

Sisyphus and Fibonacci Sitting in a Tree

First, There Were Snacks

Before getting on the superhighway to begin our journey from the City on a Hill to The Center of the Universe, Clara and I stopped at Wal-Mart for bottled water, beef jerky, and cigarettes.

We were exploring the concept of “real life” in art and doing things that normal people would do, unironically. We walked through Wal-Mart’s Narnia-like doors, entered its kaleidoscopic cavity, and reminded ourselves that we weren’t actors in an absurdist circus; rats in an experimental maze; flies on a wall extending to infinity in every direction.

We told ourselves that the supermarket’s well-ordered isles could be seen as almost utopian if viewed from the right angle. We told ourselves that late capitalism is late capitalism is late capitalism. We told ourselves that we’re just travelers in need of some snacks. Although we needed only enough for the drive from Boston to New York—and for the night we would be staying there—we left Wal-Mart with a 30 rack of FIJI water, a five pack of Jack Link’s, and a whole carton of Marlboro Reds.

The Informationless Superhighway

Harsh industrial noise music is colliding with the rumbles of our U-Haul truck’s engine. The post-industrial landscape is blurring by, outside the window. Sometimes I look up from the road and become entranced by Clara dragging on a Red, her black hair dancing freely with the smoke and the wind. Her lipstick makes a red stain on the butt of her cigarette and tints my lips as I take a drag. I admire her smooth, pale skin, her delicately straight eyebrows, her dark, deep-set eyes. I feel a love like the love a guy fish

feels for a girl fish. But she never looks back at me; she stares hawkishly at the fleetingness of the things outside. She smokes the cigarette down to its butt, tosses it out the window, twists open a FIJI water, and gets out her book, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

With only the noise music to listen to and no one to talk to, I begin to feel paranoid about the artwork in the back of the truck: two ceramic sculptures and five LCD monitors. Our roommate, Wit, told us he'd pay us \$20 to bring his sculptures—two water fountains from which viewers are asked to drink: one, a penis the size of a Corinthian column, and the other, a sailboat-sized vagina—from our polyamorous artists' commune in Boston to his first art show in Brooklyn. He also said we could show our own work, so we're bringing five monitors with which to display our collaboration: an interactive Facebook installation that asks viewers to post statuses and then comment on and like others'. We finished the piece about a week ago when we were still on our Internet-commentary binge. Although we're into real-life stuff, now, and I already changed my name from Nick to Norm, we haven't created anything new yet, so we decided this piece would do. We weren't really sure what we wanted to say about social media, but we wanted to say something about it, and we knew that gallery-goers would get something out of using Facebook on a huge screen in a gallery. So, we ordered the screens from Amazon, waited two days for them to ship (because we had Prime), and then connected our MacBooks to them.

The Wretched Climb, Oh God!

"Is Sisyphus happy?" I ask, trying to start conversation, but not really remembering much of the book. "I'm not there yet." Clara says. "Didn't you read it in, like, high school?" I ask. "No, Norm. A thing to remember when talking to people of *les*

type normales is that we didn't all go to prep school." I laugh. "Don't give me that. What was it called—that arty place you went? Oh! Clear-Ridge-School-of-the-Arts-where-we-get-to-scribble-and-glue-things-together-because-our-parents-are-so-rich." "You're so self-deprecating. The thing is," she says, "Camus says that your attempt to do anything—to become an artist in your case, and mine—only becomes a tragedy when you become aware of and/or question that attempt, and/or the meaninglessness therein." "Well put... The French do like their food." I'm going a little crazy from staring at the road for so long. "Speaking of: lets eat." We exit the highway and enter a Podunk town with a strip mall in the middle and small houses on the periphery. *God, she's so hot. That rainbow propeller hat. That mustard-colored apron. That name: Brittany! And those milkshakes.* I think I'm falling in love with the Wing Stop drive-thru employee as she hands us our food. On the way out of the drive-thru, the top of the U-Haul truck smashes into an overhanging picture of a chicken wing, and we sputter off. Clara concurs that the girl at the window was hot, and says we should've asked her if she likes art and then seduced her. As we merge back onto the highway, I dump a bag of Jack's Links into my chocolate shake. I realize that this is the first time I've driven from the City on a Hill to the Center of the Universe, but, for some reason, it doesn't feel like we're descending from a glorified precipice, down into some directionless and meaningless cosmos. Actually, it feels more like we're ascending from the directionless pit that is Boston up to the height that is New York—carrying our art on our backs. As we approach the city, the buildings seem to grow like a field of gradually stimulated penises. We take the U-Haul all the way down FDR Drive like a trash bag falling down a chute, and then cross the Williamsburg Bridge.

Meat and Greet

Finally, we reach the gallery in Greenpoint. Our host for the night, Wit's friend, Dean, comes out, his biceps overflowing from a white T-shirt that's straight out of *Grease*. I find out later, after our orgy, that he is, coincidentally, playing Danny in a new production of *Grease in Space* at a theater in downtown Brooklyn. When I first see him, I tell Clara my heart is exploding. Although it *is* throbbing, visibly, through my black turtleneck, Clara knows that I recently came out and have had a tendency to over-vocalize my attraction to other men. Still, she agrees he's hot. His hair is parted, princely, and slicked back. His skin is crème brûlée. His voice is cashmere. "Can I grab anything for you?" I can't tell if he's thinking the same thing I am. He lifts the boat-sized vagina above his head and carries it inside. Wit is in there, sitting cross-legged on the ground, deliberating where to situate his sculptures without disturbing the gallery's feng shui. When he hears Dean's footsteps, he lifts his right index finger and points. Dean lets down the sculpture and then drinks from it. "Perfect." Wit says. After setup, I snort two lines of cocaine with Dean, while Clara and Wit share a couple grams of mushrooms. Gradually, around ten to twenty people enter the gallery. They make their rounds, drink from the fountains, post statuses on the screens, and take selfies. After about five minutes, the complimentary wine runs out and the collective interest wanes. A girl wearing colorless horn-rimmed glasses and a floral dress approaches me. "I really like this." She speaks in an unusually urgent manner. "You're like, like saying social media brings people together virtually, and, and, and art about social media brings people together physically!" She laughs. "Metaaaaa! Poosh!" She pulls her hands away from her head like she's pulling knives out of either side. "Poosh!" She says again, gesticulating similarly. "My mind just

thought my mind was exploding.” She laughs. “It’s, it’s, Aaron, by the way. Have you tried Jill’s coke? Have you?” “Thanks for the physical feedback. I don’t think I’ve met Jill yet, but I, I, I’ve already been helped in the coke department.” At this point, most people have formed small circles and are talking about what the other people they know are doing that night. Clara is stroking the ceramic side of Wit’s penis fountain; Wit is using our screens to watch cat videos on YouTube, crying with laughter; Dean and Aaron are flirting; and I am standing on the opposite side of the gallery, like a goldfish, opening and closing my mouth, curious about the humans on the outside of my bowl. I get a little sad when I think about how we drove so far for five minutes of attention. My stomach growls. Then I remember that we have Jack Link’s in the car, and I get an idea. Clara and I sit on the floor of the gallery and sip on FIJI water, munching Jack Link’s—we try to ignore the semicircle of oglers around us. A boy wearing cutoffs, 20, starts to weep. Then Aaron joins in. Then Dean puts his arm around Aaron and also starts to cry. Eventually, everyone but Clara and I are in tears, holding one another, swaying back and forth. My cocaine buzz fuses with a feeling of artistic validation, and I get a high so high that I’m on top of Everest, indifferent to the fact that my best friends and our guide may or may not have just slipped and fallen to their icy deaths. I am I am I am—alive.

The Wretched Descent, Oh God!

Clara, Wit, Dean, Aaron, and I take the G train back to Dean’s apartment. They’re talking about where to get pizza once we get off the train, and I feel myself coming down from both the drugs and the adrenaline rush. By now, the only remnant of cocaine I sense is a drip, stuck sourly in the back of my throat. I get a vague feeling like I could be on any train, anywhere, going from somewhere to somewhere else for whatever reason. I

imagine a rough, pixelated satellite image that begins at the top of my head and zooms out, up through the ground, above Brooklyn, then above all of New York, getting more and more defined on the way. We get off at Metropolitan Avenue and climb out of the subway, squeezing by an obese man on the stairs. At Williamsburg Pizza, thick, orange grease gets all over my hands, and Clara tells me it's natural—really good for my skin. I rub it into my arms and legs on the way to Dean's apartment. There, Dean says he only has one bed, so all of us have sex and then go to sleep like a pile of beached seals. The next morning, Dean and I are the only ones awake, so we drink coffee and he tells me, in spite of the taboo, he's been reading a lot of Ayn Rand and knows that if he works hard enough, no one can stop him from becoming the next John Travolta. I applaud his assurance, wish him luck, wake up Clara, and then we go. We take the G train back to the gallery, and I imagine our car moving parallel with FDR Drive on the other side of the East River, falling like a trash bag down a chute. We get to the gallery, pack up our screens in the U-Haul, and then begin our journey back to Boston. But before getting on the superhighway and leaving the Center of the Universe, we stop at Dunkin' Donuts for breakfast sandwiches. Clara and I sit in the sterile dining room and talk about what concept we should explore, next, in art. Also, when will we be coming back up to New York, and for what?