

YOUR AEON

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POETRY

Haunter 5

Tailor Made Pain 49

A Whore Named Chastity 65

Crooning Neuter 79

PROSE

Nothing But God 99

HAUNTER

CHET BAKER HUFFING A GAS RAG

Born to feed
Born to thrive
Born to breed
Born to die

II.

Who's going to love without asking you to drink their Kool-Aid?

III.

Ask me what it means.
Like you could ever forget your purpose.
The scent of your breath on my skin:
it all rushes back to me, like Chet Baker huffing a gas rag.

IV.

Fuck your abusive parents.
You're perfect.

EVOL DOG

I.

Skin feels cold against it, playing braided heartstrings for a choke
chain, she drags me out
along with final conversation using the tone for talking to dogs.

II.

Brush a hand through hair, frustrated, and nod, dismissing her like
your younger brother.
Brush a hand through hair, frustrated, and nods, dismissing you like
a younger brother.

III.

Nervous tics, ticks in mane gorged from punishing speculation, your
true-love is sick of it, that
'sick of you' sick and after all that effort—

SILENCED, AGAIN

I.

Okay. You're right. There is no answer.

II.

"All my feelings are like your feelings—just a bother if they worry me at all."

RATHER STARVE FREE

Rather be starved for love, or just plain hungry, if my thoughts are clear than to be bloated by the warmth of careless strangers.

Bodies that call themselves friends but know the meaning is *'only what you take from it.'*

WILL POWER

If you want it bad enough.
If you feel anything at all.

HAUNTER

I.

I feel completely separate from you on this swing, even though we're
in perfect synch.

Legs pumping blood pumping legs.

1. child's excitement.

2. caffeinated anxiety.

3. deep and welling resentment.

4. cutting absence.

II.

I am enlightened being, a true zen guru: nothing's real, the world's
a (bad) dream so I live my life like a jocular perversion, smile
full of teeth, bobbing side to side, with no flesh to frame it.

Your truth is breath, I trust, and I feed on it...so hunting, I
track the scent, close my eyes and keep haunting you.

THE CIGARETTE

The lie through her teeth like smoke from a cigarette, that she,
'cannot,' 'will not,' 'does not,' love him;
as poisonous and comforting as nicotine.

.2

One wall away, slouching over herself in the stairwell,
by the time she finishes that cigarette
she'll have forgotten how bad the sex was.

RITUAL

Endurance, the same trait she loves most about me, wastes her patience.
It will outlast her and it will outlast our love.

'*Only you,*' she prays; whispering into routine eternity.
preys

JEALOUSY

I.
I know there will always be other men.

II.
I have to believe in myself.
I have to believe for myself that love's no factory, and a few slips
won't mean the can.

α

As if proving your love to me would make me feel more secure.
As if you could make me more secure.

β

I'm never as threatened as you think I am.
I've always been good at burning bridges and never looking back.
Through my tears: pillar of salt.

INSECURITIES

I.

Afraid that what you're doing to me you're doing on purpose.

[No one can 'do' anything 'to you.']

Like the closeted homosexual most violently rejects his burning desires, I rejected mine.

"You..." I think, "make me feel things I don't want to."

Like jealousy
and fear
and the urgency of self-reliance.

II.

She silently falls in and out of love with me like it was sleep.

"Did you kiss someone who smokes cigarettes?"

No. I didn't kiss anyone.

"Why do you look guilty?"

Because I feel guilty you'd asked me that.

I'm convinced you did...

I brush it off.

She could still love me.

She still loves me.

She could still

She

loves me.

III.

—the venomous sting of your betrayal slithering in my ear and
promising me paradise.

EVOL DRUG

Afraid to dive in and meet Him.

Never enough trust to start over brand new,
and so endings—before they start

blame yourself,
make the same mistakes, with the same prospects,
and relapse
with Her again.

RICH GIRLS

I.

Laughing your jackal smile,
"I know you,"
you said
"more than you know yourself."

We have the same problem: you don't think you think you're better
than everyone else.

II.

Pacing in and out of a car window's frame, looking in black mirrors,
hoping next time I'm someone else.

III.

I treat everyone the same: treat you like a friend
trust you like a stranger.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN IT TO YOU?

Being surpassed by your love for a person,

then choking in the vacuum between you and that love.

THAT DAMN CAT

A draft in her room
from bay windows
to let fresh air in.

It comes in,
attracted to our heat
and takes her pretty song
out on a wave.

I'm lucky to be in here
and I'll be glad to take
her pretty song
out the crack
the cat dragged me through.

MORNING PRAYERS

Two sticks of incense
since she's left,

they burn in her honor.

The only light I
left on is the
cherry.

Burning midnight oil,
obsessing over tomorrow
(*today*) .

She's home
and tan,
she's mine.

Seconds pass
cinders splash
the tray fills,

like my heart
in my throat.

She's coming tomorrow
(*today*) .

IN EDEN

When I marry you
I want our house
to sound like you.

When you wake up
next to me,
I want to taste
how close
you are in me.

When I fall asleep
I want to dream
of all the places
I have been with you,

so my weak memory
can piece together
eternity.

Like a stained
glass steeple
time can pass through us
a portrait of love
tempered
but untamed.

'SUBS'

I.

on 7th a girl
dressed head to toe in leather
smiles herself naked for me.

II.

:Masturbating to fucking girls I don't know like I miss them

III.

With every judging tongue silenced, who wouldn't have enough love?
Where each word sung was it's own bodily expression.
But instead you keep it bottled up, put on the shelf, in a jar you
poke holes into sometimes.

IV.

There are certain things I don't tell people because of the way they
ask.

I can't tell if you think I'm a real person or not.
Entitlement is a venereal disease.

not that it's eating at me
or anything

pissing fertilizer on your lawn.

Your smile like your social circle,
it's unclean sterility

It's hands-free
voice commanded
totem

carved from the throats
thrusting knife to sculpt
sometimes with your smokey
hands

a light like a siren.

My Valkyried face
in awe of the weapon,
and on the other end
stoicism to be pit into bronze
for it's callousness. It's
untouched, virgin, sociopath y.

V.

the unenlisted
drop outs in drag
half-faggot deserters
need a place to put my conquest urge
apparently it is not gay sex.

here I am
after his cunt is gone

and you could bottom out here
all sanity like a shanty child
in some back alley miracle

my life has brought me to my cradle
to be lulled, finally, into the warm
blanketing hands of flawed self-love

eyes wide open
screaming to see
blind as a bat

a vampiric youth in
your old friends glow
a makeup fuck w no makeup
an apology to the ones you buried
in justifications. Mirrored in intellectualized drug use.

Because, yeah, of course
you fucking miss me and
I did too.

I'm holding my hand now, wailing,
like that wounded animal I was
but bleeding bleats
and untamed
whild
savaghe

the animal you want to poach but
whose beauty haunts you
like some ragged angel

bite my heels and try to drag
me down. We'll talk but,
you can't keep me.

/UNTITLED/

A kiss on the first date may as well be having fucked them,
is like plucking me, the flower I am, before I had half a life
to blossom and then trying to tape my head back on
like a kid-squeezed dandelion, except I'm the one I'm for.

Rubbed me under your chin to see if it'd show up yellow,
if it shows up yellow you're in love.

Never showed up yellow.

But then cancer is a kiss you never gave. I end up eating my love.
Burnt toast and high fructose 'spread.' There's no difference between
dominance and submission.
Power is just going through the motions and there's nothing more
pathetic than that.

Making myself more conversational. Making myself more commercial.

Gag me.

I want to be your dog.

I will be your muscle.

You can be my muzzle.

II.

It's a metaphor: Love is a prison you make for yourself
and sometimes someone else, where, for all of our sakes
you stand on the outside of the cage.

III.

Story about a girl who takes you home but won't sleep with you.
Don't slip her the pink. She's playing for pink slips.

Part where you both fight tears in your eyes in front of each other
after you make the mistake of telling her you like her. You have no
idea. She is disgusted but likes you too.

I ask her if she's alright because I know she's not.

Her beauty is a pleasure I, like every man, stroke with thought
and ceaselessly spit polish to a rusting decrepitude, to fake jewelry
stains.

Love like I'm stoned, clearly not much of a smoker, paranoid, keeps
talking anyway, running your mouth, says too much, she says just
enough, both proving yourselves to be proving yourselves. Proving
yourselves to have broken promises you both, mutually but alone,
made to yourselves.

'I need another copy.'

'You threw it away.'

Clavicles pouring themselves out as she crushes the ember in a
cigarette butt and smiles passive aggressively.

IV.

It's disgusting that it's so easy to forget to treat people like
they're going to die one day.
Instead we start small wars. The smaller the wounds the better.
We should all stay strangers so we can keep hurting each other on
purpose on accident.

V.

Trash compactor in the alley light like it's a halo in Touched By An
Angel.

Throw me away like the person I loved most in my life.

Take me for granted like I did with my exes.

Imagine it was something so it feels like there's the intimacy of a
history.

Press my buttons to find out I'm inside.

But then Karma only happens to people who believe in a punishing God
in a merciless world.

YOU ARE NOT COOL ALONE

you are not cool alone
eating a wet burrito across from
a Louis V. bag like its a person

getting free coffee from the village bar
where baristas fuck firemen and
police academy

who fuck open mic night performers
but are totally lost on you:
(you are totally lost on them)

your Thai silk, rose patterned
button up is overkill in a place where
comedy shirts and polos reign supreme
and there's still no one to impress
no matter how many friends you make

after your third hour in any one place
you're at the point of
outwearing your unwelcome

if you're not alone
you're going home w/ a girl
you're not sleeping w/

she asks if she can kiss you, like she doesn't
think you'll ever make a move, maybe because
she's 'traditional,' and she bought *you* drink

more excited by the nasa foam mattress
than the prospect—

she's a writer
she will run from you in person
21: runs from love

but will text to see if you've read
her story about a girl who kills her
boyfriend but...doesn't remember!

the whole time you're just thinking about
how nice it would be to be her dead ex-boyfriend
you will have a dream about your verbally abusive
ex-girlfriend (she looks like her...) naked
in a pair of running shoes
but the next day
you will stretch for the first time in months,
wake up from dreams
outside you'll see clearly,
shoes on telephone wires,
even cigarettes are beautiful
the morning has this effect on you

listening to 'The Employee is Not Afraid,' before work,

your gaze,
touched by everything, tears in your eyes
for once in your life
glad,
just to be alive

PURGATORY

Everything is an ends in itself.
Everything is an ends and itself.
Everything and is ends at itself.
Everything and an ends to itself.
Everything is and ends an itself.
And in an endself it is everything.

SMASH THE MAC

XVI.
GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT
GUILT NARCISSISM GUILT
GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT GUILT

XIV •

Sometimes I feel like an actor and that I can play anything my friends want me to be.

I can be everything—

backwards handstands, carnival flips, always smiling flush, flushed after too much, I work until I have no period blood.

I.

I am a new internet personality.

I can welcome everyone into my world—cosmic breadth, the wingspan of an entire universe—a cyber catalog of my successes.

Follow me on Twitter to experience my day to day triumphs against my own deeply suppressed futility, a sense I dull because of obvious evolutionary repercussions.

[Suicide.]

You can like and comment on my meals, my friends, my art, my interviews, all of which will display how convicted I am.

VI.

There's a devil in me
and I hide him when
they come around.

I imitate their smiles
to live beside them.

I memorize the best responses
to their favorite lines.

There's no one in here
except a bargain, blood
contracts—thumbprints.

I am [the/] a spirit.
I find them to haunt
and spill myself in:
shrieking alarm [!]

Some of us
will hang around forever
until you acknowledge we
exist.

She had to ask the
wherever-I-go-ghost
to go.

He'd been turning on
the stoves at night for
attention.

LITE OF MINE

He holds the five fires
and spasms it's lights
over the bones, shot like dice
chance/no chance/chance

all despite the offense.

II.

A computer fails to understand random,
it creates an algorithm and calls these patterns
(disjointed,) 'random.'

What's the difference between you, me, and *the computer*?

III.

'This little light o'mine,
I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine,
let it shine...'

IV.

God asks the Dharma
and the Destroyer of Worlds answers.

THEY'RE CALLED FRIENDS BECAUSE THEY CALL
THEMSELVES THAT

I was wasting time looking for love,
feeling ignored, wasting efforts
with doddering women, who, unlike the toddlers we resemble
thought love was something to look for.

Sometimes passing through arms (empty)
congratulations (empty) by hearts (empty)
and minds (heartless)
singing praises like
rattling tin cans after
the shotgun wedding,

supplemental self is all they can bear to
entertain.

'Soft. Stupid. Jealous. Shiftless. Spineless.
Weak.
Fearful,'
muttering (and only to myself)
(of myself) (the only self I' ll ever be with)

I remember:
*It's good I know these people, to know what a friend' feels like.
They' re called 'friends' because they call themselves that.*

UNITED EUNUCHS OF AMERICA

Done spending myself in the
love-sickness of the love-skeptical.

United Eunuchs of America

with your hearts polished to gold
only to be jaded by those who lift spit and soot
to deity,

who spend their nights feeding longing
with longing.

I understand.

Cutting parts out: my feelings are illegal
my love is my sin,

and all I make
is love
and I do
is love
and all I am
is love.

“JOHNNY APPLESEED IS A VIRGO, TOO.”

Breed love breathing
like dandelion's ejaculate
and they see my beauty
freckling greener grasses,

my hair an untamed mane of sunbeams
catching my raspberry highlights like through
a dream catcher
my white t, like a white flag, waving in the wind
my smile like a sunflower, suspended
on fences by the expressway

too busy to stop and smell the roses.

It's okay, I'm with me.
Sometimes techies forget they're from redneck towns
even when they live in a rundown, redneck town,
but take culture for granted because
(for them) California's good enough.

You can take
me for granted.

LET'S GET DIVORCED

I.

Time you've spent alone hung out
the door of our faces like wreaths

my insides like Christmas lights
strung along
feelings I left up late into summer
to forget about till next year, when
I'm turned on again.

II.

Like you, I hurt because I think about
marriage when I think about
anybody.

I get antsy, being me.

Let's elope.

Promise ourselves we can fix our parents
when I take you to live in that cottage,
or
porterhouse steaks, horses, Grandma's meatloaf
or
beards, beerguts, and boredom,
an unholy trinity you'll pray under,
like the oppressive light above
priests

at the end of Catholic's center aisle.
You will be the woman
who'd walk you down,
reliving her traumas,
swallowing her words,
nursing her cancers,
the ghost of her voice,
something about how it's best
to marry a man who doesn't know you,

there's more power in anonymity,
(where it's impossible for responsibility to breed.)

he'll keep you around for longer.

Children for insurance,
a lump in your belly for the
one on your eye,
a lump in your belly,
for the one in your throat.

/HANGUP THE HANGUPS/

obvious your gay best friend plays good
accessory to
emotionally vacant, stoner boyfriend
but,
like so many women,
collecting

this time
neuters.

Acting better than instinct
then pissing all over my virtue.

The security of double tied laces...

Write me a letter after your next pregnancy.

Write me a letter after your next abortion.

TAILOR MADE PAIN

Beyond contents as in—beneath them.

As in—what one holds in their hands, not seen potential.

As in—not what you have but who you are.



Obsessed with seeing the dark side of the moon, as if thought itself
was science to spoil it all for you.



You imagine everyone else to be happier than you are,
the same way everyone else imagines you to be happier than they are.



Taught my entire childhood that mistakes weren't accidents but
indications of your permanent failures as a person each one chipping
away at you only to leave a deformed bust, or worse, in your
addictions, dust.



You will not develop a self, alone.

Feral children telling healthy children their closets, attics,
apartments are the pique of social development—interacting with,
and sometimes without, mirrors.



Envious, staring in awe, hating yourself for not believing the myth,
yet desperate to understand, like the last four years of your Christianity.



“Everybody makes mistakes,” I told myself and that’s exactly when I
stopped making them.

What I wanted to say matters so much less than what I needed to say.



You make her a mirror she'll answer all your questions.

You make him a mirror he'll answer all your questions.



The realization you are everything you want to be;
the practice, manifesting it.



Strip clubs? I support single mothers.



Don't get mad enough to do anything about it.



Animals do not settle their differences.



—emotionally vacant, well-read, morons disguised as beautiful
intellectuals instead of validation addicts.



—guilty until proven innocent.



May our youth be forced into positions of muted rage and
self-righteous masochism.



Give me a reason to be angry, not the privilege
to understand why you are.

—which was actually the name for Pangaea after we
invent the time machine.



There's something seriously wrong with the culture: if you start on
stolen land don't be surprised if it ends with stolen lives.



People are born through horrifying effort. Though conceived on birth
control, I could not be completely unwanted.



A rotting pier; my rotting focus.



Animal is sinless because it is godless.



Too radical sometimes. The root of radical means root; if you're
hungry you don't go to the root, you go to what bears fruit.



Too excited for me, like I'm one of the stubborn poor ones, who if
shown the benefits of crawling up the class ladder, might just make
enough money to be marriage material.



Trust: taking a deep breath and lies as truths.



Because if I left you, you would have so many choices.

Take care of me: pets are easier than people.

■

Leave me: alone. With me: alone. By myself: less than both.

■

Why do I obsess over the details in love and gloss over them
everywhere else?

■

Only my needs are selfish.

■

Building a subculture is not the same as replacing the dominant one.

■

Art Historians: Be a fan or a professional. Don't be a professional
fan.

■

A suicide case: collapsed under a life heavy with...meaning.

■

Restless in bed, bloated with thought, my notebook like a faithful
chamber pot.

■

"You will always be around that kind of humiliation."

■

We wear out songs hoping to feel the same way we did the first time,

the way we wear out friends.

■

More tattoos than personality.

■

Steve Jobs: Martyr of the Technocracy.

■

I live in a place where touch has a stigma.

■

She humanizes patrons and patronizes me.

■

Even the handshake is a competition.

■

Wore my most gutter to the show and still felt like a Christian.

■

They call you buddy because they're worried you're gay.

■

Sometimes I fuck girls so they'll stay friends with me.

■

Hard to not know who looks down on you, exactly.

■

If you have no faith in humanity, it's because you have no faith in
yourself.



Their leaders rape children. Their followers worship rationale.

Ignoring your needs is, by no means, strength.



In the end you can only be one person: yourself.



In your fight against apathy you become it.

In your search for neutrality you become a perfectionist. In your search for perfection you become an extremist.



How it's made: H.I.V.



We choose truth over reality: as if personal space dictated a private existence.



The aphorist: proletariat-yuppie in the manufacture of new Americanisms.



You did not make the friends you think you did.



Stigmatize need—call that independence.



You can be greater than every indifference.

Passionless the speaking corpse lives on!



Nostalgia is a masochist's regret.



Jesus died so you could work for him.



The positive spin is so fucking nauseous.

Better an honest scourge* than a dishonest saint.

Imperialise what's left of us.

Nothing scarier than the privatization of ideas.

"This guy will do anything to engage someone except have something to say."

Selfishly, someone to look inside me.

someone to [want to] look inside me.

I have prophetic dreams but you're never in them.

There are needs too base to categorize as 'need'.
Love is in that category.

A WHORE NAMED CHASTITY

/LUV JUNKIE/

My new capability: traits my junkie heart withdrawals nostalgic for.

A longing for love: passive hunger, obese in resentments,
cutting down on tears

(no longer as sweet

 milked

 like blood out a tapped vein)

the shed weight is begging again.

II.

Mutant case of big fish small pond syndrome.

Pride has a way of showing all 5 faces in all 5 fires blank.

Sculptures need negatives,
love chisels at it but stone fruit leave pits.

Chew your food twice over feed the paste to your ruins faced enemy.
Fibrous mash twining from one mouth to another, money-shot seed,
parting itself.

The safety you feel in your anger stripped you naked with the loss
of your impotent righteousness, where self-immolating in protest of
Self, you' re the man with a lit Molotov at the candlelight vigil.

/A WHORE NAMED CHASTITY/

I belong to every woman I won't sleep with when
I'm with you.

I'm a whore for you: virtuous to everyone
but me.

I will sell honor for our security,
because I'm yours,
I'm everyone's.

I will walk chaingang with you,
prison break
into our love,
where
Freedom is it's own consequence.

/MASTURPIECE/

I'm throwing it away, w/ you, like factory faulty rubbers, brimming
with me, a puddle of fake apologies, not-caught-slipping specimen
for your pain(t)s to nurse to here and now.

Painted like your favorite framed, knit hobo clown, my mouth smeared
with left overs of your kiss to make-up, after the last fight, which
I would realize, is our last fight I smile myself [watching my own
portrait, as if in my vanity (mirror) (i cracked)] broken down
to breaking into tears

till emptying a feral grin,
terrified and over sentimental,
crying at the sight of fire is Mowgli,

burnt by the earnestness,
gagging
slump-crumpled, back into cavernous blindness,
where even breath echoes.

/POST AGE/

I.

Dressed to kill, tonight: patterned pants, heeled boots, and you
told me you liked the sad puppy sticker on the front of a notebook,
a blood hound, you'd ask me if I drew it, I would be disappointed
to tell you no, no, I 'didn't draw it' but 'I wish I did.' and you
said, 'I like it.' And then I would stare at the red in your hair
while you talked with my brother in the kitchen.

This is where I should lay out my feelings for you, conveniently cut
& dry, for the safety and sterility of my notebook, but of course
would instead text you during your most vulnerable times
(between 10 & 12) where you're thinking about it too—but with
someone else.

II.

Puerto Rico: the only place in America where you have to speak, good English:

Please—give Tere an hour of liberated silence in which to scribble herself out to me like love is a foreign language and she has to learn it all over again and explain it to me on paper. Not because she actually forgot—just because it comes out better that way.

Make that hour feel like a prayer or confessional, where the obligation is forgotten in the rhythmic chanting of soft paper under hard lead or the purr of a ball point rubbing up against the legs of her 'after-a-long-day' so she can feel a hiccup of ticklishness up her calf, give her goosebumps from goose-egg.

III.

"I feel like you have to be dumb to be that in love."

"I want to be dumb."

"Everybody wants to be that dumb."

"I am that dumb."

IV.

becoming a better me for me.
becoming a better me for you.
becoming a better me for me.
becoming a better me for you.
(no petals left.)

V.

Option one, suicide: emptier and louder more often.

Option two, the ox that carries the most, cries least:
more substantial, softer, rare like jewels or
girls who write back.

SOME OTHER PLANET

A bombed out suburb, like some other planet.
Stone grey granite and life taken for granted.
Cabin fervor in the bones of techy domestics,
who promise to mind their own business, if
it's rednecks setting the 4th of July leftovers
until somebody's dog kills another body's dog in a
panicked act of instinctual recall. Where
the pets feel safer than the people.

The complexes, next to real houses,
stained like Nagasaki's silhouettes
with the smell of pet stores and cigarettes.
In front of one given a loveable family-style
home, a sculpted lump of rust resembling,
a lion, a royal conduit for an MGM yawn,
leeching the color out of a nearby palm,
only one head taller than me, like a ghost
would take a mans breath--

somewhere this summer, sucked dry like
Slurpees by anemic-thin highschoolers,
fitted in fitted caps, as if their souped up Hondas
were sponsored by the energy drink brands
embroidered into them. (This boy was brought
to you buy Monster.)

Dying of thirst diabetic sun decides
to burn through tye dye sky, a nauseous

cotton candy
and us, noxious.

More to us Americans than meet the eye.
People wouldn't notice, though.
They're boarding up their windows,
locking the doors, and raining sirens
on anyone sane enough to want to leave the house
screaming

accented death in the rubble of martian rock
replacing our lawn. (Pumice-stone.)
Because we learned 70 years too late
that lawn has been 70 years obsolete.

CROONING NEUTER

(-)

You try to carve out a little place to exist in unmolested by thoughts of another.

(+)

I love the way the pieces work together and how you can exist because of all your trashy, post modernist, friends and their shitty little scene, because even hating you is a part of my blessed existence.

DEFEATIST

Stigmatize people you'd never approach in real life so people are just as discouraged as you.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

I.

She fell on the ice with my younger brother inside of her and she thought to herself that she hoped for miscarriage.

What was it that made her keep it? God The Father or My Father?

I can only imagine what she thought of me.

II.

An impression of himself in scribbles, strokes of automata, the Dadaist is philosophically rooted in the psyche of a broken family—his business is senselessness composed to be presented: bottled water.

PITTANCE

The problem is that we are constantly restraining ourselves.
Existence begins at the end of Personality.

You want the world, it doesn't see, to perceive your virtue.

You act only when you are certain, so never get what you want,
and feel sorry for yourself.

ARCHAISM

Man as an animal will demand a beginning, as he has purged himself
of it: a means of seeing now.

Self is seen as need: man wired to Self, wires itself to need self-
ishly.

Getting under your skin, Self can only live in you, parasitizing and
parroting always:

"I can only cannibalize purpose, and (you can) record my progress."

"Crystal clear," and as fragile, an element synthesized before al-
chemists could forge it.

Metallurgy for a heart of gold: sacrificing the priceless beating.

II

In an attempt at finding cultural universals I have abandoned behavior
specific to my time and place—I am barely human.

Having sabotaged myself by leaving behind behaviors specific to any
one time and place—the feral living.

Counter: the human-animal is maladaptive though the human-animal is
the ultimate predator.

The truth behind civilization is that it's the total inversion of
the natural world, surviving only on specifics, on the necessary

skills in the here and now and annihilating history and nature.

Congratulations: the cities have swallowed up the villages
;like you forgot to spill blood on the frame, and it's Passover:
your aeon is coming.

III.

I had lost myself that year in lucid dreams that have no physics—
lawlessness is gravity— that I could commit to.

I found what I lost potential like vitamins during a pissing I had
with a competitor I never lose to.

Goliath is a mass of people I saw when I saw their white faces
cinched with smiles zipped tight like the top of a dimebag.

.IV

In a past life I was a rich foreigner, I emigrated to America for an
even greater fortune, then I died and woke up a poor white American.

I live in between these two lives. I have dreams of the future.

I hope to wake up in death and understand either one but by Karma's
logic, had I been good, I wouldn't have been born at all.

NOSTALGIA IS A MASOCHIST'S REGRET

One day you'll call me. You'll be the first one.

Walls will freckle in artificial suns by the time it takes you too.

I will get an ulcer from all the thoughts of you I drink at my desk.

I will fill notebooks with thoughts of our potential only to be dis-
posed of or hidden in hardwood, tell tale, could fit a person—in a
choice-illiterate Utopian society— and I had a reason to hide you. Or
someone to hide this refuge from.

Embarrassed by the sheer act of will it is to keep you in my memory as
opposed to my childhood— must have replaced it with you, and how you
make me feel.

All the best parts of forests and baseball and skinny dipping instead
of showers, and fireflies on the walk home, and glowing war paint from
their guts, and you were like school to me, in the margins of an edu-
cation.

Hoping that the stars on one night would be swallowed up by light
pollution, and pollution pollution—Los Angeles is a good place for
people who want to die.

You're the girl I write my wills to, my suicide notes are in your mail-
box. All my sappiest truth drips from it. Bled out into your ears with
all the strength it takes to put a cigarette out. [Under your heels,
on the sole of your boots, on the soles of your soul.]

And I know you're older—and you're even older now. It's not just that
the world bows to that walk, or that Marin is either meth or empire
and you're neither—and that fucking slob you called a boyfriend— you
were so tired of being what makes a man lucky.

You can count on me. *"I'll love you like every man before me never could."* (hahaha...) I'll make you wish—follow me—if even with your eyes. Then you can point, brush your thoughts over me with a white finger, call me out, a wonder, and 'how bright' I am and 'how fast' I'm gone, you can wish, you can pray on me with your eyes and watch me reigning down just one more time, like a nest of hungry hearts, your party will chirp slack-jaw-awe down to the blonde one, Dee—

INTEMPORIAL

At high noon in summer: looking down a small hill, Dolores Park, rollercoaster's length, where Chiara would be ~~walking~~ standing me up, suburban hopeful, any second now.

[RECEIVES TEXT.] "DON'T THINK I CAN MAKE IT. SORRY."

Because she knows I'm crazy, she can tell the way I lean with a plastic cup of wine in my hand and the plastic red lean in my voice...substantial intention. Anemic posturing. Eager to listen.

Grass in spinning curtsies, unwilling—like skirts over vents—my tears welling up, privately, like morning dew some other season, for every filthy hipster here to feed on

(race car drivers don't watch the wall, race car drivers watch the road)

publicly, looking over gutters filled with shattering glass reflecting more to me in morse—beaded, rolling blackouts under halogen.

A diamond at hilltop in an unblemished semi-precious moment—that is so temporary— clinging blanket-consolation: that I am *"so rare."*

UNTITLED

I.

It never turns out how you think but that doesn't make you feel any worse.

It never turns out how you think it will and your milk white feels so soft, like Lily Petal...

I'd seen it before—in repeat in my head. These were not the words, or the voices, or the touch—these were not at all the pangs or places. [Trashy. Parent's couch.]

You and I put a perimeter around our existences, our surreality handled neatly, with the clenching hands of crane game prizes, wringing claw.

We dust old shelves and find new words for Silverfish-eaten chapters, more important than ever.

This is the sound of love: talking about itself but not turning in on itself.

It recognizes fear replaces it with life, kissing in time yr breath is a feeding orgasm I am I on[to] you—and I have never loved you | [as much as I do] | until now.

.II

The relationships you have with men make me hate myself.

DESTINY

Where destiny is Space Mountain, you're strapped in and you can't see anything except some flung paint in black light like stars— except this time, it's like Water World— you can barely feel anything pushing through a murky swimming hole of opportunity and that would be the sense of direction I have, where all life changing experiences are happening purely by hoping— just to follow that feeling, tossing in an orange floaty and maybe bumping into destiny.

SPIRITIST

My spirit animal, the hyena: I can live for days off scraps.

I can live forever on your fat— I know life's a desert, so I'm happy when I catch something that smells like you.

I can drain marrow from your bone— I'll chew on it for days till it's as soft as gum, leaving nothing but the mess behind.

ff COMPOSITIONS

You put a fence around your heart to funnel in the crowds, outside rubbernecking in on them about the retarded white tigers. You're breeding them—and so many are yr failures you selfishly believe

this mutant

a masterpiece by nature.

I am not looking forward to them anymore—I don't see their faces and imagine lives.

I try empathy, rehumanization. I dehumanize myself in balance.

"You are your future."

"The future is now, if you want it."

"The future is not a problem!"

[The future is coming if you don't want it.]

...fearless in approaching the face of no-future. Fearless in approaching the faceless—
an ambitious Crest® brand smile
beaming—

taxidermied—
from a slobbering striped mongoloid
harvested for a Chinese charm-tea.

.II

You forgot about the time you accidentally had pedophilic thoughts
about how you were capable of having pedophilic thoughts.

—

it ended in visuals • • • what does that make you?

—

my paranoia: my chalk circle

- Your father wants to fuck your girlfriend, who says, to herself,
- “Your father wants to fuck you,” (?)

because Dad has dreams of fucking her dead mother
who is her dead ringer.
The sister misses out—*Dad's never pinned her to a couch.*

“You have the same dreams, motherfucker!”

Protect them

at all costs

from

‘_yself.’

.III

Horror vacue: your fear of blank space
drawing on today's dread of anything relaxing
for fear the police dogs are sniffing at your door
for the day you spent
stoned, (to and for yourself)
you missed the call from work and now they're breaking down the frame,
like Samson chained by guilt with the birds in his
outed
gooey eyes.

Pedestrian without forward movement,
civilians less human than Sharks.

If you think you have a moral qualm
you're a function—

.IV

If I sat here and really stretched myself, if I really thought about you hard, in attempt to understand you, I would probably still hate you. There are limitations to sympathy.

Though we have discovered our greatest evolutionary bond besides endorphins released on orgasm: mirror neurons—still, when a white person watches black person's hands get stabbed there is less neurological response—says the Lab Coat Clergy.

So...I stop thinking about you. I stop dictating my time around you and what you value. But once that slide is removed, a blank backlight sits still. It's humming makes me nauseous. Death and the light at the end of the tunnel are the same feeling: and therefore the same thing.

People believe they can think themselves out of situations. My father for example —is approaching impoverished schizoid. Overwrought with the thoughts means you wring emergency supply down, dry and pact. You are plugged—as soon as you unplug life support. I think therefore I'm fucked.

*I stop thinking about you and think about the next person. Hate is replaced with infatuation. Feelings of desire and security emerge. I consume a woman's emotions like I consume her body as pornography. I rationalize your lifestyle with my non-judgmental prejudice towards my own. I avoid pain in every sense.

You imagine fucking her—you feel like you should. Silence is death. Blank space is where the devil gets in. Fear is a motor of bleeding white noise. White noise is as comforting as the recurring repression of excitement at your child's (erotic) nibble at your breast.

If you believe the pleasure on both ends simultaneously coincidence then you are a Christian, and I hate Christians.

[Coda at Paragraph 4.*]

f—We deny ourselves ourselves for ourselves.

ff—We all exist in a vacuum, mutually exclusive.

Nothing But God

.l

In A Fit

//

My determination to leave the village is in direct proportion to the feelings of futility it bred. Santa Clara's a town that, had it not been making trickle down money from its urban hubs, could easily be mistaken as Salem as much as it was seen from outsiders as a signpost of prosperity. We knew it wasn't: witnessing out a 9x9 grid-ded window, from across the lot, a burglary, where a hooded figure darted into a cage-link door and ran across the only light on in the invaded house. He ran out, with something in his hand. A thin dripping trail of blood, snailing behind him.

An invalid picking a fight in the complex parking lot.

Enough domestic disputes--the sirens running up and down our streets like jockey's, like race dogs, like vermin look for heads to break, lead pipes to busy themselves chewing, Karen Drive was a place regularly combed by police.

The S.W.A.T. team was called in once for a suicide attempt gone hostage situation. Where some Marilyn Manson fan pressed a gun to his mother's head swearing, 'I'll kill her for fuck's sake, I'll pull this trigger if these cops don't fucking leave. Just let me do it in peace.' The entire block and myself rubbernecking, watching without enough fear, like it was daytime drama.

On independence day a gunshot I whispered to myself, like a mantra, was 'only a firework.' Out of my window I stared at the lights swelling into the scene. All I could see was a pair of Jordan's soaked in blood poking out from behind the tires of a cable van across the street. Safe in here, you think to yourself. It has nothing to do with you. It was just a man with a heater on a bicycle, left out for too long. Are we lonely out here?

At a certain point a even a pig's baton is touch.

Living in the suburbs but never really invited.

The corner next to the record player, with a joint and an introvert: my neighborhood.

The pretty girls would sometimes stop in for the novelty, giving you rides for artisan coffee at the outdoor mall. You never went anywhere without them and that's when I started to get sick of myself, when I hated every woman I got to know who paid attention.

Animals go blind living in the dark for so long.

///

My car broke down and I was sleeping in it for the week I was waiting move in. I stayed in the area I first parked in, paranoid because it was stuffed like a pinata with what I belonged to—my hereditament: clothes, a mattress, and my house, a car. Offered seamless transfer to one of my job's original retail locations.

I met him at a Starbucks®, the cheapest coffee shop I could choose populated enough to avoid my own murder, which seemed a sensible concern after my ex-girlfriend's classmate was raped and murdered meeting with the infamous Craigslist Killer. I sensed he was insane but like many determined people, I ignored my instincts. The science minded are the most vulnerable to lapses in logic. A mind's contents: the weakest thing you can rely on. The projection of your own equality into the world is not insurance from a snake eats snake reality. I was either going to be hung up, decapitated on the fence of nearby development, body winding down cage-wire like a gnarled root of a nearby tree, or going to have a room in Santa Monica.

He sat in front of me awkwardly wearing a yellowed white -t under a heather grey zip up hoody. His appearance was disheveled, he had beady eyes, thick black hair, and 5 O'Clock shadow—kept asking for the deposit.

"I want to see the room first."

He shadowed me to an ATM where I pulled the money and flashed it. Then I followed him to the complex and was told to wait outside. There was a conflict inside, a yelling fit, with me embarrassed, flushed, and nauseated. I summoned all of myself and dragged myself by the collar to the front door, hammering on it. The ex-tenant of my room was answering the door. The master tenant pushed forward, past him. Off more drugs than he was on, I imagine, he swore to me everything was fine. I spent the night inside of his room, him telling me, calmly, "Sorry, he's just...frustrat-

ed. He's supposed to be out of his room already. He should be gone by tomorrow."

Nerve-burnt, totally alone, and without refuge, I accepted the cartoon's offer of spending the night but couldn't sleep. My instincts, which I consciously push aside, allowed me to tap into a determination for safety that kept me wired until 4 a.m. Stupidly, I watched Blade Runner in its entirety. I finally fell asleep, waking at 6:47 a.m. from a nightmare of an Asian Lieutenant strangling me. I moaned into the room, it was empty now.

//

Scouring Craigslist® was an act of desperation. There had been warnings posted:

BEWARE! ROOM SCAM, SANTA MONICA!

Do not trust room listing for room on Wilshire. I responded and arranged to supply deposit when I found out there was no room available. The room was occupied! Then never saw him again!!!!!!

I went back to my car to wait and confront the thief.

I called the police and waited for news. Staying in the area a few days before he was scheduled to start working again. I got a message from the master-tenant who assured me 'the situation is fine, it's only a matter of time.' The police told me the same thing. Unless I could prove anything was stolen, there was a breach of contract, or if there was a disturbance at the house.

I was spending time in places with free Wi-Fi where there's always a hissing espresso machine prodding me into tears before the next game plan. Fighting hard for the safety of anonymity "Nothing to see here..." as I cried in coffee shops.

It's the suburban fear that keeps their children suburban, poverty and psychopathology are the mainstays of the city. Debauchery, open mindedness, and excitement were side effects. The cities were okay to build yourself up in but no place to stay any longer than you needed. It was the threat of a child learning too quickly and in learning too quickly be estranged from the world it inhabited.

Curiosity is perversion; anyone displaying too much emotion is a threat. Curiosity is an interest, interest a vulnerability, vulnerability like walking in on a roach crawling out of your drain. After the lights turn on and the screams have finished tripping in waves across the porcelain, you put him out like a cigarette.

You could be him—scuttling back into the sink. Get what you want when they throw their fit, know they could spend their lives terrorized by your existence...but adapting to your surroundings too much was considered maladaptive itself. In a world so transposable, inconsistency was adaptation.

//

The sun's purple over my rightful complex. I notice a letter tucked under my windshield wiper, and begin slipping a phallic forefinger into the soft lips of the envelope when red and blue lights were barking in my periphery. The siren sounded in chopped taps as it drove into the driveway almost up the stairs. A shouting match that slowly came into ear's focus. He was there, holding a mattress over his head, prepared to throw it over the balcony if the tenant stayed any longer. He'd promised.

"Goddamn it! You fucking creep—I just moved in here!"

The police leapt out of the car and walked up the stairs. The white man with his hands around his belt, pulling up his pants, his elbows bent at a 45° angle. Leading the patrol with his puffed up chest followed by a black woman with a short braided hairstyle and baton out, clapping it, classically, into the palm of her free hand.

"What's the problem here?"

The white cop shouted to interrupt the fit by threat of force alone. Authority is a threat by force. The man threw the mattress off of the balcony and the black cop kept her gun on him. They rushed up the stairs to finally detain the delusional pathy. What about being sheltered too long can drive a man into the determination it takes to stay locked away all day in his room, away from the work, away from the sun, away from the fair?

We're satellites inspecting one another; constantly praying we can make contact. Communication is so high risk we have a barrier at all times. We don't like hands on

interactions, we imagine the heat and pressure to be enough to burn our skin, so feeling itself, heat and pressure, human touch is alien. The police are social lubricant; they acted as a physical manifestation of the modern world's practical material mindset.

The pigs grabbed him and dragged him down the steps, he was laid out like a carpet being slid to the bottom, where then, like a blow up clown, he was beat into submission, fists raining down on him, with a pigs baton following as an accented up beat. He was gurgling blood, slowly pushed up and out by a spasming tongue, loose teeth spiraling in and out of the mess in his mouth.

I watched it all, running immediately to offer a concerned testimony. I felt I was watching my life in perfect cell division, repeating itself, squared after. Existence in the Nth, functioning on artificial intelligence, intelligence itself. The suburbs are following me, my suburban is showing, this was a mistake. I turn on the radio, leaning back in my seat listening to the slow churning beat until my vision blurred and the tears stream across my eyes. Vacantly burning for vacancy while burning inside sunbeams. The sky was red again, my vision red, the sound closing in on me, all around me a crushing presence, the present. The positive would say plans change and to keep moving forward. Even though my Shakespearian fate is screaming for me to submit to the weight of homelessness, no matter how safe I really am in reality.

I closed my eyes, which coughed up their last bouts, tears sputtering, like the death rattle of my Saab, I heard it die, turned the key and heard it momentarily be resurrected. My initiation—my primal rite. It was all as black as life before birth, its gestation the big bang—everything stems from this moment.

Father Figure

Trapped in Barstow, California for the next hour, he was thinking of his arrival, somewhere else. Trying to focus on staying in the lines, he thought of the last time he had seen his son, the feeling he hadn't seen him since 'staying in the lines' was advice he'd given him. That's how Taylor always imagined his children. The divorcee hadn't seen his children in three years even though he lived in the same state now. His eyes on the road were both vacant and burning. Taylor's son once dated a girl Taylor was convinced was a heroine addict, a woman he strongly disapproved of, she had the same exact look he has on now. It's the same look though, it's like the train wreck of a heart—something gasping it's last breath, stuttering it's fucked death rattle, before flying off the rails in silence and slow motion. It was the only water running; the head was empty except for traffic lights:

Scrolling through Google image results for 'waif,' like through a Viewmaster®, his mind held up to traffic. The 3D Rollodex® for a reminder, both of how he felt and how he couldn't admit to himself, but knew, that his children felt. His heart was burping up emotions but it stopped pushing blood years ago—it was an ant race of shifting lint through his arteries.

//

He was out of the shower now, staring at a hotel bible in a half-pulled drawer buttoning a striped shirt up. It wasn't that he couldn't imagine a different way of dress; it was that Taylor's life was full of Sunday's bests three times a week. Taylor had age on him; at 52 it wasn't enough to topple a deep youthfulness. His Grandfather left him a receding hairline, as baldness skips a generation.

He looked from The Bible to the dresser mirror and stretched his neck, exposing himself to himself. Grey chest hairs reminding him ironically of youth. Leaving the

top two buttons loose he picked up a golden chain from next to the hotel Bible and placed it around his neck, framed perfectly. A cross dangled.

He picked up the Bible, such an ancient tool of wisdom where all points were a point of entry. This mimicked man's stance at our point in the food chain, tertiary predators who can access the food web at any point—the most enduring and highly evolved predator. Tarot Card readings where Luck was God's will. He opened The Book.

¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

He closed The Good Book, touching his pendant, his forefingers scanning its rocky surface. The emaciated body of Christ running into his fingerprints. He opened the drawer and neatly tucked the Bible in. Then he moved to the his bedside, sitting with perfect posture. He lifted the phone and started dialing a number. The phone rang, Taylor was nervous. The phone rang again. Taylor opened his vacant palm as if there was something to read. The phone fed his ear a computerized ring. Then a silence, almost with a click.

"We're sorry—"

His son's voice came through the static, "Jordan Stookey."

"—is not currently available, leave a message after the tone. To leave a call back number press 9."

A sustained beep sounded and Taylor could now feel the pressure of him on air. He was good at writing letters; he always wanted to be a writer.

"Hey, Jordan," he started, with the weight of disappointment in his voice, pressing into the receiving parties receiver. A whisper of what it could be—

"I'm in Los Angeles, and I've got some time to see you, my son. I'm heading to an event later, so call me when you get this. I love you. I'm so proud of you, Jordan."

He put the phone down after a second of breath. He laid himself down on a completely untouched bed. The accents, different shades of browns, framed the sheet in a different way. Each line an opportunity to see it's blank beige in a new way. He leaned into the headboard, both hands behind his head. Then he turned off the light. The blinds already closed still leaked a small trace around Taylor. His chest rose and

sank. He closed his eyes.

//

The blood rose to his face when he heard the phone grating against its casing, it growled until Taylor found his eyes rolling back from out of their sleep and he reached for the phone.

“Hey, dad.”

Like he was eating, “H—ello.”

“How are you?”

“I’m good! I’m in the Los Angeles area, I was wondering if you wanted to meet up.”

“Yeah, sure. I can show you around Santa Monica. Where are you?”

“I’m closer to downtown.”

“Alright, I’ll get ready now—it’ll probably be an hour.”

“Okay. That sounds great.”

“Alright, see you soon, dad.”

“Love you, Jordan.”

There was a pause.

“Love you too. See you.”

The phone clicked.

Taylor put down his receiver.

//

.III

Communion / Uncommon Unions

“You’re driving now?”

My father had never seen me in the driver’s seat before. He had never taught any of his children to drive so it was magic he could be given a tour of a town he knew for so long. My eldest brother was born in San Diego and Los Angeles was an area so full of life and culture; he couldn’t help but stay for weeks at a time. For being bred in the sticks, dad had a cultural understanding deeper than some of the most educated urban-blooded peoples. Maybe it was the Frank Sinatra he had been exposed to opening his eyes to a world of lights, brooding with potential that both attracted and frightened him. In this weird way, he was a star-struck hopeful.

His upbringing had given him beauty—the gifts that only nature can nurture in man. It’s stillness as vast as traffic jams in Los Angeles, blackouts in Oakland, the satisfaction of feelings of belonging in a place so new and unnatural to you that you thrive in it. Some of us, in sink or swim, always swim, while the passivity that comfort breeds makes even the fiercest minds go soft—clay in the hands of context. Loveless labors made daily that by sheer force bore the spirit into absolute submission. Deserts where even the most stimulated—the most introverted—are sawed through like butter.

“It’s great to see you...my son.” he smiles and a puts a hand on my shoulder, adding comically a dramatic my son but mostly out of an sincere guilt and insecurity, a reminder that I’m,still, his son.

I smile.

“It’s great to see you too, it’s been a long time.”

A motor was lulling.

“What’re you doing down here?”

“Oh—I’m here for work, building the business.”

I’d been distanced for so long the phrased triggered no recall.

“With the Tribune?”

“No this is a separate thing, it’s an event. I was wondering if you wanted to come

with me.”

I was stone faced, looking away and when turning forward, smiled.

“What is it?”

“It’s some speakers from around the country. I’d really like it if you came.”

Brevity was pressing hard enough to press sweat through my collar.

“Maybe...what is it?”

“What do you want to do right now?”\

“Show me around—it’s your neck of the woods. What would you want to do right now if you could do anything you wanted to?”

The sun cleared even the South’s infamous and suffocating smog. It was cut through, clearing way to a sapphire blue, tickled by the feathers of tall palms, the frame of any sight. You could only look up. In so many cities you felt consumed by your sight, weighted by greys in complexes and businesses burying you to only feel concrete and your eyes, the pressure to watch with a fearful eye counting cracks in pavement, as if open eyes and awareness weren’t only impossible but uninteresting. Cities claustrophobic, heated, air like the breath of its occupants. Death in every bored conversation—everything sounds like a mutter, bodies dragging themselves back-shuffle into the safety of chain link front gates. Door knobs handled by so many before so nothing was old enough or new enough. You could never break a space in or feel the history of it before you.

What was it that brought so many people to the same crowded spaces? It wasn’t the immigrants that came with gifts to offer it, wasn’t the shining promise of commerce—it was a myth built on the rusted bones of predecessors, the myth passed on in whispers, part by commercialized local histories and part by the settlers, the new money sucked all of the primordial talent up and is pissing it’s remnants all over territories new money live in. Centuries ago it was acceptable but here and now it was the glue of a myth, passed on from the suburban satellites of interest and like a dime bag, hand to hand in a cycle making every major city something like Hollywood.

The hotbed San Francisco used to be, its political and artistic history was gone. The women who made it were buried. They could not afford to be buried there anymore. Sid Vicious, arrested for public intoxication said it all, his hypocrisy as a pillar of punk:

“You can’t arrest me! I’m a fucking rock star!”

In the end even the infamous are seeking fame. Recognition in a society where on some fundamental level, the most immediate, it did not exist. In the end everyone just wanted to be an icon in a world of symbols—even if it meant being a rune, a hieroglyph—anything but nothing. Anything but what we are right now. A goal so huge and unattainable it seemed specific without a specific plan, just need. That’s what brings us together—need. No one doesn’t have it.

“We can go the Boardwalk and then Venice and check out the shops. Whatever you want. What’re you feeling like?”

“Are you hungry at all?”

“Yeah, you want to get some Pho?”

“Pho?”

“It’s...a Vietnamese style soup.”

“Jordan, do you remember when you were really little and I took you with me on a trip from San Diego to San Francisco. You were probably, 8.”

I remember it, vividly, as the youngest and least traumatized by childhood. Repression was never a necessary survival skill. I had always been the most proud of the pride and my rebelliousness left me unbroken through all the attempts at caging me in God the Father’s discipline. As family keeper, I remembered with both eyes the most vital parts of us. I gave them all of my attention. Seeing more good than bad naturally I was hero to my four brothers who in childhood severely rejected me as an other. My annoying, clingy, tendencies drove them away. After succeeding, the family motto was, W.W.J.D., ‘What would Jordan do?’

“Yeah I remember. I found the journals you kept before we left for California.”

“I wish I would’ve kept those, I think I threw a lot of that out...”

“It even had drawings I did in the car.”

“It was so long ago.” he said.

“So, you’re hungry?”

//

I stopped in a well-lit parking lot we had to pay for in West Hollywood. Dad got out of passenger's side and I followed after, leading him down to an animated Pho bowl pouring itself out in neon. It was packed so I asked the waitress for a time.

"For two? About 15 minutes."

"Lucky..."

Outside the weather simulating a damp room. Dad was sweating, the sunburn in his face had time to calm, he was still swollen, but better.

"So what's it like to finally be out of your mom's place?"

Dad was rubbing everyone the wrong way with a speech about how 'the boys needed to earn their own keep now' that we were older, last time he visited California, before his life-affirming move of familial desperation. Wondering what 'the boys' were still doing living with their mother, though at the time to oldest was 20. Dad was a strong believer in the myth that everyone got what they deserved, and that there was no explanation except for lack of willpower for a lack of anything you needed. Both financial and psychological bootstrapping were his core beliefs, as an in denial, at risk, schizophrenic, and ex-alcoholic. His children who had failed to meet the standard disappointed him.

Good intentions: really just another way to conquer. Dad never made a full child support payment since the divorce, and Mom, used to doing everything herself, felt hopeless, taking no legal action. Her helplessness was the rich girl syndrome found in nihilistic women who see no better future and who's longing to help themselves, undermined, turned into sympathy for others. Literally translated—pathetic. Mom was well cared for in her youth, in better conditions than she'd ever had in America. Feeling sorry for others whether or not they can afford it. Helplessness and a dream deferred made men iron fists of authority, domestic fascists, women: paper millionaires, golden ring prostitutes, or philanthropists.

Dad's failures were both as a human and man. He had somehow failed to keep the woman of his dreams with his plan of burdening her with children and his moral rigidity offered a weapon against his children who out of laziness he also felt he needed to control. He couldn't be too involved as he was already so wrapped up in his empty aspirations for a generic success.

But with me, he was bored enough of it to pick up again, and in me tried to find the children he'd abandoned. He had left them and now he could do them the favor, coming back to save them from their fatherlessness.

He would write me letters of apology but we never answered his phone calls and all his letters were the same, except they took twice as much effort to complete. He took every chance he had to instill his values because if he didn't have paper, if he couldn't have publication, he would live on in his genes forever. But no one's genes are theirs anymore, in fact, the amalgamate belongs to no one. A child is brand new, it hasn't previously existed in this combination before, the benefit of sexual reproduction is that, unlike plants, there is so little of us in something made up of so much of us. The apple doesn't fall far from tree, but people eat apples and their lungs don't shit oxygen.

I was careful to answer the loaded question, smiling in disbelief.

"Well, it only took me three years dad."

//

We made it to a table, following the empty, shaking skirt, to glasses half-filled with condensing ice water. She guided us to our respective seats with an outstretched arm that whipped at its fingertips and lit our chairs. Planting ourselves, tucking ourselves excitedly into the edges of a chair. Once we fit, the waitress handed us the main menu and the drink menu, a menu Dad handled with a fearful respect, his hesitation reminiscent of the weight of a Bible. It filled his palm like a scale and it slowly dropped to the table.

Opening my menu while the sound of hooves clicking trailed away into a swinging door, behind it, cracking glass. There were televisions in the corners of the room; all muted but almost as bright as the tropical aquarium lights. I sat in the booth side, looking at a small plate perfectly blank on the black marbled desk, with green and mild greys swirling in itself, the murk of a simulated naturalness. Past my hands that seem more brown than ever in this light and up into my father's face, unavailable.

The memory of throwing ice down dad's t-shirt, tucked in, during a drive down from Michigan back to Indiana; he was selling something then too. Or shouting at

him in front of a television, across the cottages mangy, spotted carpet in between the ends of the ratty futon. Accents of gnarled, splintering, wooden walls. Shouting as loud as I could to wake up this 6 foot tall, tank of a man from his blue-light high, stoned after the hours of just as vacant factory work. It wasn't his fault.

Dad kept a tin tub of Bag Balm®, whose tagline, "every farmer's friend," was a medicated hand balm for the strongest and most damaged hands. Farmers after hours of milking cows end to end would have callouses for palms, a new hardened skin would create a permanent pair of gardening gloves for hands. He was never all there. It was how I imagine Jericho, if I yelled loud enough I could break down the walls but after Dad snapped out of it, I felt the little 70 year old wooden casing that kept them together in one place. It would all fall, leaving the sides blown out and roof sunken in. Like years of tears no one was willing to shed had left them waterlogged. Like our lives had sat out, stagnant for too long, the way a carton of milk's sides start to bulge in a hot car.

"Dad!

Dad. Dad. Dad. Dad."

He snapped out of it again but didn't look away. He made a sound like a chopped hiss before saying, slowly in his wooden voice,

"This Boston Bombing stuff...it's just...sick."

"What happened?"

"These...terrorists, right here in America, decided they were going to bomb the finish line at the Boston Marathon."

"Oh, I thought that was unmotivated."

"No, it was Terrorists. They said they were reacting to America's presence in Afghanistan."

"I don't blame them," I said flippantly, not realizing that what would get me out of the conversation with most friends was dragging me into conflict with my father.

He knew they dressed different in California, he didn't really think that anyone he liked could have a different opinion than him, or a different sexuality, or different politics. If he thought about all the varying existences he would live his life trembling at just the thought of his own being, existing among so many others, uncontrollable and out of reach.

"You don't blame them?"

"It's stupid to use symbolic gestures in a group of two to attempt to make a major defense of Islam—specifically in a nation as apathetic as ours."

"It's disgusting. It doesn't make any sense, murdering innocent people."

"—no one's innocent here really."

This quickly turned to harsh territory. I was in church again.

"If you're not born again, then you're not saved. There was only one Jesus, and if he's not your savior..."

"You're saying if you don't believe in a Christian God, then you're going to hell. What about people who have never, ever, heard of God? People existed before God."

"No one's existed before God."

"So the Native Americans are in hell but George Bush is going to heaven?"

He paused for a long time before answering me, dead in my eyes.

"Yes."

The waitress fluttered over. Her nails were done in three different pastels on white or black, commanding all attention, her hands clipped to her checks like a throne's backing. Her black hair down to her ass, falling over her shoulders like water. She slanted her thin hips and a slender neck, and a smile grew from her dimpled cheeks, shooting a glow into my eyes waiting to ask him the question.

Dad in a nervous preoccupation took initiative, to distract himself from the sermon he'd given me. A compensational confidence for his shaken stance.

"I'll have lemonade to start," he ordered before the woman could ask.

She wrote it down without looking, her eyes at me asking silently.

"I'll have a Thai Iced Tea, please."

The woman smiled and turned, almost into herself, as she disappeared behind the kitchen divide, always partially visible for being such an unnaturally tall woman.

I was face down in my palm, the other hand running laps through my hair. For a few seconds dad seemed forgivable but I saw nothing in him I recall in myself. I was not even tied genetically, literally I was, but I inherited my mother solely. Staring at this aging, white man, who may as well be a brother separated at birth. This stranger, this greying portrait...he couldn't be real. There was nothing but the impressionist

finger painting of the man that had raised me.

Virtue calmed the spitting hatred in me that no man should have for a father. I wanted his mind to stop reeling and so landed on pity time and time again, but pity doesn't make a person, it barely makes a feeling. It's the atoms before they have a place. Pity is a place where nothing can be built and so a quiet resentment fills the blanks, and it chalks it up to God, or what space was before we were in it. Years had passed and the old man was the smear I remember him as.

The waitress came back with a smile bigger than before, which forced our table to shrink. Humming orders happily, dad's for the equivalent of a Chicken Noodle Soup and an order with pig's feet, for me, for the fuck of it. We ate in silence.

//

He asked to go to a record store, the go-to option for the easily entertained. Luckily, even if I'd been jaywalking with my city legs for a year now, I was born in Indiana, the only of the brothers to be a red blooded Hoosier, an Oaky at heart. We never complained about the quiet.

I rummaged through pop for a classic, Mariah Carey, and started examining the back. Mariah Carey was almost naked, he seemed nervous. Feeling a strong guilt, flooding his hands, when I passed it to him, he was almost shaking.

"That's such a great album. Mariah Carey is incredible."

"She sure is. Also very naked on this album."

"Well, she's beautiful."

"...have you made a lot of friends here?"

A question that lingered too long to be about 'friends.' I avoided talking about my love-life with my fundamentalist father. In phone conversations with my mom he'd scold her for not keeping a closer eye on the oldest one, who had a sexual appetite. A father is heavily invested in his son's sex life so feels responsible for it. Less puritanical families would have opened the lines even vaguely about the brooding sexual life that youth starts to sputter up, like jism but out of a pot rim, drips down into a mess that for all good reasons can't be ignored.

"Oh yeah. It's crazy how lucky I've been meeting people over here considering how

horrible the move was. My roommate is one of my best friends and we really click."

"What does he do?"

"He's a sushi chef."

He flipped through another row of records.

"Where are you working right now?"

"Same job, near the boardwalk."

"How you likin' it?"

"It's good. I like it."

"You going to school?"

"Yeah, I'm taking voice lessons."

"Your cousin Katherine was taking voice classes for a while. Your Grandma's always been practicing in a choir. That's great, Jordan. I'd like to hear some of that. I miss singing, even for church. It's such a good feeling."

"I've met most of my friends through my voice class, it's helped me out a lot, I've got a great teacher. I can tell the difference."

"I used to remember taking piano lessons from this big, German, woman, 'zaftig' you could say," he laughed at his own joke, "and I hated it. I never kept up with piano after I got into high school. I regret it more than anything. I should have stuck with it..."

He let out a sigh. Nothing more concrete than regret. I smiled, it wasn't what I felt but it seemed the only appropriate response, silence. It seemed like after that the atmosphere had died without a rattle and couldn't be summoned up again. With age was there a certain sensibility lost? The faculty to know when to be happy for someone else and not compare it to anyone's accomplishments. Parents, they seemed so full of sighs, constantly racking their minds wondering what happened like they never had any chance at all. It was that being an old fart wasn't a metaphor, they had resigned in every in so many senses. They were passing through their lives like gas, loosely to and through to the end. In their fiercest attempt to preserve their ego they cushion themselves from the blow of failure and in that, all of life's opportunity for success.

I tucked a James Blake album in my armpit.

"I'm ready."

He put down the Mariah Carey album and tried to snap out of it. Looking up, lost, and readjusting to the space around him. He followed beside me and put a hand on my shoulder, he brought me to his side with a firm, punctuated, loving grip and walked forward as if leading a procession, his un-lived years behind him like a battalion made prisoners of war. The air died as his hung head and pair of sunken shoulders slinked through the doorway. The sun was hidden somewhere now. The air was slightly cooler.

//

Despite better sense I was pulling into the convention center, a smaller boardroom sized event inside of an enormous four star hotel. Parking was designated, I filled my space like water poured into a drinking glass—choreographed dance before choreographed dance.

He stood tall and pulled himself out of the car, with a pride I had only seen before a church sermon, with his briefcase in hand like it was a bible—his word lived in a box, behind a combination lock. Just the right pressure and opposable thumbs can unlock certain freedom. I was chaperoning a dance for my own son now. Fearing what I discover he really does.

People were funneling through the double doors. I joined the mass, side by side with him. From a steady satellite to a binary in the steady influx. Shoulders brushed against us, in time. White faces lifted up and dad gave a polite greeting. Southern hospitality from a man who'd just moved to and from Tennessee.

He was afraid of his interests, his ambitions, he only trusted drudgery—he only believed in hard work and bloodshed as a means of freedom. To be interested, to be immersed was too high risk. Believing martyrdom the only virtue and all pleasure sin he could never embrace himself, his faculties.

He tortured himself, to feel a pain he believed was always for a reason, he could not control pain, he could control how it was interpreted. It was inevitable, it was a constant—what varied is whether he interpreted it as senseless or success. The sting of sweat in his eyes reminded him he was alive. When in a dead world, a world that traded passions for passivity, he was like them, living.

Shoulders brushed him again, it was Sam and Midori, long time friends who'd made it independently. Sam gave me a firm handshake, while giving dad a quick pat on the back. Sam and Taylor had contracted Siphylus together in the Navy. That felt like connection to them.

“Sam—nice to finally meet you, Jordan. Taylor talks so much about you.”

“And how you're quite the ladies' man,” chimed Midori, “being such a handsome boy.”

“Thank you.” I laughed nervously.

“Are you ready for this?” said Sam.

“I can't wait.” said Taylor.

“We'll see you in there.”

They passed in and found another group they recognized near the open seats they were approaching. They were Diamond, you could tell from their suits.

“How're you feeling, Jordan?”

“Good—what are we doing here?”

“You'll find out, just wait.”

We walked into the room, nothing but purple and gold, like they'd made everything down to seat cushions out of recycled Crown Royal® bags. The chairs had white accents and there was a faint paisley pattern in the carpets, with flowers to break up the monotony, all shades of purple in the rug but the flower's bulbs. It was arranged like a theater, the chairs in a semi-circle, split down the aisles, leading up a small staircase where solid velvet covered it, like thick shining moss. Then, the lights, an altar, a microphone, and a pull down screen.

I had seen this before but it felt as if it were the first time. This was a temple, another place of worship with the perfect amount of men and women filling seats. The ministers were filling their seats, behind the pulpit. They weren't just suits that fill any small town church arena—these aren't your average hope peddling goons, these are power players. In mind, body, and spirit, immaculate presentation. The grey hair and hard bodies, a vampiric youth proving you could live like this forever too. Carey Bartleman, an ex-televangelist filling the seat furthest stage right.

People are so dependent on vision, so much evolution is based on having the perfect distance from a perfect star, and that the select range of light making it through

our perfect atmosphere was neither too imperceptible nor too harsh. We are not to look to directly at what gives us life. It blinds you—worship your origins and don't look too close.

I find myself staring into a stage light a crew member's testing. It flickers, my vision a flashbulb floating under closed eyelids and then dying. I reoriented myself. I saw my father inspecting a seat cushion from directly in front of it, before politely taking his place, Taylor dusting the seat of his pants the way a woman would keep her skirt together. He was comfortable but anticipating the presentation and my reaction with nervousness. The anxiety tucked like his hand in between his crossed legs.

He always crossed his legs like a woman, which I found strange, not just because I imagined it's painful but because he was such a man, always self aware in his masculinity.

The best Christians are narcissists.

Narcissism was believed, by Freud, to be a result of an over policed child. One scolded too often for tripping over themselves or eating their dinner gracelessly. High strung children adapt to the conditions of always feeling watched, to the point where they can only watch themselves.

The cyclical thinking leads to a cyclical psychology, bound to be unwound and only with the most conscious efforts could you disarm a spring this tightly coiled. Like a rusting piano string, the narcissist is a long and loveless labor. Only the most detached and patient love could set him straight, in tune for himself and with others, to be hammered at, harped on...he thinks. The narcissist is impatient and hates to talk. He bangs his head on the wall and sees progress as the brick's red fading or wood displaying his relief his only consultation. His reality is a mirror and women as mirrors and his life is a manipulation of others. His moral system mechanic. Taylor was in every sense a narcissist. The narcissist was bound to and by himself. He ended up taking more than he gave. He saw himself as he saw others seeing him but didn't ever really.

The crowd calmed, the pulpit filled, throne after throne, and even though it was silent the crowds anticipation felt the way a creaking door sounds, a stutter before sound begins.

"Good evening," said Carey, rising from the furthest right chair, taking a confident walk to the altar.

"Ladies and gentleman, I want to thank you for coming here tonight. It's amazing to see so many men and women congregated with the focus to free themselves from the bond of serving others senselessly. Amucorp® has been a business that has helped men and women help themselves for decades now. You're the reason and the cause of that growth.

You can't get what you want working for another person—a life in service of another is wasteful. Is it truly mutually beneficial? In order to truly free yourself from toil, you must start your own business—Amucorp® helps you do it. Who's making the real money when it comes to a business? It's those who are the originators. But you don't have to be alone to be the originator, you need help, you need investors, a pool of others from which you can start.

The worker, he works thinking he's getting what he wants, he thinks he is going to move up, rise through the ranks, be noticed by those on top. The worker sees his efforts as statements to those above him in the workplace. He went to college, he wrote the papers, he followed the rules. He wants what's rightfully his. The businessman sees things differently. Think of the world's most innovative minds—Benjamin Franklin. Never set foot into a classroom and yet he's one of the most well-known American minds. A pillar of our history.

My father used to tell me: 'A' students work for 'B' students and 'B' students work for 'C' students. You know who survives in this society? No—anyone can survive. Do you know who thrives in the society? Those who go out and get it. Those who seize opportunities. Those who take the initiative—those who build the framework that others follow."

Taylor was furiously scribbling in a notebook he'd silently taken from out of his suitcase. I watched, starting to feel my face heating, I was slowly getting red. Some noise in me, vague and formless sought a shape, but only sank into an inky anxiety. My father, in the same place I'd seen him 10 years ago. A decade had passed and I was beginning to think it wasn't a second that'd passed but with the sermon running on I noticed my father had physically embodied his changes. His body had lost color,

it'd lost life, it was dying in front of my eyes with the same power that a will to live had in a person. My father had lived protecting himself. As if perseverance itself was to be valued, chasing ideals with no grounds in reality. Achieving any one specific goal would ruin the chase.

The problem was that he, like so many other men, had lived without sharing the child, the source of all life. The spirit's fuel is that which gives, like a tree gives it's exhale your inhale, it depends on being expressed. The only evidence that you ever existed on this planet is what you've given. It's only a song when you sing it.

His ambition stemmed from a fear of being swallowed by his desires again because the time when your one true love seems to slip away into murky doubt or the illusion of a concrete danger are the most crushing to feel. Birth and kidney stones don't compare to the feeling of being left and the only feeling worse than being left alone is having driven someone away. But like the myth promises, the only time your wealth can leave you is if you want it to. Life feels important only when you have some other place to be.

Taylor's most promising venture was wealth and making it as a means of escape. The feeling of need and want themselves making him weak. When he was younger he would write letters to his brother while on trips out. His time in the Navy was long and distant. He would come back once a season and be on the sea again. What exactly he was doing no one would know except his brother. He never talked about it to his wife or kids. The reason Mom found herself with a bad case of the clap after dad's trip to the Philippines. He, like so many famous writers before he decided he wanted to be one. His career highlight a rejection letter from National Lampoon telling him to keep sending work, it wasn't bad, it just wasn't a good fit for this issue.

Music started playing and he looked to me, clearly uncomfortable during the talk, startled, bordering on disturbed now. First an American flag fading in from black, the extreme close up being pulled out. A horn slowly gushing up with the beating of wind on cheap, heavy, fiber, slapping metallic chattering from the rivets.

Amucorp® appeared straight in the frame.

From the worker, to the soldier, to the wife, an entire family, shots of an Amer-

ican neighborhood and a church steeple, and the gates of heaven opening into a bald eagle. The exhausted imagery all added up to feed the marks of the American playground that a responsible adulthood provides. You could be what you wanted. It wasn't about buying what you're selling, living what you want. It was about finding a comfortable middle ground for exchange. Life's a compromise, regardless of how it compromises you.

The hallucinogens were run down and they started watching an interview with an ex-military. He was older now, 31, but he'd made it. He was tired after the military of putting his college education, something he'd risked his life for in the service of his favorite nation in the world—America, in service of massive organizations he felt completely out of control of. America, the only country he'd spent more time living in than killing in, which is what informed his opinion of his nation, like every other stubborn nationalist, was a nation that had apparently promised him something.

I couldn't help but wonder what exactly America had promised him. The American was so infatuated by a nation that it would choose to be tricked by its non-specifications. Who was this America? Where the fuck was its mouth? Who was it talking; it reminded me of a burning bush. The explanations based off of some interpretation as fact.

The soldier wasn't turning his back on his nation, he just believed there was a more satisfying direct, proactive way to satisfy his financial needs and that would mean, naturally, a more labor free and satisfying life. Pushing work onto another and wearing a cross was the main project. It faded and the lights blossomed back in. Taylor was readjusting himself, picking at the jean near his crotch as casually as you could pick, trying to be quick.

The suits picked themselves up and shuffled. The legs they wanted to stretch, were in quiet. We are all respectful out of reverence just for respect. Another speaker came forward, the next in the row of chairs. Sweating, my jaws tightened like a car jack, like a bad case of lockjaw. I felt present, visible in the light, the way a sick girl at a party hangs around for too long and the night is just waiting to smell the vomit, the room was its own feeling of missing something and being sure of it and how to fix it.

I looked at my father for a moment, who I knew was proud but I didn't feel any-

thing near pride. Holding onto my shoulder blindly, he turned to me with a beaming smile that I wished I could have remembered outside of any room. Outside of a church, outside of a congregation, outside of a car, away from the past. I felt longing and pathetic.

“God bless us. We’re so blessed to be able to be together like this. Building the business, our own. We don’t have to answer to anyone else but ourselves...”

Exploring himself after child rearing became too real. He was a man, he had a right to. How’d he have so much money to just pick up and drive from Tennessee to California to Santa Monica to Idaho. I was witness to the mid-life crisis. Internalizing, fully and finally, I was orphaned.

I was on a baseball team once but don’t remember it. I felt alone most of the time, my whole life was batting practice. A strange adult man in the same outfit as me, feeding a machine it’s ammo, swing after swing on an overcast evening, hoping to make it to make him proud. I could have lived my life being bought hot dogs at neighbor’s sporting events.

“Living for ourselves,” the voice blared, in that dramatic southerner’s oratorical drawl, where even the sounds alone made you feel proud, “is the best gift we have to give to others. We are the salt of the earth; we are our only gift to give!”

The audience broke into applause, shouting one man screamed, ‘Amen!’ It was an event being there together, cheering, the way you would at a ball game. My stomach sank. I panned the room and like a breeze through dandelions, bobbed through their movements, joining the applause like I knew I never could.

//

Passing back out of the double doors we met with Sam and Midori again, both newly smug, refreshed by absolute reinforcement of their preexisting biases. The only thing worse than a religion based on original sin and the constant guilt that drives you to adopt unrealistic goals and an infinite inferiority complex, is a spiritual retreat with the generic feel good embrace, warming you with the feeling of total acceptance of everything you’ve ever done, are doing, and will do. The horoscope-inclusive attitude dangerously close to a Klan rally.

That’s when an enormous white hand planted itself into my left shoulder. I shot up, startled. Sam was ready to say goodbye, he’d arranged a ride back home with another acquaintance in advanced, which was Sam’s polite way of saying he’d the time and money to stay a few days extra in Santa Monica.

“It’s always good to see you Taylor, coming with you to these events always strengthens my resolve. You’ll go sapphire soon enough, Taylor. Don’t worry. That’s why you’re here.”

“Thanks, Sam.” he smiled.

Sam and Midori power-walked away into the milling heat of hopefuls and he turned to find me.

I filled my place, playing my part, subordinate but care-giving, supportive-lead I turned the key, muttering, sighing as privately as I could. Dad had lived years this way, a wet nosed salesman, where the goods and services were as good as an alms bowl. A beggar without a robe, a monk without a tower, he was like a drunken Noah, where, after ruthlessly disgracing the name, and betraying his kin, they did the Christian thing. Turning another cheek and sending the crowds away, tucking in their red faced father. The family had its own demands but its laws were greater, it was its obedience forever.

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Bucket List

On entrance to the hotel room, he placed his briefcase against the bed's headboard. A click and the handle dropped, like a deflated actor after the take. He started undressing at the collar button, after reaching the television in the end of the room, he turned towards me, standing in the entrance.

"That was fun, wasn't it?" he asked, knowing it wasn't.

It was rhetorical. He stood, dazed, in the mirror. The silence was the dusty glare filling with an incomprehensible guilt. I found a place and laid out on the bed. The perfectly matching color scheme reminiscent of a teenage blog's margins. The power of design, the subtleties of accents as a foundation. He had completely undressed himself in my periphery until crossing my line of vision. A man, more alien to me than ever, a great ape in a gold chain. His body covered in an almost fur thick mane of hair. The closet door, two sliding panels, also mirrors. My father's shriveled and aged cock disappearing as he pulled the door open for a hanger. It had been normal to me for years.

I can only try to piece him together. Who he was. Not dress, not a history came to converge to make the person I had learned half my life from. Tethered now to a man I'd never really met. The closest to family history was a conversation about grandpa being an immigrant. His religion had left a man in denial, blind to years of his own existence—banished as sin, deleted from memory. A passionless man made up of passionless ritual. Without words he closed the closet doors and walked without thought into the tiled bathroom. Gears squeaked, valves sputtered, water ran through walls and finally the peaceful muted hissing of water. He was humming the tune of Frank Sinatra's, 'I Did It My Way.'

I noticed the briefcase next to me, unlocked, a dark slit down the glittering brass lining of its fastening, peaking out. Curiosity called me to open it and I couldn't deny myself. I picked it up, held together on one side, and slid it over my chest. Opening it, slowly, quietly, it was popped open, exposed like a dumb clam. My soft hands blindly burying themselves in the contents and pushed around until I was clenching

a year-thick planner.

Randomly, flipping past some sparsely filled dates, until, suddenly, the weight carrying my fingers momentum stopped on a list. Pages flicked into their places, splayed, reading:

BEFORE I GO:

SAVE THE BOYS

BUY A HOUSE

FIND A PLACE TO BURY MOM

PERFORM A STAND UP SET

WRITE A BOOK

VISIT JAPAN

MOVE TO SAN FRANCISCO

GO BACK TO CHURCH

GET MARRIED

RETIRE IN ROANOKE, IN

In all caps. My heart skipped a beat while my stomach ran up and down my throat. I threw the day planner into the suitcase, and the suitcase across the clean but clearly worn hotel room rug. You cannot wash the use out of a place. Even when it's invisible it's permanent. It has a taste. Collecting my things, catching myself in the mirror, in front of me. Grabbing my phone from the table, I noticed a half open drawer with a leather jacket exposed. A piece of red ribbon poking it's forked tongue through between the pages, where I opened it, containing the passage:

³⁰ I and my Father are one.

³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

³² Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

I slammed the book shut. I was swallowing the heat down my throat. Hands were

nothing but pressure, tectonic plates waiting to slip. Eyes watered. Third breath the catalyst to a high-heat pitch of the book straight into the glass. It's iced-explosion in glittering cuts. I tore the front off the book and with a pen; ham-fisted something barely legible across the top. The inside of the underside of a turtle-blank slate. Tearing at the door handle and finally, stepping out of the hotel room, crying, into the patient womb of an elevator. Its doors closing like curtains. It's ringing...

//

The water sealed up. The shift through walls finished snaking. The bathroom door handle closer to a dorm stall than a 4 star hotel. Exiting the steam and walking, shamelessly, into the cold room.

"Jordan?"

He looked across the floor, following the train of paper to a desk buried in glass. A mess of diamond bright shards, salting the wood. He stepped lightly but couldn't avoid the coals of splintered glass in his feet. He bled from his feet like Christ would have. He looked through the pile, and pushed a flat palm across the torn jacket, reading:

SAVE YOURSELF

He slid his hand to the gold cross on his neck, twisting it, pulling his prayer like a rosary through his fingers. Telling himself with every stroke he was a good person, his son was backsliding. He needed his help and his father's love and Christ's love. When a father's love would have done. There was no mirror, finally, to absorb himself in. The theories were an absent reflection. It was blood and debris. He looked up, craning his neck all the way to the ceiling.

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