

Lock Down, Rise Up

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An Exploration of Human Potential
in the Back of Beyond

JB HOLLOWES

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in the Back of Beyond

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Out Beyond Ideas

by Rumi

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense.

(translated by Coleman Barks)

To Angel, I'll meet you there.

ANGEL 1990

"I'm scared," Angel's mum whimpered. She was curled into a ball behind their new brown sofa with soft cushions. He could smell the flowers in her perfume, the leather from the couch, the sweat from his father, and the piss that had dribbled down his right trouser leg. "Shut up, yer upsetting the lad," his dad spat in a forced whisper and handed Angel a Colt '45. "If anyone comes through that door, shoot 'em in the leg," he said. He used the gritty voice he used for the men in his gang. His dark eyes glinted like steel. His cheekbones were flushed.

Angel felt the cold black metal of the heavy gun in his tiny white hands; his six-year-old face tinged with pleasure at being part of this grown-up game. The mix of fear and excitement churned in his stomach. The fists on the door beat in time with his heart. The sound drowned out all sense. "It's the police. Open up, or we'll have to break in."

The shiny gun felt good in Angel's hand, although his wrist ached with his attempt to hold it steady. His little pudgy fingers barely reached the trigger, even with two hands wrapped around the butt. He wondered what it

would be like to shoot a copper in the leg. Would the blood splatter everywhere like it did in the Zombie films? Would he enjoy the copper's scream? Or would he end up shooting the light bulb? Like when his sister had made him mad, he'd picked up his dad's gun. He'd been shocked at the power of it as his little arms ricocheted upwards. The bullet was still embedded in the cracked magenta ceiling between the light and a red blood stain.

"Good lad," his dad said. Angel's arms shook as he mustered all his strength to be a man. The police didn't break in that day; something to do with a warrant.

The next day, Mum made Angel go to school. Her eyes were red and swollen. The large blue bruise on her cheek looked like it was gonna be a corker. Angel fetched the frozen peas as soon as he saw her. "Don't leave Mum," he said as she started to cry again. He'd heard his dad threaten to kill them if she kept on. She'd screamed that she'd leave and take Angel with her. He'd listened to the thump of her head against the wall and knew his dad was holding her by the throat. He liked to do that. Hold them up by the throat. Like chickens. Legs dangling, arms scrabbling, eyes bulging. His dad once said he liked to let go just before their eyes popped out. He'd snorted with laughter at the thought that one day he might go too far. It had been Angel's sixth birthday that day.

"Go on to school, Pumpkin," his mum said and kissed the top of his head, his black hair gelled down like his dad's. "I'll be OK; tell Miss I've got a bug."

Angel dragged his grey rucksack down the broken paving slabs all the way to the school on the corner

of his road. He knew his teacher disapproved of him turning up without his mum by the scowl on her face, but he didn't care. He was a man now. His dad trusted him with a gun. All morning, he sat throwing blue Bic pen tops at the other students' heads and daydreamed about cops and robbers. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave," the teacher snapped.

"Fuck you!" Angel shouted.

"Right young man, down to the Head," the teacher fumed, red face matching her red jumper.

"Alright, Rudolph," Angel said. The other boys laughed. They always did.

The Head Teacher kept him waiting. Sweat dripped down the back of Angel's neck as his confidence slipped. He liked the Head; he'd always been kind to Angel. One time he'd even given him one of the green lollipops from the glass jar on his big desk. Angel picked at the stuffing on the old chair outside the Head's office and fixed a scowl on his little face.

"Come," the Head called out.

Angel stood in front of the vast mahogany desk. He felt like he'd shrunk as he stared at the large Head Teacher. The room smelled stern. A red bubble gum wrapper lay on the floor by the bin. A loud clock ticked and tocked and measured his time away. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" the Head Teacher asked with a smile. Angel's mind flashed back to the feeling of the heavy metal gun in his hand, the cold black glint in his dad's eyes, and the sense of excitement as the police pounded the door.

"A Gangster," he said.

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