

LUMP

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Dan's lump is most easily detected in the shower under running water. He can find the tender spot with three flat fingers using a circular movement beginning at his armpit and moving along his chest. Dan's lump is on the right side and is not detectable by the naked eye. It is the size of an arcade token and slips around under his skin, evading his nervous fingertips. It is as hard as a tennis ball and hurts only when stirred by sudden movement or burdened with the weight of books or memory. On a pain scale of one to ten, where one is no pain at all and ten is the worst pain imaginable, Dan does not know where his lump belongs, since he senses he has a very capable imagination, making the scale quite vast, the numbers too far apart to be practical. The incremental fractions that separate each number, he suspects, are infinite. Oftentimes he finds he cannot imagine the scale's imaginable end. As for its humble beginnings, he worries that if he's ever experienced a scale of one, he was not sufficiently aware of this experience when it occurred. Even worse, he fears that if ever he were aware of such a thing, he might cease to exist. Dan's lump has no smell, only his skin's scent around his breast. Dan's lump is the shape of an egg and moves about as a yolk would inside its shell. Dan's lump is a powdery yellowish red like the gradual colors of a peach. Dan's lump is the size of a matchbook and feels like a wound in his side when he sleeps. Dan's lump burns sometimes, like when he's tossed and turned too much at night. It throbs at his right, pulsing opposite his heart. Dan's lump feels like a punch in his armpit when his fist pounds the air. Dan's lump is brown like the color of a river when the current stirs the mud. The River Dan overflows brown in the rain.

Dreaming, I sleep. Dan's lump leaps, lumpety-bump it is on my breast. Dan's lump sits on my breast, and spreads, in blood's deepest shade and the shape of a Victorian silhouette. Dan's lump is warm. It throbs and glows and bursts, splashing me in a hot red wave, and the liquid soaks the sheets. It slides down the windows to puddles on the floor. Out of the dark hole left behind climbs a child, wailing, tumbling onto fluid sheets. Dan's lump bursts, and it is a child on fluid red sheets, and I lift it and it is warm with tight fists and closed translucent eyelids with tiny trembling capillaries running through them every way. Underneath the lids its eyes glow yellowish-gold. Its body slips through my fingers but I gather it and hold it, squirming, between my legs. I relax and feel it settle down into silence. I push it up inside of me. I push it up, squirming again, and it is inside and I feel it rumble, warm and glowing. Then, quiet once more. Simple sloshing. I rise. We change the sheets.

Ten, Dan counts. Nine. Eight. Slowly, he thinks them through: Seven. Six. Dan lies beside me on the bed, his hair and chest still wet from the shower, smelling of soap and warmth. He holds my hand and I breathe and we wait. Five, Dan says. Four. He is counting backwards from imagination into flesh. Three. I can feel liquid turn solid, the rumbling resume. Two, Dan says. A single, expectant syllable. I sigh. Dan sighs with me, and as the air escapes, his mouth shapes the word: One.