

The Crickets Try to Organize Themselves Into Some Raucous Pentameter.

by Jac Jemc

A secret search rolled from Odette's eyes. A gulch split her down the middle and she had the world believing this was the way she liked it. Odette was a woman who spent entire days bending backward within herself, never letting on that she was uncomfortable, out of her element, ready to leave.

Odette had fallen in love with a waitress who was too good to be true. Odette thought the woman looked familiar and asked if they'd met somewhere. The waitress said, "I've never even met myself. I don't know who you are, for sure." Odette tried again the next weekend, made sure she was seated at an appropriate table. Still nothing. Odette dreamed of the waitress, dreamed she found a red silk blouse on the ground in the woods, and several yards up, she found the shirtless waitress crouched in a bush. Odette dreamed she handed the waitress her blouse with her head turned and then the waitress walked out of the woods while Odette walked farther in. The dream happened again and again. Odette went to the restaurant the next week. Still nothing.

The next time she had the dream she crossed a shallow brook before she found the red blouse in the woods and when she found the waitress in the bush, after she'd put her blouse back on, the waitress said, "The water is taught to become wider." Then the waitress walked back and when Odette followed her several minutes

later, she could see up ahead that the waitress was almost to the clearing, but between them was a full stretch of rapid river.

Odette returned to the restaurant and the waitress said, "Listen, I will never remember you, okay? I have been yumped up too many times and I'm not ready for it to happen again." That killed Odette. She was a sucker for not knowing what the hell people were talking about. She left a bigger tip that night

Odette returned to the restaurant the next week and the waitress said, "Listen, you act like you know what I'm doing, but you don't. Trust me." Odette said, "All I've got is every minute of the day."

Odette was scared of giving the waitress up. She was so sure of her, but she was also brave and so she stopped.

Instead, the next week, she went for a drink at the 400 Club. This wasn't her bag, really, but she felt uncomfortable in low-class places, like she was pretending. She couldn't help but feel the money within her. At the 400 Club, a man appreciated her youth. He was a banker and thought she was an escort. "I'd like to use your dress as an alibi, if it's alright with you," was his opener. Odette didn't know what the hell this one was talking about either so she accepted the drink he offered her and hoped the mirrors would carry her off into some netherworld while he went on. Before long, his thumb bones cocked up and down her knee and she would be lying if she said she didn't enjoy it. She appeared at ease to the banker, but in reality she was living this moment locked up in the folded hands laying in her lap.

The banker asked Odette if he could lure her home with him for a nightcap. Odette said, "You'll have to delay the sunrise if you want *me* to go anywhere with *you*." She was drunk enough that she was arranging herself into poems that he wouldn't understand. He urged her on, unable to take a circuitous "no" for an answer, but she

spouted off another refusal, "I'm sure you've got a lot of spare change and guts in your piggy bank, but I'm going to my own home alone before the light reveals me."

The banker pouted, "Odette is the world is Odette." He was okay at this game. "Can I get your number?" he asked. Odette shook her pretty little head, "You can have my permanence and the rest of *this* rotgut." She handed him her glass and he drained it. There were enough napkins on the bar, but the banker pulled a fountain pen from his jacket pocket and wrote his number on Odette's arm, so that he could touch her again. Odette looked at her arm, and slurred, "Classy." She watched the runny ink bleed between her skin cells. By the time she got home it would be unreadable.

Odette did nothing for that week. She thought, "I wish that asshole would have written his number on a goddamn napkin." When the next weekend rolled around she went back to the 400 Club, in hopes he would be there. The banker was at the bar already talking to another girl. Odette was pretty much fearless so she walked up to him anyway. The banker frowned at her, "You didn't call me." Then, he looked over at his new companion as if to say, "So this is what has happened." Odette said, "The ruins were profound and formful, but totally unreadable." The banker nodded, "Nice to see you though." Odette walked away; there were some sentiments she understood.

Odette drank her whiskeys slowly and alone for a while eavesdropping on a bottle blonde ranting at her companion about how they never went out for nice dinners anymore. She listened to more of the conversation and built her remaining suspicions carefully. This woman had found her meal-ticket in a guy who was tall, well-built, attractive, but obviously lacked confidence for one reason or another. This man could do better than a bleach-job with a hunger for a fancy dinner and an allowance.

Odette spun on her stool to eye the man over the shoulder of the blonde, and before too long the man couldn't hide his attentions and both he and his companion had turned to Odette.

"Can I help you with something?" the blonde asked Odette. "Put your mask back on, sweetie," Odette was ready for a fight. The blonde said, "Excuse me?" Odette shrugged and looked over to the blonde's companion. He just smiled a little and then tried to take it back. The blonde kept looking back and forth between them, until she was disoriented and her anger carried her off. "I needed that," the man told Odette. "You saved me." Odette offered her arm, "Take me for a walk." The man was anxious not to lose his chance, "It's raining out there, though, you know?" "We'll admire the light catching the umbrellas together." The man looked a little stunned. He didn't know the game of saying extraordinary things, but Odette thought, "I'll have to teach him."

This man was an engineer who didn't engineer anymore. As they strolled the wet streets, he began talking about how it was tomorrow already and how tomorrow, today, was the anniversary of the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. Odette thought, "This guy has a long way to go," and so she said one of her extraordinary things, "Can you imagine the bodies trying to heal themselves? The contrast of their wet new skin to the cremains around them? The pattern of a dress burnt onto a woman in patches?" The engineer who no longer engineered looked at her with the boned vision of envy and disgust. He didn't know how she could think of such a thing and thought it was appalling that she did. The engineer would not play the game and so Odette said she was heading home. He asked if he could give her a ride, but Odette refused and walked the miles carefully in her heels, hesitating and imaginative.

Odette returned to the restaurant to see the waitress. The waitress remembered her, alright, but she didn't seem to like her. "What is it you want from me?" the waitress asked. Odette started,

“Well, I believe in a slanted precision to all things...” “No,” the waitress said, “what's your order?” Odette sighed; she was bumping up against the winter of this woman again and again. She ordered and said nothing as each course was delivered to her.

Odette sat, eating and remembering how she sometimes forgot to pretend romance into situations. She thought about how she needed to stop the self-conscious bullshit and buy into a grand gesture or two.

The waitress returned, and Odette caught her arm, “I've spilled so many sing-alongs of what I knew I was supposed to say. I'm not doing that here.” The waitress looked at her with a new deficit of imagination, no longer projecting onto Odette lecherous leanings, but instead seeing her clearly, and soon as the clarity came, tears formed as well. Odette knew her time was limited, so she played every card, “I've tried talking to other people, and you confuse me best. I want my memories to meet yours. I want to collapse beneath your complexities. I want to feel a million small surgeries knit us together. I don't want to let myself down and I don't want to avoid the hardest options. Come have a drink with me when your shift ends.” The waitress lied and told the truth and said, “Yes,” figuring she'd change her mind later.

At the end of the night the waitress didn't know where Odette had gone, and so she packed up and headed out, but on a bench a couple blocks down, Odette sat smiling, “With so many events and so many memories, it's easy to forget which is which.” The waitress took Odette's proffered arm and they headed down the street to the 400 Club.

Once inside, the waitress apologized for not being dressed right. Odette said, “Get serious. Your face dresses you up.” Odette could tell the waitress was impressed, and then Odette wondered if she wanted a woman who could be impressed by this schmaltz. The

banker, was alone, down the bar. He wandered closer and grinned, all sly and circular, at Odette and the waitress. "Didn't I saw you in half once?" he asked and Odette turned to the waitress and rolled her eyes. Remember, the banker is persistent, though, "What's your friend's name?" Odette didn't know her name, so she kept quiet. This problem was out of her hands, but Odette hoped it would grow less familiar. Odette looked into the waitress's eyes and her wish came true: the waitress brought her lips right up to Odette's ear and whispered her name, so only she would hear: *Farah*. Odette was over the moon, she loved this name so much. She turned to the banker, and said, "This one's mine." The banker took "no" for an answer.

Farah began telling stories, but never looked Odette in the eye. Soon the club was closing and they would need to exit into the hurrying air. Odette said nothing, just listened to Farrah tell it. Odette tuned in and out as she stared at this lovely girl: "My knife digs into apple upon apple...This god who had recently named his rivals...Three sisters sit in a dark room as their father walks through unaware of their presence and when he is out of earshot, they slap hands...Cicadas emerge like specters." Here was a girl who knew the game without naming it.

Odette dropped Farrah at her apartment, kissed her cheek, looked longingly at her. "The things we say can crystallize our future in many ways." And with that, Odette was back in the cab and Farrah was standing on the stoop, trying to remember all of the things she'd said.

In the cab, sleep had made a fist of itself, and Odette was unsure she would make it the long ride home without being knocked out. By the time the driver pulled up to her building though, she had caught a second wind and now was laughing giddily at the unavailability of death and taxis.

She didn't fall into her bed, but instead filled her bathtub with water and clipped strand after strand of pearls until every pearl she owned rested on the bottom of the tub. She dunked her head underwater and rescued each pearl, sucking it into her mouth and then spitting it onto the fluffy bathmat. She experienced an abstract panic many times as she lost a pearl and found it again.

She shut her eyes and trawled the bottom of the tub with her soft lips. Coming up empty, she found she'd rescued each pearl. She scooped the pearls into a soap dish, her lungs tired and her neck aching from the angles. She shed her clothes, loosened her body onto her big bed, and slept, mute and dreamless.

