

It is not you.

It is me that
I am trying to
avoid.

“Avoidance”
By Gary H. Button

At university, I worked in a biomedical lab for one summer. I applied to a bunch of internships and managed to land one working for a mad scientist who took a liking to me.

He was conducting experiments on little meatballs, giving them life and letting them walk around. It was the strangest thing. I kept thinking about spaghetti and meatballs but then the meatballs would walk around the little cages and pass messages to each other.

The meatballs were funny. I read the messages they were passing — they wrote in English surprisingly — and they wrote about finding food and water. The meatballs ate flank steak. You could tell the adults from the children because they had more mass, they were rounder. Also, the meatballs had sex and made little meatballs. They took chunks from themselves and made a little meatball with arms and legs.

It was oddly kind of cute.

As months passed, the meatballs changed. The mad scientist got more sophisticated with his technology and the meatballs started building things: tools, fire, little houses. They gave each other names, and nicknames. One particularly misshapen meatball was called “Lumpy.”

I found that funny.

I found myself biking to class or sitting in a cafe and wondering what it would be like to be a meatball. They had little lives, wives, children. They were only meat after all, so what kind of life could that be? Could they feel love, desire, aspiration?

I do remember that the scientist introduced beer into the meatball cage and things got out of hand quickly. The meatballs all got drunk very quickly and started fighting. They passed messages of rage and lust. And even a few meatballs were killed. We immediately removed the beer, but it was too late — they had tasted it and demanded more. Their little meat fists banged against the cage and they threw messages to us that said “fuck you, more beer.” We buried the meatballs that died that day and only gave the survivors beer on Fridays. It seemed like a good compromise since no other meatballs died.

Summer ended and funding ran out for the meatball experiment. It was sad since we had to “dispose” of the meatballs. I couldn’t do it, my heart was too soft. I knew all of their names and family circles, I sometimes snuck them extra beer. The mad scientist had to do it when I was out. One day the meatballs were there and the next they were gone.

“Protein in and protein out,” was all the scientist said to me when it was over.

I can never forget the summer with the meatballs. I think about them often.

“Meatballs”

By Gary H. Button

I sit staring at the white,
It taunts me a little,
I beg for pity but there is no response,
Just a cold surface of light

Tears come to my eyes,
I hold them back,
But I am even too weak,
Not to cry.

Get up,
Take a walk,
Bake a cake,
Watch TV,
Sleep,
Drink —
But after,
I come back.
And it still here,
Waiting for me,
Unchanged and
Daunting.

The only thing to do
Is punch it in the mouth.
Throw the first blow, and react second.
I don't think about the white,
The empty,
The blank.
There is only me
And my fists.
I cannot try,
Because if I have tried,
Then I have failed.

"The white"
By Gary H. Button

Raise the banner of sloth and sin,
Cheer in the beer halls and sing of men,
Who reveled in their food and drink,
And shirked off work without a blink.

Casual sex near the beach,
With restaurants and bars just in reach,
Sleep on a bench in the park,
Wake up and go out after dark.

Dancing around in a broken shack,
Drinking moonshine on your back,
A life of leisure with a queen of the pole,
Chums, and mead, and rock and roll.

“Banner of sloth and sin”
By Gary H. Button

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