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It 's Such a Beautiful Day

By Don Hertzfeldt

On the way to the bus stop,
Bill saw somebody he recognized
walking towards him, but he
couldn't remember his name.
He began to think of things
to say when they'd be
close enough
to acknowledge each other.
As they drew nearer,
their eyes locked,
uncertain if the other
was gonna stop to talk.
The person greeted Bill
as Bill mixed up the phrases
"What's up" with
"How's it going?"
Confused, the person
blurted out "Thanks"
before he knew
what he was saying.
Words caught in Bill's throat
and he replied, "Weh."
They did a sort of
awkward half turn,
and then continued on
now confident
that the other was not gonna
stop to talk.
They never saw each other again,
and a day later had each
forgotten the whole thing.
Later that night, Bill sat down
and put on a big sweater,
but it only made him sleepy.
In the supermarket,
Bill was always very careful
to select fruit from only
the back of the produce piles,
as the fruit in the front
was at crotch level
to the other customers.
An old man who smelled of
gasoline held up an onion
and said, "Big onion,"

to no one in particular.
He smiled at Bill
and Bill looked at his socks.
At the checkout counter,
Bill found himself
behind a big guy
whose T-shirt read,
"Second Place
is the First Loser."
The checkout girl said,
"How are you doing today?"
Bill said, "Fine, thanks,
how are you?"
She didn't answer.
Bill felt used.
As he waited for his next bus,
Bill stared at
a torn shopping bag
that was blowing in the wind
on the end of a broken pole
and anxiously sucked blood
out of a sore
in the corner of his mouth.
(men singing opera)
Bill dropped his keys
on the counter
and stood there
staring at them,
suddenly thinking about
all the times
he'd thrown his keys there
before
and how many days of his life
were wasted
repeating the same tasks
and rituals in his apartment
over and over again.
But then he wondered if,
realistically,
this was his life,
and the unusual part was his
time spent doing other things.
(scrubbing)
Bill sat down and read

a celebrity interview.
Then he watched the ants
crawl around in his sink.
(fluttering noise)
That night, Bill dreamt
of a monstrous fish head
that fed upon his skull.
(eerie exhale)
(low guttural sound)
In the morning,
Bill felt really tired
even though
he'd just been sleeping.
His calendar had a photo of
a manatee on it for the month.
It always seemed as though
the manatee was staring at him.
Bill sat in the living room
with a giant box of crackers.
He thought some food
might help him get going,
but felt kind of strange eating
in front of the television
without having it on.
Pretty soon he was watching
a boxing match
on a Mexican channel.
He'd been watching
a lot of boxing lately,
but didn't really know why.
In the fourth round, there was
an accidental head butt
that split open one of the
fighter's heads pretty badly.
They showed it over and over
again in slow motion.
Before he knew it,
Bill had eaten
the entire box of crackers.
He felt really lousy
and didn't want to get up.
He had a sudden urge
to talk to somebody,
so Bill phoned

his ex-girlfriend
and told her about the manatee
on his calendar.

"Did you ever see the movie
about the giant manatee
that attacked a city?"
she asked.

"I think you mean giant mantis,"
said Bill.

"Oh yeah," she said.

"Giant mantis."

(groaning)

The next morning,
Bill felt even worse.
Downtown, the hot smell
of manure
blew past him as he walked.

Bill soon came upon
three dead horses in the road,
apparently struck down
by a large moving vehicle.

"Well," he thought, "That would
explain the smell then."

He met his ex-girlfriend
during her lunch break
and they took a walk
to the park.

He noticed that every time
he was near her,
she sort of moved away with a
tight-lipped smile on her face
as though everything
were okay.

Mostly they talked
about death.

They agreed that being buried
seemed too claustrophobic,
and Bill didn't want
to be cremated
after he'd read that
the intense heat
boils fluids in the skull
until your head explodes.
He decided that he'd want

his body shot off into space
in a rocket ship.
He figured it'd be too expensive
to launch the weight
of his entire body,
but maybe just sending his head
into space would be good enough,
preferably in front of
a little window.
His ex-girlfriend said
she'd be really creeped out
if she knew Bill's severed head
was floating around
above her in space.
Bill was given a new booklet
at the clinic
discussing potential memory loss
in his treatment.
Inside was a cartoon character
saying,
"I don't know about you folks,
but I could lose my keys
eatin' breakfast."
His neighbor, trying to be
helpful but failing,
cornered Bill in the parking lot
to explain
how cryogenic scientists
could freeze his brain in ice
until a point in the future
when microscopic robots
could repair it.
Bill daydreamed about
all the brains in jars
he used to see at school,
how he used to wonder
whether there were still
somehow pieces of individuals
inside,
scattered fragments of
partial dreams or lost memories
lodged deep within
that dead tissue,
or whether this entire archive

is immediately erased
the moment that the body fails.
He began to think of people
in a new light,
how everyone's just little more
than that frightened,
fragile brain stem
surrounded by meat
and physics,
too terrified to recognize
the sum of their parts,
insulated in the shells
of their skulls
and lower middle class houses,
afraid of change,
afraid of decisions,
afraid of pain,
stuck in traffic
listening to terrible music.
(cheesy disco music)
His neighbor stared at him
and said,
"Last night I dreamt
all my toes fell off."
On the way to his front door,
Bill's other neighbor said,
"Sup," as in "what's up?"
Inside, he noticed a weird
wet spot on his mattress
that he didn't remember
being there before.
Bill watched part of
a documentary program
about a 5,000-year-old ice man
that was found in Italy.
Scientists explored its colon
and everything
on live television.
Bill wondered if the ice man
could have ever imagined
this would one day
have happened to him.
(projector being turned off)
That night, Bill dreamt

he was at the seaside,
desperately throwing dead bodies
off of a little boat.
(splash)
(seagulls cawing)
Bill took a walk in the park
to try and get some fresh air.
He noticed somebody
had written
"I Love You"
in the playground sand,
and he thought that was
really beautiful.
As he continued on,
a sudden dribble of urine
shot down his pant leg.
That was unexpected.
Then some little fat kid
with a deformed foot
tried to sell him
a magazine subscription.
Bill looked at the list
of magazines for sale
and angrily wondered why they
didn't offer any Asian porn.
Then he wondered why
he wondered that.
On his way to the clinic,
he found he had a little trouble
understanding people.
(loud discordant sounds)
Even his pamphlet
seemed different.
The guy next to him
at the bus stop
had the head of a cow,
but Bill pretended
not to notice.
His doctor said he had
some discouraging news.
The latest tests ruled out
the possibility
of further surgeries,
and his current treatment

didn't seem to be making
any progress.
He wanted to start Bill
on something new.
He couldn't think of any reason
why Bill should be seeing
things, though,
and asked him
a series of questions.
(loud, discordant sounds)
(soft ambient noise)
(distant footsteps)
(birds chirping)
Bill picked up
his new medication,
went home,
and masturbated for seven hours.
He woke up the following morning
and thought his room
seemed different.
(loud discordant sounds)
His mouth was bleeding.
Four of his teeth
had fallen out in the night.
They looked sort of like
dog teeth.
Everyone in the supermarket
looked like some sort of demon,
and they all had gigantic
bacteria-ridden crotches
buried in all
the god damn produce.
(flies buzzing)
It felt like his whole body
was sparkling,
his shoes felt as though
they were filling with blood,
and his hands smelled like
copper.
(men singing opera)
(zapping)
When he got home, he found
a pair of Lion King slippers
in his closet,

but had no idea whose they were
or how they got in there.
(crickets chirping)
(distant horn honking)
The pipe is leaking!
The pipe is leaking!
Bill could read the thoughts
of his waitress,
who wore too much eye makeup
and had no self esteem.
Outside, horribly deformed birds
checked their voicemail.
I am made nervous by a clone...
I'm a little princess,
I sure am.
(voices layering)
The effects of tranquilizers
on ant health
at higher altitudes
are unpredictable.
Why don't you come over here
and sit on my lap?
After lunch, Bill put on
the Lion King slippers
and flew to the bus stop.
(discordant sounds)
Bill dropped his keys
and stood there staring...
suddenly thinking about
all the times
he'd thrown his keys
there before,
and how many days of his life
were wasted,
but then he wondered if,
realistically,
this was his life...
(narrator's voice layering)
This was his life.
This was his life.
("This was his life" layers)
(audio slows down)
(whispering voice)
(robotic voice)

(maniacal laughter)

(static)

(screaming)

(discordant sounds)

(slowed down audio)

(woman singing opera)

(laser fire sound effect)

The power of Christ compels you!

The power of Christ

compels you!

(slowed down roar)

(roaring)

(roaring)

(distant heartbeat)

(persistent high-pitched noise)

(heartbeat speeds up)

(street noise)

His mother came to take care
of him all the way from Omaha.

She was a waitress
and often smelled of baby powder
and cheese.

They spent a lot of time
together doing puzzles
and watching television.

(jubilant shrieking)

One morning, as Bill was staring
at the patterns in the carpet,
she noticed a loose thread
in his collar.

(hisses)

(clattering)

"How could you think
I'd ever want to hurt you?"
she said,
and crumpled to the floor.

In that moment, Bill thought
she looked really old.

Sometimes the fluids in the IV
put a funny taste in his mouth.
Bill awoke to beautiful sunlight
streaming through his window.
He tried to climb through it
but didn't have the strength

to stand.

(beeping)

(beeping)

(gentle breeze blowing)

The next morning,

Bill actually felt pretty good.

The day after that,

he felt even better.

Then he felt

a lot worse.

But the following day,

Bill felt just fine.

"I'm sorry, I just don't know
what to make of it,"

his doctor said.

"Maybe Bill's body

is simply rallying

before finally giving up."

His uncle, whom Bill had not

even noticed in the room,

had taken a lot of time

off work to fly in

all the way from Tulsa.

He looked vaguely annoyed.

(birds chirping)

After another two days,

they concluded

Bill was not going to die,

so his mother had all the

flowers removed from his room.

She also had to have his casket

returned at great expense

and inconvenience.

(traffic sounds)

Bill had to go back to work

the following Tuesday.

It rained for

the entire bus ride.

(bus idling)

(bus driving)

(sounds of the ocean)

Last week, Bill's class

took a field trip to the beach.

His half brother Randall

came along,
a little boy in the special
class with aluminum hook arms
whose mind was as misshapen
as his legs.
(metallic clattering)
No one at school
really knew him
because he always rode
a separate bus
and was taught to stand
within the confines
of a tetherball circle
every recess.
In the late afternoon,
Randall was over with the adults
when he spotted a gull overhead.
His eyes burst with emotion
and he suddenly took off
stumbling after it.
Tears streaming down
his little face,
he stretched his aluminum hooks
as wide as he could
towards the sun,
howling, "Boon, boon,"
and disappeared
into the deep blue sea.
The other kids were surprised
he could even run that fast.
Bill's mother
put a heavy coat over him
whenever he left the house
for fear that he might
fall victim
to something called
"walking pneumonia."
She started doing this
the winter after losing Randall,
but then made him wear it every
day for the next five years.
In the summers,
he also had to wear a helmet
and asbestos safety gloves.

These were the days
she rarely left the house
and shaved the cat
on weekends.

On his sixth birthday,
his mother gave him
a postage stamp
and a piece of yarn
and hugged him
for five minutes.

His parents argued again
that night
and she threw meat.

His stepfather stormed
to the door
where he turned his face up
towards a hole in the ceiling
and yelled, "I just can't handle
this god damned woman,"
and left.

(door slams)

She stared at the front door
and rocked there in place
saying, "Aaa, aaa, aaa,
aaa, aaa, aaa, aaa."

Every now and then at school,
he'd find a note from her
in his lunch box.

(water running)

His hair was finally growing
back.

After completing the clinic's
daily memory quiz,
Bill went to the city and saw
ants take apart a dead bird.

(footsteps)

Yesterday, he spent 30 seconds
trying to open his front door
with his mailbox key.

It's been over a year now
since his diagnosis,
when they'd stayed up late
drinking
and Bill slept

on the couch.
In the morning,
he sat on the toilet seat
and quietly watched her
put on her makeup.
That afternoon,
she told him it was over.
In the hardware store,
a nice kid with a skin condition
helps Bill find the right
battery for his wall clock.
He had taken a walk
to the park
but didn't really know
what to do with his day there.
At home, he makes toast
but changes his mind.
He's been having trouble
sleeping again,
and realizes he's lying
in the dark with his eyes open.
(tool powering up)
(leaf blower power increases)
(power increasing
and decreasing)
When Grandma would visit
and he'd show her his drawings,
she'd often imagine how easily
she could toss little Bill
into the fireplace,
or even through
a thin window,
for he was still young
and quite small and floppy,
and she reckoned light enough
for a woman
of her size and strength
to hurl across the room
several yards or more.
In the middle of the night,
she opens the drawer
to find the preserved
cat head from last week.
She can feel the fish

smothering her brain,
and the magic scrubbing
of their furry little heads
across her skin
is doing less and less good.

(voice layering)

And she decides this is
because the little heads
are of low quality,
and she needs more of them.
She needs more of them
from higher pedigree cats,
little heads with better hairdos
and cleaner little ears
and clearer eyes.

(static)

They said she had a tumor
and was suffering from seizures
and dementia.

Bill didn't know
what those words meant,
but he had ideas.

Grandma was born
in Bootblack, Wyoming,
two years after the great mud
storms drowned all the hogs.

Her father serviced
electric machines
and once strangled a rock in
a fit of religious excitement.

He enjoyed wood
and telling the children
late night stories
of how his own papa
used to tame the wilderness.

He was a quiet, unassuming man
who was eating an onion one day
when he was cut in half
by a train.

(train horn blaring)

Grandma's older brother
became a preacher
who grew his mole hairs long
to purify his soul.

In his early years,
he secretly fathered
an illegitimate child
and smothered it one night
in the abandoned stable.
As he aged, he became
plagued with fire bugs,
and once claimed to have seen
an aquatic creature
make off with the sheriff's
prized cow.
He was eventually crippled
with lead poisoning and polio
and was killed by a train.
Grandma's little sister Polly
had beautiful golden hair
and pounded at imaginary animals
with a hammer.
She died at the age of eight
after contracting yellow fever
and catching on fire.
After Polly's death, Grandma's
mother cut out her tongue
and vigorously enjoyed
taking health tonics
and prescription medications.
(wind blowing)
(slowed down screaming)
A wild man wandered into town
that summer
and beat the church organist
with a shovel.
He defecated what looked like
a pile of blueberries
on the family porch
and disappeared,
howling into the marsh.
Nobody knew that this wild man
was in fact Grandma's
great uncle,
a forgotten, unwanted child
who'd been fed carbolic acid
and abandoned in the northern
woods 52 years prior.

He ate mud and sticks
and knew only how to say
the word "Bible."
"Bah ball!"
He died alone in the field
one summer morning
while dreaming of the moon.
Six weeks later, a sunflower
grew out of his head.
In their later years,
Grandma's family
moved to the big city
where her mother lived out
the rest of her days
making jam
and persecuting Jews.
(clinking)
There was a bush in front
of their building
in the shape of a heart
that made her cry
every time she saw it.
She died alone while Grandma
was away at boarding school,
surrounded by visions
of phantoms.
(eerie sounds)
Grandpa died 11 years
before Grandma did.
He used to sit next to her
every Sunday,
but now she plays
his bingo card for him.
Last night, Bill dreamt
he was young again
in a field with friends
at the seaside.
A big, happy seal barked
at them
and bounded from the water
to play soccer.
He was pretty good.
It was like an animal movie.
Then the seal hit the ball

a little too excited
and it flew over
everyone's heads
and struck a little boy
in an adjacent field
really hard in the chest.
It seemed like maybe he had
a heart condition or something
because he wasn't moving.
Everyone sort of froze.
The seal retreated
to the sea.
Nobody knew what to do.
(birds chirping)
He'd slept on his arm funny
and it felt sort of numb.
(whispering voices)
Sometimes it sounds like
there's voices in the water.
He's been putting
some weight back on
and his doctor had said
that was good news.
At the bus stop,
his left testicle ached
for no apparent reason,
and it almost made him
feel dizzy.
Not much happened at work.
Bill made a pyramid
out of three staplers,
and the new guy
swallowed a paperclip
and was rushed out
in a wheelchair.
The guy in the next cubicle over
told Bill about a thing
he saw on TV
about identical twins
who were separated at birth
but had individually grown up
to be serial killers.
It was as though
they didn't have any choice

in what they turned into.
"Genetics is pretty messed up,"
he said
as his chewing gum
flung itself from his mouth.
At lunch he told Bill about
a physics book he was reading
about time,
how the passing of time
is just an illusion
because all of eternity is
actually taking place at once.
The past never vanishes away,
and the future
has already happened.
All of history is fixed
and laid out
like an infinite landscape
of simultaneous events
that we simply happen to travel
through in one direction.
Bill made a joke
that he could have sworn
he'd been told that
somewhere before,
but the guy just stared at him
like he didn't get it.
At home, Bill watched
the microwave spin his food
and daydreamed about
the Galpagos Islands.
He'd purchased the new brand
of paper towels
that had hundreds of little
raised bumps across every sheet.
(microwave running)
(microwave beeps)
He found a message
on the answering machine
that was sorry to inform him
his mother had just died
that morning.
They said she'd launched
into a fit of senile hysterics

after skipping her medication
and was hit by a train.
She'd reserved her own funeral
plot years in advance
in order to be buried
alongside her parents,
but due to a clerical error
had to be placed 50 yards away
between a coffin full of rocks
and a rich woman's
golden retriever.
After the funeral, Bill went
through her old storage boxes
and was surprised to find
a hundred-year-old photo album.
Among the many pictures
of relatives
and people he never knew
were several photographs
of bacon and lumber.
He also found an old series
of strange portraits
that had been neatly labeled
for unknown future reference.
Scattered throughout the box
were forgotten photos
of himself as a young boy.
He'd read once how each cell
in the body replaces itself
and dies as the years pass;
how everyone is
slowly reconstructed
out of continuously changing
pieces.
It depressed him how foreign
the pictures seemed to him now,
how his ridiculous ingrown cells
had long ago stolen
this happy dead kid's identity
and with his own life
made a complete mess
of it.
Beneath the album
was a folder

of his mother's
medical records.
Attached to
her initial diagnosis
was a physician's note
that strongly recommended
she never have a child.
(passing traffic)
He pictures himself
having trouble breathing
and waking to a room
full of concerned faces.
He'd been terrified of dying
his entire life,
and as much as he tried
not to think about it,
death was always
in the back of his head,
around every corner,
and hovering on each horizon.
He'd brushed shoulders
with death on a few occasions,
but in his carefree youth,
it had almost seemed
like an abstract, impossible
thing to ever happen to him.
But with each passing decade,
he began to gauge the time
he probably had left,
and by his 40s,
what he considered
his halfway point, at best,
he had come to know

just one thing:

you will only get older.
The next thing you know,
you're looking back
instead of forward,
and now, at the climax
of all those years of worry,
sleepless nights,
and denials,
Bill finally finds himself

staring his death in the face
surrounded by people
he no longer recognizes
and feels
no closer attachment to
than the thousands of relatives
who'd come before.
And as the sun continues to set,
he finally comes to realize
the dumb irony
in how he'd been waiting
for this moment his entire life,
this stupid, awkward
moment of death
that had invaded
and distracted so many days
with stress
and wasted time.
If only he could travel back
and impart some wisdom
to his younger self;
if only he could at least tell
the young people in this room.
He lifts an arm to speak
but inexplicably says,
"It smells like dust
and moonlight."
He'd forgotten years ago
to replace the battery
in the cheap wall clock
in his kitchen,
and it was forever stuck

on 11:

He couldn't remember why
he'd put a clock there
in the first place,
since it was sort of
in an awkward nook
around a corner where he'd never
wonder what time it was.
Near the bottom
of the storage box,
Bill found an old notebook

he'd never seen before.
Filling the pages inside,
his mother had repeatedly
practiced her handwriting
so she could send him off
to school
with the best-looking notes.
He calls his ex-girlfriend
and arranges to meet for lunch
after his checkup.
(opens and closes drawer)
This morning, he couldn't
remember where he'd put
the clinic's daily memory
quizzes.
(zapping)
(hum of vacuum)
He decides to make toast,
but for a long moment
can't think of how it's done.
There's only a brown stain now
where that bird had been.
His doctor has nothing
but good news.
Bill has continued to make
terrific progress,
and he can no longer find
anything out of the ordinary.
He tells Bill that if he'd not
known his medical history,
he would probably give him
a clean bill of health today.
(otherworldly ambient noise)
(birds chirping)
(wings flapping)
On his way to lunch,
Bill smiles
and thinks for the first time
that maybe everything
will be o--
(zap)
(zapping)
Bill was born
late Tuesday morning

into a world of orange
and red.

He likes the way the aquamarine
rug feels across his hands.

(wings flapping)

He likes sunbeams
and rockets

and the smell of the backyard
in the early morning.

(dog barking)

He likes tigers
and trees

and melted chocolate ice cream
and watching the lights
while falling asleep
in the backseat.

(cars rushing by)

(wind howling)

(zapping)

Someone sits on the shore
and tells him

how the waves have been there
long before Bill existed,
and that they'd still be there
long after he's gone.

Bill looks out at the water
and thinks of

all the wonderful things
he will do with his life.

(thunder rumbling)

(sharp inhale)

(zapping)

(thunder rumbling)

(zap)

(low buzzing sound)

Bill.

Can you hear me, Bill?

Look at me, Bill.

Look at me.

140/90.

Bill, can you hear me?

-Bill?

-Bill?

Can you hear me?

(static)
(roaring)
(wind blowing)
(bell ringing)
The last thing
Bill can remember
is speaking to
his ex-girlfriend...
(film exploding)
(whooshing sound)
...bird wings,
and the smell
of black licorice.
(water dripping)
He watches dust float across
the sunbeam above his head.
And then he goes
back to sleep.
His roommate's name
is Matthew,
a paralyzed young man
hidden by curtains
who communicates
to the nursing staff
through a row of buttons
that can play
five different
electronic sentences,
but more often than not,
he only presses one of them.
"I am in pain."
Every afternoon,
the reflections of sunlight
from the traffic below
cast colorful patterns
across their ceiling.
In the mornings,
the sunlight illuminates
Matthew's curtain
and makes it look beautiful
even though it's just gray.
His ex-girlfriend's
been visiting lately,
and they talk for hours

about current events.
Sometimes they eat
ice cream bars.
It's the happiest he's been
in a long time.
(thunder rumbling)
(rain falling)
Bill is introduced
to a new doctor
and given a short interview.
He doesn't know
what month it is,
but he's aware
he's in a hospital.
He can't remember his address,
so he supposes he must
have always lived here.
His vision's a little blurry
and he no longer has strength
in the grip of his left hand.
Bill is asked to describe
a series of photographs.
He's able to put words
to many of these objects
but is very confused
by some of the others.
(rain falling)
He also has difficulty
distinguishing the faces
of people he knows.
All of these people
really just look the same,
and though he can recognize
his ex-girlfriend
because of her long hair,
he can't remember
her name.
He tells the doctor
he has a fish
living inside of his head,
possibly a trout.
It'll be another night
before it dawns on him
that something seems missing.

All the memories the doctor
asked him to recall today
are suddenly out of his grasp.
So many years of faces
and moments
are mostly just a vague feeling
now.

The years are slipping
out of his head.

Yesterday,
a gardener with a hose
blasted all the sparrow nests
from the second story awning
of the building next door,
raining mud and little broken
eggs into the parking lot.

(medical equipment hissing)

Another test
has been arranged
and Bill is taken
to a white room.

A radiologist makes an incision
and pushes a catheter
into his femoral artery.

The catheter is
carefully pushed
through his stomach
to his heart,
up through his chest
and into his head,
where a special dye

is introduced
to flood the blood vessels
in his brain for x-rays.

Bill is then asked to raise
his arms and count to 20.

A powerful anesthetic
is introduced
to temporarily shut down the
left hemisphere of his brain,
and for the remaining half
of Bill, the test begi--

Bill, can you hear me?

Bill, can you look up

here for me?
Can you tell me
what these objects are?
Bill, can you tell me
what this is?
Bill, can you add up
these numbers for me?
You're doing great, Bill.
Okay, and what do these numbers
add up to?
Look at me, Bill.
Look at me.
Bill, look at me.
Okay, Bill, can you tell me
who this is?
It's okay, Bill,
you're doing great.
And can you tell me
who this is?
Bill, can you tell me
who this is?
Do you remember her?
Today she's joined
by her boyfriend,
a young man named Steve
who spends most of the afternoon
in the corner
quietly staring
at Matthew's curtain.
"I am in pain."
The doctor explains to her
that Bill may be having trouble
understanding past tense
and present tense.
It may also be difficult
for Bill to understand
which of his memories
are real
and which are imagined.
When the brain is confronted
with major memory loss,
it often fills in the blanks
with confabulated stories,
false memories,

people who never existed;
invented conclusions to make
everyday life less confusing
and to somehow rationalize
what's happening to him.
Today, they will chat awkwardly.
Bill's been unable to stay
on one subject
for more than a few moments
and seems to get
easily frustrated.
She will say she didn't know
why she'd brought Steve along
yesterday
and admits he'd been so shaken
by the experience
that he quietly cried in the car
on the way home.
The sparrows have already begun
to rebuild,
but he's not sure if he feels
happy or sad for them.
He dreams he's part
of a rocket crew
reentering
the earth's atmosphere.
As they rapidly descend,
it's believed that
eating ice cream bars
will help prevent them
from having strokes.
As the heat intensifies,
Bill eats his ice cream bar
and secretly hopes that
if something bad had to happen,
the ship wouldn't explode,
but just that everyone else
would have strokes.
A final battery of tests
are ordered
to positively rule out
the chance of surgery.
Highly drugged, Bill will have
no memory of these tests

other than a terrible noise
to his right
and a brief vision
of a seahorse
and a falling tree.
(medical equipment running)
This morning, he can't
remember the last time
his ex-girlfriend
had come to visit.
It could be hours,
or maybe it's been weeks.
His uncle, whom Bill had not
even noticed in the room,
looks out the window
and talks about Bill's mother.
Then he says, "It's too bad
people don't say how they feel
until it's already too late."
And then he says nothing.
The TV in the room
is always on mute,
and behind his uncle's head,
Bill watches a superhero
quietly melt a monster's face.
His doctor visits and asks if
Bill might be more comfortable
at home for a few days
under family care
until the final results
come in.
(door opening)
(keys clanking)
A neighbor must have put
these groceries
in his apartment for him,
which was a very nice gesture.
It's kind of a really nice day.
He decides to walk
around the block.
On the side of the road,
he sees
a woman's tennis shoe
filled with leaves

and it fills him with
inexplicable sadness.
He walks down his side street,
alongside the bridge
past the farmers' market,
and back up
the main thoroughfare.
(birds chirping)
It's kind of a really nice day.
He decides to take a walk
around the block.
On the side of the road,
he sees
a woman's tennis shoe
filled with leaves
and it fills him with
inexplicable sadness.
He walks down his side street,
alongside the bridge
past the farmers' market,
and back up
the main thoroughfare.
(birds chirping)
It's kind of a really nice day.
He decides to take a walk
around the bl--
(door opening)
(keys clanging)
That hand is dropping
everything.
Wasn't he supposed
to call somebody?
What was her name?
What in the hell
is wrong with this mug?
(keys clanging)
Does he really need
this much food?
There's a doctor
on his answering machine.
(beeps)
Has he been sick?
A doctor carefully explains
test results with him.

He goes over numbers
and information
that Bill doesn't understand,
and reiterates things
that Bill doesn't remember.
He's momentarily quiet
and then tells Bill
he doesn't have
very long to live.
It's kind of a really nice day.
He decides to walk
around the block.
On the side of the road,
he sees
a woman's tennis shoe
filled with leaves
and it fills him with
inexplicable sadness.
He walks down his side street
and sees striking colors
in the faces of the people
around him,
details in these beautiful
brick walls and weeds
that he must have passed
every day but never noticed.
The air smells different,
brighter somehow,
and the currents under the
bridge look strange and vivid,
and the sun is warming
his face
and the world is clumsy
and beautiful and new.
And it's as though
he's been sleepwalking
for God knows how long,
and something has violently
shaken him awake.
His bathmats are gorgeous.
The grain patterns
in his cheap wood cabinets
vibrate something deep
within him.

He's fascinated by the way
his paper towels drink water.
He's never really appreciated
these things.
All this detail
he's never noticed.
Detail he's never noticed.
He's alive, he's alive.
He's alive,
he's alive.
Never noticed.
He's alive.
The stars rattled him
to the core.
All these lights have traveled
for tens of millions of years
to reach him at this moment.
How somehow far away,
our own sun looks
just like one of these.
How many of the stars
no longer even exist,
but whose ancient light
is just reaching him now.
An impression from a ghost,
an amazing infinite time machine
every night above his head
that he's ignored
for most of his life.
He wants to stop people
in the street and say,
"Isn't this amazing?
Isn't everything amazing?"
He runs to the car rental place
and finds himself a freeway
and drives all night,
following directions
in his head
to a place he can't remember,
absorbing everything
he can
before it all fades again
with the morning.
He's got the keys

to this car.
He also has keys
to a motel room,
but he can't remember
the last time he slept.
He's sitting in the sun
outside of a laundromat.
An older guy in a baseball cap
stands at a payphone
and nervously lifts
and hangs up the receiver.
He asks to borrow Bill's pencil
and then places a call
to his daughter.
He tells her he loves her
and he's proud of her,
and that "one day soon,
we'll finally have our day."
Then he says,
"Fantastic, fantastic,"
and hangs up the phone.
Although it looks like the wind
had been knocked out of him,
he presents the pencil back
to Bill with a little flourish,
as though proud no harm
had come to it
while in his possession.
He dreams of fog
on the dark edge of a cliff
where hundreds of feet below
the deep sea swells up
against the rocks.
And if you lean over the edge
and squint your eyes just right,
you can barely make out
the gray shapes of all the cars
that had driven off the cliff
over the years
sunken deep beneath
the surface.
And as each wave washes slowly
over them,
the undertow quietly pulls

their headlights on and off,
on and off
on an endless loop
growing slowly dimmer
over the years
until the day comes
that they fade completely.
He's at a house now.
When he was little, he would run
through a house just like this
with a flashlight
pointed at the ceiling,
pretending he was an astronaut
soaring over the moon.
A familiar person's here.
He's not sure how he found him,
maybe he's been followed,
but they're talking now
and Bill is given an address,
an address his mother never
wanted him to have, he says.
But it's important
Bill have it now,
an address where he can find
his father, Bill's real father,
a man who was gone
before he was born,
a man he'd only met once
but was too young to know it.
And he's driving again now,
for several hours,
he's not sure,
and with every mile,
he loses a few more memories.
And he finds another motel,
and that night he eats
a lot of ice cream
and doesn't remember
his dreams at all...
doesn't remember
his dreams at all...
...remember his dreams
at all, his dreams at all.
He's in a nursing home.

Is he old?
Is he old?
A room full of windows.
A room full
of windows.
And he gives a name on a paper
that's not in his handwriting
to the front counter,
and a frail old man
is being wheeled to see him now,
a man who's been here
for over ten years
but rarely had a visitor.
Neither of these two people
remember why they're there
or who exactly
this other person is,
but they sit and they watch
a game show together.
And when it's time
for Bill to leave,
he stands and says something
beautiful to him.
And neither of them understand
what he means exactly,
but the old man
begins to cry anyway,
and they will never
see each other again.
He's driving a car,
and every time he realizes
he's driving a car,
he figures he should
just keep driving the car,
and sometimes he sings
and sometimes he cries,
and the left side of his body
is beginning
to grow slack and numb,
and all he wants to do
is just keep driving,
somehow to keep on driving.
He has no more directions
to follow,

but he fills the car
with gas again and again
and keeps going
into the night.
He wants to keep going.
He wants to go forever.
(wind howling)
(birds chirping)
It's such a beautiful day.
Wait a minute,
he's not gonna die here?
But he doesn't die here.
No, no, no, Bill, get up.
Get up, Bill. Bill, get up.
He can't die here.
He's not gonna die.
He can't ever die.
Bill?
Bill?
He will spend hundreds of years
traveling the world,
learning all there is
to know.
He will learn every language.
He will read every book.
He will know every land.
(soft pop)
He will spend thousand of years
creating stunning works of art.
He will learn to meditate
to control all pain.
As wars will be fought
and great loves found...
...and lost...
and found.
Lost...
and found.
And found.
And found.
And memories built
upon memories
until life runs
on an endless loop.
He will father hundreds

of thousands of children
whose own exponential offspring
he'll slowly lose track of
through the years,
whose millions
of beautiful lives
will all eventually
be swept again from the earth.
And still, Bill will continue.
He will learn more
about life
than any being in history,
but death will forever
be a stranger to him.
People will come and go
until names lose all meaning,
until people lose all meaning
and vanish entirely
from the world.
And still, Bill will live on.
He will befriend the next
inhabitants of the earth,
beings of light
who revere him as a god.
And Bill will outlive them
all...
...for millions
and millions of years...
...exploring,
learning, living,
until the earth is swallowed
beneath his feet.
Until the sun is
long since gone.
Until time loses all meaning
and the moment comes
that he knows only
the positions of the stars
and sees them whether his eyes
are closed or open.
Until he forgets his name
and the place where
he'd once come from.
He lives and he lives

until all of the lights
go out.
(quiet nature sounds)