

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

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Open to Discussion

SLEEP WON'T COME. It can't. There is a cacophony of tiny voices emanating from my mattress.

The voices have an intimate knowledge of my thoughts and actions. They talk about things that I may have been thinking about had I not been thinking about tomorrow and sleep.

The trick is of course to ignore them, but it is not so easy. I manage to block them out for a few moments but then my train of thought shifts and they weasel their way back in again.

I grow hungry lying here. After an hour of wakefulness I get up and fix myself a sandwich. The voices cease as soon as I leave my bed. I can think clearly again and the voices seem a bad dream.

Fear of the voices' return keeps me from returning to my bed right away. I pick up a book I've slowly been working my way through. In it the characters are well defined and with clear-cut motives. It is comforting.

As soon as I lay down the voices begin again. The situation is unacceptable. I have to go to sleep. I have a long day tomorrow. I can't keep getting up to make sandwiches and read all night.

The presence of the gun in my bedside table is made known to me. I always feel safe in my apartment. The gun is for work. There is no reason I need to be thinking of it now. Yet the thought comes to me clear and concise.

The voices are whiny, annoyed, persistent, formidable, stern, sobbing. They are maddening. They are all me, and yet they are not me. They are the "me" I want to be and the "me" I fear. There is no containing them. I cry out for them to stop.

"Stop! Please just stop!"

The voices take no notice of my plea. They come from another place. There is nothing I can do to quell them.

A picture of the lock box that contains my service pistol comes into my mind again. It does not leave so quickly this time. Though extreme, it certainly is one solution. Dead people don't hear voices. The thought calms me.

I don't have much to live for but there are some things. I have some family left. Then there are all the little things, which don't amount to much really. The truth is that I am too scared to do anything so permanent. The voices will leave eventually. They always do.

Lying in my bed the knowledge of the gun's location ceases to bring me comfort. The gun begins to think for itself. It thinks that I am a coward, and it is right.

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The gun feels unwanted and neglected. It is only let out to breath while I am on duty and even then it stays impotently in its holster. It is resentful.

"You're not coming out tonight," I tell the gun.

"I understand," says the gun. "I understand that you are a coward."

"You can call me coward all you want."

"Okay. I will."

The gun is quiet now. It knows I will not succumb. It knows that I am too prudent for its snide remarks to rattle me. For now, at least, it seems to have relented.

The voices have not forgotten me during my words with the gun. They return as soon as our conversations ends. I try to tell them I am their master as I did with the gun but they fail to acknowledge my power over them. I don't blame them. I am not convinced myself.

The voices are persistent. I hear them even as the gun vibrates in it's box. Back and forth my mind goes. Only when in dialogue with the gun do the voices stop pestering me.

"I know what you want, but I'm not going to give it to you."

"Oh really? What do I want?" asks the gun.

"You know what. I'm not going to say it."

The voices are talking about the time when I was fourteen and that girl liked me. They're talking about an argument I had with my Dad. They talk about all the moments in my life that I regret, that I was embarrassed by, that I wish I had done differently or had never happened at all.

I talk to the gun just for the sake of blocking out the voices.

"Are you comfortable in your box?" I ask.

"It's very snug." says the gun.

"But do you have room to spare?"

"There's a little wiggle room." it says.

"That's good." I say, feeling very warm in my bed, wrapped tightly under the covers.

The voices come back and I know the solution. I must take the gun out of its case.

"Okay, I'm going to take you out now, gun."

"I'll be on my best behavior." says the gun.

"Exactly. Keep that in mind."

"You're a good owner." it says.

"Don't blow smoke up my ass." I say.

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I take the gun out and set it on the bedside table. I put away its case and I take the gun in my hand. I get back under the covers. So far so good. The voices don't return. The gun is heavy in my hand.

"How do you feel, gun?"

"Very fine, thanks for asking."

The voices must be scared now. They are made timid by the threat of the gun. They don't know it was just a bluff. They really think I'd take my own life. But I am too scared to and it was just a bluff. I am thankful that they didn't call me on it. Maybe I will get some sleep after all.

The gun grows heavy in my hand. My palm grows sweaty. I try setting the gun down on the pillow beside my head but it isn't comfortable. I will conduct a test. I put the gun under my pillow and release my grasp on it.

At first there is only silence. I feel relieved. I look at my clock. If I fall asleep right now I will be able to get five and a half hours of sleep. I let go my hold on the day and slumber begins to dampen my thoughts.

Just as I drift off I hear them. They start quietly but quickly gain momentum. They're talking about the girl that may or may not have been paid to sleep with me. They're talking about my friend who found Jesus. They seem to suggest that I need to find Jesus too. This adds to my resentment of the voices. I really hate them. I am incredibly frustrated.

"It's frustrating, isn't it?" asks the gun.

"It is. Exceedingly so." I say.

"You know there's a way out."

"I already told you. I'm not going to do that." I tell the gun emphatically. "Besides," I add. "You just want to be fired."

"I do." says the gun. "But that doesn't mean it isn't applicable to your situation."

I take the gun back up in my hand. What must I do? Tape the damn gun to my hand? As long as the safety is on it should be fine, but stranger things have happened. Sometimes it seems there's no way of avoiding becoming a statistic for one study or another.

I get up for a fruit cup. I leave the gun on the bed because the voices permit this. I do not need it in the kitchen. The voices do not follow. I take a fruit cup from the refrigerator and a spoon from the drawer. These things exist outside my head so they are safe.

My fruit cup finished, I view the bed suspiciously. I want no part of it but it is four in the morning and that is where I am supposed to be. Eating fruit cups now is not part of my schedule.

With misgivings I lay down on my bed. My left hand automatically reaches for the gun and grasps it. I check that the safety is still on.

"Are you afraid I turned the safety off?" asks the gun.

"No, I was just checking." I reply.

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"You're in denial, you know."

"Yeah, I know."

"You have serious mental problems." says the gun.

"Yeah, I know."

"You shouldn't even *own* a gun."

"I know you're right." I say.

But none of this is new ground.