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A Glorious Storm

Cover Page Footnote

For those who help me smile.

A Glorious Storm

by Bryan E. Kashon

One late summer morning when the leaves buzzed with the silent intensity of the day and the sun beamed forth with clairvoyant raptness, Franklin “Jay” Thomas got a call from his best friend Ricky Kirkpatrick. Having been woken from a spectacular dream, the contents of which had left Jay rather hard, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and answered. Before he had any chance of listening, Ricky began to talk, blazing on about something so miraculous and “astronomically wicked” that Jay had to hurry over.

“As fast as you can,” he breathed into the phone.

Dazed, Jay stared out the window, watching the breeze tickle the trees and light up his room. Sleep, dripping with heavy temptation, drained from his leaden limbs.

“Jay. Are you listening?” his dreams asked, cradling his thoughts.

“Yeah yeah,” he droned, thinking of Ricky. School was crawling closer, but this was the first time Ricky had appeared all summer. Jay pulled his covers over him and cradled the phone against his ear. Before he could choose sleep, a bolt of lightning charged through Jay’s spine as he picked up the words “dead thing.”

“What did you say?” He asked Ricky quiet, jarred from sleep, vibrating.

“You’re goddamn right, Jay. I found a dead thing,” Ricky gloated.

“So? We see dead things all the time,” said Jay, trying to brush off his excitement.

“We like dead things.”

“Debatable. I like sleep.”

“You sleep too much.”

“Untrue and impossible,” smiled Jay.

“This one’s special. It’s big.”

“Ooo I like ‘em big. What is it, a mountain lion?”

“My lips are sealed.”

“It’s a bear. Is it a bear?”

“It’s a surprise. Come on. It’ll be fun.”

“Fun. Like the “fun” things you’ve been doing all week?”

A silence, pervading and still, hung between the lines.

Ricky broke it, unsteady. “Yeah. Whatever. See you in fifteen?”

Jay glanced at his erection, shivering from his dream. “Thirty,” he decided.

A solemn oath made five summers ago required Ricky and Jay to tell each other about any dead thing they found hiking The Trails. Their promise led to a macabre collection of sights: coyotes, opossums, cats, and a nest of rabbits, among others. The worst was a doe, once blessed with beautiful indifference and a glowing tan coat, slaughtered in the forest north of their neighborhood.

Jay had been strolling, buzzing from anti-depressants, when he smelled the rotting carcass. As he got closer and spotted the writhing mass of maggots, he shuddered. Shaking, he threw up his Spaghettios. Coughing up runny smears of bile, Jay smiled at the squirming noodles swimming in the dull sunset tomato sauce. He had been rotting from the inside.

Jay retched, and walked home alone...

No one was outside on the way to Ricky's. Stomping on the premature crunchy leaves filled Jay with fiery explosions of mirth. He had felt them before, bursting, and was willing to accept the rumbling inside of him as one of the beauties of life, ever-present and inconspicuous, like the way these dying summer days brought his emotions to a boil; a steaming soul of tea within.

Jay could only describe it as kinetic energy. His body was a rubber band stretched taut. Bounding from leaf to leaf he grinned. His boots crunched and crashed into the pavement. They sent jitters through his bones.

The low thump of a bass guitar tore Jay from his thoughts.

Ricky's house was still, sitting motionless in eternity: a photograph on suburbia. As Jay walked up the oak porch, covered in cigarette butts and... *Boxes?* he felt the hues of the morning wash away. Music dinned, and family, desperate to be heard, screamed among it. A crash, (the piercing shatter of dishes), silenced the shouting, then muted the music; the sharpness sliced at Jay's eardrum and sent his head in a whirl.

Jay knocked. A deep rumble responded, a scramble followed, then, finally, the bolt clicked. Jay pushed the door ajar to Ricky's father, hefting boxes, filling up the room. Cradling a box on his hip, Ricky's dad swatted Jay's back—once, twice—smacking the breath from his lungs.

"Hey, Mr. Kirkpatrick," Jay coughed, seeing Ricky kicking his feet in the corner.

"Hey, Jay. Ricky? Kitchen. Dishes. Now."

"Yes ma'am," Ricky responded throwing up a mock salute.

Uncertainty hung in the air as Jay shuffled past Mr. Kirkpatrick. With a thud Ricky's father set the box, and himself, down in a chair, and began to read the paper. Jay watched Ricky pick up the remains of the plates and bowls, then start sweeping. He worked slow, dragging the bristles across the floor, slapping the dirt, china, and food underneath the kitchen counter.

"What's up?" asked Jay.

"Hey," Ricky responded, despondent.

"What's up?"

"It's—We're—Nothing."

"How convincing."

Jay watched Ricky's face darken. He went to speak, wanting to make amends for his comment, but Ricky stopped him. "Wait here," he said before dashing up the stairs, a spark in his eyes.

Jay leaned over the counter and looked around. The house's signature—a lingering hint of lemongrass—was gone. All around lay manila burdens of cardboard, packed with memories, dishes, and garbage, glaring at Jay. He peered back at them, feeling a tickling fear creep behind his ears. Ricky didn't need to say it, because Jay felt his internal cup dry: his happiness evaporated by uncertainty.

With a leap, Ricky landed on the kitchen floor before Jay. Tucking a baggy in his pocket, Ricky grabbed a lighter off of the counter and walked toward the living room. He tied his jacket around his waist and opened the door.

"And where do you think you're going?" Mr. Kirkpatrick asked, lowering his paper enough to glower over it.

"Out," Ricky replied.

"Did you ask Other Dad?"

"He's asleep. I didn't want to wake him."

"Ha! That must be why you were blasting your records."

"You gave them to me to listen to."

"Excuse me," he drawled. "How long?"

"I don't know."

"We've still got lots to do," Mr. Kirkpatrick said matter-of-factly, setting the Times down in his lap. He stared at Ricky, and glanced at Jay—once, twice.

Ricky sighed, and dropped his shoulders. "I know. It's one afternoon though."

"Fine. But you know the rules: be home when —,"

"When the street lamps come on," Ricky interrupted. "Don't talk to strangers. Don't smoke anything that's not pot. Smile. I'm not a kid anymore."

Rolling his eyes Mr. Kirkpatrick picked the paper from his lap and shook it back to life as the boys filed out. Ricky closed, and locked, the door, then shooed Jay off of the box-ridden porch.

They set off toward The Trails. Ricky pecked at the conversation. After they had walked past town the grasses—chattering over each other in the breeze—forced Ricky to swallow his words. Trying to seize the silence Jay turned and saw another scowl cloud Ricky's face.

"You know you can tell me anything," said Jay.

"I know."

"I mean you don't have to tell me everything, but if something was wrong," he trailed off.

Ricky gave Jay a half smile, then turned back toward The Trails. "I'm fine."

"Yeah, but if you weren't you could tell me. That's all I'm saying. I'm here for you. *Is everything ok?*" Jay persisted.

"I said I'm fine," Ricky responded, pursing his lips.

They walked for an hour. Jay was impressed. Ricky was not one for directions, and more than once had to retrace his steps. But he walked with an uncommon confidence.

Beige ranks of grass gave way to gnarled bushes, puckered with crimson berries. Walking along the dirt trail, Ricky and Jay stared ahead as the towering trees began to swallow the path. Their dark branches, awash with vermilion and amber leaves, shivered in the fall wind as the sun draped their trunks with heavy, autumn shawls. The quick changing seasons always stormed the woods. Ricky stopped, nodded at the side of the road, and ducked into a nook. Jay followed, wresting his shoulders through the brush's tendrils.

Jay saw Ricky slide down an earthen lip toward a pond of slimy, stagnant water, abuzz with flies and mosquitos. The pit, yawning into the void, was stacked with piles of trash. Ricky grabbed a stick and made a beeline for the pond, determined to pull a mysterious lump from the muck. Cautious, Jay watched from afar, waiting to go down the hill. As Ricky lunged at the water, Jay studied its saggy shape, drifting listless through the murk. To Jay the floating, matted, gray coat was more sullen shipwreck than sordid beast.

"Holy shit," whistled Ricky.

Jay said nothing. He silently picked his way down the hill and brushed himself off as he walked toward Ricky, whose fruitless hooks had only managed to loosen the mysterious beast's hide.

"What is it?" Jay asked.

With one last lunge Ricky managed to snag the creature. Grunting, he yanked it on shore. "It's a wolfhound."

Its fetid odors were inescapable on land, and shot through Jay's sinuses. He walked away to clear his head and threw up behind a pile of rubble. Jay shivered and felt the warmth drain from him and replace with it a cold, hollow feeling that rooted through his body. Standing up made him feel dizzy, but he staggered back to Ricky, who had left the dog to dry. He stared at the beast. It was rancid, and bloated with time.

"What are we doing here?" Jay asked.

"We're making memories."

"You're stupid. This is disgusting."

"You always vomit," Ricky retaliated. He looked Jay up and down and began digging in his pockets.

"I want to go. This is dumb."

"We do this every day."

"We haven't done this all summer. I'm done looking at corpses." Jay pointed at the skeletal coat of fur, and the swarming flies. "This? This is fucked up."

"Jay, wait. It's not that gross. Just. Give me a minute."

"No. I'm going," Jay decided.

"Shut up," Ricky shushed.

Jay knew Ricky was leaving. "I didn't want to spend my last days with you like this."

Ricky stopped, and stood. For a minute he collected himself, then started to fish in his pockets again. He dug until he yanked out the lighter and a baggie full of small balls with fuses. Pulling out a red, one inch sphere, he handed it to Jay and chose a similar one himself. Jay weighed it in his hand, and felt its power. A simple bead filled with wrath and intensity that he could never possess.

Jay was holding a storm.

“Are these cherry bombs?” he asked, feeling the glow return.

“I found them in my grandpa’s attic,” said Ricky, “and he just let me take them.”

“Your dads didn’t stop you?”

Ricky smirked, turned, and started walking to a broken cement wall. Lighting a bomb, he tossed it at a pile of bottles in the distance and ducked behind it.

“What the hell, dude?” Jay cried. He sprinted to Ricky and scrambled behind the slab.

Peering skyward at the *Pop!* they saw the curious twinkle of glass paint a fractured portrait against the clouds.

“Now you,” Ricky said, offering the black Bic to Jay.

Jay hesitated. He thought about Ricky. About him leaving, but never even telling him. The breeze threw his thin black hair into his face. He sniffled and held the ball out to Ricky, silencing the storm. “I don’t want to.”

“Here,” Ricky ignored, lighting the flame under Jay’s fuse. It hissed to life, the wick curling from the heat. Jay tossed it into the water and watched it shoot a flume into the air. It cascaded back to the pit, producing a faint rainbow against the trees. It smelled like rain, like the past. Jay stared as the water misted the ground: soft tears on the earth.

“Another?” Ricky asked, jiggling the bag.

Jay shook his head and stood up, walking away. “I want to go home.”

“We just got here, Jay.”

“So?”

“So let’s stay and keep doing what we’re doing,” Ricky insisted.

“What are we doing here?”

“We’re having fun. We’re doing what we normally do over the summer.”

“Maybe you are.”

“You aren’t having fun?”

“No! You’ve been acting different all day. All summer. You want to keep playing with this dead thing. None of this feels right.”

“What do you mean?”

The question bounced off Jay’s back. He scraped his feet and hands along the ravine, scrambling to get out. He heard the lighter click, the fuse hiss, and the soft whistle of a cherry bomb just to his right. It went off, aggressive and industrial, and spat a cloud of dirt into the air.

“What the hell?” Jay asked shielding his eyes on his ass.

“What do you mean? You said it doesn’t feel right.”

“So you tried to kill me?”

“Stop ignoring the question.” Ricky grabbed several bombs from the bag and stuffed them back in his pocket. Before Jay could leave, Ricky pulled out a deep grape ball, *The Violet Hurricane*, lit it, and chucked the bomb closer to him. Scurrying away, feeling a boil begin, Jay dashed toward a palm-sized rock. He scooped it up and hurled it at Ricky, as another *Pop!* pierced the air. It struck him square in the chest. With a groan he dropped the baggy and lighter, and staggered back.

Rushing forward Jay leapt on the Bic and bombs, and yanked out a little, pink kiss.

He torched the fuse and tossed it toward Ricky, who smacked it out of the air into a pile of beer cans, and braced for the blow. A small *Crack!* tore the air and spat the cans everywhere. Jay lit another and tossed it behind Ricky, who flung himself onto the ground. Ricky furiously started searching for another lighter.

Pop!

He patted his pants and shirt and jacket, spitting out the dirt thrown upon him by the explosion. With a triumphant shriek he tore a shining red Zippo from his pocket. With a swish Ricky held the flame in his hand, then to a cherry-sized *Maroon Typhoon*. He tossed it over his shoulder and plugged his ears, the shriek of the explosion shaking Ricky’s short frame.

“Fuck you, Ricky!” Jay spat, chucking his last bomb toward Ricky’s shivering body.

Tearing at the ground Ricky lifted himself from the earth and jumped away from the *Snap!*

“I’m gonna kill you, Jay.”

“You can’t even tell me you’re leaving, you pussy. And I’m your best friend.”

Growling, Ricky lit the last bomb in his hand, a brilliant red dwarf with an extra long fuse, and pitched it toward Jay, who caught it in return. Smirking in triumph, Jay stared as the fuse shriveled slow under the sparkling flame. Then, eyes wide, Jay began to hustle in place. He screamed and looked at Ricky, who spat out some blood. He boiled inside, brimming over in bubbling rage. Before it could blow off his hand Jay threw it back at Ricky who caught it with a shriek. They continued their game of hot potato trying to get rid of the bomb, their hearts flying. Denying the final throw Jay smacked it away, then dashed toward Ricky, who collided with him. Entangled in one another, they traded soft blows to their heads, chests, and arms. Unbeknownst to the both of them, the dwarf, destined to cleanse, landed square in the hound’s caved in chest.

“What’s your problem?” gasped Ricky.

“What’s my problem? What’s my *problem*? My problem is I’m always sad and they lowered my dosage. My problem is that I’m going to lose my best friend and he won’t even tell me. I’m going to lose the only good thing I have left in this neighborhood. I’m going to miss you, and I don’t miss anyone! Not even my dad.” Jay cried, dueling and scrapping with Ricky in the dirt.

“My dad... It was unexpected, we —”

Crack!

Ricky and Jay, sprawled on the ground, watched as the wolfhound erupted—a fiery burst followed by a shower of gore. Jay had bubbled over and felt himself drain in awe.

They laid in the blast-zone. A glorious storm had come through and drenched them, washing away their voices, their hate, their fear. Sitting up, Jay felt the sun cake on the remains of the dog. Ricky, pacified, stared at the cloudless sky. They stayed for what felt like hours, turned to stoned by their own bewilderment.

“My dad isn’t in remission anymore. About a week now” Ricky said, peeling a dried hunk of fur off of his arm.

“Ricky.”

“I know. I should have told you. But damn it, Jay.”

“Where are you going?”

“Maine. We’re going to stay with my grandparents until...” Ricky stopped.

“And then?”

Ricky sat up and chewed on his lip. Jay stared at him. He didn’t need to say it out loud.

“Ok. When do you leave?”

“A week. They told me this morning.”

“But we talked this—,”

“They sat me down. Told me we weren’t just moving across town anymore. I had just hung up the phone.”

Mute, Jay looked at Ricky. “Will I ever see you again?”

Ricky stared at the sky. Jay followed his gaze. Together they watched a flock of birds fly south together, united. Jay relaxed with a sigh, sprawling out on the dirt. They stayed and watched the sun, languid and lumbering, sink into the horizon.

Later, Ricky took off toward the trees with Jay in tow. They scrambled up the dirt bank and began trekking home. The bushes slapped their legs and chests, and rustled with their footsteps. The trees gazed down at them, their knotty boughs filled with the hum of the day.

Jay began to cackle at his own disgust. He looked over himself and Ricky, saw the dried terror splattered across their faces, and laughed into the trees. He laughed as Ricky giggled with him, and then when his tears started to streak his dirty cheeks. He snorted and guffawed at the sounds of his misery. Glancing

up Jay saw Ricky crying, too. They took a step toward one another under the fall branches and felt the melody of the trees grow with their laughter. Soft, light, Ricky lifted his hand and wiped a stain of blood and beast from Jay's nose, and followed it with a soft kiss. Taking Ricky's grimy face in his hands and kissing him hard, Jay listened to the music of the woods. They connected, crying together in the chilled, evening air. Breathless, they pulled apart, and held one another close. Their breathing, heavy and excited, began to settle back down into a contented bliss.

On the way home, Ricky held Jay's hand. Together, in the fading of the day, they glowed.

Standing on the oak porch steps Jay kissed Ricky's cheek and smiled goodbye. Ricky waved to Jay as he turned toward home. Glancing at a lost dog poster as he walked past, Jay smiled drunk in the street lamps, feeling more radiant than ever before. With his warmth coursing through him, Jay strolled home to a house whose doors had once been rotted by time; to a house whose backyard had witnessed his first kiss; and to a house whose walls were intertwined with golden threads of memory. Deep down Jay knew that these feelings must exist within everyone, or else he wouldn't love his parents, or the beautiful brown skinned girl in his math class, or Ricky. So he took his warmth and held it to himself, a blanket from the drier, and felt that instant capture on his reel of the past.

The rest of the week passed too quickly, as all yearning fall days do. But time, and disease, forced the two of them to accept the limited beauty offered graciously to them by the soft, autumn world. When the time came it was morning, before the trees awoke. Ricky placed a letter in Jay's mailbox, pleading that the distance would not erase their new connection. *And many more to come*, he falsely promised. Ricky stared at Jay's still room from the street. Ricky's car drove into the sunrise long before Jay would wake up, realizing too late his alarm had not been set.

Jay would never mention these moments to anyone. The two exchanged letters for weeks. Until one day. A small, vermilion letter addressed to Franklin "Jay" Thomas arrived the day before the grieving town of Wells, Maine held a funeral for Enrique Ricardo Kirkpatrick. Jay would realize two months later, walking The Trails, that it was the last letter of its kind.

Even so, every once in awhile—when the moon shone bright and nostalgia hung heavy in the air—he would relive that day in his mind. Franklin "Jay" Thomas would paint it with vivid crimsons and catastrophic explosions, and revel in the haunting beauty of the past, forgetting his problems for just one moment. And then, as if on cue, he would glow.