In Loving Memory Of Simon Paw'et

Thierry Saintine
CUNY City College of New York

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In Loving Memory
Of
Simon Paw’et

By Thierry Saintine
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

—from this branch

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.

Pierre¹ is the Toussaint,

history left on a shelf
to chase after L’Ouverture²

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

Today’s special,
canonization glazed
with an Haitian zest

¹ 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.

² 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 snitched
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 blur

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