

Three Flash Fictions

Delaney Otto

A Strange Cure for Procrastination

Ghoul startled, the fifth alarm on their phone blaring an annoying alarm clock screech into their ears. They shut it off, tossed the phone onto their bed, and resumed staring at their desk, the light of the laptop providing an irritating glare. Their lamp was on, but it did little to help them without outside assistance from the sun. They looked at the clock in the bottom of the laptop screen and saw 3:33 AM glaring back at them. They clenched their eyelids shut, hissing at the pain of dried eyes against dry lids. *Screw this*, they thought. *Absolutely screw this. Screw this class, screw this school, and screw the idiot high school senior who signed away the money they didn't even have to go here.*

Their stare hardened at the open Word document in front of them, bare like fresh snow except for the dark text of their name, the class, and the name of the assignment. The letters bled and fused together with Ghoul's vision as they spaced out. (Their mom used to call it "becoming a temporary astronaut," but Ghoul didn't think it was funny anymore after the accident; now their mom seemed to be a permanent astronaut.) Ghoul wanted to reach into the computer, yank out the blank page before them and bite it, tear it to shreds, ball up the little wad of scraps and set it on fire. But they couldn't, and they damn well couldn't afford to take their anger out on the laptop.

Instead, they got up from their desk, let out a bit of anger by swinging their desk chair hard enough to slam into and ricochet off the bed frame, and marched into the bathroom. They flicked the light on,

cursed at the zap of static meeting electricity as their finger met the switch, and got on their knees in front of the toilet.

Feels like praying, they thought, remembering the old ache in their knees from years back, kneeling in the hospital's mini chapel beside their weeping father. They snorted at the idea of a picture of Jesus on the bottom of the toilet lid, all doe-eyed and smoothed down brown hair.

Half-continuing the joke, half-not, they put their palms together and bowed their head so their forehead touched their fingertips. "Dear God, take this procrastination from me. Rip it, uh, rip it from me like an exorcist rips a demon from a . . . possessed child. Cauterize the wound and clean it with Holy Water, then send me back to my desk so I can start this paper . . . um, free me from the sin of sloth . . . please. Amen."

Then, they used one hand to pull at their lips to fit the other one through, dug their fingers into the back of their throat, and with the thought of exorcisms now on their mind, hurled.

They yanked their fingers out of their mouth, feeling their throat seize and their stomach heave, pushing sweat out of their skin, flesh going clammy. They could feel something pushing out of their throat, some large mass that the muscles in their neck shoved and struggled against. Ghoul's lungs raised their worry immediately, and the aching need for air erupted in their chest. They gagged and cried, reaching their hand back into their mouth to grasp the lodged thing. Their fingers found it, slippery and smooth, and they found enough purchase to grab it and *yanked*.

Their throat finally gained traction, and with a shove the long obstruction flew out of their esophagus. There was a splash as the blackened mass finally exited their mouth and sloshed in the toilet bowl. Ghoul shuddered, gasping for air, staring down at the gelatinous blob, dark as tar, sitting in the toilet water. It rode on the water, dense and viscous and wobbling like gelatin. Before it could move, before it could hint at moving, before it could give any slight, even accidental indication of consciousness, Ghoul tugged on the lever and flushed the toilet. They sat there, throat burning, eyes watering, body shivering, until the toilet was done refilling the bowl, and they flushed again. Again they stayed,

staring, waiting, until it refilled again with clear water.

Then, they got up, washed their hands, brushed their teeth and tongue until the taste of asphalt and oil and stomach acid was scrubbed off, went back to their desk, and started writing.

Do You Think Aliens Find Humans Strange?

Log entry 4019:

Today, Agent Stevenson—one of our human attendants on board—showed us something that I find truly, disgustingly fascinating about the human race.

He showed us videos of humans eating “peppers,” and food items seasoned with them or sauce created from them. I watched their faces turn red, watched perspiration leak from their foreheads and create a shine upon their brows. I watched tears run down their faces. They lurched and coughed, hiccupped and groaned, their faces scrunched up into expressions of agony.

And all the while, Agent Stevenson was *laughing*.

I was mortified, and I asked what he found so funny about the suffering of his fellow species. I had never found him particularly threatening; I had treated him with the same respectful caution as the other attendants on board that weren't of my kind, taking note of differences between our species. So I was quite put off by this sudden sadistic behavior.

Agent Stevenson explained that these videos weren't recordings of torture or punishment, but rather a “challenge” that humans *enjoy* participating in. They challenge themselves to see how much heat they can tolerate, how long they can go before they need to quench the pain with milk or “ice cream.” They record themselves, sweating and hiccupping, pouring milk over their faces, for *entertainment*.

This isn't the first time the human attendants have . . . unnerved me. First, it was Agent Garcia's piercings. Apparently, in human culture, it is *fashionable* to impale one's ears, nose, or other small patches of skin and put a decoration or jewel in place. We Heurians are a delicate species, I have to admit, and the idea of breaking our skin just for fashion is *abhorrent*. Garcia had multiple piercings, and took them out and showed them to me, explaining the proper way to “do” a piercing and take care of it. These wounds can get infected, apparently. Infected!

And there are humans who try to do it on their own with no proper training!

Then there was Agent Langley, who I have not spoken to in two weeks following our most recent conversation. Apparently, there is a term on Earth called . . . “thrill-seeking.” He showed me videos of humans on bicycles racing up ramps and over long drops, of humans jumping across buildings and scaling up walls, of humans *throwing themselves out of airplanes*, all in the name of this “thrill-seeking.” It nearly scared me to the point of sickness. I asked Agent Stevenson if these pepper challenges were a part of this strange genre of human activities, and he said it could be, albeit more “tame.” I don’t think damaging the body part responsible for my sense of taste is very “tame,” though I suppose it would put me in less mortal danger than flinging my body out of an aircraft and hurtling myself towards the ground.

Each time I learn something about these humans, the more thankful I am that they’re on *our* side.

End log

Time as an Animal

Father Time doesn't exist.

No man would look upon the role of Time and all that it entails and accept it, unless it was forced upon him, shackled to him. It would have to be a punishment or a prison, inescapable.

Time is an animal, driven by instinct. Its mind is incapable of understanding just what its role is in the natural order of things. It just fulfills it.

It runs and runs, driven by fear of its own extinction. That's what its instincts urge it to fight against. So it keeps moving, a steady pace fueled by that ache in its bones to survive. If it stops it will cease to exist, its animal brain tells it. And so it runs.

Time does what it must to live, thus condemning us all to Death. Like a bee makes honey, Time makes Death. Time doesn't know this, too driven by the avoidance of its own end. It has created the circle of life, the concept of age, the existence of decay and rot, all in its effort to keep its heart beating. I wonder if its heartbeat sounds like the tick of a clock.

I don't blame Time for Death's existence. I can't blame a mosquito for its bite—it's hungry. I can't blame a bee for its sting—it's afraid. I find it too cruel to hate a creature for its nature, for what it does to survive; it doesn't know any better. Thus, I cannot hate Time, no matter how much I fear Death.

Besides, without Time what would we be? We wouldn't be here at all. There would be no evolution, no adaptation from the water to land. There would be no matter, for without the time to move around, atoms would be frozen still, which would cause their extinction. Without Time, there would be nothing.

So, I accept Time and I accept the Death it brings with it. I only wonder if Time, like a lot of animals, would like to be a pet.

Delaney Otto is a Junior with a major in Communications and minor in English. She enjoys a variety of stories, though she has a preference for fantasy, magical realism, horror, and happy endings. She has a habit of starting stories and projects without finishing them and buying books but forgetting to read them. She's also a big fan of the moon.