

Common Casualty

I have never really been a yawner. Even when the days are too long and the next begins too soon, when my eyes puff with circles and my feet begin to scuff, I barely yawn. My parents, avid yawners, make their tiredness known, echoing through the house with every jaw dropping scoop of inhalation, a sigh - the cherry on top. Their yawns reflected a life satiated rather than spent. I, on the other hand, barely yawn. Yet, in the spring of solitude, I became witness to three new yawns, precipitated by the season's unbearable, undiagnosable monotony. Yawns characterized by a furrowing of the lips, a jaw opening to possible contamination, and eye ducts dripping like caves - these were not the yawns of fatigue or fulfillment. These were the yawns of impenetrable boredom.

The first yawn appeared during the beginning weeks at home. As a piano player, I occupied myself with the taps of black and white keys. The C major scale followed by warm-up tunes, eventually steering to a methodical and familiar song remained part of my daily agenda. As days became weeks, I decided to challenge myself with a new composition - *Liebstraum Love Dream*, a favorite Listz piece, hoping to lighten isolation's mood. My fingers battered the keys, playing the song at first with heavy force. Driven by purposeless purpose, my daily regime continued until my fingers began to caress instead of force the ebony and ivories. No longer was the song a daring distraction to emptiness. Instead, the mundane muscle memory replayed as easily as cutting with a fork and knife. The excitement of perfection dwindled until even my own mastery made my eyes grow weary and my foot weigh heavily on the pedal, blurring the sounds and eliciting the genesis of yawn number one.

A couple months in, my second yawn appeared. Unlike my piano playing, my sleep cycles followed no agenda or routine. Sleep became a new hobby, always attempting to beat my last record of twelve hours then thirteen with two naps in between. I slept uncharted like a reckless seaman, traveling waves of slumber by my own compass, landing at some deserted isle of rest until I felt it time to sail again. To me, these imprudent dozing sessions were my only beneficial source of *self-care*. "I was never this alert," I thought. "Hell, what else was I to do with the lonely hours spent in isolation, detached from the world itself?" Though, despite my faulty understanding of

the *productive* snooze, the second yawn came from the azure REM sleep currents, sinking my ship into bottomless fatigue. I awoke from the depths, seasick from the salty, sweat-dripped blankets and yawned deeper than the sea itself. I was not refreshed; I was exhausted. And, my attempts to distract myself with misguided hibernation proved to only lead my vessel to the shipyard again, bored and deserted.

Unlike its predecessors, the third yawn, however, did not come from my own mouth. As my past attempts to diminish my boredom were unsuccessful, I took to the public, masked of course. My mother offered me trips to the local hardware store, as her form of entertainment lied in excessive house renovation. There I became an observer of yawn number three. Every public yawner followed the same routine. Through the surgical blue of nonwoven masks, lips appeared to tighten to an O-shape, slightly pulling the fabric down the bridge of the nose, until an index and thumb pinch readjusted its fit to follow CDC guidelines. Lids pursed together, closed eyes relieved the dry stare. And, as I and my remodeling obsessed mother travelled down aisles of Hampton Bay fans and Black and Decker drills, I also felt relief. The man in aisle three yawned as deeply as the two kids in aisle fifteen. My own mother followed the same pattern. This third yawn was universal - a common casualty.

I have never really been a yawner, but in these months, the yawn became a familiar foe. We all yawned. We all felt the seductive malaise of seclusion. We all occupied ourselves with our own tedious and unbearable routines. Loneliness almost drove us mad. But, despite our solitude and desertion, our yawns were our great equalizer: the commonality keeping us sane. Yawn.