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 BRANDON WICKS
 

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*THE HOMEOPATHIC CURE*

Begin with blood. What do you think of? A surgeon? The crimson smear of his latex fingers as they work inside an arrhythmogenic heart. Pump, pump. Pump, pump. The soaked gauze, replaced every few minutes. A protruding clamp with scissored handles. A rubber tube siphoning the fluid as it pools. Or perhaps not. Perhaps a dark stain on the highway instead; a crew of service men with their rumored tanks of cola-based serum, scrubbing the asphalt clean.

Perhaps none of this.

So move to tissue, flesh, teeth. But move closer. Push aside the sterile masks, the nitrous, the distracting glare of an examination light. Focus instead on the abscess. A pain that festers for months. You can taste the rot when you breathe. You can feel the pulse kick to the root of your jaw: the living nerves sing out and spot your vision with each misplaced forkful at mealtime. Solid meats and vegetables become a torment; the body sinks. Eventually, the aching fever spreads outward, infects the entire head, until you would relish carving the putrefaction from your own tender gum.

Ah ha. Maybe you see my point. But wait: move to excrement, first. This, this is daily. It is inescapable, this familiarity with your own urine, your own feces. But ah, what plumbing we have!—restrooms, water closets, tidy bowls—the words themselves provide a sanitary distance, no longer in the company of shuddering bowels. No longer dispensing a chamber pot early in the cold morning. No treading carefully to keep its filth from sloshing onto your hands. No emptying the bucket into a vegetable garden. Come spring, the zucchini will blossom through a crust of last month's waste.

Tell me, who would want to live this closely again?

My friend, Sangio, is rotting in his bed.

The lights were dimmed when I last visited. The curtains allowed a dusky, mouse-eaten daylight. He breathed heavily against the mattress, the sheets drawn up to his bare chest, which was sunken and slick with sweat. Such is his attitude. Lying supine under a slow fan, Sangio is practicing his own religion.

"Ollie?" His eyeballs cast to the side without raising his head. They appeared larger than before, like boiled eggs, but jaundiced. He grinned, open mouthed. "Do you smell that?" he rasped.

I had my handkerchief pressed to my nose. "Smell what?" I said.

He barked out one laugh, then two, and winced. His eyes squeezed shut, the pale blue veins throbbing in his temples.

"Your mail," I raised the bundle where he could see and placed it on the nightstand.

I peered at the bathroom door, slightly ajar, and considered using his toilet. The light was off in there. I decided to leave it that way.

“The neighbors,” he said. “Are bastards.”

I cleared a seat for myself beside his bed.

“Tromp tromp tromp. Tromp tromp tromp. Fuck fuck fuck. Squeak squeak squeak,” he singsonged along. “And then they have the nerve to bang on my ceiling when I cough.”

“We should get you a new apartment.”

“They should get a new bed.” He cleared his throat, leaned to spit thickly in a glass jar. “One that is not metal.”

“Or at least have it oiled,” I said, and it hurt him again to laugh.

The farthest windowsill was filled with a small dirty pyramid of old pharmaceutical bottles, their labels peeling and their contents mostly empty. They captured and released a strange plastic light, orange and watery. [continued]