

Happy Hour

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"I mean, take *Dracula*, for example," Vicki said.

"Oh, God..."

"Not again."

"Do we have to?"

"I'm serious!" Vicki protested.

"So're we!" Dennis retorted. "You always use *Dracula* as an example. It doesn't work for everything, you know."

"I know, but it does seem applicable to many of the conversations we have here. That's not my fault. I didn't even start this topic - Gary's the one who brought it up."

"Ha! Brought it up." Lisa giggled into her beer.

Adam rolled his eyes. "Let's not get into that again. There's no way my innocent mind can compete with all of you in the double entendre game."

"You won last time," Gary recalled.

"That's right. And now I'm spent."

Amid the jeers, Vicki sighed. "Could we get back on topic, please?"

"But of course, Madam Van Helsing. All I'd said was -" Gary began.

"Please," Jan said, "we all know what you said. We're not deaf. A little drunk maybe, but not deaf."

"A little drunk!" Lisa cried happily, raising her beer. Everyone echoed her words, the glasses scraping together.

"Anyway," Jan went on, "we always end up talking about the same thing. Sex."

"Sex!" Lisa cried, raising her glass again, but Gary lowered her arm back to the table. She frowned fuzzily at him.

"You guys always have the most interesting conversations," said a voice from above. "Can I take some of these glasses for you?"

"Yes, thanks," Gary said, over the noise of a half-dozen glasses being pushed helpfully across the tabletop.

"Looks like you're ready for another round," the girl said, piling glasses on her tray. "Same again for everyone?"

"Yeah, looks like."

"Coming up."

"We don't always talk about sex," Vicki was saying to Jan.

"Sure we do."

"No, we don't. We talk about literature."

"And our students, of course," Dennis added.

"But it always comes back to sex," Jan said.

"Not with my students," shuddered Dennis.

"Shut up about the damn students," Adam suggested.

"Gladly."

"Literature is sex," Jan insisted.

"Not all of it," Gary said. "Unless I've been reading the wrong books."

"Well, if we're talking about sex you started the whole thing this time," Vicki said. "You said you'd just done the lecture about imagery for the first years and the students had noticed how sensual most of it was."

"Oh, my, aren't we the fancy English teacher! Just say 'sexy'," Jan said.

"Took them ages to stop giggling," Gary sighed. "God, I hate freshmen."

"Freshmen," Lisa said scathingly.

"Let me guess: you used Wordsworth's 'Nutting' -"

"They couldn't even get past the title."

"And what else? The sonnet?"

"Naturally. The old stand-bys. I thought about giving them part of Swinburne's 'Anactoria', but, well, you know -"

"First years," everyone finished for him. Eyes rolled.

"First years," Lisa muttered darkly. She leaned her elbow on the table and dropped her chin onto her hand.

"Well, for God's sake, if you were going to use 'Anactoria'," Vicki said with exasperation, "it would have fit perfectly with the imagery, you practically would've had to mention -"

"If you say *Dracula*, I'm going to bite you," Adam said.

"Enough of your vampires, vile woman!" Dennis formed his index fingers into a cross and thrust them in Vicki's direction. "Hooray, more drinks!" He snatched two glasses off the girl's tray before she'd even stopped moving.

"*Dracula* doesn't count," Jan agreed, over the noise of drink distribution. "It's too easy. Look: one, a vampire is the sexiest damn monster in folklore, unless you count succubi, I guess..."

"Succubi?" Adam said blankly. "What the hell's a succubi?"

"Succubus. Succubi's plural," Dennis said.

"Oh, thanks, that helps."

"What about werewolves?" Vicki was protesting. "Werewolves are sexy."

"All that hair? Wouldn't have predicted that about you, Vic," Gary said.

"Sexy in that they're the unrestrained animal side of human nature." Vicki rolled her eyes. "I mean, talk about imagery -"

"I *thought* we were," Adam murmured.

"- werewolves tie in perfectly. It's obviously a tie to lunar imagery: lunar, lunacy, the loss of control according to the cycle of the moon... the whole patriarchal myth of female hysteria -"

"Oh, here we go." Gary downed half his drink.

"What? It fits perfectly," Vicki said indignantly.

"We're getting a little off-topic," Jan said. "Let's go back to my earlier point -"

"Oh, yes, 'cause it's all about you," Dennis muttered.

"Got a problem with that?" She threw him a grin and continued. "Okay, so the first reason *Dracula's* out is because vampirism is too obviously sexy, just as a concept. Two, it's a Victorian novel. Of course it's full of sex. It's the product of a repressed society that couldn't do much else but try and hide years' worth of lechery in plain view—" She broke off suddenly.

Everyone looked expectantly at Lisa. As the nineteenth-century specialist in the department, she usually spoke up first and loudly whenever anyone made a blanket statement about her Victorians. Slumped crookedly, she took a moment to notice the silence. By the time she roused herself to look around in hazy curiosity, the conversation had swept on.

"So we can't use any Victorians for this topic?"

"It's too easy to use Victorians to exemplify sexual imagery," Jan said flatly.

"That's kind of limiting," Gary frowned. "I mean, American lit isn't exactly hot and heavy either - pre-Jazz era, anyway - for pretty much the same reason. And the 1950s were so prudish they wouldn't show a pregnant lady on TV."

"That's TV. We're talking about literature."

"We'll run out of eras."

"Or eros," Dennis suggested.

"Maybe you should just listen."

"Oh, sure, patronize the linguist."

"Well, excluding Victorians reduces my sample base by almost a third," Adam said. "Canadian lit doesn't exactly span the eons."

"Or eros," Dennis crowed, raising a glass. "Because of course, as everyone knows -"

"Canadians don't acknowledge sex," everyone chorused, and the glasses clattered again.

"That joke's getting old," Adam sighed. "Plus - and I can't stress this enough - it's completely untrue."

"It sounds toastworthy, though," said a voice from above. "Everything okay here?" The girl glanced at Lisa's glazed face.

"Nasty breakup," Vicki confided. "She's at the morose denial stage. We'll look after her."

"Well, I'm not okay," Adam said. The girl looked around in surprise. "These ignorants are saying Canadians don't acknowledge sex."

The girl laughed. "That seems a little hard to believe, but maybe I'd better let you sort it out." She grinned at Adam and headed back to the bar.

He watched her go until Dennis leaned over and said, "It wouldn't last a week."

"What? What are you talking about?"

Dennis grinned. "Yeah, right, what'm I talking about. The girl, what's her name, Mandy or Randy or whatever."

"Her name's Candace. She's been our server every Thursday night happy hour for two months now and you don't know her name?"

"Calm down - you know it for me, don't you?"

"You are such an ass," Jan told him.

He ignored her. "And I'm saying, even if you went for it, it wouldn't last a week."

"What? Why? I'm not that much older than she is," Adam protested. "I mean, what the hell, right?"

"Did I say anything about age?"

"Though there's definitely a cradle-robbing factor," Jan murmured.

"She's a student," Dennis said.

"Not one of mine," Adam said.

Dennis waved a dismissive hand. "It's not a question of age, it's a question of maturity. Mental age, if you like. Frankly: you'd get bored."

"I don't know - I've heard Adam's lectures. He might be about her level."

Vicki grinned.

"Thanks so much."

"How do you know she's a student, anyway? You don't know that. I don't recognize her from the department," Jan said.

"I recognize her," Lisa said suddenly. She offered them a wide smile. "She's Candace. We see her a lot."

"Have a drink, dear," suggested Dennis. "Before it's time for us to carry you home. Again."

"Don't be mean," frowned Vicki. "She misses Larry."

"Yes, apparently. I just can't imagine why."

"So you've just *assumed* she's a student, then," Jan pressed on.

"Well, yes, but obviously she is. She works here, doesn't she?" Dennis spread his arms and said pointedly, "Campus pub."

"So? She could just be a local kid."

"Working here? Why would she? There are forty-six pubs in town. She would have tried for an off-campus job before trying here and the odds are -"

"Forget the odds. You're still operating from faulty logic," Adam agreed. "We don't *know* she's a student."

"He also doesn't *know* what her 'mental age' is," Vicki noted. "Another fault in logic. Or just him being an ass. Again."

Dennis sighed loudly. "She's young and thus, quite literally, hasn't had the life experience. Therefore she is not as intellectually and thoughtfully developed as an older person. QED. She's also, I insist, a student."

"She could've had a terrible life, or an incredibly eventful one - she could have had loads more life experience than Kenora boy here," Jan said, with a nod at Adam.

"It's 'Guelph boy', thank you."

"And your insistence that she's a student," Vicki said to Dennis, ignoring this exchange, "is based purely on the fact that she works here?"

"Statistically, she -"

"Statistics don't mean anything from a faulty premise!"

"Are we talking about math now?" Lisa interrupted with a frown. "Larry knows about math. He's a sci'tist."

"We know, hon." Jan patted her shoulder.

They watched her settle her chin back on her hand and close her eyes.

After a moment of uneasy quiet, Vicki said, "It's a big assumption, that she's a student. But you're also assuming she'd be remotely interested if you asked her out."

"I have many sterling qualities," Adam pointed out.

"Oh, indeed, sir, indeed. But perhaps she'd prefer Jan."

"Oh, for God's sake," Dennis muttered. "Damn lesbians again."

"I'm just saying." Vicki spread her hands innocently.

"Yeah, you're always 'just saying'. You know, the lesbian thing, it's like the vampire thing: it doesn't work everywhere."

"It's a reality of modern life. You should keep it in mind."

A slow grin spread over his face.

Jan spoke hastily, before he could reply. "I think we've come full circle. Back to our original topic. Adam had a point, and so did Gary. Once we start eliminating historical eras because of 'characteristics' of the time, we'll not only lose much of the literature base, we'll avoid the question. I mean, aren't we really talking about the prevalence of sexual imagery in literature? Shouldn't we wonder why it is? I'm talking throughout the centuries, across the globe, male and female writers both. Everyone, everywhere, forever."

"Maybe because you're looking for it," Dennis said. "Which is frankly why I sometimes hate hanging out with you guys. All you lit types overanalyze everything. Then you analyze your analysis. You need to be more like us linguists. Fact,

historical data, the word itself, tell you everything you need to know: how a word is built tells you where it came from, how we've grown and cultivated our languages to mean exactly what we say. Let's take an example perfect for all of you: consider the root word common to analyze, analysis, analyst -"

"Please. Even the purest linguistic reading would reveal sexual connotation," Jan said. "As your own example illustrates, thanks. Though, granted, you probably wouldn't find as much with linguistics as you would if you were reading a little more creatively, with an awareness of the social connotations of language, and without your right brains hardwired so permanently into your left, and without your heads so firmly up your... analyses."

"You know, people have already looked at this sort of thing, the connection between language and sex. I mean, look at the 1960's -" Vicki began.

"If you even think about mentioning any French feminist theory, I'm leaving," Gary said. "You with me, guys?"

Adam and Dennis raised their glasses. "Down with de Beauvoir," they intoned, and all three men drained their drinks.

"Fine," Vicki snapped, "here's someone who should be more up your tight little patriarchic oppressor alley: Freud."

Dennis whooped.

Gary grinned, raising his eyebrows at Vicki, then at her drink.

"What? Oh, come on! It's not even a stretch, he's completely on topic!" Vicki looked somewhat desperately at Jan, who shrugged back with a helpless half-smile.

"And this is why I sometimes LOVE hanging out with you people," Dennis crowed. He leaned over to Vicki. He tapped a finger rhythmically on the table and chanted, "Drink, drink, drink..."

"What are you, seventeen? You expect me to chug a scotch and soda?"

"You said the F-word - you know the rules."

"He was completely relevant to the topic!" growled Vicki, glaring at her glass.

"And this is a criminal thing to do to a fine single malt."

"On top of the felony of putting soda in it," Gary assured her, "this is just a misdemeanor."

"And it's your own damn fault," Dennis added.

"Drink up."

While Vicki gulped and gagged, Gary turned to Jan. "You know, as fun as this has been -"

"It is happy hour after all." She raised her glass in a mock toast.

"I kind of wish I hadn't even mentioned the topic."

"What, only now?" Dennis asked. "You're only sorry now?"

"I mean, it's too broad and nebulous. We'll never pin it down; all we could do is list examples. It *is* pervasive, it *is* everywhere you look - and yes, it is probably there, in many cases, *because* we're looking. I just don't think humans can disconnect their brains from their sex glands."

"Or their hands," coughed Vicki, adding hoarsely, "their writing hands. I mean, they can't disconnect their writing hands from their sex glands... Never mind."

"It's a good topic. But I think you're right," Jan told Gary.

"So we're retiring the issue? Putting it to bed? Leaving it limp and unsatisfied?"

"For God's sake, Dennis," Adam said, "shut up."

"The topic is closed," Gary announced.

"At least for now."

"I must have missed the best parts," said a voice from above. Candace smiled at Adam. "Did you win?"

"Nobody won," Gary said.

"I think I made my point, though," Adam said.

"Good job. You know, you guys have the most interesting conversations," Candace said as she piled glasses onto her tray. "I mean, my friends and I never sit in a bar and discuss sex." She paused, frowning. "Well, not sex in literature, anyway."

"Maybe you should try it sometime," Adam said.

"Maybe I should. I don't know, though - it wouldn't really be fair to my friends."

"They don't read?" Gary guessed.

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Actually, what I meant was that listening to you guys every Thursday has given me some pretty good arguing points. It'd be too

easy. All I'd have to do is bring up the convention and they'd be done, blown out of the water."

"What convention?"

"Well..." She seemed startled. "The Aristotelian one? Of narrative? I mean, talk about art imitating life, please, no one can try to argue it's not just another way sex, especially male sex, has come to dominate literature. I mean, come on: rising action, climax, falling action? Yeah, right." She put another glass on the tray and wiped a puddle of beer off the table. "When they talked about it in high school we all snickered, but we didn't really realize then how insidious it is, you know? It wasn't any kind of template for narrative unity, it was one man's libido imposing itself onto thousands of years of Western storytelling. I guess Freud would have something to say about that, huh?" She looked around at their frozen expressions. "So... anyway. Last call's in about ten minutes."

They all watched her leave.

"Who the hell is she?" Gary managed, and got a slap on the arm from Lisa.

"Told you," she frowned. "It's Candace!"

"Yeah, but -"

"Candace!" Lisa insisted. "She's one of Larry's doc'ral students. Fizzy-sist. Fizzizzi-sust. She's a sci'test, like him. She's verr' good. She's with some kind of something, you know? A prisspal. A principle, whatssit - the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle," she said with careful effort. "Candace is trying to prove it. Or

unprove it, maybe. Or using it to do something. She's verr' good. Does physis with math, and with - math and stuff, like Larry. Larry does science, too."

She looked blearily around the table. "Where is Larry? Why's he not here? Oh." Her face crumpled. "No, no, I know why."

They all watched her sniffle. Jan handed her a tissue and patted her shoulder.

Dennis raised a glass to Adam.

"Go ask her out," he said. "What the hell?"

"It's my round anyway," said Adam, standing. "Same again for everyone?"

Gary looked around the table. "Yeah. Looks like."

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