

The Corner Suite

Worlds begin by dividing. They begin in waiting lines and end on a good note. They begin when I notice your warmth, but they don't die out after you've left; they just take on a new shade.

I can make out scenes of supplication around me, painted across huge, mahogany beams. I hear it's a synagogue by day. The rafters are as old as prayer, and could splinter with as little force.

When the colossus falls, I could be under that - I'm under that now - or I could be just a few feet off the target. I'm over there now too.

I've bought this temporary air bubble outlining my body and the felt padding that makes my seat; I cannot move even ten feet; my hands start getting nervous. I need a reason, I need to hold that reason, and a ticket only gets you through the door. But wherever I am, whenever I die, I'll have a reason for being there.

Why do I smoke cigarettes? It's not about a chemical, although the chemical compounds the dependence on a feeling. If it was about a chemical I could sit in my living room with a patch under my sleeve doing fuckall while the specious drug slid into me. No, the feeling I crave, it's to be excused. I crave a default setting, a kind of rest. Everyone wants a reason to be idle and listless.

I expend myself in finding reasons to be unstuck. This way there's less and less of me that could be suspected, like I'm a prop in a tableau, like I'm just one end of a parenthesis.

But I can't do that here. I can't because this is not nowhere, this is a performance, a pronouncement, I wait with lips open. I can't pull out my Bic because the breathy click would draw attention, the glow suspicion, and the smoke downright hostility. God forbid something

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happens in a flick-of-the-wrist: the rafters go first. The flame from my tiny little ash jumps into the sky, engulfing constellation, myth, world-view. Bye-bye ticket-holders.

Like this I weigh worth. I watch the scales of action to see which side comes down heaviest. The action is inevitable and never as intended. Then the period of assessment. I see just how wide the gap is between what I imagine, what's gone down, and what I feel. And then I do it all over again, like I'm pissing with my eyes closed.

Not long after a world begins, there will be questions that pop like stars from an all-black sky.

Why do we constrict like reptiles around stolen goods? Why do we pour from room to room like solvent into a beaker?

We force ourselves into the space of others so we can tamp down the voices in our head. Entering that arena is almost a commitment to sedation. Speaking brings with it its own blunders and agitations, but also a few polite surprises. It's a sedative with side effects. It's a cigarette: sparking first, cooling next. (Cancer later?)

Nothing is exempt from context, least of all words. And we're in the thick of it now.

I wonder if loneliness would exist if we'd never met.

I'm alone in the mezzanine, contorting my body into a posture, and I wonder what it's like to collapse into our atomic units. Where my matter transfers through the lining of your cells.

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Our atoms bounce together like we're playing jacks, and every turn we sweep up a different combination.

I can't tell you any of this, and it's the reason (a circular one) that we're not exactly the same. My thoughts are one plane, my words another; fit flush against yours, they make the box we've built to mutually understand, yet distance, one another.

When I am alone and drinking, I start to connect. I like, comment, reach out. The white space of the Internet absorbs the hues of difference. I'm by all definitions a good and present friend. After the first string of drinks, I sober a little. I wince at the white-hot glare of my own narcissism. I am disgusted, briefly. I drink again, but a splinter of self-hatred has cracked the liquor's halo. I have an inkling I can't shake.

I wish I could lose my head in a cloud of smoke.

But it'd be unholy, and if I'm anything, I'm obedient, I keep going, I resume. I resume like the factory machine that keeps heaving even after its master's throat has been cut. This is called sleep and I walk off ledges without realizing there was ever a difference between air and solid ground.

There is another religion and that is of the body. There, the mind is its own glass idol, and there is no right or wrong, because the mind is off in its corner, making itself busy. One might call that place beautiful, but there is no beauty there either.

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The holy is its own mutual agreement that depends on surrender. It's an agent of surrender. It's lucid dreaming. In this drama, belief is the child of divorce. It is a substance of confusion and interruption. It is the object of its own inquiry, and is unyielding, like an abstract painting that knows something we don't.

It's the time in this theater that fucks with me the most. It's squishing itself into the outermost ring of its circle like liquid in a centrifuge. I see it normal and I see it nearly nothing. I'm somehow stretched across this double, stuck in the crawl space between two rooms of surrender.

One could sit oneself down anywhere in the world and it might be too much to the left or to the right. How to know. How to feel not knowing, and know it's just right. An assumption is made holy through belief. I believe spirituality is sitting in this room, watching a performance, and not knowing what to do with these hands, with this mouth. I believe spirit is a car spewing out exhaust as it idles underneath the street lamp.

My arm hairs graze yours on the arm rest: I turn from a metal to a gas. The contact is not romantic; it is illicit; it is absolutely nothing; it is a tear in the spatial canvas around us. We don't say anything but we know all of this.

Worlds begin in wondering how much we can say to another person without becoming that person altogether. Touch is the dam lifting and the water flowing.

A line trails out the restroom door. A synagogue's never seen so many people near to or actually pissing at once. Who here believes in anything more profoundly upsetting and more patently untrue than the self? My turn arrives. I pass by a mirror and make eye contact with a man wearing a shrewd, doubtful expression. He has a tattoo in cursive that runs down his left

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forearm, which reads, “We are all patients awaiting a doctor.” He leaves the bathroom without washing his hands.

We face what we think is a forward darkness. We quietly form horrid opinions, then defend ourselves against them by assuming others are thinking something slightly worse. Our heads bob above our collapsible seats but our bottom halves drip into a vast reservoir of what we don't see.

We wiggle like toes that can't achieve secession from the fat slab of their origin. It's why at least half of the world hates the other half - they can't stand feet. And the other half has a foot fetish, so.

Someone on stage shouts about how we're all grit, meat, and electron. You could smash us together like boiled potatoes. This person's a champion of empathy. They stand on the soapbox of society and praise we turn ourselves inside out. Praise we lobotomize the vestiges of ego until we are wispy bodies of water vapor.

They aren't done. We clap them back at the encore. Planned spontaneity helps orient us in a dim room, and besides, the prospect of returning to life outside seems dire.

I make fictions about the silhouettes around me. The bald-headed man only nods this vigorously so he can feel young and relevant. The thirtysomething peering down at her phone, filming every detail, will only recall a few strange echoes of this night, as if it was a three-day-old dream. And that same shrewd, doubtful man, he gets up now from his seat. He

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floats to the back of the room and into a shaft of light issuing from a crack in the door. I haven't noticed this light before.

This man's lone shadow creeps onto the red curtains that drift loosely on stage.

I hear it in my heartbeat as my aorta clenches: something is off. Release, release.

Why am I feeling this. The curtains drift more slowly, more crimson. I can't hear anything.

Waves of blood begin to waft down from my head and through my arms.

A crack of sound smashes the theater apart.

There is a moment of shocked silence: we are whole again, linked in ignorant, devout silence; we drift in tandem, like strands of kelp. Then screaming.

Light and shadow alternate in stripes across the walls and ceiling. My sight has shrunk down to a pinhole. I know it's not fiction because it's too fake to be fake. The curtains are ragged with puncture holes, and smoke is kissing the singed velvet.

I am in the aisle.

I am on the stage.

I am in my seat again.

I am on the floor with my arms gracefully, beautifully laid across the arms of the others.