

How Josh Met Emily

by Sean Taylor

All day the rain had been coming down every thirty minutes in fifteen-minute episodes leaving a fifteen-minute dry period in which to travel, or to consider doing so. Josh knew this science as he had been observing and timing it with the hope of making his escape from his third story loft just over a vintage store in the Upper Haight neighborhood of San Francisco. His gaze spread down the street at Golden Gate Park, he pressed and leaned into the glass of his bay window with the left side of his forehead and adjacent shoulder, not with the least bit of worry that the glass should break even considering that his fall would indefinitely be fatal. In the end the clouds were passing at a rate he could not ultimately measure.

He was, however, moving back and forth quite often between the window and the map all morning, measuring the distance between his street corner and the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park. He measured this with nothing more than a piece of thread he had only just yanked off an old sock abandoned due to the liability of its holes, one hole on the heel, the other thinning and about to form on the smallest toe.

The measurements were spent; it would be fifteen minutes on his road bike or half an hour of walking. Had he decided to ride his bike the water kicked up and splashed about in the puddles would have left him just as wet as if he had surrendered the extra fifteen minutes of chance rain by walking.

He walked diligently so as if to compromise with himself, "this is all I can give right now, lets see how it works out," had been his slogan for the passing winter in which he felt he would never complete another poem, painting or piece of art of any sort despite the grant recently awarded to him, the grant of Stagnicity, is what he had deemed it.

His coat was large, brown, and almost military looking. It ended just above his knees, he had chosen it for its anonymity and warmth; there was nothing aesthetically pleasing about it. In Golden

Gate Park on a cold rainy day he had found this coat perfect among the dark greens of the trees and browns of the mud, he was safe, hiding from his grant of stagnicity.

On his walk he listened to Simon and Garfunkle's The Sound Of Silence twice back to back merely by chance through his headphones. The first time was from their greatest hits album, the second time was due his having the soundtrack to The Graduate, and because his entire library was set to play any song on random this chance had occurred. When it came on the second time he had let it play through not caring for the repeated haunting nature of the song, he understood this to be much more of an omen or merely fitting for the atmosphere, he had silently thanked his MP3 player by sliding his thumb across the screen ensuring it had stayed dry.

Upon reaching the tea garden it had been how he had hoped, dry under the surrounding awnings and barely occupied by tourists. He had never known the Japanese Tea Garden to be serene, to be peaceful, meditative or otherwise relaxing at all. The Japanese and Chinese languages in themselves had scared him out of the largely Asian neighborhood known as the Sunset two years prior; to say he was scared is a little strong, more so intimidated and hushed by the speed and volume of such a culture.

He could not relax in the Sunset, though he had fully embraced the idea of Koi ponds and sand gardens, he had always wanted to rake the sand until it was his, his millions upon millions of tiny rocks, his galaxy aligned.

He took a seat facing the small creek after ordering a pot of green tea and some almond cookies, placed his order number out of his sight and then went the length of closing his eyes as well. He had wanted nothing more than to listen to the rain falling from all sides around him, from the gutters, ledges, rooftops and of course the sky.

"What's your name?" He heard come flooding in from his dry shower; he opened his eyes to find a small Asian girl, with black hair and black eyes. He had guessed her to be nine or ten years old, she was dressed in a long white thick coat that came down past her

knees to her ankles where large white boots shot back up her tiny legs to keep her covered nearly completely, save her hands and her face.

“Josh, my name is Josh, yours?”

“My name is Emily, What are you doing?”

“I'm listening to the rain, shhh, can you hear that?” He said this with hope of either boring or occupying her, both keeping her subdued, “Close your eyes and look up, breath in the rain, smell it and just listen.”

She did as he had asked while peeking a tiny bit at him from the corner of her right eye, after two long deep breaths she exclaimed.

“I don't like to close my eyes, its too dark, I don't like to sleep either.”

What he said next he did not think to say.

“Well you know you should get used to it, after this life is over that is all that there is, closed eyes and the sound of rain.”

Saying this had greatly caught him off guard, she was a child, regardless of the mood Simon and Garfunkle, the weather, his grant, or his artistic block had put him in, he should not have said this to her.

“How do you know?” She questioned.

“I don't, I just figure.”

“My mom says in heaven your shoes never get untied, my shoes are always getting untied, that's why I have to wear these boots, I just slip them on.” She informed him.

“Oh, okay, what if I just really like the sound of rain with my eyes closed, can that be my heaven?” Josh asked, hoping for a very quiet answer.

At this point the tea arrived and as soon as the waitress disappeared Josh added about two ounces of cheap Brandy from an aluminum flask he had pulled out from the very large breast pocket of his coat.

Emily watched him add the brandy, though she shrugged it off as if her parents or someone she had known for a very long time had done this on a regular basis.

"I guess so," she continued the conversation "I mean if you liked the sound of rain so much with your eyes closed wouldn't you never get anything else done, why not just go to heaven now then."

At these words Josh quickly became concerned, trifled with even, he did not know where this girls parents were and felt as if her had been chosen to baby sit the obligation of staying alive as it is now embodied in a small Asian girl named Emily.

He took a large gulp of tea then broke one of the almond cookies in half, he presented it to her, it nearly the size of her tiny right hand.

She accepted the cookie, and ate it much like the squirrels across the path had, with both hands close to her mouth, nibbling around the Almond in the middle. Josh saw this of course as a window; an opportunity, to tell Emily exactly what was going on if you go to Heaven of your own accord.

"You see if you go to Heaven on purpose," he started and stopped, endlessly careful with each word, listening to them as if they were being said to him by a wiser older Josh, "Than you don't get to go to Heaven, you go to a place the opposite of Heaven, where your shoes are always untied."

What had he said?

Why did he say that?

He had never put his foot in his mouth so much in one day as he had here, with Emily.

"My mom also says that in Heaven your hair stays the perfect length and you never have to cut it, it is always perfect."

"Well in opposite heaven every time you make scrambled eggs the shells break into a million pieces, then you spend eternity picking them out of the yolk."

Josh had given up, he was on a one-way train to his truth, I'm sorry Emily, he thought, but you started this, he coughed slightly and then took two more strong pulls at his brandy tea.

"I bet in Heaven when you trim your fingernails they always tear just right across, they never bleed."

"Well in opposite heaven your socks are always inside out, no matter what, and forever wet around the collar."

"In heaven you never get a runny nose because everything smells so good, it smells like flowers, not like stupid rain."

Emily was becoming fussy, Josh could sense it, Josh was already fussy, and Emily knew it.

"Oh yeah, in opposite Heaven when you go to put on a belt it never fits one hole is too tight and the next hole over is way too loose."

"Nobody wears belts in real heaven, cause they don't wear pants."

"They don't wear pants?" Josh asked.

"No, they wear robes. Haven't you seen the pictures?"

Emily was right; she knew she was right, Josh knew she was right too.

"Emily get over here, your brother is still sick, we're going home," A woman's voice called out from behind them both.

Emily glanced back at her mother and then with her mouth wide open dropped what was left of her half of the cookie onto the ground below.

"I have to go now, goodbye," Emily said quickly, though she would have said, "Have a nice day," had it yet been introduced into her vocabulary, but it wasn't, so she didn't.

