

IT WAS DAWN
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CANTO I

When I was a child, Death came into our home looking for my Father and me. He snatched my Father's spirit but I held my breath and hid alongside my Papa. It was dawn.

**"+Pax huic domui et omnibus habitantibus en ea."
Peace to this house and to all who live here."**

"Your father is dead."

"What? "

"He's dead."

"When?"

"Dead."

"He moved."

"No! The bed did. "

"My hand is caught!"

"Away from him."

"He moved!"

"No! The bed is sagging!"

"Look! The sheet is wet!"

"No! It always happens."

"He moved!"

"No! Hijo! "

"Shake him!"

"No! Now you are the man, hijo!"

"I am only seven!"

"El Hombre! A Man!"

"Papa!

"Don't touch him!"

"Papa!! Look at me!"

"Dead, hijo!"

"Everything is dark Papa!"

"+In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti."

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

CANTO II

Like the village woman who grinds her meal, knowing she makes a life nourishing communion for her children; so too, I plied the flesh of my own maturity. This was my genesis. I did not steal fire, but, the sacred clay and the spittle of my own creation. I knew life before I was a man- an affront to Death and my defiance of the inevitable.

It was dawn, when my mother looked on in silence, while our parish priest recited a prayer that would absolve him. "By this holy unction and by His Most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon thee all of the sins thou hast committed by thy sight: per visum; by thy hearing: per auditum; by the smelling: per odoratum; by thy touch: per tactum; by thy walking: per gessum; by thy taste and words: per gustum et locutionem."

For more than a decade, I met the conditions annually for a perpetual indulgence to release my Papa from Purgatory. I never understood why a man who died at 27 years old should have received the possibility of a life sentence in Purgatory. I reasoned that he must have regularly committed the deadly sin of Envy because he envied those who weren't poor like him and his family; or the deadly sin of Gluttony because he always wanted to provide more for our dinner table than he could afford on his salary; or the deadly sin of Lust because he married my Mother when she was 18, sired three children by the time she was 21, and made her a widow at 25. His coldness kissed my hands and cradled itself in the warmth of my tiny palms. I stared at him to see if he would look at me: per visum...deliquisti. Amen

"+Per istam sanctam unctionem + et suam piissimam misericordiam indulgeat tibi Dominus quicquid per tactum, per visum, per auditum, per ordoatum, per gustum, per gessum et locutionem deliquisti. Amen."

CANTO III

A February breeze carried a waning gardenia fragrance and the scent of fresh earth jumped up to meet her at Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma, CA. She swept across the cemetery, which proudly displayed her well worn headstone jewelry, and rendered Holy Cross immaculate for us. The priest recited the Litany for the Departing Soul and commended my Father's soul to God, "may satan most foul...tremble at thy coming...and flee away into the vast choas of eternal night." The casket was lowered, white gloves and roses danced into the grave, and I threw handfulls of dirt listening for a reply.

We lingered. Late afternoon ushered us towards the gate. The sun kissed each headstone before fading below the horizon. Dusk snuffed out our footprints. The cemetery was a still life of marble and granite silluouettes inscribed with names that had not been spoken aloud for decades. The monastic great silence descended upon Holy Cross Cemetery.

Night unfurled her shroud revealing a chorus of angels laying prostrate before an apocalyptic throne. Barely visible in the night sky, a seagull circled in search of a last morsel, not of carrion, but of an interred memory, its plaintive cry heralding the "Ita Missa est" of yet another day.

CANTO IV

"All is dark, Papa..."

"It's an eternal night, hijo..."

"I have many dreams, Papa..."

"Of the light of day, hijo?"

"Yes! I dreamt, Papa."

"About our home, hijo?"

"And my Mama..."

"Yes, my wife..."

"And her tears..."

"Her pain..."

"And her suffering."

"I dream, Papa."

"About our family, hijo?"

"And my manhood."

"Yes, a flower..."

"Whose fragrance was crushed..."

"In life's hand?"

"My seed, Papa."

"Choked by the limestone, hijo."

"My children, Papa?"

"Mere fragmentary images..."

"Of my own maturity?"

"Which never was, hijo."

"Papa!"

"For a moment..."

"Yes! I did believe..."

"That you lived?"

Yes! the fullness of my lifetime..."

"Tasting Love's nectar?"

"Yes! Her richness, grace and beauty!"

"The joy of youth, hijo?"

"Yes! The springtime of my grace..."

"Cascading forever over a barren universe?"

"Yes! Like immemorial rivers!"

"Unredeemed and ageless?"

"Yes! Et expecto..."

"You are but seven."

"Yes! Resurrectionem

"You were but seven."

"Yes! Mortuorum!"

"A boy, eternally dreaming!"

"Yes! et Vitam!"

"A child, eternally dust!"

"Yes! Venturi

"An image, eternally fading!"

"Yes! Saeculi

"A man?"

"Yes! Amen!"

