

## Walls

There, in the depths of a concrete cell, you rot. The walls are painted a disgusting green, so foul of a color that you find yourself sickening at the mere sight of it. The clock ticks away, interrupting the absolute silence of your home.

You are alone.

Above, a single light bulb offers what meager light it can muster, illuminating the empty corners of your studio apartment. The tiles shine in a sterile way. How many times you've scrubbed them, you've lost count. You've lost count of many things. The days, the time, perhaps even the reason you're still going.

The clock continues its incessant ticking, demanding your attention. Just to placate it, you glance at it, eyes drawn to the increments of the minutes and hours that mark your life.

Eight-twenty-two in the evening.

A sigh escapes your lungs, grown weary from all the time indoors. It felt as if the ever-present dust in your home had crept its way into your throat, sapping the moisture from your breath. Yes, your mind tells you, only a drink will alleviate this horrid desert within you.

And so, you rise from your prone position on the floor, the mattress groaning. Your apartment is tiny. The fridge is mere steps away, forever in easy reach of your gluttonous hands.

Open fridge. Bottle clinking. A sucking noise as you sip from it, the alcohol burning its way through the dust.

With an exhale, you pull it from your lips. It did not help. You are still alone. Still weary.

This realization only heightens the unbearable silence. You must stop it. You must do something to abate the quiet.

Bottle in hand, bare feet sliding across the tile, you turn on the television. Immediately, your dulled senses are assaulted, blaring sirens and vivid imagery streaming from the glass screen. It imparts an urgency, a panic. These are the end times, it proclaimed! Fear for your lives!

You shake your head, powering through the existential anxiety. The headlines read out the daily death toll, a statistic that you have been watching rise every day since the quarantine began. It was in the thousands now.

Another sip from the beer bottle. Another sigh. More ticking from the clock.

You are frustrated. You miss the gold of sunlight. You miss the feeling of cold morning air within your lungs, invigorating you. Idly, you toy with the idea of flinging the bottle at the clock, just to silence it.

You are alone.

The alcohol is streaming through your veins now, numbing the hard edges of reality. The green of the concrete seems just an inch more friendly, a smidgen more bearable. But it still does not help.

The screen changes, this time showing the rows of dying men and women, ventilators affixed to their faces. Medical professionals, clad in their armor against the plague, shuffling between the sickened. Their motions were practiced, routine, yet a single glance at their eyes showed the exhaustion they felt.

A spike of guilt wells up within you. Your conscience is chastising you. What right do you have to feel depressed so, when people are risking their very lives out there? You should be grateful for the safety of your concrete cell! Grateful for the opportunity to watch the world end, all through your TV screen!

More beer. More ticking. More death and decay, beamed directly into your eyes from the media.

The bottle is empty now, and your eyes are drawn to the clock. Eight-forty in the evening. Time moves so slowly, here.

A buzzing resounds from your pants pocket, startling you. It is your cellphone.

Fingers numbed from the buzz; you pull it clumsily from your pocket. A familiar face adorns the center of the phone, one you have longed to see in person since the quarantine began.

“Hey,” they say.

Their voice is like balm to your sore ears, so bruised from the quiet. You have not heard another human voice in months, save for the news reporters.

It takes time to remember how to form words. Your tongue had grown unagile.

“Hey,” you reply, “are you okay?”

“Yeah! Actually, I was just thinking...”

The conversation was banal, empty of substance. Simply someone close to you, checking in. I am still here, it means. I have not forgotten you.

Empty words about empty things buzzing through a cellphone speaker, yet it means the world to you. The connection that had been severed within you was, slowly, repairing itself. You place the bottle in the trash, foregoing another round. No more drink tonight.

And there, in your tiny apartment, the ticking of the clock fades to the background, and the green of the walls bothers you no longer. For the first time in months, you relax, your lungs filling with dustless air.

Because you aren't alone anymore.