Heaven, or Whatever

Shane Koyczan

"You can't just do whatever"
The words stumbled out of you
Like a drunk leaving a bar looking for a fresh new last call
You were not a man of words
But did your best to offer advice
You offered me "You can't just do whatever"
And I know what you meant
You meant that whatever I choose to do, I must not be aimless
I must not simply spin this globe and go wherever I stick my finger
Because 71% of the time I will end up in the ocean
And if I do end up in the ocean I can't just do whatever,
Better learn to swim"You can't just do whatever"The conversation came after you asked me about heaven
Told me that you thought heaven would be specific to each person
And that each person would have their own version of it
Then asked me what mine would be
I was so scared to tell you,
"I don't have one"
But you nodded your head,
as if confirming a suspicion that school
had robbed me of a belief in some stories
You said "you don't have to beleive what I believe, its enough to be good.
Be good"
I will.
I will think about your heaven
Your heaven would be the same haircut, forever
It would be a stick a dog and some distance
A lawn that always needs mowing
A six-pack of pills in those short bottles and your real teeth back
Because your dentures could never master that bottle opening trick you loved to do
The first time you tried it with dentures I had nightmares for a month
Because I though your mouth had fallen off
Your heaven, would be Austria before the war
And Canada after you met grandma
It would be head cheese sandwiches and blood sausages
Other deli meats that would ensure you would never ever have to entertain dinner guests
And I would never be in danger of having my lunch stolen
Your heaven,
would be a stash of raisins
Problems that you could fix with your hands

I remember you tried to fix everything with your hands
I remember the difficult days
I remember the bandages
They looked like tiny blankets, as if your knuckles had all gone off to bed
Walls that looked like they'd said something to get under your skin
And where suddenly made to pay for it
I know you were an angry man
Finger tips like spent shotgun shells, bleeding smoke cocktails of gunpowder and singed plastic
You had what some people would call, "a temper"
But you loved a good joke,
even if it was on you
Something that would crack open the walls of your chest and let the wind tickle your heart
Just enough to let you know it was still there
You didn't always laugh, didn't always smile
You did keep a mental ledger of what you called your "send flowers list"
I remember thinking it was a thank you to those who got you good
But learned the truth after my grandmother added a thin layer of sand to your sandwiches
Because you refused to make your own lunch for work
You told me about it when you picked me up from school that day
You said "Grandma just made the send flowers list"
And I asked "Because you love her so much?"
And you said "Because I'm gonna kill her"
Of course you didn't
Your version of kill meant two months before winter,
Having a seamstress take in each of her coats a few inches
So on the first day she need one
She fumbled with the sudden tightness
And you stood there smiling then said "Honey, I love you no matter how big you get"
She did not laugh
And managed to staple your smile back into a straight face
When she told all of your friends at work that you had to move into the spare room
Because you couldn't stop farting at night
You often asked me "If I had a heaven, what would it be like?"
And I told you that for such a small word, if, is just too big to wrap my belief around
I would not bend to the hypothetical
But wish now that I would've
Even if it was just to ease your mind in the belief
That I could be headed to that other place you believed in
I would tell you now how my heaven is here
It was here, in the gentle warfare of your relationship with Grandma
Where volleys were traded back and forth
Like hockey cards between children who didn't care what the stats meant
My heaven would have been someone in grade five finally willing to trade me their fruit roll up
For my tin of sardines
My hell was wondering "why?" Why would you give me sardines for lunch

My heaven would make you laugh
Cause I get the feeling you didn't get to do that very much
Through my hell, through the night terrors and bloody noses
Through the eyes black, bruised back, sneak attack, nap sack and winter coat hijacks
You did your best to seal up the cracks in my armour and made my heaven here
I would have loved to have made you laugh more
To make your send flowers list just once
So I offer you now my if
If there is a heaven
Mine would have a post office
And I could send letters to yours
The first letter would read
"Hell's not so bad, they pretty much let you do whatever"
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