

*Stuck In Motion by Amos Kinloch*

The chime of the clock tower means that I've been sitting completely still for almost 2 hours now. My record is 7 hours, 23 minutes and some change. I don't think I'll ever get even close to that again. It just doesn't excite me like it used to.

Some sparrows take flight in my periphery and I ignore the instinct to look. I'm not allowed to take my eyes from the statue, with the exception of blinking. I've historically focused on the patch of patina right above her hip, but today I chose her outstretched hand to spice things up. Very poor choice. I can't stop my attention from wandering to my own left hand, the limp muscles crying out to move and the viscous blood I can feel tugging on my vein walls. And of course that damned scab on the thumb knuckle I've been picking at for the past couple weeks. Usually I can distract myself with other scabs, pimples, or blemishes elsewhere, but with her delicate, polished hand constantly in view it just doesn't work for that long. I can feel my organs squirming more with every passing second and I know I won't last for much longer.

Someone sits down on the bench next to mine. They didn't interrupt me at all, so it must be Callie. Her arrival's as good as any sign to stop. I slump into the merciless metal slats and let my head fall backwards. The sudden movement almost makes me black out.

"It's been a while since I've found you at the Dancer."

"Yeah, I needed some variety."

"Did it help?"

"Not really."

It is pretty rare that I come to this spot anymore. The Dancer, being a nude woman, however abstracted, does make me feel more like a creep, and definitely makes me look more like a creep.

“Cal, can you describe to me what it feels like again?”

She sighs.

“Not right now, Eric. I came here to look at the statue.”

Callie’s never concerned about looking like a creep.

I focus my eyes past the oscillating leaves into the sickly grey clouds and notice they’re also moving. I put my index finger on the thumb scab and attempt to move across it at the same glacial pace.

“I don’t think things are gonna last much longer with Bobby,” Callie says.

“You said that like three months ago.”

“Yeah, but this time he’s really got the look he’s gonna split.”

I lift my head from the backrest and sit up slightly straighter.

“Has he realized you don’t find him attractive?”

“Well, a couple nights back I may have asked him to lay completely still while we did it. He’s been a bit distant since.”

“Yeah man, you might have fucked yourself with that one.”

Callie mutters something I can’t make out, then we sit in silence. Around five minutes pass like this before we’re startled by a shrill voice to our right.

“What are you guys doing here?”

Oh hell, it’s Bill. He’s another reason I don’t come to the Dancer very much. Bill has a serious problem. He may be the worst of us.

“It’s a public park, dipshit.” Callie always makes the mistake of provoking Bill to get close enough that we can smell him.

“Well, you shouldn’t look at her like that.”

I avert my eyes as he approaches and focus on the thumb scab again. Callie started it, she can handle things herself.

“It’s very rude, you know.”

“Oh, God forbid we offend a statue!” Callie retorts. “And c’mon, you’re one to talk about being rude. We all know what you do here when no one’s around.”

Bill scoffs.

“I haven’t the slightest idea what you’re implying.”

“I’m saying you erect a statue of your own.”

It’s a worn out joke, but a clipped laugh escapes my lips anyway.

“How dare you! I would never ever disgrace her like that. I love her, you know! And... and she feels the same!”

Something resembling pity hits my stomach and drives me from silence.

“Jesus Christ, dude. Get a grip.”

“You dirty minded freaks just can’t understand what we have!” He turns around and starts to walk away. “You’re jealous. And you’re dirty, and disgusting, and vile.”

I sense that Callie’s not going to leave it be.

“Hey Bill! Is that white stuff on her bird shit, or did you –”

I jump up and cut her off.

“C’mon, Callie. Let’s just go.”

She looks at me as if I had shot her. She must have been saving that line.

“Seriously, let’s go.”

She follows me.

“I don’t know why you antagonize that guy. He’s probably not stable. I’d really rather be on his good side.”

...

The burning sensation that was patiently waiting in the corners of my eyes has finally spread, but I can’t turn my computer screen down any further. I guess it’s as good a time as any to go to bed. I make the three step journey to the mattress, pulling my phone out of my pocket on the way. When I flop down a Coke can dislodges from the tangle of covers and falls to the floor with a tinny thwack. Shit man, I haven’t even had one of those in at least a week. I roll onto my side and begin scrolling. If I don’t find something to watch while I try to get to sleep I can hear my body rotting.

It’s these tiny gurgling sounds. Reverberations of thousands of imperfect processes falling out of sync with each other. Sometimes it’s a bit like water boiling in a covered pot, other times more like the hissing of a fuse, and sometimes I can fall asleep before thinking of anything even close to resembling it.

Before I had a phone to drown it out with, I would tell myself this old fairy tale. I wish I could recall where I heard it first. It was about a servant who overhears witches plotting to kill the king, and that anyone who tries to stop the plot will turn to stone. But being loyal, the servant recounts everything to the king anyway, slowly turning to stone from his feet to his head while he does. They keep him as a statue in the castle to honor his heroic act.

Frankly, I could never think of a better way to go. To have all these sliding bits of flesh and viscera creepingly freeze together, transmogrifying tissue by tissue to make a static and sublimely uniform matrix! It must be what it feels like to come.

...

Goddamn I wish I could take my jacket off right now. I didn't flag it as a potential problem when I started my staring, but now the black fabric is soaking up the midday sun like it wants me dead. What's worse, I chose to focus on Clark's face, and his perpetual smirk is starting to read like he's entertained by my situation.

I really didn't plan on staring so early today, but I got the urge at the supermarket. No, it's more like a thought that appears, and then I just know it's going to happen. So I put all my groceries back and made the short trek down State St to the memorial.

I overheard two of the store employees talking about Gary. One remarked she was surprised he wasn't in today; wasn't his whole thing not missing a day of work in over 30 years? The other half-whispered back that he'd been diagnosed with colon cancer. It made me sad. Gary's a really nice guy. He is one of those old guys that constantly talks about when he was young, but when Gary does it it's not totally miserable. Hope he's doing ok.

You know, I've always figured that's how I'm gonna die. Not completely sure why, but I do think it'll be colon cancer.

It occurs to me I could take off the jacket and start the staring over. It's only been about 30 minutes; I wouldn't be wasting much time by resetting. But only lasting 30 minutes is kind of embarrassing. Clark must sense my struggle cause his smirk is growing. Fuck you, man, I've sat through worse.

The brunt of the sun is on my shoulders. It's starting to act like a physical pressure, like it's pushing my shoulder blades forward at a snail's pace. And I feel the top of my spine sidling outwards too, trying to form a hump like an old man has. Like Gary has. And there's a pressure all under my skin too, like a million searing springs aching to unfurl.

Suddenly, it's all eclipsed by a throbbing pain in my gut. There's something at the bottom edge of my ribcage that's rapidly expanding, pressing all my organs outwards. My muscles and bones strain to keep them contained and I feel countless things crying out that they don't want to burst.

I leap from the bench and tear the jacket off, screaming. All the pain subsides as soon as the cool air hits my skin. I register the unholy sound I've just made and freeze. Oh shit.

I look down the street in both directions. There's no one at all. I wait 2 minutes for anyone to appear from the houses or sidestreets. Nothing.

A new tension builds quickly in my chest and shoots out from my mouth.

"HEY!"

Another 2 minutes pass without any response.

"HELP! HELP! SOMEONE HELP ME!"

Again, nothing.

I unleash an incoherent string of every dirty and profane word I've ever heard at the highest volume I can manage. When I've exhausted my entire catalogue I move to mimicking any sex noises I can recall from those videos online.

Then I wait a full 5 minutes for any kind of reaction, but it doesn't come.

"Huh." I shrug my shoulders and sit back down. A breeze starts up and bites at my sweaty back and arms, so I put my jacket back on.

Man, I didn't even last an hour.

I look up at Clark, who apparently finds the whole thing very amusing.

Fuck that guy, I'm going to another statue.

...

As I'm walking towards the town square I look through the window of Sally's Diner and see the priest having dinner with Ethel Adams. I try not to grin too much, because I know it can creep people out, but c'mon, that's funny. This town is full of perfect little ironies if you know the people the way I do.

This town, despite having only three statues, has what must be the largest population of statue perverts in the world. I suspect we really have the only statue perverts in the world; the scattered mentions of such deviancy I've found online are all from accounts traceable back to here.

Some years back I started a list of all the perverts I could detect. It's currently at 37. Of course, I don't include myself; I'm not attracted to statues like these creeps, I just want to be one. All but a few are skilled at hiding, they get married and have children and stuff. Some have gotten divorced; I often wonder if they cried out "David!" or "Thinker!" in bed. The only clue to the existence of these perverts that the wider public ever got was Harry Jeffries, who was not at all shy with his interests and is now serving time and probably on a couple lists.

I pass the corner store and John W. Thorogood comes into view. Before I can become fixated by the immaculate detail in his robes and the stern, almost menacing expression carefully chiseled on his face, I notice Callie sitting on the courthouse steps staring up at the marble. I stop for a moment to observe her; her expression is graver than the statue's. Damn man, she's not even blinking. I gather the courage to approach her before I can find any appropriate words, so I sit down silently.

"This place is cursed, isn't it."

It's not really phrased as a question, but I respond.

“What could give you that idea?”

“I mean, c’mon! Just look at it all!” She gestures wildly in no particular direction.

Something’s very wrong for her to miss my entirely unveiled sarcasm.

“The people here don’t walk, they fucking shamble like they’ve been dead fifty years. It’s like God came down with a straw and personally sucked the soul out of every last one. They don’t do anything, and they don’t want to do anything! Fuck, *I* don’t even feel like doing anything. Godammit my soul’s been sucked up too!”

Her intensity sears into my chest and when I try to use my voice it barely comes out.

“It’s not all that bad.”

She scoffs.

“Well of course you would say that, you sit still on a bench like a retard for fun.”

I take her following silence as an apology; it’s the only one I’ll get.

“Hasn’t Bobby talked about moving before?”

Her head slumps as I ask. I don’t find the feeble attempt very convincing either, but I don’t know what else to try.

“It could be good for you, Callie. Really, it would. And, I—” my voice falters, and almost doesn’t start back up. “I could go with you, too.”

I look down and start tracing the veins on my left wrist as I brace for a response to this pitiful display, but it doesn’t come. A minute and a quarter passes without anything. Randy Higgin’s dumbass souped-up truck roars down main street towards us, the sound eventually rattling everything in the square as he passes. As it fades away I hear a faint wheezing, maybe one of the tiniest sounds I’ve ever heard. I turn to Callie, her head still slumped. My heart starts beating faster. I’ve never seen her cry before.

Eventually I move closer, and she notices.

“I’m stuck here, Eric.”

I open my mouth and nothing comes out.

“I’m just stuck here.”

I close it again.

“Bobby left me today.” Her quiet tears grow to a sob. “Oh god, Eric, I tried to tell him. I tried to explain everything to him. It just came pouring out, and... and he looked at me like a thing. A thing you see on the side of a road. A thing and a whore. Suddenly that’s all I was to him, a dirty fucking statue whore.”

I feel numb. And I feel words being compelled from my mouth only by the idea that words probably should be coming from my mouth.

“Bobby doesn’t matter. We could still move away from here.”

“Are you just fucking stupid?” she spits, standing up and whirling around to point at the statue. “As long as Thorogood stands, and Clark stands, and the Dancer keeps doing her stupid little dance, I’m stuck here. And you’re stuck here, too! All of us godforsaken freaks are stuck here!”

As she starts to storm away a prickling thought pulls me back to some sense of being.

“Callie,” I say.

She keeps walking. I stand up.

“Callie!!”

My volume shocks her into turning around. Her face boils without moving.

“Don’t do anything drastic.”

The tremors and cracks in my voice reverberate in the air and echo back to my ears. Her face doesn't change.

"Please just tell me you won't do anything drastic."

She turns and starts up at the same pace again.

"I won't do anything drastic," she calls back to me.

I sit back down. After about three and a half minutes of just breathing I look up at the unfazed Thorogood. He doesn't look back.

Now's as good a time as any to do some staring.

...

Before I'm even awake I can feel the slowly pulsing ache from my bladder. As my vision fades in, the sensation sharpens. A low rumble emanates from my chest and quickly grows into a loud, rasping groan. I slide from the mattress, barely settling upright before stumbling to the bathroom with the sheet still clinging to me for half the distance.

If I had it my way I'd never piss again. What the hell's even the point of drinking if it's just going to come back out later? And I know that as it's passing through it's ever so slowly eroding my insides like a canyon river. Of course shitting is much worse. I hate it so much that I've attempted to stop eating on several occasions. Not the greatest idea ever, I know, but I can't think of any other way to stop it. Who knows if it would even work that well; I can only reach about a day and half before getting real hungry and eating again.

My routine piss lamentations are interrupted by the memory of Callie. She was in a really bad place yesterday. I know she wouldn't lie to me, but I can't help but worry a little anyway. I limp back to the mattress where my phone is reclining against the pillow. She doesn't respond to

my text right away, but she never really does, and it's pretty early in the morning for her to be up. I guess I just have to wait.

I begin the process of settling back into the blankets when I notice voices from the street below my window. The hushed tones are mostly unintelligible, but exclamations continually rise above the hum in fleeting moments of intensity. When I hear Candice from across the hall drawling out “it’s just unbelievable!”, I get up and walk straight to the door. There are some upsides to falling asleep in your clothes and shoes.

Some people from the building are gathered outside, along with most of the occupants of the houses around us. The talking has stopped by the time I reach the outer part of the circle, and several people turn to look at me. I look back at them for a moment, then avert my eyes to the trees. When I look down again they’re all turned towards me. After 6 seconds without breathing, I let out, “What’s going on?”

No one speaks for another 4, then Dave says, “Someone did something drastic.”

I start sprinting before my brain gathers the courage to even suggest the idea.

Oh, Christ.

Christ.

God, please tell me she didn’t.

She said she wouldn’t.

I swear she said it.

The phrases cycle repeatedly, breaking down into tatters of a few words and eventually pulses of single words which match pace with my panting.

*Please.*

*Christ.*

*Wouldn't.*

*Swear.*

*Please.*

Something clenches my arm and I'm jerked to a stop.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"I've got to... she's... I think... Christ..."

"Hold on now."

My other arm is grabbed and I'm spun around towards the voice. I vaguely register Sheriff Johnson's aggressive mustache and sordid breath in the moment before my head turns back in the direction of Callie's place.

"What's got you so riled up?"

"Callie," emerges from inside my babbling. "I have to see Callie!"

"Well, you can do that outside of a crime scene, kid."

I fall limp in his grasp and frantically scan my surroundings. A slipshod barricade surrounds the front of the courthouse. Small chunks of marble litter the ground, and by the austere pedestal lays a sledgehammer and most of Thorogood.

I fling myself to my knees and grasp at one of the sparkling pebbles. It's rougher than I expect and a sharp bit sends a shock from my thumb all the way to my chest. I drop it, and as it falls still I can see the point of a smoky mineral protruding from the pure white matrix.

The sheriff sighs. "Who the hell would do such a thing? I mean, doesn't it seem a bit drastic?"

The word tugs me to my feet. My muscles tense to sprint again, but the crystalline gore fills my brain to the point that it can't give orders. As I stand there, swaying slightly, my phone dings from my back pocket. I check it and I fall back to the ground. Thank god she's okay.

"Are you alright, son?"

"I'm fine. I just need to sit down for a moment."

I clamber over to the nearest bench.

"Are you on some kind of drug?"

"No sir, those are bad for you."

"That's right."

He turns around to face the half occupied pedestal and sticks his thumbs into his beltloops, hitching up his pants slightly as if to get back to business.

"Howdy, Sheriff!" Jim Edmond appears from the nearby storefronts and intercepts him with a visibly firm handshake. I immediately turn my hearing off. Jim is the type to leave his house just to talk to anyone he sees. I don't get him.

I close my eyes and slump further down on the bench to feign relaxation, but there's tension in every part of my body. I hear a dull but reverberating thud. No, I feel it. A quaking impact. Then another one. And then it just keeps happening. I can feel it in my arms as much as my head and chest, the sensation of wielding the death implement as much as receiving it. Who the hell *would* do such a thing? With each impact I feel my muscles restrict more and more, hugging my bones until little fissures form. All of the hairs on my body stand up, the little bumps on my skin quiver and shake and then run, jostling past one another in a pointless attempt to escape the crowd. Half of my blood switches directions, the turbulence makes every vein and capillary squirm, and every organ slithers and intertwines and catches and knots as my teeth start

wriggling to get loose. Dormant larvae feel the vibrations and start dancing, their pulsing beat sends my brain oozing down my spine and over my ribs, the acrid fluid dissolving indiscriminately. My vocal chords start shrieking to pierce through the cacophony, but they only add to it.

I feel a wetness on my fingertips and open my eyes. There's blotches of blood on my hands. Gross, I picked at the scab again.

"Yessir, all three of 'em. Smashed to bits just like this."

I look up at the sheriff, still engaged with Jim.

"The son of a bitch was real busy last night. I've got Sammy over at the Clark memorial and Johnny's out at the park with the dancing woman." He sighs. "Frankly, Jim, we don't have a clue as to who the hell would do such a thing."

I wait for the hammer strokes of these two new deaths to strike my chest, to set my viscera screaming again, but they don't come. I only hear my heart. My heart and a faint clacking that's roughly matching pace. The clacking grows louder and I realize it's not resonating from my body, but from the brick walls on either side of Brook Street. I look past Jim and the sheriff to find the source, but whatever it is hasn't reached the top of the hill yet. It now resembles the sound of someone running in boots, only too infrequent, and Jim and the sheriff also turn to look. Slowly a lighter slapping joins opposite to the dull clacks, forming a full set of footsteps.

Bill emerges at the top of the hill, charging towards the square with only one shoe. His eyes are bulging and wet; his mouth hangs open; his breath is sharp and erratic. He's about 100 feet away when he sees us and freezes.

"Jesus, Bill! What happened to you?"

Bill doesn't respond to Jim, but his eyes widen. I start to feel like he's looking more at me than the other two.

"Bill, are you ok?" the sheriff hollers.

"It's you!" he hisses. "You and that wretched girl did it!" His face contorts as he tries to dredge up words from his gut. They spray out of his mouth with several strands of spit. "You vile bastards!"

The sheriff steps forward and Jim steps back.

"Talk to me, Bill. What's going on?"

Bill reaches up and clutches his temples as tears pour down his cheeks.

"She was helpless. And look what they did to her."

He drops one hand to his side and wipes his nose with the other.

"Oh God, you filthy deviants... you..."

...YOU DEFILED HER!"

He pulls a pistol from the back of his waistband and points it at me with violently shaking hands. A sharp crack shakes the air and Jim stumbles backwards to the ground. My body has no immediate impulse to move. Another shot rings out before the sheriff fires off his own. Bill pivots slightly and shoots again. The sheriff clutches his neck and drops to his knees. Bill turns back to me and I finally jolt from the bench. He fires two more as I scramble to get behind the side of the courthouse.

As I round the corner my foot catches on a far flung chunk of Thorogood. The sidewalk bites into my forearms and knees, sending shocks through my bones and knocking out any breath I had left. I wait for the frantic, lopsided footsteps to follow behind me, but they don't come.

"It's all of you, isn't it?!" Bill yells. "I've seen you all look at her with your filthy eyes!"

Shots start ringing out in all directions.

“But she only looked back at me! You hated us for it!”

Cries from the storefronts begin to rise above the din of gunfire and shattering glass.

My whole body is shaking.

I can't get the sound of Jim's skull hitting the ground out of my head.

Someone needs to do something.

He didn't even try to break his fall.

But the sheriff said the other cops were at the other statues.

The sheriff had blood oozing from his neck in sharp pulses.

Who knows how long it could take for them to get here.

His heart doesn't know it's killing him faster.

Oh god, someone needs to do something.

The shooting stops, and so does Bill's yelling. There's only a soft sound of pacing on the cobblestone walkway. Unsure of what to do, I begin counting the seconds, but the erratic pounding of my heart makes it very hard. Somewhere around 45 pass before it occurs to me

He must be out of bullets.

The sheriff had a gun, though.

What if he picks that up?

Someone needs to charge him now.

Christ, I'm the only one even near him.

Fuck.

I should do it, shouldn't I.

*Fuck.*

I have to do it, don't I?

I don't know if I can.

I attempt to stand, but it doesn't happen. I try to just move my arm, and that doesn't happen. Nothing is moving.

There's a sudden flurry of feet smacking the pavement. Someone is flying towards Bill. There's another gunshot, then the sound of two bodies colliding and hitting the ground.

As the following silence gets longer my muscles slowly relax. Eventually, I'm able to stand and I peek around the corner of the building.

Bill is sprawled out on the ground, unconscious.

Next to him is Callie, bleeding from the chest.

I feel my knees buckle as my vision fades out.

...

The shifting leaves throw dancing speckles of soft sunlight onto the patch of bronze that I'm focused on. I still can't figure out how the leaves are always moving while the air sits so still on my skin.

Every summer has grown more sickly sweet than the last since then. There's this taste to the air that sticks to the back of my throat even when I'm inside blasting A/C, and the colors have gotten so saturated that I've taken to wearing sunglasses whenever I'm not in the act of staring.

The statue still hasn't developed any kind of corrosion or patina. I miss being able to look at that stuff, but I'm glad it's not there. I couldn't bear to see the sculptor's beautiful work be defaced in any way. It really does look like Callie.

I wish I could admire her as a hero the way the rest of the town does. As brave and honorable as her action was, I alone know it wasn't motivated by bravery or honor. And of course there's also that wretched thought that tarnishes her. It's not so much a thought anymore as it is an unconscious truth. Or a cancer on my brain. I know that if I hadn't frozen in place, if I had acted, then I would be the one fixed upon that pedestal. Static. Forever unchanging. She never wanted it, but she got it. I'm ashamed, but I just can't make myself love her the same way knowing that.

I'm one of very few people that still visit this spot. All the statue perverts moved away after the statues were destroyed. Quite a few split immediately, leaving jobs, houses, and families without a day's notice. Others lingered a bit, but within a year I was the only one remaining, my status as a pervert being honorary, of course.

I've been out here to stare nearly every day since she was put up. The practice is paying off, too; I've smashed my record dozens of times now. My heart rate sometimes gets down to 28 bpm and I rarely get hungry or thirsty anymore. Before today the record stood at 22 hours, 13 minutes and 3 seconds, but right now I'm on the cusp of hitting 24. I made sure to start today right on the clock chime so I can be completely certain of when it happens. I think it's about a minute away now.

My heart starts to speed from its lethargy, the heavy pulse causing little tremors in my shortening breath.

About 45 seconds now.

My whole body begins to tremble lightly.

About 30 now.

I feel a softly aching tension in my feet. It starts climbing up my legs, and my heart jumps to an even higher pace. I have to focus hard to keep my trembling from becoming actual movement.

15 now.

The ache reaches my stomach and chest and its saccharine touch instantly doubles my breath rate. Oh, god, just keep from moving for a bit longer.

5.

The ache shoots down my arms and into my brain. I think I might be feeling it! Callie, I think I'm feeling it!

The clock chimes.

My heart stops beating

.

.

.

for exactly 5 and a half seconds.

.

.

Then it starts again, back at a dirge pace.

My breath is normal too, and the grand ache is missing from my body. I feel only the little aches of complaining tissues and the soft reverberations of putrescent gurgling.

Well, shit.

Nothing happened.

Now's probably as good a time as any to stop, but I think I'll keep going for a bit longer.

Just in case.