

INTRODUCTION

Love + Lust

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

CLARE O'NEILL

Love + Lust. I didn't know what to expect when I chose this symbiotic pair as the theme of this edition of *Open to Interpretation*. I liked the idea of trying to portray both emotions in a single image. But I knew it was a gamble. I wasn't worried about the writers, as I knew the chosen images would evoke plenty of mood, connection, feeling, and memories. My concern was the photographers. Could they capture a moment suggesting both love and lust?

The call for entry went out:

Lust is an intense appetite, craving, or untamed desire. We lust for an array of things — money, power, objects, sex, or just living life. Love is a powerful affection or personal attachment and comes in a variety of forms, which can encompass romantic, sexual, platonic, narcissistic, or even religious feelings or attitudes. Show us your interpretations.

Well, it turned out that perhaps love and lust aren't so symbiotic after all. Or at least it became clear that it was a tall order to capture both in a single image. So we changed the call slightly — allowing the depiction of either love *or* lust. The submissions started to roll in.

Some of the submissions were eye-openers, even for me. There were plenty of tender moments between a parent and child, as well as portrayals of couples at different stages in their lives. But there were others — submitted by both photographers and writers — whose interpretation of “lust” went way beyond what the judges were comfortable including in the publication. (And I'm putting it mildly.) I think we covered the complete spectrum on this call.

More than 2,500 photographs were submitted for *Love + Lust*, and photography judge Aline Smithson selected a group of images that reflected her own sense of style and vision. Of the 31 images chosen, only one is devoid of a person. Why? Maybe because love and lust relate to our very core as humans. We talk about loving spaghetti or lusting after a new pair of shoes. But those are empty feelings. As novelist Paulo Coelho expressed in *Eleven Minutes*, “Profound desire, true desire is the desire to be close to someone.”

When I asked writing judge Dorianne Laux to say a few words about her judging experience, she replied:

I began to hear lines from the poems and stories as I looked at

the images. It was an odd feeling, as if I knew the story behind the images, in fact, many stories. Three photographs that evoked particularly wonderful responses had something in common: Brittany Chavez's *The Grand Tetons*, two people side by side on a made bed, in dim light, looking up at the ceiling; Robert Larson's *Grandma and Grandpa*, two older people propped on pillows on a made bed, holding hands, watching television; and Gary Mitchell's *The Moment*, two people making love on a bare mattress.

Though all were couples in unique situations at different stages of life, they seemed to tell a story of a single couple on a bed, young and in love in a first apartment, then the troubled mid-marriage, and finally old age, at peace, a whole history between them. In none of the three photos were the couples looking at one another. Maybe that was part of each photographer's good instinct, to deflect the gaze, and thereby increase the mystery of the moment.

Love and lust simply are. Both are powerful emotions. Both are part of life.

But some are afraid of lust. It can feel dirty and impure. Others embrace the feeling. While I can relate to some of the fear, I admire those who can openly and freely enjoy lust — a lust for abandoning your shoes and running barefoot in the ocean, a lust for another's touch, a lust to sing, to dance, to explore, a lust to rejoice in life for its own sake.

Love is more easily experienced than defined. Love is not one thing. Novelist Jojo Moyes writes:

What love is depends on where you are in relation to it. Secure in it, it can feel as mundane and necessary as air — you exist within it, almost unnoticing. Deprived of it, it can feel like an obsession; all consuming, a physical pain. Love is the driver for all great stories: not just romantic love, but the love of parent for child, for family, for country. It is the point before consummation of it that fascinates: what separates you from love, the obstacles that stand in its way. It is usually at those points that love is everything.

I would argue that the driver for all great stories is love and lust — each a passionate commitment to be recognized and acted

upon — or not. Some are worthy of being embraced and nurtured. Others fade into fond memories or wry remembrances of something (or someone) that seemed like a good idea at the time. All are worthy thoughts and emotions — together or apart.

Be free to love and to lust — to be so human, to be so much a part of life.

“When you start to really know someone, all his physical characteristics start to disappear. You begin to dwell in his energy, recognize the scent of his skin. You see only the essence of the person, not the shell. That’s why you can’t fall in love with beauty. You can lust after it, be infatuated by it, want to own it. You can love it with your eyes and body but not your heart. And that’s why, when you really connect with a person’s inner self, any physical imperfections disappear, become irrelevant.”

— Lisa Unger, *Beautiful Lies*

Photographer
Brittany Chavez

THE GRAND TETONS

10 | 11



LOVE + LUST | OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

Writer

Mario Beruvides

EL QUERER QUERER

*Save some time to dream, cause your
dreams may save us*

— John Cougar Mellencamp

¿Qué hay en un sueño?

En ese cuarto transparente y oscuro,
que permite que la esperanza viva siempre.
Necesario y suficiente.

Gemelo.

¿Un sueño puede salvar?

Accidente sin sustancia.

Transparencia viva,
oscuridad.

En esa residencia me encuentro,
en esa residencia me he perdido.

Tu silencio,
mi destino.

Lo plural en nosotros está,
no falta nada más.

Solo un sueño,
solo esa esperanza.

El amor es la única sustancia,
que la anticipa un accidente.

No hay filosofía como el querer querer.

Translation by

Maria O'Connell

LOVING TO LOVE

*Save some time to dream, cause your
dreams may save us*

— John Cougar Mellencamp

What is there in a dream?

In this room transparent and dark,
that permits hope to live forever.
Necessary and sufficient.

Twin.

Can a dream save?

Accident without substance.

Living transparency,
darkness.

In that residence I find myself,
in that residence I have lost myself.

Your silence.

My destiny.

The plural is in us,
nothing more is lacked.

Only a dream,
only that hope.

Love is the only substance
That accident anticipates.

There is no philosophy like loving to love.

Writer

Michael Corrigan

A BEDROOM IN CRETE

Our
love tousled sheets
your
sweat dampened hair
us
salty skinned
from the hottest
part of the day,
on the whitewashed wall
a Gekko
silently watching
the intimate revealing
of ourselves
to ourselves
in this little democracy
where
both of us
are king.

Photographer
Kristy Carpenter

ALBUM



Writer
Laurie Harper

WORTH THE FARE

It doesn't matter what happened after the "I Do."

I remember our wedding day with delight. I was so sure of what our lives would be together.

But it turns out you were not who I thought you were. I was not what you wanted me to be.

Yet that time between the early heart fluttering and breathless realization of love, and its now-observed inevitable demise, was worth it.

How else could I come to know the world, humanity... my own self?

Writer
Christine Levens

PEONIES

Sometimes they open in June,
as they did this year, in this part of the country.
When I was a girl and lived up north
I prayed hard the May I was married.
I prayed for the ants to do their work early,
to crawl and nuzzle into the buds,
to open the white, pink and fuchsia blooms
in my mother's yard, so the smell, so sweet
would weave into the fresh linens and formal clothes
of the luncheon tables and our wedding guests,
a smell so sweet that everyone in town would remember
our wedding and would forget about the war.

14 | 15

Photographer
Felicia Simion

BLUEBIRDS



Writer
Airianna Tauanuu

FALLING

I fell like snow falls
Softly, slowly, silently
Into you

We sat like stone
Cold, quiet, content
To be

You were like the sun
Bright, bold, brave
For me

And we burned up the night
Together

Writer
David Hoggan

SHUDDERS IN AND AROUND

Her talk is an arpeggio, opening out like a fan or a wing—
I push it here, there, back into itself, and it's always shapely, lovely.
I sit in the drama, trope, and glamour as an ache of affection, or
love or what may, shudders in and around, damply, sharply.

Photographer
Douglas Beasley

SYLVIA IN THE RIVER, TRADE RIVER, WISCONSIN



Writer
Anna D. Allen

CALYPSO AND ODYSSEUS

Had he beheld me
as I beheld him, never
would we have parted.

LOVE + LUST | OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

Writer
Jason Matthews

AFFAIRS OF THE DAY

She has no time for the lake —
the way it clings to her even after she's left it;
it presumes too much —
but for the sun, she lingers.

She presses him against her forehead.
When she says, *kiss my eyelids*,
he is there. When she guides
him to her lips, he follows,

he leads, he bites just a little.
She holds his taste, savoring,
while he browses the hollow of
her throat. He sneaks inside

through the hoop in her earlobe,
but she turns her head, and he moves
on, down, anywhere, everywhere
he can reach. She throws her blouse

in the reeds. The lake ripples,
jealous, and claims it. Her skin stipples
in the quick grope of the breeze, but the sun
chases away the memory, chases

away all but the moment, and her
movement against his heat. Her
heart is a nova of joy, incinerating, ultra-
violet, boiling away the lake and the hours.

Photographer
Catherine Just

NAP TIME



Writer

Mario Beruvides

LA VOZ DE MI MADRE

La voz de mi madre es dulce.
Es suave como los tiernos cariños de mi infancia.
Es de emociones fuertes y risa amplia.
Su casa es grande, llena siempre de gente,
pequeñeces, arte, yuca, frijoles y un descanso.

¿Conocemos a nuestras madres?
¿Vivimos sus conmociones?

No hay piedra de agua azul o lirio armónico
que conozca esa sonrisa.
Confieso no entiendo.
Quizás por la composición de células
que demarcan la dualidad humana,
o la torpeza de rumores lógicos.
Al fin, ¿que importa?

La voz de mi madre es dulce.
Y la recuerdo más en las tardes lentas de nuestros sueños,
cuando con cariño y paciencia mis versos su respirar toca.
Hay que ver la felicidad que resuelve la voz de mi madre.

Translation by

Maria O'Connell

MY MOTHER'S VOICE

My mother's voice is sweet.
It is soft like the tender affections of my infancy.
It is strong emotions and full laughter.
Her house is large, always full of people,
figurines, art, yucca, beans, and a repose.

Do we know our mothers?
Do we live their commotions?

There is no aquamarine stone or harmonic lily
that knows that smile.
I confess I don't understand.
Perhaps by the composition of my cells
that demarcate the human duality,
or the torpor of logical rumors.
Finally, what does it matter?

My mother's voice is sweet.
And I remember her more in the slow afternoons of our dreams,
when with affection and patience my verses touch her breath.
One should see the happiness that resides in my mother's voice.

Writer

Cindy Snyder

BABY LOVE

I.

All you need is love
and succor — warm bed, your thumb,
hand on my body.

II.

Breath, co-mingled, is
a blessing that enskies me;
asphyxiates me.

III.

Trust, peace, hope, love in
the weight of a baby's hand.
The greatest, is sleep.

Photographer
Claire Mallett

SPEAKEASY
BEAUTY



Writer
Daniel Hirsch

IRON LINES, NOSTALGIA, AND THE
TENDERNESS IN BETWEEN

Her t-shirt read, “Eat More Kale,” a thin green knit that clung tightly to a straight torso. It drew attention to peaked shoulders and the subtle curve of her breasts, the effect amplified by an unwieldy denim bubble skirt that hooped and lifted with each movement. Every step and twist revealed garter clips — none of the four meaning to show — and dared them to cling fast to tattered lace stockings lest they decide to take the Chucks from her feet and part ways with the upper togs of the disjointed ensemble. The outfit beckoned playfully. So too did the wink she tossed in his direction.

Those clothes now occupied a desk chair. They slumped over the back and arms like a marionette with broken strings; shoes settled between the front legs, faithful as the family dog. With naked flesh relieving the distraction brought by the garments, her body’s theme again leapt out at him: a dichotomy of hair curled to roses and willfully beset against the severity of an angular face. And when she lit a cigarette and pulled it to her lips in a practiced, single fluid arc, slowly blinking before letting eyelashes settle into two feathered lines, only then did her age make its betrayal. She was older than the flouncy garb had let on, and that promised experience awakened him as much as the inexperience previously exhibited in her fashion.

Still, the gaze that had drawn him in remained the same. Her eyes anchored the two personalities as a whole, darting quickly and then slowly settling before opening to a depth that he had waited his entire life for. He felt his blood move faster. All of his lovers, dreamt and beheld, stood before him as one, and he now saw only her.

Writer
Jamie Wendt

ANDREA

Until the magazine arrived, he hadn’t realized she was modeling nude. On a Friday afternoon, he swung his leg over the seat of his bike, locked it up, then noticed the mail and Andrea’s nipple on the doormat. Her opaque garter pantyhose must have been the nightclub “outfit” she mentioned trying on last week. He had visualized black leather, a jumpsuit zipping up the front, the tightness of her biceps and butt perfectly round, her long fingers wrapped around a beer. He unsnapped the helmet’s buckle under his chin, held the magazine in both hands so that his thumbs bordered both her hips, her nipple surprising him again as he stared, longing for the cigarette she was smoking. She must have known that her bellybutton peeked above the panties, that her breasts sagged and left nipple eyed the camera like a secret while she looked the other way, fearless and bold. Suddenly he craved a 44-ounce coke, wanted to run into all the corner stores and knock the stacks of magazines to the floor, dishevel her stiff, parted hair and push both her hands down to allow buyers both nipples. He wanted to hold her face in his hands and use his thumbs to wipe off her dark eye shadow. He wanted everyone to know he saw her naked first.

Photographer
Donna Rosser

SERENDIPITY



Writer
Kristina McDonald

THE SNAKE PIT

You can't slow dance with a snake
but he can wrap his tongue
around your finger, he can wait
in the dark on your doorstep
he can swallow the flowers
your boyfriend sent you
he can whisper in your ear
that nothing matters
except what you feel

so you fall asleep to the smell
of wilted petals and you wake up
with scales under your nails
and everything around you begins to swirl
it's the same moment
you keep coming back to
the way his body fit in your hand
like a promise and now
your body is sinking and now
the ceiling is higher and now
you can't remember his name

and the walls around you hiss
you chose this, you chose this
now crawl your way out

Writer
Melanie Richards

LEAVING PARADISE

Her version of the story
remains untold: forked
tongue whispering to her

from the branches,
her life a snarl of doubt
and strife and disrepair,

green fire of the serpent
forcing her to choose.
She opened all the gates

to her body without fear
while summer swayed
on its green leash, glad

to die before that god.
The truth was this,
that the man refused

to burn, night after
night, and would not leave
the safety of the orchard,

those windless rows
repeating themselves,
leaving a future

without the promise
of that brilliant fruit
that he would never touch

or taste or love again.

Photographer
Gina Roston

REFLECTIONS



Writer
Charlene Kwiatkowski

RED

I part my hair
like I'm parting the Red Sea
red is for blood
fire
roses
and curtains in my living room

I can part those too
stare out the window
dark grey clouds
hang like a burden
watch them part
see the sun break through —

brilliant!
there are so many things that can part
tectonic plates
two roads
last night's mist
her name from your lips

Writer
Robert Christian Schmidt

MYSTIQUE

In the summer of '69, Véronique spent her days in the pool house waiting for Edgar to return.

The weekend they had spent in his mansion in the hills was one she would never forget, and she was sure that he had meant it when he said that he was going to leave his wife and run away with her. She left her apartment in the valley and moved into the pool house — not the mansion itself, for there were no servants on staff when Edgar was gone, and she couldn't maintain it by herself.

In June, Edgar sent flowers and cash with his apologies. He was going to be in Switzerland for three weeks for work. He'd see her on his return. She should buy something nice to wear for their night out on the town. She listened to jazz and read Camus and Steinem under the palms.

On the Fourth of July, there was a raucous party next door. Edgar stole away for an hour or two in the pool house, but there were too many hands to be shaken for him to stay. The shopping spree he sent her on so that she could be prepared for her entry into society was extravagantly lonely.

August came with the promise of dinner and dancing under the stars on the pool deck. The servants arrived to ready the mansion, followed by Edgar's children — and his wife. The butler introduced her to the family as the girls' new French tutor as she smoked the last of her Gauloises.

In the fall of '69, Véronique was found dead in the pool house where she had spent the summer waiting for Edgar to return. No one ever knew.

Photographer
Chris Bickford

MIDNIGHT KISS, AVENUE C



Writer
Judith Kitchen

LATELY

Lately she had been thinking about her one affair. Like a photograph in the chemical bath, it had become more clear over time so that now, in her mind, the two of them remained young, eager, somehow entranced. What she liked was that they had remained friends, talking to each other on the phone once a week for the next eighteen years until he died. In fact, they had settled into each other's lives, a bit like an old married couple, which was what he had once told her they might have become. She remembers because they had been standing on a busy corner, the streetlights a dulled yellow in the shiny wet pavement, and he'd put his arm around her waist and told her that, if they had met each other first, they'd have been giving dinner parties. That's when she knew that affairs were pure fantasy. She would never have been giving dinner parties with anyone.

Writer
Susana H. Case

NEW YORK NIGHT

In the crosswalk of a street they hadn't seen before, tunneling out from the subway to a new party, new friends, no taxis: the night traffic's quiet. It doesn't matter that he's just lost a job he liked, as the blue-green light spreads through the city, gently envelopes them. They're excited by all that's new, as well as the exquisite feel of skin upon skin, theirs now halfway familiar, that night, not their first night. No, not their first kiss, nor their thousandth, if they were to be so lucky to last together, but it's even odds if there are more brushes of lip upon lip, or more stars to wish upon visible in the haze.

Photographer
Hillary Atiyeh

TIM & ILSA - WAKENING SAVASANA
FROM THE SERIES "DAILY PRACTICE – THE ESSENCE OF YOGA"



Writer
Jeanne Gallaher

WE'RE ALL HERE

We're all sleeping under the stars,
hiding under linens and roofs,
yet under the stars.

We're all breathing wild living air,
teeming with pollen and insects,
the same living air.

We're all naked under our clothes
all of the time naked,
under our clothes.

We're all drawn to the bed of the earth,
pulled to the center,
bound to the earth.

We're all burning night and day,
all of us naked and tethered,
all of us under the stars.

Writer
Matthew Wimberley

PHOTOGRAPH AS A PERMISSION TO THE PAST

We are not allowed to linger, even with what is most intimate.
— Rainer Maria Rilke

In the black and white photo
A man and woman lie together
Naked and ringed in foxtail
As though they've begun
To lose one another.
Looking down on them
From overhead
He has her
Cradled in his outline —
The pallor of the field lit
Against the dark of their bodies.
Maybe this is how Adam slept
With Eve on their last night
In Eden —
Still naked and without knowledge.
Their hair is the same color as ink
Chosen for the Bible.
She is asleep.
He is kissing the blades of her shoulders.
Grass falls
Over them, and where the grass ends
Shadows band their white legs
Dimpled and cold.
His hands disappear under her chin.
There is no way to tell
How long they kept still
Or if he is whispering into her ear.
And because it is a picture
The two have already stood up
Dressed and walked away,
Together or alone —
Part of them left
Pressed against the ground.

Photographer
Susan A. Barnett

SEX ON THE BEACH



Writer
Sierra Golden

SO WHAT

My grandfather spent forty-three days lost at sea. Found dead, he held his cock and a photo of Mima. Now, she won't let go of my wrist when I duck out the trailer door. Her hands hover over peeling paint as the screen slaps shut. The hairdresser I call fondles my ear lobes. Some girl on the news escapes a flaming house just in time because Bobo the dog dialed 911. All the footage shows her rubbing his ears like they might turn to gold. She sobs, "We sleep together every night," and suddenly, every time, you wish you were the dog, licking between her toes and turning your belly up for her to pat. So what if I carry these women, their tongues and cheeks, the small humps of shoulder and knees across my bleak horizon? My head rattles with lust. I've got nothing. Don't we all burn to be touched?

LOVE + LUST | OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

Writer
Robert Christian Schmidt

HINDSIGHT

It seemed like a dream come true when she suggested it. His girlfriend wanted to bring another woman into the bedroom with them. Every porn fantasy he'd watched in college flooded his mind.

He loved his girlfriend, but it was confusing, at first. He wasn't sure where to look. Where to put his glasses. Where to put his hands. Where to put... well... anything. But the other two knew exactly what to do. They would put him on the bed and work him over while working over him.

He watched his fantasies come to life before his eyes. He always finished first, getting up to get something to eat, leaving them to do whatever it was they did. Sometimes they'd stay in the bedroom. Sometimes he'd hear them getting cleaned up in the shower.

The first time he came home to find them starting without him, he thought it was the best thing in the world — all the release, with none of the foreplay. By the fifth time, he started to wonder if he wasn't on the wrong side of a joke.

She insisted that she was still his girlfriend, and that this was just something fun to do. But he wasn't having as much fun as he had had when they started. Not even as much fun as when it had just been the two of them. It took all he had not to break down in front of them.

The morning after he told her that one of the three of them had to leave, he found his life packed in boxes and waiting in the front hall. Throwing on the first clothes he could find, he stumbled out into the glare of the new day, wondering if anything was worse than wearing his heart on his sleeve.

CONSOLATION



ZOE

Hands across my chest,
I take a deep breath I try to stay calm
One would assume that I am used to this by now,
She's running behind again,

Up the stairs she comes,
There is lightness in her step,
A certain sense of slowness that I often admire,
It is more important that today's outfit looks right than making it to the bus on time,

Out the back door we go,
Holding hands talking about the plans for the day,
I keep looking at my watch worried we won't make it,
She seems to be at peace knowing it will all work out,

Standing on the corner holding hands,
Encouraging the sun to come up just a little faster,
I pull her close knowing that our time together is coming to an end,
Perhaps I even lift her up off her feet,

Cherishing those few special minutes together,
Secretly hoping the bus is running a little behind,
Getting lost in those beautiful eyes,
Loving that infectious laugh,

As the bus approaches I begin to get sad,
Knowing that little girl will not be little forever,
How many more times will I get to do this,
As she climbs the stairs and leaves me for the day I look at her through the bus
window and whisper I love you.

THE PALLOR OF
THE WANING MOON

Our children, bless their hearts,
break our hearts as much or more
than loving their mothers ever did.

This is the shadowed sting of
fathering. Sinking stones shatter
the pallor of the waning moon.

SELF-PORTRAIT #1



DREAM BOX

Desire, even in its wildest tantrums, can neither persuade me it is love, nor stop me from wishing it were.
— W.H. Auden

At first, both her knees jerked
no way, ho's a.
Then all that money for a would-be star.
Though it still took more:
The dogged dream in which everyone
wanted her. And something about love,
early on so hard to place.

Anyway, she made the video
for the new interactive game
where players could have her
every which way, even loose;
and she let the haptic joy glove
that went along
be custom molded
from her formerly privates.

Their sole direction was don't act —
the public wants real. No saving
secret tricks for just your husband
as it's said the divas do.
And give them options. Do mad,
do starved, do trapped, do ice.
Not hard at all, remembering
Jack's silk thumbs in the boathouse,
a betrothed, a bridesmaid and a keyhole,
how the neighbor's kindness
turned sharply south.

Their bet was one day she'd be
a Marilyn or Madonna and fans
could then have her when she was fresh.
Like Mickey had Ava, well before Frank.
And, in that world, each could be
her only, despite all the others.
Which made her give everything —
farm girl sweat, full-mouthed drool,
lathered bush, kettle scream.

In the new millennium, love will need
many more places to hide.
And this, she thought,
the last pouch they'll search.
Hence the cover was her design,
to throw them off, to match the dream:
Faceless hands,
lewdly young boy's, lately old man's,
one's first bid, one's last.
And everything in between.
To herself, she gave the wrinkled sheet
like a brown paper bag. No jewels.
Eyelids soft and cast toward earth.
Rough-cut, platinum hair
with dark and holy roots.

PORTRAIT WITH SADNESS
AS SUBJECT

In the black and white photo
A woman is covered in a sheet
Wrapped like a dress
Centered against a dark background.
She is caught up in a net of hands
Though she does not look afraid —
Face cocked to one side
Downturned, lips and eyes
Closed. Her right
Hand is holding the fray
Of the cloth against her breast —
Almost translucent. And the pallor
Of her exposed thigh:
A kind of despair
For the figures just beyond
The frame. One of the unseen
Grabs her stomach
Another her wrist, and others
Her shoulder and forearm. Two hands
Do not touch her
One is closed, tender next to her forehead
Maybe ready to brush the hair
From her cheeks.
The other holds a corner of the sheet
As if a cape
Or an extension of the woman —
A wing of off-white feathers
Ready to fall away.
Angelic as she looks
Empty of struggle
One light cast down on her,
There is a melancholy
In her pose
Like grass in a field
After a thunderstorm.
Looking at her
I could reach out and brush
My hand across
Her chin and collarbone
Though, it would mean nothing.

LOVE



PHANTOM

Why do I feel like we are each kissing

the one true love who got away?

I'm glad you are here, in my arms.

I care for you,

even if my heart was long gone

before the day we met.

THE SHADOW BETWEEN US

I don't know why you haunt me. You weren't my first boyfriend, or even my "first." Maybe because by the end of our first date, we'd finish each other's sentences. Within a few weeks, we'd lay in each other's arms and plan the future, our future, even while her shadow hovered between us; present, but not there.

You told me about her. Your fiancée. At least, on our seventh or eighth date you did. It was too late, I'd fallen in love. Confident you'd see the error of your ways, I'd snuggle close, listen to your fears, say "Everything will be fine," while hoping you'd dump the bitch. You didn't.

After six months with her always there but not there, in the bed between us, I ended it. Or maybe you did. We'd both ended it so many times by then I can't recall who dealt the final death blow. I waited by the phone, knowing you'd call. You didn't.

I went to bars, parties, anywhere I might run into you to show you I'd moved on. To see you one more time. To see, in the flesh, the shadow that still hung over me. My longing became tortured obsession, stalking. I drank to forget, but those brain cells carrying memories of you wouldn't die. I fucked other men to forget, but you were there, in the bed, between me and him. Between me and all of them.

Time heals wounds, but leaves scars. I don't think of you anymore. I don't Google your name or dial your phone. I don't go to those bars. I don't fuck those men. You've faded. A shadow.

I don't think of you at all anymore.

ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL



PRINCESS

When my daughter told me she loved him, I could have screamed.
But I didn't.
Everyone else had already been critical enough.
Though I knew he was just not right,
here was my baby, my princess,
whom I'd sworn to honor and protect,
more determined than I'd ever seen her.
No... the time for sage advice and even the gentlest of questions had long since passed.
So, when she vowed, "We'll be together forever!"
all I could do was hug her close,
tell her I love her,
and pray
the bite that was surely coming
wouldn't leave a permanent scar.

THE EMBRACE

sometimes you can just see it
in the eyes —
the yearning
three years ago she disappeared
into a mist
of confusion, she wanders at night
he speaks to her, she says
who are you
go away

the dog is a constant surprise
that usually pleases her
he watches the dog
to be sure she does not kick it
or strangle it with her love
he never knows which —
when the dog is outside
she yearns for the dog
somehow remembering its absence
the dog yearns
to be outside
to be free
of her embrace

the man yearns, yearns
for the woman who left —
who didn't live for the dog
for the days
when they were young
she cooked and cleaned
and danced, spinning
in the light, under the olive trees
when her hair grew long
when her eyes saw him
yearned for him —
and they came
together
in wild embrace.

Photographer
Gary Mitchell

THE MOMENT



Writer
Shelly Catterson

SIDEBURNS

He wore those punk rock cowboy sideburns, fuzzy arrows pointing right to his lips, so she took him to bed. He lived above a Himalayan restaurant, always smelled of curry. And dirt from planting trees. Those afternoons with him, dirt smelled better than anything, even lilacs.

Her decision manifested like lightning, but the execution crawled at the rate of geology. Trees grew out of rocks in the time she took to cross her heart and the train tracks below his apartment.

But she didn't hope to die. Not before she rested her hand against his left sideburn, just below the scar.

Writer
Rosemary Ann Davis

HE/SHE HAD SEX

I gave you the V.D. He had sex with a different man every night. She never saw him again. He told him he wanted to be monogamous. They fucked in the bathroom stalls with the doors open. Her roommate was a lesbian. He touched her in front of the other men. They wore leather. The flame came very close. The infection was serious, so they went to the hospital. His nipples were pierced. The women at the street fair took their shirts off. I sat on his lap in a bar. Don't touch me. I sat back up on the sink; spread my legs. The wax dripped down. She had sex with strangers the night before every holiday. I seduced the man next door. Her nipples got hard. She stayed with each of them for three nights. I came. He kissed him. He picked her up and pushed her back against the wall. I dropped them off at the bathhouse after the bars closed. They had anal sex until she bled. The dildo was passed around as a joke. I talked about sex with my therapist that next morning. He wanted to be loved. The doctor gave her a shot. I knew he slept with my old boyfriend, but he didn't know that I knew, and I didn't know that he was still sleeping with the girlfriend I thought was long gone. She swallowed it. The seats in the theater were sticky. That *really* turns me on. She made out in the bushes. I was horny. He never found a partner. I felt isolated. Asian men attracted him. He spanked her hard. He put his arm around the other man's shoulders and pulled him in. They checked each other out. She knew she did not want to be alone.

Photographer
Michelle Bablitz

PROM QUEEN RETROGRESSION

46 | 47



LOVE + LUST | OPEN TO INTERPRETATION