

It felt like I was freezing to death.

Pale white, my hands fumbled along the rough edges of my coat, searching for the pockets that would be warmer, should be warmer, more comfortable than outside the jacket where it was colder and damper than hell, even though hell was supposed to be warm, and I knew that it was a dumb simile to use, but it seemed better than describing the cold as ‘colder than shit’, which was even more of a stretch.

To me, it didn’t matter how I put it, because I was cold, and confused and damp, standing outside alone and lost on a drab sidewalk that stretched forever towards the hovering cloud that flittered just inches from the ground.

I didn’t recognize a thing. I didn’t know the building I’d just left or the sidewalk that I stood on. My eyes followed the sidewalk, in awe of how it seemed to wander on its straight path forever, at some point becoming indiscernible with the clouds that made everything so socked in and claustrophobic.

It had been cold all day. I woke up cold when my eyes slowly slid open in the dark unfamiliar bedroom. Nothing seemed familiar, except for the plume of air that slowly exited my mouth and cut across the one small patch of light in the room that escaped through a crack in the thick curtains just above my head. I’d seen that plume before, on chilly winter mornings as a kid when I played outside, or when I sat on a chairlift night skiing. I knew I’d seen that white vapor before, but in the weird bed in unfamiliar room, I wondered if it really was my breath making that vapor trail. Was it that cold in the room that my breath would make a white coke trail across the room much like a airplane would crossing high above in the freezing winter sky?

In the first seconds after waking up, my eyes searched the room, looking for things I knew. Gone was the warm red hue of the clock radio that sat at my bedside, the bookshelf above my bed replaced by a window covered with thick red curtains. With that I knew I wasn’t home, because I had blue curtains in my room.

The room I was in was grey, or mauve, maybe Winter Ocean blue. Was that cerulean blue maybe? I wasn’t too sure, but I knew the room wasn’t bright enough to be painted a white or beige. The color of the room seemed to suck everything in, leaving no details to be seen. Maybe it also sucked in all the heat, and that was why I was so damn cold, although it didn’t help that I was naked, a goose pimped popsicle that felt sticky with sweat and the remnants of whatever had led me to this strange room and uncomfortable bed.

And I rarely slept naked. Ever.

Being confused made shadows out of nothing and colors duller than normal. I had no bearing of what lay beyond the bed that I lay in. It could be a studio apartment or old stone mansion, but in the bed, I couldn’t make heads or tails of what was past the shadows. Only my imagination ran wild as my muscles twitched and pulsated in unison, hungry for clothing and the comfortable embrace of my bed, not this lumpy futon that I was laying on. And who’s futon was this? I tried to think quickly, wondering if I knew anybody who owned a futon. A friend, or friend of a friend maybe, or a sibling of a friend... Sure, I knew lots of people who at one time had owned a futon, friends who had

gone through minimalist phases, or people whose parents had separated and the best they could do was buy a futon and stick it in a corner of their father's one bedroom bachelor pad downtown. But most people's dalliances with futons had lasted no more than a week, maybe a month or so until their backs gave out and they quickly abandoned the dream of living in a three tatami mat room in Tokyo, living on vegetable tempura, udon noodles and Sake.

Everything seems easy and idealistic until you have to sleep on something, or somewhere, or with someone.

The someone. I heard a sigh beside me, the unfamiliar touch of naked skin against my thigh. Beside me on a pillow more off the bed than on, I saw hair this way and that, a thatch of hickory brown curls that hid features and snaked towards my elbow with graceful mischievous arcs. Wow, she had great hair, and seeing it for a second made me pause, almost remembering why I'd ended up with her in the first place.

I almost remembered those beautiful curls, and fogged over and fell prisoner to the cascading autumn colors that seemed to be moving towards me.

Confused, I wanted to touch it, draw my fingers through it, but thinking made me feel unwell and made my anxiety unbearable. I needed to know why I was naked on a futon beside someone whose hair looked like water flowing from a third world running tap, brown and rusted, orange tinged and never ending.

There were more breaths, a sigh and more plumes of warm air battling into the cold room as I stared. Beside the bed I saw a muffled dull blue glowing two feet from my eyes, and curious I reached out and lifted my shirt off of an old clock radio that shone reluctantly underneath. Curious, in the soft blue light, I held my shirt up to my nose. It was wrinkled and smelly. I hoped that maybe the smell of my shirt would bring back why I was on that futon at that exact moment. Maybe I would smell flowers and perfume, things that would trigger a face, a place where I knew the hair beside me from. Or cigarette smells, a reckless odor of nicotine and the walls of a bathroom, urinal pucks wafting into my nose from a night on the tiles. Of debauchery and random meetings, dancing with girls with red-rimmed eyes and a swagger of being sexy and drunk. Sexy drunk. But the smells of my shirt were nothing but the smells of my shirt, a mix of body odor and deodorant that were always present, had been with me since I was ten. That was nothing new.

I pulled the shirt over my head and stared at the clock that glowed an unconvincing 6:24 AM, and it struck me funny because I never woke up this early.

Prickly and tingling with the buzzing of a thousand chilly bees, I slid my numb legs out of bed and they fell to the floor like rocks from a cliff. With a thud, my heels bumped into something hard, then came to rest on a pile of clothes. Blind, I searched in the darkness, my hand skimming the floor like I was dipping my hand unknowingly into a pre dawn wintry ocean, dragging across the surface unaware, brushing against the waves of fabric as my hand slowly floated through each piece of clothing, looking for the familiar touch of my coarse boot fit jeans that I'd been wearing. And that was a positive thing, remembering that I had been wearing those new boot fit jeans that I'd bought just two weeks ago. I remembered everything about them, but nothing about the night before.

Pulling on my jeans, I tried to be quiet. Every move I made caused the figure in the bed to sigh and toss and turn, their hair coiling like the smoke from many sticks of thick incense, their teeth gritting as I fumbled feebly with my button fly.

Loudly, loose change came tumbling out of my pockets, a cascading sound of sleet on a tin roof that made the inside of the room suddenly loud like a playground, awakening memories and echoes of gravel on a metal slide. Hard things falling on loud things.

After that, it got quieter than anything I'd ever heard, and holding my breath, I stood still as the figure's breathing quieted for a second, dormant senses searching momentarily, then back to normal with a cough and snore.

Tiptoeing, I navigated around randomly placed furniture and piles of books. I stubbed my toe on an ashtray stand that was shaped like the Space Needle. It towered beside a TV that glittered in the same ray of light that had highlighted my breath not too long before, the same light that fought through the small opening in the thick curtains, oddly red hued and giving the overall impression of fire, contrasting with the coolness of the room that was as far from burning as possible.

In fact, I wish it had been burning so I could've run out without looking for my shoes and jacket. I wish that there had been a gun to my head that would've forced me out quickly and in such a mad dash that nothing would've mattered. I wanted to run and not give a shit about the consequences. But that was stupid, and I wasn't stupid and knew that it would be dumber than anything to leave my stuff behind, because then I'd have to come back some other time and pick it up, and that was not a good idea, since I had no idea where I was in the first place.

More sounds in the bed, a sigh and the swish of covers moving against a warm naked body. I wanted to see what was there, who was there, what shape I had woken up next to. I felt the contrasting feelings of nausea and horniness battle in me, but I knew I had to leave.

I headed for the door. My hand turned the door handle, and surprisingly whisper soft, it opened and I stepped out into the air-conditioned white noise of the hallway, closing the door with a barely audible sigh behind me.

From darkness to light, I was stunned. The patterns in the hallway were too bright and long, the floor carpeted with the colors of a mid fall sunny morning, reminiscent of the hair in the bed I'd just left behind. Yellow and brown shapes mingled with long orange lines, and my eyes fought with the overload of it all. Watering, my gaze was forcefully led halfway down the hall, where everything suddenly changed from one pattern to another, as the walls starkly began to glow with a subdued gold hexagonal wallpaper that repeated over and over, hopping over doorways and around corners. Its perfection was relentless as it continued on. I marveled at this hallway within a hallway, its contrast and contradictions. It made me laugh. It made me cringe. It made me feel dirty, like I'd stepped back twenty years, back to when garish was good, autumn was warm and welcoming, and more was better. I expected roller skates and people lying in dark corners, fucking like drugged up rabbits after a night at Studio 54, in this hallway so garish and loud that it spoke overwhelmingly of disco and key parties.

Who had I left behind in that bed, the body in the room that seemed so unfamiliar? Was the person old and stuck in a time long gone, or were they young and out looking for

something that reminded them of a cross between their youthful suburban dens, the local steak house that they went to with their parents every Saturday night, and the worn video store copy of Saturday Night Fever?

Confused, I tried to relax, but renewed came the feeling that I needed to leave, and with that I aimed for the exit sign. Through the hallway door I found the staircase hot and stifling, opposite to the room I'd left just minutes before and the hallway I'd just been in. It made me weak, and unsure. In the heat and the contrast, I got dizzy and felt myself wavering, my footfalls not so confident anymore, which weren't that confident at all. My stomach somersaulted, unevenly loaded like the washing machine I heard somewhere in the apartment building, turning and thumping, all the towels and clothes heavy on one side as it spun. Desperate to make my queasiness stop, my left sweating hand gripped the fake bronze railing at my side, and my right pushed at my stomach, trying to even things out with pressure. Sometimes pressure made everything better, and I closed my eyes and tried to pull myself together, but failed in the end as I felt it coming but didn't want to or couldn't stop the puke as it flew from my mouth and landed all over a potted plant a half floor below me.

At least I hit the planter, and with my throwing up, I felt a bit better, happy in the little fact that I knew that I was hung-over, and that there was a reason why I'd woken up somewhere strange, the alcohol leading to me standing in a hallway too hot, sick and dizzy before 7AM.

My throbbing hands pushed awkwardly at the door. It was my face that first felt the ugly slap of the air outside, a moist cold middle finger that brushed alongside my stubble and weaved through my hair, making my face blanch from the jarring touch. The temperature was intolerable, not because it was freezing, which it technically wasn't, but hostile in the mixture of coolness and the fine mist that weaved through fabric and skin, stabbing me with pricks of iciness as it swirled around me, mocking me as it highlighted the cool hand of damp sweat on my back that'd started in the warm hallway behind me.

I threw up again into a hedge, but this time I didn't marvel as it hit anything. I was too cold to care.

Staggering to the sidewalk, I looked left and right, but nowhere in sight was my car. Gone were the familiar landmarks of my neighborhood, like the tall church steeple at the corner two blocks from my house, or the large Japanese flowering cherry trees that lined every street I'd ever known.

From where I stood, I couldn't see the peeking silhouette of the downtown core, glistening in the distance and taunting the sky with glass pillars that reflected light like mirrors, even on a grey day like this.

I tried to slow my breathing. There was something else where I stood. Sweeping through the air was a loud directionless rumble that echoed from the ground and rose through the tree branches. And in the small trees, I noticed birds crowding together, huddled in packs, trying to keep warm. They seemed unimpressed by the resonance of sound that snaked along tree leaves and arced off of grass blades, poking holes in the thick mist. The sound seemed so complimentary to the buildings around me, the sound picking up where the low buildings left off like a gigantic theatrical backdrop.

I found myself drawn to the way the air lay heavy with the sound, making it indiscernible from the misty rain that fell. Air, ground, sky, they all rolled interchangeably into one another without seams, without signs of tape or glue holding things together. It was a marvel, maybe a one off of nature and man made things that bled together, becoming the same thing in a marriage of dreary grey and ground rumbling bass.

Dumbly awed, I aimed my wobbly legs towards the sound that seemed as big as the skyline in front of me. I had nothing else to do.

And I walked.

Down the sidewalk my shoes scuffed, and I marveled at the low two-storied houses that littered the sides of the road like dollhouses. The houses were evenly spaced and shimmered in a cover of dull moisture and the hint of morning light. Monopoly houses, the green ones, and as I walked past each one, I wanted to be in any of them, with lights gradually coming on and signs of life showing through drawn curtains and blinds. I saw warm colors and shapes moving, and I knew there would be coffee inside and warm mugs to wrap my fingers around, something to coax me back to life and ease my temperature and mind

Walking, my ears perked at every second of peace that rode on the rain that fell around me, on me, the time between the roar and rumbles predictable and precise. That moment of silence almost felt like the second right after turning off a loud TV, or leaving a concert, where your ears adjust and nothing seems able to make a sound. It's just the beating of your heart in your ears that you can hear, and that for those few brief minutes of shrouded silence, the world isn't so bad and scary, just silent and slow.

I almost wanted to be there forever, lost in the silence and tentativeness of everything.

At the end of the houses, I came to a hedge. Like a wall, the large green barrier of boxwood, cedar and ivy stood towering in front of me. It was thick, green and impervious, and I stood defeated and weak in its shadow. If I was ten, I might have tried crawling under it, if I was fourteen I might have tried to run full speed through it. But I was tired, and loathed the feeling of turning and going back to the apartment building. I didn't want to go back.

The rumbles, they got louder, the air heavier. With my hand brushing the side of the green wall, I walked alongside its thick width. Not too far from where I began to feel defeated, I found a path through the hedge, and once through the arch of dripping green and shadow, things started to make sense.

Off in the distance, highlighted by the lights just behind it, I saw a chain link fence three times my height, a fence that stopped people from going beyond into the field and beyond that where more lights and the runways were. There, airplanes taxied and waited, awaiting their turns to rumble off into the grey curtain of morning with their occupants staring wide eyed out of plane windows into the zero visibility of low lying moist clouds that waved at them as they departed.

So long Vancouver.

I knew where I was as I slowly crossed the busy road. Soon, I came to the tall fence in the drizzle and watched as the planes took off one after another, the morning rush hour of air traffic fading away, dotting the sky with lights that probably lined off into the distance

with perfect uniformity, and that I would've seen clearly if it wasn't so cloudy and drizzly.

At my right, not too far away, maybe a quarter mile, I saw a blinking and tired neon café sign at the edge of an industrial park, and I knew that sooner or later I'd walk over to the café and would have a coffee and a muffin, or maybe a greasy breakfast of bacon and eggs. After sitting for awhile, listening to the sounds of truckers and warehouse workers debate if so and so was a dog fucker, and how much they'd like to give it to that new girl from accounts receivable, and after my thumbs darkened from flipping through the morning newspaper, I'd walk over to the airport terminals and would catch a bus, and then slowly would make my way back to my house, where I would shower then check the answering machine, hoping for a clue of what I had done.

It almost seemed funny that so much had happened to me before eight in the morning, because I never did anything before eight in the morning.