

## Party Police

At the front of the stage there is a sleek black amplifier, which is reverberating their sound like the others. The crowd beneath its resonance is not unified, but rather they are bound by the mutual experience. The speaker of this lowest amp, well-used but powerful as ever, seems pulsating, fore and aft. The young bassist, shining from her slick, earned sweat, the lights, and her uninhibited stage presence, heeds to her precise instrument. The glassy collected frontwoman is standing to her right on a soapbox, curving to their song “No Eye Cerberus,” which she is gracelessly nailing. They are playing with indifferent strut and the brisk keyboardist is igniting zealously on the vitals of their instrument.

Near the back center of the stage is a stout drummer with his hair down to his shoulders, binding every individual in the space together with each of his strikes. Every member of the band, and every listener in the audience, hears the exact same sounds, but each of them hears it in a slightly different way—some count in fours, and some in eights, and some do not count at all, and simply feel the rhythms in their bodies, wherever they feel them, in their bones, in their skin, in their frontal lobe. The vibrations of the amplifiers, translating and undulating the vibrations of the band, curl around the audience like strings around fingers. A teenage couple, who are swaying and bumping into others around them with unmindful bliss, are attached to three girls, no older than thirteen, who stand in a small circle, facing each other and enthusiastically mouthing lyrics to each other, and they, in turn, are tied to a blonde middle-aged woman in a gray hoodie, who is standing behind them, unmoving, arms crossed, but smiling slightly in the reflection of the stage lights, and she is tethered to a chubby college student to her right who is shouting the lyrics with unmatched verve, shooting his left arm into the air with a

pointed finger every third line or so, and each of them is only ostensibly aware that the others exist. They are hearing the lyrics, but this means something different to each of them, and, in a sort of way, this proves that the song is only about one thing, and it has nothing to do with the lyrics. It is, at least, not really about a cerberus.

Later, these ties will come undone. Instruments will be put down, and lights will be turned off, and over the next twenty to thirty minutes, hundreds of feet will shuffle through open doors, and out of open doors, and onto streets, and into cars, or into late night bars and clubs, into houses, into apartments, into hotels. A teenage couple will order a Lyft and hold hands in the back of the car on the way back to their homes, while a stranger in the front seat will play R&B music just slightly too loud. One will get out, and later, the other, and they will split the price of the ride. Neither will comment on the music. Three girls, no older than thirteen, will get into the back seat of a blue Kia Sportage, and later lay down in sleeping bags under the same roof, and wake the next morning as if from a dream. A blonde middle-aged woman will drive out of town, and take 95 back to her home, which is a few hours away. On the way, she will stop at a diner, and order two eggs, hash browns, a corn muffin, and a black coffee. A chubby college student will walk just a few blocks away to a dark dorm room, where he will step lightly to his room, past the rooms of his two roommates, who have long been asleep. Each of them will have long forgotten who they were standing next to just a short time ago.

The ties between the band members, in a certain way, will come undone, too. They will not come apart, but they will loosen, like a worn shoelace on a wayward foot, or a patient before a therapist. Backstage, their eyes will meet each other's with a gentle tiredness. The keyboardist will give the drummer their big grin, and tell him that they thought that someone in the front row

looked like their high school English teacher, Mr. Rimes, and the two of them will laugh for a few seconds. In the van, the bassist will lightly touch the vocalist's hand with hers, and their hands will stay touching for awhile. In the hotel room, other things will touch, too. Still tethered, but with slack. There are still more sets to play. They will play them together. There is a visceral comfort in this.

In the midst of all of this, the venue will find itself superficially empty—a vacant black void where there were people before, cold and somewhat hostile, where before it was warmed by its lights and the crowd and the energy which consumed the stage. The amps will be silent, and there will be no instruments, nor anyone there to play them, or to hear them be played. There will be only imperceptible bands playing to imperceptible crowds in silence; silence as if the room had become a black box graveyard, where the caskets are empty spaces that hold no bodies. Something else remains, but it rests along with its home.

Before all of this, though, there is the encore. The band has left the stage, and the lights have dimmed slightly, but the audience is still cheering, and shouting, and clapping, and there is more to be heard. In the din, the threads around them are bound so tight that they might burst. They do not burst, and because the bonds are so intangible, neither are they strangled by them. The band returns to the stage at a moderate pace to even louder cheers, even louder shouts and applause, and as they approach their instruments, the vocalist pushes her black hair behind her ear and leans into the microphone.

“Thank you for coming. We really would be nothing without you.”

And they begin to play. She opens her mouth to sing, and it is ethereal. Not her voice, but the whole of the thing.

There is, perhaps, something cyclical in it. On preceding nights, there were other bands, and on proceeding nights, there will be more. They will play different songs, for a different audience, and these individuals will be untethered and go to different places. Perhaps, also, it is always the same band, playing the same songs, for the same audience. Metaphorically, but also sometimes literally. In this way, it is a cycle, too. They will only wear different clothes, have different cells.

But a process being cyclical does not mean that there is no point to it. Many pointed things have cycles to them. Water, for example. Revolving doors. Life itself. There is a point, and it lies in a sleek black amplifier, and bassists and singers and keyboards and drummers, and rhythms counted in fours and in eights and not at all, and sound like invisible string, and ridesharing services and sleepovers and college dorm rooms and in a corn muffin had at 5 AM, alone in the company of others. There is a point, and it lies in cheers and shouts and applause and hands touching in tour vans and bodies touching in hotel rooms. There is a point, and you can't always see it from where you are.

I can see it from where I am.

Thank you for coming. We really would be nothing without you.