

The Waxen Eyes

Ollie Frank

EDITOR'S NOTE

The pages that follow were left in a subsidized apartment at the northern edge of the city. The man who lived there had been diagnosed with a degenerative visual condition. Neighbors recall little other than that he was often disheveled and had poor hygiene, and that he seldom left the apartment. On the rare occasions he did, he moved quickly, never lingering, never speaking, and always returning home quickly and without delay. One week, he was not seen at all by any of the residents of the apartment complex. Then, without any warning, he flung himself from the window of his apartment, dying instantly upon hitting the ground. When officials entered the flat, they found it cloaked in complete, deafening stillness. Dust blanketed every surface, and cobwebs hung in the corners like old drapery. A single mattress, a desk, a chair, a cramped kitchen, and a tiny bathroom were all that furnished the place, with nothing but chipped paint and dust to serve as decoration. On the floor of the apartment, there was found to be a variety of filth, uncleaned vomit and trash, as well as, most disturbingly, the remains of an animal. The wooden desk was one of the most notable furnishings in the apartment.

Housing a variety of pens along with the manuscript and a lone drawer. The manuscript was sprawled out unorganized upon the desk, and was untouched by officials, who mainly concerned themselves with the window that had been jumped from rather than the desk. The manuscript consists primarily of personal journal entries, varying

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wildly in style and tone. In the drawer, there sat nothing but a single piece of paper, a letter from a doctor informing his patient that, shortly over six months from then, he would go completely blind. Back to the manuscript, the writing within it varied drastically, with some entries seeming coherent, even lucid. While others were completely illegible, seeming to resemble the thoughts of a madman more than anything else. I have made only minor edits for legibility, although a large number of pages were unsalvageable, completely scribbled out to the point that it was impossible to tell what was originally written. What follows is, as it seems to me, the true confessions of a man losing his vision and, evidently, his mind. It is not, however, my place to comment on the contents of these pages, only to acknowledge that they, along with their author, have been left behind and forgotten. In the time since I first discovered this manuscript, I have concluded that, if nothing else, it asks to be read, as almost all writing does, and that's all there is to it. While the man who wrote this may be long gone, what he has written remains, and I feel it would be a disservice to the dead to allow it to rot away in time as he has.

FOREWORD

I have always fantasized about dying with the light in my face, a brightly lit room, someplace warm and nice, and surrounded by loved ones. What I never imagined was myself sitting in a dusty, wooden chair, in a sad, cramped apartment, which is undecorated in the most unnerving manner possible. I am here not out of choice, but as a result of the fact that there is nowhere else I can be at the moment. Though I shouldn't complain about my surroundings, for soon, I will never see them again. In due time, my vision will disappear, as will my capabilities to perform daily tasks and live my life. I cannot help but silently mourn my life, though it is yet to be lost, and that mourning paralyzes me from doing anything other than thinking, thinking, and rotting away. After all, what purpose would it serve? Why should I continue to live life with the knowledge that soon I will be completely incapable of doing so, and everything I did beforehand will only serve to taunt me, memories that will swirl around me and remind me of what was once possible, what was once filled with energy and color, floating freely in the sky, now desiccated, lying limp and soggy on the floor, never to fly again as it once did.

I have realized, in the time since my diagnosis, that I don't quite feel anger or sadness or even anything at all towards my condition. Well, I do feel all those things, but I do not feel them in any substantial way that causes me to identify them specifically. I, instead, am

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only aware of the emotion soup that I have felt in my gut and which I have not stopped feeling in my gut for a single moment since learning of my condition. I do not feel the happiness, the sadness, or the melancholy; they are not differentiated from each other, and I instead just feel, simply put, like a dead man. I am a dead man lacking in any of the usual benefits of death, and I am left instead just feeling like a man done wrong by the world. I was never particularly fond of life; this is simply the nail in the coffin. I write only because there is nothing else for me to do. After all, I know that any experiences I seek out with the limited time I have left will fade away into nothing the moment my vision goes, and this writing, well, this writing will stay here. I will not be able to do many things once I lose my vision, yet none quite torments me like the idea of not being able to write. I will have nothing to do but think, and it will be impossible for me to record said thoughts. I could always speak what I wish to be written to someone and have them write it for me, but then again, I know no one who would be willing to perform such a service, and I am not so much a fan of being forced to speak into the world prose which was only really ever meant for a page. So here I lie, with nothing left, trapped within this room, this room which I have grown to hate more in the time since my diagnosis than I ever did previously. I never really got a chance to do anything proper, to really live. All my childhood aspirations still rest unsatiated, and I, being poor, alone, and soon to be blind, cannot accomplish any of them. I have been unable to accomplish any of the dreams I had for my life, so all that is left for me is this slow waiting, this purgatory, knowing that every single second brings me closer to absolute darkness, from which I will never emerge. I have no other choice; I can wait, and I can write. One day, I will wake up, open my eyes, and see nothing, and that will be curtains. I write not to renew

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hope or to document my thoughts, but to perform my last rites, to make sure that there is a eulogy of sorts prepared for me, so I do not have to utter a word to others of what has happened in this room and my mind, so that I may speak never again on my life once I have lost my vision, for all the words will have long since been exhausted on these pages and in my mind, and that will be all there is to it.

One



I have never been an extraordinarily happy man. Even in my youth, when I didn't have a future of blindness hanging over me, I was always downcast, never quite happy, though never exactly miserable. Yet as I've grown up, I have leaned more and more towards misery, further and further from the apathy which used to shield me from misery. I was never happy, yet, at the time, it didn't make me sad; I simply was, and I didn't quite have a reason to smile. As time has passed, though, this lack of meaning, this space in which my reason for happiness should have been, has begun to torment me more and more. As I grew from childhood into adolescence, my quiet displeasure with my life intensified, and it has ever since. Now, things have never been as bad as they are now, yet even in spite of that, nothing ever made me happy. I've always kept the thought in the back of my head, though, that one day, something may fill that void in my chest and bring me the happiness I wish for. In High School, I told myself I would find what I was missing in college, and in college, I told myself I would find it in my career. I would think to myself before I went to sleep, something along the lines of, "Just keep going, live, and eventually you'll find that things aren't so bad, you'll find a reason to keep going, and you won't need to encourage yourself anymore, it'll just come naturally." Every night, I would think to myself something along those lines, just to remind myself to keep going, that no matter

how long I was unhappy, I had come too far to quit now, and that someday, I would be happy; I knew I would, I convinced myself of it above all else. I can't help but think of the younger version of myself, the child who would sit on the swings alone while others played. Throughout primary school, I would sit on the swings and watch my classmates smile and laugh, and I would wish for the same kind of joy. Yet I never ended up leaving that swing. When I went to High School, little changed. I was never quite an outcast; I was never bullied in any meaningful sense, but I, just as I did in primary school, spent nearly all my time there longing for something I didn't have. I would sit at the table with people whom I called my friends and who called me theirs, yet our relationship was, like all those I had, hollow. I never had a connection with any of them, never went out with them outside of school, and never spoke to them beyond pleasantries.

I struggled deeply to list them amongst friends in my mind. To me, and likely to them as well, we were simply people who claimed to know each other. Very little changed in college, and subsequently in my career, if you could call it that. I never stayed anywhere for very long, nor did I ever earn a great deal of money. To spare the details, years passed, with nothing eventful occurring, and now I sit here, pen in hand, in this desolate, bleak, dusty room, with chipped paint and no hint of any scent in the air, writing, with a diagnosis stating I'll go blind soon in my drawer. Needless to say, my life has not been a happy one. It does, however, strike me as odd that despite my current condition, I am no less happy than I was while working, or while in college, or even further back, when I was in high school. Despite having lost the only hope I had for a better future, despite knowing that in less than six months I will no longer be able to see, I just feel the same, dull,

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consistent aching in my chest, an ache which I have long associated with unhappiness, yet ceased to care about years ago. It has long since become a part of me, just as my arms and legs are. I wonder why I don't feel like I'm in abject despair, despite things being at their worst. Perhaps I lost hope long ago and just never realized it, maybe I've simply grown so attuned to suffering that it no longer afflicts me, or perhaps I am already at rock bottom.

Regardless, I now make good on the promise I used to make to myself; I no longer need to encourage myself to keep going, and I no longer need to utter words of positivity about the future in order to motivate myself to continue. I simply creak along, like a machine that has long since lost its purpose, following orders from a creator long dead and fulfilling routines that no longer need to be fulfilled. I just wonder, a husk, a lost soul, yet I got what I wanted. I no longer need to encourage myself to keep going. For that, I'd like to think my younger self would be proud of me.

Two



If my memory knew no bounds and if I could take note of every minor aspect of the world that crosses my mind, I would write it all. I would denote every last-minute detail of my existence, even if it took thousands upon thousands of words. I would depict the memory of my walk one afternoon five years ago with the same agonizing detail that historians use when describing the fall of Rome. Every single meal I eat would be, in and of itself, an *Iliad* and an *Odyssey*. A walk down the street would be sufficient for a thesis on the concept of thought. It would be complete, obsessive, and maybe, if nothing else, honest. Art is, on a fundamental level, a depiction of the world through an abstract medium, and I use the term abstract loosely, meaning in any manner that isn't a direct perception of what is being represented. If someone were to record a single month of uninterrupted thought, unfiltered, unforgotten, and unedited would, without doubt, be the most truthful piece of writing ever made. But such a thing cannot exist. The very moment a thought is remembered, it is already shaped by the act of remembering. The instant it's written, it has changed again. To exist is to interpret, to think is to distort, and to write is to betray the original thing that moved you to speak at all. The book I'm describing is impossible, and yet I continue to write it anyway. Not because I believe I'm getting closer to it, but because it's the only thing I can still do. Lately, I've wondered if losing my sight

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is removing some of that distortion, peeling back a layer of interpretation I never knew was there. Everything I write now feels quieter, less adorned, like I'm transcribing something instead of inventing it. It is a pointless, frivolous thing to think about, and like most things I think about, it torments me. If I ever created something meaningful, it would not be because I had reached some imagined ideal; instead, it would be because I had violated it without realizing it, and in doing so, became something simpler, perhaps less aware, but more honest. Today was much like any other day, though I find myself increasingly less capable of distinguishing one from another, not due to any lack of awareness or effort on my part, but because the days have begun to melt into one another, forming something viscous and uncountable, a kind of slow, invisible erosion of time that leaves behind nothing but residue and softness, like paper soaked in water. I woke late, though not because I slept well, and I sat upright for a while, not thinking, not dreaming, just adjusting to the strange and shifting blur that now greets me each morning, a blur that does not concern me as much as it once might have, because I am learning not to expect clarity when I open my eyes. I didn't eat breakfast, though I thought about it, and I walked to the kitchen and stood there for a while, waiting for some purpose to arrive, and when it didn't, I returned to my seat without having done anything at all, which seems to happen more often lately. I boiled water, eventually, but only because the sound of the kettle reminds me that something in this room still moves, still produces steam, still reacts to heat. I drank without tasting it, and spent a long time looking at the cup after it was empty, wondering how much longer I'll be able to tell when things are full or empty by sight alone, and what it means that the thought didn't frighten me. The light that comes through the curtains in the afternoon still weighs it, but it's

growing thinner, and I can no longer say for certain what color it is, only that it's there or not there, and sometimes both. I've stopped pretending I will call anyone, or that anyone will call me, and I no longer check the phone, except to make sure it's still dead, which it always is. That brings me a quiet sort of relief I can't explain. Now, the sky is beginning to dim, or perhaps it has already dimmed, and I have only just noticed it. Either way, the day has passed in silence. So I mark it with this, a sentence, a paragraph, a slow arrangement of thoughts set to paper, not out of inspiration but out of the need to confirm that I am still here, that the world, however vague or fading, has not yet disappeared completely from view. So I ease into my blankets, which do nothing to warm me, and hope to sleep and dream more, so that I may, though briefly, have a respite from my thoughts.

Three



I went out earlier today to buy food and restock on the necessities. I've been staying inside as much as possible since my diagnosis, not out of any fear or worry, but simply because I find it extremely hard to see a reason to do so anymore. In the days when I knew I would have my vision, I was able to find meaning in attempting to function in society. I knew I would need to continue for years to come, so there was no point in isolating myself and making things harder than they already were. Things like working a job, getting basic exercise, and going shopping were things I had to do; that was a fact that would never change, and avoiding them would, as I saw it, simply make it harder to do them at a later date, when circumstances forced me to go out and get things done. Now, my days were numbered; I will not need to exist as I do for much longer, no more than six months, and so, I see no issue in allowing myself to rot indoors and neglect my obligations as much as possible.

Nevertheless, I have no intention of starving, nor do I intend to live in absolute filth, so, as much as I wish I didn't have to, I must venture out to perform the bare minimum. Today was a sunny day, so I had no issues with the weather. The sun hit my face, and I felt its warmth for the first time in a while. I felt warm in that moment, yet I had no other reaction to the sun other than that. I felt utterly cold

in its heat. I walked down the street to the convenience store near my apartment, where I bought the necessities, including food, drink, toilet paper, and other essentials. I made a careful effort not to gaze at anyone in the street, not to catch one of the glares which I was sure were being cast upon me. I wasn't completely disheveled; I still made an effort to shower and keep clean. I would, no doubt, come to miss the feeling of having a routine once my vision fully left me, so I, in service to my later self, who would no doubt yearn for the days of being able to wash himself without aid, continued with my routines, even though I didn't care whether I was dirty or clean. Every step down the street felt like a chore, a Sisyphean struggle, an obligation that I was being forced to shoulder despite how much it burdened me.

I felt the cold gaze of others upon my back as I walked down the street. I could feel them turn and look; I could feel their contempt towards me. Yet I knew not why, I would never know why, I could never know why, because people and their motivations are as illusory and incomprehensible to me as the stars in the sky are to ants. I am dwarfed in their complexity, made into nothing but a peasant looking upon great gods, their whims far beyond me. I could feel their thoughts like specters upon my back; I could feel them all come upon me like wraiths in the night, only to vanish into nothing. I can feel their hate towards me. I have long held the position that it is an irrefutable fact of the world that everyone hates in one form or another. Even now, there are people whom I hate, despise, and wish the worst for, regardless of whether this hatred is new or long-standing. Yet, regardless of my knowledge of this hate and how harmful it may be, I simply can't bring myself to move on from it, to let go of it. If the relinquishment of a grudge were a matter of logic, then I would bear

none against anyone. Yet forgiveness is not a matter of logic; it is a matter of emotion, and emotions are volatile and uncontrollable. It is because of this that, no matter how much I believe I may know about both myself and others, the removal of hatred from the heart of man is, in my eyes, a near-impossible task. No matter what I do, whether it be everything or nothing, I cannot prevent the hate that those passersby on the sidewalk feel towards me, nor can I bring myself to relinquish the hate I feel against those who wronged me, even if said wronging may have occurred years ago.

I greatly envy those capable of forgiving on a whim and moving on without a second thought. It is a skill that is incomprehensibly useful and one I wish I possessed. I, instead, grip the blade of a knife with the intent of throwing it at someone else, yet I never do. I simply continue to cut my hand, waiting to throw a knife that will likely miss its target, and leave me with nothing but a gash on my hand. There is only so much that can be solved with thought, only so much that one can be rational about in life. Sometimes, the only option available is to wait for an option to present itself, a wait that weighs down on the mind, steady and crushing. The grudges I hold may not be the death of me, but they certainly weigh upon me, and whenever they rear their head, I can't help but wince. I can only think about them and their cause. I hope to digest them through my thoughts, to break them down into something so absurd and ridiculous that I can't help but forget them. At times, I wish to grind the hatred I foster towards others into a cloud of fine dust which will blow away into the wind and return to the nothing from which it manifested. Yet such a thing cannot be my goal, for I have already lost that unique spark which allows one to be something so noble as to be an enemy of hate. Once I reached the

store, I grabbed what I needed, brought it to the cashier, and mumbled something that I think was intended to be a pleasantry, but came out as utter nonsense. I then paid in cash, as I usually do. I shut down all my cards and closed my banking accounts after receiving my diagnosis. I now keep all my money in cash; visits to the bank were an unnecessary chore that brought me nothing but stress. The way I see it, I'm not sticking around, so I see no purpose in keeping assets that serve me in no way other than to take up my time and complicate my life. Keeping cash is just much simpler. I have enough money to cover rent and food, as well as any other unexpected expenses, until around the time I become fully blind, after which I have no plans for my future.

After counting the money and putting it into the register, they flashed me a look that I could only interpret as one of polite worry as they handed me my bags, and I walked out the door in short order. The clouds were covering the sun now, and the warmth I had felt upon stepping outside was no longer there. I wondered briefly if this is how it would feel when I lost my vision, simply the clouds obscuring the sun, and then never moving, condemning the world to a perpetual cloudy day. If that were the case, then no one would ever feel the warmth of the sun on their face again. I frowned at the idea and walked home briskly, feeling the same hate beating upon my back from the passerby as I did on my way there. I know not why they hate me; such things are beyond my understanding. In fact, they may not hate me at all, but I cannot know that, just as I cannot know if they truly hate me. Truthfully, I think that I find it easier to believe that they do hate me, for it allows me to skirt the burden of being social and make myself as small as possible, so that, in six months' time, I

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may vanish completely from their lives, and my weekly walks to the store can become a thing of the past.

Four



In recent times, there has been nothing that I have grown less fond of than the few things I used to love. When I was younger, when life was simpler, I was always fond of the sunset. I never adored in any profound way, for I never expressed anything in any meaningful manner, but I would always catch myself in appreciation of the sunset when I would find myself before it. I never commented on it, never wrote about it, never painted it, I never put the quiet, almost shameful adoration I had for the sunset into words, never truly acknowledged it. Yet now, I am forced to do so, for, upon looking out the window and seeing the sunset, I felt a distinct twinge of frustration in my chest, a feeling of rising and falling that wasn't quite comfortable, a discontentment which hadn't come upon me in the time since my diagnosis until this very moment. I still remember the rare days when I was younger, out and about after school and not sitting at home, catching the sunset on the horizon. I was never quite able to pinpoint what about it brought me such warmth but I was always so very fond of it, now, in retrospect, now that I am older and, to indulge myself, wiser, I can look back and think to all the aspects of the sunset which I found beautiful, a feeling so alien to me at the time that it never occurred to me that it could be the source of the warmth the sun brought me. I was fond of how it turned the world colorful, and how it painted the sky with a wonderful gradient of red,

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fading into orange, fading into yellow, and finally fading into blue. I liked how, during the summertime, when days were hot and long, the sunset would often be much cooler, with the sun being lower in the sky, and as a result, the breeze was more noticeable and cool. I believe I may have also enjoyed how it was never quite the same, no matter how many times I saw it or how much time passed; each sunset was distinct and beautiful in a way that no sunset had ever been before. I loved so many things about the sunset in retrospect, no matter how much misery consumed my mind, no matter how much that miasma of unfulfillment clouded my head, the beauty of a sunset would always find a way to creep through, to illuminate my vision, to give me a reason to cast my head upwards instead of staring towards the concrete as I walked. I am so grateful to have had such a thing in retrospect, even if I hardly had the mind to appreciate it.

I appreciate my past enjoyment of the sunset even more, considering the fact that now, when I, as I mentioned earlier, look out my window and see the sun setting on the horizon, I feel nothing in my heart but unhappiness. I feel as if I am watching a great tragedy unfold before my very eyes. I feel as though something grand and beautiful has been snuffed out before my very eyes, not the sun, but my light, my enjoyment, my hope. I stared into the sunset out my window only for a few moments this evening, no more than a minute, before swiftly closing the window and drawing the blinds. I now sit in darkness. I do not consent to have that orange light bathe my room. I only gazed into the sun for a short while today, yet it did not take anything more than that short while for me to realize that the light had gone out. The orange light no longer warms me; the red, orange, yellow, and blue no

longer enchant my senses and give me a reason to cast my vision forward rather than towards the floor. As a matter of fact, I want nothing more than for the sun to set forever and to cast the world into darkness, so that the average person could understand what it means to be cast into darkness, though much time will pass until I truly lose my vision, I feel as if I have already lost the ability to see, I feel as if I went blind years ago, and am only now, with the threat of true blindness on the horizon, realizing the state of my mind.

Looking out at the sunset this afternoon, I was reminded of the warmth I once felt, the warmth of years past, the time when I may have still carried hope, the time when my spirit's potential might have been untapped, the time when things could've had a silver lining. I was reminded of all these things solely because I no longer have them. I was, in a way, robbed years and years ago, and am only just now, upon searching for what I have been robbed of, realizing the extent of the theft. I never quite grasped just how much I have lost in years past. I have thought of myself as unhappy for a long time, that much I have made clear, yet it never occurred to me just how much said unhappiness has eroded what could've possibly still been under that veneer of noble, silent, suffering which has marred my life. I could've had something, I could've captured that joy, I could've encased that warmth that sunsets brought me and done something with it, anything, I could have done anything, yet I did the one thing I shouldn't have, I disregarded it, I turned my back to it, I thought to myself that they were alright, that sunsets were somewhat nice, then turned back to my misery. I can only wonder just how many things I have forsaken in this manner, just how many things I've turned away from in my youthful foolishness.

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There is no meaning in regret however, for the sunsets I now recognize my past love for remain in the past, and in the present, I despise them, I sit here, and I write in silence, for I cannot bare to even catch a glimpse of that orange hue upon my walls, I cannot bear to have it the sun bathe my small, sad little apartment in its evening light, I simply cannot bear it. I cannot help but wonder, how long will it be until I forget the warmth of a sunset, until I cannot recall the colors painting the sky, until I cannot put into words the things that I once enjoyed, I wonder how long until I lose it all, I wonder how long until I forget just how much I have lost. It is a morbid thing, and something which I by no means look forward to, being that far gone, yet I do look forward to it somewhat, though I know it to be an irrational and ridiculous anticipation, and that I may just as well look forward to death. I just cannot help but think about how much I'd like to be rid of the pain that the sunset brought me on this evening, which was otherwise unremarkable, unfeeling, and unpainful. I cannot help but lament the trouble it has brought me, shining through my window in all its audacity, flaunting to me a paradise that I will never be able to reach again, a paradise where I stare at the sunset and appreciate its glory, relishing its colors, which are different and radiant every time. It is something I will never experience; it is something that, years ago, I likely would've wished to experience. Perhaps that is one of the paths I could've travelled, perhaps that is one of the better futures I could've found myself in. Yet I have spent much time alone and thinking, and there is nothing I have found that inspires more misery than reflecting on the past, and what could've been. We all live in the present; that is where we are doomed to be, regardless of what led us here. As a result, to look upon the past is simply to torment oneself with unattainable

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untruths, futures that aren't, and never will be real or tangible. So I must bring it upon myself to shut the blinds as tight as I possibly can, and to restrict all thoughts of the past from trespassing in my mind, so that neither is able to torment me as they have this evening.

Five



One thousand times more important than what someone does in life is the legacy they leave behind. A truer measure of greatness and success in life simply doesn't exist. If one's legacy is massive and sprawling, then they have truly succeeded in living life to its fullest. This legacy may take different forms and differ from person to person, but the fact remains the same. Every rational person will eventually find that their top priority in life is to cultivate a lasting legacy, and their second is to discover purpose and enjoy themselves in the time they have left. I never knew my grandparents; all of them, on both my father's and my mother's side, died before I was born. This lack of knowledge surrounding people who played a role in my creation is something that greatly disturbs me: The idea that I was completely unable to meet or learn of people who were, in my eyes, just as responsible for my birth as my parents.

The fact of the matter is that they, in their death, left nothing behind, nothing besides their material possessions, which were likely doled out in a will. Apart from their children and their possessions, they had no legacy, nothing concrete left behind, a fact which never ceases to cause me disquiet. There were no writings or paintings, or expressions of the self that they left, nothing to express how they lived. All they left behind was wealth, hollow and unimportant, and

children. Children who, while they will pay their respects to their parents, will too someday pass, and will surely not take on the burden of building a true legacy for their parents; such a thing cannot be done posthumously. I say this all not because I feel any amount of grief, I don't care about my grandparents, for I never met them, and I don't give them any amount of credit for indirectly causing me to be born, for it is through that act that I am stuck here in this painful, pointless life. I say all this simply to provide an example, for, in spite of everything I just said, my grandparents have done much more than I. They had children and produced as much wealth as possible for them, then lived to quite an old age and passed away peacefully, content with their lives. They may not have produced anything that I deem particularly important from a legacy perspective, but, again, who am I to judge? I have done nothing, I have been nothing. My impact on the world has been, to be frank, beyond negligible. I have no real connections, no significant amount of money, no children, and, in terms of legacy, nothing to leave behind. When death finally greets me, and the burden of life drops from my shoulders, I feel as if there will be nothing I leave behind in my wake. It is for that reason that I motivate myself to write. I say all this simply to explain why I write, and explain to whom? That much I can hardly guess, perhaps to myself. Anyways, I write in this book, not to help myself, I do not seek a form of therapy, I do not seek a release. I write in this book, truthfully, to prevent myself from simply going to sleep and never waking up. I write because, in the way of legacy, this writing is all I can hope to leave behind. I mentioned in the foreword that, once my vision is gone, I will be unable to write, unable to put my thoughts anywhere meaningful, and I will be, by any definition, trapped. I do not intend to remain that way; however, I do

not believe I will live in such a state for very long. Perhaps both can be true, what I said in the foreword, as well as what I attempt to say now. Perhaps what I write can be multiple things rolled up into one, a simple solution to a problem. My problem? I have no legacy, which is one of the few things that genuinely bothers me about my life, aside from everything else that inspires misery, and my other problem, the fact that I have nothing to live for. I gave up long ago, and I truly did think myself content to go through life a husk, though I never imagined I would wind up a husk lacking not just in purpose or humanity, but in vision as well. That is one thing I cannot stand and will not live with. So, at this time, while I still have my vision, I will use these writings as a reason to cling to life, and not to throw in the towel while I still have some time left with my sight, though said time may be miserable regardless, as most things have been to me. So, my point is, I will write for my legacy, I will write for my sanity, and most of all, I will write because it is the only meaningful thing I can do while my vision lasts. My room is dark, my blinds are drawn, the outside world has forsaken me and I it, so, I must recede inwards, I must do what I can with what little I have, so that when I am long gone these papers will sit strewn about, and someone can, regardless of what nonsense they may come to contain, acknowledge that a man who lived wrote the pages they look upon, and that man was the miserable I. The miserable I who has dwelled in misery his whole life, and the miserable I who has found himself far beneath where I originally thought rock-bottom to be. The miserable I who has lost his hope among a thousand other things. The haunted I, the blind I. I write as a dead man who somehow, through some cruel twist of fate, is doomed to walk the earth still. I walk as a Cain of my creation, yet I have murdered no one but myself, and I am

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punished by no god of grand renown and importance, but by myself, for I am alone in my silence and my pity with nothing but these pages that I write, to solve the issue that my losing spirit has created for itself, so that I may do something, anything at all in the time before I lose my sight.

Six



I have recently developed a habit of going on walks at night. I hardly sleep most days soundly, and so, the time I spend awake after the sun goes down has become increasingly boring, so, seeing as almost no one is out at the time, I've begun leaving my apartment and going for a stroll. It's not something I enjoy, but it serves as a replacement for the otherwise irreplaceable relief provided by sleep. See, I am hardly physically tired most days, for there is very little that I do, yet I sleep as much as possible, so much in fact that in recent times I have found it near impossible to go to sleep at night, for I already pass most of my time while sleeping. I relish sleep; I adore it. It is one of the few things I can say with absolute certainty that I love. I love sleep because it is the only thing in this world that supplies readily available oblivion with no drawbacks.

Sleep allows me to die, even if only for a short time. Sleep allows me to die and, in turn, relinquish all of the burdens and the stresses and the qualms of life and simply be nonexistent.

There is no little voice tormenting me while I sleep, and there is no constantly nagging pressure weighing on my back. With the exception of a select few unsavory dreams, sleep is, undoubtedly, my favorite state to be in. Yet as I mentioned, I am hardly able to sleep as much

as I wish I could. So, in the time that I spend unable to sleep, I have begun to walk. It is usually extremely early when I go out, somewhere between one and three in the morning, and there's almost nobody out and about. I dress in dark clothes and leave my apartment quietly, moving slowly down the stairs and opening the creaking entrance to the building slowly, as if scared of being caught.

I didn't need to sneak out; nobody would stop me from going for a walk, but a part of me doesn't want to be perceived, and part of me imagines the neighbor asleep in bed, hearing someone walking in the halls, and taking note of the noise. I'm not entirely sure why, but the idea of being perceived and having my actions taken note of bothers me to some degree. I wish I were a ghost, to be honest. I wish I were a ghost who could fly through the sky, viewing the world uninterrupted and unknown to all. I could float freely and easily across the world, observing it without interference, and pay no heed to the outside world, which would ignore me. It's a peaceful fate, I'll admit, but I can't let myself get caught up in it. I've found in time that indulging myself with daydreaming and imagining a better, more ideal future for myself leads me to doing nothing but yearning more than I already do. Back to the matter at hand, upon exiting onto the street, I usually make a left and walk straight until I feel like it is time to go home. I don't go right because I end up in an area with streetlamps, signs, stores, and bars, where people are spending time laughing and drinking, and there is no place in the world that I want to spend my time at less. I go left and walk, the only light being that from the windows of buildings I pass, all silent, all brewing quietly in the night with happy families, with mothers and daughters, with brothers and sisters, with young men just starting their lives, with old men waiting for theirs to end.

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All those apartments I pass house a life, a person living, an experience had by one and not by others. It isn't something I feel any emotion towards; it's just something I always find myself acknowledging when I go out on these walks. My mind drifts to the fact that these people exist, and so do I. It is a subtle reminder to me of how this world has jilted me, and I it, and how such a stable, purposeful life will never find me.

I continue walking, and every once in a while, I pass a homeless man, sleeping in a box or some sort of sleeping bag. Every time I have passed one in the time since I began going for walks, they have been asleep, though I fear for the day that I meet one awake. Just what would they do? It's the unpredictability that scares me. A cold, penniless man who has nothing to lose would they have a conversation with me? Would they rob me? Would they just stare at me? Would they recognize what I have that they don't, and take it out on me? Would they scream at me? Would they even go as far as to kill me? I don't like being near someone so unstable. People in general are unstable, but being around someone who is especially unstable is something I would like to avoid, if possible. I don't need that stress. I know it's time to turn around once I start thinking about how long I've been walking, for that is how I know I have run out of reasons to be outside. In spite of the near-endless list of things that bother me in one way or another, being out at night is not one of them. I enjoy the absence of the sun, people, and almost all things beautiful. I enjoy the feeling of the world gone quiet, of all noise and color and trouble sucked from the world, all the demons sit in their nests, and the street is empty, quiet, and alone, perfect company for a troubled mind. It allows me to feel as I wish, to feel as if I am a ghost. I can walk down the streets at night and hear the chirping of bugs and the rustle of leaves and be among crea-

tures who would rather not be seen. I think of myself as somewhat of a spider, weaving a web solely for myself, a web which does not harm humanity, yet I can only make myself known in the pitch of night, lest I be exterminated as if some kind of pest.

I often wonder how creatures in the bushes and trees spend their days. When it is too bright to make themselves known, I wonder if they sleep, as I do. Perhaps I am simply a bug, unable to participate in the undecipherable rituals and habits of humanity, unable to adapt to an impossible, constantly changing environment dictated by creatures larger, stronger, and smarter than me. Perhaps that is the situation I find myself in; perhaps with the bugs is where I belong. Sometimes, by the time I return, the sun is rising, and the sky has turned significantly brighter and bluer than when I left. I'll quietly make my way back upstairs and walk into my apartment, the appearance of which causes me to feel nothing but contempt towards both the apartment itself and myself for living in it. After getting over the sheer strength of the hate I feel towards my living quarters, I sit down on my bed, make myself comfortable, and pretend as if I have just awoken from a restful, peaceful, and joyous dream, in which I walked the night streets happily and without worry. It is at that point, after realizing the irony in trying to pretend my sleepless night was simply a dream, that I lie back in bed and finally fall asleep, just as the sun begins to rise.

Seven



I am not human. I am endowed with eyes that do not know where to look, a heart that doesn't know how to feel, a mouth that does not know how to talk, and a body that does not know how to compose itself. I am left only with my mind, which finds purpose only in constantly reminding me of all the previously mentioned flaws. I am not human because humans cry when they are sad, and I cannot bring myself to shed a single tear, even under the worst of circumstances. I am not human because when humans are sad, they get back up and recover swiftly, and I do not. I fall too hard and stay down for too long, making it impossible for any normal person to help me, and I begin to lose what I have been given; I let slip the grace I am afforded like sand through my fingertips. I am not human, for humans have a place in rooms, they have people they belong to, they have people who love them and care for them, and wish them well. I do not have these things. I have been in the same place for years, yet I still haven't found my place. I am still an obstruction, a stowaway in a life I no longer wish to exist within.

I have had this feeling of dread welling up within me, this feeling of whiplash at the state I am in, this state of urging and compulsion that lights a fire in my stomach and punishes me for my failures with burning scorn. It fills me with such pity, such burning, sad pity, that

doesn't quite know where to go within your chest, so it simply remains like a tumor in pushing down on your chest. I was out for a grocery run today and walked past a homeless man who was begging on the sidewalk. It was broad daylight, so I felt none of the fear that I had spoken of in the previous entry. What I did feel, however, was frustration, frustration towards this homeless man, begging at the feet of passersby for coins, likely a drug abuser, a man who sits at the lowest echelon of society. All I did was glance at him as I walked by, yet he looked back up at me, and he stared at me with contempt and anger. He sat there, on the street, with nothing but the shirt on his back, and he endured, and he begged tirelessly to survive. That was why he hated me, that was why he looked at me on that street with such condescension and disgust in his eyes, because he could see that I had given up, he could see that I, even with more than him, had given up, and if placed in his position would likely curl up and die on the sidewalk, too demoralized to even beg. He looked at me like that because he saw in me the same thing I see now, subconsciously, and the same thing that boils in my stomach now, as I write, and causes me such unhappiness and discomfort. I feel hopeless, more so than usual, at the state of my life. I think that maybe, something, anything, will present itself to me and bestow upon me hope and meaning and relinquish this great weight from my shoulders, but I know it is childish to pretend, to wish for a prince charming to rescue me from this castle. I'm a grown man; kids from my childhood have lives to tend to, relationships, and careers to manage. What do I have? What progress have I made? What have I done with my life? My opportunity? My great gift of free will? I've done nothing, I've sat, and I've written, and I've pitied myself, and in moments like these, I just can't help but think, is this my punishment? Is it the blindness that has ruined my life and my motive to live it? Or

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is the blindness simply a final nail in the coffin? Curtains on a play that has put half its audience to sleep.

I worry that I am too negative and hopeless, having conflated my problems and faults, and I've been led astray. But then again, I'm soon to be a blind man; what is there to come of me? I don't doubt that this feeling, this discomfort, like everything else, will pass, but I can't help but put to paper that glare of that man on the street, that stare which pierced me through and through, that stare which called me to the stand and forced me to testify for my sloth, for my carelessness, for my transgressions against him and everyone who I would otherwise see as below me. I cannot stop my mind from racing back to him, to that man. Were we really so different? What would have stopped me from winding up where he is now? And even so, he still begs, he still tries, I could see it in his eyes, and he could see it in mine, the fact that he had something to live for, despite having nothing, while I, on the other hand, could not for the life of him find a proper reason to live, despite having more than him. That look, I believe that this feeling of dread will pass, but that look, it will be a while before I forget it, before the image of that beggar leaves my mind, staring up at me, with those eyes so filled with fire, a fire I have never caught a glimpse of in my own eyes, even in the best of times.

Eight



Recently, I have discovered that my new favorite way to pass the time during the day is by staring out the window, specifically gazing down at the street below.

My apartment is a good couple of floors up, high enough for no one to see me looking, and low enough for me to distinguish almost every important detail of the people walking on the sidewalk, going about their business as normal. I have spent hours upon hours, days perhaps, entranced in the scene down there, watching all the people walking back and forth and back and forth, watching the ants tend to their hill like machines, dutifully and with no hint of intellect in their eyes, but I must digress, for the ants I mock live happier lives than me. Anyway, it feels as if my apartment has become a personal zoo, where I can observe these animals in captivity, these creatures that I can hardly begin to understand, as they go about their routines and live their lives as normal, unaware of my watchful eye. Do I feel a little creepy doing it? Yes, but it is a public street, and my boredom has long since eroded my will to be “normal,” as others would put it. I watch the people move up and down the sidewalk, sometimes walking into restaurants or shops along the street.

Do these people visit these places daily? Or is it a spontaneous thing, to go out and spend money exorbitantly for the afternoon? I

cannot know. I think that, maybe, a trip to one of these places may make me happy, as it seems to make them. I wonder if it's really as simple as it seems and if happiness is truly that easy, not some great mystery to be solved, but a simple pleasure to be sought. Yet, I am reminded that it isn't that simple, and that, even in the days before my diagnosis, before I had fallen into reclusivity, I never did enjoy being one of those people down on the street. Going to work, a job that I picked specifically because it allowed me to keep my head down, do what had to be done, and clock out. Now that I think about it, I don't think I spoke to anyone my entire time working there besides the person who had interviewed me. I wonder, what was it that the interviewer saw in me? Or were there simply no other applicants for a job that was almost entirely unskilled, repetitive labor? I would work that job, earn money, and save most of it, yet the money I saved brought me no happiness, nor did the money I spent. I recall when I considered gambling some of my weekly earnings online, hoping the thrill of winning would bring me happiness. At least then, even if it were through something as pointless and stupid as games of chance, I would have something meaningful to spend my money on. I was up, then down, back up, back down, and before I knew it, the hundred or so dollars I had added to my balance were gone.

I could hardly tell what upset me more, the fact that there was no money left or the fact that not even the absurd act of throwing away my hard-earned money brought me a sense of purpose. Back to what I was saying, realizing the stores and the restaurants weren't where my attention should be directed, I focused my eyes back onto the actual people walking down the street—a middle-aged man in a sharp blue suit, carrying a leather briefcase, someone important, clearly. A wom-

an pushing her child in a stroller, clearly a mother, heading where? It's anyone's guess. Maybe she's going home. Maybe she's running away. I'll never know the true lives of the people who walk the streets. I can't answer the questions I ask myself, though it entertains me to try. It was then that my eyes drifted from the woman with the stroller to an elderly man walking down the street slowly with his walker. He had clearly lived a long life, a full one. I could see it in his eyes, even from here. I felt a twinge of envy in my chest, enough to make me wince and turn away. I didn't like that look; it reminded me of a wound, one I'd rather not open up. When I turned back, I found my vision set on a woman, the most beautiful I had seen in god knows how long. Her hair was blonde, and she wore a long, frilly red dress and high heels. She wore a smile on her face, the kind of smile that makes you feel like a child, the kind that makes you think she would hold an umbrella over your head when it rains. I wondered where she could be going, yet no places came to mind, as there was no scene in my head that quite fit her. She was out of place on the gray sidewalk surrounded by beige people who did nothing to stick out. Her very existence seemed to scream for attention, dressing like that when night would not fall for hours, and where could she possibly be going in an outfit so beautiful? I had never been one for love, not that it ever presented itself to me in any notable manner, yet in this moment, I lusted for this woman on the street. I wanted to speak to her, I wanted to be near her, I felt distinctly attracted to her, though I knew not why, and before I could even realize the thoughts rushing through my head, she stepped past the frame of my window and disappeared down the street, leaving me stunned. Why was it that this woman, whom I had seen for a total of fifteen seconds at most, had turned me into a deer in the headlights ef-

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fortlessly, mesmerizing me completely with her appearance? My heart fluttered, only to quickly be pushed back where it belongs.

I shut the blinds swiftly; that was enough window watching for the day. I went to sleep that night haunted not by what I had seen, but what I had felt, what that woman had welled up within me, how she had captivated me. I then came to a key question, one which I had forgotten to ask myself: Why does the sight of beauty feel like a slight upon you? It is then that I reminded myself, that fact which I had already long since came to terms with, my reason for locking myself away in this apartment, the fact that I am soon to be, as much as it pains me to say, a blind man, and all beauty, no matter how captivating, no matter how lust inspiring, no matter how perfect and pure, is an affront to me, and will, in all its beauty, serve only to torment and mock me. For in this world filled with beauty and color and wonder, I have always been unhappy, always uncontent, and soon, I would never complain of my view again. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep, but the darkness was especially unsettling, likely due to the thought of blindness still lingering fresh in my mind. So I was lying in bed, eyes wide open, staring up at the ceiling. As I sat in that silence, I couldn't help but say to myself, chuckling lightly, "What a great view this is."

Nine



The other day, I was going out for a walk at night, taking in the all-consuming silence of the streets as I usually do, when that all-familiar and somewhat comforting silence was disrupted by a noise, one that was distinct from the occasional rustling in the trees or chirping in a bush, and that came from directly in front of me, sitting right in the middle of the street like a guard placed to defend, a black as ink cat, it meowed softly and looked up at me, it was holding its right paw up above the ground, it was injured. Yet it didn't whine or cry or come towards me for help; it just sat there, looking at me. The streets were dark, and I had to squint to make it out, but there was a little bit of blood dripping from the cat's paw and onto the pavement. It was clear instantly that this was not a normal injury; someone had intentionally hurt this cat.

It brought a frown to my face and ruined my otherwise perfectly peaceful night, and I contemplated briefly whether it was the fact that the cat was hurt that ruined my night or the fact that my conscience wouldn't allow me to walk past the wounded creature. I have long since come to terms with the fact that I lack many things that come naturally to others; yet, of all these things, empathy is not among them. I couldn't just allow this cat to sit here, holding its paw, bleeding on the floor. It wasn't going anywhere on that injured paw, so, after a

long, exasperated sigh, I turned around, back towards my apartment, to fetch something to bandage the cat's paw. It upset me slightly to have to walk back to my apartment; it would throw off my rhythm and result in me not getting home at the usual, perfect time from my walk. It upset me, but I knew it would upset me more to leave the animal sitting there, so I had to help it. I couldn't help but wonder who had hurt that cat? What reason would someone have to injure an animal senselessly and then leave it there on the street to suffer? Exceptionally cruel, disgustingly cruel, unexcusably cruel.

Why? Why would a person do that to an animal? It made me think of my own fear of people, and, were the cat able to speak, what it would say about it. Perhaps the animal isn't too different from me, perhaps we are kindred spirits. The cat and I have both been wronged by people, we both roam the night, we both have few methods of communication with each other, and yet, here I am, walking back to my apartment, throwing my routine that I cling so tightly to away, just to put a bandage on this cat's paw. It is abnormal to fear other people. It's a result of an aberration within the mind, but I am helpless to fix it. It is things like that cat that remind me that people are evil, people are wrong, and that, at the end of the day, I am not one of them. That is, truthfully, why the cat didn't run away from me in spite of the fact that a person had just harmed it, it was because the cat could tell, the cat was acutely aware of the fact that I did not belong to the same species as the one who harmed it, that is, not to say I am special in any way, or apart of my own, cooler, better species, just, to say that I am excluded from the grouping of mankind. I do not belong to that group, and I haven't for a long time. The miasma of malice and greed and sickening cruelty has vanished from me. It took me around an hour to return to

my apartment with the bandages, an hour during which I contemplated nothing but the cat and my newfound relationship with it. I haven't done much of anything recently, let alone something morally good, so, despite everything, doing this for the cat felt good; it didn't make me happy or alleviate the dull, aching pain that I had locked away in a closet in my mind, but it made me feel good, a tiny, momentary accomplishment, something to be happy about, to know that I am better than the person who hurt the cat originally, to know that I am writing their wrong. I returned to the cat, still sitting there, with a small pool of blood now sitting at its feet. I had a roll of bandages, that was all. I would kneel, bandage the cat's paw, and be on my way, simple as. The cat winced as I applied the bandage, but it didn't fight, scream, or run. It didn't quite look comfortable around me, though I could tell the animal had no other options. Halfway through bandaging the cat's paw, one of the few illuminated windows from the building to my left opened, and a man leaned out, shouting. "What the hell are you doin' out this late? Are you bandaging that shitty stray?" Silence, fear was in my feet, then my legs, then my chest, then my head. My heart skipped a beat, and I continued bandaging the cat, though the man kept shouting, "If you bandage that runt, then he won't leave, and nobody wants a fuckin' black cat hanging around, that's bad luck!" I stayed silent in spite of the man's screaming, "Hey! I'm talking to you, freak!" Silence again. I didn't want to speak to this man; I didn't want to hear his voice. I didn't want him to perceive me that way. I just wanted to bandage this cat and leave, to do just one thing for the night. I heard a window shut harshly, and like that, the man was gone. This man was the evil I had spent my walk thinking of; he was directly responsible, or at the very least complicit, in harming this cat. It was bad luck, and so, over that superstition, it seemed that the people of

the building had decided to mutilate its paw, in an attempt to drive it away. Clearly, a particularly crude and stupid group to injure the paw of a cat in an attempt to make it relocate, as if it doesn't need the paw to do so. I finished bandaging the paw and turned around to return home, though the entire situation stuck with me and bothered me for quite some time. Perhaps I wasn't so irrational in my fear of people; perhaps I am the sane one. Perhaps the people of the world are simply too evil to see the evil within themselves. To mutilate an animal over something so simple as bad luck is stupid. I got home and lay in my bed staring at the ceiling, and for once, I found that sleep came without much of a fight. I woke up the next morning, still thinking of that cat, still thinking about what that man had said, all that over bad luck. Suffering, real, tangible, bloody suffering brought into the world over bad luck from a black cat. "Bad luck..." I murmured to myself with a chuckle while rubbing my eyes. Upon finishing the rubbing, a part of my vision was still blurry, so I rubbed again. However, I found that the spot on the right side of my field of view remained abnormally blurry. I washed my face, still blurry. My condition had decided it was time to make itself known, giving me something to remember it by, to take from me even the short moments I have when my fate escapes my mind. I wondered, quickly, if it was maybe the cat's fault.

Perhaps this was simply bad luck, accrued from bandaging a black cat in the dead of night. I wondered, perhaps the only difference between the people of the building and me is that they release their violence outward, harming cats and screaming obscenities from windows at those who bandage them. Perhaps it is the release of violence that protects that man from the bad luck that I am so well acquainted with. I know for a fact that the man who screamed at me, the man re-

sponsible for injuring that cat, wakes up this morning a happier man than I am, and I also know that he wakes up free from bad luck, for he harmed the cat, and I healed it. Perhaps we simply live in a world where violence and cruelty are rewarded, and attempts to heal or do right are punished. Perhaps this is just the world, and I, along with the cat, am simply condemned to live in it. I looked at the wall blankly. The blur didn't fade. It wouldn't fade. There would no longer be a waking moment without the reminder of what was coming. I would not cry. My eyes darted away from the wall, and the blur darted with them. It was then that I realized it was not the cat's bad luck. It was mine.

Ten



Two weeks have passed since what I will from now on refer to as the cat incident, despite the fact that I know it had nothing to do with the cat, nor the cat's supposed bad luck. The blurry spot in my vision remains, despite all my prayers that it may one morning vanish. I have not written because, unsurprisingly, I have found it quite hard to focus on anything besides that spot in my peripheral, it's such an accursed thing, I hate it with my whole heart, though I know it to be irrational to do so. I know that the spot changes nothing in reality. I know I can still see. I know that since it appeared, it has not once inconvenienced me in any tangible way. Yet I have never felt more crippled by anything in my entire life. I feel as if both my legs have been smashed with a lead pipe, my feet have been chopped off, and I have been shaken by the head until the fragments of my bones clatter to the floor like gravel upon dirt. Though, to be honest, such a fate would be preferable to the mental anguish I feel now at the constant sight of that blur. I have thought at length about suffering, both mental and physical, and while I suffer no physical torment, I am not tortured, weak, starved, or anything of the sort; I am, however, paradoxically, all of those things, and a thousand more, yet only inside the prison of my skull. Even if I don't fully believe it to be true, I like to believe in the idea that, no matter how much pain one is in, and no matter how bereft of hope a situation may be, there

is always someone suffering more, hurting more, less sane. The way I see it, suffering is a moment in which the general burden of existence weighs most upon a person, to the point where it cannot be ignored; it is not an emotion per se, but it encompasses them; it is a state of being more than anything else. Those who are clinically depressed are suffering, those who are injured in war are suffering, and those who are stressed are suffering. All of these people suffer, none of them in the same way, none of them the same amount, yet to all of them their suffering is equally profound. However, back to my point, I'd like to believe that there cannot be a singular person who suffers the most of all people; such a thing is sheer impossibility. This is a result of the definition of suffering, as established above. For example, imagine that there is someone in the world, this can be anyone, an old man or a young child, who is so depressed, so trapped in the illusory halls of their own mind, that they have lost every single shred of their will to live. This person's burden is so great that it is impossible to endure under any circumstances, and for the sake of argument, there is no other person who could endure it; they are beyond rock bottom, and they suffer abundantly as a result.

On the other hand, imagine someone beaten and battered, tortured in every way possible. They feel pain in every inch of their body as well as within every centimeter of said inches. Despite this, they have not given up hope; their resolve burns brightly in spite of their hopeless situation, and the thought of giving up, to them, hurts more than the countless wounds across their body. They likely won't survive. They are aware of this to some extent, yet they remain steadfast in their belief in survival, and they suffer greatly as a result. Now, the important question is, which of these two people suffers more? The one

suffering from bodily injuries maintains his mind, while the mentally injured retains their body, though both will lose everything eventually if they do not recover. The answer is neither. Neither of them suffers more. The fact of the matter is that both people, the tortured physically and the tortured mentally, at some point during the suffering they endure, will imagine someone who has it worse, who longs for the suffering they experience in comparison to theirs. It is a fact that the most twisted, hopeless situations can only be contrived by minds that look at them and think that they might be pretty lucky to stand where they stand, and so, in contrast, their suffering is just a little bit more endurable. The saying “Comparison is the thief of joy” is a well-known platitude, and one I despise very much, for comparison is not the thief of joy, but life itself.

Nevertheless, I believe that, though it may be milked to the bone for all its meaning, there is still value in analyzing the use of comparison. I could compare, for instance, as much as I despise using it as an example, the blur in the corner of my eye, to the glassed-over, empty eyes of one who has already gone totally blind. Most would say that the totally blind man suffers more, yet comparison cannot be so simple, for the blind man has accepted his fate and now lives with it. At the same time, I find it impossible to do so, and am crippled mentally by a condition that otherwise hasn’t affected me. Does that make me weaker than the person who is fully blind? Or does it make them stronger? Or does it simply mean my situation is more dire? How is the question influenced by the lives we lived prior to our condition? Does that play a role in it all?

All of these questions are ones I cannot answer, for it is impossible to objectively rank or assign an exact number to suffering, as it is a unique experience that requires life and sentience to occur and cannot be reduced to a fact of the world. Suffering is not like the phases of the moon, or the tide, or the weather, or even happiness; it is more like a dice roll, say you roll a six-sided dice, and every time you roll a three or under, you suffer misfortune, and every time you roll a four or higher, you are given a second wind, a renewal perse, a break from the trouble of three and below. That is suffering, suffering is luck, suffering is chance, suffering is unknowable. Though suffering is worse, for the dice analogy implies equal chance, and life is far from equal in any sense of the word.

It should be clear why I am compelled to pour out all these thoughts on suffering, it should be obvious, but in the off chance it wasn't, I am compelled to say all this and to speak on suffering in such disruptive length becuase, for the past two weeks since the cat incident, I have done nothing but rot in this apartment, and be crippled by my suffering. Perhaps I am wrong about everything I said before; perhaps they are the ramblings of someone who has already gone mad. Yet, I still question my sanity, so it is clearly intact. I'd like to imagine the page itself understands what I am writing and feels my suffering along with me, yet I know it to be just a page. I suffer, and I sit inside, and I know not when my suffering will fade away, and dull as all other kinds of suffering in my life have been, I do believe that such things do happen if given enough time. I just wonder when my dice will begin to roll above a three, if it will ever roll for me again. If it does, I suspect it weighed, for no one deserves to be as unlucky as I have. It feels bad to pity myself, it really does, even more shameful to put it to paper, but I

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hardly care as I am now. I pity myself so deeply. I remember how happy I felt to bandage that cat's paw. I remember thinking to myself, "Maybe it won't be that bad, maybe you do have something to live for, maybe this is what it is that you seek." I remember, just for a moment, allowing myself to feel happy. Yet the cat had nothing to do with anything regarding my eyes, as a matter of fact, the cat had nothing to do with any of this, I was simply blaming my bad luck on it, no better than the people in that building which had tried to drive him away, the only difference is I torture myself to survive and they torture others. I have done nothing in the past couple days but think about that, and I don't think I will do anything for the next couple days from now, I don't think that there is anything i want to do but sit here, and wait for the pain to dull, for I have nothing on my mind besides suffering, and the one thing I despise more than doing nothing is doing the same thing over and over again, so I'll stop here.

Eleven



The saying, “Time heals all wounds,” is one I have heard from others, as well as myself, far too many times for it to comfort me anymore. For I know there are some wounds that time does not heal, wounds which fester and rot beneath the surface, wounds which writhe beneath the skin, wounds that time only dulls the pain of. My blindness, or, more specifically, its manifestation, is not a wound that time can heal. Perhaps I was simply under a delusion upon first being diagnosed; I had yet to see anything that could throw me off balance, but now, I find it near impossible to compose myself in the face of it. The future, I simultaneously wish it could come this instant and be delayed forever. What I cannot stand, however, is this infernal waiting. I have spent all day in bed, a stupid, stupid choice, for I knew then as I know now that my escapism would force me awake come night, but I had not the will to resist the easiest option in the moment, and, now, I pay the consequences. This night has not been too rough on me, however, though I haven’t gone for a walk, and have nothing to entertain me otherwise, it has not been a rough night. I don’t know how it hasn’t been a rough night, but, for the last five hours, I have been able to completely and utterly placate and entertain myself by simply looking out the window. Yet, all night, I have not cast my gaze down at the sidewalk like I usually do; instead, my eyes have been set on the stars. I cannot look at them without seeing the blur in

my vision, but I find that no matter how cruel and sour a reminder it is, I cannot avert my focus from the stars. I sit here, in my room, which feels to me like a crossroads-esque purgatory between living and dying, and all I can look to is the stars, to occupy me, partially, but more so, as a reminder of my fragility.

I don't mean to wax poetic, I do not feel like a poet, and I am not under any delusion to become one; the romance has long left my veins, yet, under the stars, I am possessed by something unlike myself. I was never infatuated with the stars, never interested in astronomy, and lacking in any aspiration towards the heavens. However, I don't feel quite as fond of them right now. Under the light of the stars, though some too far to see clearly, even with my vision intact, I feel as if I have been reduced to even less than I already am, lesser in significance than almost everything, and, under the moon, brought down even further, equal to the ants which crawl underfoot, and even further, to the dirt that they build hills out of, and the pebbles which sit between. It is under the stars and the moon that I am brought down to this level, and it is with the sun that I will return. But tonight, as I look up at the stars, my suffering feels like it will blow away like dust on the wind. I am still unhappy, profoundly unhappy, and there is next to nothing that can be done to change that, yet, when I feel this small, when I look to the stars and am put down to nothing before the light of another solar system, another planet, another sun, I become so very numb, so humbled even in bouts selfish thoughts. Under the night, I am not reborn or cleansed or purified or baptized or any other word meaning a purge of negativity, the misery remains, but it is so out of focus, so unimportant in the face of the canvas for its anguish, the requiem which it is unknowingly part of, the machine in which it is a screw, tightened and unmoving,

no matter how it wishes to shake and buckle, kept into check, unable to do anything of meaning other than vanish. It does me good, though, to feel as if I can vanish so peacefully as a screw in a machine, to fall out of order and drop with a clank simply, knowing that it won't make a difference, knowing that I, and everything surrounding me, is simply a nothing surrounded by more nothings that somehow comprise a something, a screw holding a gear which turns another gear which results in the moving of one thing towards another, all contained within a larger system doing the same, an existential nightmare for anyone who values their individuality, anyone who views themselves separate than others, anyone who thinks themselves important. Yet to me, I feel a peace wash over me, like the tide being shifted by the position of the moon, a marionette by something I could never understand. I cannot help but wonder if it is all I would like to be.

Suppose I would prefer to go out in a blaze of glory, if I were happier to rebel against order and all things good, if it would satisfy me to do anything besides contemplate my role in the world. If such an ambition burns within me, such righteous fire, I can only imagine it reduced to embers, beaten back and snuffed in the darkest pit of my soul, long since forsaken, long since purposeless. The moon and its army of stars smile down at the earth, with a grin that inspires beautiful melancholy in those awake to see it, those tortured souls who do not sleep a night, and have no whims with which to occupy themselves. Such nights are a torturous respite, such nights are beautiful and ugly, such nights are impossible for me to comment on, for they exist far beyond me, in the stars and in the solar system where everything lives and dies in distance, where suffering and loneliness are hollow words. What I mean to say is that it is this night that gives me a fresh lease

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on life, a breath of fresh air in a desolate void. A renewal, though I am still miserable, and my vision fades, I feel, under the light of the moon, only for a moment, released from those chains I have tied and bound myself with, from the weight of existence, where things come and go and exist and cease and conflict is to be mended with peace and life tended before death. All things human, all things terribly frustrating to a mind that seeks peace above all.

Twelve



Today I opened my cabinet and found, much to my chagrin, that there was no food remaining. It has been around two weeks since I last went shopping, and one week since the cat incident occurred. I have been extremely wary of leaving the house, and, if it wasn't clear from my last entry, I have suffered quite a blow to my morale, something I seriously didn't think possible until recently. It saddens me to read back the thoughts I was feeling that night, to think my resolve would be shattered so quickly, as if I had none to begin with, and was simply pretending to remain composed. All it took was a nudge, a little reminder, something that would prevent my mind from drifting, and that alone was enough to cripple me. I flop down onto my bed, rolling over onto my back and counting the chips on the white paint above my head and tracing the pattern of decay painted by time upon the roof of my apartment. It would do me no good to sit and reflect on these things.

I stood and walked over to the cramped and gray kitchen. I opened the cabinet, seldom expecting something just to appear, yet again, nothing. I took a step and opened the fridge, which was reduced to nothing more than a white box containing an empty carton of eggs, a single tomato, some mustard and ketchup, and, to my greatest displeasure, some moldy pudding, which I quickly threw away. I wanted

to do nothing less than leave the house; I couldn't bear it, I couldn't stand the idea. I looked out the window. The streets weren't particularly busy, but there were still people, still demons roaming about, still evil on the streets. I shuddered, closed the blinds, and looked back at the door. Why was this so difficult? Why was I so weak? Why did I care? I gritted my teeth and took a step towards the door, then five more, before swinging the door open and bursting through it. I took heavy steps down the stairs, reached the foyer, and stepped outside into the fresh air. It wasn't a particularly beautiful day, but the weather wasn't bad. Clouds were hanging overhead, and the air had a brisk chill to it. I turned right and began walking down the street to the convenience store. The people cast their gazes upon me; I knew they were doing so. I felt the sting of their contempt upon my back like it was raining needles. I knew how I appeared; I must look disheveled, and I haven't showered in a while.

I spend all day cooped up in that apartment, marinating not in filth but in dust and silence. I must reek of sadness, I must appear similar to a parasite, a parasite upon the city. I am nothing but that, a parasite, a disgusting thing that needs to be purged. I do not belong here; I am from elsewhere and must live as a parasite upon this city in order to survive, a goal I have long since grown spiteful of. I quickened my pace and reached the convenience store. The doors opened, I walked in, and, quicker than anyone may have ever done before, I bought the necessities: instant ramen, canned soup, rice, eggs, sandwich bread, peanut butter, milk, instant coffee, canned tuna, energy drinks, potato chips, some candy, frozen pizza, frozen vegetables, microwave meals, cereal, toilet paper, paper towels, shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, trash bags, and finally laundry detergent. With all of

that, I was sure that hell would freeze over before I was required to leave the house again. I took it all to the counter, hands full, I think I would've rather died than drop something and need to stop and pick it up. I swiftly paid in cash at the register without speaking a single word to the cashier, and made my way out the door, plastic bags filled with groceries in hand.

Veni Vidi Vici. Like a pathetic Caesar, I had come, seen, and conquered, and now I would return to Rome, my sad, monochrome apartment, which is significantly less awe-inspiring than Rome, fitting, as I am the last person in the world who deserves to quote Caesar as if it means anything. Walking down the street, things had become busier. Women were walking with their children, Men in suits carrying briefcases and clearly on their way to work, and elderly people were walking slowly down the street. They all knew something I didn't; they were all clued in to the tempo they should follow, the cadence with which to speak, the rhythm that they needed to walk at, and the glances they needed to direct towards others. Everyone I passed on the street was singing, performing an orchestra of the most beautiful song, a song that could turn a miserable, hopeless world into one full of color and meaning, a song that could inspire hope in even the most hopeless situations. Yet in all their harmony, all their wondrous rhythm, I was deaf to it all. I was deaf to the song that they played, the tune that defined their existence. I was deaf, and I had been deaf my whole life, so I had never learned this song. So, as all the people in the street dance and harmonize and rejoice in the anthem of their lives. I could not participate, nor watch from the side. I could only stand at odds with them, stand amongst their orchestra, singing the wrong tune, dancing at the wrong rhythm.

A metaphorically deaf and soon-to-be literally blind man standing amongst a horde of those who would tear one to shreds for ruining the song they took such joy in. A horde of animals, a horde of animals dancing around a fire and believing it to mean more than anything else in the entire world, believing truly in their hearts that if one were to extinguish their fire, or disrupt their dance, then that person would be deserving of a fate worse than death itself, to be rejected from the masses which derive such joy from each other, and to be tossed aside, never to be given a chance to rejoice as others do, and made to watch, as the future they could have had dances brilliantly in front of them. I returned to my apartment building, opened the door into the foyer quickly, and shut it behind me before taking a deep sigh. My introspection on the walk back had exhausted me and left me timid and gloomy. I walked upstairs, still quick with my pace, as to avoid running into someone and having to say something along the lines of “Excuse me” in order to pass them, words that would undoubtedly sound inhuman, coming from the mouth of a man like myself, as a matter of fact, they would probably mistake me for a homeless man, and call the cops, a nightmarish turn of events that sends a shiver down my spine. I reached my apartment and realized I had left the door wide open when leaving. How could I do anything so stupid? How could I? Someone could have gone in and stolen everything, or trashed the place, or some other terrible thing. My sanctuary, my greatest safety, the one place I knew I wouldn’t be infringed upon, the one place I knew the stalking eyes of men and women would not reach me. I crept up to the door, still swung ajar, and braced myself to look inside, yet, upon peeking my head around the corner, the room was untouched, exactly how I had left it. So, without wasting any further time, I quickly entered,

shutting and locking the door behind me, before finally breathing a sigh of relief.

I set the bags of groceries down on the kitchen counter and took a deep breath. Finally, I could drop my guard; Everything was intact, untouched, and it seemed, despite my idiocy in leaving the door wide open, nothing had gone wrong. Perhaps my streak of bad luck had finally come to an end. I stood for a moment, hand on the counter, before I heard a noise come from behind me, towards the bathroom, a blind spot that I didn't see when peeking in through the door. Was someone in here? Had I made a fatal mistake in assuming my apartment was safe? I froze for a couple of seconds, paralyzed with fear, before turning slowly. I did not find myself face-to-face with a murderer, nor a burglar; no, what met my gaze was much worse. Sitting quietly on the floor, A black cat, which I quickly recognized as the same one from that horrible night, with a tattered bandage crudely wrapped around its right paw, purring softly, as if mocking the idea that I had ever even left it behind.

Thirteen



Why was it here? That was the only thought going through my head. Why was this cat, this cat that I had seen the night before my condition progressed, this cat that had indirectly caused me so much pain, in my apartment right now? It purred softly and looked at me curiously, as if asking me the reason for the look of shock on my face. I continued to look at it, and it reciprocated, looking at me. We stood there, looking at each other, for a long while, before the animal turned away from me, walking briskly towards the window, before lying down quietly on the floor, bathing in the light that seeped through the blinds. I continued to stand there, looking at it, yet it didn't look back at me; it no longer seemed to care about my presence, which was ridiculous, because it was in my apartment. I wasn't just going to let this thing sit in my apartment; I walked over to it, and, after giving it a nudge, it looked up at me apathetically, as if I was the one bothering it. I tried shooing it, getting it to stand up so I could force it up the door, but it didn't respond; instead, it opted to just stare at me. I was fed up, and I would not be made into a guest in my own home. I grabbed the cat by its scruff, which, at least, got a reaction out of it. It jumped to its feet and, swiftly and coldly, scratched my hand with its claws, drawing blood and forcing me to let go of it. The cat hissed at me before turning away, lying back down on the floor as if nothing had happened.

I must be the only person in the world with luck like this to have a black cat for a squatter. So much for comparing myself to Caesar, I was no longer lord of even this depressing apartment, my throne usurped in an instant by a stray animal, how pathetic. I walked back towards the kitchen, rinsing the blood off my hand and wrapping it with a bandage, glancing back scornfully towards the creature while doing so. It was unaffected, however, by my anger, simply ignoring me and continuing to lie on the floor. I wondered what I could have possibly done to deserve such humiliation at the hands of a cat, and a stray one at that. My past life must have been exceptionally evil for luck like this to find me so consistently.

It really was the same cat I had encountered that night; the bandage was still on its paw, though it was bloody and in tatters now, and it wouldn't be long until it fell off entirely. Is that why it had come? To have me replace its bandage? I thought about it for a moment before taking a deep sigh and grabbing a bottle of rubbing alcohol, along with the bandages I had just used to wrap my hand. I walked over to the cat quietly and squatted down in front of it. Instinctively, I hated this animal. I associated it now not just with bad luck, but with the loss of my vision, and seeing it again brought me much pain. Rational-ly, however, I knew myself to be better than the people in the building I had the animal in front of. I knew that bad luck was a superstition, and that my blindness was caused by nothing but my own body failing me. I hated this animal, but that hate did not control me.

I unwrapped the cat's bandage, revealing the bloody wound underneath. It was festering, and it surprised me to see how composed the animal was, despite the pain it must've been feeling. I doused the

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bandage in alcohol and began to wrap the cat's paw. It winced as the bandage made contact, squirming slightly as I wrapped it around its paw, but moments later, I was finished, and stood back up, stepping away from the animal and back towards the kitchen, to observe it from a safe distance. The cat, however, seemingly revitalized by the pain, shakily rose to its feet, turned to face me, and limped towards the kitchen. I stood there, unmoving. What was it doing? Why was it behaving in this way? I can't even understand humans; how could I possibly understand what goes on in the mind of a cat? It reached me, and, after standing at my feet for a second, began rubbing itself against my legs, purring slightly as it did. I stepped away quickly, unsure of how to react. The cat responded even more puzzlingly, looking at me for a moment, before limping back to its spot on the floor and lying down again, this time facing me. It was at this point that I realized the animal had no intention of leaving. Having just applied a fresh bandage to it, more out of pity than love, it seemed to think it beneficial to stay with me. I didn't want a pet, I didn't want a friend, I didn't want anything at all, I just wanted to stay in this apartment and be at peace until I lost my vision, but now, there was an intruder, a great evil from the outside world, penetrating my sanctuary and reminding me of things I hazard to think about. Yet, I hardly desired another scratch on my hand, and, despite how much it pains me, it seemed that removing the animal, which sat motionless, dozing on the floor, would cause more trouble than allowing it to stay temporarily. So, much to my displeasure, I decided to leave the creature be, hoping it would leave once it woke from its nap on my floor.

All the stress of finding the cat in my apartment had distracted me from my original purpose in going shopping, that being, the now intensified growling of my stomach. I microwaved one of the premade

meals I had bought and quickly devoured it, not only hungry but also exhausted from all the ordeals I had faced that day. I wondered briefly if the cat would be the last of my problems for today, but I quickly put it out of my mind; to think about such things would bring them about, and that was the last thing I wanted right now. After finishing my meal, I threw the plastic tray it had come in into the garbage, before walking over to my bed and lying down, utterly exhausted. I would sleep now, I thought, but sleep simply would not come. I was anxious; I simply couldn't bring myself to doze off. I sat up in bed, frustrated. I looked to the floor and saw that, still, the cat hadn't moved and continued to doze peacefully. I considered moving it while it slept so soundly, but the thought of it waking up and giving me another scratch kept me from doing so, and, truthfully, there was no point in attempting to remove it, as it had already marked my hand with its claws, and so I would not be forgetting about it any time soon, so, its presence did me no real harm. Yes, it was a black cat, but I knew deep down that bad luck wasn't real, and there was something about its nature as a taboo, an outcast, that I found endearing, in some corner of my heart, I think it may have reminded me a little of myself, however I am no cat, so I didn't entertain the thought much longer. It wouldn't harm me to have the creature around, I hated the sight of it, yes, but I didn't hate it; I simply hated what it reminded me of, what it represented, what I associated it with. That was no fault of the animal; it had done to me nothing that I hadn't deserved. If I kicked it out, through physical means or some other method, what better would I be than the people on the street, who scorn me as I walk past them? Or the people in that building who wounded it, causing such suffering over mere superstition? I was better than that, I knew myself to be, and, in all my misery, I knew what it looked like, and the cat that

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slept peacefully before me had experienced misery. It seemed I had not been quite as unlucky as I had thought. In truth, this encounter might have even been a rare instance of good luck, something I had not felt in some time. I felt compelled to smile, even if only a little. I sat up in bed for a while longer, watching the cat sleep, and, before I knew it, I found that the sight of the sleeping animal had calmed me, and, soon, I drifted to sleep, slightly less lonely, and possibly even glad, in my heart of hearts, that the cat had found its way to me.

Fourteen



It has been two days since the cat arrived, and I still haven't made any effort to get rid of it yet. I may have grown slightly fond of it, maybe attached to its presence, or perhaps it provided me with something which, previous to its arrival, I lacked. I have been feeding it with canned foods, mostly tuna, yet soon I will need to leave the house to get more for the animal to eat, an act which I dread the very idea of. It surprises me, this twinge of attachment I feel towards this cat, which I dreaded the very sight of mere days prior; I haven't even engaged with it beyond feeding it during the day and watching it from afar. It did provide me a sense of entertainment, to watch it, though it did more than just that. Truthfully, the presence of the cat had alleviated the painful loneliness I felt. That numb, dull pain of quiet isolation had taken permanent residence in my heart, refusing to leave under any circumstances. I have been feeling lonely since adolescence; I have always felt a sense of isolation. This cat, it was, in some ways, a kindred spirit. A lonely, wounded creature forced to wander, looked down upon, and forced to live in exile. The miserable life of the animal that rested in my apartment mirrored my own, and, in that way, brought me a degree of comfort. I have been so lonely, bereft of companionship, that living alongside even an animal who shares in my displeasure seems like a blessing, an infinite weight off my shoulders. Early today, I sat watching the animal.

I did not wish to look out the blinds at the people below, because it usually brought me discomfort or misery, to watch what was so fundamentally different from me. I was watching the cat pace around the room, hopping from my table to my desk, then back down to the ground and around the room again. Pacing around the room with a slight limp on its still wounded paw. I found myself so consumed by thought about the cat and what thoughts must be going through its head that my thoughts were, for a long while, distracted from the usually more bleak aspects of life. I could still see that blur in my vision, and the cat reminded me of that night often, but I couldn't bring myself to focus on any of that. I was solely distracted by the animal walking around my room, carrying itself back and forth between the bathroom and the kitchen before strolling in front of the window and lying down to rest. Once the cat lay down to rest, I knew it wouldn't rise again for a while, so I stood up and walked over to the kitchen, boiling water to make instant noodles and stepping into the bathroom to relieve myself. Something in my gut told me not to stay away from the bathroom, no matter what. Still, I disregarded it, because what could possibly be lying in wait in the bathroom that could inspire such fear in me? To push forth such a strong instinct to flight rather than fight? Regardless of my gut, I walked into the bathroom, yet before I could use it, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and in an instant, before even turning to look fully, I knew the reason for the fear I had felt mere moments earlier. I do not know why, but before I felt repulsed or fearful or had any sort of reaction, I felt compelled to perform various actions, such as forcing a smile and raising my eyebrows, as if almost to convince myself that the man I saw was truly me. There was something horrifying in the face I beheld in the mirror, something disturbing and implacable. I looked for longer. I beheld the dark, tired brown eyes and

myriad eye bags underneath them that gave way to an unkept black beard, slowly growing to hide my mouth underneath it. The person I looked at, the person who, by all assumptions of how mirrors work, was supposed to be me, disturbed me in a manner I have never been disturbed before. There was something about his appearance, about my appearance, that felt distinctly missing, as if a warmth that was meant to be there had long since been extinguished. Something in me that I used to recognize myself had been removed, and what was left appeared a hollow vessel. I could not bring myself to stop staring into the mirror, to stop looking at this thing meant to be myself, and so I stared, trapped in time, ensnared, looking in shock at what should've been myself.

I finally snapped myself out of it and flung myself from the bathroom, straight past the kitchen, and onto my bed. I lay there for a moment, in shock at what I had seen, still struggling to make the connection that the ghoul I had seen in the mirror was, in fact, me. I had taken relatively good care of myself before, until those two weeks after what happened with the cat, where I hardly moved from my bed, only rising to eat and occasionally superficially clean, though most hygiene products were already near empty beforehand, and I was of no mind to replenish them. I suppose I really had let myself fall to that level, to be such an ugly creature as to terrify even myself. I flagellated myself for it, though I was interrupted by the noise of the water I had begun to boil before entering the bathroom. I rushed out and turned off the stove, leaving the boiling water to sit for a moment. The whistle of the pot had woken the cat, who seemed hungry, looking straight up at me. I felt ashamed even to show my face to the animal, knowing now what I looked like. But the cat didn't care, walking up to me to further signal

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its desire for food. I opened a can of tuna, scraping it into a small bowl and setting it on the floor. The cat looked up at me, purred quietly, before looking back down and beginning to eat the tuna. It didn't seem that it cared about my appearance, though I knew if I continued to live off the opinion of stray cats, I would certainly find things to be much worse long before my blindness worsens. I felt that one aspect of my suffering was alleviated, while the other was amplified. I was less lonely, yes, but to know the consequences of my neglect towards my appearance, to see the justification beyond the reactions of passersby at the sight of me, I must be the most disgusting person on the planet. How will I show my face? I shudder to think about it. I poured the boiling water into the noodles, letting them sit for a moment before eagerly beginning to eat. As I did, I looked down at the cat, happily enjoying its meal. It brought me comfort to have it here, and despite whatever else was grieving me at the moment, the presence of a creature so similar to me, even if it may simply be a cat, brought me great comfort. I finished my noodles and lay down to sleep, though it took me a long while to find rest, for I was unable to close my eyes without being tormented with the thought of what I had seen in that mirror and how my neglect had changed me far beyond what I had ever imagined possible.

Fifteen



I had a nightmare last night, though no matter how hard I thought, I couldn't remember what it was. I woke this morning in a cold sweat, my bedsheets soaked, and the cat mildly displeased at the ruckus. It took me a minute to ground myself in reality, as it usually does in the morning, though this morning was especially dreadful. I was still scared, still petrified by my dream, though I couldn't for the life of me remember what about it had terrified me so powerfully. I lay in bed like that for a while, with my phantom fear, my heart pounding as I tried to remember what I had dreamed, yet no matter how I tried, I simply couldn't trace it. It frustrated me greatly to be so terrified, and of nothing at all at that. I'd like to believe myself to be more rational than that, if anything. The fear quickly vanished, however, when I finally arose from my sweaty, stinky bed and went over to the bathroom, thinking splashing water on my face might bring me to my senses. Only to look in the mirror, and be met face to face with the terrifying visage that had kept me up the night prior. One look at my face was all it took to expunge all thoughts of fear in my head, and remind me why I felt so poorly rested this morning, and likely, what I had dreamt of that caused me such terror. I could hardly bear to look at the crumpled, ugly thing that stared at me through that mirror.

I exited the bathroom and sat back down on the bed, rubbing my eyes harshly before quickly standing again, looking out the window, looking for something to distract myself from the tumult of emotions that swelled within me. When you feel a pain for long enough, it begins to dull, you grow used to it, and the pain is no longer so harsh, but instead a simple gnawing feeling, a slow atrophy that you can identify as something which is killing you, but can hardly complain about. This was something I have long since accepted as a fact of life, and, though I despise the feeling nonetheless, it is something I can manage. The realization that came upon looking out the window, and realizing that I couldn't make out the same details that I was able to the week prior, was not one of these pains. The realization that the progression of my condition would not come solely in blotches of blurry vision in my peripheral vision, but also in gradual, unnoticeable degradation in the quality of my vision, was not one of these pains. The pain of that realization was, in fact, the complete opposite in fact. It was sharp, to say the least. A pain less like a cramp or a gnawing and more like a stab wound, or being bludgeoned to death. It was a pain that hit like a bag of bricks, and one that hadn't only struck me once. However, the pain did nothing to move me. The realization did not hit as it did the morning when my condition presented itself to me, or, perhaps, it did hit me the same, possibly even harder, yet it had hit me so hard that I simply had nothing left to react with. It had washed over me and left me with nothing. And so I sat, for a while, looking out the window, quietly thinking to myself all the details I now missed. Looking down at the people, the scurrying, endless crowds, and thinking quietly how difficult I found it to make out the details of their clothing, and silently frustrated at the fact that I now needed to squint in order to determine what shoes the people on the far side of the street were wearing.

Yet I had no emotional energy remaining to be used in order to feel upset, to lament, to cry; I could only watch, just as a man who has his head blown clean off with a shotgun does not weep for the loss of his head, he is simply gone. I write this now in the same state, catatonic, is how I would describe it. It is a departure from how I usually write, and though the transition from the previous entry to this one may be jarring, the quality of what I write is, at least for now, the least of my concerns.

My point in saying all this is that, for lack of a better way of coping, forced myself into this state of dullness. I do not believe that there exists in my body, nor my mind, the emotional passion to throw the tantrum I did previously. To vomit regrets and digressions onto a page and to mourn so fiercely. If I am to write anything, it will only be cold and detached, as is likely already clear. I have gone numb, and I cannot see myself being anything other than those things for quite some time now. Besides that fact, I believe myself to be unaffected. I think I will take advantage of this, using this distorted stoicism I have developed to accomplish things I previously couldn't. Maybe I will go for a walk later, yes, I think that is a fine idea, for in all my empty hollow chest, there is still energy that needs to be exhausted, something I need to use my body for, as I think. I sat for a long while at that window, thinking, and it has now been a long while that I have been sitting at this desk, writing.

The cat sits quietly, that animal could know not my plight, and I do not need it to. Though it did make me feel a twinge of happiness, the fact of the matter is that a twinge simply is not enough to compensate for the mental state I find myself in. I feel as if I sit within the

eye of the storm, in an extremely sane insanity, and one that I know I will quickly drift away from. I know something still bubbles within me, for even now I see, I write harder, more fiercely, even as I write this very sentence, the ink bleeds through the paper, marking it with words black as pitch and making a quiet scrape as the pen pushes the paper up against the wood. I have been, and continue to be, adept at reading my emotions. I had no friends and was deeply unhappy as a child, so there was little else for me to occupy myself with. Yet how I feel right now is something I have never felt before. It is something that defies definition, a feeling that seems illusory in nature, as it is no feeling at all. It is as if I am attempting to gauge the composition of empty space through examining it, to find the qualities of something with nothing left in its place. It is the strangest sensation, and it disturbs me to a degree. It goes against all my understanding of how my mind works, of how I feel sad, of how I exist. Feelings are supposed to feel, so why, why have I found myself in a position where the very idea of weeping at my situation seems alien? What monstrous thing have I stumbled upon and woken from its slumber with the deafening reverberation of pain that rang out from my soul, and how has it commandeered me so seamlessly?

Sixteen



This afternoon, yet not in the pitch black of night, but instead in the light of the setting sun, light that would usually bring me sadness, yet now only feels like heat upon my back. I grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, and nothing else, and left my apartment, walked out onto the street, and turned right. After turning right, I began to walk. I dared not look in the mirror before leaving the house, for I know myself to be tattered and hideous, but regardless, I can hardly convince myself that it makes a difference in my current state. I will be hated all the same; the people on the street will see it in my stride and my disposition if not in my hygiene, and once they do, they will hate me as easily as they breathe, as I have stated again and again. Yet, today is different. The glares of passerby do not matter, nor does the beating of the sun against my back. Instead, the only feeling I feel is a dull moan in my chest and in my stomach, an amplifying void that swallows my pale, miserable countenance and leaves nothing in its wake. I am less than filled with sadness; instead, now only hollow, lighter in stride, yet entirely purposeless. It is that fact that brings me greater pain than any; it is that fact that would compel me to take my own life were I in any other mindset, yet, regardless, my left foot steps in front of my right foot and continues as such to no avail. Life is a miserable thing to muse about, a terrible thing to contemplate, for it is so unbearably trite. Men have suffered,

as I do, and no doubt handled it better; have men lived happier lives only to think the same thoughts I do and believe that they are just as, if not more, justified in doing so. I have grown, in my isolation and in my unhappiness, to loathe the human condition, for it is the human condition that allows for such unbearable imprecision in the experience of living one's life. I have talked about suffering at length already, so I would like to make it clear that it specifically is not what I refer to in this moment. What I refer to is the state one finds themselves in when they think about themselves, the curious pit one finds themselves in upon attempts to turn inward, and be selfish for a slight while. To compare one's inward thoughts to others, and to believe that in that moment of thought, that the life one thinks so passionately or apathetically about, the life that one lives, is more important than the lives of those around them, and to believe that such a fact is justified solely in the fact that the life one contemplates is the life one lives. It's circular, backwards logic, and it makes terrible writing and even worse thoughts to occupy oneself with. It is easy to get trapped in thinking about it, in some inner battle, simultaneously attempting to convince the mind of both its importance and insignificance. It is a pain and a blessing to believe either. No man wants to think his life something important, for to place such emphasis on an existence is to create expectations, and to expect is to be let down. But it is equally as horrible to find the mind bereft of expectations, to believe the self is purposeless and lacking in value, a face in a crowd, a series of inconsequential thoughts drifting up into space and lighting up the clouds with terrible misery. I move my left foot in front of my right, and I move my right foot in front of my left. It has been a while since I took note of those who I walk past, and I cannot believe I am doing what I am doing, yet I have no will to suspend disbelief at my actions, to make the

connection internally in my brain beyond a singular thought that I am freely and easily doing something which I have spent my life in avoidance of, that I am being perceived and changed and brought down into this hell that I have longed so desperately to escape, this maelstrom of people and things and places and relationships and love and loss and- I can no longer put one foot in front of the other. I have walked so far that I have reached the edge of the city, and in front of me lies a large body of water, and hanging above me a gargantuan bridge, a monument to human perseverance and ingenuity, a mocking reminder of the qualities found in such abundance in a race that I cannot for the life of me belong to. Thousands of years of history and expectations and pride and beauty that I cannot possibly indulge in, a world that I will forever be an outsider to. I would say I am sad, I would say that it bothers me like nothing else in the world, I would say that I long to belong, but such desires within me are subdued and numb, dead and shot like a wild animal behind a barn, a rabid viscous creature that once wished to do things that others would not, and to act upon whims that would have, in some shape or form, satisfied him. Nothing resembling that remains now. I stand under that bridge and look into that water like a cold animal in the rain, like a cat with a mutilated paw. All the great gifts bestowed upon me at birth were destroyed in a great storm that began in my heart, no, I am no storm; I am nothing so powerful and formidable as a storm. I know who I am, and I should not attempt to embellish my current state, for I know I cannot and will not allow myself to fall under such a delusion. I am a cancer, I am a ghoul destined to hide in the shadows and to gaze with awe and disgust at the inner workings of a system which I actively hinder, a world which I do not belong. I believe I will sleep under this bridge tonight. I already look the part of a street urchin, no, something lower than

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that, for urchins aspire to live and sleep under bridges for comfort and warmth, which they do not possess. I am luckier than they are; I have a home and money, and I possess the means to be something resembling a human, yet, while they sleep here for necessity, I sleep here out of choice, for I do not deserve the abode of a member of a society who functions and plays his role. I sleep here to assume the role of an animal, of a cancer, of a thing unbelonging and alien, no, not alien, I was at some point, something resembling something normal, yet now, I am a cancer, a thing to be cut out and removed, and, so I will sleep here tonight, under this moment to pride I cannot know, and lineage I cannot be proud of. I will sleep here, under this bridge, numb. Even now, I write this under the bridge, my thoughts undeserving of the basic convenience of being written out on a desk, under the guise of civility. No, the veil has been dropped, the truth has been revealed. I write and sleep here like an animal, and that is all that there is to say.

Seventeen



I woke early this morning with no feeling of restfulness or even the sensation of having slept at all. It was as if I had blinked and the light had, in an instant, found its way back into the sky and the day had come. Despite the feeling of no time having passed at all, I knew it had for two reasons. One, it was day, and I knew the night had not truly vanished in the blink of an eye, two, and, much more important and meaningful than the previous reason, the tumult of despair I had felt the night prior, that had torn my rationale asunder and brought me to fall asleep under this bridge, had vanished, leaving in my stomach a pain resembling it which, though I knew the pain hadn't weakened or been resolved, no longer lorded over me so powerfully as to command my feet to move in spite of misery weighing my bones and my mind to toil in spite of total exhaustion of the soul. The ordeal had washed over me, the sharp, stabbing, murdering pain in my stomach reduced to a dull scraping, and that pain that made me its vessel for a time, while it remained unresolved, had left me sobered, under this bridge, with a terrible headache and a clearer mind to comprehend the gravity of the meltdown I experienced the night before. I heard the bustle of the street above; it must be sometime around eleven PM. I've been asleep under this bridge for almost half of the day; it's ironic to think that the soundest sleep I've had in months would happen not in my bed, but under a bridge. I stood up, turning away

from the water swaying softly under the bridge, before quickly realizing that I had become caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, I was hungry and wanted to go home and rest. Yet in order to do so, I would need to walk home, however long that would take, at least a half hour, in the middle of the day, when the streets are the busiest, and the people are most alert. My only other option, however, is to just wait under this dingy bridge, spending my time staring at the gently stirring water and the chipped paint on the bridge above it. Yet the rumbling of my stomach quickly illuminated the fact that waiting like a coward, waiting as I had always done, was not an option. It was not long after that realization that I, reluctantly, stirred forth the energy in my legs to once again put my feet in motion, one in front of the other, like I had done in order to get here in the first place. It was not long after that stirring of energy that I was back on the street again, moving my legs, colloquially, walking. I found quickly, however, that walking was not as easy as it was previously; my legs, like my mind, now awakened from their previous stupor and aware of the finer details of life that any decent, functioning person must examine in society, were quickly tuning themselves and adjusting their precision, making themselves conform all the regulations that one must follow in order to walk in a public setting. Maintaining the proper distance between my steps and keeping my feet spaced properly as to maintain balance while still looking collected, ensuring that the feet are not splayed too wide or contracted too far inward as to keep a proper posture, and keeping a ten-degree bend in my knee when my heel strikes the ground in order to make absolutely sure I don't trip on an uneven surface and humiliate myself. I do all of these things for separate reasons, yet all of those reasons connect to the one, single reason that stands above all, that being, not to stand out, or, more precisely, to not alert the people

of the street as to just how far divorced I am from what they are. I can appear to them homeless and disheveled and disgusting and stinky, sure, those are all qualities which a human can possess, and while I frown to imagine the inner thoughts of a person who may have walked past me in my current state, I can live with such humiliation, if I can just manage to scrape by without alerting the hive-mind to what I am, to how I fester under bridges and sit in a mire of my thoughts, yet still crawl back to an apartment resembling theirs, though likely much sadder, dustier, and bereft of life. I had covered some ground at this point, and my legs had fallen back into the familiar muscle memory regarding the rules imposed upon them, requiring much less conscious effort to maintain their comportment. I remember little of the prior day, the stupor of misery clouding my ability to reminisce, but the manner in which I walked down the street must have been horrific, and I shudder to think that I might encounter someone who saw me in the act of making my way towards the bridge. My disgraceful demeanor could only be justified by my even more off-putting appearance. My unshaved hair, my sunken eyes, my face robbed of color and life, and my clothing, dirty and smelly. My entire being was an attack on the senses, an assault on the idea of the civilized, modern man. If you were to show me to a crowd of homeless men and proclaim I have a home and food and all my needs accommodated, if you told them I have a shower with hot running water and an unopened razor sitting on my sink, practically begging me to shave, that crowd of homeless would likely leap upon me and tear me limb from limb, ripping my arms from my torso and my head from my shoulders before relishing in the gore that remains. Even the lowest station of society would be sick to find me using their struggle, their plight, as camouflage to disguise the fact that I am what I am. For almost the entirety of the walk home, my

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head has been held low, as the idea of even making eye contact with the people around me brings me terror. I take note of their shoes as I go, one person, a pair of white branded sneakers, jogging along; they speed up ever so slightly as they pass me.

Another, a pair of leather dress shoes, flawlessly steps around me as to not arouse even the faintest sense of an acknowledgement of my existence, as people like me are nothing but obstacles for people like that, people in leather dress shoes. There were many shoes on the street, and I took note of them all, yet the shoes I noticed last were my own. Dirty, black sneakers, with the sole peeling off a little around the heel, no brand like the jogger I took note of, if asked where I got them, I think I could only say that they simply appeared; they were shoes made to cover my feet, and nothing more. If I were to step on a nail, it would likely go straight through them, and if I treated them too harshly, they would probably fall apart without much resistance. They are shoes because if I were barefoot, it would be disgraceful, though, being barefoot is the least of my worries, as of right now. My feet slap gently against the concrete; my walking is clean and calculated, though I know it doesn't truly matter; it just helps me to cling to humanity. I could get down on all fours and gallop home yet doing so would bring my nothing but intensified sorrow, I have to hold onto something, I have to maintain just that little aspect of humanity, for if I let it all go, if I let the flame fully extinguish, it'll be fully gone, with no chance of being recovered, and that I cannot allow. As long as I can maintain this one little thing, this tiny spark, then perhaps the flame can be kindled again, perhaps I can clean up and strengthen my guise, perhaps I can make a recovery, but then again, there's the fact that I will be blind soon, and no such thing will matter, and so I cannot motivate myself

to worry too much about the future, just enough to justify living until the lights go out. I reach my apartment, my legs aching slightly. It was a long walk, both to and from the bridge, a walk I have never made before, and my legs, atrophied from my otherwise sedentary lifestyle, are sore. I walk into the foyer, past the mailboxes, up the stairs, and make it two floors up before seeing a woman, standing in the hall, grabbing a package from her doorstep. I stop for a moment, standing on the last step of the stairs, deliberating whether I should just walk past and hope she ignores me or wait for her to leave, yet I don't get the chance to decide, as she turns her attention towards the stairs, looking at me for a moment before pointing her finger at me and declaring to me, "You can't be here!" I took one more step, now standing on the level as her instead of on the staircase, and looked at her, still frozen. She spoke again, her voice rising to a quasi-shout, not angry or yelling, but a loud, authoritative volume, like a politician. "If you're homeless, then find somewhere to stay elsewhere because this is private property! I'll call the police!" She pulled out her phone. The police. That was the one thing I wanted to invoke the least; this woman would call the police, and when they arrived, and got to investigating, and examining and prodding at every single little detail, they'd discover me and load me into a car and stick me in some room and force me to speak to them and explain myself and have photos taken of me and, eventually, throw me in a concrete cell. That was one thing I couldn't take, one thing that I could not recover from. I couldn't run away from this. I would have to say something. I had to convince this woman not to call the police on me, or all would crumble, all would turn in upon itself and collapse upon me, and I would be buried. I would wish I were dead if she finished doing whatever it was she planned to do on that phone. So I had to do something, I had to speak, I couldn't yell and scare her,

and so I had to speak, and I had to do it fast. I quickly and quietly reached into my pocket, pulled out my keys, and hovered them in the air, holding them between my fingers before awkwardly sputtering out, “I- I- live here...” while pointing at my keys with my other hand, as if they weren’t already visible enough. The woman lowered her phone, slowly, with a shocked, sad look on her face. “Oh...sorry.” She said, much quieter than before. Before I could take even a moment to think about what I had just said, my feet moved almost autonomously, with no regard for the rules they so flawlessly followed on the street, flailing me up the stairs quickly in a series of movements that could only be likened to the sprint of a caged animal just released from its cage. I quickly ascended the rest of the stairs leading to my apartment, swinging open the door, entering it, and shutting it quickly before collapsing against it and sliding down onto the floor, lying against the door and breathing heavily, exhausted from both the borderline sprint up the stairs as well as the frenzied fear in my chest from my run in with the woman and the prospect of having the police called on me. I sat like that for a long while, looking around the apartment until I calmed down, a calmness that did not come easily. I looked and found almost everything unchanged, and the cat was fast asleep on the floor, in the same spot where it had been when I left. Truly, absolutely nothing had changed in my absence. It was clear that the stress of the past two days had taken a toll on me; it took no less than half an hour for the fear to leave me and for my heart to slow. It was only then that I stood, pouring myself a bowl of cereal, devouring it quickly, and sitting down exhausted in my chair, where I still sit now, as I write this, and heaving a sigh before returning the pen and paper I had taken back where they belonged. It felt as if an eternity had passed since that moment, when I decided to leave the house and walk until I couldn’t anymore. I still

do not know entirely what absurd force compelled me to do as I did; I know only that rationality was the last thing in control of me at the moment. I do not know how I will proceed now that I am home. Now that I am back here, everything returns to me at once. I have so much to think about, so much to contemplate, so many issues plaguing my mind. The woman I encountered and what she said to me. I can feel the weight of the key I used to prove my existence in my pocket, and the shame the woman's eyes placed upon me, like a stain on my skin. All the thoughts of the walk to and from the bridge sit with me too, and, most important of all, the catalyst behind all this chaos, my decaying appearance, which, while I know I possess the means to fix, I am left wondering whether or not I wish to do so, whether or not cleaner appearance suits me, or even benefits me. I am eaten up and consumed by all of these things, these ideas which paralyze and stir around me, and leave me no choice but to sit at this desk and write, as I do now, so that I might find some amount of clarity, some semblance of reason in my mind, some rationality that may be strained out of my confused and disorganized mind. Yet, if there is one thing I can say with certainty, it is that I am home now. The nightmare is behind me. The panic has retreated somewhere deep under my ribs, still pulsing in wait, yet repressed for now. My heart no longer claws at the walls of my chest, and my legs no longer twitch with the urge to run until I collapse. That much is true and is, among all the things plaguing me, a victory I can take at least some amount of bitter comfort in.

Eighteen



Alongside every failure, there is a second one, a Trojan horse that masquerades as something useful and, over time, causes much more trouble than the original failure ever could have. This second failure is regret, the regret of one's actions, of their shortcomings, of their misdeeds. It is unstoppable, unbelievably persistent. It is a nagging at the bottom of one's conscience that whispers to them that they are wrong, and that they are evil, and that they should feel bad about what they have done. That is not to say that such a thing is not useful at times, for even a broken clock is right twice a day, and there are some, obviously, some extreme scenarios in which one should truly feel regretful of their actions, yet for someone to find themselves in such a position, it is likely that they would've already forsaken their sensibilities. Yet, regardless of this small justification, regret serves very little practical purpose to a man who is merely seeking to find his way in life, a pursuit which many men spend their lives indulging in. Regret in those cases simply serves as an antagonist to their ability to remain cheerful and serves no purpose other than to torture them with the past.

See, failure comes not from the outcome itself, but from one's perspective of it. With this logic, one will never feel regret if they never occupy themselves with idealizing an optimal outcome and resolving to achieve it, and solely it. Getting hit by a truck is not something

to be regretted if one does not expect crossing without problem, one who steps outside every day expecting to be struck by lightning will find themselves pleasantly surprised each day, and if they were to be struck, it would be nothing but painful, there would be no regret, no sense of failure, only an expected future coming to pass. On the other hand, when one experiences something they perceive as a failure, when one comes to hold expectations for what they will tolerate in life, and those expectations are not met, they suffer instantly, without delay, faster than one's brain even realizes that something bad has occurred. As soon as one realizes the error of their ways, as soon as they realize the path they chose to travel led to an undesirable outcome, they feel that pang of terror in their stomach, that instant recourse that comes after losing a bet or being faced with an imminent loss, the jump in heart rate, the widening of the eyes, the empty feeling shortly afterward, all these things can be attributed to failure. Yet, without regret, it stops there, for one has no option other than to recover and move on, and that's where it should end. If the situation needs to be rectified, for instance, an argument with a friend or lover, then a normal, well-adjusted person should put themselves through the trouble to apologize and make things right if possible. Otherwise, they should do their best to move on if such an apology cannot be made. This is where it should stop, this is where it should end, this is where the misery should naturally end. One should experience failure, experience the aftermath, and attempt to rectify it if necessary. Yet, unnaturally, it doesn't stop there, for the slow and insidious killer, forever lurking in the back of the mind, will attempt to push the suffering further as a result of one's actions, further than it should ever otherwise go. So, unfortunately, the end result is that one finds themselves lying in bed, suffering from regret over a mistake that was made days, weeks, or

perhaps years ago, or talking with a friend and feeling guilt over something they said in the past, only to be struck with the pain once more and forced to ponder if the fact that if they remember it, then others may as well. These things, these reminders of the past, are unneeded. Truthfully, everything that must be learned from a failure is learned on the day of said failure occurring.

Regret is, at its core, simply the imposition of society, an emotion solely directed by what is deemed right and wrong by others, and not by one's own conscience. It is a fact truly unbecoming of all whom I encounter that they would seek to impose regret upon someone who wrongs them so freely, for it is a crime to make one regret a decision they made with a sound mind and a determined will, to make someone suffer over a failure which they have already atoned for. When I bandaged the cat, bathed in the light coming from the open window of the man who screamed at me for doing so, he attempted to make me regret it with his words, to convince me I was doing wrong, when I knew it was the opposite. It is people like that who are the worst of the worst, the product of a world that judges, restricts, and scorns others, without doing much else unless it is one of those three things disguised in some other form.

I have no real purpose in saying all this other than the fact that recent events have left me rattled to say the least, and while I have already spent much time contemplating said events, there is much I have yet to come to terms with, and so, considering I haven't left my apartment or done much of anything since getting home from the bridge, there is much pent up thought for me to release as well as a creeping boredom that I must stave away somehow, with my method of choice

being to write. I do not think that the thoughts above comprise much value, nor do I think many people would agree with them, yet it brings me relief to write them nonetheless, it brings me some cruel relief to know that, perhaps in some distant future when I am long dead someone will stumble upon these pages, and perhaps flip to this one directly, I hope that, at the bare minimum, someone can read of my struggle and afford me the pity I was never afforded in life. These writings, as inconsequential as they may be to the grand scheme of the world, are the only evidence of a truly unbound version of myself. A version whose thoughts flow freely and unrestricted, and every part of the whole contributes to the synthesis of the ideas which I put to paper, one of the only things I fear is that I lie to myself without realizing it, and, in turn, lie in my writings, do I put on a facade without even realizing it? I cannot know for certain, and that, above everything else, terrifies me. I will soon run out of food suitable for the cat, and as such, I will either need to let the thing go out and fend for itself, not an option in my book, or go out and get it food, which, considering my appearance which I hesitate to rectify for multiple reasons I plan to elaborate on once I fully understand them as well as the weighing anxiety I feel at just the thought of being ridiculed as thoroughly as I have previously, the thought haunts me. Yet no matter what decision I end up making, I hope only that it is one I won't come to regret, for I would rather die idly in this apartment than have to add something to the long list of failures which I spend my time, endlessly and against my will, regretting.

Nineteen



My vision got worse today, yesterday, and the day before that as well. The world is getting blurrier and blurrier, and my peripheral vision is almost entirely gone. I have no problems seeing things in front of me, but I feel as if I will never again have the sensation of seeing something out of the corner of my eye. I can't help but feel like I should feel more at that fact, that I should have some sort of grand breakdown which results in me ending up under a bridge or isolating myself further than I already have, but the further degradation of my vision no longer holds that sort of novelty to me. I feel no great dread or impending doom, nor much of anything really. The terror I feel when thinking of my condition has grown dull and tired, and I have grown far too used to it for it to give me any sort of shock or revelation as it has before. I have thought at far too much length about the future, and I have felt that aching in my chest far too much for it to have any profound effect on me. I feel it, truly I do, and it kills me to know I will never see as I once did.

Nevertheless, I know that no matter how great a tantrum I throw, there will be no change, no recovery, no discovery that changes my perspective on things, and so the only option afforded to me is simply to sit and feign apathy while waiting for it all to slip away. I

was awoken this morning by the cat, sitting at the foot of my bed and meowing impatiently at me. Once I stood and got my bearings, I realized that it wanted food. Upon walking to the fridge, where I usually kept the canned tuna I had been feeding it, I found nothing. The day I had anticipated had come, and it was time to go out and buy food for the cat.

I could've just let the animal stay hungry; it would probably find some other source of food if I didn't feed it, yet there was a part of me that couldn't do that, some fragment of empathy that prevented me from simply shrugging my shoulders and letting the animal fend for itself. I didn't have any deep emotional connection to the cat, after all, I hadn't even given it a name in all this time, yet this cat was the only form of companionship I had, and regardless of if it was sentimentality, desperation, empathy, or just sheer absurdity driving me, I knew that I needed to go to the store and buy this animal food. I walked into the bathroom and splashed water on my face before looking up and getting a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I was far beyond unkempt now, far beyond any sort of quantifier for how stomach-turningly disgusting a person could appear to others. I was beyond even the homeless, for with them it was at least unintentional. When I looked in that mirror, what I saw was the very concept of disgusting imbued into a creature that once resembled a man. My hair was greasy and unclean, appearing both soaking wet and dry to the point of appearing brittle like straw at the same time. My face was worse, wrinkled far beyond my years, and bags upon bags sitting sadly under my eyes. I must've smelled like a corpse, too, for the clothes I wore hadn't been changed in weeks, though I had grown far too used to the smell to notice anymore. This was all intentional however, for while I had the means to fix

my appearance, it was one of my thoughts upon returning from the bridge, that it may have been beneficial for me to appear this way, to present myself to the world as an assault to the senses, for it would make it easier for me to hide my inhumanity, to shield myself from the world and to ward off those who may look closer than I would have liked. My appearance, my stench, my disposition, all of these would keep people away from me, while, if I were to shave and shower and change my clothes, there is no doubt that I would be looked upon, or worse, approached by others, for they would think me to be one of them. This appearance, on the other hand, suits me much more than any other, for it allows me to conform while still remaining completely unapproachable. It is a perfect alibi with which to disguise myself, for who would willingly walk up to and engage with a disheveled, crazy looking homeless man, almost no one. It was with that thought and a steeled resolve that I walked resolutely out of the bathroom, out the door of my apartment, out onto the street, and began to walk towards the store, intending, this time, to stock up on enough supplies never to face such a conundrum as this again. I've never let my facial hair grow as long as it is now, and I can feel it brushing against the wind as I walk. I'd always assumed people just preferred to see others with shorter hair, because when one's hair is too long you can't make out their facial features as well, and it is generally deemed an important thing in society to be able to make out the faces of others, without being able to do so, it is almost impossible to read their intentions. I, however, benefit from none of the following things, for I am no businessman, no salesman, no stockbroker, nor do I belong to any other similar profession that values trust above all else, even the morals that may inform said trust, and requires seeing the faces of others clearly and at all times so that you can be sure of their true intentions. Whatever aspect

of the face that those trained calculating minds analyze to extract information about a person, it is no doubt obfuscated by my appearance. One could not even attempt to read the thoughts inside my head just by looking at my exhausted eyes, misshapen with bags, or by my mouth, entirely covered by hair. All that one could hope to extrapolate from looking at me is that I am filthy, deranged, and most importantly of all, not worth their time. There is a comfort that I feel in that truth as I walk down the street, a certain privacy as if curtains that have been open all my life have just been drawn. As I walk past people, I look at them, much blurrier than I remember, with much less detail. Yet my thoughts shift not towards their thoughts, but instead shift inward, back to my own. I think of the man in the suit going to work, the teenagers going out to eat, and the old husband and wife going to the park. It is the same perspective I have held my entire life, looking towards others and wondering what they think of me; however, that perspective has changed, and for the first time in my life, I find myself observing other people as I imagined they observed me. I have no clue when this change happened, perhaps sometime during or after my walk to and from the bridge, perhaps it is the product of the last couple months spent in near total isolation, or perhaps none of those things, perhaps people are simply easier to see through a blurry lens, and the often suffocating self much harder. Regardless of the reason, as I walk down this street, I cannot help but find myself looking at people, examining them, and not at all out of the corner of my eye, as that area of vision is far too blurry to do any sort of examining with, but by looking, really looking straight at them. The people on the street, unmasked by my eye, and when I look, when I look at them with this distorted visage, they look away, avert their eyes, or, even more absurdly, even take steps to move farther from me or to escape my obser-

vation. How bizarre, to think that the people I cowered before, the people I kowtowed to so readily, fearing exposure, fearing for my life! To think that those people now flee me, they look to me, and know in their gut that I am something they are not, something they are to ignore and disregard and to look scornfully upon. Yet I still exist; that's all that matters. I still exist in spite of all of that, and in spite of all of them. I walk on the street among men and I breathe in their air and I walk on their streets and I sleep under their bridges and I am not them but they can do nothing to touch me, to drag me down from this throne of trash which I have constructed, this castle I have built myself and the battlements which I have dragged myself upon to gaze contemptuously at all those people, the people of all ages and genders and walks of life who would once look upon me and who, now, are looked upon by me, and to exist above them, to exist above their thoughts, and past their judgement, it feels as if I am breathing for the first time since I was a boy. To feel the sun on my face, to feel the wind on my hair, it has been all too long since I have roamed during the daytime without feeling naked and exposed. Sooner than I imagined, I found myself walking into the convenience store; the walk was short and, for the first time in my memory, enjoyable, seeming altogether shorter than it usually did. The walk to the store felt less like a great odyssey through terrifying monsters and dire straits and more like, well, a walk to the store, as was supposed to be. I filled a bag with canned tuna, along with some other snacks and supplies for myself, and walked up to the checkout. I looked at the cashier; it was the same one I had paid with every other time I had come here, the one at the checkout aisle closest to the door. I looked at her, I mean, really looked at her for what must've been the first time as I handed her the cash, and she looked at me. She had a sad look on her face, as if she wanted to cry.

For a moment, I really felt like saying something, I really did, but something told me I shouldn't, something in my gut whispered to me just as it did before I beheld myself in the mirror, something told me I shouldn't say a word, that I should quit while I'm ahead, hand the girl the money, and leave. But, then again, something good came out of the mirror, I have a renewed view of the world through these blurry eyes and in these ragged clothes, that came from the mirror, perhaps my understanding will deepen if I just say something to this girl, just ask her what's wrong, go against my gut just this once, and allow myself to extend outwards, perhaps I will feel better, perhaps I'll find that my gut was wrong, as it has been many times before. I looked at her again, and she still had that sad look on her face as she counted the money slowly, though she and I both knew it was the right amount. I opened my mouth and, attempting to gather whatever shreds of bravery allowed me to speak back in the stairwell, I spoke to her, "What's wrong?" The voice sounded alien from my mouth. I can't remember the last time I took note of my own voice in any real fashion, and the words practically leaked from my mouth, falling damply upon the ears of the cashier. She looked at me for a moment with tears in her eyes, clearly hesitating before speaking, and I knew in that moment that I should've listened to my gut as her jaw opened a crack and the words slithered out of her mouth, "You look like you're hurting." I recoiled, my spine curved inwards, my toes curled in my shoes, and my untrimmed nails cut my palm as I balled my fist. I snapped quickly and grabbed the bag of groceries, let out a cold, quick, "Goodbye," and pivoted on my heels before flying out the door. How could she know? That was the only singular thought that ran through my head as I nearly sprinted home. Is it because she had seen me before and knew how I looked before my transformation? If she knew, did others on the street who had seen me

before? Why was she so sad? Why did she appear so disturbed by me, so bothered by how I'm "hurting"? I looked no one in the eyes on the way home, I didn't gaze into the eyes of those I passed, and I didn't concern myself with their eyes. All over again, that cashier stripped me and exposed me, and showed me that she knew, that she knew I was different, that my body did not truly affect my mind, and that it was possible to discern exactly in what ways. How foolish could I be, to think that of all the people I thought about who make it their job to read faces, that I would neglect to think of the cashier, someone who spends their whole day looking at people's faces and interacting with them, and to think that I was so absentminded as to actually open my mouth and speak, to instantly, with the tone of my voice and the manner in which I spoke, give away what I truly am, and expose me once more.

The borderline sprint home felt somehow longer than the leisurely, enjoyable walk there, and upon reaching my apartment, there, lying on the floor, was the deeply unsatisfied, voraciously hungry cat. I looked at the animal as it stared at me expectantly, alert at the prospect of finally having something to eat. I felt bad, having left it hungry for so long, but I had returned now, and all that was left to do was to grab a can opener, crack open one or two cans of cat food, and flip them upside down, letting the food slide out slowly and plop down on the plate on the floor. The cat instantly dug in, devouring the food with no regard for me or its surroundings. I thought of going and lying down in bed, but there was no point in doing so. I knew that no sleep would come to me after my encounter at the convenience store, and I couldn't simply move past how quickly a mere five words crumbled my facade: "You look like you're hurting." That was what she said, and

still, even after the run home, and even after feeding the cat, and even after sitting down and writing all this to process what occurred today, I cannot put into words what about that sentence destroyed me so effortlessly. Was it that she knew my misery? Or perhaps it was that she knew something else, or maybe it was just that she knows me more intimately than most; there must be a certain degree of understanding, watching me purchase groceries like the apocalypse has come every month or two. Whatever it was, the cashier's expression, the tears in her eyes, the words she spoke, they all wounded me. The entire interaction wounded me, yet even worse, I am completely incapable of figuring out what part of me has been wounded; is it a feeling in my chest? A thought in my mind? An ache in my heart? All of them? Every time something like this happens, every time I experience something like this, I can trace my pain to a part of my body, and I can manage it based on that sensory experience, based on where in my body the majority of my angst is concentrated. Yet now, I feel it nowhere, yet I know I am hurt, hurt badly, as a matter of fact, by the combination of that cashier's voice and face and the emotions behind both. Yet I am too badly crippled by said wounds and unable to see where I am hurt. I cannot help but think back to my encounter with that woman in the stairwell and wonder whether what happened back then is similar to what happened today. It is simply unbearable to think that in those two isolated moments, those women might've seen something in me that I have spent my whole life refusing to look at.

Twenty



I was looking out the window earlier today and realized I can no longer distinguish between men and women on the street; it is simply too far away for my eyes to make out, and all the colors blend into a blur. It was with that realization that I figured I should write, as there was no point in attempting to occupy myself with something I am no longer capable of, and I might as well cherish my ability to write, as I can still do so comfortably, without having to squint until my face cramps. It's a tragedy, really, to think that, through no real action of my own, I have lost the ability to do something as simple as watch the passerby on the street, something as essential as making out the difference between a man and a woman from a distance. I shouldn't be sad, though, it's just another addition to the long list of things others are capable of doing thoughtlessly, yet I cannot do for the life of me. Yet this is different, for in the past I could pin the blame onto someone, whether it be myself or others, there was a scapegoat, a reason behind my turmoil that I could trace and identify, and that much was enough for me to cope with, to know it was a consequence of action rather than sheer luck, and to know it was something I could occupy myself regretting if I truly wished to. This, however, my loss of vision, cannot be attributed to anyone; that's what makes it different, that's what makes it so painful. It is that pain of being unable to trace my suffering to a root that I believe the cashier

may have seen in my eyes and heard in my voice that day, that frustration, that trapped energy, that scream unable to find a mouth. It was that pain that revealed me to her; it was that pain that illuminated the darkness, shattering the illusion and allowing her to peer deeper than she ever should have. No, it wasn't that, it didn't come crashing down the instant she saw through the cracks, it was that inquiry, that god-forsaken, simple set of five words, spurred by that short millisecond glance taken at my true self.

I still don't know entirely how to put a name to the emotions I felt in that moment, what words to amalgamate to describe the manner in which my heart, brain, and nervous system all jolted at once as if shocked by enough electricity to cook a whale. In that single instant, my entire body revolted against my mind and told me to run, to go, to get out of there and not turn back. How pathetic, how measly, how cowardly I am. Truthfully, I still shake furiously when I replay it in my head; the emotional whiplash of the moment is simply too much for me to bear, even in recollection. It reminds me of the encounter in the stairwell, on the day I returned from the bridge. That woman who, in an instant, went from threatening to call the police to apologizing to me with a sad look on her face. Could she have seen the same thing the cashier did? And even so, what is it that they both saw that disheartened them so much, to turn the hostility of the woman on the stairwell into sadness and to shatter the composed neutrality of the cashier? Just what did they understand about me in that moment that inspired such sadness?

Could they have pitied me? Yes, that was exactly what it was: a look of pity. That's the word I've been looking for; that's the emotion

they both wore on their face as they looked at me. Not scorn, not contempt, not disgust, but pity. It hits like a truckload of bricks to think that those two might have felt such an emotion towards me. It was something I had only ever afforded myself, something I could never imagine a person feeling towards me, or something I could feel towards another, but yet, that's what it was. Yet before I can even begin to digest the gravity of this realization, I feel something brushing up against my leg, and, looking under my desk, I find the cat cozying up against my legs, before rolling over onto its back and falling asleep. Its paw is fully healed now, and judging by its significantly more rotund figure, it has gained weight as well. I pitied this cat; I pitied it when I found it, and I pitied it when I allowed it to stay in my apartment. It was my pity that healed this cat, that brought it back to health, while I have done nothing but decline. Could it be that pity is what I needed? Could it be that the look in the eyes of the cashier and the woman on the stairwell is what I needed? Have I been running away from happiness all this time?

No. Absolutely not. It makes me sick to think that I would even entertain that thought for a second. I am not a cat, and there is no amount of pity in the entire world that could lift me, that could elevate me from the pit that has swallowed me whole. I do not have something as simple as a mangled paw to be healed with a bandage; I'm going blind, and I am lacking in any and all aspects of humanity. I can't help but look at the cat again; the animal is dozing peacefully at my feet. There has never once been a hint of pity in that animal's eyes, and I don't believe it's because the animal is incapable of pity; no, it's because pity is an insult. Something given to those who are helpless and beneath oneself, something given to those who cannot help them-

selves. The cat does not see me as they did, or as others see me; it sees me truly: a kindred spirit, one who has been hurt and has nothing, as it did that day on the street. The cat and I have only each other, and so it is not pity we afford each other, but empathy. I am equal to the cat; we are both animals rejected from a world that doesn't have a place for us.

I cannot help but hear the cashier's words echoing in my head, "You look like you're hurting." I can feel my emotions towards those five words shift to anger and frustration at the cashier's audacity to say that to me. Who is to say I am hurting? What authority does she have to put a name on the emotions I feel? I resent her, I loathe her, to stand there and say something so presumptuous and then continue to go about her day, ringing up groceries as if nothing happened. To have such a luxury, to run one's mouth so freely at those you view as beneath you, to bring them such upset just to go home as if nothing ever happened. Beyond even that, beyond even the infliction of mental turmoil, for her, this measly cashier, to challenge my worldview that I have so carefully constructed, to stand there and force me to witness as my camouflage of filth that I believed would make me untouchable and unseen does the very opposite, and welcomes contemptible pity to my doorstep. I cannot help but wonder if there is anything in the world capable of hiding what is inside me, of truly obscuring what I wish to obscure. I don't know what to do, what to make of all these thoughts, all these realizations, all of these terrible revelations.

All I know is that I can no longer tell a man from a woman at the end of the street, yet a lowly bored cashier and a woman on the stairs can pin me down in a single glance and cripple me. Perhaps that is what frightens me most. That the world is vanishing from my sight,

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and yet it still insists on seeing through me. I will not make the same mistake twice, I will not allow anyone to see through me again, and I vow to myself that from this moment on, I will speak to no one. I will go blind, and I will die in silence, and never again will I be violated as I have been by the eyes and the words of others.

Twenty One



Yesterday, I thought things couldn't get any worse, though I knew myself to have thought something along those lines at least a dozen times at this point, but truly, what more could be taken from me? What new, cruel twist of fate could be thrust upon me to push me deeper into the ground than I already am? I have given up on masking who I am behind a veneer of filth and have instead vowed to disappear, to never again speak to another, and to remain here in this apartment until all has gone dark and this all can finally be put to rest. However, just like it has every time I have made such a foolish statement, or even hazarded to think that thought, to offer myself up that cruel comfort that it would be impossible for things to worsen, they have done exactly that. A truth I had to face when, after waking up with a terrible headache, making breakfast, feeding the cat, and spending a moment standing around, irritated at something I couldn't exactly place, I chose to open the blinds. I knew there was no point in doing so, I knew that no good could come of it, I knew that I could no longer even watch the people on the street as I did before. It was a purposeless, stupid decision, yet I was drawn to open those blinds nonetheless. What I was met with upon doing so was, however, far worse than anything I could ever imagine, for there was no subtle realization that an aspect of my perception was lost, or a quiet death of detail in the world that once otherwise existed, instead

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what met me was a stabbing burning pain that felt as if someone had driven a hot needle straight through my eyes.

I recoiled instantly, covering my eyes and shutting the blinds instinctually. Things had gotten worse, much worse, and regardless of my vow not to speak to anyone, I don't think I would be leaving my apartment to do so anyway, as it was clear that my condition had done more than simply make things blurrier or darker, and that my eyes were no longer capable of facing the light. There was a lingering white smear burned across my vision, and my eyes still burned as if something had attempted to boil them in their sockets. The blinds were shut, but there was still light in my apartment from the bulb in the kitchen. Upon looking at it, my headache intensified greatly, and my head throbbed as if it would explode from pressure. I rushed to turn the lights off, now standing alone in the dim darkness of my apartment, the only light coming from the cracks in the blinds and through the bottom of the door. It was then that I realized the gravity of the situation, the true terror that I faced. Not only would I be dying blind and alone, but I would be in the dark as well. I would not have the comfort of warm light on my face again. Something I took for granted so easily, something I considered a given, the basic comfort of a well illuminated room, thrust away from me in an instant, yet it wasn't truly taken from me, as with all things my condition had left its mark upon, it was never gone, simply ruined for me, or warped and transformed into something painful and torturous. I would spend the rest of my days in darkness, in a room with working lights and an easily accessible light switch. I wanted to sob, I wanted to curl up into a ball and sob and remain like that until the world ended. Yet still, in spite of all of this, I still found myself impulsively thinking that there

was zero possibility that things could get any worse from here; it just couldn't be possible. I couldn't imagine what could be taken from me, what could amplify my pain past the fever pitch it had reached. I sat down quietly on the floor, let my head drop into my hands, and tried to imagine a future where I was more miserable, more hopeless, more afraid, and no matter how hard I tried, I simply couldn't. I don't know what I was looking to accomplish, thinking like that, perhaps I simply wished to occupy myself, perhaps my brain could muster nothing else in a state of shock, perhaps it was some sort of comfort to myself, or, even, a challenge to the universe, to prove me wrong once more. Regardless, I persisted in that stupor, trying my hardest to imagine a more miserable me, a version of myself that knows true despair beyond what I know now, a version of myself that would beg on his hands and knees to be in the position I find myself in this very moment. Yet before I could find that version, I was interrupted from my meltdown, my panic, by the meow of the cat. It had finished eating and, seeing me on the floor, had come over to see what the fuss was about. It was especially deprived of detail in the darkness, only a silhouette against the blackness behind and around it, and only distinctive from it in its two gray eyes and white teeth. I had never taken note of its eyes before, but before I could examine them closer, the cat turned around and moved back into the darkness, out of my sight. I stood up and paced around the room, feeling around for the cat, yet I couldn't find it. This was, for a better definition, torture beyond comparison. I couldn't see anything because of the dark, but that didn't really matter; what mattered was that I couldn't see anything. I couldn't find the cat, no matter how much I wished to stroke its fur, something I had never done, or look into its eyes, which I had never taken note of, or just feel any shred of comfort, any kind of companionship in the darkness, which

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I found myself trapped in. For the first time, I truly, more than anything, above all else, wanted contact and comfort and I cannot find it. I almost deliberated turning the lights back on, but the thought of the pain I felt and the white smear still permanently affixed to my vision deterred me. I sat down on my bed helplessly. Perhaps there was no version of myself unhappier than I am now. Could this finally truly be rock bottom? Could I have reached the end of misery? I heard the cat meow, though it was impossible to discern from where. To think that I would be spending the rest of my days in a dark apartment searching for a black cat, it sounded like the opener to a terrible joke. Yet it was no joke; it was reality, and there was no escaping that fact, no matter how hard I tried. Sitting there on my bed in silence for what felt like hours, I began to take notice of other things in the apartment that had previously been overshadowed by other, more attention-grabbing stimuli that I was now bereft of in the darkness. The refrigerator hummed quietly in the kitchen, cars whizzed and honked distantly on the street, just barely audible, and there were occasionally footsteps in the hallway, a sound that unnerved me greatly, despite knowing it was nothing new; I was simply taking note of it for the first time. Much to my chagrin, this was my new reality, and there was nothing I could do about it. A nearly blind man stuck in a dark as pitch room full of working lights, spending whatever time he has left listening to the world move without him as he searches for companionship that he has made it his ultimate goal to be free from. The irony of it all is not lost on me, though it brings me no relief. Only now do I understand that I was never meant to witness the world at all, but to fade unheard in a corner of it, a smudge of life destined to vanish without leaving even the mercy of a shadow against the light behind.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As a result of the author's condition, each entry from this point on is increasingly illegible, with a significant number of sentences written partially off the page, overlapping lines, or extended sequences of meaningless scribbles and markings, the meaning of which is rendered completely indecipherable by the author's inability to see what he had written. Whenever the text could be reliably reconstructed and restored to legibility, it has been restored and presented as faithfully as possible. Readers should therefore bear in mind that what follows represents not only the author's final written thoughts, but also the final constraints under which they were produced and the ideas surrounding said constraints, which further shaped them. The disorientation, repetition, and fragmentation that appear in the following pages are, above all else, consequences of the author's condition, not a stylistic choice, but a part of the author's suffering; as such, the entries have been restored with such a thing in mind, with careful consideration to the tone and ideas they present. Said ideas have been retained wherever possible, in the belief that the integrity of the manuscript depends on allowing the reader to witness the form the author took as he struggled to communicate during his last days. No attempt has been made to soften, embellish, or reinterpret the content of these entries; even in their damaged state, they possess an immediacy and intensity that resists such interference. What follows, then, is presented exactly as it was left: the final record of a mind approaching its edge.

Twenty Two



Three days have passed since I shut the blinds and turned off the lights, and it has been dark and boring and in all ways miserable ever since doing so. I feel as if my capacity for boredom may reach its limit before I go blind. At one point, I tried once or twice to look out the window, knowing it would burn me, for no other reason than desperation for something to preoccupy myself with, but as expected, the light provided me no relief and simply burned away at my eyes, assaulting my senses until I had no choice but to recoil from the window, letting the blinds drop once more. Occasionally, I find myself contemplating, sometimes wishing, that something would happen to cure my boredom, to entertain me and alleviate me, to lift me up from this abyss and free me. Yet nothing ever does come to do all those things, though, remarkably, things to do happen, and change in such an environment. Unremarkable things, that others would disregard, a leaky faucet in the roof being fixed, a process I paid painstaking attention to, listening astutely to the wrenches and footsteps above me, and the subsequent cessation of the dripping. More personal changes occur, too. For one, I had a dream last night. In all the time since I have received my diagnosis, which has been, by my estimation, around six months at this point, I have never once had any dreams. Even in the time prior to that, however, I never experienced any dreams while I slept. I always thought it must have been because

my mind was preoccupied with other things, or simply the fact that I lacked imagination; regardless, the fact is that I have never been a dreamer, in any sense of the word. Yet last night, I dreamt, and not a simple dream, but in the most vivid, clear colors, and I found myself helplessly immersed in the dream, enraptured by it. It is now that I wake and write this, with a still near manic clarity about the dream itself. It was a bizarre dream, and I feel as if a mark has been left on my soul by it. I was moved to tears when I woke, yet still, I cannot bring myself to sulk and lament on the experience; it was spiritual, in a sense, and I am hopeless to describe the feeling of it. I can only go into detail about what I saw and felt, and hope that some amount of it is communicated, though I can hardly hope to do it justice.

I remember it vividly. I found myself standing, or, more accurately, wading, in an ink-black ocean, with a dark sky hanging in the air, fog resting on the horizon. The ocean was made not of water, but of some kind of tar substance, reaching up to my waist and restricting my movements; I could hardly move, though, there wasn't anywhere for me to move to. I turned around in the tar, through great effort, and found behind me, suspended impossibly in the sky, a monstrously large black cat. It was sitting atop the air upright, a darker black against the gray sky, before being suddenly illuminated as a halo of bright white light appeared above the cat's head, appearing from nothing and floating like plasma drifting through the air. I squinted at it, though it burnt my eyes, a pain which must have been, in hindsight, purely mental, considering it was a dream. It sat in the sky, thin as a razor, vibrating in the air like a struck blade. Suddenly, a rhythmic purring began to echo through the air along with it, and the large cat

opened both eyes, exuding the same light as the halo and forcing me to cover my eyes.

The darkness seemed to constrict around me and press into my ribs like ropes. The thing slowly ceased purring and spoke to me, though it never used anything resembling a voice. It spoke to me clearly, through the light from its eyes seeping through my fingers, attempting to shield my own; it communicated to me in an instant, and it said, without any possibility of misinterpretation, “When did you stop looking?” Which naturally led me to think, when did I stop looking? It was in that instant that it felt as if my hands had been over my eyes much longer than I originally thought; it felt as if I had covered my eyes long before the cat illuminated, long before I even started dreaming. I took my hands off my eyes and found myself unable to move, trapped in a void of complete darkness. I thought, panicked, that I must have sunken into the tar I was standing in earlier, and could no longer move within it. My fears were confirmed, as I felt the presence of the cat, and, smacking the surface of the tar, it communicated with me again, smacking the surface of the tar lightly with its tail, and bringing a dull thud to my ears. That thud, as the light did, communicated to me again, though I hardly understood how, it said clearly, “What did you do?” Before I could even answer, I found that the tar around me didn’t really feel like tar at all, and, upon squirming around slightly, the tar sunk away to find a series of constricting, arms, hands, legs, and thighs constraining me, wrapping around each of my limbs and my chest and, though previously masked with tar, were now clear to see. I pushed away fast and crammed to my feet, before looking down at the massed bodies that moments ago had cradled me to find that they were not simply random limbs and body parts, but my own.

Lanky pale arms, a small scar on the right knee, these were my body parts. I fell back, covering my eyes and recoiling at the sight, the only thought repeating in my head, Why? Over and over and over until the cat communicated to me again, as a light coming through my hands like before, and saying the same thing too, “When did you stop looking?” Suddenly, I uncovered my eyes, only to find myself back where I started, standing in the tar, looking at the cat. It was still glowing, though dimmer now. The cat stood, walking slowly towards me. I was deeper in the tar now and could no longer move. The cat’s tail flicked softly, beginning to glow, burning my eyes. I tried to close them, to cover them, yet I found that I simply couldn’t. No matter how I tried, my eyes would do nothing but remain open. The ring above the cat’s head began to pulse, brighter and brighter, illuminating the darkness further with each pulse, sending out a wave of brilliance and burning away at my eyes. Though I could not close them, I could only watch, and, as the light intensified, scream, as the cat grew further and further illuminated by the light, every detail, from the pores on its nose to the shimmer of brilliant on its black fur, was illuminated, before, suddenly, in the midst of all this, the monstrous cat bent down, putting its face right up to mine. I could count every whisker, every pore on the creature’s nose. It was remarkably beautiful, so much so that, through the pain of the light, and the terror in the face of the creature’s size, and even my previous fear at being stuck beneath the tar, it was beautiful enough for me to take notice of it, which is to say, it was exceptionally beautiful. Suddenly, the creature spoke again, “Do you miss it?” and, instantly, as if I had been there the whole time, I found myself in a grassy, beautiful field, with the setting sun to my back. The light didn’t burn; as a matter of fact, nothing felt like anything. I looked down at my body, only to find that I had none. I was simply

floating, floating in this beautiful field, with the setting sun, and the grass, and the leaves on the trees, unable to feel it. I looked to the sky, and to the trees and the grass, and appreciated it best I could. Perhaps this was a gift, regardless of my inability to feel it; perhaps this would be my last glimpse. Yet in my heart, something felt off, and as I looked around the field felt vaguely familiar, my concerns were quickly, unfortunately, proven right, for my peaceful appreciation of the environment was quickly broken when I heard the voice of a child and, upon looking in the direction of the noise, found a young boy with his father, swinging on a swingset. It was clear as day that it was my father and me playing at the playground near my house, before we moved away. Yet that was impossible; this happened years and years ago. It was then that I blinked, only blinked, and, before I even realized it, I was on the swing, and my dad stood behind me, pushing it and sending me flying into the air. He spoke to me, "Alright, you ready? Three, two, one, Jump!" before pushing the swing harder than before. I jumped, more out of instinct than any kind of rationality, landing awkwardly on my knee and scraping it open on the woodchips in the surrounding area. It was the same scrape that gave me the scar I saw earlier. My dad rushed over, holding me and asking if I was okay. I didn't hear a word he said to me, nor could I explain what it was that was going through my head at that point in the dream, but I simply began to cry. Now, as a child, I could have only been crying about one thing, the scraped knee, and that was likely why my dad hadn't questioned the scenario and simply picked me up and hugged me, and though I knew it was a dream, and I knew no such logic applied, I could only thing of how lucky I was that I had fallen back then, so that I now have an excuse to allow myself, in this dream, in my memory, to cry. For though my dad must have thought I was crying over my knee

in that moment, I was not, for I could only be crying over one thing, and it was the answer to the cat's question; I was crying because I missed it. After all, I missed being alive, I missed the moments in which the burdens I carried weren't at the forefront, and when life seemed to have paths for me to diverge upon, though that is all gone now. I was there for a while, in my father's arms, and I would be a compulsive liar if I didn't say that it made me happy, that I wished I could go back, to the sunset on my face and the smell of grass in the air, and that sense of being carefree, of being alive. When I finished crying and opened my eyes, I found myself on my knees before the cat again. I wanted to say something, I wanted deeply to ask some sort of question of it, to beg some sort of answer or knowledge from it that would bring me whatever it is I wanted, some combination of words that would make me happy, that would in an instant fix my problems and make everything alright, just like my father would after I cut my knee, some simple, plain combination of language to alleviate my burden. But it was clear without a word being spoken either way that the cat had no such words, and neither would I, for such words could never exist. I sat there for a moment, looking up at the monstrous yet magnificent animal, which, in response, looked down at me, before slowly bringing its head down, touching my forehead gently against its own, before slowly moving away, and purring with finality before I am quickly grabbed and pulled down into the depths, I feel myself sink deeper and deeper as the hands and the legs and the interlocking mass of my own limbs within the tar drags me deeper. My head tingles, and I feel the words from the cat resonate into my brain, truer than anything the cat communicated through sound or through light, the touch of the creature's reached deeper than any other form of communication it had used, and thus it spoke five words, five words the meaning

of which I knew in an instant to be as an answer to its original question as well as as a final response to me “You let everyone down, you failed us all, you forgot us.” It was with that statement that I awoke with a jolt in my bed, drenched in sweat, the cat sitting upon my lap, slowly dragging its tail across my leg while watching me. I looked at it for a while, registering what just occurred, before reaching towards it gently and slowly, attempting to pet it, yet as soon as I touched it, it turned into dust, drifting into the darkness as if it was never there. I was then left alone once again, to process the events of my dream in silence, as I do now, writing this. I have no words for the experience I had tonight. I can still see the field, the sunset, my father’s arms around me, and the knowledge that none of it will ever return. I am not caught up in any kind of nostalgia or desire to return to that day; that isn’t what bothers me. It is the realization that I had all that, to think that I had so much latent potential in my veins, so many chances to take the right path, to have a good life, to be happy, and still, still failed at every step. I shudder to confront it, just how badly I have dropped the ball on it all, just how awful a path I have driven myself down. My failing vision is only the body catching up to the life I have lived. And as a result of all those efforts, or lack thereof, I now sit here in this dark room, too exhausted to cry, and too aware to pretend I do not understand what the dream wanted me to see. I had other options; it could’ve gone another way, I understand that. The worst part is not that I understand it, though. The worst part is that I cannot imagine ever choosing otherwise.

Twenty Three



The darkness has grown darker in recent days, darker still than what I thought possible originally. It seems as if it is nighttime all the time, and things are quiet. I still find myself thinking about my dream, about the revelations it presented to me, and how clearly I understood them, without argument, without debate, a true, inarguable presentation of my failures. It pains me, it pains my heart. I stood earlier today and simply began to drift throughout the apartment. I slid my legs slowly, feeling myself sway around like a gust of wind blowing upon the street below. I felt free, unstructured. I couldn't see my surroundings well in the darkness, so I drifted slowly, feeling around for things so as not to bump into them. I drifted through my apartment like this slowly for a long time, what felt like an hour, though I do not know. As a matter of fact, I'm not quite sure how many days have passed, either. I lost track at some point after shutting the blinds, and I'm not sure when. My drifting was eventually interrupted by a noise, a soft meow through the darkness, causing me to freeze in place so as not to kick the cat accidentally. I knelt, seeing its piercing gray eyes through the blackness of the surroundings, and put my hand on it, petting it softly. It purred, lying down on the floor in front of me. I sat down with it, continuing to pet it for a while, peacefully. I wondered why the cat was allowing me to pet it now, of all times, after all, it had never come so close to me

before. I didn't care; it felt warm, it felt safe, it felt like a companion. I lay down next to it, still petting the cat gently. It still didn't move. It was the greatest companionship I had felt in a long, long time, since the lights went out. I lay with the cat for a long time on the floor, and was immensely comfortable to the point that I fell asleep.

Upon waking up, an indeterminate amount of time later, I found that the cat still hadn't moved; it was still in the spot where it had been as I was petting it. I reached over and pushed it slightly to awaken it from its nap, yet still, the animal wouldn't move. Was it sleeping that deeply? No, if it had been sleeping, it would've scratched me for pushing it and disturbing it. I put my hand on it and shook it gently, but there was no response. I put my hand on the cat's neck, feeling for its pulse. In that moment, the quiet humming within the walls of the apartment, only perceptible in absolute silence, seemed to sing a devastating, destructive, repugnant choir to the beat of my heart, and to the silence of the cats. The latter of which sat dead on the floor, its heart stopped. My entire nervous system shook and cringed, and I could do nothing but turn and vomit. The cat, the cat I had saved and bandaged and nursed back to health, that cat which brought me much comfort and which I staked so much in the name of, was dead. It sat dead on the floor, and I sat with it. Why? Why was the cat dead? What had happened? Why was my only friend lying on the floor, cold and motionless? I wished to sob, but I couldn't bring myself to do so, I couldn't shake that dream, I don't even know how long it has been since that night, how many days have passed outside since, but the words of that cat, even in these circumstances, just won't leave my head, even worse than the cashier or the woman on the stairs, they feel like nothing compared to what I face now, those words from the

cat, "You let everyone down, you failed us all, you forgot us." I know I let them all down, I know I failed, but who did I forget? Who could I have forgotten?

What could I have— The realization hit me like a ton of bricks, harder than that, harder than any logical deduction had ever hit me. The regret I spoke of, to say that I felt a downpour of it so drastic I felt I would be washed away or sanded down to nothing by the tumult of it all. To say that my spirit to go on, already crushed beyond recognition, was removed from reality entirely would be an understatement, because the sheer crushing weight of failure and regret bearing down upon me in that moment could have rended the most prideful of men into ants scurrying around in the dirt. I ceased vomiting in an instant, and clambered to the cat's bowls, two cereal bowls which I usually filled with water and canned tuna, both were empty, and completely bone dry at that. I moved every limb at once, like a freakish animal of the night, I knew where it all was, I had been in this apartment long enough, I didn't need light, yet, I needed to see, I tore at the blinds, just how many days had passed, that I had lost my sense of time, that I had lost my ability to function, I ripped the blinds open, only to find that no light flooded my room, no relief from the blackness. However, it was not nighttime; I heard the cacophony of people beneath me, the cars going past, the woman calling for a taxi, the dog barking as its owner chases it down the street. The world was bright and moving, and it was going on as usual. I saw, in spite of all the lively color and life I heard, nothing but darkness, no light illuminated my view; the world was black, the world was abyssal, endless nothing, an array of sounds in an empty hell. A sinner kept in captivity in his dark tower, his dead companion who met his fate at his neglect mere steps behind,

a sinner trapped in hell, yet a sinner is not innocent. A sinner cannot be innocent, for a sinner sins. A sinner lets everyone down, fails everyone, and, most of all, a sinner forgets.” The streets are busy, and the wind moves through the air in a breeze of vitality, and yet all is black.

The homeless man on the street begs for money. I can hear the coins hit the cup in his hand, making a rough clinking noise. The noises of the world are so beautifully descriptive, yet the only one I wish to hear, the meowing of a black cat, is no longer present, no longer exists for me or in me, and so the universe may as well have closed its doors. I have never been a religious man, yet whatever afterlife turns out to be the truth I just know that it will deem me despicable, for I have been despicable, I have been selfish, and the worst of it all is I am too far gone for these realizations to mean anything, to do me any good, for worst of all, I am scared, I have been scared and I have been conquered by fear, and I realize that, though such realizations will do for me no good. The delivery man is barked at by a dog while doing his route, the garbage truck drives past, the man aboard it grabs garbage cans quickly and dumps them in the back before continuing, and the biker is yelled at by a man in a car. All of these things, all of these lives, all of these somewhere in the abyss where my presence rests. I am not capable of moving through these dreamscapes that these people inhabit, though I can see them all. I see them all, and I weep for I will never know what it is to be them, to echo the sounds they emanate, to be a thing that makes up a world, that creates a community, that brings things life and structure, and to make a life worth living. That could never be me; the chance was gone, yet just like the loss of the cat and my vision, it wasn’t ever truly taken from me. I forfeited it, and that was the only truth there was.

Twenty Four



The wind blows refreshingly in my face, and I hear it flow through my hair, though it is an odd sensation, for I haven't the slightest idea what my hair looks like or the length of it, so all I can gather is that I have hair, and that hair blows in the wind. The window is open, and yet I cannot see it, nor can I see the wind that blows through it, though I have never been able to see that. I wonder if there is someone out there capable of seeing the wind, of seeing it drift weightlessly through the sky, causing the world to sway invisibly with its motion. I could almost envy them, being able to see the unseen threads of the world so clearly, to see what composes the tapestry of day-to-day life. Though I am in no position to envy, nor to desire anything, for that matter, for today is the day of my death, and that is all that should be on my mind, yet, it is the last thing on my mind, it is the least of my concerns, and no matter how my heart aches with regret and tells me to weep and lament, I am unable. I am unable because it is hard to discuss death, and I am not good at doing hard things. If I had to guess, it is for that very reason that I cannot see the wind, but I digress. I must digress, for as of right now, I can hardly do anything, and so there is no point in idle thought about being capable of seeing the wind, when it is only through sheer instinct that I am able to write on this page. The wind is blowing melancholically on my face. And a shiver runs up my spine as my mind forces me back to

it once again, the dead animal, lying cold and still on the floor behind me. I shouldn't call him an animal anymore, I really shouldn't. It makes me sick to my stomach all over again to do so, but to call him something else, a friend or a pet or otherwise, and to only do so after he is gone, I feel as if that would be even worse.

My whole purpose in isolating myself was avoiding a situation like this, avoiding this pain, this loss, this feeling of losing something beyond my life or my vision, but I failed nonetheless. I am left here now alone, with grief I never bargained for, yet accepted all the same. I was a fool to think I could erase myself without harming anything around me. So, as a result of my actions, I am a murderer. I have neglected and murdered my only friend, and there can be no reconciliation for such an act. I never even gave him a name; he was always just an animal, or a cat, or a creature, but never a name. He was a stray, and he was scorned, and I found him, and I healed him, and I thought myself to be doing a good thing, to be virtuous, to be better. Yet I failed, I failed to give my friend any love, I failed to squeeze out even an ounce of real compassion from my heart, just as I have all my life, only mimicking virtue weakly without ever truly embodying any sort of love. I have done all this shamelessly, and for that, I am worse than a murderer, for I have not the strength to embody evil, nor goodness, so I am idle, I am an idle killer who kills with his stagnancy.

Yet, despite all my grand revelations of failure at every step, the wind is still blowing on my face, the street below still buzzes with noise, and, still, my one and only friend sits dead on the floor.

For the world cares not about revelations and realizations, the world pays such things no mind, for they are only thoughts, and thoughts on actions that have already occurred change nothing. My understanding cannot bring my vision back to me, nor the cat, nor anything else that has been lost as a result of what I have done. It is done, and so there is no use in fighting it. I have made choices, an endless amount of them, choices wrought with mistakes and regret, and now, I find myself meeting the consequences of those choices, consequences that I wrought upon myself and have no right to complain about. Consequences that sting and poke and burn me ceaselessly, for that is what I have earned myself in my journey towards oblivion. I cannot help but wonder what I would think of myself, were I to see the state I am in now back then, when I first got my diagnosis. I wonder if I would recognize myself, if I would recognize my face as belonging to me, or if I would be repulsed by myself. I cannot know, I cannot know what the man who lived that day would think, for I am no longer him. I wonder too what my father would think, if he would recognize me as his son, or as a person at all. I long to know the answer, yet it is an impossible thing to know. I cannot help but feel attached to the past. I cannot help but cling to those memories, those moments drifting away now so freely in the wind, drifting away as I soon will. My emotions, too, drift freely and weightlessly. I am more sorrowful than I have ever been, more frustrated, more of all things which weigh on one's soul and bring them struggle, yet these things do not weigh me, they do not compel me to cry nor to scream, they simply exist, their impact exhausted. I say all these things, about how I feel, and what I think, knowing there is no longer any purpose in doing so, and I wonder had I thought all this sooner, would there be something that could be done, some course of action that would've led me somewhere differ-

ent and altogether preferable, but such ideas are meaningless, even if there was such a path, it's gone now, along with any hope that existed with it. I have failed, and there is finality in that failure that cannot be overcome. The path I have chosen to walk is ending, and there are only so many steps that I can take from where I find myself now; none of them are exceedingly pleasurable, though I have no choice but to take them. I don't know why, but now of all times, I find my mind drifting back to the woman on the stairs and the cashier at the convenience store. I am less afraid of what they said now, maybe simply because there is no point in fearing how others perceive you when you won't be around to be perceived, but truly, I believe that their words no longer scare me because, looking back, I understand them now. The woman in the stairwell, the way her disposition changed when she realized I lived in this apartment, the way her entire attitude shifted, it terrified me at the time. The look of recognition on her face, recognition of the fact that I didn't appear to belong here, and the fact that the only thing that gave validity to the fact that I wasn't some cold homeless man seeking warmth was a set of metal keys, which seemed to be, at the time, more human than I was. Yet, I don't see it like that anymore. The reaction of the woman hadn't resulted from a realization that I wasn't human or was in some way different from her; it was the fact that we were alike, the fact that we were both human, in her eyes. The disheveled, deranged-looking man in the stairwell was living just a couple of floors above her. It would've brought her more comfort to see me on the street, that I'm sure, but I can find nothing wrong with her thinking that. I was so terrified of put under a microscope, of her calling the police and examining me to find that I was nothing like her at all, but that was never her fear, as a matter of fact, it would be preferable if I were to be something alien and different from her, as to

see someone so similar to you in such a state, it would disturb anyone. It brings some small, insignificant amount of peace to come to terms with that experience finally, yet said peace is nothing now, and can go nowhere. Perhaps had I made such a realization months ago, when the experience was still fresh, I would have been better off, but I must stop myself. I have talked enough about what could have been; it is already clear to anyone that I have squandered all chances of redemption. The cashier, too, comes to mind, how those words tortured me, how they do still, yet I cannot help but blame myself. It was inevitable, really, I was stupid to think that I could go to the same place each month, and not expect her to say something. However, as ridiculous as it may sound, considering the anguish it brought me, I'm glad that she said what she did, I'm glad that she spoke, just as I am glad to have experienced my dream of the cat, for I could not reflect as I do now otherwise, I would not have been pushed as hard, and I would undoubtedly leave this world more of a fool than I already am, something which, in spite of all the shortcomings I have accepted, is something I would rather avoid. "You look like you're hurting." I have probably repeated that sentence to myself in a frenzy more than I have any other combination of words throughout my entire life. Though despite all the time I spent curled up in turmoil over those words, I never truthfully understood them, that is, I never understood them as the girl who spoke them did. There was never any moral intent behind those words, never any grand meaning which I failed to grasp; it was simple, so simple beyond belief. I simply wanted anything but to accept its simplicity; it was so clear, so simple. I did look like I was hurting, I was disheveled and unkempt beyond words, and my eyes were undoubtedly emptier than any, and I was shopping as if a nuclear fallout was occurring the next day. What would I have said?

Were I the same age as the girl, working at a convenience store? Likely nothing, I would think the man in front of me was deranged, and would hazard to even glance at him. Perhaps that makes me just as bad as those who I believe hate me, the passerby on the street, whom I so obsessively ignored, narrating their thoughts in my head. The cashier did nothing wrong, nor did the woman on the stairwell, nor did anyone else whom I directed my fear towards, the nobodies I passed on the street, those who I believed to be staring at me and examining my every step, did I ever once even look up to see if their eyes were directed at me? Sure, I felt everyone watching and analyzing me, but how does one even feel that? What was I so scared of all this time? Was there a single time when I really, truly, was being examined by someone other than myself? I can't help but instinctively grip the window as I realize it, and the realization crosses my mind just as the wind breezes across my face. For the first time, clarity, and a final declaration of the soul, a whisper, that's how it hits you, and the crystal clear presence of an unmistakable fundamental mistake, an original sin, the seed of festering cancer-like anxiety planted in my mind from a young age and corrupting all that it touched. It was always just me, no blindness, no people, no society, no lack of humanity, just me. I did this very carefully, in fact, over very many years; I chose to walk this path, and now I must see it to its termination. With that knowledge, my grip on the window tightens even further, and I lean forward to drift upon the breeze, and, for the first time, I leave my apartment without hesitation.

