

Tissue Paper

High School Entry

Half written papers and cigarette butts littered every surface in the drafty New York City apartment, kicking up and floating about whenever a strong wind gusted outside. The few people who had ever entered the building offered politely that it simply needed “a woman’s touch,” though what it really needed was anyone’s touch at all. The

most recent housekeeper, a short plump woman with a habit of impudence, quit her job maintaining the apartment after a particularly bloody quarrel with her employer. Months later, the position had still not been refilled, nor had anyone the notion to do so. The space lay as it was, accumulating failed poems and forgotten characters like a graveyard collecting the departed.

If stripped of all the waste and the curtains drawn back, it would become clear that there had once been an effort to keep the apartment structured. Dissecting each room, one would notice every individual piece of furniture was extremely tasteful and most items new enough to still smell of the tree they were carved from. Earth tones connected the apartment, though the terra-cotta browns and olives were too dark to be distinguished in the poorly lit residence; the curtains were scarcely drawn back and never had a burnt out bulb been replaced. Books, most of which were visibly worn, reread out of their meaning, lined the walls and became more concentrated as one approached the bedroom.

The intoxicating musk of aged paper almost visibly fogged the room where Samson lay. He'd shut his eyes and taken his face in his hands, only to find himself, minutes later, in the state between consciousness and sleep. If he focused, a few moments of clarity were his, but his overwhelming biological drive would quickly trick him back into submission. A song he faintly remembered hearing the day before was omnipresent. He concentrated on the few sweet chords he could actually remember, hoping it would help reveal the rest of the melody to him. Realizing the futility, he began rewriting those missing parts. He reasoned with himself that a majority of the song

remained vague because if it were any good, he wouldn't have dismissed it in the first place.

He sighed audibly and swung violently onto his left side; annoyed that he'd never be able to transfer the edit out of his mind. Samson's left hand lay trapped underneath his head, while his right roamed freely, gently tracing the topography of his chest. Straining his eyes, Samson read the bedside clock to be twelve thirty-four. Noon or midnight, he wondered. In the absence of natural light, time was truly subjective. He contemplated standing, rolling a small patch of dark hair on his stomach between two slender fingers. In his home, Samson wore only boxers and a robe, if that much. Even alone, Samson was self-conscious about the coarseness of his hair, scrutinizing each brittle strand as it was pushed and pulled.

The last thing the young man wanted to do in that moment was stand, but he did so anyway. He took five heavy steps to the window, parting the thick cotton drapes and discovered it was night. Samson watched the streetlights outside flicker statically. Samson had tried for many years to appreciate the constant shimmering and blinking as his city's natural art, but he could not convince himself to accept the eyesore as anything with greater meaning. Florescent yellows and reds made visible Manhattan's air, swirling with pollution and a certain breed of insolence native solely to the island. Directly behind a particularly bright lamppost, Samson watched a cloud of the mixture twist, the ashy haze slowly expanding only to be quickly whipped into a thin wire of smoke. Above the lights reach, Samson imagined the air was purified by this exchange, as if the chemicals in the illuminated air filtered out the debris and heartache, returning

the cleansed oxygen back to the sky to be whisked away to a mountain top, or a farm, or some remote tropical island.

Samson blinked away the thought, forcing a scowl and quickly drawing the curtain shut. When he was in the state of self-loathing he'd been in for the last few weeks, he preferred to wallow in the emotion.

He traveled down the hall to his study, carelessly stepping on papers he'd written. All his papers, all his thoughts, concepts he had once believed to be the most profound ideas he'd ever conceived, they now lay helpless, neglected and undesired by even their creator. He bent down at the doorway, picking up an unlit cigarette that had fallen out of his pack the night before and hung it out of his mouth. The paper stuck to his lips, sticky from just waking up. Samson wiggled it with his upper lip habitually, knocking over more potentially brilliant papers in search of a lighter. The lined paper floated gently to the ground, cutting the air silently; a dramatic last stand to get the attention of their author. The beginnings of the next few Great American Novels were knocked out of publication before Samson became aware of the rusted red lighter in his robe pocket. He pulled it out and flicked it a few times without actually lighting anything then sat down at his old mahogany desk.

The desk was an antique he'd inherited from his grandmother several years ago. If one could focus on the design of the apartment, the artifact would have been noticeably unfitting. The entire relic was hand carved, extravagantly so. The family boasted, though the sources of this "fact" were entirely unquestionable, the desk had belonged to the first Tsar Nicholas himself. Samson's apartment seemed to mock the

regality of this piece, to which the desk responded as any nobleman would to this humiliation; devastated in private, but with the same upright posture and artificial vigor it had had before.

The only other piece in the house that rivaled the desk's stature was the focus of Samson's attention currently. His gaze rose against the wall, meeting eventually the feet of a woman. His entire body remained absolutely still as he traced her body cautiously with his eyes, as if he would surprise her if he were to make any sudden movements. Samson's breathing slowed down, as the woman subdued him.

As his eyes reached her face, Samson allowed himself to see the painting in its entirety. The subject of this portrait looked even lovelier in full than she had in pieces. Each detail of her appeared plain if analyzed separately, if assembled however, she was strikingly beautiful. Her waist was tied in dramatically by a corset which both exposed a better portion of her breasts and pulled in her midriff beyond anything near a woman's natural circumference. Her body was further exaggerated by a yellow Cinderella dress worn over this, its full skirt hung separate from her body, finishing the synthetic hourglass figure and rendering her entire lower half invisible.

Scrawled on the lower left corner in quick charcoal read "Anna Marie c.1734" and an indecipherable signature was written beneath. He'd found Anna Marie at a busy street fair in the city many years ago, paying only eight dollars flat for her. Despite her age, which would have led one to believe she was of great value, her artist died, as many do, anonymous and without proper home, making the painting of no worth. Samson kept no art in the house other than her.

As was characteristic of her time, Anna Marie's mouth did not grin in her painting, but when Samson thought of her, he always did so with a smile on her face. Several times, he even indulged a vision of Anna Marie throwing her head back in laughter, her long, black curls enveloping her arched back playfully. She was truly radiant then, possessing a soul of her own. She seemed so warm, so tangible. In his memories of her, she was more real than any person he'd ever met. He knew her face better than he knew his own. Every dimple and crevice had been memorized until her face was so distinct in his mind he could picture the two of them together in such felicity.

Samson knew if he did not remove himself, the next few hours would be spent studying her, as he had spent many nights occupied the same way, but it was too late; she had already consumed him again. Samson gave her a soul, and now he would suffer for it. Anna Marie could never be touched or spoken to, but she captivated him nonetheless. Samson communicated best in writing, but he knew no words that would describe her effortless perfection. Thousands of half written papers and cigarette butts littered every surface in the drafty New York City apartment, all dedicated to Anna Marie.

Shaking himself out of his reverie, he lit his cigarette, closing his eyes as he took a deep, warm breath. Repositioning himself, Samson reached for an unmarred sheet of paper. He rushed through the ancient drawers in the desk for a pen that hadn't yet dried out, ultimately settling on a blunted pencil. He pressed his first character on to the paper with enough pressure to etch stone. Again, Samson began the impossible task of conveying Anna Marie's virtue justly. Each sentence wrote itself on the page, the pencil was merely her instrument, as was he. She leapt down, throwing herself onto the page,

wishing to be possessed by him in the same way he was possessed by her. Each thought flowed evenly onto each other, his mind more fluid than it had ever been.

As he wondered if tonight would be the night that he would finally be articulate enough to profess his true affection, all thought was interrupted by the unmistakable banging of an insect trapped inside a glass lamp, desperately fighting to escape. Anna and Samson were not the only lives in the apartment, nor would they ever be. He heard a buzz once more, glancing over instinctually, to find the cause of this commotion, only to watch the helpless creature attempt escape, battering itself against the surface with such force, it killed him instantly.