The Dangers, Risks and Joys of Being Young

Kaitlin Boyer
Western Oregon University, kboyer16@mail.wou.edu

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A collection of poems related to religion, sexual abuse and youth.

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Like Shooting Fish in a Barrel

Our cabin’s leader takes us
into the woods.
Snickering and holding hands
we march into the dark,

arrive in a field full
of boys and girls surrounding the fire.
The faces of friendly camp counselors
fell off a mile back,
replaced with furrowed brows—
odd for a summer camp.

Tonight we must accept God
into our hearts.
A man threatens that Hell
can take us at any time:
even tonight.
“Receive God now, or risk
an eternity in Hell!”

Every girl in my cabin woke up
the next morning—
probably God’s gift.
We’re brought to a small cement pond
full of bought fish.
Ah, the beauty of nature.

Each set of hands held a rod,
while I chose a gauzy net.
Swore to Bekah that I could
catch a fish without a pole.

Sure enough, this groggy little guy
swims right into my trap.
I spring to my feet, amazed at
the ease of my gullible prey.
Before I can release him into the water,
a large woman beats his head with a baton.
Splattering water and blood on my face.
His shiny body quivers,
eyes empty.

Parents arrive,
sent home with
a greying, dead fish
squished to the side
of a zip-lock bag
that I never wanted.

Easy and Wild at the Moda Center
8 dollar beer sloshes onto the floor
while girls covered in mesh head to toe
close their eyes
and float to a different universe.

The mini skirt with bladed hipbones
falls down the stairs.
Can’t tell if it’s because
she’s trashed or starving.

Men disguise themselves as
chairs, trying to grind
on girls who are too
fucked up to care.

The opening bands struggle to get the attention
of the audience—
begging the ladies to throw
their hands up and scream.

Molly exchanges hands
and the sensation of touch
makes panties drop—
had we worn any.

Instead we sing along to the lyrics,
snapchatting our wild play
so friends can
look and listen,
but only for a while.

And I Never Did
Nancy’s grandpa snores in the other room while we struggle to keep it down, suffocating our giggles into pillows. We’re sprawled out on the dirty carpet that reeks like an ashtray.

Her stuffed giraffe marries my cheetah for the hundredth time this summer. Nancy lifted Grandpa’s flip phone to film the special occasion.

While she shoots the reception, her freckled nose crinkles, smiling—“I’ve got a secret, Kaity-Bug!” I snatch her hands up in mine, and press my ear to her mouth.

“Grandpa touches me—promise you won’t tell?”

And I never did, even when she slipped through my fingers, ran away to the desert and sunk into the sand.