

## Log of Man Moths

*“Men and moths are interchangeable commodities”* –Frederick Brooks

e. . .

I saw him once.

He was living in a crack under the equator. If you placed your fingers on the map, you could trace your way along a seam, no thicker than your nail, until the drywall softened around a spot of putty bubbling below Kinshasa. I thumbed the spot of putty and applied pressure in a rounding motion until I pushed out a small hole which I heard plop on the floor on the other side. A dank draught leaked out of the hole and I used my palm to plug it, feeling the cold air run through the black room on the other side. Underneath the map paper my fingers felt the spackle, ductile though long dried. Something was clicking inside the hole. I tightened my headlamp and my neck strained as I pushed my face through the membrane of the wall. From his side, I must have looked like an illumined adult fetus crowning into the black world of the man moth.

He stood about seven feet tall, frozen except for his semi-flared shivering wings crumpling against the ceiling and the floor. I do not know whether he could see me or not but the large opal pools of his eyes peered blinklessly back at me.

–What are you doing here? I asked, They shuttered this school long ago. Asbestos.

After a few minutes of silence he laboriously retracted his wings and turned sideways, revealing numerous drafts. Large blueprints tacked to the black wall displayed designs for a series of civil works, invariably involving concrete and large bodies of water. I saw labyrinthine irrigation systems, tetrahedral tide breakers, a monolithic lunar dam.

7.389. . .

When the man moth had an immense dream during an electrical storm, a servant polishing the spiral banister of his babel-like palace fell over the rails and crashed into our world through a rictus punctured in a streetlamp’s globe. The servant whose paper character could not have sounded a fresh puddle remembered nothing but the act of cleaning. He dragged boxes from dumpsters, stripped tarp from abandoned construction sites, and broke off the mirrors of cars. From these items the servant built a structure in front of the Presbyterian church. The predawn morning would wake him and he would sweep the boxes and polish the broken mirrors and at night or when it rained he would lay his head against the cement under the cover of the tarp. A dark massed stranger laid food under a bucket every other evening, which he would suck from the squeezings of his clenched palms. Then the day one winter when he froze to death.

Even before waking up, the man moth had forgotten him.

20.086...

MAMB

“You see, men equal moths only when one cannot partition communication between the two. Otherwise, a combinatorial explosion occurs.”

Demonstration:

MM

MM, MM, MM

MM.MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM

MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM

MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM,MM

• • •

[illegible]

Where 'M' denotes 'men' and 'M' denotes 'moths'.

## 54.598...

Dam entombment.

Like the man moth, the man entombed in the dam exists only in conversation. But around the reservoir where in the summer the weekenders drove out from town to lay out blankets and cast fishing lines, the story swarmed out of the air in intervals. No one living remembered the construction of the dam, but even the resident engineers who issued reports on the sediment quality and depth of that dark pan of water told in moments of boredom of the man the cement mixers interred. No record of any such accident existed, but fifteen workers went missing during its famously doomed construction, overseen by a bookish young man, fresh graduate from Monmouth, who had secured the job through a connection of his father's. The portrait still hung in the back office.

Near the concrete walls a spot of algal bloom appeared on the water surface that grew the next day and on the third became a lime film of scum spreading bank to bank. The algae leached the oxygen from the life beneath and the fish stink smell coincided with the arrival of unseen skin-breaking flies. The mud sucked at the engineer' flippers as his body disappeared into the clinging scum. Globbs brushed against his goggles as he descended down to the brown bed. He pulled the reservoir plug, releasing bubbles that burst through the algal bloom. The open latch sucked up the sediment of the river bed and, suddenly, sucked the diver in too. Before the pressure crushed him, he saw a white object bobbing against his goggles. A skull in a hard hat.

The weekenders down stream hung their mouths and would not believe as the wall of water and rotting shale came rushing down the creekbed. Two survivors reported seeing a large, broad figure fleeing through the woods, his height somewhere between seven and ten feet.

### 148.413...

After reading ‘e’, ‘20,086’, and ‘54.598,’ please listen to the audio file titled ‘MHJSiRS.ogg’.

### 403.429...

When the man moth woke he wandered and puzzled once again at the vision his dreams had delivered him of living inside a transparent tube and of scraping his belly across against a strip of damp bark. In the gray area the master poured from a window and the man moth approached to adore him, brushing against the glass pane as lightly as first snow. A treelike object blocked the master, crossing itself with its own branches.

She compared the lesions on her arm with the lesion on her arm in the mirror. She remembered how once when she was hiking to a waterfall a dog sprang out of a farmer’s house and left a similar bruise on her leg. That happened in the town where she grew up and would have gotten married, where once in the middle of a still dewey night she had a waking dream of a winged man floating into her window and lifting her silently to the moon, so lifelike still she could conjure the temperature of his short breaths panting upon her neck while he carried her. Under the layer of subcutaneous fat the hematoma extravasated, bringing to her skin prints of daffodil and lilac. She put on her robe and began to tie it, wrapping its dense cotton around her, the fibers gently clinging like tendrils to her damp skin, thinking now of the fields where she hid as a child, pressed against the grass amid the screaming cicadas...why again was she thinking of the beginning? Oh yes, the bruise. She unknotted the cotton waist and instead opened the robe once again to take a last look at the bruise within the sleeve. A sudden rapid shrill clicking filled the room. She looked up into the mirror beyond the image of herself with wet hair and one breast out and out to the image of her cotton back within the window behind her body.

He thought he heard a scream. But through the silence came only the distant sound of the elevated train. He turned the television back on and put the remote on top the paper back novel whose spine read *The Monarch*.

“We can discard any stories about craven building managers because simple science gives us the reason we know this type of death did not happen. Any object falling into wet concrete would create air pockets, and air pockets of any size would create weaknesses in the integrity of the compound. Human remains would have compromised the structural stability of the concrete.”

Outside his window something knocked a trashcan over. A rat maybe, no more homeless at this time of year, too cold. They die or move to the equator. A rat or a thief.

The man moth lay squeezed under the municipal dumpster, paralyzed with fear. He remembered only the shrieking, which appeared in his brain as a sustained and blinding white light screaming beneath his eyes. Gradually the memory

of the shrieking diminished and shapes returned to his vision. The trembling subsided. He could no longer remember why he had been so afraid. It must have come from the pernicious and false memory his dreams had delivered him, of living in a tube and crawling on his belly. He could see the world again. A discarded television set had shattered on the floor of the dumpster, opening a crack from which an amber slime now leaked. The man moth retracted his wings slightly to bring his face close to the dumpster, hovering his tubelike mouthparts along the encrusted side. He stopped upon the sticky slime and very slowly sucked from it. *It contained salt!*

Very slowly and not too much, he ate little now. Overhead the gauze of clouds pulled open and he felt the approving beam of the master. The master, whose face was made from rays of sunshine and to whom everything but butterflies belonged. Already he felt his stomach distending and he thought he might vomit from delight. The moon light bathed over the dumpster where underneath the man moth felt his aging body filling with warm and wondrous pleasure. Now he did remember the old days, though it seemed incredible that could have been him. To think, my my, how he once ate: feasting for days upon *reams of pure and silken hair!*

#### **1096.633. . .**

After reading 7.389 and 403.429, please listen to the file titled ‘JaC9FWS.ogg.’