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**AMNESIA
AND OTHER GIFTS**

The goodbyes have overturned the horizon and lay bare their seed on fertile ground; there is a pale face receding, framed by a curtained windowpane. He'll rise, forgetting, but as he slides the curtains open and hears the tinny metal slide of the rings suspending them, he will be flooded with misery, a desire to lay back down in bed.

The light filters through the trees—strange blocks of shadows dance on the wall. Some leaves are bright, mantis-green, backlit by the sun—others are fern-green, muted and shadowed. They tremble on their branches, the burgundy maple tree in the background reminds him of rust or blood. He turns and fingers the sheets where they used to lay, obsessed for many weeks with one another's bodies. Her period was intense—thick and streaming out of her. She was afraid of taking anything with hormones, so the copper IUD had rendered one day of every month a kind of horror scene, but in truth he thrilled at the intimacy of it, even as he was repulsed by it. It was hot to the touch, he could almost see steam rise from the rivulets running down her legs. He thinks of a dead rabbit sighing its life into the sky.

The stains of her blood trace their bodies and he can't bear to throw them out. He decides that the next time he brings someone home he'll say he'd cut his foot—or his hand. If he decides in the moment it will sound more true.

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How do you imagine the future? I often conceive of it in vignettes like this. Although conceive is the wrong word because in truth they come to me—the visions are full-bodied, screaming or sashaying into my consciousness—I don't have the sensation of *creating* them.

But why are the imaginings so cruel? Why do I imagine his dread at my recent departure when that departure is not coming. Yet. That kind of sadness—those sickening final goodbyes that coat your days in thick grey ash—is currently coiled sleeping, docile as a sun-drunk cat.

I remember reading that you often dream of horrible things so you can psychologically prepare for the very worst things if and when they happen. Like circuit training for your nervous system. I recently wrote about another one of my morbid fantasies which involves my brother's tweed coat and my mother's grave. My mother was disturbed; she told me she didn't like experiencing the "shadow of her own death." I said I understood. But I also knew I'd keep imagining it.

Sometimes the casket is open. Sometimes I sing Celine Dion, choke-laughing at how saccharine and awful the lyrics are, but goddamn they feel good to belt out on the highway. Sometimes my father is crying, unshaven. Rattled and terrified. Sometimes it's spring and the brightness of the daffodils silhouetted against the late March frost is spectacular; I pick as many as I can hold; I fill her whole casket with them.

It's one of the hardest days I'll ever have and I think my mind is trying to help me pre cope with my own inevitable unravelling. Perhaps if I imagine it 100 different ways, one of them will be close to the truth and when the daffodils rear their rippled yellow heads, I won't scream into the snow; I will have been here before.

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I've been thinking a lot about the dialogue between imagining and forgetting. In truth, both feel predicated on possibility. *Imagining* lances all kinds of psychological blisters. Adults happily pretend they can forge the future. Self-help books insist that the Universe sees your pining and just might bend to your will.

So go ahead, conjure that piano, that porsche, that perky-tilted blonde; try things on! Change the furniture, the rage, the loss; try pesto instead of that alfredo sauce. *Imagine* the world being kinder, more just. *Imagine* a world that feels less like purgatory—

filled with indiscriminate killings, venomous spiders, leaking sphincters, inexplicable rashes, impossible cruelties to children and the environment—and more like a fraught family reunion! *We're all gathered here together for a few days...sort of by our own will! We should all do our best to take care of one another while we're here and have a good time before heading our separate ways again.*

But isn't forgetting *also* a kind of imagining?

I've been reading a lot about amnesia recently. The Mayo Clinic breaks it down into three types: The first is retrograde amnesia (difficulty remembering the past, things that were once so familiar), and the second is anterograde, which is difficulty learning new information. These two are caused, of course, by a delectable variety of absolutely terrible things from brain swelling and alcohol abuse to seizures and tumors—you get the idea, the human body is nothing if not fragile as a paper mache egg...but the kind of amnesia I'm interested in is the more rare, dissociative, or psychogenic amnesia, induced by trauma.

The brain protects itself from remembering something awful. And in this void, in this, once-was-pain space, we find another kind of imagining. A place where that thing never happened. You can imagine a life that isn't marred by the inky edges of darkness; violence, death, depression. The mind, knowing what it does to your poor heart, to your central nervous system, to your

bowels which run with ice when you *remember*—tidily blurs those edges until the memory is gauze.

It helps you imagine a better past. It is, of course, often not much more than a fleeting parlor trick—the memories course back and cripple you—but it's a lovely respite.

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My fascinating if mildly morbid research started because I couldn't remember having sex with my ex boyfriend. I realize this a trivial thing in many ways, but it started to eat at me. It was a small, but potent and disconcerting void. It was as though someone had come in with kindergarten scissors and started sloppily snipping those memories away. Like that very sad, very wonderful movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*?

Did I bring the scissors? Did I wear stockings on my head—my features mashed against the silk mesh—and start lopping out our love making?

...and then I realized I was relieved. In part. It is both the cruelest and most lovely of gifts. To forget his face and hands and feet. It's like losing time—the minutes that made hours which made days and weeks—simply vanished.

I started looking at the few photographs I had of his naked body. I've always wondered if post break-up one is even allowed to do that...but I suppose if you

remember their body in your mind it's tantamount to the same thing, but I didn't anymore. So was it a violation?

I started to scroll—that eerily familiar sensation of thumb-sliding, a gesture once awkward and unimaginable now ubiquitous—and stare at his limbs, trying to conjure what once felt like an extension of my own body.

I suppose my mind is willfully forgetting so I can move on. His whole body is a scar that's blistered and ran and is just a bumpy ridge I run my fingers over in the dark; I can't really feel or see it, there's just a shape where he once was.

And now? I'm busy imagining more goodbyes; I'm imagining the void that my absence will bring to another person's life. We've only just begun and I already need to forget.