

INSANE INTIMATIONS OF NAUGHTY LITTLE SECRETS
or **SEX SCENES OF A YOUNG BOY**

Scene One: Dirty Books

It was like finding buried treasure
The day I first discovered my father's
Dirty books,
Hidden in his top dresser drawer
Under an innocent pile of
Clean underwear.
When my father was at work,
I would sneak into his room,
Slither out a book,
Do my dirty business,
And sneak it back
Before he came home.
One day the book
Wasn't there. Shit.
I was sure I had been discovered.
But I later found out
It was a younger brother.

Scene Two: Shirley

Shirley was a year older.
She lived across the street.
She let me twirl the golden
Silky locks of her pubic hair.
One day we were fooling around
In my pitch black bedroom,
When my mother suddenly
Flung open the door.
"Are you sick?" She asked
Shirley and I answered simultaneously.
"No," I said. "Yes," said Shirley.

Scene Three: Lisa Copeland

When I was about ten I would go to Dean Park
Across the street from my house before dinner
To play football or baseball or tennis with my friends,
Or play horseshoes with Tom, the town drunk.
Every evening Lisa Copeland came to the park
Dressed to the nines, all made up.
She was tall, thin, pretty, flat as a board.
She would stand on the street corner,
And lift up her skirt.
I had no idea what she was doing.

BROTHERS

I was the oldest
Of four brothers.
From a very early age
There was an expectation
Thrust upon me
By my parents, my contemporaries,
My teachers, and my community
That I would be the best.
My kindergarten teacher
Told my mother
That I would go to Harvard.
What might seem to be,
At first blush, a blessing,
Turned out to be a curse.
I only tried to do those things
Where I thought I could meet
Those expectations.
Out the window:
Science, math, technical skills,
Working with my hands.

In school my brothers were
“Peter’s younger brothers.”
Nevertheless, free from
The expectations placed on me,
They all had in their lives
The task and opportunity
To find their own way,
And create their own path.
And they all did just great!

Footnote: As for me,
My kindergarten teacher was right!
I did go to Harvard, and
Despite my self-imposed limitations,
I did live a satisfying life.

POEM TO MY THREE YOUNGER BROTHERS

About thirty years ago
(I can’t remember exactly when)
I wrote an email to you
(I can’t remember saying exactly what)
To the effect that I had finally figured out
Why God put me on this earth:
To be a warrior for justice.

Some of you
(I can’t remember exactly who)
Wrote back to the effect that
(I can’t remember exactly what):
Who the fuck does he think he is,
Having some kind of divine purpose?

Well, now that my career is over,
I am going to say something else
That may piss you off:
I think I did what I came here to do.
(And, I might add, so did you!).

WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

Why hast thou forsaken me?
I was raised Jewish.
I went to services Friday night.
I was bar mitzvahed under threat
That if I quit, my three younger brothers
Could not be bar mitzvahed.
Our Rabbi was the famous Rabbi Gittelsohn.
He wrote a book called "Little Lower
Than the Angels." In it he argued
That the odds of a horse developing
From a Protozoa by chance were
One followed by a million zeroes to one.
Proof of God's existence, he said.
Nonsense, I thought.
Turns out he was seducing
Half the women in the congregation.
That was enough for me.
For the twenty-five years
After my bar mitzvah
I abandoned religion.
Why hast thou forsaken me?

BEING JEWISH

Do you like being Jewish?
Well, I didn't burn in Germany's ovens
But I was alive when other Jews did.
How ironic that I was so safe
While just around the corner millions died.
Jews are the Chosen People, so they say.
Chosen for what?
Slaughter? Discrimination? Superiority?
Why did they always look so funny?
Long beards. Yarmulkes. Talits. Black suits.
Stuck out like a billboard advertisement.
Too easy to spot. Too easy to round up.
Too easy to ghettoize. Too easy to kill.
I've been Jewish for seventy-eight years now.
What difference did being
Jewish make in my life?
Not much.

BLESSINGS

I am fully aware that, compared to
Millions of Americans who are suffering so
I am most blessed. I am free
To pursue my activities.
In retirement, I don't have a job -
And a salary - to lose.
I have Social Security, and an IRA.
I don't have little kids in the house
To feed, and amuse for twelve hours a day
I don't have elderly parents and relatives
To take care of, or even worry about.
I have a loving family, a safe place to live,
A community, a church, friends nearby,
Access to food and supplies.
I am in pretty good health,
Considering my age. All in all,
It could be worse, a lot worse.
And I know that as we head
Into a perilous future, disaster
Can strike in any form, at any moment,
Even in slow motion.

CONCLUSION

It is said that the Chinese character
For "crisis" is comprised of elements
That signify "danger" and "opportunity."
In this pandemic "crisis" I have tried to
Find "opportunity" amidst the "danger."

WILDERNESS

When my spirit is broken
I retreat to my spirit home,
The wilderness, "an area where
The earth and its community of life
Are untrammelled by man." [The Wilderness Act]
Where "I can hear the almost
Unbearable sound of
the roses singing." [Mary Oliver]
Where in the crystal clear rushing rivers
I see justice roll down like waters.
Where I can't see, taste, smell fetid air.
Where I revel in the sweet,
Sticky smell of my own sweat.
Where crystal clear lakes in stillness
Caress the reflection of snow capped peaks.
Where ancient trees cradle my sorrows
In sympathy. And where in
The deafening sound of silence
I strain to hear the faintest whisper of God.
In the wilderness my broken spirit
Is healed. Even resurrected.

THE REDWOOD GROVE

Trees reaching for the sky
Creating palaces for spotted owls
And feasts for babbling bugs
Silent like the deafening roar
Of an ocean without water
My thoughts splatter the heaving earth
Transfixed by bursts of sunlight
Sizzling mightily through the understory
Scarred by eons of catastrophes
And intermingled with paradigms of peace
Time stands still like Dali's melting clocks
Only to be reborn as trembling tarantulas
And what of us? And what of us?
We hurtle into yesterday's platitudes
While the redwoods stand like sentries
Guarding the spectacled ruins
Of ancient conundrums and forgotten possibilities.

ILLUMINATION

after "Illumination" by Rimbaud

I

We were only dating. The cancer was gobbling up your mother from the inside out. A hell of a reason to get married. Your bad back like a sparrow's broken wing. Forget about Africa's game parks, Michelangelo's pietas, the pyramids, rockets to the moon, descents into Hell. I fell into the jaws of a steel trap.

II

"A flight of scarlet pigeons thundered round my thoughts." I punished you with my silence. You punished me with your affairs. "What is my nothingness to the stupor that awaits you?" A mutual murder-suicide pact. Crab apples falling down rotting, like wasted mirrors underground. Four years an eternity. Hammers tossed through walls. A screaming ring throwing ceremony. Broken glass. Cries swallowed like fistfuls of dirt. The Mercedes our chariot of dust. So we wrenched the wretched rain, and said enough.

III

A Phoenix sprang unexpectedly from the devastation. What would the ancient ones in the insane asylum say? The agony of desecration vomited up a hidden truth full blown from the head of Zeus: our marriage was interfering with our friendship.

LOVE: A VILLANELLE

Love is giving everything you have to give.
What is required is to give your heart away.
Your capacity to love increases as you live.

Perhaps your dog is what you love at five.
You show your love by wanting to play and play.
Love is giving everything you have to give.

As a teen you take your first real dive
Into fleeting puppy love that does not stay.
Your capacity to love increases as you live.

In your twenties love's what makes you come alive.
Your passion brings you closer night and day.
Love is giving everything you have to give.

And then you're ready to marry and to strive
To be always faithful, to never wander or to stray.
Your capacity to love increases as you live.

Love can last a lifetime if you forgive
And never let the flower of love decay.
Love is giving everything you have to give.
Your capacity to love increases as you live.

villanelle

CIVIL RIGHTS SUMMER 1967

In 1967 I was a law student at Cornell Law School.
That summer for thirteen weeks I did Civil Rights work
in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
I worked for a black attorney named Murphy Bell.
Murphy had a wife, two kids, and a good real
estate practice.

Murphy and I filed law suits to integrate the Baton Rouge jail
And stop the building of an airport runway extension
Through a black community, instead of a white graveyard.
When we drove around together, I lay flat on the backseat floor,
So nobody would see a white man driving with a black man.

After a rally focused on one of our lawsuits,
My picture appeared on the front page of the local paper
With two other civil rights leaders
Under the caption "Civil Rights Triumvirate."
Soon after I met a nice girl on a bus to New Orleans.
We made a date, but she cancelled two days later.
She said her father, a Klansman, saw my picture in the paper
And told her that one of these days the Klan was going to get me,
And he didn't want his daughter with me when they did.
In my apartment I slept with my door barricaded and
A loaded gun under my head. Not that I knew how to use it.

In July Murphy represented fifty civil rights activists
Who marched from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge
For nine days through the heart of Klan country.
The fifty marchers were guarded by 500 state troopers and
Seven hundred National Guardsmen.
Every night they returned to Bogalusa, and resumed the
March the next day, because there was no safe place
to stay along the way. At the end the marchers and the Klan
Held almost simultaneous rallies on the Capitol steps!
It was a miracle that no violence broke out.
The March was a lesser known but seminal event in
Civil Rights history.

The Klan burned crosses on Murphy's lawn.
I said to Murphy: "At the end of the summer
I am going to fly back to the safety of the North.
You have a good life here.
Why do you risk your life
Doing such dangerous work?"
He said: "Peter, just because I'm black
I take my life in my hands
Every time I walk down the street."
Murphy is the most courageous man I have ever met.
Inspired by him, I devoted my legal career
To public interest work, trying to help make the world,
A better, more just, more peaceful place.