

## Whore

As experienced by Daniel Haddix

Mary Lou:

I had already jumped out a few bedroom windows when 'daddy' got home by the time I met her. These six months are still my longest relationship. Demure, innocent, country cutie with pigtails; she had an engineered body with an organic smile. I could describe how we met, the sappy stuff, what it meant, however, I'm not, this is about me. Metaphorically speaking, with a stolen handgun, I shot a cute puppy numerous times in front of a happy clown who was entertaining joyous veterans and their grandchildren while they ate oven fresh cookies at Ronald McDonald's birthday party. All that needs related is she forgave me.

Cigarettes, booze, and Mary Jane were gone, which, they had been a mainstay for a few years. We had open minds and hearts that closed out the world, if we even acknowledged the world's existence. No words could possibly describe our connection. She told stories, which I would neither confirm nor deny. It was how we kept our friends guessing and to keep out of our business.

Everything was storybook dreams until I had this nightmare. No need for the gory details, except to say, she received the treatment I got from teachers, bullies, and passers by; she had become their scapegoat, outcast, freak. She was me in this vision. And, our hometown had turned me into my forefathers. I woke up crying and it seeped in as a definitive premonition. I turned pale-faced as I prayed to the porcelain toilet gods. With a selfish decision I broke a promise, our hearts, and the flusher.

In 2008 I needed a break from my girlfriend Alicia. After going to my grandma's for the best afternoon breakfast in the tri-state area, we went to the geriatric center to visit her sister, my great aunt Shirley. The three of us sat at a table in the cafeteria, two of us forced conversation. I glanced at a paper somebody left. A column with a poem dedicated to an old friend saddened me greatly. I carefully ripped it from the newspaper, folded it, and tucked it into my wallet. My eyes observe the room afterwards. A nurse with her head tipped down was staring at me. I looked back the way a deer glares at headlights. It was the girl who taught me to be myself. A bad dream hung between Mary Lou and me, instead of years. She walked off and the world existed once more. I hugged Mamaw and Aunt, told them I loved them, and I'd be right back.

I wanted to talk to the ladies in the laundry department where I pulled a thirty day stint of

community service, but, the paper column had crushed me and I needed a smoke. She walked up to me in the smoking area, not saying a word, even after we were the only ones there. "God damn it, Mary Lou, I'm sorry" I said absolute without definition. I showed her this tattoo I got just as a reminder to not do anything dumb, for example, break up with a great person so they won't face my persecution, though, she would have. Her index finger brushed the frog on my chest, kissed me, and she was gone. I forgave myself after I knew she had. Later that day, I may or may not have slipped a married woman a note. It may or may not have read my cell number with the sentence 'wouldn't blame you if you didn't call'.

Jamie:

This jazzy firecracker was too hot for her well being. Everyone else wanted to impress the tall blonde girl, except me. She was impressed by the way I didn't care for social pleasantries. We had our jokes. She called me white trash and I called her rabbit ball; inside jokes. Our friends despised us and each other for being, well, friends.

One night she called "I'm gonna line you out, right here and now" she greeted and went on to say "It's been almost a year, you're over her, and that's why your step-sister's friends end up as bad sock jokes. However, ass jack, you haven't forgiven yourself for hurting her and that's why you won't get close to anybody. You're strange and your love is unusual" She paused for me to say something, I didn't. She was right, I could have loved her for it, yet, I couldn't utter a word. We had our own sock joke, I'll give the punch line, but the rest is/was ours: I woke up with one sock gone, the other on backwards, then she said I thought you wore flip flops. Hilarious.

I pussyfooted around every innuendo and opportunity with Jamie. We had dreams of escaping our hometown, the place were dreams come to die and state troopers came to make a name, the new 'old west'. The phrase "A shot in the arm" has a very bad meaning in the place, which became another joke. We had the most foolish ideas of escaping, by which age if we were still single we would marry each other and live our lives happy and drug free. Years pass, I almost had a driver's license, and we began to fall victim to what our hometown is. She called pissed and wanting to know where I was the night before. "Getting drunk with some pals" my regular answer. She broke up with me and we weren't even going steady. She had called that night because she worked up the courage to ask me out; I wished I'd been there. She wasn't wasting any more of her time on me, can't blame her, I was tired of wasting time on me too.

She called every now and then to make sure I wasn't too drunk, stoned, what have you. I

only saw her twice after that. The first time she looked scorned. The second time, some five years later, we had become ghosts roaming our pill ridden town. With crooked grins we acknowledged each other at the dollar store. For a moment, we look speculatively familiar, however undeniable, we had changed.

I never cared if I crossed paths with any female I've met again, yet, I always wished them well in all their endeavors, Jamie was an exception to one half of that statement. It was 2008 and it had been a long time since she dropped off the map. Although, I went to DUI School with her husband, he looked at me like he knew my name and could smash my face in for it. My eyes said "Get off the needle and take care of your wife, you stupid, undeserving junkie-fuck". Honestly, she was the farthest thing from my mind when I glanced at the newspaper in the old folk's home that day. It had her picture with a poem in her dedication. She passed away from a horrid disease, like we feared, drug related. I had no idea. The friend I was would have been there. I wanted to cry after I placed the article in my wallet, I couldn't, I smoked a cigarette instead. I don't know who wrote the poem "pastor, go tell them". This is what it read and what the pastor told them:

Pastor, Go Tell Them

She was slender and graceful as a girl, her smooth  
Auburn hair in place,  
Long lashes shading large soft eyes looked shyly from  
Her smiling face  
Beautiful, bright, soft spoken and sweet  
More bashful than boisterous, not indiscreet  
Bad acquaintances introduced her to smoking pot  
And drinking  
Then to pills and later the needle and she was soon  
Beyond thinking  
Her conscience was seared, she couldn't love, she  
Couldn't feel  
Her focus was on the next fix if she had to beg, borrow  
Or steal  
In her short life's final week after life support was  
Disconnected

She confessed her sins, God cleared her soul, but her  
Body was too infected  
She couldn't overcome it, but God had a little time to  
Give  
For her to pass on a message, so that others might live  
As she lay on her deathbed, the product of bad  
Choices  
Her thoughts were to warn others and she begged for  
More voices  
She said "Pastor, use me as an example, tell what I've  
Been through  
Tell how drug abuse claimed my life at just  
Twenty-Two"  
Someone else will be tempted to do as I've done  
Some other daughter, some other son  
They will lose those blessed ties to family and friends  
And will follow my path and to the same  
Dreaded ends  
Please, Pastor go tell them; please go tell them now  
Warn all the young ones; try to save them somehow,  
Keep them from drug abuse, oh please, for their sake  
Talk to them, preach to them, whatever it takes  
She said "Time won't let me tell them; you can see  
That I'm dying  
But this message is crucial and on you I'm relying,  
Tell all the world how drugs bring sickness and strife  
Take to them this warning from one who paid with  
Her life  
She said "Pastor, I'm so undeserving, but can my  
Funeral be at your church?"  
He replied "Yes my child, I'd be honored"  
And he repeated that from the pulpit's perch  
Death came to her then early that Sunday morning

The Pastor burdened by her words began to declare  
Her warning  
He said "It's up to you now, for her message you have  
Heard,  
She sent a clear warning and I've tried to repeat every  
Word  
I will keep telling it and so should you  
How drug addiction took her life; don't let it take your  
Life too.

Mary Alicia:

Kim asked how I thought things would work out with when she found I was with Alicia, again. She knew how distrusting I am in general demeanor. "Hit it and quit it is the plan, so, probably not well" I replied joking and serious, depending on how things went. She called me an asshole, and just to let her know I saw her as one of the guys I said "Bitch, I know". Reminds of the time me when she said "It's funny, you offend people like it's a wholesome American past-time". That may've been true.

I kept an emotional distance from Alicia, which wasn't hard. We never tried to really know each other, maintain trust, or anything traditional. In this preconceived doomed relationship, we didn't hold past sins against each other. Not, with a second chance we both gave. Three months in, I was starting to feel secure in the fact she loved Pepsi, literally. To compare her to a car, she was a Cadillac with a faulty radio: Easy on the eyes, but, God what awful racket. She may have strummed an audible note from time to time, although one statement always statics my receiver: I don't believe in the L-word. People confuse it with somebody they want to fuck more than a couple few.

One fine evening in 2008, lish and I got into a small spat. "It takes a terrible man to forget a Pepsi" I rattled out the door. Long story short, I ended up in the boonies drinking, smoking, and tooting. Out of the five, I knew my neighborly cohort and, of course my worst enemy, me. The other three consisted of a cool truck driver/road pharmacist and two stereotypical rednecks. They were the ratty hicks that gave good natured hill-jacks like me a bad rep. Also, these intravenous drug users, also, gave good time recreationist like my favorite enemy a bad name. With what the hicks said, my faces bleed white. "What was that whore's name? Mary something? Remember she got caught scroggin' a football player in high school. Said it was

rape” he stated casually spitting tobacco juice. My voice raised the whole time I spoke, and so did the Rottweiler behind me. “Don’t worry bout her God damn name. If ya don’t shut your yaps (I directed to the counter part) Y’all are just going to have to kick my ass. Honestly, fellas, if ya beat me to an inch of my life please go the extra mile and feed me to that barking ass dog, I’ll sweet talk your mom to let me in her house, then I’ll burn the place down, piss on the ashes, and just for shits and giggles, I’d leave a note saying ‘I’m so sorry’ just so insanity would be easier to plead. Just because that’s the kind of motherfucker I am.” My voice was crackled, popped and was almost drowned out by the dog when I got to ‘fucker I am’.

They looked at me kind of funny, I smiled and tipped my fedora, they look at each other almost embarrassingly as if they hadn’t been reasonably depersonalized at this point in their life. The whole time in this weird silence I thought “The only other high-school defense mechanism I got is where I don’t talk smack. It’s usually ineffective, but, I don’t know that by not trying. Double negative, weird. If one of them says “smucker’s ham” because of that damn dog or makes a furtive movement I’m gonna punch the bigger one in the throat-box and go from there”. They where still looking at each other, they looked at me again. I was still smiling, more so, because I wasn’t on a tangent anymore. “Bye, Roadpharm, guy, crazy guy” the talkative one said. “HAeeey, you fellas be careful on the road. I’d hate for anything to happen because, well, I loves you guys” I wasn’t even aware I was speaking at first. I figured why stop while I was having fun. Roadpharm patted me on the shoulder “Don’t do that again here, but, freaking hilarious. I don’t like those thieves anyhow. Seriously though, I’m not stupid enough to letcha talk that crap to me.” He joked seriously, good man. I left my pal and poly-substance there, bought a Pepsi, and Alicia fell asleep in my arms on the couch that night.

While she slept I turned on the tube. Nothing was on, the remote was forever lost, it was stuck on lifetime, my arm was numb, her hair kept getting in mouth when I yawned, and she snored; I thought “I’m kind of having a good time.” Kim called; I was having an awkward time. Alicia wasn’t moving and I didn’t want to be rude to Kim. I talked to her like a friend until the point she “grew a penis and turned gay for me. See ya”. The conversation had steered away from anything I was willing to talk about. Alicia woke, eyed me down, and said “I trust you”. I fell asleep with her head on my chest.

Pepsi, the caffeinated god of relationships, deemed it fit for another argument. We spent good deals of time together, and, we really enjoyed our space, thus Pepsi worked. My grandma told how couples get into arguments over nothing, mountains are molehills. Ain’t that backwards, molehills out of mountains? No, everybody’s got it backwards. I made sense of it

as my grandma and I drove to the geriatric center later that day.

A couple hours later I pull into the apartment complex with a cube; twenty-four cans, twenty-four reasons to love me. I left it set in front of her neighbor's upper apartment door and walked to my truck, turned around lit a smoke, and looked up. A Green plastic lawn chair was coming right at me. I remembered it; the arm was broke when I set the Pepsi by it. I would've stepped out of the way, but, I didn't want it to hit my truck. I cussed, kicked the chair, it was stuck in the front of my truck anyway.

Kimberly:

I woke up in my favorite truck on my favorite spot of my favorite abandoned strip mine, by my favorite CCR ringtone because of a person I knew a long time; since high-school. "I love you". Why wouldn't you, I'm awesome. "Seriously". I love me too, half of the time. "No, jackass, love you" Mmph, why you wanna do that for. "Urggh". I love you too, but, we're still not friends. An incredibly short period after that, which spelled the ruin I was expecting. I knew when I left our hometown, she'd leave me. It doesn't matter who cheated who, it was matters of happiness. I handled things the best I could, as I always do. The last thing I told her was "I'm not going to make you feel guilty or be weak and vulnerable by doing so. Pursue your happiness, all the best, friend."

Daniel:

I was pulling out of a little street with this plastic lawn chair on the front of my truck, which, I also assumed was the break up. I stopped to dislodge it with my foot. My buddy, who was walking up the street, told me my arm was bleeding, I hadn't notice. I told him I went to the old folk's home that day and that I had a hell of a breakfast. "Don't admit nothing do you, boy, nice, take these." 3 blue xanax dissolved under my tongue as he dissolved in my rearview.

I stopped at a PJ's real place, who wasn't home, snuck in the back door, stole a fifth of rum and orange juice. I left a note that read: If you found this, you know I stole your shit and you're cussing my name at this very point in time, but, I O U. I took your roaches too-pest control.

Kim thought, and probably still thinks, Pj lives where he used too. I just didn't have the heart to tell her that Pj moved and one of my other notorious friends was a sixty something, lesbian, street pharmacist, had moved in. I walked in Bulldogs' (that's what she looked like) as usual, blah. "What happened to you? Heart broke again?" "Just another day in the

ol'hometown, What are you ladies doing this fine day?" I fidgeted with the duct tape bandage on my arm, kind of scanning the room. "Honestly, Young Man, we're talking about dongs?" an old woman on the couch drunkenly cackled. I laughed. Bulldog, being straight to the point, which made her fun to hang out with said "Show us something worth seeing and I'll give you a pill". I thought about it; I'd done worse just to picture text a friend the goat and any man who hasn't been in a penis showing contest is a liar. I laughed again, whipped out my thermometer, wind milled it and put it away. Two for showmanship, no way. "Heh-heh, what'd you feed that thing?" Bulldog chuckles. I threw my hands in the air "White women, weeeeeee" I said in my dorkiest voice because I thought it was funny. Counted the prize and what I credited, I went to the mine with 10 pills, bottle, and a few dooby snacks in and about my system.

Kim called when I got to the mines, she asked what I did that day. I went to the nursing home with mamaw, had an afternoon breakfast, and I showed my penis to roomful of old perverted ladies, for some drugs, and a cheap laugh at the expense of teasing these old women, It's pretty crazy. You should join me or save me. "I hate your sense of humor sometimes" Me too. "What really happened?" Lesh and I split, and I got this napkin taped to my bicep. "Sober up, then call me before you call her".

I was at a place I'd take women I didn't care about to think about women I cared about; fitting. With each drink, puff, and line, although incredibly comfortable with the idea, I realized this is no way to be. I could say I thought about how the hometown crushed my soul to snort. I thought about Mary Lou, Jamie, Alicia, Kim, not so much about prostitution. This was my last real night of wild, debauched, craziness. No, really, it was my last night of poly substance abuse. It was kind of weird how I summed everything up: I broke a heart to preserve that same entity; looked blindly on somebody to see who they really were; came to comprehend what I never understood. Trickster personality, middle of the road cheese eater bouncing around a Johari window, which sounds like me, but what do I do about Kim? Which ending, works best for her. I just don't know what to do until I'm already doing it; wing it.

Right before I met Mary Lou, an old hag, I do mean hag, had paid me and a pal to cut her grass. Cut grass to get grass, at ages before teens. She came on the porch and without emotion, kind of like reading a newspaper aloud, she told how much she like my grandma. Then, she talked about pap. I could have chopped her up into tiny, small pieces, instead, I was at a loss for words, good ones anyway, when she said how bad it made her feel to sleep with my grandpa all those years ago because my grandma was such a sweet-heart. The next day I met this country girl.

Over the spring break, 2009, a disturbing conversation

“Haven’t you found a woman yet?” Mom asked.

“Nope, haven’t been looking”

“It’s been almost a year, ain’t you over Kim?”

“I’m over everybody, don’t want nothing from nobody, not even Mary Jane”

“I thought you’d never quit that stuff”

“Quit, I’m just paused”

“Boy, if you noticed it yet, there’s no hope for ya. You’re from a long line of crazy whores...well, the men are, the women in this family are the exact opposite. You’ll never learn anything the easy way, and you won’t understand why anything happens in a relationship. Now, think of what you inherited from your dad.” I knew she didn’t actually mean every word she said; I knew what she meant, the exact opposite.

All in all, I don’t think whores exist, just people, damaged people, then me, a pale face joker with a crooked grin and squirting orchid.

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