

Sprinklers

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Found a diamond in the data mine
Torn from child with skeleton fingers
By Kevlar jackets with invisible hands
I hadn't eaten today and the sky was red
Hadn't the luxury of ethical refusal.

Pawned my bloodlust to the man in the rusty cage
Basket case villain of sweat and loose change
Glass case caskets cast shadows of
Brass knuckle firearm chimeras
Entity of violent design
He ripped me off cus he hadn't eaten today

Ate mutant poultry and told myself
There is nothing you can do
You have to eat it.
Though this muscle never once let
Instinct take hold
Animalian impulse to flow
From her spinal chord
Like magenta moontrail
City silhouettes

Like blood from the jugular
Christening claws of jaguars
The conveyor belt guillotines
Relieving the body of duty
And emitting raptor essence
Ghost cyclones like the rapture

And I throw the compacted
Assumedly muscular puree
To rot in the sun.

The bacteria hadn't eaten today.

Snow Delirium

The dark of the night is what usually sets the stage for mystical experiences; when you hear "It was dark and stormy night," you're ready to believe any story that might follow, no matter how impossible. I, too, have had my mystical visions in the din shadows usually or in my dreams that presaged events that turned out to be true. However, there is another extreme situation -- just the opposite of darkness-- that can open a sixth sense and shut down common sense: bright sunshine and vast vistas of snow, especially in high mountains. At one time in early June I hiked up to the Cascades mountain ridge area, and I got so enthralled by the peaks and the pristine snow covering them that I just kept trudging from one to the next, but when it got to be afternoon and time to head back down I simply could not find my own tracks. It was as if someone had swept them away. Needless to say, it was very scary coming down using only the sun as a guide; not every slope leads to the valley, most of them end in a sheer precipice with one or two thousand-foot drop beyond it. But that was an instance of common sense shutting down, a negative experience, and here I want to relate a positive experience, the opening up of a sixth sense.

One day last winter I was trudging up to the top of Mount Misty in PA -- a mere molehill compared to the giants of the West -- on the only trail available even when the ground is not covered by a foot of snow like it was then.

It'd fallen a week earlier, but the only footprints I saw were those left by deer and other unidentified smaller animals.

The virgin snow yielded to my heavy boots, but my whole body felt weighed down having to heave my legs out of the white embrace of every step.

The forest was frozen in crystalline silence, even the wind was hibernating, and an icy sun was slinging its blinding slivers of light at me, as cold as knives.

Suddenly there was some noise up ahead, the scrub oak was swinging wildly along the trail.

Animals and deer, unlike people, never bump into things, never disturb the prayerful slumber of the wintry forest.

I stopped to raise my gaze at the bend in the trail up there, but the sun was in my eyes, and the sunglasses shadowed the trail.

However, it had to be a human figure up ahead, no doubt about it, except still ill-defined, the face disfigured by goggles and the gait disguised by the special choreography demanded by the snow.

So I just stood there in my tracks, my gaze fixed on the approaching figure.

Revelations just happen. Just like snow, I told myself. Or do they?

What if I don't understand the trackless stranger?

And how about me? Sweat was hanging in icicles from my hair in the back.

Is life worth an explanation? I didn't want to exist before existence was thrust upon me. And now I just want to know.

But have I ever found anything at the top?

And why not?

I stood there squinting. My glasses were all fogged up from my huffing and puffing.

Belief has nothing to do with it, I said, if you've earned a revelation.

I found a dry corner in my shirtsleeve and wiped my glasses in it.

It was time to move on.

What if the trackless stranger attacks me?

And how about me? Will I make any sense to the mystery figure? Sweat was hanging in icicles from my hair in the back.

Will an explanation change my life? Life always seemed like

a Xmas present I didn't know what to do with. And now I just want to know.

But have I ever found anything on the top?

And why not?

I stepped aside to make way, while the mystery hiker, face swaddled in a scarf, was stumbling through the snow bank like an avalanche but still waving an arm towards me in passing.

Was that a vague gesture of benediction or caution or just a hello and good-bye?

The rest of the trail was clearly marked for me by the descent of the mystery, by loosely scrambled footprints, all the way to the crest. And maybe the trail was a little easier to negotiate.

But at the top I forgot to track down the footprints.

Maybe they got lost under the underbrush of my exhaustion.

Or else I was afraid to face the nothingness hanging from the sky.

On the way down I had my own tracks to follow, my own footprints to read, combined with those of the mystery hiker from nowhere. I started feeling a debt of gratitude to the two hikers preceding me, not only for making the path smoother but for simply preceding me; to the mystery hiker for reassuring me that mystery was still alive and well at the top, and to myself for making the effort to look for it.

Yes, I felt grateful to myself, to that even more mysterious someone I had been coming up. That someone was confidently expecting a revelation from me -- the me coming down -- and all I was bringing down from the top was a hiking stick. And sweat hanging in icicles from my hair in the back.

But there was something else that came down with me: a sneaky yet exhilarating belief in magic and miracles.

Paul Sohar

Understanding

"No, no, honey. Grandma's sick".

Those five words echo throughout my entire existence. Grandma's been sick for as long as I can remember. Actually, before I can remember. For the past twenty four years, I've only known my grandmother to be "not like other grandmoms" as my father would always say. When I was seven, she'd broken her ankle. Then she was hospitalized for reasons unbeknownst to me. Later, another ankle, gallbladder removal, left ankle (again), cancer scare, stroke, and two heart attacks that quietly crept up on her. So quietly, in fact, both incidents went completely unnoticed by family members until it was almost too late.

Physical sicknesses, though, can be seen. To a child they are obvious obstructions as to why Grandma can't cook dinner or take bike rides with the family on cool, crisp Saturday evenings. With physical debilitations, no one questions the health of a loved one. Instead, friends and strangers console. They assist. They understand. Instead, what they don't understand are the diseases of the mind. When what ails cannot be physically comprehended, cannot be seen, cannot be mended or repaired with stitches and casts, those same friends and strangers are much less sym-

pathetic.

It wasn't until I was almost 16 that my mother told me my grandmother was schizophrenic. For years, I'd seen her stare silently, blankly into the unknown and wonder what was so captivating that she wouldn't direct all of her attention to me. Why does she lay in bed all day? Why is she so flat, emotionless? Why does she hate me? I didn't understand. It seemed like everyone was keeping some great secret from me, like I was being sheltered from something that ailed my own flesh and blood.

I very distinctly remember trying to crawl into bed with her after one of her many surgeries. I was immediately grabbed by a relative and told "You can't lay with Grandma now, Drea. She has to rest." Rest from what? Ever since then there have been innumerable instances in which my grandmother required immeasurable amounts of "rest". Sometimes it was obvious why—an upset stomach, a cast, eye surgery—but other times, determining why she couldn't be bothered with me was much too difficult to decipher—lying in bed, curtains drawn; days without speaking, no lunch. There seemed to be many more bad days than there were good and as a result, much anger developing inside me.

The interesting thing about human beings is that, many times, when we are afraid, confused, or saddened our initial reaction is

to lash out in anger rather than work to comprehend the things that aren't agreeable to our sentiments. Because of this, anger was the most prevalent emotion I possessed. It wasn't until much later that I attempted to gain knowledge and understand my grandmother's disability in a feeble attempt to dissipate my rage.

After hours of research on paranoid schizophrenia, things started to click. Delusions, hallucinations, the dark circles under her eyes from endless sleepless nights, the pale blue doors that were locked from the outside, all forcibly apart of her genetic composition and repeated institutionalized treatments. I quickly realized that there was nothing she could do, nothing to fix herself without the help of medical professionals and prescription drugs. But I still didn't understand. I was still unable to apply what I'd learned to her past behaviors towards me; to her rapid transitions from being the loving, caring grandmother that I grew to seldom see to the cold, harsh woman that would spew hurtful words at me. I wasn't able to grasp the bitter reality that those glacial behaviors were not really her; that fear and aggression had overtaken her too; that when these things happened it was time for a change of medication; that those hurtful words meant she would once again be locked behind those barred, pale blue doors with computerized locks.

Once, she asked my grandfather to take the television out of their room. There were voices in it. Not the voices of various actors and morning talk show hosts, though, but voices that left her petrified. The voices that kept her up at night. The voices that choose only to torment her, camouflaged from the outside world. Two days later, she was gone again.

We visited her daily and no one mentioned to friends and family that she'd once more been hospitalized. The few that did know were not told why. "I can't sleep here" she would tell my grandfather, but there was nothing he could do. She needed to be monitored and he was not skilled enough to do it alone. And so, after our hour long visit, we were forced to leave by nurses with strict rules and regulations to adhere to. When she returned home the telling pools of sleepless nights under her eyes were bigger and darker than when she left. Sleep there really was impossible.

I do remember good times with my grandmother, though. Before the many broken bones and mental breaks. Prepubescence. She would sing while she cooked breakfast and dinner. Smokey Robinson, I think. And she would say silly things to make me laugh while I peeled carrots into the trashcan. These were the

days before resentment and schizophrenia disrupted our times together. Before I noticed that there was something wrong with Grandma.

When I was nine, Grandma mentioned an uncle that I'd never known while she was running my bath water. She told me that he'd be "about 20" in a few days. Puzzled, I stared at her as the bubble bath filled the tub. Confused, though I was, I knew to leave well enough alone. I later asked my mother about this mystery relative and instead of telling me what Grandma was really alluding to I received, "Oh, she's just talking" and the conversation was over.

It wasn't until nine years later that I learned my grandmother also suffered from depression—the result of the loss of a child and the miscarriage of another. It was also around that time that I learned about the immense racism she battled in 1950s Alabama. How can one woman carry so much pain? This, I decided, was what sparked her schizophrenia. Constant hate and discrimination are enough to drive anyone mad.

She isn't mad in the sense of derangement, mind you. My grandmother is quite reasonable and level headed; rather, it is in the pure essence of extreme hurt and misguided trust that

she is haunted. I can't help but feel that deep down she relives these painful moments each day and that they are so deeply engrained into her psyche that she will never be able to separate herself from so many agonizing memories.

Eight years after my mother's initial confession, I still don't truly understand the diseases that afflict my grandmother. I do, however, have much more compassion than I did as a small child and even as a teenager. My own struggle with depression and numerous operations have helped me connect to her in a way I doubt anyone else in my family can. Our bond is not a typical one in which memories are shared over milk and cookies, but rather, it is something that grows stronger with the battles we combat each and every day. Because of my hurt, I now recognize the fact that I will never fully understand hers.

Andrea Hayes

Bio

I'm Joshua Loner, a songwriter from atlanta. I play with a band called great american noise jihad in Atlanta. Your website said you like weird and crazy. These are probably unorthodox and potentially offensive, some people might not dig them because I say fuck too much or talk about porn explicitly.

Paul Sohar ended his higher education with a BA in philosophy and took a day job in a research lab while writing in every genre, publishing seven volumes of translations. His own poetry: "Homing Poems" (Iniquity, 2006) and "The Wayward Orchard", a Wordrunner Prize winner (2011). Other awards: first prize in the 2012 Lincoln Poets Society contest; second prize for a story from RI Writers' Circle (2014). Latest translation volumes: "Silver Pirouettes" (TheWriteDeal 2012) and "In Contemporary Tense" (Iniquity Press, 2013). Prose work: "True Tales of a Fictitious Spy" (Synergebooks, 2006) and a collection of three one-act plays from One Act Depot (Canada, 2014). Magazine credits: Gargoyle, Rattle, Rhino, etc.

Andrea Hayes: writer, editor, knitter, cat mommy.