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### Event Story: Together in Silence

Reading is often seen as a solitary hobby due to the nature of it, but Hush Hour challenges this narrative and brings into question if it could possibly be a social one.

Last week as I climbed the stairs to the second floor of GILD brewing, I was met with a bulletin board adorned with pins, and scraps of paper scattered around bookmarks. The board displayed strips of paper under a sign that read, “What are we reading today?” I smiled at the simple welcome it offered, scribbled down the title of my current read, and pinned it among the others, noting at least five other scraps announcing they were reading the same book.

Turning the corner into the lounge I was met with a rush of sound, loud music tangled with even louder conversation. The last light of the day poured through the windows lining the front of the building, spilling across the room falling on the faces of a mosaic of people.

Each wooden table was adorned with reading lamps, glasses holding a variety of drinks and books of every shape, color and size. It was a scene worth pausing for, a small space brimming with a community that felt both intimate and infinite. The room held a captivating brilliance.

Gathering my courage, I weaved through the tables scanning the books on each one—*Onyx Storm*, *Sunrise of the Reaping*, *Fearless*—the titles began to blur together as I attempted to search for my own place in this literary heaven.

As nearing the back, I conceded to standing in line to order food when a stranger approached me and offered a seat at their table. After ordering my food I brought my drink over, sat down and thanked them for the welcome. Their names were Angel Griego, Zero Romrell and Rae Maurer.

Griego had thick brown hair falling to their shoulders and a crooked smile. Romrell had a brilliant smile containing gems that shimmered in the soft lighting, complemented with pink and green hair. Maurer had the most striking purple hair I have ever seen. *Wind and Truth* by Brandon Sanderson, *Notes of a Crocodile* by Qiu Miaojin and biology lab notes were spread across the table.

When Maurer was asked about her choice to bring her lab notes she said, “Sometimes it’s just nice to get a change of scenery.”

A soft bell rang out cutting through the noise and a hush fell over the room. Aimee McQuilkin and Nicole Vanek, the organizers of Hush Hour, stood and began to speak, “Welcome to Hush Hour!” Subtle, quiet cheers popped up throughout the room as the organizers exchanged smiles.

Vanek thanked the brewery for hosting and welcomed both new and returning readers. She listed the upcoming meetings before explaining the structure of the night. “In a few minutes, I’ll ring the bell, and our hour of silent reading will begin. You’ll know the hour is up when I ring the bell again. You’re welcome to stay and chat or leave when you’re done.”

The crisp sound of the bell rang, and like a switch had been flipped, the entire room opened their books and began to read. Paperbacks, hardcovers and e-readers fill the space, while the noise of bar scene downstairs slowly faded beneath a playlist provided by Slant Street records.

Though Hush Hour is a relatively new event, started in 2023, Nicole Vanek, Aimee McQuilkin and Connie Brueckner are all members of the same Missoula book club, Book Club for Mayor, which was founded in 2005. The idea was inspired by a similar event that takes place in New York, Reading Rhythms.

Towards the end of the hour, Romrell's jaw dropped and they flipped their book over on the table, a move ever reader knows. Something big just happened, a slow smile crept onto my face. My hour had consisted of 55 pages, two tacos and a root beer. As an introvert, it was a perfect way to spend my Sunday evening. Though being surrounded by strangers would usually be my nightmare there was a certain familiarity I felt for the 30 or so people that sat around me on the second floor of a small-town brewery.

The bell rang once more, signaling the end of the hour. Another humorous minute passed as readers quickly finished their pages before conversation began again. The numbers dwindled as people returned to their lives, but a few tables remained, chatting about what had happened in their books, mine included.

Griego finally got to the turning point in their book, Romrell had three pages left and Maurer had made it through a question on her lab homework. As we called it a night and walked out onto the street a hint of a new friendship appeared when they asked me to join them at the next meeting.

Perhaps in a world so often defined by noise, silence can still bring us together.