

“Friend Zone” – Dylan Garity

The first time I ever danced with a girl
she leaned in close and asked me:
why are your arms so stiff?
Dancing with you is like dancing with a mannequin,
if they made mannequins super bony
and with very sweaty palms.
And to be fair, my palms were sweaty
and simultaneously ice cold.
I was, and continue to be, a miracle of physics.

Who knew that adult hands could be supported by wrists
that a five-year-old or baby duck could easily snap.

This may be part of why I spent my teenage years
absolutely failing with women.
In middle school, I would ask girls
who I liked how much they weighed
to see if I might weigh more.
Numbers made me excited!
I loved math!
I used to think this meant everyone else loved math, too!

In high school, I became intimate—
with the friend zone.
With one girl, I spent so many years in the friend zone
I didn't even realize I was in it.
She was from Sweden
so I guess it was literally Stockholm syndrome.
I would come over to her house and help her with calculus
and I would comfort her and tell her how she was beautiful
or how her boyfriend was a dick or how integrals are related to derivatives.
Eventually, I spent so much time in the friend zone
that I grew to think of it as some kind
of magical home away from home, some lush forest
filled with unicorns and elves and puppies
none of whom were getting laid.

I was on an adventure!
Constantly uncovering new questions about this mystical place:

Are you in the friend zone if they're sleeping with other people and NOT telling you about it?
Are you in the friend zone if they tell you they could totally see marrying you in fifteen years?
Why would you marry me in fifteen years,
if in fifteen years I'll still be a virgin because you never slept with me?

A few months after my first girlfriend and I broke up,
I heard she lost her virginity to the next guy she dated.
At the time, I thought of this as a betrayal, not her choice.
As if she owed me something.

A newspaper column once defined the friend zone as follows:
She discusses her love life with him and has the "audacity" to ask his advice on it. He performs favors
for her. He does everything a boyfriend would do -- but without the benefits."

as if the only reason to be a good friend
or a decent fucking human
is if you get something in exchange.

The problem is, when I started
thinking of myself as a savior,
I ended up thinking of myself
as a savior with a salary.
You put in your hours as a nice guy
and sex is just a living wage
but sex is not a transaction.
Sex is not a handshake to seal some deal.
That girl did not owe me anything.

Last year, I heard that her home was broken into
in a neighborhood known for sexual assaults.

Nothing happened to her.

We all know the statistics.
Your rapist is more likely to be someone you know.
The boogie man, the stranger in the alley, is real,
but not as real as we are.

We all know the statistics
but we don't know how to accept
How easily we become part of the problem.

You cannot kill a monster
until you are willing to see it in the mirror.
Until you recognize its shape in your own skin.