

NOT

Quite



THERE

a zine by zoe-aline howard

**WHAT FOLLOWS IS KINDA POETRY KINDA PROSE
KINDA TRUTH KINDA FICTION. IT KINDA MAT-
TERS I GUESS. THAT BIT IS UP TO YOU.**

She's a flamingo in thigh high boots, a strutted,
bent-knee cat in a Bentley, above it all but sinking
too, same water as the rest of us.

She laughs and jumps to the front of the line,
crosses us in stitches (we forgive her, because,
sugar, how could we not).

Watch her inside, lips against a microphone and
nail-blue kiwis fingering the railing across the
stage, down to where we sit

(forgotten that this was karaoke night, the wallows
song sunk back of the throat, cigarettes on the
outdoor patio, breathing heavy
the first time i didn't cough after a smoke was at
the under 21 show my best friend drove (she didn't
back out)).

This girl though, floating out the back door and I
can imagine my hand folded into hers,
the taste of her neck (metal from ice), the way she
might call me babygurlll or maybe she would tell
me to back off or maybe she's a dream.

Miss her at midnight. Mourn her by morning.

I lied about the cigarette in that interlocked alcove, the door that ducks out across from the stage.

The show and the babygurl were real, she was my real life sabine, but she was up on the stage dripping in sweat (not ice) draped in remodeled felting, draped in ukulele straps and unbiased fabric across her breast. Taking requests and I was the schoolgirl outside the fish bowl teeth chipping at the glass finger tap tap tap tap tap see me, see me, **she didn't see me.**

She saw my best friend in their box of the universe, two women crying over the music but I was somewhere else and maybe that was the first time I wanted to draft smoke

(this girl was like a fat Audrey Hepburn, not a waif but a wifey) and man did I want to swallow the cigarette holder wineglass chopsticks between her fingers. I'd carry her out of the place but the merch stand was calling my best friend was calling and my pants came up above my rib cage (could count back then).

Previous love notes hadn't tasted so much like strawberry dum dum wrappers (dumdumdumbdumbdumbdumb this is dumb, I'm reminding myself, slipping away and holding the shoulders of the girl who could have driven us home but her mom is out front. We're still kids but I was telling the truth about midnight.

There were drawings, sketches— no, prints of these figures hunched on tiptoe, crouched over an anthill and they were swallowing my thoughts every third song

(best friend is drifting off, her mother and stepman are waiting for the drop, midnight is coming, she reacts to the words but not my remarks on the volley of instruments by the keyboardtrumpettuba player).

Then I'm tell her about the scorned carpeting, who would shag a dance floor and that when they played our song, I'm sorry, I wasn't listening to you or to chip tooth with the vodka soda, I was thinking about the prints of the giants and their large fingers, the way that I might have been better at volleyball if my fingers could touch, my thighs too (the muscle).

We don't take a ferry home, but my stomach turns and the next thing I'm thinking comes as I'm spanking marmalade onto cherry toast in her kitchen, and I'm thinking that I know less about the show than I know what it would be like to stink my hand into the flamingo's mouth.



Honey, I call the manager, Flamingo and I are gonna start a hotlamb band whether you like it or not, this tension this is real, this is Naturalized Fester, and when I find that I can turn the floor below my feet to puddles and pool water I begin to question the value of a dream.

There are plans to meet and contracts to make good on, so here I am, Babygurlll with the queen bee of southern something and somber sock rock, in my bedroom.

She's speaking in the words of thos ethereal Weetzie Bat wonder-esses, saying Babygurlll this is positively iridescent decorum and I look around at the space and sugar, for once it is. The bookshelf is a double wide sprinkled with every shade of murmur red and blue kiwi.

Insult to injury and I'm shuttered up by my birth mother's creaks on the stairs (back home now) and satisfying as it is to find Flamingo bundled up in my only hoodie a ball on the floor (not unlike the dead rabbit dragged away by a cat that no one feeds) and these fantasies are numerous.

Call best friend up and hotlamb, we have to start a band, baby don't you remember that night I spoke flamingo?

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Of course the answer's a bar hopping no. Sugar, don't know what I was expecting, best friend isn't one to savor those kinda conversations (y'know, the ones you store in your purse with the napkins and the bullet sticks and the contours (condors) and the avocado in case the bar doesn't carry your specific brand of drink (Pepsi isn't okay, no sir)).

She just responds with a K but it's a loving K, it's the K that you remember framed with kangaroos and xylophones (no that's x) on the wall, running circles around the kindergarten classroom. Those markings on the wall made you want to cover your own but you aren't allowed tape and she's back in my head again, bounding to centerstage, hopping baloney and telling fools gold stories I can hear her talking In my head and I've only loved boys, but again, I want to know what her wrists feel like under my fingers.

The rest of the conversation with best friend is nondescript and she catches the strings I've tied to my toes, she brings me back down to earth (thank heavens).

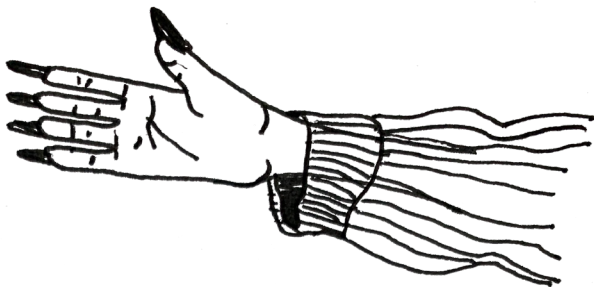
She pours water over my face and asks if I'm feeling okay (I'm not sure) then I feel like the classic phonies beaker,

I tell her this and her face twists into knotted ribbon, ribbons wrapped around the braid plaits of every little girl on field day

(except my sister the year she cut her hair),

are you sure you're alright? Best friend is asking.

Of course, K, of course, I'm just a perfect Dewey's delight in ivy blue paper, no red, no it's green.



After the night with the flamingos and the blue kiwis and the mistaken identities of self, I've lost color in my cheeks but made up for it in my nails.

I'm energetic when I'm sleeping on the floor of best friend's house, but if I'm being honest I've reached TLC paramount in fantasy and most of my days are dazed in some mirroring of thought, Flamingo. Flamingo singing and femme and violent and lovely and beautiful and it takes me two weeks to recognize the man with the sanitary goatee as my father.

Why Daddy, you've grown! In my absence, my sister is breasted, cocky, my brother too. Things are detailed and I'm trapped in a loop and I am obsessed with validation and with dreaming and with cigarettes and most of all with hands. Sister reads my palms and she finds me to be positively average. She references the book from the library.

But when I look later, the crystal ball rolling around over my fingers and shattering when, well, sugar. When I throw it at the portrait, crossed again in stitches later that nice I should've left the glass for someone else, I'm reminded. **Well, sugar. I'm tired. Well, sugar. These are my hands, won't you hold them?**