

M Seidman

Sun Tape *Fragment*

*pause* He'd found the gun in a book. Remembering he layed in bed remembering. Every black man was issued one, one of his own a single bullet that bullet his own name on it. No matter who in the sight it would x no one but him, it could pass through the bodies of an entire city but it was a bullet on a round trip, cored for suicide. This gun an element this gun ID body part post-natal unamputational. It turned up in drawers under socks, in overcoat pockets bought in cheap used clothes stores stuck to the flats of graduation caps, dropped into the shut-eye lap of a barber chair, laced into sneakers, spokes on stroller wheels turning, slow with menace on turntable tops, hid with a name under bar stools, turning, laying like forgot on subway seats, half hid in kid parks in the dirt, one gun one name found by the same name this gun the black mans transmigrated chain-steel generational bequest as Citizen American.

Willie lay watching the ceiling.

It lay too on the back seats of limousines. On corporate desk tops. On the body of sleeping woman, sleeping man.

Ceiling like a map now. He in rememory watching it as the light outside grew like a welt, the soundless urgent growing heavy with the threat to explode and flatten everything.

Too it lay on supermarket shelves. Bookshelves too and its handle often stuck from the channel knobs of TVs. Teeth brushes. Door keys.

The growing light swelled, a yelling face without sound: a trapped, skull-sized airbubble rising heavily to the surface of a pool of tar: the streetlights blew out, and the building shook. Willie smelled smoking asphalt.

The Southside was unexpectedly quiet at night.

A bloodred thread of sun emerged slowly from the wall in front of Willie, and a cloud of Salsa floated past his window, cut, and a car door slammed. There was the whistle.

He'd found that gun a few years back in a Wright book. There was a desperate flailing like of men with snakes bit fast to their fingers in the cities, of trying to shake the gun: the bullets flew like sparks: hundreds unconnected to the name died. A super stood in his doorway searching through a neck-manacle sized hoop of keys. It was like that. Men and women police smashed dishes kicked magazines, bashed records and stereos on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. It was like that too. And now the desert was to be used as the lot for the name; sand ashtray for American cigarettes; long long list of the gun: the desperate flailing hands across the dunes like an upturned bug, feet sparking; a thousand bodies piled before each name, to stay its reunion with oblivion. Camera garbage in the branches of an oasis bush; a manual typewriter beneath a sky blue like a PC screen; someone's scorched eyes. The gun heart   bullet   On the amber nude bodies of sleeping women, sleeping men, the gun like a shining smug insect perched atop captured food.

Willie lay, imagining he in his body as the final punctuation mark finishing a sentence started long ago. Sim whistled again. He slid off the bed, felt in a few pockets and finally found the keys in a coat under a chair. He tossed the keys out the window and Sim caught them with one finger through the ring. He was up the stairs, through the door aiming for the chair before Willie'd buttoned his pants. He sat in the chair; the rising sun was like spraying blood in his hair and Willie couldn't look; he walked behind him.

"Hot as a fuck already," Sim said.

The red sun gleamed dully on the thin spot in Sim's wildly curly hair. He arkd up a half-closed fist. Willie closed his hand over Sim's. The sun was hot on his back.

"Top Gun, no America, no Century, no Day Night."

“Yeh, well that’s alright.”

“Just letting you know.”

Sim let the two Top Gun into Willie’s hand.

“Want some ice coffee?”

“No man, I’m gonna go.”

“Yeh. Alright. Thanks man.”

Sim bolted up, turned and offered Willie his keys. He stood perfectly in Willie’s shadow. Willie took them.

“Thanks man. My buy next.”

“Yeh.”

He closed the door on Sim, waiting until the front door slammed to turn the bolt. The engine kicked on the Salsa and faded down the street.

He felt the floor-wood on his naked feet, the hot air uncoiling into his window, the good unshowered thickness of his body in the steady growing heat; he smelled the sweat from his armpits and could still smell her cunt in his beard. The brown yard-dogs stood in a loose pack on the corner, taking turns pissing on the identical spot at the base of a street-lamp. They covered the corner like a turned down book page, the full garbage like a stale glass of wine. They followed each other across the street, sniffing and pissing, slipping through the gash in the body-yard’s link fence and laying heavily amongst the scrap, panting.

A curtain was pulled across the street and Willie automatically stepped back, out of its eyeshot.

‘The Koran Interpreted’ was on the table behind him. He opened anywhere and dropped the dope in the middle of the book. He noticed the passage: “The Terror.” He let the book slunk closed. Great towers in the desert sky, the stars strung like burning jewels between them and the vastness welling up, flowing in and welling up inside until he choked and spilled it out, howling on his knees in the desert sand flooding the sand with that huge vastness he could not keep in any longer, howling out the black star-burning sky, pouring it in the sand from his throat, the two black towers in the distance pressed against the sides of his head.

He’d held the words like stones in his mouth  
they moved, threatening to crack the back of his teeth  
looking, watching her face and eyes  
a thing in him raw, like it’d been whipped  
aching for a sign  
nothing. of the world to cling to now nothing.

Every thing seemed to be the inverse of itself, the after-ghost of an event just missed; aloofness stank from everything, a scent that filled him with constant unresolved fury and quenchless despair. Almost every book on his shelves contained at least one fold of dope; he’d copped every day now for a month and stuck the score on the shelf. There were probably 60, at least. Sim didn’t know; he thought he was using as he had been, and to look at him you couldn’t tell: sleep came light and infrequent when it did and food had lost any interest it had had.

There was a way she held him; and she slid both thumbs into his mouth as he came; and with his hair held his head like some urn found in a dump, studying it absently before letting it fall and smash to pieces.

Willie felt a back tooth with a thumb.

When he'd been kicked off the dark room job after over a year he'd gone back at lunch time, each day for a week, leering at his old boss over the pickup counter, like dealing cards flipping snapshots of the sun at him, pupils pinned to flyspecks in his night-blue eyes. The daylight seemed to wring his eyeballs taut and pull great headaches from the base of his neck to his eyes. The whispers of his old developing mates sifted like fine sand into his blood, the old blood off the corner he'd deferred for years.

"Hey Willie," Tregenia said. "You been away."

"Yeh," Willie said. "Gimme two."

One of the sun-shots fell in the snow as he pulled the twenty. He left it. He never went back to the dark room and not one of his developing mates sought him again.

That was the first cop.

Passion-cold as pinpoint eyes the words he'd sought found. The books laced with untouched dope something that there, like the words. A late power. Song love, leaving. Remembering, "She came at me with me. Taking turns, two me's make love to them. Betwixt morning and evening they are shattered, and that without wisdom."

The heat mounts, uncoiling into his windows, he feels it, an endless gesture of beckoning of a ghostly silenced hand. How the street calls. Thought-friends retreat leaving the roads emptied soon as he hits the door.

*pause*

The wind broke into Willie's mouth, stealing his breath; the front door clicked shut behind him; the cold was like a sniper's crosshairs perfect on his chest: it had him. Quickly he felt it way deep, through his coat to his center. Must be thirty below in the wind. Take about five blocks start to warm up. The six steps down were perfectly sealed in ice, the cracked red concrete magnified under it looked washed clean and new, closer, vital and beautiful. He saw each step going down. A candy wrapper was trapped on the third step down, perfect preserved, a kind, strange face staring back from outside of time.

Willie reached up to place his hat and fell down the last three steps.

He sat on the sidewalk facing his house, knees up.

A huge rent in the brick he'd never noticed caught his eye. It started at Dead Louie's kitchen window and rooted up the face to the top of his inner left. It looked as if the building would split open any day now, like an ax in a coconut. He'd never noticed. He wondered if it was new or he'd just never noticed. He wondered if the building would be there when he got back. He hoped it would fall sometime when he was out. Should get out more, he thought and laughed aloud.

He squatted and stood up.

Moses, Louie's Cocker mutt was looking at Willie through the child-fall fence. A dog who always looked like he was about to ask for spare change. A cloud of fog kept puffing from his face.

"Hey Moisha," Willie greeted.

Moses nodded and looked askance at Willie, puffing. A hopeful glint flickered from his sideways eyes. Louie appeared behind him.

“Lo there, kid,” Louie said.

“Hi Louie.”

Louie leaned out the window. His apartment glowed with its terrific stench. A staggering incense of neverwashed neverchanged socks motionless air neverwashed flesh and decaying vermin it seared through smell like an explosion, as ears are deafened by a huge bell. It poured from under his door like smoke from an apartment on fire, collecting at the top of Willie’s stairs, and coming home Willie had to pass through it, fast, like a man through an air-lock getting out of a radioactive storm. You could not in-breathe around him. Face to face conversation was like pearldiving. A big ditch in him had been dug open during the Nazi war. He was shirtless, and had a handful of papers in his left hand. His thin silver hair was charged with static and was apparently very attracted to Moses’ fur. Their hairs reached towards one each other and hovered, stretched up, floating, almost but not quite touching. Louie was fat and very pink faced, his torso very white. Not pale. White. Silver hair glinted on his chest. A cratered bulb nose. White stubble in a ghostly aura usually traced his face. And thin, soft-pink feminine lips, lightly cruel sadly arch and demure. His bright blue eyes always startled and tearing. In them Willie often saw a stifled urgent plea, a mute timbre of panic, of being caught in his steadily breaking body with no egress but oblivion. When out he walked slow on the walk, each hand with a cane, oscillating, antennae-like and oratorial, a conductor’s gesture and an insect’s grope, shift-throwing his great bulk like an overpacked traveler kicking a suitcase down a ticket line. Moses trotted circles about him and Louie’s head slowly scanned the street. He liked Willie.

“Listen a listen Willie if you wouldn’t mind when you got back would you spread some salt on the stoop cause I can’t go out. I can’t go out. Stoo icy and I can’t take a chance so if you would so maybe later I could go out.”

“Sure Louie. You need anything?”

“Maybe if you’d pick me up a paper maybe yeh?”

“Okay. I’ll be back in a little while. See you later.”

“Thanks a lot kid. Take care.”

“Alright Louie, see you.”

Louie waved the papers, his hair arching to Moses’ earhair. The dog watched him sidewise, puffing through the child-fall fence. Willie glanced at the rent in the bricks again. For a second he thought it was wider. He waved back. He pushed down his hat and put his hands in the coat’s pockets, feeling his glasses and gun.

*pause*

Wrong O’Kein and Willie bump into each other in front of the laundromat, waiting for Two-Hit. Their shoulders touch through their coats and Willie can feel the sharp shoulder-bone. ‘Man he’s thin,’ Willie thinks. They look at each other in wordless greeting, keeping their hands down. Two-Hit’s Ice Cream truck, one stripped back wheel propped on a dairy crate and cinder blocks sits across Division Avenue, “Row Row Row Your Boat” on a warped tape loop plays drunkenly over and over and over from the green loudspeaker over the windshield. SUNDAES PUSHPOPS SOFTCREME . They can see Two-Hit’s head behind the small glass window in the side of the truck. Two young girls come up and buy vanilla cones, with colored sprinkles. They both wear short inflated yellow-jacket yellow coats and grape-juice purple jeans. They pass Willie and

O'Kein with the cones in their mouths, talking. Willie can see the outline of one of their pussies shaped by the jeans. She has a black eye. The other has dirt on one of her cheeks. A barrette with a little white bird in her black hair. Willie turns, watching them as they pass and walk away. He sees Wrong in the glass of the laundromat door, overcoat and long red hair dead-still, reflected over the empty candy machine inside. Like a Botanica icon sticking out of a trash can, leaning tipped. He and Willie look at each other. Wrong's eyes are bright blue, his hair just as red, in a long ponytail, wisps moving around his face in the wind. Clean shaven sharp pale pink face, thin pale lips and eyes at once anguished and distant, always retreating. Crows feet the only sign of time.

"Looking for a sack of bubbles," Wrong says quietly, putting down his eyes. He smiles with his mouth closed. Willie remembers him at the fire behind Junior High, his big teeth bared showing in the gleam, his shrill shrieking laugh, throwing beer bottles at the bats skimming the lit night sky. He's the only person Willie still knows from then. Watching him Willie feels as if he is holding one of his own bones in his hands.

"How's Sheryl?"

"She's okay, doin' alright."

"When she due?"

Wrong looks up at Willie, the back at the ground.

"No man, we destroyed it." Wrong raises a hand and strokes his chin. "Time flies when you're having fun." He shows his big teeth. "Life is but a dream," he sings softly. "We couldn't find a name." He pushes up an eyelid with a finger tip.

An old Hasid with a white beard and big brim hat passes slowly. He looks at Willie.

"Hello," he says.

"Hello," Willie returns.

Wrong glances at Willie. Willie shrugs. He watches the man as he moves away, talis showing from the hem of his coat, pantcuffs covering his heels. Like some etching from a cobblestone book, he thinks. Not translated. An elegant poverty that always moves me.

"That's the first time one of them ever said hello to me," he says to Wrong. He doesn't respond.

"Merrily merrily," Wrong sings.

"There's a line from a poem," Willie says. Wrong begins to walk towards the truck. Two-Hit's hand is sticking out the window, showing a two-fingered "peace" sign. He follows Wrong, looking both ways up and down Division.

Wrong finishes, and walks off. Willie says "See ya O'Kein," and Wrong lifts one hand without turning around, moving off.

"O, El Ciego man how's it."

"Alright Two-Hit not bad."

"Calandra?"

"She's gone."

"Yeah well. What you need?"

"Gimme two."

"El Ciego man I'm also selling Hershey's for the Weitzman-Clemente Boys Club. Buck for two."

"Now ain't that perfect. What no cigarettes? Alright. Two. With almonds."

"Good man. It's for the kids."

“Uh huh.”

Willie sees himself in Two-Hit’s dark glasses, a thing with a big head leaning over miniscule feet under twisted legs. The light turns green behind him, in the glasses. He looks down into his palms. Two folds, stamped ‘Soft Sun.’ Two-Hit hands him the candy.

“Bye, Two-Hit.”

“El Ciego. See you Willie.”

Willie walks around the back of the truck, turning onto Draw. A cop is standing with his feet apart in the center of the sidewalk, both hands in his coat. His holster is empty. Their eyes meet. He is Chinese, with a little boy’s face; his cap is too big; a thing in his eyes is very eager. Black eyes, like a bird. Willie feels a vertebrae spark as his stride palsies between steps, his balls tightening with his breath. The cop is twenty feet away. He feels the dope in his palm, under the Hershey bars. Past the cop he can see his stoop and he remembers Calandra leaning off the last step, holding the rail, stroking the air with a reaching hand. He walks on, beginning to slowly drift out towards the street. The cop follows him with his eyes, head turning. When Willie steps onto the street he says

“Hey.”

Willie stops and looks at him. His gun is in the pocket of his candy hand. He doesn’t think he would.

“Got what you need?”

Willie turns over his hand, showing the Hersheys. The name says JUNG. A song of words in his head sings “There’s blood in every thing.” He begins to walk on, his whole back tight with waiting.

At the top of the stoop he looks back, as he turns the key. The cop is gone.

Inside a piece of mail lays on the floor. He picks it up. It’s from Stritch. Postmarked Portal, North Dakota. Upstairs he throws the candy and the folds on the bed, opens the envelope. It’s empty.

“Bastard.”

He crushes it and pushes it in the garbage.

(Opens the bag fills the spoon fires the lighter drops the cotton fills the syringe ties up and pushes it home. Soft Sun.)

*Calandra whispers into his mouth, recording into the Sun Tapes, sing-song lady’s whisper with a bolt in the small of her back, arching hump-arching the air while he watch the reflection on the off TV, finding and losing themselves in the liquid spread reflection moss candle image. “God ... is found ... only ... in combinations ...” Her tongue covers his eye. He sees the camera and sound man reflected in the glass, walking in crouches, an arm beckoning. Then the actor was a man acting an actor and the film revealed a man where only shadows are let to be ... this is the greatest moment in all of film ... no cut ... nobody yelled cut ... Calandra squats over the lit candle, the heat making her drip sex-rain into the wax and menstrual blood the whole thing sputters. She squatting over him, whispering into his mouth, recording into the Sun Tapes, the hot very slow steady blood dripping onto his belly, hot as dream-piss in a five year old bed. “Choke me if you want.” He knows how heavy the bricks the plaster would be. The curtain moves across the street. Mexican Indian woman in a pink dress spitting in a mug holds the curtain back as if she had her arm over the shoulder of a friend. Her black braid is thick and falls past her breast. He cannot remember ever seeing her on the street. Calandra sitting in the torn office chair, two finger circles piled on one eye, pushing herself around the room with her feet. “Moving pan.”*

“How does one go about ordering a building inspection?”

“Well this is the department of buildings?”

“I hear noises.”

“Settlement I know settlement but I think it’s a little more than just settlement.”

“What do you mean I have to wait. Wait til what?”

“Could you tell me the last time the building was inspected?”

“I have to come down myself for that?”

“Look somebody’s at my door. Yeah. Alright. Thank you. Bye. Shit.”

Willie looks through the peep-hole. A young man standing outside the door waits, his head tilted in listening. His head is shaved and fuzzy and he wears a black button down shirt. He raises his head, eyes shut. His mouth opens slowly and Willie can hear him breathing in long suspirations, methodically, wetly, rhythmically. He faces the door with his mouth wide, eyes closed. Willie can see through to the back of his throat. There is an opening. It is like a gill or a hearts ventricle, two flaps, delicate and shivering in the flow of his breathing, opening out from the back of his throat. Willie can see the wall looking through his mouth. He just stands, eyes closed, mouth wide, the air blowing through his head like a thread through a bead. He appears to be recharging. A continuous sighing sound comes from his head.

“He’s got a girlfriend,” Willie thinks.

Willie watches for some time. Eventually the young man goes away, moving out of the hole’s fish-eye frame. The hall stays. It doesn’t move.

*pause*

The heat uncoils into his window.

He takes a deep drink from the empty candle. Still no one has answered his ad, ‘Private Detective/English Translations. Reasonable.’ Calandra’s mother looked at him with disdain as she removed the dress from off her murdered daughter. The bullets had only pierced her undershirt, leaving the white-lace dress intact. A beleaguered stray black cat kneaded her fallen hat upon the brick-rubble in the lot. He’d thrown it dried anchovies before.

*pause*

*Blind Willie the Wick, The Blind Candle, watched the yard-dogs turn circles humping each other lazy, loose pack on the corner and snorting in the street. They covered the corner like a turned-down book page, the empty garbage a stale glass of wine. The brown dogs moved up the street, each pissing where the one in front had pissed, dog by dog through the gash in the body-yard’s link fence soundless frantic pacing between the scrap. The blue air fuzzy over the fur, pink diseased patches luminous and kind of green. A Post truck came by and hurled a tied stack of papers onto the metal awning of the bodega. The crack set the dogs yowling and Dead Louie’s dying mutt downstairs began too. Willie’s torn office chair creaked as he leaned to flick his cigarette onto the sidewalk. A fart escaped him. He’d seen no one and decided he wouldn’t keep waiting. The streetlights flicked off. The change in light was loud.*

*He got naked and rolled under the sheet, moved some grit from under his ass and watched the ceiling. At this hour it always seemed more like a map. A bloodred thread of*



*sun emerged from the wall as a cloud of Salsa floated past the window, cut, and a car door slammed kind of quietly. The whistle.*

*Sim caught the keys one finger through the ring and was up the stairs aiming right for the chair. The sun was like spraying blood in his hair and Willie couldn't look. pause*

[1990]