

OH GIVE US THE LIVING CHILD

*Willie Edward Taylor Carver, Jr.**

I first heard about courts and judges from when my mom read a story from the big white leather-bound coffee-table Bible that had witnessed my papaw's death, my parents' wedding, me and my cousins' births in the carefully capitalized and cursive letters that she reserved for such irreversible moments that marked beginnings and ends.

That story was kept way back in those black ink pages older than Jesus about two lowly women who came out of the shadows of their time when one baby died and another one lived and stuck together in a pit of loss each woman claimed the only baby left breathing between them both, and a judge named Solomon who was also a King said,

“Cut it in half!”

and while one woman reached up to take hold of her part of the child the other cried, “I give him away then. Let him live and not be divided!” so Solomon gave the baby to her and all of Israel fell silent in awe because they saw truth and justice in his wisdom and named it God.

When I was a teenager, I stayed silent in the shadows of my time and it wasn't yet clear to doctors or teachers or lawyers or preachers if in this American story I might be the living or divided child if someone might someday offer me up or if I was already dead and because my teacher taught us how to look up facts in databases and because I learned that only one-in-four people were believers in marriage between men like me and men who might like me back, my adolescent doubt dulled those tracks of time leading to tomorrow.

But by then I had lived enough and I should have already known that just thinking and believing ain't enough to make a thing real, that the world is full of folks cradling and soothing dead things, and whether we call it God or we call it wisdom, justice and truth, it's something binding and breaking both the past and the present, summoning back the far flung unraveling of the future's edges, a lasting light of hope and love can move even kings to let us live.

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So we breathed and we met and we mattered and over and over again
we shared our resplendent scars and stories and lit them with such truth
that the three-in-four people in witness of us fell silent in holy wonder
that shadows receded and the courts and judges had nowhere to hide,
that teenagers and former teenagers checked databases and the numbers
began to recount such vibrant stories that they had to find new colors
and thirty-two lives from the very shadows and time and place as we
offered up their worthy names until the highest courts spake in tongues
and said that those lives and hearts and this nation would not be divided
and gave us, whole, to ourselves and to each other that we all might live
and two great oceans rejoiced as millions between them were finally free.

In my new-found freedom,
I joked with my husband that it was really just an upgrade
the day the state of Vermont let us convert our civil union into a marriage,
and I joked with my mom too,
that maybe this new paper would last longer than the first one did,
but she didn't laugh,
and instead opened for me that leather-bound coffee-table Bible,
and traced her fresh blue ink pen capital letter cursive across the page,
and showed me our names and the place and the day of our marriage
written in the space of beginnings and ends.