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## Kids

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## Five Poems

Author #1

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“Do you remember me?”

Just in from the rain, next

to me,

“Do you remember me?” she asks,

as if the whole thing never happened.

I forget what I said, but it was at least fifty

miles south of brilliant. All I could do

was swallow stones, pray for Wild Turkey

while trying to look like a one-man glacier.

Quickly as she came, she left.

Carrying two glasses of too-expensive

pinot noir,

but not before telling me

that she had been reading my e-mails

from...a long time ago, with a wistful tone

that I might be imagining. But then,

maybe not.

A century or two, dear. That's what

it feels like. Except when it feels like

six months or so. But I was speechless.

And now we're talking again.  
Did you commute my sentence  
from precarious silence  
and feigned indifference  
to convivial chit-chat in bars,  
which is how we first met anyway?  
How nice of you.  
Or is there  
a statute of limitations on this  
sort of thing?  
If so, I wasn't  
informed.

But then, you didn't inform me,  
which is how it all began, against  
reason and decorum and whatever else  
makes up the unlikely acquaintance  
of two smiling, wounded animals  
so accustomed now to a resonant,  
cavernous, yet soundless echo...

While your husband watches

from across the room.

## Rx: A Personal Prescription List

Bring me a cure for every hangover I'll ever have.

Bring me screenwriters for the dull moments

To work in some ink-stained revisions.

Bring me more tangible truths to cling to

In the merciful medicating night.

A cure for sleep, some beautiful breathy diversion

In a thinking man's neon-inflected metropolis

To fill those interminable hours between the shadow

Of thought and expression.

Bring me someone, that rare co-conspirator

Who runs not from the night

But with it, as in dreams that flee from me.

Bring me anything, anyone from anywhere

To keep away the slow, burning, gentle cult of domesticity

The cracked plastic grins, the sickly platitudes, the ever-retreating mirage of perfect bliss

The downhill slope of passion amidst the leftovers, the electric bill, the freezing bed

The fairy tales that cannot be, born of banal greeting cards,

Tragic missteps toward the moderate

Deadlier by far than my most overwhelming decadence.

Bring me a room with three good walls, a window, a door

Open to the possibilities of tomorrow, a path

To start anew from,  
To pace while I plot my next moves, all the while  
Trying to laugh at the past, looking towards  
Light amidst the darkness,  
Someone bearing some subtle silent clue  
To bring me a line  
I can scrawl or spill upon a page  
Without first feeling altogether too close  
To a tortured sixteen year-old girl  
With no date for the prom.

## Snapshots of the Mind, 3 A.M.

Sitting bleary and warm in a room with bad lighting  
Looking at myself, I am moved to wonder if indeed  
I am the Narcissus of our plugged-in age  
Or just some guy in sore, pressing need of camera and shelf space  
To freeze time desirably, decoratively placed alongside  
A certain wealth of collected wisdom in prose.  
This cannot be right. I see not myself nor anyone else in reflection but rather  
Row after row of books, papers, envelopes torn in fearful, shaking haste.  
Assorted dancing fleeting, tragic, wasteful reminders of foolish and wise endeavors,  
Their aftermaths a muddled inglorious mess of tragicomedy, chaos, missed connections.  
Hotel keys unreturned two years on from two hundred,  
Two thousand miles away,  
Loose change, endless receipts  
But no photographs, only snapshots  
That film cannot hope to capture  
Unless they sterilize the colder truth of experience  
Which I'll not have them do.  
What kind of life must you feel the need to lead



That you dare not or choose not

To put it to permanence

Outside yourself?

This conspicuous absence is terrible. Something has to go on that shelf

And I'm open to suggestions.

## Kids

I sometimes wonder  
if someday I'll meet  
the woman who talks me  
into having kids.

Or maybe we've already  
met and things just haven't  
gone that far yet.

I've watched untold multitudes  
of harridans and oafs  
dragging their spawn  
down the street, into  
grocery stores, restaurants,  
emergency rooms, movie theaters,

home from school,  
with a practiced look  
that is  
(not for lack of trying),  
quite unlike relief.

Always crying, redundant lumps  
of protoplasm.  
Small tragedies with parents  
who wear sweatpants and bunny slippers  
in public.

Of course,  
practicing for it  
is always fun.

But the world  
is dangerously  
overpopulated  
as it is. Civic duty  
demands that the family  
name dies with me.

The family name almost

died with my father,  
in no rush to have children  
of his own for the best of  
reasons having to do with specters of  
cocktail parties, tennis, and blank-eyed  
debutante-puppets whose own fathers  
owned a vinyard somewhere and wanted  
to nuke Vietnam.

But, as will happen now and then, somehow  
my mother eventually inspired him.

Or wore him down.

I still don't know which it was.

All I know is that the condoms  
somehow made it into  
the waste basket one night.

So...does this go on?

Me perhaps playing the distant father  
retiring to my study with book and bottle,  
at least until  
the kid gets old enough  
to be worth having

a conversation with?

What, for that matter,

would we even talk about?

I suppose if I were to go far enough

to give advice,

I would say

that they should love openly,

somehow,

no matter what the neighbors think,

being generous enough to assume

that the neighbors can think at all.

Embarrass yourself, laugh.

Most things are accidental,

like a bird flying into a window.

Although

just maybe

some things aren't,

like a meeting of the eyes

across a room nearly empty

at an hour

when all respectable people

should be home in bed.

No one asks

to come to this sideshow,

whatever it is.

Far fewer get to choose

how to leave it.

Though maybe with a modicum of honesty,

they could.

Beneath screaming neon,

around earth's imagined

corners, I suppose

that we're all just here

to help each other through

this thing, whatever it is.

Now then...

off to bed.



A Partial Elegy for San Francisco

The Greyhound bus pulls out just before  
ten o'clock that morning, heading south  
leaving behind the acrid tang of pot smoke  
and coffee too weak to defend itself  
at the terminal,  
the air something like cat's breath within.



No matter. Better things are coming. I'll be there  
in time for dinner. Panacea to ease the minute wounds  
inflicted by the mother and child picked up outside  
a gas station convenience store in Santa Rosa,  
the latter just an inconsolable cacophony of noises  
like freshly broken glass.

He and I may have something in common there.

But I'll be out of this soon:

Gone to the simple, knowing  
smiles and sideways glances  
of varied acquaintances with couches for talk, for sleep,  
or dalliance uphill westward to Valencia, or North Beach  
depending on the day, the hour, the prism and the light.

Or maybe we'll all just get drunk and lamentable  
and go out somewhere for corned beef hash and ice water  
around noon  
the next day, our overwrought bones afterwards  
rattling up the stairs (yet happy in that weariness)  
to an apartment where the lock on the door  
barely works and the off-white paint  
eternally peels beneath an unconquerable sun.

In the end, it came down to one old friend  
casually juggling nectarines on a balcony  
apartment overlooking Telegraph Hill,  
tossing them to me between  
sips of beer one afternoon  
just short of summer,  
talking of his moving south,  
talking of why every president  
should read *Julius Caesar*,  
and why I should make a living  
reading it in my mellifluous voice,  
talking of long odds in Los Angeles,  
and old girlfriends. All this folly to the world, of course.

Since then, the waves break as ever  
against the Golden Gate: Talismans  
like a slew of gleaming butter knives in the kitchen sink.

