

Alice

By: Logan D. Bates

Her ways were those of warm half-smiles and
Teasing glances across square tile floors.
She could turn wilted grass green
For nothing more than a laughing dance upon its canvas, a
Fading Fenix flashlight
Cast against a cold clouded sky.
She had a sour lemon speech—tantalizing—
That turned sweet in the honey whisk of her breath.
And even if only for my own tongue, it
Took to my taste like home-brewed white lightning.

Dignity was her companion, kindness her weapon, and love her muse.
She was the wilderness and I
Her sole adventurer.
The one
Who dared to conquer her reckless waves and proud
Mountaintops, seeking that one intrepid lie all men
Wish to tell. The one that cannot
Leave the lips without stain.

But she was more than the poems I conjure on her behalf—
Half-baked attempts at recreating the work of God.

For she did not only capture the envious or curious eye,
But also the heart of a young man, determined
Against all odds to live out the adventure he had so longed for.
And she was it—
The first touch of sunlight through
Smokey blue eyes—my
Alice.

Hints of lilac and sugar on her skin salvaged bitter seasons,
And there was a part of me that truly began to believe in eternity—
That day, when my eyes first wandered to her figure,
Posed like a Greek goddess over McGraw text-books and a
half-eaten cafeteria muffin.
We danced under pale square lights until the song
carried us out under the stars.

Amorous whispers in waiting ears taught
me the true nature of the soul.
It was the art of climbing chain fences,
Walking highway lines,
Sneaking out squeaky push-windows,
And finding a sip of something a little too strong
Beneath the closed cupboards.
But in the late mornings, when she would roll a low shoulder,
Playing out our song upon satin skin,

I would hear a note played too far out of tune.

She would brush against my hips,

And there would be a bitterness on her breath I couldn't forget.

A trailing finger on her silk skin that began to draw blood.

For it was coarse.

Cold.

And I knew, and yet still

I chose my suffering.

“Why do you wear that cross on your neck?”

I told her it meant something,

And she said I was just like all the other boys.

I would bring her flowers and they would be

Left out to dry—to die.

I would spend every night in her arms,

Trying desperately to quell the cold,

To keep her from slipping between the

broken boards of her home—

But even in the summer heat,

My hands grew black and blue.

There was an intimate love between the wrapping of arms and the

Crack of her open fist against the worn leather

Of my dash. A kind of passion that was measured

Out in caustic promises
and silent interstate rides.
Memories we did not know we were making
For the last time.

For out in the fields, the broken heart can become
A gangway plank to heaven. Twisted
Out of your chest until the steps run out.
And then there is nothing left.
Nothing at all.

Alice was the wilderness,
And her heart I could not conquer.
For every cold wave and snapping crack of wind
Was as much her as the flower—
Now wilting—
Upon the vast green and empty fields.
I wandered them, holding
Memory as promised future
Until the well ran dry—
The stairs counting down to none.