

Script



2010

— The Bird

What is it
in me, in us
that it's hardly worth
writing the poem
when I find a dead bird
as I mow the lawn,
and I push along, push
along?

Day opens up and gives birth
to day, day after day
a day. A day for growing
grass, naked in the lawn,
stretching out and before us.

Seven days later,
I walk by again.
Feathers, beak gone,
rib cage open as the sky,
lock and spirit vanished
from the spot
of yellow kindling,

coming in thick and scraggly,
blond hairs reaching for air,
emerging sideways and lost,
a beard of dry worms
where flesh once was.

Surprising not a single soul, the grass
grows in and heals the hole, annoys
this higher life and must be mowed
again, the blades pushing up and along,
up and along.

Christopher Dorn —

— A Room Full of Masks

Elise Page —

Big, fat drops were slithering down the car's windshield as I sat next to Frank. His hands were gripped to the steering wheel, though we were stopped. He wouldn't make eye contact with me, despite the fact that I had asked him the question.

"Well?" I had unbuckled my seat belt and scooted to face him in attempts to make him feel some pressure. It was raining so hard outside that there was a dull roar inside the Subaru. Frank was still refusing to look at me, but I could see that he was shooting glances at me from behind his gold-wire bifocal frames. The crinkled lines around his eyes were sort of cute, I remember thinking for the first time. He slowly lowered his hands down the steering wheel until they rested in his lap. His began to concentrate on his hands, staring deeply into the lines in his palms, perhaps seeking his own fortune; I imagined he could see his lifeline shrinking right before him, his love line blurring, and his luck line ultimately disappearing. He looked totally pitiful. I reached across and forcefully grabbed his forearm. He jumped a little, and then shivered—I guess I would too if my 18 year old step daughter was making wild guesses about my personal life.

"Don't tell your mother that this conversation ever happened," he whimpered out. He finally turned to face me and I could see pools beginning to rise up, his irises beginning to float in them. This was probably the first moment that I noticed he had a mole on his chin, below his lips and to the right. Just a little one. "...but I think I might be."

These last words were ultimately what I had expected to hear, but their incredible weight seemed to sink into the stuffy air of his car.

"Jesus, I'm sorry Frank. I shouldn't have joked about that crap. Damn. I mean, I'm really sorry." I sort of felt like crying, I could feel it rising in my throat. I wanted to cry for myself being in this awkward situation, and cry for Frank and his fear, and my mom for her ignorance. Instead, I started picking at my nail polish, which is a bummer because once I start I can't stop and I had just painted my nails two days ago. It was baby pink this time; I'm done with my purple phase. I was scratching the pink flakes onto the floor of Frank's car, which he had just gotten detailed. I felt bad, but at the same time I didn't care and I knew Frank didn't care that much. Still, I reached over to the little plastic shelf on my side door—you know, where you store your maps and random McDonalds receipts? I grabbed the first thing I felt—it was a mini wooden

African mask, with little rope tassels attached to its chin like a beard. It looked incredibly familiar, and I wondered why Frank had it. But I guess I also knew why, too. "So... you're not gonna tell my mom? I mean, I feel like—"

"No, I'm not going to tell her. I can't. I get that she's your mom and everything, but can you see it from my perspective for a sec? This will ruin me. And her." Frank turned the key into the ignition and the car pattered to a start. The heat blasted straight into my boobs and neck, and I realized that I had been getting kind of cold. Frank shifted out of park, but then shifted back like he had more to say. But he stayed silent. He pursed his lips for a second and then looked at me again. I was focusing on the rain drops on the windshield, picking two and then pretending that they were racing, but they'd always end up meeting each other and becoming one drop. I felt exhausted. Frank probably did too.

"Well, shit, is this the reason your first marriage didn't work out?" I had now picked off my entire pinky nail's worth of polish. I outstretched my hands in front of the heater, my legs curled up to my chest. It's a tough call, you know? I like Frank, but this business was pretty fucked since jump-street.

"No," he said. His eyes widened a little. "No. God no... well, maybe, but I didn't have a clue that was why. I just thought, and I think she just thought, too, that we just weren't right for each other."

"Well, don't screw my mom over just 'cause you're embarrassed. That's effed up, Frank. Seriously."

"Seriously." Frank was nodding. It's funny, but this shitty situation was the first time Frank and I had ever identified with each other. I kind of liked him. He looked at me and I smiled a little at him. I reached my hand out and put my hand on his shoulder. He looked down, and then put his hand on my shoulder too, for just a second.

"For now, I won't say anything. But, dude, you gotta get your shit together, Frank-o. She's my mom, and I love her."

Frank let out a big exasperated sigh. He tossed his head back for a second and if he wasn't in a small-ass Subaru, he probably would have thrown up his hands. "I love her, too. That's the problem." He put the Subaru into reverse and backed out, shifted into drive and exited the Safeway parking lot. We forgot to even go into the store to buy what we needed for dinner. It's funny, though, because no matter what I'm doing at the Safeway, I always remember exactly which spot we were parked at on the day I found out Frank was gay.

It's not like I'd planned to bring it up—shoot, I don't even think I really believed it. But in the weeks leading up to that afternoon in the parking lot, I'd been noticing Frank noticing men. First it was no big deal. He picked me up from school one day and he just happened to see me standing with Jesse, a super-tall black kid on the track team I used to pole vault with, till I decided to be a smoker. I don't smoke anymore—it exponentially decreased the amount of random make-out sessions I had. But I never went back to pole vault. Instead, I had to take an art class over again after school because I had failed mask-making. Who needs to make masks, anyways? Like, why is that even considered a useful skill? Is there some big market for masks somewhere?

Anyway, Jesse's pretty built. And he was just out of practice so he had been in the locker room, showering. He had come out to stand with me and was wearing jeans, a wife-beater, and a hoodie over that. I don't want to brag, but we made out once. He has a girlfriend now. She's pretty nice. But we were just talking and stuff when Frank pulled in. He waited while I chucked a deuce at Jesse and walked to the car. I got in and Frank was just ogling at Jesse through his rear-view mirror.

"So who's that? New boyfriend?" Frank asked. He was still creeping through the mirror.

"Dude, Frank. I don't do boyfriends. Besides, Jesse's got a lady friend, and she's pretty hot. No contest."

"Girlfriend, huh? Well, he's a...good looking young man. Did you two ever...?"

"Oh, dude, Frank, too personal. If you must know, we kissed once. Nothing else." For some reason, I had this intense desire to tell Frank that Jesse was the one boy at this school that I would ever date, that I think I sort of love him, that when we made out that one time I never wanted it to end, that he told me he had feelings for me that night, and I blew him off because I was afraid. That I kick myself every time I see him with his girlfriend now. But I didn't say any of that.

Frank was driving slowly out of the parking lot, still sneaking glances to the rearview mirror. "He's quite athletic looking," he whispered, and licked his lips, which I thought was weird, but it's November and it's not like Frank is a big fan of lip balm, so I let it go. "Does he do any sports?"

"Yeah," I said. "We did pole vault together last year and he plays basketball, too. He's pretty good at both. Vaulted 14 feet last spring. But listen, Frank, can we move on to something else? This is a little too much 'personal life of Megs' and not enough 'how about them Seahawks' for my taste."

If I remember correctly, Frank let out a little cough and told me we had to

go to the grocery store before heading home and then we sat in silence the rest of the way. We're pretty good at that. He bought me a Gatorade at the store, though, and he never buys me shit.

Couple weeks later, I had to take the bus into town after mask-making and then meet Frank at the State Farm Insurance place where he works. This was when I actually started wondering if there was something a little queer going on, pun intended.

The office is like most, filled with men in worn out leather shoes and pants that are just a little short. In November the sweater vests get pulled out. Casual Friday means sweater vests and ugly leather shoes but with your best pair of Costco jeans. Maybe it's weird, but I sort of think that sweater vests look best on a man who's a little on the round side. Which is perfect, since there are only two men who aren't roly-polly, and only one lady in the whole building. She doesn't wear sweater vests. She wears horn-rimmed glasses and her name is Kathy—how perfect is that?

The two guys who aren't super large are Frank and this guy Rick. Frank isn't fit or anything, and he definitely looks his age (almost 57?), but he's been known to go to the gym and hit the old pool or throw some dumbbells around. I think he told me once that he used to play football.

This guy, Rick, though, he's the hottest old man I've ever seen. I mean, like, I want to seduce him and have a Lifetime movie based on it. He's got this badass square jaw that's always perfectly shaved, with a little bit of grey at his temples. The rest of his hair is this perfect chestnut brown color, and he combs it to the side. He's got frameless rectangle glasses that just slightly magnify this beautiful pair of baby blues. He always wears crisp slacks and a really thin tie over shirts that have a faint checkered pattern on them. Best thing of all though, are his hands. He has big, brawny looking hands, but they look so soft, and his fingernails are perfectly rounded and short, but not like he bites them like most guys. I've imagined touching his hands so often...is that weird?

Anyways, so on this particular day, I walk in and Kathy's at the Xerox machine and talking to someone through a Bluetooth headset, which I hate. She goes, "Hey how are you?" and I go, "Just swell, thanks Kath—" before I realize she isn't talking to me. So I head down the hallway and see Bruce, my friend Taryn's dad.

"Yo, Brucey, you seen my dad around?" Everyone here knows Frank isn't my real dad, but I think old people like to hear that step-kids are willing to adopt new parents. I think it makes them feel better about the possibility of divorce if they ever need to. Like, if a kid can reconcile the situation, then so can

anyone. That's what I would want to feel like if I was middle-aged and unhappily married. I would want to know that my kids would still love me, and even love whoever I loved next. I don't think people do enough for each other like that, you know, letting others know it's gonna be ok. So anyways, Bruce points down the hall to Rick's office, which pumps me up, cause that means I get to interact with the hottest old man ever, even for just a second.

So I go into his office, but forget to do the little courtesy knock because I'm super excited, and plus the door's open. Rick and Frank are both standing, almost shoulder to shoulder and leaning over some papers at the desk. And Rick's hand is resting on Frank's upper back. Before I came in, he might've even been rubbing it a little, but as soon as he sees me, he pulls his hand down and greets me.

"Oh, hey, Meggie. Sorry—had to steal your dad away for a little bit. Have a seat? You want a coke?" He was already pulling one out of his mini fridge. I took my seat, trying to shake off this one homo moment as an old man bromance. Frank was sort of half-sitting, half-leaning on the desk, with his hands at his sides, brushing the desk with his fingertips.

"Yeah, hey. No biggie. What are you guys working on?"

"Eh, nothing much. Just discussing a client." He cracked open the coke and handed it to me, then looked at Frank and smiled. They started talking business, so I started ignoring them and looking around the room. Rick had his office decorated in sort of a theme. I know he'd been to Africa a while back and so he had a few African masks on his walls and a sweet-looking spear. It's kind of scary, actually. The masks all have horns and weird tassely beards. They look right at you, kind of, but they're masks, so they don't have eyes. I imagined that Rick put them up to protect himself, maybe, but I don't know from what. There were traditional African paintings and some pictures of him in a tan Jeep with lions in the background. He also had pictures of him with a woman, who was really pretty. *Ok, so, not gay*, I thought.

"Yo, Rick," I said, interrupting the bro-fest occurring. "Who's the hot chick?"

Rick smiled and picked up the nearest frame. "That," he said, "is my baby sister Jill. She took me on Safari a couple years ago. Did I tell you that?"

"Oh yeah." *Maybe still gay*. This was a bummer, because if Rick was gay, then it meant that all of my fantasies would be over. As awesome as it would be to make a Lifetime movie about an 18 year old seducing a 54 year old gay man in an insurance firm, I figured it was a little outside my range.

I hadn't even made the connection that if Rick was gay, then he had just been hitting on my step-dad, and my step-dad didn't seem to mind. Until Rick

left the room to go make some copies. As he walked out, I looked at Frank to ask him a question, and I saw his eyes gravitate straight towards Rick's tight old-man ass. I pretended to not see anything. I kept my eyes on Frank till he noticed that I was looking at him, and then he cleared his throat and started shuffling papers. "So, uh..." I stammered out, and then I realized I forgot the question. "...what else do you have to do today? I got some homework that needs to get done before Grey's Anatomy, Frank-o."

"Well, Rick's gonna print off that stuff and then we can go." Frank was peering at me through his bifocals with his lower lip sticking out and his mouth turned down, with a too-casual approving nod. I could tell he was trying to read me, to see if I'd noticed, but I wasn't letting on. I picked up a smaller mask that had been balancing on a bookshelf and began tracing its mouth with my finger. This one wasn't as scary—it looked like it might be getting ready to smile, but accidentally got carved in a different way.

Rick strode back in—it's funny, I never would have pegged him as gay. He's so not feminine at all. He has this real majestic manly march when he walks, and I don't think he uses hair gel...maybe he does but it's such good quality you can't even tell. Gay guys have stuff like that, I think. Anyway, Rick came in and smiled at Frank, giving him a little once over starting from his belt and up. I was starting to sweat a little. Rick handed Frank the papers, saying, "Ok, here you go, Frank. I guess I'll see you tomorrow, and Meggie, it's always nice to see you. You get prettier every time." I blushed. I mean, just 'cause he might be gay for your step-dad doesn't mean he isn't hot.

So, we got in the car, and headed to the grocery store (I feel like we go to the grocery store for something every day, because my mom always can't make up her mind about what she's gonna cook till that day, and then she calls Frank). It was on the way to Safeway that I finally brought up the question.

"So, Frank. Rick's pretty fine for an old dude." I couldn't help it. It's the only way I could bring it up.

Frank got all awkward. "What? That's a little inappropriate, Meg. He's my work partner." He was making that face you make when someone asks you if you have a crush on someone and you do, but you deny it, and say something like *Um, ew? No. We're just friends.* You know which one I'm talking about.

"Whatever, Frank. You know you think so too." I was looking out the window so as to look nonchalant, and also so I wouldn't have to look at Frank's gay, panicked face. He slammed on the breaks right into a parking space at the Safeway. And it seemed like right then it started to rain. Frank was looking at me with a stern face, like a real dad might, but I could see the fear and uncertainty in his eyes. I'll be honest, it made me want to cry a little. But I don't pull

that crap in public. So I kept right on with the nonchalant business. "What, Frank? You're not gay, are you?"

Well, you know what happened next.

* * *

So now, I'm keeping this monumental secret for my fucking step-dad of all people. We sit at dinner, and Frank and my mom talk like nothing is weird. And I guess nothing is to my mom. Maybe even to Frank. He's always been gay, it's just now he's admitted it to someone. And he still loves my mom, he says, which I totally get, because love doesn't really care what type of person you are, or what gender. When you love something or somebody, it means you give up that kind of judgment.

That's how I loved my deadbeat boyfriend Charlie for two years, even after he cheated on me with my best friend Jen. You just... lose control of your brain and just—love, despite the faults and the betrayal. Which is why I can't be mad at Frank for liking men. I don't think he can help it. And I think, since he's married to my mom and has gone to great lengths to seem straight and do straight things, if he could help it, he wouldn't be gay. It kind of throws a whole monkey wrench into the operation.

The big thing is that Frank says he's never acted on it. He says he's just attracted to men, but he's only been with women. In fact, just his ex-wife and my mom. He says Rick is the first guy he's ever gotten close to, even in friendship, because he's been avoiding men his whole life, since he always found them attractive and he figured he should just stay away. So sometimes I watch him with my mom, and he listens so intently to all the words she says. He's probably one of the best husbands ever, because he feels so guilty all the time that he works extra hard to be good to her. Sometimes I wonder if she should ever know about it... She's so happy. And from the outside looking in, everything's perfect.

But then I look into Frank's eyes through his bifocals and I realize it's not really my mom who's gonna be messed up about this situation. I mean, if Frank tells her, they divorce, she gets a new husband (who maybe doesn't listen as well, but maybe could be her tennis partner or something). But if Frank doesn't tell her, he never gets to live his life the way I think he should. You know? And when I see him and Rick interact, with so much care for each other, and so much fear, I wonder what things could be like if everything was different. Like, he and Rick could, like, move to Hawaii and get a dog together and go on walks and sell insurance together in a big room full of masks.

— Moonrise Over Mt. Yale

Collin Stewart —

I was already in an unfamiliar world as the four of us stood around our backpacks in our new house. Mom said my sister was sick and that the two of them would not come hiking with us. The house was dim—it was four in the morning—and the walls were stark white. It smelled of new paint, and reminded me of a hospital. It was strange that my sister, fine the night before, was suddenly struck ill. Mom said it was stomach cramps. I thought she was faking it so she wouldn't have to hike—as a ten-year-old I didn't understand what was really meant by stomach cramps.

When Dad and I left the house the moon was so intense that it washed out the stars, and made our shadows sharp and long.

As we rode together, we didn't talk much until we crested Independence Pass at 12,000 feet on the Continental Divide. On this watershed we met the first rays of the sun that bounced off the scraps of dirty summer snow. Then Dad started.

"Collin, I wanted to wait longer to tell you these things, but with the way the world is, I'd rather you hear it from me than from the values of the world. So I'm going to talk to you about sex this trip. I suppose we should start from the beginning—Do you know how babies are made?"

We were driving straight into the sun; it made crescents of light shimmer in front of my eyes. I squinted, looking as long as possible at the glaring prying light.

"I guess, yeah, I sort of know some things." I ventured a glance at Dad and was surprised and unsettled to see him staring straight at the sun too, and chewing fretfully at his upper lip. I wondered if this would go on the whole trip—each of us desperately avoiding the gaze of the other as we set up the tent and as we stood on the mountaintop.

In truth, Ryan Gordon had told me about sex in first grade. We were standing in line waiting to go back into class after the recess bell had rung. Our backs were against the cream-of-mushroom colored brick of the school and I was standing next to Ryan. He was tall and unruly and my mom said he had cute long eyelashes. He also had an older sister, which explains how he came by this secret knowledge he was now divulging. I had an older sister too, but she was so embarrassed when she had to start wearing a bra that she stayed home from school for days. So it was Ryan Gordon who initiated me to the ways of a man and a woman at the ripe age of six. He didn't go any further than "this

goes into this like this,” and I had thought that the matter was that simple.

Dad was now talking about Bill Clinton, explaining how he'd had an affair, and how even those that were supposed to be role models often gave the wrong message about sex. That is why he wanted me to know the real place of sex, that it was special, and set apart. And all this time he was staring straight into the sun—I'm surprised he wasn't blinded.

Dad handed me a book—I think he was starting to crack under the pressure of saying the word sex so many times. I'm now 21, and he still handles the word “breasts” with quite a bit of trouble, rolling it around in his mouth as though he bit off more than he could chew and is trying to find a polite way to spit it out into a napkin. I suspect that his dad didn't give him much of an example for how to communicate about sex, rather he assumed that my dad knew what was right. As for me, I was thanking God with all my heart for the printed word.

The book was titled “The Journey of Life,” or “The Miracle of You,” I don't remember which. Most of the book seemed to me to be transcribed from the communications of aliens with their mother ship.

Krrrrrr... Zygote come in, do you read me? We are in the third trimester... over. Krrrrrr.

KRRRcht... Roger that flagellum 1,000,023. This is Zygote docked on the mother planet Placenta. What's your 40? Krrrrrrcht.

Krrrrrr... We have just entered the Fallopian system and are preparing for warp speed. Krrrrrr.

They could have at least made a comic book for us. The book did have some pictures though; successive snapshots of fetuses as they developed. They reminded me of a box of animal crackers I had spilled in a puddle and watched grow bloated and soggy.

On the trail we hiked past delicate dangling cups of blue bells and marched through upright pines. The late August air was absolutely still, the sky cloudless, and the mute wilderness muffled the chaos in my head. I don't remember any exact details of our conversation on our hike up to Kroenkee Lake at the base of Mt. Yale, except that I almost died of embarrassment when we ran into hikers around a sharp corner just after my dad had said the word “vagina.”

A whole set of words that had been taboo my whole life, avoided like lepers, was now free game. Every time Dad used one of these new secret weapons it was as if someone had stepped on the ant's nest of my mind—thoughts came swarming out, bumping into each other in psychic pandemonium.

“Sex is a wonderful thing, possibly the best thing God has given us. But here is what happens. A man wants sex so he acts as if he loves a woman, but

abandons her after he has sex. The woman feels as if she has been lied to, and is hurt by the abandonment. Sex is eternal, says the Bible; when a man unites with a woman you are united in some way eternally.”

It was this last that woke me up in later weeks scared and crying. Sex was as final as hell. A woman could take your soul.

Our campsite was at tree line. The willows were changing yellow, and smelled hot and clean, like laundry just out of the dryer. Around were gentians, deep throated, deep blue, dark burning torches, heralds of autumn and winter snows. At our campsite was a spring bubbling from the ground—icy and surrounded by moss. I had always wanted to drink water from a stream using one of those gentians as a cup, but most streams in Colorado held bacteria that would make a person violently ill. I asked Dad if I could drink from the spring and he said yes, so I dipped the gentian in the spring and splashed the teaspoon of water into my mouth. For an instant I was afraid. I'd never drunk straight from a stream before; I knew I would get sick. But the fear faded and was replaced by pleasure in the novelty of what I had done.

As we set up camp, the ants in my mind settled down and began to resume their familiar chain of command. Some of the things I'd been told, the zygotes and trimesters, were so boring and beyond my normal world that they might as well have been a lecture on the chief exports of Mongolia. But when I began to think of my past, my own origins, my future with women, and the dangers lurking around sex, I felt dark winds of fear and disgust and desire. I who had not a hair on my body apart from that on my head, who weighed a whopping 80 pounds, had gained more weight than was measurable.

Clearly I wasn't going to sleep much that night, so I suggested to Dad that we climb Yale in the moonlight. We started before nightfall, and as we gained the ridge the red tundra flamed under the burning western sky. The wooly beards of the mountain dryad seedpods puffed upward like smoke. Verga hung in front of the red sky, rain falling perpetually but dissipating and drying before it reaches ground. A curtain of water, brown like smog with the sun behind it, always falling but never meeting the thirsty roots of tundra and trees below or filling the cups of the gentians, open and expectant. To the east the moonrise over the Mosquito Mountains, was huge, swollen to bursting, and blood red. By the time we reached the summit the moon alone dominated the sky, its pale light reflecting on each mountaintop while each canyon held deep darkness flowing down like syrup.

Our headlamps were dim. We turned them off. We descended under the great moon into the darkness of the valley, our shadows long and separate.