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Rubber Sharks

dedicated to Maurice Brayley

Brent Cottle

In grade six I hunted deadly rubber sharks that lived beneath the ice over the playground puddles.

Rubber sharks were just something to pass the time of recess.

Or were they? Could there actually be a herd of man-eating rubber sharks lurking beneath the icy puddles of Cardston Elementary School?

I sure thought so.

In grade eight Greg Schmidt was Goggles Pizona.

He would become Goggles Pizona when we were all just sitting around homeroom right after lunch. We would all just be sitting there waiting for our classes to start when suddenly he would transform himself into Goggles Pizona.

Goggles Pizona's favorite victim was Kevin Shields.

With amazing speed, the lethally lithe Goggles Pizona would abduct Kevin Shields.

It was quite a sight, Goggles Pizona beating on Kevin Shields while conducting a dialogue with Greg Schmidt about Kevin's haircut (a Beatles 1965 haircut).

Was Greg Schmidt Goggles Pizona or was Goggles actually Greg Schmidt?

In grade five I hijacked books from the library.

In other words, some of the books I took out of the library were not officially checked out.

Like a radical member of the PLO, I would abscond with books by hiding them under my shirt. How devious of me.

And once the books were safely out, I would leave a ransom note:

I took a book out without signing the card. If you ever want to see it again, you must pay me a ransom of more recess time. — a dangerous radical who won't hesitate to dismember you.

As far as I'm concerned, I always received payment.

In grade one I looked at teenagers.

I didn't envy teenagers—in fact, I despised them.

Teenagers were ruthless. They always had blank stares and were mostly seen laughing among themselves at jokes no one else would get.

Teenagers never did anything for a good reason. Teenagers would probably kill you if they felt like it.

In grade ten I knew every girl romantically.

In math class I would pick out a girl I liked and she would be mine. At lunch I would take her cruising in the car I didn't own. We would study together. I would meet her parents, take her out to eat for fifty bucks a plate. I would stay real late at her house, leaving the car I didn't have parked out front so that jealous guys would drive by and see that I was still there way past the time they had to go home.

And then math class would end and Mr. Richards would say, "Brent, did you accomplish anything today?"

And I would say, "Yeah, I accomplished a lot."

In grade eleven Mike the Murderous Morbid Mercenary killed Spiderman.

On Sundays, the Incredible Hulk, Silver Surfer, Spiderwoman, and many other Marvel comic book heroes can be seen putting flowers on his grave.

Next to his grave is Captain Canuck's grave. No one puts flowers on it.

In grade nine I slept through a film in social studies. A film something about improving Israel's agricultural economy by grafting more productive branches onto old peach trees. To this day I am haunted by a recurring dream in which I am placed in the care of mad Jewish doctors who keep cutting off parts of my body and grafting on peach trees. "We've created a kosher monster," they exclaim all the while.

Don't sleep in class.

Between grades ten and eleven I worked painting the high school. Those halls are my masterpiece, my industrial *Night Watch*.

Despite the earlier unpleasant experience, sleeping in class became one of my more enjoyable bad habits.

Embedded in my subconscious are lectures distorted by sleepy imagery.

Napoleon paints the Mona Lisa.

Albert Einstein starts the hippie movement. $E = mc^2 = \text{peace}$.

The speed of light is different in playground zones.

It was like having four classes a day with Jim Keegstra (if you're not from Canada, Timothy Leary can be a substitute).

Or maybe it was just the fluorescent lights.

Pleasant schizophrenia.

Grades one through twelve were fine.

Then I graduated. And Brent Cottle watched as I left. My time with him was done. Responsibility takes its toll on imagination.

I left as they handed him the diploma. I just walked away. I walked out onto the sunlit prairie of the Blood Indian Reservation. Out among the old generations. The ancient spirits. Out with the other old men of the tribe who no longer felt useful.

Brent wanted to come with me. He longed to come, but his body was too tangible. He said goodbye with tears in his eyes.

And I sang back to him, "Boy, you're gonna carry that weight a long time." I sang with a chorus of the fab four Beatles squared to make it a psychedelic sixteen.

I walked until I reached that point on the horizon where the plains meet the sky. At which point I stepped onto a cloud. Because for me the world is still flat.

There I joined the other discarded souls of imagination. Left to hunt rubber sharks with Goggles Pizona.

We
make
a
beautiful
silhouette
on
the
frozen
lake.

