

Never Meet Me In Limbo

I was never an honest man; I wasn't born to be. While some had the pleasure of dancing to the radio that sat upon their marbled kitchen island as they shared a stuffed turkey dinner with their family, I could only watch from the window and listen to the beat of my stomach. I didn't steal because I felt that people didn't deserve what they had, I stole because I wanted what they had, and sometimes, I needed it. Though that doesn't justify the dishonest ways in which I have acted throughout my life. Maybe I deserve to be suffocated by the sullen concrete corners that whisper to me at night and spit me out from its bars during the day, into a sea of despondent men moving aimlessly within more dark corners. Maybe my closest relationship should be the figure that never meets my eyes yet watches my every move. The figure that murmurs into a radio that buzzes when he speaks into it or whines and plays others' voices when he doesn't. The buzzes and whines that follow me as I wake up, eat, shower, and sleep. Maybe I am meant to succumb to this routine for the rest of my life. But as I watch the flood of orange jumpsuits stomp against the wet road and disappear into the night, I realize I was never an honest man; I would never be.

I hopped over the rubble and made my way to the running crowd, escaping the dark corners that held us in limbo. Red and blue lights traced the backs of our heads as rain struck our cheeks, soaking us in shame as we splashed in its puddles and dashed beneath its wrath. The siren's blare drowned under the passionate yells of men yearning for their lives or the cries they released when it was no longer obtainable due to the batons that tormented them under their brutal whacks as they lay on the slick road, defeated. White smoke pluming from canisters swallowed them, welling their tears and squeezing their throats. However, it shielded the men in masks that fired them as they hid amongst its clouds and wielded their weapons from the shadows. Its thick arms rapidly spread, stretching from the west guard tower to the east one, consuming the orange jumpsuits in its path. Those it did not yet reach did not once look back at the cloud consuming the defeated men. They looked forward to the flat terrain holding nothing but the

louring sky. They did not run to escape, rather to reach their destination. Though, they did not know what or where this was. Nor did I. Some ran west, others east while I, north, but to whom, to what, or to where were we running with such passion—probably fifty miles from the nearest town and five times more from a familiar face. A face we could no longer picture due to the years apart, but would know when we saw it. A face I would know when I saw the tight bun that always sat upon it, leaving no strands to get in its eyes when they focused or stick to its forehead when they focused too hard. A face I would know when I saw its sparkling eyes once so full of life that dimmed from sunken bags and a growing frown. A face I would know when I saw its frown turn into a warm smile that brightened when I called it momma. I would know the face of my mother, though I will never be able to see it again as it already made its way through life and death, though never met me in limbo. How could she afford the miles that separated us when I was no longer there to support her? We could barely manage a trip to the food drive ten miles away without risking her job. The job that consumed her days and nights yet barely gave her enough to make it to and fro seven days of the week. Then again, why would she willingly visit her banished son forced to wander in between life and death due to his dishonest ways of thievery and deceit? The ways that put food in the fridge when we couldn't make those trips, but ultimately left her alone with the pain and guilt of his mistakes.

It felt as if her eyes bore through me as I raced under the sparkling stars in the dark sky. Stars that seemed to dim with each stride I took, as did her eyes when I was dishonest. I first saw it happen a few days after her birthday. Every morning I watched her open the windows in each room of the house to listen to the neighbor's radio as she got dressed. When I gifted her one, she was so thrilled she initially didn't question why their music suddenly stopped. No matter where we put it in the house, it always played static. It buzzed and whined as voices shuffled in and out, and we shifted through the channels. Though she still managed to enjoy it, humming to the buzzes resting between snippets of music and whines that smothered it as if they were part of the song. That was, until she realized where I got the radio. I was never an honest man, but she wanted me to be. Though that never stopped me, because the look that fell upon her face

when she sulked at the overdue bills or empty fridge was far worse than her look of disappointment.

However, nothing was worse than the look I received now as the stars pleaded for me to stop. But I was doing this for her; to be there for her; to help her. That's why I did it all. I finally looked up to the stars, to her eyes to plead in return. As they looked back at me, I realized there was no longer a "there" for me to be; there was no longer a "her" to help.

The thought anchored my feet to the ground, bringing me to a halt. I no longer had a reason to run. I no longer had a reason to be dishonest. The sound of the radio grew louder and louder as we locked eyes in the sky. The white noise played like a lullaby. The whines sounded of a bird's whistle. The buzzes sweetened into my mother's hum. It reached its maximum volume as my head hit the ground and white smoke began to cloud my vision. Pressure shrouded my body as a black figure, hugged by the smoke, lifted their arms up and down as if to bring pain upon me. Too consumed in the eyes of my mother, I felt nothing. Her eyes shined with satisfaction as I was finally free of my ways. The radio's hum went in and out as the figure swung its arms. The figure that did not meet my eyes yet watched to make sure I didn't move. The figure that murmured into buzzes and whines as I woke up, ate, showered, slept, and now as I lay. The buzzes and whines that sang to me while I looked into my mother's eyes in the night sky and while the closest bond I made in 15 years dragged me through the wet grass, across collapsed bodies, past my limbo, and to my rest.