

# What Do You See?

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## What Do You See?

I see a dog's severed head.  
Is that okay?  
Does that mean something?  
Am I crazy?  
Sometimes I think I'm crazy.  
But to think that makes me sane, doesn't it?  
Or does thinking that it makes me sane actually mean I'm crazy?  
Do you have to prove your sanity to anyone or is it generally assumed?  
If the Doomsday clock went down to zero and the bombs fell as planned  
And in their final moments a man and boy embraced each other out of fear  
Would you be too busy commenting on how their outline left on  
The adjacent wall looked like the embrace of two lovers in the heat of passion.  
If you cut your wrists and black ink oozed onto this table and coagulated  
Like eyes dilated by the bright whites of these papers  
And you asked me what I saw,  
I would do you a courtesy  
And not say a thing.

## A Murmur

The forest's heartbeats echo crescendo.  
The lone tree watches through the dark.  
Kneeling in its sap, I count the rings toward the center.  
I had to chop it to understand it.  
My arm is an extension of me, and  
I take the full responsibility of this.  
I shout in a child's stupor, "The center is my origin."  
I take the full responsibility of this.  
My arm is an extension of me, and  
I had to chop it to understand it.  
Kneeling in its sap, I count the rings toward the center.  
The lone tree watches through the dark.  
The forest's heartbeats echo decrescendo.

## In an Electronics Store

In an electronics store, televisions twinkled  
As far as I could make out and showing interest  
Let their images wash over me.  
Others stopped to watch too, wondering,  
“What is this?”  
The flashing pictures migrained my head until I couldn’t see.  
High definition wasn’t reality; Blu-ray couldn’t replace the blue sky.  
I found myself released from light’s shadows, and  
I walked past the cash registers and my eyes refocused,  
Looking past the automatic doors:

Outside gull squawks echoed the silver sky, and I  
Inhaled the smells of fish food and which brought  
Thoughts of nautical voyages giving release  
From nights spent at home with microwaved fish sticks.  
Navigating dark waters until a pillar brings to light  
Honks of trafficked cars, the thick air that  
Stifled my lungs, fifty inch television sets hung  
Out of gas conscious vehicles riddled with dents and bumper stickers  
Reducing the world’s problems to nearly clever puns  
That I couldn’t help but smirk at. And as my parents  
Arrived in one of those cars, I quickly got in knowing  
My place.

## A Green Bench for Greening

Discarded newspapers swelled into papier-mâché mounds,  
Headlines dissolved, blurred.  
Steam rose towards grey heavens,

And I stood near a green bench covered in droplets.  
It was dedicated to a Will Greening of 78' to 01'.  
“A green bench for Greening,” I smiled.

A joke of a monument, really.  
An unfortunate grave marker erected  
To prop up transients and cigarette butts.

Could he be the Unknown Soldier of San Luis Obispo?  
A local landmark for people to visit and wonder  
All of the things left unsaid.

\*

A peace officer entered the church.  
A God fearing man fell upon hearing of his father's death.  
My Bible teacher walked out supported by his wife.

A family friend lost his wife. He strongly embraced me.  
I had never met him before.  
And he shot himself two days later.

\*

As rain began to fall, I pulled up my hood and  
Made sure to keep my face dry.  
Further down the street were more green benches.

## The Old House

A house foreclosed and we of interest  
Forgot fences in our easement.  
Our shoes scraped against the gravel .  
The place seemed smaller than in the pictures.

Protruding weeds filled the carports.  
I wished then that I could mow them.  
But I remembered how they stained my pants  
And knew how fast they would grow back.

“How could they let this house go?” I asked my father.  
He kicked a stone from the pathway he’d put in place.  
“Time, son” was all he said.  
This home had been *his* first.

“They uprooted the pepper tree.”  
I knew something seemed different.  
“It had shaded the house so well  
Even though it had always made such a mess.”

The roof’s shingles blotchy,  
The painted trim had chipped away white.  
The inner world was obscured by window blinds  
He couldn’t see past, but I assumed the worst.

Behind the house the chicken coop was vacant.  
“Do you remember building that coop, son?”  
I remembered. And I recalled the rooster  
That frightened my mother, so much

My dad had to beat it back,  
So she could collect the eggs.  
He eventually gave it away  
It was too wild to keep.

As we circled the house,  
We talked about the poor foundation  
And how the state of the plumbing had been downhill.  
“It’s best we moved on,” he said,

“Location, location, location.”  
But all I could think of was how much  
The name etched in the cement steps  
Resembled a tomb’s marker.



## The Fear of God

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand

–John Donne

It's a cold day in hell  
And your words are like spirits  
Trailing from your lips

The asphalt lies rough against my head,  
And the ambulance lights strobe my face  
Much like it does the others

I lie here waiting, wanting  
But god, you just kiss my head  
And mourn who I wasn't

I think, think about breathing  
So much that I cannot  
And my lungs swell with pride

Quickly, beat my chest  
Put your lips to my mouth  
And teach me how to breathe again

But you keep your head away  
I open my eyes, and you're afraid  
That I remembered how to breathe

I force your spirit into me and  
You fall into the ground as I rise  
Up to the heavens and take your throne

## Crack the Sky

Men divide clouds in flight  
Emulating little gods in play.  
Miniature jet planes that will all fall eventually  
But are quite the sight to see in the air.

A couple could be seen falling tandem who  
Had committed each other to formal attire.  
The tie pulled against the man's neck, and  
The white dress was a parachute in itself.

Another could be seen clinging to a square object.  
He was tossed out too soon—  
A man torn from his berth  
By parents and given nothing but faith in a satchel.

What does one think while falling at a terminal velocity?  
Possibly thoughts about the passed loved ones somewhere above  
Or more likely the ground's approach.  
Parachutes open like large thought bubbles with holes

Making men fall faster,  
Straddling the differences between their faith in firmament and the science of terra firma.  
There is a mound of bodies at the target zone, and as each diver  
Touches down, laid to rest, their parachutes deflate and encompass them.

## A Passing

I ralphed  
I couldn't stop it  
It felt unnatural  
I leaned against the tree and  
There was my math teacher  
Through the window  
She saw the whole thing  
I was red in the face  
My best friend had passed me  
More pepperoni and cheese  
I saw the cheese cling to the crust  
'Til all the strands tired, broke away and fell  
As a mangled lump of sauce and grease  
I couldn't think straight  
It looked unnatural  
It was my math teacher  
*With* my best friend  
I saw the whole thing  
Through the window and  
I couldn't stop it  
I leaned against the tree and  
I ralphed

## A Shadow's Man

Dark shades chase men down cobblestones.  
They are the imitators and pantomimers of shakin' hand,  
Forever faithful to the show capturing every ugly misstep.  
From a silhouette agreement pervades a question of initiation.  
Men laugh at the little joke that they are restricted to shadow.  
Surely not for they are the one that each day's sun reflects on.

A portrait of a man cuts through the alley to his home,  
Watching his shadow jump obscuring the light from one shadow to another,  
An ink blot dripped on the canvas of a masterpiece  
Bleeding into etched houses and colored flowers,  
But spreading til every fabric is tinged.  
It continues down the easel to the floor out the door.  
The man enters his threshold, drawing the shades into him,  
And the door shuts leaving the light out.

## To Summon Snowflakes Next to the Creature

I am alone,  
Lying here awake, with my head aching,  
Trying to understand why some eyes never close  
But just simulate sleep with rapid, aimless movement.  
I pray for something more.  
The apartment is quiet.  
Its dim walls know nothing worth telling.  
I think I'm good.  
I think I'm right.  
The hall leads me.  
The bathroom is dark,  
The shower's water is hot.  
Here with hair matted and body dripping,  
One could cry and no one could tell.

But I know how to comfort self,  
To gain carnal understanding.  
It comes as easily and thoughtlessly  
As if I wasn't there at all.  
But just when I feel not even God  
Himself could interfere, a big bang occurs.  
My heart races and my chest is heavy.  
What could be out there behind this plastic curtain?  
The water continues to fall down my face.  
Was shame at hand? I wait,  
I wait until enough time passes  
To convince myself that nothing had happened—  
To step out and to see there was nothing.  
I appear from behind the curtain, feet first.  
I grab the towel to wipe the perspiration from my body,  
To cover myself from the fogged mirrors  
Which the vanity light reveals framed  
In my blurred reflection.

## A Pack Rat's Shrine

“Everything will find its use someday,” my father had said,  
 “You just have to give it time, son.”  
 But stacks of Rolling Stones with covers torn and staples ajar  
 Seemed to scatter his reason.

“It is greed,” Mother had said, quoting God,  
 “And a false sense of accomplishment  
 That makes your father lust for things that are just dust.  
 But today he is to give it all up.”

I imagined his affinity reduced to an air of adultery,  
 But those rented walls just a storage unit.  
 I could not believe it to be a perversion of nature  
 To have a place for yourself.

So I tried to find utility in stuffed deer heads,  
 A deceased stepfather's bowling trophies,  
 Vinyl records silent on Volvo racks.  
 An M.C. Escher further distorted  
 Under greasy black typewriters.  
 Can a pack rat's shrine have no place in practicality?  
 Where is the virtue in self-indulgence?

We came to an arcade machine,  
 An offering I'd inherited from him.  
 We promised to submit it to the world, and  
 Tilting it forward I felt the joystick graze my arm.  
 I remembered wrenching it and owning it.  
 I caressed one side of the black machine and then  
 Forced it away from me, giving my father the full weight of it.  
 When the black box tore open his flesh  
 Was I supposed to feel guilt?  
 The shrine required the blood of a man, and  
 I was still a boy that cherished his toys  
 And couldn't yet face a god I didn't know.

## Autophobia

There is a certain discomfort  
Being behind the wheel of a car.  
Thousands of pounds of metal  
Moving at godly speeds.  
When it's just the car and me  
Who's to stop it from crashing  
Into a traffic light, a parked car or  
A crowd in a crosswalk?  
I can't.  
I can barely stop myself  
From jumping off the nearest railing.

## Time Lapse

Slow down everyone  
 You're moving too fast  
 Frames can't catch you when  
 You're moving like that

—Jack Johnson

Laying in my racecar that was two feet too small,  
 I recalled chasing you through darkened streets  
 As street lights blurred yellow streaks up and  
 Down the boulevard that would have placed  
 Me in the backseat of your blue station wagon.  
 A head of long, black curls in the driver's seat  
 Directly in front with a body strapped behind.  
 With the rearview mirror turned away,  
 I could only imagine a smile on your face.  
 Something human at least. Something that  
 Makes nightmares

not seem real.

All the times I looked under my bed and  
 In my closet, I was looking for you.  
 I've seen you hiding in mirrors,  
 Heard you knocking at my window,  
 Felt your cold kiss on my cheek,  
 Smelt your rot on my hands,  
 Tasted your blood on my lips.

There was a picture on the nightstand with  
 Glass cracked,  
 Rubber burnt.  
 Frames can't catch you when  
 You're not there.



## The Metronome

The clock ticks seem more important  
Than this test worth half my grade.  
I leave answers blank because to guess  
Would seem to assume I know.  
Time's up.  
School's out.  
And I'm gone.

Metal strikes metal  
As I pass the campus construction site.  
The sun begins its descent down the mountain  
And I hope that the workers are satisfied.  
Satisfied with what they've done,  
Who they are,  
What they've become.  
There's no time for regrets  
When your sweat dries before it hits the ground.

A countdown has begun.  
"Soon" claims the sign at the bus stop.  
We all have at least that long to wait.  
The bus will arrive when it arrives,  
No sooner, no later.  
But that doesn't stop my backpack from feeling like it's full of bricks,  
My books feeling weightier than their subject matter.  
My peers' faces are fatigued beyond friendly  
Not that I'd talk with them anyway.  
I am like them,  
We just need to go and it will be over.

A rhythm remains in the back of our minds.  
For some it may come from their headphones  
Repeating the drone of their favorite song.  
Others it was something from class  
That they can't stop thinking about.  
And others still think about what's next.  
What am I going to do when I get home?  
What am I going to do when I finally arrive?

A nameless bus arrives already full.  
We're not too concerned as we line up anyway.

It's the first bus out of here  
And I will go wherever it wants to take me  
I will get off when I've had enough,  
When I have discovered that I've arrived  
And the rhythm has been satisfied.

## BART

I used to think BART had something to do with the Simpson's character,  
I was wrong.  
BART is about getting people from place to place.  
It is rather interesting to see the landscape move past the window though.  
Trees and bushes, buildings and people all seem to blur past  
Like they're the ones in a rush and I wasn't the one to leave them behind.  
Gone like a quick snap of the fingers that makes me remember for an instant  
Something that was buried deep in within the subconscious  
To know a feeling  
Just to forget it with the next snap  
And never get it back.  
The goal is to go from Place A to Place J.  
I really just pick from the map the letter  
That means the most to me  
And then to try to explain it to the stranger  
Sitting across from me  
Who I will travel with for 15 minutes of my life  
And will never see again.

## Splitting Hairs

I have been cutting my hair.  
It is normal to trim here or there  
Even shave your neck.  
But this is different.  
I keep twirling my brown locks  
Feeling the grease between my fingers  
I am measuring them between my thumb and index finger  
Until finally when I can't resist any longer  
I rush to the bathroom to snip them off.  
I could get my haircut.  
I should get my haircut.  
They could provide some professional help.  
But then I think of how I'd have to drive there,  
Make nice with the stylist,  
Try to explain what I think I want done,  
Regret what I had done,  
Pretend I liked it,  
And then calculate their tip.  
No, I'd rather avoid the waste of time and money  
And stay here.  
Stay here with this great weight on my head.  
My hand will constantly comb for unwanted strands  
But I mustn't go too far.  
Although I think I feel a bald spot starting to form over my left ear.  
I must not rape my head of what is good.  
I look at myself the mirror with scissors in hand,  
Thinking about how I don't want to look crazy.

## My Criss Crossed, Shoe Laced, Sexualized Mind

“Did you ever find Bugs Bunny attractive  
when he put on a dress and played a girl bunny?”  
“No,” I shook my head, “why would you even ask that?”  
“I was just joking. Just joking.”

I trudged through campus, rain weighing  
Me down and shoelaces untied again.  
I heard a voice say something about a shoe,  
But I continued on being tardy, and thinking  
That it could be fixed later.

“You know ‘That’s what she said’ has ruined sexual innuendo.”  
“Ah-uh.”  
“One’s suggestive wordplay is being tainted by amateur jokesters.”  
“Yeah, I guess...”

Class was a bore.  
I thought of the professor naked.  
Why would I do that?  
Now I can’t unthink it.

“Some people just say it after every sentence until  
They get a laugh. Comedy requires tact.”  
“C’mon, it’s not that hard.”  
“Nice try.”

The cute girl I had seen in church needed a pencil.  
I had one to give, but said I had none.  
Could that be it?  
The story ends with nothing clever.  
Denial had become a part of me, but  
It was time I brought these ends together.

“Sufferin’ succotash!”  
A pencil was dropped.  
“What does that mean?”  
I bent over for it, smiling forcibly.  
“It doesn’t mean much of anything.”  
And then I saw it.  
“It has to mean something.”  
My shoe split red.

“Suffering savior, possibly.”

I am bleeding.

“That’s what she said.”