

In Case of Death
by David Nash

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Clear as a bell

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Kingsgate Project Space

1. Cessation of Breath: Is He Breathing?

He's not breathing, and he cannot go on like this. He needs air. Mouth-to-mouth is a fool's game: you must not believe that you have enough air for the both of you. The body should supply itself, but in this it can be encouraged. Breath begets breath, and life life. One O says yes to another O and that equals oxygen. One god nods to the next god, who nods to the next and so on. Therefore plant plants, as follows:

- (i) The chest is just a gathering of shapes as it is, and it knows full well what it means to be a shrubbery. There is depth and breadth enough for soil, and it lends itself naturally to inhabitation. From there to conurbation. Drop seeds and sow. It grows in spite of itself.
- (ii) The extremities are a framework already in place: honeysuckles, for example, thrive on the order inherent in limbs; fingers are the beginnings of mathematics, and you will find the sweetpea loops nicely to a ring; ivies are many and incessant.
- (iii) The holes of the head are a blessing. Eye sockets, in particular, are favourable to succulents.

2. Cardiac Arrest: Is There Any Rhythm to Him?

They say: cut the wood yourself and it will warm you twice. It is the same for the heart – if you beat it, it will beat. And it is the same with blood – it won't move unless you move it. This is the kind of work that must be done by hand. This is monks and manuscripts. This is sculpture. This is the work your father did, is where you came from.

- (i) Locate the heart by feeling
- (ii) Trace out the gridlocked veins
- (iii) Prepare the bell for pealing
- (iv) Make fists and take your aim
- (v) Pound it till it feels like kissing
- (vi) Push the blood between your hands
- (vii) Force the heart to miss what's missing
- (viii) Forbid it to neglect its plan
- (ix-xii) Of all the laws that you could leave him
Leave him only one:
Hurt could your heart every man
Hurt can his heart none.

3. Pallor Mortis: What Colour is He?

Isn't it tempting to leave him? Now that you know he's as white as you? Is there no way he could live like snow lives, which is to say: unanimously, without discrimination, everywhere, carelessly/carefully, in paralysis, absent, and dumb? No: that is the opposite of science, and you should proceed like so:

- (i) Hit him. The pocket-bursts of red as you rain down your blows remind the skin of its duty.
 - (a) This is not advisable for the lips, which, if blue, should be bitten, as before.
 - (b) This is also, NB, only a temporary reversal of the state.
- (ii) If saffron seems like an investment, remember that its employment requires the body to steep (and steep and steep) and be bathed. Did your hands memorise the weight of his? Well then, now's your chance: knead the yellowing water into him, notice the steady dawning of your skins. Saffron is pittance.
- (iii) Cow's piss also does the trick.
- (iv) There is always war paint. Humans have been making themselves up for years. They are canny and, often, uncannily like themselves. It's a neat trick, but you, of course, would always know.

4. Hypostasis: Has His Blood Settled?

Bloodset / Blooddown: when the body designs its own horizon in telling the erythrocytes: “Rest now”, or “Settle”. And they do, in good faith, like children called to come down now from the trees: with a pause, then dripping one by one from the canopy. With relief. With the sound, even, of *relief*, the deflation of that last f. The way a bus is grateful to be waved down, the way a coal chimney savours its condemnation. In such a way does the blood settle, and its acceptance is crepuscular. To cause a *bloodrise* you must:

- (i) Reverse gravity.
- (ii) Reverse time.

5. Algor Mortis / Decline in Temperature: Look Up: Could You Pick Him Out From a Crowd? Is He Redder, More Gigantic Than Before? Is He Whiter? Tinier? Is He Closer To / Further From Land? Is He Different, Depending on Your Location, or Constant? Is He Causing Havoc to Radio Signals? Would It Mean Sudden Death to Approach Him? Blindness to Look? Or Do Those Advances Neither Put In Nor Put Out On Him? Does He Remain Unmoved? Are You in the Sweet Spot? Is It Down to Him What Gets Eaten and What Fed? Does He Cultivate Your Farthest Points? Is He Beautiful at Your Edges? Does He Still, Albeit Rarely, Tilt Your Tired Face Towards His? Must He Always Remain This Way, Never to Swell or Contract, For You to Be Happy? Listen. Are You Satisfied or Not?

It is considered a strength to find yourself in any given room and still know where North is. In the same way, you should be able to read a dwelling, know if he is adding to it or taking away or if there would be no difference without him. Assuming the latter:

- (i) You could melt him, but he would not flow.
- (ii) You could torch him, but he'd burn too slow.
- (iii) You could fuck him, but he wouldn't know.

6. Rigor Mortis: Can He Yet Be Turned?

By now it should be clear. You are on a boat-deck, both of you, and a white sun fizzes on the water as though dropped like an aspirin. Then it dissolves completely. Darkness. Two unseeable faces, etched uselessly into smiles. You cast out a word or two and they frost over with brine: each stroke of the pen is breakable. Things snap or creak and you credit these sounds to him, but these are equally plausible: the sucking of a mussel; the canvass canvassing; the scissorwork of seagull wings; one sea creature tearing the flesh from another sea creature; a jellyfish pulse; sounds of your own invention. You line up his armpit hair to the marram grass on the shore, and the parallax is kind: they are near enough to a perfect fit. You recount the boat parts: Forestay. Gunwhale. Thwart. Tiller. Transom. Jib. Clew. Keel... Even if he was moving, he might as well be doing it behind the ocean, somewhere utterly else.

- (i) Wait.
- (ii) From the bilges of hopelessness, skim the oldest foam and the darkest pitch, and from the oldest foam and the darkest pitch, procure the lowliest gnat, the sickliest, and
- (iii) Name it thus: His Finger Twitched.

7. Decomposition: Has He Broken Down?

Once, you decided to catalogue life. It was a losing game, but even then you knew what was and wasn't reversible and therefore you persisted. You constructed his every last hair - the one that flags age; the ancient; the wisps; the cowslicked. You thought of digestion, the blanket alchemy of browning, that shiest of Chinese whispers. You thought of nerves. There were:

1. assemblies of cells;
2. paliaments of bone, bipartisan clicks and bickering, motions, stalemates, and all of them were legislating, legislating movement and stasis;
3. two sides, the right of which dictated;

When you dreamt hard, you could make a nail erupt. Dreamt lighter – the skin of a lip, a scar, the stirrup. Bigger, bolder things too, like

- a. breath. The stuffy grammar of it. How it guffaws at the smallest misstep;
- b. the subject/object of the heart;
- c. the check and balance of breath;
- d. two feet, two pliant, compliant feet, two suffering feet, two poor feet God love them;
- e. all kinds of erections;
- f. the idea, in his mind, of an I. Distinct from you, who to him is: Him;
- g. the glacier game, the earthquake, the seaswell, the henpeck we call “breath”.

You wrote blood, and then you wrote it in Greek, and then the whole thing fell into translation, into action.

Reaction: he turned.

He turned on you.

He withered in your hand, flopped out.

It was a time after Babel, when everything you had named was suddenly anonymous.

Falsehood is not in words: it is in things.

He feeds himself to the world, a dandelion, its damage done.

You cover your mouth and nose.

- (i) compose again.

