

Theory Slut

Stacy Graber

I once dated a woman who looked like Fran Lebowitz but I didn't recognize her as Fran Lebowitz. I had never read her. I would have recognized Susan Sontag. Following grad school, I took a job with a lesbian magazine and placed a personal ad in their classifieds. I did not know that the magazine had just been sued by Catherine Deneuve for trademark infringement. Then the magazine owner found herself in court opposite the famed actress. It was so unusual to sit across from the very woman who, in *Repulsion*, had served up a dead rabbit that none of us knew what to say.

I finally managed, "She killed Harvey, man."

The judge awarded the actress damages, she returned to Paris, and the magazine was defunct.

Defunct. That is why I forgot having placed the personal ad. I had placed a personal ad a week before we all went to court and then had to search for new jobs. Justine went to work for a lawyer. Nox took her hockey more seriously. March Hair adopted a child. And Frosted Flakes married a kid-sweetheart, a guy who wouldn't bother her about bed.

What would I do if I had no work? I knew theory. I could talk anyone you please: Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes. I'm not name-dropping. Oh, and Walter Benjamin—Lebowitz loved my Benjamin. Those days, I walked around raucous in a pink, zip-hoodie, no shirt, short skirt, bare legs, canvas wedges. The way I looked, a kid in the Haight-Ashbury glanced up from the sidewalk, caught my sex halo and said: "Yer an angel," like some Flannery O'Connor character.

That's nothing, that's nothing.

I remember, a week before Catherine Deneuve came to town, I sat serious in Farrakhan's fund-raising center off Market and ate sweet potato pie while mentally blue-printing my personal ad. Farrakhan made the best sweet potato pie in the city, the best pastries overall, really. A woman tried to interrupt my dessert with politics and I told her, "I'm ashamed to say, but I'm illiterate." She pitied me. Gave me more pie.

On the way home I wondered if bread was more important than literacy.

A reminder of a tiff I'd once had with a guest at a colleague's wedding. The

girl had just graduated with a teaching certificate and she was high on Ed so I argued the thesis that bread was more important than literacy, teased her. She went crying to the groom, my colleague, a guy who knew theory. “Little Squab Bones is too sensitive,” I assured him.

The groom said, “Hey, take it easy, take it easy.” He was a fisherman and liked things cool.

Back to my personal ad, it read: “Girl with poor attitude. Makes scenes. Looks like Sigourney Weaver. Theory slut.”

I placed it in the classifieds and summarily forgot.

Sometime later, Frosted Flakes approached me with a big envelope containing a smaller one and handed me the contents. “This came for you.” It was marked response #59.

Dear Sigourney Double:

I want to meet you.

I will be in San Francisco on _____ and you should be _____ and say _____.

Signed,

Caustic

I liked a good Mad-Lib like so I decided to answer: “A-Okay.”

As I said, I did not know whether it was Fran Lebowitz. Would I have cared? It’s hard to say. Many would jump at the chance of dating famous. My main concern, would her pale skin and center part? Then maybe. Kiss her center part, as Salinger suggested, the quixotic gesture.

When I met her at the restaurant it turned out that she talked with her hands Jewish, like my Jewish. Gestured what I knew.

She wore Eastern European, tuxedo shirt, jeans, cowboy boots. Her face like Kafka’s sister. She played with her watch and had a split between her front teeth.

And of course her stories. A big-time bard with her always at center and the room zoomed in on the Russian of her, charismatic, demanding, pointing, urging, building on a premise, lecturing me like I was auditing a course. The waiters loved her orders. I sat wordlessly, took no orders. I wore an undersized white suit, jacket half unbuttoned.

In silence I said my piece. Which was funny because I commanded the full range of what could be said but I thought that breast exposed was higher comment. It went like that on our first meeting while I watched her, mute as she spoke, and I wondered if it could go down.

She drank diet pop and I had sangria. That is what made her evaluation more emotional. She explored her own history without my asking one question and

laughed inwardly at self-discoveries I could not know which made her boring.

And somewhere in the midst of dire explanation, when she was on the verge of something really big, I interrupted, “Yeah, the world looks pretty sordid. Who’s paying?”

The thing about exceptionally bright people is they are sexually excited by poor transitions so I knew I could say what I wanted without negative consequences.

Fran Lebowitz asked if I wanted dessert. She wanted more time to sell herself. So when the cart passed, I grabbed a slice of lemon chiffon. She pushed up next to me and I passed the sugar fork between my lips.

Some kind of acerbic speech about people and the way they did things while the tart, gelatinous essence slid down my throat and I realized I hadn’t eaten in a few days, since the Farrakhan fundraising center. I was hungry and Lebowitz liked to make speeches and pay restaurant tabs. I listened to Fran Lebowitz rip off Gertrude Stein’s brand of inversion and repetition, “Good grammar is not endemic and one does not want to listen to grammar but rather things endemic.” I didn’t give a shit but the cake was something, a darling throwback to cakes made one at a time by old ladies in stocking-toe hose. A little bit like the lemon crunch cake served at Machus in my youth before Detroit went busto.

“Do you know any good ruin porn?” I asked her, pondering the separation of yolks and whites.

“That’s a funny question,” she said and traced a line from my bra’s front clasp to my throat.

I was done with that cake. She asked me if I wanted to leave and I told her yes, but without you. No remorse for being rude because I had built that inevitability into the date. Those days I fucked like an angel and spoke ill-mannered.

“Don’t you like me?”

Fastened up my buttons. Sex on lock-down. Sent her on her way.

I lightened up considerably on the walk home alone. In my small suit a little man mistook me for a prostitute and I smiled expansively.

The streets of San Francisco smell like urine. It’s not hard to get a date. I thought about placing another personal ad but, this time, I wouldn’t accentuate theory if it got me a girl like Fran Lebowitz. A girl who talks too much is one thing I can’t stand.

In the morning she called me and asked if I wanted to do breakfast and, though I was hungry, I thought better of it. I told her no and she said she’d left me a gift at her hotel. She returned to New York, I suppose.

The concierge phoned me later to tell me that a package was waiting and

I said he could keep it. Gifts are nothing to me. There was a place that served a charming onion roll and I could just afford that for breakfast as Catherine Deneuve had taken us all to the cleaners. In roaming thoughts I dreamed up another personal ad: Whorey girl, black tights, pearls, misanthrope, drinks wine, eats cheese, looks at pictures, likes it cold.

This time, Stan Fish's assistant wrote to me. Didn't write her back. Best to nip it in the bud. I wanted a Plain Jane, a doppelganger to my flamboyant theory.

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