

Juggling Fire, Blindfolded



Eric Evans

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Note

This collection was unknowingly written over a four-and-a-half-year period as a chronicle, of sorts, of a long relationship and marriage coming to a difficult (but very amicable) end. As such, there were any number of people, places, artists (and their works), and items that so often made the good things better and, perhaps more importantly, made the bad things a little more bearable. This list is in no way complete but it covers a lot of the bases. And, I'm serious about all the Wilco – some days nothing made sense until Jeff Tweedy sang it through my headphones. So, without any further delay, I wouldn't have made it through without Wilco, The Drive-By Truckers, John Coltrane. e.e.cummings, Jeff Buckley, Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (book and movie), Evan Williams bourbon, coffee, drinks with Kathryn Moroney, long phone conversations with Larry DaSilviera, bitch sessions with Steve Craddock, Eilen Jewell's cover of "Shakin' All Over", Carole King's "It's Too Late", Albert King's "Please Love Me", Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House*, sections of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, Woody Guthrie, Nick Lowe, The Black Keys, Mavis Staples, Joe Henry, Richard Thompson, Stanley Cup playoffs, World Series baseball, Billy Collins, more Wilco, Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings, the city of Chicago, Patton Oswalt, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, Marc Chagall, Patti Smith, Michael Chabon, Eric & Slap's Big Mess, some very cool shirts from Goodwill, a little more Wilco, and a whole mess of Tom Petty songs, especially "The Waiting", which is, indeed, the hardest part.

For Diane – with more gratitude, apology,
and respect than words will allow ...

Untitled #176

They just don't know, the glowing
couple heading into the restaurant,
more in love than love itself,
- hand in hand,
arm in arm.

They just don't know that one
day the little things, so small
and quaint and inconsequential,
will become big and bigger,
maybe even monumental, a
tribute to every poorly chosen
word or sideways glance, a
public record of every questionable
intention and its graceless
execution, a tumbling down
of the way it's supposed to be.
How could they know, on a
random spring night as they
enjoy an early dinner, that within
those enfolded hands sits both
the genesis of their destruction
and the seeds of their renewal?
Nowhere on the menu will they
find such an inescapable fact.

5|29|08

A Revival Of The Art Of The Secret Glance

And so it's come to this,
to hoping and waiting for
a goodnight kiss more
familiar than a pucker
and a peck, more desirous
than dutiful, open to the
specter of possibility.

And now it's turned here,
at a chance encounter
mimicking what was once
a given, a revival of the art
of the secret glance, each
day more and less hopeful,
alarming in its typicality.

We've arrived at full circle,
back to the beginning once
more, the innocence of
courting with the exception
of twenty years of reference
and the wild formality of
a business letter.

7|3|08

His Conquistadora's Kiss

Rickety was the day, ill-conceived
like a make-shift bull-fighting ring,
with its cut-rate matador in his
hand-me-down suit and threadbare
red cape, taunting the bull of an
afternoon to a greater state of
agitation, our hero's modest
skills insufficient to the task at
hand, the beast no closer to the
slaughter than the day before,
the picador's lance long packed
away, the overwhelmed assassin
waiting on the taste of his
conquistadora's kiss and the first
of many welcomed drops of tequila
to come.

7|29|08

Leave The Pearls

Discard that dress, I want to say
to her, let me peel away the husk
of the day as I peel away your slip,
sliding it past hips in a sudden
rotation, clockwise and spinning
me like a planet off its axis,
free of gravity's tyrannical
pull.

No, I want to murmur into
her neck, leave the pearls and rings
but lose the rest, lose sight of
time and space and the error of
our ways, let the doorbell chime,
let the phone ring, let dinner
sizzle and burn, let the world
fend for its own inhospitable
self.

Remove, my look suggests,
every last barrier that keeps me
from your magnificence but the
impulse falls short as there are
eyes at the window, a nudge at
the door, a buzz in the air and the
steady howl of hungry mouths yet
to be fed.

7|31|08

Sad Songs

Sad songs never had much to do
with me - they were what others
played on repeat in the late hours,
full of regrets and mistakes and
doubts, the wearied voice of a
broken man.

But now I know those songs, their
unfulfilled desires and almost
permanent ache, the tiny details
embedded in the passing notes,
recognizing myself in the errored
ways of someone else, grateful
for the company but bleary-eyed
all the same.

These songs, simple and mournful,
sometimes quiet and occasionally
true, have found a home in my
bruised display, serving notice
that we all know the words - some
sing the verses, some the choruses
and some unfortunate few can
recite them all from memory.

11|14|08

The Victory Of A Well-Chosen Word

“Your life,” she said, “is a bit abstract to my people.” And she’s right, I suppose, as her people are business owners, most, with a pilot here, a military man there and what do they think of my such modest goals, content often enough with the victory of a well-chosen word and the subtle reference to match, no sale to make, no ledger to balance, no deal to close. Just the self-imposed task of noting the ephemeral.

11|23|08

Your Hips A Solar System

Please, I say, please
unzip yourself right now,
show me what I've missed and
send me stratospherically so,
your hips a solar system
and my eyes all the more
telescopic in the searching.

Yes, I say, yes, yes,
unzip yourself right now
and take the teeth ever
so slowly, biting into
the fruit of the moment
with opulent grace, its
skin and seeds consumed
as the feast that it was
always meant to be.

1|14|09

"We Are Not Symmetrical"

"We are not symmetrical"
she tells me, "not squared-off
or made up of jigsaw cuts"
as I ask her to size me
up once again, to compare
this to that, front to back,
side to side, picturing
myself a scarecrow with
lungs, a voodoo doll built
to scale, an anatomy book
come to life, that jumble
of nerves and joints, expressways
of ligament and vein, knowing
full well how uneven we are,
irrevocably on the far side of
incomplete.

1|20|09

The Bounce House Of Our Room

I am, I declare, this tall and want
to ride the roller coaster of your
spine, the teacup of your underarm,
the tilt-o-whirl of your belly, tossing
me to and fro, side to side, havoc
on my balance and wonderfully so.

Ticket in hand and I want to spin
on the carousel of your roundabout
hips, pinned to the curve of your
accommodating ribs, the jewel-eyed
horse's gallop matched in stride by
the lust-filled lion's eager pursuit.

Front of the line and I make my way
past the fun house mirror of your
nightstand towards the water slide
of your calves and thighs and into
the bounce house of our room, with
it's flaps tied tight and our shoes
in a pile outside, there to be retrieved
at a much later hour.

5|13|09

Untitled #182

If only the fillings in my teeth
would pull the signal of some
distant radio station I might
finally have the words to make my
point, to chart a more assured
course.

If only the metal in my
mouth conducted the sound of
that mid-day talk-show host with
all the answers and the army of
listeners to prove him right,

I
wouldn't need to wrestle so much,
wouldn't need to break the backs
of such uncompromising nouns and
verbs only to reassemble them in
a far more skeletal form.

If only
my jaw would receive the satellite
feed of all those late-night songs,
Motown rhythms and Stax beats,
Booker T. and Marvin Gaye moving
things along, the syllables a strand
from tongue to ear, inarticulation
strewn to the side like the sheltered
embodiment of haste.

5|19|09

Juggling Fire, Blindfolded

As the government of her nerves
falls into open revolt, I have nothing,
I'm told, but patience and humor
to combat the mutiny at hand, the
coup of chaos over desire, her
womb palace stormed by the armies
of imbalance with troops along
the border securing the perimeter,
guarding the interior, aware of
the slightest breach, the smallest
advance, each shot across the bow
batted down with haste and force.

As the government of her nerves
sputters and starts and sputters
again with a logic of its own design,
I will dance and sing and juggle
fire, blindfolded, if only for a
momentary pause in the freefall
of her scrambled thoughts, plucking
them with delicacy and care like
negotiations in a minefield, giving
voice to the constituency of each
extremity and limb, searching for
the wiser counsel of her body
politic, grateful for any sense
with the will to present itself.

8|13|09

The Third Reel

If the year were a movie we'd be at
the start of the third reel by now,
conflict established and the hope
of resolution coming into view.
Somewhere there's a director
of this thing but damned if I ever
see him on the sound lot that is our
days, placing fragile faith in a
seemingly absent entity. This real-time
film's been long on drama but short
on special effects, its sex scenes
theoretical and its violence of the
verbal kind, censor-free and raw
like broken skin. The feature has
no stars, just character actors you'd
recognize on sight, saying things
that cut a little too close, set to
a soundtrack decidedly mid-tempo
and just this side of sad. So, I will sit
here with seat reclined and drink
in hand, waiting for the credits
to finally role and then, I say with
no small measure of relief, let the
editing at long last begin ...

9|5|09

Conjecture Is Easy

Conjecture is easy from this side
of the line, a formless parade
of “what ifs ...” and “what thens ...”,
gauzy linen wrapped tightly about
your impulse and wish, gestures
layered in tight sheaves of doubt.

Conjecture is warm and safe and
familiar, a friendly enemy with
a hidden blade, an affable foe
with a priceless offer and a crooked
grin, hands in front pockets, head
tilted just to the side.

Conjecture is the dark side of
empirical, its back-handed cousin
with a dubious past and not much
to say for itself, father of your
furies and a bastard at that,
conjuring up skittish ghosts and
motivating them with nothing but
indelible fear, bending every word
back upon its brittle, fragile self.

10|6|09

The Sounds Of Faithful Combat

Crows hold grudges.

They also mate for life.

You can, I'm sure,
imagine what some
of those long-distance
flights must be like,
a travelogue of unfinished
arguments and raw nerves,
more right and less wrong,
compromise on the wing,
the miracle of flight
coupled with the singular
sounds of faithful combat,
accusations and endearments
interspersed amongst the
treetops and powerlines.

10|14|09

What Once Is Is Now Was

What once is is now was
what once did is now does
what once wished is now fact
what once whole is now cracked

what once cracked now to mend
what once taken now to tend
what once known now a guess
what once East is now West

what once West now turns North
what once first now comes fourth
what once urgent now on pause
what once simple yields to awe

what once awed now commonplace
what once hidden leaves its trace
what once sour finds its sweet
and what once strange extends to greet

10|25|09

Uppercase

My “D”, when written, looks just
like hers whether spelling out
her name or adding to the grocery
list on the refrigerator, her hand
guiding mine in the grandest and
smallest of ways, palm over knuckles,
arm along arm, breath warming
the back of my neck.

My “D”, when pressed to paper,
looks just like hers, from the
tiniest top-left curl before the
swoop right and a cut back left,
pulled together by that sturdy
connective line, the spine of the
skeletal thought pushing its way
bravely if blindly forward.

My “D”, when firmly printed, shares
a history with hers, twenty-odd
years in the making and not yet
ready for the textbooks but the
stories they’ll tell when its time,
full of sweat and blood and spit
and tears, all that exuberant living
compressed into the uppercase
diamond points of such a simple
line and curve.

4|19|11

Jersey Shore

There's a night on the Jersey Shore
that waits for us like an afterlife,
our deferred reward for the battles
of then and when and here and now,
a night designed for sea salt scents
and dampened skin, for outdoor
showers and the loosely-tied plush
robes that follow, for wine-spiked
kisses and unfettered hands, exploratory
impulses and wild exhortations to
never stop, for such wished-upon
isolation, no screens, no phones,
no knowledge of any kind save for
the mutual notice of one felicitous
moment folding seamlessly into
the next.

6|15|11

The MacPherson Thing

The MacPherson thing is alive,
an organism to reckon with,
genetic and hard-wired, fused to
her DNA like eye color and blood
type, an heirloom of certainty,
rightness assumed.

The MacPherson thing calls its
own shots, ninety-seven percent
sure of itself and not so concerned
with the other three, of little
consequence with those kinds
of odds to play.

The MacPherson thing doesn't need
popular support, doesn't need
to campaign for your vote, doesn't
need to shake your hand or kiss
your babies although it will
when the spirit moves - and
it often does.

The MacPherson thing is comrade
and enemy, friend and foe, enviable
in surplus yet indifferent to your
envy, goodness and betterment
its frequent cause but exhausting
when you choose to sidestep the
intent of its benevolent aim.

8|15|11

The Notion Of Scratch

Halstead loved his nurse to the point
of invention, rubber gloves for her
red, raw hands. Do I love my love
just the same? Yes, I nod emphatically,
yes. But will I ever create for her
a better wheel or a brighter fire?
A new language to speak or an old one
reconceived? Remake then into when
and when into now? Embrace the notion
of scratch or manage the overwhelm
of a blank slate?

All I can offer her now is my sturdy
reinvention, a stripping down and
building up, a reformation of what
was and formulation of what can be,
a new calibration of all the aging
machinery, dials and knobs, levers
and gears, all employed in the eternal
service of our greater good, the
fragments of last week and last year
rebuilt and reformed, tomorrow's
full body defined by the soldered
skeleton of today.

9|12|11

If She's The Bell ...

If she's the bell, so sonorous and
crystalline, then I must be the crack,
the flaw, the distortion at the edge
of its call, the serration of its
smooth decay, the sandpaper scratch
of a moon goddess after a two week
descent of cigarettes and scotch.

If she's the car, a pristine, metallic
green '65 Mustang, let's say,
than I'm the dent of the driver side
door, the thoughtless act of a
distracted stranger and its marked
consequence, the blemish monumental
once attention is drawn.

If she's a record, so rare and prized,
the secret of life spun into her
grooves, then it seems to stand that
I'm the scratch, the gouge of an
errant needle, too impatient for the
next note, its instinctive insistence
unknowingly distracting all with
the task of attempting to follow.

9|28|11

Maps And Lanterns

I would, with little prompt,
give her everything. And that,
come to find, is the rub. She
doesn't want everything, you
see, only something. And so
I search with maps and lanterns,
compass and triptych, seeking
out that tiny, inscrutable
something amidst the loud,
brash overwhelm of everything.

10|13|11

The Good Press

Look, we'll all cause some wreckage
over time, break a tooth or an arm
or a heart, all succumb to our
certain blindness, fall victim
to the good press, believe in our
fractured fairytales.

 The least we
can do is survey the damage and
claim it as our own, set the chairs
back upright and settle up the
bill, and maybe with time and luck
and grace we can sit in those chairs,
one day,

 at a table heavy with food
and drink and remark on the health
of the fixed tooth or the casted
arm, admire the stitched and faded
scar of the mended heart, the muscle
made all the stronger for the
regrettable abuse.

1|22|12

Upon Further Review

We are, she and I, upon further review, different in just the same ways, depending on the day and the details within, one moment's collusion making way for an equal collision, ground given and ground stood for such oblique motivations.

We are, she and I, in the plainest of light, the product of our flaws, our finest traits taken to the furthest degree and turned in upon themselves, bound to expectations too hardwired for notice, the subtle transformation of opinion into the calcified arrogance of fact.

We are, she and I, of clear eyes and level heads, better and worse than we appear, stronger and weaker, lighter and darker, kinder and meaner, everything found in the implication, everything relative, reliant on the curse of context as our most trusted of shields.

5|11|12

Acronyms As Currency

"Why don't you attend to your function in the plan?" - Mr. Paulson

"I don't know my function." - Kleinman

- from Woody Allen's *Shadows and Fog*

Tell me you've never felt like
Kleinman and I won't believe you,
tell me you've never felt the
palpitations of a highwire crossing
with the nuance and grace of
time-lapse photography or walked
the planet's rotation set to some
unrecognizable shuffle, the reset
button forever out of reach,
vague disorientation as the new
normal, and I'll mark you down
as disingenuous at best.

Tell me each week doesn't supply
you with its share of Kleinman
moments, the unsettling notion
of a Swedish monologue with no
subtitles, a fusillade of jargon,
acronyms as currency and double
speak as the default, or the universes
untold in a book encrypted with
five languages - two dead, one
live and two more yet to be
deciphered - and I'll see your lie
for the truth that weighs it down.

Explain to me the details of your
ever-present function in the
still-formulating plan with the
inherent sureness of a drunken
blind man navigating a minefield
and I'll see the dents in your
hand-me-down armor. Show me
the doctrine that brought you this
far and I'll show you mine as
we share a drink and start to
calculate the going rate for bullshit
on the open market these days.

5|24|12

Untitled #206

X assumes its place in one equation
or another, the variable, the wild
card, the key to the whole damn
mystery; X serves as the simple
signature of the illiterate, the
calling card of John Doe's band,
the open-limbed signifier that
something sexy this way comes;
X marks the spot on the treasure
map of our incoherent desires,
the sunken chest never quite
as deep as we dig.

Ex sounds like the fall of the axe
that it is, the confettied air
of a boss/lover/wife severing their
tenuous ties, the cleaving of was
and is, the bruised embodiment
of past tense, the precision cut
of an Exacto knife soaked in
Novocain. Ex speaks volumes with
minimal effort, assumes control
of the room upon introduction,
tells bitter tales with its narrowed
eyes and stiff, straightened spine.

And yet for every X there is a Y,
a perpendicular point, sequential,
let X equal Act I and Y Act II
with now as the intermission, the
collecting of senses and gathering
of nerves. If ex is was, then
why must be is, the open end and
the digging down, the long-delayed
acknowledgement of yonder and yes,
the unrehearsed swan dive and the
fervent hope for arms to catch before
the unambiguous arrival of the ground.

Untitled #208

I'm attempting something like
ballet here, like a pirouette
in work boots with loose laces,
like a trampoline flip in ice
skates and a hazmat suit,
breathing obscured, sensations
layered away and the blast furnace
of my anxiety set to high.

I'm assuming the role of gymnast
here, looking for the perfect
score from that damn Russian
judge but the chalk has been
replaced with Vaseline and the
landing mat has become a land mine,
exploding my hopes to place
for the medal of her secret looks.

I'm walking the line like a
drunkard here, reciting backwards
alphabet, finger to nose, setting
alibis straight, innocence intact
despite the strobe lights in
my eyes and blinking no longer
does any good, no longer keeps
out the inevitable and its aftermath.

8|21|12

Your George Bailey Moment

At twenty-three, you'll have your George Bailey moment and earnestly promise Mary a lassoed moon, never once considering the impossibility of delivery, never once appreciating what you've just done.

At thirty-three, you'll have that quiet, unsettled moment of inventory, the long-coming realization that there will never be enough rope to pull the damn thing from the sky, that the moon will keep its stubborn distance from your youthful vow.

And, at forty-three, you'll finally get the obvious point, that it was never the moon that she wanted but just the moment instead, the closed eyes and interlocked hands as you stood beneath and enjoyed its light all the same.

12|26|12

About the Author



Photo credit:
Michelle Macirella /
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Eric Evans is a writer and musician from Buffalo, New York with stops in Portland, Oregon and Rochester, New York where he currently resides. His work has appeared in *Artvoice*, *decomp magazinE*, *Tangent Magazine*, *Posey*, *Xenith Magazine*, *Anobium Literary Magazine*, *Pemmican Press*, *Remark* and many other publications and anthologies. He has published seven previous collections and three broadsides through his own small press, Ink Publications, in addition to a broadside through Lucid Moon Press. He is the editor of *The Bond Street Review* as well as the proud recipient of the 2009 Geva Theatre Center Summer Academy Snapple Fact Award.

Books from Ink Publications

The Anatomy of a Cratedigger by Eric Evans

The Halo Effect by Eric Evans

Punk Rock for Hip Statisticians by Eric Evans

A Beat Too Long by Eric Evans

Tristero Rapid Post by Eric Evans

Hell or Cleveland by Eric Evans

Godflesh by Eric Evans

Broadsides from Ink Publications

How Not To Dress by Florine Melnyk

The King of Water by Eric Evans

Losing Duende by Alicia Hoffman

Every Day of My Life by Michael Estabrook

Geometry for Two by Lisa Feinstein

Lisbon via Boston by Eric Evans

Good Fortune by Alicia Hoffman

Crows by Eric Evans

www.inkpublications1.wixsite.com/mysite

Reviews for previous books by Eric Evans

The Anatomy of a Cratedigger

"Evans is making photos out of words here, capturing what's sad and amazing, grainy and memorable in each moment, reaching for what is worth hanging on to and hinting at what exists outside each frame."

– *Quimby's Books*

"Evans personalizes the obscure and finds the common ties between the pedestrian minutiae of family life and the more dazzling subjects of Patti Smith, Vermeer, Dystopian Literature, and Tiananmen Square...these poems are lyrical narratives, clear creative musings in lined form, and musical to the ear, reminding us that we, too, can think like a cratedigger, and that our connection to the archives of the world is an important one." – *Democrat & Chronicle*

The Halo Effect

"A collection of five poems cascading...in streams of rhyming couplets...great poetry slam material..." – *Zine World*

Punk Rock for Hip Statisticians

"...poems dealing with punk rock, sex and various musings running the emotional gamut from the contemplative to the angry ...short prose masquerading as poetry..."

– *Zine World*

"Evans has impressed me in the past...[and] ...this collection does not disappoint. *Punk Rock For Hip Statisticians* [is] a passionate, heavy collection of work, well worth your money." – *Blind Man's Rainbow*

A Beat Too Long

"There are definite moments of vivid imagery ...his figurative language is strong...if you even vaguely enjoy Eric's work, then check this out." – *Blind Man's Rainbow*

Tristero Rapid Post

"Erotic, romantic, punk rock, raucous and dangerous. These are poems drawn rather than written." – *The Quarterly Pearl*

"...wry poetry rich in metaphor and description...the poems are beautifully wrought and touchingly serene...this chapbook is terrific..." – *Lucid Moon*

Hell or Cleveland

"...[Evans] celebrates the beauties of our mortal existence...[with] scarcely a dollop of dishonesty." – *Mandrake Poetry Review*

Godflesh

"[Evans] writes poems of quiet resignation and pensive thoughtfulness ...a combination of strong imagery and smoldering anger."

– *Factsheet Five*