

## Impression Sunset

Our legs were in the setting sun, Max and I, sitting atop the hill in cooling grass which ran statically down to the field below where it tossed and turned under a light June breeze. The pale solar light filtered through an atmospheric lens and painted the park with vibrant pinks and yellows and somber lavender and blue hues. Children ran the daylight away on the Monet-pallet which lay below us, and the pond beyond the field was dotted with geese doing nothing at all. Families went through the motions in all corners of the park and couples sat on benches to breathe in some of the more loving colors and imagine the scene was set for them.

Max and I reclined on empty palms, fingers anchored in the tired blades rushing towards the horizon. He moved to brush dust from his *Misfits* t-shirt, swept his lightly blonde hair backwards and to the right, and took a slow, long drag off his cigarette.

“Did I tell you what Stacie asked in history last week?” he asked me.

“No, what?”

“She asked where Poland is. Poland. How the fuck do you not know where Poland is?” And I chuckled warmly and a smile swept my face back into the cool breeze, but I felt quietly guilty that so many of our happy moments seemed to come at the expense of others.

“Well at least we never have to deal with those people again,” I said, and we silently toasted the end of high school one more time.

“You can say that again,” he said in unconscious agreement. Our conversations weren’t always riveting, but they didn’t need to be. We found comfort in each other’s company, and Max passed me the cigarette as he always has and I sucked in deep. The smoke filled me in the lightest

kind of warmth and I slipped just slightly above my skin for a moment and sank back into the grass.

We were there for what we knew may be one of the final times and we soaked in the evening, caught in a surreal stasis between two stages of life, two states of mind. Tugging at the back of my mind were all of my high-school sins: the faith I'd lost, the girls I'd screwed, the opportunities I'd missed. My thoughts swirled between two colors – a moody high school blue which lamented my failures and praised my successes to heaven and hell, and a pale white of my brewing maturity which tried to bury everything under the perspective of a long life, not yet lived. I have to imagine Max was feeling the same.

“Do you find yourself thinking about the girls you wish you'd have taken a swing at?” I asked Max with a wry smirk, passing the cig back.

“Constantly,” he said, long and exasperated, taking a short puff. “It seems unreal that we'll never see like half of these people again. Remember Lucie Stein?”

“That blonde girl you were friends with in middle school?” I asked, remembering.

“Exactly,” he answered with an animated head shake. “I was in love with her for three years and never did a thing about it. And now that I'm older and would finally have the guts, she's got a boyfriend and I'm leaving this town in two months.”

I took back the cig and leaned farther back, knowing the feeling. “I know there will be girls in college,” I said, “but there's just something about the girls you grow up with that makes them seem magic. It's a shame I missed out on so many of them.”

I watched a couple across the field standing at the side of the pond. They were maybe fifteen and the guy held his girl tightly around the waist as she leaned her head confidently on his shoulder. I thought back on all of the girls I'd dated in high school and wondered if I'd be able to

amount to that confidence again. They call it ignorance, or innocence, but the beauty of youth is in its warm confidence – a boyfriend’s shoulder at fifteen is the safest pillow on this earth.

“There just seems to be something very different about adult relationships, doesn’t there?” asked Max and he reached into his pocket for another smoke as I flicked the filter down the hill.

“I know exactly what you mean,” I said, “Watching my parents recently has just been pathetic. It’s like they’re never even looking for romance. They’re just racing forward hoping to get by with as little disturbance as possible. They could be standing at fucking Niagra falls at sunset surrounded by rose petals and a string quartet and my Mom would probably ask my Dad if he was certain he’d sent off his tax forms.”

And Max laughed an arrogant high-school laugh, lighting up coolly. He tried to blow out a smoke ring, failed, and said, “Sometimes I just feel like there’s beauty all around us and so many people refuse to let it in,” and we leaned back, feeling very smart.

The geese skimmed this way and that across the surface of the pond, following whatever caught their eye, no agenda whatsoever, and I let that beauty soak in, feeling it like cigarette smoke. “Sometimes I’m afraid we just let our minds run away from us,” I said, “and as we age, we learn to stop finding more than there is in the little things,” and I reached for the cig to clear my head.

“Maybe,” Max said, watching the children play football in the field below. “Or maybe our parents know that the beauty is there, but they’re afraid to acknowledge it, because they know that they don’t have much longer to experience it.”

“I just don’t know,” I said, and I really didn’t.

Max pulled out a poetry book that was sitting beside him and began to flick through it, as I finished off the cig and grabbed the box from Max’s lap. The sun slid down a little lower as I fit another Marlboro between my fingers and we entered a cooler half-light. I watched the football

boys pack up and head home just as a young girl sat on a bench beside the pond and pulled out a violin and bow. She rosined and tuned quickly, knowing she was short on daylight, and began to play. She played shyly at first, but became more confident when the football boys were long gone. She wasn't perfect, but she was very good. I thought maybe I recognized the piece, but I probably didn't. I probably just wanted to feel cultured. But I felt it swell and pull with the minor steps that I romanticized so much.

Max squinted to read in the early-darkness, and I let my head hang back as he read from Keats. He told me that "beauty is truth, truth beauty," and neither of us knew what that meant but we certainly felt enlightened. I wondered if you need to understand poetry for it to be beautiful, or if just the melody in the syllables carries something spiritual.

I handed the cig to Max after he set down the book, and I looked at his hazy form shrouded in the now near blackness as the violin swept against my ears. He wore a diamond stud in his left ear and his meticulously sculpted bicep bore his favorite words from his favorite high school band, pressed in permanent ink. I wondered if our parents were right, if we'd really regret our tattoos. Maybe it would seem silly later, but that night Max looked beautiful to me and he sucked back nicotine from the cig which seemed to glow brighter than normal against the creeping dark.

"Have you seen the pictures that Josh and Mandy and all of them have been posting from their trip to Mexico?" He asked, brushing his hair back again.

"No," I said, my trance broken.

"They're all essentially the same group of people in the same fake-ass pose, just in different spots around the resort. Those kids are in one of the prettiest places on Earth and all they can think to do is use it to score attention on the internet."

“Yeah,” I said half-heartedly. “I don’t know. Sometimes I think we might just be too romantic. To each their own I guess.” And I sighed very deeply.

Max took a very long drag, hunched back his shoulders, and stared into the last sliver of sun that peaked over the horizon. “Maybe your right,” he said, “but I can’t help but think of all the beauty I’ve seen and feel differently.”

And we watched the sun linger behind the distant hills for a moment longer, sending forth a flat plane of rainbow light across the park, passing down across our eyes and running with the grass to the field below, and the violinist became more perfect, swelling and fading with the riotous dying light of the sunset. And I watched Max smoke as the darkness crept in from all sides, eating up his form like a swarm of dark locusts, and it was warm and inviting. And with each passing moment, the cigarette burned more brightly, the violin sounded more loudly, and the darkness covered Max more completely. A moment later everything was complete blackness, Max was warmth beneath the soil of the night, and the burning tip of his cigarette hung against an impression sunset, one million shades of black. The violin filled all spaces of the night and I knew only the vibrance of the moment.

The suspended embers were a beacon of our youth. The transient moment of our adolescence, our confidence, our romance, our sensation. A fixed light in the melodious, sweeping field of black time. We were the moment from which beauty is born, the quiet light in an August night sky, and the tendrils of solar warmth that awaken April-morning sleepers between the cracks of window shades. We were the crest of the romantic ocean which sweeps through the laurels of verse and falls to troughs of hollow human touch. We were safety and vibrance and the pinnacle of realism. We were wholly alive and the violin resonated against my bones to the natural harmony of my soul, and then slowly faded to blackness as Max’s cigarette burned itself out.