



Blood and Salsa
by Jonathan Penton

Unlikely 2.0

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Some of the poems in *Blood and Salsa* have been previously published, in some cases in a different form, in:

Beatnik Cowboy
BorderSenses
Denver Syntax
datura
Edifice WRECKED
Muse Apprentice Guild
Newspaper Tree

*The boy in the belfry, he's crazy, he's throwing himself down from the top of the tower
Like a hunchback from heaven he's been ringing the bells in the church for the past half an hour
He sounds like he's missing something or someone that he knows he can't have now*
—Suzanne Vega, *Knight Moves*

On the many things I do not understand

He speaks of a passion, strange and wonderful

I think of Joanie Vollmer

I study her death besides Tupac's and Cobain's

I wonder at the precise size

of the hole in her forehead

I think of writing, this attempt to force others

to spend a moment with the thoughts I think every day

He tells me that he caught the literary bug at a young age

That's good, I tell him

Better that

than for it to catch you...

First Crush

One day I decided to climb up a mountain and think about you

I wanted to go to a quiet place, so

I found a pretty spot on the side of the mountain

but all I could think about was that old

boyfriend of yours

and how he threatened to kill you

Over the quail and the water

all I could hear was his voice

over and

over

I'll just fucking kill you, fucking kill you, fucking kill you.

I didn't want to think about him

and I didn't want to think about killing anyone

least of all you

So I climbed higher until I couldn't hear the quail anymore

but I could still hear his voice

So I climbed higher until I couldn't hear the streams

anymore

but he was still there

I'll just fucking kill you, fucking kill you, fucking kill you.

I had to climb higher

I kept climbing long past the heights that it was
 safe to climb
which wasn't so bad except I had no way to get back down

I climbed to the top of the
 mountain where all I could hear was his voice

I'll just fucking kill you, fucking kill you, fucking kill you.

Suicide Note #832

The cloud cover broke today
I have no friends, but
the sun at least wants to say goodbye

Shhh! Baby Jesus
is sleeping. He can love you
at a later time.

Oddly enough

it was raining

in the desert

I don't remember gender

just those big brown eyes

that saw something in me

I don't

Bruce Springsteen played

to remind me that I can't start a fire

worrying about a broken

I remembered Stephen Stills who said if you can't

be with the one you love love the one you're

and

I've heard

poets do not like to let go so

it is not terribly odd that

I see this moment as the quintessence of loneliness

when you're lonely

every moment

is as stupidly important

as the last

Oh, I remember you
Though I can't quite get a handle on where or when
But I remember steam and blindness
Menstrual blood on the sauna floor

I remember truth as a gun
Fantasy as a bomb
And lies for every possible purpose
I remember the alcohol that couldn't help me forget

I remember which details can be abandoned
And which memories can't be lost

Fucking

“I don’t like that word”

Chaya tells me

I sit silent

not wanting to answer as either a poet or a libertine

It’s hard to form opinions when I’ve yet to pick a role

Still,

When someone later tells me

that fucking requires a penis

I lose my patience

What was everything else we’ve done?

The casual play of idle hands?

It surely wasn’t making love.

Dearest Mother,

I swear to g-d, this is the very last time
The last hysterical telephone call
The last warrant issued
The last burned-out Chevrolet

I swear to g-d, this is the last wild woman
My Bonnie and Clyde days are over!
But you must understand
The opportunity I have here:

Past indiscretions don't come close to this
One more, and I'm done
Please send a small cheque.
I can pay you back in the very near future.

I had a guardian angel once
though he was never cut out for the job
After several years and a number
of fuck-ups, he was demoted
sent to take care of an Illinois McDonald's
where he mostly helps the grill chef keep up with the customers
and occasionally rescues the fry cook from fire

I was given new angels, one after
the other, but I never warmed to them,
no reason why. I was imprinted
I guess. Once you've had
a burger-flipping guardian angel
it's hard to relate to the more successful sort

Often, during rough spots, I find myself craving
undercooked low-grade meat.
Twice I've awoken outside Tasti-Freezes
in towns I've never seen. I hear the angel
has rough spots. Nobody will tell me where he wakes up.

“I’ve been listening to classical music,” she tells me
“I find it very soothing.
I need more relaxation in my life.”

I think of Wagner’s screams and Sousa’s marches
Prussians drunk on war and power—

—Beethoven’s unfinished concerto for the man he loathed
replaced by that crashing, maddening ode to the most unrelaxed
passion of all—

Disturbed, I cultivate friendships with my elders,
and a middle-aged man tells me that he listens to classical
music to decrease his libido

I think of
thin-lipped Germans and
bastard Russians

Nannerl touching Johann’s penis in the music room
as Leopold narrows his resolve and
Napoleon prepares for war

—I think of Austrian celebrities dressed like women and the
cuckolds who loved them—

I tire of such intricacies.
I retreat to my childhood world of rock ‘n’ roll
childish, transparent, Oedipal—

boy meets girl, boy fucks girl,
boy bashes father-in-law's head with a baseball bat
Simple, pounding rhythms,
brainless ballads of loss

The sort of thing I can relate to.

I seek simpler sexualities.

I turn my back on majestic music and briefly wonder
what other people hear

all i want
is for you to grab hold

of my sin

from the inside

surely
from that vantage

you can squash it forever

leaving me free

to truly love

all the
women who aren't you

Second Crush

One day I decided to climb up a mountain
I took along a small jug of water and a list
of all the women I wanted to cry about

But when I got halfway up the mountain, I realized that your
name wasn't on the list

I could have added your name to the list, but I had not thought
to bring a pen

I couldn't go back down, because by the time I went up again I
would forget how to cry

I couldn't cry without your name on the list, because then how
would I remember that I ever loved you?

I would have happily written in blood, but the nearby rocks were
so small that all I could do was put a bunch of ugly scratches on
my hand

The Rules of Attraction, Poetry Style

If you crave violence
and I crave violence
is it then cheating to stab you in your sleep?

To a Wife Forgotten

I was never untrue
To anyone but you

Watching You Say Goodbye

Sometimes we wait for nightfall
Sometimes we wait for romance
Sometimes we wait for our enemies to die
Sometimes we hold back our orgasm, watching our enemies
under our hips, waiting for them to come
All of these things are easy

My father is waiting for forgiveness
He doesn't remember the first time he gave me a black eye
He doesn't remember the first time he hit me with a chair
He doesn't remember the time in Oklahoma
the time in Texas
the time in Georgia
the time in Mexico
But he knows he has sinned, and he waits and he waits
for the day when I can call him and tell him I can trust him again
He knows that one of two things will happen
I'll forgive him, or he will die

I am learning about my father
I am learning about him when I see the love in your eyes
mixed with the fact
that you can never trust me again

The man in the leopard-skin robe says:
 each chakra is associated with a sound
 each sound unlocks another layer of the soul

He plays his sounds from a strange square machine
They are neither pretty nor offensive

In 80s Hollywood comedies
 having soul meant you could shake your ass

 Soul would come out of strange square machines

 The kundalini made a boom-shaka-laka,
 boom boom noise

The man in the leopard-skin robe does not play the flute
 the guitar
 the bongo
 the snare
 or the wa-wa

He swings a pendulum over my crotch, and I feel nothing at all

Possessions of the Lady of Uncertain Age

Bottom shelf:

wineglasses
champagne flutes
absinthe bottle
good times
transitory moments
memories of nothing more than that

Second shelf:

europa and the sea
stout beer mugs, delicate brandy snifters, coffee cups
the camaraderie of circumstance and time

Third shelf:

india, and the absurd knickknacks that implies
barbie-doll gods, archers and children
the failure of someone else's path

Fourth shelf:

ceramic figurines from nowhere
small children in love
a dancer rests her head in a harlequin's lap
a teenager combs waist-length hair
two girls just their tiny bellies out as far as they can:
one supports a rabbit, the other a hat

Fifth shelf:

victorian urchins
rosy-cheeked, full-bellied,
singing in the choir,
climbing a storm-ravaged tree
a mother, bundling children in the rags she
finds behind dumpsters and country clubs
a girl and a harmonica
a boy with a guitar

Top shelf:
one ballerina,
one nun,
and one cracked glass fish with a rose in her mouth

Debbie Deconstructs Dementia

After Suzanne Vega

She's losing her identity again

It started casually, when she told a few of her mothers' stories
as if they were her own

Then earnestly, as she realized she no longer knew the difference

the men that she's known become
slippery, indistinguishable
from the pubescent nibbling
of another girl on her breast

there are imprints on her flesh

from an encounter she is sure was more than twenty years ago

She is almost positive

that she was raised Catholic

Why does she have memories of living on the West Bank?

she has six pen names

how many of them are real?

She avoids the houses of her lovers and friends

They seem to offer no way out once she is in

Third Crush

After David Mamet

One day I met a woman with eyes like a Townes Van Zandt song

She told me I looked like Jesus, or perhaps Adam
We got along like dykes and dogs, but

I knew it wouldn't last
so I decided to love her leave her and spend the rest of
my life writing poems

about how much I missed her
That way, I could enjoy the pain of losing her and not have to
listen to her voice

I was proud of my plan and I decided to tell my mother about it

But my mother didn't like my plan

In fact, she got very angry

She told me that it wasn't right to love someone when you knew
you were going to leave them

I asked her if she felt that way about it why did she kick me out
of the house when I was only thirty-eight?

But mother wouldn't listen to reason

She was so upset that she called the beautiful woman
and told her what I was planning

But the beautiful woman didn't believe her

So I loved the woman and left her
and then I sat down and wrote this poem

I hope you like it
I hope the beautiful woman reads it
I hope it makes her happy

Enough

I know you saw me
doting over her
caring for her

taking all of her psychoses and turning them into something
a little more beautiful
than what was there before

You loved me then
and perhaps I was lovable

I know you saw me an hour later
telling him I'd kill him
if he offended me again

You snickered
thinking you were watching the macho bullshit posturing
of a kind and sensitive soul

Flattering, but I'm warning you now
and I won't warn you again:

it might have been macho bullshit
but it was not posturing
it was not a game
and I would have felt no guilt
no shame
at leaving his body at my feet
blood on my teeth
satisfaction in my eyes

And I know
 and I'd like to forget
But I know
 given the right circumstances
 I could do it to you

This is how I've always defined honesty
I rub in my own face
how thin the walls are
between the man I try to be

and all the wicked things
I know I've done
and all the wicked things
I will do in the future

I like to remind myself
when I'm reading stories to my son

or comforting a friend

or caring for my mother

of the time I popped open a man's eyes with my thumbs

and when I tell myself that I'm checking myself
I like to remember
how much pride I felt

when the tissue gave way

how much pride I feel today

When your mom
looks at you with those sharp green eyes
and tells you you just don't look like
anyone she's ever seen

When she tells you
that it was alright
that you married a *shiksa*
and you have to tell her
that she's talking about your older brother

That's when I want you to come back to me
With your bullshit about eternal love

Yet Another Letter to Bill Burroughs

Here we are
in no particular space-time location
mourning corpses with cunts

the stuff legends are made of
because you talk and talk, Bill
and we'll never know why you did it
although it's pretty easy to see why she let you

We have theories, treatises, easy explanations
We say it's easier to be dumped with finality

big fucking deal

Smartest poet of the 20th Century, you are, Bill
and the standard, the easy, explanation
seems dumb enough for you

As for why I did it, well
Despite the deep desire for drama they shared
my woman wasn't much like Joanie

who stubbornly took care of you

mine, ah
mine wanted *me* to take care of *her*
a burdensome pleasure, that
as you would know by proxy

So you killed Joanie

and I let the
human in Sandra die

Well, hell, no big deal for me
By the time this is published, my tiny literary clique will have
entirely lost interest in my personal little mess

You made yours into a career
bloom where you're planted, and all that jazz

Your wickedness
ran deeper than mine
and offered you more inspiration
a better vocabulary of hatred

a richer way to spread pain

and call it art

Forgive me, Bill, I'm babbling again.
Cut it up if it bores you, I already have.
What we know is this:
You shot a woman and became a god

Was it worth it, Bill?

To you, I mean.
We both know it was to her.
But was it worth it to you, Bill?

And I know you've tried to write the answer to that many times
and we know it cannot be done

Is it worthwhile
to push oneself past one's limits
to experience horror, cruelty and hatred
just to learn how to write?
Could you save us the trouble of research?

Ah, but Bill
we both know

anyone who asks
is destined to find out on their own

Jonathan Penton travels North America with two suitcases, a laptop, and a herd of feral cats. Many a town has observed his approach with vague curiosity, and many a town has sent him off with a hefty cleaning bill. Since neither he nor his cats are employable, he rarely backtracks. You can learn less about him at his web site, www.UnlikelyStories.org. He is deeply indebted to Michael Rothenberg for his assistance with this chapbook, as well as Rofiah Breen, Terri Carrion and Joja.

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