

BALKAN LOVE STORY

she looked exactly like the pic on her profile
but with more clothes on
dark eyeliner, distant stare
i thought she called her hair violent
but her accent, thicker than the stuffed pepper
i ate in the marketplace
was describing a shade of purple.
"why would you come to Bosnia," she asked,
more as a statement.
we drank Sarajevska then walked to another bar
past anti-NATO graffiti
and buildings once kissed by mortars.
she never stopped smoking.
down Marshal Tito Boulevard
we found a loft room
ordered half-liters and kissed.
"i'll never leave here," she said
not without a certain defeat in her voice.
and though i tried, it was difficult to understand
the cultural identity and background
of a Muslim girl from a nation scarred by war
who was out-drinking me,
whose favorite band was Joy Division.
"i like going out with American men,
you all have credit cards. . ."
we carried each other into a taxi,
some beat up Yugoslavian coupe
that took us into the hills,
passing out on a cold futon.

when i woke up, still drunk
my head was trying to nuzzle
into the leather jacket
she was still wearing.
i stood and found a cigarette
looking around in an abandoned house
full of black cats
and piles of garbage
wanting to leave quietly
but looking out the window
at the lights of the city
in the distance
i knew it was a long walk
back to Sarajevo.

WITHOUT TURMOIL

i've never known a life without turmoil
that million miles of bad road
with the consequence of
departed laughter.
for as sure as the coins today
will slip from my pocket
so too will those lost passions
obscure with the years.
people enter
and leave,
ghosts of tenderness,
our companionship made
to be thwarted.
i've never known a life
without the threat of depression,
looking at the sky when
i was 10 years old
saying fuck you to God,
'you're as real as Santa.'
growing up in the shadow of a nation
at constant war
where the enemy is whoever
we aren't shown on the news
and everything we own
was paid for in blood.
i've never known a life
without uncertainty
my eyes and my heart

pleading to see distant lands
for the burning risk
of madcap love
the derelict drag and
that sliver of freeway,
all the wanton cries and
adversarial nights
grasping for promise
headlong toward the light,
taken as one, shoulder to shoulder.
i've never known a life
without turmoil.

RIDE

she gets in the passenger side with
a crashing bounce and slams the door
in one motion and her dumb pretty smile
makes a collision with mine.
she rolls the window down and lights a smoke
with matches from the center console,
hand out the window and feet on the dash
before i even pull out into traffic.
"what did you do last night," she asks
already knowing the answer
from someone else.
i tell her anyway.
she laughs, shakes her head, takes a drag,
exhales straight up in the air.
we're at a stoplight and she leans over
plays with my hair, tosses her cigarette
out the window and mutters something about
getting salad rolls at a Vietnamese place on 82nd.
as the light turns green i wonder
how many filters stained with her red lipstick
pollute the city's gutters.
"let's wear clown costumes
and go ice-skating at Lloyd Center."
i don't answer.
we drive, we sit in traffic
she plays with the stereo
it begins to rain.
i'm looking straight ahead
but can sense her expression sour

as the wipers start to screech.

"let's move to Lithuania and start a
tour guide company. we'll live in an
abandoned house and adopt a
bunch of stray cats."

gaw damn, she's full of ideas today.

i glance over as she lights another one

staring straight ahead

behind her five dollar sunglasses.

"oh wait, it's cold there. let's go

to Uruguay."

the rain starts coming down in sheets

and i forget where we're going.

it doesn't matter anyway.

FOR BRIAN

i'll meet you out there
past familiarity
cut loose and lost
our bank accounts empty
in a land with a language barrier
and the kindness of strangers.

i'll meet you out there
we can play the desperate-hearted
desperadoes, where the footsteps
of our lives
intersect with one another.

i'll meet you out there
with pocket change and bad habits
driving a beat up Chevy
'til it runs outta gas
and we're left stranded with only
a six-pack and some backwashed dreams.

i'll meet you out there
almost by accident
when the fog of San Francisco
lifts us
by divine circumstance
graciously
into her palm.

i'll meet you out there

dizzy off a Chinatown Bus
with a wound in my foot
to explore army surplus stores,
the cemeteries and train tracks
of West Philly.

i'll meet you out there
to the places only you have been
the motorcycle madness of Havana
and the seas where you so often
make yourself at home.

i'll meet you out there
many times, before we're old
and we'll run laughing, crying
from the hell we cause to ourselves
away from the void
and into the cosmic wilderness
of brand new chapters.

A WINTER'S NIGHT

she was smiling back at me
mostly with her eyes, glowing
like the rock from space
that killed off all the dinosaurs.
we were talking about the Dust Bowl
for some reason, about black blizzards and John Steinbeck,
the term 'Okies,'
and how neither of us
had ever been to Arkansas.
my glass was continually refilled
even when i didn't need it
wondering to myself why
i wore a white button-up shirt
to a red wine affair.
and the warmth carrying between our faces
could have gone all night
if not for the fact
she wanted an adventure.
"bring the bottle, let's go up
to the cemetery.'
so we stamped our feet, laughing loud enough
to frighten the whole neighborhood,
clinging to each other
like gravity's next victim
with anticipation of the fall
being part of the game.
ambling among the tombs
we smoked Parliaments and read epitaphs
holding each other up

in the wet uncut grass
exhaling mists of Cabernet
and discussing roundly
what our inscriptions
should one day be.