



Don't Kid Yourself

Poems by Don Winter

By Don Winter

Things About to Disappear
On the Line
No Way Out But In
Saturday Night Desperate
Even the Dead are Growing Old

Don't Kid Yourself

by Don Winter

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for Rebecca Schumejda

For Steve Henn

one for toad

you begin to see that his poems
walk the balance beam
of his obsessions

that they don't simply talk to avoid
what's going on

that while yours may want
to solve the problems of the universe
his want to see Chicago

that they like to joke
& all the jokes are practical

that they dream of brothels
gather choirs from losses
describe things as they are
that they spent a night or two in jail

that if you had a choice
between buying a book of them
& getting your raincoat cleaned
they would tell you
to clean your raincoat

where i grew up

a mail truck circles like a lost dog
a bathroom door *men* lies flat on the ground
a sewer line tied off like an umbilical cord
a pregnant woman sells herself
kids with alphabets
of scars roll worn tires down the street
a man stands
under the busted neon turns a coin
in his pocket

one life to another

“stick the hook there,”
grandpa said, rolling
the worm like a booger
in his gun-shell
fingers. i stabbed it
in the wrong places.
i caught one

fish all day.
grandpa drove it home,
a wet sock
in a basket.
it puckered & spit

in the frying pan.
snagged on rusted
nails, bass heads
yawned, mouths big enough
to swallow a thermos
of whiskey
in one gulp.

a toast

after they chained the factory gates,
dad drove truck for non union
restaurants, 6:30 to 6:30,
no overtime pay, no pension.
days off he watched my sister & me
while mom cleaned up
at sleep cheap. mortgage kicking their asses.
car held together

with duct tape & mirrors.
he busted two ribs
getting out of the rig.
a week on the couch
feeling like a truck backed
onto his chest.
one night, having sent us
to grandma's, they beat down

the xeroxed days
with wine & a motel bed.
watched late, late shows. drank.
puked in the toilet.
before they checked out
they toasted each other
& touched
empty glasses to their lips.

hit & run

dad pivots as if to catch
the bitch or bastard. no one.
mom said there'd be days
like this, but dad always said
an eye for an eye,
you break it you bought it, no son
of mine, do as i say
not as i do, what kind of fairy
throws a ball underhanded anyway?
his face bulges like the creek
he damned with mud: it worked
okay at first, but water started
sneaking through, he couldn't hold it back,
& what a mess. after that
when dad said you're up
shit creek, he knew he knew that water,
without a paddle he'd trade
now for a baseball bat to beat
the sonofabitch blind, someone out there
thinking he's got away with this, someone,
by fucking christ, is going to pay.

cultural exchange

for Fred Voss

at coffee break kento
told uncle johnny he could cut
more aluminum cookies
if he'd quit looking
at pussy books.

“look pal,” uncle responded,
“to really understand working stiffs
you have to learn the factory howl.”

he howled until his face turned red.

after a few tries kento
got it down real good.

“where were your ancestors
on december 7, 1941?”
uncle asked.

kento said, “in japan,
it costs eighty or more bucks
for one pussy book.”

tattoo

light slices the kitchen
in two. mom's ice bag
sweats on the counter. i woke up
to glass broken in the trash
& blood stains on the couch.
i stare at dad's tattoo
of a man stiff-armed
against a howitzer,
cigarette in mouth, not knowing where
his shells are landing.
his glare
scrapes my plate.

grandpa's barn

spent its life
falling down. wind had keys
to his house, where nights
he coughed up the war
in the trenches
of his sleep. insects wound
his days like a watch.
he spit mail pouch
into the bushes, & with his clasp knife
cleared the south forty
from his nails. fields rained
to his touch,
then browned. his neck
turned to red
corduroy, hands to old
harness leather. when he fell
in the field like a blasted
stump, our family circled
his farm like a fence.
but, we were born
to be discounted: tax men tore down
grandpa's farm to plant
a walmart.

grandma's doctor visit

it's slow getting grandma
into the car.
she's big on jesus
& honored her promise
to go to the doctor.
i hold her as she vomits,
stumbles, then crumbles.
she rests her head
on the dash, & i wonder
if my shit box
will make it through
the snow. i wheel her in
& hold her again
as she vomits. she's been this way
for weeks. jesus hasn't answered
her prayers like he did
for many years. i fall asleep
in the exam room.
in the last days even the strong
will be made weak.
the doctor runs tests
& concludes
she has grown old.

pest control

it's cousin jimmy's fault.
he left the grease pit
open. back line crawls

with them. hit with raid, they back-
flip, scratch the air,
or try to burrow

under bun racks, hide in mops.
"son of a bitch," jimmy spits,
bugged out on spray. jimmy makes

a buck sixty an hour, & shuffled
in line with the rest
for months at the unemployment office

before he landed here.
months of being angry
at fuck knows who or what. he sweeps

many as he can,
living & dead, out the back
door & lets it

slam. more crawl out.
later, drunk at the creek,
jimmy catches catfish

& leaves them
in the rowboat
to swim in the rain.

dry creek bed

after a whole week
of maggots the stink is gone
from the dead catfish

remember eugene

nights she came out
in that flame red halter,
that mini-skirt the width
of a hanky,
& she kissed him
on the lips, then slapped
his cheek, put his hand between
her legs, then twisted his wrist.

he told her
he'd work a couple of years
at the quick & cheap
'til he figured out
what it was
he really wanted.

now, when she calls him
a lifer, he stares out the window,
the work he does best. last call
shows up like an arrest
record, & he wonders how close
he can park to the employee door
before he makes his run
for it.

cousin jimmy's liver

outlived doctor's expectations
by fifteen years. dying in the hospital
he had me smuggle in
some beer & pour it
into a beaker
left for a urine sample.
then he waited
for the nurse to walk in
before he drank it.

tent revival

dad stayed home,
drank & read until numb
enough for sleep. i helped
set out the folding chairs, wheel
the organ down the ramp
of the u-haul. everywhere hands
worked fans in that tent,
& the preacher, hair slicked back
by lard, stepped up to warn
the world might end
that night. "who would be saved
must file to god's alter," he yelled
above the feedback & mom,
babbling amens into the organ music,
quaked down the sawdust aisle.
"oh Jesus, touch this sister
who accepts in faith
the things we cannot know."
mom knew dad's love
was terrible, hardly better
than none at all. she howled her faith
at stars. rid of the devil,
she left dad for good
each week, but he said "where else
can you go?" supper he'd shake
his newspaper into obedience.

knife's edge ballet

you poor dumb bastards.
that one you're talking about,
there, at the end of the stage,
she was beautiful once,
before the kids, before the welfare
hotels. we'd watch the house lights go down,
then come up like the rush
of blood you're feeling now,
& the ring of the spotlight
would slip over her & she'd dance to us,
& i guess she was arrogant
or naïve enough to think things might
turn out. she showed her breasts
to half the wasted punks of hamtramck.
the strobes all over her body like hands.
but who finally gives a shit. the body runs down.
the paradise of lights becomes
a walled park you'd die
to get out of.
now before coming out to dance,
the memory of the customers she's known flicks
open like a switchblade
& she meths herself past
forgetting. & that's all you need
to know, you poor dumb bastards,
next time you stick
a dollar where your eyes have been
& tell her how goddamn lucky
she'd be to have you
in bed with her, & she whispers back:
you're gonna get fucked, sure,
but i swear you'll never get laid.

at the conference

i sit at the back
in my suit with my badge
hello, my name is don & my cup
of tepid coffee. the overhead reads
you only succeed
by *putting students first*. the dean repeats:
“change is your rocket”
& “innovation is your way.”

the guy next to me,
my rival for teaching fuck-
who-cares, has a list
he’s working on:
things i want to shove up the dean’s ass. so far:
our school’s official
pencil, a bar of soap,
salami, a pool cue, 905
stones, a student’s fist, a flashlight,
a toothbrush holder. he signs
my name to the bottom, hands it
to the collector

of topics for that afternoon’s
open session. the dean raves:
“if we don’t hit
our target soon all our
rear ends will be
on the line.” he proposes we should
agree & everyone’s hand
goes up. i put mine up, too.
i’ve run out of paperclips

to unwind. break, they pass around
the sheet to sign
for the \$10 stipend. no one talks
about the \$999 we're paid
per class. i slide out
to my car to get a cup
of something stronger. the sky
is still there, dry blue & most of it
still up.



About The Author

Don Winter, b. 1958, went from being owner of Southeast Real Estate to poverty after a 1998 divorce. He then took up the poem, and from 1999-2006 his work appeared in most small press (and many “academic” press) journals. He is the author of critically acclaimed books and chapbooks including *Things About to Disappear* and *No Way Out But In*. Todd Moore calls *Saturday Night Desperate* “as good as poetry gets.” From 2006 through the present, Winter has been an Instructor of Technical Writing, Workplace Cooperation, Labor History, and Reading/Composition for Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana University, and unions. He won the 2012-13 Associate Faculty Award for Excellence in Instruction. The author may be contacted at donwinter8@gmail.com and P.O. Box 1265, Niles, Michigan 49120.



Critical Acclaim for Don Winter's Poetry:

"One of the small press' finest poets." *Chiron Review*

"Don Winter is one of the best poets in [the] small press." *Small Press Review*

"Don Winter's stark, lyrical tales of truck stops and strip bars and closed-down rusting factories are as strong and American as Jack Kerouac hitching a ride in a truck rolling down a lonely highway at dawn or Hank Williams singing of train whistles and cheating hearts and they will hit you and move you with their force. He is that rare thing, a true poet."—Fred Voss

"The poems of Don Winter have the same strong realistic qualities I find in my favorite narrative writers, e.g. Hemingway, Bukowski, Updike, Roth, and Haslami: recognizable locales, credible characters, sharp dialogue, terse descriptions, and a minimum of authorial intrusion. He deserves the praise he receives from everywhere. Don, thank you for all the good words you've graced the readers of your work with."—Gerald Locklin

"One of our favorite American poets."—Joan Jobe Smith

From: moorebt842@msn.com
To: donwinter@hotmail.com
Subject: Hey
Date: Mon, 7 Sep 2009 12:04:32 -0600

Don,

this is just to let you know that ever since you sent me your first book, i have looked forward to your work wherever i can find it and Saturday Night Desperate in my opinion is as good as poetry gets.

I remember getting hit once with a baseball bat right in the middle of the back and the force of the blow spun me around toward a girl who was laughing. sometimes poetry will have the same effect on me. reading Tom McGrath's Letter to an Imaginary Friend was like that. your poetry hits me like that.

the marginalized poets are the ones who really count in this world. the academics are the ones who make poetry so boring.

and many thanks for saying those kind words about my work. i really appreciate it. thirty and more years ago when i started the mag roadhouse i published one of Tom McGrath's poems and he sent me a very kind note saying that he had read The Name Is Dillinger and really liked it. i still have that letter somewhere around here. it means a lot to me. i almost met him once in Milwaukee where he was going to read. then he cancelled at the last minute due to back problems.

a friend of mine, Gene Frumkin, who once was one of Tom McGrath's students in L.A. used to talk a lot about the experience. Frumkin has since then passed away. one last thing. any time a book of yrs is due out, please send it to me.

as always,
Todd Moore