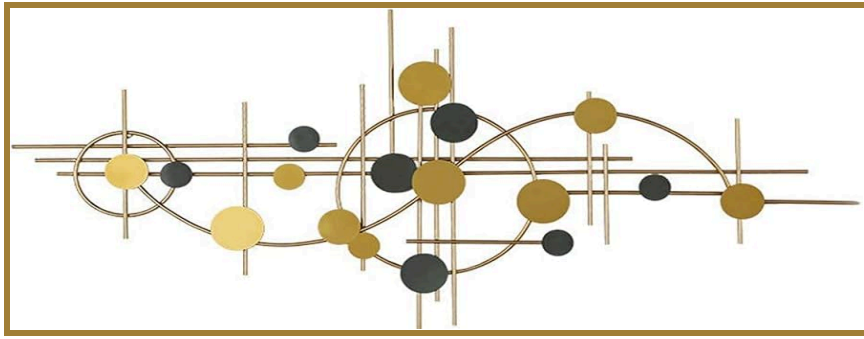




THE WORDS

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Reflective Essay

An Introduction

Many have asked me the same question. The same inquiry everyone receives multiple times in life. “What will you be in the future?”

Most usually have varying answers depending on their age, but mine has always stayed the same.

“Author.”

Why this occupation though? Why not something more thrilling, like an astronaut or singer? For one, those jobs had never piqued my interest. Sure, they seemed objectively cooler than the traditional author role, but that never helps anyone individually. Astronauts are collectively important for the scientific aspects of space, and singers create music that eventually becomes adored by millions, but neither understand the aspect of trying to understand and help people.

This is what being an author, especially a good one, is all about.

You write to understand yourself and others. You write to escape and explore. You write to communicate and understand. You write because of this deep passion to know the truth. You write to express yourself. You write just because of that one story that popped into your head. You write to create realistic characters that serve a purpose, and settings that drip with keen details. You write for fun, or to cope. You write for everyone, or just yourself.

No matter the reason, this is why people write. This is why many (like myself) slave away for hours typing and typing and typing even more. This is why being an author has always been worth it. This is the reason why I’ll always create stories. This is the reason why it will never change, nor will my passion ever decrease, because if I at least help one person through my words on a page- it is worth every second.

So, no. I’m not a singer or an astronaut.

I’m a writer, a storyteller, and a helper.

Monsoon Blues

“Monsoon blues,” his bird would whisper carelessly in the husband’s ear. These words were his undoing. It was all the husband could incomprehensibly think about. It was all he could mumble. Even the heavy crashes of cymbals from above and the impending sheets of rolling gray didn’t break his dead stare. His toes dug into the dew-ridden grass; his calves dripping red onto the dark green. The water rippled and cracked before him, but his bruised fingers kept working with the knot—the knot of a yo-yo.

The toy lay on his lap. It was a simplistic design: sleek, red, and perfect. His thumb brushed over the top, but he tirelessly worked with the string. His fingernails were chipped and kept getting caught in the thin spool, but that didn’t stop him, nor did the howling of the maple trees or the consistent spraying of sand into his numbed yet desperate eyes.

The husband kept working with the contraption. He wanted it fixed. He needed it fixed. It was such a delicate toy. Something so special. Something so complex. Something he mistaken as simple. He was wrong.

The husband was left with the crashing waves that had been ripped by the winds. He was left with shades of red mixed with tears from the heavens. He was left with the rolling deep gray, which encompassed the last of the clear sky. He was left with their home sitting perched behind him. The back door violently swayed open and closed. He was left with the howling of wind mixed with the distant call of injustice. Flashing blue and red reflected off the window panes of their house, while his bird was left inside.

And yet, the husband sits by the lake, left with the knotted yo-yo, pointlessly fiddling with the toy. The toy he broke. The toy he can’t fix, though he dared not throw what was left in

the water. The husband, who would soon be a chained number, wouldn't dare sacrifice anything else to his miserable monsoon blues.



When the Monsoon Comes

“When the monsoon comes, don’t stay again,” I always said to my bird.

It was a warning, especially when every fiber of the house would speak. The wallpaper would darken and moan. The oak floorboards would beg for the weight to be lifted off. The windows would crack and blur, providing no hope to see. The ornate door would whimper and scream, with no in-between. No room would feel safe, especially if the lights couldn’t hold on.

My hands would grasp my head. My feet wouldn’t want to touch anything, and using my eyes was just as frightful. My bird did not mind this though. She’d wrap me up with her feathers; the warmth was incomparable. However, whenever my bird was near, the walls would wail even more. They’d tell me horrific things, specifically about death.

I never dared to tell my bird that though. I didn’t want her feathers to disappear. I didn’t want her to realize that she was prey protecting a predator...and neither did I.

However, the longer she was around, the longer the house would strain and contain. The bedroom curtains, though frilly and weak, started to sing like strong nooses. The water in the bath, though perfect and clean, began to choke and gasp. The silverware on the table, though shiny and pristine, continued to scream even when being cleaned and buried in the cupboard.

My bird didn’t know these thoughts though. She only knew the surface of my issues, but nothing ever stays entirely hidden.

I could tell she had begun to fear me, for my bird began to pace around on the oak floor, instead of laying in the covers at night. She began to keep the side door propped open, while

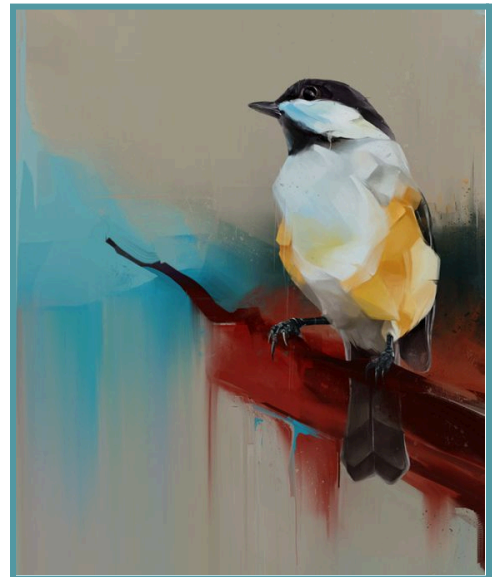
sitting on our cracked cement steps every night. She began to eat like a slave or a king, no in-between. She even started playing with the red yo-yo; the yo-yo from her childhood. There was nothing special about it, except the fact it was the only thing enjoyable from her past. Apparently, it calmed her.

It never calmed my monsoons though.

Weeks had gone by, but nothing had changed. The yo-yo was still curled beneath her feathers, and my bird gently cradled the time she had away from me.

I didn't like it. The house didn't like it. Nothing liked it.

Eventually, this hateful mindset led to an onslaught of breakdowns, which my bird came home to. Black ran down her face, and her feathers retracted. The look was pure terror, but the sympathy in her eyes was great. Love outweighed fear.



So, her scrawny legs came crashing down to meet my huddled mass. I told her to go. I told her I'd bite. She cooed in my ear instead, ignoring my warnings. Her beak became rough and insolent against my cheek. I saw her brilliant feathers begin to surround me; the string of the yo-yo wrapped around her pinky.

I didn't want to be captured by a bird though, not again. Even if it was mine.

No Fire Extinguisher For You

It was a normal Tuesday in August. The average amount of yelling and rushing around on set was already present, even though it had only hit 11:00 am. California's bright and sunny skies didn't match the tone of the atmosphere. The buildings shook with nerves, cameras were melting from the heat, and the pavement was tired of the spilt lattes every week.

The vibrant, black cameras were glaring off the fireball's magnificent light. Shadows of Hollywood's tan units were encroaching on the scene being filmed. Everyone was bustling around. Some were helping fix Robert Hudson's (already gorgeous) black hair. One woman sprinted past me; her red cargo pants caught my eye.

"So, has my dear film connoisseur found any jaw-dropping inspiration today," Hillary casually said, as she strolled up behind me. She was gifted with long legs and a voice smooth as caramel. Her skin was a mixture of dark and light tones, due to her vitiligo. Some people found this laughable, but Hillary never allowed anyone to take her as a joke. This was probably the main reason I was attracted to her in the first place. Her confidence was something else.

"Ha. Ha. Ha," I replied, as the lady in red cargo pants flew past me like a freight train, again. "Nothing new yet, just the same old stuff."

Hillary put one of her golden brown arms over my shoulder. "Oh come on," she shrugged and waved her hand at the impending doom that awaited if the director had another meltdown. "What isn't there to love in this site of havoc," she asked dreamingly, as if the chaos excited her. I knew better though. Hillary's eyes were dazed and focused on her new crush. (When will that be me? Probably never, but a guy can hope.)

She rambled on about everything that would be shot today. However, my attention drifted towards Robert Hudson. He stood in between the shading of the building's units, impatiently waiting. The sunglasses that covered his bloodshot eyes slowly fell off his face, as he was peering at the sidewalk.

However, Hudson didn't see the next thing coming at him... and I didn't see the camera guy and his crew laughing.



A man was running towards him, arms spread open, ready to catch him in the inferno. The flames somehow rose off the civilian rather than consuming him. How was this mysterious man not writhing in pain? I don't know. I did know where the fire extinguisher was though.

I ripped Hillary's arm off and sprinted into Hudson's direction. Surprisingly though, the suicidal fireball started to slow down, but nothing was stopping me. I sprayed the white fumes all over him, only for an agitated response, much laughter, and Hillary shouting, "Ooooo that's my oblivious boy!"

Eventually, I came to find out that this was a test run (and a prank according to the crew). This new technology was being used to simulate real fire, which my little stunt clearly proved worked. It also proved that my head needed to be pulled out of my ass, and that my ass needed to be kicked.

I really should have read the script.

Discarded Melodies

The Uncle

My mailbox had been sitting empty for weeks.



No newspapers from the New York Times or articles from “National Geographic” ended up perched in that small box. They had disappeared after ending my subscription. No point in keeping up with the news, nor did I find the subject of rainforest creatures entertaining like she did.

For many weeks, I had been planning on digging the whole post out of the ground. Burn the wooden stake and crush the metal into something useful. However, I couldn't do that, for I still had a letter to mail.

It wasn't anything normal though. It was still a piece of paper. One with words evoking heartbreak, betrayal, and love. The other is sitting on my piano still. It was completed, except for the blank space where the title should be. I couldn't begin to write anything else on it, since she left.

The creamy paper just sat there, watching and waiting for me to inevitably put it where it needs to be. So, on some random Tuesday, I took the music sheet and neatly folded it into the envelope. I licked the seal, pressed it shut, and grabbed a pen.

I wrote what was necessary, and then walked past the front door to my office. The shredder was waiting patiently, as I dropped the envelope into it. The word “Discarded” slowly disappeared into the sharp blades.

The music inside me finally died that day.

The Niece

Mommy and Daddy had plenty of mail coming in each week.

They had magazines and crumpled newspapers perched inside the small box. However, whenever those white envelopes came through, Mommy and Daddy would argue. At first, I didn't know why. They were only simple letters.

I got my hands on the mail the next weekend though, and rummaged through until I found one. Sadly, it wasn't what I was looking for and Mommy caught on quickly. This is when they decided a "talk" was necessary.

Daddy told me about how my uncle and aunt weren't coming back here anymore. Mommy followed with how hurt and embarrassed she felt, especially when still receiving letters from Auntie. They weren't mad, but their voices weren't happy either. Collectively, they told me not to worry about them, and to never send anything again.

However, I had always been close to my uncle. He was the one to get me into music. He introduced me to the piano and showed me how to compose songs. Therefore, behind Mommy and Daddy's backs, I started writing. The notes came easily to me, and I made sure to use an assortment of different colors for added effect, which he always loved. On the back, I wrote "To Uncle".

On some random Tuesday though, Daddy had found my letter. He didn't say much to me. Daddy just took it in his hand, practically crumpling it, as I begged for him to give it back. Instead, Daddy walked into his office and dropped the letter into the machine that destroys things. I saw "To: Uncle" disappear into the sharp blades.

Mommy and Daddy had killed the music inside of me that day.

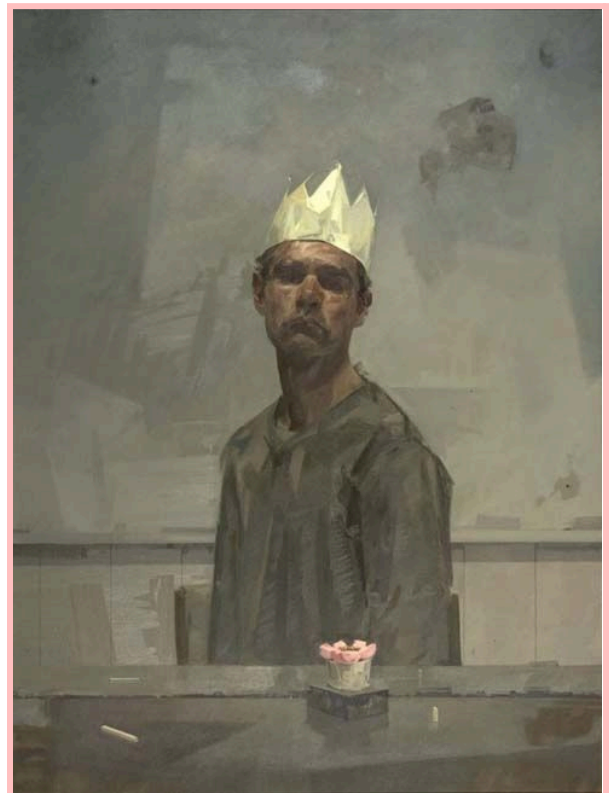
To Understand

The mud on my feet from the previous thunderstorm back in “San Franco” was dried and caked between my toes. The water in my canteen was barely enough to keep me standing upright, and my food supply was diminished severely. My horn still throbbed, and I felt droplets of blood seeping through the bandage I wrapped around it. The sun was glaring against my eyes, blinding my vision, but the gravel beneath my feet was unmistakable. Squinting hard enough, I saw a sign up ahead. “Measel: Home to Nothing”. Depressing, but the town fit the description.

A water spigot stood outside the abandoned grocery store, which I promptly used to clean my feet. The building was dark blue with bordered up windows. Upon looking around, I noticed that everything had the same dark blue trim. Letting curiosity run its course, I kept walking down the road. House after house passed by. Most looked inhabitable, whereas some had paranoid faces peering at me through the slits of their blinds.

One of the homes caught my eye. It looked the same, except a sloppy ‘Happy Birthday’ had been hung across the house’s pillars. No signs of life were around, until I peered through the window.

An older man sat at his dinner table peacefully. A cake laid in front of him, with a cardboard crown resting on his skull. My curiosity got the better of me because I slightly knocked on the thin glass. The man seemed startled at my presence, but nonetheless, gave me a delightful smile and waved his hand. I’d assume



the gesture meant to come in, because he didn't protest when my footsteps echoed across his hardwood floor.

"I don't get many visitors," he gently stated, as I glanced around his apartment, "Where are you headed? I can't imagine there is much left farther west."

"Oh no. I actually came from the west," I said, glancing around his apartment. "I'm headed east to...start over." I gave him a faint smile, which he returned.

The man didn't move, but rather pointed to my horn. "You have one."

"Yeah, I know," I chuckled, noticing the grim and gray features. Everything was dull and crusty, like this place begged for burial. "Do you want to rip it off my head or lecture me about how *wonderful* of a gift it is too?"

He appeared momentarily perplexed. His gaze drifted to some pictures on the wall. One displayed a small toddler with webbed feet. Another with mismatched wings that displayed bulging pink veins; her hair pulled into a bun. The old man sighed.

"They are alright, but he can't walk properly, and she hurts constantly." He pointed at my horn. "I understand the burden."

I gave him a half smirk as other items began to catch my attention. There were multiple letters on the cabinet behind the old man, but most were sealed shut and unopened. The cake gently sat in front of him; the frosting almost melting in slow motion. No candles could be seen on the pastry, but a match was intertwined within his fingers. Odd. My gaze rose up to his face,

noticing the wet paint smeared across it. Bright pink, neon blue, and sunlight orange combined onto his gray, wrinkled skin.

“Party happening soon,” I asked curiously, my foot touching something wet on the ground.

The old man shook his head. “No, no, I’m afraid not. These colors were from a party days ago,” he stated casually, “Though I do have an occasion to celebrate.”

“Ah, well you must want some company,” I asked, “I mean, who’s going to eat all that cake?” He laughed at my horrible implication of a joke, but to my surprise, shook his head at my request.

“I’m afraid this is something meant to be done...,” he paused halfway through, “...alone.”

Confusion consumed me, until I noticed the liquid sprawled out across the floor. It was clear, but the viscosity had this menacing tone. Realization hit me like a train.

It was gasoline.

“But...why,” I asked.

He looked upon me with certainty. “I’m old. I’m dying. I’m hurt.” The singular match in his hand made sense now.

“But...what about them,” I asked, pointing to the pictures on the wall. He shook his head though, dismissing the possibility of staying at least for them.

“You can’t just do that? They’ll miss you.”

He shook his head. “No, they will be fine. They won’t care.”

“Of course they care. Everyone’s got someone or something. I mean- hell dude- look behind you. Those letters clearly indicate-”

“-nothing. Absolutely nothing,” he said, playing with the match in his hand. Was he imagining it? Was he hoping I’d leave, so that the scorching heat would solidify this false bliss of his? Nonetheless, I kept trying.

“I don’t understand,” I said exasperated, “If you’d just let the colors soak in-”

“-They don’t,” he said abruptly, interrupting me. “They don’t dry. They don’t stay. They drip on my outstretched hands, only sitting there for temporary display.”

The man’s hand gripped the table harder, as the match lay solemn between his fingers. I noticed his sudden movement, as he saw mine. I reached the table, but the old man struck the match first. It illuminated his face, as I saw the colors drip onto his lap.

The old man sighed, when seeing my hesitant posture.

“I’m sorry. It is just too much, for so little color.”

The match dwindled in his hand. The cardboard crown laid crooked on his head. His face was mostly pale now, and the cake sat lopsided on the table.

“...I’m sorry, too,” I said, viewing the tiny wildfire resting in his palm. The warmth from that singular flame spoke life and death.

He looked upon me with this expression of understanding though, but my eyes didn't relay the same.

"You don't understand. I know. It must hurt," he said, pausing for a brief moment, "I know I am not right though. I want to be, but I know it won't be right. I don't think I even understand myself."

I opened my mouth, but promptly closed it.

"And maybe both of us never will." Seconds flashed before my eyes, as the light within his eyes flickered once more before being consumed by the inevitable blaze.

His chair creaked as he leaned forward. The man looked sad, almost regretful.

"Do me a favor," he said one last time, "Never stop trying to understand."

I had eventually left that house, almost in a flurry. It had become nighttime, so the blaze was clear, even from miles away. My heart was hurting. My horn was throbbing. My foot was bleeding. However, unlike the man, I will keep trying.

I try to understand.



Hungry City

I didn't even pull out my gun. I didn't do anything. I just stood there...and watched. I let every person's shoulder bump into mine, as they tried to escape the red and tangled mess. The men and women piling in through the roof had knives accompanied with murderous smiles. Some busted through the church's walls, riding their new experimental beasts. The roars of delight and hunger- something I would never forget.

They weren't organized though. Some shot haphazardly. Others used kitchen utensils as their bloody toys. Their beasts were released from their iron chains. The muzzles fell to the ground, allowing a hideous display of carnage, bones, teeth, and veins to be seen. One went after the frightened prey. A hairless beast drove its handler into a wall, and the others fought over the dead meat.

The dead being Toby. The meat being him. He was a meal. Toby. My friend, my partner, our mission. The stained glass. Those teeth. His exposed bones. Toby. The red, the smell, our city. The hungry eyes. Those veiny mouths. His draining blood. Toby. My friend. Dead. Eat. Red. Too much red. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run. Run.

I've been running for weeks though. The laughing and that color red follows. Down every street, across the slabs of ruined cement, and through chains of anguish. I never lose it. It is a part of this city. It is what these musty ruins crave for.

I see everything clearly. The people break and tear, but they never share. Banging on drums with no rhythm and screaming over the influence of their medications. The hysterical laughing of hyenas drowns out gunshots. Moldy drumsticks are kicked to the curb with unlucky corpses. I live in this starving pit.

Across the street, a figure approached with this zombie-like gait. “Why don’t you come



to my palace, pretty boy,” the individual chuckled, breaking me out of my stupor. Her teeth were grinding in her mouth. Her eyes erotic, almost like blood moons. She sauntered closer as her necklace bounced against her knotted shirt. Stray yarn unraveled around her feet. Nothing was sane about her, yet her hunger was so real.

My feet moved on their own. My pulse quickened and my breath puffed out in front of me. The lack of food and water affected me, yet her blood moons kept dripping their dreadful

red in my mind, keeping me in constant motion.

I could hear the snapping of bones and the creaking screams of trapdoors. The windows of every building were crying blood. The cracks were chomping at my heels, and the sewers were gurgling, ready to explode. My brain thumped. Banging and clashing, with nowhere to go. The sickening smell of hunger begged me to give in.

Desperately, I pounded on someone’s door. It didn’t matter who, but I needed off these streets, away from this devastation. I needed away from that sickening sweet smell and red moons that I lived with for too long. Someone cursed through the window at me and heavy footsteps were approaching the door. I just wanted help. I didn’t want to keep scrambling around, but no one cared.

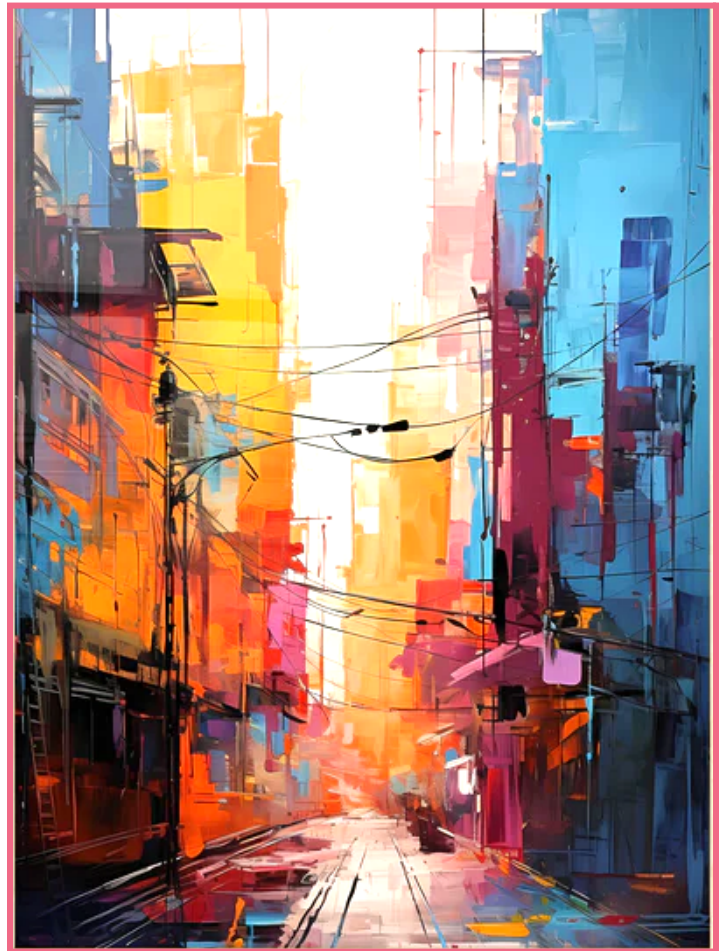
I continued running, passing countless street names in a blur. Thoughts about my past swirling through my mind. Thoughts about Toby and those clean bones. Thoughts about this city. How did I even live in these gluttonous places?

My feet eventually gave into the ground, tired from the restless days and nights. I was in the middle of an alley on my knees. The shade encompassing my body was eerie. The eyes of stone cold bricks were judging me. Vines of fungi were shaking and laughing with uncontained joy at my fear. The ground was rumbling, ready to eat me whole. My hands automatically covered my face. My stomach growled. My toes were curled. I was prepared.

Nothing happened though.

Instead, something soft grazed my nose. I peeked through the curtains of my calloused fingers to find this dainty piece of cloth beside me. It was light orange; a pigmentation I haven't seen in years. The stitching was more vibrant, but it wasn't entirely neat. Hints of teal embroidery were added for contrast, giving the cloth this bumpy feel. It was pleasant, and the faint aroma wafting around me smelt like newly blooming flowers.

Another bright fabric flew by, so I continued in the direction this color came from. It took me down tight alleys and narrow streets. However, it slowly opened up into larger spaces, where faint sunshine shone through the arches and roofs, speckling my face with needed light. Music played in the distance. True music with whimsical instruments and rhythm. The narrow street opened up to this small town market. There was no blood red, only billions of colors hanging



by delicate knots on walls and patios. Mosaic tiles and rough sand sat beneath my feet. It was beautiful. It was peaceful. My nose fell silent and my ears rejoiced.

None of this had tempted me. It welcomed me. The hunger lingered in my soul, but nothing here reminded me of that cruelty. There weren't any dead bodies or meaningless chaos. The aroma was refreshing, and the colors were respectful. This place...it gave me care, without even knowing my past.

I draped detailed gold ropes around my neck, sunset colored silk across my shoulders, and textured teal pants on my legs. I felt at home. I felt free. I felt everything.

Cupid Changed

I remember walking down these streets years ago. It was my father's birthday, and we decided to travel to an oceanside city, which was much different than our northern hometown in Michigan. Everything was brighter and ultimately more lively. Women were wearing frilly sundresses while men wore casual khakis. The multitude of cafes, stores, and businesses was extraordinary.

However, more interesting was the fact that everyone's wings were out. I hadn't known that there was such a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Some were mixtures of browns with hints of white, while others had faint orange hues with feathers as long as my legs. It was something you didn't see much back North, where everyone only took their fuzzy wings out in the comfort and warmth of their own homes.

Perhaps this small memory was the beginning of my obsession with wings, or maybe it was due to what I saw the next day.

There was this gigantic palace we had entered. It was a few blocks from the beach, so most of the road was covered in white sand. The building had these ornate gates, which swung open upon our arrival (along with many other people piling in). It had a garden full of green vinery and the grass was lush.

There were a multitude of intricate circle/heart shaped ponds that sported many kinds of Koi fish. Purple, pink, orange, and silver scaled ones rippled the water. Curious, I tried walking towards the fish, but my mom had seen my intentions in advance and scolded me.



“Arthur Loveland. We DO NOT disrespect his grounds like this,” she said, immediately grabbing my arm to drag me back on the crowded path.

At the time, I didn’t necessarily understand what was so important about this “him”. My dad and mom both seemed equally excited though, and so did everyone else. Some were tapping their feet impatiently. Others were jumping up and down and pointing at something blindingly white, and even more had tears streaked down their faces.

After a long wait, it was finally my parent’s turn to meet “him”. This so-called person deserved all this praise though. I had determined that after seeing his wings. They were pure white, with little hints of natural sparkles embedded within his feathers. They were the biggest I’d ever seen, and had that perfectionism that no one else could achieve. My parents immediately thanked him, and the man almost looked surprised at this fact. His golden eyes veered off into my own though.

“Who’s this young man,” the entity with beautiful wings had asked.

“It’s our son. Arthur Loveland. Isn’t he just the cutest,” my mom replied.

My dad tried to say something snide/sarcastic in reply, but it immediately got shut down from mom’s elbow into his ribs.

The winged man didn’t notice, but instead kneeled down to my level. At this point, I could see every fine detail etched into his wings. His face had this sincere look, and his hair was golden brown with a tint of red. His robes flew like water across his body, and his wings gave off this soft powder everytime they twitched lightly.

“You have unique and beautiful wings,” he had said, with the gentlest smile on his face.

“Use them.”

And from that moment on, I vowed to use my wings for good, and I took it upon myself to work for this man.

The winged man, who was Cupid.

I had returned to this same city about 12 years later, and followed the same route to Cupid's palace. This time I wasn't visiting though. I was hired to deliver mail to him. It was a simple job, but the only one I could apply for that would allow me to get close to him. (Contrary to prior belief, Cupid isn't looking for some young apprentice to take his place.) Therefore, I was officially his mailman, which had been seen as a highly desirable job years prior. It was weird that it had died in popularity.

The suburban city was even stranger. The shops, cafes, and businesses weren't overflowing with customers. There was hardly anyone out, and only a small crowd was standing outside around Cupid's palace.

I promptly showed my ID to the guards scheduled at the gates, and was immediately let in. The others behind me that we're waiting began yelling at the "injustice". Most of them were dressed casually with wings that looked droopy and unkempt. Something about them looked highly depressing.

His palace appeared different as well. The grass didn't seem like the lush quilt it once was. The ornate details weren't apparent. The cracks could be seen on the pillars I walked by, but the interior was breathtaking. It was a mixture of indian/egyptian design, with an open floor plan. Even the entrance/walkways were wide enough for even the longest wingspans, with satin curtains blowing almost magically in the wind. The mosaic tile underneath my feet was a wide

arrangement of oranges, reds, purples, pinks, whites, and browns. This whole place screamed elegance.



“Beautiful. Isn’t it,” Cupid asked. He had just walked into the room and outstretched his hand for the mail.

“Yeah. I mean it is quite breathtaking,” I said.

His slender fingers wrapped around the letters, almost as if signaling that this conversation was done.

“I bet you’ve been pretty busy,” I said, trying to keep the conversation afloat.

Instead of walking away though, Cupid gave a sour look. “Oh, yes. Plenty busy,” he said. His annoyed stance and scrunched up facial features said it all. I had said something wrong. Cupid brushed the statement off though, shrugging his robe back onto his shoulders. In the process though, I noticed small particles of his wings falling off onto the floor. It was powdery and white.

“You should head on back,” Cupid said. He looked slightly frazzled, but before walking completely out of the room he turned back around.

“Arthur. Make sure to protect those wings,” he said, before striding back through the purple curtains he came through.

Weird.

Several weeks had passed, and I was still his faithful mailman. I had started to despise the job though. It wasn't physically demanding or difficult to retrieve the letters, but the small crowd demanding “injustice” or whatever grew significantly bigger. It made me tense up, especially since last Tuesday someone ripped some feathers out of my right wing while I was trying to deliver his letters. In all my years, I hadn't seen anyone disrespect people that horribly.

Nonetheless, they scream and yell for hours at Cupid's gates, demanding gibberish from the man. I could see it was taking a toll on him as well, for his wings were looking less white. They appeared more powdery each day. Cupid was in total discomfort, and I couldn't help but feel sympathetic for him. Especially when I arrived late one night, and found him pacing back and forth on the mosaic tile.

He greeted me with a slight wave, and then eagerly took the letters from me. His hair was a mess, and the velvet robe was wrinkled in multiple different areas. Cupid must have noticed my prodding eyes because he straightened his back and faced me. His golden eyes pierced my own.

“Arthur. Don't you think your wings are pretty. Maybe even useful,” he asked.

“I mean definitely useful, but maybe not-”

“-actually useful,” Cupid finished for me.

I placed my hand on the table and looked down. “Uh, what?”

Cupid shrugged. More powdery dust fell. No response.

“I mean, uhm... isn’t that harsh given your position and-”

“-and what,” Cupid asked harshly, “I’m not the winged love of god. I’m just here, helping others on their journeys, when really I ain’t doing nothing.”

He began to pace back and forth again. His breathing became labored while his robes dragged across the unswept mosaic tiles.

“Arthur, right? You couldn’t have really believed this whole time that I did anything more than just sit here,” he chuckled. “I mean at the beginning I thought I was *really* doing something you know? I would come out with my robes and wings soaring high, almost showing others the ability to love, that it is entirely possible,” Cupid waved his hands in the air, “It was going so well, but something changed.”

He twisted his robe inside the palm of his hand before continuing.

“Everyone just stopped coming. Of course it didn’t happen overnight, but something new was happening down the street. It was booming music from miles away, with flashing lights that could reach the stars. So I became obsolete, just another pathetic man sitting in his impending doom. I was just waiting for myself to implode, especially when they started protesting, like everything was *my fault*.”

He pointed at me like Cupid was demanding something from my soul.

“I mean- c’mon’ Arthur. Does that sound correct? They destroy their own wings, and then come complaining right back at my gates. Screaming their slurs and insults, while their feathers start to fall out even further. It’s incredibly naive.” Cupid scoffed under his breath. “So don’t make my mistake kid. Don’t think you can fix everything with your wings. It gets you nowhere.”

...I was too pissed off though. His words and negative mentality infuriated me. I was still trying desperately, so why couldn't he? Cupid, the supposed god of love, couldn't anymore.

What a joke.

What an excuse.

What a failure.

Yet, my anger seemed to stem more from the fact that Cupid might actually be more right than wrong. It is probably why I stormed out of that room, never to deliver another letter again.

A multitude of years flew by, and Cupid was exactly right. My wings were ultimately useless. I tried again and again to prove they weren't, but each time left me having to cover up my wounds, scars, or discolorations. The baby blue patches in my left wing had fully disappeared a year ago, and the chunk of ripped out feathers from the right would never grow back.

Looking in the mirror tore me apart. It killed me inside. I didn't want to see my wings anymore. I didn't want to see them battered and hurt. I didn't want to know they existed.

So, I took scissors to them. I clipped my wings. I clipped the same wings my mother was so proud of me for. The same wings my father had at



his age. The same wings even Cupid complimented on. Yet, I still snipped with the scissors. Agony running through my bones with each cut.

I threw my hoodie on after finishing up. My wings were not visible anymore. It was almost a relief. Almost.

So, I took to roaming the sand ridden streets again. Others could be seen partying down the block. Their feathers were unnatural shades of pinks and greens, with dirty edges and disgusting scents. It was horrendous to walk by, especially when stepping upon the multitude of feathers littered across the roads.

I closed my eyes and continued walking further. The familiar sound of someone's voice could be distantly heard. He was shouting loudly, almost too much, like he was desperate. The other female laughed and yelled back. It was almost too heartbreaking to hear, because I knew that man. His palace was something I could never forget. His wings were something unforgettable.

I sighed.

I could only hope that Cupid would never change that aspect.

I could only hope that no one would do what I just did.