“Black & White Pictures” is a series of poems both inspired by and imagined about the sonograms taken of my daughter, Belle. While meditating on the possibilities of becoming a father, as well as dealing with the issues of alcohol and drug abuse, I examine the general fears, un-readiness, and panic that accompany that scenario. Ultimately, through the weave of the sequence, it becomes apparent that the coming of Belle offers hope to come out of the other side of my childish behaviors, and arrive at the real adulthood needed to be a responsible father. While asking for more time to better myself, so that I can be what I believe to be a better man and a good father, the avalanche of her coming forces the themes of the poems into a clearer, steadier light of welcome. Whether addressing my own personal issues, or the excitement and promise of a child coming into the world, “Black & White Pictures” pieces together a full montage of a relationship that has started from conception, and it, along with the child, gestate fully, until the birth of Belle.
**Table of Contents**

Black & White Picture #5  
Black & White Picture #7  
Black & White Picture #9  
Black & White Picture #11  
Black & White Picture #12  
Black & White Picture #13  
Black & White Picture #14  
Black & White Picture #16  
Black & White Picture #19  
Black & White Picture #22  
Black & White Picture #23  
Black & White Picture #29  
Black & White Picture #30  
Black & White Picture #36  
Black & White Picture #41  
Black & White Picture #44  
Black & White Picture #53  
Black & White Picture #54  
Black & White Picture #63  
Black & White Picture #73  
Black & White Picture #74  
Black & White Picture #75  
Black & White Picture #80  
Black & White Picture #82  
Black & White Picture #85  
Black & White Picture #87  
Black & White Picture #88  
Black & White Picture #94
For Belle

*With special thanks*
*for David Schloss*
Black & White Pictures
Beginning with a line by Charles Simic

To feel the pin that once pierced the hero’s chest, to be in love with that pin, to make it your pet, to stick yourself repeatedly, because nothing else in your life is ever allowed to feel pain again.

Ego & ego & ego, I am the egg outside her hips, the cracked one that has the lingering smell of my father. I am the hero before the super powers, I am the geek in the glasses that has no strength yet.

This is what we all say will change the where of our hearts & right now mine is jumping like a bonfire confused by the winter surrounding it.

Peapod, you will read these words someday, you will find my unpublished drawers, filled with my dervish leanings & then know my sprawl & how I beat myself into the sober man before you now, concerned now with nothing else but the deflation of old weights on my young shoulders.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #7

There is land everywhere
& when we bring the ocean
you will know it by the alien
nature of the wave.
Nothing & eternity, the depth
of iron & that simple,
crushing nature of time. The whale
is not amazing. The sea-
weed is not amazing. The dark-
ness is all-consuming
when the rush comes to you,
when the light fights to see
anything with a buoyancy,
going anything willing to be alive.
From the mud, this hanging tree, 
turned from the face of death 
& facing a new song-line 

has the purest of blood luck. 
This malleable shape 
has begun to stare at me 

slowly, like the landing 
of a helicopter in a Vietnam 
movie with an ominous descent 

& a threatened clearing. 
If I were forty years older, 
I'd be dead in Chan Tho, 

my arms still raised, 
welcoming the metal bird 
to the torrid earth. Baby, 

in this poem, I'd be willing 
to travel time & die for you. 
In this poem, I'm a father.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #11

With arms tucked, then raised above the crying side of the dance; however small

the movement, the ankle arches up, flexed to the agency of this gravity.

Frame, you are in my most favorite of frames & that twirl you gave us

the first time we saw you was whole & true & something I did not miss.

Show me your right palm, that part of your hand that drags down your leg.

show me your right palm, let me drag it across my scars & the things

I still haven’t learned. Let me show you the worn tendons of your desperate father.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #12

Become what you must,
become a saint if that suits you,
become a whore
if the hump becomes righteous
& when you come home,
after you come out
& when you come home
after you scream bloody things
we will readjust all hopes
& dream a dream of everything
possible & nothing outdone
& nothing not examined
or blindly probed.
Gone is the unadorned moment.
Gone is the weak thunder of winter
& gone is the need for more ice
to ease the ravine. With everything
lit, we can climb to the highest
point of Columbus & beat our chests
& scream to the compass below
that the circle of piss has drained
from the scene & headed into
the Ohio, headed west & south
to the gulf, where no one will see
me raise my arms in defiance
& the best joy I’ve come up with
so far. Gone is the unadorned moment,
where my heart is not relentless.
Tender field of human folds, energize your orneriness with a kick, just one spinner into Emily’s gut. Let me know that you hear the thud of place & growing anxiety & growing anticipation that your legs will move so fast we have to train for your arrival. Don’t turn back to where you come from, don’t hold on too tight to where you are now. Bang your head on the side of the wall where my lips are resting, rest no more in your position on the map of my whole world.
Water, do not know
your own level.
Flood everything
with your mix
of fluids & hair
& when the town
& the people
move from the banks,
raise your tide
in victory. Water,
take me with you.
If the sun is out
too long, we will
take our salt
& become something
else, something harder
that stands
above our damages.
With this whole thing being built
on falling apart, built on the fall
& the failing, we have come to the new-
ness that will be your crying
& your mysterious laughter.

Put your hands in my mouth
little one, keep me from swallowing
you whole. If it is true that a rose
begets other roses, what flower
will you be? What flower can you be?

What flower will you think you are?
Seed, growing flesh, you are a sunflower
& your mother’s face is the sun
& your mother’s face is the sun,
we shall follow through the sky.
To lie
& say

that you will not hurt
would be

to take the sexy
out of the bee

sting
& to ignore

the dying flower
that follows.

To lie
& say

that your heart
will not break,

that I
will not break

your heart
would be

to combine
our wishes

& deny
the nature

of all fathers
& all children.
Some of us, some of us
are frozen lakes, shores
filled with shithouse flies
& some of us are thick
boots that can take the ice
& feces like easy gravel.
There is an element
of danger with so much
water & so much cold
in our lungs,
but have no fear,
I've given up smoking
& I will have plenty
of capacity left to fill you
like a parade balloon
& watch you float away
& watch you rise above
where my feet have been.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #29

The posing shadows
have paused in my arms.
Developing slideshow,
release the stars!

Baby, go, or go ahead,
I've been dreaming
of peach trees in Ohio,
I've been dreaming of you

& your first reach for fruit.
Imagined or not, painted
& holding no juice,
but what we find to believe.
Singing back to space,
I would like to shape
the screams that come out

of his mouth, shape
the cries & the whys
of his vocal cords, shape

him new ears that hear
only the pretty. Belle,
there is a yard with dirt

waiting for you. There,
I am covered in dirt,
waiting for your desperate

searching to find me.
Follow the dark trail
like bread crumbs. Back.
Luck
& more luck,
the kisses laid
in my lap
& the light,
as far
as I could see
came to me
& came to me
more often.
To say
the dark is gone
is to have
the ego of the sun
& to have no
fear of losing
what has become
most dear.
Let's greet
the moon
with our pistols,
let's ready ourselves
to protect her
from the myths
of night.
Luck
& more luck
the kisses
are coming
& the lighting
of all day
will be a story
with real arsenal.
If I wrap this gift
with more
than my moving mouth,
more
than the look of one

man;

tracing his hand down
a belly, should I bother
with a bow?
I'm in a tan

sheet, lighting

new
positions of myself,
waiting
for the dream of you;

to be over. Why decorate

a stone? Why sing the song
if the traveling is not done?

Anxious, I wait for
your kicking legs.
Beginning with a line by Carl Phillips

The field is yours, Belle. None of us left in the wheat

can rush forward in this reflexive light of crafting. Look to your feet,

Belle. The stones are for tripping, the lengthy grain is to settle you & when you fall your scars will balance your beauty. The tether is ours, Belle. The knees & ankles & hamstrung pursuits are yours.
At the window
at the blue of evening
my little starfish

is asleep already,
probably pissing
in the sac, floating

& flipping,
working up a good
lather of self.

At the window
& blue of evening
I’m readying

all the towels
of my father,
preparing to clean

the thrum
of anticipation
soon to be voice.
What is left beyond my limbs?
In the quiet
does a chest
covered in sweat,
pitched forward,
can you anything other than a rash?

I think we will all find
my fingers surprised with how bright

the sins get when I lean on the window looking North

of our house.

I think we will find the cool moon calling us with an ample declaration & a steadying

to the violent kicks of a new soul.
I really liked it, when the doctor had to chase you, had to follow the thump of your foot & the rise of your heartbeat, like it was your first game & you had decided to play all by yourself & you had decided to show off what a little avocado can do in the right fluid. Em just smiled as the jelly was pushed all over her belly, off her belly & onto my shoes which were caught flexed in the game. I really liked that, the first tightening of my hamstrings as I listened to you bound from corner to corner of what is your world.
Past the muck
of our street
& our ravine, the water
has risen closer
to the stone house
peering over the edge,
peering into one of Ohio’s
small falls. There!
A hubcap floating,
knocking around the rocks,
stuck & then unstuck
& then stuck again.
There! The rat
on for the ride,
holding his crossed arms
so tightly against
his chest that you can
barely see his daughter,
crying though the waters.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #74

...will just pour
out of her, like light,
like a new world,
like the same world
with something
I'd be willing
to wash
the blood off of.
Between the kick
it's natural to be afraid
that the glittering
will turn to darkness,
that the imagined cure
may turn to catastrophe.

Look through the air
& belly. Look through
her hair & study
the strands, so casual
in their wave.

The moon goes down
there sometimes
to memorialize
the magic hours of the sun
& you go down there
to memorialize her.
Gone to the rug,
I've started to swim
with the blue whale
where my office
used to be.  This sea
is calm.  This sea
is gentle enough
to go choppy
in my innards.
Rocking chair,
you are no longer
a sign of madness.
From what root
does the so long;
lonesome beast
come from? As body
turns into bodies
& so forth, we all begin
to pass through
the opening breath
of the opening breath
of more bodies. First,
let's believe in the lungs.
Then, let's believe
in the gasping.
Isabelle, I believe
in your best bubbles.

Isabelle, this is not
the ocean, though it
might feel like it.
If the floors are planked does the curse of the carpenter carry over? Wood onto wood, my knots will thunder through the burial of developing self. Sapling, fear the saw that I might be holding.
Black & White Picture #87

Just think, Em said,
we'll know what the belly

is in three weeks. No,
I said, we won't know

that for some time.
Back or front hand,

it's time to be ready
to have our hearts broken

by a love
bigger than our own?
With one finger
the gurgle became pounding,
that little life exploding
through the rest of my hand
like the first time you shoot
a shotgun or feel your first
quiver & arch. Five fingers
to the wall, my palm
is a drum set. Five fingers
to the wall, I wonder
if the spacing of beats
is a language telling me
something other than hope.
Five fingers to the wall,
the strength of my forearms,
the muscles leading to my grip,
have gone deaf to the nightmare.
It will be your face
that quills me. It will be
that wrinkled little revolution
that drags my shadow
into the living proof.
The coffins have come,
the coffins will come again.
Let's start with your piss
on my face, when no diaper
will do. Let's start with the rain
of wrist to back while
we change ourselves for you.
With so many pages of bird & flight, so many half-winged dives; Wholeness, your kiss has rescued my meniscus, brought my legs back to me, gave my arms the ability to throw a right hook & a good left jab. In this, our kingdom of movement, the rapid change & duck has left my chest bare & targeted. How is it with such an athletic new stance, I feel so incredibly vulnerable?
With no mountain & no sea,  
this is still not a plain,  
still not cropped & gleamed  
like the balding lands  
of the West or the tipping  
parts of my hair. With little  
lean & little to collect  
our waters, I've kept my mouth  
open for twenty weeks. Belle,  
I know you will have  
an ultimate thirst.  
Belle, my throat is flooded  
with a young Spring. Belle,  
we can be birds, & I can cool  
your first screams with Ohio  
& her forgiving, confused skies.
Like on the 4th, like a lit snake,
your uncurl has begun to take
the scene. As your knees move
away from your head, remember
that when you hear the fireworks
there are still two months
of elbow configuration left.
Remember, the swoop
& boom of being born takes
loose hamstrings & a good shimmy.
Remember to put your hands
in the air during the big drop.
BEGINNING WITH A LINE BY ANNE Sexton

No, the wind’s not off the ocean.
That air, that bare breeze, full
of cicada shells is up from Oxford
& with their non-sounds the spin
rests in the memory of their sounds.
No color left, the reel plays out like
a tragedy. Once washed with loss,
the news, the story of a child
in a toilet still feels like a salted spray.
I know now that it was only my spit
dancing back at me in a rush of Ohio.
I know now that if the ocean calls
on this child, the fit will be filled
with epic. No, the wind’s not off.
Isabelle, twelve ounces
of our flesh, we know
now that it's you in there.
I saw your fist today,
Emily felt it. I watched
as you threw haymakers
& gulped fluid
& refused to show your ass
so that we could look
for parts. Belle, I have
useless arms for you now,
but when I started reading
Sexton to you tonight,
you started kicking
& punching & I knew
I had you. Lips, lips,
black & white eyes
that gave me new ghosts
to love, keep listening,
we've only just begun
learning the violence
& blood of poetry
& what you'll learn to love.
She'll dream back at me.
She'll dream of satellite instants & zebra fish. She'll dream of subliminal kingdoms of arched backs & throats. She'll dream of grown boys & girls, drunk on their own bodies. She'll dream of the un-simple. She'll dream of chickens with heads. She'll dream of more than eleven stars. She'll dream of darkened roses & their profound thorns. She'll dream shining lines with no context & no end. She'll dream in orange & mango & her lips will quiver without knowing why. She'll dream of dead-legged fathers & a good creek crinkling & smile. She'll dream. She'll dream. She'll dream. She'll dream.
Puffy love,
the few hairs

above the button
have started to grow

over my knuckles,
like the cage

taking the bird.
My hand

has been captured
by your punching

bag. Call upon
the hold.

Call upon
your creature fear.

Kick the pressure
& kick again.
No need for a gauze,
the un-furious blood
has rested in our making

hands. Belle, your eyes
began with my thumbs
& your legs I’ve pulled

from waking nights,
when the grass welcomed
change. Your tightened

fists, how they slam
into the wall, were a gift
from the gods

& their ornery mood.
Ten fingers closed tightly,
the how of the why.

We’re waiting on your when.
In the jar, Belle,
the myth of your eyes
has spread to trucker
& quarterback alike.

The black
& white pictures
I show off at the bar,
make the stools spin

like drunks
when they imagine
your clenched hands
opening to them.

Endless beauty
never ends,
it only begins
with the stories.
The violent heat of the unrolling storm, perched above the ceiling fan,
where the bruises come from the wood & the myth of the mountain matters not.

Swirl, the bottles all broke like that because they were empty.

Belle, when you kicked my face last night, was it because you could smell the Pabst?

If the roll around continues, will your legs stretch out beyond your father’s lack?
Go ahead & go ahead
with that beautiful recklessness of youth.

Trip, break, bleed & then do it again, faster, with more blood.

Hell is the high water of a creek that you’re too lazy to get out of.

Hell, is a body with no scars; is a daughter that never cried out for more of everything & never did anything to change the wind her father spent his life creating.
Belle,  
sit  
where the apple  
sits. The tree  

is an instrument  
of death. Sit  
where the apple  
sits, look up  
from the ground.  
Extend your rot.
How to dance with such villainy
& poise, to be in the wrong

& smile like a damned fool
& smile while you die in the fruit

of a proper damming. Belle,
your father is a long jump attempter

& if you can dance like he does
without knowing the reasoning

you will have the proper sting
& stretch in your ankles to leave

the stage he's built around plunging
sand(s). Watch how fast his feet

move. Ignore what his hands do.
Each half of you that leans

to the beach will want the salted water
more than the burning grains.

That's the hope of fatherhood.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #151

Back then
again
from the Vicadin
& Yuengling,

I've given up
on
the easy sleep
to sleep less

Belle, I'll be soft
when you arrive,
I'll be tired
& ready.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #152

No more linger to
this emotional force,

every word is soaked
with the coming air

of flail & sprawl
& wailing need.

To appear in
the door of anarchy

& love the flesh
you breathe in

is to be the brightest
red ball still bouncing.
Spacious in perspective
away from long days,

lines of radiance
praise this season's
treasure,
kept silver
beneath the stone

walls where the apple
will try to fall.

Wintering
to the core,
the sun can still whip

through to the seed
of September's darkness.
On a bench, the music babbles

& Belle kicks
to the beat,
ignoring
the ebb,
embracing
the tide.
Rock, baby,
find yourself,
your little hips, your little rebel hear.

When your first scream takes the room,
we'll assume
your declaration of independence has been made.

BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #155
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #156

With the gold showing, that crack
in the frame showing, that crack
that separated the protective glass

from the reality of the room showing,
the turn must turn & roll
to the picture. Tree, hands above

head, Belle, only your smiling
is missing to keep this scene
from the garage sale. Our tired

eyes, our tired minds, have split
into price tags. We're going broke
waiting for your lips to develop.

We're going broke because your father
spends all day writing these poems.
Think of the torn up birds,
their bodies in twain as the planes
rifle through the air;

Belle, the weight
of your weight, when I speak
through the pubic bone

has left my cheek bruised
& hungry for a lessening.
For you

& in pain,

my one good wing
should circle you
like a true obsessive

grimacing both proximity
& the inability to hold onto
your future gyrations.
Muddy road through
the violent violet landscape,
Belle, you need to enjoy

the squishy things
before the full visual

overtakes you. Forget
the roll up of the pants.
Forget the Midwest
& her saucy rolling hills.

Feel that dirt. Love Ohio

first. We'll fall in love
with new things together

as we learn all
that a mud-caked daughter
& her drunken father can feel.
Flaw
of the tether,
this fray
could be magic,
could be tragic
too. Belle,
how thick
is the rubber
of your balloon?
Keep gravity
from the grave,
embrace
the helium

this poem
provides you.
Stuck sap,
your leak
has clacked
my heart,

un-housed
my arms
from muscle
sheathing.

I feel stronger
now, with
your limbs
as thick
as the blue
orchid
planted twice
in the front
of the house.

I feel stronger
now that
you can prop
me up.
BLACK & WHITE PICTURE #173

Why wish you more innocence
than I was born with? Why hold
the cloud beneath the ocean?

Belle, the horrors, distanced
from you now will wait, excited
for my reach to fail you. Fear not

the deluge, maybe you'll find pleasure
in the darkness, maybe you'll dance
through the candles, avoiding none.

No matter the amount of wax
on your legs, think of the strength
in your hamstrings after the scene.

Think of the full flex of what can be
done & how pain is only an alarm
bent on putting you on your whole toes.
There is no logic
to this blood. This blood
is a moveable shrine
to what’s fine
& could be better. Hold on,
daughter, this blood
wants to kneel in prayer
& wants to have the ego
not to. This blood,
this rage from the heart
& pushed by the lug
& lungs, this blood
can crawl the floor,
if needed. This blood can
linger in the knee
& clog the throat
& take both ankles
& rush the valves with pure
havoc. Daughter,
this blood is charred, cooled
& unbalanced in the mirage
of sustained varnish.
This blood is music
& the silence that follows.
COLOR PICTURE #1

Un-
invisible hand

your cry
& titanic blink

say
all of the words

I did not know.