

DONNY HATHAWAY  
EXTENSION OF A MAN



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Atco

# Extensions of a Man (for Donny Hathaway)

Cory W. Lovell

Like a boy on a farm staring at a single prop flyer in the sky, "I want to be up there, I want to do those things."

I've already fucked up enough that was good, like any young fella would, in his reckless rake days.

I hauled my old life out to the curb, on a foggy night, air rich with salt, and hopped the surfliner to sunset, click clacking through nowhere as the good Lord pelted the lounge car with buckshot, lightning frightening wide eyed cattle, knowing I wasn't wrong, just grossly unprepared.

After eight years in California my first thought upon departing was The Beach Boys are full of shit.

My island nation is not a power in decline, reckless and inflammatory, but on a straight path towards its prime, collected and seeking.

Sometimes repeat spins of Maggot Brain and apple cider vinegar shots are the only way to get out of bed in the morning, cayenne pepper and lemon juice burning my throat as Eddie Hazel shrieks solos like his momma just died.

I haven't felt knife sharp on a Saturday night since I screwed the cap on and walked away, it leaves me looking for a joke to crack or a bottle rocket to spark, but if these never present themselves, look past the boredom, babe, please, and know I'm just trying to be a man you might understand.

Teeth chattering inside my own insecurities, panic attacks instigating the endless permutations of abandonment, somehow, someday, you might not want me anymore.

There are bad people out there and sometimes you think maybe you can trust them.

Any student of history will agree, for how far our society has progressed, the idea of an individualistic American life has actually become more strangling, myopic, and sad.

I feel old fashioned in my expectations of my fellow men, who keep themselves busy with selfies and copped attitudes, while never bothering to learn self-sufficiency, or, at least, to shut the fuck up every once in a while.

Subtlety and stamina make up the metamorphic stone, hard pressed by circumstance and strife into a smooth, sparkling strata of survival called swagger.

Understanding the anguish, if not the indulgence, in my father's repeated words; "I can't keep up, keep chasing after it, doing a job I can sign my name to, sacrificing for security while the rest of America is at the mall."

Wondering whether we'll weather the peaks and troughs of my paternal middle initial, the way we Wells tend to wither into old dogs, wild and worn.

That's my end game, to just be a man, in my minor American life, a little closer to the moon each night, a little more awake come morning.

Choosing to keep living, choosing to keep trying, choosing to keep making art, choosing to keep living here, choosing to keep waking up, choosing to keep feeding myself, choosing to keep trying to not be my father, choosing to keep trusting people.

It's a collection of constant little disciplines that accumulate to make up a man; a consistent effort to be good, to grow better at love, at patience, at commitment and recommitment to ideals and reformations.

The sun rises, I get up, I repeat, like instructions on the side of a sad shampoo bottle.

After ditching the sauce, after breaking down my patterns, after forgiving the grudges, after losing the weight, after writing the books, after reading the books, after isolating myself, after opening myself back up again, after doing the work.

I'll try and keep my nose clean.

I sing at the kitchen sink, behind the lawn mower, on hands and knees scrubbing hardwood floor and tile, each and every day, shirt off, hair scuffed, doing my own work, to make my scales squeaky clean in the eyes of a God, who if indeed does bear an image akin to me and mine, must love rock n roll as much as I do.

How many times do I lather, rinse, repeat in this endless cycle of unnecessary cleansing?

There is no vacation from growing up, though I've seen a good many people try, medicating the frustration of slow progress with sex and booze and irrelevancy, I even tried it myself and it felt like heart rot, the condition that can kill a sequoia, whose rings pile on year after year until they live 200 of our paltry human lives, as long as they keep trying.

Like a gutter punk Capra, realizing my era of cynical idealism has long since passed, retreating from the public eye to find a new method for my madness.

Don't hold on to this Werther's Original tin full of stickers, patches, and pins that have never found their proper place, it's finally time to piece this slapdash accumulation into an existence.

I understand what Alex meant when he said, "Nothing can hurt me", and drove off in his big black car, the solemn liberation of stoicism and remove when you give up on everything you have nothing to lose.

Psychospiritual Ascension is painful and confusing and complicated.

My greatest friend and most treacherous adversary is time, how much of it I have, what I do with it, what state it sees me in when I begin to share it with another.

They sat there, opposing one another, competing for the lunar light, hiding and spilling out over long stretched moments of massive distance, polarizing spirits hitting a little too close to home.

I'll get right with the Lord before I go, a viatic settlement of the soul, to ensure that some part of me becomes something else, if even just a memory or a mushroom or collection of musty, yellowed pages in the discount bin of Green Apple books.

My messiah's named James, a Jesus of cool, elements of Baldwin, Booker, Dean, and Stewart, smoking and preaching on a corner barstool.

I used to dwell on the past, rewrite it in my mind, tormenting myself with the red pen edits that stood in opposition to temporal physics, then the future became my source of strife, what will be, what must change, Petty's simple admission 'Most things I worry about never happen anyways,' and so I'm left with the constant effort of drawing back to Now, to all that Is, to who I Am.

The part of death I find myself preparing for most of all is the dissolution of the concept of time as we know it here on modern Earth, every millisecond accounted for and named, when I'm fairly certain the moment the inertia of my soul proceeds past this body, time, much like space, will become far less linear and structured.

Yet another way to perceive, the phases of the moon,  
the surging and receding tides, the fertility of her,  
the maturation of him,  
and still the knowing behind dark clouds.

I hope when all is finally writ, large and small, fine hand and chicken scrawl, that my life will end like a good old Gershwin song; glittering crescendos, a comforting coda, meandering, rich, and long.

Like a summer stock Ophelia finally given her big break, chewing through scenery and ad-libbed pearls.

I watched her glide into the saloon, carrying a vintage Louis Vuitton purse, wearing Friday night's dress on a Tuesday afternoon.

How am I to ignore a woman that rides her horse down the highway, all grown up on guns and bee stings, masking her emotions like a luchador behind a blue lace bra.

I know she's trying to shake me, trying to break me, but I'm gunning for her like a full throttle motorcycle, rolling a million miles past all her concepts of the homeboy who cried wolf.

She speaks and smokes, speech spills out like a warm, popping record, spreads waves of sound out into my tiny home.

I parked discretely around the corner from her house, on the opposite side of a vacant lot, her bedroom window visible but I was safe from view, stewed in a vicious, masochistic anticipation, desperately wanting to prove myself right so all my longing for her could transform into hate, waiting there for hours, slowly draining all my mental energy, my eyes becoming heavy and dry, on the verge of sleep when a dumpster cat jumped onto the back of my Ford, disrupting ever so slightly the weight distribution, and slinked along the length of the bed until she caught my eyes watching her in the driver's side mirror, realizing she'd been realized and quickly disappeared.

In my observation of contemporary gender dynamics, in the general sex obsessed attitude of American society, in each and every one of my personal relationships, the barrier I find, the fear I know I need to face, is the persistent and nauseating worry over fidelity, the idea that I can love with all my heart, try to understand with all my patience, be kind and devoted, and someone will still want to fuck other people.

My companion today is a mid-century short story collection, tuberculosis patients, newspapermen, busted down American dreamers and sore losers of love.

When we first started sleeping together she had a lot of nightmares. They'd wake me up in the middle of the night, her muffled, pained moaning, until they went away, or I just started sleeping through them.

Her companion today is an outstretched soul, testing the limits of her psychic extension while also calming the antennae that have so sensitively begun to sprout.

My nose buried in a book, hers buried in a pillow.

A door is left open and a breeze brings with it a nightmare through the screen.

She had peaceful, restful sleep now, pawned her nightmares off on me, transmitted her horrific visions into my consciousness and savored the respite, sprawled across the bed, snored loudly as I shivered, a sheen of sweat about me, my rapid moving eyes a cinema of catastrophe; Nazis hunted tuberculosis gypsy children, poachers tortured young orcas and orphaned baby gorillas, loved ones became Lucifer, betrayal after betrayal.

She reassured me, "Don't worry. You'll see me again tomorrow night."

The clouds were lovers, took one another's body through the projection of the moon; he above her, plunged into her, licked at her, her wrapped thighs up around the torso he so carefully controlled, pushed in waves of the moon.

I can't shake this inherent lust, like a cactus thorn in my heel, a full, deep balled hunger, that keeps me peeking up from these waterlogged pages to sneak a glance at everything she has that I always want to be mine.

A dark cloud cruised in front of the crescent moon and pushed its light down towards a gentle mountain below it.

She points insistently to her small brown pussy, glistening with sweat, coconut oil, and the beginnings of arousal, saying "Put your mouth here. Now."

Nothing is something to do on a slow hot afternoon lying silently next to you.

She slaps her palms down flat on the cold stone, pushes her ass out to me, legs planted shoulder width apart, and gulps a bit of air as I slip in.

Like a micro budget telenovela, screaming repetitious passions from department store balconies and hotel stairwells.

She stifles a scream and slows her pace, giggles a bit and lightly slaps my face, a sure sign she's reached her desired destination.

I was scared of the whole thing now that I loved her, she knew that, would stop loving me, never want me, now I fucked her too hard but never made her cum, now I was immature and overweight, now I was a boy to be made a fool of, now I was much, much safer if I remained aloof, detached, superior, even in its utter falseness.

Fact: The chances of making it in your marriage long term are exponentially better if you survive the first five years, but I might actually be thinking about restaurants.

Hunched over a splinter wood cinder block bench, humbled by the impossible sweetness, heavy with the weight of the want along the harrowing journey from solitude to union.

I feel loved when I get to take care of her, tenderness and deliberate action, not rushed or slapdash, a validation I wish would manifest more so in moments of mutual contentment.

It won't be the happiest day of my life, nor will any one day, as long as it's a continued push of growth, clad in turquoise and linen, leather and oil, as long as the spirit is advancing toward release in the safety of our interlocked fingers.

I began to wonder if even the truest and highest of loves required this constant vigilance and insistent confidence in order to sustain and survive, the little stray threads of jealousy, fear, and doubt that dangle from even the finest tailored cloth of affection never pulled, lest it all unravel.

The self-sabotaging pin prick on your fingertip draws my blood as well, my stubborn prideful misstep trips you up too, we're in it together now, wed to the brushfire as much as the lightning strike.

I'm still consistently surprised that you want to spend time with me.

Butting my own day to day concept of normality against another's, hoping for complimentary set of values, seems such an enormous gamble, a game of emotional power ball, the winning numbers of which shift with each passing night as the jackpot grows and the algorithms ensure one less victor among the millions.

No matter how it started, no matter how it ends, your skin was my skin, my blood was your blood, and our secrets were welded into a seamless steel wall, by choice and will.

Say we start a family, knowing all we do from our own tumultuous upbringings about the effect parents have on their children, how the hell are we, despite our best efforts, to keep from mucking up the emotional patterns of an innocent young human?

Sometimes I just don't have it in me to swallow my pride and say I'm sorry.

For all the grief she has and will cause me, for all the times I'll hurt her feelings and disappoint, there is an understanding that this is a love that engenders a certain amount of pride at its undertaking, despite the fact that the very definition of the term, the root concept of the effort, was not fully understood upon it's commencement.

I'll take her tired feet in my hands, I'll take her salty sweat in my mouth, I'll take her frustrated tears upon my shoulder, I'll take it all and keep the kitchen sink clear of filthy dishes too.

Home is the quiet castle you built in my cacophonous mind.

Like a schizophrenic soul star on a seventies stage, showing up songwriters with dynamite delivery.

A wise person once said, "A white boy jams, a black man grooves, you tell me which sounds sweeter?"

My heroes never made it, not all the way, maybe not until they died, and even then worshipped selectively, by punks like me, who secretly strive to be underrated.

Homegrown huddled masses, raised on Mad Max and cocaine, public schools and Cobain, with a B.A. that already bounced out of business before the shake and take commenced.

It's so much easier to fail when I convince myself I never really tried, feigning fearlessness in place of insecurity, eye rolling punchlines in place of pop song poetics, saccharine sentiment and vitriolic vinegar out together for a drive.

My all-time favorites are my all-time favorites for a reason, they've got my back like a far away friend I've never met who still knows absolutely everything about me.

All the things I thought I'd do by the age of 33, instead are reevaluations of my basic capability, and a prayer that I might overcome the rest of these frailties.

It's a selfish, ragged vanity, an intentional disregard, as insecurity, classism, rebellion, and creativity blend together and find form as style.

That vagabond actor, so hard to pin down, always on the fringe, also struggled with how to be a man, artist, and lover, and chose narcissistic wives out of an insecurity that he wasn't good enough or smart enough to be with a "real" woman, so called, or at least that's what I was told by a former keeper of his flame.

This pen and paper might be a cop out, a sham, a close shave over the hairline fracture of truth.

I woke up one morning, my muscles ached from exertion, and realized that I'm never aware of my fantasy coming to fruition until well after the fact, being that reality exists on an unpredictable continuum while dreams have finite narrative structure.

It never fails, in the aftermath of any success my immediate reaction is frustration, a sense that I can do better and I didn't earn it enough.

If we try at all, we end up too close to ourselves to see the beauty through the bullshit or the misspellings in the eloquence, eventually we'll need an editor, someone to help us ditch the chaff and keep it simple, stupid.

I sit across from other men, other women, who have chosen fates such as mine, and find the same set of stark circumstances, a poet's never famous till their dead, and only then to the other's dying, but they live with the glint of excitement in their eye, sharing the same streak of simple amusement as me, we've struck fool's gold, shine it up and stockpile it among the many other stories told.

It's curated intimacy, refined over years so the loose, sloppy, half-baked bits don't slip out too much and reveal that I'm often angry, lazy, dumb, horny, judgmental, self-absorbed, stubborn, classist, melancholic, self-destructive, unattractive, gross, cruel, and needy.

Poems and marriages aren't much different after all, carefully chosen words, lips in rhythm, fractured facsimiles of actual emotion, and in the end each book better than the one before.

For a decade yellow legal pads full of mismatched silverware and patchwork pajamas, words like a middle school jazz band striving for Coltrane, and I've only gotten so far, so, yes, my love, I'll make an appointment with a therapist.

Like a quasar in its youth, densely packed and luminous.

