

## Confessing To You

When the sun's firmly planted in the sky and the mercury rises high, I think back on those cicada days of our youth. In my mind, they are all a golden brown and the sounds of laughter and cries ring out. They were good, weren't they? You and I and all the others, running around through the backstreets and alleyways, making our mark in any small way we could. We really were little shits. It's obvious looking back, but that wasn't how we saw it. Nah, we were the real and we were in a constant fight for our souls against the unreal. The unreal being anyone who wasn't one of us. Flawless logic if there ever was.

I can't help but wonder what my words will do to you when you read them. What they will force you to relive. For me, sitting here on my front porch in my mother's worn rocking chair, I can't help but recall that incident with the ice cream truck and that little blonde haired boy, James, I think his name was. I know you'll remember, if not right away, then close to it, but if you'll indulge me in my excising of these memories, maybe they will not haunt me further.

It was the fifth of July, I'm sure of that, though not of the year. I know it was the fifth because that day I had to sneak past my father who was passed out on our living room floor. Someone had stuck four or five little flags in the waist of his pants and it made him look foolish. Next to him was a bottle of beer that was damn near full. Carefully I tip-toed and picked it up and drank the whole thing right there. It was hot and flat and plain gross, but I wasn't picky, couldn't be. Finished with my breakfast, I sat the bottle back where I found it and left through the back door.

It wasn't bad for July. A few clouds kept the sun off us most of the day. Walking into town, I passed a firework stand selling everything for 75% off or more. With just three bucks I got ten bottle rockets and a box of firecrackers. I lit a few of them firecrackers off to pass the time, scaring a couple of birds. The whole walk I couldn't keep my mind off of you. What you were doing, what you were wearing, if you were thinking of me. I knew I had to see you, even though we hadn't been apart but seven hours. I ended up finding you sitting across from Carrie at Manny's diner sharing a basket of fries. I went up and said hi and stole one of them fries. Just being near you felt so good, like a cold shower on a hot day or the first full breath after being punched in the gut, you just had a way of making me feel alright. At some point I had said some and it made you laugh, god what a laugh. I never knew if you felt the same way about me as I felt about you, or even if you knew I felt about you the way I did. I was never too sly about it so I suppose you must've. Anyway, I didn't stay long for fear I'd make a fool of myself and besides, I still had to meet up with my friends.

I found the rest of the gang playing soccer with an empty paint can on the sidewalk outside the poolhall. Chris was beating Danny pretty handily. Danny would always pick fights he could never win and Chris would always take him on. Deep down I suppose I held a sort of contempt for my friends, but it didn't matter much because they were my friends and you had to stick by your friends. The game ended as we all knew it

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would and we were left sitting on the curb, passing around a cigarette Chris bummed from a passerby. Chris looked older than he really was from many summers spent working as a strawberry picker. The sun had turned his skin into a kind of leather and he was also able to grow a full mustache, not that thin, patchy shit the rest of us were stuck with. We debated on going somewhere else, but none of us could agree on a spot, so we sat and waited for Ms. McClung to come and open the poolhall.

We passed the time by telling jokes and stories we'd told about a hundred times before and talking about what we would do when we got out of that nothing of a town. We all talked a big game, of moving out and finding success out east and coming back one day to rub it in the faces of all those who said we couldn't, but the thing was, it was just that, talk. Not a one of us seriously believed we'd make something of ourselves, but it sure felt nice to pretend we did.

As we sat waiting, this kid, maybe ten or eleven, long blonde curly hair, walked right up to us and sat down. I had never seen this kid before in my life. He was short and had this mean look on his face and before I could wonder any further, the kid started talking like he was continuing a conversation from earlier.

"I say it, two things I hate most in this world is people tellin' me what to do and people disrespectin' me."

We didn't know what to say to that and this kid took our silence as a go-ahead to continue rambling.

"Yup, you don't tell me what to do and you don't disrespect me and we get along just fine. But you choose to do one of those and we gonna have problems. One time, there was this kid who was playing with a frog on the swing and he said I couldn't get on because it was the frog's turn. Well I told him that that frog don't know what a swing or a turn is, but he said it don't matter. So you know what I did? I picked up that frog and I chucked it about as hard as I could and then I sat on that swing and laughed as that kid started cryin'."

It was then I knew there was something wrong with this kid, like in the head. So I stood up and walked off and without saying a word, my friends got up and left with me. We got about half a block before that kid ran up beside us and started walking along with us.

"The other day I went to the picture show 'cause they was showin' four or five of them Buck Rogers serials back to back. Ya e'er seen them Buck Rogers serials? Anyways, halfway thru the third one the power cut out. You believe that? Then one of them fellers that worked there come out and said we got to go 'cause they wouldn't be able to get the power back, somethin' 'bout unpaid bills or somethin'. I tell you I was pissed and I almos' went up to that guy to give 'em a piece of my mind, but my ma said I was not to do that, but when he passed by my seat I was sure to give 'em the ol' stink eye. And another thing..."

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The kid went on and on even though we weren't showing any kind of interest. We were doing laps around the block with the foolish idea that this little, little I-don't-know-what would get tired, but he never did. He just kept on talking like he was grown about the most childish shit.

Sometime during our fifth lap Chris got fed up and looked directly at the kid and told him to, "Buzz off fer Pete's sakes." But the kid didn't take the hint and just kept on.

By lap ten I was about ready to haul off and hit this kid I was so pissed. I didn't, though I don't know how. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the ice cream truck drive by and that's when I got a pretty good idea. I stopped walking and the kid finally shut up. I said to him, "You see that ice cream truck that jus passed by?"

"Yeah, course I did," the kid said.

"Well," I reached into my pocket and pulled out a nickel, "I got a hankerin' for a fudgesicle. You mind chasing that truck down and getting me one?"

He looked confused for a second, but quickly he got all giddy. I pulled out another nickel and gave it to him, "Here, get yourself something too."

"Alright," the kid said as he started off in the direction of the ice cream truck.

When he was far enough I said, "Let's go, quick," and we booked it. We made it all the way to the general store before stopping. Danny looked as though he would keel over and die right then and there and I wasn't doing much better. Chris looked as though he could've ran another mile before he even broke a sweat.

"I never ... thought he'd ... stop," Danny said through gasps.

"Yeah, and who was he anyway?" I asked.

Neither of them had the slightest clue. We caught our breath and were once again without something to do. Not wanting to get caught again, we decided to head over to the abandoned hotel. It wasn't far and it had provided good cover before, not from a kid, but desperate times.

On the way there I thought I saw you. It scared me because I didn't want you to see me like that, all out of sorts and running from someone half my size. I'd have been more ashamed then, if I hadn't just walked close to two miles and then ran another mile. It wasn't you I saw, just someone with your same auburn shade of hair and about your height. Someone from school I think. It don't really matter.

Though the building was quite old, it had only been shut down recently, if memory serves. So the inside, albeit completely caked in dust, wasn't so bad. We got in through a window that one of us had already broken. Once in, Danny made a beeline for some snacks he had stashed away, Twinkies or somethin'. Chris walked to the bar where there was a dart board and an out of tune piano he liked to play with. And I, I grabbed the key to room 106 from behind the front desk, inside the same drawer that I left it in.

While on my way up the stairs and down the halls, I ran my hands along the walls. Over torn wallpaper and on desks that had lamps that wouldn't turn on. I made

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my way to my room and listened to Chris butcher whatever song he was trying to play. My room looked like all the others on the outside. Same brown, wood doors, same golden door handle, the numbers on the wall next to the door were different, but that's to be expected. I slid the key in and turned the handle to reveal why this was my room.

Covering the walls from floor to ceiling were paintings. Some of single flowers, some of bouquets; some with animals, dogs, cats, birds; some of boats sitting in the harbor, some of boats fighting against the sea and the sky; landscapes of deserts, mountains, rivers, and fields; but my favorite were of people. People sitting and talking and playing cards, one of a mother and daughter as they hang clothes up on a line, one of a little boy sitting on the ground with a ball in his hand looking kinda sad, one of a man and a woman standing alone in a crowded dancehall swaying back and forth. They were from the other rooms, each had one or two to make them feel more like a home and less like a place. I had moved the best ones into my room early in my stay and whenever I needed to come and hide, I would stare at the paintings and imagine.

I would make up stories and names and lives to waste away the hours. Most of them I'd just make up, but sometimes I'd tell the stories of people I knew. More often than not you'd show up in the stories, didn't matter if I was making them up. One way or another you'd find your way in and from there on it was your story, I couldn't help it. Sometimes you were a cowboy or a trapeze artist or a waitress or any number of professions. Sometimes you were loud and brash and stubborn or sometimes you were soft and sweet. Sometimes you weren't even you, you just sorta resembled you. And sometimes, very few sometimes, there were stories about you and me and these stories always ended the same way, your hand in mine and us sitting on a hill, watching our little town fade away. I hope none of this makes you feel uncomfortable now. Hearing about all these lives you never lived with people you never met in places you've never been may be a shock, but I thought I ought to come clean after all these years. I never thought you might have a problem with it, and to be honest, I still don't, but you never know, so I'm sorry if that's the case.

I wasn't able to pick a setting before I heard the sirens. I could hear the two cop cars race past the hotel and I took off out the room, down the stairs and out the window so I could follow best I could. Sirens always meant a show and I didn't want to miss it. I don't remember stopping to talk to Danny or Chris, but I must've because they were beside and in front of me respectively, and we were heading towards the noise.

We cut through the alleyways that we knew like the back of our hands. After a minute of running, the sirens cut out, but by this time we were so close that it didn't much matter. It had to have been, whatever it was, only a little bit further, and sure enough.

I first saw the crowd, though to call it a crowd would be an insult to the word. A handful of people stood on either side of the street and the cop cars had the road blocked on both sides. And in the middle, the thing everyone was staring at, was a rust

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covered, soft top Mustang with a crushed windshield and blood on its hood and a boy who couldn't have been more than ten or eleven. Curly blonde hair. A fudgesicle in each hand. One was half eaten and the other still in its wrapper. He was laying on his gut so I couldn't see if he still had that mean look, but I'd like to think it was a bit relaxed now.

First I wanted to puke. I'd never seen that much blood before and it didn't sit right with me. Next I wanted to fall down because my knees started shaking so bad. Lastly, I wanted to run away. I didn't do the first two, but I did run. I ran as hard and as fast as I could. I felt as though if I just got far enough fast enough I'd lose this feeling of dread that was chasing after me.

The rest of the day was a blur and my memory sorta cut out. I didn't speak much, I know from other people's accounts of that day. I had a look on my face and I wasn't all there. Whenever I've asked about it, that's all anyone would tell me.

I woke up the next day with a splitting headache and the light from a window carving into my eyes. I knew I wasn't home because I couldn't smell my dad's Camels. It took a long while, but eventually I gathered my wits and realized I was in a room at the hotel. Not my room, but it was definitely one of them. On the nightstand was a large brown bottle, the label peeled off, probably Danny's doing. Next to it were two glasses, one empty and the other almost full. I downed the second glass hoping it would cure me.

It was only after I took my medicine I saw you sitting in the chair next to the bed. You had your neck at such an angle that it must've hurt like hell when you woke up. Other than that though, you looked peaceful. It confused me, your being there, made me all nervous. I got out of the bed as quiet as I could. I was fully clothed, shoes and all, so I just walked out the room, making sure to be careful and not wake you.

I made my way down the hall and passed another occupied room. The door was wide open and I saw Chris and some girl lying on the floor. They had a blanket pulled up to about their waist and they were sorta on top and next to each other. Neither had clothes. When I made it to the lobby I saw Danny face down on the couch. I don't know how he was breathing laying like that, but I suppose he must've been.

I took the long way home, I didn't want to get anywhere near where that boy had been. The more I walked and thought, the truer that statement became. I didn't want to look at the same things that boy saw and I didn't want to stand in the same places he stood. The whole town had somehow shrunk while I was asleep and now it had become impossible to both be there and away from him. I could feel him rubbing up against me, intent on never letting me forget, like a goddamn ghost or something. In just the time I had been awake, that town had got so small it was getting hard to breathe. I could feel it squeezing me in its grip and it felt like if I didn't get out then I was gonna be smothered. Escape was the only thing on my mind at that point.

I got to the house and saw that it was empty, which only made my decision to leave town all that much easier. I shoved some clothes in a bag and took some money

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from my dad's sock drawer. I thought about leaving a note, but when I couldn't come up with any words that were good enough, I chose not to.

I made my way to the bus station just outside of town. I could tell it was going to be much hotter than the day before. The sun was just barely over the horizon, making the sky a collage of golds and purples. It was a beautiful scene, unfortunately. The whole walk I figured I'd write you a letter, explaining why I left so suddenly. I planned it out in my head, what I'd put in, what I'd leave out, how best to explain my confession so you wouldn't think less of me. I never sent that letter, never even wrote it, and I'm sorry about that, you deserved better. Best I can do now is come clean after all these years and hope you don't think the worst of me.