

Roderick hopes

Dave Eggers
The Guardian, Friday 21 January 2005

A larger | smaller

Roderick is in his kitchen, hoping. He is pouring grapefruit juice into his souvenir Enron coffee mug, hoping with great psychic effort. He knows that his wife, Janice, will awaken soon, and will spend a few minutes in the bathroom, and after her few minutes in the bathroom she will walk toward the kitchen and to him, and at that time she is very likely to talk about how much sleep she did not get. Roderick is hoping, hoping with such effort that his knees are making noise, that she will not do this today.

Roderick and Janice have been married only a few months, and did not live together before their marriage, and thus he was not aware, pre-nuptials, of this habit of hers, of informing him every day of how little she has slept. There are slight variations to how she delivers this information - "I didn't sleep a bit last night"; "I laid awake with my head vibrating"; "I didn't fall asleep till four, and I've been up since five!" - but deliver it she does, each morning over breakfast, thinking firstly that Roderick is interested in this information, and secondly that Roderick will believe her news, even though Roderick knows quite well that she sleeps just as much as he does, which is an average and adequate amount.

So Roderick butters his bagel and hopes. He adds some jam to his bagel and wishes. Then he hears the creak of the mattress, the turn of the doorknob, and sees her entry into the bathroom. It will not be long now, he knows, until she will come to tell him the groggy news. "Oh lord, I'm so tired," she will say, and he will tense up like a prisoner flogged. How can he tell her, politely, that he doesn't goddamned for one second give a rip about her sleep or motherboning lack thereof? Is he supposed to feel complicit with the forces who steal sleep? Is he expected to do something about finding or creating more sleep for her? He refuses to forever feel guilty about sleeping soundly while she does not - but she does! - and thus he decides that if she really wants to get knocked out, he can and will accommodate her. There are sleep-aid drugs - Tylenol PM, Ambien, codeine, morphine - that he could slip into her late-evening hot chocolate (for she refuses to take anything drug-like, even aspirin).

He wonders, as he cuts and carves his cantaloupe, about perhaps-more-permanent solutions to her problem, and then catches himself. Might her daily complaints about missed rest drive him to send her off to a more ... indefinite kind of slumber? Would it all, could it all, possibly be that tidy? His eyes widen, and a grin involuntarily overtakes his face. What would be the formula - 20 Ambien, 30 or more? - and, if successful, and even if caught, would any jury convict him? He brings the cold spoon to his mouth and sucks on the orange melon flesh. He looks up in time to see her padding slowly toward him. "Look who's all happy and well rested," she says so sourly the walls bend inward. "Will I ever know the peace you know?" She frowns theatrically. He nods. "Soon, my love, you will."

Short short stories

These Certain Young People

Dave Eggers
The Guardian, Friday 1 April 2005

A short | smaller

There were two couples, who knew each other because one half of one couple had dated one half of the other. Years ago. Names: Darrell and Jane, Eric and Darcy. Jane and Eric had dated many years before, and this was in the past, it was agreed, and it was fine with everyone all around. All were friends now, yes. Neither of the couples was married, but they were monogamous and happy and 27. All of them were 27 and they enjoyed being this age. One day the four of them decided that they should, as a group, go skiing some day - spend a weekend together in some place with snow and cottages and goggles.

They set the date a month hence, and rented a house. As the weekend approached, Darrell came down with whooping cough, and Darcy was sent away on business. So Jane and Eric, who had had a history - a rather steamy history, it must be noted - were left to decide whether or not they should still go to this cottage, for which they had planned and paid. Darrell and Darcy were reticent in their advice; they were both very trusting and disinclined to conflict or suspicion. Even so, they secretly hoped their mates would choose not to go, because after all, things do happen alone in houses, after skiing and with eggnog and hot tubs. In the end, despite the secret wishes of good Darrell and Darcy, Jane and Eric decided to ski after all, thinking that it was silly to let the rental go to waste. They made the wrong decision, of course. It was a stupid goddamned decision that only idiots of a certain age would make - that age when you do cruel and wretched things because you think there will always be time to become a good person later. These sorts of people are terrible and aren't worth talking about any more.

Short short stories

True Story, Kansas City, 2003

Dave Eggers
The Guardian, Friday 20 May 2005

A larger | smaller

"I'll say goodbye before I leave," Jim said. "No need," said Bob, "let's just say goodbye now. You're leaving so early, and I'll be asleep."

"That's OK," Jim said, "I'll just nudge you awake for a second and say bye. No big deal." "Well," said Bob, "I'll be sad to see you leave, but really, I'd rather not be woken up. It's midnight now, and I gotta get to sleep, so I'll just say bye now. It was great having you here, and I'll see you next time I'm in town. Hope the couch wasn't too uncomfortable."

"No, no, buster-boy. I'll see you in the morning. I'll just give you a quick goodbye punch on the shoulder. It's something I like doing, so I'll see you then. You can go back to sleep if you want to."

"Oh boy, Jim," Bob said. "It really sounds great, that goodbye punch you're talking about, but, you know, I really love my sleep to be sort of the uninterrupted kind, and besides, I just had a booster shot and, man, it'll hurt like a mother to have you punching my shoulder there, especially in the cruel light of morning. So anyway, I guess we'll say farewell here, while we're both lucid and all. Farewell, goodbye, etcetera." "No-no-no. I can't let you off that easy; you mean too much to me. What is this, Russia? No, I insist, as a good guest, to thank you properly. I'll just whisper ..." "Listen, shitwipe, if you dare to even turn the knob on my door, I'm gonna hack you to death with an axe made from your own tibia and fragments of your skull. I'm gonna ..." "Well then. Good night, Dad." "Yeah. Good night. Come back soon, son. Any time at all."