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# Interlude

*by Dustin Michael-Edward Davenport*

On my way west, I'm stopping to rent a room in a hostel right in the vortex of a small college town. The food is cheap, and there really isn't anywhere else I can afford to go. My room is small and comfortable, with a strange middle-eastern chair that sits low to the ground, a bed with clean white sheets, a dresser, and a roll-top desk in the corner next to a window with a view of an alley that runs between another building and my own. I can hear people talking down in the street, but whenever I look out I never actually see anyone speak. Nails are plunged all over the walls from paintings and portraits that used to hang there but don't hang there anymore. I don't bother to unpack my clothes in the dresser, as I'm only staying here for one night so I can catch the train to Fairmount in the morning. I check out the dresser and find, under a reserve of fresh linen, a pair of Gideon's bibles and a dream catcher. I hang the dream catcher over one of the nails still embedded above my bed, and set one of the bibles in a shelf in the desk. The room is too muggy and humid so I pry open the window. A weak breeze escapes into the room, but only seems to make it hotter when the air rushes out again. I decide to go down into the town to get something to eat until the room has enough time to cool off so I can get a good sleep after two restless nights on the train.

Looming majestically over the small town is a snowy crag of mountains that warmly refract the sunlight glinting off of the distant white-capped peaks. The place I'm staying at is located in an area called "The Hill", which consists of three or four square blocks of shops and theatres and cafes where kids from the college congregate in-between classes. But since this is their summer break, the streets are packed day and night. Everyone looks like a tourist here, even though there are no old adults around anywhere.

I walk a couple blocks to a small café with a patio out front. All the tables are empty except for one where an older girl—about my age— sits alone in front of a laptop computer. She has a ragged piece of clothe clutched in her hand that she keeps brushing against her lips. Her thumb is swollen and wrinkly like she has been sucking on it for a long time. Up a few steps into the entranceway is a sign that reads: WAIT TO BE SEATED. After standing there in the doorway awhile, a woman comes up to me.

"You can have a seat," she says curtly, a slight look of irritation on her face.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I just read the sign here."

"I'm sorry," she apologizes, turning over the sign to read HAVE A SEAT. "We should have changed that awhile ago. Most people would have just sat down anyway."

"That's alright," I laugh softly and follow her up the steps into the bar.

The waitress sits at a small school desk in the corner, away from the busy lunch crowd that would soon be rushing in from the streets. A scrap-pile of clothe is stacked high on the table: different tiles of soft fabric which she carefully and patiently folds into perfect shapes. When she is finished with one, she lays it down on an empty table beside her and right away starts folding another. The neat piles on the once empty desk are quickly starting to contend with the undone pile. Soon they are sure to meet in the middle. The clothes she folds reminds me of the worn piece of fabric that the girl on the patio had been chewing before I came in. The waitress patiently folds one more piece of fabric before she goes around the bar. She stands up on a small box that elevates her a little above the clean marble counter.

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“What can I get you?”

“Can I have a gin and tonic please?”

“Do you have your ID?” She seems slightly embarrassed to ask.

I hand it to her.

“You’re a long ways away,” she says, handing it back to me. “Are you out here for school?”

“I’m just passing through on my way to Fairmount.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard it’s real nice out there. Do you have friends that way?”

“Yeah, my friend Murphy has been out there for a couple years now.”

“Well, do you want the top shelf stuff?” She uses a broom to point to the uppermost shelf. “It’s pretty good?”

“That’s okay,” I say. “It all tastes the same to me.”

“Well since you said that, then I’ll have to give you the good stuff.” She brings down a gold bottle from the highest shelf and looks at it admiringly. “I’ll only charge you for the cheap stuff though.”

“Thanks,” I say, sitting down at the bar to watch her mix my drink.

She pours liberally from the expensive bottle, letting the clear liquid drain out of the spout in a constant flow until she neatly flicked her wrist to cease the stream.

“Would it be possible to have a couple sandwiches as well? I haven’t gotten a chance to eat since I came in.”

“Where are you staying?”

“Just at the hostel around the corner.”

“That’s where a lot of people stay when they come through town.”

“I’ve stayed there once before.”

“So you’ve been out this way already?”

“Once.”

She smiles and slides me my drink across the clean marble counter.

“If you want to go sit out on the patio I can bring out your sandwiches in a minute.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”

“Sure.”

The girl with the computer is gone. At the foot of the table I see the ragged piece of clothe she must have left behind. If she came back it would still be there. I hope she comes back for it and hasn’t just left it

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there on purpose. An old woman passes in front of the gate that separates the patio from the street. In her hand is clutched a wilted bouquet of wild flowers. She reminds me of the blind girl in "City Lights" who Chaplin, in all his clumsy munificence, decides to buy a rose from with his last pence. In front of the gate is a row of potted plants. Carefully, with especial tenderness and delicacy, she plucks a few of the brightest flowers and adds them to her bouquet. The new additions to her arrangement stand out vibrantly against the wilted ones, though soon they must look the same. As soon as I finish my drink and light a cigarette, the waitress brings out my food.

"Here you go," she says cheerfully, setting the plate down in front of me while picking up my glass.

"Do you want another drink?"

"No, that'll be alright."


"Well if you need anything else just let me know."

Before I can pull out my wallet to pay the tab, she goes back inside. Through the window behind the patio I can see her sitting at the small school desk, neatly folding small scraps of clothe into perfect shapes and then stacking them high on the table beside her. She comes across a baby's bonnet and holds it up into the sunlight. Cradling the bonnet against her chest, she looks a little sad when she finally folds it into the perfect shape and adds it into the anonymous pile of rags. I quickly eat one of the sandwiches and wrap up the other to save for the long train ride tomorrow. When I go inside to the bar and ask how much I owe, the girl looks confused and disconcerted as she scribbles out my bill on a torn piece of paper she takes from her pocket.

When I come back to the hostel there is a note for me on the bulletin board where announcements are posted: EDWARD, CALL MOTHER IMMEDIATELY. I use the phone in the lobby. My mother tells me that Murphy lost his cell phone, and so to get a hold of him I am supposed to call a woman named Marilyn instead. Murphy called my house the night before and told her all of this. We talk for a while longer. It's good to hear her voice. I don't feel so far away anymore.

On the door to my room was posted a note which repeated exactly what the one on the bulletin board had read. The room is much cooler now, but before I left I forgot to refasten the screen so the room is swarming with all kinds of bugs. Most of the bugs congregate around the light that stays on all night. I draw down the blinds and keep the window open so the cool air can come through.

The next morning I gather up my bags and head downstairs to wait on the front porch for the cab. After I spoke with my mother the night before, I called a taxi service and scheduled a pickup for the following morning at 6:30 AM. My train departure is scheduled for 7:00 AM, with an arrival time in Fairmount of around 2:00 in the afternoon. I drop my key off at the front desk so I can get back my ten dollar deposit. The man behind the counter—dressed in a heavy blue robe with the tassels tied tight around his waist—says that the person with the key to the register won't be in until 10:00. Since I don't know exactly where I'm going to stay when I get to Fairmount, I give the man my parent's address and say to send the money there.

It is still pretty early and there aren't many people out in the streets. The sun's not even up yet. As soon as I step outside, I immediately sense a pressure weighing in the air like after a steady rainfall. The yard in front of the hostel is moist and gleaming with dew. The steps leading up to the porch are dyed a dark grey. Drops of water splash down onto the banister from plants hanging from the ceiling. When I step off of the porch into the street, I recognize the rain-fallen pressure to have receded. There aren't any puddles in the streets. I sit back down on the porch and smoke a cigarette while I wait for the taxi to take me to the station. 

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**Dustin Michael-Edward Davenport**, born in Kalamazoo, MI, lives in Eugene, Oregon. His writing has appeared in *Bartleby Snopes* and the *Danse Macabre* (an excerpt from his novel 'Myth of Melody,' entitled "To Be Above The King.") The above story is also an excerpt from my first, as-of-yet-unpublished novel, "Myth of Melody."

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