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Writing Workshop #1

 As cracks of dawn began to shine through the blinds of his window, Michael finally brushed off the covers and rose to sit on his bed. He had been awake for a while. It had been some time since he had really been able to sleep. Two or three hours of shallow sleep had become the nightly norm for him, while the rest of the night he would lay on his bed and think.

 Michael checked his phone; it was 6:12 a.m. He slowly pulled himself off of his bed and glanced over at his roommate. Vik was still sound asleep, a twinge of jealousy shot through Michael’s mind, but he pushed it away. He had been living in this apartment with Viktor for four years and they had always been good friends. Michael walked tiredly into the bathroom, he was still tired but knew that there was no chance of him getting anymore sleep today.

He looked at himself in the mirror and remembered the days back when he was a teenager and would psych himself up in the mornings. He would tell his reflection, “You the man! Today is your day to shine.” Now it was his reflection who would talk to him. “You look sleepy,” it said to him in a mocking tone. “I always do,” Michael responded disinterestedly. The first time his reflection had talked to him, Michael had been terrified and thought he might have been crazy. He had gone to see a psychiatrist who told him he should be getting more sleep and had given him pills to help. Those pills were still in his drawer, Michael didn’t want to be dependent on drugs, he wasn’t crazy and that was all that mattered. Over time, Michael learned to live with his reflection, after all it was nothing but his own thoughts projected onto the mirror.

Mirror Michael spoke again, “Is today the day?” The question made Michael hesitate. “I don’t know,” he told himself, but deep down he knew that was a lie. As he brushed his teeth Michael thought about the discussions he had had with himself over the years. He had never grown to like them, but they always provided him with much needed decisiveness. He listened to himself and followed his own advice and that made his life easier, almost as if what he was doing wasn’t coming from him, but from some other person living in his head. Michael spat, rinsed his mouth and looked at the mirror one last time before leaving the bathroom. “Today,” whispered his reflection. “Today,” Michael echoed back.

As he walked into the kitchen, Michael noticed the time on the stove, 6:33 a.m. He quickly poured himself a bowl of cereal and began to eat. As he ate, he stared out his apartment window overlooking the city below. He had grown up in this city and used to love it more than any other place in the world, but now it just filled him with dread. The tall buildings and smoggy atmosphere shrouded the city in shadows and Michael almost felt like he could see evil oozing out of the streets and alleys.

Next to the window was their calendar. Today was the fourth, his birthday. Vik had written it in big bold letters with a smiley face next to it. This didn’t make Michael smile, he hated his birthday. Another year has passed he told himself. Another year of nothing but the same. He could certainly expect a call from his parents today, after all they had to call him at least once a year to feel like they were accomplishing their “parental duties”. “What a joke,” he thought, ever since he had dropped out of school his parents saw him as a disappointment. His father had told him as much and his mother simply cried and cried. He wished he didn’t have to think about them. He wished he didn’t love them. Most of all he wished it still didn’t hurt the way they all but removed him from their lives, but alas he did, and he always answered their phone calls pretending everything was alright.

Michael glanced back at the clock, it was 6:50. Vik would be getting up soon. He loved Vik like a brother, but had always been jealous of him. They had always shared many of their problems and had similar situations, but Vik was so positive, a real optimist. He could never understand how Vik could be overloaded with work and troubles still find time to be excited over something so small like the anniversary of someone's birth. Michael knew Vik had once been depressed and a bit of a punk, but somehow Vik had pushed through it managed to turn himself into what Michael could only see as an ideal individual. Michael aspired to be like Vik, but he knew that no matter how hard he tried, Vik was Vik and Michael could never see the world with the same colours as him.

Michael left the kitchen and went to fetch his bag and jacket. It was Monday and he needed to leave for work soon. He hated his job. Everything about it was tedious and soul-crushing. He especially hated his coworkers. They always tried to pry into his life and force him to eat lunch with them or go to some sort of event. He disliked socializing and hearing their stories made him sick. Every once in awhile, he wished he could just make them be quiet forever. When he had these thoughts, he would always force himself to calm down. He hated violence and knew it was often his lack of sleep that made him irritable and antisocial. He missed sleeping. He missed closing his mind and the warmth of waking up fully rested. Most of all he missed his dreams. His dreams that would make him forget the world and forget his worries. Dreams that he would rather never wake up from. He had tried telling Vik about this once, but it had just resulted in an extremely worried reaction from his roommate, so now he just kept it to himself. He pretended to be able to sleep and pretended to be happy.

As he put on his jacket, he heard Vik’s alarm go off. “It must be seven O’clock,” he thought. He was late. He rushed to get his bag and walked towards the door. Today was an important day, he couldn’t afford to be late. He grabbed his keys and stood in front of the mirror on the door. “Are we sure about this?” he asked himself. He saw his reflection nod. He opened the door and walked into the hall. Walking towards the elevator he saw his neighbor, Alicia. She waved to him and they chatted while they waited for the elevator. “Happy birthday!” she exclaimed, remembering what day it was. “Thanks,” Michael replied back. “You should come over for dinner to celebrate tonight!” she proposed. “I’d love to, but I have other plans,” Michael said sadly. The elevator doors opened in front of them. Alicia entered then glanced back at Michael, “Aren’t you coming?” she questioned. “No, I’m going up today,” he told her. She gave him a puzzled look as the doors closed in front of her.

As he waited for the elevator to make its way down then back up to his floor, Michael thought about Alicia. They had known each other since he had moved in and he had always been too fond of her for his own good. At first he thought they might make a good couple, but as the years wore on, he found it harder and harder to try and make a move, though he still cared for her deeply.

He heard the elevator stop in the lobby and checked his phone, it was 7:16. He was on time. Relieved he checked the message Vik had sent him. “Where are you? I thought we were having breakfast for your birthday?!?!?!” He didn’t feel like responding, he was in a hurry. The elevator opened in front of him as he put away his phone. He got in and pushed the button labelled “R”. As he ascended he felt something he hadn’t felt in a long time, excitement. He marveled at the newly rediscovered emotion and wondered if it took anything away from today. He decided it could only mean he was making the right choice. As the doors opened and Michael saw the early morning sun, he took a big breath of fresh air.

He stepped out of the elevator and made his way to his favorite part of the entire building, maybe even of the entire city. In the corner of the roof was a small chair that he had put there himself a few years ago. He loved to stare out over past the city. He imagined being able to see the entire world from up on his high perch. As his vision passed over his favorite spots like the mountains in the distance and the horizon past them, his phone rang. It was his alarm. 7:28 a.m. He stood up and walked to the railing around the edge of the building. He carefully stepped over and looked out once more past the city, the front of his feet no longer touching the ground. As he took his phone out one last time, he briefly wondered what Vik would have gotten him for his birthday. It didn’t matter though, nothing could be better than the gift he had gotten himself. He looked at the time. 7:30. “It’s time,” he thought as he prepared himself. “I can sleep now,” he said aloud as he took his final step forward and smiled as he fell into the darkness.