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dipsomania

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dipsomania

A Master's Thesis

Collection of Poetry

For

DePaul

University

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Poem*after Chris Green*

I was born on Good Friday
the 13th,

the day Jerusalem drowned
drunk on the blood of her hollow son.

I was born Caesarean;
a scarred door of origin.

Mother's knees sinking me
into water rinsing me, for the first time,

clean.

Johnny Appleseed Is Carving His Jawline Into Mount Rushmore.

The great conservationist has learned that there's no home for the heroes of folklore. Johnny wants a headstone, he doesn't know crowds love mountains collapsing.

Shirley MacLaine danced through broken ankles. Claiming past lives made her easy to dismiss. So the water-plunge witch-test left critics looking for Ocean. But she talks

Johnny down: *reincarnation is real. Reader-response*

will always control your legacy.

There's no use wasting stone.

Recovery. A Nonfiction.

Left arm bound by the Bible belt stretched
thin between his teeth, stripped skeletal

in the closet, plunging flagpoles into any land
left in his skin. He says,

Dylan *I snuck into your bed.*
You were blacked out *I did things.* And I said
nothing.

I couldn't talk without his dad's southern drawl
scratching *faggot* at the back of my throat.

The next time we spoke, it was not about the breaking
the entering. I told him I was working the fourth step,

he said: *That's the relapse step.*

One year sober I get a call from a past flame
extinguished with piss. She says,

Dylan *do you remember?*
You were every evil *you did things.*
And I listened

to hear all the pillage in my footprints.
I'm still afraid of locked doors, she says.

Still, I miss the muted sounds of blackouts.
I miss the world I never knew I lived.

Wild Boar Sonnet

Like all threadbare Americans, I am not welcome.
I did not choose to come, to leave.
Brought by bait-and-switch then switched
with birch and willow, and sold for bait.
Before the fences and rifles
death was not a daily reminder.
The timberwolf and tiger, with bared teeth,
fed on me like a lover. It was intimate
the way they'd watch me die.
Predators paid respect to my pulse.
But you, aroused at the sight of me – a child
peering through a telescope – your wild
pig-faced eyes peaking over the nose
of the barrel, let the bay dogs bark.

When it Happened,

Smoke billowed out of the building
like a cartoon: Road Runner kicking up dust.
Seemed no different than the usual news.
So I ran for the bus, last fistfuls
of Captain Crunch in my gums.

At school I learned the word tragedy
reading teacher's blank stares – paleontologists
afraid to exhume any bones– my parents
were in an airplane to New York City.
To the World Trade Center.

What I remember most is how my own life
seemed a microcosm of the whole world.
The kitchen nook of the childhood home.
The Captain Crunch lining my gums
alone as mom and dad spun globes.
I remember the image on the TV
Teacher dialing mom's cell phone.
Relieved by clipped ringtone, the voicemail.
I studied adults' faces for a way to feel.

I remember looking down the long line
of front lawns and wondering where to buy a flag.

Hospice

In a bathroom stall, we hoist my grandfather by the armpits.
He's more spare parts than spaceship – arms splayed apart
while dad gloves the shit spitting down his father's legs.

Years ago, Yankee stadium, the old man fell back into my chest.
For the first time I felt a body's bones collapsing in on themselves;
his starveling eyes looking back at me
playing pickle with the seats and the sky.

Back in the stall, the two of them dancing in the piss-soaked dugout,
I wonder if he wishes I hadn't broken his fall.

The 7th Inning stretch is over,
the crowd calls for him now. We tie his shoes
prop him up presentable. Dad is firm,
No need to be gentle, he says.
His weight on our shoulders
for today.

The Chemists

The old man is no scientist,
maybe more of a librarian.
Leather-bound under stacks.
Classes for chemistry labs.
A lecture on his brother Claude splits
the specter. Billions of particles. He shoves
a dead man's ashes down a sieve,
spits him out in a saturated form:
he tells the class that Claude was:

a bad chemical

In the age of better living through chemistry
The old man's brothers lived best.
Claude and Clarke watered their brains after
careers clearing pharmacies. I heard Sherlock
breathed radioactive decay down little boys'
necks under the baseball bleachers.
Frank chewed his straw always.
Transmitting liquids
through the eye of the flask
furrowed in his shirt pocket.
Grandpa had two heart attacks at 50.
He's 87 now. Hasn't had a drink since
the second eruption in his chest.

He's grown weary
of chemicals.

Six scars on my skull mark my father's missing hands.

Hands the size of mine, now.
The family home gone, now.

Those ceilings so low he'd stoop.
Crouch down the stairs, then.

My pops posted like a giant: six feet
all Superman. Too tall, then

for the walls. Marty Mcfly and I
always lost our eyes in the spiral,

the bald patch on his crown from a foul tip
to the top of his skull. We played catch

but both of us can't grow hair in spots
we lost sight of the ball.
The stadium. Staring
at our likeness.

Praise Song*After Lucille Clifton*

to the children
on Halloween
with masks and
capas, playing
character for
candy all day
and night.

Praise the parents
Praise to their playing
along, like they don't turn
tricks for treats every day

like they know nothing
of a minstrel show.

Drift

My family is not a tree, we
forest-fire-water;
weather endless
overservings. Betray
roots shaking where
splinter groups grasp
for groundwater.
Freckled Black-
Irish eyes are crying
bloodshot and blue,
rivers of bile leaking
spotted livers.
Wade down.
Water-logged.
Bloated and swollen.
All of my ancestors,
all death by water.
These stalks,
never satiated
drowning self
never satisfied.
I'll carve a record
of my wrongs
on my rind.

Small Talk

How's work?

Not fine.

What I mean to say, stranger, is

I hopscotch

between burnt bridges.

How many times have you hit the same wall

before believing in brick?

How's my love life?

Nonexistent.

What I mean to say,

is that I live vicariously through home videos I've taped

and pieced back together frame by frame.

I'm fine.

The First

In the dark blue
corduroy king-bed
of a couch we laid
graceless love notes.
The pinched divot
in the left half of your ass
you named scar
I named dimple.
Ferocious toes kicking free
of ankle manacle jeans.
The plastic smell
of packet cheese melting
over macaroni.
Your cherry-flavored Chapstick
rank, bruised, and beautiful
bowl full of sliced peach.
My name marked
printed crimson
into the pillow.
Shooting clouds
that we'd flip and flip
until they were falling skies.
I finger-painted my first words
butter-knifed between your shoulder blades.
Do you remember what they said?
Three words back then.

Aphorism

There but for the grace of
a gallon of vodka go I:
barleycorn barrel
rolling river roulette.

A hailstorm hitting the muzzles
of voiceless mothers watching
sons disappear. A cloud
of quiver hovering over
every bottle in the aisle
that follows me
to the checkout
counter cliff.

My Dog Didn't Like My Drinking Buddies

To know him
was to fear him.

A reminder
of the liar I was.
Time spent imbibing
with fair-weather friends.
He'd spend all night
boxing, between
me and them.

But I swear, as I drove drunkenly
stumbling through stop signs,
he spoke through the red
curtains lining his throat,
by cocking his chin.
Just like I did.

He said, with
homeless growing eyes,
I killed a coyote.
40 pounds: my carcass,
your armored car.
Was he a friend of yours?

The Cost of Coins to Play the Lottery

Empy Bucket echoes

Drum beats on city streets

War cries play game shows

Pointed toes of leathered feet.

October 22nd 2012

It's Monday morning, fix
 a liquid breakfast
 plastic-bottled brown liquor on ice
 forfeit the day away, retreat to my room
 the bed's stripped sheets fly a white flag over the basement window
 I don't want to be seen by the backyard.
 What I haven't sold has been stolen
 except the cord to a phone
 filled with friends and family
 who've foregone a funeral,
 placed bets on an obituary;
 no one wants to watch a drunk die slow.

Collapse onto the mattress.
 Can't steady the glass with one hand
 the shakes are so barbaric I need both
 and breakfast becomes a basin
 I wash myself clean of last night's sins

this isn't hell's deepest ring imprinted on my chin
 this is merely Monday morning

I put down the drink
 The glass sweats
 both of us steaming and

I see ice melt for the first time

I see the whiskey barrel's bark stripped by water
 and pull up the blankets
 anticipating my past to pay for in withdrawal
 this is merely a Monday morning.
 not nearly my darkest day, but this
 this glass half-full of whiskey
 this is bottom made rock.

Six feet deep but can't dream of living clean
 made my dirt bed not ready to sleep,
 this is when I stop digging.
 This is when my atheism
 forgoes a life boat
 for both bended knees,
 this is I need a deity to free me
 this is when I cry God –

because –

I need a noun.

Chin&Bone

We are all guts and stories.
Of shotgun shells.
Of nervous stomachs.
We fight.
We 'Fuck it.'
We covet
Wisconsin cheddar:
a love letter between
our half-hometowns.

We are all *Purple Rain*
and *Nebraska* on road trips.
Driven to Minneapolis together
we know where the best places
to piss are.
We've marked our territory
from the twin cities
to the second city
with so many songs.

People say we aren't even brothers.
We know the truth; we've all raised
each other, so you can bad-mouth me
and my excess of ex-lovers but don't dare
say a word about my cousins, my brothers.

We are all chin and bone
when we're on stage.
And we've made a lot
for rib-caged Boyz II men
on minimum wage.

Reunion

Granny's been slow-roasting hot-beefs all year
 awaiting your arrival. She knows miracles.
 could've been the wedding in a flood
 cut coupons converted feasts for a family
 breeding faithfully. Jampsy's name flying
 modestly on Mulberry. He knows miracles.
 Turned Buick into a Bentley, sweet tea to bourbon,
 Lazarus rose from 86 seasons of Midwestern Snow.

Irish shared crops
 farm-to-table by necessity.
 Baked potato famine food,
 wonder bread and boxed wine still
 hand-picked and spread thin.
 Remember to forget
 the three hands on your wrist
 ticking like your tapping feet back in Chicago

Every winter we'll repeat, retreat to Holiday Inn's
 thaw thickened waistlines and thinning faces.
 Now the child of our children, parents
 Of our parents. Rest, men
 at the feet of mothers rubbing shoulders.
 Granny began the laying of the hands
 kneading dough rolled thick necks
 there is always enough to go around.
 All will be fed.