

When you walked into his apartment, you were instantly overcome with a vague sense of discomfort. There was something too open or too white or too new about it. The feeling would hit you, unsettle you and cause you to develop nervous twitches and actions that you never were prone to anywhere else. You would sit on the edge of his broad, backward-sloping couch, trying desperately to not fall back into it, into a position from which it required you much labor to retrieve yourself, and look comfortable at the same time. This was not possible. You would look around the walls for something interesting to focus on to distract you from how uncomfortable you were and would be disappointed every time around. You would try to get interested, or try to think of reasons why you might be able to get interested in his framed Les Miserables poster, or his German 60's concert poster, which displayed a rare form of psychedelic artistry even less exciting than its American model, or his Sports Illustrated two page shot of Larry Bird standing in a grassy field, but to no avail. You would eventually come full circle and your wearied, frustrated eyes would fall on Dave himself. You would look at his eyes, which would be continually shooting nervous glances sideways at a pair of dirty socks that he was afraid might offend with their odor. This glancing would very quickly drive you crazy; you would look over at the socks, why you didn't know, as you had already looked over three times or more. There they still would be, looking guilty at the foot of the white mattress that was suspended at just the wrong height, too low for sitting comfortably, too high for a snug, next-to-the-floor comfort, by heavily shalacked 2x4's standing on their ends. He had done the bed himself, and was very nervous about whether or not to be proud of it. It was nothing to be proud of. You would then have to look back at him, to be polite because he was talking. There was sometimes a spot, on a good day, when you could focus on the top of the bridge of his nose, right between his big but somehow beady eyes. This spot was the only one on the whole face that held still and was relatively calm looking. You would know from experience that the nose was off limits even if motionless due to its size and odd, puffy shape. You would remember how you could watch his chin without much problem, focusing on the many blond whiskers that poked through its skin, but that eventually there would come his twitch, which would rudely shake you from your long-awaited and brief spell of calm and send you frantically searching the walls again. His twitch was not uncontrollable in a medical sense, it was just a nervous habit of sharply, quickly, opening his mouth wide open for an instant and then letting it turn to speaking or rest position, slightly but noticeably agape. So you would try your luck with the smooth part of the nose, right at the top between the eyes, and try to breathe slowly while you listened to him talk.

«I'm getting really into the Travelling Willburys,» he would tell you proudly. He knew you were into music and the Bury's have so many failsafe names in their lineup. Some of these he would run by you as if it wasn't very exciting for him to be talking about this, trying to drop the names like he'd been dropping them for years. «Petty's just got such an amazing sound, you know? He just knows something that,

like we, well maybe you do, but, like I just don't. But George does!» and he would start getting excited and would laugh the rest of the words out, losing many of them on you. You would find yourself forcing out the same sounds as he was making and saying «right right right».

«He's innabackinnavidelike (and here he would do his rendition of George Harrison, holding his hands out in a pretty accurate air-guitar position, but picking with his left hand where the neck might be and just moving the fingers of the right hand all over the place) you know?»

You would change the subject. «Why do you have Cosmopolitan magazine, Dave?»

«Oh, that, yeah. I feel like it keeps me just this much (a pinch with his fingers) ahead of the game» He had clearly rehearsed the latter part of that and delivered it with a mirror-ried smirk/nod combination.

«Right right right,» you would force more laughter, not sure what game he was referring to but pretty sure it was women he was talking about.

«Hey what about that girl, Dave? Have you seen her again?»

«No, you know, she hasn't come into the store since that one time.» He would be talking about a girl he saw once in the ice cram store where he worked. Last time, when he told you about seeing her, you had thought that maybe there was a story beginning. Maybe he actually talked to her or something or she talked to him. But there wasn't. She had been seen, though, as you where notified with vigor by Dave, who more offered it than told it to you. He seemed, when talking to you, to be dipping a timid toe into an unfamiliar body of water, and it was very much how you felt sitting there.

«Now that I think of it, that time before, you know, when she was in there, when I saw her, I think she definitely, like, looked at me you know, like, she, we made eye contact.» At this he would twitch violently at the mouth. The words 'she' and 'we' had been particularly tough for him.

«Oh word?» You would genuinely be interested now, although the reason for your interest might be a little vicious. «You should say something, you know? Why not?» And then you would really want to leave. The big white box of a room would begin to feel dry and stale and the socks would start to whine and the couch would start to win. You would go over and look at his record collection, giving the place one last chance to hold your interest. It would fail and you would say, «Well I think I'm going to go,» feeling that you owed him for some reason the honesty of not giving him an invented excuse. You would sense a great panic and commotion going on behind his eyes, which would go blank as he robotically and awkwardly showed you to the door, stumbling in small ways in and out of your personal space. You would feel that at any moment you might be unable to breathe. The hallway would be refreshing as a dim green waterfall. You would walk out onto thirteenth street and be so happy and feel so alive. This you would try not to admit to yourself, and the sourness of the guilt would counterbalance the sweetness of the freedom and you would be sober once again in the drizzle.