

## “Postscript”

By Jay Kruse

I came into this world screaming. Like most sacks of flesh and blood do when they get pushed out into some doctors gloved hands. It was one of those days, the type where the sun slanted just enough off the surf to blind anyone walking by. Not enough to ruin anyone's day, but enough to make angry people angrier. My mom couldn't wake up my dad that morning, (he was too drunk to be roused by anything in those days) so she drove to the hospital herself. One foot on the gas and the other on the dash, I was the world's biggest inconvenience before I even got cut out of her belly. She had half a mind to slap me in the incubator for deciding to start coming out feet first and making the doctors give her that ugly c-section scar. I was supposed to be called Frankie. Her dad's dad's dad's name or something to that effect, but she was too out of it to say it right and I got Fracti written on my birth certificate. I like my name. My fifth grade teacher didn't. We were learning about Greek and Latin roots, I had no clue my name was Latin for anything, but she did. Called me to the front of the class all smug smiles and eyebrows up in her hairline. Grabbed my shoulders with those wrinkled claws she called hands and said

“Fracti here has a Latin name because his parents must have tried to be different.” She smiled, voice dripping with saccharine sweetness. I almost told her she was wrong, that everything my name was could be chalked up to a spelling mistake but she pressed on. “Fracti means broken.” I blinked. “I'm sure you'll live up to your name.” She said in that same sweet tone that started to make less and less sense for the words coming out of her mouth. All the kids kind of looked at her after that, like they didn't understand what to do. We didn't know what cruel was, so this must be kindness, right? I thanked her and sat down. I never said thank you again after that.

If my mama didn't already have enough reason to hate me, I had this terrible love of the past. I wanted to know all sorts of things. She would snap at me that it didn't matter, that all the people I obsessed over were worthless bones and dust. I found a box when I turned 14. I found a lot when I turned 14, actually. All my friends decided girls were the newest game to play. I didn't get the appeal. I rummaged through the old crate on my birthday. At the top I found a picture. Faded by time but in surprisingly good shape. I did a double take. I struggled for a second to read the cursive under it. "Frankie Chron." Oh. He looked just like me, his dark hair slicked back lazily, a curl falling forward into his eyes. Same dimples on the same cheek. But his eyes caught my attention. They weren't looking into the lens, they were off to the side, gazing adoringly at a mystery person who was just out of frame. I heard my mom coming up the stairs, so I shoved the box and the picture under my bed and glanced out the window. Watching as the new neighbor boy moved in, Peter, his name was. Peter was something I wasn't expecting to discover that year. Or the next. Or the next. And suddenly we were 16. His roof was where I spent most of my time, I picked up smoking up there. Bad habit, we knew that, but his family did it and we didn't think much of it. A lot of things happened that September. We were sitting there, soaking up the last of summer as the sun went down. He handed me his cigarette and I took a drag. It was a brief moment, I could have thought about anything in the world. But my mind snagged on the thought that my lips were brushing where his had just been and suddenly I couldn't get it out of my head. He looked at me, the last rays of sun making his red curls burn a golden fire around his head. I couldn't tell at the time if it was hell or heaven inviting me in, but I went. He tasted like the maraschino cherries he always took from my milkshakes, it made my brain short circuit. I pulled back to see him staring at me. It was silent but for the gentle sound of the lake in the distance. He moved to stand, and I acted on instinct. My hand closing around his. The other went to his jaw,

feeling the smooth line and the jut of the bone. This time he kissed me. We wouldn't say it for another few months but all I could think was I love you I love you I love you you're loved—

I never thought I was a romantic before Peter, but in that perfect year you would catch me acting like one. Finding out his favorite flower, his favorite food, his favorite song, his favorite everything. I knew my mom would beat me within an inch of my life if she ever found out, so we loved each other with that constant kind of dread. He would lie beside me, carefully undoing everything my mother had caused me to believe. He made me more than a typo. More than a c-section no one wanted. More than something broken.

Peter didn't accept a cigarette for the first time in April. Two weeks before he turned 17. His head was in my lap and he waved it off before I could hand him it. I was confused but didn't push, he seemed tired. I kissed his forehead and let him sleep. One week before he turned 17 he came down with a cold. I snuck out of my house to bring him soup I learned how to make the night before. Four days before he turned 17 that cold turned into pneumonia. I was holding him when he coughed up blood and I cleaned it off his mouth. The day before his birthday he was put in the ICU. The day after Peter turned 17 years old I broke all five fingers in my right hand when I punched his flatlined heart monitor. Before my dad OD'd he would beat me for crying. It wasn't something a man was supposed to do. But I was hardly a man anymore. God, I never was. I was still 17. And so was Peter. I would become a man soon. Peter would stay 17.

I got dragged out pretty quickly after I broke the monitor. Tossed into the dirt outside the hospital with unbidden tears slipping down my hollow cheeks. I walked home without noticing the way my feet moved. Dropped to my knees in front of that box my 14 year old self had opened. I picked up the picture of Frankie again, I recognized that look in his eyes now. It was the way I stared at Peter. I checked underneath it, picking up a worn paper I had never seen

before. I had to wipe my face over and over before I could see it through my tears. It was covered in white-out. But this was what was left.

Dear

I have found that the days after your departure I've been simply surviving. I'm starving

Things are scarce in these times,

This is the first time I've been able

to write since your lungs shut down

I found myself like a                      stuck

I considered myself a smart man, a lot of people did. I believed  
that I understood grief. I realize now I was wrong

Now I can say                      that I understand                      I feel akin  
with the people— all of those people who are able to tear the world apart for the  
I was never a man of faith but                      He didn't listen. Perhaps  
that's the payment

I was watching                      , and I wondered briefly if it was possible,  
somehow possible. That if I were to                      , and I made it to the edge of the world before  
the night came. If I could stay in a place where the sun is still up and the day doesn't end— not  
to bring you back,                      — but so there can be a  
world that won't move on without you, because I know I                      will.

Thank you,

-Frankie , forever your

I stared at it for a long while. What my great-grandfather had written. What some self-righteous sociopath had blotted out to hide his love. I wasn't alone. Frankie had a Peter. So I did the only thing I really knew how to do. Start filling in between the broken pieces until they aren't so broken anymore. This was my ending. It was Peter's ending. And it was an ending for Frankie, one that wouldn't be erased.

Dear (Peter, and all the other boys we love in and out of the frame of photographs)

I have found that the days after your departure I've been simply surviving. I'm starving (because you've left me unable to drink in your smile). Things are scarce in these times, (not in terms of what I have, there is plenty to keep my body alive). This is the first time I've been able to write since your lungs shut down (like some sort of Ferris Wheel or carousal, still spinning weakly long after the lights go out). I found myself like a (broken clock) stuck (exactly at the time your heart stopped beating). I considered myself a smart man, a lot of people did. I believed that I understood grief. I realize now I was wrong (you were all I had that was right)

Now I can say (with the deepest regret) that I understand (Achilles and his rage) I feel akin with the people— all of those people who are able to tear the world apart for the (men they weren't allowed to love.) I was never a man of faith but (I prayed to god to keep you with me). He didn't listen. Perhaps that's the payment (for the sin of making you mine when the world told me I could not.)

I was watching (the sunset that night), and I wondered briefly if it was possible, somehow possible. That if I were to (take off running), and I made it to the edge of the world before the night came. If I could stay in a place where the sun is still up and the day doesn't end— not to bring you back, (I know there is no amount of begging that could do that)— but so there can be a world that won't move on without you, because I know I (never) will.

Thank you, (my love, my life, my everything)

-Frankie (Brought alive by Fracti), forever your (mistake)

(P.S. I love you I love you I love you you're loved)