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Cover art by Katrina Haffner.
To Barton D. Seager – A man of limitless support and an inimitable storyteller who remains a constant source of inspiration
“Dying words have a better than usual chance to survive.
There are reasons, reasons rooted very deep in human nature, why men pay particular attention to them and preserve them. ... Peoples far distant in time, place and customs have joined in the feeling that the utterance which is never to be followed by any other is by that very fact significant. ... Death can make even triviality momentous, and delirium oracular. Last words have an aura about them, if not a halo.”

– from LeComte’s Dictionary of Last Words
Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, traditions, laws and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is subsumed under the male...

The power of the fathers has been difficult to grasp because it permeates everything, even the language in which we try to describe it.

– Adrienne Rich
In the beginning, there was nothing but me. In the end, it will be the same.

This is a story, at its essence, about two people. Two people who define ‘good’ in very different ways. And people tend to focus on the differences, instead of seeing the similarities. But, in order to understand this story, try thinking of all people as one entity, instead of separating them into categories. As one body of many, many cells. Humanity, I suppose. There, the line between good and evil will fall away because the body subsumes both—there is no dichotomy between the two (inside One).

But if people are all cells of one larger body, than there must invariably be cancer cells, sleeper cells, gnawing away at existence. Then, the dichotomy is restored! (right?)

If so, for what purpose?
What does this speak of free will?
Two, one, zero.
Some cells believe they are improving something so vast they need symbols in order to conceptualize it. Some cells see change as the only salvation, death as the only way to life. One might call them cancer. Others ‘evil’. Sometimes they simply don’t realize how destructive they’ve been.

When Arthur and Chimera came to know each other, they didn’t know which category the other fit into. They didn’t know where they themselves fit in.

It all comes down to conscious movement. Constant improvement for a cell’s capacity—that reworking of a million wrong choices. This life in constant repair.

Some cells don’t have a choice. Some cells exist to serve some minor purpose and then die, a-poptosis. They flake off into infinity, tiny wisps of unexistence, snowflakes dissipating into the black. Chimera Aoki was an inconsequential snowflake, only a cell on the tongue of humanity. She faded from a brilliant, pulsating red to a deep, rotting grey as she floated off the very tip.

Cells in the mouth, by the way, are the quickest at regeneration; they are the purgatorial stillborns, the teenage suicides, and the “only the good die young” accidents.

So Chimera Aoki’s energy was sitting atop all of existence’s tongue, one apart and a part of One, a peacefully ignorant decomposition, when she first met the siblings Numen-Noyes and their father
Arthur. It would only be three months later when consequence, fate, whatever you’d like to call it, swept her grey, bloated corpse-like cell into infinity. When she died, the body was in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Want to know what death feels like?

A tidal wave of coagulated mint jelly, the forceful bristles of a candy-apple red, and an indescribable feeling of floating and melting at the same time.
There were a lot Amens and a few Hallelujahs. She found many Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. Jesuses, Marys. She decided to spare her audience the Help mes—of which there are quite a few. I am hots. I am colds. The affirmatives and negatives. The references to sleep.

Deaths that have been documented seem to fall into three categories: those that were able to wither away in the presence of loved ones, those that have been immortalized in lore, and the suicides that have documented their last steps away from this world. Of course there are many
of those who passed without documentation; they remain painfully mute, like a phantom limb.

All truth? No, there was a large mythology there. But perhaps the words that have been placed in their mouths speak more to the meaning of their lives than what their actual lives did.

*I wish I could quote them in their original tongue.*

Some just said goodbye.

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Leaving the city with a horrible twinge of sorrow pitted deep in her abdomen, Chimera leaned forward to watch the images fleeting by in between the smudged fingerprints and face-marks on the bus window. As they passed through lower Manhattan, the glowing yellow signs covered the bodies below with a perverse sunlight. Those bodies lit their cigarettes and arched their backs against their buildings. They moved inside as a shadow framed in light. Further back, the black loomed, running along side the Greyhound in clumsy, tumbling waves down the sidewalk, and, for a moment, she thought about the L underneath everyone moving back to Brooklyn. She was reminded of the two siblings and what she had found in the middle of Arthur’s bed. The enamel of her teeth flashed as she bit her lip and allowed the tears to roll down her face like wind-whipped raindrops against the window.

*Where am I going?* Chimera thought, looking down at her bloody hands. Her knuckles were
swollen and the inside of the bus smelled of iron and salt. It smelled like New Jersey, a low-hanging cloud. It was raining heavily outside.

She looked down at the papers in her hands, the manuscript smudged along the sides. She had finished writing her first manuscript—a book of deathbed decrees. A book of last words. If this book had a soundtrack, it would be silence with an almost muted muttering—a woman speaking intangibly but continually and a woman’s voice nonetheless. It would be as rhythmic and arrhythmic as a human voice, a lopsided beat with the octave of estrogen; it would have an undeniably maternal cadence. Beside her, both children sat slumped over on top of themselves in slumber. The three of them were moving away from that bed, away from Arthur, though Chimera felt something unseen tugging at her to go back. There was a familiarity there; a routine, a touch, and its smells. The smells were different here—she was seated close to the bathroom.

You’re never here, she complained to herself. Here. Oh, Arthur.

When Chimera was young, she would get horribly homesick. She still carries it with her as an adult. Whenever she is too far away—not from a place necessarily but from people. Right now, one person. Arthur. As she leaned back into the seat, she thought about how she was now an entire world away from him—her mind crossed the
distance between them and a sick, hollow feeling grew inside but she couldn’t tell if it originated from her stomach or her heart.

It made her feel this compulsion to scream until the bus driver stopped right there, in the middle of the Holland Tunnel, and stopped the cars, trucks and buses full of people behind them so she could run out. So she could go back and find what was missing (she still didn’t understand everything that had happened). So she could ask him Why?

But her lip just bled, and her heart got so big that it choked. The bus rattled on towards reality with a load full of strangers, its engine humming to the beat of the muffled sobs, so wet and heavy that they floated through the air, filling the hollow, darkened body with the sorrow of some poor, little girl, using her hair to soak up the tears from the very last seat by the mini-bathroom. No one looked back, no one chose to hear, and no one cared that she was not crying for herself, or for him. No one cared about the siblings and what she found in Arthur’s bed. Leaning over, she hugged the boy, trying to absorb his pain. Behind them, a man wheezed as he tried to shove his immense body into the opening of the bathroom and she cried.

Everything seemed so pathetic in New Jersey.
Arthur Noyes was seated in his sanctuary. It was quiet and he was alone. He was talking to themselves.

*From the very beginning, the problem has been that people see too much importance in themselves. The Greeks called it hubris. People saw divine and inalienable rights materialize out of ether. Look around this city!*

He was thinking about men. About monuments to men. Made by men. For men. He was thinking about how pathetic men could be.

Weak.
Vain.
Little creatures.
He was thinking he could save them.
It’s all bluster. How we bump into and off of each other, across the surface of this life. How we compulsively measure each movement. Each acquisition. Each conquest. Must delineate where we’ve been, must define. Time and lines, time and lines. Different forms of separation. We get lost in the dark with different tongues and faces and trajectories. Sometimes you just want to reach out and feel something else warm and soft and hold onto it for a moment, really feel it before you stumble on.

I have something soft and malleable in my hands. I can make it into anything I want. It beats like a foreign heart. It leaves reverberations off of the black walls of this cave, a fading glossola-la–la–lia.

Arthur’s thoughts turned to the first time he met Pesach and his sister—

Before the first time I met my children, I had never held a brand-new baby. The girl wasn’t an infant; she was about three. But the boy was an infant, he was closed-eyed and deep red. Almost aglow. Swaddled tightly in a blue blanket, I could tell from a distance how fragile he was and I could feel the warmth from his little body. The girl was porcelain but my son was deep red and all the more delicate. I had children in a state of purity. He was of my sister but I was the Father. No, I never was the Father; but I am the Father. It was all the more a blessing because there was no need for debasement. No part of it rooted in sin. Unlike Jews where the mothers
carry their bloodline, in Christianity, it was Mary (without sin) who kept Jesus pure because God was his Father. And the Father was the Son. And They were Holy.

A red pulse (inside)—pulsating deep red like my heart, my heart held in my hands. Little shudders, new lungs shaping fresh noises from its crevices, and I looked down to him in my arms and I saw my hands, the size of dinner plates, engulfing his body—they were a father’s hand, they were my Father’s hands, I saw their color and their creases, the thick slabs for fingernails lined with dirt, the smell of the farm. I almost dropped my son when I saw his hands, when I lost my own. I felt old and powerful and lost between something concrete and ethereal. Where was I?—between a fractal of Father and Son circling onward, smaller and smaller.

Before Arthur, no one wanted these children, Pesach and his sister. No one was around to protect them. Somehow, they slipped through all the cracks. Often, the most dangerous person is someone who acts in the role of parent to a child, someone who knows something you don’t, someone who is responsible for exposing you to truths because they easily can make something wrong seem very right. When you’re a child, it is hard to see outside the shadow of your Father.

Arthur thought, when he came into their lives, that he saved them from the crowd. From their ugliness. From untruth. The crowd sees a burden
in the body. They question whether the spirit is a part or apart of the flesh. They forget that anything can be rectified. Arthur couldn’t trust what they said, their interpretations. He couldn’t trust anyone else to teach his children the right way. He had only learned it himself through some type of divine intervention. And sometimes it felt like Arthur was the only one who knew that a few simple adjustments, the flesh could become a conduit for good rather than an instrument for evil.

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of deity in bodily form.”

He was thinking he could save them all from their sadnesses.

Arthur’s mouth was a pomegranate, thick and red, spreading across his skin, somewhere between hate and mirth. The seeds of his teeth punctured the space between and his lips parted so the juices of his mouth ran forth, as thoughts stained the air like blood from a fruit. Of these thoughts, these spoken—there was always a silence. There was decency to think of. The face you show in front of the crowd. It was protection as much for his children as for himself. So he sat there in silence, smiling pure contempt through the deep purple of his thick, fleshy lips.

Great men live outside the laws of man, those frozen lips told him. You are a great man. Who could make great men. For all men.
Some people are special. More special than others. Though rare, no one would dispute that they exist. They see things in ways different from everyone else. They can understand things we read everyday but never connect. Arthur read everything. This house was covered in words and Arthur spent all his time connecting the infinite into something finite.


Father used to say, “You’re giving me attitude with those s’s. Just say Yes// (blunt) when I tell you to do somethin’”.

The room was half-lit and cold when those lips told him that he knew how to save them. His children. Sun spilt from the sole window and it disseminated upon the flakes of dust that swam in the cool spaces between. His throat worked, swallowing hard against the silence, as the still mouth spoke without any censoring speech.

The scene looked like a man complacently choking, in a barren white room, sitting on an over-turned box, his left hand down the front of his pants.

Eventually, he would confess out loud to everyone the workings of G-d that he was going to implement. With only a few words, he confessed, declaring that he found the G-d in every man, he was every man—he was G-d. An auditory ejaculation with its promise of salvation hit the cold air as he became cloaked in night.
Yessssss. Oh Chrisssssst.

I have a secret, Arthur Noyes said to the black room. No one was there, but everybody already knew.

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