White Space

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What goes on in the blank spaces of a page?

http://www.lushstories.com/stories/quickie-sex/white-space.aspx

He paused, "You know it's strange, but I can't seem to remember anything at all."

Robert stood in the doorway, unsure what to do, disoriented.

"Is that so?" said a voice from inside the room.

"Yes," Robert said, frowning. "Believe it or not, for a second there I couldn't even remember my own name!"

Charlotte looked around the corner at him. "I hope you haven't forgotten mine."

"Charlotte! Of course." Robert laughed. "Now that you mention it, it almost feels like I didn't know it at first. And..." He looked around. "Damndest thing, but I can't remember where we are."

"My hotel room," Charlotte said, leading him in by the wrist.

Robert looked at the cream-colored carpet, wide bed, and heavy curtains pulled tight over large windows.

"So it is. Odd that I should forget right after coming in here. Actually, it wasn't even like forgetting, it was like I never knew it in the first place. Imagine that, to all of a sudden find yourself somewhere and not know where it is, or why you're there, or who you are."

Charlotte took a bottle of wine out of the mini fridge. "It's traditional to begin a story in medias res."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"In the middle of the action, so that the reader will be drawn in by questions about the things they don't at first know." She handed him a glass.

"But how can the reader find out what's happened before the story began?" He had no idea what she was talking about, but he loved listening to her throaty voice.

"It has to be communicated through exposition," she said. "For example, if I were to say that we just met in the hotel bar an hour ago, and that I'd picked up on you, and that it was all my idea to come up here to my room."

"I guess that does fill in the blanks a bit."

Robert frowned. Something about this conversation seemed very odd to him.

"Something about this conversation seems very odd to me," he said, and then he blinked. "I don't know why I just said that. I mean, it's true, but the exact way I said it, it feels... artificial? As though they weren't really my words at all, but ones that someone else picked for me? So strange..."

Robert swallowed half his wine at once, feeling selfconscious. Charlotte smiled without showing her teeth.

"I'm sure it's just my imagination," he said.

"Certainly," Charlotte said, setting her glass down and moving to the bed.

She was tall, with wide hips, small breasts, and long dark hair. Her red dress fit like a second skin.

"Have you ever noticed how a story will sometimes describe the secondary characters but not the main one?" she said.

"No, I hadn't," said Robert.

Charlotte kicked her shoes off. Robert set his glass down next to hers and crossed the room to the bed, loosening his tie as he did.

"Well, I guess that means—" he stopped. "Would it sound crazy if I said that I didn't even notice I was wearing a tie until I just loosened it?"

"Incidental objects don't usually enter a story until an action needs to be performed with them. You left your briefcase by the door."

Robert looked back. "So I did."

"A seemingly trivial detail that's singled out early on may become important later."

"Do you... do you hear something?"

"Like what?" said Charlotte. She had her back to him now.

"A kind of clicking noise?"

"Like a tapping?"

"Yes!"

"No, I don't," she said.

Robert looked around. "I'm hearing it all the time, but I can't tell where it's coming from. No, actually, it's not all the time, it's only when one of us says something, or does something. If we stay very still and don't say a word—"

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"It stops, until we do something again."

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"Like that!" he said.

"It's probably not important. Like your briefcase. Are you going to take all night to kiss me?" She pouted her red lips.

Robert leaned in, putting one hand on her hip, brushing his lips over hers once, then leaning in a bit more, kissing deeper.

"Mmm. You know a first kiss can be the most important part of an erotic story."

"But what do stories have to do with—"

She kissed him again, wine-stained lips panting hot breaths on his open mouth.

Charlotte turned and unzipped the red dress, letting it fall down her shoulders and hips and then stepping out of it.

"Black is the most common color for women's underwear in fiction," she said, turning to show off her black bra and panties combo.

She took hold of his tie, pulled him to the bed by it, then pulled it off entirely and tossed it across the room. She ran her hands down his chest, opening each of the buttons on his shirt in one swift motion.

He kisses her neck as she stripped the shirt off his back, running her lacquered nails over his shoulders. She pushed him to the bed, pinning him, then swung one leg over his body and settled down to straddle him between her thighs.

"I guess I'm meant to be the dominant character in this scenario," she said, sounding bored.

"You say the strangest things."

"That's because I'm breaking the fourth wall," she replied. Charlotte unhooked her bra, tossing it aside without paying attention to where it landed.

She licked the ends of her fingers and swirled them around her large, puffy nipples, flicking the tips as they stood erect, then guiding his hands to her breasts. He massaged them in a circle, savoring the feel of the soft, hot flesh.

"Pinch harder please. Mmm, good. Harder."

She shook her hair out, letting it fall in curls across her back, a few stray locks spilling over her shoulders and trailing the lines of her collarbone. She squeezed his body between her thighs until he grunted and then relaxed just enough to let him to catch his breath.

Her smile was not entirely friendly as she applied pressure again, grinding her crotch against the bulge in his pants, sweeping her hips in a steady motion back and forth against him, pushing down, teasing him with the soft, wet, inviting spot between her legs.

Robert experienced a sensation of swimming, or falling, or fighting (he wasn't sure which). He felt, for some reason, as though nothing about this situation made sense. Try as he might, he could not recall anything about the night before coming to this room except what Charlotte had told him, and even then in terms no more specific than what she had said. It was like an invisible force was pushing him forward and he had only the choice of going along with it or being crushed by the wave.

Charlotte, meanwhile, had ripped his pants off. Her smile grew even more unfriendly as she pressed the tip of a long nail against the bulge now clearly visible under his briefs. She shimmied down his body, locking her knees against his, rubbing the bulge, the corners of her mouth twitching when his breath quickened. She slid her fingers against the waistband, then under it, and flung the last garment aside.

She circled two fingers around the shaft of his cock, forming a ring and stroking from the base up to the head.

"'Cock' is easily the most common euphemism for a man's genitalia in fiction" she said. "It's one of the few truly vulgar words that rarely spoils the mood."

Charlotte squeezed tighter, fingers rubbing against the smooth skin and reflexively contracting muscles of his erection. She raised herself up enough to guide his cock between her thighs, pushing her panties aside, sinking down slowly as her wet lips slid over his swollen shaft.

Robert grunted, thrusting up and grinding against the inside of her cunt.

"Did I—" he said, gasping, "did I just thrust up and grind against the inside of your, er, cunt?"

She raised an eyebrow. "I don't think I've ever heard anyone say it quite like that."

"I don't think they were my words. Do you ever have that feeling like you're not in control of yourself?"

"Oh, I love that feeling," she said, tossing her head back and beginning to ride him, bouncing up and then dropping back down to the satisfying smack of her naked thighs on his.

"That's not what I meant," said Robert.

"Shhh. Just concentrate on this for now," she said, stroking one of his cheeks.

She arched her shoulders and back muscles to drive down on him with greater force, biting her lip as she did.

"Verbs tend to cluster together as a sex scene goes on," she said, eyes closed, head tilted back, frame shaking with the effort of each downward thrust. "Common words are," she gasped, unable to speak for a second, then the list spilled out of her in a rush: "'moan', 'gasp', 'scream', 'pant', 'tremble', 'shake', 'ache', 'claw', 'writhe', 'thrust', or even, if it's that kind of story, just 'fuck.'"

All at once she fell on top of him, keeping her back arched, the wave-like motions of her body continuing. Her face and open, panting mouth were only a few inches from his.

Robert had that feeling again, of being forced ahead. It wasn't just Charlotte's aggressive style, it was a feeling like strings being pulled, as though each movement, each word, each breath that he took was being determined independently of him, and he was just following directives.

Charlotte's lips were so close to his that they touched in an impromptu, open-mouthed kiss when she spoke:

"Do you feel it?" she said, her body convulsing.

"Yes," he said, his mouth open, gasping.

"Are you sure? Are you sure that you feel and that you're not just being made to feel?"

"What's the difference?" he said, his hands moving over her hot, sweaty flesh, but even as he said it he knew the difference, had known it all along, had just that very moment been thinking about it, but still other words formed and left his mouth seemingly without his consent.

She responded by pounding down on him so hard he thought he might break, the sensation created by that moment so intense that any response was, for the moment, impossible.

"And finally," she said, eyes closed, brow knit with concentration, "describing the climax is the most challenging thing of all. There are," she said, voice growing faint with exertion, "many ways to go about it. For example, one might ground the sequence by expressing it through purely physical means..."

Charlotte's pace quickened into a rabid frenzy, rocking back and forth faster and faster, the bedsprings straining under her exertion. Robert's hands slid over the curves of her waist, hips, and naked thighs, all slick with sweat.

Her breasts were crushed against his chest, her face buried against his neck, a keening moan from

somewhere deep in her throat gradually growing louder and higher as her nails bit into his shoulders. Her cunt became hotter and wetter with each second

"Or," she murmured, so softly he could barely hear her, "you could try to express it through outsize descriptions of sensations and state of mind."

Charlotte moaned as pleasure welled up inside of her, spilling out, overflowing, saturating her senses, the hot, aching, electric force of it stimulating every inch of her from head to toe. She felt it take hold of her, throw her back, push her down, and finally burst inside her, expanding past the limits of her body, her mind, her feelings, her self, and then crashing back in to fill the void it had left behind, leaving her drifting, helpless, numb, inebriated with the force of it, dragging Robert along in her wake all the while until both were spent.

They lay quiet for a long time, the only sound their matched panting and the wild beating of their hearts.

"Of course," she said, when she could talk again, "all of that is a matter of personal style. Everyone expresses things their own way."

He dressed in silence while she lolled on the bed, watching him with half-closed eyes.

"That was amazing," he said, "but strange. I can't remember what you were saying, but I remember that it made me feel very confused. And very uncomfortable."

"That's because you're not a self-aware character," she said, sounding bored again.

"I just wish I knew what that damn noise was," said Robert. "It's still there, that clicking! It's been there all along."

"It's a keyboard," said Charlotte.

Robert looked at her. "A keyboard?"

"Yes. It's the sound of our words and actions being written. That's why you only hear it when one of us is doing or saying something."

Robert stood with his belt dangling in his hand, staring at it without seeing it.

"What did you just say?"

"I don't know, read it back. Hand me my bra, would you?"

Robert found it flung over the back of a chair and passed it to her. He felt dazed and his head hurt.

"I feel dazed and my head hurts," he said. "And I don't know why I just said that. And I'm sure I didn't really feel it until just before I said it. And I don't understand what you're saying at all."

"I'm saying you're not real, Robert. And neither am I, neither is this room, or this conversation. We're just fiction. This is a story, Robert," she continued. "You're a regular guy and I'm a woman who's no good for you and we're having a night of cheap thrills, and then you're going to have a horrible revelation. That's our plot."

Robert's mouth went dry and his palms began to sweat.

"This is all being made up as it goes along," Charlotte said. "That's why you couldn't remember anything when you first got here, because that was the beginning of the story, and nothing had been written yet. But when it was written who you were and where you were and what you were doing, it was as though those things had been true all along."

Robert finished dressing. "Look, I don't really know what you're talking about, but I'm positive that it doesn't make any sense."

"You think you're real, don't you?"

"Of course I do!" he said.

"Do you have a last name, Robert?"

He froze.

"Surely you must?" said Charlotte. "If you were a real person, you would. Maybe you should check if it's the name on your briefcase?"

He felt sick to his stomach. "But if I'm just a character, then you must be too!" he said.

"Of course I am," she said.

"Then how do you know all of this? How is it that you know all the things that I don't? Are you writing

this?"

"Of course not! It's just my dialogue. I only seem like I know everything because the writer has decided to use me to voice exposition.The same information could come through omniscient narration instead.But dialogue is more interesting to read." She studied her nails as she talked.

"But surely people in stories don't know that they're in stories!" said Robert.

"Not normally, no. Do you feel frightened?"

"Yes!"

"Good. Your existential horror is important for thematic purposes."

Robert wiped his sweaty palms on his pants. "How is that you're so damn calm about all of this?"

Charlotte laughed. "It's how I'm written. But I can react entirely differently if I'm written another way. I'm a fantasy girl in a sex story, I can be anything. What if I were a frightened, hysterical waif who needs saving?"

Charlotte's eyes went wide and she started to shake. She grabbed Robert by the wrists and pulled him toward the door, half screaming and half sobbing.

"Robert, Robert, I don't understand what's going on!" she said. "I don't know why I said all of those things or what that awful noise is or what's happening to us! Robert, let's get out of here, I'm scared, I'm so scared, I don't know what will happen next but I know I don't want it to, please Robert, help me, help me!"

Robert pulled his hands away, horrified, and Charlotte burst out laughing again.

"See how easy it is?"

"That was a very convincing act," Robert said, rubbing his wrists.

"It wasn't an act. I meant it all. But now I don't. Or maybe I do still, but I'm supposed to act as though I don't? Maybe I'm even more a prisoner of this story than you are, not allowed to express the same terrible fear that I know we both feel. It hardly matters."

Robert paced the room, running his hands through his hair. "This is the craziest damn thing I've ever

heard! Are we even real? Are we even here?"

"There is no here! It's all just words, words, words. I'm only here now because I'm speaking dialogue. Then again—"

Maybe I'm not here at all. Maybe just my dialogue is. Or maybe

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"Stop, stop it!" Robert covered his head. "It's horrible!"

"I'm sorry Robert, but that's the kind of story this is," said Charlotte. "Of course, it's almost over."

Robert looked up. For a moment he couldn't breathe. "It is?" he said.

"Oh yes. There are only a few more pages. It's a short story Robert, a very short story."

"But I don't want my story to end! What will happen to me when it does?" Robert's voice cracked.

"Do you know what happened to Ishmael after the end of 'Moby Dick'?"

"No?"

"Nothing! There is no Ishmael. There is no Moby Dick. They're just collections of words, and when there are no more words then there is nothing else. Soon this story will be over. And to tell you the truth, I don't think you're going to make it all the way." Charlotte stood. "I think you might be leaving this story even before it ends."

Robert backed away. "But I don't want to! Can't I stay? Can't I do more?"

"Probably not. You're not very interesting."

"I can develop!"

"That sounds like a lot of work." Charlotte yawned.

"What if there's something the reader doesn't know about me?" A million thoughts tumbled through Robert's mind. "What if I'm coping with the death of my fiancé? Or what if my fiancé is alive and I just slept with you to get back at her for cheating on me first, but now I only feel worse, and I'll find her and have a reconciliation?

"Or what if—" He groped for an idea. "What if I've robbed a bank, and I'm on the run, and I'm about to take you hostage? Yes, that would keep the story going!"

He looked at his briefcase. "I bet there's a gun in there!" he said. "And stacks of unmarked bills."

Charlotte shook her head. "I doubt it."

"But look how often the briefcase was mentioned earlier, to make sure that readers noticed it! That must mean that there's something important inside, something that will keep the story going!"

Robert's hands shook as he fumbled with the briefcase latch. "Don't worry Charlotte, whatever is inside of here and wherever I go next, I'll be sure to take you with me. I won't let our story end now!"

"It won't work Robert. You still don't understand."

"Yes, yes I do! Don't you see, the briefcase is open!"

"And what's inside, Robert?"

"Why it's, it's... nothing at all. There's nothing in the briefcase. Of course, it was a red herring…" Robert's voice became faint and his eyes lost focus. "The whole purpose of the briefcase was to mislead the audience, to heighten the surprise here at the climax. This is the moment of final dramatic revelation, which is why my voice has become faint and my eyes have lost focus, physical details that communicate the emotional trauma I'm going through. It all makes sense, if you think about it."

Charlotte closed the briefcase and patted Robert's hand. "And now it's time to go away. That was your entire character arch."

"But can't I stay a little longer? Just one more page, one more paragraph, a few extra lines?"

"I'm walking you to the door now, and now I'm opening it for you and saying good night."

They stood in the doorway.

"What will happen to me?" Robert said. "Is it like dying?"

"Only real people die."

"But I could almost be like a real person! People say that about characters, don't they, that it almost feels like they're real?" Robert stopped. "But that's not going to happen to me, is it? I'm going away now, aren't I?"

Charlotte nodded. "Once I close this door you'll be written out of the story and you'll stop existing forever. Do you have anything you'd like to say before you go?"

Robert swallowed and licked his lips. "Well, I guess—"

Charlotte slammed the door in his face.

She stood for a minute, listening for his voice or footsteps. There weren't any.

She sighed.

"That was awfully mean. There must have been a nicer way to write him out."

She went to the table and poured herself a new glass of wine.

"Oh, of course, that's right I'm the bitch, I'm not supposed to care," she said. "Over-sexed, self-indulgent femme fatale who uses men and then discards them, that's my profile, right? I wish I weren't such a dull, misogynistic stereotype. Oh well, poor Robert, at least he got one good lay before he had to go."

She sipped her wine, and then she put a finger to her chin in thought.

"But wait, I just realized, there are no other characters," she said. "Now that he's gone, I don't have anything to do.And that must mean that *my* story is coming to..."