

Some Poems from *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face*

by Mitchell Grabois

WHY WE LIKE IT: Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes: *...when a submission crash lands into our Inbox that is soooo good we're jumping like fleas on a dog....mesmerizing bard-ings that read like compressed novels, or at the very least, short stories...the breeze inside the gale...Listen to...'the woman with dead eyes whispers 'I am misunderstood' and 'women about to explode into glitter/who wear their features as if they/own them'. Almost every line is get out of your seat good and images infiltrate the mind in startling quanta...awake us and transform. The dirt inside Grabois's music pulls us down to an earth unwashed...and in that grimy, smoky bar on skid row streets everywhere doth Bukowski raise his glass...in the hoary din of Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit'...'WTF, Mitch. Laureate with an upper case 'L'. Feed your head, poetaster. Feed your head...' E.S. Read Cynthia Anderson's review of *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face in Nonfiction*. Read Mitchell Grabois's 'Author Guidelines' in Issue 2 (Nonfiction).*

RICH SOOS, editor of *Cholla Needles* writes...*Unlike most writers, Mitchell Grabois is not hiding behind words in some abstract mumbo jumbo that is known as 'poetry' in academia. You will understand every word, every sentiment. His plain-speak is disarming...*

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At Walden Pond

My car was rolling

but it was dying

Mercedes and Audi wheelwomen

sped by

blaring their horns:

hate-filled screaming

We were very near Walden Pond

very near transcendentalism

I came out of my hotel room the next morning

and couldn't start my car

Tears came to my eyes and trickled down my cheeks

as if I were a skilled actor

A nun came out of the room next to mine

and spied me crying

She came up to me and let me know that she loved me

She loved misery and poverty

and her nearness to Thoreau's cabin

Thoreau needed so little

He didn't need a Japanese car

He didn't need a nun to console him

He didn't need a god of consolation

There was a repair shop down the road

and the nun put her shoulder
to the cool metal
applied her love and minimal weight
and together we shoved the vehicle down the road
She was sweating when we arrived
and the mechanic
in a Boston accent
condemned me for using a nun
as an animal

It was her idea, I said

her idea

A nun is like a child, he said

She has to be protected from

her foolish notions

The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face

I kissed the woman who slices lunch meat
at King Sooper's
She shoved smoked turkey at me
leaned away

and called: *Next!*

I kissed my doctor

I'd been wanting to do it

since she first told me to stick out my tongue

and complemented me on its smoothness

and the elegance of my taste buds

I kissed her and she asked

On a scale of one to ten, how have you been feeling this week?

I kissed her again

Have you been seeing or hearing things that aren't really there?

Have you been feeling suicidal or homicidal?

I kissed her more deeply

really sent my tongue to a remote locale

Do you have access to weapons?

I said:

How can you ask me that

after everything we've been through?

Anyway, this is America

She called Security

Security knew me

from the days when I was a high school football star

and an amateur boxer and cage fighter
who went by the moniker *Destructo*
They were afraid of me
called the cops
warned them: *Be sure to bring your stun guns*
your billy clubs
and chemical weapons

The first cop who entered the room—
I kissed her
She yelled *FREEZE!*
Hands where I can see them!
Get down on your knees!

I happily complied

Pesticide

After a struggle
they took me from my farm
Farmers always fight
to stay on their land

Weather, banks
and the nuthouse
are three of our biggest threats

And bugs of course
I filled my suitcase
with my special blend of
DDT and Arsenic
It had always worked for me before

but they yelled at me
and took my case
and put it in the attic

They said they'd give it back when I left
but I knew they would never let me out

Trap

The woman with dead eyes says:

I am misunderstood

bruised by indifferent humanity

When I see her on the bus I ignore her

I don't want to fall into her trap

She could suck the juice from my soul

She could pigeonhole me

like a used book on a shelf

pages brown and curled

So I ignore her

for my own protection

Her cunt broadcasts like a radio

She flexes her calves

as she lays in bed sleepless

Insomnia has made her calves into hardballs

With that locomotive power

she could push me into the next county

into a dry corn field

She could bulldoze me into Murphy's Bar

My only defense is to keep myself off the TV screen

of her malignant drama

I must always remember:

she is the woman with dead eyes

If I forget

all I have to do is look in her eyes

If she's wearing sunglasses

I must rely on memory

Glitterbang

Cheryl gets off the bus at the wrong stop and is

surrounded by women about to explode

into glitter

women who wear their features as if they

own them

women with symmetry and grace

women with so much confidence that

if they wanted to

they could destroy Iran's nuclear weapons program

with a thrust of their breasts

Cheryl pulls her raincoat tightly around her

but the black hole that is her soul

sucks in all the stylish women

dozens of them

until the sidewalks are empty

Another bus pulls to the curb

The doors open

Cheryl climbs in

Landlady

My landlady worked as a police dispatcher in Oakland

but was a habitual gambler

and though she owned a pink Cadillac she won in Vegas

she never had any money

I suggested that she let me sell the Caddy

and put the money in an account

that I would manage for her

but, though we'd become lovers

and I'd moved in with her

she didn't trust me enough

Instead she sent me

on daily missions to the dumpsters

behind the Safeway two blocks away

for their best produce

She had a saying:

In America only the very rich

and the very poor

understand that resources are limitless

I didn't want to do it

but she wasn't making me pay rent

so I gave in

I was already clinically depressed

and dumpster diving

put me even further down in the dumps

so when I was arrested

for trespassing and theft

and placed in the back of a squad car

it felt right

Alone in the jail cell

I felt lonely

and longed for company

even if it were another prince of degradation

My landlady bailed me out in the morning
told the cop that she'd warned me
not to dumpster dive
(as if I were her juvenile delinquent son)
but that it was my drug

We cruised slowly in the pink Cadillac
headed for home

Cheryl Begins Her Career as a Homeless Person

Cheryl tapes a knife to her inner thigh
buys a can of mace
stands at the freeway onramp
She drove up this ramp many times
back when she had a car
She always picked up hitchhikers
even when they looked dangerous
especially when they looked dangerous
so she hopes someone stops for her
someone who won't try to rape her
because then she'd have to cut off his dick

She's so fucking tired of being a temp

and now she's not

She told the manager at the agency:

Take this job and shove it!

He laughed

a big hearty peal of laughter

Ever since Johnny Paycheck sang that song in 1977

he's looked forward to someone saying that to him

and it's taken until 2012

so he pumps his fist and shouts *Yes!*

pulls a hundred-dollar bill out of his top drawer

the same bill he's held since 1978

through several low-level managerial jobs

and hands it to a

confused Cheryl

plants a big kiss on her forehead, which normally

she would not tolerate

but she's too taken by surprise to do anything

like kick him in the balls

which she's always wanted to do to a boss

not as far back as 1977

because she wasn't even born then

but for a long time

which she's always wanted to do to a boss

not as far back as 1977

because she wasn't even born then

but for a long time

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Readers sometimes ask what my stylistic/literary influences are—the question leaves me baffled. Since the publication of *The Arrest of Mr. Kissy Face*, a couple of reviewers have compared me to Bukowski—but I never read Bukowski's poems until three years ago, so his could not have been an influence on mine. However, Bukowski and I came from similar backgrounds—a little rough and unschooled.*

However, paradoxically, I did attend college. It was against my wishes. By the time I finished high school, I had come to believe that one learns best from life, not books.

I took three creative writing classes while enrolled in college. My first professor had one normal eye and one that looked out into an unknown dimension. Her mantra was: "Be organic in your writing." The second professor told me, "Despite Gary Snyder, English is not an idiographic language." (Snyder may have been an early influence.) The third professor claimed that the best bar on the town square was the Albany, which was not true at all. However, he was the advisor for the college's literary magazine and was thus the first publisher of my poetry. The college was Humboldt State University on California's north coast. After dropping out of UC's Berkeley, I was attracted by Humboldt's geography (rocky coastline/redwoods) as well as the college's low level of academic demand. After graduating high school in Los Angeles, I was more comfortable with a low level of academic demand than with a high one.

*Most of my poetry has an autobiographical aspect. 'Pesticide' evolved from an experience I had soon after moving into our abandoned family farm house in The Middle of Nowhere, Michigan. The barn was a disaster. I spent a lot of time shooting feral cats—I got to be a crack shot. I killed 59 of them. They thanked me for putting them out of their misery. I also worked at removing moldy hay from the hay mow. One day, I opened a sort of secret closet and found a full 50 pound bag labeled: **Arsenic and DDT**. In the old days, my grandfather and other farmers used all kinds of evil chemicals deadly to bugs and humans. I thought of keeping it, in case I ever wanted to kill someone, or a lot of people, but finally took it to toxic dump day. One of my enemies was checking people in. I fancied throwing some arsenic and DDT in her face, but restrained myself.*

'Landlady' is another autobiographical poem. I set pen to paper and pretty much described the essence of my life at the time of the poem. My landlady was pretty sexy but it was her adult daughter I was really interested in. She was a potter and worked on the wheel. She told me I could make love to her, there in the cellar, if I made a really nice pot, but no matter how hard I tried, I never mastered the technique. My arms and hands and fingers betrayed me (something they've never done in the process of writing poetry). So I was stuck with her mother.

'Cheryl Begins Her Career as a Homeless Person' was just another poem that described my day to day world. You know, writing this I'm reminded of something Chuck Palaniuk said about writing EIGHT CLUB—everyone was blown away by the book but it was basically just as accounting of the day-to-day lives of him and his friends in Portland. Which is a good lesson for poets and writers: Don't live a boring life and maybe you'll get some usable material out of it. My wife has always told me what a marginal person I am. Except she's wrong—committing to a relationship with her has made me far less marginal. Which leads me to another poetic reality: never underestimate the power of sex. It's one of the chief engines of our world.

When I lived in Humboldt County, I sat on the roof of my girlfriend's apartment building and watched the Humboldt Crabs play AA ball in the field across the highway. I felt excited, waiting for the local sluggers, twin brothers, to slam pitches out of the park. I felt the edginess of acrophobia as well. When my girlfriend put her arm around me, I wasn't sure if her intent was to hold me or to shove me into space.

I heard the throaty roar of log trucks downshifting as they decelerated, coming down the hill towards the town's one highway traffic light—the noise cut through the crowd sounds.

The pungent odor of the pulp mill drifted across the bay and that smell, reviled by others, caused my soul to soar. I did not work in that mill but a sister factory, a saw mill set off the road near Big Lagoon (from which I caught many fish). I pulled wet lumber off a conveyer belt and threw it onto metal carts until they were stacked full and I yanked a chord that sent a blast of sound to summon the forklift driver.

After the game, I crawled back through my girlfriend's window and we listened to Mingus, Coltrane and Pharaoh Sanders on her old phonograph. It was the early seventies and we often fell asleep in each other's arms to Marvin Gaye's hit album, Let's Get It On. Later I walked across town to my abode, a barely converted horse shed, big enough for just one horse or for me. I'd wake up in the middle of the night to hear my friend Ted, enraged by his girlfriend's latest infidelity, chopping wood on my front yard which was the backyard of the house. I wasn't annoyed by being awakened—he was meeting my firewood needs. The fog drifted in and out, carrying the tang of the ocean and moistening out skin and clothing.

In other words, there were literally thousands of sense perceptions all the time, as there are in any place where we live and breathe. Is it possible that those were my literary influences, not books, not the styles of other authors but the styles of the world as if unfolded within the sphere of my youthful senses?

BIO: *Works by Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois appears in magazines worldwide. Nominated for numerous prizes, he was awarded the 2017 Booranga Centre (Australia) Fiction Prize. His novel, Two-Headed Dog was based on his work in a state hospital and is available for Kindle and as a print edition at Amazon. His poetry collection, THE ARREST OF ME. KISSY FACE, published in March 2019 by Pski's Porch Publications is also available at Amazon. Visit his website wordsbymitch.com to read more of his poetry and flash fiction.*