

Strangers Kissing for the First Time

Nuth ing, nuthi ingthen, nothing then, from singularity, nothingandsomething swelling towards...swinging, the hanging white tubes hundreds of feet up cleansed the room in fluorescence, and still the set lights cast weak shadows on the white bed sheet doubling as a screen behind them. Her eyes landed on him, for only a second, no doubt in order to take in the rest of the empty warehouse over his shoulder. They said hello, again, and she nibbled on a delicate hors-d'oeuvre lip, and he concentrated at her tan, natural skin like a task. Staring comfortably, he preened himself by smoothing his curly black hair along the side of his head. Certain rituals. He wore a casual light blue suit, fitted perfectly, and orangish brown shoes. He looked good. Certainly liable to induce a powerful sexual response.

The black glass bracelet she swung undulated like a distant chime. She wore all black. Before, in the small office waiting room, directors and “co-creators” talked with their hands. There she was, sitting with one slender leg folded over the other, watching intently. He had hoped, in the waiting room, that they would be paired together.

Here, in the warehouse, she asked, “Do we just start?” The directors, standing in the shadows, just smirked and played mute in adherence to their stark realism allegiance. Or something. She laughed sheepishly and silently. She looked up at him, “I don’t even remember your name. I’m sorry.” He said his name: John. He pretended to forget hers: Corinne, again.

He unclasped his hands from behind his back. He took a step forward and held the edges of her black top. She laughed, she settled, she looked in his eyes. He moved his head towards hers. Out of his lower peripheries, he could see her lips waver, pushing forward to kiss, resetting to be kissed in wonderful compulsion. It set a motion inside him. There was the real impulse, he feels deeper, deeper than the smiling, the preening, even the talking, he feels it more viscerally. He rushed his face to meet hers...the ticklish buoyancy of her lips bending and pressing against his, the subtle imprint of her tongue. Hands taking on a mind of their own and holding, petting the other, each like vague words of an exact language. Exact, as in, perfectly understood. As strangers without memories to direct their movements, they touched fluidly, responding to each other. Somehow they finished simultaneously, and leaning backwards, they smiled at each other, eyes glazed over, lost together in a vague wave of intimacy.

God bless the euphoria, John saw Hanover Street opening up the city three dimensionally and at each intersection a collection of colorfully neat and packaged Brazilian bakeries, their delicate and powdered pastries in glistening windows. He found himself pressing his fingers against his lips, enjoying the fresh sensitive elasticity. He looked beyond the interspersed hum-drum shops, like dry cleaners and travel agencies, hardware, or kitchenware shops, and no finance firms came to view, none whatsoever.

Women in sundresses stood on the corners languidly like they planned being there all afternoon. Blossoms grew inside the storefront’s glass and blossoms on the trees overhead. The heat amplified the blossom’s scent, smelling like organic semen. He heard something that vibrated in the quarks of invisible dimensions all around. An old hippie woman, the overalls, stringy grey hair, and potted plants, called from her balcony “Great suit!”

“Thanks,” he shouted up at her. The kindness of strangers, man!

Months later, on the computer screen, pairs of attractive strangers carried out a certain

dance of leaning forward, backing off, acting shy, smiling demurely, with animalistic oohs and laughs, and quick bursts of small talk, before one took control and assuming a serious look, moved towards the other. Blossoms, John saw blossoms, watching himself move toward Corinne on the screen and kiss her. You couldn't tell it was a washed out warehouse anymore, visually pleasing now, and accompanied by a Soko song. Her lilting voice went, "Give me all your love now, for all we know, we might be dead by tomorrow." And John heard the directors screaming, "So easy, even strangers do it!" The co-director adding, "Love is everywhere," with her hands spread wide open. Drifting slow eyes across the screen, the same he shared with Corinne, John noticed the video had over a million hits, over a million people saw John kissing Corinne, and a similar significant swell built up inside him.

The television was on. The newscaster drained the energetic light from her eyes, but not from that made-up face, and turned to camera three for our next story, a sad story, coming out of Chelsea. A dead boy. He received the full package, more than any long time local dying after a long life serving the community. No, it's the kid who gets the interviews with the family members, an all-night vigil, and as today's was crime related, a politician on screen promising change, so that what happened to little Davis will never happen again. But of course it will. The mother, a frail woman looking at home in her grief, whimpered as she spoke, saying, "Davis was a good boy. He never did anything wrong. Everyone loved him."

John muted the television and raised his phone, poised to call up the local Chinese place. Instead, he saw a text from his mom, reading, "Dear John, It's your brother's birthday. Make sure you call him. Love, Mom." John took a second to gather himself.

Despite his strongest hopes it would go straight to voicemail, only teased by the four unanswered rings, his brother picked the phone with an abrupt "Hello." John wished him a happy birthday, and not much else. His brother responded with pleasant, very short answers, lulling John into a dreamlike state, a conversation both happening and not happening at all. Was this even his brother speaking? It sounded different, maybe, and certainly strange to him. The lit candles of the all-night vigil wavered on the silent screen, little white lights like stars drifting across the park and John wondered how many of them actually knew little Davis. Killed by an unintended bullet was the headline.

At the end of the five-minute conversation, John said goodbye and ended up, phone now resting on his chest, looking out the window at the light burning against the opposite building into a blood-orange hue. In minutes, the dimensions, of buoyancy unfolded from the space of existence, and fell flat so that, to John, existence was a series of frames expanding outward, and maybe it was the candle lights, but no, don't think of that now...the collapse backwards, and lost in the darkness, he didn't have the energy to go turn the light on, so instead remained hyperventilating into a dark and empty room.

There were rows of seating lined against the wall in the waiting room of whose building he wasn't sure, and he wasn't sure whether or not he should check in, and as he looked around, he saw once again there was no one to check in with, and remembered he already knew that, so he leaned forward, placing his elbows on his knees like a impatient child and looking at the concrete floor, he made a frustrated grunting noise. He raised his head to see if anyone noticed. The room was empty, empty until he scanned to the seat in the corner, and there was the child, the child he knew but never met. He squinted for a second, impossible...Before on second thought, he recognized him accurately. The boy who died from an errant bullet.

"Is it true you never did anything wrong?" John's voice echoed in the rectangular room, a room all white, a room where nothing escaped, and the light reached every corner and the

structures cast no shadows. The origin of the light was everywhere, so that maybe, the infinite shadows canceled out, and the relative lightness was indistinguishable. With no apparent shadows everything was flat pigment, and a guessing game of hardly decipherable distances.

The kid looked up at John. Earnestly, “What is right and wrong anyways?” he said. He squirmed, taking his folded hands out from between his legs and refolded them on his stomach like a sage. “But it is true.”

“How can it...” John began, but stopped because his voice sounded slow and errant, like his mouth was filled with cotton gauze, recently operated on. He tried again, hitting every syllable intentionally prompt, “Houcan idbe trooif they rizno suh chidthin azrite inrong?”

The boy nodded attentively. He laughed. John, now realizing he’d just woken up from surgery in the waiting room, looked around for his mother to pick him up. His mother was running late, or maybe she died in a car crash, and he was stuck here forever. He felt his stomach heaving, the operation was deeper, more visceral than he’d first expected. “Annid? ev reewonlove yeewww?”

“Yes.”

“Buttit cuh dint say vieww.”

The boy’s smile faded, hiding the endearingly sharp and crooked teeth. He shuddered. Opposite to the boy, a figure crossed in front of John, a black blur. A woman, by her brown straight hair, halted before the boy now crumpled and crying into his small black fingers like an old widower. She slowly reached and collected the boy’s hand in her own. It was a stranger, it was Corinne, barely recognizable, thin lips so severe. John looked at her from lowered eyes. She wasn’t angry. “Theeshas awwl red deehapp end,” she said.

“Whh...”

“Theeshasawwlreddeehappend,” she stared at him, “Ovuhn ovuhnin ovuhaguhn.”

He couldn’t understand her. He knew they are all shrinking backwards into a single dot in the center of the room, but as it was relative, they would never realize before the implosion. His brow concentrated fitfully on her like a task, focused past her skin, and somehow into her. The boy sobbed. The stranger smiled gently at John, who followed her eyes down through her black sleeved arm to him. His whole frame shook and he squeezed her hand. He couldn’t tell if she understood. In his task, even success will not reverse the shrinking room. Like morse code, he squeezes: there is an impulse we share. There is an impulse weeshure. They rizan im pulseweeshure. Theyrizanimpulseweeshure.