

Chapter 7 of *The Debate*, Vol. 2 by B. Douglas Robbins

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By the evening I was feeling terrible. I went by Tres Ex, the on-campus convenience store, and bought some Immodium, but as soon as I took the tiny blue-green pellets, I ran to the bathroom and vomited them up.

Now dark, I wandered through campus. I could not stand to go home; my small apartment and my smaller roommate was a scene I couldn't handle just then, so I haunted the buff buildings. I wandered up to the Lake thinking I needed some liquid serenity, but that wasn't it. Soon I found myself twinning through the West residences, watching all the content undergraduates, as if through a telescope, as if I was not one of them. Their concerns were petty in light of the fact that we were all these bodies, equally vulnerable, equally likely to fail; they couldn't help me, of course, I was much too far away. I wound through Terman and the Press Building, and the Old Union and the School of Law as the dry twilight slunk the sky deeper and deeper into its self absorbed blue. I guess I thought I was looking for something the way people look for something when they have no idea what it is.

I was becoming sicker and sicker. I dry heaved in a falling orange tree outside the Post, and then later repeated in a deciduous bush with some sort of berries lining the bough. I was tempted to eat them for they might have been medicine and certainly wouldn't have worn me away any faster.

I didn't really think anyone could have been of any help. I had to go it alone, I thought, and isn't that always the case? Won't that be the way, ultimately?

I had isolated myself in a debate cocoon for so long, that upon the occasion of my expulsion I had nary a friend at all. It seemed too hopelessly cruel, but somehow unsurprising. I really was not at all surprised. *This is what's happening*, I thought, and I was not surprised. I was sick with grief and sick with guilt, and sick with self pity, and irony, terrible, terrible admixtures. My emotional landscape was a gaseous hell and worst of all I could not bear to suspect why. I was burnt and dry. I felt like the husk for someone else. And then came the rain to return me to earth.

I'm a stranger in a strange land of knotty ugliness, through the gut, and I puke over and over but nothing comes of it except feathers and dusty down, an ash for all my trouble which is nothing more than mudless dirt, dry and flaky.

I pray for rain.

Eventually I become delirious. I am unaware how sick I am. I wander among huge empty buildings, those staid and decaying buildings. I feel the erosion. I know it is true unlike anything I have ever known since. The truth of all things predicated on them not being around someday. How self evident; not even worth the bother of saying aloud. When the rain comes to wash them, and it comes to wash us, tiny bits roll off, and each time we cup them up and pack them back on. And repeatedly we're washed away each season, as the season washes itself on to other things, until we can pack less and less of ourselves back, more having leeches into the soil until so much is lost it's far easier to join the clay than glom any more on, and that's where you stay. For love it's done, I believe now. The soil loves me so much, it must have me back and the rain sees to that, and the seasons see to that, they all love me so much, I have to cry.

I feel tremendously sleepy. I can not wake up. Each time I lie down at the foot of a tree or at the thick lawn at the Main Quad, I soon awaken to the deep tickling of my stomach re-wrenching itself, contracting and heaving, and wringing all that is not there.

I have lost most of my peripheral vision so that everything around me comes as a surprise, like out of nowhere, **pow!** and a walking couple appears under the dry fluorescent lights looking at me tremulously and then quicken their step.

The night grows darker and darker and colder. I am shivering and sick thinking to myself that it will pass and I just need to go a little further until the loop brings me home again. The longer I wait the sicker I am, and the loop never backs on itself. Soon, soon, I think. I retch and feel worse. I am all alone and sad about everything. I sit down on a step in front of the red Hoop in between Meyer and Green, though it can be the Garden of Earthly Delights and I don't know the difference, and I cry. I cry so much I can not remember the last time my face was so wet under a dry sky. My face rolls tiny bits right off, like little pieces never settled. We're never settled. The Hoop cries with me.

I feel a little better but even worse due to the stark realization that I'm into a place for which I have neither the faculties nor the materials to get myself out. That is a very real terror. I am overwhelmed when I see too late I'm in over my head,

and I've been there for a while.

My meager last line of defense is to heave a stomach already empty many times over, straight to the sky, like a deformed howl. Swallowing. From a frightened hyena. I am alone, without exaggeration. Edge. The careless world. The food. The cold grows and the sleep grows and the pain in my head and the hideous stench from my mouth makes me even sicker my my stomach and I can not even cry anymore. I do not know my guts through the beggar. God save me for philosophy. It's all sour. I'm deep under confusion. I have lost my memory, and my identity.

maybe I should lie down. and maybe I ought to resign myself to larger schemes. I can lie down and give up. I can go away where am I maybe I should just lie down and everything will go alright.

I see a faint green glow at the top of a huge block the huge block has pictures on the side from long ago when people wore things the place is dark but a green spiky the big block light was the last sight of life left through a gate that warns me about trespassing a beacon and the gate is flimsy and without a clasp or lock so going on the hall around the other and climb the black metal fire escape then there pushing underneath up and I do it again that black tingly and flaky thing, at the top a the the a handle it's hard and then a click and it cloncks down complete I sway at the dumb door it was hard now it changed and it's soft I swim bitter stomach cruel drools why not why not go into the dark door into an even darker way now they dangling tentacles at the end where a faint light sings okay for then I wade like tar through the short canal sing through the spindly tentacles sing and into the open place hiss sits cross-legged white static hiss in front of a small hisser like the one my daddy to the bottled water and jumper cables the lamp has a green something or something making it soft and green.

the girl has big eyes her eyes are as big as the the they're big and darker than my she wears the pants humming soft so easy and a big I can not she is far far away like in a fish I feel sick tickle itchy hissing again I hunch over my stomach clenches fist in guts of the throat drawing water on the side of my inner cheek nothing comes a thin line of sour drool like when when I stand again everything is staticy and white like through gauze on the ticky like on she is barely coming in white chewy cotton on the line far wall of mimes in a row of notes in time from the hardrockhard block plastic sheets crinkle as the white rim revolves

the something walks over from the far away and she is here very fast she takes off her grumpy and pats on my my different

okay my shoulders It was big on her and small on the underworm I feel warmer and dizzy always dizzy I don't fight her she asks softly *are you sick* I try to say something I don't know what I will say but I try to say something come the say it will come I no longer have the way she knows I am very white static gauzy fizz she looks concerned I can't feel what she feels we are so different hissy fizzy I could slip away I am she asks *are you sick* hmmm hhaaaa and grunt the most bobby easy barely above the water language not allowed will I speak ever over again it seems like a rhetorical issue that the the what is a rhetorical issue what is happening is what is is what is happening and it is what are nor not care I no longer know the way she knows I probably should I know that much but I neither care nor not care it is very different

she brings me slowly over to her thing its all over out of the body is happening from my head when I jostle from here to she lays me down on on no on on her flat she dims fuzzy glue and makes hot in my mouth *here* I try to protest I will only vomit a clenched fist though she goes on so I slowly drink her habit it is not sweet it is like the smell unlike any tea I have never had floral like chamomile and different

The girls with the green lamps gently touch my forehead with small warm hands is some Her other hand tilts the ceramic my head is not for me I drink the smooth elixir and she lightly braises my temples

What is your name she asks

I try to muster an answer I know my name I should know my name but I can not speak it Like a word of power lost to After a moment I make a moaning sound It does not resemble my name at all trapped *Shhhhh* She makes small circles at my temples and then at the center of my forehead with the tips of her finger tips of her finger

My stomach contracts It does not go so far as to ejaculate the green lamp tea It rumbles and pinches itself My head aches when I move it I feel for sure I feel I am past the point of no return The green lamp girl feeds me a second mug weaker than the first smelling of peppermint I have long given up trying to control my fate I am utterly in the hands of a green lamp sprite doctored in all the herbal potions

After the second mug she lays my head down and covers my shivers in a wool blanket It is hot like sunshine Where does she get a hot sunshine blanket or hot tea I can not ask her I can not say the word I don't have the way

I am in much pain I fall far asleep Down down own

wwwn nnn Overweighed like a swimless sailor stomach full of
rocks and small cags of iron and lead

I have a dream

*I am at the edge of a crystalline lake where, at the bottom I
can see the faint image of a beautiful woman in whitish and pinkish
shards of effusive cloth swirling around as she tries to free herself
from some sort of restraint.*

*I dive in. When I swim to her, she changes into a baneful
witch. She claws my ankle with a chilling grip, and shackles me to
the depths. I run out of air so I breath the water with great
difficulty. It flows through my lungs becoming a part of me,
possessing me, while the conundrum of the witch floats away
pleased with her sinister work, spinning like lust.*

*No one knows where I am, starved for air, shackled by the
ankle. My lungs balloon with blood while my lips turn numbly blue
and my tongue remorsefully thickens. I cannot cry nor cry out and
all around me is suffocating fluid. Blood in lung. Blue in lips.
Thick in tongue. Unable to cry-*

*Far above, the weak sun makes promises. It is a small
yellow orb. It is a trembling fire above the water, fearful to
trespass, and it becomes fainter.*

The green lamp girl wakes me to administer another cup of
tea. My stomach has settled but my head surges and whines. I
drink her warm tea and soon fall asleep again. This process repeats
itself. I dream about monsters or demons or get stuck in loops
where I re-manage the same meaningless images. The green lamp
girl wakes me for tea and eventually soda, and much later juice.

The night wares older. Rain comes, splashing the black
windows, roaring thunder. The green lamp girl strokes my dry
head and speaks soft, lenitive words I no longer recognize.