

## *Hard Reds*



# **Hard Reds**

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## *Hard Reds*

*For my parents,  
who taught me to take risks,  
and Aunt Jackie,  
a writer in her own right.*



I

LIKE THE DEVIL



## EXPLAINING POETRY ON A FIRST DATE

Is like telling the Prom King why I'm in Chess Club  
but still want the corsage, the one with the tiny basketball.

Why I can name every Tri-state poet, but don't know local DJs.  
A Pilot pen makes me happier than any red satin

dress with polyester loofah sleeves. All my friends  
carry Moleskines. One scrawls homophones on her hand,

another taped a pencil to his headboard. We collect epigraphs,  
read out loud in empty rooms. There's a library in my bed.

How do you explain wanting to die or marry yourself?  
That success isn't a matching loveseat or the Whitesnake video?

I don't want to get my picture taken and leave the dance early  
because my head's full of streamers and cardboard stars.

The lights are always low. It's affliction not religion.  
Not once have I thought I could be saved.

## ECHOLOCATION

I pulse now, once:  
I want a man who can  
build me new planets  
out of mint and tin and  
still maintain good posture.  
One with bare feet  
and big hands that carry  
lavender in wheelbarrows  
through my yard.  
Hands that hammock.

I bump and swell.  
A man with a wingspan  
from Gombe to Galveston,  
who folds me  
into knotted shoulders,  
all thumbs and metacarpal,  
like a papoose to backboard.  
Stiff as my high school  
boyfriend's letterman jacket—  
thick with forget-me-not.

A man who doesn't care  
I'm only in love  
with his overbite.

The tare between maxilla  
and mandible. How his  
zipper snags my lip—  
He doesn't give a shit  
that I'm seduced by violet.  
I love the way his hair will smell  
twelve days from Sunday.

Terminal buzz: I want a man  
who'll never stand  
for terra firma, who dangles  
by his toes for the wind  
alone. One who comes out  
swinging. I'll soak his scars  
in coconut milk, I'll heal him  
with heliotrope. I'll grow  
sanguinaria in my navel,  
throw clover from the roof.

Decibels somersault  
—*look back, look back*—  
but lilac lands in the canyon  
without an echo,  
and I keep writing love songs  
that vanish in thin air.  
One day, he'll nose  
my nape for blood.

## RED DRESS CENTO #1

In the arithmetic of red dresses,  
a red dress means go. Unlike most  
vagabonds in sturdy boots and a stained  
rucksack, I wear a red dress and slingbacks.

And there'll be no scream from the lady  
in the red dress dancing on her own.  
I had to cross the solar system  
on foot before I found the first thread

of my red dress. On the night avenue  
I am a brag in my red dress: *I dare you*.  
It is only me, sitting in a red dress,  
imbibing red drinks.

And the red dress (think about it,  
redress) is all neckhole.  
I put on that red dress and that is all  
I ever did for poetry. A girl who sat

by oranges, wore a red dress. Sometimes  
I walk though my village  
in my little red dress all absorbed  
in restraining myself—a woman in a red dress

is the reader's digest condensed book of love.  
All my life I saved for that red dress.  
The red dress crumpled like cellophane.  
The red dress a wilted petal on the floor.

## POEM FOR JASON RAY

A poem about you would begin with a belt buckle,  
a West Texas town, a field of sweet potatoes  
or peach trees that sway

that say this is how air should taste:  
sasparilla, sweetgrass, foam, quarry.

It would be littered with shingles,  
a lop-sided shed like a white cat  
in a dark field, a weather-worn tomcat.

It would leave tools all over the house,  
T-squared, weave around sawhorses.

It would be reflexive, a humor choked  
with asphalt stretching like clotheslines, backseats,  
the cowboy's long tendons.

It would breathe sparks, a circle of stones  
itching with rusted railcars that sand

the levee of my skin, distilling it into blues:  
a damp haystack, a dog's side sliced on barbed wire,  
a guitar that reveres silence.

A poem about you would be in two-steps, line dances, of city  
and sidewalk, the language between them, the hidden.

It would chop cedars, mine gypsum.  
Be full of cinnabar dust, raw erupting knuckles  
behind the bucking chute.

A litany of bathtubs and slow-leaking faucets.

## LIKE THE DEVIL

He holds on to life with his teeth,  
dangles it by the nape.  
Tastes with the fury of cayenne  
and says *hush-hush-hush*  
with his hands as he drinks  
wine from me like an open spoon.  
He can tell magenta from maroon.  
He grins like the devil,  
all jump-start and red bell  
pepper. Stitches me together  
as if my cunt is a wound,  
his tongue, copacetic.  
I mend, sprout wings,  
and scream things.  
A firebird possessed  
of the power to fly,  
he shuts his eyes  
and wills it so.  
Off he goes.  
Grunt and scruff, this  
spitfire. This hellcat.  
A scrapper who turns the screws  
of my truss rod, straightens  
my back. Names the stars  
of my knees with one eye

closed, opens my gates,  
faces the bull.  
*Olé! He's muy caliente.*  
Itch, bitch, and boil,  
he celebrates supine  
and sublime. Pins  
the tail on the donkey  
every time, this toreador.  
A necromantic lynx who  
swallows whole but plays  
legato, in tune.  
He follows me out of rooms.  
*Hush-hush-hush.*  
It will be all right.  
He who holds on to life with his teeth  
will never go hungry.