

You have nothing to say today. Just piles of articles to edit. Someone needs to submit three articles in a week to different journals. This is how they're going to maybe get to the next level. Someone else has a couple articles they don't need for a while. But you have nothing to say today. Just articles to edit. You have nothing but articles to edit. There is nothing to do but edit articles.

You run out of articles, but you still have nothing to say today. So you get up to go out to the cafe because every day is the same, every day is the same. But then you decide to make yourself tea at home, because you have nothing to say today. What if you met someone at the cafe and they wanted you to say something? You could talk to them today all you wanted, but you wouldn't say anything. Because today there is nothing but articles to edit.

You can see your thought getting in a loop, and it kind of bothers you, so you get your stuff together and head on down to...

MITZI'S CAFE

A homely and just-right place. You have been going here several times a week for the last several years. There's a big glass window facing the street. You face it and see your reflection in the summer evening. You also can see into the cafe, where you see your friend Brian sitting, reading a book.

You enter the cafe. That was easy!

Inside the cafe you see a counter where a man waits in line behind a woman. She's ordering some kind of drink, and he's looking up at the menu posted above the barista's head, out of reach.

You stand in line. Good things come to those who wait!

Brian is turning the pages of his book, a turn for every two minutes. This means he is probably reading a fiction book. When he reads philosophy books, it takes more like 5 or 10 minutes between page turns.

After a modest interval, you arrive at the front of the line and order your favorite, green tea. Just the right amount of caffeine.

You get your drink and go to sit next to your friend Brian.

BRIAN: Oh, hey Beth.

YOU: Hey.

BRIAN: You got green tea.

YOU: Yeah.

BRIAN: It's one of those nights.

YOU: For you too?

BRIAN: Yeah. I'm here reading a fiction book, not

a philosophy book. Fiction always gets me down, but I read it when I'm going to seed, so maybe that explains it.

YOU: And when do you read philosophy?

BRIAN: When I'm going out to kill giants.

YOU: You mean windmills...

BRIAN: Well, they could be giants... We don't really know yet...

YOU: The "could be" is philosophy.

BRIAN: Exactly. You have to make sure they're not giants.

YOU: Someday we're going to have a re-evaluation of giants. You know how vampires are sympathetic characters? Same thing with giants and ogres.

BRIAN: Ah, the blurring of boundaries.

YOU: Yeah, pretty soon it will only be knights-errant who are evil.

BRIAN: The book I'm reading is called *Don Romero*. It's a re-telling of the Don Quixote myth set in Sunset City. Jesús Romero immigrates from Mexico as a middle-schooler and makes friends with Ramon Hernandez. Jesús discovers a Classics Illustrated comic of *Don Quixote* and is then inspired to read the original book, which he rereads all the way until he finishes high school. He wants to emulate Don Quixote, wants to be the foolish knight, knowingly, but also sincerely. His sidekick is Ramon Hernandez the Fool who's into all kinds of advanced altruistic things but in a

naive way. Jesús decides to develop an undying love for Rosa Gutierrez, and pledges his life to do altruistic things for her, most of which end up being fantasies that he only talks about. His first car is an old muscle car, which he calls Rozinante. Rozinante gets totaled and he has a funeral for it. Then he gets a new car and calls it "Hijo de Rozinante".

YOU: Wow, it looks like you're almost finished.

BRIAN: Yeah, do you care if I spoil it for you?

YOU: No, that's fine.

BRIAN: Jesús realizes after a while that he's an incel. He says "I'm an incel for you and you alone, Rosa." Ramon decides they should start a movement of being heroes, and they attract other incels and dreamers who try to prove their love to their crushes through different kinds of gallant idealism. The movement is called Quixotism, in honor of Jesús' inspiration. Quixotism then becomes so powerful that it sucks away members from the alt-right. Someone recognizes this later in Jesús' life -- like in his forties -- in a newspaper article. So where I am now, he wants to tell Rosa about his achievement, in hopes that she will finally be impressed. He wants to bring her a pink rose to help impress her, but the vendor only has white roses and red roses. It's hard for him to choose, but he goes with white, for the purity of Rosa. All the way there, he's anxious about what she'll think of the rose he chose... Right now, in the book, he's walking back and forth a block away from her apartment, trying to work up the nerve to text her to tell her he's there...

YOU: Oh, so like he told her he had something to

tell her?

BRIAN: Right, yeah.

YOU: So what happens? You've got me interested.

BRIAN: Um, it will take me a few minutes...

YOU: That's fine. I'll just look at my phone.

Tonight is going to be one of those nights.

There is nothing good on the Internet, as usual. It's all good, so none of it's good.

Brian finishes the book.

BRIAN: Okay, so she accepts him. "Over the years, you have diligently tried to earn my love, going to great lengths. You even brought me a white rose, my favorite color of rose. I never told you it was my favorite, but you knew, because you know me, Jesús. With this final accomplishment, I am willing to become your girlfriend. You have lived up to my expectations and then some." Then he kisses her hand and they try to figure out where to eat.

YOU: So it's a happy story.

BRIAN: Yes. I think so. Maybe it's supposed to be funny.

YOU: I wonder what kind of point the author was trying to make by having the main character be named Jesús, Jesus.

BRIAN: Maybe Jesus comes in different forms.

YOU: Or his work has to be done by people other than himself.

BRIAN: Right. Maybe you and I should be Jesus.

YOU: As an atheist, that makes the most sense out of the gospels for me.

BRIAN: Why is that?

YOU: Because then the gospels are just a pattern for living, and they're meant for everyone to try to live.

BRIAN: You don't think you need God's power to live it out?

YOU: I'm sure to actually live it out, yes. Most people aren't going to end up acting like Jesus, if they try. But you don't need a God to try. Nothing can stop a person from trying except themselves.

BRIAN: I guess as an atheist, trying your best is about the most you expect.

YOU: Things aren't always going to work out, but we do what we can.

BRIAN: I don't think all atheists think the way you do. It seems like if you were a really consistent atheist, you would just give up and let things happen.

YOU: That's fine. I'm not a real atheist. Secretly I'm a theist.

BRIAN: Really?

YOU: Yeah. I just don't realize it yet.

BRIAN: Okay, yeah, that makes sense.

Julia enters.

JULIA: Ugh. Tonight's one of those nights. I'm going to get stood up.

BRIAN: How do you know?

JULIA: I just know things about relationships sometimes.

BRIAN: But not all the time?

JULIA: No. But tonight I know that my first date isn't going to show up.

BRIAN: Federico?

JULIA: Federico.

YOU: Let's play Monopoly.

JULIA: You're feeling impulsive, Beth. You know what Monopoly's like.

YOU: I know. I know with my impulses.

So you go get the Monopoly box from the shelf and set up the board, money, cards and tokens. You're the car, Julia is the shoe, and Brian is the dog. You get into the game, not to win, but to enact the roles.

Time passes.

Time passes.

A man approaches.

MAN: Hey, you guys are playing Monopoly. I guess you're too far in for me to join?

BRIAN: Yeah, but you can watch if you want.

MAN: I love Monopoly. It's a classic. Me and my wife invite the college students from our church over to play board games.

BRIAN: You only invite two students? Or do you have other games at the same time?

MAN: We have other games too. We set up the card table so we can have two games going at once. We have a blast.

YOU: What other games are you into?

MAN: Just the classics. Clue is great. Settlers of Catan.

BRIAN: Settlers of Catan is newer.

MAN: I know, but for me and my wife it's a classic.

BRIAN: You say you go to church.

MAN: That's right.

BRIAN: What church do you go to?

MAN: Fullness Church of Hoheres Wesen.

You, Julia, and Brian playing this whole time.

MAN: Are you guys Christians?

YOU: No.

JULIA: No.

BRIAN: Sort of. I'm definitely a theist.

MAN: Here we are talking about religion and we haven't introduced ourselves! Hi, I'm Grant.

BRIAN: I'm Brian.

YOU: I'm Beth.

GRANT: Beth! I don't hear that name too often!

JULIA: Julia.

GRANT: Julia, pleased to meet you. So Brian, you're definitely a theist, but you're not a Christian?

BRIAN: Well... I might be a Christian...

GRANT: Depends on what people mean by "Christian", am I right?

BRIAN: Yeah, I guess you could say that.

GRANT: People get so hung up on labels.

BRIAN: Right, but labels are important.

GRANT: Absolutely. Want to know my label?

BRIAN: Absolutely.

GRANT: I consider myself to be a "Christian egoist"...

You and Julia stay below the surface of the water.

BRIAN: What do you mean by that?

GRANT: I love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and ego. *I* do, nobody else does. God doesn't love him for me. It's up to me, and *I* do that.

BRIAN: Doesn't the Bible say that pride is a sin?

GRANT: People get so pious. They think that ego is the problem. Ego's not the problem. God created us to have egos. Pride is a problem. Ego's not a problem. So the piety is, we're supposed to give up our egos. As though that's salvation. Salvation is a negative. Real salvation is a positive. Connecting with the Father. The salvation of piety is a negative. Getting rid of the ego.

Julia has something to say.

JULIA: Hold on. I've been a lot of different people in my life...

GRANT: Interesting!

JULIA: ...and I've seen myself burn out over and over because of my ego. Ego is unhealthy.

GRANT: People get pious about health and balance. It's part of humility, or ego-killing. But health and balance don't give you life. Nothing gives you life like the Father.

JULIA: Really? Doesn't food give you life?

GRANT: Jesus says he's got food that will always

keep you full.

JULIA: Okay, yeah.

GRANT: Believe it, sister! It's more than true!

Julia has the wisdom to disengage.

BRIAN: Okay, but aren't we supposed to become more like God? Is God prideful?

GRANT: God is not prideful, but he has an ego. Look at Jesus! That guy was very humble... huge ego!

BRIAN: Do you think God likes having an ego?

GRANT: Why not? God created us with egos. And God said everything he created was good! Very good!

BRIAN: You've never experienced love beyond ego, have you?

GRANT: Have you ever experienced the Father's love?

BRIAN: I'm not sure what you mean...

GRANT: Then you haven't! You'll know when it happens.

BRIAN: What if it never happens?

GRANT: Maybe it won't. But you look like the sort of guy who will find it someday. Or rather... it will find you!

YOU: You said something about "piety" earlier.

What do you mean by that?

GRANT: Piety is just how people get so *serious* about things.

YOU: Shouldn't we be serious about things?

GRANT: Absolutely! Being serious is great. I'm serious about things all the time!

YOU: So what's wrong with piety?

GRANT: The problem with piety is that there's no *life* in it. Do you want to go around life like you're dead? No! Be alive. Love God because you want to. Do good things because you want to. God can make you want to do good things more, right. But only if you love him. You think you can love God if you don't want to? Show me. Good luck.

YOU: How do you know God exists?

GRANT: Do I need to know he exists to love him? The rest is just trust. Nobody knows anything!

BRIAN: You don't act like you don't know anything...

GRANT: Rest assured, if I know anything... it's that I don't know anything! But I don't know even know that... so I know things!

BRIAN: Yeah, I guess that's where I've gotten to myself.

GRANT: Good! We agree on something!

JULIA: If Christians are so great, why do they cause so much suffering?

GRANT: Because we're sinners!

JULIA: Isn't that a way to escape responsibility by trying to appear humble?

GRANT: Maybe evading responsibility is one of our sins!

YOU: Aren't the big political divisions in our country between secular people and Christians?

GRANT: Sure, but maybe the secular people are the ones who have the problems! Why not?

BRIAN: Our country is tearing apart. Doesn't that mean something to you?

GRANT: Absolutely. We have to learn to be friends.

BRIAN: Don't you think that if we have to learn to be friends, we have to internalize our own problems and not blame other people? Doesn't that mean we have to not see things from our own point of view so much?

GRANT: People think we all have to be friends. And I agree. The only enemies we have are the powers and principalities. Satan. And Satan wants us to make the very idea of "we all have to be friends" be our God. It's the subtle, subtle *lie* of the enemy. Satan wants to give us *everything* we want as long as he keeps us from God.

BRIAN: How do you know your point of view is correct?

GRANT: Because it gives life. Do you have a better way to choose a correct view?

BRIAN: If you add up the different things in life, shouldn't you be able to extrapolate into the future and, *see* the things that will give more life later? You don't want to find out that you're wrong later on.

GRANT: Why should you think that reality adds up into a whole? How do you know that is true?

BRIAN: It's always been that way.

GRANT: Really? How do you know that?

BRIAN: Because it's always appeared to me that way.

GRANT: But is that a good reason for the future to not be different?

BRIAN: It doesn't make any sense for me to not see it that way.

GRANT: So you just see it.

BRIAN: And you just see what you see.

GRANT: That's my reality.

BRIAN: I think that we can know more about reality. I think God is where everything we see comes from, and God has to be a being who loves us. In order to contact us metaphysically, he has to share our experiences. And he endures us for so long because he loves us.

GRANT: That's a nice way of putting things, and when I was younger, I might have believed in God that way. But I'm going to reject it. I prefer to believe in God because it's how *I* see things. No

rules. Just faith.

BRIAN: Okay.

GRANT: Hey, you're young, you'll see more of life. You haven't got past your block yet. Don't look down. Don't care too much. The important thing is that we both believe in God. It doesn't matter too much how we get there.

BRIAN: Do we both believe in the same God?

GRANT: If you're right, then my God is just your God, right? And if I'm right, your God is just my God.

BRIAN: I think your God is a picture. God speaks it to you, the same way he speaks any other picture. You trust it, and that helps you trust overall, which helps you trust him. But it's not necessarily the picture he'll show you when your heart is aligned with his.

GRANT: You may be right. We Christians long to see God face to face.

BRIAN: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

GRANT: You may be right, brother. You may be right. You ever think about going to church?

BRIAN: I've thought about it, yes.

GRANT: If you want to check out Fullness, we have Saturday night and Sunday morning services. You might like our midweek Bible study more, though, because you have the Intellectual mind-type.

BRIAN: "Mind-type".

GRANT: Ha ha, just a little Christianese! I forget sometimes. Mind-types are like what the flesh of your brain is into or good at. Your muscles. It's one of those personality type fads that come through. Boy do those add up!

BRIAN: "Mind-type"... interesting...

GRANT: I can see the wheels in your head turning...

Brian finishes his drink.

Grant looks at his drink.

GRANT: Haha! This whole time I forgot to drink my drink! Well, it won't drink itself! I'm going to leave you guys to your game. Nice talking. See you in another life!

He walks away.

YOU: That was generous of him, to offer to meet us in another life.

JULIA: He might be back in a week.

YOU: That could be another life. Nobody dies in Mitzi's.

JULIA: Not even that guy who drank cyanide.

BRIAN: I feel full of something... it's not all nice.

JULIA: You didn't like that guy.

BRIAN: I liked that guy... I liked a lot of what he

said... interesting point of view... I feel... empty...
I'm ... aching.

JULIA: Yeah. I felt the way you do now the whole time.

BRIAN: Living in the future?

JULIA: Yeah.

YOU: Yeah. He had an interesting energy.

BRIAN: We were already feeling weird before he started talking to us.

JULIA: But now we're overstimulated.

BRIAN: Yeah, but I can still tell that he brought a joy that was aching.

JULIA: He didn't feel the ache.

YOU: Really?

JULIA: No, but he has the ache in him. We felt his ache for him.

BRIAN: Maybe he knows something we don't, though.

JULIA: He definitely knows something we don't. According to your philosophy, Brian, doesn't he come from somewhere, like a real place?

BRIAN: Yeah.

JULIA: Yeah, he's been somewhere.

BRIAN: You've been a lot of places, Julia.

JULIA: Yeah.

BRIAN: He seems whole and fresh, but then... aching.

JULIA: How do I seem?

BRIAN: You're struggling...

JULIA: But then?

BRIAN: You're just you. Just Julia.

YOU: Maybe if we knew Grant better we would think he was just Grant.

BRIAN: Would he be whole and fresh, but then... aching... but then Grant?

JULIA: "Grant" and "aching" would be hard to tell apart.

YOU: Is there anything wrong with carrying an ache around?

BRIAN: I know that in the New Testament, people go around with a "body of death" that they want to get past. Probably Grant would say something like, "Absolutely! I'm carrying around a terrible ache! Keeps me humble!"

JULIA: So he can justify all kinds of unhealthiness.

BRIAN: He thinks he has a life in heaven.

YOU: Maybe he does.

BRIAN: When times are hard, people like him do well. That's a benefit to him.

YOU: But life is pretty good these days, right?

BRIAN: There's a Calamity coming.

YOU: Yeah. But if we survive that, then what?

BRIAN: People will go around with their aches.

YOU: Julia, do you think the ache is his pain?

JULIA: No. It's something else, but it feels like an ache to us. If he feels it, it will also feel like an ache.

YOU: What is it really?

JULIA: I don't know. I know things with my feelings. Maybe Brian can figure it out.

BRIAN: You and I are connected to invisible things, Julia.

JULIA: Oh thanks Brian! You're making me blush!

BRIAN: Now you're making me stammer.

JULIA: You didn't actually stammer.

BRIAN: You didn't actually blush.

YOU: Are we going to declare a truce in Monopoly and put it away?

BRIAN: That sounds fine. I want to retire to my house on Baltic. That'll be enough for a little dog like me.

YOU: I'll retire to my hotel on St. Charles. Only the finest room service.

JULIA: I'll retire to my railroad system... so I can travel in my retirement.

You put the game away and all three of you get fresh cups of tea. The night sets in, and you have nothing to say to each other. You don't know why you have nothing to say to each other, and you're not about to break your silence to find out. It's enough to be present to each other. If you said out loud that you were being present to each other, the presence would be broken.

Then you finish your drink and leave, and Brian and Julia say a few things you can hear as you walk away.

JULIA: So what's that book about?

BRIAN: It's called *Being and Having*.

JULIA: *Being and Having*?

BRIAN: The title is about how we are bodies, and have bodies...

JULIA: Interesting...

You walk out the door and into the night.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT
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COMMENTS

1. *Being and Having* is by Gabriel Marcel.

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