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## Confessions

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## Confessions

I once hung my son  
by the straps of his overalls  
on a utility hook  
nailed into the garage wall.  
He laughed at his father's mischief,  
and I dashed for the house  
to fetch the instamatic,  
so I might snap  
his scrapbook smile.  
Somewhere that print still records  
how the straps, as he struggled there,  
must have snugged the bib  
up under his chin.  
Still, I stepped back to focus  
on mirth and madness suspended  
above and below his grin  
where half his face flushed  
blood-rush crimson,  
the other half grayed, hushed blue.

I once shoplifted  
a tin of Vienna sausages.  
I crouched in the aisle  
as if to study the syllables  
of preservatives, tore off the lid,  
pulled out a weiner and sucked it  
down. I cruised the produce,  
pocketed a nectarine, popped  
seedless grapes into the hopper  
fast as my choppers would chew.  
A man in a bloody white apron  
intercepted me at the checkout  
after he'd sniffed out my trail  
of banana peel, cellophane  
candy wrappers, pistachio shells,  
and an exhausted bottle  
of chocolate moo.

I've cheated on exams,  
made love to fold-outs,  
and once I walked my paper route  
backwards in a snowstorm after dark,  
so I could steal down a particular alley

where through her gauze curtains  
a lady I've never forgotten  
lounged with her nightgown  
undone.

I have overcharged  
neighbors and friends. Once  
my tiniest daughter bounded in the back door  
beaming, her fist full of wadded  
five dollar bill. She'd unearthed it  
on the playground

and I swapped her  
that five-spot for a fifty cent piece,  
shiny enough to mingle with a few pennies  
until her plastic purse jingled with joy.  
Maybe too young to know the disguises  
of change, but she told her brother  
about a proud bird on one side of her coin,  
and on the other side, a man's face  
turned away.

And I've neglected birthdays  
of people who remember mine.  
First week of December last year  
an old friend mailed to me a shirt and tie.  
I wore the shirt twice, decided I didn't like it,  
wrapped it for my brother  
and laid it under the tree on Christmas eve.  
Without the tie.

So many excuses  
I have concocted to get by.  
I call in sick when I'm not.  
I've grabbed credit  
for happy accidents  
I had no hand in;  
pointed fingers to pin the innocent  
with crimes unmistakably mine.  
I've been so desperate not to look a fool.  
Once instead of facing the fast balls,  
I leaned back of home plate  
and swung to hit  
the catcher's arm.  
I took a free base.  
He wore a bruise I had to look at  
for weeks in the halls of school.

I've thrown sticks at stray dogs.  
I've ignored the cat  
scratching to come inside.  
Even in the rain.  
I've sat for idle hours  
in front of the tv, and not two feet away  
the philodendrons for lack of a glass of water  
have gasped  
and expired.  
More than once I have awakened  
to my love, crying  
her confessions beside me,  
and I have feigned the lifeless sleep  
of an ancient stone.

Lord, I have failed  
to learn from grievous error.  
I have repeated  
gossip. I have invented  
gossip. I have held hands  
in a circle of friends  
to rejoice over the misfortunes of strangers.  
I have pushed over tombstones.  
I have danced the devil's jig.  
Once, when I was barely old enough  
to walk on my own  
balanced on the ties and cinders  
behind an abandoned garage  
-- I counted sixteen windows --  
and needed only four handfuls of stones  
to break every one.

*Lowell Jaeger*