
TEN KEYS

To Being A Champion On And Off The Field

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TEN KEYS TO BEING A CHAMPION ON AND OFF THE FIELD

1.

As far as I can tell,
this all started
at a Comfort Inn in Bemidji.

And all the beeps you hear while reading this

mean something
you can't just point
and click to the trash.

Thus far, the paths that leave here have been reduced to a key in the lower-right corner of the summer. That star represents us, that dotted line where we may or may not be headed.

It's just started to rain

and I've been thinking a lot
about those two ducks we always see together.

And how I wish,

right now,

we were them.

3.

By now, I've memorized where all the raindrops land
and translated their surnames into 114 different languages,
classifying their origins into three distinct genealogical groups:

1) Gut Shot.

2) Bridge-Fed.

3) Sifted.

Today, when I was bored,
I began weaving a hammock
from the flight paths of birds
and some willow trains
I scarfed from the lake.

4.

Thing is:

it's finally stopped raining here

but all that matters right now
are these waves
canceling the hull.

Today,
the lake is freshly stocked.

Tourists,
sprawl-raised,
aquarium-eyed,

have mouth-bred
and choked the water.

I can walk across the deepest part
but there's nothing Jesus about it.

up
Their shear breaking us
into plates.

I have nothing left to do here
 but assume there is something about you
 in the way the aspens flinch.

Or are those birch?

I should really be able
 to tell by now
 and what that means to someone,
 perhaps me,
 is that I have to try a little harder
 to clean the stress
 150 miles puts on an envelope
 of little white flowers
 and a Heineken coaster
 that tells me about a dream I had.

If you haven't figured it out yet, this is my attempt at a semi-annual beauty special.

You will find a quiz on the following page and it may tell you what you need to do in order to make yourself feel better this season.

Or maybe it won't

and all this is
 is my attempt
 at reprogramming
 the tour boat's loops

into waking up

to piss together

outside our tent
 in the middle of the night.

6.

1) This season, there is something to be said for debris:

- A. The waves stuck in commute.
- B. The gulls bumper-cropped.
- C. The tourists typed in a different font than us.
Single-spaced. Justified a bit to the right.

2) Though you are progressing satisfactorily toward a positive self-image:

- A. The scaffolding is no longer strong enough to hold us.
- B. They keep coming from the city, dyeing the trees blonde.
- C. The sinking feels traitorous, but, maybe,
the mud will exfoliate our skin into bone.

3) The tourist larvae you've found slung from the parklights:

- A. Sop up the waves with torrential towels.
- B. Gull shore crumbs and infants from the fresh-raked sand.
- C. Are metered; enforced 8am to 6pm except Sun. and holidays.

4) You make scenes in public places to take attention from:

- A. The crane tearing each white, private pier open in segments.
- B. The quiet fending of circulators in water.
- C. The citronella clouds, the water-spot stars.

5) You are sure there is nothing more to this:

- A. The little girl watches me through the back slats of a chair.
- B. Her dark brown curls wind down her hand
to the stuffed wolf she holds close by its throat.
- C. Her fingers leave small, dark prints in the white fur.

7.

I'm still hung-over
from two nights ago;

the lake is beautiful
but I've started to forget some things

cannot be bought
or forced to migrate,

even
by thousands of tourists.

Here, our caste
is typed,

departmentalized,
and, unfortunately,
it's not just some corner
we've been backed into

but something decidedly
more

de-veined
and water-
striding.

This time being,
we'll nestle
in the pier cribs,
attach ourselves
to the bottoms
of wooden hulls,
label-tongued,

serving,
deducting the shear
from our currents.

As long as the waves are cursive
our lines will never still.

8.

If you could see my path,
perhaps, even pick it up fresh
from the wake left behind,
you would see six circles:

arrow plains with Clovis points

sparring the shore,
labeled in cuneiform,
returning to their source.

The fact is:

some paths
cannot be cleared by teething machines,

only broad strokes,

or campfire,

by leaving expressways
and following deer paths
worn in panoramic.

I guess, in a way,
I am trying to tell you
there are no answers here

except,
for some reason,

I think a hammock between two trees
is what we should be shooting for.

9.

Yellow is health in campfire.
Two babies looking at each other.
Hands bloodless, graceful
with no wind to touch,
the windows re-imagine me
fulfilled, sustained, painted
to the sides of the lake homes.
Drained, dredged, developed.
This is my cross to the north shore.

10.

This morning we walked to the lake
and built geoglyphs
from shattered pier cribs
and the fossils
of multi-million dollar estates
built in 1906.

We tied our hammock there,
between two aspens,
with the wake
of a drowned tour boat
and a strand of deer path
we found at Itasca.

The birds were real,
their paths caught on us.

Even as the shores recede,
you have your crayons out,
coloring the trees in
brown and green.

The moon pulls each wave to us
and taxes can never be taken out of that.

BALANCE

I tear the styrofoam packaging of our new year
to pieces and make rickety angels in its drift.

What else is there to do?

Shame is a caucus of unblemished skulls
objectively critiquing the intentions of my mouth.

I've started a new entry for it in my portfolio
of grizzled, midwestern industries.

I bag the flecks of carbonized skin
it's left ashed in my arm hair.

I note its uncommon talent for gristle, the slurry
of human noise and grip its made of my one true sledding hill.

No matter which atlas I buy, the same body's remains;

the floral and faunal decals peeling from the exposed rebar
of a guilt that doesn't erode
like the community of endless laundry and light that surrounds it.

Don't know about you.

I've spent my winter filling the rooms of this house
with mobiles, ferns, the restorations of prairies.

You wouldn't believe what my heart smells like right now,

abraded of that glorious stench we cobbled together
while all around us the concerted fields of Wisconsin
were being classically trained to erode into sprawl,

that glorious stench of us eating wild blueberries in the mountains,
destroying indestructible cars in the snow.

TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE SATELLITE HEART 1 & 2

Because of constraints
in this distant budget we've passed,

the use of real blood has been phased out
over the course of the year.

Our corners have not been cutting themselves.

Only red nail polish left
to make our little plastic soldiers bleed,

our little blue cavalrymen
taking a bottlecap brush to the knees.

I can't even afford the small mammals I need
to comprehensively test my capacity for loneliness.

I'm sorry.

This type of abortion is never an easy decision.

::

And now, I've got helicopters closer to me
than the heart recommends for adults.

I calibrate how many gearless rotations
I've lost to its advice,

how many rising shreds of women
I've clutched in absentia,

their flawless retractions on screen,
photographs, evelessly posed

on the bed, on the tarmac, on the car,
on the cushionless couch cross the room,

Never the day-gash of bra strap
in the mid-little coax of their spines.

Never the underwire's sick teething
in the tenderly closed mouth beneath each breast.

The insides of their windows
not like the outsides;

their retractable skies
smudged with the clinching
of many people in a smalling space.

I'm pretty sick of this shit.

I bite my cheeks into small doorframes of skin into skin.

I beg the parked cars to clean me
by scribbling on their dirty windows with my finger.

I am so scared to come for them.

So scared that nothing is reflected from their moister parts,

nothing clenched for later,
nothing preserved, nothing glanced

but my terror of the sounds they might make,

the sounds they might take from me
and amplify into an irrevocable night of bells.

FOR SUZI, APRIL 6TH

You can hear the dead I made
crowded nearly still in the street outside.

I know you can.

And I know how much it reminds you
of the soft wrestling of those life jackets
we saw floating on the lake without bodies.

I can hear them too.
I made them, so I know they will wait.

I've been trying to write down an escape plan for us.
It's so well formed in my head.

And I've been trying to make you a care package
of rations I have left from the looting.

The important things I've taken
from stores and others' bodies.

I've filled a box with Band-Aids, bottled water,
a Campbell's Chicken and Stars.

I know you're skeptical.

No one for the mail in a week.
Power cut Friday.

But my body still hoards the smell of your skin
before saliva in its mouth as it breathes,

so I need to write this.

Thursday. I'll have the sniper rifle ready
on top of the bank across from your apartment.

You'll have to run as fast as you can.

I'll try to draw them away from you with human noise.
As much as I can make.

I made them, so I know they'll be listening.

This'll give you time. I hope.
God, I'm trying.

Remember, if they grab you, keep low,
I'll try to take their heads if you keep low.

And what is filling your chest as you read this
is a by-product of the guilt inside you,

the guilt that blames yourself for the failure of my body,
my mistaken body that is not infallible hero,

but an untrained, barricaded, secluded body,
a body just without aim in your distance.

That guilt is more senseless than the dead
I hear now crushing themselves against the door.

It's the senselessness that's terrifying.

If you read this you'll understand.
If you get this package you'll understand.

God knows you're more a survivor than me.

You calmed me when I thought the wild horses
in Medora would trample us on our air mattress,

when I flinched at the wounded bleating of animal
that woke us in the dark of Itasca.

I hear the grizzling of their throats in the hall,
the clawing of their shredded hands at the door.

There is a distance of shouts from the window.
A defacement of that distance, those shouts.

Human sounds, just there, alive, somewhere,
above the dead, above what might be birds
tearing through the down of their own bellies.

Weight crush splinters frame.

A heavy, human rust.

I love you. Please,

don't make me look at their mouths.

PRESERVATION

Because of these bodies,
we must, of course, have a ventilation system.
Otherwise, the atmosphere inside
would be too stifling to store
their foragings, their longings and dusks
amongst our already buckled shelves.
We give them quiet slits at certain angles.
We produce their sounds for them,
tender their closed spines with barest fingers.
In a technical sense, our living surplus
of dereliction is low-use material,
but the straddling lobes of our bodies,
their mouths and sex and burning glands,
welter against oxygen and catalogue,
against vast, windowless archival.
I wake startled each night by their babeling,
lamp myself frantic to sketch
new designs for the patient lust
I've been working so feverishly on;
attempt after attempt at transplant, my body
always rejecting such a wild dysfunction,
such a lenient model of carnality.
If contrition is a reason for reconstruction,
it is not the act itself, not the minutiae.
Leave the sweat to bead the dancing girl's calves.
Ply our mouths from the vulnerable mouths
we redact as invulnerable.
Hold closed this seclusion that lacks
the truce of a viable distance.
We control the temperature of our warehouses
until the temperature becomes what we store.
We fight the collusion of our bodies
until our bodies complicate us possessively.
But does that complication exact us?
Does that possession compel us
toward a less quarantinable lust,
a more absolute contrition?
A contrition so precise in its shelving
of all our bodies have foraged.
Our bodies so precise in their confusion.
Our bodies rejoicing yet abraded
as we make unbound brains of their longings,
as our unbound brain make hearts of themselves.

A YOUNG TECHNOLOGY

There are so many high school girls here
but it is only their perception that seclusion dehumanizes
that I put into my mouth.

They say their car doors are stuck with ice
and, I assume, inside, they too
are filled with every kind of loneliness.

They don't know yet that makes us powerful.

I'd bless their hearts, but it's not that easy.

Their synthetics blushing in the fainted yard.
Their abundance paned
with this fragile winter breaking against itself.

HUMAN RESOURCES 1

Not quite sure what the dawn
keeps shoveling over us

but there's a pond full of it out back.

The ducks there have mass, give mass,
die slightly from the water.

In mass, they flee toward the porch
as a dog sets upon them from the path.

In the kitchen, I don't know why I'm nervous,
so I douse myself with green tea, makeover shows.

Bright veins open. Five beers in,

I imagine the windows of our home
unblown to sandstone cliffs,

the swallows looping like sprung snares,

some lost goat refusing to climb.

I write a looseleaf note to you,
fold, tape to the tv screen:

Baby,

Please, let's not make history tonight.

If you come home.
Just let's sit with the pond.

Let this dawn dissolve us in its layering.

The anthropologists will be here soon enough.

Mistaking my semen stains for gypsum glyphs.

Ignoring the drop of your menstrual blood
I leave to share the gray, fitted sheet of my bed.

Our preservation has nothing to do with us.

Our bodies are not our bodies poured from plaster.

I've left my heart and mouth and penis
preserved for you
in ziplock containers in the freezer.

TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE SATELLITE HEART 3

The innumerable men waited
in the stadium for her performance.

They swore into hush when it began.

They surged in their seats, their saliva and tears
leaking out into each other's aisles,
flooding the corporate boxes,
the concession stands, the mezzanine.

They clowned at first,
threw their plastic cups of beer onto the field,
threw their garbage into each other's mouths.

They shook and collapsed in the grandstand.

They stalled and then fled and fled to the field
where she stood on a stage at the fifty yard line.

The men wept around her, breathing in piles,
reaching for her, trying to comfort their bodies,

climbing each other to discard her
for her flesh and flesh and saliva,
the smell of her between her breasts,
between her earlobe and hairline.

There was the heavy breath from the loudspeaker.

There was the conformity of their spines
to what they believed was her spine.

They bent and unbent, brushed one another
They startled at each touch, struck out blindly,
caving each other's chests and skins and fasteners
with torn-up bits of bleacher,
the disfigured hollows of stairwell cages.

She stood still on the stage above them.

She stood still as they scraped their trunks
in oblique, apostolic agony.

Her long skirt and its beckoning hem.
Her long skirt and its clutching to flaw at her hips.

She stood still on the stage
and ignored the men in their rapture.

She stood still on the stage and stared
above their creaking bodies.

She was waiting for something to happen.

She was crying but there was no door for her to close.

She was a biology teacher.

She knew the name for every thing in their bodies
cutting itself to make her love them.

LAKE EFFECT

A.

It's these guts that need a place to be,
these guts, collapsing, tugging out my skin,
tugging my outside, cradled, fumeless skin,
these guts that need a way to tear from spine,
my tender shim, my skinny tender shim
of sky, the city flogged, my skinning hands,
my hands skim curdled light from spun-lake dark,
the faucet collapsing and collapsing,
the water's fault-cut bloom skinning my hand,
this gurgling inside me, in, collapsing
onto stones; her water falls onto stones,
her water sutures itself, the sky here
contains her, my skin contains her, my chest,
whir and murk and folded guilt, contains her.
I will not rise, as me, the lake is gone.

S.

Icicles on the coal cars this morning.
Near the walk, clumps of walk pretend to dark.
The loons, cloaked with lake, scatter dagger-board.
The torn walk is leveled for me but slants
in snow. In snow, my dark prints contain me.
The white contains me and the lakeshore begs.
The white contains him. Bleach. Window cleaner.
He poured from me, is left, the smell of night
in the cedar chest. The smell of him left
amongst my sheets, amongst the startled sheets.
I wash the rug. I wash the rug. The rug
flapped out, the rug disloyal and leaving.
The snow is light, it contains me, does not
contain him, but does contain him; the smell
of night and loons and fading cars destroyed
by distance, by sleep. I wash the basin.
The rug dries, contains him. The basin dries,
contains him. The rug and basin dry. He left me.
The snow is white and such men leave dark prints.
I contain white, the loons contain white, bleach
contains white, dark prints are contained by white.
He is contained by white. The dark prints left
mean we contain white and are contained, cars
brace the white as the city braces sky.
Seatbelts. Consummation. I am contained.

A.

I tear a shim from the city and prop
up the sky, I tear a switch from the sky
and throttle the city, throttle its kind,
throttle the planks of its rootless siding,
I left her paling with snow beneath eaves,
I left and glistened as I left and cried,
I glistened without light, unmade of light,
driftless, dragging sutures, the lake is gone,
its snuffling waves are gone, the lake is gone
and now the barges, now the sumped barges
leak along the river, dislodge and lodge
the waves, the river waves, dislodge, Dubuque.
It's this guts that lodge and dislodge, barges
leaking along salt-clopped steps, the road leaves
the red-shift clime of buildings, the barges,
the lock and dam further on, the river,
its broken legs caught beneath my engine
block, its curt thighs caught beneath my engine
block, I left her but the snow contains her,
my heart-scattered salt, sand-melt, plow-scrape, I'm breaking
this control, I cleave through the barges, the leave-strain, the state.
Inside me and outside me there is a glisten without light.
Inside me and outside me there is a piling of moisture that will not last the day.
The conduit snaps shut and the dusk-light contains her. I contain her.
She contains me. And we scatter slightly
into the dust and cushion and phosphorescence.

NOTES

Thank you and several small bows to Diagram for previously publishing “Balance”.

The “Transmissions from the Satellite Heart” poems owe their title to the Flaming Lips’ album of the same name. The first line of 2 is reworked from the Flaming Lips’ song “Pilot Can at the Queer of God”.



