

CHAD PREVOST

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*POEM UNDER NO ILLUSIONS OF ITSELF AS AN OLIVE BRANCH*

This could be the poem you plucked from the dove's mouth. Once upon a time, it was the artifact you dreamed of, the branch to a new world. Or, this poem can be your covenant as it scoots its chair away from history's table. It's gone to chase fireflies and roll away memory's tombstone in order to characterize itself as a poem of witness. All it's ever wanted was to pick itself up by the bootstraps of its disadvantaged past, the fact that it wasn't brought up in a family who cared for its salvation. There was a time when it felt redeemed by all it didn't understand, like how a sparrow becomes a bat in the evening off the Colorado's limestone cliffs, or why hope refuses to keep pushing up its curious head like a mushroom under an alien moon. It listens to the arguments for remaining at war, for picking a fight with the dull life of its reality.

It never asked to perform a soldier's duty, to act as a stand-in for lost causes larger than itself. It's more like an adolescent who wants separation from its author-parent, wants to rev up its Harley and motor away from its origins in Chattanooga, from the person parading around as Chad Prevost. This poem has been searching for proof of its existence. Originally, it began with an allusion to Samson, as a blind metaphor for toppling the support pillars and sacrificing its life to bring down the persecutor philistines. When it realized it would only die a senseless death that way, it flew off to the presumed space of Eden's waterlands, but the past's constant falling away from an idyllic source seemed overdone. When this sentence's logic couldn't find the tomb of Jesus or proof of the real Ark, it gave up forcing the historical record against the canon's representations, believing the exiled Jews' existence miracle enough.

This poem was minding its own business in a local café, trying to nail down what's been

on its mind, when a former student of the author's asked him what he was doing. When he told her he was trying to write this poem, she said, "I've never liked poems. Why not just say what you mean?" After a few beats she said, "Put me in one of your poems?" Like anyone, this poem only wants to mean exactly what it says, wants to be known, accepted for what it is. Maybe it knows it doesn't deserve any better than what it gets, knows what you'll do to it even as it puts its trust in you, even as it makes a kind of idol out of you, saying to you the very things it would love to hear.

If this poem hadn't seen all it has, it wouldn't be so at odds with itself, wouldn't try to get Chernobyl out of its radioactive heart by naming aloud in the middle of the night, without warning, the cancer-stricken kids it has come to know, wouldn't keep its wounds unhealed by picking at its scabs. It might think that ignorance really was bliss unless it knew for a fact how you and I are chained by what we fail to know. So, it doesn't know what else to do but offer itself as a paean of praise, token of observation, prayer in disguise of an elegy, and extend the olive branch of its halting attempts at meaning so at least while each word lasts in your mind's eye, it feels some sense of purpose, a kind of giving back even as you bottle it up and cast it to the open mouth of the sea.

Maybe somewhere too deep for it to go this poem knows how you're preparing to strip it down and make it beg. Or, for all anyone knows, this could be the poem you saved from the arid heat of Hell's Canyon where it wanted only to remain unread and forgotten. Its author had been suffering sunstroke beneath a bright Boise sky and got the crazy idea to find the Hemingway house in Ketchum where the old man blasted a hole in his head when he couldn't order his world the way he'd always done before. Hemingway had things this poem's been willing to live without: women, money, fame spreading like fire ants across the desert west. You might say both traveled the world in search of facts that led them to the heart of uncanny fascinations with death. Blood flirts in this poem's mind like a matador's red cape.