

4:30

By Joe Riley

Bars close at 2 A.M in California, a nuisance for this dedicated "alcoholic" (maybe)--stumbling, fumbling words, spirit, and memory--creating lost connections that evaporate into the cosmos, leaving energy that might not have existed at all. And your friends smile when you see them at 4:15, 15 minutes before your shift, loosely lubricated in bourbon's brown, oily haze that stoked this hazy fire of next day halfie's, not drunk but not entirely sober. Sometimes I'm charming; a friend says you bought a rose for a beautiful Cuban girl you fell in love with outside of Vertigo. You said some charming things, in broken Spanish, she smiled. You kissed her cheek prompting a giggle, and then she furtively slipped away, encased in a naughty box created by her unfortunate looking friends. But, you made her smile.

--They were just jealous, because they wanted it too.

My friend laughs.

Then there are the nights when you don't sleep 'til halfway through brunch, and your alarm goes off, your throat burning like the Gobi, but getting up hurts too much. You roll over.

You catch the last alarm, the one that if you missed, it would result in a week without getting paid, sitting at home emptying bottles. But luckily, like always (somehow) shit connects and you beat about, not like boats, but like the wings of a hummingbird spastically flying about the ruins of what could be a nice apartment, collecting the necessities. Your work shoes, check. Your wallet (don't remember it being this empty), check. Your phone, check. Throw the shirt you've worn for the last three days into the drier, vanishing the wrinkles, but musking the pot flavored B.O. you seem to have developed. No time to shower, dry shave, it hurts, but life's tough, sometimes a helmet is necessary. You pray the bus is waiting at your door.

4:30 again. Same friends you saw 12 hours ago, saying nothing. This time the executor of my drunken state doesn't come up to me and smile. I attempt banter:

--Motherfucker, last night was crazy.

Considering the vacancy of memory, this is normally a safe thing to say. But this time my forced charm isn't met with a reciprocal, but with a burdened stare, a broken voice and strange tears. Nothing can be understood in the hectic attempts to elucidate the dead night. My drinking buddy sounds like Bob Dylan, but from Scotland, after losing his first dog:

--Tony... North Beach... pizza... fight... head... pavement...

Pause, then tears turn his eyelashes into icicles:

--He punched this dude... and his friend came up behind him, hit him with a bottle, and he smacked his head super hard against the pavement.

No more. I feel my pupils shrink like raisins, and can't look my buddy in the eye. I can't cry, tears are pointless and sometimes it's better (easier) to avoid being human.

Why is it you always promise to quit drinking on Mondays, when everything bad happens on Saturday, sometimes on Tuesday. I've heard rumors of Wednesday having wildly unfortunate happenings, but rarely travesties. Good Fridays are great because of god, and Sundays are serene unless you happen to work at the restaurant. I hated Thursdays when I was in grade school, I think because of lunch, but college repaired my relationship with Thursday. Something about Saturdays always seems to suck. And on Sunday I drink again, because the shift was hard, San Francisco's cold, and Tony's in a coma.

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