

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Edmond, Oklahoma
Dr. Joe C. Jackson College of Graduate Studies

Some Assembly Required

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN ENGLISH

By
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Edmond, Oklahoma
2015


SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

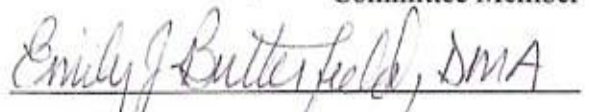
A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

April 24th 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the instructors throughout my college career, in particular Fred Alsberg for pushing me to pursue the craft and Kit Givan for his assistance in preparing this manuscript. I would also like to thank my committee and classmates that have supported me. And for her continuous support and unrelenting pressure that I continue on, I would like to give special thanks to my wife, Mrs. Sara Maib.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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PAGES: 90

A creative thesis of lyric poetry. A collection exploring the struggles and beauty of childhood, relationships and desire as they play out in front of a Western Oklahoma backdrop.

Some Assembly Required

Keys

Fourth of July

Yesterday, dad took us to the firework stand
piles of explosives, wrapped in colored paper,
legal explosives, child approved explosives,
we would use to finish our war.
My brother and I motionless, silent,
staring at the vast array of possibilities,
ignoring my father's enthusiastic attempts
to sell us on
fountains and aerial shells,
missiles, sparklers and roman candles.
We had no use for such extravagance.
Our soldiers awaited ammunition.
Rifle-man still lying in the grass prone position,
mortar-man kneeling, red dirt rusting his weapon,
our cannons and rifles empty
bazooka-man's shoulders tiring
as radio-man urged us to hurry.
Arriving home, father lit our punks
my brother and I, opposite sides of the river
flowing steadily from the yellow garden hose.
Our men waiting there.
My brother's green army hiding in tall grass,
mine, tan, covered in mud, camouflage.
War had been raging for days,
and now the final battle.
Black-cats, stuffed into dirt like landmines,
tossed men into the air, left craters in the earth
dynamite collapsed our twig bridge
crushing any hope for retreat.
Smoke of red, white, and green dispersed revealing the
devastation of the backyard battle of the fourth.

My Father

Rust colored dust fills the air
as he steps down from his
John Deer tractor.
Cut straw juts from tilled earth,
scrapes against oil-stained jeans
Removing his hat,
he wipes his brow with plaid sleeve.
Neck and face red from heat,
hands brown with blackened crevices.
Blonde hair appears white in summer sun.
He pauses for a moment, looking
out across harvested plains.
A hint of a smile emerges. He turns,
scrapes dirt crusted boots against the tire
climbs in his flatbed Chevy.

Claustrophobia

Grass overgrown fenced off with a wire pulsing and pulsing—a buzz
faint, overwhelming it echoes through wheat that waves endless
and the tree stands—solitary, roots deep, branches lashed by
dirt that rides the air, embeds itself in eyes and teeth.
Church steeples reach high above years of boarded up
windows, yards of broken down cars
stripped for parts to carry the
unemployed to Sunday service, pulling tithes from welfare checks to
pay for words of hope and death, crying out and blinding.
Open space confined by infinite nothings and traditions defined.

Boys Will be Boys

The day was Oklahoma August hot
I sat on the lush green grass
in my spotless Sunday dress
beneath the shade of the climbing tree
my father eventually cut down.
In my spotless Sunday dress
I watched
my brother, eight years old,
covered in mud from the
yellow oscillating sprinkler
dragged over to flood the flowerbed.
Mom's camera
posed me into a bitter smile
captured my brother in his glee.

Jr. Hi

*There's no point in going, she huffs
slouching into a kitchen chair*

"Hungry?"
Yes.

"So didn't learn anything?"
Did you?

I chuckle
thinking back to the years of public school.
Hour after hour watching students
passing notes, challenging teachers
with idiotic statements, smug smiles, hateful glances,
pointless assignments and daily grievances,
choice of clothing styles outweighing the need to study
flawed science laced with religious intent,
incorrect history glorifying the white patriot.
Girls vomiting in the bathroom stalls only to come out
telling the school of the girl with the razor to her arm.

"So anything happen today?"
*Mrs. Scroggins said she's got her eye on me, says
I should be careful, and that I should blame my brother.*

"She was in his class you know, graduated together."
I know, she says he was mean.

"He wasn't, but she's always been a little crazy,
think she kinda liked him.
But for your own safety, keep that between us."

Her face brightens up a little, before she starts in,
*Did you know Mormons really have missions?
There's one in my class, I asked her, it's crazy.
And you can do drugs and not go to prison
Samantha's dad was just let off with a warning.
And the DARE lady tried to get me to sign a thing
saying I'd never do them, like those people at church
who wanted me to promise to never have sex,*

"Well, you don't have to sign them, but believe me
sex and drugs aren't the best idea."

*I know, I know, but things happen,
like George spit in my Saxophone,
good thing I didn't sign a no violence agreement.
"Haley!"*

*I didn't hit him hard, just let him know I'm serious.
"About Saxophone?"*

*No, I hate band, but it's better than Ag,
that was the only other option.
Thanks for the sandwich.*

Backyard with My Brother

Army men, dozens of them,
preparing for battle
digging trenches
with sticks as the water hose ran
carving out rivers,
forming swamps and lakes.

My brother up to bat,
“Throw a fast ball,” he yelled,
“hard as you can.”
I let it fly, out of control
straight through the dining
room window.

Wood planks nailed in the tree,
we pushed ourselves through
the hinge door, my father built.
“We need to gather supplies,
if we want to survive out here,”
he said, “we’ve gotta be quick, in and out.”

I kept watch, as he entered the kitchen
slipped in through the garage,
I held my concrete-sharpened stick,
ready to defend him.
We made it back safely, a box of Little Debbie’s,
cold hotdogs, and a bag of marshmallows.

The rivers had dried up in the August heat,
our army men scattered from battle.
He handed me a small stick and a paint brush,
“There are fossils here,” he said,
“use the brush, don’t wanna break em’.”

The Duplicities of Maybe

What did he say?
Maybe.
To him maybe means yes.
Are you sure?
Positive.

And so my brother and I make plans
what else could we do on a maybe
from our father
we call our friends and arrange,
set up the meet at the bowling alley
then John's house, where else?

She said maybe!
What?
Mom, she said maybe.
Why did you ask?
I didn't.
We're screwed.
What?

To Mom maybe means hell no
don't you know anything?

Keys

At seventeen my father gave me a set of keys,
keys to all the doors I might encounter,
skeleton keys on a brass ring.
In secret, he'd crafted for years.
The bow of the first shaped to resemble a heart
hammered out when I was young
as I sat on his shoulders walking through the park
and sat with me in the sand box.
The next engraved with the face of a monkey
as I sat on his knee at five or six
asking him why, why it rains, why Jack didn't have a mother
why my brother didn't have blonde hair like me.
He answered with questions and questions and questions
leaving me to continue crafting as my wonder grew.
Another, a simple oval, thick and strong
crafted and kept in that locked box in his closet,
designed in silence, up at dawn working til' sundown
day in day out, weekends a foreign concept, leisure a myth
best rejected. It was chiseled with the motor of his combine
running 14 hour days and polished with the erasers that wiped the daily equations
from blackboards circling his classroom.
The key with the crown, a key designed to offer the upper hand,
crafted each time he set up the chess board, or sent me to my room
with a little sheet of paper, a word problem of train speed, or the wooden puzzles
he would leave on my night stand.
My favorite is that thin blade, so thin I fear it might snap.
Crafted with few words as insults were hurled, his body
stood straight and strong, not stiff but unbending, unreactive
a key that mirrors his polite smile as ignorant words were strewn across the room
he straightened his tie and watched with a calm awareness
the world attempting to rip itself apart. It wasn't fragile
as I had thought, but strong as my mother would fume and that evening I would hear him
whisper her an apology perhaps, a reasonable argument, perhaps even pleading, hardly
matters. It was thoughtful, respectful, humble
I have no doubt of that.
Then the jester hat. Not for practical jokes but letting go, just for a moment
when his eyes no longer scanned the world in anticipation, but grabbed my hands and
spun me around off the ground letting me fly through the air into a snow drift,
Those moments when the golden brown of the marshmallow no longer mattered those
moments when we lunged it into the fire and smiled letting it blacken and crackle before I
blew it out.

Then there was one, it wasn't polished like the rest, it had no engraving begging
recognition or meaning no hand carved symbols to be adorned.

When I held it, it left a black residue on my skin—hard to wash off.
And so I asked one evening, why, why did you give me this key?
His face was stern as he spoke. Eyes steady. That's the key to every shiny lock that looks too good to be true. The key that will bypass all the rest with a lie and a smile. That's the key I hope you never use and the key I wish I could say you'll never have to.

My Mother

As dinner approaches,
she sits, only fifteen years older than I.
Peeling potatoes.
The light accentuates her young curves,
refuting the three feeding terms of her breasts.

I watch her with my little sisters,
stressing over the younger's times tables,
listening to how a girl has managed
to turn the entire third grade against her.
Then attempting to console the older
who's crying because a boy called her a heifer.

As they retire for the evening
I can't help but gaze upon her,
light shining through the glass shade of the touch lamp
upon the pages of her book,
each page turns with the enthusiasm her life is lacking.

Was there once a dream?
Perhaps a friendship, another woman she
could share her multitude of pains and scattered joy.
Or a love, a young man,
Not the bastard who abandoned us
I only two months, or the farmer who claimed her
so that he might satisfy his impulse for family,
but a love; honest passionate and promising,
free from the burden of supporting me.

My eyes lower as she walks by,
I sit typing away
praying she not ask to read this evening.
I can already feel the tears that would swell in her eyes,
the rock in her throat, as her cheeks become heavy.

"I love you," she speaks softly draping a kiss on my forehead,
as if I am so fragile that anything above a whisper might shatter me.

Christmas Dinner

The presents are stacked under the tree,
wrapped in crisp corners, and metallic bows.
I avert my eyes knowing
Aunt Jackie will be watching
as they force me to the floor piling presents
on my lap.

My facial expressions
aren't malleable like my sister's,
with her shocked face, you're-so-thoughtful face,
I-love-this face and her all impressive
how-did-you-fucking-know face.
All I've got is my thanks-
I'm-clearly-disappointed face.
That proves me each year to be
the ungrateful one of the bunch.

And then the awkward dinner seating—
people retreating to different rooms with
their loaded plates and quiet whispers
of what they've heard of cousin Shelly
or nephew Kyle since they last spoke.
I escape outside for a nicotine break,
take a swig of Jameson in the car.
Upon my return the comments are inevitable
mentioning the smell
of smoke that clings and lingers.

I find a place on the couch
beside my cousin Deanna,
Katy quit coming years ago,
She was my favorite.
Deanna mentions something about
returning to this hell year after year,
word-vomit full of life long bile.
I hold my tongue, honesty only a ploy.
Any words will be carried in the whispers
that accompany plate two.

Between Geary and Bridgeport

The shadow of the bridge lingers
over the North Canadian river.
Out of service as long as I can remember.
The cement towers graffitied from top to bottom,
names of friends, enemies, and young
lovers from the towns' past.
Spray-painted stick figures,
took shape on the abutment,
One of them me holding hands
with her, hearts dancing round our heads.
I remember walking rickety deck planks,
climbing down in a nook of the tower.
We'd sit for hours beneath the planks
laughing, holding each other, smoking
cigarettes, watching others jump
from above disappearing beneath rusted water.
Lying on our backs, blankets,
car hoods, or pick-up truck beds,
watching the sun set, the stars come out.
Often overly aware of the coyotes, wild hogs,
and oversized beavers. Drunken young men.
building bon fires that ignite forgotten shotgun shells,
melt beer cans, burn cigarette butts
leave no trace of us, just a pile of ash.
The shifting sands of the North Canadian
claim forgotten ice chests, lawn chairs, deserted cars
just as they swallowed luggage trunks livestock
and train cars after the 1907 derailment.
The river wipes away its past, but the bridge
told our story, that we were there.
the bridge has vanished, and part of me.

Highway 281

My gaze follows the fence line as it travels the green hillside,
past the grazing cattle until it runs with the highway's white line.
The morning sun glistens off the asphalt.
The black tire marks jut out from the road.

He catches my eyes, hunched over,
Kneeling on the shoulder, in his dark denim jeans.
Light reflecting off the glass scattered about his knees

Back to the morning paper.
My eyes had coated the story
with a rich apathetic glaze,
"High School Senior Lost in Fatal Car Accident"
The line below her picture,
tagged the dark haired beauty as only seventeen.

The man lifts slightly; the light catches the gray in his hair.
Raising a small white cross he begins to hammer.
I slow,
watching him in the rearview.
Finishing his task, he collapses beside the cross.

Banks of the North Canadian

Lying by the river
beneath the train tracks
rusted metal and rotting boards,
smoking cigarettes.

Early spring
too cold to swim.

A duffle bag
filled with spray paint cans.

She smiles, painting
the budding flowers pink
hours pass,
weeds and overgrown grass
turn silver, metallic blue.

The red dirt river bed transforms
into a dream, a trance.

We kick off our shoes
leave footprints in the sand
rocks, scarce but sharp,
blood droplets left in our tracks.

Next to the cement abutment
she begins shaking a can.

Two stick figures emerge
women, holding hands.

One yellow hair, the other red,
we have no brown.
She paints a heart
her initials next to mine.

The paint faded now,
she dances through those clusters
of pink flowers
that sea of silver and metallic blue.

Death

gone,
non-existent like this town
if you pick up a map or blink
while driving past,
departed,
moved on as if
simply fed up and done
with this place,
slow decay,
transfer of energy,
spirit, angel, ghost making a
home in the house on 3rd street
the one with the shutters
the backyard overgrown,
always here,
never here,
disappeared,
loitering in limbo like those
kids outside the Napa store
every Friday night
as cars cruise main,
pushing daises,
worm food,
reincarnation of course
we don't believe in that here
cept' old man Pritchett
he was a king, or a goat,
depends on the day,
another plane,
different channel,
forever asleep,
no longer asleep,
free from pain,
from worry not that we have
all that much to worry about
other than the drought,
six feet under,
keeled over,
expired like most of
the food on the shelves
of Miller's grocery,
easily forgotten,
always remembered in town gossip
yearbook pages, pictures on
the wall of Joe's dinner

boasting biggest catfish,
ascended,
descended
free to disperse
into the universe,
taking one's place
amongst the stars.

Avoidance or Apathy

Drive to Work

In the middle of the street
a pair of work boots stand empty
their owner snatched up by a UFO, aliens
investigating the man's
calloused hands, stubble covered face
and stern expression.

The rapture picked him up
his shoes no longer needed
on the soft grass beneath
his childhood oak tree.

Spontaneous combustion
like Anna Martin leaving
only shoes behind,

A flaw in teleportation
a man stands barefoot
in the transporter room.

The invisible man has entered
the city, I swerve slightly
let him be.

And

Conjunction

unappreciated, unneeded, unnecessary

no need for that beauty of a word

the beat that ties, leads, emphasizes

at war with the oxford comma.

That soft build of connection to an

aspirated stop, that vocal pause upon which we

hang until carried along by more

of this and that, bait and switch if and only if,

down and dirty, up and down and over and out,

live long and prosper, now and then and again,

in and out, here and now so on and so forth

and that's the way it is

no ifs, ands or buts, good night and good luck.

Direct Deposit?

The bank teller asks every two weeks
as if this simplistic resource
will improve my daily existence.

Walking in, there he is
security guard with army
boots laced tight.

As I fill out my deposit slip,
a frail old woman stops in
front of him, "Hello Frank".

Standing in line, a man
early fifties
lets me go ahead.

He wears jeans and work boots
Dirt and grime taking permanent residence
in the creases of his hands.

He points to a teller,
slightly younger than himself,
she's busy at the moment,

Helping a man in a back-brace
with too many questions, her annoyance
clearly written on her face.

The filthy man smiles, a handsome smile,
one I understand, I take
my place ahead of him.

The little old woman asks for
her cash in tens, stops to chat
with Frank about the weather.

She waves me up.
The conversation is short.

But she smiles, I smile and she greets me by name
like Maib's convenience store back home
or Alibis' bar just down the road.

She smiles,
I hurry off to grab the door
for the little old woman.

“You’re sweet,” she says, walking past
followed by the man in the back brace
who pays me no attention.

Echo

She asks how I'm doing.
I consider my condition
then decided she means hello
and answer fine and you?
He says good morning,
I question if it is,
but decide he means hello
so I repeat his words to him.

I move on through the office
wait in line to fill my coffee.

He says he spilt some
I consider helping
but decide he means hello
and I smile in reply.
A woman kicks the printer
says damn thing never works
I decide she means hello
and say good morning
as I sit down at my desk.

First smoke break of the
day, many phrases are repeated
I respond the same.

A certain man, Kyle I think,
smiles as I walk towards him
toss my butt in the ashtray, turn to leave,
Not going to say goodbye? he asks.

Not the Only One

Mentally retarded people freak me out.
Fuck being politically correct,
it happens.
I can't be the only one.
Don't act like you don't know
what I'm talking about.

I see you staring at the woman
twitching talking to herself.
You pull your children away
as he, with garbled words
tries to hug them.
You report it to security
that unstable suspicious visitor.

Don't tell me it doesn't happen
don't ask how can I say that
I'm not the only one.
I watch you turn down an aisle
cross the street, move seats, switch lines.
You whisper and giggle
point or gesture in her general direction.

"He's autistic," she says immediately
the woman in her fifties with the twenty year old man.
Why does she say that?
It's for your own damn good,
to stop those thoughts she knows you're thinking
about her son.
"I'm sorry," she says.
She is.
She knows how uncomfortable you are.

Oh I get it, really I do.
You don't know what to say,
what to do, what he said,
or if she understands you.
You move away,
pretend you don't know
you're being addressed.

He asks for help, you scurry off.
He says hello you raise an eyebrow.
Sometimes you smile, it's true

not because you're nice
certainly not comfortable.
It's that awkward,
"There's clearly something wrong with him."
coping mechanism.

"I'm a teacher," you say, "I understand."
Sure, use that excuse,
act like that wasn't you hoping
he was in another class when he was a child.
Tell yourself you were relieved
for the new special needs assistant
because you felt guilty
you couldn't provide properly.

Okay, perhaps, I'm taking this too far
perhaps I'm assuming too much and
I'm over here all alone a little freaked out.
Go ahead, say this is cruel, unfair, untrue,
tell me that was never you.

The Break Room has Run out of Coffee

The phone hasn't stopped ringing.
My secretarial voice has lost its
enthusiastic tone.
By the time I hang up
two messages are waiting.

Every time my boss walks by
she hesitates.
I smile, as I do, but have no
chance to charm her or
fantasize being called into her office

Papers pile on my desk
I push them aside
attempting to finish
yesterday's bullshit.

Accounting sends me a list
of all the sales with something amiss
tossing round phrases like revenue,
reports, with that credit, debit, negative
positive business I pretend to get.

And finally it's ten o'clock
so I grab my pack of smokes
and spend 10 minutes hiding out
in the parking lot.

Who's Next

Office doors shut again,
you can hear the hushed tones
and lack of laughter.
The higher ups going in and out
no words spoken, no smiles, no
questions about your weekend.
HR scurries about.
Coworkers conjure
whispers of who's next.
Others engrossed in computer screens
or papers piled high
heads lowered making a last ditch effort.
I hear health insurance lasts till the 30th.

Confession

What it must be like
to be the father
behind lattice.
A penitent enters
weighed down
with transgression
leaves
with buoyant stride,
his baggage left
on priest's shoulders.
Yet there he sits,
awaiting another and
another
piling the petty, the
unspeakable, the
continuous degradation
of virtue.

American Assurance

Parents have perfected the art
of building confidence.
You're perfect the way you are
Don't listen to them they're just jealous
and so it goes
flaws, flaws no more,
but endearing qualities of individuality.
Those children grow
flawless, perfect.
I'm just a bitch
I'm an asshole sometimes
They're jealous
can't handle the truth
If you don't like me fuck off.
And now,
those parents,
sit and question
the approach
of indoctrinating perfection.

In the Dust of the Election

Family divided.
The phone hasn't rung the
Facebook comments halted.
Allies stick together
shunning the enemy
unfriending those who disagree.

A few days before victory,
my girlfriend and I at a funeral
*Don't you know, her aunt said,
He's a Muslim.
It's true, he has a ring,
and you know
Muslims want to kill the gays.
I'm only looking out for you.*

At my cousin's birthday
our naivety pointed out again,
*He's not even American.
His plan is to destroy us
and you're helping him.*

*Gay marriage is a ploy they say,
it'll never happen
it's an abomination and
this is a Christian Nation.*

They aren't all quite this drastic,
some seem to touch an argument,
*He's killing the economy.
There are no jobs.
Our people are starving.*

They claim it isn't fair,
*taxes should be cut not raised,
global warming a myth,
oil and coal the only way.*

Then of course the doomsday crowd
must share their knowledge too,
*He's taking all our guns away.
There will be no protection
when he comes for you.*

The apocalyptic chants
are fairly common too.
He is the Anti-Christ,
stripping our religious freedoms.
Revelation makes it clear
the end is here.

America they claim, has been infiltrated
Mexicans taken the jobs
welfare and food stamps
creating debt and Obamacare
poised to triple it.

Perhaps you think this is all a joke
guess you haven't met
those good old southern folks.

Avoidance not Apathy

That little nook down on 9th street
between the bargain store
and barber shop,
that's where I saw him,
lying on the ground, bottle in bag.
Clear how he got there,
I said to myself,
adjusting my skirt
as I quickened my pace.

Think it was that Circle K on
Columbus, down on the south side,
where the fight broke out.
A group of three surrounding
a teenage boy
I put my car in drive.
Got my gas down the street.

It was raining when I saw them,
a man holding a child
beneath an underpass on I-40.
Not sure where I was headed,
but I switched lanes as I hurried
to ensure I didn't spray
them as I passed.

Must've been over summer
when I saw that little girl,
down at the grocery store
bruises covered her arms
even before her mother grabbed hold
yanking her away from the
candy. I turned my cart,
made my way to produce aisle.

Just last week there was a knock
at my door, she wanted a cigarette,
said she just needed a minute
just a second away from him.
I let her in, let her talk,
then closed the door behind her
locked it, hoped she wouldn't come back.

Reds

Skinned deer hangs dripping on garage floors blood swirling in drains channeled into rusted rivers piped into bathtubs and sinks pink coral climbing the tiles as waters rinse blood from knife from skin. Reds of young women taken by men young or old as trophies to hang on the walls by the antlers of the most recent kills. Reds washing reds of infants screaming lungs and beating hearts that grow and break and harden with a gun in their hand as they sit on the bank of rusted rivers sighting firing one shot and done.

Oil

Drives the economy, jobs and earthquakes,
corruption, greed, Saudi Arabia, gas prices cue
time for vacation.

Bar talk circles and settles families lose jobs,
gain jobs or save money at the pump,
wars and trade and reserves, pipelines and tar pits good or bad or kill us.

And here on the family farm the glare
light of the rig beams through bedroom windows
once pitch black, the stars are gone.
The stars are gone.

What matters at all when the stars are gone
and the gravel intrudes upon the soft dirt and wheat
that waves that once coated the land with green or yellow now concrete,

gravel, trailers and towers and light that blasts and strips
the stars from the sky and no one notices, no one speaks of it,

only jobs and the economy, earthquakes and corruption
anything that effects the wallet,
only the wallet
but the stars are gone.

Living in a Red State: A Woman's Frustration

I watch visions of war and revolt in the Middle East,
hear pleas for those nations to give women rights,
support equality, education.
But I'm told social issues don't matter, here,
in America,
it's the economy at stake.

So we push for jobs and focus on the money,
we have to build up America, for our children they say,
their future is in our hands.
I listen, I do, I consider the wealthy and pain for the poor.
I care about Libya, Syria, Iran, Israel and Egypt.
I look at job growth, at foreign affairs.
I care about the elderly, health care, and business.
I study up on legislation, both that passed and failed.
I concern myself with profits, debt,
and that middle class I might one day infiltrate.

But when I look at her, my fiancée
sleeping there beside me,
peaceful, for a moment, her chocolate hair
a mess, snuggling deeper in her pillow;
that woman who wants more than anything
to have a child,
to be a mother,
to make a family
I can't help but ask,
A job for whom, what future?

I've been told I'm selfish, I suppose that's true,
But you're telling me to vote
for economic reasons,
advance American values
for the next generation,
when I can't even adopt children?

I should revolt against this health care bill,
or so many people say,
but my fiancée can't put me on her insurance,
because we can't get married.
Abortion, an issue I'll never face,
but I can fight for those who will,
and it's true,
I do concern myself with how a ban

or bill for personhood,
might restrict my options to have children.

The issue is the economy,
at least that's what they keep telling me.

Conception

South, across the Red River,
Marlise Munoz lies lifeless.
blood pumping through her
veins after a shock revived her heart
but had no effect on her brain.
An IV pierces her arm, an endotracheal tube
keeps her here.

The family pleads, she be released,
let go, into the peace that death
might offer, but the hospital takes
no steps forward,
but throws up its hands
entangled in the strands of legislation.

Fourteen weeks, the fetus inside her
takes precedence,
the woman lost all rights
upon conception. She is now
nothing more than an incubator
to the state of Texas.

Treatment

Flower

She's that flower that shrivels and wilts and screams
out for morning dew and springtime
warmth so that she might bloom once
more and people might swoon and
adore the bright petals, the sweet scent.

How easily we forget the bitter taste on lips,
forget the roots that suck every last
drop of moisture as we wither in her wake.
But we forget—forget the harsh winter wails.

We claim it, my beauty, my love, my trophy
only to be pierced deep as we remember,
as screams of winter drag us down
beneath frozen dirt.

Long Distance Call

I envision her burrowed in the down comforter,
the sun attempting to nudge her awake,
the cold urging that she stay.
Wiping the coffee-colored hair from her snow-white face
she places the phone to her ear.
“Good morning, lovely.”
I speak gently,
praying to prolong the peaceful spirit of morning.
Lying down I close my eyes.
This early she hardly speaks, but
dazzling whispers creep from the silence.
I lie still,
striving to hear the bed creek beneath her,
her footsteps on the hardwood floor.
I imagine the pink, silk robe
sliding off her shoulders,
gliding over the generous curve of her hips,
as if river water flowing over polished rocks.
The faucet squeals as it fills the tub.
The water welcomes her,
releasing a sigh of pleasure.
“I love you baby,” quickly follows.
I focus in on the clink of her make-up against the counter,
nail bitten fingers decorating her face
a mixture of eye shadow, I’ll never understand,
dark purples, blues, greens, a layered line of black,
until her eyes could hold God captive.
I interpret, a frustrated sigh at the mirror,
pouty dissatisfaction.
“You’re fucking gorgeous!”
I say with giddy glee.
Her laughter reassuring, right on cue.
Heading toward the door,
she halts in the kitchen,
I feel the debate within her.
I smile at the crinkle of the wrapper,
the jingle of the silverware drawer as she fixes a bagel.
The howl of the wind ceases,
as her car door slams.
I sit alone, wishing
I were there to light her cigarette.

The Other Woman

I hear our friends talking,
homewrecking, they call it,
despicable, weak, cruel.
She's a slut, a whore,
just wait till I get my hands on her.

Yes, there she sits
with her stilettos on
tan legs, waxed beneath the handkerchief
she claims to be a skirt.
Her eyes a work of art
designed to invoke arousal,
accented by blush and red lip stick.

She stands beside an empty bar stool,
scanning the crowd for that man
with the ring on his finger
the family pictures in his wallet.

Yes, there she is,
finishing her martini
before approaching
to ask this kind man
to drive her home.

Once there, she pulls him in,
rips off his pants,
grabs his dick, won't let him leave
that fucking whore.

So, I heard he asked for a divorce.
Yes, the other woman, no doubt,
that deceitful, heartless wretch.

I saw them together last Tuesday,
running the track at Planet Fitness,
It was early morning.
He started laughing, doubled over,
she jumped on top of him,
rode him right out of the gym.

I followed them,
thought you should know.

They went to her house.
He followed her in.
Can't say exactly what happened,
but they came out
after a couple hours,
different clothes on.

He opened her car door,
when they went to brunch,
ordered a couple drinks.

He talked a lot.
She argued a little,
scolded him with a smile
then giggled at his rebuttal.

They went to a matinee.
I bought a ticket.
It was a horror film, suspense driven.
When it got bad, he reached up,
turned her eyes toward him.

They grabbed an early evening coffee.
He pulled pictures from his wallet,
teared up in conversation.
She moved close, lifted his chin
whispered something,
before kissing him.

I know you're angry,
but if I might,
I followed the two of you last week.
When he tipped the babysitter a hundred
before leaving.

Maybe I hid in the trunk of your car,
heard you bitch about his driving.
He didn't open your door,
not that you gave him the time.

At dinner, he was watching you over his menu.
The waiter arrived,
he wasn't ready to order.
You got upset,
do you remember?

You picked the movie,
a romantic comedy,
I liked it, reminded me of him,
with that other woman.
He laughed out loud,
you glared, nudged him with your elbow.
After that, he seemed bored,
spinning his wedding band.

He drove to a hotel,
reserved a room last week.
You asked what he was thinking,
said it was irresponsible,
inconsiderate not to ask you.
He didn't argue,
just drove you home.

Later that night, after you fell asleep,
once again, leaving him
wanting,
he moved to the couch, texted me.
Wanted to see me Tuesday,
said he'd call into work if I was free.
I said I'd meet him at the gym.

I thought about him as I fell asleep.

Now, it isn't what you think.
He broke it off two years ago,
told me he wanted to fix things,
save his marriage,
said he was desperately in love with you,
but now, well...

I'm sorry, I never meant to hurt you,
but that whore,
she just wants to make him happy
she fell in love.
It's true, I'm selfish,
call me what you want,
a bitch, a whore, a cunt.

But I'm not taking anything,
you didn't toss out years ago.

Conversion

Over and over again
I hear that I have one
a gay agenda.
From what I hear,
my mission is conversion.
Put my vest on,
let my hair down
go out and find them
those heterosexual women,
lonely, heartbroken.
Charmed,
flattered by my desire.
I've had
my conquests.
My ego inflated
by a woman's curiosity,
her body overwhelmed
by my touch.
And unfortunately, I
must admit, I
once gave
myself to a man,
conversion didn't happen
for anyone.
Some might say
my admission
hurts our cause,
our mission, our gay agenda,
but who doesn't want
to hear their seductive
qualities breakdown
walls of orientation.

Vulnerabilities

Glimmers of hope on which we prey. A smile lacking confidence opens the door seats you at her table, dreams lacking accomplishment serve unending shots at your expense. He left her, she rattles on and on as this stranger brings tear drops to your table. Help her up take her home be respectful, too obvious. Take a few days. There she is, mood improved, a smile, she invites you out invites you over likes to talk your safe, and she asks you to stay, one night, another you build her up while pulling her under and then that's it that's the end, she expects too much and you're tired no better time to call it over.

Treatment

How can I make you happy?

I raise an eyebrow as nameless lips
make their way from neck to chest.

I want to giggle, roll around
in her arms
destroying that firm gaze of seduction
only to pin her down pulling
it back to the surface.

Happy? Her hair smells
of apricots.
I want to grab it pulling her up
to discuss this idea—Happy.

Tell me what you want.

Her hands drift
 down
Unbuckling my belt
her breath warming away the chill bumps
persistent since
thrown back on
cold silk sheets.

I want to hold my
hand to her cheek.
Make her blush
telling her of the beauty
hidden within each and every
element of her being.

If only it were so easy
sensation a cure.

48 Hours

Day 1.

Don't fall in love with me,

I say,

raising my lighter to her cigarette

Don't worry,

I can take care of myself

she responds,

swiping a match ignoring my gesture.

Don't fall in love with me.

Oh shut up.

Let me take you out.

As we sit down at the table

our eyes lock, she smiles,

Gorgeous,

get whatever you want.

Half way through our meal she decides

I'll have another. A second martini

is set down beside our plate of alligator.

Back at my house

she picks a place on the couch.

Don't fall in love with me,

I say,

laying my head on her lap.

So you keep telling me.

Her fingers run through my hair.

up and down my neck.

Be careful,

I can be charming.

Really sweetie,

I'll be fine.

Day 2.

Entering the bar,

I make my way to the corner

She follows, breasts immaculate

the color of coconut shells, woven with silk,

I've never been here.

I was pretty sure of that

My words are stuttered, the thickness of

her thighs clench my every breath.

Just so you know,
I'm kind of a light weight.

Three drinks in

She winks from across the table.

What? No?

Five drinks in
Her hand glides up my leg.

But really,
not sure I can finish this.

Don't worry beautiful
Just leave it.

As I stumble from my stool
she takes my hands pulling me behind her.

I've decided
you can have me tonight.

So, you're place?

I ask.

She laughs.

If you think you can make it.

I follow her home.

Lips of whiskey, hands of satin
her nails drag my back, teeth find my neck
with a jerk of my hair her kiss moves to my chest.

Don't fall in love with me,
she says,
Pulling off my jeans.

The Delusion of Robyn

With Love

Driving to nowhere, car packed full,
all we owned. Just driving, smoking,
kisses at every stop light,
hands unable to control themselves.

Driving until we couldn't drive anymore,
until our empty pockets cued the gas light,
and we stepped out into the chill
of November's approach.

She jimmied the lock with a credit card,
We made our way across the cracked
linoleum, through the kitchen.
She left me there, waiting,
told me it was okay, we'd be okay
as she went to gather our things.

Light shone through the window,
moonlight/streetlight mixture, blue tint,
on the pallet of blankets piled on
stained carpet, her arms wrapped round me.

Huddling together after, ice cold showers,
dancing in the empty house
the dance, all we had, all that mattered,
And sex, sex to stop crying, sex to cry,
sex when hungry or tired or
angry, sex and love and sex we called love.

It was that fantasy romance,
that beautiful disaster
always remembered,
flawless.

Treating the Mundane

Tight jeans, low cut red blouse.
Her dark curly hair done up,
Tall black heels.

She moves from her place by the bar.
A rug grabs her heel
Thrusting her slight body into mine.

Her life, eight years with him,
longer hours, three children, same income,
new point of devastation.
Daily sinking deeper, screams silenced,
spewing routine, swallowing reality
drowning in each passionless fuck.

She smiles with overwhelming intention
my eyes dive into hers,
blue, not a deep blue,

rather that of a swimming pool
the bottom painted to amuse you,
cooling carnality burns my eyes.

I sink my teeth into the moment.
She knows there's no cure,
but I offer treatment.

I pay off her tab, offer to drive.
She insists I follow.

Her delicate hands betray him,
discovering the softness of my skin.
She cries out

as I taste the neglected nectar of her soul.
In her trembling, she deserts him.
steadily rising, indulging my ambition.

But after, she checks the clock.
tosses me my clothes, hands me my keys,
walks over to her vanity and slides on his ring.

As if nothing has happened
She returns to routine.

Cheating

Cheating they say
cowardly, selfish, spineless,
weak, brutal
they say
and hateful—
a betrayal. A lie upon lies,
broken trust, they say
the end, or beginning of the end,
it's already over.
Just leave, they say, if you're unhappy,
no fixing this, no hope left,
they say and say
and say again
and then one day—
I'd never, I've never,
I left him first, I never acted on it,
it was him and it was her
and it was already over,
or so they say and say
and say again
as relationships crumble
under the weight of pride, dissatisfaction
and wonder

until what's the point
it was already over
no blemish here not ever.

Breaks

Breaks

My heart was broken a time or two or five or more.
Early on, the word No was all it took to sting,
bring tears to eyes and screams to the air
with whirling arms and flailing feet.
Then switching schools, those amateur insults on your teeth or height
or bowlegged running down the court and perhaps, most of all
mother's disapproving looks struck deep, an introduction—
bruised the epicardium.
Love creeps in, at some point, smiles and words and kisses from her
heartbreak redefined. I painted a picture of each with
bulging veins, her favorite color,
scented with her perfume,
hung it on my wall a year or so
then packed it away in a box with the rest
collecting dust in the basement.
There's always that one, the one that
outshines all the rest, when she's gone
light shatters, scatters about
into tiny splinters embedded in the myocardium
dissolving over years.
For her I built an eight foot box wallpapered
with flashing cumulous updrafts
and hid myself within, doors locked
with my bottle, greasy hair, and sweat pants.
Then there are those that don't involve her at all
those deep endocardium rips for a mother or life-long friend
those stitched up with jute—an eternal
itch you feel with every beat but learn to ignore.
You can't paint them or hide away you just learn to
take a moment when the itch intensifies and sit
and stare and smile at the beauty
that chokes the aorta.
Life is little more than heartbreaks piled high
defibrillators, stitches, scars and stents.
In the end they take us all.
I can only hope that some might say
She was sad, but she did it well.

First Day of Kindergarten.

The morning sun glistens in her sapphire eyes;
I turn off the engine.

“Do you want me to come in with you?”
I ask, the red-bricked school looms above us.

“I can do it,” she whispers.

Grabbing her Dora bag, I walk her to the door.
“I can do it,” she repeats clenching my hand.

A stone drops from my throat, lands and rolls
across the floor of my stomach.

“It’s okay, sweetie, I’ll walk in with you.”

Neither of us speaks as we enter,
the children already in their classrooms.

Our footsteps ricochet off the
blinding white walls and freshly waxed
apple red tile.

She stops, her back stiff, head held high.
“I can do it.”

Kneeling down I help the backpack
around twig-like arms.

“You know which one it is?” I ask.
Her hand shakes slightly as she points.
A rainbow of numbers and letters decorate the door.

I place a kiss on her forehead.

She makes her way down the hall
blonde curls bounce
blue shoes drag.

She slows
approaching the door.

My eyes glued to her little body,
sparkling skirt and black jacket,
mostly hidden behind her enormous backpack.

She turns back...

Her tiny body trembles,
tears stream down cheeks,
chin contorts
fighting to calm quivering lips.

I run to her
sweeping her up in one motion

we retreat.

Barbie Shoes

Barbie fights through the dirt on the little girl's shoe,
she is lifted from the floor and pointed toward you.
The little girl smiles.

You almost speak;
those are beautiful shoes,
you'd say,
but hesitate glancing toward her father.

Dark hair is withdrawing
from his forehead
drifting down his face

He wears a white t-shirt
stained yellow
holes forming on the seams
with scuffed work boots and jeans.

Black has taken over his fingernails
the crevices in his hands
and the fabric near his pockets.

The little girl is dancing,
twirling with her blonde curls
fumbling around in her beautiful shoes.

A stranger brushes past;
the girl stumbles into her father
her forehead scrunches questioning you.
You have no answer.

Her father clenches the counter
His eyes latch on to the swift man
the swift man cursing at his phone
the swift man with his polished shoes.

The father's calloused hands relax,
as the man disappears behind the sliding doors,
cupping his daughters face
her arms wrap his legs like packing tape.

You watch as the two walk away,
the father, with a slight limp
carrying a grocery bag and gallon of milk
the little girl skipping in her Barbie shoes.

25 Years

Just last week
couch cuddling
they watched
Law and Order
sharing their suspicions
their reasoning,

It's too early
can't be the doctor,
bet its that other guy
the janitor.

No, it's the intern,
did you see how he reacted?

He didn't react,
he's just bad at acting.

Just wait. You'll see.

Just last week.

And last month,
a dinner date
sharing their day
over a bottle of chardonnay,

Martha stopped by
said she and George
are going on a cruise.

Don't know how they can afford it
Probably can't, but their going
Martha said she's sick of waiting.

They're living off unemployment
It's ridiculous, government paying
for a cruise.

Oh, come on. George is looking,
he's worked all his life.

Just seems like Martha should be
looking herself not dragging
George off on a cruise.

She said it was his idea.

Sure it was.

Just last month.

And just last year,
at their daughter's wedding
they reminisced in whispers
gliding across the dance floor,
do you remember

that day we met?
 Oh yes, Fred's diner
 the first time I was fired.
That's when I knew,
when you swooped in taking
the blame.
 Hard not to, you were crying
 but not really crying, on the verge,
 fighting the tears. I had no choice.
I talked about you for weeks
told all my friends I would marry
you.
 I told mine you were crazy,
 I was convinced you stole that
 \$20.
Maybe I did.
 Oh really?

Just last year.

And 5 years back
when they escaped
the kids for a weekend in Vegas,
shocked to discover
their gambling skill,
or beginners luck
considering the following trip.

And 10 years back
when they took the family
to the mountains.
The four of them hiked for hours,
their laughter echoing
as their bodies tired.
They helped Maggie build her first fire
that warmed Gabriel,
chilled to the bones
after attempting a swim in the river.

And 15 years back,
Daniel, the name they gave the
breathless body of their third child.
Depression hit hard,
gutting their home completely,
empty stares, empty words, nothing,
only a house of heavy air,
cold nights that spilled over into

days. Week after week they waited
for warmth to return.

And 20 years back,
that first big fight, initiated
by the desk they bought,
some assembly required.
Such passion, and cruelty
as the picture frame
shattered on hardwood floors.
The next morning all the words,
strewn about, rose back up,
He packed, gone for a week,
didn't think they'd last.

And just yesterday,
he packed once more,
no passionate breaking of glass,
no raised voices releasing
words that couldn't be put back,
no doors slamming,
tears or exasperated sighs,
no pleading, begging, blaming,
no apologies, no confessions,
only a sense, some kind of
understood end, hovering
above them.

Uninvited

She's mentioned it before,
the way she used to pack a suitcase
sit on the front steps
and wait for her father.

I picture her there
little girl, pink dress,
hair all done up
hoping he might notice.

I've always thought
myself lucky to have avoided
such disappointment.

Yet here I sit alone
our dinner plans forgotten
dismissed, interrupted by
unexpected obligation.

I tell myself it's petty,
after all, in the grand scheme it is,
and yet, there's a catch in my throat
my cheeks heavy.

Uninvited, emotion,
room by room, it redecorates,
locking reason in the cellar.

Here I sit, on the front porch
clinging to my suitcase.

Night Terrors

Sweat and screams and crawling multitudes creep in orifices as knives are placed in hands of his or hers of yours or theirs and the children smile as you slit their throats and women chained and bruised as water drips from dungeon walls into frozen streets where loved ones lie and die, run down and over and hearts beating under broken bones as blood oozes into snow like the deer your father once hit and you were forced to kill, bullet to head, and black and dark and silent too silent as she sleeps beside you no breath no movement and you awake with sweat and screams and another night, another dream.

Signs Apparent Overlooked

I glance at the tan butt in the ashtray,
the woman in the red dress, among the white.
I think of getting up,
of dumping it.
Pull my eyes away,

attempt to focus on
her going on about the
asshole
who cut her off over at 50th and Western.
I offer to pour her a whiskey.
No response.

Continuing her rant about
the fucking fag motherfucker
in the yellow truck
who never learned to drive.

She stands, walks to the fridge,
a Coors Light. I pull out the tray,
begin rolling. A condensation ring
on the table
smudge it out with my sleeve.

“You want me to cook dinner?” I ask
handing her my work of art.
“Nice.”
all she replies, flicking
a bic as she sucks.

I pick up the remote, flip
a few channels, nothing on.
The second PlayStation controller
lays—half under the couch
its cord unwrapped.

“I wish I knew where he
lived, I’d kill the little shit,
shove a crow bar up his ass
little bitch would fucking like it.”

My eyes fall
back to the ashtray,
the tan butt has climbed up,

now well distinguished, as ash
is tapped from the end a blunt.

Setting down her beer, she plucks
the remote off the arm of the couch,
leans back
brown recliner, her speech
now relaxed,

“Dime beer tonight, I might go out.
You get the laundry done yet?”
“Jeans are in the dryer, whites in
the wash. Haven’t gotten to the rest.”

“Not surprising. How could you,
you fucking whore? Who was it?
You fuck her in our bed? Did you?
Did you fuck her? Can you hear me?
Think I wouldn’t know?”

I start toward the kitchen,
her hand catches my shirt.
Beer hits floor, my head, the cabinet,
her grip, tight, my throat,
my legs give out.

“She make you cum? You scream
her name? Scream like a pathetic little bitch
when she pounded that worn-out
second-hand cunt?”

Her words rhythmic, a beat
woven into my vision, sharp and dull,
then sharp, then sharp, then dull,
dragging me down and along and under.

“Get off the floor, you filthy
lying slut.” The smell of beer hangs,
thick, round my neck. My abdomen
collides with her right
cowboy boot.

Her shadow, heavy,
cast by the light of the fridge, hovers
with the crisp cracking of aluminum tab.

For a girl I once knew

Throwing rocks as hard as we could,
windows shattering, old windows,
single pane thin glass, crashing,
fragmentation.
Dust covered daggers—a satisfaction
tempered glass can't offer.

The house long abandoned
absorbs our anger,
perhaps we were stoning
the kid at school who
spread the rumor,
perhaps, it was our sisters
for their constant intrusion
or our mother's for their lack
of attention.
We stoned the religious
for their eyes of judgment
Ourselves for our
impurities,
her father for his desertion
and mine for lingering
by my bedside.
Stone after stone
glass covering the ground
showing our progression
towards that craved state
exhaustion.

Normalcy

Every nine seconds, is that what they told me?
Not sure, perhaps.

When I stumbled out of that house,
climbed to my feet, covered up bruises,
reset the shoulder, cleaned the cuts,
I was so proud, so scared, so angry.

One in three, I think that's what they told me.
Least you didn't have kids, they said,
easier without kids.
Don't know why you stayed long as you did.

I'm not taking sides, they said, back then,
just try not to rock the boat.
What did you say to her? they asked me,
maybe you shouldn't drink so much.

She needs help, they said, she's had it rough,
doesn't know anything else.
Have you talked about counseling, they asked,
considered depression meds?

He just gets angry, she said, the other day.
I know he's frustrated, not much opportunity
here, we need to go somewhere else
Oregon maybe, he'd like it there.

Didn't ever have a stable relationship, she said,
He doesn't know how it's supposed to be.
Not his fault really, he just needs to know
I'm here for him, that I won't leave.

Just another one, just another one of three,
every nine seconds, we say, nothing new,
nothing to see.

Remembering the Cycle

She was so proud of that piece of aluminum,
flat bottom, sides bent up,
a motor clinging to the back.
Fishing poles, an early morning drive
that piece of aluminum loaded
in the back of her truck.

Friday night,
I waited up, thinking the worst,
Took the typical steps,
called the hospital, the police.
Nothing.
Concern turned, and quickly,
to an anger I'd never felt,
a jealousy or suspicion
thoughts of her with some stilettoed-woman tied to a bed.
I sat with the oranges and
browns of our floral couch
trading my coffee for whiskey,
rehearsing half-hearted lectures imbedded
with fantasies violent, confident, demeaning
a dream—her on her knees
a red brass barrel to her head.

Early morning, once again,
she takes a knee beside our bed.
I wake to her smile and
shaking hands.
A plastic ring from a quarter
machine, neon green.
She slips it on my
finger, tears in her eyes,
confessing her undying love
with promises that one day
there will be diamonds, one day
she'll be better,
one day she'll deserve me
if only I'd forgive her.

One day, her grip tightened around my throat,
I closed my eyes, a jolt, as she flung me aside.
Textured walls... *Why did we texture the walls?*
My face burned. My head jerked back.
The dresser, hard, cold, *needs dusting.*

The floor, green,
somewhere between emerald and sea weed,
Disgusting color for carpet, I thought,
as my rib cage was branded by her boot.
Hands transformed,
soft palms caressing my face,
her tears carried endless apologies.
My body curled tighter.
Her shadow lingered.

Sitting there in the middle of the lake
her smile assuring me we'd stay afloat.
The morning Oklahoma sun glistening
as it never had before, reflecting
in her eyes a blue that would
soon fill the sky above rusted waters.
And for a moment, I was convinced
Our happiness would last forever.

Some Assembly Required

Some Assembly Required

And so you begin, you and her, on hands and knees
with the A through J's, screws, and anchors
strewn about the floor.
She's excited, screwdriver in hand.
You hold the instructions deciding which
steps are a given, which a necessity.
She picks up J and G, as you instruct,
pounds drive cam connectors
deciphering the front and back
of plywood panels, holding B vertical
as she twists and twists and curses
at the cams unwillingness to fit
you switch convinced of incompetence.
She flips the instruction booklet
starts back at 1.
And you hammer and screw, hold steady,
drop, twist, turn and turn over
What the hell is this rubber ring?
Toss it.
She thinks you need some music and a drink.
You hold it together.
Wrong screws, wrong holes, you search for more
from the tool box not removing shit.
She laughs and you lash out
and she pouts, and it's not over not near over.
And these panels have no stickers
what are they? process of elimination.
You had dinner plans, an hour ago.
The front and back you figured out the
up and down not so much.
She pours another and you take 5 minutes
and two shots and a drink
the shelf freestanding for the moment.
You want her to rub your shoulders
She'd rather hammer a nail in them.
And the whole thing is upside down
You flip it, a screw strips, you superglue that shit
the holes aren't where the holes should be
you bust out the drill, she's pissed.
In the end, there it stands a simple 8ft shelf.
You're drunk and you want to fuck and for all she cares you
can fuck yourself until the end of time.

The Jar

Sighs upon sighs upon eyes that dig deep and roll and dodge and drill into muscles that ache and pound and want as she smiles, a pulse a heat the drives you into her and breaths upon breaths that hold and caress as tears fall are wiped and stored up in a jar on the shelf in the back of the closet to pull out and offer up like wine with your evening plate before her ass shakes at the sink scrubbing the pan and you want her again. She's tired the headache the long day and sighs upon sighs and in the morning, she smiles hands ready to explore the ins and the outs that pile and build until you break and you find her again holding the jar to cheek.

Social Media Induced Apathy

She's on Facebook again,
the ignorant, religious, conservative
republican misogynists out in force.

You couldn't make this shit up!
She turns the screen towards me,
This time it's a radical catholic page titled
Why women shouldn't go to college.

She proceeds to read the reasons;
College isn't an education, not anymore.
Women should be mothers.
Being a mother is respectable.
College attracts the wrong type of men
Nothing is taught of domestic responsibility.
Career should be a woman's final option.
They will regret it in the end.

I chuckle,
she glares,
rage clearly visible.

But they are a hindrance to our cause
They are convincing women they can't
be what they want. We went to college,
we have jobs, its offensive!

I dunno, I'm not convinced, besides,
I'm slightly exhausted from trying to be
an informed, atheistic, liberal, democratic feminist.

Obligation

I know you'll want me when you get home.
All day you've been waiting to walk in
find me overwhelmed with desire.

I've already thought about how to change the
flow of conversation.
Ask you about your day and let your
stories trend us away from the bedroom.

But that can only last for so long.
Eventually you'll mention it,
how you've thought about me all day,
and I'll be forced to respond.

I know what I'll say, I'll play along.
Pretending that my body has been aching
for your touch since this morning.

And for a moment, my words will satisfy,
we'll talk some more as your eyes
drag down my body. I'll force a smile
you won't realize is adulterated.

You'll tell me how lucky you are
what a hot wife you have.
You'll tell me how happy you are
how wonderful love is.

I'll search my mind as I climb into bed.
Grab onto an image as your hands
make their way over my body.

And for a moment, my body will satisfy,
your hands will continue their expedition
excavating a series of moans
you will accept as authentic.

Unexpected

Nearly three feet tall,
brown curls bounce approaching the register.
wobbly legs, smile on her lips,
her eyes wide as she allows her
gaze to rest on me,
pulling out a desire
until now I was unaware of.

She laughs,
a giggle that radiates innocent joy.
I want her as my own,
to grab her hand and run away
take her home where we'll gather pillows
and cuddle on the couch
make some popcorn and watch *The Little Mermaid*.

I imagine her
bouncing through the rooms of our house,
that suddenly seems so empty.
My wife comes home,
climbs into bed beside our curly-haired angel
reads her a story as I listen at the doorway.

The little girl takes her father's hand
She exits the grocery store—disappears.

An Affair

It should take a little effort.

I should have to go out
in secret.

Perhaps, remove
my wedding band,
season lies, let them marinate
grill to perfection
serve with an aged cabernet.

I should have to enter those
darkened dens where gossip
thrives in stagnant air, mutates
and spreads
a rumor—an epidemic.
Espionage to craft my defense.

I should have to
color truths with reds and yellows
fold them into
hypnotic origami roses
offer from a sweaty palm.

It should take a little effort.
If only it had.

Sunrise: The tree atop the hill

The world awakes
a kiss of light,
the sun peeks
over the horizon.
They rise up,
two trunks,
as if from one seed.
Roots dig deep
become one system,
branches reach, interlocking.
Sustained by one soil,
they sway
as lovers do,
two trees
as one.

Making Dinner

I said I'd make her dinner, something fancy,
but after the errands of the day,
I found myself staring at the stove,
thinking of pulling out
the pans, standing there for hours,
or minutes that felt like hours,
slaving away.

I pictured myself washing dishes
as she relaxed for the evening,
resentment intensifying
before I even opened the fridge.

I sat down on the couch,
lit a cigarette, enraged by my lack of motivation.

My mind drifted to having children,
and how much she wants them,
how exhausting they'll be.
a baby crying, two older
running through the house,
asking me to get him this, or that,
to put in a movie, get her a snack.
I'll have to listen to their stories
act amazed as they show me
what they made at school today
some bullshit clay figure he calls a dog.

Putting out my cigarette,
I climb out of the ditch we call couch,
back to the kitchen.
Pulled out the chicken,
arranged the seasonings, grabbed a cutting board
two skillet and a pot on the stove.

Poured a glass of wine,
slid to the floor in front of the sink.
Didn't move as her car pulled in,
replaced the tears with a scowl,
raising my glass to my lips.

Words

for her

Standing there before us
the judge spoke the words,
words I was to repeat,
words I'd rehearsed but never heard.

Her dress was white,
bought to show off the boots
from Texas,
their sequins shimmering,
a spectacle,
dancing in the light.

As they escaped my lips,
those short snip-its strung together
vowing a life of devotion
through all the struggles that
will befall us.

Her hand shook,
I reached out,
allowing her to take hold.
A smile found her, extinguishing
the fear in her eyes.

The words shook and fell apart
they were snagged and torn
as they made their way
to my lips, but upon reaching her ears
they must've been transformed.

The words stream down her face
carrying *devotion, surrender, security*.
Reaching up, I lift a word from her cheek,
the first drop of matrimony.

Lesbian Bed Death

So that's what we call it
When the relationship
becomes too *comfortable*.

At first the sex is constant
Three times a day or more,
initiated the second your eyes
lock with hers,
or her hand grazes your skin.

She's scrubbing dishes
you walk up behind her,
lift her up onto the counter.
She's lying on the couch
you climb on top of her.
You're driving in the car
forced to pull over
as her hands raise your heart rate
cause your body to tremble.

But as time passes,
things change.

There are days of nothing.
She walks by naked
you're watching T.V.
hardly notice her bending
over in an attempt
to get your attention.
You share a shower,
she's soaking wet,
water running down her face,
your bodies don't even graze.
Lying in bed at night
work, bills, kids, night classes,
you're exhausted.
What's the rush,
there's always tomorrow.
So you cuddle,
hold her close and kiss her forehead.

But then she says something about it,
Lesbian Bed Death that is,
and you realize the opportunity here.

She wants you.

So you think on it,
the two of you, on a solution.
You go to the store to find new toys
and throw in some accessories:
a whip, some porn, new lube,
maybe pass on the anal beads,
grab a blindfold, some handcuffs,
Pick up some massage oil, some candles,
strawberries, chocolate covered,
It's alright if you go overboard.

You start sexting her while she's at work
or out with friends.
You cook her dinner,
pour some wine,
turn up your charm.

Fuck her on the kitchen table,
have a towel on hand to
place beneath her head.
She won't let it end there.
So you follow her to the bedroom,
where she'll spend hours
making sure it hasn't got you
The Lesbian Bed Death.

Give a thanks to Pepper Schwatz,
and in a couple months,
Bring it up again.

Epitaph

If an epitaph could be a novel,
an epic, a journey,

I'd write of love and loss and pain
with those moments of ecstasy in between.

I'd write of religion, science and politics
with drugs a vast assortment,

I'd write of greed, hope and apathy
with those glimpses of honesty.

I'd write of her lying on concrete
the sun shining down,

and of the stars that shone above us
as we laid in the road of that one stoplight town.

I'd write of her with me with him with her
with him with me.

I'd write of loyalty, trust and honor
with lies at every turn.

I'd write of coffee and champagne, affairs
and wars with details of whores and other things.

I'd write of pain and beauty—
beauty without end.

If an epitaph could be a novel
She might just live forever.

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