a sleigh ride in april
Seth Cable

While digging random holes in the backyard one afternoon, my daughter and I discovered buried there a little plastic doll bearing a remarkable likeness to my genetic mother, Leora. Not knowing what else to make of it, we decided today to take the doll to Leora's spot within the Wet Wall.

Rather than face death, Leora was the first in our family to volunteer for the Wall. My brother says that she's immortal now, in a way. I can't consider that immortality, though, any more than the 'immortality' purchased through a natural return to the soil. At the very least, they say, joining the Wet Wall is an act far more purposeful than death. The purpose, though, eludes me, and I've never been convinced that anyone else has actually hit upon it. But, whatever. It is what it is, as Leora would often say. I wonder if we'll still hear her say that, in some form or another, when we get to the Wall.

The sledge to the stretch of Wall incorporating Leora takes about three hours, and so we packed a light lunch, my daughter and I. There's been an abundance of dry bread this season, which is helping to make up for the ongoing embargo on fruit. Nevertheless, our lunch is heavy on salts and starches. My daughter -- who barely remembers Leora now -- keeps asking me to open it, but I want to make her wait a little while longer. I don't want her getting hungry when we're there. Not that I give the stories any credence, but some say that the Wet Wall can tempt those who arrive with a hunger. It can, they say, confuse one into thinking their craving is a yearning for empty space within to be enveloped and filled with a mass far greater than oneself. I don't see how it could, unless the world is a far more fantastic and magical place than Leora ever led me to believe. Nevertheless, there's no sense in taking chances.

Leora's genes are my genes, except with an X instead of a Y. So, in a very real sense, you can find me there in the Wet Wall, too. I imagine some of the other folks on this sledge are making a similar calculation. "How much of me is already there?" "Is a part of every person's lineage represented yet?" If so, we should probably fire the thing off into orbit, or bury it under a mountain. Let it serve a purpose as some kind of chromosomal archive. Why let it just succumb to rot and ruin, as all monuments eventually do?

But, no. The purpose of the Wet Wall, as far as I can see, is to have no purpose. It's merely something we do now, like piloting drones and cutting holes in our ears.

It's just visible now, a tiny white line cutting across the hills rolling towards the horizon. You can smell it not long after you see it, like someone parked a new car in a hospital bathroom. One of our sledgemates remarks to their neighbor, "You ever see anything more disturbing in all your life?"

"I don't know. I guess it's fine. Whatever."
"You know, when people join up, their brains get all jumbled together? Like, the brain just un wraps and flattens out, and then all the nerves just spread out like trampled wheat stalks, tangling all around each other and all around everybody else’s in that mess. How’s it not just killing yourself, I wonder?"

"I don’t think that’s true. I think you heard wrong."

After a few minutes in welcome silence, my daughter looks up to me and asks, "Is Lenore going to like the little doll of herself?"

"Leora, honey. And, no, I don’t think she will. But, it seems the right thing to do." "Well, I hope she does like it. At least then somebody will."

She throws the doll on the ground by my feet, grabs my remaining hand with both of hers, and begins to sing one of those songs they’ve taught her in the village school.

"You don’t have to love me, but I have to love you, You don’t need to see me, but I need to see you, Our words are only noises in the deep, deep blue."

So come near my dear unless you fear to hear something true..."

Aside from the consumption of our lunch, nothing much happens for the next couple hours, until the sledge finally creeps to a halt before the main stairs up to this segment of the WetWall. It’s been years, but I still remember well how to get to Leora’s spot.

Standing before it, I run my fingertips along the face of the Wall, following the motions that were explained to us all those years ago. Given its name, I’m not surprised by its moisture, but I am struck by its warmth and texture. I’m reminded of my days as a baker, molding meat-stuffed pastries in smoke-choked underkitchens.

As had been explained and promised, the surface of the wall swells to my touch. An oblong bubble forms, approximately five and a half feet tall by two and half wide. The pallid coating of the wall peels back, exposing a pink glistening blister, its surface punctured by a network of red and blue tendrils. The blister expands, and then portions of its outer edge begin to contract. A simple five-pointed star forms, and then each of those points contracts further, becoming irregular, until a familiar outline comes into view.

Embedded in the wall, an effigy of my genetic mother looks down upon us, its eyes two red bulges punctured at the center with pits so dark I feel my pupils widen in response. She regards us, and then folds her arms — such as they are — in a gesture I recall from afternoon visits with my late partner.

"This is Leora?" my daughter asks. "I don’t think I recognize her." "That’s okay, hon. She doesn’t recognize you either."

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