Noted Mirrors

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For Curiosity
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Abstract

_Noted Mirrors_ seeks exploration, it seeks discovery it seeks experience. I think, like most of us, I’ve often had far more wonders than answers, but I often like it that way. _Noted Mirrors_ tries to understand a romance that frightened, a friend taken away too soon that crippled. An unconditional love from grandparents and a mother that rescued. A relationship with an absent father that poisoned. Revelational relationships with familiar strangers that taught so much in the form of freeing. A fascination with Redwoods and Orcas that brought so much life into merely being. And a curiosity of the abstract that brought so much sight into merely seeing.

I think I learned just as much from writing this book as I had to learn in order to write it. What I mean is that in order for me to write my truth I first had to find meaning in that truth. What it meant to me, what I thought it could mean for people like me or the public in general. I found that meaning by simply realizing that I could be whoever I wanted to be as long as I remained curious; I could dream. So, I’ve chose to be a writer of ubiquitous exploration, whether that search led me home or to uncharted lands. I’ve chose to be a writer of foreign discovery, whether the finding is something of the exterior or interior. And most importantly, I’ve chose to be a writer of curious experience, no matter how many answers I get, no matter how many questions I have. _Noted Mirrors_ serves as a reminder that I’m still dreaming, even today, right now.
Preface

To write is to simply dream while awake, to have the benefit of consciousness while dreaming is more than lucid, it’s a license to create and innovate. I’d like to think this to be true, just as I’d like to think my writing to be reticulated trails that compass me about the planet.

*Noted Mirrors* ultimately serves as a conveyance of curious experience. The book begins with intimate, impactful past moments with family, a childhood girlfriend that taught so much and a friend taken away far too soon. All this accompanied by peculiar images of redwoods, orcas and other aspects of nature. These types of poems are always the most difficult for me and seem to take the most time to pull from inside. My professor Doug (D.A. Powell) always says’ *sometimes it takes a while for the impact to settle before the writing comes*; I’d attest to that truth. But I always ponder of what writings or art in general, or if any art at all would have come if not for these impactful curious moments in my life. Nonetheless, I wouldn’t trade my path thus far to know.

Like most of us, I often sail an ocean of thought wondering infinitely of what’s. You know, like what is life, what is happiness, and the hardest one of all, what is love? That infinite voyage of wonder often motivates me to write of my experiences of love or what I believe love is or was. It is my belief that we often learn how to love from our family, but we often learn the meaning of love from a lover. Mother, Grandma, Grandpa or even an Uncle can love us so much that love can become a muscle memory for us. We begin to unconsciously love others the way we’ve been loved, which is an inimitably beautiful thing. However, it’s only when we are loved intimately,
romantically, singularly, most often at the time, differently; that we begin to really think about and understand the meaning of what love means to us. *Noted Mirrors* begins with a story of my first moments of experience with a romantic love. A naïve 17 years old kid, San Rafael, CA on my living room couch. It scared me paralyzed, but it made me realize that love wasn’t merely a muscle memory in action or a repeat of treatment you’ve become used to. Instead, love is a feeling that actively inspires that muscle memory, galvanizes that repetitive treatment of others and encourages that warm curiosity of the future, and even still love doesn’t tell you what love is.

*Noted Mirrors* also touches on subjects of longing, lost and poison caused by the absence of a father. These subjects have such a heavy presence in the book because I struggled to understand that absence as a kid, in fact, often I still do today. The loving presence of my grandparents and mother often mitigated the impact of my misunderstanding of my father’s absence. For that, I can only be eternally grateful. These experiences have shaped and motivated stories in *Noted Mirrors* so authentically and purely; writing of my grandparents spills out onto paper very soft and warm, for they are the first people I learned and tried to emulate the action of loving another from.

I’ve been guilty of purposely writing abstractly and allegorically at times. I often cannot accomplish such a feat when writing of past traumas in my life. I often believed that if I wrote these stories in a murky, abstract way then I could dampen the pain I’d feel from recollection. This turned out to be false and it’s only today that I understand why. You see, when something
has truly touched your heart, whether from heartbreak or heart warmth, you’ll never be able to

tell the story of it comfortably, less painfully, unless you tell it exactly how it was. Just the mere

presence of an abstract tone causes uneasiness because it comes off almost as a lie about

something that matters so, so much to you.

I wish to tell a brief story.

The impact of death did not register for me until someone I actually touched was killed. I must

have been around 12 years old when he was murdered. He was a kid I wasn’t particularly friends

with, in fact he and my older brother would fight often, but he and I were cordial. A few times at

school we even play wrestled at the playground, he was a lot bigger than me, I’m sure he’d hold

back often. When he was murdered on Market and Giaramita in North Richmond, CA something

happened to me. I looked at my hands and expected them to be bleeding. No, they were just

hands, but for the first time I noticed how soft and fragile they were in the grand scheme of

things. It haunted me for years that someone I actually touched before was gone, murdered like

nothing, here today, gone tomorrow. That moment taught me how fragile and precious life is and

how nothing or no one is guaranteed to see tomorrow. I always remembered that feeling. But that

did.

March 29th, 2011. The murder of Ervin Coley touched something in my being in a way that I no

longer knew or cared who I was anymore. I went from a coiled ball of saltwater, to a murderous
dreamer to someone that had given up on the only place he’d ever known. It’s only recently I am able to speak, let alone write about these things. Tragedies like these are amongst the most challenging to write about for me. Details of Ervin and what he meant/means to me often animate spherically in my head and many truths come out in *Noted Mirrors*. These kinds of writings always feel different, like something terribly wrong has happened in the form of omission, similar to the way I felt when the tragedy first happened.

In the second section of *Noted Mirrors* I write about the you’s I’ve known. I think there is something very powerful and intimate about the word you. The word seems to imply familiarity, connection and personal perceptions of a you that we perceive or once perceived as truth. And that’s a very strange concept when knowing it’s not at all uncommon to use the word you when talking to a stranger. Most of these you’s are addressed to past romances and times spent with my father as a child.

*Noted Mirrors* captures a significant amount of rural Northern California, as my father lived far up north in places like Eureka, Redding, even Chico. Some summers my brothers and I were fortunate enough to fall into his schedule. We’d spend summers in these vast natural settings surrounded by beautiful cavernous lakes, ginormous redwood forests, majestic white mountains and treacherous Pacific Ocean water off the coast of Humboldt County. I can honestly say these seldom adventures had a most macro impact on my life. But, not because of a dad taking on the responsibility of being a father, more because the settings were so different from anything I’d experienced in North Richmond that I couldn’t help but think differently, view differently,
behave differently, write differently. It’s funny you know, when you’re surround by these things, by such beauty, it allows you to look more into you in a sense. You feel so small and so unimportant in the grand scheme of things that it puts a magnifying glass on who you are. I now understood that I knew no one, and myself I knew so little. And that filled me with curiosity and wonder. One can’t help but express these new feelings, these new realizations, for me it came out in my writing.

Redwood Forests appear often in *Noted Mirrors*. As a child these mysterious giants served as an escape from my reality; whether back at home in North Richmond dreaming, or at present amongst them; as I often felt absent from my father even during the seldom times I was around him. I took back home with me fascination and curiosity. I first tried to tell friends and family members about these captivating Jurassic Giants, but I could never express my wonder sufficiently. So, I began to write about them, most of my early writing of Redwoods was assembled very slowly by design; I’d try to capture the lifestyle of these long living, slow developing giants. Redwoods often expelled me to a place of what I believed to be magic. But the strange and most fascinating part of it all for me when I wrote about Redwoods is the nostalgic familiarity aspect I’d get from writing about something genuinely foreign to me. There was some anamnesis going on that I never figured out even to this day and this is the reason I continue to include Redwoods in my writing and the reason they are riddle throughout *Noted Mirrors*. 
Orcas also appear in *Noted Mirrors* quite frequently. I’m absolutely fascinated by anything that disregards its safety in favor of curiosity, because I’m often the same. For me orcas represent that carelessly terrific, adventurous, whimsically inquisitive side that we all have inside of us. Some of us chose to let that side live more often, I fall under this category. I have little close-up experience with orcas, I’ve only seen them from high cliffs near Big Sur, CA on Highway 1. But the few times I did, an indescribable curiosity came over me. It’s hard to convey, like trying to explain that dichotomic feeling of youth entangled with maturity that the feeling of romantic love gives. A curiosity so profound it makes one feel so young and arrogant, yet so silly and clueless. I couldn’t sufficiently explain it if I wrote a book about it, but I loved trying to in *Noted Mirrors*.

The last section of *Noted Mirrors* is home to the outward poems as my professor Brittany Perham likes to call them. She simply means that they could be read a bit more ambiguously or allegorically than some of the others. What’s quite intriguing is all of the things that usually appear in my more direct writings, like family, romances, orcas, redwoods, etc., they all appear in these poems as well. But the settings always seem to be arbitrary and the characters, either omitted or secondary, sometimes even tertiary; it gives a very ambiguous feeling. This section was the most interesting to me because when I think about it in great detail, I say, *that’s fun, you know, isn’t that what poetry is supposed to feel like? Isn’t the writer supposed to feel as though they’re putting together a puzzle of literature that could turn out to mean just about anything other than what was intended?* But then I think of the reader, should a reader feel as though they can connect the writing to the author? I’m not so sure of the answer, but I’ll give my belief. I believe that the author has one responsibility and one responsibility only, and that’s to write
down their truth in whatever way it comes out and deal with whatever praise or backlash that comes from that truth. I acknowledge that writing is strange, understanding is subjective, often even temporary, and truth is downright frightening. Sometimes it can take a writer years and years to understand something that they themselves have written, but that same author will grasp in great detail something just as abstract and strange written by another author. It’s so satisfyingly perplexing; that’s the beauty of writing poetry, and that among all my other motivations and curiosities cited is why I wrote Noted Mirrors.
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And all of the writers around the globe
Sprawled across the living room couch, we lie; my favorite cartoons chasing each other around the TV screen.

Tom never found out if she was or wasn’t his baby, but Louis Jordan sure would have been proud of him.

You thought I was asleep, and I did my best to play as you thought.

My hand in your hand, one by one, you kissed my fingers. We’d watched Titanic one too many times.

You were the kind of girl my mom never warned me about, and she wasn’t off work until 5; boy was I in trouble.

*Hey!* You called while shaking my shoulder. I was in full character, as I stretched and yawned. *Hey!* You called again. I lay as still as summer cove water at Whiskeytown Lake.

But you knew what to do and I knew it was coming. As you dove in, I tried to turn my face, too late. How could something that smelled so good have such an awful texture? Candy lip-gloss, who is your creator?

I put on my cool voice, *wassup big head*? You smiled and asked if I had a dictionary.

I pointed to the bookshelf.

You grabbed it and jumped back on the couch. My nerves all at once just went away, a book, now this was something I was good at, I’d never watched you so curiously careful before, at least not while you noticed.

You skipped the A’s and the D’s; thought sure you’d try to find our names.

E, F, G, H, I, J, K….. A calm euphoria suddenly came over me; I thought you were going to the R’s. I could talk about Rottweiler’s and Redwood Tree’s all day.

Arriving at the L’s, your pace slowed, diligently shuffling through the pages before stopping. *Look!*

You were pointing at the word ‘love’.
Read the definition.

A profound passionate affection for another person, I read.

I looked back up at you; you weren’t smiling anymore. And I was no longer curious, careful or euphoric.

Tried plugging my ears without the use of my hands. Blink, even harder blink with a yawn, pretending to be tired.

Then the typhoon of a warm silence,

I love you.

I think I went deaf for a second after that. Not knowing if I meant it or not,

I love you too, I replied.

You then lay on my chest; dictionary cuffed to your side.

You fell asleep,

I fell in love.
Grandpa loved any kind of candy.

He kept stashes around the house like money.

Sometimes Grandma would find them and throw them away, saying they were old;

he’d be furious.

I remember the night he got peanut brittle stuck to the bed sheets.

Grandma was furious,

I thought it was funny.

Never knew stocking the candy aisle at Costco would one day make me cry.

Grandma had a way with words.

*Go fetch me a soda pop and bring the bug juice from top the frigidar,* she’d say.

She was merely referring to an open Shasta Coke that Grandpa hadn’t finished and the soy sauce.

I loved plums but I hated plum jam.

Grandma loved plums and loved plum jam even more.

Sometimes she’d catch me in her tree stuffing my face before she could get to them. She’d fuss at me, *boy if I catch you in that tree again, I’m gonna burn down that pigeon coop, ya hear.*

Grandma knew I loved my birds more than the plums; I’d take no chances.

Grandpa thought it was funny,

he’d go out, get me a few ripe ones and bring them back in.

*Don’t tell Granny about this, ya hear,* he’d say.
One day, Grandma went to the hospital and stayed; now I understand the lyrics in Bill Withers songs.
Bug Juice and Chicken

And sitting at the kitchen table imagining new ways to make dishes made a million times before. First cut my chicken breast into strips then strips into blocks. Before finishing the last block, Grandma would say, boy get the scissors. I never knew where the scissors were. In the spoon drawer, Grandma would yell. As I checked the rice I’d swing by, get the scissors to complete the task. I got the garlic powder Grandma, before she could tell me. Boy get the coanbread bowl. Got it Grandma. And don’t forget the Bug Juice, she was merely talking about the soy sauce.

Vinegar, oil, honey, soy sauce and garlic? Check! Pour everything in and hope to the marinate Gods that everything came out right. Fetch me a soda pop when you come on in here. Grandma would speak French words as I walked to the dining room table; I never knew what she was saying. Sit down boy, I understood that. And sitting and talking about Louisiana. Grandma loved to tell me about how beautiful the Creole women were there. Boy them Creole women would cook them big ole pots of Gumbo, Jambalaya and rice and they’d fish better than the men. Bad ladies’ boy, just bad, and good, beautiful women too, like church ladies, Grandma would boast. Hours and hours casted back to Louisiana until her mind came back to California. Boy go check the rice! I heard it beep about an hour ago Grandma, it’s fine. As I got up to finish cooking Grandma would head to the living room where Grandpa was, The Young and the Restless was coming on soon.

And cooking and looking out the window across the field and seeing the open space that now has homes. And looking about the cabinets and seeing canning jars with plum jam and peaches and wondering how old they were. And looking on the counters and seeing the plastic food dispenser with Grandpa’s endless cornflakes and the mystery machine Grandma would use to make apple turnovers. And sitting in Grandma’s chair, the one that faced the stove, the fridge and cabinets all at the same time;

and missing my Grandma.

I miss

my Grandma.

I have to go to work.
Far Northern California Dad

I just wanted to go fishing.

All of you guys had Broncos, yours was red.
Unc’s was my favorite.

His wheels were taller than a naïve 11-year-old.
I remember in Eureka
I remember I walked into Unc’s hotel room and saw all that money on the dresser.

It scared me.

He gave me 20 dollars,
told me to go get some Pokémon cards.

I just wanted to go fishing.

You liked fishing too, but not like me.
Fishing was my dream when awake, my inimitable wonder.

Fishing was the excuse you told Grandma
when you couldn’t make it down to see us.

I remember in Redding;
I remember I found all that money in the bottom drawer,

It scared me.

I wanted to steal 20 dollars and buy bait.

I just wanted to go fishing.

_The crazy one with the white Bronco_,
they’d say.
I didn’t understand why they thought Mat was crazy,
he was my favorite, I loved him.
I wished he were my dad.

He taught me how to fish.
I remember in Chico,  
I remember he let me hold all that money on the top closet shelf.  

It didn’t scare me.  

I just thought he loved me.  

He gave me 20 dollars and said  
let’s go fishing.  

We went to Lake Orville.  

All of you guys had Broncos, all of that money  
And that’s all you guys invested in.  

It’s 2018 now,  

you guys are different, the Broncos are gone  
and all that money too.  

Unc is such an interesting talker; he talks about 3 things,  
cars, money and you.  

And Mat, if I speak to him now  
I have to speak to a robot guy first,  
he’s been in that place for a while now,  

It was over money.  

And you,  

We don’t talk much,  
I’ve forgotten how much money I’ve loaned you over these years,  
could use it for school or something,  
doesn’t matter, I guess.  

Money isn’t what I want, it’s never been;  

I want to eat banana nut cereal before bed,  
I want to ride my bike everywhere there’s a Redwood Forest,
I want to drive my nice SUV off-road as if it’s not a nice SUV,

and o yeah,

I want to go fishing.
Poisoned

The hardest part about life is not following someone you love into what you know is heartbreak. I’ve lost people I love because of it. I haven’t figured this out yet, I don’t think I will, because it always saves me. I remember I told Grandma that you had a long nose. She told me I was wrong, and then she cried, because she knew I was right. Ever played basketball in elementary school thinking of poisonous snakes? I guess I was the first black mamba. You know, that guy was really great, but he never was on my team; sort of like you.

I’d have loved you just as much for trying and failing as I would if you had succeeded: as long as you tried. I never wanted to show you I was smarter than you thought I was. I never cared about showing you, you were wrong about me. I just wanted you to trust me; I wanted you to believe in me and I wanted you to see me.

That would have given me far more joy than a fucking notion of proving someone wrong.

*Just believe in yourself,*

they always said this.

*Use the doubters as motivation,*

they always say this shit;

but they will never tell you that not having someone to believe in you can poison you.
Lying in the bed of a truck watching fire in the sky.
We’d seen them before, only from a different perspective.
In North Richmond, we often snuck and slept on the roof.
Watching them shoot would save us; we didn’t know it yet.
We heard shots sometimes; they didn’t come from the sky.
We couldn’t see them. We knew what they were. Up at Whiskeytown, we never heard them, just saw them, we liked it that way. We’d often watch the water hoping to see one shoot, we rarely had any luck, just saw that big watermelon candy shaped thing. They could only be seen shooting in still water. Last night I dreamt I was with you; lying on a lake cabin roof with a friendly Rottweiler, surrounded by Redwoods. Watch the water, you said. There they were, shooting across like fire in the sky. I turned back to you; you were the dog I lost long ago.
Things change, but memories keep.

God’s biggest mistake was giving the gift of memory without omission.

Recess had a way of transforming us into adorable, territorial lunatics. We’d sprawl across woodchips, as if the word splinter meant cocoa butter; and we’d race on monkey bars sincerely, way before we had thoughts of racism.

This was our kingdom of paradise our place of arbitrary rule.

*Ervin!* A girl shouted, as a little mob moved in on us.

*What?* You replied, we all stopped and stared like vigilant little meerkats

Before she could answer, *no!* You shouted.

The only girls allowed in our kingdom were the ones we didn’t like. It made it easier for us to pretend we had no interest in girls.

*If you don’t marry Keontae this time, we’re gonna make you.*

*Leave me alone!* You shouted, translate, prepare for war.

Like a mob of unwavering pirates, they swarmed us. We gave them all we could until we couldn’t anymore, there were simply too many for us to handle.

As we retreated our kingdom, like lions before a herd of elephants, we noticed the girls we didn’t like weren’t with us anymore. Perhaps they’d been renegades the entire time.

We knew if they turned you into a husband then we’d all eventually have to come to grips with the mortality of our coolness.

So, we ran like Forrest, as if the mere thought of them getting close to us was capture.

Suddenly, they stopped chasing us; we watched them stroll over to the basketball courts where the 5th grade guys were hooping; they must’ve found a new matrimonial interest for Keontae, you were now safe.
They’d given up just before we did, exhausted and gasping for air, like Muhammad Ali after the 14th round in Manila, we rejoiced in our victory. We boasted of how fast we were and teased you of alluring the heart of a girl.

As we made our way back to our kingdom, we noticed the 5th grade guys weren’t playing basketball anymore. Instead, they were scoping us out, as if we were planets. Guess the girls had planned beyond being outrun by us.

We’d been betrayed by our very own fellas,

They ran us down, like a free safety to a fullback, subdued by the baseball diamond, They held you down as Keontae placed a ring onto your middle finger and kissed you on the cheek.

They pronounced you two man and wife, and then they let us go.

Not sure what hurt us more that day, seeing you become a husband or knowing we’d been victims of blatant treason by the fellas we aspired to be like.

As we sadly sauntered back to our kingdom, we weren’t so sure if we were fit to be rulers anymore. It was only a matter of time before the other girls got us.

Then all of a sudden you giggled; you had the biggest mischievous smile on your face when I looked at you.

*What?* I said.

You told me that the ring was made of a dollar bill and that you were going to buy two honeybuns with it after school.

*Tight,* I said while smiling.

After you told me that, I remember thinking marriage must not be so bad, I had even hoped to marry Tonnisha later that week.

I remember this like it all happened yesterday.

I remember using your weight set on Sanford Street after school.

I remember your dad gave me those roller pigeons.
I remember sitting in that abandoned house talking about how big boys had pubic hair and knowingly trading lies with each other of having it.

I also remember that you were killed March 29th, 2011 and that I went to your funeral on my 21st birthday on the 14th of April.

Tonnisha and I never wound up married; we dated a while after high school but grew apart. I went on to college and she to Cosmetology School. I think it saved us from the hood.

We tried so hard to save you from marriage when we should have been trying to save you from the streets.

I still speak to Keontae from time to time; she’s my friend on Facebook, she lives in Louisiana now.

I’m sure she remembers you.
It Doesn’t Land

You know, as ferally menacing as a tiger’s roar is,

you’ll never be in more danger than when you no longer hear its roar.

Eerie taciturnity

But is the danger in the silence or in the unknown, are the two even separable?

I’m sure the tiger knows the answers, its choice of weapon depends on it.

Some places are just different, you know, a Lupine flower is classified as a weed in New Zealand. What excess of beauty they must have.

A racist swamp of moral sludge is classified as a President in America. What morality they must have.

He’s a talker too, attraction to his daughter, building walls for Mexicans, even comparing gay marriage to a golfer that sucks.

He’s a roarer too, president of law and order, grabbing women by the pussy, dominate is what he says, dominate the streets.

But sometimes he’s quiet, sometimes the roaring stops; takes the right words though, white supremacy, black lives matter, China, taxes, stuff like that.

He’ll talk a bit, but for the most part, the roaring stops, and he shuts the fuck up, and you’ll never be in more danger than when that happens.

“I often try to explain the feeling of hearing an old R&B song,

or seeing an Orca or a Redwood Forest,

no matter what word, what phrase, what gesture, what audience,

I feel I never can, but the soliloquy always lands.

But if I explained in plain, candid English how lucky and proud I am to be an American, how I love living here; articulate, eloquent as they say. You may think you’ve just had a conversation with an African Grey Parrot.
All the words would be there, even some entertainment, but something would be strange, as if you’ve seen what you thought sure was going to be an L starting a significant word, but it never made that right turn, leaving you baffled and vexed”.

I wrote this a few weeks back, it didn’t fucking land.

Just like for America it doesn’t land that Breonna Taylors murder wasn’t about drugs, illegality, or even melanism or what’s right, or wrong. It was about what they know they can do and the reason they know it.

I wish to confess a direct story.

I had a friend name Ervin Coley; he was murdered March 29th, 2011 and I went to his funeral on my 21st birthday on the 14th of April. I was awake the night he got killed, I heard the gun shots. The hood talks, we knew who did it, the police knew who did it, the police knew that we knew who did it. They were just waiting for a retaliation. My Grandpa served in the military, he died in 2007 and left a lot of guns, let’s just say, accessible. I’d have these vivid, live dreams as if I was living vicariously through a 223 Ar-15. I’d leave the closet where my Grandpa’s guns were, get in my 1996 z28 Camaro, remove the T-tops and drive the speed limit to where the murderer hung out. They’d know who I was, I went to school with some of them, but they wouldn’t know my intentions, they wouldn’t know I knew. Wassup, they’d say, shit I can’t call it, I’d say. As I parked and exited the car a big black Ar-15 would become center visioned. Open fire, the crowd would scatter, Ar-15 standing over the murderer and shooting until the clip stopped spitting, over and over in my head, like a scene from a favorite film. And I knew I was wrong, and I didn’t care that I was, because of what this person did to my friend. Over and over, but the end always wound up the same; red and blue lights flashing, handcuffed in back of the car. Moma crying, dad not there and me knowing I was wrong, and knowing one day, no matter how hurt and angry I was at this murderer, one day I’d care that I was wrong and one day I’d understand I became the exact incarnation of what had hurt me so much. I never forgot that blindly dark feeling, I think it save me from the hood, it made me realize I had to leave or become my enemy. The moral of this story is allegorical. But the moral I wish to convey at present is that no matter how many times this movie played out in my head, it ended the same; me in jail, my life over, my family hurt. The murderer’s life over, his family hurt. I’m here to tell you that those cops that night knew they were going to open fire and they knew someone would likely die, and what hurts me the most is I’d be willing to tell God that not one of them envisioned jail or any ramifications after; they knew what they could do, and the reason why they could do it, and they were right.

I never forgot that blindly dark feeling, I think it save me from the hood, it made me realize I had to leave or become my enemy. I regard that feeling now as an old friend I don’t miss. Well, sometimes old friends come back whether you miss them or not.

One of my literary Mothers told me, when people show you who they are, believe them. I believe you, America.
One of my literary Fathers told me, *it takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.* Nowadays I’m not so sure what that could mean here in America.

I’ve grown to hate this place and I can’t wait until I finish school here.
Dating Meanings

Sometimes an L won’t make that traditional right turn,

not because it prefers a smaller character or a different letter,

but because words are at times merely figures on a borrowed paper;

or sounds up for speculation.

I wish to defend myself.

Lucky… Lush… Love… Liberating Life.

Strip their phonemes and graphemes nude and let lucid adjectives entice lively nouns

If meanings of these words aren’t within a speaker’s innermost depths; if feelings of these words aren’t held within a writer’s most treasured, indescribable experiences; then these words merely fall to a puzzle sitting on a creatively lazy man’s table.

I wish to give an example.

I try to explain the feeling of hearing an old R&B song,

or seeing an Orca or a Redwood Forest,

no matter what word, what phrase, what gesture, what audience,

I feel I never can, but the soliloquy lands.

But if I explained in plain, candid English how lucky and proud I am to be an American, how I love living here; articulate, eloquent as they say. You may think you’ve just had a conversation with an African Grey Parrot.

All the words would be there, even some entertainment, but something would be strange, as if you’ve seen what you thought sure was going to be an L starting a significant word, but it never made that right turn, leaving you baffled and vexed.

Sometimes an L won’t make that traditional right turn

not because it prefers a smaller character or a different letter,

but because it simply isn’t meant.
Phoenix

I’d done so many stupid things, like buying luxury cars and thinking burritos were actually native to Mexico.

I should have done more stupid things.

If I were still as naïve as a child I’d not know of today’s meaning, and I’d be just fine with that.

I reached Moss Landing at around 11am.

I remembered the beautiful Swedish girl I dated back in college. I had come here with her before.

I didn’t kiss her because I was sick.

Let’s just say she didn’t believe me.
That’s one stupid thing I’d done I wished I hadn’t.

I grabbed my kayak and launched out of North Harbor; I’ve never noticed how cute sea otters are.

They’re like little inquisitive Rottweiler’s, galvanized by even the mere thought of discovery, kind of like me.

I reached the 7-mile mark at about 4:30pm, looked around for a bit, I didn’t see them, but I knew they were there

Somewhere.

To live my life in sincere wonder, like the first man that realized that those Orcas merely wanted to play with him.

A poet’s poetry.

If I’m lucky, I’ll get to swim with them.
Tangible

We held on,
like a pair of Nikes’ hanging off an eroding coastal cliff.

You didn’t fret the height of Redwood Trees or the depth of the Monterey Canyon,
you feared intangibles.

Your animated green eyes kept me close
but close isn’t contact.

When you reached for my hand
I assisted with a shake.

I didn’t know you’d hold my hand,
you taught me how to hold
you taught me how to touch

You held my hand.

I didn’t know that
you’d release.

I didn’t know that
I’d hurt you.
You laughed so much yesterday
that your cheeks ached.

But,
today is a different day.
You would not have cried today

if
I hadn’t
made you laugh yesterday.

If
you really want to
make someone cry,
make them laugh
first.

Gary taught me that,
ever bastard.
If I Had Known

I should have brought you flowers,
that’s what that singer said.

They’ll be dead by next week; I’ll just buy a Redwood Tree.

I’d never told you that I’d watch you sleep
until my eyes closed.
You were my favorite movie.
You gave me the eyes of a child again,

everything was new to me.

If I had known I’d one day write this, I’d have woken you more often.
Focus

You’ve never watched me
so closely before, new eyes
familiar movie
on a thirteen-hour flight home.
You’ve found something new,
like a hidden coat pocket.
Are you a tigress
merely looking at her cub,
or could I be a marked deer?
I’ve Seen You Naked

Lush lucky if I were a Kiwi, precipiced upon Shakespeare’s Cove.

Intro to a Disney film, only the castle wasn’t built yet and the river was flooded in pacific cerulean.

A golden gates dive of wonder, like an astronaut, I was weightless, would only be natural to float.

An intrinsic blue then conveyed to me the meaning of Kaiyo,

and like a Redwood Tree, I saw your wisdom without ever having to strip and cut you down.
Russky

You’d remix and reimagine
the bad memories through the beautiful times,
nostalgia is what you called it.

I never got that.
Understanding can be just as impressionistic as a Starry Night;
even so, I felt you had your reasons.
You spent more time in windows than mirrors, really wasn’t interested in how your sentences
were read, as long as they were run-ons with false fragments.

In a strange way, I figured myself parallel.

One day I walked in on you while you were painting. No water, no colors nor a single brush, just
a canvas with disorderly markings unfurled all over and Redwood Tree needles.

I walked closer,
sensing I was there, you never looked up at me.

I’ve learned to paint the world with an eraser, that way it’ll never see my true colors, for this
world isn’t ready for my kind of beauty.

I understood you so little but knew you so deeply though we never even touched.

I never got that.
Small Redwoods

When we were kids, we wore big shirts, had baggy pants, wanted bigger feet.

As we grow, eventually we find a small bird that flies towards:
    it makes us want small things.

We want smaller pants that fit, to move more freely:
    smaller shirts so the wind doesn’t hold us back.

    We want someone beside us with smaller feet.

The world gets smaller:

    so we can be closer to the person most beautiful to us.
Sparks

And I wrote of small Redwoods:

I wrote

“When we were kids, we wore big shirts, had baggy pants, wanted bigger feet.

As we grow, eventually we find a small bird that flies towards: it makes us want small things.

We want smaller pants that fit, to move more freely: smaller shirts so the wind doesn’t hold us back.

We want someone beside us with smaller feet.

The world gets smaller:

so we can be closer to the person most beautiful to us”.

And you never did see my writing; only my spirit, my dreams, my propensity to stray away from folks correct opinions. Even my photos of a darkness that once held my hand, not my writing.

What does it mean that a chandelier falls for a fire sprinkler? Close proximity love, only one there love, someone wants to die

love?

I want to help

love?
I never knew what I wanted from you, just knew you were more than sparks, more than flashes, there was day in there somewhere, that was good enough for me.

I only put my faith in things I don’t quite understand; it makes me feel safe. It’s no good thing, nor an antonym of.

You ended up in my car the night the coked up Hongkonger tried to rape you. Your mom called me when you tried to jump off that bridge in SoCal. Your friend Sophia messaged me after graduation when you wilted at the thought of living. And your dad hugged me for changing the oil in a car he thought you would die in of no mechanical failure.

You messaged me on Instagram the other day, told me stories of fire, rising, giving living.

Told me so, so much of what you had become and what you wanted to be.

I told you of Cordate and how it was my new favorite word and how distance can sometimes give the most proximate answers.

We laughed and laughed about how much we missed each other; how close we were to each other:

then you asked to see my writing.

I never knew what I wanted from you, just knew you were more than sparks, more than flashes, there was day in there somewhere, that was good enough for me.

I never did find my day; I found something better. I realized all those flashes; all those sparks were creating coupled reticulated trails. I guess I followed the sparks, and you the flashes.

Go head girl, do ya thang, I’m so happy for you and I’ll see you later.
Redwoods on a Broken Highway 9

We were two lost souls that only found each other to be forgotten.

The darkness
made you less afraid to cry.
Me too.

I wanted to tell you the way I once felt about you.
How you were once my favorite movie.
How I once made my favorite book a metaphor of you.
How much I thought it would have been me and you.

But it wouldn’t have changed anything.

You missed him the way I missed her:
animated memories, bipolar hope and cold comprehensions.
Midnight Fragments

Tonight, I've watched

your hands navigate
my eyes traverse
the galaxy

these memories are now
nude and veracious

I am now

holding

the pain of
old dreams

alone.
Happy Trails

Stay on the trail; eventually you’ll reach the Redwoods.
Bring a friend if you must,
and believe what you say when you’re happy.

We lounge in the opulence of our almosts.
We lie in the courtrooms of what happened last night.
Stay on the trail; eventually you’ll reach the Redwoods.

Look to the stars, visualize your debut.
If you don’t see a star of stardom, then you have not
believed what you said when you were happy.

A light can lead to a dungeon, it's not all tradition.
A dungeon can lead to your garden, only by your own admission.
Stay on the trail; eventually you’ll reach the Redwoods.

Listen to what she said; you’ll need to one day.
Hear what they said, it’ll decide your company,
for no man has ever stayed steady without the balance of others.

To awake in a bed you’d be happy to die in.
To die in a bed you were always happy to lie in.
Stay on the trail; eventually you’ll reach the Redwoods.
Believe what you say when you’re happy.
Maybe a True Story

Whenever nights get cold

and the air smells of variance,

I remember

kindness in the Redwood Forest is not the love you give in the city.

Roaming round aisles in this derelict thrift store I call a mind, I once found that kind of love.

Not the kind you find in Santa Cruz, California feeling sorry for a pretty face, nor the kind found in unreciprocated words to saplings that you once believed would grow.

But the kind you find on an unplanned trip to New Hampshire and realize through the meaning of foliage that Autumns are different.

Or the kind found in a bucolic Trinity County, 9:38 p.m. lying in the bed of a blue Dodge Ram with Batman covers and my little sisters’ favorite pillow;

the kind of love you feel on a Saturday morning, climbing your Grandma’s dearest plum tree.

Loves like these are best evinced around 11pm, when the heart is heavy, the mind is ajar, and the eyes are closed.

Bout 18,000 days from now, I’ll be 79 years old.

Nostalgia and I would’ve had many foot races by then, me losing the majority. And o yeah, I’d have befriended an eagle or two.

And maybe I’ll get there, maybe I’ll live the rest of my life beside a Redwood Tree and a sunrise that smells of reminiscence,

If I remember that kindness in the Redwood Forest is not the love you give in the city.
Again, I’m Grateful

Our best can be found in the imperfections of that which we love:
for we are useful at inspiration, not existence.

A givers lullaby is particular; even so, we aren’t chosen, only wished to animate.

My ear holds a sightless sapphire,

It leads me over beautiful lunar terrains, chromatic Redwood Forests and curiously welcoming homes.

I tour on, as if by remote control. You may ask, what inspires me.

My favorite color is blue; my favorite animal is an Orca and my favorite days are sunsets.

It’s obvious where I’m going, isn’t it?
Trinity County

I trust it.

I remember Redwoods protruding from the water like Orcas,
more rockslide signs than stop signs.

And the eagles, the sounds they made.

I only put my faith in things I don’t quite understand
It makes me feel safe.

Does an eagle touch the clouds for fun or merely to boast?
What about a Redwood Tree?

I’m not sure God knows.

A long time ago

I was here.

Only I was naive and felt good company when alone.
I didn’t quite understand then.

I’m here again.

In this beautiful place, where I first learned to trust a feeling,
to trust a sight, to trust a life.

I still don’t quite understand,

but I feel safe

I trust it.
A Full Day on Jupiter

And the typhoon of a curious silence, such a powerful speech.

Like voltaic currents in deep, dark pacific water; or consecutively contrasting the sounds of Tupac Shakur and Avril Lavigne.

Something is different about you, 10 miles above me different. UC Santa Cruz, home to a kid from North Richmond, different.

Revelational beauty, different.

Like the indescribable moment a wild animal realizes it’s in no danger with a kind person.

Someone once told me we could recreate everything besides time, life and feeling. A Sonoma State graduate once told me bring your own environment.

Looking at you now I feel this indescribably lively, perennial youth that’s often accompanied by the warmth of a blanket of inquisitively.

It’s very environmental, like the softening of a breeze caressing its way between misted Redwood Forest foliage.

Water takes the faculties of elixir. And I, motionless in wonder, a transfixed audience only able to react with eyes and thoughts. And you, a winged sigil, free to go, free to stay. But you’re always with me.
Tenants of Redwoods

Finding is bliss.

I’ve been there before,
the landholders are very tall and to give to them money is to take from them;

life.

It’s what you create, isn’t it?

Would you give me your smile if I were an upended rainbow? Your words if I were your secrets, your heart if I were a temperate canopy in your storm?

Rhetoric’s brilliance is often pointless;

not ironically.

Sailing an ocean of Redwood Gardens, I remembered you as a déjà vu.

I’ve created this spherical mirage, this remix of memories that deny their origins.

Again,

just to hope this time different.
Japanese Redwoods

I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean.

A singer told me that as a teen.

I thought in terms of this macro mass of beautiful water we call the sea.  
I didn’t understand the macro picture.

I learned on a Korean peninsula I couldn’t save the world, but  
if my heart was big and open; I could be it for someone.

If we believed like fishermen do, the world is an apple;

    healthy, tangible, colorful, vulnerable and grown often,  
    because everyone needs an apple, just not the same kind.
Undone

I’ve spectated still green lights sway magic carpets along a ceaseless pier: my kind of world.

I worry I’ll graduate school soon, get a job, get married: their kind of world.

If I’d once floated over fiords, coastal waterfalls and Redwood Forests: I wouldn’t tell them about it, and neither would I finish the last chapter.
Baby Dolphins

Sometimes the professor asks the most questions, rather often times. He knows they dream like conscious breathers; tall trees will grow because of this one day

the smell of Trinity County will suffuse the room. The professor’s countenance will tell the complete story.

They won’t see,

but, one day, they’ll be Redwood Trees, assimilated in totality.

And they’ll remember

a relict gave them water.
Kea

Magic happens every day, but specific, just once. I’ll tell you a story, only if, in return you dreamt.

Sometimes sunlight walks with us.
I only wish the albedo of a Redwood.

*We become clumsy and uneasy in the presence of beauty.*

A Sonoma State graduate told me that.

Beauty isn’t quite ubiquitous as a Starbucks in Seoul, but quite omnipresent to a native dreamer.

I once dreamt an endemic bird lived on a mountain in Marin, stumbled, fell, woke up in New Zealand.

There I was, cloaked in the beauty of ornithological sounds, I’d have traded all of my tomorrows to remain free.

I saw them fly, I heard them sing, I felt their lives living.
Worth

Caught in a net of wonder,

I once witnessed a little round perspiring man harness a Redwood Tree from golden swords.

Just 5 dollars is what he wanted for it.

Do Russians today know of what happened with Alaska?

I didn’t want to steal from him, but I sure wanted that Redwood Tree.

I may have been wrong.
This Time’s Different

And to be within narrative, to brave holding the truth of old photos, and live the originals of tampered memories.

To follow the kind of nostalgia that heals by impaling the soul with the touch of a wounded fire,

that doesn’t burn

nor take,

but gives

still.

To rouse the breath of the spirit and to root me so deeply in wonder, that I am lucky to almost forget,

we’ve taken the kindest bite of lesson

and we’re in trouble.

If Mother had given us the probity of the giants,

If Nature had given us the discernment of a Redwood Grove,

If a gift in some essence, was the extractor of rationality.

The funny thing about a gift is its powers are largely weighted upon the receiver’s understanding.

I’ve wished myself different, an aberrant word on a less wordy page in the book. I’m reminded of my position when I remember my favorite car was born in 1969, the same year we finally pushed over Wawona.

Leaving the Redwood Forest, I wonder of words like penultimate, time, secede, family and I think of the pyrrhic triumphs of an awfully beautiful society.

All at once, an original childhood memory interposes my thoughts

and I remember the reason wolves, bears and mountain lions can all live in the same forest and rarely ever fight.
“The Redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always. No one has ever successfully painted or photographed a Redwood Tree. The feeling they produce is not transferable. From them comes silence and awe. It’s not only their unbelievable stature, nor the color which seems to shift and vary under your eyes, no, they are not like any trees we know, they are ambassadors from another time”. John Steinbeck
It rained off and on, like confused lovers.  
The kind of rain you wanted to be in,  
It meant you were in a different place.  

The land was green and red and spring,  
smelled of a season God had kept from the rest of the world.  
Roads were graveled, as if cars would no longer be there one day.  

The scarlet Macaws stopped traffic  
flew over crocodile inhabited rivers of Tarcoles.  
The Great Green Macaw had the power to make even the most arrogant men wish for understanding.  
The Toucans secretly hung with Capuchin Monkeys, as they preferred to jump from branch to branch as if they had no wings.  
If it weren’t for photography, you’d be just fine only hearing the Resplendent Quetzal calling out to its lover.  

The land was green and red and spring,  
smelled of a season God had kept from the rest of the world.  
Roads were graveled, as if cars would no longer be there one day.  

Costa Rican Redwoods
Our Best Ally

A man walking along Manuel Antonio Beach;

peach skies; calm, transparent, mysterious waters; and dense fog,
as if by mere curiosity, Redwood Trees wanted to be here.

As he hunched over to tie his right shoe, something caught his eye upon the sand. He picked up
the rock and began to admire. The sun had begun taking its nightly rest, he'd been admiring this
rock all day. As he began to head back to his car, he tossed the rock into the tides as so many
before him had done.

Coasting back home, curiously the memory of this rock had all but vanished from thought.

But memory of admiration, peace, beauty, curiosity, importance, rediscovery of sentience;

remained.
Redwoods on the Caribbean

No one talks about curiosity until they’ve seen an orca,
nor love, until they’ve believed in magic.

I often wonder if wonder is fraternal to magic, as if curiosity isn’t, as if indescribable feelings aren’t, as if Redwood Trees aren’t.

If cocoa butter were a sound, what would be heard? Caribbean waves kissing coral sand on a warm night, the sound the heart makes when the eyes see an Orca, wind caressing its way between misted Redwood Forest foliage?

Or would it be

instead

the words of someone I’ve loved for a while now?

I’m gonna do dangerous things, you know, like board a flight, 2am, SFO. In my duffle bag, Nike socks, Calvin Klein boxers, a few tanks, soccer pants and a toothbrush. In my suitcase, a couple saplings from Wilder Ranch State Park and memories of someone I’ve loved for a while now.

So high, yet I’ve landed, so nervous, yet for years now, I’ve planned this.

I often have these tangible, impermanent, but cyclical feelings that don’t often feel like they belong solely to me; as if by corporeal intimacies I now share my hands, my lips, my dreams, my fears

my future with someone I’ve loved for a while now.

I’m gonna do beautiful things, you know, like plant Redwood Trees on the coast of Central America, hang a few poems on my wall, eat a white nectarine and go hiking. In my pockets, a couple seashells from Manuel Antonio Beach, some lint from Santa Cruz County California. In my hands a teal water bottle, a bit of trust and a little belief. In my backpack, a camera and the writing of someone I’ve loved for a while now.

As deep curiosity comes before love, poems come before naked conversations.
One day I'll be able to speak to you the way I can write about you; until then, let’s talk about Orcas and what we believe magic actually is.
Nothing That Hasn’t Been Said Before

We often see the world with our own eyes,

this is when we’ve gone blind.

But what to do when you see the world upended from your peers?

They’ve known their crimes even before committing,
and they’d apologize
only
if they knew I was aware.

Fuck does that even mean?

………….. Not enough to write on a kaleidoscopic paper in my-second-least favorite notebook.

To live my life in sincere wonder, like the first person that realized those Orcas merely wanted to
play with him.

Thanks, Kaveh.

You know, often times that wolf is actually an Aussie Shepherd looking for another wagging tail
or perhaps a tail to help wag.

I thought of this while reading an Alice James book, but learned it while living in Asia.

They say spirits of dragons lie dormant in oceanic rocks there. I remember in Korea, initially
gestural arguing with cats at Daewangam Park that aspired to compete in purring and slapping
competitions. Seemed to be unisonant too, either they were all slapping or all purring. I may
have participated, even been slapped a couple times myself, but that’s private, what happens at
Daewangam Park stays at Daewangam Park.

Or Japan, on Tsushima Island, when I almost called the Canadian Trump supporter with
European dreads a bitch during a mountain biking trip. She just wanted someone to talk to. I
remembered what that word did to my mom in 1990’s Richmond, CA. I’d have never forgiven
myself if I had, but neither would I if I hadn’t said fuck Donald Trump.
Or in Japan again, near the beach with old bullet shells, Japanese Redwoods and rocks carved into hearts on it. Where the vigilant officer told some friends and I that we weren’t allowed to play at the kid’s park because we weren’t kids anymore. I could see in his eyes that he was scared of me; because of our group, he was solely looking at me, straight at me, with a tentative glare; as if something bad was about to happen. I assured him that it was no problem and we wouldn’t play at the park anymore, took him a few seconds to process my response, then all at once, his countenance completely shifted. *Domo arigatogozaimashita*, he said while bowing. I felt a little bad about it, wanted to give him a hug and smile, but didn’t. As we walked away, I wondered to myself why I never felt that same kind of compassion when in similar situations in America, I remembered why when I returned home.

I think of Europe often, a part of me sometimes feels like I’ve lived there before, then I remember, it’s just the American ethnic demographic. Ignorant huh….? That’s ok, I redeem myself when I remember Harry Potter is the reason that one day I’ll go to Scotland, to Ireland, London; prolong my blinks and say I was dreaming.

*Nigga why do you travel so much, why you ain’t been to Africa yet?*

You know, I never knew Morocco was in Africa until I ate a Moroccan sandwich in Seoul, Korea’s Itaewon district. I always figured it to be in that interesting part of Europe they call Spain. Now Kenya, Tanzania, I feel like I’ve been to these countries before, but not like I’ve felt I’ve been to Europe. No, no, it’s different. I’ve repeatedly dreamt of fishing Lake Victoria with the locals, immeasurably fantasized about hiking Mt. Kilimanjaro with lions through dense Redwood Forests, even once pondered of meeting a Somali pirate that took inspiration from me to be whatever a poet is. These countries are the only two on my wall with map push pins but no passport stamps in my book.

*What about other African countries?* *(prove your blackness)*

Well, I do want to go to South Afri…… *Nigga that’s the whitest country in Africa*

I’m not quite sure if I could write enough in my largely vacant least favorite notebook to show how much I don’t give a fuck…. So, I won’t.

But I’ll hold onto the word white, that’s why I want to go there. If I could one day swim with an Orca, just to see those black and white patterns whimsically maneuvering about the sea, curiously trying to play with, observe and understand me; morally, I’d feel the train had stopped where it should be. But If I could just see a Great White: conceited, inquisitive, swimming stealthy, innocent danger. I’m not sure how I’d feel; scared, grateful, investigative, inimitable;
that’s why I’ll go. And I’ll be sure to spit in the water before I depart, that way I’ll always be there.

One day I’ll close my eyes, call it a prolonged blink. When they reopen, I’ll be gone, hopeful of meeting a misunderstood Aussie Shepherd somewhere.
Remembering a Redwood

Beauty hasn’t a care for permission, tributes nor recognition; it does however have a soft spot for curiosity.

I’ve seen entire lives visioned through a canopy held up by giants.

Vicariously, no

anamnesis is what the philosophers might tell me.

I’ll just call it charitable symbiosis.

I’m sure it’s understood I am remembering a tree.

I hope what’s understood is I’ve lived my life through the meaning of autumn’s foliage, cordate figures and arbitrary creativity.

I want it known, that a tree has given me this quiet formidability

I wish to tell a story before I leave this borrowed page.

We often wish ourselves as free as a Steller’s Sea Eagle, as jolly as an Orca, as brave an African Lion.

How could we become any of this if not for the memory of a tree?

We often wish ourselves, rich, tall, handsome, pretty, and wise.

How should we imagine these things if not for the memory of a tree?

I care that we remember,

more than a tree has to;

for a tree remembers all, even that our lives are but a second of splintering in its curious universe.