



ON THE ROCKS WITH SALT FOR FAVOR... I'VE GOTTA CATCH UP WITH MY FRIENDS...

THANKS

SO I GAVE MISS KITTY A CAN OF REAL-PEOPLE TUNA (JUST SO SHE KNEW I WASN'T MAD AT HER) AND DOUBLE-CHECKED ALL OF THE DOORS BEFORE I LEFT FOR THE PARTY... AMAZINGLY, I ARRIVED NOT TOO TERRIBLY LATE, DESPITE MY WARDROBE INDECISIONS AND THE CAB THAT I NEVER THOUGHT WOULD GET THERE... I ONLY MISSED THE FIRST ROUND OF DRINKS, FORTUNATELY...

GIRL, IT IS SO GREAT TO SEE YOU! YOU LOOK GREAT!

THEY'D SAVED A SEAT FOR ME AT ONE END OF THE TABLE, NEXT TO LAURA, KIM, TOM AND THIS GUY PHIL, WHOM I HADN'T SEEN SINCE CERAMICS CLASS (THOUGH I REMEMBERED HIM WELL SINCE I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT HE WAS CUTE)... IT WAS WEIRD SEEING THEM ALL AGAIN...

CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS PLACE NOW? CHECK OUT THE COOL MURAL THEY PAINTED...

MURAL?

OH, YEAH...

I MEAN, WHO WOULD'VE THOUGHT? YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE WERE, LIKE, THE ONLY WHITE PEOPLE WHO CAME IN HERE?

HA HA

HEY

WITHOUT THE SKIN OF CLASSES AND ANNOYING PROFESSORS TO BIND US ALL TOGETHER, THE CONVERSATION FELT A BIT STILTED... OR MAYBE IT WAS JUST ME...

UM... SURE...

I LOVE YOUR "OLD LADY" LOOK... I ALWAYS DID... IT REALLY SUITS YOU! WHERE'D YOU GET THAT BROOCH, ANYWAY? IT'S SO CUTE! ARE YOU STILL PAINTING?

I'M MORE INTO DRAWING RIGHT NOW, ACTUALLY... I LIKE THE CONCEPTUAL, UH, IMMEDIACY OF IT...

PLUS, THERE WAS THIS OVERARCHING URGE FOR SO MANY OF THEM TO MAKE SURE THAT WE KNEW THEY WERE STILL "ARTISTS" TALKING ABOUT THEIR "WORK" OR THIS OR THAT GROUP SHOW THEY'D BEEN IN...

SOME OF THEM HAD GOTTEN REAL-LIFE JOBS, THOUGH, LIKE BILL, WHO WORKED AT THE LOCAL NPR STATION... AND FIONA, WHO SAID SHE WAS DOING FURNITURE AND LIGHTING DESIGN FOR SOME INTERNET START-UP... I COULDN'T SWORN I HEARD SOME TALKING ABOUT MORTGAGE RATES, TOO... WERE THESE THE SAME PEOPLE WHO'D EAT PLAIN RICE WITH TABASCO AND FALL ASLEEP ON ONE ANOTHER'S FLOORS? I COULD BARELY AFFORD TO PAY MY RENT, LET ALONE DINE MUCH BETTER THAN I HAD THEN... I STARTED TO FEEL DEPRESSED THE LONGER I SAT THERE... I NEVER CAN THINK OF ANYTHING INTERESTING TO SAY... I'M BORING... PEOPLE ARE NICE TO ME AT FIRST AND THEN I DISAPPOINT THEM... THEY GRADUALLY TURN AWAY... STOP TALKING TO ME...

SO WHEREABOUTS YOU STAYING NOW?

UM...

HA... AROUND DIVISION AND SACRAMENTO...

DIVISION AND SACRAMENTO... MAKING IT SAFE FOR THE NORTH SIDERS, HUH?

HEY THERE ARE SOME REALLY BEAUTIFUL OLD BUILDINGS OVER THERE.

HUMBOLDT WAS ONE OF THE CITY'S GREAT PARKS, TOO... JENNEY AND JENSEN, Y'KNOW?

RII-IITE...

THAT'S KIND OF WHAT I WAS GETTING AT...

WELL I LIKE IT OKAY... I MEAN, I'VE HEARD A GUNSHOT OR TWO NOW AND AGAIN...

... BUT I GOT A CAB HERE TONIGHT, SO, I DUNNO...

I WAS GLAD

THAT PHIL JUMPED IN LIKE HE DID... ESPECIALLY SINCE I'D BEEN SITTING THROUGH THE WHOLE DINNER UP TO THAT POINT NOT KNOWING WHAT TO SAY TO HIM AT ALL... AFTER THAT, WE PRETTY MUCH TALKED NONSTOP...

...AND THERE'S THIS SUPER OLD LADY WHO OWNS IT WHO LIVES ON THE FIRST FLOOR AND OHMYGOD I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT - SHE WENT TO THE ART INSTITUTE TOO, BUT, LIKE, A MILLION YEARS AGO...

YOU KNOW, I'VE STILL GOT THAT GREEN BOWL YOU GAVE ME THE LAST DAY OF CLASS...

GREEN BOWL?... GREEN BOWL...

OH... OH MY GOD, YOU DO NOT!

I DO THAT AWFUL THING? I GAVE YOU THAT?

HEY, I LIKE IT...

OH WOW GREAT

HA HA

I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU NEEDED AN EXTRA

NPR MUG

ANYWAY, THE NIGHT WAS WEARING DOWN AND THE WAIT STAFF, HAVING BEEN CLUED IN THAT WE WERE A BIRTHDAY PARTY, BROUGHT OVER A PIECE OF FLAN WITH A CANDLE STUCK IN IT AND SANG "HAPPY BIRTHDAY" IN SPANISH... THEN CAME THE "GIFT GIVING," WHICH IS ALWAYS UNCOMFORTABLE, ESPECIALLY IN A PUBLIC PLACE...

HE WAS SO INTERESTING AND AMAZING... I MEAN, HE KNEW ALL OF THIS STUFF ABOUT NEIGHBORHOODS AND THEIR HISTORY... HE SAID HE'D BEEN WORKING FOR SOME KIND OF PC URBAN ARCHITECTURE 'REJUVENATION' PROJECT AND HAD LEARNED A LOT THERE...

I GOT REALLY NERVOUS WHEN BILL CAME TO MY GIFT, THOUGH... I'VE NEVER BEEN A GOOD GIFT GIVER, AND BESIDES, I HADN'T HAD TIME TO GET HIM ANYTHING, SO I JUST GAVE HIM AN OLD PAINTING...

I'M SORRY... I KNOW IT'S LAME AND SUCKS AND EVERYTHING BUT I FIGURED YOU COULD THROW IT AWAY PRETTY EASILY BECAUSE IT'S SMALL, AT LEAST...

NO... IT'S REALLY, REALLY NICE... I LOVE IT