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The Elephant in the Corner

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"At two o'clock on a Sunday morning, no one in their right mind would be sitting on the remainder of a sordid, disco-era recliner, casting sideways glances to four unfamiliar walls, each adorned with outdated college paraphernalia, subconsciously fighting the bitter March air that, without invitation, has ventured under the door and through the cracks of a drafty, filthy, nearly condemned apartment. Yet, here I am, in my left mind apparently. I'm slouched voluntarily in my uneasy chair, balancing on a rusty spring. . . waiting for him."

Cover Page Footnote

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JENNY STOCKDALE

THE ELEPHANT IN THE CORNER

At two o'clock on a Sunday morning, no one in their right mind would be sitting on the remainder of a sordid, disco-era recliner, casting sideways glances to four unfamiliar walls, each adorned with outdated college paraphernalia, subconsciously fighting the bitter March air that, without invitation, has ventured under the door and through the cracks of a drafty, filthy, nearly condemned apartment. Yet, here I am, in my left mind apparently. I'm slouched voluntarily in my uneasy chair, balancing on a rusty spring . . . waiting for him.

Bent in half, over an out-of-tune Ovation, strumming clumsily to a very stark rendition of "Fire and Rain," I occupy my shaky hands, inflicted in part by the cold, but mostly by my explosive nerves. The sparse, subdued audience, scattered about the room, consisting of three drunken twenty-somethings and a boa constrictor, listens passively to the music. They may as well be absent altogether, for when he finally enters the cluttered space, all else fades into the yellow wallpaper behind him.

"So he happens to be moderately famous," I admit to myself. "And he just happened to invite me here after the concert," I choke down under my breath. "And he's heading in this direction." I panic, fumbling for something witty to blurt out, to convince him that I'm more than a name scrawled on a torn receipt, adjacent to a phone number that he'll never call.

"Here, I'll be right back," He coyly mumbles, as a silver capo lands in my lap.

My eyes follow him curiously out of the room, seeing last, his heavy black leather boot as his long figure disappears behind a wall. I then let my eyes shift to the object resting on my knee. Suddenly, I'm reminded of a complaint I had made to him in a previous conversation; I had lost my capo at his last show and was terribly melancholy over it. With the obvious falling into light, I palm the small gift and abashedly note the dumb grin spreading like wildfire across my face.

In he walks, wearing a pair of jeans that are so worn-in you can detect the faded outline of a wallet in the right rear pocket, and a pickle-green t-shirt that rants off a random logo, of no use to anyone but himself. I know he sees me studying him. I know he's filing away somewhere behind his tired, bluish eyes how transparent my thoughts are, but whatever is felt, it remains unsaid. He sits down next to me on the three-legged coffee table, unsure of what to do next, pushing out a self-deprecating comment.

"You should know better than to think anything I say is of any worth," he teases. "It's good to see you again, though," he claims.

Trying to hide my tomato-paste cheeks, I avoid looking him in the eye and break the ice with a salty: "Well, that's a worthless assurance then, isn't it? I'd shake your hand for a job-well-done tonight, sir, but I'm sure you get that all the time, and I don't

know you well enough to know where your hands have been.”

He jumps at the chance to respond: “Sharp, sharp, sharp Ms. Stockdale, always playing the defense. Haven’t we gotten past that yet?”

“Never,” I colorfully utter. “I don’t trust you any farther than I can throw all one hundred ninety pounds of you.”

“One hundred and ninety two,” he smugly corrects.

The droll exchanges go on like this for hours. I am caught off guard when the brittle house’s bellowing clock reminds me seven times that I don’t belong here. I’m even more astonished to discover that the house, once harboring an after-party of nearly fifty people, was now sheltering an eerie silence. All that remains are two breathing bodies, chortling every once in awhile, facing each other in the dull sunlight spilling everywhere through warped windows.

Quietly, as not to wake the ghosts, I retort, “You know, I brought that book for you, the one you’ve always wanted to read—*Atlas Shrugged*. I know you’ll probably never get through all one thousand, one hundred and sixty-eight pages of it, and there are no pictures, but you’ll have something to resent me for at least.”

“You’ve been nothing but stellar,” he urges. “In fact, I brought you that CD I said I would. It’s over there in that bag, the one with the ball cap on top of it,” he stumbles over his severely outdated slang.

Too exhausted to move, he remains balled up under a ratty blanket, his squinting eyes for once seeing past the end of his nose, into the next room. I can see somewhere to the left of his expression that he wants nothing more than to submit to sleep—I’m sure I’m wearing a similar face—but there is something unnamed, undefined left floating in the quiet light that won’t permit it.

I’m sitting on the edge of my seat, bent in half again, only this time it’s not over a guitar, but over my equal—one who has no room for me, regardless of whatever fondness we may share for each other. I’m certain now, as I sit here staring at where I could fit in beside him, that this is the shapeless issue I’ve been ignoring all along. I know now why this vacant room has seemed so crowded, why it feels like we’ve been dancing around the obvious all morning, why there’s an elephant of impossibility that I’ve refused to recognize until just now.

“I’m going home,” I admit to what’s left of the fabulous musician crumpled on the couch in front of me . . . but he does not hear me; he’s asleep.

As I open the grating, nearly unhinged door, I turn back, giving an understood, wordless goodbye to an unreachable boy, and the elephant in the corner.