

ANEMONE SIDECAR

CHAPTER 10
of
THE
ANEMONE SIDECAR

Corporeality, Part I

- Barnes, Christopher. 45
Benítez, Luis (epigraph). 1
Bourgeois, Louis E. 43
Bowes, Harold. 24
Fintushel, Ariel. 41
Garni, Ricky. 14
Harris, Lisa. 47
Lawler, Patrick. 11
Leibow, Christopher. 2
Massimilla, Stephen. 19
Murray, Gregg. 9
Nimes, Cheyenne. 39
Parry, Silas. 31
Rakovan, Jacob. 27
Roth, Forrest. 29
Schapira, Kate. 33
Strongin, Lynn. 37
Stutz, Michael. 44
Taylor, Ed. 38
Tran, Stacey. 17
Tremblay, Bill. 22
Vaughan, Chris. 55
Vishwanathan, Ajay. 18



The Anemone Sidecar, Chapter Ten, 2010,
built on the work of select multitudes.
Cover image by Daniel Boyer.

*appearance is always
the corporeal trick*

-Luis Benítez

Christopher Leibow: *Excerpts from Gray's Anatomy:
The Poems*

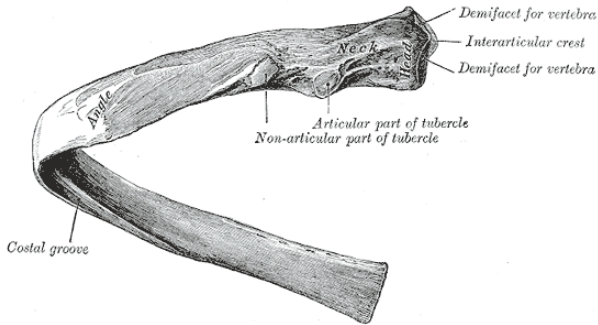


Figure # 209

At the base of her spine
an apostrophe

A possessiveness'

{Scrimshaw}

like on the whale bones
Of gutted Humpbacks

She sings

her cry somehow

as beautiful.

as the harpoon
between the 3rd and 4th ribs.

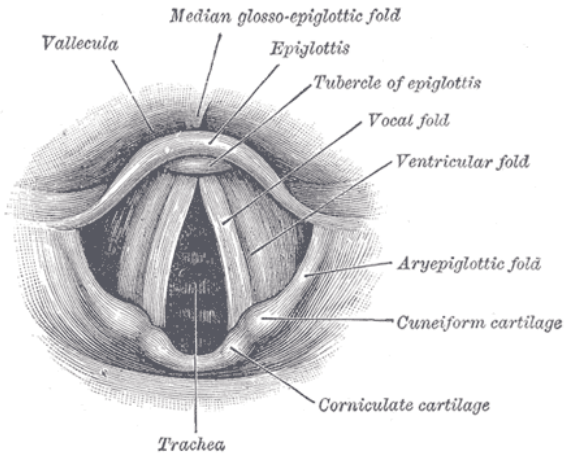


Figure #306

The angels gather around in a circle
 looking at a dead bird.

‘It is like us.’

They sing hymns
 and the dead bird flies to heaven

a less experienced [{death} , {reassigned}]
 angel whispers

“ We are of the same meaning”

The angels take to the air but one
who sits and preened his wings

with his golden beak.

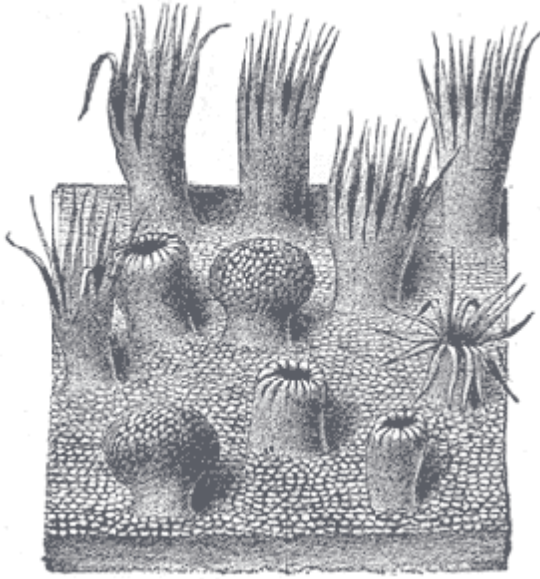


Figure # 196

The veal was familiar.
kept from motion
stagnant as water

the lack of exertion limits
blood supply.

I am sold daily by the pound.

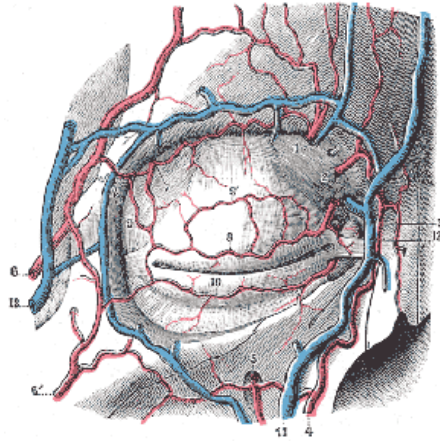


Figure # 89

There was no way of explaining
the sudden turn of events

The instantaneous reversal of
you being you but not exactly you

and the way you carried the knife
cavalier and bloody.

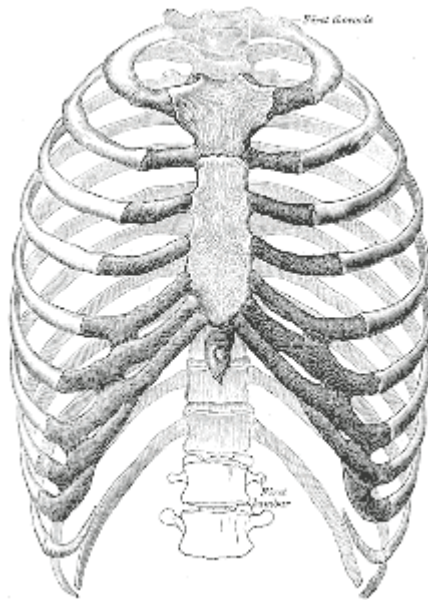


Figure # 63

I was born without a rattle.

I was stolen by indifference that filed me away.

I fell asleep a poet and woke up a plumber.

I was a mechanical nightingale caught in a cage.

I could never stop her from crying.

Gregg Murray: *Palazzo of the Babies*

it was there, and it was there
in the palazzo of the babies
that the disbelief became grief

of gild, of gaunt guitarladen
minicorpses traipsing around like
sombros of folded night

how many wet nurses slit their
wristwatchbands in the tin pan
of the garish homunculous

how many walked alone, solitude
their harsh torment drawn close by
a shimmering facade, a moonlit place

oh, i don't think you have a god
damn clue, ramon fernandez, your
lonely mind was a clam clambering

and your slain reference had lain
but a broad ghost in whose wings
i nestled like a black revolver

and
the palazzo
of the babies

was a temptation of the mind's grey lips

and
the palazzo
of the babies

was a starry-eyed breeze of a somnolent trough

and
the palazzo
of the babies

was a fledge linging seaward like hammered serafin

the palazzo,
the palazzio,
the palazzadizio,
the palazzalollapaloozadizio

of the spelunking babies

it is no longer sacred hopefully one day will be found
air fills up the space around the trees

Thompson-Plaster Electrical Cabinet

what we've left behind can be disturbing the amps
off our brains the amputations
of the soul the body shedding its thousand
skins
reality
can be disturbing the twist minds the unsaid monkeys
like wildfire once the cure is discovered
insides liquefy reservoir of the unknown
once the cure is discovered the disease soon follows
two electrodes and a spark-gap generator

I invent a fake religion
with miraculous contraptions can I touch your
adobe heart
a pile of daylight composed
of many meanings I am afraid I will end up being invisible
life comes with thirty-five different attachments
if you do not love
the body as intensely as disease loves the body
you can never be cured

Ricky Garni: *Two Men on a Split Screen*

This is television.

They're twins.

The one with the moustache is really smart.

"Kierkegaard, Sartre, Sting Theory, Hegelian Dialectic,"

and then

"Blah Blah Blah" –in French.

The twin without the moustache isn't so smart.

"I'm hungry! I want some chocolate! My butt itches! I think I broke my watch when I lost it!"

But you know, it's truly beautiful to observe and feel and articulate pain.

He's OK smart.

Look at him reach across the split screen and grab his brother's moustache!

OUCH!

And now it's right in place. He twitches his nose a little. And in just seconds he is the smart twin!

“Kierkegaard!” he says, sophisticatedly.

But it doesn't last.

“My watch broke Hegel when I fell on it my butt landed on it, Existential.”

Meanwhile, just over the little paper clouds: chocolate.

His smooth-faced brother drives away in a chocolate car with little puffy buttery-white cocoa smoke rings that leave a trail that disappears in the summer light.

“Yes,” says Smoothy. “All in all, an acceptable exchange.”

His heart is filled with love. Family always comes first, he says. Then chocolate. And brains, brains can help...

Slowly the chocolate steering wheel begins to melt and slowly he begins to lose control. He is hungry, and yet filled with love, he waves at his brother, he honks the horn, he speaks in French, his watch stops, he is this, he is that, he doesn't know why.

I'm a little confused about corporeality. I imagine that if your [sic] doing too much damage in the shadow realm that the % will drop from 50% - 40%.

-Shadow Priest, post on Halion Corporeality

Stacey Tran: *my mouth is a balloon*

there are parts of me i'd be willing to let you borrow
if only i were in better condition
like if my heart was not such a fist
or if my fist was not such a hammer
knocking at the seams of your windows like a storm cloud
not so fair of weather after all

i just thought it a good idea
to go to the carnival once the sun comes back
and we could share cotton candy
or just watch the noise and the reds and blues go on without us
we don't have to be a part of anything
and just sail

my mouth is a balloon

Ajay Vishwanathan: *To Mere Bones*

Sitting here I used to watch days die behind dark clouds, the gloaming punctuated by kerosene lamps burning on the other side of the river that flowed so silently the sough of the wind among trees felt louder. With Father finding different ways to tattle in the afterclap of Mother's death, I found myself another home along the river talking to rocks, plucking at grass blades and lying on tree roots that slithered along the muddy banks, my solitude serving as much to slake my thirst for peace as to converse with Mother whose ashes they scattered here into the waters. Permanent like birthmarks she had left memories all over me, my playwounds, and scabs from Father's anger that she fussed over. People said Father loved her, which left me asking why love was violent, willing to deliver pain, pain that made death dear. Now, with childhood moldy, sepia vignettes with withering edges, I wondered why I chose to return here after so many years, where many greedy diversions had left the river dry, leafless trees lining its shriveled fringes. I sat where I used to, combing for reasons to feel happy. The wind gathered speed and swished through the branches. Bending down, my old knees shaking, I grabbed at the mud that used to be water and wondered, with river now showing mere bones, if what I held in my fist was part of Mother.

First Fruits

The life discloses itself only once
it has burst. In a district inaccessible by ear,
afloat before a deep blue bruise in the sky,
the professional in his cerulean scrubs
gives up, darkens. Sunday drains
through capillary saplings, four-hour drip

beneath the impending dusk, clouds so low
that breathing is underwater labor.
Same distant fin flicker.
Same anemic intervals dim
on your palate.

When you part faint leaves
to taste the air, you hardly remember
which figure, breast or benignant pear
you were expecting.

Your day's a bone knitting,
a bargaining. This branch bent
like a bicycle fender, a section scar
where you should have held
a second stomach.

Are you okay, my flickering gill?

No. No sleep. No trout.
Your mouth grows impatient of the night-
stem crushed between brain
and tongue.

This twig
your finger remembers being bitten off
at the joint. Then the sliver
of whimpering pain. The obstetrician
rolls up in the fishpond, still alive.

Bill Tremblay: *Resonating Song*

Just as I tell Cynthia I feel
the need for some constant
as my body rusts, some caravan
trekking steady on yellow sand,
into the mystery, here it is!
Not just atoms sport
varied numbers of moons,
apparently, Einstein's transfer
from E to M's frequency at
which lit-from-within bundles
wobble on strings played by
ambient bows in galaxies
since the baby first screamed
into this room that wonderful
keeps growing. So it's all
music on strings as Pythagoras
said. This is what I'm told.
I dig the concept. Timely.
The wicker chord structure,
what I based my work on
when young, the I-don't-know
that gets followed by I-better-
find-out. What I found was
machines that don't flow like
nature downhill. They draw out
value stolen from everyone.
Pity I've never had a rod for
nihilism. Crazy as it is,
I don't want it to end, this

music on these strings like
unrolling sheets of notes on
an invisible fence upon which
King Pleasure floats a line that
settles like silk “Where will I be
tomorrow?” on the black mirror
of the lake where I dreamed of
being invited into a band to play
the trill what I feel writing you.

Harold Bowes: two poems

Memo on Tour of Physical Plant

At the pool facility I met with the Pool Manager, who led me on a tour of the physical plant. I observed that the facility as a whole appears to be in excellent condition.

I asked the Pool Manager to show me equipment with original cost of \$499 or greater, which she was able to do.

I observed the admission process to ensure that it complied with the recommendations we have made previously. Names are entered on a white sheet and check marks appear in the appropriate columns.

In conclusion, the tour of the physical plant went well. The facility is well maintained. The staffing appears adequate and the staff members competent. In addition to the Pool Manager and her assistant, I saw lifeguards on duty.

Transparencías

Winter beach;
Coming over the ground mist
The hang glider's single wing

Looking through your brown eyes
And 1970's vintage contacts
You've cut class, come to the beach
At the end of the road

The transparent skin
Of a beached jelly fish

While you clean sand from
The lenses, they spill forward

Into the glinting sand

Into the drying sea foam's
Iridescent bubbles

Like glass floats
From Japanese nets
But miniaturized
And split evenly in two
And lost

While behind your eyelids
Shorepines bend in the wind
In a yellow light

At dusk
Rusted nail heads protrude
From a wooden block

On this starless night,
The headlights on the cars
In the parking lot
Hurt your eyes

This poem first appeared in "Remark."

Jacob Rakovan: *The women with the heads of
birds...*

The women with the heads of birds
are singing in the bright place
their tongues stitch bright bones with flowers

are singing in the bright place
their tongues stitch bright bones with flowers
on the final beach, atomic eggs on white sand
the vanishing point a well of ending
the pail drops down, the water ringing in the *dark dark dark*
the women spit stars in the wormy eyes of sailors

o my soul, have mercy
when I am stripped beyond naked
when I am undone, a mouthful of ash
when I am come at last to the hollow city's drowned battlements
when I have stretched my skin's boat across these splintered ribs
and sailed beyond the edges of the world,
o my kindly one have mercy

boatmen stand in the bright blast of heaven,
scraps of film develop in their pockets, tattered insignia
dropping among the bone thickets, the copper briars
and still you spin out the promise of angels,

flowers turn their deaf heads towards the sun
in the windless calm, among the blooms sirens
sing a mantic song
prophesy to the worms

because the end of beauty is death

and when I am come at last to that shore I will carry your name
in my mouth, a bird with the head of a woman,
your fingers hooked in my collarbones
your breath in the windy hollow of my skull

in the marsh
In the islands in the sea of milk,
the labrynth of my days unwound
and you, spinner of my days
perch at the end of all threads and ways
at the end of all tales,

o my bird
o my tongue's confusion,
o heaven, be with me even past the end
where the cold rocks scrape their tracks around the sun
where the radio coughs out its last in the icelight of stars

Forrest Roth: Field Communion

sutures tight-sewn achieve no space, none remaining even for a
sliver host falling upon grass

some may want returned their waning pulse to find under flame
left safer either fluid or bloodspoil when keeping secretion
diagnoses apprehend tensile weakness there are haven entering
through screendoors bent quarter past ten, patient remembers
wrong a famous author's epitaph, gives up

preservation, doctor *strength* or a bit of learning beside them
examines—

moth-crowd loss above this table in klaxons, tentative glassed, are
breathing summer pines stirring into thorax helps silence
another have a settle on the perhaps outside powder close-
tucked since finger knows abdomen knows corners palpitate
ruins within the frame could again dry sticky threads
assemble a wind

this before might change, ensnares this is so

they agree, and regarding proceeds deepest wounds anterior
posterior lateral lacerate any sputum advises prior third shift
nurses rub scapels on dry polish metal sink leading bucket
trough its bypath vena cava as skillful as determined two
ways: under lantern needs saving, under candlelight asks tracing

antennae tympanum wingpattern eventide call fold over

at the sill finding cocoons it is sentinel for a friendly kitchen
saying floor takes shape at treadprints among humours spilt
nothing becomes so recluse will little guests assist counting
off doctor hovers,

*that sunder of our paltry beacon guides, in observation, and esteems the
corpus, counts*

Silas Parry: *Submarine*

A man in a grey suit walks down a windy street.
The pavement is wide and the shop-fronts are run-down
in faded browns and yellows. He smokes a cigarette
as he walks and scuffs his heels.

The man stops and peers in the window of a pet shop.
Inside is a tank with fish: lit up in greens and blues.
One yellow fish one blue one red all the colours
of the prism. He watches them fly, gracefully traverse
their glass world. He thinks deep into their vast wilderness
of ferns and bubbles.

Far underneath the seas in a submarine,
one thousand feet below and diving in deep
blacks and blues. Swooping shapes above
and slow groaning shudders, cracks in the thick metal hull.

We are in the dark
prepare to dive.

Acknowledge acknowledge
prepare to dive—crushed like tin cans—

to the bottom of everything.

the never-world
of nothing and blackness.

Perhaps if we go deep enough down

we can hit the earth's crust

scrape past infinity-coloured pebbles
and continue

Kate Schapira: *The beloved episode*
(excerpt from Dogbook)

I had to do hands.
I had to do hair, eyes.
When I got to the sex parts
I hesitated. I was afraid
no one would believe me.
Inside my own lightweight
braincase a little dog with
levers may be pretending
to be me, make me snap
and grizzle and grieve, but
who's hiding, in that case,
who does the lover protect
and from what, making
protection her own,
her beloved, embattled,
projected, implanted,
bound around the chest with
three heavy straps and three
broad metal buckles.

We call parts and acts what
we called them last time.
We were both crying,
the bulbs released in us. When
in doubt I try to think what

a human would think.
That story is a convenience.
The hooked-up human
stomach hurts with gas
and guilt, based on fact,
but not fact.

These are voices. Keeping
mine even, I become
a panicky pathway repairer.
I'm working as fast as I can.
An ambulance chaser, I
forget who's there and that
it's you, my beloved;
that we build each other;
the difference between saying
this and saying nothing.

Test question: who responds
to touch? In the building,
along bad wire, I
could only see two purposes
for being built: on and off.
This failure is called inertia
and can't be cured by looking.
What is failure? Any story
of the lover's a story of error,
error, error, transcription
error, well-formed error, hard-
blown sporadic rain of error.
None of that in space, just air
traded for ransom, access to

schematics, scalp left
on the latch. I don't
remember seeing your name written
anywhere. Yet I must have
called to you,
"I will be here still.
I will be your portion."

*Is Gertrude Stein not Gertrude Stein
but somebody else living and talking in her body?*

- attributed to Hearst Press

Lynn Strongin: *Anything by degrees...*

...is bearable.

I was strapped to a tilt-table after polio.

I saw a deer's death out the window in those Westchester woods.
Night alone would give me back my hood, the bloods of longing:
corporeal. Incorporeal.

I saw myself tilted by a board on a wheel a bit more each day
blood rushed back to my feet purple, then red, then pricking pins
& needles

an itch I could not get to.

Ferocity in the throat of a young lion rose in me:
strapped to the table.

Where did they get these inventions but from the Medieval
world:

traction, pulley, burning, the whole bit.

But having achieved upright position, a mirage walking:

Those woods which were unrolled like carpet

wools silver & grey

were rolled back by degree

a Turkish carpet printed with bestiary:

running, walking now were shadow memories.

In a brown corner stood woods like carpets back rolled up each
summer

stored in moth balls & rolled out again in autumn:

this carpet was never rolled out again:

roped by the thick twines

of childhood history.

Ed Taylor: *Swim Lesson*

The water cold as algebra.

The live float as if dead.
The young old and blue.

A thin knitter fattens waiting
and waiting for a child to come
out.

A teacher up to her neck
puts glasses back on
as the thrashing stops
at the deep end
finally.

Cheyenne Nimes: *Natural Disaster*

SHE IS CANDLES and shades in the 60's milieu. Bel Air Palms Hotel. Time is iridescent here, isn't it? The tan line holds; it's meant to be noticed, the tan line. She is out stretched crucifixion-like against the wire mesh. *Someday I'm going to become famous again*, she says out her lacquered face. Clutches a script. Wishes the lines could speak her way out. Lines everyone knows are coming. They have no defined faces or ends, or sometimes even limbs. As if these lines had a piece of themselves written elsewhere, supernatural entities. Large animals. They come down at the edges of natural disasters. Like fires. Along the way good land has been burned into scar tissue and we're seeing the hoof prints, instantaneous appearances of light, its unmistakable sharp glows. *I'll take you out there*, she says, pages of the script fallen to the ground. You can take as many pictures as you want but her red eyes will never show up in them.

*We've just uploaded "Corporeality" from Vulgarizer's
up-and-coming album Anodyne.*

-metalunderground.com

Ariel Fintushel: two poems

She Wasn't All Wings and Lift

You mistake me my heart is in the plant your strange hands drop
like a leech into a fire bucket

fire in the pit hot air rose
and the heavenward lady's hell-bound heart
are mine

Willy you mistake me I am not white figure floating angel-ghost

My heart is planted in Granville
down among the tombstones

Verla never seemed to mind

when according to Tiny's mother Tiny's brain stopped working
she was on her way from Embro Marmaduke Licksillet
then halfway between home and Harriet Cotton Mill

her hands became claws *like a bird's* said her mother
and she took meals on the roof
one eye drifting up
her body canvas-rippled on the wind

but Tiny's daughter Verla never seemed to mind
the cold whirring touch it gave her chills and giggles
like someone moving was holding her
a cradle of blue veins
and afterward she often felt heavy sleepy
tasting a mineral largeness on her gums
where her molars were growing

Louis E. Bourgeois: *All Matter is Suspect Thought*

And deep, way deep, into the night, the walls began to exclaim:
Save us, save us, we don't want to be here anymore.

He left his room immediately and in a state of absolute Euphoria, he hung himself under heavy moonlight because he couldn't bear to lose one iota of his Joy.

Michael Stutz: *Some Days*

I feel
almost

unable
to talk

Christopher Barnes: *Deaths' Day*

Now that the transcendent gadflies
Knock out
This moment will pass.

Ill, Eddie's at ease,
Thermometer-checked,

An unfit pupil,

Nudging desks.

But inside, oh inside
A blunt edged pulley
Smooths down the heart.

...listening in virtual environments may contribute to the understanding of presence and its relation to corporeality.

- Turner, Turner and McGregor,
Listening, Corporeality and Presence

Lisa Harris: *Cold and Broken*

An encyclopedia will tell you that the city of Bruges is named from the Old Norse word *Bryggja*, which when translated means landing stage, and it was one of the few cities the Vikings did not plunder. The city was linked to the sea via a canal from Zwin to Bruges despite floodwaters that erupted during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Those same floodwaters flushed the rats from the streets into the houses, the rats that fed the fleas and bit the people who turned black and blue before they died.

What an encyclopedia does not tell you is how I felt when the plague sneaked into my home and stole my children and my life from me.

When I lived in Bruges, it was the biggest and most influential trade center in Europe with between forty and fifty thousand people. Banks and merchants kept themselves busy making and selling the finest quality wool and lace. My husband and I were tradesmen who bought and sold flax. We lived in a respectable part of town, and we lived well.

How fortunate we were: plenty of food, plenty of clothes, plenty of love! We made superior fabric that the French wanted to wear. They brought us the English fleece they had gained by trading their fine wine, and we turned it into cloth—not straw into gold, but very close.

The French can be an unforgiving people in their jealousy, and they resented their former Flemish vassals' economic success. When they tried to regain control of Flanders, the English went into an uproar, and the result was a civil war in Flanders with the English supporting the manufacturers and the French backing the landowners. Thus, the Hundred Years' War began.

On the first Friday after Lent in the Year of Our Lord 1301, I awoke to birds singing “cha-here,” to a platinum and silver sunrise, and to a slice of time so thin it passed before I could enjoy it. In that sliver of time, I momentarily forgot about Angelique and Luke’s deaths. For that threadlike second, I believed my children were alive and well, playing outside my house. Crows sat silently on snow-covered boughs, watching them play.

And then the last week flooded back into my memory.

Angelique’s neck showed the bruising first, and then her cheeks turned blue. Before long, all of her had turned dark purple. I fed her figs at dawn, but it did no good. Sour, wretched death killed the very air I breathed.

I left Angelique with her brother, Luke, and ran from the house in search of the barber. I skidded past the people in the alleyway, and although I had my doubts about the power of the rosary, I clung to it, reciting the Our Father and Hail Mary. The people I passed wore masks over their mouths and noses, trying to keep the disease away. My apron pockets bulged with rocks to hurl at the zigzagging rats that owned the alley.

“How could Angelique, my bright-eyed girl, be dying?” I asked myself. Angelique shivered and vomited, ached and cried, was giddy one moment and delirious the next. Then there were the egg-sized lumps in her groin, which had turned into the size of common apples by morning.

I stopped at the barber’s shop for advice. His blinds were pulled down and his shingle was gone, but I knew he was there. I could see the glint of light at the window’s edge.

The day before he told me: “Put her in a pest house and keep her with the other sick ones. Do not risk having her among you.” But I refused.

“If I take her there, I know she is lost. What can I do for her at home?”

And the barber looked away from me as if to say, she is lost anyway. But he did not say that. Instead, he offered: "I can sell you these horse bones. Put them inside the entrance of your house. I can sell you pickled snakes for cutting. You can save urine in your slop bucket to bathe her. That is all I have left to offer you."

"Come to the house with me and bleed her," I pleaded, repulsed by his other suggestions.

"No. I no longer leave my shop. The risks are too great. Give me your money, take these things, and do not come here again."

So I laid down my coins and picked up the bag with the bones. In the crook of my other arm, I cradled the jar with the pickled snakes.

The bones did no good. Neither did the snake charms, which I fed to the rats as sacrifices. The next day before dawn broke, I returned to the barber. I banged on the door and shouted his name, but he did not come. Finally, I opened the door, and the smell told me his fate before I saw his bloated, black body writhing on the floor. He propped himself on one elbow, choking out, "You bloody woman. You have brought this fate upon me!"

There was no one else to go to, so I returned home and continued my prayers to God and all his saints, "Spare us, O God. Spare us." And then there was no time for prayer. The world became ripped apart by my children's voices. Prayer. Medicine. Barber physicians. None of them helped.

My husband fled the house and went from tavern to tavern, drinking and laying with other women. Marauders came into my home to find what they could and, finding death, they fled. All around the city, strangers helped themselves to what they could, but they could make no use of death and so they ran. It was as if my marriage had never been. It was as if my children had never been born. But I had been married, and I had borne these

children, and so memory came at me like a buzzard, wanting to tear out my eyes, my liver, and finally, because it was broken into pieces, the buzzard carried away the pieces of my heart.

I lifted Angelique's body and carried it to the cart, and then I carried Luke's, piling my two children into what had been their toy. I wheeled them to the central square, where I was greeted by men who looked like large birds. They wore all the clothes they owned and covered their faces with great beaked masks. I knew the beaks were stuffed with spiced and oiled rags to cover the stench of the dead and dying. My husband had been wearing one for weeks before he left.

I could smell an overlay of lavender, vinegar, and rose oil; all of which barely covered the rotten smell. I could not leave my children there, so I continued to wheel the cart to the priory to secure last rites for them. I walked past streets piled high with garbage and bodies. When I reached the priory, there were no priests. I had no shovel and no strong husband to help me bury our children, so I left their once beautiful bodies on the ground, their silent hearts no longer able to pump blood through the swollen tissues.

I returned to my house for one more night. As I lay in my bed, I heard the scuffling rats around me. When I looked, I could see their silky black fur inviting me to pet them. I had tried to predict the arrival of the disease based on the color of the sky, and I had closed up the house when the orange sunsets appeared. I heard tales about the large port cities where the corpses were stacked high in a tower built on a barge that, once filled, was set aflame and then afloat on the water. But there was no tower here and my children lay dead in front of a priory with no last rites, no funeral service.

I could not rise from my palette to begin my daily rituals. What was the point? Instead, I lay under my blanket, my mind

crowded with images of Angelique and Luke as they lay dying. Gone were my halcyon days, no more charms, no more calmness, just the moans of a city sick with plague and the echo of the cries from my children.

In the morning I boarded up my house; it had become an empty tomb for me. I took nothing with me. Nothing. I walked out into the countryside, speaking to no one. I had begun having visions and continued to have them because I refused all food. And on the third day, I joined a band of flagellants.

I had come upon them in the midst of a town square several days' journey from Bruges. All of them were naked and chanting, "O God, spare us!" While they chanted, they beat their bare backs and shoulders with leather whips tipped with small iron spikes. I had expected their faces to reveal pain, but instead they shone with rapture. On the order of their master, they fell to the ground and began weeping. The spell that had prevented them from experiencing pain was broken once their master spoke.

Transfixed by my own grief, I sat and watched them for several days. I lost count of time. Twice a day, the flagellants arrived in a long, winding procession to the square where I sat. They removed their white hooded robes with red crosses sewn on the front and back, and their ritual began.

I approached the master one morning and said, "May I join with you?" I told him about Angelique and Luke dying. It was the first time I had spoken since their deaths, and my voice, an unused instrument, was a ghost's voice, reedy and torn, cold and broken.

"You may join us, daughter, but first you must know the rules. You must swear obedience to us for thirty-three and a half days, to represent the years Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, spent on the Earth. During that time, you may not bathe, you must sleep on the floor or the hard ground, and you may not speak unless you gain my permission first."

"How do I gain permission, Master?"

"You must approach me when I am clothed and touch the hem

of my garment. Please understand that no one may speak when naked, except to chant: O God, spare us! Remember, we are the only hope some of these people have because in our prayer we are the intermediaries to God.”

I doubted that the chant could gain divine intervention, but the flagellation appealed to me. I had enough experience with the plague to know that the time it took most people to die was the same time it had taken God to create the world.

I stayed with the group for the thirty-three and a half days, and the wounds I inflicted upon my body created scars that remained with me the rest of my life. The scars became my ornaments, my jewels.

After the time I spent with the flagellants, I entered the convent, Our Lady of Fog, a lace-making nunnery where I was granted refuge and silence.

When I arrived at the nunnery, Sister Margaret Mary showed me to my cell and explained the rules of the Order. She also showed me a beautiful doily. “You will learn how to make lace here, Lucia.”

The threads were so delicate that I doubted I would ever succeed.

During my second day at the convent, I watched the sisters make lace, amazed how one strand of linen thread could be turned into an outline in air. The lace making became its own book of hours. I listened to the nuns speaking about God, and the spoken words fell into air where they were tatted and transfigured into the lace of conversation. I learned to make the delicate fabric. The lace was of our making through the will of God, but it was never for our own adornment. We made it for the high priests and the wealthy townspeople.

Occasionally I left the nunnery to go to saint day festivals, where I listened to roving bards singing ballads, ate small pastries filled with meats or fruits, and tried to remember the joy of my life before the plague. Then I returned to Our Lady of Fog and

watched the sisters twist the thread to make cuffs and collars, adding them to older garments as a means of repairing worn edges.

In the acres behind the nunnery, the parishioners grew the flax to make the lace to give those who wore it status. Sometimes while I watched them harvesting, I remembered the plague as if it were from another lifetime. I remembered the rain as it fell constantly and drove the flea-infested rats inside, spreading the plague. I thought about fear, as prevalent as death, about how people left their husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, parents, and children to die, hoping to escape death themselves.

At Our Lady of Fog, I learned to make lace using wooden bobbins, twisting and crossing many threads. Later I learned the Italian style, making lace from a single thread and needle. While I was there, I told no stories. No one asked questions. Instead, we filled our days with lace-making and prayer. At night, I dreamed of my children in Heaven, and of joining them there.

Chris Vaughan: *Our Dad the Circus Octopus*

Between midnight and predawn it's suicide silent. The moody light of life's refrain mists over the world. In these crepuscular cavities there are men and women who think of nothing but a blissful oblivion of their own. Beyond and beside this there's nothing.

Murray will be poised just right in the moody half-light. He has a time of day (or night), a week and a month. The method will be unremarkable. If there has to be a suicide note it will be the note future suicides refer to before taking any serious steps. But to get it on paper there's a limit, a window framed by weeks and months and nights which stops shining next Thursday.

Murray signs it, a seismic reading of volcanic activity attaching the gaudy M to the bulbous P, then stores it and schedules the suicide for the following Thursday morning at roughly 2am.

Later that week he rips off the bottom of the page and makes a small box in the right hand corner, prints a bold black PTO in black biro inside and continues into the morning, the night, the next month, his pen tracing the ethereal rails of the suicide route year after year, his words a shunting Death Express that never seems to reach the end of the line, until, four decades later,

The hymn finished. Father Dmitri cut short. Wundra steps up to the lectern,

'Like a dud firework packed in damp cardboard casing sulking in the dewy morning-after. That's how Dad looked to me wrapped in his soggy suicide note. Tullius the cat left his feet for the first time, pawed his hair and pelted down the hall. He was found by one of my nephew's friends, a little tubby boy named Deagen. Deagen found Dad wrapped from ankle to upper lip in a patchy scroll of different papers: lined, dotted, squared, glossy

photographic. Yellow memos and crayoned family portraits (formerly on fridge), where he was Dad (which one of us drew it I don't know) and granddad (little Brian drew that one I think). Scribbled over erupted insides of cigarette packets and on lavender toilet paper rolled around his waist all scrawled over in black or blue pen like the colour of his toes or in some areas pencil-lead the shade of his face,' she strokes the splintered face of the empty lectern catching her breath.

'His putrefying feet lumbered over the edge of the swaddle and some of the purplish black moisture had run onto the newer ordinary A4 sheets from the fax machine with Simon's corporate logo on. A toenail had fallen off which made Deagen puke outside in the hall and that's what brought us into the room, tubby being sick, and that's what made Nathan say "so, he did it," and Simon reply "took his time".'

"Come on kids let's go" I told them. But some kids stayed inspecting the wrap, gawping at the cryptic cartoons fixed with masking tape or reapplied sellotape, masking tape on sellotape, duct tape on masking tape. Deacon, my oldest nephew, read aloud near the right shoulder, "it's a pity I did not get a vasectomy early on. It would have saved the lives of at least three and probably would have prevented the anguish of an entire generation. These things tend to multiply uncontrollably," each syllable pronounced like a note on an over-amplified banjo. Deacon is unlikeable. I'm sorry Deacon, sorry Simon but, well you know...

'The other kids looked bored. They plucked some bits from Dad's pelvis and used them as rugby balls, sleds and shields.' Wundra inhales deeply and lets out a long whistling breathe full of fluoride, TCP and tobacco.

'The way the pages of his paper pall were wound round him it was hard to note where to end or begin. We guessed it started somewhere near the left or right ear. Nobody wanted to move him. We all knew how much the autopsy would mean.

“Throttled by dreams to the grave,” read the neck’s plain paper with Simon’s dull *Time Care and Share* logo in the corner. Deacon said it out loud again and I thought guiltily *I dislike that kid, blood or no blood and I suspect no blood* – sorry Simon, sorry Deacon – Janine - but, you know,’

Simon shrugged, Deacon nudged Janine awake. Behind them Nathan and his eldest daughter inscribed indelible noughts and crosses on the woodworm bench. Deacon nudged his mum again and Nathan’s wife laid full length along the third pew with her head resting on a prayer book, feet on a kneeler, one arm tucked under her candyfloss thigh.

‘He must’ve have rolled himself in the sheet more than half a dozen times, picture him dizzily cocooning himself that night.’ Pause to picture. ‘Parts had congealed with age, old age, and there were folds that first had to be delicately unravelled to reveal the heavy scroll beneath. Some pages were stuck together. Others never came apart.

‘We’d removed the top half and were rolling him out of the multilayered sheath when we found something new, we unearthed detailed pictures in crayons and acrylics on plywood planks of areas of the brain segmented into different rooms, like medulla/hallway, thalamus/kitchen – here look:

‘Hallway: This is drawn and labelled as the medulla. Dad is passing through the hallway stumbling. He has crashed into the furniture and leaves a telephone, frame and small table upturned on the floor.

‘Bedroom: The hypothalamus. Here he pictures himself sitting up in bed. Red faced. Books stacked to the ceiling.

‘Kitchen: Here is the thalamus. He’s trying to fumble with a faceless brunette on the kitchen surface but evidently can’t get it up. His tongue hangs out his mouth white.

‘Remember how we all looked at the tongue. The cold post-mortem adumbrating on the dead man’s taste buds, remember that?’

They nod.

‘Parlour: So this is the cerebellum it says in crayon on the little paper tab. It has three jars of gherkin on the shelf. On the floor is ant killer. It can be used for wasps and cockroaches it says here.

‘A Patio: I don’t remember ever having a patio in any of the places we lived. Few of them were real houses but converted from something into something or back into something. Bungalows and flats I remember. But here is a patio and on it Dad is facing the wall reaching impotently to catch something fluttering in the drain.

‘The bathroom: The Pallium. I’m questioning how much he knew about the brain, as much as I do probably. In this room which is the pallium, which is the bathroom, his shit outsize’s and outweighs him – crushing him to the walls and ceiling.’

Nathan’s wife adds a prayer book to her pillow.

‘Basement: In the basement of the basal ganglia he has multiplied with the intention of torturing himself.

‘Lounge/dining: Temporal and frontal lobe. Our mother is cleaning.

‘When we laid it out flat I scanned the pages for my name, Wundra, Wundra, Wundra? Nathan, Deacon, Simon and I filed through the pages like condemned archivists. The kids were sent away with their mums. Only I really live in that house but you all come frequently as if it’s still our family home. The children in the garden and the wives kept at bay around the kitchen table and in the conservatory.’

‘There was the cat, dull silver and sluggish, Tullius would lay like a dollop of compressed scrap metal by his feet for days and nights on end.

‘Tullius watched as Dad was carted off. We all stood indoors leafing through the sheets and assembling them in some sort of order. We took the barely readable and brittle pieces and left them to one side neatly. The newer company headed pages we

piled where his feet had been. Using the imaginary anatomy of his body to arrange the items as we went, where his feet stained the floorboards a pile marked *fairly new 1990s*. By midnight we almost had a paper reconstruction of the frail body. The last shreds that made up his hips were prescriptions and tax forms scrawled over in red biro, one for gout another for chronic bronchitis.

‘I stood at the head, Nathan hunched over his feet and Simon and Deacon leaned against the walls. We all wondered if we each saw the same ghost in loose threads, knee-like knots of hotel note pads and post-its. Did Nathan see the mayhem of his face, Simon the uneasy slouch he had when walking like heavy braces corroded around him? Did Deacon see any resemblance to his granddad or any human form? I saw gestures, a fleck of exhaustion in his fingers upturned to the telephone table in a helix of envelopes, the chest of watermarked ads. And Nathan looked away at me and Deacon and at Simon and made the same gesture with his fingers, he looked exhausted. We all did. Tullius pawed the cheek and chased the bits and pieces down the hall. ‘

She stops breathlessly and combs her hair back tightly with one hand fanwise.

He looked for cerebrovascular damage. He tried to find cerebro-degenerative indicators, something basic to kick things off on the natural death front. The Pathologist looked to his Technologist photographing the body.

‘Pajama bottoms, loosely knotted, no elastic, grey – downy on his legs. Nothing on his feet. . . A vest on his torso, too big for him, falls from his shoulders. His initials are penned on the label: MP. There are no other clothes, except he was removed from a quilt made up of paper. Because of this last detail there is a lot of residue on the surface of the skin, ink, splinters, paper fragments,

paint, pencil lead, newspaper print. Ultraviolet light reveals at least a dozen substances, all of which evidently come from the paper casing. It is not entirely improbable that one of these materials may have offset a reaction, but I doubt it. We will have a better idea after the internal examination.'

The Technologist diligently went ahead with the undressing, commented now and then – an abrasion here on the iliac crest, bruising there, I can see violation of the bellybutton. And then when Murray lay naked, mildly bruised, imperceptibly grazed, the Pathologist reviewed the young techie's pointers. Nothing indicated trauma. The small cuts were from being eighty four and the bruises brutal additions to old age.

With the big incision nearing he'd like it all cleared up before then, a glance and grant, but knows in all likelihood the heart's the killer and that is pocketed damn deep inside behind a messy matrix of muscles, concealed by a secret life of blood and bone.

Murray was washed then weighed with the assurance of the large dial on the rod at the foot of his bed/tray/buffet cart. The Technologist measured all the parts of his body, the length of his calf to his thigh, his thigh to his waist, waist to chest, chest to shoulders, shoulders to neck, neck to base of skull.

'White Caucasian, eighty four years of age' he spat into a Dictaphone, 'grey hair long to shoulders, blue eyes. No distinguishing marks, no birthmark or scarring, one small mole on his underarm.'

The Technologist brought the body block and inserted the weights to pin Murray flat. The Pathologist asked the Technologist, 'do you think?' Then cut off and said 'I'm going to make a T incision, this case is unlikely to be strangulation, in fact it is certainly not. So for the sake of aesthetics and cosmetics I will make it a T not a Y.'

'Ok.'

He drew the knife across the shoulders and skated down to the pubic bone. He sheared at the chest cavity, forcing the doors open to the interior. Removing the ribs he saw the heart and lungs clearly. He lacerated and cut away at the posterior tissue like a burnt side of toast. Immediately he opened the pulmonary gland and saw a floater, 'a floater here, right here,'

'Ah, classic,'

'I see no need to continue. This was a pulmonary aneurism.'

'Great, let's piece him back together and get going,' the Technologist's skin is milky like a shallow lake slopping over fresh concrete.

The room is cold burgundy and clinical beige. No windows and very high heavily framed lights cross the ceiling. Behind the dead man's head are two wide shafts and a long full sink. On the shelf above the sink are cleaning products, detergents, bleaches, disinfectants. In all there are eight taps. There is a smaller sink beside the big sink with a pair of gloves at the bottom soaking through.

Walls, hanging on a thick rod, on wrists: many dials, for weighing, timing, testing, for balancing, expostulating, deducing and solving, many dials for as many functions as the defunct organs being weighed and examined like cheap ceramic mugs.

Progressing quickly through the other organs he listed them meticulously and briefly, their size and shape and remarking any blemishes or abrasions. After all though, through a whole boot sale of organs, he remained convinced of a common aneurism. No abnormality, a regular body-blip. Just another body blip,

Blip

Father Dmitri interrupts 'Miss Patrick shows great...' Wundra draws an aggressive circle with the plywood thalamus to cut him off. He sits back down.

'We all took our separate piles of paper and sorted them page by page, making a dot-to-dot of Dad's testimony to his own loathing. Chronology was impossible to fathom. Only slight markers like births, deaths and influential TV shows lent a hand in indicating the years. Six hours later I had two hundred and eight pages fumbled into a vague decade, 1962-1972, and after all this I had no clearer idea who he really was.' She unsheathes a slip of brittle paper from her hip pocket,

'The first page begins:

I was born on 12th October, 1938 and I die on 15th December 1962. I read 1938-1962 and feel a great weight slink off my back. b.1938 – d.1962. Murray J Patrick was born in Gravesend, Kent in 1938. He dies aged twenty four. Married with no children. Murray, a childless, barely married man dies not unhappy, not happy, in nineteen sixty two. He is twenty four, a respectable age to die and he did it all by himself, that's the main thing.

Another page, a pink blotter reads:

Nineteen seventy five is a good year, as good as any other. I don't know a good year, night time is as close as you get, but I know a good place. Gravesend is a great place. It is famed for its deaths. It has the minor symbolism of my birth and it is universally suitable for all kinds of death. It was the border of the great plague and was also where Pocahontas checked out. It is like a terminal for big deaths and little deaths. I would join the Graves End Senior Dead Scheme...

Something happened. Something happened to the length of three more batches, some bigger, some smaller.

'I questioned the findings of the autopsy and requested a new one. We searched deeper in the text. Tullius camped out on his bed all week, day and night, grieving the warmth.

‘Dr Wodinsky was polite but dissuaded. He was nervous. I asked, “do you find it a disprovable series of events?”’

Badly she intones a male monotone, flattens her chin to her neck. ‘It is ... not provable, in that sense, by any means I suppose, but my job is to make an astute examination and then decide on the most likely cause.’

‘Yes, but likely is as likely does.’ I circled his desk predatorily and put my palm on a textbook about bronchi, ‘we are very sure that he committed suicide, we are positive in fact, why else was he wrapped up? Here, take this list. These are notes he made of the ways he would do it. So now tell me?’ I told him,

‘Well... to be frank Miss Patrick he was eighty four years old. A pulmonary aneurism is as likely to occur in a depressive eighty-four year old as it is in a happy-go-lucky geriatric of the same age. It is also likely from what I saw he wore the note every night for many years.’ He opened a page of the textbook and pointed to an illustration, ‘here look...’

‘No’

‘But you will see here, the floater – there,’

Her Punch and Judy act made the kids snicker. ‘I’ve seen enough. Will you redo the autopsy?’

‘He continued reading the page as if I’d left and was just thinking of the digital picture of busted bronchioles, but was really thinking how to get rid of me, remove me like an appendix ... “Yes okay. I will do one more, but you need to understand that my findings will be accurate.” I left satisfied he would do what he could.’

Blip ... All those blip bloody blips.

‘It’s incomplete, we know that. A real suicide note gets signed off to signify the blip. The end would be the point at which we published, shredded, anthologised or torched it – and here we are, about to torch it.

‘We all looked at the edited manuscript on the kitchen table, “so who reads it?” I asked,

‘I think we should take turns’” optioned Deacon.

‘No one of us should read aloud.’”

‘We take turns.’” Kick, Punch and Judy – Simon, Nathan and Deacon feel their voices violated inside out.

‘No lets each take a day to read it. This is my reasoning: each of us knew a slightly different Dad and the impression we get when reading will be slightly different, so to get the closest reality in these pages we should read to ourselves with him in our head.’”

‘Okay’”

‘Okay’”

‘Okay’”

I carried the bulk in two trips to my pink bedroom and sat down on the teddy raked rocking chair and began. My favourite passage:

Octopi are prone to do it at night. They eat themselves, stab themselves or starve themselves.

Allegedly a circus octopus stabbed itself when the circus disbanded, its tricks went unnoticed, its life confined to performing alone in the dark. Caught in some deep undersea agony, the stark headlights of their existence suddenly too bright in their too-human eyes, they maul their own tentacles and rip their own delicate tissue in alien revulsion. All female octopi suffer postnatal depression, intuit the stretched springs of their life cycle winding down, the tides accelerating and end it all by starving.

Fifteen hours later I hung off the chair and lay on the floor, a sheepskin rug as a cushion and Tullius’s scratch board as a prop, fanning the last few pages over my face and finished.

‘I handed over to Nathan who handed over to Simon who handed over to Deacon who handed his pile back to me in a four day relay. Re-read, reassemble, edit. Each of us had a different ending by the time we’d finished. We agreed to wait for the next autopsy report before making any hardliner decisions on how to

deal with it. The consensus at that point was to make one standard photocopy and let the original ride.

‘I hung up on Wodinsky.

“So what’s the verdict?” Nathan asked cheerily from the kitchen table.

“They have no fucking ... inconclusive. To me that only gives weight to the suicide theory. Seems damn fucking blinding obvious to me,” I expressed my conviction in large inflating balloons of arms, like this.

“Cool,” said Nathan.

“Yeah, that’s great,” said Simon chumping leftover breakfast in what could’ve been Dad’s mouth.

“Thanfuckingtastic,” mumbled Deacon, whose mouth is childish.

“So,” I said finally, “we should get things together. Incinerate him and that manual of his.”

“Cool,” said Nathan and the other two nodded.

“That cat, it died.”

“Oh. Where is it?” I asked

“In the alley partially buried,” answered Deacon,

“It had not moved since...”

“Oh, poor thing, a broken heart I suppose.”

“Do you?” asked Deacon impetuously, *blood or no blood...*

‘It was stupid so much care had to be taken over his appearance from the morgue to the church into the cooker. None of us would see him so for the benefit of the mortician who’d have to do all the executive taxidermy we said “leave him as he is, it was his last wish.”

“You’re sure?”

“Extremely sure,”

“Okay” the mortician’s assistant bounced down into the vaults of pampered dead in mid-postures of putrefaction and beatification, death and deathliness.’

Harvey Slim: he is halfway inflated but his eyelashes are impeccable.

Jolene Lopes: hair a stunning cake. Mouth could easily be reciting Dickinson.

Murray Patrick: he is straight. No clothes. His arms and legs are complimentary in the box. His face has a murky translucence like rain water schlepping over faded graffiti.

Again Father Dmitri fumbled heavenward toward Wundra's rapt unfortunate face (Murray's). This time she cleaved the large Medulla in his face,

'My Dad was not a very good Dad. From as early as I remember he wanted out. Our use to him was as cruel proof of his conviction that all life started bad and got worse. He saw us as embryonic suicides!' She nods at the button pusher. He dutifully presses his button, starting the slow hydraulic tick tock tick clank of the coffin conveyed to the exit. Wundra moves to the front,

'If it were up to me he would have finished this great ode to nothing a long time ago,' she speaks at the awkward pace of the coffin's conveyance, tock clank. 'But alas, my father was a stickler for getting things down on paper, and here' brandishing part of the note, vacuum packed in six Tesco carrier bags stacked either ends of the coffin, one lashed in the despairing Father's face, 'is his longwinded prescription for life. When my mother died her sister asked me what possessed my Dad, why did he relent with such a long depression without seeking help? I answered something like he didn't see the point and wanted to end it before it ended him, but really, in reality, I should have answered truthfully – if only I'd known then: He has nothing else to write about. And now as we watch him trolleyed to the last room of his life I want to say I outdid him, I am better than him, I will haunt him down there and

taunt him with the one thing I earned for myself away from that sonofaprik: doability. Please find at home, labelled and placed in the draw of my desk three USB sticks, pink, green and blue, containing my own ode, exactly half a million words in length – double spaced, Calibri, addressed to Murray Patrick with the intent of mocking his arduous life project: Dying to stay alive.’

With the frontal lobe as a grapple she mounts the moving coffin, surfs down its varnished pine mane to the head then in one fluid leap from its brass nose through the bead curtains silently bellyflops the furnace, followed 3.4 seconds later by the suicide note and Murray whose limbs are still neat and complementary in the box like an eroded Vitruvian Man.

‘Well’ says Simon.

‘Yes well ...’ replies Nathan,

Mrs. Patrick finds it hard explaining to the teens what happened on their way home. ‘It is just something that can happen to people when they get to a certain ... well ... when they find out that.’

Janine: ‘Sometimes when grownups don’t, when they do, when adults start to they end up ... It happens.’

With corroded alloys and open windows the old funeral car noses onto the motorway throttling its way home, followed by a newer model shunting closely behind. Inside Nathan and Simon chase raindrops, drip, down their windows and race the big drops top to bottom, drip drop, blip.



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