Half Awake in a Fake Empire

by Sean Brown

Cooking dinner for one in a city that isn't my home. A beautiful city that I'm slowly losing interest in, just as I become a local. In a tiny apartment set in the most realistic part of town, I've turned the music up loud to drown out my thoughts. I've forgotten how much I love this album. How sad and fun at the same time, how much it reminds me of her. How she used to dance and smile, a little kid showing off, and how much I enjoyed her then, how much I enjoyed the idea of us.

Chopping vegetables, trying to eat healthy between ridiculous party weekends. Taking a stab at being an adult. Is this what my parents did? Open the fridge and stare at the beer for a full 15 or 20 seconds. Some good local micro brews bought the week before, and yet somehow didn't seem like a good idea today. My hangover lasted two full days last time, and though I knew that it couldn't be healthy, I didn't really care. Hangovers are proof of the experience, the megalomania. She told me I drank too much, and I knew she was right, but I didn't really care.

I'd never really thought about drinking in those days, the ones when we'd made our dinners together. Back when we were poor and happy. Before we'd started fighting about silly things, learning ugly jealousies together. Life is better now without the pain, and yet somehow incomplete. In this tiny kitchen, in this foreign city, somehow I missed her. I missed hearing about her day, and smiling when she complained about professors, friends, life. Smiling when I listened to her plans, how she was going to make it big, how we both were. I missed coming up behind her, hands on hips, soft kisses on her neck, and how she would sigh and lean into me.

She was never mine, and I knew it even on the best of days, and yet sometimes I could trick myself into thinking she was. We were

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so young, so brave and idealistic. I never knew why she picked me; I just did my best to never disappoint her. And when I did, I knew it hurt me as much as her. So much passion in living for the moment and letting the future take care of itself. So naïve in thinking it would last.

I put a little butter in with the rice not realizing I still did it that way because that's how she liked it. That's what she'd taught me. She's a thousand miles away and she's still in this kitchen. After all these years, I'm still cooking rice for her. I'd cook for her tonight; pour her a glass of wine while I chopped our veggies. We'd eat healthy because that's what she liked, and I just liked her.

We expected something, something better than before. We used to stare at the stars on the tennis court outside her dorm and dream together, just be together. The world was ours, in it together, back before we got so silly and grown up, just half awake in a fake empire.