



OK: Right now I'm working on a symptoms diary for a mysterious itch and a dialogue between twins who can't tell themselves apart and a collection of restaurant recommendations received on a recent walk in lieu of other smalltalk and the projects have really been bleeding into each other like when you're cut in a couple different places and holding yourself in an unusual position. I'll start with The Twins:

- "Look, I know myself *well*. I run my fingers along each measurement of my body many times while I fold my laundry."
- "What could be better? Of course, on a real body you wouldn't need to crease the pleats."
- "You're just as passive-aggressive as I am."
- "I'm a demonstrative person. That's why I have so much heartburn."
- "I've never had heartburn in my life."
- "What's your secret?"
- "I gargle the light until I can't see my lap and the drink sits uneven in the glass."
- "Are you standing or what?"
- "My least favorite position."
- "What size is your bed?"
- "Queen, or Full."
- "Those are made to accommodate two adult sleepers."
- "That's why we share."

In all the shame of my scurvy, I tried to fix my hair by use of my shadow. Having taken too many sections of paper towels for my needs, I lay one over top of the holster for someone else. These are the nights of dousing myself with apple cider vinegar. Ignoring the lights that are built into the rooms, everyone has bought new lights.

I don't want to talk about light after this.  
I'm here with the bugs.

And at the center of any real and enduring problem is a hard, perfect sphere of discouraging inscrutability. If one digs carefully (or else sets off a lucky charge in some old mine), one might discover a crag

or cavern seeming to provide for sustained interest and exploration, at least until enough excavation is completed that another, harder, innermore sphere is discovered—each paradox simpler than the next. Like so many things, this is not like a Russian nesting doll.

As it so happens, the people I work with are real characters. Just to say, when they're not \_\_\_\_\_, they're \_\_\_\_\_. They knew me first as an imbecile, which is how I gained their trust.

One is Raymond. Or, he was born Alex, and he goes by Raymond, and he answers the phone as David, and so does his boyfriend, Leonard. They work at a restaurant, and it should make sense if you've ever worked at one.

(No, I don't think he intended for half of his shirt to be untucked. Stop touching the hem with your mind!)

These are people (a) for whom the metaphors come easy and the world breaks down into parts, (b) for whom some interactions tend towards equilibrium and others towards entropy, (c) for whom the mouth seems just another cavity of the nose. They have about as much respect for each other as you or I would for an unattractive stranger: enough, but not so much.

⇒

The Restaurant: carpet designed as instruction for chair placement in several arrangements; small, blessed patio you can see from the front like a mirage; and even croque madame on the menu. (That's the one with the egg.) It's exactly the kind of place there ought to be more of. It's recently venerable, so there's also a wall with pictures of The Proprietor holding various celebrities around the shoulders.

What is the process? Are these restaurants who employ a staff of well-trained star-spotters? Or do the celebrities come in, order, see the pictures, and volunteer that they should be included?

“That's a good question” is a delay tactic used on the Sunday shows. And you wouldn't believe who comes in.

There's The Mother, who once accidentally folds up The Baby with the carriage.

The Baby who, now older, becomes divorced from The Good, looks back at those origin years as a hazy sham, meets The Painter and becomes on-and-off-enraptured.

The Painter, who, promised a life of insisting and refusing, becomes more interested in the lichens than The Saint, who—after all—was rendered from a death mask on commission.

The Saint, who—after all—was canonized only as an ethnic olive branch, whose miracles were only sexy endurance performances ending with announcements that they were over, whose audience comprised of lawyers trying to impress their dates.

The Dates, poor things, having broken their “No Painters” rule last week (still can't believe it) figured they may as well see a lawyer or two.

The Two Lawyers on a bus stop billboard: one with hair, one not. One mostly handles the divorces, one the bankruptcies. One has accidentally worn something blue, thinking it was black. One has crossed his arms too high on his chest. (These may also be The Twins.)

- “Hanged. *Curtains* are hung.”
- “Jeez.”
- “I don't mind if this is the night I remember by this stain forever. Or, put another way, I don't mind if this is the stain that delivers me back to this night forever.”
- “I can't even see it.”
- “It's right here. It's blood.”
- “I can't see it. It's too dark. How did you—?”
- “Just like you, I make my perfect life one day at a time.”
- “Huh.”
- “What have I told you about what I've wanted for years?”
- “I lost track of your ambitions about the same time as my own.”
- “As I remember it, you confided in me first.”
- “It's fraught. It's absolutely fraught. My mother and I *grew up* together.”
- “What?”
- “Some of the things I say to you now are more for the benefit of those who might be overhearing.”

All the seats feel a little deeper in my present condition. I thought at first it was the wind, a bug, a chill, a bead of sweat, some disagreeable polyester, a hair trying to grow into another's follicle. Whatever it is, **The Itch** is made bearable by imagining the perfect tool to scratch it.

I've come to feel like something left on the scanner bed. Please tell **The Image** to go on without me to the corner where The Sunset Tourists stop one by one in the middle of the crosswalk and take pictures against the light against the light.

But I didn't want to talk about the light.

In and out of certain of it, though, The Radicals are sequestered in ineffectual fields of aesthetic inquiry. There, the people talk about **The Revolution** as if it were a party to which they are deciding what to wear.

One scoffs as they change a verb to past tense, memorializing the recently deceased. Some AM/PM nerd checks their watch and smiles that it *is* tomorrow. All The Old Leftists drink Diet Coke. I have a sobering moment, figuratively speaking.

- The gap between what we know and how it happens is where fiction resides. We must root it out.
- How?
- With guesses, I think.
- You don't need to say "I think." It's painfully obvious that you are the one thinking.

Behind my back, over my shoulder, by my side, on my mind. I am the one thinking. When you were nervous, you were thinking for two. I do a pained smile. – Pain caused by the smile. – I smile through the pain. My face is drawn, not in at the sides but as a spiral from the center. Only deposed royalty should scorn another's expression of happiness.

I thought I knew what \_\_\_\_\_ was, but it turns out I didn't know what \_\_\_\_\_ was. I knew what some of it had been.