

In the Midst of a Haze

Smoke billowed all around me forming clouds of pure white. They were darkened only by their depth, an effect produced by the wanton consumption of a once living thing by the merciless greed of a few carefully maintained embers – I'd blown it myself.

Sitting cross-legged and leaning heavily against a wall for support, I suppose at that particular moment, I was nothing if not satisfied. Passing the smoldering grass to my new friend, I awaited her own exhalation. Smoke billowed from her mouth, smelling like some exotic perfume, at once both offensive and attractive. Seated on the floor, I wallowed in the smoke-induced state of ecstasy for a while. Presently a somber thought slipped stealthily through the mire of worldly pleasures in which I had been unabashedly bathing, and presented itself at once as both solemn and merciless: "Why am I here?"

"Why am I here?" I silently asked a passing cloud of smoke. It seemed to attempt an answer; its convoluted body twisting slowly, forming non-existent words with its non-apparent mouth. Whispered secrets caressed my red-rimmed eyes. As I stared into the white-void, I felt both excited and captivated by the question: I found myself wandering the landscape of my mind, searching for an answer, gazing through the void, trying almost desperately to capture some hidden meaning which could alleviate my sudden misplacement of memory. When I saw that the smoke had faltered, that its words had failed their purpose; I began to grow frustrated.

Casting an inquiring glance at my companion, my heart slowly removed itself from its accustomed depth to an arresting

position within my throat. I could feel myself grow a little hotter by the second. I tried to recall where we had met, how well I really knew her, or even who she was. Her face seemed familiar, and something else as well, but it was escaping me.

I never liked that about myself; how unreliable my memory could be. Although, sometimes, I think that I would be a little bit better off if I never remembered anything at all, or at least only remembered the good times; the ones that placed me at that notorious world-pinnacle: Hovering over the world from the highest peaks of a glorious mania.

The question returned once more. Some slight consideration of the topic was given, and a verdict issued: I did not know why I was here, yet alone where here even was. In fact, I couldn't recall anything useful to me at all, including who the young woman sitting next to me was, or how I knew her to begin with.

Taking a deep, calming breath, I tried to relax some; taking my time to even out my mood, leaning a little heavier against the wall against which we were both seated. Calmed, I turned and said to my companion, "I don't remember your name." Taking a deep draw on the ever-shrinking paper held by her long and slender figure, she exhaled a second cloud as white as an angel's robe, and casually responded, "Why do you need to know?"

She was the epitome of cool, so much so that it irked me. "Did you ever say it?" I asked, taking the paper from her. "No," she said. I took a long draw, held it, and then coughed a few times. Passing the paper back, I asked "Why not?" Her face twisted a bit with irritation. "Nobody asked." She said curtly, then turned and turned up the radio. "Trying to keep up with you, and I don't know if I can do it..." squawked the little box. The rhythm soothed my tired nerves somewhat. She leaned a little harder against the wall, adjusted her legs, and then returned methodically to her smoking. Fair enough, I suppose.

The room we occupied was crowded with random objects: A dresser stood near the room's exit covered in several empty, crumpled up packs of cigarettes, a few discarded lighters, and a couple half-filled ash trays. A rickety nightstand crouched by the foot of a bed. It presented a surface wholly occupied by a large radio, with its speakers stacked on top of it.

Two lamps had been set on a desk created by several stacks of clothes-filled plastic tubs with a few heavy pine boards laid across them, the lamps having had small paper cutouts positioned on their shades so as to form provocative shapes on the walls, each reflecting their own take on someone's very own specially patented form of perverse and coarse humor.

Posters depicting various bands such as "Pink Floyd", "The Mars Volta", and "R.E.M." hung on thumbtacks from the drywall, their corners tattered and wrinkled. A couple of stained and uncovered mattresses had been stacked against two walls to form a bed which had been littered with paraphernalia. The bed's headboard being a closet door which had been propped between it and the wall, with what remained to be seen of it being decorated with various pin-ups. The door having become a headboard after having been relieved of its hinges so as to make room for a few boxes that were too big for the closet.

A window loomed over the bed. Its thin glass panes were rimmed in white-painted wood, flaked with age. The view from the window was modest: from its ground-level perch you could see the back yard.

From my seat, I could see that many years ago a fence had encircled the yard; its high walls retaining the privacy of the window, enforcing its protection from intruding eyes, upholding the house's occupant's dignity. Now the once-proud fence exhibited the worst symptoms of dry-rot and termite damage; its once-gleaming coat of pure white paint seeming to merely accent the gray hue of the decaying wood. Like everything in this world,

the hubris won out and now the corpse of a once-fine thing remains to humble us in any way it can, all while daring us to surpass its day-old grandeur with our own: Trapping us in the formation of our own hubris.

The yard contained by the fence was surprisingly free of clutter, was relatively well maintained, save a few large cracks in a dilapidated walkway, and several patches of medium-length grass growing against an old paper-birch tree. Beyond the fence lay a field, its land un-touched by the municipality probably due to the fact that it was a fairly low-lying property, the kind that seemed to have a tendency to flood during heavy rain. The field sloped gently away from the house.

Early in the day the window would allow the Sun's imperious rays to filter down from the highest of heavens and end their journey on the grey-carpeted floor. The rays themselves seeming to me like so many microscopic mini-men, strapping on helmets, kissing their partners, then piloting their tiny light-crafts like kamikaze rockets into the turf, screaming the death of my self-repression: An endless, all-consuming depression, perpetrated by my own damning actions. I thoroughly enjoyed their sacrifice, and often wondered between acts of self-deprivation, as the light-hued curtain fluttered softly in some slight breeze, whether the light's mini-warriors were successful in their crusade to preserve me against my crippling doubts and fears.

As it was, a storm seemed to be brewing. Clouds roiled and boiled on the horizon, threatening still more violence. Promising a renewed vigor to surpass the previous storm that had already left the ground soaking wet. Silently I grimaced: I hate storms.

I shifted slightly, trying to get comfortable. A terrible dryness had nestled itself in the back of my mouth, stretching ever downwards, attempting to turn the fleshy pillar I call my throat into a crumbled mess of dusty agitation. I tried to swallow but nothing came of it.

The thirst grew. It was a menace, ever present. It relished my suffering, sought to increase it at every turn. It was the physical manifestation of my everyday life, threatening to seize my humors in an executioner's grip; to strangle me with the concept of an endless and unobtainable desire.

The paper made it back to me. I cracked my chapped lips for it, oiled my creaking jaw, and puffed its smoldering ashes to life. I took a very long drag on it, inciting a fiery revolution, and in fanning the flames devoted myself to the careful consideration of my world.

I could recall myself having awakened from some deep slumber; so, I must have been here at least one day so far. "One day" I thought. That's enough time for most parents to start to worry. Probably not mine though. I wondered if my parents had even noticed my absence yet.

It wouldn't surprise me if my departure, and subsequent stay away from home had been downplayed as one of my many authoritative rebellions. Besides, what it always seemed to come down to was that Mom was too far away to know, and Dad was too preoccupied to show whether or not he cared.

An impulse compelled my hand, and I gently scratched at my forehead. The thin skin felt cool against my fingers. Cool and clammy.

I loved both of my parents, without a doubt, and still do; yet, I believe that I was not the child they deserved. They deserved a child that was an easily distinguished athlete, one that stood out, proud and strong, upright in both action and bearing... Or perhaps an accomplished academic, one that proudly followed my mother's footsteps, that did the family proud through cerebral accomplishments: A child that sang the praises of Gods and men, and swiftly called to justice any accusations of poor upbringing from his parents.

Unfortunately for me as much as them, I was neither an academic nor an athlete, or rather I had been both all at once, simultaneously failing to excel in either. It seemed as though my best trait had been concealed in my careful observation of the world. Through this trait I watched, helpless, as hatred tore my family from me; my observations gave rise to the outwardly cold and abrasive son-of-a-bitch you see now: The true bastard of fate, viewing the world as a menacing testament of what happens when you allow yourself the illusion of an invariable destiny.

Smoke once more billowed from my youth-wrought iron lungs: It gave testament to the arrogant resolve that tested their capacity, filling the void at once with both THC and hubris, then expelling it for all the world to gaze and wonder at their might. Straining hard, I watched as the smoke lazily began to dissipate, my curiosity and determination to seek its truth urging me to consult whatever embers of memory its heavy grays and whites had to offer. Glassy eyed, I saw its contents clearly.