

11-15-2012

Table for Five

Melissa Kalinowski
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/italics>

Recommended Citation

Kalinowski, Melissa (2000) "Table for Five," *Italics*: Vol. 2000: Iss. 1, Article 20.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/italics/vol2000/iss1/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Italics by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Table For Five

MELISSA KALINOWSKI

The little girl's name is Lavender. She is often brought to the monthly meetings my friends and I have carved into our schedules to keep us together, threaded. She is the adopted child of my friend Maria's sister. Maria is tall with thin, white legs that look like candy canes after the red has been licked off. She has curly bronze hair, a knack for being late, stressing out about everything, and a passion for firemen that has nearly burned her down; no pun intended. She always tells

dirty jokes, leaves an awful tip and someday wants to leave her art gallery job and head for white sands, beaches as long as years.

Maria always smuggles Lavender in like dope, or outside purchased candy in a movie theater. She would barricade the child on all sides with dolls, color books, and puzzles to keep her occupied. It was a rule that children were not allowed at meetings, (not that any of us had children, but when Lavender appeared for the third time we tried weakly to erect such a rule) but Lavender was Maria's duty each second Saturday of the month and so, in essence, became our official timekeeper. She would stomp her legs, steal our purses, and spill our drinks at unspecified moments and we all knew the meeting had come to a close.

Last month she was mesmerized for a whole two hours over Maria's planner, we took this as an omen that the talk would be especially revealing today, if not lacking in Maria's sprints across the room after the unruly child.

All four of us girls met in college and after graduation decided we needed one day out of the month to touch base,

to remember what everyone's faces looked like, who we were really becoming anyway. We come together and talk about love mostly, relationships, our lives, as we know them at the moment. The group consists of Holly, Gwen, Maria, and myself.

Holly is the most reserved of the group. She has long, blonde hair that reminds you of Rapunzel. She is a social worker, allergic to everything and has been a member of just about every religious movement that has ever come about. She is currently in the process of moving out of the apartment she shares with her boyfriend, suspicious that he's seeing another woman across town who wears brick red lipstick, smokes Camels, and has long black hair. We gather that Holly has moved from suspicion to firm belief. Holly has poor vision, wears tortoise shell glasses and her face is always slightly flushed as if she's been caught in a lewd act.

Gwen is the clumsiest girl in the world. She trips on Lavender, small dogs, shrubs, and her own size ten feet. She has cinnamon colored hair and a tan complexion, making her seem exotic, foreign, out of place. Gwen's father is a shrink, so Gwen often prefers our sessions to be horizontal—hence the weird looks from patrons when they spot her trying to do so. She believes in love at first sight, the evil eye, and dream interpretation--the class she attends after our meetings. Right now she's unemployed. She claims she's helping her dad with office work, but with Gwen you never pry. She's secretive and we know when to politely nod and kill the subject.

Then there's me, Charis. I was named after a perfume my mother bought on a trip to Paris. She said it smelled of whimsy, plum, and a memory she once had. She pronounced the concoction ethereal and felt I deserved a little of the same. I come to laugh. I come to spill myself on the floor like a mess, so they can clean me up, fix it better, turn it right. A painter who wanted to seduce me said that I have Phelo blue and burnt umber in my hair, a little red in my eyes, and a thousand years of guilt in the pit of my stomach. Figure out what *that* looks like. I'm a freelance photographer. I haven't had a serious relationship in years

and don't care if I ever do. I often feel less sane after our meetings—that's why I keep coming.

Today I sit, waiting for the girls, waiting for the mixed perfume of them as they hustle into the warmth of the coffee shop, arms extended for embraces, admiration of another's hair cut, necklace, aura. Lavender runs past me and right to the candy machines dropping quarters in her glory run for sugar. Holly starts us out today. Jack, her boyfriend, called from a pay phone last night explaining a flat tire, unexpected deadlines, and bad weather, preventing him from seeing her that night so he can see "Brick lips, I'm sure," she says steaming. She tried speaking to him about faithfulness and loyalty, where he then began to blow up, claiming something about being owned and free will.

"Trying to *own* him? How ridiculous," she shrieks. "The answer is, by setting up rules about our relationship, I'm owning myself. I'm framing a basis from which we'll work as a couple. This is so *I* don't get hurt, so *I* can be protected and assured. Needs and wants are clear, certain, not vague. These checkpoints and questions in a relationship are legit. Understand what I want and you won't fail me, or *I* them, right?" she turns to us with her blue eyes shiny and cold, looking like brass door knobs on winter mornings. Gwen and I nod quickly in unison as if we have never agreed with anything else in our lives with more devotion.

"My turn," Maria grumbles pushing her coffee aside. "I guess it's my turn to bombard you with my own small dose of depression." This should be good I think to myself. Maria chats on the surface but when she has something important, mood altering, to say, it drips from her, then floods.

Maria looks as if she's going to cry. "I've been thinking more and more about my past relationships and, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems that maybe I ran away from the men that came too close, closer, hitting me at my center. There were men like that; men that reached me like nightmares in the dark. They lived in my head, knew the stain of my demons, the course of my blood . . ."

The waitress interrupts us by clearing cups and plates away. Maria must think she's eavesdropping as she waits

till the girl is gone before she resumes. "It was easier to love those who remained, in relation to me, at a safe distance—not exhuming, just wading," she says with a guilty look. "A person's own waters are heavy, thick, and mysterious—staying dry seems stable. But the men who wanted to drown still call to me like the dead, a haunting." She looks away as if she's uttered the worst curse possible on us, then not looking at me quickly adds, "Are you using a new moisturizer lately?"

I take this as my subtle cue for center stage. Today's discussion seems to be mostly on heartache and I'd rather not display my own. I'll give them a little, a small gumdrop of taste that lets them know I'm participating, but only to a point. "I was walking past a mirror" I hear myself say, "and the thought occurred to me: I'm greedy. I want so much for myself. It's like I'm someone I don't know, someone you caught sight of in a crowd wearing a worn, red hand me down coat, tattered at the edges, buttons heavy, sagging and black like horses' eyes, never looking good—not even when brand new. I sometimes feel like that coat. I'm zealous, and now can taste it for what it is." I look at them all as if I'm running for presidency, "girls, I'm done with feeling sorry for myself. I want things for me, so much of them, that I feel like I could give birth to myself all over again just so it could feel right, for once, from the beginning."

They all exchange worried looks then relax. I always say things that shake them up; they expect it. "Gwen?" Holly pleads, "it's your turn, you *do* want to talk, huh?" She had a bad session with her father last week and forewarned us that she might not be forthcoming with any evidence of her existence, if that was okay with us.

"I'll tell you this much" she whispers, her eyes narrowing. "I went on a date last Friday. He's beautiful, a lawyer. I was so nervous that night that I put my blouse in the freezer. I hung my jeans on the line; it's the middle of November! I had to combat the heat and intensity this man exudes, with a cool shield of control. Isn't that just the strangest?" Compared to the story she told last month of believing the spirit of a dead relative had visited her in the form of a rabbit in her garden, we conclude that we've heard stranger and

thank her for her contribution today. “He smells like wood, burning leaves . . .” and then Gwen is no longer with us, lost in a memory, loving the trap.

It’s 8:00, time to fumble for keys, grab the woman nearest you and hold her still in an embrace. We are about to enter the frost on the sidewalk, when we notice someone missing, a certain someone who is company for our knees, waistlines. We spot Lavender, oblivious to the fact that we are leaving. She is sitting beside a little boy, orange hair, toy gun, missing two front teeth. They are sitting among the ruins of what used to be cookies, seeming to have been shared by the two of them—the answer, in chocolate, on their hands, faces, and clothes. She hasn’t noticed us yet, still smiling and holding his sticky hand.