

Philia, For K.

Memoir: a narrative on a specific, important, or pivotal moment in one's life. For weeks, Devin skipped over the feat, for what in his life was worthy of such a title? He was mauled by a dog as a toddler; is that good enough? He's run, past midnight, on Grand River from gunshots that may or may not have been directed at him and his brother, K., how about that? Or, this'll surely do, he's hidden in a dark room from men who would've slept sound as a babe at the sight of yellow caution tape following their unwelcome visit. Then, for too long, he's been set on the notion of any of these things as being too bland for a narrative—where's the drama, the scandal, the twist? As if idly watching while blood dried on his brother's skin in the hospital trauma wing wasn't dramatic enough—memoir enough. And there, next to him, smelling backwoods and dead skin, as he wrote this, he realized just how many times K. has evaded death. Ergo, as in the words of Franz Kafka, "a book must be the ax for the frozen sea inside of us." Presently, it was this, this dodging Death dance his brother had memorized, which finally broke the sea inside of him.

Before, Devin would've deemed the darkness of the late witching hour a fallacy, but past three o'clock, he received the call. He didn't think much of it; his father just forgot something or pocket-dialed him—he almost missed the call. How would that scenario have turned out, he wonders?

"Hello? Where you at?" he asked his father.

"Da hospital, with your brother," said his father.

His chest tightened and the seconds expanded. There had to have been a logical explanation: sprained limb, maybe. K. was highly asthmatic; perhaps he couldn't get to an inhaler in time. Then again, it was past three in the morning, and many times before Death called him in the dead of this hour. He asked if K. was okay.

“He was shot, 8 times, they in there working on him now”, his father said.

Devin jolted out of bed and found the nearest items of clothing. He frantically paced the room, looking for the essentials: his keys and wallet (I.D. verification may be needed). He paced while thinking to himself, running through every possible scenario—both otherworldly and natural.

“You don’t have to come up here.”

Devin was appalled at this. Why wouldn’t he go? Had his brother frolicked with Death so much as to where a near-death experience was unimportant as a forgotten cousin’s baby shower?

“What you mean? That’s my brother”, Devin replied.

His father went on, giving him the details he had on hand—they weren’t much, only empty statements which led to questions neither party had the answer to. He was perplexed: his father’s voice didn’t falter (as it had months before, after he received the call his friend had been kissed by Death—and yet, this was his son). The steadiness of his father made him question everything—was this another dream of his, so colored with the paint strokes of reality that the only thing needed was a stark shift in setting? Then, he was dreaming. But nothing changed—as it typically did the moment he was aware of his R.E.M. state. He quarreled with this—how could he be so calm?

The teen rushed out of his house, and though it was late, he was taken aback at the stillness of his neighborhood. Only the light to his house was on. He felt bare—as if everyone was afraid to address his inner turmoil, as he himself was afraid to address his inner turmoil. He had not dressed properly, and he shook slightly as a twinkle settled in his throat. Floating on the asphalt, he realized how oblivious the city was to his current state. Parties, platonic pollution, pauper prostitution—and there he was, racing to see his brother before Death received his invitation.

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Sinai-Grace Hospital. Presented by the Detroit Medical Center. In some twisted fashion, Devin instantly knew which hospital K. was being treated at. It was as if the allure of a graveyard masked as a hospital pulled him in—and like a bee to nectar, he couldn't resist. To his family's dismay, it was always somehow the closest hospital to familiar near-death experiences. He pulled into the lot and was struck with déjà vu. The image, every minute detail, was etched into his mind to the point where if God had dropped a canvas, painting materials, and talent, he could render a portrait.

On his way there, he called his mother, she didn't answer. He called his younger sister, she didn't answer. At last, his older sister, N., picked up. She didn't believe him at first—they all were aware of the things K. was into (and many times before, news similar to this was exchanged), but something about this night was different. Coming from Devin somehow made it much too valid as in the past, they were usually the ones to give him the news. He waited for N. in the parking lot—their mom not far behind, but in a frantic state, which made her impossible to level with.

The building itself seemed young for its age. Devin's whole life, he'd heard the horror stories of the place, and yet, before him once more, it seemed younger than him. It was designed as if the architecture team responsible for it had other ideas for the building: wings led to other sectors, which led to long hallways you weren't sure you'd return from. The aroma of the vicinity was peculiarly of the past and future—similar to geriatrics: specifically, ones who'd been neglected in nursing homes, and as a result, the unpleasant scent of piss stuck to them as white on rice after having collected decades of bed sores and halitosis. The future: he'd one day have to smell like that. The past: senior citizen care was a field his mother, sister, aunts, and friends were all deep into. They'd come home with many stories about the old white men who'd hit on them (which they had to ignore), the old white lady who'd spit on them (which they also had to ignore), or the old families (not in age, but in the

sense that they were forgotten). When he couldn't hear his mother or N. dragging their feet in late past three, he'd smell them, the same piss smell emanating from the hospital.

Its position in the community was well established. It sat comfortably near two schools: a high school and a K-8 specializing in foreign languages. Over time, it began to noticeably shift from an establishment solely meant to treat medical occurrences to a place for the homeless to sleep, for the addicted to get clean for a week, for the crazed to feel sanely medicated for an evening. He had heard stories of homeless people who purposely inflicted injuries on themselves for food, water, shelter, attention—and every time his paths crossed with that of Sinai-Grace, he knew the same tales were occurring in real time there. For Devin, the place was a legacy graveyard: the hospital his grandfather died in, the soil a family friend died on, the earth his mother and brother-in-law could have very well been buried under.

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Devin emptied his pockets in the car—which made him wonder what had occurred for a hospital to require a metal detector. This one he knew the answer to: years of parking lot family brawls, patient threats to hospital staff over patient neglect, and the simple reality of the area surrounding the facility. Inside the emergency room—pigs clustered together for the slaughter. It was a Saturday morning (Friday night, city speaking), and he'd expect a crowd, but not like the one that was before him. The emergency room was lined with window walls to the right, overlooking the parking lot. The bottoms were dusty, and the glass itself was cold to the touch. The creme sheet vinyl flooring was glossy, and you could see your step before you took it—Jesus walking on water. The entrance was cut off by perverse security guards, both of whom were armed.

“For K. T.?” the male guard asked Devin's oldest brother, P.

“Yeah,” P. responded.

“He’s got too many people already.”

“What, so I can’t come in?” P. asked, conflicted—his face was twisted, and his tongue moved in a way Devin hadn’t heard since his childhood. Devin expected this from Sinai-Grace. Though he’s never before been approached with this rule from the security enforcement, it wasn’t out of fashion. Through their despondent despair, bystanders watched as if to hinder addressing their own problems. N. stepped in.

“When y’all start doing that?” she asked, a slight passive-aggressive laugh followed towards the end of her statements. “We been coming here for years, and we have never had this problem.”

“Ma’am,” the lady guard addressed N., “that’s how we’re running things tonight.”

“Why? There’s seats open, y’all got all these other families in here?”

N. and the lady guard went back and forth, their squabble audibly crescendoing. N. claimed the guard didn’t care about her job (as none of them do at Sinai-Grace, according to her).

“What’s your name?” N. asked.

The lady handed N. Her ID—N. took a picture of it, and wrote down her verification number, then threatened to report her later.

It was late, but the adrenaline kept Devin going. After his father and aunt left his brother’s side, he was finally given a chance to see him, his sister N. accompanying him. He tried to imagine the horror, although this wasn’t the first time his brother was caught frolicking with Death; this was the closest he’d ever gotten to receiving Death’s tender kiss. He attempted to prepare himself for the sight: what does someone who’s been shot 8 times look like? But this wasn’t just someone; it was his brother. Ergo, the more accurate question was: what does a big head, high yellow, doe-eyed, toddler shot 8 times look like; what does a hefty football player with an infectious smile look like maimed 8 times;

what does a brother look like hung 8 times? No amount of imagination would have prepared him for the sight.

N. broke down in tears after her first glance at K. His body was bare; presumably, the hospital staff had to cut his clothes to quickly treat his wounds. His torso, arm, and head were covered in blood. His mouth, specifically, was soaked with hemoglobin—most of it already dried on his chapped lips. A bullet wound was gushing on his chin as K. sat flat in the bed, seemingly unable to move properly. N. rushed to K.'s side and tried to hold his hand—but his left arm was out of commission, so she went over to the other side. Devin placed his hand in K.'s, and after 18 years of maturing together, of fighting each other, of laughing at (and with) each other, of loving each other, he finally heard his voice. It was low and the kind of slurred tone where, in the movies, they'd tell the injured patient not to speak. But Devin wanted him to, as if to reassure himself he was okay, that'd he make it. He'd thought a lot about Death and accepted much about him, but he still wasn't ready to introduce him to his family. Death was the white friend you were cool with but never brought home—and not for obvious, dated reasons, but due to the fact that they'd simply confuse more than understand each other. He'd always thought being a translator was stressful, but translating cultures was much more taxing.

Devin wasn't sure if he'd ever be ready for Death to meet his family: he'd always tell his parents that they'd outlive him. Some say a parent should never have to bury their child; he knew this to be true, but equally leveled with the notion that a child should never have to bury their parent. So who goes first...

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The room, open as a funeral—by a flicker of late July Newport fate, folks you don't know from Adam show up. That's how Devin felt in the trauma section at Sinai-Grace, where an invisible aura was the only thing differentiating those who were pulling every ounce of faith they had together (from

recounting the first prayer they memorized to begging for their last sin to be absolved) from those who were counting the seconds until it was time to punch the clock. There weren't any chairs or a television: it was clear this room wasn't for waiting, resting, or even healing—just quick treatment. As if, they knew you'd be dead or moved out for the next victim to make their way in before you could even think about flicking a television on. The line on the EKG machine was flat as an uncharted tightrope. This upset Devin. Was it a harrowing gesture of foreshadowing? Was the machine even powered on and connected to K. properly?

No amount of narrative exposition in the world can make an audience level with the feeling of hearing your brother say your name in darkness as he's walking away from the light. Only those unfortunate enough to relate to this wretched state of affairs could grasp the warming sting of the ardor axe puncturing their feeble, melting waters.

“Devin,” K. said. The feeling felt like every floral July meadow on the planet. It felt like your mother and warm soup in a frigid winter, and Rocky reaching the top of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and your high school graduation and Pinocchio reaching Geppetto from Monstro's throat and K. The very embodiment of him, his jokes and his playful manner, and his face, both aged and immature. To know, even through the freight of his slain eyelids, he could decipher the hand within his. He could feel Devin's presence. The universal presence of brotherly love wrapped up in a name. For in all of Devin's life, K. was protecting him; in his lowest moment, he called his name. Words could go on and blend into psalms of tomorrow and forgotten tales for bards to sing around future fires while strumming the strings of a hereafter instrument, and there'd still not be enough syllables conjoined to express the feeling.

Devin found himself judging the hospital's negligence for K.: he was in excruciating pain, his gauze was as bloodied as Friday the 13th, and he had to have been thirsty—blood can't be refreshing,

can it (if it's truly thicker than water?). Then, he halted his internal complaints and took a second to simply thank God, for his brother was alive. Devin never stopped thanking, and he never stopped holding K.'s hand—as he did before: defending him from their parents, cooking for him (never let K. touch your stove or half an hour later you won't have a house to come home to, let alone a stove), keeping up with his appointments, saving rainy day money for him.

Weeks later, the scars still haven't healed, and the weight around his cardiovascular system hasn't gotten any lighter to live with. In the kitchen, Devin could spot the scar on his brother's arm as he leaned shirtless against the kitchen sink. It reminded him of something he feared, a hazing ritual of sorts. That in order to be a man, to be aged in general, life had to initiate you in the worst way possible. Said initiation hadn't come for Devin's body yet, but maybe it already claimed his soul—since all the witching hours when his brother evaded Death, Devin's escaped him too. For what is life without the *philia* he'd known his whole life—without K.?