

Gandy Dancer Archives

Volume 6 | Issue 2

Article 2

5-1-2018

She Was the Wall

Elana Marcus
SUNY Purchase College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knight scholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marcus, Elana (2018) "She Was the Wall," *Gandy Dancer Archives*: Vol. 6: Iss. 2, Article 2.
Available at: <https://knight scholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer/vol6/iss2/2>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at KnightScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gandy Dancer Archives by an authorized editor of KnightScholar. For more information, please contact KnightScholar@geneseo.edu.

She Was the Wall

Toby repeated her Gmail in my ear twice and asked me not to write it down because it was Shabbat, and we were at the Western Wall. I had surely learned my lesson by then; just a few minutes earlier Toby had whacked me in the back of the head with a prayer book for using my cell phone. And now here she was singing her email into my ear, inviting me over for Shabbat dinner at her apartment in Brooklyn once we both returned home.

“Promise me you won’t write down that email until Shabbat is over,” she begged me. It was like the validity of her religion was suddenly placed in my hands. If I wrote down the email, she would know, and she would start to question everything she believed.

“I promise.” I repeated the email to myself over and over until it started to sound like a prayer. I spoke it into the wall and shouted it towards rabbis, begging any holy thing not to let me forget it. I would be going to Toby’s.

When Toby first hit me in the head with that prayer book, I thought she wanted to convert me. I was already Jewish, but I think she could sense that I wasn’t Jewish enough. Before our confrontation, I was watching her. Everyone was. She was walking around the women’s section of the wall, armed with her prayer book, whacking anyone with a cellphone in hand. But these women didn’t care; as soon as Toby abandoned them, they just resumed what they were doing in a more secretive manner.

She was fascinating. Everywhere she went she caused a scene. She was on everyone’s radar, and everyone was on hers. The leader of my tour group leaned in close to us and scoffed, “If she’d put half the effort into praying as she does hitting people with prayer books, maybe she’d find her peace.” Or maybe this was her key to peace, guarding this wall against us disrespectful seculars, preserving its holiness.

And then came that *bang*.

“No phones on Shabbat!” she screamed in that high-pitched voice of hers that should have been familiar to me by then, but it was like something else when it was directed my way. I was shaking, but not because I was scared; I was honored to be one of her subjects, one of the cogs in the machine that gave her life purpose.

Her method of discipline was systematic; first came the whack, then the scold, and then approximately forty-five seconds of a cold hard stare to make sure the phone was put away and that it would stay away. I just looked into her eyes. This was the first time all night that I really got to see her face, and it was stunning. Pale and stressed and wrinkled in the shape of the words she scolded. And when I realized that the moment was fleeting, I asked her what her name was.

This threw off her sculpted stare. It was obvious that no one had ever bothered to ask her this before. I pulled over a seat next to me and asked her to sit. I wanted to know everything about her. What leads a woman to become a character like this? She was hard to break through at first, but when I told her I was from Brooklyn, her face lit up. She was also from Brooklyn. And then I knew I had her in the palm of my hand.

I told her that I wasn’t religious, but all she wanted was for me to be present. To take it all in, because if you were Jewish, this was what it was all about—being at the Western Wall, singing and dancing, flaunting your Judaism because there was no other place in the world where it was so easy. Once I had broken through her thick skin, we talked for what felt like hours. I was no longer just sitting back and watching this scene unfold before me; I was a part of it. She brought me to life that night.

Since that day, Toby felt like a dream to me. I wrote down the email as soon as Shabbat ended the next day. I knew it was right, it had to be. I wrote to her when I got home, and a few hours later I got a reply from a man named Toby who kindly asked me to never email him ever again. What could I do to find her, knock on every window in Brooklyn with the lights off on Shabbat? Maybe. Or I could just keep praying her email, it was the only proof I had that she was real.