



Talking to Strangers

Description



Midweight linen and cotton batting

The grocery store / coffee shop has a glassed-in patio with rows of tiny tables and normal-sized chairs. Red light is emanating from the ceiling and seems to carry with it a concentration of warmth. It's actually so warm my friend, Elizabeth, and I take off our winter coats moments after claiming one of the tables. Nearly all the tables are taken, but we find one along the East side. We start to sip our coffee. The heat keeps coming. We take off our sweaters. I wonder if the man sitting at the tiny table squeezed beside us is annoyed with our conversation. He is typing away at his keyboard. It looks important. And then, as I'm coming back from tossing a napkin in the rubbish bin, a retired man with a blue gingham shirt stops to ask about the camera I have with me.





Talking with strangers is one of the joys of my life. I'm interested to hear why this man is asking about my camera, so I listen for a while. We're caught in between the door to the grocery store and one of those tiny tables packed in the hot greenhouse patio. After a few moments of conversation, someone behind him is waiting to open the door. As I step back to allow room for the door, I accidentally bump into the tiny table behind me. The table occupant is evidently so annoyed by the intrusion, understandably, that he quickly leaves the greenhouse. I'm embarrassed. After a few minutes when it's clear the conversation isn't going to come to a natural end and has started veering in directions other than cameras, I try graciously to find an exit and say how nice it was to meet him. I swim through the heat and the sea of tiny tables back to my friend at our own.



Wrapped up in my self drafted, quilted vest made from lovely FS Sphinx Midweight linen and cotton batting

A short time later, my new camera friend calls through the red glow. He's taken up residence two tables away. Our typing neighbor, still working on his important document, is unfortunately situated between us. Apparently, my gracious exit from the conversation earlier wasn't as final as I thought. I'm soon roped into full conversation again. "What lens did you say?" My retired friend asks. "IT'S A 50MM LENS," I say again, more loudly this time.





I find myself in a triangle which will inevitably inconvenience someone. If we keep shouting across tables, the typing man between us will surely be annoyed. If I shut down the conversation, the retired man could be offended. He was being very kind, after all. I didn't want to respond to his kindness with curtness. If I join him at his table, I would be cutting into precious friend time with Elizabeth.



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“NOW WHAT IS IT YOU DON’T LIKE ABOUT ZOOM LENSES?” He shouts over. Just as I am reaching peak embarrassment about shouting across tables, our typing neighbor is apparently reaching peak annoyance. He packs up and walks out of the sauna. The second casualty.



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At this point, a middle-aged man sinks into the seat on the other side and cracks open an enormous beverage. The heat hits him and he takes off his winter coat the same time a thought hits me. I bet some of these people come to this strange, glowing red grocery store steam room to just feel... human. To feel like they are getting a hug from the warmth emanating from the ceiling. To be near other people at these tiny tables when they are lonely.



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With this thought in mind, I feel terrible all over again about the two (*two*, *TWO*!) people leaving earlier, but I also feel hopeful. This warm place will still be here tomorrow. And next time maybe I will come alone and take the time to have a proper conversation if someone asks about my camera. Because deep down, aren't we all a bit lonely? We can all be someone else's stranger to talk to on lonely days. Strangers, especially ones who don't bump into your table, can be lovely.

CATEGORY

1. COMMUNITY

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