

What He Knows What She Knows What You Know

by Alex M. Pruteanu

he thinks:

next time i come around i want to be a redwood.

which is amusing since he's not a buddhist. he's not even religious.

or what is it they call it now?

spiritual.

and the intellectual idea of repeating life, even as something else, is repulsing to him, yet still holds a certain amount of intrigue. still it's cruel and unusual punishment. it's folktale. mixed with curiosity.

mixed with worst of all, hope.

still, a redwood.

reincarnation as means of repenting for ongoing sins, not punishment.

he thinks:

sins. what a joke. body of christ. blood of christ.

but there are things that work him over now. he slaps a label onto himself: humanist.

maybe he's turning into that. it wouldn't be a bad transformation.

he's old and tricks don't stick too much at this age.

but labels...those things have stubborn adhesives.

there are those things he'd like to take back. calling mikey beyer a fag all throughout seventh grade. the time he stole money from his mother's purse when he was ten. walking out on the bill at denny's stiffing the waitress. many others later on that hurt people. a sack full of things to take back. a cellar's worth.

and the chunk of time in new york.

in the months following 9/11 he lived in islip. there was a shuttle bus carrying boys and girls to a muslim school nearby. after the attacks he joined the others on the streets every morning waiting for the van, and threw eggs and oranges and half-full coffee cups at it.

sometimes spat at the windshield.
they were just children going to school.
humanist.

—
even though she has a weird name, she was born here in america.
at a hospital in maryland, just off the beltway. you can see it as you
loop around, just before the mormon temple. it's an ugly hospital.
looks like an institution.

hanan arzay.

it's moroccan. it's a weird name for the american kids but she
doesn't go to an american school.

her parents are ahmed and fatima. immigrants from rabat.

her high school is for muslim students, and she and a handful of
other kids get bussed from her house in islip to khalil gibran school
in deer park.

every morning there is a group of angry people who throws eggs
and coffee cups at the van, livid about 9/11. they shout insults at the
kids inside.

sand niggers.

smelly arabs.

terrorists.

they've done this for two straight months since the attacks. one
time, a woman hurled a bottle filled with maple syrup and shattered
the window--a large tarantula of a crack smiled at them. the woman
was so angry, hanan could see veins pulsating on her forehead.

she thinks:

this is what it must be like for palestinians in gaza. this is what it
must be like for palestinian people to get to work or for palestinian
kids to go to school.

—
at the khalil gibran school in deer park, hanan's koran teacher
throws a piece of chalk at her for requesting literal translations of
the holy book.

hanan arzay is later expelled for the insult to islam.

