

Friday Night Serenade

Peter Foreman is a bastard. Just when I've started to get my act together in college, he has to drag me to an all-night romp in the middle of the woods with all the old high-school guys. I have a biology exam Monday and the last thing I need is to get piss drunk with all these burnouts that never managed to make it out of town. Yet, here I am. With a six pack and a bad attitude, I stumble into a haze of weed and drunk twenty-year-olds.

"Freaking Bloom Goodwin!" That's Peter calling me from the kitchen in his always aggravating seventh-grade dialect. I skirt around a roaring game of quarters in the living room and make my way to Peter and his buddies in the kitchen

Peter Foreman's been my best friend since birth. He grew up down the street from me; we were always in the same class; we always played on the same sports teams. He is the nicest guy in the world and the best friend you could ever ask for. Also, I hate him. He's got that goddamn shade of black-brown hair that doesn't tell you a single thing about a person, except that they are consistently and repulsively ambiguous. Tonight, as he pounds shots like there's no tomorrow, he's wearing classically blue jeans and a comfortable basic t – Peter's kept every secret he's ever been told, but who really cares if a guy like that knows anything about you anyway?

"I'm so glad you could make it!" he began enthusiastically. His volume instantly annoyed me.

"Yeah man, don't mention it." I say as I coolly slide my hand into my pocket and allow my watch to poke out above the seam.

"Well make yourself at home," he says. "Everybody's around."

I give him a polite appreciative nod and wander into the bathroom off the kitchen. I open the door and stumble in upon a junkie I don't recognize with a cord wrapped tightly around his bicep and an empty syringe in his opposite hand.

"Seriously?" I start in a pissed off tone. "At least lock the door if you're gonna do that shit."

He stares dumbly at me, clearly already gone.

"Get out of here!" I yell, pulling him up off the floor and pushing him through the doorway, wishing I could wipe the fresh memory of his pathetic escape from my head.

I stare into the mirror for a moment and take stock of myself. My khaki colored jeans and collared red baseball t are relatively unscathed thus far. I run my fingers through my dark brown hair, pushing it back and to the right. I've got to remember not to do that in front of people. Makes me look like an ass.

I almost consider leaving as I exit the bathroom, but I notice some friends off to my right. In the den, sitting on the couch, is Syllas, Abigail, and Carraway. Syllas Wakefield sits on the right. Now I'm confident enough in my manhood to admit that Syllas is downright beautiful. Chiseled jaw line, washboard abs, flowy blonde hair – he's got all the key assets. But Syllas was never all that interested in the ladies. Don't get me wrong – he did just fine in that department, but he never commanded the legion of gorgeous women you might expect. He was way too into his writing for that.

Sylas is constantly writing: poetry, stories, journals, whatever. He's got this backpack that he keeps all his work in, and it is with him at all times. In fact, he's clutching it tightly against his chest right now. It's essentially the only thing he cares about.

On the left of the couch is Abigail Rivers. Abigail is gorgeous, but there's no chance of getting near her. Abigail's religious. Like, very religious. She carries a bible with her everywhere. Sometimes she reads from it. Out loud.

But man, she's got this long golden hair that tumbles down her back, and she always wears these sweaters that look like she knit them herself, and they fit in all the right places. It's a shame really.

In the middle sits Carraway Stevens. Carraway wears glasses, and if you don't know that, you don't know Carraway at all. His hair is as brown as brown could be. He could live to be 150 and there would not be one speck of gray in that pretentious oak blanket. The three of them are passing a joint as Sylas reads one of his poems.

"I wrote this one last year, so you know, I've changed a lot since then," says Sylas.

"I'm sure it's awesome," Abigail assures him politely.

"Yeah," Carraway adds sarcastically. "I'm sure it'll be wonderful."

"Hey guys." I say lamely as I approach.

"Hey!" exclaims Sylas excitedly. "Thought we'd never see you again. Wanna hit?" he asks, offering me the joint.

"Nah man, I don't really do that stuff," I reply.

"Hey, it's your loss," says Sylas as he takes a long and slow drag.

Just then, a mass of tangled bodies comes hurtling on to the couch.

"Hey there!" exclaims Carraway who receives the brunt of the impact. The tangled bodies are in fact the interlocked Amber Glass and Seamus Forester. In high school, they were known for hooking up at parties.

"Oh sorry, didn't see you there," says Amber cheekily as she pulls her lips away from Seamus. Amber is wearing this dark blue crop top spotted with lavender lilies that hugs every curve tightly and cuts off just above the pierced navel that is painfully close to artistic expression but struggles to jump over the hurdles of teenage angst. Her black mini skirt just tickles the top of her knees.

"Oh hey there Bloom," Amber says to me. "Boy do you look good. These last two years have treated you nicely." I smile dumbly for a second before regaining my composure.

"Hey thanks," I say. "You don't look too bad yourself."

Seamus, detecting that his moment has come to a close, steals one last kiss and carries his brutish form off to join the dumb jocks at the foosball table on the opposite side of the den.

"So you were gonna read that poem Sylas," offers Abigail.

“Oh boy,” adds Carraway.

Across the room, I spot an opportunity to get away for a moment.

“Excuse me,” I say as I cross to the piano on the adjacent wall. Sitting at the bench with earbuds in is Elizabeth Newman. She’s wearing an adorable yet conservative flowered dress and sitting all alone. I tap her on the shoulder and she removes one bud from behind her blonde hair.

“Oh hi Bloom,” she says shyly but sincerely.

“How’s it going?” I ask. Elizabeth is probably my favorite of the old high school gang. She was always very shy, but very sincere, very real.

“You know. Just over here trying not to be noticed,” she says.

“Same old Elizabeth,” I reply. We laugh quietly and she offers me the earbud.

“Would you like to listen?” she asks. I nod and put the earbud in.

She’s listening to classical music. A whole symphony orchestra. Who sits alone at a party and listens to classical music? I take out the earbud.

“Do you like it?” she asks hopefully.

“Yeah, it’s cool,” I reply half-heartedly. She frowns slightly.

“You were always so in to this music stuff,” I say. “What’s so exciting about it anyway?”

“Well, you know,” she starts. “I connect to it. Every piece, every instrument even, has a story. An emotion, a message. It’s fascinating to watch those stories unfold. Music’s always changing: what’s cool, what sucks. Always in flux – Just like the violin, bending under the pressure of the cellos until it settles into the perfectly harmonious note. But I think it’s the oboe that keeps me coming back. I’d bet you could change every damn note in the score, and that oboe wouldn’t change a single thing.”

“What do you play?” I ask.

“The violin.”

Suddenly someone is grabbing my face and turning me around. It’s a girl and she’s kissing me. Like, really kissing me. Her tongue is down my throat. I wonder if this is awesome or terrifying when suddenly I feel something pass over my tongue. Just as I start to worry, I realize that I’ve swallowed it.

“What the hell?!” I yell as I push her away, but she’s immediately running off into another room of this giant house.

“Are you okay?” asks Elizabeth.

“I think she passed me something,” I say. “Oh my god. I think she slipped me something.”

Just then, Seamus tosses a football across the room to one of his jock buddies. It misses badly and slams against the old wooden clock on the mantle, shattering it into a million pieces.

Needless to say, I'm freaking out. I've just been drugged and am probably going to die. So I immediately head for the front door, likely in route for the hospital. As I enter the living room, I'm stopped by Amber.

"Hey! Where you headed?," she asks, puffing out her chest slightly.

"I gotta get out of here," I half-mumble as I try and push past her, but Peter is close behind.

"Yo Bloom, what's up?" he asks.

"Look," I begin in a very paranoid tone. "I think somebody slipped me something, and I have a bio exam on Monday, and if I don't get-

"Woah woah woah," Peter cuts me off. "Dude, relax, nobody slipped you anything."

"But there was this girl," I start.

"Just relax man," says Peter. "You're gonna be fine. Besides, you're clearly hammered and I'm not letting you drive anywhere."

"I haven't had a single drink," I say.

"Well now's a good time to start," says Amber from my side. "Come play some beer pong."

I hover for a moment, feeling a bit woosy. "Umm...." I say. I sneak a look at Amber's crop top. "Yeah sure, you're probably right," I say and immediately feel a little better.

"That's my guy!" Peter exclaims triumphantly. "Now somebody get this man a game!"

Amber directs me over to the kitchen table turned beer pong table. I try to relax. I run my hand through my hair (damn it, wasn't gonna do that), and check my watch. I'm okay. I take up the ball and begin to line up my shot, when suddenly, over the shoulder of my opponent, I notice Elizabeth in the den.

I swear to god, I see music notes. There are fucking music notes coming out of her head and floating all around her. And I can hear them. Whole notes, half notes slurred together. Deep slow tones. I can *hear* them.

I'm freaking out again. I've got to get out of here. I drop the ball and turn, but Sylas is there and grabs me.

"Hey man," he says. "You never listened to that poem."

"Dude, I gotta get out of here."

"Relax dude, you're fine." He assures me and leads me over to the couch in the den. I still hear the music. Even when I'm not looking at her.

"Goddamnit!" Sylas shouts as we enter the den. He left his bag on the couch for two seconds and someone has gotten in it and spread his writing all around the room.

"It's okay man" I reassure him. "I'll help you pick 'em up."

“No no no,” he says. “Just go relax.”

I mumble thanks and stumble out on to the deck for some fresh air. The cool breeze feels amazing against my skin and I look up at the sky. It’s a cloudy night but I’m faintly aware of some color dancing behind the storm. It’s as though I can *feel* the stars.

“Everything okay Bloom?”

I jump, forgetting for a moment where I am. It’s Elizabeth. And her fucking music note cloud.

“I’m kind of freaking out here Elizabeth,” I say with what I can only imagine is a horrified look.

“It’s okay,” she says. “I know what you mean. It’s weird to be back with all these high school friends. Kind of makes you think about your future you know.”

“That’s not exactly what I’m freaking out about,” I say as I notice her music has changed slightly. She’s taken on a higher pitch and a slew of quarter notes is intermingled among the long and laconic drones.

“But I think it’s okay, you know. There’s as much reason to be optimistic as there is to be scared.” I’m suddenly aware of how long her last sentence was and how quickly these thoughts are passing. Elizabeth looks gorgeous all of a sudden. She has a glow among her cloud of notes. “I was so shy in high school you know. I think I’m ready to finally start coming out of my shell.” She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. I don’t know what’s come over me, but I swear I am absolutely in love with Elizabeth Newman.

I look up at the sky again and I feel warmth combating the cool wind. I look down at my wrist.

“Where’s my watch?” I ask.

“What?” replies Elizabeth and her music misses a beat.

“I was wearing a watch, I was wearing a watch. I swear to god I was wearing a...” I fade out as the breeze is suddenly entirely too tangible. As though it’s carrying some turbulent emotion from up wind. “Can we go inside?” I ask, paranoid.

Elizabeth takes me by the arm and it’s as though the music is being played against my bones. I can hear it in every inch of my body and it begins to emanate outwards from me. In the den, Amber approaches me, and sees that I’m distressed. She grabs me, and I feel for a moment as though I’m on a cloud. I’m a raindrop gathering weight. And she kisses me hugely.

“Relax, will you?” she tells me. “We’re going to the pool.”

“Okay,” I say in submission to the chaos in my mind.

The next few hours slide away from us in a blur. That beach ball dances around the pool faster than the second hand sprang in fear from the shattered clock in the den. The pretty bodies swimming about in tight two pieces are captured up by chiseled men spearing dinner from the lush plains of the pool surface. We send bullets of love-lust whizzing about in every direction, filling the liquid void like bubbles of night life overtake a crowded dance floor. I watch two background persons slipping away into the darkness through the widening gaps in the sleek-iron fence. Their gaping smiles and raw

gestures of sexual energy threaten to pull me back into a moment of consequence, but I relax, because I am fully aware that they wear no watches and time cannot follow them into the space between the fence posts.

Amber is beside me as I clutch the edge of the pool like an anchor. She slithers her body around mine and conjures up adversarial images of snakes and escape ropes. I consider sliding into one of those co-human moments – an instant of isolation for the sake of experimenting within a new set of social classes. I wonder if we could fit through the fence posts, when the shy-violin tickles at my anchor hands.

Elizabeth! I'm speaking too loudly and forget to phrase my remark like speech. "What's up?" The dull weight of my escape rope wraps around my right ankle and settles beside me. She accepts that second-hand speed party game for a moment before passing it on to the next lust bullet.

"I think Peter was looking for you," says the music as eighth notes dance around her golden hair. Her music cloud has gotten more hectic. But not more anxious. Simply more full. She seems relaxed.

"Oh okay. I'll go find him in a minute. Thanks Elizabeth." She drifts off out of sight, but her melody stays lightly in my ear drums, reminding me that music changes.

Amber Glass picks playfully at my chest hairs. A few of the poet's works slide on a breeze into the surface of our melting pot. I look at the sky. It has that same sense of shaded borders, as if beyond a widening sleek-steel fence of its own right. Yet the clouds of the early evening have parted, and the stars beyond are beginning to forget their place. Little suns from far away times swirl about and paint me a moment.

The Spirit and the Cynic sit nearby and dialogue just loud enough to overcome Elizabeth's lingering bravado. Carraway asks for a reading, an argument, some fuel for his deep brown hair to feast on. A good Christian never denies the word. So Abigail pulls back her angelic locks, opens wide her testament, and reads:

"Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Elizabeth's music picks up and I imagine Syllas' ears are pricked. The poet does not only bend to his own words, but the words of those before him. Be it law, poetry, a mockery, the word has some spirit.

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Amber presses her lips against my earlobe and I see simultaneously the lengthening slats in the fence post and the grounded Seamus with another beer. Perhaps it isn't faith, but he has his center.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die."

Just as Elizabeth fades the beach ball comes to me. I push it on to a passerby and feel Promiscuity slide her hand into the small of my back.

"Well," began Carraway. "It seems we really have our boats against the current tonight."

“Bloom,” Amber whispers in my ear.

“Yes”

“Where’s the conflict?” she asks

“Conflict?” She rears back, her arms around my neck, pushing her breasts out into the space between us. Elizabeth is on the other end of the pool, bikini-clad now. Some fisherman are singing harmonies to her brewing strength.

“Well yeah, conflict. You can’t write a good story without a conflict. What would Syllas make of this night?”

I think long and hard about the space between the fence posts. I think long and hard about the music. I think about Seamus grounded in moments, Peter stuck in yesterday, Carraway never believing. I think about Abigail’s golden hair.

“There’s a reason we love *Catcher*. Holden doesn’t need an enemy. The whole world’s full of shit anyway.” She softly kisses the space between my jawline and my throat. “Moments keep us living. We do what we can.”

A mellow warm softness washes over me, slides through my consciousness from ear to ear and stops at each vital organ on the way. Elizabeth. She saunters through the loving water, approaching us with bravado and sixteenth notes full of awareness. She’s beautiful like before. Amber kisses my shoulder blade.

“Come dance,” sings Elizabeth. Amber’s hand is on my cheek and I’m looking into her eyes. “Let’s go,” she says with a smile. Over her shoulder, the space between the fence post glows with sentience that borders on arrogance. It grins at me like a father watching his son’s first steps.

The sky seems lower around us, and those star moment paintings are now orbiting me. They illustrate sensations I’ve never before experienced. They whisper that I’m alive.

“Ok.”

The den is different. The shattered clock pieces have shifted to the borders of the room as if to allot the maximum space between them. The people are singing love songs to one another, be it with voices or bodies. They are swaying to a rhythm made mercifully fluid by the absence of watches. I don’t recognize any faces. There are only empty bodies waiting to be filled with human moments.

We dance.

The steps we take are light, allowing for no hindrance of gravity or friction. We express ourselves whole heartedly like Van Gogh painted skies and teenagers make love. The sifting tones and rhythms swim about us tangibly - overcoming Elizabeth's quaint melodies.

When I was small I sent love letters to Jesus and thank you's for a mundane life.

I sang campfire songs about bigotry because I felt acceptance was finding a group of people so similar to yourself, that you can't possibly be judged. I thought redemption was carried by the waves of a tired tide and I neglected to realize that the portraits painted by sweaty bodies are grace that Judas never knew.

I'm screaming with my throat, feet, and values to the tone of everyone else's endeavors. We're sympathizing with the idea of being alive, and recognizing the fluidity of that instant of existence. This dance floor is a Sunday Night camp fire and the pastor is that long forgotten star now hovering over the pool deck.

I am completely in love with the person in front of me. She's a figure swinging around in time with me. We have so much in common.

Amber grabs me around the waist and I catch Elizabeth's tune for a moment. Suddenly everything is tangible again.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"I've never been better."

And Amber and I dance together. She slithers like that ambiguous image from the pool, but I see now that she is neither a snake nor rope. She is the tail of a comet. She whispers past the sedentary in a moment of brilliance, that reminds us all of our size. She is something glorious hanging in the night sky.

As Elizabeth fades once more, I think the mass around me shares a moment. We feel, for just a second, like a supernova. The symbol of tiresome death, but too brief, and too bright to give a shit.

I remain in the den, but I slide into my backyard. I'm very small again. Peter throws me the football and I catch it as I always have, pretending I've just won the super bowl.

"Do you think we'll ever have girlfriends Peter?"

"Who cares man. You've got your whole life to look for a girlfriend, but dinner starts in twenty minutes, and this game is tied."

Amber kisses me gently. I'm on a surface. My back is cool and my aching dark hair falls like Abigail's over my shoulders.

I'm on a table. I'm lying on a table.

"Do it." Amber whispers to Seamus. The brute unleashes a wave of cool air across my scalp. My body sizzles for a moment, as the unknown substance leaks into my skull. I feel a weight relinquished from my chest like Atlas realized the sky is just fine on its own. I almost want to slide into a sense of newness and be finished. I recall my baptism as I process the scent. It's bleach. They've bleached my hair.

Promiscuity kisses me again and I see myself from above. I have openness above my brows like Sylas, like Abigail. I see the world around me and accept it as it may be, as it has the potential to be. I feel that kiss like I've never been kissed before. I feel Amber like I used to feel Jesus.

"Come with me" her body whispers in my ear and I rise up from the Jordan.

We sift through the party and I look on all of my friends.

The music is kissing the past. Peter touches her gently and notes jump from her skull and surround them. Two figures molded into one by a moment.

Seamus is where he ought to be. He's playing games in a more real realm than the rest of us. By god, he's something wonderful. He's happy with who he is and completely unaware of who he could be.

I can see Sylas is considering gathering his slippery words strewn about the carpet, but he realizes that love isn't meant to be held. The poet makes love even when he hates.

The spirit is experiencing the supernova differently than the rest. She sees no limit to its longevity. She is passionately and permanently pulsating with the sensational.

And the cynic's hair may have gotten darker. He will never be in love.

She brings me to our own room. The closing door is independence from reality. She's singing moments with her fingertips on the back of my neck and I think I consider the consequences for a moment. Then I remember my father, who lived a wonderfully safe and happy life.

I pull her close enough to experience my heartbeat. Not just hear it, but experience it. I want her to recognize my life. We are creating something, a sensation that circumvents the experience of time. We are breaking the boundaries of pleasure, co-dependence, and honesty. We are elevating to a level of sincerity that a priest can never know. We have no pulpits to lie behind.

Her lips are on me like holy water from a waterfall kisses the luckiest rocks on Earth.

Every separate brush stroke paints redemption from being alone on another sad square inch of my soul.

We tear at each other's boundaries, wanting to know physicality well enough to separate body from mind and recognize the heart as a separate entity all together.

Our clothes are off and we see each other's vanity. Know each other's privacy. The eyes are the heart of the lion but the body is the claw and we understand each other's risk.

But we embrace each other like a fire dancer, realizing the closer you are to danger the farther you are from death.

Promiscuity is my sensation as we tumble together to the bed.

In a swift motion we come to be one.

Our eyes share a star bridge like Amber's comet tail composed of one hundred solar systems of infinite significance.

Sinister stereotypes appear to be drowning in our brilliance.

We are something greater than sin. We are love permeating the fabric of minutes and seconds.

Our passion is seeping into the time quilt so completely that milliseconds never once given regard are suddenly overcome with significance.

Promiscuity cries "experience this" and elevates our pace.

We seep into that downstream current of tightening time.

Suddenly seconds pass with the gravity of a black hole, sucking us rapidly into sentience.

We make love with the idea of being alive.

We detach and lay softly beside each other.

The night sky leaks in through the window like a broken dam.

Stardust occupies the air in our lungs and Amber's breasts heave nostalgically.

Beauty deserves to be appreciated. Plain and simple.

I have the sensation that this night is presenting life to me like a mansion.

Doorways upon doorways – each opening to unveil a glimpse of what life is or ought to be.

Somewhere down the hall lies a moment of significance and a being of causality.

We dress. And our moment together ends with a gentle kiss and an understanding.

The music is again before the piano bench, and I cross the den in seconds to bend beneath her keystrokes.

“You are no longer my violin.”

“But I am not yet my own oboe.”

“Does the pianist abide by the orchestra?”

“The Pianist doesn’t give a damn.”

Amber stumbles to us, and as a family, the lover, the music, and the prodigal son make their way to the poet and the spirit.

Sylas stares deeply into Abigail. She reads gently the words of the lord.

“May I kiss you?” asks Sylas.

She looks up from her good book and sees the universe in the poet’s eyes.

“Yes.”

They kiss.

The galaxies in Sylas’ eyes coalesce into an orderly yet unpredictable form.

“You know,” begins the poet. “Yeats was all caught up in gyres. He must have never fallen in love for just a moment.”

“What about Carraway, Peter, and Seamus?” asks the lover. “Shouldn’t they be here for this?”

“They have empty lives left to lead.” We all agree.

The lights begin to swirl through the windows. For just a moment I’m entirely awake. I remember. Elizabeth’s music fades and is drowned by the familiar sirens. Red and blue dance on the walls.

But the music returns to me and with it my sanity.

“Let’s go” says the spirit with a smile. She beckons us to the back door.

We circle the house and load into my car.

I drive.

I vaguely hear men screaming at us. The men behind the lights and sirens.

We cross the border into the shaded space beyond the tree line like a glass pane shattering our seclusion and I'm brought to tears. I think long and hard about the space between the fence posts. And I remember the campfire songs.

I pray:

Dear God,

Six years ago I asked you to forget me.

I begged for a life full of sin, I lusted for an experience.

I've felt beauty tonight.

I've become the sun and seen the darkness beyond my boundaries.

Moments shoot out in all directions as I approach the looming doorway.

Were I to compare, I'd prefer this mansion to that campfire

There's something to this world you've forsaken

You made us broken for a reason.

We approach the darkness at high speed.

Perhaps the cynic, the past, and the brute are lucky.

They're safely stewing in consequence.

But then again,

They'll never know what it's like to explode.

END