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For Hype Literary Magazine

Red

Every day:

A pair of pale little legs in red sneakers at an overpass. Bubble gum popping from sun-chapped lips. A book bag filled not with books.

A man's rusty Buick doing 80 on the highway below. A sleeping squad car a half mile down. Dust and August heat rising from the road.

Stones denting the Buick's hood as it speeds under the overpass.

Every day he races through, and the memory only dawns when the stones pelt his car again. An angry fist hammers the dashboard, curses cackle from a stubbled mouth, but the fury becomes fumes in the summer heat when the squad car comes alive, screeching its way out from behind a religious billboard.

“Don't make me come down there.”

- God

A warning. Then a summons. Then another. Every day, red sneakers hop up and down in his rearview, shrinking as the man speeds on.

“Tomorrow,” he huffs through his cigar.

Another day:

A riddled hood and angry eyes on the overpass. The Buick engine rumbling, its tires lapping up the highway. Red sneakers again. And something else—someone else—behind them.

Pale legs kick wildly in the overpass above. A book bag full of stones crashes through his windshield. The man swerves, spins, brakes.

The dust settles. The heat doesn't.

Beyond the broken windshield, one red sneaker sitting on the road, staring. In his rearview, on the overpass, nothing. No one.

A yelp. Red and blue lights flash. A tall blond coffee stain with a gun hip glares through mirrored shades.

Sees a serial speeder.

Shattered glass.

Not the sneaker.

Not the bag.

For days after:

No pale legs. No sneaker seeking its twin. Flower petals instead of stones, sticking to the pockmarked hood and clean new windshield of a Buick doing 55.

Papered phone poles lining the highway. A young kid's face. A phone number. A new billboard.

“Well, you did ask for a sign.”

- God

And the same squad car sleeping behind it.

Rising

Waves grow with menace as they rumble to shore, but despite their vigor each one flattens and froths when it finally arrives. They kiss my bare feet meekly before receding, but they never stop coming in. Their relentlessness reminds me of the pain and self doubt I've suffered the last few years—that gnawing feeling in my stomach telling me that my twenties have been a waste—and the way I've kept pushing toward the shores of my uncertain future, regardless.

I've been twenty-nine years of waves.

The sun climbs through the cloudy haze on the horizon, and I kneel into the sand to take another photograph. I'm focusing my lens on the sky, the colors blossoming out of the morning, and their reflections on the water as the sea appears to breathe it all in.

There is a gratification for me in the sound of the shutter, a ritualistic calm in the clicking of the aperture as I balance the camera's eye. For a moment, I lose myself in a grade school memory.

“Mrs. Steinmetz,” I said to my principal one morning, “I have a question.”

“Go ahead, Angel.”

“What's the difference between sunrise and sunset?”

“Well,” she smiled, her face raised with age, “what happens when the sun sets? It gets...”

“Darker and darker?”

She nodded. “And when the sun rises, it gets...”

“Brighter and brighter.”

“There you go,” she smiled again. “You've answered your own question.”

Morning light crawls across the beach, and I take hundreds of photographs. I will carry on until my memory is full and, if I'm lucky, end up with one good shot. The sun glows behind the haze, rising slowly—relentlessly. From moment to moment it appears still, but after an hour and a half here, with my slacks rolled up and my feet crusting with sand, I see how far it has come. Our light towers over the ocean, painting the sky in its wake. Every wave is illuminated, and I begin to see that there's much more to it.

The Window

The window fogs,
clouding the harshness of the world outside
from what's within:

the steam of mashed potatoes
escaping an opened pot,
as mother leans over
to perfect the alchemy
she's known for half a century;

father's sweat
coming from the basement gym,
as he keeps himself
ready to bear the weight
of whatever the future brings;

the laughter of the grown men and women
mother still sees as children,
taking their places at the table
to share where they've been.

The window fogs
and the sun looks like God,
shining hopelessly over a cold world
we've learned to warm.

The Eyes of When

If time would grant a single wish,
I'd want a window through its skin—
to brave the ether of the past
and halt my childhood's hourglass,
for just a moment, long enough
to redefine the unmined rough,
to glimpse the cherub that once was,
before the storms invaded us,
before the heartache and neglect,
and broken spirit that they left,
to peer into the eyes of when
and find all roads unmarred again,
to cradle myself with my future,
to soothe the scarring and the sutures,
to quell the welling of the salt
and tell myself it's not my fault.