

‘The Memoirs of Men’

Recently I uncovered a priceless collection of some memoirs, relics from the past of our civilization, although not historically old enough to be labelled as history. Before, we knew peace, or should I say forgot the horrors of war yet again. What I fail to understand is how our kind repeats the same mistakes again and again, sometimes before the passing of even a single generation. Even a baby who has had his fingers singed by a flame or hot plate knows not to touch it again. Then why do men repeat the same mistakes again and again? Are the tsunamis of despair and trauma so weak in their power to shape our motifs? I come here in search, in search of answers, for my own existential sanity and satisfaction.

I unravel the carefully wrapped plastic sealed casing, eager to start reading the first priceless artefact that I have managed to procure through great personal labour. They say that the fruits of hard work and labour taste much sweeter. Hopefully that is the perspective that I am able to leave myself with, but I don't believe that there is any sweetness left to be had, nothing but the abhorrent bitter aftertaste that presides and lingers on my tastebuds. Nonetheless, I strive towards any semblance of forward progress, delving myself into the psyche of my first saviour. Through this poem, one he wrote in 1991 during the separation of Yugoslavia, I begin my soul searching;

**

Memoir #1

The crack in the Glazier:

As I listen to radio, I am met with sweeps of pride then sorrow,
For my creations now fail to bathe in the light of the morrow,
My creations, Once calcified in glory and fame,
Now calcified timeless in dust and flame,
Not as charred as my empty heart,
But ridden throughout with signs of anguish and pain,
The soothing blues of no respite to those asleep for good,
I pondered again, were all those years of glass making in vain?
For this glass, with cracks and cuts within,
Will with blood forever Red be stained.

**

Although I have never personally been skillful or masterful enough to be able to experience the loss of great creations of mine, I feel a shiver of relatability propagate down my spine, through my limbs, and spark empathy in every fibre of my being. What sort of anguish must befall one in remembering their pride and joy in the memory of death and blood? I guess it is true that in trauma we are bonded, for I can see plain as day the distraught existence of a man who expresses it as a beacon or lighthouse for others, to let them assimilate and grow stronger from it. I did not yet see it that way, but I probably knew deep down. My instant reaction was far more painful, maybe amplified by my own grief to resonate with that of the glazier.

I continued to read in concentrated silence, unconsciously inhibiting my habit of entertaining any of my usually distracted thoughts from grabbing my attention. However, that is not to be confused with a lack of thought, rather just the contrary. My mind was melting together all my emotions and motivations to fine-focus on finding an answer in my soul.

**

Memoir #2

The Oakley family letters

“Dear Father, I write you today a more broken man than I knew possible to be...”.

- Never does it hurt more than when you remember a voice that will never be heard again -

Those were the first soul-crushing, gut wrenching words of my Son's last. My uncontainable joy and excitement when my wife notified me of the arrival of mail from my Son were soon diffused by a palpable tension of overwhelming dread as soon as I removed the crisp envelope and saw the tar black, frayed corner of the folded letter, with the memory a deep red colour underneath. I proceed to unravel the somehow still-perfectly creased folds of the sooted paper. My last pearls of hope clinging onto the strings, as I read out the first sentence. What kind of misery must my boy have gone through to convey such weighted words of despair as his first statement to his beloved parents, previously conversed/informed almost a whole year afore, the horrors upon his tender young soul. I cannot imagine. I do not dare. I was at this moment too strung up in my remnant of hope, that I was yet to notice the unnatural silence from Mary, my habitually larger than life wife. As I eagerly continue, my eyes darting past and shooting past my point of continuation, I try to compose whatever part of me would give into my mental subjugation to maintain control of my trembling lips. “I have witnessed true evil father, and it comes not in the shape of a beast nor a demon. The shape that manifests in front of me is that of torn limbs and dismembered organs splayed out

on red clayed-dirt, intermingled and intertwined beyond recognition by even the most trained eyes of any top physician.”

- I don't even notice myself turning the page -

“My heart and mind fail to process the insurmountable loss of brothers and sons I witness in front of my eyes for every waking moment. Yesterday, I watched a soldier from my barracks die. He was my best friend and bunk mate from my first day at the Army. As I watched the (.9mm) hollow point round penetrate his skull, liquifying his right eye in the process, I felt nothing. Like an eerie calm that you cannot shake off the core of your bones, even if you did have the willpower remaining to even consider fighting it. now, I just watch, no longer feel.”

“I'm fed up father, I cannot bear any longer the fact that the putrid stench of rotting flesh and rusted metal in the air no longer bothers me, that I sometimes willingly feed my pet rat pieces of my flesh. For the sake of my sanity father, I wr.....”

“This can't be right, where is the end of this letter?”, I yell out loud in my still intentionally ignorant bliss of having seen the deep soaked red from earlier.

.... I hear a sudden and loud thud, at which I instinctively shout for my wife to see if she's ok. My eyes still glued to the end of the letter, as I manically shook and shook those leaves of paper until my attention lifted up from the pages after a five second pause of absolute silence. I repeat her name again, softer and more worried in my tone as I glance beyond the bloodied pages to see a stretched out arm jutting out of the bottom right corner of the page. Still in shock, I jumped towards her, yelling her name at the top of my lungs,

shaking her as violently as the pages that came before her. A quick rational thought to check her pulse came and went through my mind, before I took a breath of relief.

However, that was too soon it would seem. My attention dances around to find a second letter, one still-clenched in her right hand, the uneven crumples distinctly visible from my tall stature. I picked up the envelope that surely contained what she was holding inside it. She must've opened the courier while I was reading our Son's letter. What must that piece of paper have contained to do this to my beloved? I knew the cause long before she collapsed, but hope is a funny thing you see.

- The letter was from 'THE ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA',
invoiced to our home address. -

I carefully fished out the paper from my wife's palm, but I managed to tear the bottom corner anyway. The letter said just one thing, but that was one too many. in large letters at the top of the page, it read; "DEAR SIR/MA'AM, WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON WAS KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY."

- Never does it hurt more than when you remember a voice that will never be heard
again... -

The first thought that permeated my mind was a flashback of a distant memory I had forgotten I had had, of my little boy's first words to me. Although incomprehensible in any

spoken language, the feelings translated transcended, by orders of magnitude, anything that any spoken meaning could hope to achieve. I remembered as I held his tiny and fragile body, filling me with an overwhelming sense of strength and pride, to see another part of me become itself. Turns out that my son was shot two weeks ago as he was writing to tell us that he had decided to come back home and would be on his way in 2 more days. He would have been back home before the letters would have ever even arrived. I sat back on my armchair, drained of all my energy, and closed my eyes to keep my son alive for as prolonged a period as I could in the moment.

It is now a year later, all I see everytime I close my eyes is darkness.

**

My immediate reaction to reading these letters was incredibly bleak and devastating to my remaining motivation. I wept and wept. And then I wept some more, before finally my hand began to type, taking full command of all my mental faculties in the process. Suddenly everything just clicked in my mind, converting in its entirety my repressed agony and self-loathing into the most tranquil feeling of fulfilment I have experienced in recent memory. The only thing I finally decided to take away from the memoirs was not the intense suffering and trauma that nearly broke me too, but instead the core of our nature. It is the fact that every one of those shattered people still continued forward, forward enough to even write their memoirs and spread that which is of utmost importance. The memories of one another.

Fueled by my memories, I am made aware that the life I lead may not always be a happy one, and definitely not for the foreseeable future at least, but I have realised that happiness was never the goal in the first place. What we all can and must do is to never forget. Never.

Prologue:

The Narrator is the close relative of someone who died as a casualty of the war in Ukraine. He's an immigrant from the war, but his relative refused to leave. Unable to communicate any final words, nor give a final embrace, the narrator is overridden with guilt from the subsequently deprived sense of closure. He attempts to find some by reading the memoirs of others. Concurrently, he writes in the memory of, and inspired by the loss and resulting coping mechanisms. The following text is his memoir, as he comes to terms with his grief.

*****Writer's notes: Crack in the glazier is the character of the glazier from Semezdin Mehmedinovic's 'Glass'.*****