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Sea of Cortez

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Dresden Layne Caston

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University of California, Riverside

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Burial

I cannot be with the space for long

The timber walls yelling

I am not alone

The ticking of wheat

The aisle between

Heart and jaw

Closing like a heavy door

Does time change space

Nothing remains

But the sun

There is always

More sun

First Born

It's not that she wants

To be a complicit creature

But I've already begun

A disaster in fresh fog

Black Bird

Hands aren't for hitting

They are to put in dirt

An undeniable flesh earth

The clamor and yawn

The hand of weather

Will calm you

1992

Grandma Kate grew up in an orphanage.

She learned to be patient with stubborn babies.

She watched after me often while my twin cooed

With a contented face at my mother.

When Grandma Kate died, her earrings were found.

She had worn them, each time hanging the delicate

Pieces of aluminum back onto the paper nest

I bought them in.

Summer

This is the scent of your suit

When you are out of the pool

The sharpness of grass

Under your toes

Left smudged on the bedroom rug

This is what's yours

Is also mine

You Told Me My Poems Were Good

Have we met?

I have fine poems.

Please take them from me.

And run away with them.

Then explain to me

Why I'm here alone.

I Like You

And the sand

And the sand you can see

Through the water

Time Spent In Mexico

There are white men here.

They don't argue with the sun.

They discuss who has the biggest cock.

They blow smoke and bullshit.

They leave their wives and kids at home.

They drink whiskey from the cap.

They work and tinker and sweat.

They are rough and pumice turned tan.

They are as beautiful as dirt.

Lunch Break

How do I write a poem as accurate as cracks in the dirt?

I watch the tiny ant climb over them.

It's hot out here in February.

He must feel betrayed.

Maybe everything is just too big.

Language For Poets

This is a narrative of my life.

Sometimes I will write

I dream of women.

But when you ask me

I will say I don't.

Maybe I think women

Are strong and beautiful.

And that is what I want

My poems to be.

They will wear slimming

White dresses

And drink deep, red wine

And you will be aware of them

When they walk away.

Winona Ryder

I went with my family to Hollywood
And the clerk in a tourist shop
Told me Winona Ryder
Passed by her window
A minute before we arrived
I cried in the hotel bathtub
Thinking about how the word *angst* felt
Impressive in my mouth
My face grew swollen and pink
Over the plate in front of me
While my parents discussed
The rareness of their meat

Poet In The Dirt

What does it mean to say I am a poet?

I need it for the cocktail parties.

I wonder if kids come out here to play.

Do kids care I am a poet?

They don't ask what it means

Nothing makes me want to fall

Asleep like sitting under the sun

And in the dirt.

In this dirt, there is dog shit.

Cabo San Lucas, MX

When I was a kid,
I believed my feelings
Were physical things
That could be manipulated.
If they were hurt, it was
Because someone threw them
In the street or ran them over,
Which is what I told my mom
After some argument
I can no longer remember.
When I was 15, I ended up
In the hospital the night before
Our family vacation.
Everyone went except for me
And my mother.
She waited while my body parts
Were pulled out and rearranged.
She refused to look at my appendix
Suddenly held loosely in a glass jar.

On The Patio

The clothes turn and turn
Nuzzling that familiar belt
I jump at the skidding lint
The moon hides behind
Another neighborhood
It's so dark here
My light has gone out
And snuck itself
Into someone else's dream

A New Kind Of Sadness

I am here for liquor and star gazing
Even if it's counterproductive
Like being a functional alcoholic
Or when your teeth fall out
And your friends suddenly have no feet
Then you spend several days
Wondering if you're being punished
For eating them

Under A Heavy Blanket

I sit with a necklace

In my mouth

Click my teeth

Like a gas stove light

Sadness hardens

Like bad candy

And the sky disappears

Ashamed to know

What it feels like

To be strange and empty

Like a pocket

Dirt

I'd like to eat it.

If it were acceptable to roll around in it, I would.

But in this dirt, there are bees.

Bzzz and my bright blue towel.

This bee doesn't like me.

It's best to stay still, but I am running

Down the ditch bank without shoes

And my bright blue shirt.

Bees don't care a thing for dirt.

And they look for you when you hide.

A Playground Painted Yellow

Our youth

Is carved

Into single

Fragments

Of time

We keep

The secret

Of the ocean

Sneaking

Through

The light

And discover

Our limbs will

Crack like

Night

And crash

Into a neighborhood

Of snow

What Becomes Of Them

They snap necks of grass from the soil
And throw bundles of blades at one another
They glow under forts
Blankets swept over the backs of counter stools
They count freckles and stars
Play in streets
Come home with hair stuck to their necks in sweat
They get on their knees
They grab kittens
Then give them names
They crush ants with piles of rocks
They leap out of windows and climb trees
They get to the roof and tiptoe
They find a dead bird
They bury him in the backyard
And have a proper memorial
They wrap him in a doll's blanket
They stuff him in a shoebox
They cover the dirt with grass and diverge
The dog with a golf ball
They climb back into their lives
They curl up

Close their mouths

And never climb again

In The Junk Yard

I want to write poems all day.

I'm in the junkyard, reader.

I smell the oil of a man

Tinkering under the hood of his car.

A cigarette sticks to the bottom

Of his lip.

If you were here I would trade

You a poem for a transmission.

A working transmission

Will get you somewhere.

On The Sea Of Cortez

I hate smoking cigarettes

He raises his eyebrows and sings

But I love you and Mexico

Then we talk about the fish

Their bright pain so present

But not aware of us

We want to be poor

We want to wear the stars

Logic

We learn the pluck of a plectrum

The rhythm of breathing

How to share a beer

And the alertness of a bee

In florescent light

It is in this womb

We realize there is blood

In the Pacific Ocean

Facts

Did you know people give matches

Away as favors at weddings?

A match made in heaven

I am giving away pencils at mine.

With romantic words etched into the wood.

Artists may never be satisfied

With the life they should lead.

I think I'll just live here in the dirt.

Me In My Warm, Well-Fed Apartment

While the girls are (un)buried

In Cleveland

Sucking in each other's air

His cow-licked eyes of stone

Dwell on dad hood

Makes you fuck him

When all you wanted was to sleep

In the grass under the sun

Without your name

Nostalgia

To slip into the birthmark

Of your hip

Abandon the universe

The problem with us

Is that we will both die

Of the same condition

Transient Heart

This is being husked right down to the bone

Your heart as a hotel room for a familiar strangeness

It finds nothing then leaves

You to believe waking up is the worst part

In The park

Your voice breaks through

Your consciousness

And you yell something

You don't mean to.

Not an ex-lover's name.

Something harder to recognize.

You're stuck in quicksand

And the people most important to you

Run when you reach for them.

I saw an ex-lover at the park.

I believe he might have no conscience.

Do people without a conscience dream

Of cruel things?

Do they dream at all of me?

The Dirt

You told me everything in the world

Comes from dirt

But I wont abandon romance

I will always feel reckless

If I were truly reckless

I would never come back

Man Of War

The dogs at Gonzaga Bay
Will follow you when you walk.

You will learn they want certain things
Not you, an American drinking coffee.

If you were a kid you could wear
Hand-me-downs and drink coca.

Then you wouldn't have to recall
Things like—well you know,

You're an adult.
A man of war bird.

Maybe you would catch dinner.
Then we would know

What's coming next.

I Went Into Dawn Shouting

About the hat you forgot

In my bedroom

Which reminds me of a ghost

I saw on television once

What I recall most about then

Is how you smoked your cigarette

The burn in your firing holes

Bright into the sky

In The Folding Metal Chair

I rust

Like a pile

Of hitches

I learn it's a sign

Of intelligence

When crows play

They taste

Awful

When you

Say "eating crow"

You mean

Realizing

You're wrong

Is hard

To swallow

Train

An ache

A dull tug

Your toes dig trenches

In dirt

You begin to decay

A breeze brings

More dirt

It will

Conceal you

Or wash

Your feet

In The Asylum

A man tells me I'm pretty and asks me

Where I come from

I cannot stop kissing my friend

I touch her cheeks

I suck her skin

I hate the way it feels

But I can't stop

She's a veteran

I tell her they must love her

She asks me to eat her food

We share her mashed potatoes

I wish she could live in the desert

This isn't her company

This isn't my blood orange

In The Crook Of My Mother's Neck

I collapse into her hair

It's still stiff with the same scent

Bright and curled

Like the sick finch on the porch

I am always crying

And carrying him to the pool

I Count Pennies Like The Poor

The things I write fall into one big pocket

Ideas, words, heaps of dirt

Tumble through the washing machine

Where small treasures become wet

And worthless

What is the value of a penny

They descend

And make that sharp noise

Each worn-out thing fights

And pushes to find its place

Flat Coke

It's an unmistakable smell

The way the sugar stinks

After it's been sitting in aluminum

The way it pours onto the sides

Of an empty sink

You would love a cold coke

You would love a coca from Mexico

You would like the sun to shine

On your face through the mountain spaces

Of Mexico with a coca in your hand

Poetry Makes Me Blush

It spills into me it spills

Out of me in flames

I can't think about

Anything but fuel

How it was gone

And how the commuter

Violently honked

The purple

Asphalt

I know what you do

Every day

I don't want

To be that

You Can Come Into My Poem

You think my insanity is charming, don't you? Come on in. I won't bite. It is quiet and lonely here. There are no smiling faces. But the faces of sad poems. There is in fact no light here. Only lights that bite you.

Read The Yellow Wallpaper

And you will know why

She creeps around the base

Of her bedroom

Bored and tired.

Why do I feel so loud?

My walls are stone washed.

The grey is cool and contemporary.

Not white.

That's far too lonely a color.

Honey, I'm Here

This time I wasn't followed

By bee nor farmer

Only sunlight but maybe a snake

I wish I had a beer

But I must work

Here comes a damn bee

He's the only sound I hear

All bees have wings

But they sure are reckless without

A thing to do in the dirt

I Am The Girl

Made by her own half hazard dreams

The one you will see on TV

Full of herself—A Cindy Crawford

A girl with a shoebox under her bed

Who says *I'll get there*

I'll get there

The one who hides her teeth

Who draws pictures under the sheets

Then wakes up one day

And listens to all the bad things

Outdoor Shower

Salt drips from our wetsuits

We listen to the voices in the kitchen

The ocean draft travels up

Our naked bodies

It's the last time

I remember

Seeing you clearly

November

He feels the same way I do

About life and death

And dirt

That's what I have learned

*

I have bought a house

I have raked the flowerbed

And made a home for the stock

Their veins have been broken open

And dished into the dirt

They stick their purple necks out

And into the wind

I want to live in the dirt

With them

*

People don't like honesty

The way they say they do

I take anti-depressant medication

I enjoy stating my beliefs on the matter

It makes me feel introspective

People have told me I'm smart

Like my therapist

You are a bright girl, she says
(She is not my therapist anymore)
I'm afraid people will realize
I am not smart

*

On my birthday this year
I turned twenty-eight
And told everyone I hate birthdays
This only means we are closer to death
Once we are born we celebrate
Getting older
They all looked at me with pity
I looked back not feeling sorry
Just like this poem now
You will finish it thinking
That Dresden sure seems sad

*

You should see my tits
And my friend Erin's
We want one more beer
One more sticker
For the other nipple
Uno mas

One more poem

One more beer

One more day

Who hasn't seen my tits?

You should see them

Before I get old

Before I am sad and bored

See them now

Here they are

*

The neighbor's name is Elisa

She doesn't like to invest

In more than a wave

On her evening walks

She talks to me for hours

About real estate

I wonder what the neighbors think

I wonder if their husbands want

To fuck her

She's not very attractive

Not in that typical way

I've always been curious

About suburbia

*

I would trade nothing

For this yard

In The Desert

Have you ever seen a white picket fence

In the desert?

To me it seems like a strange place to be.

A place that is meant for the running

Around of things.

I want to cut the end off.

So we can all cram through.

So we can all live here.