work is written using the first person, and even the fictional works that I write often have something to do with something that I have encountered in real life – whether it was something that I experienced or was based off of an experience of someone I’ve met. However, while Lewis has a wide range of work that is written in the first person and is purely fictional, I have a great deal less.

I was attracted to the chapbook “Still Windows Run Deep” by Faye Kicknosway because I think that regarding form, what she does with fragmented pieces and cutouts on the cover of the book is something that I particularly like to do in making my own visual work. Regarding her work, I identify a great deal with her poem “Houdini” and similar pieces. The voice and sentence structure she employs is much like the way that I often like to write. I love the very vivid and tactile images she uses (for instance, her lines such as “all buttoned up in strait jackets, ropes, the chained and padlocked box” in some regard remind me of specific wording and images I use in some of my pieces such as “water bottles and baking sheets,” or “boxes and pall point pens, plastic bottles,” etc.) However, my work differs from some of her pieces such as “Winter Solstice” in style and form. “Winter Solstice” is organized in a prose-like manner and includes a great deal of fragmented sentences along with astrological references – things I do not tend to do in my own work. It describes a season rather than a person or an event, which differs from

much of my work because I tend to dwell on people or events. However, I love the beautiful simplicity of her poems like “Day at the Zoo,” and its length and concise yet profound nature is an effect I try to achieve in much of my work.

I was intrigued by “Paper Cuts,” a collection of poems by Joe Cisle. The typewritten style of the text and the home-made binding adds a really unique aesthetic to the work. I could easily see myself using these visual elements in a collection of my own. I also identified with the conciseness of the poetry and the simple yet provocative wording. I especially appreciated Cisle’s very short works such as “Holier Than Thou,” although most of my work, although short, tends to be a bit longer. Still, I am interested in what Cisle is doing as an artist and am interested in creating similar work myself.

Another writer whose work I find inspiring and challenging is Jeanette Winterson – especially her book entitled “The Powerbook.” I appreciate her musings on love, in that it is a subject that my work often deals with. Particularly I like the depth and fresh perspective that Winterson lends to the subject – something that I hope to do in some regard. I’ve always found passages such as “What a strange world it is where you can have as much sex as you like but love is taboo,” and “Love has got complicated, tied up with promises, bruised with plans, dogged with an ending that nobody wants – when all love is, is what it always is – that you look at me and want me and I don’t turn away” very provoking – along with many others.

I hope to continue the tradition of thought-provoking writers that have emerged in the post-modern as well as other arenas, and trust that I will continue to be inspired by them for years to come.