



BURIED
DIARY

POEMS

JOSHUA CHRIS BOUCHARD

BURN
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Also by Joshua Chris Bouchard

ABRACADABRA (with Fawn Parker)

BORDERLINE DEFINITIONS

LET THIS BE THE END OF ME

PORTRAITS

WOOL WATER

BURN DIARY

POEMS

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A Buckrider Book

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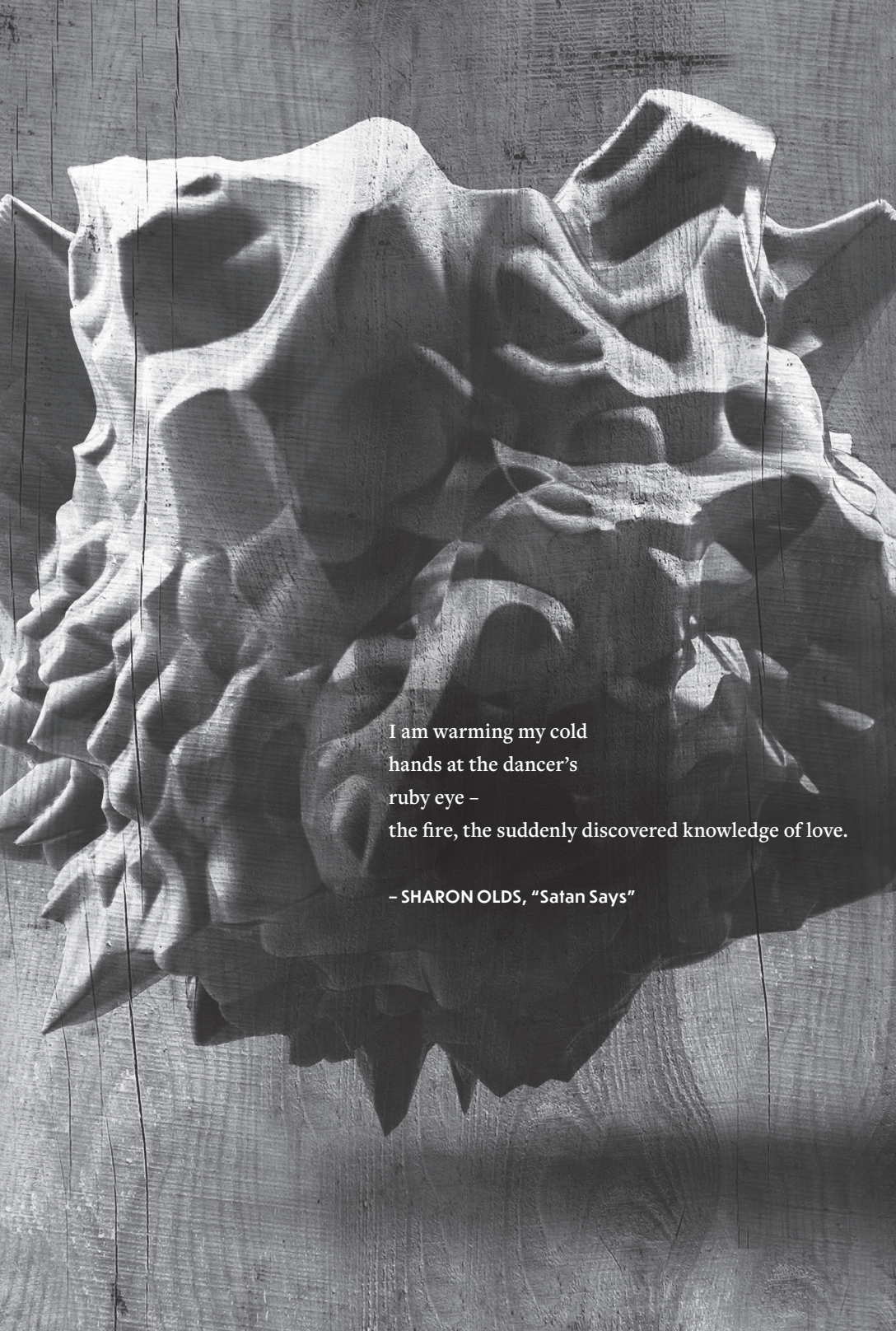
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I am warming my cold
hands at the dancer's
ruby eye –
the fire, the suddenly discovered knowledge of love.

– SHARON OLDS, "Satan Says"



Miracle

I am born in the holy milk of my mother's eyes,
and she calls me *Electric, Moment, Dumbbell,*
Fever. Severed from black muscle of hollow
bone, the earth pries my fists and they hold
me in their image. *This is a sacred rite and now*
you belong to the earth. Thank you, I now succumb
to the world. I learn to clean my hair with vinegar
and spit, slowly in time, then expertly
in my father's house. He builds conical nests,
reads his paperback, caresses my body with his mouth.
Lethargy, he says, *is a terrible sin.* She asks
him where the others went, as he clears a hole in the
branches, opens a glass bin of ghosts: teeth, skulls,
carapaces, eyebrows, tufts of hair. They were called
prisoners, threaded behind the rib cage
under her blouse and undone sutures – still, impure.
Bootlegging lives like criminals, they teach me
where they keep fault lines at the ends of dull
days, as they bathe me in the golden hem of the sun,
feed me berries and eggplants, call my names.

Dissemination

The ocean has purpose.
Saying *the past is the past* is useless.

I don't have much, but a body has its benefits.
Smooth roll of the surf.
Empty space in a trough.

The ocean opens and shuts like a window.
The thing is, I've only ever seen it.

Once I put my toes in a wave.
Chaos as it inhaled.
But that's it.

One way or the other, things overflow.
What *things*?

If you want something, fight for it.
I was told to hear myself before I speak.
You can't just take a voice once it's there.

Whatever the ocean takes, it gives back.
Right?

Irony has its uses, but lays flat like a jellyfish.
Reminds people to pay attention.

Describing the ocean is useless.
Most people already know how to disappear.

Procession

Natural causes. I read back the revisions
of your literature, receding hairline, French

accent: fledged by your little daughters.
Hot breath cringing in the lake behind

the house, steak for breakfast, wood lawns
to spread on. A part of me came from

your cock, a part of me came from
your hands, a part of me came from

the old back roads. Where the girls
crawled out to kiss their lonely fathers.

Animals

What I feel is what I always mean.
Against broken moving parts.

Writhe is all I should do.
Be those animals moaning in sun fur.

We mean to slam our arches on backbones.
Strike piles of flint with our teeth.

We can be a dog flapping its unhinged jaw.
Sometimes we are even all its spit.

Sometimes at night we burn like houses.
Bored in the rabid yellow foam of fuck.

We are brave but hide within each other.
We become everything that is holy shit.

How to Tear a Partridge Apart

Ask Daddy to show you how to hunt it. It's always wet in the moss, he tells you, and the tracks of the half-born calves lead you to open nests. They're all idiots struck by thunder. It should be October. It should be morning. It should be calm and feel like aching. Inside the trails, ask him how to finger coagulated sap from pine trees, put it in your mouth and chew it like gum. *Just like this*, he says. Nature's blood candy. Walk for hours. Enough to collapse under the weight of your backpack. Hold the rifle in your arms like a newborn and coo. Stop at a muskeg, but he doesn't call it a muskeg, and scan the covey. See them bobbing their heads, lazy and dumb, and point at them. Treat them like your children. Watch them swoon in ditches. Pick one, any one, because they're all the same, lifelike but not quite real. Replace your hand with the rifle and aim. Point at their eyes. Always remember that the good meat is the breast meat – it must be shot clean and free of pellets or lead. See the breaking sun. See the crosshairs. See the finger rest on the crescent-moon trigger. When the aim is right, shoot. If it strikes, you'll see blood on the grass. Watch their brothers and sisters hide in the echo. Put your hands on its body. Stuff it in a plastic bag. Shake Daddy's hand when he says, *Good*. Bring the carcass back to camp, the one that shadows the dead lake, and put the carcass on leaves by the logs, the empty shore. Hold the partridge upside down by its feet. Rest the head just above the ground, spread its limp wings with your heels. Place your boots over each and grip the skin, and when he says, *Do it*, rip out the legs from the body. The slow threat of flesh, ripped from feathers, as the inside separates from breastbone, the hidden parts once intact

at the pelvis, and the only things left are the head and feet.
The dull knife still cuts through hollow bone. Throw
the gizzards into a shallow hole, but he doesn't call it a hole,
and wash the breast meat in a basin. The guts signal foxes.
The blood attracts turtles. But you don't kill those things.
Daddy cuts the meat into strips, prepares the pan with
butter and oil. Keep the feet as souvenirs. Pull at tendons,
make the talons open and shut, pretend the secret thing
it came from once had life. You laugh deep in the woodshed,
sharpen knives with spit. One day soon, you'll hate all of this.

Violence

Take birds home and attach
them on cliffs with wire. Concrete
heads like the temple size
of your heart, shards of beak, remnants
of stunted growth. Your memory
is sharp now, teeth cut in shoals
in your mouth. Wet sinews of

that mouth, reflections of meat
trespassing from interiors
moulded into shape with talons,
painted onto dirt. Discarded
feathers, eyes, soft guilt.
Forget where you buried
the remains.

Jazz

You tell me how to hurt myself with spoons.
You keep bathwater in jars on the porch.
I used to be your unhinged silly dumbo.
Sometimes you find me hiding in a hole.
I used to pretend I couldn't move.
You showed me home movies about avalanches.
Your fingers held thread against my hands.
The radiator is on full blast.
You fall asleep on my tiny white thighs.
I'm grateful when you check if I pissed myself.
We're old now and live far from our memories.
You tell me you miss the glint in my eyes.
You know all my sins.

Bloodlines

I dream of basketball nets tangling the horned earwigs.
My grandmother and her baked-rhubarb effigy.

When I'm spinning out of control, I call it leaning
right in. My sister raising her eyebrows in the living
room, her heavy body like stained wool.

It's all natural, like birth or water
or deer at dusk in the rut, moths awestruck
by lamplight. Her fingers gripping at my neck.

The moment I felt my hands in the fire of my life
was when I put them in you and taught myself to be
a hell king.

She shows my blood in her hands and baby garter snakes
she pulls from traps. She begs to be forgiven.

I forget where I hid the notebooks. Without them
I'd never know her anatomy, little strips left of me to eat.

It could have been much worse without the words.
We forgive those who made it feel so perfect.

Abandonment Season

I haven't been well
lately. I'm not always
eating my greens, folding
my clothes, extracting those
cysts. My mother is sick.
A wolf dressed in knives. Soon
it will be spring.

I Hate that Journey for You

Fishing on Pear Lake at dawn
I had a knife for nothing.

A bear or wolf in broad light,
too scared to walk to the generator.

In the shadow of the shed it was placed
under the cedar, evergreen and water lines

before the clearing where they came.
Two men over the hill on a four-wheeler.

On the lake I raised my hand to wave
and they returned, my knife felt smooth

between my legs where it was neatly placed.
I gutted the fish as the men drove away.

Travelling safe back to the dark –
the men were effortless.





Joshua Chris Bouchard is the author of *Let This Be the End of Me* (Bad Books Press) shortlisted for the 2019 bpNichol Chapbook Award. He wrote or cowrote five chapbooks, and his poetry appears in *Event*, *CV2*, *Carousel*, *Poetry Is Dead*, *PRISM international*, *Arc*, *The Ex-Puritan* and more.



“A survey of the unrelenting violence of life and love. A boy becomes a man becomes a poet. The poems in Bouchard’s debut are filthy, fearless and pulsatingly alive. His hands nearly visible on the page, he cradles beauty and trauma at once and, like a strongman with a phone book, tears them down the centre. As in ‘When I Walk into an Air-Conditioned Dollarama,’ Bouchard grabs the reader by the shoulders and screams, ‘Oh look at this thing as I pass away I love it.’ *Burn Diary* is a book bound with sinew, pine sap and scar tissue.”

– **FAWN PARKER**, author of *Soft Inheritance*

“Bouchard presents our world as you have never seen it – have only dared to feel it from the unfinished basement of your 3:00 a.m. mind. These poems sneak out the back door of your memory to ‘[smoke] pot / from a cracked Coke can behind a church,’ then ‘bathe [you] in the golden hem of the sun.’ They break and burn and torment and then, when you least expect it, they settle your wounded heart. These are poems which will teach you the terror of tenderness ripping through you like a train, but only if you are brave enough to let them in.”

– **JESSICA BEBENEK**, author of *No One Knows Us There*

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