Memory Lane of Self-induced Hysteria

By Danya Bouwman

He stares, and he stares back. He moves, and he is followed. It's night, yet he can't sleep -- correction: he won't sleep, it's too dark to sleep and he's afraid. Intoxicated to a dangerous degree, he stares at the empty cabinet, willing the morphine to appear for his delight like he thought he remembered it had done so just yesterday, when he and his chums had come back from the pub - but no such luck. His bare feet are cold on the hard bathroom floor where only a week ago Sammy had been sick and thrown up everywhere. He closes the cabinet door and looks into the faded mirror on the other side of it. He stares and his reflection stares back, imitating his every move as though it were a game of some sort. It's like having a second shadow, he mused, reminded of his young nephew Tim, who would chase his shadow like a dog chasing its tail and yell, “I’m getting closer uncle Bennie!” Chasing the target, like he had done in the war only months ago as the bombardier of his squadron -- waiting precariously for the ideal moment to drop the bomb. They were all phonies in the war, the big US army and Uncle Sam making you think your life actually mattered, when really you were probably worth more dead. Bennie knew it, and every time he crossed the street he hoped no one else knew it: he didn't want to get run over. He worried about things like that, just as his co-pilot Willy -- who everybody called Blankie since he was a “wet blanket” -- would always yell out over the intercom to the sniper at the back of the plane, “Guns don't kill people, people kill people.” Now he's six feet under, shot to death by a gangster sick of his rambling. Bennie stares in the mirror blatantly and all the memories come flooding back and make his head hurt... where was the stupid morphine when you needed it? Mel had said that same thing one night, before he went crazy and ran out into the street screaming like an animal about how some guy no one could see was following him -- following him like Bennie’s reflection followed him now. Bennie paces for a bit, drinks some water to ease the hangover, and can't help but see his reflection in the window. He's led to wonder, and feels that eerie tinge you get when your instincts tell you something's wrong. He rushes to the bathroom and stares at the mirror. “Who the hell are you?” he screams. No answer. “What d'you want, get out, you got no business being here...” The memories keep flashing in his mind making his head throb with insistence: the spies working for the Navy, the fenced-off ditches for the prisoners of war, the books he had read by people who would swear on their mother’s grave they knew the government was taking over the world with subliminal messages and other devices too far-fetched for him to understand. “This world's a breed of conformists,” he keeps repeating to himself, “and I'm one of them!” He tries to outwit his reflection but the silvery surface never misses a beat. “You can't think on your own anymore -- Willy did, and he got three bullets to the head. The government let's us think it's a game; we're followed for the greater good of society --like society ever did anything for me. And what if I don't want the American dream, what if I only went to war because I had to, would they kill me too, for the greater good of “society?” We're no society; we're all clones looking over our shoulders, just waiting to brand our neighbour a communist.” He gags, but still turns to the mirror in hysterics: “You ain't gonna get me, not like you got Mel,” to which he smashes the mirror with clenched fists and falls unconscious to the floor, the blood slowly dripping from the tiny cuts on his hands, like dew drops from trees on a fresh spring morning -- a new beginning... until he wakes up tomorrow unable to remember a thing.

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