

Kyle Hemmings / Two Stories

Manhattan Love Story #1

In city windows, our bodies look supersized, our faces, sad steroidal aliens. To whom does each one belong? It's 5:30 a.m. and wet. Sidewalks are wet. I want another cup of coffee, black, no sugar. On a dance floor of spilled liquor and sweat, Zin and I acted out our fantasies of new wave love and white swan heartbreak. But now the streets are empty. Echoes are not possible. It would take a person or an animal blinded by loss. Beyond the immediate boroughs, Zin declares that the rest of the world is melting, lovers are turning one-dimensional or flat. She's still working on that sci-fi story. We pass an oyster bar, then a small gallery featuring Cezanne and Man Ray photos in a magenta-hued light. I try catching the light rain on my tongue. You don't love me yet, says Zin, because I am too many people. I am every reflection I look at. I am every character I create. No, I say, I don't love you because you're a reflection I've already caught. You only love what you don't have. It's like the rain. Try holding it and it becomes a thing of the past. Zin covers my ears and says Shhh. Do you hear them? She asks. Behind every door, you can hear the lovers, and in every lover—a secret. Every lover tries to destroy the other because it's a piece of themselves. Then they try to get it all back. A puzzle for two, all jagged spaces intact. Zin walks backwards shooting me a queer gaze that is forced, that tilt of the head that is uniquely Zin when she is philosophical. A car rushes by. She loses her balance, falls from the curb. I rush to grab her. We're both wet, I mean, wetter than what we were in a simple drizzle. With jugged jaw and wide dandelion smile, Zin looks back at me, into my eyes that she always describes as little Neanderthal men who can't make a fire. I smile back, then focus on my hand gripping her upper arm. It must be some kind of love. I can't let go. Not in this story.

Manhattan Love Story: Marry Me

My mother told me never to trust girls who speak from the side of their mouths. But Zin, with her rainbow bracelets and flat vans, can't speak any other way. A creature of A.D.D. and zip up leather, studded belt and the next No Wave, has mistaken me for the last fuzz boy guitarist who dumped her over a groupie into Goth and 50's horror films that are HYSTERICAL. So it's Saturday afternoon in a life of endless afternoons, waiting for balloons to fall, or poppies to emit milky juice through terminal pores. I mean I'm bored. So Zin calls and says what's up and yadda yadda yadda and I'm definitely leaving for school at the end of the summer and yadda yadda yadda and why is love such an ugly brute and yadda yadda yadda and I'm like Why not? So we're standing in the throng of a Central Park crowd, sweating in our skinny jeans. It's a free concert-- Blackie Ghoul and the Undertones-- who are from the Michigan area and formed as a high school band back in '64 and who have since recorded three singles but can't get picked up by a major label. And Zin is looking too cute with her chubby thighs and Ultra-glow pink lip gloss and I'm thinking of flowers falling but are they free? An announcer enters the stage and lists upcoming acts for the summer. Zin is whispering some crazy shit in my ear, like how she would marry a boy who was her best friend or some lines from her poetry like how the sky raped her but she lusted for the sun, or how the mushroom is not a symbol of the penis, it's just a vegetable that grows in her poems and I say, Zin, like you're tickling my ear. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Blackie comes on stage dressed as some glitter cowboy with shades. I'm starting to think what the Fall will be like with Zin gone. It was always a thing of Almost Love or there's somebody else just a notch above you. Zin is bobbing her head to Blackie's tune about devil women. Zin is holding my hand. Zin tongues my ear and smiles as if to say Fuck it, right? Blackie asks for a volunteer for his next song. But where is Zin? She's joining a commune. She becomes a shadow underneath your everything. I'm having flashbacks of Zin on a tricycle. We even shared raspberry popsicles at the age of eight. Was it so wrong? I'm raking through the crowd. I'm interrogating faces. Where did you hide Zin? My mother's voice answers: She will not be the girl you will marry. Honey, She's Been Around. No, mom, she's just a showy girl with too much black eyeliner. Inside she's crumpled petals. I was always unripe. I push my way to the stage. There is Zin belting out a Blackie tune. There is Zin on stage, outrageous and flirting with the crowd, making them beg for her smile. There is Zin looking down at me. I love you, Raspberry, she sings. Marry me, I shout back. She throws her brassiere into the crowd and I jump into space like the guitar solo I never could play.

Kyle Hemmings lives and works in New Jersey. His work has been published in Decomp, Blue Fifth Review, Dark Sky Magazine, Thunderclap Press and others.

Ricky Garni / One Poem

White Out

She wrote this

love love love

love love love

She said it helps me think

Then she wrote this

love love love

love love

Then she said

Everything happens

for a reason

Ricky Garni is a graphic designer living in Carrboro, North Carolina. He is toying with the idea of not being a graphic designer and just playing Beatles songs on the piano at the sushi joint in town. Seriously. He has this huge fake book and the sushi joint is like two blocks away.

James Michael / One Poem

Susie

It's a breeze to wade through a blind-green forest,
Than the thicket of the cheese-white pea seedlings
That snake charms her foot.
A misstep or a bird shadow diffraction that
Swims across the wall can sepulcher her
In the blue-white gauze of the evening.

Susie looks through the window and meanders
Into tales of her pastor sibling, orange saplings,
And plants which give tears, in lieu of the early-morn
Water sprinkles from her hospital-green herbarium.

At nights she knocks at our doors gently, wheezing heavily,
Waiting for the silence to settle, only to wheeze
And knock again, with her pious smile, star-gazing eyes
And the panting of a lonely herbarium,
To sprinkle yarns of her husband who had
Spent her, after a yield, with her gripes and black bile,
Beside the viridian bloom of a mango tree.

Susie intersperses our anxiety, with a libidinal growth
In our knickers, her face haunting us in our humid
Orgasmic, masturbatory nights, with mosquitoes
Whizzing past silently, droning through our hearts,
While Susie pants and pants and claps and claps
Like the final act of a giant old tree about to trip.

As Susie waits, bejeweled in moonlit eyes,
Street dogs make spectral double
Shadows through the tremulous shimmy
Of light bulbs, even as her seedlings
Twine through her feet, up the calves,
Making love to the snake heads of her
Whiskered legs, and drowns her into
The dizzy concentric shadow splotches
Of her courtyard.

Eddie Jones / One Story

Lethal, Irregular Beats of That Personified Body of Water

One of the most disturbing aspects of this story is that I can't prove any of it. Following the characters here will lead you to a village where bags of salt are reasonably priced and often sold in pairs. The first images are arresting, with the rugged and monotonous family life coming swiftly into focus. Timeless fishing, grandiose portraits of burdened homes, wide open spaces: it's all here, and it's all very convincing.

Vast and arid sea and sky emerge mighty as the only pillars of style. Through a careful glance you will notice the touching details of an industrialized city, and a few ideas. In ignoring these aspects for the seedier, more depraved ones, remember, as a sensitive outsider, that the sly charm of these elements will turn deadly serious very quickly.

If you lived here, you would be inexcusably poor at most things. It would be all I could do to resist my urge to turn away in shame.

A majestic documentary portrait would give the impression of a gradual pyramid of drama. In reality, the beauty is in knowing that things have always been broken. The good news is extraordinarily expensive. Nothing happens is what it comes down to. Clunky syllables are fraught with anxiety, and death is just part of it.

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More often than not, you would be a friend of a friend. Whatshisname was with you on the night in question, and you were bowling, then praying, then writing letters to the local authority commending their efforts and their steadfast valor in the search for justice.

You may be called upon in a moment's notice to let your light shine with a surprising intensity, or simply to order imported spinach. The saucy Emma Jay will complete the cast, found in whitewashed sunsoaked rooms on Wednesdays that are described here as elegant in their handling of the glistening streaks of human juices pollocked on the ceiling and floor.

For breakfast there would be a sort of creamy chocolate and rabbit loins. The season of imaginatively decorated oil lamps would begin in spring, marking the period when it is acceptable to wonder at the horror and the emotional grief set upon you by living here. This is

John Besetti would be the played-out protagonist, tough-souled in his startling portrayal as our charming young hero in a decaying world. The result would be hailed as something new.

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In the years following the security cameras and the bloody games of hide-and-seek, discussions of relocation and the effects of torrential flows of money will be interrupted by mini-revolts and voiced suspicions of corruption, ultimately resulting in mass disembowelments or widespread exile for those questioned, in the hopes that they may keep their innards at the price of being tossed out onto the fires of fate and into the wild jungles of outer Blier Cooke County.

Assuming you survive this, you will become lodged in the vehicle of local tradition, steeped in pop fantasies too silly to enjoy. You will slowly come to realize that the waltz is a terrific mode of self-expression, and you will dream of gathered masses paying top dollar to see you perform.

Being violently awoken one morning by a punch delivered warmly to your female-like trunk, you will shake the urge to marvel at the level of self-pity that consumes your every waking moment.

Local universities have named you Barty by now and labeled you as a style-free nerd. Insistence that you do in fact have style will be met with violence and hard rock and roll. The skies will mock you with nature's vulgarity, and black clouds will follow you from one clever plot twist to another.

In the end, your wife will leave you for a woman who resembles R. J. Cutler in every way. As a kind of revenge, you'll will yourself cross-eyed and wallow in your own sick. You will be locked away in some asylum known for its lack of windows and its smell of rusted machinery based simply on the suspicion that you are now a funny looking bastard. There's more, including a series of mishaps, but I feel it's best to stop here before I inadvertently alter the course of fate and make your life any more livable.

E. Jones is about yay high, with a strong affection towards very chocolate candies. Not a day goes by that E. Jones isn't seen walking too quickly or driving too slowly. He hates winter, but loves the lack of heat.

Neil Ellman / One Poem

The Meal of Lord Candlestick

(After the painting by Leonora Carrington, 1938)

The Lords and Ladies
Of Wax
Hold court
In an imagined land
Feast on flesh
Down to the soul
Creatures rare
Birds with the necks
Of ambrosial swans
Bowls full of apricots
And deities
And dancing sylphs
The soft skin
Of children
The crunch of
Their bones
The eyes are the best,
They say,
A place of honor
On the serving tray,
Fit for nobility
And the Lord himself
But to eat a child
Is to change into a child
Again
And to eat a god
Is to turn into a god.

Neil Ellman lives and writes in New Jersey (USA). His poetry has appeared in numerous print and online journals throughout the world, as well as in five

Prarthana Banikya / One Poem

Life

When biting winters
envelope concrete jungles
they head for warmth
in cold marbled rooms
buildings that stand tall
towering against others
a jillion lilliputs.

Sultry summers and monsoons
they usher in stormy nights
blurred days fade into dates
of kraft papered calendars
a dozen upturned edges
hang on rusted nails
in kitchen corners.

When Christmas hovers
they swarm markets
with bulky bags
they hunt, they scout
for little delusional treasures
treasures that fill their days
before being tucked away
in dusty cupboards nooks.

Days roll into months
forgotten moments
a lot like rain
they trickle down
years like dark alleys
they drag their lives
a bevy of jaded years
as stars burn and fall.

Prarthana Banikya is an activist based in Bangalore where she works for underprivileged children for their right to health and education. A graduate in Sociology from Miranda House, Prarthana spent her formative years in

Shalaka Patil / One Poem

Lead Role

Is there a little crevice now, where there used to be skin and bone?
Bludgeoning - a precipitous loss of the mental vision I called my own

But there is that force still, vacuous, that has replaced imagination,
Not much left for me to say after everything has already been spoken

I got in a little too late and didn't touch anything for the fear of loss
Tied around my neck, tightly wound, suffocating, my personal albatross

But I am quick to move, it takes some effort and there's always my seat,
Its comfort deceives me into believing, it's the "right" thing, not defeat

Of course I will listen to you, no matter how long winding your story,
And clap on cue so you won't follow my internal trajectory

If it's a matter of time, does it play backwards without asking for your permission?
Jumping into childhood with pretty pink tales, when as an adult I haven't even begun

So here we are, dressed in our finery, prepared for the battle to be
Our knives are sparkling, the battlefield blazing, but where's the enemy?

Shalaka Patil is a lawyer and until recently, was living in Bombay. She graduated from law school in 2009 and was working (litigation practice) for about a year, and is currently working towards a Masters at Harvard Law School. In the realm of non-legal publications, she has previously written for several supplements of the Times of India and the Newtopia magazine.