

No More Tears

by Kyle Hemmings

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When Bill arrived home from the hospital, he didn't feel a lobe lighter. There, it wasn't so much a matter of a lexicologist with scalpel classifying word manias and symptoms, but rather, measuring them in milliliters and removing their CT scanned location. There was now a lack of Bill that was complete. No more tantrums with fangs and no more fears with flash-photo eyes. His mother no longer complained of a toenail fungus.

In the house, whenever Bill's mother spoke he couldn't see her face because she always stood behind him. Nevertheless, there was that unmistakable tone of someone speaking with staples holding the gut. Bill once imagined his mother gushing paper clips or rubber bands stretching longer than the entire colon.

When Bill was in the hospital, one month bleeding into the next, his mother visited exactly twice, both times complaining of the things she needed or couldn't get rid of: mop heads, bleach, dustpans, detergents, grease, turgid water in the basement. And money. There simply was none. And the dust, she added, turning her head to a casement window that stayed locked, was piling up. Studying her fake turtle eyes in a compact, she complained that a bus driver had made a pass at her, even with runs in her stockings, or because of them.

Bill lay in bed, smiling up at the ceiling. Later, his words were marshmallow soft and incongruent as train schedules.

But here, now, location was a given in any sense **except** where he thought she stood in relation to time. She still articulated the notion of hearing something hissing inside walls. But Bill knew that this was her impression of him in the old sense. It was her decision to allow experts to drill through walls. Whenever she spoke to Bill, or **about** him to his face, her eyes moved like angry squirrels up in trees. Scared squirrels inside walls.

Bill once had a father, but he scurried underground without a paper trail. There was once a county college that Bill had attended, but that stood at the other side of the world-as-green-apple. From where Bill stood, sometimes for hours, he absorbed the change of sunlight from a bright yellow hue into a darker one into something the color of a cavity, a grotto. In this way, Bill could measure time as a continuum. At the hospital, he remembered it as freaked orange, discontinuous shades of it, dawn to twilight, and the sky, white and wistful blue, the colors of his gown projecting upwards. But with the clock, like an urbanized and neatly sectioned sun, ticking minutes to a dinner under a roof of creatures, there was only brown, light brown, sienna for lovers or ghost-watchers, warm fuzzy brown. His mother now spoke as Bill surveyed the backyard from the window.

“You know what I found in the yard while you were gone? Snakes. That’s the kind of luck we got. There are snakes in the backyard. Next, it’ll be the basement.”

Bill looked thoughtfully at the rich grass next to rows of flattened blades turning yellow. Behind him, there was the whisk of a broom, but the dust was something *she* brought in. He spoke as now he rarely did.

“You know what kind of snakes they are? They’re garden snakes. They won’t hurt you.”

This was something that Bill didn’t know to be true, but it would make her feel good, and it would maintain his presence in the warm side of the house. The square eyes of windows, the slanted mouths of blinds, opened to the sun. A kind of negotiation, a kind of truce. Bill looked down at his wrists. The squiggly marks across each, where the leather restraints were, could be the movements of small snakes. Snakes passing for worms. The bigger snakes, poisonous but glittering, the ones with multi-colors, twirling, or running perfectly side by side, were somewhere else. Those snakes were uncoiled, quiet, still as a negative of what the cranium no longer housed.

