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5/16/12

*Lightning: The Story of a Father, his Son, and his Dog, Each with One Eye*

The Father and his Son and his Dog lived in a small town at the end of the tracks. They shared a one-room house with a small yard in the back and a sidewalk-square-paved side entrance. They entered the house through a metal screen door and then a cream colored wood door. Each door slammed behind the other, creating a small crescendo of slams. They went everywhere together, for the most part.

The Son was on the tracks one day after school with a group of other boys. It was their routine to go to there, to walk the tracks, looking for pennies and arrowheads—whatever they could scavenge. Sometimes one of them would've stolen a cigarette from his Father and they would all sit in a row trying to inhale. It was one of these late-light-yellow afternoons.

The Son walked the track like a tightrope with his walking stick in hand, tapping it lightly on each tie, as he progressed. Suddenly he was on the ground, legs out beneath him, sitting in the center of the railway, looking down, with one eye, at the other, cupped in his palm, dripping through his fingers. The other boys were gone in a puff of smoke—like a speeding engine towards the horizon.

At home that night, news of this started a fire in the face of his Father. He paced forward and back in the small house, wall to wall, charging in each direction like a soldier marching into war. The Son was relatively calm considering. His pain of losing his eye and being abandoned by his comrades had subsided and he mostly wanted to rest. But his Father needed to hear an account of every detail: who was with you, how many of them, where were they when you fell, where's your walking stick now, how'd you fall...? In circles

it went nowhere. The Dog lay on his bed and watched, his head tracking the Father's motion side to side.

That night a storm swept in over the town. In fact, the boy had felt the dark cloud pull over him like a blanket at the end of a warm day, as he walked home, eye in hand, unsure what to do next. First it blew: the roof jumped from the beams, the animals tucked next to building walls, and everyone knew there was more to come, except somehow the Father. The wind was just the fuel he needed to stoke his flames of fear and anger that *he* stormed out. Snatching his beaten leather hat from the hook and clutching his cane, against the fiercest wind, he crossed his field and charged towards town; down Main Street pushing headlong through it all like a tunnel through rock.

His fist landed hard on Bill Reilly's front door, Father to Billy Jr. who was in the Son's class and had been at the tracks earlier that day. Bill Jr. stole more cigarettes from Bill Sr. than any other boy and everybody knew it. He was trouble. Bill Sr. had been in this small town as long as the Father. They too used to follow the tracks out after school searching for arrowheads. And, as it were, they too incurred a trauma that changed the nature of their relationship forever. It's never spoken of, though the ghost of it appeared. It hovers heavily in this doorstep moment, holding the two men motionless as Bill Sr. stepped outside to meet his confronter.

Then came the rain. It began all at once from under a black sky, like the Man-in-the-clouds just let'er have it. Back in the small one-room house, the Dog was terrified. Now *he* was jumping and yelping. The windows were glazed, impossible to see through. The walls filled with noise. Suddenly he stopped jumping and barking and then slowly, crouched down and backed into a corner. His hind legs folded tightly and he stretched his long, wire-haired back. Then, he looked up at the window, bowed his head down, took a long exhale

and bounded, forehead first through the glass. He landed in the tall overgrown grass just outside the house and waited for nothing. He ran across the family field and with the speed of a raging, terrified bull, he knocked his way right into the tunnel formed by the Father and he too crossed town. He ran as if entranced and didn't slow for a moment until he arrived at the house of Bill Sr, where the two men were frozen in each other's gaze.

The Dog was sopping wet and bleeding from his crash through the window. Blood had run from his head down his chest and came off his paws as if he, alone, had been running under a cloud that rained red. When he saw his owner it was as if he emerged from his trance and realized all that had happened. He began to wail.

The men shifted their attention to the animal in front of them. It was difficult to discern what was there through the wind and the water and the red. The animal was singing and gesturing wildly but not coming nearer.

More haze: At some point the Father accused Bill Jr. of knocking his Son's eye out and Bill Sr. was aghast. He knew they had had trouble in the past, but his son would never have done such a thing! And at some point both men moved to the Dog who accepted them. When the Father realized it was his Dog he didn't know what to do. But it was still blowing and pouring so the first thing they could do was all three huddled under a corrugated tin roof hut by the side of Bill Sr.'s home. The Father wiped the Dog's fringe back from his forehead to see he was missing one eye. Where it had been was a clean cavity, holding a thimble's worth of fresh rainwater. Nevertheless, the Dog was smiling now. Streams poured from the steel's crevices, closing a curtain around the three.

Back at home again, the Son had passed out. He had spent some time experimenting with his balance—which he had lost when he lost his eye. But soon he

became very tired from walking with his head tilted towards one side. He slumped in his Father's evening pipe chair and fell fast asleep.

The storm was lightening its grip. The rain was falling steadily but with less wind to angle it this way and that. Then it stopped completely, just as suddenly as it had started. It went out with a bang. The sky lit up! They all three watched from under their roof as lightning bolts flared up all around their small encampment and the air became dense and monstrously loud. Dusk had barely sunken into true night, yet the sky was black from the weather—like the day was afraid to open her eyes to it.

After the first set passed, Bill Jr. came out of the house, slamming their (same as the Father's and Son's) screen door than wood door in its frame and stood directly in front of his own father, the Father of his classmate, and a wet, wire-haired, perplexed Dog. He looked squarely at the Father. And just then the corrugated roof exploded! Instantly, the ground rumbled beneath like an archipelago coming loose from its mainland. The Dog gripped the shifting earth. The sheet metal dinged as it broke from its hinges. This small sound transformed into a high pitched ringing that buzzed around them. The ringing and rumble made it all incredibly, incredibly loud.

The land was beginning to warm and smell of its usual dry again. The sun's rays were creeping up the Father's body, ankle to leg to waist. But it was the Dog's panting that eventually woke the Father. Strewn around him lay Bill Sr. and Bill Jr. They looked as if their bodies had been flung aside like dirty laundry. The dog was sitting, stunned and contented in a kind of after shock, his tongue spilling out the side of his mouth. His head tilted sideways, like the Son's had been back at home. As the Father gathered himself and made moves to stand up, he too realized something was terribly wrong. He felt sunburned

as if he had been under the glass of a microscope during a long summer day's fieldwork. No, he felt burnt like slice of toast. No, like the butt of a cigarette. He felt intense heat near him. Heat he had never felt before. And the smell was morbid. Did something die? The heat sent him into a hallucination: he saw steam peeling off the iron tracks after the train's final car ripped by.

The Dog wasn't afraid of the heat or the stink. He lay his pink tongue down on the Father's face and pulled off the char.