

Distilled Moments

Eleven

I didn't know what drink he made —
I never thought to ask.

Like an overgrown train track,
my memory tapers back
to the sound of Dad
arriving home
after work:

cubes clattering in the freezer bin,
his hand breaking up clumps,
persisting until he pitched
a handful into a glass.
Years later,

the coffee table bought before I walked,
the varnish, still shiny, on handmade
shelves, and that overture of ice
still freed easy flashbacks.

Now his refrigerator has
an ice dispenser on the front.
Best invention in thirty years, he says.

I mix myself a drink most evenings too.

Twelve

Mom always said
if you want to drink a beer at home
go right ahead.
She knew forbidden fruit tastes too sweet.

I redeemed her offer only once:
her old friend visiting, son in tow,
a year my junior. They were fundamentalists,

which irked me. Like an ape
displaying dominance, I grabbed a beer and
drank it

while playing some game with the kid. Mom,
integrity intact, didn't stop me or act horrified.
His mother was deeply offended, they left early,

Mom was embarrassed – what a jerk I was.
To Mom, that is.
I don't give a damn about those people.

Seventeen

Some nights were slow at
Skate Kapital,
so the second session was at
Nasty Habit:

a grown-up bar, no carding. Dave,
a bearded thirty-something, was there;
he worked with Mom, he was cool,
he wouldn't tell.

Like a fledgling sparrow flapping,
I ordered J&B with Coke. Dave rolled
his eyes and said that's a waste. Try it
with water.

I didn't like scotch
with water.
I drank Sloe Screws
for a year.

Eighteen

Thanksgiving visit with aunt and uncle. I took
the train. Changed at Penn Station, but
the meetup in Mineola was like
a Three Stooges episode.
It took them
a while
to find
me.

We
arrived
at their house
late. This was my
first solo flight with them,
without Mom. Uncle Joe asked,

strong eyes twinkling, if I wanted a drink.
Sure, I said.

He mixed me a damn strong Manhattan.
I drank with him and felt like a man.

Nineteen

Visiting my home town,
I went to Grandpa's rough old house,
just across from the railway.
He offered me brandy. I said
thanks, but I don't drink
in the morning.

My uncle was there, we sat on the
back porch
and talked
about fishin'
and huntin'
and weather
for a while.

Then Grandpa smacked a glass of brandy
onto the table in front of me, like he was
throwing down the gauntlet.
It's noon, he said.
I laughed, picked it up, and drank it.

Twenty

Buy twelve, get one free!
Friday afternoon tequila bang-bangs,
I was halfway there, so was she.
A verbal dance began.
She was loved by another I knew;
Agave made us lose our heads.
We swayed and sneaked and stumbled to my room.
I grabbed a necktie, the iconic signal,
and hung it on the doorknob like a vine.
She devoured my flesh, yet left my heart alone.
I felt guilty for a while, then
pulled myself together, and
our tie was never awkward.
I should have done more of that.

Twenty-One

Wook and Boot and Ram were there for sure,
maybe Shark too, and possibly one more yet.

I don't recall the name of the game; we
said wazoo, pointed elbows, drank from a keg.

Then we lurched to the Alumni Pool.
It was a dark winter night and the building was locked.

Ram scaled twenty feet of sheer wall,
like a monkey in the trees,

to squeeze through a window. He
let us in the front door. We

stripped naked, jumped in one by one,
and splashed around, voices reverberating.

Campus police showed up
in sixty seconds: motion detectors. They

tried not to laugh as we climbed out,
dripping wet and bereft of towels.

I met the Dean a few days later.

Twenty-Two

On weekends Kevin and Joe and I
frequented Club Casablanca.
It was always hopping with

communists and
intellectuals and
women with refined sensibilities,

Ellington playing in the background.
We dressed well.
Invariably my companions ordered Gimlets.

Like a caboose, I followed suit,
despite disliking the drink:
it seemed sophisticated.

It was warm gin and

Rose's lime juice in a
small unchilled glass.

I didn't ask questions.
I learned, after many years had gone by,
there are better ways to make a Gimlet.

Twenty-Three

Brad rose from his bed without a word,
throwing the window open to freezing,
fresh, February air.
I was sleeping on the floor
of his tiny fraternity room,
an overnight stay after a limo race.
At first they were a classy way to bar hop.
Later we just rode around the city drinking

Macallan 25. Jesus Juice.
We skipped the water and drank it neat,
like no true Scotsman. In those days
a bottle was only forty bucks,
now it's a thousand. Whatever the price,
it produces foul fumes if you drink enough.

Twenty-Four

Callahan's Restaurant
always had a
long wait for
dinner.

Fortunately they served
Rusty Nails in pint
glasses for three
dollars.

Will and I were usually
shitfaced by the
time we got a
table.

We were not the only ones,
which is why there
was a cop at
the door.

One night I was under the weather,
And avoided the drinks altogether.
Like an online date
who had lied about weight,
the food, I learned, tasted like leather.

Twenty-Five

Turner Fisheries specialized in single malts.
We ordered them neat and added a
few drops of water. One night Will and I
were in of a mood for something different.

Manhattans,
straight up, and back then, with bourbon. The
cocktail glasses glowed caramel from in the candlelight.
They were so good. We had several rounds.

Then there was an audience
game and we found ourselves
on stage, holding our drinks like they were an outfit
accessory. We faced off against with some giggling

women; the announcer called our team Manhattan Guys.
We lost. Everyone laughed with at us and
we were too loose to be embarrassed. I still love
Manhattans.

Thirty-One

Glenn and I had a few drinks after work.
I was in quite a mood. Like a dog
who got into the trash, I was soon
ordering straight vodka and smoking
leftover cigarette butts out of ashtrays.
Then we went to the Cantab.
I danced with people I didn't know,
I danced with Glenn,
I danced by myself.
Then there are fragments.
Then there is a gap.

Then I found myself sitting
on a curb
in the sleet
waiting for a cab.

Glenn explained that they had kicked me out. It takes a lot to get kicked out of the Cantab at midnight. The cab driver was reluctant to take me.

When I got home I sat outside in the cold for an hour to avoid hurling.

Forty-Five

The event was only a brief stroll from our hotel, in a lovely restaurant venue. I was sharp in my suit and conversed convivially with the many guests I knew. A vodka martini, up, olives, large cocktail glass, vermouth as thin as the air in Vail. Don't need to drive, drank three. Naturally I thought

 this
 is
 my
 chance
 to
 teach
 them
 to
 dance
 like
 a
 ro bot.

I have heard there is a video.

Fifty-Six

Sitting on the deck, enjoying evening sounds, an expansive view, and a faraway train whistle, I sip a drink. What is it?

Inventing recipes is a hobby, but it might also be a rye Manhattan, a Speyside with a trickle of water, a Martini made as Maugham said, a Gimlet from a fresh squeezed lime.

My freezer has an ice dispenser.

I mix myself a drink most evenings.
It lifts my mood,
keeps the good
cholesterol high, and
like sanding a shard, it
makes me more
tolerable to
my lovely wife.

When Will visits, we go out and I have two.