

SCRIPT



J. Addison Martin

THE BRAIN IS PINK BUBBLE GUM

The brain is pink bubble gum
in God's grubby hands:
ripped and chewed and plopped,
spit dripping, into our heads.

Pop on the top, wind us up,
watch us bounce and whirr;
then giggle with amusement
at the funny jitterfall dance.

Then called back inside from play
he left us rusting in the rain.
On cold concrete we stay, scraped
like gum off the cosmic shoe.

poetry

Isabel M. Nelson

HONEYSUCKLE GROWS HERE

For my mother (but don't tell her I wrote it)

I learned from an early age that quiet is scarier than noise. I learned the words “propriety” and “decorum” before I could spell my favourite colour. I learned that sometimes Dad is scarier than strangers in the street: when he thinks you aren't looking he takes his head in his hands and sighs and all the usually-taut muscles in his face relax and he is suddenly so old that you don't recognize him. I learned that it was just easier to go outside and play in the alleyway than play inside, where we were always disturbing Mum's rest and making her cry because she couldn't play with us or really look after us. I remember Mrs. Parkinson taking me gently aside in Kindergarten so she could brush my hair for me—I must have looked like a hollow-eyed little wraith in my hand-me-down woolly tights and baggy school sweater, stained with last night's dinner. I'd never felt my hair so smooth, and the rest of the day I couldn't stop touching it. My dad did his best: he would comb my stringy blonde waves hurriedly after he washed it, maybe try some inevitably cock-eyed pigtails, but in all pictures taken before I was big enough to do my own hair I look like I'd been living on the street.

Which I suppose, in a way, I had.

My mother was very sick when I was a child. She began getting physically better when I was around 13 or 14, but her depression didn't begin to lift until I was 17. It was the worst when I was between 4 and 10 years old, and the very worst right after my younger sister was born. There were certain sections of the house where I was terrified to make noise, in case my dad hissed at me to let Mummy sleep. I stood outside her room in silence a lot. I can picture the gold and white door handle, with the china bit painted with blue porcelain flowers, but I do not recall the wallpaper on the inside of the room,

nor the curtains. I was a sleepwalker for a number of years, and I would set off the burglar alarm every six months. My terror came not from waking up in a dark hallway with a siren going off, but rather the knowledge that I'd woken Mummy *again*.

There were plenty of wonderful places to play and hide in our junk-filled 3-story semi-detached, but it was too risky to use them. So my older sister and I spent every free hour in the alleyway (known to everyone in the North as a “ginnel”), which separated Lizzie's house from the house that Mean Rosamund once lived in. That house was usually empty. There were For Sale signs always up, but it wasn't long before the moving van would be reloading the same Ikea furniture we'd watched going into the house 6 months before. The ginnel connected our street, St. Chad's Avenue, with St. Chad's Rise, which ran parallel behind it and which was full of scary, hard-as-nails children. They were our age, and they lived in the house right behind ours—we even shared a back fence—but if they appeared at the top end of the ginnel we usually bolted. Occasionally we made a few faces, but only if we had the wherewithal to run faster than normal. For the most part, it was our ginnel. I can't imagine there was really any stiff competition to see who got to play in a clapboard alley full of broken glass, student vomit, and dog poop, but at the time we would have fought for it.

Theoretically. Those other girls were *really* scary.

It was noisy in the ginnel. I got lost and then clear-headed in all the noise, the way a normal person feels about quiet. It was generally mundane noise, which was what I needed. Erica Wall's parents at number 34 bickering about their upcoming holiday to Malaga or Ibiza or somewhere equally English to go get drunk and sunburned. Lizzie's Old English Sheepdog, Nancy, barking at nesting starlings, while Lizzie's brother plays their new Nintendo 64 in the study. The radio, slightly off-station, belonging to the builders putting a conservatory on the back of Ken and Barbara's. Test matches for the Ashes cricket tournament going on, with polite cheering, at the cricket ground at the end of my street. Eventually, my dad's shrill whistle would penetrate the suburban mumblings to beckon us home for dinner; a noise synonymous, yet conflicting, with the darkening and heady summer evening. I still hate that sound because it's so damn piercing, though I can't fault him for using it—he doesn't need a cell phone as long as he's within a mile of us.

nonfiction

My sister Eleanor and I played a lot of imaginary games in the ginnel, each one with the same guiding principles and regulations—our parents were always dead, someone always wanted to marry Eleanor, and I wanted to live in the trees. There was the Island Game, the Pokemon Game and the Space Age Game. Others came and went, but these were my Big Three. The Island Game (in which Lizzie was included) even had a tune that you would sing if you wanted to play it. Each game involved spending a good portion of the time deciding what our characters were wearing—first Eleanor and Lizzie, then I would try to copy what they'd said but rack my little brain for something extra cool to throw on the end. I was never very good at making up stories. I preferred to follow what Eleanor and Lizzie decided would happen in the story. Lizzie split the difference between our ages, but, even at 10 years to my 9, she seemed so much more mature.

We'd scamper up and down the street barefoot, building up the calluses necessary to play in the ginnel without cutting our feet on the glass and nails. Once a year, at the beginning of the summer, I'd come hopping into Lizzie's house and brandish my bleeding foot for Sue to bandage up. She'd wash it, stick a band-aid on it, and send me out with a currant scone. I'd have to finish it before I got back to the ginnel, or it was fair game for Eleanor to split it with me. I didn't like sharing the treasures I found in the alley. I began spending time there alone once Eleanor went to high school, but it wasn't as fun. It needed both of us to be there, or else the clapboards loomed above me, and the ginnel seemed long and empty. Eventually, two reasons stopped me from playing there much any more. Firstly, I had found a broken calculator and almost severed the tip of my finger trying to get the rainbow stuff out of the screen; secondly, the number of drunk students coming back from a night on the batter and using the ginnel as a shortcut was increasing, so the whistle started coming earlier and earlier on summer nights.

The other, brown ginnel led to Otley Road and the way to school or the way to the gas station for ice creams if we had good report cards. At the end of our ginnel was a scary street, and often a homeless man sleeping or the builder's apprentices taking a smoke break. But the near end of our ginnel we tried to keep clean, using branches to sweep away nightclub flyers and glass. The clapboards were stained a bright orange on Rosamund's side, covered with graffiti (which is

where I first learned the F-word and that "Sharky" had been there). They were a moldering grey on Lizzie's side, and the bushes from her front garden hung over the fence. There was one that had thick, waxy leaves that were satisfying to snap off, but that sometimes had nests of baby spiders on the other side. The other was a bright and wild honeysuckle bush that grew faster than Lizzie's dad could prune it. Lizzie taught me to snap off the biggest blossoms and eat the tiny drop of nectar within. Our pollen-stained fingers always grasped for one more as my dad's whistle hung in the air.

nonfiction

Teresa Norlin

I GET TO UNRAVEL YOU

I'd been awake when you left this morning. I could have rolled over, told you to have a good day, but I didn't. I knew you'd stopped caring about what I said some time ago. As I turned over, pulling the deep green sheets off my body, I caught a glimpse of you getting into your truck. I got out of bed, and stole to the window. I rested my head against the pane and clutched a fold of the sheer ivory curtain. It was flimsy in my grasp, but I knew you wouldn't see me. You got into your truck and began to back out of our driveway.

I remember you trying to teach me to drive stick in that truck. We'd been dating maybe two months, and we ended up making out in the passenger's seat after I stalled it for the twelfth time. Why is it that I can only remember our firsts: the first time we said "I love you," the first time we meant it, the first time you referred to me as your wife, the first time we signed a card Mr. and Mrs. I had stopped measuring our life together in firsts, and had started counting lasts. I wondered exactly when we had started to lose each other. Was it during our first winter in this house; was it one really bad Monday? I leaned back and rested my head against the inside frame of the window, already feeling the heat of day beating through the panes. By now, the coolness of night had begun to leech out of the paint, but still the window's smooth solidness felt good against my temple. I knew then that tonight would be the last night, and wondered if you knew it too. I had been pulling the you out of our life for months in strands. That's what happens, *dear*, when you sleep with someone who isn't me.

You nodded at Sam, who was getting into his car next door. Erin had just burst through their front door, still in her matching nightgown and robe, but up nonetheless. Sam had forgotten his cof-

fee. Anyone who has been to one of Sam and Erin's dinner parties would know that Sam is as forgetful as Erin is thoughtful. Though it was outdoors for anyone to see, I felt guilty observing their morning goodbye kisses. Leaving the window, I turned and faced our bedroom. I remembered how much I had needed to nag to get you to hang our framed wedding portraits above our dresser. Maybe that had been a mistake.

I walked, feeling the deep carpet between my toes with each step, and made my way to our shared closet. As I pulled the chain and turned the light on, I was surprised at how our clothes were intermingled. I guess we had left behind the "my side, your side" approach to closets once we'd been married for a while. An old t-shirt of mine hung next to a pair of your slacks. Your boxers were balled up on a pile of my shoes. Sinking to my knees, I snatched them up and revealed the pair of black sling-backs I wore three years ago, the last time we went out for our anniversary. That was an old hurt though, and I shoved it all deeper into the dark corners of the closet.

I stood back up and onto the balls of my feet, feeling around on the high shelf for my dad's old rucksack. You'd teased me for bringing it with me to our new house, so I rarely used it. I tossed the pack onto the bed and turned back to the clothes. I started pulling everything off its hanger, mine and yours until it was all in a heap on the floor. I felt nothing. My nose tickled. Taking stock of the heap at my feet, I started pulling out anything that didn't remind me too much of you. I tossed each piece behind me in the general direction of the bed: a pair of sweatpants I had bought last week because they were on sale, a University of Michigan shirt my sister had given to me, a green sweater I had bought you for Christmas last year, also sporting its original tags. Noting the general absence of underwear, I waded through the discarded garments to the dresser. I grabbed a handful of my least sexy undergarments and shoved them along with the other things into the pack.

After tossing it under the bed, I surveyed the damage in the closet. Hair stuck to my forehead and to the curves of my neck, and my chest heaved. I went to the kitchen for a drink. There were dishes in the sink, uncared for. I grabbed a glass from the counter and pulled a tall pitcher of tea from the fridge. As I poured, I looked through the window into our backyard. The orange tree in the corner I planted that first weekend you "had a business trip to the city."

I had re-stained the deck each time you “went fishing.” When you stopped making excuses, I started planting bulbs. Leaving the pitcher on the counter, I went out into the garden.

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Hours spilled into evening. The day had been hot and thick but the night had started to cool off. The glass of iced tea I had poured but never touched would leave a wet circle on the coffee table, in spite of the air-conditioning. When we were first married, I had looked forward to curling up on the couch and waiting for you to pull up. My anticipation would mount with the closing sounds of evening. I could always tell when you wanted sex because you’d take your shoes off at the door. Sometimes, we couldn’t wait long enough to get to our bedroom, and we’d make love on that couch. It was hard not to see those nights when I closed my eyes. I could feel your skin, your heat with each pulse through my veins. The news had ended long

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ago and the lonely, infomercial time of night had already begun, as I tried to stare through the thick glass of the TV into the brick wall behind. Two Florida-tanned men were denture-smacking about the glorious

music of the 60’s. It was 2:30 and the horrific accident that would have been your excuse for not coming home tonight never happened. I wasn’t sure whether to be relieved or not. It was never an accident; it was always something vague and unverifiable. This game we were playing had lasted too long, most of our marriage. I ran my fingers back and forth across the frayed edge of the back of the couch till I reached a jagged tear from when we first moved in, now tempered by thirteen years of our sitting, lounging, and love-making. Maybe things would have been different if I had gotten pregnant.

I had drifted off when I heard the low rumble of your truck, but I had time to look awake as the headlights swung into the driveway and flashed between the shades of the bay window. I groped for the

remote underneath the pillow, rose and turned, resting one knee on the dark cushions. I ran through the emotions I thought I should have: anger, frustration, betrayal, exhaustion. But they were all missing, and there was nothing in their place. I was still grasping for a feeling when you eased the front door open. The lingering humidity followed you in, as if the air around my head wasn’t heavy enough. You turned and froze, seeing me standing, waiting. We stood alone, couch between us, a challenge daring each of us to be the first to cross the space, or break the silence.

“You’re still up?” you said, eyes to the floor.

Obviously, yes. I hate questions like that. Like when my mother would say “you changed your clothes?” when I clearly had. It’s what you think to say when you’re not saying other things.

You looked up at me, and then I felt it, the pain I hadn’t swallowed until your eyes met mine. You moved toward me; your steps were calculated, gauged as you watched me, searching for the hint that I knew everything. You must not have found it because you continued to close in. I breathed in all your familiar smells: Old Spice, spearmint, cotton. I closed my eyes, and leaned into your chest, mostly out of habit. The tiny sparks of sweat on my forehead melted into the fabric of your shirt, and I remembered the first time we kissed, really kissed. The red dirt of the baseball diamond at our high school had somehow made it’s way into my socks, and the back pockets of my jeans.

Then the pulse that had settled into my planted feet shot back into my arms; my fists clenched with decision as I found the hem of your shirt, turning my knuckles white. I raised my head so I could look into face as you lied to me. Eyes wide, my lips met yours. Then I blinked hard, trying to convince myself that I was imagining the sticky-sweet taste of cherry gloss. Still, our torsos fit together like they had before and we sank. As I closed my eyes, we were back in the dirt. Only this time, I didn’t wrench myself away, blaming curfew, to run home through wet, cut grass trying to re-hook my bra while you caught your breath, surprised on the pitcher’s mound. I was seventeen again, and you were perfect. The lies and lipstick stains were gone. It was heat and passion as I pressed the palm of my right hand into the flesh above your collarbone until I was sure it hurt. I tore my way through our past, racing heart and eager hands, pushing beyond the pain of this night and countless others before it.

The soft light of early morning washed our bodies in gray, as I blinked back into consciousness. I watched for signs of consciousness from you, and found only imprints of pillow-seams in the left side of your unshaven face. Trying not to wake you, I eased off the couch. My feet found your shoes, my bra in a tangled mess on the floor, straps and laces undistinguishable in this light. I saw my shirt on the coffee table next to the glass of tea, which still stood where I had left it. I was surprised not to find a dark, wet stain on the carpet and pieces of glass tangled in the fibers. I almost laughed. Instead, I wrapped a blanket from the chair around me and slipped down the hallway, leaving you snoring into the throw-pillow.

Passing through the doorway into the bedroom, I scanned. I grabbed a pair of denim shorts off the floor and an elastic hair-band from my nightstand. Disregarding the un-drawn shades, I dropped the blanket and got dressed, pulling a tank-top from the bottom drawer of the dresser. I sunk to my knees and felt under the bed for the bag I had packed. Grasping the olive drab strap, I lifted myself up. The deep green sheets on the bed had been untouched since I'd gotten up yesterday morning knowing it was all over. I gave them a perfunctory fling, then heard a stirring from the living room and knew I didn't have much time. I slung my bag over one shoulder and left the bedroom.

I padded down the hallway, and across the hardwood floors toward the front door. You had turned onto your stomach, but you were still asleep and the back of your left hand rested on the floor. I slipped past the couch, and groped in the basket till I found a pair of worn, leather sandals, and grabbed my purse from the coat-rack. I turned the handle; you stirred for just a moment as I crossed the threshold. Looking up as the sun cleared the clouds for a second, I caught the scent of rain and magnolias. I left the front door wide open.