



If You Knew Then What I Know Now

Ryan Van Meter

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The middle American coming-of-age has found new life in Ryan Van Meter's coming-out, made as strange as it is familiar by acknowledging the role played by gender and sexuality. In fourteen linked essays, *If You Knew Then What I Know Now* reinvents the memoir with all-encompassing empathy—for bully and bullied alike. A father pitches baseballs at his hapless son and a grandmother watches with silent forbearance as the same slim, quiet boy sets the table dressed in a blue satin dress. Another essay explores origins of the word "faggot" and its etymological connection to "flaming queen." This deft collection maps the unremarkable landscapes of childhood with compassion and precision, allowing awkwardness its own beauty. This is essay as an argument for the intimate—not the sensational—and an embrace of all the skinned knees in our stumble toward adulthood.

Ryan Van Meter grew up in Missouri and studied English at the University of Missouri-Columbia. After graduating, he lived in Chicago for ten years and worked in advertising. He holds an MA in creative writing from DePaul University and an MFA in nonfiction writing from the University of Iowa. His essays have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Arts & Letters*, and *Fourth Genre*, among others, and selected for anthologies including *Best American Essays 2009*. In the summer of 2009, he was awarded a residency at the MacDowell Colony. He currently lives in California where he is an assistant professor of creative nonfiction at the University of San Francisco.

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