

"BETTER TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF LIVING FEARLESSLY THAN TO GROW COMFORTABLE MOLD FROM SAFELY HIDING."



THAT WAS MY OPENING IN THIS JOURNAL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR.

A NUDGE TO TRY AND BE SOMETHING I'M NOT.

THE SORT OF THING A PERSON WRITES TO ADD SOME ROMANCE TO LIVING THROUGH BAD TIMES. TRUTH IS...

...A QUIET, NORMAL LIFE SOUNDS PRETTY GREAT RIGHT NOW.



LIVING ON THE STREETS IS AWFUL ENOUGH TO MAKE JOINING A SCHOOL FOR ASSASSINS SEEM LIKE A REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE.

TELL YOURSELF THAT DECISION WASN'T MADE ENTIRELY OUT OF FEAR.

SOME LIES ARE TOO BIG TO SELL YOURSELF.

NO ONE IS FEARLESS.



FEAR'S A REASONABLE REACTION TO WHAT'S WAITING OUT THERE.

AN INSTINCT WE DEVELOPED FOR GOOD REASON.

AND I AM AFRAID.

NOT JUST OF THE PEOPLE TRYING TO KILL ME...

...BUT OF GOING BACK TO WHERE I WAS.



BECAUSE EVEN IF WE SURVIVE ALL OF THIS, EVEN IF WE DO MAKE IT OUT OF SAN FRANCISCO, I'M RIGHT BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

NO PARENTS.

NO FAMILY.

FACE ON THE FBI'S MOST WANTED LIST FOR A CRIME I DIDN'T COMMIT.

MY YEAR AT KINGS DOMINION HAS BEEN A TORNADO OF

...BUT I WASN'T HOMELESS.



HOW IS IT THAT THIS NIGHTMARE IS STILL SOMEHOW MORE APPEALING TO ME THAN THAT UNCERTAINTY?

WHAT IS THAT?

FEAR OF A LIFETIME OUT HERE ALONE.

THE SAME FEAR THAT CAUSED  
ME TO PUSH MARIA AWAY,  
EVERYTHING RETURNS TO HER.

SHE MADE IT ALL BETTER.

MADE ME FEEL WANTED AND  
NORMAL AND AT HOME.

WHEN I WAS WITH HER I  
FORGOT HOW BAD IT WAS  
BEFORE.



THE LAST WEEKEND WE WERE  
TOGETHER SHE TOOK ME TO  
THE PARK.

I ACTED LIKE I DIDN'T WANT  
TO GO. TRUTH IS I REALLY  
LIKED THAT SHE'D TALK ME INTO  
GOING PLACES WITH HER.

THAT SHE WANTED ME  
IN HER LIFE THAT MUCH.

THE SUN ON THE WATER  
MADE THE SWANS LOOK  
GOLDEN LIKE ANGELS.



SHE SQUEEZED MY HAND,  
LOOKING FOR A BIT OF  
IDENTIFICATION IN THE  
MOMENT WE SHARED.

I DIDN'T RETURN IT.  
I STOOD STILL, A  
SULLEN, TEENAGE  
CLICHÉ TRYING TO  
HIDE HIS SMILE.

BECAUSE GOD IS  
WAITING FOR ME  
TO CRACK, TO SHOW THE  
RELIEF, TO BE HAPPY, AND  
ONCE I DO...



...IT'LL ALL DISAPPEAR.

BUT THE SWANS  
GAVE ME AWAY.

I WAS  
HAPPY AND  
SHE COULD  
SEE IT.

IT'S  
BEAUTIFUL,  
ISN'T IT?

AND THAT  
MADE ME  
ANGRY.



THE IMPERFECTIONS I'D  
TRAINED MYSELF TO  
FIXATE ON SNAPPED BACK.

MARIA'S LOVE MORPHED  
INTO NEEDINESS.

WHY CAN'T I EVER  
JUST ENJOY SOMETHING  
THAT'S GOOD WHILE IT'S  
HAPPENING.

IT'S JUST A  
MANMADE LAKE  
FULL OF  
SLOW-WITTED  
WATER  
INSECTS.



BECAUSE WHEN I FINALLY GOT WHAT I WANTED ALL I DID WAS WORRY ABOUT LOSING IT.



HAPPINESS REGISTERS TO ME AS A DISAPPOINTMENT UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

THE LAST TIME I SAW HER I'D REALIZED THAT.

AND I FINALLY CHOSE NOT TO CARE ANYMORE.

BUT TURNS OUT GOD WAS WAITING FOR ME TO SMILE, TO SHOW HIM THAT I WANTED HER, BECAUSE ONCE I DID...

...HE TOOK HER AWAY.



THEY TOLD ME SHE'D RUN AWAY. THEY KNEW I'D BUY IT.

IT FIT MY EXPECTATIONS.

BECAUSE THE TRUTH WAS TOO STUPID, TOO OBVIOUS.

SHE WAS GOING TO MASTER LIN'S OFFICE.



IT WAS RIGHT THERE AND I IGNORED IT.

BECAUSE WHAT COULD I DO ABOUT IT?

I SWEAR TO GOD, MARIA, I'M GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS ALIVE.

AND ONE DAY, WHEN HE LEAST EXPECTS IT, I'M GOING TO COME BACK...

...AND I WILL DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

HE WAS ONE OF VIKTOR'S GUYS.

WHAT COULD DO THIS?

POISON. PETRA'S HANDWORK.

LOOK OVER HERE--



THEY USED THAT CAMBODIAN BOOBY-TRAP FROM CLASS.

ONLY VIKTOR COULD HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THAT KIND OF IMPACT.

SAYA, MARCUS' CREW ARE CAPABLE OF THIS?



THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.

AND NEITHER DO WE.

YOU GET THAT NOW, RIGHT?







"...BUT STAY OUT OF MY WAY."

"...IT'S THAT THING, YOU KNOW, WHERE IF YOU PRAISE OTHER PEOPLE AND BUILD THEM UP, YOU STOP NEEDING IT FOR YOURSELF SOMEHOW."

UGH. YOUR TRANSITION TO BECOMING A HIPPIE IS COMING ALONG NICELY, BILLY.



WHAT ABOUT YOU, MARCUS?

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU LEARNED THIS YEAR?

I DUNNO.

I LEARNED BILLY'S AN IDIOT WHO'D DO ANYTHING TO GET A LAUGH.



THAT'S NOT TRUE.

DUDE, YOU DRANK A CUP OF THREE-MONTH-OLD CHEW SPIT AND CIGARETTE ASH JUST TO MAKE ALL THE GIRLS WATCHING YOU PUKE.

HEH. THAT WAS PRETTY GREAT.



YEAH... FRESHMAN YEAR WASN'T ALL BAD, WAS IT?

WHAT'S YOUR BEST MEMORY, BILLY?

WE HAD SOME PRETTY GOOD FUN, MADE SOME GOOD STORIES.



MY FIRST KISS WITH KAREN GRINSTAFF. SUPER CUTE, HUGE DURAN DURAN FAN.

AFTER WE KISSED SHE ASKED ME IF I WAS A "WILD BOY" BECAUSE I GUESS THAT'S ONE OF THEIR SONGS.

I TOLD HER, "NO, I DON'T THINK I AM."



SHE BROKE UP WITH ME THE NEXT DAY.

NO GIRL IS WORTH PRETENDING YOU LIKE DURAN DURAN.

I REMEMBER KAREN. SHE TOOK ME TO A PARTY ONCE. SHE WAS CUTE.



CUTE BUT DUMB.

I WASN'T REALLY INTO HER, AND THE PARTY WAS FULL OF JOCKS AND PREPPIE GIRLS SO I SNUCK OUT BACK.

I FOUND SOME GUYS SMOKING POT IN THE YARD.



"WHAT THEY DIDN'T TELL ME WAS THAT IT HAD BEEN SNOWCAPPED WITH PCP."

"YOU THINK SOMETHING CALLED 'ANGEL DUST' WOULD BE A HAPPIER DRUG... PRETTY MISLEADING NAME."

"IT'S LIKE BEING ON ACID, METH, AND STEROIDS. JUST TAKES A FEW SECONDS AND YOU'RE OFF YOUR ██████"

"BY THE TIME I WENT BACK INTO THE PARTY I THOUGHT I WAS MR. ROGERS."

"A WARM-HEARTED CHARACTER BELOVED BY ALL."

"KAREN LOOKED UPSET, BUT I KNEW IT WASN'T BECAUSE I WAS SCREAMING AT HER FRIENDS. IT WAS OBVIOUSLY BECAUSE THE PARTY WAS SO LAME."

"THEY NEEDED ME TO WELCOME THEM TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD."

"THEY NEEDED MORAL INSTRUCTION."



"I'D FOUND A BOX OF RAISINS IN A CABINET IN THE KITCHEN AND RAN AROUND GIVING THEM EACH LITTLE TOMES OF WISDOM, A FEW RACIALLY INSENSITIVE COMMENTS WERE BANDIED ABOUT."

"I TOLD THEM THAT EVERYONE SEES COLOR; IT'S ALL ABOUT THE INTELLECTUAL CHOICE TO NOT JUDGE BASED ON IT."

"WHEN ANYONE TRIED TO GET AWAY FROM ME I THREW RAISINS AT THEM. CHIP FRATSWORTH DIDN'T LOVE THAT AND SO HE PUSHED ME DOWN."



"AFTER A WHILE, THEY FORGOT I WAS THERE. I BECAME AN OUTSIDE OBSERVER TO THIS STRANGE BAND OF ██████████"

"THEY WERE ALL LAUGHING WITH EACH OTHER, LIKE BEST FRIENDS."

"BUT AS SOON AS SOMEONE LEFT THE ROOM THE OTHERS ALL GANGED UP TO TEAR DOWN THE ABSENT 'FRIEND.'"



THEY WERE THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO ONLY KNEW HOW TO BOND BY ██████████ ON SOMEONE WHO WASN'T IN THE ROOM.

IT MADE ME REALLY MISS YOU GUYS, FOR ALL OF OUR FAULTS... WE'RE NOT THEM.

YOU WANT ME TO PUT ON SOME ENYA, CAPTAIN SENSITIVE?



SOMETIMES WHEN SOMEONE SEEMS TO GO CRAZY WHAT THEY'RE ACTUALLY DOING IS LETTING EVERYONE SEE WHAT THEY USUALLY HIDE INSIDE.

DRUGS ARE JUST A GOOD EXCUSE TO LET THE TRUE SPAZ COME OUT.



OR AN EXCUSE TO DO SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO.

LAST TIME I DID COKE I TRIED TO ██████████ VIKTOR.

