

Blueprints in a Dusty Bag

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A stack of old papers, enclosed by a dusty bag, one smelling of senescence and grime, lies in a cabinet bestrewn with miscellaneous objects. The scent of junvenescent enterprise lingers in the form of pencil shavings, printer ink, and innocent, naive illustration. With a gentle tug, I pull the dusty bag from the credenza, as if it were a treasure chest, and it takes the shape of my fingers, like it wants me back. In my eyes lies a fragment of myself, long scrapped due to adolescent practicality. I set the documents down on my desk, so softly that it makes an imperceptible noise as it rests on the surface. Carefully, as if it were made of gold, I peel away the encompassing bag to reveal the precious papers peeking through a broken folder. As if a spellbook, the papers called me to open them and inspect each page.

Flipping through each verso and recto of the folder transported me to a time when I knew less of who I am than I know now. Yet as I ruminate over my elementary days, reflecting on the simplicity yet ingenuity of the childhood epoch, my dearest friend Daniel Labanowski appears in every evocation. After all, he was my partner in the composition of these ephemera. Each page held a comic book tainted by our childish psyche, and while foolish, it represents the earliest stages of our friendship, one that would cement into a bond stronger than graphene. Now, the “books” were quite derisible, with the most notable titles being *Louie*, *I Ate Your Mom*, and *The Night of the Killer Crawlers*. Daniel insisted, grinning, “Trust me, Konnor, the stupider the title, the funnier it’ll be.”

And suddenly, I’m not at my desk anymore; I’m back in the cafeteria, elbows pressed into the sticky table with a milk mustache similar to the one I have now. Daniel’s pencil scratches furiously across the page, his tongue poking from the corner of his mouth.

“Louie should rescue his mom by swinging on a string of saliva,” I say as crumbs fall on the comic. He rolls his eyes, “That’s pretty weird, man, I don’t think people will like that”. He adds the drawing anyway, and we both break into laughter so loud the teacher at the next table shushes us. I can still feel the milk carton sweating against my palm, the graphite dust in the air, the way our laughter rose faster than we could catch it.

With each scribble on the page, whether his “consummately elegant” illustration or my “detailed and descriptive” writing, you could almost hear the cogs in our heads constantly spinning. Inexplicably, our books grew larger than any of us had ever expected; that is, throughout the school. We received a letter from our Head of School congratulating us on our good work and were even allowed to give a presentation to our grade, and while seemingly small, it was the first time we had ever tasted the applause of peers—and we wanted more. Daniel whispers to me, “Dude... We’re basically famous.”

On stage, my knees tremble. Daniel grips the comic so tightly it wrinkles at the edges, but his grin only grows as the cheers ripple through the crowd. I clear my throat, drop into my deepest “villain” voice, and the room erupts in laughter. My chest floods with something hot and electric, as if sunlight itself had poured inside me. Daniel leans close, his whisper shaking with excitement: “We did it.” He shakes my hand, like a true “professional,” and for a moment, the applause feels like it will never end.

While in the art studio, brainstorming ideas, Daniel looked at me with a grin that let me know he’s got something, something monumental. He sprints from one end of the classroom to the other and quickly grabs a sheet of paper and a pen and sketches his “cool idea”. I look over his shoulder, but he tells me, “Not yet! You have to wait for the big reveal.” The suspense was discomfoting, as if I were holding my breath underwater, lungs tightening, waiting for the

moment I'd break the surface. Daniel searches for colors, and I tell him, "Just show me already. You don't need any colors." He gives me the paper, and clutching it like it's a sacred text, I read, "*The Night of the Killer Crawlers: The Movie.*" "This...this is the greatest idea of all humankind," I exclaim. "I know exactly who to go to to make this a reality."

We commissioned the parent of a classmate, who was a university professor at the time, to record themselves reading our "work of art". This film, while seemingly minor, was our capstone project, our culminating point: the creation of a movie. Now, in the true sense, it was a read-aloud at best, not a movie, though to us and our classmates, it proved that we could be just as good as adults, which to this day has carried me throughout my life.

Flipping through the folder, I find the cover to a book we never got to set the seal on due to the Coronavirus pandemic. "Earthburger," it says: the third book in our series. Several iterations lie in front of me, and they feel radiant to the touch, as if they contained a storage of lively memories that were never unlocked.

Now the bag is back in the cabinet, but every time I pass it, I remember: inside is the first blueprint of who I am becoming. The remnants of dust from our imperfect masterpiece lay on my desk. I softly blow them away, and one gets into my nose. I sneeze...loud and unceremonious, but real. The particles fly everywhere, something I would usually attempt to clean up. Yet, instead, I let them stay, knowing that, just like those old stories, the ones of me and Daniel, they will find their way back into me.