

away from the window. "Maple trees, yes. What is a maple tree? Tell me. Speak up, speak up," Travers said. "What is a maple tree?"

"A maple tree is a plant," Doug said.

"A plant. Good God, yes. Who can tell me what a plant is?"

"Doug," I whispered. "What is a plant?"

I felt stunned, as if a rock had hit my skull and knocked the sense out of me. I started thinking of tomatoes and wondered if a tomato was a fruit or vegetable.

"You — the one whispering." Travers pointed in my direction.

I pointed to myself. "Me?"

"You." Travers smiled. "What is a plant made of?"

Words multiplied in my mind. Molecules. Mitochondria. Mitosis. Meiosis. Nucleus. Asexual reproduction. At last I spit out, "Seeds. A plant is made out of seeds."

"I am sorry," Professor Travers said. "Seeds is not the right answer."

He turned his back, picked up some chalk and drew a circle on the blackboard.

When his back was turned, the class clown stood up and held up a *Playboy* magazine, pointing to the nude in the centrefold as if she were the answer. Students smirked. The clown returned to his seat. Travers picked up his worn copy of *Ham* and held it aloft. "For those of you that don't read. Look."

Seconds had elapsed since my answer, but to me it seemed like hours. Professor Travers continued. "Teach your eyes to see. What have I drawn on the blackboard?"

"Atoms, sir," another student said. "Everything is made up of atoms."

"True," Travers sighed. "But wrong. All matter is made of atoms, but I am talking of *living* matter here. Not inanimate matter. Perhaps I need to be explicit. All plants and animals are made up of ... ?" Professor Travers pointed to the circle drawn on the blackboard. "Of ... ?" He waved his hands counterclockwise, as if he were conducting an orchestra. "Of ... ?" He waited for a response.

"Electrons, sir?" A tall spectacled student stood up. "Electric charges

make up the universe. Animal. Vegetable. Mineral. It's all charges. It's been proven, sir."

"Indeed," Professor Travers said. He faced the blackboard and drew a larger circle with dots and smaller circles on the inside. The class clown stood up and lifted up a banana in his right hand and the *Playboy* magazine in his left. Then he closed the centerfold on the banana and rubbed the two together.

Meanwhile, Professor Travers drew arrows to the dots and lines on the inside of the circle. In large letters he spelled out all the names.

At the top of the blackboard he wrote four letters: C E L L.

Professor Travers said, "All living matter is made up of cells."

He let the idea sink in for a few seconds.

Then he picked up his copy of *Ham's Histology* and read aloud: "The first few minutes a student looks down a microscope ... are not likely to be encouraging ones ... he can derive comfort from realizing that there are only 3 categories of material in the human body: [1] cells, [2] intercellular substances, [3] fluids."

Professor Travers repeated this three times.

It was our first day in histology. We were learning to see the world again.

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Acromegaly narrative silenced

A two-roomed vestigial,
sandwiched between giants:
the house she didn't want to leave,
with its wooden screen door, torn
mesh flapping, its lime green
linoleum pieced together under years'-
worn braided rag rugs, plastic
sheeting tacked over her windows'

view of poured concrete glass; where
she sat upright, behind the bedroom
door, waiting for evening to issue her
daughter home to cook their meal on a
cast-iron stove (the type now back in
fashion), her elephant feet spilling over
loosely knitted slippers, her gravelly
voice propelled by a gargoylian
tongue (emerging as a dogfish from the
ocean), and her facial pallor so

cold; where the home lab
arrived for blood;
where the internist phoned
to promise a better life, with
CT scans and interns and IV
fluids and bromocryptine and
radiotherapy and a hospital bed
in a white room clad with fear.

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