

My daughter smiles on a Saturday sunrise

where streaks of light escape through windowsills
like walls of this black room crumbling.

O my baby Sophia I will never forget,
will never remember me

observing objects
closer than they appear.
Not at this juncture.

I should of read the speed limit,

my skeleton is starting to show--
skin shrinking like a vacuum seal
sucking fat down to my breath
my throat to dust

Pills replace protein and
now only bennies entice my appetite;

they help to fight the boredom
acting belligerent and I can't stop
scratching this beard like a tic--wait,
a thousand ticks thick
tearing the heart from Saint Agnes,
leaving nothing but the old sinner.

And may I be beaten,
buried alive in the streets of Rome
these drugs piling more and more and
I sink deeper than sorrow,

deeper

than the core
of her mother's womb.

She is not a daddy's girl,
I am not her gladiator
I cannot fight,

and I will not die well.

The Affair

Wives cheat; it's a proven fact.
Right here in this very house,
the blade still plunged in his heart
tightening like Vise-Grips.

But bloodshed is sadder than tears,
which now mixed with
yesterday's mascara crawling
down her cheeks like
legs of a tarantula.

Three hours she lay dead
in the parking lot
of the old farmer's market
with a hole through her skull and
one in her hand
(defense wound most likely)
from a hollow-point at close range
where the echo of the blast
still stretched the sky.

And my father-in-law wept
like a toddler when he went
in the morgue, identified her body,
said the stained blood smell
made him think of
a sweaty palm
squeezing copper pennies.
Reminded him of a bottle bank
he once had, a Budweiser filled
with over six-hundred coins
he traded for a bag of weed, that
he smoked with her that
August night of '94,
their own little summer of love but
that was then.
For years his wife's been pissing
on inhibitions, on herself when
she's drunk,
marking anything and everything
she took for granted.

Less and less this looks of a home,

family pictures a fading reminder
of how things used to be.
Walls have become dividers that
muffle the sound of secret lives
and phone conversations.
And she kept her phone by
her side every night,
under her pillow
a veiled dagger destined for
her husband's heart.
And at this time tomorrow,
things will never
be the same.

Childhood

Wish I was that little boy again,
bare feet in a pair of pajamas
caressing the carpet because
at that age it's ok
to let raw emotion sprawl
on the living room floor.
I was happy as home movies so
it never took much to get me smiling,
just silly pictures & action figures
bear hugs & bear claws.
This was way before I learned
of a calorie or its consequence.
Or of trans fat. Or clogged arteries.
Or what it really means
to have a lion's heart

roaring through the day
then it's off to the second job
eleven to eleven,
miles from my wife and child
where weekends are mandatory.
And all the while I worry
because zoologists claim that
cubs are killed when
lions invade a pride.
It's on TV all the time:
FATHER COMES HOME,

FINDS FAMILY MURDERED HOUSE BURGLARIZED.

And if I could be that little boy again,
turn around, face my dad
from his living room floor
carpet fibers stuck in my fingernails
and ask: "what happens
when you die?"

Don't believe him though,
I'd believe what a child should.
I'd believe we dance with angels
top of dreamy clouds
guiding us back home

just in time
for supper.

The Drive

I'd be a fool to say I really knew what it was like on the day my wife saw
her mommy get hit by a tyrant (a shorter man with goofy glasses
and a face so filthy an entire bottle of bleach
couldn't do justice).
And again I'd be a fool to say I know how she felt the day her mommy fought back,
bashed his scalp on the kitchen counter, packed up whatever they could
in ten minutes and split.
Often my wife will talk about her late mother and growing up.
She recalls being nine, her mom's countless boyfriends
coming and going like it's 2 for 1 at the strip joint.
She remembers being lonely, left at home for hours on end
to fend for herself, and there's nothing for lunch
because there's nothing to eat, maybe some soda crackers or some mustard,
or if she's lucky some bread to mush it all together.
But please don't be misled, my love is not without equal emotion,
and neither was her mother who cried every time they played Chicago on the radio.
And it's hard to say I'm sorry if she won't tell me what's wrong.
Maybe I'm wrong to even ask. Should I already know? Perhaps
she's already told me; maybe in waves not in words,
like the way willow trees talk to willow trees:
warning of insects and danger
through zephyrs and pheromones.
On occasion her mother reeked of smoke and alcohol;

that's when you knew something was wrong, the smell
of black licorice and tobacco blend.

Those days she starts drinking quick as she starts her beat-up '91 Buick,
that only started half the time and stalled the same.

And nineteen years before meeting my wife, a little girl sits in the backseat fragile
as her loose tooth. Her mommy drives, headed for places
they both don't want to go.

Beggars on the subway

Through the prowl
of piercing night,
soured souls
must hold their own.
Blind mice
to the blackest kite—
such a life
that some bemoan.

With fingernails
overgrown
filthy as a
hidden crevice.
And dotted arms,
every vein blown,
bloodshot eyed
men turn a menace,

holding signs
that set forth the premise:
wounded vets
with four children to feed,
where heads hang
like scraps of brown lettuce,
and some do slave
to one man's good deed.

Riding this train
of notions preconceived,
where the rich
and the poor alike hold tight.
As brakes grind steel
on top precision speed,
ALL are prey through the prowl

of piercing night.