Skipping Graceland

By Nicholas Brown

“You know, Bush is always comparing me to Elvis in sort of unflattering ways.”
—Bill Clinton

It began outside the piano lounge.
I was too high and didn’t want to be there
and the booming wouldn’t stop so I sat
on the curb and told David, Well I guess this
is it. He agreed and sat beside me and I
couldn’t believe how cold the beach was and how
an oil rig idled grotesquely near the shore
and the booming still roared like a siren so
inexplicably loud and I pulled my knees
close and just wanted to be with my father
listen to his army tales or drunken
antics, in his barbershop during the slow
rainy Saturday afternoons, even if
he repeated old ones over and over.
But he’s dead and gone. Story over. The end.
So then, Dusty was back in the car rambling
about California and the streetlight turns
red and he cocks towards David and demands,
If you see an old man named Vernon
Merriam tell him his grandson fucking hates him.
Then back on the couch, stuck in Virginia.
Josh asks if I wear polos and tells me I
look like an actor from Big Bang Theory
and the whole time his mom is prancing around
in a baby blue kimono giving me
the eye so I say to him, Keep it up and
I’ll give you a seventh half-brother.
Then a Coke bottle smashes above my head
and David says, C’mon, the kid is only
thirteen. So finally, with hesitancy
and too much trepidation we leave at dusk,
drive ‘til Memphis cause Ollie is a liar
and isn’t home in Nashville as agreed.
Then a homeless man walks up on David
as he’s filling up asking for five bucks, but
David offers three and I get back in the car
and the guy gets mad and David says, Look man
I’m not helping you score a nickel, which was
a terrible thing to say so he climbs back
in the car and announces, Man, fuck Memphis,
we’re driving ‘til Dallas, and so I’m angry
because we’re skipping Graceland, a promise
David made me months ago, but sure enough
we get into Dallas and learn that Memphis
was snapped by storms and tornados like the spine
of a paperback best-seller and Jordan
jokes, I’m guessing those two bucks didn’t matter.
So we make it to our high school hometown just
in time for Tyler’s birthday, but nowadays
he deals on the side, cuts himself for God
knows why, and refuses to leave his bathrobe
in the morning, so sure enough I open
the damn door and drunkenly in the stained robe
open-armed and big-grinned he shuffles like a
shadow towards me and he’s sickly skinny
and his mom goes on and on about how long
we’ve been friends and the entire time I’m trying
to persuade him into a pair of clean jeans,
but instead he jeers, College boy. Pretty boy.
Nancy boy. And then, we’re standing again on
the same old bridge pissing through chain-link as if
we’re sixteen all over again, but we’re not.
We’re in our damn twenties. Then, we hear Tyler
screaming horribly from his bedroom for God
knows why, so his mom demands we leave so we
drive to my grandma’s house and I fall asleep
in the same rickety bedroom where I lost
my virginity to Desarae on a
high school half day on my old twin mattress
and consider how she has a son now and
wonder what his name is and decide I should
probably name my son Elvis. Elvis Brown.
Reasons to Burn Your Poetry, Now:

By Nicholas Brown

“Cause how many times can you wake up in this comic book and plant flowers?”
—Rodriguez

Cause a seashell plays prettier tunes than a bookshelf and workshops are high-priced podiums and the muse is an illusion amusing over-mothered adolescents and if you disagree, then prove it and priests are paid to bear confessions.

One morning, around the time my sister began bringing home neck-tattooed Texas riff raff, my father shrugged his shoulders and said he wasn’t going anymore.
He was done.

Who could blame him?

Cause reserve catharsis and melodramatics for pigtailed seven-year-olds and melancholy for Malaysian, club-footed orphans.

Light it up and quit now, cause college is a chain-smoking carnival and everyone has ridden all the rides with everyone else, twice, even the professors palm a sweaty, damp ticket.

Cause it’s damn near impossible to keep it clean for Mom to read, to leave out Carolyn, the hometown sweetheart topless
in a leather jacket, inverse pile driving, red-faced,
on her niece’s plush, pink bunk bed
and spiral well trodden library staircases
slope down to freckled cheekbones and
burgundy skirts of past
and, seriously, let’s not go there.
Let’s not talk about how most days,
I’m just a boy who misses the rough
sandpaper backslaps of his father.
You should know now,
there won’t be time for visions and revisions,
so you may as well scribble out your stanzas on torn-out yellow pages, seal them in a bottle and toss it out
to sea for the mermaid edition of Reader’s Digest
and a heavy heart doesn’t stand on a page like a boulder,
it stutter hops like a broken-winged pigeon
and to buddies lines of fiction are bullshit and nonfiction
is brutal, and please
leave the fantasy genre for airport
gift shops and superstore bookracks.
Cause Kafka had it right dude, and a cocky
preamble is only stoking the ego, leave “scuttle”
to Eliot and Coppola,
we’re in a goddamn hurry.
Cause most days, he just wanted a son
to be handy with a hammer and unfurl
a smile on occasion, but Dad, you couldn’t stand at graduation
so let’s not get nit-picky and oh boy,
didn’t y’know only Chinese girls can pull off leather pants?
Everyone knows that one.
Cause Shakespeare wrote enough for an eternity
and if you aren’t satisfied then Proust wrote enough for two
and the click clack of her heels
still echo on the cobblestones of my dreams and towards the end
my father was the boy and I was the father.
Savannah’s left behind mascara on my pillowcase again
cause her dad died too, but I’ll never tell about mine,
how he began to call me Andy.
Andy . . . Andy . . . he’d stammer out
over a bedside hospital telephone in a gruff 1950s grumble.
How he demanded I be at the entrance in twenty with the car
and how the nurses squawked like parrots shaken in a cage,
doing their best to hold him down and how he continued bellowing
. . . Andy!
And how I didn’t even bother to correct him.