

Which Way To The End

by R. Salvador Reyes

Joey waited until they reached the crosswalk: the tall one laughing & waving his arms, and the short, tubby one—who'd thrown the hot dog wrapper into the basket—shaking his head. And when the light across the street snapped green & lit its little white, handless, footless man, Joey reached into the basket and snatched the wrapper.

The headlights from the passing cars flickered between & beneath the street-side parked ones, their shines veering rhythmically through the darkness around Joey, the monotonous tires rolling endlessly along the blacktop. He pawed at the foil gently, feeling for some spongy weight inside, hoping.

Joey squeezed everything before unwrapping it. He wanted to know first, to have some suspicion, be prepared. This is the way you did things, he thought, when everything you ever opened tried to fuck you in the face.

Joey knew it sounded like he was talking about sucking a dick, which he didn't mean specifically & exclusively. Although, when he was 13, his mouth had actually been pried by that stiff unwanted flesh.

Ain't nothin' you open wanna fuck you in the face more than a priest's robe. That's what his roommate, Terrence, had said to him on Joey's first night at the detention center, after he told Terrence why he'd been dumped there. Joey stuck to the truth, didn't embellish his memory: Father Jerry trying to shove that fat cock in his face, and Joey driving his fist into the old man's head & neck enough times to make them swell & bulge until together they looked like a bloody stem of broccoli.

It was actually the second time that the Father had tried his luck with Joey. Of course, he didn't tell Terrence about the first time, when—out of sheer terror & confusion—Joey acquiesced, then spent the rest of the night throwing up in the shower and vowed that if Father Jerry ever tried it again, he'd kill him. And although he didn't succeed, he tried.

He'd seen his dad beat a man to death outside of Footie's Town Tap one night when he was seven, which also terrified him—until his dad tossed Joey into the car and sped off, tearing across the poorly-lit & buckling asphalt of their tiny, dying

Michigan town in that ancient, awesome Camaro. That part thrilled Joey.

And as Joey slugged away at the Father, smearing a little more blood on his hand with each thud, he thought about his dad slamming his fist into the other man's face under the streetlight. He remembered how he could see the spatters of sweat & blood explode from the man's head & onto the concrete. Joey would've killed the Father too, but he just wasn't strong enough.

###