

## Waiting

By Sean Murphy

He waits.

He looks out the window and he waits.

He doesn't look at the magazine, the one on top of the others littering the table, the one last picked up by the last person who sat in this room.

He stands, not wanting to sit, not wanting to look down at the magazine. He looks down at the magazine, which stares up at him, defiant, disinterested, doing all that was asked of it. The magazine didn't ask to be brought into this room, it didn't ask to be read or ignored, to be picked up and put down, to be digested and then discarded.

He stands, knowing that if he thinks about the magazine he wishes he wasn't looking at, the magazine he won't read, he won't think of the things he doesn't want to think about.

He doesn't walk into the corridor to look into the room that his wife isn't in.

He waits.

He understands—anyone who has been where he is understands—that you must prepare yourself to wait a long time. So you prepare, and you wait. And then, it's even longer than that, longer than you remember. Much longer. He remembers: standing, then sitting in this room, almost the exact same spot, twice already (*third time is the charm*, he doesn't think) and still can't help being surprised at how long he's had to wait.

He waits.

No one talks to him (they know who he is and why he's here), and no one knows the story he could tell (it's the same story everyone who has stood where he's standing would tell).

He stands silently, shifting and sorting his awareness that eventually they'll bring her to the room. When they bring her to the room he'll see her. He'll see her seeing him, then see her seeing him see her. And then she'll ask him and he'll have to tell her. He'll try not to tell her and she'll look at him and remind him that he has to tell her.

He waits.

He wishes they would hurry up (*hurry up and get it over with*, he doesn't say) and then he hopes that they'll never come so he can stand, peacefully paralyzed.

Eventually, he looks at the table, and the magazine that waits for him to pick it up. He doesn't pick it up.

He sits down and doesn't think about the nothingness that surrounds him, the nothingness around him and the gnawing nothingness inside him. He doesn't notice the plants or the paintings or the cheerfully colored curtain that doesn't cover the light outside. He doesn't allow himself to contemplate the sterile silence screaming all around him, the vacant spaces, and the odd energies of dying life. Most of all, he doesn't think about *it*: how impossibly clean people in impossibly white clothes speaking impossible to understand languages using impossibly powerful tools and technology do everything they can but still can't keep *it* from occurring.

He finds himself staring, again, at the magazine; the magazine he's picked up without realizing it. He doesn't open the magazine that, under normal circumstances, he wouldn't have even the slightest inclination to read. He doesn't open it and therefore does not, among other things, learn about which foods would improve his sex drive and help him sleep more soundly, he does not find out ways to make his partner reach new levels of ecstasy *every time*, he does not peruse his horoscope to see what the future has in store for him, he does not discover the secret to losing ten pounds in only three days, and he does not skim the interview explaining how the fragile millionaire singer lost the chance at making millions more dollars after having a nervous breakdown while filming a commercial for a soft drink she wouldn't otherwise endorse.

He waits.

He doesn't pass the time planning opportunities that could create happiness. He doesn't deceive himself (this time) about the possibility of forgetting the present by focusing on the past. He doesn't dwell on the types of things they would enjoy doing again, the things they enjoyed, once, which they never found the time or forgot to do. Again. He doesn't think about the ways in which you discover the things you loved, *then*, become the things that bring about inexplicable sorrow: the movies, the music, the meals, the books, the board games, the photo albums, the family.

And so: he doesn't allow himself to think about her as she is now or how she was then. Or how he is now or how he was then. How he will be.

He looks down at the magazine, again, and picks it up, again.

He understands that the second he opens the magazine they will arrive, wheeling her down the hall like the enigmatic magicians they were trained to be. If he opens the magazine, the magic act, performed (again) before an awkward audience, will begin. So he waits.

He stands up and looks out the window, at the horizon, beginning to disappear in heavy air beneath the tops of the trees. He looks down, far below, where miniature people inside miniature cars sit in miniature rows, slowly moving forward in the directions of their miniature houses and the miniature respites awaiting them. The sky continues to sag, ensnaring the world in its unspeaking sentry. The people, and then the cars, and then the earth all slip away, leaving only lights that sigh stoically, bearing witness to it all. He looks down at the waning waves of lights, and these lights do not look like a thousand sets of eyes, they do not make the darkness more discernible, they do not appear as poetry. They are exactly what they are: they are progress, they are pain, they are power. They are the cold crucible of machines that control the lives of the men who made them.

He doesn't let himself think about these things. He has too many other things not to think about.

He doesn't turn around.

He'll hear them, eventually, when they come.

Eventually they will come, and he will hear them, and then he will turn around.

Then, he will...

He looks down, again, at the magazine he will not read. He knows, again, that if he picks up the magazine they'll come.

He sits silently and stares at the magazine. He stands and looks out the window. He does not turn around.

He waits.

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Sean Murphy has been publishing fiction, poetry, reviews, and essays on the technology industry for almost twenty years. He has appeared on *NPR's "All Things Considered"* and been quoted in *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *Forbes* and *AdAge*. In addition, he is an associate editor at *The Weeklings*, where he contributes a monthly column. He writes regularly for *PopMatters*, and his work has also appeared in *Salon*, *The Village Voice*, *The New York Post*, *The Good Men Project*, *All About Jazz*, *AlterNet*, *Web Del Sol*, *Elephant Journal*, *805 Lit + Art* and *Northern Virginia Magazine*. He is currently the writer-in-residence at Noepe Center for Literary Arts at Martha's Vineyard. To learn more about Sean Murphy, please visit [seanmurphy.net/](http://seanmurphy.net/).

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