

Twink Chaser

—*For a gentle bear*

I.

He was a violin serenade man. Roses were in my future. I knew what convenience meant—a back seat privacy. Tampa Bay has palm tree boulevards and bridges to islands. I didn't recognize anybody there. The odometer turned 100,000 on our last trip. I felt every mile. I know he did too. I was embarrassed riding that long. Monotonous car rides are moments when the weight of air read the seconds aloud. I felt guilty, but liked the attention. When his ultimatum popped, I wasn't ready for revelations.

II.

Lakeland Square Mall stores the town's gossip. Shelves are adequate barricades—they reinforce the ideal of specter queers touching our boys. She—the one I bring around Momma—talks about him and his beauties; *he buys them comfort and performs*. I laugh. He could be listening on the other side of Superman abdomens. I feel the miles.

III.

I think back to the slow power lines that dipped and rose—that moment when the meaning of silence was as recognizable as the taste of salt. His gaze made me feel lipstick beautiful, but the citrus rays don't hide very long in the sticky summer heat. I know the comfort of a tangerine sunset without him.

Before I lifted my palm out of his hand, he said everything was okay. He gave one last squeeze before he let go. We both understood the stars and stripes consciousness of secluded highways. Plastic Jesus's abdomen cries Kool-Aid blood from the cross every Southern Sunday pitying the kneeling boys peeping up at Him.

The Boys that Don't Know

My tongue is the musk of masculinity—a scent that keeps
me safe on the center court's flaming cross.

I calm the nerves of the boys that don't know—
my well-placed *fudge packer* taunt, the *you would know*

response. The conversation ends with my basketball
fluttering down a rainbow arc. I can't extinguish the extra flare

of my flicked wrist, but like all good boys I strap on
the masque of sweat—it's the Christ-like effort that counts.

Sneaker squeak sirens summon my desire—I long
for my place with the boys that don't know. There are other boys

and they know the ship that steers my gaze.
One times my jump shot rewarding me with siren hips

lulling me towards the bleachers. I bluff with bone bruising
knuckle sandwich fists, but his sinking dimples

have already undressed me: *I hope you're good at this game.*

Yanking Bootstraps: An Affliction

I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger: A man on the move, and just sick enough to be totally confident.

—Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Bye, Bye, Birdie

The Army's got you now

I'll try Birdie

To forget some how

—Ann-Margret, *Bye Bye Birdie*

I.

Florida soil liked accosting my feet—
the black droplets seeped through the holes in my socks.

I could smell tangerine ghosts between my toes—
I didn't take off my shoes, I didn't want to look. I wept.

Father looked down at me. The crevices around his eyes—
chiseled onto a Roman coin—deepened as he pounded the earth

with his pulsating anaconda toes. The colossus of my youth
yanked my crackling shoulder into his flaky metal car.

Be a man...

...rattled against my skull—the steam from the cul-de-sac
engulfed the baritone commandment. Sweat and dirt
dripped out of my stomach's folds. I stopped weeping.

II.

I now see Father clearly; yellow pictures from his coronation—
a red face matrimony—reveals a man indulging in cathartic tears.

I ask Momma why. She shakes her head. We look at Florida's pastel evening
blinking with desert eyeballs. Neither of us want to answer

with Iraqi Freedom. I don't always know why I cry—
sometimes I just raise my arms, yawn, and the tears fall.

During more certain times, the lachrymal salt soaks my cheeks
while I dream of Napoleon's crown—the perpetuation
of the leather bootstrap pull-up. I am moved by the myth

of anyone's empire. From Dollar Tree socks
to black booted emperor of the Gulf of Mexico. Father,

III.

my classmates were ambitious too—
MBA dreamers mastering their destinies,
unlocking the front doors to their business loan

comic bookstores housing blue anaconda biceps
bursting across the clearly dictated line
of good and evil. Too many of my MBA dreamers

reel off whiskey breath flashbacks of Iraqi Freedom,
flinch from Florida's midnight lightning crackling the skyline.

A soldier will fight long and hard to move up ladders,
up Babylonian towers promising sole ownership of the titanic stars.

My classmates, Father accept heroic Bud Lights from civilians
that dodge loose rungs hurtling back to earth
like arrows flung from Sagittarius's opaque bow.

The flames from the reentry are legendary—the spectacle,
the horror generates stateside applause.

IV.

I am an instrument of Fortuna—Father died
funding my climb with life insurance, a warehouse 401k.

Maybe, one day, Fortuna will shatter me across her knee—
the day I reach the heavens, the day the universe I don't belong to

collapses my voice. Oh, the lure of success—the scales across my eyes
leave me without imagination, leave me without my plausible reality

of M16 shoulder rifles, white beams terrorizing
Florida's skyline, black droplets slithering down my face.

I would've known my father's blue eyes—
why they burst like flash grenades

across our humid winter,
across the faceless coins,
across leather bootstraps that snapped at the seams.

A Debt to Privilege

The long days of forklifts poking reams of *buy one, get one* newspaper excerpts
 on the silver floor of warehouse dystopia means we all owe you
 suffering. You loved telling me about each ultraviolet ink stain
 on your blue collared shirt—Publix's green Thanksgivings, Wal Mart's blue
 Black Fridays. I knew each cedar plank lodged into the pores of your shoulders;
 lugging Horatio Alger crosses takes holey palms.
 Grandpa never drove you to do your paper routes on snow days.
 Your bicycle cut through the chicken wire wind
 delivering Cold War men news about how close they were to apocalypse.
 The yellowing polaroid parables lead to a tidy thesis
 for my Dairy Queen paystubs—an act of resistance
 against *the moocher class*.

I never knew what your arctic eyes wanted from life. You answered American Dream
 with nuclear family privilege—a house, a silver truck, a wife and kid
 you weren't obliged to see. You'd sigh into your sweating Natty Light
 on my bi-weekly tours of your wooden paneled trailer crammed with freezer steaks
 and premium cable evenings. Hollywood doesn't film men
 with inky Rorschach faces on their blue shirts. There is no house of worship
 for men that can't find the time to cross their cedar T's
 on unfinished blueprints that would craft that thing
 people must buy from you—the invention of bio pic academy award whispers
 reverberating into the noiseless space of our pockmarked skyline.

Beautiful Savior

I love when victims reassure me they're alright. I live
for resurrection moments—moviegoers love popcorn beautiful Jesus
ascending into the stratosphere. Until then, hushed gasps
must clatter down cathartic cobblestone streets.

My Home Depot hammer's claw will be ready
to slide palmy nails out of a lacquered cross; the audience
will whisper *so brave*, and I'll know they're talking
about me. I'm in love with the idea of bloody pulpit Jesus—
the woods with the earless Roman, Judas's puckered lips,
the scripted dignity of a martyr. I can say I was there
for the final act—a disappearing deity's escape
from His stony sepulcher before the black sky
rained closing credits.