

Before the Thunderstorm

Before the thunderstorm Albuquerque
I'm too short to climb up to the roof myself so dad helps me.
We watch clouds bruise and lightning crack bones count
between flashes raindrops sting and slap until mom yells at us
to get down off the roof in a thunderstorm Patrick
what are you thinking so we do.

Before the thunderstorm dad and mom are in the bathroom
dad's shouting I fucked up Lisa,
I fucked up, I know I fucked up I realize we don't have
money I'm outside the door they don't
know
and dad's outside beating on the shopping cart with his baseball bat.

Before the thunderstorm I'm at school and I tell the teacher I
fucked up she writes a note to mom, she tells dad
and I realize I fucked up doesn't mean the same thing as I'm sorry
I didn't say to anyone I fucked up Lisa
and dad's standing outside again staring at the shopping cart with mean knuckles.

Before the important test so I can go to the nice school on the other side of
town we're thirty minutes late because we fucked up the location directions
 dad's yelling at the lady to fucking let me take the test anyway she'll catch up
to the other kids, she's quick.
The lady lets me in so he'll stop shouting fuck and I get to go to the nice school.

Before the thunderstorm Albuquerque
dad's working on his dissertation in a Ramones T-shirt and baseball cap.
My crayons lie abandoned on the floor.
I want to watch the storm sweep forward, clouds bruising towards us
like clenched fists. I'm too short to climb up to the roof alone.

Dad stops writing,
to lift me.

Litany of My Finest Garbage

(Written by Lump, my alter-ego, during an anxiety attack)

I am my illustrious lineage of poor white trash.

I am a dollar-store manicure,
Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pies.

I am a fire in the trailer park,
gunshots in the South Valley of Albuquerque.

I'm 11, with a boil on my hip.
No doctor-money, mom has to
lance it with a sewing needle.

I am a jukebox James McMurtry song,

Thanksgiving dinner at the
Sonic drive through, somewhere in Texas,

I am overdrafting,
spending my tax return on cheap lingerie,
unpaid speeding tickets and late rent.

I'm smuggling shooters of
Jack Daniels into the movie theater,
I am a shower beer with orange juice,
an acid-trip snowball fight in February.

I am not showing up to therapy,
not taking the meds. I am failing Psych 101.
(I am appreciative of irony)
I am finishing my degree online, 2 years late.

I am hours of blank paper, rejected poems,
sleepless, obsessive cleaning,

cracked and bleeding cuticles,
crying in front of the refrigerator at 3 am, again,

I am a cheap ticket, layover sleeping in
the San Francisco Airport baggage claim
on the way to his brother's wedding.

I am slightly stoned,
walking a borrowed pitbull
through downtown Phoenix.

Variations on Rock

I.

I'm 8. Dad shows me his ticket
stub from The Clash concert
he attended in his 20's.
I have no idea what it is, but
Dad thinks it's cool.
I save all my cereal box tops
and send away for a free CD.
Video Killed The Radio Star
is the only track that I listen to,
over and over, on my discman.

II.

I'm 12. I sneak into dad's room
and steal his Ramones T-shirt
so I can wear it to school.
I never return it.
He's ok with this.

I start wearing eyeliner in secret.
When he finds out, he's furious.

III.

I'm 14. I make my first boyfriend a mix CD.
I put eight Springsteen songs on it.
I add some Bob Dylan. The last track is
Video Killed the Radio Star.
The boyfriend laughs at me.

He dumps me a few months later.
Dad pets my hair while I cry.

IV.

I'm 16. Dad buys me
a beautiful banged-up Toyota.

I buy 2 albums at the second hand store,
The Doors greatest hits and Best of The Who.
I spend the entire summer driving,
singing Out here in the fields,
C'mon baby, light my fire
at the top of my lungs.

Dad is angry I don't check the oil,
When the light comes on,
tells me to wear my seatbelt
as I'm leaving the house.

V.

I'm 17. I'm in a garage, drinking
my first, warm, flat beer. The guys
I've been hanging out with are playing
electric guitar and drums so loud my
teeth might shake loose.
My eyes are ringed in dark eyeliner.
Dad calls my flip phone. I ignore it. Later,
I let one of the guys kiss me.

VI.

I'm 18. Mom moves out.

I discover Rage Against the Machine.

Dad and I stay at the house.

Zia and Shannon move into
Mom's new apartment.

We don't talk much.
I help dad organize his record collection.

VII.

I'm 20. I'm smoking weed in a dorm room,
listening to Pink Floyd and Tool
while boys talk about music
and I pretend to listen.

I give Dad my old pink ipod
on the day I move out.
I throw away my eyeliner.

VIII.

I'm 24, in a mosh pit,
at an all-day metal festival.
This is fucking therapy! screams a guy
with a bloody nose.
I hate it when girls mosh
screams another guy,
directly into my face.
I jab my elbow
into his solar-plexus.

IX.

I'm 25, standing next to
my future husband, in the crowd

at the Devil Makes 3 concert.
I shout along with all the lyrics,
slamming my body against strangers.
He's never done this before,
but he's smiling at me.

I love this song, I yell.
What, he yells back.

X.

I'm 27, choosing the song for
the father/daughter dance
at my wedding.
I pick a Tom Petty song,
Wildflowers
but then I change my mind.

It has to be Ramones.