

Once upon a time,  
the end.

# One-Minute Interviews

**Pair up with someone you don't know.**

**Pick an interviewer and interviewee.**

**Conduct an interview for one minute.**

**Switch roles and do another interview.**

**Introduce your interviewee to us.**

**You have to be selective,**

**but you have enough space  
to explore and develop ideas.**

# Sudden Fiction

**Flash Fiction**

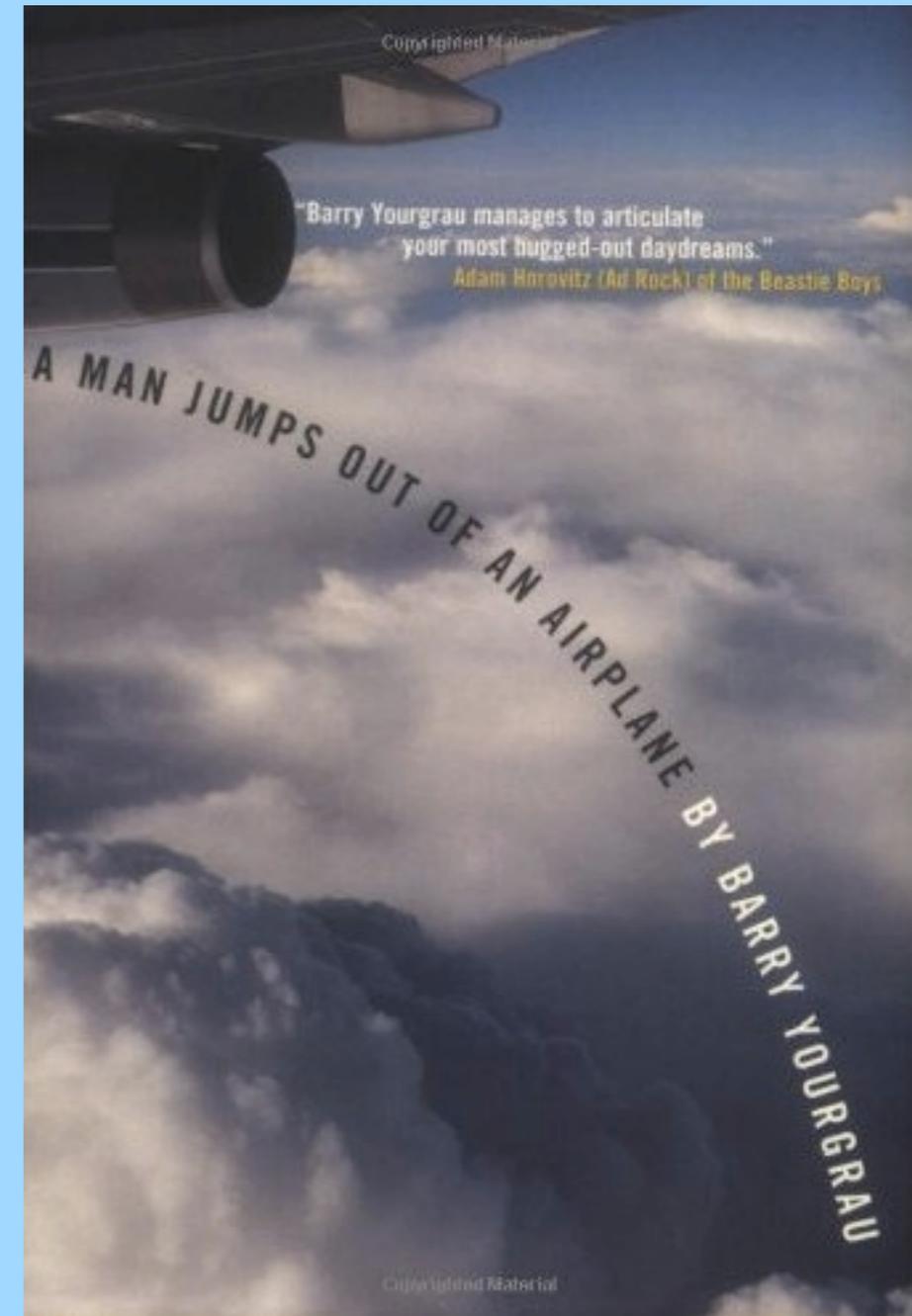
**Short Short**

**Microfiction**

**Postcard Fiction**

# A Man Jumps Out of an Airplane

by Barry Yourgrau





# Joke

by Barry Yourgrau

By way of a joke, a man puts on a disguise. He goes to visit his mother. His mother is also in a jovial mood; she also is in disguise. Unprepared, both of them get a shock at the front door. Neither of them says anything about it through the afternoon visit, which is strained and cautious and overly courteous. Privately each of them thinks the other is well on the way to cracking up, given the get-up, the paint, the tufts of colored hair. Their hearts are heavy and sick when their customary TV show ends. It's with great unease that they look over at each other, that they finally rise to bid goodbye. As the mother watches her son go down the garden path, a tear bubbles along the humpy contour of her papier mâché nose; it is absorbed by a huge nostril. The man waves from the gate; behind his fun-house glasses, his eyes are misty. He walks all the way home, head bowed under its bobbing rubber antennae.

Nothing like this dismal, mysterious episode occurs again; but subtly it haunts their relationship for years to come.

# Bomb

by Barry Yourgrau

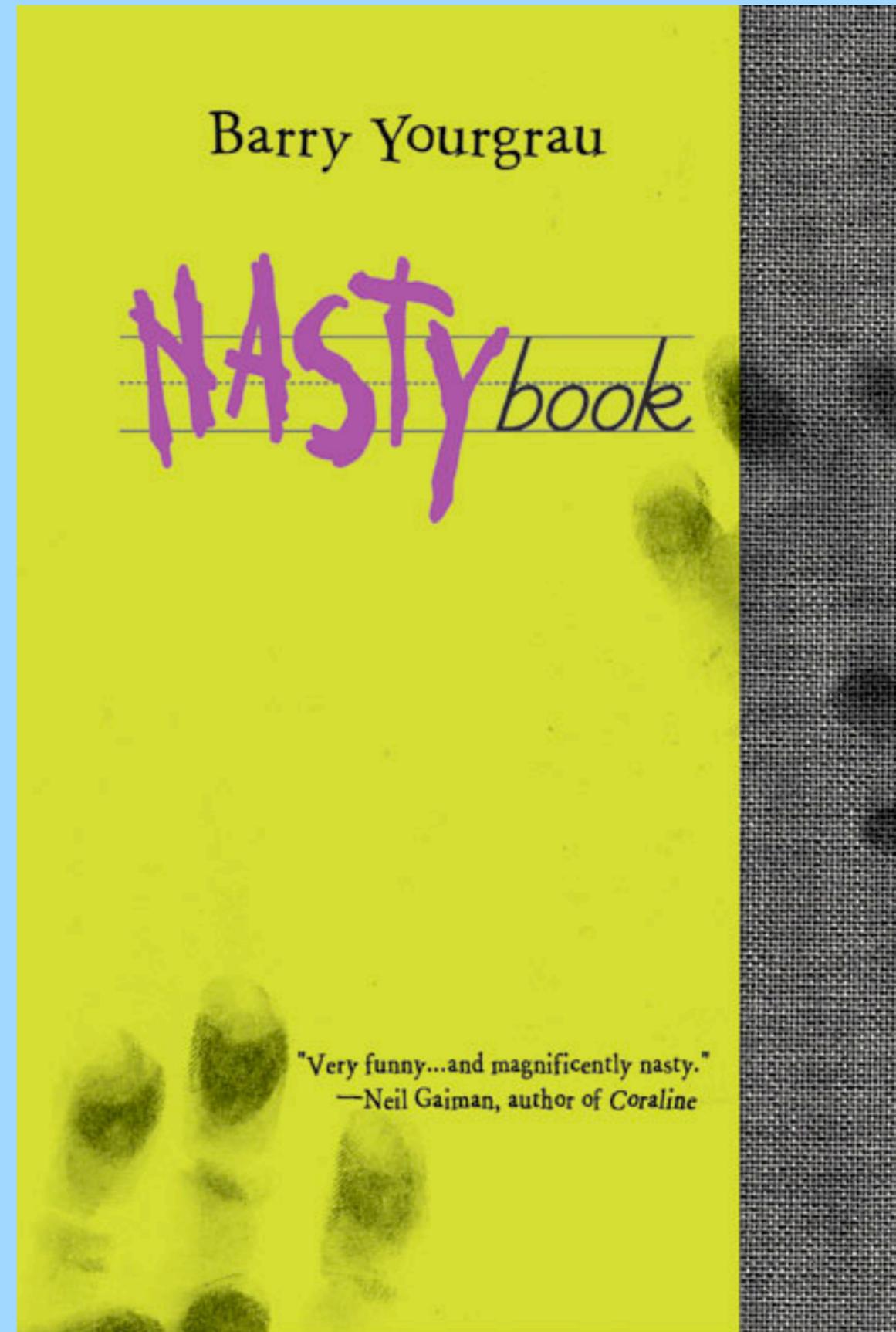
A man happens to look behind his couch and see a bomb. His heart freezes. He stares at the stiff black hands of the alarm clock strapped to the grease-cloth package. His ears fill with the sound of ticking. At last he is able to rouse himself from terror-hypnotized immobility. He tiptoes towards the door.

In the first scenario, he gets out in time. He runs for the police who put on strange iron and rubber suits and creep in behind the couch and daintily ensconce the bomb in a special wicker basket, where it roars like a volcanic toy, furious but harmless.

In the other scenario, the bomb goes off just as the man reaches the doorway. The roof of the house bursts open. The man is thrown into the sky. He lands upside-down in a tree. After a while, he shakes himself. He manages to grip and slide and finally tumble to the ground. He gets up and holds on to the tree trunk unsteadily. As far as he can tell, he's all right. He looks around. He's on a hill; he doesn't recognize at all what he can see of the green, silent countryside. Dazed still, tottering slightly, he starts off down through the trees, looking for a road. And that's how his great adventure begins.

# NASTYbook

by Barry Yourgrau



# Parents

by Barry Yourgrau

"Luke, we have something, uh, important to tell you," says a boy's father. The boy is sitting across from his parents at the dining room table. He's been called down here from his room, where he was happily rereading a comic book (Doom-Kids' Berserk Revenge!) and sampling from his collection of candy bars.

"All right then, Luke," says the father, looking stern. "No use beating around the bush. Here it is: You're not actually our son. Got it? Today your real parents will come and take you back with them."

"Huh?" says Luke, and he blinks.

"Luke, please don't make this more difficult than it has to be," says the mother.

"But ... like it here," says Luke. "I like you guys. You're cool parents."

"Well of course we are!" harrumphs the father. "But haven't you ever wondered why we're slim, handsome, attractive people, full of positive energy and style? And you're kind of a porky, boring schlub, always whining and stuffing your face?"

"My God, do you stuff that face of yours!" says the mother, with a laugh that reflects contempt more than sympathy.

"B-but you're my mom and dad - don't you love me?" blurts Luke, the full horror beginning to dawn on him.

"Didn't you hear? We're not your mother and father!" mutters the father through clenched teeth.

"Love you? How could we?" says the mother. She laughs again. "What an absurd idea! I mean, I suppose you're a decent enough kid and all - but -"

"But I like it here. It's my home!" cries Luke.

"Of course you like it, it's a huge, marvelous, well-furnished house!" snaps the father. "We're wealthy and successful people, my wife and I, who wouldn't want to live with us? But the party's over, bud. So go upstairs and get packing."

"Of course you like it, it's a huge, marvelous, well-furnished house!" snaps the father. "We're wealthy and successful people, my wife and I, who wouldn't want to live with us? But the party's over, bud. So go upstairs and get packing."

"No, wait -" sputters Luke.

"That's the doorbell," says the mother, standing up. "Must be your real parents now. My, they're early."

A stumpy, dumpy man and a stumpy, dumpy woman come into the dining room and throw their arms around Luke. "Son, it's great to see you again," they tell him, wiping away tears.

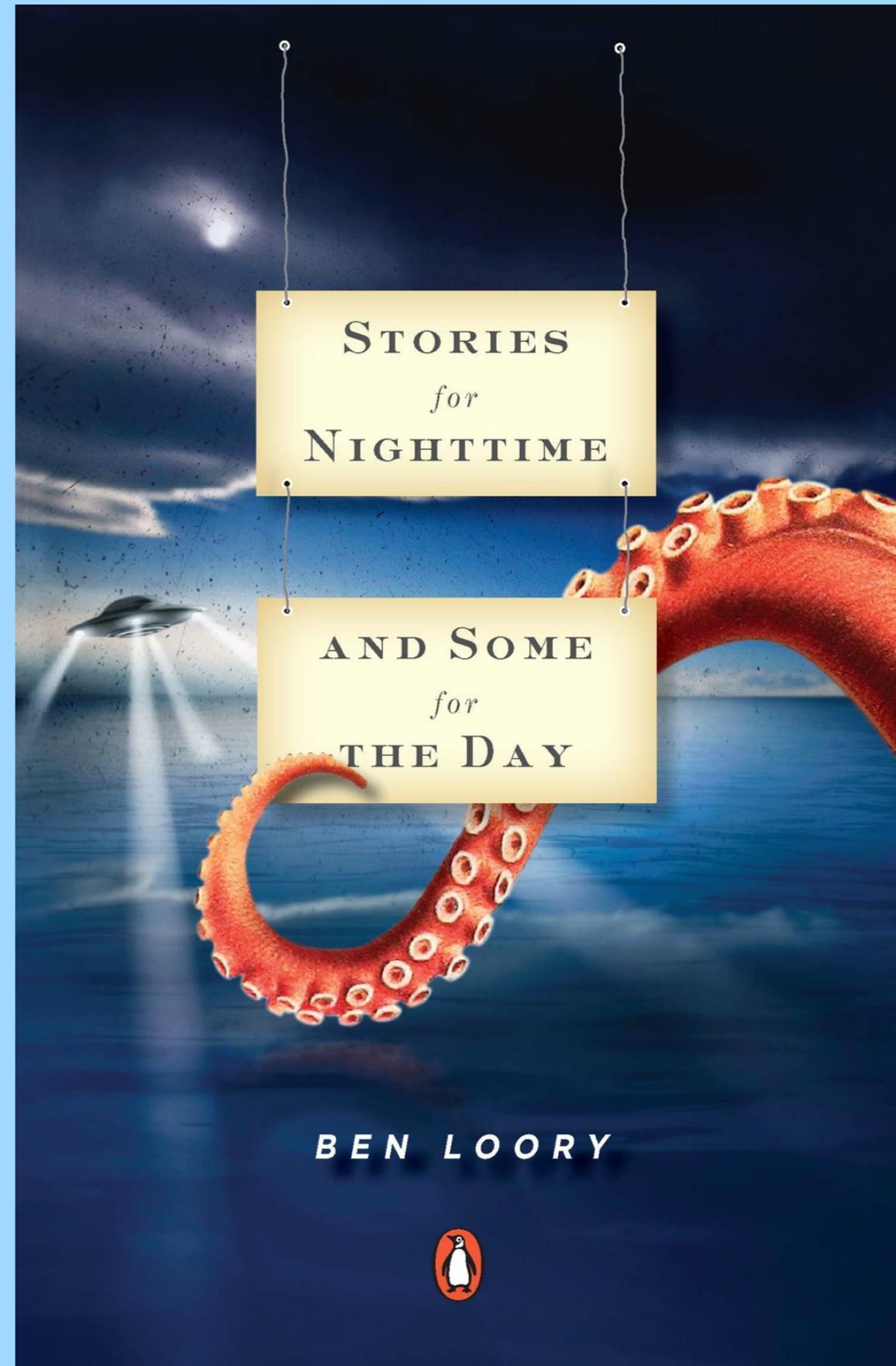
After he's given five minutes to pack, they drive him away in a truly smelly old car, with a brief, sudden stop to confiscate and throw out his collection of candy bars. "We don't tolerate that stuff, Ebenezer," he's told. That's his real name, apparently.

Ebenezer.

By evening he's lying numb in his new bedroom, which is a small, airless room in a small, dark, airless house next to a loud expressway. No more comics allowed either.

And that's how suddenly, and chillingly, a person's whole life can change.

Stories for  
Nighttime  
and Some  
for the day  
by Ben Loory



# The Girl in the Storm

by Ben Loory

There once was a girl who was lost in a storm. She wandered this way and that, this way and that, trying to find a way home. But the sky was too dark, and the rain too fierce; all the girl did was go in circles.

Then, suddenly, there were arms around her. Strong arms – good strong arms. And they picked the girl up and carried her away.

When she woke, she was lying in bed.

It was a warm bed – very warm – by a roaring fire. The blankets were soft, and she was dry. She looked around the room. There were paintings on the walls.

There was a hot cup of tea on the nightstand.

Hello? called the girl. Hello? Hello?

A young man appeared in the doorway. He looked down at the girl with a kind, quiet smile.

Feel better? he said.

And she did.



The girl stayed with the man for quite a long time, until she had all her strength back. I guess it's time for me to go home, she said, and she started to gather her clothes. But when she got to the door, she saw the rain was still falling. If anything, it was falling even harder. So she took off her clothes again, and went back to bed, and lay in the man's arms a little longer.

This went on for a very long time, and eventually the girl grew very old.

And then one day she discovered on the wall by the door the switch that turned the rain on and off.

She stood there staring at the beautiful day outside, and then down at the simple little switch. She listened as the birds flew by the window, singing.

And then she turned and went back to bed.

In the night, that night, the man woke up.

Did the rain stop? he said. I dreamt it did.

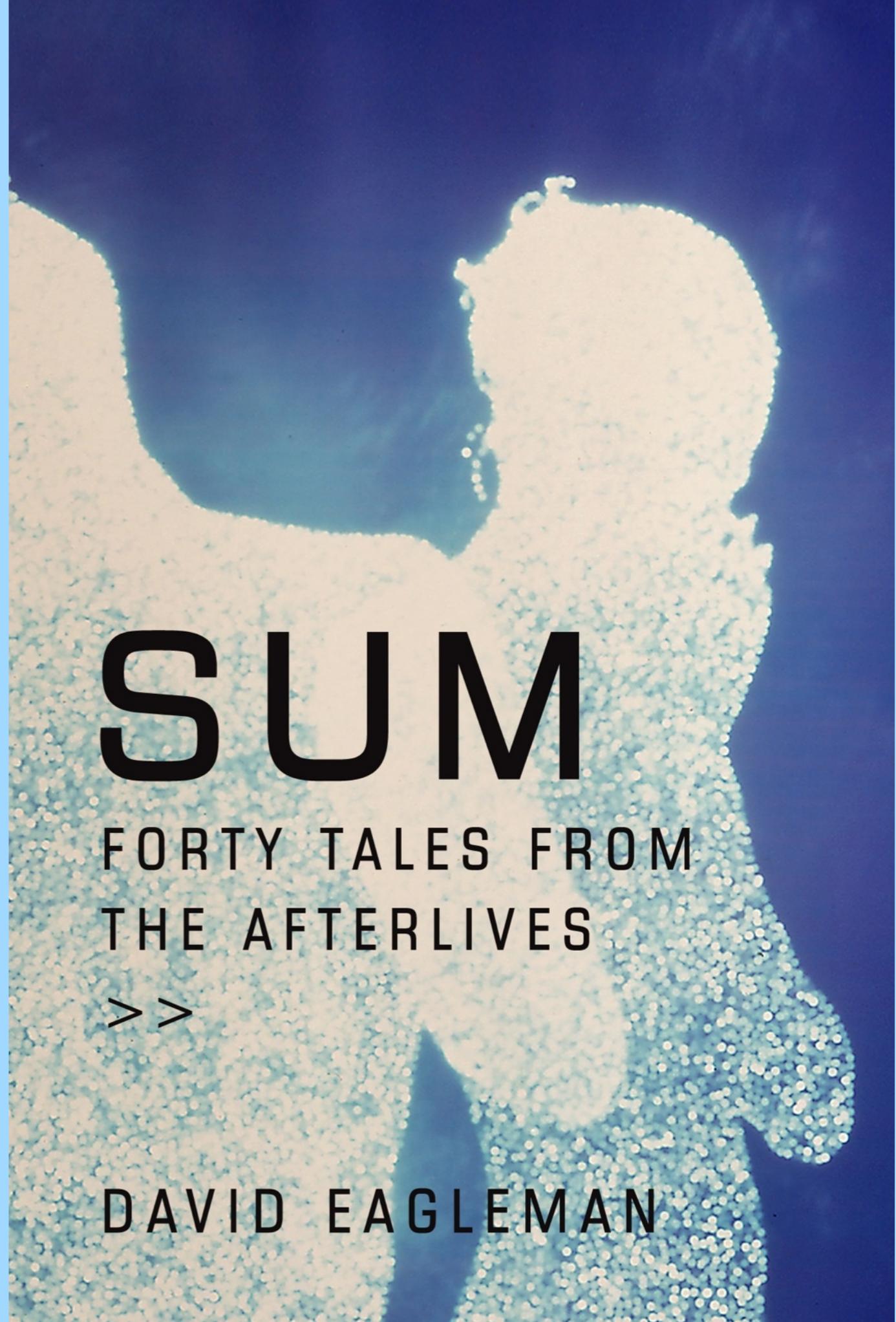
And the girl put her arms around the man and held him tight.

It may have, she said. But it's all right.

# Sum

by David Eagleman

[http://www.npr.org/templates/  
story/story.php?storyId=100778241](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100778241)



# SUM

FORTY TALES FROM  
THE AFTERLIVES

>>

DAVID EAGLEMAN

# Sum

by David Eagleman

In the afterlife you relive all your experiences, but this time with the events reshuffled into a new order: all the moments that share a quality are grouped together.

You spend two months driving the street in front of your house, seven months having sex. You sleep for thirty years without opening your eyes. For five months straight you flip through magazines while sitting on a toilet.

You take all your pain at once, all twenty-seven intense hours of it. Bones break, cars crash, skin is cut, babies are born. Once you make it through, it's agony-free for the rest of your afterlife.

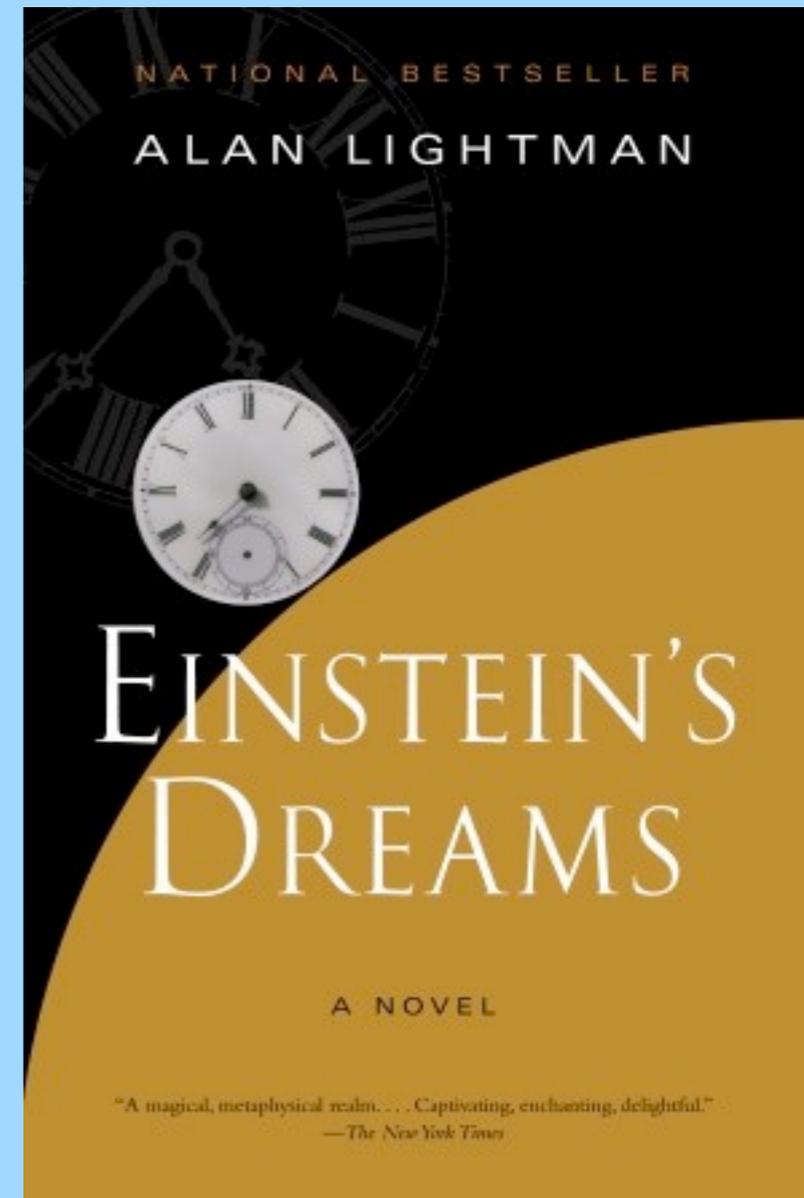
But that doesn't mean it's always pleasant. You spend six days clipping your nails. Fifteen months looking for lost items. Eighteen months waiting in line. Two years of boredom: staring out a bus window, sitting in an airport terminal. One year reading books. Your eyes hurt, and you itch, because you can't take a shower until it's your time to take your marathon two-hundred-day shower. Two weeks wondering what happens when you die. One minute realizing your body is falling. Seventy-seven hours of confusion. One hour realizing you've forgotten someone's name. Three weeks realizing you are wrong. Two days lying. Six weeks waiting for a green light. Seven hours vomiting. Fourteen minutes experiencing pure joy. Three months doing laundry. Fifteen hours writing your signature. Two days tying shoelaces. Sixty-seven days of heartbreak. Five weeks driving lost. Three days calculating restaurant tips. Fifty-one days deciding what to wear. Nine days pretending you know what is being talked about. Two weeks counting money. Eighteen days staring into the refrigerator. Thirty-four days longing. Six months watching commercials.

Four weeks sitting in thought, wondering if there is something better you could be doing with your time. Three years swallowing food. Five days working buttons and zippers. Four minutes wondering what your life would be like if you reshuffled the order of events. In this part of the afterlife, you imagine something analogous to your Earthly life, and the thought is blissful: a life where episodes are split into tiny swallowable pieces, where moments do not endure, where one experiences the joy of jumping from one event to the next like a child hopping from spot to spot on the burning sand.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102073718>

# Einstein's Dreams

by Alan Lightman



# Cell Phone Stories

# Houndstooth

by Barry Yourgrau

A girl named Keri, so cool and full of fun you'd want her for your friend, suddenly becomes ill. She lies in bed wasting away. Ominous black-and-white patterned marks appear on her skin. The terrible diagnosis is made: houndstooth-check poisoning.

More than the others, Keri went overboard for this new craze for houndstooth, murmurs the doctor. And it will cost her her young life. He shows her distraught parents the X-rays: houndstooth has invaded Keri's bodily tissues, her vital inner organs. Soon, even her big, blue eyeballs will be houndstooth. Her parents clutch each other, wailing.



At home, the tragic girl sighs through her houndstooth-checked lips, on her houndstooth pillow, under her houndstooth sheets, by her houndstooth-papered wall, under her houndstooth-decorated ceiling. Houndstooth curtains stir in the window, trendy in their deadly way. Keri's friends gather around her bed, somber at the fate of one who will die simply from being so devoted to style.

The silly thing is, houndstooth isn't really cool anymore, mutters a buddy of Keri's younger brother, who happens to be visiting. This remark provokes outrage. The buddy is forced to apologize, before being banished from the room. But he knows he's right. Corduroy is the new coolest thing. Just ask him. Or go after him and pry a look under the big bandage on his neck, where the first fatal corduroy markings have already appeared.

**Let's write some  
flash fiction.**

**Need a prompt  
to get started?**

Where would the path of least resistance lead you?

How far have you followed love?

Consider one or some of these phrases:

fog tunnel, door to contentment, wispy night, secret fun,  
enigmatic chocolate, blurry fish, false quiet, sweet wind,  
mellifluous lies, steady surprises, lopsided music

Try starting with

My last trip to the aquarium...

Her imaginary friend...

In the space between us there is...

When it rains, I...

**Commercials**

# Short Films

# Slam Poetry

Songs



**Hint Fiction**

**“a story of 25 words or fewer  
that suggests a larger, more complex story”**

# Hint Fiction

edited by Robert Swartwood

## Monster Love

My heart, bleeding in your hairy fist, finally got the **hint**. Our future was nothing but a dead **fiction**.

## Short Journey

An alligator drifted by. My anthology of survival stories mentioned boats being capsized, death in 25 seconds. No words. Two bites or fewer.

## Hello, My Name Is

A shifting identity. Edited by her. She used to call me Bob. Now it's **Robert**. Soon she'll start addressing everything to Mr. Swartwood.

"I *hate* this restaurant.

You *know* I hate this restaurant.

That's probably why  
you *picked* this restaurant.

Just... whatever.

Where do I sign?"

A tear formed in my eye  
as I watched him  
pick the peas out from his carrots.  
He learned it from her.

peas

# *Training Backfires*

Thinking it  
would inure her  
to the aloofness  
of her peers,

Diana began  
to ignore  
her reflection.

It seemed  
to work.

Until  
her reflection

rebelled...

soramimi

## *Turning Point*

Jium's nightmare was so harrowing that he opened the diner two hours early

and

met the love of his life.  
She ordered pancakes.

Her toothbrush  
left on the counter.

A post-it note  
on the bathroom mirror.

Seven years  
down the drain.



Every Sunday,  
she reads Nora Roberts books  
at the park

with a fake wedding ring.

Loves literature.

Hates interruptions.

Kasiemba



