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Relentless Anamnesis

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relentless anamnesis

I will never forget the day I saw my first railroad spike screwed into the ground. I'll never forget the day you were born. I will never forget the first time I saw a man die. I'll never forget the day I saw your mother die. I will never forget the Friends of Charleston. I'll never forget my family. I will also never forget the night a white man stepped first foot in the village of Nantu. Little did we suspect, but something began falling from our fingers and into our beloved Núa that night. Our ancestors, carrying only history and hope, were riding the silent waves of that river—into a world we had never imagined. The rest of my life remains jumbled in my wasteland of a memory, though. I'm uncertain whether certain recollections are real. I can't even tell if bits of moments run together in the correct memory. I go to the memory, and then I feel like I've suddenly stumbled upon Ozymandias. Where did this memory come from? Whose is it, who am I, and what is this memory doing here and not there? Am I Ozy or am I the traveler? Maybe I'm making this too philosophical; all I know is that I'm struggling to hold on to the person that I am. I'm holding with all I can when for so long all I wanted to do was forget.

I wanted to let go of Nantu, but the moments from then come back clearer now than they did when I fled. Those leeches we call memories feast, sucking me dry of everything I wanted to become and leaving me with only my bones to mourn for me. These memories are me, though: My soul, my heart, my brain, my skin, my tongue, my teeth, myself. Like cattle, I have been scourged by these memories, forever defined by a war that made humans human again. These will be the last memories to go and when they float away, I will join them.

I begin to piece together certain moments from my time in Nantu only to reach the final piece of the mental jigsaw puzzle and suddenly, I realize I've managed to squeeze moments into the wrong memory. It's hard knowing whether or not your life happened the way you think it did, son. It's a fickle thing, the mind. You never realize you've completely fuddled everything you used to know until you actually try to recall it at some obsolete moment later in life, like I have been for 60 years, son. I can barely recall the people from Nantu. After all

these years away from the jungle, I can only minutely recall certain scenery and certain conversations. Even those, I can barely believe are real. How do I know if they happened or if it's some trick my mind is playing on me? Can my mind really be f---ing me this bad? Rather than remembering the names of the people I called family, I've remembered actions that defined the course of other actions. I can't remember the names of the elders, I can't remember who I used to climb the highest of trees and scale the rockiest of mountains with, but I can remember the look on someone's face before they were blown to pieces. Those are what my memories consist of. I can't even really remember my family. I can remember how they died, but I can't remember too much of who they were. But I do dream about them, occasionally. I can remember my father's fiery eyes. I can remember how my father used to beat me. I can remember my mother's distant eyes. And I can remember how badly I wanted to leave. Oh, that feeling comes back to me as I write these words and put "fact" to paper. I guess certain things never leave you.

It's scary, trying to remember something you lived but not being able to recall much of it. I know my memories aren't gone yet, but for some reason, try as I might, those agonizingly painful and beautiful moments are blurry. Faces have been distorted for my well-being and for the sake of my sanity. Well, most of them have been. For a long time I wanted to keep those moments hidden from the world and myself. A few years ago, though, I began to unpack those memories while I lay in bed trying to convince myself you were OK, that you'd be coming home any minute now and that I was a fool to question your responsibility. That was then, and I've only pushed even more so since my diagnosis. I'm running out of time and I want to tell you a little bit about me. You may think of me as a father by biology, but not emotionally nor spiritually, and I truly do apologize for that. It's just that I wasn't ready. It wasn't until I realized how alike we truly were that I wanted to recount every detail I could remember to you, but you left for a long time and I didn't know where you were or even if you were alive. I just hope you can read this before I start to lose more than just my memories of Nantu. And I really wish I could remember that place now as I near the end of my time on this planet.

Samantha Callahan

let's take a walk down the hallway. it's a long way, it takes all day

photography