

My Love of the Sea

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In loving memory of Corey B. McFry.

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Introduction

The inspiration for writing this poetry chapbook came from the death of my best friend, Corey. In July of 2012, Corey was visiting Lake Michigan with his friends when a wave knocked him off a sandbar and into the water. He was not able to escape the strong rip currents and drowned. Having suffered the loss of a different friend just nine months previously, I was deeply hurt by the news of Corey's death.

A few weeks prior to his death, Corey messaged me on Facebook to ask why no one answered when he came to see me. I was not at home the day he came by, and I failed to relay that message to him. His new friendships with others stopped him from coming by for quite a while before his last attempt to hangout, which made me jealous and annoyed. If I would have known the events that were to unfold just three weeks later, I would have replied to him in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, the past cannot be changed and I must live with the burden of ignoring his last message.

This chapbook journeys the reader through my experience of Corey's death, my feelings towards the water, the five stages of grief, and a reflection. Before Corey's death, my favorite place to visit was the beach. I enjoyed playing in the water with my friends and typically ignored rip current and high wave warnings. Today, I still quite enjoy being at the beach, but refuse to go past my knees in the water. I decided to title this chapbook *My Love of the Sea*, because it signifies two things I lost; Corey and my fondness of the water.

1. Roses in May

A good friendship blossoms
like roses in May, pearly
blooms new and pure. Thorns
grow, vex, keep pests at bay
to protect beautiful buds.

Stems intertwine, creating
a spiny brush to watch
over silky, white petals
carefully arranged
into a natural spring bouquet.

Sometimes barbed wire
is not enough to refract
unwanted predators. Protective
gloves allow them to pluck
those desired for their concoction.

Only one is needed to complete
the artificial bunch of breeds.
Foreign hands clip the prettiest
of us, leaving a vacant spot
and a lonely neighbor.

2. Adam's Ale

It was the summer of my life,
warm rays pressed their strong fingers deep into my shoulders
as I took in the salted aroma of air around me.
With each reverberation of the waves, billowing onto the shores,
memories of the past year filtered through me.
All that had once happened did not matter
except for those who were dear to me.

At night, I would dream of the vast blue engulfing me
with gentle arms, and I knew that this was where I was
meant to be. When not there, I found myself longing
for the water's support and company of its suspension,
fragments of the past plaguing my freckled skin.

There was not once where I did not feel home
in every briny taste, grainy touch, cracking sound,
nor any blooming sunrise or marigold sunset.
Everybody finds rest in the crutch of paradise,
and this was mine.

As I inhaled that final bit of freedom,
I kissed my first love goodbye not knowing
it was going to be the last.

3. Niagara

*Lungs flooded with sorrow, the same
as his refreshing breath of polluted lake water.
We didn't know we'd find the absence of God
and the presence of Niagara looming over us.*

I came into the kitchen to visit Mom and Mammaw—
my aunt called to let us know they'd be late.
Someone found themselves lost in the water;
they weren't allowed to leave.

Our theme that summer punched my gut:
rip current warning for beach-goers.
Aftershocks rippled through my body
more than crashes of waves usually would.

Suddenly, a guilty conscience delivered absent
memories of a once dear friend. Drowning
in the back of my mind—his name
and the ignorance of a message left on read.

4. Dissent

My eyes glazed with the concerned glare
a child gets when they lose
their parents in a grocery store. Gaping

at the various posts of my frantic friends,
a desert of hope spilled past their desperate
fingertips, while denial crept past mine.

How could the once welcoming current
distort and morph itself into a bandit,
only to kidnap and flee with our dearest friend?

Time froze as we awaited a goblet of good news,
so we could guzzle down its sacred message,
cool our parched tongues of purgatorial fires.

Solace never came. Only unconsoling words:
this cannot be happening, no, not to me.

5. Indignation

One minute, you're okay.

Then, an unimportant echo resounds.
A crack of lightning forces itself down
your nervous system; your heart pounds.
You, too, feel as if you're going to drown.

Inaudible screams trapped inside
lucid dreams. The letters E-S-C-A-P-E
etched on vocal folds. You pull the lever
to leave. Not asking, *demanding*.

Sweating, confused, the smell of cigarette
smoke and its sweet fumes ease your blood,
darkness still looms. Suddenly,
a maternal angel comes to help you.

It's okay. Just breathe... breathe... breathe.

6. The Seawoman's Wager¹

There was a brave seawoman
 Who journeyed to Leviathan
 In a desperate effort to bargain
 For a treasured soul looted.

Nought to her was more precious;
 Sailors warned her of its conditions,
 The creature would wager a price
 For that of value to be repaid.

She found his gnarly quarters
 Just past Davy Jones' locker,
 Surrounded by decrepit coral
 At the bottom of the Dead Sea.

Her arrival awoke the serpent,
 Its tail snaked around her waist.
 Rays seeped onto its forked tongue
 As he proceeded to say:

*A penny for your thoughts?
 He taunted the seawoman curiously.
 What is it you desire most?
 Perhaps we can make this trade easy.*

Her pleas bubbled into the water,
 Exclaiming that of which she needed.
 Nought else was there she wished
 Except the return of her companion.

*A soul you require, is it?
 Unfortunately, that cannot be done
 Those who meet Davy Jones
 No longer shall feel the mortal sun.*

Her eyes with tears ran over
 As she realized the forbidden future.
 She left Leviathan's murky chambers
 Never more returning to sea.

¹ Poem inspired by "Der König in Thule" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

7. Swine's Mockery

i felt the weight of a greedy hog
crushing my chest. it gnawed
on happiness and manifested it
into lard, weighing down
my fragile ribs, suffocating me.
i tried to wedge my arm out,
force its greasy hooves away,
stop it from indulging
on any leftovers i stored
in the fridge for a later date.
he scarfed them all down
before i could save any for myself.
scoffing and slurping the remaining
bits around his fat, grimy snout,

he taunted my residual
hope for a lighter chest.

Epigraph to “Closure”

In the days leading up to Corey’s body being found, I retained a small ounce of hope that he would be found alive, clinging to either a rock or buoy in the water. Upon hearing the news from my mother that this was not the case, I searched for an article that opposed her words. This poem, representing acceptance, is inspired by the article I read from the *Chicago Tribune*² announcing his death. I wanted to portray how I perceived the article at the time, therefore I removed all words that were insignificant to me. Those that are left over stood out and provided me with proper closure from my false hope.

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2012-07-11-ct-met-drowned-teen-found-0711-20120711-story.html>

8. Closure

The body disappeared in Lake Michigan

found Tuesday morning

The body was found

and

the

rescue had been searching since

Sunday night

he disappeared

They looked, he was gone

4-foot waves when Corey off the sandbar was knocked

underwater, friends looked another went to

call 911.

There is a sign

— warning of rip currents .

9. Revelation 21:4³

In those days leading up to this final moment,
I could feel your frustrated spirit lurking
around every wisp of feathered cigarette
smoke that I exhaled from my blackened lungs.

I could taste your bitter goodbyes through
spongy filters and yet, every few minutes
I would confide to my phone in hopes that I missed
a call; a hymn rejoicing of your rebirth.

I didn't expect your second coming to be this way.
Memories of our reunion foresaw rusted swing sets
accompanied by an action-packed story of your victory
over Poseidon, your long awaited return from Atlantis.

What they did not foresee is disheveled grass,
shattered hearts, waterlogged tears of those you loved,
and the porcelain tent that forbids the July sun
entrance into your ceremony.

As I approach the hollow plot before me, I endow
upon your new, baby blue womb a finger-traced cross
as a parting gift to keep you safe embarking on your journey.
My broken farewells bead on the milky roses

aloft your casket while I plea
that our disparate fates will find each other again.

³ "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Epigraph to “Reflection”

“Reflection” is an ekphrastic poem⁴ influenced by the following photograph⁵ of Lake Michigan:



⁴ “An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ekphrasis>

⁵ Photograph from https://www.reddit.com/r/Michigan/comments/9n5lmy/lake_michigan_sunset/

10. Reflection

After you took him, I feared
my toes would be devoured
once I triggered the responsive teeth
of your gluttonous shore. I carefully
placed my dehydrated heels, gnarled
from a summer's worth of scorched
pavement, gently in the ice bath you drew
for me. The shiver down my spine
was a sign that hunting season was over.

Ringling in my ears was your anthem,
the tune of sweet oceanic serenades
sung by deviant enslaved, sirens.
Lurking below in navy, matte
ripples just a few months prior,
they tapped their tattered tails
treacherously on your behalf,
while their ancestors hummed
a shanty of youthful sacrifice.

I accepted your golden apology
only because each rosy splash of color
reminded me of his cheeks blushed
with fresh blood, each wave of sapphire
mimicked the innocent irises of his eyes,
the retreating sun's final burst of light
reminded me of his warmth,
and the water's reflection reminisced
on his beautiful life cut too short.