



1999

Upon Discovering the Café Alone

Lisa Walker

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Recommended Citation

Walker, Lisa (1999) "Upon Discovering the Café Alone," *Cedarville Review*: Vol. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview/vol2/iss1/19>

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Keywords

Poetry

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Upon Discovering the Café Alone

Tonight everything reminds me of home.
We searched for this place
(you and I).
I have discovered it
alone.*

Tonight I would smoke
here
if I didn't hate cigarettes

and I would speak with you
if I was not sequestered here.
I would tell you not to smoke.
You're killing yourself,
I'd say.

Then explain to you that sometimes I
feel rebellious and
take it out on my poetry
(unfairly),
stripping it of all capitalization
and at times
even punctuation -
then I dress like a beatnik
and walk alone down
busy streets
(ridiculous).

You'd laugh and
say that when you feel rebellious

** my heart so full of ideas
and I feel bereft of words.*

you mix some wicked drink,
repeating this until rebellion is reduced
to giddiness.

I would wish I had your abandon
then be grateful that I do not
carry your regrets.
You're killing yourself,
I'd say
(secretly envy you).

Here a sweet odor clothes the cool air,
which seems heavy with memories
that I cannot even summon
to form thoughts
close enough to catch
(I know I was with you
somewhere like this
once). Faint reminders rise and
disappear -
like steam -
around more tangible distractions
and yet something begs me go somewhere that I
cannot.

I am not a tortured artist
but tonight I feel like one,
wondering what a tortured artist might be
(nice work if you can get it),
certainly not some washed-up poet
who paid too much for coffee
...cold coffee.

Tonight I would smoke
here
if I didn't hate cigarettes

so I order an Irish Cream
(like I used to),
an old drink
for old time's sake.

I'm a sentimental fool.
(They say one should never drink
alone, but I
doubt if that applies to coffee.
Besides, if you were here
There would be no poem.
I would be telling you these things,
telling you that
sometimes I expect to find a kindred spirit
on the highway
because we look over
and discover that
from different cars we are
singing to the same song on the radio -

telling you that tonight
everything reminds me of home.)

Becoming

I always arrive
at places like this
to see
the endless parade
of souls
screaming to be regarded
(contempt or
admiration—much the same
to some).

If I am honest,
I say that I also come
to be seen,
to take my part:
(to look the same or
go against the grain—much the same
to some)
this masquerade
is more to feign than to become.