

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Grant Clauser: Three Poems

Grant Clauser · Wednesday, December 6th, 2023

Happy As

In high school my friends and I would drive around
in Stem's van, high as kites, we'd play a game
called *Happy As* and name three things
we were as happy as, like apple pie,
skipping school, making out with so-and-so,
then try to beat each other with joy
until the weed buzz wore off. One friend
shipped to Kuwait after graduation, then Afghanistan
in the first wave, and never came back.
Another dropped out of college for rehab.
The third I bumped into ten years ago
with not much to say. Me bald. He'd gone gray.
Worry and doubt, those close companions of age
worn across our faces like tattoos.
Other troubles roam around in blood cells
for years until they find something inside you
to break. Joys too, but never by themselves.
I wanted to ask him what he's happy as,
if he could name three things, and I'd try to top
his list with mine. Happy as the bills paid on time.
Happy as a call from the kids. Happy as the resting
heartbeat that's been wrong about so much.

*

Planting Pawpaws

Their seeds look like coat buttons smeared
in the fallen fruit's ripe custard.
Pushing four of them into compost pots
in fall for planting is a category of defiance,
a confidence that seasons and shadows,

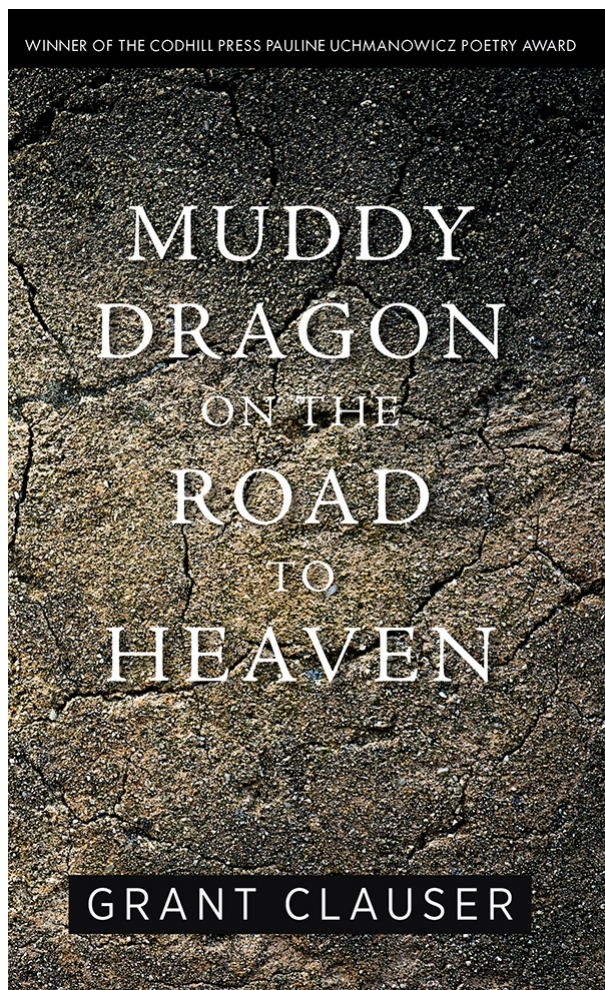
sunlight when it comes, will be kind,
 that life will limb into sturdy bones,
 that bones will leaf and bloom, and blooms
 expand to fruit settlers here called
 Hillbilly Banana, or Quaker Delight.
 A complicated sweetness that surprises
 in a season when everything else is dying.
 My therapist friend says you can talk yourself
 into hope, a new life, but it's work
 to force something bright from a dark place,
 like searching the woods for a fruit tree
 that bends between borders and wastelands.
 A neighbor gave me a bucket of them,
 and I spoon the pulp, seeds and all,
 directly into my mouth, smooth
 the small stones with my tongue and spit
 them into my palm. Some may rot
 in the planter, may be scavenged
 by squirrels or broken by ice in winter,
 but if I'm lucky, if all the promises nature makes
 with fingers crossed and eyebrows furrowed,
 then one day I'll lift ripe pawpaws
 off the ground and give you some.

*

Lower Hawk Run

A thousand times I've studied
 the whirl of water when a trout
 sips my dry fly from a riffle,
 and each still stirs me like a child
 surprised with a toy. The small joy
 of it. Like how perfectly hemlock needles
 drift in the current at the same speed
 as my elk-hair caddis. I bend
 my knees slowly into the river,
 careful to not disturb the resting
 of time, believing water itself
 is time pushing and pausing, adding
 to itself, all of it eventually
 to an abyss so great even the sun
 can't reach the end of it.
 This trout. This fly. This dash
 from hiding into morning light.
 Let's all be children again, finding
 delight in small surprises, bending
 our lives with the ease of water

flowing over stones, great things
moving through us.



Muddy Dragon on the Road to Heaven by Grant Clauser

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