The Misadventure

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Abstract

I REMEMBER afternoons on the terrace by the sea. I would sit and read. Sometimes, I would pick a conversation out of the murmur of voices. I’d eavesdrop up to a half-hour on the more interesting ones. As the summer wore on, a lot of the faces became pretty familiar. We’d nod, somewhat hesitantly, as “familiar” strangers tend to do...
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Most people came to the terrace in clusters, but I liked going alone. I imagined that they all had fabricated all kinds of fantasies about me. And it got so I played a sort of game with the regulars. I spent half the summer dreaming up false clues to toss at them. For a whole week I alternated the *Geographical Review* with *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. They were both big enough to conceal a copy of *Glamour*. The next week I spent on *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism*, mainly because the book jacket had big, readable letters. But there wasn’t really enough incongruence in this for anyone to take notice, so the next week I brought the *Reader's Digest*. At the same time, I was using matchbooks to trip up my “audience”. I'd spent a whole afternoon running all over town gathering matches. But matches take more imagination, and, at the end of day, I'd
only collected 3 worth keeping. One from the Men's Athletic Club, one from the Bus Depot, and my prize, from the Tenth Tower, the local bar catering to homosexuals. The one from the Tenth Tower was by far the most difficult to get hold of, but that's another story.

The next afternoon, I set out for the terrace at the usual 3:30 time. I always planned on getting there before the regulars, so that I could get my props set up. I carelessly planted all my matchbooks on the table. This was to be the final foil. The three matchbooks were to be my prime weapons in destroying every single conception they'd ever had of me. I practiced being engrossed in the Reader's Digest. They began to arrive.

There were the usual, occasional halts in the conversation, when they would discreetly, and subtly, glance in my direction from the corners of their eyes. But nothing unusual was happening. I began toying with the idea of leaving before the usual 5 o'clock time, when the curly-haired one, who only shaved every three days, got up and sauntered toward my table. I could tell he was trying to be casual. I quickly rehearsed all the answers I'd planned, for when they'd start hurling questions at me, which I knew they'd do as soon as they could no longer cope with the frustration of "not knowing". He leaned his hand on the table, and gazed down at me. I concentrated on appearing engrossed in my reading for a while, then looked up.

"Hey, kid, s'pose I could borrow a match?"

He didn't even look at the covers, picked up the Bus Depot one at random, and went back to his table.

I realized I held no more significance for them than an old public building, the inscription over the entrance so worn and weathered that no one ever bothered to read it. I dumped the matchbooks into my purse and fled.

When the terrace was out of sight, I could no longer contain myself. I laughed in hysteric all the way home. The laughter would catch in my throat, and I had to pause periodically to catch my breath. I got a side ache from running so fast and laughing so hard. People stopped to stare after me. I must have seemed a mad woman.
But there's irony, even in the trivial. I'd kept my visits to the terrace a secret because I didn't want anyone to tag along. For years I'd been using dental appointments as an excuse for everything, so it came naturally to me, and all my friends knew I had lousy teeth anyway.

One of the last days, before we were all going home, I overheard the tail-end of a conversation as I passed the john in my rooming-house.

"Look, don't let her kid you with that story about the dentist. . . she's having an affair with her history professor."

"Yeah, I'm sure, . . . get a load of this! . . . She's got a book of matches from the Men's Athletic Club on her desk . . . Bronson lights his pipe with the same kind of matches every time. . . . Well, I suspected it all along . . . the way he'd look at her during the lecture . . . kinda guilty-like . . . those secret smiles they'd exchange. . . ."

Sometimes—though oh so seldom—we don't have to pay, but rather are rewarded for our follies.

april is the cruelest month
by patricia frey
journalism, jr.

in april I sit in the pale grass and read a book. looking up then over the top of the page and seeing birds, crazy lousy birds there in the green-bud trees.

singing.

singing to let you know they are back, singing in the morning, the afternoon, singing somewhere in the fog.