

dave malone

O

love poems from the ozarks

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d a v e m a l o n e

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for jenni

Contents

From the Poet	11
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I. Spring

We Blossom the World.....	16
Hips.....	17
Spring Dress.....	18
The Knobby Throat of Spring.....	19
Romantic Theater.....	20
Tango.....	21
Thunderboomer.....	22
Lupercalia.....	23
Hawksbill Crag.....	24
Ode to the Woman Fish on Norfolk Lake.....	26
Enlightenment.....	27
Landscape.....	28

II. Summer

Photograph.....	31
Longitude.....	32
Silk.....	33
You Can Deny.....	34
Fifth Innings.....	35
Beyond Expectations.....	36
Hurt.....	37
Conundrum of a Complex Man.....	38

Falafel King	39
New Life	40
Ramp.....	41
What We Are	42
August.....	43

III. Autumn

Unmarked.....	47
Separation	48
Relationship.....	49
Aquaphobia.....	50
Loving.....	51
Portrait of Your Legs.....	52
Civil War	53
The Deep.....	54

IV. Winter

Language.....	57
Forget It.....	58
Sham.....	60
Admission Price for Doubting Who Can Love a Poet.....	61
Lovers Disappear inside Devil's Backbone	62
Mirror	63
Ghosts	64
Local Gods.....	65
The Boatman.....	66
Bruising Beauty	67

Propulsion.....	68
Small Strangeness	69
New Moon	70
Reunion	71
Tiny Machine.....	72
Acknowledgements	74

From the Poet

Teen Magazine. That glossy mag from the late 80s and early 90s. With covers and spreads of girl crush stars like Scott Baio and Leif Garret.

But there was also, *blue of the heaps of beads*.

The Diane Wakoski poem, “Blue Monday,” once perched near the back of the magazine, perhaps between a shampoo ad and the latest poofy hairstyle.

In high school, my sister and I, only eighteen months apart in age, were good friends. I can’t recall if my literature-inclined sister (teen mags notwithstanding) told me to read the poem, or if I thumbed the glossy pages of the edition seeking pics of bikini-clad girls, or if the roots of my lifelong passion to understand the intelligence, feelings, and power of women took over—but nonetheless. *Blue of the heaps of beads* grew in my head.

This was not an ordinary love poem.

There was a man in a blue suit. There was a fedora. Blood pooled on the street.

My sophomore year of college, I decided not to date. Instead, I wanted to understand women. I figured a purity and openness might occur without the dating and sexual element (as much as is possible with nineteen-year-olds). And I learned how to listen, and though the mysterious wants and desires of women still seemed distant, I felt I now knew something of compassion and of the heart.

By my junior year, my poetry-reading list grew to include powerful, memorable influences such as Fred Chappell’s prose poem “Midquest,” which featured the ebullience of his lover bathing.

The amazing, Midwestern, earthy, dark, mysterious poems of Jack Driscoll. I gulped Anne Sexton's love poems and Marge Piercy's and Sylvia Plath's, and of course, Diane Wakoski's.

I knew it necessary for a good writer to have life experiences, so at the age of twenty-two, I cashed my grandmother's college graduation gift check and drove my ugly but reliable Toyota Tercel across the south and east from Biloxi to Manhattan. At twenty-three, I moved in with two girls in Albuquerque. At twenty-six, armed with a graduate degree in English, I unsuccessfully tried to pull a Raymond Carver and worked as a janitor. At twenty-seven, I became a newspaper editor. I have worked in medical billing, at a semi-trailer factory, at a city parks and rec, and in academia. During those renegade times, I loved a couple of women, and I believe they loved me.

Blue of the heaps of beads.

When I was thirty, I prepared a full-length collection of my love poems which embody a passionate, romantic take on life set against both city and the Ozarks. I was brave enough to mail Diane Wakoski my manuscript with a request for a back-cover blurb. On a summer day in 1998, she responded by letter, writing magic about my volume: "Could it be that sex and love actually belong together? How nice to still embrace that rather literary idea." And I wept in the post office.

Since that time, I've published four more books of poetry. The landscape is similar. It is Ozark. It is woman in all her magnificence. It is passion and pain.

Blue of the heaps of beads.

I always come back to the love poem, and I always come back to the Ozarks.

Through interesting twists of fate that included a town barber,

a drifter, and a snowstorm, I found Jenni here in southern Missouri. In ninth century Japan, it was customary for lovers via courier to exchange poems celebrating their romance. Many of the poems in this volume were ones I originally sent to Jenni. Often, I was the courier, delivering them in the shadowy, Ozark night. Other times, my biking messenger, James, (who looked a lot like this poet) brought them to her workplace. Sometimes, a poem rested on our bedside table, ready for us to read together at night.

Given the rich natural world where she and I live, given our roots, it was of course natural that southern Missouri, our hills and hollers, the lake, and our little burg between a pair of Ozark knobs would provide the backdrop for my love poems to her, for this work.

I wanted to capture passion but not shy away from the flawed nature of love. To love the shy backs of someone's knees, his or her unfairness—these encompass what we don't always discuss about our lovers. But I want to say what cannot be said. These revelations are my *blue of the heaps of beads*.

Dave Malone

Somewhere in the Ozarks

January 2015

I. Spring

We Blossom the World

What we can't say to each other blossoms the world.
Charges from our yard, the forsythia bushing out gold.

Runs into Ozark countryside as scent,
honeysuckle perfume intent on coupling.

The wetness of dew settling on beat-up barns,
the torn-up sky greening into tornado and your morning
meanness.

The back forty sinkhole where I drop all my sins against you.
The poke greens and radishes daring to take out carrots you
swore by.

The harps of daylight pouring through stained-glass of all the
religious.
Church bells ringing out crisp as hearts.

Hips

Early morning, the earth is nothing.

The sprawling mocha wood sleeps,
the blond fescue still.

Then, the golden prairie flames,
the timber plain consumed.

Spring Dress

I love the unknown in you,
the unfair, the shy backs of your knees,
the colony of dimples
that sleep in moon-shaped huts

leaning

toward your mouth.

The Knobby Throat of Spring

Clouds shake with gray,
dancing a dirge of winter.
The house booms cold
like the solitary space
within a canon's bore.
A burst of sunlight chases
away grizzly April.
Beside the pond, a lark.
With her gullet charged,
a fillet of steel.

Romantic Theater

Spring days, the bruising redbuds
eclipse our town square of brick and awning.

Spring nights, the thicket of crickets
drowns our town in sugary chorus.

Yet, winged music nor purple bloom
usurps your theater—bedroom lights sizzle

beside a hushed set of onlooking eyes.

Tango

All the shadow selves
you and I clutch in the dark,
dance in the open doorway of loving—
bruises and safe words
inside the smack of tango.

Thunderboomer

April wind batters Ozark afternoon.
Redbuds bleed purple on the lawn.
Gray gnaws all the way down
to toe-stumbling roots.
Lightning forces squirrels into flight.
The house cries dark with hope
as you rise from the breakfast wasteland
we savored like hipbones.
I follow you into the bedroom
where you curl against me,
the gale smacking then cupping
the front door into giving up.
You are melty as butter.
Clouds blacken outside
like toast.

Lupercalia

Let the youth
be blooded
and wild.
Let them flee
the hilltop cave
and wreck our town
with tattered goat skins
and ripped laughter.
Let the girls
be whip-struck
by nude boys
until legs part
like bleeding orchid petals.
Let the older hearts
abandon the work
of tilling the soil
in fading winter sun—
for they, too,
once flooded the streets
with blood.

Hawksbill Crag

By gravel road
we rise four miles
into Ozark bluff.
Our truck hugs
the slant
of timber line
thin
as a pencil streak.

At Hawksbill Crag,
we tramp
thousands of feet
above shaggy pine
and the thumb of Jehovah.

I clutch a walking stick,
while you slide to the edge
of the bluff face
and act as if you
plunge
to
your
death
until you
slip off

the boulder
back into
the buttonholes
of the pines.

Ode to the Woman Fish on Norfolk Lake

You dive
into the lake
where the GPS
charts a depth
of 82.3 feet,
but your arms
as fins
just dip
inside
the ruffled pillows
of waves
before I can
make my anguish
known to you.

I dread the deep
that is more
than bottom-feeding,
cigar-smoking,
whiskers-long-as-Pujols'-hitting-streaks
catfish—
but before
I can rope feeling
into language,
you rise from death,
a floating spear.

Enlightenment

Tantric gurus talk about getting lost in sex
as if God is a place to get to—
nevermind this moment.

Landscape

Your body rolls
as deep and dark
as any Wyeth landscape—
and better.

The brown hills of Maine
toast
against limbs,
inlets of toes.

[BROWSE ON AMAZON](#)

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