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## What Do You Say Liza Blue?

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# What Do You Say Liza Blue?

Four months ago yesterday my beautiful blond King of Cups kicked back, reevaluated his life and kicked me out. Meaning: Clayton Lee Taylor found someone else.

Yesterday was a Sunday. Now it is Monday and it is raining and it is about two-thirty in the morning. Check out my Timex battery-run alarm clock. I must raise my head, turn my head and focus my eyes on the green hands. They read 2:32 a.m. Close enough. I can get about three hours of sleep without waking. I'm depressed.

Most people can sleep for hours on end when they are depressed. I know, I've read about it.

When I was seven I read a story in *Reader's Digest* at my grandmother's house about a man who slept for close to ten years straight when some business deal fell through. My grandmother saves all of her magazines in cardboard boxes in her basement. *The Reader's Digest* was in a box with *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Look*, *Ideals* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. The box was marked April 1966, the same year and the same month I was born. The story was long and I was so proud that I could read that I told everyone about the sleeping businessman at dinner, and then my mother and I went back to our house and I told my father about it and he said he didn't think the story was true. I believed it then and I believe it now. The man owned some company that did something with steel and he had already lost a lot of money the year before and then he lost some big deal with a U.S. car company (Chrysler makes sense here, but I can't remember the exact company) so he told his secretary that he was leaving for the day. He got into his Mercedes (blue if I remember) drove home and went to sleep. His wife could not wake him the next day so she took him to the hospital and after a while he could sit up and feed himself etc. . . . etc. . . . but he basically just slept for ten years. He could not talk or read or watch television or anything. Just stare and sleep. He woke up ten years later like nothing had happened. Another day, another morning. What a surprise he had. That's beside the point. He was depressed and he slept.

My best friend Michelle said she sometimes slept twenty hours a day when she was depressed. She said she had dreams of getting into her mother's station wagon and driving out to Omaha, Nebraska. Why in the hell she picked Omaha I don't know. It's far away from Madison I guess. A destination. Well anyways she didn't do it, only thought about it because she said she was just too damned tired to mess with gas stations and credit cards and restaurants and what would happen when she got caught because she had just turned fifteen and wasn't legal. When she was down all she could do was sleep and eat. I sent

her Joni Mitchell's "Ladies of the Canyon" and a giant bag of M & M's. In between sleeping and eating she called me and told me thank you and that she was writing down all of her dreams but that she couldn't remember much of them. And what she could remember wasn't very good anyways, she said.

One morning when things were still fine between my Clayton and me, he told me that dreams cleaned out his soul. He picked me up at about five in the morning and I made a thermos of coffee and we went to this old field to watch the sun come up. That was all he said. "Dreams clean out my soul. That's why I love to sleep." He doesn't talk much in the mornings. It was so comfortable just hanging out in that field.

Oh the luxury. Sleeping and eating. I can do neither. Don't ask me why, I really don't know. I'm depressed is all. Bluer than blue. Down, down, down. I really should be able to sleep. I really should. I'm off of caffeine. I exercise at least two hours a day. I walk the dog. Go to the grocery store for my mother. Wash the car. Go to movies. Read. I don't know. I mean I still do things. I consider myself active.

Today, for example, I went to aerobics with my mother. She goes twice a week. At first I told her I would go with her so she would stop bothering me about it. She wants me to meet some new people since I'm home. Since I paroled myself from college for a while. She doesn't understand why I like to do things alone right now. Why I do things like go to movies by myself. Why I don't visit some of my friends at school. Why I don't have lunch with my friends that are still at home. "Be patient with them," she says. "Go to Mary's party. She called three times." On and on and on. "No car until you return the call. Why don't you go see Brian?"

I brought Brian home for Thanksgiving before I even met Clayton. A mistake. My mother loved him. More like adored him — underline, underline. My father, "He's a fine young man. Knows his politics. Business smarts too. A fine pick." Brian's about as fine of a pick as Spiro Agnew was. Extremely right wing. A mama's little baby. And boring, boring, boring. I brought him home only because his parents were in Europe. I felt sorry for him. He wore patches on the elbows of big baggy sweat-ers. I liked that. I wanted one of those sweaters. So I brought him home. A mistake. I have not heard the end of him, but I did get a sweater. It's on my chair on top of *The Phantom Tollbooth* which I have been reading just about everyday. I always put that sweater on that chair. I like it there. I love the brown. And the patches. Pretty classy.

So at first, when I was driving with my mother to aerobics, I thought I was going pretty much just to shut her up. But after we got there and I saw how much she concentrated on the dances, I realized I went with her to be nice to her. She's been mellow lately. And I've been thinking about telling her about this whole situation with Clayton. She's been

making a sincere effort to control her periodic hyper, spastic fits lately (e.g., not stressing about the house because I smoked a cigarette in the living room). And I've been pushing her. I smoked two cigarettes in there the day before yesterday to see what she would do. I was comfortable. I was in front of the window. There's this great view of this bus stop from that window. The whole connect the suburbs to the city deal. It was about five-thirty and people were coming home from work. They looked like little kids coming home from school. Only they had mustaches and hairsprayed hair and briefcases and crumpled newspapers instead of lunchboxes and math and spelling tests. A couple of people were smoking. That made me want a cigarette. So I just did it. I lit one and smoked it. And then another. I had a great view. I was comfortable. I didn't want to go outside. No big deal. My mother didn't do anything other than open the windows and vacuum twice. No confrontation. I appreciate that. So I ended up going to aerobics with her.

We went to aerobics and I had a pretty good time. Those women are fat. They wear lipstick while they dance around. This lipstick sticks out because most of the women turn pale when they exercise. It was pretty funny. We were doing what they call the Thriller to Michael Jackson's "Thriller" no less (two kicks with the right leg, two with the left, turn around, repeat; the whole time waving the arms in front like a windmill) and some little kid unplugged the box that was playing the tape. Tripped them all up. They were on a right kick, arms flapping, really into the whole thing. Then silence. They looked embarrassed and awkward like they were lost in a parking lot or something. It was funny. They've been doing this dance stuff for the last two months with the same women and the same leader and the same dances and the music stops and they all get so uptight and self-conscious like they just met the women around them. All participants in the faux pas of the century. It was funny. Little chickens with their heads cut off.

I did the whole hour with them and then I came home and walked our dog whose name is Sunshine. Sunshine and I walked around the block twice and I told her about what happened at aerobics. I didn't care if anyone saw me talking to her or not because I really felt like hearing what I had to say about those women and my mother dancing on that racquetball court. I was feeling pretty good about the whole afternoon and then I imagined Clayton shooting a whole roll of black and white on those women. That wasn't too bad, but then I had this clear vision of Clayton sitting at his desk and coloring in each woman's lips with real lipstick and I felt sick at my stomach. He was always doing cool things like that. I took Sunshine home and then I jogged for about three miles. I should be tired. Right? I should be sleeping like a babe. Three-thirty, I bet. Check it out. (Procedure) 3:23 a.m. Not bad. I'm getting pretty good at this time deal.

My sister Trish is nine now, but when she was six I taught her how to tell time. It didn't make sense to her. She is a great little kid and does great in school but when she was in the first grade she just figured that you do what you do when you want to, or when your mother tells you to or when your father tells you to. Sometimes she makes more sense than a lot of people who are a lot older than she is. My mother had to pick her up from school early one day because the nurse called and said that Trish had hives all over her body. When I got home from school Trish told me that she had to list into a tape recorder at the allergist's everything that she had eaten for the past two days and that she had to come home from school early because she couldn't tell the class when it was ten-thirty and that they should go out to the bookmobile. "I got hives instead," she said. For some reason this made me really sad then. We sat at the dining room table and learned how to tell time with one of those little kid records—"Mr. Greenjeans Tells Time"—with one of those little books. She was wearing a plaid skirt and red shoes and my mother gave me twenty dollars for teaching her.

Now she has her own alarm clock and I've got me a white Timex battery-run glow in the dark alarm clock. Sweet. Clayton Lee Taylor's responsible for giving me that clock. We had some good times together.

First encounter: the bus station on my way home for Spring Break. My mother was upset about the bus station deal ("Fly silly, you'll save time"). I was upset about going home for Spring Break. No choice. My godmother was getting remarried and my mother is particular about my attendance at functions of this sort. I was really into testing her back then so I told her that a bus ride takes a lot longer than a plane ride and that I needed as much time as I could get and that I would get home when I got home. I hate it now when I do stupid stubborn things like that, but that's how I first met Clayton—at the bus station. Sitting in a plastic chair and two to the left of me, there he was reading an old issue of *Newsweek*. Maybe reading. He kept looking over and smiling. Cool. It was cool then. I hoped that he was going to the same place I was. Finally he put the magazine down and said with an attempt at a John Wayne drawl, "Do you want a cigarette little cowgirl?" (Even cowgirls get the blues.) He was wearing an army jacket with the name Henderson over the right pocket. I said sure. A free cigarette is a free cigarette. So we sat and smoked and he said he had nothing better to do and that he would like to ride along with me to Madison. We bought a twelve of Michelob and sat in the back of the bus by the little latrines. After a while, maybe two beers, he said, "If those bastards end up plunging us into another war, I'm sticking a peace sign on the back of my army jacket and making some posters and standing by that bench right there." He pointed to a faded green bench in front of

a drug store. We were in Ohio I think. I don't know. It was dark. So he just comes up with this remark out of the blue, everything was quiet until he said that, and then a couple of people turned around or crossed and recrossed their legs etc. . . etc. . . So he said, "I'm letting people know how I feel about that shit." Pretty funny. Made those people squirm. Cats on hot tin rooves.

Where have you been all my life Superman? I wanted to ask him. I wanted to ask him that. I'm into melodrama sometimes. That's something I'm working on though. Elizabeth, my therapist, my analyst, my psychologist—whatever the hell you're supposed to call her—my shrink is having me make a conscious effort to separate between fantasy and reality. She puts a lot about Clayton into the fantasy category. I don't blame her. He was too good to be true. Oh don't you think Liza Blue?

She'll say something to me like, "Okay, let's pause for a couple of minutes, Nicole." She is really into relating to people by using their names before, after or during every single sentence that comes out of her mouth. Liza I know my name. I'll ask her to refrain from using my name so often—please—because it makes me feel as if I am being interrogated and she'll say, "Okay Nicole, we're pausing here, and we're going to make a separation between fact and fiction." In all reality, it is hard for me to look at that woman and make this conscious effort to separate fact and fiction. She's short, five one is pushing it. Perfect brown hair, green eyes, crystal clear complexion, white white teeth. The whole bit. A regular walking Barbie doll. I feel like telling her to wake up and smell her coffee. Twice I've almost shouted, Liza, YOU'RE not real. It is irritating and embarrassing when she does that fact and fiction crap. She thinks I'm really screwed in the head. What the hell? I'm depressed. I'm down for a while. Playing possum.

Elizabeth won't let me smoke in her office either. Not only can I not smoke in my own home without the risk of confrontation, but I can't smoke—not even one lonely little drag—at the place where I'm trying to work this whole troublesome affair out. Ridiculous. Here I am pouring my guts out to this woman, I mean talking personal, personal, personal and I cannot smoke even one single cigarette. Liza says I can't smoke in her office because the nicotine makes the body nervous which adds to stress which adds to anxiety which adds to depression. Hey Liza, I'm at the head of the class. It doesn't matter if I smoke. She doesn't want me to smoke in her office—really—because she's pregnant and she's afraid the smoke will hurt her unborn child. Prima donna mother wants a prima donna child. Makes sense. What good old Liza should think about though is that her precious unborn baby has to listen to human horror stories all day long. Now, let's talk trauma. It's no wonder that kid's in the fetal position. Sometimes I'm pretty funny at night.



Going to see Elizabeth is part of the deal I made with my school so they'll let me come back in the Fall, if I'm up for that. Intensive therapy. Pretty intense. Not too fun. I mean I'm a private person, I don't like the idea of making innards public. Jesus Christ play the violin. Me agreeing got me out of school for some time and mellowed my parents out a little too. They were really stressing about my grades and my health. I wasn't doing work or going to classes or eating properly etc. . . etc. . . the whole deal. What the hell? I was more down then than I am now. The crisis point, don't you say Liza Blue?

My immediate dismissal from school was part of that deal too. So my mother and father come to pick me up from school. I've got two bags packed and have my white Timex battery-run alarm clock in my pocket. Meredith, my mother, is wearing a gray wool skirt, navy blazer and of course pearls. Those pearls. Her hair is behind her ears and she's smiling a little too hard. She's fidgeting with the strap of her purse because she wants a cigarette. She doesn't smoke in front of me because she thinks smoking's unbecoming, especially for a mother. She knows I know, but she doesn't want Trish to find out. Trish is nine and could deal with it. Nevertheless, my mother has smoked for the last seven years in bathrooms with fans going. She can flush away the butt — the incriminating evidence — when she's finished. No problem. Good Lord the closet smoker. It's mid-October and she has a lovely tan.

Baxter, my father, too, is tan. He too is wearing a navy blazer. Ready for the office, minus briefcase. He is smiling like my mother. But his is an even more strange, strained smile. This smile makes his forehead wrinkle, like he's concentrating. It's the same look he gets when he reads the paper. We don't try to talk to him when he reads the paper.

"Ready kiddo?" he says. I nod my head. He picks up my bags.

"Honey, you look wonderful," my mother says. The typical. Yet I have not showered in four days. I'm wearing filthy levis and the brown baggy sweater with the patches that I got from Brian. My face is white. I'm too thin.

"Yes," I say. "Ain't life grand?"

She smiles again. My father gives a short, business lunch laugh. We get in the car. I stretch out in the backseat. My mother makes a comparison between a deer being blinded by headlights and running straight into a truck that's delivering milk and orange juice to Lawsons, and going through a semester of college and not feeling settled, not being comfortable with the environment yet. Consequently one can get blinded by those headlights, the brightness of it all and run straight into it and get hurt, she says. One does not know enough from experience to go to the side of the road or pause and let that truck pass. She applauds my decision to come home. My father agrees. They've prac-

ticed. It's a long drive. We should have flown.

I check some shrinks out around Madison and I pick Elizabeth. She has a nice smile. She picks me. I start going to therapy. I go alone. When I get home, my mother is usually making dinner. "Are you all better?" she asks.

Elizabeth thinks I should tell my parents everything about Clayton. I won't. I mean I might, but I don't want to. It's a long story. My my. You ain't heard the sorrows I've seen. I think my mother would cry.

Back to that bus ride. When I got to Madison for my godmother's wedding, Clayton was asleep. His head was on my shoulder. He had been sleeping for a couple of hours. Every now and then he would flinch in his sleep and smile. Bizarre. Cool though. I liked him. I picked up his head, picked up my bag and said something like, "Good-bye Henderson, it's been a hard day's night." Something profound. I gave him my school address and got off the bus. Pretty typical. A good time.

As far as I can tell, that is the beginning. I mean I'm depressed. Things are fuzzy. Maybe this thing started sooner. Maybe not. Who knows? My karma's off.

I go back to school. Everything's fine, fine, fine and then Clayton shows up out of nowhere. He says he's thought about it and he's going to take a couple of winter courses. He takes a class in Black American literature and one in Third World politics. We sit in the library and he reads me the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks. He likes her soul, he says. She has a pure vision.

He gets a letter from his family every two weeks. They live in Texas. His brother is a great tennis player he tells me. Clayton cashes their checks, but rarely reads their letters. I wonder about this, but don't bother him about it. He says that his brother is ranked something like seventy-three in the world.

We get closer and closer. I'm really happy about being with him. I want him to meet my family. He won't. So I don't mention him to anyone back home. He doesn't like pressure. I can't imagine him having dinner with my family.

He says that Third World nations are more honest about poverty than the U.S. is, and he teaches me how to be radical (e.g., convinces me to stop shaving my legs) and I teach him how to tolerate small talk. We make plans to learn Spanish and go to Central America etc... etc... and I am really in-love.

Elizabeth questions this in-loveness part. Hell, I'm a kid. Fact or fantasy? She thinks that I was at a vulnerable point in my emotional growth cycle and just wanted someone to cling to. The whole replace the father concept. When she mentions Clayton with my father, I think of my father telling him that his photographs really aren't good enough to make any money to speak of. Man to man. I think of this and feel



kind of sick and that I could actually throw up in Elizabeth's trash can. She keeps tissues on her desk and when I feel that badly I just take one of these and cough into it a couple of times and then I feel okay. I was in-love, though. I'm still in-love. Hey, but so what? Liza Blue you wouldn't question it if you really knew you.

So Clayton and I are supposed to go to this radical bonfire one Friday where a bunch of people are going to burn an effigy of Reagan. Pretty cool. Pretty radical. He comes to my room. He's wearing his army pants and his beat-up levi jacket. He's smoking a Drum cigarette. He's holding the white Timex battery-run alarm clock. I'm really happy to see him. I love to see him. I'm in-love, right? I feel kind of high. I'm not. He's drunk. "Time flies," he says and gives me the clock. "Catch you around." Well, I stop smiling. I don't ask what-the-hell. Our relationship is based on mutual independence. I go to the fire alone. It is a real bad scene. I'm not into it at all.

Michelle tells me that when she was really down and going to therapy, intensive therapy, just like me, she slept a lot. I mean she claims that she sometimes slept for twenty hours some days. I might try to write that woman a letter tomorrow. If I feel like it. I don't have to do anything I don't want to now since I'm depressed, except go see Liza m'love and try to eat. I'm getting just a little bit bored. Some nights as I lie here I think I could go back to school the next day. And some mornings when I watch Trish getting ready for school or at night when I see her doing her homework, I think I could really get into that scene. What the hell?

A couple of days ago Trish and my father went to the library and checked out *The Little House Cookbook*. They made doughnuts. Trish was doing a project about pioneer women. That's so cool that my father made those doughnuts with her. He was so proud. He came up here wearing my mother's apron that says "BITCH BITCH BITCH" carrying two of those doughnuts. "For the princess of the pond," he said. The doughnuts were awful. But I was so happy he made them. I can't remember him making anything else ever, except money of course, and my crooked bookshelves that I left in my room at school. My roommate had all of her books in them when I left. I didn't feel like taking them out. Displacing them. Books have souls. They can feel. The whole picture. I love those bookshelves.

So Clayton out of the blue falls in-love with someone else and says he feels like he's married to me. The excitement is gone. Dwindling interest. Whooha. I'm stunned. I think I'm on a bad trip. I swallow any bit of pride I've ever had and sob and whine and beg to get him back. He shows me poems he's written to his new lover. He tells me I'm the closest person ever to him, but that he wants this new woman. A possession. I think he's selfish of course, and that he has a split personality. The

typical. I tell him not to call me or to come to my room or insist on private intense conversations. I go back to my room and get drunk for about a week. I love gin.

Part of my deal now is no booze. Thank you Liza Blue.

Okay, so I maintain for a while. I see Clayton around every now and then rolling a Drum or throwing a frisbee or something. He looks sad. I look like hell, but I'm functional. I get up every morning and put on my endurance and go to my classes. Things are cool for about three weeks and then one night I freak. I saw Clayton earlier that day and he started a real personal conversation. I was sad. I ignored him and went to my room. Then I wanted to call him and then my body felt like it was going to explode and I felt like little lines of gunpowder were going off across my forehead and I was scared. I didn't feel sadness or anger or anything. My body was just going crazy on me. I needed something. So on and so forth. I got emergency counseling. I signed the papers and here I am. In bed, wide awake.

I kind of feel badly about not telling my parents what's going on in my head. What's to say? It's a long story. It kind of scares my mother when I forget how to pronounce certain words and when I sit and stare out the window and things. She wants to know what's wrong. Elizabeth thinks I'm selfish. I can tell. But how can she know what's going on? Oh happy day. She's pregnant. She has a practice. She's successful. Ain't life grand?

I thought about telling Elizabeth about this article I read in the paper about a week ago. It was about a little nine year old retarded girl that got raped, got pregnant. The fetus died in her womb and she carried it around dead inside for about two months. It started to poison her body and she was in intensive care for about seven weeks. Sadness. That would give her something to think about.

Liza Blue thinks I've been babying myself a little too long. Hell, I'm hurt. I can't sleep. I'm grouchy during the day. Six-twenty. The sun's coming up. 6:21 a.m. Pretty damn close. Ha. Morning has broken. Another day another pay. Whoo-ha. Life in the big city.

This isn't the first time I've been down this low. When I was seven my family stayed in a cabin in Southern Ohio for a month. Get back to nature. I got depressed. I was lonely. I wanted someone to swim with me and come to my cabin for lunch etc... etc... We were in the wilderness. I got lost in my mind. That depression lasted for about a month I guess. Hey when you're a kid, you grow fast. Ain't got no worries. So the story goes.

I have to venture forth to see my oracle today. Cleanse my mind. Work this thing out. Oh, what do you say Liza Blue?

*Joan R. DeWitt*