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Why do we love to think about having everything we cherish destroyed? The idea of an apocalyptic world seems to be a common interest among the large majority of human beings, making them the only known species that enjoys thinking about the day when the Earth has been destroyed. Whether this event occurs when another superior race disrupts our way of life, or a chain of natural disaster renders the Earth uninhabitable, a common theme is shared. Throughout all these stories of chaos and the beginning of a new era, there seems to always be some sort of heroic theme presented. The themes vary from love triumphing to the good in mankind prevailing. The common ground is indicative that humans are overconfident in their ability to remain good in times of desperation and rise above the challenge when faced with dire consequences. The Road by Cormac McCarthy presents this concept in a slightly different way. However, throughout The Road, the Man and the Boy's moral ideals drift further apart as the Man grows ever closer to death.

Early on, we know very little about what has happened or who the two characters are. All we know is their relationship is that of a father and son, and that they're traveling together on a road. The Man watches the Boy as he sleeps, suggesting a deep overall care for the child, but he also seems to be highly concerned with their surroundings. He is always thinking about any other survivors of the apocalypse, as seen when he uses the binoculars to check their surroundings. Less than an hour after sunrise, the Man has the Boy up and traveling, carrying a knapsack of

“essential” supplies, again hinting towards his paranoia. The cart holds more than the essential items, ranging from maps to toys intended for small children. It seems highly peculiar for a child to need toys during an apocalypse, and even stranger for a man focused on efficiency and survival to deal with the extra weight the toys add to his cart. It may be that for the Man, the toys are his way of holding on to humanity and passing it down to the child. Another choice which doesn’t make sense is the route the Man has chosen for their travels. He is constantly worrying about being found by other survivors, but still he chooses to travel on the main road. One possible explanation is its the fastest route to the South, which the Man is fixated on reaching, but the Man prioritizes the boys safety in all other areas.

Inevitably, another group comes into contact with the Man and Boy. Initially, the father and son hide as the group passes by on their large diesel truck. However, the truck stalls going down the hill, carving time for the travelers to rest and explore the nearby area. One member wanders away from the group in order to relieve himself, straying too close to the terrified duo. In an immediate effort to avoid further conflict, the father tells the stranger that he better not try anything or else. The Man makes references to several medical terms about the brain’s anatomy, hinting about his pre apocalyptic life. Obviously the stranger ignores his warnings and uses his knife to hold the Boy hostage. In one swift, clean move, the Man blows the other man’s brains out, proving once and for all he will do anything to protect his son. The duo is forced to flee from the now alert group members, and the Man stops after some time and has to hold his mouth shut to avoid coughing. His chronic cough hints at a severe lung illness, possibly even lung cancer. However, he never once asks for help or pity from the boy, indicating a will to want the Boy to

live as normal a life as possible. In addition to blowing the man's brains out, the Boy's father also washes the aftermath out of the Boy's hair, simply stating it's his job.

As the story progresses, more key events play out. Everyday the two struggle to get enough to eat and drink. No matter how hungry they get, the Boy keeps reassuring himself by asking his father if they would ever eat another person. The Man always replied a plain no. The Boy then continues to talk about the "fire" which they have because they're the good guys, and the good guys don't eat people. This is evidently a moral his father instilled in him, indicating the father is strongly opposed to cannibalism and harming another innocent person. Although, the Man's behavior is not indicative of this, as he has a do whatever it takes attitude. As the Man brings the Boy to where he grew up, the Boy stays behind while the Man revels in old memories. The Boy spots another small child, who promptly runs away. Despite the Boy's pleas, the father refuses to look for the other child. He tells the Boy that the child must have a family and it's not their responsibility. He shows an obvious lack of empathy for anyone other than his own child and has no problem letting the other child die. After many more streaks with a lack of essential supplies, the two stumble upon a bomb shelter filled to the brim with food. The Boy wishes to stay behind and enjoy the food. His innocence prevents him from seeing the danger in staying in a shelter that is easily found. The Man on the other hand is constantly looking for intruders and signs someone is watching them.

Despite finding a large supply of essentials, the Man still grows increasingly more hostile. As they continue farther along the road, they pass an old man who call himself Ely. The Boy eventually persuades the Man to feed Ely, but this was not an easy feat to accomplish. After the Boy falls asleep, Ely and the Man talk, during which Ely admits he thought that the Boy was

an angel. To which the Man replies his son is a god. Then Ely says that would be quite the thing to see a god walking through the same turmoil they are forced to suffer, proving there's no hope. After their encounter with Ely, the Man and Boy find a ship on the coast. The Man braves the tides and swims out, collecting any supplies he can. The food he does find, causes the Boy to become feverish and sick for a few days. The Man holds himself solely responsible and beats himself up over the event. While they're camped out near the ship, the cart is stolen. After tracking down the thief, the Man shows little remorse stripping the man of any dignity. He forces the thief to remove all his clothes, leaving him to die. The complete lack of empathy is alarming, especially since his son was pleading miserably the entire time. After some crying, pouting, and shouting, the Man decides to head back and leave some basic supplies for the thief to find.

In addition to Man's heart growing colder, his physical condition only continues to get worse. After straying into an ambush the Man is shot in the leg with an arrow before he can eliminate his assailant. With no way to properly treat the wound, it can only be expected to get worse. If that physical handicap wasn't enough, the Man is also constantly coughing up blood. Despite the odds shifting more and more against him, the Man pushes onwards, demonstrating great deals of perseverance. However, eventually it all catches up with him and the Man can no longer continue the journey with his son. He tells him to move on since he can't hold his dead son in his arms like he once thought. The Boy refuses to stray far from his father, demonstrating devotion unrivaled by anything in the story. After some time, another man finds the boy and brings him to his family after some discussion. The family consists of two children, proving there are good people out there.

The moral implications of this fiction are immense. It manages to show the truly darkest parts of human nature, including the ability to do anything in order to survive, particularly the capacity to eat one another. Even those people who were good, managed to slip in the darkness during periods of time where he felt the things he felt valued most threatened. It's in theory no different than a mother putting her own life on the line to save a child from a home intruder. The story also shows that compassion is a hard thing to maintain. Obviously the examples presented are extreme, but as people's lives grow bleak, they often struggle to demonstrate their love for others. One final idea presented is the ability for humans to rebuild after a truly life changing catastrophe. It shows that human spirit is not easily broken, and that while the weak will give in, the strong always make it through. Moral of the story, the fire burns brightest in the dark, and the darkest hour isn't always during the night.