

Asleep

By Josh Smith

I wake up in the strangest places. Doorsteps, unfamiliar bedrooms, office buildings, alleyways - wall, you get the idea. The problem is that it happens all of the time. I lose focus on things. It's not that I simply forget; it's as if there is nothing to remember. I have become strangely comfortable with the fact that I do not know my own name. If I have a house or an apartment somewhere, I couldn't tell you where it is or what it looks like. If so, it's likely that I've been evicted by now. I don't think I live here.

As usual, nothing around me sparks any memories. This isn't the motel room I fell asleep in - it isn't a motel room at all. In the hallway, there are pictures of people I don't know; no one I recognize anyway. Sometimes when I wake up in a house like this, there is a note by the bed, or on the kitchen table. Though I can never make heads or tails of them, I always take them with me. Today's scrap of paper tells me to call Sam at the office if I want to go have lunch. Meaningless.

No one is ever home, just like here. I search through drawers, flip through photo albums, always hoping that I'll spot myself laughing with some long forgotten friend. Just like always, I see pictures of someone's family vacations. Someone's senior pictures. Nothing familiar. Nothing that explains why I'm here.

Outside, everything is the same, only on a larger scale. More strange houses, unrecognizable streets and a parade of parked cars. I never have keys, so I keep to the sidewalk and occupy my time the only way I know how. I wander down all of these roads, reading all of their names, concentrating on the ratio of green to white on their signs.

Today's coffee is a little stale. I drink coffee to stay awake, to keep from forgetting, but I don't think it works. I find myself growing tired in the middle of bright summer days like this. Some days I like to pretend it's just the heat.

Strolling along these nameless roads, staring into the colors that spell out direction for so many others, makes me long for one of those simple lives that snicker at me every day. I want to wear a suit and tie and drive an oversized SUV to the towering office suite where I sit in a cubicle from nine to five. I want to go home and pay my bills, water my lawn and sit down in front of my big screen TV to watch shows about other normal people with problems that can be resolved within their thirty-minute time slots. I want to tuck in my son and feed my dog before falling asleep next to my loving wife - instead of on this park bench, surrounded by pigeons. But this bench is all too comfortable in the shade of these trees.

"Hey man, you got a smoke?"

I sputter out a hardly coherent, "no," while trying to figure out how I ended up in this park, receiving a wake up call from a complete stranger. I fish through my pocket for the note I wrote to myself upon discovering my problem. The sheet of paper torn from a small notebook that reads,

Everything is OK. You've just been sleepwalking again.

Labeling my problem as sleepwalking is easier to swallow than referring to it as "losing time" or some sort of amnesic episodes.

Like usual, there is a half-empty cup of coffee (still warm) and like usual it makes me wonder what kind of mind state I'm in while sleepwalking. I must be somewhat conscious, enough to buy a cup of coffee or get a motel room as I do from time to time. I've even blacked out at work, only to jump up from my desk and bolt down the hallway. My boss told me about this incident right before he fired me.

At least today, I picked a somewhat comfortable place to wake up, not too far from Sam's house either. I've been staying with Sam, a former co-worker of mine, since my wife Anne and I separated. Since I began losing time. Though our previous relationship existed entirely within the office, he was the only person to offer any help when I needed it most. He's aware of my situation and keeps in contact with Anne. I made him promise not to tell her that I lost my job. Or that I haven't seen a doctor yet. She's very intent on getting me into a doctor's office. Even though I assure her it's only sleepwalking, she's convinced it's something more serious.

While she's at work, I need to stop by the house and pick up a few things, particularly some job hunting apparel and a little cash. The yard is a disaster. If the grass weren't so tall, it would be invisible beneath all of the leaves. Anne must be working plenty of overtime these days. I don't carry keys anymore, as they tend to disappear in my sleep, so I creep around to the back of my old home and get the spare key from the shed. My black- Anne's black lab, Roy can't stop wagging his tail. I make sure to fill his food bowl before heading into the bedroom.

I dig an old suitcase from the bottom of the closet, careful not to disturb any of Anne's things. Equally careful, I sort through my nicer suits and pack up enough to get me through a few interviews. I reach for the little tin can where we always kept spare cash. My electric razor is still here too. A faint sparkle catches my eye as I flick on the bathroom light. Anne's wedding ring teeters on the edge of the sink. When did she stop wearing it? I glance down at mine – still wrapped around my finger.

I open my eyes to concrete stretched out below my face. Above me, a black lab is licking my cheek. My head is pounding, and I have skinned knees; I must've fallen over. Where did I get this suitcase? Where am I? There's a note in my pocket... that's right – I'm a sleepwalker.

The frantically wagging dog trots off through an overgrown lawn. This seems like a nice neighborhood, the kind you'd see on a TV show. I don't understand how someone can live in a place like this and neglect even the smallest aspect of it. I stop for a moment, looking at each house, waiting for someone to come out and tell me that my

supper is ready. I know I could never be so lucky, but I scan every house around me before I continue walking. Slowly.

I stop at the first coffee shop I come to, eagerly awaiting my opportunity to peek inside of my new suitcase. My mind races around the possibilities it could hold. Photographs? My address? My name? I should know better than to get my hopes up like this, as the suitcase contains only a few nice suits and an electric razor. If these suits are mine, it could mean-

"Brian?"

A woman's voice keeps repeating, coming closer.

"Brian?"

She's right at my side now...

"Brian? Are you okay?"

"I think you have me mistaken for someone else."

"Brian, it's me, Anne."

"Who? Anne? Do you know me?"

The blood rushes to my head so quickly that I nearly pass out.

"I'm... Yes, I... Oh my god, what happened to you?"

She comes close to inspect the gash on my head that's been pulsing since I woke up.

"I don't know. I think I fell."

"Have you seen a doctor yet?"

"A doctor? I don't... I don't know. For the cut?"

She has a somber look in her eye. She knows me, but she's afraid to tell me how. I watch her eyes flash between my wedding ring and the floor. For a second my heart jumps and then I catch sight of her bare fingers.

"What's in the suitcase? Did you go home?"

"Um... suits... I guess. Home? I don't know where home is."

In an instant I'm struck with bravery, cutting off whatever it was she was about to say to deliver every question I've been aching to ask. "How do you know me? Where do I live? My name is Brian? What's my last name? Who am I married to?"

I continue as the tears well up in her eyes. Unable to complete a single thought, she turns and runs for the door before I can even apologize.

Where am I? Great... another motel room. At least I managed to keep the suitcase with me. My coffee cup is on the nightstand, next to my note... what's this? An addition to my note... in my handwriting? *And your name is Brian.* What? Am I that conscious during my blackouts? Maybe Anne is right. Maybe I should see a doctor. I'm still pretty close to our- her house; maybe I should go see her. I should probably go talk to Sam first and find out how long ago she stopped wearing her ring.

I catch a bus to my former office building and wait on the bench across the street. I should be able to meet up with him before his lunch break. That looks like... that *is* Anne's car pulling up to the building. I slouch down, holding my suitcase up in a weak attempt to hide, but she's staring at the doors. Waiting for someone. Right on time, Sam strolls through the door and climbs into her car. I can see them embrace.

I slide my wedding ring off for the first time in my life, leaving it right there on the bench with everything that's ever held me in place.

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