

light reading series

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Kyle Beachy

## SO LITTLE IMPRESSION

**H**e drank two Diet Cokes before halftime and now the daddy's pee is like a locomotive. Drops splash onto the back of the daddy's huge hands, inevitable and warm in a way he finds nice. The daddy does not – this was a lesson he taught early and often – does not glance at the penis of the man peeing next to him. One huge daddy hand rises to the tile wall, his pee slows to a drizzle, then a drip, then a stop; and the daddy goes into his routine. He shakes his penis, he pinches his penis between thumb and pointer and stretches it outward twice, then shakes his penis some more. When he is sufficiently convinced his penis is empty, he tucks it back into his briefs and buttons up his fly. It is Saturday, one of two days the daddy is allowed to wear denim. Now the daddy turns from the row of urinals to approach the sinks and long continuous mirror on the bathroom's opposite wall. Outside it is hot and humid enough that just standing creates sweat drops to slink down thighs into socks. But here, inside the sparkling and newly constructed boys' room, it is air conditioned. The sinks are equipped with automated faucets that turn on and off with the presence or absence of hands. The daddy leans slightly forward and examines his hairline in the mirror, then reaches his hands into the sink. The water, aerated white, falls in a uniform tube. And even though he wishes there were a way to control the water's temperature – the daddy is big on control – the daddy enjoys the way the water goes from white tube to clear blanket when it hits his hands. He might even smile, here, and look up into the mirror to see himself smiling. This is when the important things start to happen. The man who was next to the daddy at the urinal, the only

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And next? When his gaze is drawn from mirror to actual can't figure out the sink. physical granddaddy, standing confused two sinks over, the granddaddy's pants pleated and hiked, shirt half tucked, half nor, glasses big and round and plastic, hair gray and matted and uneven because who at his age, after at least one war and multiple grandkids and much loss and pain, who at his age has the energy to worry about hair? About appearance at all? But what he must, the daddy thinks, staring, what the old man must worry about are the clusters of plum colored spots the daddy notices speckled over parts of the old man's face, spots the daddy wants to call liver spots but not with any authority — he's no doctor, the daddy — spots that portend something very bad indeed going on beneath the surface, this granddaddy, no longer abstracted by reflection but magnetically there,

other person inside the brand new bathroom at the Stacy Park Athletic Fields in Marietta, Georgia, begins walking toward the sink. In the mirror, the daddy watches the man and sees that he isn't a daddy but a granddaddy, old and slow-moving, with the color and texture of wet newspaper. The daddy's faucet switches off as his hands pull in toward his body. The old man's reflection reaches a sink two over from the daddy, and this next part is crucial: The old man doesn't understand the faucet. In the mirror, the daddy watches the old man tap the top of the faucet with his fingers, bend forward to examine the faucet from above, step back and look at the floor. He mumbles. And the daddy, drawn as we're all drawn to the pathetic, lured by futility and failure and confusion, at this vital moment shifts his eyes from the reflection over to the actual old man who

flesh and blood and breath and stink, two sinks to the daddy's left, struggling with a faucet designed to eliminate struggle. What happens next is the daddy becomes sad, a complex and elusive sadness that hits the daddy square in his gut, and then metastasizes outward, filling the daddy with a tightness unlike any sensation he's ever known. There are pieces of the sadness the daddy recognizes — flashes of his own daddy, now dead, and bits that project forward into the daddy's future, when he will end up as pained and plum-spotted as the old man — but the heart of the sadness is one the daddy understands no better than the old man does the faucet. Because the moment he pins it down, it becomes something entirely else. It is like the pain of a cinder block dropped on a toe, pain so encompassing it fills you; sadness you cough at; sadness with its own sound. It is a shifting, changing, comprehensive sadness. And all the daddy wants is to explain to the old man that the faucet will go on its own, that it's very simple, that this is a technology designed to make life easier, but he is unable to speak because his tongue has become frigid. And here the daddy begins to cry, tears tracing paths that quickly become cool on his cheeks, and he is frozen outside, burning inside, and scared by what this sadness means about his life and future and marriage and fatherhood, and the sadness is just much much more than the daddy is capable of handling. When finally the old man says, partially to the daddy but mostly to himself, he says, Look at that, just stick them right under. But the old man's success doesn't stop the daddy's sadness, on the contrary now the tears erupt and gush and the daddy can no longer tell the difference between hot and cold, and he knows there is only one thing to be done.

sitting cross-legged on the floor between the urinals and sinks, searching for answers. Until one day, exhausted and unable to wonder any longer, you settle on your own explanation, you put together a sequence of events that may have conspired to make the daddy do what he did. What made him walk from the boys' room to his car and pull slowly to the far end of the parking lot, pause for a minute, perhaps reconsidering, perhaps not, before gunning the gas pedal and accelerating like a madman across the blacktop, tires smoking and squealing so loud everyone in earshot turns in astonishment to see the daddy's Acura cross from blacktop to grass, tire smoke replaced by dust, reaching speeds the authorities estimate as up to fifty miles per hour and driving directly into the West-facing wall of the newly constructed restroom. You will remember how you stopped kicking at dirt when you heard the squeal, instinctively removed your goalkeeping gloves, and watched the mommies and daddies turn in confusion, cloud of dust rising behind them, before you saw the impact. The way the Acura rebounded in a sick parody of an underinflated soccer ball, how your mommy folded at every joint at once, falling to the ground like rocks through water, and the game stopped, and no one knew what to do, while the building remained unharmed. Eventually you will exhaust all speculation, and have to settle on the explanation you most see fit. And once you construct and visualize this sequence about an old man and a faucet, this will be the story you'll stick to. The story will become truth, and you will share it with anyone who will listen. So please bear with me, this is the only sort of recovery I know. I am going to tell it again.

And you. Hands baking sweaty inside rubberized gloves he bought for you, you are eight years old and kicking at the worn patch of dirt in front of your goal. Across the field your teammates are beating the utter crap out of your opponents so badly the ball rarely crosses midfield, much less requires you to perform even a single goaltending duty, which is just fine, you're not very good at goaltending anyway. You are kicking at dirt, bored and wishing you had a button to speed up time when you see your daddy step out of the bathroom. Your daddy emerges, and instead of returning to the sideline where your mommy and a cooler of Diet Cokes await, your daddy makes an abrupt turn.

You can tell something has changed. You just know, the way as children we intuit things that really matter, even before our minds can forecast their significance. You follow his path from the park's bathroom toward the parking lot, even at eight you can tell his steps are determined and important, until his path leads him behind the crowd of parents gathered on the sideline, and from your perspective, he is gone. You can't see him anymore. You see the mommy lift one hand to cover a yawn, and you see all the other mommies and daddies cheering for their little boys, but you don't see the one daddy who matters. He is gone. Something has happened and you will never know exactly what, there will be no explanation given by any of the people who an eight-year-old relies on for explanations, and you will spend the next twenty years returning to this moment over and over again, with no relief. It will be torture. And every time you visit your mother in Atlanta you will return to the now-decrepit and stinking park bathroom, spend entire afternoons