

Old Life

by Chris Becker

It has been 5 years now, since the fire that took everything from me and I wonder if a day will pass in which I don't long for the past. Some days are better than others but days like today where the rain spits on my concrete block of a home leave me wanting my old life back. But "those days are gone" like the last thing the FBI officer said to me after I was informed I am being put into Protective Housing. (HA! They really meant Isolated Housing) FBI Special Investigator Milo Kilowski made it very clear to me that the fire was a decisive message and that the firebomb that destroyed my former life had been linked to 3000 others all at the same time. Who would do such a thing? Its been 5 years and they still haven't figured it out, and frankly I gave up trying to understand too. So I have been sequestered in this freedom jail ever since because I happened to be the only one of the 3000 who wasn't burned to a crisp. Lucky? On days like today I think not.

My wall talks to me about my schedule for the day and the smell of the automated coffee dispenser singes my nose hairs but the rain has clouded my ambitions even how meager they might have been. When I was smuggled here five years ago the over polished, glossy brochure Officer Kilowski handed me about this place made it sound impressive.

"A place where technology and living are linked."

Milo was a very candid stocky man who rarely minced his words. When I gave him a puzzled look upon the examination of the brochure he said

"What did you expect us to put you in a Mansion?"

which was followed up with,

"You will be safe here, I give you my word."

Protective Housing works on the premise of eminent danger. You accept blindly because there is the illusion that at any moment you could be killed and a person in that circumstance rarely denies the help being offered. But 5 years in I don't feel so scared and I mostly just agonize over the ridiculous shit box that government has provided. I really just want my stuff back my wife, my dog, my books, my records, my paintings, my drawings, my paintbrushes, my tools, my house. I don't even know if any thing survived the fire. Upon asking Kilowski just says,

"All items have been logged as evidence and evidence will be returned to the rightful owner upon completion of the investigation."

He sounds like such a robot. I'm surprised he doesn't list the rule ID number along with his canned answer. At first I pressed for answers but now I just go day to day attempting to forget my memories.

They say memories fade with time, but some memories you never want to forget. My wife had such beautiful handwriting the kind that has those cute little curly cues at the end of some words and she made tiny little circles over her i's and j's. It was such a reflection of her patience and style. She use to leave me such beautiful hand written notes for groceries or tasks around the house. On valentines day she would write on the mirror with red lipstick. I loved reading her books because I could get into her head from the margin. The Incident took all that from me except for the last book we read together. As a technology blogger, in my former life, I was always being inundated with waves of technology most of it crap but I usually only was given one to review. However this young rep at Hybrid Plus Pens gave me two pens and said,

“Try it with your wife. it will save all your notes to the cloud for sharing just get a book that has the hybrid logo”

The drizzle is like salt on a paper cut today. I request the wall to bring up the Hybrid Plus Portal, stats automatically flash about my frequency to the site and ads are directed to my temperament flash in the corners. Lately mostly antidepressants show up and have been for the past 5 years when I think about it. The wall now glows with the last remnants of my wife's writing. Her questions and sarcasm about my insistence she use the pen. She even hassled me in her notes poking fun at my techy job and rubbing in that this book was her choice. I sit at the edge of my bed and move through the pages like I have hundreds of time before. I close my eyes and flop back on the bed hoping that is this might all be a horrible twisted dream. The door speaks up and announces to my concrete block,

“FBI Special Investigator - is approaching.”

I open my eyes right as he knocks on the door.

I open the door and Kilowski is standing holding a small tattered cardboard box with a tag that says evidence in bright yellow and black tape.

“Evidence?” I say,

“Does this mean the investigation is over?”

Kilowski gets a slight smile out of the corner of his over stoic face and hands me the box. He turns around and upon exit says,

“Go back to your old life and find someone who you can use that pen with!”

I just stand in the doorway overlooking the other concrete blocks and get rained on as the premise of my “old life” rings in my ears.

