

Amusement
By Jordan Liu

Characters:

J: programmer writing a script. drawn to aesthetics. spends a lot of time going back to make the capital letters in the script lowercase.

P: has chemistry with everyone but remains mysterious. somewhat by choice, somewhat by socialization. might not actually exist.

Scene 1: rollercoaster

P: so what do you do?

J: for a living?

P shrugs

P: sure.

J: nothing anymore.

P: how do you mean?

a pause.

J: I write dialog.

P: you're a writer. me too, actually.

J: what do you write?

P: action movies. yeah I know what you're thinking, actual humans write those? they're not just computer generated? CGI explosions all the way down?

J chuckles.

J: I'm sure there's an art to it.

P: he says, not believing his own words.

beat

J: so, what got you into writing action movies?

P: my mom was line producer for Michael Bay. when I finished college with a degree in journalism...

J: not very many leads?

P: you could say that. Mom pulled some strings and, you know.

Clerk: next single rider.

Clerk: push the bar up to release.

J looks around.

J: thanks.

Scene 2: middle ground

P: you know about that girl who died on this like 10 years ago? her hair got caught in the metal frame just before the drop. ripped her whole face off.

J: that's not true.

P: it is.

J: okay it is.

P: so what kind of dialogue do you write?

J: mostly lowercase. occasionally all caps.

P: very little middle ground.

J: what's Michael Bay like?

P: robots, for one thing.

beat

P: let's go to the hall of mirrors.

J: okay.

Scene 3: hall of mirrors

J looks into a mirror.

J: can you hear me?

P: who is this?

J: can I just say something.

P: you'll have to find me first.

J: I really like how you're willing to meet me where I am. conversation wise.

P: (imitating J) because I am you.

J: so much so that I don't mind that you're constantly deflecting.

beat

J: for humor, I know.

a pause

J: are you still there?

He rounds the corner. P is standing between two mirrors, reflecting herself infinitely.

P: a thousand me's. in lock step.

J: did you hear me?

P: you're a good conversationalist.

J: thank you.

P: I was talking to me.

J: (imitating P) thank you.

Scene 4: edge

P and J are standing in line for the big wheel.

J: i've never actually been on the big wheel before.

P: never? wow so this is an exciting time for you. welcome to life on the edge.

J: lonely out here.

P: edginess is its own company.

beat

J: so. I think you're really cool. would you want to get dinner or something? in like a romantic capacity?

a pause

J: or if not, that's fine.

P: listen. I mean I like hanging out with you. it's fun. you're quick. and savvy.

J: right okay.

P: seems like you know what I'm going to say.

J: I guess so.

Clerk: next two! right this way.

Scene 5: the big wheel

J and P sit. After a silence:

P: it's beautiful up here.

J: hm.

P: first impressions?

J: hm.

P: there's the bell tower.

J: will you cut it out.

P: if you stop being weird!

J: seriously. if you don't like me, then just stop.

P: stop what? being myself?

J: you know what you're doing.

P: I know what you think I'm doing. like I exist to be liked by you.

J: okay so let me down easy then. just don't keep being perfect. you already rejected me which I guess must be what you wanted.

P: you're making this easy.

J: more than I can say for you. you know why people like action movies? they're simple. heroes are heroes and villains are villains. and they don't try to prove they're good people because if they did we would feel bad about hating them. but not you. you want so badly to be liked, but only to the extent that it proves you're likable.

P: jesus I just don't want to go out with you.

J: fine. then leave me alone.

They sit. The big wheel continues to slowly turn.

P: don't you think you're taking it a little personally?

J: yeah maybe. how would you prefer I take it.

P: what I'm trying to say is: look, you write dialogue right?

J: I used to.

P: you're writing this dialogue.

J: she said, not really believing her own intention.

P: so. you have a choice in how the conversation plays out. you can get stuck resenting me if you want, but personally I think that's a little cliched. villainous even.

J: sorry, am I not the hero?

P: action movies aside. just be honest. you control this story, and to relinquish responsibility would be dishonest.

J: of course you think we control our narratives. you're a journalist. journalists create narratives. but this isn't that kind of script, because I'm not really that kind of writer.

P: is that your point?

J: no.

P: i don't decide what this is. you do.

J: then.

P: go on.

J: here's what it is. it's a moment from a point in his life so fearful. so unwilling. he imagines her up and puts her on a pedestal, then goes back and turns all the letters lowercase. so what kind of person sets up that story just to be unwanted? if he controls the narrative, then why this narrative? a rollercoaster is full of little mountains, but the deceit is that the first mountain always gives you enough momentum to clear the rest. if it didn't then they couldn't sell tickets to the ride.

P: so what do you do?

J: I write dialog that doesn't go anywhere.

beat