SHADOWS, EDGES BREATTHING

Poems & Notes

By Haley Crigger

John C. Young Scholar 2012-13
For Niel
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Dawn (an introduction)

dawn

I am only an anarchist in my own clandestine epitome, a pro-choice law-bender; heart holder. Generally speaking, I don’t like to say a word about anyone.

But I love good cop
bad cop
me cop (worst cop
ever--Let’s have a party, I said. We’ll invite
every holdable
grapheme-stuffed fellow who ever spoke
to my sorry soul). Jail man preacher
man the man wo-
man. I am Patrick Swayze
(dead man), because
there are no corners
in these mortal blueprints. I mean,
look at yourself,
your clefts
your crevices, feel yourself
over for a single right angle.
Intimacy is based on shared vulnerability

dawn

I discovered the heart of an absentminded wife, or husband

in the small cog of a habit, still sipping behind

your back ribs with my sorry, my tongue, the most obtuse muscle

--two tastes for busted candy, flashed on a soft-spoken hood.

You spoke of bird dimensions, baby chicks in metal spoons.

Let's meet there. Where shallow water and gravity work best to swallow feet,

under the kitchen table as two unlikely trolls, after

the sigma of your preoccupation and under the graphite of

please. Let's meet between the candles between

the meals we’re not having, the yellows spilling out of holes

onto us.
Spring Cleaning

When I was eleven
I said to a schoolmate What if
I cut off all my hair? She said
I honestly wouldn't give a crap. I
instantaneously reprimanded my heart
for hurting, and in the same way

you will come home.
To a brilliant home, more thermal
than forgiveness, than the cigarette smoke cascading
your wall of random shit

that I got you in London;
that your nephew drew for you;
that used to be framed in
the glass you absentmindedly shattered,
twice--both times you knelt
in a silent phone call;

   Daddy,
we both still call our fathers,
as our tremendous young-
lady lives splinter
into the quietest
day.

sunrise
To Farrah Fawcett Playing the Acoustic Guitar on our Futon

I say *Do you need anything? We’re going to the liquor store.* She’s only 20--our house baby. She answers in her best teenaged caricature:

> Five pizzas. I need five Hot N’ Ready pizzas and for you to hold my hands until I die.

She picks at the thin gold hoop in her nose, and when I laugh and say *You’re the greatest thing about this place* the soft coral of her mouth snaps like a menthol crush--a marionette. I wonder when she rubbed off on us. When even I started living by small untruths:

> Everything that comes out of you is golden. You’re so beautiful I could puke. Look, I’m puking in my hands.

Look, I’m puking in my hands.
Both of Us Home in December

sunrise

I find forgiveness suddenly
irresistible. I even dream

of its long fingers--good for
playing the baby grand

here in the family room, or just me
like a big stringed thing--mostly

upright, one shake
of washtub--elephantine obsolete.

Like the forsaken shoe factory off Fourth
they now use to shoot horror films.

Can you imagine if the workers needed
one more reason to just stay home?
On Being Asked What I Could Never Put into a Poem

I say my pit of reservations that matches yours
but is female, and juvenile. I say it doesn't matter.

I say what matters is the blue cap neurotically smashed
to the fucker asking if I even have a driver's license.

He burned up our doe eyes in August
and we decided we were lucky

we hadn’t agreed on a station yet
while you fed me avocados and broken
celery in the house you grew up in and I died inside
your basketball shorts and your mother’s stare.

I say and point there
was our second chance. Now

my lips drip red and my hair drips blue;
I'm sitting inside your silver Beemer

in a joy so grotesque it fills the car
like a sky. I forget

the tube of lipstick in my hand; it hits
the carpet and my eyes catch fever.

I say that I'll forget you, sovereign
as a black bird, still believing

the best women stop time
and traffic.
On Asking Two Sweet Teenagers to Get Sweeter

It's like getting that scratchy
quarter out from behind

your ear. Like solar noon,
and sunset, and none of us

knowing how to play tennis. It's sulphuric
like a hero, maybe Jesus, or at least

the radio jingle ringing from Peter's fingers.
We all say "What?" at the same time.
To My Songbirds

Dear Guy, did you know
you were conceived in a pitch
pair of wayfarers?

Stella girl, your aunt
tried to name the dog after
her favorite beer.

My Cash, may you rule
everything around my
window as I go.

How many times have
I named you? My three song birds,
the Blink-One-Eighty

-Two bit I won't ask
to walk alone to if I
marry your father(s).

You and the others
are free to come in any
unwonted order--

I'll be here, knocking
back nomenclature, lost in
the lines in my hand.
They gave each other

each other for each other's birthdays. Samson is

still, a scared twin
in the mirror: Gemini in inky suspenders.

No one ever stays,
the stars will never listen,
cries Aquarius,

lapping up sea foam,
waiting for the Cancer to swell, and catch up.
This is the largest space I’ve ever been inside

it echoed while I carried
a gay friend’s fingers in one
hand, a glass of chardonnay
in the other, and I saw you
walking on your hind legs,
Professor.
A Party

Rejection sits alone at a party (the way you’d imagine her), and so you gaze, lovingly, from the middle of the ballroom floor--free glaciated silk, hip to your willowy figure. You treated each other like white wine, to french manicured, self-assured hugs.

Think to abruptly hang up that love-lock and turn to Lucidity--blue-eyed siren--give the gaze to her and, then, why not to others? Give it again and around, thieve, change eyes with baroque and deadening abandon.

In some distance, Jealousy--sly, sly man-child; sore loser; smooth talker. Takes his seat with Rejection and breathes about you: She is--how shall I say--too soon made glad. You don’t hear, but turn back in time to see his tongue in Rejection’s lobes.

She is singing; everyone is ignited: Grief is a jump-started, ravenous titan, galloping at Lucidity, taking her down until just her torso hangs from his maw.

We can’t help but to stare at the suggestion of a bellybutton--gratuitous, honed, and on the money still.
Sunset (an introduction)

Picking out psychopaths

and making other unqualified diagnoses will put you on

the Scientologists' radar. That is terrifying. Those people

are terrifying.

And all of this, what you see here,

is at least partially rooted in some brief

and likely shallow love affair

with numbers--the scale

of the Hare Test--a marriage between

two narcissists: promiscuous, transient, superficial. It's all

dark. Every poem should be the last

poem.
If it bit your skinny heart of 19 years into slivers, threes, can you make love to it at 22?

Between your collar bone and the fat of your breast, is there compromise for the Love King?

Sylvia, did you call the Radio Kill[er] when you were tired of faking it?
One Day I

scissored
the billboard,

removed Eckleburg’s spectacles,
slid them delicately

onto my
head, said,

You know what

a tire
is only my seat at

the theatre, the insect
food chain, a charismatic,
pentecostal fingernail.
This touch

of my hair, knotted
into ocean is really the way

I'm two-timing you.

My kitten heels are little girls,
my bottom lip is my heavenly father,

and every day is a portrait
of heaven and hell.
Enoch & Enoch

The young thing inside
ostracized a looking glass
in New York City.

& miles South, a lonely dolt
is a fur-gilded killer.

I savor grotesques
as readily as a rape joke. Enoch, Enoch,

your Mothers thought your mothers
couldn't stomach you again.
Piano Man

dusk

Pretty boy, the green-black of your river-
Wide mind does live in your hands. Icy
Thing, piano man, why do I shiver?

Fool, my portrait spoke from night’s shade, slice me

For thy love: shadows, edges breathing, call

More softly than forgiveness, and thrice he

Dragged you to the Spring, the mounting--

his all.

Sound Narcissus—too hunted, too pure; odd

Man, out of my arms--

For the brewing fall?

Pharisee, see what you made talk like God.
When the serial killer
tells his non-violent writer
best friend that he loves him
and it's clearly true
I'm reminded of my sexy
scary ex-boyfriend.
Not because he ever loved me,
but of all the wet dust I bothered
up running hard on my non-athletic
runway legs, my calling cards left
and right, from the insufferable quality
[I know he felt more
acutely] of being
exceptional.
Night Thoughts

She made a party trick out of sailing
her eyes back, like suns might set

and set, and set, and
set, if god were really

ever a man like me. What
was it like (you ask) to have her
damn my hand back
to her like a jigsaw--

Let me tell you something:

If she's not afraid of you
you can't know the sucker

punch of her stopped to ask
for anything but mercy.
A Young Boy in Beauty’s Castle

dusk

Belle bat
her host of spider legs
into a deep molasses residue,
and the Beast let her, let her,

let her. Let her hair down
into his regret, his old, shut-up
wrongs dripping in arrogance;
the rose drips, too.

I peacocked into their castle--with the beauty
now written into
the crevices--ran my
boy fingernails into
the wall and carved
for myself an easel. I pulled out
my pen and scrawled:

I am bad
I am bad
I am bad.

Because I do enjoy cow tipping,
and other things that don't exist yet
we'd defend like they were
our promiscuous cousins. Yes,
I caress the devices
that don't exist, the lovers’ ghosts,
who will never keep me
from being a realist, but realistically,
I am still afraid. And

\[ I \text{ am bad} \]
\[ I \text{ am bad} \]

\[ I \text{ am bad.} \]

Princess Belle scooped me up
from the graffiti and clapped

a hand on my bottom.
She and the new governess love
bad things, and wry joys,
and ambivalent, raucous boys.

They think it makes them deliverers.
A Young Boy in Corporate America

dusk

You, you thought you were the boss.

Wore the suit, a three-quarters cup of cocaine in limbo between your left and right damsel fists, fingering for the commode on your first day. Point away yesterday's displaced, eroding father.

He was tossed by the old order, boomeranged just to get the shit to sell.

Threw him the bag: *Go, run, get out of here.* Applauded for your clemency, your tenderness.

Swept the little bit of escaped snow from the tables and chair arms into your efficient palms to get it *gone, out of here.*

I showed you--snuck up and cawed
*I'll put the white on your back like the white in your hands.*

Flung that man's wrecked life clockwise and turned to me like you weren't horrified by any of it.

Cooed, *Come, Baby,* believing a young devil like me would refuse the tit, reckon myself too big. But I verged on you, petrified, staggering for a bottle.

One of your new employees walked in and all three of us were bewildered:

A sandy-haired Caliban suckling cranberry and vodka from the canteen in your wise, efficient, lady hands.
A Psychopath, a Dog, and a Poet

Psychopath C.E.O. (man of gold, amygdalaless man) scatters some photographs of Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan under the soggy nose of a (basically dead) dog, says These are men I have heard of. And

*if you want a friend*, the gold man hoots, *get a d--* No, thank you, answers Wellington, sniffing back in agony. A six-pronged gizmo fixed between each of his left ribs--a gift from his previous owner, *a crime of passion.*

The man protracts his salty left palm--a snare (a dentist glove covers his right--an economic giver), and Wellington the dog nearly carpets it with an instinctive tongue.

But thank the Dew!

--barefooted and thigh exposed She shimmies down, tries to steady the already
steady lamppost, folds herself over, 
mutters *Dog,* 
and something about the sea.
I think writers are just pacifists fueled by the contrast of violence.
Cast of Characters, in Order of Appearance

- Patrick Swayze
- Ex-Boyfriend #2
- College Roommate
- Farrah Fawcett
- Ex-Boyfriend #1
- An Annoying Cop
- Jesus of Nazareth
- Simon Peter
- Guy Patterson
- Stella Kowalski
- Cash Bundren
- Mark Hoppus
- Tom DeLonge
- Travis Barker
- Samson
- A Very Good-Looking Professor
- Alfonso, Duke of Ferrera
- Terius Nash (also known as The-Dream)
- Myrtle Wilson
- Enoch Emery
- Enoch Robinson
- Narcissus
- Echo
- Lucie Brock-Broido
- Billy Bickle
- Belle
- Miles (of Essex) and his Governess
- Al Green
- Wellington (the dog, of Wiltshire)
- Emily Dickinson