

TRAILER TRASH



ANDIE WOODARD

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by Andie Woodard

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R-Rated Movies Past Bedtime

The light from the TV flickers
making shadows on the walls
monsters with fire-breathing mouths.
I inhale Mommy's smoke.
The soles of my feet are black.

You're a dirty girl, someone says
through the white noise.
Someone is crying
or laughing
or making a sound like they're
glad. It's hard to tell.

Don't look, Mommy says
& I shield my eyes
with this shredded blanket, barely enough
to keep me warm.
Its pattern has changed
spotted with cigarette burns from when
Mommy falls asleep.
I thrust my finger into a hole.
Scratched by the charcoal edges, I
spread it wide
so I can peek
through—

Family Tree of Knowledge

Mommy tells me about God
who lived in darkness before
he made us & I wonder
if that's where his daddy
left him.

I wonder if he's afraid of the dark
like me & that's how come
he sighed in the dirt
& made people & made them
love him.

God dragged his flowing robe
on the soft grass of gardens,
peeking through branches
to see his children
naked.

He was angry when
a talking snake fed them & gave them
clothes.
Why should they hide
from him?

It's nothing
he hasn't seen before.

Boogeyman

The Boogeyman does not live
under my bed.

There's no room beneath
this bare mattress.

He lives at the end of the hall
in a room that locks from the inside
where he keeps sweets & secret
tales of what grownups do
in the dark.

He doesn't want anything in the world

except to touch me.

When he catches me
he parts my red, swollen lips
dusty with the dried spit
of drooling and dreaming
& moans against my mouth,

You are beautiful.

Don't tell anyone, he tells me
& for a while, I don't.
What would I say?

No one believes in the Boogeyman.

Red Light

Usually, Mommy's eyes are brown
but when she cries, they're green.
Mommy looks at me
with the eyes of a different person

& I look at the McDonald's bags
piled in the floorboard. I look
up at the red light, waiting. My finger
goes inside a cigarette hole in the seat.

I didn't mean to tell her
about the Boogeyman.

I pick at my Esmeralda shoes that
didn't have her picture on the inside
of the foot so I drew her there with pen
except it's not the same.

I ruined them.
They're ruined.
I'm sorry, I tell her.

Her lips light red to the end
of her cigarette & it's like
a firefly visiting when she
whispers, *I prayed for this*.

She says, *I knew*
he wasn't a good man
so I asked God to give me
a sign.

She prayed, *Make him do something*
so horrible that I never forgive him
again.

She tells me,
This is it.

Lessons on Womanhood

Sometimes I sneak Mommy's razor
in the bath & practice
being a lady
but when she catches me

she says, *Don't shave your thighs.*
When you have sex with a man
his hairy legs will rub you
raw.

I feel my fuzzy legs & imagine
those smooth, magazine women
& wonder if maybe men
want to hurt me.

Don't ever let a man hit you
& apologize, Mommy tells me
squinting through cigarette smoke.
Her eyes are gray today.

He'll say he loves you but don't
let him do it
more than once.
I'm always asking

Mommy where Daddy is
& she's always drawing me
pictures of him, saying, *This*
is what he looks like.

Now, keep your legs closed
till you're married.
Then I say, *But you didn't wait.*
She nods, saying,

& look what happened.

Green Sky

Tornado alley has no cellars.

The foundation won't hold, would crush
that safe space: a bunker, debunked.

I cried the first time I heard the sirens
& Mom said to hide in our dry tub.

Pots collected leaks. Forehead to knees
I prayed I'd live long enough to bleed.

The storm spared our mobile home, rickety
on cinder blocks, a child stacking boxes
to reach ice cream in the icebox.
So commonplace became this miracle, this
shifting to keep upright, I learned
the only real prayer is a rain dance.

We kept a bare mattress ready, standing
by for softness or shelter. We never dressed it
in sheets again or asked why Dorothy
visited the Emerald City in her twisted
dream; she saw our queasy
sky, our jealous god, same as us. We shared
the same fate like poets do the sunlit moon.

There are no mansions waiting for us
in heaven; only fools would think these
glittering gravel streets are gold. A yellow
brick house, a sturdier hiding place, is
the best we can hope for.

Self Portrait

When we got the eviction notice
the one we knew we couldn't
fight, we sold our TV, our VHS
tapes, our favorite movies.

We didn't make much.

Some women from church said
God told them to pity us & take us in
to their sturdy, brick houses with extra
empty rooms.

We made ourselves portable
threw away family photographs
portraits of me as a kid

posing in front of those cheesy
greenscreen backdrops
the flash shining off my glasses
my smile, big & dorky.

We threw them away & it was easy
to mimic those pretty girls at school
who slept in clean sheets at night.

Dirty Pool

I was still learning the rules. I didn't know
a playmate could be an opponent, that a shark
could swim so close. He didn't circle.
He scratched, fondled the cue ball.

I didn't know how to play dirty.

My hips against the wood, I disappeared
inside the nearest pocket, the mesh net a small
prison.
His lips against my ear, he called the shots.

He named me: *eight ball, eight ball, eight ball.*

Good game, I said, shaking hands
with his blue fingers, my grin
soft. Even now, I feel the chalk between
my teeth.

To Know, in the Biblical Sense

I have forgotten how to pray.

When I get on my knees, my mouth
is otherwise occupied, wide, a serpent
speaking softly about those forbidden
things, fruits that make mouths wet
& worthy, about juices that drip down chins.

Eat & you will know, he says.

He runs a finger over my chapped lips & says,
This is my favorite part of you.

He says my name like we
are not strangers. So, then:
if not on my knees, how
can I commune with God? How
can I ask for
help?

Cocaine

I came home to find her
in my bedroom, her long shadow
flickering across the lamplight,
bent over a small table in the corner.
Diamonds glisten in the brief
brightness, rows of them,
each barely bigger than
a nostril. They scratch.
They cut. We sniffle & maybe bleed.
Between us, we share one dollar.
I leave her to count her riches
while I lie in the dark & write
letters to myself, signing them
with someone else's name.

Coming Down

I take a tab, double stack.
Wait for it to hit.

Dance with my friend.
Her man don't mind.
Hips grind. Slow mo.

Nothing sexual.
Lights: on. Show: over.
My mouth: dry & drooping.

Crowd like a gas leak.
Bathroom. Sink.
Mirror: me & hollow sockets.
Shame: the swell of my lips.

Drunk driver. Words trailing.
Arrive safely. Stay up late.

Touch each other.
Nothing sexual.

Neon moon: waning.
Friend dozes.
Her boyfriend: feigning fatigue.
Sweaty hands: grazing.

Lay down with me.
Scream: between my teeth.
Grinding. He tells me,

You're shaking. Relax.
My jaw: strong. My mouth: shut.
Nothing sexual. Nothing sexual.

Search for Me

Associate me.

Abstract me.

Extend beyond the main emotion: rage.

Functioning for the next decade and beyond
is dire, a distinct form of psychopathy.

Validate my victimization
and do not.

Across generations, I—a child, an ass,
a pubic hair exposed—developed.
I longed for violation called love.
Dissociation altered my spirituality.

The math of trauma means the average
woman is 11
the first time.

Validate me and do not.
Tell me I am the only one.
Tell me, *Sure*.
Say, *Yes, you're special*.
Tell us,

Your suffering has meaning.

Erasure poem from "Complex PTSD research directions for nosology/assessment, treatment, and Public Health," by Julian D. Ford on NCBI.NLM.NIH.gov, pages 1–4; some punctuation added; some capitalization changed.

Zoloft: A Love Song

Forgive me, I don't know why it's so hard
to press you against my lips, lay you flat
on my tongue. I don't know why
I play so coy with you, only you. I wish
you could be someone else. It's not romantic
but I wish I didn't need to settle down
in the end. Forgive me, my broken instincts.

Forgive me for being the kind of woman
whose throat you were born to kiss, whose
stomach your seed was made to swell. You,
on the counter already cutting a rug, waiting
for me like a tall glass of water, another
good thing I never let quench me—you,
the kind of hard body a mother begs
God to give her daughter, the kind
who slow dances with a heart—please
forgive me, my two left feet.

Turning Point

Back at the hotel, the toilet seat
is as cool as a headstone on my arms
my vomit, hot on my lips.

I'm grateful no one came back
with me. The wailing
in my belly says, *More*
is coming, but that's all for tonight.

When I squirm over the mattress
the overhead lighting an unforgiving
God, I tell myself, *Sleep*
on your side so you don't choke on your own
puke.

I remember overcorrecting
my steering wheel, wondering what
swerving into the median would do: burst me
like a balloon, my body mostly water?

Shoot me like a star, brilliant at last?

I tell myself, *Don't choke*, & surprise myself
with this subtle kindness like a mother's
gentle hands, feeling for a fever.

Don't Worry, I Think I'm Sober Now

My skin tingles, so I stain it
at a tattoo shop. There's
a boy in the waiting room,
his eyes sinking, our smiles
syncing. He uses
ink, too.

At my Airbnb, he reads me
a fiction from his own pen
& I listen
for the rhythm against
his chest. He doesn't know
there's poetry
inside him.

When he kisses me
he cups my face in both
hands. His nicotine fingers
fill me all way up, reach
deeper
than the pills
ever could. He goes down
smoother
than the vodka I don't drink
anymore.

This slender boy knows about
hunger. He wants to be seen, but only
like this.
Look at me, he whispers—firmly,
tenderly—
& I do.

Blind Light

Sunlight strips the blinds & casts them aside.

It's the morning after.

In this blind light, his pupils make room for blue

& I tell him, *I hate the beach,*

all that hot sand burning; how the ocean

wants to kill you.

But I don't think it would hurt to drown

in the way he looks at me, his irises reflecting

someone else erasing the stretch marks

that would tell him all my secrets.

He kisses me between the lines

he cannot read.

Anxious Attachment

I'm lost in the underworld
again, my Eurydice .

I'm scrolling through old pictures
Hades posted of you
when you were happy
with her. Her fiery hair
draping over your shoulder
warm & inviting.

I'm comparing them to our selfies
our own reflections on the River
Styx: We could be beautiful .

Do you see our faces on the water
or do you see ghosts ?
Do her cold fingers
hold your wrists ?

Does the rain from her wetness
weigh down your robe
& is that why you walk
behind me ?

You sigh against my hair
but I don't know if I can wander
with wide eyes
into the yawning hot dark
when the gods have broken

their covenant before. If I look for you
over my shoulder, will I find you
gone ?

Bedtime Story

He shuts my shaking thighs
like a book pressing a rosebud
a keepsake, still wet with dew.
The words run together
the ending spoiled.

I still hope he can read me
hope he'll trace his slim fingers
over each line. It's the only time
I can claim him. His skin, his taut
arms, his hardness: the only part of love
that's for sure.

We're anxious people. He worried
about taking meds to slow his heart
down. What if he couldn't get it
up again? Now, on the bed beside me
dry pen in hand, he grunts,
I knew the pills would do this.

I'm taking pills too & I still want
him.

It could be a side effect of his
dosage, I suppose. It can't be
a symptom
of some other disease. I need this
to be a true story.

Residents of My Rental House

This bedroom was for my son, but instead
a coiling creature sleeps here that is not a worm.
Then there is a worm, I think. A wormlike thing
in the toilet.

There are so many black-pepper baby
spiders, scurrying. There are giant
cockroaches that do not scare
my child.

He doesn't live here. Neither do the roaches.
I always find them legs up. There are individual
ants, a white butterfly that's just
a moth.

Large lingering things that look like mosquitoes
but aren't. Each time I enter a room, I find them
lower & lower to the ground, like balloons: breathless
& grieving.

Why weren't their strings good enough
for little hands to hold?

Why are there never ladybugs or decorative
insects with magician wings, the kind
you'd catch & keep? Where
are the lightning bugs we caught in jars as kids?

Remember those? How each time they
blinked
you could smell the earth? Remember reaching
for one with both hands, praying?

Red

When I see her home for the first time, I can tell: There's something warm about her. It's the sentimentality of it, I think—how each piece of furniture has a story, rescued from the side of the road in a rich-kid neighborhood or purchased at a thrift-store price she's excited to recite. Little trinkets & tiny works of art hug one another on her bookshelves. Soft rugs swaddle the floors in every room, even the kitchen.

She's politically opposed to overhead lighting. Fairy lights hang on the walls & keep the corners from getting lonely. It's not bright enough to read by, but the ambiance adds a twinkle to her hazel eyes, like someone drew her, like an artist placed it there. In this light, like early-morning sun, her whole apartment becomes a fireplace on a cold night. Lying with her on her bed, her smooth shoulders still speckled with shower spray, soothes me like warm soup on a sore throat, an elixir.

A dresser, a cabinet, a bold stroke in a painting—each room in her home has something red in it. In my own house, blue has magicked its way into the upholstery, the details, & I wonder if red came to her in the same way: unconsciously & also by fate. When I'm with her, I find myself thinking of chakras, the seven colors that mark each one, from the purple Crown representing oneness with the divine to the red Root representing the fulfillment of our most primal needs. Something primitive & hungry, satisfied at last.

I'm not sure how much I believe in that kind of thing—chakras & clairvoyance & all that—but I've been told before that my aura is blue, a bright blue, my Throat chakra opening.

Maybe hers is red.

Devotion

The moon is talking with the girl.
She says, The world may cite dangers of sex
or expound on the blessings.
Drink from your own fountain, rejoice in your youth.
May you be captivated by love
by another in full view of the LORD, and examine her.

A life is pleasing for the poet
brokenhearted like me; love me; let me;
there is only time you can never
get back.

A *worldly woman* can save me.
The sexual revolution was a long time ago.
Go where I am bringing you. Approach closer
have me. Let us
lie
with a woman;
grant me the grace to live a pure life in a very impure world.

I want you.
Express how you honestly feel about me by God.

Sex is pure but you tempt me.
Decide how you'll respond before your face is close again.

God designed sex for pleasure.
Let me into your desires, your own
perfect pleasure inside.

Erasure poem from Youth Walk Devotional Bible, devotional sections entitled "Why It's Wisest to Wait" (page 654), "Revelations for the (Sexual) Revolution" (page 705) and "God's Design for Sex" (page 1237); some punctuation added; some capitalization changed.

Life with God

Why would God make
this heart-wrenching request?

Abraham's son Isaac was a gift
held before him with an open hand.

Abraham
could
reject God because of
his love and kindness—

Trust me, son.

Abraham
might have taken Isaac and run away. But he gave
another lie. He
didn't spare him—

Abraham took his son
in both hands to God.

Erasure poem from The Journey: A Bible for Seeking God and Understanding Life (1996), page 29, Discovering God: Life with God; some punctuation added; some capitalization changed.

Running on Fumes

This isn't the first time
she's made a home in her car.
She delivers pizza & sleeps in the same
once-white place. Embers, ash, smoke
have grayed & tattered the cloth
interior like they have her
body.

It's comfortable, or maybe the word is
"familiar." It's somewhere, anyway. Here
she can bundle in her three thin
coats & get warm
enough.

The car is running & the closed
windows are moist & opaque & the wrong
color, like her lungs. Something gives in her chest
like a worn tire jack: BAM. Just like that
all that T.R.U.T.H. propaganda
her daughter learned at school
comes true: She can't breathe.

She has the good sense to call 9-1-1
not her little girl who's not so little now, Miss
Got Her Own Money Now, Miss *Too Good*
to Share, Miss *Gone Just Like Her*
Daddy.

She'd just tell her, *I told you so*
like all the doctors do. *What's your emergency?*
drones the operator. Her heavy, bloated heart
beats loud & bitter: *What-do? You-care?*

Her lips are mouthing her location but no
sound comes. Talking takes
breath like housing takes
money like love
takes time
& she's
all
out.

Orbit

Memories are stories we tell ourselves—
shapes we sling around the scenes
of our past, like the pictures we make
in the stars. From other planets,
different tales are told across the sky.
Once upon a time, a little girl
had a mother who disappeared inside her
dreams—or: long ago, a woman was a mother
who slept to silence her own stories. One
day, there was a little girl who found
the Boogeyman above her bed, upon
her—or: once upon a time, a man
treated a mother like her father
who prodded the girl's thunder thighs
with pointed fingers & taught her
not to trust herself. A long time ago
in a creamy galaxy where planets revolve
around the son, not daughter, a girl
who would become a mother was locked
in a room, all alone, until she wet herself.
Her step-siblings dragged her across
the soiled carpet by her hair. Her mother
was in a far, far away land, gambling away
their electric bill. The girl ate & ate & ate
before the food could go bad & she grew
& women were cruel & so were the men
who wanted her. One day upon a once,
there were men who wanted her.
A time, she married a man who found a stray

dog & killed it to watch her cry. A day, there
was an uncle with heavy hands & laughing
lips. One time, one day, once, one, 1-1-1-1-1—
once upon a time, there was a girl
who was little a long time ago, who might
or might not be a mother & a daughter.
It depends on your place in a planet's
orbit, on the tilt of its axis, on which
of your eyes is open or closed, on
the shapes you have learned to make.
The strings that trace constellations
are brittle things.

Rewind

Magical movies & sci-fi stories warn against
time travel, claiming butterflies have it out
for us. I'm supposed to say, *Everything
happens for a reason & God's will be done.*
But the truth is: If there really was a God
who existed outside of time & prayers
were like wishes, I'd ask for the power
to pulverize your painful past
with my own shaking hands & hold it
out to you so you could blow it away
like an eyelash. If God listened like you said
He did, I'd take the ashes of your trauma
to the beach where you grew up
so you could watch them be undone
by the wind or disappeared by the gleam
of the sunlight. If forgiveness really was born
of sacrifice, I'd spill our shared
blood & rub the salt of your childhood into my
wounds so they could sting & heal & scar
& then I could forgive myself for being
ashamed of you. If I could pass through you
like the holy ghost, I'd reach into your chest
& cradle that childlike, pure part of you & plant it
in the new skin your memories made in me
water it with my own eyes so you'd never
cry & I'd make us into different people
altogether. We'd be so loved, so disgustingly
lousy with love, we'd be boring; each Christmas
filled with family who only touch to hug;
our lives, so abundant & blessed absolutely
no one would write about us.

Acknowledgments

During my junior year as an undergrad, I was talking with a friend about a random memory I had from my childhood. I remembered sneaking glances at the “dirty” scenes in R-rated movies when my mom would ask me to cover my eyes. We all slept in the living room, so if the grownups wanted to stay up and watch movies, it meant that the TV light would flicker on us—my young cousins and I—and sometimes keep us awake. My mom didn’t really care if we stayed awake as long as we got up for school on time. However, she would always watch me when a “naughty” scene came up: the two love interests kissing deeply, removing each others’ clothes in earnest. That’s when she would glance over and tell me to cover my eyes. But I had a trick. I would use a blanket to cover my face, but no matter which blanket I used, I could always peek through a small hole, made by a cigarette burn. My mom was a chain smoker with sleep apnea, so she often fell asleep while smoking. Through these charred edges, I caught small glimpses of adult happenings, ones that spoke to my own experience being groomed and abused. When I told my friend this story, he was quiet for a moment, and then just said, “You should write a poem about that.” So, thank you to Collin Moore; though our friendship was short-lived, you gave me permission to be a poet.

Thank you to my mom who always believed in my writing, even when she didn’t care for the subject matter.

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The Boogeyman in my poetry was sentenced to 10 years of parole and, soon after his sentencing, served nine years in prison. Wesley Ross Addington is no longer on the sex offender registry, but you can find information about his conviction by searching case number 3808076798 in the Collin County judicial records online.

About the Author

Andie Woodard (they/she) is a queer writer and activist. In 2017, they received their BA in Social Science, with a focus in Psychology and a minor in Journalism, at the University of North Texas, and in June 2022, they earned their MFA in Creative Writing at Antioch University. Andie has been awarded runner-up twice in the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference's Personal Essay Contest (in 2014 and 2020) and received a Best of the Net nomination from Prometheus Dreaming for their poem "Self Portrait." Andie lives in the Dallas Metroplex with their very anxious emotional support dog, Sirius, and their little cat, Young Bernie Sanders. You can find more of Andie's work at www.ModusOperandiee.com.



