

10-25-2011

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Recommended Citation

Fisher, Dan (2010) "Keep Quiet," *Fishladder: A Student Journal of Art and Writing*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 23.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/fishladder/vol8/iss1/23>

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Keep Quiet

“I know what you’re thinking. Don’t do it.”

Allison loves textures. She loves to graze her fingers over everything. Today we’re at the art museum and the paint is caked on the canvases. The painting we’re looking at is five feet tall, two feet wide and an inch thick. It’s by someone we do not know.

“What?”

“Don’t touch it. I know you want to but don’t. Just put your hands in your pockets or something.”

She has her hands behind her back and I grab her wrists and cross them. Now she has imaginary handcuffs on.

“But I want to so bad,” she says while stomping her foot.

“If you do, I’m leaving.”

By now she’s giving me an all teeth smile and I’m laughing. A minute later I’ll be looking at the next painting and she’ll be running after me. She’ll be laughing and I’ll know her secret.

“I liked the blue shirt better. It matches your coat.”

She’s asking me advice on her outfit – she always does. Tonight she’s wearing skinny jeans and going on a first date with our friend Brian. She trusts me and I’m glad about that. Truthfully she looks fine in any outfit but I try to give it to her straight and honest.

“Those shoes look like deer hooves.”

“They’re the only ones I have.”

“Your feet look small.”

She’ll take my advice about the shirt but leave the shoes on. In her room there is a tall mirror that she sits in front of. She does her hair and make up while sipping an Old Style. Her make up case puts shame to my tackle box and I can taste hairspray.

“Why did I tell Brian I would meet him for a drink? I really don’t want to do this.”

“Why not?”

“It’s going to be awkward. What is there to say? There is nothing to say. Why does he even want to see me? Every time we’re out at the bar he completely ignores me. There’s no point.”

“It’ll be nice though. I think he’ll appreciate it.”

“I really hope he doesn’t want to pick me up. That would be so uncomfortable.”

“Yeah.”

Holding the can of Old Style, “I probably shouldn’t be drinking this.”

“Well, nobody’s perfect.”

I say it with a smirk and she is giving me a look that says, “I don’t need that but I know it’s true.” And it is true and I mean it. Allison isn’t perfect.

“You’ll be fine. I’ll meet you at the bar later.”

“Okay.”

“Two fifty black and tans.”

“So good.”

The bars close at two but I know she’ll be home later because she likes to stay after and talk to the bartenders after they turn on the lights. It’s three when I hear the door slam and rushing up the stairs and another door slam. She’s crying loud and I’m already sympathetic. I can hear her down the hall through both our doors. She’s saying something to herself but I can’t make it out. I can feel the tension in the air and the pressure in her veins.

I have to go to the bathroom but I don’t want her to know that I’m awake. I want her to know that this moment is private and that she can let out what needs to be let out. I want her to cry and fall asleep. I want to wake up in the morning and give her an encouraging smile. I want to keep secrets. I want to pretend.

I’m taking her out to lunch. She knows that I know that she was crying. We keep quiet because that’s really the only thing we can keep. We can’t keep our embarrassments or even our secrets but we can keep quiet.

By now she’s laughing hard and I’m laughing hard too. We talk about our favorite days like the day we spent inside watching an entire season of America’s Next Top Model before going to see The Police in concert or the night when we watched Labyrinth while eating Speedway nachos. No regrets.

“Where to do you want to eat?”

“I really don’t care. Somewhere cheap?”

“Remember when we went to Fridays because we kept seeing commercials for it between America’s Next Top Model?”

“So awesome.”

“And we got kind of drunk off of one tall beer.”

“Those beers were huge though.”

We decided to go to Long John Silver’s because it’s Allison’s favorite. She’s embarrassed but I think it’s endearing. I make comment on how high the drive-thru window is and how it’s like we are really on a boat. We take the food home and eat it in front of the TV. Keeping Up with the Kardashians is on and we are laughing even harder.

After long weeks when the bar doesn't sound good, we find comfort staying inside listening to vinyl records. It's my record player but I let her choose the record. She decides to choose from her own collection.

"What are we listening to?"

"Just listen. You'll know."

And after the first verse I do know and wonder why I even asked. Listening to Bob Seger sing "Hollywood Nights," I think about my favorite story of Allison. When she was young she used to have one of those diaries with a voice-activated lock. Her password was "Bob Seger." It's funny to think about all the things we keep to ourselves and how they're hidden in our memories, between the words of our favorite songs. Looking at her, I smile. She smiles back and we both keep quiet.