

Blood

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

The Department of English

State University of New York
New Paltz, New York 12561

May 2022

BLOOD

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We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this thesis.

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing at the State University of New York at New Paltz

Cutting Ties

We walked up Avenue A,
The younger us
Following far behind
Just out of view and almost
Getting lost.

I thought I almost heard
The newly adult version of myself
Ask for directions,
But in true me fashion,
[She] decided to play smart.

All four of us
Made it to the apartment,
Past the Oval Study lit up
With evening readers,
And the basketball courts,
Emptied now of the voices
From earlier that day.

And at the table we drank
Cheap beer familiar to our
Former selves. And I noted [to her]
The fulfillment of some distant fantasy
That no longer was.

So soon they left the two of us to reminisce
Without their uninformed interruptions.

The City, Framed

*May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rain fall soft upon your fields.*

Framed, the proverb hangs
Above a certificate printed in Greek,
My grandfather's father's name
Almost faded along a line

Spyro

Same as my father's brother
Who'd kept his name all the way
Up to his late-in-life apartment
On West 86th street,
Far from the proverb here in the
Lower East Side.

Poem, Forced Out

I am not a painter with a supply
Of ideas, brushes, oil and canvas.

How amateur, to list, just for the form
(Acrylics had an extra syllable).

So I am not a painter but if I
Were to be, oils are the preference.

And am I hardly a poet, as I
Have not made a single rhyme yet? Tell me

Is there even a form here or just some
Vague attempt at meter, fluidity?

When you read this aloud, do you make sure
To inflect your voice at the question marks?

It wouldn't work otherwise, monotone
With no sense of urgency,

Identity
Crisis,

How cornball,
Another one of these.

Emma, αίμα, αίμα

A woman came into the store
On Friday,
Maybe Monday.

I recognized her accent
Quickly,
Same as my cousin
(Uncle?)
Thenasi's.

Are you Greek?

I asked, although I'm not sure why,
When I had her name up on the screen

Fillakos

And her accent there too,
Thick as honey.

What's your name?

She looked me up and down,
Trying to find the Greek.

So I gave her my last name,
(Credibility) and said of my first,

Not so Greek.

A laugh from her
Thickened,

Like blood!

A Soul's Death

A panic woke me from my sleep last night
As unconscious me remembered my old
Clarinet. Then in bed, I sat up right,
Thought about how there was certainly mold
Growing in the wooden reed, somewhere in
That velvet-lined case like a casket. How
Fitting, conscious me would come to thinking,
That clarinet in untouched pieces now,
Its rightful owner, my late grandfather

Somewhere beneath the city, unbothered,
Bound by the sounds above; familiar soul.

Watermelon

I never told Pappou
My favorite word in Greek:

Karpoúzi.

And now, I'll never get to.
Not that it matters,
And I'm not sure he'd have understood
Why I like it so much anyway.

But maybe he would have laughed,
Full-bodied,

Karpoúzi

A laugh heavy enough
To turn into a cough,
With the accent on the
Upsilon,
Then back to laugh,
His legs elevated
Cartoonishly from the wheelchair,
Speech slurred

This time from smiling

As I say the word

Karpoúzi.

Claustrophobia

In a city as big as this one,
I wonder,
How is it that I feel so
Claustrophobic?

This Manhattan is an island,
After all,
With its bridges like limbs
That could be severed off
If some higher being
Tried hard enough.

I write this from the Stuy Town
Apartment,
Suffocating from the heat
And we all wonder, together now,
If the unmoving thermostats
Are what killed Pappou,
Half joking, like sadists.

And I feel as though I'm underground,
Burning all the way up on the 9th floor,
Where I can almost pluck what looks like
A needle
Off the Empire State Building
Through the bedroom window
With my scorched hand.

The Last Sacrament I Ever Made

My godfather was dying
In some hospital in Maine

While I made my first communion
In a church on Long Island.

My godmother was with him

(Not me)

So that I was an orphaned
Child of God that day.

(Late May?)

I thought I'd been lucky
When I got a married pair

(Aunt and uncle)

Real parents!

In the case of disaster.

But

What was the point then?

With one dead and one distant
And my belief in God
Gone.

This Afternoon (In the Country)

We looked out of the big window during lunch
And saw dad sledding down the small hill
That starts at the house
And ends at the ravine of still water,
Nearly frozen now,

On an old-fashioned sled with
The rope attached,
And a red metal bottom
To skate across the snow that's almost ice
But soft enough in the sun

Today.

At The New House

Good to go outside,
Out of house and head,
Writer. Sit on this
Damp earth: uncanny.

Outside house and head,
Hear the birds singing
Damp earth's uncanny,
Familiar song.

Think of child's spring,
[A] backyard all the same,
House and head different;

Nothing can
Never change.

Finding My Grandmother In Anything Else

I fell in love with anyone
Who smoked filterless Camels
After you died.

The smell of the smoke in the
Outside air a memory
Of everything before.

Like pages of a crossword book

Or the box
Of our travel
Scrabble,

And sometimes perked coffee,

But I drink it every day.

Two Weeks Apart

Maybe it's best
I didn't know you,
Uncle.

Despite our near 23 shared years
On this sphere.

For now I get to hold your
Dead records and wonder

Did we have the same favorite
On *American Beauty*?

And in all your Stones,
Why didn't you have a copy
Of *Goat's Head Soup*?

Uncle *born under the same*
Bad sign as me, in some distant
Cold winter.

Tribute To Scarlett and Oscar

We all scar the same
In my family.

Extra pink tissue,
Keloids,
They call them.

One on my left knee,
A cousin's too,

Mine from the little dip
Between the driveway
And the lawn
On my bike
Unsteady,

Hers from some fall,
Trip, up (down?) the ramp
At Shea Stadium.

I've got another
Up high on my back,
On the left side.

I'd had some mole that
Could've been melanoma
Someday soon

So they replaced it
With my keloid,

Extra pink tissue that
They said

*Would be gone in time
To wear a strapless dress to prom.*

Early March in Rosendale, NY

A woman sweeps the snow from the sidewalk

With a broom. She clears the path from her house

To the street that runs through town. And she talks

To her aimless husband about her doubts

That this snow will be stopping anytime

Soon.

The Interval

There are geese out back
In the yard behind our house.

In the sunshine last week
They made sense,

Their voices like some harbinger
Of spring.

Today white snow coats
Their feathers and wings

As they seek shelter
Under the willow,

Its branches like some ceiling
Fit to challenge

An incessant winter.

Our Tree

It's late March
Now, the spring
equinox.

And yet our
Christmas tree
Sits out back

Browned green
Pine in the
Shadow of

The house, lights
Still on it, unlit,
And unplugged

As if it
Might come inside
Once more.

But it
Sits near our
Fire pit, and awaits
Its turn

To be cut
Into pieces

To warm us
Again.

Neighbors

I'm sitting on the bench
Half under our burning bush
Both left by the previous owner.

I can hear the creek rushing
In the distance, downstream
Under the makeshift bridge

Untraversable,

Left by the previous owner.
It doesn't matter,
Since that bridge connects us

To land with signs that read

Private Property

And

No Trespassing

Though we've never seen
A soul, or the owner.

I like to think it's sturdy enough
For small animals to run across
Back to us if they get caught
Trespassing.

Five Runs In The Top of The Ninth

Mets win
After losing two-zip.

I almost lost my voice
In our own living room
Watching the first two
Round third.

Tie it up,
Make it a metaphor
For the whole thing.

We've got a religious guy
On the team (a few)
Who kisses up to the sky
Anytime he gets a hit

Or we win.

As if God's a Met fan...

Two run homer off his bat

Yet he thanks the *Man upstairs*.

Out of Place

Gentle light of morning
Accompanies my attempts
(Failed) at writing this
War poem.

Erase,
Delete,
Sounds about right

When it comes to
War poetry.

What have I got
To add?

Some anecdote
About the First Boer War
Where my grandmother's
Grandfather
Died as a drummer?

Or something surface
Level about World War I
In parenthesis...

One hundred years
After the Great Influenza,
And a pandemic of our own
Yet I have got nothing

Not even a form
To affix to,
Conjure Owen,
Sassoon,
Ones who
Had plenty
To add.

One Self

It is in this body of sun sensitive
Skin that I sit down to write, with hands cold
Against the keyboard, or holding the pen.

The window is open in front of me,
And I can feel the same breeze that I see
Touch the grass and the trees across the street.

It is in this same world that I have lived
Since the days before I knew that I was.
And here I still am, sun-worn and full-grown
As far as I know.

The sun comes out from behind a cloud
And I'm aware of my almost-light eyes,
A hazel one shade darker than my dad's
And distant from the blue of my mother's,
And my brother's too.

It is with these eyes whose color is closer
To the shade of the blades across the way
That I see the breeze and think to myself
What is the grass? If not sun-worn, full-grown,

A reminder that so it goes, and it grows

Onward and outward.