

## Short Story: Another Chapter

Maybe sleeping will help me escape reality. It's not as if I'm nervous parse, rather curious would be the word. I've never really been closed off to new experiences. In adolescence I was accepted to that special writing school abroad, and had my parents approved I would have surely gone. However, this is a different type of "experience;" one I wouldn't enjoy, would I? I need to go back to sleep. Who knows how much I'll get once I've arrived; how much I'll need.

I don't know this song on the radio. Has it really been a month since I've listened to music? It doesn't seem that long. If I blink again this could all be over, and I'll be back at home! If only it were that simple. The heavy volume drowns my thoughts. I should ask the driver to turn it even louder. "How long before we get there?" "It will be close to 3:00 a.m.," he responded. I just bowed my head.

Drowsiness has me questioning life itself. What is one supposed to feel right now? Fear? Anger? Regret? Seclusion? Why do I feel relieved? No longer in that state of limbo I suppose. Decisions have been made; the contracts have been signed. Oh God, I need my family! I saw my parents just yesterday, but it seems months, even years have passed. Will I ever be able to see them again? To hug and kiss them? What do they think of me? Their successful son and brother who altered his life and theirs so drastically. I pray I'm an example of what not to do. I don't think my siblings could endure this affliction. Can I?

I've lost all feeling in my extremities and my heart is racing. If I can just ignore the obvious, my surroundings; this metal so foreign to my skin. I'm tired of fighting these thoughts of the past anyway. Sometimes it's best just to give in, right? Relieve the anxiety by thinking things through.

At least I finished my degree a few months ago. Not that I'll ever be able to use it now, but it's an accomplishment. I remember that day the Dean came and pulled me out of class. I somehow knew it was me he wanted once I'd seen his face. Being paraded through the hallways of a college has got to be the most embarrassing moment of my life. — Then there were my co-workers. What were they thinking of me now? They'll probably read about all of this one day, if they notice me missing at all.

We just pulled off the highway. The clock reads 2:44 a.m., so I suppose we're nearly there. I wonder if I'll recognize anyone; would someone recognize me? Maybe some friends I made these past few days, after all we were facing the same potential circumstances. It would be nice to know someone.

The narrow, private road opened to reveal the new stage of my life. My mind and heart met to feel something I can only describe as apathy. "You are powerless, Jordan." I told myself. "It's best to just be numb to all of this." Set my face indifferently; refuse to show emotion.

We reached the first gate and the driver exited the truck. It's the first time I've been alone in over a month. Should I take this opportunity to cry? To scream? To run? Several men walked around me with guns in hand. This can't be real. Oh God, tell me I'm dreaming. He drove through the first gate, and then another, until we reached a large garage. The bright lights erase my signs of slumber and again, my interest arises.

I froze for a moment when the truck's door opened. I guess I'm supposed to get out now, or should I wait for direction? I inelegantly jumped from the back seat and surveyed my surroundings. In a room close by, a new man removed the bonds that held me physically. I watched as he scavenged a bag of possessions, listing each on a paper as my

belongings. This man turned to me with a picture in hand and stated, "is this your only one?" The faces of my family collapsed my heart. I was barely able to nod forward in consent as my body froze in beneath me.

"Strip," said the man, and I complied. This is one routine I'll never get used too. How demeaning, being forced to undress myself upon another man's order. Then this shower. It must not heat to a comfortable point. What if I'm yelled at for taking too long? I better dry off and dress myself quickly; noticing the plain, oversized suit that was laid out for me. How long would I be wearing this?

Now with a woman, I felt a sense of ease. How surprising to see females here, in a place so besieged by men. She asked, "May I take your vitals?" and, "Have you eaten today?" I answered only with a nod of my head, revealing the trepidation I felt. "It's going to be okay Jones." she said, while drawing my blood. I guess I've exposed more than unease with this shaking of my hands. "Wait. Jones? Do you have a brother here?" asked the lady. Joseph?! "No. My brother is safe at home." I replied. Granting me a compassionate gaze.

In another building a man stood ready to issue more commands. "Grab a mattress from that closet there." I can barely navigate through the darkness, but the one here in front looks to be in good shape. I threw it over my shoulder and made my way toward the exit. "You should choose another." said the man, as I turned to view my selection. The essence of blood and urine that covered the cloth then met my senses. Reviving that morbid curiosity I'd come to recognize.

I now lay in chastisement, surrounded by goliaths of this domain. When I wake will this be over, or will I feel the same? Is twelve years of slumber a path that I can take? For now ill simply ponder this state I can't change.