



**BUT YOU HAVE SUCH A  
PRETTY FACE**

**Crystal Senter Brown**



**But you have such a pretty face**

Crystal Senter-Brown

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***For Mama.***

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**When I think of home**

## **Ella's tambourine**

so we decided  
to sort through your belongings:  
the church dresses, hats

stockings, thick- heeled shoes  
worn not only on Sundays.  
The nurse's aides had

thrown everything  
into boxes even your  
Bible, the one my

grandmother gave you  
last Christmas. The three of us  
stood by your bed, already

prepared for the  
next patient, as my brother  
searched each box for

your tambourine.  
*I know it has to be here*  
I said, remembering how

much you loved to  
play it, how it would breathe  
life into any "dry"(your word for boring)

church service. As I  
felt the burn of yet another  
round of tears welling up in

my eyes, I heard the

familiar jingle, as my  
daddy pulled it out of

the last box. We left  
everything else behind, told the  
nurses to remove

your name from it all-  
*someone else could use it now.*  
On the ride home, no

one spoke, I held your  
tambourine in my hands, my  
fingertips tracing each

disc, it's hard, round belly  
worn by a lifetime of use...

I could feel your hands, too.

### **For the lion fountain at Fred Miller park**

the lion's roaring, metal mouth  
swallowed our heads one by one,  
we stood on tip toes taking turns  
as the water spewed out  
onto the fronts of our shirts

we were too young to care about

staying dry and clean,  
grass stained knees were  
just fine with me  
it was the summer of 1983,  
and 100,000 degrees  
so this lion fountain  
was like gold  
like an ocean flowing onto our desert

after spending the entire day  
skipping through rocky creeks, playing  
hopscotch and doubledutch  
touch-football, swinging  
twirling, dancing, eating peanut butter and jelly  
the lion didn't have a chance of escaping us

so we took turns  
feeding from his mouth  
savoring this moment

everything would change by this time next year

everything always does.

## George's departure (An Alphabet Poem)

*For Granddaddy*

**A**s I was learning how to write my name in cursive, you were dying  
**B**ound by tubes and breathing machines, you never once  
**C**ursed the nurses or  
**D**octors, your faith allowed you to welcome the  
**E**nd, even if we didn't. At  
**F**irst I didn't believe you were actually  
**G**one, even when nannie took me by the arm  
**H**eaving me up and over your casket  
**I** didn't want to look at you, I  
**J**ust wanted to go home, rewind the clock back to when you  
**K**issed me on my forehead and gave me Cheetos before we  
**L**eft for school. But now, family  
**M**embers,  
**N**ot knowing what else to do, carried in cakes and fried chicken,  
**O**range gelatin molds and gallons of sweet tea, which we  
**P**retended to actually need. These strange people were  
**Q**uick on their feet, ironing neat stacks of  
**R**ed cloth napkins, ironed and ready for your wake. I  
**S**at in the front pew and watched you, your skin flat and ceramic-  
**T**inted by an amateur mortician, your suit jacket crammed  
**U**nderneath you. I *still* miss everything about you, from your  
**V**oice, to the  
**W**ay you made music with Nannie's toy  
**X**ylophone, to the  
**Y**ellow

Zinnias in our garden, no longer in bloom.

## Home

When I am home, I am seven again  
I am dusty pigtails and five best friends  
I am hopscotch on hot sidewalks  
wearing pink jelly shoes  
I am 4th in line at the West Elementary pool

when I am home, I am the Christmas parade on Main Street  
I am two tiny bare feet in Panther Creek  
I am a Dairy Queen chocolate-dipped ice cream cone  
and Saturday morning cartoons with my big brother Jerome

when I am home,

I am a tent revival on Wednesday nights,  
I am brass offering plates with the crushed velvet lining  
I am *Amazing Grace* and the taste of fried chicken  
I am red kool-aid and switches picked for lickin's

When I am home, I am slowed down, *whole*

I am the daughter of Janice and Joe  
I am Miss Frances' granddaughter  
and Ella's twin,

I am the poet who remembers to stop just to take it all in,  
when I am home.

## Ladybug

1.

She wants to see and learn everything,  
practice what magic can make the world spin,  
she gives in too easily  
and has never properly learned to hold a grudge

2.

She knows what red clay between her toes feels like  
has cleaned chitlins fresh from the pig  
and of course she has done her time in more than a few  
Tazewell, Newport and Rutledge, Tennessee  
Baptist tent revivals.

3.

*She answers to*

*Ladybug*

*Babe*

*Pop*

*Mommy*

*Miss crystal*

*Babygirl*

*Chris*

*Booshane*

*Dotcom*

*Csb*

*Toute la femme*

*Chrissey*

4.

She has never been to Venice, but longs to spend  
two weeks canal-side  
in the midst of poetry and sleep  
white wine and chocolate ice cream

5.

She is Corey's bride and longtime lover  
Adonte's nagging, very uncool mother  
Janice and Joseph's only daughter  
And Jerome's fuzzy-headed baby sister

6.

She misses Lynn, Melanie and Sasha  
Ella, George and Eugene  
she needs to call her daddy more  
but is sure to write her grandmother by hand  
every single week

7.

She speaks to strangers  
forces frowning faces to smile  
and she still has miles and miles to go  
and she still has miles and miles to go

8.

She is at her best when in the company of children  
surrounded by fingerpaints and chicken mcnugets

board books and spongebob squarepants  
identifying with toddlers and awkward teens

9.

She is often mistaken for naive  
already mother by the age of 18  
she erases normalcy and proceeds  
to writes her own destiny

10.

She finds a story in every face  
a poem in every situation  
sipping haikus for breakfast  
nibbling on tankas for a midnight snack

11.

And these days, she is restless  
wound up and ever-ready  
a boundless ball of poetic energy  
always dreaming a brand new dream

12.

She is a sweet tea- drinking  
quick-thinking  
peach cobbler- baking  
country-girl

born and raised in the hills of upper east Tennessee

she is me

she is me

and

she

is

free!

### **Teen me**

She's a believer in magic and shooting stars

orange Hubba Bubba and bumper cars

*light as a feather, stiff as a board* player

Mortal Kombat- fighter and Pac-Man ghost slayer

Prince poster-hanger and grassy hill tumbler

dollar pool-swimmer and good luck summoner

city bus transfer'er and baby balancer

sweet tea mixer and Kid-n-Play dancer

howling laugher and landline phone gossipier

cupcake baker and open mic rocker

toddler chaser and bedtime story reader  
boo-boo mender and stray animal feeder  
older now, but still a Tennessee girl at heart  
lucky to have had Morristown as my start

excited to see what the next decade has in store  
I am running through each and every God-opened door

thankful for the blessings god has given his girl  
ready for this room, this city, this state,  
the world!

## **That time when my brother Jerome was Evel Kneivel**

First born,  
brave and bold  
curly haired, masked and caped  
his apple red Converse give him a running start

He has been convinced by friends  
that jumping five parked cars  
wouldn't actually be *that hard*

and of course they all line up  
chanting and cheering  
*Go go Jerome go!* They howl

and soon,  
he is airborne,  
cape flying/  
bike wheels spinning in mid-air

he soars up  
up  
up  
up

and he feels the warmth of the sun

the freedom of flight  
he feels the wind  
the sky

and then

the crack  
of pavement.

### **Welcome Home**

(for Aunt Ann)

With barely enough  
room for your own things you offered  
me space in your home

saying *stay here for*  
*as long as you need to...*  
your sons carried

my luggage as I  
balanced my baby boy on  
one hip. You never asked

what happened, instead  
you cooked dinner, bathed my son

and tucked us in for

the night. And for the  
first time in many years, I could  
breathe and collect what

was left of my sanity.  
This became my first real  
lesson in what it

means to be family,  
what it means to have a home  
to go to when the

world seems to be crashing  
down around you. Sometimes all  
you need is a warm

bed, a good night's rest  
and someone who loves you enough  
to hold you up

until you can fly  
again  
on your own...

**Love**

**And ooooo, baby!**

(a jazz poem)

And ooo

I get

So lonely

When he

Ain't here

My body

Prefers

His, my

Lips were

Made to

Kiss (him)

My arms

Just

Don't feel

Right if

He ain't

Between

'em, my

Body

Prefers

His, my

Hands won't

Grab on

Nothin'  
Else but  
Him even  
If I  
Tried, man  
They'd probably  
Just raise  
Up and  
Say *woman*  
*are you*  
*crazy?*  
Gimme  
Some' a  
That sweet  
Brown, sugar  
Only  
He can  
Give, he  
Simmers and  
Bubbles  
Up from  
My soul  
Reminds  
Me of  
Why I  
Have lips

And hips  
And when  
He ain't  
Next  
To me?  
*Oooooo baby,*  
I don't  
Even  
Wanna  
*Breathe.* My  
Thick legs  
Prefer to  
Be wrapped  
Around  
Him, when  
He ain't  
Near 'em  
They just  
Downright  
Protest!  
They sit  
All crossed-like  
Won't do  
Nothin!  
And I  
Guess to

You this  
Sounds kinda  
Crazy but  
My baby  
Breathes air  
Into my  
Lungs, he  
Adds an  
Extra  
Spring to  
My knees  
I even  
Have this  
Special  
Melody  
Only  
He can  
Make me  
Sing  
I say  
Ooooo weeee!  
Baby  
You were  
Made for  
Me! And  
He just

Smiles with  
His arms  
Around  
Me.  
Just  
Like it's  
'sposed to be.

## **Backsliders**

Sunday mornings are  
our only chance to dance under  
the covers, your slick

skin against mine, the  
scent of our dreams dancing in  
the air. You touch me

*there*, where prose is born-  
where my heart beats- we speak the  
same language no

one else knows. We stay  
in bed past noon, you become  
my lunch, my belly

full of you. Your kiss,  
still on my lips, i dream of  
more sundays just like this...

