

This morning I'm scheduled to meet my new friend at John Mason's house in Glendale on West Kenneth Road, to see if John can repair the trumpet that my friend inherited from his uncle. John Mason is a French horn player with a repair shop in his garage, who I found by googling "French horn repair" a few years ago, and he's fixed my French horn once ever since. As I drive towards the mountains after exiting the 5 freeway, Glendale is covered in a thick white fog, which looks particularly beautiful from Western avenue with its extra high palm trees slowly swaying and its sidewalks covered in purple jacaranda flowers. Most everything is white, green and purple, the buildings, the sky, the trees and the flowers, with deep gradients spanning each hue and ending in the same thick white fog. Glendale always gives me this particular feeling I can't quite pinpoint, something majestic but so California-casual at the same time. When I turn left on West Kenneth road to get to John's house, I'm so pleased to find that his street is also covered in fallen jacarandas as far as the eye can see. I park my car in front of John's house atop a perfect oval-shaped bed of flowers, indicating that no one must have parked there overnight. I'm early so I sit in my car listening to the hip-hop radio, before deciding to get out and walk back and forth on John's block for a few minutes, from jacaranda bed to jacaranda blanket. I turn around and see a young man approaching from far away on the other side of the street atop a hoverboard, his hands casually stuck in the pockets of his electric blue tracksuit, big wireless headphones on his head, and his eyes looking far ahead of him, slicing through the endless jacaranda adorned sidewalk.

My new friend arrives shortly after from that side of the road, coming from North Hollywood, and parks his truck across the street from my car. We greet each other and he tells me that he stopped by an old Hollywood costume rental house on his way here, and that today you can fill up a bag with as many things as you can and pay \$25. He suggests I go there afterward so as to also enjoy this bargain. He gets his trumpet out of the trunk, it's in a little leather suitcase and he immediately looks like a different person walking with it in hand, like a professional of some kind. We walk up to the house and I'm hoping that John will be there as promised, as he doesn't answer the door right away. He opens the door and we walk into the living room towards the dining room, with a little nook on the right with his sheet music and a couple of French horns ready to be picked up and played. His little dog jumps at us. We walk behind the house into the garage 'shop' and John sits at his table and starts undoing the trumpet so that he can put all of the separated pieces into an ultrasonic bath to deep-clean them. He's using a wooden mallet and a piece from another mallet's handle to dislodge the valves without bending them. It all works smoothly. For the last valve he uses a piece of fabric wrapped around in a tight knot and it comes out in one strong pull. He tells us that we don't have to stand around so we both grab chairs and turn into a captive audience. I ask John where he was playing the French horn the other day when he said he'd been out playing all day, and he says he was performing the music from the Final Fantasy video game inside a synagogue. He didn't know what to expect but it was actually very romantic and pleasant to play. He jokes that his garage shop is a lot like the wand shop in Harry Potter, and I ask if that means that there is a specific French horn for each person, but he doesn't hear me. I ask if he's ever played the Harry Potter soundtrack, and he says that he actually played on the last Star Wars soundtrack, but not any solo, "only horn 6 or something." We talk about the differences between brass and string players in the orchestra, as I'm trying to welcome my new friend into this new cohort he inevitably is joining, and John confirms that brass players love their beer, whereas

strings prefer wine and cocktails. The brass players I knew in France also really liked their Pastis and wine. One reason why strings have to be more serious, John says, is because they need to and can practice much longer hours to get to their level than brass instruments for example, whose lips get tired after a few hours, and can easily get injured. John's ready to put the pieces in the bath and my friend asks if he can put a finger in the water. We both do and can feel a slight tingling, but John recommends that we rinse our hands afterwards to avoid getting chapped skin from the soap. The main body of the trumpet is fully in the bath, but the smaller pieces are all together inside a metal basket, like they would in a fryer. "If you like getting burnt and cut then you're in the right place," John says. He shows us some of his mouthpiece-making tools, including metal triangles that are cut to the inside shape of a mouthpiece. Everything is messily spread out all around the garage, but every time he needs something John knows exactly where to find it. I ask if I can try the natural horn that's been eyeing me on a stand on his desk and he says I'm more than welcome to, and disinfects the mouthpiece before handing it to me. I just play a few notes, mostly trying to remember the fingers for the natural horn, and put it back on the stand. John notices a couple of particularly dirty trumpet pieces and makes a separate bath for them with a higher soap concentration, inside half of a large white plastic bottle that floats above the water like a bath toy. John jokes for the second time about vacuuming his dog's poop by mistake this morning, and having to take the vacuum apart like one big French horn to clean it up. After he takes every part out of the bath and puts the trumpet back together, he shows my friend how to apply grease on all the trumpet parts. I admire the mother of pearl parts atop the valves, and my new friend says that his dad used to go diving for abalone. He explains how you would just dive with a big knife and cut them off their rock, but only if they had reached a certain size. Once the trumpet is all back together, John demonstrates a few notes, and tells us about the time that he played with Frank Sinatra in Las Vegas, and the trumpet player, one of the best he'd ever heard, could play such high notes that they sounded like a whistle. He says that guy "had the chops," which my new friend and I secretly laugh about because he told me the other night that he likes to call video editing skills "the chop." John says they performed "Fly me to the moon" together, and the trumpet player taught him a secret tip for playing really high, tucking his upper lip inside the mouthpiece in a special way.

When my new friend pays for today's service using the Venmo app, John's phone makes a big cash register sound, which I've never heard before, but is right in line with the garage shop ambiance. John seems happy to have met us and says it's great to have made new friends when we leave. He says I should hit him up anytime about playing duets, after I mention that I also have the Otto Nicolai duets that sit on his music stand. We walk back outside and I lend my new friend my copy of Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* before saying bye for the summer.