

Ephemera

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Razor wire spirals twist in a timeless vortex, silently shredding any semblance of connection to the land beyond. The Prison looms with haughty, disdainful contempt in his watchtower eyes for the tainted flesh he gluttonously gorges upon. His ancient stoney visage stands weathered yet unperturbed by the feeble blows and curses hurled against the labyrinthine lattice work of cells undying, immortal torment for the wretched refuse ceaselessly cast out for his consumption. Whether the agony he sucks out of the marrow of their souls delights him, I know not, though the vacant hunger within his bowels I am certain is never sated.

The shackles and handcuffs jangle loosely on my buck-twenty-five frame as I step into the maw of The Prison several weeks before my eighteenth birthday. Masses of men walk with me, all of us being funneled in to be processed and broken down in his digestive dungeons. I spot a man in perhaps his mid-twenties in prison blues who had been there for maybe several years. "That guy is a prisoner," my mind not-so-keenly observes, seemingly unconscious of the fact that I too was now a prisoner, sentenced at seventeen to serve more years than I had lived upon the earth within the rotting belly of this corpulent creature.

Pairs of elderly men with walkers and canes stand waiting in line, with no pretense of a "Colored Only" sign. Hair white as the cotton some picked as boys, sharecroppers sons born under the shadow of a burning cross and swaddled in that same red white and blue flying above the prison. Convicts no longer leased after capital's inverted Great Migration to the global South from decaying urban wastelands of the New Jim Crow North, where slave patrols stop and frisk another generation lost.

Panthers hunted and killed paved the way for The Streets bastard progeny. A future blazing in the eyes and hearts of a generation of youth snuffed out. Malcolm and Fred, Kent and Jackson, My Lai, Attica, Wounded Knee, Jonathan then George. A cruel wind blowing, a bleak landscape left in the wake of the storm. Harsh rain watering a soil now fertile for carnivorous and poisonous foliage. Across the prairies and plains living tombs are erected, prepared for boys and girls unborn.

A contraption that

Extracts

Life

Blood and Soul

Constrained within this curious cube

Ancient Mechanism

Steel teeth gnash

And solitude grinds

Like clockwork

Encrusted with blood and shit and cum

and the residue of youth consumed within the

Cells

Dividing in agony

Reproducing

These inhuman machines

2 AM. My peaceful slumber rudely interrupted by repeated bellows that I had to get up and get dressed to go to work. I refused to relinquish the warm embrace of blankets, dreading the cold night air outside, the wind that would whip through the windows for hours, as I tried to burrow and huddle beneath loose stacks of hundreds of plastic wrapped newspapers stacked to the roof in the back of the car. But the blankets were ripped away, and I grudgingly arose to dress for the ride to the warehouse. I wouldn't willingly be getting up for school six hours later, either.

Time ticks in an empty warehouse, weary workers barely awake await the arrival of bundles of newspapers hot off the presses. We scurry about in the nocturnal underbelly of society so that Those Who Matter have news of Important Things, sitting outside their doors when they arise and sip coffee harvested by children who will never play and laugh with the boy waiting in the warehouse. Bundles lugged, papers assembled and stuffed into plastic, heavy laundry carts full of newspapers pushed and dragged outside into the night air to be crammed in hundreds into the back of cars and trucks. Houses, apartments and hotels are visited in blistering snowstorms and summer thunderstorms with stories from a world painted in vibrant colors glaringly different from those moonlit mornings.

Homeless. The threads begin to unravel, my precarious balance on the edge of society inching closer to a protracted free fall. The weight of my worthlessness on the Scales of Justice alchemically transmuted into bars of iron and steel, my tomb awaiting with door ajar for that blind uncaring judgment sealing the boy's fate.

Brass jackets spring loaded, seventeen copper-toned smooth-domed cold killas on the block. Glock cocked. Folks and People locked in perpetual mortal combat, every fatality not just a tragedy but an indictment. Of a system born in blood. A million bodies of naked Native children buried under mud. Slave chains, stolen names, exploitative aims.

Midnight
Red Light
Black and White
Sit Tight
Rear View
Peek A Boo
I See You
Comin' Through
Lights Flash
On My Ass
Time to Dash
Hit the Gas
No Cell
Go to Hell
Nothing to Lose
Oh Well
Hoodie Up
Lights Out
High Speed
Nonstop

Stick-up split-up - loot goes one way, guns go another. Headlights approach behind, a pistol pitched out the window. Adrenaline still coursing kicks into overdrive when suspicions become certainty. I sit in the back seat clutching my sawed-off. Should I or shouldn't I? It's not a moral question but a tactical one purely of survival. No way I'm letting this motherfucker take me. The valueless outlaw life of a boy with no future reduced to immediate binary logic with only one outcome. Driver pulls the car over, star spangled lights of the Law bursting in the night air behind us. A silver starred nemesis strides forward, with the force and weight of a titanic beast, my finger poised above the trigger, annihilation impending for us both. I bide my time behind the semi-fogged windows of the back seat and slip the shotgun under the front seat as he steps to the driver's window. After a few brief questions that aren't addressed to me he walks away, oblivious of the fact that two lives were spared that night.

My finger squeezes the trigger, the darkness rent with tongues of flame and a deafening blast. Pellets explode on sawed-off trajectories careening out in a flash. Colliding constellations of crudely-drawn stars, a clash of pitchforks and crowns, Disciples and Kings of bastard lineage. Tarnished mirror images stand in that moment, right and left merely a reflection of two boys the same. Of the dangerous class. The night shatters, shards scatter as the seeds of pasts and futures pierce the darkness and into flesh and bone. My mirror counterpart clutches his arm as he falls to the ground, his blood trickling down the pavement. The street stained with ruddy tears as I reload the shotgun and move swiftly down the asphalt rivers, the wail of sirens in the distance fast approaching.

Monochrome honeycomb kaleidoscope of sparse chambers refracting solitude, each identically reflected cell a unique snapshot of torment flash-frozen in the void of timeless eternity. Screams reverberate through the cavernous cellhouse, a symphony of suffering punctuated with groans, moans, rage-filled bellows and the pounding of fists on walls. Futile attempts to break the isolation, to escape the the phantasms conjured within the minds devoid of stimulus haunting the ceaselessly counting seconds of blank clocks, unnumbered and unseen.

Alone. A dim light bulb's weakly-glowing filament strains to illuminate the empty cell. The angular geometry of concrete and steel sharply delineates this existence from the flow of life beyond. Decomposing minds violently burst open along the adjoining rows of sepulchur, the filth of decay permeating the stale air. A sack of flesh reduced to basic biologic functions on life-support, comatose convicts' brainwaves flatlining.

Lightly running my fingertips over the concrete wall, I wonder how many other men have been here, how many other times someone has walked in and heard the metal door heavily slam shut behind them, to be left standing alone in this empty cell.

Although I'm alone in the cell, a nonstop cacophony continuously bombards my ears. Other men, in other cells just like this one, strain against the solitude by calling out to each other; some to talk, others to argue, and some simply babble nonsensically to themselves.

As I gaze around at the sparse geometry of the empty chamber, I'm struck by the notion that this vacant cube of steel and concrete will be my abode for the foreseeable future. I might be in this particular cell for a week, a month, a year, but even if I'm transferred out of this cell, the next one will be almost exactly identical. Maybe it will have someone else's name jaggedly carved into the paint underneath the bunk, maybe my next neighbor will spend all day and all night in a psychotic rage banging on the walls of his cell, maybe I'll be in a cell with bars on the front as opposed to solid metal, but no matter what trivial differences may await me, the next cell will be just a carbon copy of my current crypt.

Twenty-four hours comprise a day, but time blurs out into timelessness without any environmental cues to differentiate day from night, light from darkness, winter from summer. Days, weeks, months, and seasons pass by while the cell remains the same. Brown leaves gently glide to the ground, the first tiny flakes of snow float past, pile up, then melt away as new green leaves spring forth, all beyond the walls and outside of my reality. Perhaps if I try to peek out of the sliver of a crack next to the cell door I can

glimpse a small opaque window and I can tell that it's morning by seeing the faint light beyond straining to penetrate the diabolic darkness within.

I lie on the bunk, staring up at a blank white ceiling, not wispy cotton-clouds stretched thin floating slowly across the pale blue sky, knowing that I cannot move more than a few feet in any direction. Instead of verdant fields of lush green grass beneath my toes, there will only be rough, gray concrete, well-worn by the soles of countless other men pacing the same few feet back and forth continuously. My skin won't feel the gentle caress from the lips of a lover, only the jarring cold steel of handcuffs, chains, and shackles biting into the flesh.

Convicts collect dangerous contraband, cells stockpiled with caches of clips fully loaded with armor-piercing words. Neurons being illegally modified to fire fully automatic, schematics shared from cell to cell. Field manuals of class war filter in, former tactics fall away as revolutionary science begins to reveal a strategy for liberation. A vision of a new world dawns, awakening humanity from the nightmare-riven slumber of American dreams.

That moment when constellations of history align, that clockwork mechanisms of myriads of gears - big and small, interconnect lives and streams of human experience - click into place and whir along in planetary synchronicity toward liberated possibilities...

In all my years of solitary, a confrontation like this (and ultimately much more than this) was exactly what kept me alive another second, minute, hour, day, month, year. Hundreds of armed cops, lined up, aiming assault rifles and sniper rifles at scores of unarmed men, women and children on that hot Ferguson August night. Standing there, on the front lines with the people, arms linked across W. Florissant Ave., the burnt husk of the QuickTrip store that had become the epicenter of resistance stood witness.

No one, myself included, could have predicted that it would be in Ferguson that the people rising up and refusing to accept another cold-blooded murder of another Black youth, would shift the course of the Empire. But in that muggy Missouri summer heat, shit began to get real hot.

Tools of oppression are never far away. Perhaps offscreen, behind the scenes. But their proximity is intimate. Handcuffs, chains, shackles. Pepper spray, tear gas. Riot shields, tactical teams. Shotguns, assault rifles, sniper rifles.

Razor Wire Infests My Veins

My Heart Strains

To Beat Free of Steel Bars

Tonight The Streets Are Ours

There was a moment
When the crushing stasis
And grinding normality
Ruptured

Where History
Was Being Written
In Images
Of hands
Held aloft
Fists raised
Mother's tears
Feet marching
Through tear gas
Confronted with
Assault rifles
And riot shields

Mass Media Molotovs
Hurled
Incinerating
The Lies
Of Empire

Anyhow, Ferguson. Well there's a lot of levels of things with that, as with all things. I mean what other response does a white supremacist late-modern-empire-beginning-its-decline have to race and class oppression unrivaled in history? The United States wrote the book on white settler colonial apartheid. The fear of the dangerousness of oppressed people coming to greater consciousness - of their own oppression and who their real enemies are - and the possibility and potential of unity and organization of those people against their oppressors is the foundation of "policing" in this country. And preventing a movement of those people from actually cohering is at the heart of every response the ruling class has brought forward in policing. It's all aimed at keeping people in a state of fear and suppressing resistance and organizing - even the remote potential of such. And that shit has been much more potent - and increasingly less remote - in the last year or so than it has been in a long time. Frankly, thanks to the people in the streets of Ferguson who continued to come out and confront that repressive armed force of the State day after day, with those images radiating out to the world both exposing the lies of U.S. empire and inspiring the world with their courageous determination.

One of my friends (also named Brian, oddly enough, but who I met in prison and was a pen-pal of mine when I was in solitary) posted something on Facebook with one of the photos they had of me on the cover of this St. Louis newspaper in a keffiyeh in a cloud of tear gas in Ferguson and he said, something to the effect of "This is my friend Gregory who became immune to the effects of tear gas in the IDOC." Well, not quite immune but certainly I've developed a fair tolerance to some implements of chemical

warfare due to the tactical team coming into those cell houses sometimes daily pepper spaying someone before their “cell extraction.”

Of course they're connected - Pelican Bay, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Fallujah, Jenin, Ferguson, Wounded Knee, Attica, every slave revolt and rebellion crushed, every village burned - concentrations of the political power of empire growing behind the barrels of a lot of guns.

Visions of death slowly materialize in my mind. Bathtubs of clear water turning red. Pristine white sheets covered in blood. Wrists dripping, razor sliced flesh agape. These images feel more compelling than the likely manner, though.

Serious questions of revolutionary strategy roiled in my mind as I walked the Vegas Strip. As I pushed past the slow walkers and drunk dudes and ladies, my mind alternated between the dialectic of the personal and political. Occasionally I would pull the Gatorade bottle of tequila out of my back pocket and drink as I pondered the situation. Every day my mind would confront the bathtub that beckoned me to release my life blood into it's water.

I like baths and showers. In prison the notion of a bath was quite enticing. Hot water enveloping your body... In fact there were a few meditations I did in prison that explored the body relaxing in warm water.

But my thoughts were caught up in the moment. I don't know that Vegas is all that different than the rest of America, except in particulars. Yes there a number of things here that make things more interesting. I had spent most of the evening playing video blackjack with a revolving crew of people. A guy from Tokyo was perhaps the most interesting to me. He spoke little English, so I dutifully conveyed to him a small selection of the most important words pertaining to our situation: "Bullshit!"

"Motherfucker!" "Bust!" I had quite an affinity for Japan as a kid, and the notion that I would be sitting in Vegas playing blackjack with a dude from Tokyo seemed quite ironic and unusual, given my many years behind the walls.

Our fingertips touched, across carnal cards commoditizing flesh. She might have been younger than me, but not much. One of the only women passing out those cards, certainly one of the only younger women. Much younger than the woman old enough to be my grandmother who some dude was trying to forcibly "return" one of the cards to earlier that night, to which I finally had to say, "Just give it to me then" and he finally left her alone.

I could give a fuck less about the content of the cards, in an immediate sense. I'll skip the political analysis at this juncture. And not to read way too much into this minor passing moment, or fetishize the interaction, but I felt more of a connection in that momentary brush of fingertips passing beneath the neon lights than in almost any other time here. Of course, aren't almost all interpersonal interactions more of a Rorschach test than anything? But I wondered about her. She likely hadn't done time behind the walls, but her father, brother, uncle, or boyfriend probably had. How much do they make, passing out those cards? Probably next to nothing. Not much different than the credit card ads I had passed out a few times as a kid, which I ultimately never got paid for. Some fucking rent-a-cop chased me off after I put a bunch of them under the windshields of cars in a mall parking lot. And I quit after that. But never got paid.

Numbers and icons roll past on three wheels

My life flashing against their random rotation

Cylinders spinning

Which one has the bullet?

\$1 turns the wheels once more

But for how much longer?

Must hit that million dollar jackpot

Of worthless words and sentences dropping

Perhaps it will pay off

With or without a bang

Everything feels unusual. Writing, here, sitting underneath palm trees, typing on an iPhone in front of a pool. What could be more of a contrast to writing with a "security" pen on top of a worn-out mattress on a steel bunk in a maximum security prison? Hard to think of a greater contrast, except perhaps the writing I tried to do in Mexico under similar circumstances except with the pool replaced by a beach & the Gulf of Mexico. Walking through this casino, flashing lights everywhere. Dudes in suits and parades of women in miniskirts all night. Not quite the same as parades of convicts in drab prison jumpsuits and handcuffs & shackles. Coming back to a hotel room overlooking the Vegas Strip, two huge beds awaiting. Shower whenever I want. Can take an elevator downstairs and get food or drinks at any moment... Yeah, nowhere near those cells, those chow halls, those yards, those Streets.

Afternoon summer sun shines in through the window across the pristine white tiles of the shower. Quite a different vividness even compared to the dull-mirror stainless steel shower walls like they had in Pontiac prison. A steel-toed boot silently crushes my keffiyeh to the floor in the next room as my blood, deep red, splatters across the white tiles from tactical team bullets ripping through my flesh.

I watch the clouds hovering above the city buildings out of the shower window. The white tiles remain pearly white. Flashback? Flash frozen future photo? Flash that shit outta my head, whatever it is.

Late afternoon sunset above the cityscape outside my shower window. I've lived for years in a concrete tomb without any window, period. My apartment shower has a window, with fresh air breezing in, that I can stand under the hot, steamy water and look out across the city. A presaging scent of fall wafts in, putting my mind back to being on the yard in Joliet prison in the first fall I was locked up. That faint fall scent always reminds me of that prison yard. And trick-or-treating with my cousin as a kid. And now, standing in the shower of my apartment, contrasting the fact that I can look out of a window in my shower when for years I lived in concrete and steel cells with no window whatsoever.

I slowly return to consciousness from slumber, immediately expecting my surroundings to be the concrete walls of a prison cell. I glance over and see my friend asleep on my couch across my apartment from me. We had spent most of the night talking about her trip to Palestine (that I nearly joined her on), writing ideas, prison life and incidents, and "From Prison to the Penthouse" - a must-see reality tv dating show starring myself seeking love and romance (that I might probably should seriously consider putting together). Not that different from many discussions I've had with many celly's in many cells. Except I was not in a cell. And none of my cellys were women. I woke up at least one other time that night, immediately upon returning to consciousness expecting to be in a cell. But my friend remained across from me sleeping on the couch until she woke me up to let me know she was leaving, and if I needed any more support for my deposition in one of my lawsuits against Cook County Jail later that afternoon to let her know.

It was something of a ritual, I suppose. Any new cell you were put into, especially if you were ridin' solo without a celly and especially in seg, you had to do a full clean down of that motherfucker. Food detritus, dried blood, feces, dried pepper spray, who the fuck even knows (or wants to really know...) what all layers of desiccated remains of human habitation remained encrusted in the slow-grinding teeth of The Prison. The bleached-white tiles of my bathroom seemed almost sacred in contrast to the dull monochrome grey and browns of the multifarious "correctional facilities" I've been held captive in for what seems like most of my life. Since I was sixteen years old, I've had about just over two and a half years that I've not been in prison or in jail, on parole, probation or on bond fighting a case or political prosecution. I'm thirty-seven now. This bathtub needs cleaning. No way I'm facing that without both a real and ritual cleansing.

The most translucently icy blue water, temperature barely tolerable to the touch, envelopes my feet. I sit, notebook in hand, perched on the side of the tub before settling in. Immersing myself to the waist, my legs outstretched floating in that warm-hot water, puts me back in mind to one of the yoga meditational relaxation exercise I used to do in prison. Back, in fact, to some of my first experiments with the practice when I was in Danville prison.

Ritual ablutions. Amidst the smokey incense and herbs, black and mild, ceremonial implements imparted by my Shamanic Elder who accompanies me on my journey, I sit in the tub. Dates and dried mango, spirits of blue agave, prepared the palate. *Blood In My Eye* on the floor, pale water drifting against the pearly tub not marred by the bloodbath presaged to me in Las Vegas. Just a sumptuous hot bath in my apartment in the city. Major qualifiers, for my context. But... can I do this?

Fully immersed in the tub, in some ways not so much different than the practices in my mind of immersing myself in water in prison, I recline. White laser Rosicrucian rose-sigils seem to timewarp inwardly upon the white noise of my eyelids.

This bathroom is barely smaller than most cells I was in. My studio apartment outside the bathroom is not much bigger than about three cells.

Settling back and relaxing in the tub, not so much unlike The Dude in *The Big Lebowski*, without the German nihilists. Or FBI SWAT teams busting down my door. No tactical cell extraction team bout to pepper spray me and run up on me to drag me out of a cell. No tear gas. No mean muggin' about to lead to fist fights, shank games or gun play.

I'm sitting with my arms on my knees in the middle of the tub as the now-lukewarm water slowly empties down the drain. Blue-black tattoos, in the Latin *Solve et Coagula*, inscribed on the inside of my forearms, contrast with the flesh, tub and tiles. Breaking myself down, analyzing, resolidifying, recreating. Another season begins, the old begins to wither, new shoots begin to take root. The triple-dark void of Chaos returns all unto it's womb and transmutes old life into new, old ideas into new, old places and times and moments into other moments and times and places.

As I raise myself from the tub and look out the window, dark storm clouds approach. Reality often does not give us quite the symbolism we may be looking for. I feel perhaps more relaxed and renewed than I have ever felt before. Still uncertain. Still stumbling about in the darkness trying to find my way, my next foothold, my next step. But breathing. And thinking. And writing.

"Oh, I've got that book on my bookshelf!" I think to myself, for one of the first times in my adult life. Just as my eyes scanning the shelves in poor lighting locate *Neuromancer* between *Les Miserables* and the Criterion Collection DVD set of *Brazil*, I heard a crash from the bathroom and notice that the foreboding thunderstorm I had seen out the bathroom window was now fast up my building. I had to run to the bathroom to shut the window, not before savoring the scent and sprinkles of rain coming through the screen as I looked out at the stormy gray cauldron of clouds outside.

Subway cars extend to infinity
Each car a microcosm
Of isolated yet interconnected lives

"I could go for both," I thought. The hair-flipping and twirling, the expressiveness at least seemed to indicate some recognition on the part of the young women who walked onto the L before me and sat across from me as I stood near the door.

Argyle. The law office I used to work at was right over here for a while. Seems light-years away from where I'm at now. Same train, different universe.

Long brown-blond hair flowing, one of the women rushes out past me laughing, as we are stuck waiting on another train to pass. Throwing something in the garbage, I think. Then she rushes back into the train car and sits down again.

Synchronized typing on cellphones. That very-this-decade pervasive social passtime. As I scan the train car I see a Starbucks hat sitting perched on someone's head, farther down someone is wearing a Nirvana t-shirt with a Star Wars handbag.

And then, as she twirled her hair around her finger, she slowly but quickly turned to the side a little bit, smiled and gently bit her hair between her teeth.

And today I found out she died. As a cool fall breeze blows in through the window, I look out at the night sky and the lights of the city. Other apartments, thousands of lives. Seasons' definitely changing. I am more alone now than perhaps ever. Those last tenuous familial bonds - or what passed for them, in my life - now gone.

It was quite an enjoyable day, actually, before I got that phone call. Caught up with a friend I hadn't seen since before I was on the hunger strike in Cook County Jail and in Ferguson and all that shit. Walked on the beach, she asked me some questions from her time interning with the public defenders office about the frustrations and sexual harassment she experienced there. Guys in holding cells with a bunch of other dudes standing right there whipping their dicks out at her. Some of her experiences writing to a few guys who were in solitary, and the psychological complexities of those kind of relationships with people.

No Caller ID. I'm not answering *this* phone call. This is your system doing this, I don't want any part of it. Property relations, bureaucratic formalities. None of that matters to me. I'm trying to appreciate a life, and a small set of lives interconnected. Not by blood, but out of a desire for family. I had no choice in the matter, of course. But whatever the difficulties and dysfunctionalities, or personal shortcomings, they tried. They worked. There were often times that they did little - if anything - else. We traveled some, and had some small niceties here and there, probably many times more out of my socially-conditioned "wants" for toys or trivial status objects than theirs.

We were different, though. And I cannot really fault them, as individuals, for any of that. My mom struggled tremendously with words and memory because of being hit by a car when she was a kid. I called my mom on my dad's birthday ten months after he died. She didn't know it was his birthday nor did she know who I was. My dad read some, but he had his own struggles, with weight, and how being overweight affected him and how people saw him. Not that he would ever talk about it.

And that was one of the hardest things for me, our biggest difference. I want to understand, to interrogate myself, my thoughts, feelings, desires; to communicate with others, to share ideas and stories and laughs. To try to have some shared connections and memorable moments with others. If I hadn't organized the memorial for my dad, there wouldn't have been one. If I hadn't spoken in remembrance of his humanity, no one would have. And I hope, before my time, that I can write a few words in remembrance of my own humanity.

Did not expect to be taking this trip, on this overcast fall day. Do I really need to walk past two police cars in the three blocks it takes to walk to the L from my apartment?

Woodstock. No, not the famous one. The one in farm country Illinois where one side of my adoptive family ended up. I narrowly made the train, with only minutes to spare. The city looks eerie through the blue-green tinted train windows smeared with grime. Today would have been her birthday. Instead I'm making her funeral arrangements.

Park Ridge. The train takes me through places I haven't spent time in since my childhood. One summer when I was about ten years old I ran away, among other reasons, to go to a "date" I had scheduled at a swimming pool where we had a previous date ice skating. Des Plaines public library has a multi-story new building. I read a lot of books as a kid from the previous venue of that library. The theater is apparently shut down. The second story martial arts studio I attended when I was about four or five is still there.

A mom and her son on the train laugh as they play with an orange dinosaur. Mount Prospect. I used to buy comic books at a store right near here, and steal Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars from a store a little further down the road. Suburban Chicago. Used to deliver newspapers in the middle of the night to many houses and apartments around here before I was even ten years old. Arlington Heights. I used to take Tae Kwon Do blocks from the train station here at that age too, and our martial arts studio was even in some town parade they had here once. Arlington Park. Horse racing.

Pumpkins and corn stalks. My grandma & grandpa used to have a huge pumpkin pile every year at their garden center. Halloween was one of my favorite holidays. One year I was traumatized by a guy who worked there in a scary mask - I ran under my grandma's kitchen table and refused to leave from under it all day.

Maybe the physical distance made it easier. Or the years of isolation. But then when I begin thinking of my mom lying dead on the floor, I can't help but think of the boy running in tears trying to escape the cruel lash of the leather belt, the anger, the rage. The days I lay on our floor crying from her blows. Nothing I did was deserving of that. I couldn't escape those memories when my dad died either, as I stood crying in the shower as I prepared to make his funeral arrangements. That very act, the tears, the emotions rooted, intertwined, tangled and strangled in that abusive relationship, fused and frozen in my mind.

I'm sitting at the end of my block looking out over Lake Michigan, waiting to sign a check for my lawyers - and good friends - to get paid for the lawsuit we won against Cook County Jail banning all newspapers for 30 years. 70 degrees in late October is quite a feat for Chicago weather. But I'm living on stolen land, not by my own choice, an unwilling subject of white settler colonialism in North America.

Yesterday dirt from this ancient land slipped through my fingers onto my parents casket now resting in a pit dug into the soil. Together again, for better or worse. Not quite sure which of those prevailed, but there they are now.

And I alone again, as always.

I keep expecting it to end at any moment. That it's not real, or at least so unreal that it's infinitesimally brief existence renders it as though a figment of my imagination. Queen size bed, grey Egyptian cotton sheets with a fine-lined interlocking pattern, nothing extravagant but man, so unreal. Cum and sweat stained, flat-as-a-steamroller-lived-on-top-of-it prison shithole mattress it ain't.

I'm used to living with, expecting that everything I have will be taken in an instant. That everything I believed was a lie. That I have no home, I have no future, I have no significant possessions. I have friends, and memories, and experiences. I've been in some shitty places and I've been in some beautiful places. I've devoted myself to resistance to injustice and to liberation, at times from dire necessity and others just because what the fuck else would I be doing?

And yet... I'm thirty-seven years old and this is the first time in my life I've lived on my own, on the grid, in an apartment of my own. I've barely been functional this whole year. You'd think perhaps that people you've known for years might appreciate the significance and difficulty that this would present to someone such as myself.

But nah. It's all good. I'll figure it out.

I still didn't think of the couch as "mine." It was a couch, in a room that I happened to be staying in. Kinda like "a cell." Not "my cell" by any fucking means. Like the time they took all my property when I was in ad seg in the Lake County Jail when I was 17 and refused to clean the cell that I was held captive in. It was not "my cell" motherfucker, and fuck cleaning your cell. Your government's cell. Your system's cell.

Broken

On the most

Basic

Level

Decomposing

Flesh

Muscle

And Bone

Untouched

Years

Grind

My Heart

Into

Dust

A Dream
Of Grey Dust
A Hurricane
Extracted
Inhaled
Floating
On Water

A Prophecy
Foretold
Inscribed
By Time

Ashes
And Death
Alone
I Shiver
In Silence

My Skin
Afire
Cold Flames
Of Oblivion

Every day, the question

Unasked, unwanted, unuttered

But posed

In myriads of moments

Innocuous

As they may seem

To the casual observer

But there are none

I

Alone

Confront

The Question

On A
Collision Course
With
Death
And I
Don't Know
How To
Stop

Nanoseconds Drip By
In an Eternity
Every One
A Lifetime
Of Solitude

I Wonder
If I'll Ever
Be Human
Again

I Wonder
How Long
Can I Continue?

But I Won't

Let Them

Destroy

Me

I Always

Expect

The Cell

To Be

In the Cell

The boy

Alone

In the Cell

I wake up

Expecting

To Be

In A Cell

Surrounded

Suffocated

By Concrete

And Steel

Crushing

My Spirit

Razor Wire

Lacerating

My Soul

On Endless Days

In Identical

Cells

With No End

A World Exists

Somewhere

People Live

And Have Joy

And Laughter and Love

Somewhere

I'm Trying

To Find

That World

But

All I See

All I Feel

All I Know

Is the Cell

Alone