

Suspicious Activity

by John Olson

I go down to pick up R and get a cartridge of black ink for the printer. It's an extremely pleasant summer day — early afternoon — and the air is exemplary: clear and sweet. So far so good. But as soon as I park and go to a nearby cash machine the fun begins. I put my card in the machine and it won't process; a message tells me my card has been blocked due to suspicious activity. Suspicious activity? Did someone try hacking my account? The bank is nearby. I walk to the bank and, happily, find it free of customers. The teller — a pretty young woman with thick black hair — invites me to come to her window. I tell her my card has been blocked. I give her my card and she looks it up on the computer. She tells me my card has been blocked. Yes, I know. Can you unblock it? She goes to talk to a supervisor. They have a short discussion and she returns. She gives me my card with a number written on a post-it note she has stuck to the card and tells me that if I call that number they can unblock it. Do you know why it was blocked, I ask. No, she answers. She offers to withdraw the money and I say thank you, that would be nice. You're much prettier than a cash machine. No laughter, tension. Maybe she thinks I was hitting on her. It's hard to be innocent in a me too world. She gives me the money and I thank her and leave. I head back to the lot where I'm parked above R's store and pass another bank and notice a small tent city by the parking lot, if not in the parking lot. I wait at the intersection for the light to change. There's a stench of urine in the air. I feel like I'm standing in a foreign country plagued with terrible poverty and income inequality. But it's my country, the United States, which is hardly recognizable anymore. A man standing by his tent as if in a trance, completely expressionless, picks up a wooden chair and throws it to the ground. An enormous woman talking to two men breaks off from the conversation, goes to the man and begins howling abuse at him. He stands passively, still in a trance, or shock, and says nothing in return. The light changes and I cross the street. Most everyone is

wearing a mask, which is a relief to me. I go to Fed Ex for my ink cartridge and get 40% off. Nice. R appears just as I return to the car and we head to a sports store in Ballard for a new running shirt. The traffic is stalled on the Ballard Bridge due to construction. We make it to the sports store, I get my running shirt, and we return home. I don't know what to do, I tell her. I don't think this country is going to last another year.

