

Just a Cuckoo-Bird Away...

Something really disturbing happened recently. I'm in prison, of course, but in prison, I'm also in a college class. It's a horror-show of a class, the sort of thing I'd never have come near in real-life school, but I don't have much choice under the circumstances for reasons that really, truly aren't worth trying to explain. Suffice it to say that the content is insipid and my attendance is coerced, so naturally I'm reminded of what school was really like for me before I dropped out of high school and went to college. Deathly boring. Sometimes I nod off, but also, I find myself answering questions on many of the mindless quizzes much like I did in 7th or 8th grade, i.e. with some humor or even a bit of derision, just to take a little of the edge off of the inanity of it all. I simply couldn't care less about the class material, so to keep myself mildly entertained, sometimes I joke. On the last quiz, I was asked to name "3 kinds of rounds," referring to the common questions asked in so many of the "groups" they foist on inmates here (the class is about creating and leading "groups"). I listed two in earnest, but couldn't help exploiting the ambiguity of the question by noting that #3 could be ".38 calibre". It's a type of round, no? Anyway, next class, teach took me to task for my "flippancy," warning me that although she has a sense of humor, there's a risk of being misconstrued when saying something "that could be interpreted as threatening violence." Huh? WTF?? Who could interpret the mere mention of a type of bullet as a threat of violence?? What kind of person?

Of course, I've been hearing of this creeping insanity for years — students expelled for "violent" poetry; arrested ~~for~~ passing comments; little kids lambasted for making "finger guns" — but I'd never actually seen the lunacy in action. It still felt like the kind of thing that only happens in newspaper articles (though Daniel's suspension for kissing his girlfriend in violation of the school's "no-contact policy" was very real). I did my best to hide the contempt as she spoke, but soon I realized... genuine DANGER was near! Suppose she'd just shown my silly answer to a pig... could I have avoided being whisked off to the "hole," and a whole lotta loss? Doubtful. The reality is, simply: I'm never more than one delusional or thin-skinned fruit-loop's excitable ejaculation away from a great deal of suffering. ^{Just} One ill-tempered comment by an unhappy non-prisoner could, and almost certainly would, cause a ton of damage. It's a maddeningly scary thought. Hey... have you read any Ta-Nahisi Coates? — I perceive some parallels.