Requiem

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THE DAY is warm and green and yellow and things don’t
die on warm green yellow days, but only fade away for­
gotten. Is now—and ev—er—shall be . . . wor—or—world
with—out—end amen. Brown and barefoot, little Orley
Christenson skips across the thick thick lawn before his home
humming the deep chant he remembered from church this
morning. A—a—a—amen. He tries to imitate his father’s
solemn tones as he heard them then, but his voice only
breaks and he loses his breath in the strain of the attempt.
The charm of the chant is lost in the failure. Burying his
hands in his pockets, he glowers at a stone blocking his path
and, disdainful of pain, kicks out a stubby toe in impotent
rage. The pebble skips and clatters across the sparkling
cement sidewalk, stops, blocks his path once more. Head
high, pretending not to see, he leaves the walk and soothes
his toe in the cool, green grass. Is now—and ev—er—shall—

"Orley! Orleyorleyorleyorleyorley!"

He turns his head to see his six-year-old brother bound
across the thick thick lawn and pull up, panting, at his side.
Denny looks up at his brother, buries his hands in his
pockets, and plaintively asks, “Where ya goin’, Orley?”

Feigning purpose, Orley studies the ground, buries his
hands deeper in his pockets than his little brother, and walks
on, silently, curling his toes around tufts of grass with each
step. His left foot works better at the game than his right.
Denny studies the ground and walks beside his brother.
“Huh, Orley,” he says softly, “where ya goin’? Huh?”

Orley stares seriously at his brother. “Oh, someplace.”
Denny pouts. He had taken such care to avoid that an­
swer, because now and now and after that and after that and
oh well anyhow, “Where’s someplace?” he says and pouts
that he said it.
“Just someplace,” Orley says like he always says and studies the shadow that moves so softly over the thick thick lawn. And the two walk on until Denny almost forgets to say what he always says, but he doesn’t.

“Just someplace isn’t anyplace.” And Denny pouts again and moves to his brother’s other side and steps on his shadow.

Until drifting toward someplace that isn’t anyplace, the shadow is lost in a bigger shadow where the green is deeper and darker than the green on the lawn. And Orley parts the drooping limbs of a willow tree and plops right down in the middle of the deeper darker green.

“This place isn’t anyplace,” Denny frowns, but plops right down beside his brother.

In the shade of the hollow of the willow tree, Orley tugs at the tip of a blade of grass until it slides from the rest of the leaf, and he nibbles the pulp from the moist, white end. Denny breaks three in the middle before he gets one that’s just right for nibbling. He smiles with surprise that it isn’t bitter like dandelion stems, and he wonders why he never did it before because it tastes almost like real food. Glancing surreptitiously at his brother, he pulls up five in a row without breaking a one, and bites them all at once, and almost forgets that he was going to tell his brother something, but he doesn’t.

“Orley?” Denny whispers.

His brother ignores him and stares out from under the shade of the tree to a part of the lawn where the yellow makes the green brighter.

“Mom said Mr. Henley died yesterday.” Denny looks expectantly at Orley from the corner of his eye, but the sun and the grass have dulled his brother’s curiosity, and Orley hears only words, only words from his little brother. Soft sounds on a warm, yellow day.

When the soft sounds cease, Orley is aware of the silence. The words had fallen gently on his ear, and he is undecided as to whether they were a pleasure or a distraction. If only they hadn’t come from his little brother, he thinks, and more in an attempt to imitate the sound than as a response to his brother, he says, very softly, “Hmmmmm?”
A smile of success wrinkles Denny's freckled brown nose, but only for a moment. Pulling his finger between his toes, and feigning great seriousness, he starts to say what he said before.

But he thinks about what he said before and he remembers how his puppy looked when a truck squashed it in the street. And he remembers his mother saying it was dead and he says, "Mr. Henley's dead," and it sounds different from what he said before.

Orley thinks about this for a while, poking a blade of grass between each of his teeth. "Oh," he says doubtfully, carefully, "you don't know. You don't know." His eyes roll exaggeratedly in scorn.

"I do too know, Orley," he says defensively. "I do too know. I heard Mom say he was dead." Denny nods his head belligerently. "Mom said he was. Mom said." His eyes open wide. Somehow, it won't really be true until his older brother believes it. "Mom said," he repeats. That statement alone stands as irrefutable evidence.

Orley thinks about Mr. Henley and about being dead, but the two thoughts will not merge. Just when he imagines Mr. Henley being dead, just as he sees him lying down with his eyes closed like he was dead, he rises and walks around his front yard raking leaves or something, and he isn't dead anymore. Unsustainable, death melts in his mind like a lump of butter in warm summer sun. Alive is alive and dead is dead and one just can't be the other.

"I never heard her say it," Orley says. "I never heard her say it at all." With easy nonchalance, he picks at a callous on his heel. "At all," he mumbles. And he wipes the skin from his heel on the grass of the thick thick lawn.

"Well, she did too, Orley," Denny says, rising to his knees. "She did too and you're just sayin' that cause she did. She did say it, Orley. She did." His fingers form a knot around his thumb. "You're just saying that, Orley." His lips imitate the knot around his thumb.

"I'm just sayin' I never heard her say it, that's all," Orley barks. "That's all. I'm just sayin' I never heard her!"

"Well, okay then!"
"Well, okay!"
"Okay."
"Okay." Looking away, Orley sprawls over the cool green shade and rests his head on his fist, satisfied that he said the last okay.
And still on his knees, still pouting, still gripping his thumb in his fingers, Denny, very softly, whispers, "okay," and then sprawls like his brother in the cool green shade.
A cloud moves slowly toward the lump of yellow at their backs, and the shade of the tree becomes the shade of the cloud, widening, lengthening, stretching slowly further over the cool, green grass before them. And just as it appears that the shadow will remain, dark, immutable, the bright yellow light presses the shadow of the will once more into the thick lawn; and widening, lengthening, stretching out before them, the yellow overtakes the shadow and devours it.
Orley squints. "Did Mom really say that?"
"Yeah, Orley. I heard her."
Pulling a thread from the seam of his t-shirt, Orley thinks about Mr. Henley again. "Do you like Mr. Henley, Denny?" he asks.
"Sure," Denny answers.
"No," Orley mutters, "I mean do you really like him?"
"Sure," Denny repeats.
"Really?"
"I said 'sure', didn't I?" Denny knots his fingers around his thumb. And Orley, studying his brother's face, sure of his sincerity, speaks with great solemnity.
"Well, Mr. Henley didn't have no relatives." Wrinkles crease his smooth, brown forehead beneath strands of soft yellow hair.
Imitating his brother's expression, Denny frowns. His lips form the hint of a pout.
And the two boys, quiet, serious, sit beneath the limbs of the willow. From the corner of his eye, Denny stealthily observes his older brother, mimicking each move, each gesture. For a long while they sit, speechless, together.
"Hey, Orley," Denny says finally, reluctantly.
"What?"

"What're relatives?" Looking away from his brother, Denny affects nonchalance. He pulls his finger through the toes of his other foot and inspects the greasy threads of dirt that roll onto his finger.

Orley stares at him incredulously. "Don't you know what relatives are?"

"Well . . ." Denny considers his answer. "Not for sure."

"What do you mean 'not for sure'?"

"Just . . . not for sure." Denny rolls the thread of dirt into a ball and snaps it from his thumb with his forefinger.

Orley grimaces contemptuously. "Well, either you know or you don't know. You can't know 'not for sure.'"

Denny wiggles his toes deeper into the grass hoping to find the little ball of dirt. It is impossible. "Okay," he mumbles.

"Okay what?"

"Okay I don't know what relatives are," Denny says, still mumbling. His little brother's concession brings a smile to Orley's lips. He turns his head.

"Relatives," Orley begins slowly, condescendingly, "are like parents and stuff like that."

Denny pouts, wishing he'd known what relatives were, forgetting why it was so important that he know.

"Mr. Henley hasn't got any of 'em," Orley says.

And Denny thinks about Mr. Henley being dead and then about his not having any relatives, and the first thing makes him feel kind of funny and the second too, but both together don't really make him feel any different than one alone. And he pulls his finger between his toes over and over again, but no matter how many times he does it, he can always pull out a little roll of dirt.

Until finally the spaces between his toes begin to burn, and he says, "Mr. Henley's relatives are dead, too. Huh, Orley?"

And Orley says, "Yeah," and after they both sit there for what seems like a long time, Orley looks at his brother very
seriously and says, "We're the only people in the world who are going to remember Mr. Henley. 'Cause Mr. Henley's dead."

"God'll remember him, Orley," Denny says quickly. "God will." But getting no response from his brother, he says once more, "Well . . . He will," in a way that asks why He won't.

And Orley says only, "He won't."

And Denny says only, "Why not?" but wishes that he had said it less quickly and in a way that might sound less inquisitive.

But he hadn't. And Orley, demonstrating once more his great patience, his magnanimity, begins, obliquely, to explain:

"You know why," he says, "Mom don't like Mr. Henley, don't you?"

Denny pretends once more to look for the little ball of dirt. "Oh," he mutters, "kinda . . . ."

"Kinda?"

"Well . . . sorta . . . ."

Shaking his head disdainfully, Orley explains. "It's 'cause he didn't believe in God. That's why." Orley can hardly conceive of such ignorance.


"And that's why," his brother explains logically, "God won't remember him. 'Cause Mr. Henley didn't believe in God." Orley extends his hands to his brother. "That's why."

"Oh." Straightening his leg, Denny watches a small pit form in the flesh of his knee. He flexes it, causing the dimple to disappear. Very slowly, he straightens it again. The dimple starts as a dark brown wrinkle, deepens, then settles solidly above his knee cap.

"Oh," he repeats.

"And that's why," Orley explains, "it's up to us to remember Mr. Henley."

Over and over and over and over and over, Orley's little brother creates and destroys the pit in his knee. In, out. In, out. He locks his other leg. There, the dimple forms itself further to one side, smaller, with more wrinkles. He bends
that leg. Up, down. It appears, always, in the same place. Always.

"Denny?"

"Huh?" The dimple disappears as his knees rise to his chin in round brown mounds and he winds his small brown arms around his legs.

"Go find some of the kids."

"Huh?" A mound recedes and forms a fleshy dimple.

"Go," Orley says patiently, "and find some of the kids."

"How come, Orley?" he asks, filling the dimple.

"'Cause we need some more kids to remember Mr. Henley," Orley states simply, directly. "We're not enough."

"Oh." Denny leans carefully against the trunk of the tree.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Well go on."

"Oh."

The day is warm and green and yellow and little Orley Christenson watches his little brother's brown bare feet leave the cool dark shade and pad onto the yellowgreen thick thick lawn, silently. And the yellow shines on his brother's brown skin so that it's more yellow than brown, more yellow. And Orley watches his little brother until he's only a little little boy across the street, and then only little, and then nothing at all at all. And he hums. Is now—and ev—er—shall be . . . wor—or—orld with—out—end amen. Until, after a long long time, all fades away but warmth and green and yellow, and away across the street that shimmers white, a nothing at all at all turns into a little little boy. And it's his brother.

And bounding without a sound across the thick thick lawn, Denny parts the limbs of the willow tree and plops down, panting, in the shade beside his brother.

"Well?" Orley says.

Denny only pants.

"Well, where is everybody?" Orley asks, frowning darkly.

"There ain't nobody, Orley." Catching his breath, he looks away from his brother, observes once more his dimpled knees. "There just ain't."

"There's gotta be somebody, Denny."
"There ain't, Orley," Denny says again. "Honest. Just ain't nobody around." He tries to pull a blade of grass from the shade but it breaks in the middle. "At all," he says.

"Nobody?"

"Nobody."

"Well, then," Orley says firmly, "we got to do it ourselves." Orley's palm makes a ffmp as he slaps it against the deep green grass. "We got to."

"Remember Mr. Henley, you mean. Huh, Orley?"

"Yeah." His thumb to his lips, Orley affects deep thought. His eyes are closed in contemplation.

Denny interrupts. "What're we gonna do, Orley?"

His brother remains silent.

"To remember him, I mean. Huh? What're we gonna do?" Denny looks quizzically at his brother. "Huh? Huh?"

Raising his bright blue eyes, Orley drops his hand to his lap. "You know, at church this morning," he says, "they sang this thing. You know." Orley lowers his voice. "Is now—," he chants, "and ev—er—shall be . . . ." He pauses.

"Remember, Denny?"

Denny smiles. "Sure, Orley. I remember."

"Do you?"

"I remember it, Orley." He smiles again.

"Sure?" Orley raises an eyebrow.

"Yeah, Orley. I remember it. I do."

Orley points a finger at his brother. "Sing it for me."

He is afraid. "Now?" he asks softly.

"Sure. You said you knew it. Sing it for me." His voice holds the hint of a plea. "C'mon, Denny."

Denny smiles weakly, lowers his voice as he heard his brother do. "Is now—and ev—er—shall be . . . ." He hesitates.

"C'mon."

"—and ev—er—shall be . . . ." Denny stops again and looks at the ground. Where was it he threw the little ball of dirt? Where?

Orley frowns. "World without end," he states.

Heavily, on the thick thick lawn, the willow's shadow lengthens as a cloud passes grayly before the lump of yellow
in the sky. And slowly, heavily, the light reappears, overtakes the shadow, devours the darkness.

Denny squints. He follows his brother's lead. "Wor—or—orld with—out—end."

"Amen."
"Okay," his brother says. "Now we'll do it together."
"Okay, Orley." Denny smiles.
"And remember Mr. Henley dead when you do it."
"Sure, Orley."
"Dead."
"Dead."

Is now and ever shall
Is now and
The day is warm and
The day
Is

**Stale Wind**
*by Christos Saccopoulos*

*Architecture, Grad.*

*I*

On the white walls of my cell
With a thousand colors of sorrow and joy
The mosaics of memory bridge
The minutes from zero to nothing

I have aged:

The old seek comfort
In polychromatic mosaics

The young strive in the fog
With hope by their side
To fit colors with patterns

(The dead know no comfort
The dead have no hope;
A tessera here, a tessera there
in others' mosaics their memory lives)