

# LETTER TO ELSEWHERE, FROM NEVADA

Courtney Cliften

Shannon was late for our coffee date. A coyote got hold of a small dog, was dragging it across HWY 50 when she had to slam on her brakes. Shannon pulled over, fought off the predator with a nearby branch and searched the area for tags before taking the dog to the vet. Shannon waited for the small dog's family to arrive. A retired man and his wife. They said Levi, the Chiweenie (mix between a Chihuahua and a Dachshund) had been in the family for 11 years. Shannon didn't blush when the couple calculated vet costs, compared social security checks to a month of life for the family pet.

Just thought of her college cat, Zeppelin. Mostly white with a few black spots around his mouth—right where his missing whiskers should have been. Zeppelin got skinny one day, his spine more present than ever. Vet said Zeppelin had cat Leukemia, said treatment and meds were \$750 a month. Said it might buy him a couple more years.

Shannon was attending community college at the time. Working as a tutor for \$8.00 an hour (75 cents above minimum wage).

The alternative was a shot of euthanasia for \$450.

Vet said it'd be like falling asleep.

Shannon carried Zeppelin back to the car, drove an hour East where her dad had a safe full of birth certificates, social security cards, her grandpa's first bible, and a collection of rifles and handguns.

Together, they loaded into the pickup, drove to the hill behind the desert cemetery, where a big white "Y" for Yerington was painted on the rocks facing the valley. Shannon's dad dug a hole—maybe three feet deep—wrapped Zeppelin in a white towel.

Still breathing,

he laid Zeppelin into the dirt,

shot him with the pistol,

shoveled dirt atop his body

before his blood had time

to color the cloth.

Shannon understands sometimes grief is easier than hunger.

Shannon orders a black coffee, sits across from me in the busy Midtown café. Shannon apologizes for being late, recounts the story: quick and to the point, says *I swear I'm not lying*.

Says *I know this sounds*

*fake*, pauses, remembers I'm

from Nevada too.