



## The Longest Beginning

by Michael Peter Garza

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We are beginning to end all over again. Evening begins, and memories are emerging like scorpions from the sand, and eleven o'clock passes by as a gentle numbness invades—waiting in our small dark bedroom—heavily draped over my still frame—crouching over the headboard; we do not touch, under a thin blanket, listening to the silence of heaven. Resistance meets the scent of a summer breeze, and the senses fade into gravity. Fear and injustice drift away. Appetites and all desires are lost to the numbness. Peace and serenity lie somewhere unformed. I am losing ability to hear the wind pass through our trees. Somewhere very far away, next to me, you are ignoring your own exhaustion. *Y dejemos sin descansar.* I suppose I should embrace my anxiety and sweep the numbness away.

Are you thinking about that company picnic that we had to miss this afternoon because of my migraine? I know your mother wanted you there. I told you to go without me. Last year, I took my tanned skin and dark hair, despite what your mother's protesting eyes may have wanted. I never told you that Jaime flirted with me at the water park. I hesitated because I was afraid that you would see through the facade of me saying I hated it. I wanted to hate it. The people you know always seem to be trying to find themselves. They are always trying to conquer their own whispers, and I know I must seem vulnerable to them when I am sitting comfortably in silence. It must be hard for you to trust me. Did you ever trust me? Are you convinced that I am here because you are what I gave up heaven for? Maybe it is because I have never been entirely sure myself. I heard Jaime found marriage but is already filing for divorce. "Jaime has never found someone who hasn't turned out to be absolutely crazy," I remember your mother telling you. "It just goes to show... you can't tell a book by its cover," she would add. What if I took the road that led away from you? Would your mother be saying the same thing about me now if I left you then? I honestly do not care.

Do you remember the first time I left you forever? If not, I should forgive you. Even the seasons were confused that year. Spring came early, and it once snowed in June. That autumn was unusually warm and sat over us like that damn salon dryer bonnet that hovered over my sister's head when her boyfriend, Saul, told her how much he liked curly hair. We live with the curse of our straight brown hair. Saul eventually left her for some blonde with pretty teeth. "He must have been struck blind to walk away from you," had to have been one of the few kind things I ever heard you say to her. I would see him in passing, at times, while in the complex where I ran away. He had already left the blonde and still drove a grey Audi with the long key scratch on the passenger side, perhaps a recent goodbye message from someone with pretty teeth. Apparently, I enjoy finding a strange comfort in recognizing unrecognizable, uncomfortable, estranged, and unfounded joys. For this, you have jokingly called me a sadist. The masochist in you will not remember me eating dinner outside, by myself, most of the time. What is it about a meal alone to recalibrate the consciousness of solitude? Still, there were times I would sit at my table as the flickering flame of an electric candle lifted the burden of my anxious mind by temporarily traveling into infinite thoughts of nothing. flicker, flicker. I sat powerless against the crushing depth of loneliness when you chose to join me. I ignored a voice pleading to find a compromise when suddenly staring into the eyes of thoughtlessness. flicker, flicker. What kind of enemy is worthy of carrying

Editor's Note	<p>weapons of infinite destruction? What could I possibly use to end the memory of us? With pulled pins, knuckles white, and the targets of my self-destruction never looking for cover, I imagined plunging the device deep into the belly of all my securities and your insecurities and feeling the implosion. Would I feel anything at all? flicker, flicker... I remember thinking I was prepared for a peace. A distinct peace without you felt almost palpable. I simply needed more solitude to oppose the void you always brought me. flicker, flicker... knock, knock. I already knew it was you. Were you prepared to consume the tragedy of me again? I cannot remember what you said, and I walked helplessly back to your car that was parked next to Saul's. I wonder if there is a grey Audi out there with a broken taillight left by someone with straight brown hair.</p>
Guidelines	<p>Why will you not talk to me in a crowd? Why do you say you taste god in my lips, but dismiss conversation? "We're fine, mother," I hear you lie. Who cares if my tongue ties itself up around the people you hope I do not embarrass myself around? I never plan to say reckless words that can never be forgotten or forgiven like blurting out "zip-a-dee-doo-daa" when I am asked what I know about your work. I guess you really "can't take me anywhere." The company you make me keep are not who I care to know. How can I carry a conversation with women who do not wear fishnet hose and short miniskirts, study the men for shallow holes then share whispered plans of action to fill those voids with something like whipped sugar, advertise intentions through too much makeup, do not do drugs, or, at least, we do not think they do, and, yet, maintain labels that, somehow, do not include prostitution. They are harvested fields lying prone, waiting for each season to come, and, yet, I began to understand their perspective the longer we lingered as a "couple." How the hell do you know so many men with facial hair? What could I possibly have in common with them? Unless they understand the soft, sweet, crashing waves of nembutals, we have nothing to say. Perhaps we have. Oh my, perhaps we have. How does that come up in between thoughts about accounts, claims, and whatever the hell they want to talk about? Los conozco de toda mi vida, and I will not waste any more of myself listening to glass tongues. Tengo odio para mis odio, and yet... I have not enough hate for whispering men. I hate the men. I hate the men whispering, over and over again, as they reach to greet me with blistered hands used to plowing fields with unclean tools. You used to save me from these figures as we talked alone about nothing and, later, as I freed Venus' illusion, you consumed the divinity, and we tore through the flesh of indifference, disrobed the costume of time, and tightly embraced a moment of sedation. We felt eternal, and it was my turn to whisper with celestial lips, "no soy escéptico." Yet, here I am, conscious of my unconsciousness, and our foundation has turned into the taint of my constraint and becoming, so far, my least favorite mistake. Venus, once again, has lost credibility. Thoughts that you may always be there as my keystone are no comfort anymore as deposits of time press over us, y nunca cambios con tiempo. Staring over the precipice of a suicide, giving no attention to the distance below, the whores are staring passively and holding their drinks with talons for nails, and bearded, vicarious men want me as fuel for their fields.</p> <p>i am fading into the moment when i cleaned the back yard and burned dead leaves. the fire burned hot and long into the afternoon. an occasional wind picked up, and the heat swirled around. smoke permeated into me, masking the smell of discontent, and you could not stop tasting me. is this how you want me, smoldering and carnal, stepping out of the smoke like a minion from hell, lust dripping off like honey from a spoon, asking the saint watching inside to remember its vow of silence. with closed, dry eyes and suffocating lungs, you tried to consume enough to fill the void as i lay passive, drained, weak, and hollow. the god on my lips cannot live with a devil in these fingertips.</p>
Contact	

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I ran across your friend, Jacob, shopping in the snack aisle sometime last week. How did I become part of this ambiguous constellation of stars? Jacob is taller than you, and his blue eyes always have a half-asleep look to them. He wonders how you are and why we missed some recent event that you never told me about. I told him we had a "thing" with your family. He asked a lot about us in his un-tucked designer shirt and ironed blue jeans. He flooded me with question after question. He seemed genuinely concerned for you. There are no looks of suspicion on his face. Have you become so good avoiding our condition that you have become immune to your own deceit? Where is the sextant that can navigate through these stars? I began to regret picking up items in the refrigerated aisle. "I don't know, I guess they've just been real busy lately," I am answering. The Klondikes are melting. For God's sake, the Klondikes are melting! Wait. Why did he ask about your cousin? I suddenly understand why I am being detained. "She will probably come over sometime this summer. I'll call you if I know something," I try to end the conversation and avert my ice cream anxiety. I was checking out and debating the need for another lip balm when the girl scanning items smiled and apparently recognized me. She seemed pleasant, and I cringed when, in her excitement, she forcefully scanned my already melting indulgence. The daughter of your high-school president says hi.

A voice that began as a whisper and struggles to cross the chasm of our connection now echoes somewhere into the horizon. Is the gap between us that far, or is there a dark mass that eclipses your concern in our sleep? How long have you been asleep? Do you care if you ever wake up? Still, when you gaze at me, the phantom of my missing essence knocks, and I lay lifeless at the foot of the door hoping you will force your way inside. You press against the glass and cup your hands to remove the glare and stare into a house where you see no one is there. Is there anything inside that can help me

attract you to the unseen silent disaster lying hidden on the floor? Is there anything inside? There is no emergency here and no need to call anyone for help. No amount of distress calls or smoke signals can save me now. You have taken everything for granted, and your god has been silent for some time now. Like my consciousness, our world is a blur, and we are not fine.

fine. where do i find fine? is it lost somewhere on the coast of your mother's beach house? is it sinking into the sand like my still feet in the receding waves? i know you enjoy the sounds of the surf at night. i do too. the blanket you would bring was always too short and the winds were always swirling. yet, we never felt the cold as the tide licked at our toes, ankles, and then our hips, where we summoned our primitive addictions. we were natural as the rhythm of waves. primal and unfiltered is how you need me to be. the moon pulls on the waves and beckons us to the sea. a serenity unpolluted by civilization. you resist the ocean coming to wash away your castles and release into the mysteriousness that is us. when did i become the blanket that never fully covered? when will you crucify your ambitions? mis sangre y mis cuerpo esperan en el mar.

A woman with beautiful blue eyes tried to sell me some soaps yesterday. It was impossible to see anything that her imagery weaved through deep-sea irises. Her smile was inviting, and I thought about her all day. The eyes kept me drunk with possibility. Does she know she is selling me the idea of purification? Does she apply the soap she sells? Somewhere, I can imagine her blue eyes lighting a match, focusing on the flickering flame, and lighting the candle for a dinner for two. Will she kiss the lips of her lover and feel something? Will she smell the subtle fragrance of innocence on her skin? Does she find comfort in her lover's embrace, or does she feel the need to wash when she stands idle and thinks

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about it? Does she comprehend just how far away the stars really are? Do her lovers make love to her with the lights on just to find intoxication in her blue eyes? Does she let them? Does she want them to? Does she feel me wanting to make love to her in the sea, lit by the moon, so that the ocean can see, in her eyes, what it desires to be? Does she ever see what the mirror cannot see, or does she always believe the reflection? Does she ever consider any of this? Is there a way to stay asleep and slip away from this limbo? Even if anxieties, false memories, haunting whispers, and unmoving feet fuel my dreams, sleep would still give more comfort than the nightmare of this incessantly looping noose that I tie for thoughts that have no form. Your weight sinks deeper into bed, eyes closed, and I begin to feel the rhythm of your heartbeat traveling through the coils. I have not felt the weight of myself since you first came to me. I am not a satellite trapped by your gravity. The moon meets the void, leaves its earth as the solar system indifferently dismisses it and watches as it shows a face never seen before, and can slowly begin to reflect the light from another star. Your heaven never could contain me. Somewhere between the black, traces of me are the only evidence against my claim that I was never there. I am simply a stone spinning silently in space.

My muscles feel so weak, my head still hurts, and the world is moving much slower. I lie paralyzed within the passionate embrace of this isolation. A cold air coming from the vent is some comfort. Time has forgotten to forget, and lingers bitterly on the tongue like a very dry wine. The coast is desolate and the erosion never ends, while my skin begs for skin like a magnet feeling its way. I am motionless and feel more and more emotionless. Layer upon layer is peeling back and revealing the greedy fly that feeds on dying nerves. I do not have the tools to melt the inhibitions that lock me within my confessional and, even if I could, these shackles of your spirit would still bind me in slumber, without reservation or penitence.

I have gone to bed without clothes ever since we met and I lie vulnerable and accessible. The air is warm tonight and I have no need for a sheet. My tanned skin is no value when the lights have slipped away with the twilight. Still, I am the one unable to separate myself from this asphyxiating room and salvage enough breath to let you know why I am blindly feeling for a weakness in the wall. I am hoping you are paying attention at how I wish you would ignore the fits of frustration that always swell within me. I seem to mean nothing when I mean nothing and, lately, the days seem to float away like a ship without its mast while eyeless ghost crews scan the still waters and silently wait for change. You are my final confidant and, yet, the only one I cannot convey to that our river will never see the ocean while it spends time arguing with stone. I am a cello without a bow. I am the salted soil. I am a general without a war, a banquet without guests, a windowless room without a clock, a zero and no one. Is there some way to deceive the serpent's gift of infrared? Piles of shed skin are proof that it was here. The blood passes very coldly through me. The blood passes so cold. The blood passes so very coldly through me, and perhaps the serpent saw something lifeless, like a stone, and has elected to pass me by. I took an axe to the family tree, and traded all my colors for a type of vision that barely sees any desire for you to be unlocked from the safe that I have long lost the combination for. Why do I not remember the code? I know I would have left a trail to find my way back. What clues did I miss? Is it hidden somewhere in this gold decoder ring? Why did your mother borrow my enigma machine again? Waldo may not even be here. Perhaps, the serpent has consumed me after all.

I can barely feel you leave me now. Are you avoiding awakening me or were you always just barely there? I can see you move in the dark as you see our two tall windows, one to each side of the fireplace, looking like blue stained glass,

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that stretch the shadows from the tops of the pines onto the living-room floor. Your mind is begging for relief as you walk between the shadows. Perhaps having me near gives you the ability to see what is not there. The water you drink never seems to satisfy, and the reason why you left me is suddenly lost in your new dissatisfaction. The lasting restlessness and headaches dig out your hidden numbness, and I remain an unnamed child and feel your empathy falling like a sinking stone.

the bed pulses again, and your heartbeat is slow and strong. when did you return and why are you still so far away? are you contemplating a release for your carefully gathered stones or are you saving them for some other purpose? try to aim for the head.

I watched as you emptied the coin jar, methodically separated, and counted. You believe there may be enough to change the oil in my car. We both know it is never enough, yet you pause before refilling the empty vessel. Is it the appeal or the fear of an empty jar that makes you stall? Like a sinking Spanish galleon, filled fat with gold hastening its fate, raining down its fortunes and fading into cold, crushing depths never to feel the sun again, you put away our jar and embrace closure. When will you awaken from the coma that is me? Will the car have enough gas to get me to work? They called in the prescription, and I never found time to fill the tank. I did not remember you saying that you could not tolerate generics, and is the iron still out? If you see it, could you put it away? I may have paid the water bill twice. Why can I not release the anchor that follows you into nothingness so I can make my way to the surface and abandon my ship? Why do you never ask me to whom I am talking when I am on the phone?

I know you miss the smell of smoke and damn the weight of gold. Like a dead Aztec god, you wear your precious metals into oblivion. Come to me and ask me for your release; or is your courage disappearing somewhere into the depths? These thoughts are becoming unimportant as I feel your hand slide over my shattered core. I must accept that your consciousness has finally faded away, and Sunday morning ends the longest beginning.

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**Michael Peter Garza** studied English at University of Houston. When not finding multiple methods of finding new and creative ways to explore the fascinating culture that encompasses writer's block, he is the fortunate custodial caretaker of one Russian Blue named Poe.

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