

## Sebastian Albu

### “3d Person Passive Present Tense (I Can See You)”

hE gets a call at 5:30 on Friday from The Doctor about a show on Saturday. After a brief mental tug of war hE agrees to check it out although hE realizes it will require interaction and effort. The next 28 hours pass uneventfully. hE arrives at the venue alone. In queue, hE is flanked by crusty beards and dreadlocks. The air is ripe with the reek of patchouli. Waiting underneath the marquee, hE bums a smoke and realizes that hE has become a cigarette snob. hE flicks it disdainfully into a ceramic flowerpot filled with sand. The last lungful comes pouring out of hIS left nostril and dissipates into a heady blonde's luxurious pompadour. hIS eyes flicker slightly when he sees that The Teacher and The Paramedic have arrived. hE is genuinely happy to see them and gives them their tickets. hE tells them that hE is waiting for a phone call and they will meet up inside. Minutes later, hIS right thigh detects vibrations and information is disclosed on both ends.

Inside, hE spots The Teacher and The Paramedic at the bar. The Teacher has ordered three shots of thick purple syrup. hE has made a resolution to keep the drinking to a minimum this evening, but the Jaeger has already been poured and paid for. hE tips the glass and hears the chilled evil slime laughing all the way down hIS throat. It is early and the house music is still on. hE makes hIS way to the front of the stage and stands under the gigantic disco ball, following the 6,237 squares of light oscillating around the room. He traces the silver reflections around the hardwood floor until hE becomes dizzy and nearly loses hIS balance. hE is forced to close his eyes and regain inner ear stability. hE scans the room and decides hE is acting strange. The Doctor is speaking with another friend. hE walks over and stands awkwardly among them. The Doctor and The Father are discussing what they are drinking and hE wonders if another shot wouldn't be a bad idea. hE decides this is unwise and stands silently as the house lights dim. Both hands are thrust into the pockets of hIS wool coat and the band comes out right on cue.

Somewhere in the middle of a syrupy saxophone solo, hE recognizes the familiar spiraling mood descent. It is a plunge into abysmal depth for no apparent reason. Perhaps it's the sight of The Teacher and The Paramedic's tender vertical spooning on the dance floor. They are gently swaying as one to the pulse of the music. Perhaps it's a lack of serotonin. It's no different than countless other times. There is an obscure recess near the back of the bar and hE finds an empty wooden bench between another couple and a redhead chatting on the phone. It is a good place to let the blackness descend and envelop hIM completely. hE stares out with jealous eyes. Despite the somber camouflage, hE is spotted by a figure emerging from the crowd moments later. It is The Healer. She is followed by two others. Instinctively, hE hopes that she has not seen hIM in the caliginous corner, but their eyes meet. hE tries to avoid her smile. This is impossible and hE bows hIS head, trying to defer attention. An inevitable embrace ensues, however; somewhere in a cavernous recess, something stirs. It feels warm and undulates like a ripple on a lake after the first drop of a summer rain.

hE leads them through the sea of gyrating hippies, to the front of the stage. Each step feels a little easier to take, yet hE is still unable to accept the waning of the bitter gloom that enveloped hIM five minutes ago.

The music seems a little sweeter now; the rhythm is just a bit tighter. A strange feeling, wavering between comfort and sleep descends upon the room. hE desperately tries to absorb all of it until hE realizes it's everywhere. Even a small breath captures it. It penetrates hIS eyes, seeping through hIS eyelids. It slithers into hIS ears. Drops condense from the air onto hIS tongue. It tastes sickly sweet, like a fleshy peach left on the windowsill too long. It descends through hIS unkempt mane and the uncut hairs on the back of hIS neck tremble in tune with the vibrations exploding out of the horn on stage. hIS hands dampen inside the stifling pockets of the jacket and hE wipes the sweat on hIS pants. hE feels the transfer of heat from palm to hamstring.

hE has not said much to The Healer and turns in her direction, but she is already standing next to hIM. The words flow freely from hIS mouth like a freak vernal storm and for the next two hours, hE forgets that it is the middle of winter.

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It is approaching midnight when the show ends. He is standing under the marquee once again, this time with The Healer at his side. The Father is speaking to a woman who looks like Lisa Loeb and her friend who has an uncanny resemblance to an octopus. His spirits are high and everyone is invited back to the house for a late night soirée.

The Healer and The Doctor arrive first. There has been talk of the strange bottle of green liquid housed on the mantle. The Father and Lisa Loeb arrive together with beer. The Octopus arrives last, unaccompanied and empty handed. There are not enough chairs in the apartment so everyone sits where they can. The Father takes a seat on the floor next to Lisa Loeb and they share a beer. Loeb and The Octopus are first-year students at a local culinary school. They are freshly acquainted roommates and this is their first night out on the town. The conversation quickly turns to the carafe above the fireplace. He bought it in Barcelona two years ago and it has remained unopened, gathering dust; it is waiting for the right night. He walks across the room, brings it back and sets it on the table. Lisa Loeb hungrily eyes the emerald fluid. She confesses her love of the wormwood oil. She tells anyone who will listen that she "makes the stuff back in Houston." It is a claim that obviously must be backed up, so despite the fact that there are no sugar cubes in the house, a glass is filled with three ice cubes and as many fingers. The uncaramelized cane doesn't dissolve, but it helps to cut the anise. The highball begins its slow orbit around the room. The mood is tentative and The Father is the only one doing any serious drinking. The Father has put away a quarter of the bottle and is holding up surprisingly well. The tumbler is empty when it arrives back to him. He refills it and places it on the coffee table. Lisa Loeb's small hand greedily curls around the cylinder. Out of the corner of his unfocusing eye, he sees her drain the glass. A small gob of sugar trickles down her chin, staining her sweater.

He and The Father are playing video games; voices are raised and curses fly. He senses a slight disturbance in the seat next to him. It is not totally apparent at first, but he notices a pronounced change in Lisa Loeb's demeanor. She is wobbling in her chair,

seemingly devoid of any muscle control. Her eyes roll halfway back into her skull and there is no doubt that La Fée Verte has gotten a hold of her. She is grunting like a jungle ape, drunkenly gesturing towards the television. Moments later, she slumps forward, beaten. Her hair falls, draping her face, as her head bobs like a water balloon in a tub.

Glances are exchanged around the room and an inquisitive face turns to The Octopus. An unspoken message is delivered. It is not lost in her tentacles. She realizes that the second thoughts she had prior to coming up to the house were warranted. After all, she knows these people only slightly less than Lisa Loeb. Unfortunately, there are certain implicit rules that she is bound by in this society. Ultimately, it will not be an easy night for her.

Lisa Loeb has fallen into the chair and someone has removed clumps of hair from her mouth. She will get much worse before she gets better. As this dawns on him, he realizes it is growing late. His amusement at her incoherent babbles and moans drains like battery acid down a sewer. The Father leans back against the wall and takes another swig from the bottle. It is a strange scene, this room full of relatively sober people dealing with a spree of intoxication. He must take charge of the situation while the others surreptitiously conceal their mirth. He is not thinking in great detail. Instead, he coaxes Lisa Loeb to her feet. This proves to be more difficult than he anticipated, as the elixir has worn her will away. Her shoes are strewn about the room. When he tries to communicate with her she swings her legs back and forth, slamming her bare heels into the floor. It is obvious that reason will not work. Once again, his eyes meet The Octopus'. The frustration is evident on her face as she tries to talk Lisa Loeb out of the chair, but this only makes her flushed friend whip around wildly, groaning even louder. In an act of exasperation, he puts a bear hug around Lisa Loeb and lifts her to her feet. He spits out a lock of her nicotine flavored hair and tells The Octopus that it's a good time to bring the car around. Without any response, he hears the door swing open and she is gone.

The Green Fairy has flattened Lisa Loeb. She feels like a sack of potatoes as he hauls her across the room. They traverse the twenty feet of hardwood flooring in what seems like an hour. The Octopus has parked several blocks away and she is cursing her friend as she fords through the snow. Lisa Loeb is incapable of standing on her own so he is forced to cradle her against his chest. She is merely inches away from him and he is certain she will either try to kiss him or vomit down his shirt. Her breath smells like the epicenter of a compost pile and he turns his head away to escape the vapors. A look around the room relieves some of the anger. The Doctor, The Father and The Healer are shuffling about, desperately trying not to laugh. The Doctor walks over and takes a shift propping up Lisa Loeb, but as the exchange is made, she slides to the ground. Her head comes to rest on The Doctor's shoe. The door opens and The Octopus walks back in, accompanied by a flurry of snow. Her bleached hair tied back into a tight and purposeful ponytail and her face is cold and red. She looks down at Lisa Loeb and runs a hand across her face. She understands her night is far from over. The Doctor is a good man and offers to help her drag the hiccupping corpse to the car through the several feet of snow pack. The Octopus says nothing. She picks up her half of her friend and they disappear into the street. Fifteen minutes later, The Doctor returns shaking his head. The new roommates will have to return tomorrow to retrieve Lisa Loeb's car.

Relieved, he looks at the time and decides that the festivities are just about over. But the Swiss tincture has also left its mark on someone else. The Father has been drinking it straight from the bottle and the effects are beginning to show. The Father is a stubborn man, but after much bargaining the bottle is conceded and a firm handshake is extended. The night barrels right along for The Doctor and The Father. They are laughing like lunatics as they head to a Middle Eastern restaurant for some lamb and perhaps a few pieces of baklava. But he is tired. He wants to laugh but it's too late for that. He looks at the bottle one last time. It is half-empty...or half-full. A strange shoe rests upside down on the coffee table. He turns to the Healer. She smiles and nods. He turns the light off on the way to his room and closes the door behind them.