

Kris Rubertone

Senior Project

### *Apparition*

*Apparition* is a collection of poems produced through the classic and old-school process of heartbreak. In the summer of 2018, I was employed at a Catholic, all-girls, sleepaway camp. It was a place where I had spent fourteen unforgettable, almost indescribable, summers making lifelong friends and memories. I had started going when I was only seven years old and grew from camper, to counselor in training, to counselor - all with the same group of friends I'd met during my first two weeks there. Camp was my happy place. But I was willing to give that up for what has become *Apparition*.

That same summer, I was fired from a position as a camp counselor for pursuing a romantic relationship with a coworker. I had gone into it knowing that it could end up in flames; the 'Catholic' part of Catholic camp was emphasized very strongly (so much so that we had mass once a week), and homosexuality wasn't something often discussed in front of the children due to its apparently inappropriate nature. And still, I was in love for the first time in my life and dove right into something I knew would eventually bite me in the ass.

Was it worth it? Definitely. But it hurt that I had lost the one place where I truly felt like I belonged and had everything I had ever wanted. I felt guilty and heartbroken for my campers, whom I had to leave abruptly without explanation while they watched Disney's *Mulan*, none the wiser. I felt ostracized by my friends for having lost a position that I'd worn so proudly for many years. I felt judged in the one place I had felt so safe, and myself.

But I still had my girlfriend, and under the hope that I could see her as soon as possible and for as long as possible, I applied to study abroad in Mexico City, where she lived. We'd talked about it for months and decided it was a great idea.

She broke up with me when I arrived.

I spent the next five months in Mexico, my apartment fifteen minutes away from her workplace, and I couldn't see her. I felt so alone; and it felt like reaching out to her wasn't an option because it seemed as if she didn't care that I had given up my semester to come and see her. She moved on, got a job as a flight attendant, and escaped from the situation as quickly as she could. I couldn't pass a job interview for months because I had been fired. I didn't know what to do. I felt resentment.

So I wrote.

The process wasn't difficult at first. I had a lot of feelings and emotions that I needed to put somewhere, and I couldn't talk to her about them, even though she constantly reassured me that I could. So the writing and words came easily. As time went on, I found that I wasn't moving on like she was, and writing about it wasn't helping me move out of the pit I was stuck in. When I wrote about it, all it did was make me that much sadder, and cry that much harder.

But I refused to stop. I thought that if I stopped writing about her, I would stop loving her. And if I stopped loving her, I would forget about her. Though now I know that that isn't going to happen. I knew she loved my poetry, so I continued to write. Sometimes I would go so far as to show her what I was writing, just to get something I wanted *more* from in response. I felt selfish. But I allowed myself the time it took to cry and heal, and I'm still allowing myself that time because my personal journey is not over yet.

Writing poems became my only connection to this girl. It felt like the only way I could reach out and share my emotions without coming off as a burden was sharing my poetry with her, *about* her. I didn't care if it was sad, or hateful, I only cared that I was meeting my emotional needs by getting my feelings out there in the only way I thought she could listen. The process wasn't easy anymore, it was *tiring*. It was like I was forcing myself to become poetic and romanticize my own pain just so I could get some validity from the one person from whom I thought I would never have to ask for it.

Even when I left Mexico, I continued to write. It was one thing to be home in New York and know I couldn't see her because of the distance. It was another to be in Mexico City and know I *could* see her, but not being able to because she didn't want me to. So things were less intense for a while in my head. There was less chaos. And then she got her travel visa approved for work and she was constantly posting pictures in New York. The chaos was back and worse than ever. The process became infinitely harder again, and the tone of my poems, like *valhalla i have come to thee*, reflected that.

At a certain point, I wanted to stop this project altogether. Coming back, day after day, to these memories was wearing me down like nothing had ever done in my life. I was constantly reminded of camp, of being fired, and of being left alone in a foreign city. The editing process would take me weeks at a time just for a single poem, because I couldn't get through two lines without bursting into tears. I felt pathetic, as if dedicating an entire forty-five-page manuscript to a girl made me weak. So of course the only logical thing that ran through my head was sending all forty-five pages to her.

She didn't comment.

Maybe I thought having it all on the table would make me feel better; absolve me of the guilt and anxiety I had been feeling for nearly a year and a half. Maybe I just wanted to

torture myself a little. I don't know. Whatever it was that caused me to share my work with her made me feel like absolute garbage. I was trying to heal in the wrong way, by trying to make her feel guilty. I don't send her my poems any more.

Most of the poems in this collection revolve around my time down in Mexico dealing with the breakup, as well as constant anxiety resulting from my termination from the camp. The title, "Apparition," refers to the essence of my relationship with this girl, as well as to a religious figure - St. Bernadette. I chose this saint specifically because it is the name of the camp I went to.

St. Bernadette of Lourdes was a young girl who claimed to have seen the figure of The Immaculate Conception on several occasions, and was named a saint for her visions. She was a powerful figure in my camp, though I did not grow up religious, and plays a large role in this collection. The idea of religion itself makes itself obvious in more subtle ways, which can be observed in poems like *sleepwalking*, *ribbit*, and *the dead sea*.

The first half of *Apparition* focuses primarily on the beginning and, to put it bluntly, happy parts of my relationship with a gradual descent towards a more anxious and foreboding tone, the second on the negative and painful aspects that followed after the breakup. I had written most of these poems during the summer of 2018 and the spring of 2019, both significant semesters of the relationship. The last of the poems were written when I had decided to make this the subject of my project. They are a mixture of regression, healing, and acceptance of what is.

Coming back to look at them and edit them brought on a strong wave of emotions that I wasn't keen on accessing, and I'm still dealing with that - but the emotional distance makes the editing process richer, I think. I'm in a different place now than I was a year and a half ago, and the chaos in my head and heart has died down a little bit. I may not be able to bring

myself to read through the project in full as an entity, but I am confident in my writing and healing processes, and trust that I have led myself to a better place, both as a poet, and as a person.

The hardest part is trying not to feel the things I have felt in the past when I edit. Pushing all of those past emotions to a different location is not easy, and I often find them prickling at my eyes, begging to be let out. Sometimes it is best to recognize that you do not have to let a dog out of its cage just because it whines and begs, because it might end up biting you when you do.

- **Kris Rubertone**

**part one**

## sleepwalking

### I.

at night i made sure they were asleep  
arms and legs tucked inside at all times  
sometimes the side bars helped but poor  
ella sherman fell and screamed when  
she hit her head it was 2:49 AM

*i don't want to sleep on the bottom bunk*

### II.

i didn't realize i was asleep until i was  
awake and my body was rolling over  
yours trying to get to hers not wanting  
to disturb any of theirs (if they saw us in  
bed together they'd start asking questions)

*why do they look at each other like that at breakfast?*

### III.

i found myself distracted by the scent  
of cigarettes and lake water still dripping  
from the ends of your hair onto my pillow-  
case my bed was starting to smell like you  
i wonder if anybody had started to notice  
when they made us sit down for mass i  
would try to brush my fingers against yours  
and hope that nobody was watching us

*i saw them fall asleep together at rest hour*

## II.

but now i wanted to let you sleep my legs  
dragged me through the darkness for decades  
following hushed whispers about us  
during the new hampshire nights

*i think our counselors might be in love*

## I.

all the way to the front of the cabin  
and when i finally got to ella she had  
climbed back up to the top bunk with  
violets springing from her arms and  
legs like her own personal garden

*this one doesn't need water*

she'd tell us in the morning with a  
smile small fingers poking at bruises  
without so much as a flinch.







puddles                    i watch as beggars kneel

and weep

dirty

fingers dipping  
desperately for a taste

the birds sing my heresy

to the king.

## arts and crafts

on wednesday nights i'm watching  
stars dancing across my ceiling

b u r s t i n g into balls

of fire embers landing on my  
cheeks and i'm rehearsing the

way your lips did the

same smile bright warm like  
the sun i don't even need a

blanket when we sleep

do you remember the night  
we kissed in the shed up against

the buckets of paint

that room stored more secrets  
than supplies if you opened up

all the containers

of glue you could hear the  
small noises you made when

i kissed you

for the first time in my life i  
was thanking god for closets.

summer secrets

i know it has been over a year

i still think of that night

when

before second session

the skies broke

into a gradient of pinks

purples against the setting sun's

ripples *i still have*

*all the photos in my phone*

and i felt sick from

dragging on your

cigarette huddled in

the backseat of a

2006 greening volvo

begging to be swallowed

by the fake leather seats

while you smoked outside

with our friends

do you remember red lights

up in the arts shed

there's a picture of you

surrounded by the

fairy bulbs wrapped

around the rafters

it was nice to just

sit in there and talk

sometimes our friends

would join us passing

gossip among the paint

splattered tables

like who's girlfriend

broke up with who

because let's face it

catholic girls camp

is the best pick up scene

sharing a bag of dum dums

and making eyes

waiting for them to leave

so i could kiss you

in the dark

i'm sorry i could only

kiss you in the dark

last summer there was a night you sat next to me on the bus  
back from camp fatima. second session i could hear annie's  
laugh from the back rainbow striped shirt rolled at the sleeves;  
~~OUR FAVORITE~~ and i felt your fingers dancing across  
leather seats to get to mine. i could make out your smile in the  
darkness against headlights that lit up your warm brown eyes  
for just a second, ( i saw the whole universe hiding right in front of me )  
and then gone again. i remember your hand was warm to  
the touch, knuckles scarred by your own nails i am sure i  
could hear this night screaming at me' *DO NOT FUCK*  
*THIS UP* i have never responded well to authority.

## broken promises

*i told you i'd given  
up cigarettes for good  
but i still like the way  
they look between your  
lips*

replaying the nights when it  
was too hot to be under the

blankets and all i could  
do was cry about how

we didn't

have enough time i could  
blame the fever rushing over

my body - *at least the patriots were winning* -  
or just too much  
nicotine (but never the truth)

and i am trying to fall asleep to  
the sound of the creaking

of their bedsprings playing  
chords in the night while we wept my

fingers found a home in your  
hair and pulled as if to say

*please don't forget about me*



**i need to stop throwing away my receipts**

i spent hours sitting myself down in front of  
shattered mirrors surround me and

i taught myself how  
to sleep

with my eyes open while i was trying  
to make out my own face in the shards

to learn that just because  
something

is broken doesn't mean that it doesn't  
work i wish i could get back all

the money you spent on  
scotch

tape trying to put me back together  
just to have to watch me crumble

beneath your careful  
fingers

i can still see small spots of maroon  
smeared in the cracks of my eyes

and nostrils but when i  
raise

my fingertips to my lips they are wet  
black copper dark dripping onto my tongue

i am leaking broken  
and i say

*but i still work*  
*but i still work*

**red july**

this is the tragic

magic

of beginnings

*i think i'm falling in love* whispers at

three o'clock in the morning

and those are the moments that

i will pretend i am an animal

sitting atop this wolfeboro heat

paws melting to the asphalt on the

blacktop of a children's playground

still in the sun

of a bright red july

because

you said

“stay.”

after that i stopped sleeping

forgetting what it was

like to feel awake – spots

of color danced across

my eyes i started having

visions of following green

bullfrogs up mountains for months

surviving on moss and brook water

my dry heels were digging

into wet dirt

begging to

swallow me

whole beneath

the sheets of

earth where

we thought

*we were invincible*

they led me to bottomless cliffs

croaking as they blindly jumped

and waited for me to follow

i closed my eyes ( i could not croak )

and stumbled backwards  
into the brush surrounding  
st. bernadette's statue and fell into

her arms

i could hear them crying in  
the back of my head

*eventually she'll let you go*

echoing over wentworth pines  
(they started shedding before  
the summer had even begun to end)

**VIRUS DETECTED!**

it is the middle of the night  
and  
i am trying to take steps forward  
you away

amplified vision of white cabins  
stony hills dancing with tree roots  
i can hear you as static in the foreground

*there's a gli*

*tch*

*it's n ot                      wor    king*

the cabins crumble on  
their cement blocks i am a vibration

a buzz

a bug

when i touch you              i am white noise

can you hear me over the shrine songs?

part two

## the breakup

i thought one day you decided

you just couldn't love me

anymore and even though i was

afraid of the dark i decided to

let the blackest corners of my

room swallow me whole i started

to suffocate on the void that forced

it's way down my throat and inside

my chest ( i started to tighten ) lungs

stretched like latex that kept inflating

and sent my ribcage piercing through

my shirt quiet bleeding in the shadows

almost as if the light knew to stay away.

**but the weekends hurt the most**

*mondays*

i've started washing down my waffles  
with cheap wine

- hardly two dollars and i get drunk  
enough to cry myself to sleep -

*tuesdays*

from the oxo in the middle  
of the night

- i've learned to ignore the sadness  
behind every cash register -

*wednesdays*

on the rusting metal balcony of  
my mexico home

- i can count the amounts of cigarette  
butts thrown through the bars -

*thursdays*

i'm trying to lose the smell of you

burning forest candles and sea salt  
clinging  
to each crevice of your body

in the dark

- have you ever cried so hard you threw  
up shaking like silent seizures -

*fridays*

sometimes when you look in the mirror  
red and puffy

- do you think to tell yourself that you  
aren't the only one to blame? -



## **dreamland**

i've been watching mirrors  
in my sleep they are painted on the  
inside of my eyelids when i dream i see

~~her~~ my

brain black    rotting  
like tar                    bubbling slowly

resting on my tongue  
hot and bitter and with a choke  
sliding down my throat

my words ran into each  
other                    *pleasecomeback*

clinging

to the roof of my mouth  
when i spoke they were  
heavy slow my jaw pulled

apart                    teeth

stretching like glue dripping  
over the sides of my lips

*wake up*

*wake up*

she still isn't here.

i woke up dreaming of  
cigarettes and you and  
the way that they used

to burn to the tips of  
your fingers, molten  
craters in unmarred skin

dressed like the earth of  
venus, your own personal  
ash trays in the pits of your

elbows and when i awoke  
i started burning holes into  
my childhood mattress

deep in the night with cigarette  
butts that put themselves out  
over sharpie scribbled secrets

trying to remember  
the scent of you tobacco  
and black halls mints

my cries became piles of  
ash staining my vintage floral  
sheets, resting thick, black

soot on my cheekbones  
like highlighter in the sun  
smothered in the night

and when i sat down to  
eat breakfast, the blackness  
slept under my fingernails

**the dead sea**

one day back in november

it rained

and the purple flowers

began to wilt

beneath the graying of the clouds where st. bernadette lay crying

when i ran past the puddles

with holes in my soles

i stopped to watch your reflection look

back at me with wet cheeks through tear

filled potholes

and when i dipped my fingers in them

to get to you            salt stuck

to the curves of my cuticles

now my mother asks why i won't

stop biting them.

**a paradise untouched by man**

in my mind i live in the jungle

lounging

in trees

back bent

over

branches

scratching against

my bare legs

sunlight hitting

through the vines

that hug my wrists

imagine jane

i can still see you

yellow in sabors eyes

sunshine soaked

kisses on pale white

skin bubbling caramel

under the heat

at night the

wolves cry for me

*because i have no tears left*

as sad operas bounce

off the moon

at least we are under the same sky

**one woman show**

last night i  
dreamed i had sat the audience

down

in rows of rusting  
red metal chairs curtains hiding a

detritus

stage in the center of  
the cacahuamilpa caves and when

you

watched me rip my heart from  
my sleeve and swallow it whole

i tasted

curdled chocolate  
milk left on a cabin shelf

forcing

its way down if you asked  
me what flavor healing came in the

only

right answer is *not good*  
as my heart sunk back into my

ribcage

protected - the thunder of

clapping a distant rumble

against

its ears from the audience

and when i took my bow i

had to

keep from getting sick on

your shoes i always did have stage

fright.

**boda de pesadilla**

the other night i dreamt

( suffocating on sheets )

i sat in the pew of a cobblestone church tied down

by cotton corners with my ears pried open

*sí quiero*

the tips of my sunday shoes just barely brushed the stones

cold through the leather and i was meant to be still among the spanish chatter

like the purple flowers that had chosen a home inside your hair at the altar

( i am so sure *la condesa* wore these on her wedding day )

*sí quiero*

when i parted my lips to object to this union

all that trickled out sang

*felicidades*

forever holding my peace teeth biting tongue

until i awoke with the taste of copper and salt

**again we hail thee**

they put stones in my shoes

saint bernadette

my steps are heavy down

avenue sonora

and i still think of you

and i still think of her

and i still think of us

as my knees fall to the pavement

heavy with sin (according to you)

*but your first illusion was of a woman  
at the virgin age of fourteen*

can you tell me - when you spent  
your nights drinking from the spring

did you think she was in love with me too

*there must have been something  
in the water*

and

when the girls learned to fall in love with life

(and even sometimes with each other)

behind your shrine among the dandelions

were your visions of something holier?





**on the way home from ibero**

i have found homes  
in the  
back seat of mexican ubers  
silent blank stares  
through rear view mirrors  
there are  
dandelions sprouting  
from the drivers ears  
turning green at the lobes  
worn knuckles  
whitening against  
the wheel  
with a soft grip  
here among the fast moving  
buildings  
i can pretend

that i don't think about you  
and when my mother calls  
into my ear over the radio

*find what you love and  
make yourself heavy with it*

i can pretend  
she is not talking about you  
even though the heaviness  
i feel in my chest  
is screaming  
your name and

choking on the  
syllables.

## **shimmer and shine**

months ago in my younger days

i began to tell the stars all about

you and the ways that (i thought)

you had hurt me they listened to

me as i wept through the metal

bars of condesa's balcony and

when i awoke the next morning

the stars had gone but i couldn't

bring myself to be hurt when i

found them resting in your eyes.

**coldfront**

in the winter i liked pressing my nose

up against the glass of

frosted windows  
blankets of white

trying to warm mother earth

*does it snow in mexico city?*

( and then there are questions that

even google can't

answer

don't ask the internet

*why*

everybody thinks they are right )

but i have found that

snow has lost

its luster when

it is not falling

on you.



**broken bouquets**

there is a basket of crocodiles hiding in the mattress.

i share it alone

with their ridged backs

which stir beneath the sheets

and press up against my spine in my sleep

begging to be let out

with a hiss

through the thin cotton sheets

of a wooden bed

*it almost*

*feels as if*

*you're hugging*

*me when*

*their jaws*

*teeth sharp*

*run down*

*the length of*

*my body*

and in the morning

i will slice them from the cotton

rub the sleep from their eyes

and  
we will wreck  
the cosmos in the garden  
beneath your porch  
which you were probably  
growing for your wedding day  
( purple petals still stick to crevices between teeth )  
i'm sorry  
they were not ready for love  
until scaly hands  
clasped their bodies  
and ripped them  
at the roots  
in the fading sunlight  
of a soft morning prayer.

**jacarnadá trees**

at dawn i awoke by the train tracks

earth had reclaimed

in my high delusion

bright green vines sleeping

around my ankles

when i stood it was hard to disturb them

sleep walking me through moss paths

fingertips brushing ivy

hugged walls

until i spotted you

skin green

sprouting

stems from your

scalp across the rails of the tracks

*so*

*she took you from me, too?*

but this is where you belonged

surrounded by jacarnadá trees

and out of my reach



## resolutions

this year i'm learning what it's like to be alone

that i'm not good at it like you seem to be

the color purple used to be so pretty

especially on flowers

now it makes me so sad and flowers make me sneeze

i feel like dogs love me differently

at night i'm trying to make the ugliest parts of the city my favorites

so that they won't remind me of you

but everything here shines

yesterday i stood so close to a bus it chipped my jacket as it passed

i felt your fingers tugging me backwards but when i turned around

it was just my shadow

leaving nail marks in my wrist

and still i stumbled with a laugh

rugged boots scuffing against the damaged concrete

singing like some kind of fucked up church hymn

when i jumped through the rain puddles

wishing i could get rid of your reflection in them

it was a start

i kind of felt invincible

**you**

rebeca

this is not a love letter

because

we are not lovers

tangled legs on an air mattress in the basement of a friend's house

through the lens of high eyes beneath her porch

the flicker of fire licking our elbows

and tonight i will bury this

not a love letter and my heart

on that hill in central park

behind the baseball pitch

and i will help you leave them there to rot if i do not

break my nails trying to dig them up before - i

replay that last conversation in

my head

but how do you bury

a heart

that is

beating?

**valhalla, i have come to thee**

when a viking chief died

do you think the thrall who was  
being forced bottles down her throat  
and stabbed

and fucked

and burned

( at least they burned together )

was thinking of him

who died a man of honor

and she his whore

~~i was thinking of you~~

as if she had owed him her life

for losing his own

*did she dream that she would be*

*rewarded in valhalla?*

then you wanted to throw *us* a

viking funeral

*i want to burn ships not bridges*

and one of us had to be the

thrall

and one of us had to be the

match holder

*why won't you let this ship burn*

~~because i am still on it.~~

**bacardi blues**

i have been waking up with scars on my tongue  
the other week

i threw up your name over and over again

as my best friend caught it in her hands

and tossed it out the window of a speeding uber

towards the indigo hotel in downtown l.a.

the letters slipped through her fingers

coated in rum and honey on ice and

burned my throat

when i climbed into

bed jack's mom reminded me that

*she doesn't love you anymore*

but my eyes played all those nights

behind the dining hall in a fast motion movie

before i could even blink.



*don't worry you'll see each other again!*

through the humming of the rain

and

there was wet  
hair sticking to  
the sides of your cheeks

(when you kissed me goodbye i could feel it tickle me

how could i ever think that this wasn't real)

i don't go down to  
that end of the road  
anymore

and those rocks ask me why i've stopped

visiting them.





## sleep paralysis

sometimes i still have to sleep in  
that bed on long island

and mangos from your hair is  
soaked into the pillows i had never

so tightly my knuckles are bursting  
from the stretch over bone

i am almost suffocating from  
the endless emptiness

and there is me and memories  
of you spilling into my brain

dreams last night i thought i saw  
you at my bedside rolling

reach out to touch me  
*i am leaning into the*

it's okay to be by myself  
but here the scent of cigarettes

felt so awake at two in the  
morning now i am holding on

ripping at the joints and running  
red into your empty side of the bed

anchored on my chest  
in this room there is darkness

but i should be thankful that you  
still want to visit me in my

your eyes when i called you  
beautiful i thought i felt you

*hands of a phantom  
in my mind.*

**alexa, go to sleep**

while i was washing my dishes this morning

i asked alexa

*how can a person stop dreaming*

and for a few moments      only the scrub of the sponge

against bruised plastic      filled the silence

*you do not stop, you just forget*

a melodic hum

of machine as a choir      low

pruning fingers

messy

with soap      trying to rid

the memory of you

so long ago

beneath the scalding stream.

## progress

ghosts have been visiting me  
    in the night  
passing white shadows on my walls  
still heavy weighing down my mattress  
    and lying beside me  
as if i had welcomed them to  
bed me but they speak softly  
    in hushed whispers  
against my ears by the hundreds  
sliding beneath my sheets cold  
    against calloused feet

offering to me  
    *that pain too will pass if you let it*