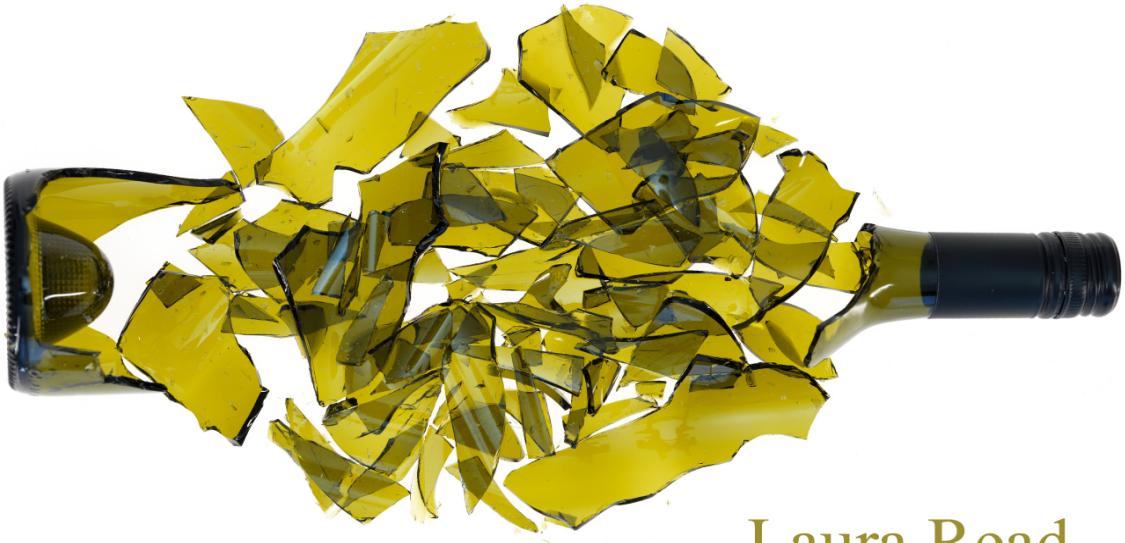
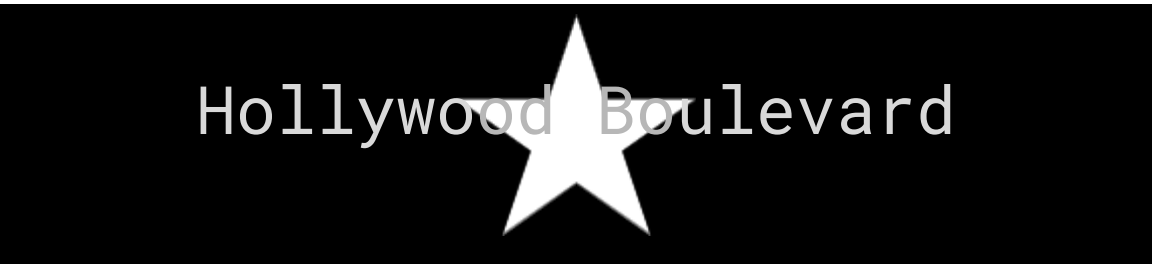
THE CHEWBACCA ON HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD REMINDS ME OF YOU



Laura Read

The Chewbacca On



Reminds Me of You

The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You



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There are two of you, and two of me.

– Jackson Browne

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.

– Wallace Stevens



MENU

· EST.2010 ·

POEMS

Order In	3
Green Alabama	5
That Cheese is For You	6
Storage	7
Evangeline	8
The Big Dipper	9
$1.99	10
The Hammer	11
The Wheels Are Silver, the Day Blue	12
WHen They Were Water	13
86	15
Flower Horses	17
Love Seat in the Corner	18
Paper Clothes	19
Menlo	20
Freebasing	22
Nine Bridges	23
Watching Oksana	25
The Current	27
The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You	28

The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard

~~Reminds Me of You~~

Order In

I wrapped the long apron strings
twice around, kept the tickets
in my pockets with the balled-up dollars,
wore my hair pressed to my head
so I was brown eyes and lip gloss
and breasts. I liked it best
when it was busy and I could yell
Order in at the chrome window
where you stood. I made the salads,
ladled the Irish stew, sliced the shepherd's
bread, and when I came back
my dinners were already steaming
in the window. When it was slow,
I emptied the ketchups into each other,
banging their glass mouths together until
they chipped. I could feel you behind me
in the kitchen but when I turned
you were always looking down
at the Guinness Beef or Reuben
you were making for me to take out.
I knew how you felt. It was like the long
basement hallway in St. Aloysius
where I had to go for piano. You could see
someone coming from a long way off.
Click click down the polished hall crowded
with the plink of piano keys, the smell
of flaky rolls rising in the cafeteria

ovens. My smile tight as my apron binding
my lips. We stepped one way
together then the other until I stopped,
said with my eyes, *You first.*

Green Alabama

I hear the other cook ask you
what you think of me
and you say you like my eyes.

Once I heard my ex tell his friend,
She was prettier then.

I was on the other side of the door, dripping
from the shower.

I left him in Mississippi, rode the train
across Alabama. The trees flung
their green shadows on the clapboard churches.

The green vines dangled rain.
The sky was the green of a mirror.

The man sitting next to me wore
a checked shirt. We didn't speak.

But when the sun went down,
he put his hand on my leg,
and I let him.

That Cheese is For You

When I come back to the restaurant kitchen
with my gravy-streaked plates, I ask
What's that cheese for? and you point
at the industrial-sized cheddar
left in the window. *That cheese? That cheese*
is for you. I take the cheese back
past the dish boy with his pocked cheeks,
jeans black and sagging, past the deep pots
of Irish stew, grease floating on the surface,
to the walk-in where I line up the plastic-covered
dressings every night at closing. In the morning
the Thousand Island will have an orange film on top
I'll have to stir in. But tonight I'll drink
Black and Tans with you at the bar.
I like how the Guinness balances on top
of the Harp even when you tilt it back
down your throat, one body sliding against
another, never bleeding down like Monet's
lilies you'll wake up under in my cold garage,
plastic stuck to the windows with a blow-dryer
by my ex-boyfriend who stood naked
on my couch, sealing the room. But first
we walk your bike through the park,
the night poured over the day. You're wearing
that orange windbreaker. At my door,
you stop, waiting to see
if I'll let you in.

Storage

We store our bikes down the stairs
that unfold like the neck

of a jack-in-the-box, underground city
of booths from C. J. Timothy's, neon sign

dark. That winter the snow
slanted over us, the traffic lights blinked

red, no one came in, we were alone
with the glasses upside down on the bar,

mouths quiet. We were open until
we closed. Then we started pouring,

went down through the kitchen
to the ghost bar. What were we singing

underwater, under winter, *O'Doherty's*
ironed on our chests with a harp,

instrument of long fingers? How long
were we drinking? And how

did we get home? Our bikes had gone
dumb in the shadows like the sign

unplugged from the night.

Evangeline

Where you live no one lives. The glasses
are still in their box, packed into cardboard
cells, the laundry delivered by your mother,

all the sleeves tucked behind the chests.
Like the way you walk, apologizing
for your body. If not for you,

I could see the low-flung mountain,
I could think about the air up there, thin
as a dress, sharp like the lemon cleanser

I'm using on the tub. I bought you sponges,
dishtowels, potholders with chefs bearing
wine bottles. But we're drinking beer

in our pajamas, listening to Matthew Sweet
sing "Evangeline," staring at Evangeline
on the CD cover clasping her fur hood

closed. It's 2:00 in the morning, only time
you can be anyone. Like Evangeline.
I'm going to get a coat like that, ride a sleigh

into the highest countries on the map,
stand alone on Russian train platforms,
watching my love keep leaving.

The Big Dipper

It was the bar we went to after
the bar, named for the metal
scoop of stars like the wire
egg dipper you have to bend
so you can lower the egg down
into the dye. By the second pitcher,
we can bend the constellation,
push the night into a pocket
where you can keep your mints,
your matchbooks, the quarters
from my tables. When the band
comes on, you'll find the words
to their songs. The Dipper
is windowless, a blue garage
lit by beer and microphones.
But I can see your foot hitting
the floor, the singing dammed
in your throat. All your life
you've wanted to be that guy
with the guitar. You want to dip
it down like a woman, yank
it back up. You want everyone
to hear the strings against
the hollow, to listen when you sing
about that girl. Her hair is black,
her eyes are coins, you'll never
find her in this darkness,
but she's the only one for you.

$1.99

When you bring me a rose wrapped in plastic from the 7-11, I tell you a story. I say, he had a white shirt that was thin from washing. When he took it off, his skin was oily like the cloth you use to clean a gun. He shaved his hair short as the pussy willows I used to pinch in the cold hallway vase. Who could believe their carpeted heads on the ends of their crooked spines? His lips cracked open like an old book, with that good smell in the fold. His eyes, too, open and shut. I lived in his pupils, in miniature, and duplicate. That's how he took me, in through the pinholes. The fields were blue, flecked with grass. His Marine uniform was one color for the pants, one for the coat. I don't know why they make them like that. Or why they rotate their rifles like a compass, drawing a circle on the air. I can see the pencil hoop he left. It's a cutout. There used to be a boy there, behind the blue jacket, the buttoned skin. There used to be another slice of sky, white and thin.

The Hammer

I never bowl, I just sit in the swivel
chair fixed to the floor, watch you throw
the Hammer. I see why you call it that—
12 pounds of clouds stirred into blue.
Every time, the pins break into strikes.
Pitchers of Miller Lite sit on the plastic
tables like centerpieces, teh lights
lower over the lanes, the stars come
out. Between turns, you stand
with the guys, your big hands
in your pockets. You're wearing
your crisp white shirt, hot from the dryer.
No one else at North Bowl can make
the pins crack. I'm wearing you
like a letter jacket, like that ring
your mother will lend you the money
to buy, pear-cut diamond. The carpet
in the jewelry store is blue like the lights
in this alley. You can't breathe
when we're standing in front
of the windexed cases, all the rings
winking from the slits in their boxes.
I know the one I want, three small stones
on either side of the center. I want
to band the band on the counter,
I want the ring to roll on my finger.

The Wheels Are Silver, the Day Blue

Your bike is broken, but you're riding it anyway, your street tipping to let you off, your dad running with you. It's the kind of memory you're not sure of. Later that year his heart will lie down in the bed of his ribs and they'll take him away on a stretcher. This you remember. Like I can still see my dad's twin bed. He was there when I left for the Christmas party where I drank hot chocolate from the machine in his faculty lounge, sat on the red upholstery. The basement smelled of coffee and pipe smoke, and I could feel the building rising up over me, brick by brick. People stared at Tom and me with their eyes shining because they already knew but why take us home early when we could still have Santa and cookies cut into bells. I wore a long dress, patchwork like the quilt that was pulled up over his pillow when we got home and my mom took us upstairs to stare at the bed.

When They Were Water

Your mother's smoking. The ash
at the tip turns orange. She can tell
by my pleated skirt I'm in college
so she tells me about teaching, gives me
a red bag for my books. We wear
our hair short so we're all eyes
and you know our meaning. She's drinking
Gallow wine—I saw the jug in the fridge
when I stayed here at Easter. It rained
on the leafless trees down the street
where the neighbors hung plastic eggs.
There were rabbits taped to the windows.
I stayed in the blue guest bed all morning
reading a book about a woman
and the ocean. Once you brought me here
and went out in your crisp white shirt,
the one that means you'll turn my car
stereo up and drive down the streets,
blowing last autumn's leaves to the curb.
You were gone for hours. We made pasta
and your mom kept filling our glasses.
We didn't talk about you. Or your dad.
Just the cruise she went on last summer.
There are glaciers in Alaska you can see
from the boat. Some of them rise up
like the one that tripped the Titanic,
but some are just floods trapped

at freezing, swoops of water changed
mid-current. It's as if someone was about
to say something important, standing
at the sink, looking out at the yard.

86

When they come to take you out
to pancakes, I don't know
this is code. Like 86 means the kitchen

is out of something.
It's late but pancakes sound good.
I want to sit in the booth

and order a stack of blueberry, drink
coffee and stare at the stunned lights,
the thick slices of pie. I don't know

you'll come home fired, after
the pancakes and the shots
at The Lucky Penny, that tonight

is the first night you'll crawl
into bed in your clothes, the truth
torn: a man stole your bike, your check

you just cashed, you didn't hide
a lighter in the cheap powdered detergent,
the kind that leaves grains on our clothes.

And you don't know where
that bag of mushrooms came from.
They look the same as the ones

you stuffed with crab at the restaurant.
But I can smell stars on them.
And water. I think if I put one

on my tongue, I'll come loose
like the sap dripping all day long
from the maple's dim heart.

Flower Horses

When I bring the drinks to the patio, I see you standing at
the carousel, waiting in the dark with the white horses, their
saddles packed with flowers like the ones in New Orleans
where I went with the boy before you, girls dangling like beads
from the latticed balconies, the moon pasted to the sky, and
from the French Quarter to the Mississippi, the houses dark.
When he kissed me in the corner of the last bar, he closed his
eyes, pretended I was a girl in white cotton, all night waiting to
lift my shirt. These breasts are heavy, Louisiana sweating down
between them, and my boy's gone limp like the trees, trailing
their long arms on the water. We won't come here again.
The flower horses are leaving, their heads down. Your horses
are still, backs cut open for their golden poles. All night they
dream of mirrors and pianos. From the patio, you look like
them, the moon brushes your skin, your mouth hands open.

Love Seat in the Corner

You're drinking.
That's the only way you can stand
the love seat in the corner,

the matching Christmas tree coffee mugs
your mother bought us.
The trees are sketches,

evergreen spine and branches,
and when the light is thin
and the stove isn't working

and I don't want to take off
my clothes and lie beneath you
in the loft, my fingers laced

around the banister
like you're making me, you throw
the cold coffee at the curtains,

slam the cup into your head
until the tree is broken
and there's a line of blood

between your eyes, sudden as the winter
returning to itself, the sky crazed
as it breaks into snow.

Paper Clothes

There are so many words for clothing:
le pantalon, la jupe, des chaussures
laid out on the pages, flat like the paper
clothes you fold onto the collarbones
of dolls, false like the dickey sewn
into the navy blue jacket I wore
when I interviewed for this job.
I asked for a glass of water, the waxed
cup shook, the principal stared at me
until I thought the dickey had come
loose, he could see my breasts.
There's not enough fabric,
and my arms are hot, they want me
to take everything off, *le manteau,*
la robe, and you, your soft stomach
exhaling in my hand when the stars
shine in the windows.
I get dressed when it's still dark out,
pull on *une chemise,* sleeves cut from the sky.
They're pink-flowered like my arms
beneath their thin cover, white spots
of hydrocortisone over the eczema.
When I'm at the board asking
How do you say scarf, skirt, I'll feel them,
flush with knowing.

Menlo

The town is a road cut from leaves,
the 7UP sign the old kind with the rainbow
of flowers. I bring you with me
because I think maybe they'll hire me
to teach their last children
in the school with the desks
swept back for summer, the closets
packed with brown-papered
textbooks, their grandparents' names
on the inside covers. I think
we can live in the one-room house
for the teacher, and in winter
it won't snow so close to the coast
but it will still be cold enough
and we can light the stove.
You'll drive to Aberdeen
or Ocean Shores and get work
in a restaurant where you'll spend
lunches frying up fish.
Sometimes you'll lift a live crab
from the tank in the lobby,
all the locals shifting their eyes
like portraits from the gray sea
and the gray sky to the crab
as you walk back to the waiting pot.
They go back to their windows,
silenced by the seamless dark

lowering. At night, we'll sleep
with the woods behind us,
the forest hollowed.
The trees are cropped like cancered
heads—no scarves covering
nothing where there should be
something, only sky where they stood
with their arms shoved up, leaves
shaking, their eyes full of owls.

Freebasing

Out back plates break,
people yell *Fuck,* the cats
are poor cats, their hair stands up
on their spines, they drop down
from the landing, soft as laundry.
The sky is stripped of blue,
of birds. Out front concrete
stairs to the people who hear us
the night you break the lamp.
If I don't close the blinds
they'll look in before I get
the vomit off the carpet.
You're gone again with my car.
I don't know why the toilet paper's
cardboard rolls have been removed
so they're boneless, why
there's burned foil stuck
to the bottom of the garbage
until I learn *freebasing.* Crack.
You're composing in powder
and flame. And you're alone
inside it. I want to ask you
what's it like. Postcard streak
on the freeway, pink blur
where the cars just were?
The music's ringing,
there's no lid on the sky.

Nine Bridges

I pack your clothes in the suitcase
I took to France. The moon
looks different there. If you walk out

onto Boulevard Raspail,
you'll see it hanging between the café
on the corner and the florist,

all the bright flowers brought inside
for the night. I want to see
that moon again, not this moon

glowering at the window.
In one of the compartments, I find
a pair of silk underwear I used to hang

on my closet door with its matching bra.
The blue satin glowed in the watery
dark, waiting for my body.

I must have worn them
when I walked down those streets—
Raspail, Montparnasse—so smooth

I forgot them under my clothes,
the cars, the metro, the smell of bread.
I could still wear them, but there's no

Paris here—no Eiffel Tower
to stand under and look up at the way
it divides the sky, no Seine, dirty river

I leaned over the nine bridges
to spit into because I was young
and the city was already forgetting me.

And now I am packing your clothes
in this blue box, pressing your shoes'
mouths together, folding

your white shirt, your black jeans—
they've never looked this nice,
I'm even belting them down

with the suitcase ties.
It's not mine anymore—
you can keep it.

Watching Oksana

After you leave, I watch Oksana Baiul
win the gold in Lillehammer. She lands

every axel, her blade chips off
sequins of ice. But I keep thinking

This time she'll fall. Like that day
last summer when I was running

and tripped over the hose, scraped
a clean layer of skin from my knee,

and you put Band-Aids on it.
We sat here on this couch.

It's cold. Last night the door blew off.
I'm staying in, watching Oksana

position herself for the jump.
I wonder if she thinks, *I'm jumping,*

*this is it, I could fall and it will all come
to nothing*. I don't eat or shower—

I'm too busy with Oksana. She's small
like a music box dancer. Even when

I'm not watching, I think about her.
I can open the box and there she is

in silver. I start to trust her.
Sometimes you come to the door,

but I don't get up. You knock,
then shake the building by its shoulders

of mailboxes. I call the police.
Red and blue lights light up the snow

but still I stay on the couch, my toes
in the Afghan's holes, my eyes

on the television which is off now
but I know she's in there, skating.

The Current

I'm wearing a yellow dress,
and my hair is long,
like the time since you left.
I'm in Fiction, reading first lines.
But I don't know mine—
when I see you walking
toward me, I can't
remember what I was ever
going to say. Should I leave
or cry or ask you why you stole
my money, $100 worth
of twenties at each ATM,
how much time away
from this life did that buy?
Sometimes you had to live
with me sober, knowing
one of you was lying.
Or should I just smile,
one of those sad smiles, slow
like a river stopped
for a minute in the shade
by the bank. You might even
walk out into it, thinking
it's safe.

The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You

It's hot so I sit and watch him
for a while. Every night he must hang up
his costume more matted, molecules
of sweat caught in its coarse lining.
That's the kind of job you used to go out
looking for, your only tie cinched
around your neck. You had to walk
all day like the superheroes
because you didn't have enough money
for the bus by the time you knew
you had to get sober again or
I wouldn't keep washing your pants,
emptying your pockets of lint
and lighters. All day Chewbacca poses
with the tourists, grins as if admitting
he's not the real Chewie.
But he looks so hot inside the fur coat
of his body, so maybe you'd rather be
Spider-Man in his skin of blue
and red nylon. He gets to slither up
the stoplight, hang upside down
as the camera flashes, blood
rushing to his face behind the web
of his mask. And then you could be quiet,
though I'm sure you could imitate Chewie—
when you open your mouth, out comes
the choir of dolphins and lions.

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Floating Bridge Review "Green Alabama," "Paper Clothes"

PANK "When They Were Water"

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About the Author



Laura Read was born in New York City and has lived most of her life in Spokane, WA. She is the author of Dresses from the Old Country (BOA Editions, 2018), Instructions for My Mother's Funeral (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012, winner of the AWP Donald Hall Prize for Poetry), and the chapbook The Chewbacca on Hollywood Boulevard Reminds Me of You (winner of the Floating Bridge Press Chapbook Award, 2010).

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About the Press

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