

From **insomnia diary**

By Bob Hicok

Bottom of the ocean

At least once you should live with someone more medicated than yourself. A tall man, he closed his eyes before he spoke, stocked groceries at night and heard voices. We were eating cereal the first time, Cream of Wheat. He said that she said *we're all out of evers* without explaining who she was or how many evers we had to begin with or where they were kept. I slept with an extra blanket that night. This was strange but that year I had to read Plato for a grade, each circle's the bastard child of a perfect O I remember he said, and Kierkegaard I thought was writing stand-up with *the self is a relation which relates itself to its own self* but my roommate nodded as I read this aloud, he'd stood so long before carnival mirrors that the idea of a face being a reflection of a reflection of itself was common sense. On the calendar the striptease of months, dust quietly gathering on the shoulders of older dust and because he'd not taken the microwave apart and strapped its heart to his head or talked to the 60-watt bulb on the porch he thought he was better and flushed his pills. Soon he was back where windows are mesh and what's sharp is banished and what can be thrown is attached so unless you can lift the whole building everyone is safe. We had lunch a year later. Or he spun the creamer and wore skin made of glass while I ate a sandwich and by that I mean I was hungry and he was sealed in amber, a caul of drugs meant to withstand ants and fire nor did his mouth work but to hold words in. I'd wanted to know all that time what happened to our evers, to ask if he remembered what he said and explain to him he was an oracle that day, I wanted him to tell me about the woman who whispered or screamed that our chances were up because the phrase had stayed in my life as a command to survive myself. That was the day I learned you can sit with someone who's on the bottom of the ocean and not get wet. By the time he said things were good he'd poured twelve sugars into a coffee he never touched.

Spirit ditty of no fax-line dial tone

The telephone company calls and asks what the fuss is. Betty from the telephone company, who's not concerned with the particulars of my life. For instance if I believe in the transubstantiation of Christ or am gladdened at 7:02 in the morning to repeat an eighth time why a man wearing a hula skirt of tools slung low on his hips must a fifth time track mud across my white kitchen tile to look down at a phone jack. Up to a work order. Down at a phone jack. Up to a work order. Over at me. Down at a phone jack. Up to a work order before announcing the problem I have is not the problem I have because the problem I have cannot occur in this universe though possibly in an alternate universe which is not the responsibility or in any way the product, child or subsidiary of AT&T. With practice I've come to respect this moment. One man in jeans, t-shirt and socks looking across space at a man with probes and pliers of various inclinations, nothing being said for five or ten seconds, perhaps I'm still in pajamas and he has a cleft pallet or is so tall that gigantism comes to mind but I can't remember what causes flesh to pile that high, five or ten seconds of taking in and being taken in by eyes and a brain, during which I don't build a shotgun from what's at hand, oatmeal and *National Geographics*, or a taser from hair caught in the drain and the million volts of frustration popping through my body. Even though. Even though his face is an abstract painting called Void. Even though I'm wondering if my pajama flap is open, placing me at a postural disadvantage. *Breathe* I say inside my head, which is where I store thoughts for the winter. *All is an illusion* I say by disassembling my fists, letting each finger loose to graze. *Thank you* I say to kill the silence with my mouth, meaning fuck you, meaning die you shoulder-shrugging fusion of chipped chromosomes and pus, meaning enough. That a portal exists in my wall that even its makers can't govern seems an accurate mirror of life. Here's the truce I offer: I'll pay whatever's asked to be left alone. To receive a fax from me stand beside your mailbox for a week. It will come in what appears to be an envelope. While waiting for the fax reintroduce yourself to the sky. It's often blue and will transmit without fail everything clouds are trying to say to you.

Insomnia diary

At 5 a.m. light
from their living room
sinks fluorescent teeth
into powder dropped
from the grey womb
of clouds already moving
to Cleveland,
pregnant with snowmen.

I'm a voyeur
in the sense that I float
through the window
of a bungalow
as parents take turns
holding the scream
of their son.

I've seen the thorn
of his voice contort
his body. Seen
his mother's lips
form sounds of comfort,
her only medicine.
Seen the man pace
when not holding the child
and the woman pace
when not holding the child
and both
pace with the child
in their arms,
small miles of asking
their flesh to heal
a stubborn pain.

We've been together
since one a.m.
This is more intimate
than watching sex,
which may be a confession.
This is more personal
than my tongue's
opinion of saffron.
And though it's not
the dream
in which my left hand
leaves
for a better gardener,
in which I stand
above myself and pet
my eyes, wanting
back in,
it suggests the dream:
a feeling
that each life
is separated
from a life,
that each shadow
has ambitions
to cast its own shadow,

Or just now,
how both parents
made a cave
around their child,
reaching across,
reaching through
each other
until there was one
body, and how it felt
wrong to stare, almost
pornographic
to see the hunger
of a soul to encounter
the nearest thing
to itself.

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