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ARRANGEMENTS

Daniel Cameron

A good rule of thumb: it takes five years to recover from the death of a loved one. Not only that, but spring moves North approximately thirteen miles per day. It's August now and you didn't know him whatsoever.

Occasionally in life someone will ask, have you ever been to Europe? If you tell them, no, they'll say, you should go. You can nod and express desire then continue thinking about why it's been ten months since you've driven your car.

Sometimes you will be replacing a bulb in a table lamp and recall that a human body at rest releases the same heat as a 150-watt screw-in. Then you can think does it give off the same amount of light?

Then you can think about all those replacing-light-bulb jokes. And why you burn candles instead.

Eating out, your server will lean over the table and with a sense of familiarity ask, how is everything? Or, can I get you anything else? This will be uttered whether the table is singular or not.

Despite saying, good, nothing, I'm fine, thank you, you leave an oversized tip you can't afford.

As you watch television before bed someone on screen will make a comment about how watching television ruins the brain.

By the time the evening news airs you'll prepare yourself to fully fathom what happened today. Halfway through the broadcast someone will read a missing person's report at which point it's okay to remind yourself that one trained dog equals sixty search and rescue workers.

Rarely, though it does occur, an anchorman will inform the people at home that a SAR dog is trapped in a frozen crevasse. The camera never stays long enough to count the sixty rescue workers huddled at the scene. Rest assured the Nielsen ratings have their own estimations.

Traditionally human-interest stories are comprised of schadenfreude and animals.

Volunteering is very rewarding and often manages goodwill without the shallowness of cameras. Cedars-Sinai offers positions in the nursery year round. Spend a weekend walking the halls with VISITOR pucked to your shirt. Learn in the training seminars about anti-contraction medications, atosiban, nifedipine, and fenoterol. Be aware of the inherent risks: cerebral palsy, gastrointestinal problems, and mental retardation to name a few. Mark on your calendar the limit of viability at twenty-four weeks. No sooner.

Remember this all factors into the abortion debate.

After handling preemies, when you're physically shaken, leave the NICU, avoid peering into the steamy isolettes, and drive home. Nauseated with despair, you can follow up with thousands of exhaustive articles online until morning sickly shines.

Work is necessary. Sometimes you'll need to motivate yourself when ultimately there is no meaning to life. Of course finding good work is difficult. Persistence is key. Practice in a mirror. Some people that lock themselves in the bathroom anxiously memorizing dialogue, include comedians, advertising agents, and White House press secretaries. Occasionally teenage boys practice sexual thrusting.

Never answer an interviewer's question for longer than sixty seconds. This formula allows for sixty complete one-minute responses per hour, so consolidate. You can watch the clock tick as the HR lady asks, why do you want the job? Searching the classifieds, you can think, she must've thought I was eager to leave.

Funny, you've noticed a similar effect while microwaving your frozen express dinners. The neon clock counts backwards and your hunger dances embarrassingly. Grilled Turkey Medallions because it's Thanksgiving. Mesquite Grilled Chicken in the summertime. Rapping your fingers on the sink basin you feel determined to master the art of cooking this week. Immediately, as the chicken still lazes in infrared splendor, you're a prize-
winning chef of Le Cordon Bleu. Skip the gradual process; all four burners on the stove are blazing.

In the blink of an eye it's all happened.
You taste test everything.
Showering in the morning, pull back your stomach fat and suddenly your body is carved in mahogany. The marathon gun waits for your toe to creep near the starting line.
In the Laundromat, you’re a happy mother.
In the movies, you’re in the movies.
Lifeguards and receptionists do it on slow days. They daydream. Those are the two professions listed by title in the Intro to Psychology textbook you skimmed in the corner chain store. Generally, the author touts, it occurs out of boredom. But you know this type of eagerness, with the imaginary eugenics involved, perennially sits like a third eye in the middle of your forehead, crying.

In order to address boredom outside of work, create plans to shop to exercise to clean to call your mother long distance. Generally only a third of the items written on To-Do lists are completed. Thankfully you'll be able to tell an ex-lover you had dinner plans with so-and-so, but they fell through at the last minute because so-and-so had to do such-and-such.

If you are drastically bored, a sex change will age you five years. Non-surgical transvestism fluctuates your age relative to your clothing choices.

If life seems like all work, television, and household repairs: add people. It’s not uncommon for real people to throw actual cocktail parties. You can think about how often you hear cocktail party from literature or film versus how often you attend them. Also, it’s not entirely rude to consider the get-together elitist then immediately admit to jealousy and promise yourself to try and have a good time if it kills you.

Afterwards you’ll learn to save your skepticism for things without rules of thumb, because cocktail parties are famous for them. One, for example, asks you to let a bottle of red wine breathe two minutes for every year between the vintage date on the label and the present.

Another will become apparent to you at the party. And another. And another.

Flying standby after a long trip to your Sister’s, you know it is safe to assume that beyond the terminal windows the pilots coming in would never think of landing if they hadn't touched down in the first quarter of the runway.
You are supposed to make another pass.

Returning home at nights when the silence of your life is deafening, television doesn't matter. Lights on or off, doesn't matter. Drinking wine alone under your bedsheets, the bottle’s Lamaze, doesn't matter.

Sometimes it's beautiful that the ceiling plaster takes shapes when you cross your eyes. Other times it's beautiful when you stare at the ceiling and nothing forms. Both, however, are the same barrier that, after a week, is no longer thick enough to quell the raging stench of a neighbor dropped dead above.

Police all sound the same over the phone. You learned this from your own experience. Sgts. to cadets, there is a warble of woodland creature in each throat. Officer Roddick is a tranquilized animal trying to get a statement. You would commend him for performing his dangerous job well, but you'd sound like a grandmother thanking a boyscout in the crosswalk.

During renegade cop flicks an angry commissioner who’s on his second angioplasty will threaten the renegade cop(s) with stale desk jobs. Fortified paper-pushing. The main character, a loose cannon, hates the idea, yet weekend moviegoers who return to their offices on Monday are never insulted.
They know it's not real.
A real police officer will not ask you to “free associate” unless he or she is a part time psychiatrist as well. Instead, when you say the word “thicket” after Officer Roddick explains the cause of death, he will bid you goodnight and finish the report himself.

Calling directory assistance from your dead neighbor's number is weird. Technology twitters; you wonder, if one day
they're able to teach robots what you've learned, does that make you a robot? Does that make machines human?

The service hasn't been disconnected. The automated operator transfers you and it rings, and rings, and rings.

You let it.

Insomnia is a common side-effect of mood medications. Buddhists with sleep disorders are encouraged to meditate on metta, or loving-kindness.

You're not Buddhist, but you try so hard to distract yourself with what's good.

Masturbation fails quickly.

You don't laugh at the late night talk shows anymore, but they're on, glowing like a toxic lagoon. Lying on your side, the same question pulsates from your temples, who constructed this thing, sadness, to be so comforting?

Confused, you pray.

You thank God for taking your beefy neighbor. Heaven or hell, he's removed from the equation. No longer a congenital concern. His wise empathy is there for you all the more.

You want this pity to last forever.

So when you're awake all night and finally do call one of those infomercials, or those hotlines, or those charitable organizations that flash on TV, you could be up for hours in the company of someone whose job it is to let the customer hang up first.

Frozen in this grave, am I--
Iced over by a deadly chill
In my bones.
Like weather-enduring gargoyles stones.
Breathing under covers,
I catch the thrill of empty breath.
And I sigh--
by and by
to the feverish, ever wondering why.
I stand cemented to this sanctuary.
Am I comfortable here? or comforted?
Perhaps,
I simply indulge in a place to rest my head.
There are cracks in my brain,
where thoughts leak out through my lips.
And through the ink in my fingertips.
You bandaged me to keep them in.
But now,
They're leaking through my skin.