

# To Marr is a Good Day

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My only source of income that can really be called my own, the other portion being my father's, most of that which is his dead mother's, dead because no matter now much she poured down her throat the fire was never quenched, is from a job as an assistant to a sculptor, and I hardly call it a job at that, but it is on account of the monetary transactions that come at the end of the day. I've got an eye cocked backwards to keep an eye on the back, of the van that is, where some sculpture balances precariously. I'm in the front, Sarge is driving, he knows where, I never pay attention to the roads, though maybe I should, Sarge looking more like an ax murderer each minute, but no, the ax murderers in movies look like that, the real ones dress like Wall Street bankers. His outfit not a that of a banker, unless by banker you mean in the sense of back in history a bit, he could be a farmer, a landlord with tenants, keeper of the ledger, so banker maybe in that sense, the overalls sense, the trade you a suckling pig for that mason jar of molasses sense, but I sense he wouldn't last as a teller in the new arena of the twenty four hour ticker. Who watches the ticker for typos anyway? Is that a job, does it pay well, do the health benefits cover Lasik when your eyes go?

Sarge talking to his boss on the phone, Lucie, the wife, the boss of bosses but also the one he's responsible for, but she's the boss, because he needs a boss, needs to know he's not really the one it all rests on, with no backup. So do you have a girlfriend these days he asks, he's asked before, it was always no, bad breakup, you know, laying low, but this time the answer is yes I had a girlfriend, three days of hardcore realness ya know, yeah he knows, a whirlwind just like with Lucy he tells me, twenty some years ago, maybe eighteen, in Atlanta when he was heartbroken himself, dragged to a party, saw her across the room. I told myself I was going to marry that girl he told me. Don't they all say that? No I don't think they do. Even my grandmother wouldn't say that, she had a slutty streak I'll wager, juggling well dressed boys at dances. She says so herself, not in so many words but loud and clear if you know what you're listening for. Well dressed nice boys who want to be married are just too dense to know the honeys who want starched good guys are mostly rotten or not ripe yet or past prime and bruised in the sweetest parts of the peach.

He sold a few pieces of art in the last year, now hard at work making more, clocking in clocking out but just in his head, keeping track of how much he's been working as if setting up the expectation for what his paycheck should be, but cashing it the easy part, the paycheck still only potential in the pocket of a teacher of law at State who should be attending the weekend's garden art show, where we're setting up more

pieces, one of which will surely catch the eye of the law teacher gentleman with well padded pockets. If not, and that a possibility as sure as the other is, what can you do but stop off and grab a beer and keep driving to the next spot where you'll set up the massive steel structures, symbols (because we all love symbols can't live without them wouldn't know how to symbols of structure and language they nudge we budge but in our own direction the ones our own symbols decide) which are fucking heavy to my arms and they leave rust marks and indentations where the metal is scored and diamond plated and those symbols fade from my skin by the time I sit back down in the front of the cab and we're off again, rolling down the road.

Not that I don't know its not all work for him either, cutting up metal and reattaching it, wielding torches listening to music making art, wouldn't be a job at all except for that monetary impulse at the end of the day always waiting, and not patiently, so how is he Sarge this jovial calm, of course not thoroughly calm in his very core but that reserve of chaos necessary, needed as a reminder both of all the obligations of finance and security but more importantly reminding of time and love, and how neither will always be there, especially not if you're looking past them, scanning the road like they tell you to do at the DMV, foolish bastards missing the moment, so he's not staring at it, the bottom line. Its not going anywhere, doesn't need to be minded like an infant, watched like the stock ticker, bullshit uncontrollable stressing out the world, making them doubly and triply count the money in their pockets and then clutching it while they sleep as if it will bring them happy dreams, money only a symbol, and I guess we love that one best, which is why we cuddle and spoon with it and hide it in our mattress.

And not a job for me either as I said, but does he really know that, probably not cause he knows the facts, I'm a college kid on a fixed budget (not fixed like the old aged retiree, not a sad budgeting but the noble one when you're young and poor or at least don't mind living like you're poor) who needs or at least can use the money he gives me for the monthly expenses, but really I'd do it for free and he always rounds up when he hands me the fresh folded bills.

Of course if its not a job for him that would make it leisure, which wouldn't explain the canoe strapped atop the van, like a border collie on the shortest of leads ready to pounce into the water and paddle through the current. In the middle of the Haw river, Sarge will sit on the back of the boat, would be weighing it down near to the point of compromising the tin levees, if not for the counterweight, a blue cooler at the front of the boat full of beer and ice and melted water, and he sips on a can and skulls around with the oar one-handed, thinking maybe in this moment How did I get here? Why am I not there? But its only for a second, before a log ahead demands his attention, his guile, another obstacle in the sea of them, or river of them, the biggest obstacle the steep banks themselves, muddy with vines and creepers comingling,

whispering, banks keeping to themselves, making insider trades, watching the canoes go past even faster now that the current's picked up.

The biggest job I suppose is family. Having one, having to keep one together, afloat, not like when he was young and had a motorcycle. Two wheels take you places four can't, places one person can be but more can't, like quiet angus beef pastures in rural Georgia in the dark still night, where humid cow patties render those special mushrooms—produce too fresh even for the farmer's market, but not for this farmer, bearded creeper that he is, big bag full of the fungus slung over the shoulder like a Haight-Ashbury Santa. Or alone on the ALCAN highway, breaking through the wind, no evidence if you break wind, all the way through moose country back to the old U.S. of A., pausing once to remember a scene in the back of an Army transport truck when it was twenty below and everyone dropped acid, even before it kicked in getting treated to the whole show, out the window and up, the entire sky the stage, the soft twinkling stars the opening act for nature's heavy metal Hendrix, the Aurora Borealis, flashing in shapes and symbols defying duplication or reportage, into his squinted eyes, lighting up the whole brain, every crevice and wrinkle, for just an instant, challenging him to live fifty more years and try to recapture those thirty seconds. Marriage supposed to mean one man one woman (or man man woman woman you know the drill) but always seems to mean in-laws (and ex in-laws if you have that drama), and they age too, losing their mind even as your back goes, they using the same template, on the same course as you, ultimately, just some unknown number of turns ahead. The wisdom of having kids clear once more, equal to assembling yourself a pit crew, someone to tighten the screws on your hip or lift that gallon of milk to upper shelf of the fridge. I don't need to tell you the wisdom of not having them, the downside of being alone as you decay tempered by the notion you repeat to yourself, the accomplishment you can claim of not bringing another fragile soul into the mix, the crossfire. Even if your success hinged on random chance or low sperm counts or latex shields. Shit, pat yourself one time, the world's ending in 2012.

Standing in a freshly mowed oval of lawn, I watch as Sarge talks with a fellow artist, himself here like us to install bent metal, his less grand and forceful than Sarge's in my view, his with curly cues that spin with a slight breeze, ours a set of twelve foot spikes, roofing nails in the tool belt of the great Colossus, connoting crucifixions and construction accidents on a terrifying scale, imposing because of size and the size of the images it looses. They talk about commissions who got one who didn't, then joke about surface things like high school football buddies might, waiting for the game to start and watching the JV cheerleaders stretching. Associates by mere chance, afterthoughts most of the time save these moments of gathering where faux friends, or foe-friends, engage in banter.

When I was a kid in Mexico I didn't really understand its significance, Sarge says. La Cucaracha, La Cucaracha, he can't walk . . . Porque no tiene marijuana por fumar. Then later in life I realized what I'd been hearing as a kid, because I always liked the song. Speedy Gonzales on par with Betty Boop it turns out, he smoking his mota, her with that delicious garter and dress two sizes too tight, a duo seen out often under Red Lights. That last sentence mine not his. You better get going he tells me. In the cab of the van, doors open, I just finished a cigarette, took it from the pack of filters Sarge had sitting there, told him when he asked about my habits that I never stopped smoking cigs because I never really started. Yeah I should probably go, I told him, already with the money he'd given me earlier folded in my pocket, and I'd earned it don't get me wrong, like I said, that arts some heavy shit, but still the money a bonus, almost worth the effort to get the chance to encounter some heavy shit. In Sarge's mind are things like what he's going to do in the minutes after I pull away from the shop (a gravel floored warehouse way out on the other side of the county), like drink another beer maybe or call it quits on that and just lock up, other things like how excited he is for a good dinner, Lucie and Sarge been assembling the spread by phone over the course of the day, fresh salmon, risotto, wasabi horseradish glaze, a raspberry wheat beer Purple Haze, then there's the thought of Pressley the collie and how he'll need a game of fetch before dinner, but those things are floating around not pinned down, in the mind not on it, in the head not on it, not on the head like lips and a beard and coarse hair and a hat even, not touching the forefront of the mind now, not making contact like his lips make contact with the cigarette, those thoughts more like the smoke exhaled or inhaled, floating not grasped, thoughts that feel good, give you a buzz, but too much maybe poison like the smoke. Control of the moment as much as you can ask for, hope for, claim. In that sense each instant a world unto itself, without influence from potential future worlds and past climes or bills that will be mailed next week or ones that didn't get mailed last. The present time what everyone is looking forward at anyway, just another present, can't see the forest for the trees, why not stop and look down and clear a place and build your cabin in the forest.