

Silent Movie

Ric Hess

I like to go to the movies alone. It's easier that way. No one to worry about—*Are you enjoying the film? Are you comfortable? Do you need anything?* No bullshit about asking someone where they want to sit, how close or far away from the screen, or in what section of the row. I get my popcorn and soda, I pick my seat, I sit down and watch the movie.

This one girl I knew, Nancy, was from Detroit. Her family was fabulously wealthy. She was beautiful, a brilliant conversationalist, possessed of a radiant personality and a sensational ass. She liked to discuss plot lines as they developed. We lasted two months.

Now I sit by myself, in splendid isolation. I go to the matinees, when I know it won't be too crowded. I pick my place, stretch my legs up on the seat in front of me, rumple my coat and bag across the seats on either side. I make it very obvious that I am not available for chitchat. Still, the world is full of idiots.

Some people, it seems, are desperate for the company of strangers. Or perhaps they can't imagine someone actually desiring ninety minutes of solitary contemplation. Invariably I attract these people. I think at those times of the sensible nature of concealed weapons permits.

They sit down, among a sea of available chairs, in the seats right behind me, or worse, the ones in front of mine. If they come in numbers, they start to chatter. They seem to imagine that they are alone in the comfort of their living room, catching up on gossip. They regard the movie as a pleasant diversion. As they take their seats, they turn and smile as if they assume I will be pleased that they have chosen to keep me company.

I used to suffer the presence of these people in silent agony. At worst I would get up and move, slamming my belongings together, muttering under my breath. The interlopers would look on, confused,

as I moved away, as if I was the offender; the crazy person, the gauche buffoon. If I'm crazy, I finally reasoned, I might as well have some fun.

They were a couple—middle aged, well dressed. There were perhaps a dozen other people in the theater, spread out at considerate intervals. I saw them enter, look around tentatively, make their way toward me. The previews were already underway. I shrunk down in my seat and exuded simmering anger. It didn't help. The seats they chose were, of course, directly in front of mine.

The woman stood there, blocking the screen, took off her hat and coat, shook out her hair, stretched luxuriously, turned to me and smiled. Her companion began to read the credits out loud.

"Hello," she said, "Lovely afternoon for a film, isn't it?"

"Fuck a duck," I replied.

"I beg your pardon," her escort turned to look at me, not sure he'd heard correctly.

"Cocksucker, bugger ball, cunt-hair," I told him. My tone was matter of fact.

"My God!" The woman exclaimed "Are you out of your mind?"

"Butt pirate, cunnilingus, baby shit," I said.

The woman grabbed her hat and coat, they fled, not just to other seats, but the theater entirely. I waited for management, for remonstrations, but there was none forthcoming. I sank back down, pleased with myself, chuckling.

"That was brilliant," a woman whispered. She was sitting two rows behind me and a little to the right. She had long dark hair and violet eyes. I'd noticed her when I came in. She leaned over and tapped my shoulder. "What did you say to them?"

"Just enough," I said, and she smiled at me. I experienced a sudden change of heart, I moved my coat off the chair next to mine.

"Would you like to sit down?" I asked her.

She reacted as if she'd heard a fart in church.

"No thanks," she told me, "I always watch movies alone."