

Two Futures

Every night I took a walk. I have done so since last summer, but I do not know why I even began. I chose to walk at night; however, like the reason why I had started, I do not know why I chose this time of day. Some of the city's black-hearted souls wander the streets at night and my neighborhood was no exception. Even with this knowledge, my reasons are unbeknownst to me with the exception that it just feels like the right time. Each time I step outside my door, I come in contact with these urchins; however, they peacefully pass me by. Not a single man wishes to acquire my money or cause any physical harm to me. Did they know something about me that struck fear into their hearts or did they just simply assume that I wasn't worth the effort?

Sometimes I would see the same rough faces as I would briskly wander the darkened streets. In my mind, I have labeled them with certain monikers, but their identities are not important. I didn't believe that they served as anything significant in my life. They were just random people just like me, but the image they conveyed set them apart from me. I was very unlike them in every imaginable way. I had a decent paying job, I owned a modern car, I enjoyed the wholesome things that makes us good-hearted people what we are. I never dipped my hand into the blood of crime. I never stained my conscience with foul and nefarious deeds. I had convinced myself that I was the saint among the sinners, but something told me that I had been lying to myself.

One night I set out from my apartment on 5th Street for my routine walk, but for an odd reason that I could ascertain, I made the decision to take another route. I was heading toward a destination that I knew had existed, but I never thought I would walk there just for the sake of walking there. As time passed, I arrived at the metro line station. It was quite a distance away from my apartment and it seemed too troublesome to walk there each and every night, but for an unknown reason, my feet brought me here this evening. I walked in and found the nearest bench and I took a seat in order to give my feet a rest and as I did so, I just found myself sitting there and staring at the pedestrians that wandered by. I thought to myself about their destinations, their arrivals, their business here within the city, and things that wouldn't normally interest me, but for some reason, it was all that I could think about as I sat there.

At the time, I thought nothing of the fact that I came here to the station. Subconsciously, I believed that I just needed a change of scenery... to try something new and outside of the normal walking scenarios that I encountered for the past thirteen months. While I no longer felt tired after a few moments of resting, something compelled me to stay seated. It was like I didn't want to leave the metro line station. I couldn't figure out why, but I felt like I had to be here. Quite some time passed when my mind snapped out of the notion of staying there any longer. At that point, I had decided that I would return home and settle in for the evening.

The road home was long. For some reason, it just seemed longer going back than it did coming here. Usually when one makes a trip, the opposite is felt. That is when I noticed that I had been walking slower leaving the station than I did going to the station. It felt as

if I was in a rush to get there, but I was in no hurry to leave. At first, I simply thought that I was just savoring the walk home knowing that I expended enough energy getting there and that I would just leisurely make my way back home, but when I finally arrived back at my apartment, a growing urge to go back overcame me. I knew it was late and that I needed my rest, but I had decided that I would go back tomorrow night.

That night was like any other night. I fell asleep without any trouble and soon, the morning light peered into my apartment. The moment I awoke, I couldn't help but think about the reasons why I went to the metro line station last night. The thoughts ran through my mind and all I could come up with were wild guesses that didn't make much sense. With each guess, I felt that I had been lying to myself. The truth was that I never knew why I went last night and I don't even know why I would be going tonight. It just felt like the right thing to do. Perhaps it was a sign. I had been alone for so long now. Perhaps going to the station was a way for crying out for attention or perhaps a way to be noticed or just recognized. Maybe I felt that if I sat there long enough, someone would acknowledge my presence. Was that all that I was doing this for? The attention?

I felt tired all of a sudden. I knew that I had just woken up and that not everyone starts their day off fresh and ready to go. I knew I had to go to work, but for some reason, I didn't want to go. I wasn't one of those people who hated their job, but this feeling inside of me just told me not to go back there any more. I couldn't understand the reasoning behind even contemplating on leaving my job, but my mind convinced me that I should stop going. Even know it is common knowledge that people work for money in order to make a living, somehow, I felt like that didn't apply to me anymore. I stumbled through the mess that was my apartment and flopped back into my bed where I closed my eyes. The next thing I knew, they opened into darkness. Night had come again and when I rose up from my bed, a fear came over me. I felt like I was late getting to the station despite the fact that I didn't have any arrangements or specific time to be there. I just felt that I should have already been there a while ago.

This time I ran. I didn't briskly walk or use a quicker than normal walking speed... I ran. I had to get there as fast as I could. Something told me that I should be there... that it was my rightful place to be. When I got there, it was busier than the night before, but oddly, the seat that I sat in last night was, again, empty. I found it odd at first, but believed it was just coincidental. I took my seat as my heart pounded from all of the running I did to get here. I sat there and caught my breath, but no one took notice that I just sprinted in here and took a seat. I guess things were just too important in their day to day life to take notice of someone as insignificant as myself.

Tonight, I stayed longer. Perhaps it was due to the fact that I slept all day and that I had plenty of rest and had no need to sleep, but whatever the reason was, I decided that I would just sit there and watch the people come and go. Ever know the feeling that if you stare straight ahead long enough that you start to develop a keen awareness of what's in front of you, but everything else becomes blurred and unimportant? They call it tunnel vision and I slowly developed it as I sat there on that bench and stared into the crowd. I stared long enough that the people were no longer recognizable figures, but nothing more

than motion blurs. It was as if I had entered a trance-like state. I never felt my thoughts and attention this concentrated before. I had reached a new level of mental clarity, but I still could not understand why.

It seemed as if nothing would snap me out of my state, but, alas, something did. From having tunnel vision, my vision was blurry and would have taken a moment to readjust to see the full picture. I caught something out of the corner of my eye. One of the blurs was not moving. In fact, it was very stationary. I felt a presence that had been watching me for a quite some time. I closed my eyes and reopened them to a hazy view. I locked eyes with this figure that had been staring at me. With my eyes transitioning back to a normal state, I closed and rubbed them before I reopened. When I did, the figure was gone and all that remained were the everyday people that traveled back and forth from their trains to the door and vice versa. Did I imagine that or had someone been watching me sit here this whole time?

The urge to remain there subsided and the feeling of return took its place. I stood up and exited the station and began to walk home, slowly, much like I did the previous night. This time, I had no desire to return to the station the next night. My curiosity was gone. Did someone notice me? Did I get the attention that I thought I needed? Was that the reason as to why I didn't want to go back? I didn't quite know why at the time, but I just knew that I shouldn't go back there... at least... not for now.

I arrived home rather late... or early I should say. The sun had begun to rise in the horizon. The amber rays of dawn shone on my street and illuminated every nook and cranny of my living environment. It wasn't the prettiest place imaginable, but it was the place I called home. I walked upstairs to my apartment when something caught my eye. There was police tape blocking my door way and my door was wide open. Inside there were two officers searching my apartment. I was immediately frightened. I didn't know why. I mean, I never did anything that would warrant my arrest. I was never involved with any illegal activities. Why were the police at my apartment and what were they searching for? I didn't stick around long enough to find out. I quietly snuck away in hopes that I didn't draw their attention. I made it outside of the apartment and took shelter in the alley behind it. There I waited for hours until the police called it a morning and took off.

When the coast was clear, I snuck back up to my apartment and made sure that I wasn't seen. I carefully opened the door just in case they left someone behind to keep watch on the place. You never knew if they were setting something up or not. When I opened the door, my apartment was a much bigger mess than it was when I had left. Everything was out of place and some of my furniture had been broken. Just what did they do when they were in my home? I thought about calling and complaining, but that would be like turning myself in, but I didn't do anything that would have gained the need for my arrest, but, yet, I was still hesitant to call. Perhaps I just didn't want to know the reason why they were there. Maybe I was just too afraid to find out the truth. I decided to stop worrying about it and get some sleep. I turned to close my door which I thought I had left open, but to my surprise, my door was already shut tight. Perhaps my mind

wandered too much and I closed the door and never realized it. Nevertheless, I locked myself in and headed toward my room.

When I entered my room to climb into bed, I noticed a large bloodstain on my mattress. This frightened me exponentially. I staggered back and gasped for air as if I were hyperventilating. Just what the hell happened in my home? Did someone break in and end up having a fight with the police? I didn't see an ambulance outside, but perhaps they had already left before I returned. Any fatigue inside me was now lost and a hunger for answers arose, but before I could put together any rational thought on where to begin, a loud banging came from my front door. The knock banged three times and it silenced itself. I was too petrified to answer the door. What if whoever was in here returned? What if the police had returned and they were here to arrest or question me? I didn't want anything to do with what happened. All I wanted was my life to continue on as normal so I ignored the bangs that came from my door.

Oddly enough, the bangs never returned. There were three bangs and that was it. After that was dead silence. I slowly crept up to my door and looked through the peephole to see nothing on the other side. Something was obstructing the view through the peephole. Perhaps whoever banged on my door was waiting for me on the other side and that they blocked any chance of me knowing their identity. I didn't want to take any chances. I noticed a cold breeze entering the room and noticed that one of my windows had been open this entire time. It was odd how I just noticed this now instead of when I entered the apartment, but perhaps I was so distracted by the events that took place that I didn't want to notice anything around me. I decided to be clever and to surprise my attacker.

I climbed out onto the fire escape and made my way down the side of the building. Once I reached the ground I re-entered through the main door and quietly made my way back upstairs to my apartment. When I got to the top step of my hallway, I hugged the wall to the corner where I slowly peeked around the corner. Much to my surprise, there was nobody there. What was there was a small envelope taped to my door. It was addressed to no one. I peeled it off my door and immediately opened it as I was curious as to what the contents were. I pulled out a folded piece of paper and opened up only to reveal a letter. It was not addressed to anyone specifically, but after skimming through it, I just knew it was intended for me. I closed my eyes and reopened them and focused on the very beginning of the letter. I read it to myself while keeping my tone of voice under my breath.

"You have two futures."

"The first future takes you back through the door of your apartment where you will waste away into nothing. You have no job, no money, and no life. You will live alone by yourself and your future will be what you make of it which, from what I can tell, will not be much."

"The second future involves you returning to the station. I know that you have a lot of

questions and that you seek answers. I can give you the answers that you seek and give you what you have felt all along: The thing that is missing in your life: closure.”

“Two futures... one path... the choice is yours.”

I looked into the words on the paper and then I looked at my door. Walking through my door gave me a sense of warmth and comfort, but the thought of returning to the station made my mind ache and my fear swell. Any normal person would choose the warmth and comfort and be done with it, but curiosity arose. I had to know why I had no desire to return to the station. Why each time I thought of returning, fear overwhelmed me and robbed me of any confidence. I had to seek the answers.... I had to seek closure.

I made the decision to head to the station in broad daylight, but by the time I got to the front door, something told me to wait until night. The walks started at night... the visits to the station occurred at night... it was only fitting that the answers being offered to me be given at night. I knew that if I walked back into my apartment that I would be choosing the future that promised nothing and uncertainty so I slept in the alley behind my apartment. I slept all day until nightfall. When I awoke I knew that the time had come to seek the truth. I could almost hear the words of the letter echo in my mind to snap me back to reality. I stood on my own two feet and began my final journey toward the metro line station.

At first, I was fine. There was nothing wrong with me at all, but as I drew closer, I could feel nausea settling in. I felt that maybe I caught something from sleeping outside. I ignored it with a little frustration that I knew that I was now coming down with something, but as I got closer, the symptoms changed. No longer did I feel nausea building inside me. My muscles cramped and ached and they stopped me dead in my tracks. A sharp pain entered my stomach, but slowly subsided. When I felt ready to continue I walked on. Things seemed fine until I rounded the corner and made eye contact with the station. A foul odor came into the air and I clutched my chest in absolute pain. The pain was blinding and all I remember before passing out was that I dropped to my knees and then my vision turned to a bright light.

When I woke, I was face down on the concrete in front of the station. It was still night, but I was unaware of how much time had passed. The pain was still there, but it was tolerable enough to the point where I could stand. When I got back to my feet I tried to move my legs, but they felt as heavy as lead. I struggled to pull myself toward the station, but a voice inside me said I was not ready. My curiosity piqued and I cried out that I was, indeed, ready to know the answers. When I accepted my future, the pain ended and my feet became light. I marched on, determined to seek the truth. When I entered the station, the same scenario was played out before like the two previous nights. People in their everyday lives hustled through the station as they tried to get to their destinations. I glanced over at the bench I sat at for the past two nights and it was empty again. It was almost like a “Welcome Home” mat in front of a door.

I approached the bench when I felt a shiver in my spine. It was a signal to stop. I turned around and came face to face with the figure that I thought I saw last night! My eyes widened as I instantly knew who I had been staring at.

“Brother... I give you your answers.”

The world around me dissolved. Everything disappeared. The people, the station, the city... the entire world.... Gone. My brother was gone again, but in his place, was his voice.

“You’ve been lost for a while now, Sebastian. I thought that I would never find you, but here you are back where you belong. The night that the company called you and said you were laid off due to cutbacks hit you pretty hard. You devoted your life to your job and despite the fact that you didn’t go far, you remained loyal in hopes that one day you would make it. It was the only thing that kept you motivated. When the news struck that you were laid off, it hurt so much that you decided that there was nothing more to live for. At the time you were confused as to why you took your own life which is why you never made it here. You were lost and left wandering... searching for answers. You were confused and scared, but you do not have to worry about that now. The future you chose has brought you home.”

The future I chose has brought me home. My warmth... my comfort... my reason has been found. I now knew why no one paid attention. I now knew why I always felt alone. I truly was alone, but not anymore.

Now...

I was home.