

RL RAYMOND

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

- Revelations 2:13

an†ipas

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I

1. They carry sharpened spoons
2. He doesn't

II

3. Rape of the shroud
4. Convergence

III

5. Sunday school
6. The Man-Child
7. Outside

8. He'd never acquire a taste for apples

IV

9. Long ago
10. This will be the last time
11. Above

I

They carry sharpened spoons

Somewhere
behind rusted vans
and neon vulgarities
the panhandlers change shifts
darkening the letters
 on their placards
 with stolen markers
 or charcoaled wine corks

They roughen their scruff with dirty hands

They rub their glassy eyes red

There are territories and rules here –

Theirs

He doesn't

remember much
about the day

he decided
forgetting
was the best course of action

the day he knew
digging deeper
could only expose what he feared

foetal
introspective
 finger-clawed & eye-shut
 buried just deep enough
 to make unearthing

possible
desirable
certain

he remembers

that he forgot
the signs
the maps
 letting shovel edges rust
 letting the dread shrivel

ensuring he wouldn't
dig
or get dirt
in his eyes

II

Rape of the shroud

The first ring

 digs under the blanket
 runs its fingernails
 against the grain of the sheet
 grating and catching
 the occasional thread

The second ring

 slices through
 with hellish violence
 light bleeding
 into his eyes

There is no third ring

 only a *what*
 a pause
 a grunt
 and the clatter
 of cheap electronic plastic
 against the cool planks
 of hardwood

Yesterday's clothes stink

Keys... wallet... knife...

He slams the door
chokes on the windchill
hopes to christ
the car
will start

Convergence

early
grey
fogged in ice-mist
the wraiths dance
in pairs
atop the manhole covers
a quiver
in the crisp stillness

the highbeams catch them -
mid gyration -
by surprise
before obliterating them
under the heavy bumper

as the killer races
over
and away
the wisps resurrect and
rejoin their play
from a vortex of oil-stench
replaced by calm
in the red glow
of dying taillights

III

Sunday school

taught
charity

at all costs

The Man-Child

wears a T-shirt
the colour of a thousand deaths
soiled
 resoiled
 from being worn everyday
 a movie scene -
 his favourite movie scene -
 barely discernible in the pattern

the stains under his arms
that almost touch
the wooden cross
hung
around his neck
belie
his cherubic face
 pink and smooth
and the mute awkwardness
 locked in his smile

they too reek
hands out
caps down
the daggers in their eyes

hunting the weak
croaking as the Man-Child
offers an apple palmed from the home

you can't drink an apple
offers a juice-box
you can't drink that either
with a chuckle

he doesn't understand

he pushes the apple
the juice

they slap it away

harder...
something harder...

they point to the store
he's never allowed to enter

head bowed
he picks up the apple
and eats it
silently shuffling away

torn

juice spilling into the sewer

Outside

the car idles
double parked

inside

a bottle on the counter
the Man-Child in the corner
 lip biting
 teary-eyed

I called you

I called the cops
brother or not – I've had it...

thankless
he shoves the clerk
and responds clearly –
 with a shatter
 and an amber stain
 sluicing down the wall

he grabs him

the young one's shirt rips

let's go

Drinking?

NO NO NO

wordless

the head shaking

insistent

frightened

Why then?

NO NO NO

but the shaking pauses

the eyes shift

to the devil smirking

across the street

He'd never acquire a taste for apples

he sprints
while the Man-Child
cries
and obediently
heads for the car
amid sirens

screams
 threats

focus-deaf
the brother pounces
on the mendicant
grabs a handful
 of greasy hair
glimpses something rustic
 and vicious
 in the wrinkled claw
reacts with the advantage of age
 the precision of rage
drawing his blade
 efficiently
parting skin and sinew
 from ear to ear
as a sharpened spoon
clinks to the street

blood spills
into the sewer

IV

Long ago

they
would

eat pie together

after dinner

after grace

This will be the last time

he doesn't bother to ask
or tell

his kid brother
scared by the flashing
red
blue
red
blue
so close in the rearview
hugs himself
clutching his cross
nodding his head
over
and over
and over

there is no point

nothing will change

he has tried
over
and over
and over
again

nothing will change

for him
for them

ahead
instead

of turning right
to make for the highway

he turns left
down a dead end

full speed

chased

coming to rest
against a concrete pillar

full speed

crushed

against the dashboard
against his brother

losing himself
losing the boy

in gas fumes
in futility
in flames

Above

the grit
of pavement

the rust
of hot steel

the glint
of broken glass

wisps of smoke
cheap whiskey
and dying breaths
comingle

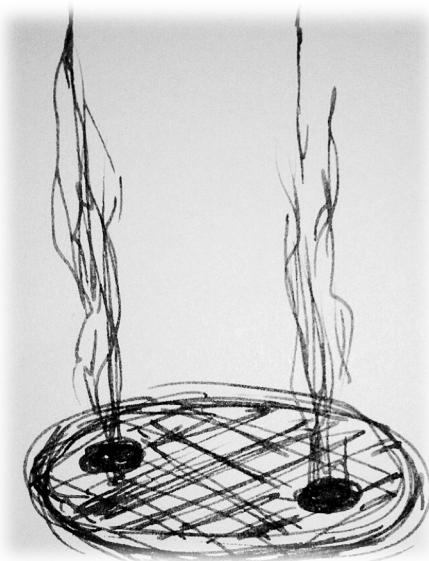
pirouette

once
with the liveliness of light

twice
with the absence of regret

at last fading
undisturbed

in exit



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