Forsaken Darkness

By : Riovocci

Venturing into the dark side of Cleveland, a naive white man reflects on his ignorance and the night he accompanied his black friend into the ghetto to get chicken wings.

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/Riovocci

Copyright © Riovocci, 2014
Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

Forsaken Darkness

By nine oâ clock I was rubbing my eyes. I desperately needed a break from the hypnotizing computer screen, and upon hearing some yelling coming from outside, I rolled my chair over the tall gothic windows of the computer lab, peering at the dark with suspicion. Streetlights threw pink and orange hues on the wet shine around the black puddles that had collected in the parking lot. I gazed fascinatingly at a group of students, dark figures, jumping over puddles and joking around, who were causing the ruckus. â *Why canâ t I be out there too, to be liberated from schoolwork, and to act as one who is free to play amongst the night?â* I laughed when I thought of that being what Shakespeare would probably say. But then my mind crossed some serious topics, like the finance paper I was neglecting.

My breath framed the suburban darkness on the glass as I fell softly into a thoughtless stare. I watched for a few more seconds as the dark figures scurried into one of the brick dorms, listening carefully for the beep emitted when an ID is swiped to gain entrance, and at the same time using the uninteresting scene as an excuse to avoid my schoolwork. The sound of pant legs rubbing menacingly together passed by the doorway to the lab and broke the dark hypnosis.

As I headed back to my computer one of my shoe laces got entangled on the antique heater, and I looked back into the windowâ s glare just in time to see the reflections of scowls that other people in the lab directed my way. I swiftly returned to my computer screen, trying to uphold a disciplined attitude as if the pants belonged to my parents or an admired professor observing my dedication to academics. Yet, not a soul was standing in the doorway, awhile the residual wind from the passerby made the room feel a tad chillier, as though the air conditioning were running.

â Alright, letâ s get this done!â I internally scolded myself as a teacher would scold an unresponsive, daydreaming student. My finance paper looked back at me. I imagined the lonely sentence that barely stretched the width of the paper turning into a frown. Another distraction entered the room, my thoughts. At a time when I needed to focus, I realized I had to pissâ thinking of the rain, the puddles outside; I fled briskly to the restroom. Once again I escaped the loneliness of the lab, of the single line I could not progressively replicate. A quick stroll to the bathroom, in and out, and I was on my way back to studying, back in serious mode, ready to write, when I saw my friend Darius walking down the hall.

Darius, a cheery individual who is friends with practically everyone at college, was outpouring with wires and gizmos, which is actually typical for him since he treasures how he listens to music; for this reason he wears very exquisite headphones to receive the best sound quality, so I didnâ t think anything of it; heâ s even showed me the headphones before. Yet, as I glanced at him, puzzlingly, and he came over the shake my hand as he commonly does when we bump into each other, I noticed much more than headphones.

â Youâ re wired man,â I joked, inspecting his robotic-like appearance.

â Hey, whatâ s up? â ¦ Yeah, I got to wear this. The doctors gave it to me to wear for basically a day, to get data and stuff about my kidney. Iâ m donating my kidney to my mom in June, so I was at the hospital this morning. It took forever man; I was so ready to get out of there.â

â What? Donating a kidney?â I was shocked by the news because Darius showed not a sign of unease or anxiety, not a sign of frustration; nothing but cheeriness glowed in his eyes. Upon a closer look I realized a monitor was clipped on his belt. His left arm was bandaged in gauze pads, drooping slightly to his hip for support.

â Thatâ s crazy man.â I didnâ t have the right words ready, so it was the best I could do to convey my surprise. Although, truthfully, I felt ashamed for my ignorance.

â Yeah man, Iâ m so hungry. I was actually about to go get some chicken wings from Kimberlyâ s or Hot Sauce Willieâ s or something, cause Iâ m starving â ¦ you know cause it has been almost twenty-four hours now and I just got done putting my project together,â Darius said.

â Who you going with?â I asked.

â My roommates are out. Iâ m starving dude, like I said, Iâ m about to go get me some chicken wings, Iâ ll probably go to Hot Sauce Willieâ s or Kimberlyâ s ya know.â When Darius says certain words I notice a trace of the renowned Brooklyn accent in the pronunciation; he was born there; it particularly surfaces, and I joke with him about this, as he says the word â coffee.â

â Wait, so you donâ t have anyone to go with you?â

â Yeah â ¦â

â Hey man, Iâ ll go with you. Iâ ve pretty much finished everything and I havenâ t eaten yet,â I lied. â Iâ ve never been to Hot Sauce Willieâ s or Kimberlyâ s before. Count me in,â I blurted. Immediately I regretted my impulsiveness, remembering that lonely sentence waiting for me back at the lab.

â Well, to be honest, I was thinking I would go to Kimberlyâ s, actually. I really want some of their chicken wings.â

â Thatâ s fine with me,â I said. By then I was already predicting a long night ahead of me, an inevitable trip thousands of words long, but I wasnâ t fazed. In my head I planned how I would finish my paper, the number of hours I would have, and how much sleep I would give up.

Polite as he is, Darius was reluctant at first at the idea of me tagging along. He briefly mentioned how rundown the area beside Kimberlyâ s is, adding that he is nervous to go there, but is unable to resist the great food.

â There are a lot of black people,â he had said, blatantly. Moreover, Darius did not want me to pack up and leave and shirk any remaining work; final exams were a week away and nearly everyone who gave a damn about school was buckling down. After I reassured Darius that I was ready to go, we descended the stairs and I followed the reflection of us coming down the stairs in the tall gothic windows that overlook the stairwells. â *Referencing all the mumbo jumbo Iâ d heard about races and blacks versus whites, I let those rumors fall into thetransparent silence that a window holds back.â*

A minute later we were in the parking lot, heading for Dariusâ s car. As per usual, Darius called ahead to Kimberlyâ s and placed his order while I pessimistically looked at the dark sky, trusting a storm was brewing. I had never been to Kimberlyâ s before, but I was willing to give it a try. And I felt like keeping Darius company as he went to pick up his order, for I donâ t often get the chance to go out and have fun with friends. While leaving the topic of skin color arose, again. Darius is a cautious person and he felt compelled to say something along the lines of the shadiness of the restaurant.

â Look this place is kind of in the ghetto. I mean the chicken wings are good, but you know, itâ s not the nicest place and stuff,â he confessed, but went on. â What I mean is Iâ m black, and Iâ m scared of this place, man.â

As I focused on Darius, as we exited the college parking lot, the dark pupils in Dariusâ s eyes grew larger and darker when he spoke seriously of Kimberlyâ s. None of my prior interactions with Darius wandered into to such frightening, ominous topics.

â Even though Iâ m blackâ Iâ m scared, you know. Imagine you going into a place with white people and feeling scared,â Darius explained. He recounted the last time heâ d gone to Kimberlyâ s and the amount of discomfort he had endured as heâ d waited for his order.

â Last time I felt like I was going to die in there, I swear someone would kill me, but the chicken wings are definitely worth it though.â

We cruised along South Green Road for a time, while the familiar sights became unfamiliar after we crossed Mayfield Road; I had never been past there in all four years at college. Darius talked about his personal life and delved into my own. In the meantime I reflected on how I had met Darius.

In the fall, Darius and I had both enrolled in a creative writing class with Professor Mason, an esteemed short-story artist. After weeks of vigorous writing, each member of the class had to submit a story for a workshop. Dariusâ s stories always were set in the ghetto, involving everyone from bank robbers to gang bangers, from guns to heartbreakâ s precision; given the emphasis on inner-city violence, I concluded that the folk tales of the Wild West had ostensibly urbanized into what I would dub the tales of the Grungy Ghettos.

Soon we passed a school, and followed a winding segment of the road with dense, bunched forests converging on either side, and dark, cold rain pelting the hood, sparkling ahead in the headlights as if it were as rigid as skydiving diamonds. Trees appeared dressed in their natural green color under interspersed streetlights. And soon, in the rearview mirror we left the few city lights of South Euclid in the wet distance. Other cars periodically hissed by, scattering the loose water collecting on the road into the tall grasses that needed to be mowed where pieces of litter mislead me to believe that animals were about to cross. For a cold day that turned warm and then cold again, the road had been so warm from the nice day that steam was eerily rising from the shiny black pavement as we neared Collinwood, with asphalt ghosts trailing; I never looked back but I swear the grim reapers was riding in the back seat, polishing his scythe, grinning beneath a ghastly cloak.

Darius glanced back forth between the road and me, his left arm lay drooped by his side. With the guidance of a few lights brightening the bruised sky to a mystical amethyst over distant buildings, a sign that neighborhoods were close by, we entered a line of red taillights waiting at an intersection. We finally broke free of the woods and I became confused by the sight of a large house, possibly an abstract mansion, seen only by the huge windows in funky rectangular shapes, even on the roof, with black crosses caging faint red glows. â *This does not seem like the hood?â* I was perplexed by the grandiose design. Little did I know that I would soon understand why the hood truly is dark.

Crime knows it can ensconce in the dark. Proving we do not need sunshine to survive is easy, for our hearts exist in such a sunless realm, beating our blood hard through the thin byzantine of lime green veins, serving our body, feeding our mind, allowing subsistence. My mind was astray in odd notions.

Nevertheless, the house turned out to be quite misleading. Rounding a curve, the next thing I knew I was eying a series of storefronts visible against the black skyline. Of all the stores, only one was litâ neon lights marking a small Chinese restaurant open for business amidst the outnumbering facades that sat empty and dim, with real-estate signs that listed numbers for hopelessness and partners.

Not a soul walked on the street, either; and for streets they looked as if they were bandaging the impoverished abyss. Darius continued to talk about his family, telling me about his mother at first and then he digressed to

reflecting on his friends. All of his testimony was fascinating to me and acted as a reminder of the hardships and severe setbacks faced by others, which I had largely avoided in childhood, growing up in a stable home with both of my parents together.

â What about track? Will you still be able to run?â I asked.

â Yeah Iâ ll still run track, but Iâ ll have to give up another one of my passions â ¦ Many people donâ t know this, when I tell them, some just laugh, but â ¦ I love boxing.â

â Boxing?â Darius is five feet and five inches tall and slender, so the notion of him boxing was shocking. Donâ t get me wrong, Iâ m not completely naive to boxing. I am aware that several varying weight classes exist, to keep completion intense and the outcomes a derivative of similar statures clearly winning as a result of skill. I knew that much, but â ¦ Darius, a boxer? I had a hard time thereafter coming to grips with the idea. However, Darius is a strong fella; the type of guy who makes a promise and executes, who is straightforward and honest.

â Oh really, thatâ s too bad man,â I said, even showing my surprise, which Darius anticipated and welcomed.

We greeted another road of storefronts, and once again the only operable restaurant was a small Chinese place. At a stoplight I found myself despairingly glancing down the tunnel of closed businesses. We passed it and headed into a gloomier district. Abandoned buildings colonized the lightless air circulating around the city of warehouses, with concrete fields of junk between and chain-link fences keeping the sidewalk detached from the old brick factories, windows boarded-up, and black water dripping from the roofs. Suddenly, looking outside, Darius and I noticed we were entirely surrounded by boarded-up, derelict warehouses of enormous proportions.

Chain-linked fences, rusted and tall, eerily keep vandals out. Now and then I would look through a locked wrought-iron gate, back into the emptiness of single purple-black lights flickering soundlessly, shining on unneeded delivery platforms and courtyards. Amongst everything, it was the height and width of the great brick buildings which astounded me most. This was the side of Cleveland that I was never exposed to. Just then, a strange thought entered my mind, a hellish vision of some kind as I was hypnotized again, dwelling on the sight of forsaken darkness before my eyes.

â For every dormant factory we leave, the devil is working in the reclaimed gloom, producing suffering to further ruin the lives of the enveloping neighborhoods that once depended on those factories for employment. When we close factories for the sake of greater profit, driven solely by greed, and toss charity and value into the embers of avarice, it is but the sparks for which enable the Devil to dwell and operate the machines, to manufacture suffering.â

Soon we arrived at another road of storefronts, although most were empty just like the previous two roads, and we turned left at an intersection, pulling into a parking lot at Kimberlyâ s shortly after.

â I hate parking here, itâ s so shady, you know. Itâ s the kind of place you get robbed,â Darius admitted. I peered at the parking lot and started to agree.

A maroon Cadillac pulled in right behind us, four or so spaces down. It sat idling, nobody moving inside, but the windows were so tinted that way, so filled with the gloom I had recently witnessed, I could not even tell if anyone was driving. For me it was as if fear sat in that car, in that grand darkness, watching my torment play out, and growing stronger off it.

We made our way inside. Instantly I realized that I was the minority, glancing at all the black people ordering and waiting. Not that I minded being the minority if it was a better side of town, but there, at Kimberlyâ s, I was genuinely scared. We stood in line; I imagined all the eyes shifting to me, curious as to why I was thereâ despising me because I wasnâ t their color; I stared up at all the signs prohibiting customers from certain conduct, then at the glass wall separating the cashier from the ordering line, with a little slot to shove money or credit cards under, to pay. The whole scene evoked my experiences walking into gas stations situated in the ghetto of my hometownâ with regard to all the extra precautions undertaken to deter crime. But, still, even back there it wasnâ t this racially lopsided.

A man talking on his cell phone, scratching his back at the same time, loitered by the pick-up window. If this were in a more upscale neighborhood, scratching his back in front of others would be considered rude, and the glares would direct his way. But I was out of my comfort zone. The man repeatedly complained to the cashier. A cook moved somewhere deep in the kitchen, behind some stainless steel shelves and cooking-ware, in the midst of white smoke rising from orange flames, amidst sizzling sounds as if water were being poured on something hot.

â Where is my fucking food?â The back-scratching phone guy indignantly complained, becoming more discontent with what he deemed â slow serviceâ by the minute.

And the sassy cashier, a rather larger woman, would look at him in an equally unpleasant tone and say, â calm down honey,â or, â itâ s on the way sugar.â

Needless to say, her voice was reassuring. Lost in observations, the unfamiliar atmosphere, before I knew it, I was standing in front of the cashier, too. She was a large black woman who did not act arrogant or unwelcoming toward me, thankfully. The experiencing was humbling as I mulled her aura, wondering if she owned the place, or ran it by herself as the proprietor. I ordered a Wing Dinner and reluctantly paid with my credit card, feeling curious eyes looking over my shoulder the whole time, memorizing my number. I nervously moved aside but the cashier summoned me back to sign the receipt, which, given the sign stating that anyone who uses a credit card must show a photo ID when paying, made sense.

I proceeded to force my card into my pocket, deciding to refrain from removing my wallet again, and waste no time stepping aside, fearing I would anger someone in the process, and slipped into a booth across form Darius so I didnâ t anger the zombie like people queuing also, fixated on Law and Order playing on a small TV above the takeout window. I crossed my right leg over my left, my shoes in plain sight so everyone could see that I was poor, since the soles of my Pumaâ s were peeling off.

On the glass wall was a famous sticker in a circular shape; a white sun was half visible, rising from a hill of red and white stripes into a pure blue sky, a famous symbol of President Obamaâ s campaign. Of course, for those who know his famous mantra, Obama pledged â Hope.â And it was there, in Kimberlyâ s, that I remembered hope. We all hope. I hoped I would not be killed. Darius hoped he could spare one of his kidneys for his mom, and live to appreciate her. Hope is the optimism that wishes to avoid that fateful slope.

To pass the time, I chatted with Darius about anything. I brought up exams and school multiple times. I could tell he felt similar to me: anxious to get out and dig into those delectable chicken wings we could smell, wafting as if they were invisibly flying in the steamy air. Maybe I apologized three or four times to Darius for my order taking so long, but I regretted not ordering blindly beforehand. More and more people arrived, the line grew, and grew, and before long the place was packed with customers, and me, of course, being the minorityâ the only white guy; a chicken in the dark.

Sadly, I thought of the environments those people are confined to. Maybe they shall return to a cold, drippy, dust-ridden three-story house in Hough, with a terrace and porch of former glory; while debilitation is now the

true resident. Maybe they reside in rundown apartments. Maybe they didnâ t have a place to stay. I interrupted myself, considering all of the assumption I had made.

People waiting for orders lounged in the booths next to us or leaned against a wall. They looked tired, a few utterly exhaustedâ certainly ready for a sleep after devouring some chicken wings. Perchance the last thing on earth that they wanted to do was wait in line behind some punk white kid in jeans and a dress shirt who seemed too cheap to buy a new pair of shoes.

Moving my head about the room as I spoke with Darius, as to not draw any attention to my curiosity, I recognized the shirts two men wore as the insignia of the University Hospitals. Judging by his clothes, greasy hands, another man appeared to be an autoworker. But then, with the call of the big woman, sort of yelling the number, â 98,â I approached the pick-up window, grabbed my food, and thanked the lady. She gave me a â mhmm,â like I wasnâ t worth a full word. *â Who cares?â* I didnâ t blame her. Besides, I was already headed for the door by the time she returned to other orders, Darius in front of me holding the door. We booked it outside. The smell of rain drying on cement was in the foggy air as we left Kimberlyâ s. We turned the corner and I half expected to be mugged, but nobody was waiting. As soon as I shut the cardoor I let a sigh of relief.

â Dude â ¦ that was scary,â I impulsively said. Light rain pattered around us as we left Kimâ s.

As we made our way home a storm loomed. Thunder growled in the distance and lightning dashed across dark windows, broken bottles on the street, awhile the night sky abruptly lit up in deep purple where a zigzagging-silver bolt emerged, flashed, and cried out, with a trailing hiss.

â Man â ¦ I have to admit, I was horrified,â I reiterated. Tellingly, as I mulled what I had seen, I knew I had delved into the sorrow of Cleveland, a place all but forgotten in the minds of mainstream politicians; a district where the only spirit that dwells at length is the suffering of the people, subsiding despite joblessness and waning hope, in that, a forsaken darkness.

â Yeah, I know â ¦ me too. Itâ s like I said before man, Iâ m just as scared as you,â Darius emphatically said.

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2014-04-19 20:00:01