

Hello, Goodbye, and Other Pleasantries

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Abstract—This edition of *Hummingbird Drama* will see me through a rather intense transition in my life. I'll be moving west, starting graduate school, and leaving everything that is currently familiar to me to pursue something that I am passionate about. I am tremendously excited and equally as nervous. There's something waiting for me out there, and I'm ready to find it.

Index Terms—oh no, oh boi, here we go

THE IMAGING CHAIN PODCAST

My good friend Tom Caruso is starting a podcast about the imaging chain and other imaging-science-related things! I had the honor of being his first guest. [Check it out](#) and be on the lookout for more episodes!

BLACKBIRD REGRETS

I lost my thoughts this morning to the sporadic calls of the blackbird. Somewhere in the woods he yelled for me, calling me, inviting me into the treetops and the canopy of the forest. I couldn't join him, though, because I have a Zoom meeting soon and I can't really climb trees.

ATLAS

I am Atlas in the morning. The heavy dew rests on my shoulders and I sink my knee into the soil, bearing its weight. I am Atlas in the afternoon. The Sun's heat bears down on me and my other knee is forced into the arid earth. I am Atlas in the evening. The weight of another long day brings me to my belly and I rest with it on top of me. I will bear these burdens again tomorrow, and every day after.

I AM HAUNTED BY THE GAUSSIAN DISTRIBUTION

I was popping popcorn last night (at a very unreasonable hour) and I started thinking about the Gaussian distribution again. The corn pops started slowly, had a peak, and then tapered off. "Hm... I bet I could model popcorn pops with a Gaussian distribution," I thought, standing mostly naked in my kitchen in the middle of the night. "It really is everywhere."

HOW LEONARD COHEN'S *Marianne* BECAME EVERYONE AND EVERYWHERE I HAVE EVER LOVED

I clean the kitchen in the morning. I always play music when I clean. As I was washing dishes, *So Long, Marianne* came on and I thought of you, and you, and everyone, and everywhere, and my mistakes and how I have ruined love and how it is probably better to just move on already. But, with hands paused under running water, I thought about everything like that and I slowly sang along because it helped.

HOW TO CONFRONT SENTIMENTALISM AND BECOME EMOTIONALLY LIBERATED

The weight and necessity of small, mundane, ordinary things is extraordinary. I spent about a week cleaning out my room. A lifetime of possessions in a single place. Put these in the donate pile. Put these in the trash. I don't need these anymore. These are old memories, so let me indulge myself one last time and then be rid of them. What's the use? I want to remember, but maybe not now and maybe not often. I want to be *able* to remember, if I want. The things I kept, I kept. And, the things I pitched, I pitched. My room is cleaner now, and so am I.

FOUR BAGS

I made an Excel spreadsheet to help me pack. My Mom helped me on the front porch. These are just things. I am adding to the list. Underwear. Shorts. Books. One fork, one spoon, one knife, one plate, one bowl, one glass. Only the necessities. I have four bags that I can bring. It should be plenty of room.

GETTING REALLY EMOTIONAL IN THE HOT TUB

I didn't cry in front of you because I didn't want to ruin the moment. *Kids* by MGMT was playing and I felt so silly for my trembling lips and my tense throat. I will miss you.

LONG NAILS

My nails have never been longer than they were on vacation this summer. But, all good things must end, and when I got back Home I destroyed them. And now my thumb is wrapped in a Band-Aid and my fingertips are tender.

EYE TWITCH

I listen to the subtle signs my body gives me to tell me that it is stressed out. For example, my freshman year in college I got hemorrhoids. Not a great time. I often get cold sores, and more recently my right eye has been twitching. Thanks body.

THE RUBY RING

I dreamt about my grandfather's ruby ring, and rushed to the jewelry box when I got Home to find it.

SUDOKU ON VACATION

Strange, how I looked forward to that. I shouldn't be solving problems right now, I'm supposed to be relaxing. But this is the best I can do, sitting on a bed next to you in the middle of the afternoon working on this puzzle. I can't do arithmetic. I am the boat and you are the propellers. Structure and progress.

BLUSHING, I'M SCORCHED

I have no idea who you are but I think we should go to the dance together. I remember the back of your neck, how it turned red and then charred like a burnt marshmallow.

HYDRATE PLEASE!

It's only Monday but I've already managed to drink an ENTIRE glass of water. It's shaping up to be a great week.

WHAT A STRANGE COMBINATION

A tough grin and a bowl of orange juice. Gritted teeth. Frozen blueberries, floating and sinking. What sound does that make? It's sloshing and bumping around, for sure. A metal spoon. Electric flavors, zapped by the 9am alarm.

STILL HAVING SLEEPING PROBLEMS?

I get confused when I sleep on the floor. Unfortunately, I have been sleeping on the floor almost every single day for weeks. Fortunately, the confusion is stimulating and exciting, albeit disturbing. Sleeping is a balancing act nowadays. I am uneasy and my acrobatic dreams tilt and turn around me.

LOTS OF STUFF

Blueberry blessings live in small plastic containers. "I'll only have one, I don't want to have a bad trip." Backseat panic happened again and I scrambled to open that app where you sell eggs on a farm to calm me down. There's no open spaces in the backseat of a compact car. It's an assassin, this feeling. The knife is long and cold and sharp and it reaches everywhere that I can't.

CHERISH

The air is untangled here. I braid strands of the afternoon while I sit on the front porch. The fabric is soft and gentle, adorned with the rustling of trees and the chirping of birds. I run my hands over the blanket and press it to my face. With eyes closed I take in a deep breath and hold on tighter. This is how I want to remember Home.

SOME INTROSPECTION

So I've been doing a bit of thinking about how I cope with anxiety, sadness, and overall angst. It has been really challenging, recently, to be optimistic. It has been miserably difficult to enjoy anything. Considering everything that's happening, I can't really be surprised. It's frustratingly hard to be motivated about anything, and I feel very trapped. So, what's to be done? There are some "short-term" fixes, I've found, like working out, taking a shower, writing, cleaning, etc... But while these are totally valid ways for me to get out of ruts, to get out of BIG ruts I need something more. And I'm in a dummi-thicc rut right now. Like, I *really need to do something about this* rut. As I was mulling over my troubles in my bedroom earlier today, I experienced anger. I don't get angry very often, but it flared up for half a second and then disappeared. When I went chasing after that feeling, I discovered that the source of my anger was *myself* and my *feelings of sadness*. This felt really

backwards at first, but then I started to pick it apart. I don't like who I am when I'm like this. I'm simply miserable, quite honestly. I have so much I want to be doing and getting done but my own self-pity is getting in the way. I want to be making progress, but instead I'm staring at the ceiling for most of the afternoon. So, in a fit of anger my mind yells "GET UP" and this anger forces something out of me. And, since I'm almost never really angry, my mind listens. It's like a swift kick in the ass. Somewhere deep underneath all of the melancholy there is a little coach blowing a whistle yelling at me to do more laps, more push-ups, more of *anything but what you are doing right now*. So I will do my best to listen, because SOMETHING has got to change, because I'm really fed up with being a writhing sack of misery. Something else that seems to help is "collaborating with my sadness." This has proven to work for me in the past. Personification of sadness allows for the act of negotiation. If I can talk to it, I can get through it. It's a give and take, then, instead of all take. "Okay, how about I take a shower and we can just chat about how miserable you are making me." And more often than not, it complies. It feels nice, to compartmentalize and attack. Personify and conquer. Idk. Seems legit.

Revisiting this: Anger really isn't the best way to solve anything. It consumes and destroys. I never want to rely completely on anger for anything, and I never have. But, I can't ignore the fact that it did seem to help me for a brief moment. I think the important distinction here is that my anger was directly at myself, at an *emotion* that was already consuming me. And, considering how brief it was I don't see any real harm in it. Now, I don't want to depend on this tactic, so I'll stick to my other methods but it's just hard to ignore. Now, what I need to figure out is this: was my anger just severe disappointment? Or shame? I have a hunch it might be. How intimately related are these three things? Anger, disappointment, and shame... They seem pretty connected to me. So, perhaps it was just disappointment, which makes sense. Regardless, I'm feeling much better, probably because of the writing. Let's move on for now and take the W where we can.

SYNC

It's going to be okay. You reached over and grabbed my hand. I squeezed your hand, and stopped. You squeezed my hand, and stopped. Back and forth like this. On and off, one and zero. We couldn't seem to get the timing right. It was strange to me, but I didn't say anything because it felt so coincidental. I knew that it was, but I pretended for a second like it wasn't.

SOME TIPS

Visiting an elderly relative that has some kind of memory-degenerative illness like Alzheimer's is like going fishing. You bring pictures, trinkets, other relatives as bait and cast your line and hope you catch something. A smile or a flash of recognition or anything that seems familiar. And, if you don't catch anything you can't be upset because that's just how fishing is. Sometimes you catch something and sometimes you

don't. The first few times I went fishing I was really upset that I didn't catch anything. Like, I put in all this time and effort just to get nothing back. But, then you learn that this is how fishing works. It's part of nature. So I'd go back to fish and come up with nothing, and nothing again, but *sometimes* you catch a fish and it is wonderful and then you remember why you go fishing, for moments like this. And you pause on the bank and smile.

ANOTHER THOUGHT

This morning's thought comes to you from a place in my brain that has no name: Do worms have to try harder to dig uphill? Gosh, this is more complicated than I thought it was going to be. Let's just pretend that worms *can* feel how much they are exerting. I imagine that going uphill would be harder? Well, now I'll imagine that *I* am underground digging like a worm. Would I be able to tell? I think so, because my senses would probably be able to tell me if I'm upside down or right-side up or any combination of the two. Do worms have that? If we imagine the extreme case: a cliff. My hypothesis is that it would take the worm longer to climb up the inside of a cliff than it would for the worm to climb down. But this isn't a question about time, this is a question about exertion. Would it be *harder*... I'll have to give this some more consideration.

I LIKE WIDE OPEN SPACES

The flippant horizon is boiling over with storm clouds and it's starting to rain. We have been dreaming on this hill for days. My body, it feels so attached to the earth. My mind, hanging onto the minute hand about to strike the top of the hour, is falling. I bolt upwards. "We need to walk." Thus began a panicked promenade around the deserted campus.

RELEASE

Pink hands pry open premature flowers, petals peeling from perfect buds and falling, one by one in the morning. Thirsty, the air gags and the wind is silent forever. Gaping, the ground begs for the storm's mercy.

MAIL IN THE BOX?

Let this half-hour be a monument to everything I've ever known about this place. Sunsets and satin grass sing the day to sleep, and I squint as the last light filters through the tree's green leaves. On this hillside I rest, perhaps for the last time, as a child at Home.

MISMATCHED

"Don't wear corduroy in the summer." I walked out of the house in my red corduroy pants and cursed the season. My mom pretended to be disappointed.

NECK INJURY

For the last two days (dear, it feels like years) I have sustained a rather unpleasant neck injury from sleeping on my neck wrong. It appears as though I am not just limited to the troubles of the mind when I sleep, but also of the body. So, my last few days at Home have been... very still. It has been really uncomfortable, trying to pack and be productive while battling nostalgia and other departure-related feelings, but not being able to turn my head and look at things has made it infinitely more difficult. However, it has forced me to slow down, which I enjoy. I feel like I'm taking things in more deeply, since I'm limited to a snail's pace at every waking moment. It has gotten much better over the last few days, which I am really thankful for. I am just *really* hoping I don't do something to it again while I'm travelling to Arizona. I can see it now: a boy with a roller-cart full of luggage wincing in pain on the floor of an airport. Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

AT THE DINNER TABLE, PLAYING CARDS

Tobacco spit in prescription medicine bottles and eating cold Reese's peanut butter cups upside down.

SIX OF CLUBS

Sitting next to my brother playing Saratoga. Helping me. Six of Clubs.

TRANSITION

PRELUDE

The lightning storm clouded the sunset that first night. The mountains dissolved into the horizon and the entire sky became powerfully gray.

DESERT PLANTS: A FIRST IMPRESSION

What the fuck? I want to understand. What even is a cactus, honestly? How are they doing their cactus things, in the ground like that? It must be tough being a tree in Arizona. In all honesty, I'm afraid of desert plants, but I really admire them. I don't think they need affirmation from anyone or anything. They seem rigidly independent and I really appreciate that. But do they need love? This is a mystery I will linger on.

VINYL MORNINGS

Little breaths on an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar place. Small stretches, and then. Up, into the room. I drop the needle and feel the air change. The blinds are still drawn and the record is spinning.

THE GROCERY STORE NEARBY

I entered the store with nothing and left with two boxes of Eggo's and a black Bic lighter. "Not for smoking..." I thought. "Yeah I live right across the street. What's your name?" There was no music, no talk-show radio, but a *spelling bee* playing on the store's sound system. I looked at canned goods while a contender struggled to spell a word.

ANOTHER STORM

The trees raved in the evening wind. The dry air bruised the night's silence and I stood still for a few moments to think about my place among the turmoil and the beauty.

HERE I SIT IN MY ROOM I SIT AND THINK

I'm trading in my alarm clock for a train whistle. I'm a greasy mess and my glass desk proves that. I've got the perfect view. It's incredibly lonely! I've been making a lot of risotto. This will be quite the battle. Old math and new ideas. At the end of the day I can't help but smile because this is what I love; it's really strange. It's very peaceful at night. The Sun sets just over yonder. Candles and a hot shower and Oreos in bed. Imposter syndrome is a real pain in my ass. I still think that everyone hates me but that's just introductions. Stay positive, stay kind, brush your teeth, make your bed. It's a marathon not a sprint. There's smoke in the sky so I can't feel blue. I heard someone yelling outside last night, I hope he is okay. I have everything and nothing to do. I'm taking a multivitamin now so I'm doing great, thanks for asking! I still don't have shampoo, I haven't washed my hair in a week or so. The leaves shivered before the storm hit. Lightning struck the mountain. Thunder. Sweaty outside, cold inside. This has been some of Week One.