

As Skies Became

Crimson

The fleeting and ever moments of a boy now soon to be gone

By

Thane Houchell

Edited by Jason Thomas and Eric Cooke

*To Nicole and Blythe,
For never ceasing to believe in me
And making me smile*

“Innumerable are the ways in which I treat you as a means. I ask your help, I ask for Information, I may buy from you or buy what you have made, and you sometimes dispel my loneliness. Nor do I count the ways in which you treat me as a means. You

ask my help, you ask me questions, you may buy what I have written, and at times I ease your loneliness. Even when you treat me only as a means I do not always mind. A genuine encounter can be quite exhausting, even when it is exhilarating, and I do not always want to give myself..."

-Walter Kaufman, *I and You*

"Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and your life will be serene"

-Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*

Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

-Psalm 39:4

Ch. 1

The sun doesn't always set like that. Never just like that. This is what I was thinking as I stood alone on the sidewalk outside my apartment. I was dying. Well I had always been dying. I guess I was just more aware of it now. Rotting away from the inside. Some may call it a cancer. I just call it shitty luck and poor genes. The universe just taking its toll upon me as my cells slowly become more cannibalistic. But anyhow, back to this sunset. No this one was its very own, I thought to myself. Its very own expression. Ain't that something, I said in a whisper. Hiding my words in a sigh. Ain't that sunset just something. That red. That purple. With utter grace it brushed distant treelines. Skimming the rooftops of these sleepy homes. Hot damn! Hot mother fucking damn was that a sunset.

Ya sure, sunrises are basically the same thing you might say or even better, well go fuck yourself because they're not. I curse at this moment not out of anger, but in full fledged fucking disagreement because sunsets honestly are unlike any other god damn phenomenon known to man. No matter where you are in this world a sunset will find its way to the optics of your soul. I don't care if it's the front lawn of suburbia or the grand fucking canyon... a sunset can make it dance. The same two or three colors - blended

by the hand of Lord Jesus himself- again and again birth phantasmic arrays unknown unto that point to the spirit of man.

Ya, the rainbow may be a promise to never flood the world again, ok ya I says, but that sunset I'm looking at is a promise that there is to be the most beautiful tragedy amongst the human life. That there's gunna be hurt. That there's gunna be joy. But most of all that we're not alone. That there's love out there if we open up to it. That's a promise I want to see, not cus it's gunna make my life the way I want it, but that it's the one that will authenticate the way it is and can be. For all sunsets are genuine because we too can be... genuine. Where sunsets never slumber to the winds of night so too lies the heart of man. There he sighs no more for he is home.

The day was closing. My last day. I descended down the crumbling stairs that connected my townhouse to the sidewalk with an air of caution. Even the slightest bit of precipitation could turn this simple crackly path into a death slide. I entered my house and made my way to the back sliding door. Upon exiting the house I had just entered I proceeded to sit next to a fire I had lit earlier. Don't worry, Chancey was keeping an eye on it while I stepped out front. Next to the fire on a little metal table I had a nice glass of my favorite cabernet sauvignon, a pack of the harshest cowboy killers I could find, and the best damn mix playing on my phone containing the greats such as Ben E. King, Van Morrison, Zeppelin, Hendrix, Portishead, Massive Effect, and Floyd. That's some fucking tunes to end a day on. Having all that makes a man sure that the he's destined to see another sunset after this, be he in his prime or but has only a few hours to live. Whether in this life or the next there's a sunset waiting for him. That's something I want to believe in. I wish I only believed in such earlier, dying to live as I am now.

As I looked around in nervous shots of my gaze I saw the first stars peeking out as the sun finally dipped below frozen soil. I closed my eyes, paused my music, and just listened for a moment. Silence except for the crackles of fire. Silence except as Chancey quietly hummed along. There is a certain symphony to the silence of nature. For unlike other precarious environment's artificially constructed, nature's silence is alive. It flows and ebbs to the dancing's of the wind. It yearns out life into existence. It burrows deep into itself when the skies weep. All that is truly done is done in silence. In such silence the soul awakens and performs. For silence is its life and its life silence. But what the fuck do I know anyway. I was just a drunk sitting by himself on a Tuesday night thinking weird thoughts... well I guess I wasn't alone. Never alone. Not with Chancey. Not with God.

I was deluded in a lot of ways, as I am sure you can already see. Had my head to far up my own ass to see clearly. Fuck what is that smell, I yelled, with a taste of formaldehyde in my mouth. God dammit why don't these people I call fucking neighbors ever pick up their dogs fucking shit. Fuck did it really smell like a morgue filled with decomposing shit out here for a second. Speaking of morgues. Cancer is a bitch.

Well actually the cancer shit ain't to bad once you stop trying to fight it. I mean sure, it gets hairy the last couple weeks or days before you kick the bucket, but your body, like your mind, is pretty good of going about its business in willful ignorance right up to the moment of full implosion. People don't often even consider the things that matter till it is far too late to do anything about it, and your body don't really start spinning you through a world of pain till it's all fucking ka poeey too. It's really the whole ordeal of dying that really sucks. It really leaves an existential itch in one's back ya

know. Right in the fucking middle of the back too. That shit ass spot that you can't reach without a back scratcher, and who the fuck has one of those except my grandma and my odd neighbor Gladice.

Ehhh... Gladice... God did she have some fucking rolls and some knee slapping titties and O' how she love to swing 'em at me. She was perched up two houses down in her humble little garden she up kept. It was getting kind of cold to be worrying about those decaying flowers if you ask me, but then again maybe Gladice knew something about horticulture that I was unaware of concerning pre winter planting. Jesus she was a sight for blind eyes. But despite all her grotesque aesthetic features, or maybe more properly in spite of her grotesque aesthetic features, she married well somehow and is living off some old geezers leftovers after he kicked the old bucket.

She lived in the nice condos oddly connected to my shitty town house unit. Nice enough lady, but then again the less fortunate of the flesh usually are. What choice do they have? But I was thankful, as awful as it may sound, that God had blessed me without the ghastly sight of Gladice this evening, up till now, so I could bask sinfully in a little visual ecstasy. It would be nice to see Gladice though before I go. She would be good company. At least I think she would. I mean I could get up walk over and knock on her door. All I would have to do is invite her out to watch the sunset with me. Me being as young as I am comparatively to her she would not over romanticize the whole event, but it would make her smile that a young guy such as me, though normal as I may be, made such a gesture towards her.

I'm not even going to lie on this one though. There was no way in hell that nice little thought was ever leaving my head on route to action, not tonight at least. I wasn't

ready for that yet. I had a lot more practicing in the artfulness of spending my last day before I go for that kind of experience. Though you might have thought, till this moment, that tonight was my actual last day on earth and my cancerous demon infinitely close to grasping my life in the bowels of the night. Nope, not yet, but it could. Seriously, when you know you're dying you can't just keep lying to yourself that you've got enough time to do a couple things before getting probed up the ass by the reaper. Because when death is at your doorstep ew buddy you bet your ass that seconds and months, a year and a day become pretty indistinguishable one from the fucking other. So if you want something you better give it your best shot every second you can practically afford to, because at any moment... BAM!! You're fucking dead and your planner and goal sheet might as well have been offed with ya. So as you can see I'm practicing this shit, because when that day finally comes for me you better fucking believe it's going to be magic, or at the very least something I never stopped chasing after, ya see. Not till the last breath of these decaying lungs will anyone be able to doubt that I didn't give it my best fucking shot.

So ya, I had some stuff medically wrong with me. That's not pretend. Full blown nut cancer we'll call it. I know right? Ball cancer. It's like worse than even having ass cancer, right? The one thing that a man is suppose to love and cherish most dearly is trying to kill me. The family jewels are out to get me. How poetic. If only I could have rubbed my nuts a couple more times, done something, they could have caught it before the spread. If only I had found it before it creeped its way to more fatal zones. But you know what they say about if only's... they fucking suck. But anyway, back to what I'm doing here. Every night for the past two months I've come out here with my things and

enjoyed my last night. In doing this I hope that one day, maybe, I could get closer to my perfect night to die. That properly perfect night. Ya that's what I'm after.

How crazy does that sound? It may be morbid, but it's lovely to me. Its funny how a morbid thing like death can arouse one to find beauty in this seemingly dismal existence. The way I see it you will have some look to God, which I've done plenty of, others to their families, and others just go mad looking for something they can't find, but trust me they're all looking for the same thing. Looking for something beautiful in this world or the next. That's what we got going on in this here backyard. Searching. Fuck is that a racoon. Fuck I hate those little buggers. The little fucker ran right past my foot I swear. Anyway It's like the human tendency or something to just search for that shit. The Beautiful. I think we try so desperately to find it and where we can't find it we look to create it. And how awfully and amazing are we at doing that. Creating. Meaning can be found just as easily at the bottom of a crack pipe as it can be found in a Bible. They both inspire great thrusts into one's life. A purpose to live. Given this, one must always be on the search for a beauty that seeks us as much as we seek it. We must not become idolaters to things, whether it be meth or sock puppets. Always searching for that which first sought us.

See, where all of you are looking forward at your destination. Your next fix or loss. Whatever it may be. A job. A family. An A on that calc final. Shit, for some of us it's just as simple as getting ourselves a fucking burger in our spare time, but the point is everyone is heading towards something. And no matter what that something is, as far as you're concerned, it's what you want. It's the one thing that is finally gunna give you a little peace, a little fucking meaning in this insurmountably short life of ours. But you

know deep down there's only one fix that is really going to do the trick and it's to face one another. Shit, just even a little fucking genuine eye contact, that's what we're really after. Acknowledgement and the chance to acknowledge so we can finally feel like we're fucking alive on this god forsaken planet, and that somebody else sees it too and we see them.

And o' trust the fuck out of me, there was a period when I wanted nothing more than that with a woman. Looking at each other in the sunsets of our lives, the twilight of our nervous wobbling through existence. I wanted her, whoever the fuck she is, to just see me as I was and not just what I was to her. That's what I guess I'm looking for out here. Communion. Communion in a postmodern age where people are closer than ever but too blind and deaf to see how close they already were, how close they always have been, how much closer they could be.

I don't know. I'm looking for something in this world. This much I know. God help me I hope it's out there. This among a few other things were what was on my mind as I walked back into my house slowly with my thoughts. Dammit the doors jammed again. JoJoooo. Chanceyyyy. Oh there it goes. Back inside. Fucking door. Gotta remember to call the maintenance guys about that. You want to know something crazy? So get this, right now we are soaring millions of miles an hour through an infinitely expanding universe. Billions of stars thrown out into the abyss like an infinitely large pool table, but here's where it gets even fucking crazier. Here we are, you and me, against the seas of the eternal, just fucking sitting here jerking off with our lives. Unknowingly masturbating while the divinities of a cosmic overture strings out unto creation. I know, a random fact to perch upon when entering one's house, but the universe was on in the other room

and it made this thought pop in my head. Follow me though, I think I'm going somewhere with this. Do you know what is even more nuts than our infinitude of fineness... it's that I care that the universe goes on.

Not only am I dying soon, but I still give a crap about the universe going on even if it will soon be without me. For some odd fucking reason I give a damn about all this going on. Maybe I was suppose to. I guess that's what we do though. We are beings who care. Who are care. Heidegger be damned, why do we care so fucking much? Not just those people who do something with their lives, who change the world, even the laziest scumbag in the world cares about something. We all fucking care so much. But how does one go farther than caring? How does one turn care into newborn action in this world? How does one go on loving? That's what this guy right here with a nut cancer onslaught wants to know. I plopped down in my chair and grabbed my copy of Peirce's *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Talk about one hell of a read. God damn, where to start, I thought to myself.

By the time I finally looked up it was a new day. I had pulled myself into a tiffy of an adderall binge last night and was just finishing up the 5th chapter of my book and was drifting off into more emotional territories. I should have found her by now. I should have looked harder. Been open to more. Maybe then I would have found her, I thought in dismay. I really hope I do before this all goes down. Dying really has a way of making one thing apparent. Nobody wants to die alone. Ya that maybe a tacky truism to attach right now, but fucking listen to me when I tell you that truisms and cliches take a whole new meaning to a ghost in the making. Simple truths become unbearable weights on the arms and legs of man just trying to put a little pep in his step. That is, as he steps

into potential darkness, in my case. Do you know how many cliches we just walk through everyday? We ignore them when we think all is fine, but once your time is almost fucking out they are nothing but a slap in the face of all the things you are completely incapable of doing. Do you know how preciously bland life is and we don't even appreciate the former of the two adjectives til were pretty much dead or out the door already... At least I didn't.

Jesus, there goes that train. Of course the apartment staff didn't tell me the tracks were literally two feet behind my building when I moved in last year. Why the fuck would they? Thankfully, I've moved across the street now to the town houses. So there's that. But ya, there goes that train again. It was surely the premiere rust display of somewhat impressive art work, if there ever was one in the Butler tri county area. It was this and more to me though. It was a memory. Some insignificant significance I wander back to from time to time. Ok, so me and my buddies were pretty high at Dick Fealey's place. Like that silly kinda high where one guys getting real introspective about REALITY AS IT IS. That was me at the moment. One guy's just giggin and pushing the racism a little too far about hawaiians of all people to get racial with. Yup, Dick Fealey was he. Who hates the fucking Hawaiians any way? Fuck you Dick, I said, completely random like. What the fuck, he retorts. Nothing man, just fucking with you, I says to him. Fucking weirdo, he returns with a laugh.

See, Dick Fealey had one of those tri state kinda laughs. As in, if you're anywhere in the mother fucking tri state area, you'll hear it. I laughed along with his boisterous laugh with every ensuing joke nonetheless. So, as I was saying, you got those guys. Then there's your sober friend who would like to be as fucked up as his

friends, but doesn't smoke because he wants to be a cop someday. Yup, that was Ethan. Ethan was my best friend at Miami as I am sure to restate later. Me and Ethan use to be a lot closer, but he quit smoking like a bitch and it was from then on we slowly grew apart. So, you have him as well. And then there's the creme de la resistance. Every congregational meeting of stoners has this guy. He's that one guy dancing to quiet electronic music in the corner by himself. For us that was the one and only BARSTOOL. O' what a guy. He's like the weird background show that nobody really knows why as to the reason they're watching, but nonetheless move their somber gaze to his slightest trip and arm rotations.

Wait, who am I again, I think to myself. O' ya, I thought promptly, reminding myself. Fuck was I stoned. God damn, this was some dope shit. Fuck, I seriously was forgetting who I was for a second. Let's keep our shit together brother, I says to myself. Keep it the fuck together. While we took a break from our trip into the psychedelia that we were most fond of: MARIJUANA. It then dawned on us to take a break in the fresh air. Well, as fresh as we were going to allow it to say the least. Cig my dear friend, Barstool asks me, leaning in towards me as if to tell of secret plans. Why, my good sir, I'm surprised it took you so long to ask, I says to him in response .

O' cigs. The most precious of all smokes. O' the cherished cigarette. As one of my heroes, Chanler, of the critically acclaimed tv show Friends once said, if I may paraphrase: Think of it not so much of it as something you are holding, but more so that its the one thing truly missing from your hand. Damn was he right. Anyway, back to what I was saying. So were smoking in a more refined manner than before and my

buddy Barstool breaks out in an existential phenomenology of being-there unlike you've, or at least I've, ever heard before.

Being in that moment was what it was all about. Look around, he says. Listen to that train. Damn! How close is that mother fucker, he proclaims with a heightened level of paranoia, as he lurched backward. Shit. Anyways listen to that train, he says. You see those lights, he said prophetically, as if no one had ever thought to look at them before in our entire life. Listen to those trees. Listen to those fucking trees... They're singing. Damn those crickets can move some magic, he comes to a whisper. It may sound like two stoners geeking out in their bland environment, but trust me, there was more than the cliché it sounds like. See, that's what I'm talking about with the clichés. They're real and so much more when you know they're not permanent. You find out in dying that clichés aren't clichés because of their own fault. Its us that get stagnant. Get boring. Get bored. We forget how unique every moment is and how mysterious it is to connect with another human being. If you ask me, there's no such thing as cliché moments, just clichéd people.

Anyway, speaking of crickets and getting high. Me and that same one and only BARSTOOL were getting baked, and he had this track you see. Not like the ones behind my place, like a music track dip shit. It was some elvish-lord of the rings-spiritual kind of shit with crickets in the background. But get this, ya see. The dude that made this track actually slowed down their chirping, the crickets, to the level that it would be if the crickets life span was put into ratio with a human's. Shit, that doesn't make sense. Let's see. It was like he made their chirping the speed of what they would be like if time passed for them in a relative way to how time passes for us. Fuck that still might not

make sense. Just try to follow me. I swear, it's worth experiencing. Listen to this fucking track. Youtube it or something! Seriously! He does this, ya see, and instead of just random chatter it's this fucking elvish shit. It's beautiful. We search and we search for beauty and we come to find it in fucking crickets. How audacious is it when we think we're looking for it and in turn it finds us. What is to us random fast paced chirping is, in actuality, a symphonic explosion of sound when you slow it down to the right level. That right level is where the music's at. Its their level. The crickets. Its their level of being in the present. Maybe there is something to learn from this you know. Maybe we need to slow down to our level of being in the present. We've got to have a symphony somewhere between us playing the song of man. Maybe if we just slowed down. Maybe that's what drugs and death do to us. They slow us down. This could of course be just another internet hoax, but I hope that wouldn't cheapen the metaphor. At least I hope it doesn't. I don't know. One thing I do know though is that being in the moment, communion between fucking crickets is... well it is. End Flashback.

I was back in the present and that present was about to go out for sushi with a friend, but I got sidetracked as I so often do and missed out on the sushi aspect of the ordeal. I texted said friend to let her know I wasn't going to make it as I floated off to other thoughts. I'm not sure what set it off but I was reminded of an article I once read. I don't know why, but I just can't get it out of my head since I read it. It was a sweet little number in national geographic that a dude wrote after he got back from time spent over in India. Real real shit. Hit me right in the face harder than a sting from Ali. It read something like this:

And there I came upon the endless river where men greater and lesser than I have come to pay homage, reckoning back to a time now long gone, but ever near. What stirred its beckon call onto me. With what strength did it yearn me into existence. The Ganges had a way of bringing a man to thoughts such as these. A holy river to pilgrim and a bustling array of mysterious activity to the touristeye. I guess I fell somewhere in between the two. For neither fidelity, nor mere pleasantries called me to the banks of these here waters, but something quite odd to my own sensibilities. For even though the practices of the devout, be they hindu or not, were a far cry from my understanding... I felt at home... At home but surrounded by strangers. But then again all men are strangers to a man who hides himself such as I. No, my place here had not yet been spoken for in the tides of my own history. But I was there. Somewhere special. And that I knew besides any concrete reason why. I was here and she was close.

Damn what a night that guy must have been having. Could you imagine if that was my night? Could you, because I hardly can. It's one of those things that you're either there living it or you're just some jackass reading about it. That's a night to go out on. The longing. The waiting. The awe exploring, mind opening, existential awakening this mother fucker is having. Something fucking was happening to this guy. Something that I only pray could happen to... No, something I will have happen to me. What's prayer without hope anyway? I mean shit, that's what I'm aiming for with this expenditure of mine. Fundamental and foundational cracking of experience that will push me into salvation.

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