



Layering Exercise

Noah Schoer

When it came, they were not ready. Although they tried, they could never have been fully prepared. This was worse than anyone could have anticipated. Every second left was spent do is praying that the tide of tears would lead to an end. Running from that which they could not see, they stopped. For a family that was far from perfect, this was the perfect way to go. For years, they had been barely staying afloat in the massive sea of baggage they brought along everywhere. With the Son going away to college, they thought a new chapter would be written in the Gale family story, but instead, volumes upon volumes were added to the already extensive chronicle of their complicated, convoluted lives. But now, none of that mattered. Waves of terror washed over each of them, interrupting their streams of consciousness. They gazed into each other's faces, noticing the pores that they had never seen before. For this is what eminent death does: tears life as one knows it to shreds and floods the mind with non-sequential thoughts. Slowly, they turned, with their minds in free-fall. Towards the wall, they crept, as it surrounded them. Only the piercing sounds of the Mother were heard, a sound that could cause hell to freeze over. Routinely, as if by instinct, the Son grabbed her in fear, although he was far too old for such a thing. Maniacally, the Father rushed around the house until there was nowhere left to go. As they were swallowed whole, not a peep was made.

Rachel Korman

A few nights ago I dreamt that four fishing hooks were stuck in my thumb.

Lined perfectly in a row, they each poked, side by side, beneath the surface of my skin. Conscious of the way the hooks curve at the end, I turned the first one at an angle before slowly pulling it out. The pain was less than the shock of realizing how deep the hook really was. Only a drop of blood remained after a surprisingly clean removal.

I pulled the second hook out of my thumb the same way I did the first. Curved at the right angle, the metal rose from beneath my skin.

By now, I was impatient. The pain thus far had been slow, and I wanted a faster way out. I yanked on the third hook, pulling straight up. This lack of care resulted in gore. The top of my thumb split open, revealing vivid, red insides of tissue and tendons. Blood pooled into my cupped, pale hands as I yelled for my mom to help me.

I woke up before handling the fourth hook.

Roy Missall

A Bedtime Chat

“How’s your ice cream?”

“Good. How’s yours?”

“Better. It’s vanilla.”

“How can vanilla be better?”

“It’s just a fact of life.”

“No, actually it’s not. Liking vanilla is like preferring white rice. No, shh. It’s like playing Gran Turismo for the menu music. No, shh. It’s like going to a cut flower shop and looking for ornamental grasses.”

“At least I didn’t buy a strawberry plant.”

“What the hell is wrong with strawberry?”

“Everyone in their right mind knows that strawberry isn’t a real flavor. It’s a copout to avoid the purely dichotomous, morally signifying decision between chocolate and vanilla.”

“Oh, chocolate for sure.”

“You can’t be chocolate, you’re already strawberry.”

“I am—”

“Shh. No.”

“I—”

“Shh, stop. They’re coming.”

“We were having such a nice time.”

“Shh.”

“Wait, who’s coming?”

“Nobody.”

“Oh. Darn. How would they get here anyway?”

“I believe they’d follow the star.”

"Stars."

"There's more than one?"

"I don't remember. This window is too small to tell."

"We don't have a window in here."

"Exactly. Windows are expensive anyway."

"Yeah, and we're broke."

"No no. It's just you that's poor."

"Both. Definitely both."

"Just one of us. At least I can afford strawberry."

"You know as well I do they give us those for free."

"But at what cost?"

"Shh. It's bed time anyway."

"Fine."

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Tom rolled over and closed his eyes. As he lay, his mouth still a little sticky from the ice cream, he imagined being back home with his mother, when he was a young child and used to sing with the old clock in the den that signaled his bedtime. He hummed a few notes out loud, but the walls just deadened his voice, so he let out a long sigh and drifted off to sleep.

John Walsh

Andrew started living in the attic in his senior year of high school. During that time the carpet was fresh and the breeze sent rushes of wind through the open window chilling Andrew down his spine causing goosebumps to erupt all over his skin. Downstairs his parents listened to classical music but Andrew always felt as if the tight scratching strings felt like needles on his skin. In due time, Andrew's friends moved on to college, but he stayed back cause he was hung up on a sweet talking lover that never really did him any good. Come winter, the addict consumed Andrew as he became dependent on its close quarters to keep him feeling safe and comfortable. The carpet became thin and pale from the dry winter sun through the window, and the window could only open a crack, as it's hinges were worn, so only brief, unsatisfying gusts shot through. In the spring time, when the frost cleared allowing regeneration, Andrew became more lively and even fixed the attic up a little bit by getting a new carpet and replacing the old hinges. Once the Summer came, however, so did all of his peers returning from college, and Andrew shut himself in the attic by the window, craving for some magic breeze to blow from the dry summer air, as the addict slowly relapsed into its lowly state. No one can predict what the future will bring for Andrew, or if he'll finally free himself of his attic.

Jessica Dammers

Beatrice's earliest memory was of standing in her father's library, looking on as he prepared manuscripts for his lectures. Her father, a researcher and professor of anatomy at the University of Cambridge, would lay out the contents of his knowledge on his drawing table: a model of the human spine, a scan of a true human brain, and even an illustration comparing the veins of leaves to veins of the human body. She remembered her father had hand-drawn dew on the leaves to make them read more realistic. Her father was smart— she knew by the way he pushed up his glasses by placing his index finger on the arch of his nose. However, she was far too young to acknowledge just how advanced her father's research was.

When Beatrice was almost eight years old, her father's forward thinking was considered a novelty in the world of science. His studies reopened discussion on several ailments that were, for centuries, considered closed cases. Her father, though after his death, became most famous for his essay on the importance of the appendix. While most researchers had placed the organ on a shelf with other seemingly purposeless units, such as wisdom teeth, or tonsils, Beatrice's father found the fault in their logic. This essay angered the medical industry, as appendectomies were performed periodically. The essay, which was refused from publication by The Medical Collection, was hushed from media. Not wanting to bind his career, her father agreed to never allow a student, coworker, or even family member to borrow the essay for personal examination. The only printed copy was preserved between the pages of a September

1925 Farmers' Almanac, found by a middle-aged Beatrice as she was clearing out her late parents' home. The essay, which was on display at The University of Cambridge Library for three months, brought forth the interest of many readers, but no further interest on the importance of the appendix.

Nick Covell

Burrows stood at the deli in a line made up of four people. It was less a line than a segment, he thought. The deli smelled like fresh meat and 409. The old woman ahead of him was crafting a sandwich that was not on the menu. It was a cacophony of ingredients that any professional would advise against: tuna fish, 3 pepper Colby jack cheese, mayo, onions and lettuce, sweetened with honey mustard on rye. The clerk rolled his eyes and winced backward to bark the order to the sandwich crafters, making the entire deli aware of the woman's unusual taste.

Burrows advanced in line and aimed his shoulders at the clerk.

"A #1 with American cheese, no mayo, on white," he said.

The clerk accepted the order graciously and shouted it backward. Burrows maneuvered out of the way to stand and wait for his order. He surveyed the room for the man he was meeting. A backpack stitched with "J. BURROWS" stood erect, reserving a table, but there was no sign of the man. He had never been late before.

"Your sandwich, sir."

His body jerked mechanically to face the clerk and his head nodded in a stern thank you. If the man did not come by the end of his sandwich, Burrows would leave.

Emma Caster-Dudzick

Martin's Walk

There was an avenue full of shops and buildings that towered, broad and grey. Clouds were herded overhead, squeezed between the buildings into tiny pastures of blue sky. Below, cars honked and bleated in the street, pushing forward slowly from green light to the next. A stale winter chill hung above the road, filling with exhaust. On the sidewalks, people moved against each other, shoulder against shoulder, weaving and pushing and following. Doors opened, doors closed. Some went in, some came out.

One door opened out from a thick concrete building and Martin, tall and slender with legs like stems, was carried into the crowd. He worked in an office on one end of the avenue and lived in a house at the other. Every day was filled with a fight to get here or there.

It took about 45 minutes, given all the pushing, shoving, waiting, and weaving. He left home at 6am every morning, when the sky was still quite dark. His office offered no view apart from windows and concrete. By the time he got home after work it was inevitably dark, which meant his 45-minute walk home after work was the only time he had to see the sky. Luckily, he stood a good degree above the crowd, which allowed him room to crane his neck back as he walked.

And so he did, with people trampling all around him. Cars honked, people barked, exhaust fumes smoked the air, and Martin bent his long neck back, looking for the sky. The further down the avenue he went the harder it became. His slow pace was no match for the crowd that pounded past him

like hooves until he felt almost flattened to the ground. Every day ended the same. By the time he reached home he had barely seen any sky. Instead he felt, curled on top his back, the weight of years he'd yet to have sow him into bed.

Paige Schindler

Charlie had been on the offensive all day. He had woken up from a nightmare that's content snuck away but lingering sensation bombarded his mind. He couldn't shake the feelings of confusion and sorrow and, more than anything, terrorizing fear. He woke up in this state often, never able to remember his dreams. Life is terrifying, he would joke to himself, of course I have nightmares. His therapist recommended drinking tea. He never found that it helped. He made a cup anyway.

The only interesting thing on TV was this special about endangered gorillas in the jungle, and for some reason he just couldn't get himself to care about them. Monkeys always creeped him out. Too humanlike, but slightly wrong. The uncanny valley. The voiceover asked the audience, "Can you imagine a world without gorillas"?

Yes, he could. And it wasn't his duty to save their asses- he'd never even met one. But he sat and watched the whole special because the alternative was the news, soap operas, or going outside, so the gorilla show seemed like the only option.

Time droned on. Hours later, the show ended. It was far too long for a documentary, he thought, even though he watched it the full way through. He carelessly flipped through channels. Nothing seemed important.

He was rescued from channel-changing hell by a cheerful knock on the door. A smiling girl stood outside. She must have been about six. Before he had a chance to ask what the girl was doing here, she marched in like she owned the place, hopping on the couch and changing the channel to

some cartoon he didn't recognize. Her parents walked in behind her and he remembered—this family lived down the street. They visited him every day. Very nice people.

They usually had an arsenal of questions for him—how is he eating, how is his blood pressure, that kind of thing, but today, the husband immediately sat down quietly at the kitchen table. He sat upright and tense, gripping tightly the seat of the chair while the wife paced the kitchen nervously

“We've been discussing it and we think”, she said, “I think you need to slow down a little,” She said. That seemed a little preemptive for her to say—he had only watched television all day.

“I mean”, she added, “the house is full of stairs. Sooner or later...” she trailed off.

“We think you should go into a retirement home.” The husband said.

“A retirement home?” Charlie gasped.

“We think,” the man said, “You should just be able to relax and let people do things for you, you know? Take the stress off a little.”

“I'm not stressed.”

“We just want to make sure you can get what you need.”

He could hardly believe the scene before him. He was being ambushed by two people who were practically strangers

“What gives you the right to come into my house and attack me? You think you can just come in here and convince me to go into a nursing home?”

“Not a nursing home- assisted living!” the man exclaimed

“We’re not trying to attack you.” said the woman, quietly

“Then what are you trying to do?” She touched his shoulder.

“Daddy, please.”

“Dana”, he says, unthinking. But she’s not Dana. She couldn’t be. Dana’s just a little girl.

“I get nervous when you’re here all alone! I’m afraid you’ll forget to turn the stove off...”

Then he remembered. Dana was all grown up and long out of the house. And then he remembered everything.