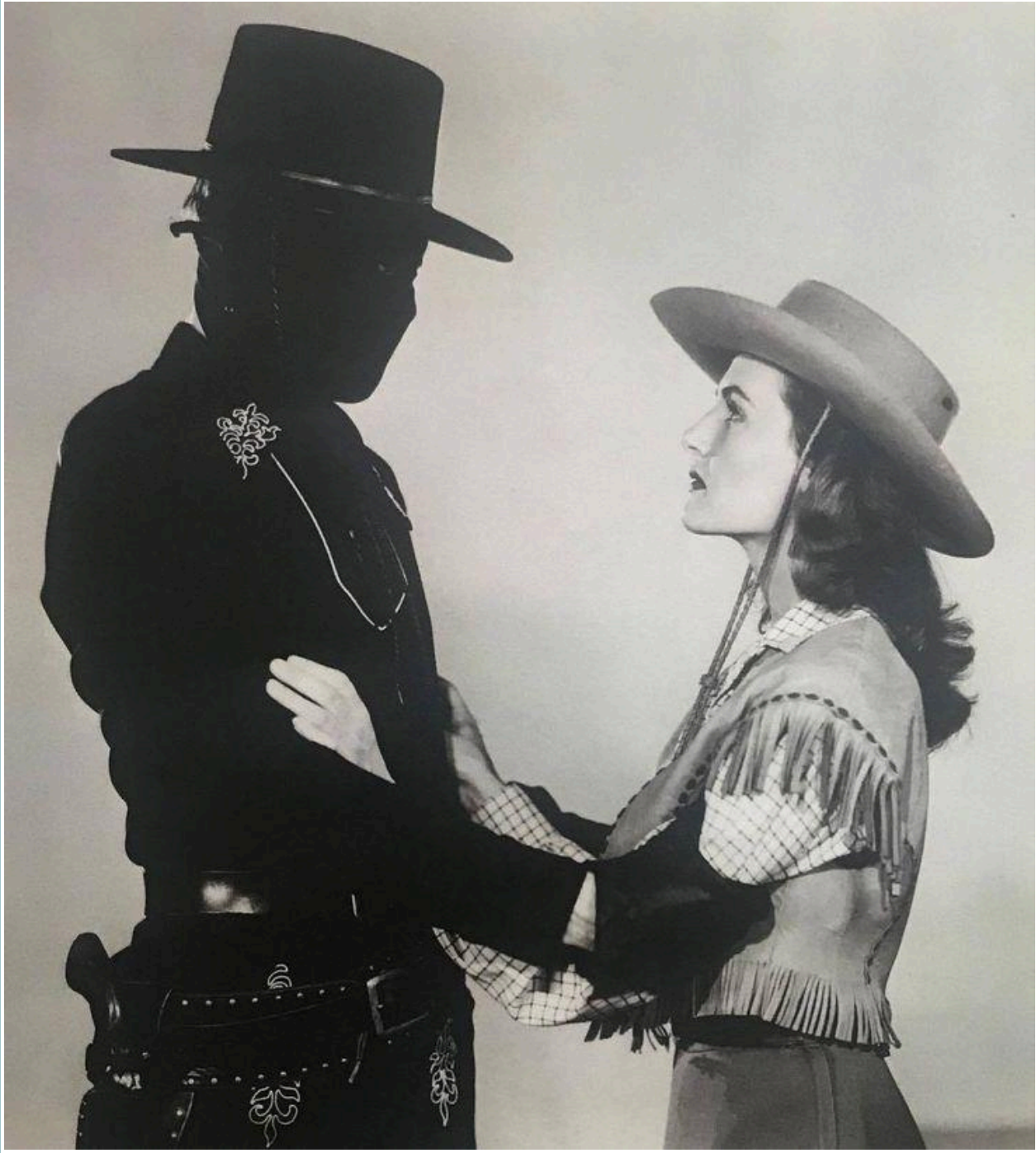


Country Songs
By Dan Svizeny



Listen to the horses clipping clopping
Hoof beats everywhere never stopping
Gonna ride my Palomino, ride him to the fair

-Raffi

Rhythm

Shadows up and down like the tide. Everywhere, no matter where I go. Think up a grand exit. Think not. Crush out a cigarette and shoot me into space. It may be the only way to escape Earth's shaky rhythms. Since expulsion is out of the question. Forge on. Through the wind and the rain. And as the droplet explodes. Tell your troubles to go to hell. I am happy. I am happy. Are you happy?

Spring Lake

While my skin turned a shade of red
I found god
I had told myself
If I ever met him
Or her
Or it
I would kill him or her or it
When I did I would find out where god hid the happiness
Where god held the peace and joy and love
And just let it all out
Flood the masses with the secrets of the universe
No one would have to read for them in a book
Or kill
Fight
Pray
Donate
None of that
It would all just fill up their little houses

Untitled III

My condition is your condition. We must prove to ourselves that we, yes we, are truly special
That we are creative like no one has been creative
We are the intrepid explorers of our own shallow depths
Feeling around in the dark for a pang of newness
Some pale flicker of light like an old Bic in the rain after a shake, fighting for its cheap plastic life
The way through is through and we, the creative, the special, must do what we have to do
Life is the purest example of not giving up

human scene

the philosopher
out of the west
contemplates
the human scene

you
me

the human scene

you
me

the human scene

Purple Fields

He saw the purple field
Leaving our post
The time had come
We both layed down
Our backs in the overgrown grass
And closed our eyes
The black was heavy like syrup
Thick and impassable
Pressure pushing down
Below the surface of the earth
The backs of my eyelids were painted green
Trees wet from rain barely covering the soft swaying summer sun
We layed in the purple field waiting for time to travel
But so it goes
We laid there forever
Together
In the purple field

IN THE FLOOD

At the exact moment we passed on the sidewalk
I heard a son tell his mother
"I love you"

From behind he wrapped his arms around her neck
She reached back and tried her best to return the hug with her arms as her body moved forward
Not to miss a beat
Failing miserably

They were on another planet
One where I was an invisible species

One where I didn't exist

Mother smiled as big as her mouth would allow
Forcing her eyes closed
Mouthing
"I love you"

The sidewalk stopped
My legs kept moving as they sank into a quicksand of my own creation
Playing this moment over on the inside of my eyelids

Now that I am in the flood
It isn't all that bad

Wave to a walker from the truck

Red eye to new hope
Color pulsing into the back of my skull
Driving along a border road between disasters
Deer in different states of decay line the road
One for you, one for me

SLC

When I landed in Salt Lake
I saw thousands of blonde children
With hundreds of blonde parents
All younger than me

I was jealous
They were sure
Never a doubt
That they were right

They didn't know it
But I was wrong

All of the blonde children
Are dancing in heaven

Masterstroke

When I look at myself in the mirror I see a wax figure version of my face. Shiny and wet. Dripping down into the sink. I lift my hand and swipe slowly at what once was my skin, exposing the white of my cheekbone. Unable to draw a line. I turn on the faucet towards scalding and let it run.

Mist rises from the sink causing my wax skin to glob glob glob at a quicker pace. The mess of me fills the ceramic sink in a beautiful pattern befitting a modernist painter's masterstroke. I think - bravo.

Grabbing for a paper towel, my life flashes quickly before my eyes. Sunny visions of youth. Birthday cakes. Baseball. Kissing on a couch in a dark basement while my heart beats out of my chest. Running from nothing at full speed. Diving in the deep end headfirst.

I hold my hand under the faucet. One, two, three, four, fuck. I look up at my face. Now a skeleton. Two eyeballs floating in a cave. Like a kids halloween mask. I turn away to face the day.

RUNNING PAST CONSTANT SPRING

Slow

Methodical

Uphill

My breath and the

crunch

crunch

crunch of crushed stone

Drinking the air

Plodding up stairs to the sun

Ocean City

There will never be the girl you meet on the boardwalk
There will never be a kiss like theres no tomorrow
There will never be a disappear into the haze of a summer night

When I walk along the shore
I wish the water was a cloud
And the sand was gold

Island of Bulls

Directly below the bridge stands a lone white cross
As simple as it gets
Stuck in mud
Disappeared by the crest
Back again

Water never remembers
It can only forget

He jumped the short distance into the shallow
Filed with rocks smoothed by a million years of current
a million more years will forget

Rules

What are the rules

As the seagrass swirls in chaotic wind

Please tell me what are the rules

As the rains wash a city into the ocean

Daddy, what are the rules

As the bubbles burst in the humid summer night

What are the rules

In the darkness of night we lay thinking

What are the rules

As she lay prostrate on the side of the road

What are the rules

If the days fly by

If the days fly by

If the days fly by

Blind Pilot (Mexico, May, 2023)

The blind pilot flew no handed through the clouds
Touching down gently on the tarmac
Face first into the tropical wall
Laid out on the sand
As the lizard waits
While my body turns fluorescent
Pink
I am here
I am here
But still
Here I am
Inside my head
Like the rest
Burning by a sun I don't recognize
More powerful
With a specific distaste for me
Searing the walls
If you can't see here that it all goes on without you
Then you are my blind pilot
And I'm asking you to please
Fly me home

The Boxer

Out of nowhere

I hear

The Boxer

Snare echo down the stairwell

And suddenly

My dreams

Are cinematic

The Lot Was Filled With Pickups

I carefully pulled the Tacoma into a spot between two F150s. I didn't care much if they wouldn't be able to open up their heavy doors and step up into their kingdoms. The strip mall was run down. It had barely survived last year's flood. The Pizza shop hadn't reopened. But the Chinese restaurant was doing bang up. The CVS relied solely on self checkout. It seemed like someone came to open it up, then left. Leaving the store and all of its contents up for the take. I sometimes thought I was the only person to figure it out, but couldn't bring myself to test my theory and walk out, nonplussed, with a 12 pack of seltzer.

It was cold and dark and the clock on the Tacoma was spinning. I had hoped my children were home asleep in their beds. Dreaming of butterflies. The harsh white of parking lot lights acted as a spotlight placing me on center stage. It had to be me. I didn't see anyone else around. Just a parking lot filled with pickup trucks.

I patted down to the pockets of my jeans and pulled out a piece of paper folded over and crumpled up. The writing, illegible, on the paper told me I was in the right place. I walked into the deli and met the overweight counter lady wearing a gas station attendant's shirt. Dawn. I felt the need to buy a pack of

cigarettes, a tin of dip, and a lighter. I resisted the urge and slid the paper across the counter to her smiling fat man. Dawn is a beautiful name.

She pointed to the door in the corner adorned in punched holes and the remnants of wiped away mud. Surrounded by brooms, mops and buckets, caked in dust after years of neglect. I thanked her, thought again about nicotine, then walked back to the door. I pulled my sleeve down to cover my hand, not wanting to catch whatever was surely about to be transmitted to me by this knob. I pulled and opened. There was a never ending creak. I looked up the carpeted stairs into steep nothingness.

Starting my ascent I was overtaken by a new scent. It was pleasant, but something completely foreign. Spice. Cologne. Windex. I made it to the top after a few minutes of light stepping where I met an incredibly small door. Maybe two feet in height and a foot in width. Without hesitation I knocked lightly. Figuring it would be impolite to just barge my head through. After silence for another minute or so the door opened and a face appeared, filling the hole.

"There's no way I'm fitting through that hole." I said to the smiling Asian man.

"Turn around" he barked.

I carefully turned to face the bottom of the stairs. I couldn't see the start, so I carefully placed my feet on the step so I wouldn't tumble down to the depths of hell.

"Turn around" he whispered after basically no time had passed.

In the place of the tiny door was a large opening, giving me plenty of room to walk through. So I did and entered. It felt like an office. A few figures were milling about, all in off white garb. But I liked them instantly and felt at peace. I felt around for the folded piece of paper in my jeans. The writing had changed to read that I was, in fact, in the right place.

The main room was joined by a number of other rooms, doors closed. The carpet was deep red and the walls were gold. Each door was white. I felt a hand caress my back, and as I turned a beautiful man walked by me. I fell in love right then and there as he disappeared into door number two. I felt the urge to follow him as I racked my brain for who I was. My history, any memories. Childhood. Love. Enemies. Any story I could tell myself. I couldn't remember a fucking thing.

I started my way down the hallway, peering into rooms with open doors. These rooms were on display, for me, the doors had been left open. Like I was some patron of the arts. One room was filled with water, all the way to the top, like a fish tank. Nothing was floating, it was all just obscured by the water, but no one was swimming, and the water was contained inside, somehow even though the door was wide open. I went over and dipped my hand into the water. I pulled it out, and my hand was wet and shriveled like I had fallen asleep in the bathtub and woke up a shriveled mess.

Another was almost empty, except for a head without a body. The head had gray hair and the smiling face of an older man. Distinguished and very alive. There was a two by four balancing perfectly on the top of his head. But he was happy. I smiled and kept it moving down the hallway.

The final room was the largest, likely the main meeting room in its former life. Where executives would sit and make decisions around a speakerphone placed carefully in the middle of a long oak table. Buy. Sell. Hold. I stopped in front of its large opening to see a circle of men, holding hands. They were moving slowly as if on a track like if they were playing ring around the rosie at kindergarten recess. I noticed that they were all floating a few inches above the ground. I hesitated to enter this room.

I felt a hand on my back and smiled. Feeling eternal warmth and love cascade out from my center. I turned, hopeful for my lost love, but saw no one. The floating men were smiling and silent.

Appearing first as an apparition, then solidifying in front of me, a small olive skinned woman with pulled back shiny black hair put out her hand. She was beautiful. Not in the way I was used to, but a beauty that brought along with it comfort and knowing. I could see us growing old together. Sitting silently on the porch in our rocking chairs. Looking out on our land. What a life it was. It was perfect. We were content and love was all around. I gave her my hand and she held it there for what seemed like eternity.

“What do you think?” she spoke.

I reached my hand into my pocket, searching for the folded piece of paper.

“Everyone is ok. You are fine. Your children are home, sleeping peacefully, they will wake up from their dreams of butterflies and live long beautiful lives filled with laughter and as much love as an earthly life would ever allow.”

I started to cry. I don't remember crying. I don't remember ever being overcome. But I cried, and it felt like it was supposed to.

“I guess things are different here.” I said

She looked at me with soft eyes and smiled knowingly. She took my hand and led me into the circle of gray haired men. I looked down at my bare feet, then over to my hand already loosely holding another. I slowly lifted off the ground and joined in the rotation, as the olive skinned woman glided over to the front of the room and closed the door

Nailed to wood

my god is real

what about yours

my god is bad

your god is good

my god is flying

your god is nailed to wood

Fire, December 19th 2022

Black smoke from the fireplace
Curls to the ceiling against white brick
Unable to look away
As my lungs fill
and out
goes a cough
As my lungs fill
and out
goes a cough
I should have unlocked the door
Even with the screaming
Even with the yelling
Looking back into the fire I think
I'm sorry
But I can't bring the words up and out
Looking back into the fire I think

Tell me what you want from me
I would do whatever
I would make whatever you said a reality
Ghosts of smoke fill up the room
And the alarm
Bleat
Bleat
Bleat

Box of Rocks

hazel made a box of rocks
sitting in the driveway wearing crocs
I pulled the staples out of my head
then got the shovel from the shed
to fill the hole once filled with rocks
in the driveway next to the box

All-Stars (August 19th) by Dan Svizeny

George and I smoked weed out of a coke can before practice most afternoons. It was late July and New Jersey was laced in a cloud of humidity that refused to break. Right as the afternoon started to turn to evening, we would jam in the back of George's mom's minivan and ride to our home field on the edge of town, as stoned as possible on whatever a middle schooler could get their hands on before the turn of the century.

Hitting soft toss against the chain link of the batting cage. Throwing dusty waterlogged balls at an empty bucket behind home plate. Hitting the relay at the top of the infield. Shagging fly balls at dusk under the lights. Practicing our stance for invisible cameras. Mitts cracking under an orange midsummer sky.

All-Stars meant that we were the best our town's little league had to offer. George was a wiry tough motherfucker who never wore a shirt. He was on the middle school wrestling team, and his favorite summer pastime was doing backflips off a rusty trampoline into his above ground pool. He hit over .600 that summer and rarely made an error in the field. We shared the same birthday. August 19th. Leos.

I was taller than George, but he was better at everything. I was a husky home run or strike out punk, tucked away in right field, who shaved his head and dyed it blonde.

One year earlier a New Jersey team stole the hearts and minds of a sports loving nation for two weeks in late August. Beating Japan to take home the little league World Series title. They were on Sportscenter every morning dancing with their mascot – a guy in a gorilla suit – *The Beast from the East*.

George had two older sisters. Both of whom I paid way more attention to than George. One night the oldest one took us to 7-11 to buy cigarettes. It was the first pack I ever owned solo. Kools. We packed into the back seat of her Celica and lit up as her little silver rocket shook and bumped its way down route one. Her dark hair whipped around her face as we picked up speed. Windows down. She looked back at me in the rear view mirror. We both smiled through the darkness. We could have hit an eighteen wheeler head on and I would have died happy. I wondered if this is how they did it in Toms River.

The next day we played in the state tournament, the first step in our assured ascendancy to Little League World Series dominance. We lost unceremoniously to a team from the Pine Barrens. George played well but I struck out a few times and ended the game on the bench. After handshakes and tears I unbuttoned the polyester jersey that had my name stitched beautifully on the back, crumpled it up and put it into my bag. It was the last baseball game I would ever play. It was also the last time I saw George.

New Jersey summers are still sticky. They always feel sped up, dreamlike, to the point where you wonder if they even happened at all. As I sit idle in a suburban parking lot, flood lights kick on across the street. I roll my windows down to hear the ping of an aluminum bat and the roar of a crowd of proud parents. I push-start the engine and start off down a busy road lined with traffic lights, bending down into the orange of another summer night.

The Last Kill

While my skin turned a shade of red

I found god

I had told myself

If I ever met him

I would kill him

I sat there, burning, face to face

Knife in hand hidden behind my back

I could do it but first

I needed to find out where he hid the happiness

Where he held the peace and joy and love

And just let it all out

Flood the masses with the secrets of the universe

No one would have to read for them in a book

Kill Fight Pray

Ever again

My sweating hand behind my back

Awaiting the last recorded kill on earth

Goodbye

My sweet witness

Upstate

a.

Miata topless 100
To the Catskills
Dream catcher memories
Dance to the AM
So long Jerry
As the convertible rips
87 north

b.

Still in golf spikes
Sitting at the bar in a country club upstate
Discussing with a member
The Power Broker
And how Robert Moses
Was a bad man

c.

Every kind of loneliness
Is the worst
Stomach pit visible
Bottom dropped out
Looking down the well
Into nothing

You Bought Yourself Your Dream

I don't remember where but I think I heard that all you need is a good pair of shoes and a nice watch, the rest just sort of falls into place. I would see him everyday in and out of the deli. Never knew his order but I could probably guess with a gun to my head. Turkey and cheese on a kaiser roll. Mayo. No. Honey mustard. No. Both. Banana peppers. Pickle. Tried and true everyday without fail. He would rotate the chips. And that fucking watch. God damn, that motherfucker shined. Gold and silver face with beads of rice tightly wrapped around his fat fucking wrist. I don't know what would make someone look good in something, but it was pretty obvious to me that this asshole didn't look good in that watch, or rather, that watch didn't look so good on his hairy ass. Fuck him.

Watching this asshole in and out of the deli everyday was a real pain in the dick. His face man. His fairly fucking neck. I figured it was a Rolex, being that was what this type of asshole would wear. I heard that somewhere. I knew there were better watches, I think, more expensive ones, but this dude was working in Conshohocken so what else could he possibly know. I heard that somewhere but I'm not sure where.

My window looked out across Fayette and right into the swinging frosted glass door of the deli. I could just walk over all normal and order myself a sandwich, wait for him to pay then follow him out the door. I could grab his head by the back of his ugly fucking fat fucking rolled hairy neck and slam it through the glass. Just leaving it to hang there while I undid the clasp on his watch and slowly sized it up. I would probably need to figure out how to get it to fit my wrist, but I don't think that would be a problem. For days there would probably still be a hole in the door after they pulled him out. Dead, no doubt. Jugular cut. Something like that. Sandwiches and chips on the floor covered in glass and clumps of blood, a real crime scene man.

Yeah that's what I'll do. Just slam this motherfucker's head through the door. Grab the watch then book it out west. I heard somewhere that all you need is a pair of nice shoes and a watch, and you can make it anywhere.

I woke up in a cold sweat at three am, so tired that I was wide awake. The radiators hadn't been bled in god knows how long, a slow leak of heat wasn't enough to take the bite out of the room. With my eyes closed I could still see the room clear as day. It was the only one I ever knew. As I rolled over and went to wipe the night shit out of my eyes a gold and silver Rolex sat loosely on my wrist.

Love Has Set My Soul Free

I've stopped writing
Looking up a hill
I'll never climb
Right in my backyard

The wrong side of thirty
Dragged me screaming
Across the threshold

I have read
My poetry
To a woman
Heart in my mouth
Arms open
Awaiting acceptance

Stared into the eyes
Of love
Truth and forgiveness
At the Hindu temple
On route 130
In New Jersey.
I am new again

Thank you