

Sweet Bird of (Dying) Youth

Approaching 30 with that song of purple summer

I won't miss the blackouts. Or especially the waking up from the blackouts. Those mornings were always difficult, embarrassing, clumsy. Fishing for keys and underwear in some stranger's house.

No more: Changes are happening. The jugs of Carlo Rossi have disappeared from atop the fridge. Five-for-five vodka busts seem somehow less...interesting. The thick stack of bills is finally being opened and addressed. I can envision a future in the kitchen beyond mac 'n' cheese mix-ins and Häagen-Dazs. And I can't remember the last time I passed out in a cab. It has been a while.

And so it seems time to say goodbye now to my hedonistic 20s. Almost.

Just a few weeks ago, I turned that precipitous final corner toward my 30s: I celebrated my 29th birthday. It was a typically amazing height-of-fall day in Portland, sunny and cool, tromping among leaves to a lazy morning brunch, boyfriend in tow. (This is new, too.) Later—after an idyllic day of walking, ice cream and happy hour with friends—a touring musical at the Keller and, to close, a champagne toast at Clyde Common. A perfectly enjoyable birthday.

I woke up the next morning close to tears and foggy in that familiar post-blackout kind of way (though I'd only had one drink the night before). Why? I seemed to be disoriented about what had just taken place and—scary thought—what was coming next: the real, true final step into adult-

hood and my 30s. The prospect of it left me spinning for days.

The entirety of that birthday, turning from 28 to 29, seemed impossibly near-perfect, packed full of friends and love and promise and—this was the scary part, maybe?—it was all very, very *adult*. Like, no alcohol-fueled drink-throwing binges or tear-stained cheeks birthday theatrics *adult*. Like, I am turning fucking 30 years old soon and need to maybe leave behind some of these 20-something antics and grow the hell up *adult*. I found the idea both exhilarating (“thank God, I get to be taken seriously now as a grown-up and all of life's answers will now be bestowed unto me!”) and confusing as fuck (“exactly how boring is this whole *adult* gig gonna get?”).

Looking back now, it seems that my 20s, perhaps like yours (whether you are in it now or remember it way back when), involved some mix of two major elements: 1) stumbling soul-career-love searching and 2) conspicuous consumption of things, substances and people. We work a lot of different jobs, we question our values and morals, we go on dates and sleep around and then we consume every taste and smell and sight and sound in range, pass out in a stupor from the stimuli, and wake up to do it all again.

The past year was a perfect example: a whirlwind of ingested substance(s), unpaid credit card bills, Craigslist connections, housemates from hell and many boxes of Annie's Mac 'n' Cheese. My

early 20s included all that, too, plus a truckload of unmentionable mores: the married guys and coke parties, seasonal retail jobs that paid so little it was determined more money could be made elsewhere, the ER trip from alcohol poisoning.... Oh God! Just how ashamed of myself should I be?

As I slouch toward 30, I find it difficult to know what to do with all those experiences and pleasures and horrors of my 20s. How to categorize or interpret them? Or maybe just lock them away for all time? Were those experiences white-hot crucibles of gay youth that helped challenge and ultimately form my current self? Does simply turning 30 really flip that all-consuming switch from on to off? Should I call that dude from Boston's Back Bay to apologize for stealing 60 bucks from him so I could get a cab ride home to the other side of town at 4 a.m.? The mind boggles.

I have a typical birthday habit that is well-ingrained: At some point I will likely burst into tears, for no explainable reason. I told this to my boyfriend the morning of my birthday—he laughed, kindly.

And then, sitting outside an ice cream shop on Southeast Hawthorne later on that perfect afternoon, he offered up his iPod earbuds. “Listen to this,” he said, explaining that it was a song from the show we'd be seeing that night, *Spring Awakening*, a musical about exploding into adulthood after the harsh trials of adolescence.

The lyrics pounded in my ears:



Corner View
BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

And yet, I wait/the swallow brings/a song too hard to follow/that no one else can sing.

The earth will wave with corn/the day so wild, so warm/and mares will neigh/with stallions that they mate/foals they've borne.

And all shall know the wonder/of purple summer.

I'd been wondering this whole time what was supposed to happen next once—or if—I made it this far. I think I'm starting to understand what it is. As for my waning 20s, I'm just glad to have finally emerged from that harsh winter alive, into my own kind of purple summer. **JO**

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