

Sit and Deliverance

One spring night, I sat in a swiveling office chair in a swinging bachelor pad by the beach. The marine layer hung slow and low like Angelino smog and the dim studio track lighting illuminated the edges of the well-read paperback in his large hands like an airbrushed beauty queen loved idyllically by the artist who created her.

I love it when he reads to me. There's nothing more gratifying sometimes than a voracious reader who feels the words he or she is reading aloud to me. The intonation is everything; the stress on certain words or passages, the fluctuation in verbal tone – it's like witnessing a temporary bridging of the subjective gap we're all cursed by, if only in small paragraph patches. Such is the beauty of writing – to express is sublime, but to share is divine.

The book he read from was, at first, one that I did not recognize. So, I sat like a child with wide, quiet, semi-impatient eyes, waiting for the imagination payoff.

Just two weeks before, he called me just past midnight to read me Robert Frost, and I had mistakenly took it for a not so opaque, but yet touching, way to roll down my stockings with his mind. After this particular night, however, I stood corrected.

He grasped that book in his hand and began to read aloud. His oft meter that can be characterized by shy, rapid-fire mumbling when expressing from the heart was replaced by deliberation in focus and expression that comes from love of the art. Each word was clearly enunciated; none were missed, and some sentences were delivered with the imagined passion of the original writer's intent.

During the introduction, my head went everywhere. I focused on the text, I thought about the writer, and the writer the writer wrote about. I thought about my childhood, I thought about the first time I read this book at thirteen years old, but had skipped over this introductory part because I felt it wasn't important to the text. I thought about this man before me, sitting in a sweet, swiveling black leather office chair with his head bowed in reverence towards the tiny text in his massive hands. His mouth was opened like a choir boy hitting the mark from his heart. I suddenly respected our friendship.

He reads to me for him and not for me, but I am the lucky, lucky recipient of witnessing his devotion to the text. My stockings, though interesting to him at times, are not the reason why he and I collide. He needs to read, and I need to be read to; in this, he delivers me and he is delivered.

[Home](#)

The Great Paper Chase

Her itchy trigger-typer finger depressed the automatic window button. In the calm, still silence of just-past midnight in downtown L.A., the mechanical whir of the window seemed louder than it should be. Then again, it was the still of the night in the prop-like city, she was idling at a needless red light with no one else around, just next to the aluminum baked Alaska that doubles as the Walt Disney Hall; successive lack of sleep and excessive caffeine usually did amplify sounds and sensitivity.

It was a pissier of a day worked well into the night, the kind when the feeling the fight rose up hard enough way past inspiration to expose a high level of unrest; unrest with what, it was never quite clear. She took it as a sign of the times. All she knew was she was idling, and some dude was not paying attention to her frivolous charity.

“Hey!” she yelled out her car window. “Hey!”

He was the only guy around for miles, it seemed. The red light kept its stolid gaze, though there was no traffic in the still of the night. She looked back. He was oblivious to her, this man on a mission.

He was a black man, about 40-ish, pushing a shopping cart. She could see at the bottom of his cart, beneath reused plastic trash bags and a blanket, that he had a collection of bottles.

“Hey!” she yelled again, to no avail.

He kept going past her car, now just clearing it behind her.

She stuck her arm straight out her window and looked backward. In her hand was an empty Crystal Geiser bottle.

“Hey! I have a bottle for you!”

He didn’t respond.

She thought to herself, “Come on, I’m trying to be nice. Let me do one nice thing before the end of today.” It was the little gestures that made her feel better; one nice thing a day usually lessened the feeling of being a faithful member of the corporate button pushers’ society.

She waved her arm wildly. She wouldn’t do her one nice thing today, and not because of her choice. Was it the city that made her feel so selfish, or was the emptiness innate? she wondered.

He looked up from his cart and his eyes lit up. He ran toward her arm, his eyes fixated on the bottle. As he approached, she could see his eyes. They were wide and on fire; probably the result of a stimulant. Behind them was a grin of being in the Zone during his usual workday – productive and repetitive. Just like everyone else, it's the repetition that drives the demon of unrest away.

He reached for the bottle and nodded his head as if to say thank you. Then, the bittersweet selfishness infused with sympathy arose from within her. She was strangely compelled.

“Did you ever think that you’d spend your life chasing around polyurethane?” she asked.

She was used to delivering poignant rhetorical; one-liners can sometimes make for good copy. It makes people think. But this man, too, was used to not getting an answer when he spoke, but for different reasons. This time, though, the floor was all his.

“Did you ever think you’d spend your life chasing paper?” He asked. She paused, and then laughed.

“I guess we’re truly environmentalists after all,” she replied.

Then they shared a smile, these two people with nothing in common; well, except for recycling — he recycled bottles, and she, paper.

The light turned green and she turned the corner and floored it, heading home. He turned the corner in his cart and continued his work day, sailing down the street, trying to make good time.

[Home](#)

Happy Endings

A young-ish woman entered the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf on Santa Monica bearing a small dog beneath one arm like the latest Prada clutch. She was beautiful on that kind of “West L.A.” kind of way – blond, slender, waxed, and wispy – fresh from Pilates.

She approached the counter and got the immediate payoff of “Awwwww...he’s so cute!” from the barista behind the counter. The young-ish woman nuzzled in to the dog and replied, “He’s having separation anxiety.”

The dog had no idea what was going on.

It’s amazing how pets become our heart’s mouthpieces, the baby banter reflecting our inner child’s sing-songy whine. I wondered what kind of separation anxiety the woman was going through.

Maybe she was one of the aspiring who, after a short stint in the land of the intangible, was leaving town with her tail and the memories of many temporary men promising a half-Surbubanite, half-Hollywood happy ending between her legs. Maybe she was going through a breakup, or worse, a divorce – and he was getting the dog. Yeah, that was it.

She walked outside and proceeded to talk to her dog like a wily, fun-loving toddler for about ten minutes – clearly the trial run of the first of limited visitation rights with the child-substitute that she would never have with the man who was leaving her.

L.A.’s a lot like that – a collection of bittersweet beginnings and endings that in the heart read like short stories and novels never finished – a Choose Your Own Adventure book that often feels unfulfilling. Thank God for rewrites.

This isn’t an everyday town, this perpetual Disneyland city, but, there’s a lot to be said for this brand of life experience that can be crammed into the years out here. With its spread-out landscape, geography becomes a time marker for different eras and phases, and each is a little bit different than the next person’s recollection of his or her own events.

I suppose when the going gets confusing, it all turns into fiction anyway, because it’s more palatable. This is one of the few places where people almost exclusively buy into their own bullshit branding re-invention of themselves. It’s a permanent state of adolescence, making faces in the bathroom mirror and dreaming of someone caring – a chronic yearning.

The young-ish woman asked the little doggy if he wanted to go back to his “misguided daddy,” adding, “We have to forgive him because he doesn’t know what he does – that’s right.”

The dog still had no idea what was going on.

I felt bad for her the way a mother feels when she peers into the bedroom of a child going through some sad stuff and watches them process without he or she knowing. And then I felt bad for her because, after all, she was talking to a dog. Thankfully, as a fiction writer, I knew I could give her a happy Hollywood ending.

The dog looked up into her eyes like Bogart, nuzzled his face into her chin, and replied, “You know what? Forget about him. He doesn’t care about me, either. It’s all about me and you, kid. Let’s go.”

[Home](#)

Welcome to the Neighborhood

The groupie cells in my body tingled with the reality of living in Andy Walker's apartment and the prospect of leftover writers' feng shui made my fingers ache to hit the keys. The way people react to this 900 sq. ft. box is like living in L.A.'s best, not-so-kept secret; a fountain of Ambition Springs Eternal on some kind of writer's star map, like an East Coast writer's tour featuring a cabin where Mark Twain once took out his contacts.

I suppose I could cut a deal with a few profiteering groupies to orchestrate tours for the run-of-the-mill, starry-eyed aspiring "writers" looking for a one-way ticket out of poverty via a trial download of Final Draft and a box of inch and a quarter brass brads. Hype alone often fuels this town, morphing even the most ordinary man perched over a glowing laptop screen into the supernatural post-post-modern Machiavelli. Yet as lucrative as that could actually be, I think I'll just continue to write and hope for the best; I want my shot at the spotlight.

But it's hard to get the spotlight when you're still living in the shadow of another writer. It's only been two weeks since I've moved in, but his undying presence makes him the invisible roommate I never see. This, of course, makes him the cool one who's always out at mythical Hollywood networking parties soon to be seen on perezhilton while I'm home slaving over a nineteen-inch glowing box and some disconnected ideas that aren't going anywhere, but it does have its advantages.

Tales of knowing the legend begin outside my door and drift down the hallway like a Mack truck testing the Doppler Effect. For a purportedly quiet guy, people act like they know him personally. For a while, I thought they did.

From what I've heard, his quiet demeanor was his own best mysterious character projection, like an adopted lovechild of James Dean and Marilyn Manson – cool, but fucking weird. And it didn't hurt that he was rich. Stinking rich. Filthy rich. The kind of rich that makes you wonder why he never left an aging apartment in the nine years he skyrocketed to writing superstardom. But that's what made him so cool was that blue collar, Bruce Springsteen kind of way – he personified the rags to riches trip; he came out to L.A. with only \$250 in his pocket and a driver's license, and subsequently rode the Metro straight into the pearly gates of Hollywood and drove out in a Rover made of mise en scene.

But that's only his image – but it can be entertaining.

"Why should I go to work everyday, working so hard, like a slave, when I can just stay home and write a screenplay?" one neighbor impassionedly, but rather rhetorically, rattled off in his thick Dutch accent one Saturday afternoon while flipping a burger on the grill with one hand and nursing a frosty import in the

other. By his volume, I assumed he had sucked down quite a few before coming out on his deck that was opposite mine.

"I will tell my first born son to forget about business school, forget about the MBA, forget about what this country is built on – No! I will tell him to write a script."

He continued to rant, using the spatula in his right hand as sort of a Napoleonic extension of his jealous tirade.

The perfect background music of the moment popped in my head. It was a cross between Led Zeppelin's Immigrant Song and Morrissey's We All Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful. I kicked my neighborly, getting-to-know-you smile into high gear, not really knowing how to react when I realized that he was serious.

Then he looked down at my typewriter in front of me and asked somewhat caustically, "Vhat? Are you a writer, too?"

I wanted to lie. My superficiality had been exposed. I was crushing the hard-work-and-eventual-payoff of the American Dream in favor of lusting for my own writers' shortcut to fame and fortune. Yet, I was impressed to see a relatively recent Angelino implant slam the Hollywood Dream with such conviction. I thought you had to live here at least for five years before being able to generate and dwell in that kind of negativity. I wanted more.

"Yes," I replied, assuredly, "yes I am."

He stopped talking after that. Instead, he stared into the smoldering grill and took turns drunk-mumbling and cynically laughing to himself and pressing down on the hissing meat with his oversized spatula in between large gulps of beer.

Welcome to the neighborhood.

[Home](#)

Grace

Note: The look of desperation is in the eyes of many around me, she thought.

A pen and pad approached ready to start another job on this hot Sunday noon. The brunch rush was dissipating, but her edgy efficiency was hanging on, coming to a sputter-stop, like a car almost out of gas.

Waitresses in this Los Feliz joint usually look like a cross between Pippi Longstocking and a Goth chick you'd find at some Hollywood haunt where men wear more eyeliner and black leather than their dates. They're codified in a "life is shit – but that's just the way it is and has been for many successive generations, so let's all get wasted" mentality.

She was different. Her eyes were perfect little blue pools of beauty. Her skin was flawlessly tanned porcelain pink and her beauty was flooring saturation in an otherwise grayscale room. She was Grace Kelly in a black apron. What set her apart even further from superior aesthetics, though, was what came through her eyes.

Note: Don't stare, she thought.

It's hard not to stare when there is such high contrast. Her eyes trailed her as she crossed the room and returned with a fresh pot of coffee. Her small gold tendrils curled in the summer heat, casting vulnerability against her sharp mind

The coffee pour-sloshed into the standard issue sandstone-colored diner mug. A couple of renegade drops cleared the rim of the cup and splashed onto the table. A quick wipe rendered a clean glass.

"Thanks," she said, looking up at the waitress. Their eyes locked for a couple of seconds. There was a strange understanding. The desperate recognizing the desperate.

Note: Her dreams were once big and now they're muddled, and she's too smart to be working there, pouring coffee at a shit-kicker-trendy passing-as hip-oise diner with dirty floors, dingy seats, and programmed cool Musak, she thought.

The waitress left and she sat in the booth looking down into her coffee cup. The cream swirled in one spot like "Starry Night." Ah, the patterns; those soothe; art everywhere. She scanned the room of green and gray leather booths filled with people eating while thinking: Beauty is everywhere. Beauty is everywhere. That was her escape: finding beauty, searching for proof that amidst the crap and chaos and desperation that there was still a glimmer.

Seeing beauty is an art, like everything else, and in that, she felt blessed. But she was also cursed with empathy. An empathic observer is tool to understand the human condition, but it can be overwhelming. To see sometimes is to feel and to feel is to experience and to experience is to live a thousand lifetimes at once.

The man sitting next to her, her lover, rants and raves. His life is a mess. She feels his pain as if it were her own. A young blonde woman walks by, head full of haze and a mouth full of sorrow. She feels her pain. An over-privileged and bored couple sitting just outside the window on the fabulous patio has lost the joie de vive. She watches them chew. The hash browns seem to taste like paste and there's nowhere to go when you've done everything and bought everything you thought you should, because it's all the same boring place. She feels their pain.

Note: Beauty is everywhere. Beauty is everywhere. Look harder, she thought.

She scanned the room again. People walked in, people walked out, waiters serving, people sipping, eating, talking.

She gulped her coffee. Her lover continued to rant. His life is in shambles. She doesn't know what to do. She scans the room. The beautiful waitress is in a far-off corner spacing out into her view of what lays beyond the windows, wondering how her life got to be working Sundays for a little over minimum wage. A young scruffian with a trucker hat and a Beck shirt stood at the front door, eyes full of hangover, looking for sustenance. He looks lost inside his own mind. This isn't his life, either.

Note: Beauty is everywhere. This is just a temporary slump, she thought.

The coffee cup is refilled. Cream is added, stirred, and gulped. It doesn't taste as good as the first cup. It tastes toxic.

She looked behind her and caught the projection of her own eyes' reflection in a mirror posted to the wall. The creep set in.

Note: I'm so full of it, she thought.

So what if I'm living paycheck to paycheck? So what if I'm not where I want to be? So what if I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be outside of a loosely titled "writer" living in a talk-laden city of bad scripts and the chronically dissatisfied? So what if I'm nearly thirty? So what? So what if I know if I had enough money, sometimes I think I'd leave in a heartbeat. So what if my dreams have become perverted into something I don't recognize? So what if I am just as helpless as the next person? So what? So what? So what?

Note: So what.

Sometimes there is no beauty outside of the mind, and she knew it. She nervously sipped her coffee, the only salve to the rising horror complicating her mind, the cacophony of the world's desperation sitting on her shoulders.

The waitress came by and dropped off the check and told her and her lover that she hoped that they had a nice day; and she meant it in the way a person wishes for others what they really need. Desperation is its own unspoken language that can only be perceived by those who are intimately acquainted with it.

Note: There are desperate people around me everywhere, she thought.

Note: And I am just one of them.

She chuckled inside and smiled back at the waitress and replied, "Definitely," with such assurance in intonation that survival was the only option. The fight would go on. And maybe, she thought, the beauty of it all is in the pursuit.

[Home](#)

Chance

We met at the corner of Hope and Sixth; not at a coffee shop like I had always thought it would happen, but at the intersection of two major downtown streets just after the intersection of 2004 into 2005, beneath the deafening techno blare and green laser lights playing among the trees like a military scanner of the times seeking signs of intelligent life. In the city where escapism is masked by hedonism, this can be a feat; people would rather sell their brains to feel as though they had a clean soul. But we two souls collided in a sea of disseminating crowds, our own intersection formed by a series of consequential life events tracing back to the Big Bang and even before.

The third time we kissed, I marveled at the thought of how two previously unfamiliar people can even connect at all in this huge expanse of a world. As he his breath met mine and filled my senses with who he was, the pictures of his childhood album shown to me hours before flashed through my mind. I was blown away by the parallel movies running in my mind of his childhood pitted against mine; the choices his mother had made, the choices my mother had made, the choices he and I both made growing up through our tumultuous twenties on our own – all running together to this point, when we were here, trying to get closer, trying to feel who this person was in front of them.

Dancing in his arms on that well-traveled pavement, I first saw his heart. Then his pain. Then his strength. And then his lips.

“I could kiss you for a week,” he laughed into my ear.

He’s always doing that – laughing the truth, catching people off guard with it, reflecting it like a big mirror into their unsuspecting faces, and making them think.

Whipping around the dead man’s curves of Mulholland Drive in a matchbox plastic convertible Volkswagen just after a five-day rain had passed, I watched his boredom dance among his longing and realized that he was slightly dangerous in seeking his own truth, chasing that which doesn’t bore him. In this brave new world known as now, the bravest thing I could do was to let him in. Way beyond girly dreams of landing the man, I knew he would change my life, no matter what happened. It may not be intentional on his part; the energy makers in the world can’t be stopped. They give off chutzpah like lightning, and once struck, there’s no denying or fighting the transformation – for better or for worse.

I gripped the passenger car door handle harder. We took the next corner deep and fast. A deluge of water that had collected from the week’s rain into the inner curve of the turn shot up and around the top of our open car, but left a drop on neither of us.

[Home](#)