

Evanescence

By Mason Turner-Tree, MD

The cold, damp institutional concrete leapt at me like a prisoner attacking with a fork, ready to extract my radial artery and bite it in half. Fear permeated the minimal throng of people who were just moments before ensconced in laughter, joviality, and irresponsibility. The vague camphor smell went unnoticed until a polyester protector reminded us that the room was last occupied in the early 1960s. Suddenly, as she inhaled deeply, we all followed suit, as if our individuality had been stamped into an 8x8 cell with a regulation coiled, uncomfortable bed and an assaulting jumpsuit. Suddenly, the camphor flowed over me, not in my lungs, but on my skin, across my eyes and through my hair. The collective shudder was more frightening than the camphor. A shared soul is less easy to tolerate than a distant smell leaching from walls that contained such misery. I peered to my companion, hesitant to break the collection of souls marching alongside the polyester protector. It was night. Bleak, cold, wet, and exhausting night. As I broke the camphoria and touched my companion, the bare bulb blew. An echoed scream blinded us, until we realized that it was blackness, not loudness that had burned the retina of our collective. I pulled to the window, and looked at the marshmallow skyline, enveloped by black, moonlit tar. Suddenly, it was 1960-something, and I was trapped. Imprisoned not by concrete walls, but by loneliness and isolation. The smell of chocolate now filled my lungs, but never made it to my brain, stopped on its marginal path by the bleakness of my soul. Snuffed by the camphoria. Blinded by the pale green that I could feel pressing against me. Relief was usurped when a bowl of light fell upon that very same pale green. The polyester protector squashed the collective with her bowl of chocolate-scented fragrance. I stood alone, so close to the moonlit tar that fear permeated my olfactory senses and dragged me, quicksand-like, into the roiling pot of tar, studded with the white, fluffy figures that seemed like heaven. They too, were imprisoned by the sticky filth around us. Suddenly, a solvent hand touched my shoulder, and the collective was gone. The pale green marshmallows were sucked into the moat, and a radiant dragon appeared to damselize me. In the distance, I heard, "That was the room, where Robert "The Birdman" Stroud died ..."



Mason Turner-Tree, MD, earned his AB degree in psychology from Dartmouth College and completed his medical degree at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center/ Parkland Hospital in Dallas, TX. He joined The Permanente Medical Group as an associate physician in the Department of Psychiatry at San Francisco Medical Center and in Addiction Medicine at the Chemical Dependency Recovery Program in July 2003. He is currently working on his first novel. In his spare time, he also enjoys playing classical piano and attending opera.