

again leave my paw and spill out onto the page, and all I can hope is that, as Kay put it, I'm left with a picture of the thoughts and feelings that I might have had at the time.

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There is a strangely comforting humiliation to the act of confession, to admitting to the one on the other side of that screen just how long it has been since you engaged with your sins so directly, so honestly. You kneel on that delightfully familiar kneeler, the same you knelt on in high school, the same you knelt on when you got home from your failed venture in Minnesota. You fold your hands, you nearly rest your nose against them, doing your best to smell only your scent and that of the cedar before you, not the priest, not the feline who was in there before you. You admit your deeds and the words roll off your tongue with the aspartame tang of your shortcomings.

For a while, when I was getting my psych degree, I stopped going to confession. I will admit that there was a brief time during those studies that I thought I understood quite a bit more than I actually do. I knew enough to be dangerous. I thought, "Ah yes, if confession is the catharsis of letting go of an internal stressor, I needn't go to confession, so long as I have that regular release of spiritual energy!"

But while confession certainly involves catharsis, that's not its sole purpose. I got my catharsis from the class trip to a junk yard where we were given goggles and sledge hammers and let at a stack of cars, from letting a friend talk me into driving up into the moun-

tains so that I could shoot his pistol, even from visiting a batting cage.

But it wasn't the *right* catharsis.

I never felt like I was handling my sins when the bat made contact with the ball, and even when the ball hit me instead of the bat, I still had not served penance. I wasn't shooting my guilt, not blasting away my unworthiness before God. I was just panting and yelping like an idiot in a fenced-in enclosure. I was just tasting cordite or stale oil on the air, not the clean, cool flavor of the act of contrition.

I lacked the post-catharsis cleansing, and so I went back to confession. I lacked the flavor of it.

It is not anything so grand as synaesthesia. I don't think that voicing my sins actually tastes like an artificial sweetness, one so sweet that it hurts your teeth despite the implicit promise that it not do that. It's not an actual flavor in my mouth, just this sense so strong that that is how sin must taste spilling from the lips, that is how confession must taste.

Thinking back, this has always been the case for me, at least when talking about anything of such dire import.

I remember the night I decided to leave Saint John's. I remember leaving the library and walking to the quad, taking the long way home to put off walking alongside traffic on the road. I remember praying as I looked up to the stars, and then as I sat on the grass, and then I remembered that same tang of confession in my mouth as I said to myself, "I don't want to be here."

I tasted that again today, still taste it.

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned," is when the taste started. "It has been three weeks since my last confession."

Citrusy-sweet words from a clumsy mouth.

“I have felt desire towards someone...”

Sweet, gritty, leaving the tongue feeling a little too dry.

“...who I am not sure feels the same towards me...”

Salivary glands working overtime.

“...and it is taking a toll on me. I can’t think of anything else.”

And then, with a few words, the taste beginning to lessen, the words of my priest: “Are these thoughts adulterous in nature?”

“No, Father. She is not married.”

“Do they stem from lust?”

I frowned down at my paws. “I don’t think so. It is an overwhelming need to be with her, even just romantically. Like I need her in my life.”

“Like you need to possess her? Keep her? Do you covet her?”

“Perhaps. Certainly to an extent.”

“And what have you done to address these thoughts?”

The crushing weight of my iniquity sliding from the back of my neck to rest on my shoulders. I shrug weakly. “I have been praying for understanding, but Father, I don’t want to rid myself of them. I want to fulfill them. I want to be good to her, I want her to be happy. I just also want to be a part of that.”

“I see.”

“So maybe it is a form of jealousy, or perhaps envy. I’m yearning for something I can’t have.”

“You can’t have that fulfillment?”

“No I just...” I fumbled for words before coming up with, “It just feels like I can’t have that, like it’s out of reach.”

“I see two aspects, here.” The voice was quiet, comforting. “The first is that you are lusting for her — and I say lust because there is more to that word than simply the carnal. It has to do with a de-

sire that is out of control, to the point where it truly claims you. Lust and greed can go hand in hand, and both tie into the second aspect, which is that you are coveting something to the point of distraction. You are spending more time thinking about the little lie you've told yourself, that you can't have her, than you are about the world around you. Does that sound correct, my son?"

"Yes, Father."

After a moment's silence, the priest continued. "We all know the commandment that you should love your neighbor as yourself. There is a balance to be struck there, because you still have to love yourself, too. You don't disappear out of these equations just by virtue of loving your neighbor, you still have to attend to your own needs. If you need that love in your life, then perhaps that is worth seeking out, because not doing so only seems to be causing you pain. Does that make sense?"

It stung to have that laid bare in front of me. I counted three long, slow breaths before I replied. "Yes, Father, that makes sense."

There was silence on the other side of the screen, and I could hear a quiet cough from outside the confessional. Words failed me, and a pang of worry that I was being unfair with the priest's time. The tang on my lips was starting to fade, so perhaps I had voiced all I could.

"For these and all my past sins, I ask pardon of God, penance, and absolution from you, Father."

A soft hum on the other side of the screen, that soft noise the priest always makes when considering penance. And then, "Alright, my son. I would like you to say five Our Fathers for your penance. I also want you think on who it is that you're envious of, or what you are jealous of. Think about that balance of loving others and loving

yourself, and ask yourself who it is that you are hurting in these situations as you pray.”

The weight on my shoulders slid down and off of me. “Thank you, Father.”

That was Wednesday, and coming on Friday evening, now, I still do not know the root of my jealousy. I waffle still.

Sometimes, it feels like envy. It feels like I’m craving something that I cannot have, something that is being kept from me in some form or another. By whom? Who would possibly be keeping me from Kay? Kay herself? God? Myself? I cannot begin to place any sort of blame on any one source.

Other times, however, I recognize that there is nothing keeping me from ‘having’ her, and that perhaps I am simply jealous of something that I do not yet have, but see myself having in the future.

And other times still, both words fail, and I’m left simply with yearning.

I’m left with yearning, and I know that the only one who I am hurting in these situations is me, that to love myself as I would love a neighbor feels always out of reach.

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I see a client with obsessive compulsive disorder. She has a tendency to pick at her fur and skin, some troubles with physical affection that make her feel ‘gross’, a fear of driving that leads her to worry that someone has been struck by the car, and a sort of external claustrophobia that leads her to struggle with the idea of closed-in spaces such as cabinets and cupboards, which we suspect stems from some early childhood abuse.