

Headache

by Anthony Gonzalez

“Don’t look at me like that,” a strung-out homeless woman murmurs, the muscles in her face lose contraction. “I know where you’re going, so don’t look at me like this couldn’t happen you,” her enunciations mimic the tone of a witch placing a curse on her victim.

There was a curse on this city, and I was on my way to the source, well aware of the poor bastards that better people refused to call victims. The saps who injected their honey and embraced its warmth during the cold winter nights. For those who didn’t depend on the honey for warmth, they depended on it to speak. You see, the drug was the only antidote that allowed people to speak without the pain induced by their other faces. Their other faces that grew at the back of their own heads whenever they made any noise which included speaking, laughing, crying. Without Honey, the pain of the growing face was enough to kill a man. With the drug, the face still grew but at a much slower pace and relatively painless.

A man named Alder Dia Blue (just Blue for short) introduced the drug only recently. He rose immediately to the top of the ranks within the drug community, even claimed to see God after his enduring trip from Death Valley. When he got back from the trip, he sought it fit to see every Honey transaction through with his own eyes. Whether exchanging the substance himself or idly sitting back while watching one of his men attend to business.

Now I’m walking up to Lexington street for my own high. A homeless woman mad dogging me like I just shot her mother.

“The only difference between you and me, is one of us has got a place to stay,” she says.

She was right. I did have a place to stay. I didn't need its warmth.

It was well past midnight. Bodies scattered the pavement while I dismissed that some of these people could be dead. You could always tell who was on the brink of their death from the onset of the growing face by the way they would cover up their heads with beanies. And every time, around the same time, there was a mixture of conversation of laughter, talking, and tears barely expressed with a strung-out man's diaphragm.

Inching closer to Blue, my skin began to crawl, and a light sweat covered my face. The midnight dew seemed to stick right onto my forehead. My steps began to grow reluctant to move forward. A baby's cry rang in the near distance, I heard it before I saw it. In the arms of its panicked mother who tried to solemn the baby's cry with vicious swaying from left to right. It was no use. Children were also affected by the plague that ravaged the city and they were the hardest to keep quiet. As the baby continued to cry its other face began to grow as it shrieked now in pain.

“He won't take it!” the mother exclaimed, rubbing a raw, rock-solid piece of Honey on the gums of the baby's underdeveloped teeth. “He won't swallow it! He won't stop crying! He-He,”

Just then the woman aside from her pulls a pen from a sweater pocket. She removes the cap and ponders at the point, glancing at the baby's mother.

“No,” the mother says. The frequency of the baby's cry rattles the eardrums of everyone in hearing proximity.

A consenting nod is exchanged between the two. The woman beside her rams the point of the pen through the newborn's temple, silencing it immediately. Next came the sobbing and even I became remorseful that I was on my way to see the man who let this all happen. I'd buy his Honey, but I'll also tell him what I saw here today.

Despite his status, Blue wasn't as impressive as one may think. He worked inside of a liquor store. If you didn't want honey, that wasn't a problem: he also sold alcohol, cigarettes, snacks, shoelaces. When I arrived, he was the one behind the counter selling the stuff himself. There was a man in front of me so tormented I thought his knees would give out, his burning head would explode on the counter. He didn't want any drugs, he said to Blue. He just wanted to talk. Blue looked at him disdainfully.

"Please, sir, I cannot live like this. My family cannot live like this. I miss my children's laughter and the sounds my wife made when we made love. Even on your drug they slur their words, I can't understand a thing they say," the man claws at the back of his head. His other face spread quickly.

"If you're not here to buy, the door is right there. Now stop speaking, it's bad for business," Blue replied, waving him away and nodding to the next customer.

"No! You're going to hear me!" the man now screeched in pain like the dead baby. "God, please, just let me scream without dying! Let me live without your Honey!" Then he twisted, collapsed, screaming like a transitioning werewolf fighting to remain human. His screams turned to groans, then a whimper, until at last his breathing stopped completely. Silence.

"What can I get you, young man?" Blue asks.

My heart beat heavy in my throat. If I could speak without the pain that this man just endured I still wouldn't. Instead, my body stood still, my lips quivered. Finally, I mustered up the only words I could, feeling only a small bit of agony beginning to creep up at the back of my skull. "A gram of Honey, please," I said, sliding my money on the counter.

I caught a glimpse of Blue's backside reflection on a mirror behind the counter. I saw only the upper half of him floating, his lower half completely gone. Even if I could speak about what I saw, who am I to talk?