

1 The street pavement was a sticky gray that held onto his shoes, but at least the pain in his stomach was gone. Where had it gone, Carlos wondered. Oh yes, the needle took it away. He was floating and ready to see the world with his new eyes. But once on the streets, he was so weak all he wanted to do was sit. It didn't matter where. But there were people around and he didn't want to be seen. He approached an alley behind a restaurant. He had worked at that restaurant. The Marseilles Continental. He tried to remember when. Doesn't look so impressive from the back. Nothing does.

"Could I interest you in an appetizer?" How many times had he asked that, leaning over a couple in his black uniform. An upscale, expensive restaurant, they taught you to memorize the order. Pork Belly Sweet Potato Hash, Chef's nightly selection of Artisan Cheeses, seared Foie Gras. Point to the main dishes gracefully. Always stay on the right side. Or was it the left? He couldn't remember.

He leaned against a black-blue dumpster. It seemed like a huge stomach filled with the heavy smell of grease, car exhaust, and human sweat. But there was a sweetness in that he craved, needed.

Someone was coming. The mustard-yellow light from the open kitchen made his eyes wince. Must be a busy night, he thought grimly, they're taking the garbage out early. He recognized one of the kitchen staff, a big-bellied man in a brown-stained apron and paper hat.

"Carlos? Is that you? God, you look awful."

"I am awful." And he heard himself laugh as the sharp pain suddenly returned to attack his stomach.

"Let me get you something."

"No!"

But the next thing he knew there was a Styrofoam container in his hands. Mashed potatoes, some cut up pieces of sirloin, gray with pink on the inside.

"Sorry, I have to get back," the man said. "Busy night."

Left alone with his meal, Carlos couldn't decide which was worse, the stinging in his eyes or the pain in his stomach.

~Michael Simpson 349 words

2 My inner light burned red again, so I read more and more. Waves of emotion flowed over as I crossed genre and points of view as easily as most walk room to room. It took no time to be immersed in the seemingly insatiable need for even more. What was the red light to me? Knowledge? Fascination? The feeling of euphoria I felt when reading? I was not sure; I just needed more.

I wandered through a Science Fiction day, finishing four books in the day and opening my mind to new possibilities. On another day I was lost in fantasy, and the visions of alternate worlds danced across my imagination. There could be no greater feeling than the satiation from thousands of random words bound in a cohesive manner to relay understanding. I love this feeling so much that I can barely contain myself as another book becomes available. My red light to perhaps be quenched for a moment.

I was amazed as I began seeing patterns and understood pathways before I reached them in so many tomes. There was a feeling of satisfaction as I digested word after word and in the process saw the world in a different light, the light shone from an author's mind. It was here that I found inspiration and elation yet still experienced a near atavistic appetite as my need for more increased. As each page was assimilated it only pressed my need.

Eventually I found the secret. There could be no pause in my endless pursuit and near lust for the secrets hidden in the written word. Yet as I read an interesting work, I realized that inside of me there were thousands of ideas, perhaps millions. In that moment I closed my book and sat at a desk and began spraying out words for others to consume. It took weeks but finally I had given the world something that would open minds and hopefully create the longing for more that I felt each and every day. Now the blue light burns with the red, and life is good and purple.

~Andrew Smith 350 words

3 Out There

The day dragged by in a hazy purple hue. Nothing had gone right. My locker wouldn't open, the guy next to me at lunch had dumped his soup on me, and now I was home watching a sitcom. When I got up to get a snack, I noticed Mom had left me a sink full of dishes. Fudge, all I wanted to do was go up to my room and finish my homework after this show. I filled the sink with suds on one side of the sink then the other before heading back to the living room to turn off the T.V. So much for my show, heading back into the kitchen, I turned on the radio, Dish by-dish I did my best not to let the tears flow down my cheeks. It wasn't pleasant being a teenager. And with spring break coming up, I was going to be here at home. We couldn't afford to travel; maybe someday I'd save enough to get out of this little town. At least I had the library to keep me company, and I could ride my bike almost anywhere in Cadillac. The biggest issue I faced was finding my place again. The door slammed, and my brother was home racing upstairs to do who knows what. I sighed as Lucky Star by Madonna came on the radio. It was something to make me smile, make things better if only for what three minutes? And that was my life, music, books, and jumping on my bike to leave the confines of my space. That was, for now, there was more, always more elsewhere, and someday I hoped to find it.

~Angela Crandall 278 words

4 Percival sat under the windowsill, finding comfort in the light of the full yellow moon. He was too afraid to turn on the overhead light as it would show him what he already knew. He was alone. His eyes remained dry, indicating he'd finally emptied all his tears. His stomach growled, reminding him for the umpteenth time he hadn't eaten in nearly a day. He'd never had to worry about eating before, as his mother always furnished his food. He circled his arms around his knees to still his legs. It didn't work. His legs always mimicked his worry and this night was no different. He reached for the tin can, dumping the contents. There seemed to be a lot of money, but while his mother had taught him to read, she hadn't taught him about the value of a dollar. Still, if it were nearly enough to buy the house she'd dreamed of, surely there was enough to pay to give his mother a proper burial. He'd find his way to the morgue in the morning, beg the man to let it be enough. He picked up the small picture frame that held the picture of his mother. Though the photo lacked color, he could see the creaminess of her skin, the black within her hair, and the deep rich brown in the eyes that stared back at him. He studied her smile and wondered about the color of her lips. Were they the fresh pink that she often wore that matched the shade of her cheeks or the deep red like what she'd worn this day? He touched his cheek, remembering the kiss she'd placed there moments before hugging him and bidding him goodbye. If he'd known it would be the last time he'd see her alive, he would have insisted she hold him just a little longer. His stomach grumbled once more, and he dismissed it. It was no greater than the ache that filled his heart. He curled into a ball, staring at the empty bed as if doing so would bring his mother back.

~Sherry A. Burton 349 words

5 Megan licked her lips as she focused on her English Lit professor. She yearned to plant a kiss on his mouth and comb her fingers through his long black hair. Sitting in the back of the 200-seat auditorium, she squinted to see the aura of soft pastel colors emanating from his body. Her friends in the dorm assured her she only saw the aura because she and the prof had a true love connection.

Megan shook her head. She had to concentrate on Thoreau, not the professor and his aura. Cupping her chin in her hand, she leaned her elbow on the tablet arm of her chair and focused on her professor. Chills surged through her as she listened to his baritone voice through the PA system. His quips about college life and his knowledge about the dead authors amazed her. She was in love with him, but he didn't know it...yet.

She pictured a romantic dinner together so she could consume his wisdom and laugh with him over a plate of shrimp, slaw and fries. Would his eyes sparkle when he gazed at her in the candlelight? Megan smiled. She couldn't see the color of his eyes perched in this seat so far away from him.

Still dreaming of her professor, the students' hubbub startled her back to reality. Class was over. Megan swiveled the arm of her chair away and bent down to retrieve her bag from the floor.

A quiet voice interrupted her. "Excuse me. Do you know who this backpack belongs to? It was a couple of rows down from you."

Megan straightened in her seat. The professor, her professor, leaned toward her to show her the bag. She stared at him, speechless. The short man with gray streaks in his hair and deep wrinkles around his eyes waited.

"Uh, no," she managed to croak out. "And no, I don't want to go to dinner with you."

The professor stepped back, his eyes wide with surprise. Megan grabbed her bag and pushed past him.

He had lost his aura, and she had lost her appetite.

~Janet Glaser 350 words