

Brozni

Brozni pressed his lips and punched dangling Dr. Pallek below the ribs a bit a time or two with a padded hand but it was all about the bad shoulder these days, an old sports injury that had managed to never get better he liked to think, so he walked over and went again to the section of rubber pipe filled with gel medium, lightweight and good. The proper batsman's bat. Passed the energy along. Pallek made all the sounds right for the scene, there was a music to it the way a drummer heard music.

Later he drew up a seat like a farrier's stool, and a ruddy foot of Pallek. A good right foot, been walked a little. Little bird, fluttering and soft-hearted. Pressed into service now, no doubt to serve with distinction. He cast his enthusiast's eye: foot of a gentleman farmer, then, grower of beets by another man's labor, Brozni always did this as kind of a gag, there was no science to it, they all sounded the same, knock-knock.

The soles of a man's feet are god-given for this, surely. Later there was something to the side and Brozni went vaso-vagal, pinch the septum, putting in a thumbnail, then the anti-nauseal spot on the wrist he'd learned from a boating book. Evidently the doctor had bit his tongue or something, and there was our trickle. Brozni surprised himself with a broad retching sound. Appalling. And he almost said bloody hell I've gone to great pains to avoid this. Funny how the wrong words come up.

The bracket from which the naked Pallek was suspended faced him to the north and empty part of the room, kept empty and unadorned because focus now. Behind were Brozni's desk and accoutrements; he put off his punching mitts and went to the locker with the box of prophylactic fingertips, the powdery smell and the feel. He got a pair and a plug of cotton, and he tapped the gauze into the offending jowl and pinched the mouth around.

Over the speakers he was using Grieg's piano or someone's for morale, and he built it up quite a bit with the clicker in his back pocket. Now the left foot. Light and giving, a new balloon with a little warm water in. He thought to go over the medial plantar nerve, other nerves available beside. Mark time along. An andantino now. Pallek barked or made sounds like a klaxon, the like of which are always at once to-the-point and not terribly telling. "I hear you. The old men of my craft from revolution days made a discovery that helped them in their project and which, ideally, we use even now to present times. They would ply the old hard generals for a signature or some such thing and occasionally break something important." He massaged the foot now to keep the nerves sensible. There we are. "Could be anything. Off to hospital, wouldn't want him dying on you. A big win for him if he did, and your failure and all its consequences. Anything to tell me?" Which had the sudden effect in the doctor of silence. Silence beneath his breath, labored and both liquid and dry. "Anything at all?" He brought down the piano and asked into Pallek's ear, soft voice: "Surely now." Just the breathing. And

he would wonder at times like this about the one here who couldn't hear or just wasn't listening. Imagine, all this and not listening. Or maybe even not caring, despite everything, imagine that.

They come in here so fucking proud. Brozni thought of it as this twig you want to clip but can't quite get to. Get to it by reaching around, through its soil; or bend it by breezes. The penis is responsive and communicates with the inner brain; Pallek's penis was down there in the folds. A member at its worst, miserable, a scrap of cartilage. Brozni touched the end of the truncheon to it and put a little negative life in: and it draws up, a pucker, a periwinkle: if you do it right it could be very, very unarousing. Where art meets science. You are not a man and cannot have self-regard, something like that. There was no female corollary, interestingly. Women tended to think the analogue to be ennobling; he didn't do the women, too complicated. Anyway, drive the pride down and press it down.

Anyway. And Brozni brought his hands in and arranged himself just abaft the mastoid bone on that side, eye on the pulse point. "I want you to know that everything you're feeling right now is valid," he said but not really, saying it under his breath as they say, not nearly enough breath to lift it all to the ear, which is to say not Pallek's ear loud with beating blood, the hiss that hid the sonants or what's called white noise, and Brozni always thought of it as a deep bed or cloud of cotton, into which he would loft his words — the pellets, the peas, the little pearls — and they disappear. Offer and withhold. Pallek even looked and almost made eye contact. Brozni: "I'm listening." Pallek said nothing.

Back at his desk he packed the clout in its sleeve and gave Pallek's file a quick second look. Father of, a couple of marrieds though not right now. Scratch golfer whatever that is, and collector of silverine cups from the Club. The regular habits, all of them. Failed beard, which he already knew. Seemed his doctorate was in a psychology science, which certificate he'd never used in practice. Expensive, that. Interesting.

And then there is always force, which wins if you would only let it. Brozni went to the lower bay and out came the rheostat, the two-stroke engine which needs venting through the hose and he hooked that up, and which sends power through the pair of padded bats, or wands he called them, magic act. He knew all the hidden touch points, the angles, the adipose, the varicose, the lachrymose ta-dah. And in the middle of it he said, "Say what you know. You're here because of what you know and won't say." Touch, touch. "We've all done things we shouldn't have. We might feel the shame or not but the shame is there." And then he would say, "I'm not trying to hurt you. Pain is just a medium." And eventually he would tuck into his quiet sing-song, for the pace, and of course the pleasure a rhyme provides. "Where I touch I leave a hole. Every hole contains a word. Form the words into a stream. A stream will always make its bed."

Eventually an indication, and Brozni killed the motor. "Sorry, did you have something to

tell me?" A phrasing he used with reluctance because he wasn't sorry, but sometimes it helped but not this time. Right now there was just that expression, like an animal in pain, which doesn't understand, and only knows that it's not supposed to be this way.

A lie. Lies and lies, that is my life. You know damn well why. You could make this stop anytime. At times like this Brozni might pause like now to reset the scene, if only to let it alone, also like now.

An alarm tone. Right, some other time then. The Poles came in. He called them the Poles because one was Novak and the other Schorst. They took Pallek off the bracket and carried him like yoked animals. "Mind the blood there," he said but they probably knew of course and didn't respond. People just don't talk anymore he said to himself, but then he realized he'd said it to them too, but they didn't respond and he thought it was because maybe he'd been joking or not said it loud enough or said it aloud.

Brozni did not smoke in this room because of the smell, so he chewed a lozenge, watching the time, sharp as a tool about time. He washed his hands with the cold-water hose. He sat and opened the interface and did online banking, shopped and did browsing or whatever it was. At the hour he went to the other door, they were both blue matte metal doors, but this one had a ledger on, for the day. He read it and also opened the door, and as it opened the smell of air-conditioned air came in and Mr. William Zouche was already approaching, clutching his file and loosening his tie.

Brozni: "Ah, yes. Bill. Please come in. And how are we this morning?"