

it's Like Losing
cc&d chapbook

HOOVER

it's Like Losing

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Scarsuonitajdn
Publications

Acknowledgements

Even Years Before He Died – Rat’s Ass Review
Salt And Beer And Sitting On My Ass – Children, Churches & Daddies
Castanets – Your One Phone Call
It’s Like Losing – Fox Cry Review
Over My Dead Body – Dead Snakes
An Asshole Thing To Do – Misfit
Lazarus – Children, Churches & Daddies
Ho Chi Minh – Children, Churches & Daddies
No Real Reason – Misfit
Just Like Elvis – The Bitchin’ Kitsch
At 59 – Fox Cry Review
Still Up In The Attic – Mad Swirl

Dedication

For Nick and Ali

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Even Years Before He Died

I am a lineman for the county . . .

It comes on in the background
of the bar across the parking lot
from your motel over the conversation
and clicking of pool balls behind you.
It's your favorite Glen Campbell song,
you can't help but sing along while
you remember your sister had that album,
the one with his face on the cover,
how the whole family would watch
his show together every Sunday night.

I hear you singin' in the wire . . .

You take off your cap, rub your hand
over your head. You think about
how you saw online a while back
that Campbell, with the haircut, sideburns
and smile you wanted back in the 70's,
now has Alzheimer's, no more performing
for him. That's what killed your poor father,
even years before he died. You see him,
as you take a long swallow of beer,
in that sickly clean smelling lock-down unit
of the nursing home staring at the tv all day long.

. . . and I want you for all time.

Your dad began showing signs in his mid-60's,
getting lost for a few minutes driving to places
he'd been a million times. You're 61, now starting
to worry every time you can't remember somebody's name
or a movie title, or where you put that book down
a few minutes ago. You look up at the clock,
then down at your near empty beer. You hope
you have time for at least a few more as you try
to signal the bartender, but this is your first time here,
and there's no telling when things are going to shut down.



Western Flyer

Salt And Beer And Sitting On My Ass

These days an angel who limps and speaks
only broken English wakes me up early
every morning. First, she reminds me
to make an appointment today to see
a doctor about my blood pressure
and rambles on about my daily sins
of salt and beer and sitting on my ass
in front of the tv, while I roll over in bed,
try to cover my head with the pillow.
Then, she begins to read, in alphabetical order,
the list of people I've disappointed in life.
I whip my pillow across the room at her,
ask her politely to please shut the hell up,
but she never does. So, I flip her the finger
before she gets through the C's, struggle out
of bed, shuffle over to the bathroom. I steady
myself while I pee, tell myself I'll be OK after
a few cups of coffee, try not to think about
a huge bacon and eggs breakfast with my mom
and dad, or any other of the good things I can
no longer have or probably never deserved.



Big Country

Castanets

My girlfriend is learning to play
the castanets. Her teacher is
a very old man from Granada.
She says if you mention Lorca to him,
he'll take out a silk handkerchief
to wipe the tears from his eyes,
then whisper sobbingly in Spanish,
*Always remember, you play the castanets
more with your heart than with your hands.*



Ghost Town

It's Like Losing

Like me, he eats alone most nights
At the little Greek place in the strip mall
With the Walgreen's and the tanning salon
near my apartment. He's got a thick beard,
always wears an Elmer Fudd hunting shirt
and one of those black Viet Nam P.O.W caps.
I hope to hell he's older than me, but I know
It can't be by much.

Tonight, I look up from my paper and food
to hear him say to the waitress after he orders
the chicken parm special, *My dryer died today.*
Had the damn thing for twenty-two years.
It's just like losing another member of my family.
Seems like since Jeanie died, I can't catch a break.
She tells him that she understands, pats him
on the shoulder a few times, says his salad will be
right out. He turns to stare out the window and I push
the sports section away, get back to cutting my way
through some pork chops that now seem pretty tough,
try to remember the last time I used a dryer
that didn't need quarters.



Hudson

Over My Dead Body

Screaming Mimi was my aunt's professional name; she was a stripper in Dallas in the 1960's. One year when I was a little kid, she brought her boss Jack Ruby to our house for Thanksgiving. My mom seemed to like him, at least more than most of Mimi's other boyfriends back then, but at the table during dessert he told a dirty joke real loud right in front of me and my cousins about a traveling salesman and a farmer's daughter and nobody laughed except him. It got real quiet until my mom asked if anybody wanted another slice of pumpkin pie, said there was still plenty of real whipped cream left.

A year later, after we watched him shoot Lee Harvey Oswald on tv for the hundredth time, my dad grinned and said to mom, Well, you can relax now. I guess you don't have to worry about your sister bringing him over for Thanksgiving again next week. He'll be here over my dead body, she replied, sitting up straight in her chair. That filthy joke he told last year really ruined my dessert.



Miller High Life

An Asshole Thing To Do

He's rolling through the channels,
stops on something in black & white.
What's this? I ask. *Schlinder's List*,
you dumbass, my friend replies,
Haven't you ever seen it? I shake
my head. He says we should watch it,
thinks I'll like it. It's really good.

I remember it was a Sunday afternoon,
she was way late. We had a date to see
Schindler's List, then this Indian place
she was dying to try. I hadn't seen her
in two weeks, kept saying she was working
a lot of doubles, too tired to go out even for a drink.
A knock at the door and I see she's not smiling,
a quick kiss on the cheek, but before I can say
that we better get going she steps past me,
announces that we need to have a talk.
She's gone a few minutes later, left me
sitting there alone with a letter she wrote
to explain why she couldn't see me anymore.
Even she said it was an asshole thing to do
as she walked toward the door. I never read it,
but I'm pretty sure I still have it somewhere.

After a few minutes of the movie, I give up,
start to leaf through an L.L. Bean catalogue
off the coffee table. Why aren't you paying attention?
my friend asks. Don't you like it? When I tell him
it's too sad and painful for me to watch, he says
he understands. It's a powerful story, that's for sure.
One you never forget.



Bison

Lazarus

You've probably heard of me.
My name is Lazarus. I felt like hell
for years – achy all the time, nasty cough,
couldn't keep food down, trouble breathing.
Add to that my two nutty sisters, Martha
and Mary, who just drive me absolutely crazy.
It's no wonder neither of them can find a husband,
and get out of my hair, they're too busy following
this new Jesus The Savior guy around. They brought him
by one weekend and he was okay, kind of quiet,
didn't eat or drink too much, but I didn't see
what the big deal was. I was really hoping
he was going to take one of them off my hands,
but he just told me he was sorry I was feeling
so bad and to hang in there, and then he was gone
wandering around again. That's when I got a lot worse,
started coughing up lots of blood and finally, thank god,
I got to die, and I'm telling you, it was great.
No pain, no job to go to, real quiet and cool
down in the grave. Then, after only four days,
it seemed a helluva lot shorter, the next thing I know
I'm being yanked out of there by good ol' Jesus,
and I'm all wrapped up like the mummy,
and everybody's yelling and screaming and happy
except me. Of course, now, Jesus is long gone,
but I still feel like crap and I saw some blood
on my pillowcase this morning, so I guess now
I have to die all over again and that's really going
to suck. I was afraid that when I die again real soon,
my sisters would run and get Jesus to ruin all my peace
and quiet again, but I heard just the other day
the Romans finally caught up with him
and plan to nail him to the cross quick as they can,
and, frankly, I don't blame them one little bit.
Why can't these religious nuts just leave
the rest of us well enough alone?



Kentucky Swans

Ho Chi Minh

My grandmother played
co-ed volleyball on a team
with Ho Chi Minh at a Y
in lower Manhattan way back
before the first world war.

He used to have everybody over
after matches to his tiny apartment
in Hell's Kitchen, she said, for bowls
of steaming pho tai, but only if they won.
He was weird that way.



Beauty Adds Ruin

No Real Reason

I'm sitting in my car drinking a Coors Lite at the the Gas and Go on the twisting highway south of Logan, West Virginia. I stopped here fifteen minutes ago mostly just to pee, grabbed some beef jerky, Fritos, and beer for the motel later tonight. I got in line to check out behind a tiny old woman with a cane in a Steelers sweatshirt. The cashier was twice her size with long gray braids and eyes so big I can't imagine them ever being fully closed. She slides the elderly lady a pack of Newports, then leans over the counter toward her. Notice anything? she asks. The old woman hands her a bill and says, Oh, that smells real pretty. The cashier takes the cash and straightens up at the register and says, I don't know why, but I just dabbed on some perfume this morning. No real reason, I just thought it would be nice. She smiled widely and I couldn't help but notice that one of her front teeth was completely grey. The old woman took her change and limped away. Bye-bye, Doreen, the cashier said. Say hi to Eddie for me. When I put my stuff down, she asked me if I had found everything I needed. I nodded yes and inhaled deeply, trying my best to get a whiff of something sweet.



Air Conditioned

Just Like Elvis

My new girlfriend attends
a church where they believe
Jesus had a twin brother
who died at during childbirth.
Just like Elvis, she says.

When I asked her
what evidence they have
for this, she tells me that
their pastor wears a jumpsuit,
the hymnal's full of Elvis songs,
so at least it's never boring,
like real church always is.



Kansas Cross

At 59

I find myself driving around
western Kansas, pausing to pee
and eat gas station burritos
in little towns with big names
like Ulysses and Syracuse.

I pull off the highway to take
a photo of a small roadside cross
that marks a car wreck death.
My lens zooms in and out
on a world so flat and spacious
that it almost makes me believe
it can go on forever.



Tennessee

Still Up In The Attic

The trains didn't stop at my hometown anymore,
but on firefly nights with windows wide open,
I could hear them rolling all the way down along
the Hudson, south to Grand Central or north to Albany,
then west to places I had never been. It was my world
then, the tract house neighborhood full of kids, the A&P
and Western Auto, the Tastee-Freeze, and our elementary school.
We played softball all summer long, games of ghost runners
and poison fields, bought icy, little green bottles of Coke
at the Sunoco station on the bike ride home. Our dads were back
from the war and the G.I. Bill to computer jobs at IBM
and highballs before dinner, tomato gardens in the backyard.
Moms kept house on coffee and cigarettes, served meals
like clockwork with church every Sunday.

But the summer games became summer jobs scooping ice cream
or painting houses, then the kids all scattered for college, or jobs
in Houston, Charlotte, or Atlanta. I heard the A&P got torn down
and the school closed, came to realize my parents were forgetting
any news I gave them on the phone, ran out of good excuses
for not getting home more often. They had our house air-conditioned
a few years before they sold it and moved down to Tampa for good
and died soon after. I came home the last time to get my yearbooks
and baseball glove still up in the attic, and I'm sure that down by the river
the trains were still running like always, but I couldn't hear them anymore,
my bedroom windows now closed up tight.



Wright Morris Tribute

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