

Tooth and claw



“ Disguises” Every character and their relationships between them in “ Tooth and Claw” by T. Coraghessan Boyle, disguise themselves in many ways, both consciously and unconsciously, all for different purposes. The author introduces us to four major characters in this story that all interact with each other and have some sort of mask over themselves hiding their true identities and motives. The main character James Turner Jr. as recently moved to California “ So that I could inject a little excitement into my life and mingle with all the college students in the bars...” he lives by himself in an apartment which his aunt pays for even though he has a full time job. This apartment is extremely messy and unorganized. It seems to me that James is not living up to his full potential, he is running away and maybe even hiding from something the apartment is perfect example of just that. James has a full time job but was recently told to take some time off and now he does not know what to do with his free time.

James is drawn to a bar named “ Daggets,” “ Daggets is the only place I feel comfortable. And Why? Precicely because it was filled with old men drinking themselves into oblivion. It made me think of home. Or feel at home, anyway. ” James has moved halfway across the country to “ Mingle with the college students” yet he frequently visits a bar that is surrounded with “ old men. ” He has been eyeing a waitress at “ Daggets” named Daria, but “ hadn’t worked up the nerve to say more than hello and good-bye to her. “ Daggets” may serve as another mask that James is hiding beneath, it reminds him of his father (who died sixth months earlier) and he can also relate to Daria because of how close in age they are. A mysterious man enters the bar named “ Ludwig” who begins to show falsehoods right from

the start. He begins to flirt with Daria and orders two raw eggs from her, everyone believes he is going to eat them but he does not. After James has had a few drinks Ludwig convinces James to play him in a game of dice but doesn't tell him what they are playing for. Ludwig surprises everyone and brings in a large cage with an African wild cat inside it, to everyone's surprise this is what they will be playing for. James doesn't have the courage to back down and " I couldn't back out without feeling the shame rise to my face— and there was Daria to consider, because she was watching me, too. " It seems as though Ludwig sort of a con artist, he brings an exotic animal that he wants to get rid of to a bar where almost every person in there is judgment impaired. This was Ludwig's plan, go to a bar, convince some drunk people to play a game, and dump this animal on them and leave. James is intoxicated enough to fall right into his plan, not knowing what hit him until it was too late.

James wins the game of dice, winning the cat and immediately after Ludwig disappears and James is trying to figure out what has just happened. Daria witnesses this and immediately shows interest, excitement, and curiosity. " Daria rose and came to me with a look of wonder. ' Don't do a thing till I get off, O. K.? ' and in her favor she took hold of my arm. ' I get off at nine, so you wait, O. K.? '" Daria is falsely identifying herself to James (unconsciously or consciously) she begins to lead him on. James believes she is interested in him but she is really interested, excited and curious about the cat and the moment, she is in for the ride.

Daria has her own motives, it seems she does not really care about James. They go shopping together to buy essentials for the cat, Daria in control of

the situation and in complete disregard for James. " I watched Daria march up and down the aisles seeking out kitty litter and the biggest cat pan they had...'I've only got ten bucks,' I said...she reached back to slip the band of her ponytail so that her hair fell glistening across her shoulders, a storm of hair, fluid and loose, the ends trailing down her back like liquid in motion.

She tossed her head impatiently. ' You do have a credit card, don't you? '"

Daria is subtly flirting with James; she is leading him on again so that she will get what she wants. She does not care whether he has any money; she is so interested and curious about the animal that she will do anything to get what she wants. The next two days Daria stays at James's house and they occasionally talk and have long conversations but becomes clear that she is only there for the concern and interest in the cat.

The first day she leaves and says " Take care of our cat now, O. K.? " It seems as though she is implying that they are together and the cat is both of theirs. This seems to confuse James, he doesn't know exactly what she meant by that. Replying to this he shows another falsehood by not showing exactly how he feels, " I shrugged in a helpless, submissive way, the pain of her leaving as acute as anything I'd ever felt. ' Sure,' I said. " She then pulls him in for a kiss and calls him " sweet. Every time she enters the apartment she goes right to the cat and every time she wakes up she immediately says " We have to feed the cat. " Soon Daria's ride is over, her interest is lost in the cat and in James (if there was any real interest to begin with) and so is her curiosity. She soon figures out James's real personality, how he is basically a loser and whatever interest she may have had with him, has been lost. After she has spent the last three days with him she ends up telling him

that she has a boyfriend and that she doesn't want to give him the wrong "impression. Whether she realizes it or not she leads him on this entire time and already did give him the wrong impression, she was falsely identifying herself and her actions towards James. James does not know what to do with himself after what Daria informs him. He formed a dependence on her, " I felt lost without her. " He becomes angry and hostile with the manager at " Daggets," his boss, and himself. After he is asked to leave the bar for drinking too much and insulting the bartender, James faces the cat and essentially attempts to commit suicide.

He goes back to his apartment, " Pulled open the door, and slipped inside. And then—and I don't know why—I pulled the door shut behind me. " Every character in this story misrepresents themselves in one way or another with the way they act towards each other and with what they have people believe. Even the giant African cat misrepresents itself, it does not belong in a bar, nor does it belong in an apartment. The characters in this story hide behind masks, physically or theoretically all to gain something or to hide something.