



# Good Friday 2000

Dana Crum

## Good Friday 2000



Dana Crum

*And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness  
Over all the earth until the ninth hour.  
And the sun was darkened,  
And the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*  
—LUKE 23: 44-45

I did believe once. I sat in church  
fifty-two Sundays a year, the Bible pinned  
to my thighs, a dissected dove.

In DC it was just Ma and me.  
No default-set smiles  
when entering the sanctuary.  
If we missed service, the phone  
minded its business. My knees forgot  
the rough kiss of carpet.

Reverend Smith preached and paced  
and clenched his fists, the veins  
in his brow throbbing like snakes  
in a muddy country stream.  
He listed what I must and must not do—  
bear abuse from throats thick  
with wickedness, never forget  
I'm a lampblack smock  
not worth its daily cleansing.

The unyielding pew  
sliced my thighs in two.

The sky lights up like a blank TV screen,  
then blackens. With a boom the tube  
shatters and clear shards shower down. It's day

but it's so dark I can almost believe  
God's reminding us of an ancient Friday's weather.  
I can almost believe Christ dropped into time

then dropped out  
as the sun burned black.  
Can almost believe he grappled death;

that he served as our whipping boy  
then his father wrapped us  
in a long embrace.

*A long time ago...I met a man called Jesus...He talked...with me...  
He walked...with me...And when we got to the fountain...that sprang  
from His veins...He washed me in His blood...and right then and there...  
I lost all my stains...Right then and there...I made a down payment...  
And I send a lil' on it...every burden that I bear...*



“You wouldn't be a Christian  
if your slave master wasn't one.” With Rasheed  
between classes.

“They got you worshipping  
a white Jesus, turning the other cheek  
even though Five-O is whooping yo' ass.”

“Good to know.”  
Stuffing my bag with mathematics. “But  
I'm not really a Christian anymore.”

“You ain't no Muslim.”

“What? I gotta be one or the other?”

In Grandma's black-and-white bungalow,  
no music but gospel, no dates

without the family Argus, no floor  
unscrubbed or leaves unraked

without a lecture  
patched with Scripture.

Roll your eyes if you want to.  
Her fist

would fix them. "I'll bust  
you upside yo' head."

*You know...a whole lot of people quit Church... 'cause they ain't hear what they wanted to hear... But it's the shepherd's job... to feed... and lead... It's the flock's job... to swallow... and follow... Don't you know it's perilous... to walk away from the Church?...*



We sat on a blue Sunbird—three flat tires, no hubcaps.  
“At Princeton all you gon’ get is ‘The white man  
this, the white man that.’ And all the white man  
done is exploit the black man and lie  
about his past.”

“Now our chains are mental.”

“Right! But Lincoln ain’t free us. The ghetto, crack,  
these fucked-up schools, low-paying jobs. It’s a  
cipher unequal.”

“That’s why I’m leaving.”

“We need smart brothers like you. Stay.”

A tabby scudded up the hill, its four legs a dozen.  
I stood. “You don’t need to like the college I’m going to.”

“I’m just trying to save you, brother.”

“Save yourself.”

One Spring Break  
my mom asked me to say grace.  
I bowed my head. "Can you do it?"

She eyed me as we ate.  
"You don't bit  
more believe in Christ than you believe  
Reagan love black folks."

I studied squash.

"Do you even go to church?"

Chomping pork chop and cabbage.  
"Sometimes." Not a complete lie.  
I went on MLK Day.

*I wish I had some comfortable words to tell ya...I can't find them  
in the Book...I just keep on reading and reading and I keep stumbling  
into these same words... 'Ye shall be hated...of all men...for my  
name's sake'...And I stay up all night...just trying to...find something  
nice...But all I find...is hard things...*



Cruise up and down its hills, and the Magic  
City drops and rises, a dark carpet  
nailed down with blazing tacks.

The first time I flew down—'98, the year  
my mom moved back—I purposely forgot  
to pack a suit: that way no church.

This time I don't forget.

At Damascus Baptist  
we sit before the altar, my grandmother's  
black wig awry, her hair  
gray claws; my mother  
crowned with a yellow hat, its top  
a lopsided pound cake. The organist wrings  
music from a dying organ. The church sings:

*At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light  
And the burden of my heart rolled away...*

The sky lights up like a blank TV screen,  
then blackens. What happens  
to the soul? Does it

arrow north or south, a flock  
of Arctic terns? Does it  
stir the limp limbs

of a fetus  
in its bubble? Or does it  
crumble, a fist

of dry oak leaves?  
I squat between a murmuring metropolis  
and a cacophonous town.

I visit. I roam their streets alone.  
Strange tongues point like fingers.



28022 22<sup>nd</sup> St.  
Lubbock, TX 79410  
qavepress.com

Copyright © 2014 by Dana Crum

Designed and edited by Sebastian Matthews.

Cover art: *The Chapel*. Frontispiece: *Letting Go*.  
Both by Virginia Crawford Pierrepont, a professional  
artist based in NYC. Visit [virginialakecrawford.com](http://virginialakecrawford.com).

Q Ave Press board: Curtis Bauer (Publisher), Ross Gay,  
Sebastian Matthews, Elaine Sexton & Ryan Walsh.

Printed at Warren Wilson College Press by  
Peter Constantinou.

The author wishes to acknowledge the editors of  
*Two Cities Review*, who published an earlier version of  
this poem. He is inexpressibly grateful to Ann-Marie Brown,  
whose faith in him never dimmed, and The Seven Hills  
School, which awarded him a writer's residency that made  
completing this book possible. Visit [danacrum.com](http://danacrum.com).

First printing. Edition of 100.

