

Crawlspace Crawlspace

a server for
not love, loneliness, self-deprecation, sufferers and sadists.
and its inevitable and tragic conclusion.

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

I

Daydream / Violence

Seven-twenty-four, Sunday. The waking sun zebra'd the bedroom with encouraging white light through the blinds. Outside the feathered quilt, my feet bathed in the warmth. Untampered comfort. My lover asleep beside me still, a calm expression set on his handsome face.

I got up off the bed, got showered and got dressed. I put on plain clothes. Laced shoes, twill trousers, a t-shirt tucked at the waist. Attire to make sure I wasn't going to stand out.

Before I left, I kissed his neck, felt his chest with the palm of my hand.

Obliterated brown and green bottles were spread like bursts of unwound labels and seriously cutting confetti over the pavement, crackling under my shoes for the duration of my walk to Joseph's Catholic Church. I snuck glances at the yawning drivers that stopped at crossings. Looked into the passing early morning public busses. Emptied. Unused. Sorry in service.

There were birds. Injured pigeons marching. Combative for the honour of kebab pitta. More delicate, smaller peckers landed on electric lines overhead and in between impaling iron skewers no barbed ledges.

My sunglasses turned the sky rose.

I waited, hidden, around the corner from Joseph's. I entered four minutes before the modern glass entrance and the wooden doors a few metres further inside closed and the service started.

It was irregularly filled. There were attendees in every row. Mainly families. They kept their belongings very close. Their sagging handbags and totes rested on the benches next to where they fell taking up as much if not more room, so I was forced to perch three rows nearer than where I'd hoped to be audience at the very back.

A guest speaker. A middle-aged woman, blonde, olive sweater, spoke about her own indications and calling. A rags-to-ritual in two years anecdote, which felt seemingly prolonged.

The pastor followed. I'd heard his course untold times. So much so, my memory's adopted recollection of dragged, bloodied, scabbed knees through streets as its own. Today was not another retelling. Instead, the pastor offered sentiment about violence. And with a stiffness to his gestures and his legs' movements, he moved on to be suggestive about restrictions in sexuality. It would not have been direct if there were not children there to listen. He concluded the service with prophecy and cleverly circled back to keeping within the tried framework of the church's wider tolerance.

It didn't matter where I deviated. I was contently distracted from a future, the flames and the gasoline many'd liked to have drizzled over me. Evenings were scored with violins in earphones. A treadmill with a view of sky and a small pocket of often vacant woods. Walks with borrowed dogs. Handpicked, overjoyed small breeds. Rapid hounds. Time-consuming, baseless conversations. Laughter. Negligible frustration steadily soothed with alcohol by acquainted stone firepits on slatted decking. The scent of smoke. Smoke. Scent of wood. Scent of everything brand new. Clean. Washed. Trying on new trainers, choosing cleaner, trying books. Morning showers. A sustainable pattern of days working from home and on others, driving automatic for a straightforward commute. Evening baths, together. Much of all of it in fact, together.

Although I neglected fear, I was not naïve. Not about the world, I hoped. I followed the status of whatever was unveiled, communicated or strategically miscommunicated in the mainstream. I spoke to others, to friends, about the circumstances in their worlds. I learnt about this country and others, and I chose to do so as a reserved spectator rather than a consequential example. I retained an indifference, and happened, yes, to be less worried because I was in love. Very much in love with this person.

But then the season was near changing, and happiness cannot be permanent.

New Violence

The UK's always gotten darker toward the end of October. Though I mean that figuratively, in reference to the viral, airborne optimism of our population, of course objectively the days are shorter as well. Light abandons us by early evening. Making it worse, it's cold.

October through to February, there was an inconstancy amongst our country's residence. A new show of imbalance. A volatility in behaviour that caused a very noticeable reluctance in how suitable uniformed response was served. In defence of themselves, emergency services submitted various patches of data for the financial year republished by various news venders. The data evidenced a move from a consistently gradual incline in reports of sexual violence and crimes committed with knives to ascending Kilimanjaro. The numbers publicly disclosed shot vertically. On average, two-point-five times compared to the previous year. If you were to imagine the year as a human exchange... visualise yourself approaching another person. You'd ask politely if they would consider lowering their voice because of the baby asleep in your niece's arms. They'd acknowledge your existence once you spoke. They'd then retract a knife regularly used to cut vegetables and stick it into your abdomen. Pull it out, put it back in. In and out, and in and out, doing that... for as long as you last on your feet. With that or a similar image rightfully imprinted into their heads, emergency services, and government, and support services feared upholding their responsibility to ask everyone to be a little quieter.

Cause for the crazy was partially repeated reasons, the same as always, further rise to the cost of staying alive, inevitable redundancies, alcohol reliance, threat of homelessness, embedded terrorism. But the sudden spike, which was irregular, was anxious response to initially leaked broadcast of an epidemic in Kazakhstan. Rumoured to have formed in Oskemen, a viral infection similar to influenza, spread out from the largest city in the east of Kazakhstan. The death toll was above forty thousand. Consider that Kazakhstan, although it is huge, has a population of twenty-two million people. For comparison, the UK's population is seventy-two million and the UK's death toll for Covid in its first year was seventy-one thousand. Kazakhstan contained most of the virus. Still, for the concentrated duration of five months it was relentlessly storied in European media. We were frightened more than anything that it would reach our cities and countrysides, causing another nationwide quarantine. Never mind death. We were terrified we would be forcefully restricted again to limited interiors. Inside. Inside homes shamelessly reduced in size. Inside our own insecure minds.

So, the response was for us all again to behave as if it were our last days alive.

Out of love

Introducing melancholy. At the start of August, my effective neglection of concern came to a close. My partner of five months, who for the past three months had lived in my apartment, ended our relationship. When I asked for the reason, he was honest. He'd 'wanted' for others. And when I'd asked, "What the fuck specifically does 'wanted' mean?"

He answered, "I've liked other people."

"I like other people," I retorted.

He, by 'like' meant 'wanted to feel them'. Feel their attentions, eyes, and their flirtation. Wanted to fuck them. And even more than that. He spoke about three other men. And his feelings toward them which were concurrent for almost start to end of the five months we were together. That hurt. That was nauseating to listen to. It caused an unpleasurable knot inside my already disordered stomach.

These three men disclosed were unlike each other. In appearances and qualities and character. How did I know? Well, I knew because strangers they were not. I knew all three of the men. They were friends. One was a relative. And not one was similar in either appearance or quality to me either. Not even the relative. Which I didn't infer to be even partially complimentary.

I traded sleep for foggy playthroughs of how and when I might've first inspired his realisation and what I might have done that confirmed that, on second thought, I was not the person he wanted to be with for any

longer. I watched myself in mirrors. I overthought my behaviours, the ways I reacted to music, how I asked to hold his hand.

"I haven't been unfaithful to you," he said. But it was. It was unfaithful. And then he said, "It feels unfaithful how I've felt." He spoke about denying himself curiosity. Rejecting adventure. Feeling terrified what he would sacrifice for commitment. "I honestly don't like what we're doing." Fitting into a bath together. Walking the accessory dogs of "richer people too busy and too fucking lazy to walk their own pets. Behaving like we're white, fine, we are white, but like we're straight, too," married, "and tame, *Harry*."

When I took my turn, spoke about how I had felt in relation to the relationship, I was not destructive. I said less. I just said, "I don't have anything," and shrugged. No true feelings were hiding. Things unsaid, yes, but not unexpected. I did not cry. That was what was I held back. That was what was hidden *here*. I was polite to him, not so insulting. I was understanding. "I wish you had been honest with me sooner." You must've been tired, I thought. Tired from pretending.

The past was the past. It was immovable. I'd tried to reserve pleasurable memory to lessen the damage inflicted.

My experience, this had been love. It had acceptance. I had been excited for the ongoing dedication, conceptualising futures while we laid undressed with each other only to talk about excursions.

I recognised there were problems that were not getting easier, such as I had often felt an unequal part. He was the receiver of a more apparent dedication. I could not kiss him outside, call him anything other than his first name in front of his parents. Could not talk. Did not bare much emotion. I would either shorten or entirely curtain my want for and relief from expression. I withheld. My frustrations were mostly kept to myself. The routine annoyances with colour, unmatching graphics, colleague's contributions, with other drivers, and my grandmother. The question 'how are you?' was never posed. There was no caring provocation to encourage me. I asked, 'are you okay?', and when I asked, I then stayed silent and listened. Ensured to hear his every feeling. The deflated, repetitive updates, administrative woes, the insecurities caused that were by hook or crook his older, straighter brother's fault. And affection... he was not shy. Shyness was not an excuse. I was a servant to a more one-sided affection, too. One which was sexual and was a repeated reinvention to satisfy one uneven half of the whole.

All this said, I adored him beyond this shit. Couldn't change that. Much as I begged to.

injury

Forcefully removed from relationship, I woke up alone.

The sun coming in through the blinds was altered. It wasn't glorious any longer. The apparent space next to me felt unreal.

When I woke up alone again, the same feeling remained. And again, and again... and it got sadder. I grieved the loss of my easiness. My own playfulness. More than no longer laughing, I couldn't picture laughing, couldn't hear what it would've sounded like if it were possible. I could not rekindle my own smiles. Not in imagination, nor in reflections. I couldn't draft a hypothetical conversation about food, or social media, or the unexpected changes to forecast, or font. Wreckage of happiness lived only through vague recounts of time spent with him. Seeing him entertained. Opening jewel cases, loading three albums into the sound system bought from the music shop Dandelion. Cooking with the music he chose in my kitchen. Seeing the indents in his collarbone. The smaller indents in his grin. His expansive and distinguishably set back eyes. Unintentionally, I had deduced myself. I'd pushed myself out of every picture and only held to thought of him, making my part in these memories nonexistent. When he smiled inside my thoughts, or spoke, he was smiling or speaking to himself. Not to me.

Distracted by a loud altercation happening at a distance, I missed my step. There were people ahead on the station's high escalator, but momentum took me past them. Somewhere between the point of misstep and laid out on the tiled stone at the bottom, my foot broke.

Fang

A week in in the black cast, I was tentatively attending a date with a web designer/videographer.

“I left Nanjing in China when I was sixteen and have lived here since,” she answered when I asked, “Where are you originally from?”

We were introduced eight days earlier at a get together organised to celebrate and see off a mutual friend who ventured east internationally, leaving one declining society to attend to another. Agreeing with the rules of an icebreaker, we traded shirts with each other. Shouting above the nondescript music and doing our best to read each other’s lips, we chatted graphic design, user interface, polish pastries, houses in the lake district. We sat crookedly, with our legs numb, crushed under a revived dining table pushed out of the way, up against a winding pattern wallpapered back wall. It was all at once attractive and aggravating how much better she suited my shirt. Her shirt only fit me unbuttoned. I was worried I’d ruined the shoulders.

On the date, we wore our own clothes. But we happened to match, both wearing eighty percent black.

The hour of dining, the following two hours of cocktail inhalation were enjoyed. We agreed it, however, wasn’t romantic. We openly debated sexuality, and we kissed. The kiss was affectionate, but we both said we were not any different in our underwear because of it.

She asked, “Do you believe in God?”, sniffed, “Are you religious?” Her attention while, was on the silhouetted image of a figure hung on a cross on my inner forearm.

“I am. I believe in a God.”

“A god?” she caught, then chose to hold my hand in hers on the table without wishing to draw attention to it.

“The God. Though maybe I hope he would practice enough mercy not to set me alight before trial.”

“You would hope.”

“Because of what I am.”

“I understood, Harry.” Her thumb stroked my wrist. “For the same reason, that’s why I also can’t agree with belief. But I think that- I do think that it’s uplifting. That you can be who you are and believe in the something bigger separated from the unacceptance based around it.”

Fang listened. Showed interest in the clues about myself I’d offered.

Before dessert, I asked her, “What do you keep looking at?” because she seemed to have a fixation with the street immediately outside of the restaurant. Every fifteen or so seconds, she looked. She followed every slowing car and stopping pedestrian.

“I’m sorry,” she apologised. “This is my first date since some shit happened. I went on another date about a month ago. It was another guy, he was thirty-nine, too.” She scraped the cheese off the cake’s base and took small bites in between sentences. “It started off good. It was a good date, I felt like I had control... I was worried I wouldn’t before, because in the first forty-eight hours of messaging he’d sent photos of his dick. When I didn’t reply, he deleted the photos, and we pretended I never saw them. Or, that it never happened. I liked the person opposite me. The person he was on the date. But then three police officers in full uniform came into the restaurant. They made their way over to our table and they took him. One of the officers stayed for a few minutes longer. He was kind. He gave me cash to cover the bill and then I was left all by myself to finish the food.”

Fang went on to say she crashed when she’d left the restaurant and got back to where she lived with her mother. She said she was then woken up at one am when her date sent her a message. She showed me the message...

Hi. I’m SO sorry. That was awful and I understand if this is the last message I get to send. I wasn’t arrested. I haven’t done ANYTHING. I use multiple dating servers. there is one that is for not love and for fetishes. I met another man on this server and we met twice in person before I cut communication with him and reported his behaviour on the server. He is a Copyist if you know what this is. He is a small actor whose attraction is pretend. Tonight he got fucked

himself up. He broke his own nose and reported it as an assault and gave my name to police. I have been let go now. If you will talk to me, I would like to try again.

Fang said she'd read the message before cutting communication, reporting *his* behaviour and going back to sleep.

I did not know what a Copyist was.

I was more curious about the server referred to in the message.

Crawlspace (I)

The link was shared by user SOFIA0 in a long thread about access to the server. I installed the programme onto a cleared hard drive, feeling it was important to be kept at certain distance from my work.

The installation took four minutes. I used that short period to remove the loose picture of my ex from the top drawer of my desk.

It took a little more time to move the files onto my phone and to find instructions on how to prevent a crash when the server started up.

The first thing you saw was

0.

then

not love

in a small, gradient font. Which was only on the screen for a few seconds before the screen turned from black to a bright blue taken from the gradient. A very deep blue.

Crawlspace

was centre. Or, in fact, it was slightly off centred. There were buttons below, for

Login

Register

The server required first and last names, gender, and a date of birth. It encouraged I select a minimum of one want.

Suggestions were

men asian verbal abuse women transgender black asphyxiation bondage pain roleplay paint domination
I selected 'men', 'women', and 'paint', 'roleplay' to start. Uploaded two photos of myself as well.

A photo of a photo. The photo taken with my phone's camera of a photo from a disposable camera. In the photo, I'm sitting under lamplight, at my home desk, wearing the same shirt Fang happened to borrow. I can just see I am working on the final touches of promotional graphics for a four lettered brand that sells squash rackets. The other photo was captured in Aveiro, Portugal. Horizontally, a third of me's in shade. I'm wearing white trainers, shorts, no shirt. I'm topless as I wandered the narrow street. There was no curb or front gardens separating the unmarked road and the residences. Beige stone, tile walls, indented doors, shuttered windows. The slanted clay roofs were as low as what would be first floors. A telephone line was planted midground, between my white skin and the cloudless sky.

Account created.

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