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Six Feet Under

"All true stories begin in a cemetery" 1

We played Hide-n-Seek, Kick the Can, & Bloody Murder everywhere we went. Neighborhood games with thirty kids, in department stores hiding behind racks of blouses or bathing suits, in parking garages weaving in & out of cars, pillars, stairways.

Saturday mornings were soccer mornings. The field was adjacent to St. Francis Cemetery. When the older kids kicked the ball we kicked the can. we crouched behind the tombstones. The small cedar groves disguised our eternal souls while we waited for a twenty count, "ready or not here I come," & "Olly Olly Oxen Free!" We ran 'round that graveyard without a thought to the saintly dead. Our freedom was true & everlasting.

One October morning,
I found the perfect spot.
A hole in the ground:
right angles, smooth sides & deep.
Who leaves a hole just laying around?
I jumped in; no one could find me.
Perfection six feet down.
I had to call for help

once it was clear that I couldn't get out.
The other kids got our parents, & while shaking his head, my father pulled up the post-modern Lazarus who left only footprints upon that hole's sandy bottom. The other parents tried to hide their disgust... their laughter. I didn't understand the concern. It was just a good hole. Who doesn't love a good hole?

That afternoon,
my mother & I
went grocery shopping.
We drove past the cemetery
& saw a crowd around
my hiding pace.
They were looking down,
probably questioning
the child's footprints at the bottom.
Probably considering the dirt
kicked down while I attempted to
scramble up.

"Did another kid get stuck down there?" I asked. "Not exactly," mom replied. "Not exactly."

1. Zafon, Carlos Ruiz. *The Shadow of the Wind*. Translated by Lucia Graves, Penguin Books, 2004.

West of Texarkana

In Northeastern Texas. on the prairie between Paris and Texarkana, the sun was setting on the Year of our Lord 2011. Lost on a muddy two-track, we saw an enormous buck silhouetted against the rising stars of New Years dusk. Abandoned Fords, Buicks, & Toyotas rested in an open field w/ brush and weeds towering through their trunks & hoods. Left ajar by past owners or forced ajar by time & rust, the trunks & hoods revealed the vacant void of history. Abandoned trailers, washing machines, & tires grew where the rattlesnakes & rabbits once played their endless game of tag. We turned the rental car around to head back in time for beer, & fireworks, hoping to make it through the soft sand, the deep ruts when we saw their eyes flash in the headlights. Glowing white & hollow, a dozen spaniels blocked our route. They'd been left like the Fords, the Buicks,

& the Toyotas, like the tires & washing machines.

Once well-fed & tame, they lived off the land.

These dogs, in touch more with the hidden coyotes & razorback killers than with their housebroken brethren, were learning the ways of their wolfen ancestors. They stood their ground as if to say:

"This land is ours again. This North Texas waste belongs to North Texas wretchedness. Like the tires & Toyotas, we now make the calls."

Blind Alleyways of Yesteryear

Day follows day. Night chases nighttime down a dead-end street. Deadened and dirty, the sun sets on our midday snooze as the blind alleyways of yesteryear fog the memories we left behind. Will you be there when the highways turn to dust? Will you be there when our empty lungs burst? When I call your name, will you come running? Lord preserve us and protect us, I'm drinking whisky for breakfast.

The dark silhouettes of our fabled ancestral name hide in the corners of tomorrow's tombstone tea.

No one remembers those Kaiju killers like you and me.

We drove forty miles of dirt roads in the rain.

Mud to the floorboards, mud to the chassis.

Forty acres of forest wood, looking for the key

to childhood bliss.

Lord preserve us
and protect us;
we're drinking whiskey
for breakfast!

Deadened and dirty, the sun rose over frigid February mountains. Cloudland Canyon obscured by forgotten cloudland haze. Who recalls the antagonistic, b-movie daydreams and rolling hills of central Tennessee? Who recalls the Natchez-Trace? Lookout Mountain and Joe Wheeler lost to nobody. What he had is gone. What we made is broken. Lord preserve us and protect us; we're drinking cyanide for breakfast.

Reading Defoe and Eliot through backseat, Midwestern hate. Virginia Woolf never tried to make the midnight run through green Indiana smoke. The gates came down and the cops beat down dogs in the parking lot. It must be said. the toilet bowl tour flushed lives from its grasp as we chased down one more kick. Lord preserve us and protect us, we're drinking arsenic for breakfast.

Clouds explode from mental concentration and the holes they leave let through limitless light. When might those clouds return? Longing for the return of the king, the return of that cloudless summer peace. The holes in our skies rivaled only by the holes in our history. Making our own beds for all our sleepless tomorrows. Lord Preserve us and protect us, we're drinking hemlock for breakfast.

Sitting Bull in Limbo

In the Somerton District The police are confused. At Standing Rock the police are confused. The police are misguided. Red lives matter, but we sleep and ignore as the buffalo roam through our familiar costume romance and the feather headdresses of our souls, too tightly, sit atop our aching brows.

Fear and mediocrity, ancestors suffering in the land. face to face, fight to the death, but the fearless Dakotans. the fearless Sioux might still be forgotten. Like another Wounded Knee, another Little Bighorn. And the dream catcher hanging on our collective rearview mirror won't catch this dream and the mirror won't reflect the truth.

"However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India." ¹ So too our conduct in the Dakotas. So too our conduct in these United States.

King Philip and the Wabanaki Confederacy marched through the frozen north; they marched to their doom in the face of American Exceptionalism. It was an undefined exceptionalism that turned its back on Wabanaki families. Buried in the dust the hopes and dreams of Pontiac and Dragging Canoe and Red Cloud. The vision of the Red Stick, a future aimed to seize the future so long ignored.

Sitting Bull stood tall, eye to eye w/
transgression.
That old battle ground,
The Black Hills,
Devil's Tower,
that old battle ground

will run red again. The headwaters of the Missouri will run red again. People stand and take AIM, arm in arm, the long march, that dream deferred. And Kyle Kirchmeier is to be steeped in cries for revenge up to his very ears, to make him forget that his Government is responsible. The cliff hanger and the mischief hatched and the colossal dimensions it has been allowed to assume.

 Marx, Karl & Friedrich Engels. "The First Indian War of Independence: 1857-58." New York Daily Tribune. 18 September 1857.

The Wild Cannibal

As Queequeg's coffin becomes Ishmael's raft and the sign relationship shifts again and again, the object loses its tight hold on reality and on Melville's holy page. Our heroic cannibal is pulled beneath those South Pacific seas and we mourn the fate of the great man. The towering giant and his terrible tattoos are lost in those turbulent times, but the cannibal lives on beyond the waves.

What is a cannibal but one who eats his own? One who destroys the future by devouring the present. One who looks upon his neighbors as he looks upon his poultry, his cattle, his hogs. Who are the raw; who are the cooked? To hunt across the frozen waste, to fell the albatross and spear the stag in those jagged highlands, we sew what we reap and the Pequod crew sinks again and again. And again and again we rise to hunt anew. When the harpoon is cast at the heart of our future, when the bombs fall

upon distant kingdoms and lost gods, the skies tumble and crash, and the wild cannibal is us.

HOT ROD

fast and furious

archangel in paint and chrome

brings me home-

purring megaphonious,

combusting with sav and sap

that i glimpse

peeking into warm grill chintz-

then she lifts her corset bonnet

and lets me touch her glinting bones

secreting home spun

pheromones

attracting, like moon and sun-

mysterious

and mnemonic

old senses,

fallow and fenced

soon become drenched

quiller and squirter

in that linguistic converter-

glow mapping,

overlapping,

slowly blown

in the metronome.

I'M GETTING OLD NOW

i'm getting old now-

you know,

like that tree in the yard

with those thick cracks

in its skinbark

that tell you

the surface of its lived-in secrets.

my eyes,

have sunk too inward

in sleepless sockets

to playback images

of ghosts-

so make do with words

and hear the sounds

of my years in yourself.

childhood-

riding a rusty three-wheel bike

to shelled-out houses bombed in the blitz,

then zinging home zapped in mud to wolf down chicken soup over lumpy mashed potato for teawith bare feet sticking on cold kitchen lino i shivered watching the candle burn down racing to finish a book i found in a binbefore Mam showed me her empty purse and robbed the gas meterthe twenty shillings stained the red formica table like pieces of the man's brains splattered all over the back seat of his symbolic limousine as i watched history brush out her silent secrets.

THIS WEIGHT OF WATER

if i could lose this weight of water from my shoes, that follows the place i'm walking-

i know it's not the blues, or patterns in the grooves of souls talking-

but the plate of my mistakes is full and contemplates what's left to be worth calling.

i change my shoes, and tune my station to your chords of conversation, and in these wired interludesi find life's translation.

WE MOVE THE WHEEL

we move the wheel that turns through each mistake, giving motion to the roles we chime until both trickle out of time like brittle steel that rusts and breaks into lapsed devotion.

less, or more,
you imagined it was sure
sharing the road
with you,
treading under dark, grey and blue
sky, wondering where it went going
to unfold
in fates wind blowing
fondling your full face
to some top-to-bottom place.

we have moved the wheel, only to reveal our high Metropolis is still the same Acropolis of extremes and obscenes spreading gangrenous genes.

we have separated Dream from Time and live in mirages like Bacchus and Libera duped in an era condoning crime, altering the images of it's illustrious self stealing the wealth of massed, divided synergies.

THE DARKEST FLOWER IS THE EVENING

again
consensual persuasions
make sensual equations
as we smoke and share a think,
then the same
as she bends over the shingle sink
breasts slapping
on bowl and rim,
peachey buttocks yapping
as i slide in
and out of her velvet purse
each time deeper than the first
two parts making one perfection
of mental physical connection.

outsides
i saw two magpies
in the branches of a tree
barbed tower
watching our sharing eyes
shape fractured liberty
slipping the shackles of feudal power.

in this then,
i know how all of when
you're gone
reduces me to being one
and the darkest flower
is the evening
opened by your scent
giving everything
and receiving
mine in mind and meldings meant.

A Vessel of Tulips

to expunge grief on every sign post--- bare its commonality with the ectopic dusk,

say, storm every intricate part of a loss & have it begging for the reach of forceps or a needle to redeem this

pea it singled out from the pod.

you've become a transparent smoke a rare response to God's shots. I envy the humble heroes of the quiet bubble of their sincere appetite.

every day, I fraction my prayers into bread & wine — atonement for a loss & needle bits of it into my status

to carry every part of your plans for me to peddle each of my prayers for you---

a parallel plurality of the thirsty hearts.

I wasn't aware that the hyphen at the end of this sort of love arrows into a deep void, when moments suddenly trip us into ages until we wake up in another person's bones—— an accident that abandons one in a naked season.

It dupes one of the glimmers, a value, a belief in the democracy of air.

I assumed this empathy

& waited for you every night to show up at the parlour & tell me this was just a nightmare, or maybe plant a dimple on my cheek as a formal goodnight---

look at us still standing at the opposite width of this ocean, pretending

we'll still meet to part no more.

but in case this is the end or a step closer to reality

may heaven understand that you were a vessel of tulips shaped into a shade in the form of a father to me, may they understand that you've always been an angel here & you'll do better as one over there.

A Crescendo for The Heart's Opera that Reads Us as A Mere Phrase

The world waited for the emergence of bloodstains from this search party

before declaring me emphatic stress to everything beautiful.

it's a night party when every star swells up with your name & your eyes carry a moon that reflects

the photosynthetic gaze from the asymmetric concord reigning in your heart

& your mood breaks into fireworks in the middle of harmattan.

this means you are a dry field consuming yourself to keep others warm,

mahogany splitting itself into palpable planks that lure flaming love

to every cold body. But what happens when everyone pomades you with formalin immediately you lie comatose

on the sofa of your grief? Do you pronounce love a republic of thorns

or do you substitute your scents of burns with a nation of regrets that

breaths underneath your lungs?

most times what we sentence our comfort to impress reads us halfway as a mere phrase.

most times what we sentence our comfort to impress reads us halfway as a mere phrase.

For Brothers Who Rent Tomorrow with Leer Satchels

a parrot lost its mouthpiece to the rattles of my intestines while I sit side by side with my elder brother, plotting

the gradient of tomorrow on a Cartesian plane; exactly where we cap a lot of dingy acnes

with periodic haloes on a low budgeted axis. this means I and my elder brother woo glossy goals with the

tongue of the rich for our tomorrow, even when today's arithmetic equates us to raggamuffins.

I know the plight of limbless plans; it prides itself around our bodies as unsolved surds, while we mutter the

eerie squeaks of a heron that lost its wings to the straps of the squall

& I hope this violent air carries the burns of our heart to the palms of God

perhaps, he will notice how our dreams become a burning brush amid a thirsty hinterland.

at nights before we go to bed, we sum up the quotient of each of our plan & fiddle it

as the highest common factor in our litany; that is exactly how my mother taught us to

make crescent canons the subject of the formula in every quadrant of ambition, we etch for tomorrow.

rage

i don't
ever ever ever ever
wanna see him again
i can't even begin to type his name
i know that i am right
by the way my head reacts
to seeing, hearing, smelling him
feeling him in that position again
it's not real it's not real
someone save me please

whether in this life
or in the next
i will have my revenge
i will wound him like he wounded me
i'll fuck him up again
i wish that i could tell myself
that i am fucking right
but my memory can't be trusted
and my brain is fucking fried

we must never censor our bodies

my body is something to be celebrated not to be talked about in hushed voices in a disapproving tone my body is mine i am not a freak for lov ing it i am a freak for sure but i reclaim that for myself not my body

New shoes

They were in a Sally Army window and I pressed my nose on the glass. Smudged snot until a lady tapped and shooed. "Can I have them?" I asked. "Can I?" "How much?" and a hiss, and then "All right but that's it, they're for school as well," and I was so happy I sang back to the shop and tried them on, though the lady was doubtful. "Are you sure they fit", but she was the shooer and I said "Yeah." At school I bled, my heels bled so badly, I bled into the soles and my feet squelched, my socks saturated, clotted, sticky with pain. I limped bleeding left then right, the shriek held grimly inside as my classmates stared. "Tough," said Dad, "You wanted them." Every day for a term I bled, I bled and howled at Dad but "Tough." I couldn't understand how he could see me bleed until my heels knotted with scars, mounds I still have today. (And now I understand there was no money for new shoes, I bled and he bled too but we were both stubborn.) One weekend he threw shoes at me. "Try these." Brand new, proper shop new. Soft. A dancer's shoes. I danced. I lost them at school, someone stole them during gym. Dad did not speak to me for days. But it was strange, the kids who'd

watched silently as my heels
left skin and blood in corridors
grabbed me one morning,
"We know who stole your shoes".
dragged me to a skinny girl
with the taint of the bullied,
the aura of the bullied,
"Give her back her shoes" and
she took them off silently,
handed them to me and walked away
in her socks with "You scummy thief"
echoing, she bled, she bled.

Marshmallow

So they show a child one marshmallow and say, you can eat it now. But - if you wait, we will give you tomorrow. What will she do? Eat it now, I say, of course. And he laughed, you have no self control, impulsive funny lady. And I said. No. Eat it now. They will lie. There will be no marshmallow tomorrow. There may be nothing tomorrow there may be no tomorrow. I don't even like marshmallow. But best eat it so they can't take it away. And he said again, funny lady. But this time he didn't laugh.

Haiku

Yes my past is dark But nobody died, as such Or begged to, that much.

Another 24 hours

| Wake up |
|-----------------------------|
|-----------------------------|

- 2. Ablutions
- 3. Eat
- 4. Commute
- 5. Work
 - 4.
 - 6. Return home
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 7. Sleep
- 7.5 You have nothing
 You are nothing
 You can do anything
 You can be everything
 You have no limits
 You live your best life
 You live your worst life
 You are somebody else
 You are fluid
 You are done

0.5

Changed

Tell me now, is this how you play the game? Very interesting, the game of life The more you change, the more you stay the same

I came to you because of your good name You live with a straight face, this double life Tell me now, is this how you play the game?

You expect me to fall in line, be tame
But I have emotions, not a non-life
The more you change, the more you stay the same

I am an acronym to you, just BAME You dehumanise me, such a low-life Tell me now, is this how you play the game?

You steal from me, guilt-free, have you no shame? I feel like you have stabbed me with a knife The more you change, the more you stay the same

Can you do better? These words sound so lame No can do when corruption is so rife Tell me now, is this how you play the game? The more you change, the more you stay the same

Realities

School? Done Pre-University College? Done And you enter University

It is the done thing, nothing strange about it. Your father and grandfather have been that route It is just the way things work and we know it well

You meet the others and boy! Could they be more other? They speak different languages, not the polished English of your private school Nor the reasonable English of your pre-university college

Some of them are the first in their families to attend university Others can read and write English But can barely speak it

It is a strange environment But it is a sample of the big world Out there in your city of Bangalore

A city you grew up in But a city that you are only now Getting to know

Hang on! Is this what privilege really looks like?

Tongues

This is my **உண்மை** I move between the ফুল্ফাণ্ডা It is what happens in भारत

Especially when your mother tongue Is different from the local language A country with so many languages

Almost a continent An image of what an integrated EU Could look like

English? A colonial remnant Now a link language

But it can never evoke My cultural emotions Like தமிழ்can

It can never remind me Of my childhood Like కన్నడుcan

Nor can it replicate This new majoritarian colonialism Like हिन्दी can

Tears

Tears, not just mine, but those of All of our ancestors

Tears in every fibre of our being When was the last time that we smiled?

Tiers to determine social position The lowest, reserved for us

An Hour, A Face, A Smile

give me an hour or a face tell me if you treated me like oneof your anxious games would you be able to read thesigns painted in lipstick on my face?

give me an angel or a wide open smile a dream isn't an answered prayer itsa plague of rats seeping through my blood itsthree outlets at any given moment drawn in admiration ofsomeone's lost boy

give me heartache over trigonometry any day saying my business is yours andnever the other way around.

Atlas Forges For Herself

All my life I wanted to walk like I belonged I couldn't, life had me head bowed Skin to Atlas My shoulders rubbed raw Now, slowly burden lifting Like a new world rising out of the sea Arose beneath me all that was beautiful The parts of me that were vile Black burnt the atoms of my bones insides who were not all that Embracing Binding Healing The words I'm searching for The feeling of being strong again I am all of me Not fearless But not hiding anymore.

If You Find the Motor Oil Kissing Me in My Thirties

Where the 30s are flat Flat out that that is what it is There is no consequence

I hum hidden songs in your coat pocket You find me kissing your mother Well I just needed the money For the booze, Fiona Starling lovedrunk hickneyed Nevertenderling

We wash ashore twice an autumnal dirge And sing trance for those who can't hear it The death of love is nothing new when You drink to remember how good it felt The other night The other night The other night

Remember your astronaut dance lighting me up In hidden denouement for the apocalypse Then some stalling momentum may fear thee weather upward Happy, so to say The foreign emotion

But saying it— No, that's stupid And you're a dumb fuck idiot, too Congrats

But we won't end on that note
Don't ding the dong or prick the prong
Maybe belle the weather station vein
Cocka doodle weather toe struck disguise
For a foot long hiker
Never made it to the coast

We all say navy crayons looked the most romantic That was never an official crayola color Crayola politics Crayola dictatorships Crayola sheep farms The end of Crayola as we know it

There it goes
Whiff it again
The motorcycle wheel
Never one spins but twice sings the song
We invented it
We did this to you
We are very, very, very sorry
Apologies all around
The sardonic ending
So it seems, to me pleased
Never, so
Hum ho





Triptych



Triptych



Triptych