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a l b a . v o o r n

isaiah bunevitsky

a rabbi and a latent
homosexual walk
into a bar

Stop me if you've heard this one before.

As is infuriatingly typical for the guy, Steve somehow manages to interrupt my perfect evening in three seconds flat. His ringtone shrills through my pay-per-view, catching me with my fingers stained in chicken grease and my belt already dangling off the sofa. I groan as I flag, reasonably irritated when my newfound awareness distorts the sounds of lusting hour into ghoulish shrieks of shame. I could let the wind answer and attempt to reengage my libido, but hell, what are friends for?

I expect him to carp on about our caseload, no greeting, just remnants of conversations interrupted by our commutes. He's finicky like that, loudly vocal about his displeasure working a nine-to-five like everyone else, but always making it my problem. The routine goes as follows: he disguises his whining as riveting commentary on overconsumption and I satiate his savior complex with vaguely agreeable mumbling. A real Karl Marx, this one, ignoring social convention to talk praxis.

I don't hear about modern slavery tonight. Instead, I pick up the receiver and listen to the matching vacancy of his apartment. I would think him a stranger if I

leah
quinn

cooked

I don't remember our first words to each other on the app but I remember the way his lips felt against my cheekbone when he walked up to me that first evening in September.

His walk had the confidence of someone older. The energy between us felt silken, as if in those first moments, a cord was tethered between us. There was no liminal acquaintance phase; there was just before, and the immediate subsequent sense that he had burrowed into my bloodstream. Everything he wore was dark so there was something of Berlin about him.

He was fifteen minutes late whereas I find my inescapable punctuality deeply unfashionable. I remember his square jaw and short blond hair but mostly I remember how I felt speaking to him. Calm. Like I'd met him before, and not once or twice but like we'd shared a thousand conversations over dinner tables, like I already knew what it would feel like to fall asleep in his arms, or cry with him, or run my tongue up the sweat of his neck as he fucked me.

He was impressed by my job but not in the way men usually are where they enjoy the prestige of the newspaper name on my CV as if they can inhabit my accomplishments through osmosis. I got the impression

klau stepień

sunday, again

Santa Claus did not come that year, and the air tasted of something rotten.

Gifts were still received, but every child knew their parents had left the packages under the tree, for the adults had made it abundantly clear in hopes of easing any lingering fears. It was the year when Santa Claus was not welcome.

It all began and ended with Amy G. Dahla, the first girl in Year 6 to wear a bra, though not for any practical reason, as she was, for her age, still rather flat-chested. She revealed the colourful stripes beneath off-shoulder tops, and everyone at school—the boys, the girls, even the teachers—felt compelled to have an opinion on her fashion choices.

“She doesn’t need it,” the girls would roll their eyes as soon as Amy left the locker room. At home after school, they would inspect themselves in the mirror for signs of puberty, imagining breasts where there were none and fearing everyone could see through their shirts. Later, flopped beside their mothers on the sofa, they would ask, “Could you buy me a bra?” The answer was almost always the same: “But you don’t need it yet.”

“It’s inappropriate,” the teachers would say, stirring their too-strong coffee or over-steeped tea in the

mary katharine tramontana

the hôtel amour

During the first year of the plague, I found myself living in a 4-star hotel near the train station in Nice. The hotel cost 400 euros per month for stays of 28 days or longer—a pandemic promotion. Twenty-seven days and it would have been thousands. So I rented our flat to an American PhD student for an extortionist price, and told Lucien, who was working on a film in Baden-Baden, that it was for far less.

It was a design hotel whose stairway carpets had seen better days. My room was cheerful: a wooden desk with little drawers, an immaculate bathroom, and large floor-to-ceiling windows with wooden shutters which led to a balcony. On the balcony was a sole succulent in a heavy ceramic pot, which I'd lugged all the way from Monaco in the rain. There was an ugly view of train tracks in one direction, and grand buildings extending toward the beach in the other. It was my first time in the South of France, and I was shocked by the mélange of dilapidation and luxury that composes the Côte d'Azur.

It was autumn. I'd been living in the hotel for three weeks with a story due for *The New York Times* when I decided to rent a beach lounge for the day. The nearest plage belonged to a chic hotel with a sister hotel in

alba voorn

the cruel part

The bandage has loosened its grip on my head. I noticed that some days ago, yet no adjustment has been made since. The dirty white textile has covered my left eye for a long time. I can no longer give an estimation of the factual period. Could be weeks, months, ... years. I did however intend to track the passing of seasons, but I failed. I stroked the bandage in a futile attempt to flatten the edges that started curling up. The itch had lessened. A notion I quickly waved away, afraid of inviting the ache back in. There was a person sitting next to me. We had been sitting like this, shoulder to shoulder, for some time now. Another timeline I have kept no track of. That person seems to have adapted their breathing rhythm to mine, thereby obscuring their own. The intentionality of that synchronization is open for debate as well. That person is larger than me, yet we haven't looked at each other directly. It sits on my left side, it would ask for too grand a gesture to face them. Therefore, this observation is merely based on a gut feeling. To be honest, nothing here seems to follow the laws of deduction.

I hold my eye focused on the horizon. It really is a flat line with barely any markers on it. Desolate, yet not abandoned. A large white sky emphasizes the

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