

## A Quiet Mind

I sit and read poetry mostly at night after a long day. It is difficult to give myself over, yet it feels so close - almost tangible. I don't know how to describe a problem. I can't read a struggle and I am far too self involved to empathize.

It came and went with God.

A brilliant flash of self discovery quickly overwritten with the present. They say higher education is supposed to open your mind, not end it. The other day I was reading an article attempting to discover if it is common for your liver to hurt after drinking. It turns out that is a symptom of a liver disease commonly associated with heavy drinking. So I left the website, and dismissed it. I didn't want to know. I keep a quiet mind now.

The discovery of God is a lot like the discovery of alcohol. I have never found more excuses for myself and my actions than in either of these. God can justify - it's more than that - give a sense of destiny, a purpose to your actions. Alcohol allows you to run a simulation without the full weight of the consequences (sometimes). Imagine the combination. I've never lived such a luxury.

I remember my first joint. It was beautifully rolled in the hands of a strange girl who was raised by a fundamentalist pastor. She was defiant of her upbringing, and maybe that is why she remained stoned most weekends. The room was filled with people, maybe fifteen or so. Passing the joint around, I remember being nervous. The fear made me feel alive. The anxiety between hits was pressing, and finally after fearing that my cover was blown and the weed had run out - I nicely vomited into plastic chalice, like all kings do.

But that excitement is gone now. I no longer find excitement in smoking joints. Nor drinking till the point of extinction.

But in this article, where I discovered that my liver may be overworked, I stumbled across a comment at the bottom of the page from a recovering alcoholic and smoker. He talked about addiction and withdrawal a little differently. How the world is no longer exciting. How psychological addiction is far more powerful than we could ever imagine and finding excitement again is far and few between. Imagine ruining your life where you could never experience excitement again.

I think I'm damaged. I traveled while I was young and am still young. I saw the world because I wasn't sure if I could ever again. I spent nights at the taverns, the pubs - splitting pints with whoever would listen. I have seen the cliffs, the rivers, the valleys, the slums, the cities... I have driven the excitement from my life.

I visited Angkor Wat a few weeks ago. It didn't take my breath away. I was impressed by the size and history, but the general sight of something so beautiful should shock me like electrotherapy is supposed to. Provide a reset, a new standard to measure beauty. But, my excitement has left with my passion. I've seen too much. I have drank too much, lived during the night and slept during the day for too long. Excitement has hit its peak. I have to reach so much further to be excited. I have to touch the edge of life.

But that's not what God did to me. He worked with the most dangerous parts a human being can tamper with - existence. I have never found a reason to live more intentionally than under the protected guise of a believer. But now that I have left a faith, found a faith and once again left it - I can no longer pretend that faith is beautiful or even powerful. It is a decision much like love. One that you take up one day and vow to never let go. But I never had faith then, because I obviously let go.

But I still had the experience of faith.

Since then I have searched for something to drive me further and farther than before.

Injustice, Justice, Social Inequality, Equality, Politics, Education, Journalism... but nothing seems to pull in the same way.

I live with an empty purpose.

I fear being taken again only to be left in the desert to search helplessly for the speckle of an oasis.

So when I read poetry after a long day  
I regretfully pull away. I hold back the tidal wave that surges inside  
I don't want to feel nor be swept away by the current  
Because I am scared of being lost  
Being driven so far into the depths of my mind that I would never be able to escape.

But if we're being honest - and I hope we are, I would love nothing more than to spend an evening fighting for my life to come above the surface of the raging waters. Each gasp of breath spent an eternity in the spaces between words, and the deep full breaths of each and every poetic spilled into my lungs. I want to swim hard against the current, only to always be dragged so far away from where I was. I want to live in the space my mind occupies.

I want to let go.

## The Obituaries

Life is a night in a subway tunnel in Paris.

It is short. It can be quickly revisited in a short, typed page where one experience bleeds into the next and is lost in a chaotic reading at the front of church; where you can go at any moment spliced into the next day's obituaries in the local paper.

Life is reduced to four hundred words or less placed besides a tasteless advertisement. And when the obituary has been read, and tears have been spent - a box is placed in the ground to preserve that which need not be preserved - it is capped with a stone on which are inscribed dates.

In school no one ever remembers the dates on which the presidents were born, died or even if they have died, but they do remember if they died young. As if we only remember those that died young, not because they died young but because of what they did before they died and when each moment flashed before their eyes they weren't able to get past their twentieth birthday when they died at thirty.

Even with all of the most advanced medicine death is not an exact science because the good always die young; but death is selfish so maybe they weren't that good in the first place and there is a conspiracy between life - death - and those just selfish enough to cash in.

The subway tunnels in Paris are never a substitute for a burial plot even though those ready to die lie in it night after night waiting to be taken and end a miserable existence which includes alcohol and loneliness all packed into a brown paper sack like my mother used to put my lunch in before I left home and attempted an education locked away deep in the subway tunnel's of Paris.

## The Dinner

Death should be casual, like Sunday dinner - in which a greeting, grasping and goodbye can be had. I watch the food carefully, stirring it on my plate, the after-taste of death, the sustainer of life - mortality presented in the flickering of a candle. I shared the space with the supreme forces of the universe, if only for a few minutes, three times a day.

I took my fork, lying silently next to my plate and reached into the abyss. It screamed of my fate, shrieking at the sight I stabbed at the flesh - the slow devastation - Darwin's theories overcome, I sustained. Bringing forth the essence of life, I began to accept the truth. The truth that screams at me "all life is selfish." That all life is death incarnate.

I remember watching the slow chill of death seep silently into her. As it slowly permeated through - the steam of life - of a fresh cooked meal - left and replaced by a cool damp mess of hopes left unhinged. Nothing to open nor close - because the coffin doesn't count. It never does. The tupperware of the underworld wears out eventually. Leftovers aren't quite as good, except on those rare occasions when the meal was exceptional and flavor still courses through. When the life that was lived, was powerful both in flesh and death. All of our attempts at preservation and containment can't even withhold the power of a life lived well.

I grab my spoon, knife and fork and place them carefully on the ledge of my plate. Dangling them precariously. They looked down over the edge, questioning the purpose that they lived. I picked up my plate and carried it over to the sink. She looked over, her eyes carrying the soft cold stare that demanded such attention. Her words were careful, calibrated and cautious - yet forceful. "When you eat, eat carefully. When you cook, cook well. And when you die, die tastefully."

And with those words, she shared her last dance with dinner.