

Colliding. 1, Jack

by athens 7
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I am going to the surgery, a morning as dull and ordinary as all the others in the past four years, when I see the poster: the most promising talent of the new generation of pianists, finally getting his chance in London. Needless to say, by the time I finally reach the surgery one hour and a half late, the ticket is resting safely against my chest, just two inches below the scars, while I try not to think too hard about it because otherwise I fear I will get a slight case of tachycardia; and I don't want to ask myself what does it mean after all this time to be here, unquestioning and eager and anxious but not scared --never scared. So I let it be, as always when it is about him.

The days left me to exist before the concert are an unending, delicious torture. It seems that after discovering that your life has been devoid of meaning for years, your heart just can't keep quiet.

I count the hours, tick off the minutes. I purchase a new suit. The night before the concert, I can't sleep. I try to read. I drink. I go out at the first rays of sun cutting through the polluted fog and I spend the entire morning wandering the streets. I come back to change dress and then I am off again. I can't eat.

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The exhibition is a haze that I can't quite remember. The notes come fluidly from far away, hitting my ears without my nerves being able to elaborate their meaning.

There is just an imperative crowding my mind, deafening my senses: go to him go to him go to him go to him go to him go to him ---
Hush, mad heart of mine, of course I will.

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I wait for him for two hours outside the theatre, near the back entrance for the musicians.

The air is crisp and chilled and my suit is tragically inadequate for the task of protecting me from it, but not for a single moment does the cold really reach me. My skin tingles with sparks of inner electricity and anticipation, and at the same time I feel like I could fall dead on the ground any moment, right here right now.

Many people come out and go away without paying any attention to me.

Whenever the panic seems on the verge of seeping through my veins and overcoming, I light a cigarette. Currently I am at the fifth.

What if he chose another exit, met a charming lady and took her home - extract the case - certainly this time it's going to be him - rub the match - maybe it wasn't really him on that stage maybe he was a ghost and all this is an hallucination - inhale - maybe, maybe, may -- - - hush shut up feel the smoke filling the lungs exhaling from the nostrils mouth slightly parted in a shaky breath --- -

The door opens again and I know, with the simple, ineluctable conviction of a prophet. The air around us changes, crackles and moulds itself into a new reality, the reality where we always belonged since the beginning and to which we are finally coming back.

I raise my gaze and he's there, standing in front of me, full of grace and beauty and meaning, his slender figure a lithe line defining the limits of all that is sacred and knowledgeable and important in my universe.

See me see me see me, I pray.

He turns and when he finally sets his eyes on me - those eyes, *God*, how could I have ever been satisfied with a mere retinal imprint of them - I realize that all these years I have been a walking dead leading a crippled existence, slowly devoured by pain and need and sheer *absence*, and I didn't know it. There he is, with that look on his face of composure and detachment, as if he never hurt, as if we never parted like two strangers in an empty house in Dublin, as if we bid goodbye yesterday evening and not four years and eleven months ago.

If possible, time has made him even more fascinating. The seraph is gone, life and travel and education have washed away the virgin candour and the restraint, and replaced it with a new awareness and compelling masculinity: he was a frail star timidly rising from the clouds when I left him; now he is a man developed in his wholeness, conscious of his power, his luring class, and not afraid of using it.

It's shocking and exhilarating and slightly terrifying, this return to the living: the world is suddenly tangible again, the contours of things are sharper, the sounds more intense.

Time stops in this small droplet falling beyond and over dimensions: we are caught in an infinitesimal moment of clarity where all truths are revealed and acknowledged and then scattered away again.

Obviously it cannot last.

A shift, a lessening of magnitude until normality of perception is restored and reality is bearable again.

The mood in his eyes alters, something starts to fade, but doesn't go away completely.

"You" he says.

"You" I echo.

We speak in whispers, and yet our voices feel almost too loud in the stillness of the moment.

He doesn't seem able to go on. So I needle him, trying to make it easier, to re-establish the old patterns.

"You let your hair grow. Very unconventional. And, great Scott, is that actually a goatee? I thought the distance played a trick on me."

"Whe- whereas you are as unkept as always" he stutters after a too-long pause, quite far from his usual standard of dry sarcasm. My heart jumps at the thought that maybe, just maybe, it's because he is too overwhelmed at seeing me.

And could it be... could it be that his cheekbones are reddening because he is pleased at knowing that I listened to him playing?

Another shift. This time I see that he manages to shut the emotion off; his blue eyes grow colder.

"After all these years... What are you doing here? What do you want?"

"The same thing you want."

To go back as we were, and perhaps even better if you will allow it. Don't pretend you don't feel the same way I do. It's useless.

"You don't know what you are talking about. You cannot imagine what - what I have become. What I plan to do. I am different now."

I move towards him until we are face to face. Another thump in my chest. How is it possible to be moved by the difference in our heights? And yet, when I have to imperceptibly incline my head to look at him in the eye, I can't help feeling a distinct pang in my stomach.

"No, you are not" I reply. "Neither am I. I know everything I need to. The rest are details you can tell me later."

The words come to my lips without thought nor effort, as if we were enacting a script written for us a long time ago, as old as earth and human passions.

"I come to serve, Patrick."

His name said aloud is what finally does it, for both of us. Never uttered, never thought, not even in my weakest moments, and now it's out, a strong

melodic sequence tasting so rich on my tongue, and everything is laid bare. To him the choice to stomp on it or envelop it in his arms. He shifts on his feet, bows his head down. Takes a deep breath. "Are you sure?" he whispers at last to the pavement. I straighten, raise my chin, clasp my hands behind my back in a mock of military posture. "More than anything else in my life" I answer low and clear. He closes his eyes, waits a second, two, then turns and walks away. I follow.

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The next day, when I go visit him at his new apartment, the goatee is gone. | "Now I have proof you are the most peevish gentleman in this respectable metropolis." "You are delusional if you believe that I cut it because of you." "But I will admit that I prefer you like this. Your complexion is too smooth and delicate to be tainted like that." " ! " "And when you blush it becomes even more endearing!" "W-would you please just close that babbling mouth of yours?!" "No." "... I hate you." "Of course." |

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Two weeks later, without neither of us making comments of any sort, I move to the flat next to his.

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