

**Marginalia on the Seven Pillars**

**Pillar #1**

*God, as sovereign  
Creator and sustainer  
Of all holds Ultimate  
authority Over His  
creation. I will glorify  
God by surrendering  
every area of my life  
to him and by offering  
godly respect in all my  
earthly relationships,  
starting in my family.*

So He's sustainer,  
sustaining, a bridge  
across black water,  
sustaining like slices of  
white bread, honest  
potatoes rolling in the  
pot. Pinch your middle,  
sustaining.

Cross his heavy  
slats and straight path  
along the gap balancing  
your porcelain bowl of  
surrender. Lie down  
and fling your white flag  
up before his one blue  
eye.

Release and render  
every area, even the  
blue-shadowed, the half-  
formed ache at the belly  
of your throat. Remit,  
release and hear  
the eggs in your  
porcelain bowl skitter.

Lewisburg, PA, June  
2004: In workshop a  
man said *There's only  
one problem with this  
poem: Where is the  
beauty?*

I sleep singly in  
my still unfamiliar bed,  
mattress thin enough  
to feel the coils O  
across my back. I  
profess virginalness,  
again, uninterested in  
even *harmless flirtation*  
(whoever coined the  
term: I take issue). *But  
You've got someone  
waiting for you* A says, a  
little slurry but her small  
body sparking.

But B said I  
make things ugly. He  
has a point.

Though it's  
summer the cold blues  
my exposed toes and  
fingers through the  
rough blanket I shucked  
from the empty bed in  
the room next to me.  
I've been, for two  
weeks, poster-girl for  
normal, smiling on the  
cover of my own  
product line of

**Pillar #2**

*Human life is a gift from God and is of transcendent worth. It is to be protected, encouraged, and loved from the moment of conception until the moment of death. I know that each member of my family must ultimately give an account to God...I will honor God by expressing self-sacrificial love to each of my family member throughout the entirety of their lives.*

“I encourage you, life.”  
I treasure you.

Treasure laid in velvet, clicked shut and shoved beneath the bedspring, nestled next to the pictures of red-nailed women spread-eagle.

*sacrificial love to each of my family...*

I believe the writer believed it. See him in his cubicle tapping his keyboard; his angel hangs above him, weapons sharply silver.

How he juggles abstractions: honor, sacrificial, transcendent, *entirety of their lives.*

smiles and light summer sweaters, armfuls of books from the library and every literary journal with any reputation stacked by my bed. I hurt from reading the word Ceylon over and over. From thinking too hard about birdhouses. From saying Fuck with a new smile afterward. A sort of revision, a bit of blonde in the word's brass.

I marry my books spilled at the bed's metal feet, shadows of the opened suitcase slung along the wall.

The door knocks and I listen for the footsteps' retreat (*where did she go? She was just here*).

Maybe I'm immune to beauty. I cannot translate it. Cannot talk about it. On the way to lunch A once said “If I had your face I would never stop taking pictures of it.”

First I laughed then realized she'd paid me a compliment.

### **Pillar #3**

*God has established the family as His first institution on earth. It is worthy of my most noble aspirations and commitments, including my commitment to moral purity, marital fidelity, and Christ-like love for each family member. Because marriage is a picture of Christ's faithfulness to his bride, the church, and because the family is a picture of the father's faithfulness to his children, I will honor the Lord by being faithful and pure.*

Marriage the bleach bottle kicked over at night, whitening a knife of carpet.

Purity: flecks of angry skin dried after scrubbing, skin asking to be scratched.

Purity is habitual. It must be pressed, pulled up and ironed smooth.

And Christ-like love: love that sets the fig to rot. Though I know He stopped the unclean woman's blood and raised a daughter from dead (imagine her unstrung eyes sizzling to life), what's to replicate?

The Christ white and blonde is wrong, but I still see him looking flint.

Lewisburg, PA, Late June, 2004

I'm only a little drunk but I tell them this: I do not regret. And there is no such thing as making love: it's all fucking. Maybe it has something to do with the cigarette in my hand. Maybe it has something to do with a matronly *five years married*.

"Making love" means light jazz and vanilla-scented candles, giggly forays into hot wax and edible underwear. Falling asleep before the other's done brushing their teeth.

I tell them if I had to do it over again I'd do it over again. But "making love" is what middle-aged women do to Michael Bolton music. They wear pink negligees they've purchased solely for the occasion. Sex interrupted by pets' wet noses and nightmared children.

I cannot drink anymore without getting sick, so I haul back up the words *Fucking Making Love* in my trash bucket and hug as best I can the thin mattress.

#### **Pillar #4**

*By exalting Christ, resting on the sufficiency of His word and giving place to ministry of the Spirit, the local church becomes the means by which spiritual growth is promoted and the ministry of Christ is brought to my family, my community, and to the world. I will support and will encourage my family to support our local church with faithful attendance, diligent service, generous and God honoring giving, and loving cooperation.*

Oh Hallelujah and the hymnbook's print is tiny. We squint. Oh onionskin, Oh Bible leaves. Children pull ponytails. Mothers bring bagatelles to wave before crying babies' squinched eyes.

Twin ceiling fans click and shake the feathers on the organist's hat, thin as a wedding cake's crystallized flowers.

Does resting on his word mean his word is the only place to rest? I like how His word is organized by numbers preceding every sentence. 13. Jesus wept.

The bride of Christ files out for lunch, leaving her clothes behind. The bride loads up on rolls and green bean salad at Cracker Barrel. The bride is naked and unashamed because she knows she is beloved.

Early July, Flight from Lewisburg to Oklahoma City:

Connection in Cincinnati where 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks bloom below the plane, tiny flowers in a light bouquet. The city is pretty from this far away, each light a porchlight or streetlamp; each means children sleeping in their made beds, sheets snapped tight around the corners, or sleeping on loose mattresses stained with cat piss, shoe prints, the bed-guts lolling from holes the sharp coils made.

You are rolling toward me. You swallow the city gas station by gas station, cloverleaf up and out the suburban sprawl. Slim strips of concrete mark who is coming from who leaves behind all those lights like a chunk of night lifted clean from the sky and set down behind you.

Listen: it's only from a distance that it looks as if you've left something better than what's coming.

## Pillar #5

*Time is a resource given to each person by God. One day I will give an account to Him for how I have spent the time He entrusted to me. As I order my life in concert with his will, I will discover that I have sufficient time for personal growth through prayer, for the study of God's word, and for fulfilling every God-given responsibility related to my family.*

As if this resource is ever sufficient. As if it doesn't always end in brick a foot before the place your fist rests to ache (aches to rest).

But the metaphor sounds—in concert (violins raised on black clad shoulders and the bows stroke together in time).

But sufficient says lack, says *enough*. Not bountiful. Not the bowl's rim welling. But enough. And how to measure.

After you've read the book once you are supposed to read again until the notes groove and your memory pips the lines unasked.

I used to do this, leather between my knees under caterpillar-laced leaves, hammering the words in. Just like repeating *highway* over and over until only the motion, the smell of rubber, and a ripped metal parapet remain. But no content.

July 11<sup>th</sup>, Shawnee Oklahoma:

It's still my house, though the smells are too sharp and the backyard's planted with rotted pears, *squelch* between my toes.

Expecting *lush*, leaves gathered in black shadows, a little cold edge under the wind's lilt— not this dryness dotted with what it has ruined: a black-threaded pear skin, a robin's clean bones, a sprung clothes hanger.

I wash the dishes as if it hadn't spent a month wishing only to be here. It seems too soon to resume the regular. I swirl what has soaked and floats, skinny bits of scum, along the top of oily water.

July 14<sup>th</sup>, Missouri, Indiana, A little sliver of Kansas:

Maybe someone genuinely loves the Midwest.

I make poems out of anagrams inspired by the exhaustion of landscape: corn husks, red farmhouses, ocean of wheat. They end with whatever I last saw edge the window: silos, a long dead dog.

## **Pillar 6**

*God has provided material resources so that I may glorify Him through the exercise of faithful stewardship over them. Therefore I will diligently seek my master's best interest in the way I earn money, expend it for life's needs, use it to touch the lives of others, and give it for the support of His work through my local church.*

At the least we could pray over every purchase, head down among the upended bicycles, suspended. Pray to use this high speed blender in your service and never for an angry smoothie.

I almost wish this was not suffused with irony.

*Seek my master's best interests.* Language says what you can't: Jesus palimpsest. He withers the fig tree then stops the widow's blood. Paul's blindness is both fabled and printed across his pages. I wonder when metaphor stops being metaphor because it is so apparent.

The writer, like me, believes it isn't what you say but how you say it. Place *I will* and *I do* blankly on the page, no cushion in *seems* or *feels* and it will be.

Where we're going we don't know anybody, and all the better: here I will be voluble and laugh without worrying how much gum pinks through.

This is what I tell him over the roar of the van's engine.

From this distance up I understand the desire for bigger wheels, more space between you and the road, the rolling rubber, the pummel of tires over cardboard boxes and an animal's sturdy bones, vision clear above every other head.

He says *write this down I have a line for a poem* and I tuck away his line *I'll steal that later.*

The bus stop's gleaming bathrooms thrill me. I wish I was dirty so I could strip under the blunt metal heads. Imagine that scouring water and pressure ramming the hair right from your forehead.

**Pillar #7**

*The greatest and most noble purpose in life is to glorify the Lord through the fulfillment of his great commission. I will glorify the Lord by sharing my faith with my family, and by joining with them and others in specific activities that cultivate a passion for fulfilling the great commission.*

Go and tell all nations—  
What? Exactly. The preacher almost cried at the pulpit while explaining his need to make converts, flip light switches, open out folded edges of superstition, wash faces and help them see love in their own language.

The many purposes fold like perfume ads in the one glossy purpose. I want to want to sell the cure, be the PR man for what ails you. But what ails you ails me. I keep the cure in a vial I've never swallowed. Tell me as I give it—does it go sweet down your throat but turn to gall in the belly?

Can passion be cultivated or does it bloom untended from your forehead, thorned and impossible to pick?

Passion is red and hurts to rub like a cat tongue. Passion is a rolled up carpet nail-studded. Passion is repetition repetition. Passion is searching the lines you know have guttered up empty every time before.

I almost wish I lived here so we didn't have to reach our destination.

History underlies everything:

When we left the church the vertigo first set in. We are leaving the place where we were hallowed and dunked. Old clothes filled with holes. Stockings that no longer fit. But look how I once wore them as if they were my skin.

The feeling simmered away slowly and made disbelief more believable. Convince me that I won't be stricken.

*If You loved me you'd never let me forget. If I loved Him forgetting would be impossible.*

If the Ghost lived in my chest it would never stop knocking.

If Your mind was buried in mine we would never be disentangled.

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