

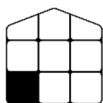
A
B U Z Z I N G
O F
F L I E S

T H O M A S
K O D N A R



A BUZZING OF FLIES

THOMAS KODNAR



glashaus

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for Christian,
who listens to my buzzing

Back Home
for a Bit

I'm moving back home for a bit. Same old tasselled cushions, blue and yellow, on the sofa. Same old pictures on the walls in the same old frames. Same old deck of cards on the same old parlour table; you always know the ace of hearts, from the oil stain on its back. Same old terracotta vase next to the same old Panasonic. Same old cranky cat, slinking about the house a ragged shadow, both grim warden and gloating burglar. Hates me, that cat. Always has.

It'll just be a couple of days. Otherwise I wouldn't be doing it. Truth be spoken, though, I don't have much of a choice. I have to get out of my place, and I haven't found a new one yet, not the right one. I guess I could hunker down with one of my friends for a while. But we're not teens anymore. We all have our own lives now. Might sound like the very reason why staying with them should work out nicely; but that's only if you fail to reason well. Privacy's important. And let's face it, it's not like any of us have guest rooms. Most of us don't even own a couch, let alone a spare bed. Plus I haven't seen most of my friends in quite some time. Weird how these things go.

And weird how I say, I'm moving *back home*. I haven't lived there in over a decade. But it's what you call it, no? Home. It's not where the heart is. It's where mother's hearth was. It's where you don't pay for food. It's where privacy becomes common property, like it or not.

I'm moving back home for a bit, and the committee is there to receive me. The woman who raised me. The man who stayed out of it as much as he could. The dogs who replaced me. The cat that won't die. Mother, father, pets, and the house feels crowded. With me it's a party.

“Welcome home,” mother says with a smile, happy and solemn, as she pulls me into a hug. She’s excited, close to tears, but steady for now.

“Is that the last of your stuff?” father asks, frowning at my holdall. He frowns often. It’s a habit of his.

“Rest’s in the car.” Most of my stuff arrived yesterday. Boxes piled to the ceiling in the old playroom, which serves as a sitting room now from what I understand, or maybe it was knitting. Has served as such, that is, until my possessions rolled in on the high tide of life to make the room unusable. I suggested we put it all in Dina’s room, but mother’s having none of it. “What if she needs it?” I doubt she will. No one but me is going to come running back home anytime soon. My siblings have—how do they say?—*made it*. I’m the one who doesn’t know what he’s doing. Haven’t they got one in every family?

Father helps with the rest of my stuff. Mother watches from the kitchen window. Father grunts and grumbles, mother simpers. The dogs sit idly by. They like me, unlike the cat, or at least I think they do. Hard to tell: they’re very quiet. Good-natured souls, my parents say. Living statues, I call them. Creepy old fuckers. Squat on their haunches and stare. The Dane, Charly, has this way of tilting his head sideways, like he just asked you a question and is waiting for your answer. The mastiff snorts when you pet him, dousing you with snot.

The cat comes shooting out of doors to flit between my feet. She’s everywhere at once, and determined to break my neck. Twice I almost fall down the stairs. Once I step on her, and she yowls, and serves her right, and mother calls up to be careful. “She’s in poor health, you know!”

I’m moving back home for a bit, and home, that is the room with the garret window, the tight spot with no fire exits,

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the one place where the cat won't go. She tried, but I don't let her. The staircase to my door is an alarm system; every single step creaks like a heavy branch in heavy wind. No visitor comes unannounced. Even the cat's feet aren't soft enough to climb to my door unnoticed.

"We'll have dinner in an hour," father informs me from inside the door. "Will you be eating with us?"

I will be eating with them.

I cram as much of my stuff as will fit into my room below the roof, but I alone already seemed enough to have it burst at the seams. The chamber's well-equipped for a boy who prefers being outside, elsewhere; not ideal for a man and his worldly possessions. When I need something, I'll have to go downstairs to the playroom and find the right box. *There's* a fun new game to play.

It'll just be a couple of days, I remind myself as I descend the stairs, *creak, crack*. I won't stay long. In the playroom I shove, lift, stack, shift boxes until I find the one with my py-jamas. I'm used to sleeping naked, so they've been stuffed away with other clothes I never wear, but just now upstairs I decided I won't be sleeping naked in this house.

"We made your favourite," mother announces when I join them for dinner. I don't recognise the dish.

"Thank you."

Charly and Sam, the mastiff, sit in their corners. They don't beg for scraps. The cat's off doing cat-stuff. The house is very quiet. Only the table *clinks* and *clanks*. Conversation turns to my little brother. To his wife, who's expecting. If I will want children, mother asks. "I'll want a flat first." Laughter. Even father chortles. He seems nervous. Sam shuffles and grunts. Charly tilts his head aside.

Night falls slow here. All is slow here. I read until my eyes ache. Then I lie awake in the dark, aching eyes looking up at

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the ceiling. I remember childhood fears. What if the stairs creak? What if they don't, yet there's a knock? What if someone's outside the window looking in? I don't have these fears now. I feel fine.

I feel *very* fine. It was a nice day. A nice meal. This is a nice bed, in a nice room. I missed this room. I didn't know I missed this room.

What if I won't leave it? What if I stay forever? What if no one wants my children? What if I won't *make it*?

Different fears for different seasons. I fall asleep.

I wake up to silence, daylight smooth. So refreshed. My head so straight I'm dazed from it. Thirty minutes yet till my alarm goes off, but I'm done resting. Done resting? How tight have I slept? I didn't know sleep could be that way.

Mother's in the kitchen. "Father's in the basement."

"Okay."

The cat hisses at me from atop a cupboard.

"Coffee?"

"Please."

"Do you want breakfast?"

"Not now."

"What are you going to do today?"

"Don't know. Look for flats."

"You should give yourself time. Relax. You're home now."

The coffee's nice. "I think I'll go outside for a bit."

The dogs are in the garden. I throw a ball. Charly tilts his head aside. I pet him, then Sam, who showers my arm with snot. The old cherry tree is shy to bloom; a fungus is killing it, father has told me. When I heard I was sad; inordinately so, I think. Seeing it breaks my heart. There's white spots all over the top branches, eating down towards the trunk. A slow death. A cruel death.

The rest of the garden is neat and healthy. The currant

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bush is crooked and labyrinthine. Two shrimpy apples bear puny green fruit. Soon it'll all thrive. The lawn is mown. There's a hole the dogs must have dug. Just large enough for a rabbit to fall through.

I light a cigarette and look up to my garret window.

Someone's behind it, looking down at me.

"I wish you'd quit that."

I jump out of my skin. Drop the cigarette. Pick it up quickly when Sam comes running. When I look up again the window is empty.

"It's not good for your health," mother explains. "The cigarettes," she clarifies when I stare at her, open-mouthed.

"I—I thought I saw someone in my room just now."

"Hmm?" Hanging a shirt on the clothesline.

"In the window. I thought I saw a face." No reply, and definitely no face. I look at the laundry again. "Is that my shirt?"

"Yes, dear."

"You washed my shirt?"

"You put it in the laundry basket."

"I did?"

"Yes, dear."

I don't remember doing that. "Huh. Must have been ... force of habit." Old, old habit.

"I really wish you'd quit smoking."

At the foot of the stairs to my room I hesitate. The door's as I left it, closed. Maybe father was looking for me? More likely I was imagining things. At the top of the stairs I hesitate some more. Then I open the door.

I read and drink my coffee, I clip my fingernails and browse the world wide web. I go downstairs to shift boxes until I find pencils and paper. I think I might take up drawing again. Haven't done that in ages. Mother creaks up the stairs to ask if I'm up for a game of rummy. Father deals. The

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ace of hearts bleeds in mother's fingers. Father and I share a glance.

Back upstairs I open my door to find the cat sitting on my desk. "How did you get in here?" She yells her own reproach at me before she shoots out past my feet, down groaning steps.

Come dark in bed I reflect on the day, on the house, on my parents. Everything is as it has always been. And yet, somehow, nothing is the way it was. *I've changed*, I realise. *I'm not the same*. Yet I'm back home again. *Home is the place where you'll always belong*. But I don't belong here. It's only for a bit, though.

But what if it isn't? What if I don't get out? What if I stay?

You won't. You're afraid you will, so you won't. The fear in itself guarantees the flight.

I hope I'm right.

Slumber so deep it's death. Waking to broad daylight sweet as sugar. I smile when I sit up in bed. I can't help it, can't not smile. I stretch my arms, my legs, yawn the last of the night away.

That's when the stairs creak.

And *creak*, and *creak*.

"Mom?" No answer. "Dad?" *Creak. Creak*. Must be the cat.

I get out of bed, apprehensive in spite of myself. I know it's the cat. Or maybe one of the dogs, brave enough to come upstairs for once. I cross my room, put the hand on the door handle, wait, listen.

Creak.

I open the door.

"Surprise!"

Dina throws her arms around me. I try to get my breath back, stammer my hellos. "W-what are you doing here?"