

LOCAL ENTRY PROSE

winning entry Seán Donne local young writers Awards
- Rose Keating

Taxi

13th November 4:29am

Ethel smells like Winter. Like ice and raw diamonds and slightly sweet chimney smoke. She carries it with her at all times; it's in her blood, I think. She climbs into the yellow cab and the scent fills my head with words; breathe in, breathe out; her. Like wine, except it's just getting rough around the edges with age, somehow. She sinks into the seat, and I ask her where to. Her red slash of mouth stretches, and I watch all her ice melt when she tells me anywhere.

5th December 8:34pm

Ethel likes the feel of rain. She never says it; but in the late night drizzle, she rolls down the dripping window, leans her head to the wind, and sighs as the rain kisses her cheeks; her eyelids. I watch the mask she wears leak away in the eager droplets licking at her skin; black mascara, electric blue eye liner, rouge cheeks; all drip drip dripping down her face. I try to look away, but it's hard to not love her then; seeing all the broken bits and pieces no one else got to see; her mouth in a tight, flower bud, about to burst; raw with the feeling of all that rain.

17th December 8:02pm

She never seemed to feel the need to talk; but I think that said a lot more about her than words ever could. She would just sit and watch the neon lights flitting, flirting across the dark stretch of road, her eyes darting from point to point, catching floating glimmers in her pupils. Her whole body seemed a language in itself; legs stretching, teeth gnawing, fingers drumming restlessly against the window pane; every muscle of her body seemed to want to tear out against her futile skin and paint the air with words that could never be enough when torn apart from lips.

21st December 12:57am

Sometimes she brings a CD with her. I never mention it and neither does she. She just wraps her impatient fingers around the delicate thing, jams it in, and lets the music come dripping out. It's always something smoky and dark and sad and rich. I can practically smell the notes drifting in the cab, filling the stale air with honey vinegar pangs, charcoal and chocolate, copper, cloves, spice; everything bitter sweet and tainted with memories. She sings along every now and again, quietly, words just spilling out. I can hear cigarettes in her voice, and long nights, and men and tongues and money and blood and sweat and a lot of stuff she doesn't like to think about. It weaves in and out of the cheap CD lyrics, all her thoughts, moments, dime a dozen love struck words, all echoing off each other; merging into all these god damn chords of her.

24th December 11:37pm

I dropped her off at her usual corner, watching her clamber out through the door. She seems tired tonight as she hobbles towards her destinations, worn heels clacking off the frozen ground. She leans against the wall, her breathe trickling out in an icy mist, clouding

her eyes for just one moment; before it all snaps shut. She jaggedly slaps on a smile, legs stretching, lashes batting, tongue darting as a customer approaches; the show must go on and all that, I suppose. Somewhere, I can hear a bell chiming too early, or too late; ding dong, ding dong. Click clack, click clack of her frayed high heels pattering away down the frozen street, gleam of tinsel in her hair. Too late then, I suppose.

27th December 2:20am

It wasn't that she was pretty. Well, she was; had to be in her line of work, to survive. She had the dark eyes and the lips and the smile and the skin and the cheekbones and all the other things on our pretty little checklist. But it wasn't that. It was when she was sitting and brought her knees up to her chest, hugging them tighter and tighter, knuckles bleached white. When she dragged dirty fingers through wild hair, glancing in to the mirror, quiet sigh, or when she chewed barbarically on chipped nails, or gnawed thoughtlessly at chapped lips, till they split and bled and she'd sigh and and sigh and sigh some more; paint over with her blood coloured lipstick. It was when she stopped being pretty for a minute, when she was sad or tired or hurt or angry or even just a little lost in her own head; those tiny brief moments when she started being Ethel. The little shards of her I always tried to steal. That's what it was.

31st December 11:47pm

"It's not always a matter of right or wrong, you know."

I let me eyes rake her face in the empty space that follows her barley spoken words. There had always been an unspoken rule of silence between us, her, lost in the dark shadow windows reflecting bending light, and me, lost in her. Something has broken now. She is turned away from me, but I can see bruises trailing along her cheek, her set jaw. I want to say they were delicate shades of lilac and indigo, a sprinkling of something tender, like bruised clouds in evening air; sunset glow. But they weren't. They were raw and ugly and smelled like blood gone sour; bitter bitter blue mess of everything that was wrong. Because she was wrong. This was so god damn wrong. Her skirt was hitched up high on her legs; more bruises, darker. And then there was the circles under her eyes. Grey, then the black pen ink dribble lashes smudged into her skin. She looked tired. She tried to smile; there was lipstick on her teeth, and paid me the fare. Her shimmering, gossamer clothes caught in the neon light, an explosion of glimmers. Somewhere on earth, there are fireworks going off, filling the night with colour for just one moment, reaching so high and then gone in a tangle of tired smoke, ghosts of a year caressing the sky. Winter smoke never tastes like it looks though, does it.

31st January 2:32am

Ethel doesn't get taxis anymore. She doesn't wait on the corner for me, blowing kisses at all those faces floating past. I don't know where she is. I don't want to know. I do. I don't. I can't want to know. Stop.

13th November 4:29am

I wish Winter would stop smelling like Ethel. It never does.