

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/2

Shannon O'Connor
Caffeine Headache

The rock star walks into the coffee shop. He waits in line with everyone else, and nobody around him notices it's him. My co-worker whispers in my ear, "It's the rock star. He's in line." I turn my head, and I notice him.

He comes to me to pay for his coffee. He is wearing a tank top with rings on his fingers and streaks of pink and green in his flowing mane of hair. He tells me what he has already ordered. I ring the two drinks up. He hands me a hundred dollar bill.

"Do you have anything smaller than that?" I say. "We keep the twenties locked away."

"No, this is all I have," he says.

"You don't have a credit card or anything else?" I say.

"No," he says.

Does he mean to tell me that a rock star of his stature walks around the city on a summer afternoon and only carries a one hundred dollar bill? I thought he was lying.

"Well, I'll have to give you small bills," I say. I hand him eighty-six dollars in tens and fives and ones.

"What did you do, break the bank?" he says.

I hand him his change. It's a company policy to keep the twenties locked away. I'm not sure why. I think it's overreacting. The idea is that if the store is robbed, the thieves will only get small bills. We're not supposed to open the box for anyone. Even rock stars that come in.

He waits for his drinks at the end of the espresso bar. The young woman making his drinks is from another country, and I have never asked her where, because I have heard that is a rude thing to say to someone. I don't work with her often.

The rock star asks her where she's from.

"I'm from Ukraine," she says.

"My grandfather was from Ukraine," the rock star says. "They're beautiful people, but they're crazy people." He laughs.

She laughs, too. I think it's an offensive thing to say to someone, and I would never say that. The rock star takes his two drinks and leaves. I talk with my Ukrainian coworker about him. She is too star-struck to think he is rude. I would be too, if he said that to me.

But he knows where I'm from, because I'm from right here in this city. Anyone could look at me and tell that. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. I blend in with everyone else. Nobody thinks I'm weird at all, which is fine with me because I can hide.

My other coworker tells me later, "I would have opened the lock box for you, so you wouldn't have to give him so many small bills."

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"I didn't want to have to ask you," I say.

The rock star is one of the best celebrities I have seen at the coffee shop. I tell this story for years and years.



I left the coffee shop after working there for a long time and started working at the hospital down the street, which is one of the biggest and most prestigious in the world. I made appointments, and I had a small job at a giant place.

I worked there for about a year; one day after work, I walked through the parking lot near Whole Foods, and I saw a group of people with their phones standing around taking pictures. I turned to look at what the fascinating subject happened to be, and it was him, the rock star, trying to open the trunk of his SUV, but failing. He struggled with the keys, and couldn't open the door, either he didn't know how to open it, or he had the wrong key. More people swarmed around him, taking photos, talking and laughing, saying "Wow, look at him, he shops at Whole Foods like everyone else," people wondered what he bought, did he buy any junk food? What was he doing in the city? Everyone stood around amazed.

He walked around his car to the side with the steering wheel, and tried to open the trunk from there. I didn't take any pictures. I felt sorry for him. I think that someone who is going grocery shopping should have privacy, and when he's struggling to open the trunk to his SUV, people shouldn't take pictures of him.

I pitied him, and also the people around him taking pictures because they had nothing better to do than to stalk a rock star after he went to Whole Foods. That's what's wrong with this country, and the world, people's priorities are not in the right place. I vowed I would never be a stalker, or take photos of a celebrity for fun, so I could post them on social media.

I am a cog in the wheel of the world, and I get a caffeine headache if I see injustice. Coffee will cure my ache, but there's not much I can do to solve the awful things that happen. I simply observe, digest, and try to explain everything to myself to salve the pain.