

## Poems by Christopher Keaveney

### The Fine Art of Shenanigans

Unencumbered  
The keen ascends,  
fattening to hullabaloo.  
Under the refuge of a shawl  
an old woman rocks  
akimbo in her grief,  
banshee teeth crooked  
in something like a grin.

In my folding chair  
at the back of the waking room  
I finger a photo  
of me as a boy  
crowded by a man  
they wanted me to call  
Uncle Squid,  
a man who arrived in front of the house  
like clockwork in a truck  
once every three years.

Himself laid out  
in all his glory,  
a life lived beneath  
the brim of a tweed cap  
under faded eaves,  
Inwood and Washington Heights,  
the copper of blood on his lips  
after another scuffle with the cops  
on a block where  
everyone was an enemy.

In the absence  
of a father,  
it was his job

to give me the belt,  
beating three years' worth of a boy's mischief  
out of me.

I would relish the game,  
the zig and zag  
from room to room,  
his heart not in it,  
a tired shaking of the head,  
fulfilling righteous duties.

Later there would be ice cream  
and apologies in the shape of mumbles,  
a conspiracy of winks  
across the table,  
letting the drinks fizz  
to mask our relief.

Grant me this one absolution,  
a backward glance  
to an old woman left wheezing  
in the corner and beyond  
to you in front of the Parkgate Tavern,  
Your right hand raising a Rheingold in mock salute,  
the left upturned as supplicant,  
gap-toothed Maitreya,  
the hint of a rakish grin  
from under the shadow of your visor.  
Always the last laugh.

### **You Are Forgiven**

For the incense  
that clings to you like dread  
and for the abstinence  
that might be a foreshadowing  
of flowers lost  
in the half light of dusk  
on a road bent on recession.

I had almost forgotten  
the prognosis,  
an elevation of legs  
underwater,  
when autumn ceased to matter  
to a young man  
good with machines  
for whom the blues weren't nearly  
what they seemed.

### **Summerstock: A Triptych**

The first one is insular  
like a kiss during wartime,  
the clemency of the fractured rib  
for an aging boxer  
down but not out.

Sunlight is hardship  
for the sightless  
in the second act.  
The warmth that was the sepia  
Of a mother's kiss.

On three  
an old man's memory  
of a barbershop quartet  
heard on a summer's evening  
is one kind of sanctity,  
these torn jeans,  
the torque of the falling branch  
in my hands  
yet another.