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About 1,700 words

The Great Grudge that Never Died

By: Casey Baron

“The waves will always swallow the children, but you must endure.”

That’s what my therapist told me after the dawn of the new world. I sat at the bar as Po Ben dusted the scarce bottles perched on the rickety shelves of the bar. My old-fashioned glass was cupped between my hands while the vodka-coffee liquor-artificial cream mix perfectly blanketed cubes of ice. Previous glasses sat to my right like judgmental exes. Old footage of the 2013 NBA Finals shuttered on the old flat screen and I fed on a bit of chocolaty nostalgia.

“That was the last time we won a chip,” I said. Po Ben responded with a what, and I waved my hand as if to erase the mumbled statement from time itself. I took a second to peek around the area, noticing the usual clan of folk’s performing a Santeria ritual in a booth under a once pristine arch. Never too early for a damn ritual. Everything was once pristine here though; now fat multicolored and ethical electric chords protruded from the walls, light fixtures were either broke or missing, and Po Ben walked around in boxers and wife-beaters. These are the

things keeping us alive, our vices while taking shelter under six-hundred feet of some bucking water. The once crisp grandeur of this hotel housed well-off people, and now people ploughed and moaned in pleasure on tables where a city mayor probably ate. Or probably even where the lively Santeria took place, I can only hope.

I could feel my hands begin to tremble again as the images of art, children, and water started to come back. But I killed them off momentarily by immersing my throat in the remainder of my sweet laced cocktail. That glass would become judgmental as well. I pushed it to my right with the rest, tapped my fingers on the cracked counter, and Po Ben made me another. The game was just hitting the fourth quarter with the Heat down by ten. Twenty-one years after the fact and I still got little hair raises watching everything unfold. I sipped again from my new mix, clacking my fingers against sweating glass, and waiting. My new world ritual was taking shape, wake, drink, oh I forget, shower then drink, and choke the pain out of brain pinching memories.

I rose from the stool and apathetically walked to the kitchen. Canned chicken or whatever the fuck would provide nutrients for the day was my prime objective. Through the double doors I went, canned chicken I retrieved, and I walked out with the mission accomplished. Now a new face sat at the opposite end of the bar; he sported curly hair with a salt and pepper goatee. A burlap sack stuffed with something heavy in it, took up space in front of him. I resumed nostalgic intake, the fourth quarter set to begin, while nursing on my white Russian and picking at the community of chicken cubes.

“Weird drink for a man of you...stature,” he said.

I answered no remark and continued taking everything in.

“Basketball fan,” he said.

“Yes, I was, when games were played, and I would go with my best, I mean, former best friend to view them,” I said.

“Well whether they are, or are not, you’re still watching this game with a certain angst, best friend.”

Friend, he had the balls to call me that. I spent a year in that edifice of drowned steelwork and that’s all he returned to offer. *Tick Tick*. The noised emanated from the burlap sack. The man moved towards me and placed a hand on my shoulder and his mouth to my ears.

“Ten minutes,” he said. His lips retracted from the airspace of my ears before he kissed the broad strokes of my shoulders. Po Ben reached for the sack to investigate, but the new man threatened him off that idea.

“How you doing,” he said.

“Fuck you, Wolfe.”

“Watch it,” he said.

“I’m good, looks like you picked up some things from up top I see.” I nodded at the Walrus tusks stashed away in his thick black best. The North Face, it said, now it’s just a remnant of times gone. I took another swig and back to the TV.

“Yep, picked it off some carcasses. More of those things around in this area than when the retired folks flooded Aventura.”

I smirked for a second, “good to know,” I said. “I haven’t been up top in a couple months.”

“You should consider changing that, like now. Because you won’t want to be here in a few minutes.”

Tick Tick.

“You’re still going through with that? After all these years.”

“Yes I am, I just came to get you and our property.”

“The coins are safe, but you can’t just come here and blow the place up. People depend on this. On this shell of a life.”

Tick Tick

The game was entering its somewhat inevitable outcome, all things considered. The Spurs took the ball and the lead with only seconds remaining.

“I can do it. You know why? My father ran this place and he fucked me over in this place. Now we destroy it and we leave and we move on.”

Wolfe’s father owned this hotel, and while he detested his son’s life, he would take Wolfe’s boyfriend here and they would spend weekends together. That was before Wolfe met me as a patient in his private practice. Wolfe never did let it go, so he hatched a plan. Blow the place and let the sea fully take it, so it can be no one’s refuge. Maybe then, in his mind, he could move on.

“Look at this place, Charles. It’s absolute shit. These people can leave, but I won’t be responsible for them once we get to the surface.”

He didn’t even get to finish his rousing speech. Po Ben began to inspect the sack once more and I shook my head in a no-don’t-do-it type fashion towards him. Wolfe spotted him regardless. The Heat recovered the ball with nineteen seconds left, and the inevitable loss shifted. Down by three became tied all-around and overtime in the blink of an eye. If only Po Ben’s fate would be so lucky, but that was sealed like the package of fresh technology used to be back in the day. No destiny was changing for him. Wolfe walked up to the sack and snatched Po Ben’s body from behind the bar counter, propped him atop the sack, and repeatedly skewered

the guts from his torso with his handy tusk. The Santeria squad of women scattered from their table, lunging towards their living areas above.

Tick Tick

“I guess he won’t find what’s in the sack,” Wolfe said.

“Yeah and curiosity killed the cat, but you’re still a fucking asshole,” I said. I finished off the last of my exes. “We should leave, now.”

Wolfe walked off ahead towards the lift and I moved towards Po Ben. I would have saved him against anyone else. Anyone but Wolfe, not my partner, no matter his level of asshole behavior. The Heat won the game in overtime with a blocked shot from Bosh. Ben always loved that ending. I kissed my wrist and pointed to the sky, depending on his mood in heaven he may spit down on me or look upon my soul with kindness for the gesture, I made my way to the lift anyway. The images began to rush back on our way up. I fell to my knees clasping at my head trying to claw the images from my brain tissue itself.

“Charles, Charles remember,” Wolfe said. The lift continued to rise, its mechanical gears lifted Wolfe and I from my heaven and his hell, into the opposite of each. Each mechanical piece of the lift began to take on new forms, as the metal fences turned into peach walls with drawings of families and houses. And Wolfe dissipated into air as maybe twenty to twenty-five kids in seats filled his spot. This is how it always started. I could see myself in my tie and dress shirt, a new one every time the nightmare took shape. That day we were talking about heroes. Those kids would put masks on my face every time we spoke on the topic. Then the lights flickered off for a second and the kids turned instantly from happy to scared. I peered through the glass slit in the door and kids ran past my view before water rushed them out of sight. The water then bulldozed its way into my classroom, taking its property and stifling me awake.

Wolfe returned and so did the mechanics of the lift as we hit the top. We yanked up the gate to it and let in the light of the new world. The sky was blue like doors residing in my nightmares, and not a cloud intruded upon its moment. The breeze brought with it a brown grime of a smell, infused with heavy saltwater. There were some dead animal carcasses scattered around the never ending view of ocean water. I soaked it all in like a proud daddy. Across the way on the roof of another submerged tower were two polar bears green with algae spots. Their bodies looked frail, but the bear began to fling their dirt riddled white paws at each other. Each bear doing its best to maul the other into cannibalistic submission.

“So this is the world now,” I said.

“Yes,” Wolfe said.

Tick Tick.

The detonation of the bomb hundreds of feet below shook the top of the tower, and it began to collapse beneath us. Before it did so Wolfe and I rushed to his boat, started up the engine, and drove off. I looked back at the mauling bears for one last time, taking in their majestic scene of a battle.

“Grudges don’t die, you know. They just morph into uglier things, like a kid’s artsy drawing in pre-school.”

“I know,” he said. Mr. Wolfe Wellstack wrapped his arms around me and placed my head on his shoulder. It was the first time he held me in a year, and since then the nightmares have subsided.