

Hints of Violence

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A collection of stories for,
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A Notebook

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Contents

Caffeine	4
Stockton 2005	7
Untitled	10
Walls are for Painting	15
Drive	19
The Bitch	22
Untitled	25
He Returns	28
Untitled	30
Lounging	33
Sanctuary	36
Untitled	38
Mexican Spiderman	41

Introduction

When I think of being in Professor Lifchez's Environmental Design class, I can't help but think about the differences between his class and my creative writing classes within the English department. It was these differences that helped me think of writing in new ways, ways that only now, a few years after taking his class, am I beginning to articulate what the class meant to me in my development as a writer. I think about the differences of knowing a truth and accepting it, and what that means, how that translates when it comes to writing: to hear about texturing a piece, having some sense of what that meant, but only after the class ended realizing the importance and how to thoughtfully texture, especially in literary fiction in which character is given the most importance (along with conflict). Yet texturing i.e. worldbuilding still needs to be done, whether we're working within genre fiction or literary fiction, because it's a way into the perspective of the people in the story we're telling. It's an opportunity to meld characterization with plot and conflict, to show the essential nature of the chosen POV, etc. However obvious this may be, until I was able to think about it and articulated it for myself, the profound impact of these sensibly simple thoughts didn't mean much to me.

To me, being able to explore this in Professor Lifchez's class, to find importance in what I had always considered normal, and to be able to take steps into sometimes absurdly and unnecessarily violent or vulgar landscape, is something I will always be grateful for. I'm grateful because that's how I've been able to learn and refine.

With that in mind, I order the following stories in a way that to me signifies this slow (maybe too slow haha) refinement of my progress as a writer.

Caffeine

He woke up at 3 in the morning. Made coffee, packed his things, got into a cab, and headed to the airport. He had another coffee before getting on the plane.

Why fall asleep? No, he wouldn't, couldn't ever do that.

He'd be ready in his seat...burning a hole of inquiry into the seat in front of him, while his periphery did the real work. He was accustomed to the monotony of the ordinary, but never let himself revel in it.

He knew that even those less aware than him would find his statue like quality disconcerting if his eyes remained open. Luckily he was alone on this side of the aisle, which made things easier for him. But just in case, he'd put his carry-on under his seat, not overhead; they didn't know the dangers of such a move.

What's this? Someone must have forgotten something on the previous flight?

He put his bag on the empty seat to the right of him. And felt underneath with his left hand.

Gun! With a paper attached? Why the paper? Why was there a gun under my seat! Should I let a flight attendant know? Of course not. They'd panic. Maybe even accuse me! They're all useless! The gun can stay under for now.

He grabbed the paper, meticulously sliding it between his ankle and shoe. Then untying and tying his shoes. Before bringing the note to his lap and just slightly turning towards the window while not losing complete sight of what was happening everywhere else on the airplane.

The note read as follows:

- 1. When the flight attendant comes by with drinks, she will trip two rows behind you.**
- 2. One row in front of you, the person closest to the aisle will get a brain freeze.**
- 3. Directly across from you, the person will move their laptop and you will see Memento being played.**
- 3.5 The cockpit will open.**
- 4. The pilot will attempt to crash the plane. Use the gun.**

What was he to make of this? Sweat rose through his pores and quietly sat atop his nose. He wiped the sweat, then looked at his right hand as it trembled in front of him.

Then the mechanical sound of the cart's wheels, clicking after every revolution, inched closer. The loose wheels of the cart rolled on, half swaying side to side, only truly being directed forward by the strength of the flight attendant. The sound of the wheels rolling against the carpet floor slowly became more sonorous, until it almost blared, roared by our hero. His eyes were transfixed forward, but he heard the jolt and finally forced himself to turn around, stiffly looking on two rows behind him, the flight attendant on her knees, holding on to the cart, laughing as she raised herself up.

Of course this would happen, it was written. They wouldn't lie right off the bat.

He scanned the airplane, no one looked at him. It all seemed genuine, like they weren't trying to evade his eye contact, they just didn't care to notice him. He then looked at the area where the attendant had just been. Noticed a loose bit of carpet sticking out, loose thread reaching towards the cart, while loose strands could still be seen on the cart's wheels.

Of course this could have been a coincidence, but it was still on the note. Perhaps the person who wrote the note was also observant? But why leave me the gun! Why not take care of it themselves? Weren't they also on the plane? They had to be. How else could they have planted the gun and the note? If there was real danger, and they were just as aware or could really look into the future why not use the gun themselves? This doesn't make any sense?

He gnashed his teeth, gripped the hand rest as if it would awake him from the nightmare, but he was still there, shaking his leg while trying to control his breathing.

Before his leg could calm down, his eyes frantically scanned the area ahead of him and zeroed in on a man who looked to be in pain. His eyes hidden by cheeks that were squeezing them shut. And then he remembered the note...

Brain freeze! Why? Why! Why write something so innocuous? If they wanted to fucking convince me, why not do it with something more impressive than a man not being able to handle a spoonful of ice cream! What a sack of shit, stupid man-child! This is supposed to make me take control of the plane! I need to remain calm! Calm. Calm. Still just two out of three. What worthless piece of information, to make me do something so obviously idiotic.

He just nodded his head. Quietly shifting back and forth in his seat. Biding his time as best he could. Although he couldn't help himself from never letting his neighbor from across the aisle out of his periphery.

This is such fucking bullshit!

His nose scrunched as he seemed to be more agitated then anything. Then his neighbor put his laptop facing outward while he rummaged through one of his bags under his own seat.

Sure enough...

Of course it's fucking Memento. Yeah, yeah, a bit more incredible than a fucking brain freeze but still there are other possibilities.

Most unnerving to our hero was the fact that he could be the man behind it all. How else could he have guessed the movie? *Unless they saw someone watching it before they got on the plane. But than how else guess the seat? No that couldn't be it? Why me?!*

Before his head could fold onto his chest, he noticed a smiling flight attendant holding a tray of food in one hand while trying to open the cockpit with the other. Before he could even think, in one motion he grabbed the gun under his seat, got up, and was walking toward the flight attendant. *Of course it opened, the note said as much...*



There was a noise: LOUD...SCREAMS filled the cabin...

Stockton 2005

His name *was* Jesús. He thought he was clever, witty even, but all he did was use the nicknames others had come up with to talk shit (he never came up with any himself) it was fucking annoying really. Anyways, his name's not Jesús anymore, my brother, Alberto gave him a new one, (the fat fuck had it coming, so don't feel sorry for the fucker) "shut up Jamón" my brother had on one of his trademark shit eating grins.

We all started cracking up. Jamón put on a face that said, he knew his name wasn't Jesús anymore.

Ray started in next, covering his mouth with his fist, "AAAAAA!" then pointing at Jamón, "Jamón! that shit's a knee slapper!" he howled and bent over as he slapped his knee.

We always tended to hang out in our court. We lived in Gateway apartments (they weren't gated)



it was a long court that three different apartment complexes shared: Gateway was filled with more Salsa and Cumbia music than I could handle, Adobe Haciendas was filled with only asians as far as I ever saw, and Home Crest Town Homes which led in from the street into the court was mostly black people. Don't get me wrong we were all mixed up together, but most people like being among their own kind, cause when shit goes down you need to know people, and it's better if you know neighbor already, you feel.

I don't know how the older people got along with each other, but it didn't seem like we ever did. I did see a few older people get layed out by dumpsters and manholes: alcohol, piss, shit, and blood

all mixed into the air, grumbling about "I'm gonna fuckin kill 'em," but I don't know why really, it wasn't my shit to deal with. What was, was that there was always some shit between us and the kids from Adobe Hacienda, I always heard some shit about mexicans and asians not being able to get along, but the asians never seemed to get along with the black kids either so...

My brother knew more, but I couldn't care less, not my shit.

I don't even know why Jamón always hung with us, even before he got his name, there was always something his fat ass was doing that made us give him shit. He was loud, obnoxious really, never knew when to shut up, always had stupid ass ideas we had to shit on. Dude was a born follower—is what I guess I'm trying to say.

My brother Alberto was our leader, he didn't always hang with us, since he was always getting into some shit with his own friends, but when he hung out with us, he was in charge. He was older than all of us, older than Jamón and Hector by a year, Ray by two, and older than Ivan, Raul and me by three.

Anyways, I guess there was a real value in coming up with clever names for everyone. The ones that were Spanish or blended English and Spanish were always better than the straight English ones. We all spoke Spanish at home and straight English at school, so it was cool to be around each other and speak whatever came to mind first. No one was going give us shit for speaking whatever the fuck we wanted to, so that's what we did, we said 'shit,' 'fuck,' 'puto,' 'pendejo,' 'verga' it was a paradise, no bullshit ass teachers, or angry parents, even if the dirty ass apartments weren't the most beautiful fucking things I'd see in my own block, it was fucking paradise as long as I didn't have to go home. And I never planned on it.

We had just gotten out of the bus that dropped us off by Home Crest and we were giving Jamón shit cause he had come up with another stupid ass idea.

"Awe come on man, I didn't fucking mean it like that. Why you guys always giving me shit? What I ever do?" Jamón loved playing the victim, it was that kind of buster ass shit that always made people pile on, dude never wanted to stand up for shit.

"Man why you always being such a bitch?" Raul said.

"Man, fuck you I'll beat your little ass, dumb bitch." Jamón was getting mad, shit always happened like that everyone was always cool until they weren't. Hard to find anyone who could take a joke around here.

"Hey, you know who's a real bitch? Them white ass fucking teachers." my brother said, dude was fucking smooth, he'd get caught occasionally for the shit he did, but he never got in trouble.

"Nah, the fucking mexican teachers are the worst, always making it harder on us like we special or something" Ivan said.

"Ha, for real though, it's like bitch, your name's VASQUEZ you ain't fooling no one, you ain't white either" I said. It's like they wanted to prove they weren't from the same hood or something, they didn't have to worry about that, we knew, and white people wouldn't care, dumb bitch.

"Yeah man mexican teachers are the fucking worst. I like white teachers they be giving us new names. Ray said. We all knew what he meant, we started cracking up.

"Al-burr-doe, to the principal's office" Ivan said.

"Raw-ewwwl" Ray said.

"Jee-sus" Raul said.

"Ray-mun-doe" Alberto said.

"And...Allan" Ivan said. That gave them all something to laugh about, like I chose to have a white person name, eh whatever at least it wasn't something super common.

We had all started waking down the court, but Jamón had stayed back, to contemplate the universe or some shit, who the fuck knows. It didn't seem like anyone really cared, I sure didn't. I had nothing especially against him, I just didn't care, I guess that's what people mean when they say "no offense" at least the first person anyways, cause people always be fucking lying, never wanting to start shit but always talking shit.

Alberto had turned his head back for some reason, he always had a knack for hearing shit we never heard. Maybe because he was older? I can't wait till my ears get older.

"Hey, what the fuck!" Alberto said. "They're trying to fuck with Jesus!"

I don't know how, I didn't have to try, I didn't think, my fist--clenched, my eyes—fierce, my skin—burning, and I was—there, we were all—there, standing in line, with Jesus, against *them*, waiting...

Untitled

It was dark. The earth was dry, Steven was unsure if the ground would break from under him as he pushed off, and felt clumps of dirt crumble in between his fingers. As his lips cracked and split open, he was grateful to have blood soak his lips. He couldn't see much, and as he reached for a wall he over extended himself and fell back to the ground. Steven thought it was soft in a way, he rolled over and noticed the way the top of the pit glowed, an aura of soft light, looming over him. As he stared at the mouth of the pit brimming with light, Steven remembered why he was there.

Could any amount of cursing or supplication help him now? He had always felt safe with his drink, and then that girl, that damn girl! She shouldn't have been there; she wasn't even old enough to drive. Yet there she was--on the wrong side of the road, three in the morning, soft lights calling out to him--blackness--followed by the cold leering glow of hospitals and reporter flash bulbs.

He was free after three months, a miss-trial, but he couldn't drink anymore, the taste made him remember.

As he picked himself up, his stomach turned, but he knew there wasn't going to be any food, he had just eaten before the bag was pulled over him. They must have had him for a while, because he was being forced to hunch over from hunger.

"Is anyone there?" Steven said. Before he could reorient himself, he heard another voice, not from up top but from within the darkness, "where am I? What's going on? What is this!"

Steven went towards the voice, reaching into the nothing, he felt an arm—back—gun! Steven leaned into him, "stay down!" and took the gun from the man's waist. As Steven holstered

the gun behind his back, his arm grazed against something, was there another man? "Who's there!"

"Let go of me!" the man on the ground demanded, as he writhed trying to free himself.

"Who else is here?" Steven asked.

"Man, I'm the only one answering, get the fuck off of me."

Steven reached out, and felt dirt, he let the man go, and put his back to the wall, "who are you? Why are you here? What's with the gun?"

"Gun? What fucking gun?"

"I just took it from you, you can act stupid all you want." Steven said.

"Man I don't own a gun. That shit ain't mine."

"Fine. Why are you here?"

"Man I don't know? You woke me up."

"Ok, so what's the last thing you remember?"

"Can we get out of here first?"

"Look up, it's right there, but unless you can jump 20 feet into the air, I don't think we're getting out. So, what's the last thing you remember?" Steven said.

"Fuck. What the fuck. Man I don't know, I, I was eating, I walked out of the diner and someone came behind me."

"Yeah, same."

"Why would they give us a gun?"

"I don't know... there aren't any bullets in it either." Steven said.

"Maybe there's one in the chamber."

"Not that kind of gun, it's a revolver. Check your pockets, they gave you a gun, maybe they gave you some bullets too."

"No, I don't have any, why would they give us a gun though? This doesn't make any sense."

"Maybe they just want to mess with us?"

"Hey, you check your pockets?"

And there it was, a single bullet, "I, I do, one." Steven didn't know why they would throw him down here with a bullet. None of this was making sense to him. Did he have to kill the man in order to get out? No one had made any demands, they were alone weren't they?

"What're we supposed to do with one fucking bullet?"

"Hey we have a gun, and a bullet, what now?" Steven shouted towards the opening. No one answered, they were alone, Steven knew he was here for a reason, what was this man's reason?

"You have a lot of enemies?" Steven asked.

"Just one, but I don't think he's responsible for this, unless you're also his enemy."

"I don't have any enemies." Steven said.

"Well why are you here then?"

"I don't know, some misunderstanding."

"Right, you were pretty quick to take that gun from me. You're pretty adversarial aren't you. I'm sure you have enemies. I'm sure you did some shit to deserve this."

"So then what did you do?" Steven asked.

"Oh nothing really, simple act of betrayal."

"Great I'm supposed to trust you."

"You took that gun from me because you trust me, right. And now you have the bullet too."

"Hey I didn't ask for this shit, just stay away from me and we'll be fine."

Hours went by, too many for it to still be night time, and yet there was no more light coming from the top. It stayed the same, fixed and unchanged, Steven realized the light had to be artificial. There had to be someone up there, if not now at some point, Steven discerned that it might be at some routine interval. Yet no demands, orders, or anything of the like had been made to them. If and when that ever occurred he was at least somewhat pacified knowing he had gained the upper hand, he had both the gun and the bullet.

More time passed, perhaps even days, Steven still didn't hear anything from up top, no food was thrown down, no water, nothing but the Phantom voice of that man could be heard.

"We're not here for penance, we're here to just suffer until we die." Steven said. He put the bullet in the chamber. "We're both here for a reason aren't we." Steven searched for the man, he was lying still, Steven raised him, put his head against his, and felt its roughness, its odd shape against his head. What did that matter now though, Steven brought the gun against his

head, and pulled the trigger. As the muzzle flashed a halo of light over their heads, a glimpse of a rope could be seen dangling ten feet above them. The other man got up, scraped his nails against his skull, and disappeared into the thick darkness of dirt, muttering "...boring... dumb fuck."

Walls are for Painting



"Quiobole."

"Que pedo?"

"Como estamos?"

"Ay—That's what's up."

Those were our greetings to each other. We met up by a bench that was tucked away, hidden under some stairs. We were supposed to be in school, but what would that ever do for any of us. Besides we don't even go home most of time; we're going to go to school? Nah man that shit ain't happening. Anyways, there was supposed to be some special deal going on at In N Out, that was our excuse for ditching, but none of us ever paid attention to dates—April fucking fools. I'm glad radio's dying, I hope their dignity is taken from them too. It's cool, whatever though, school is straight up boring anyways. I didn't even have art class today.

"A man, hey D, pass that shit" Fable said. He was always interrupting my thoughts; fool didn't know how to properly chill.

"Hahaha D is straight—lit" Pack said.

"Nah I'm good. I don't know what you guys talking about" I always had to affirm my state of mind for these fools.

"Man you stay looking high" Ketsup said. "You be waking up lit huh." He really liked food, hence the name. He's cool though, easily the chillest one out of all of us.

Fable and Pack got shaved heads cause haircuts are expensive. Me and Ketsup went the opposite and let our hair grow out, straight long black hair growing for over two years now. And no getting ripped off with "split end" haircuts, like we could afford them anyways. And so, what if we wear long white tees "like everyone else." Stupid ass teacher needs to mind his own business. Just cause that nonobservant fuck can't tell we different, doesn't make it true. It doesn't take clothes to figure that shit out. Most of our clothes is messed up anyways. I don't have any pair of jeans that don't have some splash of paint on them, sweaters are the same deal, I got torn—busted converse even though they're only 3 months old, cause we always hitting up new spots, climbing fences, going past levees, under bridges, running away from places we weren't supposed to be at. And immaculate fingernails, ain't no way we can get caught with paint under our nails. But whatever, teacher thinks cause he went to Berkeley he knows shit. Dude don't know me, but people always be judging. It's cool though, I'm good, just chilling...

It's just that motherfuckers always give us shit when they see us. Say we look like gangbangers. Those crazy assholes are always shooting each other for nothing. When we got into some shit it's cause someone else started it... or cause they be biting our shit. Dudes always want to take a

style that doesn't belong to them. So, what if we look like "cholos" that shit don't make us one, and the gangster fools all know it—we're just here to paint. No one gets that though...stupid ass people.

Anyways, we decided to just pass another day here, tagging on the bench for now. We'll probably go hit up some spots later.

"A Pack let me see that new tag" I was curious to see his new one that he'd been talking about. He had tags and blow-ups all over Hammer Lane, by the movie theater too, those always got painted over real fast. That didn't matter though, it was part of the game, you take your picture, people go by, and then it gets painted over.

Pack took out a sharpie, "yeah sure fool, it goes like this."

"That shit is dope" Ketsup said.

"But do you have the can control for it though?" Fable always liked giving everyone a hard time.

"Ha, you fucking know it, you trying to battle or what?" Pack said.

"Man you already know I'd win, you see that shit on the cop car? Don't act like you didn't" Fable said. He lived with his grandparents, dude would leave his house in the middle of the night and disappear for days just painting and crashing at people's houses with no repercussions. He was a bit crazy like that, but who wouldn't be after the kind of shit he'd been through.

"Ha, don't lie, the flares didn't add up, we could all tell that you must've been shaking when you did it" Pack said.

"Man, fuck you, the tip got clogged and I had to finish with an orange dot" Fable replied.

"We staying humble huh" Ketsup wryly said.

"Ha. And you? You a poet or a writer?" I said. Ketsup always said the kind of shit you'd expect to hear from some cholo-poet that was wise beyond his years.

"I'm surprised you still with us, you look like you're in outer space" Ketsup said.

That made them all laugh. I don't know what it was about my eyes, but everyone always thought I was high, even when I wasn't. "Yeah, yeah, whatever fuckers, you're all a bunch of toys on my jock. We going to go paint or what?"

"I'm down" Pack said.

"Yeah me too" Ketsup said.

"What about you?" I asked Fable, since he was looking around and not paying attention, dude was higher than me.

"A look, look" Fable said. "You see the cop, you guys ready—"

"Oh my god, I'm not trying to run fool" Ketsup said.

But Fable continued, "alright, alright, when it rolls over this way, you guys know what to do.

Don't be fucking pussy's."

Before any of us had time to stretch, a synchronized "FUCK YOU" bellowed out of us, and it was time to run—

Drive

It was 2:30 AM. Sky black. Reed was scrolling through his phone searching for the app. It was time. The prerequisite was in his coat-pocket. Reed guided his hand over the hunk of metal as it called out to him—he breathed in the world—he wished he could ignore it, but his mother... Reed looked at his phone, his app told him 6 minutes, 6 minutes before the rest of his life began, 6 minutes before he could finally do something of value for his mother. Now they would listen to him: the doctors, the health insurance company, those that told him to just spend time with her...they would all listen, they would have to...

And then it arrived, the vehicle leading to his destiny.

He audibly swallowed his spit... “cash—credit card—now.” Reed pulled the gun out of his coat pocket and firmly pressed it under the Driver’s armpit, digging into his rib cage.

For the Driver, the discomfort of the gun brought pleasure. He was ten again—on the ground getting kicked in the ribs by Juan Dolores—gritting his teeth, waiting. Two days later he was carrying a laxative to school. He waited for Ms. Herrera to coral the students for P.E. and got Juan to be the last one out with a chocolate coated peace offering, Juan ate it; he shoved him to the ground and locked the door behind him. After thirty minutes, he watched as Ms. Herrera opened the door and the students of P-3 could be heard in synchronized disgust: “ewww!” Juan’s own gang initiating the chants, “Shit boy! Shit boy! Shit boy!” Years later, on his way to his SAT’s he heard that Juan had committed suicide. From then on whenever he had gotten perfect scores he would equate them with the triumph of Juan’s death. For now, he was content, rhythmically tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, his elbow brushing against Reed’s moist arm—an almost imperceptible smirk growing over the Driver’s face. Reed kept silent. The Driver turned off the a/c, the music, and Reed’s thoughts almost became audible.

A droplet of sweat trickled down his forehead, “alright the silent type, that’s fine with me” Reed said as he cuffed the Driver into zip ties, “this way you won’t try anything stupid.”

“Now give me what I fucking asked for.” Reed said.

The Driver just smirked, just as he did it to his psychiatric clientele. The Driver felt the gun leave his rib cage, slowly being pressed against his ear.

“Look, I got a sick mom alright, nothing personal. I can get her a kidney but it’s expensive, don’t make me shoot you.”

The Driver hated those that thought themselves to be noble. **The criminal in my experience never believes they are anything more than the victim. Evil men have never believed themselves to be. They are on the other hand—righteous. Are you righteous?**

“Look just drive to your house, I just googled you, I know you have a wife; she’s gonna help me pay for my mom’s transplant.”

Oh, so I am to play the hostage. The Driver said. **I don’t think I’ll make a good hostage. I know things, things you wish you’d known before getting into my car...Look over here, you see that water tower, it’s the fourth tallest structure in our city: 624 feet at the railing. And that train station over there, I can tell you whatever schedule you want to know, pick a line.**

“Just drive to your house, or I’ll shoot you and try this again, I’ll have to anyways...”

You know what; pick a number: one, two, or three.

“Fine, two.”

Oh that's a good one. After I dropped you off, I was going home too. To kill that cunt. And that stupid whore daughter of hers too...You wanna fuck ‘em before I kill ‘em?

The Driver saw as the last question made Reed wince. He could see Reed fidgeting, the gun shaking against his ear.

How's this: we'll go to my house, you let me kill them, and I'll give you the money. It's not like I'll need it anyways.

“I'm not listening to you.”

You won't even have to ask. I'll give it to you. I have 4 safes. I don't trust banks.

“You know I can't trust you” Reed said. “Look at what you want to do, what you want me to believe. Why would I ever trust you?”

Aw, think of all that money, it could be yours, but fine. Fine. You don't want to fucking listen. Fuck ‘em anyways. What do you think I was gonna do after killing them? Do you think I was under some delusion that I was gonna live some stupid normal life!?

“What’re, what are you doing?!”

The Driver saw as the speedometer rose as if it were broken. 70. 80. 90. 100.

“Stop. Stop the car. Slow the fuck down!”

You can point that thing all you want. Shoot me. Stab me if you want. How good do you think you are at driving from the back seat? At 112? Shoot me. Shoot goddammit! Shoot me. C'mon. Do it. Do it!

“Stop!”

Give me the gun. And the knife.

“Fuck no.”

I'm not stopping. I don't care either way.

“Ok. Ok, slow down goddammit!”

Don't throw them out, or I'll slam us into a wall. C'mon hurry up, or I'll do it anyways.

The Driver saw Reed’s eyes darting from corner to corner, Reed grabbing his chest—wincing—but instead of handing the weapons to the Driver, Reed threw them on the floor of the front passenger seat.

Heh, you think you're smart, don't you? I guess we'll be going home after all. He slowed down to the speed limit. He heard Reed’s breathing become shallow and sporadic. He’d won. Hey don’t worry I’ll make better use of that gun anyways.

The Driver knew these streets better than most, and here he was, on the road he’d been trying to get to, his favorite fork in all of Stockton: on his left side, the police station would be right off the freeway, on his right his home, and straight ahead was the most beautiful stretch of road ending into a cold slab of thick concrete wall. Oh, the decisions, life in all directions, he just had to choose...



The Bitch

"What! You got hit? I never hit you. I got hit, you don't know what hitting is" he said as he just looked around the sofa, not looking at me.

What the fuck? This wasn't a question, I did...I fucking did! He even hit me with a hammer once and that's not even including all the other shit he did! "Yea you did."

"Ha, right. Hand me the remote."

Motherfucker wants to turn this into a debate. Yeah, like I hit myself with the hammer. "Just cause mom wasn't there you think it didn't count, I remember."

"What are you talking about?"

"Are you being serious right now? No one's home."

"Go to your room. Before I get up."

I couldn't fucking believe it. Dude was lying to my face, like I wasn't there. Like I was making this shit up. Motherfucker keeps putting me in my room like I'm going to disappear or some shit. Yeah, yeah, I'll stay here for now. Dude's lucky I got bruised ribs.

I saw something similar happen though. We went to visit his family a few years ago, met all the aunts and uncles, even his mom. It was weird though, one of his sisters brought it up all nonchalant, how their mom abandoned them, and she denied it in front of everyone. Ha, shit must run in the fucking family. Who fucking lies like that? Crazy fuck. Don't worry though, he'll get his. I got plans.

The first time he hit me, like really hit me, I was eight. I had gone to the park, some baseball shit. All the kids left after practice, their parents were there, mine weren't, so I waited—alone. It felt like an hour had gone by before he got there, I was standing next to a tree, too afraid to sit in case I had to run, but I don't think I would've been able to run anyways. And he pulls up in that beat up blue Mazda truck, doesn't even look my way. I was glad he didn't though, and I got in. I didn't want to say anything, but he must've sensed it or something because he asked me what's wrong. Not in a caring way though, it was accusatory. I know I would've never have told him I was upset, scared, mad even, that I had to wait alone to get picked up; but I can't remember what I told him. He saw through it though, "what the fuck are you scared for? Nothing's going to happen to you. You hear me. Nothing's going to happen to you—always a fucking bitch" he said without taking his eyes off the road. "There's a reason why your brother's my favorite. You pussy."

I just kept my eyes straight, and I thought that was that, bruised my ego but it's not like it was the first time he said shit like that to me. He waited till we got home, slammed the door, grabbed me by the wrist and pulled me into my room. I can't remember much after, I just remember the first

hit, striking my cheek, falling on the wooden floor, crying. But no one was home. Of course no one was home, that's why I had to wait so long to get picked up.

That was the last time I cried in front of him, dude didn't like it when I cried. I didn't either, I'm no fucking bitch.

Dude's not all bad though, and don't worry—I'm not him, I won't lie to you.

Dude did put food on the table. I ate every day, not always a lot, but I never went hungry. Dude went to jail for us, stole pampers (for me), stole a leather coat (for himself), stole a jacket and a beanie (for my brother). Stole a whole lot of other shit we needed, like actually needed. Dude did that. Dude even tolerated me, the bitch. I scare easy, but like I said—I got plans. And don't worry I won't try to excuse what I'm about to do, maybe you'll think I'm a monster, but I ain't no bitch.

This bitch got plans. It's been two and a half years of protein and puberty. Sounds fucking gross, I know. But I'm about to show dude what time it is.

"Hey, why you always be wrestling with just my brother, you scared of me or what?"

"Get the fuck out of here, I'm watching something" he said.

"What beer is that, third? Where they at, I'll make it even, I don't want you to have excuses after I beat the shit out of you."

"Oh yea. How're the ribs? And get out the way, I'm not in the fucking mood."

"Yeah like you ever are."

"What the fuck you say?"

"You're a fucking pussy!"

I didn't wait for him to get up, he put his arms on his knees, trying to get up and I tackled the fucker. We pushed the couch backwards, rolled on the ground like fucking idiots. I managed to get behind him, and put my forearm against his neck and started squeezing. He tried to get up but couldn't. He tried to dig his fingers into my eyes like a fucking bitch but I just put my head down and digged my forehead into the back of his skull. I was going to do it! I was finally going to kill the fucker.



But my mom came in. Grocery bags in her hands. "Que, que haces? Dejalo, DEJALO IR! Oscar ya!"

I didn't want to, but my mom's face, her face, man I just couldn't. I was a bitch again. And I just looked at her. She just looked at me, gripping onto the grocery bags, it was like she forgot they were there. Then I saw his cartoonish fucking face fade from purple back into something normal. He was trying to catch his breath, dude looked human and I forgot dude was dude.

He grabbed my arm and pulled it behind my back, kept pulling on it until my shoulder popped. Dislocated my shoulder, tore my rotator cuff and dropped me to the floor. I just looked at him, waiting for him to start raining punches, but he had a look on his face too.

"Hit me again" next time I'll fucking kill him.

Untitled

Seven days...seven days--nothing but a mountain's stream to show...Where has all your life gone? The priest was exhausted, sores had been spreading across his withering body since he had made it onto land, unable to find food. He knew not how much longer he could go on. But the priest had not been forsaken. This was just another test. Altruistically given to him whom he knew was more than capable of holding true to his faith. Regardless of the circumstances, no matter what had been his lot—he—should not falter. God does not only give; he shall always provide as well. All one need do is look upon the mercy the almighty provides.

It had been seven days since their ship crashed. The storm had ravaged their ship for fourteen days before it crashed into hellish stone and was torn asunder...And from the wreckage and the brine, a murky shadow erupted, the priest gasping for sweet life, clutching at the limp body of the ship's captain. A cave just off the coast was provided by the eternal, the priest was grateful; gave his prayer and lay the barely breathing body of the captain inside the merciful shelter. While he went out for food, water, and fire. Only able to find the last two.

*Your bounty has grown not in this cursed island of...Green! Green hell, Green desert, all Green but inedible! I know not what to do. **God grant me the strength to continue, for I know not what I may do without your light.***

As his body faltered yearning for bodily sustenance—obtaining water every day had grown into an increasingly arduous task. The priest cursed the double burden of the captain, which did not move from the cave's floor, but did not parish and he was compelled to provide for him as well. Although those thoughts were well hidden through his teeth, as he spoke a different tune to the comatose captain, "we have been spared, he is not done with us."

Show us the way, steer your lost flock back into the light.

But there was no answer for the priest. The crackle of the fire was all that was heard, as his shadow echoed from the cave's wall and looked back at him, shrinking and growing as the fire ebbed and consumed the wood that was keeping it alive. He had tried to save his personal bible, but it had gotten wet like everything else. The ink had bled between the pages, the gold trimmed edges had turned black, and no amount of drying near the fire could save the book. Alas, he did try, and after seven days the book only seemed to grow heavier as most of the ink had seemed to settle splayed out across the pages rather than in neatly ordained horizontal lines of knowledge.

He spent most of the next three days, just staring at the book by the fire, not picking it up, but contemplating its contents that were hidden under murky ink. He'd eye the book and tremble; his thoughts hidden from everyone, who knows if even god was wise...

*Oh sweet sweet hunger, what am I to do...God is within. God is within. God is within! **He is good and from his bounty life is exalted!***

Ten days of hunger had given his unusable book a new purpose, as he crawled over to it and chewed on the leather-bound cover. Mushing it in between his teeth and sliding through his bleeding gums. The coarse material grew just a bit softer with every crushing action of his teeth. And as he had already gone for water that day and need not leave the shelter of the cave, he was glad to have some task to tend to other than the captain.

I will bring forth your doctrine into flesh. It was a crude joke, cursing his god through his teeth, as he laid on his back after chewing at the cover of the book, exhausted, wondering if he would ever leave the cave again, wondering if there was a point to getting water? It began raining.

I have always been there for you, and THIS is how you call to ME! Even though his body had withered a great deal, the shadow he cast had only grown from the fire to the cave wall he cast his image: it crept up the wall onto the cave's ceiling directly above himself.

He is good. The priest gave a wry smile. **And from his bounty life is exalted.** *You have left me, but I have not left you. I remain your son, and what I am about to do is YOUR SIN! NOT mine.*

He cupped his hands over the captain's nose and mouth and waited until he stopped breathing. He then placed a leg over the fire and waited until the fire had singed off the hair, softened the skin, and made it as good enough as it was going to get to eat. *Curse not me captain, curse not god captain, we are in hell already, and I have just saved you, you shall go back unto his kingdom, to heaven, and I shall lay in suffering.* The priest had not much strength and did not want to waste it sitting up, he took the cooked leg off the fire and with his stomach lying on the cave's floor, he sank his teeth onto the leg.

God is good. He got up with enough strength to walk until he could reach a mountain top, ready to throw himself off. But then as he looked up and out of the cave into the sea's horizon, something was blurring into view...



He Returns

He stood in front of the house. It was a clear sky, the ordinary green of the lawn didn't stand out, and neither did the opaque white color of the house. Everything seemed fine, average, normal.

And so he walked those steps... steps he hadn't walked in four years. Face to face with the door, he breathed, reached into his pocket, gripped at the thin piece of metal, and placed it into the hole. It fit. He was surprised the key still worked.

"Hello? Is anyone home?" The man asked in Spanish, there was no answer.

Nothing looked familiar to the man, the walls had been painted over a soft blue, the wood flooring had been replaced by a light brown tile, the dining room table was nowhere in sight, the sunlight didn't even seem the same, the blinds weren't being used, it allowed the light to fill everything he saw, gave it all a pristine edge as if no one even lived here anymore. But that was wrong and he knew it. He had been trying to not remember, but he couldn't forget and opening that door had caused the threshold of memory to pour over. He wanted to wince but instead just clenched his fist, not that he noticed but he did it anyways.

He remembered how he had wanted to fight teachers, parents, cops and... kill—god. But that nightmare was over, those days were gone. But the smell—the smell remained. It was the mixing of lemon and wood in the silent air that forced his eyes close. Lemon from his mother's cleaning, and wood, freshly cut wood undoubtedly from one of his father's projects around the house. He took the smell in and could see them now, going about their tasks, eyes focused like they were looking into the past... maybe the future.

He traipsed across the living room, past the kitchen and into the hallway, a hallway—unrecognizable except for the path he remembered, a path that led to the different rooms, a closet and bathroom. He didn't know what to expect as he stood in front of his room. He wondered if he should call it his anymore. He opened the door—everything was perfectly untouched, as if he were dead and they were in mourning, or he simply never left.

The sunburst paint scheme coming from the top right corner of the wall remained—ripping across the entire room, his bed sheets with multi colored paint stains were still there, just like the smell, the smell of lacquered paint and glue. It seemed to him that the smell might've gotten trapped in the carpet flooring, brown tentacle sponges that refused to be squeezed of their... contents. He wondered if this was even possible, but couldn't know, he didn't believe he could ever paint as much to make it so.

He ran his fingers across the wall, felt its grooves, ridges—then the dents, dents that he had placed there—past angers tattooed onto the wall like craters on the moon. They called out to him, but he was still amazed, still struck that his room had remained, curious why his father hadn't fixed it all away. That's all his father ever did—fix the house—always more important than he, his brother or his mom ever were to him...

He opened the door to his closet, his old clothes were still there, everything covered in paint, even the lightbulb had a bit of paint, it made him stare at the light for a while. He rifled through

old shoe boxes, wondering if they were still there. They were. Hidden under a pyramid of shoe boxes was one without a lid, it held two smaller spray paint cans, a handful of loose tips for the cans, a sandwich sized zip-lock bag filled with weed and an old paper, it was flat and looked immaculate except for the thick film of dust that lay on top of it. He carried the box like a sleeping baby towards the bed and placed it there. He dusted off the paper and saw a faded red "A" beaming out at him. He remembered the teacher that gave him that "A." Remembered how that teacher acted as if he knew it all. It had always annoyed him... but that was then... this is now...

He remembered how before that "A" he had never received one from the teacher. He hated the way the teacher, to his mind, would speak out of turn. The student would seethe when the teacher commented on what "druggies" and "thugs" did and were like, the words "no right" played on loop in the student's mind. Until the words burst through his hands with a violent crescendo... that's when the student did it, did what could never be taken back. He didn't read the message that came with his "A" until he had gotten back home, "I do not give you this 'A' because I like you, I don't, nevertheless you've earned it. It's clear you have a cognizant mind although you are unwilling to show it in class. DO NOT WASTE YOUR POTENTIAL." But it was too late—too late to realize what the teacher had been trying to do all that time... Time he had to give in turn. He turned himself in, still unable to believe that *he* did that. Gave his body away to be gnashed against cold stone and unrelenting metal for four years, that's what it had taken for him to finally get back... to here.

The man sat there in silence, looked around the room as if he was hoping or maybe waiting for something to happen, but nothing changed. He grabbed a lighter and some rolling paper from a drawer on his desk and packed some of the weed inside of it. He tried to smoke the years old weed but it immediately made him cough. He coughed violently for half a minute before he regained control. He smiled, wanting to laugh, but wanting to cry just as much.



Untitled

I heard the spring mattress accept his weight. The bed was sinking, deeper into the darkness, metal crunch of the springs, letting me know he was there, a dark figure with me.

The hair on his forearms grazed against my arms, like the first day we met... before the tears, laughing, admission of our truths, before we were guilty in each other's eyes, before saying hi meant more than a greeting, before the kiss, we were... line cooks. Colleagues that had never met. The person that worked the days, hours, the other couldn't. Part time workers, or "halfway responsible" as he liked to say to me.

"So you're the one I'm always compared to" he said as he stuck out his hand, as I shook it, it felt more like a brick layer's hand than a cook's.

"Hi, it's nice to meet you too."

"No, no friendliness, not yet at least, I bought a rib eye, we'll see what we got, then maybe we'll respect each other."

"Why not two rib eyes, see who's better?"

"Cause we're part of the same kitchen, we have to work together."

He had a knack for endearing himself and making everyone think he was an asshole in the same breath. He was endearing with asshole tendencies. It was just like him, his smile would unarm, and his tattoos that ran across both sleeves would keep you guessing. He was abrasive, like the metal band, Slayer, was coming off his arms.

"So, how'd you wanna cook it?"

"I'm thinking a reverse sear, start it off in the oven than finish it off over the pan."

"Yeah, that sounds good" he smiled at me like he was impressed. His trademark condescension, it was sweet if you know him like I know him.

"Rare or medium-rare?"

"Rare."

He slapped the cold slab of muscle, sinew, and marbled fat onto a cast iron pan. Studding it with salt and pepper before turning the hunk of meat over and repeating the process.

I lightly drizzled golden threads of olive oil until the pan shimmered, a halo, wreathed and ready to be delivered into the oven.

After we took it out of the oven, he crushed the garlic, shaving it down after he peeled it and encircling the steak with thin garlic sheets and a small branch of sage.

I placed the pan over the fire, bathing the rib eye in butter until it all melted away. Slowly infusing the golden-brown carmelizing butter with that delicate cut of meat searing over the pan. I watched as it tenderly lay on the heat, just slightly browning and hardening on the surface while the midsection remained warm, red, only the slightest hints of pink.

He took it off the flame, ensnaring it in foil while we talked.

"So, what do you do, besides this place?" He asked me the same questions I've been asked a million times by those I was meeting for the first time. It's funny how that same question can be asked by a million different people and it can produce a million different responses.

I could've told him I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do. That my mother had passed away, and that I was still carrying her death everywhere I went. But that's not how small talk works, you have to work up to revelations of that kind. You have to trust someone first. So, instead I told him that I didn't know, I threw it back on him, asked him, "what are we doing besides this place?"

He looked at me, the way I had wanted to be looked at since my mother passed, but no one that I knew felt that they could. They looked at me with sorrow, with guilt because they didn't know how to respond, but he, he didn't know any of that. He wasn't a part of my history, he was fully my present, "I have beer" he said.

"Is that it?"

"I got a bed we can share."

"What else?"

"The kitchen, the living room, the whole fucking place."

"Take me."

Neither of us cared about the consequences, we had just started our shifts but that didn't matter. I just wanted him, and he, he was a guy that wanted me. When we arrived at his place, I didn't care about the lack of furniture, how it was utterly stripped of history—not a photo in sight—or how clothes that couldn't be his were littered over the living room.

He went into the kitchen, grabbed himself a beer, but before he could open it, I grabbed at his face with both of my hands, caressed my hand across his stubbled cheeks, looked at him, waiting, and he turned off the lights.

And here I was again in the darkness. For the nth time, he had told me that he loved me and that I loved him, but we both knew the other was just saying what they wanted to hear. I was okay with that, but I, I don't want that anymore. I don't hear his breath, I don't see his eyes, his mouth, his smile, all I hear is the bed lurching, springs crunching the way metal isn't supposed to crunch. Metal is supposed to be strong, made to reinforce, not give to our weight. I thought of my mom, and I think of metal, I want to be like both. I think mother, I think of a metal heart.



Lounging

“What you want dude?”

“I don't know, there just ain't ever shit to do around here.”

“What you mean, we drink, we smoke, what else is there to do, really?”

“Yeah but you can do that anywhere, I want the kind of shit that can't be done anywhere.”

“Like a theme park?”

“Yeah! No. Not like that, that's just more commercial shit, some other place can have that, I want local shit. Local restaurants, local stores, big city variety and small town feel.”

“You mean big city prices, and being told that 'you're kind ain't welcome.' “

“Nah fool, I'm being serious, shit it ain't like we far off from big city prices, just no fucking variety. Basically being told 'if you want mexican we got taco bell, you want chinese there's panda express.' “

“We got El Grullense though.”

“Man that ain't even that good, and that's all we got, ain't shit else around here. Everyone's so goddamn poor they can't afford to open up small businesses. It's like we live in hicktown USA, no ethnic variety 'around these parts.' “

“We got hella people though.”

“I know, but if you drive down El Dorado, all through stockton, you wouldn't know it. It'd look just like Lodi. All small buildings looking all sad and shit.”

“Ugh, they stay gross. All pretentious and shit too.”

“I know...”

Thomas didn't know it yet, maybe because he was hungover, but he was at a precipice. Much like the one that had brought him out of foster care, and into the Spanos family. He only had a year, then they died. He inherited everything, didn't take over any of the businesses until last year, when he turned eighteen, no one liked it or him, but there was nothing they could do. He didn't do much, let the board do as they wish, he just collected his share and was fine. But now, something else was in the air, besides the alcoholic stench, change was unfolding in its usual pace. Slow, unsure, and vague like the shape of an invisible cloud. But a storm would slowly brew; from his mind's eye to the public. A public that didn't know it yet, but was also just waiting, waiting for someone like him to invigorate a movement everyone could get behind.

From the purse snatching homeless man, to the men and women seething with entrepreneurial spirit, biding their time, with brandy, wine, dinner parties, and reality TV. Thomas was about to change entire trajectories of families, local business, and the revenue available to the local government. Revitalization projects would be taking hold, from restaurants that gave a better sense of the amount of immigrants that lived in the city, to charity organizations that wished to combat violence, mental health, drug addiction and homelessness with more than a call to the police. But first before any of this could take place Thomas would have to get up from the couch he had slept on, too drunk the previous night to make it to any of his rooms.

“Man why the fuck did I put my water bottle sooooo far away,” Thomas whined.

“Haha reeeaaach for it,” the man said.

“I’m trying.”

“Keep trying, don’t give up, never give up. Keep being the best you can be.”

“Haha fuck you. Oh fuck, I feel a beer dump coming on.”

"Stupid idiot you were drinking brandy all night," the man said as Thomas ran by, "you weird fuck."

The alcohol filled sweat poured out of Thomas as he sat on the toilet. If it wasn't for the clothes he was wearing he could be mistaken for anyone of the homeless men he'd pass as he made his way inside his building downtown. But slowly thoughts were converging, between the strain on his lips, the dizziness of hours without water, he muttered about business and beer. Frustration filled him as he tried to empty himself--hands gripping onto the roll of toilet paper--wondering why a mayor that had allowed the city to file for bankruptcy had gotten reelected. Men were at work, and he played, he had heard similar statements being made to him all his life. Thomas had money, that couldn't be challenged, but his mind he never cared to test. Their statements bounced off his impervious bubble that was wrapped around diamond and gold.

“Whew I feel much better,” Thomas said to the man as he slapped his distended stomach.

“Another drink for the road?”

“Really?”

“Why not?”

“Man I don't know how you people do it, I won't drink again for at least another month, well at least two weeks.”

“Alright, well I'll see you tomorrow, 9 am sharp.”

“Good try, be there at 8. And I'll send an email later but you can hear it now, I want to go over new proposals, city-wide, anyone with an idea is welcomed to pitch it, just as long as you can convince me its along the same theme, you'll get the go ahead. No trusts, or anything in my name though, I don't want any of that sucking up shit.”

“Alright, so what's the theme.”

“You'll hear it on Monday, get some rest, we're going to really start doing something around here.”

“Yeah okay, Monday.”

The invisible cloud in Thomas' mind was starting to take a more definite shape. He still didn't know exactly what to do, but he knew he had real money. The kind of money that could get you out of trouble, fuck you money, he didn't know how exactly but he was going to use it to tell the mayor to fuck off. Thomas made a pot of coffee and just stared out his window, sunlight traveling through him. "This is it."



Sanctuary



I remember being five, standing next to the door, with my brother waiting impatiently as my mother made sure I had everything. Her telling my brother to make sure I got to class because she wouldn't be able to take me, the car had stopped working again. She was going to take another bus to work, but she had to finish cooking first, so my brother could just come home and heat our dinner. "Esta en kinder ma, no necesita nada, va estar bien" my brother told my mom. My mom worried a lot. It was my first day of school, I didn't speak the language very well, I was nervous but I didn't let my mother know, she kissed me goodbye and told me Sylvia would be waiting for me at the bus stop after school. We walked out...

To this same shit, twelve years later and they're still doing the same fucking shit. Only thing's changed is I'm not scared for my brother and my mom anymore. They got their *mica*, the fucking assholes in their white vans can't do shit to us anymore. But they always leave with others...

My mother had told my brother what to do in situations like this, "no se separen" I had heard my mom telling my brother. "Nunca se separen" she said. We walked to the back of the apartments, there was a gate there, we would use the money my mom gave to my brother and take bus 22, since we couldn't risk going past the migra and getting stopped.

They could take my brother away—I didn't know it then, couldn't articulate it then—it gave me hate, I hated those fuckers, "just doing their job" assholes would say, yeah forget about the human, jobs are more important.

Same white fucking vans. Rarely they would have a border patrol seal on them, but mostly like the ones right in front of me now—they were blank. Plain white... invisible intentions. *Then it'd*

be too late, they'd start banging on doors, cutting off the only vehicular exit, waiting for people, but most were already gone, already working, thank god for incompetence. They couldn't do those too often, even the news would cover the ones that happened at people's homes. Still, inevitably someone would be taken. Sometimes in a month I'd see them back, sometimes I'd never see them again. They weren't even my family, but it scared me, made me wish I was religious. I remember being so scared for my mom and my brother, wishing they would just stay home. Especially when it had felt like months of local Spanish radio and TV stations warning of raids and checkpoints happening across the city. Like my family had to run a maze and hope we weren't in the wrong place... I didn't want to burden them with more shit to worry about, but I was scared for them. And it seemed selfish to me sometimes, because I didn't want to be left alone, it's not like they would even take me.

They call me different things these days, sometimes a spick like everyone else in my family, sometimes an "anchor baby" whatever the fuck that means. They give me shit for speaking Spanish, but it ain't like they want me if I only spoke English. Fuck 'em, what the fuck have they ever known, I'll play Hector Lavoe and right after I'll listen to Rage Against the Machine.

I guess I never thought about it too much, how they did what they did, *came into the apartment's and basically broke in, it's not like they ever left because someone didn't answer the door...* I was so fucking stupid back then, I didn't even think about that, *I thought I could hide them: under a closet, under the bed, somewhere, anywhere in the house. I thought I'd stow them away like luggage and bring them food and water. As if I could answer the door, and make the assholes leave, they would've just taken them if they had ever chosen our door.* God, I was so stupid. But that's what it took for me to sleep, delusions going unchallenged.

Now I had to walk through these assholes, the worst are the mexicans, the ones with the self-hate or whatever it is that let's there fucked up minds have this kind of job. They always stare, a few times they've told me shit, but I just ignore them, what the fuck can they do to me anyways. "Ay translate something for us." I didn't know if they were half serious or half joking, fucking assholes either way. I told them to fuck off, some got mad, most of them just laughed. It's nice to know they can keep a sense of humor over the miserable shit they do.

At the corner of the street I just keep staring at them, waiting for my bus, no news vans around, just the sounds of engines humming, pale red light glowing between the fog. Wondering how long until this is mentioned on the radio, another day filled with caution. I feel like an asshole 'cause I'm not angrier. Like it's my duty, that I should just hit one of them with a fucking bat for coming into my apartments, fucking with my people. I don't know if that would do anything, just end up in jail I guess. They can't fuck with my family anymore, I'm so stupid I think that's enough. Enough to make me just stand here, looking at them as they try to fill up their van. I wonder if by the time I'm thirty, I'll still be remembering the same shit...

Untitled

One thing you have to know is that you have to eat fast. Because everyone else will, elbows used as shields on either side of their bowl, (everyone is emotionally cold), spoon digging the food away (like they got a chance to get old, as if life exists out of this hole), but eyes always on the lookout for objects coming into their periphery. How else could it be? We're wicked, broken, but ain't no one going down on their knees. "Man, you ain't even hungry." You'll hear them say, but they best back the fuck up, or they'll get a spoon in their eye, 'cause this is my food. Mine.

This was his third week in the orphanage, he didn't talk about how he ended up here, no one did, it didn't matter, it didn't take a genius to figure it out. He was here, like they all were, alone in their dream—fantasy broken. This was his new home: three-one-three on eighth street, old dark wooden slabs hastily put together half a century ago. No one cared then for this building, it must have had the same purpose. Holding the city's bastards in one lot. A different kind of homeless people, but homeless nonetheless, rejects that were better ignored than accepted. Maybe the place wasn't as much worn down by time, but by the evil-eyes that lived inside. On the lawn stood the gatekeeper, a new age gargoyle that tried to change the façade of the building, a statue of mother Mary, directly underneath of her were the kids, in a windowless basement where food was given to them. It was empty of charity although they provided meals, two times a day.

My father, when I had a father always insisted on Spanish, I guess I know why. But at the same time they could also be lies... (the way, people told me my father never dies, inside of my soul, who gives a shit about that, I'm too fucking old. No imaginary friends, no hide-and-seek, no counting to ten) I've been lying a lot, stealing, cheating people out of their meals. I'm not sad about it, I don't cry, (I get angry and pick fights) I'm just doing what was done to me on my first day here. (before I saw clear) I'm good though, better than most now. I disappear into the crowd, I don't speak, don't make friends, but I listen and strike (shrouded by night). Don't plan on staying here until I'm eighteen (motherfuckers won't stop me) I'm going to see the world and write. Always remembering the words, I had with my father:

"Habla espanol?" he asked me about a friend.

"i don't know, quien sabe?" i replied.

"Well then, no es Mexicano."

"maybe to you, still gonna get criticized."

"With that clothes he wear, sure to get the evil-eye."

"got the nopal en la frente."

"He's not right in la mente."

"says who?"

"Todos lo saben."

"no, it's just you."

"Dime, why are we here?"

"cuase you wanted to give me a better life."
"And what do I ask in return?"
"everything."
"Hablame en serio."
"to never forget my culture."
"Si, tu cultura, what else?"
"never lose my tongue."
"How else would we communicate?"
"would i still be your son without Spanish?"
"Ya lo hablas, nunca te lo quitaran."
"but if i didn't?"
"Quizas si. Quizas no."
"i guess we'll never know..."

On October fifteen, after a few years, he escaped his prison, started seeing the world. One city wasn't enough, he always moved entirely, like from earth to earth-two. The exodus didn't matter to him, "Shelter in mind" was his mantra, with fists ready to greet the world. Always remembering that shit hole on eighth street, it got him his first poem published, he didn't even remember where it first appeared. He looked out the window, looked back down at an old paper with yellow tinted corners, it was his poem, the one he wrote as a kid, feral, and angry, before he got married, before he stopped moving, before he understood that he was only landless and fatherless so long as he believed it... he read the title, 'ghetto-mexican-samurai,' it made him smile, made him want to read the rest of it: Although he already knew what it said, he felt he had to look at the worn page.

Fists holstered in my hoodie's pockets
Like a ghetto-mexican-samurai
Not trying to unsheathe my two knuckled swords
And (have to) break bones
Just so I can be left alone

A wayfarer

A

Lone

Fighter, hoping to keep my weapons holstered
Out here for no one but myself
A cholo, a ronin...
Eyes fierce and fists clenched
Always caught off guard
With smiling strangers
W o n d e r i n g
Where the fuck is that place?

Where no one be set tripping?

Not here fool
I'll keep my fists holstered
Like a ghetto-mexican-samurai
W a n d e r i n g

He wasn't glad for those experiences but wasn't angry at them anymore. He was glad he was more than those three words. His father was gone, had been gone for too long, an injustice, but he was a father now too. Didn't have to think about what his father would say to him now, he said it to his children instead. Hugged them the way his father used to hug him, saying the things his father couldn't say anymore.



Mexican Spiderman

Most people like to think that they're descendant from some fucking old king, the oppressors rather than the oppressed, that's nice and all, but look around, nothing but fucking poor people for miles, peasants, plebes, one step removed from drinking from the fucking gutter. me? i won't lie to myself, i won't do that. i'm motherfucking poor, generations of filth, no olmec king, no nahuatl chief, no mexican politician, just motherfuckers that were hungry and bit into anything that was in view—that's my lineage. A history without pride, that's me, that's my blood, veins of dumb-fuck farmers, with eyes glazed over with old world superstition. That be me, and shit don't bother none, i'm here. Fuck who don't like it.

“Fool—” Ivan the interrupter spoke.

My name is Tomás, spelled with an 'h,' you know, t-h-o-m-a-s. tomás to those who know me, Thomas if you don't. The best i ever hope for is a silent 'h' the rest gets butchered, tome—ass. That be the name. It was given to me by my mom, in honor of her brother, but spelled differently, 'cause i'm my own person. Been living in Stockton all my life, a land of farmers, flat wasteland of dirt and vegetation. No restaurants, no big theater, no big buildings, just a bunch of fucking idiots like myself with time and liquor. That's why the name suits me, everything melds together around here, no architectual variety, my name stands invisible on the roll sheet, at least if it wasn't for the color of my skin. Tengo el nopal en la frente as the paisas like to say. thomas, fuck it, i had to have a name.

“Fool—” the interrupter spoke again.

i wear long white tees, and blue jeans, like James Deen in Rebel Without A Cause. But browner, smaller, less charismatic looking, if i were an actor i'd be like Paul Giamatti or Steve Buscemi, but with a ghetto-cadence when i speak. i'm bastard blood. Some teachers like to bullshit, trying to pull a brother up, call it Mestizo, nah son, it's called being a bastard. It's a dirty fucking mixture of forgotten histories and new found catholics. No more shape shifters, witches, and abstract evils, it's only god, god, god, saint a-z and La Virgen de Guadalupe; if you really crazy a ghost or two. That ain't me though, i'm a nothing, no one, a cypher, delusionally a one man army... getting all my weapons together. Burning books and they all the bible. i'm here in the fog, with visible breath, waiting...

“Fool.”

“i'm thomas--i--bleed bastard.”

"Fool, you crazy." Ivan said.

"So. What you think?"

"I think you're better at this than painting."

"Nah, this just something on the side. Like you and what's that girls name?"

"Stay on topic fool." Ivan said looking past his shoulder. “Don't be bringing that shit up

around Karina."

"Yeah, whatever."

"Man, if that's what it means to be in a honors class, I'm glad I'm not in it. White people be caring too much. You know how much homework I got?"

"Some of us can't be that lucky."

"Nah son, that ain't luck, last week with Karina--that's lucky."

"So you good? She ain't pregnant yet?"

"Pfft yet, clever motherfucker, you need to put shit like that in your homework."

"So, what you think?"

"Yeah it's alright. I mean it's no Harry Potter."

"Gangster ass fool, and you fucking love that shit, you fucking hilarious."

"Ha, fuck you homie, he's a cool white dude and you know it. Fucker don't know how close to being mexican he is, using the same shit our moms be using." Ivan cupped his hands and yelled towards the sky, "don't ride the broom fool, use it to clean!"

"So what you trying to do?"

"I don't know, none of the homie's are here so I don't know."

"i got homework to do, so maybe i'll just go do that shit."

"You know what, help me with mine."

"Man, you do homework? Let me stop the presses."

"Fuck you, I'm not trying to fucking fail, just cause I'm not some nerd-ass over achiever don't think I don't know what I'm doing. Straight D student right here. I get my credits, I'm graduating just like you fool."

"Yeah we exactly the same."

"Alright fool, check it, I got to write a persuasive essay--"

"About?"

"That's what I was getting to, don't be rude, fool. It's about Spider Man being Mexican."

"Hahaha, you crazy, he takes his mask off though, dude is white." i said.

"Nah dude you just ain't getting the right perspective. Check it, dude loves climbing shit right? So forget the whiteness, they all got to be white on TV anyways, so swap the skyscrapers with walls, fences, and BAM, Mexican!"

"Dude's from New York though, he'd be Puerto Rican."

"Nah, man Puerto Ricans don't have walls to climb, fools got to swim."

"Alright fine, what else though, you got to be able to convince me with more than one piece of evidence."

"Yeah, I know, chill, I got this, let me speak... Dude lives with his old ass aunt, tell me why that shouldn't be his grandma? You live with your Grandma! Half the people we know live with their grandparents. The dude is Mexican!

"But his parents are dead. Mine aren't."

"So they still not around."

"Yeah, right now, fool you know they coming back, they just got deported, they'll be back before the end of the week."

"Nah but come on, how many white people we know don't got parents? See what I'm saying?"

"Fool we don't know any white people, except Steven, and he lives with his grandma too."

"Dude, du--"

"Oh shit, Steven is Spiderman!"

"Fool."

"This what you saying."

"Alright, alright, but fool, Spiderman loves them white girls, not just any white girl, but the really pale ones, you watch the show, she red headed, they be hella white. Mexicans love that shit."

"Got me there."

"Yeah, so, what you think, I win? I get to keep my D?"

"Yeah, fool, you straight, you'll pass. But why Spiderman? Why don't you just go with the Fantastic Four? They from Stockton."

"Man, they whack. One step removed from the fucking Wonder Twins."

"What's the dude's name always turning himself into a bucket of water?"

"Man, fuck him. Stupid ass show."

"You know, if you really wanted to convince me, you should've changed his name from Peter, to Pedro or some shit."

"Alright, alright, the reason why his name should be Pedro..."

