

C.E. Chaffin

Jawbreaker
A catalogue of my co-existent
psycchospiritual layers from
the inside out

The Void

Null and void my center
as I stare red-eyed from the chrome skull
of a dimestore ring
at a cigarette's gray flakes
upon the empty web
spanning the fathomless bowl
that distorts my face
in a stainless steel parabola,
standard issue, invisible.

How could you not forget me?

Despair

Weeping and gnashing of teeth
allow some feeling at least
when the anti-matter relaxes
its mobius grip.
Then I can be something—
even evil is better than *nothing!*

All my hallowed ideals
appear forsaken camouflage
for my insistent egotism
and consequent jealousy
of all things not me:
refrigerators, insects, lizards,
stars, the retarded and the dead,
my pain at not being them.

I would be insentient as stone,
a cold smooth thing, an agate.
Nothing I remember
is without pain.

Purgatory

When the spit turns up
I promise my heart to God
then take it back as soon as
the rotisserie turns my head
into the coal-bent air,
wavy as summer asphalt.

God is beyond
these blistering hands
strapped to my sides
like plucked wings— either
an intergalactic sadist
or the cosmic jester
chortling beneath his lapel of stars.
Cruelty is a joke I missed.

Where is hope to whisper I exist?

Repentance

After sweating blood to know,
and knowing I bled in vain,
awareness strikes: neither
despair nor quite acceptance,
more an admission of exhaustion—
like Jonah vomited
on Nineveh's shore.

Once pride is stripped I see myself
as no more worthy or unworthy
than any other, one cockroach
among the hordes that dip
mahogany feet in excrement.
before the Passover.

I am comforted I am no better.

I am comforted they are no better,
who twitch along the baseboards
in jerky reflex as if puppeted,
who overmultiply until they starve
then look on tragedy as undeserved.

I used to think I merited more.

I am a cockroach in God's hand,
crawling in-and-out the palm-hole
as if I belong— a merciful absurdity
that wraps my karma in a bedroll
I can sleep on without evil dreams.

Forgiveness

I suffer to accept and accept to forgive;
not transactional justification
but nature tested beyond nature;
not the practice of religion
but the inescapable conclusion
of losing all, even my valuation
of it. Grace comes not when
I lay down my arms but when
I can no longer lift them.

Redemption

I see how wounds make beautiful tattoos—
no wonder God forbade them.

God uses faults more easily than virtues
because they allow more latitude.

“I have not come to call the righteous,
but sinners to repentance.”

Moses, his mouthpiece, stuttered.

But is Eve made lovelier by scarification?

Joy

Purer than light and more nourishing,
the water of life fills the hollow of grief
without changing its shape.

You will not see it in the average face
but where sorrow is grooved
in the inverse pyramid between the eyes

but the corners of the mouth
curve strangely up with a secret
you would give anything to share.

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