

One Hundred Moving Parts of Love

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poems by Lenny DellaRocca

Number 30 in the 2River Chapbook Series



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About the Author

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About 2River

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series. 2River is also the home of Muddy Bank, the 2River blog.

Richard Long, Editor
2River

ISSN 1536-2086

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When she spoke about her grandfather's walnut trees
I remembered something
out of a book
about a man who
stood on a hill
outside town.

Stood there all

night playing guitar
for a woman
who didn't love him.
I thought maybe
her grandfather

was the man in that
novel. Someone
I knew somehow.
She kept on with
her story about
earth and sunlight.

She said something built from the soul is not made
by the heart
though there is
blood in it.

And then she kissed me.
I saw in her eyes
that I missed
the last train.
Places move back
and forth under our feet
like clouds, she said,
because falling forever
is the same as standing still.
And she could not
love me. She said
a harvest is a work
of art in the sky,
a museum of the
ground made from the beautiful left hand of the world.

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Editor: Richard Long
Book Cover: Artist Name

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Published September 2022 by 2River

Acknowledgments:

Some of these poems, or versions of them, first appeared in:

The 2River View: "Saints of Electrocution"
Apalachee Quarterly: "The Man Who Slept on Roofs"
The Blue Door: "A Branch in Her Hands" and "She's Wasn't There"
Long Island Quarterly: "After the Blast"
POEM: "Half"

An earlier, very much different version of "Geppetto's Other Boy" appeared in *Festival of Dangerous Ideas* (Unsolicited Press, 2019) as "Geppetto's Smile."

Love in the Time of Wind Chimes

There was that girl on a swing at sundown,
her bare feet
in September air.
I was going
to tell her
about the little dipper
twinkling above
the church
last night,
or that these
violets I
took from
the garden
made her eyes
look far away.
I wanted to kiss her, but got lost in how she
held the chain
in her hand.
She said swinging
like that
made her slip
from the world.
There was
something in her
eyes, a flash,
a burning tree.
I knew then
I'd never see
her again.
I said goodbye, and she whistled, softly, to no one.

A word about E poems

These came about organically. When I noticed how some poems were taking the shape of an E more or less on their own, I began shaping them consciously. I simply like the way it looks on the page. I began to use the form as a constraint. I made rules- there must be the same number of lines above the long middle line as there are below it. I try (but don't always succeed) to make the middle line a turn or associative leap. I am very aware that the lines may not break where they might "normally" break in order to form an E. But the shape and how it looks on the page is more important than where lines are "supposed" to break. One can't hear lines breaks when a poem is read aloud anyway. And one more rule—except for a few exceptions (none in this collection) E poems must end on the first page. There's more I could say about them, but I'll leave it there for now.

Lenny DellaRocca

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After the Blast

I went out for a loaf of bread. A pack of Lucky Strikes. On the radio, President Kennedy said the Soviets would not be permitted to keep missiles on Cuba. And then I ran out of gas. I ran out of gas as I was taking a shortcut through a field where I once made love under a tree in the middle of nowhere. A blinding light. The sun must have exploded, an egg breaking in the middle of a sizzling pan. Is anything left? Nothing is left. When the world shakes that much everything falls over like toy soldiers in a living room storm. Everything disappears. Nothing was ever here. I Think I had a woman. Yes, I married a girl from a town that doesn't exist anymore. I'm not sure it ever did. I can't remember her name. I can't remember mine. Were there children? What of the children? Maybe there was a boy or a girl with braces and freckles, who ran to me when I came home. But who gets to go home when the world is smoke in the eyes of god? I kept walking. The sky turned white with fear. It was like the afternoon was going to faint. And it did. It's why I can't remember anything before the blast. Why my name is stuck somewhere deep inside me like a leaf in the mouth of a man dead three days along the banks of a river. A man without fingerprints whose wallet is a washed-out life, blank as this harrowing sky. How long have I been a ghost in the middle of the world?

That Night at the Jetties

We smoked some dope in the van on the way to the jetties. Then Fat Vince broke out the water pipe. Atheist said something about the rock festival—the Stones and Johnny Winter on stage together. Ronnie told us that he made out with Vicky Crawley on a blanket in the rain. He said she let him unbutton her shirt, French kiss her with his hand in her bra. I was glad it was dark. I'd have been embarrassed for getting stiff. Weeds opened a bottle of cherry wine. We swigged it real good, passed it among the six of us. It was the blue lights in the windshield that alarmed us. The cops, I mean. Scootch looked out the driver's window, told us not to freak out. They were at the pier with an ambulance. Folks fished from the pier at night, 'specially weekends. After stumbling like bowling pins from the van we walked over to the police cars. In bits of conversation between onlookers and some of the cops we learned that a boy had the calf of his leg torn off by a six-foot tiger shark. I heard the kid's father plead with the ambulance driver to let him ride with his son to the hospital. Then he told a friend to make sure nobody messes with the shark because he wanted to have it mounted. We watched the boy, my age, carried to the back of the ambulance on a stretcher, the gash and bloody flap of flesh and muscle torn from the bone. Somebody told a cop who was writing a report that the boy was fishing from the pier. He had something big on the line, couldn't reel it in. He went down to the shore walked into the water and pulled the nylon over his shoulder, and with his back to the waves dragged the fish onto the sand, but not before it came up behind him and took his leg. The cop set the clipboard onto the hood of the car, walked to the gray and white slab of meat in the sand. Emptied his gun—six rounds—into its head.

For Fred & Billie Witkoff

Jim Azar

Judith Berke

Marzi Kaplan

Henry Logan

And for Marie, always

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I sat under a tree with him in an empty field across from the hangout where dozens of us smoked dope weekend nights. New Year's Eve 1969, and it was Florida cold. Everyone knew Atheist dealt heroin. Once, I watched him hit up my best friend, who turned blue as a balloon. Most of the kids in the car ran off. But Atheist knew what to do. Hit him up with speed. He saved my best friend's life. When the cops came to Atheist's door, he climbed out through his window. They'll never take me alive, he said that night under the tree, sounding like James Cagney. He grinned. The cops found his stash under a rock near the turnpike bridge. Somebody was a narc, he said. We slept under the tree until dawn. Woke up, walked home. Never saw him again except on the news one night. They cuffed him, put him in the back of a patrol car. I received letters saying: Greetings From the Penthouse, and he told me about life in prison. Some mean fuckers in here, he said. Smiley faces or LOL hadn't been invented yet, but I could see him grinning. Eventually the letters stopped. Like most friends I knew back then, I lost track of him.

Fifty years go by when one night I see him in a local TV commercial. Fucking Atheist! His shoulder-length hair red and wild as ever. He's wearing a fucking tie! Curtains Galore! Huge sale! he grins. I pick up my phone to dial the number on the screen.

The Man Who Slept On Roofs

That summer he ran into the burning house, came out with the child. Nobody asked where he came from. Nobody knew who he was, yet everyone seemed to know him.

One day he broke up a fight in the school yard, told the boys he'd show them the rings of Saturn.

Follow me, he said.

And so they went up to a roof he'd been sleeping on. Look through the telescope, he said, look at that trampoline for stars.

From then on, the boys brought someone up each time—the barber, telephone repairman, police chief, until everyone in town

went up. Every night the neighbors watched him climb another roof, set up the telescope and study the night sky. Women loved how well-mannered he was,

men said he could tear

a Corvette engine apart and rebuild it in ten minutes.

He knew when someone lied.

He knew when it was going to rain.

Katy down the block could hear for the first time since she almost drowned

in the flooded quarry.

People came from miles around to go up on the roof with him without ever calling his name.

Somewhat he always knew.

They slept beneath the stars together until one morning they woke up, and just like that, he was gone.

Saints of Electrocution

I read a short story about a woman who was hit by lightning and for the rest of her life she was able to perform small miracles. Her hands were always hot. She met a man who had also been struck, and when they made love small birds twirled from their bodies. Afterward her house smelled of charcoal and lavender, green and violet blooms crisscrossed their flesh in a factual network of iridescent trees.

I worked in a factory assembling transformers, testing them with bursts of voltage. I'd dial the juice up or down based on the number of red wires. Some were a few inches long, others a couple of feet. Sometimes one of them touched my lap or wrist. The jolt threw me off the bench. If you saw me naked, you'd see tattoos of angry angels where I was kissed and burned.

A Branch in Her Hands

He said, You can't make a harp from a cherry tree.
Only when
it blossoms,
I said. Because
music
is the color
of trees
when love

finds a woman's
face, when her
hands are filled
with strings.
Impossible, he said.
Have you ever
touched

a cold flower
in winter? I said.
It burns. It burns the way trees light up a meadow,
the sun in them
like milk
touched
by a little blood.
I loved a woman once.
She turned

petals into half
notes. With her hands,
she made them
sing like a choir
of boys.
She stood all day under
the moon with a harp
made from a tree.
When the man came
he said, What
have you done? Listen, she said, this tree is singing.

3.

He dances across the zodiac like a shadow across a sundial.
A woman cries: Falling forever is the same as standing still.
But the sweeping man says: There's no such thing as distance
when there's all the time in the world.

4.

Dreaming of a pendulum,
I wake the moment my mother dies.
The moment my father dies.
The moment my sister dies.
The moment her eldest son dies.
The moment her second son dies.

And I cant shake the feeling
that I'm being watched, that
that man on the roof,
the man with a broom
in the mirror
isn't me.

He Sweeps

The Invention of Children

1
He makes things disappear,
sweeps them away with an old broom—
wedding rings, a flight of birds—all in his waltz.
He sweeps away black feathers and stardust,
whistles a tune heard only by those whose time is up,
while leaves twirl
in an autumn column of smoke
three stories high
above a house. My mother,
sleeping under a tree has written a letter:

Dear G:

Gravity is a myth.
I've become an atheist.

2. Children dream of momentum and queens
at chess tables under trees.
Their blood is a kind of fire.
Their house is full of crows.
On the walls are tapestries of boys
sweeping the streets of dead towns,
a fresco of Jacob's ladder,
a scarecrow in a trodden field.
Astrologers at the top of a watchtower
measure the ascension of stars—
choreography in minutes of arc.

All through the rooms,
a far away hissing of straw.

Shhh...be quiet as a mushroom. Take the sky into the top
of your head. Never think moon
or angel. Think moon
or angel. Let rain tickle
your tongue until
it sprouts a giggle.
If a rabbit offers a
language of roots,
take it. Tip a pail of thunder
into a puddle.
Walk proudly down the
lane in leopard pajamas.
Listen to the bells
in your sister's ribs.
Use a pink crayon to cry.
Remember, the sun is a friend when you're on your knees,
but you don't need
light to do extraordinary
things. So sit
at the bottom
of a well, give
your best Barbie
to charity, hold
your breath until
your birthday
shows up dressed
as Dorothy Gale.
Ask grandma
to tell you a story.
Build a house for it.
Let it float in all the rooms. Let it soar out of your mouth.

Gepetto's Other Boy

My father makes my face out of wet stone rubbed with indigo, my ears made from spider webs. A few light years for the eyes, he says. Now I can blink an afterlife. He puts a sparrow in my mouth, a teaspoon of lithium that gives me dreams about a girl made of orange rinds and coffee. My veins are made of blue worms dug up after a hail storm. The distance from my bedroom window to the morning star is measured by a long poem called "Once, I Watched Her Ride a Horse." Kirkegaard, my father mumbles, existential liar! He is almost done. Give me twilight, father, some wilderness and gold. But he adds a clock in a doorway in my chest. Tick. Tock.

Half

It is because I travel half alone
I understand emptiness; a place for everything,
an openness where halves fill.
Even togetherness must be filled with separation.
There must be a place for everyone to die;
life is our emptiness and cry for grace.

It is in endings I have come to know
the beauty in letting go; making room for more.
What are we but shapes some kind of god has
poured into half way and then withdraws
like a deer filled up with drinking
that suddenly sees its reflection in the stream.
That is the surprise of silence when shimmering,
we stand face to face with ourselves.

It is because we stop breathing between breaths
that everything comes to awareness,
so that is enforces our repetition,
when we speak it is a re-enforcement of ourselves,
we perpetuate and sustain our own rarity
by being alone; we make it real.
Together we become a conference.
We speak among the dumbness of nature
and hear our echo.

If you come to me seeking some kind of oneness,
it is a halfness that will fill you up
until you love. Give birth, die;
the other half will be reflection, silence,
the echo of the emptiness that must contain us all.
I have come here half way to my death alone,
found it full, total, with living things, you;
we speak and then we sleep.

Astronomy's Music Lesson

There's a place on your back where once there was a
second wing, where my hand slices
up the curve of your spine,
rests on a shoulder blade,
and I kiss it.
It smells like Vick's and Vera Wang.
The other night I left a note on your Jeep:
Where are you, love?
Rain laughed at it.
And now your eyes say that when you fell,
hard and fucked-up into
nightclubs and straight jackets, you just
wiped your mouth.
Clouds burned you a scar so fierce
you couldn't stop touching yourself.
It's why you keep me in minor keys, where
I can only warm the half of you
that won't break.

The other half is ice on a red vase in moonlight.
How did you jar such a faraway tune?
Am I your freak
addiction? Capo for your
banged-up guitar?
Goddamn it. You burn
with someone else's name
on your neck,
music from around the block.
Evenings when the sun
takes your hair
in spangled blaze,
I hear singing
at the deep end of your room.
A song about high places.
When I touch your fear of heights
I feel that phantom
wing, torn, hacked off your back.
My love, the hole it left is just the sky at night.

My Father and The Thing That Mel Made

I imagined our house an empire on the verge of fairytale.
All these years later
in the yellow light of a bare bulb,
I'm smoke-shadow on this garage cupboard
which was built by Mel, our neighbor,
who worked it done Sundays
in the summer of '58.
He was a carpenter from the old days,
yellow pencil behind his ear.
Mel was an oracle.
Something in the way of magic in his eyes.
That blue snow.
He was a level's bubble of know-how,
steady as a sun dial's shadow.
Put it in the thing that Mel made,
my father told my sister
after he let snap a tape measure for something needing cut,
but cut wrong.
Sometimes at night I thought I heard
a box of screws
spilling onto the concrete floor
of this old garage.
My father said it was the house
creaking like an old puppet,
a storm of tools,
junk-drawer ghosts,
a clock that lost its chimes,
tarnished dog tags or
radio beeps from Sputnik.
My father was a man who believed in
nothing but cold steel, wheel of saw
sparking out its guts,
a Geppetto who could never fix what needed fixing most.

Gratitude du Jour

I'm grateful for the blue rising smoke
from that old rusty
barrel of leaves,
autumn's old perfume.
I stood in the yard
with my father,
who drew the breath
from my face
just by lighting
a hand-cupped match.
He was a standing stone
with blue questions
in his eyes.
The air around him
crackled under
the sky's busted shelves
of slate. November up
in flames. Ash, sparks
like ragged
orange stars, fell to the ground, burned
out like dying
fireflies in the cold.
This brain-fossil will not
be unearthed
when I'm gone.
It's beyond machines.
But I'm grateful
for the memory,
and how even with
sixty years between
then and now, I
still glow with
the burning
of my father's face,
and my mother
at the window, looking out,
but not at us—no—
out to some distant
day when our names are not remembered.

Wealth in Dreamtime

This time we stroll through the streets of old Sorrento
down along Vesuvius
to Positano, (hey, it's a dream)
where Marie and I sit
at an outdoor cafe. A round
woman with a purple scarf
serves us orange liqueur.
Tastes like opera.
Marie says it's
god in her mouth.
The streets of Positano zig zag
down to the sea
where women with skirts
in their hands step
into the water after
taking off their Ferragamos
the way only Italian girls can.
This time Marie and I don't return to the tour bus. We hide
in the back of a shop that sells
Italian candy, glittering
masks from Venice.
Later, we find a small flat
above a dirty garage,
pay for it when I sell
my poem, "Wounds
in Astronomy's Music"
to Vogue. Dividends from
"He Kept on Talking"
bring enough for dinners
of veal and Prosecco,
milk baths on the roofs
of Jazz-Age hotels.
"Crime and Poetry" sells
for a hundred grand.
That's a lot of panna cotta, a lot of Verdi under the moon.

Dancing With Madonna

after Deborah Denicola's dream interpretation talk

It's so Gatsby that I dream of ragtime, that I'm on a yacht
off the coast
of Long Island
slurping oysters
from abdomens because
Deborah's drenched
in pearls at her
dream class/
book-signing, ostrich
feathers jutting
from her hat.
Tell me, Deborah,
the meaning of those
bright stones
all over the floor
of my house.
And why am I naked?
But when Deb says she dreams in color, and one time she
danced with a pop icon,
hands go up even
before the Q&A.

They want to know if
the star was Vogue,
did she smell like
retro lingerie,
and were the 80s
between her legs?
Deb tries to interpret
her dream but her
audience wants
lipstick and cigars. Screw
the dream's meaning
their faces say. I can see it,
they want illusion,
a way out, they want the Roaring Twenties in their beds.

Snow for Neon

After reading an essay about Lynda Hull that sizzled
like a welder's arc,
I wrote a poem
about Lynda's wig & syringe,
the El that ran across
her window
in an old hotel
where she kept repeating:
It was never warm enough.
My poem reeked—
All spiced-up & goofy
with language,
adjectives pushed into lines
like someone forcing
a boy into an X-rated movie house.
I'd written poems for her before—
snowflakes on
a neon sign. The long red wire of Lynda-love sparked
but never had much
heart to fire up. Soul-dead
& cold, I couldn't see
my breath in those poems.
Too much Wow! in my
faux cut wrist, and
as far away from blood
as Newark is from
Florida's grass
not cut for weeks,
white ibis stalking ground
to stab lizards. Dear Lynda,
your black orchids slit my heart
with cursive silk,
but every poem I
tried to write for you
ran its tongue along the edge of a winter's blade.

To Read a Surrealistic Poem

a poem about star-cozy suicides, fireworks in cold religion,
and the train in one's
apartment that grows
far away places
that smell like women
with snow on them.
You see each
line is about
childbirth, the scream of it
and how it burns
history like a girl
with flammable lipstick
who draws a black cat
in crayon on a knife.
One must remember
to feel the edge
of each neon word,
lap up its sacred discharge.
Now smoke a pipeful of yellow jackets. Their quivering
mathematics in the honeycomb
of one's lungs
sings of everything
one's been told about
keeping house and reruns.
Does one believe
God or Mia Farrow?
There once were extraordinary
women in a state of grace
with Twiggy eyeliner
and combat boots.
They had philosophical
fistfights and dipped
scrotums in their milk.
Wrote poems about
turning the world
over and over and over.
Poems about Hurricane Vagina, the Girl with Magic Seeds.

Moulin Rouge

Tables of four edged the small stage
sweat-and-perfume close,
a shredded tinsel curtain
shimmered in blue light.
Her French accent made the room
a poor man's cabaret
though I didn't know it then;
I was American and twenty-something
knocking down shots of cheap
tequila with friends.
In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida launched her show.
A haggard-looking Marlene Dietrich
with a white and yellow twelve-foot boa constrictor on bare
shoulders.
Some men whooped when she
lifted the creature above her head,
leaned so a thigh peeked
from the slit in her glittering red dress
like dinner for two.
The devil is my friend she cooed,
and maybe she had been to hell,
kissed Lucifer on the lips
because she brought the snake
between her legs and tugged.
She flickered like a seizure in the strobe light.
After her set she sat at our table,
picked me as a mark for drinks.
We closed the bar. She took me home.
Put Pussy in its cage and fed it mice.
It swallowed them while they squeaked.

Paris and the Rain

Love is a viola at the end of summer.

It's raining, and my wife's name is Marie.
In Paris we stood on Ponte Marie in the rain,
looked down river to boats with gardens,
umbrellas parading along both sides of the water.
We smiled like we would die next moment,
because yesterday, inside Notre Dame,
footsteps echoed in a masterpiece of silence.
We watched light turn glass and stone to glory.

Paris: Hot chocolate at a famous cafe,
where lesbians and actors talked poetry
and architecture. Frowning waiters leaned
at tables-for-two with trays of espresso
and baguettes. Flower pots drizzled orange
and purple petals from the eaves.

Ponte Marie under our feet in the rain.
Soft green air around chestnut trees
along the Champs-Elysées.
Our hands on stone bridges. Love and rain
in a painting by a master of light.
Rain is a lover who falls to the trees from clouds.

It's raining in Florida. We sit on our patio
watching wet mangos fall—blushing plump women
once the rage and lust of Paris.
The silence between us fills with books.
Marie reads a French novel about an unfaithful man,
and I, a book about a fictitious painting by Renoir.

Rain here, rain in Paris, and music.
Music in love with the mortal, carnal world.

Imaginary Interview With Elizabeth Bishop

for Denis O'Donovan

Elizabeth Bishop sits with friends at a corner table
in Gene and Georgetti's
in Chicago. Her hair
brushed back
like someone
cruising down
Lake Shore Drive
in a red convertible Mustang.
The man opposite her
is an intellectual
who criticized
Simone de Beauvoir
in the back
of TV Guide Magazine.

They nod, these
corner friends.
I go over and ask Liz
about "The Map," because
even after a friend with a chrome degree uncurled it,
I still don't get it—
Who cares about Norway?
Where's Chicago?
The intellectual friend,
ignoring me,

says something about
the red cow and the fire.
I say Sorry, Liz
your poems bore me,
they give me
the Big So What

in neon lights.
That's the problem
with kids like you,
she says, putting
a fork of clam sauce
into her mouth. You want
fireworks in your underwear, she says, you want candy.

She Wasn't There

This apricot is so full of love I feel it in my hand.
I stole it from
a woman's table
while she hung her clothes
on a line outside.
Through her window
she looked like a girl
in a painting.
Impossible to tell
where it came from,
that light.
I thought she looked
at me, but it was just
something I read about.
Her dark hair trickled down
like it might be dangerous.
I wanted to steal her clothes. I wanted this lusty
fruit to tattle.
Wanted her to
catch me
in her things
singing to myself
with a broom
in my hands.
But instead I slipped
into her shadow
that she had tied
to a set of knives.
Did I mention
my escape?
A pentimento
of light and shadow—
I was there in the room, and just like that I was not.

The White Album

I knew Pierre. We drank coffee at cafés near the river
Saturday mornings.
I watched his eyes.
They were the kind
of eyes that made hats
with flowers, and hands
so gentle they could
make you dream.
There was so much light
in his eyes
I couldn't stand it.
Pierre pulled white
roses from the world,
painted them with
music made
of lemons and snow.
Yet there was nothing in them, his eyes. Nothing at all.
The empty white vase that longs
for peonies
longs forever.
The tip of his brush
so fierce with love
imagined
a new world,
and the world
loved him back.
He knew it was
all in his head,
but light came
out anyway
from the
backs of his
eyes, which emptied the world of everything it had.