

My Room-mate Bukowski

By: J. Alexander

LIAM is lying on a quilt at center-stage; he is hung over and dimly lit. He mutters incoherent slurs to himself as he points to the ceiling in recognition. He is reliving a dream he had in the minutes before he woke, he is glazed over and not fully aware, it is about 6pm in the evening. It appears he may be going insane. A light from a nearby candle flickers on his face. There is a lamp on stage, but it is off. There is one bottle of alcohol visible.

LIAM (*To himself/Remembering*): hands, hands, hands, pulling, reaching, wanting, grabbing. All to take a piece of me. Wanted my soul; to steal away my... essence. There were halves of bodies, sticking out of the walls and the ceiling and the floor. It was as if (*Beat*) they only existed from the waist up. Just reaching as I lay in my bed. I wondered... (*Beat*) where the rest of their bodies were. I pictured the outside of my house; just legs. The bottom half of bodies. Kicking and flailing. I laughed (*laughs*) The hands did not like that. The faces got angry. Their fingers grew longer. Long enough to touch. To pull. To grab. To tear. I could feel my body being torn apart. Ripped at the joints that connected my bones. Every direction. My ears were torn off the sides of my head. My hair; plucked from my scalp without remorse. My eyelids stretched. Fingers reaching inside my mouth, pulling at my tongue, breaking my teeth... I remember the moment my legs became (*Beat*) detached... I was surprised that there was no blood on my sheets, they were white as snow. Pure. Crisp. Pristine. Stark. Naked. I was this ugly, torn and mangled creature amid unsympathetic surroundings. Not even the sheets that had enclosed me all those nights showed recognition of my pain, my suffering, my anguish. Not a single drop of blood was shed. The faces laughed. They got what they wanted...

There is a long pause and LIAM closes his eyes and breaths deeply.

CHARLES (*off-stage*): Are all artists like this?

LIAM snaps out of it.

LIAM: Fuck off!

CHARLES (*off-stage*): I'd love to, but I can hear your existentialism through the fucking wall!

LIAM: Asshole.

CHARLES (*off-stage*): I heard that. It's called a fucking journal! Get one.

LIAM: It's called a fucking soul! Get one.

CHARLES: Ever hear of suffering in silence?

LIAM: (*Beat*) make me.

There is a silence.

LIAM CONT'D: Don't come in here

Enter CHARLES

CHARLES: It's fucking 6 o'clock in the evening. What are you doing?

LIAM: I said get out

CHARLES: No you didn't, you said don't come in here

LIAM: Semantics

CHARLES: I'm the one who will have to clean up after you if you decide to off yourself tonight.

LIAM: Poor you. Don't humour me.

CHARLES: To humour is something active, I assure you, I am using as little effort as humanly possible.

LIAM: I don't need your help, I just need to be left (*Beat*) alone.

CHARLES: It's kind of hard to focus on my work if you're in here emoting so fucking loudly. Just tell me what the problem is.

LIAM: You'd only serve to underscore it.

CHARLES: What do you mean? And where the hell is your bed?

LIAM: I don't need it anymore, the floor is better for me. Keeps me humble. Close to the earth.

CHARLES: Yeah but where did you put it?

LIAM: On the roof.

CHARLES: The landlord is going to shit a brick. Look I just want to get back to my research. How can we end this little episode as quickly as possible?

LIAM: See, that's what I mean. You and your fucking PhD papers and anal sweater vests. You're just making the gap deeper.

CHARLES: What gap?

LIAM: You don't' fucking understand.

CHARLES: There you go again. I think you enjoy it.

LIAM: Enjoy what?

CHARLES: This “man against the world” routine.

LIAM: Routine? You think I choose to be this way. You think I like to suffer.

CHARLES: I do.

LIAM: I’d change this in a second if I could.

CHARLES: You wouldn’t. You enjoy the self indulgence. The wallowing. The masochism of getting paid to suffer for your art.

LIAM: It isn’t a choice.

CHARLES: Bullshit. We choose our own paths in this life.

LIAM: Our paths are cauterized onto our souls. They are given to us by our ancestors. They are in our names, our physical structure, our entire fucking beings. We are built to fulfill a purpose.

CHARLES: Don’t even try to tell me about having life paths imposed on you, you’re just looking for an excuse to continue acting this way... My father was a fucking hippie, he never saw the need for formal education; named me after fucking Charles Bukowski. You don’t see me using it as an excuse to drop out of med school and act like a... (*Beat*) self-indulgent, womanizing, masochistic asshole poet do you?

LIAM: Is that how you see me?

CHARLES: Well, not entirely, I ran out of adjectives at the moment.

LIAM (*Cheekily*): I think you have it in you. (*Matter-of-factly*) You’re in denial (*Beat*) Bukowski eh? One of *my* personal heroes.

CHARLES: Figures.

LIAM: Embrace your calling Charles, I have a feeling your true destiny will come knocking one day.

CHARLES: He was an alcoholic. Besides, clearly you take after him a lot more.

LIAM: I’m nothing like that.

LIAM takes a drink.

CHARLES: How so? The water content in your body is all wine.

LIAM: Well Charlie-

CHARLES: Don't call me Charlie

LIAM: (*With hard emphasis*) Charles. (*Beat*) Bukowski was an alcoholic... I (*Beat*) am a drunk... (*Beat*) Big difference

CHARLES (*Dryly*): Enlighten me.

LIAM: An alcoholic needs alcohol; he uses it to get through the day, to numb the senses. He runs from himself, from his own soul. He is afraid. He attends AA meetings with other weak pussies like himself. He has a problem; no control. Chaos. (*Beat*) But a drunk on the other hand-

LIAM points to himself

LIAM CONT'D: A drunk does not abuse alcohol like the alcoholic, he (*Beat*) utilizes it. He uses it to liberate the soul. To free it from the cage, the prison that is this physical world, that it may (*Beat*) spill out of him, perhaps, onto the page. Precision. He is in search of truth. Ordered chaos.

CHARLES: Truth?

LIAM: Truth.

CHARLES: Excuses.

LIAM: And you, you're the worse of them all.

CHARLES: Are you calling me an alcoholic?

LIAM: No, I'm afraid it's more grave than all that.

CHARLES (*Not amused*): Really?

LIAM: You... (*Beat*) are a drinker.

CHARLES: A drinker?

LIAM: A drinker, unlike the drunk or the alcoholic... (*Beat*) plays a game.

CHARLES: A game?

LIAM: A social game, of obligation. Like a monkey. He has no soul. Nothing to free and nothing to stifle. He's an empty shell.

CHARLES: Where are you getting these fucking definitions? And what about the poet?

LIAM (*Confused*): The poet?

CHARLES: We are comparable only by the words that we write. Remember last year, when we both sent our work into the university periodical?

LIAM: biggest mistake of my life, that magazine is bullshit.

CHARLES: I was published and you weren't.

LIAM: See what I mean? Bullshit.

CHARLES: Wine may lubricate the drunk, but it evaporates the poet. *(Beat)* When you write under the influence, *(Whispers)* you're left with nothing.

CHARLES winks playfully.

LIAM: I am not desperate for attention from a crowd who bases its merit on forms, codes and conventions of the written word. Makes me claustrophobic.

CHARLES: Of course not, you'd rather lie here in the dark and wallow.

LIAM: At the cost of keeping my soul. Exactly.

CHARLES takes notice of the darkness of the room.

CHARLES: Why don't you turn on a fucking light?

CHARLES goes to turn on the lamp that is on stage to no success.

CHARLES: What the fuck?

CHARLES inspects the lamp more closely.

CHARLES CONT'D: Why is there no bulb in this lamp?

LIAM: It isn't environmentally friendly

CHARLES *(To himself)*: Of course, a lunatic writer and a tree-hugger, makes sense.

LIAM hears CHARLES' mutters.

LIAM: You know where the term lunatic is from?

CHARLES: You're going to tell me aren't you?

LIAM: A lunatic is a person who is in tune with the universe. Prefix: Luna, meaning moon. Someone who moves according to the phases of the night orb. A lunatic is awake, he is alive and unbound by the trappings of the material world. Give me lunacy over someone who is asleep like you any day. I whole-heartedly accept my title. *(Declaratively)* I am a lunatic!

CHARLES: Who the fuck calls the moon “the night orb?”

LIAM: A lunatic does

LIAM begins to laugh maniacally

CHARLES: You are right.

LIAM: About what?

CHARLES: There is no saving you.

LIAM: Exactly.

CHARLES moves to exit, but before he leaves, he boldly blows out the candle that LIAM has lit; his only source of light.

Exit CHARLES.

The stage is now so dimly lit that one can really only make out the shadow of LIAM’S body as he lies on the floor.

LIAM (*To-himself*): Sometimes I feel as if there are finger nails scratching on the inside of my chest cavity. Clawing, wanting to get out. Tiny souls trapped inside my larger soul. They need me to free them. To tell their story. These characters, these emotions, these fragments of life. Trapped darkly in my body, only to be set on fire, to be lit, by my pen. I must write. I must believe in this. I have to believe that there is truth here. I have to believe that this is the path to my salvation. I have to believe that these voices will quiet if I free them. I have to believe in these things, and if I don’t, I have to believe that I will... (*Beat*) perish.

(Blackout)