

## Jude Browning

### *Morning - A Good Man Speaking Well*

Claggy deposits collected in the corner of each eye; he removes gummy yellow discharge between forefinger and thumb and wipes rheum across the outside of his white, pinstriped cotton duvet. Rolling onto his right side, he resumes sleeping. He stirs, knees bend, his rounded right ankle bone tucks into the dipped hollow cleft of his foot. Drawing duvet tighter, pulling covers under his chin; swaddling himself in the security of his bedsheets. Untucking his arm, palm face down, his hand rests on the cooler outside duvet. Scrunching fistfuls of fabric, knees toward torso, eyes open, blinking in quick succession; tears run down his cheek and seep into the pillow. On his back, legs hip distance apart; he places his arm over his face and covers his eyes with the inside of his forearm. Lifting his legs at the hip, he raises the duvet and catches the bottom of the covers with the tops of his toes; folding the end of the duvet under his feet, wrapping his extremities, he turns onto his side. Bending his left leg at the knee, his right leg compensates to accommodate the change in position. Left arm under his torso, right arm on the outside of the duvet. Eyes open. Blink. Rolling onto his back, joining hands above his head, elbows bent, cradling cocooned ears against the insides of his upper arms. Staring at his bedroom ceiling, blinking slowly; he sniffs, back of hand pushing tip of his nose upward. Left hand placed on abdomen, right hand scratching his scalp, wrapping around his head, palm holding bottom angle jaw. Eyes shut. Kicking duvet from body, rubbing face, propping upright, arms behind back, hands flat on mattress, creased wrists. Swivelling into seated position, feet landing on a sheepskin rug.

Parted green curtains cast a slit of cream light on the rug and his bare feet. Ruffling the sheepskin covering a small section of wooden floorboards; flicking matted lanoline fur with toes, spreading, bunching and gathering textured wool. Standing, straightening his spine, extending arms to the ceiling, expanding ribcage, deep inhalation, deflating his chest cavity with relief. Floorboard dust swirls as he rises, shuffling toward a mirror hung on the opposite wall. Face puffy with sleep and creased from crumpled bedsheets; patting his cheeks, fingertips move skin in circles, his jaw hangs open slowly. Massaging his jawbone anticlockwise, mouth agape, lips soft, he emits heavy continuous tones; richly rounded.

Gradually increasing pitch, mouth relaxed and issuing sonorous baritone notes. Crisscrossed wrinkles frame sagging eye socket skin and reveal the bone structure of his heavy set features. Stiffly walking toward the bedroom door, hand outstretched, skirting the end of his bed; his nudity is carried with the comfort of privacy.

Lightly pushing his bedroom door ajar, he enters the hallway and moves to the bathroom. Thick set red plastic switch down, red hot water light illuminated. Sunshine fills the bathroom; he shields his eyes and kneads furrowed brows. Pearlescent shower curtain drawn to one side, shakily he lifts his right leg over the edge of the white enamel bath and steadies his balance against the door frame. Right leg grounded, his left follows as his hand grips the stainless steel fixed shower head. Swiveling the electric temperature dial clockwise, water chugs, gradually a steady even flow funnels through the hose. Closing his eyes, tipping his chin back and rotating his head, water runs off of his cheeks, jaw and neck. Opening his mouth, sticking out his tongue, releasing low resonant notes. Bringing his hands to his eyes, he rubs water into his face and over the back of his scalp. Bending at the knees and picking up Mint and Tea Tree shower gel propped between the bath edge and white tiled wall; the transparent bottle is three quarters empty, vigorously shaking opaque sap green liquid, a dollop is dispensed. Running his cupped palms under the shower, green gel turns to white foam and is worked along nostril creases, bridge of nose, cleft of chin, brow bone, forehead. Index and middle finger firmly lather emulsion into his pores, circulating soap along temples, cheeks, corners of his mouth, jawline, muscles of his neck, nostrils. Splashing remaining suds from his face and eyes, he returns Mint and Tea tree Shower gel to the bath edge. Bending to retrieve Unscented 2-in-1 Anti Dandruff Shampoo, upturning the white and blue bottle, a thin stream of fluorescent blue liquid rushes from the plastic flip lid. His hands massage silken suds onto his scalp, sparse fine hair slides under his fingertips. Rinsing discarded hairs from his hands and reaching for Mint and Tea tree Shower gel, clear bottle unturned, jerking green soapy custard out forcibly. Lathering soap under his right arm, concave hollows suction foam, straightening his arm toward the ceiling, rubbing white froth into flattened skin and craning his neck to examine unfurling underarm hair. Moving stomach skin upward, rinsing his sucker plunged belly button, dragging torso hair toward his line of sight. Bending at the knees, lifting left leg to bath edge; washing his ankle, calf, thighs,

groin, buttox. Repeating actions with right leg and continuing to lower back, torso, upper chest, shoulders, forearms, shoulder blades. Showering hands clean, turn down water dial. Beige ribbed cotton blend bath towel retrieved from the back of the door, he blots water from his body while stood in the bath. Stepping over the ledge, tying towel tight, pulling belly button toward spine. Red plastic switch pushed up, red light off. Shuffling into his bedroom he parts the green curtains, releasing sunlight.

His early morning regime is an unselfconscious routine developed out of convenience. He will go to the kitchen to prepare a cup of tea for himself, slipping on his newly purchased Lime Green and Sky Blue slider sandals and re-tying his towel before stepping into a less private space. Wiggling the kettle lead out of the base, he walks to the sink, looks down into his neighbor's windows and struggles to turn on the cold tap which is poorly attached, causing the handle to skitter and inadequately grip the valve. This has become habit and while he regularly reminds himself to fix the flow adjustment, he will not pick up the replacement part on his way home from work. Once he has returned the kettle lead securely, he presses the transparent plastic switch down and a blue light indicates the water is boiling. He opens the gloss white kitchen cupboard doors directly above the boiling kettle and looks for tea bags in an empty glass mason jar. He tells himself to pick up tea bags on his way home. His To Do List: *replace screw tap mechanism, buy tea bags*; will develop throughout his day but none of his listed tasks will be accomplished.

Hung on a wire clothes hanger attached to the back of a round rattan chair are a pair of beige trousers, a white and grey pin striped dress shirt and a camel cotton blend blazer. Folded in a pile on top of the cream chair cushion are plain white boxer briefs, white tube sports socks and a white v-neck cotton undershirt. He sits on the edge of his bed; bunching the white sock between thumb and fingers of each hand, he wriggles toes and then his entire foot into the elasticated cotton sheath. He steps into his beige trousers which hang loosely when fastened below the waist with a zip and button fly. He loops his black leather frame style belt buckle through his trousers, the unfastened ends dangle heavily. Feeding his left, then right arm through the sleeves of his white v-neck cotton undershirt, he tucks the hem into his trousers and removes the white light grey pin striped dress shirt from the hanger.

Buttons at each wrist and down his chest fastened, he gathers the front, then tail of the shirt into the waistband of his trousers, draws his belly button to his spine and prongs a hole through his belt. Sliding his left, then right foot into brown moccasins, he steps back and adjusts the collar of his shirt in the mirror and runs his hands down his torso. Holding his own eye contact in his mirror he swings his brown cotton blazer behind his shoulders and thrusts an arm into each of the sleeves. The shoulder pads protrude and increase the width of his silhouette beyond his natural frame.

Pulling the main door of the tenement shut, he crosses the street toward the road leading to the city centre. The digital clock mounted to the facade of the grey pebble dashed garage incorrectly displays today's time and temperature in segmented red numerals. Stained splintered wooden pallets lie propped against storefronts, vegetables and fruit trampled into the pavement as gutter gathering produce mixes with water and swirls in oily puddles. Refrigerated truck doors swing open, flagged beef hangs from industrial hooks fixed to pendent chain links from the ceiling of the distribution lorry. Breakfast at The Mexican Taco stand is to his left on the approach, set behind a low level concrete wall marking the parameters of a parking space shared with Car Wash and Repair Services.

He watches the cook thumb Smoked Bacon packaging, fumbling between two thicknesses of polymer. Abandoning the tab seal, the cook pierces a yellow handled chef's knife through the plastic, raw pearly globules trail from the blade poised above the hotplate. The cook skirts an opening along the inner edge of the packet as warped plastic curls inward, peeling from the glued seam. Separating one, then two pink slices of bacon flushly clinging with slick opaque fat, he lays the meat down as steam and smoke rise. Reducing rapidly in size, rashers are unstuck and turned with a metal spatula. The undercooked side concaves, fibrous rinds curl and draw rasher edges together in a shallow gully glistening with pooling lilac liquid. Prying the crisp underside from the hotplate the cook shovels each rasher onto a pre-buttered crispy morning roll. Bun spread on brown paper bag, white fat paste coats pastel pork, he takes a bottle of red and with elevated concentric rings patterns the bacon. Picking up a bottle of brown the chef layers zig-zagged sauce over the red spiral pattern. He slides coins across the stainless steel counter toward the cook who counts the money in an

upturned palm one coin at a time. He picks up the roll from the steaming counter and sits at the round wooden bench, with his back to the cook he looks onto the Car Wash and Repair Services. Parting the breakfast roll, he studies the meat and mixed sweet corn syrup sauces blended to a puce condiment. Pressing each half of the roll together, his gaze lands on the Car Wash and Repair Services workers. The top of the well flamed brittle bun shell cracks, strong bread flour creates an elastic dough snag which stretches as he pulls his mouth away. The Car Wash and Repair Services employees move stiffly in their electric blue workman's overalls, their bodies boxily contained in coarse waxed fabric. Wooden fencing arranged in rectangular slats painted powder blue backs the Car Wash and Repair Services logo which is contained in an oval frame and written with rounded yellow lettering legible from a distance. The Car Wash and Repair Services employees are staged against signage, uniforms zipped to the neck and thick soled rubber boots heavily grounding their posture. Bacon skitters from his breakfast roll, gripping rasher between forefinger and thumb he chews a bite free; strands of fat stretch and snap, splattering puce sauce over the collar of his white shirt. The Car Wash and Repair Services employees lather a Hot Mustard Hatchback; leaning into the vehicle, wiping suds of acid rain grime along the hubcaps and rim. A single Car Wash and Repair Services employee drags a dense yellow sponge from the front wheel to the bumper revealing a multifaceted sheen. He tosses the brown bag and resumes his route to work.

## Epilogue

*His body is written into presence, reality fabulated as an authored space constituted in language.*

*Language works against body; body works against language.*

*What gets written into the frame of looking?*

Commissioned in response to the exhibition Ulay: *so you see me*

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