

# LITTLE STEVE

«Selig sind die Vergesslichen: denn sie werden auch mit ihren Dummheiten "fertig".»

— Friedrich Nietzsche, Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft (1886)

6:00 a.m. The alarm clock starts ringing in a little town in northern Minnesota. It's time for Little Steve to go to school. He opens his eyes and for a moment, in that fleeting eternity that washes over consciousness, from waking to awakening, Little Steve isn't sure where he is. Snooze, time, space. The treacherous depths of those sweat-soaked sheets. But why are they wet? He doesn't have a fever, and it's the end of February in one of the coldest places in America. He falls asleep again.

\*Ring, ring, ring\*. The piercing sound of the alarm once again. 6:05 a.m., snooze. He has enough time ahead of him, in a couple of minutes his mom will come and open the door, and the fresh smell of bacon will fill every inch of this dark and damp room. Snooze, time, bacon, sweat, the flashing lights of the alarm clock. Each bleep marks a second, each second a step away from the invigorating smell of coffee. It's just like that girl said in that movie, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour. Why is it so hot? Isn't it February? There was a huge snowstorm last night, he clearly remembers; one of the few things he can clearly remember right now is that storm.

6:10. Snooze. He should stand up to go to work... or school; he only worked summers at Old James's Store as a clerk. Helping Old James and sneaking out beers for the gang. Beers and joints at the creek, waiting for those hot summer nights to come and embrace them in all their youth. Maybe it was summer, and he had to go to Old James at 10 a.m. That would explain why his mom hadn't opened the door

and why the smell of bacon hadn't come to rescue him from this stench. But no. He was pretty sure it was late February; he clearly remembered the snow of the previous night.

At least he didn't have any homework. Damn, he couldn't even remember when the last time was that he had any homework; well, he had Laurie for that. Sweet little Laurie with her freckles and her red hair. Was that her name or was it Jessica... -It's... maybe I'm just feverish... I... am confused... Damned thing that time is, memories, dreams... it feels to Little Steve like he has been dreaming for ages, each dream overlapping his actual memories, creating a world that doesn't exist, that will never exist. Like those torrid nights in... where was that, beaches, rum, cigars... dreams from a place where he had never been before, from a place that he didn't even know existed.

6:15. Slowly, Little Steve knows that maybe, just maybe, something is wrong. The alarm clock didn't go off this time... it probably quit on him like sweet Laurie did, back then when the bad times came... but they were together just the other night, at the creek, with the gang, and the beers, and the joints after Old James's... and the summer nights that were winter nights, that were nights in another bed that wasn't his; in a country where he didn't belong, with all this blood on his feverish hands... where's that damn bacon... where's the simple life... the one with all the dreams ahead, or behind, or overlapping and overlapping, and Little Steve feels the urge to light a cigarette, but his dad would literally kill him if he smoked in his room, my room, our room, the room that reeked of iron, sperm and sweat, and nothing like bacon.

It's dark and cold outside, maybe it's Sunday. The day of the Sun, the god that rises every morning to keep this world warm, alive, ready to kill and destroy. "In the end it is all we do: we kill, we destroy, we ravage the world seeking something that does not belong, trying to achieve some ridiculous nirvana of houses

with white picket fences and shiny cars and fake gorgeous women, and kids that don't run on parks anymore, and big-screen televisions and Internet and stupid games that keep them away from life."

But that's just a nightmare in Little Steve's world. They still play outside; they go hiking and swimming and breathe the fresh air of freedom. The freedom of running away from parents. Who would want to miss an afternoon locked in a room in front of a screen, who would want to miss a sunset, who would be stupid enough to choose a television over hanging out with the gang over the creek?

Who would want to stay locked in the house, listening to his dad getting drunk, yelling, beating old poor mom to death? Who would like to hide under the bed, singing songs of freedom while reality collapses right outside the door? Scarring him for life. Deep wounds that will never heal. That will carry on with Little Steve, making him unable to love, to care, to feel.

6:20. And he feels the unshaved beard in his face, the tang of rum he has never tasted filling his mouth. The thirst of a body that drank too much the night before. But he hasn't shaved in his life, he's too young for that. He remembers the night he was going on a date with Sarah, and his dad came with a razor and shaved him, cutting him right above the lip, making him bleed all over the sink. Laughing at him while calling him an idiot who couldn't even shave, who would never be a real man. Little Steve could clearly remember how the tears washed the blood away, how he didn't go on that date that hadn't happened yet. How that scar in his upper lip would never disappear, and later in life he will have to grow a mustache to hide it.

Steve shakes his head; they are nothing but bad dreams, nightmares of a reality that should never be, a past that has never existed, a future that could have been so much more different from how it will be.

He wishes that today would be a weekday. By this time, his mom would be sitting on his bed, the open door letting the smell of love and bacon float towards

him. His sweet old mom sitting there, slowly bringing him back from the realm of dreams. And he would stay there with his eyes closed, pretending that he was still asleep, letting her play with his hair and loving her so much for her kindness and her pain. "Wake up my love, my sweet little prince, wake up, breakfast is almost ready, and you must go to school."

6:25. The clock goes off again. It rings inside his head; it rings like the school bell, like his bicycle bell, like the bells from hell approaching him slowly, but surely. A ray of sun finds his way to his face, to that face full of wrinkles, to that head full of white hair. But it is not his head, is the head of a man he should never be, a lost man, a forsaken. But Little Steve still waits and dreams about running outside like every Sunday. To go and hang out with the gang, running around on his bicycle all the way up to the hill, from where you could slide down the snow and laugh like crazy kids, throwing snowballs and sometimes rocks.

Careless, happy. Trying to make each day eternal, to avoid going back home where only pain exists, where things were getting worse every day. Are those times long gone or just waiting outside the door? Steve can't remember if it's Sunday or not, if it's time to go to work or to school, if outside that door awaits him the full brunt of the cold winter snow or the humid warmth of an eternal summer. Everything is so messed up, the time, the year, the memories, the nightmares, the ghosts under his bed. Laurie couldn't help, sweet Laurie, the love of his life, the one who shut the door when he most needed her.

6:30. And there is no more love to be given to Little Steve, to Steve, to old Steve who had to run like the wind with his hands full of blood, full of vengeance, full of pain and tears on the night of the big storm. With the snow and the cold wind creeping all the way into his bones, with reality breaking apart, running away, running towards, running without knowing where to go. Little Steve still waits in his bed for the sweet smell that will save him from this dark corner of the world,

from the cracked wall, from the dripping ceiling, from the dirty clothes stacked in a chair, from all these years that lay between now and then, from all the scars that never healed, that could not be hidden by a mustache.

But Little Steve still doesn't know the metallic taste of the gun in his mouth. He still doesn't remember the manic laughter of his drunken dad torturing his mom until dead. Beating up her lifeless body while Little Steve holds her in his arms, crying, bleeding, losing with each tear the fear of facing the monster that had slowly, methodically, broken his life.

Little Steve doesn't know these things while he waits for his mom to come and wake him up. While he waits to go to the creek to hang out with the gang, drink beers, smoke joints, and love sweet Laurie under the summer nights of his little old town.

But the old guy that slowly wakes up in the sweat-soaked sheets of a rented room in a shady neighborhood on a forgotten island, does remember. He remembers all too well, and he starts to realize that this is reality. That everything did happen. That the one dreaming is the Little Steve that died that stormy night so many years ago. Before he ran out of his house after defeating the monster. Running away from town to town, escaping the law, escaping his past, even changing his name. Finally, I reached a place where nobody cared about what happened before, a place where he could be Steve again. A place where every morning he could wait, in his drunken wake, for the only thing that could save him from death, waiting for the smell of bacon to come and save him from himself.

-The End-