

@Hearts

by Ivan Reyes

The space heater whirred in the lonesome room, the giant, square window bathing the room with moonlight, and Lawrence sat on the naked particle board and ruminated upon the vast importance and significance that this very room would lend his mega-empire of a business which started off as a vendor of cheap, high-resistance ink toner cartridges. He fell asleep.

He awoke. The space heater still turning from side to side. He stretched. He paced the room, trying to electrocute his imagination. He disliked all of the designer's ideas as to what should be the thematic thread of this room, which would become his office. Founder and creative president.

The first design the designer brought to him was far too aristocratic, with all the furniture bearing gilt lining and a shimmering chandelier. Though he did enjoy immensely and deeply the idea of gilded objects in his office. Perhaps more restraint was necessary.

The second design idea was to make it look like a home, however, it was obvious, aching so to Lawrence, that this idea carried the air of an unbearable pompous self indulgence, as if to say "Lay a path of roses for me." Although, feeling at home did sound decadent and attractive. Also, it's truly impossible to recreate that "homey" feeling outside of the home. It would be a shell. It would leave one feeling devoid of a soul. The crushing realities of life would become amplified and one would become a mannequin, a smiling fool, a stumbling corpse, a car without gas.

The third idea, the worst of all, was something akin to making his office resemble some corner of a modern American mall. Obviously he was straining his designer far too thin, so he halted everything, and told the young spry designer that he'd contact him when he had

an actual actionable idea to bring to him, and an idea of substance, and he apologized for wasting his energies thus far. The designer did not mind. He bid himself adieu.

He had brought a change of clothes in his gym bag, as he planned on going to the gym, at some point, and went down fifty floors to look for a place to get himself coffee. In his gym clothes he looked like perhaps a carpenter or tiler. He found a medium sized coffee stand, "Express Minute." The sign displayed the typeface bursting out of a broken bean with so much vigor that it made a fireball in front of itself. Lawrence looked at it and smiled. He takes a cup of black coffee and proceeds to a bench overlooking a man-made lake where he sits and ruminates and clears his mind of all things even remotely related to what might be an office and a pair of joggers pass him by and he smiled at them and although they were stoic he sensed some inner warmth within them which he decided was to be directed towards his calm and strong presence, and he lifted one leg over the other and looked at the sky, then looked to the lake, which mirrored the opposite side of the lake where folks basked in the temperate weather. He takes a sip of his coffee. It's flavor is good. It fills him with confidence. Yet, he cages the confidence, knowing that he is a strategic type who will release it later, in some crucial moment -- and this moment's confidence will fuel some majestic moment at some future time. He takes another sip. The flavor is good, his body is telling him. His molecules rejoice in it's strong splendor. He takes a third sip. The flavor is good, his body aches with this message, the flavor is good.

Back at the office, he looks down at the coffee stand. He sees the young lady throw a series of tarps over it. He speaks to himself: his younger self, around 25 years younger, is a ghost in his office. Although the ghost is of his younger self he appears more tired, he has not learned to measure the tide of disappointments and cease resistance to them, to let the disappointments do their work, to sit aside while they cause chaos and destruction and to jump back into

action at just the right moment, right before everything crumbles. He is also, at the same time, more handsome and less handsome. The hunger burns in his eyes too strongly. They are threatening. The ghost is tense, there is a spring trap within him somewhere waiting to explode and capture someone. If they had a conversation, Lawrence thinks, it would go this way (although no conversation takes place in actuality -- in actuality they stalk each other in silence; however, this is how it would go).

"You're trite," the ghost says.

"I know. It's good to be trite."

"It makes you a fool."

"Then I'm glad. It means I'm a human."

"You're weak."

"There's no need to be strong, Napoleon was strong."

"Everyone will laugh at you."

"I will join them."

"You don't deserve your Mercedes."

"Then I'll get a BMW."

"You've embarrassed your family."

"With?"

"You shall die alone."

"In peace, then?"

"Please, forgive me."

"I will never forgive you. We rest when we die. I have destroyed you by sheer tyranny of will. And yet, here you are. But you are not so bad."

"I don't want to die alone."

"If I am strong we will die and be mourned by thousands."

"I am so confused."

"I'm righting that."

Lawrence picked up his cell phone and dialed out a message, a text to that young, creative designer. Hugh.

"I have an idea. I'll email you with the details."

Hugh responded with a text, containing a thumbs up emoji and that is all. Emojis bothered Lawrence.

In the ensuing weeks the construction team worked on the office until it was finished and then the entire building became populated with a workforce of engineers, and designers, and artists, and lawyers, and people who could manage groups of other people, and people who could inspire the creative fire within special individuals, and secretaries, and clerks. The youngest members were the most intimidated. The older members tried to mentor them. They understood something special about the creative soul. It needed space to grow in to. And it needed to know when to make new space once the old space was filled. Of course, this is all metaphorical, yet it was literal, too. But the young confused the old. And the old

confused the young. Lawrence reveled in this. He was using flint to create fire.

"You don't understand!" the old would say to the young, and the young would say to the older members in turn.

What mattered was Lawrence. He was the beholder of the glorious vision that would light the path. He needed his team as a doctor needs his tools. So that's why he turned his office into the new, improved, larger indoor "Express Minute." His actual office occupied a small corner in this enormous room. It was like a temple for coffee. Lawrence Archibald Arnold, the door to his office read in gilded letters. All the coffee was free. He paid the owner at the end of each day.

On to more important matters. Lawrence could work knowing that outside his door his team was releasing their demons via a hot cup of coffee. He had an idea for a series of office toys. Something for his workforce. But also something for the average consumer. Small figurines connected aesthetically. Some would be limited edition, limited run. Something to make office life more bearable. Targeted to you. For you. Just for you. We thought of you. You're special. You deserve -- he looked out the window and wondered what caused all the pain in the world and looked at his pencil -- he'd use it, perhaps to draw a vaccine.

