

THE CORIOLIS EFFECT

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THE CORIOLIS EFFECT

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I dedicate this novel to the reader's father

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PART I

A TROPICAL
DEPRESSION

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CHAPTER 1

A TROPICAL DISTURBANCE

THE TWO TOURISTS SPENT MORE TIME SIGHTSEEING THAN STEERING and didn't see the yellow school bus barreling down on them as they rounded the crest overlooking Montego Bay.

After somersaulting off the cliff, their scooters sailed into the bay while their bodies plunged to earth and exploded in a burst that painted red blossoms on the plaza. Many of the islanders got their first look at human organs, while children rushed into the waves to fish out two new motorbikes.

Locals said the gods selected their sacrifice by spinning the wheel of misfortune; but in the moon-shadows of the palm trees, they whispered another story: that someone needed two large shipping crates in a hurry.

Later that day the bodies were brought to the island mortician and his assistant, Astride. They worked in a small mortuary on a narrow dirt road that sliced through a canyon that was carved by the floods that follow the hurricanes.

"M'Lord, they were fat as whales," Astride whispered, as she stuffed seaweed into the voodoo doll in her left hand.

"They're just shells now," the mortician replied, just before taking a bite of his tuna-fish sandwich.

"We are all to be forever," Astride added. A second, finished, doll lay on the table by the rear door.

A lung and liver lay on a surgical table. On the bookshelf—a bag of potato chips, a Diet Pepsi, and a kidney. An eye floated in a dish atop a plywood crate kept as a spare for the next stray family that couldn't afford a coffin.

“Please set that down, come here, and take this,” the mortician snapped, holding out a bloodied surgical rag.

“That eye be watching me,” Astride answered, pointing at the eye while she shielded herself from its gaze with the voodoo doll.

“Stop looking at it. And finish your project later. I don’t pay you to be a witch doctor. Put down the doll and come here and help me,” he snapped as he turned back to the table.

Astride took the bloody rag and tossed it to the table by the back door. She wiped her hands on the yellow and green stripes that zig-zagged across her black dress; but she only managed to smear the red blood into orange streaks.

The mortician was a large man. His belly folded over itself and new layers protruded each year. “My grandchildren use my belly as a staircase,” he often would joke, as if laughter and food could camouflage his work’s reality.

Astride avoided the eye and searched the distant hill beyond the window. When the bodies were delivered, they were told to prepare for a visitor.

“When will they get here?” she asked as she wrapped chaparral vines around the doll. She set down the doll near the first one on the table and took a step closer to the window.

“When they get here,” the mortician replied.

“Can’t think so good with this anxiety,” she continued as she fanned herself with her hands. Her crimson painted fingernails flailed around her head.

“You sound like you’re excited to see them,” the mortician said, and added, “I’d rather you focus on this work.”

“Hard to work with an eye on the coffin,” Astride whispered.

They heard a van drive up, a door slam, and the sound of approaching footsteps crunching the gravel in the driveway.

Astride looked into the mirror that hung near the rear door to the back garden and studied her face. She pulled down her dress, tightened her hair bun, smacked her lips and turned to face the front door.

The front door opened.

The mortician set down his instruments and he and Astride stepped back, partly to make room for the big man who entered, and partly for his cigar smoke, but mostly for the rumors that circulated around him.

El Cigarro was over six feet tall. A thin white moustache slid across his upper lip one morning and stayed. Few had enough courage to get close enough to find out if the lines on his face were scars or wrinkles from too much sun; those that did soon swam with fishes.

"The impact did the work for you," El Cigarro laughed as he pushed his fedora back over his head. As he pressed the cigar between his lips, he slipped on a blue surgical glove and picked up a brain, rubbing his thumb on it the way natives press the coconuts that lie on the beach after a tropical storm.

"We'll pay you the same. Tonight you'll receive the delivery," he added as he flipped the brain into the air, caught it, and tossed it toward the trashcan. "Won't need this no more."

The brain bounced against the wall, leaving a trail of slime as it found a resting place beside an empty can of tuna fish.

"Remove the bones. It's a large shipment."

"Whom do I see next?" El Cigarro continued, now addressing the police chief who had slipped in quietly behind him and had remained nearly unnoticed until now.

"Can't always see him but I can see the puppet strings," people would say as they watched the police chief following El Cigarro on the street like a lap dog. The chief was a thin stick of a man—a walking tree with two branches for arms.

"They arrived. On a yacht. In the bay," the Chief stammered. "There's a navigator. Mr. Walker," he continued. "No one else. They have one child. A daughter. In Manhattan," he added, as if speaking in shorter sentences would get him noticed less.

"Take me to Walker," El Cigarro ordered, thrusting his arm and snapping his fingers at the officer. The thrust of his arm deformed the helix of cigar smoke into a turbulent cloud that followed him out the door.

Astride and the mortician were alone with the stench of the cigar

and the rumors of an imminent drug war. They decided to go home for a late afternoon rest before the work began.



The night's shroud descended softly on the Caribbean. Red hibiscus and white angel trumpets in the mortuary's back yard absorbed the ultraviolet light leaking round the earth's equator, converting it into a glow that warmed the garden. Pineapples and bananas released their intoxicating oils while frogs and crickets prepared for their night's performance.

Two coffins containing 500 kilos of the finest South American cocaine had been delivered earlier that evening to a surgical room flushed with a pale light from a waxing moon.

Astride and the mortician, each dressed in black, sliced, scraped, and stitched. Bones were replaced with bags of white powder—every cavity gently packed so as not to tear the flesh.

"The stitching's important," El Cigarro had warned them.

They recalled the story of another mortician whose sloppy stitching made a U.S. Customs officer suspicious. That mortician became his own shipping crate—waste not. The U.S. Customs official who had noticed the odd stitching was reassigned to another unit—want not.

When the bodies were closed and dressed, Astride took out the two voodoo dolls she had made earlier. Chaparral was laced around sticks that served as arms and legs. Each leg hung straight down, while the arms crossed the body as if the voodoo doll was its own crucifix. A small white conch shell was glued to the top for a head and small brown clams created the face. She placed one into each coffin, stepped back and saw the stern face of the mortician looking at her.

"For to be a safer follow-to for spirits, yes sah, respect," Astride countered, as she waved her hands at him.

The dolls were made from the wood of the Blue Mahoe tree, used to create the soft sounds of the cuatros—a kind of lute that has been played in that part of the world for over four hundred years. Legend says the sound of the cuatros is so magical it spirits souls from their graves to hitch a ride on a tropical storm and sail the world on the Gulf Stream.

“As you wish,” the mortician replied, raising his brow and lowering his head as he capitulated to the mumbo-jumbo.

“Spirits surround us,” she insisted, snapping her red-tipped fingers and brushing the air.

The mortician studied her face.

“Astride, your eyes—dilated,” he exclaimed. “You have been ingesting drugs this evening.”

“Yes sah, respect. Helps me see these two spooks that missed their boat to the fish locker,” she replied as she stepped back.

“And there they be again floating a’fore me!” she erupted.

She ducked her head, lifted it back up and blew into the air.

“Shoo!” she exclaimed, as she returned to the coffins.

Astride used the pins from her Rasta hair bun to fix the dolls to the inside walls of the coffins, while whispering “*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*” She sang the words in a rhythmic, Calypso passion, not knowing what they meant, having forged her own religion from whatever floated onto the shore of her consciousness through the years.

“Got to clear the spirits,” she added, with a snap of her fingers when she saw the mortician staring at her.

The mortician placed a candle on the window ledge as a signal they were done and they began to leave.

“Visitors now?” the mortician asked as they heard the slam of a car door ripping the night’s fabric.

“Bandulus come early,” Astride whispered through a clenched jaw.

“This is too soon,” the mortician said as he stepped toward the outer room.

He turned back to Astride and whispered, “Quick, go back, hide in the garden.”

Astride returned to the surgical room, and then toward the rear door. She opened it and stopped. In the distance, two more headlights from a second car were racing toward the mortuary.

“Too many actors on this stage tonight,” she whispered as she returned to the room. Her eyes darted around like a startled fish as she searched for a way out.

Then she snatched a bag of the cocaine with her left hand and took the candle from the window with her right. She placed the cocaine in the pocket of her dress and used her foot to pull a stool toward herself. She stepped up and slid into the empty wooden coffin that had earlier supported the eye.

"We're all going to be here soon enough," she whispered as she reached around the lid, placed the candle on the lid and lowered herself into darkness.

A hole in the wooden coffin gave her a view of the room as the mortician opened the door to the police chief from earlier that day.

The chief nearly fell forward into the arms of the mortician.

"Please, please, sir, help me," the officer stammered as he stepped back and lifted his bloodied shirt to reveal a knife wound.

"This is not good. I need to close this," the mortician said.

"Here, this is what El Cigarro wants," the officer added. The police chief reached into his shirt and leaned to the side, compressing the wound. He grimaced as he pulled out two seashells from his pocket.

"They're shells," the mortician said as he gazed upon them.

"No, inside the shells. I had to disguise them. Take off the cover and you see the flash drive. It holds the records of the operation; the money laundering through the art museum in New York. They know I have it. One's a backup," he continued in an agitated voice.

"Calm down, take them back," the mortician commanded. "Or the spirits will come for you, too."

The mortician crossed himself, clasped his hands, and was about to reenter the lab when the screech of a car skidding to a stop tore the silence.

"Hurry inside; they're here. Press firmly. I'll ask them to take the coffins," the mortician whispered. "Quickly, out the back door. Hide out there in the garden. You'll find my nurse there. I'll tell them the car is hers."

After the police chief stepped into the back room, he closed the door behind him. Through the hole in the coffin, Astride watched him stumble.

The police chief pulled himself back up by pressing down on one of the coffins. He lifted a voodoo doll, stuffed one of the flash drive shells into its chest and pushed it back into the side of the coffin.

He clutched the second shell and then rushed for the back door while lifting his gun from his holster with his other hand.

When the front room slammed open, the police chief stopped and turned.

“Don’t kill me, don’t shoot. Please, I’ll give it to you,” he shouted.

The first bullet blew the gun from his hand and hijacked his thumb for a ride out the back door. The second bullet splashed into a red pool in his forehead while foamy white dough ejected from the back of his skull. Blood burst from the crack and splattered the ceiling. He fell backwards and hit the floor while his knees were still vertical. His fibula snapped through the skin and his pants bulged from the protruding bone, while his spirit slipped into the night sky through the open door.

The mortician rushed into the room and clutched his chest when he saw the body.

One of the two gunmen took the flash drive from the hand of the dead officer.

Astride remained stiff in the coffin, holding her breath, fearing it would pass through the plywood lid and quiver the candle’s flame above her.

The gunmen saw the back door was open.

“Who else was here?” they demanded of the mortician.

“No! No one was here,” the mortician stammered as he took a step back.

“Your assistant. Where she at?”

“She was here. She left when the officer arrived. Through that door,” he answered. His lips quivered, and the gunman stepped closer to the mortician, who added, “She has seen nothing.”

“Don’t piss me off,” the gunman shouted and raised the gun.

The mortician, lost in a storm of fear, grasped at memories of his grandchildren climbing his belly. He reached for a scalpel on the

operating table in a gut reaction to defend himself from his own fear. The first gunmen fired.

The bullet made a perfect entry and ripped part of a curved aorta from his body, pinning it against the wall like the tail of donkey. A pool of blood spiraled on his chest, like the Giant Red Spot on the planet Jupiter, while the wall behind him was splattered with blood that dripped like viscous tears on a wine glass. His last words were, "My grandchildren," as he passed into immortality and his body descended nearly without a thud for all its weight.

"Call El Cigarro," the first gunman muttered.

Astride lay still in the coffin and listened to the phone conversation.

"Dead. Both," said the second gunman into the phone. "Accident. Your puppet raised his pistol," as he kicked the dead officer. "Doc raised a cutter so we snuffed him."

"Your addict ran off. She not be here," he continued. "But we have the flash drive. Breathe easy; still in the shell," he said as he slammed the back door closed.

"Cake is packed," the first gunman called across the room.

"Yes sah, we can step it," the second one said into the phone.

Through the hole in her own coffin, Astride watched the men roll out the coffins. A few minutes later they returned.

Then she heard the order "Sell this place."

The first gunman opened a canister and poured gasoline over the mortician and police officer; he splashed more around the room. He lifted the candle off Astride's coffin, tossed it on the floor and ran from the room.

Astride opened the lid of her coffin and moved quickly, trying not to breathe the scent of burning flesh: out of the coffin, across the floor, through the back door, into the garden, and down the dark road.

Star-burst silhouettes of palm trees eclipsed the bleeding stream of the Milky Way as she raced after her shadow, cast by the orange streaks from the fire.



Across town, Mr. Walker turned his head toward the orange glow in the distance. Then he stepped onto the newly orphaned sailing yacht and the warm scent of citrus followed him.

In the distance, he saw the yellow headlights of a van approaching. It drove along the pier and up to the where the boat docked. Several shadows emerged and transferred the caskets to the yacht. One shadow handed Walker an envelope.

“You’ll get the other half when you arrive,” the shadow whispered.

“Whom do I see when I get there?”

“They’ll find you,” the shadow replied as it dissolved back into darkness.

The van pulled away, leaving Walker alone under a mist of starlight. He unlaced the mooring line’s knot, and pushed from shore.

The boat barely moved and only rotated in place as the Milky Way seemed to spiral above his head. He had to use the motor to slip into the wake of Hurricane Nicholas which had cleared the sea of ships earlier that week.

The scent of citrus he brought onboard was soon washed away by the salt air.

“Only thing to worry about now is sea dragons,” he thought as he gritted his teeth.

“Three of us on board,” he whispered as he steered out of the harbor. The shoreline faded into darkness as he added to himself, “and two of them don’t talk no more.”

He remembered the legends about the Bermuda Triangle and about the creatures that wash ashore on nearby islands.

“Don’t wanna be seeing any of them alone on this trip,” he implored the moon. “Only empty shells now and don’t talk—they be bones, no more.”

The stars reflected with pinpoint perfection on the sea before him. Behind him, the sailboat shed moonlit vortices over the ocean. The two diverging streams of the boat’s wake—a silver necklace adorned with white whirlpools—gripped his focus as he continued looking toward the past.

“May have to use this engine the whole way,” he shouted, as he turned forward. “No wind tonight!”



But he was wrong. A wind was blowing, and a storm was rising—two storms: two bodies and two stories.

Just off the coast of Africa, a high-pressure system was developing. This system would begin pushing warm air out over the ocean. The warm air would meet a low-pressure zone and the wind would stream inward. The earth’s rotation would redirect the streamlines into a vortex swirling around a central eye. This will take some time to develop.

Meanwhile, another storm was accelerating far to the north. This storm had been percolating for years; it had been simmering almost as long, it seemed, as the Red Spot has been fuming on the planet Jupiter. It is a storm between a father and a son who have forgotten how to talk with each other. Like any storm that was finally beginning to spin, it had its own center, its own voice, and its own eye.

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CHAPTER 2

MARCO AND THOMAS

I'M SITTING IN A CAR ON THE NEW ENGLAND THRUWAY IN THE BRONX with my dad, baking under a scorching sun while car horns blast each other like lions on the Serengeti.

The traffic is bumper to bumper.

My father rarely speaks when we pass an accident. In fact, we haven't had a conversation in years. Our attempts have degenerated into grunts layered with regrets. It's not that I hate him; it's that the distance between us expanded too fast, and now I don't know who he is anymore. But this time, it's different. He says something; something strange.

Before us, on the left side of the freeway, is an overturned car. The front of the car faces us. Orange police cones direct us to merge a lane to the right to give the emergency workers room to extract the two bodies.

The late-afternoon sunlight refracts through our front windshield.

"Car's turned over," my dad says, as his foot slips and he pumps the gas and brake pedal simultaneously, jolting the car. An angel with silver-tipped wings—a Christmas ornament which refused to return to seasonal storage and found a home hanging from the front rear-view mirror—starts swinging back and forth. Refracted red light reflects off one wing, blue from the other.

So, yeah, that was it. That's all he says as he lifts his right hand from the steering wheel and massages his temple. I guess it wasn't the words—it's never the words, is it?—it was the depth of the silence that preceded them. I have a feeling a light is about to turn on inside his head, like we're both overlooking a valley of a shared memory and terrified of falling.

"What about it?" I ask, working my way back.

“Never mind,” he says, as I turn my head and look into the car on my right. There’s a family in that one.

Does he even know I’m alive?

We exit at Eastchester Road, to the west of Co-Op City. To our right is Pelham Bay Park, the gateway to the Atlantic. My dad glances toward the park. We know what happened there fifteen years ago. We don’t talk about it.

“I remember Freedom Land Amusement Park,” he begins again but in a stronger voice that must have tossed the old voice overboard. He’s fidgeting with the strap of his seatbelt like a man desperate to break from a lifejacket.

“It used to be there before they built that Co-Op City,” he says as he tosses his attention past me and out the passenger window. “There was a ride there called Danny the Dragon—a red, fire-breathing dragon. I fell off the ride. My dad caught me.”

“I know, Dad,” I say, wondering what jiggled that memory loose, because that wasn’t what I expected; normally, it’s always the accident he talks about. But you can’t control a memory when the memory holds the puppet strings.

We’re off the exit ramp and driving through the northeast section of The Bronx.

They never got around to planting trees in this section of The Bronx. Eventually the city abandoned the neighborhood to the growth of concrete, the flowering of flat tires, and the falling leaves of shredded furniture.

My dad’s lost a lot of hair and what’s left has turned grey. You could say he’s still handsome—or maybe you can just imagine he was. He hasn’t put on much weight and his muscles still roll shadows on his shirts. He was a tall guy once—about six foot one, but now he’s shrinking under stress. I’m now taller than he is and just twenty one.

He’s shaking his legs. He does that a lot. I asked him once if it was nerves, but he says it’s as if he wants to break from the car and run, just run, in any direction. “You want to run?” I had asked him once, thinking he’d leave me.

“No, you want me to run?” he replied. Checkmate with silence.

“Why do you do it?”

“I need to be in a different spot. Maybe I’ll find it,” he had continued.

“What are you looking for?” I pressed that time.

“Don’t know,” he replied.

I wish we could stop playing word games.

His palm cups his chin and he’s chomping on his thumb’s knuckle again. We’re heading home after a day of shopping.

“First the tailor, then the luggage store,” he had suggested.

“Let’s go to Macy’s in Cross County,” I interrupted. “We can get it done fast and go to City Island for an early dinner.”

“I know where everything is in that neighborhood,” he interrupted.

So I decided the hell with it. I really wanted to talk with him but when he gets defensive, I pump my brakes. I just wanted to spend time with him. I should have said what I wanted but was afraid of getting too close to the cliff. And he was evasive. And I remembered the past. And he didn’t want to talk. And I got angry. And he shut down. It’s his fault.

He better not fuck up this assignment he’s been given. He’s the assistant to the director of security for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and he’s been preparing for some exhibit they’re setting up. Some artwork coming in from Rome for some art show they’re planning about love or sex or some shit like that—like there’s a difference. Tomorrow he’s flying there for some meeting.

Now we’re on Gun Hill Road which runs east and west. Only in The Bronx would there be a street named Gun Hill Road. This is where colonists raised cannons to stop the advance of the British. Seems there’s always a battle somewhere in my head.

“The art’s going to be unprotected for a short time once it’s checked in,” he interrupts the silence. “It’d be a perfect opportunity for a theft.”

What the hell did he mean by that?

Something’s happened to him in the past few months, ever since plans for this exhibit began. He’s lost his drive, can’t focus, and spouts shit like that. He’s planning something.

My dad used to be in great shape. I hate the way he is now. I feel my

calves—massive. I pump my bicep. I have the muscles my dad lost. I've got the six-pack now.

"I'm a man," I think, as I pull back the hair that's fallen over my eyes and run my fingers over my shredded abs.

The Cross-Bronx bus in front of us spews fumes into our car. New York City bus and subway drivers are a breed apart. They really don't have much freedom; they have routes—a destiny. It's better for cabs; they can veer off course—I suppose that's why cab drivers are happier than bus drivers. I've rarely seen bus and train drivers smile, but cab drivers are loopy happy. Cabs can go where they want. And then there are pilots. Pilots can go up and down—more freedom, more challenges. I suppose space travelers top it off—they can go back in time. I wish I could go back in time.

We pass the bus.

"Dad, please help me," I whisper so softly I know he can't hear. I'm about to talk when he starts talking first.

"I wish it hadn't happened," he blurts over my whisper. "Now I've nothing to give you for your future. So I've no choice."

Shit, just when I need help, I have to help him.

"No choice for what, Dad?" I ask, casting my own worries aside. "Have to do what?" He doesn't respond; he shrugs. He looks like he just woke up.

"Never mind, sorry; didn't realize I was talking out loud."

The light turns red so we sit in silence. The stench surrounds us: the shit on the sidewalk, the garbage in the gutters, and the exhaust fumes of the traffic.

On the corner, some kid is jookin' like Lil' Buck. Above, the Number 2 subway line roars as it races to its last stop, six blocks to our right. The noise vibrates the windows. If they break, the heat from this cauldron called The Bronx will flood the car.

Behind us, the past catches up.



My dad would take steam showers after a day of training for the police academy. I would sit outside the bathroom door with a picture book of *Puff the Magic Dragon* and wait for him. I don't remember the feeling of waiting: just that he was in there, and I was on guard duty. He was the king in the temple, and I was his soldier. I wish I could go back and watch that moment like a movie; freeze it, capture it. Today, it's an image painted on the scrim of memory: it's like a floater in my eyes—the moment I turn to look, it floats away.

Then he'd come out, smelling clean, hold me against his chest, and I'd feel his warm muscles. He'd send me to bed with a slap on my butt.

But I wouldn't fall sleep right away.

We'd sing word games. He'd be back in the kitchen—Mom and Dad could only afford a small place when he was in training—so I could hear them. I'd be lying in bed, and he'd sing some song with funny lyrics. And I'd sing it back. We'd alternate lines and laugh. And we'd create single sentences where every word rhymed, like 'there's a goose on the loose drinking juice with a moose.'

This would go on for a while, confounding my mom.

"Thomas and Marco, you'll wake the neighbors. Thomas, Marco has to get to sleep," she'd say.

I think she just wanted us to let her into the game. But it was our game: me and my pop. And it would end only when he'd come in and cuddle me before I fell asleep.

He was handsome. His soft, brown hair was thick and draped over his dark brown eyes.

He and my mom would be talking in the apartment—they never fought—and she'd be making a point. Then he would look at her, and she'd get all befuddled and say, "Stop looking at me with those eyes."

"How else am I going to look at you?" he'd say.

I get this now because Cyrise—she's this chick I know; I'll tell you about her later—says I do this to her. "Stop looking at me like that," she says. And I would say, "How else am I going to look at you?"

It's the devil eyes. Sometimes I think the only reason my mom would disagree with him was to see his eyes glowing like that.

Then the light went out after the accident.

There was a trial.

The only thing I remember from the trial was the red and blue angels. My dad insisted in court that it must have been the red and blue light of a police car. Then the prosecuting attorney reminded him that he had talking about red and blue angels on the night of the accident.

“We find the defendant—guilty!”

I wanted to run to him, to be in his arms so he could wash away my fear, but my Aunt Caroline held me back. I think she was crying for my mom and hating on my dad. My dad reached out to me but I couldn't move.

He didn't know Aunt Caroline was holding me back.

They didn't put him in jail because they blamed the victim, too. They said there was blame to go around—the other driver was drunk, too. But for my dad, it was over. He was off the police force just as his career was about to begin. There was corruption in the force, and no one could find the source. They had to blame someone, so they blamed him.

Now there was no way he was going to become a police officer. He would become a guard in a museum. He'd grow in rank and responsibility. He would soon be a mid-level manager but never an officer.

Then darkness descended—it was no longer funny or sad; that's the way all dysfunction is—as if the director is conducting a comedy and a tragedy at the same time.

My first memory of how my father changed was when I left a wet water glass on a new mahogany coffee table that he just built. He got angry when he saw it, shouting about warping the wood. He raised his hand to my face and it scared me. I didn't know what I was doing. I was only a kid. It was just a glass of water on a wooden table.

It would take a day for him to calm down from something like that—me too, because it scared me—and then all would be back to normal.

Then a month later something else would happen. And I'd turn away from him because I still held the grudge from the glass of water warping the table, or some such shit, and I'd look at him with the same fear.

This went on for years. I was there, he got angry, and I would turn away. He would feel sorry and try to make his way back. But I got lost. I'd get over it, but he'd get angry again at something else. He'd apologize, but then I'd get angry when I remembered. He was slow forgiving, worrying about himself, so I wouldn't forgive—or some shit like that.

Sometimes I wished he would just hit me and be done with it. Then we'd both feel so bad, we might actually talk. He might see that I do respect him—that I know he still has power over me.

My mom got sick. Then she got worse. Finally, she died when I was twelve—the big C—and my dad started to drink.

Soon there was a distance.

Once I heard him talking in his sleep—then a loud scream. “I was not driving the car!” Part of me wanted to wake him from the dream, but I was angry, and I wanted him to relive the accident so I left him in the dream. Isn't that evil of me? Letting him sleep to relive the pain: punishing him by doing nothing? But what freaked me out is that the next night he came into my room, telling me I was having a dream in which I was shouting about not driving a car.

Now it's just me and my dad, adrift like bodies floating on an endless sea with no bones to build a bridge. We've forgotten the song we used to sing. And sometimes I think quietly about all the songs I don't listen to, the music I don't know, the friends I didn't make, all because I spent my time fighting my dad. I'm twenty-one and have no friends.

I wish there was a river. I wish I could sail a river and go back in time to be the boy he loved, and to meet again that man I loved before life turned on him.

I have to find the right river to sail. But first I have to find the man in me. Will I ever see myself as man?

I should just tell him I love him. But I won't. Apologize? What for? I was the child. I have my excuse, and I'm going to use it.



The light turns green, and we're moving again down Gun Hill Road.

“I'm sorry I drank so much after the accident, but it was the only

way to blunt the pain. And I'm sorry it hurt you and your mom, Marco," he erupted.

"Aunt Caroline held me back," I whisper at the same time, so he can't hear me.

Why do I even bother to remember this? He doesn't listen. Fuck, I'm out of here. Let someone else deal with him. He's become an epic failure. I have to stop thinking now, or I'm gonna snap and kill someone.

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