



BURIAL

Peter Dellolio

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

Peter Delloio's, "Burial," is part therapy session, part confession, and part tragic coming-of-age, as if Denis Johnson, Junot Diaz, and Donald Ray Pollock got together to write a story about the destruction of a young girl's innocence.

Our protagonist is finding out who she is, how she is who she is, and how to process the feelings that she's buried inside of her for so many years.

At its core, "Burial," is about care – although given the subject matter that may seem a bit of a stretch, but I stand by it – and how the small acts of kindness that we give to the love in our lives is oftentimes the only thing that lessens the pain of our trauma.

Care is seeking self-help when your emotional past overwhelms you.

Care is tucking feelings away when you're just a child and the unfathomable terrors of humanity provide you no excuse for the life you were forced to live.

Care is burying the dolls of your childhood so sweetly and delicately because you were stripped of the option of being a child.

Care is feeling that you can sow grounds you've left fallow.

Care is taking the time to craft a story that lets the reader empathize with sorrow and reminding us that where we have come from does not dictate where we have to go.

Delloio's, "Burial," is heart wrenching, but will give tenfold what it may take from you.

There is love and consideration buried beneath this tale, and I truly hope you enjoy.

QUALITY QUOTABLES:

This joy, this love: the ordinary, commonplace ingredients of the life of a child, were never for her the genuine gifts they should have been; in her world, they were counterfeits, imposters, charlatans and false prophets; their deception came from the lowest rungs of humanity's ladder, and what was most touching about her refusal to give back hate and scorn, but to instead bestow only gentility and kindness upon the world, was the way in which these obscenities, masquerading as offers of goodness, constantly led her to expect love and trust, only to spit at her love, to ridicule her trust, to prove to her again and again that cruelty, depravity, anger and intolerance were the four walls of her prison, and that because she was a child, she could not escape.

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Leaves and twigs scattered suddenly, as if the last, hurried pat of her seven-year-old palm, hitting the flattened surface of moist earth that moments ago revealed a fourth hole, was somehow acknowledged by the secret watchfulness of nature, and the little whisking breezes, surrounding her finished labors, had somehow bestowed their blessing upon her task.

She had left the house as surreptitiously as her tiny form and sincere energy would allow, running down the old boards, almost jumping across the eighteenth-century backdoor steps of the farmhouse, charging into the woods like an infantryman rushing into battle, head held high with quiet dignity and deadly purpose, without even an atom of fear, soul impervious to danger, defying threats to life and limb, lying just ahead in the enemy's midst.

She felt that if the subjects of her special mission showed great strength and courage, then so should she, therefore she looked upon her four inanimate playmates with a mixture of wonder and resignation, and so, the night before at bedtime, she watched them reverently as they sat in a Buddha pose, exhibiting an air of perfect composure, their faces cradled by the soft glow of moonlight, their eyes looking straight ahead with resolve and confidence.

It would not be a communal grave; she wanted above all for each of her sweet friends to be laid to rest in his or her own sacred plot, so that the dog (Snowflake), the cat (Marshmallow), Raggedy Ann, and Raggedy Andy were to be given the same privacy and decency one would expect from the funeral of a deceased loved one, as each soft, delicate figure was loved by her, as if it were indeed a family member, and in her young heart, each one had died a kind of spiritual death, not a physical or a biological end, but something far worse, and in her young mind, which possessed wisdom far advanced for her age, wisdom that was shamelessly forced to coexist with her innocence, the only way to save the purity of her playmates' existence was to remove them forever from the eyes of the living.

She knew, of course, that there was a solemn finality to this act; she had considered other means of burial which seemed to offer the same degree of respect but which, unfortunately, lacked the same quiet efficiency as the earth: a stone tied to each of their necks followed by a loud splash in the pond that was too close to the house and therefore presented the risk of unwanted noise and attention; a funeral pyre with the bodies of her friends neatly stacked in a crisscross pattern that, again, would risk discovery either because of smell (the burning figures' clothing and buttons would surely waft into the house, stinging her mother's otherwise unblinking, expressionless eyes) or sight (it would not take long for clouds of thick gray smoke to fill the deep blue sky and be noticed between the bare November branches by her father as he went through the woods deer hunting); no, only the participation of the silent earth, offering its mystery of covered holes as a kind of accomplice, could defeat the tyranny of the senses and negate the influence of sound, smell, and sight.

The ancient instinct in all sentient beings, human or animal, to protect and comfort helpless young, has immeasurable dignity, and perhaps by symbolically adopting this role of the

beneficent mother, she somehow restored to her spirit and her psyche a portion of the pure joy and carefree love of life that had been so brutally taken from her.

This joy, this love: the ordinary, commonplace ingredients of the life of a child, were never for her the genuine gifts they should have been; in her world, they were counterfeits, imposters, charlatans and false prophets; their deception came from the lowest rungs of humanity's ladder, and what was most touching about her refusal to give back hate and scorn, but to instead bestow only gentility and kindness upon the world, was the way in which these obscenities, masquerading as offers of goodness, constantly led her to expect love and trust, only to spit at her love, to ridicule her trust, to prove to her again and again that cruelty, depravity, anger and intolerance were the four walls of her prison, and that because she was a child, she could not escape.

There was an immense cornfield down the road, behind her parent's farmhouse; her father would call out to her on summer nights, angrily demanding that she make her way through the towering, moonlit stalks, so radiant and majestic in the musky perfume of July country nights; finally, almost magically safe, she comforted her mind and body as if, for just a few moments, this metaphysical union of spirit and matter belonged only to her, as if her being and her senses functioned first and foremost for her own pleasure, and as if the glow of the diamonds in the black velvet cape of night was intense and pulsated only because of her imminent rescue, that moment of drama, the intervention of the caped hero at the last second, and the all encompassing arms of the night, reaching down to take her away, as she lay on the ground in the middle of the cornfield, looking up at the sparkling ancient sky.

The cornfield had become her sanctuary, her escape; an oasis of fantasy where her imagination ruled and the malignant realities of the farmhouse disappeared; the farther she ventured into the multiplying matrixes of leafy giants, the more she felt the dissolution of her body, and the more she felt the freedom of her senses, the release of all sensate modalities, the miraculous freedom of being allowed to feel and hear, to touch and see and smell what she chose, the way a bird decides where to build its nest, the way a ghost crab delicately emerges from a hole of glassy pebbles, sprightly sidling along a sunset-drenched shore.

She froze suddenly, having filled the last hole in a kneeling position; her father had taken two shots in rapid succession at some bucks; she was familiar with the sound of the high-powered rifle he used for deer when he hunted on his property; momentarily startled and remaining on all fours, she found it strange (even though she had heard these sounds hundreds of times) that the report of the gun always created waves of thrashing and squawking sounds as hundreds of frightened birds flew maniacally off the branches, violently pulling out leaves and twigs in their wake, as if the trees had been pulverized by the winds of an atomic explosion.

Her father's reflection appeared on the shiny, slippery black orb of the dead buck's eye; reaching up to gut the carcass, his undulating, distorted form seemed to loom over the trees, as if he were a giant emerging from some dark, forbidden part of the forest, preparing to devour his kill; at the same instant, she arose, straightening herself, while in a very low voice she uttered prayers intended to guide the souls of her sacrificed brethren to a heavenly plane; but just as the gleaming iris of the slaughtered beast made her father look like a gargantuan, supernatural thing,

the square, yellow plastic garnet of her toy ring, in the fierce glare of midday sun, gave her a compressed, shrunken appearance; having dutifully accomplished her honorable task, her heart felt stronger than a thousand oceans, but the illusion of perspective on the surface of the ring made her look no taller than a blade of grass.

It was perfectly natural for the girl's father to dress out a deer or any other game that was in season right at the spot where he made the kill: this saved him the trouble of twice carrying the offal collected in a pail; had he performed the gutting and skinning in his basement, he would have to bring the pail back into the woods, about half a mile from the house; he often left the innards of his kill as well as assorted food garbage from his family just beyond his property as a way of keeping smaller, scavenging creatures such as opossums, raccoons, foxes and so forth from coming too close; everything in his world of hunting was calculated for maximum efficiency: he was a cold, one dimensional, one minded man who did not see a microdot of gray in the world; its inhabitants, its events, and its meanings were strictly and savagely black and white to him.

The cruelest dimensions of his nature manifested themselves primarily through this strictness of viewing, understanding, and judging the world; ownership, especially the primitive rights of those who own, who possess, who wield sovereign power and control over that which belongs to them, these were the only rituals of mind and matter that earned his attention and respect; for him, every conceivable manner or method of ownership (including all abominations of behavior that kowtowed to the lowest instincts of man) reverberated with the echoes of a life well spent, a dedication to Puritan laws of work and God, and a sacrifice of the self in servitude to the needs and welfare of the family.

A curious parallelism of movements occurred: as the girl slowly stood up, during the silence that ensued after the gun's report faded and many of the birds returned to the trees, she relaxed somewhat and slowly took a few steps backwards, smiling at her finished work, at the carefully flattened soil that now concealed four tiny graves, and, just as she backed up a little in this admiring regard of the dirt, her father wiped blood and oily fluids from his hands as he slowly took a few steps backwards as well, contemplating with equal satisfaction his completed task of evisceration, and deciding that the carcass was ready to be brought back to the house (first he would scatter the entrails collected in the large metal bucket).

She did not understand, yet somehow she knew her deeds today held a kind of sacredness, something that could be preserved and revered in her mind and her heart, unsullied by time or circumstance, something that could not be compromised or made foul, the way the dandelions and short grass were deformed just now, buried under the rising steam and bloody slime of the dead creature's insides, her father having dumped the bucket, making all the glistening portions of internal organs scatter about, some of them clinging like rubbery cobwebs to stalks and bushes, most of them unfolded and layered upon the earth, like pink and red lava from a purging volcano, bubbling prehistoric waves of matter, invading and destroying the decorum of nature and civilization.

There was no compassion in the aftermath of this butchery. Her father was performing a functional act by leaving the entrails along the perimeter of his property, just as he would often

bring out buckets of discarded food to the same general area. It was bizarre that the severity of his thinking never included an awareness of how these deeds were a form of sustenance for the small creatures that roamed around his land. The fact that these acts kept the animals nourished and alive never entered his mind. She knew this better than anyone. She knew that his only interest was in preventing the scavengers from coming too close to his house, a sealed world that would always remain private and inaccessible to outside scrutiny. There were two reasons he did not simply exterminate the animals: the first was that such a holocaust would disrupt the balance of nature in his hunting zone, eliminating the food supply of the animals he liked to hunt (deer and ducks for example) and eventually driving them away. The second reason was pure inflexible dispassionate practicality: there would be countless trips to collect and dispose of the carcasses. So to think of this distribution of the innards of his kill as a form of humane regard for the raccoons and opossums and foxes would be like thinking that barbed wire is a welcome sign to trespassers because it is not electrified. He was a very successful salesman who possessed a powerful, instinctual understanding of the difference between surface appearance and private content. She and her siblings were never allowed to invite school friends to the house; visiting the homes of their classmates or any other children they knew was forbidden; strangers of any kind were always kept at a distance; on the rare occasions when her father allowed her to receive a doctor's care, he would obstinately and obtrusively hover over the examination, no matter how small or minor the ailment or bruise that necessitated the visit. She would develop a life-long anxiety about fundamental health issues and doctor visits in general as a result of her father's morbid rituals of possessiveness and inappropriate attention when she was examined. Therefore, her emotional education regarding the contradictions and hypocrisy of her father's behavior and habits gave her a critical acumen far beyond the maturity of her years. She knew that he was motivated only by this maniacal need for privacy. He did not care one iota for the welfare of the smaller animals whose existence was supported by his steady supply of offal. If he could have scoured the forest with an automatic weapon and eliminated all of these little beasts without adversely impacting the steady supply of larger prey that he so enjoyed hunting, he would have done so with glee punctuated by a soulless grimace. Of course, all of this was the private content that he was so skillful at concealing. None of his neighbors had the slightest idea that he performed what they saw as humanitarian deeds only for the express purpose of guaranteeing the presence of the other animals that he hunted, killed, and butchered. The final step was the taxidermist so yet another stuffed carcass could be displayed in his "great room" with its forty foot ceiling and walls filled with the mounted motionless bodies of bears, deer, elk, caribou, and others. She knew that an inexhaustible supply of frightening anger always smoldered within him. There was no way to anticipate or prepare for it. She and her siblings knew that he was extremely mercurial and could transition from irrational hostility to goodnatured cheer in a flash. Their only coping mechanism was to determine what mood had taken hold of him for that day and to act accordingly. If he was antagonistic and violent, the only recourse would be to immerse themselves in homework and household chores, to stay out of his way as much as possible. Nevertheless, he would always find some wrong or fault in what they had done, and physical punishment soon followed. If he was pleasant and ebullient, he would encourage them to play and often join in, full of paternal benevolence and happy spontaneity. A classic example of bipolar personality disorder, although, to his children, there was only the daily torture of not knowing if their father would be loving or hateful, thus depriving them of the precious consistency that is so essential to the emotional evolution and psychological well-being of a child. He felt that the children were his property. He believed he had the right to do whatever he

wanted with them. She knew the hunting was over because the rifle fire had subsided. He said goodbye to his hunting buddies and hoisted the disemboweled body onto the wagon he used to bring back heavy game. She gave the burial area a final look and tried her best to clean the dirt from her dress. She knew he would want to know how she got dirty. He shut the meat freezer lid in the garage after depositing the animal. He went into the house and removed his clothing. She walked up the stairs as slowly and quietly as possible. She went into her room and sat on the bed. He followed her and closed the door.

“Your father used Snowflake and the others?”

“He put them into sexual positions?”

“Including his penis?”

“He wanted you to think it was innocent play?”

“We don’t have to talk about it this week if you don’t want to.”

“Most of this happened more than forty years ago.”

“It takes time.”

“I wish I could make the pain go away.”

“I know these wounds run very deep.”

“So what did you do with all the dolls?”

AUTHOR’S NOTE: *I wrote Burial as a kind of homage to a very dear friend of mine who was abused by her father. Her solemn ritual of burying the stuffed toys resonated with me for many years. I tried to capture in prose some of the courage and dignity that she displayed, even at such a young age. I wanted the story to come across as a dark fable, not a public service announcement about parental sexual abuse. With some literary influence from James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, I kept the sentences flowing without punctuation (until the last paragraph), hoping to create a more panoramic view of the scenes and details.*

AUTHOR BIO: Born 1956 New York City. Went to Nazareth High School and New York University. Graduated 1978: B.A. Cinema Studies; B.F.A. Film Production. Wrote and directed various short films, including James Joyce’s short story *Counterparts* which he adapted into a screenplay. *Counterparts* was screened at national and international film festivals. A freelance writer, Peter has published many 250–1000-word articles on the arts, film, dance, sculpture, architecture, and culture, as well as fiction, poetry, one-act plays, and critical essays on art, film, and photography. Poetry collection “A Box Of Crazy Toys” published 2018 by Xenos Books/Chelsea Editions. He is working on a critical study of Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock’s*

Cinematic World: Shocks of Perception and the Collapse of the Rational. Chapter excerpts have appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Kinema*, *Flickhead*, and *North Dakota Quarterly* since 2006.

His poetry and fiction have appeared in various literary magazines, including *Antenna*, *Aero-Sun Times*, *Bogus Review*, *Pen-Dec Press*, *Both Sides Now*, *Cross Cultural Communications/Bridging The Waters Volume II*, and *The Mascara Literary Review*. *Dramatika Press* published a volume of his one-act plays in 1983. One of these, *The Seeker*, appeared in an issue of *Collages & Bricolages*. Peter was a contributing editor for *NYArts Magazine*, writing art and film reviews. He authored monographs on several new artists as well. He was co-publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *Artscape2000*, a prestigious, award-winning art review e-zine. He has also taught poetry and art for *LEAP*. He is an artist himself: artpal.com/fish56tail



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. His paintings and 3D works offer abstract images of famous people in all walks of life who have died tragically at a young age. He lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn.