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A Portrait of Polluted Water

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Breakfast had started with the sun melting on my pancakes following the murder of my son. I remember telling him before he died that my father was a river and my mother was a bitch. He gave no reaction or made any movement of interest, so I took my fork and shoved it down his slender throat that was already lubricated with maple syrup. I told him I was god and that he must repent for not acknowledging me. I don't think he got the joke, because he died shortly afterward.

I doubt he ever really existed, not in spirit anyway. He never spoke to me because he didn't have a language. Right now I can't even recall if he had a name. But, of course, this doesn't matter now; I'm intelligent enough to realize that there's no sense in calling out to a corpse.

A Portrait of Polluted Water

by Jeff Speed

When I was his age I used to dream of demons with urine-stained teeth riding through a burning forest of grey, smokey mist on the backs of indescribable hounds. This pack of monsters was so immense that it surely would have eclipsed the sun had my vision provided it. Too tired to run, I stood by and waited until one of the de-

mons with urine-stained teeth bent over the side of his hellish mount and grabbed me by the hair of my neck with a swift, effortless sweep of his blistered arm. As we rode he whispered secrets into my ear—all of them I have since forgotten—violent secrets that simultaneously thrilled and scared me. When the demon with urine-stained teeth had finished speaking, he landed in front of a burning gas-station and dropped me. I remember him saying before I woke up, "The water is polluted . . ."

The angel in my brain tells me what I did was wrong. That my son was special, authentic.

I used to wrap a blanket around my son and me in the cold months on rainy mornings. We didn't have a fireplace, so I'd turn on the television with the sound muted to allow the lights and colors to flicker around us. I'd read the final act of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* over and over until my son was asleep. When he dreamt, he took small breaths and consequently appeared dead.

Now I looked at his slumped body that was draped clumsily over the back of his chair. If it wasn't for his open eyes or the fork protruding from his open mouth or his blackened lips I would think at this moment that he was dreaming. His pale, porcelain flesh was not yet aware that its resident was gone, a light sheet of sweat shrouded the boy. I drank a glass of water, and it swam in my head.

The birthplace of my sins is in a quiet fishing port located off a tiny, non-existent ocean that I can only visit when I close my eyes. Because of this, I am blind there. I can hear the ocean, and I can hear the voices, and I can hear the colors. Bright colors that smell salty but perfumed in orange clouds. The colors tell me my name when I forget it. There are three of them; I suspect that they are soft, like pastels of some sort, but I can't see them.

I can only recognize them by shape.

Once one of the colors, an isosceles triangle, spoke to me of my son.

"Your boy has vision," it said. "He is an artist who is blind and deaf to reality. He can see my skin and speak my toes. He is a yellow Michelangelo!"

When the color shaped like an isosceles triangle finished he disappeared, and I was left alone and blind in a breezy wharf bar.

An old fisherman sat next to me. He breathed from his mouth, constantly expelling the sour odor that slept on his tongue. I could feel his worn and calloused eyes on me, and I could hear the liver spots on his hands jumping from one to the other like junebugs between two porch-lamps. Somehow I knew he was smiling.

Suddenly, the old fisherman grabbed my unguarded shoulders and screamed out in that sweaty glee that possesses the senile: "I hold the sun in my throat! In my throat! The sun burns in my throat! If you weren't blind you could see it!"

And then he laughed and stumbled away muttering something about a partridge.

At the time I had thought nothing of it. I went on eating the tasteless pretzels moistened by stale sea air that sat in a grimy-feeling plate on the bar. I listened to the faint sounds of the ocean and felt the whispery rhythms of the bar patrons. When I had had enough I opened my eyes. I was

lounging in a lawn chair beside a hotel pool; the high winter sun winked at me; I forgot my dream.

"What would Jesus think of you now?" That was the angel in my brain.

I looked at my son again, and he makes me want to laugh. He looks like the worm of the butterflies I'd catch a long time ago. I'd catch them in jars and put them in the freezer. They wouldn't die; the cold would only kill their senses. When they were unconscious like this I'd cut their wings off as though I were a surgeon and carefully pin needles through their midsections. When the impaired butterflies thawed I would place their bodies near ant-beds and watch as the tiny ants descended on the huge prey like Indians after buffalo.

Unfortunately my son is too big to place next to an ant-bed. They could never get his head down the hole. That shadowed head with the annoying grey eyes staring vacantly at my kitchen ceiling. I hate that head, that face. There's no anger in it, no love, no deceit, no pain. It just hangs from his shoulders, expressionless like the portraits of floor-tiles hanging in "modern" art galleries. Today, we acknowledge the spiritless. We can only see the water, not the pollution in it. The polluted water that swims in my brain and makes the angel drunk. I can feel it now, sloshing from side to side, flooding the canals of my rubber head. It feels like the blood of abortion with chunks of flesh stirred in. Someday my son's body will flush

through someone's head. The obscure thoughts of unfinished pancakes will occupy that person's mind.

When I was my son's age an old woman with long nose hairs and a copper smile would make me pancakes and sausage. She would speak German and cry a lot at night. But I didn't mind; the pancakes were good. One morning, though, she decided to make biscuits instead. She loved cats and eventually died.

I ate the rest of my son's pancakes. They weren't as good as the old woman's. I never learned how to make them the way she did.

I looked at my son again. I took the knife that the river gave me and cut into his numb flesh. I cut around his stomach and pushed my hand through the opening; it felt like jello. I began to eat. Although the shapeless, wet morsels didn't look like pancakes, the taste was there—but admittedly muted.

Breakfast had started with the sun melting on my pancakes following the murder of my son.