

from *Among the Untamed*:

First published in *Works for Now* (*Espresso Chapbooks*, 2020)

That night at Mountain Mecca

Your first date, your new man picked you up in a battle cruiser
about the same vintage as the *Millennium Falcon*
but half as flight-worthy, back seat crammed with buddies
claiming bragging rights over hooking up the two of you.

He took you to listen to Billy Cowsill, still alive, still belting it out
from the front of the band, guitars and drums,
pedal steel and accordion sweet and driving behind him,
that ramshackle floor cratering, slipping

out of true along the lino's edges where it met the crooked walls,
barbecue pit cranking out smoke-licked ribs and pulled pork to cry over,
whole place shaking with certainty that none of us
would live forever, so we'd best get on with it.

Billy burst into "Vagabond" and the dance floor filled again,
couples clutching each other, holding back the suspicion
of what might await, the night train, the fears, the shakes, the loneliness.

Billy pulled out of the hard streets of Vancouver

by his friends, propped up and cleaned up and dried out again,
and he sure could sing, all that junk, heroin and booze, uppers
and downers carrying straight into the melody, a direct line
from Hank Williams and Janis Joplin, sounding out

all those lost and lonely times we knew and feared,
places we trusted Billy to shout out so we wouldn't have to.

They cut the album that night, and the whole city claimed
to have been there. You were. The band didn't tour, and Billy died –

young, as expected. We want to outlive our bad boys and heroes
to mourn what we lost, what we didn't become.

He and you stopped dancing together. The Mecca burnt down.

He married and you moved on. Just like the song.