

I Don't Want You to Love Me
by Richaundra Thursday

I am not asking you to love me.
You will think that I am and that's not your fault:
On my knees, begging to please you, to make you happy;
I don't blame you for mistaking my want for your want for wonton-ness.

Believe it or not, I'm not looking for love.
When I slip into the collar, the metaphorical leather is more armor than consent.
Your attention is aspartame and maybe if I consume enough,
I'll forget I'm affectionately diabetic.

You'll be forgiven for mistaking my request for definition for one of intimacy.
I'm a bogeyman, a protopathic shoggoth,
I'm a steampunk fantasy; i will expand or contract to fit whatever set
Or airship balloon you want to stuff me into, not quite what Bruce meant
When he advised being water, you're a pool for me to drown myself in,
I'd love you like being waterboarded

If I WAS asking you to love me, you'd know because
I would warn that you'll get blood on you,
And neither of us will get to decide whose;

That afterwards it will be an episode of CSI,
All repackaged and sexy, with none of the smell,
Lit under UV similes and sent to allusionist labs:
Returned promptly because the imagination has unlimited funding
And we only have 42 minutes before I find a new monster to unmask.

I would say we were Luke and Mara Jade in that you will be wiped from existence
And I will continue to anger entitled white men for not being what they want me to be.

I would say we were Rogue and Gambit in that I'm only as strong as the people
I pickpocket personality from and I'm hoping if you're a tool enough,
I won't feel guilty when I fly off.

I would make monster metaphors because, while I want to make a cynical commentary
On the honesty of relationships being based on consumption, blood, bone, marrow,
Every lover an invited incubus, every date a ghost story in potential,
The truth is, I always believed that every romance was a redemption story:
Returned mermaids and vampires their souls, tamed beasts, quieted demons
And I'm not dubbing you to go challenge them, not because I don't think
You're up to the task, but because honestly, I trust them more than you.

And if you're thinking, "That's a lot of conflicting messages,"
Know that my inconstancy is not a lack of sincerity, only identity.

I am not asking you to love me, I'm asking you to create me.
But we don't want that either. I am the princess, and the witch AND the dragon
AND the tower all at once and you will be staggered, cursed, burned
And thrown from a story we are both just extras in and I have worked
Too hard for too long to build myself from razor wire spider webs and the softness
Of mushroom clouds, to be GOOD, if not whole.

So thank you for noticing and maybe even caring and if you want to stay,
I promise there will be wine and video games and being cornered into listening
To poetry you will never have to worry is about you.
I want your thoughts and your smiles, your gas money and your leftover hoodies.
But I don't want you to love me.



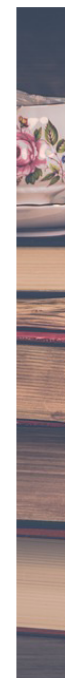
That foot-tapping, hip-swaying, neck-oscillating, head-bopping,
one-handed-snapping; a pair of crossed legs on a bar stool, a flip flop foot
pulsing up and down under the fabric of a light pink v-neck dress; next to them,
a beer in hand, there are hips that stay still as a torso swings side
to side in between deep swigs; eyes closed, brows contracted, a small
smile sits on a bobbing head, her toes
tap tap tap the tiled floor; a blue Hawaiian shirt with a pair of
sunglasses hanging on chest steps side to side and claps, looking around
to beckon others to clap with him - no one does.

My lover bought a beer (which I sniffed) and swayed behind me,
fingers trailing along my shoulder and arm, and came to settle
gently grasping my waist, pulling me along to match his rhythm until
the instruments faded.

"NEXT SHOW IS AT 10PM," a voice booms and passes
around a black hat for tips. My lover tugs my hand and my
body follows him out.

Two doors down, an artist's market. There is one booth where every
piece has a tree in the shape of every kind of woman, each trunk embedded
with holy curves. The artist said "body positivity." I spent \$10.

Our last stop, we cornered near the door, watching the musicians from the side;
the audience was filled with women; eyes closed, heads tilted downward, a single
hand lifted into a fist or holding a drink; one woman with long braids and a floral
pink dress danced unabashedly in front of the stage, stepping forward and
backward, arms rotating, her face concentrated in sound; the lead singer
alighted the stage, her voice seemingly sent from the sky just
for this: for every kind of woman, eyes closed, dancing together
at 10pm on Frenchmen Street.



hand holding
by Megan Russo

pinkies tied together with sharp metal coil
glittering like a dewy web between us
tugging you along beside me
but sometimes you tug me
carrying the other along
fingers laced together
nails clawing at the backs of our hands
embarrassed by our impulses
the late hours we keep
terrible food we force feed each other
the putrid ichor that flows freely from our lips
when we talk about other people
we are our shared burden.



Frenchmen Street
by Sarosh Nandwani

It's The New Love
by Parul Yadav

I wonder at times, why do we love?
Seeking this is always a quest for the mind, as the soul feels.
it's a feeling per say but thousand emotions did it feeds in you.
But what am I am, in my own self thinking of that lost love which was free of will,

A few years ago, love started as chaos did it.
The memories of the past, the soothing of that kiss, the new fresh smell of flowers
the morning happiness, thoughts and images that you saw in everything.
Those visions remain ingrained in you, never will it fade as the love was
the strongest you ever did.
Leaving its impact on you day by day.
Was it and will it ever be lost, was the question
that gave chills, deep dark horrors
Of loneliness embarks the journey with you.

It's the new love.
Call it by any emotion, feel it with the soul, love it with the heart,
pieces by pieces did it create.
People fall in love in mysterious ways,
the comrade with the touch of the zest of passion,
they go on with the new explorations.
The needy, the greedy, the big, the wiggled, the houses that turned bricks into beautiful places to live.
The love that people do shrines in every heart,
the stories that are never faded but
also, never was it accepted!

Parul Yadav is a 19 year old undergraduate student
from India currently pursuing English Literature
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She loves to write occasionally and dwell
deep into the topics about travel ,fantasies and far away lands .
Often escaping from reality you will
find her working in a secluded space of her own

