

Poor Me

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*“Some people never go crazy. What truly horrible lives
they must lead.”*

— Charles Bukowski

I

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I had acquired myself a new car: the 1974 Dodge Dart something something. Bought it off a man with severe dyscalculia. A brand new ride including insurance for an unseemly amount of cash. He made me condone every single nook and design the car had to offer and the costs came down to a straightforward multiplication made on his pocket-sized calculator. He mumbled at every button he pressed and raised his voice as he came closer to the solution. "\$2200!", he yelled through the showroom. "That's a steal," I answered with a penurious smile. He looked astound when I told him I didn't need to test ride it. I drove off and noticed the young salesman waving graciously at me through the rearview mirror. A real confidence booster, I'd say.

My first jaunt was destined to a place where I did a weak attempt at getting the moneywagon back on track. Having a running car might have been of assistance to pull it off.

Pleased to meet you. My name is Matthew. I'm 26 years old. I own a high school diploma, lower school diploma, swimming certificate and a pack of large condoms. Not that I need them, but my ego does; it doesn't know any better. Poor thing. I have always considered myself—now bear with me—a realist, but came to the conclusion that life has more boredom to offer than excitement, more heartbreaks than relationships, and I found out life isn't going to get any better than this. So now you could say I'm more of a pessimist, whatever suits you. Little by little I stopped being nice to people so that they have no expectations of you at all, which

feels nice. I like to think my parents think the same way because they are way better at it than I am. I'm like an itch on the center of your back that cannot be dealt with, making you want to put a bullet in your head. But I can assure you: one day that itch will be gone, and you won't even be able to sleep because you feel there's something missing. So won't you give me a chance?

"Excuse me, sir? Are you there? Sir?"

I blinked and lost my focus on the man's hairpiece. Back in the real world, I thought. I looked around me to make sure if I wanted to go through with this: office desk, blinds, Ikea chairs... It wasn't tempting at all. The place reeked of paint and cigars. A sickening combination, really. Then I realised the urge of getting a job had dissolved due to the discount at the car dealer.

"Is everything okay? Should I contact somebody?"

Was I really going to let this degenerate play boss over me? A bold decision it would be, a renouncement from what you could call isolating yourself behind invisible cell bars, keeping a grown man-child away from civilization. But I preferred the "some alone-time": voluntarily spending day in and day out in your room while getting your biggest thrill out of the visits from your mailman. It was my comfort zone. I didn't feel ready yet for the outside world.

I took the safe route: while demonstrating a repulsive and somewhat blameworthy laugh—as if I stood above him—I responded,

"You take care, mister."

He crossed his arms over each other, turned his chair more in my direction and stared at me. His eyes were deadly; they wouldn't let go off me. While walking towards the door, I looked into his eyes and forgot about the man himself. I closed the door as slow and steady as possible, not losing eye contact, and the moment he blinked, I was in charge of my own eyes again and quickly closed the door behind me. Almost entrapped in a boundless road of stress and deadlines. Now that I look back at it, it would have been good for me, but my inner child didn't allow me.

I wasn't expecting the job interview to end so early, so I made a detour to the celebration to boost my spirit; a quick visit to the liquor store did wonders. My body refused, the larger part of my brain turned its back on me, but the misconception of "more alcohol is more fun" was authoritative. Like being at a toy store I ran towards the section that spoke to me the most: easy-to-chug, cheap-brand, high-percentage and possibly flake-filled liquor. Often I got reminded of the "Do Not Touch, Only Look" policy, as the vendor was well-educated on the subject Economics—I never had a thick wallet on me. All I could afford was a six-pack of bottom-shelf beer, which I chugged half of in the parking lot. The other half was a gift for the birthday boy. The one aspect I didn't like about the car was the smell: way too clean for my taste. I poured the leftover of my third beer on the upholstery, mainly across the dashboard. It was a simple homage to my old car because we'd been through a lot together—a big emphasis on all the woeful endeavors at creating bar fights to at least have something going on. They'd kick me out, telling me I was too drunk, but I knew exactly what I was doing. Despite my functioning alcoholism I threw up in the car on a regular basis. Passengers would

always insist me to clean it, but those residues became fond memories.

The shindig I was headed to—with strong tendencies to drive into upcoming traffic—was thrown not too far from where I lived by a seemingly pansexual or asexual fellow (nobody could tell) named Nigel, royal son of the higher class family and soon to be rich too, from what I understood. "Being on the rise": a phrase he kept repeating to all guests, bragging about unpromised accomplishments. But in the end it didn't matter. His family fortune had a couple more digits compared to mine and his elders were more than willing to share it with him. As long as he behaved. And sat still. And followed every single prescription his old man gave him. He represented what I never planned on becoming.

I parked my car somewhat really sloppy in the midst of their Versailles-garden, knocking over several projects he had built in high school. The alcohol was strong with me. I spotted a pink sign bathed in glitters that said: "go through the back" How nice. The stravanza took place in his backyard, or his parents' actually. I recognized everybody from high school, leaving me with no option but to jump in and endure the ride of every single goddamn life story the guests had to tell. It was more like a reunion: put on your best smile and your peacock feathers up high (iron them and pluck out any grey hair in advance) to show them you haven't made any regrets from birth to present. "It makes you the man you are today." I felt either being outclassed, or the exact opposite. Then there was Dani: she was the one who hadn't disavowed me after graduation day. She actually cared about me and despite the fact that I'd made uncountable mistakes in her presence, gave her various burn-outs and the word "sorry" became meaningless, she was still there. Also she was what you could a guilty pleasure: we all wanted to fuck her, but no

one dared to admit it because she looked a little different from other girls: controversial, with piercings (I hadn't located all of them) and unnatural looking dyed hair.

She and the other former high-schoolers had formed a circle with a bonfire; an acoustic guitar waiting for me to be smashed on the head of the person who had the guts to pick it up, and a few seats left.

"Good evening, lads!" And everybody greeted me back, but from the look of Dani I knew she wanted to be in the center of attention.

"Milady." I bowed forward, kissed her hand and she laughed. No blushing though.

"Good evening my lord," she said. Always eager to play along, but never original responses. "I didn't know you were friends with Nigel."

"Stop it, you! You know how badly I wanted to be here." I pawed my feet on the ground. Again she liked what I was doing.

I looked around in a full 360 degree and the only thing that came to my mind was: "What the fuck am I doing here?"

"What," Dani asked.

"Did I just say that out loud?"

"I know this isn't a blast," she whispered to me, "but can't you try to get along?"

"I'm just saying, we can all agree that this is the type of party that NEEDS booze to satisfy its costumers."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"In the particular case, booze is like auto tune: if you need it, you ain't doing it right."

"When did you come up with that?"

"Just now."

"Bullshit. Full of shit as always."

When Nigel showed up—back from going potty—the whole circle began clapping for him with me out of beat. That wasn't the alcohol. He looked the exact same as I remembered him from high school when we were in class together: His trademark Polo-shirt with its collar all the way up; jeans indistinguishable from a Dollar Store pair, yet ten times the price; his hair looking slick—the similarities with Elvis Presley's being unnoticed, and his reading voice was his talking voice. When I closed my eyes, I could imagine him sitting in a bathrobe next to the fireplace, reading his future-children stories of how he became rich. That was if he ever was going to be.

It was up to the guests to toast, tell others the dearest memories you and Nigel had shared. It was clear that everybody struggled with this. Dani said something about her being tutored by him, which was the one time in trade for accidentally ruining one of Dani's sweaters by knocking over his Chaudfontaine. My toast went as followed:

"Nigel," I said as I stood up, raising one of my own brought beers, "if it was up to me, I'd be sitting at home right now. I'd snuggle up with one of my favorite records and be mesmerized by not only the music, but also by the thought of not being here. Unfortunately, dreams don't always come true—despite how reasonable and understanding they might be. This, however, is a crapfest of unknown proportions, your biggest achievement yet, waiting to die down as liquor runs out, and I'm here to help you achieve that goal." I took another sip of my beer. "Put that in your garden!"

For me this was a moment of pride, but I had no one to share it with. After my saying, an awkward silence came in that slowly dissolved when Nigel came in with toast (the edible kind). I noticed a funny mixture of anger and acknowledgement from the other guests directed at me. To