

BETHEL

Two Minds in Twain (by their Paragraphs)

By J Christian Lawrence

*I knew that man, and when I could,
when I still had eyes in my head,
when I still had a voice in my throat,
I sought him among the tombs and I said to him,
pressing his arm that still was not dust:*

*“Everything will pass, you will still be living.
You set fire to life.
You made what is yours.”*

*So let no one be perturbed when
I seem to be alone and am not alone;
I am not without company and I speak for all.*

*Someone is hearing me without knowing it,
But those I sing of, those who know,
go on being born and will overflow the world.*

~Neruda, a fragment of the poem, “El Pueblo”

Fruitas del sol, soul, all souls’ diem *a todos* totaling toll. A totem in hand *los ocuros*...

Payed the bill. Grocery clerks. Oh, I remember that nice young man that lent me his hand and *maneo*, I remain, here, hear the main Maine maimed memory. Toe-dough. Is someone at my door? Errand boy sent like roses. Pay him? Movies move the...

I knew that my mother was trapped now in the dark night of the soul. I remember her reading to me, St. John of the Cross. Sainthood. She was losing her memories and all the memory of saints. It would have been easier to forget her too – sometimes she’d point at me and bare (dentured) teeth and hiss, ‘Why are *you* here?’. I’d shudder and cry later. Who would she be today?

On my vanity there is a little hummel boy humming the little drummer boy and they go down the lane the main lane Maine – Mass – Chatham and Sandwich and sandwiches on the

beach in the fall, falling of the waves – crshhhh.... crshhhh... crshhhh... and Benjy dog loved to play tag with the sea, see Benjy run, there was his tail was the air happy to Robbie and to me. Sandwiches. His hand was light, and the precious hands were peachy pink I kissed them when he fed the sandys to me – I didn't have to kiss them – I snuck a kiss with Juan behind the red bricks behind the streets cross, seven year old, and – who were there when? Whose kids were where were they mine? Me? I hid the kiss from the kids when we brought kickball kickbacked – He fed me a slice of the cucumber sandwich and whipped his hand back before I could playbite him again and he laughed and blushed and pushed me down and his hands went up to my – Oh where am I – Oh – oh how pretty the blue blanket is and my little room and Clarence brought me this pola-photoRoy where did I put the one with baby Sarah? Tel-E - 'We have the youngest customers in the business!' 'Nothing does it like Seven-Up!' 'A Little Dab'll Do Ya!' smoke smoke – Doctor Khan – Oh, such dark skin! – Arm against arm (white doctor sleeve pulled up) – Mine was a bitty Mexiskinny *One dark night, fired with love's urgent longings*

*ah, the sheer grace!
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.*

The car made a rattle, like some lost metal was bouncing in the engine without aim. Great, there goes the money for takeout this month. When I parked, I checked my makeup in the mirror – never wear mascara here. 'Shady Elms and Acres' was the name. Shady prices, maybe. And the acres? Of concrete. Chicago. Windy city whipped my face when I stepped out till I reached the threshold and into the porches of the place dashed inside. Belly of the beast. Brenda the receptionist received me with a knowing nod, and I initials the form quickly – S.G. Up the stairs. Into the labyrinth.

... *You have fled me like the hart, having wounded me. I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.* Robbie? Why have you robbed me? Give me my heart back, you'll trip, and you'll fall, and you'll dash it upon the stones upon the ground. Saramago. Says me. Marquez made me cry, Melquiades' parchments hurrying the hurricane sugar cane Cain Dominos falling down on each other on me, 'It's smart to stay slim and trim and get Domino's Energy Lift too' lift me up in the air where I can see my waist slim wastelanding on old age's cleft... cliff. Sugar is good for you, Robbie? Causes heart decease. Disease. A. How old am I? Where am...?

What a maze hallways so long they vanished into dots in distances – left here – left here – in in to the center – straight. They kept everything in the halls because the residents would fall on the ice of the outside and crack their heads like glass, spill hot red wine out. Wine dark sea. I remember her reading that to me. Take the second right. I dreamed about this place a few times. In the dreams, I didn't know my way, and the hallways never ended, and shady attendants in blue-green hospital gowns, three of them, men, always men, would follow me around sticking close to me always staring at me and not answering when I asked them why, why they surrounded me in a circle. And they started to push me, back and forth, pushing me, I cried out for mom. But I didn't make any sound. I was just outside her door. Her door on my right, 316, wait a moment. Gather my bearings.

On that glad night – in secret, for no one saw me, nor did I look at anything with no other light or guide than the One that burned in my I have a secret in my head that no one nose. gnosos no zzzzssss. Go to the shows. Sleep don't weep. Goose-a goose-a gander, Where shall I wander? In my lady's chamber; there you'll find a cup of sack and a race of ginger, upstairs and downstairs, and in my lady's chamber. There I met an old man, who wouldn't say his prayers, So I took him by his left leg, and threw him down the stairs; the stairs went crack; he nearly broke

his back. And all the little ducks went, ‘Quack, quack, quack’. Look for Catholics in the cracks. Protestants *pro* the test. Protest. Kennedy. Dallas the last I saw him see the TV Roy weeping at the cracking of the Catholic cranium. ‘Knock, knock’, there’s someone knocking at my door. Blue Beard had many doors blue doors white wives last door what a sea.

I knocked on her door; I went in without waiting. I took in what a room bankrupting me looked like. It was smaller than it should be. And it was too clean. It had no paintings and soon to be paintings and potteries and the pieces of poetry, like her little blue home in Maine did. Don’t cry. She’ll see. Her place here had three rooms, a living room, a bathroom, a bedroom. Her living room was with a little table and a little counter with a microwave and a fridge underneath and a TV in front of the couch not on and a motel art beside the TV of a ship leaving its harbor. The walls were eggshell white. The door on the right, closed. Bedroom.

“Mom? Its Sarah, I’m here”, I said out loud.

I walked to the door and knocked on it.

Tickticktick the clock and the mousey in went around saying hello lets go for a walk, let’s have a talk reading to... reading to moon night before bedtime... talk about school right. How was school? Who’s this opening this door?

She was on the bed, staring at her dresser. She looked at me and I knew that she didn’t recognize me today. Not at all. That was better than the days when she bared her teeth at me and hissed. Her room looked the same, bare and boring. The dresser was opposite her bed and was mostly empty, but on top of it were many photographs and a clock. No art on the walls.

“Hi mom, it’s Sarah. Sarah... What were you thinking about just now?”

“Hello...”, I said again.

“Hola, seniorita.”

“Hola. ¿cómo estás?”

“Hola. Are you here to knit?”

“No... maybe later. Would you like to knit? Did you do any knitting today, mom?”

... kn kn kn kn kn knit

Must remember not to ask too many questions. I put my purse down beside the bed and kneeled beside her and held her hand, which was veiny and cold and frail. She was still in her nightshirt. She smelled like scat. An accident?

“Are you nice to me?”, she asked me.

“Yes, mom. I’m very nice to you. I’m always very nice to you.”

“Oh, my it’s time to go by Rudy’s”, she said, looking at the clock.

Rudy... Rudy well who was Rudy? Someone from Maine or earlier, Tijuana? Not a Mexican name. Maybe ask her. Follow the train of her thought might be good for her, see how long she can keep it on the same tracks.

“Mom, who is Rudy?”

“Rudy, you know Rudy, cariño. He drives your yellow Camaro. Boothbay Harbor where you keep your little Formula. Hm?”

Rudy... Maine then. Don’t remember him... Maybe a friend, maybe from before I was born. Maybe some stray page from her book torn. Showing me show me.

“Rudy? You remember him mom? Who was he?”

Poor little cariño little confused cariño she doesn’t know better or joking with me like pulling my leg on Boothbay bay that time we went out without Rudy knowing we took his boat and I went up on the nest and looked for the distant white-water rumbling, tuna, tuna. Teatime. So cold up there. So windy wind-hair. Oh, cariño is joking with me sweet thing caring. Share.

“Oh, you know Rudy, he’s your husband.”, mom said.

I blushed. Laughed a little to myself. Three years since vows were last vowed. Then bowed out from the fight. Till death do us part not playing that part anymore. Name wasn’t Rudy. Derr- Don’t say his name anymore, no more, depending on how much wine is in me. Dark sea. Derrick. Damn it. Don’t say his name. Bastard. Better name. Or silence. Der-

- “Okay, mom. Whatever you say.”

She smiled and there was a warmth there in her face that was like childhood.

“Mom, can we go to the bathroom? We need to clean you up real quick, okay?”

Oh, who is this little girl? Does she has to go to the bathy? ¿Dónde está el baño? What hotel is this? Oh, my, I should find it before she, oh so young don’t know how to hold I had a dream I couldn’t hold, it. Not lady like. Stand to my feet, well why am I moving so slow? Quickly, cariño, quickly, carry you to the bathroom we’ll make it making cakes in the kitchen and my oven mits were from Momma, Bethel, knitted them herself, *You knit me together in my mother’s womb*, God will be with us in the tomb, time to get up and go and get the cakes they’re coming out the window sneak out to see the boy Juan and he sang a snatch of Mariachi Vargas in my ear. Nibbling on the ear. Carry cariño. Warm.

I helped her up to her feet, held her shoulder, into the bathroom. She wasn’t so heavy. Lost so much weight. Like a little bird. Such a strange thing life is a recurrence of carryings. Her me. Me her. Two childhoods. And one childhood is very happy, and the other childhood is very sad. We went into the bathroom which was so small and it smelled like bleach and the walls were white like bleach. Small sink on the right, don’t bump it. Help her into the very low tub. Gently turn on the water till... Warm.

Oh little cariña the niña had Robbie's ears yes she'd robbed his ears and sangre pour sangre is the time seen on the screen like Elvis on looping N B C see his knees swing back and forth King crowning the King of Kings and birth is He born again; *I tell you la verdad, no one can see the kingdom of Deus unless all is born again* under Dad. Robby came in and cried at Sarah seeing for the first time. This niña needs a bath! How stinky she is! She made a tinkly in her diaper. Make sure the water is warm. Clean her. Why is this baby in my hands? A cry is a baby asking for love. Oh, how much love there is in the world! How much crying there is in the world! Why is this baby in my handslove?

I washed my mother. It was not gross to me to see the shrinking of her body. It was like washing a baby. When I first washed her, it was very difficult because it felt like an assault on her dignity; it felt like a surrender of her autonomy. Alzheimer's is fighting a lost war. When these things first began, I thought that life was a mistake. But now it is an honor to share in her suffering. Oh, turn the faucet, water's getting into her ear. I felt like a mom. Oh, Derr-I mean, bastard, never wanted children for so long I was afraid too and fear enables fear. I still bought a baby book and read it alone until I got up the courage to leave it on the couch for him to see when he came home from work to drink smoke but he scoffed at my obvious cry and put it under the couch and told me to go get it and throw it out later after we had protected sex; no. I didn't throw it out. I like the name, Juan, like St. John. I like the name, Danielle. Baby names. I can't name this baby in my hands because she's already named; her name is Danielle. But why is this baby in my hands?

There, all clean. Clean towel hanging here. Oh, it's baby blue, her favorite color.

I dried her off.

I dried her off.

Baby blue towel for baby.

Soft...

Dry little cariña niña off so she's clean and dry and warm and soft, no cry, because love answers with love and one is loud and young and loud, and the other is quiet and old and quiet. Love answers love. Amor. Many tongues. Lingua. More warm. Sing to her like S... Sar... like Beth-used to like the singing. What was Momma's lullaby? Oh, how I would like to see a horse. Just one. One more time. Caballo call me a cab from out of this place... Shhhhh.

*"Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleepy little baby.
When you wake, you shall have,
All the pretty little horses.*

*Blacks and bays, dapples and greys,
Go to sleepy you little baby,*

*Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleepy little baby.
Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleepy little baby,
When you wake, you shall have,
All the pretty little horses."*

What? Is she humming? I leaned closer to my mom, wrapped in the towel, and I heard a humming in the way of lullaby, slow and comforting. Used to be a singer. Her voice got too weak and went the way of her weight, small. Held back tears. She used to sing for dad; he married her; her singing captured him when he went down to Tijuana after a bad breakup and he found Christianity again in her voice. Dad is dead. Does she know...? Does she feel his absence in her bed at night? I do feel the absence of Derr- don't. Why couldn't I have found one like dad? Maybe I shouldn't have gone down to Mexico too. Treat women like cattle there. Honeymoon. Forgot her clean nightshirt. Better go get it.

Cariño niña was wrapped in a towel like a mummy. Where was her mommy? Oh, I better look after her till she gets back. Who was singing just now? Oh, how I love a song. Love languages. She's not dressed. Dressing. Ensalada de aguacate I made every day after school and

other things but mostly that, Momma's favorite, to take la patria to Maine-land. Oh what was in it? Oh, I'm trying to remember so I can make it for her. Oh, queso mozzarella en cubos. Tomates cherry. Cilantro. Cebolla roja. Se adereza ligeramente con jugo de limón, aceite de oliva, sal y pimienta. Toss. Serve. White bowl with blue lines made it myself my pottery wheel I love the feeling of clay on mis manos clay from clay to clay again. Todos es círculo de Dios. Shaping a bowl of clay is raising a child; molding tiempo do its timing. Am I? Derri- Wedding. Rudy? Where is? Who cleaned my sheets today? They're so cold. Oh no, the niña is naked get her something to wear, *there four, a man shall leaf his father and mother and be jointed to his wife, and they shall become one jointed arm. Make sure to move together both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.* Leaves of grass. Clothes of grass. Close the door. She needs to wear *the Lord Deus made tunics of skin and clothed them.* Better go get it, Cariño.

A blue nightshirt from the closet and return and looked at the photos on top of the dresser before I dress her. Photo of dad, photo of mom. There was their wedding, and there was my wedding. Where did it all go so wrong? What did *she* have that made him want *she* more than me? She was a white woman. Cheater. Oh, he was afraid of intimacy. One day, we were at the park and there were children swinging on the swings at the park and he stopped and looked at them and I held his hand and squeezed it and it was another question. There was no no this time but the wetting of his eyes that were a yes. And we tried that night. And for three nights. And for three months. And he felt ashamed. Doctor's visit. Whose fault was it? Does it matter? It didn't to me, but I think it did to him, masculinity. Sheets got colder and colder. Distance of miles.

“Cariño? You're getting cold.”

Oh, my mom is getting cold. Cariño? Cariño today.... So a good day today then. No hissing from her... A cool breeze on a desert day. I hurried back into the bathroom and banged my hip. Jacob wrestling with God. Israel? I've given up the fight don't change my name.

I dressed her in her clothes. I rubbed her tummy and kissed her forehead. Oh, it's Sarah. My little Sarah. Niña cariña. My little girl, how long has it been since I've seen you? Oh, but you look so much older in this little blue nightshirt. Oh, should I call your husband, Derrick, into this room? You're so clean and pretty for him like on your día de la boda, oh you're such a pretty... Where is this room? Robb-Say... Say..... s

Mom looked at me for a moment like she used to. Such a brief glimpse says so much. Hmm... I picked her up again and helped her to her bed. I sat her down and held her hand and I opened my phone to the playlist I made of songs she used to sing, a few recordings. Her voice. Oh, this was always so difficult to not cry I played a song called "Con Que Pagaremos"

*Con Que Pagaremos amor tan inmenso
Que diste Tu vida por el pecador?
En cambio recibes la ofrenda humilde
La ofrenda humilde, Señor Jesucristo
De mi corazón.*

*With what do we repay, a love so vast
that You gave Your life for the sinner?
In exchange, accept the humble offering
the humble offering, Lord Jesus Christ,
of my heart.*

*Y cuando la noche extiende su manto
Mis ojos en llanto en ti fijare
Alzando mis ojos veré las estrellas.
Yo se que tras ellas, Cual Padre amoroso
Tu velas por mi*

*And when the night spreads out her mantle
my weeping eyes will be fixed on You.
(With) my eyes lifted up, I will see the stars;
I know that (from) beyond them, loving Father
You watch over me.*

*No puede pagarte con oro ni plata
El gran sacrificio que hiciste por mi
No tengo que darte por tanto amarme
Recibe este canto, mezclado con llanto
Y mi corazón*

*I cannot repay (to) You, with (neither) gold or silver,
the great sacrifice that You have made for me.
I have nothing to give You for so much love to me
Accept this song, mingled with tears,
and my heart.*

Her voice was beautiful and her voice was clear and I wondered if she knew her voice, and I couldn't help but to cry a little for it.

Why was Sarah weeping? Poor little child, weeping mychild. I put my hand on her hand and hold so it doesn't crack. And I thought it would make her feel better if I sang to her so I sang to her my favorite song, *Con Que Pagaremos*, and I sang it quietly but clearly, and I remembered when Robbie heard it and I had robbed his heart from him and held it like I hold Sarah's hand. Love is such trust in the hands. Don't stumble with it.

She is humming to her song. What a soul she has. What a memory is music.

Sol, sol, sol, *Ni un hombre más que pase sin que reine. Ni una sola mujer sin su diadema. Para todas las manos guantes de oro. Frutas de sol a todos los oscuros!* Sarah my daughter don't leave me when I remember that you are with me. Oh, who is this holding my hand? Is this my momma? Bethel?

"Momma? Momma?"

I shook my head. Tears. She wiped them from my face.

El alma es eso entre almas...

I tucked my mom back into her bed and turned the music off and turned off her light and kissed her head. I said goodbye. I said goodnight. I thought this must be what tucking in my neverchild might have been like. I left the room and cried the whole way home. And what would tomorrow be like?

I abandoned and forgot myself, laying my face on my Beloved; all things ceased; I went out from myself, leaving my cares – forgotten among the lilies.

For a moment, I thought that the soul is that between souls.

What is a name? What is my name? Oh, how old am I and how often have I been old and will I be forever old or just Be again?

...That night, I had a dream of my grandmother... her name was...

Bethel... Bethel... House of El... House of God.