

## ***All hurt no comfort***

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him<sup>1</sup>*

Wild Space

A man knelt in a circular clearing. A woman stood behind him. Her strong hands held a hammer and needle from a bygone era. The hammer tapped the head of the needle. The tip of the needle broke the man's skin. Ink and blood ran down the man's back. The hammer continued to tap rhythmically, and the needle continued to pierce flesh.

A rudimentary brush swept the clearing a day ago. Pebbles and stones remained. The man's knees rested upon stones. The stones were now boulders. The boulders dug into the man's flesh. The sensation was a mix of burning and pressure. Time passed, the needle tapped, and the man did not move.

The man's posture was rigid. His insides ached. His organs, diseased, thudded with a dull pain. A rot pummeled him from within. Each tap of the needle on his back reinforced the pestilence's assault within his body. The throb of torment reinforced the reality that his body was consuming itself. A wave of nausea and heat flashed through the man's body. He fought the desire to retch.

The clearing was designed to enhance meditation, but contemplation would not come. A dying man could ponder only death. Thoughts raced from a past of mistakes to a future that would not come. Friends, lovers, and children would be left behind. The man was not sure if his despair was founded on losing their companionship or on a selfish desire to exist.

Beads of sweat formed on the man's brow. The sweat dripped down into eyes clenched shut. The sting of sweat and despair formed tears. The man wept from pain or guilt or both. The needle tapped. Tears flowed down the man's naked chest and splattered the sand below.

Bird-like creatures chirped as they floated on the breeze overhead. The sound of waves crashed onto the nearby beach. The man did not hear them. The universe was silent, and the man was left with only misery. He did not hear but felt the thunder of the needle striking his flesh. The rhythm of the strikes was agony and heartache.

The man wanted to spit. Bile or the taste of medication filled his mouth. It was a temporary but repeating sensation. The needle would tap, the sensation would come, and then it would fade. It was persistent and reminded him only of his fate. The desire to spit was a desire to expunge his ego.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hound of Heaven by Francis Thompson (1890). This poem should not be counted for total word count or content. It was added simply because I like it and felt replacing HIM/GOD with HIM/dark side was an appropriate change. I take no credit nor should be given any for its inclusion, beyond artistic flair.

The needle tapped into the man's flesh. It was a process of enlightenment, but the man could only think of himself. He only did what he had to do. There was no reason beyond the self. The man's shoulders shuddered as he inhaled, and the dark side of the force wrapped him in a familiar crown of power. His body absorbed the self-chosen pain of the needle and focused it into the core of his being. He was, once again, the center of the universe. He had failed again.

"Should I stop," the woman asked.

"No," the man replied.

The needle tapped the flesh. Failure was preferable to not trying, but the man could not shake the feeling that temporary pain was preferable to permanent death.

*Is my gloom, after all,  
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
I am He whom thou seekest!  
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Ditto/Ibid.