

just start somewhere

Sebastian was born in a root cellar on a warm October evening. It was cool in there. It was always cool in there. The dirt floor felt alive under his sprawling fingertips, as he waited to become.



Metamorphosis was a constant theme for Sebastian, just as impermanence was for Tom. That is another difference they had in common.



There is a whole host of differences between Tom and Sebastian, if a person wanted to list them.

Tom, for example, was born into a weird hippie commune, and Tom is not even his real name, which is long and Sanskrit and is not to be used. Tom is the name he adopted when he left the weird hippie commune to become as one with the world of men.

Metamorphosis.

Impermanence.

Over and over again.



Sebastian's first friends were the many-legged.

Tom spent his early years sleeping on the children's platform with an ever-changing assortment of waifs with big, unruly hair. The children were expected to get along, and to some extent, take care of each other.

And they did.

Sebastian would watch a mosquito swell dark red on his own blood, and try not to disturb its meal.



It was cool in the root cellar, and smelled of clean dirt, and sometimes Sebastian imagines he is still there in his perfect little hideaway, with the many-legged, and the packed earth alive under his fingertips.



His first friends had no voice, and so now, he must speak up.

on the meaning of impermanence and metamorphosis

Sebastian used to have a job.

Sebastian used to be a research entomologist.

Mostly, Sebastian researched the development of pesticides.

Much about this work in the killing field disturbed Sebastian (for example, the casual use of the concept “termination opportunity”).

When distressed, Sebastian tended to express conflict. A blurt of truth might escape his lips before he could help himself. This could be, for example, while compiling mortality data, or tweaking a statistical analysis of residual contamination by increasing the sample size. Smoothing the result, it was called. Smoothing the rough edges of truth: the research facility, through a shift in perspective, became a factory generating statistics. They virtually manufactured data, based on demand.

Statisticians called the data massage “increasing the sample size.”

Managers called it “broadening the research horizon.”

Sebastian called it “diluting the evidence.” Diluting

it until the answer came back, “no detectable residue.”
Just like sausage from Chernobyl. Diluted until no
longer considered radioactive.

But all the poison was still in there.
Somewhere. Somebody was eating it.



Sebastian was laid off.

Well, not exactly.

His contract was not extended.

True, but not really.

He feels laid off. They told him not to come back.

Might as well be laid off.



There was a spill at a test site. They were researching
a promising neurotoxin, a potent carcinogen which (in
the shorter term) was remarkably effective even in trace
amounts for wiping out nervous systems. The focus of
their research was the dispersal of this neurotoxin to
target bugs, and eventually, hopefully, the right bugs.

No other research was mandated. Through
a reprieve from the laws of science, spraying this
poison over crops was seen to have few environmental
consequences worth investigating. Collateral damage
all around the food chain? No alarm bells went off.
Horribly toxic, yes, if used as directed, but otherwise
posed no risk.

This was the heyday of pesticides, when no problem couldn't be fixed by dumping enough poison on it.¹

Sebastian may have been stubborn. He may have persisted with an unpopular line of reasoning. He didn't intend to be off-putting, but sometimes he had that effect. Sebastian as always was just trying to be reasonable and logical. And patient, because it was very frustrating to see science subverted by elements of faith.

Science is supposed to be based on solid research, logic, and reason. But if a chemical company is funding the research, obviously it is reasonable to place one's greatest faith in chemicals: there was logic in that.

And that is the circular science of rationalization.

Anyway, there was an unexpected spill (which became known at the lab as the "premature evacuation") during the mortality assessment / community penetration / environmental dispersal trials. One immediate side effect of exposure to this neurotoxin was confusion.

Sebastian presented investigators with convincing symptoms (although it took him a while to figure out what had happened).

The symptoms persisted; tests suggested a metabolic signature of the neurotoxin, while other investigations were inconclusive. Sebastian was placed on long-term disability. Told to stay home. Told, specifically, not to come into his prior place of

¹ We are still in this heyday.

employment without being invited in writing.

He was not laid off, and his contract was not extended.

He was not supposed to go in to work.

He was not working there anymore.

It was not known what Sebastian was going to do.

That is a lot of nots.



Sebastian has time on his hands and is using this time (and his hands) to make a permanent record of a number of transitory things.