

Shotgun Love

Judy was my first love
at age six a love so pure
I had no name for it.
We played show and not-tell
in the dirt underneath
my wood-frame home and
once were naked together
in a field of cotton with
stalks thinner than our
legs and boles whiter
than our small sexes.

We went to church on
Sundays and she once asked
what I thought of our being
naked and I said I knew
God didn't like it,
but I did.

Mother ended our romance
when she heard of Judy
taking me into her parents' bedroom
with the blinds dirty yellow and torn
where I was taking off clothing
but she wanted to show me
her father's shotgun and
pulling the trigger blew
a hole in the wall, much
larger than my head.

Even if she had wounded me,
I would have forgiven her,
because never again has love
smelled so much like gunpowder,
nor has nakedness been so loud.

Facial Tiers

You think you know me well
but I've been hiding all these years;
the man in the iron mask,
the stranger at the Masked Ball,
throwing necklaces from the floats
at Mardi Gras;
Halloween year round.

My face is sewn on my skull
like a bad hair weave.
Rip the stitches out
only to find another mask,
made from an outlaw's bandana,
or a clown's greasepaint,
or molded in papier mache';
geological layers of faces
showing the ravages of time.
Still, I want you to know me

so, when I lie dying,
bring blackboard erasers to my bedside
and clap them together.
You will see a quick flash
of light flying through
the dust of white chalk motes.
Weigh my body before and after death.
You will notice a difference
of only twenty-one grams.

That was me.

Natural Disaster

We met in late Spring,
a time of birth and storms.
Sat at outdoor cafes,
birds in the background;
Nature's Muzak.
We held hands,
our wedding bands
in purse and pocket,
toying with our coffee spoons
and each other's hearts.

A few years afterwards, late Spring,
the time of storms and deaths,
I finally saw the vortex
surrounding you, dark and swirling,
and realized you had pulled me
into the Eye of the Storm,
along with the neighbors,
other men, who thought you were a warm
breeze, lofting birds into the sky.

Now, we live in the wake of
your terrifying dervish dance;
empty and broken homes
scattered over the countryside;
crazed birds with feathers stripped.
You left us all with
splintered two by fours
blown through our hearts.

Winnowing Time

Hunting season is open
children shooting one another
pockets full of pistols
all falling down
no need of plagues
silently flowing under doors
candy is dandy but
guns are much quicker.

In parks near the swings
backpacks stained with blood
in littered streets near corner stores
leaves violently torn from trees and
blown into gutters running red
blood ribbons on white prom dresses
babies tossed into commodes
white porcelain drowning pools
rocking 'n rolling
shaking 'n breaking
crying 'n dying.

Death riding on a fingertip
bodies cheap as wads of gum
spat onto a hot sidewalk
smelling sweet and sugary
and everyone stepping around them.

Each one leaving a mother
who the next day
still cooks the meals
washes dishes
does the laundry and weeping
 changes the stained sheets
on a wrinkled empty bed.

Uncle Floyd's Dreams

I live now with
the ghost of my uncle
who only loved one woman.
She was driven away
by his mother who
did not approve
of anyone.

Sometimes he sings
in the attic and I
see the woeful airs
as they soak through the ceiling,
float onto the bedspread,
and burst like sad bubbles.

He told me of seeing
soldiers in his bedroom
at night,
shooting and screaming,
light bursts and bombs;
of how he would run
toward the door, afraid
of stepping on the floor,
men's raw meat everywhere.

Grandmother later told me
he had been in no war.
I remember his
blue, burdened eyes and
large hands that carved
a car of wood
with springs and axles
and a steering wheel
that really turned.

He could also
shoot a pistol and did so,
in front of a friend;
smiling once, he left
with a bang and
took his smile with him.

My uncle had ghosts
before he became one.
Between the mournful songs,
he sighs. Tears roll
down the attic stairs,
gathering dust, forming
small spectral balls of mud
that finally hit the floor
and splatter. His dreams
then become my own.