

traversing the stars

by
Dakota

Sins of the Father

On Sunday mornings my father would tear back the blankets and yank me out of bed. He would stand over me with sour wine breath hurling fire and brimstone about what sinners we were, spitting madly in his corrupted mix of fricative English and peasant Italian. He had an old-school pedagogic rearing style. No affection, kind words or tolerance. He was steel ruler and leather belt across my back to get my attention. He was clenched fist to my face and whiplash grip on my nightgown, little limbs rag doll in the cold early morning assault.

My mother would hide behind straggly hair and closed doors. Her muted sobs clawed the rooms of the house like a torturous scratched record bumping never-ending, bumping never-ending, bumping never-ending...

Every Sunday morning was hell. Every Sunday morning I would cry. Walking to church I would hold my cupped hands to my eye like a lens and marvel the details of the world—a broken paling fence, swollen ankles in red shoes, the celestial nose on my mother's face.

St Peters Catholic Church

Sunday mornings Father Julian would wave a fat fist over the crowd and boom down sermons in a thick, angry Italian tongue. The veins in his throat would bulge; fat and blue, and he would slam the oak lectern with his fistful of bruising bible verses.

I would stand beside the holy water and watch the unblinking crowd of deadpan, po-faced followers. They reminded me of black and white photos of thousands of WWII German crowds looking up enamoured at the Fuhrer. Blue veins bulged in Father Julian's throat and my father's pointed finger dug deep into my shoulder—*verily, verily devil child...*

Stained light pierced the tears on the statue of Christ, nailed to the back wall overshadowing us all. The scent of myrrh dizzied my head.

Offer up my wrists

I began to read, write and explore photography long before primary school. I knew my calling was in the realm of words and images. Something all my own compelled me to the page—lured me to conduct a symphony of melodic words on paper. Something all my own compelled me to a drawer of photographs on my mother's side of her bedroom. Black and white strangers sharing meals around a dining table; my mother tall and polished, smiling in tailor made suits, among them. I made daily trips to her room spreading out the proofs, imagining stories about these strangers, trying to understand my mother's corrupted explanations. Mostly, she sat in mournful silence while I held the negatives to the window and pondered, with a squinted eye, the mysterious realm of film to fibre.

The hand of the devil

My writing table overlooked the yard where my father lurked. He would boot-stomp through the veggie patch, slamming down a spade into dark dirt. All around him chickens pecking the upturned earth. I kept a fleeting eye on my page and all eyes on him, never too engrossed in the otherworldly luxury of wordplay. I sat up high, like Christ pinned to the wall, and watched over myself.

The cock crows twice, but I do not hear.

Suddenly my father is billowing beside me, seizing my left hand—*the hand of the devil*. He clenches my wrist and squeezes until the skin is lined in strips of sausage red. In Father Julian-like fury, neck veins bulging blue, he is close to my ear hissing venomous words, *I warned you devil child...*

In his grip I think... *These are my tools*. All around me is crying, pleading, my mother pulling her hair in the background. I stand barefoot in something wet. On the floor pages of my writing smeared in a puddle of piss.

Privately

I teach myself to write with my right hand. At night, I gaze at the stars through cupped hands, imagining other worlds. *These are not my people*.

Through the looking glass

I wake one Sunday morning, only thirteen, with a compulsion to write backwards. Still in my pyjamas and stumbling-tired I pull a sheet of paper and let the words flow, from right to left. Text appears like a form of English-Arabic. I hold it up to a mirror and smile—*my new privacy*. In the notebooks I carry to write in I write backwards in public, on trains, buses; at school, at home and on important documents—. On the murals of my bedroom wall, whole passages in reverse; the mirror on the

opposite wall unravelling... My mother tilts her head and frowns. My father lock-jaws; his mouth a cold, straight line.

The first man I met...

My father, often said to me, *I'd have shot myself if I'd known this is what my life would be.* He would sit long hours in his toolshed rifling through old photographs and drinking wine.

Follow Her Furrher

I put a handgun in my mouth and taste the metal on my tongue, cutting my lip in the quickness. I tilt my head, look to the sky, and lick the blood on the barrel.

When I am sixteen I slip out the backdoor with a camera across my shoulder, a lumpy black garbage bag of clothes and no goodbyes. I cannot carry the suitcase of my mirrored-writings. I leave them behind. And I never return.

Into the fire

I jump from church into therapy exorcising all those father demons, those mother monsters and the tick-tick-tick of adolescent self-annihilation. I am sixteen years old cutting the umbilicus at my navel. I am hacking inwards, diving downwards deep gazing at archetypes, sub personalities, Jungian typologies, dreams, the unconscious, and the pantheon of Greek gods... I'm tracking every Tourette-like twitch of my body. I'm scuttling the tunnels of the soul, the dark subways in search of a portal to the source,—my capital 's' Self, the masterplan...God if you dare.

In the sewers of the Self

...it's cathartic, chthonic. I'm the great epiphany chaser. I long for other worlds and the promised sun. *'You're in the grip of a complex'* ¹Repeatedly assured: *Transformation is alchemy. Black is suffering, is gold. Is God, even.* I am deep-sea-diving the soul convinced by my therapist who loves me to swim through murky waters, keep uncovering the black, black, black, poor wounded child.... springtime is on the other side.

When I leave the cult that is therapy I am fractured, disoriented. I am 27 years old.

¹ A core pattern of emotions, memories, perceptions, and wishes in the personal unconscious organized around a common theme, such as power or status (Schultz, D. & Schultz, S., 2009).

Seismic crush

For a glitteringly turbulent time, I fall in love with a boy in a blue shirt.

We tumble through shimmering touch, talk into the night about Booker prize authors and riding motorbikes. He plays me songs, sending me messages through the music. With gentle hands he punches through my barbed-wire-ribs to get to my heart. But my heart is a cave you cannot traverse. I boot stomp through the dark and prick him with pins.

For several years I post him songs, send him messages through the music. In the end we are a Berlin Wall. *I am where I am and you are where you are...under different stars*².

Somewhere among thousands of handwritten pages of my writing is his phone number.

My heart is a cave.

God came to me on the highway...

One early morning travelling to Rosebud Jesus appeared before me, outside the car, with His arms out wide, taking up the whole of the world before me. He placed one hand atop my head and the other against my cheek. Warm, palpable, I could smell the sting of dry metallic blood close to my nose. I sat bolt upright and leaned back hard into the driver's seat not believing the scene before me. I ventured to ask out loud, *How have you come to me?* to which I heard, *I am like a good book. I am everywhere.*

For months He came to me in dreams playing amazing acoustic songs—moving melodies that had me searching desperately in the day for the soundtrack. In sleep's sweet liminal state, those twilight moments before coma, He would come as a warm white light and cover me, like sun on bare skin in a still, perfect day. Our conversations were long—like first lovers talking themselves into sleep. I spent my life chasing lovers but this...this was nothing like it. It was love like I have never known love before. *I was sweetly broken*³.

Truth is

Like something illicit I told no one. Like something illicit He came and went. And all the books I read of Him were not the voices of my father, or Father Julian. But Jesus is not a man to shake his head.

² *Different Stars*, Trespassers Williams, 2004

³ *Sweetly Broken*, Jeremy Riddle, 2007

In the quiet cave of my heart He asked me – *So what are your loves?*

I came to my knees, rested my head on the wooden floor and thought of the boy in the blue shirt.

...No. What are your loves?

I offered up my wrists, and showed Him black & white photos, words on white paper.

So write.

So take pictures.

I cried myself into sleep and when I woke, He was gone.

Awakenings

The year I was born John Lennon released the single *God*, and publically relinquished his ties to false idols, things iconic, mythic, spiritual, heroic and bogus. A long list of things he no longer believed in.

I don't believe in magic,
 I don't believe in I-ching,
 I don't believe in bible,
 I don't believe in tarot,
 I don't believe in Hitler,
 I don't believe in Jesus,
 I don't believe in Kennedy,
 I don't believe in Buddha,
 I don't believe in mantra,
 I don't believe in Gita,
 I don't believe in yoga,
 I don't believe in kings,
 I don't believe in Elvis,
 I don't believe in Zimmerman,
 I don't believe in Beatles...I just believe in...me

It was his metaphoric shedding of skins, a goodbye to 'yellow brick road' falsities; a return to humility. Did the song and the transformation come to Lennon as an epiphany? Not according to him. To him it *just came out of me mouth*. He says nothing deeper than this about it. This is Lennon, the 'give peace a chance' guy. The guru of 'imagine all the people living life in peace'.

...it just came out of me mouth...

Maybe it's as brutally simple as that. God slipped out the back door with no goodbyes, leaving me with a lumpy black garbage bag of yearnings.

The message

I am everywhere. –a broken paling fence, swollen ankles in red shoes, the celestial nose on a woman's face.

On a whim

I take the stairs to the Melbourne School of Art & Photography armed with a folio of photographs. I say, *can I look around*. I am greeted by the school's founder and owner—Kay. She spreads my images across a large table in an empty room. *Have you ever considered drawing?* Three times I tell her; *I cannot draw*. Three times she tells me; *oh but you can*.

She makes a pact with me. *Be here 10am starting Sunday and then we'll talk*. For eight weeks every Sunday morning I raise my hand to my squinted eye learning to measure the distance and angles of human anatomy. I learn to loosen my wrists in a new way and let it all flow.

Every Sunday morning is bliss. Every Sunday morning pieces of the old me fall to the floor with my pencil shavings.

At the end of eight weeks I can sketch anyone's portrait in photographic likeness. At the end of eight weeks she offers me a fully paid scholarship in art and design. I spend two years skidding along the polished corridors in my socks between the art and photography departments feeling equally fraudulent—*I cannot draw*—and exhilarated—*oh, but I can*.

The scent of developer dizzies my head, deliciously.

A barefoot boy

in blue jeans meets me at an intersection. I say, *I know you* and he smiles. Across ethereal skies, under different stars, I see him and he sees me. I tell him. *You're like the boy in the blue shirt*. Seismic.

He disappears like Jesus. And he is everywhere.

I smile at the litany of life's dramas

...listen intently to the moving melodies like a soundtrack. My hand and eye move to the shape, the anatomy, the rhythm, like a cinematic lens marvelling the quirks of the world.

My heart is a compass

*Life experience is what you bring to the page*⁴...So I write. So I take pictures. I am where I am, and all of us are in motion, traversing the stars.

⁴ Quote I wrote down years ago, might be one of my own, because despite researching I cannot find who said it.