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### In Loving Memory Of Simon Paw'et

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**In Loving Memory  
Of  
Simon Paw'et**

By Thierry Sontaine

**Simon says**

*Listen to your insignificance*

for no one else will brave the silence  
worn flatulent by youth gone out of style

youth sung in dead tongue  
youth dumb forgotten  
youth slung

## Twenty

never made it

past the border,  
the barb-wired  
patrol river,

never past  
the make-believe papers,

or the sticky counter  
with the Movado stools,  
the dirty martinis  
in striped suits,

he never made  
the legal age,  
never made  
the professional  
shot glasses  
and scampi bottles  
from under the table.

Twenty never made it  
past a dream he found  
in his dead mother's bible  
folded neatly  
beside Jesus Cristo.

## **Kin**

He slumps in the chair  
like the ten year-old mistake  
she made freshman year algebra  
with an adjunct lecturer, finals week.

A sweat bead slides down  
his freckled plump cheek  
onto the math worksheet.

They look nothing alike  
according to gossips  
at her church, her parents  
and strangers' gaze  
at the mismatched  
skins they wear.

She pencils another set of numbers on the page,  
he groans, tenses like she felt one full moon,  
after the flood,

a nine-month-step problem,  
no scholarship.

The afternoon sun leaves their table with questions  
the lone night will once more hide in a bottle.

## Another Love Story

All she rescued out of the storm  
is a ten-year-old disaster playing to happen  
and a pair of boxing shades

He updates his MySpace page, forgets his image  
He calls his daughter collect,  
confuses his tangerine suit number for her mother's cell

She survived her high school scaffolding  
but tripped over life after college  
She ordered the combo: child-long distance father

He goes to his firstborn interview, dressed late  
He rents his daughter for the weekend,  
quotes his late pick-up fees

She subleased her pillow to midnight friends  
to eat morning flakes in bed  
with her daughter slipping into adolescence

He wheels his mother to church, smokes a sin  
He drives his sister out of her car,  
picks up a friend's twenty to life

She reminds him of the promises  
He replies he had all the pieces.  
They met many *sorrys* ago  
on her way to the library.

## **Canvassing grief**

They held hands  
for the first time at the wake

The room was stroked  
just right by a broken chandelier  
and red velvet walls ambushed at every corner  
by ashy lamps sketched out of a surrealist magazine

A crowd of trends,  
dears and co-workers took turn  
behind the podium tickling the mummy roses  
painted on the dead end-tables and around the open casket

Nothing dared to move  
after he was summoned to speak  
by the silence policing up and down the aisle  
stopping at random to accost a disorderly murmur

He began “father”  
and mud-slid into an unpaved impasse  
of childhood trees, single mom, three decade  
old questions stuck in the drainpipe of his throat

They held hands  
for the first time, this last time

## **From yonder**

There's a tree falling from this branch  
for all sinners to cross over

There's a tree falling—

And a child waters the crops  
of rotten promises growing  
on the country farms  
of adulthood—

—from this branch

An echo belches the last verse  
of this ancient tale that time shelved  
in the reserved section beside  
the deaf pages left alone to stare

There's a tree—

No one dares to climb  
for fear of losing ground  
on the oxygen the body needs

—for all sinners to cross over

## **Cradling thought**

The wind saddles a flock  
of racing leaves  
and pulls up on him, nesting  
a budding thought

The sun rises from behind  
the unskilled buildings  
casing the avenue

Men and women model  
down to the train

His mother kisses  
a half cigarette goodbye

The stroller wheels  
over a laid-off coffee cup

They embrace at the request  
of the church bells

He wonders why  
they always go opposite the people

## Could be worse

Thirty won't cost as much  
As twenty

Spent

his first Independence day  
with his arthritic mom  
since prom-night,  
since growing his hair  
and twin silver studs.

On her couch,  
in a blue and guilt striped shirt  
he flipped  
through commercials  
and credit card debts.

## **Might no one**

Might be the moon  
humming for its knight  
Might be noon

No one taught  
him against aging  
No one learned

Might be his lungs  
whistling for a taste  
Might be a song

No one mourned  
his weight loss  
No one thought

Might be the drums  
beating poor cellist  
Might be fun

No one heard  
from yesterday  
No one dared

Might be long  
waiting for tomorrow  
if no one

## **Simon teaches us**

He never knew  
that brown stew chicken was ragout  
in patois minus the vegetables

He never knew  
that masturbating was only sinful  
in under-developed tongues  
with no health insurance

He never knew  
To

Listen to the voice

Of his mother cooking  
his father's folktale in the kitchen  
where hair can never seem to grow  
or curl

He never knew why  
his school books talk around him  
and never listen

To the needles poking  
at his crotch  
the Monday  
after he let himself  
in someone's closet  
with no hat

He never knew that youth  
lasted a weekend  
Sunday mass excluded

He never knew to stop

## **Night Out**

They look young posing  
with jealousy

Drunken glass pieces skate  
across the naked floor

They look worn running  
out of fun

Bed sheet rumors  
knock the night manager's  
pinned nametag

They met over moonlight  
hit singles  
through a once friend

## Chez Toussaint

Simon writes

*Laughter splashed  
out of dancing carafes  
and youth painted walls*

And despite history

*He led a hairvolution  
combed in New York  
short after the independence.*

Pierre<sup>1</sup> is the Toussaint,

*history left on a shelf  
to chase after L'Ouverture<sup>2</sup>*

Simon always reminds  
after a shot too many,  
last call,

*Today's special,  
canonization glazed  
with an Haitian zest*

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<sup>1</sup> **Pierre Toussaint** (1766 – June 30, 1853) was born in Haïti. He learned to read and write and he came to New York from Haiti in 1787. In New York, he became an apprentice to one of the city's leading hairdressers. Pierre Toussaint quickly became a popular abolitionist. He was freed from slavery when his owner died in 1807 and later became quite wealthy. In 1996 Toussaint was declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II, the second step toward sainthood.

<sup>2</sup> **Toussaint-Louverture** ( May 20, 1743 – April 7 1803) was a leader of the Haitian Revolution. Born in Saint-Domingue, Toussaint led enslaved blacks in a long struggle for independence over French colonizers, abolished slavery, and secured "native" control over the colony, Haiti.

## **They call him Paw'et**

He tied verses around every envelope  
con edison mailed him and stuffed them  
with the rent in his alliteration tube sock

Luck's still on vacation  
so is cousin income  
and uncle loans  
doesn't answer his phone

He bumped into sunrise not once  
this stanza getting up with midnight  
every rhyme on craigslist

Rejection rings three  
skipped meals a day  
looking for confidence  
who hides in a pillow case

He worked at the museum as a metaphor  
keeping children's candycurious fingers  
and german artpologetic strokes segregated

Eating runs on  
a Ramadan's schedule  
making all local stops  
to Ramen noodle street

He tied verses around every hour  
a day lends him and puffs them  
with his thoughts into the night's line break

## **Staff Meeting**

Four men sit in an oval  
Pens, pads, on their mark

At six, leaning against the new shredder  
fundraising corks open the meeting

Nine, beside a glutted trash can  
boys on drop-out rosters follow

Twelve, the program director  
scrolls down his blackberry

Three o'clock, by the door, I sit  
my head poked out the bullshit

The meeting turns counter-clockwise  
back to the director who to my comment  
steams "don't argue with me"

## **Sick Day**

The sun looks him up and down,  
morning trips over his snores  
drilling through the bedroom floor

into the afternoon spring

time sips on in bed giggling  
with moonlight pill bottles left  
lidless in case his boss asks

## Crutches

It aches to picture him as a boy  
who once wore uniforms and legs  
to playground fights.

Grays ambush his ash-purple lips  
bullying a dying cigarette  
and pushing through a group of teenage eyes  
who refuse to spell his name without crutches.

It takes too long to draw him  
through cracked windows.

I move to a backless bench across the street  
beside my next week's project whose missing son  
she heard is coming back later—older.

It's too late to give him legs or the yankee cap  
he grows his hair into. I'll pick up tomorrow.  
It's been hard getting him to stand on a pad

## **Make Up**

She misplaced my trust, I walked.

The night was indifferent, the hour a sinful gown  
A cop car insisted, the cold stars snatched  
I confessed. Confessed courting the indignant streets,  
upskirting the new building's long-legged windows,  
dreaming through stranger's Egyptian blinds

She flung her wallet, I ducked.

The car was crowded, the seats empty  
A man engaged me, his friend 'cusses'  
I transferred. Transferred to another part of town,  
another reign of sounds, bottled lights,  
another round of lies—no chaser,  
my limping eyes, an out of service train ran over

The morning was whistling, the wind jumpy  
She honked

## **A stranger beside me**

I know him. Met him at dusk  
a decade ago. His name  
and age tossed with the parade  
somewhere in a box my mom  
shamed me to never open.

What's he doing here? Always  
dressed in invisible colors,  
still chewing on the same nail.

It's him. I know him. Buddy?  
Hey! It's me, remember me,  
shy guy with backpack and slacks.

What's he doing? No, please wait!  
Don't leave me with this pillow

## **Simon brings us**

The voice

Of expectations' only problem  
never intent's fault  
no matter if actions wear malicious shades  
and hurtful khakis  
no matter if the moon stands you up again  
for curvaceous clouds  
no matter if your checking accounts  
for your mood swings  
no matter if Monday forgets to smile  
in the conference lounge  
no matter if your phone bill is high  
and your inbox horny  
no matter

*The voice of your insignificance*

*Simon says*

Till morning dew comes  
on scaffolding leaves  
where he lives  
with a middle-aged  
viral patient always  
in sharing spirit

He clocked  
out his mother's  
many odd jobs  
ago

And plopped  
on his roommate's  
federal assistance  
couch rolling  
his thoughts

Till morning dew comes

he avoids his mother  
so he can blame it  
all on his father  
to whoever jingles  
a quarter

in his wintery hat  
or whoever  
gives his smile  
a ride to a black alley  
on christopher valley

Till morning dew

## **Thirty got him**

on north illicit  
and clouds street

Many knew him bi  
the distance convertible  
he rode through town

And nameless mornings  
spent in leather laced rumors  
at his mind's desk

Thirty years cuffed him,  
a clock hiccupped his rights

The judge deliberated  
aging for life no bail

## Simon recites

The last verse of genesis  
on the streets of his unkempt mind  
looking for shelter in a pair of socks  
turned asphalt color with streaks of red  
light in the back seat of a distance convertible  
in mid October days after his thirtieth birthday

*Listen to the voice of your insignificance*  
for no one else will brave the silence  
worn flatulent by youth gone out  
of style in the middle of winter

*Listen*

when no one  
remembers his name they bury  
deep in their spam  
box away from wife  
and children  
they used to complain about

*Listen*

Hears nothing when the sun sleeps  
where morning doesn't run

He assumes the given name corked him  
at a parade last Halloween

Here's how it began from little a friend  
volunteered at a precinct

He left looking for himself at the street fair  
but slid over youth peels

**Simon warns against**

Everything  
pen named tradition

everything  
postmarked sacred

everything  
promised

*your insignificance*

He digs out of a recycling can  
his mother's passing  
with mourning painted finger

nails

everything  
he remembers  
everything  
thirty blurs

in a go green  
bag of smells

everything  
adds up to this  
everything piled  
in a cart that squeaks

his sister brings at visiting hour  
in her incriminating white uniform  
with smiles he wishes the glass window  
could send back to the board where future  
was once spelled gpa in bright chubby colored fonts

before everything  
happened  
before anything

*Listen to the voice of your insignificance*

sown above his left orange breast pocket

he slides in a slice of his childhood  
he's carried since first communion  
in the same wallet his father left  
behind with him in a closet full  
of tears his mother smiled overtime  
to forget doesn't have a lock

## **Simon leaves us**

With instructions his dimples  
traded in for smiles

friendships that never sail  
past the bar

moon-size illusions  
jail shaped

contusions gossiping  
out loud

morning breakfast  
in diapers

## **Simon remembers**

every child

dreams

loves

giggles

forgets

to listen

to the voice

of indifference kept  
in solitary confinement  
for turning down mashed potato  
flies and drown stew chicken  
he never knew was ragout in penitentiary

he never knew to stop  
until the jail priest began

“The Lord is my shepherd”

he heard silence for the first time

“I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”

months ago in a stranger’s bed  
a banker’s wrinkle  
a one night song

“he leadeth me beside the still waters”

he moved to stop  
for the first time

“I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”

he never knew  
that mid-knight  
drinks and “no”  
didn’t mix

he never knew  
silence

until a knife

squirted  
on siren painted

walls  
his insignificance