

Bing Ma Yong

When I saw ants crawling out of his bumhole I knew that something must be wrong. Not that he was dead, or anything dangerous like that, though he was lying down, naked, and snorting like a masturbating hippo.

There was a little highway of stuff on the table, and the ants were hiking along it. The table was made of wood and painted green. It always makes me think of the rowboat my granny used to take me fishing in. They're both a sort of seasick fishguts green. My granny bought the table, too. But that was a long time ago. Today the ants are hiking along the highway. They're all hurrying away down the stuff, none of them want to go back into Caspar. Can't blame them really.

He's called Caspar and he's my best friend. His parents say they called him Caspar after a dog, a little beagle with long ears that they once had. The dog used to go fishing with my granny too, sometimes. I don't know if he minded the color. Caspar's parents are some sort of scientists, like astronomers or TV repair experts or something. That's why they had all these magazines around the house, about asteroids and cancer and things.

One of the magazines had an article about a guy who finds out about ant nests. You know, ants have these whole cities underground with royal chambers and hospitals and garages like. What this guy figured out was that he could discover the shapes of these cities, where the

streets went and everything. He would pour some glue stuff or cement or something into the ant hole and when it had dried he'd dig it up or pull it out and there he'd have it, the whole city in one piece, like something you'd pulled out of the bottom of the ocean.

So Caspar goes like I wanna do this too, and I tell him he doesn't know an ant nest from a hole in the ground. And he says no its not ants he wants to do it for but The Human Gut. There's a whole city down there too he says, with highways and rest stops and lots of traffic, and he wants to see it out in the air so he can tell whether its like a downtown or a highway interchange like.

Whoa, I say, you're not pouring cement into my gut, it's bad enough with the cafeteria food. And he says it's not going to be cement and it is going to be his own gut. And he isn't going to dig or pull it out since it's his own gut but let it slide out nice and easy the way the gut likes things to come out. What he wants to find is something he can drink that he can poo out just soft enough to come out easily and just hard enough you can see all the highways and hospitals and things. But it'll take a while to find this stuff.

I've almost forgotten about all this when he phones me a couple of weeks later. He's found the right stuff. It's a mixture of rice porridge and cornstarch with just a little pine resin. Rice porridge is called Jook in Chinese which seems to me a kinda weird name like it zaps straight into your stomach like a kind of arrow jook jook jook, but I remember my granny saying it is the kindest thing for your gut. She knew all that sort of stuff because she was a missionary when she was young.

Caspar said the jook makes it slide down easily into your gut and then the cornstarch makes it fit tightly into all the little alleys and parking lots. And then the pine resin doesn't do anything until it comes out into the air, but then it makes it go solid quick before it loses its shape. He said he'd tried just a little of the stuff and he'd got these really fine turdies, with creases and bumps all over them just like he figured the walls of the bottom type intestine must be. Like those curled up round fossils, trybynites, he said, or those little long shellfish dookies you see on the beach at low tide.

It's a week later when the doorbell rings and he's standing there clammy and pale like a dead fish and shaking. It turns out that the jook and resin stuff wasn't so hot after all. When he made bigger casts by swallowing more of it they were just like the little shellfish dumps, smooth and regular. Where were all the little alleys and parks and places he knew were down there? He tried cramming it in after putting more resin in the mixture, so it would be forced to flow into all the little corners of his inner city. He even held a plug in his asshole for two hours to make pressure from below as well as from above. But this just made it begin to harden before it came out. Terrifying, shit terrifying, he said, to feel your gut turning into a statue. He could only get it out by sticking a finger in and loosening the bits right at the bottom, grabbing the toe of the statue, like. Then everything came out in a rush and fell in pieces on his bathroom floor, a mess because some bits were solid rocks and some were mud and they got all jumbled up

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But that wasn't why he was standing at my door shaking to keep himself upright. He had tried something else. He said he had been thinking about how stuff gets to all parts of a city, like newspapers and toilet paper, and the answer is that people take it because people go everywhere. So what he needed were like little people to take his stuff everywhere. He thought of them as people laying asphalt on all the roads even the little ones so that where there had been just dirt or cobbles or grass now if these guys did their job and there were enough of them there would be nice even black tarry road. He needed little guys to move his stuff everywhere. So he mixed up a whole bunch of his stuff and while it was cooling he went out back where there was a big anthill and he got about a hundred ants. He mixed them in and down it all went.

So there was Caspar at my door, the parks and alleys of his gut being surfaced by a hundred little workers. I didn't believe they were still alive but he said he could feel them scurrying. Not a good feeling, in fact a sort of terrifying feeling, like if you were walking on a thin crust over a canyon or if you knew there was a hungry alien around the corner. He hadn't slept for three days. No wonder: three days and four nights with a little six legged army tramping and tickling around you. On the inside. And we could see them: he came in and took off his shirt and sat on my granny's old green pine table. The skin on his belly was rippling and heaving like still water when the downdraft from a sudden storm hits it. Somethings gonna happen, he said, but I don't know what.

What happened was that he took a shit, or a shit took him. His mouth opened like he wanted to sing, there was a sudden popping sound, and his pants just bulged. He tore them down and stared at the semi-solid slowly settling almost smoking dump. His face relaxed into a smile, almost the smile of the recently dead. "I've done it: there's my city. The little guys came through."

As he spoke Caspar sank onto the table, drained, exhausted, emptied. But he hadn't done it. His city was a formless blob of putrid goo. And the little citizens marching out were on their way to some other home, each holding proudly between his mandibles a little nutritious gem of jook.