

MEMORIES



Clean the pot, keep it safe, and place it in its proper location where it would remind him of what he truly did not know.

Not picturing himself as a person who would buy such antiques led him to the conclusion that it must have been the woman in his memories who purchased it. She was gone and not even this pot would bring her back.

As most folks know, porcelain of this quality is made in pairs to fulfill the Yin and Yang. The mate of the pot had disappeared at the time that she had. The thought that they would never be re-united was constant in his mind.

An ashtray could be clearly seen half-covered in a greenish slime, the clear offspring of the pizza. Yet, rather than clean it, someone had continually stubbed out cigarettes in the slime. By the looks of it, the slime was feeding on the nicotine. This was something that would have taken time to grow in a lab, but here it was flourishing in this rather new and extreme ecological environment with each new butt that had been put out in it.

A new cigarette butt had recently been stabbed into the organism, dripping a grayish black mixture of ashes and slime over the edge onto the desk. The dry stains around the ashtray indicated there was no hope for life on the outskirts of the ashtray. The fact that certain death awaited the slime had kept it within the limits of the ashtray. Yet, now and then it would try to reach out and infest.

A picture hung on the wall in the direct line of sight between the pot and the ashtray. The picture, which was and was not truly a picture of what it was meant to represent, hung stoic in all its glory. Although only a single wallet-sized picture, it hung in grandeur, framed in a fashion befitting a royal portrait. It had been maintained on the wall with such care and dedication, it appeared to blend into the wall. It was easy to forgive the fact that the picture was nothing more than eyes staring blankly into the void, the rest of the image having been damaged by fire. It only laid proof to his madness for having a portrait built into an apartment he did not own. What was even worse was the fact that the portrait this man cherished was nothing more than eyes.

Looking hard enough, it was clear that the eyes were the eyes of a woman. There was a kindness in those eyes that gave reason for the disrepair. What reason lay within the eyes could only be speculated, although as he stood there, the eyes gave him pause to ask for forgiveness. They seemed to smile back at him in such a way that his heart felt the tears come as he stood there, letting them rip deep. They tore into the memory of his lost love, allowing him to retain the pain, but not the memory.

There were no other pictures on the walls. This one and only picture had been kept free from any external influences that lay about this cesspool of an apartment, just as had the pot. The frame was made of wood so exotic that one could not rightly say which tree had provided its flesh in order to bring these eyes to life. The glass appeared to have been handmade in some artistic institution.

Everything about this frame indicated the state of mind one would have needed to have been in: obsession, it was, or could it have been called devotion. When a love, a true soul mate style of love is lost, there are two things that can be done: move on and find something else to fill the void or devote the remainder of one's life to the memory. With him it was hard to tell, for he did not open the dark recesses of his heart. Like a home closed up for decades, everything was kept under the cover of dark sheets or else left alone to the ravages of time. Yet, the true treasures of his heart were kept in perfect order, locked away in the deepest crevice, far from prying eyes. It had not been that long since he had lost her—just a couple of years. Still, without her there to keep order, he was at a loss. The dreadful event that had taken her and his memory now forcing

him into re-learning the fact that a room needs to be kept, though, that was about to change. As of this day, he had made a decision to bring the rest of the apartment up to the standard of care enjoyed by the pot and the picture. But where to start was the issue revolving around him. In all actuality, it had stumped him. He was at a loss about what to do with the amount of unwanted growths that were continually fed by the countless care packages sent by his family. This in turn brought about the first decision in his steps to bring everything back under control. He got a trash bag to take care of the filth. Taking the first of many boxes, he opened it to find a sweater next to a container of juice, which, lacking refrigeration, had spoiled beyond recognition.

The juice in the trash bag, along with the sweater box, was placed under the picture. This process was repeated for the next six hours. In the end, eight bags full of trash, twenty sweaters, thirty shirts, two pairs of pants, and countless socks left his apartment free from the cancerous growths. With bags now placed in the kitchen, he started the next part. To further clean the floor, he would also have to wash clothes. Armed with another trash bag, he started picking up the garments strewn across the floor. Finishing with four trash bags full of clothes, he needed to see if the washing machine still functioned.

In the country he now called home the washing machines were smaller than those common in the western world. With the machine at max capacity, he could clearly see that it held only a third of a trash bag of his clothing. The cleansing of the apartment continued. The floor was now noticeable, though dust balls were still seen scudding about the room with the slightest breeze. This was easily rectified by a mop-style cleaner.

The cleaner held a moist paper towel on the flat surface of the floor and was attached on the other side to a pivot joint, followed by a handle, allowing the towel to remain in full contact with the floor as the cleaner was pushed about in any direction. Just as the Americans in the early days of settling the western United States eradicated the buffalo from moving trains and such, he also eradicated the copious amounts of dust balls.

This massive cleaning prompted the use of another trash bag for the used paper towels. With a furrowed brow he pondered *Dam rug, how do I even take care of it? Do I wash it?* A rug that he could not even remember buying. It would require a turn in the washing machine in order to bring its original colors back to life. He dropped it in line behind the trash bags full of clothing yet to be washed.

With a lively chime, the washing machine indicated that the first load of clothing was now done and required drying. Carefully, he took the clean clothes to his veranda where he could hang them to dry. Just then he noticed something had been growing where his rug had been apparently not needing a constant source of light to live, it reminded him of himself.

He chuckled. He had to take care of this, although by the looks of it, a simple wet paper towel would not be sufficient. Taking the cloth towel that he had used ever since he had moved into this new place to dry his hands after washing them every morning, he set it in the sink to soak. He sprinkled laundry detergent across the grungy rug and then followed by getting onto his hands and knees. Using the soaked towel, he started to scrub away every bit of mold. Upon finishing the task at hand, he noticed that he had not eaten all day. Deciding that the floor needed time to dry, he stepped out for a bite to eat. But the trash blocking his way had to be handled first. It took him three trips to take out all of the trash bags from his apartment. As he did this, he noticed the sun was marking the time as late afternoon. Since he did not like being outside after dark, he decided that a quick walk to the liquor store was all that time permitted.

He went there to buy a sandwich and something to drink there before once again attacking the monumental amount of things to clean. What a society in which he lives where everything that is

edible can be made into a sandwich. He stood there wondering what to get, but could not decide. She was working that day and by chance saw that he was in need of some help. Walking out from behind the counter, she asked in a soft voice if she could help him in any way. Nothing looked particularly good to him. Suddenly noticing that she existed, an end to his confusion was at hand. Looking up into those nice brown eyes brought him face to face with something that had been lacking in his life since the woman of his dreams had been taken. With a nice smile he calmly stated that he had no idea what was good. She nodded and returned his smile while saying that the vegetable sandwich was one of the top choices and that the nutritional value was probably worth the price. Taking the sandwich in hand, he glanced down at the drink he had already chosen, which he was now sure would ruin this healthy meal by introducing toxins not to be found in a healthy vegetable sandwich. This frustrated him with questions about the true value of health for a man in his state. She quickly saw in his furrowed brow that he was truly in need of help—and more than just in food. He needed help for his life. She walked over to the drinks and pulled out a simple green tea.

Handing it to him, she simply said, "This will compliment that sandwich."

From then on he would only eat lean meat for health reasons, but more so because someone had taken the time to care.

Finding out the name of this woman would not be as simple as asking for it. The thoughts started to flood his mind, 'What kind of man would he be if he were to try to pick up a woman just after meeting her? What would she think of him if she was even remotely interested? Where would any form of a relationship go, matching a stable and sensible woman with a man bent on self-destruction?

Would this even work?

There was only one way he could find out and that was through the simple admission that he was interested in her. However, this would have to wait for another time when he could be better prepared and look more the part of a gentleman instead of some stranger off the street. What was important now was the task at hand. He followed her slowly back to the counter and paid for his small meal. With a nod and smile, she accepted his payment and thanked him for his patronage. This was when their eyes met, giving them both a glimpse of the spark, that solitary spark that fuels whirlwind romances. She blushed; he simply smiled back at her as he walked out the door. A quick glance back into the store revealed that she was watching him even after he had walked out the door. He smiled again as he started his trudge back to the apartment, where he would continue with his work. This work of changing the conditions that had kept him a prisoner to his past would consume him until it was done.

Everything until now had become the past now that he had been given a renewed spark for life. He started to realize that there could be life after such a loss. His life began to show signs of flourishing. He just had to want it badly enough to move in this new direction. The rest of his cleaning seemed to take less time, although he did not complete it until early the following morning. The clothes were washed and hung out to dry, the ashtray lay empty and clean, and there were just four more trash bags remaining to be disposed. Once they were taken out, he returned to his sanctuary. In this new womb he had created he would soon be full of life rather than gloom, which prickled the back of his neck even now as he stood there in satisfaction of his accomplishment. His mind would never really be free and clear of the gloom.

A glance around his apartment bore witness to what he could truly become with the past properly packaged and thrown away. Where the piles of gift packages had once claimed space, there was now beautiful emptiness. Where the clothing and the rug had once desecrated his floor, there was

only pure wood. The copious amounts of dust balls were all corralled into the trash and led away, leaving nothing more than a distant memory.

Lying down on his bed with a nice book, he read a few pages before drifting off into a dream—one he had been having ever since he could remember, yet this time it came harder, faster, and was more painful than ever.

The pangs he suffered from this dream were there to remind him about what he had lost. There was no denying that he could have changed the outcome of the events that had led to the loss of his love. There was a certain truth when he spoke to his one confidant about the numerous events that kept these memories in his head and yet still a blur, and that truth was REGRET. There was regret where something else had been torn out. This was a thorn in his side about not being a man. Could he have changed what had happened, and if so, then what would he have done?

Could he ask for another chance to run through the maze, a maze where he would gladly starve looking for the cheese? But this was his lot in life. As long as he could remember, he had chosen the sequence of events that laid the foundation of what he had become. That fact clearly still held true. It was in the past. That is where these fevered dreams came into meaning. For a man whose soul was wracked with regret, they served as a reminder. *Why do people let others torture one's soul when they can do such a great job on their own?* The clear thought was more of a wisp of smoke rather than anything as tangible as the pain about to come.

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