

Editorial- The Benefit Seen

Sunset. You can't see, but you feel it. The walls are cooling. Somewhere out there the sky is full of irrelevant, beautiful, wasted colors. The slivers of light usually visible through the cracks of the doors disappear in resignation like tired old guards. On the other side of the wall a lifetime thick, animals change shifts and the sun takes its intermission before beginning its other role as dawn.

You're watching your show as that thought about walls thick as lives bounces around. The deepest thoughts always do- bounce around, that is. They bounce, and grow appendages in the form of words that we mistakenly stifle because we think they are far too eloquent to have come from minds expert in nothing but justifications and schemes. And so we discard our glimpses of eloquence as we might do with a letter to some distant love because we translate ^{it} ^{to} vulnerability, which is but an ingredient of ^{and} ^{to} cowardice, to the flowery nothings whispered by the fearful, lonely, and emotional. But, surprisingly, here comes this thought: lifetimes are a measure of distance for some people, not time; the past can be an actual place. How random, you think, and eloquent and interesting. And ^{as} before you discard your sunset revelation, you give a silent nod that's a little self-impressed in agreement with yourself.

It's a thought, though, that only your neighbors would understand. Or soldiers. Or priests. Widows, maybe. But a lifetime away, on a street whose streetlights serve as the demons' alarm clock, a few angels still say their prayers. Your name is still contained in a few, though in a thousand more curses. That sunset you can only feel continues on as desert sunsets do- running, sprinting past a horizon of rocks and reptiles, slicing those prayers in half like God's own guillotine.

But it's too late in the day for philosophizing. You unroll your mat and feel the knots in your back loosen. As your torso lowers to the fabric, the weight of a dozen lives slides off your shoulders into an invisible abyss like a glacier breaking off fragments of itself and crashing into some forgotten piece of ocean- that home of silent, stoic pains and sweat and concrete tears- but only for the night. The chain remains, and the weight will return when you sit ^{up} in the morning. It's okay, though. It's expected- no, welcomed, that weight, because it's a constant reminder that there's still work to do.

As you lay out, the T.V. drones on. You stare at the bottom of the rack above- a canvas littered with the scrawling of men desperate to be remembered- as the commercials that have become the soundtrack of days too long and nights too short play on a few feet away. The blue

flicker of the screen makes the shadow^s dance, and they perform your memories on the cookie sheet stage above for you and your audience of demons- a hellish Broadway.

In your mind, as the echoes of clicks and clangs that signal the day's end can be heard in the distance, you consider a hundred things. Conversations past and future replay or form. You recall and reconsider and maybe regret words unsaid, and, drifting into a peaceful sleep, design those plans of the drunk or half- awake that we all know won't happen. Your eyelids shut, slowly, painted whatever color serenity is on the inside. The wings that men like us grow at night make their ready as you find freedom in dreams.

Your eyes close.

Your eyes open- suddenly, like someone jolted you awake.

The lights are blinding. They gleam off of your cufflinks and shine across the sea of bald heads that stare up at you expectantly, their gazes hungry to the point of visually violent. As you look at your own suit sleeved arms and tailored slacks and some polished wing tips that you don't own, you realize that in your right hand is a mic.

The room goes dumb, silent ^{IN ITS} ~~is in~~ expectancy and pregnant with the ghost^s of old sunset watchers like yourself. The floor is littered with sunflower seeds and the millions of words lost on this most unforgiving of audiences. The click-clack of your wood soled dress shoes is the loudest sound in the room. A screech of mic feedback fills the auditorium like a banshee hell bent on reminding you of your inadequacy.

Obviously you've got nothing for them. Your silence betrays the false eloquence you've paraded around as confidence. And before you can begin, probably for the first time in your life, to apologize for your silence, the dusty hardwood stage that looks like it belongs in some high-school gymnasium becomes the dirt floor of the coliseum. Then an Athenian amphitheater; an Aztec temple; a parliamentary senate address; a glistening cathedral pulpit; the Vatican balcony- in the way that happens in dreams where you just understand and it doesn't have to make sense. You pass from there to that purgatory where the ghosts reside, ^(COMMA) and join the ranks of those who have spoken either too late or not enough- those ^{WHOSE} ~~who~~ graves are, in the end, neighbor to those who came too soon or spoke a little too much. Somewhere, though, deep inside the graveyard of the hourglass, ^(COMMA) are those who did the right amount at the right time, who had words prepared when their stage appeared. Those are the ones we later call hero, savior and "great". And, I guess, sometimes, ^{VILLAIN} villain.

Your eyes open. For real this time. You spend a silent, sweat soaked moment deciphering dream from reality. The T.V.'s still on.

And so the robotic process of folding and brushing and rolling begins, way before the sun starts its own daily routine. But still you have nothing- no words for the audience that you possess every day, nothing ready for the concrete stage sitting under your feet this very minute.

To quote Whitman, "The powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse." Contribute we may, and should. Only a few will. But what Whitman didn't say is this: that we do not write our verses over lifetimes, submitting our contributions to the editor from deathbeds or ledges. No, we are instead allowed windows- times in life when our words become activated, animated by need, glimpses of greatness wanting only for a vehicle, which anyone of us may be. But will we? When we find ourselves beneath the spotlight, what will we say? Will we complain, commiserate, dwell on obvious grievances, or might we edify and inspire, revive the calloused dreams of men once devoted and spark the oration that might be the feet of legacy?

It's a shame that in a world so loud, so little is said. I myself am prepared, anxious for my day on stage, unintimidated by the lights and the ghosts and the thirsty stares. So much so that I built my own stage. This is my platform and yours. Daily we must strive to find the words that can be the arms of the thoughts. Then we build more stages. Yes, the seats seem empty, the ghosts angry and desperate. But eventually they will fill. Men will file through the aisle once they see the benefit of their attendance.

I guess that's what we'll have to be then- the benefit seen. Actually, I like how that sounds. And it's moments like this when the mirage of hope is worth it; when it just seems right, you know? Seems worth it. Thus, as our time winds thin, we must speak because we think too much, and bleed, not because we are numb, but because we feel too much.

I hope.

Forever Engaged,

James Hodgkins