

Brent Lucia

Through Cobblestone Streets

Even if it was a dream at least I was part of something. I couldn't remember the last time I felt included; I've been avoiding people ever since my last moment of contact with my x-girlfriend. Once the relationship reached its deathbed, we didn't pull the cord. We brought in the medical ventilators and hoped for the best. After a few months on life support, I began sending her haikus via text-morsels of love in Japanese poetic form:

My Love in your Water

I hide it from my failed soul

Buried in Heart Waves

She never responded. Or at least I don't think she did. After a day of silence I made a sad face out of a colon and half a parenthesis and was about to send it to her but changed my mind. Instead I spiked my Iphone into the concrete and bought a pack of camel lights. I hadn't smoked in over three years. The first drag was a breath of fresh air, strangely enough, and I hoped to God it got me closer to the end of this tragedy. That day was three weeks ago; I haven't gotten a new phone since.

Now I have this dream. It's my signal. A lighthouse on destinies forgotten shores. I won't battle with my destiny or look to ignore it; she's a real tuff mutt. All I can do is wait and observe; a complete surrendering to fate.

So it came to no surprise that I approached a strange man on the F train who resembled a character in this dream. He was Puerto Rican, wearing dark Ray-Bans and a white tank top that simply stated “Shake Your Culo.” The man was older, straight faced, bobbing his head to the music in his brain which seemed to go on endlessly. I couldn’t escape the structure of his eye sockets that dug deep into his skull like construction sites. His thin red lips pulling his cheeks together; the same lips that talked to me late last night.

“Remember me?” I asked, taping the man on the shoulder.

“Huh.” He said.

The train took a sharp corner; I dipped under the overhead bar. The man looked away; he wanted no part of this. In another world we were brothers, riding together like we were today-only down sharp alley ways on cobble stone streets. Me as the driver and him in the back wearing a tailored made suit and a top hat.

I tapped his shoulder again, this time with authority. “You don’t remember me I take it, I was...”

The man looked up with pure hatred in his eyes. “Stop touching me pal, wus wrong wich you! I dunno what it is you talking about.” So I stopped. I couldn’t press him. Our midnight rides were long gone, just fragments from my broken brain. Without him knowing I dropped one of my business cards into the side of his book bag. When he’s ready to talk, he’d call.

On that train I wondered if at this time tomorrow there would be a similar moment like this one, as if all moments were tied together like pearls on a string, falling in a pattern that we could sometimes stop and understand. I wondered if my x-girlfriend could see the same patterns. There was a picture of us smiling in front of the Williamsburg Bridge taken by her sister, both our eyes burning in a desire for love. I wondered if that was ever a true fire, or just some tired heat.

I walked down Broadway, towards 34th street, catching an eye of random strangers here and there. Some of them looked familiar, like B-actors in recurring movies, but none existed in my dream. In the exhausting air of midtown, I couldn't escape my own thoughts; I thought back to the worlds' drawn in my brain. The dream was resurfacing, attempting to show its unfamiliar face. There was a long car ride, my eyes glaring down an old road. My Puerto Rican passenger, distinguished gentlemen in the backseat, talking to me like an old friend.

Yes!

We were in deep conversation, listening to each other's wisdom on life. I turned from the road to face him, to catch his final words of advice. Such words were muttered once in a lifetime....

But there was nothing. A deep, blank space. I should have gotten the Puerto Rican guys number. He was my only chance.

Suddenly, like cattle I was filtered onto 34th and eighth, dead center into Herald Square. The crowd swelled like an unwelcomed bruise; my pupils dilated. I wanted to dissolve into the masses like salt running through water. These were the dying dreams of men and women, moving past each other like blades of light. They took me in like I was one of their own and soon you couldn't see me. I surrendered under each angry, metal cloud that decorated the Manhattan skyline.

Finding Zion

Tucker walked out towards his car twisted in knots, tighter than his bulging waistline. There was no room for the beers he was about to have at Rumsfield's Pub, his weight now reaching new levels of obesity. He reached for a packet of M&M's in his glove compartment. The chocolate calmed him down. His wife couldn't seem to get off the edge of the world, screaming her fucking head off like someone was about to push her over the side. But there was nothing really to yell about, her roast beef dinner was cooked to perfection and her daughter just brought home an A in honors history. But when it came time to washing the dishes, she couldn't help but start a fight about the mortgage, digging into Tucker's beaten confidence with her pitch fork-flames dancing off in the background. Tonight wasn't the first time she got angry; she performed her she-devil act on a daily basis, burning any life that grew inside their home. Tonight Tucker just left without saying goodbye; he went to get drunk with his phone off.

Each street Tucker turned on was empty. He kept checking the rear view mirror to see if anyone was following him but he was all alone. Outside the horizon ran on endlessly, separating the place that Tucker knew from the world of the unknown. Tucker focused on the stars above the trees and wished he were out there even though he didn't know what "there" was. He was lonely, and this world he built for himself had shaken him loose at the moment. He was a fallen fruit in the wind. He wiped the side of his beard to feel the skin that kept him close to Earth-something human and familiar. And just as fast as it had struck him, this feeling of divine fellowship had left, and the spirit world breathed a sigh of relief. His eyes went back on the road. He could never focus long enough on the horizon to speak to the unknown; he could reach out only briefly but never gain a response. Was anyone's willingness to surrender ever heard? He thought back to a life as a child, his mother always dragging him to church,

demanding he repent his sins. The weekly confessions were followed by locked doors when he got home. Nothing was ever talked about. The cold dinners by himself at the dinner table were endless. His mother was a saint, said the priest, a true daughter of the lord. And she would smile under the chapel, under the fresh white boards of the wooden church. But home was dark-blacker than the bruises on his neck from his father when he failed to follow the house rules. His mom, the saint, could only watch and pray. He gripped the steering wheel harder now, the past covering him like a blanket on fire. But Tucker was older and capable of living with the burns.

The popcorn at the bar was stale and the bar top stuck to Tucker's forearms when he sat down. The stools were ripped, the glasses stained with old lipstick and the bartender had a look of carelessness and the personality of dried toast. Tucker kept his phone off, listening to the juke box move between songs. The record was slowly being picked and placed in its playing position. Elvis was chosen; the song was "In The Ghetto." Tucker ordered a pint of Guinness and let the song drown out the voice of his wife in his head. Once the first sip ran down his throat into his belly his large body relaxed; the knots took a break on their death grip around his heart. No one was talking in the bar except for Elvis. The bartender didn't even look anyone in the face; he kept to himself, and nothing was said.

A man in a white collared shirt watched Tucker drink his beer. His hair was trimmed down to a crew cut and his skin seemed soft-almost golden. He was clean shaven, and his blue eyes bounced off the pure whiteness of his freshly pressed shirt, accompanied with a straight black tie. His black pants were creased, falling to a perfect length right above his black dress shoes. On his chest was a small black name plate that read "Elder Gunther." To the right of his plate of chicken salad and mixed fruit was the book of Mormon, and Gunther had his hand gently rested on top of the small black book. Gunther had just finished his second meeting with an AA clinic down the street. He scratched his fork at his chicken salad, playing with the pieces of celery that clung tightly to the chicken

while thinking back to his speech-particularly his choice of Brigham Young quotes: *“We aren’t going to wait around for the angles anymore, we are going to build Zion right here in America.”* The sentence gave him goose bumps; an electric energy ran through his spine. He loved those words and he thought back to all the young men in the audience that night, smiling as he said them. Prosperity was ours; he knew that to be true. Why couldn’t everyone see this truth, he thought to himself. If I could share the word of our Lord with everyone I meet, then there is a chance that all could share in this truth. We could all learn what it means to be human. A smile grabbed his face instinctively, a habit Gunther could never shake. He was always smiling for no reason, just laughing in the image of his wonderful God.

Tucker turned on his phone; he had twelve missed calls and one voice message. He put the phone to ear and listened to the first few words of the message:

“You are half the man my ex-husband was, Tucker, you limp-dick, fucking...”

That was enough. He shut his phone back off and concentrated on the lines inside his Guinness. He had been with his wife for four years now, his second go at marriage. A decision he made at the age of forty-five, living in a one bedroom apartment, scared of growing old alone. But suddenly death wasn’t as scary as it used to be, there was something to be said for the one option out of his living hell. There was divorce, yes, but then he had to start all over again, the long nights alone and the free time with his thoughts. No voices in the house; he couldn’t bare the silence and yet he couldn’t stand the constant arguing. These feelings were not new, but Tucker ran from them like an escaped prisoner, afraid of what he might be capable of if he came to terms with his thoughts. Something was slowly boiling inside of him, the bar was as quiet as a graveyard and Tucker could hear a sound of liquid steaming from an open surface. It came without warning, without any sense of the unknown, the horizon or a God. It showed its teeth to Tucker as he kept his eyes closed-he knew what it was. Rage.

Suddenly a hand touched the back of Tucker's shoulder. His eyes opened. "Hello sir, I'm Elder Gunther. If you have a moment I'd like to talk to you about the church of Ladder Day Saints. Do you believe in God?"

Tucker turned around; his eyebrows were drawn down in confusion. He looked at Gunther, his flawless white teeth shining across his pale, young face. His ears were perked up, his hair freshly cut in a perfect rectangular shape. Even Gunther's buttons on his shirt were perfectly aligned with the button on his pants. He looked at the name plate and immediately knew what this was about, but Tucker didn't turn away. There was a long silence as Tucker stared into the man's eyes. There was opportunity here, he thought to himself. Something was burning from inside those bright blue eyes.

"Yes," said Tucker. The boiling hadn't stopped, it simply was containable now. Tucker could live along side it. He listened to Gunther as the man dove into a storyline regarding salvation and Jesus Christ. The Guinness touched his lips, flowed down to his pit and stretched out his gut. Gunther explained the glory of God, the great teachings of Jesus Christ that were spoken to the early American settlers. Tucker listened intently, responded with questions and gave signs of agreement. With each description, Gunther became more enthusiastic, falling into a trance of pure joy and excitement. He refused to sit, and when Tucker offered him a beer, he thanked him but said he did not drink. As Gunther continued to talk Tucker thought he saw the horizon in his third glass of Guinness- the straight line separating the stout from its white foam. There were two contrasting worlds, never to be joined. How fucking awful, Tucker thought to himself. And this man thinks he can bring them together. Tucker heard the boiling sound again; his left eye began to twitch- nothing but a nervous tick.

"Where's your closest church, maybe I'll come in and pay you fellas a visit sometime." The words were not Tucker's, yet they escaped from his mouth. Gunther stopped his preaching and looked in amazement at his new friend. Never would he have thought that a conversion could come so quickly, in a bar none the less. His eyes were

beaming threads of pure blue light, staring down at his possible new brother. What spectacular news. Gunther couldn't help but flash a smile.

“Right there on Fredrick Street we got a church, Tucker. I'll write down the address.” Gunther pulled out a pad and a pen. “Here ya go. We would love to have you come in. I'm there Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays all day. Otherwise, I'm doing mission trips around the neighborhood.” He handed Tucker the paper. “There ya go, buddy.”

“Thanks.” Tucker pushed the paper down into his pants pocket. Rubbing his beard, he looked up and saw Gunther staring, showing off his glistening white teeth. His face brewed perfection, a pure happiness. Gunther looked like he never even felt pain, it simply didn't exist. Tucker tried to smile back, forcing his lips to move out towards his ears briefly, failing to show his teeth. Smiling wasn't something you did in Tucker's family, it came only when asked during professional photos. His mother never smiled at him; her teeth could have been rotted from her mouth and Tucker would have never known.

The night grew late and both men lost track of time. Tucker, now holding two Mormon Pamphlets against his half empty pint, put down his drink and looked at his watch. It was twelve thirty, the last bus for Gunther to get to his church left an hour ago. Gunther ached with disappointment, taking off his glasses to rub his forehead. How did he forget his bus? It wasn't the first time Gunther lost track of time while preaching about the lord; he was comfortable with that excuse.

A voice suddenly cut the silence. “I'll drive you home.”

Gunther stopped rubbing his face. “Thanks Tucker, I appreciate it. That ok? I only live a few blocks away.”

The barman was wiping the bar down; the lights were turned off in the back dining room. Tucker was confused; did he just offer this man a ride? The line on his half drunken Guinness was blurry now, staring at it made

Tucker dizzy. He was done trying to find the horizon-this was no business for a drunken man. Gunther continued to talk on their way out, preaching about Joseph Smith and the Angel Moroni, but all Tucker could hear was the boiling sound, making its way to his surface.

Suddenly, a few words escaped from Gunther's muted speech and reached Tucker's ears. "...and so Brigham Young says that we aren't going to wait for angels anymore, we are going to build Zion ourselves..." Tucker looked over at Gunther and new his game; another one of those religious robots, sputtering off one dogmatic phrase after the next. The angles were gone, Tucker thought to himself, leaving us to drown in the failures of life. Yet this man talks to the horizon, and he says someone talks back. Then where was the voice for Tucker? Where was his Zion? The screams came crawling up Tucker's spine like an old friend, circling his ears. He knew the voices all too well. Once at the car, he watched as Gunther got into the passengers seat, buckling up like a good boy. Like his mother would want him too. "I have a mother," Tucker said to himself out loud, as he got in the car and reached underneath the driver's seat; his cold hand finding the handle to his .45 caliber pistol.