

I see a man hanged himself once, in the trees back of the lido late in that first burning summer after the little circus stopped coming to town with the tattooed Jewish trapeze girls, and after they stayed away it was like loneliness came in their place and later on people would say they had the sight and we should have known.

That summer was like living every day in the embers of a big and hungry fire that burned for ever and sucked all the air out of everything and every breath scorched your lungs so you breathed shallow and it was that same summer my friend Snotty Nosed Chaves went drowning in the canal after he jumped in for a swim and couldn't climb back out because the sides were steep and sheer and too high and nobody knew. He was no great swimmer and the water was deeper and blacker than it looked and colder too. And that same summer a woman commits suicide down the road walking in front of a train and they raised the fences after that. They said the devil was on the whole neighbourhood that summer. It was airless and breathless and long and hot and perfect but for the flying ants and the dying. They said there were demons over us all like a cloud of flies and some Baptist preacher did the rounds preaching on street corners and even knocking on doors like they used to in the black and white days, but my dad said it was nonsense and he wasn't scared and he forbade me to be scared too.

I was scared anyway. He said people die when it's their time or if they go early it's on account of they make mistakes or get bitten by plain bad luck, like the kid did in the canal, or had no job or good woman or man in their lives, or got betrayed or just lost in the fog of it all. He told me I could pray if I wanted but best not to any god in particular. Hedge your bets, he said, and don't be scared. No god listens to chickens he said. Chickens don't have a god. Chickens just get fried he said.

But people dying is an unpleasant thing and by all accounts from what I observed a very random thing and I was properly scared if I let my mind go there. Death was just too unpredictable and always very personal and as ugly as the flying ants that covered everything like tar and drowned in their millions in the cool water of the lido. Every morning we scooped them off in big nets on long poles before the customers came and everyone came there that summer because there was nowhere with cooler shade or sweeter water and it was

everyone's wish all day and all night just to submerge their super-heated bodies in those cool holy waters.

It was my dad cut the hanged man down. The shrill screaming whistle that broke up the air hurt my ears. One whistle blast, the first one, led to others as people joined in the panic. It was like a horde of cicadas from hell were let loose in the still and perfect summer afternoon. Blowing whistles was the alarm signal at the lido and my dad was foreman. It was grown-up professional lifesavers doing something when nobody knew what else to do. They all had shiny chrome whistles and that whistle was authority.

That noise made my spine almost hurt and lit me up with excitement. It was a pure shiver-making, knee trembling adrenaline kick. It meant the ordinary and peaceful was gone and something bad and exciting had come. There was a pause when the lifeguards and swimmers all looked across the water at each other like time and gravity and everything just stopped. I swear I could see their eyes clearly from halfway up the shallow end where I was, which was a long way. Fear and panic. When those things are in someone's eyes you can see it a mile off. Then someone was running fast and I realised it was my dad.

That pool held one million and two hundred and fifty thousand gallons of water. That's a lot. My dad said it was one of the biggest in the world but I don't know if that was true or he was making his job out to be more important than it was, but he ran a full hundred and fifty yards and straight into the small copse before the fence just past the deep end. The deep end was 15 feet deep, I don't know what that is in metres or yards, but it's deep. You won't hit your head on the bottom even if you dive off the top board, which is pretty high. He ran straight past me and I was shocked at his speed and the power of his body in a fast sprint. I'd never seen him go like that before. I half turned away as he almost hit me. He sure wasn't going to go round me at that pace. His bare brown feet struck the ground and lifted again like an Olympic sprinter with dust lifting from every footfall. He was wearing little swimming briefs in a spotted print like a leopard and a washed-out orange tee shirt with LIFEGUARD right across the chest. One day I wanted one of them shirts. People respected a man who wore one of them shirts and they were always sun warmed. You could pick one out of the drawer in mid-winter and hold it your face and feel the sun on it. They *radiated* summer and that's a magical ability. They even smelled warm.

He went so fast he was almost in flight, his feet hardly touching the ground at all and his arms pumping and boy could he run, and he jumped clean over a lazy swimmer who climbed out of the water like a fat old seal in the sunshine and was stuck on his fat stomach trying to gain his feet, and he cleared him easy.

Other men joined in the race and everyone still in the water and on the side stopped their playing to watch and slowly gather to see.

I went after him. I tried to make my feet strike the ground like his, lifting them the very instant they touched the ground and flicking them up behind me and raising my knees high like he did. I was trying to make dust fly. I was slow compared to him but there was a satisfying flick of dust behind me and I looked back and see it and heard it slide under me.

Other lifeguards ran too but not like him. Mostly they ran to be second at the event, to witness history, but he ran to change it. I could tell.

I saw him slow as he passed the first whistle-blower who was pointing and speaking with his voice loud and panicking and his face filled with fear and my dad kind of bounced and pivoted around him hearing all the story he needed, then went into the copse past the pool. I saw him climb a big old mossy oak tree. Just a glimpse through the heavy foliage.

I ran harder but I was so slow and I hated being slow. I wanted to see why my dad was climbing trees. He climbed easy and seemed to almost swarm it like he was rippling up over it and climbing it like a wind climbs a hill. I saw him in those glimpses through the trees and he was fast.

I got there late but soon enough to see a big man, fattest and palest I ever seen, fall to the ground and my dad jump down beside him. The fat man crashed but my dad landed light as a cat. The fat man was so pale he was like a fat and dimply human-shaped candle that had softened in the sun and lost its intended shape. His skin looked like it was made of candle wax too. Old candles starting to yellow. I saw candles that colour at my nana's funeral. They didn't look good on a human being and death close up is not like in the movies. Death close up is a cold and heartless hard bastard. Everyone should hate death. There ain't no sweetness in death.

The man was in swimmers and now he was laying in the dry leaves and acorns that had been there since autumn and winter. Beside him was a rope and noose and I could see how he had tied its bitter end onto the lower limb of the tree and slung the noose end over a higher branch then climbed up and done the deed. His white foot had a cut where bark had opened the soft skin. There was moss under his finger nails where he'd scrambled up one last scramble and blood and skin under his nails too like coils of fine cotton, and deep scratch marks all round his throat where he had fought the choking and tried to take back the hanging and changed his mind or maybe the horror and pain of it made him fight or he saw Death and realised what a heartless cold fucker he is, and I heard

my dad say that and he never swore before and I didn't understand it at first but hearing it made the whole thing even worse. I could see where my dad had cut the rope to fell the man. I knew he had a knife, he always had a knife, even in his swimmers. An old liner lock knife, smooth handled and razor sharp. Older than me. It wasn't a weapon, it was a *tool*. And it was a *Live* blade. A Live blade is like a razor.

The oak was an easy tree to climb even for me and I was no shaved monkey. It was one of the best trees in the whole wood for climbing and always made you feel good even when you was a bit tubby and not much of an athlete like me, but I wasn't going to climb it ever again. Not after this day and there weren't no smudge stick witch or bells and blessings could bring it back clean.

The man wasn't looking too flash and people gathered and looked on with stillness and frowns, but my dad had pulled the noose loose and was pounding the Waxman's chest and giving him *artificial respiration*. He wasn't going to quit on him. He was sweating and hitting the man's chest really hard so I thought he'd break it and then rocking on it with all his weight, pushing it down and letting it rise.

Another lifeguard, Mad Louis, joined in and took over the chest compressions while my dad breathed into the man's mouth, and after a long time the Waxman suddenly vomited right up over my dad's face.

And he breathed.

At first not the healthy breath that comes with life, more a rattling feeble kind of sound that didn't bode well, but breathing is breathing and for sure it's better to rattle than nothing at all, and he was breathing and in a few minutes the breathing settled into a shallow rhythm.

My dad and Mad Louis rolled the Waxman, who was now tinging pink like he was outbreaking in roses, onto his side. This was the *recovery position* and now they would *monitor* him. I'd read the book in the lifeguards' hut. I knew this stuff.

Around the man's neck a redness and blackness and mauveness appeared as blood went to where the noose had been. He looked real bad and real sore, and where he had clawed himself started to bleed little fine rivers and many nights after I dreamed bad dreams of fine white coils of cotton skin grown huge in focus and lacy rivers of deep red blood.

A slender good-looking woman with a real short French bob handed my dad a towel and helped him wipe his face clean of sick. She kind of tended him. She

was in a flowery bikini and looked fit and taut like there was no fat anywhere on her body.

When the ambulance came and carried the man away, my dad walked through the small crowd to the pool and one or two people patted him gently on his back and others just parted for him to pass. Other people gathered up the rope and policemen came to take such things away. I saw them all but nobody bothered my dad. They just watched him quietly like he was kind of risen above other people that day and people did right by recognising it without saying a word. He passed me without speaking.

He walked for a bit, head bowed like a prize fighter and a hero, then dived into the pool, tee shirt and all, and swam all the way to the shallow end without once coming up for air till he was over halfway. Then he broke the surface gently, almost tenderly and without a ripple, and swam the rest of the way in a slow breaststroke. He had a good stroke with no screw kick or anything. Some people thought he had been coached to swim in proper lessons, but he learned it from his brothers in the canal and just perfected it. He read books on it.

People still watched him. He leapt out of the pool with ease and didn't need to use the steps and walked back down its length to the lifeguards' hut. In there he wouldn't be bothered. It was Staff Only. It said so on the door in bold letters. One of the best things in my life was I was allowed to go into that hut and other kids were jealous. It was a special privilege. There wasn't much in it, a kettle and a couple of hard chairs and a table all stripped of paint and a kind of bed come couch for first aid. There was a big first aid kit and a Minuteman resuscitator and a refrigerator. There was a window either side of the door, but they were small and shuttered so only splinters of light came through and it was always golden light, always warm, and dust always floated and drifted in the beams and I could watch dust like that all my days. The room had some tall lockers and a sink and smelled of aftershave. It was always cool in that hut because the concrete walls and concrete flat roof made it like a bunker, and just along from it was the first of several big old fat fountains whose water drifted in mist across the concrete and faded peeling paint and cooled even the hottest noon day. It felt safe and manly and strong.

I knew some things for sure that day: I knew I'd always remember when I saw a man hanged and brought back alive, and I knew I would never understand how a man would want to die in such a way on such a sunny day by a perfect blue sparkling swimming pool or abuse a fine old Oak climbing tree. It was a living day, not a dying day and I knew a grown man should have known that. I also learned that day that dead people don't look good, not like in the movies, and

there ain't no peace in it. The dead might be still but the living are frenzied and furious and broken by it and afterwards their new shape is nothing like it was before. And I knew for sure that the dead do come back.

For a moment there by the pool in the fine sprayed mist of the fountains as the heat shimmered and people drifted away I wanted to be righteous. I wanted to be a hero and to live a hero's life. I decided I would strive to rise to that challenge and try to be pure in thought and deed and save lives. It was settled. My road was made and I made a solemn pledge and an oath to be righteous and pure for ever.

A suntanned brown girl in a pure white bikini, older than me but not quite a woman, ruffled my hair and smiled. She had green eyes and fair hair bleached almost white by the sun. She knew I was the *saviour's* son, so in some way I was kind of holy and special. She acted like that, like touching me was somehow touching *him*. I smiled up at her in gentle humility because that seemed to be the appropriate thing to do. I knew the look to make. Like a kid in a Jesus movie they showed in the youth club at the Baptist church. She touched my face with her finger, brushing a strand of hair from my eyes. Her finger was delicate and her nail very white against her brown skin. She smelled of perfect coconuts. I did The Lamb of God look. I was righteous and pure.

She had the most glorious titties I had ever seen, really ripe and full and straining at my face. I could actually see her nipples outlined under the thin cotton and I think I smelled them too and felt them alter the fabric of the air just there in front of me, so my face tingled and was heated up. It was the same as an electric charge you get from one of those alien metal zorb balls in the fairground only it was zapping me straight from her nipples. I reckoned I was seeing the best little titties in the Western world right there an inch in front of my face. I wanted to touch them and it was almost impossible not to lean forward and just open my mouth like I was taking holy communion, but I resisted. Resisting such temptation was what a hero would do and also she was pretty strong looking and would likely knock the shit out of me if I touched her uninvited, and I was glad I was wearing shorts and not just little swimmers and I resolved right there and then to one day get me a pretty golden girlfriend with titties just like hers. A real genuine wahine from Hula-Hula Land. And I swore another oath as I watched her walk away and she was as perfect from the back as she was from the front.

After the shock wore down, which was quicker than you might think, that day got perfect again and just the same as before except for being a little subdued and quiet because a lot of people went home early, and for another few hours

that day stayed perfect as a picture. There were a lot of perfect days that summer.

The pool was edged in concrete terraces where people could sit and sunbathe or eat their sandwiches and ice creams or sip coke from cold glass bottles. There was grass growing up through cracks in them terraces, and the painted edges were peeling and faded and patched with lichen which flaked and powdered under the lightest touch. I sat around on one of the higher steps until most of the people drifted home and I watched the evening settle on the big old pool and the holy water was stilled. The air was always perfectly still in them nights and there was a silence like in a church. It was still warm and the terraces still gave off heat from the sun. The last people filed home tired and relaxed and some were red and sunburned but they looked at ease with everything, like for once the buzzing was stopped. In the lowering sunlight I could make out flying bugs and dust and pollen and soon birds dipped onto the surface of the pool to drink, just flicking over it without even breaking their flight. It was the same every evening because just as people went away nature reclaimed the lido and nature didn't mind me watching.

Lifeguards swept up and emptied bins and some were smoking and the smoke curled like genies lit blue by the sun. I promised myself that one day I would smoke like them and make blue genies. It sealed the relaxing moment. Everyone moved slow and lazy and no one was rushing to be someplace else because no place else was better.

Every night just before lockup I grabbed a snorkel and mask and went searching for money and jewellery that people lost in the water. Signs everywhere said DON'T LEAVE YOUR VALUABLES UNATTENDED and some people were so worried about leaving their valuables unguarded that they put them into the pockets of their swimmers and forgot them. Swimmers only have shallow pockets so there was always something to be found and sometimes I got riches and I was like a treasure hunter, which was my dream profession and still kind of is. I had a nose for where the loot would be and knew how to get the right angle so the low sun would reflect on anything shiny. I was good at it, better than anyone else, and if someone lost something like a ring or gold necklace and knew they'd lost it I was always the one they'd ask to try and find it. If I couldn't find it, it wasn't in the pool, simple as that. If someone reported a loss my dad would always point them in my direction and I was proud to be the finder. If they didn't report it though, it was finders keepers unless the person who came the next day to report it was a nice old lady or a poor guy or

something or it was a wedding ring or locket with a baby picture. I always gave that stuff back and the rest I kept.

But it was a lean night. Just a few coins and a rubbish necklace not worth keeping, so I left it on the side. I dived down to the bottom again in about seven feet of water, not deep enough to have to clear my ears but deep enough to be cooler water, and I was planning on just chilling out down there for a while because I could hold my breath a full three minutes but Mad Louis suddenly appeared next to me on the bottom. He had a mad bulging-eyes look and he ambushed me like a shark. He was properly mad, which is how he got his name, and more like a small kid than a grown man. He ripped off my mask and launched me straight up like a rocket, driving off the bottom with his feet so one second I was looking for sunrays to light up lost gold and the next I was out of the water and spinning in the air. He was strong and explosive as mad people often are.

In my slow-motion somersault I saw my dad and other lifeguards laughing and getting ready to jump in. This was the best of every day, when everyone would wash off the dust and sweat and sun and have some fun, and if Mad Louis was in the water, throw me around until I was sick.

I hit the water with no grace or style whatsoever and stung my back real good but I didn't make a fuss. My dad made a rule that went however much it hurts or annoys you, always come up smiling, so I came up smiling and Mad Louis threw me again but more gentle this time. He knew I took a stinger the first time and wasn't going to let up but never wanted to hurt me either.

Then the peace was all over everywhere as the younger lifeguards hit the water all around me and shouted and laughed and wrestled. The older lifeguards just slipped into the water at the other end and swam gently to cool off, not wanting to draw attention from the youngsters because they didn't want to wrestle. My dad could have wrestled but he wasn't of a mind to, so he kind of positioned himself between the two groups and everyone left him be. He just swam off the day without going far or fast and he was still brooding over the hanged man, I could tell, and when I thought about it it was right to still brood because it was a dark thing had come to pass and my dad had brought a man back from death and Death don't like being cheated.

I got out of the water after a while because I was being used as a ball and it was tiring, then soon after most of the lifeguards and other staff had gone and just my dad, Mad Louis and young Davy Crockett were left. They called Davy 'Alamo' because he had the same name as a cowboy who died in the fort there

in a war against the Mexicans. Actually he wasn't really a cowboy, he was a *frontiersman*, which suited Davy even more because that was exactly what he was in his own way and in our time.

When we were alone Louis and Davy made me spar and throw punches at their upheld hands and duck their counters and move my feet and bob my head and they said I was a boxer and my dad scoffed and said I was a cardboard boxer and they laughed and said I would be a champion one day. Then the men robbed the café and shop. My dad had cut a master key from a blank one night in winter and after Davy locked up the gates we helped ourselves to choc-ices and ice-cold Pepsis. I never took anything from the store because I wasn't allowed to steal, but they took what I wanted and gave it to me. It was a *perk* of the job. Every job has to have a *perk*. The old-time lifeguards all talked about perks and spent a lot of time looking for them.

The night watchman wouldn't arrive for another hour and we'd always wait for him so my dad could hand over the keys and report that everything was fine. You heard him coming through the iron gates, so we never got caught in the shop, and my dad loaded his bag with sweets for everyone at home and wrapped choc-ices in sheets of newspaper so they wouldn't melt too fast and locked up the shop again. It was the once-a-week treat and he made sure nobody ever took too much. Just a skim, a taste and somehow it always tasted better when you didn't pay for it, so the ice cream was just a little bit creamier, the chocolate a little more chocolaty and the Pepsi a little cooler with bubbles that popped gently in my mouth. Even the water beaded on the bottle more perfectly when you didn't have to pay.

Davy sipped his Pepsi and smoked a hand-rolled cigarette so the smoke drifted around me and tasted damp and sweet. It was laced with old rum and went by that name. He made the others smile by blowing smoke rings right over my head so I was like a saint. He'd changed into a washed-out tee shirt and faded and torn blue jeans that were real old and threadbare and patched on the knees and crotch. I liked them and wanted a pair just like them. Maybe I would smoke Old Rum too once I got started on my smoking career. A man could do a lot worse.

I never knew where Louis and Davy lived but they never rushed there and when they went out through the gates at the end of the day, it was always with something like sadness and it came on us like mist and it was like they knew all this wouldn't last. Both men moved slow and confident so every part of them was relaxed and easy and they moved with a kind of natural rhythm. They didn't so much walk as stalk across the shimmering ground. They were very

different from each other, but that one thing was alike. I practised their walk when nobody was around to see and you have to half shuffle and roll your shoulders too like you're dancing a slow dance with an invisible lady and just move real easy and calm like a cat on a hot day. You *slink*.

Mad Louis rode a massive old Triumph with an upswept exhaust spotted with clumps of rust in small flowers. Sometimes he took me on the back and it was like flying. I'd perch up behind him, hold round his waist and he'd slalom all over the deserted road between the lido and the highway. I could feel the power of the big engine right in my stomach and even when he went fast I always felt safe.

I wished we could all live at that lido, the lifeguards and my dad and me and my family, because when I was there I was never lonely or afraid and I hate being lonely and was always afraid outside of them gates, but inside the rusty wrought iron gates the world was perfect. There were no gangs or vandals or druggies or drunks and no one trying to put the bash on anyone. They wouldn't dare – my dad and Mad Louis and young Davy Crockett banned anyone who caused trouble or even looked like trouble and nobody would dare take them on because they were bosses amongst men and they said it was a family place, and so it was.

But it was more than just safe, it was deep everlasting peace. Or so I thought in the days when I believed in such childish things.

My dad said the 'Dhammapada' could have been written right there at the lido. That's a book by the Buddha that Davy read and onetime he gave my dad a copy after. Davy said you shouldn't kill things but sometimes killing people was OK because they could come back better and more 'elevated and enlightened'. He said killing people was sometimes a righteous favour, and Davy wasn't a liar.

Then too soon the sky was deepening its blue and it was getting towards dark and the watchman came in through gates that were squealing tired and old with exactly the same tune they did every night and I heard the engine far away through the trees and the dusk as he pulled his old car safely inside. The noises drift low through the evening, and hiding our loot in an old Gola sports bag, we went. My dad always took one last look over the water every night the same and I thought then he was just checking everything was OK, but really he was searing it into his memory so he'd never forget because he knew it wasn't for ever and it wouldn't ever be better or more perfect and he didn't want it to end.

The watchman was nearly two hundred years old. He always gave me a fruit-flavoured hard lolly which I think he stole by the handful from the shop at night, so I reckon that shop must have made a loss every summer. His name was Bill and he chained and padlocked the gate behind us and locked the old lock like he was nervous of intruders and would spend the night in the lifeguards' hut, doing a round of the fences every hour or two and using a key chained on a post every here and there to turn in a big black box he carried on his belt that told the bosses he had done his checks. It seemed like a nice job. He had a small mangy black dog called Blue and a big lunchbox and long silver torch and always some fruit cake in tin foil and I reckon he slept most of the night. If anyone broke in he wouldn't be able to chase them away because he was too old and he wouldn't frighten them off because there was nothing even slightly threatening about him or Blue except Blue's yellow rotten teeth that might poison you to death if he bit you, but who would break into a swimming pool in a forest?

Mad Louis kicked his Triumph alive and revved it, destroying the peace with rattles and thunder and choke choke choke and then he revved it again and again until my dad was pissed off, then he laughed as he rode away. Davy threw his duffle bag over his shoulder and strolled into the woods, taking the long path to town. Most nights he liked to walk and only accepted a lift if it was raining hard. He turned briefly before the trees and nodded to my dad, softly saying 'good job today', and kind of saluted with a smile and a flick of his right hand. He had a really good smile. My dad returned the gesture and Davy turned again and was gone in the fading light. The forest just seemed to envelop him and dandelions floated around his footfalls and tiny bugs glinted silver around his head, and in the haze he vanished and I was left alone with my dad and he was colder when we were alone so I was never fully at ease, and I think he wanted to walk that path with Davy or ride out with Louis but instead he had to take me home and be a father. I think being a dad wasn't his natural element, which in my book made him even better at it than if he had been a natural born dad. He had to work at loving me and still I was loved, so he did good and I knew it was true and he was sad as he watched them go and told me softly to get in the car.

It was getting late in the season and soon the lido would close and the gates would be locked for winter. The lifeguards would all go away as they did every year and my dad and me would be lonely again. It was always this way and in the weeks of winding down, a heaviness settled on us. Right then I wasn't sure if that was the reason he was sadder than other days or if it was the hanged man or both, but I knew afterwards that it was more than both those things and he couldn't name it and neither could I it, but I think right then he sensed and knew

real bad things were coming and he couldn't see their shape yet nor smell their breath.

He wiped some dust off the wing mirror and winked at me, which was rare because he never looked my way much, and I climbed into the hot car. It was a Singer and a rust heap that he worked on every weekend. It was a major job keeping it running on no money and even the seat belts didn't work so there was a scarf he used to tie me in my seat. My dad was a man who loved a routine. He loved to make lists and write on things in heavy indelible pen and he tied me into that seat just the same way every day.

Outside the lido and the trees and peacefulness and perfect nature, the city was on you straight away and the pace of the roads and closeness of the buildings was tight in your face real fast so there was no time to prepare for it and it was always a shock. Fear spiked up in me every day the same and my Spidey senses lit up because it felt like threat was everywhere and dusty mean-eyed people stared at me for no good reason as we passed. Dusty roads replaced the fine sweet dirt of the forest, which was a real forest but I guess if you were a woodsman you'd call it a copse. It was the last outpost of the great ancient woods that met the city to the east and it was ringed by roads and derelict buildings, so just a narrow track linked it to the greater wood and I thought that link, thin and winding as it was, kept it alive like an umbilical cord. If we had driven east we could have gone a lot of miles under the trees but we never went that way. We headed instead straight towards the baking hot city and there was no tree nor grass nor flowers that way for a long long time. My dad tuned us in to *Listen With Johnny* where Elvis was falling in love, and the city through the dust was mellow yellow in the evening light and my fear was getting smaller as the music filled me up even though we were heading deep into the concrete and tarmac towards home. Home was good and the fear in me had no reason to be and each day once I was over the shock of leaving the lido and seeing all the hard concrete and hard people I just took on a different skin and rolled with it and the fear died down as the music came up and I saw the city dust and the city people dancing that special city dance and it was OK.

I kept my head down because my dad was brooding and he was dangerous when he was like that and I was looking down at my worn-out tennis shoes and right then I was surprised at how worn out my pumps had got. They had been white once and in my mind they still were, but the canvas was grey and dirty and there was grass stains and the rubber toe cap was slit and the canvas was fraying and I must have been looking pretty intently because I saw a lot of detail. My dad saw me looking down and I felt his hand on my neck, hot and strong and calloused,

just briefly touching me and it sent a warm shiver through me because a touch was so rare and even a brief one was something good and he looked brown and lean and hard. His dark-blue polka-dot shirt was all open at the chest and it clung to him and he wore a small gold cross nestled in his chest hair and and I saw him how other people saw him and he smiled and that was all.

He was like a lion and when people saw him like that they knew they were looking at something properly dangerous and my dad could smile at you and somehow make your blood run cold and a shiver dance right through you. It was all in the eyes and the corners of his mouth and something in his energy. Every night I went to bed convinced that nobody would kill me in the night except maybe him, so every night I said, 'Good night God bless Dad, see you in the morning' and wouldn't go to bed until he said the same thing back because he was a man of his word and if he said, 'Good night, see you in the morning', I knew he wouldn't kill me in the night, but I had to get that promise or the night was long and full of demons. My dad didn't hate anyone or anything and wasn't a trivial man but I knew for sure he could and would kill anyone and destroy anything without even losing a minute's sleep over it. Not a minute. Unless he gave his word. He was a man of his word.

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