

What you're waiting for.

by Sean Taylor

I was in the shower measuring my pinkies when it happened. After five minutes of deliberation it turns out they were deadlocked, but I wanted my left one to be stronger, thicker and of better use. For as long as I can remember I had played favorites with all things and today inevitably is the day of the pinkies. The water ran down in a manner all too casual and forgiving, I had just ended a relationship a week prior and whenever the thought of her entered my mind I had said "To the shower and forever."

I can stand here all day and measure all of my lefts with my all of my rights and I can play favorites and mostly be a little less than lonely. Though it was two thirty in the afternoon and I became rather hungry, I hadn't eaten that day, just woke up from a nasty hangover in an empty bed and had said, "to the shower and forever."

It was a busy year. It was the same year I had stopped blessing people after they had sneezed, and it became long enough in that right alone, yet winter had finally come. The Consumer Electronics trade show back in June had finally belted out something that would change everything, these scientists had finally figured it out, and they could finally detect earthquakes. I had always figured that field of science to be dead, and lost, that everyone in that big science building went down the hall to the Cancer studies or to weapons manufacturing.

What doesn't kill you?

It was slightly conversational and vaguely powerful.

These seismologists had built this machine, dropped it deep into the earth and let it tug and pull at all of our continental shelves. They did it with the use of magnetism, and when they would give we all knew it was coming. It was like nagging your parents into spanking you, how much these devices caused or detected the earthquakes was unknown; we just had to know it was coming, even if we were the cause. Of course the first problem was due to the depth of these charges, the signal would take five to ten minutes to

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/sean-taylor/what-youre-waiting-for>»

Copyright © 2010 Sean Taylor. All rights reserved.

reach us and everything would be five to ten minutes too late, telling us something we had already known. So they over sped the signal and now everyone gets a warning of five to ten minutes prior to the earthquake, everyone called it "the window" and everyone asked what you did in the window yesterday, in that window, and everyone always remembered too.

PG&E bought up all the shares and installed radios into every household, like smoke detectors, and if you don't pay your utility bills they simply did not work. And you too can be alone in a city aware of a nightmare.

Everyone paid his or her bills on time.

I was in the shower when it happened, the movie phone guy comes out full bore and starts yelling at me, he says, "There will be an earthquake in five to ten minutes."

I had only just figured out the length of my pinkies, I was to the shower and forever; he was slightly conversational and vaguely powerful.

I had thought to stay in the shower and let it go, the biggest fault of this new earthquake detection system was that there was no way of knowing if it was going to be a bump, a thud, or a thunderstorm; we knew something was wrong but we didn't know what, or to what degree.

I have a shower radio with a clock, I was hungry and I had five minutes to get out and get dressed and run straight into Golden Gate park, which was a two minute jog or thirty second sprint from my house.

I decided not to decide.

I found a vein, a thin blue one that ran up my left pinky finger, but with no twin vein for my right pinky, and after carefully studying them for two minutes I came to the conclusion we are not inkblots of symmetry, that scars, and well life, save us from our own identities by identifying them.

"My pinky" I said to myself "is my pinkies pinky."

And then I got to wonder if I was still drunk from last night, if this was a hangover or if my teeth did hurt as often as they

shouldn't.

"There will be an earthquake in the next two to seven minutes," blares the living room. After that warning they will countdown to the window, the five minutes of quiet when everyone waits, everyone either says "shhh" or "Did you hear that?"

San Francisco was the first city to install these devices and they backfired in the most peculiar way. These groups sprouted up, these earthquake fan clubs, bloggers and forums of people all whom when they first heard these alarms, first the five minutes warning, then the declining others, would run into their homes instead of out of them.

These people would run home in five minutes and get into bed and get naked and fuck in the window. That's what they called it too, fucking in the window, some new kind of thrill seekers.

I know because I was one of them, I work up the street on ninth avenue waiting tables and so did my then future former girlfriend, except she was on eighth avenue.

When the alarms came on all our co-workers would run to that baseball field off of Lincoln Street, though we, we would just sprint home. The adrenaline from the run and the countdown was the greatest aphrodisiac ever invented, like racing to get naked because you're skinny dipping in a spa in Alaska, yeah those earthquakes made the air still like Alaska.

Yet now she is gone and I am alone in the shower with two minutes till the hiccup or the great collapse. I suppose I'll wait this out. I start to think of all the other people in this city in the shower when the alarm goes off, I am, I think, with them right now. I figure maybe I'm mostly alone; they are all running down staircases or falling down fire escapes, some of them naked, some of them with towels, mostly probably naked though.

There were these others though, this group that started up on Craigslist, some guy started it, he said when the alarm starts he's staying in but he will have a light on that sits in his bay window and if anyone wanted to join him for the big bump they were welcome, that he would have cookies and drinks and nobody should be alone

in such a state of emergency. Of course quite a few others followed and it was a huge thing in the Castro. In fact an entire dating scene started with unlit lamps left in night windows, the lamps would be removed as soon as they were in a committed relationship, unless, you know, they were into that kind of thing.

I have even heard of web cam races to see who could build the biggest house of cards before the earthquakes hit. They built these indoors too, in their very own house of cards; somebody said it was a metaphor or something. The first alarm being the starting gun, and what a whistle it was. I saw a video of one once, this guy was sweating so much the cards stuck to his hands then to themselves, which all the judges ruled cheating, and he was just crushed at the end, well, you know, figuratively, it turns out that earthquake was just a baby tremor.

I did it too, after she left, I put a lamp out, though my window only faced my backyard and it would only be visible by the courtyard of surrounding backyards, but it was there, and to be able to say it was enough, to remove it someday was enough.

It is nearly insane and impossible how impractically important these symbols became when we knew our world was about to shake and change.

Yet here I stand with one minute left just staring at my toes. I know my shoes as well as the way I have walked for the last twenty-four years have pushed my toes into different directions, the displacement of weight, weaker muscles due to vitamin deficiencies, shallow bones. All these factors added up to the difference between the left and the right. I got to wondering then if babies are completely symmetrical, they say that symmetry correlates rather closely to beauty, perhaps this is why babies are so cute, so beautiful.

I was once a baby too.

Alright, lets do this.

I don't dry off or put on socks, I don't grab my phone or my wallet, when I'm running down the street the hard asphalt wears away at the tiny rings on my toes and on eighth street I tripped over an

uneven slab of sidewalk and go wrist and hand first sliding into the sandpaper of the street.

The alarms they placed on most all street corners are blaring all around me and I know that shower got me so far away from any kind of safe or clean.

By the time I get to the park I can see all of them, all of the singles, milling about with cigarettes like they're waiting on test results. They stand around looking at their watches or phones, talking about the nothing before the big something. I swear it's a bar without any booze in that field, no one thought to bring a kite or a football something to throw around while the big one finally hits. This park is the biggest singles event I have ever seen, and it seems to occur to me, this peasant crowd would rather be with someone through danger then safe and alone. Everyone in the park looks up at all the lights in the windows of the Victorian homes on Lincoln street and some consider running in to one of them, some even do.

Where else do you look during an earthquake but into the eyes of someone who loves you, for reassurance, for comradery, for hope? I have however come to find that my broken bloody hands and my pinkies for that matter look completely identical to eachother after the fall. I have become a symmetrical inkblot but a rather messy one at that. I feel born again too, the adrenaline and my newly marred features save me from the casual encounters, I have had my earthquake alone, and it feels better that way, I didn't need it, nor did I need anyone else to destroy myself with.

