



Lionel Sides in the Can

By

Larry Deery

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

Larry Deery's, "Lionel Sides in the Can," has these brief vestiges of paranoid poetics that really make this story hum. As if Philip Ó Ceallaigh and Samuel Beckett got together with a bunch of Adderall and wrote a tale of beautiful madness.

Lionel is a disintegration, an other on the outsides of whatever your definition of society is. I picture Oscar the Grouch wandering with hyper-awareness and poetic fractals in his eyes – he is a kaleidoscope. His world is dangerous because he sees the world in poetry, yet he must live in

prose, "Poetry is nothing if not measured. I'm stropopy. I need to calibrate something. My pedometer no longer works." His poetic perception, his measurements, are what keep him sharp enough to live the only life he has and, faltering, he knows he must correct.

There is agency in the way in which a human can control their world in the language of which they see it in, and Lionel knows that if he slips between the cracks of his lines he will be lost – a salt covered snail whimpering letters.

Deery's style loosens the unconscious, letting the world pour out as it is seen.

The tale ends with broken form, and I like that.

Enjoy this story.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

Six (more) days of wonder and I get it. I have an idea. I think I can do it. I can do it. All I have to do is - do it. What choice do I have? What choice does anyone have? We are all victims (hence we are all heroes). Victim = Hero.

I turn. A man stands woebegone, two lips a-wobble. I set my ears a-wiggle. He wants to know what my game plan is (in a way). The question intrigues. It's quite obvious, is it not, I say, and shunt the can on its wheels, my prep for take-off. The man stands firm forcing a momentary pause for thought (delay). He identifies the can as his (seemingly). This is news to me I say. But I see the resemblance. He feigns indignation with overly sincere superiority. I initiate linear propulsion. The man holds firm. I adopt a holding pattern. He folds his arms. I hum a hymn of nonchalance, my finger to my lips, spitting out blistered rhythms. He grabs the can and pushes home his ace in the hole, nine tenths possession (that is). I shake my head and say, now if you wouldn't mind, -

DAdA 14

It's (this) morning, (today). Pause: Later, and after (the before).

A hole burns in my day. Through it my plan plummets to unfathomable depths. It's never like this. And it won't be, tomorrow. Tomorrow will always be like it was (before). I'll make sure it is.

I wait, pen in hand. I'm a poet. I write poetry. With engineered rigor. Measuring instruments at hand, I write something. Dogs bark. No, that's not poetry. That's a fact.

The garbage can shifts an inch. (I calibrate with satellite precision). The handles hit the wall. The dogs paw violently but wait patiently. They'll tear me to shreds first chance they get. For now, I'm safe. My pedometer has stopped working. It's solar powered. A sliver of sunlight squeezes itself through a fissure sliced in the side of the garbage can. I hold the pedometer up to catch the ray. It's dark in here. Very dark.

This is what I know (certainty). Any deviation from fact is caused by fear. Fear skews my view of what I know. When what I know becomes less than fact then what I know is not what I know but what I think I know (poetry). I auto-correct once I do (deviate). Until then, take this as fact. This is my day. This is my day everyday (except for today of course as already mentioned). Tomorrow returns to normal ordinary like all other days (past).

Rabid dogs bark and wait to pounce. They sense my terror. There's fear in that. Excitable jitters. I'm no hero. It doesn't interest me. Nor will I die at the hands of blood thirsty dogs (either). I told you. Chicken fear grips me. The dogs may not . . . scratch 'rabid.' Think (wild and savage). No! Fear factors into everything now. Write a poem (that's an imperative)! Mind blanking via writing functions as a diversionary tactic. I need my graph paper. I can't write without my paper. Poetry is nothing if not measured. I'm stropopy. I need to calibrate something. My pedometer no longer works. I no longer walk (I'm stationery) - I'm trapped (forever) - No - I will escape - Go gather facts - Call it poetic license otherwise. For the moment count hysterical swerves in thought (I can't, my mind is away with the fairies).

DAdA 7

This is my fact-based day. From fact one. It's after the before but before the after which comes later.

I'm new here. It's not like the place I am before. It's different than that. Sunrise conflates night with day. The venetian blind divvies up the sun in chords of chocolate orange. I watch it melt through the slits and shadow the room, plastering itself from floor to ceiling. It pulls me in as I watch it climb the wall. I'm all over the place.

I stretch a pair of dormant legs (walk). It's garbage day today (with weekly regularity). I stop and stand and stare. Garbage cans fringe the sidewalk either side at regular rifts, tucked snugly by erratic curb cuts. I split the road dead centre and walk, equidistant from dwellings left and right of me. Sidewalks are a no-no. Either side serves its own purpose but foments imbalance with erred preference. I count each can in forward motion (me). One side at a time (head to the right). And then backwards (head to the left) when I double back so to speak. I bank both tots (in head), left side first, right side last. Said head is then mined for dregs with legs and past deposits. Poetically speaking (of course), I fish for said deposits in murky undergrowth (accumulated head trash) and pluck from fervent arteries (current emotional backwash), trainspotting surges that coagulate into a sensory overload of useless inertia. What comes to mind is the number of steps it takes to walk the block from end to end (and back, on the other side of course). Separate entities, and differing by two steps to its twin. I've counted them before (obviously). My pedometer confirms these facts (when it works). But today is not the day to go in search of missing steps.

DAda 1

Before.

The week previous to this (week) I enact the exact same routine. The garbage truck comes, the garbage truck goes. I step out to devastation. Garbage cans scattered, randomly patterned. It's chaos, simply put; complete disorder and confusion.

I want undone the done (already). The question is, can I? Fear + failure abound. My head hurts. Slit from within, it festers unyieldingly. I return to topic and stand witness to present time of mind. It's garbage can carnage. Angled ambiguity. Geographical ineptitude (today's poetic theme in the bag – I bank it for later). Repeat and say it again: complete disorder and confusion. Garbage cans strewn willy-nilly. As simple as that.

My spatial planning has gone awry. I give over to happenstantial recklessness and wind my way through, tampering begrudgingly (I use the tip of an index finger) with each can I come close to, looking neither left nor right as I plodder down the block. For a reason: They're watching. They're talking. I think they're talking. I think/I know they're watching. But I'm sure I can't be certain. Therefore –

I chase after the truck. For what? Don't ask. Caught, I sit breathless on a wall and watch it work. I wonder.

DAda 6

Six (more) days of wonder and I get it. I have an idea. I think I can do it. I can do it. All I have to do is - do it. What choice do I have? What choice does anyone have? We are all victims (hence we are all heroes). Victim = Hero.

DAda 7

After before but before later which comes after after.

I return home (and wait). And listen. Garbage cans fall from as far up as the sky (it seems). They bounce from on high and ping pong down the street. It's mayhem, plain and simple.

This does not do (for me). I step out (wherever, I am plumbed, head to toe, pole to pole, right where God wants me to be). The truck turns, disappears, leaves a road off-kilter in its absence. I palm both eyes. My stomach churns. It's voluble inconsistency sliding slowly into Hell (when I peep). This simply won't do. Deflecting imminent insanity, my mind burrows through a cerebral shunt and I instinctively cup both ears to catch it. It fails to show.

I inhale deeply. It's not the end of the world (I think) but the end of mine (I think/I know). I rein it in. Scratch the apocalyptic mindset. It's not a total catastrophe. Disarray dampens my enthusiasm for perfection. A fix is in order (as already noted). There's clarity. Of sorts. I inhale deeply. I will not always be in control (of everything). Said incongruity heralds plan implementation.

Emptied cans times ten is my tally for task completion. All garbage cans, emptied and so forth, returned home. Home being (obviously) home.

Obviously. I take it from the top; my first of the day. The lid lies open and the can sits askew street-side. I flip it shut and wheel it home. Time of the essence (being) I tally forth. I roll the second to the curb and lift it onto the sidewalk when I'm spun three sixty. Not something I anticipate, it alarms me.

I turn. A man stands woebegone, two lips a-wobble. I set my ears a-wiggle. He wants to know what my game plan is (in a way). The question intrigues. It's quite obvious, is it not, I say, and shunt the can on its wheels, my prep for take-off. The man stands firm forcing a momentary pause for thought (delay). He identifies the can as his (seemingly). This is news to me I say. But I see the resemblance. He feigns indignation with overly sincere superiority. I initiate linear propulsion. The man holds firm. I adopt a holding pattern. He folds his arms. I hum a hymn of nonchalance, my finger to my lips, spitting out blistered rhythms. He grabs the can and pushes home his ace in the hole, nine tenths possession (that is). I shake my head and say, now if you wouldn't mind, -

But he (obviously) does mind. I simulate seriousness, nodding my head to indicate intent. Body language is not his forte. Bellicosity isn't mine. His greedy fingers tap a tale of woe on the lid so I relinquish control and tally forth. Peripheral vision airbrush takes him out of the picture. I resort to tunnel, grasp a nearby can and advance. Two men await my arrival up ahead, Woebegone and an associate (of sorts), Troubled. Troubled steps forward and articulates. His question has a déjà vu ring to it. My response, too. Community engineering, I say. Troubled is touchy. And possessive (awfully so). He pulls at the can and parks it by the curb alongside Woebegone's. They both vanish then reappear moments later and head street-side to push in garden gates and drum on front doors. I loiter, alone in disarray.

People discharge onto the street. Dogs bark. Cats hightail in zigzag fashion. Men congeal into sentry posts by garden walls. I feign indifference. A man steps out and guns for me. Who are you, he asks. I'm Lionel, I say. What are you doing, he wants to know? Right now, I say? Yeah, right now, like right now, he demands. Yeah, talking to you, like right now, I say. No, I mean, what are you doing on the street? I tell him, like I've told him. He doesn't get it. I have things to do, I say. Now, if you don't mind. But he does mind.

Said things impinge on his wellbeing. He looks disgruntled. I run the gauntlet until I reach the corner where I stop and think. It's what I do best. I decide to wait another week.

The week grinds by. Incalculant ruminations produce results in the red. I am at a cul de sac. I headbutt the approaching wall. It hurts (to think). Constancy compromises a vague mental agility. I reach for it and it disappears. Put plainly: I'm an idiot (of sorts). I counter said insinuation with – I reach and it disappears. I (re)turn to the problem at hand: me. It fails to interest.

The truck has come and gone. Garbage cans slide into a gigantic sink hole (my head). I struggle to counter its pull (out of my head). It's not that though. Plan implementation year zero: I clear two in no time (six times two equals twelve). I'm quieter now. There's health in stealth. I adapt in order to succeed (survive). I know I can do this. I'm almost sure I can (do this). I tell myself I can. I tell myself a lot of things. Poetry becomes my fall back in times of confusion. I have my poems - my graph paper - my lack of focus. There's always that. I digress.

I egg on (myself). An unpredicted glitch forestalls my advance: I am hit by a fish. It clings to my head then swims down my neck (dead). I feel at sea and scan the surrounding landscape. Next, a cauliflower falls short of its intended target (me). I kick it to the curb. (Now I know they know) I scour the horizon. Glass shatters at my feet. A second jar overshoots and cracks on a car wheel. I run. Projectiles rain down hard and fast on me. The truck rounds the corner. A distraction, I cozy up behind a garbage can. People gush down driveways, coagulating en masse by their gates. The truck stops. I peep. The driver alights. The street is Debris City. It's raining people trash.

“What's all goin' on here, folks?” he asks.

The crowd brays loudly. Some jump gates and gallop excitedly.

“Shush now,” he says.

They crow in response.

“You all got a problem with me doing my job?” he asks.

No, they shout. No!

Angry Pout steps forward. We want him! he shouts. Him means me (I'm sure). They know I'm near but they don't know where. The crowd secretes a bloodhound. It's me they're looking for. It's me they want. I state the obvious (obviously).

“Now, hold on a second,” the driver says, his elbows raised, hands attached (of course).

They hold on. I hear a whingeing yelp. A screeching eight-year old comes running through the rye (so to speak, more prickly pear than bluegrass perennials though) waving bloodied arms through tattered sleeves (she’s been through the scratchy weeds in search of Lionel Sides) and trips on over-anxious fears then splits her head on garden stones. The driver shakes his head and spits flamed bitumen, becomes a truck intent on murder. They step aside in time to wipe the child’s bloody nose and extricate unseemly spines.

I am prey. They will hunt me down. I will die. I have lost control. Fear insinuates apocalypse. Squeezes out rational thought. Anxiety. Panic. Terror. I’ll say it again. I am prey. But firstly, I am poet. Inappropriately poetic at the worst of times. These are the worst of times. And in the worst of times I am Crass. But now is not always. Now is me. Now is time for change. Now is - I am – Change! Perhaps.

A garbage can lies overturned ahead, lid askew. An official invitation so to speak. I calculate a credible countdown to consummation. And before they know it I’m cocooned from view in plastic camouflage.

I’m still. I soak in fetid overrun. A sidewall fissure lets in light. I work a finger through the slit for news from the other side.

I lie, ear to the air, for sounds. Truck engine revs fade. Phones ring. People talk. Voices mimic hot air blown through hollow bone heads. It’s all go from what I hear. From afar through the hoo-ha comes a jangling ding dong. Someone’s in a hurry. It rounds the corner. I screw my face to the crack and pop an eye to the world. Scratched plastic on the sidewall fissure strobes flashing light through the slit, blinding me momentarily. The vehicle comes to an abrupt stop somewhere down the street. It’s an ambulance. The caterwauling kid is stretchered out.

The ambulance air kiss goodbye creates a vacuum which births a void toward which lesser free beings slowly canter. They’re looking for me, to where they think I should be. They’re right but they’re wrong because they can’t see. I go foetal in my sequestered sheath. They screw their eyes and spin their wheels one last time to the peel out of peel outs. But it’s their own smoke that blinds them. They cough and wave their hands to clear the air. A virulent wind is whisked up

from out of the blue returning them to Mother Earth's Lost and Found (poetically speaking of course).

It's later. School's out. Kids abound. My garbage can crashes, tumbles and flips, multiple times. Someone groans, exhausted from their shunting. Children tussle. There's a scuffle. They argue over who should home the garbage can. Neither wins. All is quiet, then suddenly I am upright and on the move. They grunt the can up the driveway. Dogs are barking. I am in the back garden (obviously). A woman's voice calls the kiddies in.

The dogs circle, sniffing violently around the can. Hours pass. A child appears. He feeds the dogs then flips the garbage can lid. It's dark out.

I can kill if I have to. I know I can (kill). If I have to. My fingers spasm. Ready to rip him apart (if they have to). They transition to fists. I anticipate a bloodletting (of sorts). Stars shimmer through the tree tops. I goad myself into killer stance ready to pounce. Vegetable scraps and kitchen waste rain down on me as I contemplate death and the Milky Way. The lid slams shut again.

Hours pass. The dogs are whistled into the house. It's time for bed. I lift the lid and take a peek. All is clear. I tip the can and make my way out of here.

Red, white and blue monkeys swing through the trees above. They crisscross eerie tendrils in the dark, going around and around and around in search of banana food. Show teeth. Show butt cheeks. Show me up for the loolah my imagination takes me for. I know cop lights. They're cop lights. Drama implies they flash for me. I'm a killer after all (that kid is so lucky). I think my way through to where I need to go. I find a way out of here. Lionel falls over garden walls.

My late-night ventures wake the hounds. Muffled woofs from housebound bowlers trip indoor lights and outdoor floods, vaporizing my every step. Two gardens down the bark becomes a bite. Dog ivories chomp through sweating flesh. I gob smack the bitch and run. She returns, hopeful for one last lunge. A butt bite sends me head over heels into prickly pears next door. I ouch.

I hunker down beneath the final wall that shields me from the world. A Police radio murmurs emergency calls on the other side. Trite responses echo reluctantly down the street. I periscope the wall. The patrol car faces blindly away, the officer, oblivious and at peace. I slide clumsily

over the wall, falling limply to the ground, one eye on my nemesis the other to the stars. I will myself invisible. I am - Invisible. And (home) free.

DAda 14 and then some.

I become visible. A(gain). A work in regress. I back-peddle fairy tales and call it poetry. Clean and measured, my lines bleed out across the page in neatly gridlocked quads. They exist to within a hair's breadth of their lives. I measure. I rule. I synchronize. I write. I am - Poet. The line dictates. To a nano-milli measurement of something or other. I measure. I am measured. I know my limit. It is reached. I swim within those limits. Saved.

I live in a bin and burn holes in my day with nuanced regularity. I walk. My pedometer tells me so (it works). How far from home can I be? It doesn't say. I take another step.

I like haikus. I write haikus. Lionel Sides' Haikus. Try some. Buy some.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I had just relocated from rural Oregon to urban New Mexico. The day after I arrived in New Mexico was garbage day and the garbage truck had just come through. I looked down the block and saw a street full of emptied garbage cans strewn about. To my peaceful country way of thinking it was chaos, like something out of the movie, *The Day of the Triffids* (1963). That was the inspiration for "Lionel Sides in the Can." After that it was just the simple heart-breaking, soul-destroying matter of finding three thousand words to flesh out the idea. A task, all writers are familiar with.*

What comes through in the story for me is the impact of big cities on certain individuals and how alienating people can feel in an urban setting with the obvious triggers of aggressive neighbors, changed societal mores and the constant presence of law enforcement on the street.

I am influenced by everything the world has to offer. When it comes to writers, I tend to lean more toward JD Salinger, for everything he has written. I also like James Joyce, Frank O'Connor, Brendan Behan, and the great short story writers of the late nineteenth century such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Orne Jewett and Kate Chopin.

AUTHOR BIO: Larry Deery graduated from San Jose State University, CA, with a degree in English/Creative Writing in 2014. In his spare time he writes short stories. Quality spare time is spent concentrating on jobs and careers and how best to avoid them. So far, he has met with great success in this field. Larry has been published in such notable journals as *The Oddville Press*, *The Ginger Collect*, and *The Manhattanville Review*. He currently resides in Ireland where the work ethic is negotiable.

