

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RED**  
**A ROMANCE**

**I. JUSTICE**

Geryon learned about justice from his brother quite early.

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They used to go to school together. Geryon's brother was bigger and older,  
he walked in front  
sometimes broke into a run or dropped on one knee to pick up a stone.  
Stones make my brother happy,  
thought Geryon and he studied stones as he trotted along behind.  
So many different kinds of stones,  
the sober and the uncanny, lying side by side in the red dirt.  
To stop and imagine the life of each one!  
Now they were sailing through the air from a happy human arm,  
what a fate. Geryon hurried on.  
Arrived at the schoolyard. He was focusing hard on his feet and his steps.  
Children poured around him  
and the intolerable red assault of grass and the smell of grass everywhere  
was pulling him towards it  
like a strong sea. He could feel his eyes leaning out of his skull  
on their little connectors.  
He had to make it to the door. He had to not lose track of his brother.  
These two things.  
School was a long brick building on a north–south axis. South: Main Door  
through which all boys and girls must enter.  
North: Kindergarten, its large round windows gazing onto the backwoods  
and surrounded by a hedge of highbush cranberry.  
Between Main Door and Kindergarten ran a corridor. To Geryon it was  
a hundred thousand miles  
of thunder tunnels and indoor neon sky slammed open by giants.  
Hand in hand on the first day of school  
Geryon crossed this alien terrain with his mother. Then his brother  
performed the task day after day.  
But as September moved into October an unrest was growing in Geryon's brother.  
Geryon had always been stupid

but nowadays the look in his eyes made a person feel strange.  
*Just take me once more I'll get it this time,*  
Geryon would say. The eyes terrible holes.  
*Stupid,* said Geryon's brother  
and left him.  
Geryon had no doubt *stupid* was correct. But when justice is done  
the world drops away.  
He stood on his small red shadow and thought what to do next.  
Main Door rose before him. Perhaps—  
peering hard Geryon made his way through the fires in his mind to where  
the map should be.  
In place of a map of the school corridor lay a deep glowing blank.  
Geryon's anger was total.  
The blank caught fire and burned to baseline. Geryon ran.  
After that Geryon went to school alone.  
He did not approach Main Door at all. Justice is pure. He would make his way  
around the long brick sidewall,  
past the windows of Seventh Grade, Fourth Grade, Second Grade and Boys'  
to the north end of the school  
and position himself in the bushes outside Kindergarten. There he would stand  
motionless  
until someone inside noticed and came out to show him the way.  
He did not gesticulate.  
He did not knock on the glass. He waited. Small, red, and upright he waited,  
gripping his new bookbag tight  
in one hand and touching a lucky penny inside his coat pocket with the other,  
while the first snows of winter  
floated down on his eyelashes and covered the branches around him and silenced  
all trace of the world.

## II. EACH

Like honey is the sleep of the just.

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When Geryon was little he loved to sleep but even more he loved to wake up.  
He would run outside in his pajamas.  
Hard morning winds were blowing life bolts against the sky each one blue enough  
to begin a world of its own.  
The word *each* blew towards him and came apart on the wind. Geryon had always

had this trouble: a word like *each*,  
when he stared at it, would disassemble itself into separate letters and go.  
A space for its meaning remained there but blank.  
The letters themselves could be found hung on branches or furniture in the area.  
*What does each mean?*  
Geryon had asked his mother. She never lied to him. Once she said the meaning  
it would stay.  
She answered, *Each means like you and your brother each have your own room.*  
He clothed himself in this strong word *each*.  
He spelled it at school on the blackboard (perfectly) with a piece of red silk chalk.  
He thought softly  
of other words he could keep with him like *beach* and *screach*. Then they moved  
Geryon into his brother's room.  
It happened by accident. Geryon's grandmother came to visit and fell off the bus.  
The doctors put her together again  
with a big silver pin. Then she and her pin had to lie still in Geryon's room  
for many months. So began Geryon's nightlife.  
Before this time Geryon had not lived nights just days and their red intervals.  
*What's that smell in your room?* asked Geryon.  
Geryon and his brother were lying in the dark in their bunk beds Geryon on top.  
When Geryon moved his arms or legs  
the bedsprings made an enjoyable PING SHUNK SHUNK PING enclosing him from below  
like a thick clean bandage.  
*There's no smell in my room,* said Geryon's brother. *Maybe it's your socks,*  
*or the frog did you*  
*bring the frog in?* said Geryon. *What smells in here is you Geryon.*  
Geryon paused.  
He had a respect for facts maybe this was one. Then he heard  
a different sound from below.  
SHUNK SHUNK PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING  
PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING PING.  
His brother was pulling on his stick as he did most nights before sleep.  
*Why do you pull on your stick?*  
Geryon asked. *None of your business let's see yours,* said his brother.  
*No.*  
*Bet you don't have one.* Geryon checked. *Yes I do.*  
*You're so ugly I bet it fell off.*  
Geryon remained silent. He knew the difference between facts and brother hatred.  
*Show me yours*  
*and I'll give you something good,* said Geryon's brother.

*No.*

*Give you one of my cat's-eyes.*

*No you won't.*

*I will.*

*Don't believe you.*

*Promise.* Now Geryon very much wanted a cat's-eye. He never could win a cat's-eye when he knelt on cold knees

on the basement floor to shoot marbles with his brother and his brother's friends.

A cat's-eye

is outranked only by a steelie. And so they developed an economy of sex or cat's-eyes.

Pulling the stick makes my brother happy, thought Geryon. *Don't tell Mom,* said his brother.

Voyaging into the rotten ruby of the night became a contest of freedom and bad logic.

*Come on Geryon.*

*No.*

*You owe me.*

*No.*

*I hate you. I don't care. I'll tell Mom. Tell Mom what?*

*How nobody likes you at school.*

Geryon paused. Facts are bigger in the dark. Sometimes then he would descend to the other bunk

and let his brother do what he liked or else hang in between with his face pressed into the edge of his own mattress,

cold toes balancing on the bed below. After it was over his brother's voice got very kind.

*You're nice Geryon I'll take you swimming tomorrow okay?*

Geryon would climb back up to his bunk,

recover his pajama bottoms and lie on his back. He lay very straight in the fantastic temperatures

of the red pulse as it sank away and he thought about the difference between outside and inside.

Inside is mine, he thought. The next day Geryon and his brother went to the beach.

They swam and practiced belching and ate jam-and-sand sandwiches on a blanket.

Geryon's brother found an American dollar bill

and gave it to Geryon. Geryon found a piece of an old war helmet and hid it.

That was also the day

he began his autobiography. In this work Geryon set down all inside things

particularly his own heroism  
and early death much to the despair of the community. He coolly omitted  
all outside things.

### III. RHINESTONES

Geryon straightened and put his hands quick under the table, not quick enough.

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*Don't pick at that Geryon you'll get it infected. Just leave it alone and let it heal,*  
said his mother

rhinestoning past on her way to the door. She had all her breasts on this evening.  
Geryon stared in amazement.

She looked so brave. He could look at her forever. But now she was at the door  
and then she was gone.

Geryon felt the walls of the kitchen contract as most of the air in the room  
swirled after her. He could not breathe. He knew he must not cry. And he knew the sound  
of the door closing  
had to be kept out of him. Geryon turned all attention to his inside world.

Just then his brother came into the kitchen.

*Want to wrestle?* said Geryon's brother.

*No,* said Geryon.

*Why? Just don't. Oh come on.* Geryon's brother picked up  
the empty tin fruit bowl

from the kitchen table and placed it upside down over Geryon's head.

*What time is it?*

Geryon's voice came muffled from inside the fruit bowl. *Can't tell you,* said his brother.

*Please.*

*Look for yourself. I don't want to. You mean you can't.*

The fruit bowl was very still.

*You're so stupid you can't tell time can you? How old are you anyway? What a jerk.*

*Can you tie your shoes yet?*

The fruit bowl paused. Geryon could in fact tie knots but not bows.

He chose to pass over this distinction.

*Yes.*

Suddenly Geryon's brother stepped behind Geryon and seized him by the neck.

*This is the silent death hold,*

*Geryon, in war they use this for knocking out all sentries. With one surprise twist  
I can break your neck.*

They heard the baby-sitter approaching and Geryon's brother stepped quickly away.

*Is Geryon sulking again?*

said the baby-sitter entering the kitchen. *No*, said the fruit bowl.

Geryon very much wanted

to keep the baby-sitter's voice out of him. In fact he would have preferred  
not to know her at all

but there was one piece of information he needed to get.

*What time is it?* he heard himself ask. *Quarter to eight*, she answered. *What time will Mom be home?*

*Oh not for hours yet,*

*eleven maybe.* At this news Geryon felt everything in the room hurl itself  
away from him

towards the rims of the world. Meanwhile the baby-sitter continued,

*You better start getting ready for bed, Geryon.*

She was taking the fruit bowl off Geryon's head and moving towards the sink.

*Do you want me to read to you?*

*Your mom says you have trouble going to sleep. What do you like to read?*

Bits of words drifted past Geryon's brain like ash.

He knew he would have to let the baby-sitter go through with this in her wrong voice.

She was standing before him now

milking hard and rummaging in his face with her eyes. *Read the loon book*, he said.

This was cagey.

The loon book was an instruction manual for calling loons. At least

it would keep her wrong voice away

from words that belonged to his mother. The baby-sitter went off happily

to find the loon book.

A while later the baby-sitter and Geryon were sitting on the top bunk calling loons

when Geryon's brother surged in

and landed on the lower bunk, bouncing everyone up to the ceiling.

Geryon drew back

against the wall with his knees up as his brother's head appeared,

then the rest of him.

He clambered into place beside Geryon. He had a thick rubber band

stretched between his thumb

and index finger which he snapped on Geryon's leg. *What's your favorite weapon?*

*Mine's the catapult BLAM—*

he snapped Geryon's leg again—you can wipe out the whole downtown

with a catapult surprise attack BLAM—

everyone dead or else fill it with incendiaries like Alexander the Great he

invented the catapult

*Alexander the Great personally BLAM— Stop that,*  
said the baby-sitter  
grabbing for the rubber band. She missed. Pushing her glasses back up  
onto her nose she said, *Garotte.*  
*I like the garotte best. It is clean and neat. An Italian invention I believe*  
*although the word is French.*  
*What's a garotte?* asked Geryon's brother. Taking the rubber band from his thumb  
she shoved it in her shirt pocket and said,  
*A short piece of cord usually silk with a slipknot in one end. You put it*  
*around someone's neck*  
*from behind and pull tight. Cuts off the windpipe. Quick but painful death.*  
*No noise no blood*  
*no bulge in your pocket. Murderers on trains use them.*  
Geryon's brother was regarding her with one eye closed his mode of total attention.  
*What about you Geryon*  
*what's your favorite weapon?* *Cage,* said Geryon from behind his knees.  
*Cage?* said his brother.  
*You idiot a cage isn't a weapon. It has to do something to be a weapon.*  
*Has to destroy the enemy.*  
Just then there was a loud noise downstairs. Inside Geryon something burst into flame.  
He hit the floor running. *Mom!*

#### IV. TUESDAY

Tuesdays were best.

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Every second Tuesday in winter Geryon's father and brother went to hockey practice.  
Geryon and his mother had supper alone.  
They grinned at each other as night climbed ashore. Turned on all the lights  
even in rooms they weren't using.  
Geryon's mother made their favorite meal, cling peaches from the can and toast  
cut into fingers for dipping.  
Lots of butter on the toast so a little oil slick floats out on top of the peach juice.  
They took supper trays into the living room.  
Geryon's mother sat on the rug with magazines, cigarettes, and telephone.  
Geryon worked beside her under the lamp.  
He was gluing a cigarette to a tomato. *Don't pick your lip Geryon let it heal.*  
She blew smoke out her nose

as she dialed. *Maria? It's me can you talk? What did he say?*

.....

*Just like that?*

.....

*Bastard*

.....

*That's not freedom it's indifference*

.....

*Some kind of addict*

.....

*I'd throw the bum out*

.....

*That's melodrama—she stubbed her cigarette hard—why not have a nice bath*

.....

*Yes dear I know it doesn't matter now*

.....

*Geryon? fine he's right here working on his autobiography*

.....

*No it's a sculpture he doesn't know how to write yet*

.....

*Oh this and that stuff he finds outside Geryon's always finding things  
aren't you Geryon?*

She winked at him over the telephone. He winked back using both eyes  
and returned to work.

He had ripped up some pieces of crispy paper he found in her purse to use for hair  
and was gluing these to the top of the tomato.

Outside the house a black January wind came flattening down from the top of the sky  
and hit the windows hard.

The lamp flared. *It's beautiful Geryon*, she said hanging up the telephone.

*It's a beautiful sculpture.*

She put her hand on top of his small luminous skull as she studied the tomato.

And bending she kissed him once on each eye

then picked up her bowl of peaches from the tray and handed Geryon his.

*Maybe next time you could*

*use a one-dollar bill instead of a ten for the hair*, she said as they began to eat.