

## SIXFOLD SUBMISSION, JULY 2018

### BABYDOLL

There are stories that are told to us  
about who we were as children.  
Who's to doubt or prove  
the veracity of such?

Not photos that only capture the highlights of a life  
and maybe glimmers beneath the eye's surface.  
Maybe some home movies capture  
some semblance of our essence.

But our parents knew us before we knew ourselves,  
so their truth must be fact.  
But there are times when a new truth crashes down on us  
when we least expect it.

On my twenty-first birthday,  
my mom re-gifted me a doll I had as a child.  
She boxed and wrapped it, presenting it to me,  
Backstory and all.

As I gently removed the gift paper, uncoiling the ribbon,  
Mom droned on and on about how much I adored this doll;  
couldn't go anywhere without her.  
Babydoll was the name I gave her.

With such sweet words and images from my mom,  
I knew I'd cherish this sacred old gift in a brand-new way;  
have a brand-new appreciation for who I was as a child  
I knew I'd recall many memories in the days to come when I held this precious doll.

I was so grateful my mom had taken such care  
in the preserving this singular object  
until she found the perfect moment  
to present it to me once again.

On such a milestone as this day, I lifted the box lid carefully  
and peeled back the layers of tissue paper  
to reveal this highly anticipated object  
and my heart froze.

My blood ran cold, spine tingled, head spun, dizziness enveloping me.  
A dark vertigo tunneled my presence,  
spiraling me into a past I didn't remember;  
a past I couldn't fathom.

My mom had woven stories of who I was  
using words like precocious and bratty interchangeably, even flippantly.  
But a whole new story was revealed with this unveiling;  
a story that must have been horrific.  
This truth must have been  
stifled, smothered, swept under carpets;  
a story no one in my family  
dared relive or recant.

This precious keepsake, this quilted square from my fabricated past  
had just roared back into the present like a train through a tunnel.  
Babydoll had clearly been dismembered;  
each limb torn from its body and duct-taped back on.

Had I done that? Yes, my mom laughed.  
Babydoll had evidently been scalped;  
tiny tufts of fake hair peeking out of the follicle holes.  
Had I done that? Yes, my mom laughed.

Babydoll had one eye removed, de-socketed.  
Perhaps I did this so that my doll emulated my bad eye?  
The remaining eye blinked, or winked, as I tilted her;  
An ominous sight.

I sized up the insanity of the object I'd laid bare.  
Babydoll revealed, in painful detail,  
a childhood I don't remember;  
a childhood story I can't recall, an unbiased disturbing study in psychology.

This was the doll I adored? This was the doll I with whom I went everywhere?  
I had so many questions for Babydoll.  
Did I have a tiny little rage in me to mistreat this doll as I'd been mistreated,  
and then hug her close and apologize later?

Did I have a tiny life-sized frustration that could only be relieved  
with fistfuls of fake hair and limp, loose-hanging limbs?  
Did I have a tiny desperation to cling to something all mine;  
holding onto it by any limb I could grasp as I was dragged like an inconvenient object,  
me, swinging from my dad's grasp; she, swinging from mine?

Her smirk and her surviving eye made it quite clear  
she wasn't talking.  
What I discovered upon receiving this relic  
was a haunting scrap of the true me floating closer to the surface.

Babydoll, with her impish smirk, her omniscient remaining eye and her mangled existence  
told me in one glance a story quite different from my parents' tales;  
a truth that could only be discovered but never explained.  
My history is a mystery.

## VALENTINE'S DAY

Today, Valentine's Day  
I was listening to a radio show  
The call-in prompt was  
'What is the most romantic movie you've never seen?'

Well, my first thought, my top pick,  
without even needing to think or recall,  
is Shawshank Redemption  
A horrific romantic novella and movie.

Two prisoners – lifers form an incredible bond.  
One breathes new hope into the other;  
makes him smile again, think again  
laugh again, dream again.

One makes the other appreciate music and listening  
books and reading, thoughts and ideas,  
planting in him a notion to get busy living  
or get busy dying.

The definition of romance is a story depicting heroic deeds  
in a historical or imaginary setting  
The setting of this story  
is a prison full of souls tethered, bound, gagged, stifled

Romance includes a spirit, sentiment, emotion, desire  
Escape.  
A romantic person indulges in extravagant daydreams  
such as the one Dufresne described after his extended stay in 'the hole'

When he returns to his fellow inmates  
he describes how easy his time was  
because he had his music  
for companionship

When questioned about this, Dufresne explains that he kept this music  
safe in his mind where no one could touch it or take it away  
as they could everything else  
This concept fascinated those around him, especially his friend Red.

Dufresne plans and successfully executes an escape years in the making,  
leaving only a note behind for his good friend Red,  
seducing him in an extravagant daydream; inviting him upon his release,  
to seek him out on a sandy shore far away in a dreamlike location,

where they could live together, start all over;  
live with the freedom Red thought learned he should never entertain;  
live with a freedom he only laughed about on the inside;  
a freedom for which he never hoped while locked away for life.

Dufresne wrote of a freedom  
where he and Red could be busy living  
and no longer waste their days dying;  
a liberation of spirit and soul.

Because of this newfound hope, Red finds a desire once again  
and looks forward to his next parole hearing, his shackles feeling lighter and looser.  
So this time, when he pleads his case with hope in his breath and wings on his heart  
he is finally approved for parole

Through a scavenger hunt Dufresne leaves for Red in his farewell note  
Red finds him on a sandy shore  
where they embrace each other as free men;  
they embrace a new freedom and a new life.

After being busy dying for so many years buried among cold harsh stone walls  
and so much rubble of dead dreams and crushed souls  
Red and Dufresne finally get busy living happily every after.  
What could be more romantic than that?

## FOR THE BIRDS

Idiom meaning worthless, undesirable.

For the birds, my grandmother would often say,  
to dismiss some idea, notion or piece of leftover food.  
I always found it insulting, this derisive idiom,  
once I learned it was derisive and not actually advice or food for birds.

Birds should be treated much better than  
receiving our detritus, whether it be ideas or leftover food;  
all birds, even seagulls-known as rats of the sea to my father.  
Birds are majestic creatures who can fly anywhere they choose; be as free as they desire.

More importantly, they can see so much with their supernatural panoramic abilities.  
I envy these qualities and superpowers.  
I often entertain what they might be thinking,  
as they perch high above humans, who are tethered to earth by gravity;  
imprisoned in tin cans on asphalt strips,  
fastened to our appendages that end in light boxes.

I'd like to believe those wise ignored creatures  
pity us our anchored state;  
we humans weighed down by so much,  
as they fly off to new scenes as easily as  
we switch channels on our tv.  
Such freedom a bird has.

**BEHELD. N. To observe, to see.**

Frank, my dad, but not my father.  
Dismissive, narcissistic, impatient, intolerant.  
Me, but never myself (around him). Powerless in his presence,  
invisible to him. Unless I was trouble.  
Talking fast to be acknowledged  
walking fast to be remembered  
eating fast to not be left behind  
Frank. Never came to my plays, graduations, wedding.  
Frank. Always looked at me. Never saw me.  
always criticized. Never commended.  
Frank was his name. Frank was his language.  
Frank. A monster to me as I was growing up;  
A stranger to me once grown. nothing to me anymore.  
I'm no longer beholden to you.

Dear Dad,  
I forgive you  
for never being there to support my achievements  
for missing all my milestones  
not because you deserve my forgiveness  
but because I do.  
I forgive you, Dad,  
for putting me down  
and crushing my confidence  
not because you deserve my forgiveness  
but because I do.  
I forgive you, Dad,  
for emphasizing time and again  
what a disappointment I always was  
not because you deserve my forgiveness  
but because I do.  
Your soul-crushing disdain taught me  
to believe in myself  
to survive and to thrive.  
I forgive you  
because I deserve that much.  
I forgive you Dad,  
especially after finding out,  
from my siblings,  
that I was your favorite.

## A DRIVE ONE MORNING

Driving to work  
songs blasting, me singing  
zoning out, daydreaming  
making good time  
until  
traffic disrupts everything  
the fast...slowing  
the slow...crawling  
the crawl...stopping

A sea of brake lights on the horizon  
I look around  
while stuck at a standstill  
observe the window-framed drivers  
boxed in around me

To my right  
road-focused and white-knuckled  
Behind and in front  
on phones texting, calling for contingencies  
One driver had a comic book slung over his steering wheel  
surely breaking an Oklahoma law, I believe  
To my left, in the fast lane, a driver, window down  
for optimal audience  
clearly incensed  
yelling for all to move, to let him through  
let him switch lanes, cheat the holdup  
ride the shoulders, illegally slide into express lanes  
break all the laws we civilized folk follow  
Deep down, I long to be that arrogant, type A driver that I am

At times like this, I realize how small I really am  
how insignificant my existence is  
as a watch the red horizon ahead  
And I glance at all these self-righteous horn-honkers  
trapped in traffic with us peons  
I want to shake these people  
I want to tell them we're all the same  
we're all human running the same race  
driving the same roads  
I want to tell them  
their jobs, problems, destinations, worlds  
are no more important than any other sand-grain  
in this ocean of cars on a parkway

As we inch past the holdup  
the accident that inconvenienced so many commuters  
should be enough to extinguish all the smoldering impatience  
As we slowly drive by, giving wide berth  
to the flame-enveloped carcass that was once a car  
black smoke billowing theatrically toward the indifferent blue sky  
I glimpsed what looked like  
a crash-test dummy inside, but I knew better

As the cars whizzed past me on either side  
their impatience turning into exigence  
determined to make up all that lost time, as if nothing life-changing just happened  
I shuddered at the sheer apathy  
of so many people  
I listed into the slowest lane to compose myself,  
maybe send out an apology to no one in particular  
on behalf of my callous fellow humans  
I'm sure I should be grateful for my life and everything in it  
By my humanity suffers and saddens  
For another senseless loss

A honk startled me into the present, prodding me to speed up, move on  
So I did  
I drove on, picking up my pace along with the others  
as our lives moved on  
while someone else's would not.