

Aesthetic Ascetic

ZOE KEROUAC

I earned the family name. Jack Kerouac's Punk Little Sister finally had a traveling experience worth thinking about.

Of course I wasn't on the road when it hit me. I was at a bar in the cowshit town that spawned and occasionally continues to define my existence. I was sitting across the table from an underage friend of a friend who continued to smoke menthol cigarettes as I downed my characteristic rum and coke. It was an exercise in openly consuming that which the other would have greedily devoured if invited a single drop or drag. It was an expression of our wicked streaks. He was my kind of kid. It surprised me because most of my friends have outstandingly shitty taste in companionship.

So as we sat, me drinking, him smoking, my friend describing the "fuck-me" boots of a mutual friend who was not mutual to me, the universe skewed a little to the left and dropped the realization in my lap. It occurred to me that my back of the hand home town was littered with a new breed of boy perfectly engineered to break the hearts of strong-willed fragile girls like the one I had been not so long ago.

This new uberman is deceptively ambiguous in age. He looks like he could get a woman like me thrown in jail while at the same time looking well old enough to have learned how to get a woman

like me to beg his name in a whisper as he simultaneously tears my resolve and my heart in two. The race of reckless distraction hides shaggy box-black hair under any kind of cool cap. You can't see but you can sense the bed head beneath that betrays a look of innocence. It's not the kind of hair that accompanies high school slackers. It's the kind of hair that late night friends with benefits always return with. They wear cool shirts that say nothing or reference obscure bars, bands, or shows. They have silver hollow plugs in both ears that aren't outrageously stretched. Just big enough to notice. Just big enough to catch my eye and draw my attention to those extra soft hairs that litter napes of necks and dance on indecent confessions.

They're emo style boys who listen to hardcore punk and AC/DC. They drink whatever you offer and smoke menthol cigarettes. Their stories are always good and their sleepy laughs are deadly. They don't have to grin or smile or scowl to entice an infatuation; their blank responses are enough. The night before as I sat in a different bar with a different friend, the same breed of man served my drink and had a 12 second relationship with me in which he kissed me softly, fucked me roughly, and left his smelly shirt as a souvenir that caught my tears every time I caught its scent.



I am reluctant to admit that one of my best friends, the boy around the corner who I dated for 2 days 22 hours and 22 minutes has become the 23 year old local who high school boys hang out with and high school girls long to talk to. He's hairy, shaggy, smoking, drinking, playing firehall shows, having parties at his house. He's still a wannabe badass with a skateboard to me but I see now that he's likely party to this social revolution I'm witnessing as I sit across

from the friend of a friend who is ashing a cigarette that doesn't quite smell like my bestfriend-lover but would satisfy my mouth's mourning just the same.

Later, in the sky—not on the road, big brother—as I looked down from a plane onto little villages that decorated tiny dry valleys and spawned kids who were just as hungry for a cultural revolution as their parents' crops were for a good rainy season, the realization occurred to me that the west coast home that I was returning to was not touched by the social revolution that dominated my attention in my misguided outings in Cornfield Pennsylvania. Then again maybe the west coast emo hardcore boys are serving drinks here too. I just don't know because I'm not a public lush on this side of the continent. I drink behind locked doors

from large plastic cups rather than in smoke-filled bars from short glasses that cost five bucks to refill.

Life here doesn't revolve around ass-backwards outings to four bars in one night to meet people who won't ever know that name that no one ever yells. West coast world is dominated by a literary

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revolution that I, pet to all the stars that I am, have become more than simple party to. It's an orgasmic wave washing over a little town that

calls itself a city and I'm surfing near the back watching my fellow addicts laugh with maniacal satisfaction as they birth offspring who wreck them. Our *elektric* creations. These fellow in-patients guess they know me rather well despite their lack of knowledge that my name is in fact a noun, an adjective, an adverb, and on rare occasion, a full on verb. They know that I have loved (in a biblical sense) one man alone but do not know that he and I lead nearly separate lives that nearly always stay separate and that we merely double ourselves with the identity of our union. They are not aware that I have never seen him in a social situation that wasn't mine alone. I have never met his friends nor have I ever accidentally/unexpectedly bumped into him. I am a stranger in the Pacific home because they do not know

the person. I'm a stranger in the Atlantic home because they do not know the soul.

All of this is terribly ironic as you now look at me awaiting the stereotypical sap of the girlfriend smitten with a man who kissed her on his own the night before. Someone begs me write that *he* is home. And although my eyes tear on long treks when I remember the electricity of his breath on the crook of my neck, although relaxation deepens post meditation when I collapse by his side, I am a stranger in his land as well. He is merely the fuzzy warmth of a familiar bed. He comes complete with the intermittent stark realization that I am Goldilocks and he is Papa's too-hard bed.

Thinking of him. Thinking of him and me and how we are a puzzle that sometimes never completes the picture. Now I want the cigarette that my friend

offered to me from the friend of a friend's pack. I want the Kerouac smoke to curl and I want the chilling noncomfort of a tinkling glass in my left hand. I want to close the curtains and die on the living room floor a stone on rainy Monday.

She begged me to tell her that I was happy with my fake marriage and nearly six years with the yogi of brutal honesty let me only answer, "We are a complicated creature." We are enough. We may be strangers in each other's worlds but the warm fuzzy beds-too-hard are the closest either of us will ever come to home.

At the end of the page I find that this was more than the Kerouac faux-fictional travel's rehash.

This was Jack Kerouac's Punk Little Sister trying to earn the family name only to fall short and hard into a diatribe about going home. ✕

