

In Bed With Shannon-Weaver

Also by Z. David Forrest

Dopamine Addict (novel)

In Bed With Shannon-Weaver

Poems

Z. David Forrest

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First Edition

To Vida.

I wanted this to be a transition. This book, within itself. At this time in my life, I feel the best thing to do is wrap the poetry I've written up until now into a nice package. A goodbye package. A "let's move on" package.

This book is about love and heartache, family, humanity—mostly written in college—a time in my life that I'm ready to let go.

This is my offering.

To Vida, my fiancé, everything I am is yours. This poetry, my heart, and the paper trail of love shards I carelessly lost to others.

Most people choose to forget.

I choose to give them to you.

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In Bed With Shannon-Weaver

I

Jesus Wept. *For Reetika Vazirani*

He was usually godlike, making jokes, signing autographs,
enraptured women at his feet—he seemed more human tonight.

I don't think I cared for it.

One Hour Photo

And tomorrow let's not forget the insignificant things.
Snapshot of the morning cigarette. The can of vanilla Coke.
The rustled sheets you woke wrapped inside of.
And I heard it said once in a song that *like Elvis,*
like everyone—we all die, we all live on. And if all
we have is coffee table pictures, moments of time
we can pay for—we can still open our albums
and say *this was me in the morning, matted hair and coffee.*
And this was my Lovely standing in the doorway—
long legs in boxers and a halter top. Though when
I'm old and pissing in a plastic bag, show me
the pictures I took in my youth; of my children
playing in the park, and the one of me smoking,
fingers on my glass of merlot. Show me these photos
after the life I've loved is done. When I'm dying
in a room full of flowers, take pictures of the flowers.

Jack (i.e.)

I said Miss, your hands are
too large to hide between
your legs. And there's a nice
apple in your throat, like mine.

And that's how I met Jack
when he asked me what plans
I had in downtown Chicago.
Call me Jackie she said

with a woman's handshake.
Then Jackie smiled a woman's
smile—gentle and with comfort.
She told me I was handsome

and that she just had to try...
I wouldn't admit being flattered,
that I found her amazing
like a cicada—not quite unshelled.

It Would Be A Luxury To Believe In Nothing

When the poet Hudgins writes
of praying drunk, and later
about *the poor jerk who wanders
out on air and then looks down*,
I can't help but think of myself
on nights after work beside
my bed. And not just myself,
but also my mother. Always
tired from the bars, she used to
pick me up for weekends and
when I begged her to quit
smoking and drinking and to start
acting like a mother to me,
she would only cry because
the hangover got worse. She
would try to justify it all
by filling the air with smoke
and words that told me how
she prayed for me every night.

The part about the poor jerk
is me looking down to where
the beer is, between my legs.
My father is disappointed
with me. I can tell when he calls,
which is why my phone is still
ringing. I'm just like my mother,
begging forgiveness
from a silent God because I
always feel guilty about something;
afraid to let go of faith,
afraid of falling past a God
that might just exist, afraid
that He won't remember me.

Sweet Manhattan

A man unconscious in a New York subway is encircled
by the natives. A woman is talking in his ear. Someone else
is calling 911 on their cell phone. But I'm a foreigner
in this land, a tourist—blacked out on concrete.

I talked later to a man outside The Strand bookstore
where we shared a cigarette and looked at a church. I asked
if the rat race ever got to him—he replied that Stanton Island
kept him sane. I took the ferry over that night, saw Lady Liberty.

Sweet Manhattan, you were good to me—
I would sweep ash from your streets. I would scrub your subway tiles.

The Trades of my Wife

She is color pencil chalk.
She is paint and foreshadows
grain of canvas grain of cedar wood
grain of book binding
brick window pane concrete
and grass mortar caulk
shrapnel and confetti
broken shards a silk tie
paper pen words
and words ~~crossed out~~ after revision
the back of a hand
the discomfort of a bruise
smoke that warns of fire
a black-cat firecracker
your favorite pillow
a good pair of Levi jeans.
She's a sponge
beneath her cotton pajamas.
She soaks it all inside.

Smokers

And the jokes between us are tragic
when you're coughing up your lungs
and I mention how you should quit
smoking in between the drags
of my own cigarette. And you reply
Sure, I need to like you've never
thought about it and we laugh
like we're immortal, like cancer
will never come for us, like the Grim
Reaper isn't standing over our shoulders
looking at us, and then his watch—
again at us and then his watch.
And we both have had grandfathers
who smoked Luckys all their lives
but emphysema took yours and throat
cancer took mine, (actually it was in
my grandfather's esophagus)
but the Reaper is blind as to how
he takes you, as long as he takes you
and can cross your name from the list.
We light up our smokes and they
burn like soft coals of a campfire
at night, put the filters to our mouths
and inhale, flick the ash, exhale—
like we did at our grandfather's funerals.
And we remember how those old men
made smoking seem like a macho thing
to do, but it killed both of them
in the same slow fashion, with the same
breathing in and out that you and I
are addicted to. What were we joking about?
Oh, I remember. There was an awkward
moment when you told me that the doctors
found a murmur in your heart last week
and I responded with how I woke up
yesterday, unable to breathe. It was all
we could do to laugh and light up.

Extreme Unction

I have a picture of a deserted city block
in Little Italy where a Catholic priest is
crossing the street. His black robe
sweeps the ground with the kick of step,
the rosary jumbled by push
of thigh and knee. From the caption
I could assume he was in a hurry—

*this picture taken two weeks after
the towers fell in New York.*

I'm sure his schedule was filled
with families to comfort, burials
to oversee and I hope, some
Extreme Unction for a life holding
on for it. There is some comfort
for me in knowing that a priest
will come to my deathbed before
my last breath to take my hand
and place it in the hands of God.

*Wrap my knuckles in a rosary
dear Father and accept my penance,
I never believed before now.*

Miller

He touched his child with probing fingers,
washed both hands before his wife came home,
hid the gay porn and started dinner

to keep her from getting chary. Miller
led the Sunday worship, considered by some
to be a man of God, touched by God's fingers,

blessed with a voice any non-believer
would envy. No one imagined what he had done,
the gay porn, the fights after dinner

over phone bills to 1-900 numbers,
the drunken nights spent with drag queens. No one
knew he fondled his son with dirty fingers

touching and pressing, a loving minister
whose hands were blessed by God, by His Son,
forgiven from gay porn like many sinners

fallen from grace. But I had no faith in Miller.
I saw him kiss a man, deep with his tongue,
caressing his butt with dirty fingers
like a porno you hated to remember.

The Brew Co.

It was over billiards, or something stupid,
maybe a girl. Glass shattered,
and everyone turned around, saw fists
and chests, and four guys wrestling between.

We laughed and cheered them on,
waited for the cops to come and break it up.

The woman next to me laughed in her tight
red dress and her breasts almost fell
out in front of me.

In Its Right Place

inspired by Radiohead

If we can be sure of this, that everything is in its right place, like your mother used to say when she told you to clean your filthy room, then from the street lamp on the corner of Walnut and South where the Mideonites stand in the intersection's four corners, shine the light of God's salvation with their cardboard signs pointing to heaven, as throngs of drunken men and women surf the bars to hook up or just drown their week's stress away, we can breathe a relieving sigh, stop the disconcerting thought of the wasted man passed out on the sidewalk, that he doesn't belong there, it wasn't meant to be, or that the police rushing behind me aren't meant to arrest some college kid who yelled out *pigs!* twenty times, and at the same hour all the bars let out, the crowds surround the paramedics and police, ignore the fire truck, ambulance, and I'm trapped in the middle of it, from the man lying on the stained cement to the officer warning me to the safety of my car.

At Five in the Evening *for Lorca*

Throughout Andalusia's plains, duende lies
in the dirt, between the blades of grass,
almost an apparition with a blood type.

Dali is in the wind, Bañuel in the sky
for other ghosts are here from the past.
And deep inside Andalusia duende cries

out curses against knives-- against all knives,
and Falangist guns pointed to his back,
and for a Blood Wedding's ghost, duende sighs

from the fertile loam, from the roots. Tonight
Dali hides with Bañuel in a mountain pass
where this Andalusian earth knows that to die

in Spain is to somehow be reborn alive,
electric in the dirt and blades of grass,
almost an apparition with a blood type

and face, a body unbeaten by this life.
At five in the evening, with the grass
of Andalusia beneath your feet, duende lies
in the bloodless voices you almost hear at night.

So Friend,

You read my book, and soon found yourself there.
Upsetting, isn't it. The light which portrays you
Isn't the brightest, but rather dinge. It isn't fair.

*Goddammit, you had no right! How could you bare
My secrets on page sixty fucking four! It's true.*
You read my book, and soon found yourself there.

So friend I ask, have you ever loved me. Ever cared?
I mean, like I love you. Admire you. Believe you
To be the brightest. I'm rather dinge. We are fair.

But you forget about that. You'll sit and stare
And act like I'm the sinner, you prick. But you
Read my book and found yourself, *yourself* in there.

So you preach my faults with your drink in the air
Laughing and smoking, and self-righteous too.
You aren't the brightest, but dingy and unfair.

But this hurts. A nail bleeds at the quick. You tear
My heart from its valves. I'm sorry. I'm not. You
Read my book and found yourself there. Liar.
You were never bright. Just self-preserving. It's fair.

II

Depression

I'm trying to find a beautiful sky in Missouri
but I've been waking up on the wrong days--
I'm told that yesterday was beautiful
and tomorrow is supposed to be gorgeous
but today, everyone is staying inside
and hiding in their basements.

Slut

I wasn't torn at the seams, but ripped down
the length of the sleeve when she told me
that she was wishy-washy and turned around

about us, and that all the emotions she had found
when I kissed her last night couldn't be believed
and must be torn at the seams, even ripped down.

And now, I'm smoking again in the dark of a lounge
where a couple is kissing, her hand on his knee
and my eyes become washed. I turn around

and cover my face, take another drag, suck it down.
My friends would say that I'm being a pussy
and would rip her down with curses and nouns.

That is, if they were here. But I came downtown
alone, like I eat alone and now, watch movies
alone because I'm wishy-washy and turned around

and horribly pathetic. I'll let my friends clown
with me tomorrow night, but let me right now, grieve.
I wasn't torn at the seams, but ripped down.
I am wishful and want to fuck around.

Hack Her

You're my sex object.
My block of java code.
I've created Strings
for what you might say,
and attributes for breast size,
hair and butt = ('J-Lo');
I've defined methods
for what you would do to me—
like FuckMe (position, timeAmount)
where position and timeAmount
are variables I've set.
But I can't debug you.
The LoveMe method
has never worked.
You always crash
when I invoke the code.
You throw up
an error and wipe your mouth.

In Bed With Shannon-Weaver

There's a spider in our bed. Small, brown,
and skittering across Simic's poem. I'm reading
My Noiseless Entourage, cursing and she has curled
herself on her side--covering her face with sheets.
There is no sleep for the wicked. And my eyes

are open, like Simon Peter's, after his third denial.
Simic does these things to me, makes me bleed at my ribs.
And I don't know why mere words mean so much to me.
But they do. They're altogether crucifying, altogether
saving and I wonder, if like most things, they're altogether

bullshit. I never told her that I let the spider skitter.
It was so quick, I had no time before it was lost in the purple
sheets, on its way to his wife, I'm sure. Maybe their home
is beneath the bed, because it couldn't be here, with us --
not with how we toss our bodies in accented frustration

after each argument. We speak by pulling sheets and unpulling
them, by huffing, by turning and twisting into different positions,
each aching for the tiff to be over. But these words, the
unspoken ones, abound in each Simic poem and even more in my
life. What else can I do with this new taste in my mouth, when

she would cover her face with sheets forever, but just let her?

Berwyn

He surprised me, this man, when
he leaned out and tugged at my blazer
at the Berwyn train stop in Chicago.
I told him to leave me alone about money
but offered a cigarette instead
for his dirty lips, while I waved
my smoke like incense
to relieve me of his gutter smell.

Too tired to think of something else,
I pulled out more cigs when he tried
to talk, giving them like bribes
to shut him up. My head ached
from last night, when after sex,
she started asking what my dreams
were for us, if we would get out
of the city, or what we could name
our kids. That's when I rolled over.

Over coffee this morning, she said
I snored all night. I grunted
and walked fast for the train.

Website Noir

I have only seen pictures of you. Images on the computer screen.
Little captions of *Still unable to see the truth*, *Flattered by your gaze*
and *Looking for soft boy parts to make my mattress comfy*.

I have only noticed your hair, and the different colors of it.
The curvature of your lips and the pink that glosses them.
Yes. I have noticed that too.

And there is this ache to the words you write. And there is
this glue in your eyes, like you've only now been put back together.
And my fingers have traced your neckline, smudging the monitor.
I've done it more than once trying to reach some small part of you.
Trying to judge the depth of the shadow your jaw casts on your chest.
Nothing there but pixels.

But it's real enough.

Red-Letter Day

Like Jesus' words in a King James Bible,
red letters on calendars and almanacs used
to mark saints' and feast days as holy.
Now, my memory considers the red stains
that soiled the cotton pads my mother left in the trash
before she and my father split. It considers how
my brother drove his fist into my nose and the way
blood discolored my hands like clothing dye.
Memories most etched in my brain are colored
with red—there was the day I discovered
my pubes beginning to sprout in a bathroom
decorated in red curtains and shag carpet.
There's another memory when I first kissed a girl
on a red leather couch. The clouds were streaked
with red from the sun when eight years later, I saw
her walking on the campus sidewalk
in the opposite direction from my own and I
stopped after ten paces to turn and watch
her hips swing. But memories are after the fact
and how is it that we can we change them?
What I should do is mark the calendar in red
and tell myself on *that* day I will visit the mother
I have forgiven and the brother I desperately love.
But this isn't a plan, I won't follow through.
I procrastinate—which is something I've finally
brought myself to realize. I had wanted to plant
myself in her path and ask her if she had
thought about what a red-letter day meant
and if so, would she say that today was such a day?
But I was afraid that neither I nor the analogy
would have made any sense, and I would have been
red-faced, embarrassed like that time after
a poetry workshop when I walked from there feeling
like an ass because I turned in a poem about the grandfather
I loved most though he was a drunk that went
to AA and still smoked cigarettes with every

cup of coffee. I wrote how I thought he was
a saint for showing me that parents can't blame
their children for everything and to hold
my chin high because I could hunt squirrels
and gut the red organs and how proud of me
he was for that. My mistake, I was told,
was pretending that I knew what I was
writing about. But I never quite know what
I'm doing because I marked the calendar three
months ago to tell her today how much
I feel for her—like *I red-heart you, be my Valentine*—
all that Junior-High sappy mush one can say
when it's too early for her to hear about love.

I want fake love, but that's all I want.
-Chuck Klosterman from Sex, Drugs and Cocoa Puffs

On The Futon With Ms. Murdaugh

I had heard so many stories. That this girl with child-bearing hips couldn't count how many boys she'd had between them. This girl, with hair the color of autumn leaves, couldn't tell you who had run their fingers through it. But I've met girls like her before, heard stories like hers before, my favorite being Josie Pickett from back home. We thought she was a slut, the whole town of us, and we showed no mercy for her washed-out jean skirts or her Volkswagen bug, rusted through everywhere. And even though Jason was proud of how he had bent her over, we were never quite sure whether we believed him. Jason was usually a liar. He always bragged that girls were hard to get his entire dog inside because it was so goddamn big. But our locker days told us different, and so did his ex, Cara. No one asked Josie. She was punk rock and tattoos, and she scared the hell out of me—though she sat next to me in the movie theatre and asked about my life. I was less guilty than most of my fifteen year old friends. I thought so, because my family went to church three times a week. She asked if I thought she was a whore and I said that I wouldn't know; I had only heard stories. She looked hard at me, said *they're probably true*, and then—the movie was over. I never told my father, afraid he would disapprove of me hanging out with the town tramp,

my choice or not. *What would Jesus do?*
Jesus hung out with whores all the time.
If it's true that he never slept with any
of them, then I'm more like Jesus than
I realized. Because I'm with this girl,
this self-confessed well-versed girl is kissing
my face like it's the only one that she wants
and between our wrestling on the couch,
she's telling me about her life and I
find that this is what I've wanted all this time.
Her head on my chest. Her mouth spilling out
all the stories about her. It is this sweet
affection that is dearer to me than love;
this opening up that is more sacred
than a bible story in Jesus red because it is
the most brilliant thing, if not the most pure,
the most fragile, so easy to pervert. She tells me
her favorite painting is Georgia O'Keeffe's *Iris*.
And I smile, bite my tongue. Try not to laugh.

*This is the nightmare. See how you
perceive it. We sleep the sleep of exhaustion.
--Eavan Boland*

Achilles' Heel

Her boyfriend can't help her, as she lays and shakes
on her bed, her cries sporadic with her breathing,
tries to stop because *it's a sign of weakness*,
like a loose temper or smoking, says *I don't know
what the hell is wrong with me*, while curled
on her side in a fetal tuck, spooned into his lap
and chest, belted back with his arm tight across her
breast to somehow stop her tremble. He whispers
slow into her ear, tells her softly that's bullshit,
that even he knows it takes a strong man to cry,
that she's not crazy, they will get it fixed,
whatever it might be. And as to what brought
about the mood swings, the depression he heard
in her voice, saw in way she acted, made her
stain the queen size comforter with watered
mascara, it was the assassin of her emotions,
or the chemical imbalance of her body, maybe it
was her troubled years in St. Louis, the adolescence
she never talks about, or the fact she hates
the holidays due to family fights scarring
her childhood memories. She's told him all
the stories, and it, still unnamed, buried
in the membranes of the subconscious,
mocks his weakness to relieve her in the fight
to steady her breathing, and dry his eyes.

The Night I Was A Hyperbole

She dreamed of putting her hands
into the hands of the stars.

We used to end every joke with *And Scene...*

Our heads would bow towards our fists.

Mine was a small apartment
near a shitty Kum & Go convenience store.
Potheads would pass by my door
knocking loudly and then running.

I caught their ringleader once
but she stopped me from hurting him.

I was going to elbow his jaw.

She took me back inside the door
and held me for what seemed like
an eternity cut short.

I asked her to love me
and cried for her not to leave.

In acting, she told me, the masters
can cry on cue. But the believable
ones, well, before you know it
you find yourself. Crying with them.

The Drain

He never asked for the resolve to stop
her from it, to pull her lips back to his
before she wrapped them on his stiff cock.

He had laid there, his eyes on the ceiling
in meditation of other things rather
than the warmth of her tongue and the pressure
applied and unapplied,

like how his father had warned him about this.
That a woman could suck your very soul
into her mouth; leave you without God's salvation.

He couldn't tell her that it was painful
when she brought the blood in a rush to the head
and his fists clenched the seam of the mattress.
But he was done with being saved,

he wanted her to take it,
to spit it all into the sink
and run the faucet.

Them Apples

I wasn't allowed, to explore inside her
mouth with my tongue, to reach and probe
the calcium of her teeth, the rupture

of her breath as her voice split and broke
into words, told me to stop and bit
down hard into selfish taste buds. I woke

quick to the numbness of pain, and spit
mixed with blood in the roof of my mouth,
as my face puckered and I grabbed my lips,

my tongue forced against my gums with stout
pressures to appease the wound. I hushed
myself, as she bent at the waist, laughed out

loud, her smile sucking in wind to calm the rush
of her breath, though that didn't help. She fell
to the floor, doubled up at her midriff in some lush

hysterical ritual to the chuckle god, *oh to hell
with you too*. I seethed, and cursed her
as well as I could with a tongue so swelled

up, but still she laughed at my thick words,
her cheeks flushed like apples in red summer
that you couldn't pick for fear she'd be hurt.

Vida

It is the middle of November and the leaves haven't changed.
The maples are green with chlorophyll, branches still covered in foliage.

The birds haven't flown south, and there is no frost to scrape from my windshield glass. It is the middle of November and I am

lost in Texas. The crows, the grackles, they watch me as I drive past their electric wires. There are hundreds of them. All talking, all looking for food and stretching their wings—the wires sink under the weight of them. There is no reason to leave. It is the middle of November

and I am enraptured by a girl. I think about the way her irises change. Dance different shades of brown like a falling leaf, when she looks this way

and that, when she looks at me. She makes me miss home. I shout to the birds,

hoping to make them fly. Watch them soar south. It is the middle of November

and the birds just sit there. Stretched up and down First Street as if there

is nowhere to go. No magical "South" is waiting for them. This is home,

this is life and nothing else matters. Not even the past. Not even the snow

storms that covered me in Missouri. It is the middle of November

and everything is different. I pull up to her apartment and knock on the door.

I wonder if she is waiting, her hair still wet from the shower, her body loosely

wrapped in Wal-Mart pajamas. I wonder if she'll bury my face into her neck.

If I will tell her secrets. It is the middle of November and she opens the door.

She is home.

III

The Fool

A woman, plastered with alcohol, tripped
on sidewalk cracks—damned stiletto heels.

I stayed sober; watched her from a distance,
blowing smoke from my pedestal. A cigarette
was my scepter. My clouded exhalation, a judgment.

*he's worked a miracle
I just now bought a brand new car
God bless the Indian Summer.
-Pedro the Lion*

Indian Summer

My mother always married in the Indian Summers.
When the first frosts would melt into the ground and warmth
could be felt again. She would hang her jacket in the closet

and grab the nearest boyfriend's hand, run to a justice
and say I do. *God bless the Indian Summers* she would say
while making breakfast on Saturday mornings, the weekends

I came to visit. She would tell me to thank God for sending
someone to love her. *But I've been here all this time.* I didn't say
anything in response, but I considered the possible reasons why

she would think like that; because they would be divorced
in six months. Did she really think this one would last forever?
I didn't understand how she had three-year boyfriends only

to break them off for another marriage, another try and fail.
And the answer I got went like a Pedro the Lion song,
It was a cold time in my life son, and God has sent

*your new stepfather to warm my heart, and Indian Summer
in autumn.* To that, I would just walk away and say nothing.
My mother would need me again soon enough. So I rested.

Out Of Line

My father tried to teach me how to break
loose a bolt, turn a ratchet counterclockwise,

about wrench sizes and impact drills, air sanders,
and bondo and paint. He wanted to teach me habits

that work—which is where God came in, the Bible,
Christian school, prayer. *These habits work,*

he would tell me, when the light was flipped on
in my room to wake me, when the light was flipped

off for sleep. The Bible. Prayer. And everything
in between—school, work. Work keeps a man

in step, work and more work, *this work is meant
for you, son. You are meant for this work.*

Ratchet counterclockwise, impact drills, poetry?
If there is rebuke here father, then rebuke gently.

A Single Memoir

She thunders through the living room,
around the kitchen, and out the screen door,

so close to tearing the rotten slamtrap
off its hinges. My heart thumps behind her

as I circle to the kitchen in small hope.
She stumbles, cries as her knees give

way to the ground, her voice breaks as she
trembles to stand and pack tight the blue Toyota

with clothes and makeup and the furniture
my father worked so hard for.
Everything but me.

I'm left with my fingers pressed to the glass,
as she buckles herself, starts the engine,
and leaves with a blown goodbye.

On the Psychology of Divorce

When I was five we threw our river rocks
at the cottonmouth's head, whizzing our stone
bullets past its blackened body
into Judson's creek where they sank below
the surface of their own indentions.
The clouds were low, it was about to rain.

And I had yet to see my father in such
a light as when we broke that cottonmouth's neck:
My father's stone had hit but he kept hurling
his rocks as furious as his arms
enabled him until the snake drowned
and he said that it couldn't hurt us anymore.

Dire Straights

The blue economy car moved quick against the cold
on that highway. How I was in love, with every twist
and turn my mother's tires kissed the road, running
from the wind; and watching it all, I could see
the towns and lights grow slowly faint
like the pale lights that lit the heating console,
coerced to sleep by the foreboding
sense of quiet, the soft tangle of road.
Trapped by my suburban dreams
I felt the breeze, and woke to the cold
of an open window. The air,
so suddenly born, so defiled with smoke.
The cigarettes that had become my mother's
medicine came twenty to a box, and whether
I liked it or not, the entire prescription
was to be taken tonight. Though I tried in vain to shut
it out, the fumes so penetrable, so fluid, the vinyl
cab became nothing more than cumulus
nicotine that could suffocate even
the pinkest of lungs. Through the dark car to
the soft of her shoulder, I would stretch my hand
in part, for relief, but mostly, out of love.
I missed her. Besides those weekends
that came twice a month, when she took
me home to her simple apartment,
my being was lost in her absence,
in the ghostly air, where my mother
in her silence would take hold
of my hand, squeeze it slightly,
and let go. Caught by the sorrow
between us she would say,
It's alright baby, go back to sleep.

This Sickness

I couldn't keep him
in his bed, inside his Wal-Mart
comforter and cotton sheets.
To stop my father before his cracked-skinned toes
split like water frozen in a mason jar,
before he stubbed the frosted
wooden floors and drove his flu deep inside his head,
took an act of God, but would be a waste
of His time.
My father wouldn't be kept from her. He worked before
anything else, and not even this sickness of phlegm
and headache kept him
at bay, not even his wife, or my baby sister hanging
on his leg as he walked, could crush the morning
ritual of putting on
coat and gloves and hat, from reaching for the pickaxe
so that he could break the ice around the tires
of his diesel truck,
to drive that cold and unwilling beast to work. And watching
him leave the driveway was a ritual unto itself,
waving through the window
to the honk of his horn, and blowing kisses from lip to lip.
But today, as the ice splintered from his tires,
I felt my father to be
a sort of god, though snot dripped from his nose while mouthing
an "I love you", I saw that through pane and glass,
my father was Thor
with a hammer, a pickaxe on the metal truck bed.

Voices

My mother tucked me in and kissed me goodnight
on the lips, scrunched the comforter and sheets
around my neck and turned off the ceiling fan.
But the door was left open, which was my safety,
my bronze shield against the dark monster that crept
in the ceiling shadows. The soft glow of orange-
shaded lamps across the hall gave some peace to my mind.
But I couldn't sleep. And it wasn't the darkness in the corners
or the spirits that abided in them, neither was it the voices
I assigned to the spirits that drove sleep from me,
but it was the human voices—my mother's and my stepdad's.
Like the ghost cries their voices rose and fell and rose again,
higher this time, more strained. I had heard this before,
the groans between a man and a woman, but I believed
my mother was being hurt. While the bed supported my legs,
I walked my hands in a pushup along the floor until I saw
their hammock in the living room, the orange-shaded lamps
and naked bodies. When I drew myself back, I shook and cried
out loud, loud enough for my mother to come and check on me
without a robe, just her nakedness asking me what was wrong.

Lotus

My sister is all that is beautiful—though she was raped at fifteen by a redneck boy from Kansas. I had run away from the wheat stalks and soybean fields by that time, far away from home, too busy with work at the gas station—balancing the cash in my drawer. Abigail said that she had called the night it happened and asked when I was coming home. *Not for a few weeks.* I told her, and though she begged me to make the drive, I couldn't. I had to do laundry. Take my girl out to dinner. Clean my apartment. I don't really remember what excuses I gave to her, but I didn't come home—I remember that, because I hated going home. Dad was having an affair. My brother was working at the carnival and fucking the town sluts. Mom was dating someone new and I didn't care to meet him. My reasons were selfish reasons. And though Abigail used to embrace me when we were kids, when she found me crying in the wheat fields because I hated my life, I couldn't do this one thing for her. I couldn't drive seventy miles to hold her before she went to Texas and was swallowed up by her life, by her faithless spouse and baby son. I wanted to be beautiful once. A lotus flower that grew from the pond's mud bottom. To fruit and flower in chorus.

This Storm

Clouds move and change
much like a woman.
You can see them for miles
in Kansas, anticipate the water
they carry, watch as the stratus
comes to weather you.
I've seen cumulus clouds
with one side towards the sun
white like cotton swabs
and imagined angels asleep in them.
But the back of that cumulus
storms in a gray, Zeus is throwing
lightning with his eyes closed,
there is a temper here
beneath the cotton faces
and the beauty is changing.
I should repent now.
Tell her I'm sorry.
Get inside my house
and hide myself in the covers.

Wood

My father used to smile when I was sixteen,
and I struck the block of walnut wood with everything I had
until I gave up, and he finished it. I remember once,
we split some hedge wood, and bats came flying
from the yellow grains out into the yellow sun.
There was nothing my dad appreciated
more than the heat of hedge from a stove,
except maybe the fine red finish of cherry
when you have sanded and stained its skin.
My father loved me; I knew that.
And though I didn't understand where I fit
with his other loves, like his new wife, or the feel of bondo
when it molds to the classic 69' Chevelle,
when I turned sixteen, I drove my Chevy truck
down the gravel roads where we lived until I hit
the blacktop. And I kept driving east, past the small
town where I went to school, past the state line.
Like some black bat flying when the world split open,
and for the first time, I saw the sun.

After I Cheated on my Fiancé

I waited in my apartment for my father to knock on the door, and I stared at my reflection in the glass tabletop. The lines on my forehead were deeper that day and I tried to rub them away with Mary Kay's *Lotion for Men* my stepmother bought for me last Christmas.

The knock came and my thoughts condensed into drops of sweat on the back of my neck that soaked my shirt collar like an Assemblies of God preacher, and because of my upbringing I felt I had to tell my Christian father to pick up his balls and choose between fucking his wife or his secretary.

But I look back now at what I said those three years ago and want something different for him and me. To know back then that the lines on my forehead were not the wisdom of a son, but were merely patterned after my father's— they cut deep in our family.

What I've Chosen To Remember While Reflecting On My Life While Drunk In A Bar Downtown Springfield, Missouri

My father used to wake up at dawn, crack two eggs into the pan and toast some bread before moving me from underneath my sheets. Cereal and milk waited on the table where I would plop myself in a chair, rub the sleep from my eyes and fill a bowl. I would wait for my father and his eggs-over-easy to sit themselves next to me, quickly followed by his soft voice asking God to bless the food we were about to eat. We were quiet when it was just the two of us in the morning at our century-old country house; a car or two driving farmers to their fields, grackles rustling the maples, crickets vibrating love octaves to their mates.



Every other Saturday, I expected my mother to call and arrange to pick me up for the weekend. Because I wanted to stay up all night and watch movies I wasn't supposed to—Dirty Dancing, Commando, Dr. Detroit. I wanted to wake up the next morning after only three hours of sleep and watch cartoons. I knew that the morning would turn to afternoon before my mother would merge from her bedroom and cook some homemade doughnuts—it would be my treat for her being out with Mr. Whoever the night before until she stumbled home drunk, laughing loud enough to wake me from the living room couch and rub my eyes until I could see what was going on. Alcoholic kisses were the only means she used to put me back to sleep. That, and promises I would always believe, but were never kept. She was going to take custody of me as soon as she had the money.



I had reasons to stay up at night and beg God to graft my parents back together. My father's tears coming from behind the bathroom door made me pray even harder. On days that I had to mow our big Kansas lawn, I would often look down the dirt road and hope that the fury of dust rising from behind a car would be my mother coming home; or at the least, coming to take me away from my books and long lonely afternoons snuggled inside a hay bale stack—the only place I could hide from my father and his chore list. My hopes were ill placed. I was eleven when my father brought home my kindergarten teacher to be my new mother. God forgive me for my hatred.



My stepmother had something wrong, a sugar imbalance in her blood or something. We never really knew because the doctors kept changing their minds about what it could be. All I saw was that her attitude towards me shifted like the weather of a Missouri day-- morning sunshine and warm smiles then a freezing rain of dirty looks and harsh words. First chance I got, I ran outside to my cubbyhole and cried for God to rescue me from my life. He answered me when I turned eighteen and I moved out to find my place in the world. I think my father expected my return.



Sometimes I wonder if God remembers my prayers in the hay, the days I walked in the woods trying to find him or the entire year I looked at the abandoned silo and thought of jumping headfirst. My prayers were never answered like I hoped for. The influence of my mother is seen in every tequila shot I take

and cigarette I smoke despite my father's heated warnings concerning the sins of her life.

I was raised to believe that promiscuous smoking drunks are damned and now I have to think about the things I was taught growing up, more so when I'm plastered and just finished sleeping with another girl I didn't love.

I feel as helpless as I did in my youth. My God, I know I've screamed it into your ear before, but I've lost you.

I've lost you, I've lost you, I've lost you!

How am I supposed to live like this—with just pieces of a heart and a few shreds of a soul?

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