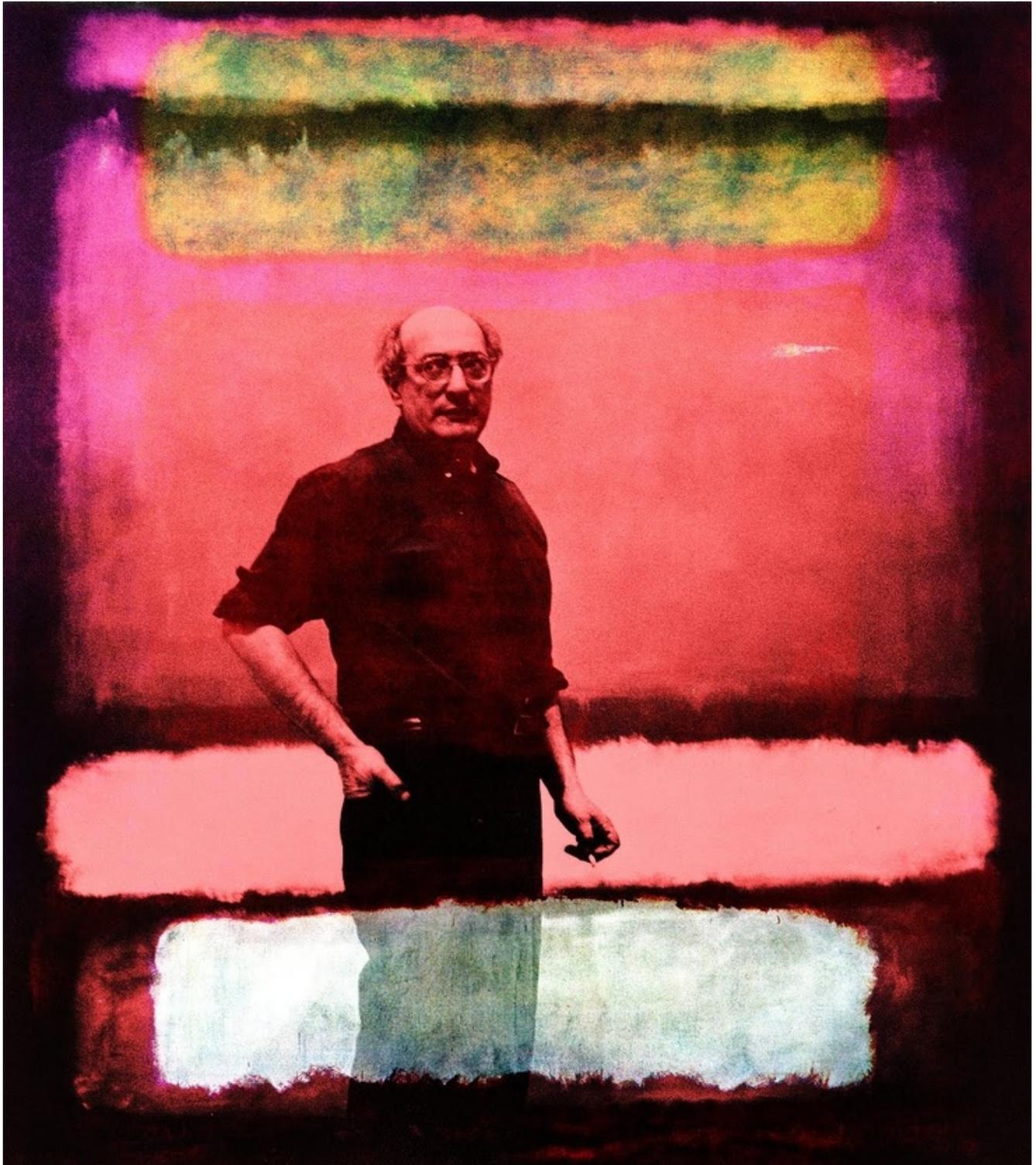


New Fiction from Chris Daly: “The Rothko Report”



"My father's work takes you to the edge of the abyss and invites you to look." -Son of Rothko

Dateline South Florida, October, 1962: It was Monday 2:00pm EST when Sister Linus began to slap the living shit out of Louie V. The original offense was, along with Richard L., "jumping like a puppet into line behind the ring-leader", that would be one Brian B. Except to exist, Brian had done nothing in the new school year. Richard was unpretentious, almost unconscious at times, naturally refined, and not a person even the most obtuse teacher would strike. But Louie was scrawny-strong, head rising on his neck like a bird about to eat something amazingly large; him one could smack, especially when he would not stop laughing. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Today this would be so viral. The nuns were not always wrong; Louie later went to prison, Richard became a junkie, Brian escaped to the West Coast and a long underground life as a political satirist. The three members of the puppet gang were given notes directing their parents to a meeting on Wednesday.

Up the coast in D.C. on that same date a bit after 8:00pm EST Secretary All Hail MacGeorge was shown U2 photos of possible missile launch sites on the cold war enemy-client island "ninety miles away", and at midnight he informed Secretary Mac the K, and they decided to let J Fucking K sleep, because he might be needing same.

Parental or legal guardian conference would not be a big deal, another adolescent pain in the ass. Tuesday after school they were down at the back-to-back paddleball court off Dixie Highway, south end of town, in time for the surprise appearance over by the concrete wall of Louie's father. Not exactly homeless, he lived by the good grace of an east coast Italian American network that did not include the nearby well-kept house of Louie's aunt; from which he was likely on stay-

away remittance agreement that he was likely in violation of by showing up in the park. Worse for the gang: in his hand were their packs of cigs taken from their designated concrete cubby-holes, and he was doing a thing all kids hate; keeping them in the dark. Fairly soon they understood that Louie's father would be giving back the herbs, but of course he proceeded to fuck with them. Too bad they couldn't bring him to the schoolhouse meeting, but here's the way that worked: Louie's aunt ran a prosperous mid-size I/A grocery store, and Richard's father was a necktie manager with a wife who kept plastic covers on the living room furniture. From both of those families to the church the money flowed, actual appearance not required; for the Brian family, reverse that.

In the western-style democratic nation-state capital that morning J F-ing K had been informed of the photos, and later at the meeting with the Macs, the Brother (RFK), the "Birds" and others, options were discussed. Do nothing, as the threat of thermo-n annihilation was already completely and firmly in place, and new spots on the island, though psychologically and politically spooky, were window dressing. Another option: apply boiler-plate diplomatic pressure. Or: back-door a choice to the Bearded Man of Island Truth: split with your angel or we bring T fucking R back to life for San Juan Hill II. Maybe we can without further adieu just do that. Or at least an air-strike on the sites. (This last plea from General LeMay-I, hawk of hawks, always ready to bomb the East Wing and ask questions later – in fact all the joint big birds were doing that thing with their wings.) Finally, there was the Harvard Yard son of a whiskey runner way: set up a blockade, call it a quarantine. Peaceful co-existence as we know it on hold.

The female parent of Brian got home from her Nurse's Aid night shift Wednesday morning and they went to school. (Da was out pushing a hack.) Brian was fairly quiet, appropriate for a celebrity in reverse, owing to a somewhat screwball-ish exit from parochial school into the public system, out of that into

juvie home, then back into the arms of holy mother, all in one family-on-the-skids year; after that a year off for all concerned, and now a lecture was being delivered hard upon the kid's denial, he was about to turn thirteen, how much is he supposed to be able to explain, but they all knew that something was up and so they treated him like Al Capone. Brian later in life learned that both parents had folded in a fair amount of boozing to make it through more or less undetected. Of the three friends, his was the only in-person meeting.

The flyboys were getting better and ID'd another site on the island that same day. The transgressor-sponsor nation was like the Brian family, with barely three hundred "Little Boys", while the Big Dog had three thousand that they were admitting to, so it was the player with the smaller arsenal who had to issue forth the official denial that any missile sites existed on the proxy island. In J Big Dog K's top desk drawer was a recon photo of something in a clump of palm trees.

At age twelve members of the criminal syndicate weren't ready for the girls they had begun to notice, except for Richard. He was not loud or dangerous or great looking or especially witty, though like his friends he faked some version of all those things. He'd learned to carry himself in a way that was beyond his age, and had a natural sweet spot for girls that they responded to, including Susan S., queen of the grade level, who had a good personality and was developing nicely. Richard, Susan and Brian hung out briefly, significantly, Thursday after school till Susan was picked up, and Richard and Brian headed home in the other direction. Louie was not present because the aunt clan had him on close watch working at the store while gypsy dad was around. Richard and Brian decided that on Saturday morning they had to get the hell out of town.

DOOMSDAY UPDATE: OPERATION DOMINIC, JOHNSTON ISLAND, CENTRAL PACIFIC, WAS THE SITE EARLIER IN THE DAY OF AIRDROP TEST CHAMA, (PHOTO OF WHICH IS A ROTHKO); RESULTS WERE "THOROUGHLY

SUCCESSFUL" WHILE THE YIELD WAS REPORTED TO BE BELOW THE PREDICTED VALUE.

The friends did a version of the Three Musketeers sword thing on the playground on Friday afternoon and headed off separately, Louie to the well-stocked Italian American store which had great food that was beyond the Brian family budget. Richard was picked up by his creepy stuck-up mother in their creepy Buick. Richard had learned to communicate succinctly, with a word or slight turn of head. Brian hit the sidewalk feeling that the week had been a seasonal hump and getting over it was an accomplishment. The school, Little Flower, on U.S 1, was too damn small, it got inside you. In the compact perfectly square back half of a duplex mini-compound of the Brian clan he had a place by the bedroom window, fan blowing in his face, to read every forgettable book in the Little Weed mini-library. Maybe he loved Friday more than the weekend it promised. On this particular one he looked out through the fading light and had a thought: I'm having a thought.

Up the road the photo-op boys were getting their meeting legs. Affairs of mutually assured destruction are best settled in the heat of the moment, within a few days the first best option was declared to be the thirty-knot ocean-going blockade, though if the other guy was rushed to get in and complete set-up operations, one might later have to deal with hot targets, thank you, Brother LeMay-I.

Richard's already gone brothers were twelve and fifteen years older, one of the curiosities of that mausoleum house was an untouchable double stack of Playboys on a corner hallway table, which entitled Richard to be unassuming. Brian was more familiar with the world of sidewalks than need be admitted. They were Saturday kids trying to not look like kids on tour down around 1st Street in Miami before 9:30 am, having bused from Young Circle in Hollywood; they hit a few elevators, people were starting to look at them, self-appointed cop-

types, they escaped across the street to Bayfront Park, where a certain amount of laughter ensued, the natives, the Cubans, the queers, everyone was funny; across the water was Arthur Godfrey Beach on the spit of land known as the Gold Coast. At certain ages one can complete an adventure by 1:30 in the afternoon. They trudged back to their respective homesteads. Richard's house of sophisticated moral relativism had powerful A/C. At his de facto duplex Brian laid down on the terrazzo floor next to his bed where it was cooler. Richard was probably on the phone with Susan S.

DOOMSDAY RECORD CONTINUED *In the world of insanely significant meetings beware of what may follow a day when "nothing happens" except the discovery of other sites. Earlier on this particular date ninety vertical miles from a particular faraway atoll there was* **A SECOND SUCCESSFUL OPERATION FISHBOWL EVENT, ESSENTIALLY ABOVE THE ATMOSPHERE, SO NO LUMINOUS FIREBALL WAS FORMED; AT THE MOMENT OF DETONATION OBSERVERS IMAGINED A GREEN AND BLUE CIRCULAR REGION SURROUNDED BY A BLOOD RED RING GONE IN LESS THAN A MINUTE, AND BLUE-GREEN STREAMERS AND PINK STRIATIONS THAT LASTED HALF AN HOUR. Who knew about THE DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIMENT, SAME DAY, IN THE IMMEDIATE ATMOSPHERE OF DISTANT SEMIPALATINSK, ABOVE THE FAR STEPPE IN NORTHEAST KAZAKHSTAN?**

Sunday was traditionally the most dangerous day in Brian's life, and more than twice he had been hauled in on the afternoon of the day of too much rest for normal types, and too much exposure for the new generation of under-financed freaks. After casing the church parking lot for cigs, he spent some time over in a half demolished, half interrupted construction area of a certain block where it felt "bombed out" and was interesting to be in. Get out of there, yelled a passing parishioner; Brian interpreted this as a warning from the small gods he'd learned to respect.

On that holy day up on the porch the Big Dog determined to continue the discussion of the future of the existence of the

human race on the high seas where at least there was literary precedence for wit and wile.

Louie was installed Monday at the front of the line, the rightful place of Brian who was in the middle, and Richard was at the very end; in a barely covert manner they were all laughing because being famous is funny. Louie had a certain extra-nutty look in his over the shoulder eye and on the playground later with the dynamic diction that would later win third place (crowd favorite) in the speech contest, confessed immortal inspiration for a caper; his neighbor across the street was gone for two weeks and Louie had a key to water the plants and turn on the hose in the yard; in this domain was much cool shit, and likely in an old world hiding spot, cash; on Thursday night the whole street would be gone to a big Knights of Columbus event, and yes he would be the obvious suspect, which was the perfect alibi! Louie had missed out on the weekend adventure, and anyway they had a rep to live up to.

On this date in the evening J Fucking K made a Big Dog dinner time TV speech revealing that their boats were steaming this way and our boats would be cutting them off because evil hardware will not be tolerated so near the Gold Coast even if it meant putting everything on the line. The TV store crowd chewed on that and it tasted like an opinion the populations of all nations are used to concealing.

Same date doomsday check-in: AT 6:10 IN THE PARTICULAR TIME ZONE, TOP OF A VERTICAL ARCHIPELAGO JUST NORTH OF MOST OF THE MODERATE PART OF THE SOVIET, ABOVE CAPE DRY NOSE, ON AN ISLAND OF RED AND BLACK SHALE WITH STEEP CLIFFS FAMOUS AMONG LOONS, A THERMO-NUCLEAR POP QUIZ.

On Tuesday after school Louie had a fight with Patrick K, a stocky individual normally of no interest to the three immortals. At first it was even but at a certain point Louie's strikes ceased to have effect so he picked up a piece of thin

piping and delivered a whack across the shoulders and back, mainly an indication of true craziness. But Patrick was stocky of mind and body and barely blinked, and after that things wound down, and they even shook hands, not that any invitations to join any elite groups would be forthcoming.

Cargo was in the water and the whole world was chattering. N fucking K the Red Dog sent an unpleasant telegram. The secretaries and the Bootleg Heir continued discussion of the options as the cabinet-level brother played pocket-pool and LeMay-I danced up the wall and along the ceiling. There were further reconnaissance revelations and "states" lined up. Adlai the Intellectual Dog (and bald icon of loss at Brian's) was working the U.N.

Louie didn't make it to school on Wednesday and Sister Slappy made the mistake of advising stone-faced Richard and Brian to distance themselves from their friend with the crazy disposition. You'll never learn, she said, and that's when she predicted they would all wind up in the big house, which so nearly came true. Later Brian would not remember any practice ducking under the desk that week. Did the parochial world not get the memo from a fellow-travelling power-earthling who was the first Catholic in that high office? That day Richard and Brian were allowed to hang a bit, and it was noted that it might be OK if the following night's somewhat screwy b&e caper were called off.

Out on the briny the boats came near the other boats and a holding pattern ensued. It was poop time in the meeting rooms; invade the former gambling and good music mecca and Arthur Godfrey was probably fucked. One more thing, said Mac the data genius of the automotive business who'd been installed in the cabinet to lend horn-rimmed credibility, the incoming vessels with the barely camouflaged decks are shadowed by a sub. Che Fucking G, Island Beard #2, said bring it on; said the yankee didn't know or didn't want to know that they would lose.

The foolish three, imagining that Thursday was a new day at school, gravitated along the lines of attraction, and so were taken to their assigned punishment places, Louie by the ear, Brian by the sleeve, and Richard, whose clothes, a version of the blue and white, one did not touch, by the little finger, whatever that was supposed to mean. In semi-covert caper-conference at recess it was decided that they would look at stuff but only take that which was irresistible. At an early hour of the night the three holy bums were spotted on the approach by a neighbor and had to veer off from the target house. They screwed around in the paddleball park for a while, waiting for the coast to clear, and then re-scheduled for Saturday daytime when walking around was not as conspicuous.

At the U.N Adlai the Man of Loss, an intellectual vivand who kept a social apartment on the premises, had big pictures and a pointing device, and the other guy, per a flyer in the original charter, refused to respond to direct or indirect questions. About that time a ship slipped red rover and made a run for the island. All right, they were warned, we know that's not a serious tub, but don't let it happen again or else. We and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which we and you have tied the knot, wrote one world leader to another. N Fucking K who had pounded the international table with his shoe, might be cracking but on-site construction continued, and the Bearded One demanded the big pushback if they were invaded, for which eventuality he correctly guessed the BD was in preparation. Someone came into one of the smallest meeting rooms with word that a U2, whose existence the BD denied, had been shot down out of the other motherland's airspace, pilot probably dead. Life at the top can be embarrassing.

After school that Friday Brian reported to the back of the nun station wagon to be delivered for an hour and a half of weed-pulling originally scheduled for Saturday. He had toyed with the idea of trying to make it on the coming weekend day from

the convent straight to the break-in, but nah. Louie was attuned to craziness, Richard was untouchable, but Brian was the slightly and essentially seasoned criminal. When Brian got home he received for his birthday a small money tree to which was attached eight one-dollar bills and one fiver on top. He thought of bringing his wad on the caper and pretending to find it. He didn't exactly know why, the whole thing did not bear a lot of thinking, but he was feeling lucky.

Brother R Fucking K met secretly with one of the opposition's Brothers Fucking K straight out of Dostoevsky, who put the parallel missiles of Turkey on the table with the one's on the Island. The highly competitive presidential sibling left the room to make a phone call.

Doomsday Progress Report EARLIER, JUST AS THE DAY HAD ARRIVED, AT AN ALTITUDE OF 31 MILES, 19 MILES S-S/W OF JOHNSTON ISLAND A SLIGHTLY DISTORTED BRIGHT MOON-LIKE SPHERE WAS SEEN, YELLOW AT FIRST, THEN GRADUALLY SHOWING GREEN, PINK AND VIOLET HUES. BLUE-PURPLE STREAMERS WERE FORMED AND TWO OBSERVERS WITHOUT GOGGLES IN PLACE SUFFERED RETINAL DAMAGE.

The first thing the juveniles did was get tired of watching the fresh white mouse cower in the corner of the cage of Louie's pet snake. They took a circuitous route to the paddleball court that offered the broadest operational perspective. Damn if that same neighbor wasn't about, but in a more oblivious mode. At the right moment they crossed over and entered the back part of the back yard. The grass was of a type too nice to walk on. Tom Sawyer and the two Huck Finns traversed the immaculate lawn in preparation of entry through a window left open and through which one could be boosted and then open the door from the inside. Why just use a key when one could ruin the end of a good story? In fact, at the last minute there was the sound of crunching gravel on the street, which was the residents returning a week early from vacation just because the world might blow up. Louie covered the retreat by turning the hose on the fantastic lawn. Brian spent

some of his roll on fresh packs of cigarettes and soda and by the time they got back to Louie's Mr. Mouse was barely a lump in the long throat of Mr. Snake.

It was Black Saturday, LeMay-I and his ilk of the various persuasions were bouncing off the walls and N Fucking K officially blinked, the hardware would be off the island and J Fucking K secretly blinked, the Turkey items would be removed without announcement, most boats turned back. A sub shadowing the flotilla in question was out of communication and came close to launching the first final torpedo. Apparently three guys down there argued it out correctly.

From the Journal of Doom WITHIN THE DURATION OF THIS PARTICULAR ROTATION OF THE EARTH, NEAR THE USUAL ATOLL THE CALAMITY DOMINIC MUSHROOM CLOUD REACHED THE HINDU HEIGHT OF SIXTY-THREE THOUSAND FEET.

Brian determined to save his bread for a non-white shirt for the upcoming social season, a new concept, and so had a Sunday afternoon to fill somewhere besides the pinball arcade, without his friends. After eighth grade graduation the three went to separate schools and thereafter saw each other around town now and then. Louie developed a knack for hanging with an older crowd, making himself useful, and followed them into the county jail, where one time he dropped acid. Brian would rather die ten thousand deaths. Then Louie topped himself; after getting out on bail he went back on visiting day with a bag of weed down his pants to smuggle in, and on that particular Lord's Day he disappeared into the correctional system. Same thing almost happened to Brian for a bogus pot bust, the judge fucked with him and then let him go to California, where one night at Barney's Beanery he sat in a booth with visiting Richard, who was out on bail, and there is nothing like waiting for a court date. Richard had gravitated upwards, which is possible when money and a little finesse are involved, to a small group of rich kids who became practiced hedonists chasing after excellent junk in two-seater sports

cars. Brian arrived at the little local deconstruction site thinking spot to find that a passing idiot had taken a dump in one of the half-finished rooms. He took a step back towards the street, and spotted just in time the front end of a patrol vehicle emerging to the left; his reflexes were sharp but he was still living too close to the line. The arcade was safe, and he could just watch.

N Fucking K was never the same, there was the old familiar low buzz in the politburo. J Fucking K had one year to live, but this Sunday was a good day; K Brother met with Brother K to finalized the deal and have some Chinese. Someone came up with the idea of exchanging phone numbers; the Man of the Moment had an exit line out of advertising: if one invades when the same result could have come through negotiation, then you don't have a very good war.

**Doomsday Nightly Sign-off AT THE END OF THE KAZAKHSTAN
STEPPE HARD BY THE SPOT CALLED SEMIPALATINSK ON THIS
PARTICULAR DATE IN A BUSY YEAR, ONE COULD HAVE HARDLY HELPED
BEING AWARE OF YET ANOTHER BEATIFICATION OF DUST.**