

"He looked at himself in the mirror,  
conscious"

"He looked at himself in the mirror, fully  
conscious that he"

"He looked at himself in the mirror, fully  
conscious, living in himself, living in his  
pain."

First sentence.

"He was fully conscious of his pain. He  
was struck by his pain. His"

"He was fully conscious of his pain. He  
was struck by his pain. His pain was  
present to him. He wondered if there  
was something outside"

"He wondered if there was something  
outside his life. Maybe he could"

"Maybe he would be happy, but maybe  
he wouldn't, if something was different"

"Maybe he would be happy, but maybe  
he wouldn't, if something in him was  
different, if he could be otherwise than  
himself."

"Was there a God? If there was a God,  
maybe there was a reason for him to be  
himself."

"She came in and said hello. 'I'm here to  
change your life' she said."

"'No', he"

"'Okay', he said, 'you can change me.'"

"'Thank you', she said."

You don't know where to go from here in your short story. Or, you don't know, maybe it's a novel. You get the sense that it's a short story, though, and that's okay.

You're sitting here at Mitzi's Cafe, trying to get some inspiration. You wish that there was someone here for you to talk to, like an old friend. Old friends bring you news from a different world, and it's nice to catch up. The people you see every other day are nice, but old friends always seem to be having good things happen in their lives.

You decide to get up and go outside and go back to...

## YOUR APARTMENT

Your studio is minimally furnished, with some pictures on the wall. Your bed is a futon which is currently folded up. The bathroom door is propped open to let the bathroom air out.

There is nothing to do here.

## OUTSIDE

You go out onto the street, not really knowing what to do. Then you think, why not take the bus somewhere?

So you wait at the bus stop for the 40

bus, which goes a long way. You'll know what to do by the time it gets to the end of the line, you think.

Standing there is a woman, who likes what you're wearing.

WOMAN: Those shoes are really cute! Where did you get them?

YOU: I ordered them online. They're fair trade shoes from Ethiopia.

WOMAN: Wow. The fabric is really interesting. It looks different from different angles.

YOU: Yeah. Your shirt is cool, too.

WOMAN: Thank you! I painted it myself.

YOU: Are you an artist?

WOMAN: I was when I was younger. I'm Angela, by the way.

She extends a hand which you grasp.

YOU: I'm Beth.

ANGELA: Where are you headed?

YOU: I'm just trying to clear my head, so I'm going for a bus ride.

ANGELA: I do that kind of thing too. I'm headed all the way out to the train station. I've got a trip to take.

YOU: Vacation?

ANGELA: I have to visit my parents. My dad isn't doing too well.

YOU: That's too bad.

ANGELA: It's a good thing I can go.

YOU: Yeah.

ANGELA: So, what's occupying your mind?

YOU: Just, existing. Getting through time. I was working on a short story, but nothing was clicking.

ANGELA: Yeah, why do we live, anyway?

YOU: I know. Anything on your mind?

ANGELA: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of things.

She continues.

ANGELA: I don't know, I guess it's probably stuff that I shouldn't share with strangers I just met.

YOU: Yeah, that's okay.

ANGELA: So, what do you do for a living?

YOU: I'm an editor.

ANGELA: Oh I see, you like to write...

YOU: So I'm an editor, yeah...

ANGELA: How do you like that job?

YOU: It's alright. It kind of makes me swim through time. How about you? What do you do for

a living?

ANGELA: Oh, here's the bus...

You both get on, pay, and sit next to each other.

ANGELA: Okay, here we are... I'm an administrator for a non-profit... not in charge, but still an administrator.

YOU: What does the non-profit do?

ANGELA: We help at-risk youth. We have a tutoring program and do educational things. We do classes on nutrition, exercise, and teach psychological skills. Have you heard of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy?

YOU: No, what's that?

ANGELA: It's a therapy based on teaching skills like emotional regulation and mindfulness.

YOU: Okay, that sounds really nice.

ANGELA: Yeah, we give classes based on that. We want kids to have a good foundation.

YOU: That's really neat.

ANGELA: Yes. It's a rewarding job.

YOU: Sometimes I wish I could do something like that, that really makes a difference. But something in me won't go there.

ANGELA: Yeah, I can understand that. Some things speak to you, and some things don't.

YOU: And it's strange, because I think young people need help, and I want to help.

ANGELA: But it's just not you.

YOU: But it could be, right?

ANGELA: It could be, but only if it speaks to you. If it doesn't speak to you, leave it alone.

YOU: I guess I get tempted to engineer myself, to fit a certain image. But what if that image is a good thing? What if we could all respond to what the world really needs? Wouldn't that be good?

ANGELA: Yeah. But that's not the way things are. Hey, if you're a writer, you must know something about how to write? And you're an editor...

YOU: Yeah, that's true.

ANGELA: Here (she rummages) here's my card. And what's your phone number?

You rummage and reply with your card.

YOU: Here's mine.

ANGELA: We both have business cards!

YOU: Absolutely.

ANGELA: We need volunteers to be tutors all the time, and you could help with writing skills.

YOU: Yes, that would be interesting.

ANGELA: Okay, great.

You sit in silence. The bus speakers call out the stop. The bus stops, someone gets on, someone gets off. The bus starts up again.

ANGELA: Okay, so I know I just met you but I like your energy. So I can tell you this. What's on my mind is that I broke up with my boyfriend recently.

YOU: Wow, that's hard. But it was your decision, so it's a good thing, from your perspective.

ANGELA: Yeah, it was a good decision. He wasn't the worst boyfriend, just, not emotionally satisfying.

YOU: Yeah, I guess you had to dump him.

ANGELA: Yeah. I've been thinking over it, over and over. For some reason, this won't leave me. "Not emotionally satisfying"... what kind of person am I? I've been in abusive relationships before... not the worst kind of abuse, but still, abusive. And after crawling out of those relationships, what did I do? I went straight back into the game, looking for more men. I have a hunger for men. I crave men to fulfill my emotional needs. I devour them. And when they can't give me my supply, I get rid of them, always hungry.

YOU: But if you're hungry, what are you going to do otherwise, starve? Can you avoid all human contact? You're going to want to consume somebody.

ANGELA: I would even consume the people on the bus. This conversation would lead to another and another and I'd consume you, automatically. Well,

I'm hopeful that realizing this, I can come to some kind of understanding.

YOU: Does this pattern affect your work?

ANGELA: Not really. At work, I'm living for other people. Really living. And I'm happier there. But when I get off work, I relax and my hunger takes over. And I get in relationships. And I live for my partners and friends. But it's really about what I consume.

YOU: I don't feel like you're consuming me right now.

ANGELA: I'm not. But if we stayed friends, down the line, looking back, we would both see that the seeds started here.

YOU: Okay. So you consume people. Do you have any hope?

ANGELA: I like that response. I grew up in a Christian household, and one story that I didn't understand when I was little was about how Jesus saw the woman at the well and said "It's true that you have no husband. You've had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband." And he offered her living water. You see me, better than most. The men in my life are addicted to me as much as I am to them, so they can't see me as a person. The women in my life say nice things to me, nicer than you do. But I want someone like Jesus to come into my life and say "You're an addict, you're insatiable, you fake love in order to get your supply. What you say is true." Because I know it's true, and I want to hear the truth about me. Even if there's nothing I can do to be better, I want to hear the truth. Your response



was good. I do consume people. I want people to see me for who I am, and really see how messed up the way I am really is, and accept me, and not be fake about it. And maybe that's my hope. I don't think I can stop consuming people like food. I don't have any hope of that. But I can hope that someone will tell the truth. And you did tell the truth.

YOU: Is there any way to reduce the damage that you do?

ANGELA: Maybe. One idea I have is to find a better man to "love" (she marks with air quotes) A tough man, with his head together. Again, someone like Jesus. God, you would think I should go to church or something...

YOU: You think you could find a man like Jesus at a church?

ANGELA: You know, I don't think Christians are even trying to be like Jesus most of the time. That's not their gospel.

YOU: I don't know... well, if that's true, what are you going to do?

ANGELA: Keep eating people. Keep seeing my therapist.

YOU: Your therapist helps you but they don't really help you.

ANGELA: Yeah.

YOU: Well, if you want we can wail together.

ANGELA: Okay, but very quietly, because we're

here on the bus.

You put your arm over her shoulder and lean toward her, and she leans toward you. You both tear up. You go back to how you were.

ANGELA: You fed me just now.

YOU: I knew I was feeding you.

ANGELA: I'm sorry.

You look at her eyes.

ANGELA: God, Beth, where have you been all my life?

YOU: I don't know, this is a really weird situation.

No one on the bus takes any notice.

ANGELA: It's okay. There was something different that time.

YOU: What?

ANGELA: I don't know why it was different. My emotional hunger craves people's flesh, and their sunshine, the sunshine of their faces. But also craves how they see me, and what they say I am. And it craves them, as a thought object, something to lovingly caress. Did you know that I've dated three men who were more than 10 years younger than me? I'm too old to have kids of my own. I doted on them. They were my precious, beautiful boys. One of them was one of the abusers. I craved children, I craved youth. I craved the sunshine of their youth, the beauty of them.

YOU: I'm about the same age as you.

ANGELA: 45?

YOU: 41.

ANGELA: Bless you. God bless you.

YOU: Why?

ANGELA: Today there was something. I get my supply through human interactions, through the reflection and revelation of human personalities. Supposedly those are about communication. But there's never really any communication. My heart doesn't want communication. It wants anything but communication. Healing, joy, pleasure, excitement, purpose. No communication.

YOU: Did I communicate?

ANGELA: You were there, but something else communicated to me. It's always communicating, but today I was open to it.

YOU: Do you think it was God?

ANGELA: I don't trust myself enough to think that. To let Jesus save me. I don't know if I can ever believe in God.

YOU: Okay, whatever it was, somebody spoke to you.

ANGELA: Yes. If it spoke to me, it was somebody.

YOU: I'm just trying to figure out God, too.

ANGELA: You can't figure out God, you can never

know him. Then you'll want to feed on him.

YOU: Maybe that's why he's so distant. Hey, my friend was telling me about George Berkeley. He was a philosopher from a long time ago. He said that everything we perceive is spoken to us by God.

ANGELA: So it's like we're living in the Matrix?

YOU: Right, but God is everywhere, in every perception. So if that's true, what kind of God do you see right now, when you look out the window of the bus? What kind of God would speak all that visual detail to you?

Angela tries the thought on.

ANGELA: He's... really quiet.

YOU: Can you feed on him?

ANGELA: No... I can't... but he's there.

YOU: Maybe that's how you see God. You're so hungry that you can only be given him in ways that don't feed you.

ANGELA: Are you sure you don't believe in God?

YOU: I think to be honest, I'm an atheist right now. But I could be wrong.

ANGELA: So you're an agnostic?

YOU: It feels more like I'm an atheist who could be wrong than an agnostic who is right in her agnostic position.

ANGELA: Okay, I can see the difference. So God helps us by not existing?

YOU: Right. But we can still think about him.

ANGELA: I think he does exist, because we can think about him.

YOU: Are you going to feed on him that way?

ANGELA: No, he's just an idea. He's irrelevant to my well-being.

YOU: How does that make you feel?

ANGELA: I don't know, I'm not sure I feel anything right now. I'm just okay. Huh, maybe this is the Holy Spirit.

YOU: The Holy Spirit?

ANGELA: In Christianity, he's one of the persons of God, and he indwells people. I thought the Holy Spirit was a spirit of power. But maybe God's not all about power, and maybe healing comes from the word of God and not through his power.

YOU: Do you want to go to church now?

ANGELA: Right now? I have to catch my train.

And soon the bus arrives at the stop near the train station.

You get off and walk with her over to the platform. She buys her ticket from the kiosk.

ANGELA: Beth. How lucky we were to meet. I

think the universe put us together. Not God, he's powerless. And the universe has no personality. So that way I can't feed on either of them. I don't know where your travels are going to take you. I don't know if I'll feel comfortable calling you in to do tutoring for the kids. Maybe you'll find a different opportunity. Maybe I'll change my mind.

YOU: We don't have to be friends. You can keep this moment as a moment.

ANGELA: Yes. Thank you.

You give each other a side hug, and then you walk away, wondering about the meaning of life -- not wondering if it had any at all, but wondering what the message of it was saying to you, specifically.

You go back to the street where the bus stop was, cross to the other side, wait at the stop headed home, get on at the right time, and ride, ride, ride.

You get off and go sit down in Mitzi's Cafe. You're a cafe rat. Julia sees you.

JULIA: Hey! How are you?

YOU: Hi Julia. I'm just processing things.

JULIA: What happened?

YOU: I couldn't focus, so I went on a bus ride to nowhere.

JULIA: To nowhere? Bus people do that?

YOU: We do. If you have a month pass, why not?

JULIA: Yeah... and your month pass costs as much as gas does these days... Maybe I should quit driving...

YOU: Public transportation has its downsides.

JULIA: Okay, but we were focusing on your emotions.

YOU: Thanks. So I met this woman at the bus stop. She was nice. She told me about a volunteer opportunity through her work. And then we didn't have anything to say, and she started talking about her relational hunger. She said she went out with a lot of men and had a lot of friends just to consume them emotionally, to feed her.

JULIA: Wow.

YOU: And I comforted her, and it was kind of strange.

JULIA: Like what kind of strange?

YOU: Do you ever have weird moments with strangers?

JULIA: Yeah... it happens a lot. Sometimes I'm the weird thing, and sometimes they're the weird thing.

YOU: I think in this case, she had something she really had to say, but there's no one on earth who can hear it, so I heard it.

JULIA: Okay, I think I know what you're talking about.

YOU: And then we got off the bus. She had to take the train somewhere.

JULIA: So, do we consume each other emotionally?

YOU: No, I don't think we do.

JULIA: I agree. I don't know why that is. I think we're just people to each other.

YOU: We do have chemistry.

JULIA: But it's light and sparkling.

YOU: I think maybe we're just in a different place than her.

JULIA: I used to consume people a lot. I think I still do. But right here? No way.

YOU: How lucky we are to know each other.

JULIA: Yeah...

YOU: So how is the dating going?

JULIA: It's always first dates.

YOU: Is that disappointing?

JULIA: No, because it's all first dates with the same man. I'm still dating Jackson, but his name was something else originally, and he has a different name now.

YOU: I guess that keeps you from consuming him.

JULIA: Yeah. I just consume him a little. You can't



consume someone too much on a first date -- even if you want to. The dynamic hasn't evolved yet.

YOU: We know way too much about dynamics.

JULIA: Yeah. Life is too short and life is too long. Too short -- I'm 30 and I want to be a mother some day. And I have to figure out which name of my man I want to marry. I don't want my kids to have a different man every Friday night be their father.

YOU: You're thinking ahead. When I was your age, I didn't think about these things.

JULIA: How old are you again?

YOU: 41.

JULIA: You don't have much time left.

YOU: Yeah. At this point, I'm okay with not having kids.

JULIA: What about a husband? Or a boyfriend?

YOU: I'm not sure. I guess I'm okay with one or without one.

JULIA: Wow, you're really chill.

YOU: I'm lucky. I experience the same things everyone does, even the extreme things, but less so at the same time.

JULIA: You are lucky. Well, my life is just weird.

YOU: Yes. Your life is weird.

JULIA: Thank you for validating my point of view.

YOU: You're welcome. Scrabble?

JULIA: Of course.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT  
Episode 5 "Angela"  
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## COMMENTS

1. I used to have a pair of shoes from SoleRebels that had an interesting weave to it. SoleRebels is a fair trade brand from Ethiopia.

I got into fair trade some time ago and now I'm wondering if it's the best way to spend my money. For what I spend on fair trade clothes and shoes, I could buy the cheap, conventional versions and donate the difference to an effective charity. In principle, I would rather support the norm of "clothes should not be made in a sweatshop" instead of "it's okay for clothes to be made in a sweatshop if the wealth produced is enough to make up for poverty somewhere else". But thinking in a utilitarian way (adding up harms and benefits objectively), maybe buying conventional clothes and donating "does more good" in the short run, maybe a lot more good.

I do think that supporting entrepreneurs who are nationals of developing countries is a good idea. That way the profits stay in country. SoleRebels was founded by an Ethiopian woman. In theory, at least, she should have a better grasp of Ethiopian issues than an outside philanthropist. She has more of a stake in Ethiopia, as a citizen and not just as a businessperson or philanthropist.

Which norm is more exportable? That is, which can be spread to the most other people? How livable is it? Fair trade involves work, to find something to wear, but the benchmark is simple. You have to buy a certain amount of clothes in a year, so you have to give a certain amount. If you buy conventional clothes, it's easy, and you might

conveniently forget to donate enough to make up the difference. Fair trade is the norm that we would want in the ideal future on earth. The end state of society is everyone paying a fair amount for clothes, not everyone exploiting a few people and then giving the difference to people who are worse off. So from a perspective of implementing a cultural change that starts now and continues for generations to the final sustainable society, fair trade involves less change, and may be better for that. It may be an easier standard to actually keep yourself to, and may make more sense intuitively.

This all is thinking long term. Do we know the future? Is there time? Also, can we do calculations of good correctly? What is "good"? What is human well-being? A heuristic that I tend to use in different parts of life is to diversify and resist change. It's arguably less rational, but also less prone to me betting too much on the wrong thing that looks obviously right right now. So I might continue to buy fair trade sometimes, and sometimes not, sometimes donate instead.

Fair trade purchasing, like charitable giving, can be done well or poorly.

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