

*A Selection of Poems from*  
**ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS**

A Collection of Poetry by David-Matthew Barnes

## Puddle

I was a motel.

On a dirty highway,  
veer off to the left,  
glide right in.

You'll see me smiling  
and dancing baby,  
just for you.

Blinking and buzzing,  
I'm the sign  
with my pink and white  
neon shimmy.

Snapped  
mosquitoes grilled,  
tortured.

Flashing  
in the \$22 a night,  
TV included  
Vacancy.

## Love Ghetto

For Neneh Cherry, who sang the song.

Young, strong, horse, girl.  
Gallops through the city,  
wears the skyscrapers,  
diamond pendants round  
her neck, the city is  
round and round.  
Beautiful girl, girl, black, black.

*I got your back.*

There ain't nothin' brighter  
than that crooked tooth smile,  
passed on to every stranger  
cuz one might be the one  
to see the life, change it.  
She's gonna be a movie star, a super  
model, soul singer. Anything - anything  
but this. Wired wire –

*the city's on fire  
and I ain't got no desire.*

When she turns to catch  
a glimpse of a love ghetto sunset,  
Daddy digs through garbage  
with his dirty fingernails, tobacco beard.  
She pretends not to notice, sometimes she don't  
care that Mama cakes and sugars her veins.  
Daddy sells the black and white television  
for a twenty-minute Technicolor high  
and she ain't nothin' to 'em

*but mo' money on the 1st.*

She might surprise you, just yet.  
This girl - she got a plan  
and God bless the child  
if Billie did it, so can she. Watch her.  
Off and runnin', clothes in a brown paper bag,  
she feeds on the subway, burns like the hole  
that she trots through the moon.

*I'z gonna be there soon.*

Rides bareback through the urban fields  
of dark faces in the darkest places.  
The bus depot is a barnyard  
for back breaking  
farewells and soiled departures.  
It smells of piss and rape, the sweet  
fruit of suicide. She cannot stop,  
as close as she is –

But she smiles at the beautiful, shiny stranger

who loves not just the spirit  
but the hunger in her eyes.  
She tells this man her secret:  
that this is the day she's gettin' out  
of this stable of misplaced hopes, her  
dreams of pure white glamour.  
Instead, he buys her breakfast, feeds her  
the too-good-to-be-true horseshit  
expressed by a man who needs a wife, a mother,  
an outlet for his own attempts, failed.

*I'z never wins.*

## If I Were Wiser

I would get out  
of this *diablo* car,  
walk home and fear God  
along the way.  
Instead,  
I am giving you  
    and giving you  
a saintly hand job  
while you drive around town.  
    I must go down  
on Santa Monica Boulevard.  
You bump and grind  
until you find  
your favorite song  
    on the radio.  
You wipe my chin  
and sing to me in Spanish.

## Angel

Inspired By Carolyn Forché

Would you like a bowl of ice cream?  
Or we can talk about the way you look  
in that red and black trimmed  
athletic suit  
that makes me  
want to sit in your lap,  
tell you dark, dirty things.

Perhaps you can tell me more  
about El Salvador  
and although you miss it,  
if you went back  
you would be killed  
and you never would have met  
an American boy like me - who wants to kiss you.

I do all that you want me to,  
out of lust and for leverage.  
I climb on top of your heart,  
tug at the strings  
that slides your chaos  
down around your knees and pleases  
your fight for freedom.

I capture the glow and the heave  
of your breathless and remarkable  
gift to fill my void with your insatiable  
search for unconditional love in L.A.  
Although we have come close,  
there is more than sex and sweat  
between us - there lies

a country or two.

## Hickey

While your Prom date was passed out  
on a torn mattress on the floor of  
your bedroom, barefoot  
in her black cocktail dress, wicked  
matching purse and wilted white  
carnation corsage, you and I were  
tuxedoed and lip locked in unspeakable  
passion that was finally released when  
you offered to drive me home in your  
lowrdin', souped up, bass boomin'  
barbaric Monte Carlo. Mexican  
boy. Sex God. Rebellious roughneck.  
Fine-as-hell football player star....  
My skin became one with the shiny  
sheen of the leather upholstered backseat,  
my handprints emblazoned on the window,  
your voice in my ear, panting my name,  
declarations of your urban Latin love.  
You branded me, like territory, leaving  
your mark on my neck. On Monday  
morning, there were rumors and speculations  
at school and the unspoken knowledge  
that no one else  
was ever allowed  
to touch me.

## He Must Be Drunk Again

With his Italian stallion  
stance and stare, cunning  
*paradiso*, he blocks the light  
from the hallway outside  
of my bedroom. His pride  
is plastered on his face, half  
smirk, smile, slur. The moon  
shoots our shadows on the wall,  
illuminates his truth, movie like  
misery of my grace. He inches  
closer like fatigue. I avoid  
his eyes, the brutal cinematic  
discontent. His voice cracks  
my skull, cinnamon words sprinkle  
sorrow on my skin. I am *intaglio*,  
engraved with his mythical view,  
the delicate manipulation of allure.  
His lips curl into a catapulting grin.  
They say my name. His acrobatic  
breath makes me think of the circus,  
forces me to accept my reward:  
the obligatory kiss. It tightropes  
into my mouth. Deeper. It traps  
my wanderlust, *desideri*. He collapses  
into clay, waits to be molded  
with my compliments, concerns.  
I never ask where he's been, goes.  
His answers are suicide, his lies  
are commonplace. He rolls over  
to sleep it off. Dreams that I am  
a woman,  
or a saint,  
the answer to his drunken prayers.  
I close my eyes to see that my hands  
have just missed the trapeze. Lullabied  
by the smell of whiskey, I lick the air,  
the netless stench.

## Here

The air in here chokes me.  
I can feel it tighten when I kiss  
the splinters on your wooden face.  
Words close in on me. The walls  
scrape lust from my cheeks,  
box in my fatalistic love.  
My grave realization:  
I have no rights to you.  
I forgive you for this  
shallowness you've sunk into. Blind,  
deaf and dumb - you corner me. God,  
dirt, hammer, nail,  
screw you.  
I cannot be here.  
I've been dead for weeks.

## Shotgun

I'm not your dog or your sister  
or the sun beam that gleams  
in your eye, I am just  
your passenger on Highway 5.  
It is summer. Our affair  
is ending soon. I'm pretty  
sure by winter, you'll be  
dead. We pass  
Zamora. We are almost  
there, your hometown,  
to take your parents  
by surprise. *Imagine the looks  
on their faces.* It made you  
laugh, so we planned this road  
trip. I can't wait to see who  
you are. To pass the time,  
we laugh, we play  
alphabet games, 20  
questions. I kiss your lips. I think  
of pomegranates. Find  
a song on the radio. We sing  
until we reach the edge  
of a town to which you swore  
you'd never return. We swerve,  
cruise into the center  
of a place that does not  
become you. Like a map,  
you fold your hand into mine.  
To make it matter, I whisper  
*welcome home*  
as you check the glove  
compartment to make certain  
that the gun is still there, loaded.

## Molasses

Could it possibly be  
that before you can  
    love me  
you must first love  
the roots of trees,  
white chocolate chunks  
and catwalks?

*Sugar cones are better.*

Is it safe to say  
that my, my, my  
    precious beating heart  
that you so lust after  
is brittle, is broken,  
is prickly, thorned?

*You can go cut yourself.*

Let's discuss this  
proposition you've  
    made me  
sick  
sick because you drank too much  
(as usual) and - did you just throw up  
on my sleeve?

*Cross your heart and hope to die.*

## The Town Star

When your Daddy was giving  
his sermon on sin, you were  
lighting up Marlboro's behind  
the church, taking the biggest  
drag on your life, letting Billy  
touch you there - the tighter  
the skirt the more boys loved

you. You told everyone in town  
that someday - yeah, someday soon  
you were gonna be a singer, a rock  
star, a Hollywood movie rebel  
come true. What vision clouded  
your mind when you were down

on your knees for Billy, the boys?  
A private parade. A joke out  
of hand. In an old, dusted barn:  
a shotgun to your skull. Were you  
the shiny star of a million wet  
high school dreams? I was

there the day your Daddy spoke  
in church. Your Mama - she wore  
her white gloves. I heard the murmur  
of the town as we wept through  
your eulogy, when we realized:  
you would never get your wings.

## Sacred

### An Internal Monologue

I've never been to New Orleans,  
but I've snuck inside your skull.  
Don't know which is darker.

Pink lights play charades on the walls.  
Some drunk girl is singing *Black Velvet*.  
I smell vomit, whiskey, fear -  
So I look for you.  
It seems like you should be here.

I've never broken a window with bare hands,  
but I've cleared off a crystal-covered mirror.  
Don't know which happens quicker.

A bird dies on the front steps of an old Victorian,  
from the stagnant smell of downtown Sacramento.  
I think it was murder. I feel  
guilty, hold my breath. I wish  
I had a cage. I wish I had the nerve to fly.

I've never played the harp, the cello or the violin,  
but I've slow danced with drunken strangers.  
Don't know which can linger.

It's sad to say, but I have admit:  
the men I have laid down with  
I felt nothing for but sometimes  
pity, boredom but never shame.  
Those that mattered I can not name.

I've never held a child that was my own,  
But I've touched those that hate their mothers.  
Don't know which is lonelier.

Some may laugh, but I want  
the white picket fence, white carnations. I want  
Shell Beach, the farm house, the sold out show,  
the hands, the sand, the dark haired man, dimpled,  
Italian just like Marco Leonardi.

(more)

I've never felt the kiss of death,  
but I've been saved by Nick and time.  
Don't know which is sweeter.

It happens on the freeway, just before  
midnight. You are the passenger, not listening  
to the radio, to the person beside you, your own voice.  
You're looking out the window, to the skyline. This  
is how you imagine heaven to be.

I've never been the headliner,  
but I've gone down on the lead singer.  
Don't know which is harder to do.

Music is my comfort. I use it to drown out  
another loud mistake. I hear them sing, not just  
for money, only for me - the things that I dare not say  
but feel, like black and blue melodies  
on my lips. I celebrate them; rock stars that I know.

I've never been in a war like Vietnam  
But I've slept with many enemies.  
Don't know which was more useless.

My generation is beautiful. Exploited in their mothers  
clothes which have become cool again. They are  
unhinged by their own fear of fear, the desperation  
one feels while trying to be original when it's already  
been done before and much, much better.

They are Lindsay Lohan and liposuction.  
They are bad mothers and Britney Spears.  
They are murdering husbands and reality t.v.

I've never been a prostitute,  
But I've gone hungry for days.  
Don't know which aches more.

(more)

I imagine the moment as something sacred.  
A celebration just like Mardi Gras.  
Streamers, confetti. I want a parade.  
Arms slide around my waist.  
Fireworks explode with clichéd reason.  
He digs in to the plantation of my soul  
And we watch the world below, from the terrace.

I've never been in love,  
But I've seen the color of heartbreak.  
Don't know which is more beautiful.