

New Fiction by Dylan Brown: “The Nephew”

written by Guest Contributor | July 26, 2017



[Photo Courtesy of why files]

There he is at work, with the short sandy hair, clean-shaven, blue computer light reflected in his brown eyes. Evan’s desk smells like the bag of watermelon Warheads he keeps in the top drawer. He lets the awful thing hover on his screen. It flickers back at him. He thinks of his older sister’s upcoming birthday party, and how he’s an uncle, and he has to keep his nephew away from the fire.

At the party he finds a spot by the charcoal grill. He listens to the trees and wishes Hannah hadn’t left. She’d said she couldn’t see herself with an omnivore anymore. There was a job with a non-profit back east championing animal rights. He’d said he’d try going vegan for her. She said no, it had to be for the right reasons. He said he’d do it for the animals. Two weeks later, he saw her off at the airport security line. She said she guessed they could kiss one last time, if he wanted to. He thought she’d taste like kale, or broccoli. Instead, she tasted like burnt hair.

Now, his sixteen-month old nephew, Ro, just out of arms’ reach, tumbles in the dark grass. The trees are tall, cypress, buzzing a hundred yards off-droning. They sway like Christmas carolers.

A woman brought an ash-black lab, the dog’s enormous tongue lolls out, a payload slapping Ro’s cheeks, nose, and forehead. He laughs and laughs. She wants to know where he works. He tells her but he’s also listening for the trees—they’re whirring, he knows, but it’s drowned out by concussive laughter and the crunching of ice and glass bottles in the chest. He tells her about scrubbing social media feeds.

“That must be hard.”

“It isn’t so bad.”

“What’s the worst thing you’ve seen?”

“Are you sure?”

She nods.

A man stabbing his wife. A Dutch journalist whose severed head dripped like some ruby-colored tropical fruit split in two. An erect penis held next to a tube of toothpaste. No mention of the awful thing. A girlfriend who moved away. She's vegan. Evan asks the woman where she's going.

"Have you seen the dog?" she says.

Evan remembers Ro.

He looks behind the keg, near the toolshed, under the shrubs. At first he doesn't recognize him, he can only hear him giggling. Ro's under the table where the sweating pitchers of rum punch, red cups, and paper plates sit. Ro has a bag of charcoal briquettes spilled out around him. Dark powder. He's covered in smears of black char and in the shadows under the table he's almost invisible, save for the whites of his eyes and patches of milky skin. Evan wishes Ro would disappear into the darkness. But he can hear the trees, no longer a mechanical whirring—the drone is gone. They're putting words together now. Or sounds that sound like words. Sad, they seem to say. How young, how beautiful! Tragic, though. Unavoidable. Look at him, they say. Cute now, but he wouldn't always be so small.



Dylan Brown was born in Düsseldorf, Germany and is a graduate of the MFA program at Oregon State. His work has appeared in *Brevity*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Collagist*, and *Barrelhouse*. He currently works as a bookseller in Los Angeles.