

James was startled when the knock on his bedroom door woke him as the sun's rising shadow painted the room. An image he had not seen in months. It was the middle of February and the room was filled with the harsh chill found at the relinquishing of blankets. He wondered, as he slipped a robe over his naked body and slippers onto his cold feet, whether he had been up this early at any point since the calendars had changed. He had purchased the one hanging on the wall of his kitchen no sooner than the second week of January. Rubbing his tired eyes, he began to feel the irritation of his being woken so early alongside a splitting headache taking residence in his right temple. He began his movement slowly towards the bedroom door and felt his anger clump in his chest. He yanked open the door that guarded his bedroom against the hall to find nothing but a note sitting on the console table awaiting his attention.

The note was a folded piece of white stationery with a black scribbled message. James identified the message to be that of his housekeeper, Tana, by its horrid handwriting. This made the tightness in his chest intensify as Tana had been firmly instructed when hired to never wake him earlier than 10:00 in the morning. This being the rule unless instructed differently the night before, and the night before there were certainly no instructions of a desire to be awake at this time. He looked down and struggled to read the handwriting stating "Mr. James, I am sorry to wake you but Mr. Daniel was very insistent in your meeting him for breakfast at the Park Central Hotel at 8:30 am." This, of course, is a translation of Tana's true words as he was a first-generation American whose English was a not-so-rare mixture of an Eastern-European country, which James could never quite identify, alongside the Brooklyn accent which Tana had learned hoping it would mask his foreign roots.

James took this note alongside his anger back through his bedroom and into his bathroom where he would need to begin his usual morning routine of cleansing himself of the hangover that aided in his usual morning displeasure. The bedroom was a mess of drunken undressing with his dinner jacket and brown wool pants lying crumpled on the floor a few feet shy of the leather armchair. His white oxford shirt found itself inside out and hung over the edge of his bed with his underwear and socks crumpled at the base of it. His shoes were nowhere to be found yet would surely turn up by nightfall. He grabbed his watch off of the desk which lay upside down beside an empty bottle of Laphroaig 10yo and a clear crystal drinking glass. The pigmentation of the remnants seemed to indicate scotch and the ice added at the time of nights when the neat liquor becomes too overwhelming to be drunk on its own.

James saw on his watch that Tana had woken him at 7:00 in the morning, giving him roughly an hour to remove this hangover before leaving his home. He would then walk roughly 15 blocks which he would shorten by journeying through central park. He placed his watch back onto the desk, dropped his robe and slippers and stepped onto the cold tile of his bathroom. He turned on his shower to its highest heat and turned to see himself in the mirror. Even in his height of unhappiness, either physical or mental, his eyes were something he could always find happiness in. As the water heated James splashed cold water on his face from the left of his

double vanity sinks and took his toothbrush, which had been drunkenly thrown the night before, from the right sink. The cold water dripped off of his cheeks as he brushed the liquor off of his breath. He then walked into his shower and sat on the cold stone bench, unreachable by the water, and let the building steam encompass his being and steal the liquor from his pores.

When he finally finished steaming the hangover out of his system he washed the stench from his skin and hair and dried himself with one of two fresh towels left by Tana the night before. He then styled his hair to his precise liking, taking no less than fifteen minutes to do so. When finally dry and properly primed he walked into the closet back in the bedroom. Once inside the closet, he dropped his towel into the bin of worn clothing and linens taken by Tana daily. This bin usually held solely one towel before Tana would enter and pick up the remnants of the night before from the floor. James put on a pair of underwear and black socks and then decided on a white oxford shirt and a grey wool herringbone blazer and black slacks. He tied his black tie, laced his leather shoes, added a belt overtop his pants, buttoned his jacket, and walked out of his closet grabbing his watch and nothing more as he walked through the hallway and into the kitchen.

Tana conveniently was nowhere to be found as he surely was hiding elsewhere to avoid the wrath of his tired and unhappy counterpart. James drank from the cup of coffee that Tana had left on the kitchen counter for him and felt unhappy about the empty bottle of scotch that he remembered in his bedroom. A drink alongside his coffee would have eased his building nerves well as he prepared for what he imagined would be a stressful breakfast. Ultimately, he decided he would be alright as he knew the bartender at the Park Central Hotel and hoped he would make him a drink beneath the bar even though it would not officially open until the lunch crowd arrived. James pulled his left hand into his watch and tightened the steel clasp, looking down to see the time now showing 7:45. It was time for James to leave as he preferred to walk at a slow pace. This made it easier for him to find unhappiness in the community around him as they sprinted past on either side of him.

He pulled on his dark blue wool-cashmere top coat and left it unbuttoned as he grabbed his black leather gloves and his cigarette case off of the hip-high table sitting next to the door. He called the elevator in the hall and dropped his head to his shoes. Although there existed solely one other apartment on the top floor of the building, James feared to need to speak to anyone at the moment. He stood motionless in front of the long hallway mirror exactly opposite the opening door of the elevator which aided in the vanity of all guests he had ever entertained. Finally, the elevator did come and he quickly and coldly instructed the man inside that he would be going to the lobby before putting his head back down and saying no more.

It was surprising that James had been asked to breakfast this morning as he did not often have plans while the sun was out. He could fill his nights with ease by those obsessed with social lives and prowess. All that was needed for this was the instructing of Tana to call a handful of the names in his phonebook filled with these sorts of people and let them know of a

party he would be throwing, or a show he would like company to attend, even a drink in a space they usually would not be allowed inside of and could not afford had they been permitted. James did not have friends during the day, he spent much of his time alone. This was not an upsetting feature in his life as he really did not feel much admiration for the general person. Of course, the crippling loneliness was felt in his life, but this was not because he was not seeing people, but rather because there weren't people whom he would feel less lonely seeing.

Now as he walked out of the front door of his building, he immediately turned right to walk down 67th street past Broadway and Columbus until he reached the park. James was not excited about the breakfast he was approaching. He preferred his breakfast to be a toasted sesame bagel with a double portion of cream-cheese picked up from the cart which lived on the corner of his block alongside a cup of scorching black coffee. He would eat this alone on the benches outside of Tavern on the Green no earlier than eleven in the morning. He then preferred to sit there and watch the families and strangers walk through the streets of Central Park as he scribbled away brooding thoughts to his notebook. He would do this for roughly an hour, at which point he had put, what he felt to be, a full days work in and thus deserved to walk inside and into the South Terrace Room for a cocktail. Today he would not have this unhappy enjoyment, as he walked past Tavern on the Green and further into the park. He dreaded every block closer he got to the park's end and the unfortunate character waiting for him.

He walked alongside the great lawn and the rocks whose immense heights were daunting tasks to the children hoping to mount their peaks. He spoke to no one which gave him bliss in his somber disinterest. He thought of turning around many times, he rationalized why skipping breakfast was fair to all, he created stories which he would have Tana relay at a further time to justify his lack of attendance. As he finalized the story he'd tell and prepared to turn around he saw up the road the blonde hair that rarely left his young mind no less than twenty years earlier. His feet stopped, he could not get them to restart. He was bumped by those around him walking by but did not notice. He remembered this blonde hair all too well as it scurried away from him, not knowing he was there, not noticing the frozen man in the middle of Central Park.

He remembered sitting at the Ivy Inn in Princeton when he was studying writing at the great pretentious university. He sat at the bar alongside his best friend during this time, discussing girls and their unhappiness over laughs and smiles as their beers dwindled. It was then that he saw her for the first time, it was not her hair that night that caught him in her web but rather her eyes. He could see from across the bar the blue that he understood immediately would be his internal downfall, he knew he had been caught before she had known she had caught him. He subtly spoke to his friend about that girl across the bar and her beauty and to his surprise, the two of them walked over to this grouping of girls with the confidence solely held by drunken men unconcerned with the possibility that the girls could be uninterested in them. He asked the girl to the bar with him and ordered them drinks. They spent their night together overly indulging

in liquor to calm their nerves and reaffirming their happiness with the other. They kissed at the bar as people began to end their nights and lights began to turn off. He remembered her tasting of tequila and cigarettes as they walked back to his home together and the way the lamp shone on her blonde hair as he kissed her cheek and watched her walk away.

He was able to move his feet again and he began to walk through the park once more. The hair that had sparked his memory had long since walked out of sight, but the memory of her persisted. He remembered the party he had thrown on the request of a friend, and his immediate acceptance based on his constant desire for those he cared for to be happy, a feature he had not grown out of, although he had dwindled the list of people whom this would apply to. He remembered the way people danced in the small living room, the sweat dripping from their uncaring bodies, their hands and lips touching in the darkened room with lights flashing all around. She stood in the mellow kitchen away from the madness that was the dancing, needing the only rare drug in the home that night, a breath of air and a moment of peace. He saw her there as he walked through his home, in need of the same. Her calm was incredulous to the few who could see it, who could understand that she did not just look better than everyone in the home that night, she thought better as well. He grasped her hand within his and took her alongside him through the crowd that presented themselves as a barrier to the moment they both grasped for. He took her up the stairs twice over to the attic where bright bulbs of light pierced the night, and more importantly where quiet pierced the noise. They sat in bliss for what was the entire night in his memories of the party he had thrown. Finally, she stood to guide him back downstairs which he understood was her obligation as someone whose friends she had left. He grasped her hip and felt her skin press against his palm. He felt her happiness as he pulled her close to him, he let go and could feel her displeasure in their travels downstairs but he knew she would never speak them out loud. He kissed her cheek as they walked down the stairs and entered the darkness they were obliged to take part in.

James was excited now as he walked through the park, the cool winter breeze feeling nice on his red cheeks and his cold head, which he refused to put a hat over based on it being a day in which his hair had come into place properly. He stopped his quick footsteps to pull aside to a bench alongside the towering trees poking their heads above the quickly moving people and pulled out his cigarette case which held four cigarettes and a box of matches. He lit a cigarette and stepped onto the match, dulling the potential fire that could have taken down Manhattan. He continued his quick and peppy movement through the winding streets that make up Central Park and tucked his gloves into his inner breast pocket in order to hold his cigarette with his cold fingers. She had hated the cigarettes he smoked. He remembered the night he had seen her within the dark rain. The darkness adding the highest value to the few bright lights that poked through the falling water. He saw her walk out of a house alongside the music and people who spilled out of it drunken and loud. He saw her over the smoke coming from his breath, a mixture of the cigarette in his hand and the cold of the night. She walked out of the front door and down the

steps of the porch he stood on with little notice alongside a remarkably less remarkable friend of hers and his eyes could not venture off of her. He had the cigarettes she did not hate in the breast pocket of his jacket, hidden from all those looking to make conversation over the self-deprecation of the smoke. He had bought them that afternoon and she walked away without knowing. He thought of this that night when one of the unremarkable girls spoke to him, asking him to fill the rest of her night with a story she would tell her friends in the morning. He went home alone that night.

James thought of the way the snow came down around her and reddened her cheeks as the days at school got colder. He remembered the way they would sit under a blanket outside together and talk of their favorite literature over the lit cigarettes she hated, and they would shiver yet be hesitant to touch as it made all emotion overly existent which petrified them both. He thought of the way she smiled at him with the blue eyes that had grasped him months before.

James was then pulled out of this trance of memories by the end of the park in front of him. He exited the park where trees were replaced with buildings, benches replaced with traffic cones, his happiness replaced with the anxiety of strangers and the breakfast that was now short blocks away.

James stood, waiting for the light to change and accept him back into the unhappiness that he had escaped from, even if just for a while. When the light did finally change he was no longer waiting for it. James had turned and walked back into the park behind him, he did not go to breakfast that morning.