

# **This Place I've Made My Home**

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I tell myself this every morning. A wildflower swaying, apart from dry grasses. I repeat it. I turn it over. I reiterate it throughout the day to remind myself there is no hurt too dense to crush me. It first came to me through a voice I no longer recognize. When I parse my memory in search of its speaker, all I get are echoes of childish thoughts and the dominant shrill of my mother. I no longer try. I just don't want to.

It's all emptied out. A dutiful gesture. An accommodation for interested tenants. Trash is strewn about the curb, so much of it thrown out now quivering in an ugly display stinking like rot in the rain. The days go by and the stench slowly subsides. Though it never truly goes away. It rises and courts with all the blood and fantasy that excites the atmosphere and brews the whims of the skies. I tell myself to just ignore it. I tell myself it's okay. Pretending I can breathe just fine.

I collaborate with friends to escape every night. A new couch every morning. A new view out the windows. A new smell possessing me awake. And new reasons to push me out the door. Days I spend foiling my impacted frustrations through paperwork and pageantry. Where people walk, I dance. How people stutter, I sing. Anything if everything to prevent the quiet from taking over.

This night starts the same as all the others. In a bar. In a place to gather and prepare, and to open up all the halls usually shut in as to allow the evening to furnish me with what it will.

I'm first. My walk here was just a simple stroll across the block. My friends come from greater distances. I pass the time stirring over a glass and scrolling through distractions on my phone. Outside drops fall, illuminating the evening with a neighborly grace before gashing out in fury. My friends all cancel and I am left alone. At least the rain outside establishes a comfortable hum to alleviate the pain of silence.

I couldn't help myself. I don't know if it was the expression of my face or an accidental glance that attracted him, but I am approached. He tells me his name. I allow his entertainment, then unwittingly encourage it with half a smile. In the evening hour I am taken, like a ripe fruit from its tree, and released of an agony I didn't even know I had.

In the open rooms I tendered inside of me, I left but one object. A toy. A purple monkey plushie with a smile adorning his sullied face all prodded and picked through with sewing needles and quilting pins. I couldn't let him go.

Every time the thought of tossing him out crossed my mind I shuddered. Poor things don't deserve such discourtesy. I just think of myself and feel an intense hurt, almost so naturally.

The storm curdles and inflames on the other side of those panes of glass. It surrounds us, but we don't know it because inside there is just us, the warmth, and still glasses of alcohol and subtle charm.

I let myself get away. I let myself open just enough to allow fresh air inside, and a crack in the doorway pried just enough to signal an invite to a confident stranger. I let myself feel okay. Perhaps it was. Perhaps too much.

When he moved in, I insisted I could and would be happy to help. But he was too proud to take my offer. It was a quirk to me. A little tag you'd find in his box of things nearly all torn and worn to dregs from repeated washings. Nothing more than that, deserving of a toss-away.

I cleaned so much for him that he didn't even notice. Spots in his corners he couldn't see because of such boyish eyes. Out into the alleyways it all cracked and shattered like nuisance beer bottles.

As I strolled outside, seeing myself as I was then, I took care not to cut my toes on all the sharp objects I let litter the yards and walkways. If the day ever came around again I'd take the time to sweep it all away. All the little pieces of scrap and glass I used to forgive as nothing more than the base cost of living.

Drops started to patter my forehead. I saw the storm coming and I went back inside. He was gracious enough to extend a warm blanket and a bed to lay in.

He took shelter in me. He built it. He made his home, painted on the brick of my insides. When he moved his furniture or displayed his art, hung from nails he pinched into the walls, I felt it like scratches to my tissue linings. Bursts of blood wracked from lesions you earn from hopeful love leaked out of me. Dripping out my nose and ass and scatter in my vomit. This dark pulpy bloodied puss, the aches of love and sacrifice and silence.

You put up with it though. If it hinders you, detracts from your worship and joy, you let it. And it's worth it. You tell yourself that. The burning sensations you feel over and over, rising in your gut and the peels of your skin start to feel like the reminders of a home you never lived in.

The memories you make up to calm you in the quiet, they take residence too and before you know it, you've allowed yourself to shelter more comfortable lies than sincere joys.

You bring it up to him. His construction, his environment, the ways he tells you he needs to live to feel accepted, to feel content at the very least, to feel nurtured. This is him. This is it. This has sculpted a perfect poison that pulls you out. That kicks you to the street. Alone outside, pattered by rain, as your whole self contorts just for him.

A slight crook of your eye and you see all the shards of old beer bottles and circular mistakes mingling in the alleyway somehow withstanding the violence of the rain and your blood.

He doesn't agree with you. He urges you to rest. A good night, he says, a good slumber to cure that supposed ache in your brain. From deep inside. In your body he made his home. The desire to agree rises and grips your tongue.

This time you don't let it.

In an exchange of fire, a combat of heartbreak and anger, you separate. It was exhaustion, you tell yourself. In the morning all will be well again.

All quiet, and like a slip of paper taken by a breeze, suddenly he just goes. Gone. All traces remain, but no indication. No idea of a direction as to where.

By sunrise you are taken by the most painful hurt. It's all over you, a pox to your skin and termites to the walls. It pulses from inside of you, a thickness of sweat and ills. You stumble. You collapse. Without a single thought, trigger or action your whole insides cave in. They swell. They escape you. In furious vomit, you're on the carpeted floor throwing up over and over until you're gagging on nothing.

Eyelids shutter and you fall, cradled by the stink now festering in your floor. In the bloodied mess, you awake to see so clearly now all the evidence of his inhabitation. His clothes. His art. His crap. His stained furniture and books and trash and movements and flourishes and promises and touches and laughter and shouts and assaults and apologies and apologies and apologies and apologies and apologies.

Poor purple monkey with all the needles and stabbings. It's gone. It's gone away and you don't know where. It's faded like the mist coating the backdrop so light now you would never find out.

Yet here is him. With that stupid half smile. That draw. That razor sharp fishing line you couldn't see in that thick water you were cultured in. And that strident wildflower, you thought all alone in those plains you knew as the world. It wilted in such the attitude that you now doubt it ever existed in the way you wanted it too.

It was just this. It was a lonely hour you were passing. A lonely moment in time. You wish. You wish it was.

You wish it was just that. A passing moment, not a lifetime. Not in the silence with shades drawn as the sun settles far away to give you the darkness again. An old friend to hold you like your favorite blanket.

Why must you always live the mistakes to learn them? Why is it you that has to become smarter through survival? Why do you have to live here?

Why is it you that has to be the home? Always you.

You run outside ignoring the wind. Ignoring the storm. You just run. Pour gasoline throughout the apartment and let the dogs set it ablaze. Live with friends for some weeks before settling again.

Clean yourself. Go out and breathe. Touch the grass. Touch the air.

I am willing to try again.