

Cheryl Smith

Author's note: I don't have much to say about myself except that I love the rhythm and melody of words. The perfectly turned phrase can grant pleasure and bring about inspiration. I hope to one day be able to create and inspire in ways that many an author have before me.

Solace

The time of year and place in time that I'm most content is in my bed on a sunny summer afternoon. At this time, I find that my senses are heightened while somehow spiraling down into a beautiful dullness – a silence, stillness that was not there before. Usually my bed is an escape. I can crawl under my covers, hug a pillow to my head, and hide from the world. When doubt crowds into my life, I know only one thing – my bed will offer comfort. When I need a good cry, my blankets will hold me and my pillows will wipe away the tears. Afternoons free of worry, when I choose to lie down, not my fears or doubts, but simply my body – these are the times I've found to be made of peace. To me, solace is a sunny afternoon nap.

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The window's open, a soothing breeze shines in, and the sun is blowing across my face. I listen silently to the buzzing – the only buzz that doesn't unnerve. Bees tumble outside my window as I watch them through the screen. Music plays far off – or perhaps it's laughter. Yes, children laughing. I wonder what game they play. I picture bare feet, Popsicles, and dirty fingers. Reminiscing about my own childhood, I settle deeper. Quick vignettes of happiness flash through my mind. Sidewalk chalk in rainbows, discarded bicycles, bouncy balls, and sprinklers. Closing my eyes I sigh and feel a breath whisper against my neck. The gust that washes over me and lifts gentle hairs comes from beyond my window, beyond the trees it wakens, beyond the town and hills and forests. It comes from the far away sea, off of waves and billowing sails – it comes to my window and blows through and says hello to me. My hair takes flight and tickles my back and I hear the screen shake in its pane. A chill runs through my body and I reach out for the corner of my blanket. Pulling it over me, I roll with it and turn away.

The comforter beneath me is cool to the touch. I smooth it down with my hand and little balls of lint grab softly at my hand. A piece of thread sticks up, and I hold its unraveled end between my fingers. Once, then twice, I wrap it around my pinky, pulling it tightly. Blood beats strong in my finger's tip as it begins to turn red. I let the string to and feel the steady pulse fade. Searching again for the rhythm of my heart, I hold my breath and become silent. Blood beats in my brain, spots appear, and finally I exhale – grateful for the oxygen that awaits me. I smile at my foolish exercise. Of course my heart still beats.

When the spots clear from my eyes, I find myself staring at a flower in fuchsia. Thin, dark leaves branch off, and the edges fade to cream. My eyes wander from one flower to the next, looking for similarities in this confettied lily field. There are too many unseen patterns for my tired eyes to pick, so I give up the search. Throwing off the flowery covers, I roll over to face again the window. I watch the wind blow and dishevel the leaves outside. A solitary cloud is pushed across the sky and passes briefly before the sun. The world dims for a few seconds before shining again.

On afternoons such as these, things seem to shine from within. They seem more pure and true than nature intended. The grass in the field beyond my window burns neon. Sky blue does not exist on this day. Turquoise is more accurate. Even the water sparkling in the glass near my bed shines silver. I reach out for the cool cup and wet my finger on its side. The condensation rolls over my skin and, as if cued by my touch, the ice cracks.

Bringing my fingers to my mouth, I wet my lips and taste vanilla that not long ago melted on my hands. My tongue had not been quick enough then to catch every drop that rolled off the cone, and is not quick enough now to catch the cold water dripping down my arm. I take delight in the sliver of cold cutting a path through the fever of my flesh.

Realizing how hot I've become in the sudden absence of a draft, I fight the covers still tangling my feet. Reluctantly, I climb out of bed and plod to the fan across the room. I set it to blowing and look back at my haven. The sun casts shadows of windowpanes across pillows still crisp from laundering. A slight halo surrounds the bed and I'm drawn back into its depths. I dare not resist the pleasure offered me.

Plunging back in – my only option – I settle deeper than ever, ready for sweetness to overtake me. Barbeque scents, sun-warmed skin, smooth fabric sensations. I find that my senses aren't distinct or individual. They mix, mingle, and conspire against me to create pictures, illusions, and dreams. I drift off with thoughts of sky and wind, seeing streams of man-made clouds, surrounded by flowers and warmth and sun. My eyes see the red blackness of comfort through heavy, drugged lids and finally I sleep. Beautiful, sunny, afternoon sleep. Solace.

