

Final Explosion

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A piece of burning metal whistled by my ear, but I couldn't pull my eyes away from the brilliant green and blue flames that were rocketing upward a few feet away. The aerosol cans encased in the bucket of unleaded gasoline had finally ignited, resulting in a loud "BANG" and suffocating smoke that reeled into the tree branches above. The burning mass of chaos lay at the center of an old tire that we had found among scattered car parts in a section of forest behind a small local neighborhood.

The three of us cheered for the havoc we had generated with our hands among the silence and peace of a friendly forest. The fire hissed like an animal, releasing the energy it precariously contained. What was the driving motivation for what we were doing? I asked myself this very question as I looked at my feet that were buried and numb in the New England snow.

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My parents were divorced before I could comprehend the meaning. By the age of seven, the stress from it had a visible impact on my life. For me, the stress translated into migraines, which meant many nights kneeling by the toilet vomiting between hammering jolts of pain pulsing through my skull. I couldn't look at light or smell anything too strong, or the pain would send me reeling. I remember the doctors clearly.

"Well, everything looks good up there," they would say pointing to my head, "but there are clearly sources for these headaches; whether it is stress or simply an allergy, we cannot be certain."

It didn't really make sense to me; there was nothing I ever anxiously thought about and I

felt lucky to have a close family aside from the divorce. While this was the case, there was still immense weight on my shoulders. It built up internally like a fire under a canopy of trees slowly gaining strength, and I was always unaware of its presence. Whenever it built up enough for a migraine to materialize, I felt like my head would explode, sending my eyeballs and brain careening toward the walls around me. Like the aerosol cans in the fire, I felt like it would take one small spark or catalyst to make my head pop. Every time, after my stomach violently purged itself, the pain resided and I could fall asleep in peace.

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The migraines dissipated after a few years, and Middle School promised a bright future. During this time I began my football career and carried it with me to High School.

“Line-up!” my coach yelled; the veins in his neck protruding like worms under his skin, “Find someone your size and face them. When you hear the whistle blow, run and knock the snot out of him.”

“TWEEET!”

I looked up in time to see a refrigerator grow legs and sprint at me, blocking out the sun and making the ground rumble. It was Chris, “The Tank.” He once ate fifteen pieces of pizza and drank fourteen Red Bulls in one sitting; I had witnessed this legendary accomplishment just days before. His royal blue helmet was black and scarred from his tendency to use his head as a bowling ball. My fists clenched and I lowered my helmet; I wasn’t about to go down because this kid had a ravaging appetite for inflicting pain. How many hours in school had I waited for this moment to release my stored frustrations, to release the hours of talking about the future, college, my career, even my salary?

The tops of our helmets met like sparring moose, and I heard a phone ringing in the

distance with flashes of yellow exploding in the sky.

My senses slowly regained their grip one-by-one; the smell of grass, my ears ringing, blurred vision, my skull pulsing. Chris was sprawled on the ground and I was somehow standing. The crunch of my coach's footsteps on the grass rapidly approached and his face was red with excitement.

“Th-th-that’s what I like to see! That’s a hit!” he yelled, “That deserves a head-butt.”

He extended his head back and butted the top of my helmet with his bare forehead. When the ringing in my ears subsided, my brain was blank. Silent. At least for the moment my questions, ignorance, and doubts of the world around me were absent from my consciousness.

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The fire was dying out in the center of the old tire and the aerosol cans had all either blown up or finished making the hissing noise and torch flames. The drum of gasoline we had used still had some gasoline left at the bottom and it lay by my side as I watched the destruction. The feeling of adrenaline pumping through my blood as I heard the loud explosions and hissing fire felt familiar.

The three of us stood under the trees. It was icy under the canopy of branches and the sun was behind grey clouds in the overcast sky. Here we were in the middle of the woods using explosives for enjoyment, yet none of us had provided a specific motivation. Why was I gripped by the sudden need to be destructive? The migraines and football were a thing of the past, leaving me with the burning mass of aerosol cans.

I'll never forget the cheers of glory, the thick blue flames rocketing upward from the frozen ground, the black smoke engulfing the trees, swallowing the air as it floated into space. Sweat rolling down our faces, our eyes squinting from the blaze. Chunks of tire and metal

shooting outward, nearly missing us. Our breathing, the release from today's struggles and yesterday's failed promise dissipating like the tire and junk in front of our eyes. The smoke blocking out the sun, casting a shadow over a bright light, hiding it there to illuminate the surrounding trees. The glimmering hope of an end, the final flash of light that was the final image of my childhood. Me breaking from my past and traveling into the realms of manhood. Everything stopping. The smoke clearing. The forest exhaling.