CfK

by Kilean Kennedy

Our parting shot, one final song coming in at under a minute thirty, captured and fed to the amps by a lineup of foamy Radioshack microphones. There wasn't even a title but it did have our name in there, shouted, over and over. We can still hear it, living on in the sore bones of us stuck forever local. A sturdy and goatish original by know-nothing punks from the sticks. Who cares if we were puny and smelled like fresh milk? For a few years we played and rocked, even turned the Appalachian soundscape a little brown at the edges. At least at first. Mainly grades 8 through 10. And we didn't sing for those granular salt-of-the-earth types sprung up all around us like sour mushrooms. Instead we scribed tunes about homicides and things we'd seen on reruns of Law and Order. The actual music was hillbilly garage metal and then this noisy Goth and clog vibe we originated. It confused and aroused. The farm kids and pool hall rats loved us.

We didn't get any prom gigs but we played the county fair one year, five feet high on an empty trailer bed, backed by a stack of itty-bitty Marshalls, crashed-up derby cars and riding lawnmowers tricked out for the nightly pulls. A championship moment, indeed. Though it's hard to even mention without circling back around to our lead axeman, Dougie. He didn't like the attention or the bright show lights at the fair. Dougie wasn't happy with our songs about the murderous and the rich, saying the tunes were hollow, plastic even. According to him those songs, and the people in them, lacked heart and a much-needed dose of smart assery. Dougie was a visionary.

Much different than his dad. Dougie's dad owned this scuddy Motor Inn place and then one day renamed it, calling it The United Sates Motel, showcasing his megawatt loyalism not one hundred yards away from a really well-known cave, or what used to just be this intense gaping hole in the ground. It was a spot we'd occasionally loiter and use as an echo chamber for our latest

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profanities. The Motel was bad enough but then the guy who owned the cave, suddenly roused by a fresh surge of Patriotism, decided to apply a few changes of his own. This guy was a friend of Dougie's dad and his dim idea was to put up a sign and start charging admission to the cave. This all happened during the kickoff to our most recent Desert War. So along with charging five bones to stare at spray-painted stalagmites and Marlboro Light butts mashed into cold mud, the guy started calling his place American Cave. Right across the road from The United States Motel. Dougie shook his head at that, played even harder.

A lot of things about Dougie people didn't understand. One of those people being, of course, his dad. Unlike that vicious bastard we didn't care if Dougie liked guys. Not one single bit. Whatever Dougie was into was always fine with us because he was so supremely solid. Everything he liked seemed to make him better. There was a joyful menace to the way Dougie worked his chords and it coated our sound in a gloss of dignity. Dougie's dad hated it, though. Couldn't stand Dougie's passions or our band. He'd started getting on Dougie real bad about the dark glam look we had going at the time. A couple months after the fair he threw Dougie out of the house and went berserk and trashed his gear. Dougie split. He started sleeping in a two-man pup tent behind the bus garage at school. We visited him every night, took him warm sacks of grub from Taco Bell, extra blankets, firecrackers, even offered our own basements but Dougie refused. When the grass started frosting at night Dougie got brave and snuck back home looking for a few of his Bowie CDs and heavier clothes. We later heard from a nosy alcoholic neighbor the details of how Dougie's dad caught him and yanked him out to the front yard, screaming and thrashing, standing over Dougie with clumped hair in his fists, slugging wildly at the face of his own boy.

Dougie disappeared until about a week later. According the county Sheriff, as we overheard him tell our parents, Dougie had filled a backpack with two cinderblocks, loaded himself down with the backpack, and stepped out into the air dropping 200 feet off the

Somerset bridge and down beneath the icy waters of Lake Cumberland. No notes, no explanations. There wasn't much talk but we knew Dougie's face was still busted when he died. It had to be. And those ugly marks were probably the least of his pain. Not even sixteen. As for us, it was hard times for losers who'd never actually lost anything. Off came the mascara, the studded bracelets, the chains and earrings. We chucked our black duds and swapped eyeliner for acne cream. Grabbed cotton T-shirts and laced up hi-top sneakers bought on sale by our moms after the basketball season ended.

One of the things Dougie left behind was this rusty Evil Knievel lunchbox jammed full of songs. We found it in his locker the day after his funeral. We knew he was always writing things down but he never asked us to play any of his stuff. Soon as we found his lunchbox we started singing about everyday people grown strange inside, and not, mind you, the hateful and simple-minded hog molester sorts like Dougie's dad. We sang about the other good people of our Mayberry-gone-NC-17 countryside. The riffs got nimbler and our swaying heads dropped. Right along with our ballsacks.

Without the slightest intention at a pose we began staring at the ground on which we played. Our tone went deeper and harder. We told ourselves it's what Dougie would've wanted. We started practicing in this vacant old building that had mutated over the years from a Gatti's Pizza to a bingo parlor to a gospel television studio and finally, to a cavernous empty space, perfectly hollowed. The acoustics were as pungent as the mold in the ceiling tiles. The practices got weird. So much angst. No smiles. Each of us sad and sappy but better as a band. We didn't care about the future or if anybody wanted to hear us play and this drew people to us. All summer we jammed, surrounded by all kinds, not only the hickish thugs and cruel populars, but even some of the meaner religious types — mostly kids our own age that usually couldn't wait to tell us how soon we'd be slow-roasting on the flames from Satan's anus because of our music. Even they came to hear us.

During a typical night we'd power through the strongest of Dougie's tunes. None of us ever gave too much thought to what his songs really meant and it's probably best. We knew there was no teasing out the spirit in a song like *Hamster Sacrifice At The Big Church Picnic,* the tortured chorus of *Lice On The Shortbus*, or even our most popular ripper, *Pubic Orange.* Those unholy gems spelled it out for you in tautly scripted verse. Dougie's work, his creations. Whenever we talk about him now it's the last night we revisit. How we didn't even know it would be our last time playing together. Nobody asked about why we quit. Same as nobody asked about growing up.

Before our final song we hit the audience with a crunchy rendition of *Fur On The Collar*, one of our strangest, in which Dougie detailed the habits of a merciless half-werewolf daughter to a preacherman. Her body stays human but from the shoulders up she morphs into a lycanthrope. Hard not to think Dougie had some sort of godless voodoo coursing through him when wrote that one. There's our memory of him and those songs and it's soaked with the image of us, the sounds of us, after he was gone, our band filling that blackened shell of a building, goaded to play louder and keep doing something we didn't start, but loved — the amplified pack of us guiding Dougie's she-wolf as she traipsed the parking lot at Big Lots, full moonglow on her bare and shapely butt, purest goddamn evil in her fevered yellow eyes.

We built the outro from *Fur On The Collar* right into our final and best song, the one with our name. Can you hear it? If you were around that summer you would've heard it. Maybe even screamed it. Could be you just know it because you've been in a smalltown at some point in your life and seen a place change from mean to silly to mean again. Seen the Motor Inns boarded over and the caves choked full of beer cans and dogshit, and been satisfied. Or maybe you've been beat on by your own father in your own house and understand the hard grace in an angry song. Maybe your Dougie was just as good as ours, the way he placed us out there in the darkness, shouting our own name into the faded little world where

we operated and made life. Not long before Dougie died he told us we sounded like something in the middle of a full-blown rot. He was right. And that is exactly what our superstar called us, Carcass from Kentucky.