

Version 1 (February 2016)

Broken

i.

A puppy's vinyl choke chain: yellow, frayed wrapped tight
around antique door knob and two hundred fifty
year old oak door, holding up three hundred pounds of misery
stretched between tomorrow and fifth of single malt.

ii

"Okay, let's write this up, I got one hell of a night
planned – mussels with the old lady – then some blues
It's just what it looks like, that leash, that good booze,
Wrap it! She's a damn dentist. Shit, he worked for the city."

iii

deep breath last long swig suck gut until ribs hurt
shake head so vinyl slips to collarbone
nod head nod head to tighten collar into sweat

Her, home from hospital over pool of shit and urine
the body leaves as final gesture, under leash against that door
sponge one hand, old boxers the other, knees bloodying kitchen floor.

Version 2 (November 2019)

I Just Can't, I Just Can't White Workshop This Poem

1. *The Poem*

A puppy's vinyl choke chain: yellow, frayed, wrapped tight
around an antique door knob on a two hundred fifty
year old oak door, balancing three hundred pounds of misery
and flesh between eternity and expensive fifth of single malt.

ushering
into/with 2

"Okay, let's wrap this. No matter they're colored, I got a night
planned - mussels with the old lady - then some blues.
We know him. It's what it looks like, that leash, that good booze,
Wrap it! She's a damn CPA, he was a doctor worked for the city."

deep breath / last long swig / suck gut hard until ribs hurt
shake / shake head / so yellow vinyl / slips tight / right under chin
nod head / nod head / to clinch collar / into darkness / into sweat

Her, home from hospital over the pool of shit and urine
a body leaves as final gesture under the leash on that door
sponge one hand, boxers the other, knees bloodying kitchen floor.

2. *The Problem*

I just can't white workshop this poem.
They will like the opening way too much.
The first reading will earn that awkward
workshop moment of silence surrounding
the visual hammer blow from the over-the-top
opening stanza. But isn't that's the problem?
They love it when you drop a sanitary
semi-exotic urban image. Especially one
where most of the chunks of flesh
are scrapped away, leaving just a little
skin and some body fluids. But that worn
collar, that brass lock, that good whiskey
was there, so that opening is just a photograph
dressed up in lyric and line breaks.

(first stanza)

(carefully)

leash
it

The problem is the lie. What I don't say.
What I can't read for all those earnest faces
around the table. I don't say how his grandfather
was Chickasaw. That his daddy died
with a needle in one arm, the other cradling
a bottle in a cinder block house on the poorest
part of the res. What I don't say
is how her great-grandparents were island
slaves twenty five years after Lincoln set
everyone free. That after running, after the
rickety boat ride, sharecropping Georgia dirt
was a blessing in a brutal life that made
sense in a world of hunger and hurt.
What I can't say, what I can't subject
to the vicious tyranny of metaphor
is the scene of that first time. When
they saw each other floating
in all those white faces in a high school
hallway. When their eyes finally
drilled in to each other and they saw
enough - enough color, enough need,
enough escape, to lose themselves for two
decades lost in a strange and familiar pain.

(won't)
(won't)

won't
her grand parents

sweet sense

their
finally

workshop

I just can't white workshop this poem
because the truth is there was just this door
cut from a tree growing before the Mayflower,
there was just this barely empty bottle of scotch,
there was just this leash, one end cut
by paramedics, the other still wrapped
around that brass. I can't white workshop
this poem because I won't share the image
in that room, around that table
of his hands on her throat squeezing harder
and harder each time in meter
her head slamming against the wall in a slow
steady rhythm. What I will never read
in workshop is the first thing she saw
that morning: the coffee table moved

that happen so
many times she lost
count
not the slumped

room
workshop

to the center of the kitchen and cleared off of everything, ash trays, beer bottles, papers except the one-way ticket back to the islands for the next day he must have found while she slept looking for papers, weed or another cigarette in her purse.

I can't write workshop this poem because I can't listen to the discussion about if race is really necessary in this text. I can't act appropriately interested during the casual scan of the lines to inquire whether they are iambic or trochaic. Because there was just this kitchen, this door, this empty bottle, this leash. And I can't face what I left out to get that elegant dismount, what I must ignore to pretend the poem can reach past that leash, that door, that blood and piss stained floor. What I had to not see to earn lyrical closure, what struggled and struggled to stay the hell out of the final stanza. Next her bloody knees, next to the torn boxers dripping piss and shit was a small plate with three white pills, and a big tumbler of vodka without ice. She would pop one then sip, pop one then sip, pop one then sip, tight braids framing the face, framing the swollen eyes, the tear streaked coal-colored skin with perfect teeth in a small firm smile.

when they

body in the kitchen,
tied to that leash,
not the barely finished
bottle, not the pool
of piss and shit
but the coffee

I intended them

lines of coke
(it's a party)