

The Leaving Women

a collection of poetry



Kelbi Anna

The Leaving Women

The Leaving Women started as a single poem and grew into an idea as I wrote more poems in a series. I have always liked the idea of telling a story through a series of poems. No dialogue, no plot devices, no world building. Just a series of poems that connect like a story. Like an album of songs that tell a story. A rock opera in poetry. In The Leaving Women, we have two women who meet on a train, Shelley and Leigha. Very different women who are both leaving something behind. They take turns telling their stories to each other as the train carries them further from their pasts.

Offerings

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The Leaving Women

I caught a slow train moving down the coast,
adios, baby, here's a champagne toast
to pulling out of Cali with a sigh and a heave
sorry, baby, you should have known I'd leave.

I come from a long line of the walking kind,
catching trains and cabs, leaving pain behind
in drawers and under pillows where you sleep
not enough faith of heart to chance the leap.

We keep our feet firmly on shaky ground,
our fingers left bare, not ring bound,
with no apologies floating in our wake
life is a rush when a few hearts break.

You'll rise alone when the train gives warning,
look out on another empty desert morning,
but baby, your foolish heart has to be forgiven
everybody falls hard for the leaving women.



For Too Long We've Been the Peacemakers

I will no longer apologize for my fire.
I will no longer cower before my own anger.
I will own the spark that rises up
like a shield against your condescension,
You shoot arrows and expect me
to accept the bleeding wounds
that come with your precision.

I will no longer stand without defense.
I will no longer be a soft target.
I will rise in my new found strength,
grab arrows from the air as my own.
You can lick your wounds for awhile
and let your voice shake when
met with your own mistakes.

I will no longer play the peacemaker.
I will no longer use silence to soothe.
I will meet your harsh words with
the unapologetic armor of age.

You spit out the word “defensive”
as if your attacks are part of my
birthright, like breasts and blood.

I will no longer apologize for my fire.
I will rise in my new found strength.

And so two women, both leaving something and more than a few someones behind, meet on a train heading anywhere but where they were. A few tips from Shelley's flask as she throws her feather boa over the seat in front of her. A few timid sips from quiet Leigha. Soon the stories begin to flow.



A Day and a Night on Purgatory Road

/ Shelley

I met a man dressed in black robes,
gold cross around his neck,
on Purgatory Road on a hell of a summer day.

We walked with dirty words stuck
fast to the soles of our feet.

“You’re not evil because you bleed,”
he tried to convince me.

I laughed, got him something to eat,
took him out and found him
a job in a street dancing show.

Without the weight of the cross
he was as light as air on his profane feet.

.

I was never very good at taking pictures of the moon,
but this night the focus was crystal clear.

“I don’t know if I like you or
if you just taste like a memory,”

I told him through the ruffled feathers
of my second hand boa,
on a night when the milky way loomed
large across his freckled face.

.

Out here you’re neither hero nor villain.

Just someone with one hand holding
a gun to your head and the other raised in surrender.

One more step down purgatory road
collecting existential sole dirt,

under a mazarine sky
on something of a Sunday,
on a hell of a summer day.

You'll find yourself surprised to be satisfied
with where you are and at home
with the company you keep.



Leave it Unsaid

/Leigha

I'll leave it unsaid that they don't choose me
or wouldn't or won't or can't

Just leave it all unsaid
that there are so many others
before me they would
take into their arms.

I'd be the last they'd offer comfort
on an afternoon when the concrete
burns through the skin of your feet
and even the birds have grown silent.

I've existed for decades with something missing.

You can be who you are
when glossy hair falls in waves
and your skin is a young peach.

They let you open the windows
in the white heart of winter
to smell the snow even as
the room around you freezes.

Most of us are not allowed that grace.

Most windows and doors remain
firmly shut when you weren't
born with the right face.

Don't worry. They always choose someone else.

So leave it unsaid that they
wouldn't won't can't choose me.

The world has already engraved
those words deep into my skin.



Love With a Poet

/Shelley

I once dared love with a poet,
all summer blues and Woodstock beads.
He wrote and we loved in an
abandoned shack on the beach
with only sand crabs for company.

.

While he dabbled in simplicity,
I read the words on his palm
to fill the space after "I love you."
Hermits watching the seasons change,
riding waves like we were part of the sea.

.

He'd say he was sad, but he'd smile,
like right now was a question and
his hands were full of lies.
His danger once bared must be attended.

.

He was a tidal pull and I
chose escape with the new moon.
"Look at all of these desperate
attempts to show you who I really am!"
screamed through the darkness and
his words walked next to me like a friend.

.

I once dared love with a poet.
His love beads circle my neck
and I feel him in the pink
of every stinging sunburn since.



Secrets Kept

/Leigha

I once found secrets buried deep in pillow cases
carried door to door to collect sweets, a few
stuffed in pockets for the cold walk home.

I slept on secrets entwined in my hair,
snarling at the nape of my neck in thick knots
and dreamed of cavities eating my teeth.

I whispered secrets into the curve of a seashell,
dropped them on the shore to disappear,
only to be put to the ear of an old beachcomber.

He pretended to only hear the ocean.
Like I pretend to treasure the sharp things
I keep stuffed in my pockets, under all the sweetness.

Shelley has loved and loved and loved and thrown them away one after another. Feather boa trailing, half empty bottle in hand, she walks away leaving nothing but the scent of cinnamon and cloves in her wake. On to the next temporary thing. Leigha only wishes for something wonderful to see her behind the ever present books she loves to get lost in. She has endured the worst of love and only hopes there is more than unrequited love ahead. And the train continues east.



Element of Water

/Shelley

Everytime he came in from gathering the sea
into his hair, onto his skin
a moment of salt crusted Gemini zen,

I would be waiting in my silo of silence with
hands smelling of freshwater.
The clean plucking of the lotus from the mud.

these tenuous connections
these elements of water

We fell like drops one by one in a metal bucket,
filling ourselves to the top
and overflowing drip by drip by drip by drip.

I only knew him as Poseidon, one June when
all the colors of summer
held us and we disappeared into them.

Free to love a self named water god with
sandy feet and moonstone dreams on each finger.

He was a single moment of lightning serenity
belonging wholly to the storm.

Disappearing on a wave when the tide called him home.

Seagulls

/Leigha

I don't speak his name.

One whisper and you'll know
that I once dared to love him
across miles of jeweled sky,
across seas tossing secrets
between white-capped waves.

My body a boat
with sails at full
to rush to him on
a single breath of
merciful redemption.

There were no answers
in the shadows of
seagulls close to his
shore, seeking crumbs.

I arrived seeking crumbs,

to find an empty slip
for a lone boat
battered from the trip.

Venus Ascending

/Shelley

He called me his
Venus ascending,
as if I had risen from
the sea only to love him.

As if caffeine connections
and pub crawl small talk
could seduce a daughter of water.

As if his beauty were any match for my own.

He was selfish poetry in
leather bound notebooks.

He was nectar and blood
in the heart of a windflower
grown in the shade
of forsaken love.

Soon he was writing his
selfish poetry for another
goddess he believed ascended
just to gaze upon him.

Like a true daughter of Uranus
I walked away an elegant fury
threw on a sea foam party dress

and set out to find another lover
among the gods of the city lights.

*The passing slow trains give
my eyes and ears a break
from the leftover silence.
But, you've heard all this before
on the journey to wherever
our profane feet are headed*



Love in the City

/Leigha

I once fell in
love in the city,
with the background noise
of lives lived in car horn unison,
first kisses under
spotlight streetlights.

Bus exhaust fog
in the evening rush,
hands warming hands
in the late night hush.

Daylight midnight,
all night lights
making stars in our eyes.
Skyscraper shadows
sheltering the hum
of a million rebel hearts

hidden in the noise
of the hurry and the homeless
and the harried and the heathens.

a new city love carved in old concrete



Ah, so our Leigha does have love stories of her own, just when we were beginning to think it was all unrequited love and men made of air.



Me and Jesus' Son

/Shelley

Backroads of America,
full of unrequited dreams.
Small towns that once
knew promise, now
breed impossibility.

We saw it all, me
and Jesus' son
in those days
of cheap wine and
fifty-cent loaves of bread.

I'd spend hours on the
back of his motorcycle,
breathing in leather and
exile, sun reflecting off
the chrome like wildfire.
Dreading the stops for
gas or food when I had
to unwrap myself from
his body heat.

Dreading those small,
boarded up towns where
you could buy nothing but
gas, convenience store food,
and a beer at the only bar,

before heading out of town
to sleep under the stars.

The sound of the motorcycle
still ringing in our ears
like white noise in the silence.

Just me and Jesus' son.
He was my miracle, even
when we could barely
keep our heads above water.

**Jesus' Son is the title of a book by Denis Johnson*

Man of Air

/Leigha

I made a man out of air.

Gave him a monk's voice
the body of a drama.

He wrote novels of white mountain mists,
sang in a tone that spiraled gently into
cochlea and slept in my inner ear.

He came in the early mornings
in pockets of insomnia,
in solitudes when I left
thoughts untilled
for fear seeds of discontent
would reveal their cracked coats.

I made him from yearning.
Pulled his parts out of my poems.

Designed arms that held safety
and wrapped around like
a worn out flannel robe.

I made a man out of air
and breathed him in to
expand my belief that
someday I would exhale
him into flesh and bone.

The night is winding down, the bottle empty, the carefully applied morning mascara smeared over the dark circles of insomnia.

After all the laughter and all the sharing of shame and regret, a quiet descends over our Leaving Women. A comfortable silence of best friends who've just met.

The night rolls by mile after mile like lives passing us on hurried streets. If it seems that Shelley has the better of the stories, if it seems that our poor Leigha just couldn't get a break, well, that's the way it is. A feast for one and crumbs for another.

But, perhaps our Shelley wears these losses with less finesse than her words would let on. Perhaps she wears them like a burden on her broad shoulders.

And perhaps poor Leigha still has some adventures awaiting her when she finally arrives in a place that feels like home.

Here a proper poet would insert another poem. A poem of arrival. A poem of friendship. A poem that wraps everything into a neat little ending. I am not that poet

I will only leave you with the words the hippie poet from another summer wrote for our wild child Shelley, and hope you can see how our shy Leigha can claim them as well.



Beacon in the Night

she's sandalwood and cinnamon
and lanterns swaying in a breeze

she's the cusp of evening
and gentle curves carved from clay

she is the keeper of this lighthouse
and the night wind calls her sister



Thank You for reading this small offering of poetry

If you would like to read more of my writing, you can find me here:

[By Kelli Anna](#)



A playlist for Shelley and Leigha can be found on [Spotify](#).



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