

Syrup Sandwich

a life of measured progression

Devlon E. Waddell

With an introduction by
Marc A. Evans

Dedicated to:
Those who taught, inspired, challenged &
believed in me before I had the capacity to
believe in myself.

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Contents

Introduction (Marc A. Evans)	1
Syrup Sandwich	7
Broken Glass	9
Mentor	13
Parking Lot	17
Helen	21
Paystub	33
A Commuter's Blues	35
Road Rage	39
Coming Home	43
Luxury of Time	45
Silhouette of a Man	51
Sunday Mornin' Joy	53
Career Counselor	63
A Father's Lament	71
Afterword	

Syrup Sandwich

I would always toast my bread. My older brother, on the other hand, would lay a slice on the counter, tip the gold lion forty degrees and allow the thick sweet amber liquid to creep over the lip of the bottle and fall gracefully to its destination; leaving a beautiful thin ribbon of goodness clinging to the burgundy label waiting to be wiped away with a napkin. The process was wonderful to witness; almost orgasmic when participating. There was, however, a point at which my brother would always lose me. To see the essence of all that is good being absorbed by the bread was disgusting. Like a sponge left drying at the chalkboard during summer vacation, the bread would draw the nectar into every single available crack, pore, and crevice. He and I never shared the same respect for

the syrup. The cold way he would flop the top layer of bread onto the bottom, and squeeze them together was just plain insensitive.

Reverence would be the only way to describe our relationship; the syrup and mine. Its movement was gracefully purposeful. How it captured the light, held it for a second and then reflected it back into the world. The seductive way the saccharine flavor resonated on the palate. When I ate a syrup sandwich it was an event. I would toast two slices of bread to a medium brown, white bread and white bread only. The degree to which the bread was toasted was very important. If the bread was not brown enough it retained an absorbing quality, and if the bread was too dark, it would be too rigid and crunchy. Neither was acceptable. It had to be toasted perfectly. When the bread was toasted to perfection I would lay one slice next to the other on a dinner plate ensuring that there was no contact between the two. Next, I would retrieve the King from the cupboard; taking the time to wipe the bottle with a damp dishcloth. The wiping of the bottle was key. I could not have any

interruption of the natural flow of the liquid. The pouring of the syrup onto the toast required concentration. When done properly the syrup would spill out of the bottle and dance onto the toast with a certain elegance. I had to be measured in my application of the glorious condiment, so that I could cover the tops completely and still have enough time to lean forward to witness the syrup meeting the crust and eventually trickle onto the plate to bathe the red and green floral pattern in its deep golden tone. Finally I would get a knife and fork of the same design from the drawer, sit at the kitchen table, alone and in silence, and consume the delicacy. Usually, after a tall tumbler of cold water, from the faucet, I would repeat the process.

Road Rage

The heat was permeating. When I opened my car door I was enveloped by a cloud of air that was no less than twenty degrees hotter than that which had already scorched my skin as I walked across the parking lot. Mid July in Baltimore is as ugly as it gets as far as the weather is concerned, but I was as broke as a whore at a minister's conference, so I decided to roll down my windows and allow Mother Nature to condition the air in my car. Trying my best to look cool as the sweat poured from my forehead and pooled in my beard I turned up the radio, pulled out of the parking lot and headed for the parkway.

Having the opportunity to get off of work at five in the evening was a mixed blessing. Anytime I could leave the grind before my regularly scheduled time absolutely thrilled me, but with nothing but rush hour traffic

waiting out there for me I needed a certain level of preparation to get me to the point at which I could leave the building without having the thought of the traffic alone raise my blood pressure to unhealthy levels. Like most drivers I was just arrogant enough to believe that if everyone else was not driving at the exact speed as me they were somehow wrong. The drive home was my time of meditation. My music and the hum of rubber meeting road should have been my only stimulus. Instead the chaos of cars swerving, horns blowing and engines growling left me more tense than the demands of my job. After all of the swerving, blowing and growling I would finally make it into the city where I would be surrounded by a swarm of pretentious middle-aged corporate types yearning for the moment that they reached the city limits so that they could relax in the comfort that they had yet again braved the threat of all of the vagrants and muggers that inhabit that cesspool called Baltimore City. My route would take me from the northbound parkway to Russell Street; from Russell Street onto eastbound Baltimore Street; from Baltimore Street onto northbound Charles Street; all in an effort to

arrive in the northeastern most area of the city as quickly as possible. Usually by the time I hit Charles I had made peace with the fact that I was the only driver on the road capable of navigating the streets without any serious threat to the lives of pedestrians or other drivers. It is also at that time that I was normally sinking back into my seat and lighting a cigarette as I estimate how late I would be getting home. On that day as I listened to Kweli ask “what ya gonna do when we come through...” a midnight blue Cherokee Laredo cut me off to pull into an available parking space just ahead of me on my right.

The blood began to pound punishingly through my veins as I caught the drivers gaze. “This nigga is trying to kill somebody.”

“What?!” was his response as he returned the mug.

“You’re a jackass that’s what. You might wanna try to watch where you’re goin’!”

He responded with the Queen Mother of all cuss words, and the stream of expletives that rolled from my tongue would rival any sailor, prisoner or woman scorned.

Traffic was stop and go so I was only two car lengths ahead of him. He was still within earshot as I continued to curse him, his mother and any other sundry family member that came to mind. It had been a long time since the Negro in me had shown himself in such a fashion.

I had only moved up two more car lengths as I began to calm myself. I checked my rearview mirror to take note of where he was headed for future reference. I was a little disturbed by what I saw. The bastard was walking through traffic toward my car. I looked again to verify what I thought I had just seen, and I learned quickly that my eyes had not deceived me. As he moved toward my vehicle I began sizing him up. This light skinned brother with the blue t-shirt clearly had me by a couple of inches in height and a few hundred trips to the gym. I was not, however, too concerned because this brother also had

some sort of chemical process in his hair which raised his chump quotient ninety-eight percent. I was still at the traffic signal on the same block where the argument had started so I unbuckled my seatbelt in an effort to prepare myself for the impending confrontation. As he moved closer to the car I heard him ask if we were alright.

“What?!” I said with as much disgust in my voice as I could muster. He had reached my car at that point and leaned toward my passenger side window.

“I said are we alright? You know, we don’t need to be out here arguing with each other like this. We need to save that shit for them other people” he remarked as he extended his right hand through my car window. I was surprised by the gesture. The sincerity with which he spoke left me with a renewed sense of humanity. What he offered with a handshake was more than just the acknowledgement of a mutual understanding of ideas. He offered a new beginning; the opportunity for two individuals to transcend the expectancy of who we were.

Coming Home

I saw the orange glow of the setting sun meet the rooftops,

and I felt the calm of the skyline, at dusk, beckon me.

The city that I come home to is not the same city that you fear.

The city that I know is the community that raised me, the culture that made me, and the people that gave me opportunity, despite the egocentricity of our time.

So, I'm not impressed by your two car garage, and your single family home,

Because the asphalt jungle is my urban oasis; where the concrete playground was my field of dreams,

where the one way street hosted my superbowl, and
where I shot my hoop dreams through a hollowed milk
crate.

Wonderfully worn, and beautifully burdened is how I see
my city as I come and go, and come again; and
again I'll come home.