

REDEMPTION OF A COMMON LIFE

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities, and Social  
Sciences

Morehead State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Blythe L. Hunt

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Gay C. Eckland  
Director of Thesis

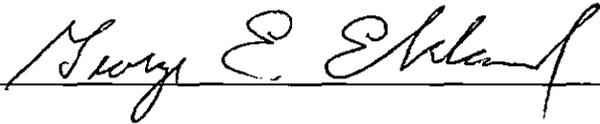
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Date

## REDEMPTION OF A COMMON LIFE

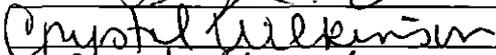
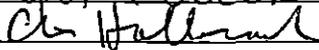
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Morehead State University, 2011

Director of Thesis: 

A collection of poems expressing the cycle of redemption found in an ordinary woman's life as she grows from an innocent young girl to a confused adolescent and then to a woman at peace with herself. The first section, "Sweet," uses simple themes and forms to illustrate the simplicity of a young girl's mind and the hopes and dreams she believes are inevitable. These poems show the promise of life and the freedom children have living out of an unblemished identity untouched by others' sin against them or their own poor decisions; the poetry is meant to spark a sense of nostalgia and fondness in remembering life before it was tainted by experience. The second section, "Fallen into Sour" addresses what happens to a young woman's heart when she is mistreated and makes unwise decisions as she attempts to navigate her world of fallen dreams. The poems in this part are experimental in form to reflect the confusion of the woman in her chaotic world. Out of her mistreatment, she views the world from a skewed perspective and therefore experiments with

things that further damage her sense of identity and prevent her from remembering who she is under the years of living a rough life. Finally, “Unmasked” reveals how acknowledging one’s true self under the masks a woman wears to be accepted and find happiness can start to bring healing restoration. The woman experiences true love and redemption from her life of ugliness as she peels back the masks and allows herself to be loved for who she truly is—not who she wants to be or wants to convince others she is. The collection explains the cycle from naïve childhood to wise—though broken and mended—woman.

Accepted by:

 Chair  
  


**Part I**

**Sweet**

**Tiny Claps**

Big-kid-band-concert-bored,  
but I can sing  
along to *Jingle Bells*—  
at least the chorus—  
and then from Mommy's lap I give  
tiny claps  
tapping my longest fingers together  
to make a tiny sound  
that no one can hear  
except for Paco in my pocket  
(who is probably asleep by now).  
*Tiny claps, tiny claps* I whisper,  
my middle fingers stretching toward the stage  
in tribute to my sister and her violin.

**Paco**

Dweller of the mailbox

keeper of my secrets

audience to my stories

laugher of my jokes

mystery to my mother

conspirator to my schemes

scapegoat for my escapades

comforter to my tears

thief of my sister's Barbie

tracker of fairies and elves

confuser of my siblings

solution to my little kid loneliness

**Mister's moustache**

Fuzzy and gray and sticky  
 pulling the skin above my lip when I smile—  
 which I try not to do since this is serious business,  
 this business of tricking Daddy  
 into thinking I am someone else—  
 not his princess, but a Mister.

Debonair and sophisticated,  
 you turn me into a charmer of mommies,  
 a scarer of poodles,  
 a dignified midget with a Wiggles umbrella for a cane and a Lincoln log for a cigar.  
 You come with an English accent,  
 which strangely resembles Peppa Pig's,  
 courteous manners, and a bow—  
 my right hand moving in slow circles by my bending waist.

Your power delights for hours  
 until after sticking you on the mirror,  
 my eyebrow,  
 and the poodle,  
 your glues ceases.

So I return to my day job of

Daddy's princess.

**My little pony**

It is clear to me that you look better  
with a chopped-off mane.

I don't know why Olivia cried—

I dressed you in your pink tutu (the prettiest one)and put you back  
where I found you.

You were worth the corner  
and the lecture

and the dirty looks from Olivia.

I love you the way you are.

You are perfect to me.

**Grover**

Like Cookie Monster's skinnier brother  
 with your soft fuzzy blue  
 and wacky laugh.

My heart thumps when you come on the screen  
 in anticipation of your wild antics  
 and unreasonable fears.

I think I am smarter than you,  
 so I feel confident and protective.

Not for babies, but those of us with sophisticated  
 humor and a tolerance of monster nakedness,  
 who need to learn the difference between M and N  
 and who appreciate the finer things—like your sexy  
 dance moves, your straggly arms jerking back and forth,  
 your head bobbing like your friends'.

You are super with or without your cape.

### **The charmed life**

Pink plastic high-heeled slippers with purple  
jewels on the strap,  
a wild pink boa for keeping my neck warm  
and teasing the cat.

Clip-on earrings of dangling blue gems,  
yellow tutu to show off my Ariel Underoos,  
and a lovely Black Stallion horse  
that is actually a purse

which doubles as a treasure holder for:

strawberry lipgloss

My Little Pony's brush

a beautiful silver gum wrapper someone accidentally threw away

a Crazy Eight deck and

one red Leepressonail that I found in the library

or a carrier for Paco when he tires of my pocket.

**Sweet moves**

Booty-shaking, hip swaying,  
shimmying moves—  
you put Miss Jennifer's heel-toe-heel-toe-shuffle  
to shame.

You prove that I have skills  
and am a natural star  
who should probably be on tv—  
and not just on home videos—  
teaching the world to dance.

You ensure me attention from the millions  
and millions of people at brother's soccer game  
who laugh and clap while I dance on the bleachers,  
and laughter from a tired and moody Mommy.

I'm pretty sure you are the key to my dreams  
of being a famous lady with three pink poodles  
and a pool.

## Hot Chocolate

Forbidden with your creamy  
hyperactive-inducing sugar.  
High in the cupboard—way  
back where I can't reach you even  
when I've managed to sneak up onto the counter.  
Even better with marshmallows  
and chocolate sprinkles.  
Oh, how I dream of you and wait for  
the day I'm old enough to drink you every day.  
Tabooed with your promise of keeping me up  
and making me crazy  
I would marry you if I could.

## Grownup life

If Mommy is right, I will outgrow my plastic princess slippers  
 and grow boobies like hers,  
 finally able to embrace my wildest dreams—  
 which, it turns out, cannot involve marrying Daddy or Paco—  
 my ambiguous future.

You enchant me with promises of:

my own black stallion to win races and approval and respect from the whole world,  
 the ability to grow a baby and tv-kiss a man like this—“mmmmm, ohhhh, mmmmm.”  
 being able to read a chapter book by myself and ride my bike alone,  
 the skills to make pancakes,  
 my own tv in my bedroom and a real monkey I can keep in my backpack that will keep me  
 company  
 when I am having adventures in exotic places like Disney World and China.

I will probably open my own ice-cream shop for girls and animals only  
 and become a famous veterinarian.

## Baby Cheeses

You're pretty weird, how you turned water into wine  
instead of chocolate milk

and how you used mud to heal the blind man  
instead of medicine like when I had an ear infection—  
that stuff really works.

Or how you let those bad guys kill you when everyone knows  
you could have just flown up to Heaven—you made your mom cry, you know.  
Why did you let Judas be your friend if you knew he was going to be mean?  
And why did you wear a dress? That's probably why you never got a wife.

I think you should have had a cape and a mask  
and beat up the soldiers who came to arrest you.

You should have sold your mud medicine for all the blind people  
and given the crowds Happy Meals instead of fish and bread.

And taught *all* the disciples to walk on water—not just Peter. He turned out to be dumb in the  
end, anyway.

But I like how nice you were to Mary Magdalene and  
how you brought Lazarus back after he died.

You were pretty cute as a baby, too—in your little manger with all the sheep.  
It's just too bad you never had your own Baby Cheeses.

**Desire****I**

“I wish,” she said one afternoon  
on her walk, “That a little bird  
would stop to talk to me,  
teach me to sing and  
maybe to fly.” Hugging her arms,  
she carefully walked the line of her  
life—the sidewalk in front of her house—  
not looking forward, not looking back.  
Her eye was on the hummingbird  
dancing in the sky.

**II**

Laughing, swinging her arms now,  
she twirled—  
as little girls do—  
her striped tights exposed, her shoe  
flung off her tiny princess foot, her  
sparkling crown from last  
weekend’s party for Madison’s 4<sup>th</sup> birthday  
askew,  
hairclip slipping from her fairy-fine hair

curling around her Gerber-baby cheeks.

### III

Suddenly she stopped, knelt  
in the grass, her plump  
hand shaking off a lump  
of dirt from a fistful of dandelions  
created simply for her  
delight.

**Daughter**

You spin the world  
with your sweet smiles and chubby  
thighs, sticky hands patting  
Daddy cheeks in delight and  
naïve adoration, ignorant of his  
ugliness and how he hurt your mother  
and his deepest secret—  
that he never wanted  
you until he saw your bloodiness  
and fell in love with your refreshing dependency  
turning him into the man  
he always wanted to be.

You are the reason Mommy gets up each day  
so she can peek in on you in your  
flushed asleep peace  
and trace the line of your sweetness—  
the softness cracking her hardness as she  
wonders how to protect you from becoming  
bitterness masquerading in heels and lipstick.

**Bottled baby**

If I could just put you in a glass jar  
and keep you baby forever,  
pickling your purity to preserve  
the innocent pink of your helplessness  
and giving me purpose for the pointlessness  
of a life that would end hollow and void  
were it not for the second chance of you.

**Part II**

**Fallen into Sour**

## Changed

New parts and unexpected  
urges challenging even the most grounded  
of girls, causing you to second  
guess who you are.

Eyeing each other—staring  
you down to ensure  
camaraderie in misery.

Running playing laughing attracts  
stares of grownupmen  
who smile wink say hello and would you like a cup of coffee?

These men—they know who you are  
and there is no more wondering—  
your identity crisis is placated by gifts and adoration  
until you knows exactly whose you are.

**This Time**

Years of watching trying failing  
as the other girls are affirmed in their  
womanhood, preferred for their flirting  
and affirmed in their femininity  
as she stared at her lap biting her cuticles  
repeating her mantra of  
somedaymyprincewillcomeandlikemefor mymind  
while all the time knowing that until she  
puts on the red lipstick and undoes one more button  
and initiates—conversation—  
no one will bother.

Her girlfriends gossip and laugh about their weekend dates  
while she smiles and nods and convinces them  
that her grades are worth the loneliness.  
No one is convinced—they just don't  
care.

Or at least want to be responsible for trying  
once again  
to get her to loosen up.

But this time she will do it, pucker on strawberry lip gloss  
take off the keds  
and borrow her roommate's push-up bra,

tired of apathetic ambiguity.

**Slippery Slope**

One drink

One smoke

One look

One stroke

Two laughs

Two sighs

Two winks

Two lies

Hesitation

Elaboration

Deception

Capitulation

## **Unveiled**

He was intrigued, of course,  
though she didn't mean to be mysterious.

She meant to be pure good virtuous.

Romantic.

Wearing white and the hope from doing it  
right.

He realized soon, of course,  
though she didn't see it herself.

She meant to be determined strong moral.

Honorable.

Cloaked in her morality trickery of salvation  
by principles.

**This Is What It Feels Like to Become A Prostitute**

How easily I could slip into believing that  
this is all I'm worth.

It's mostly true anyway.

The way his eyes popped when he saw me  
and how he said if Brittany Spears is a 10

I am at least a 7—no, an 8!

How the whole date was planned around one  
thing that I was too weak too tired too shamed too apathetic to resist.

And now I lie here, rolling

my eyes as he fingers my bra—

after all, he's never seen one this big or fancy—

and make the mental jump into asking

him for compensation for my

time and also for putting up with an hour

of Chris Angel.

Which was 59:30 longer than I

had to put up with this schmuck.

At least he's a democrat.

## Going Green

She'd heard that not everyone got high the first time  
and that it could make you hungry  
and thus gain weight—which is the end of the world in this world—  
so she instead basked in the smoke,  
laughing as though she herself were the one puffing  
on a joint instead of other things.

None of it mattered the next morning. She had learned  
that the world is preserved—this world anyway—  
by shared fear and common secrets  
that would expose them all, so why bother  
talking about it anyway?

She liked coming home smelling like their sin,  
as though it were her secret,  
pretending that she was an equal with them  
instead of their pet.

## **What morality gets you**

failure

shame

unreachable standards

a reason for your mother to yell at you

a reason for your father to not look you in the eye

a focus on behavior instead of on being

a ruler to be measured against your peers

self-hatred justification

a paper-thin mask to be worn in public to make sure no one knows the truth about you

a platform to look down at others

lip wrinkles from puckering so much

a false foundation for friendship

basis for spiting your lover

secrecy and fear when all you need is antibiotics

**Song of the Paradise Hotel**

clink, clink

puff            puff

knock, knock

giggle            giggle

crash—giggle—ohbabyyes

slurp, slurp

groanohbabyyes

gasp, GASP

smack thud

stompstompstomp slam!

pound, pound

sob, whine

muffles scratch rattle.

sigh. SIGH.

clink, clink

puff            sigh

puff, clink, puff, clink

sigh.

creak            snuffle            whimper

smooch, groan, kerplumph!

squeak, squeak, squeak

ohbabyyes.

## **The Irony of Being Good**

She's accepted for her behavior  
but will never reach the standard set  
and is miserable in the meantime, singing the age-old  
song—if only people knew the real me, blah blah blah.  
Acceptance conditional, always on the verge of losing.  
One-dimensional, boring, predictable.  
When you're bad, no one has expectations—  
no one is let down  
and eventually no one cares unless you find the one  
who does. Who care bear you without your mask  
because he threw his away a long time ago.

## Firsts

Orgasm—age 13 after getting ideas from reading my aunt’s “Cosmopolitan”

Smoke—age 16 with my hip older brother

Drink—age 18 alone after school, bored, feeling neglected, wanting to get my parents’ attention by becoming a statistic

Vibrator—age 18 when alcohol didn’t do it for me

Sex—age 21 when I was straight-edge and refused to drinksmokewhatever—fucking my RA seemed a good alternative

STD—age 21 when I found out my RA was fucking my roommate, too

Intoxication—age 23 with my boyfriend—turns out he wasn’t drinking the bottle of wine with me after all

Abortion—age 24 with that same boyfriend—turns out he wasn’t loving me after all

High—age 28 at my bachelorette party

Affair—age 33 when my coworker was irresistible

Divorce—age 35 when we couldn’t work it out

Ironic, Pollyanna Redemption—still pending

## The Traveled Road

She thought she took the road less  
traveled—the risk, road her mother warned her about and said  
only “those kind of girls” went down.

Went down, straight to hell, or at least Jack’s Pub on Friday nights  
or maybe down to the city where they did whoknowswhat  
with whoknowswho.

She knows who and what now, but she is a sophisticated  
version of “those kind of girls,” with a college degree  
and an eight-to-five job and underwear  
from Victoria’s Secret.

Now she knows that “those kind of girls” have no  
choice what road they travel—  
it’s all in your make-up. The genetic kind,  
not the Covergirl kind.

No matter how many poems or philosophies  
she knew,  
she was destined to travel  
that road.

## Virtue

I wanted to be the girl songs are written  
for—Jesse's girl, sweet sixteen, a southern girl with the way they kiss.  
I wanted to knock men out, be their muse, control my world  
and theirs, too.  
Songs aren't written for the Cinderella types  
anymore; the virtues of Maria and Miriam the Librarian are  
not celebrated.  
Virtues to be sung about are big butts,  
hips that don't lie,  
ass hangin' out,  
and born that way.  
I'll keep my other virtues stowed away  
for my gravestone.

**Ode to G&T**

The innocence and succulence of  
your lime,  
seeping its juices into  
your glass,  
preparing me for the bitterness of  
your stream,  
the shock of the chill against the warmth of  
my tongue,  
the dizziness and deliriousness of  
my head,  
the suckling of the chaser in  
my mouth.

**Melded**

Each day I put it on, although for years I  
think I slept in it night after night,  
which makes sense since I was usually sleeping with  
someone whom I couldn't trust to see me  
without it, so  
it stayed on for days, weeks, years? at a time.  
At first, my family begged me to take it off,  
but I insisted that they imagined it and had  
just never looked at me closely. And now  
I can't tell where it ends and where I  
begin. Maybe I was right after all.

**Part III**  
**Unmasked**

### Penetrating the Cracks

Years of polishing a perfected persona that fooled  
 —mamas and sisters and aunties—  
 rubbing out wrinkles wreaking potential havoc  
 —but I, the only gatekeeper and housekeeper—  
 focused solely on sanding the surface  
 —no Heathcliffs or Darcys allowed—  
 neglecting the nether regions and those not seen  
 against the risk of being:

1. discovered
2. uncovered
3. known
4. what Holden refused to name.

Layers of years of names of mine from you and me, daddy and Donna Reed  
 shame heaped on shame for who you said I am  
 becoming to no one.  
 Shame becomes hiddenness—a mask of murdered  
 dreams and simple things like an honest like of granny smith apples—  
 stuck and hardened, modge-podged to my face safe  
 from access until he spotted the crack and covertly  
 rappelled down, millimeter by millimeter.

### **Job Description for a Knight in Shining Armor**

- See a girl across a crowded room
- Make mental note that Said Girl is the most beautiful woman you have ever seen
- Do whatever it takes to get Said Girl's attention
- Win Said Girl's trust by becoming her friend
- Convince Said Girl you truly love her for who she really is and not her looks despite the fact that she is the most beautiful woman you have ever seen
- Tell Said Girl who she really is
  - Tell Said Girl that the woman her exes and mother and boss insist she is an imposter
  - Point out Said Girl's amazing qualities that only a Knight in Shining Armor can see
  - Convince Said Girl that you are dependable and truthful
  - Affirm Said Girl in her identity as Wonderful
- Win Said Girl's love by treating her according to her Wonderful Personality
- Fight Said Girl's lies of the masks she wears to please others and that she has put on to protect herself
- Provide a safe environment for Said Girl to take off her masks and attempt to live out of her True Identity of her Wonderful Personality
- Trust Said Girl with who you really are, too
- Spend the rest of your life with Said Girl, reveling in the joy of honesty and true love

### **My Life Was Like a Zoloft Commercial**

Waking up I wish my eyes had never  
opened, yet another day in the well  
of colorlessness and stick figures, their  
mouths gabbing up and down with empty  
sentiment and trite comfort, foreheads lined  
with caterpillars' torsos moving in  
response to me—my nods and tears and sighs.  
Forgotten were nights of rollerskating  
on Magnolia Street, high on the fumes  
of the blossoms whose carcasses threatened  
our smooth knees below our terrycloth shorts  
and above our cotton knee-high socks.  
Lost was loving my fro and dotting it  
with plastic-bow barrettes and maybe  
a feather hanging from a ribbon. Then.  
I was alarmed to seven o'clock and  
I saw the red of the digital screen,  
the first color I had seen in years. I  
smelled lavender from a sachet and heard  
hummingbird zips and zings on the other  
side of the screen. I thought I was dead. Then.  
I recognized my deliverance like

the Israelites out of Egypt. How  
many mornings did they awake in the  
desert panicked, scanning the horizon  
for Pharaoh's chariots, until they laughed  
at their fear and leisured in the sun, the  
manna melting on their tongues—the sweetness  
of freedom incarnate. Did the bleeding  
woman check below for spotting after  
touching the hem of God or did her faith  
keep her well? No matter—for today I  
notice the flavorlessness of fish sticks,  
and their odor taking over. I am  
actually annoyed at the fridge's lack  
of tartar sauce; I am ready to live—  
to lick life raw and climb out of my well.

**Forgiveness, Part I**

The shame of how I hurt you has changed  
who I am—a version of deranged  
Me colors what I do, say, and think.  
How I interact with others links  
back to who I became once I broke  
your heart and started hauling this yoke  
of self-centered obsession with how  
disgusting and ugly I am now.  
Your love undid that—how trite it sounds  
to credit Love and to say I've found  
freedom in your forgiveness—you say  
I am not defined in any way  
by my actions. And so I can be.

## Forgiveness, Part II

Like everyone else in America, I am entitled, victimized, and a result of my situation. I have a right to withhold from him, even though I will never see him or have the chance to tell him how he ruined my life . I wish I could slap him, now that I know how. This is what happens when you refuse to forgive someone:

bitterness

resentment

depression

inability to be happy for someone else

joylessness

self-pity wallow

and the worst one of all: becoming defined by that horrid action against me.

I refuse to allow him any more control over me or any role of importance in my life.

I forgave him so he can't hurt me anymore—

I can escape an identity of something false, ugly, imposed by someone else's violence.

And so I can be.

**Richard Nixon**

was long out  
of office  
by the time  
I was born  
and yet I  
begged every  
Halloween  
for a mask  
of his face.  
Alluring—  
his face was  
to me, my  
fingers held  
up in peace  
signs, although  
I didn't  
know what that  
really meant.  
So I saved  
my money—  
since my mom  
refused my

pleas—and bought  
the rubber  
likeness of  
President  
Nixon whom  
I never  
really knew.  
Only that  
he was in-  
famously  
bad. With his  
face on mine  
stealing my  
innocence,  
masking my  
identi-  
ty, I felt  
raging shame  
of being  
R. Nixon.  
I couldn't  
take the heat  
of the man.  
Or rubber.

What relief  
to peel his  
face off mine  
and breathe air  
unfiltered  
by his mis-  
matched nostrils  
pretentious-  
ly trying  
to pass as  
the real deal.

How sweet to  
realize  
that I am  
not Richard  
and never  
will/can be.

**I have taken to**

wearing my tap shoes to the grocery store  
sometimes with the petticoat from my wedding  
but usually just jeans and my college sweatshirt.  
I keep them in the car for unplanned trips  
to Target or Starbucks or any place  
the floor will accommodate the tappity tap,  
shuffle kick of my dancing down the aisles  
or in place while in line, my jazz hands  
and smile shaking back and forth  
(if my hands aren't terribly full—sometimes  
it's a necessary jazz hand, singular),  
my eyebrows up, remembering the good  
ole days and creating the good new. When my dance is  
done, I heel-toe to the exit, slow-clapping it out.

## Lemonade Stand

I set up a lemonade stand last Saturday,  
remembering how fun it was when I was ten,  
and it was so much easier this time around—  
I could drive myself to the store for the lemonade mix  
and I didn't have to borrow the collateral.  
I am sophisticated now, so I thought of using real  
lemons and the silver pitcher that was  
a wedding present. I considered having a zero cent  
price, but thought people might think me strange  
if I were giving something away, like maybe I had spiked it  
with poison to mimick the nebulous neighbors who were  
sure to stick a razor in my Halloween candy,  
so I stuck with twenty-five cents. I set up my stand in the front  
yard by the sidewalk and people looked at me  
like I was weird. Or special. But what did it matter?  
In the end I made four dollars.

## Rock Star Probability

Do my chances of becoming a rock star  
 increase with my trite lyrics—*love me for  
 who I am, not what I do...experience the  
 freedom of my love for you*—since they  
 are relatable and catchy, or should I  
 go for hipster, with a children’s piano  
 and rainbow xylophone in the background?  
 Should I stick with folk since I am not 18  
 and need a bra with more support?  
 It’s not the fame I’m after, but the means  
 of communicating my unashamed ideas  
 of love and life and blahblahblah. I have a  
 hypothesis that turning on my web cam will  
 automatically draw out the real me, whether  
 I celebrate Sunny D and rum or the mystery  
 of double rainbows. Will my bounceless bra  
 and ukulele shoot me to stardom or will I  
 be content with well intentioned shabby art?

**Dear Oscar**

You can come out of the stench of your life. I  
 reach to you as one who has climbed out of a well  
 and understands the slippery slope of being unknown  
 or at least misunderstood. I heard that your neighbors—  
 your so-called friends on the Street—  
 tried to convince you to go on “Hoarders”. I get it—  
 it’s not the stuff; it’s the relationships you want.  
 You know, I’ve never even seen your legs.

**Heaven**

Someday I will be  
exactly who I  
was meant to be—no  
scars, shame, selfishness.

Just me without the  
burden this world  
so I finally  
can see clearly who  
I am and who you  
are. We can be in  
love perfectly with  
noses that smell how  
lilacs really should.