An ode to the eyes that see all and say nothing

By Molly Brandt

To the eyes that see all and say nothing

Appraising each of your counterparts

Cerulean like a bright flowing spring

What a simple glance can do to a heart!

Limitless like the stars you wish to fly

Skin kissed by Apollo’s fair blessing

Soaring and reeling through the endless sky

Seen through those eyes that do no confessing.

Soft smile wakes the weary observer

Calloused hands worried from each other's touch

Writing notes and thoughts with brilliant fervor

Such quiet words can only say so much.

Are my musings with you all for nought,

In your lovely eyes a cold afterthought?

No One But You

By Molly Brandt

The diner was quiet. Juliet swept the dilapidated tile floor, mind numbed by the repetition of dull colors. Red, white, red, white. Again and again, sweep by sweep. She hummed quietly to herself, a song that someone had played on the jukebox that afternoon. It was a bouncy, soulful tune and Juliet found herself swaying and smiling as it played through her head. Sweep, sway, smile. *One Less Angel* she remembered it was called. As she swept around the bright chrome base of the jukebox, she paused and leaned the broom against its side.

Taking in the bubbly, fluorescent neon along the sides, Juliet ran her spindly fingers over the song selection, searching for the tune that was so desperately stuck in her head.

When her eyes found the song, Juliet eagerly punched in '19' and watched the records spin until the single was in place. A click later, Shy Baldwin's voice drifted across the diner, over the counter and back into the kitchen, where one line cook remained, preparing vegetables for the inevitable Friday rush that would take place the following day.

*The stars shine, your eyes catch mine.*

His head perked up upon hearing the upbeat be-bop tune, and turned out to catch Juliet's gaze, who had her trademark grin, mischievous and expectant. He shook his head and chuckled, a knowing, sweet sound. Setting down the head of lettuce in his dark hand, he wiped his palms on a tattered dish rag.

"Juliet," he started, moving around the wall into the dining room, its chairs and tables against the far wall, rag in his hand.

"Peter," she said, mocking his tone into the top of the broomstick, miming along to the words into the makeshift microphone.

*Could there be one less angel in heaven?*

Both abandoning their respective cleaning tools on the tall counter, the music moved into the second verse. Juliet held out her pale hand, and Peter took it, dark skin juxtaposed like a dark glove against a bright snowbank.

Juliet's pale rose lips formed a genuine smile as the two began a jazz box step, their faded oxfords shuffling over the tiles. A handjive followed, each clapping and moving at their own accord; the moves coalesced together and set up the two for the jitterbug.

*Must be one less angel in heaven, 'cause look who's dancing with me.*

Grabbing Juliet's hand, Peter swung her under his arm and out, arms extended. Juliet laughed as the music shifted into the bridge, the two coming back together for the bus-stop step. Heels clicking, the two moved into a sugar push, deep amber eyes locked on emerald.

*My heart stops, the music drops, the world falls away suddenly.*

"Texas Tommy?" Peter asked over the music; Juliet nodded and shuffled a quick triple step that clicked merrily on the linoleum along with the music.

The partners giggled as Juliet tripped over her own feet, Peter's hand catching hers to steady his clumsy counterpart. With his hand in hers, Peter pulled Juliet into a wrap move, and back out in a flourishing twirl.

*My angel loves me, she said she loves me, oh that's heaven to me!*

The music stopped with Baldwin's voice ending in his masterful belting tone, and the diner fell into silence once more, save for the two dancer's panting.

"Can you imagine if we showed up at Ruthie's  Dancehall and put on a show like that? We'd take first prize, guaranteed," Juliet spoke after catching her breath, fixing the pink skirt and starch white apron of her uniform.

Peter shook his head, gaze falling to the floor, smile dropping onto the worn tile. Juliet realized her mistake quickly enough and caught her breath. The air seemed to hang in suspension as Juliet quickly filled to the brim with guilt.

"Jules, they don't let people like me through the door, much less let us win any prizes," Peter spoke solemnly. His strong form slumped against the counter, and his slender hands reached up to untie his apron, dirty from days of use. He played with the frayed strings, the air thick with sorrow.

The sight broke Juliet's heart. The notion of segregation made her so enraged that she wanted to break the rack of coffee cups, right then and there. She wanted to show up to city hall and give the malevolent Fat Cats a piece of her mind; she wanted to march in the streets and picket the state capital, she wanted to stride right up to Mr. President and *make* him change his corrupt laws and apologize to each and every individual who had been disenfranchised by racism.

But most of all she wanted Peter to feel safe, comfortable, and confident in his own beautiful skin.

They hadn't known each other long. It had been a bit over a year since Juliet had shown up at the diner looking for work. The owner, a man from the Bronx who had moved south for the weather, was eager for a new waitress. His daughter had left a few months after he had opened the restaurant, running off with a young boy who had flown in the war. When she left, he was down a waitress, and gave Juliet the uniform the second she asked if they were hiring. His name was Chuck, and he made it his personal mission to make the greatest diner-faire East of the Mississippi. After experiencing the atrocities in continental Europe during the war, he was hyperfixated on the harmless things he could do in life, determined to make peace and great burgers all at once.

Peter had been an employee for a few years then. Though he had started off as a dishwasher when he was 14, he had worked his way up and was now Chuck's right-hand man in the kitchen, all at the young age of 19. Chuck had seen Peter playing kick the can across the street when he was first moving into the diner, its chrome siding glimmering in the high afternoon sun. He had asked if the kid wanted a job, and Peter happily obliged, eager for money to buy nice things for his family and to save up for an automobile. He'd always liked the look of a Chevy.

He was working the day that Juliet came in for the first time. She caught his eye from over the counter as she came through the door, cherry red lips smiling as she neared the counter. He thought she looked like a honey-blonde teenage Wonder Woman. She thought he resembled a pilot or a great Broadway star, a real all-American boy.

When she had left after being told to come back the following day for training, Chuck made his way back into the kitchen to continue making his secret sauce recipe. Upon picking up a large wooden spoon and stirring the large gumbo pot on the stove, he turned to Peter with a wide grin.

"Well kid," he breathed, testing the sauce on a petite spoon and nodding in satisfaction, "looks like we're finally gonna have a fresh face around."

Peter smiled and continued cooking on the grill, curious what her name was, what she liked, and if she'd be any good at being a server.

And what she would think of him.

Busy days and long nights had made Juliet and Peter friends, and the two best employees Chuck had ever had. They attended high schools on the opposite ends of town, and never saw each other outside of work, but somehow became the closest friend either had.

Juliet thought back to when Peter was late for the first and only time ever. He was on the evening shift, and the staff on that night wondered what could have possibly made Punctual Peter late. Chuck flipped burgers anxiously, watching the back door with expectancy when Peter had walked in. His head was down, and he clutched his ribs with his right hand. Juliet had shot a look over the counter upon hearing the creak of the hinges and stopped mid-order when she saw him quietly enter, apologizing to the customers she was waiting on.

Wasting no time, Chuck and Juliet had patched up a silent Peter in the small office. They knew what had happened; the south was never safe for young black boys. Chuck had called the police immediately, but was told there was nothing that would be done.

And that was that: no justice for the innocent.

Juliet vowed to give Peter a ride to work in her old Ford pickup from that day on.

She kept her promise.

Swept back to the present, Juliet crossed in front of Peter to the jukebox, once more searching for a Shy Baldwin song. She punched in the selection '20' and waited for the soft, lonely tune to float over the restaraunt.

*No one has to know I think you're wonderful, no one has to know you're my dream come true.*

Peter's figure remained defeated against the counter, and Juliet felt her heart tug against her chest in sorrow and another painful, consuming emotion.

*Let the world go spinning in space, we'll find a place for two. So no one has to know I want you, no one but you.*

Hesitantly, Juliet reached for Peter's hands, soft and careful. His fingers shied away in protest at first, then softened into Juliet's touch. She took the apron from his hands and set it down on the counter, and gently pulled him forward so the two stood close amidst the yearning melody of the song.

*No one else can tell I think you're beautiful; no one else can tell you're my favorite view.*

Juliet carefully laced her arms around Peter's neck, and began to slowly waltz to the song. He smelled like peppermint and honey, and his forget-me-not blue dress shirt was ironed with care. Juliet knew his mother pressed it every other day before he left for his shift; he had told Juliet about her when they had stopped for sodas after work one late night.

*Let the world all think what they will, I'll wait until they're through. Cause no one has to know I need you. No one but you.*

That same night Juliet had parked outside his small home, the lights glowing behind soft yellow curtains. He had looked at the house then back to her as she gave him an easy smile. It was hard for her not to tell him how much she loved him right then and there. The strange feeling had alluded her for months, each stolen glance and charming grin only multiplying the butterflies she felt in her stomach, her mind wandering as she worked or read or drove to him and his stupidly perfect amber eyes and how they crinkled at the corners when he smiled.

But he had climbed out of the truck like he always did and leaned back through the open window, chin resting on his arms on the steel frame. After a drawn-out gaze and a soft 'goodnight', he would wander up the dirt path to his front door, wave one last time, and shut the door behind him.

Now, with him melting into her touch as they waltzed, Juliet wondered how she could possibly tell Peter everything.

*Tonight I'm gonna tell you that I'm hoping, praying that darling, you feel the same.*

Instead, she uttered a soft apology.

"I'm sorry, Peter. I regretted it as soon as I said it".

It had always been a sore spot that the two weren't able to go dancing together. It was a shared passion, and they both wanted the other as a partner. Peter had known that it was risky using the diner as their own personal dance hall, but as soon as he had pitched the idea to Juliet, there was no going back. She had latched onto the idea and not let go, and Peter was happy to go along. The two had spent most every closing shift together they had alone dancing. Something so simple held all the answers for Peter's anxieties about the world around him, and Juliet couldn't think of a time she was happier than when she was dancing with him. From Lindy Hop to the Charleston-which the two still loved despite its waning popularity- they danced their sorrows away. Peter had thought himself some sort of Cinderella- whenever he was dancing with Juliet, all seemed magical and right in the world. But the clock always had to strike midnight, no matter how much he fought it.

But here and now, the slow piano and Shy's sultry voice lulled Peter's aching heart as he swayed with Juliet in his arms. She seemed so close, yet so far. He cursed the world for keeping things on the outside they way they were. He hated Jim Crow more than anything in the world, and hated it even more because it kept him on the other side of a sprawling divide from who he loved.

*No one has to know we could have everything.*

They were young. *Age has a funny way of telling others what they think you should know and what you should feel,* Juliet had written in a leather-bound journal. *Just because I am young does not mean I cannot love deeply*.

She thought about what she should say to Peter now, in this tender moment. The song was ending soon, and Juliet already felt regret creeping up in her throat for not saying something sooner, for not taking this perfect chance.

"Juliet," Peter said, interrupting her lamenting. She lifted her head to meet his gaze, and was once again caught in awe at the beauty of his eyes. They said so much, and Juliet felt as though no one would ever be able to see her as completely as Peter seemed to be able to.

"Thank you," Peter said, his eyes scanning her pale face. Her eyebrows knit together quizzically, and Peter felt his chest tighten with endearment at the expression.

"What for?" She asked. Seeing him softly smile, Juliet felt her heart lighten, though the smile could not hide the sadness behind his gaze.

"For driving me home."

"Oh."

"And Juliet," Peter breathed, heart leaping in his chest.

"Peter," she said in her lighthearted mocking tone, her downcast expression changing into that mischievous smirk he loved so much.

He stepped away now, spinning her under his arm, and pulled her close once more. The sorrow was gone and they were swept off to their own place, just for the two of them, where nothing mattered outside of the diner with the old tile, the chrome furniture, and the bright rainbow jukebox.

*Let the world do what it does, you're safe with me because...*

"I love you," Juliet uttered before she could think. Fear struck across her features in realization, and she quickly looked up and scanned Peter's features, urgently searching for a reaction. His lips fell into an easy smile, and his cheeks glowed with happiness. His eyes shone bright and Juliet knew she had said just the right thing.

"I love you too," he spoke softly, and pulled her into an embrace. Swaying to the end of the song, the two were safe in each other's arms. Though they were sure such euphoria would wear off when they had to face the real world together, for now, in that moment, nothing mattered besides them, waltzing in that place for two, where there was no one else.

*I love you, no one but you.*