

Petty Injuries

by Caleb J. Ross

His most violent injury was birth. No fault of his own, of course. If concerned with fault, one might be more satisfied with what the balanced would call petty injuries; paper cuts, fork mishaps, those resulting from infatuation with and lack of knowledge regarding electrical outlets. Fortunately, for Sam's mother, fault and blame are neglected devices.

Fault and blame can be forgotten after three steep flights of stairs. Pregnant-lady-take-the-elevator kind of steep. I-said-elevator, holy-shit-she's-falling kind of steep. A-faked-relief-when-the-child-is-born, but-born-special kind of steep.

Sam's frame is shoddy. His crooked three pieces; feet, knees, torso look stacked by a drunken creator and seem to disobey balance with every step. "Spider legs," his mother calls them, struggle to keep his torso from touching the ground. His head rides the resistance, cocked deep on a hinge, his shoulder a pillow like, as the old saying goes, he's got a few screws loose. Limbs are last minute accessories, there only to make sense of the larger picture; to make him fit as best unfair parts can do.

At the top of the stairs Sam knows about gravity. Although never completely at terms with the reasons behind walls, the floor, hand rails, he understands them and sees no reason to test their boundaries.

Laughter sounds like laughter but Sam knows which side he is on. Sam tops out at understanding the simplest concepts, but he is conscious of friendship.

At school or home friendship is a fixed pairing based on money or a court ordered community service project. Petty Theft Nathan has

earrings and smells like a foot. On Tuesdays and Thursdays Elaine comes from an organization up town and brings colored paper and small toys for Sam and small gift boxes for Sam's mother who hasn't smiled since Sam's most violent injury.

He knows this laughing boy laughs at him. Sam would run, hide like his mother has told him to do, but from the top of the stairs the world looks too far down to grasp. He understands depth and recognizes the potential for pain upon impact to the hard ground—he remembers it from his most violent injury—so he stays far from the edge. But the boy laughs and Sam, more than he wants silence, wants a kindred.

Pushing the enemy down this large flight of stairs is a feat only in that Sam's hand-eye coordination has never been fair.

When it's all over and the enemy's body no longer laughs, when it has stopped bouncing from step to step, Sam is pulled away by unfamiliar arms into the tightest hug recent memory allows. He cries when the ambulance siren gets loud and the lights move fast. A crowd gathers quickly and hovers with feigned contribution; not offering help, but only the open-arm gesture of help. The excitement, the wide eyes and gasps are all outside Sam, but inside, behind the crying, Sam stares down at this possibility of his first true friend, special now and bleeding from the head at the bottom of the stairs.

