

*TUNC* – it’s like some kind of sinister onomatopoeia, a way of transcribing the sound a car boot makes when it slams shut outside your bedroom window at 3:00 AM or the noise of a baseball bat being run along a wrought iron fence. I imagine it’s the sound my life makes every time it hits bottom. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not a beat you can dance to, but I have begun to detect a definite rhythm; a kind of syncopation between the lows and the deeper lows.

*TUNC* – like a cheap watch hitting the bottom of a 44-gallon drum full of used cooking oil and rendered animal fat, the years I spent climbing the ziggurat from shit kicker to busboy in a succession of burnout jobs is time I’ll never get back. I used to run track in grade school and won myself a fistful of medals, all engraved with the title ‘Champion Boy’. Maybe this made me cocky, so when my teachers said I had ‘potential’ I failed to enquire whether they meant for good or ill. Perhaps they picked it early, this capacity of mine for self-destruction, my aptitude for sub-minimum wage bullshit employment. I don’t run anymore. Cigarettes and apathy have seen to that.

*TUNC* – the word hovers above me as I struggle to close my eyes, some dyslexic obscenity carved with grim perseverance into the powder coating of this uncomfortable prison cot. I wonder what the illiterate felon who occupied this bunk before me intended with this piece of poorly formulated invective. Was it externalised self-loathing, etched in with an illicitly sharpened prison issue spoon? If so, then he and I share a lot more than the fleas in this pillow and a propensity for improvised sharps. If regret is just nostalgia’s ugly twin then my dreams are like a fucked up Norman Rockwell painting.

*TUNC* – I hear it in the agitated babble of an eight-year-old, Argentinean thug who’s waving a gun in my face. You know your habit has got out of hand when your ‘financial advisor’ recommends decamping to South America as a means of economizing. At least, my geographic descent neatly matches the general trajectory of my career prospects. But right now, I’m having difficulty concentrating on this midget Pablo Escobar’s forthright bartering technique. The gun has me transfixed. It looks obscene, gigantic in his tiny hand and all I can think is: “Why don’t they make these things in children’s sizes?”

*TUNC* – I looked it up. It ain’t Spanish or Portuguese, it’s Latin. It means ‘then’. If I could live my life backwards there might be a point to all this crystal clear hindsight. As my Guru says ‘Inhale and breathe the good air in. Exhale, release impurities within.’ I’ve lived my whole life with the steady throb of suppressed brutality, like the palpitations of some sick, ulcerated organ buried deep in my guts. And I’ve nurtured grudges so petty that the names that I carved bullets might as well have come straight from some random page of the phone book. But still, they don’t go easy; if I let this all fall away there won’t be much left of me.

Champion Boy