

Much Ado About Exploring.

by Rhys Nixon

John was sitting at his computer one night after work, when he read an article linked to him by a friend. The article was about Urban Exploration, people who visit abandoned buildings, old subway lines, and other structures. John thought the idea of exploring man made things, instead of natural things, was very interesting. John decided that he would explore something that night. He knew that there was an abandoned house only a half hour way away from where he lived, and it would give him some experience in exploring. He installed a flashlight app on his phone and waited until 1am, to be sure that nobody would be around.

John always thought things like graffiti art was cool, and he liked the whole hip hop scene in general, but he never thought about being an urban explorer. He pictured himself dressed in combat boots, an olive green military jacket, and some sort of brown pants, speaking with the locals about different spots of interest. He could even take photos with his phone and upload them online, possibly becoming a huge sensation. People would want to go with him on his explorations, but due to his reclusive nature, nobody would know who he was. He would probably keep his job at the supermarket, just to throw people off the trail. He imagined himself to be a sort of an urban hero. An Indiana Jones who listened to Wu Tang Clan.

By 1am John was feeling sleepy, but was still determined to start exploring. He left his tiny, bottom floor apartment, and walked down the quiet echoing road in the direction he thought the house was in. Way in the distance he could hear a large truck, possibly carrying some sort of produce or something, but otherwise it was absolutely quiet. The houses all appeared twice as tall as usual, and the

streetlights were long and bright.

As he walked along the road, the street lights reminded him that he should have probably gotten a hold of one of those geologist helmets, the ones with the torch on top, so that he could have both hands free while exploring. He quickly felt like a complete amateur for forgetting this one crucial aspect of exploration, and now the idea of only having one free hand made him think that he won't be able to explore to his full potential. He also realised that he should have probably researched the house he was going to earlier, just in case it was still in use, or still there.

It took John an hour to walk to the house, but as soon as he saw it he knew it was worth the walk. The house was completely run down, abandoned years ago, and it was starting to fall apart. The white picket fence was mostly flat on the ground, with hardly any white paint left on it, and the only thing still standing was the chain-link gate, with a padlock still on it, that had been cemented into the ground. The grass was up to his waist in height, and there were many trees and bushes scattered about the yard, which almost covered the house.

The house was made of red bricks that had faded to a dark, deep, brownish colour. At the bottom of one of the corners of the house the bricks looked like they were cracking and buckling under the pressure, probably because the foundation was completely rotten and falling apart from underneath it. There were piles of bricks scattered around the front door, which had brick sized holes in it. John could barely see the roof, as the trees in the yard had started growing over the house. John hesitated for a minute, took a deep breath, and walked straight up to the door and kicked it open. He instantly felt embarrassed about kicking the door open.

The first thing he noticed when he walked through the doorway was the smell. It smelt like somebody had decided to do the laundry,

but after organising their clothes they decided to leave them in a corner, forgetting them. The room appeared to be the old living room, the carpet had indents that looked like those left by a heavy couch, a coffee table, a recliner, and a TV set. The walls were a dirty white, with tacky wallpaper covered in roses rotting and falling down the walls and onto the floor. The carpet was hard and grey, and felt more like gravel that had been covered in cement. The curtains were a pale peach colour, and were covered in dust, which collected heavily on the bottom of them.

He made his way through the stale air, filled with dust particles, and headed to what he thought was the kitchen. The house only had a few rooms, and the living room was attached to the kitchen, which was separated by a brown, heavy looking door. The door was covered in different graffiti tags, which he figured were some sort of urban explorer identification to let other explorers know what is in the next room, or even possibly a warning. John made a mental note to look up 'urban explorer graffiti language' on the internet when he got home. He slowly approached the door and tried to open it as quietly as he could, heeding the warnings of the graffiti.

As he pushed on the door it let out a loud, slow creaking sound. It seemed to echo in the kitchen, and travel all around the small house. There was a sound of glass shattering, and he burst through the door to see what caused it. He couldn't see anything, so he took out his phone and opened the flash light app, and saw that the kitchen window had been smashed, leaving pieces of glass on the floor, and a splash of blood on the windowsill. He cursed to himself, realising that it was another urban explorer who had probably thought that he was the police. He also noted to look up 'secret urban explorer signals' when he got home, in case there was a secret knock you had to do before entering a room to let other urban explorers know that you were a friend.

The kitchen had the typical black and white tiling, except the white tiles were stained a dark, reddish brown, some parts more so than others, and the walls also had splashes of the dirty, reddish brown as well, which contrasted with the flaking white paint, which exposed the wood paneling behind it. There were also a unit of cupboards installed in the wall, but all of the doors had been ripped off and where on the floor, and parts of the cupboards were sagging, looking like they could fall off at any minute. John tried to turn the handle for the aging kitchen sink, but it was frozen shut, completely encased in orange, white, and green rust. He also noticed that the only cutlery still left behind were soup spoons, which were all over the floor and in the sink.

As he looked around the room, John noticed that there appeared to be a lot of medical equipment lying about; needles, little empty vials, gauze, and an empty first aid kit were all strewn about the kitchen. He thought that the previous tenants, before abandoning the place, might have been doctors, or veterinarians, but they mustn't have been very successful, since they had to abandon their own home. He also realized that he should have brought a pair of gloves to protect his hands, and decided he would buy some tomorrow.

He picked up one of the vials and tried to read the dirty label. It said 'MORPHINE DIACETATE', but somebody had written 'HORSE' over it with a sharpie. He knew his suspicions were true, that the previous owners were indeed veterinarians, and that this must have been some sort of medicine to be used on horses. He noticed that all of the vials had HORSE written on the front of them. John realised they must have specialized in horses, driving out to the country to one of the many stables to perform checkups. He did wonder why they had to abandon the house though, as stables usually have a lot of money.

Suddenly, John heard a group of people burst through the front door. He wished now more than ever that he knew the secret knock of the urban explorers. Before he could say anything, the kitchen door was also kicked down, followed by a group of men shouting with bright flashlights.

“Get on the ground!” They kept shouting at him, “don't move! Raise your hands in the air and get on the ground!”

“It's okay, I'm one of you!” John said, pointing at the group of shouting lights.

“He's got a firearm! Take him out!” One of the men shouted, as the group of them tackled John to the ground, tasing him.

“W-why?” He said, before passing out.

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When John woke up he was in the police stations holding cell. The walls and the floor looked exactly the same, and the barred wall and door looked exactly like the ones John had seen on TV. There was even a stainless steel toilet next to the bed he was lying on. The room was completely empty, luckily, and it was completely silent. Outside the barred wall was a desk and chair, with a small lamp on it, and a stack of paperwork. Other than that, the room was completely empty.

A door across from where he was sitting opened up, and a police officer walked in carrying a clipboard. The officer glanced at John as he walked in, and sat down at the desk, which was facing the cell. He flicked through the rest of the paperwork, and the sound of paper rustling echoed through the cell, and started making John

very nervous. 'All this for an urban explorer?' He thought to himself.

"Did you need a glass of water?" The officer asked John.

"No, no I'm okay." John said.

"Okay. I just have some questions I would like to ask you about the incident."

"Okay, whatever you want."

"Great. Firstly, what were you doing in the abandoned building last night?"

"I was exploring."

"Exploring?"

"Yes, I'm an amateur urban explorer."

"Right. You were exploring an abandoned house?"

"Well, it was my first time, and I wanted an easy place to practice exploring."

"Okay. You do realise that the house was full of drug paraphernalia, right?"

"Oh, yes, I saw the horse medicine in the kitchen."

"Horse medicine?"

"The previous owners were veterinarians."

"What makes you think that veterinarians occupied the building?"

"The vials were all labeled with the word HORSE, so I figured it was their way of organizing their medicine, and that they must have specialized in horses."

"I'm sorry to break it to you, son, but that wasn't horse medicine. Horse is the street name for heroin. You were found in an active drug house."

"A what?"

"A drug house. We had reason to believe that there was going to be a meeting between a dealer and his client, and we have reason to believe that you are one of the two."

"That explains the glass then."

"The what?"

“Oh, when I entered the living room and approached the kitchen, there was a sound of shattering glass. The kitchen window had been smashed, leaving blood and glass everywhere.”

“I see.”

“Yes, so that must have been the dealer. You must have seen the blood, right? And the glass?”

“Yes, we did.”

“So, the vials weren't for horse medicine?”

The officer looked John in the eye, and let out a loud sigh. He realised that this was not the dealer that he had hoped for, and that he was just some idiot. He stood up, walked over to John and opened the cell door.

“That's enough questioning for today, you're free to go. Follow me to the reception desk and we'll have you sorted out.”

John was elated, but also incredibly embarrassed. He tried not to look at the officer in the eye as he led him down the narrow, grey corridor towards the front desk.

The receptionist was sitting at a very tall, dark coloured wooden desk, covered in a lot of paperwork, and had a large computer screen in front of her. The desk was right in front of the huge glass doors that led outside, which brought in the sunlight. The light reflected off the marble floor and bright white walls, which made the whole room feel like it was glowing.

“Tracey, could you process the horse whisperer over here. Here's the paperwork.” The officer said to the receptionist.

“Oh course.” She said, without looking up.

“Horse whisperer?” John said to the officer.

“Stay out of trouble, John. Leave the exploration to the experts.” The officer said.

The receptionist typed up a few forms, and within fifteen minute, John was free to go. As he stepped outside, the light hurt his eyes, and it took him a minute to adjust. He sat down at a nearby bench and tried to figure out where he was. He got out his phone, which the receptionist had given back to him, and looked up the nearest bus and it's schedule. He remembered that he wanted to look up if

the graffiti meant anything, or if there was some sort of secret code that urban explorers used, and he looked them up on his phone as he walked to the nearest bus stop.

