

There was a must in Joe's room on the day the fires started, but as a child you think it could just be a dream and you don't feel the need to escape the way adults do. So he woke up, clutching a furry and matted brown teddy, and took his pajama self in to his parent's room. He found the hall and bathroom was a smoke filled hallway and there was no way he could get to her. He knew his father was not home, and the main concern was his mommy. So the next righteous thing for him to do was try to run some water in the kitchen and get try to put out the flames, but before he knew it there were rubbery men with lots of gear and boots sweeping him in their vice like grip, and talking him down a bunch of ladders. These ladders he had seen out the window of the apartment, but he did not wish to exit from his family in that way.

Nothing could stop Joe from going over how he could have gotten into his mother's room. He went over the scenarios many times, as if he could find a time machine to relive his mistakes. The child grew into forgetfulness and wondered if now, as a grown man, living in an apartment very close to the one where his mother burned to death, if he had just let it all just settle and push it away until the numbness of life took over. If the waking hours were just a memory to the event, and the event was really not real; this kept Joe sane enough to trudge through a life where money and food and existing led the path to the end. It was not so much that he had a saxophone in his closet and sometimes would dream about playing it; he knew he would pick it up some day, one day when the inspiration hit him like some ten ton ball of lead, between the eyes preferably so he would not have any excuses, except for the fact that because of getting hit with the heavy led, he was in the hospital and on medication.

The day was so much of the memories of the fire, that Joe had to get out and do something other than flip through the musty rotten books that line his two room apartment, his books were the biographical lot, with Teddy Roosevelt holding the key to his entertainment. He thought he was a fine man, a gentleman. The pieces of his life, such as eating fried chicken and pancakes for breakfast, gave Joe the rush of inspiration and hope, because Joe himself like to fill up on a full and meaty breakfast. It made the day go slower, with a full stomach and all, but at least you had the sleepy feeling that made life a little less sharp.

So today a Saturday, Joe was thinking about his mother, how she gave him the only feeling of kindness in his life, and realized that for all these years, 35 or so, that he never expected it from anyone and had been living his life with that element, kindness, in his life. That he was just accepting the blows as they came and the occasional hello from a stranger, taking it in, but merely on the surface, where it never went much deeper, and a person could say, ahhh, that was a good feeling. Instead he was not used to the kindness and left it wrangle itself to nothingness, never hitting his soul. This made him sad enough to go to Moe's watering hole on the corner of his street, because he knew Wanda would be the cocktail waitress, and just for an experiment, he wanted to see if he could feel what kindness was supposed to do to a person if accepted.

Place was empty, it was noon on Saturday. Dark and musty, like home. He felt the nearest seat, bar stool, with his hand, and made sure there were no holes. If he was about to feel kindness he did not want a plastic hole on his rear interfering with it. Wanda was bending over at the other end of the bar, her big rear in view in a tight pink skirt, tan stockings and some type of tennis sneakers. Her auburn bouffant was in full puff, but even from behind, her demeanor, if that were universally possible, was bright.

Since she was so darn busy, putting away cups and whatnot, Joe decided to catch her attention and say hello, not something he normally did, but this was the experiment, remember. She shot her head up with the face of a wrinkly clown, all made up so early in the day. She smiled and made a bit of a giggle, that Joe thought might be a sign of the kindness, so he smiled back and felt kind of nice. She said, "What in the hell are you doing in here? I haven't seen you in a dog's age young man!"

Joe was slow to respond, since he let the smile take him over inside and out, and said, "Oh, we'll, trying to stay away from the poison, you know what it can do to a man," and then pointed to the bottles behind the bar.

"Well, since you are in, what kind of poison would ya like, sweetheart," she said so offhandedly that it took Joe a minute to remember that that was what the kindness would sound like if he listened for it.

Joe warmed and answered while folding his hands on the mahogany wood, "I would like a bourbon on the rocks, and make it a double, since you are looking so pretty today." Wanda giggled with a strange look of surprise on her face and kept rubbing the bar down with some kind of wood cleaner, she had to stop herself, to make the drink. She looked surprised at the flattery and kept her head down while pouring the drink.

So this is what it is like, he thought, without even truly knowing that kindness was so very much more.