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Floating Half Pressure

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Cover Page Footnote

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Floating Half Pressure

*" . . . nothing as solid as sadness: living at half pressure
expresses it best. Half pressure."*

—E. M. FORSTER
A Passage to India

An old ynungman here I lie
And die—
But cannot
The gray rain punches at my pane
In rambunctious rhythm—
Still I thirst
The hoarse niagara of numb centuries
Has filled my ears—
Yet I have not turned
Nor can I
I have stood on the gaping gulley of
Hollow death
And felt the chilling waft — my shoulders shivered
And I smiled with fear looking both ways
Weakly coughing
And returned to painful nothing.

My soul is a heap of ashes
Scattered about the universe
I have come back to the scene
Of last night's dry lust
I have thrown
My handful of dust
And smiled bitterly—
I do not know her name
Nor the names of many
I have tried to tell them all
I have tried to tell them all
I have tried to tell them all
And they have asked:
 Have you seen?
 Have you done?
 Have you been?
 Have you gone?

And looked away
And were ashamed for me that I have asked
Kiss, kiss me, kiss me
And forget—
And I have for a little while
And then drove in the light black
With carlight blinding me
With raindrops laughing at me
With the question still
And returned to painful nothing.

On Friday nights
There is beer spilled on the bar
I write with my finger in the white foam
And put the smooth glass to my lips—
I count my hours by the glass—
And feel the liquid cold
And taste the flat untaste
And soon I do not care
Until:

The tinkling glasses stuttering for filling re-filling
The star-glowing cigarettes whining for suicide
The dentist-drill conversation shouting for intelligible
recognition
The wandering smoke exploring meaningless room corners
The half-felt, half-meant handshakes mocking unfortunated
memories
The protesting pool balls belching hurt-complaining
objections
The jukebox wailing million mock melodies of unremembered
contexts
The jingling phone booth punctuating dismal success and
failure with too-defined clinging
The constant fans spinning rootless reality into bluegray
mazes
The chipped paint secretly staring at fanciful human
flies
Concrete credibility retreating into the dark white room,
filled and confusing

All
All fade away
All fade away
All fade away
And I am drunk no longer
And return to painful nothing.

I can see the lights of passing cars
Drive along the ceiling
And hear the approach and fade
Of their dumb, objective engines
And the rain
I know their windshield wipers are going
Back and forth, back and forth:
Funerals during Rip Van Winkle's sleep
My life is steeped in dust
And yet I shower
And still I cough
And smile with fear looking both ways
And outside with no thought
Inhaling mechanically
Floating off with the smoke . . .
Murdering my cigarette in the black-stumped graveyard
And return to painful nothing.

The rain has stopped now
The dawn has gone
And I, a jack-in-the-box
Jnmp
To wearily wend the lonely paths of my
Jumping-bean existence
 My grief tearless
 My soul homeless
 Floating half pressure

JAMES R. HALL, JR.