

"Paranthetically"

Mikey found a magic pen. It did not look like much. An ordinary pen you found at the store ten for a dollar and some change. But, holding it, you felt the Potential, just waiting. They say when God closes the door, He opens a window. Mikey'll figure it out.

In the chasm that exists between cosmic credits and debits, the desire to achieve balance, however transient, lies entropy. It is cold. Perhaps it is only proper, considering. Mikey's Dad was murdered shortly after his fourth birthday. Mikey's Grandmaw said He needed him more. Mikey was four; how was he supposed to feel about that? Didn't some other kid need their Dad less? Perhaps the pen was God's way of saying sorry.

His love for his Dad was as it should have been: pure, taken for granted. Nature demands that some things are certain ways. Mikey was cheated out of the liberty and privilege to grow indifferent to or even like his Dad. For a time, he remained in a suspended state of residual reverence. It was probably the least he could do.

When Mikey's Dad abandoned him, he left behind ten brothers and sisters, a Mom and Dad, and his Grandmother. Mikey's mother was loosely affiliated with three sisters, one brother, and her mother. Mikey's mother ripped him and his two-half-brothers away from them all.

They were taken far away, a little too quickly for good taste, to Texas. There was a lone Uncle, his Dad's brother, who followed shortly thereafter. Likely, he was driven by convention. Religion. Family. Duty. He wanted to look out for his nephew in his brother's absence. He valued fidelity.

Mikey's mother was either a whore or a prostitute. He never actually saw money change hands. "Mother" renders a disservice to all the real Mothers everywhere, even those who loved their children enough to beat them with a coat hanger. Love defies Reason. Kathrynne. That was the name attached to the uterus that spat Mikey out. Being born grammatically incorrect had dire consequences.

Mikey was the last of Kathrynne's children. Her third. On his Dad's side, he was First Born Son of First Born Son. In a different day and age, this distinction may have impressed upon the family, on Mikey, a moderate sense of nobility, the duty to perform. She had cancer while he was in utero. This was not the source of having been poisoned in the womb. Her crucible of darkness. No. Mikey's defects came from her black heart and rancid soul. The doctors advised terminating Mikey, but she needed him. Mikey and his brothers had a dollar value.

Later in life, Mikey heard in a movie, "Mother is the name of God on the lips and in the hearts of children." Amen to that. Calling her anything but Kathrynne would be blasphemy. If children were indeed born innocent, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, what did Mikey have to atone for?

Kathrynne was mentally ill. She hated people but more than tolerated men. Her two mantras were, "I can't wait to go to sleep and not wake up," and, "Tomorrow is another day." What kind of suit is that? How do you reconcile that? Mikey was taught early about impermanence. People were disposable. Curiously, he would eventually gravitate to the practice of delayed gratification. Maybe it was an act of self-preservation. Such was his legacy of schizophrenia.

Mikey had a lot of "uncles." There was a litany of names. Ray. Rex. Chester. Once in second or third grade, "Uncle" Bob bought Mikey a remote controlled motorcycle for his birthday. A cheap Radio Shack toy got you into Kathrynne's pants. She grounded him on his birthday, sent him to his room, and Mikey watched Amy Elliot play with his new toy.

Mikey grew up isolated in most respects. Moments of appearing normal occurred here and there. He had LEGOs, an Atari, and no dreams to fail at. Sometimes he and Greg would wallow in mud. Mikey was happy to be lost. At school in February, his paper bag decorated somewhat, for Valentine's Day, remained empty at day's end. The kids next door failed to make it to a different birthday. No one showed up to watch him place last at the school's track and field events. There was no "uncle," even, to watch Mikey receive the black consolation ribbon. Black is the color of death.

You can't make people care. About anything. Oblivion is intoxicating. There was no sustained external influence that provoked Mikey to do more than get by. Or to present to the kid the concept of self-actualization. Those thoughts arose much, much later once deprived of spiritual anesthesia and he had wrought much damage and heartache. Mikey's Uncle tried, but, Mikey was an ungrateful little shit.

Maybe Mikey was only half-ruined. Maybe that part of him his Dad had contributed would help to minimally offset the despair Kathryn fostered. Mikey was at the age where he had not entirely grown past his need for the traditionally contrived love of his parents. It remained a vestigial reflex that infrequently resurfaced.

Any kid in elementary school has a natural propensity to use a magic pen. Mikey was no exception. Kids operate largely intuitively, tapping into a higher state of consciousness they slough off as they mature. He was at the kitchen table, sort of alternating between doing homework and doodling random things.

The magic pen was in Mikey's hand. He did not remember picking it up. He paused over his school book and his eyes fell on a passage about World War Two. He found the hand attached to his arm inserting a comma between two words. Instantly, there was a deep explosion in his mind, the totality of the idea, of the battle described, contracted and then expanded with unbridled energy, imprinting itself into Mikey's consciousness.

He was there. He heard the guns. He heard the screams of the wounded. He tasted Death, Abound. Those present could not see Mikey; he was a spectral observer. He was enraptured. This was way cooler than flipping your score in Asteroids. Mikey was so consumed with the enormity of it all, he did not notice that the panoramic view had dimmed and then disappeared entirely.

He was sitting in the kitchen chair. His system was in shock. Reality had been turned upside down and inside out. But kids have a high threshold for extremes and he quickly recovered. Of course, the thought immediately arose: What else can I do? Mikey put another comma in another passage and was again transported back in time.

He repeated this over and over, in all types of books. Spider-Man was particularly cool. Days later, he found himself in Kathryn's bedroom. It was unoccupied. It was too early to ply her trade. He found himself inexplicably drawn to the little cabinet her TV sat on. Family photos and other mementos sat forgotten inside.

Mikey pulled out the green photo album and opened it. People were vaguely familiar, if not so much specifically, then by deducing their identity by their position to others. There was one of his brothers. The other one. Kathryn. Guy with mustache. Is that "uncle..."? Oh. Dad. Mikey found in the photo album two of the little memorial cards from Dad's funeral. Not much left. The flag that had covered his casket had been relegated to the garage a long time ago. Memories are a nuisance.

Mikey sat, holding the little card. He read aloud his Dad's name, the day and year he was born, and when he was killed. Twenty-eight years old. Mikey did further calculations: six weeks, to the day, after his fourth birthday - dead. Eight weeks, to the day, before his Dad's twenty-ninth. Stupid math. Kathryn had eradicated most holidays from Mikey's childhood, but somehow, St. Patrick's Day, the day after Orphan Day, survived.

Mikey sat. He struggled to recall mythical Dad. His Dad. If anything, he mourned an idea, a mental construct, not the man. A symbol of what his Dad should represent. He had become an abstraction; a diminished phantasm of the past. What once was will never be. He thought he recalled jumping on Dad, one early morning, trying to roust paterfamilias for some outmeal. A vague notion of playing ball with his Dad and Aaron, the neighbor's kid with whom he went to day care at the Air Force base with. It seemed that he bit Aaron, blamed it on the ball, ran away from Dad into the house and locked the door.

It did not amount to much. He took the card and sought out his magic pen. He took both into his room and shut the door. This formality was not necessary to maintain privacy. He read over the Scripture on the card. Yeah, more God. He seems to get around. Mikey punctuated the Word. He was back at the funeral. The casket should have been closed, but Grandmaw needed to see her boy once more before the earth swallowed him.

It took a moment to recognize people. Kathrynne was actually standing up front. He saw his two sometimes half-brothers. And himself. He bore witness to him giving his Dad his Most Precious Thing, his Big Bird stuffed animal. His brother Matthew would later confess it was the most heart-wrenching, unselfish thing he had ever seen. The vision lapsed, echoing with the miserable sound of a twenty-one gun salute.

Mikey was dumbfounded. He tried to process the totality of things. To be so close yet so far. Farther than wherever his Dad was then. Heaven, perhaps. As a Catholic, Purgatory was an option. Emotions, forsaken, buried deep down, atrophied, started to slowly slip from their shackles of contempt. They coalesced into one huge, overwhelming need: to be complete.

Mikey needed more, suddenly. A primordial longing for validation - for needing that connection that can be given exclusively by one's progenitor consumed him with a fury. Mikey took the pen and the card and attempted to make another mark. Resurrect Dad once more. The pen had run out of ink. Mikey took it for granted, as he did most things, that the magic would last. He of all people should have known better.

Tears ran down his face. He was cheated once again. This time, it was his fault. It did not ease his burden; it made it worse. There is an irreverent ebb and flow to emotions. It was good enough. It would have to be. The glass is not half full. There is no finger pointing at the moon.

Finis.