

How I Came to See the World

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Even before he cleaned up, back when he spent most nights shivering in his basement apartment or nodding off at the bar, even then, T-Bone had been a lover of animals, had refused to kill the cockroaches that shared his kitchen, would crouch on the corners downtown and coax pigeons to eat from his hand. And there was that old dog he had, Marty, that was always getting hit by cars. T-Bone loved that dog.

His name wasn't really T-Bone, but the nickname had been around for as long as I'd known him. His nose had collapsed from all the junk he'd snorted—at least, that's what we all assumed. The whole bridge was receded, nostrils puckered shut, so that it looked like he had a big dent in the middle, like the side of a car after a T-Bone collision. In fact, that was one of the explanations he gave to people who didn't know him well. "I was in an accident," he'd say, or sometimes just, "I had an accident," like a little kid who'd wet his pants.

T-Bone and I were living in a twelve-bedroom halfway house for recovering addicts on the north side of Pittsburgh. He had been locked up for a few months

and got out soon after I left the hospital. Our rooms were across the hall from one another, and he was doing okay as far as I could tell. But the whole process of getting clean had scraped him hollow and left him searching for purpose in every stupid, meaningless thing. He bothered me with horoscopes from the newspaper, would pick up things from the ground—a mitten that had been dropped in the gutter, or those pamphlets that religious groups hand out on corners downtown—and take them home, study them as if they held some secret meaning he had to decode. He checked out self-help books from the library and was always giving me lectures or reading me passages out loud in front of strangers on the bus. None of it ever stuck, though. He'd bounce from one thing to the next, never giving any of it enough time to sink in. Sobriety, it seemed, was the only thing he really managed to stick with.

T-Bone was so self-conscious about his nose that, even if the temperature was in the eighties, he'd often pull a ski mask over his head before leaving the house. He went through these horrible cycles of depression, would push his cot against the door of his room and barricade himself inside until me or one of the other guys banged on his door. We'd hear him croak, "Go away" or "Leave me alone," and we'd keep banging until he got fed up or someone fetched the ladder and climbed in through his window.

But other times, he walked around like Dick Van Dyke in *Mary Poppins*, smelling flowers and waving hello to everyone he passed, dancing little jigs that made you pretend you didn't know him. His teeth were huge and crooked and far apart and he had this open-mouthed grin that was almost horrifying, especially when he was wearing that ski mask. It was like someone flipped a switch, the way his moods struck. Some of the guys at the house were nervous that T-Bone was too manic, that he'd relapse, or worse, that he'd end up killing himself, that we'd kick open his door one day and find him with a belt around his neck. But one night, not long after I'd moved into the house, T-Bone found me sitting on the floor in the bathroom, pinching a blade I'd snapped loose from a disposable razor, and without saying anything, he told me how his older sister had hanged herself when he was a kid. He'd been

carrying that pain around his whole life and could't imagine putting another person through anything like it.

We went to addiction support meetings three nights a week, and on Saturday mornings, everyone volunteered at a Methodist church, where the staff director of the house was sometimes able to get us donations of canned food or toiletries. T-Bone spent the rest of his weekends sitting in a plastic booth, pressing the button that lifted the mechanical arm to allow cars in and out of a parking garage. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, I waxed floors downtown at the convention center. I'd been at the house for almost four months and had been thinking about leaving just as soon as I was able to save some money. I wanted to head west and make a new life for myself. My older brother, whom I barely knew, owned a restaurant franchise out in Arizona. He had written me when I was in the hospital saying that if I could get out there, he'd give me a job and let me stay at his place free of charge, at least for a while.

T-Bone and I were both trying to find more stable jobs, but in the meantime, we supplemented our paychecks by participating in medical research studies at the university hospital. Some of the nurses knew us by name. They liked us because we were reliable—we needed the money and signed up for as many studies as we could. We were regulars to the women who ran the ragweed allergy experiments. Sometimes it almost felt like a real job—waking up in the morning, riding the bus downtown, keeping track of our different appointments. It felt good to have those responsibilities. Once in a while, we could make extra cash donating platelets or blood plasma. If one of us had a particularly harrowing session, like the muscle tissue study, or the one that took anal swabs for HIV research, we'd treat ourselves to hamburgers on the way home.

Rumors always circulated about these mythical jackpot studies in which they paid you a thousand bucks, put you up in a hotel, injected you with some weird virus, and observed you for a week or so. Maybe they pumped you full of some experimental medication and maybe you were the one guy in a million who exhibited the hideous side effects, but T-Bone and I knew we had seen worse things

in our lives. Sometimes we found ourselves wasting whole afternoons, dreaming about hotel Jacuzzis, cable television, continental breakfast, and big, warm hotel beds. I had decided that if I ever landed a jackpot like that, even half the cash could get me started toward my goal of buying a bus ticket out to Phoenix. Setting goals was something T-Bone and I were both trying to be better at.

But our options were always limited. Because of our pasts, we often couldn't be considered "healthy controls." Plus, T-Bone was pretty much blackballed from any of the psychiatric studies. Many of the screenings weren't more than a short interview or a few boxes checked off on whatever paperwork, and we knew we could get past them easily if we lied, but honesty was another thing we were both working on.

I was doing a neuroscience study that took up my evenings, had been skipping meetings and getting home after curfew. By that time, I'd been around long enough that the staff at the halfway house left me alone, just so long as I was making money and was able to check in with them from one of the hospital pay phones. It had been a few days since I'd seen T-Bone. I spent those days riding the bus by myself, smoking cigarettes outside with the nurses. For the study, I had to sit in front of a computer in a dark room with electrodes stuck to my head, memorizing pairs of words that were randomly generated on the screen: *Mother, Hatchet. Forest, Blinking.* After a few hours, the administrators would come in and quiz me. I knew the pairings were arbitrary, but some of them struck me as funny or strangely beautiful, and I couldn't help but wonder about them. *Children, Rust. Shaking, Brail.* Even after I'd signed the waivers and had everything explained, I was never exactly sure what the study was trying to prove.

I got home late after one of these sessions, and a small crowd was gathered outside of T-Bone's door, debating in hushed voices how long it had been since he'd come out. Two days, three days. None of the doors had locks, but there was a trust rule that no one who wasn't staff could go into someone else's room without permission. I pushed through the crowd, knocked a couple of times. I peeked under the door to see if it was barricaded on the other side, but I had a clear view,

straight across the dusty floor. When staff finally arrived, we all sighed with a mix of relief and disappointment when we found the room empty. A note scribbled in pencil and left on T-Bone's cot explained that he was staying in a hotel downtown for a week and could we please not touch any of his belongings. A couple of the guys chuckled at this—the only things in the room were a few old phone books and a dream catcher that hung from a nail in one wall. At the end of the note, he'd scribbled the address of the hotel and his room number—"in case of emergency."

The next evening, I rode the bus downtown to T-Bone's hotel, wondering if we would finally live the dream we had shared so many times. The smell hit me as soon as I turned down the hall toward his room.

"What smell?" T-Bone asked. He held the door open only a crack so that I could see his one eyeball peering out above the chain lock. Behind him, the room was dark. "Does it smell?"

Sometimes I forgot about that nose of his.

"I'm not supposed to have visitors," he said.

"Never mind that. I came all the way down here. Just open up."

A housekeeper pushed a cart full of linens toward us. She waved one hand in front of her face and looked around as if she expected to see a putrid cloud floating through the air above her. T-Bone closed the door as she approached and I stood against the wall, waited until she had rounded the corner, then turned and knocked on the door again.

"Come on," I hissed.

T-Bone let out a few wet coughs while he undid the chain. The door swung open and he stood in the stretched-out rectangle of light from the hall, wearing nothing but a pair of briefs. The television flickered in the darkness behind him, illuminating the edges of his tall, pale body.

I gave him a hug. "Jackpot," I said, stepping inside. "I never thought—not in a million years. How much are they paying you?" I groped for a light switch, flicked it on, and caught a brief vision of the room: empty pizza boxes, plastic bags, waxy fast-food cups, soda cans crushed into twisted hourglass shapes. I let out a nervous

sound of disbelief as a skunk waddled through the garbage, lifted its nose and sniffed the air, then disappeared under the bed.

I laughed and then I was quiet. T-Bone closed the door and turned off the light. He sneezed and wiped his nose with a fistful of toilet paper, then fastened each of the three separate locks. "I think she's nocturnal," he said. "I read that once, that skunks are nocturnal."

I stood there, blinking, while my eyes adjusted, waiting to spot the skunk whenever it crawled back out. In the dark, I could see that the bed had been stripped down to the bare mattress and the bottom drawer of the dresser was pulled out and lined with bedsheets. A sitcom laugh track growled and, in the blue glow of the television, the skunk emerged, its tail like a frayed rope, nose in a pile of trash, sniffing and lifting a leg and pissing on the carpet.

"Yesterday morning," T-Bone explained, "I leaned out the window for a cigarette and she was there—two of them! Her and her sister—God bless, rest in peace." He bowed his head and made the sign of the cross. "I climbed out and followed, watched them wrestle and chase each other around the dumpsters and out across the parking lot, and then they were trotting across the boulevard. From nowhere, a truck—a real nut, that driver—he comes down and *whoosh*." T-Bone mimicked the impact, slapping the heel of his palm into the cup of his other hand. "Terrible. I scooped this little one up just before another car came past. I swear to God, have you seen the way people drive around here?" He shook his head in disgust. "She put up a fight, scratching and spraying, but I wasn't about to just leave her out there all alone, no warmth, no family. Nuh-uh. No way." T-Bone crossed the room, crouched, and ran his hand through the white stripes along the skunk's back. I could see now that his chest and arms were decorated with long pink scratches—proof of the whole encounter.

"I named her Cindy." His mouth curled into that enormous grin.

"P.U. I think I'm gonna be sick." I stepped past T-Bone, pulled the cord on the ceiling fan, pushed the window open, and let a cold breeze enter the room. I sat on the edge of the mattress and looked out the window. The bright reflection of television was superimposed over the parking lot outside, a current of headlights

pulling fast along the street beyond. The skunk sniffed a wide circle around the bed. I pulled my feet up onto the mattress so that it couldn't get near me. There was something unsettling about the way the skunk was walking around with nowhere to go. She looked exactly like a wild animal trapped in a hotel room.

I looked at T-Bone. "You're drooling."

He turned away, wiping his chin with the wad of toilet paper that was still in his hand. His smile disappeared.

"The medication," he snorted. "They said it increases my glands. You know, my saliva glands. Whatever." He lifted the animal in his arms, placed her in the dresser drawer, which I realized was meant to be a little, skunk-sized bed.

T-Bone coughed and sneezed. There was a knock at the door, and he leapt to his feet and hustled me into the bathroom.

"Just keep quiet," T-Bone whispered. He closed the door and I stood alone in the dark. A moment later, the door swung open and he plopped the skunk—still swaddled in bedsheets—into the bathtub. I pressed my back against the wall and listened to T-Bone greeting someone in the other room. The two of them chuckled and spoke in low voices. I tried to breathe through my mouth, but I could taste the skunk as much as I could smell it. Being so close to a wild animal, trapped with it in that small, dark bathroom—my stomach tightened, as if it were being lifted on a hook toward my throat. The skunk scratched against the porcelain and then slid down over the side of the tub, its claws tapping on the tile floor. My fingers found the top of the toilet and I lifted one foot to stand on the rim of the bowl. A soft brush of fur moved against my pant leg and, despite every horrible thing that I have witnessed in my life, despite the times I have stood quiet or feigned apathy while my mother wept or my friends wasted into half-dead ghouls before my eyes, when I felt that animal move past me in the dark, I put one hand over my mouth and screamed.

In the same moment, the bathroom door flew open and T-Bone shouted, "All clear!" I was so surprised that I slipped and my foot splashed down into the toilet.

T-Bone sat on the side of the tub. He held a clipboard tucked under one arm and with his other, he lifted the skunk onto his lap. I planted my dribbling shoe on

the bath mat. Cigarette butts swirled around the toilet in my wake.

“Nothing to worry about, my friend,” T-Bone said. “Just the nightly checkup.” He scribbled on the clipboard. “Records of my symptoms. They come back for it in the morning, look me over, take my blood, shine a light down my throat and tell me what’s inside. Other than that, they basically leave me alone in here. Now, let’s see . . .” Then he orated, speaking each word aloud as he wrote: “I. Feel. Oh. Kay.” He glanced at me, then back down at his clipboard. “No. More. Drool.”

I kicked off my shoe, peeled away the damp sock, and wondered who would be reading over T-Bone’s paperwork the next day.

The animal sniffed at the end of T-Bone’s pen. He looked at me. “I’m taking care of her, okay? Just worry about your own self.” He set the animal in the tub and resumed scribbling. In another moment, he stood up and threw an arm around my shoulder. “You brought your swim trunks, right?”

I’m the first one to admit that there are a lot of things I never learned how to do. My mother died when I was a baby and, relatively speaking, I wasn’t much older when I dropped out of school. I’ve mostly worked at pizza shops and gas stations since then. I’m no good on computers and I probably couldn’t point to any countries on a map aside from the US or Canada, and, despite all our talk about the hotel dream, I’ve always been too embarrassed to admit to T-Bone that I never learned how to swim.

I had thrown a pair of cutoffs into my backpack, but I had mostly been excited for the possibility of sitting around in a bubbling Jacuzzi. As it turned out, the hotel didn’t have a Jacuzzi. The air in the pool area was thin with chemical pungency, but it was a welcome change from the room with the skunk. The water was empty aside from the two of us, and while T-Bone did jackknives off the diving board, I walked back and forth in the shallow end and watched the shape of my body ripple and distort beneath the surface. It was strange and comforting to feel my limbs pushing through the water, the difficulty of planting my feet firmly on the bottom. I remembered one of the word pairings from the neuroscience study: *Tethered, Blur*.

T-Bone splashed toward me from the deep end. He didn't ask whether or not I could swim, just smiled and spluttered and said, "Watch me. Like this. Keep on kicking. And cup your hands."

I did as he said, splashing everywhere and not making any forward progress. "You got this," T-Bone said. "You're a natural."

A boy and girl, nine or ten years old, came in and sat in the plastic chairs near the towel rack. They watched us, whispering to one another.

"Let's get out of here," I said. I stood still while T-Bone splashed a noisy circle around me. "Besides, what you're doing, that's just doggy-paddling. That's not even real swimming. Listen." I could feel those two kids watching us, probably thinking I was some loser who couldn't even put his head underwater. I cleared my throat. "I mean, really, they're not going to let you bring a skunk back to the house."

"Oh, I'm not going back," T-Bone said.

"What do you mean you're not going back?"

He stood and shook his head. "We're hitting the road, remember? Jackpot. I'm a big winner. We did it."

I wasn't sure what to say. I'd told T-Bone about how I was planning to leave soon, about buying a bus ticket and getting out of here. But despite the countless times we'd shared our fantasies, I realized now that I'd never truly imagined T-Bone going with me.

"They already gave me a big-time check," T-Bone said, "and I get another one next week, when I finish. We'll rent a car or something. We'll leave town in style."

"Yeah," I said, crossing my arms.

"Race you to the far side." T-Bone grinned and took a huge, gasping breath, dunked his head under, and splashed, inch by inch, back toward the deep end. The kids were in the water by then, jumping in and climbing out and jumping in again. The shallow side was small enough that I couldn't go anywhere without getting splashed by them. T-Bone touched the far wall, and I watched, embarrassed, while he splashed back toward me.

Fingers wrinkled and teeth chattering, we walked back through the lobby, wet footprints soaking into the carpet behind us. A cart stacked with linens was parked in the hall. As I scanned the numbers on the doors, it became clear that the cart was in front of T-Bone's room. The door was open and inside, a woman dressed in the black polo and slacks of the housekeeping staff was spraying long hisses of air freshener back and forth across the room. The ceiling fan cut fast circles above her. The sheets on the bed were fresh, the comforter tucked neatly at the corners. The dresser drawer where T-Bone had made the skunk's bed was closed.

T-Bone stomped across the room and rummaged around while I stood in the doorway and scanned the room for any sign of the skunk. When she noticed us, the housekeeper said something in another language, but T-Bone paid her no attention. He pulled the drawers out from the dresser, looked under the bed, then marched into the bathroom, pulled back the shower curtain, and lifted the lid of the toilet.

"What did you do with her?" T-Bone whimpered. "Please. God. What have you done?"

She let out a string of words, gesturing at the trash that still littered the room. She kicked at a Styrofoam container at her foot, and then, with one finger, she pushed upward on her nose and snorted like a pig. The housekeeper sprayed a cloud of disinfectant in T-Bone's direction. We had an idea of what she was saying after that.

T-Bone looked down at his feet and raised one hand to cover his nose. The other hand curled into a fist at his side.

The housekeeper was already headed toward the door, giving T-Bone a couple more snorts on her way. T-Bone slammed the door shut behind her and the plastic *Do Not Disturb* sign that we'd neglected to hang on the outside clacked against the knob.

I felt a breeze and noticed the curtains trembling in front of the open window.

"Look," I said. "She's probably fine. She made her escape and she's returned to the wild. This is good. She'll be happier out there." I gestured to the vast

parking lot outside the window. “In nature.”

T-Bone was already lacing up his shoes, pulling his ski mask over his head. He climbed up onto the window sill. If there’s one thing T-Bone has never been, it’s graceful, and as he made his way through the window, he toppled into the hedges that ran along the side of the building, flailed around like a wind sock for a moment before crashing onto the strip of grass beyond. I stuffed my feet into my shoes, the left one still damp, and followed him out.

“Come on,” T-Bone called, springing to his feet. “She can’t have gotten far.”

I lit a cigarette and walked slowly while T-Bone peeked beneath cars, getting down on his hands and knees, calling, “Cindy? You there, girl? Cindy?”

“I’ll check down this way.” I headed off toward the far end of the parking lot. A lump of guilt was hardening in my stomach—it was me who had opened the window in the first place, and I could see how it was my fault that Cindy had escaped, if that is what happened. I didn’t bother to check under any cars, just walked along the edge of the parking lot, past the windows of other rooms, some of them dark, and some opened, lights on, the babble of television trickling out into the night. My warped reflection followed me in the windshields. I reached the end of the building and sat down on the curb. The noise of traffic hummed from the street on the other end of the parking lot. I thought about being out there, speeding along in a nice, clean rental, T-Bone sitting passenger side and the skunk curled up in back. “What a life,” I said.

A moment later, a woman’s scream echoed across the parking lot. Later on, sitting at the kitchen table and explaining everything to the staff director at the halfway house, T-Bone would describe how he’d spotted Cindy curled up beneath an Impala, how he’d been trying to coax her out. But sitting there on the curb, I already had an idea of what was happening, could picture T-Bone down on all fours, drool running from that stupid grin, body covered in weird, pink scratches, no clothes but a ski mask and sneakers and his Hawaiian-patterned swimming trunks, reaching under the car without realizing that the windows were open, that someone had been sitting inside and was stepping out just as he cooed, “Here, girl. Come on out here, you precious little girl.”

As I jogged back across the parking lot, I could see a woman in a suit jacket and heels deliver a number of swift kicks to T-Bone's ribs. When I got close enough, I grabbed her by the wrists and asked her to stop. T-Bone was at my feet, moaning and gasping. The woman shouted for help and footsteps clapped against the pavement behind me. From the corner of my eye, I could see hotel clerks in red jackets running out from the lobby.

I have never spent more than the occasional night in a holding cell, but I have dealt with my share of street cops and social workers and judges who have been kinder than they needed to be, and I knew that T-Bone and I both had files, that our names and our prints belonged to the state, and that neither of us could afford much more trouble than we'd already had.

I let go of the woman's wrists and without hesitation, she hauled off and clobbered me across the jaw. As soon as I regained my wits, I grabbed T-Bone by the arm, yanked him to his feet, and ran.

We sprinted through downtown. Cars honked and brakes squealed. T-Bone coughed and wheezed behind me, a whistling sound coming from his throat with each breath. We put a few blocks between us and the hotel, then ran across the bridge, beneath the highway overpass, and up into the small, dark residential roads. We clambered over a chain-link fence and into the park, our footsteps thundering as we jogged down the empty trails. We collapsed against the cold metal railing that circled the reservoir at the center of the park. T-Bone coughed and retched. The lights from the city were blocked out by the surrounding trees, and ducks glided silently over the dark surface of the water, which lapped in a slow rhythm against the concrete basin. The night was warm but I was sweating from our escape and the wind felt cold against my skin.

I listened to T-Bone wheezing for a while longer, and then I told him, "Gimme that stupid mask." I tossed the thing down into the water. "I'm going home." I walked away, down the path that circled the basin. I was pretty sure there was another path on the far side of the reservoir that would lead through the trees and out onto the streets on the other side of the park. When I peered over my shoulder, T-Bone was gone, but then I noticed the tiny, pale shape of him moving on the

opposite side of the reservoir, growing smaller, farther away. As I walked, I looked down into the water, a shimmering darkness that grew wider and wider between us. I tried to pinpoint the moment when T-Bone and I reached the widest point, when we were the farthest away from each other and were no longer walking away but heading back toward each other. In another few minutes, I could hear his wheezing breath again. T-Bone made it to the far end before me. He headed down into the trees and onto the path that jigsawed through the park. I followed about twenty feet behind him. His breathing sounded worse and worse. We didn't speak, just kept going deeper into the forest. Eventually, the trail thinned and disappeared and we were walking along the edge of a trickling stream that crept across the earth like blood from a slow wound. T-Bone pushed his way through the brush, clearing a path, and I walked behind him, keeping my distance, like a stray dog, scratching at my bare arms and legs.

The ground swelled into a ravine around us, and we followed the stream to where it trickled from the mouth of a metal storm pipe. We climbed the slope around the pipe, our hands clawing at roots. It occurred to me that I had no idea which direction the halfway house was in, but it didn't matter. T-Bone could have been headed anywhere, I realized, and I would have followed to make sure he got home okay. Coming over the crest of the ravine, I could see streetlights through the trees. The doors at the halfway house would be locked by now and we would have to convince whoever was working to let us inside. We didn't say a word to each other, just walked home through the night with the smell of chlorine still clinging to our bodies.

T-Bone was bedridden for days. Whenever he breathed, it sounded like a big wad of bubblegum was stuck inside his lungs, stretching and squishing each time they inflated and collapsed. The skin around his nostrils became so chapped that the edges bled and scabbed. For the first time since we met, I found it difficult to look at him. I wondered what it was they had injected him with in that hotel, if maybe he was, in fact, that one guy out of a million who was exhibiting the hideous side effects.

The last intelligible conversation we had, he was sitting up in bed, nibbling french fries that I'd brought him from the hospital cafeteria, and he told me about how, when he found Cindy beneath that car, for whatever reason, he knew that they were saying goodbye.

I woke early the next morning and went outside for a cigarette and found T-Bone pacing in the road, shivering and talking to himself. He hadn't changed his clothes all week and was still wearing those blue Hawaiian swimming trunks. The old scabs from catching the skunk were bleeding again, as if he had scratched them back open. He didn't seem to hear anything I said. Some of the other guys from the house helped me walk him back inside. The staff had him pee in a cup, but before there were any results, two cops arrived. They put T-Bone in the back of their car and drove him to the station. Of all things, he had missed a meeting with his probation officer.

T-Bone spent a night shivering in a cell downtown before he was transferred to the hospital, where, after another day, he was diagnosed with rabies. By the time I saw him, it was like someone was flicking that switch in his brain, on and off, on and off. Sitting bedside, I noticed the plastic ID bracelet around his wrist. I had never known T-Bone's real name before then. I held his hand and rotated the bracelet so that I could read it: *Jeffrey P. Brzowski*. I put my hand on his cheek, which felt as warm as a cup of coffee. He was in the hospital for three nights before he died.

I hate to think that T-Bone's death is how I came to see the world, but I know that I never would have been able to leave while he was alive. I stayed at the halfway house for another five weeks, then bought a beat-up Honda at a police auction for less than it would've cost me to bus cross-country. I drove thousands of miles through fields of wheat and corn that shuffled in the sun and low green hills that rolled across the earth like the ripples of a huge wave before the car broke down outside Glenwood Springs, where I got a job washing dishes at a sports bar right off the interstate. The weather has been mild enough that I can spend nights in the car while I'm saving up to fix whatever it is that's busted. Most days, I work as many hours as they let me, staring down into the murky dishwater, and

the whole universe is nothing but the tiny yellow jewels of oil that swirl around shipwrecked chunks of wet food.

Each night, I walk back to the car with the Rocky Mountains rising behind me, black against the already black sky, like a bad memory from childhood, distant and urgent at the same time. Sometimes when I can't sleep, I gaze up through the windshield at the enormous night and try to remember those pairs of words from the neuroscience study—*Chimney, Bones. Whisper, Collection*—and I can almost begin to fool myself into thinking that there is order to the universe, that there is a reason for the way certain things are paired together, and that the reason will someday make itself known. But my mind always wanders back to memories of T-Bone going crazy in his hospital bed, and I can't sleep at all, remembering his dried, cracked lips and gummy saliva clinging to the corners of his mouth.

