

The Howling

The wind was howling again last night. The ferocity of it would put a pack of alphas to shame, not that I couldn't hear them piercing the night with their reply. And I welcomed both.

I did chance a glance, though I was in the midst of a sleepy stupor so it may as well have been a dream – sometimes it's difficult to discern the difference. Waking and sleep often meld in to one these days. Like when the hints of night suffuse in to the lingering echoes of day – that balanced, diaphanous stitching of twilight that meshes the two together is where my current reality has rested since he passed.

I usually capitalise on such an occurrence. The sheer cacophony of it, dichotomously, would instil a placid oasis within my mind, heart and soul all. When this trifecta of being manages to find such seldom solace, it's when I manage to rest in totality. Though rare it is.

But, the thought took me completely unawares, am I already asleep, and in my dreams I long for the howling? Almost as instantly, the challenging thought arrived, Is that a kinder alternative?

It felt real enough, that one thing was for sure – but both sides of the coin often do.

I yawned, not that it did me any good.

I stretched, not that it did me any good.

I contemplated the actions required for movement; covers off, body shimmied, legs down, so so...

When I finally conjured the motivation and effort to look, it could have been five minutes or five hours from when the initial notion took root.

Odd that, when your world ends but the planet is still spinning, spinning, mercilessly spinning without any sympathetic pause, emotional break, or promise of letting you catch up time just...

It's like a puzzle. Well, more fitting for this simile would be an old puzzle. One that was acquired from a different generation and stowed away somewhere for another date, but abandoned and forgotten as puzzles are won't to be. You find this temporal puzzle, left in the attic, relevant from a distance but not to you. You want so much for the pieces to fit together, but they don't.

Minutes are folded and tarnished, seconds, frayed at the edges as they are, don't quite link as they ought to. Chunks of hours are completely missing which makes the whole thing seem futile before you even attempt it.

Monday, Friday, May or February – they're all just words jotted down on calendars and journals of people who still adhere to them, marking the unceasing trickle of time.

It does get tiresome, trying to make sense of it all, so you just acquiesce in to the muted chaos, and give up. Let your mind fall, let the puzzle be in its inevitable forevermore broken state. I should try to consider that the puzzle is whole, and I am not. Something is broken, of this I'm certain.

Perhaps that's when it started, now that I put the words down and gaze upon them like far off symbols, betraying my secrets in their black, glistening whispers. Perhaps, perhaps that's where I went wrong. Allowing the grief – at its most powerful; an entity of sheer force and terror that my eviscerated will could not stand against it – to clutch in to me. My defeated mind and body allowing its tendrils to invade and encroach, to coil and snuff the light out.

The insatiable need for him, the deafening pining, it was all so much to face, to take, to bear. I needed something to drown it out the silence of his absence— and that's when I heard... Oh, how I wish those howls were calling me now. They truly are kinder.

But I, in my weak solitude, I submitted. I objected every healthy brain cell to the plague of loneliness, and so it began. But now, at this concept of present in which I reside, I can't say when this was. I know not, and never will manage to remember.

I managed to reach the window last night – or the dream **simulacrum** did, and he- I- we- we pulled the thick velvet curtain back. A sheet of dust leapt for a freedom I could only dream of, and pattered down on me, swirled about me and peppered to the floor – those poor, fallen motes. I envied them.

As if my presence was an affront, I was met with a roaring gale. It buffeted the glass and I heard the wood groan under the attack. So too, could I hear the evidently loose metal fittings rattling, but above all the howling, howling, howling. And I welcomed it, though I feared it.

I stayed my want to retreat. I scanned the courtyard. I stood stalwart and stationary in the fray of such natural, ferocious, primordial anger, and I prayed – for the first time since I can remember – for an equal strength. I longed to command the solid, unmoving presence of the hewn marble statues and statuettes. Alas, as I've grown accustomed to, I longed in vain.

My disposition, unruly as it is, veered clear of stoicism and found its reflection in the bosky skyline that separated me from my nearest neighbours – over a mile away, a lifetime.

The coal black leaves tossed against the purple-tinted night sky, the constant shifting blocking out the misted cosmos of a world I may as well have lived in, cancelling out the sporadic stars which attempted to pervade the endless expanse like a disease.

The wind... the terrible wind gripped at those silhouetted leaves and yanked, viciously from side to side, as if a primal rage had invigorated it. There was symmetry here, in the little motes of light that remained – tainted and marred as it was – and the attempt of the unseen, but always heard to snuff it out.

From my vantage point, it looked as if I were surrounded by an approaching tidal wave of towering, ominous shadow. My presence of mind invading. The sheer holistic turbulence took my breath away, the anxiety began mounting, building, rising as the world attempted to asphyxiate me. Closer it encroached, tighter the panic gripped until... until...

The wind loosed another ghastly, piercing roar of fury and the wolves offered their haunting reply.

I can't remember stumbling backward, falling in to our- my bed. Yet, I found myself there, enveloped in an icy cold sweat which the bitter air in the room gnawed at, and still, it scorched and seared like the torrid cracks in the land of my desolate heart.

I thought for a moment that the window had finally capitulated; crumbled and permitted the wind entry, because, though the howling continued in its entirety, the muffled quality to both canine and nature had ceased. It was not until I had to pause for breath, 'til I realised I had welcomed the howling inside the house, inside of me.

I fell back, and wept, and slept... or so I hoped.

Did the dream spill in to reality, or did reality feed the dream? I never knew.

My partner was always a sickly man – and superstitious, to boot. He prayed for good health, and often disclosed that he thought it was working. I never believed him. He spent most of his time toward the end in this very bed, and he'd often call me to him, call my name and ask me to stay with him a while. That he missed me. That he needed me. I'd curl up next to him and rest his greased, matted hair on my chest and I'd listen. He'd tell me, on these occasions,

that he heard something – that the house was haunted. I never believed him in that aspect, either.

I know the seeds that planted such nonsense. The settling wood, yawning and groaning from under the morning sun, or the echoes of our footsteps from when he was healthier rebounding and ricocheting down the vast, empty halls to paint the effect of a spectre in pursuit... but a house, a lonely house at that, will often create the illusion of unseen guests because its purpose of existence is to host. Lonely minds, too, often see or hear things they want – whether they're there or not.

He told me he heard all manner of things, and I teased him. I said any creaks or sudden noises that befell him are, what I stated, a house needing more than two souls to warm it. That we should consider parenting soon. The two of us had endless love between us, that we were fit to burst. When he was better, we decided, we'd consider it in sooth.

And now, the hope of more souls is dashed. The comfort of two is a mocking memory. There is only one. Mine.

And, as if taking up the mantle, as if inheriting it as I did all his myriad, worldly possessions – all tainted with the once sentimental and fond memories – I now find myself a sickly man. Though, physical health I have no complaints, nor will a doctor of the utmost learning sleuth a cause of concern. My poor mind has fallen victim to some reserve of madness. Though I still hold tight to my disbelief in the realm of residential haunting, I can't deny the acoustic spirits in my mind. The corridors of thought, the hanging pictures our memories painted together, the leisurely spaces that have fallen to disuse... Aye, the house is not haunted, but my life is.

Haunted by...

Him.

His voice.

Longing for me to join him.

Telling me he missed me.

Telling me he needed me.

Day in, day out. Assimilating those folded minutes, disjointed seconds and filling in those chunks of missing hours.

Of which day, I know not.

Of which month, I'm none the wiser.

Whether I'm sleeping or waking, I can never be sure. Nor, of my sanity.

It's been a long time since he passed, but still, I hear his call.

Only when the winds and wolves are wining does his sweet, haunting voice cease.

Strange that...

I loved him so, and hate them more.

Yet, here I sit, journal in hand, begging their return and his absence. His voice, calling, calling, mercilessly calling without sympathetic pause, emotional break, or promise of letting me catch up.

Perhaps I should...

No, I'm just tired. Or mayhaps, this is a dream.

My strength is waning.

I hope the world howls tonight.