

Heaven and Hell

By

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BILLY

The bottle hit the table harder than Billy had hit anything, ever in his life. He hadn't the slightest hint of anger in his entire bone, but today he was mad. He had found out that Cynthia had been talking to an old boyfriend, someone from the past. Someone Billy didn't like. And that turned Billy's calm little mind flipped upside-down and all his thoughts spilled out of his mouth hole like mush.

Why am I standing what is this drink? I've never even liked whiskey but I drove all the way to the store to buy a bottle and I don't even know if I'll be able to drink this whole bottle. It burns my throat and I don't know, maybe I just want to supplement the pain and anguish running inside my brain with another sensation. I just can't take it anymore. Daddy never loved me and now she doesn't either.

She's glaring at Billy from across the table. There is not a single solitary semblance of the woman he fell in love with across the table. She is looking at Billy like he's a monster, like he's some big looming creature. Like he's some kind of dinosaur from the Mesozoic Era. Her facial expressions look as if he is a tyrannosaurus although he feels more like a brontosaurus on a day to day basis. Although on some days, when he's been licked clean enough by Cynthia's foul mouth, he feels like a stegosaurus. Just mean enough to not fight back. But regardless, Billy is no tyannosaurus, nor is he a brontosaurus, and he's definitely not a stegosaurus, he's simply a small man. A small man that has been emasculated by just about everyone in his life.

Billy realizes he doesn't want to drink this drink. He just wants to go lay down and preferably Cynthia would be there too, but honestly Cynthia staying where she was would probably be preferable to him. He's realizing that he just had the worst day in the world and as he left the parking lot of the bank that he worked at, as he flicked the end of his cigarette and the tobacco turned to ember and then turned into ash while the pale blue sky rolled by slowly at the horizon line. He's flicking the cigarette as a tic to calm his brain, he's flicking it three times to get it just right, he's controlling the amount of smoke he lets in his lungs and he takes all that he can take and then he exhales. Then he gets in his car and Billy just wants to go home but he gets a call from a friend that said some guy named Brian had been flirting with her at her work. She worked the front desk of a credit union. They both worked with money but Billy was much closer to the big dollars in the back. Maybe that's the way the system placed them but they both hated their jobs. Cynthia did a much better job of putting on a face and playing nice with society. Billy ebbed and flowed. He was

cool as ice one day and hot as the devil's dick on another day. Billy's boss had just told him that he'd have to be quitting his job, soon. That he missed too many days when his poor Ma was having troubles of the head and heart. That Billy raced home to save her, while his own marriage was dying in the process.

There ain't no sunshine when she's gone. Or is there? Billy faded back into consciousness as he looked around at an empty room. All had been stripped from the wall and he felt more claustrophobic than ever. Encased in his tiny cell he was greeted two small windows, one to the overgrown foliage near the rear quarters of the manor. Except this wasn't a manor, it was a small one-bedroom home that he had found by chance in the area. There was only one other window, which showed a tranquil view of the patio. Except the view either in or out was anything but tranquil. The flowers had died long ago. From dust, to dust. From dusk till dawn.

Billy snapped and was immediately in the driver's seat of his car. He was driving this vehicle to the bone. Billy owed a lot of money to the bank that financed his car, which was, funnily enough, the bank for which he worked. Billy's standing in the small area which he took his breaks. A plume of smoke is entering his lungs as he puffs and puffs and puffs and puffs and puffs and puffs and then inhales the smoke into his lungs. He's immediately triggered by the chemical reaction in his brain. Or what he thinks is the chemical reaction in his brain.

Smoke enters. Smoke leaves. Smoke is, and isn't, at the same time. He's smoking and he's smoking and he's falling asleep at the typer again.

Billy was a modest child, he had not much nor did he want much. He was mostly concerned about the wellness of his mother. Through thick and thin they conquered everything together, although Billy was far too small to make any impact into the situation. However, Billy was more of an impact than his small mind could even conceive.

I'm just awake and there's screaming and I can't go back to sleep. Why are they fighting? What are these words? I just want to sleep and wake up and start over again but they won't stop yelling. They're yelling and they're yelling and he's holding her and hugging her and she looks okay, at least I think she's okay?

Why does every thought going into Billy's brain seem like a Grand Idea? What are grand ideas, anywho? Are they just normal ideas thought by grand people or could normal people have grand ideas as well? Who knows the answers to any of these questions, he sure doesn't. And neither do I.

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Billy fades back into the current life. Or what he perceives is the current life. He's on a bus and he's going to nowhere in particular and he feels just fine. He feels like red, red wine running through his veins, veins, veins. He's fixed! He's fixed! He's better! The Hollywood Ending he always knew he'd have. He takes a bow, he's on the stage.

He's too afraid to be on stage. He's blushing because he has to kiss Juliet and he's never kissed a girl before and what if she retreads before I kiss her and therefore my first kiss is a rejection. We're all so afraid of rejection.

Billy fades again into the morning light, the sky bright from beyond his blinds. He's always waking up. Waking up from a nap, from actual sleep, just nodding off? He was always waking up from something.

Coffee does a body good. It always sure helped Billy out. Those long nights watching those vaults sure did a toll on Billy, now. Bills, bills, bills. Billy never went by Bill. Bill was a man's name, and Billy was no man.

What really makes a man? Billy had heard so many dueling arguments that he really didn't care the answer anymore, yet he did. Was it being strong? Untouched by anxiety? Is that what made a man? To be a stone figure, unhinged. Billy couldn't even envision feeling unhinged, so the idea itself

bemused him. Everything bemused Billy. Billy never knows what's going on. His thoughts won't let him. He only knows when to nod and when to shake his head, when to eat and when to fuck. The rest is foreign to him. It's written in a different language. *Sin ti no puedo respirar. Te necesito en mi vida.*

Billy is now sitting up in his hospital bed. His pillows feels like the material that's used to make tarps and other things that keep the rain away. The showers are as hot as his devilish tendencies, yet the heat scalds him and he feels the burns for days afterward. He keeps thinking he's walking on water. Is he really walking on water or is the floor just so wet because God do they ever clean these places why is that woman screaming why is she pulling her hair out who are these demons in my mind why can't I just sit still I'm sitting sitting sitting very still but I just can't focus on what's in front of me all I can see is everything that's surrounding me.

The doctor is sitting in front of Billy. He looks like God, in his big chair front and center in front of Billy. Either God, or the principal. Different words for the same thing. Some authority figure that you nod your head in agreement to but question each and every thing that comes out of their mouth. Can't this man make a mistake just as I can? What do we make, that aren't mistakes? Billy is twiddling his thumbs and doing just about anything else that can fill the silence while He reads the paperwork filled out by the staff. His heart is pitter-pattering and everything is happening all at once. The Doctor looks at Billy and his expression is blank. He says just a few simple words, a quick diagnosis. This is what's wrong with you, stop taking this and start taking this. The pills will be waiting for you. The pills.

Billy is beginning to get a headache. He grips his forehead and massages it as he catapults into the current reality. He's walking along the shoreline and the sounds of his portable radio are filling the air. It's "Cool Cat" by Queen, off of their 1982 hit record "Hot Space," most known for the song "Under Pressure" although this album is anything but a one hit wonder. The synths are synonymous with the times and the orchestration from the band is ever-apparent. Billy has never heard these songs before but they feel just so familiar. He felt so at ease and in the correct place as the song continued.

Billy had just finished reading Siddhartha. The ever-present "Om," echoed through his subconscious and he knew so much and so little, all at the same time. His episodes seemed to coincide with the book. When Siddhartha and Kamaswami were creating their empire, he felt the apathy that immersed Siddhartha's soul. When he reached the part where Siddhartha becomes one with The River, he felt an ever-present calm wave

over his whole body. He felt what the characters felt. He always felt what everyone else felt. When Billy was a small child he got hit in the stomach, and his first response wasn't to fight back. Instead, in those moments of pain, Billy searched anywhere he could find in that brain of his that would make sense of the altercation. But he couldn't. It was always too far to reach. So he grasped his stomach in his hands and cursed the pain and let his aggressor walk away.

Everyone is always walking away. Hurt people hurt people. We are all alone, and we are all dead. God is Dead. God is Love. War? What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again!

Billy cut himself shaving again. He's always making himself bleed. Never on purpose, Billy's far too skittish for that. As the blood ran down his face and into the drain, Billy viewed the mess that he made. On one hand, it was a horrible mess and he'd have to clean it up very soon, but he could almost see tiny works of art in the pools that were collecting in his sink. He only let himself have that thought for a brief moment before applying pressure to the wound and running hot water down the drain.

Billy's walking down the street when he encounters a man that looks oddly familiar. He stops in his tracks when he notices the man walking towards him, his eyes locked. Billy asks the man where he's going and the man's eyes stay directly focused on Billy the entire time. He can feel his warm breath, he can sense his anger, his uncertainty. His want to hurt Billy. The man is actually an old patron from the bank. One that the bank hurt very, very much. Billy wasn't the one working on his account, since Billy's job was to guard the vaults, but he was the victim of the man's anger even so. "Aren't you supposed to watch my money, you fucking asshole? Isn't that what they pay you for? You tiny little bitch of a man." Billy didn't quite know what to say. He rubbed his forehead and apologized and blinked into some other time period. But the man shook Billy and would not let him escape the reality this time. This time the man was standing next to Billy in the street. It was a quiet street corner, there wasn't much around. Billy could see that the man had something in his pocket, but he couldn't exactly tell what it was? Was it a gun? Was this man going to take a pistol and put the fucking barrel into his temple and make him stare at him as he pulled the trigger? Billy couldn't stand the smell of alcohol, and it was pouring out of this angry man's mouth. He could smell the stench, the hate, and sadness. The man didn't pull out a gun, thank God, but he did pull out a very sharp knife and as he swiftly dug into Billy's side all Billy could see were all the clouds in the sky and how that one right over on the left hand side looked just like a dog. Billy saw the man walk away as his body dropped onto the ground, he flipped and flopped around like a dying fish for a moment before gracefully assuming the fetal position on the ground. This time, the

blood was pouring from a dangerous place. This could kill him. He kept that in mind as he grasped at the wound to apply pressure, just as he did to his razor bumps. He held his wound and bit down very hard into his lower set of teeth as he closed his eyes and waited for a miracle.

Billy Hurt. William Hurt was the name on his file, but Billy hadn't gone by that name in a very long time. William was his father, and Bill, his uncle. He was the only Billy, and that was his name, and his alone. Billy had suffered from a stab wound to the chest, and there was plenty of bruising and blood loss. His file also reported that Billy was "unresponsive to the first response team," along with "increasingly manic to the emergency room technicians." They gave him a pill to sleep as they dressed his wounds. The last thing he saw was a man sitting at a table far from his seat at the bench. The man had his arms strewn across the table that was meant for a group, but he had his drawings and papers all over the table. His face looked maniacal and even though he felt pretty maniacal himself, it was clear that this man was much worse off than he. He looked like Jesus at the last supper, just if none of his disciples had come to visit him at his final meal. Jesus being lonely was a strange concept to him.

They took his blood pressure and kept freaking out and telling him that it was high. That it was high, high, high, that he needed to take another pill to make it go down, down, down. That he just needed to rest and relax and that all his problems would go away. It was too bad that it wasn't that simple, that he was only able to bury his troubles a little bit deeper into his brain but there was only so much you could squeeze into the cracks before it all starts spilling out like a goose down pillow that's just been punctured.

Billy had all his possessions lined up in front of him. The Alcoholics Anonymous manual that he was reading, because it was the only thing to read besides the Bible, and he was sick to death of reading the Bible. He was laid down wrapped up in the blankets wanting so badly to make his bed and tuck in his corners. His heart wouldn't stop beating and his mind wouldn't stop racing. He was getting increasingly sweaty and unable to come to peace with his thoughts. He closed his eyes and hoped sleep would come. But of course, it never did.

Billy faded for the first time since being in the hospital.