

Lexington, Kentucky

Not everyday, a man comes into my backyard and tends to my garden. This is not a euphemism. His visits are in real and actual time. And because of these visits, I now have a collection of drooping tulips, a few yellow petunias, and so many marigolds, I can pull a bunch for my mother and still it appears none have gone missing.

Let me get this out of the way. The man is not an old friend, nor is he a hired gardener or landscapist. And, even by the work he has completed thus far, I wouldn't be able to tell if he had once been schooled or practiced, or if he was brand new to the gig of planting, as I know very little about gardening myself. I do know that this man is not a neighbor, nor a vagrant, nor a migrant, or a refugee. And if you might be thinking it, I'll let you know now, he is also not a caveman or a neanderthal from the dawn of time trying to force agriculture in the tiny, dirt space of my yard. This is 2018, and I have looked into all of this, and I believe him, wholeheartedly, when he shakes his head at each and every suggestion that he might be anything other than a simple and regular man who is about the age of 29 or so. Which just so happens to be exactly around my age or so.

So he is just a man. Just a regular man, who, by the looks of it, makes his way in by shifting the two loose panels of my dilapidated wooden fence and turning himself sideways just a bit to enter, what is now, my garden.

“Is he a homeless?” Suz asked. Suz is fluent in English, but says she doesn't have the kind of time to concern herself with the articles she may or may not still place in front of her nouns. “There's still the... residue.” She says. She means from her first language. Words that

cling to her tongue still, like something sticky getting in her sentences anywhere they can, even if out of place and order.

“I believe he has a home,” I said, “I just haven’t asked where.”

Suz had called me later that morning, after the man had exited back out through the fence and out into the alley. She wanted me to come over for hot dogs which is sort of, kind of her thing. She forgot I had a day job, which she sometimes does as I am a mail carrier with sometimes long and open afternoons, so I called in sick, and took a train and then a bus, to a stop 5 minutes from her door. A house in the Sunset, big, and shared with 5 other women and a goldfish.

“You’re getting to know him,” she said. She handed me a hot dog she’d just cooked on the stove. It was cracked in several places and charred from the pan. I took it without ketchup.

“I think that is the case,” I said.

“You’re getting to know a homeless.”

“He dresses real nice,” I said

“What’s nice to you?” She asked.

“Polka-dots. He wears these fancy polka-dot shirts. They have short sleeves and a collar.”

“The Polo shirts.”

“Oh right,” I said, chewing. “The Polo shirts.”

She squirted ketchup onto her second dog.

“From the looks of it, they are made of a sort of silk slash cotton material.”

“Sounds nice,” she said, “does that mean you touched it?”

“...Touched it?” I asked.

“The Polo Shirt.”

“Oh.”

“What did you think I meant?”

We looked at my hot dog.

She raised an eyebrow, pinched a piece from the rounded edge of her dog and fed it to the fish.

Suz is the only person who has seen the man. The duplex is occupied only by me at the moment. My downstairs neighbors had a baby and have moved away to Lexington, Kentucky, or so I heard them saying on the phone and through the floorboards to their loved ones or friends who were concerned or excited, or both, for them and their decision to pick up and go away to Lexington, Kentucky, where they will have, or so I heard, a much larger home during what is an exciting time of growth and happiness.

I have never been to Lexington, Kentucky but it is a city and a state that I do enjoy saying aloud and often in my apartment and in the building that is now all mine.

In fact, the first time I saw the man, it was a brand new day, and I found that I had woken myself up that morning by saying Lexington Kentucky again and again in my sleep.

Lexington Kentucky Lexington Kentucky Lexington Kentucky Lexington Kentucky.

Over and over like that, until I was interrupted by the man's voice saying, "It's a good place, Lexington Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky is a good place". The voice came from below and so I thought for an instant, it was the man of the family and that they had never really left at all. Perhaps I had dreamt up the whole thing, all their happiness, their newborn baby, the little moving truck, one that had looked just like every other moving truck I had ever seen, the one they had all drove off in, without looking back behind them or waving goodbye to me.

When I heard the man give his opinion on Lexington Kentucky, that it was a "good place, I did not jump out of bed with excitement or anything. I turned myself over gently, and lifted myself slowly, and put a finger to a blind and pushed it down. He had already planted several sets and sorts of flowers by then, and I was more startled that I had not realized he was back there, and that he had likely been more than once, then I was to see him for the very first.

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