



MITCHELL GRABOIS

Cherub Sky

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Under a cherub sky, fading, then resurgent, across a long field of corn unrolling from the front porch of this one-room schoolhouse I call home, Cousin Joe's cows bellow in their field.

I remember his mother, my Aunt Tootsie, ungainly, Lithuanian, her muscles powerful under layers of fat, early in the morning, the world still inky around their dirty barn, way too filthy for a milking barn.

I remember how she hit stubborn cows with a shit splattered two-by-four. It made me wince. I was much younger, sensitive to abuse, my muscles weak under layers of fat.

These scraps of life come at me like a bundle of newspapers thrown from a truck by a ragged paperboy in a cap. The bundle comes undone on impact and the headlines roll out: *We Won the War*.

Litany

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I'm a litany of symptoms, severe headaches, ocular migraines—have you ever had one? Half-blinded by geometric patterns, nausea wells up, and my heart lurches like an old VW with intermittent vapor lock.

I thought I'd left dysfunction behind in my impoverished youth, kneeling by the side of the road. Even then I didn't panic like I do now, over nothing. Anxiety floats free in the turbine-stoked, insomniac wind.

I still use my dad's old doc. I remember house calls in blizzards, once when I was burning up with fever. I'm sixty and he still calls me Junior. Now he looks at me, troubled. He's so old I wonder if he'll drop dead while examining me, but he's kept up with modern medicine. He orders me a CT Scan, an EKG, a carotid artery ultrasound, a heart monitor, an optic exam, extensive blood work, like he's just discovered Chinese food and he's ordering one of everything.

The tests show nothing. To distract myself, I think

of small changes in the insect world, the bees' new hive in the trunk of the dead apple tree, and how voracious the Japanese beetles are this year compared to last.

I sit here tonight on my porch, shake a bottle of sleeping pills like a cup of dice, slosh the beer in the red and blue can. The wind gusts hard, the turbines growl and pound my lonely home with subsonic vibration.

I look across a long field of healthy corn to the ranch house of the newcomers, with its straight roof lines. He's an earnest veterinarian. She's a Christian with a capital 'C' and a straw cowboy hat curled up at the edges, from which falls long unruly hair. Her tight jeans are a revelation, but seem to contradict the way she signs the notes she tacks to my door: *In His Grip*.

I see God's wrinkled hand at the back of her neck, squeezing, not hard in God terms but pretty rough in human ones. Her neck bones compress around her spine, that cord tied direct to her clitoris, so the power of God makes her exult every day. I guess it's not a contradiction at all.