

Foot  
by Eric Cecil

Your foot went. You were walking and it was gone. It slid off at the ankle, as if sliced clean through the bone. Then it disappeared. There was no blood. There was no wound. No pain. There was an ankle and a foot and then there was nothing: just the blunt end of your leg.

You weren't prepared to lose a foot like that. You could never know that it would vanish, forcing you to lean into a passerby, to slip and roll onto the pavement. You couldn't predict that the concrete would skin both elbows and a knee. Only one knee. The other was gone now. The whole of your right leg, in fact, was missing, was absent, was nowhere.

Everywhere people stopped to look at you. You were stiff with shock, lying there on the ground. You pushed yourself upright at the hip, your eyes wide and dazed: first searching the gathering crowd, then surveying the remains of your body. Both of your legs were missing by now. Part of your abdomen had disappeared. A shoulder. Right buttock. Desperate, you looked beyond the crowd for help. You saw a man limping across the street. He looked at you and away and continued ahead, passing two women with hands to their mouths. You brought your own hands to your mouth. You found only the knobs of your wrists. They banged your lips like batons.

The hinge of your jaw worked. Your voice would not rise to meet it. It, too, was gone. You rolled onto your side and reached an arm you did not have toward the leg of a man who stood over you. You recognized him as the man who'd just crossed the street. He studied you from under the brim of a hat. You closed your eyes and felt as if you were falling.

You felt as if you were falling toward a long darkness. It panicked you, burdened you with pointless questions. You wondered, for example, if you'd concussed yourself, if you'd struck the back of your head on the pale and unforgiving concrete. You wondered if you were now *unmoored*. That was a word you'd heard someone use once. You supposed you could use it now. You turned it over in your mind until it dizzied you. Then you let the long darkness fold around and over you and take you away.

It was still dark when you opened your eyes. This darkness was normal. It was not long or endless. You could not fall toward it. You could not tell where you were. You were no longer on the ground, but you were still lying on your back. You still felt *unmoored*. You shut your eyes again and tried to return to the deeper darkness that had absorbed you earlier, to summon the crowd you'd seen gathering before. You could do neither. Gone. So many things were gone now. Your foot. Your legs. Abdomen, shoulder, right buttock. Your hands.

You opened your eyes again. You were still in the dark, but there were lights somewhere ahead. You hadn't noticed them before. You squinted at them now. They slit the shadows in thin, faint lines, like gills. As you looked at them, you didn't dare move. You didn't want to disturb your body. You didn't want to find any other parts of it missing. So you lay like that, inert and exhausted, opening and closing your eyes: open, close, open, close.

Open. The lights were still there. They looked brighter now, clearer than before. You clawed a hand in the air, hoping to shield yourself from their glare. The hand surprised you. You didn't expect to see it intact. You didn't expect to see, in the depths of the lights, at their source, what looked like shrubbery, what appeared to be a patch of sky.

A window. You recognized it now. You were lying in bed in a dark room somewhere, looking at a window. You didn't know how you'd arrived. But you knew that you must leave. You rose from the bed and moved to the window's side, reaching out with your recovered hand. There you expected to find a wall, a door. Instead you tripped on your newfound foot, cantered on your reclaimed legs. You stumbled back into the deep shadows.

It was hard to see here. You could discern only vague shapes, dim outlines. You slid past the assumed length of a couch, the planar edge of a desk, the skeletal backing of a rolling chair. The low heft of an endtable knocked against the bulge of your ankle. You staggered, grunting, and stepped deeper into the room's uncertainty. The scant light dwindled as you limped forward. Slowly you scissored your arms into the darkness ahead, stopping only when your right hand grazed something directly to your side. Its warmth and texture puzzled you. You hesitated, then pressed your right palm onto its surface. It was skin.

You dropped your hand. You didn't dare say anything. You didn't want to risk the loss of your voice, the voice you could not find when your foot disappeared, your legs, abdomen, all those parts of your body. Nor did you want to reveal yourself completely. But still you were curious. You pursed your lips, your breath running ragged with expectation, and extended your arm again. This time you reached directly before you: stiff, shaking, sweat slicking the crease of your palm. When your hand connected with the skin a second time, you held it there, waiting.

There was no movement. No sound. With caution you crawled your hand over the skin's contours. You discerned the obvious features of a face. You traced the crook of a jaw, drew your fingertips over the folds of a nose, slid them back down across the curl of a lip. The lips peeled away to reveal the hard slate of teeth. Tension knotted the underside of a chin. You grasped the chin between forefinger and thumb, noting the shallow breath that fluttered at your wrist. The breath was even and calm. There were no signs of alarm, even at so close a distance. Even under the weight of your touch. You wondered if they could study your face with their eyes as you now explored theirs with your hand, if they could see you in the darkness. You narrowed your eyes,

looking for any signs of activity. You saw only the false movement of shadows. You found the nose again, traced upward toward its bridge, bristling the thin brush of an eyebrow. Finally you felt your way to the fine lashes that hemmed the globe of an eye.

You tapped the eye gently. It twitched against your forefinger, blinking. The blinking ceased when you flattened your thumb on the eye's surface, the lashes bent against the pad of your finger, the ridge of your nail. The eye itself quivered. You expected a response now: the lids batting with a forceful insistence, the head pulling back, a voice telling you to stop, please. You heard nothing when you extended your fingers to the ridge of an ear, your hand feathering a patch of thick hair.

You gripped the side of the face and head and applied firm pressure with your thumb. There was a spasm, a convulsion. Then the eye gave completely. You felt it retreat into the depths of a wet cavity. The curve of its socket caught the web of your hand. Still you pushed deeper, pausing only as the eye jellied under the hook of your thumb. You released and heard a tremendous weight fall to the floor. You felt it, too: all the way through the foot that had once left you, the legs that had once gone, the abdomen, all of it.

All was silent as you stood in the darkness of the room. Your arms hung at your sides. Your right hand was slick, unclean. The left was clenched. You turned, searching for the lights of the window. They were still somewhere behind you. They were barely visible now, as if obscured. By distance, maybe. A blind corner. You no longer cared. You moved forward, waiting for the room to fold upon you as the deeper darkness had before, back when you'd left the crowd on the pavement so long ago. The room did not respond. It allowed you in, giving way just as the eye had. The light behind you faded and fell away.

Stronger lights now glared ahead. These were heavy, fluorescent. They beckoned. You lurched toward them, as if bowing in obeisance. As you neared, you saw the frame of a door. The interior of a bathroom gleamed inside it. Cracked tile glistened upon its floor. Three sinks hissed torrents of water along one wall. Three urinals burbled at the other. A small window showed at the back.

You entered the room and stopped just short of the hissing sinks. Each basin brimmed with discolored water. The room was humid with it. Was acrid. You watched the faucets pooling into their basins and frowned at them. I must, you thought. I should wash my hands. But first I should stop the hissing. You walked to the first two sinks and turned the knobs until each fell silent. At the last faucet, you brought your hands to the water and let it run through your fingers. You then tightened each hand into a fist, as if grasping the stream like a rope. It ribboned over your wrists and into the basin. You dropped your fists into the cold, discolored water and looked into a portion of mirror that hung above it. Verdigris flecked and cancered its surface. You stared

through the ruin and studied yourself from under the brim of a hat. You were clean now. You looked away and turned and limped toward the window.

It was open. Through the fine mesh of a screen, past the thin iron bars, you saw plumes of shrubbery, an expanse of lavender sky. Short brick buildings bordered the length of a parking lot. There were no cars. At the far end, a crowd had gathered. You could not see how or why. Somewhere a man's voice rang out. It croaked with hysterical frenzy. My foot, the man yelled. Foot. Foot. The last word echoed among the buildings.