

In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 45

5-4-2018

Can I Tell You a Secret

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Recommended Citation

Hall, Ryan (2018) "Can I Tell You a Secret," *In the Ords: CSUMB Literary Arts Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 45.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ords/vol1/iss2/45>

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“Can I Tell You a Secret?”

He began, loud enough I could hear him across the coffee shop with headphones in and with twenty-five conversations going on, “Can I tell you a secret?”

The woman across from him startled at the level of his voice, then looked around to see everyone covertly looking back at her. She whipped her face back to him, cheeks hot and said,

“Yes, whatever, just keep your voice down, everyone is looking at us!”

“Let them look,” he stood up to face the audience he was performing for now, “everyone can I have your attention please? I would like to make an announcement! I would like to tell you all a secret, but most importantly, I would like to tell this gorgeous, sexy, and wonderful woman beside me, a secret.”

No one heard the shocked, “Oh no.”

Not after what he said next. “This woman right here is the love of my life. We met right here, almost a year and a half ago. This very table actually. We were meeting a mutual friend of ours who was planning their thirtieth birthday party. Despite both of us knowing her for years, we never met. Fate intervened that day, though, fate knew we had to meet. The secret, this secret I cannot hold onto any longer, I want to marry you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you, to start a family and own a house and have your support on every journey in our lives. That’s it, that’s my secret.”

At this he turned back around, smoothly sliding onto one knee in front of the woman he had been talking about. Her beanie had been haphazardly thrown on and her shaking hand were struggling to fit into her gloves. He hesitated for only a second before continuing,

“Amelia, my beautiful Amelia Taylor, will you do me the incredibly humbling honor of becoming my wife?”

Silence.

As far as secrets go, this one had to be the least-well-kept and most shocking secret Amelia has ever been told.

Onion-bagel guy clicked off his call, the previously wailing children stared with wide and confused eyes, no milk was being steamed nor shots were poured, and some teenage girl and her mom hovered in the entryway, scarfs still wrapped tight around their throats, uncomfortably warm.

I stared. Silence continued on. Ten more seconds, and another ten seconds, and another ten seconds.

Amelia stood, and grabbed his hand, pulling him up in front of her.

“Ben.”

The “Oh, no,” that fell out of his mouth, everyone heard.

“Ben, you know what my answer is. Why...” She trailed off, once again seeing the audience, “Why did you do this?” People, everyone in the world it seemed, strained to hear her quaking voice. Her eyes bright, did not shine with tears, but restrained anger. He did not answer, but his hands came up swift to grab her face, his fingers warm on her already hot cheeks. He looked and looked and looked and ten more silent seconds passed in agony for everyone watching this play reach its climax. Ten more seconds. I have never hated time more than in that moment.

He kissed her.

She pushed him off.

Everyone gasped.

“What are you doing?! Why? WHY?” She could no longer be restrained. Ripping her jacket off the back of her chair and shoved her arms through the jacket and tried to grab her purse. Both of them reached for the bag at the same time. His grip firm, pleading, confused. Her grip determined and harsh, ready to leave.

“Why?” both his cheek and ego throbbing as he actually became aware of what was happening to him, to *him*. “Amelia.”

All he could say was her name. Breathing hard and not letting go of her bag,

“Amelia, I love you. Don’t go, please, what did I do wrong? I called your dad last week, I asked permission and everything. We can talk about this. I promise whatever you are mad at, I apologize and I will make it better.”

His last sentence, now a whisper, “Just don’t go, please, everyone is watching.”

She exploded.

“EVERYONE IS WATCHING?!” She reeled around to face the coffee shop propelled by the wraith of an angry god.

“LISTEN UP THEN, EVERYONE, THIS MAN WILL NEVER BE MY HUSBAND!”

Panting, she continued, “We are not even *dating*. You’re my friend, you’ve never asked me out or told me how you feel! Why would you ask me to marry you?”

He attempted to yell something about grand gestures and getting out of the friendzone, but she interrupted him.

Facing him she lowers her volume only slightly before yanking her purse from his grip finally and says, “You’re expecting me to play this beautiful little thing for you to manipulate. I cannot, will not, ever be that thing you want me to be, I will never be beautiful in that way you want me to be. I will never be your wife, your property, or under your control. Ever.”

Ten seconds.

Ten more seconds.

Then, the moment, people, the world truly ended, ten more seconds.

He slapped her. The sounds reverberated against every open laptop, every trendy dark wood table, echoing as the force of the hit took her to the ground.

And in those ten seconds the world ended and rebuilt itself.