The Frequency of Bends

Something has shifted recently. Over the last few months, I have kept seeing people bend over surfaces, and it seems to happen much more often than before. The very first time I noticed it was when I saw Nina, wearing black tights and a short dress, arching her back with her hands resting on a vanity basin as I entered the bathroom at a party. The door was unlocked, and I felt embarrassed to have come upon Nina, since she seemingly hadn't expected anyone to come in. Now that I recollect it, I think she might have been snorting cocaine there.

I got very drunk that night and passed out shortly after I got home. I woke up the next morning on the kitchen floor, feeling acute throbbing pain in the back of my head. There was a small, oval, still-wet bloodstain on the shag carpet. I went to a hospital, and while I was waiting for my appointment, one of the nurses was bending over the reception desk. Luckily, no concussion was found, but the wound had to be stitched up. I could not get the stain out of the carpet and threw it away.

Since that day, no bend goes unnoticed, and I am positive that, in any given month since the party with Nina, the number of bends I witness has been higher than in any month preceding it. One could say I paid much less attention to the frequency of bends before and be right: for a comparative analysis, I can use a rough estimate, but cannot retroactively determine the average amount of bends I witnessed before. Nonetheless, it remains forever constrained by my subjective perception.

I have seen it from behind, from the left and from the right, have seen it happening far in the distance and have seen it from above, standing on the balcony while my neighbour was washing his car by hand. It happens a lot in the office. Last month, I went to a public swimming pool and saw people bending over to lay out their towels on sun loungers. When I change the bedsheets, I am the one bending over my bed, as I can see when I look in the mirror. I have already witnessed it in the same bathroom where it started, but with a different person, and I have seen Nina arching her back in a different place. In some cases, it can be suggestive and teasing, inviting even. I have seen women bending over in heels and in stilettos. I have seen a man wearing tights, stretching towards a TV remote control that was placed on the far side of the table. I have seen a man doing it in a military uniform. It would be described in a song, appear in a film or commercial.

I have seen it with the music playing loudly, in complete silence and have watched someone doing it to whimsical music.

Once, someone was repeatedly bending over and then straightening up, bending over and then straightening up. I turned my head away; it was happening too fast and felt somewhat wrong. Once, I counted 28 people performing 33 bends in a single day. There is sometimes a degree of fatigue to it: the person bending over might feel tired, their back might hurt or their neck might feel stiff. Some people would lift their leg, some would support themselves on the surface, lifting both feet off the ground.

I have conducted some brief research, looking for a recent film or a music video featuring a visually appealing bend that could have unintentionally influenced people to recreate it, but haven't found a convincing example, at least according to ChatGPT. If this is not a natural phenomenon but one of magical origin, who could have cursed me with such a specific spell? Was it Nina? I apologised to her immediately, and she didn't seem irritated or embarrassed, only fairly surprised and tired. I haven't noticed any changes in her attitude since. If not Nina, have I offended someone who was bending over in my presence, prompting them to condemn me to perpetually seeing variations of the first image? I could have blamed it on my head trauma, the decompression of my skull, but hardly could my own injury affect other people's actions. It hurt during the first few weeks, now I can't even grope the scar, and it is already fully covered by my hair. Is this to teach me to always knock before entering the bathroom? I do knock now, I did knock before, always. If this is a curse, it was formulated rather kindheartedly.

Sometimes, when I go somewhere new, I anticipate that the moment I enter, I will see it. Sometimes it does turn out that way, sometimes it happens later, sometimes it happens and I only remember it afterwards. As a matter of fact, I don't mind noticing the bends around me and I have no intention of making them stop. Often the way they are performed is beautiful.

Today I ran into Nina at an art exhibition opening. I approached her, we chatted for a bit and agreed to go for a walk nearby after the formal opening. During the walk, Nina spotted an observation deck in the distance and suggested we go up there, I agreed. On our way, she mentioned a research paper she was working on about a growing societal demand for a means of anonymity. I asked about it, she was eager to elaborate. As we got closer to the observation deck, we discovered that it was occupied by a group of

tourists, and the tour guide gestured for us to wait until they were finished. While we stood to the side, Nina shared one of the inferences she had come up with in her research so far: the yearning for a means of genuine anonymity can often be appeased by simulated anonymity alone. I asked her to send me the paper when it's finished. The former prime minister's private residence was located down the hill, below the observation deck, and two men and one woman from the tourist group were leaning on the railing to look at it. After several minutes, the observation deck was still occupied, so Nina and I left.