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Sea of Cortez

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Author
Caston, Dresden

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Sea of Cortez

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of the requirements for the degree of

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in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Dresden Layne Caston

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Thesis Committee:
Professor Jill Essbaum, Co-Chairperson
Professor Andrew Winer, Co-Chairperson
Professor Anthony McCann
The Thesis of Dresden Layne Caston is approved:

________________________________________

________________________________________

Committee Co-Chairperson

________________________________________

Committee Co-Chairperson

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
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 won't 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 you 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.