

The Hour of Three

With eyes wide open, lying in his bed and blankets pulled up to his chest, Diego was staring at the white ceiling, using it to project his imagination and fantasies. He was vaguely aware of the red glare of the digital alarm clock that stated it was three in the morning. It nagged the periphery of his left eye, but he ignored it.

He had not been able to sleep for a week and a half. He remembered when he last had insomnia a couple of years ago. Back then he slept at least a couple of hours a night, and now he was not sleeping at all.

Diego had become accustomed to indulging in his imagination to great depths at night, when he was supposed to be sleeping. Before this indulgence, he tried for a few nights to go to sleep, but his body would not let him. He felt tired and yet his eyes refused to stay shut. His body ached, and his mind raced with thoughts. He tried meditation, masturbation, deep breathing techniques, exercise, reading a boring book and still he could not fall asleep. Now he was spending his time in his imagination, staring up at the old white ceiling in the dark.

He thought he could hear the trees swaying in the gale that was forming outside. The windows themselves then rattled and whined as the wind pushed hard against them. This was all peripheral in Diego's senses, but he was still somewhat aware.

He was letting his mind wander down the hallways of his memories, first going back to the last time he was plagued with insomnia. He spent those late nights staying up and staring at the cathode-ray tube, watching television aimlessly. Usually, before he knew it, he was staring at a dead channel with color bars and listening to the hum of dead television air, while his digital clock on his night table read: three-zero-five, a.m.

Then there were a few days where under his night table lamp he read a few novels, engulfing his night life in whole other fantastic worlds, losing himself until the sun came up. Then it was time for work and the whole day began again, only to be greeted by another long night. This went on for a few more days and then without any explanation, he could fall asleep again.

Diego could fall asleep so quickly that all he did for a time, was lie down and close his eyes. This shocked Diego, yet he also tried not to give it too much thought. It was weird for him that he could go to sleep so easily after having insomnia for a week and a few days. Yet he pushed those thoughts away. He was just happy he could instantaneously be in a deep slumber.

This made things even weirder for him now. Now, wherever that was, he thought. He kept pondering on the circumstance of his odd sleeping patterns and his new bout of insomnia. Will he fall asleep soundly in a couple of days again and continue with that pattern or will something new emerge? He wondered.

Then he saw his dog barking and running towards him in a field. He remembered his dog, Bax, back when he was a kid and they were living in that big green house surrounded by evergreen trees at the edge of town, with a backyard blending into the wild forest. He could smell the pine in the air and taste the clean, crisp, cool air and felt the air brush his cheeks. He was running with his dog in his backyard, when Bax bolted into the woods, barking madly. Diego called out to Bax and in return heard no noise. Silence was all that greeted Diego's ears, with him standing

on his tip-toes looking around. It was getting dark fast. Diego felt his heartbeat in his throat pulsing quickly. Then he heard a bark and saw the darting figure of Bax break from a pile of sticks on the forest ground. Bax then rushed towards him. Bowling Diego over, Bax laid on top of him amongst the leaves on the ground, panting and licking his face. Diego laughed and pushed Bax off his chest and stood up. He looked around the forest, picked up a stick and waved it at Bax, saying, "C'mon! Let's go!" Diego walked with his dog into the forest. The memory then faded into the darkness.

Lying in his bed Diego turned onto his side and looked at his clock on the night table. It read three o'clock a.m., again. He then turned onto his back, with a brief glance out the window, seeing the tips of the swaying trees before he locked his vision with the ceiling. He needed to kill more time. His mind at the moment felt like a dead channel with the incessant hum of color bars on it, or the whooshing and static scratching of white noise. His mind felt unusually blank. Then he imagined words written on little banners flying through the air of his mind, being pulled along by zeppelins, and the occasional helicopter. For a minute he thought he saw a dinosaur face in his ceilings' water marks. Then he saw a zebra.

Diego remembered the time he read a story of an African veldt, with zebras' running in the distance and lions eating something unnamed and unknown. It was unbearably hot in this veldt, with a few trees dotting the landscape and heat shimmering everywhere. The ground was a golden color, with the occasional shrubbery stubbornly existing in the arid conditions. There was a man in this story and he was exploring this veldt, but this veldt wasn't real. It was a holographic room in the man's house and his kids had programmed it to look like an african veldt. The room was called 'the nursery,' where these kids could exercise their imagination, but recently it was stuck on this one scene. Diego remembered that the kids programmed the room with their thoughts to look like this, out of spite towards their parents. In the end the kids lured their parents into the room. The parents thought it was safe because the holograms were not real. But something happened. They became real and the parents got eaten by the lions and it was revealed that this is what the lions were eating the whole time. Diego remembered, thinking that one of many literary interpretations of the story might be that so much mental time and energy being used for an idea can forge it into a reality. The kids had poured so much time and energy into the room, that the hologram became a reality. 'The Veldt,' a short story by Ray B--. For a second he could not remember the authors' last name. Then it came to him, like pictures on a static television screen slowing focusing in. Bradbury. He really liked that story. For a second he thought he could make out a lion on the ceilings' water marks by turning his head sideways, but it was not quite right.

Diego looks at his clock, shifting his blank gaze from the ceiling to the red glow of time. It reads: 3:00 a.m. in block letters, again, and again. He knows that he works in the morning. He knows that he bikes to work. He knows that he has lunch at 12:00 p.m. sharp in his cubicle, alone. He knows he bikes back home at 5:30 p.m., picking up food at the Burger Shack on his way home. Sometimes its Chinese food and other times a foot long submarine sandwich. He knows he eats at 6:00 p.m. in front of the T.V. in his living room, and then he is in his bed the next instant, looking at another T.V. at the foot of his bed. It stays on till 1:00 a.m., and then it goes off automatically.

This is his routine. This is his daily life. In the grips of his insomnia he always looks at his clock at three, and for the whole hour he periodically checks to see how much time is passing but it always seems to stand still.

Diego thinks to himself that all he can ever remember these days is lying in his bed in the night and the day is just a blur of routine. Yet he knows the routine. He just cannot seem to remember all the nuanced details of his daily life. They feel like they are slipping away from him. Only his night life does he remember in great detail, but that too is beginning to blur around the edges, as Diego thinks to himself, was it yesterday or last week that I thought about my dog lying in bed? He looks up at his white ceiling, in the dark, letting his mind wander aimlessly down the hallways of his memories, in his sleeplessness, no less full of dreams than if he could fall asleep.