

Me, Butterfly Hu, and the Damnable Season

by Drew Jackson

When the city froze and the darkness began to arrive ahead of rush hour, my pills worked; Butterfly Hu's did not. In a double blind trial, you can't know who gets the miracle, and who gets the sugar.

We met six months ago in HumanaCore's waiting room. I held a clipboard on my knee while trying to crowd the most troubling details of my recurring affliction—the howling fits, the arresting inability to give an albino lab rat's pink asshole about anything (sorry, I forget the clinical term)—into the small spaces on HumanaCore's questionnaire. When I raised the pen they gave me to my lips, a warm hand sheathed in a clear plastic glove caught my wrist. “Spirochetes everywhere,” said Butterfly Hu. “Free pens at HumanaCore aren't free.”

“Thanks,” I said. “Forgot where I was.”

“S.A.D. like me?” she asked.

“Ask me in November.”

HumanaCore drew blood, gave us meds and daily logbooks. If we felt weak, we were to write it down. If our bladders leaked, or our noses ran with verdigris snot, we were to write it down. If we stopped sleeping, if our hearts raced, if we went blind, if we hallucinated, if we confused smell with taste or sight with sound, if we began to feel like God's favorite prophets or saviors, we were to write it down. HumanaCore said that each day we should circle the picture that best reflected our mood; Butterfly Hu and I named each one of the little faces: Hopeless Crying Man, Vaguely Dissatisfied

With Everything Man, Zen Neutral Man, Mirthful Buddha Of Compassion Man, Blissed Out On Jesus Or Something Stronger Man. "Look," she said, pointing to the white margin on the left of Hopeless Crying Man, "they seem to have omitted I'm Going To Fucking End It If The Sun Doesn't Come Out Man. What is the control group supposed to circle?"

On that first night, Butterfly Hu rolled from my arms and said (more to her bedroom wall than to me) "I just need to put it out there so you can start getting your head around it, dude. If you got the placebos, you can't come around. I hate depressed people. They're selfish. Soul eaters, really."

These pills are better than last year's. They leave the taste of saccharin and passion fruit on the tongue. These pills don't show me Aztec gods, or golden rays of sun on a December night, or keep me from breaking up over the sight of a dead stray frozen by the roadside. They only prop open a door somewhere inside of me so that something amusing could stop by for a visit.

Butterfly Hu won't answer her door, although with my ear pressed against it, I can hear her sobbing on the other side. Against my cheek, her door feels feverish, and through the gap in the weather stripping leak the smells of a life neglected: hair weighted down by human grease, armpits gone to seed, untended kitty litter, kitchen trash not carried to the dumpster.

I will knock again. When she appears in the doorway in food-stained flannel pajamas, and slippers that should have been pitched years ago, I will not wince.

These pills, these nameless pills, that HumanaCore gave to me, but not to Butterfly Hu, they focus me. In time, I should be able to convince her that I am not the winter.

