

## Flashbacks of a Father

He said times were different;  
Things were different.  
No genetic predisposition,  
Simply a society of social norms  
Predisposed to this penance.  
Drinking wasn't just accepted,  
It was expected,  
Required.

*Cheap plastic flasks filled with  
Even cheaper liquor  
White once, now stained  
With shame  
Stashed  
Behind the suspiciously inconspicuous  
Black-bagged magazines  
I was too young to be entertained by  
Now I know why he spent so much  
Time on his porcelain throne*

As the sad story goes,  
One thing, then another:  
No wife to be found  
Amidst all the clutter.  
The loss of a job,  
The loss of a mother.  
The crash of the market  
All too much to bear.

*His broad-brimmed straw hat  
Shaded his pride filled-eyes  
As he watched my childhood  
Never without  
His 64oz mug and sordid straw  
As I cautiously asked  
For a sip, not a nip  
Hoping it was water  
Or nothing stronger  
Than Diet A&W Root Beer*

He had no control,  
Not of her, not of him.

He had no chance,  
Not at hope, not at home.  
His life was in ruin,  
He had to escape.

*Ricocheting like a pinball  
Against mom's compulsive collection,  
Burdened by:  
Bundles of blankets  
A poor excuse  
For a pillow  
And a daughter.  
His drunken stumble  
To escape  
To sleep in the car,  
Terrified he'd suffocate  
I learned too late  
It was the only place  
We could breathe.*

My mother was mad  
In more ways than one.  
Obsessive  
Depressive  
Hollow and numb.  
Dump the kids off at daycare  
To sit home all alone.  
Blame her husband, a lawyer,  
Dishwasher and Dad,  
Money-maker and  
Soul caretaker for  
Not doing more.

*He couldn't live this way--  
Neither could we.  
So the price was paid,  
\$18k for a rehab getaway  
A chance to find God  
And place a new order:  
Serenity instead of Svedka Vodka  
Courage instead of Castillo Spiced Rum  
Wisdom instead of Wild Turkey Whiskey  
Dulce de Leche ice cream and  
Clover Valley Caramel Cookies*

*Instead of everything else.*

It worked for a while,  
For as long as he worked it.  
Yet each step he took,  
Brought him closer to home.

*We tried to prepare,  
Pour it all down the drain--  
The booze and the beers,  
Even the minty mouthwash  
With its taste of temptation.  
But we forgot the demon  
That dwelled deep within  
The vows that he'd made  
For richer or poorer,  
When times were the worst  
She demanded he be better.*

For alas,  
You can't treat the symptoms  
And ignore the root cause.  
To have an effect,  
To stand any chance,  
You must divorce  
The unstable source.

*He could have,  
He should have,  
If only  
He would have.*

*Love comes at a cost,  
And he cordially paid it.  
With every ounce of spirit  
There was no shortage of proof  
Everything he did  
He did for us.  
He stayed in hell  
So we had a home.*

And he stopped coming back.

## A Storied Room

A room can't contain her,  
but it might help explain her.

She's painted the panels in pure personality  
A pesky pile of pillows--  
A pleasantry with no purpose.  
Put the fluff to the side, so she can get down  
To all kinds of business.

A dilapidated dresser still dangling on  
Curvaceously crammed with clothes and with cloths.  
Her creative cravings so ceaselessly clad  
In cognizant confidence--that there's always a chance,  
No matter the challenge.

New age and old soul,  
New tech and old money.  
Grounded by crystals  
As her aspirations soar.

Sheaves of shoes, with so many soles  
She can saunter and speak,  
For our sapient souls--  
Show what it is to be seen  
No matter the scene.

Her spiritual soul showcased on a shelf.  
Witchy wonders and worldly wonderings  
Aesthetically assimilated amongst the astute  
Scripts that speak to sense and to soul.

In the day or the night,  
There is always a light--  
The flicker of fate, a fervent flame,  
The sun filters through a window frame.  
She's learned how to shine,  
No matter the darkness.

No matter the depth of inventory,  
This is only a part of her story.

# Everything In Between

## I

I keep wandering,  
Somewhere between awake and asleep  
Not sure whether I'm haunted  
By ghosts or by dreams.

I keep waiting  
For the feelings to fade,  
To move past the memories,  
To stop daring to dream,  
To fathom a future without you in it.

## II

You wanted to meet me  
In that in between place  
Where our differences don't matter--  
    Our definitions,  
        Our perspectives,  
            Our perceptions,  
                Our realities;  
Where the dark doubts don't doom  
All our hopes to shoulds and should-nots.

The place where we can be--  
Always together.

Where I get to kiss you each night  
And bid you good morning.  
Where I get to be the nook you snuggle into  
To get away from the world.  
Where I get to be the reason your smile  
Reaches up to your eyes.  
Where I get to hear all your heart has to tell me,  
Followed by "I love you."  
Where I get to prove my love again and again.  
Where I get to hold you close and never let go.

Where my dreams come true  
Because I'm holding you.

### III

From morning to night  
I always come back  
To this place in my mind  
Where memories are all I can find.

Guided by my heart  
Through time and through space  
Through snippets of stories  
And the moments that mattered--

An off-handed invite  
For a last-second flight  
To flirt with fate,  
To meet your people,  
To camp with wild horses,  
To tease you mercilessly--  
    In the kayak,  
        In the car,  
            In the tent,  
                In the shower stall next to yours.  
To the moment I asked,  
*Can I kiss you?*

From taking your parents' daughter away--  
An 18-hour road trip,  
With a paw-tistic puppy  
And both of us pms-ing  
To meet my family on Thanksgiving  
Thankful we'd survived.

To learning the joys of cohabitating  
And all of the realizations it reveals:  
    Melding laundry is a new level of intimacy.  
        There is a *wrong* way to fold towels.  
            Some people actually like dusting.  
                Dishwasher Tetris is an art form.

#### IV

The person you fell in love with,  
Isn't always the same person who moves in.

That among the books and baggage,  
You also have to unpack  
The expectations  
The insecurities  
The past  
And the present

#### V

Yet those times are gone--  
With the chance to make changes  
When they might have mattered.  
So I picked up the pieces  
Of every mirror I'd shattered  
And began to reflect  
On the self that I saw:

My flaws, the furious fissures--  
Fault lines that would yawn  
And swallow me whole  
Were actually just cracks  
That allow me to contract  
And e x p a n d  
To breathe in again  
And again...

My pock-marked personas,  
That left me vulnerable  
Feeling pitted and exposed.  
Were in fact, a chain of chinks  
That brought light  
To a whole new perspective,  
Of shimmer and sheen.

Your fingertips would  
Find a brand-new body  
One with more scars,  
But more healing

One with new chapters  
One that now lays open  
One that knows  
Where it wants to be:

Forever free  
From your memory.



## Sanity

In the spirit of "Harlem"

What does it feel like to lose your sanity?

Does it slowly slip  
like sand through your fingers?

Or is each piece pried  
and picked apart?

Does it splatter off in bits,  
like the blood of a boxer who keeps taking hits--

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

How many more till I hit the floor?

Can I rest then?

*Please.*

## **The Prognosis: “All the Odds Are Against Me.”**

Cancer: When malignant cells invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.

Malignant:

1. Tending to be severe and become progressively worse
2. Tending to produce death or deterioration
3. Antonym: benevolent

Benevolent:

1. Characterized by or expressing goodwill or kindly feelings
2. Desire to help others; charitable; well-meaning
3. Possessing or manifesting love

**We're not supposed to have favorites, but we do.**

Week 1: Start steroids and radiation.

Week 2: Prepare body; gain 13 pounds without an appetite.

Week 3: Body shuts down; feels the effect; face/fight fatigue; must keep going.

Week 4: Start to lose your hair.

Every day: Hope and pray.

**We're not supposed to cry, but we are.**

When do you lose your hope?

When do you lose the brave face

you're wearing for everyone else?

How can you wheel around the world

acting like nothing is wrong?

How are you okay, but we're not?

**He's not supposed to have to face this, but he is.**

What to expect:

Headaches, hair loss, sadness, hearing loss, jaw stiffness, guilt, tooth decay, seizures, crying, nausea, vomiting, denial, earaches, depression, dry mouth, anger, trouble swallowing, changes in taste, worry, trouble with memory and speech, grief, extreme tiredness (fatigue), yelling, changes in skin texture, sense of hopelessness, skin and scalp changes, fear, soreness (or even open sores) in the mouth or throat, loneliness, swelling in the gums, throat, or neck.

I have never hated the internet more.

**He's not supposed to beat this, but he will.**