

FLARES

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I had always known that in war it is customary to use the art of deception. Forces disguised behind masks of dark camouflage hide behind twisting walls of smoke, silently watch you pass but never stir, as you stare into a wall of clandestine intentions.

Deception has always been a necessary evil of such affairs, while truth remains the first casualty of war. In every field, it's hard to see through to the truth, hidden by the face of fire and smoke lures our minds farther from it. But amid various smoke screens, we can sometimes find a beacon, a distant flare to keep us connected with our allies. Flares show bright in the darkness and even brighter in our minds, made darker by treacherous fatigue. They let us see that we are not alone in miserable mystery. It's the same no matter where you are, out there and even here at home.

The Smoke Screen

An avid viewer of television, I can honestly say that I learned everything that I thought I knew about the world through the lenses of film cameras. I think that it was a white-haired gentleman (everyone probably knew him as Mr. Rogers) who once explained that TV had the potential to educate the masses within their own homes. I think there is some truth to that, but now when I think back to everything I've seen, I'd say I knew too damn much about the word *terrible* and too little about *lovely*. The images had always drawn me so close that at the end when I turned off the TV, I would just stare into the black mirror of the screen, reflecting reality back into my eyes.

As a little kid, I wasn't too familiar with the world outside of the woods where I lived. The only connection to that world came to me in a staticky voice that spoke through a glass face. My TV only had few channels to watch: FOX, PBS, and shows like Nova and National Geographic films, but needless to say, I watched everything I could. The programs always provoked questions as to why people did all of the stupid and foolish things they do. Later in my life, I would learn that most other children may have grown up with TV screens as their first window into the world outside, the first glance into the mystery of human experience, the first teacher.

Out of all of the events I witnessed on a television, one was the most vivid, the footage of desert storm soldiers trotting through the thick clouds of dust, moving like machines in a strange singularity with one another. It seemed so mysterious and exciting, and I wanted to be there. I wanted to go see it for myself, right there in the world, so brightly displayed before my eyes. But this was just a screen; one that displays its own "TV magic" and all that magic has ever been is merely smoke and mirrors. It's easy to get lost in the smoke but then you can see the reality reflected back at you from the mirror of a dark, silent screen.

Here at Home

Coming into high school, many of us had an expectation of what we thought our lives would be. Sadly, it's hardly what any of us meet when we finally arrive. It all becomes so confusing and even painful when our view is so distorted. Like in warfare, we use our own deception to keep ourselves hidden, too afraid or too angry to let our true selves be known. Often, the friends we assumed to have understood, vanish into obscurity as they hurt us, trick us, but most of all, confuse us.

Some of us hide from a world like this, too tormented to chance suffering at the hands of our peers, while others find comfort in returning the same cruelty. In a fog like this, everyone seems like scary and monstrous silhouettes who only desire the suffering of others for reasons unclear and unfair. It's like war, almost, and we are afraid and blinded by the smoke screen.

It's never easy to show your true face, but there are still flares and still someone who will take the chance to light one for you. The bright and fiery light, shown by the ones who want to be found, discovered, accompanied. We are drawn to this sort of light, and when we find it, we can finally see through the smoke – people you never truly saw before at last become visible. The smoke lifts, and as you stare into another face, you see yourself reflected through eyes as curiously fragile as your own.