

*Aimless Missoulian*

“What’s wrong?” Joshua whispered to Meghan. They laid nose tip to nose tip atop a crimson sheeted bed laden with scratchy felted pillows.

“Nothing,” she replied with her usual smirk. Her lips smirked through tears and rage, and even through the act of stubbing her toe. It was an issue of facial anatomy more than a personality trait or mindset, but nevertheless aided in her otherwise dullish appearance. “How are you?” she asked with an upticked voice.

“Good, I’m good.” Joshua sighed, releasing a cloud of morning breath, before rolling on his back to face the ceiling. “I’m sleeping in a bed with a *moist* woman,” He stifled a laugh and continued, “Living in a beautiful city with free minded people. Mom and I are closer than ever. Life’s good, right?”

Meghan playfully slapped his left breast. “Please never call me the ‘m’ word ever again.”

“What word is that now?” he jested.

“Moi—“ she began before stopping herself and shuddering.

“It’s just a word, you know. It can’t hurt you.”

“I disagree. Words *do* hurt sometimes.” She rushed her lips to his acne scarred cheek causing a collision of the hearts and leaped out of bed naked and fast.

“Where are you off in a hurry?” Joshua dumbly inquired.

“Work, remember, I switched to the morning shift,” she answered with a reverberating agitation, as if this was the seventeenth time she’d told him. She slipped on her skivvies and bra, and stuffed her fat rolls into the waistband of a tidied pair of yoga pants from her middle drawer.

“I thought Hannah worked the morning shift, or was that—” he pondered.

“Yeah, Hannah’s *gonna* work the morning shift with me.” Meghan interrupted, “It used to be Amanda, but she married that old woman she met on Craigslist and quit. It’s like, sometimes you don’t even listen when I talk.”

“What were we talking about?” he quipped.

“Cute.” She made a prissy face and threw on the first flower patterned tunic spotted in the closet. Her fingers ran through her fine hair to form a quick, thin pony. He debated on telling her that her hair looked on the verge of being too greasy for work, but decided against it.

“Megs,” he said instead, “you are so gosh darn beautiful.”

“Oh sure, thanks,” she dismissed with a belly full of insecurity and reached to unlock the bedroom door.

He returned his gaze to the ceiling. “The world is luckier to have you.”

He laid there for a great while after she left. His focus narrowed on an unpainted, white spackled section of the ceiling. Questions rolled through his brain regarding this mysterious patch. Why did it go unpainted after all these years? It had been there for at least as long as he’d known Meghan. Why was it spackled in the first place? Was the ceiling damaged? It must have been. But how do you damage a ceiling to such a state that it requires a 4”x4” slathering of primer spackling paste. Maybe the previous resident hung a disco ball from the ceiling and it

ripped out the sheet rock when the party got too bumpin'. Or the more likely scenario was that an electrician cut through the ceiling to fix some sort of wiring issue. The house was old after all; built in the Lewis and Clark district sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, back when the airport was where the fairgrounds sit today.

“You’re still in bed?” Meghan said from the doorway.

Joshua shot up from his relaxed position, accidentally smacking his right hand knuckles across his chin. “You startled me.”

“I startled you?” she scoffed and stepped into the room. “I just got off my shift. It was a brutal morning. I burned my finger on the waffle iron while making cones.” She grabbed her fluffy green towel from the hook, locked the door behind her and stripped off her shirt. “Thought I’d come home and shower before heading downtown for lunch. It’s Lunch in the Park, want to join us? Hannah’s going too.”

Joshua paused for a long three seconds, which felt like an eternity in the cha-cha-cha of conversation. “Why do you always lock your door?”

“How do you mean?”

“You always lock your bedroom door,” he repeated, “Anytime you come in your room. You always lock it. Why?”

“It makes me feel safer, I guess, I don’t know.” She, by any metric or standards, appeared flustered. “What’s up with you the past few days?”

He paused for another long three seconds.

“I need to shower,” she said, knowing an authentic answer most certainly wasn’t about to come anytime soon, and exasperatedly plodded into the adjoined bathroom.

Joshua threw his hand triumphantly to the nightstand and blindly fished for his phone. His fingers slapped wildly for it, but kept finding chap-stick, hair ties and fingernail clippings instead. “Where is it?” He finally turned his head to look where his hand was pawing, and with the aid of his eyes saw it sitting mere millimeters from his blind search area. He gripped its thick rubber coating and swung it to his face.

It was set to the selfie camera upon opening. A rational person might feel embarrassed by something so vain, but Joshua held it in selfie mode for a great while. A greater while it seemed to him than the time he spent staring at the patchwork ceiling or brooding over possible answers to Meghan’s questions. He just stared at himself, and after the phone fell asleep and all that remained was a black screen, he continued staring at his reflection through the fingerprints smudges and sporadic screen scratches.

He tried various expressions, from straight faced to mouth agape, and finally settling into a forced smile that he held for the remainder of Meghan’s shower. She emerged from the bathroom like a plump goose waddling out of a misty lake. “Are you going or not?” she asked, “because I don’t want to wait around all afternoon for you to make up your mind. Hannah just Snapped that she’s already waiting in line at that cute little Thai stall.”

“Yeah, sorry, I guess, I’m not sure.”

Meghan stared at him: at the faintness of his smile, at the dew in his eyes, at the coarseness of his wavy black hair, and she thought he was too pretty to be lying there in her bed.

“Just stay.” Her tone: commanding, in a cute friendly sort of way.

“Are you sure?” Joshua asked for reassurance.

“I’m sure,” she answered wearing her permanent smirk.

“I’ve been feeling so—” he began.

Meghan’s phone blared with an obnoxiously loud ringer, interrupting his thought. “Oh it’s Hannah, I gotta take this and run.” She made an unceremonious beeline for the door, flipped the knob’s lock and trounced out; leaving Joshua alone again.

He threw himself backward so his head crashed into the bizarrely tall stack of scratchy pillows behind him. “I should’ve gone.” He sighed.