

Survived By

We used to talk about weather
the way distant fathers and
teenage sons talk about
sports – phantom words
exchanged in rhythmic
monotone fashion every time
Mom would hold the phone
out to me and say,
“Talk to Grandpa.”

Grandpa, if you were still here,
I would tell you that on
Christmas day this year
here in Connecticut, it was 60,
and two months later, I wore
a t-shirt without a jacket.

I can't hear what you
might have said – how your
cancer voice stretched so thin
as it snaked its way through the
phone line from Delray until
that was all you were.

and that's all we were –
empty voices
on the phone
every now and then.

You used to sing the J-E-L-L-O jingle
into the phone when I was little,
and then again
in person on rare visits.
I never knew you weren't the first
one to claim it – that you just quoted
an old commercial of Bill Cosby.

I loved you all the same – the way
fish love the rainbow rocks at the
bottom of their tank.
I loved you the way Mom said your name
right before she would hand me the phone.

I loved you because Mom loved you.
And because you were your own person too.
But, I never saw him.
I never heard him in the recollection of
your nostalgia. He was never that real to me.
You, were never really that real to me.
You were a person I compared the weather to.
And for the stunted time we had together,
that was enough.

Daddy Daughter Dinner #23

There are 1,
2,
3,
4,
5 hanging lights in this Ruby Tuesdays
that I can see without turning around
or getting up to go
to the bathroom again.

There are 2 lights in the bathroom.
I can wrap the straw wrapper 1, 2,
3, 4 times around my index finger
before it starts to overlap – twice
comfortably around my thumb.

My father sits across from me.
He has 2 eyes.
They're blue like the color of the
drink menu's font.
His hair turned grey...yesterday?
Or a year ago?
I guess that makes sense.
He's 57? 59? Almost 60 for sure...

My sister shares a booth with me.
She has 2 blue eyes layered with
silver white clouds, rimmed with navy.
Her hair is curly blond,
folded over and under itself
like wheat fields silhouetted by
the setting sun.
Her straw wrapper wraps around her
index finger about 4 times too.

Aah, food's here.
I got 1 turkey burger.
I take 1,
2,
3,
4 bites until I reach half –
save the rest for later.
Still 5 lights. Still all covered in

crimson shades that cast a hazy
hue over all the dark oak tables
and oversized booths.
Mmm, these fries are good.
I think I ate 9 so far.

My sister got a salad with chicken.
She lets me have 1 bite.
Dad offers some of his plate but
his...is drowned in ketchup
and pepper and half devoured before
we're even sure what it is.
He asks for my pickle chips as he steals
them with his fingers moisturized by
his condiment concoction.

There's a baby at the other table.
His mom has frizzy yellow hair and
long pink, chipped finger nails.
The baby smiles as the fork full
of finely cut chicken come just within
reach – "Rach?" Dad asks, impatient.
"What?"
"How's school going?"

"Fine."
4 letters.
"Yes."
3 letters.
"Ok."
2 letters.
1 more dinner down.

Good Night

Good night hazy moon,
with a face full of craters
and dust.

Good night black trees,
dragging their fingers
through the March sky.

Good night infinite asphalt,
hugging the wheels of my Jeep,
trekking through time and places.

Soon, it will be morning.
The sun will rise pure pink,
the moon will shrink
to a white speck
lost in the sky sea, and
the trees will be greys and browns,
sprouting first hints
of spring.

And the road will still be here,
playing home to mid-life
adventurers and steady working
commuters and me – a 22 year
old heart pumping wanderlust
and fear of being swallowed
by the quicksand of a still life.

Our Secret Garden

I never knew a boy
could have rose petal lips.
Yours bloomed into my favorite
sunset orange against mine
that first night.

We spent the summer in new soil –
swaying in the marsh
air as if it reeked not of nature's
pungent musk, but of the Atlantic's
gentle breeze.

With you, my body
found its way through the fog
of past lovers.
Into enchanted gardens
ground new cursive paths
of pleasure.
We blessed Mega Bed with our
desires on Monday afternoons
and Sunday nights.

We were a secret summer garden.
All worries of reality dandelion puffs
taken by light winds.
But, as the days began to shrink,
sun rays losing heat,
our soil hardened.

Our petals shriveled against
autumn's scythe.
Your lips, chapped with apathy,
buried our cursive paths in
fallen leaves.

I left that last morning
a stem encircled by raisin petals.
Our last empty kiss snatched
by a wind laced with the promise
of frostbitten winter
alone.

The first time I told you I loved you

I didn't mean it.

The words were popcorn kernels.
I struggled to wiggle them out from
between my teeth and watched them
crash into your face.

I looked into your drowsy eyes,
as we laid nose to nose on your twin
mattress late that Sunday night, and
trailed my fingers
along your ears, trying to
soften the sound of each letter as
they took form inside your mind.
You believed me because you
had been waiting.

Those words spilled out of you
two weeks prior. Your eyes
struggled to focus through all
the vodka sloshing in your brain.
They pinned my sober heart into
a corner, teasing my morals with
your faulty hangover memory.
But, I stayed strong
until the guilt of watching you wait
drove my tongue to dig out
those kernels.

I didn't mean it then.
And I told myself I've meant it
every other time since.

But, today,
nearly two months later,
we're sat at your cluttered kitchen table
eating lunch together.
We let our empty plates sit as
our conversation carries us into
the sunset, caressing our faces
through your dust ridden blinds.

I forget what I said but,
you laugh. Your brown eyes
turning gold under the warm
orange light.

Your smile so pure, my
breath falls out of routine.
You sit across from me,
so simply,
and beautifully
a man.

I say,
I love you
and watch each letter
blend into the sun
on your cheeks.