

You Held a Sun

by Carlos Ferrão 2007

Open your eyes and face the new day. There's no hope in this dark morning, but wake up. Wake up! Throw the blankets to the side; let them get even dirtier on your filthy floorboard. Feel the cold outside the bed's womb. Ignore the futility of it all. Summon old and neglected muscles to stand you up. Open the door and stumble into the corridor. Remember how light hurts your eyes and keep them closed. Use the wall to guide your way to the bathroom. It's easy; just trace the black handprints on the formerly white wall. You've been making these marks ever since you moved in. They are your testimonial to all these impossible mornings.

Undress and please abstain from looking at the mirror. You know how you feel when you do that. It isn't bearable in the darkness of the night, let alone just after waking up. Step into the tub. There, be careful, you have to lift your leg high and the icy enamel is always a surprise. Open both taps. The hot water must be turned all the way. Ponder on how much cold water you will be having. Is it one of these days?

Can you contain it? Do you need a little help? It's been freezing this week, so you decide to give yourself a treat and mix only a little cold water. Watch the steam rise from your skin. This is almost too hot for comfort. Let it be a punishment then. Because you went easy with the cold water today, you let it scald you. Imagine all the plans for this day being seared from your skin and becoming one with the water which whirls down the pipe. Purified of intention and desire, a blank sheet lies in front of you, so make this day as unremarkable as possible.

Back in the room now. There is always the risk of meeting some stranger in the corridor but this time you didn't; a small hurdle that you got through and the first of a day filled with them. Look at the alarm clock and curse silently how late you are. Promise never to indulge in a hot shower again. Forget this promise tomorrow, but for today let it burn your mind and make your life feel out of control. Scrape your disgusting body with the unwashed, rough towel. Throw it on the bed and, as soon as it leaves your hand, remember that it is wet. Take it off the bed and wonder where to put it. Leave it on the chair and hope it is dry by the next morning. Open your closet and get your uniform. Try to take pride in it. Fail. Put it on anyway: white shirt, grey pants, black shoes. Don't forget the bright red tie. No need for complicated knots; it comes with a Velcro in the back which is perfect for the idiots in your firm. Keys, travelcard, sandwich, go!

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At your job. You're late but just made it. You rush into the foyer and pick up the ringing phone: it's from your company's headquarters to check if you are on time. You are so there's no need for more conversation. Have a nice day and the same to you. Sit down. Wait for the office hours to start. There are always a few people early, are they hard workers or brownnosers? You will never know. Here comes one. Try to remember their names when you greet them. If you forget, just say Mister or Miss.

For you they are Mr. Colt or Miss. Baines. For them you are a simple nod of the head. They don't know your name and they don't care. You are new here and you rarely smile. Sure, you do them favours outside your responsibilities. Sure, you are polite when you call to let them know they have visitors. Yet, they can feel there's something about you. In this aseptic construction of white and green marble, all emotions are forbidden... except greed and only because it goes well with handshakes, smiles and, of course, money. You keep your hunger bottled up inside but they can tell it is there.

The parade continues. Suits in grey and black both for him and for her, for young and for old. For the men, the ties are a sign of personality, but how much personality is there if it's your wife and relatives choosing them? Women have more choice, but you know that any exuberance is a sign of femininity. They can't have that. You must be yourself, as long as you are like everybody else. The entire world is secrets yet how obvious they are.

Watch them and reminisce. You once wore suits like those. The tailor-made ones were the best. They were like a second skin. No, not like a second skin, for your first skin is imperfect. They were the only skin. In them, you felt invincible and in command of yourself and all around you. You could do everything you wanted. Money was easy to come by and people would respect you when you told them your job. Your place in society's higher stratum was assured and that made you careless. You lost your subtlety and were caught breaking the one rule you could not break.

You spot Edie coming your way. She works on the fifth floor and wears the same uniform you do. She could wear a grey skirt instead, but she prefers the trousers. You've questioned her about it once. She told you it was a matter of taste, but you know better. You know she doesn't wear the skirt because she is ashamed of her varicose legs. You've never seen her legs but they are repulsive for sure. She

is your age: old. She should have children and a husband by now. She is close to being too old to get either. She will never get you at least. She greets you with a smile as she always does. Go on and greet her with a nod. It's the only chance you will have this day of feeling superior to somebody. She comes down here to pick up the newspapers. Up there, they have a coin-operated coffee machine and a kitchenette while down here on the ground floor you don't even have a water fountain. In your mind, form the words b-i-t-c-h because she never brings you anything. Endure her babbling. You don't care about what's on TV and no, you don't even own one. Sometimes she leaves in a few minutes but today she's testing you. Wonder if it is on purpose but realise she is too good-natured to do it on purpose. Now, try to find a way to make her go away. Visualize your face as an expression of boredom. Modulate your muscles into that face. Not all of them at once, just enough for her to get a clue. See? You are at least a bit like everybody else in this building: it's all in the body language and subtext. She leaves. Look at the clock on your desk and hope this little episode wasted your entire morning. Hope hard, hard enough to make the absoluteness of the clock go away.

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They've given you a lousy deal. With a park so close and you only have half-an-hour to eat your lunch. That's barely enough time to go there and come back, let alone enjoy it. Still you can't help but look at the clock, pay attention to it and try not to lose a second. Wait with sandwich and keys in hand and when that hand reaches twelve, rush out!

Find your favourite park bench and sit down. It could be so much better; it could be close to a... no! They are watching you, remember that. Look around. That old lady feeding the pigeons, is she one of them? No, probably too old. How about the young gay couple walking their little dog? They are here every time you come for

lunch, so are they here to watch you or because of their dog? If they are employed, why do they have free time during the workday? Let these questions and this paranoia corrode you. Blot out the vibrant Sun. Expunge the fresh air. Annul the pleasant breeze running along the hair on your shin. Make this yet another terrible experience in your day. Add to that collection of self-aggression and pain. Remember what they said: no punishment is enough for you. You can never be free, no matter how much you discipline yourself. Please finish that sandwich quick, you want to get out of here as fast as possible.

On the way back to the office, hurry your pace. Why? Are you late? You know you aren't so why so fast? Avoid this question. Avoid all questions. Make your life a blank. Make your life an automated blank of eating, shitting, sleeping and working. You are a tube where food goes in and shit comes out. Everything else is peripheral.

Sitting down and looking at the time. Monotony broken by the occasional delivery or visitor. Sign where you have to sign; call who you have to call. There isn't anything else to it. How much higher your mind has flown before. Now it only crawls, dragging your ugly belly along the dirt. Yet in the solid earth, it finds the ballast it needs. So tie it down and wish for better days you know won't come.

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The end of the day approaches in lazy, measured steps. Already people pass by your desk, their faces open with the joy of being one step closer to freedom. See them rushing to their homes and wonder what drives this race; wonder what they have got so good at home. Tell me, what would you have at home that could force you to run to catch a train? In your deepest of secrets, you know the answer. But for them, what is their driver? Would they tell you their secret to happiness if you asked? No, they never would, not in a place like this.

You collect your scattered possessions on the desk and group them close to each other. Form little piles with precarious balance. The wallet laid flat first and then pile up the mobile phone, keys, a pen or two and finally maybe a stapler? Try not to look at the clock again. You cannot will time forward and neither can you will it backwards to happier times. Nevertheless, you look up from your desk and there she is. Below the clock, sitting on one of the black single-person couches: an angel that fell to Earth.

Little toes sprout from little feet inside little black shiny sandals. Such small feet... you could embrace them with your hand. Her legs dangle from the couch spindly and smooth. A navy blue skirt tapers to her tiny waist and from there a white shirt blossoms from under a felt jacket. Her gentle hands rest on her sides and rub the leather of the chair, testing this new material with unabashed curiosity. You look at her face and it is your dreams made creamy, freckled flesh. Even the hair is perfect, blondish and falling in tangled wild curls. She is singing to herself but you can hear it too. Harmonizing with sweet unspoilt innocence and breaking the thumping of the steps on the frozen marble. What a vision, what a gift you have received.

Wait! Why is she here? This is no place for children. It must be a trap. Look around and try to spot them. They are here and you know it. You see no one suspicious at first so look again. Is it the van parked outside? The glass doors could allow them to look inside if they wanted to. If they catch you again, it's over. You must be careful. Sit down again as if nothing happened. Move as if you were ignoring her presence. Hide behind your desk and use it to shield your eyes.

You're doing well so far. You got a good look so let that image remain behind your closed eyes and feed off it. Resist. Do not dare look again. Remember that people do not look at children as you do. It is a trap, surely.

You hear your name and open your eyes. Looking at you is both the girl and a woman. Your first reaction is to make up a justification for looking but the woman speaks first. She introduces herself as Kimberly and the girl as her daughter Laurie. Kimberly works on the seventh floor in Sales. Apparently, her husband used to pick Laurie from school but now he can't. The new arrangement is that Laurie will come to the building and wait for her mother to take her home. Would you be so kind as to look after Laurie every day while she waits? After all, it is very dangerous for a little girl these days. You never know what kind of predators might be out there. So, will you do her this favour? You nod.

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At home, shut off the lights and close the window. Create an absolute darkness that will serve as the perfect stage for a play of lust. Strip and sit on the bed. It is hard to do, but ignore this room's smell. Ignore your old and rough skin. Remove those blemished things from this fantasy. It is not you in here; it is she. She is here to share it all with you and shines like a guiding beacon. The beauty of virginal creation is within your grasp. You reach out a hand and it too becomes bathed in light and warmth. It touches the innocent skin and does not destroy it. Harder now. Harder and faster. Don't stop: reach the point of no return. Go through and above it. Finally let go of what you have held for so long.

Afterwards, wake up and cry in the dark. You've lost again. Months of desperate trying destroyed by her. It is gone, maybe forever. You've taken a step towards something that you cannot have. Can you end it here and now? Remember how they told you this would be your last chance outside. One more slip-up and they would lock you forever. Locked like the animal you are. It is what you deserve. If you cannot control yourself, they will do it for you. Do you want to end it right here and now? How would you go about it? Shot to the head? Hanging? Castration and then

bleed to death? What would be the best way? You do not have the answer so let it go. Tomorrow you will see her again. Will you pass the real test?

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Laurie has arrived. She is over there on the couches playing with magazines she can hardly read. Her mother has trusted you to look after her. How easy is that? You just have to sit here as you always do and occasionally look at the girl. You know nobody will try to harm her: this is a very safe part of the city and there are cameras everywhere.

You are here and she is there. This separation of a few yards protects you from her, not the other way around. You are such a pathetic grown man, hiding from a child behind a desk. You try not to look, but she is so lovely you cannot help it. The way she puffs her cheeks and talks to herself imitating some animated character you don't know. How her body is full of bright, vibrant life and needs to get up, run, jump and do clumsy cartwheels. But best of all is how she ignores the place she is in. All these serious men and women around her, their faces set in grim grey stone that do not register on her rainbow world.

Soon, her mother will be here and the torture will end. Is it really torture? Ask yourself honestly, please. Is it not a pleasure to feast on this vision? From this hour of looking at her, you will take something home. You will take all these expressions, bits of skin, gestures, and tics and mould them into what you truly want. They cannot get to your thoughts. Behind the locked door of your brain, you have absolute privacy. Say her name many times and summon the perfume of her existence into your life.

You look again. She has made a mess of the foyer with magazines scattered everywhere. You should do something. If you avoid all contact, it will look like you are afraid of being close to her. What kind of suspicions would that draw? You must

reprimand her at least this one time. Hope she behaves so you can return to the safety of your desk. You get up and walk to her. She is looking at you! She rips pages from the magazines and throws them about. Wait. Stop and think for a bit about this call for attention. Is she trying to draw you closer? Trying to seduce you? You know them to be capable of that at any age. Surely, she is aware of her attractiveness. What could she want from you? Could it be...?

As you are about to speak, Kimberly interrupts. She has just arrived and is very mad at Laurie. Grabs her by the arm, shakes her and scolds her harshly. Laurie is on the brink of tears. Now is the time to be strong, so you hold your mouth shut. How you wish you could smack Kimberly and take Laurie away from this old hag. Instead, you bite your lip and hold the words and the actions for when they are opportune.

Kimberly turns to you with apologies. For you, there isn't a problem: the cleaners will take care of the mess. She knows she is being pushy but could you help Laurie pass her time? If you have the time, of course. You hesitate at first but end up agreeing. Oh, how weak you are. Weak and sad and on the way to your doom.

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In the morning, Kimberly brings you some colouring books and crayons. You place them in a drawer, trying to give Kimberly the impression you do not care for them. Later, when the foyer is deserted, you bring them out and go through the pages of animals and plants and big sunshines. Can you learn a bit more about Laurie from these books? Did she choose them or were they bought by her mother? You try to piece it together but Laurie just seems too mature to enjoy them. There is something about her smile... an adult trapped in a child's body? No! She is more than that. She is one of those golden angels that are put on Earth to show us the

splendour of life. She is like Carmencita, the first one they took away from you. The same look in her eyes; the same innocent lust that asks for nothing back except total devotion.

Turn your attention to the crayons and their chaotic assortment of colours. Red seems to be the one that is worn down the most. You hold it close to your face analyzing its shade. It is the colour of blood. It is the colour of painted lips in mouths meant to be kissed. It is the colour of a vagina flushed in readiness for penetration. Is this a coincidence? Go back to earlier times in your life when not everything was connected. A time when an event stood on its own with no need to draw little lines from it to everything else. Step into an earlier, ignorant you and look again at the crayon. Is it really so improbable that she would send you this unsubtle message? Then you notice something new: sweet red apples. It is the crayon. You bring it to your nose and that is what it smells like. You cannot help but smile. There are no more doubts in your mind. She wants you as much as you want her. It will not be simple; there's a hunt and a chase first and only then can it be consummated. She understands the rules in this game of seduction as well as you do.

Put everything back in the drawer and just think about her. Take her by the hand and hide together in the special room of your mind where only the two of you exist. The fluorescent lights become candles and the functional office furniture becomes cushions dressed in silks. Think about her now and dream the bleak day away. Soon she will be here again.

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For all intents and purposes, she is a child. You have to pretend that is how you see her. It is as much part of the act as this job and the rest of your life for that matter. The blind around you two do not understand. Therefore, you talk to her as you would to any other child: simple words, simple nouns and keep it simple. You

almost want to tell her not to worry. In private, you will say the words of love she wants to hear. For now, you maintain the charade. You show Laurie the books and the crayons and use them as carrots to bring her back to your desk.

Behind it, she is barely visible by someone walking through the foyer. When they come closer, all they see is a kind man and what could be his daughter entertained in an innocent activity. You both smile in a picture of harmony that suggests a family, albeit not the one you would want with her.

She answers your questions about her mother, about her school and her friends. She is not happy and you know why. She is not a child and should not be made to live like one. Shall you have the love and dedication to save her from this? To take her to a place where no one will know you and where she can be how she truly is. They will think you are father and daughter and, if any suspicions arise, the police will be corrupt enough to be bribed into not caring. That will be true living.

Soon, Kimberly is back to collect Laurie. She has Laurie say your name and thank you. For a moment, you panic as Kimberly's own gratitude borders into flirtatiousness. You do not want her. She does have the same hair and eyes as your little angel, but the world has soiled her too much; tainted her beyond redemption.

They are leaving. You keep your eyes on Laurie, waiting for her to look back over her shoulder and maybe signal something to you. She doesn't and, in a flash, there's the pain of her withdrawal. A long journey home squashed in a loveless train. The endless search for her during the night. The uselessness of arms that cannot hold her. The gruelling twenty-four hours until her return.

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Your life has become a colouring book: an array of meaningless black lines, which serve no other purpose than to demarcate empty white spaces. You wait hour after gruelling hour for those late afternoons when Laurie brings her bright, young,

life-lusty colours into your life. Everything else is a painful plod of clock-watching and lonely fantasizing.

The first week with her ends much too soon. As expected, you become inebriated with love and stop thinking properly. You make no plans for the weekend, so Saturday hits you hard. Your lack of contact with Laurie binds you to your bed. Your energy disappears: what is the point of spending energy if it isn't towards her?

By Sunday, you must see her. You do your best to remember her family name but can't quite get there. You spend a sleepless Sunday morning going through random entries in the phonebook expecting to find one that will make you remember. Stupid, stupid, stupid. If you had anticipated this during the week, you could have searched the company files for her address.

It's no use staying in the apartment flipping through the phonebook. You open the covers and fill the room with the smell of your sweat and semen, both simmered over 2 days of despair. You lift your unwashed body out of bed and it's time to hit the streets looking for Laurie. No, you don't know where to look, but another hour of waiting would be unbearable.

The first stop is her school: closed on Sundays, of course. Next, you trace the way from the school to your office, thinking that maybe her house is on that path. Nothing. Where else shall you look? You don't know, so get your skinny legs moving with the frenetic energy of your disease and look anywhere that might be plausible. Spend all the money in your wallet entering every theme park in town to look for her. Visit every toyshop and shopping centre to browse for your stolen treasure. Walk, walk, walk and sometimes jog a little as if you were late for a date. You know that tiredness will get to you in the end and force you home. However, by then, this nightmare will be over and you will close your eyes and be with her once more in your dreams.

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The awakening is brutal and unexpected. You can't remember your dreams but know, just know that she wasn't part of them. It is as if her presence in you has worn thin because of spending these two days without her. Whereas the other workday mornings had been pregnant with hope and promise, this one only brings you a cold, empty vacuum of emotion. Even those sweet blue eyes seem to be fading from memory. Grab them, don't let them go or they might never come back.

You lie inside the duvet all day. It is so pointless to go out. Your mobile phone rings and rings with calls from your company's headquarters to ask where you are but you have gone past caring. Only Laurie matters now so why should you wait for her in that horrible place? By lunchtime, you at last get out of bed. Open the closet and pick your best clothes. A clean shirt and jeans? No, something better. How about the grey tailor-made suit you kept from your days as a successful young man? You lay it on the table and take out the shoes too. Polish them nice and choose a tie that matches the outfit. Go to the shower and take your razor, your shaving cream, your nail clippers and your perfume. Everything must be perfect for your date with Laurie.

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She is not expecting you. You come upon her on the street and she almost doesn't recognize you from the office. The initial plan was to tell her how you feel, but you end up lying about her mother and taking her back to your flat. Her obedience was too easy: there's no doubt that Laurie wants this as much as you.

Back in your room, she sits on the bed and asks how long until her mom comes to pick her up. You tell her not to worry; you now have all the time in the world for yourselves. You take your jacket off and place it on the chair. You sit next to her. The excitement and tension is so strong you don't know what to do first. Shall you tell her how you feel? Shall you show it by kissing her? Shall you touch her? Seems

like a good idea, but where? Touch her tiny hand first and then envelop it in your palm? Maybe touch her bony thigh and ride your fingers up her fair skin? She is not making the first move and she shouldn't; you are both older and male so you should start.

She asks again how long until her mom arrives and you lose control. You throw yourself over her and kiss her pretty lips while running your hands under her skirt and shirt. Now she is all yours: a live doll subject to your will. You smother her under your weight and size and muffle her mouth with your kisses. Is she moaning with pleasure or screaming in protest? All of this gets lost in your insanity and perversion.

You grab her neck with one hand and pin her down. You pull out her little white panties and smell them. They smell of lavender and freshness, not of rot as women's panties do. Turn your attention to her lips now. They are so tiny and well formed. Two little hairless bashful buns that cling to each other. You probe them with a finger and she tries to push it away but you are stronger. A little squeeze in her neck and she is compliant again. You push the finger but can't penetrate her. You apply more strength and it goes in. She is screaming so hold her neck tighter. Why can't she understand you are just warming her up for sex? It's all foreplay, yet she is not getting wet. You realise this is going to be very difficult and take a long time yet you persevere.

It becomes pointless so you let go of her neck and stop fingering her. Carefully, you take off her clothes, her body limp and submissive to your actions. You sit back to admire her smooth and uniform skin untouched by the ravages of time and life. You tell her how much you venerate her; how you know that you are inadequate but hope she will forgive it and take you as you are. You kiss and lick her all over. You kiss her pink, flat nipples and lick her between the legs. You lose

yourself in caresses but she seems to take no pleasure from it. She just lays there, inert and unresponsive with her eyes closed. Is this too much for her? Maybe it is. It's been a long day so you ask her if she wants to rest now. Tomorrow you will wake up together so there will be no more waiting for each other. No answer and you notice she has fallen asleep already. Poor girl, you should take your own advice and take things easy at first.

You switch off the lights and cover yourselves with the duvet. You reach and pull her closer in a hug. This long awaited human contact strikes you in a shock of missing and longing. In an instant, all has changed in your life and the pain of loneliness is gone.

In your dreams that night, you hold a Sun, but not a scorching Sun. You hold a Sun that fills you, this room and your life beyond these walls with light and life. You hold a Sun that is now inside you; light comes out of every pore in your rejuvenated body. That night, you held a Sun.

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You expected to wake up with feathery kisses and the green apple smell of her hair. Instead, you wake up with harsh, violent words. Leather gloves grabbing you, punching you and throwing you about. You are surrounded by uniformed men who call you ugly names while stomping you with their heavy black boots.

You are still in your room, but the hands are carrying you out of it into the corridor. You grab the door handle and a nightstick crushes your tendons forcing you to let go. Before you are gone, you look back to the bed to look for Laurie. Kimberly is crying by her side. What happened? Laurie is not moving and Kimberly is not trying to wake her up at all. The hands pull you out and push you through the corridor. You fall down and try to get back to the room but a fist smashes into your

mouth and a red glaze covers your face. Looking at the ceiling, a swarm of black boots forms over your head and you are not awake for long after that.

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In the trial, they were not kind. They used horrible words to describe you. It was never your intention to kill Laurie. Even Kimberly must know that. You loved Laurie more than she did, after all. You just wanted to be together with the person who loved you and who loved you back. Why is that wrong?

Like so many others before, your love was too true for this cynical world. They had to crush you, smear the beauty of your love to validate the mediocrity of their own existence. Laurie's dead and that's all that matters now. Soon, you will join the rest of the prison population. You know what that scum will do to you so you will do it first. The warden left you some sheets, a stool and there are bars on the top of your cell. Coincidence? You know it was not a coincidence: this pragmatic world allows for no coincidences, except the one that brought you and Laurie together.

You wait in your cot for the night to come. You do not sleep, using these last few hours to remember Laurie before it's all washed away forever. You think of not only the good times you had together but also of the ones that never came to be. Soon they will be back for you, so make those sad, melancholic muscles move one more time, just this one more time. Tie the sheets together to form a rope and knot it to the bars, then around your neck. Stand on the stool and take a few deep breaths. Finally, when you have summoned the courage, do it. Let go of this frigid world and leap into Laurie's passionate embrace.