

Fourteen Days of Rain

How it feels to step off the curb and hail a taxi
My hand so naked in the rain coming down
And you still sleeping deep and dark in your bed
While the big hand rolls around
How it feels to be crying in the backseat with the meter running
Wondering what I got myself into now
And racing neck and neck down Forty-Second
In this black and white postcard of your town

Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain

All I know about you, right hand, crooked lampshade
Timex on the nightstand beside the Book of Hours
Change of the Century on repeat until you feel it
Moving through you with hydraulic power
All I know is true, forty second stoplight
While the meter readout quantifies this ride
All I know baby, four bucks and change
But a whole new world is implied

Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain

How it feels starting over
Reinventing hope and mystery, the rain in our faces
And the whiskey in your kitchen, confessions and omissions
Little lies to buy a moment of grace
How it feels to be crying on the corner in a thunderstorm
With yesterday's dress soaked to my skin
And stepping off the curb, across the river of Forty-Third
Past the flashing lights of vice and sin

Fourteen days of rain
Fourteen days of rain

1917

When he sailed for America in 1917
Jimmy Brennan's mother slipped her son a note
Said she'd taken his father's treasure from underneath the mattress
And sewed it in the hem of Jimmy's coat
Jimmy walked the streets of New York City, free and unafraid
With an eye for opportunity and deals to be made
He cut his coat open to find his father's treasure
Was just a deck of cards painted with naked ladies

There's a new name written down in glory
And it's mine mine mine oh lord
Lead me, Moses, across the red dirt road
Across the red dirt road

When Stuart Miller lost his job in May of '31
He took a train to Halifax, which cost him most his money
He saw a dirty picture lying on the club car floor
Which turned out to be a dollar bill folded funny
Stuart walked out from the station, dollar burning in his hand
He gave it to a fortune teller for the luck within her
She read his cards and told him – you are foolish with your money
But you'll never be lonely – then she asked him in to dinner

There's a new name written down in glory
And it's mine mine mine oh lord
Lead me, Moses, across the red dirt road
Across the red dirt road

©2006 Annie Gallup

Three Brothers

Maybe there were three brothers
Far away and long forgotten
Maybe there was a quest for love
Fortunes told, an age old riddle
Oldest brother drove his truck
Through fields of gold and fields of cotton
Youngest cursed his brothers' luck
You were the brother in the middle

Faraway
Faraway
Faraway

Three brothers on the make
Love to break and love to barter
Oldest took champagne and cake
Lost the wager, caught the garter
Youngest searched his whole life through
A diamond shoe, a white tuxedo
One too big and one too little
You were the brother in the middle

And I almost remember the night I left you
Down, down, the stairway down
The room so black when I awoke
In silence, silent out your kitchen door
Rolled my car around the block
Then popped the clutch and morning broke

Faraway
Faraway
Faraway

There were three brothers
Each more lonely than the others
Oldest learned to see the world
On black and white tv screens
Youngest drove into the river
White wall tires, black Camaro
Gone to dreams of gold and green
You were the brother in between

Faraway
Faraway
Faraway

©2006 Annie Gallup

Avalon

When Mary's brother Artie was discharged from the army
He wore a dog's tooth on a chain and sat for hours, his hand covering his chin
His eyes were too wise and scary, but I remember coming in with Mary
Screen door slammed and Artie jumped out of his skin

Cartoons on the tv set, carpets smell like cigarettes
Ballpoint pen, pretend tattoos... Artie never told us what we shouldn't do
And he had a rock that saved his life, he let me use his pocket knife
I carved a heart, a skull, a sword, and tied them to a ribbon and a pin

Avalon
Avalon
Avalon

Artie was a card sharp
The night he joined the Euchre game, he threw down the winning hand
And rocked back in his chair so wild I almost thought he was about to smile
I know he didn't mean to knock the fishbowl off its stand

But the bowl came crashing down, goldfish thrashing on the ground and dying
All the grownups laughed like it was supposed to be a joke
Artie disappeared, I could hear footsteps on the landing, I was crying
I let them all believe that it was because I cut my hand when the fishbowl broke

Avalon
Avalon
Avalon

What if we gave a party, Mary said, to cheer up Artie
Isn't there supposed to be a big parade to welcome soldiers home?
So we made a paper hat from the Daily Democrat
Marched on down the center line, Artie marched in military time

People watching on the corner, cars pull over, honk their horns
In the park a black dog barked, a soldier marching on parade!
When we stopped at the light Artie just kept right on marching
On and on and lost from sight behind a swarm of cars with flashing lights

Avalon
Avalon
Avalon

©2006 Annie Gallup

The Contender

What I learned to do for love
Is to never look away
Watch him in the ring
Hands taped and dangerous inside his gloves

Duck a jab then take a left hook on the chin
The crowd leans in

So the fight begins for real
And maybe there are words for it –
Overhand, upper cut, combination, cover up
Connect, blood, sweat –
Or maybe words are not invented yet
No word for reflex, adrenaline, intimacy
And no closet full of clothes at home
Just muscle and skin, the fundament
And the ritual of witnessing
The fight. Fighting. Fist.
This is how it feels
This is what I want to say
Lead right hook
Straight left over the top
Knock out punch
Do you trust words?
Do you question the flex of his spine?
Some of his hate and love and anger
Used to be mine

What I learned to do for love
Is to never look away
He lets his robe fall to the ground
He lies down in my arms
“Gently. Gently,” he says
As I touch the mark on his breastbone
The shape of an anatomical heart
“The champion,” I say
And it doesn’t sound foolish
Even with his eye puffed shut and weeping
And his mouth swollen to a stranger’s mouth
Later, when he is sleeping
I fit his fist against the pulse
Above my ear
And slowly count to ten
“The champion,” I say again
And I wonder where it can possibly go from here

©2006 Annie Gallup

3rd Person

She sees her life unfold, a story told in the third person
She wakes from a cat nap, she says as she wakes

She dreams about drowning or driving to Jersey
She knows half a man there who lives on a lake

She needs a drink she says, pouring a whiskey
The whiskey goes straight to her head she said
As the whiskey goes straight to her head

Her friend Tom the poet was an overnight success
She could have had Tom, she says to the mirror
Tom moved to Amsterdam to smoke off his depression
She only likes Amsterdam three months a year

She needs a drink she says, pouring a whiskey
The whiskey goes straight to her head, she said
As the whiskey goes straight to her head

Harry died in Hollywood and Sara sings the boys to war
All the little children have nothing to eat
She looks good in baby blue, she says, thinking of the river
Clear water running over little bare feet

She needs a drink she says, pouring a whiskey
The whiskey goes straight to her head she said
As the whiskey goes straight to her head

©2006 Annie Gallup

I Rode the Train

I rode the train past the churchyard of Santa Isabella
Through the rain I heard the bells and saw the crowd with black umbrellas
I pressed my hand against the glass but no one turned as the train flew past
The churchyard of Santa Isabella
Only passing through

I rode the train through the factory town where my days were stamped from steel
Nights I'd comb my long hair down in a summer dress and slingback heels
Restless in the dirty heat, lean out the window, call down to the street
Of the factory town stamped from steel
Only passing through

I rode the train past he field where I lay with my first lover
Rolling waves so sweet and green and the sway of purple clover
His raven hair against the sky, red tail hawk circling wide

Above the field and my first lover
Only passing through

I passed the town where I forgot how to pray when I was young
And I heard the sound of children singing songs in my first tongue
I searched the street for that angel choir, flock of yellow birds flew from the wire
In the town where I forgot to pray
Only passing through

I rode the train while the sun sank below the earth
In that deep twilight I fell to sleep and I dreamed the memory of my birth
The arching of my back and the heartbeat of the wheels against the track
As the sun sank below the earth
Only passing through

©2006 Annie Gallup

Enough

Sometimes it's a story about a long lost friend
Gets your running backwards through places you've been
Until it's five in the morning, never got to bed
But the sun's up bright, kind of clears your head
Sometimes the waitress has a smile like Beth
It's been so long a time it kind of takes your breath
But she talks to truckers like one of the boys
And you can't ride home on a stranger's voice

Then you find yourself in Iowa, little blacktop road
You know somewhere someone waits for someone you don't know
But you don't have to hurry, the day is passing slow
And that's enough

Sometimes you remember that sharp dressed man
He let the whiskey pour the whiskey and he shook your hand
And he talked about the alligator shoes they wear uptown
Might have talked too much – you just write it down
Across the Mississippi you decide to go
Through that town with the name of a town you used to know
You can still sing the melody but you forgot the words
Because they made you cry and your memory blurred

And somewhere someone's saying "hell with it all"
Somewhere someone's turned your photo face to the wall

But you know there's someone somewhere who might answer if you call
And that's enough

There are deer walking these fields at night
See them by the road in your highbeam light
And you slow down baby, ghost by cool
You're not afraid of dying, just of being a fool
East of Granite City at the Troy motel
Hear the highway hum as you hold yourself
Flying headlong toward the future just as if it might exist
Close your eyes, fall asleep unkissed

And somewhere someone plays that song you used to know
Somewhere someone finds a photo of you from long ago
And in the morning in the mirror you'll see your own face one day older
And that's enough

©2006 Annie Gallup

Sugar

He came from Canada and before that
From a place he wouldn't talk of much
I was lucky, he said, but the look in his eye
Said nothing of luck
He ordered good whiskey, paid with a fifty
Folded his jacket on the back of his chair
His shirt was fine white cotton
Cut to fit him fine
Oh sugar you'll never be mine

Time passed so fast the sun fell out of the sky
With a violent flash of red light
And the moon rose high overhead
Leaving streaks of white
His hands were not rough but he handled me roughly
His touch was not sweet but he touched something sweet in me
His hands still carried the cane, chains
Three hundred years of hard times
Oh sugar, you'll never be mine

There was a seashell on the windowsill
I remember that
And a black and white photograph of a woman
With a scar like a cross on her cheek under glass
And a newspaper clipping, barefoot boy
With a stolen gun and a rich man's son

Yeah, I got away with it, he said
Or I didn't but I got away and that's half of my crime
Oh sugar, you'll never be mine
Sugar you'll never be mine

©2006 Annie Gallup

Field of Flowers

Men fight war with fire and steel
And with the force of their bodies, that was the weapon turned on me
And like the fields of Flanders where the poppies grew
I lay down the battle, but life chose life

And war fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore

Occupation soldiers carry rifles through my town
They follow orders and they long for home
My body an occupied city, this unborn child a soldier
He's a weapon and a stranger, but a child is just a child

And war fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore
War fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore

This tiny soldier knows nothing of war
He smiles, dreaming of a field of flowers
Blood red and reaching on long thirsty stems
For the sun that shines on the world without borders

And war fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore
War fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore
War fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore
War fights war
I don't have a home in this world anymore

©2006 Annie Gallup

Away From the Lights

Maybe you were riding through small towns on the backroads of East Texas under a full moon, in a derelict Cutlass Supreme, wind high and badgering the car and the woman behind the wheel was not a mysterious woman but she had a mystery about her that meant something to you on a cellular level, in a participatory way, and just then on the radio, Carlos Santana tearing Samba Pa Ti out of thin air, and you turn to her to say:

Let's pull over somewhere away from the lights

But the moment already has a momentum of its own that you don't understand so instead you just watch her driving, cotton dress pale in the x-ray dashboard light and even when the song ends and Zenyatta Mondatta comes on, even when she exits the highway and power steers the roads all the way to your door, leaves you with a wave and a smile, even when you put your key in the lock and the microwave coffee smell of a place you've lived too long alone washes over you, and even later still when you're lying between your favorite rancid sheets while a slant of moonlight fans across a poster of a painting by Andrew Wyeth thumbtacked to your wall you are still turning to her to say:

Let's pull over away from the lights

As yet unaware that the urgency of those words belongs to a chance that won't ever come again, just:

Let's pull over away from the lights

Over and over until it becomes an idiomatic phrase in an archaic language without context or meaning still somehow comforting like a refrain:

Let's pull over somewhere away from the lights

Hi ho the derry oh

Ooh-ee ride me high

Let's pull over somewhere away from the lights

©2006 Annie Gallup

Almost Forgive

All the years since we last spoke
I've been writing the stories that you might have told
Once you drifted away saying life is a joke
A curse on the joker who lives to grow old

Lie lie lie

I could almost forgive you for taking that ride
When we ran out of gas saying you'd go for help
But I wanted so bad to think you had not lied
I waited all night, made a fool of myself

Lie lie lie

That night in Fort Smith you were drunk on your ass
Smashed the last pitcher and broke up the game
Then when Mike cut his fist on the carnival glass
It was his blood they found when the cops finally came

Lie lie lie

Well I still have your shirt with the holes in the sleeve
Where you held cigarettes to burn scars on your arm
That night that the landlady told you to leave
When she broke in to shut off the smoke alarm
And if only I'd known it was hell for a ride
When you loaded your stuff in the trunk of my car
But when Mike called your bluff and you called him outside
I felt sick to my gut you might take it too far

Lie lie lie

All the years since we last spoke
And all the stories that you'll never know
Because you took out the world in a cloud of blue smoke
Like a man who has nowhere to go

And I could almost forgive you for taking that ride

Lie lie lie lie

©2006 Annie Gallup

Faithful

High wind and listening for a knock at the door
Cold night air comes rushing in the arms of the one I'm waiting for
High wind and listening for the sound of my name out loud
Yellow candles flicker down, flicker down, flicker out

But I have been faithful to you
I have been faithful to you

Crowded room, Chicago blues, touch on my arm
Smoke and leather press against me, leaning back into the bar
Crowded room, Chicago blues, trouble and wine
Fall together through the haze, hand on the small of my spine
Faithful
I have been faithful to you

Last train, driving rain, no need to ask
Sharp dark suit and ruby, passing back and forth a pocket flask
Last train, driving rain, as if we both knew
Words we spoke were dark and dreamy, dangerous and partly true
But I have been faithful to you
I have been faithful to you

Black cat in the brambles where there once was a town
Slow dance in the broken glass that's tumbled down, crashing down
Black cat in the brambles, holding muscle and bone
Jack weed and sorrel in the cracks between mortar and stone
Faithful
I have been faithful to you
I have been faithful
I have been faithful to you

Ebb tide, September night, water like glass
Step into the ripples where the phosphorescent minnows flash
Ebb tide, September night, following in
Moonlight walking across the water, across water and skin
Faithful
I have been faithful to you
I have been faithful
I have been faithful to you
I have been faithful
I have been faithful
I have been faithful to you

©2006 Annie Gallup

Free

I was yours for the time it took to climb the stairs, let myself in your door
Dogs were howling out in the yard as I walked through your empty rooms, I was yours

When I left my fingerprints on your sugarbowl, on your piano's long smooth legs
I was yours for the time it took to cry myself to sleep on your bed

I was yours when I heard your key in the lock and I fell down the stairs, broke my rib
Yours when I tore my clothes on your rosebush and crashed through the laurel hedge, bloodied my lip
Yours when I grazed my throat on the razor wire and bruised my hip, scraped my knee scaling the wall
I was yours for the time it took to untie and free the howling dogs

For the time it took to climb the stair let myself in your door
I was yours

©2006 Annie Gallup