



# **Inheritance**

**Poems by Louise Robertson  
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## Inheritance

My father never slept. He'd  
suck in the cigarette like  
it was air itself, hunch over  
the coffee, but never look it  
in the eye. I tried  
these things as a girl,  
sipping the cigarette's  
ash breath, swirling the coffee  
like a fortune teller.  
But it was just the not sleeping  
that stuck. I suck it in,  
hunch over it, never look it  
in the eye. Sometimes I curl  
up on the couch and let  
not sleeping hold me,  
the way a father might,  
around a young daughter  
who wants for nothing.

## A Week

A week of work:  
slotting oneself into the cube,  
carpet for walls – half-walls – the wishing  
that happens all day long.  
And then you learn to treat it like  
a game, say, that chart needs a graph.  
Or you fantasize the whole time  
about winging your way west on highways,  
like a bird following the telephone wires until  
they end at a shore, travel north and head back.  
Or you mourn the lost time, losing more time  
to grief. I can't say that I do anything  
useful, the way wood chopped,  
stone built, or fabric made is useful,  
but then all the world is in the computer  
now and I shall not say it doesn't exist.  
Except you know,  
when I look up, see dishes  
or books or tables  
I think, yeah, it doesn't.

## On Getting Older

I hate to break it to you  
but life still feels pretty  
much the same as you get older.  
The leaves still scratch the street  
with their little claws, the sky –  
still a belly  
-- or a bowl --  
depending on how you look at it.

It's just that at a certain point you start  
to think you might have seen enough  
of the hanks of wire in the sky –  
or you have had lots of food and its  
time to sleep. Or maybe somehow  
everyone is living out the same  
stories over and over –  
except there's a little more smog,  
fewer grizzly bears and a whole  
lot more electrons winging  
around.

Sometimes, I think I feel young,  
but I'd like to feel even younger  
by going out where  
I don't have to look at all this crap anymore.

There I said it: my death wish.  
Sometimes I don't want to have to look at all this crap anymore.

## Rip Tide

You do not ask a drowning man  
what went wrong or how to prevent it.  
He did in fact go  
in the water at the rip tide zone, did in fact  
not know how to watch for the way  
the sea changes direction  
sliding against itself like loose teeth.  
Even if you went back in time  
to go to the baby he was  
and whisper in that baby's ear  
a warning – about the water and its muscle -- he will  
only wonder about that soft air on his cheek  
and flick it away like a bug.

## Race

I know when I'm acting  
like a white person. He gets  
all quiet and waits  
for it to pass, like a shampoo  
commercial, with the inevitable  
blond. There I am  
comparing what "blond"  
means to us white folks  
and what "light skinned" means  
to black folks. He gets so  
quiet.

## Long Haired Hippie Freak

So now you know,  
how liberal I am.  
I'll tell you why,  
because I remember the moments  
where the egalitarian  
utopia of my inner mind  
was disturbed by reality.  
I can still smell the yellow  
grass on the school playground,  
the sugar crisp between teeth.  
Or I can't forget rubbing my rounded  
sneakered toe against the oil-bruised  
asphalt at the gas station in upstate New York.  
Those realizations, a rind,  
an ether, pure adhesive.  
I am still mad.

## **Toast**

Anyone who makes my father look good,  
she said, is something special.

## Wine Party

It always seems,  
after the soft cheeses  
with pliant rinds, after  
all day staining your mouth purple  
with wine, after hot, stirring moments  
quoting passages of James Joyce --  
especially the parts you really hated the most --  
after seeded crackers and trying to push  
away tall men others fell for, after  
all this, you go out into  
the blowing, empty streets,  
a 10 speed bike ticking along with you,  
dark sky higher than you remember, crusts  
of leaves, sticks and broken  
cups alternately scrubbing the ground  
and littering it, then  
-- and always then --  
the smell of dust  
and rain makes the grand ideas  
of the night line up  
like old shoes,  
scuffed, ratty, tried on.

## Love Poem #572

We wait so long sometimes for what we  
want: extra time, a few bucks.  
I considered this question the other  
day, as I held up the idea of you,  
like an object. (I am picturing  
the inevitable 5-pound glass weight,  
tear-drop shaped, 5,000 facets.)  
I turned it around,  
looking to see if I was waiting  
for something – a day off,  
new shoes so I could jack up  
my feet with some leather and  
cracked floors. And I decided  
that no, the idea of you  
is not waiting for anything.  
Everyday, it feels like it's already here  
with its morning toast, hot blankets,  
and the car rolling into a dark garage at night.  
It smells of broken leaves, motor oil,  
sunshine.

## **Kisses**

I would much rather have your mouth  
on my body. I would much rather  
have my lips closed around my soul  
while I enjoy the taste of my salt  
on your tongue. I would much rather  
keep some clothes on. I would much  
rather not even mention that thing  
and instead tell you all the other  
secrets like rice on the floor.  
Let me keep talking  
until my mouth is open,  
words all over you so many of my kisses  
gone out of me and onto you  
I never noticed the moments  
when we were on top of each other  
and I had your spit for flavor  
and you mine.

## For An Ex

You must think you are  
a wind that blew my hair forward,  
as if it didn't grow that way to begin with.  
You must think there were no  
books flapping their pages against my face.  
You must think you're like every boy I ever smiled at,  
except with you I must have meant it.  
You must think I am a closed house,  
door broken, concrete basement.  
I do live in a house. And he and I add on  
rooms all the time, use bodies  
like the good possessions they are,  
rub heads and hands and skin  
for pleasure and never count  
it a cost. I have a piece of paper  
that I bought, it says none of this  
is any of your business. It's a curse on you,  
to never know what I know--  
worth every cent and year I spent on it.



Louise Robertson has publication credits including small press journals, anthologies, a law school newspaper, and arts festival programs. She has been a member of slam teams including many Rustbelt Poetry Slam teams (one of which won this annual regional event), one of the Writers' Block NPS teams (2013) and represented on the regional and national stage. Robertson's awards include, but are not limited to, first place at the 2009 and 2007 Columbus Arts Festival, 2nd in the 2006 William Redding contest, and the 1992 Mary Roberts Rinehart award.

A passionate advocate for the presence of live poetry, she has organized and helped organize poetry events for the past years in the following capacities and others not mentioned here: Oct 2011 - Present - host and organizer of the Writers' Block show First Draft, a poetry dedicated to new poetry; 2011 - Host City Chair for the Women of the World Poetry Slam (WOWps); 2010 & 2011- Marketing Director for the Women of the World Poetry Slam; 2005-Present - Marketing and web presence for the Columbus-based poetry night, Writers' Block Poetry.

Robertson holds a BA from Oberlin College and an MFA from George Mason University.