

JIMMY CHEN

The Search for Namable Things

For a guy who had never touched Jennifer's buttocks, I was rather touched by them. Her buttocks were of the tone and contour that evoked the natural response in high school boys. My science lab partner was Steve. I did his homework in exchange for not having my face rammed into the desk. When I was inspired, I wrote love poems for him to give to her. A reoccurring motif was the moon. At night, I imagined Jennifer's face looking at me in the dark: her golden blond hair a soft nest on my pillow. Night light is my favorite kind of light. As one is not aided with a full spectrum, the tonal variants which glide the eye over the terrain of a lovely face are celebrated in quiet. At this point, Mr. Hardy asked me to point out the gallbladder of the unfortunate frog flayed open at my table. The word, or question, with which I replied was not exclusive to this class: What?

Steve went on a few dates with Jennifer. Word spread that he had even had sex with her. He knew my feelings for her and expressed camaraderie by not slamming my face anymore. I'd see them hanging out by the bleachers, holding hands, walking to class together. I was incomplete without them, so I watched. I once tried to sabotage their courtship with a poem in which the narrator (Steve) cannot find his way to the cave. Along the way, he loses his sword. Jennifer, not the most gifted reader, didn't catch the symbolism. Instead she fellated him in the parking lot of Baskin Robbins. As it turns out, the gallbladder is located underneath the liver. It produces bile, which aids in digestion. The frog's eyes are still open, frozen in the moment it met its death.

There's this theory I heard that God invented suffering to make sure people would always need him. It's like happiness is distracting and misery keeps people focused. All big things can be condensed, packed into small ideas. For example, the moon is the sorrow God feels for us. He doesn't want us ever to be completely in the dark, so he put this

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huge stone in the sky to act as a mirror during our darkest hour—only this mirror is opaque and takes some of the light for itself, a commission of sorts. God places the moon very close to us so it appears the same size as the sun. Everything in the sky is a trick. We are not that bright.

Mr. Hardy was in the Korean War, where he screwed up his hip and pinky finger during two separate incidents, both which involved unplanned explosions. He ended up teaching high school biology, a graying crew cut the only mark of his time as a hero. His pinky finger was severely crooked, and for some inexplicable reason he used it to point. Chapter Seven in the textbook *Human Reproduction* really got him going. I remember only one thing he said in class all year, in reference to vaginal intercourse—something about the cervix taking a good beating. His eyes lit up as he said this, a vein the size of a rat's tail popping out of his temple. I felt sorry for him; a man in a man's world is a sad thing. Mr. Hardy hated this one girl, I can't remember her name. All I know, all anybody knew, was that she was a vegetarian. She had a nose ring, dyed purple hair, and big leather boots. Whenever we got out the frogs to dissect, she would make comments about how wrong it was. Mr. Hardy asked her if she ate meat, and she proudly said she didn't. He thought for a long while, his face red with fury. The next day he told her that her boots were made from animals so she should shut the fuck up. Everyone laughed and the next day she was gone.

Mr. Hardy let everyone pick his or her final seating arrangement on the first day of school. There was a line of guys behind Jennifer, all geared to sit in the most optimal seats relative to her. I got the golden seat—directly across-behind. The across arrangement provided the best view of her buttocks, with occasional prospects of her face, while being behind her let one do it secretly.

I suffered from hay fever those years and had a sniffing tick. During study session, I sniffed and sniffed until one fateful day when Jennifer got up and handed me a tissue. This was the only time she looked at me. Everyone laughed and the next day I was still there.

When my dad isn't at the office, he's at home fixing things. Last year we tore up all the carpet in the house to put in wooden floors. It took us two weeks. I got accidentally caulked a few times. He makes fun of my hands, says they aren't man's hands, too soft. He shows me his hands, callused and full of blisters. Last time I held a nail for my dad, he hit my fingers with the hammer. Two of my fingers turned blue.

“Now you are a man,” he said.

I have the sweater she left in class one day. I put it in my backpack, waiting all day to take it home. It's really soft, like her hair continuing over her body. Light blue, a calm afternoon sky. To throw it up in the air would be to lose it forever. Birds would mistake it for a soft patch of sky, catch it in their beaks and fly away. I sleep with it under my pillow. One day the sweater fairy will come and arrest me for theft and chronic masturbation.

I'm driving with my dad back from Home Depot at night. We bought a new toilet. The ceramic thing glistens in the back seat, propped up with seat cushions my dad had taken from the couch. It sleeps quietly as a cradled newborn. Reflections from the traffic lights above trace the contours, sweeping over the pristine and perfectly rounded bowl. It exists inviolate, until the moment I see it. The human gaze is corrupt, it turns objects into ideals. Every time I look at Jennifer, I want what I am not. I look out the window.

It's looking right at me.

What: when a blade of light comes through the curtains, it lights up all the air molecules and you realize air is thick, and each breath is a massive act. There's a tiny car carrying a man, his son, and a toilet down a road. From inside the car, the son looks out the window. The stars fidget with each mile, stubbornly grasping onto the universe. Car takes father son and toilet to the main street, at the light by Baskin Robbins. The son sees his friend's car parked by a stone wall under the broken lamp. A girl's head comes into view now and then. She massages the testicles with her hand, moving them around and around. In this world, the son wants tell her, no two things are the same. "No two things are the same," he mutters at the car window. "I hope one day you find the moon."

