



KISSING DYNAMITE  
*A Journal of Poetry*



# PLAY IT AGAIN

a special feature zine curated by  
Jason Bates & Libby Cudmore

## Editors' Notes

The idea for *Play It Again* came to me while listening to our local classic rock radio station while at work. I was in the middle of an internal condemnation of them playing Nirvana and Alice In Chains—as these bands were part of my rebellious youth, they could not possibly be “classic rock”—when I caught a couple of lines from “Mainstreet” by Bob Seger. *“Unlike all the other ladies, she looked so young and sweet/ As she made her way alone down that empty street.”* I thought, that sounds pretty stalkerish. Very creepy, Mr. Seger. I’d always taken that song to be a romantic ballad about longing for a past lover. But every time it came on the radio I listened to it. Really listened to it. And it is a terrible song about stalking a young stripper. It’s obsessive. It’s gross. Then I thought, what would her perspective be? How would her song tell that same story.

And don’t even get me started on “Jack and Diane” by John Cougar Mellencamp. That song is not a little ditty about Jack and Diane; it’s about Jack. Diane is a sex object. There is nothing romantic about it. It’s not a love song about high school sweethearts growing up and beating the odds. So how would Diane tell the story?

These poems are responses to songs that are considered “love” songs. These poems give a voice to the other half of the story. I hope they make you think.

—Jason Bates

Too often, women are relegated to being the songwriter's muse, the object of desire or scorn, without a voice of their own. With *Play It Again*, we hoped to lift women to hear them reflect on the songs that speak to them—and how their own stories might be told within them, between the lines.

—Libby Cudmore

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## You're My Disco

*Scout Bolton*

I remember when a boy's muscle could hide  
inauthentic; sinewed through a lace dress and  
tights, splayed out legs like we did with the Barbie  
and the meek, patterned place where you'll know me.

That sheer, mesh bra and the nothing it obscures,  
those ancient, boyish pyramids and the wonder of  
how they got there. Antoine de Caunes kissing  
Gaultier in a soft-sphere; silk falls, else me

with that red hair you learned my name for, now  
alert in fear on the nape — further still is my apex  
of proof, cheerless and stiff, and you who dug out  
entropic me — with each beat we are landing on chance.

Sixteen and still no clue about the difference between  
boys and girls. You crouch and curl and lurch beneath  
the red carpet. All of you tight as a drum, the blood you  
use to communicate your preference makes a girl

spit you out in your close, celibate rooms —  
just as you line all of me up by rank and file,  
I see the weak, commanding prince in you  
and wonder if, nine years your junior, the king in me  
could come to pin and horde you.

## Baby You Got a Lot to Learn

*Clare Welsh*

we don't do gifts / but the county fair knife / engraved with the word DADDY /  
you won / like you win every street panting / at your boots / for me / I keep DADDY /  
buried / under more/ exact weapons / pepper spray / key jab / gun / a long hall ending  
/ with a possibility / you walked into that place / i always go / the deep dive glazed in  
blue / neon / you drowning / in blue/ at the jukebox bleeding quarters / for chuck berry  
/ hank williams / but it wasn't / trouble / until you pulled out that old paper back like a  
matchbook / *a good man is hard / to find /* yes i said / he is / are you / a good man /  
DADDY/ and the bartender's highball glass dropped / like the sky/ we fell deep/ into  
trouble / you held me like I was the ghost of your boyhood / so innocent / i almost used  
my real name / so experienced / the photographs on my wall looked/ the other way as  
we loved scars /tattoos/ time from our bodies / you gave me the knife / called me/  
DADDY/ why / i said / you're the man/ you said i see you /and you did / you said/ i see  
you / with those / city johns calling your name like it's the one / word for desire / i see  
you / spin desire into castles / i see you / get what you want / oh no baby / i said / i get  
what i need

# Love is a Mixtape

*Misha R. Ponnuraju*

## I. September (The Party Track)

*Do you remember?*

Cue the trumpets, the cowbells, the trombones.

Build the crescendo with the syncopated heartbeats of sixteenth notes, the wispy flags of eighth notes waving their banner over won wars.

We will collect the spoils in the form of weddings and family reunions, prom nights, birthday parties in apartments that were too small for stomping feet. *Bada yah*. Let this sound be common, the rhapsody of what we call both Cheesy and Holy.

*Do you remember?* In the dark, we will return to decades of our parents, we will forget what time-zone we are in, beneath twinkling lights of our drunken stupor.

Count blessings like half-steps and red cups, they will be plentiful.

*Only blue talk and love.* Only words of blue —

blue of carbon dioxide rich blood cells, gasping in between

measures of oxygen. Dance with abandon. Shake that ass, your lineage

has told you so. *Do you remember?* I remember lyrics through my thighs. I hear certain

songs with hips. Falsetto attempts will fall short of what has been made perfect. Words

will submit to the authority of Melody, it will bend to the Almighty and Omniscient

will of Groove, this lesson of songwriting bestowed upon us mortals

— do not get in the way of that which makes you move.

## II. Blessings (The Walking Track)

*Blessings keep falling in my lap*

from skies that remind me what color can do to the world

— what anger can fist-sized hearts carry when clouds offer

shade and rain, asking for nothing in return? *Blessings keep falling*

into tin buckets from leaky roofs on stormy nights. We will carefully

step around it. We carefully walk forward on nights that encourage

a second cardigan, but when I forget one, you put your arms around

me and I pretend like I am warm (I am, in a way). *I'm gon praise Him*

*'til I'm gone* far away from this time and place, I will praise Him even

when we no longer walk in the spring-time, or even go on walks at all,

even after I give you our old aux-splitter as a memento of what we used

to have: this piece of old technology that has become outdated with us.

### III. Gravity (The Road Trip Track)

Keep me on this road, where the light is. Keep me in the passenger seat, fingers tousled in your hair where the light is. Keep me on the ground falling forward, collapsing into tomorrow, where the light is. Keep me on this narrow path without streetlamp, and eyes seeking where the light is. Keep me safe, and dry, keep wheels aligned and high beams on, keep this light where it should be. Keep me grateful for rain when it makes driving unsteady, keep my feet steady on the pedal, keep me tucked within the hope of a child bundled in a frayed safety blanket of pink muslin, keep me away from knowledge of an adult who understands chaos and blood will fall where it may, keep me where the light is. Keep me here, in the driver's seat with fingers gripped on the steering wheel, keep me in this quiet prayer, keep me in this midnight song to myself, keep me where the light is.

# I'm Always the Refrain in Your Songs

*Courtney LeBlanc*

*Please don't keep me.*

*(Please don't leave me.)*

You promised and pledged and slipped  
a ring onto my manicured finger and we

kissed as petals fluttered down around  
us, soft as butterfly wings. Now your hand

is on the doorknob and my heart is beneath  
your feet and I know this moment will become

a song – your soft tenor and the callouses  
on your fingers strumming the chords

of our discord. And another woman will fall  
for your smooth voice and your rough hands

and later, you'll write happy songs about her  
but I'll always be there – the quiet harmony

that builds every song, that built your heart  
into something another woman would hold.



## Sorry, Billy, Virginia's Not Coming Out

*Susan Blackwell Ramsey*

And really, she didn't even hesitate.  
You shouldn't have asked if I've ever said a prayer  
for you – she then counted the times you said you care  
for her, about her. Zero. End of debate.  
You were, right, I grant, that she's starting much too late  
to get pregnant at sixteen, but let's be fair –  
instead of sweet talk, praising her eyes, her hair,  
all you did was bully, ridicule, and berate.  
You sad little punk, that's no way to seduce someone.  
The Jesuits taught her logic, and she could see  
right through your metaphor, realized you lied  
when you said *stained glass never lets in the sun*.  
Any church girl could tell you that obviously  
to see the colors you have to be inside.

## When Brian Wilson Threatens to Kill Himself If I Leave

*Danielle Rose*

*God only knows what I'd be without you*

Fuck god. God knows shit. I'm sick of being slipped on like a puddle. Tired of counting bottles like rosary beads because this is not a process that befriends forgiveness. I want to silence every note that tastes better from a bottle. Remember how you can't even speak for yourself—yet. I am resplendent in my love like a way to apologize without all these noisy distractions. I think what it is like to be a song. To be your song. To be your song about me. I just want to understand why it tastes better. And I'll just do it all again surrender bottles and pill-cases for promises to leave heavier. God knows how to love god and maybe how to apologize but he never looks you in the eye. I'm climbing fucking fences. Pulling you out of quicksand. These metaphors are so banal my sweat pulses. Please just become a fucking tunnel and travel through.

## Why Did That Boy Kiss Me?

*Logan Kaye Jung*

That kiss from  
Johnny I postulate  
to evolve from  
direct,  
mouth-to-mouth  
regurgitation.

Parent to  
offspring—he's only  
17—we're gonna  
masticate.

Oh-là-là-  
là-là-là-why, oh,  
why was Johnny so  
damn shy yet kissed me  
twice  
that night...

Oh-là-là-  
là-là-là-why, oh,  
why is feeding  
Mabel's  
only  
courtship price?

## Christine

*Ellora Sutton*

Phantom, you did not plant these red roses  
that I conjure from the air. Friend: *he's there*

like I don't know or I should care. Phantom,  
in the wings. Martyr of the rats. He's there

thinking a good song is love. Phantom, sing  
for me like a sweet bird. Lover: *he's there*.

You'll get used to the voyeur in the mask,  
Phantom, nothing more than his noise. He's there,

boy playing Father. In tender moments,  
Phantom, I see an animal. He's there,

a shot dog howling. My hand on his face,  
he's in phantasmic ecstasy. He's there.

*Sing for me!* Furious as an organ.

Red Death. Clapping monkey. Phantom. He's there

and I'm not. See how quickly the song stops?  
He's nothing more than a phantom. He's there.

I take my voice with me. It was always

mine. Glorious. Soaring. *I'm here. I'm here.*

## Author Biographies

**Susan Blackwell Ramsey's** work has appeared in such places as The Southern Review, 32 Poems, Poetry Northwest and Best American Poetry; her book, A Mind Like This, won the 2019 Prairie Schooner Poetry Book Award.

**Scout Bolton** is a poet, editor, broadcaster and critic from the North of England. She has previously published two full collections under a deadname\*. She is currently working on a television script and freelancing as a broadcaster and journalist about abnormal and criminal psychology. She is 30, and lives with her wife, son, and has another son on the way.

**Logan Kaye Jung's** I(<3)U!: A Factorial Chapbook is out now. A summer student of Thurston Moore at Naropa's Kerouac School, they've since been published everywhere from Jacket2 to Lambda Literary to the On-line Encyclopedia of Integer Sequences and anthologized as far flung as Erase the Patriarchy (University of Hell Press), Emergency Index (Ugly Duckling Presse) and the forthcoming second edition of Tonebook (Inpatient Press). Recent exhibitions include shows at Sediment Arts (Richmond, VA), Labor (Mexico City), and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis. They write to live just outside Resurrection City, harDCore.

**Courtney LeBlanc** is the author of Beautiful & Full of Monsters (forthcoming from Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), chapbooks All in the Family (Bottlecap Press) and The Violence Within (Flutter Press), and a Pushcart Prize nominee. She has her MBA from University of Baltimore and her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She loves nail polish, wine, and tattoos. Read her publications on her blog: [www.wordperv.com](http://www.wordperv.com). Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

**Misha Ponnuraju** is a graduating senior from the University of California, Irvine, where she was the Editor in Chief of New Forum, an undergraduate literary journal. Born and raised in Loma Linda, California, Misha hopes to continue working on her first collection of poetry and prose, which focuses on love in all of its different shades and colors. Misha would like to thank journalist Rob Sheffield, particular for his memoir, "Love is a Mixtape," which she drew a lot of inspiration from in the drafting of the poems published here.

**Danielle Rose** lives in Massachusetts. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in The Shallow Ends, Sundog Lit, Pidgeonholes, Barren Magazine & Glass Poetry.

**Ellora Sutton**, 22, is a poet and MA student living in Hampshire, UK. Her work has been published by The Cardiff Review, The Hellebore, Poetry Birmingham

Literary Journal, Poetry News, and semicolon, among others. Her debut chapbook, *All the Shades of Grief*, is forthcoming from Nightingale & Sparrow.

**Clare Welsh** is a writer and photographer based in Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendencies*, *Puerto Del Sol*, and other places in print and online. Her chapbook "*Chimeras*" is available through Finishing Line Press.

## Song References

Page 3 - "You're My Disco" by Waldorf.

Page 4 - "Candy's Room" by Bruce Springsteen.

Page 5 - "September" by Earth, Wind, and Fire.  
"Blessings" by Chance the Rapper.  
"Gravity" by John Mayer.

Page 7 - "After All" by William Fitzsimmons.

Page 8 - "Only the Good Die Young" by Billy Joel.

Page 9 - "God Only Knows" by The Beach Boys.

Page 10 - "Why Did I Kiss That Girl?" (1924) by Robert A. King and Ray Henderson, composers; Lew Brown, lyricist.  
"Kiss The Girl" (1989) by Alan Menken, composer; Howard Ashman, lyricist.

Page 11 - "The Phantom of the Opera" by Andrew Lloyd Webber.



## About the Editors

**Jason Bates** once fed Pudge a tuna fish sandwich and is now an abomination. He is an assistant editor at *Kissing Dynamite*. His writing has appeared in *Before I Leave...Lit Zine*, *Figroot Press*, *Bone & Ink*, and *Lingering In The Margins*, a River City Poets Anthology, and forthcoming in *Riggwelter Press*.

**LIBBY CUDMORE** is the author of *The Big Rewind* (William Morrow, 2016) and a frequent contributor to *Paste*, *Albumism* and *Consequence of Sound*. Her poetry has appeared in *Paper Darts* and the *Barrelhouse Blog*, and her short fiction has been published in *The Big Click*, the *Stoneslide Corrective*, *PANK*, and the anthologies *HANZAI JAPAN*, *WELCOME HOME* and *MIXED UP*, and the forthcoming anthology *A BEAST WITHOUT A NAME: FICTION INSPIRED BY THE MUSIC OF STEELY DAN*.