

# ticks and of misguided ecstasy

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He was standing there - staring - as he saw everything, and everyone, he ever had, ever known, ever loved burn down in front of his eyes. He didn't cry, didn't scream, barely even noticed as sirens and firemen supposedly invaded his every sense. He was numb as he watched on with wide eyes of what looked like pure emerald clouded with every emotion possible - none of which he actually *felt*.

Police officers started coming to him, but he'd either wave them off or just seemed like he couldn't even see or hear them. The word 'shock' was heard and registered in his mind; however he was incapable of deciding if that was indeed what he felt. Somehow it didn't sit well with him- he didn't appreciate the fact that people were now bombarding him with questions - questions he didn't have answers for, when all he wanted was solitude. Was it too hard to be left with your own mind now-days? It was certainly a struggle within itself to actually listen to its logical, bipolar whispers, he thought bitterly to himself.

He sat on the pavement, away from the noise and flashing lights. Away from the hypnotised crowd whom now formed around his house (what's left of it) like pigeons trying to pick as many pieces of information as they could to feed their curiosity without actually lifting a hand. He pulled out a cigarette and placed it in his mouth slowly after having examined it while turning it in his fingers, the feel of it oddly comforting. He then opened the lighter, staring at its fire as it danced in front of his eyes.

In that second, it was mesmerising. He stared at the dancing flame as if it were a foreign creature and wondered how something so small, so controllable by the flick of a button, could have created an inferno like the one he'd witnessed less than an hour earlier. He wondered what his family must've felt like being eaten by it, wondered why it couldn't have been him instead; if it was too late to be him as well.

His heart suddenly felt heavy as the numbness started to fade and the emotions emerged resurfacing with such momentum that he almost stumbled as he stood up to steady himself against the street light. The prison within his eyes opened, letting the tears escape freely as he lost the constant inner-battle of appearing seemingly unaffected.

"What's wrong?" An innocent young voice asked, pulling him away from his train of thoughts.

"Nothing," he answered - trying to sound somewhat gentle - to the blonde pig-tailed girl of about 5.

"But your crying!" She exclaimed as if that explained everything in the world. "Mummy said that if you feel sad you should always find someone you care about and give them a big hug!"

She opened up her arms, looking up at him with a cheeky toothless grin that had him smiling for the first time since the incident, and -a bit hesitantly- he opened his as well embracing a bit of sunlight in what was sure to be his darkest time.

"Are you better now?" She asked eyes sparkling with expectation.

Still feeling a tightness in his chest, he only managed to nod which sufficed for the little girl whose smile widened as she ran to her parents standing in the crowd. He closed his eyes thinking of that

random encounter with that bubbly naive little girl. He thought of how later on that bright canvas that is her life will be tinted with blacks and greys - he scowled.

He thought then of her words... *"find someone you care about"*...and wondered if any of those were left. Then he wondered if he even wanted any of those to *be* left as horrific as that may sound. Would it be easier if he hadn't cared about anyone or anything throughout his lifetime? Would the pain he was feeling now subside? Would the memories be worth forgetting if it meant that he didn't feel the weight of the world on his shoulder, and the grief of a son and a brother losing his parents and sibling?

They say that love is the greatest thing one could feel and he won't say they don't tell you about it's damage, because they do, but is it enough? Too conflicted he did the only thing he could think of - he went to a bar...totally stereotypical and he was well aware of the road he was taking. Guilt filled him as he remembered blonde pig tales and hugs that he *almost* went back, but it wasn't enough. His parents laughter, his brothers mischievous smile, the aroma of chocolate, and flashbacks of burning flames made his already rapid heart gallop faster in his chest and his lungs constrict - he needed an escape.

He pictured himself drowning, being pulled deeper and deeper into a pit of sand. He imagined looking at it from above seeing beauty and calm, but now it seemed like anything but. The moment he stepped foot, he was slowly sucked in more. At first, there was a bit of a struggle, but then he realised it was useless. He relished in the feel of being surrounded by calm, told himself it was as beautiful as what he'd seen from above. He tricked his brain into believing it, and his body into re-living it. Little did he know, that the bottomless pit didn't offer an escape, but rather a more constricted cage.