

Still Swallowing the Cure

It's always the same production...Borderline
smuggles a razor inside her shoe. And there are
the permanent guests, whose pinched
blurred faces blend in
with the tasteless wall decorations.
...I've returned, recommitted,
and yet the craziness isn't what it used to be.
I've lost the hang of it—the innocence of it.

Ω

I don't write poetry anymore. I gave it up to architect pixels into compelling Webs and digital rhetoric; adorning the screen with bright colors and the posed smiles of college students, professors and, researchers. I am part of a machine that sells something. I used to believe in what I do, but lately I've been questioning whether I need to make a change.

Ω

I retreat to my studies, my books and my computer games. I try to trust in the possibility that I can still be more. The knife still tempts me. Just the other day, I had to throw it away where it couldn't easily be reached—there are more people to disappoint, now.

Only I see the old scars. In the middle of meetings on marketing strategy and improving client service, I catch myself looking at them, trace my fingers over the faint, slightly puffy scars—four times a diagonal line. Four ragged purple hearts—the only visible reminders from wounds received in battle. I wish someone, anyone, would ask me about them so I could tell my war stories. How I survived—how I still survive, how I have kept from dying, how dying that way isn't an option anymore, even though it still calls to me.

Three years of therapy, then junior college—poetry classes in an anxious manic daze until it was more than just an exercise in healing—I was becoming something, a poet, a star, even a tiny little star; An award-winning little star poet. I had focus and purpose, I belonged to something, I was something, and there was something ahead for me that I could live with and love myself with.

I don't write poetry anymore, but it's still inside of me, speaking to me in distracted moments. Lines rise up inside of me and for a moment I am half in the moment, half observing it as a metaphor. But I can't seem to hold on to them anymore or scribe them into a saving grace.

Ω

Small stones tossed from their ocean boudoir
ride foam, nestle in irregular piles, lie still
and washed. The cures, the drugs, every book-smart
psychiatrists plan to straighten crooked psyches,
none make a moment so clear, as these wet,
simple stones freeing themselves.

Ω

I was first hospitalized in a psychiatric ward at the age of sixteen; locked up with a bunch of lunatic adults before spending months at a time in an adolescent psych facility, in and out, during most of my high school-years. Schizoaffective disorder was my first, incorrect diagnosis. Finally it was manic-depression, Type I with mixed features, my genes would bear it out; pretty heavy sentence for an introverted teenage girl who was in the youth group and spent all her time, nosed pressed in books. True, I did hear voices and see strange and secret messages on billboards and on TV. And there was the day I snuck home from school and hid in our dank and moldy Michigan basement, so my parents wouldn't find me—I did correspondence courses for the rest of that year.

Ω

You can't tell people about this—mood disorder, chemical imbalance, mental illness, no one wants to hear those words from you. No one wants to know you sometimes think about cutting yourself or swallowing an entire bottle of sleeping pills, or even that you want to stay at home and never venture out again.

We've lost some of our greatest writers to this illness—drowning with a pocketful of rocks, a locked garage with the car running, head in a gas oven. Seriously, you can't tell people about this stuff, at least not people who aren't family or friends—even some of them can't bear to hear it. That being said, I want to tell EVERYONE. On a daily basis I want to tell people at work or in school, "Look it, I'm dealing with something here. I need a break. I'm not a freak, I'm not a psycho, I just need a little understanding. The problem is there is no easy way to live in their world and mine. Some days I don't even have to pretend I'm one of them. Some days I am flush with average American can-do mentality. Playing the game, playing the game, but you never know where or when or how it's going to come at you.

Ω

What visions I have of you
 tonight, Anne Sexton,
I dreamt you again. You
 sipping your gin
at my kitchen table,
 offering a cigarette
when I couldn't find
 my lithium.

Ω

I don't recall exactly when I discovered Anne Sexton. When I read her poems I felt as if she'd been inside my brain—it was giddy and euphoric. It's like falling in love when you find someone who's anguished the way you've anguished—of course I made her my muse. I still talk to her once in a while, but she is disappointed in me and my trite marketing career. She laughs at me, taunts me to find where I left my poetry. I try to convince myself I just don't have the time or the energy to do it anymore. She knows I'm afraid, afraid of not being crazy enough to write brilliant, to slip into that space where you can slip words out of your unconscious. She knows I've promised never to be seduced by insanity and the death games, again. I've made promises, promises to myself that I intend to keep. It's sad having to make this choice, it's sad that it feel like I have to make a choice. Lately, I have been disappointed with Anne. Maybe that's not fair, maybe she could not hang on, maybe she couldn't find the a saving grace to carry her on. I idolize her for her courage in words, in

capturing a pain so exquisitely, but there is no glory in dying like this. The ones you leave behind, we find ways to keep going—don't think it's because we've escaped the death dreams. Once a week or more, I contemplate to one degree or another, the pros and cons of ending this burden. Some days, it's only the promise I made to myself that keeps me swallowing the cure, along with the shame of leaving behind the ones who keep me afloat.

Ω

When she is lost, I find my mother hands
deep in the earth, digging down
to the old woman who always lives
among the frangible bones of the earth.
She calls to me, tells me to sift the dirt
and see what I can find. She says it is the only
work we *have* to do, gathering the bones.

Ω

I'm sitting in my mother's kitchen as she makes us big mugs of Irish breakfast tea with milk and raw sugar, like the kind we had when we went to Ireland. She uses the brightly-colored saucers, blue, salmon, gold and lime green, the ones we picked out on one of our Tuesday-night-get-togethers. She opens the sunroom door inviting in late afternoon light and her gray mama kitty, naturally addressing her as one would a very important person.

I think back to the first time my mother had to look inside and see the whole black and blue, sad and sick, top to bottom, broken me. I remember how she carried me through half a dozen or more hospital stays, twice as many doctors, new drugs, midnight ambulances, overdoses, emergency rooms, restarts and relapses—hers and mine.

We head outside and sit in her garden, where we've dug in the earth every Saturday during Spring and I forget everything except petals and stems. I walk through her garden—a riot of poppy, astilbe, coreopsis, and the crowning butterfly bushes arching over our heads—there is no other place where she is more beautiful and I am at peace.

We walk to the woods and fill baskets with wildflowers—wood sorrel, cinquefoil and Queen Anne's Lace. She tells me their names as we walk to the pond, our duplicate prints sponged in the marshy earth. I'll forget again, enraptured by this woman who holds within her hands the secrets of women and flowers.

In late summer, we slice plump red tomatoes and sweet Vidalia onions from her garden, into a simmering broth of garlic and basil. She motions to me to come and sit with her on the porch facing the pond. She leans back in her chair framed by the slightest flush of sunset and releases a sigh making me more comfortable with the world. I realize then, this is that one perfect moment my heart has been trying to write, again and again.

Ω

010000110100101101010100
0100110001101111011101100110010101110011
010100110101011101001111

Ω

His hair is full and soft, dark brown
awash with silver. I run my hand up
the back of his neck, fingers spread,
swirling handfuls of thick locks
in smooth circles. Sometimes, when it is longer--
about two inches on the top, I make his hair
into silly shapes--Frankenstein, Wolverine,
mad scientist. Sometimes I lay
my cheek against his hair, breath him
in, all the way to my heart, where I save
these moments of closeness. This is his comfort
and the way I tell him I love him and the way
I feel loved, through this simple gesture of touch.

Ω

I began playing my first MMORPG: A Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game, Ultima Online, in 1998. Of all the many characters I've created and played, since then, there is none other I have enjoyed as much as, Rhonin. I came up with the name, Rhonin, after watching the action crime thriller, Ronin, with Robert De Niro. I added an "h" to give the name a more feminine feel. Rhonin is my second self. I say "is" because her affect on me has transcended a pixilated extension of myself in an online game. My experiences playing her online, have co-mingled with other digital experiences and still other, more corporeal experiences. I created Rhonin. Rhonin lives in me. The act of living portions of my life through her, has enabled me to acquire and incorporate characteristics not born to me, into a collective identity that is part flesh and blood and part bits and pixels. I don't know exactly how this all happened, but I understand in my gut that it's true.

I can't explain, much less convince anyone, how relationships formed during online gaming can be as meaningful as those sans-digital, without mentioning the CAN-AM Alliance (C*S). I don't remember which of us came up with, CAN-AM (C*S), but I do remember the first time I met, Lord Impaler. My real life friend and former roommate, who had introduced me to Ultima Online, was also a friend of Impaler. My friend was leading an in-game event, where a bunch of players met and were paired up for a treasure hunt. Each team was given a list of things to find throughout the game world. I was teamed up with Lord Impaler...first impression: OMG! How arrogant! Despite how infuriating and stubborn Impaler seemed at first, we had a really good time on the treasure hunt. From then on, we started hanging out more and more in-game. He had played since the game was in beta, a year or so longer than me. So there was a lot for him to teach me about the game...with him.

So we talked and talked and talked some more. I don't understand exactly how your heart can fill up as if it's going to burst, just from hacking and slashing monsters or merely standing around and talking for hours, amidst the ones and zeros. One thing I will say, it wasn't a superficial turn on. There was none of that nonsense. Both of us think such things are stupid, meaningless and not us. It may have been as simple and random as two people who happened to make a connection in the safety and anonymity of a digital space; connections that were more elusive in more traditional situations.

At some point, time and space became more than digital and we had to readjust our relationship to accommodate physical considerations. We still have to do that today. I think it's normal for all couples who come to share real life space, regardless of where they first meet, to continually go through negotiations and adjustments.

He is logos and I am pathos and in an argument or even a debate, I'm the oil rising to the top of his boiling reason. We struggle to make our contradictory pieces fit together. Sometimes we disagree to disagree and spend twice as many days trying to reconcile.

On November 3, 2007, my husband and I will celebrate our sixth wedding anniversary. We give and take an inch at a time. We love and hurt in great gulps. Recently, I've taken to writing him love letters, something my mother recommended. "You have to start each one by telling something you love about him," she said.

I love it when you take me to work in the morning...I kiss you three times in the parking lot and you get my lipstick on your lips, but you don't mind. We tell each other to have a good day and "love you". You start to pull away and I look back and you honk and I smile and on those days my day starts happy and with love.

This is a love story of boy meets girl in the spaces between packets and pixels.

Ω

What can I author that's not already been conceived inside the mind of such a skilled artisan? For now, I can only hold this gritty sand and imagine pearls

Ω

My pursuit of poetry led me to Michigan State University, where I pursued a degree in English. While there, I took a humanities and computing class and received my first formal training in Web development. The computing class led me to an internship in Web development, which led to a job as a student Web developer for University Relations. After graduation and a stint as a part-time developer, I applied for and was hired as the Web Coordinator for University Relations at MSU. I had arrived. I was unquestionably sane—they don't hire crazy people to do this kind of stuff, right? Crazy people don't have proper offices and phones with extensions, their own computer and business cards with my name and everything, right?

My first project of my first real job was one of the biggest projects I have done to date—redesigning the university's homepage. There were four of us locked in a room for hour and hours for days with flowcharts and sitemaps, outlines scrawled on bits of paper and across the white board. The information architect pushed his information science and the marketing people argued politics.

You know that feeling when you are excited and anxious simultaneously, where you think you are going to fly out of your own head or puke, but you don't want to be doing anything else; I was trying my best to keep up and stay engaged and at the same time part of me was sitting back and looking at myself...*you've arrived.*

It was exhausting and frantic, but thrilling. It was an experience that set me on the path to becoming an expert in information design and research. It showed me that at the heart of it, managing a Web development project, or any project at all, is a process of thoughtful negotiations. At no other point in my life did this ever seem possible. I survived abuse, insanity—mine and my parents, the out of proportion life of a young manic depressive, reckless, hopeless, treading water. For the first time

when someone looked at me, they saw a professional, a colleague, someone with an insight, an opinion and they wanted to hear.

Ω

...a body
hungers for half-forgotten lyrics— how
after seven hundred speechless days
words can be found in dark measures of rain.

Ω

K.K., this morning I walked backwards in my mind to find us again—ten years since you first opened your door to me; opened your door and your cozy, sun-filled office—shelves and stacks of books surrounding. You opened a door for an out of the ordinary young lady still in a daze from those kind doctors trying to straighten her bent chemistry. I drove every week or so to your tidy subdivision—you are right, I never saw a single fox and no hills, either. You sure knew how to tell a story! WW II and you were living in Turkey as a traveling professor. Along with your beloved Marie, you raised your family all over the world: K.K., practitioner of poetry—a prescription never to be taken in small doses.

I am sorry if these words are a bit rough. You might not have heard but I gave up on writing poetry and went professional techy at the University. Instead of stringing words into song, I rearrange pixels into pleasant shapes and phrases—some even say I am “awesome,” but I still dream the dream of poetry. It is rather odd. I am not really in a subdivision like you were, but this city block does have neat little house after house and some are rather particular about cutting their lawns in fancy patterns. There is a church in my backyard, which I find more ironic than anything else. Jesus and I do not talk much; I gave up trying to figure out what in God’s name he is thinking. Truth is, K.K., I do not know what I believe—except now that I have been thinking of you, I am nearly convinced of divine intervention. Sentimental or not, K.K., it is only right that you know, whether it is a line of graceful haiku, a fragment of story remembered, or even something so small as not using contractions, you made a difference in me. A difference some might point to and call good character. To me, your kind teaching of wisdom and words—such gifts—volumes of light; a peace you shared from the masterpiece of your heart, transcribing a bit of grace forever onto mine.

Ω

Whether the small measure of song residing in my bones is half-asleep or has left me entirely, I do not know. I cannot remember how it happened—when I stopped hearing the murmur of unaccountable objects. Appalling, how everything before me owns no name, no existence outside what is dull and certain. I am ignorant of everything but the wind and the water it pushes me toward. In absence of inspiration, they are nothing more than graceful elementals entangled in a dance I cannot follow—once upon a time I knew their secrets.