

A Heroic Disposition

I never wanted to die in a bathroom, especially not in the stall of a public bathroom, deciding whether or not I was about to engage in a spectacular case of what I endearingly term, “Sushi Shits.” Not only is it embarrassing but how was I supposed to defend myself when I was already in danger of spontaneously evacuating my bowels? I have a nervous stomach and a weakness for spicy salmon, the combination does not make for the basis of a heroic disposition.

I suppose if I was confronted with a situation that called for an act of self sacrifice, I would virtuously throw myself in the path of sure destruction to defend someone else. At least, that’s how I’ve always fancied myself. In all my imaginings, I was always the one on the floor in a broken heap, my last tears staining my face as my blood did the floor, aching with the loneliness and finality of death, but secure in my knowledge that the world would live on. Even if the world didn’t remember my last act, or the life that came before it.

Is it possible for someone to bravely face the possibility of their own terrifying death while sitting in a cubicle? A cubicle that doesn’t even allow for the privacy of sound insulation while one goes about completing their...err...necessaries? There’s nowhere to run. Even if I could run, I couldn’t with the functional yet fun print of my Betty Boop panties twisted around my ankles. Ankles attached to feet. Feet that won’t even comfortably reach the floor. When your feet don’t touch the floor, the first step is always painful. The possibility of numbness and the anticipation of pins and needles don’t make for the most promising of evacuation plans.

We all flail and scream with incredulity at the on screen heroines and victims for their inability to recognize the danger they go barreling into, head first, feet first, or ass backwards. We’re disgusted with the shocked expressions eternalized on their decapitated visages, the grotesque grimaces and perfectly portrayed O’s when they’re caught, gutted, strung up, or simply scared to death. I sympathize. I really do.

To react instantaneously without a fumble, you risk overreacting. The moment when you run screaming into a crowded room, your panties dangling from a shoe that miraculously managed to avoid tangling your legs into a slip and slide sprawl before reaching the assumedly “safe” home base. The looks of derision, and the laughter in the face attached to the head, attached to the body, directing the strong arms that comfort the silly little girl. In a situation when dropping your keys means the difference between a joyous ride home singing along to old school back street boys, and having your face ripped off. When allies assume you’re overreacting and remain unaware of their own peril, then they’ll probably all die too. It’s my own fate I fear.

Is it something that’s flawed in our society or fundamentally within me, to fear being humiliated in public as much as I fear death? To be fair to myself, in my suppositions I don’t fear death and dismemberment as much as I fear what might come before; The ultimate terror of anticipation that coils in your stomach and digs roughly beneath your ribs, the cold breath of what you cannot control and the horror of feeling your soul slide from between your lips.

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My fear is not something contained solely within my mind. Corporeal or in a state between manifestations, what haunts me is here. My heart climbs to escape its protective cage, raging to be free of fear, and unaware that to try and flee is to skip a beat straight into horrific death. I feel it at night sometimes, close but not yet touching. The rasp behind closed doors and the patterns on the ceiling, the soft knocks from within walls and the cries from the other side. I wonder if the organic structure that holds my muse and intellect is protecting me by translating these signs into more mundane explanations, or if it, unveiled, is exposing me to the more unwanted truths of the metaphysical.

What explanation is there for what grips me? Huddled within myself my speech is paralyzed, to cry out for help is to give myself away, to voice a plea leaves an obvious opening. If I shut my eyes I'm hindered, but I'm scared that there's another way inside. I could never bring myself to check under the bed, and peaking beneath my stall is beyond me. I have no protection, my mind is open and I fear. The faint hint of a slither and drag across the tiles, the darkness that peeks under the door, and the sense that there just might be something that not only doesn't care if you die of fright but would relish causing it.

The sensation of fingers tangled in your hair, cold digits on your scalp, forcing your head back to see, or not see. The tug on your limbs, nails dug in, bruising in its attempt to slip you free of safety and glide you gently to its maw. It's maw, its mouth, its alternate universe, or gruesome chamber of sadistic delights. Rather to delicately peel your layers of skin and leave you separate, or in one desperate moment cup your face and slowly kiss your will goodbye. To force your sight upon its disparity and hold what it does not have. I fear what I do not understand, that I do not understand its goal, its desire, or that there's no reasoning with its desire to invalidate my entire being

There's no discourse that can vary your fate, no sympathy, no magic, no lie, no lpad you can trade for breath. This is what keeps me sitting, anxiety playing friend to the panic in my stomach. There are no sweet butterflies for me, but spiders that make each leg felt as they tiptoe and climb their way up, making their plight known. There's a struggle for each moment spent in isolation, a battle to make myself move, to be mobile, to reach, to overcome paralysis and interact. It takes great courage to straighten up and arrange myself, to unlock my shield and visit my reflection in the mirror. I force myself to watch my hands as I attend to basic hygienic standards, and I hold my breath as I push down the urge to run. I walk sedately if not gracefully to the door. My hand curls gratefully around my friend the handle. It's fifteen minutes till the previews start and I want to get a good seat.

No, I never wanted to die in a bathroom, with slow, deep breaths on the other side of the door. The paralysis that overtakes your body when you sense movement out of your peripheral, and the images your mind pieces together from your senses. Waiting for the glimpse of colour, the flash from the white of an eyeball, the sense of waiting and being watched. The fear of what you'll glimpse in that small gap between the door and its frame. It's small, but sometimes small is enough. It's enough to glimpse the slide of hair, the play of light, and catch your breath.

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I have certain rules, some parameters in which I live my life by. Don't enter a room with the lights off, keep the closet doors closed, and never close your eyes in the shower. I also try not to let my feet hang over the end of the bed, or the couch, or computer chairs at night. I don't go into basements and I never sleep naked. These things however, can sometimes be unavoidable. Now, if I were to extract myself from my compromising position and bypass a life threatening situation, do I stop and wash my hands?