

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

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Why am I here?

I did some stupid things I guess.

The first time I stole something I was eleven and did it because Dave said I was too chicken to. The first time I got caught was the next day, I was proving to Dave how easy it was. I walked right in, grabbed a Milky Way, and left. I was more subtle the first time, but I was showing off and the guy who owned the shop caught me.

I didn't get caught again until last week. I don't steal all the time, maybe once a week. Sometimes food, sometimes clothes and a few CD's here and there. I never really thought it was bad. I don't really think about it at all.

When the police took me home and told my mum she said it was 'a cry for help' but to be honest I was just careless. I thought I couldn't be caught. It was a strange day.

I was going to town to meet some friends, even though I couldn't really afford to.

It started the moment I sat down. I sat down near the front for a change, I usually sit at the back. Right next to me on an empty chair was a still-wrapped twenty pack of cigarettes. I looked around but no one was paying attention so I slipped them in my pocket.

I met my friend Sammy in town.

"You lucky fuck," he said when I told him about the cigarettes. "Shit like that never happens to me. All I find on the bus is drunk people and sometimes empty condom wrappers on a Saturday morning."

We walked around town a while then went to hang out at the record store. We looked at the boxes, and then started looking for ones we already had so we could lecture each other on their merits and berate each other for terrible tastes. We left empty handed. When we were walking down the road I saw something on the ground.

"Is anyone looking, Sammy?"

"For what?"

"Just, is anyone looking about on the ground or anything?"

"No."

"Cool," I said, bending down and picking up what I saw and slipping it in my pocket.

Then we headed to the pub. The pub we usually drank in was closed. Luckily the next one we went to didn't ID us. Once I had a drink I pulled the find out of my pocket. Ninety pounds, not in a clip or anything. I showed Sammy.

"Jackpot!" I said.

"What is up with the world today?"

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"Nothing is up, I'm just awesome."

"There is no one that would describe you as awesome."

"You might want to check that with your mum," I said.

"Good one."

"Yeah, that's what she said, only nice, and, slow."

"Maybe you should try and get a real girl instead of fantasising about my mum. She's in her forties and you could never get her."

"Wow, hold on, you think your mum's hot?"

"That's not what I said."

"Yeah it was you said your mum is too hot for me, that's sick man."

"Fuck off, I'm getting another drink in before Dave get's here, want one?"

"Yeah sure, mummy's boy."

Sammy's a good guy. We wind each other up all the time and neither of us take it too seriously.

Then Dave showed up and we got to drinking, and then to arguing. We argue about music all the time. We both like a lot of the same stuff but the stuff that is different is what we fight about.

"You're wrong!" he would say when I was winning the argument.

"I can't be *wrong*. It's an opinion not a statement," would always be my response. This time he was trying to defend some new band I despised.

"But you *are* wrong, they're awesome!"

"Why?"

"Well... they... they just are. There's no point arguin'. They're awesome."

"That's a fine argument," Sammy interrupted. "You need to do better than that to convince *him*."

"Why doesn't *he* try and convince *me* of something then?" Dave said.

"I am here," I said in response to being ignored. "Besides that's not what we are talking about. I know that even if I were to convince you of a band I liked, there would be no long term point to it as you don't appreciate music properly." I could see Sammy smiling.

"You are such a snob man," Dave said and Sammy laughed.

"I know, but who cares?"

"I need another," Dave said.

"Does that mean you give up? I win again?"

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"No, I just wanna' drink."

"So you can think over a decent argument? No way, if you don't want to loose then stay right here and fight for what you believe in."

"God damn'it fine, I give up," he said, getting up and heading to the bar. It always ends this way. As he left I said, "Told you I was right!" to Sammy. But loud enough so Dave would hear. I knew getting the last word would drive him mad. It was fun.

When Dave got back he told us about a party that night.

"Who's party?" Sammie asked.

"Sohpie's."

"And how old is she?" I said.

"16."

"How do you *know* these girls man? It's weird."

"I'm not going to have this discussion again."

"Fine," I said. I gave a slight glance over at Sammy. He knew what it meant.

"So you coming or not?"

"No," I said.

"Sure, but if I'm the oldest one there when we arrive I'm leaving," Sammy said.

"Cool, well if you're coming can I bum some smokes?"

"Haven't you got any money?"

"I've got some. I can get some drinks, or smokes, but not both."

"Look dude," Sammy started. "Why don't you just get a job? Then you can pickle your liver and smoke 'till your lungs explode."

"I *have* tried."

"Like shit have you! You just want to sit on your ass all day watching This Morning."

"Fuck you. We going to this party or what?" he said.

We carried on drinking and I told Dave about the cigarettes and the money. He thought I was lying until Sammy backed me up. I told him I was untouchable. That is when the dares started. We had a couple more drinks paid with the found money and Dave said,

"Tell you what, we flip a coin and if it comes up tails you have to do a dare..."

"What are we, five?"

"...and, if it is heads, you can punch me in the face."

"Deal." I downed my drink like it was signing the contract.

It went: Tails, slap self. Tails, give Dave half my found cigarettes. Heads, punch Dave. Tails, snort salt. Tails, shot vinegar. Heads, punch

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Dave. Tails, ask bar girl for her number. Tails, drink three mixed shots in one glass; the bar girl got in on the dares then. Heads, punch. Heads, punch. Tails, steal something from a shop with security.

By the time we got to that one I was half pickled and sick from salt in my brain. I've stolen from a shop with tags and guards before so I knew I could do it. The trick is to leave the same time as someone with a bag, that way they always assume it is a missed tag in the bag and by the time they realise, you're gone.

I went into one of those video game chain stores but remembered they don't keep anything in the boxes anymore, which is probably wise. So instead I played it simple and went to a High Street music shop. Sammy and Dave waited by the till so I couldn't just go and buy something, while I looked around for something to snatch.

I could feel salt grains in my nose and the back of my head.

I picked up a video game, I didn't know what it was or even what console it was for, but I slid it between my jeans and my stomach. It felt a little like everyone was watching me and that's where the buzz comes from, the kick, the reason I do it.

It was my day. I was awesome, untouchable, and about to prove it.

I got to the door the same time as an old guy with two big bags. I stepped through that invisible force field between the two alarm towers and the alarm went off. I turned round to make it seem more believable and saw the old man back by the till. He had left his card in the machine. By the time I turned back the security guard had his hand on me and was leading me to the staff room.

He'd probably been bored all day, waiting for something to go down, and I was providing him with a few moments relief. He seemed personally insulted so I guess I disturbed him in the middle of a particularly dirty daydream about one of the punky girls who work behind the tills.

In the staff room he was asking me questions about my age, address and why I was stealing. I told him to fuck off and he got angry. He looked like one of those guys who'd tell his wife about this to make himself sound more interesting; embellishing details here and there. By the time he got her excited enough to do it I'd probably be the ringleader of a thieves and smugglers ring or some such crap.

He'd called the police but was about to let me go on account of them taking ages to get there when they finally arrived. They talked to the guard and then took me home.

Mum went ballistic. She said I was grounded but I didn't take any notice.

That night I went to the party with Dave and Sammy. It was a typical kind of school party with the typical kind of crowd. The house was huge and it was pretty full. The music was terrible, it was the kind of music that people supposedly like to dance to; just thumping and drumming. There was a strobe light in one of the rooms and some weird kid was doing the robot in slow motion.

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It wasn't long before I saw Dave going upstairs with a girl. She was tiny, barely dressed and was practically dragging Dave up the stairs.

Sammy found me in the kitchen. The rich kids had filled an entire fridge with fancy bottled beers and fizzy wine. I couldn't see a single alco-pop. I bet there was someone confiscating them at the door. We stole some drinks and started them.

By the time Dave came down me and Sammy were pretty wasted. Dave had a smile on his face that even a stranger could figure out.

"So you slept with her then?" I asked.

"We're not in a romantic comedy. We had sex."

"And, how old is she?"

"Seventeen."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Well I didn't ask her for fucking ID did I?"

"Maybe you should," Sammy chipped in and we all laughed.

Dave pulled a bottle of beer from the fridge and a coin from his pocket.

"Round two?"

"Hell yes," I said.

"Sammy, you in?"

"Hell, no."

Sammy stayed and watched while me and Dave played. Some of the younger kids came over to watch too.

This time I had to come up with dares too. Dave was a little bruised from our earlier round. I could still feel salt in my head and I knew what my first dare would be.

Tails, I had to kiss the next girl that came into the room. Heads, Dave had to snort salt. Heads, he had to tell the girl he'd just fucked that he loved her. Tails, I had to smash a beer bottle over my head.

I honestly don't know what happened after that but at some point I was on the roof with a microwave and Dave plus a few of the other kids were chanting, "Lob it!"

Then I was in the garden and my knees were dirty and my feet hurt. I didn't see the punch, or the guy who threw it but it hit me square on the nose and was instantly sobering. Two guys had me under the arms and were dragging me through the house. I heard Dave and Sammy shouting something but I didn't know what.

I think Dave and Sammy took me home after that.

In the morning Mum said I'd gone too far and that I was getting help.

And that's the story.