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His Last Lament
By Daniel “Xetini” López

The bed he sunk himself into was unkempt—sullied and bled into with loneliness—while the covers hung down towards the floor where the crumbs of last week’s dinner laid untouched. Outside, thunder rattled the unopened windows. He could hear the rain weigh in on the roof, edging to tear it down and drown him away with the thunderclaps. He lay there with his face buried into a pillow he’d forgotten to wash, again. The lights off, and the room vulnerable to the drowning of a hundred angry gods, he lay there empty and cold: remembering a life with hope, not mourning—a life with others. The dancing feet of the hundred thieves pound on his roof; he pulls the covers over his weary eyes and collapses into sleep.

* * *

When he woke up from a forgotten dream, the army of clouds had long been cleared, and the only splashing came from the water dripping down the gutters. He laid in his bed covered in long overdue homework assignments, cigarette buds, and several half-eaten hot cheeto bags. Stretched out on his stomach, he reached towards the floor for his desk-lamp, moving dirtied clothes out the way, until he finally turned the knob: a faint, yellow light half trying.

He struggled to sit up on the edge of his bed as he looked at the mirror directly across from him, pasted on the right corner was an old photo: his old self and old friends; he frowned into the mirror: a rugged bearded boy with mangled hair. The picture was taken three years ago, showing an eighteen-year-old boy—comfortable in the warmth of laughter—while his friends carry him in their arms. He tightened his face, battling himself, as he rummaged through a pile of dirty clothes for a pair of old denim jeans and pulled out a piece from its pocket. Loading his crack pipe, he walked to the mirror and pulled the photo from its position, lighting it on fire to inhale his fix. He felt disposed with; *the world wants me gone*, he thought to himself again. There were no human words to confirm the pain he harbored, as he continued to shriek his agony in an unearthly language, waiting for his drug to kick in.

Sitting at his desk now, the pipe still in his hand and the burning photo in the other, he watched as it left him and his former loved ones in ashes. To hold back the tears, he closed his eyes and pressed the flame against his left forearm, amounting another scar. He tossed what still remained of the photo behind him, and as he sucked on his teeth, he pulled out a pen and paper from under his desk and began scribbling a letter, presumably to no one, but to everyone he's known best, as well. A final letter to all who worry or once worried of his once well-being.

Preparing himself for the task at hand, he grabbed a pair of headphones from his desk drawer and took one last hit from his pipe before playing a song: "No Conclusion" by Of Montreal. He listened with his hands gripped tight at the arms of his chair. His heart twitched at the sharp changes in sound behind the singer's voice—a war of confusion with a brooding voiceover: "I'm killing myself, but it's not suicide." The pipe cracked when it fell to the ground; as he stretched back into his seat, laying his arms out to his side, he smiled and his eyes drew to the back of his head. Laughing now, he sat back into his chair with the volume all the way up; he couldn't leave without a proper goodbye—he had to inform everyone why he would choose to end his own life.

* * *

When he was five-years-old he spent most of his time chasing his older brother, Junior, around the front yard, often failing to reach him, and stopping to catch his breath; he was always too slow to keep up. Which is why whenever their father was in a drunken rage, he was the first—and sometimes the only—one to get beaten by the belt. Though that changed when the two boys were in the shower one morning before school; Junior saw the bruises on his little brothers back while he was carefully scrubbing around it.

"I—I'm so sorry Santi...I shouldn't of run," Junior wiped tears with a free hand.

The boy turned around, already crying, "don't be sorry...better me than Ama," He smiled.

Junior grabbed his brother, "No. No hermanito. I promise you, you'll never take the hits alone ever again, never!"

A hard knock came at the bathroom door, "ya apurense pinches chamacos!"

They wiped their tears, laughing.

He remembers coming home one day from school, one of his fondest memories: he had raced his brother to the room to show off the new cards he traded during recess. His brother as usual beat him there, leaving him to trail inside moments later, as he rushed to grab the cards from his backpack, kicking off his shoes and throwing himself onto the bed they shared.

“Hey! Close the door doofus! You don’t want mom or dad to see us playing, they think we’re doing homework,” Junior demanded.

Santi did as his brother asked, returning to the bed eager to display his new findings, “Look Junior! We been looking for this card for months, right?” his little hands shoved the card to his brothers face, “this is the one!”

“Um...” he hesitated, “hey uh Santi, look, don’t be upset... but--”

“Buh what?” the boy asked timidly.

“It’s a fake.”

“No it’s not... I traded three cards for it... and all last week’s lunch money. It’s real Junior!” His voice cracked into a whimper, looking at the card, “they fooled me?”

Junior laughed nervously, “No no, you’re right! I’m sorry little guy,” he grabbed his pack of cards, “how much do you want for it? I can give you these two cards,” he placed them onto the bed next to him, “and ten dollars, how’s that sound?”

The boy’s rosy cheeks flushed, crying softly, “I’m no good at this huh Junior?”

They laughed.

* * *

Slouched over his desk, with his hands over his eyes, he reminisced over the times he shared with his dead brother, Junior. He slammed onto his desk in hopes that his rage and tears could bring him back to life. All his life, his brother had always been there for him. Even when their father would beat him through the night, he was there to cover him with a thick blanket to ease the pain from the belt or his steel-toed boots. He even offered his own body to him, cloaking himself around him, as his father aimed hellishly to any flesh, no matter whose. And he died in the same fashion: taking someone else’s punishment. He died in a car crash at the age of fourteen when his father picked him up from a date, belligerently drunk, and drove straight through a red light. His father vanished soon after causing his son’s death, but rumors have it he still

lives. All his life his brother had been there to protect him—always fighting to keep the promise he made—all his life, but once.

* * *

At twelve-years-old he and his brother had made a mutual best friend from school, a kid who understood modern arts and listened to all the same weird music they had. One night, after watching a marathon of horror films, the three boys went on to sleep around three o'clock in the morning. He decided to share the bed with his friend, while his brother slept just a foot away in his own bed. The brothers both drifted off into a deep sleep. He was lost in his dream: alone, suffocating, drowning and cold. Santi could feel the grip of two angry hands around his neck; and he was struggling to breathe when he woke up. There was a hand over his mouth, covering his nose, and his pants had been pulled down to his knees.... He felt the heavy, hot breaths of low grunts on his right ear, as a cold, sharp blade was drawn under his chin. He was powerless and motionless in a shaking bed; and all that he could do then was hope his brother would wake up, as he stared at him, crying, waiting to be saved.

* * *

He never imagined he would retell that story; he'd kept it from himself for so many years. Hidden somewhere with the abandonment of his father, of his lover, and of himself. Now he sits flat alone in his chair, bleeding his hands to tell the tale of his misguided life, where he wishes he may have done right, and where he wants to accept his wrongs.

* * *

At nineteen-years-old, on break for holidays from school, he returned home to a lonely mother. They had moved twice since his brother's death, but she fixed his room as he would have liked it, both times. She washes his clothes every Tuesday, calls to him for dinner, and buys him expensive ties for his birthdays—before his death he was fascinated by ties. Coming home that winter, he would look after his mother and help her come to terms with his brother's death. They'd often dust off the snow from his gravesite; he would take her twice a week. Eventually she stopped buying him clothes, stopped cooking him meals, and moved on from her daily routine altogether. He knew she had always longed to learn English, and so she agreed to learn from him while he

was on vacation. She even learned how to web chat through the internet in order to continue her learning with her son. This proceeded for almost an entire year as she was beginning to learn how to use the language to apply for jobs and her citizenship, when out of her God's will, she was diagnosed with spinal cancer.

The doctors assisted her with her death while he was halfway across the country, frantically purchasing any ticket he could to get there in less than a day. However, by the time he exited the plane, he had three voicemails left by his mother; she pardoned him and said her goodbyes, as she stated it clearly to him: "una bendición o una maldición puede ser mi enfermedad, pero ninguna maldición puede ser de mis hijos. And remember this mi Santi: tu no eres tu padre." He stood at the baggage claim listening to the messages; he could hear the busy voices of nurses and doctors in the background.

* * *

My mind is neglected in the shadows of my tears, but these tears—you see—must mean I'm not the demon I thought I was.... I wish to see you in due time mother, but I must go now. I will wait for father in hell until his time comes. I have too many questions that you, Ama, could not answer. So, please pray that I find my way back to you and Junior. I'll rest easy knowing I've nowhere left to go in this world, and with no one left to lose but myself.

regretfully,
a man no more.