

Not Seeking Fame

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The hand on my thigh is disguised as a fatherly gesture.
"I can make you famous," he says,
And his finger slides between my legs, flicking upwards.

I never set out to be famous,
Just funny.

"As a rule, I don't like female comedians,"
A man says after the show,
"But you're pretty good."

Being funny is against the rules.

"She's not funny," the club owners tell the agency,
When they really mean to say,
"She didn't flirt back."

Simply being funny was breaking their rules.

I tell the club owner about the headliner
Pressing his erection against me.
He keeps working the club.
I'm never asked back.

There must be a rule against reporting it.

I turn down all those New York and New Jersey gigs
Because as he offers to book me,
He says we'll share a hotel room.

I just want to share my jokes.

"Show me your tits," chants the table in the back.

Listen to my jokes, I silently beg.

Comedians' offers to pleasure me
Come with creative, vulgar specificity.
They negotiate down their own requests
Until they plead, "Just touch it."

Just let me be funny.

I seek allies.

My friends try to help me.
It's assumed I am sleeping with them.

My friends don't defend me
Because it will be assumed I am sleeping with them.

I seek allies.

"You just got a chip on your shoulder,"
A comic friend says,

But he's not even looking at my shoulder.

I seek allies.

The female booker cancels my gigs
Because I win more attention than she.

I seek allies.

My friends don't defend me when she spreads the lies
Because they don't want to lose the work.

I'm funny, and that's all I want to be.

The bell curve's macabre meander
Climbs from ignorance to realization to resistance,
Falls at punishment to acceptance to ignorance.
I stop talking about it so I won't lose the work.
I'm funny, and that's all I want to be.
I falter with frailty of spirit
And move my line,
And so their eyes, comments, hands move further.
I never set out to be famous;
I just need the work.

I seek allies.

I break my rules.

But that bell rings again.

A man I worked with and laughed with before
Is now blocking the door,
Trying to force a physical favor.
I'm not disappointed, annoyed, or offended now.
I'm scared.
He's stronger than I,
And there's no way out.

Some desperate feral strength in my words
Manages to outwrestle his physical strength,
And I escape.

And I climb the bell back to that peak of resistance,
To be called bitter,
To be called difficult,
To be called unprofessional,
To be called anything but funny.

But I am funny,
Despite their rules,
And I call myself dignified,
Despite their rumors,
And I call myself precious,
Despite their promises of fame,
To avert and dodge and deflect and escape,
To call myself the simplest state
Of safe.