

Hungry  
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I'm not a good writer so this won't be easy.

I'm not going to say the right things at the right time. I'm not going to show you something in me that's universal. I don't even really believe in the concept of the universal. From everything I've read universal is code for white dude. So don't expect any of that.

And I'm not going to sugarcoat because I'm bad at it, honestly. If I was any good at sugarcoating, my writing would be much improved. As it stands all I can tell you are the facts.

Fact numero uno: I woke up dead one morning

Fact numero dos: by dead I do mean dead, not like at the hospital or anything, like dead in my own bed all alone

Fact number the third: I am alive now

You see? This is the problem with being a bad writer. Those three facts laid out like that, they weren't very compelling, were they? They didn't speak to something universal in you, did they? Of course I already told you that's not what I'm going for, but still. You didn't see anything of yourself in those facts. They were too clinical. Too factual. I should've said it like this:

That morning she awoke to the realization she was not breathing. She pressed her fingers to her nose to feel breath but found none. Held the place on the inside of her wrist for a pulse and there was none. She sat up quickly, disturbing her cat Thomas who meowed ather and then hissed, suddenly, in a very un-Thomasesque manner. She shivered. Then was amazed at her ability to shiver. She pulled fingers through her matted hair and was surprised to feel pain. "Maybe," she thought, "this is a dream." So she got up out of bed, dressed herself in something practical for work. She wondered if the children at the daycare would be able to tell that she was dead. She shivered and marveled again at her ability to shiver and be dead at the same time.

But this is maybe getting boring? You see I have no head for details; I have no idea what to keep and what to cut. To me everything seems relevant. Do I put in there that I had this terrible throbbing headache? That I had gone to sleep clothed and was mildly amused to discover I'd taken my pjs off in the night, only to start in horror at the idea that someone had come into my room, successfully raped and murdered me, and then I somehow sprang back to life? I began to wonder, then, if my life would become a life bent on vendetta.

A lovely word, vendetta. Either way the description in first person sounds too intimate to me. I think it gives the narrative a wavery quality. Do you know what I mean by that? Maybe watery would be a better word, this word processor doesn't think wavery is a word.

She decided to ride her bike to work, anyway, even though she was dead and a bit nervous about the possibility of rigor mortis setting in while she was attempting to pedal, but then she thought that wouldn't be too awful because she was already dead. She found she had an enormous amount of energy and appetite. She would've gotten to work in record time if she hadn't had to stop at three convenience stores for food. First she had a bagel sandwich, then a pain au chocolate, and finally a breakfast burrito from a fast food restaurant she would never have frequented if she hadn't been so god-awfully, gut wrenchingly, nauseatingly hungry.

The details about the breakfast, for instance. They just go on and on. But it's true, I wouldn't've eaten at that place if not for that crazy hunger. I've never felt like that before in my life. It was like my body was on automatic. Like it had been emptied of everything and needed to be filled. And I had no say in it.

Once she got to work the kids could tell. They started to scream as soon as she entered the room. Her coworkers couldn't understand it. They finally just sent her home. Suggested she see a doctor. "Your eyes," they all said. "They look really bloodshot. You're too thin. Your skin is so pallid." She wasn't sure she knew what pallid meant, but she wasn't about to ask. Wanted to seem professional and knowledgeable. She thanked them and hurried home. On the way she stopped four more times for food. French fries, a Jamaican beef patty, an empanada, and a strawberry milk shake. She could feel the food sloshing around inside her. She wondered if her digestive system was working. She thought it probably wasn't, not if she was dead. She held shaking fingers under her nose to find breath and found nothing. She sighed and a tear shimmered on her eyeball before getting sucked back inside. She felt like she was running out of moisture. She stopped at a water fountain and drank for half an hour.

I know that doesn't sound feasible. Okay, I know none of this does, but it's true. I have no reason to make it up, because like I said I'm no good at this kind of thing, this writing. It's hard enough for me to explain to you what happened. And honestly, I don't really want to, I just feel like I should. Like maybe some scientists should do some experiments on me. And find out how it happened. And why. Because ever since I've been dead nothing feels real to me. I want to feel like I'm a person again, you know? Someone living and doing things, working towards some goal, some goal other than death. Because I've already been there.

When she got to her house and opened the door, Thomas the cat streaked out in a flash of black fur. He'd never acted that way before. She sighed and locked the door behind her. She didn't want anyone coming in and seeing her. Didn't want them seeing her in

that condition. She caught her reflection in the mirror and knew what pallid meant. It meant she looked like shit. She had black circles under her eyes as black as black holes, as black as distant galaxies; her eyes were hollow empty sockets, her body looked skinnier than it actually was, her hair was tangled in a rats' nest of knots. She laughed to herself, more like cackled, actually, that was what it sounded like. She surprised herself with that dry cackling. Just like a witch. Her whole body started to ache then. Every part of her was like burning. She started saying "ow ow ow" without thinking. She said it quietly, and as the burning intensified, louder and louder until she was screaming.

You might be thinking I'm crazy. I thought I'd address that now instead of letting you stew, thinking about it, but not wanting to say shit about it. Okay look, I know this sounds crazy. And maybe it wouldn't if I could explain it better. But no, it would probably still sound weird. I'm not crazy though. I've been tested. Did that Rorschach test, personality tests, career finding tests, and even a neuropsychological test from an overzealous guidance counselor in high school. It was his first year on the job and he was administering neuropsychological tests nonstop. You practically had to fill one out before he'd let you go to the bathroom.

So like I said, and as you can plainly see, I'm not crazy. It's okay though, I don't mind you wondering. If you told me something like this, I might feel the same way about you.

After screaming for what seemed to her to be hours and hours, she finally felt nothing. Literally nothing. So in a sense she was a bit worried. She wondered if maybe she'd finally fully died, like gone beyond that weird waking death she woke up with and totally kicked the bucket. But when she stood up and walked into the kitchen for a snack because her body felt like it was about to come apart from hunger, she realized that she was still alive. At least to an extent. She carefully held a mirror under her nose. Nothing. She turned on the oven and cooked everything in her freezer. Tater tots, french fries, samosas, three personal pizzas and a 12", two steaks, a bag of spinach, a bag of mixed vegetables, a bag of shrimp, half a gallon of ice cream and six entrees (2 fettuccine alfredo, 1 spinach lasagna, 2 chicken parmesan, and 1 macaroni and cheese). She had never eaten so much food in one sitting in her life. She rested her burned hands (she burned them on the oven in her eagerness to remove the food) on her swollen stomach. "This must be," she thought, "what it's like to be pregnant."

And I did think that. But not because I was being naïve or cutesy or something. That thought really did just come to me. Also, I know you know, but I want to reiterate the fact that I'm not a very big person. God that sounds so vain. But I'm not. I'm, what? 4'11"? I think that's right. My sisters always

used to call me the eighth dwarf. Not very inventive, but whatever. And I weigh about one hundred pounds. So you see, I don't even know where all this food was going.

I don't know if I want to know. The thing gave me stretch marks. Here, look.

No honestly I never had any before. I mean, that's proof enough right there if you can believe your own eyes.

She paced back and forth across the kitchen. She didn't know what to do. She was still dead and even hungrier than before. She was moaning, running her hands up and down her belly. She could feel the lumps of food inside her pressing against her stomach. The burning was coming back, like a barely audible hum in the distance of her consciousness. She thought about going to sleep. She thought about watching a movie. Or calling a friend. Her stomach gurgled back at her like Thomas the cat purring. She could feel her intestines spasming as the food slowly dropped into them by the force of gravity alone. "Probably," she said aloud, "I shouldn't. But I'm going. I'm going to the grocery store."

The nice thing about getting told this story is that you didn't have to be there. I really did almost call someone. But then I didn't want anyone to see me like that. And honestly I was kind of hoping that all that food would kill me. Kill me really dead, you know? That whole time I kept checking my pulse, checking my heart beat; I stuck my fingers under my nose so many times it probably looked like I liked the smell. And I was beginning to. Smell.

She biked the two blocks to the grocery store in less than two minutes. In death she was much faster and more agile than she'd ever been in life. She flew through the revolving grocery store door, grabbed a buggy and ran down every aisle, taking nearly one of everything.

I won't bore you with the details of everything. Well fine. If you're going to make that face then I will.

She got a bag of apples, oranges, a pineapple, a carton of strawberries, a bunch of bananas, a yellow pepper, a red pepper, a green pepper, some broccoli, beans, fresh spinach, mushrooms, lettuce (Romaine), tofu, a kiwi, three different kinds of tomatoes, a sweet potato, a baking potato, a bag of fingerling potatoes, a red onion, a yellow onion, a white onion, a bag of carrots, a bag of asparagus, a bag of celery, a tangerine, a grapefruit, a watermelon, a honeydew melon.

Is that enough detail? I could tell you the whole thing. Amazingly I kept the receipt. I say amazingly because I almost threw it away. Well because I was so ashamed. I wasn't going to go into detail, but I could see you needed convincing. Do you have any idea how many different cereals

there are? How many different kinds of cookies, crackers, granola bars, cheeses, meats, frozen foods? I spent almost fifty thousand dollars.

But oh god was it delicious. I've never eaten like that. And I know I never will again. I bet no one else has, either, unless they've been dead.

Imagine yourself hungry. Say you haven't eaten in a day. Two days. All around you is this awesome smelling food. Melting cheese and broiling meat, steamy vegetables and soft bread. Warm chocolate and waffle cones. Everything around you salt and sugar. So you begin to eat. You eat and eat until you can feel the food in your brain even. And you're kind of high from all that food. High and wavery, I mean watery, like I said before.

That's kind of what it was like for me, how it was to be dead, although it's only an approximation.

She ate the entire one hundred thousand dollars worth of food. She ate the entire fifty thousand dollars worth of food. She ate it all. It cost her ten thousand dollars.

I was testing it out there, to see which sounds better. I know it cost fifty thousand, but is that enough? Or should I worry about whether or not it's believable? I'm not sure which is my concern as I write this. I should just stick to the truth, I know, but that creative nonfiction is kind of confusing to me. Tell your own subjective truth, right? Well which truth is better? The one that's truer or the one that gets across the heart of my story better (if it could be said this story has a heart; I think that's up in the air at this point). I don't know. Let's just stick with fifty thousand. Don't ask me how I got all those groceries home. It was quite an ordeal.

They didn't want to help her; it was obvious. They thought there was something wrong with her, something they couldn't put their fingers on. They kept asking her, "Hey miss, are you all right? It seems like there's something the matter with you." And they'd trail off and shiver. She just kept smiling in answer. It took four hours to get all the food packed away. Took her eight more to cook it all. Everything. And then, surprisingly, only one half an hour to eat it. When she began eating, it was as if her brain shut off, and her fingers and teeth worked faster and faster. She was an automaton, stuffing her own lifeless living body until she was entirely round. Like Violet in that *Chocolate Factory* book.

Or was that part only in the movie? I can't remember. But I think it works better for the story if I'm a reader. Wouldn't that make my plight more heart wrenching?

No? Well just imagine yourself in my situation.

She lay back on her overstuffed couch and flipped on Fox News. There were people screaming and running around like it was the end of the world. She changed the channel. The burn was starting up again. On Spike men in helicopters were dropping out of the sky to expertly kill famous ambassadors. On MTV obnoxious children were

spending all their parents' money on wild teenage parties. It was building inside her like howling. The pain. VHI had a countdown of the year's funniest music videos. PBS was discussing whether or not the world would end in 2012. The History Channel was showing looped footage of WWII. The burning filled her whole body. It set her hair on end. It made her clench her teeth. She tried to find her pulse. The Food Network was discussing whether or not it was okay to use butter in the era of obesity; that's what they called it. Her head began thrumming with the pain, with the burning. She got up, nearly blind, and stumbled into her kitchen. She felt her way along the stove, knocking over the remains of her five hundred thousand dollar meal. She grabbed for the salt shaker. Poured its entire contents down her throat.

Yeah, I was in pretty bad shape. I was hardly aware of myself at all. Everything had sort of started going pinkish in the corner of my eyes. I was losing my periphery. I thought about calling an ambulance, but the effort to dial 911 seemed too great. And I was afraid they'd chastise me for waiting so long. "Why," they'd chastise, "did you wait the whole day when you already knew you woke up, um, deceased?" And they'd be baffled and run experiments and tests,

MRIs and colonoscopies (it's been my experience that hospitals administer colonoscopies at the drop of a hat).

I thought I'd have a better chance going it alone. Plus, and as I said earlier, I was kind of hoping to just die already, all the way dead. That might've solved my problem, even.

And I totally lost my job. They won't let me near the place. They were thinking about suing me; thought I must've done something to those kids to make them scream like that every time they see me. Hardly anyone will even speak to me. It's like when birds know a baby bird is defective and so push her out of the nest. I've been totally rolled out of the nest. And I've cracked wide open on the sidewalk.

She knew she had to do something. She'd been dead for days at that point, maybe more than a week. She wasn't sure how to think of herself, didn't know what she was anymore. She was having a major identity crisis. Her coworkers at the daycare wouldn't return her calls. She'd been trying to get her job back. Her rent was pretty high each month, \$900 for a relatively shitty 1-1 apartment in downtown.

That was a nice place. At least it was nice until I stunk it up. When the landlord came to collect the rent that month, he just kicked me out. No explanation. He broke the lease. I thought about suing him, but then I realized probably no lawyer would talk to me. Like I said, people don't really like being around me, even if they can't admit to themselves that the aversion they feel is due to the unlikely fact that I'm dead.

I even tried to tell my mom. I figured it was a bad idea, but I was

feeling so alone at the time. And I know, we've gone over this, but it's difficult for me to explain myself. I thought at least she would understand. She's my mom, right? She loves me without limit.

She knew she shouldn't, but she reached for the phone; she'd never been this alone. A pariah. Her mother answered in the husky voice she reserved for possible romance. When she realized it was only her daughter, the pitch raised several octaves. She began to explain to her mother what had happened, "see, I can't feel my pulse," but her mother either wasn't listening or didn't want to listen because she cut her off with, "well yes, we *do* need to catch up, but I'm afraid I was just on my way out," and she hung up the phone. Listening to the dial tone, she wondered if perhaps her mother herself was dead and didn't want to talk about it. Maybe, she thought, it's hereditary. She sighed and walked to the kitchen. Her hunger spasms came less frequently, but had not diminished in intensity. The food came out of her looking pretty much the same as it had gone in. It looked like that bowl of macaroni or spaghetti or broccoli had been put into a blender or a food processor and whirled around until it was a thick paste. Thinking about it made her queasy. And then, as always, the ability to *feel* prompted in her a deep feeling of excitement. Maybe I'm alive now, she'd think before reaching for a mirror to hold under her nose.

I was thinking about sending these sketches out to a writer and asking him or her to write something out for me. Something really poignant. I don't know how much writers charge for that. Maybe I could round up a few, go find them at a coffee shop or at an open mic, and see which version I like best. See which one more tragically describes my tragedy.

Why yes, of course I think it's a tragic event. That's not melodramatic at all. Put yourself in my shoes. I spray entire bottles of perfume all over me every day just to be able to go outside and be among the living. I can hardly watch horror movies anymore because the dead are always portrayed as monstrous flesh eaters who envy the living the suppleness of their skin and the sweetness of their blood.

I wondered at first, as I'm sure you might have already wondered yourself, whether I'd be filled with some sort of longing to kill, destroy, eat, whatever, humanity. I'm happy to say I've no interest in any of that, although the other day I did get a little tingle of hunger when I walked by a swimming pool.

Maybe it was all the nearly naked flesh soaking in a chlorine soup that did it. I mean, be honest, doesn't that sound just a tiny bit appetizing?

She hurried by the pool, afraid of this new feeling. It shook her stomach and rattled her brain. She felt like she'd just been on the Gravitron for five hours straight and was finally able to wobble off to vomit. She kept her face down so that none of them would recognize

her. Oh but their bikinis and their Speedos. A hard shiver rocked her body. Their taut skin and smooth pink smiles. Those lengths of hair heavy with chlorine. She imagined grabbing one of the boys, pulling him close, and sucking the pool water from his hair. Or catching a girl by the ankle and dangling her upside down to let the water drip into her open mouth. She licked her lips. The pool was full of college kids ranging in levels of intoxication from mild to severe. She imagined sucking blood from their necks like a vampire and getting drunk from it. There must be, she thought, nothing as horrific or appealing as the thought of being drunk off someone else's blood. Like that boy floating in the deep end. He was an obvious frat boy, with some sort of Greek tattoo on his torso, short sandy hair, and swim trunks that ended just above his knees. He floated on a raft shaped like a palm tree. He looked barely conscious. She imagined swooping down from out of nowhere scooping him up with her, up into the sky where she could feast on him in private.

Not pretty, I know, and not very comfortable for me either. I think that was the day I

realized I had to be really careful. That those horror movies have a slight truth to them. Or maybe it was just that the body rush of hunger overtook me at the exact moment I walked by the pool. I hope it was just that, and it could've been, I mean, I haven't tried to hurt you, right? If I was really a monster I would've devoured you by now.

Of course I could've. I might not look that tough, but I am. I took eighteen years of karate.

Fine, I took four years of karate.

One, I took one year of karate. Yes I do have to lie if I want you to see me as imposing, otherwise how can I be sure you're taking me seriously?

No one would talk to her. Even with all the perfume, she still smelled like death. She checked her pulse less and less, hardly ever looked for breath anymore. She tried going to a church to see if they would help her. She got as far as the little church shop before they threw her out. "You need serious help," they shouted. If she'd been in a movie, this is where the sad music would have started. There would have been a montage of her walking alone, in the rain, eyes downcast and fingers trailing along a fence bordering a cemetery. It's possible the movie would have had small dogs chasing after her, to get across to the audience how fully she was detested by everything living. Of course, if she had been in a movie, during the walk by the cemetery her love would have caused an ex boyfriend to rise from the grave and she would have been able to live happily ever after with him in a less expensive 2/2 in the suburbs, not as nice as the 1/1 she'd had downtown, but a step up for it's price and for the company.

Of course it wasn't a movie. But maybe I should send my story to

Hollywood. A movie might be a better idea than a book or a short story. Movies really show, you know, they don't waste time just telling. There will be nothing but scene and dialogue and sympathetic characters that everyone would be able to relate to.

Because that's the arena of real art, isn't it, that which is universal, and here I'm coming back to that topic I promised I wouldn't try to incorporate here. The universal. The white male middle class mediocre Christian mundane heterosexual clever flashy beautiful adverb adverb adjective unlovely uncaring un un un you name it – but here it is, and it's a tiny beating heart and you fall in love with it anyway, don't you? My story, if it's a movie, is something you can tap into, like a waking dream, and no matter what language you speak or religion you believe in or whatever; it doesn't matter. This movie would appeal to you.

And I would make so much money.

Nothing was different the day I checked my pulse and it was back. I hadn't checked in days, more than a week. I don't even know what made me think of it, but I held two fingers to the inside of my wrist and there it was.

But being alive again? I can't tell the difference. And it's been filling me with this quiet agony. This terror. And it's sloshing around inside me like so much undigested food. It's making my vision turn pink; pinking out at the periphery. My breath is warm and steady. It's like a lost lover.

I am an egg rolled onto the pavement. A miracle birth. Tiny wet wings shuddering in the sunlight, glistening with yolk and blood. So hungry. You have never felt this hunger.