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A COLLECTION OF POEMS

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Michael Rodriguez

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LOVE THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS
A COLLECTION OF POEMS

By

Michael Rodriguez

A THESIS

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

LOVE THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS A COLLECTION OF POEMS

By

Michael Rodriguez

A life is itself a story. If art is a reflection on the life, if it contains any of the personality that the life is capable of, then it too should be story. This book is a collection of poems that show how one personality transforms the everyday story into poetry.

"Love Through the Floorboards" is the title poem for the collection because it illustrates how the persona of that poem adjusts himself to the situation that develops around him. He realizes his dilemma and even physically brings himself into its consequences. He knows that to live with everyday adversity, to accept it and to endure, is sometimes all one can do. He is a survivor, a warrior.

Because more attention is paid to poem as a story, less attention is paid to meditation. Meditation and analysis are given up to the mind of the reader--only the universe of others can determine what is universal.

For my folks, Joseph and Pauline Rodriguez; the muse,
Lisa McLennan; and the teacher, Diane Wakoski.

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THE THRESHOLDS OF PAIN

She would sit on my lap
and pull at the front
of my trousers
and kiss me and then
she would gently tug
at the back of my hairline
and say

does this hurt?

and for some reason
I would always say

no, that doesn't hurt

and she would tug
a little harder
and say

does THIS hurt?

he he he

and this would continue
until my eyes
were popped out a bit
from the flesh pulled taut
from her grip
at the back of my head
and I would finally

ask her

if we could please try
something else

to which

she would answer

I love you

and somehow

I believed her.

Like the slamming of doors

it was reoccurring

and like a pet

I gave it a name.

"The Thresholds of Pain"

would come out of the cupboards

and parade itself

under yellow lamps

and the silence

when we were physically

close;

she would simply

reach over

for a chunk of flesh

a wad of hair

a digit

and appendage--

and then those searing questions

and the necessary replies;

NO...that doesn't hurt

he he he

I love you

and as one makes a game

out of the weakness of

others

I too

once

seized the opportunity

and reached up

for a small victory

in the fairness of play

and she

SCREAMED

and I said

I love you

and she screamed

louder

JESUS--THAT HURT

and somehow

I believed her.

SWEET DREAMS

I never did like cats;
their cock-suredness in the
face of affection and
their natural insomnia
always told me
that they were certainly
more troubled than I,
and when she brought one home
to her one-bedroom studio,
which meant no door to keep
the little beast out,
I knew I was in for
something unsettling.

Every night before bedtime
I would be on the floor
rolling balls, swinging
shoelaces and tossing objects
in the futile effort
to wear the cat down
to the point of
my own span of sleep,
but it was always

the 6 a.m. feline playpen
the next morning;
his teeth into my ankles,
my armpits, his
ass on my head.

When it became apparent that
the cat
was certainly
 too lonely
to be left by itself
and that I certainly
did not love her anymore if
I wouldn't even sleep there
I learned to get used
to it,
which is not to say
that things got
better.

It was a period of adjustment
learning to ignore those
advances of domestic sadism
each morning when the cat
went for my body
and each morning

I would have the same dream
of my last visit to NYC
where, sleeping in a room
full of strangers, a large
and heavy-breathing man attempted
to pull off my pants
as I slept, and
just like that naked son-of-a-bitch
and the air leaving his lungs
as I unconsciously kicked him
in the nuts,
I would always awaken
to the sound
of that cat
hitting hard against
the wall.

It was self-defense and
I did not much
like it.

AN UPHILL BATTLE

She lives only two blocks away
and down a steep hill
and when she asks you over
you usually say
yes, certainly.

But tonight
the winter is busy dumping itself
all over everything
and you are warm
under the bedcovers and you are
contemplating sleep
when the phone rings
and she asks in a drunken voice

"Why don't you come over?"
to which you repeat to her
your state of being and
nothingness
and she comes back at you
like the storm outside

"Tonight I had six guys

SIX GUYS

buy me drinks and I turned them all

DOWN

for you. Do you want me to go back there?"

Of course the result is
you sliding down that hill
olympic fashion
in your five years' worn boots
and after twenty minutes
you are knocking on every
door,
window,
flat surface
to no answer
when you look in the
corner of a window and
see her passed out
fully clothed
all the lights on
to which you turn yourself
back into your previous tracks
and begin the uphill climb
with treadless boots.

A LOUD, SNORING WOMAN

I heard Stukas
on the roof
and jackhammers
and J.P. Sousa
on the coffeetable
as my sleep was pinned
to the ceiling
as my body was pasted
to the freshly painted
wall.

And as I began to wrench
an arm free
to plug her nostrils,
her knee inched up
my leg, inched
up
just far enough
to let me ignore
the whole thing--

at least for
a while.

SENSORY DEPRIVATION

"Sir--

do you need help?"

she said

"I want to send roses--

one white, one black--

do you have

black roses?"

I said

first noticing her face;

vacuous,

like the broad side

of an egg. Grade A jumbo

I thought to myself.

"We can spray them"

she said

"That's perfect..."

I said

I was pretty well

fucked up

from a disengaged

romance
and the deprivation of
sleep and
food
so I picked a blank card
the blankest the store had
and she watched me closely
the whole time
like the way a dog
watches a person eat
and I stood there
at that desk
in front of that unhatchedness
wanting to
ram my pen
into her eye sockets.
But I didn't,
I just pushed
the ink over the card.

A bell rang
and a large man
slumped up to the counter.
I looked back
down
at my hands.

"Do you need help sir?"

she said again

"BOY do I ever..."

he said

I was waiting for

a punch line

when two days of nothing

but tap water, beer

and cigarettes

started inching up my throat

and I gasped

for laughter

"YOU NEED HELP..."

I thought.

After my solitary chuckle

I could hear

his neck crack,

I could feel

all four eyes on me,

and I didn't

look up.

"My best friend
died yesterday
in a car wreck"
he said.

I never did look up
but when I left the store
I at least felt like saying
"thanks,"
and the black rose
was paid for
and sent on its way.

THE EDITOR

tuesday afternoon and
I was there on the couch
just out of bed
in my shorts and
t-shirt
drapes closed
door closed
contemplating
the whiteness of my skin
when she came rushing in
like boulders over a cliff

A JOB I THINK I GOT A JOB
she screamed
...and the man asked me to come back
IN AN HOUR
with my RESUME

and I NEED YOUR HELP

CAN YOU PROOFREAD MY RESUME

she said
and pulled out a half-crinkled wad and
gave it to me--
three or four handwritten sheets

and I looked them
over

I don't know much
about this kind of thing
I said

do your best
she said

BUT HURRY

what little I did know
was that if you made it all
at least
LOOK good
then they thought you
had SOMETHING...
and so I got to the typewriter
and began to space it out
nicely;
good, neat-looking margins
and began correcting
the words
the punctuation
the diction...

the material was what

I had imagined it would be;

PLACE OF BIRTH:

SCHOOLING:

WORK EXPERIENCE:

until it came to a summary of

HOBBIES AND LEISURE:

and

CAREER GOALS:

and it became phlegmatic

and her prose was worse

and it was all dreadful

so

I decided to liven it all up

pepper the words,

the phrases.

she then came back to me

and began to read the first sheet

over my shoulder

she said

THESE MARGINS

ARE ALL WRONG

YOU'RE NOT DOING IT RIGHT

I've never done
one of these before
I said

and then she picked up
the next sheet;
HEY...WHAT IS THIS SHIT...
THIS ISN'T ME

well, I said
it's not what YOU wrote

THIS IS A BUNCH OF SHIT
she said
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE

A WRITER

GODDAMMIT

and she kept this
up
screaming into the other room
and I began to let
the misspelled words
go by...
the bad diction...
the punctuation...

until
she ripped out the last page
herself
without reading it
and slammed the door...

GOOD LUCK

I said
latching the door behind her
and throwing my
white butt back
onto the sofa;

my best
literary imitation.

NIGHT OF THE NOVA

I was sleeping for a change
at 4 a.m. when
an old black Nova
pulled up
in front
next door

it had no exhaust
and because it was
so cold outside
it kept
stalling.

This guy in the Nova
kept revving his engine
and stalling
revving and
stalling.

I looked out my
window
to see what
satan looked like

but
his windows
were completely frosted.

REVVING and
stalling
REVVING and
stalling

this is IT
I thought,
I'm going to hell
in a four-door
black Nova
in the middle of winter
and I hate four-doors.

I lit a cigarette
and waited.

Later,
a little blond-haired girl
about ten
came out of
the house next door
and got in

"field trip"

I thought.

The Nova revved
and drove away
still
on the wrong side
of the street

he stopped
a few doors down
further
revving and
stalling.

ALL QUIET ON THE
INSPIRATIONAL FRONT

all is

shit

and you want

more you want

LIFE after

execution

you want

perfect chaos in

black and white

so

you set yourself guidelines

like never getting up

from that machine before

anything

is written

down

and you allow yourself extravagances

that you may call artillery,

things like

beer

but naturally those extravagances

are abused

and mostly you are left with
only a spinning room and
a desktop covered with
empties

and then you do things like
go to the window or maybe
to the bar and
sometimes something hits you
but when you come back
at your desk the typewriter
is besieged like
falling castles like
the alamo by the army of
empty bottles

bastards
you say
I'll show them
and you carefully reach
over the top and
hit the power button

fists on each side
like a cannon,
right thumb on the return

and twenty seconds later
the landscape is
leveled

finally taking the seat
under your ass, your arms
dangle over the smooth pine
and broken glass like
dead soldiers on a beach

you feed the machine
blank sheets of paper and
sometimes
there is even
poetry

SELF DENIAL

"NO

Rodriguez DOES NOT live here"

I said

dripping wet after running

from out of the shower

which I am always consequently

sorry for doing.

Nobody ever says anything important enough

worth freezing your ass off for.

THE LOAN CENTER

is not a welcome call

even when I'm dressed

and warm in my clothes.

Now freezing

watching a puddle collect itself

on the stone floor

pissed off because

I owe something

and they want me to pay up

covered only at the crotch

I began to assume

my almost alter ego
"Look" I said
"I don't have
a forwarding address
I never really knew
the poor bastard,
I just lived with him awhile
and if I were him
I'd be running too."

There was a pause
and I could picture
even began to have empathy for
this sorry jerk
on the other end of the line
thinking to himself
what a shitty job he has
and wishing he was home
kissing his girlfriend on the cheek
when he shocked me
by saying
"Thank you for your help..."

"You're welcome..."
I said.

Shaving my face and dressing
I thought how easy it can be
to fool people
who don't exactly know
how to get exactly
what they want
and as I was
toweling up the concrete floor
the phone rang
again.

I sat down this time and
I picked it up
and an unfamiliar
woman's voice
came through
soft, low, and breathy
asking for a name
that I knew could not
be my own

"...is that you?" she said

"uhhh...this is HE" I said

"HI baby
how are
YOU?"

"JUST

FINE"

I said.

THE WAITING ROOM

I was happy to be there
in the hospital
as I was beginning to understand
how hangings and executions
were once
very popular events
as I sat there in that
waiting room
packed in with all the other
waiting people and
in-going patients.

They had mostly
sat quietly
waiting for their own
particular cures
or the cures for whom they waited on,
thumbing their chins
watching the pregnant women
and staring at the television
until
a college kid was dragged in
by the armpits

covered with blood
and reeling.

At the top of his lungs,

"FUCK YOU

IT'S ONLY BLOOD"

he screamed

the others stopped
staring at the
television.

The sight of this bleeding man

DRUNK

uncooperative and

berating the world

was attractive to them

it was not a disturbance,

it was entertainment

like the great and mad composer

scoring his last twisted bars.

Each particular motion

was noted--

the head rolls

the smears

the pool sinking into the carpet...

It came to be known
that the wounds were not self inflicted,
but now that he was
opened up
he just wanted
to bleed
screaming GET AWAY

IT'S MY BLOOD
until he finally passed out
saturated in his
own self.

The crowd still wanted more,
they kept staring
laughing out of the sides of their mouths--
begging for an encore.

They got it when
he was still out cold
a nurse stripped him
down
and sponged him off
revealing
the pranks of a drunken evening;
slogans tattooed with indelible ink

across his belly read

ANTICHRIST

and on his back

FUCK

ME

when the nurse had finished

he was clean

and still out cold

propped up in that chair

no longer reeling

but still giving it off

and myself thinking

"YES man, you're still doing it,

no more props but it's

even getting better

KEEP IT UP

YOU'RE STILL ALIVE..."

and I had hope for myself

and the paltry existence of others

but not quite...

as I was leaving with

my buddy on crutches

that body was still in that chair,

but the others had
cocked their heads
back towards the
television.

A SENSE OF TORTURE

The violinist on the radio
slowly
drags his bow
across my smokey apt.
at 1:00 a.m.
like death
grinding against the eyelids
of existence,
and while I am
being impressed
by his sense of torture
an entire and unexpected
orchestra comes
in
like an unwanted guest
as loaded planes
blast into space
I am thinking of women
in fast-looking sneakers
and waiting
for that forsaken
violin
to drag its way back

as the phone rings
six times
and my ass
sinks
one-half inch
deeper
into the cushion of
this chair.

CRUCIFIXION AT 3 A.M.

Like a bug on a horse's ass
it comes back
and crawls up the inside
of your shirt and
rests in that place
that cannot be reached--
this
kind
of restlessness
walks to the store
at 1:00 a.m. for the twelve-pack
and stops off for snacks
at 1:30
to return home
to hang
over the toilet
with nothing
flowing,
it brushes your teeth
without toothpaste
and flushes
while the room
fills with smoke

it hangs up the telephone
after 20 rings
and chooses to smoke
another cigarette--
its justification is
MORE
and like the dream of the hungry animal
this
kind
of restlessness
feeds
off the sleeplessness and
rests on your belly
as the soup on the stove
bubbles over,
its crucifixion
pins your back to the sofa
while
you feed the spider in the corner
ants that
crawl
across the
floor.

THE LATE SHOW

I had passed out
staring at
THE LATE SHOW
and awoke to find
a large cigarette hole
burned into the belly
of my shirt,
startling me into the realization
of the delicacy of existence;
CHRIST, I thought,
if I am to die in my own home
I at least
want to choose the manner...

switching off the television
I bathed my skull
in cold water
and sat down at the typewriter
thinking that
this recent brush with
THE GREAT BEYOND
would certainly be keen food
for the poetic appetite.

I began checking all windows
but could see nothing.

I checked them again--
the noise rose always
as I was in a different room,
always confirming its existence.

If it wants to be deceiving

FINE

I won't play its game,
I thought as I lay
on the couch
cradling a baseball club.
I wasn't going out there,
IT would have to come
to me.

In the morning I rose
to check on death

outside I found
a large white possum
belly up,
two legs chewed off,
a hole in its neck

I typed a few lines;

death wears

expensive tennis shoes

that pad softly...

and then there came

a gentle rustle of leaves

outside my basement level

apartment window

I listened,

it got louder

it got louder until

it reached the spot

directly outside my window

and it began kicking leaves

against the pane.

I rose quickly

and hit the lights

I could then see out the window

but the noise had fallen off--

all that appeared

was the next house over.

and I stood
grinning,
appreciating its sacrifice.

I dug a shallow grave
with a snow shovel--
the winter had left
the soil
too hard
to go
deeper.

THE SPIRIT OF ELVIS PRESLEY
POSSESSED MY ROOMMATE'S PET RAT

"Elvis is everywhere."
--Mojo Nixon

Just out of the shower
I heard the screams of
my roommate's pet rat
coming up through
the tiles.
I had never heard a rat
or any other rodent
scream before
so I thought I should
probably go check
on things.

That white albino
rat
was spread-eagled on his
belly
his arms and legs
kicking at the litter,
his own feces flying
at the sides of his cage

as I dripped water
onto his
helpless body.

Gasping and
clawing
he looked very near
some kind of
death
when I noticed a large turd
hanging
out of his rear end.

I'd seen this happen
to other animals and
quickly dismissed the case
as severe constipation
and went to get a towel
to unplug
the little fellow's
problem.

When I returned
he wasn't struggling,
just
gasping and

looking up at me
with those pink
pink
eyes
like a head on the
blocks.

"Possessed by the ghost of Elvis"
I said
"There's no hope for you now
little friend."

It took him
only a few more moments
and a few more gasps.

The death of THE KING
fit the last years of his life;
red faced and
on the pot,
trying hard to squeeze
out that last big one;
an unglamorous death
and exactly, it would seem,
like that of the rat.

The difference being that
at
least
the rat went
kicking and
screaming.

LOVE THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDS

For the second time in
2 and 1/2 weeks
you FEEL like
sleep
and you're on the bed
vibrating
from the music
below
as the calls come up
through the floorboards for
more beer
and you place the pillow
over your left ear
and they turn
up
the stereo
and you reach for a cigarette
while the toilets flush
twice
and those cracks on the
ceiling get 2 inches
wider
and they holler a little

louder
as a new voice comes
up
and says
"HI EVERYBODY"
and you recognize
THAT voice and
of course you
KNOW that
voice
and as the cigarette goes
out
and
the trousers and your
heaviest skin
come on
you open your door and
those sounds
hit you like a fist
and then
you grab hold of the railing and
of course
you pull yourself
down.

RUN FOR COVER

(For J.D., who warns me over and
over not to sleep with anyone
you're not in love with.)

You first tell yourself:
the other one is six states away
and at least 1500 miles
and
this one is sooo close
that
just this ONE can't hurt
but
by the time you are in the car
driving her to her
downtown apartment
you are already referring to each other
by fictitious name
because neither of you
can remember the
real one.

Inside
you make your way through

3 very long beers
on a couch less than
3 feet wide
as she closes the distance
by more than 3 inches
per beer
you are hoping
that maybe she will believe
that you have passed out
when you close your eyes
to everything
for a long enough period,
letting your beer
spill over your lap
for good measure.

But the morning is not so
easy;
watching the rain beat against
the window
next to the bed
the clang of pans
comes at you
like gunfire
and very soon
she pulls the pillow

off of your head
and the covers away
from the rest of you
and tells you

eggs are on the stove

and

what is

THIS

down

HERE?

as she begins to hover
like aircraft
and the smoke from the burning eggs
begins to fill the room
you reach up
to open the window
and let the cold rain
fall on your face.

SATAN SMILES OUT OF
THE CORNER OF HER EYE

I once realized
that compatibility
can be a synonym
for the ridiculousness of existence
when

I once spent
a great deal
of time
with a woman
who enjoyed
reading my poems
and later
at a time when
I would
least expect it
she would
mimic the voices
and actions
of the women
I had written about.

She thought that
this was cute and
witty,
so did I
for a while.

Sometimes
when I woke up
she would be
at my desk
thumbing through old notebooks
reading material
that should have been
and has since been
destroyed
smiling
and staring at me
out of the corner
of her eye.

What's worse
and strictly by chance
she even
got to meet
some of the women
she had read about,

further ingraining
these qualities of
bewildering mysticism
like reoccurring dreams of
waking next to satan
with horns
pointed at your side.

Finally,
it all came down to
name calling;
her saying that
I was like
NO OTHER
SON-OF-A-BITCH
she'd ever known
and myself realizing
that she
WAS
EVERY
bitch
I'd
EVER known.

EASY

There are so many nice
easy
ways to drive a person
into madness
that it is a wonder that
anyone would opt for
the difficult--
it is a matter of
choice--
it must be.

Most of the time
I had chosen to be
in her room, that studio
for the terminally lovely
like a zoo for the
helplessly stuffed,
with Monet on the walls
and the peach-colored blinds
which always opened
to the sun always
shut to the darkness.

We could be in any stage
of psycho-hostility
and still it was Monet
and the peach and
the eyes of the helplessly
stuffed
upon me like
termites

this is WAR and
it's so BRIGHT in here,
I'd say,
I'm blinded
THIS ISN'T FAIR
give me a beer goddammit
let's go into the basement

But she could stare
at a burning bulb
for hours
and never get nauseous
and could plant
the turnaround like a
virus

you're so

cute

she would say and

I wanted murder I wanted

the helpless animals gutted

I'd say

don't call me THAT

call me anything beast

slob crazyass dumbass

anything

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING

oooo you're

so

cute

like that

as she walked across

the floor

and eased herself

under

the peach blanket grinning

eyebrows raised and

sideways glancing she

would say

c'mon baby

we can leave

the lights

ON.

ARCHEOLOGIST

She carried the tools
like vowels from the loudspeaker,
and consonants the color
of pity, envy,
and rage.

In supermarkets, dept. stores, and
restaurants, her finger extended:

 jesus, look at THAT
will you LOOK AT THAT
she would say
loudly, always
pointing out the obese,
the grotesque, the
obscenely beautiful,
and against my will
I would always
have to look.

It's not that I don't notice
these variations

on the human condition,
I mostly just choose
to ignore them.

Her tongue like a shovel
it was always
god, will you look

AT THAT

I can't believe it
400 pounds he must be
400 pounds

or:

look at her

SHEEEEEZ BEAUTIFUL

and sometimes their actions:

what are they DOING

LOOK

LOOK

and mostly it was
THEIR eyes looking
at US.

These people may be strange
I would say
but they have ears,
THEY CAN HEAR YOU.

LOOK

LOOK

she would say
my words the only
object of neglect,
or perhaps
she just wasn't
interested.

THE RED AND THE BLACK

I had been
a very long time
in the red
with the redhead
so
I went to the black
(or so I thought)
with the brunette
who made this
very easy

but easiness is not necessarily
a solution
to adversity
and very soon
I found myself
back in the red
confusing yes,
but it gets
worse;
we all did it to
each other
again

myself back in the red
the brunette said she
wanted to get
out.

I didn't blame her
and offered to
help

but then there was
the red;
"if you help you'll
be in her bedroom,
you'll be packing
the bed
and then assembling it
when you get there"

she did not believe
in pure
humanitarianism

"she needs the help"
I said

"so will
YOU

she said

"if you go

that is

IT"

but there we were;

myself, the brunette,

the u-haul, the bedroom ensemble,

and the highway

under the wheels--

myself thinking that

I was indeed a good person,

unbeknownst to the redhead

until

there she was

in the rear mirror,

coming up fast

and then keeping pace

to my left,

grinning and yelling

something

waving, she gunned it

hard and I watched

her car
and my altruism
diminishing

it was a long
and thankless
ride.

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