So Long Glory Summer

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“You’ve got to be shitting me.”
We gaped at it as the car pulled up the long driveway, finally coming to rest behind a beat up old Lincoln. Empty beer cans littered the seats of the car and the surrounding lawn. Everywhere the grass was wild and unkempt. It was slowly climbing walls and devouring pavement in a loose, chaotic march to reclaim the earth where the old house stood.

As we piled out, the heavy July air seeped into our nostrils, dripping wet-hot down our throats. Drew was already peeling off his shirt as we approached the front door.

“Dude, there is no way we are doing this house. No way.”
The decay was unbelievable. Intricate patterns of bare wood had been exposed on the off-white exterior in twisted, writhing paths. The naked boards underneath were dry and cracked, taking on a pale green hue as they peeled upward in a desperate attempt to find shelter from nature’s brutality. Elsewhere shutters dangled off kilter on single nails. A low level of the roof was covered in a thick moss-carpet, where a crooked gutter had been dripping thick, brown water for God only knew how long. Miscellaneous debris was scattered all over the lawn.

I stood for a moment, taking it all in. It didn’t look like someone had been living there for a long time. “Does this guy really think a coat of paint is going to make this place look better?”

“Is this even the right place?” Drew looked questioningly at our boss, Andy.

He looked over his job listing, “It looks like the right address. I think there’s like ... eighty hours of scraping work that needs to be done.”

“Jesus dude.” Drew said. This is the worst thing ever.”

Our job was supposed to be every college student’s dream: a steady forty hours a week, working for more than minimum wage. No more burgers. No more customers. No more special orders, no more spatulas, no more Friday nights emptying the grease traps underneath deep fryers. It was to be my great money making summer, and as the dollar signs flashed in my mind during the interview, I tasted my first drop of financial independence. Because that was
what this was really about. My parents had worked hard to provide for me my entire life, and I was determined to prove that they had taught me well. I didn't want to tread out into the world with the tentative first steps of a baby. I wanted to take great exuberant strides and cry boisterously, like the eighteen year old man I was. I was six hours away from home with my own apartment, and God Dammit if I wanted to buy cookies for dinner or spend $40 on a concert ticket than I would. It was going to be my glory summer.

Of course, that's not how things worked out. The company we worked for was actually threatening to implode under its own mismanagement before we even joined. We sometimes went days without working, finishing one job and then waiting to hear about the next one. We heard "we'll call you, we'll let you know" more times than I care to remember. The job proved too unreliable for those that needed the money for student loans or car payments, and we spent the summer hemorrhaging coworkers until there were only three of us left on our crew. Around mid-July, the jobs dried up for good. Despite the company's insistence that there was plenty of work to be done in the neighboring towns, I put in my two weeks notice. I was so fed up with the inconsistency that I was going to swallow my pride and finish the summer at home.

"Nice going away present," I muttered. Andy's boss, Chris, had retaliated by making our final job the most difficult one he could find.

Andy cleared his throat and knocked on the door. Drew and I stood idly behind, waiting for him to begin the bland, rehearsed speech we heard every time we started a new house. I peered into a dark window, looking for some sign of life. The house looked just as disheveled and deserted on the inside. There was no answer at the door.

"I say we bail dude." Drew was off the porch and sprawled out in the lush grass, his paint spattered shirt bunched in a makeshift pillow under his head. "Chris is just fucking with us. I'm pretty sure nobody lives here."

"I'm gonna have to go with him on this one," I added. "Even if someone is here, it's going to take all week just to scrape all that peeling stuff off. If we actually want to finish we'll be here until next Tuesday or Wednesday."

"And you know we're done after Friday."

Andy pretended he couldn't hear us. He knocked louder on the door, standing on his tip toes, trying a look in a window over the door. Several minutes passed in silence until he dully kicked the porch in disgust and sat down next to Drew.

"Well guys, I don't know what to do. Our stuff is here so we could just start working and see if someone shows up."

"That sounds fantastic Andy. You go ahead and work for the guy who, for all we know, died months ago and hasn't been found yet. AJ and I will drive home and go back to sleep." Yet even as he spoke, I felt a twinge of guilt. As much as I wanted to just pack up and leave, I did technically still have a week
of work left.

"Try calling Chris." I suggested. "See if he'll admit that no one lives here, and then make him pay us for the gas we wasted. Then we can go home."

Andy took my suggestion and called him. As the phone rang, I felt torn between wanting to hear Chris say "get to work" and not wanting him to answer. I was sure that Andy would give into Drew eventually. He was feeling as indecisive as I was, and without reinforcement he would cave to the prospect of an extra week off.

Andy closed the phone after getting his voicemail. "He's not answering, so I guess it's up to you guys. I wouldn't mind getting paid, but I definitely wouldn't mind going home."

"Look," Drew said, "if you don't want to be the boss, I will." He lowered his voice and scrunched his shoulders. "Alright guys, listen up. Now that I've grown some balls, I say we get out of here. Start grabbing the equipment."

"Now hold on. We could always leave it out here and come back tomorrow. We'd probably get a hold of Chris by then."

We sat in the grass for awhile, while Drew and Andy debated the idea. I quietly sympathized with Andy, although I kept my mouth shut, since I wasn't sure what I really wanted either. As pissed as I was about our circumstances, I couldn't quell my "sense of duty" to the job. I tried not to feel guilty for not backing Andy up.

Drew, on the other hand, was absolutely livid about our situation. He was furious that he was going back home, and he begged us to help him "even things out." His words were smooth and satisfying, and the longer the conversation went on, the more convincing he sounded. Every verbal jab, every little reminder of the things that had gone wrong all summer hit the chords that I wanted to hear but tried to bury. As the words mounted I became swept up in them, awash in the desire for vindication. I decided that I wanted a piece of my summer back.

When we started packing our gear, I half expected someone to come out of the house and tell us to go back to work, but the house remained as quiet as ever, ominously indifferent to our presence. We didn't even bother double checking the equipment; it's not like it was ours anymore. As the car pulled out of the driveway, I resigned myself to our decision. I smiled knowing that we had a small victory in achieving a semblance of control over our situation. We raced off down the street, and with one last look back I said goodbye to my glory summer.