

The Procrastinator

By Sean Treppedi

WHY WE LIKE IT: *You wouldn't think watching the clock and waiting for inspiration (and how many writers can relate to that?) is promising grounds for good fiction but we think this wondrously adept story will turn you around. The entire narrative is descriptive, third person POV, there is no dialogue—not even interior monologue. To keep something like this fresh and alive--instead of putting the reader to sleep--is a daunting task only the most self-assured and technically astute writer can hope to challenge. Pedagogues insist that you have to 'show, not tell', but sometimes telling is the only way to tell it and in that regard 'The Procrastinator' stands as one of the best examples of its kind we've read in a while. The prose is limpid, nuanced and radiant and the glory of language painting word pictures is everywhere.*

He remembered the neighborhood trampoline that served as a rendezvous for every child on the block—jumping worry-free until the sun set behind the houses.

And this breathtaking passage:

His mind continued to drift to other things he'd rather be doing, like feeling the creamy *whoosh* off the face of his golf club as it fired into orbit across the acres of pristine green terrain, or tasting the tantalizing refreshment of the first sip from his favorite IPA on an early Friday evening after a long week. He would then feel the padding of his thumb graze across the jagged edge of his index finger's nail and there he would discover the next oral fixation to satisfy.

Five stars.

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Its looming figure lurked in the corner as he deflected its penetrating judgement in his peripheral. Its back catty-corned next to the window—scanning the room with its towering frame and glass face while ticking away each waning moment of all the life that passed it. It was his mortal enemy. He never could forge a stable relationship with it—even when he approached it with optimism, he fell victim to its ruse. Each of its *ticks* weighed heavier on his brain as the text cursor blinked in unison while he gazed into the empty white abyss. The glowing screen bounced off his utterly frozen face. His teeth lodged themselves deeper into the yellow coating of the Ticonderoga No. 2—tasting soggier each bite. But, his oral fixation was the only thing keeping his mind occupied while he lounged back on the beige upholstery amongst the colonial decor of the living room. He sat up to adjust his position from the progressively exaggerated slouch he was sinking into and crossed his left leg onto his right knee. His rested foot wiggled along to the rhythm of the song repeatedly playing over in his head. Each time he had an inkling of an idea, the song would wash back over his brain like waves crashing ashore over words written in the sand. It was only the chorus too—the same repetitious words hypnotizing himself into a stunned state of incapacitation all while his enemy in the corner gained ground with each additional *tick*. The task hovered over him like a rain cloud; it was something he knew he had to face eventually, but with the plentitude of *ticks* he thought he once had, he figured he had a more than sufficient span to execute it comfortably. But, now ‘comfort’ had evolved into stress like the stages of a flower’s life from spring to winter—beginning with so much effervescence before dwindling to

brown. He awaited windows of inspiration to appear, but nothing arose for him to jump into. It was like rubbing wet sticks together for a campfire—an agonizing frustration. A frustration that had beat him to his knees often enough in the past, but the scars never proved as lessons—a conundrum where hindsight could not shed light on foresight.

Even when he knew it was right to address his task with week's worth of *ticks* ahead of him, there was always a deep-seated restriction to perform with the knowledge of these *ticks* at hand, rendering him unable. Each one that would pass with weeks to spare before the final *tick* would reassure him of plentiful opportunity like a seductive whisper in his ear manipulating him to delay—all until that final *tick* was within plain sight. Every time he questions himself in this decision to dance with his enemy and every time he fails to provide himself with an answer—it is the ultimate ruse he couldn't not help but fall victim for. His counterpart trimmed with intricate workmanship and a rich polyurethane finish nestled in the corner would boom in hysteria each hour that passed, mocking him in song that rang throughout the house, rattling him with the same face-slapping effect each outburst. It had felt as if he was entangled in some kind of sticky spiderweb he couldn't escape no matter how hard he attempted to rip free. His mind continued to drift to other things he'd rather be doing, like feeling the creamy *whoosh* off the face of his golf club as it fired into orbit across the acres of pristine green terrain, or tasting the tantalizing refreshment of the first sip from his favorite IPA on an early Friday evening after a long week. He would then feel the padding of his thumb graze across the jagged edge of his index finger's nail and there he would discover the next oral fixation to satisfy. These fantasies and distractions were all part of the great ruse; merely obstacles to stall him from crossing the tape at the finish line. He pushed his fingers beneath his wire-rimmed glasses and kneaded his face up and down to ease his tensivity before readjusting his frames to take notice of the portraits

above the mantle place. The expressions of these faces were ones that had become a staple in the room's ornamentation over the years; ones that had been imprinted into his memory throughout the long period in which they stood perched there. But, those very same expressions looked at him with different thoughts in their eyes than ever before—almost as if they were all in on the great ruse of his antique counterpart standing adjacent from them in the corner. And in between their adjacency? The silhouette of his figure projecting off the wall from the night light, joining the cast of the portraits and the pendulum-swinging corner dweller in glaring at him in shame.

He set aside his untapped keys and stepped outside onto the front stoop in search for a lifeline to cast itself at him in his drowning efforts. Upon pinching the precisely-rolled paper packed with cannabis between his lips, he held the flame to the end of it. The smoke ejected from his nostrils and wafted about in the atmosphere. One thing that he held a great appreciation for was the soothing environment of the night in his comfortable suburbia. The crickets chirped in harmony while bugs alike would chime in spontaneously amongst the lush truffles of green grass, bushes, and trees that formed tunnels over the street. The warm air felt so inviting to him in the night while he gazed across the street to admire the meticulously-groomed front lawns and enchanting light fixtures of his neighbors. His mouth, wrapped around the burning calmative, formed a sudden smirk while he puffed another exhale into the air thinking about all of the cherished memories he had in this neighborhood. He recalled racing down the declining street feeling the gravel vibrate beneath him on his skateboard, launching baseballs over the house to his brother, and him and the neighbor kids' water gun platoon. He remembered the neighborhood trampoline that served as a rendezvous for every child on the block—jumping worry-free until the sun set behind the houses. He remembered chasing after lightning bugs with jars every first night of June, covering every square-inch of driveway in chalk murals, sinking two feet upon the

first step outside on a snow day, and hearing the sugar-craving jingle ricochet from the ice cream man's truck throughout the neighborhood as him and his companions deployed into a predatory chase. The memories began to cave in like a building built upon nothing but nostalgia had its foundation beams kicked in as a tear splashed onto his bottom lip and he licked away the salty moisture. The childhood whimsy led to the naive thrills of being a teenager—sneaking out of the house for parties, the rush of driving for the first time, and the excitement of returning home after the first kiss. This view from the stoop outlined the spark notes of his coming of age. As he blew the last puff left, it was that moment that it dawned on him—the window had opened. Alas, he felt a pull on the fishing rod that was his desperate search for an idea and he frantically trotted inside to capitalize.

The keys *clicked* and *clacked* to the rhythm of documenting this epiphany. He was in a rat race with the hands of his lurking corner foe. Afraid to know how many *ticks* he had left to be afforded at this stage, he didn't bother to pay it any more attention; he just bared down as his fingers tried to keep pace with his rapidly developing thoughts. His heart palpitated like the beat of an African drum; the contours of the vein atop his forehead grew more defined; adrenaline that felt like hot gas stirred in his throat and spewed through his nostrils. It was any moment his foe would seize his stimulus away with a final outburst of its chiming anthem of mockery, marking the last *tick*. His fingers muttered feverishly in this rush of composition that he yearned to access at will. Riding the invigorating focus with enthusiasm, he vomited his most colorful thoughts onto the page just as he-

END

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The Procrastinator* was written as a tribute to the deception of time and the price of taking it for granted. Aside from time, its themes are based around personification, denial, and the commonalities of the human condition. I was influenced to write this story upon reflecting on various personal experiences and perceptions of my own. It explores issues of anxiety and the subconscious, while featuring an unreliable narrator who sympathizes with a flawed protagonist. The duration takes place within an hour, but is depicted to be an eternity. Stylistically, I wanted to create a simple narrative that paces itself with a lot of visual imagery and builds ominously.

AUTHOR'S BIO: As a copywriter with a B.A. in Print Journalism, the art of storytelling and its many platforms is a craft that Sean has always valued most. Sean is a native of Northern New Jersey and in 2015, he was a winner of the Edward R. Murrow Journalism Award. His freelance work spans between published flash fiction, sports editorials, and radio spots.