

4 Flashes

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

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Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

Crunchy Jikama

I was lying on the grass on my belly, my shoulders raised, supported by my arms. My hairy lower legs were raised, my ankles crossed in a girlish way. I noticed something strange in front of me, a wasp—it looked like it was burrowing into a bare patch of dirt in the lawn, its stinger quivering.

But then I saw another and I realized that I'd gotten the direction wrong—it was coming out of the earth, stinger up, like a blade of grass or a tough little weed.

Then a third.

I was trying to figure this out when I noticed they were rising all around me. Then I felt a sting on my thigh, just below where my shorts ended. I screamed and kept on screaming until I couldn't anymore. After a while, my girlfriend came out with a bottle of tequila and some salt and a lime. She'd been trained as a nurse, so I trusted her.

My first hangover in two years, and it feels like morning. It *is* morning. It feels like love, like the reincarnation of an old friend, like a poltergeist is handling the details of my life. Red wine is redder in Mexico. I eat a crunchy white vegetable whose name I cannot remember, though that vegetable is like a brother to me.

When I get full-blown Alzheimer's, I will wander the streets crying, trying to get someone to tell me the name of that vegetable, but no one will know what I am talking about and they will tell me: *Go home, old man.*

Someone will put me on a bicycle taxi pedaled laboriously by my old friend, Delgadillo. Delgadillo will say: What does it matter, the names of things? You can't remember my name anymore but you still love me, and I love you, though I wish you hadn't become so obese. Pedaling you is a burden, and my chain clanks from the strain.

Saint Rogers

My dentist, who is also my lover, came from a family of eleven children. She was the oldest. She wore long Mennonite dresses like her mother and one of those gauzy caps. She helped take care of the younger children. She collected their baby teeth when they fell out. She put them in a fishing lure box with many compartments. Once out of their mouths, she wouldn't let any of her brothers and sisters ever see their teeth again. She hid the fishing lure box with cunning and wouldn't reveal to anyone where it was. Not even when her father attempted to wield his patriarchal power, she would not yield.

She believed that there was totemic power in that box, and that by having it in her possession, she held shamanic force over her siblings. One day she found her parents' baby teeth, and she appropriated them too. They became her possessions. Everyone's teeth were her possessions. She got a strange look, a possessed look, when she talked about teeth, when she talked about wanting to be a dentist.

Her mother prayed for her. She prayed during the day and at night when her daughter lay sleeping, dreaming of teeth. On a radio show, one that her husband forbade her to listen to, she heard that a preoccupation with teeth meant a preoccupation with sex. She was scared. If her oldest daughter went sex-crazy before she was even an adolescent, what did that mean for the younger girls?

None of this was ever resolved. It went on and on, part of the subterranean life of the family.

My lover went to college, and to dental school, and became a dentist, and became *my* dentist, and sexually assaulted me in her dental chair during my first appointment, while I was floating on nitrous oxide, and became my lover, and moved me into her luxury condo, as you already know.

I don't know how to pray, I told Mr. Rogers. He was sitting there in his cardigan, canvas sneakers on his feet, and I realized that those accessories were his monk robes and rosary beads. He was a TV star and a saint. He leaned over and confided that he believed that *Cookie Monster* was real, not a puppet—*real*.

I was there to interview him. Instead I told him my troubles. I sunk into him like a child sinking into his mother's lap. I told him about my cousin's recent suicide, and about my lover, my dentist, and our troubled relationship.

He let me talk until I'd talked myself out. Then he suggested I pray.

I told him: *I don't know how to pray*.

He said: *It's not hard, not complex, You need only three words*.

I love you, I thought.

Thank you, God, said Mr. Rogers. *This is the only prayer you'll ever need*.

Evil Scag

Film chemicals poisoned us. Toner and fixer made Kodak rivers. Even as we set our images in silver paper, we destroyed our fleshy selves. We drank in carcinogens, sweated out fluorides and hydrocarbons. Our bodies became bulbs streaming ozone.

I'm full of chlorine. The city pool is inside me. Goggled swimmers stroke up and down my ribcage.

Now Kodak has followed Polaroid into the bone-yard. We've gone digital. My wife's gone surreal. She's an i-phone on a neck. She's still good in bed, still has big tits, but I can't look her in the eye, there being no eye, only an i.

To rehabilitate myself, to make my way back, I took up with the woman with dead eyes. Dead eyes would lead to live eyes—that was my theory.

The woman with dead eyes gave me a sexually transmitted demon. She didn't even have to touch me. She did it through my laptop screen. The woman with dead eyes, she's a venereal kitty. She's a human immunodeficiency virus. She's not human, not really. The sum toto of her experiences have bashed the humanity out of her.

I didn't click away fast enough. She got me, gave me a sexually transmitted demon. She's not even pretty. She's ugly, according to Western standards of beauty, Eastern too, Northern and Southern. She's no ding-dong belle. She's an evil scag. All she cares about are the unmet needs of her vagina. She poked me, and it was the beginning of the end.

Exile, With Harlot

1.

When I was nine I wrote a three-page treatise in pencil, *Why I Am An Atheist*. At fourteen I decided my life's fate: to be a hermit in the desert. I built a shack and learned to squeeze water from rocks. My friends were horned toads, lizards and scorpions. We sat on the floor of my shack and talked about other people's perceptions of us and the FBI's definition of dangerousness, and how it is best predicted.

The scorpion seemed especially knowledgeable about this, and claimed to be an informant for spies from three countries, though he wouldn't tell us which ones.

A blue rock-lizard said: *You're full of shit, ego, bravado, all the stuff our friend Mitchell moved here to avoid.*

No, I don't care, I told my friends, I might have once cared, but I don't anymore.

2.

Our desert ayatollah looks at me with contempt. He put me in charge of stoning an adulteress. I found a good wall to set her against, but I'd forgotten to see to the stones. Someone had come and taken them to repair the wall that surrounds his olive grove. So there we were, all ready to put her to death, and no stones.

The ayatollah looked like he wanted to beat me to death with his bare fists, but he was old and frail. Instead he exiled me and the harlot too. The villagers took hold of our arms and legs and tossed us out the village gate, slammed it shut behind us. We looked out at the desert, turned and looked at each other.