

A Room of Rotating Silence

Stay off the street between the times of 2am and 6am unless you know how to make yourself something more dangerous than a city in motionless silence. Consider: being alone. Consider: empty streetlights. Consider: weapons, yours or what they might have. Am I prepared to be stolen from tonight? A gunshot in the distance sounds like the inside of a car crash you watch happen from outside the car, and in the way of feeling fear, like that could've been you. How could something be so close and far away at the same time? Intimacy has many designs, as does death. Check your blind spots. Walk home steady. Saying anything is still saying too much. Don't put yourself out there where you can be seen unless you're willing to make yourself vulnerable. I learned this on the late-night walk back home not so steady enough after I'd accidentally seduced a stranger in a graveyard. [So, do you come here often? has implications if you say it to someone in a close whisper, and] it was so dark I hadn't been aware of how close I'd been to him, and only had I known he was there by a lit cigarette. Not a firefly, regrettably. I cupped my hands and reached out to catch it. What kind of firefly stings?

“Me.” “Sorry, [whispering] I thought you were something else.”

“You put out my smoke.” “I suppose I did that. Oh. So, do you [want to see what else I can put out?]”

Not all accidents are mistakes, as it turned out to be. He'd been there alone to dwell on death existentially and defended that the best way was to be surrounded by people who were already dead. Then there was me, the polite one, who'd been whispering out of respect for the dead, bent over a tombstone the next thing I know, forgetting my manners. You know it's a sleazy thing when you've kept your shoes on the entire time, or if it's within the bounds of a gated graveyard locked

shut past close and hopped over for entry. My cemetery visit was made because it was somewhere else to look in for whatever I was trying to find.

Try the uncanny places. Don't follow the neon lights, go somewhere dim. Try life in sepia: color is expensive and unnecessary and commercial glam is too complex and intentional. Be hesitant about what impresses you. Rule 1: don't expect anything. Rule 2: expect you'll always find something. Become someone so simple that you don't even know your own name.

The moon is something between a
black hole and a splinter in the sky.
I'll be out here looking for something
that makes me feel like I found what
I never knew I didn't have.

"I apparently don't come to the graveyard often enough." And I'm not going to tell him I'm probably not coming back.

More over anything, I felt that I was just understanding someone's outline. Our faces were poured over with thick darkness that blurred us out into a couple of featureless shadows and we shared words about what we looked like so the sex could extend into visual dimensions. He had a freckle configuration the shape of Colorado and parted his hair down the middle which he explained in terms of Moses parting the seas. I described myself as "I can be anyone you want me to be, baby." Then it was over.

He sparks a lighter and lights himself a smoke, "you know, I don't really like smoking cigarettes." "Why do it then?" "It's convenient."

The wavering dot of red burned against the night sky. The June humidity draped over like curtain of black velvet.

And then a room full of rotating
silence.

The right way to jump and rob someone is waiting up until it's dark enough to stay hidden before rushing out on the sidewalk from behind buildings and alleys along the road. This was unsolicited advice, being that it was given without a word to the one being stolen from on her late-night walk back home after a classy interaction with a stranger in a graveyard.

Was I being followed out? Was it like: bang me then rob me?

A clock tower chimes in the distance.
Hello, it's dawn. At 6am the world is
a kaleidoscope. And then it's morning.
And then the world is a prism.

I don't know if it was him or if it was me who was the first to leave the cemetery. I only noticed when there was nothing left to say. He was laying against a tombstone and I was laying with him. Before then, I'd never tried existentialism.

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A short-lived era of my life was spent living with a girl who proposed a challenge between the two of us with a bet on boy count. For record keeping purposes, we set up a chalkboard in the living room and marked ourselves a tally for every boy we banged. Each would be worth one point. Before we invented the game of boy counting, we didn't really have much to talk about because

we had nothing in common at all and actually met because we had tennis lessons together, and it turns out that playing a game of rubber racket smacking against each other from 20 feet away doesn't hold much merit for friendship. I yelled across the court that I needed a roommate, that's how it all started.

“I can't believe it. You banged a ghost.”

“Dead or alive, that boy was still worth a tally.”

Points were only valid if it was a new, different boy. Multiple occasions were considered fowl play and points weren't awarded for double banging or triple banging and especially not for the daring quadruple bang. No day-banging either. Only mindless banging. The prior is a very involved activity. I mean, when you've only got two days off work in a week, that time has got to be rationed very wisely. Everything had to be ephemeral. That was the foundation of the boy-counting game.

What happens if you find a heart for someone?

That was forfeiture.

When you mark that tally, it's to show for the decision over a boy to remain nothing more than a line on a chalkboard. It's an oath to keeping him a one-night-stand forevermore. Don't call him back, don't go out to see him again. No matter how casual, even for such unassuming plans like meeting up briefly for afternoon coffee or Sunday mimosas or even just a goddamn walk in the park. No follow-ups. You can't go back on your decision. Get too close and you may find the risk of defeat stacking up high against you.

The game was what I used as an excusable explanation for my hesitations towards getting to know someone, anyone. I suppose I'd been having trouble meeting people, or maybe it was that I didn't

know how to let myself feel something for someone. The roommate I was living with, the one who I was playing the game with, proposed this would be a mode of me putting myself out there, stop being so shy. Bang every boy you can find, that's a start. I supposed. What was there then to feel guilty about? A disconnected connection with a stranger? What was so shameful about that? I was fine with the silence of being alone but hated that I didn't know how to be anything but alone, what was the method? Dating websites? The bar? The club? The grocery store? Public transport? In line at The Secretary of State? Sunday mass? The community pool? A busy intersection? The beach? In the middle of nowhere? From across the room? From across any room anywhere, not so far away at all, right there, someone so beautiful and just so slightly out of reach, someone who makes you feel so wrong for just looking at them, maybe an angel, maybe love in another life, but probably nothing at all.

What're you sighing about?

I'm on about another daydream.

No matter how many boys I banged, I never felt whole. I cried in the shower. I took walks in the rain. I woke up next to myself and felt like I had something to apologize for.

I think there's something nervous inside of me and it feels so unnatural when my face comes too close, 4 inches away, then 3 inches away, then so close all you can see is me.

I won't call you back, I'm sorry. I

can't let myself get too close to you.

I wouldn't be so reserved about spending the night on the first round, my mystery would be in check, it didn't take confidence to find someone to disappear for: I felt like magic. It was thrilling to give purpose to carelessness, there was something so theatric about it. I'd thank them, bike home,

and reward myself with a tally. It was easy to make dead-ends out of people and pretend that I wasn't looking for something more, like some kind of understanding. Sometimes I'd then go on to sit with myself and feel something more complex, like it burned. Something inside me would say I should be teaching myself how to be close to someone, anyone.

This time with the lights on.

Sometimes, they'd call for me again and I'd be given the chance to make something convenient out of myself, as a mutual exchange all the same. My commitment to the chalkboard wasn't very loyal. I'd go back on my word and let myself meet up with them sometimes.

I could be someone's company for a second time, but what is it that
I'm being asked to bring?

I'm sorry, maybe I don't understand.

I've already given you everything I
have, all except for myself.

Why would I be going over?

There'd be a lonely excuse ready, I had plenty.

This is something I'm doing to feel a bit less alone with myself, is that it? Can I just get a sample of what it feels like to be close to someone, without going all the way? Is it wrong to want someone to look at you, but not too closely? What's the difference between touching someone and feeling someone? How do I know when I've said too much? Did I pack my toothbrush?

On my way, on my bike. So much
going through my head.

I think I'm only here to practice vulnerability.

I let myself unveil a layer of anonymity when I had questions, when it was convenient, when I felt like I could take on the risks of feeling unnatural in front of someone.

Hold eye-contact for more than three seconds, put your face in focus, bring it in the light. Everything feels soft. You're inside of a world that plays in stop-motion. Everything is burning. If you don't know where to look, look at the ceiling. Blink a couple times, remind yourself that you're awake.

I can hear a train running in the
distance.

Don't be the one saying sorry when you're the one being touched, don't say sorry when you rest your hand on the shoulder of someone you came over to feel vulnerable for. Let your hand move down. Slowly trace the collarbones of something you're trying to understand.

And then two people lay together in
the empty company of each other,
looking for something, staring up at
the ceiling, so unaware of what could
be holding the room together.