

## Wishing for Rain

In the photo my father got his arm around me  
probably checking my pockets for some change.  
We're celebrating my birthday a month late.  
We're celebrating 11 months early, too.

Above us the sky is painted silver  
but then came those cold, black clouds—  
dying the grey like an aging bachelor.  
I blew out the candles and wished for rain.

All those times we wrapped our arms around each other  
I realize I was the only one gripping.  
You put me on hold like a phone call.  
And I held onto you like a secret.

Wild

Joe tells me he roped a colt.  
And Billie says he sung with Elvis.  
It's lunchtime, and we're talkin dreams again.

They get to me and start laughin.  
I tell em in my dream I ate a ham sandwich  
and best of all, I got to take my bath first.  
*In this dream, I tell em, I did not wade in the dirty water  
after momma, Dallas, Antwan, Lindsay and Lauren.  
No, I got the clean water even though I'm the littlest.*

They get a kick outta that.  
Then the kids say to tell another one  
with their eyes dartin back and fourth.  
Tommy starts saying he's on a canoe,  
but they tell him to hush.

*Casper, they call me  
cuz of my skin I guess.  
Tell another dream.*

I say in my dream  
I don't have to take the blue bus to the prison  
to give dad a macaroni picture that the guards  
gotta hold up for him to see  
but dad will never feel those noodles  
or my hair  
or my face.

*I tell em, In my dream  
Dad and I are having a little picnic  
for his birthday.  
And best part is  
we both get some cake!*

The kids fall over on their sides with that one.  
They ask questions about the cake  
and blanket we were sittin on  
just to make sure they gonna tell it right in the locker room.  
I tell em.

Finally, Jimboy ask the question.  
He says, *Casper, why are your dreams so boring?*  
The kids laugh a little, but they hold it in mostly,  
saving it for my answer to really let loose.

I look back at the bruises on my wrist  
then down at my broken boots.  
And then I tell them.  
*My dreams are wild.*

## Fireworks in the Rain

Dad was already drunk  
when he found the box of fireworks.  
It was raining outside  
but we tried to light them anyway.

All of us kids kept trying  
just cause he was excited about it.  
And as he stood there with his lighter and a bottle rocket  
I think that might of been the first time I ever saw him.

Of course I'd looked at him all my life.  
But something about seeing my father soaking wet there  
with a fire cracker under his flannel like it were an umbrella.

This is who he was.  
The man who pawned every piece of jewelry  
he could find, except for the bracelet  
he kept getting around his ankle.

He was broken. And maybe it was his dad's fault.  
Or maybe it was his own. I don't know.  
But eventually I had to leave him out there  
to go off and try and find my own light.

## Ziploc Bag

They gave us grandma's possessions in a zip loc bag.  
The little coin purse with everything but coins;  
an array of bobby pins, and photos of grandchildren slowly aging  
this was everything on her at the time she died.

We tried giving them to papa, but he didn't even as much as nod at them.  
*What happens when I die?* he asks, with a voice like sandpaper.  
*They end up in another sandwich bag?*  
It's gotta go somewhere, I tell him, and he says that I'm right.

So we made a fire in the backyard. All of us was there.  
And as we passed those pictures around,  
we all took our time with each one;  
photos this woman saved like cash for a rainy day.

When they finally got around to papa he took one last look  
then tossed them in the fire.  
And for the second time, those old photos kept us warm.

## Two Different Places

It was the last thing my father ever said to me—that he'd be seeing me soon. There are so many things about that night I've lost over the years, but I'll never forget the look he had when he got up to leave our front porch. It was as if he knew, somehow, that where he was going, and where he was headed were two different places.

The chair he'd just left was still rocking by the time he'd made it down the driveway. He was just a few steps away from his truck when he suddenly came to a stop; like he'd realized he'd left something behind. But instead of patting down his pockets for his keys or a lighter, he just turned back and looked at me. I kept waiting on him to holler at me to get back in the house until I found some shoes. But he didn't. He didn't say a word. He just stood there quietly before finally turning back around and driving off.

That was the night he was shot fourteen times in a town I'd never heard of. And even though it's been nearly twenty years since that night, I still spend them watching, and waiting—as if maybe his last promise might be the first one he'd keep.