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SCRIPT

# Meat

TUCKER WILSON

Hello, you beautiful meat sack.

Good day, you magical, self-aware pile of squishy bits and feelings.

Go forth, project yourself onto the rock you're sharing, vibrate your throat in strategic patterns and rhythms, let other things interpret whatever hellish gurgle you produce, and from it hope they learn what your chest pump wants.

There is STUFF to be seen, holy shit is there stuff. Beautiful, endless, colorful stuff.

The best part of it is, you can take your skull gelatin, give it a jolt, and suddenly you are doing stuff to other stuff, and that might make even better stuff.

Be fascinated and outraged and aroused by something, anything.

A bird, a weird stick, a song, that man who wore Birkenstocks to a funeral. It doesn't matter what, because you felt things and made magic happen with that sexy, feeling-things energy, you bender of the elements of humanity.

Point your front part at the world, let the mitochondria be your powerhouse, charge in there with the brazen confidence of an angst- and flea-ridden boar who loves poetry and lacks control.

Who knows why you do what you are doing. Maybe you are a giant bad-ass robot, piloted by a little man made of love and rage.

Maybe your mountain of cells is just getting jolted in exactly the right sequence to make you throat-vibrate at that female thing whose laugh makes you feel like a carnival, but one with soft seats on all the scary rides.

Perhaps there's a snappy dressing, bearded primate poking you along, inspiring you to take those colorful slimes and keratin strands and use them to make a world within the one that's here already.

All that matters, meat sack, is that you fly (almost) exclusively by the seat of your pants, and that you take your special brand of meat sack magic

and spread that shit like low-fat butter across this rock so that other things can have some of your magic, too,

you beautiful, wonderful, limitless person.

# Beyond the Trap

GABRIEL MEEK

She swore she could see the universe when she closed her eyes.

Her name was Beth.

Her eyes, when open, were grey.

They were not open very often.

It was always this way.

As a child, Beth lived near me. Someone in the 60s had placed two nearly identical double-wide trailers next to each other in a Montana neighborhood of rolling clay hills. They laid down topsoil and grass seed and built fences and flower-beds. There must have been a lot of children nearby in the 80s because someone turned an empty lot across the street into a park—a rusty swingset and a sandbox full of cat turds. By the time we came along, Beth and I were the only kids in this hideaway.

We thought we were true Montanans. One time, Beth bit into a pinecone because we saw a chipmunk do it. I tasted the yellow bud of a dandelion because bees liked it, and bees made honey. We thought the logic of Montana was simple: nature is me.

I'm pretty sure even the chipmunk and the bees left alone the fragments we spat out. Our Montana logic continued even as we learned what Montana was.

We thought we would find copper or garnets if we dug past the topsoil. We imagined ourselves as modern-day Marcus Dalys, rich off the stars and currents of metal hidden in the very earth that gave our state its nickname. Treasure. Shovels, and hours spent digging behind the one twisted mountain ash in the park only ever yielded the orange berries, the ones that made the birds drunk, that fell from the tree above us. We reached the clay. Beth picked up a clump of the berries and pretended they were tiny beads of copper and we used them as currency. Copper-dust.

Laying there, our torsos in the hole, clay under our fingernails and in our hair, feet splayed out on the earth-spattered grass, I looked up at the sky through the branches of that mountain ash. Then I looked at Beth, and her eyes were shut.

I shook her shoulder. "Are you awake, Beth?"

She smiled, a huge snaggle-toothed grin caused by a few missing baby teeth.

"I see the whole sky."

I could stare at the sky, but not fully. There were things—branches, and rusty swingsets, and mountains, despite their unmatched wavy beauty—in the way of the entire image. I could only see this small slice of contrail-marked universe. She was beginning to see an uninterrupted image of the entire thing behind her eyelids.

Beth and I were never in the same class until middle school.

Then we had homeroom together, which turned into language arts after twenty minutes or so. I always sat next to Beth, which I soon found to be difficult. It wasn't because we distracted each other, though we did do that sometimes. It was because Beth always sat in the back row, our table awkwardly angled.

My mother took a call from my homeroom teacher pretty early on that year.  
"Are you having trouble reading what's on the board?" she asked me one night after having spent several hours at Beth's, listening to her practicing piano. "Mrs. Ellis says you're squinting."  
I had no clue.

I didn't know until I told the eye-doctor "E-F-P-I-O-S-L-R-F-O" and whether lens 1, 2, or 3 made the red barn on the green hill more or less blurry.

As soon as I sat down in homeroom the next day, Beth wanted to wear my new glasses.  
"Why?"

"I want to see what they're like. Please?"

I handed them over reluctantly. She placed the temple tips on her ears and pushed the bridge up her nose until her grey eyes became ever-so-slightly magnified by the lenses.

"It's so weird," she said.

"What is?"

"I don't think I see any better with them."

She took them off and shut her eyes.

I put them back on my face. Remembering a rusty swingset and tree branches, I realized the wire frames cut off more of the image, everything beyond them—to the left and right, down to my nose, and up to the ceiling—was blurred, more so now that I knew the difference between blurred and clear.

The class that followed homeroom was language arts, and we were in a poetry unit. Sixth graders don't read Donne or Wordsworth. We had not yet read Richard Hugo, even though he had lived only miles from us. Sixth graders read poems that exist in a strange place between old and new, not too complicated but also not "The Very Hungry Caterpillar." This time, though, we had written our own poems.  
I shared mine.

It was simple, the rhymes never breaking, the rhythm even. I'd had to finagle to keep it all metered and even, structured so carefully. I thought it was the best thing I'd ever written.

It was also several pages long. Brevity of words was not something over which I had control at that point. Then Beth rose from her seat and walked to the front of the room, carefully tracing her way between the desks, briefly touching each one with her palms for stability.

She stood at the front of the room in front of the board and began to recite her poem. She had memorized it. She swayed slightly as she spoke, rocking back and forth from the balls of her feet to her heels. She didn't need to open her eyes to read her poem from a paper, so she didn't. She just spoke:

I fly—

Beyond the trap of my eyes

is something beautiful

something so dark and deep

it undoes the definitions

of the words I use

to describe it

until there are no words left

When she stopped speaking, she stood there with her eyes closed, still rocking back and forth ever-so-slightly.

"Hi, Beth."

With highschool came a divide, not in our friendship but in our constant proximity. We went to the same school but we began to do different things. For me, it meant drivers' ed and a job and sports nearly year-round. Beth had piano lessons and so much studying. Even though we lived right next to each other, I was never home, and, when I was, she was reading music or poetry or writing essays or preparing for tests.

It took visiting the University for us to actually run into each other.

"Oh, hello. I didn't see you there," she laughed. We hugged, crumpling our visitors' tags. "It's been a while; I've been so busy."

"Me too. How've you been? What are you here for?"

She liked to close her eyes when she talked. I think she was imagining the impact each word could have on the entire universe.

"Oh, good — lots of preparation. Hopefully it pays off. That's why I'm here. I have an audition today and an interview."

"Really? That's awesome."

"You?" She smiled. There was a slightly crooked tooth where a snaggle had been before.

"Oh, I'm up for an athletic scholarship, maybe. Meeting the coach today."

We had lunch together in the student union, catching up, reminding each other of memories we shared: dandelions and pinecones, copper-dust berries, our misunderstandings about being Montanans, and my first day wearing glasses. I only noticed her eyes open once, the grey flashing in the light before the lashes met and stayed closed.

"Do you remember that poem? The one you read in front of the class in middle school."

She smiled. "Barely. Everything's changed so much since then. There are so many other poems buzzing around in my head — my own and everyone else's."

I asked her how long it took to memorize a poem.

"It depends on the poem."

I asked her why she memorized poems — it would be easier to have it in front of you.

"I need to memorize it. I can see the words in my head, taking shape and *becoming* the poem. They trans-migrate from the paper, through my hands, and into my mind where they exist as the poem itself. They become part of the universe there."

"Do you tell other people about it? The universe."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"It seems very personal. I mean, no one else can see what you do behind your own eyelids." She opened her eyes again, closing them after looking into where she thought mine were.

"That's just it. No one else can, which is why I have to tell people, to write and talk about it, to make it as tangible as I can. I do remember part of that poem: 'it undoes the definitions' . . . 'there are no words left.' I think I was wrong then. It might undo definitions but it rewrites them with new words, new ways to describe what I see."

It was no wonder she kept her eyes shut.

If she saw all of that, if something as small as a poem could become that, I'd leave them closed, too.

Perhaps it was always that way. Since we were kids, I simply had not yet recognized the universe for what Beth had. I still don't. Will I ever?

I opened an envelope from my mother years later. She still sent things through the mail. Montana to Virginia was no small distance for letters to travel, but she still sent them.

There was, of course, her letter but folded inside, hidden amongst my mother's spindly script was a smaller piece of paper. She would send me cut-out articles sometimes, ones from the local paper that she didn't know I could still access even though I was two thousand miles away.

This one was different though, simpler — just a square piece of typewriter paper, folded as much as possible. Unfolded, it read:

I fly —

Beyond the trap of my eyes

is something beautiful

something so dark and deep

it rewrites the definitions

of the words I use

to describe it

until dictionaries fail to coincide

and the universe has changed

— Beth

# Praises Ring

KATIE LACAYO

My mom always warned me about loud music. Something about damaging your eardrums with *that rap* that all the kids were listening to. For my health, my mom explained, I wasn't allowed to go to concerts until I was seventeen. Instead, I learned to play piano — quietly. I got in trouble for banging the keys too loud. I guess mom was mostly right about taking care of our ears — the body is a temple, after all — but as we trekked the streets of Guatemala and turned towards the blaring music of the church, I knew two things. *One*, I was only going to experience obnoxiously loud Spanish gospel music once. And *two*, mom wasn't here.

We had stepped off of the main road, raging buggies dodging uncaring pedestrians, kids playing fútbol with signs reading “Alto, Una Vida” as targets, and vendors calling out enticing offers to buy bananas, milk, and paintings. At least, those were the only Spanish words that had stuck with me since high school Spanish II.

While the main road had uneven cobblestones, the side road was dusty, caking my new, why-did-I-bring-these-moccasins in pasty dirt. Apparently this was a church, although it appeared to be yet another city house or store. The doors were propped wide open, letting the music travel through the air and towards us. Halfway down the street and my eardrums were already crying.

A wave of nervousness washed over me as we neared the gold-painted doors and the crudely shaped bricks of the building. I looked around wildly and clutched my bag tighter. In the folds of the pink and purple satchel were my precious belongings: my passport, my sunglasses, and a water bottle. I valued them with equal devotion. I locked eyes with a young Guatemalan man in Adidas sneakers and a baseball cap, casually loitering on the dirt road, and my chest tightened.

We walked in through the open doors, the heat rising a few degrees in the sanctuary. My hands were sticky, my breath fast. They were all staring at us. I couldn't block it out. But it wasn't unreasonable: a group of white, high school, short-term “missionaries” barging into their church on a Tuesday. My breath caught again, and I held it, trying to let the air out like steam. Slow, smooth, steady.

During the past few days in Comalapa, I had my first run-in with anxiety, a thing that passed down from my family, from mother to sister to me. It was like fighting a battle but feeling like you're losing with every blow, and the stares of strangers complimented the apprehension so well. Weeks ago, my sister had explained tactics to conquer anxiety, and one of them was counting to ten. Apparently focusing on counting would force your breath to naturally slow and your mind to clear. I was ready to try anything. *One*. We shuffled two by two into a massive auditorium. Why did it look so small on the outside? *Two*. All of the Guatemalan congregation turned towards us, eyeing the gringo faces up and down, front to back, round and round. I suddenly felt overly conscious of my sooty moccasins, my unkempt hair. *Three*. Mom would hate how loud it was. The electric guitar alone could kill a hundred eardrums; the band was an army.

We sat down in the front row, directly facing a small, plain cross at the center of the stage. The Guatemalans encircled us in a throng of yellow and orange delicately ornamented dresses, dark, silky faces, and laughter louder than the speakers. Our translator mentioned that they play the music loud and keep the doors open to bring in the strays. In Guatemala, there were a lot of them.

By this point, we had lived in a Guatemalan family's three-story house for three days. The door was gated because of all the strays — dogs, cats, especially people — and locked ninety-eight percent of the time, but inside it was welcoming and pleasant. We clogged their toilet four times already, even though we all promised not to flush the toilet paper down, and I had lost two nights of sleep to the ferocious monster that lurked in the snores of exhausted youth. Every night I slept snuggled in my sleeping bag, avoiding my worries over tomorrow's adventures. Sometimes the counting would slip into a rhythm, a chant, a prayer. *One two, one two, one two, one two*.

Those nights I thought of the kids we would play with the next morning. We were the minority and clear outsiders here, but they loved us and we didn't know why. All we had for them was really bad Spanish and really bad soccer moves. An eight year old had beaten me the day before, easily. I saw suffering in the eyes of the children we taught at Vacation Bible School, but somehow, the light was still there. The smiles unbroken on their giggling faces. The teachers did everything they could for these kids, most of whom came from broken families. 16-19 year-olds participated in the middle school class, since many of them had to drop out prematurely to provide for themselves or their siblings. Many of these were older than I, and yet, I was grades ahead of them. I had cried the week before that I got a B- on my pre-calculus test. They were still learning grammar-level algebra.

The school's music room consisted of a few drums and tambourines, as well as a highly prized guitar. They wanted a piano, the teachers explained through a translator, but it was too expensive. I thought back to my thirteen years of private piano lessons and how I begged that we buy a mini-grand instead of an upright piano. We never got one, and I blamed my parents for the days I chose not to practice.

The past three nights I hadn't slept much because I couldn't stop thinking, and so, when we were invited to visit the church this evening, I had to drag myself. The Guatemalan church we entered had an electric piano only, which sounded like it belonged in a 70s disco track. Inside, the heat stuck to my hands, my arms, my feet, my already frizzy hair. Guatemalans crowded into the rows behind us, their eyes penetrating the back of my head. I could feel it. Blonde hair. What was blonde hair doing in their church service?

But no, the pastor stood up and said something in Spanish — it sounded nice, people smiled — and gestured towards our group of twelve gringos. The congregation applauded. My worship leader and I nervously awaited a sign to get up on the stage and lead a few songs of worship, but the Spanish flew over our heads and into the congregation behind us. It kept doing that. This was the second service we had lead in Guatemala, and my inadequacy felt mind-numbingly obvious. How could God use me through worship in English, with an imperfect voice and half-deaf eardrums? Honestly ridiculous. I just had to go with it and trust that God had it all planned out, is what my youth pastor told me. But this made me feel trapped and helpless and out of control. *One*. In the States, I could follow my own plan religiously, as I thought was best. It usually worked out. It usually worked out.

*Two*. We had leapt on stage, and I pulled my skirt down a little further to cover my moccasins. They probably noticed, my self-conscious, anxious brain warned me. We lead one song, and my voice rang out like a stray, hungry, hissing cat. Blessed Be Your Name, the easiest song to sing, and I messed up the English words twice. My eyes jumped toward the congregation at each word, each off-pitch note, but they were standing there with their eyes closed. It wasn't me they were focusing on, I realized. Together, we sang the same song, to the same God, in an entirely different language. They all clapped on beats one and three, where everyone in the States knows to clap at two and four — or at least try to. It made the music sound rigid to my ears, but they didn't care.

We ended on the glorious G note that every true and faithful American worship song ends with and plopped down on the wooden pews, relieved to be done with the matter. My heart was skipping *onetwo, onetwo, onetwo*. I stared intently at the cheap electric keyboard the band was using and took a long breath. I knew I couldn't just buy a piano and drop it off at the dusty street corner of the church or the nonprofit school we worked at all week. That's not what they needed. They were content already with so little, and really, I couldn't think of a single way to transport a nice piano to a place like this. When people talk about eating all your food because "there are starving kids in Africa," it's the same problem. What can I do? Sell all my possessions and follow Christ's calling?

Please. That was for the disciples.

After the first earsplitting song in muffled Spanish, one of us glanced around and noticed that everyone behind us had stood up. The Guatemalan worship pastor must have said something to them, or it was tradition, or we were just completely oblivious. Either way, we stood up fast. Each Spanish song lasted about 7-10 minutes and went something like this: verse, chorus, verse, chorus, chorus, chorus, bridge, bridge, bridge, bridge, chorus, chorus, verse, chorus. You get the gist. By the twelfth chorus, I could vaguely sing the lines, "Gloria, Gloria en lo alto," but got lost after that. As long as I clapped on one and three, I could pretend.

The pastor's voice hit me smack in the left corner of my ear, and I cringed from the volume. He motioned people forward passionately, but the words flew over me again. Grown men and young ladies began to make their ways towards the front of the stage, and I just kind of stopped singing and stared. The band began a new song that I recognized but couldn't place, and one by one, an old woman and a young man and a pastor knelt and bowed at the foot of the make-shift cross in the make-shift church on the make-shift road, and they prayed in words I didn't understand. My ears were ringing and my head was pounding and my mind kept counting but couldn't seem to get past *three*. I finally recognized the song.

*Four*. In English, it went, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart. I want to see You." The lady and the boy and the grown man kept kneeling on the splintered, wooden floor in front of the rugged cross, and I saw it like someone had smacked me squarely. The beauty of the country was not in the glimmering sunlight or the unique architecture. The beauty was in the relentless faith of people so different, yet so similar, to me. So much faith that they would kneel in orange and yellow dresses and put their dark, silky foreheads on the dusty ground where my moccasins had tread. So much faith that the music teacher used tambourines to help nineteen-year-olds understand instruments, even though they still would clap on one and three. So much faith that they welcomed in the gang members and outcasts from the street. So much faith that the crying and singing overpowered the army of deafening music. So much that I sat down, overwhelmed with a faith that was so outside of me.

I remembered singing this song with my head underneath my mom's elbow, when I was no more than *five*, or *six*. We were in a family Bible study back in Seattle, just a room on the third floor with scratchy brown carpet, and the ushers gave us yellow and green sheets of paper with lyrics to hymns and praises. Mom held the sheets in her long, bony hands as I peered around her arm, mimicking her words, the places her voice rose and fell. That was when I first learned to worship, but I didn't know what it meant, then. *Seven*. The final chorus blew out one of the speakers, and I gazed at the pew in front of me, glued to the seat, sticky. Maybe I should stop counting.

Why are they...  
TUCKER WILSON

