

2020 VISION



George Lee Cunningham

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DEDICATION

To my lovely wife, Carmela
Who cooks my food
Cleans our house
Loves me unconditionally
Tells me when I screw up
Tells me again if I keep screwing up
Who lets me know when she is happy
Who makes sure I share her happiness
Who lets me know when she is unhappy
Who makes sure I share her unhappiness
Who always forgives me
No matter how big a jerk I have been
Who shares my bed every night
No matter how angry she may be
Without whom this book
And every book
Would never be completed
I owe it all to her



Resolution and Dissolution

Resolution is carefully planned,
But dissolution comes in a flash.
The little crack in the dam of good intentions
That widens quickly into complete collapse.
And the rubble that remains,
A reminder of your failure.

This time, you resolve to be stronger
This time, you resolve to try harder
This time, you make no public declarations,

And this time it works.
For a week or perhaps two
Or maybe even a month or more.

But you don't give up
Because January comes again
In less than 12 months.
Last time you were weak,
But this time will be different
Or so you tell yourself.

Good intentions gone astray
Weight not lost, habits not broken,
But you never give up.
You may not speak of it to others,
And you may lie about it to yourself,
But you never lose faith.

You never ask yourself what's so special about January 1.
Never consider resolving to do better in April, June or
August.

It's merely a mind game that you play with yourself,
For such is the human condition
Of promises made and promises broken,
Of goals unrealized and lies that never grow old.

JANUARY



DEMING NEW MEXICO, 3AM

It's cold outside and dark, a gentle rain falling softly against the window

I sit on the edge of the bed, sleepless and naked in body and thought
Deming, New Mexico, the middle of nowhere and nothing
With views that stretch across the desert
Vistas of sunshine and light during the day
Of darkness and chill on this rainy night

The life blood of America flows through this town
Like a silent parade, 70 mph and keep it moving
Tractors and trailers festooned in lights of red and yellow
Drivers staring through wet-and-splattered windshields
Water and bugs mixed into sludge by the relentless sweep of wipers
Interstate 10 is busy this rainy morning

Twenty-three miles east of the Continental Divide
Eastbound on the downhill run, Westbound headed over the top
A double-stack freight passes behind the trucks
Its tracks parallel to the highway
Between the asphalt and the open plain
Barely visible in the darkness and the mist

I watch silently from my perch on the bed
My bare ass flat against the sheets, tired but awake
It's warm inside the room, heat pumped in electronically
In stark contrast to the cold and wet world outside
My eyes are weary, my lids hang heavy
But I sit awake and mesmerized by the endless flow

I want to think it's like the old days
Truckers, free and independent, cowboys in diesel rigs
Driving their loads across country, like cattle were driven in years
gone-by
But those days are gone
Now they are as grocery clerks, tethered by electronic monitors
Tracking how fast they go, how long they take, and where they stop
for fuel and food

And soon, it seems, they will be forever gone
Replaced with robot vehicles
Who never get tired, who never stop to shower and eat
Who never miss the wife and kids, who never talk back
Who never take a drink or stop by the side of the road to pee
And when they grow old, retirement is merely a free trip to the scrap
yard

But such is progress in the age of machines
I ponder this naked, on the edge of the bed
Trapped in my own melancholy dreams
As the rain falls softly in Deming, New Mexico
And another piece of America dissolves
As it passes by my window



CONTRAILS

Straight white lines, cutting across a dark blue Western sky,
Jet-propelled tubes full of travelers in cramped seats staring
straight ahead,
Eyes fixed on flat-screen entertainment to divert them from
their discomfort,
Shooting high across deserts and mountains at 600-miles-per.

Across unseen and unnoticed trails once traveled on foot or
horseback,
Or in clumsy wagons with wooden-spoked wheels and iron
rims.
People once drawn by the promises of riches, of property, and
a better life
Along rutted trails, across shallow streams, through mountain
passes.

But seven miles high, even if one were to look, the old trails
would be invisible,
The new trails, stark and gleaming, against blue sky fade
quickly
Soon replaced by others, all pointing to the places that count,
The big cities along the coasts. The lands of milk and honey.

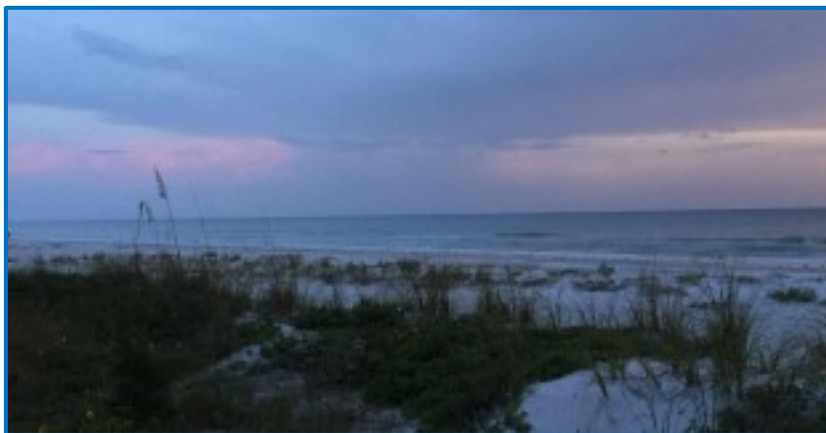
Traffic jams and drive-by shootings, warrens of greed and
centers of promise.
Places that beckon the young and the hopeful, just a few
cramped hours away.

They jet above the heads of small-town people doing small-
town things,
Farmers and merchants, mechanics and craftsmen,
bookkeepers and clergy
Simpler folks from a simpler time, family folks, content and
unashamed
In their love of God and guns, high school football and corny
country tunes.

Across the plains and hills, once home to primitives, then
replaced by farms and ranches
Now scorned by urban elites as flyover land, the places that no
longer matter.

Important people, high above, doing important things, jetting
from one important task to another,
Attending important meetings with other important people in
other important places,
Their important and fleeting tasks written in white impermanent
lines
Across a blazing blue western sky.

MARCH



The Devil is Beating His Wife

Short and hard is Southern Rain
Cleaning the air and feeding the swamps.
Big solid drops that splatter and steam against hot
concrete sidewalks
You can smell the rain, you can see it coming, and you
can see it go.

Hanging down like grey curtains from tall white clouds
Marching in from the Gulf, across the beaches and ponds
Through the pine forests and across the grassy lowlands
Feeding the rivers, pelting the leaves.

Rain warm enough to walk in, to feel hitting your face,
Plastering your shirt against your skin,
Stinging your face, not enough to hurt,
Just enough to remind you that you are alive and part of
the world around you.

And during the worst of it the sun pokes through a break
in the clouds
As the rain falls down upon you.
It was a sign, my mother would say,
That the devil is beating his wife.

And as a kid you loved the thought of the sunshine and
rain
And of the devil and his wife
And the wonders of the world
Counting the seconds between the lightning flash and the
thunder

Thinking about the power and the magic
Thrilling at the times when the lightning is close
And the thunder so loud it shakes the windows and
makes the girls cry.

And when it is gone, the air is clean and fresh
And the birds resume their songs
And the world goes on, and you ponder
What was and what will be.

APRIL



Afterglow in the Afternoon

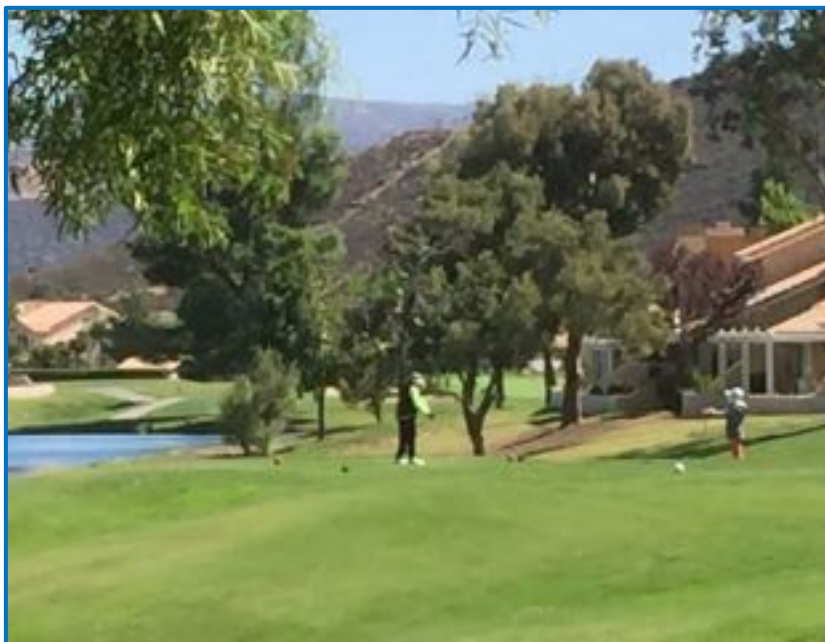
Outside the world moves on
We can hear the growl of freeway trucks, more than half a
mile away
Busy on their journeys to restock the shelves, their roars
blending into one
The trucks supply the bass line, the song birds the
sopranos
Chirping and tweeting their afternoon trills
The crows are percussion, with caw-caw-caws to mark
the time

Inside, the room is dim, wooden shutters closed to light,
The outside leaking in gives the room a golden glow
As we lie spent upon the bed, the musky smell of love
about us,

The wet spots upon the sheets, bearing witness to the act
I am limp, exhausted, damp, and drained
She is tight against my back, her arm across my chest

It's afterglow in the afternoon
A time of love and comfort
The dragon is drained, the dragon is slain
And there's peace between the covers.
The eyelids droop as sleep draws near
The slumber of fulfillment

Lovers and friends for many years,
Partners in pleasure and partners in pain
Partners in joy and partners in tears
Partners in sun and partners in rain
The passion stays real though the body grows weak
In an act of defiance, old age is at bay.



Living Someone Else's Life

You meet them more often than you think,
Successful people in the eyes of the world,
Respected members of society
And of the industry in which they prevail.
But they carry within them an aura of sadness
Of wishing for more
Of needing to break free
To step off the path and amend their lives.

When you see them in the proper circumstance,
In conversations lubricated by alcohol and loneliness,
Late at night, away from job and family,
Or during times of upheaval and stress,

They confess and embrace their unhappiness
Of who they are and what they do
When all they really wanted was to play the piano
Or paint pictures of the world as they see it.

But those times pass,
And the nose returns
To the grindstone of responsibility.
Whether recommended by others
Or chosen by circumstance,
Mortgages to be paid
Cars to be bought and repaired,
Children to feed and educate.

And the treadmill goes on
Until finally they get to step off
To retire with others of their ilk
And gather on golf courses,
Or around the pool,
And talk about who they used to be
And what they used to do,
While waiting for death to call.



Heroes and Bums

Great men are attacked
By those of little and narrow minds
And rallied behind by those
Who adore them without question.

The men who push the world forward
With new technology and ideas,
Those men who move mountains
Are not always the nicest folks
To work with
Or to be around.

Show me a hero,
Said Pappy Boyington
As he climbed into his flying Corsair
With inverted gull wings,
And I'll show you a bum.

Because heroes and bums
Are two sides of the same coin.
Like heads and tails,
The yin and the yang
Of heroes and bums.

Men who follow their own counsel
With clear focus
On where they are going
And what it is that they want.

Not to be deterred
By those of weaker intent
Who seek to endlessly ponder
The consequences of taking
Those first brave steps
Into an unknown future.

But there's a price to be paid
For such vision and hubris.
For things do not always work out
Exactly as planned,
And the critics are there always
To insult and denounce
The brave, imperfect souls
Who bully and push their way to the top.



Don't Mess With Texas

Drive across the state of Texas,
Across the open plains, and the rolling hills,
Through the wetlands and the pine forests,
Along the beaches and in the cities
From El Paso to the Sabine River,
From Brownsville to Amarillo and beyond.

Turn up the music, and take your time
And at the end of the journey,
There are two things you know
Texas is a big state, miles and miles of open space.
And you better not mess with it – not any little piece of it,
Not now, and not ever.

If you're from Texas you already know that,
If you're passing through, you find out soon enough.
We found out, years ago, on a dark and rainy night,
Speeding barefoot down the highway, westbound toward
home,
When a ranger pulls us over for driving too fast,
I step out of the car, bare feet onto wet asphalt.

Reach back to the front floor for my shoes,
And find myself on the wrong end of the ranger's big gun
Uh, I say, Uh...
I was just getting my shoes.
This is Texas, he says.
Meaning not some pussy state like California or Oregon.

Everybody has a gun under their seat.
I have a choice. Pay the fine on the spot
Or go to jail.
He follows us to a late-night store
So I can get some cash
To put in an envelope along with my citation.

He marks the seal, so it can't be opened
And stands there as I drop it in the mailbox.
The message is clear. Don't mess with Texas.
Not then, not now, not ever.
Mess around with Texas,
And Texas is going to mess around with you.

AUGUST



BOY DOGS AND BOY BOYS

Male dogs, big and little
Human males, both young and old
More in common than meets the eye,
Eager to fight, but ready to flee
A simple need to dominate,
And a willingness to forgive

They never outgrow
Their need to play,
To strut and growl
To splash in puddles,
And roll in the dirt

Secure in their penis-centered selves,
Pissing on trees and leaving their scents,
Ready to fight over objects of desire
With both sense of entitlement
And eagerness to please

A simple need to dominate,
And a willingness to forgive
To get over grudges
And get on with life

Females are needed
To calm them and feed them
To cuddle and need them
And to take off the chill.

In the moonless night where evil lurks,
Dogs and humans snuggle close
Men and women and dogs of all sexes
Sharing the warmth and common bond
Of one species for the other.

SEPTEMBER



We're All Whores

You don't have to wear mesh stockings or stiletto heels
To be a whore.

You don't have to stand on the corner
Or flag down horny motorists
Or be on call for sexual favors
As an "escort" for the night.

You can sell houses or work in an office
Be a famous actor or a street-corner mime
Be a cop on a beat or a crook on the street
A preacher, a gambler, a doctor or nurse
A singer of blues or a writer of news
A butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker.

We all know when to compromise
To look the other way, to do the odd favor
To take advantage of circumstance
To make excuses as we choose to take advantage
Of the situation or of our fellow human beings
To lie to ourselves, and pretend we are pure.

We're all selling something, hustling up a deal
Claiming undue credit for our good luck
Of where we were born,
And the world in which we grew up
Standing on the moral high ground
Looking down on the people below.

From our self-proclaimed prominent peaks
Above the sweat and reality of how the world works
We're all for sale, whether the price is high or low
Whether in politics, finance, or driving a truck
What we sell, what we charge, and how we survive
So often born of simple desperation and limited choice.

So here's to the whore, who is clear whom she is
Providing a service for those who're in need
And what she is selling is comfort and warmth
With no ties or binds, no love-yous or miss-yous
No lies of commitment
Just a wham and a bam, and a come again please.

OCTOBER



Old and Free

There are many ways to look at old age
Getting physically weaker,
But mentally stronger,
With each day that passes.
You grow immune to consequence,
Free to do as you please.

And the older you get
The freer you become.
Sure there's the aches and pains,
But you get used to those.
The discomfort is a small price to pay
For the freedom that goes with it.

You wish to kill your enemy?
You're the last one they'll suspect,
But even if they do,
They will have to prove it.
Not that you want to kill anybody,
But you'll be less concerned if you do.

Less concerned with speaking your mind.
Less concerned with what people may think.
Free to enjoy life
Without making a living.
More immune to the everyday pain
That is part of growing old.

With each visit to the doctor, your mortality is in doubt -
Cancer or kidney failure, heart attack or stroke,
Time marches on
And sooner than later,
It will march on without you.
So this is the time.

If there's something you need to do,
Some wrong you need to right,
Some act you need to take
That is frowned upon
In polite and civilized society.
This is the time to strike.

NOVEMBER



When I Die

Don't pump me full of preservatives so I will remain as pickled
as a herring

Don't stick me in a box and invite the neighbors over for one
last look,

Or bury me deep beneath neatly mowed grass,
With a brass plaque announcing my name to all who pass by.

Don't burn me in a furnace and put my ashes on the mantle
In a little commemorative urn,

That somebody has to do something with,
Each time they move, or when they clean the house.

No. Put my body in the back of an old pickup truck
And drive through the desert until you are hopelessly lost,
Then take out the shovel and dig a shallow grave,
Not too deep, and not too big, just wide and long enough
To wedge in my dead body
Then cover it up with a sprinkling of sand and gravel.

Leave no marker, no wooden cross or stack of rocks
Just get the hell out of there and find your way back to the road
And if somebody asks you, just say you left the son-of-a-bitch
Out in the middle of nowhere, just like he wanted.

And when the coyote digs up my bones and takes them back to
her den

To feed her hungry pups, that's OK, I don't need them
anymore.

And when the buzzards peck out my eyes and pull the rotting
flesh off my carcass,

And when the maggots move in, and the worms hold a party
It will all be good. Because maggots and worms have to live
too.

Because none of it is me. It was just a thing I used for a while
To walk and talk and eat and love. To feel the warm sun on a
cool autumn day,

To taste the steak, to smell the roses, to hear the birds call,
one to the other.

But when I'm dead, it is nothing, just a hulk left over, like a
dried up sunflower,

Brown and withered as the winter comes to call.

Keep me in your hearts, remember what I was.

Love me if you will, but hate me if you must.

It doesn't matter, because I will be gone.

To wherever that is, to whatever that means.

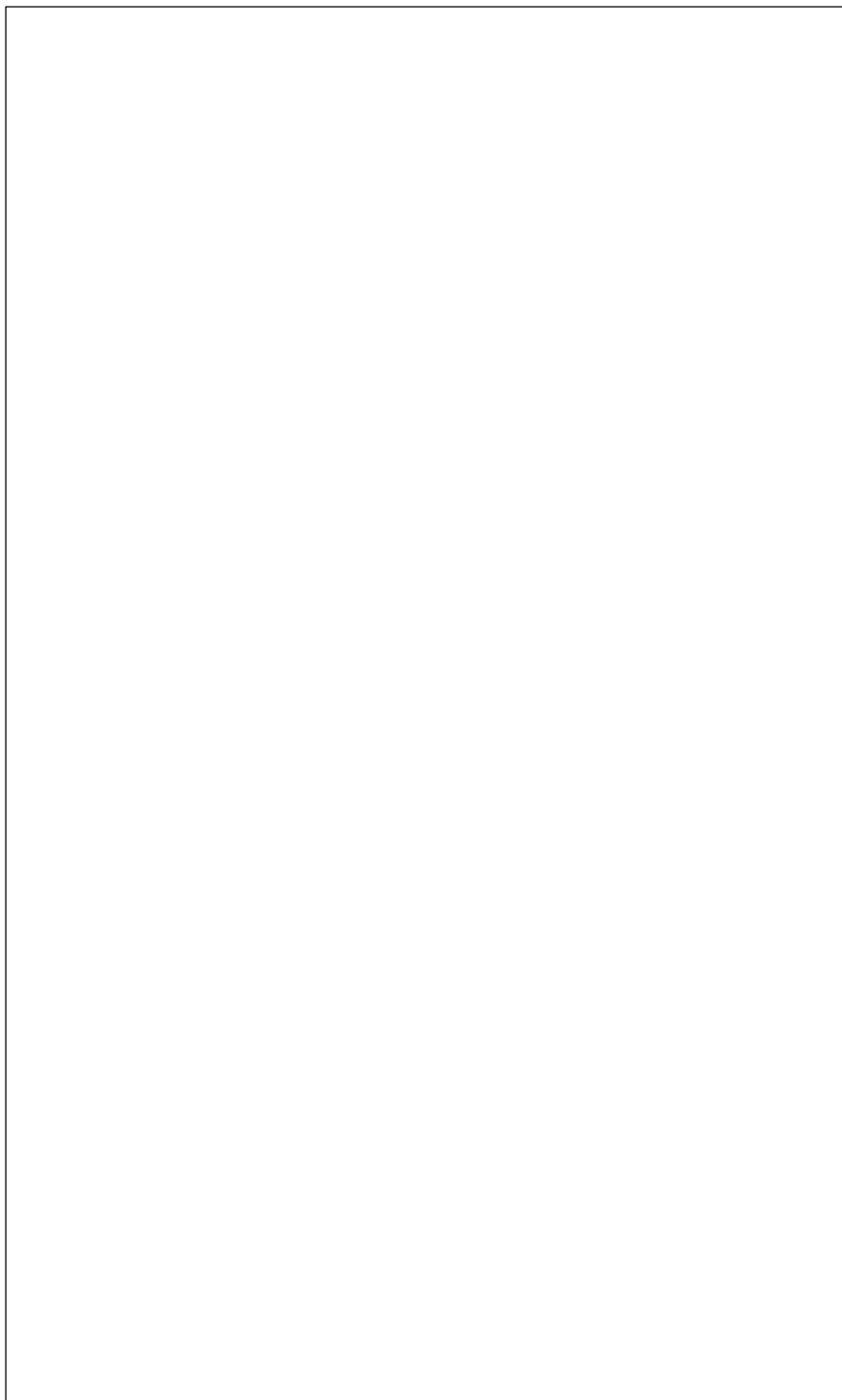
But when the coyote howls on a moonlit night,

When the bee lands on the desert bloom

When the wind blows through the lonely sage

What I was will sing along.

DECEMBER





George Lee Cunningham and his wife, Carmela, reside in Banning, California with their dog, Henry. George is an old grouch with a restless spirit. Carmela is a loving wife, who smooths out George's rough edges. Henry is the one who holds it all together.

When George and Carmela fight, Henry looks back and forth from one to the other, then throws up on the floor.

George is stubborn and moody. Carmela is passionate and impulsive. If sometime in the future Carmela kills George, he wants everybody to know that he probably drove her to it.

She really had no choice.



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