

Mr. Bishop

In my backyard, the sun has just lain its tentacles across the long rows of tobacco plants that carpet the view from my kitchen window. A abstemious green is seeping through from behind the shades of gray mist that roll and flow in-between the tobacco plants. Water from the shower is hanging cold from the tips of my clotted hair, and from time to time it falls. The droplet spends some time sailing through the air along wizzing by the drifting irony flakes of slumber. It is a queer precipitation which I am depositing onto a newspaper I hold. An egg timer on the counter discharges a choked ring. And I pause, my hand hovering in midair, about to depress the plunger on a steaming pot of coffee.

I listen intently as Mr. Bishop unlocks my door and enters my house. He did not knock before doing so. Once inside, he immediately begins to move towards the refrigerator. There is an awkward sway to his movement due to his left hip, which gyrates in its socket awkwardly and ruins his balance. His shoes are noisy, it is an expensive, rounded, echoing sound, as though his feet were made of hollow wood. His watch ticks a tasteful, discrete tick. He wears a graphite colored suit and looks as though he pays very close attention to the way his clothes fit him, as though he has calculated how the fabric falls and notices where stitches have been placed or not placed. His hair is blond and most prominent in his thick mustache, which gleams with scented oils.

I listen to his footsteps. They are a fascinating, complex, and arrhythmic sound. Tendrils of steam flowing from an array of slits on the outflow of the coffee pot drift across my field of vision. I listen: the harsh clip of the stone floor in the entryway... the hollow percussion of the wood floor... a length of silence for the dining-room carpet...more wood floor... and then Mr. Bishop appears in the doorway of the room where I sit.

There is a moment of the briefest eye contact before my gaze is drawn down slightly. His tie is a hypnotic black, and hangs limply against the starchy brutality of his shirt, which seems to be made of layers of fabric, accordioned and stitched in sinuous rilles, gleaming like the surface of the moon. The tie is simple darkness,

negative space, a vacuum. I realize this and quickly move my eyeballs down to scrutinize the steam coming from the pot. He crosses the room and enters the kitchen. He bends at the waist, knees locked, and opens the fridge. He peers and the edges of his pupils constrict in yellow light, serenaded by the music of bottles clinking against each other as the the refrigerator door swings on its hinges.



Static mingles with the music that trickles from an aluminum, Soviet-made radio. The radio is kept on the highest shelf, above the one used to keep the nicer looking bottles of liquor. The radio shares this important place in the bar with a few other things that would suffer greatly from getting wet or being too easily reachable by the client: a gold plated soviet pocket watch, wrapped in a square of an old tablecloth; a balsa wood cigarillo box holding some crumpled american currency; a small plastic bag held shut with a paperclip, some colored pills inside; a snow glob containing a little chinese junk plowing through a plastic wavefront; and a ripening mango, obscuring most of the face of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, which is printed on the ceramic plate underneath it.

The ice machine shudders and coughs in the corner, briefly drowning out the radio. I sit at the bar watching the bartender's hair gleam. The bartender takes his time unscrewing the cap from the bottle of arrack he is holding and pauses after completing the correct number of rotations to notice a fly which has landed on the rim of the glass set before me.

The fly is tasting an interesting mixture of arrack and soap on the glass rim but forsakes this when it hears a sudden sharp click, like the arming of a pistol.

Having unlocked the dead-bolt, Mr. Bishop jangles his keys back into his pocket and enters the building through the back door. His eyes are peeled wide. He rarely blinks, but when he must, the effect is dramatic. His right shoulder spasms from time to time, crunching up against his ear and ruining his balance.

Mr. Bishop's shoes are immaculate, each with a perfectly tied bow, each loop of equal dimension and the laces uniformly tightened so as to ensure the crease will appear in the exact same place on each shoe respectively when the foot inside bends. They are a reflectionless black. Deep space.

Benjamin Schneider

The bartender remains holding the unscrewed cap on the bottle and listens to the arrhythmic noise of the soles on concrete... splashing through a puddle... squishing on wet cardboard... dry cardboard... linoleum... then Mr. Bishop appears from the entrance to the back storeroom. He clumps across to the bar and raises a section of it like a drawbridge, to move through the opening. He allows his head to pivot slowly, scanning for the refrigerator.



I slurp a deep breath through the straw, a torrent of air laced with melted ice and hints of cola. I collect the final droplets in my mouth, then shove the paper cup full of ice into the nest in the bottom of a fast food hamburger restaurant bag at my feet, and lean back. The comforting vibration, a steady transmission from sets of metal wheels grinding over wheezing track travels through the body of the car, into the substructure of my seat and, after appropriate dampening by the seat-cushion, into me. I jiggle. Low amplitude; high frequency. It is a calming sensation, and the sedative effects begin immediately. Little streams of rain begin to flow laterally across the window. They quiver with speed. Behind them scenery drifts obscurely into a blurred smear and I hear a harmonic ringing above me. No... perhaps to the left of me.

I realize it's the alarm clock next to my bed: a saracen chime. I throw the blankets apart and stumble into my life.

I'm late. Damn. I hurry into the school building. I'm on my way to the room. I use the most direct rout. I cut corners. I cut others off. I precipitate my motion, enjoying the feeling of my hips smoothly transporting me, each taking turns launching me forth. Lockers, wooden doors, posters, long florescent tubes of light, all drain to the periphery of my vision. I savor the subtle changes in acceleration with each stride. Perfecting my form. Maximizing performance. It is then I notice I am naked.

Oh Christ. God. I look around me. Lockers for at least 50 ft. in every direction. A bell rings and people begin to empty from classrooms I hear the chatter of their approach. No time to think. I must move. I hear the chorus of clicks, as latches and handles and bolts shift in doors.

Then silence.

Benjamin Schneider

The onslaught has ceased, perhaps something akin the calm in the center of a hurricane. Then a single door slams shut and arrhythmic footsteps begin flowing through the halls, elongated echos of his soles on the waxed floor-tiles.

A shiver of terror awakens me to find myself looking into Mr. Bishop's metal colored eyes. He is seated across from me, wearing a magnificent duster. The collar rises nearly as high as the sparse hairs atop his head, would have overtaken them perhaps, were it not for a humane slouch in the thick black material helped along by the weight of five buckles and clasps made of the same metal as eyes.

His face suddenly spasms. His smile contorts and he raises one hand part way, it's fingers splayed out, the tendons bulging underneath the skin. His ghastly expression begins to slowly, mechanically, pan to the left and downward, as if to exhibit the vulgarity at all possible angles. The rotation ends with Mr Bishop's face at a thirty degree angle staring wildly at my feet, where a crumpled, fast food hamburger restaurant bag lays on it's side in a puddle of meting ice cubes.



The wind was full of tiny particles of ice, neither hail nor snow, and whipped around our little structure in a savage vortex. From time to time, it would find a weakness in the rubberized tarp and steel beams of the erectable and a torrent of frigid particulate would come whipping through the interior. Two men occupy the space with me, sitting on the folding chairs, passing a thermos of warm cognac and tea back and forth.

My gloves were frozen solid and long tendrils of ice hung from them. From time to time, a large piece of ice would crack free and fall noiselessly into the snow or, with a plop, into the hole. Shards rained as I continued to pull up the line, hand over hand. In between motion from each pull on the line, a thin layer of ice crystallizes on the surface of the hole. When I pull again, I shatter the delicate layer dragging it's central portion up with the line, hanging from the rope like a crystalline piece of jewelry.

Just as one man raises the thermos to his lips, at the moment the metal edge touches, Mr Bishop pulls the rubberized door open with a flourish. The stiff rope that had been holding it shut is pulled forcefully through the grommets sending lit-

tle showers of ice particles into the trampled snow floor. Bright light and cold air pours into the erectable.

His mustache is completely frozen and extends in long icicles down to his chest where it brushes the matted frozen fur of his great coat. It is the kind of coat that only could have been designed for a czar. It is decorated with shining gold buttons and is predominantly black leather, with accents of rich black fur. The collar is so wide, it extends well past the shoulders and is of so dense a fur that it when submerged in water, only the exterior tenth of the fur is moistened. His hat is tall and fits tightly on his head, so that each erratic motion of his neck is transformed into an exaggerated wave of the colossal accessory.

I stood, holding the rope, from which dangled a myriad of prisms, now scattering the white light in rainbows of seamless color dancing over the scene. And turning the clouds of condensation we exhaled into fantastic psychedelic patterns.

With one crunching step, Mr. Bishop, moved his body to the edge of the fishing hole. He bend at the waist, knees locked, and peered into the dark expanse beneath. There was no reflection from the hole, just black sea for miles underneath. Mr Bishop peered and breathed two thin streamers of condensation out of his nostrils. They hung, like contrails.

And with a single jerk of the spine, he readjusted his balance so as to induce a slow topple. Which, upon the reaching a critical angle became, with another spasm, something partially akin to a dive, but also to a crawl. He entered silently, head first, slipping into the blackness, slowly descending into the hole. The descent would pause from time to time, as we held our breath, and little prisms of ice formed at the intersection of his coat and the surface of the water. But soon the descent would begin again, drawing the prisms beneath in a glint of rainbow.