

The Gaylor Apartments

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TOO MANY PEOPLE

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A SHORT STORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A MIRROR.

The thought that I may break and die had passed over my face in the same daily way that a cloud often does while traversing the sky.

I leaned for the majority of my life against a chicken wire fence within an enclosure. In the pen there was no mystery to myself, it was all plainly laid in front of me. A passing rabbit, the blades of grass they ate and the small black pellets they produced after the eating of the grass were illuminated by light, and they all directed that light which shone on them to me. When I received this light and perceived the natures and deeds of the rabbits, grass and shit, I gave back what I saw to them. I beamed their reflections back, straight into the beady nervous center of a hare's black pupil. For an instant, he paused, and he would generously return to me some light, and I would see myself. Not in the dark glass surface of the eyeball, but of it. This reflection was what I was made of. Here I stood, something that shone only as brightly as the source of the shining. I could never create light, neither could anyone else—the hare or its food or the soil that it would later return to.

I sang along, in the chorus of all, with all. A nexus of borrowed light between us. I had this wonderful feeling from time to time. That I was the light, and its bouncing between us was an expression of the light's source, and that this trail of bouncing light would lead back one day to where it began.

I haven't had that feeling since I became aware that I will die. I had done something, one day in the enclosure that I don't care to mention and immediately following this it occurred to me how fragile I was. I am so thin, a quality I had never found to be disturbing before. But now I felt this thinness acutely. There is a limit to me, I am not light, I am glass mere moments away from shattering. As the last winding motion of this new notion slithered into the compartment behind my eyes, I was suddenly lifted from behind and placed in the back of a truck. Laying in the truck I faced the sky fully and completely, so when it began (the trembling) I did not realize at first that it was me who trembled. From my perspective, it was the sky that shook violently and without ceasing. But it was me, the motion rippling across my surface, not the blameless sky.

The truck came to a halt at the end of its trip, and I was placed back against stucco bricks facing a parking lot and the edge of the forest which marked the east most border of the property that I used to call home. I thought little of it. I wondered what damage this tremorous ride had caused. Perhaps there was a scratch, or a chip in my silver facade. I couldn't admit to even myself that I feared a fissure, deep and through me. It would be irreparable, probably, this imaginary fissure that I was becoming more and more certain of. I would be cut off, my splintered self unable to reflect anymore and no longer a part of the light-bouncing chorus. What had happened? It was possible for me to know. All this time I had faced outward contently and flatly reflected, but that had to change. The method by which I could discover the extent of the damage became clear to me, the idea of it blooming in my mind. I would curve inwards. I was at once sickened by the thought but on a deeper level I had already begun to implement it.

The top of my face, which had always been kissed by a portion of sky, started to dive, incrementally downwards. The curling I was doing slid the sky out of view, I then saw the tops of trees followed by the bird nests located in their midsections and finally their trunks and the pine needles that they had shed laying by their feet. Shortly my own base came into view after my gaze passed over an unremarkable section of tarmac. At first I mistook myself for more pavement, but soon the imperfections—the small flecks of dirt which clung to me, rough, and a worn down patch where repetitive and abrasive contact had been made with an aluminum can years ago—made me realize that it was actually me that I was looking at. The can had blown across the field straight into the rightmost portion of my foot and remained there for sometime rubbing against me when the wind blew. This patch of me was less reflective than its surrounding areas and confirmed to me that indeed I was seeing myself. I paused my arching motion at this point due to the immense weight of this discovery.

This is where I began. The boundary or difference between me and everything else could be seen through this mark of imperfection. No, this blemish did not mark me, I thought, this was me. I identified with this worn patch, regarding it with shame and fascination. I stared at it, I traced its contours, I noted the milky faded effect it produced while reflecting. Something else happened then. I saw it again, the blemish, in a ghostly dim way slight offset from its position. The scar had a duplicate over its shoulder. My nightmare had doubled, how could this be? I soon deduced that this was in fact a reflection of my own marred surface, provided by my bent-over head which now faced my foot. Thus, it followed that the imperfection threw its image up to the top of me and could be seen there, on that portion of me as well. Suddenly I felt like a fish who had just become aware he was wet. The wrongness of it was crawling all over my skin. I stared deeper and my hideousness multiplied further and further, copies of the mark were generated as I bent towards it. I couldn't help it, there was a sick magnetism that drew me towards my own horrific self. The "real" mark now appeared like the lone surviving son of a long successive line of generations of marks each standing behind each other accusing me all at once.

But this was just the beginning, for there were other marks, and little scratches, even chips. I bent towards each, becoming more and more curved, and as I did so and became more so, more marks came into my view. My face that I had once proudly felt the rays of the sun on and even more proudly shone them back onto the world, was actually a worthless thing. Now the full lower half of myself was in view, and my top half could be studied as a reflection in the flawed surface of my bottom half. I had curved inwards completely so that my head now met my feet, my body forming a circle. I have spent years like this, more than years, the majority of my life. My flaws extended into infinity floating in the illusory depth created by a reflection of reflection like stars in the sky. The sky, where had the sky gone? The light had begun to fade as I now curled horizontally, hugging my sides to myself in misery. Why does the light reject me, hide from me?

-Milo Conroy