

Same Ole' Cup of Coffee

"A human being is a deciding being."

~ Viktor E. Frankl

There was something vaguely familiar about it, yet completely different. The building was new but I certainly recognized the friendly, green Starbucks sign hanging high above. Passing through the double glass doors, that household smell transcended the air as the consistent hissing, supplemented the steam and froth spewing forth. The tables, counters, wooden chairs, the faux leather couches all brought back that nostalgic feeling of someplace safe yet a bit disheartening and I remembered thinking, *Is it possible to remain the same while becoming something different?*

My theory is that we are who we are, at the core, and that remains static. However, throughout life and over time we grow as we continue to experience pleasure and pain, but it is how we, as individuals decide to deal with these variables that defines us. We have all hit rock bottom at some point in our existence and for me, it was not too long ago. I remember reading a manuscript by Viktor Frankl called *Man's Search for Meaning* and before I even opened the pages I knew it was my time to read his words, because after my fall, I was grasping at anything, anything at all that would help me back up. And this was the beginning of my metamorphosis into the realm of Forgiveness. But first there must be a sacrifice.

Nota Bene: In 1973, scientists discovered a portion of the heart known as Forgiveness. It was realized that Forgiveness made up less than one percent of the heart at any given moment. However, just to the right of Forgiveness scientists also discovered a larger section of the heart called Love. This second chamber changed in size depending upon how much Forgiveness a person had. It was a direct correlation and a major discovery for anyone on a path of

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redemption. Furthermore, it is also a known fact that this tiny section of the heart hurts the hardest when we do not deal with Forgiveness. Unfortunately, scientists soon made the discovery, that most people in the world lack Forgiveness, creating an alternate path to Forgetting (also known as Repression), which is the third chamber of the heart that eats away at the Soul. The Soul is what provides support to the trifacta of the inner sanctuary of the heart and is the most affected by them all. Now this third scientific process, that is the direct effect on the Soul, is still a hypothesis and much like the Big-bang theory, it will be difficult to logically understand the Soul through any type of empirical evidence. However, what we do know is that Repression depletes the Soul, one day at a time, leading to the final hypothesis claiming that time heals all wounds. Again, this is merely conjecture based on my own research, which included the very thing I was about to face: My forgotten past which, was now closing in on me.

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It was half past eleven in the morning as I ordered my same ole' Grande Americano with a toasted bagel and light cream cheese and finally found a spot to squat. Preferring the sensations and sounds of the pseudo leather couches, I chose someplace safe so I could stay out of sight just a few seconds longer. I purposefully arrived early as to acclimate to my surroundings. The all too familiar feelings of dredging up the past hurled deep inside my gut as I sipped on my coffee. I know this all too well for the reason that I once sat on the other side of this table, practically beginning for forgiveness. And if you think that is hard, try sitting in my seat now.

Halfway through my second Americano the double glass doors opened and in he walked, a part of my life I left almost ten years ago. Back then it was easy to walk away even though I

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knew him for thirty-three years; as it turned out, I could no longer be an accessory to the crimes of my heart. Pride, selfishness, lying, betrayal, these are all serious offenses punishable by exile. The major cleavage however, slithered between us over the thirty-year period of our friendship. Truth-be-told, I grew and he did not. A victim of his own circumstances, unable to overcome his hardships.

Clutching the book *Man's Search For Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, I hoped its words would seep through the pages targeting my Forgiveness, but more importantly, I hoped that my sacrificial peace offering would saturate Zack's heart.

His overall appearance had not changed much, short brown, kind of wavy hair complemented by a young face, almost boyish with sunken cheeks, and that stupid soul patch just beneath his bottom lip, and his two almond colored eyes that always seemed to be sizing you up, like there was some plan of attack if you moved the wrong way. An eerie feeling came over me as the strange but familiar person sat across from me and as he began to talk I heard that proverbial sound of the fake leather settling in and I knew, line by line, what was about to transpire: After a brief time of playing catch-up on life, he would finally tell me how he had changed, how his fiancé made him a better man, and how the loss of my father and the tragedy his own father was facing had allowed him to open up his eyes to the truth.

What I was not expecting was the *truth* that would prevail through all the lies.

"I missed you," he finally said.

"I don't know that I can really say the same."

"But I have poured my heart out to you. Told you I have changed. Explained how Gail opened up my heart and made me realize my mistakes. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

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Pondering his script I replied, "It sounds wonderful and I can only hope it's true, but what I am hearing is someone who thought of all the right things to say, waiting for this exact moment."

Making a keen observation of his choice of words I offer, "You know, I did not hear you say anything about your own realizations. We don't need others to complete our journey to the self."

Appearing a bit paralyzed and perturbed with my passion to preach, he paused prior to speaking once more. I could see he was trying really hard to say the right things and for him, I can honestly say that he was doing his best, but for me, they were just words and I saw nothing different; it felt all too familiar.

"We are adults now," he proclaimed, "And part of being a 'grown up' is forgiving and forgetting the past."

"Forgetting.' You want me to Forget everything that happened because you called and asked to meet with me so you can prove to me how 'grown up' you are?"

"That's exactly right. I was man enough to contact you and not hide behind some bullshit excuse to walk away from a life-long friendship."

There was a calculated pause as if he was deciding to take out the big guns. And if I remember anything about Zack it was that he was trigger-happy.

Gradually, he spoke, "I know you blame me for *her*."

Her

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That last word echoed throughout Starbucks. Now I remembered why I do not like this place. No matter where you are in the world, Starbucks' coffee tastes the same. It never changes and it never will, it merely draws you in with its familiar signage, a false indication of coffee and comfort.

Zack continued speaking as my world spun, "You can't blame me for your failed relationship. I merely told you the truth. I showed you who she really was and how she was destroying our friendship. Well I hope she's happy because it worked!"

Being in public helped to quell my true rage, all the same, I did not need to yell to hurt someone, to inflict so much pain that my words would turn to chaos and decay. Leaning in and feeling that pleather underneath me, I placed my finger in his face as I began my descent, moving further and further away from Forgiveness.

"Blame you? Blame *you* for my failed relationship! You obviously think very highly of yourself to think that your petty, bullshit disloyalty could come between Barbara and me. I know you tried and I know you gave it your damn best because of your jealousy and your stupid pride, but make no mistake my pitiful *friend*, you did not come between us. *I* came between us. *I* failed her just like you failed me. I lost *her*, my best friend and my soul mate, in one fail swoop and I have no one to blame but myself.

"For years I lived with regret and hate in my heart. I regretted sticking up for you like I did my entire life, and I hated myself for not seeing it sooner."

Throwing in the one-two jab I added, "My father saw it. He never liked you, *never*. But my dad was too kind and gentle to ever come between our friendship, so he kept his mouth shut."

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Thinking of my father only garnished more emotions and fueled my rage towards Zack, so I continued with my onslaught, "And whether you want to believe it or not, Barbara actually encouraged our friendship in spite of how you and your family treated her. She never wanted to come between us and because of her selflessness I made poor decisions. I chose you and *you* betrayed me. So fuck you, you selfish bastard. You call this an apology? Well this is one fucked-up way to go about it."

Looking into his eyes in search of some sort of remorse it finally hit me: He was not here to apologize. And as a smirk traveled across his face I settled into the fact that it was never his intention. I was wasting my time all awhile violent thoughts were oozing through my entire body. I needed to escape before I went to jail or he ended up in the morgue.

"Jesus Christ, you haven't changed."

My last three words resonated with him as I quickly stood up from the table to leave. Taking my third step I heard something faint, something glowing, and when I looked down at my trembling hands I realized I never gave the book to Zack. And I'm glad I forgot because somehow Viktor Frankl's words were flying off the pages, coming through loud and clear. I stopped. I turned around to give him the book. And with all of my energy I made my last effort at affecting this individual sitting in front of me. Wait. That's not right. This was my last attempt at affecting *my* life.

Forgiveness equals Love and I needed to *feel* again.

"Here," reluctantly handing him the book, "This was meant as a peace offering."

As he reached up for it I could see he was crying, a pain inside of his Soul I had never witnessed before. He looked like he had something to say. Was he going to say I'm sorry? Was

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he going to put years of anger and sorrow behind me? Did he actually want Redemption, more importantly, was I able to give it to him?

Although tears were rolling down his chin I felt nothing inside. The section in my heart for Love had shrunk so small it was barely detectable. Finding Forgiveness would be difficult but if he would just say the words, I could at least take them into careful consideration in order to deal with them on a later date. I could see his lips formulating a word. It looked like the beginning of I am, as in I am sorry. Then it happened

Zake spoke. "I am dying."

Hunkered down on that familiar faux leather sofa, sipping on my third Americano I consoled Zack. I made all the right gestures and said all the right things, but now *I* was reading from the script. This human, to which I have had an acquaintance with for four decades, just confessed that he only had so many breathes left and yet I felt nothing, not a single tear or sorrow for his pain. This was eating away at my Soul. Surely, I must feel something. I always knew I was numb but this, this was forty steps in the wrong direction. If there was ever a time, now is the time for Forgiveness. But why, because he was finally honest with me.

"Zack, I want you to read the book I gave you."

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"Why? What's the point now?"

"It's bigger than just you. The book means a lot to me and it would mean the world to me if you read it."

He looked confused. How could I be thinking about reading a book at a time like this? What he failed to realize was I did not want him to read it for himself, I needed him to read it for me. My hope was that his realization would bring a freedom into my heart to finally Forgive him. But I couldn't tell him that. I couldn't formulate the words that would bring me inner peace.

Pushing forward to the end of my seat, I experienced an inner strength I had not felt since my Soul was stolen from me, and I finally confronted my truth: "I have a confession," I said hoping I could impress upon him the importance of my words. "I did blame you for my failed relationship. At least at first I did. I was so angry with myself I needed to transfer the pain somewhere else. For years she wouldn't talk to me and every day that passed I hated you more and more."

Holding back my tears and taking a few moments to breathe, I was finally able to finish my thought: "But eventually, that hate turned inwards until all I felt was pain and emptiness and the realization that she was gone forever; the reality that the only person I could blame, was me."

As I settled back into my chair taking a sip from my lukewarm coffee, I could see he looked relieved, as if I just let him off the hook; like he just won a small portion of the battle. Which meant he was still missing the point of our little meeting at Starbucks.

"Zack, I said I blamed you, I did not say it was my reason for ending our friendship, nor was it the reason my relationship with Barbara ended. I put the nail in that coffin."

Okay, so not the best choice of words to use at this moment but it did not stop me from continuing, "And don't hate me for being honest with you now but I don't think you have

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changed. I don't say that to hurt you, I say that because it is part of the process for me, to Forgive you, for what you did to me. My biggest fear is not being able to find that small place in my heart where I am able to let you go and now you have confessed to me you don't have much time left on this planet." Choosing my words carefully, I said, "Before you go, I need to Forgive you even if you are incapable of asking for it."

Looking him in the eyes the whole time, I would not let him escape his past, I would not let him leave this moment, and I will not let him waste his future.

Searching for the right thing to say in an uncomfortable moment of silence is never easy but I muster something up: "*What is to give light must endure burning.*"

"What?" he replied in a short, angered tone.

"It's a quote, from the book I gave you. Read it. It is never too late to have Forgiveness in our hearts, and it is never too late to change our station in life."

Zack was staring at the cover of the book avoiding the truth.

"Zack. In all the years I have known you, I have never asked you to do anything for me. Our friendship was always one-sided. I gave and gave to you. I sacrificed my one and only Love, for you, so now I'm cashing in my favor. Please, read the book."

I could see the wheels turning in his head, as if he was calculating his next move.

"Okay. I'll read it."

A small smile creased his lips. "After I read it, can we talk again?"

"No."

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His smile quickly dispersed.

"But I told you I'm dying. Why can't you talk to me before I die? I need someone to help me through this. I'm scared."

"It's still about you isn't? Well I'm scared too."

Grabbing my things and walking away, I paused and placed my hand on his shoulder.

"I For—. I am sorry but I can't right now."

Exiting through the glass double doors of that old familiar Starbucks I tossed my half-empty Americano in to the trashcan and continued outside, crossing the avenue, heading down the sidewalk. Across the street there was a brand new coffee shop that I had never been to before. Talking aloud to no one I said, "Hmm, Celestial Coffee, sounds enchanting. Maybe it's time for something new."