

The End: The Legend of Alcohol and the Myth of Lucius, 11-12, p. 6

"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

THE WAFTS OF hallucination are tasted on his tongue. One more sip of rotted, cold beer and the hour passes slowly with whispered observations and false exchanges of integrity. Feet stomp around the dampened carpet, and his grey eyes are strung with harmonious sour tears and threads of red veins. *Swig*. It's all so uncomfortable, the feeling of blindness as he stares lucidly—directly—seeing vivid images of half-moons taking shape on plump girls' skinny faces.

With wobbly steps and turning at the corner, the young gentleman eyes a figure sitting delicately on the windowsill tracing what seems like pages of a diary onto a dirty glass frame matted in raindrops.

Classic, he thinks about how there's always a mysterious woman set perfectly and delicately in a place where his eye will easily be caught, where his untied thoughts will find comfort in those of a charmed face—those that burn. Fleeting memories of past temptations, unreachable desires that have so ferociously taunted him before, remind his tired mind why he is there. His nerves are alive with sensation; he can feel her as the virginal dismay she attempts to mask tangles with his needy and anxious heart. Another sip rids the fear encasing his bones, and he dreams of what it would feel like to be wanted by such a creature—to be washed clean with her fair serendipity. His body feels pulled by the charm of her alluring possibilities. Prickles of warmth travel through the hair on his arms, caressing the chills to mere whispers. Without inhibition, he gazes dreamily, gaping at the magnificent sight before him.

She carefully splays taught fingers across her over-sensitized thigh, breathing ever so lightly. Patting himself down, instinctually feeling for a cigarette, he leans against the rickety doorframe as blaring hits of a heavy bass drum bubble over the furniture and down from the ceilings, spreading delirious confusion amongst the sweating, gyrating bodies that swirl around the room. All the figures seem to be lost in other worlds, unfolding like tiny cocoons hanging from a dead tree; they seek attention—they seek escape.

His tender lips pucker to a warm glass of foul liquid as he hears its caresses moan of desired places, small shady islands inviting his cold and scarred toes to dip into their waters. She giggles as she hears the slurps of his drunken thirst; he smirks as his previously fine-tuned

perception fuzzes just enough to hear the sleepy presses of her soft lips driven by a tender, beguiling tongue speak his name.

Supposedly. But, soon enough, another calling tone quickly strikes away the melody of her soft voice, harshly grasping his already preoccupied attention.

Lucius, it's time to return home. The room feels hastened, weighed down. *If you wish, the carriage is waiting, and you most definitely do not want to arrive all too late—to see your precious flames undone.* Dreaded duress hangs from his sleepy ears. *I constantly tell you about responsibilities.* He wants to sigh, but is too enraptured.

This other hidden voice sighs hopelessly while the young face he bears becomes masked in confusion and denial. Chills creep across his spine, but affect him in no way; he has spent lifetimes reigning in this typical kind of disappointment, harnessing it for eventual revenge, to feel its slow and lethal path.

I'll see to it the nighttime won't end for a little longer this day 'round, but that is all I have in my power. Now, *hurry*, the ancient woman warns, almost undetectably annoyed, as if she already knows his diverted thoughts.

He steps closer. *Lucius, I refuse to say it again,* the voice admonishes him.

He closes his dreary eyes to imagine a soft image of his taught hand swiftly caressing her cheek's skin, feeling the nerves ignite at her life and his touch. Opening his soulful eyes, the other, more intricate girl now rests both of her palms on her lap, preparing to turn and meet the admiring face she has felt boring holes through her tender back for some while. It is almost as if the movement of her body insists the same of his; as if their eyes are venerate treasures of gold and their limbs, hearts, flesh are the maps to each beloved mine.

Lucius!

A burst of pressure seizes his left temple, shaking the drink out of his fisted hand and the intensity out of his fingertips. It sloshes vehemently, covering his whole torso and the cuffs of his pants in stinging potion, seeping deeply into his skin. Like rapid rainfall of a saturated sky devouring the terrain beneath it, wrinkles suddenly run rampant across his face, eventually engulfing his body. The expanding force on each temple of his skull increases while his legs attempt to approach her, desiring the finished mystery of her eyes but, with each aching step, his feet break the old and tortured floorboards. His skin ignites in violent flames, and small deceitful horns crest, exposing their legacy to the human air.

And, as if her neck moves with the speed of the stars, her bare skin that was lofty fingers and a porcelain still-turned cheek grows swiftly, mimicking the shifting of spilled, spreading water, into alabaster stone. Both destinies encrust their bodies, and her eyes never meet his, his black holes of sorrow.

All is still; the gyrating bodies have frozen in the swampy yet crisp air. He is pure red, and slowing being draped in black shadow. Her seat no longer can hold the weight of such dense and carefully crafted stone, so she falls. Lunging from clawed toes in an attempt to protect the precious sculpture in front of him, a small flame, sparkling deep maroon, grows from her face, momentarily blinding his eyes with its intensity.

Emotion is lost on him; the wondrous hope she had so quickly given him turned so massively into death and a cemetery meant for murderers encasing the lost physique of an angel. The breaking and shattering erupting in his chest is so foreign yet so real, and confusion seems to be all that his small soul can grasp. The sorrow from his eyes seeps to the door of his heart and knocks indignantly, but the veins crust over, leaving all with no answer.

She cannot be yours, the hushed words return. You will ruin the essence of beauty naturally crafted upon her skin if you become a part of her raw destiny, Lucius.

"But I *already* am! I did this!" he screams through the surrounding mist, trying to gesture to the stone that lay in front of him, but failing as his body numbs with the silence of his heart.

You cannot be her shadow. You cannot dream of her.

"She exists because of me," the solemn words melt on his lips as he speaks them with a breathy, quietly distraught voice.

The flame calms, preserving the natural valleys of her face, and the solid frame of stone grows straight across the floorboards.

Young Lucius, have your years taught you none? the tutelary utterance asks, encasing his body.

"They have taught me too much," he mutters, feeling his heart stop beating and the dead creep through his veins. The warmth of his experience with the bitter ambrosia dissipates. The ripped floor and dusty cramped room, the car lights outside in the dark and the eerie summer crickets behind the house fade blurrily into a plane of blackness as he momentarily closes his eyes in search of peace.

You are counterparts, young one. Tainted with pleasure and life, that is not your namesake. Fouled by revenge and fallen from majestic clouds was not hers. The universe must balance. Bright sky has no part on this earth without roaring flames, yet they do not meet. Their lustrous boundaries are simply that: boundaries, creases of themselves that are forever encased, unable to meet another. Ever.

"Leave, Sapentia. You have done your task; it is becoming done. It is all becoming done," he recites, each word dripping in hushed exasperation.

Lucius, it was this drink that brought you to her. This curse will not be yours to bear, child, but your earthly existence will tarnish the hope of every soul—their running blood will stop, and heavy weights will make them land on the plane of your footsteps laid here on that floor. Your father would be proud—your own flames have been created. With her last settling words meant to embrace his reality, she retreats far below into darkness.

With still closed eyes, the kingly presence of his birth returns, forcing him away from the weight of wonder he feels behind him. Reluctance taps his shoulder, and as he turns, an image of the stone woman sits concrete. Blurred to a visual much like an illusion, his instinct to marvel at the purity embodied before him slowly fades. She is still, as is he. Steadily raising a taught hand towards the white crown in his field of blackness, his fingers violently calm as something etches ancient letters into the skin across his outreached hand. As he expects to bleed, to find pain, he stills at its absence. He looks up just in time to gaze at her body with an eternal lust, only to find her crumpling within herself, becoming the ash of beauty.

A numbness he had never encountered bores into his skin, forcing him to address its presence. The last mortal part of his mind is tattooed with scripture as he examines the mark on his skin: "*flamma illicita alba defectu*" in glowing white light seeps through his eyes and ignites in his soul; the words of angels will forever be with him. Then, the pain he craves arrives as he vanishes from within, mirroring her unworldly yet earthly descent, a sweet image of mourning as limb becomes limb and body becomes nothing.

A cave abounding in darkness grows static around his tingling, obscured, and invisible self as he opens the Dead eyes for a last time only but to see her ashes drift quietly over the peak of a doomed mountain, a peak that feels so desperately close that its wind kisses his cheek. He thinks to reach and caress its rock, to grab hold of it, but the demons cry in revolt; the image lay

still and heated in his frigid mind. She slowly covers tiny blazes erupting from the rock's inner, erupting core, and all stands quiet.

Sapientia sits far enough away from the radiating orb he has become so as to not evoke more human emotion. *You wished to see the Earth in its glory; you graced it with your presence; you tainted their chances with your own proverbial brand of ruination.* Lucius, and she paused to affirm her words, *unless it was for nothing, you must see the end.*

"No, I *must* not!" his angered tone reverberates against nothing. "I *gave* them the *choice*, the device that will either encase their love in a museum of glass or drag their feet to a cold, solitary eternity—there are options, but no escape. There is no *end*. This "end" you speak of, it is the forever of the Forbidden. *My choice*, it did not include an end." Lucius drifted away, leaving trails of floating red dust, small particles that had never reached such low depths before.

He says under his breath, "If I must lose, so must they. Let their mouths be tainted with the sour taste of a secured horror. The drink will transform their made-up selves into truly bared souls, manifestations of desire ever so thirsty to be replenished."

Do not feel as if you are a lost cause, my boy.

"Should one not feel what one actually is?" he bites back. "I am the first, the Original who has taken this path of liquid poison, and the others will forever seek my help to fill themselves, for guidance."

Yes, followers, Sapientia says matter-of-factly, and is lost as to what is his point.

"Not followers," he shakes his nonexistent head. "Children. We will be a family. Their souls will reach the ends of the earth in search of belonging, becoming playthings of my hands, becoming second, third, four hundredth attempts at removing my birth stain. They will be the eternal marking of my illustrious and inescapable identity. I will sit at their table in a frozen glass and the beads of condensation will cry, drip down the sides of its evil master in attempt to run from the Next, to try and warn. I will offer them a chance to touch my beloved, but at a price; to embrace their destiny, but experience pleasure before its bite bears teeth."

She could not tell what intentions his sober tone implied. However, she did sense a slight string of devious excitement at such a prospect as he described.

As they walked away into the darkness side by side, Lucius reappears in a hooded black cloak whose tail ripples through the air, mimicking the soft yet dangerous movement of a newborn's heart beating for the earliest time.

"No wonder they cry at first breath; they have starkly tasted the turmoil for the first time. They understand there could not be a last."

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The mark was left, and for centuries it entwined undeniable identity with unattainable desire. Those who chose, whether blindly or not, would fall in suit of their primordial master; these wandering souls in search of a completed wish would rot; they would embrace the father of their making. They would taste the comfortable torture, irrevocably becoming the End—a *reminder of his boundless end.*

Lucius's tarnish lurks beneath the awakened, and his touch may sway many more to follow through the burning hole that engulfs those sacred floorboards. He was temporary, but this potion of deathly hell will forever ride through stormy deserts at the rise of the moon so as to feel her never-tangible dust ignite his cloak and ruin the flames of his eyes. With each swallow she grows clearer.

Goodnight, sweet misery.

He is always. She is nearer.