

Eyes Without a Face

by Adam Strong

It's tough when muscle gets in the way of memory. The way pain is the only thing I can remember about certain things. Fifth grade, that's what I think of. I think of pain. Not just abstract pain, not some we'll get to it later adolescent angst or ennui. I've been through that. I'm talking about lying in the middle of a bike path, the bike under me, my leg on top of spokes, bicycle spokes. My bicycle because bullies, I mean three or four of them, Peter, Rohan, Tobin, these three followed me from school. They rode their bikes right after mine they bumped into me. They threw rocks, they jammed sticks into my spokes. Then I fell. I fell down and I cried and they called me a fucking pussy. And they hit. I was on the ground and they hit. They kept hitting. They punched me in the stomach.

Breath. One of those things you don't realize until it's gone.

Thought I was dying there.

Wasn't death. Was some sort of birth really.

Lying there, the heat and humidity of a Miami afternoon. Grass poking me, spokes and tires and handlebars, and faces, the three of them there.

Punching and kicking.

One of them is wearing vans. The shoes. Vans.

The things I saw on my student's foot that took me there. When they ask me, "What was fifth grade like for you Mr. Strong."

The first thing I remember isn't a first kiss. Isn't Mom picking me up and listening to Led Zeppelin together. All this comes much, much later.

What I remember is lying there, feeling the breath out of me.

Three faces above me. Tobin, Peter, Rohan

Remember the words. Faggot. Pussy. Fuck.

Remember the lack of justice.

Lack of faith. In anyone, in myself.

Wasn't just once either. Happened almost every day. If I made it home ok, there were popsicles, fudgesicles, orange creamsicles,

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there were two rows of cable channels on the cable box. Cable box connected to a cord, to the TV. Press the buttons and change the channels. Snap and it's Huey Lewis and the News. If this is it. Snap and it's Billy Idol, Eyes Without a Face. Those eyes and that face. Billy Idol. The sneer. Even when I made it home ok, I still saw their faces everywhere.

Tobin, Peter, Rohan

Faggot, Pussy, Fuck.

Those were the good days. On the bad days I'd get home by walking. Walking the bike that bruised my balls. Yes. My testicles, black and blue from the bicycle chain he hit me with. Over and over again. Knocked my bike over and beat me with my own bike lock.

Faggot pussy. What are you gonna do now?

The reasons why. The reasons for the beatings. The bullying. The why in the why me.

I didn't take it. Didn't sit there and get punched. Didn't sit there with the faggot and the pussy and the fuck. I fought back. Hard. Came back from a punch with another punch. I was no match for them. No match and all. Wasn't even a contest.

Something inside with all that going on. At the end of the day I still had the snap of cable channels. Had a swimming pool, and fudgsicles, and I had my MTV. Still had Yes's Owner of a Lonely Heart. As long as Billy Idol wasn't on, I could forget about it. If just for an afternoon.

