

The Wraith by Cameron Terhune, 9-1-16

"What was it like for you to get life in prison?"

Being sentenced to life in prison is an oxymoron. You are not being sentenced to live or have any sort of real life. What it really means is you are being sentenced to die in prison, to exist in a place without life, or to exist, conscious and aware, yet completely shorn of your life. What is that like?

You are told you are not welcome in the larger community of human beings. Everyone is created equal, yet you are now less, you are incomplete, you are damaged. There is something so fundamentally flawed in you that you must be separated and banished. Like the assembly line, your evolutionary strain has produced a defect which is in need of amputation from the larger human organism. You are a dead end.

In fact, more than a dead end, you are dead. You do not participate in or reap the rewards from life as we know it. You are cold and barren where others are warm and alive. You rot while they grow. You can only watch as the world turns; you may no longer thrive and dance in the moon's light or the sunny skies of endless summer. You are interred and you must now begin to be consumed by the Earth.

People know you, and remember you, but everything you ever accomplished in your life is now tainted; it is viewed through the lens of your crime. All the kind acts in the world don't remove the stigma of the "Yeah, But..." "He was a good friend, yeah, but he picked up a gun and..." "She had a lot of potential, yeah, but then she went crazy..." "Yeah, but who knew there was black blood in his heart?" "Yeah, but who knew she would do THAT?" You are now only your crime and will be remembered as your crime first, while all else comes now second or is forgotten entirely as irrelevant in the relentless storm of the Yeah, But...

So you are a ghost, a shadow of your former self, a spectre, a wraith. You try to cling to the life you had, because it is all you know - it is who you are. But everything you are is now everything you were, and all you once had

is destined to slip through your incorporeal fingers. A ghost screaming in a room can barely brush the lightest curtain, and is only seen in faded glimpses. Out of sight, out of mind, and time heals all wounds, including the devastating pain of having known you, been friends with you, loved you. You who betrayed, you who transgressed, you who are now only your crime.

After so long trying to regain what was lost, only to have it slip away time and again, you begin to get angry. You get mad at the circumstances of your non-living existence and you get mad at the way nothing can ever be how it was. Everything good that was, is now broken, ruined or lost. And in being mad at everything that you deem unfair, you start to hate. You hate this new "life". You hate what you lost. You hate that others can be in the light while you can know only darkness. You hate every tiny twist in the path of your life that led you to come to this place of no life and you hate everything that doesn't soothe your bitter, angry, forgotten heart. It is easy to hate, and you learn quickly that it takes no soul, no inner enlightenment, no special skill to hate. Anyone can hate anything or anyone else for any reason. Even a ghost can hate. And hating gives you energy, it makes you feel, it makes you almost able to convince yourself of your own righteousness, that you are alive, not dead, not forsaken. You are important. Without you, how would so much wrong in the world be properly hated? You are the most important thing in this new "life" and your purpose is all of a sudden clear; you can come back to the world and thrive in your hate. You can reconnect to what is denied to you. You almost believe it is in your reach.

But more than anything else, above and beyond each individual person, place or situation you hate, there is a core. At the center of your great powers of hating, what you hate most is yourself. Oh, how you hate yourself! You human garbage, you filth, you piece of shit. You absolute and utter, completely worthless thing. And as you go about your hating, another feeling grows within you. One day you go to hate something and you realize, in fact, you don't hate it at all. Actually, in truth, you don't care.

You don't care what is going on in the world you've come to hate so much. You don't care who or what is changing, or why, or how. You don't care that

Your Hate, your driving force, is slipping away, out of your grasp, just as your old Life did once, some long time before. In fact, you realize that it is easier to Don't Care than to Hate - it takes less work, it brings you less trouble, it allows you to slide further into the realm of existing on the fringe. Everyone notices an approaching Thunderstorm, a great black ball of rain and lightning. No one pays attention to the sky ~~when~~ ^{when} it is doing nothing. Yes, Don't Care is easier, and easy is best. You Don't Care what is wrong in the world - it's not your world. You Don't Care what other people are doing - they probably Don't Care about you, so why care about them? You Don't Care what goes on around you, because when you Don't Care, the truth is that Nothing Matters. In fact, you Don't Care so adeptly that you Don't even Care if you are alive or not. You Don't Care about your health, or sanity or your looks. All those things you so diligently worked to Hate about yourself, you realize, Don't Matter. So you Don't Care, and it is the easiest "life" yet. You are a spectator in your own "Life". After Death, this is the next best thing. No more pain, no more problems, no more troubling, confusing thoughts or feelings. All you have to remember is that you Don't Care.

Yet, when you Hated, it gave you energy - a fiery anger. Now that you Don't Care, that fire is faded and dull, cold. As you Don't Care more deeply, you begin to feel Tired. You are Tired of the same routines every day. You are Tired of the same boring people. You are Tired of Nothing Mattering, because it means Nothing Will Ever Matter, and therefore, Nothing Will Ever Change. You try to Not Care about that, but it makes you feel ~~so~~ overwhelmed and exhausted. And you are so Tired, you finally give up and go to Sleep.

Sleep is nice. The days pass and you Sleep. The clock ticks and you Sleep. People walk by, people talk to you, people live and die and the sun rises and sets and you Sleep. You Sleep through the seasons and the years and think that Sleep is best. There is no pain, there is no confrontation, Sleep is even better than being Dead because there is no uncomfortable process of watching yourself decompose. There is only Sleep, and Nothing. Oblivion.

Then, seemingly through no conscious choice of your own, your path changes. For as you sleep, one day you catch a glimpse of something. You try to Don't Care, but since you are sleeping, your defenses are down. The Glimpse keeps returning, and before you realize it, as you sleep, you **Start** to Dream. You Dream about what Could Be and what Might Happen. You Dream about all the things you used to Hate or Don't Care about, and all the things you Slept through. Slowly, your whole existence begins to tilt, until it is completely upside down. By Dreaming, and with your defenses now rendered useless, strangers now approach and come into your "life". First Desire, then Hope and finally, most shocking of all, Belief. And with these new allies, you realize you are not existing at all - you are having a Life. You come around to the other side of where you began and are now once again Alive. You are different, changed, and many old things are gone, many new things sprouted. Like the tree emerging from winter, you begin to come back to Life and branch out, to grow and partake of that wonderful Sun you were shorn of so long ago. And it Feels Good, You Feel Good. As you grow, you find new Seeds to plant, new reasons to keep reaching and stretching for the Sun. You know winter will always come again, yet you know too no winter lasts forever, so you steel yourself for the coming winters by building reserves of strength and purpose. You now have fire without Hating and Peace without Not Caring or Sleeping. You are no longer Tired and you are no longer Dead. No longer a Wraith or a Ghost; you are Now, once again, Alive and Real.

This is a story of my personal experience in being sentenced to Life in Prison. It is not a manual for those who are in my position to follow my path - I don't claim to have the answer for anyone else, because the truth I have learned is that we must each seek and strive for our own answers in life, find our own purposes and reasons for living, our own fire and things to believe in. I don't claim that everyone or anyone's experiences may be the same as mine; I only hope that by sharing my experiences, some good may come to someone, who, like me, may be in need of help or to know life is never hopeless or without purpose. Nothing worth doing is easy and nobody can tell you how you should live your life, but keeping an open mind to new ideas has allowed me to grow and change, so I hope it may do the same for you. Walk in wisdom.

This essay of my personal experiences is a freely given gift. I offer it without obligation, let or lien. My contact information is:

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Thanks for your time, sincerely,

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