

“Well now really when we go back into falling in love. And say, it's crazy.

Falling. You see? We don't say ‘rising into love’...”

Falling In

It was that morning when the full weight of my situation rested on my chest. I was insane, and I was going to pay for it. The sudden realization in a strangers bedroom that I was already lost and had been for some time was settling in. My thoughts were fluids running out of my mouth and ears, onto the mattress I laid on, flat against the ground. Eyes wide open, I spent perhaps one of the most loneliest nights yet. Despite the thoughts pouring out of me. And the girl sleeping next to me.

And the six dogs around us.

I could not manage even a moment of shut eye. Call it nerves or whatever else, I lie wide awake for the six hours between her falling asleep and stirring once more. With every minute leading up to rest my heart began to race. Aside from two small couches only a large mattress with thick teal quilts and bed sheets on the floor was available. And upon making my way to the couch, she said I was welcome to share the bed. The one she'd be in. I knew that the choice was clearly mine, and the couches would have been more than comfortable for me. But I instinctively made my way to the mattress. Because, truth be told, I simply wanted to sleep there. Despite

it being the bed of another couple, and being submerged in hounds, it meant being just ever so closer to her. And so, in the frail light filtering in from behind wooden blinds, we lay together. Only two doxies and a beagle separating us.

I wanted to say more than I managed to get out before she fell asleep. I wanted to move closer than I could muster. I wanted to hold her, and feel her arms around me. But I lay, motionless. Watching minutes change on the digital clock beside us. I scanned the plaster on the walls. Examined the pastel green and yellow paint job throughout the house. My eyes stopped on every crack and knick knack in that bedroom, pictures that told the story of when Sarah met Sally. When they fell, and when they moved in together. When these two artists decided to build a life in this small box. A box with all of their most important treasures tucked inside. Their large, intricately notched wooden table, their rickety lime green metal chairs.

All of their dogs. Climbing over the two of them in their sleep. Sniffing my hair.

I began to see things play out in my head, as if projected from film. I could see my chance introduction to her. I could see us spend mornings together. I could see us spending nights together. I could see her running her fingers through my hair, and breathing down my neck. I began to shudder as I imagined where this night could have gone. And then a pale gold light began to fill the room. It ran across every pile of unread magazines on the shelves. And across the red and blue ringed carpet on the wooden floors. And right into my eyes. Turned and stirred for a moment, pushing myself up and against the wall at the head of the bed. I dug my fingers into my eyes to ward off the sleep I never got. It was 4am.

I looked around at all of the dogs, resting as a calm barricade around me. I turned and looked through the cracks in the blinds to peer into the golden rays from the rising sun. And I saw the beams fall and land on *her*. She had hardly moved an inch throughout the night. She had a hand tucked underneath her cheek, lips pressed against it, partially parted. Her hair covered her face on one side, glistening from the outside light. She was radiant. Truly and completely.

And I realized I was hopeless. Truly and completely.

I looked away and mourned my own sanity. She had become a focal point in my life. We hardly touched that night. No caress nor kiss took place. We were away from anyone who knew us. Watching over a house for friends. Away from family who could judge us. Or the boyfriend who would hate us. And yet we did not so much as speak about us in any meaningful way.

We had, looking in from the outside, committed no crimes. To most, my conscious would appear clear. But yet my sin burned ever too brightly to be ignored. It was clear to me that we had crossed far past the set line, into territory foreign to the innocent. That night we did not meet to isolate ourselves and cheat on our world. We simply wanted to be together. Under the same roof. In the same bed.

And that was the worse thing of all. A betrayal of our own friendship, turning it into something-

This thought waged war with me for but a moment until suddenly, and quietly, *she* awoke. Turning, eyes squinting, she looked up at me, smiling slightly. She asked me why I was not lying down, and as she spoke, raised a hand in my

direction. I raised mine to meet it, but they did not so much as brush. I explained that I hadn't managed to get any sleep. She muttered indiscernibly, and rolled over, retracting her hand. She would be out for another few decades of silence. It was all I had not to spill six hours of quiet contemplation over this poor girl. Truly tired at last, I slid slowly back down to a resting position, and closed my eyes until morning.

It must be insanity. Falling into the dark because you were chasing a light.

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“..You see, for all life is an act of faith an act of gamble. The moment you take a step, you do so on an act of faith because you don't really know that the floor's not going to give under your feet...”

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The house was alive and breathing once the blinds and curtains were cast away from the windows. There was a truly peaceful warmth as the light filled every nook and cranny of that small, quaint space. The dogs ran around us as we made our way to the kitchen, grabbing treats to distract the beasts while we sat at the living room desk and ate frosted flakes together. We talked about the day we were going to have. And our classes. And music. All the songs we needed to show each other. Eating our hay hued flakes. She took hers with milk. I had mine plain like the

heathen I am. She looked up at me occasionally through her thin rimmed glasses. I only ever snuck my glances.

And then came the brief moments of silence. Not an uncomfortable one. A purposeful one.

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When we stepped out, the afternoon sun could be seen hanging early in the morning sky, proactively beating heat down onto us high up in a vast baby blue sky. There wasn't a single cloud to note in that sea above our heads. We walked down the small concrete walkway, through the tall dead grass that surrounded the settlement. We pried open the bent and aging chain link fence gate, the pole end scraping aggressively against the solid pavement beneath us, and stepped through, leaving the lives of the two lovers and their pack behind us, and entering a car that was prepared to bake us. I pulled out my phone to pull up directions, and we contemplated our destination. We could go anywhere we wanted, we only needed a place to start.

We drove down the pale sundried streets of the San Jose neighborhoods, with boarded windows and steel gates lining the path in front of us. We drove past kids playing with bright rubber balls, and large men on small bikes. Past the red rust of pick up trucks and desaturated blues of chipped wood. Shingles falling off roofs, and gutters filled with cigarette stubs and yellowing weeds. She didn't bat an eye. Why would I? It was our playground that day.

We went downtown, where the buildings began to rise and blot out the sun. Where crowds of people are always going somewhere to do something with someone. Where the smell of food and fuel burning on stoves and in cars is thick in the air. We walked through the park, and she asked me if I wanted to sit for a moment. She had never realized that the park was thick with the homeless, who lie on every bench and step around the unkempt fields. They all wore thick layers of jackets, matted with dirt and stained with sweat. They carried the remainders of their world in the black trash bags they carried, along with their cans and keepsakes from months of wandering every street within a 3 mile radius. They would gather and cluster in a few areas, and talk to each other. Reach out and talk to strangers. Sometimes talking to themselves. I hated to bring her eyes to the reality of this place, a limbo of lost, nameless souls, detached from society. When I explained, her eyes flickered. From that moment on I could watch her look at that place differently. Not a melancholy necessarily, but something close to a relief. For that day, we had other places to go.

They did not.

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I wonder sometimes just how many places have a “Japantown”. One small space where you can be somewhere else in the world. Get a taste of some not-so-local cuisine, all rather Americanized. Although surely it must be more Japan than San Jose.

Or so I'd like to think.

It was really just one small stretch of architecture that was, at the very least, inspired by the land of the rising sun. One street of sushi and koi ponds, lined with the sunbleached roads of a classic American ghetto. On that day it could be considered bustling. There were people lining the streets, and it was fairly easy to tell the tourists and visitors from the regulars. It was amazing to see this small strip and think of that as something worthy of praise out of all the things in San Jose, but as a boy from what could be considered as a small rural town, a place he referred to frequently as “the wild west”, it was certainly a sight to behold. I had my first good experience with sushi that day, and vowed to return and systematically witness every other sushi place there.

The whole dozen of them.

It was also my first experience exploring a new place with a girl I was infatuated with, in which case everything I’ve described up until this point should be taken with a grain of salt, because I could very well be biased reminiscing about this day. I was not a fan of sushi until this day. Everything just seemed to taste perfect.

And I hate that I wrote that.

Her and I found out about a cherry blossom festival that would be held the following summer, and we fell in love with the idea of going to it. We promised that we would try to go next time, somehow. I would sometimes wonder what it would’ve been like. Currently I wonder who else I would want to go with. But I always come up blank. I don’t think I’ll be going in this lifetime.

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“...The moment you take a journey, what an act of faith. The moment that you enter into any kind of human undertaking in relationship, what an act of faith. See, you've given yourself up. But this is the most powerful thing that can be done. Surrender...”

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We wanted to go somewhere we weren't supposed to. Nothing that would warrant jail time, but somewhere that, at the very least, we would lose sight of the tree line. I began searching across google maps, nothing searched, just scrolling blindly across the map for some large body of green. Who would guess that the tech capital of the country would be lacking in any area that didn't block out the skyline. Eventually we found a place nearby that appeared to be some sort of bike trail. As we pulled up into the closest parking lot, it became quite clear that this was probably not a popular spot. The trail started behind a seemingly unmarked office building, and dipped down into a trail of water that eventually led into a man made , concrete river bed that flowed quietly underneath a bridged street. It was by no means glamorous, but it was extremely secluded. And, after only a few minutes of traversing the trail, we found exactly what we were looking for. The trail split off into two paths. One would lead back up into what we could make out as more office buildings and a normal bike path sandwiched between a business district, and another that trailed further down closer to the river, blocked off by a gate that was luckily peeled back. Whether or not it was a good idea to traverse the isolated

backyard of a dirty city riverbank, we decided that your early twenties were when you should “live a little”. We ducked through the fence without a second thought.

The sounds of traffic became a distant drone as we walked slowly along a slope, looking down below and peering into the dense brush beneath us. We couldn't make out a clear ground below, but would occasionally see discarded bags and plastic bottles scattered in the thicket. The most notable treasure was a foam puzzle piece, the kind that you would see lining the floor of a preschool.

I still don't like thinking about why it was there.

Despite the somewhat unclean tone about the path, it was somewhat reassuring that there were other hikers before us. And the trash below became meaningless when peering into the golden beams of sunlight that managed to sneak their way through the trees overhead. The path was given an almost ethereal look, as if we were crossing into a land that was separate of the one we knew. A place outside of our daily routine. Time became an afterthought as we began to get closer to the sound of water.

We were then met, upon walking a wide circle around a bush at the end of the path, the river's edge, roaring past us. We looked back in the direction we came and saw the large concrete underpass above the riverbed. There was a strange contrast, seeing a street in one direction, and small islands of trees in the other. We began tiptoeing our way over the shallow water, seeing if we could cross fully, but decided that would be impossible unless we were willing to take a swim.

The warmth of the afternoon sun and the hours of travel that preceded this moment finally caught up to us, and we sat down, side by side. We took a picture together, which I will have to remember to delete. And then we sat in silence for a considerably long time. The water rushing by surrounded us in a thick ambience, and the sun turned the earth into a bright vibrant blaze before us. I cannot speak on whether I have ever experienced true peace. But I'm certain that moment is close.

The exact moment our relationship failed was when these perfectly crafted meetings ceased to be enough. When, through the veil of lust and adolescence I could see the real instincts in place here. Neither one of us wanted to be alone. And we wanted each other. I believe there was much more there than simple lust, but when everything was said and done, all that was left in hindsight was lust. Even now thinking back it's hard not to put myself in that bed next to her and wonder. Wonder what could have been different. Wonder what I could have actually changed, if anything. But those thoughts are merely fantasy, and it is high time to admit that fantasy is innocent. It's normal. It's naive, and it is immature.

And it is youth.

I could not have come up with a better day for two such people if I had sat down to write one from my own imagination. It will always be one of those moments that I look back upon, not in distaste or scorn. Just in utter bafflement that it actually happened.

When we were done sitting, we would gather ourselves, and find that going any further down the trail would simply lead us to a makeshift hut for the homeless.

A small settlement of the lost. And that was our sign to turn back. As it was for the entirety of that day. And so we retraced our steps through the thicket. Out of the woods and back to society. We walked back to her car, drove to my apartment, ate ice cream, and then she left. We never talked about feelings. Or what we were. Or what we were going to do. Just ate ice cream, content with the day. And in the end I was left to ponder my choices, deciding to trust in my gut. And I would continue to trust my gut until I finally declared myself clinically insane. After all what better time to call it then when you've reached such a point.

But really, after everything I know now that I was never failing myself in my madness.

I was simply falling into it. And it suited me quite well.

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“...So, actually, therefore, the course of wisdom, what is really sensible, is to let go, is to commit oneself, to give oneself up and that's quite mad. So we come to the strange conclusion that in madness lies sanity.” - Alan Watts