

IT CAN, IT CAN, IT CAN

by Eric Boyd

A man jumped off the High Level Bridge this morning. I was at work. A fat businesswoman in a blue blazer ordered Thai Salad, Crispy Calamari, and Ginger Crusted Salmon. Two others accompanied her, both got Classic Caesars. They shared the calamari, plus a bottle of Coppola Pinot Grigio. One of the women told me she liked my lipstick, then Blue Blazer whipped her a look: *Don't talk to the help*. After that, none of them spoke to me aside from placing their orders; at the water station I did hear Blue Blazer telling the other two how bad the last quarter was. They had lost a lot.

The man apparently parked his car—beat up, rusted out—on the bridge and sat there for some time. People drove around him until congestion became too much, then they honked. Rolling down their windows, even in the rainy October air, they cursed at him. Nobody got out and asked, *Is everything alright?*

The women with Blue Blazer were nervous and seemed content being talked at, not to. Blue Blazer would ask questions like, "Where can we tighten our budget?" and think out answers herself. One of them would mutter "Um" while the other was completely silent. The salmon was ready for nearly ten minutes before I brought it out, waiting for Blue Blazer to wind down her speech, which seemed to end positively. Things bounce back, she said. They always do.

The man got out of his car and staggered toward the pedisation barrier. Cars had learned to work around him and traffic moved steadily. He paced back and forth for a long time before standing still to look out over the water. The river below, the Monongahela, is brown and choppy and gets a lot of sewer runoff. I know because, no matter how many times management calls the borough, they won't remove the warning signs just outside our back patio. The river couldn't have looked any different for him than it usually does. It couldn't have looked beautiful.

Once they started eating, Um and Silent were more at ease. Silent ate quickly and happily and had a piece of lettuce hanging from the

corner of her mouth until Um nudged her below the table. Blue Blazer didn't notice any of it; if she wasn't forking salmon into her mouth she was having more wine, lifting the glass until it had all drained into her with one gulp.

He was tall and skinny, his hair neatly cut. He wore a light jacket and dark pants. He looked young but could have just as easily been old. He leaned over the bridge's railing.

I brought the women more water and Blue Blazer asked me if I was "a Mexican or what." I informed her that I was not from Mexico, no— then I left the water pitcher on their table and went into the restroom. I took the tiny garbage can from under the sink and threw it against a wall, trying not to scream. I spent ten minutes cleaning up afterward. I had terrible cramps and had for the last week. Someone outside the door said my name and I didn't recognize it.

I came out and stood by the kitchen. Gerard, returning an undercooked tilapia, smiled gently at me. "There you are. You look awful."

"Thanks."

"I mean you don't look well," he straightened. "You look ill."

"I didn't sleep much," I said, "and I was sick when I woke up."

Gerard nodded; he was the only one I'd told. "You haven't called?"

"He might come back."

"Honey," Gerard touched my hair.

"I know."

"You have to make up your mind."

"I know." I would have liked it better if he'd just asked how I was.

Blue Blazer and company finished their Pinot Grigio and got a second; Blazer said they might as well call it a day and also ordered a bottle of Prosecco. They became very jovial. Um said how Donald Trump was right about everything and Silent told the dirtiest jokes I ever heard. They laughed in such a fit that, when they looked out the window and saw a man flying off the bridge and through the air—heard the quick bottlerocket cracks of the tree branches he passed before landing—they giggled through pursed lips. Our

always-reserved manager gasped and ran through the back patio, towards the riverwalk, to see what he could.

The man didn't hit the water. He drifted through the sky and landed three feet away, in black mud. One of his legs shattered; rescue responders got to him within ten minutes but he was able to stand on his own, and didn't appear to be in pain. Gerard took a smoke break to get closer and he said the man's eyes were glazed over, almost totally white. He was, as Gerard said, "Stoned to his bones." He said the crowd surrounding the scene seemed disappointed, muttering things like, *Who can't make it into the river? Why not use a gun? Why not be sure?* The man got up the hill, over the riverwalk fence, and into an ambulance without incident. He just shook his head, repeating, "It can get worse....It can, it can, it can..."

The rest of the day we were all abuzz. Even customers joined in, saying how, when it happened, they were on the bridge, or the riverwalk, or a friend was fishing nearby.

There was such pity. Everyone understood that, if you try doing that sort of thing, it's a kind of tragedy when you fail. But the pity was overshadowed by awe and some idea of participation. I heard people call it everything from an "attempt" to an "event", and they all wanted to be witness to it, refusing to believe that, no matter how many people were—or claimed they were—around at the time, he was alone.

They all kept saying, "I saw the whole thing."

But no one did, and neither did I.

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