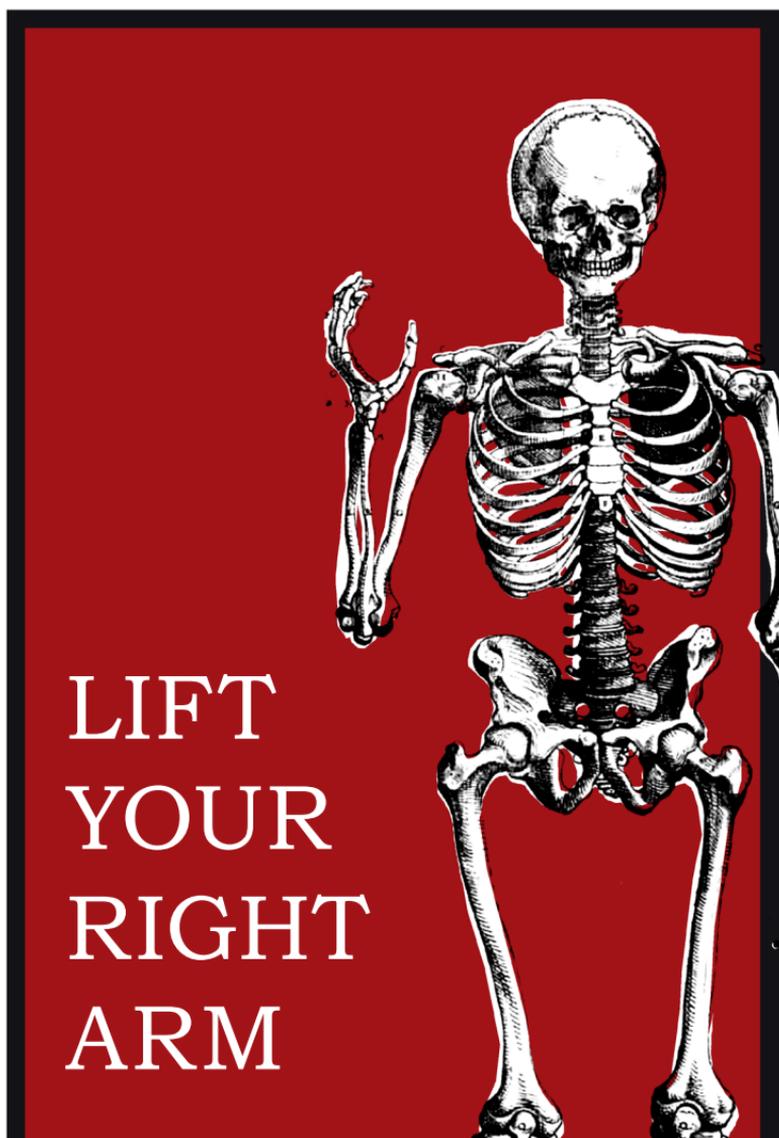


PETER CHERCHES



LIFT
YOUR
RIGHT
ARM

These five sequences have appeared in whole or in part and in various forms in the the following publications: “Mr. Deadman” in *Fence*, decomP, The Cafe Irreal, and Eclectica; *Bagatelles*, Benzene Editions (1981); “Dirty Windows” in *Between C and D: An Anthology*, Penguin Books (1988); “Trio Bagatelles” in *Conduit*, elimae and MungBeing; and “A Certain Clarence” in *The North American Review*.

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excerpts from

Lift Your Right Arm

by

Peter Cherches

two from

Mr. Deadman

Pushing Up Daisies

You can't keep a dead man down. Six feet under is six feet too many. Dead is fine, dead is dead, but buried is another question, and that question is out of the question, dead or alive, as far as Mr. Deadman is concerned.

So Mr. Deadman plans a getaway, back to the land of the living, and the living dead, if you can tell the difference, that is. Mr. Deadman's been underground way too long.

Now Mr. Deadman figures he'd better get in shape if he wants to bust out. So he starts working out, right there in the coffin. Push-ups and sit-ups. It's pretty cramped in there, and he keeps banging his head on the lid of the coffin, but that doesn't stop him. There's no stopping Mr. Deadman now. He may be dead, but he's not down for the count.

Finally, Mr. Deadman figures he's ready. Good and ready. So he busts through the coffin, into the dirt, the earth, the cold, cold ground. And he pushes his way up, pushes up through dirt, through earth, through ground. And he pushes and pushes, and up he comes, into the air, through the earth, back to earth, down to earth, and what's this he sees? Daisies. Mr. Deadman has literally pushed up the daisies!

Daisies are destiny, Mr. Deadman tells himself. And he begins to pluck the petals. Only this time it isn't "she loves me, she loves me not." This time it's "dead, not dead, dead..."

The Nail Salon

Out for a stroll, one fine day, Mr. Deadman passes a nail salon. A nail salon, Mr. Deadman thinks, just the thing I need! So he enters the salon and says to the receptionist, "I'd like to have my nails done."

"Of course," the receptionist replies. "Just have a seat over there and Julie will take care of you."

Mr. Deadman takes a seat in the manicure chair, his hands in his pockets. "I'd like to have my nails done," he tells Julie.

"Yes, of course, but you'll have to take your hands out of your pockets, sir, so I can see your nails," Julie, the lovely young manicurist, says.

Mr. Deadman removes his hands from his pockets. In each hand is a fistful of rusty iron nails. The nails jangle as Mr. Deadman drops them onto the manicure table.

The lovely young manicurist is taken aback. "What are these?" she asks.

"Doornails," Mr. Deadman replies.

two from

Bagatelles

Lift your right arm, she said.

I lifted my right arm.

Lift your left arm, she said.

I lifted my left arm. Both of my arms were up.

Put down your right arm, she said.

I put it down.

Put down your left arm, she said.

I did.

Lift your right arm, she said.

I obeyed.

Put down your right arm.

I did.

Lift your left arm.

I lifted it.

Put down your left arm.

I did.

Silence. I stood there, both arms down, waiting for her next command. After a while I got impatient and said, what next.

Now it's your turn to give the orders, she said.

All right, I said. Tell me to lift my right arm.

You're ugly, I told her. Yesterday you said I was beautiful, she said. Yesterday you were beautiful, I said. And today, she said. Today you're ugly, I said.

The next day I told her she was beautiful. Yesterday you said I was ugly, she said. Yesterday you were ugly, I said. And today, she said. Today you're beautiful, I said.

The day after that I told her she was ugly. Yesterday you said I was beautiful, and the day before you said I was ugly, and the day before that you said I was beautiful, she said. Yesterday you were beautiful, two days ago you were ugly, and three days ago you were beautiful, I said. And today, she said. Today you're ugly, I said.

The following day I told her she was ugly. You told me I was ugly yesterday too, she said. Pardon me, I said, I forgot what day it was.

three from

Dirty Windows

They met at a bookstore. She was thumbing through *Finnegans Wake* when he came by and said, “Nice weather.” She liked that, so when he asked her to join him for a cup of coffee she agreed. They started talking and he learned that she was a meteorologist.

Early on in their relationship they agreed to proceed cautiously, so they hired extras to do the stunts.

“Your windows are dirty,” she said to him.

“It’s not my windows,” he replied. “It’s the world outside.”

two from

Trio Bagatelles

One: One, two, three, five, six, seven.

Two: You forgot four.

One: What makes you think I forgot four?

Two: Because you didn't say it.

One: Why should I say it?

Two: Because you were counting by ones and you left four out.

Three: Yes, I noticed that too, though I wasn't going to say anything.

One: Well, you're both making quite an assumption.

Two: It was a natural assumption.

Three: Yes, totally natural.

One: Natural perhaps, but wrong. I wasn't counting at all. I was merely vocalizing random numbers.

Two: Random! They hardly sounded random to me.

Three: Yes, they sounded quite deliberate and sequential. Except for the missing four, that is.

One: Well, the missing four is the key. It's proof that my numbers were random. Randomness sometimes masquerades as order, but there's always something, in this case the absence of the number four, that exposes it for the randomness it is.

Two: Wait a minute. You chose those numbers. You chose the sequence. You chose to leave out four. I'd hardly call that randomness.

One: What would you call it?

Two: Gee, I don't know.

Three: I know what I'd call it. I'd call it pulling a fast one.

One: All right, that's fine with me. As long as you don't call it counting.

2

One: I have a phantom pain where my leg used to be.
Two: What are you talking about?
Three: Yeah, what do you mean? You still have both of your legs.
One: Yes, but an hour ago my legs were elsewhere. They were in the other room.
Two: What are you talking about?
One: An hour ago I was in the other room, hence my legs were in the other room. And now I'm feeling a phantom pain in the other room. Where my left leg was.
Three: Wait a minute. You're feeling a phantom pain in another room?
One: Yes.
Two: I've never heard of anything like that before.
Three: Yeah, this is one for the medical journals.
Two: Should we call a neurologist?
One: No, that won't be necessary.
Three: Won't be necessary? How come?
One: I've got it all figured out.
Two: You do? So what's the answer?
One: I'm going back to the other room to reclaim my pain.



two from

A Certain Clarence

I

Clarence decided to paint his room. It was a small room, and Clarence reasoned that he could create the illusion of more space if he were to paint his room the colors of outside. So he painted his ceiling blue like the sky, with a couple of white clouds for good measure. He painted his floor in patches of green and brown, like grass and earth. And his walls he painted no color at all.

VII

Clarence was watching a war on the evening news when it began to escalate and spilled over into his living room. How inconvenient, Clarence thought, I was hoping for a quiet evening at home. Clarence tried to ignore the soldiers and go about his business. He ate a tuna sandwich and read forty-seven pages of Proust as the war raged on. The presence of so many strangers in his apartment made him uncomfortable, but he had no intention of being forced out of his own home. At 11:30 he changed into his pajamas. He tried to get into the bathroom, to brush his teeth, but a General slammed the door in his face. "It's occupied," the General said. So Clarence went to bed, teeth unbrushed, mad as hell. He tried to fall asleep, but the war was making too much noise — incessant gunfire, grenades exploding all over the apartment, soldiers shouting foul epithets at each other. Finally, Clarence gave up. There was no way he'd get a minute's sleep if he stayed at home, so he abandoned his apartment and booked himself into a nearby hotel. By morning the war had spread to other apartments, and by the end of the second day all the tenants in Clarence's building had been displaced by war.

Lift Your Right Arm by Peter Cherches

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