



The Hayflick Limit

Matthew
Tierney

WHEREABOUTS OF A COUCH POTATO

Each instant, O it mushrooms, so many
options, a foaming cloud
of nows: more shut-eye, up and head to the can,
scratch my ear or stand

and spin, counter-clockwise, twice ... all
tentative. Infinite I
diverges in the woods, one laughs, ten more sob,
piss their pants, succumb

to anomie. In the lineup of faux me's, a single
McCoy. Hints? Apathy
turns my crank. Blinking is necessary, it moistens
the cornea. I smile

to mask emotion, carry the gene that allows
tongue rolling. So weigh
the odds, ride waves of surely-nots and bang-ons,
map my presents. I'm

a sum over histories, one zillisecond at a time,
most likely supine, massaging
my temples, eye on that mushroom cloud looming
in the middle distance. You?

THE ECLIPSE CHASER

Always got a soft spot
for your first: Kenya, 1981,
six minutes of nirvana packed
into my noggin and parcelled out
over the worst of my everyday –
open houses for fixer-uppers,
clients' tears, rubber cheques, snags
in my pantyhose – till Java in '83
restocked my memory with a swath
of E-time, just enough fuel for
a thank-god-no-kids divorce.
Mexico got me off the bottle,
come Romania I was already
agent number one four years
running. I've clocked 26 minutes
all told, in the black, yet
it's the donkey's years in realty
that sweep past in a finger snap.
A little secret, I'm old enough
to be your mother, so listen close –
nothing, nothing will rouse
those rosy little cheeks of yours
quite like a total eclipse.

Do us a favour, dear, poke
the fire. Nice. Takes the fight
to that creak there, behind my knees.

Truer words ... nights like these
are a heavy cross. All your lovers
pass in the glaze, the promises
nearly kept, their meaning lost,

each face ablaze with longing
for you-know-not-what.
Take my word: noon tomorrow,
when that opal necklace is clasped
over the new moon's nape, you'll
have your question; and when
the chromosphere forges a ring
around that black disc, last light
a cherry diamond brighter than
bright, you'll be all answer.

Near as one can get? Eyes
closed, tight now! On the backs
of your lids, the corona,
a boys' choir in white robes
sustaining a high C. Keep them
shut, it's poetry or nothing, missy,
that char eye in the day sky, pure
gobsmack. I see how you frown,
the doubt in your shoulders, but
there's nothing more to tell.
T minus ten hours till
we glimpse light once forbidden.
That's all, dear. The two of us,
timeless bridesmaids of the sun.

APEIROPHOBIA

fear of infinity

Uncaged. Run from it,
go ahead, try. Wherever you are
it's there. Cousin to zero

with none of the zip, winking
from vanishing points as though
innocent, a party trick. Face it

with no illusions. That sucking sound
is the centre of the universe
voided from its nest

in the mind. Even Aristotle
turned a blind eye, afraid of disproving
God. Shameless modern mortals

and the games they play, spurning bliss
for the oil-slickened hand
of calculus, lifespans spun

into Spirographs, giddy
paths to nowhere. The chill comes
at the never-end of forever, tingle

in your fingers a surefire tell.
Eternity is devil's work, just
look at its mark – double coil of

a serpent eating its tail.
There's no way of unknowing
what we know.

STANDARD & POOR'S

Fernando's waiting for sirens. His 1500 sq. ft. 2 bdrm., 2 baths holds one ergonomic chair, oblique to the window. Storeys below, traffic iterates simple patterns while figures close the gaps, one side of the street to the other. Sometimes he hums. His voice returns to him off oak wood flooring and drywall, knits the space between one siren and the next. After work till 4 a.m., pencil held like a knife, five years of raw data buttering the loose paper around his sock feet. Factor analysis reveals frequency peaks at rush hour, escalates late in the week. Friday nights he throws in another variable for fun. The S&P 500, the line on the basketball game. Once, Yahoo! blew its fourth quarter and sirens tick-tocked long past dinner until the Raptors covered the spread. Like ice cream, that day. Fernando upped the stakes when he added a final column to track his mood. Nine grades of 'good,' nine 'bad.' Sixteen months and a scatter plot later, Fernando's got something all right: correlation coefficient is positively dead-on. The numbers can only mean one thing – he's willing the sirens to life. Fernando feels the hidden power quicken within. Finally! A surge of well-being sends him slip-sliding to the fridge for a tub of Neapolitan. Meanwhile the city burns, a conflagration of red piercing lights.

THEORY OF EVERYTHING

The soul-searching over first principles. Some
swear by salt, Nature jogging our memory

of wounds; there's water to clean them, or
that earliest syllabic for *Why?*, even more so

the hereditary function of the genome:
Michael Jordan skywalking towards the basket,

the air apparent. Of the four-letter words,
fuck and *love* are the ones we set store by

while God looks on, right of centre, greatly
exaggerated. Take carbon, its limitless ability

to bond, such chains of harmony unsung
by the masses. Radiohead's third album? o.k.

but Mozart's Requiem is written in the script
and we're still mapping the human brain,

its blips and dark seas, unravellings, the lucid
dream of a life lived. That we only use 10 percent

makes for good copy, bad Einstein.
What creatures! To deny our fullness;

to deconstruct chance happenings: hailstorms,
bull markets, ex-wife on a beach in sunny

Cancun. To presume a final answer
before counting the grains of sand.

PARELASIPHOBIA

fear of parades

As if real life
weren't Byzantine enough.
Under a xenon-charged sky, floats

float by. A high school band sweats out
Sgt. Pepper epaulettes
and worsted slacks, bleating

a half-tempo 'When the Saints
Go Marching In,' while the majorettes
in red-spangled spandex

pause in formation, puffy arms poised,
for batons to fall like
day stars, sons of morning –

a go-kart zips past,
Methuselah in a fez, shepherding
fellow Lions Club members

in their tramp to the end.
A peril of fools. Nonsense
is Munchkinland: only

the unfocused, peripheral eye
catches the curls of green smoke,
the long road lined

with scarecrows.