

Mural, Mosaic, and Satori

by Brian Michael Barbeito

ONE

(Jacob, the tall ship mural, the dusk and night, almost drowning in the undertow of the wave, the moon watching its earth.)

The mural started at the bottom most part of the building, right where the thick grasses meshed against the stucco wall. That side of the building was the one that faced south. The mural was of a tall ship, a symbol of ages before, and was both noticeable and well pronounced because there were no other paintings on buildings in that area. Every shade of blue must have been used, in the sky and in the ocean. The picture showed the ship tilting, its sails catching strong winds, storm winds, and one got the distinct feeling that this had all happened before, the game of moving and swerving in the storms, and the way a vexatious sky toyed with the wooden vessel. Each time was dangerous, but the ship had survived its knocks and sways as the flags and marks and scars presented a plethora of ship poems and smaller stories about journeys, mishaps and victories.

The boy Jacob stared all around as he often was prone to do. He looked at the ship and the sky and remained lost for long moments in its air where he thought that he saw birds hiding in and amongst the clouds. He also felt a sort of vertigo from looking up with an arched neck for so long, and when he looked down again, the world spun wobbly while he glanced around for his parents and saw only glowing pot lights positioned and shining up at the base of the ship. Then he heard a voice, the familiar female voice.

Jacob, what are you doing? I thought you were right behind us. Don't get caught up like that.

And afterwards came the father's voice. *He is alright, Mary. The boy is all right. He was right there all the time. I got my eye on him.*

They walked along, and sometimes the boy held the hand of the mother and sometimes not. They walked beside the beginnings of a pier past some local fishermen, and then went down to the edge of the sea and strolled along there. It was getting to be night, and the dusk folded itself up like a handy rug, but one that had completed its shift for the day. The conversation between the adults continued with the sounds of the sea and its whitecaps providing a sort of stereo effect as an echo ensued by the small and large condominiums to the left and just a couple hundred yards in from the Atlantic.

It's a good area, said the mother, and there is a shopping mall close.

And the grocery store, the highway, and the entire inter-coastal. Yes it is right, replied the father.

The father and the mother had agreed in that moment to purchase one of the places that was close to the mural of the old tall ship. Of course, such decisions have to be made after proper contemplation, and it was their second or third time surveying the area. Jacob did not hear this conversation, because he was looking at the moon, and in a moment would come one in a series of brushes with death for Jacob. The waves were lapping calmly and predictably enough, but in a moment a larger wave arrived and claimed its right to embark upon the sand. In doing so, the water crashed a loud noise and took Jacob back with it towards the larger sea. In the ocean, he did not know what was happening because it all occurred in a flash instant. Not only was he under the water, but the undertow had taken him to a secondary level beneath. The outward force and pull dragged him farther, about ten to fifteen feet, just at the moment his father had reached for him.

Mike! Cried the mother. Grab him!

Then the father who had missed the lunge for Jacob's arm gathered himself again and leaped forward towards the greater sea. Jacob had come up, but was unconscious, not for lack of air, not because he had hit his head on a piece of coral, but because he blacked out from shock and fear. The father grabbed the boy and

pulled him inwards. When they got to the shore the boy awoke. He cried and screamed, still enveloped in a type of agony that had come fast as the dusk had left. They shook off his cloths, tried to dry his double crowned head with a small towel, and comfort him. The crying and shaking stopped, but on the inside he was nervous and a motor had started in his chest that could not be turned off.

They headed back to the hotel and the moon out there watched indifferently but still succinctly all of the happenings under and about itself.

TWO

(Waking up near the Atlantic Ocean, hurricanes and hurricane shutters, a boy touched by nature and alone-ness but not by the larger world.)

There was a time when the hurricanes were prone to arriving, a time that was known as hurricane season. This was a ritual of nature that sometimes came to fruition and sometimes did not. Once there was a hurricane that came, but before hand Jacob and his family had cleared out and headed far inland along roads that meandered like arteries, arriving at a small two story motel where they stayed for a couple days.

Most of the time, the windows just stayed clear and the metallic hurricane shutters waited scrunched up on either side of large frames. Nobody really noticed them or talked about them one way or the other, but Jacob usually took some time to glance at them and sometimes he became deeply pensive about what they meant and what they stood for. He thought of natural violence that had to do with the wind and the Atlantic Ocean. He thought of the Gulf Stream, that important title, that someone had shown him on a map and explained about in detail. He could not come to terms with all the nomenclature of such things, and struggled when trying to understand the mechanics involved with them. In another sense though, he felt a 'knowing' for this thing called 'Gulf Stream,' such as when a person meets another and feels intuitively in sync with that being.

It was the first and second mornings of his arrivals for the long stretches of time that were spent in those subtropical climes, that he remembered the most. He recalled them precisely because of a recurring phenomenon of not remembering where he was when it was morning. The routine of waking up in a cold country most of the time, and going to school, was what his mind and body were used to. Now, in this far off place, his mind and body awoke to something different. Curt and freshly pressed white linen sheets that stayed on a bed spacious. Cool air conditioning, and thick blinds and curtains to block out the sun and that also kept noises at bay. But there was something, a small slit in the blinds, in the middle, and also small openings at the sides, that let in a certain amount of light. This was the light from the benevolent sun that waited out over the sea and infused the day with a preternatural type of glory. But these were not the main things. The main things were the sounds, which were not sounds at all, but a single sound, a continuous chorus from the sea's waves that lapped gently. This and the smell of the air, even though the air was mixed with freshness and slight mildew laced scents...

And he did not in those waking moments know where he was, or why, but he liked it, this waking up in a new reality, a reality akin to, at the least, a lower realm of heaven. So there were the moments...quiet moments lived but unknown intellectually, where the body and spirit absorbed the room and the sounds, and there was nobody to interfere, explain, to judge or condemn, or even to assign praise or adoration. There was only Jacob and the room and the Atlantic Sea outside, as the hurricane shutters waited their wait...a marking, a warning, for some other time that lurked before and might lurk again.

But not now.

Not in the first good new mornings unburdened and properly alone.

THREE

(The old lady inland, various forms of solitariness, and taking an anole.)

Leave my lizards alone, cried the old lady in a nasal sort of whine, They are my friends, and you are going to trouble them. I know what you are up to. You are trying to capture them and they are not to be captured.

Don't worry, I won't. I just like to follow around them and look at them.

But Jacob was intent on capturing one or two and taking them home. The old lady was a great aunt on his father's side, a peripheral figure, as was everyone. Jacob was a world unto his own, and not overly interested in people. He had an older sister, and though she was around, they did not share much, if anything. This lady was to live one hundred and one years. She resided about an hour away from the Atlantic Ocean and its adventures. Inland and a solitary bird. Long since widowed, she stayed in a bungalow with religious icons on dusty shelves, and roaches that came out and traveled along carpets in the night. They always visited there for at least a couple days. Sometimes Jacob played with a toy, like the time he had a man and a woman that were small divers, and traveled in a kind of raft with a motor on the back and a ladder on the side. But most of the time Jacob stared into space or else hunted for anoles, the small lizards indigenous to the region.

This time he had gotten the idea to take one or two home.

He was having his own sort of trouble with it though. They didn't want to be caught, and he was not overly skilled with the hunting. He, unlike his father, or the boy named Jimmy that lived in the apartments across the way back at the ocean, had a fear mechanism that kicked in when he went to grab one or the other. And now the day was becoming shorter and dusk creeping in.

Jacob, called the mother, don't go far. We are going soon.

He looked around. There was a statue of the Virgin Mary that stayed in front of the house. It was plastic, and infested almost always with hornets' nests. A strange site, the Mother of God waiting, contemplatively, with hands outstretched a bit, stepping on

a snake, and in and around her back and dress hovered the hornets. It was near there, by a shaded stucco wall, that he found his lizard and captured it. He transferred it to a blue duffel bag with some grass and dirt.

The anole would be a carry on.

The anole would come home to the north to a terrarium with warm lights, a log, and a plastic and vertically cut orange juice container with rocks on it, nestled in the sand and filled with water.

We are going now, called mother, are you ready?

Don't trouble my friends, barked the old lady, they are mine and not yours.

I am ready, declared Jacob, I am all ready to go, and I didn't catch or touch anything...

FOUR

(Teachers, learning cursive, the morning dread, and the Atlantic far away.)

It was school, and the Atlantic was far away.

Too far away.

Since as long as he could remember, a feeling of dread that bordered on the overwhelming took hold of him each morning and stayed until at least mid-afternoon and sometimes longer. The only reprieve came when he could convince the mother that he was ill. At times like that he could stay with a grandmother and wile away the day doing nothing. Doing nothing was his meditation and it came easily to him. It was more than a meditation in fact, and bordered on a calling. He was made to do nothing, and sometimes to watch things. He could watch the grandmother recite the rosary with faith and quietude as she whispered each decade to herself, and she would talk to him well, like an adult, and fix eggs in the mornings while in the afternoons they ate cookies or crackers and watched soap operas or game shows. But mostly it was school...

His teachers impressed him as beings with strange agendas, bent on conformity and policing. They gave him much trouble, though he barely caused them any. He only wanted to stare out the windows or

into space, but they took him to task on this. Each semester there were parent teacher interviews where he was admonished for not trying, and often there were other times where meetings were arranged so that the authority figures could talk with his mother.

He is not really trying. We think he is as smart as the others, but his grades don't show it. He only wants to coast by.

Well, said the mother, I am going to stick on him this time, and make him do his work.

Another thing, said what had become to Jacob a faceless and nameless teacher that could represent any of his teachers, He does things his own way, and we do not understand why. The French teacher, who couldn't be here tonight, agrees with me on this. I spoke to her. He is getting some C's, but mostly D's in her class.

Well I am going to make him work harder in French too. This is going to be a wakeup call.

Then they both looked at Jacob, waiting for a response, and he would nod his head in the affirmative, trying to play the game.

One of the worst things, the teacher continued, is writing and reading. In the writing, everybody does as they are told, and since we learned cursive, writes for example their lower case 'a' by first making a curve upwards to form the first part of the 'a,' and then downwards over that line and up the other side. This is the proper way. Your son loops the 'a' right around. Why do you do that Jacob?

Jacob just shrugs at this. He would probably feign ignorance if he knew, but he did not really know. Neither did he realize that how you made your lower case 'a' was a matter of such paramount importance. He felt like an alien come to an odd land where the local culture, mores, and norms were not understood or often misinterpreted.

Jacob, called his mother.

Yes?

The 'a's.' What are you going to do about the 'a's?'

Oh. I am going to try and write them better.

Are you going to try and turn over a new leaf? Jacob was not an eye roller, nor was he disobedient, contrary to peoples' perception,

but if he could do something like roll his eyes just then, he would have. This phrase, 'turn over a new leaf,' was one his mother used all through grammar school in order to try and save face, in order to try and have him hope for a better tomorrow, in order to make sense of his report cards.

Yes. A new leaf. I am going to turn over a new leaf.

Next time, the teacher said, we will talk about these things again, and his reading comprehension. He can read, but we think he does not understand what he is reading.

Jacob heard the words but was staring out the window. The rain each night that week had threatened to become snow. Now it looked as if it was happening. A wet icy sky, and below it a new storm, obviously pregnant with great energy, now birthing, now pushing itself and remnants of autumnal leaves against the brick school building.

Jacob.

Yes?

Let's go.

Okay. I am going. I mean I am coming.

A new leaf. Remember?

Ya. A new leaf.

And they went out of the building and drove home through what was becoming the new snow in the nights that arrived earlier and earlier.

At times like this he would go to bed and not think about leaves, but instead about night terrors and how they would come, and about the homework he did not do, and about the voices and sounds that he could hear in his ears. Bells, whispers, crying, warnings, and other sounds. But he couldn't make out exactly what they were and what they were trying to tell.

In the mornings, school, and the fresh dread and the cursive and the rest.

FIVE

(Missing the bus, the odd ravine, and the peculiar beings.)

The rest was often more troublesome than any cursive dilemma or drone teacher. The rest often involved events that were weird, that could not be categorized, and that presented more questions than answers. For most, there are some places that get seen or felt that are peculiar, that are sometimes frightening, sometimes uplifting, but for Jacob, his 'rest' occurred frequently, and it was only in rare circumstances that he could hope to wrest himself from his brand of 'rest,' or the 'rest' that the universe had bestowed upon him.

One time, after missing the bus, he walked along through the ravine in deep November. The snow was high and some coyotes in the distant field wandered along the perimeter. He tried to walk faster, but the ground was like quicksand, so he settled in a phoney calm stride in order to make any headway at all. Luckily, the coyotes dispersed either losing interest or being scared off by some foreign noise or event. That ravine was a series of ravines that always held two worlds. One world was the orthodox natural world of trees, of small summits, of fences from long lingering backyards, of dim yellow lights that waited in rooms of large old houses with aged mean trees whose branches threatened and cajoled in the winter winds. But another world peaked out, not only to Jacob, but to others as well, for he had heard talk of stories similar to his own, though he never told his to anyone.

As he walked that day, he came upon a backyard where there were a group of people dressed in circus gear performing small tasks. These people, one man, some kind of a leader, two other men, and two other women, looked on paper at least, like regular people, even if adorned in strange regalia. But why were they there? And what were they doing in the approaching dusk in a cold backyard full of snow? They acted like humans, and that was the thing. That they seemed as if they were acting. Back and forth they walked, without anyone talking. And sometimes they would move their arms up, but it would be in a robotic manner, as if they were testing their arms. And who actually looked at their arms when moving them? Nobody did. This was not something that was done. But here, with this set, with this strange grouping of beings, it was commonplace.

Same with the legs, and then the neck would swerve slowly and methodically, and one of them would lift something, some peculiar object that could not be identified, and pass it to another, whereupon the other would place it on the ground. Nonsensical. No fire, no smoke, no water sprinkler system. No laughter, no song or dance or music. Just the group of beings moving around the yard like a group of aliens pretending at being human.

Jacob, as he looked upon these things, had the queerest, most frenetic feeling he had ever experienced, a feeling that intensified as he got closer. Jacob was a natural empath to begin with and also prone to anxiety, to light sensitivity, and to many more things besides. But far from making him a fantasy prone personality, this sensitivity to the world had given him a great gift of discernment from the earliest of days. He could see the world beyond psychological and secular man-made sets. It was not a world of angels and metaphysical meanderings, but it was a world of raw objects and nature.

A world he was very familiar with.

And these people, or whatever they were, did not belong in it.

But they were there.

And they did not disappear or ascend or descend as he approached. They continued their odd movements...

Arms up.

Arms down.

Arms across.

Walk forward.

The panic at seeing something from a different world acting in one's own world is almost insurmountable. Especially on a solitary November walk home in the cold darkening ravine. With the racing motorboat engine heart he walked past them as one stopped and watched him intently.

Pure psychic energy passed from his eyes to Jacob's eyes.

Then Jacob walked home.

What else could one do, after all?

Never again did he see the beings, and he never told his parents, neighbors, or classmates.

SIX

(Refuge, blankets and books, and listening to the sounds of the inner ear)

The time between after-school and dinner was empty and vast. There was nothing to fill up this block so Jacob indulged in his own diversions. If the others invited him to the tobogganing hills, it was not bad, but only took up an hour or so. His sister, if around, was busy with homework in an upper office room or simply preoccupied in pursuing the things of her own world. Saxophone, listening to albums, talking on the phone. Walking past her room he could hear The Rolling Stones, Foreigner, and others. He did not have a record player, but had collected some books.

He read the series of *Encyclopedia Brown*, the boy detective that solved crimes and mysteries in his own neighborhood. Jacob liked the feeling of following the stories, and also the carefully and skillfully drawn pictures denoting Encyclopedia and his friends. Another one was the *Choose Your Own Adventure Series*, where Jacob found himself on everything from outer space adventures to time travel sojourns. There were more, like *Charlie Brown* and *Snoopy*, and his father's old *Popular Mechanics* magazines.

When the books hurt his eyes or lost a bit of their charm, he would carefully set them on the shelf, valuable artifacts now at rest, and gather blankets and pillows in order to slumber or day dream upon. Sometimes he would stretch on the bed, and sometimes he would reside on the floor, just for a change. His bed had two drawers, and behind these drawers was a secret passage way that could fit one person, and sometimes he went in there and just stayed very still. Jacob could hear the silence, and then something else would appear.

The buzzing.

The whirling.

The quick bells.

The voices in the distance.

Talking.

Singing songs.

Singing warnings.

Worried.

Worried voices.

He could not understand everything he heard, but it seemed like the voices were extremely caring and trying to tell him that this person or that person were not to be trusted, were thinking harmful thoughts.

Hmmmm.

He listened, and the more he listened the clearer he could hear. They did not seem omniscient, but they did seem like they had an inner line to some information. He never talked with his mother about the voices, but sometimes about the ringing.

It's keeping me up.

Maybe it is the Holy Spirit, said his mother.

Maybe. Do you really think so?

Yes. It might be. I don't know for sure. I think it could be.

I don't know.

Maybe it is Baby Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and Mary, said the mother.

I have a feeling it is something like that, Jacob would reply, *yet I don't feel well.*

What is wrong?

Not sure. I feel yucky.

Yucky?

Ya.

Well, try to get some sleep. You have lots to look forward to.

Like what?

We are going away in a couple of weeks.

And with that, Jacob would try to sleep. Going away from the North, and being close to the Atlantic would be well and right. Yes. But that was a long time in his world. With all the sounds, all the buzzing and ringing and voices, a few weeks might as well be half a

year or longer. But he would manage, as he always did. He would have to manage.

SEVEN

(A return to the Atlantic, traveling along in the world, and the experience of the unitive.)

Later on down the calendar, when the days had been crossed and crossed and crossed again, when the mornings with their pale empty facade of uniformity and the sounds and sometimes terrors of the nights had been struggled through, the time to head south arrived. Jacob wondered at times like those, what would have happened if there was not such a reprieve from the world he had come to know. He packed his few things quietly. Homework he would neglect and other books he would browse through, and his clothing- shorts, t-shirts, undergarments, a few pairs of pants, and even some sweaters for good measure. The adult world handled money, passports, tickets, and other.

Through Wardair or else Eastern, two of the big airlines used at the time, they would arrive in the right region again. Rental cars and night time and listening to conversations about things he could barely remember, and then he was back in the place by the shore. The tall ship mural still waited in the nights, like an old friend or even a brother that for some reason had to live with another family far away.

And the shutters...

The shutters affixed to strong metal framing in big sills. The shutters that saw salt air, calm days, overcast afternoons, rolling thunder, blitzkriegs of lightning and rain.

The shutters that must have even seen Poseidon come at times slightly out of the sea just there. Poseidon, looking furtively or calmly around in the midst of a hurricane to see what could be gotten and taken back to watery underworlds and sub-taverns untold.

The days were spent walking along beaches or swimming in the sea, in pools, and roaming generally around the property. The nights

included television or radio, and sometimes reading or conversations with others of the same age if some were around. These took place on balconies or lawn chairs that faced the Atlantic and its then dark waves. The older kids and teenagers sometimes had a bonfire down the way just in front of the vacant lot with haphazardly foraged pathways, tall wild palms that reached to the skies and strange but resilient feral shrubs lush and with various spectrums of green hues. But he never went there and instead watched from a distance either on the ground or from the long three story corridors with aluminum railings on cement open-aired hallways.

One night he and his sister were taken with some close family friends to dinner far in another county.

It was a fancy place that some contacts of the friends had just opened. Everything went well enough and without any ruffle or hitch. On the way back something wild and cosmic happened, and this event would at the least help Jacob to stay a course, some kind of a course, through the regular world he had come to know and more often than not, dreaded.

The stretch of road was a one lane highway and the van clicked along without interruption. There were the adults in the front and in the middle; though it was a large van, there was not seats for everyone. Jacob and some others stretched out on the floor towards the rear of the vehicle. Some were talking and some were quiet as Jacob just glanced out of the rectangular window at the shapes and lights passing by. Slowly he felt an opening of sorts in his chest and head, and an infusion of energy from the larger universe. The energy that visited him as he lay there was like a bubbling and sparkling electrical weightless waterfall. Pouring and pouring itself over him and into him, he tried to get up but could not move. He waited and watched, as if an operation was being performed on his spirit. He felt himself not rising into the air, or floating this way or that to other worlds, but still there, still there, being showered with an intense energy that had wisdom inside of it or else washed away his mind and filled it with a higher order of knowing or grace.

He felt and knew at a cellular and soul level that he had come from that energy or a part of it, and he also felt that it would guide him back to itself in time. For now though, it was only visiting him, and the visit, whether by accident or design, was enough to let him taste the divine, or the source or ground of things, of being, of all.

The girl beside him sensed something was happening, and gave him a quizzical and long glance. Then she gently touched his arm.

Are you all right? She asked.

He managed a look over and gave her a true enough reply of,
Yes. I am okay.

And she left it at that while the van continued to travel along its way, which was a road straight and winding both, that went along parallel to the shore, with the inter-coastal and all that it encompassed on one side, such as its bobbing boats and manta rays and wealthy homes, and the Atlantic and its world on the other.

And soon they passed a wall that was five stories tall and adorned with a painting.

The mural of the tall ship, proud and strong, shined upon with high wattage pot lights from thick swaying grasses below. It waited as it always had. Somehow the ship on the wall had grown calm and seemed still and centred, even though it was depicted in the same storm.

This was because of the events it had weathered and known and lived through. It was also because of the materials it had been made with once upon a time. And there was a third reason, but it was unnameable and for the most part unknown.

