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BURIED RIVER

MY GREATEST CRIME IS BEATING A DOG. It would raise its paw over its muzzle in the hope of protecting itself, in the hope that I would relent. I didn't, despite the pathetic and harmless image it presented. If I burn in hell for this alone, I'll understand.

We both suffered under the heavy hands of step fathers. Mine died at the height of his reign; yours died after the smoke cleared.

My wife keeps me awake with her tossing and turning; I tell her to go sleep outside. She says, "Excuse me?" I clarify. Swing your legs off the side of the bed. Stand. Walk until you come to the front door of our house; open it and exit. When you find yourself in the front yard, lay down in the grass.

When I do sleep I am chased by hungry Orcas as I make a desperate attempt to reach the shore on the power of waves. The Orcas do the same and tear me in two. Instead of Orcas, Piranhas plague your sleep. They nibble you down an inch at a time until you're nothing but a head floating on the surface.

When all the anecdotes are assembled we come into being. But why have so many of them gone unspoken? Despite being best of friends and having talked many times, there is still so much kept under lock and key. Each day we grow older the deeper it sinks. Now a days we rarely see one another and we chalk it up to our careers, family, and a lack of sleep. But when I think of the two of us together, I imagine us running into each other unexpectedly on the street. We both have engagements to attend but we're both taken over by the serendipity of the moment and something tells us that this will be the last time, so we say fuck it to the engagements and head for a bar. What takes place in the bar could be a scene out of a John Cassavetes' movie, except the swearing and anger are replaced by garrulous joy.

THE WISH

We enter a bar where there's no presence of youth. Besides us and the bartender, there are a couple of old timers stationed in the corners waiting to evaporate and pollute the air. Why a bar? Simple reasons; as a cliché it's tolerable and in terms of pop culture it encapsulates everything from John Cheever to Cheers. People like to pontificate and talk philosophy when drunk, and we will be no different.

I always arrive in the middle of the conversation, after the hesitant beginning and at the point when we have begun to let it all hang out. At the point when we are slapping each other on the back, unable to contain our laughter. At the point where we recognize the folly of our ways and all we can do is laugh.

We begin to poke fun at one another's wives. It starts off harmless enough. If you can't laugh at the one you love then you should never have started. But then some hard truths begin to take shape. You don't feel like

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listening but you need to and so do I. Neither one of us has ever been much in terms of a tough guy, and that's part of the problem. We've never drawn blood. The bartender asks us to leave.

The old timers follow us out of the bar. One cheers in your favor while the other stands in my corner. We sock each other in the guts and fall to the ground. We vomit a little and begin to laugh. The old timers call us fags.

We walk with our arms slung around each other's shoulders. We travel the streets of our old neighborhood in a city neither of us has lived in double decades. Passing the high school we realize we're smarter than most of those who were paid to educate us. We begin to reminisce about all the hot sluts of our class that triggered a lifetime of masturbation. We follow this train of thought and it brings us to the cemetery. We begin to search for the grave of Jessica Hotly, the class homecoming queen who stuck her head in an oven. We begin to dig; six feet, nine feet, and nothing but dirt. We learn the truth; there are no corpses. God tells us to keep his secret and he'll forgive us this transgression.

Two police officers stand outside the cemetery gates twirling their batons. They ask what business brings us here so late at night. I tell them the kind they best stay clear of. One of them is about to split my head, when you inform them that there are a couple of Puerto Rican fellas stealing wreaths off of the tombstones. Excited, they hop in the cruiser and hit the sirens.

Dawn is drawing near and we've examined every nook and cranny of our former stomping grounds, and we've come to a conclusion; who needs it? We put in a call to the president and order him to nuke the site of our former selves. In a microsecond everything is transformed in ectoplasm that spreads throughout the universe. An alien in search of life on other planets captures and records our scattered existence and is disappointed with the results. He points his apparatus towards another corner in the sky.

THE TRUTH

I can't call you because I don't have your number. My only contact is an email address that has to be about fifteen years old and not a clue if it is still in use. The message reads; hello? Two weeks pass and you reply: "Long time; my bad. Hope all is well. We should get together." We exchange trivial pleasantries a few more times before a concrete plan is made. "See you Friday."

We meet at a bar that's packed full of twenty-something's. I follow you in as you make your way through these obnoxious kids and soon realize that I am following you out the door. We stand in front of the joint confounded. You know of another bar nearby.

The second bar also contains a gathering of youth but not as many. We slip past and conceal ourselves in a booth. The conversation begins with our jobs. Neither one of us really feels like thinking about work, but we can't help it; its common ground and we no longer share friends. We've polished off two rounds and I arrive back with the third; we both feel as if

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we are walking the razor's edge and ask ourselves, did I remember to pay the electric bill? The conversation deflates and we stare into our drinks. The jukebox kicks in and some kid with taste has picked a good batch of songs. The music spurs us on and we reminisce about all the concerts we partied through. When the silence creeps back in it isn't so bad. We've resigned ourselves to the fact that sharing an appreciation is about as good as it's going to get.

A song by The Replacements begins to play and we both sit there wondering how many of these kids know what an answering machine is.