

John Raley

A POETIC JOURNEY  
OF LOSS, DESPAIR AND HOPE

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013

A poetry book

As with my first book of poems, I wrote these in the middle of the night when my cell block is quiet and free of distraction. If you read my first book, then you might consider this next selection to be darker, more pessimistic. I write what and how I'm feeling at the time and believe me, I am mostly an optimistic person despite my subject matter. So, please find the hope and joy that I intended when writing some of these poems. Enjoy on the first read, then perhaps on the second.

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## REVENGE

You slapped me hard and I fell to the floor,  
 Then made the mistake of thinking I wanted more.  
 The pain cuts deeper, grows harsher with time,  
 Yet I walk thru town as if I'm feeling just fine.

The thoughts in my head grow dark and twisted.  
 My drinking at the bar gets looked two-listed.  
 Right as wrong is about to be crossed,  
 As a one way bus ticket out of town gets tossed.

That gas in the drawer I was saving for the  
 Night get used to abuse. Are you ready to run?  
 I stalk you here and there as if gas costs a dime.  
 So, stay visible, please, move closer to that line.

A parking lot so quiet you can hear water fall.  
 You walk to your truck not seeming so tall.  
 I walk up beside you, all cozy at first.  
 With gas in my pocket, it will quench my thirst.

One last glance at your eyes and my memories burn.  
 Your kicks and hits gave me few places to turn.  
 So, face me, you bastard, I'm too nervous to stall.  
 My victory to savor as I wanted it all!

## REVENGE, cont'd

One bullet in your head and the blood matches black.  
Slump, the diminish, your spine crumbles, goes slack.

Now a cell with a sick is the penthouse I kiss.  
For what I did, it's all of my freedom I miss.  
I wanted revenge. I wanted you dead.  
But the fun was short-lived, in and out of my lead.

It went fast and furious, just like that one bullet.  
The haunting of what I did brings forth churning, then vomit...

Then more vomit.

## GREY MOON

A moon that once burst orange  
Now shimmer's grey in a sky filled with loss.  
The orange moon gave and took in equal amounts,  
But the grey overcomes reason with less than any to count.

Harder to find in the sky with its circle less proud,  
The stars and the planets don't twinkle so loud.  
The grey moon, will it last from one month to the next?  
Or, will it vanish forever, no lingering thoughts to wrest?

A sliver, a crescent, a plate in the sky  
I look up for guidance and shout out this cry,  
"Grey moon, do not leave me alone on this night!  
The loneliness I feel wraps around me so tight."

"Good night, grey moon."<sup>11</sup>

## DESERT LOVE

Wrap me up, pat me down  
 You seduce me in this town.  
 A western jig and tequila shots,  
 You're hot and steamy whether I'm ready or not.

Enchiladas and their sauce call for you to be my boss  
 Margaritas, chips and salsa true to taste, never false.  
 It's Santa Fe, my heart tells me  
 And I know this town's on fire,  
 So hold me round my middle and let the dancing  
 Take us higher.

A Spanish coffee shared beside the roaring fire  
 In a hotel/bar with its walls of pulsating desire.  
 Creepin' elevator to a floor hovering above,  
 Then down that plush hallway to a room inviting love.

Santa Fe, Santa Fe, give me love and cleanse my spirit,  
 But don't hold me too tight or I'll lose this love just given.

## MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

God, it's 2AM, can't the dawn come any faster?  
The shadows of candles lit lit the cracks in my plaster.  
My strength somewhat shaky with bourbon to spare,  
I sit rather than lie holding onto my chair.

If only sleep promised had come like it should,  
I wouldn't be crying, I'd be busy, feeling good.  
But the demons come calling my soul to burn,  
No relief from their crawling the sheets slow to turn.

Every voice in this house seems larger than life,  
And the cat and the dog stop their playing this night.  
I watch them turn into the rain on the glass  
Of windows once clear for my heart to see past.

I hope for some quiet, then rambling of time  
With hues gone to neutral, no bright lights to blind.  
A glass of warm milk should now call me to sleep,  
And the wind dries my tears as I fade counting sheep.

## WOUNDED HEART

The walls are hard, the concrete thick,  
The bars on my cell too evil to hit.  
My heart is encased within these bars,  
No longer a prisoner of soft tissues void of scars.

The name I'm called, the terrible love  
Surround me at night when push comes to shove.  
In and out of my cell, in and out of me  
I turn out, turn away, as I give up my plea.

When you see me again and you flinch at my pain,  
Remember I stood where walls brought forth rain.  
My heart yanked and twisted as my body lay prone,  
My spirit all but lifted to a cloud all alone.

I cannot convince you I tried with all my might,  
I've plotted revenge and nightmares made me give up the fight.  
Red, sometimes purple, my heart's color is real,  
But the shades are growing darker with pulses to feel.

My heart still beats despite the odds  
Of screaming and crying inside the jail's pods.  
But I want you to love it, my heart though it's weak.  
In time it can heal and to you it will speak... again.

## A CADILLAC CALLED HOME

What waits for me in a parking lot of police cars?  
 My bright blue cadillac to drive me to a bar.  
 You see, I got out of jail this morning, under a blazing sun.  
 So I'm counting on you, cadillac, to take me to the fun.

I'll turn on that AC, I'll crank up some tunes.  
 I'll stop at the Wawa for coffee and balloons.  
 It's been twelve months since I sat behind your wheel,  
 Concrete and bars now replaced by chrome and steel.

From floodlights to headlights to gas, but in a tank  
 Britty likens and blankets to pears set to crank  
 Stainless steel stools to plush cushiony seats  
 Glass partitions and walls to windows that roll  
 And a trunk to carry a new life complete.

Heading out of this town and miles to the next,  
 Nothing feels better than a wheel to caress.  
 From biways to highways, down and up hills,  
 Red lights and green lights that could have once killed.



## A CADILLAC CALLED HOME, cont'd

I'm home in my car. It feels good to drive.  
No message to send except "It's good to be alive."  
Tears in my eyes and my hair blowing free  
From a year without freedom and no roads to see.

Oh, my bright blue cadillac, I won't lose you again.  
You're a home and a comfort, let's keep going round the bend.

## TWO SEASONS

spring  
mild, radiant  
planting, growing, pruning  
flowers, showers, harvest, pumpkins  
reaping, warming, blazing  
chilly, crisp  
autumn

## A RAG DOLL LIFE

Smacked and punched, what more does it matter?  
Lifeless and limp, there was this right to batter?  
Sometime ago a message was sent  
That boys will be boys, a rule you can't bend.

Pretty and slick with green eyes of splendor  
Making that boy consider his heart to render.  
Yet, an arm around her waist meant power  
And her life once endless lives hour to hour.

She keeps things together thanks to make-up and wine.  
With an hourglass ticking, she's soon out of time.  
A supper home-cooked on a white table cloth  
Meant a day of devotion to a stove and broth.

If only his kisses were soft like they were.  
If only his blessings overcame his curse.  
A front porch swing used to capture our moods.  
A lilac in a vase meant the promise of love.

What caused him to change, she'll never know.  
She'll smile her way through it, but under a black crow.  
Her strength ebbs and flows, but his always stays strong.  
She didn't bargain for this, her marriage gone wrong.  
Wrong... terribly wrong.

## ANGEL WINGS

I held on tight to my dreams that night,  
A night of tremors and rapid heart beats,  
A night of anxiety and pains in my chest,  
A night when at moments I wanted lasting rest.

An angel so pretty, so blonde, so white  
Flew into my dreams through the wreckage of that night.  
Helping me to hold on and cry without guilt  
To remember the halls and the hearts that I built.

The warmth of her wings, the gold in her robe  
Left a crown on my head, in my cell which was cold.  
She kindled a fire to heat my rapid thoughts  
To love and to hold, just no more sins to be sought.

Stay with me, sweet angel.  
Your comfort takes hold.  
You came as you promised.  
Your wings now unfold.

Gone away is the heartache the devil had spun.  
In place comes the comfort and the love to be won.  
Won like a medal keep high over head.  
Please stay with me, angel. Please don't leave my bed.

## CHERRY RED

There's never been so much blood on the floor  
 With the clanging, the banging of my cellmate's door.  
 A shattering sound breaks the silence of night,  
 The initial roar of a crowd expecting a fight.

Red on red hues stain the tile.  
 He cuts from the knife for the tissues, spared the bile.  
 Help to stop it was lame at the time,  
 Heads turned sideways then downward on a dime.

I felt helpless as he cried against the brick,  
 Not knowing if I was next to take the hit.  
 There's no place to run when your cell is packed,  
 And the guard starts to smile but then turns his back.

From light to dark, the puddle's near my bed.  
 It seems so dreamlike, a beautiful cherry red.  
 A painting well matted will trace this memory  
 Of a cherry red flow across a jailhouse floor.

STANDING TALL

Once on hands and knees  
Where the world seemed so small  
Looking face down at the ground  
And holding onto tracing each sound.

The green of the grass was my only friend in town,  
But not acres of it, a much smaller piece of ground.  
Held down by force of a body not a mind  
With my spirit inside wanting so much to cry.

Wobbling on knees and wrists awaiting doom,  
Some voices give comfort, others run to rooms.  
The one who ran the fastest to a room  
Was the one who accused me of more than she fooled.

I'm ready to rise and go to apologize.  
I'm ready to get up and leave this place  
For a lawn much less stained than this one I face.  
I will rise up! I will stand and walk tall... home.

STUPID BOY

I used to think I'd have a love,  
Coming from down under or maybe from above.  
I wanted it to consume my life.  
I wanted affection, not neglect and strife.

You stupid boy, how dare you ask for that?  
You're not deserving, so put down your bat.  
You'd only strike out not once but three times.  
You just can't mix the rowdy with the sublime.

Hey, stupid boy, you better get piping into town,  
Cuz there ain't no whiskey here to pass around.  
And you look like you need some to belly up your fears.  
Here just ain't enough to wipe away the tears.

To want the best but get the least can knock me against  
A wall.

And love that forgets its promise of forever seems destined  
To be small.

So, run along, stupid boy, get shelter while you can.  
There's always tomorrow, the beach and a tan.

## HOUSE OF DEMONS

There's no church inside these concrete walls,  
No stained glass windows between these bars,  
No choir singing hymns of joy and peace,  
And no pews of comfort, no confessional for release.

What exists on these grounds is a room called "multi-purpose."  
But its flavor of the month runs from bland to explosive.  
For many teachers and preachers take over its space.  
Men the inmates get lost and can't finish the race.

Pulpits that teach and preach seem to serve only that  
But they lack understanding. They're too matter of fact.  
The sinners, too, minister their potions of hope,  
Yet they only leave yearning for a drink and a smoke.

Black ties and polyester set the trend for attire.  
The voices ooze forth condemnation, rapid breath and fire.

I wish for compassion, not judgment so true.  
I wish for healing, not better to worse.  
Black angels seem to descend on this room,  
And the walls echo misery, abandonment and doom.

## SATURDAY NIGHT

Whew, the bartender's hot and my bar stool skivvers  
And my Manhattan needs just one more dab of bitters.  
Smoke swirling upwards from pretty mouths so chic;  
Oh yes, it's Saturday night and things are lookin' cheap.

Not that they'd look much better on any other night,  
But it's easy to see why we lower the lights.  
If the proof is in the pudding, so my bar buddy says,  
Then bring me the pudding. I'll keep my judgment at bay.

A swirl on the dance floor under hot flashing lights  
Don't necessarily mean you've got a home for the night.  
The next dude walkin' in might look better than you,  
So dance your little heart out. It's no time to feel blue.

There's always another round of drinks to puzzle.  
Keep your hands off that one or you'll stare into a ruzzle.  
Not that you're in danger; I mean it is Saturday night.  
But testosterone and liquor, well, get ready for a fight!



## VALENTINE'S DAY

On a cold wintry day with no one to hold  
 I'd have rather been outside in the cold.  
 I used to see red all day on this day,  
 But all traces of that color have faded away.

I see hearts in my mind but not in my heart.  
 Mistakes made keep my lover and I apart.  
 It's easy to cry red tears and mean it,  
 Cuz blue tears don't go with this I've been given.

I wish for good chocolate or even a cupcake supreme.  
 Red and white candies take on life greater than it seems.  
 No card to open, yet a white letter expresses love  
 In an envelope scented with the perfume of a dove.

St. Valentine, I know you're here for me to call,  
 But don't forsake me if I'm not up for the ball.  
 My tuxedo and bow tie get put on hold.  
 I'll leave them alone. Let the nighttime air grow cold.

## SILK AND SATIN

Virtue never crossed that woman's path;  
 Only sinful plotting with a body to match.  
 Cocktails and cootails led her life astray,  
 And, of course, she was magic on a wealth of Fridays.

One shudders to think of what now she could do  
 To escape the drudgery and drink wine, but with who?  
 Showboats and beaches occupy her stays  
 And she's always welcome at any mansion on the bay.

A beauty once flawless now lined with fingerprints  
 Of those who invested fully into perfume well spent.  
 A white Persian cat guards her plush velvet chaise  
 And a serpent coils boldly in her garden of splinters.

Fragments of men live her staircase to pleasure -  
 A suite of temptation with square feet too big to measure.  
 Emeralds and rubies rest on her porcelain skin  
 As they mark conquests and money given freely to sin.

Her fur piece could wrap and keep skeptics away  
 With red roses aplenty on Valentine's Day.  
 Lovers and mongers doth fish in her lake,  
 And her boudoir embraces a cigarette and high stakes.

SILK AND SATIN, cont'd

Let her shimmy and gyrate from dusk until dawn.  
Then servants gather, sweeping the night's debris from the  
Lawn.

Seduce me, touch me, hold court with my fire.  
You'll captivate, dark lady, and paint a portrait  
Of my desire.

PUNKY, THE CAT

I once cared for a cat named Punky,  
And a bit of a "punk" he was.  
A bright orange tabby always welcoming me to his master's  
House.

Punky followed me round and round as I did my duties  
And I laughed and played while he held the booty.  
What is it about orange tabbies that make them so endearing?  
Could it be that "love me" personality? Well, yes, I guess.

Anyway, I hope Punky will always be well.  
I hope Punky will always be strong.  
For I know Punky is loved by me... still.

DEAR EDDIE

I do miss you each Christmas!  
I miss the egg nog you used to make.  
I miss your generosity - to give, never take.  
I know your soul rests well with god's spirit.  
I know your wonderful mind takes hold in my spirit.

God rest ye, for you gave me so very much.  
I will always remember you and your touch.  
I visit your grave many times and speak to you.

## REHAB 101

Papers to fill out and a basin for my pills  
"Have a seat, please, and where do we send the bill?"  
It wasn't my idea to come here. A judge made it so.  
But I better make the best of it or turn around and go.

The nurse takes my vitals, my history and such  
And my blood pressure rises when I pee in the cup.  
It's a long walk down a hall with no answers  
To a "This is your room, so unpack and join the dancers."

Dancers are the others I'll soon get to know.  
And the dance itself - is it fast or is it slow?  
God, I need to check out of the pace I've been on.  
No clean memories left as it's been so long.

One day at a time is what I need to learn.  
I'll give up the treadmill as they're no calories left to  
Burn.

Classes and groups will be the typical day.  
Sessions with the shrink will keep the demons away.

REHAB 101, cont'd

"I know it's for the best," keeps rattling in my head,  
Yet nightmares keep intruding upon my sleep in my bed.  
I'll make new friends among the dancers, some almost  
Black.  
Now miles from the highway and the "breakdown" to Hank.