

Charlie Hill

Multitudes

"I contain multitudes." – Walt Whitman

"It is morning," said the first Sam and the bed became a bustle of activity. He loved, on mornings like this, to lie with his face in a sunbeam. The forking of blood vessels across his closed eyelids reminded him of leaves in autumn: thrown into the air in great armfuls or crunched underfoot. He liked the cold when it was optional.

The second Sam would not be stirred. She dreamed of her body's curves and of friends' adoration. The third Sam bounced excitedly all around the second. It wanted to be outside. Failing that, it wanted to press the skin of its forehead against the windowpane and run a finger along the flaking paint of the frame.

The fourth wondered if staying in bed this long could in some way be an act of class violence. How could they live without hurting anyone? Were they not taking away from everyone else by the simple fact of their existence? After all, the world was overcrowded and it was only getting worse.

It was the seventh, a very ancient Sam, that compelled motion in search of a fight, a righteous war. The ninth managed to find food though she couldn't shed Eight's suggestion that bran flakes look like scabs.

The seventeenth Sam was driving. She thought about the first as she edged through traffic: the spring sun on her accepting face. She wondered how many other minds were around her and whether they worked in the same way. From here she could see dozens of cars that implied heads that implied brains and she knew the queue would stretch on for miles. As she imagined leaping into all the other heads around her, she was lost.

The eighteenth Sam wondered if her wrists were too hairy.

The twenty-fifth wondered why there were even here. Thirty-seven hated his noodle soup but had a lovely lunch spent studying the broad back of Bernard from Accounts. He pictured digging his French tips into that back – really leaving a mark. The seventh Sam, still hanging on at the back of the mind, found itself confused but approving of these thoughts.

The forties were a council of Sams debating whether asking Bernard for a drink was a risk worth taking. "Live a little," said Forty-six, who looked a lot like Sam's mother. It was Sixty-seven that had the courage and defeated Sixty-six who was already making a run for the car.

Seventy-six didn't like beer, but liked the idea of drinking it. Thirty-seven still had wind from lunch and thought more bubbles were a bad idea. Forty-six said, "G&T is the lady's choice."

Eighty-two thought this conversation had gone on too long but Eighty-three wouldn't arrive to save him, so instead this Sam focused just above Bernard's eyes, where his hairline was receding. Eighty-two couldn't tell if this was a mind game or just boredom.

Sam ninety-nine tried her best to salvage a lacklustre engagement, but Bernard seemed to have a preternatural sense for hitting awkward angles. One-oh-one was too sweaty and thought only of a shower. One-sixteen knew she shouldn't be driving but there was no way she was coming back for the car tomorrow.

One-two-four had a kebab and didn't pay attention to a Ryan Reynolds movie. One-two-six found the spot Bernard couldn't and it was so wonderful he questioned why he ever left the house.

Sam one-two-nine marvelled at how rarely she got a chance to come out. Hers was a world of amphetamines and essay deadlines, one that had slipped out of existence in the past few years. She vanished into the void of sleep before she could turn this into a profound realisation.