

The Pancake House Diaries

Like a stack of pancakes from the no-name diner he finds himself in during one sleepless midnight in the city; it soon becomes a regular habit. If only he could get further away; The way back is harder for him as well. And the milk there is a watery 2% substitution that only weakens the coffee into which it is poured. Wondering how he found this midnight cowboy's diner; he shovels the last bite of his comfort meal into his mouth and takes a big consideration in ordering another slice of apple pie. Anything to avoid another sleepless night. The coffee is chalky and watered down, and it is the best that they can offer. The waitress, like a living wax sculpture of a far-gone era in time. Hair up high with hairspray like it was 1982 and long press-on nails that tap irritatingly against every dish that she sets down or picks up. With flat shoes like that and those few gray rooted hairs you could tell that she was a lifelong hospitality worker. In it for the long haul, like those bright red lips that she freshens up every time she catches her reflection in the silverware and glass display cases. Marriage must have passed on her; no rings on her fingers, as if an aging swimsuit model never got her big break that was promised to her. Or, better yet, she passed on the offers herself and gracefully drifted into more sallow fields. As if to remain noble in a world that wants to devour every inch of what makes you appetizing.

Nothing appetizing on the menu today, though. Just more leftovers from a more abundant time. Several evenings back; the pastries are what is best there. Some sweet morsel to soften the savory taste of three-day old steak out of your mouth. They call them comfort foods. They bring peace to mind in every piece that you find. No words needed here; they know that you always come in for your usual poisons. A bite from the ordinary to keep you in line. A small check-up to see that you can actually walk the straight and narrow path to sobriety. What day is it now? It has to be more than thirty. It must be at least double that amount.

He does not want to admit it, but he has gained weight. He never realized how often he put something to his lips until after he stopped constantly sipping from an alcohol laced mug that was his favorite for when he needed to drink. So, he eats now. Instead of drinking when the demons rear their heads, he grabs a bite to eat, smoke a cigarette, and sip his coffee. They must not care about his cigarettes at this diner, so he feels welcome there. Silent and complete, he would smoke with one hand and fork a small slice of pie that sat before him with his free hand. When the pie was gone, he would flip the thin cigarette between both hands until only the butt remained in his left hand. A small ashen mound would be piled up in a dish beside him when he was ready to pay the bill; always remembering to tip his waitress friend.

A silent relationship, but a solid one, nonetheless. This waiting game started not too long ago. When he first came in, he was convinced to purchase a strong whiskey and a steak. The only person to talk him out of it was his red-lipped silent waitress friend of his that smiles every time she refills his mug with more coffee. Sometimes briefly asking, "How many days now?" "sixty-two." He would answer this evening in between sips of coffee. They had a silent relationship. One where, she knew why he was always there, and he understood life well enough not to drown her ears with simple platitudes as if trying to make an easy score. And because of this mutual understanding, that no-name midnight highway diner, whose name was actually Big Bob's House of Pancakes, was the best place for him to test his fledgling sobriety in the real world.

He first began testing his sobriety skills while in the hospital. The exact one and time escapes his mind; and that is why he does not recall how many days sober he was. It was forced upon him. Everyday a nurse urging him to scarf down the cheesy omelet while he never knew that he needed sobriety in his life. They would coach him on coping mechanisms while the hospital revolving door is where no one knew that he should be sober. In and out of psychiatric

holds, his life being whittled down by new habits. The hospital staff would never really know how badly he needed sobriety training. Everything for them is already just a routine. As if these individuals were sober for a living. He still cannot believe that treatment was for lifelong sobriety. He just was looking for a one day at a time type of deal; and this night is no different.

He would try many ways once he left the hospital, but tonight he would spy a golden cheesy omelet to stave off the alcoholic cravings. The eggs fried just nicely with cheddar oozing from all corners. It was all he could place his thoughts on tonight. Chain smoking cigarettes and guzzling coffee, trying to fight back the cravings. At this hour, he would be the only customer once again. This place gave him comfort. There was something simple about the lie. He hoped that he could hold up the charade for another day. Lying to himself that he was the only addict on Earth. Nobody else could possibly know what he was going through. At least, that was his hope. And damn, that omelet plate sure does look good. Like every other night, eventually his new cravings would take hold. "What's the problem with gaining weight?" He would think to himself while taking the first bite. "I have control over my body. I chose what I eat." He thought to himself, also thinking that this was a fine substitute. While smoking his cigarettes as usual. One fresh plate of eggs and another bite into his quickly dwindling pack of American Spirits. "This must be what the American Dream taste like," he would think to himself. Always silent except for the clinking of silverware against cheap dishware as his silent waitress friend would top him off with more coffee. He would try to recall how many days sober he had achieved, while washing down greasy, almost well-done eggs with bitter coffee.

His thoughts while in the hospital were not very stable, though. While there, he would constantly argue with the staff and his own thoughts. Writing letters to the family that he thought had abandoned him. Traded his presence for the high road. But he was never safe in the real world. It would only be a matter of time before he lost all his wits.

He thought that he worked it all out in his head. Apparently not, because his meditations are moving towards rage tonight. Unfortunately, his silent friend would not be in attendance this evening. She would stay home, taking some time-off from her omnipresent tenure to the no-name diner whose name was actually Big Bob's House of Pancakes. Instead, he would get the chatty and overweight version who had very thin personal boundaries. She knew why he was there and would mention it all the time. Thinking that reliving the trauma was the proper medication for when guided meditation would not work. She simply asked too many questions. Her appearance, a bit like a wooly wolverine, was not her problem. For him, the only problem was all the questions. Maybe she acted this way to alleviate her boredom, or maybe she could not think straight enough to see it as an irritant. He did not know, and he could not tell honestly, so he just settled on it being her own personal preference. He would never say it aloud for fear of being seen as impolite; but he simply did not like her service sense. He would take a long sip of coffee, then settle on the thought. She had poor customer service skills; he wanted to keep it all impartial.

He didn't know what he was afraid of. Or worse yet, he did not know how to control the fears. Maybe he was afraid of being alone. Maybe he was just biding his time in the real world. But he was not staying in a hospital or a crisis house anymore. He did not want to go back, but he also did not know where to go next. That is why he got a job as a delivery driver. That way, he could be told where to go next. But he did not have that luxury in the nighttime. Then, he only had his thoughts to guide him; and his thoughts always brought him back to this place. Here, he was always first and last on the list. Before things changed forever. He would leave the house looking to pick a fight with someone. His problem is that most people wanted to be friendly with him. Imagine leaving the house looking to fight, and coming home with more friends. People

mostly liked him, and that was his problem. He wanted to kill the time with discord and they needed a new friend.

It was different tonight. It only happened on certain occasions but tonight, on his silent waitress friend's second day off, a separate group came into the diner for some late night service. It didn't happen often, but it changed the vibes in the diner. These patrons were talkative and probably drunk. He remembered when he was that young; young enough to reconnoiter on the evening's events at some no-name diner on the side of the road. He remembered how young he must have been to need constant conversation with others. He imagines being unbelievably young while he tried to keep his head down, trying to be a lone attendant to his own after hours spot complete with all the coffee he could force down. He knew that if he got their attention that they would like everything, every story, that he could tell them. Terrified of making new friends, that's the kind of guy that he was. Their youth made him think about a crazed letter he had written to his father while staying at the hospital. He met his father once in his life and that was enough for him.

His brother was always a well-meaning fellow. At least he became that way after all of the extended hospital stays, he watched his brother go through. His name was RJ. During every stay, he would try explaining his way into a new living situation until he found himself staying at the crisis house. He would be shivering with fear though he was never cold. Shaking with fear because of the bad thoughts he could never get out of his head. Psychiatric holds always felt like a prison sentence for him. The hospital reminded him of the place in that one movie. You know, the one about flying over the cuckoo's nest. He would try his hand at flying away as well. He figured it wouldn't be hard and there was nothing there that appealed to him. Except for the girl with the braided hair he thought he was in love with. These were premature feelings and in no way would be reciprocated because he had a problem with boundaries and this girl didn't

actually know him. The food was alright, but he had no reason to stay there. But he still had to attend groups and say something true on his own behalf. They would constantly ask him, as if taunting, “and how are we feeling today?” He felt like shit everyday that he had to be sober.

If only he told the truth in the hospital, maybe they wouldn't have sent him to the crisis house. It was there at the crisis house that he felt changed. Where he learned for the first time that he actually had a problem. He could no longer soar through the skies fantastically. No, he was at ground level with the pigeons picking at spots in the concrete. If only he had picked a spot in the hospital, he might already be home. But he was lucky because he still had a place to return to once the therapy was over with. Some souls would become trapped in one place. The ones whose families truly had forgotten. Staying for some weeks which would turn over to months. With no resources, they didn't have the wings to fly high or low with the other pigeons. But he would always hate that place because of what he left behind. There, he left behind his sense of time.

It was stolen from him when his gold watch went missing amongst his peers. They stole his most expensive object from underneath his nose while he washed his body. He was there for the program when they turned the program in on him. There were more of them than him, so he thought of it as some form of taxation. If he wanted to be irresponsible, now that he was free, he could easily replace the time piece. But it didn't matter, they stole more from him, when all he had was trust. They stole his piece of mind. Stolen from underneath a white cotton pillow while everyone was sure to be watching. His wings clipped and his mind warped, he was ready to go home. The ironic part is that he suggested the crisis house and would have been home days before the theft if he had just stuck with the hospital plan. So now he is bitter everyday.

It could always be worse. Don't think you are the first to worry about what makes a situation worse. If you have breath, then you are alive. If you are hungry then you may die of starvation. Are you hungry enough to boldly starve and waste away? Your head is still filled with childish challenges. Anything can go left or right, up or down. Don't rush things, youngster.

A lovely leather rope wrapped around your throat, helping to weigh you down. But rest assured, it's in your best interest. With the whole world watching, it feels like a segment on the evening news; it seems odd. Don't force the feeling or let it all in too soon. There is always a bit of static before you find a wave to settle into. That last thought was another rushed feeling, and so was this one. Life doesn't have to be so loud. Every sound has its place in the cacophonous symphony. Words are odd like that. Like a slice of doom from the final day cake of life. We all just want a taste of doom, not the whole cake. Forcing our peers to have a taste of doom before their turn. It brings tears to their eyes, some true trauma from the terror. Some thoughts should only stay in the mind. The further away from that they stray from a true path, the deeper the doom may creep in. Eventually, though, everything wins and then you can't help what creeps in.

I wonder if that is the real reason, we all die. After a lifetime of horrific events, the afterlife is the only place that can still handle the dream-like state of heaven and hell. Don't seek and stalk those conditions; they'll find their ways to you in due time. Just hope that it is not your due time.

Could you handle knowing that the afterlife could be your final thought at the moment of your death? Why so preoccupied with death? Why not celebrate every moment of life that you have? Alive every day, thinking all day what your death might be like. Be like life while you are still alive. Or maybe, that is what life is actually like.

Find a job that fills your life with "What if?" What if life was like some innocuous examples from the back of my mind? Am I alive, or just feeling down today? On a cold and gloomy day in

the middle of spring, that question might come to mind. Just, “What if?” fill the examples from the back of your own minds. But always ask yourself if life is what you like. Otherwise, have you gone all the way on how you spend your days? Go from my mind. Just more human vulture eyes trying like a dud in a live minefield. An open mineshaft waiting for the itchy finger of the one behind the dynamite might blow your hair back in awed amazement. It could be his job, to blow the dynamite for the first or the next time. It is likely that he is a veteran at his position. Do not hate the man with his hand on the trigger of the bomb.

There are many ways to distract the hands out of rude habits. At least, these are my bad habits. And my problem is finding new words to say. It’s okay because day by day it’s harder to cope, trying to no longer be a dope, living life like a constant joke. Must watch my ass today. Ensure that I am no butt to any joke. Everything feels like a constant fight. A fight to keep some kind of beast locked away. Hopefully for safe storage. Some beast hidden away and ready with ferocity on some sullen day in the city. The tangent or breeze flows in a different direction. Do it honestly. If you lose your focus just look to the moon and find hope for the hopeless. Anyone could do it for you. Find the right reason to not let it slow you.

Back to work, then. Another day, trying to find the new words to say. How do you explain the pain today? As we go outside to play for another day. And I am still trying to build my estate. The near-silence is a better state to work within. Hear the passing cars on the street. Traffic helps to hear the passing time. It all helps, traveling back and forth, to and fro. Hopefully not throwing away minutes of time that soon become ours. Back to work, then. Back to trying to find the novel words to say. Back to looking into the darkness and finding what it wants to say back to me.

I was a young boy, just a sapling when I first turned to the darkness for the cure. My first dose of dark silence. Not exactly with a martyr stance yet, but it was the first taste. It brought silent tears to my mind's eyes. Never wanted to go back, but I was married to the silence. A calling; husband and bride pair, perverting a heavenly oath. Silence again now. Darkness again now. As we all remember to forget the sins that took the words away for the first time. And now we find, again, that we always had the words to say. That it is only another childish challenge every day, who it is we fight for every day.

Like an empty park bench on a sizzling summer day. No old guys to debate which decade got it more right. Nothing is good enough once you reach a certain age. He would rather get more fat than argue. Sitting alone, sweating profusely in the driver's seat of his tiny car. A sweltering day, indeed. But these are the days that most people vie for. He wondered if they would also die for it. He prayed for more rain, even though it was summer. More hot days on the horizon. More of those days which he loathed with a passion. Getting too fat for proper fashion. He just wears the clothes that fit him. And they are plain clothing; certainly not the best pick for him. These words were more unsure for him. The ink would glide against the page today. As if the words were rolling off the tongue, he barely presses the pen against his pad. He seemed unsure of the words to say. So the words have come and gone. There must be several old men arguing within his head. He wants to argue less with others and more with himself.

He had plans for the future. Once he saved enough money, he would start the cannabis farm he was always talking about. He was ashamed to say that at the age of 32 he had zero dollars to his name; still living paycheck to paycheck living in his mother's house. He could quickly save the money for a tiny house, but the farm is what he really wanted. Realizing this only during sporadic spurts of creativity or heartache. Tonight, was a slightly bright night outside

of the pancake house. It seemed odd how these days, inspiration would only come during a dark note.

He slept on a Futon inside his mother's house, and he was waiting for change. Standing in front of the mirror, it was easier to think about the one day at a time plan. He would work evenings as a delivery driver for a cannabis service. This type of work was supposedly bad for his sobriety, but he had other thoughts on the matter. He would take on the year sober as he watched his body take on the toil. He was gaining weight and getting chubbier by the day. These meds that he was on made him less active, gave him a bigger appetite, and took away most of his emotions. Tonight, would be a sleepful evening. A night where he blew past eating in the diner; he took his order to go.

No, his food lay untouched in Styrofoam containers while he stood nearly nude in front of the mirror feeling dissatisfied with his weight gain. He felt like he lost some time, looking at a body that he hadn't seen since high school. There were some minor differences, like overall muscle mass, but he was feeling fat for the first time in 15 years. "It had to be the meds," he would always reassure himself. And he could have been right. But he always felt the urge to lose the extra weight. Thirty pounds after the age of thirty felt like a death sentence for him. He would look at the crowds and be glad that he was himself, although he was financially impaired. He had never been a wiz at balancing a pocketbook, but at least he was good to look at. He didn't feel that way anymore, so he honestly didn't know what good he produced for a world that wants a taste of everything on the menu. Comfort eating was a new coping mechanism for him, as was writing in what seemed to be a never-ending series of notepads. He hoped that someone, sometime might find his words poignant or meaningful enough to leave an impact. But for now, his words were just more scribbles in an ocean of unorganized notepads.

