

The Piss-Colored Man

by James Black

His open door was interpreted by the neighbor as an invitation to all but place a mirror under his nose. She demanded opportunities to fluff his pillows and coerced him into accepting gifts of food, more than he could possibly eat, and sometimes ate with him, never wincing at his sallow aspect.

"I hate eating alone," she confided.

So desperate for him to praise her pity, she would kiss his piss-colored cheek and give his bones a tender squeeze good-night, not accepting his thanks but burdening him with hers. She pushed open the screen door.

"Are you sure you want me to leave this open?" she asked.

He nodded, and she let go, the wire mesh blurring her friendly, dreamy smile. He watched the light find the shine in the worn, aluminum door as it slowly shut, the hydraulic arm hissing faintly before it latched with a hard click.

Halfway through the next morning, he sat alone and faded away. The breeze readily pushed through the screen door, but his soul was snared like one of innumerable leaves against a chain-link fence.

That evening, the neighbor found him absorbed in impenetrable slumber, and while waiting for the proper authorities to arrive, selfishly wished him alive again.

