

More than a month since our last Van Zandt song. Here's the one that got me hooked.

Song #193: ["Columbine"](#)

Who Made it: Townes Van Zandt

Year: 1969

Thoughts: I added "Columbine" to my catch-all playlist on February 24th, 2019. It's the first of 107 from Townes. Try to hear why. Van Zandt's guitar (as Eli pointed out on #106) is strong enough to match his lyrics. "Columbine"* has some of his best playing:** It's warm and breezy, but not shallow — sticks in your chest along with your head. There's extra warmth on "Columbine" because most of it (fingerstyle guitar, bongos, harmonica) gets played by hand/mouth, with no picks/sticks to get between the maker and the music.

A lesson I learned in my coaching days: challenge and support should come in equal parts. Don't expect better if you won't help it happen. Seems like Van Zandt knows this, so he pairs hard truths with care:

*Ah lady like the flower fair
Someday you'll have to fall
And you can find me standin' there
To catch you if you call*

Recall the Van Zandt/Earle partnership. I'd guess that Steve took inspiration for at least two different songs from that verse. One is ["When I Fall"](#) (F&L #135), and the other will show up later.

On the "hard truths" front, I think about this line a lot:

*Now all your pride and prancing
How much does it mean?*

In a Prine-ish, mind-unmade/unmakeable way, I think there's much I'd like to *do* and little I'd like to *be*.*** That clashes with the pride drive: lots of little "done" piles don't carry clout like one big "is" badge. It isn't clear to me what I mean, but I think I'm on the right side of it. The story matters more than the headline. Acting too *be*-centricly can put you in a bind, shunting harvests down a lengthening line. There's peril in forbearance:

*All the livin' that you're savin'
Won't buy your dreams for you*

For such a gentle song, that's a *hard* call-out. I'd guess it comes from kindness. There's a recurring feeling in Van Zandt's songs that he can't *stand* for the folks around him to miss the beauty that he sees. Compare the lyrics in "Columbine" to this standout line from "If I Needed You" (F&L #157):

*You will miss sunrise if you close your eyes
And that would break my heart in two*

Both songs are full of affection. It comes up in sharing, in breathing, in breaking. It comes up in giving and taking hard advice. The platitude is to "stop and smell the flowers," but there's more than that happening. The key line ('*All the livin'...*') warns against waiting your way to joy. Goodness isn't finite, and it doesn't earn interest under glass. Use the nice spices before they lose their flavor.

—Matt

*State flower of Colorado, where TVZ used to spend his summers.



**I've tried a couple times to learn to play the guitar part, but it's beyond me. Could be a project for retirement.

***Or maybe it's the other way around.