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How This Man Breaks

## **Gazing Father**

Some stars don't just fall and disappear,  
And most don't explode all at once.  
It's not that simple, it's not like all of the sudden  
There's this cosmic Wop Pop-Pop BAM! No,  
A star death takes time; explosions are a process.  
It's like some stars are stronger than others. Maybe  
There is a universal timeline, or maybe there is no order.  
It's probably wrong to expect a star to glow forever,  
Even if you swear your star is unique;  
The process is impartial to favoritism.  
So, as I put my sunglasses on,  
I prepare myself for this final explosion,  
The one that my unique star is 65 years ripe for. Yet,  
No matter how much I hope for a different ending, I know that  
Once it happens, there'll be no brilliant showers of golden dust;  
Nothing will reach down to touch and comfort me.

## Where There Are No More Bright Red Stop Signs

1.

An old man strips in the middle of the interstate  
Cargo cutoffs slide forever down his bald legs  
Buffering his anklebones from the wind whipping sand  
Out here Time loses grip on the old man knowing  
This probably happens to other desperate dying things  
And as his body sags another inch or two  
He laughs like a man being burned alive  
It sounds like a scream  
Yet no one listens  
There are no limits.

2.

The old man starts to signal passing cars  
By whirling his large cock clockwise  
Like a helicopter blade guts the silence  
He wants to create short pauses for contact  
But no one will open their doors to touch him  
And no one will aim straight through to kill him.

3.

It's sizzling hot on the fractured blacktop  
The old man is trying to ignore the pain  
From his fleshy soles burning to the bone  
And yet he won't stop attempting to make contact  
In this place that's completely devoid of occasional restraints  
Where there are hundreds of miles of uninterrupted nothing  
No one cares to tell you when it's your turn to stop breathing.

## Allergies

I can sense she's upset that her son  
Won't touch it won't eat it  
Nor will *my man* even acknowledge  
How the dwarfed gar gasps helplessly  
With its giant oily eye rolled back at him  
While I study this reptilian turd flopping around  
Before the fish rests limp and dead on the dish I notice  
His mother's eyes are working to reassure him that  
All of this can be conquered and reversed completely  
By realizing that allergies are obsessions of the weak

And it is through him that I can see his mother glaring at me  
And it is through him that I can hear her lullaby singing  
...it's like they think no one else shares their supper table  
On days like these I wish I could smother them blue

I can be seen but no one else notices me  
Here I am cutting my fingers  
Ripping through the ribs of this dead gar  
Foolishly testing all these allergies  
That they both can't even begin to comprehend  
How if I pressed this salty gray flesh against my tongue  
Then I would go into shock and I would stop breathing  
Then I'd die and maybe I'd even turn into a reptilian humanoid  
Yet his mother won't give up on her big "Baby  
Boy" she'll never give in as she watches him  
Still afraid to touch the rawness

## So Memory Says,

THE MAN REMEMBERS

THE EXACT MOMENT AFTER

HIS 'OLD BEING' WAS

INTRODUCED TO A 'NEW'

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*There were thousands of trees, endless rows of black  
Trees that resembled enormous hypodermic needles  
Standing upright, aimed toward Heaven, and poised  
To empty their swollen syringes of dried-out Thorazine  
Over the gutted path of burnt grass; blackened blades  
That crackled sharply beneath the man's red-blistered feet  
When he took off running to touch the bark of the trees,  
And when he rubbed his hands over the faces of the trees  
They all dissolved, and collapsed instantly—wayward clouds  
Of ash, cascading through his frail spread fingers...*

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THEN HE REMEMBERS BEING

JARRED AWAKE BY THE MANIC

WAILINGS OF PATIENTS,

HIS PEERS; STRANGERS

VOICES MELDING INTO

ONE, UNANSWERED ECHO

## The fantastic sense of loss that I feel after discovering unexpected packages

Listen, it's not entirely true; I'm not completely consumed with fear.  
Some mornings I'm fine with all the faceless noise,  
And that's saying something, isn't it?  
See, most morning I can just let the sounds pass me without a ruffle.  
It's like, even if I wanted to do something, and I'm not saying I do,  
I know I have absolutely no say over the evolution of the day;  
Crows will squawk just to hear themselves squawk  
And babies will whine for their mother's milk and warmth,  
Cars will honk in spite of stop signs and momentary delays,  
And my cats will push their paws under the bedroom door,  
In their feeble attempts to ambush our new puppy as she sleeps,  
Curled warm against the small of Krista's bare back, while  
My love is murmuring dreamy pleas into the pillow top,  
And the puppy pants smoothly through their sleep.  
But then there are other mornings, like today, where  
I am throttled awake and alert by my bedroom walls  
Exchanging echoes over my bed—  
Echoes, those are what *really* get to me,  
Because I never hear them coming,  
Not until they're already on top of me.  
On the other side of my bedroom wall, I can hear  
Work boots bounding up the stairs, until at last,  
The echoes release to an extended silence,  
And then there's this sudden thud outside my door.

**“Because they assume the boy is the most sensitive member of the family they discourage him from spending time with them in the kitchen and by doing this it is their careful intention to not only protect him from himself but to also protect him from the sadness of the world...”**

Just as a jaw works lips around a straw,  
the silence sucks up everything  
from behind the swinging kitchen door  
still, the boy hides, eyeing through  
a t-bone hole in the mahogany,  
observing his present  
family affair:

He scans what he can  
of the kitchen, and the living  
room where his eldest sister is smirking  
and tugging rough on a black and curly  
that’s sprouted from the chin of his youngest sister  
while she tries to swallow the last swollen *Froot  
Loop* from a tipped bowl of rainbow-swirled milk.  
There is a delay in her reaction—a shrill scream  
and a speckle of blood—when the hair is ripped loose.

The boy sees his mama stretched flatback down the XL window-  
sill where she sometimes monitors the movements of the sea. Yet  
today, sea or no sea, she’s transfixed beneath the strong technicolor  
spell of her TV—silently shredding her emotions against the sharp  
sparkle-garble of the Channel 4 Sunday Morning Minister, what  
with all of his excessive hair gel and hallelujah dramatics! She’s shedding  
tears that streak down the forever-gray of her sunken cheeks.

He then spots his twin going wild  
in the far corner—pink face, with a sweat glaze,  
swollen-over from the struggle to suppress the hoarse  
moans of masturbating under the family dinner table  
without anyone noticing and interrupting his pleasure,  
or telling him not to disturb his not-quite-dead father,  
who hasn’t been himself in years. The aging man is  
propped up awkwardly in his chair,  
against the table, crumbling silently—*an infinite,  
incurable silence*—like a discarded window mannequin.

## Riding the Dragon

Outside the trailer, the fields are lopsided gray. I watch my two boys– sun-burnt and naked– looping around the pecan tree, lighting bottle rockets under pink plastic flamingos, waiting for the explosions. When I turn from the window, I'm in the bathroom over my husband, Billy who's low on the black-gum linoleum, writhing like a night crawler on fire, and spraying his cargo shorts red with infected piss– final stages of the killing virus.

Billy's looking up at me, doping myself on the sink's ledge. He's screaming at me to unstuck the needle from my goddamn arm, and take a close stare at his boil-bitten face– oozing puss, and skin peeling off, from all that picking he's been doing – and to make sure I see the rot-out gapes where gray flesh chunks now under his chalky fingernails. But, I can't look down at him right now. Billy ain't got much future left in him, and the only future I see is his virus coming for me. There ain't no escaping from it, and there's too much fucking death for me to have to witness clean, not without my veins pumped with liquid forgetting. And I'm to where, cause of the cost of taking care of Billy, I can't afford that much dope; so, I got to take my doses when I can, like *right now*.

I can feel the warmth creeping all over me, *the good dragon* riding in, to help consume my sight of Billy's suffering. See, it's like I'm in the trailer, still; but, I ain't in the bathroom no more. Billy's so far away, like he's buried under sand. Soon I'm being whisked away on a water rug, over his body, through the door, and let down in the living room; which ain't *really* the living room, see. It's sort of like being cocooned within a static dream; trapped in a dead-channel snow shower. It feels like near-invisible, black submarine fingers are bending paper-thin tin sheets behind my ears; there's this incredible wooshing all through my head. When I look up at the walls, I see porcelain plates hanging from where four clocks used to tell our time, and I can hear a hacking storm of coughs coming from the kitchen.

I see an old, yet, familiar man tilted against the dinner table. His hair is knotted. His face is wrinkled, cheeks swollen and spotted with purple blotches. He's wearing a sun-faded t-shirt, torn across the chest; with long white hairs curling out. A fifth of red piss rests at hand. It don't take me too long to figure out this old man is my Billy, or what he'd look like if he had another thirty or forty years left in him. He don't look up, and he don't notice me standing across from him. He is studying a tiger shark that's stretched across the table. I close my eyes. When I open them, the shark is a platter of silver ash. Old man Billy's not doing much of nothing; not until the trailer walls start thumping. Then he starts pointing to all the china plates crashing down off the walls. I whirl around: baby blue porcelain shatters on dust balls that look like rats, scattering across the floor. I can hear still-living Billy, in the bathroom, screaming for me to help. Old man Billy is wincing, and covering his ears. When I reach out to comfort the old man, there's nothing left for me to touch. Just like that shark, maybe *he* was always ash.

My sweet Billy's hollering, "VIRUS IS SCORCHIN' ME, KIKI, AND I AIN'T GO NO RELEASE O'ER HIM!" By when I get into the bathroom, Billy ain't got much left. He's staring into the hot white fluorescents. His long scarred arms are outstretched. His legs connected, thin and stiff, like a frozen snake. I listen, and watch the back of his head thumping against the linoleum. His teeth are chattering like a truck full of skeletons down a dirt road; another gran mal seizure. I stand over him, grinning. I ask him if he wants a taste of *the good dragon*, before he goes. I tell him how I can tie up his arm, like old times, and fix it real nice for him. Billy wobbles his forefinger, and his eyes roll; bone white. He tries smiling. It's like looking through a web-cracked windshield; seconds before it shatters.

## The Night He Was Committed

All night I heard lots of echoes, bleating  
Like feral beasts, or a distant nightmare,  
Maybe. Yet, the sounds were strong,  
So strong that they overpowered the GONK-  
GONK, GONK-GONK of my alarm clock  
Trying to warn me not to open my eyes,  
Not to roll over, and not to get out of bed;

But, it was useless. I couldn't even *begin*  
To pretend to be still, and so I shuffled  
Down the hallway, straight into the hourglass  
Morning; which was blacker than black,  
And devoid of my own delight in shadows.

As I moved in on the echoes, I heard them stretching  
Purer as I neared our condo balcony, and that was when  
I saw her on the other side of the sliding glass door. There  
My mother was bowed into the bars, griping iron,  
Her face was tangled under wild, long pepper-vine hair,  
And she was screaming her years out to him. Then I knew  
Her private attempts to shatter the silence of his sickness.

**If I were you, I'd never go back to that world...**

where women cry crabs for tears  
where men shit blazing-snakes for turds  
where broad arms are soil-rooted and towering (shadows  
swell across the land like chew-chew trees) there  
colossal fists occasionally unraveling then dropping  
down to pluck creeps up from their endless road of drink  
striking their many sweaty appendages against the wind  
and it all sounds choppy like waves smacking against a jetty of nails  
*...a world where the soundtrack of your thoughts suddenly stops*

## How This Man Breaks

The man hasn't left his bed for some years,  
And he *still* won't; not for anyone, or anything.  
It's as if he has completely lost track of time  
Ever since his family abandoned him alone  
In his home. Everything is silent.

\*\*\*

For weeks, before his wife left, the man listened to her snapping  
Branches against the kitchen floor, until she had enough  
To build the sled she slid down the street and out of his life.

Not too long after her departure, his children fled on ice skates,  
Shredding through the front door they had left wide-open  
From either forgetting, or not caring, their father remained inside.

Then the January winds burst through the gutted halls,  
Spilling the cold moisture that soon solidified,  
Until every inch of the man's house was frosted silvery-white.

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Balled-up in bed, Silence addresses the man directly,  
And though he can't understand what's being communicated,  
The man senses that he might already be dead. Frightened,  
He tries to remember what his life was before it was not, but  
There is nothing besides the blurred image of an exploding beehive.

The man buries his bearded face into the aged-yellow  
Pillow. The sour stench of dry blood mixed with oils  
And sweat scorches up his chaffed nostrils.  
He whispers *I'm a shadow frozen to these sheets.*  
Then he rolls over and shouts,  
"Come back...set me on fire!"