

- **Beer Goggles**

I'm getting fat. I can see the roundness of my belly, because that's what it is now; it's no longer a stomach. Tea belly, beer belly, curry belly; it's all of these things. My skin's pale too, my pores red and elevated like pock marks all over my hands. But I feel fine; an illusion that the meds create and then sustain. I'm okay because my body's being lied to, fed false information by the prescribed drugs that inhabit me, squatting in my bloodstream like gypsies in a supermarket car park. My knuckles are enlarged, bloated by the resistance of that guy's face last night. I slipped. Just the once but it was a downward spiral that led to a pit of ugliness. Hence the drugs. They keep me too docile to move let alone leave the house. Judy has made the house dry, not even an empty bottle left in the bin, all of them on their way to go help make windows or food jars or maybe even more beer bottles. I don't know.

My life is one big question mark at the moment; I feel like the 'Riddler' from that Batman movie, my clothes covered in question marks, the punctuation infiltrating my head. I look forward and all I can see is a black wall of uncertainty. I'm not sure if that's a good thing or not.

I'm glad there's no mirror out here. I don't want to see my face. Maybe I'm also building up an aversion to glass too? Glass contains trouble; it holds the liquor, confining it so as to grant me access. Glass tells the truth, in more ways than one. I can imagine what I'd see, if there was a reflective surface around. I'd see age, descent, decay. They say I used to look yellow, my family, so I joked and asked them if they wanted fried rice with that. A tired joke, a tired mind. THEY say I'm looking better. They say I'll be myself again soon. They know everything; they sure talk like they do.

Myself? Who is that, or what was that? I find it hard to pin that down anymore. Perhaps it's the drugs, addling my brain, turning me into a child again, dependent, restricted. They say children ARE free (a different they this time) but children are their parents. They live in an allegory, a make believe world that reflects reality, but they are still bound by the rules that operate in this miniature universe of 'the home'.

So it's like I'm seven again, confined to the rules of the house, a house that is in my name but is no longer mine. I can't cope with the responsibilities that come with

being a home owner anymore. Judy is the reigning queen of my kingdom now, but since she's my sister, there's no way that I can be king. I remembered once, when I was a teenager, wondering what it would be like to fuck her. I lay in bed at night and let my mind run with the scenario, imagining how it would feel. It would be beyond sex, even at fourteen I knew that, but the perversion of it all, how fucked up it would make us both feel, therein lay the excitement, the adrenaline rush of being bad, acting naughty. I never did anything, of course, but the thought was still there so where's the difference?

Jesus, I hope that *is* the drugs. I hadn't thought about that in such a long time; I thought the years would have swallowed it up. And now she takes care of me, my big sis, coming over to fuss and pamper, to reassure. And now I don't think about fucking her: she's gotten fat.

My feet have swelled and I get cramp all too easily. The doctors say that that's another symptom of my 'disease', but I can't help but think it's just old age. I look down at their deformity and wonder how anyone could ever have loved me. I'm so ugly and that's not just me being harsh or lacking confidence; it's a fact. The truth.

Amy left before I began to get 'better', but that in itself is a blessing. I look worse now that I'm 'healthy'. I guess beer goggles don't just work when looking at women. Would she love me now? An old man sitting on the patio, sipping diet coke, still tasting the vodka it should be laced with. Another question mark, but one I'm in no hurry to dispel. The future may just be black, but I don't see her shadow hidden within its depth. Closed chapter.

My fucking back aches. It's as if my body is falling apart now that the alcohol is gone, as if that was the true fuel for my engine. At my most desperate, I compare myself to a cancer patient who is going through the gruelling rigor of chemo, but I know that is being selfish. The pills are wearing off; the prescription is in the kitchen. Good. I wish those blue tablets were sitting in the drain, slowly dissolving. Taking them feels almost like being drunk, a blanket of numbness; isn't that what I'm supposed to avoid? But I have to be a good doggy today and take my meds, because of slipping last night.

Guilt. I swear most of it is artificially manufactured, seeds sown by other people in your head. If I never again spoke with another person, never had to endure their voice echoing into my brain, would I ever feel guilty again?

Beep, beep, beep. My Casio is alerting me to once again dine on those little pharmaceutical miracles. I deactivate it and sink deeper into the sun lounger, not that I'm catching many rays on a grey, April afternoon. But what else is an 'active jobseeker' suppose to do each day when he can't spend his time sitting in the pub? I feel like I'll never work again, that I simply couldn't. There's too many people out there, too many distractions from me and my disjointed thoughts. *Prudey* Judy looks after me now. I guess that I'm her charge now, relegated from baby brother to simply baby. Ted spends all of his free time at the races and I wonder if she married him because he reminds her of me. He gambles his money away; I piss mine up the wall of the Catholic school next to the Lamb & Shank. Soul brothers. Maybe, secretly, she really wanted to fuck *me* all these years. My fantasy was a one night only kind of thing, it held the existence of a fruit fly. What if hers has stayed with her all these years? Does this mean she'll be offering to give a sponge bath before too long, as part of my rehabilitation?

Jesus, questions, questions, questions. My brain's riddled with them like woodworm. I was always a philosophical drunk, but now I'm mundanely sober. I should be sitting here pondering the nature of the universe, pontificating what effect the flap of a butterfly's wing has on the universe, not wondering whether my sister wants to give me a soapy wank in the bathtub. Maybe dementia is part of my *disease*, another happy side effect of a lifetime spent on the sauce. Personally, I'm beginning to think that alcoholism is an age accelerator and nothing more. Now if only I could find a way to reverse that, I wouldn't have to rely on my forty-five quid a week handout and Judy's 'Shepherd Pie Surprise'.

My beard's gotten long. I can see it poking out from my chin whenever I look down. I started growing it at the same time I started getting 'help'. They tell me it makes me look older, especially since the tips are turning grey, but it's part of my therapy, a physical representation of my metamorphosis from a drunk to clean & sober Christian.

It's been sixty nine minutes since I should have topped up my meds and I get to thinking how long it's been since I last had sex. I used to cheat all the time, when Amy was still around, but it was always during one of my blackouts. The only way I remembered later was because I had a habit of putting the used condom in my jacket

pocket afterwards. But even reaching into my coat and pulling out a handful of diluted spunk wasn't enough to make me stop. Amy found them sometimes too. I lied, said that I get horny drunk and jack off into a johnny. I said I liked the feel of the latex; I said I didn't want to get any on my hands. She was blonde, but she wasn't stupid.

MY head's begun to hurt as the cloud of medication around my brain begins to clear, fading like morning mist under the glare of the hot sun. It reminds me of a hangover but the pain is different. It is the ache of longing, of desire, like the kind you get deep down in your balls when some big tits stroll by. Judy's got big tits, great, saggy puppies that jostle when she gets excited or angry. I think of my sister's breasts and I'm no longer disgusted with myself. Time for my pills?

Two hours and fifteen minutes and the sun is starting to go down. I can't decide if I look better or worse in its blood red glow, as now my withered hands look like that of a monster, one who has shed his skin and whose body is made up of raw, pulsating muscle. Perhaps I am becoming a creature of the night, my true form revealed with the rising of the moon. Just like I used to be. My body *is* PAIN now and more than ever I don't want to pop those pills. If only I could enjoy how I am feeling, then I could label myself a masochist and so many of my problems would be explained. Enlightenment, a true sense of being, of knowing yourself. Maybe then the future would become a little clearer to me and my mind could concentrate on more than just the pills my body is craving. *Piss head to junkie.*

The stars are beautiful, or at least they would be if I could see them. I look up and the twinkling lights become little blue specks that promise to sedate me, protect me from life and all the awful things that drove me to drink. I was molested, raped by a be-spectacled uncle with an overhanging gut and a wardrobe full of women's clothes. My wife never loved me, daddy was never proud. My job was stressful; I was driven to the brink of extinction by modern life. The starving children of Africa made me do it with their sad eyes and too-wide smiles at having David Beckham visit their school in his Calvin Klein jeans, smelling of Christian Dior. It was the rebel movements in Darfur, the massacre that would only fade from my eyes when I doused my body in vodka.

Fuck off. I drove myself to drink, with the top down, the radio on and the sun shining in my eyes. I turned to the drugs with my head down, feet shuffling and my gut and liver twisting with agony. I stopped because, well, just because all things have to come to an end. Life is governed by destiny and therefore I believe it was foretold that I would spend all my time sitting in the garden, my body becoming the grave for my soul, thinking, wondering.

I made to three hours and forty-three minutes before I struggled up out of the chair and headed to the cabinet over the cooker. There's no hit, no feeling of elation, of heavenly white light joy. It goes in and goes down, leaving a bitter trail of chemicals in its wake. My body already feels better knowing that I've taken one, the immediate placebo effect.

I sit down and wait. The garden's too cold and I want to be warm now. I can feel my thoughts beginning to dull. Now I can't wait until they are gone.

Word Count: 2044