

Love Stories

Inspired by Faulkner's "Frankie and Johnny"

1.

... staring out upon a dark world like hundreds of other girls, thinking of their lovers and their babies... thinking of their lovers and their babies

She was young and wild, fifteen; he was twenty-four when he met her, but he had not grown up a day since he was twelve, so actually, he was, in all respects, younger than her; and by all accounts, he was certainly a fool for taking on the role, the name Daddy; while she was young enough to not be a mother. "I do love him so much," Frankie thought back then about Johnny, and Johnny couldn't think of ever loving any another girl except her, so the conception of a child was proof of the everything they were to one another and they were both so happy in the thought of their child, which signified their love, their together; and, at night, once she was plump, they silently laid down on their backs, unable to speak, only glow, staring at the ceiling, grasping palms and interlacing fingers, while with his other hand, he rubbed her full stomach, dreaming of the trophies his football star, track star, baseball star son would bring home and he smiled a second time dreaming of all the celebrations they would be having for his little boy's successes and he was so proud of all those successes' already, because his son would have the success he never would have in his own life, for Johnny, this son was his second chance; and as he rubbed her stomach, she was dreaming about all the love she would have to give her child, all the love her child would give back to her, all the love of their little family living and breathing and being always together.

Frankie soon birthed that child, and there it was, this bloody, ghastly hunk of flesh, conceived of his seed, popping out and hollering, crying, making noise, and Frankie settled down, sighing, relieved, as they handed her the alien mass, and stared at the illegitimate child blankly, but profoundly; I remember then, she reflects now, in that moment I was, despite how tired I was, happy, happy to have a responsibility in life, a purpose, a meaning, a definition-- *mother*, happy to have made my life bigger than I was by this, my birthing something; she cringes now as she

remembers this, for she thinks now, how “I too, was birthed that day into something new and different, birthed into a real grown up adult and of all the things I was expecting, I didn’t expect that to happen, and isn’t that the real kicker,” she thinks to herself, “because I was not even knowing what it was I was leaving behind to become that adult, but now I know, sure do, now that I am older, I when I look back, instead of a person, I see instead all my innocence, all my not knowing back then what I was really deciding, and I get so mad, so mad that no one stopped me, that I wouldn’t let any one stop me, that I wouldn’t listen, and that I choose (yeah right, choose) to have this child,” and right as she is about to get so mad she can’t even see straight, she bolts out with a hearty chuckle (and with that chuckle, Frankie proves yet again her greatest strength is her ability to overcome life’s idiosyncrasies, disappointments, and disparities by setting any hostility or regret she may very well be having or has had out to sail on the waters, under the bright sun of a calm day, of the briny, boundless sea of her sense of humor.) and now in a full out laugh, she is able to forget she thought about this all to begin with; because what can you do now after all is said and done, she mutters to herself in the back of her mind.

Anyway, it was back then, when the heap of flesh and bones came out a baby girl that the disappointments began; Johnny, though the baby girl was a setback for his plans, was still quite hopeful, and decided to name the girl Daniele (lightly scribbling the e; though Frankie later got that birth certificate fixed up right, making it a girl’s name, officially, then, she was named Danielle); anyway, he named her Daniele, to honor the son they did not have; the name, he figured, with the majority of it male would give the girl a strong back bone, make her more mule than mouse; and he did always try to raise her and treat her as if she really was boy; Danielle, then, grew up and became tougher than all the other girls, but given her tiny frame, as she inherited her mother’s stick thin bones, she was never able to defeat those boys no matter how hard she tried, and when it was getting on late in the night, her father would always be out, looking for her, to end up finding her crying, beat and out of breath, by herself, sitting on some curb, throwing rocks and sticks out against the street with a glum expression on her face, on the gutter forming a sadness that in all her life would never leave her; and then daddy would show up, give her a love slug on her shoulder and they would hold hands walking home; and her father learned to accept and adore his daughter’s very tender, very tearful strength. Now, Johnny and Danielle kept very close, they were tried and true best of friends, but soon enough rough times came over the household, and when she was nine or ten years old, her one and only father got himself into some trouble. Soon, the authorities were taking his stubborn minded, short-tempered hoof of a self to jail. *Poor kid, she’ll have it tough now,* he thought as they carted him

away; the last sight of Danielle was of her standing next to her mother, crying as she witnessed him being pulled, cuffed, and taken away.

Frankie did love Johnny very much, but she had needed a break from him badly, she was just itching to wrangle free of him for the past years, and this jail sentence was quite welcomed, helped balance things out, she figured, he would be stuck and imprisoned, so that I could now be free; and instead of bringing Danielle to him for visits and instead of phone calls, she stopped speaking to him all together, figuring, after all, being in jail is a hard row for anybody, I do not see how I am going to make it any better, any easier, and I am out in the world, I can't act like I don't have a life of my own and my own desires and I can't be worried about what isn't here and I will have plenty of time for Johnny later, so never mind about him anymore.

It did not take much longer for Frankie to lose interest in being much of a mother, too, for with Johnny gone and her eroding sense of responsibility to any one or thing or person or bond, what was left of the young, still buried in her heart, came rushing out and she was back to an old self, bounding across the land like teenagers, doing exactly as she pleased, never thinking of consequence, and she was working on getting her kicks and the wild out of her; that kid of hers be damned, Danielle was left to care of grandmas or friends, or whoever would get her off Frankie's hand for a few days, a few hours, a week or two, so she could have all her time for only her and all to herself. Of course, Frankie always did think, for sure, this isn't the right way to do things, isn't the way to be a mother, but I will make it up to her later; later, when I settle down; but so what if it isn't right after all there is a lot not right about things, we all learn to deal with the not right and is it right that I could have a child, is it right I thought back then having a kid was the thing to do, when maybe it wasn't and, no, no of course now I love my baby girl and all, and I could not ever get to thinking killing life was the way to go about it, and Johnny and I were so in love and that love made it seem so right, but that sure does mean things was right for me either and there is no right anyway only what is done and making the best of that, besides leaving her with others and not being so involved with raising her to be something will not do her any harm, not much anyway, not so much she won't be right in the head, she probably won't even remember, probably doesn't even notice or care and I don't neither and I am not really going to worry much about anything anyway so I don't know why I am worrying and going on like this like I feel guilty or something because I don't feel guilty at all, I just feel like having fun, Frankie thinks, and how did I even get started on this anyway, she shrugs, and leans over to pick up the phone, to call her best girl, Rose.

Now, Johnny for a time was persistent, he sure did keep trying to call Frankie from jail, even though he quickly figured out she had no interest in hearing from him and he kept trying to contact her for a year and half straight, but with her ignoring him and all, with no access to her, he started writing to her closest friend, Rose, and that has not stopped for a long time now, thought Rose to herself, he is always calling, needing something, begging me for something, and I am not the one to give him what he needs, as she hangs up the phone on him, and she gets back to what she was doing before he called, sorting through the stack of papers on her kitchen table, and sure enough a letter spills out of the envelope, she opens it, peruses the contents, notes the handwriting and recognizing the cursive of that particular man who was the source behind the markings on the page, she skips the opening paragraph, all the substance in the middle, barely glimpses the conclusion *you are my only hope, Rose, I know you don't like me shit you might even hate me but please think about this if you was here and I there and you baby daddy had your girl and would not send you any pictures of you girl and I could do you think I would send them to you hell yes I would. So please do this for me, please your my only hope please for me, Johnny.*

She tosses the letter into the trash can with all the other junk mail, no sooner the phone rings.

“Hey.”

“Hey, Frankie.”

“Got another letter and yet another phone call from your man.”

“Ah, shit; he just don't stop. What now?”

“Why don't you send him some pictures? Talk to him?”

“Don't get me started.”

“Well maybe he will stop pestering me, after all. Ever think about me, huh?”

“That man, not even near me and still wearing me out. Shhess.”

“Just wants to be a good daddy, loves his daughter, probably thinks, I don't know why, you aren't treating her the best, not as good as he would, probably wonders if you are caring about her the way he might, wondering if you are being bad to her.”

“Now you too, huh?” A snicker sounds out over the phone, “I am so sick of hearing criticisms, I am no different from any body else if they were in my situation, and shit if my ass was in jail, he would be doing practically the same thing, I sure as hell wouldn't trust him to keep inside and always be watching her and being father, you know him, he was always out hunting for excitements and playing games, and his games and all his hunting are worse because he is never going to grow out of them, while I reckon I will with a little time because women have to grow up, always end up finally taking the responsibility, so it will be fine; besides, the girl is old enough

now anyway to not always need me around, and I have only a little more time for my youth, so who is going to say anything now because there is nobody inside my mind so there is no one who can tell me what is better to do, not you, and certainly not that slob of a man in prison who is probably sitting there in jail, stewing, acting all stupidly self-righteous, and you think you can say something because you are kind of like me, but you should keep your mouth and opinions to yourself, and”

Rose interrupts her, “you are right, it is your thing, I am just playing advocate of the devil, I don’t mean nothing by it,” Rose says, trying to make amends, for no other reason than not wanting to have to listen to Frankie go on and on like she can; besides, Rose thinks, all right decisions and good acts are self-taught, self-motivated, so there is nothing she can say or hint at, nothing at all to change her friend’s behavior, so it was best to let Frankie be and make her own choices.

“Besides, the girl never did like me as she liked him, she doesn’t even listen to me, if she was always here with me we would be an orange and tomato stuck in the same pea pod, never fitting and not in the right spot. This is better for the both of us and damn I can’t believe you and damn you really got me going inside, now I am mad, really mad right now, but I am not going to stay mad at you, I am over it, but damn if I didn’t just feel like punching you a minute ago, if I was there, ooh, I don’t know why you started on me, and I am not in the mood for this conversation anyway, so why did you start it; shit; anyway, what are you doing tonight?”

“I am supposed to hang out with air force tonight, but he has to call me first.”

“What--and tomorrow the navy? The next night the marines?”

“You think you are so funny, but you’re not; I am just sticking with air force, and I am only calling him that because I forgot his name.”

“Yeah, the goofy boy you meet the other night is coming over later.”

“How long you known him? What’s he do?”

“Long enough; he doesn’t work right now, sure, he is finding something; his friends are having a party tomorrow night, are you coming?”

“We’ll just have to see about that. Probably not, I never have much cared for your ghetto-ass friends or the ghetto-ass ways you all be acting like and I just can’t be a part of that anymore, no not no more. So no, don’t count me in at all, don’t even call me before you go to ask, got that?” Rose says the last part of this in a high, uppity tone lined with haughtiness, showing off her self-respect and the high esteem she holds for herself and her baby, because she always does think, we girls are looked down upon all the time, it sure don’t help we have had these babies, that sure puts us on the bottom of the pile, so you have all that working against you, people

expect you to be a bad mother just because you are young, single, people kind of want you to be a horrible mother, makes them feel justified in their prejudices, and no one thinks much of us, our kids, and all, so I am sure not letting them think I am some dirty, dingy, no good mother, I take care of my girl, I am a good mother, while there is Frankie going on out reckless and all and doing exactly what everyone expects, proving their point exactly, and I am not like that, no, I am not, and she doesn't see it isn't all about her, not anymore, like I do, and that is why I have to stay away from her and the types she goes gallivanting around with and I swear she is never going to ascertain these kinds of things and she is always going to make herself look worse and she is never going to get any better and she is going to be the worst of it all her life and I can't have any of that in my life, no, no, I can't and that is why I am trying to find a decent men, decent people, and shit a man with a job, a man that stays out of trouble, a man who act better than most, at least acts better than her boys and their friends, anyway, those boys always fighting or playing games, all of them unreliable and liars; how many times I have been told I am going to take care of you, your baby, trust me; shit, I don't never want to hear that again from nobody.

"You sure are acting pretty judgmental, they are not that bad and you know you have some fun when you come out with me and you need that fun."

"Yeah," Rose sheepishly agrees, she is right, somewhat right anyway, going out with Frankie always does relieve some of the pressure, the headache, the stress; but its not like it used to be, because I am old now, and can't be young like I used to be, it isn't fun like it once was, now it is just kind of depressing to see people acting so foolish and knowing these kind of people are never going to change, never going to alter their ways, never going to be something different, better, just childish, mean, no good.

"How's your baby girl, huh, I hear her in the background, what's she doing?"

"Oh, dumping out crayons, making a mess, something; this whole house is a mess because of her, I can't ever seem to get cleared up. I sure do get to thinking about us, and about how we are all causalities, I mean think of your girl, Kelly, and our other friend, Sally, has two kids now and she is not any older than us, maybe even younger, and we are just a bunch of little lines thrown up what must be an infinitely long blackboard board, none of us a name or a face or anything, barely a person, just this birthing thing. I tell you the worst is these kids are just going to grow up to be as stupid and as hard headed as their fathers, and as stupid and stubborn as their mothers."

"Yeah, a regular bunch of bastards," Frankie laughs, to her the state of affairs is nothing to be ashamed about; shit, she figures, if I wasn't a part of

it all, I wouldn't be able to laugh at it, but because I see it on the inside, I see there isn't any blame, its just funny, after all, my worthless life, their worthless life, a whole bunch of worthless and it don't matter, these kids don't matter, won't matter in any long run scheme of things, and these poor kids will stay poor kids becoming poor adults and that is how it is, and I mean what is the alternative, be like Rose and thinking so highly of herself, by blinding herself to what she is and don't even see how she is the same, just as bad as all of us, just as worthless, but trying to make it seem like there is something more she can attain, something more out there, which there isn't for people like us.

"But my girl is different. I keep her clean. I am going to make sure she stays in school, she is going to have a different life. I am smarter than all of them, smarter than you, and I at least think about the way we live, the things we do, the harm we cause, and I am going to prevent it, I am. I am going to give my girl a better life, I am. Everything is going to be better for her, everything" Rose pauses, reflecting deep about those beliefs, and sometimes, man, I wonder, how I am going to make that happen, but I am going to make her life stable, she is going to have everything, I am going to make it good for her, better.

"Yeah, of course," Frankie laughs to herself, Rose always thinks of herself and her offspring as better than everybody else; she is a real snob and she is just hurting herself and her baby thinking like that; blinding herself to what she is.

"I just keep hoping."

"Yeah, girl, it will all work out for you, uh-huh. Everything is going to be peachy and great and better" Frankie says, rehearsed.

"I sure hope."

"Look, Danielle just came in the door, I am going to call you later."

"Later."

"Bye."

Frankie angrily yells, "Why aren't you with your grandma, like you supposed to be?" Frankie pauses, realizing that is only half of it, "Did you just walk here by yourself, did you even tell her you were leaving?"

"No I did not and yes I did, I walked here all on my own, and that is because I don't like the smell of her house," Danielle stomps her foot down, "and I wanted to come here instead. Why don't you ever want me around?"

Frankie does not want to answer that directly, because really why not, why can't she stick around, but then Frankie gets to thinking she doesn't want her girl seeing all these boys coming around, being around all the trash, she don't need to see that, and there is the Rose in me, thinking she

don't have to be like me, even though she will end up like it, but I sure do want to prevent it, so it is in her own best interest to stay away for now until I can promise her more, but she can't tell her that, not quite "Honey, I love you and care about you a lot, want to do what is right, Grandma has a better place for you right now."

"Why, a man coming over? I don't care, I won't tell daddy a thing, I promise, I won't say a thing, I will disappear, you won't even know I am here, I just don't want to be with Grandma, I want to be here."

Look at her, Frankie thinks to herself, Danielle really knows what is going on, yeah, smart as a whip, and bull headed and independent, too; she has learned about things quickly, and Frankie suddenly is very proud, and decides she likes this creature that is her daughter, so relents, lets her stay; with that precedent set, things changed between mother and daughter, and in time they learned to become peas and share their pod, after all; and Danielle was not transported near and far and shuffled amongst a whole bunch of other people, and she was left to grow up on her own, which gives her character, after all, Frankie thought, thinking about it some more and so I didn't do so bad raising her because look she will really be able to take on the world by herself and she is growing up smart and strong and so maybe things aren't right, but it seems things do have a way of working out and working out enough to being fine, after all.

Danielle only sort of liked most of the men her mother had coming over, when her mother did come home, and she ended up befriending a couple of them, but no one took the place of her beneficent, kind, all giving father that she still sometimes missed through and through, but mostly forgot; and Danielle learned to live on her own, sometimes having no mother at all for days, and learned to laugh at the miserable souls coming by to fetch her momma only to find the little girl and an empty house, and she learned to ignore the best she could all the random people and their random noises and random stench and their random souls filtering in and out of her life and her mom's life; and at night, after collapsing into solitude, she would find herself dreaming of the boy she would some day kiss, the boy with fresh pink lips and freckles and long eyelashes; the boy, who would, in fact, be kissing her, and, staring out her window, she thought, he would be kissing me on a doleful, crystal clear night like this, his eyes sparkling like the bright stars against the broad, dark, mysterious sky.

2.

when you've walked and walked until you're about all in and now you can walk further if you have to, but don't see how...

I cannot deny it, I can't, it is just that sometimes I really do get to missing Campbell. I cannot help it. Campbell just makes a hell of a lot more sense to me and I should have never left him in the first place. What I miss most about Campbell is that he always left me in the middle of nowhere and I would be scrounging around, desperately trying to survive, and he wouldn't come and rescue me, help me or nothing, just leaving me out there to make it on my own, and when I did make it, he would be there waiting for me; Campbell never did try to complicate his life or try to help himself or anyone else, because Campbell had it in him that instead of starting on and fixing something he didn't want to fix or instead of fixing up something broken, he would rather let it sit and wait for it to either fix itself or figured it could just stay broken. I miss that. Campbell always did make me fend for myself, even though he was right there next to me.

I miss Campbell's apathy, the passivity he shoved in the face of the world that endlessly attempted to defeat and overthrow him; he thought the world could never beat him, after all, if he just never responded to it, and he figured he did not have any control over a single thing so it was better to let everything pass, and damn he was so good at that, he got to where he didn't even notice the world slipping on by him, he was that removed; maybe once in a few months he was tapped on the shoulder, reminded of it, but then he would shrug his shoulders, and go back to his not caring. Campbell did always seem to think there was no consolation to be found in the world, no consolation for a person at all for being in the situation they were in and hated, and instead of getting mad, angry, frustrated or worked up, he just didn't add his two cents, and took the world for what is was and never asked nothing from it, because he didn't want to get in a trap of thinking he was owed something for the wrongs committed along the way, and he always said that he just wanted to enjoy what he could for there wasn't much in life and soon it would be over. I miss that, too. I am always looking for things I can never get, always trying to get restitution, always trying to find what can't be found for people like me, for people like him, which is happiness and peace.

Campbell really could be such a bastard to me; he was so careless in the way he treated me, but not ever on purpose or maliciously, he just was not thinking sometimes, and I would yell and holler bloody hell to him, and there was nothing I could yell and there was no decibel level I could scream to get him to apologize about it, because he wouldn't look back on what he did or at himself, because he figured he already fucked up, would say, yes, I am an absolute fuck with that expression of so what do you want me to do about it? and instead of trying to make it up to me, instead of apologizing to

me (which I personally liked the most about him because I hate the word sorry, because I hate apologies more than anything else in this world), he would just wait things out until I calmed down and got over it, which I inevitably did and when I did, his arms would be open, tender, and loving, however callused; and when I really needed it, he would listen to me, no matter how callous his mind had gotten, he could always listen to me and say things as sweet as the birds chirping, and so it was with Campbell that I always got the compassion I needed, because he really did love me and he really did figure I was the best thing that could happen to him, so he gave what he could, so I could never stay angry at him. I also liked how Campbell did not treat me like I was anything special, that kept me modest and my head on the earth and being around him kept me from getting too fussy and wanting things I could not have.

I miss Campbell even more because he knew it like I did. Campbell and I could talk because we had both seen morose things, horrible things, we both had been forced into rough lives and were forced to cope with tough situations. We had both seen most everything imaginable, and now grown, we got to have our own disturbances and imbalances, because the way we had it, we were both psychologically fucked, traumatized, and angry and that is what kept Campbell and I together, because we both understood sometimes what was needed was to break glasses against the kitchen floor or beat fists into walls or fall down, crying and pounding on the floor, while hollering at each other, hollering and telling the flaws and weaknesses of ourselves; we knew that we had to let each other happen and when whichever one of us was finished, we would get drunk and then our problems would be gone in no time, and soon we would be kissing and making love all night long.

Making love to Campbell is another thing I miss, we sure would scream louder and bigger than all the glass breaking and all the hollering we did to each other; we were always shrieking in excitement at the luminous explosions of two strong forces smashing into one another with all they were. Campbell and I, if nothing else, at the end of the day, fulfilled one another; but even then, late in the hours of dawn, it was alone I felt most vividly, and I doubted Campbell and I doubted he really cared about me and I could never get to believing that Campbell cared about me other than I was what made him happy, and I never did think he cared about whether I was happy; that was hard to have to say to myself, and I was always sad to have to have no faith in Campbell.

Johnny was in one of my classes, and we did not talk all semester long even though I had caught him staring at me a few times, but on the last day of class, he asked me if I would go have lunch with him, he said he would pay and everything, so I agreed to go right away. People like me will take

anything they can get from some one else; I mean, as long as they are offering, then I will take anything I am given, but I do not beg, you won't ever find me begging for something, uh-uh not ever; but Campbell surely would never, ever do something like take a lunch from some one, he would have turned the offer down as quick as it was given and without any hesitations, but that is Campbell, and that is not me. So I took up the offer and got a big lunch that I didn't have to pay for, and enjoyed that meal immensely.

Johnny and I got to talking and he told me that I sure did seem upset, troubled, and sad, which was a shame he said because I have such a pretty face, which gets all blurred in the sadness. He told me I deserved better, deserved more in life. I thought this boy sure is sweet, even though he is a liar. He said he would never do anything to hurt me and that he always did want to make me happy. He told me no one should have to be sad or upset like I was, no one, and he would help me see that I didn't have to be sad, and he told me even if I never did let him try to make me happy, that I should be careful to not let the sad become a part of me and he said he was worried and upset to think all the sad I had in me would become a part of me I couldn't ever leave behind, especially when it didn't need to be there. I took a good look at Johnny and thought maybe he had something and maybe he was right and maybe he could make me happy.

So I started seeing Johnny and he got me to see the world differently, he made the world soft to live in, instead of so hard and rough and grueling and loud and always breaking. Johnny is the type always trying to fix things, make them better; and even if something is fine, works just perfectly, he sits back and thinks about how to make it even better than it is. That is Johnny, for sure, he is a hard worker and a perfectionist, and he dreams paradises. Johnny wants to make the world perfect and when I was first getting to know him, I thought I had been missing out on so much because I never thought I could fix things up, not even in the slightest, I was always passive to the world like Campbell. I never thought I could make my life better, I thought it was always going to be down and lowly and difficult, but now my life isn't like that because of Johnny, I see how to make things better, how to shape myself more neatly, and with him everything is gentle and what I like about Johnny is how he crafts things with his keen, guiding, maternal hands and speaks like soothing guitar strings vibrating when strummed, in harmony with the wind, and with Johnny all my pleasures are small, gentle, peaceful, they are fresh dew on petals on a chilled morning; and each delight, every pleasure enfolds upon itself, wrapping up in a tight, neat package of softness and velvet, hushed. Whenever I am with Johnny, I feel clean and shined up. I feel new. What I like about Johnny is he has a way of

taking care of me, and for a while there he really was always making sure I was happy, making sure I was eating right, and making sure I was taking care of myself and I am sure lucky he is here with me because he always works to polish me up and fix me up after all the broken.

After being with Johnny for a while, I went and tried to talk to Campbell, but when I did, all I could see was his dirt and we would share just one grimy laugh and my nose would start filling up with a stink and I felt nauseous and I could only think of all the dirt in him, which offended all my new found clean, and I could not be around Campbell, because I had to get more and more away from the dirt. It was hard for Campbell and sometimes when we talk, every once in awhile, he gets to making me feel bad because he says he misses me, but he can be so manipulative, so I don't pay much attention and he has another girl now and she keeps him in line and if he was with me and I with him, we would just bring each other down again, I know we would. I think Campbell and I feel the same with our lovers now, things are nicer and all, but they lack something we need, something destructive and painful, but then we wonder if what we need maybe isn't good for us, so maybe the nicer, the clean, is what we should stick to, even though there is something missing. Well, at least, I think like that and regardless, meeting Johnny was a miracle and he is always helping me wash off all the dirt of my past, and he helped turn my life into something more beautiful than I ever expected it to be. So I do care for Johnny an awful lot and am so grateful for him and his care, and can't really see how I could miss Campbell like I do.

Part of the problem is that Johnny never has had any of the ugly, never had any struggle, never had anything dark and deep to deal with. He has always lived in a peachy keen, sparkling world and he has never had anything to bother him. He has never had to face any neglect or abuse, irresponsible parents, never had to face any poor or anything like that. Johnny has always had everything and now of course I don't want to put that on him, because he can't help he didn't have it in the way I did, he can't help he has it all and has been given it all anymore than I can help I wasn't given it all, but he is not ever as tired as I get and he sure cannot listen to me or know how to listen to me the way Campbell can and always did. That is not Johnny's fault, and it is not his fault he is not as tired as I am and that he is not as disturbed and haunted as Campbell and it is not his fault he can't listen to me, because he does try, he just cannot hear it the same way.

I thought when I entered in this union with Johnny, things would be easier, and that we would have it easy and nice and healthy, communicating and working together all the time. That is what I have always wanted in Johnny and why I always stayed with him. He treated me well and I treated

him well and we both had our understandings as best as we could of each other and we made everything easier, light, and better for each other and compromised to help each other out. That is why I have always like Johnny, but lately, he has been making it hard and I am thinking if I am going to have it hard like this and not soft like I like with Johnny, then why I am with Johnny, if I could be getting the hard from Campbell and feeling more comfortable and at least like I am being listened to by someone.

Johnny can be so selfish too; Campbell was selfish, yeah, but not in the same way. I never have met anybody who can tuck things away for only themselves, all of his resources and such, but not because they don't have the ability to give some away, but just because they want to keep a lot of things for themselves. What is it about people who have everything, they are always the stingiest people of all, when you would think they would be the most generous; Campbell who has close to nothing would give his last cent away, while Johnny is over here hoarding up every last cent he does have even though he can afford to not hoard and I don't understand why he is like that; but I know this is pointless to think about because I can't change that about him and really that does not bother me anymore like it used to, his selfishness and his gentle, rich boy self is just bothering me tonight when I am agitating like I am, because I told him again and again that I just wanted to stay in and be together and rest because it has been a long day and without even listening, he said there was a party and some friends he wanted to see and that he was going and I could come with him or stay, but he was going. I told him I was going to stay. All I wanted was to stay in and rest and spend time with him, I told him. I wanted to spend time with him, just us, because lately we have not been really talking, both being so busy and all, and lately he has been treating me like I am just anybody, like I am some thing next to him, not something he truly cares about, I told him, and I am tired and just want to spend the night with you, you and me, I said. Johnny sure did melt for a second and did not know what to do. He said we could be together, I just had to come with him, and we would walk there to his friends house and we would not stay for very long it is just that he told Mikey he would stop by and he promised me tomorrow night and he was sorry I was tired and then he gave me a hug and said tomorrow night is ours, okay honey; okay honey. It would be easier I thought to not go tonight, and then I told him I hate his promises and said okay, okay, I will go; and boy, do I ever hate promises almost as much as apologies. Why promise someone a future, what you can give to them right in the now? Why promise someone a future when you can't predict the future? And why apologize for your decision without instead saying how you are going to change that decision from being made again

and say that instead of using that stupid word sorry. I never could understand what good an apology ever did to anybody, and I don't think I will ever understand. If there is anything as empty as a promise, it is an apology; and if there is anything as empty as an apology, it is a promise; and I don't like empty things, because I want something real.

Anyway, I wanted to rest and have time for us, only us, and together. Johnny always does have to get his way though and that is because Johnny is selfish and can always be selfish and was raised to get what he wants. While I am left to compromise, like I have always had to compromise because of some one's selfishness, like I have always been pushed aside for some one's selfishness and like I was raised to expect to be pushed aside and never have the best and it was the miracle Johnny was changing that, it was Johnny who cared about what I thought and about giving me the best and now he is not listening even more than normal and is being like he is, selfish, and giving me less than what I deserve and pushing me aside, and I am upset by way Johnny is treating me and it is just more of the same shit I don't want to deal with and instead of being any easier, all the pain from Johnny just adds to the tiredness and the wear, compacting it and making it worse, and instead of being washed from the dirt of my past, my past just makes the wear of this present even worse, and so my past never really went away when he washed it, I can see that much, and the present that Johnny is giving me is bothering me like he told me I should never have to be bothered and Johnny does not seem to care at all and I am tired and Johnny is just packing more dirt on me now and I don't like that and Johnny was supposed to keep me clean.

I sometimes think that I should try to be on my own, and I wonder if it wouldn't be better, trying to be on my own, it is just that he always tells me, always says he cares about me and wants to make me happy and he tells me how he is always trying to understand me, so that I am not made more upset, and I think how sweet and how loving we are and I am so happy and would like to stick together. Maybe it is that I cannot do it on my own, after all, I do rely on Johnny to help me out and keep me held together. I do rely on Johnny a lot and others too much. I can do this alone, I think, but then another part of me is sad because I don't want to have to be on my own and I don't want Johnny to be sad and I know he likes to have me around even if lately it does not seem like he cares and I came along to make him happy and I made the compromise to come so we could be together and that is proof I love him and that I like to be with him; but I could just as well be on my own, but don't want to be and maybe that is my problem.

"What are you thinking about, girl?" Johnny asks me, "are you mad?" Johnny is not fully concerned; she can't be that mad, she really is being royalty tonight, making a stink like this; besides, she decided to come along.

“I told you, I didn’t want to go, and then I told you I didn’t want to walk, but you still insisted we did not take the car, and I have no desire to get to this party, of course I look upset.” Frankie said looking straight ahead and not at him so he would know she was really angry and did not want to make any sort of reconciliation and wasn’t looking for one from him. I don’t know why I agreed to come, Johnny always does have a way of coaxing me into doing things and I always do have a forgiving heart and I do so much want to make Johnny happy and let him have what he wants. I feel bad that I am complaining after I agreed to go.

“Hey now, baby, I don’t mean to complain. Look, we aren’t staying long, right?”

“Right. I promise,” Johnny says as he grabs her hand with affection. “Besides, we are almost there” he adds, comforting her.

What bothers me most about Johnny is that he don’t even notice how good I am to him. He would never stop complaining if he was me, because if I ever asked for him to do something like this for me when he didn’t want to and if I was insistent like he was and he went along with it, he would never let me forget, all night long he would keep belly aching and being difficult and not once feeling bad about it. That is Johnny and his selfishness after all and I can’t blame him for that when I know that is a part of him that nothing I can do will change that. That is the compromise I make for him, he gives me some things that I never could give myself and need him to give me, but that does not mean he is perfect and so I make certain compromises for him because overall he is nice and good for me.

I am starting to hate compromise just as much as I hate promises. And just like Campbell, I try never to ask for anything from anybody, but maybe I should start. I am always thinking that people can only do what they do and I either accept that or not accept that, and I think I can’t expect nothing from them and it is up to me to decide to accept them for who they are and who they are not, and that is fine, realistic, but maybe I should demand something more, but then what good is that going to do me, because the thing is, when I demand no one listens to me anyway.

It is like I am always walking a lot of miles in bad shoes, miles I never even wanted to walk, and everyone is dead set on doing what it is they want to do and that is always moving and going and doing something and I am walking right along waiting for my rest, waiting for someone to listen to me asking to stop but instead here I am just stumbling along like a lame duck going along with it wondering how I got myself into this mess and how I am not getting any rest and how tired I am; oh I always be get into other people’s messes and trying to make other people happy; and I all I want right now is a ride or a chair to rest in, because I am sure tired; maybe it is

time to be my own ride. Maybe it is time to get myself out of my own messes. I am sure not walking anymore, I didn't even want to go out tonight; and funny, all this time I have been thinking and relying on some one to just guide me and get me where I need to get going, but having other people guiding me is just not the way to do it and maybe I just need to try and do it my own and I don't know why I have been waiting on him to do it or anybody else. I don't know why I think I need Johnny to be able to take care of myself. I am my own problem to solve. I need to be by myself. I have not been alone in a long time.

"I did not want to go out tonight. I am going home," Frankie drops her hand from his, and begins motioning for a cab, soon one stops, as she gets in, she looks at him, he shrugs, Frankie slams the door, and the car drives off, "5349 Mayflower Avenue" and she is looking back at him walking forward, his fingers scratching the back of his head. I do not know who I am think I am after all, but I am not who I am with Johnny. Even though I have taken a lot from my time with Johnny, I have been relying on him too much to escape from the dirt, hoping he will bleach out the dirt of that past and make that past non existent, but I am my past and he is his past and I cannot help who I am and I should have never left what I came from. Johnny for being such a dear, gentle heart, has always been a compromise, Johnny is never as fun as Campbell and never listens, and he is too normal and decent, and I am not as decent. Johnny does not have a thing to be disturbed about, it makes him plain and boring. Who was I to think I deserved more anyway? It was always more fun to be with Campbell, but now it will never be like old times but still it will be my kind of normal. Campbell is probably at his favorite bar and I am out now anyway, it would be good to at least talk to him because he will listen to me, and knowing him, he probably got broken up with by that girl by now anyway so he will be needing some company. "Driver, stop, huh? Take me to 65 th and Main instead." I sure am always looking for trouble, Frankie snickers to herself, but that is who I am and I am looking for trouble and I don't mind the dirt I get from all the trouble I find for myself because that is who I am and I like that I am always looking for trouble and I am always wanting the dirt.

Johnny sighs, now a mere block away from the house they were supposed to be, I should really be more of an asshole, Johnny thinks to himself, then he thinks of his commitment to her and, yes, of his, sigh, love, and hails a cab, "5349 Mayflower Avenue, please."

3.

Johnny retained his sang-froid admirably. "hit me, baby, I like it," he told her, taking her arm...

Frankie came as one of a bunch of girls, it took three full cars to get all of us here and now we have arrived, she thought and laughed, because with their entrance, they make the party and Frankie smiles, it is a crowd tonight, that is for sure, a lot of men in this house, and she makes eye contact with her friend Rose, they both nod with approval, and as they get into the living room, a boy hands them each a beer. I swear, boys, if I didn't like them so much, Frankie thought to herself, I would get rid of them all together. This house is bursting with men, full of testosterone and macho, muscles and big bodies, and all the men in this room are sure acting like they are something else, something really big and powerful. Frankie rolls her eyes, they all think they are so tough, yet none of them are half of what they claim to be, none of them protecting me much from anything, they are all good for nothings, but I really like them a whole lot and like how they play, and I tell you if they can back up the play with some gut, some blood even, that is when they stop looking bad and I can't criticize them for nothing, because when they are raw and tough and being the best man they can, you can't ask for anything more than that, because I like men when they play and strut and look all arrogant and tough and I like being their girl, you know, having them all stare at me, boys are so simple like that. You be looking good, and they just act stupid as all get out to entertain you, to be cute to you, to get your attention, and that is flattering, yeah, flattering; and when boys talk to me, I don't care, it makes me feel so good inside. I sure do get to thinking sometimes the only thing good in life is having a boy interested in you, calling you, trying to get with you, I think I just need that to feel good about myself, Frankie supposes, as she rests her head on the wall, checking out the scene; I don't think I could ever change this thing in me, she starts thinking, the thing in me that likes these kind of boys, rough and rowdy and hard as all get out, mean and tough, they just be looking so good, so dangerous and I don't know what is in me, but I couldn't like anything else in a man, but his bigness, his grunt, and his snarl; and she stayed watching for some time, until she was finally disrupted.

"Hey girl," she heard, a boy comes up to her, yes, strutting, sure thinking he is something for the record books, something legendary, in that ridiculous white top, showing off his somewhat muscles and wearing in the middle of his proud face an intermittent mustache and I don't like his thin hair slicked forward, down his forehead like that; probably a baseball player or something, they all look about a like, and he looks like one of them; he's cute though, and built.

"My name is Johnny. What's yours?"

"Frankie."

“That’s a boy’s name.”

“Sure is. What do you want?”

“Damn, just trying to be nice. Just wanted to see what your name was, what you were about.”

“I am about getting out of this party and finding a quiet place to get some food or something, maybe some vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup.”

“No kiddin? This dame,” he yells over his shoulders to no one, because no one can hear him over the loud music and all the other conversations, “has a boy’s name and wants to get some ice cream,” he laughs at the sheer novelty of it, “alright, hey, let me go get the money this guy owes me, and we’ll get a going, sweetheart, my treat.”

“Sounds good, baby,” she winks as he goes away, I don’t know why I didn’t ignore him, he is cute, but I could do better, and I just got here and there are so many other boys, and now oh, shit, look at this, Frankie rolls her eyes, but doing her part to prove her loyalty, “baby, knock him out. Yeah Johnny, come on, knock hell” she encourages Johnny, because what else are you going to do, except hope he makes out on top.

The whole party stops as Johnny and some man fight it out; but Johnny was lost from the beginning, shorter and not very quick, gee, thinks Frankie, he is going to get roughed up bad and then I am not going to get anything tonight, and certainly not my ice cream. Finally. Johnny is knocked to the floor, crushed, routed.

“Faggot,” the boy spits on Johnny as he walks away. Frankie gives that boy a dirty look as he saunters past with a grimace, and she goes over to Johnny, helping him up.

“Ah, baby, don’t you worry, you had some good punches, you just weren’t paying attention towards the end there,” she consoles.

“I thought I had him, I let him slip,” he pretends to shrug it off, but he is embarrassed.

“Come on, let’s get you home, fix up those cuts,” Frankie suggests, and he agrees.

“Alright, but get off of me,” he throws her body away from his and they walk separately to his car. They get to Johnny’s house, he opens the door, and she sees before her a mess and three cats scampering to the door, crying for food.

“Damn, do you clean?” she asks.

“Look now, hun, don’t come over here to criticize, this is my abode and I do things the way I see fit,” he grunts, picking up a cat and throwing it out of her way.

“Alright, doll, let me get you some ice.”

“No, I don’t need any ice.”

“Baby, you need some ice or something.”

“I am telling you...” he pauses, there is no talking to women when they start like this, let her go get the ice then.

Frankie gets to the kitchen and prepares some ice. She turns around to him staring at her in the kitchen doorway.

“Here you go,” and as soon as she goes to put it up to his face, he knocks her the ice out of her hand, and pushes her against the wall.

“I told you, I don’t want any ice. Do you think I am a pussy?” he snarls. Frankie just responds with a fierce, “NO.”

“Don’t you talk like that to me,” he yells at her.

“I talk as I please,” he pushes her harder, tightening his grip on her wrist, Frankie hollers, and as soon as she did, she wishes she didn’t, because it is not like her to show she can be broken.

“You a sissy?” he snarls.

Frankie stays quiet, I know this game, give him the power he thinks he has now, now that I showed I was hurting, but it is all illusory, I know why he is doing this, a little beat boy, feeling a little less than adequate, but I am not scared of him, pin me down as he might, pin me against this wall, I am not going to break, he just wants to see me scared and I am not going to be that scared and he knows that and he will calm down once realizes that, I see right through him, right through his frailty and vulnerability and after a long silence, she finally speaks, “Fuck you; You better get your hands off of me,” and he sees her breakneck courage and he also sees that she isn’t scared and won’t be hurt easily, not without a fight, and he lets her go; some sort of regular crisis averted, the cops will be called to another home this evening, because tonight it is not going to go too far and Frankie knew all along it wouldn’t, because I still had the control, she knew how far he would push, before stopping and I know these rowdy types too well, how they don’t really want to hurt anybody, and I know he wouldn’t keep on trying, because he couldn’t beat me and I wasn’t scared. Frankie straightens out her clothes and looks at him.

“What now, huh, kid?” she smirks and he begins kissing her, grabbing her tits, ripping off her shirt, while Frankie kisses him ferociously, her one hand scraping the back of his neck with her nail, her other hand loosening his belt, and now Johnny takes her hand and gets her to his bedroom, both of them stripping off their clothes, and by the time they get to the bed, they are both naked. “Baby, go down,” Frankie asks and Johnny spreads her stout legs wide, rolling his sweaty tongue up and down her sex, as she pours like a dam, “Baby, I am almost there, baby, yeah” her hair soggy and matted, he lifts his head, her juice spilling out of his mouth, dripping off his chin, dropping onto her round gut as he reaches up to kiss her and they kiss

each other hard, “get up, huh, get up on all fours” he touches her behind, separates her a little with his hand to get the feel of her and then plunges his erect extension into her, plunging himself forward into a body like his extended fist did earlier, packing his breadth into her, fucking her or making love to him, both of them slobbering and drooling like pent up dogs, gnawing, biting, and growling, violently yelling and screaming and moaning; fuck me, fuck, ooo fuck me, oh fuck me yes, got it, yes, yes, yes, and then the sound Frankie enjoys best, the viscous severing of him pulling out of her opened, sopping, wide warm flesh, and they both collapse, satisfied.

“Ahh, baby, I feel all like a pig that has been rolling around a sty; you sure had me grunting there,” Frankie says lovingly into the dead still of the night, twirling her hair in her fingers, crossing her toes, making her bones crack, stretching her legs and arms out, letting the last of the excitement of pleasure move throughout her spread out body.

This is a girl who will always like me for who I am Johnny smirks happily, as he pats his stomach with a growl, I have to see if I can get her to come around some more, and with that, he leans over the bed to spit on the floor. As his torso returns to the bed, she gives his roll of fat a hard pinch, laughing robustly, she turns to him, touches lightly the bruise and lump forming around his eye with her fingers and begins kissing him with her thick saliva full of mucous; and echoing through the bare, dark air is the juicy sound of their meaty, intemperate lips and their bulky, licentious, rotund tongues sloppily rolling over and rounding one another.

4.

I don't need Johnny nor any other man to keep me, and I never will. And if you could say the same thing you wouldn't be forever crying and pitying yourself for the things you've let life do to you...

This squishy feeling between my legs, staining my underwear, Frankie thinks, crossing her legs in the back seat of another cab, is disgusting; I am gross and my breath is the smell of soggy cereal, my hair is greasy, my jeans with a spot from something sticky on his floor, and my muscles tight, tired, worked. I really do feel gross; well, good, then, huh, then, you got what you wanted, yeah, I got the dirt I needed, I got the not good for me; I got what I wanted and then I could leave him having got what I wanted because after having got it, I knew I could never go back, never go back to him again and now at least that is out of my system, now Campbell is out of my system for good. I am really unbelievable, I really am. If I had any sense and some more cash, all I would need is sixty, maybe a hundred, but I only have a twenty (damn, it don't ever seem like I ever am going to have enough

money to be able to do what I want to do, what I need to do) I would leave this city, leave for good, but instead I am heading right smack back to Johnny because I don't have anyplace else to go except our house, besides I need a shower. I need to get Campbell's sex off of me.

"Where have you been?" and infuriated Johnny demands as she walks in, "I came home, I mean I came right after you left to come here, not five minutes after you" he is interrupted.

"It is Saturday morning, we always have breakfast going by now, start brewing the coffee," Frankie says forthrightly; because I am not giving an explanation and I am not going to lie to him about it and I am sure not going to tell him either and this is my business and if I had a straight head on me, I would have come home last night, anyway, but I don't have a straight head on my shoulders, so there is no hope in an explanation or an apology and I am not going to let him get hurt because of my foolishness, and I do think, after all, he should not have shown himself so desperate, I never like that in anybody.

"I am glad you are here, that you came back," Johnny wavers in his mind with trepidation, though his words, when enunciated, came out sounding like relief; he notices she is not happy to hear what he had said.

Now him too; now him too, humph, glad you are back, shit; "I am glad to be back here, to be next to you," she mutters, putting on a fake smile, like a cheerleader trying to smile through menstrual cramps, her body warm with fever, lower back stinging with pain, the murk dripping, stomach queasy, not wanting to cheer, or be glad, just wanting some damn pain suppressants and a bed to crunch up I; besides, humph, glad to see what, a sweaty, tired, needing a shower, greasy haired mess? Glad to see what, huh? Not me, I am nothing right now, nothing but a dirty little creature that isn't about to make things any easier for Johnny or any easier for anybody. So, I repeat, glad to see what, huh? Not me, that is for sure. Glad I am here? Huh, well, any one could say that; how trite. Who talks to a lover like that, glad you are here, sounds like something impersonal as hell, I know he is upset and is relieved I came back, I want him to say he drove around all night hunting for me, looking for me, that he has been pontificating suicide, or have a tear coming from his eye from grief, or something else passionate like that, something to show he is trying, that he cares; even his love is plain and ordinary and gentle and nice and it is not thick or nothing.

"We can do whatever you want tonight, whatever makes you happy," Johnny says, anything, as long as she is here, he thinks with a brief sadness, anything to keep her here; but he is too late in his charity.

Frankie doesn't respond to him, she is busy buttering the pan, I am too dependent on these boys I love, I need them too much, I have to have

them. What I need right now is air. I need a kitchen to myself. I need a way out, a place on my own, and maybe what the both of us need to learn is how to be happy on our own.

“Hey, take over the cooking. I am going to run to the store, I am craving some fruit, some strawberries I guess,” Frankie says, “Do you want anything?”

“No. I am fine.”

“I will be fast. Where are the keys?”

“On my dresser.”

Frankie leaves the kitchen. I am lying to him. I am going to take my time. I do not want strawberries. I do not want to lie to him. I do not like having to lie to him. I will have my ride, my escape for now, and then when I get back, I will tell him honestly after we have eaten, after I am showered, after I have gathered the strength to say it; oh, it is too early to start on it now and why not try to enjoy what we have while it is here.

Johnny pours the oil out into a pan he just brought to the stove for the potatoes. I always say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, I should have stayed here last night. With her, I can never say what I need to say, what I should say; I should not have asked her anything, I should not have said anything, I should have stayed cool and let her tell me if she wanted to, I should not have said. I should have stayed cool and waited for her to talk first; but there is no should, only what is done and should of, should have, and should are all as empty as a promise; and Johnny, despite all his better intentions, has lost her, and as he cracks an egg in the other pan, he chokes on a foreboding fear that she may never return with those strawberries.