Bittersweet Humility

"ADAM! GET UP!"

Adam's day started with a spat against time. His crappy alarm didn't work again.

"Wha…" he tried to gather his sleep-encumbered thoughts, "What time is it?"

"It's ten after seven," replied his girlfriend, with more than a hint of frustration in her voice.

"Damn alarm clock."

"The alarm clock is fine; you've hit snooze at least five times," she said, leaning on one elbow, "I've been up for an hour."

It was her only day this week to sleep in. Adam knew she was pissed, and thought he'd make it up to her.

"Well, since we're both up…" the hint in his voice was clear.

"You can be such a jerk." she punched him in the shoulder, before turning his back to her and pulling the covers back up over her head, mumbling, "self-centered asshole!"

He was disappointed, but didn't really have enough time to fool around anyway. *Maybe she's on her period*, he thought to himself.

He had enough time to get ready for work and not be late, but just barely. Adam hated feeling rushed almost as much as he hated feeling as if he might be late if he didn't rush. It was bad enough that he had to spend another eight hours at the hell hole he worked at but to not have the time to slowly work his way into "work mode" always made his day much worse.

He was at the point in the shower when he was done washing and really had no reason to remain in there, except that the hot water and steam was much more preferred to the cold linoleum floors on which he would have to step with his bare, wet feet. *I don't have time for this* he thought, in an attempt to convince his inner rebel to get out of the shower. Eventually, and regrettably, reason won the battle.

Adam reached down and shut the water off. As soon as he broke the seal that the shower curtain had made against the wall, blocking out the cold morning air, he felt his skin tighten with goose bumps and the residual light burn on his shoulders and back of his neck from the hot water intensified, briefly. *Grrr* he growled in his head.

That's where Adam spent most of his time, in his head. He knew it could be a problem for him at times, like when being chewed out by his boss, or The Dark One, as he was known throughout the office; or when his girlfriend decided that his MySpace time was exactly when they needed to discuss the nature of their relationship; or when on the stupid phone (he hated phones) with his buddy Dave, who loved to prattle on and on about nothing, usually. Needless to say, it was a behavior that was not beneficial to the relationships in his life.

Adam wrapped his large towel around his back, over his shoulders and plugged in his girlfriend's hair dryer, for the purpose of getting the damned steam off of the mirror so he could see well enough to comb his hair, and shave (if necessary). Everything just *had* to be a fight for him. Nothing could just come easy. Of course, he didn't feel like he had to take a crap before getting into the shower, but he certainly had to take one now!

It took Adam approximately fifteen minutes to achieve a semblance of the "office casual" dress code the Dark One forced him to suffer, trying to balance as close to the verge of acceptability as he could manage while still maintaining *some* level of comfort. This is usually the point at which the real sense of dread began to sink in, but fortunately, he didn't have time for rue this morning so the dread became a shadow in the back of his mind.

He had yet to throw on deodorant and brush his teeth before he had to be pulling out of his driveway. He'd be there about five minutes early, which was not *nearly* enough time to adjust to being in Hell, but he'd have to make due. *There will probably be a shit-ton of emails to sift through, and all of them from Pricilla.* Pricilla was the office secretary. She always seemed to have a problem with her new

computer, even though it was brand new and a high-end machine. More often than not, his time was spent coaching her on how to use it, while she complained about change.

He didn't mind the work he did and actually enjoyed it when he had *real* work to do. A good computer problem presented a challenge to him and if it was a particularly tough problem, it would dominate his consciousness for a good chunk of time, making the day seem shorter, *even better than solitaire*, he thought.

At this point, he was heading out the door, coffee in hand and cigarette ready to be lit. *I'll light it at the second stop-light*, he thought. This would buy him just enough time so that he could put the spent butt in the ashtray outside the "Gates of Hell," thereby giving him the maximum amount of nicotine to make it to his ten-o'clock break.

Of course, the whole car was covered in a light layer of frost. *Dammit*, he thought, *I should have started the frigging thing early*. It wasn't *really* that bad though. Not bad enough that he wouldn't be able to see through it. The car's defrost would take care of it eventually, so he didn't bother scraping. He got in and started the engine which seemed to hesitate, as if trying to decide whether or not it really wanted to screw up his day, but started anyway, if weakly.

The windshield wipers took care of enough of the frost that he didn't have much trouble seeing out. He rolled down his window so he could wipe the frost off of the rearview mirror. *At least I can use that to see behind me until the defrost kicks in*, he thought. With all safety measures in place, he puffed out his cheeks with a deep, resigned sigh and put his car into gear, which always was his way of accepting the sense of foreboding he always felt at this point of his day. It was the final action he had to take to get to work. It was as if to say, *this is the point of no return Adam my-boy, too late to call in sick now*. Did he even have any sick days left? He couldn't remember.

The temperature had risen yesterday afternoon and frozen over night, so the roads had a nice coat of fresh, slick ice and of course the member of the city government would not bother themselves

with something as tedious as sanding or scraping the roads. They, *whoever the hell* they *were*, obviously had much more important things to do, such as shutting down another frigging elementary school or trying to decide if they should *impose* a local sales tax so they could afford to "beautify" the downtown area.

He made a right turn onto Main Street, a two lane road that connected downtown with the west-end and the freeway. At this time of day, Main was very busy and you were lucky if you didn't have to wait an hour to gain access to it through the ridiculous traffic, even if you *were* making a right turn. He failed to notice this tiny turn of fortune. *More traffic lights, that's what they could spend money on*, Adam thought, *instead of those stupid damned statues*. *They're ugly statues anyway*, *not worth* my *tax dollars.*

Almost immediately, a very large, black, pickup truck filled to the rim with hicks and big exhaust pipes pointing out over the top of the cab like giant egomaniacal phallus, sped up almost to his bumper (close enough that Adam braced himself for impact), and then jetted out to the left lane. Apparently, this guy had an SUV on his ass. The SUV, also travelling at speeds that icy conditions should deter anyone with the ability to reason like a second-grader, came barreling up on his bumper as well. Again, Adam braced for impact, but the young girl, *frigging woman drivers*, apparently knew enough to know that this accident would be her fault, slammed on her brakes, which caused her to slide, first right, then left and back to the right, before finally gaining enough control to even out. *Lucky bitch*, Adam thought. She pulled off into the next available parking lot. *Stay there and call a cab*, Adam tried to mentally project the thought directly into the girl's little pea-brain.

This event set off a brainstorm in Adam's head. *Why is it that the worse the roads get, the more idiotic drivers become*, he thought. *These dumb-shits wouldn't have done that on clear roads. Like that guy I almost smacked into yesterday, that almost ran the stop-sign, driving in reverse. My God, people*

should be forced to take idiot tests when they get their license. At least something like "…point to the picture that most resembles a stop sign."

This was a trap for Adam. Once the brainstorm started, it didn't stop until *it* decided it was done. He was a slave to the inner ranting. It went on with increasing mental volume, until it almost reached a road rage pitch. Fortunately, Adam was a good driver, *much better than all* these *assholes*, and didn't really even have to think about what he was doing behind the wheel. It just came naturally. So naturally, that a quick glance down at the speedometer showed he was going exactly five miles-an-hour over the speed limit (or the "*sweet spot*", as he thought of it): just fast enough to account for his smoke, and just slow enough to safely avoid hazards.

This line of thinking had the effect of snapping him out of his gloomy reverie. He looked up to a blinding sight, as the sun shone directly on his lightly frost-covered windshield, temporarily blinding him. He knew there was a shadow coming up in just moments that would remove the glare from the sun, so didn't think too much about it. *Shadow and then stop light*, he thought.

Upon entering into the shadow, and sight restored to him, the rest all happened much too fast. He didn't have time to consult the cynic that dwelled within like a guru on a high mountain. First, there was a big red Cadillac, *more maroon I guess… you know… old-person red*, immediately in front of him, at a stop, behind a few other cars that were stopped at the red light. His only thought was: *this will be my fault*; which Adam could *not* have. He was proud of his perfect driving record, so he did the only logical thing he could think of and swerved a hard left into the next lane. At this point, it all went black for Adam, but we know what happened next.

The girl in the SUV from earlier had calmed enough to get back on the road, this time, taking it easy. As she approached the car she had almost rear-ended earlier, it jerked out into her lane. She didn't have time to react and rammed clean into the driver's side door and, consequently, the wide-eyed driver.

It seemed like a lifetime to her for the ambulance to arrive, and when it did the EMTs assessed the driver of the little Plymouth Horizon, and pronounced him DOA. The road was blocked off, detours set in place and everyone was moving at a safe slow pace. There were enough witnesses to absolve the girl from any limit of fault. She sat, sobbing, shaking violently as the vision of the poor guy's eyes replayed over and over in her mind, before she had lost sight of him over her hood. She watched through the blurred vision of unending tears as the EMTs zipped up the body bag.

There was one last thought Adam had before the impact. It was one of those thoughts you might expect someone to think when facing the last few moments of their life. Adam spent too much of his time in his head, analyzing the faults of others, or all the wrongs in this god-forsaken world, and he didn't spend much time looking at himself, but at this moment, he did. His last thought was not violent or filled with fear. It was simply, *so this is humility*.