

LOCUTION
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Sunday Morning at The Waiting Room
Toronto, 1997

Maybe my apartment is filled with rubber? Each time I push on the door, it opens a crack then rebounds shut. It is funny. It is frustrating. I really have to pee. I begin to push in time with the fratic bass pounding on the wall of my forehead. The noise of music and people comes from inside and I wish I could have stayed at the party all day--bathing in the pastel lights and lullabies. If it wasn't for my bladder, I'd stay here in the front hall, resting my hot head on the fire extinguisher.

I peek inside the mailslot and am great with a tuft of hair and the back of someone's head. "Hey!" I yell. "Hey, Buddy. Can you move? *I live* here, goddamn it." Nothing. I start pounding on the door, be damned my knuckles and the neighbours.

"Chill your schnitz," Fenner barks from inside. I can hear her talking to the weight blocking the door, "Dude, you're a fire hazard. Wake the fuck up."

I tiptoe over the tangled limbs of partiers littering the floor. The apartment is basically one long hallway and so narrow that the kids can lie with thier bleached blonde hair touching one wall and their sneakers touching the opposite. I step over the debris carefully and quickly, but the bathroom is already occupied.

"I don't know who half of these people are," Fenner says, looking at me.

I say nothing, look around at the kids. A girl looks up at me with all the telltale signs of a crash landing from the night's indulgences: the huge black pupils, the clenched jaws, our beautiful, sparkling and instantaneous love for each other. We are last night's glamour queens. There's still a bit of sparkle in us but it's dulled by the cuffs of dirt around our bellbottoms and general debris that 24 hours of a good time can bring. A wafer-thin crystal kid dances in front of the refrigerator, his body all angles. Knees, elbows, and chin lift and drop like a hiccuping bird.

The b-boys in their backward baseball hats slouch on milk crates smoking spliffs. My sister's boyfriend Len uses the finger-thick joint as a microphone for delivering endless insults and dirty jokes. He is wearing white gloves and a T-shirt with circles of sweat under the armpits. Rosalyn sits at his feet and pouts, "Lenny, didn't you hear me? I asked you a question, baby." This is the start of the drug-induced weekend sitcom titled, *Insecure Addict Meets Attention-Deficit Dealer*. "All I want to know is why you were giving her a back rub?"

With his gloved thumb and index finger, Lenny presses her lips together and moves in close to her face, "Shut your hole, Crackhead," he says, then resumes talking at the room. "Freaky Flow could out play S.O.S. if he was stuffed in a burlap sack with his hands tied behind his back."

I retreat. In my bedroom a rainbow of girls fan out over the futon and floor. "Does anyone have any aspirin?" I say noticing that they are all wearing my clothes, which I finally got around to washing yesterday.

"Michelle!" they squeal but stay motionless except for Ada who raises her arms in the air when I pull my sweaty pink T-shirt off. "Woohoo, baby!" she laughs, raising her beer. "Take it all off!" She jumps up and smacks a loud lip-glossed kiss on my cheek saying, "*Moja mala truskawka*." Her eyes are tropical water blue and I'm happy I'm her Polish strawberry on these boyfriendless mornings.

"Does anyone else feel like their brain was probed by aliens last night?" I ask, holding the right side of me head. Keri and Jill consent by moaning.

"At least at Woodstock they *warned* you not to take the brown acid," Jill says. "What the hell was in that tab anyway?"

"Lenny said it was pure e."

"Bullshit. That tab was brown—brown means heroine."

"*Achh*, you just have a hangover—have some beer, it'll help." I swallow from Ada's bottle and light a Du Maurier, instantly activating the residual mystery drug. I remember my bladder.

When I walk into the bathroom, Fenner's sitting on the rim of the claw foot bathtub with her pants rolled to the knees, her feet soaking in hot soapy water. "C'mon down to Edna Boil's Curio Emporium and Prairie Warehouse," she invites. I peel my sweaty socks off and hike my polyester bellbottoms. Steam rises. We sit. For a moment, it is quiet.

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“Alright! What the dilly’s going on here?” says Ada, entering the scene and laughing when she sees ua. “I heard the girls were having a bath and I wasn’t invited! Move your skinny butts over.”

Next, Jen stands in the doorway like a diva waiting for applause. “Is this, like, a closed party?” she says, needing no invitation to show her silver toenails. Jill and Keri enter the linoleum stage like Tom and Huck on acid, smokes dangling from their mouths, pants already rolled.

“I don’t even want to know how much she did last night,” Fenner says, pouting at the volume of the drama in the other room. “Not like she’d tell me anyway.”

“It doesn’t even look like she’s having fun at parties anymore. She never dances. She just sits there with that googly eyed stare.”

“It’s just ridiculous!” Ada says rising. She storms out of the bathroom leaving a trail of puddles.

I remember old Sunday mornings in my parent’s suburban home, bathing in pristine enamel, sleeping in lily scented sheets, and later rising for spicy burritos or syrupy French toast. But I was alone. I bend over to wash my hands in the water, see a reflection of the girls, their ruby mouths glitter.

Ada appears pulling my sister behind her. Rosalind frowns in the doorway and looks at the scene, “We’ll probably all get athletes foot,” she says then steps into the bathtub, socks still on. Ada climbs in beside her and gives her a tight hug. The two of them dance in the middle and the other ten feet form a circle around them. Someone passes a smoke. I take a drag and relax when I breathe out. There was something I had to do, but for the life of me I can’t remember what.

They call this place the Waiting Room because that’s what we do here. Some of us wait for sobriety, before the long drive home to Kitchener, Guelph, or Orangeville. Some of us wait for the after-hours club to open. Then we’ll get high again and dance all Sunday afternoon, walking out of the Comfort Zone or The Basement when it’s dark. Sometimes, Fenner and I wait for everyone to leave. Then she’ll say, “Hey lady, wanna watch a *little* TV?” We’ll bust our guts watching *The Simpsons* on her four-inch portable television.