

The Getting of Ignorance

by Alice Harper

I'd like to make a toast to the suburb that boasts the half-price cocktail. Cheap sophistication at its finest. The haven that does not discriminate against the emotionally muddled, shaken or stirred. Where town-folk flock to fit into a sea of homogeneity. So as I take my order for a Pina-Colada, (the retro cocktail is back they say) I cannot help but wonder where I left my originality. Where did I leave my idealism and my youthful pride? Perhaps someone picked it up in the waiting room at a sexual health clinic, or maybe it was during the year of skipping classes and stealing whiskey bottles that it slipped away without notice, like a cheap pair of hot-pants after Mardi Gras.

I thought I'd be a photographer, a t-shirt slogan writer, a poet, an intellect, a chardonnay socialist, a revolutionist, a board-treading protagonist cum playwright, a post-adolescent prodigy. But as I approached quarter-life I discovered that I was nothing. Nothing but a pornographer.

A trend-follower.

A piss-pot.

An internet surfer.

A champagne regurgitating mess.

A rent-forgetting tenant.

An emergency-room cum operating theatre frequenter.

A postcard-collecting hobbyist.

My ambition slipped away under the stained rug of indifference, like 2am infomercials. My stomach a drink-holder, my legs as immobile as a dilapidated shopping trolley. I strolled through University, showing up late for classes and remaining mute through discussions, until any type of discussion became nothing but elevator muzak to my ears. I was never the life of the party either, but became the person who was always there to drive for more

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alcohol. Someone valued, but no more than that of a hat-stand with car keys and a tolerance for tequila. But reliability and consistency weren't my strength either and at any given moment I could take leave with someone else's case of beer only to return on Monday morning with an explanation not worthy of a drunken debauchery boast-fest. Just a silent shrug of the shoulders, which quickly became my catch phrase when present. And an explanation from others when absent.

Years seemed to slip away like weeks, mornings became morning-afters, days were recoveries, I'll do it tomorrow's, I'll do it the night before's. I'll just do it the day after. The computer wont work.

The coffee needs fresh milk.

The printer's out of ink.

The day's out of hours.

The night is for walking.

The streets are for painting red.

I wanted to be the guy who chalked Eternity on the pavements.

I wanted to have eternity.

I wanted to be eternal.

I wanted to be immortal, and I wanted to be immortalised.

Who am I kidding, I just wanted to have eternal night-time so I could dream and then awake to start something new.

Start something fresh.

Do something new.

But it never happened. I became a dreamer, a list-maker, a planner, anything that was synonymous with procrastinator, but without the mark of acceptance.

After work drinks turned into before work drinks, during work drinks, where's the nearest pub for lunch-break drinks? If you drink with a meal it doesn't count.

If you drink alone it doesn't count.

If no one knows about it you don't have a problem.

It became a writing tool, my best book titles came out of it, my best unfinished works came out of it. My best fictionalised band names were created, song lyrics for the second chorus were brilliant, the closing line to a book about someone's life that hadn't been born were perfect. They were scribbled down on soaked napkins, on take-away menus, on beer-coasters but never had the same coherency the next day. It was as if they existed only in the split second that they were born. But one day, yes, one day, they would be fertilized and my soggy, paper-thin, coasting-along existence would come to life.

I believed entirely in the powers of hope, I really believed that faith could conquer all. It wasn't a religious experience, there was no praying, there was just a divine knowledge that it would one day happen. Whatever it was, it would just one day arrive, like the second return of Christ. I banked all my future on karma and gave to charities generously, as a mere deposit to my future wealth.

Every step I took back for others was a giant leap for myself in the near future. Every puddle I stepped in was a reminder of the future I was soon to be engulfed in. Every raindrop that fell on my head was a humbling souvenir to my tropical future.

I had it all worked out, it was as if I had discovered the Biology of Karma.

But then mid-life came to me so quickly, and I realised that I had only lived half a life. I grew despondent and saw everything in halves. In half-pints to half-price to half an hour visitor hours. Nothing was ever quite enough, but I gave up searching for more. I gave up listening to music at about the same time as pubs gave up on cover-bands. Machines became music to my ears and I was soon engulfed by a timeless world where my thoughts could orbit in my head like swivel chairs. It was too late to be eponymous. I was happy enough to be an emulator. But even then, my ideas were nothing but re-runs of re-runs. Like a high-school production of Macbeth.

How could I have begun so hopeful only to plummet so low? Was this just the cry of an addict? I didn't want to die because my epitaph would have been a vilification of an unfinished life. I continued on as sturdy as an unbreakable money-box. Shiny and full of deposits, but unable to pay-off.

An abstract thought unable to be spoken.

My sentences full of Lycra syntax.

Synthetic dreams as insignificant

as a pair of

cheap hot-pants

after Mardi Gras.

