

Second Chance

I snorted cocaine so strong that Buddha descended.

To alleviate suffering, fix your relationship with Rex.

I knew what that meant, but not how. Last one then? I left my Gastown apartment and scored from a dealer in East Hastings. The fentanyl epidemic was at its peak, but I didn't care. Maybe the only way was to join my brother on the other side.

Buddha insisted. I called my sponsor and threw the baggie into an alley dumpster. I went to a 24/7 café and drank flat whites, repeating Buddha's words like a mantra.

Fix your relationship with Rex, fix your relationship with Rex, fix your relationship with Rex.

Buddha had omitted a vital aspect like a cruel joke. Buddha could've pointed with his noble index finger, order small and achievable goals. After all, he was Buddha. He chose not to. It drove me insane.

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I visited my childhood home in Kitsilano, making sure Mom and Dad were gone. They'd last visited me in hospital and like every other occasion, I told them it was the final time, that I wouldn't repeat what Rex did.

It was Spring, my parents on the ferry to Vancouver Island, making the best of the weather. I was going in the opposite direction, pick-up truck windows lowered, the cool breeze like a second chance.

I detoured past our high school, where Rex became a top provincial wrestling prospect. His medals enshrined behind glass decorate the school hallway, next to tournament pictures where his thick arms rise in victory. A memorial. Rex's body never aged, instead kept forever young.

I approached the house and used a paper clip to crack the combination padlock to the shed. I rummaged around, finding things from our past. Photos, report cards, old clothes, stuffed animals, and deflated soccer balls. I found the keys in the small tin with pins my brother used to hang posters of WWE wrestlers. Hulk Hogan. The Undertaker. Brock Lesnar. As children, mom and dad showed us the key's secret spot, to use in case of emergency. Some things never change. We'd left home but mom and dad hoped we'd come back as we were before we grew up.

I did not allow any tightness to seize my throat, nor did my bottom lip quiver. I was as strong as Rex for a minute.

I left the shed and entered Rex's room. It was stuck in time as he left it, including the pungent smell of sweaty jockstraps and Athlete's foot. I sat on the edge of the bed, the same one Rex used as a spring to practice aerial wrestling techniques he saw on TV. As the younger one, I laid on the floor, thick pillows around me. His figure cast a shadow on me as he prepared a diving chop, eyeing my limbs to not hurt me. Always, his elbow landed away from my cheek.

I tried to let go, but I was feeding on my memories.

The summer Rex was bound for college on a scholarship, I broke his collarbone in two places. All for a YouTube video. My school vlogs were popular and my online presence was growing. He had sports, I had a camera and a need to steal the spotlight. So, I set up a quasi-wrestling ring in our back garden, as a farewell. I hit the record button and surprised Rex from behind. He grappled me on the ground with ease and let me get up. I slammed him on the grass with all of my force. His collar bone snapped, the sound marking a before and after. If Rex hadn't let me gain advantage... He was never the same and we all know what happened after. How he took matters into his own hands.

I was getting ready to leave the room, when my phone vibrated. It was Orla, my agent. The last time we spoke, I had called her to get out of jury duty. Always efficient, she got me a job doing commercials for a brand-new energy drink that never aired. I'd ghosted her for months. She was professional and didn't take things personally, and looked out for me even though my career was plummeting. I wasn't not relevant, but I wasn't big either.

"Aiden 'The Mouse' Rivera's team has been in touch," Orla said. "They want you to be his next opponent. The fight is in Dubai and lucrative."

She started running the numbers. Rivera would bag five million dollars from sponsorships and pay-per-view. I was to get a two percent cut.

"I can push it to two and a half," Orla said. "Of course, there's my fee too."

I would've done it for free. I'd never ventured into the boxing ring, but Buddha had descended for the second time, and on this occasion, showed the path.

To alleviate suffering—

I clenched my fist.

"I'll do it. I'll box for Rex."

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