

Sebastian Carter

Professor Mckenna

Writing 1010

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Insomnia.

It started at some point between the day they told me and the day It all ended.

A fascination, a fixation, a purpose.

It was 1AM.

I was draped in a chair, curled up, crying my eyes out. I wasn't even sure why.

The darkness of my room crept in on me. The faint stench of stale cat urine curled around the doorway from the corridor outside, assaulting my nostrils, like a wave of sadness on a rainy day. The cat stretched and looked fleetingly concerned before settling back to sleep.

I hadn't seen my dad in a week.

It was 2AM.

A single phrase repeated itself over and over in my head, the words circling endlessly like vultures waiting for their wounded prey to finally give up and let death take its hold. The soon to be carcass of my mind had already begun to rot into nothingness. Ten words. I counted them again and again. Those ten words, swirling, chanting, relentlessly, without any sign of stopping.

'I never sleep, cause sleep is the cousin of death'

New York State of Mind, a hit from Nas' 1994 album *Illmatic* played constantly through my headphones, a quiet accompaniment to my wild thoughts, counteracting the crazy, calming me, encouraging me, leading me to the light, closer and closer to the break of dawn.

'I never sleep, cause sleep is the cousin of death'

The song became my life, at least in a metaphorical sense.

Its steady unchanging beat came to represent the monotonous cycle my life had become.

The gritty lyricism reflected the poverty, crime and drug use that surrounded me here in the city.

The pianos looping menacingly in the background seemed symbolic of the constant fear I felt.

Fear of the people around me

Fear for the people around me.

It was 3 AM.

I no longer cared about my wellbeing. It had been months since I had slept for more than 4 consecutive hours, and it would be months before I would again. I looked like I was dying. My body screamed for rest, but my mind was screaming louder.

It was 4 AM.

My thoughts came in pieces; fragments that I rearranged in my desperation, trying to figure out why it had to be us, why I had been thrown into this broken hell of a world. I began to question everything I saw, knowing that the world I had previously lived in no longer resembled the one I now inhabited. If you believe someone you love will always be there for you, the day they aren't is the day everything turns on its head.

It was 5AM.

I got up, sliding into my wetsuit, ready to start my day with an early morning swim. The cold morning air chilled me to my core.

In the surf, I am at home. The ocean is my place of peace. At 5AM only the locals are out.

The freezing, salty water stung my skin and the crashing waves blew away any thoughts of the past and of the future. You are in the present, living in the now, just you and the water. Every second you are on the wave is a lifetime of bliss. The water heals you, revives you, keeps you from going insane.

It was 9AM.

The instant I told classmates the news was the instant they stopped talking to me. With those terrible words, I lost the few friends I had.

It turns out that the people who say they have your back are the ones that will leave first when it all goes south.

I remember walking into class afterwards and just standing there, looking into their eyes, staring them down, daring them to talk. I only stayed for a second, but it felt like years had gone by.

Christophe was my only confidant during my darkest hour. A master of sleeplessness, he had slept so little during 6th and 7th grade he would have hallucinations, and after taking a yearlong 'holiday at home' during 9th grade he had returned to school a changed man. Christophe had discovered the world of hallucinogenic drugs. He sometimes disappeared for weeks and returned with tales of his adventures. We would talk about the failures of our government. We would talk about our dreams. He was one of the most popular kids in the school, but we'd grown up together - he made time for me. I enjoyed our conversations.

One day he asked me if I would sell him my ADHD medication. He promised me money. He said he needed some cash to pay off his mum's car and that he was going to sell to his friends and give me 70% of the profits. I believed him.

“I’ll think about it mate”, I said.

I wasn’t sure.

I didn’t want to be responsible for someone’s accidental death.

I decided against it.

Months dragged on, each as mind numbingly empty as the last.

Then came the day.

The loneliness was getting to my head. I didn’t even play soccer with the lads at lunch anymore. I spent my time writing songs in my notebook. I really wanted some friends.

I had come to a decision.

That morning, I grabbed a handful of pills and stuffed them into a sandwich bag.

He didn’t come to school. Christophe was gone for the next month or so, and by the time he came back, I had come to my senses and was no longer interested in entering the drug dealing business. I figured I had enough going on.

It was February 2016.

I tried my hardest to learn nothing. I didn’t want to learn anything from this.

It was a Monday morning.

I still wasn’t sleeping; the nightmares that haunted me during the day still kept me up all night.

I didn’t want to go to school.

I didn’t want to go home.

I had one option left: Acceptance.

I didn't want to see him like he was. It wasn't right. I saw him from a distance, one day every week when he was allowed to leave the hospital.

So I visited him there. His skin was paper thin, pale and unhealthy, deep hollows darkened his sunken eyes, his face rendered barely recognizable, bloated and distorted as it was by the cocktail of drugs. His hair had all fallen out, even his eyebrows. The physical and emotional pain of this long illness were seriously taking their toll. The tubes and wires sticking out of his arm and the lack of hair anywhere on his body made him seem almost inhuman, some kind of cyborg that had escaped his masters or maybe an alien from another planet. He looked like a corpse, like he was going to get packed up and hauled away in a body bag by the nearest hospital orderly at any moment, ready to be picked apart by some coroner.

As I pushed open the door, he looked up and smiled widely at me, and in that moment, with the morning sunlight streaming in through the window, I realized.

My dad was not going to die. It was going to be ok.

It was 8 PM on a Monday evening.

I went to sleep.