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Fiction Writing

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## Simple Pleasures

The night sky looms over the small town as many of its inhabitants retreat into their abode, away from the dangers and uncertainty hidden within the darkness. Autumn leaves of bright colors infest the roads, coming from trees almost devoid entirely of their luscious greens. The area is very dim as the moon lurks behind thin clouds. Besides the few houses that are still alive, the only remaining light around the area comes from a lone patrolman with a single lamp. He usually remains on the side of town where more people are, even if the majority of them are fast asleep. There is a reason the criminals of this town are unknown. Suddenly, at the edge of the side where all of the markets operate in the morning, a lone person comes into the light radius of the lamp, receiving the patrolman's undivided attention. They have short black hair and keen green eyes which looks straight through the patrolman, almost as if he wasn't in her little world. She appears to have just entered adulthood; but what made the guard tense was that this woman wanders through the young night without a hint of fear shown on her face.

"You there! You can't be out this late. What is your business out here?" States the patrolman.

Coming to a sudden halt, the wanderer stares face-to-face with the patrolman. Her eyebrows were thinner than the average man, but there were no other discernable qualities besides that. Her eyes continue to look straight through the patrolman with no change to her

facial features. At her hip hangs a short dagger sheathed in a blue scabbard. With her free hand, she reaches down quickly. Suddenly realizing what was happening, the guard attempts to reach for his sword with his good hand, which was occupied by the lamp. As he fumbles in a frantic state, the girl reaches not for the short dagger, but rather a brown bag around her left arm and pulls out a pack of meat. Almost immediately, the girl tells answers the guard's question immediately. "...I'm a traveler and I needed to gather supplies for my departure tomorrow. I was returning to the inn where my companion awaits my arrival sir." She says in a voice completely devoid of any emotion.

The patrolman stares at her blankly while his sword is left sticking out of its scabbard. Realizing what just happened, he attempts to reply in an attempt to look professional. "Oh. Y-yes, of course." The guard stammers while recovering from the panic attack. Though, he remembers that all of the markets are closed at this hour. The only ones that sell anything at this hour are merchants who are questionable in nature at best. "Have you seen anything suspicious out here? There have been reports of people operating in a black market." The guard immediately regrets his choice in words. If he had support behind him, he could at least show a little more backbone while dealing with this mysterious person. If she does know something about the black market, she would never let him live with such knowledge. Much to his surprise, the girl simply answers his question with no complications.

"...No sir. I needed to fetch something important from an old friend and lost track of time. I am afraid I saw nothing when I was indoors." She says with the same dull voice. Silence looms over the two. One shaking in his boots while the other one remains stoic. The girl seems to be awaiting a response from the guard. Those intense green eyes with very little light in them,

reaching for anything with life and taking whatever is left. Not wishing to handle the stress any longer, he attempts to end the conversation as soon as possible.

“V-very well.” Before he could finish speaking to the girl, he begins to walk back to his post. He trips on a pit that was out of his line of sight. “Heh-heh. Just please return to wherever you came from. Ok?”

“...Understood.”

With the confrontation over, the guard jogs towards the opposite direction. The girl on the other hand stands there with the same blank expression on her face. She thought that she wasn't standing out, but that was rather difficult to accomplish when she was one of the few to brave the darkest of nights. The girl returns the pack of meat in her bag. It is of great quality that isn't normally seen by the public eye. Her previous line of profession has given her many connections, few of which she still holds on to. The prime meat was a sign of gratitude from one of her few genuine past allies. No longer having any business outside for the night, she decides to return to her lodging for the night. The inn was only a few blocks away as the girl continues to walk through the darkness. Trudging through this black haze was nothing new to her. Before she began her new life, she was always walking towards an endless black corridor with no sign of the end in sight. Listening to the voices all around her, she would accomplish goals of any matter. From spying to assassination, it was all a means to help her live life like any regular person. Even if her payment was dirty money, it was money, nonetheless. Thinking about the lives of other people was above her, or at least that's what they said.

Sometime later, a pair of beady eyes shines through the bushes. Out of the darkness comes a soft noise from the bushes. “Mew.” The girl quickly turns her head towards the source

of the noise and reaches for her dagger. It is as though the darkness has lost a part of itself and granted it two spheres of light. A black cat walks towards the girl as it limps. Its back left leg was missing some fur. It likely got in a scuffle with another cat. Out in the open, exposed by the light, the cat sits down and sets its green eyes on the girl's eyes. Neither one moves an inch as they look deep in each other's eyes. Those dead eyes devoid of any sign of life.

Once her suspicions of an ambush were proven false, the girl removes her empty hand from the dagger, turns her head back towards the road, and continues down the path. Going at a moderate pace, she keeps her eyes in front of her with no follow-up distractions. The only sound is a gentle breeze brushing through her short hair and the crunching of dry leaves beneath her feet. Suddenly, crunching noises occur behind the girl as she turns around once more, finding the cat trailing her once more. Immediately responding to the girl's reaction, the cat stops moving and sits down, as though it never moved from the start. The girl walks down the path, only to look back every five seconds. The cat continues to follow, only to stop every four seconds. While the girl shows no signs of annoyance or anger, she didn't want to bring an animal back to the inn. Her new companion was very understanding, but the life of a merchant offers many inconveniences to both the owner and pet. Hoping to put this little standstill to an end, she approaches the black feline and drops down to its level.

At a closer glance, the cat was rather skinny. The darkness made it difficult to see the small outline of the cat. For an animal in desperate need of proper nutrition, it continues to hold itself in a dignified manner. The girl understood that if you need something in life, you were at the mercy of those more powerful than you. The animal pyramid was no different from the human hierarchy. This cat was incapable of hunting for itself and if she were to leave it alone, the cat would perish. "*Should I help?*" Pondered the girl. She never really thought much about

lifestyle or how she presented herself in front of anyone. If she was given her payment, she could continue to support herself. Her previous employer merely saw her as a tool. As a killer, everyday could be her last. If she was going to die, she would rather do so with no regrets.

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Before she began her life as a murderer, most of her childhood had her in the slums of a city. Day after day, she would stare at the crowd of random peasants with her glassy eyeballs as wide as dinner plates. Her hair as messy as an old fireplace, her clothing ripped and covered with stains she couldn't recognize, and those green eyes were as lifeless as they are today. She never knew her parents as they were the ones who left her alone without a single word. She could only figure out how to speak from strangers trying to hassle with shop owners, some of which would speak in a rather foul manner. All she could really do then was hope for someone who could guide her. One day, a man dressed in a black coat and donning a hat of fine material looks down on the little girl with great interest. To the girl, this was usually an everyday occurrence as there would usually be at least one person who would look at her funny and, on occasion, feel good about themselves. It was mostly drunkards down on their life who would compare their life of bad choices when the girl never even had a choice to make at the start of her life. The man, however, took her under his care without saying anything on the walk back to his home. He didn't make any attempt to communicate with the mute girl; once again, leaving the fate of the girl up to the decisions of others.

When her teacher brought her in, she was very skinny and was in desperate need of a thorough bath. Despite not showing it in her face, she was very likely to faint at any given

moment from lack of nourishment. She just couldn't tell how severe her state actually was, and how could she? She had no idea how to register the critical state that her fragile body was succumbing to.

Finally speaking to the girl, the man speaks with a goal that the girl was unfamiliar with. *"The face of a killer,"* was the first thing that the man said to her. *"Even at the face of death, you show no fear. I believe you have the makings of an actual assassin."*

Wanting to test the girl, the man takes her back out in an alleyway in the middle of the night. Very soon, they came across a man with a beard filled with dirt and his face with a slight hue of red. "Now then," the man says to the girl, handing her a sharp dagger slightly too big for her hands to carry. "What I want you to do is to take this knife and kill that man over there. If you're going to live under my care, you'll need to understand that there are people out in the world who are willing to pay a fortune in order for scum like him to disappear. You can manage that, hmm?" Without even waiting for a reply, the man shoves the hilt of the knife in the girl's hand. She walks up to the drunk man, holding the knife with both of her hands as she points the sharp edge at the target.

For the next ten minutes, the girl continued to poke into the still body, not the slight bit disgusted by the internal organs or blood leaking out of the multiple holes. The man in the black suit finally speaks up." That is enough. The work of an assassin must be quick and though. You have already proven that you have the stomach for this line of work." It was from that day that she was finally given the name "Libitina." "If you need anything from me, you shall address me as "Sir," understand?" Libitina didn't understand why the man wouldn't give her his name if he gave her one, but chose not to question the man who gave someone like her a chance at living.

To her future employers, the name “Libitina would appear to be nothing more than a title when in reality, it was a reminder that this was her life. She wasn’t sure what her teacher got out of taking in an emotionally dead child that was incapable of acknowledging poor health. With his training, she made a living out of killing for her clients. From competitors for business, to affair bringers, all of those deaths have resulted in her right to live on. Every assassination was the same. Gaining information about her target and waiting patiently for days before the opportunity to kill presents itself. She never grew tired of it, but she never really felt anything, no matter the outcome.

Six years later, at the age of fourteen, the girl returns from a stealth mission only to find the house belong to her teach in complete shambles. Walking inside the building, many of the statues and furniture were either flipped over or broken into piece, obscuring her path as she tries to find her teacher. Eventually she does find her teacher on the ground, in a posture that isn’t humanly possible. This murder was definitely not a quick or quiet one. Even in the face of this sudden realization, she felt no emotional connection to this man who only taught her to kill and face death itself. As though nothing happened, she continued to earn her way of life. As if the gods had other plans for her, her last client was a noble who wanted to hire her for protection. Protecting important figures wasn’t something she normally did as she tries to avoid direct confrontation with the public. When she heard that there were certain people after his life and that they needed to be taken care of quickly, it sounded close to what she has been doing for all of these years. She was successful in killing off the group of thugs after the noble’s life, except for one last thug who ended up breaking her left leg when she least expected it. She made few mistakes in her life, but they were all met with severe consequences, and this one was no exception. Just as she accepted her fate, a boy close to her age, her companion, knocked out the

remaining thug. He is the son of the noble that hired her. He wishes to become a merchant exploring the world rather than sitting behind a table all day caring for people that likely don't love him back.

Until she could walk on her leg, her companion took care of her as best as he could, providing bandages and helping her get around. When she could support herself again, her companion asked her if she wanted to travel the lands with him, learn how to appreciate life as he stated. *"I've heard about you from my brother. A quiet killer who wouldn't be missed by anyone if she disappeared. I think you need to learn about what life can give you, not just what you need from it."* She accepted as gratitude for saving her life and providing medical attention. For the next two years, she worked as a merchant as she spent her time listening to her companion about his stories, both real and fictional. Even if she was a person of few words, she was still an attentive listener who understood everything he was saying, He would even mix it up by playing on his guitar as they would travel for days with no signs of civilization. It gave her a sense of tranquility that she hasn't felt for so long.

She recalls some advice from her traveling companion that she never thought much about until she recently started working with him. *"There's nothing wrong with working for money. How else do you think I started my business? Your main problem is that you see everything you do as a necessity. You don't even seem to show any emotion towards that last guy you killed before you joined me. (At least I hope you didn't show joy in that.)"* He whispered the last part under his breath, but the girl wasn't the least bit fazed by that comment. It was true that the both of them relied on money a lot, but her friend always looked like he was enjoying the fruits of his labor. Playing on his guitar during their travels and paying for a sweet treat after a meal are some



instances where her companion looked genuinely happy. Is taking life for granted truly such a curse? With her newfound freedom, she hopes to know more about the true pleasures of life.

She's heard many good things about owning cats. "*Is there something about these felines that makes everyone's hearts swoon?*". Wishing to test this idea, the girl wishes to communicate with this black feline. She was capable of answering immediate questions and asking about her duties without any unnecessary comments, but starting a casual conversation was something she was unfamiliar with. Her companion would usually hold an entire conversation by himself when she was alone with him, and he also handles more complex situations with difficult customers. Forming personal connections was unnecessary as it would lead to complications in her missions. Nevertheless, she speaks to the cat. "...Hello there. Are you hungry?" she says in a soft, yet bleak, voice. The cat responds with a single meow right before it's tiny stomach could grumble. It's a miracle that this cat was able to travel so far with hunger and a bad leg. That wasn't something to be impressed with, however. There is no way the cat could survive much longer out here where more aggressive animals might attack it. The girl takes the prime meat out of her bag and rips a tiny piece off of it. She then extends her hand towards the cat, who only stares at it with great interest. "...Don't you want it?". The girl keeps her outstretched hand for a good period of time before the cat finally takes the meat for itself. "*Good, she likes it.*" She then takes out her canteen and pours it for the cat to wet its mouth on. With water droplets left on its whiskers, it starts to give itself a bath. After wiping itself, it goes back to staring at her with those beady eyes. On the positive side, it seems to have a little light in its eyes. It approaches one of her legs and starts to rub against it while purring. "*! So soft!*" She can barely feel the mass of a tiny cat rubbing on her. Curious about the coat of a cat, she butts down the basket and cradles the cat.

“...Woah.”

The cat weighs very little on her arm. Even though the fur was very dirty, it was still as soft as a pillow. Stroking the cat was especially calming as it purred in a satisfying tune. It curls up into a little ball, making itself comfortable on her one arm. Throughout all of that, the girl felt a warm tingling feeling on the inside. The average human being is usually warm on the inside as it is necessary to keep them alive. This feeling was something entirely different. As she ran her fingers through the black fur, she felt a spark in herself that felt unnatural. She does feel at ease with her companion, but that feeling wasn't quite what she was feeling right now. The cat also displays a sense of pleasure through its eyes, its wide green eyes shining like emeralds. Time didn't seem to matter in the girl's little world as she remain in place for a long time, not having a care in the world. Suddenly, something rustles in the bushes rustled nearby and the cat perks it's tiny head. Immediately, the cat leaps of the girl's arm and darts in the opposite direction, disappearing in the darkness once more.

“...Oh.”

The girl finds herself reaching out into the darkness, hoping that it would return the cat into her arm. She looks back at the source of the sound that frightened the cat away. Nothing, or at least that's what it seemed. Finally realizing what happened, a new feeling emerges and unlike the warm tingling feeling, her body feels slightly heavier. She wasn't expecting the cat to leave so abruptly. She was sure that it was happy with her after she took good care of it. That phase of disappointment left her with a hole in her heart, one that she was aware of this time.

“...I hope we can meet again”

Not wanting to keep her companion waiting any longer, she picks up the bag once more and heads and makes it to the town square where the inn is located.

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The very next day, the girl and her companion are up and preparing to head out of town to continue their business. With their horse nourished and their cart loaded, they head out into the open road once more. As they approach the gates, the girl stares out into the bushes in the hopes of finding the cat again. Her companion notices this strange behavior and asks. “Is everything all right Libbi? Ever since last night, you were deep in thought about something.” Otis says.

“...No. I came across a cat last night and I was hoping it would see me off.”

“Oh... Oh!” her companion was taken aback by her sudden interests in furry creatures. Well, I’m sure that we will see this cat again someday. What do you say I sing you a song? I’m sure you know which one.”

“...Sure.” While the girl continues to carry a blank expression, there was a new light in her eyes that her companion rarely sees. It was a sight to behold. To be human is to enjoy the simple pleasures in life.

- Better transition between different points in time. More white space.
- Go more in detail about the girl’s body language rather than just using “...”
- Talk more about the noble’s son and how he became a noble.
- When something new happens, like the death of the girl’s teacher, ease up to the moment, even if it is only a flashback. Show, don’t tell.
- Have the girl interact with the cat first, then look into her past.
- The guard scene felt a little pointless.
- Do more with the ending of the story.

- Maybe give these two characters names and give them a clear age.
- In the backflash, I am telling what is going on. Let the readers “feel” what is going on.

The assassin is observant in her surroundings after all.