

Suppression

Marcus Shelby was not a proud man. At least not on the outside. His closest friends had, over time, learned to accept his modesty. To the casual observer Marcus seemed extremely shy, painfully so, about his exploits and achievements. It wasn't that Marcus didn't recognize his self worth; he was a confident person. More so it was that he was afraid of complacency, afraid of settling into satisfaction and subsequently falling prey to inertial forces.

As an adjunct professor Marcus wasn't afforded the respect or paycheck of the tenured faculty, but he was happy enough where he was, for now.

"Dr. Gladstone, good morning."

"Morning Marc"

"Dr. Gladstone, I was wondering, should I wear a jacket to the awards ceremony this afternoon? Would that be appropriate?" asked Marcus.

"Certainly Marc. That would be fine. Although some will show up in cargo shorts, I do appreciate our department maintaining a higher standard."

Dr. Jonathan Gladstone was the Chair of Creative Writing at San Francisco State University, in the MFA program. He liked Marcus, though he wondered sometimes if he wouldn't benefit from a little hellraising. Marcus was formerly a professional pitcher for the San Diego Padres, but had only played 2 years before a chronic rotator cuff injury ended his baseball career. He'd taken it in stride, seen it coming for a while, and by the time his last paycheck came from MLB, he was already 6 months into an accelerated 1 year MFA program at Columbia, and halfway through a fictional memoir which would become a national bestseller. Some called him a sellout for exposing the dark side of the game: steroids, prostitutes, cocaine and other "party favors" not in line with the "national pastime" moniker. But since it was billed as fiction, he had reserved plausible deniability. Barely. But barely meant just that – enough, and no more.

It was drizzling that day. Portentous greys were painted with broad brushes against the November sky. The rain didn't splash, the drops were miniature. If it'd been a warm summer day, the selfsame mist from a sprinkler would be welcome with open arms. Today though, the chilling mist seeped into pores and gradually dampened wool coats, leaving glistening layers which waited patiently to be shaken off once indoors.

Silvia was not glamorous, but nary an eye did not drift her direction when she walked by. She carried herself with an infectious air of confidence (which was actually feigned, Marcus would later learn). Men were simply drawn to her.

Marcus remembered vividly the first time he'd seen Silvia. She had stopped to read the inscription on the plaque outside of Crown Hall, which read:

In the Eighteen Hundred Forty-Fifth year of our Lord, Maistrovich Crown established the literary journal, "Oculus" which became the foundation for the literary community of the same name. Oculus bred forth prominent scholars and writers for 120 years hence.

The Oculus motto: "Live as you write."

She stood there, not 2 feet from the bronze plaque, transfixed. The hem of her dress lilted gently around her thin calves as a gust from a university van blew towards. The van drove hurriedly by to deliver fluorescent bulbs to the main Conference Hall. David Sedaris was reading tonight and the Community Lit staff was ablaze in preparations.

His lips mouthed the words, "What is she thinking?" as he kept his distance, waiting for her to move. Marcus was lost in the moment. She stood there, her hair just so, holding a small umbrella above. He was unable to move. Embarrassment swept over him, first for watching surreptitiously, then for wondering her thoughts, and finally for not being a kinder person. Not being a kinder person?

"I should be more honest, more kind."

“What’s that?” she asked. Silvia’s hair landed softly on her shoulders as her face turned toward him.

“What? Oh, nothing. I’m sorry – I was just thinking aloud.” he replied. Marcus could feel the warmth rise in his forehead, his cheeks, and the back of his neck.

“Oh....are you a student?”

“No, actually I’m an instructor. An adjunct. In Creative Writing.”

“Professor Shelby?”

“Yes, that’s my name.”

“I have EN304 with you, it starts next week?”

“Oh, great.” He wiped the sweat from his brow. He had been walking without an umbrella, and the sweat could pass for drizzle, thank god.

“Thank god for what?” asked Silvia.

“Oh. Nothing. Sorry – thinking out loud again. Bad habit.”

“Professor Shelby? What do you think this means, “Live as your write.”?”

Marcus stepped closer, pretending to read the plaque. He had read it a thousand times and knew it by heart. He turned toward her to speak. A thin perimeter of black eyeliner traced her deep brown eyes.

“I want to be a kinder man.” he said.
