

Modern Romance

A Poetry Chapbook

An Honors Creative Project

by

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My Honors Creative Project involved the writing, compiling, editing, and self-publication of a chapbook of poetry. I wrote and revised nineteen poems (manuscript attached). From those nineteen, I selected eleven to include in the chapbook. I then consulted with a graphic artist and printer on layout, design, artwork, and printing of the chapbook. Attached is a copy of the completed Creative Project, the chapbook Modern Romance.

## MODERN ROMANCE

The fairy-tale ended soon  
After the honeymoon  
And sometime before the birth  
Of their first squalling son.

The ending began that night  
He came home drunk at dawn  
Falling up the stairs  
With drunken friends in tow.

Tension grew  
As his amorous advances  
Began to reek of whiskey  
And other women's perfumes.

The climax came  
One spring afternoon  
As she remade their rumped bed  
And uncovered among the sheets  
A sliver of crescent moon  
On a broken silver chain  
Last seen around the neck  
Of her best friend.

OPEN HOUSE

Violated  
Splintered door jams, useless locks  
Raped  
Attacked, alone, unprotected  
Pillaged  
Looted shelves, stolen mementoes  
Assaulted  
Unsafe in my home

Reward, revenge, repayment  
For thirteen years,  
Two children,  
And my freely-given heart.

## SHORT STORY

Last evening, restless,  
I searched the shelf for that novel  
I had left half-read.  
Like so many others,  
    It was gone.  
And I wondered if its story ended  
As ours had  
Amid boxes,  
    Spring sunshine,  
    Torn children,  
    Shredded letters,  
    And divided libraries.

## THE SET PIECE

He was the stuff of melodrama,  
His speeches full of poetry,  
Praises, pretty little platitudes.  
When he fell in love  
(Which was often),  
He loved with the passion of Romeo,  
Quick to forget Rosaline  
When a Juliet caught his eye.

But each passion quickly faded  
When reality meddled with romance.  
Love poems changed to poisonous prose  
When she refused to play  
The role he'd assigned her  
In his fantasies.

All of his women  
Proved fatally flawed:  
They were not tragic heroines;  
They were breathing, yearning flesh.

## THE PREY

Night memories of him  
Lie heavily on my mind,  
A black leopard  
Crouched on my chest,  
Clawing my neck,  
Moonlight glinting off his bright yellow eyes.

In my mirror in the morning  
After nightmares of hands  
Tightening with delight around my throat,  
Bruises are reflected  
In the blue-black of my eyes,  
A killer's fingerprints on my soul.

Though I've escaped him in daylight,  
In dreams he stalks me still  
Watching for an opening to pounce.  
Though my body's whole and healthy,  
My spirit's claw-marked still  
Bloodied by the beast  
It tried to heal.

## KARMA

Bizarre, isn't it,  
That my books, music, antique brass  
Can't fill the crater  
You've dug inside yourself.  
Surprised, weren't you,  
When you pulled me to the cliff's edge  
And instead of falling with you,  
I found hand hold, pulled up,  
Walked away.  
Lonely now, aren't you,  
Without forbidden lovers  
Or autistic children to hide behind,  
Alone with your skeletons, feathers,  
And notebooks full of lies and cries for mercy  
That no one ever reads.

As you were so fond of saying,  
"You reap what you sow."  
"What goes around, comes around."  
"You get what you pay for."

Enjoy the stolen books.

## THE ARTIST

Unruly curls escape  
From pony-tail and red barrettes;  
Blue eyes frolic  
Behind straggling blonde bangs;  
Hands gesture with exaggerated adultness  
As she interprets her latest work:  
A crayola portrait  
Of two smiling pink fish  
Wearing lavender bikinis.  
Seriously, she explains,  
Bikinis keep the fish  
From getting wet.

## ABSENCE

A whiff of your pipe smoke  
lingers in the darkened bedroom.  
Your unopened letters  
pile high on the dusty desk.  
The guitar in the corner  
cries for your fingers to strum it.  
The book you were reading  
lies waiting where you laid it down.

When the phone rings, my breath stops,  
though I know it's not you calling.  
When awakened by dark dreams at night,  
I still search for your hand.  
But my arms embrace absence  
where I once found warmth and comfort,  
And only your pale icy pillow  
shares our big empty bed.

If I knew where to reach you  
I'd call you home this instant.  
Though it's three in the morning,  
I'd rush to wherever you are.  
But we've distanced ourselves with words  
we should never have spoken  
And trapped each other in a silence  
we were never quite able to break.

## FRUIT BATS

Not butterflies in my stomach;  
Fruit bats are flapping around in there.  
Aerial acrobats amidst my breakfast  
Nest in my ulcers  
Sink claws into my stomach  
Restlessly protest my mood  
As I insist  
That I'm not nervous.

## DUET

He vibrates to her touch  
As she softly strums him  
Like guitar strings.  
She moans scat songs  
As his fingers play jazz  
On her skin.  
Saxophone strains  
Merge with guitar chords,  
Drumbeats in the jungle night  
Rock and roll to rhythms  
Ancient as two heartbeats,  
Lovers improvising  
On sweat-soaked sheets  
Playing their bodies  
In harmony with the music  
They hear in their souls.

## UPON DISCUSSING MARRIAGE

we find in the end  
no easy answers  
in spite of experience  
we give our love  
with stubborn faith in the future  
though we live our lives  
stumbling forward  
groping blindly  
down dark tunnels toward  
the distant light  
hoping it isn't  
an oncoming train.

## THE CHRISTENING

The ocean's black; the sky is blacker,  
Moonless midnight on the beach.  
Restless sea-sprite stirs inside her,  
Calls her naked to the water,  
Pulls her to the shadowy surf.  
Wading waist-deep into water,  
Waiting as waves wash on her,  
Wondering where she found the courage  
To brave the blackness  
Self-baptism,  
To face the freedom locked inside her  
Never known 'til wave-washed blackness  
Kindled her hidden spark.

## SURVIVING SPOUSE

March's budding trees and nesting birds  
Mocked the old man  
As he watched Spring from windows  
Of darkened rooms.  
"Georgia died today," he wrote,  
The final entry in his diary,  
The saga of fifty-five years together,  
Of ten children, fifty grandchildren,  
Victory gardens, harvests, droughts,  
Of Sunday morning masses and Saturday afternoon fishing trips,  
Of factories, farming, and family dinners,  
Ended in three words.

"Georgia died today."  
He died that day, too.  
Forgot his children's faces,  
Wandered alone through the silent days,  
Waited ten more years  
Longing, wondering, hoping:  
Is she somewhere in a Spring garden,  
Young again, forever patient,  
Resting under a flowering pear tree  
Watching a pair of nest-building robins,  
Waiting ten eternities for him  
To rejoin her?

IN CONCERT

It's a summer's night.  
You're playing guitar.  
The song's free flight takes you far.  
Your laughing face glows with delight.  
Your fingers race.  
As the tune gains height, you can't disguise  
What music does to you:  
Your spirits rise.  
You're flying, too.

You catch my eye with your smiling glance.  
As the music flies, we renew romance.

AT RACHEL'S

Crumpled white paper napkins  
Silver-plated silver  
Stacked on blue-gray stoneware  
Pushed to the center of the antiqued green table.  
Snifters of amber brandy  
Warming in hollows of hands  
While white china saucers  
Hold white china cups of steaming coffee.  
Soft sounds of a symphony  
Whisper from the old kitchen wireless:  
A counterpoint to the voices  
Of gathered friends.

## TABLEAU

Ancient to my five-year-old eyes  
She stood stately, proud,  
Yet gentle of face;  
Primly covered by her  
Old-fashioned, plain white  
Floor-length cotton nightgown.  
Eyes closed  
In front of her mirror,  
Her fingers deftly probed for pins  
Which held her wispy-thin white hair  
In its neat, tight bun.  
She shook the hair loose.  
Fingers combed and it fell:  
A straight snowy cascade  
To her waist.

## A FAREWELL

Tonight I crossed the dunes at dusk  
To walk the beach in solitude,  
To watch the high spring tide slip in,  
To soak in sea and sand and surf:  
My special sanctuary.

I sat atop a dune as night fell,  
To watch the orange full moon rise  
Out of the heavy slate-gray clouds  
Stacked upon the sea.

Here at last a healing comes  
To my spirit  
Deeply bruised.  
Here at last I see my self  
Apart from others' eyes.

Breathing deeply the salty air  
I desperately drink its scent  
To imprint my memory  
To prepare myself to return  
Tomorrow to my land-locked, midwestern home.

HATTERAS

Shoe-less, sunburned, wave-washed

Wet and wind-blown

Walking the waterline

Splashed by the surf.

Solitary.

Satisfied.

Home.

## GRANDPA

Memories have faded  
Thirty years since he died  
Only a dim image  
A kindly, smiling old man,  
Thin and wrinkled and tanned  
From eighty years of farming,  
Entertaining his grandchildren  
With tales of their parents as youngsters.  
On an autumn evening  
Children sit 'round his slippered feet  
Eating home-grown popcorn  
And apples that he peels  
With his pearl-handled pocket-knife,  
Skillfully carving the skin off the fruit  
In a single long red twisting curl.