

PAUL CORDEIRO, WRITER

just wanted to let you know that I love your poems “The Burning” and “Andrew Hettinger” very much. There is something felt there that is even greater than the journalism style poetry that you sent me, as examples, the other day. I felt that the happenings and drama described there felt like a real person speaking of real life events. Maybe it is just a quibble as the two other stories could be considered that way but somehow they felt distant.

THE REMAINS
Torture and Triumph

publications

TORTURE & TRIUMPH

children
churches
& daddies

2001
COLLECTION BOOK

children
churches
& daddies

ANDREW HETTINGER

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and why would you: you, who never had anyone, you, who always had the bad breaks. Everyone looked at you as different. Where would you have learned to trust. Who would you have learned it from.

I never really liked you. I met you through a friend and he explained to me that multiple sclerosis left you with a slight limp and a faint lisp. Faint, under the surface, but there, traces of something no one would ever know of you well enough to fully understand.

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and I never wanted you to; you scared me too much. You, plagued with physical ailments. You, with a limp in your walk. You, with a patch over your eye. You, who stared at me for always just a bit too long.

They told me the patch was from eye surgery with complications and now you had to cover your shame, cover someone else's mistakes, cover a wrong you didn't commit, cover a problem not of your own doing. The problems were never of your own doing, were they.

I heard these stories and I thought it was sad. I heard these stories and thought you had to be a pillar of strength. And then I saw you drink, straight from the bottle, fifteen-year-old chianti. And I saw you smash your hand into your living room wall. This is how you lived. The house you lived in was littered with trash. Why bother to clean it up anyway. It detracted you from the holes in the wall, the broken furniture from drunken fits. This was

how you reacted to life, to the world. You didn't know any better. This is how you coped.

I never really liked you. You would come home from work, tell us about a woman who was beautiful and smart that liked you, but she wasn't quite smart enough. And I thought: We believe anything if we tell ourselves enough. We weave these fantasies to get through the days.

I never really liked you. Every time you talked to me you always leaned a little too close. So I stayed away from the house, noted that those whom you called friends did the same. I asked my friend why he bothered to stay in touch. And he said to me, "But he has no friends."

This is how I thought of you. A man who was dealt a bad hand. A man who couldn't fight the demons that were handed to him. And with that I put you out of my mind, relegated you to the ranks of the inconsequential. We parted ways. You were reduced to a sliver of my youth.

I received a letter recently, a letter from someone who knew you, someone who wanted me to tell my friend that they read in the newspaper that you hanged yourself. Your brother died in an electrical accident, and after the funeral you went to the train

station; instead of leaving this town you went to a small room and left us forever. Strangers had to find you. The police had to search through records to identify your body. The newspaper described you as having "health problems." But you knew it was more than that.

And I was asked to be the messenger to my friend. The funeral had already passed. You were already in the ground. There was no way he

could say goodbye. I shouldn't have been the one
to tell him this. No one deserved to tell him.
He was the only one who tried to care.

I never really liked you. No one did. But when
I had to tell my friend, I knew his pain.
I knew he wanted to be better. I knew he
thought you were too young to die. I knew he
felt guilty for not calling you. He knew it
shouldn't have been this way. We all knew it.

I never really liked you. But now I can't get
you out of my mind; you haunt me for all the
people we've forgotten in our lives. I don't like
what you've done. I don't like you quitting.
I don't like you dying, not giving us the chance
to love you, or hate you, or even ignore you more.

My friend still doesn't know where your grave is.
I'd like to find it for him, and take him to you.
Let you know you did have a friend out there.
Bring you a drink, maybe, a fitting nightcap
to mark your departure, to commemorate a life
filled with liquor, violence, pain and death.

I never really liked you, but maybe we could get
together in some old cemetery, sit on your grave
stone, share a drink with the dead, laugh at the
injustices of life when we're surrounded by death.
Maybe then we'd understand your pain for one brief
moment, and remember the moments we'll always regret.

This poem was also published in the books Contents UnderPressure and Side A/Side B.

GOD EYES

It was a stupid point to argue about at 2 a.m.,
sitting in the lobby of the Las Vegas Hilton
listening to the clink and whirr of slot machines
and the dropping of tokens onto metal.
You believed in God, I did not. Even after two
rounds of Sam Adams and three rounds of Bailey's
I knew you wouldn't change my mind, and
I had no desire to change yours.

You told me of a dream you had: in it you and
Christian Slater played a game of pool. You
won. He looked at his hands and said, "I've got
a beer in one hand, and a cigarette in the other.
I guess this means it's time for me to seduce
someone." And he walked away. You're a funny
man. You make me laugh. Your brother even noticed
that. And you even spoke like Slater, rough, mysterious.

You were the optimist: yes, there is
meaning to life. I was doomed to nothingness,
meaninglessness. But to me you were the
pessimist: you believed you were not
capable of creating the power, the passion
you had within you. I had control in my life, even
if in the end it was all for nothing.
You think we are so different. We are not.

It's now after three and we listen to music:
Al Jarreau, Whitney Houston, Billy Ocean, Mariah
Carey. Natalie Cole, with her father. "That's why darling,
it's incredible -" you mouth as you walk toward the
washrooms - "that someone so unforgettable -"
take a spin, watch me mouth the words
with you as you walk away -
"think that I am unforgettable too."

I tell you about the first time I got drunk - I was maybe ten, and asked my sister to make a mixed drink mom had that I liked. She made me a few. So there I was, walking to the neighbor's house in the summertime, wearing my sister's seventies zip-up boots, oversized and unzipped, carrying my seventh drink and sticking my tongue out to see the grenadine. You liked my story. You laughed.

Passion is a hard thing to describe. Passion for life. You must know and understand a spirituality behind it. You do your work, the things in life solely because you must - it is you, and you could not exist any other way. It is who you are. It is a feeling beyond mere enjoyment. You said that the spirituality was a God. I said it was my mind. Once again, we lock horns.

All of my life I have seen people espouse beliefs but not follow them. Tell me you're not like them. Our values are different, but tell me we both have values and will fight to the death for them. I need to know that there are people like that, like me. We are different, but at the core we are the same. We understand all this. I'm grasping straws here as the clock says 3:45 a.m. and the betting odds for football games roll by

on the television screen. You don't gamble. Neither do I. Why must you be so far away? You reminded me that I have a passion in life, that I have to keep fighting. But I get weak and tired of fighting these battles alone. I, the atheist, have no God and have to rely on my will. When I am low, I struggle. You have your God to fall back on, I only have me.

And you looked into my eyes as it approached
the morning. You stared. We locked horns once
again. I ask you again what you were
thinking. And you said, "I see God in
your eyes." Later you said it to me again. I asked
you what you meant. You said, "I see
a God in your eyes. I see a soul." Whether
what you saw was your God or just me, my

passion, well, thank you for finding it. "Good-bye,
Ms. Kuypers," you said when you left for good
that day. I said nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Williams,
I thought, then I closed the door, walked to the
window, started singing unforgettable. I was alone
in my hotel room, and the lights from the Stardust,
the Frontier, the Riviera were still flashing.
I'm not alone. Good-bye, Mr. Williams.

*This poem was also published in the books *Close Cover Before Striking* and *Side A/Side B*.*

BEING GOD

I'm tired of dying for your sins
over and over again and why is it that
I am the one that's doing the dying
when you are the one that's doing the sinning
I don't think you're learning your lesson

I'm tired of taking this knife to my hands
over and over again giving myself the stigmata
the blood gets all over my clothes
and I can never get the stains out
and for what, for you to see how I suffer

I'm tired of being humble when I'm
supposed to be the one with the power
over and over again I become your servant
and never are you bowing to me
I don't even get a thank you

I'm tired of preaching to the converted
when the converted aren't even really listening
they're snoring in the back rows while I
deliver my sermon and there's not even air
conditioning in here and I'm sweating

I'm tired of coming to you and healing the sick
taking away the problems, over and over again
giving you something to look forward to
and all I have is an eternity of waiting for
someone to take my place and tend to my wounds

I'm tired of giving the earth up to you
watching the devil's work be done, and you know,
he's just sitting down there looking at me
and laughing, over and over again because it's
so easy for him when he doesn't have to work

I'm tired of being your salvation
over and over again you turn to me
and I have no one to turn to but myself
it's a bitch, you know, being your own god
since no one can save me from me

I'm tired of being your teacher, handing you
what you need on a silver platter and waiting
for that damn collection plate and someone
is always stealing out of it from the back row
I know who you are, you who leave me nothing

I'm tired of wearing this crown of thorns
over and over again the needles prick my skin
and even gods bleed, at least this one does
and when I ask you to wipe the blood
out of my eyes, well, I can't see you anywhere

I'm tired of being something for everybody
when everyone is nothing for me
maybe the devil has the right idea, you know
maybe I'll sit back and wait for you to miss me
as you wonder who's your messiah now