

The Novelty of Being Extraordinary

Dear Doctor Bertrand,

In today's session, you suggested I find a healthy way of dealing with my issues. You were so convinced that the reason I was driven towards the bottle was that I suffer from, and I quote: 'childhood trauma'. To some degree, this statement is correct, however, your assumption that this trauma had anything to do with my upbringing was... less accurate.

You see I grew up in a small farming town. The kind of town where everybody knows everybody and your neighbours are both overly helpful and overly nosy. Everyone went to the same church, all the kids went to the same public high school and almost every married couple were high school sweethearts. It was absolutely dreadful.

It was the kind of town where the 'Good Book' held more weight than a biology textbook on Darwinism. My family was no exception to that mindset. For one, my mother Helena was very old-fashioned. She believed in the good book. She went to every sermon and would not shy away from 'disciplining' her children if called for. I never got along well with my mother, she was always so emotional and blindly faithful and I am neither of those things. We never talked much and when we did I'd have to restrain myself from 'mouthing-off' whenever she'd bring up the Holy Scripture. I do respect that she never forced me to attend church though, it eased the tension between us.

My dad, Giovanni was the more logical thinker. He almost never smiled, more the silent type. He worked a nine to five, white-collar job. He had regular appointments with his community college graduate psychiatrist, drove a sedan and over the years he slowly developed a drinking problem- and that is perhaps the only trait we've ever shared.

Mary-Louisa is my perfect older sister. Brains, beauty and boring. She didn't have a single curious bone in her body, unlike me, and because of that she never needed 'Momma' to dish out her customary dish of 'discipline'.

It is safe to say the only member of my garden variety normal family that I get along with is my brother, Theodore. Everyone called him Teddy, he hated it. Teddy and I were both curious and playful and maybe that is why we got along so well. He's the creative one, he played the Organ at church sometimes, always loved music. We still talk. I send him postcards, he sends me roughly three page long letters. Last I heard he was in an orchestra. That was months ago though.

Now that you know of my family perhaps now I should tell you about the night that changed my life.

It was the summer of 2002, a few months before my 17th birthday, if memory serves. My then best friend, Toby and his girlfriend had invited me to a local band's concert. My parents were attending my brother's school play. My sister was at a friend's house 'studying'. I was lounging about, waiting for Toby to pick me up, when I heard the strangest noise. The sound of soft, wailing wind. So unnatural and yet it had a way of drawing you nearer, like a sirens song.

I remember being overcome by curiosity and having an urgent need to go and investigate the sound (it was in my nature after all). When I opened the back door I was nowhere near prepared for what I saw. A menacing wraith, composed entirely of a veil of black mist whose features appeared vaguely masculine. Its motions were fluid, alive, unnerving. As it began to loom closer all images in my peripheral vision faded to black. It was captivatingly beautiful in its otherworldly hostility.

It took me a few seconds before I noticed that the mesmerising noise had stopped. Instantly my world was turned inside out. The wind began to blow as though Eurus herself commanded it; harsh and unrelenting. The temperature dropped, chilling me to the bone. Suddenly, I heard a high pitched wail fill the air around me and it rippled through my entire body menacingly. At that moment I could have sworn I heard glass shatter. That was the last thing I remember of that night.

Next thing: I awoke on my couch, ringing in my ears, eyes burning and Toby frantically pacing about while questioning me. I couldn't be bothered to pay much attention to his interrogation at the time for the ringing kept getting louder and it wouldn't be assuaged. I remember the sound of glass shattering and racing to the kitchen to make sure I hadn't dreamed the whole ordeal. Or maybe I wanted to verify

that it had been a dream. Alas all the glass windows, plates, even the vases were all intact. I had never doubted my own sanity until that day.

Toby was convinced I had a concussion since I was rambling and not making much sense. Toby drove me to the hospital, I was diagnosed with a concussion just as he had suspected and told to go home with prescription painkillers, and that was the beginning of some weird shit.

After that night my life just got all the more stranger; blackouts, missing time. I began hearing things and seeing things too. Somehow despite all that I still managed to pretend things in my rudimentary life where still... rudimentary.

I would lose entire chunks of time and according to everyone else, they didn't notice anything strange about my behaviour. I still can't remember anything from those moments. And did I mention the buzzing? For days I would hear this low incessant buzzing in my inner ears, it was like being trapped in an enclosed room with a stir-crazed Bee. It nearly drove me insane. I also had visions. Well, I call them visions but, I was always awake and lucid when they occurred. In fact, they were not visions in the slightest. I would see things; the faces of people I knew would instantly morph into something heinous, then instantly back to the faces I knew. To say it made things considerably distracting would be an understatement. Imagine being in the middle of a History exam, looking up to see how much time was left on the clock and then being thrown back by the sight of your teachers face distorted and hideous? Well, that is exactly what happened to me, among the many other episodes.

After two weeks I got exasperated, more so than normal. It was the first time I had considered drowning out my problems in alcohol. Perhaps that was the thought that started it all. If I had never gone through such an ordeal, would I still end up where I am today?

Anyway, I digress. I had decided I had had enough. Enough of the noises. Enough of the weird vision things. Enough of me constantly having to explain to people why I was acting weird that day. It's like all my emotions came bubbling to the surface at once: confusion, annoyance and anger. I was seated atop my bed around midnight. I was trying hard not to scream or throw something in frustration that it

happened. I'm not entirely sure what 'it' was, but I do know it wasn't... normal. I felt something expelled from my body and it was like a fog had cleared from my mind. I instantly felt weightless.

I remember staring at this apparition cloaked in darkness and not being afraid. I remember the room shaking violently as beams of white light emanating from this being. Almost every piece of furniture spontaneously exploding and all the shards remained suspended in the air. My wallpaper ripped from the walls and the walls and ceiling began to disassemble itself. That awful noise I once heard on the porch returned to my ears and the room felt cold, as though I was trapped in a void. But most striking of all were the eyes. Those darkly tinted, weary, old eyes. They belonged to one I can only imagine had lived a long and tiresome life. The eyes, worn by men of defeat; the eyes of pure sorrow. There were no whites in those eyes, no colour, and yet they spoke volumes.

My body burned from the light, my muscles quaked as they were trapped in weightless suspense, my eyes bore tears from the strain, my throat would hurt something fierce from the screams I didn't recognise at all. Then once again everything went black.

When I awoke the sun had risen, the birds sang and what was even more disturbing was that everything in my room was as it should've been. The furniture was still in place as though hours earlier I hadn't seen them shatter into a thousand pieces. My ugly wallpaper was unscathed. The ceiling still firmly above my head. I would have believed I was going mad had it not been for the frailty of the human body.

Every muscle in my body was sore, my skin stung like a bad sunburn, my voice was hoarse and my eyes could barely handle the pale sunrise. In the back of my mind, those piercing eyes lingered never to be forgotten.

So you see, the root of my problems isn't exactly due to the environment I was raised, or the personalities of those who raised me. Instead, it was simply because I was an unfortunate victim of an impossible occurrence.

I feel like this is a good place to end things, I could go on but I feel you couldn't handle much of my unfiltered truth. As for why I drink? It drowns out the ringing ever present in my ears, makes it easier for me to sleep without waking in a cold sweat. I suppose it's my way of coping with my extraordinary life. Like what this letter was supposed to be: a way for me to cope with my alcoholism.

Sincerely,

Matelda Devoto

