

Dear Albert Camus,

I imagine that if you could receive this letter you would be sitting at your desk: your fingers paused, aching slightly from their dance with the typewriter, the late afternoon light streaming through your window illuminating the smoke drifting upwards from your cigarette. It is in this golden hour that I see you. A time in the afternoon that belongs neither fully to the day or the night. For me that is the definition of your absurd. A time, when the day, knowing light, is about to willingly shake hands with darkness. You refer to the absurd as something that lies in "neither of the elements compared", being that the light or the shadow but instead something "born of their confrontation": the golden hour. I see you in the golden hour of absurdity because by discovering the absurd through your book *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays* I was taught to fight for my life and to try to see this world for everything it is.

In order for me to truly show you the effect your words had on my perspective let me set the stage of my reality by introducing you to a close friend of mine: Despair.

Despair loomed in front of me, his dark and fading finery ill-fitting on his stooped frame. I turned from him, trying to avoid the deep set eyes that were searching for mine. Unperturbed by my evasion he walked behind me, his hand finding its way to my face, caressing it with a lonely contempt. I flinched. He placed his other hand on my shoulder, his long cold fingers gripping me. A sisyphian weight spread through me, knotting itself into my shoulders, interlacing with my fingers, veneering my bones, and sculpting my back into a hunch. But like Sisyphus with his boulder eternal, Despair was not new to me. He had been grasping my shoulders the majority of my life and it wasn't until I was 15 years old, that I finally understood that Despair had a name more universal than the one I had stuck to its lapel at an early age: Chronic Depression.

"This isn't a forever thing," the school counselor with absent eyes had told me. "You can overcome this". I imagine you would have scoffed at this woman, because for you Sisyphus and his story was by no means a tale of man on a quest of completion, for you and him "overcoming" was never the goal. I too laugh when I look back at that memory, but in that moment her words wrapped around me as tightly as the hands of Despair. I convinced myself that I merely had to push my boulder to the top of the mountain and there it would stay; what I was experiencing wasn't an eternal punishment but instead a mere hike up a hill. Each day I strived to reach the top of the mountain, yet with every summit my boulder would defy me.

Picture me at the bottom of the mountain once again, the conviction in my eyes boring through my dark companion.

"I will overcome you," I said piercingly, but Despair only nodded knowingly and the words of the counselor seemed much more distant than they had before.

On one hand, I was filled with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and growth, a deep unwillingness to give up, and a blazing fascination with the world in which I found myself. These were the qualities that willed the boulder to the summit.

On the other hand, Despair's arms were wrapped around my shoulders filling me with

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weariness. I couldn't understand how both these feelings could coexist and why one would not overcome the other. However, I found my answer in the late evening when the snow fell in slow heavy flakes, and in search of warmth I discovered your words.

I stood across from my brother's shelves, the grey light from the window illuminating the spines of the books. Except for the tired sound of my breathing, silence filled the room. I leaned against the wall and slid down to the floor, looking straight ahead. Something other than the defeating eyes of Despair met my gaze: *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. I reached out, my fingers meeting the binding. My heart pounded as I brought the book to my lap. I fell headfirst into your pages and it was there that I discovered the absurd. (Might I add, if only for myself, that although your book was pristine when I first encountered it, it has since been filled with annotations and sticky notes, merging your ideas and my reactions)

You described the absurd as the dichotomy that manifests itself within humanity. It is the "divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints." I cannot describe with justice the absurdity I felt through the passion that filled me and the dark figure that greeted me. However, you showed that it was from this contradiction that consciousness can be born. The absurd allows us to not be blind to the contrasting reality of our own lives and of our world.

When you described Sisyphus on his walk back from his summit, you stated that it was "lucidity" he discovered. The agony he felt when his back carried that boulder at the "same time crowned his victory." Sisyphus found happiness because he knew Despair and existed not in spite of him but with him. You showed me that "There is no sun without shadow and it is essential to know the night." It was then that I looked at Despair and I not as separate entities locked in an unending struggle, but as two parts of one being. It was the contradiction that made me.

I turned to the the disheveled figure next to me. He met me with eyes more embers than flame. "I do not have to overcome you," my voice echoed into the room and a certain quietude washed over me.

Your book in my hand, the figure beside me, the falling snow outside and the warmth within taught me that each summit I made could be met by a fall, but it was the fall that made the summit and the summit that made the fall. Despair was part of me, part of my empathy and understanding; Despair was the reason I found and treasured your words, he taught me of the failure of the human spirit and I rivaled him with the triumph. And so the words of the counselor "I can overcome this" were replaced by a sentence in your book I constantly go back to, "Everything considered, a determined soul will always manage."

Your book painted a new reality for me. In this life which is something that every being knows by the pounding of our hearts and the breath in our lungs we will encounter discouragement, sorrow, and anguish; we are weighted with burdens we feel we cannot or should not have to carry. But this Despair teaches us to see the humanity in each other. Because of it we know love and happiness. We cherish a newborn child because we know death. We care because we understand hurt. We love those even when they have left us because we knew their life. You

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showed me that the world is not black or white but a canvas of realities painted by primary colors we all stick our fingers in. That is the absurd. The consciousness of our lives that lies not in "the world" or "the man, but in their presence together." And that is what you taught me. To live with pain and know love, and for that I am forever indebted to you.

So I leave you to return to that golden hour, which since your death I believe is where you stay like an insect in amber preserved in its own world. Yours is the world of the absurd, and so is mine, and so is all of ours.

With love,

Sage Crawford-Kahrl

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