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# THE ANATOMY OF TODD MELKIN

CAT MALCYNKY

After seeing an episode of *Law & Order* in which a mother murdered her infant child by forcing it to swallow a kitchen sponge, forty-one-year-old Todd Melkin was even more convinced that he had a tumor in his brain. The television morticians found crystallized dish soap between the baby's brain and skull, and Todd decided that's what it felt like – like misplaced disinfectant, chemical and ravenous.

Todd had first decided on the tumor's existence when he was sixteen. He could feel it even then, sinking its roots into the folds of his frontal lobe, pushing angrily against his skull. Come December of his sophomore year of high school he was quite sure of it, but not certain enough to tiptoe into his parents' bedroom and whimper the words to his mother. He didn't know if he wanted the doctors inside of him, asking him to recite the colors of the rainbow while they poked and prodded. He thought of the starched white coats and the smell of latex and the fluorescent glare off linoleum floors. He worried that the tumor was smarter than they were.

He thought maybe he could wilt it like a flower, and for over a day he didn't drink anything. But the internal drought proved to be too difficult; he could feel its dry, chalky residue pollinating his cranium. So he tried to drown it, drinking so much water that it felt like his stomach might give way, until his throat was swollen in protest. The pain passed and Todd felt the tumor finding its footing again, having simply floated from one side of his head to the other.

For years it slept, Todd reasoned, swaddling itself in his grey matter and tucking itself in between layers of Todd's subconscious. He feared angering it by means of articulation, so he ignored the beating of its separate pulse until it slowed into slumber. Todd grew up a lot and down a little; he grew older and more tired and even grew a rather brittle goatee. From seventeen to forty-one the tumor hibernated, awakened not by sound but by silence.

*...Side effects include nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite, loss of interest, sleep loss, and in severe cases...*

Forty-one-year-old Todd turned off the television. It zapped to black. He missed the way their old television turned off – the pixelated colors shrank away from the corners into a single white dot that flickered out. He preferred things that ended gradually.

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## TURNING INWARD

Johanna Tomsick