

"In cooperation with the RAINN Speakers Bureau, we wanted to share with you an opportunity to share your story. RAINN was recently contacted by Lexie Bean, who is currently working on a project called Attention: People With Body Parts. In an effort to create solidarity and raise awareness, she is looking for survivors who have been told or forced to believe that their bodies are not safe spaces to participate in a multimedia project. From now until August 8, 2013, she will be accepting letters survivors have written to one of their body parts to publish in a book about reclamation. If you would like to participate, click [here](http://www.attnpeoplewithbodyparts.org) for more details and guidelines for submissions. Names of contributors will remain anonymous in the published version of the project.

Lexie Bean, Founder and Creative Director, Attention: People with Body Parts.  
[www.attnpeoplewithbodyparts.org](http://www.attnpeoplewithbodyparts.org)."

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**RAINN Project: "Attention! People with Bodies" Submission**

**June 24, 2013**

**¥ Submission Number Three ¥**

**by Gregg Tyler Milligan**

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Dear body, once a long time ago, you were paired with another, in a heavenly grace – a sum much greater than all of our parts together. So I will tell you a story about that time. It all began with our right-hand ... well, I should say ‘my’ right-hand and Sam’s left-paw. His body and ours were in their usual position, snuggled as close as we could get to one another. No air or light could pass between us and our bodies so close – only true love.

Sitting gently on top of my small right-hand was his furry left-paw. My kitten’s own left-hand. Smaller than mine, soft, and much more beautiful. Sam was his name. But there was so much more to how our bodies knew one another. In the deep green of Sam’s eyes was a thin band of gold circling

both of them. Just like my eyes. Except, Sam's eyes were happier. He had a slight mewling to his purr that sounded just like the song my lungs sang when I lay next to him. My heart beat too fast – that was different than Sam's, whose heart beat slow and content, full with promise. We both had fingers and toenails – Sam's were sharp and pointy at the tips, but he never scratched me. Mine were jagged and chewed down. Sam's downy coat was natural and always smelled clean. My hair was greasy and did not smell very good at all. The children at school even told me so when they laughed and held their noses as I hurried past them in the hallways and on the school playground.

Sam's movements and his legs – all four, were quick and confident – not hasty and unsure like my arms and legs. His did not quiver or shake like mine ... not until he became very ill. This was when our bodies became far too much alike but not in the sweet sensual way they used to be. Instead, our bodies; all the way past the skin and fur and down to the bone – became one body. One with an ugly sinister illness that would rack our frail bodies and make them seem singular. Like Siamese kittens attached and sharing one of every organ. The only difference was the he was a little kitten and I was a little boy.

His illness had come on suddenly, and it was his illness that showed us both how our bodies knew one another very well. Like they had met before, they would grow together and die together. But I did not know then, that one of us would win this terrible race. No victory medal to the winner. Only loneliness to the one left behind. And to the one left, his [my] body would remain ill. I would wish that in all the races I had lost until Sam, this would be the last that my body would lose – and fall, never to get up again – so that I was not only like my only friend in body, but with him forever in all ways.

It was Sam's once downy fur, now soaking wet all of the time that told my heart he was sick. I mean really sick. His slender body grew thin as the days passed when the mysterious illness appeared. At first, his eyes, a quiet green and gold, began to look sleepy. His small head drooped more often when he stood and he now seemed to always labor to stand these days. Sam's pretty coat used to be warm to the touch of my hands, but now it was cold and damp. There was now much more distance than there ever was between the floor and his light gray dark-spotted belly. But the worst of it was when his whole body shook and convulsed until Sam staggered, fell to the dirty carpet or linoleum, and the mewling turned to weak whimpers. A sound that was like feeble begging escaped his tiny throat and mouth. A mouth that once wore a perpetual smile now frowned and forced itself open for the smallest bites of what food I could find and share with him.

When Sam's body went into its spasms, so did mine and we fell to the floor together. My eyes wept, my own mouth quivered, my body ached with fear, and I begged and begged for someone – anyone to save him. Curling up next to Sam at night, our bodies sweat together, stunk of death, and loneliness. A piece of still life was all my mind and heart hung on to and soon I was feeding him with the same eye-dropper I used when he was a newborn. That which once gave him life now was used to try and save it.

Oh, my dear sweet friend. Our minds, hearts, and bodies are linked in life and death. '*You die ... I die,*' I thought, every time I cried while watching Sam's tiny ribcage move far too slowly up and down while he lay on one side. His small face staring into mine – so close I could smell through my nose the little remaining sweet-scented breath. A breath like honey that always put me to sleep. When Sam was facing me, he was like a mirror of what my mind told me I had become. How I must have appeared to others: a cold resolve giving off the odorous wafts of weakness and fear.

I disciplined my body to take Mother's abuse. All of its ugly kinds; especially, the sex stuff. I could train my body to respond to Mother in order to avoid a beating that would come if I did not make her orgasm – and I trained my body not to respond to the strangers, making them bored, frustrated, and then finally, give up and blissfully leaving me alone. But I could not train my body, mind, and heart to react any other way to Sam dying except dying myself. When his body became unable to lift itself –mine too became paralyzed from the waist down. Pug, my little sister by two years, used all the strength in her even smaller body than mine, to work together with me just to get me to the toilet. Pug pulled, I dragged, and we both panted hot air from undersized and overworked lungs that lived inside of two malnourished children. I often wondered how Pug being so small, her body so ill, her heart so big ... could pull me along the floor no matter how light I had become. Sam was easy to carry, even for me. But Pug's body harnessed the strength of Superman. The same strength used when my sickly weak body pulled Mother from drowning in a tub while she was naked, passed out, and heavy as an anchor. Sometimes, I asked my body where it got this strength to do such things, but it only kept quiet. As quiet as Sam as he laid sweating, dying, and trying to look like he was still smiling despite everything. Our wet eyes met.

In vain I suffered to save Sam. "*There's got to be a little life left in him,*" I prayed with every inch of me. "*Just a little.*" But there was none and the time grew near. Generating a force of love behind every effort destined to be the one which saved Sam, my body – most particularly, my brain and heart, found nothing but failure. Mother and Father told me we did not have the money to save him, but they always had the money for cigarettes and alcohol.

My body's relationship with Sam could be seen in my eyes, hands, and mouth most often when I stared at him for hours, weeping and praying, touching his frail body as gently as I could, and singing the old tunes I once sang for him under the apple tree that stood in our yard.

The world we knew was slipping away, and now only our hearts fought together when our bodies and minds gave up long ago. As I lay another night with Sam's bony spine against my sunken tummy, a distant outline raised itself in my heart. Every stroke of my hand down his skeletal body would be the last. With great effort, Sam would raise his head to look back at me as we lay down and my ears cried when they heard his slight neck creak and crack. This was the effect our hearts had in comparison to one another. That and a prayer – for a God still sleeping to please let me follow Sam to the place he was soon to go.

I would return home one day from school. It was the last day of school before summer, and my lungs burned from running the whole way. This would be the first day in a succession of many, my mind said, where we would nurse Sam back to health, or at the very least, be there with him when he left ... and if God was awake – I would go too. But when I walked into the only home I had ever known – Sam was gone. His whole body was nowhere to be found. Mother would not tell me where. My mind screamed, *"Now! Would be a good time to kill her. Now! Would be a good time to finally make all the wrongs – right again."* But my mind, like my body, was weak, and it shut its mouth and gave over to my heart which only wept in silence. My heart would not even tell my eyes, so that they would not show Mother was it was thinking. This would have only brought on a beating my body was too exhausted to withstand. *"It would come soon enough,"* my mind said.

Then it hit me like falling into stone that I would no longer hold him in my puny boy's arms. My mind and heart not even knowing what came of him in an already fragile world. I remember walking from Mother and seeing her bitter face stare only at the dirty blood and alcohol stained living room carpet. I walked into my bedroom on legs which had regained feeling from their temporary paralysis only a couple months ago. That feeling was somehow gone again, even though I was now able to walk. I fell on my pee-stained bed – the same one where bad things happened and were done to me, while always hoping Sam would not walk in and see.

There would be tears from eyes too tired to cry any longer. And from a hollow heart, presenting a picture of days with the only friend I ever had, were the distinctly marked memories of a rundown and

broken dream living inside a brain that did not know what to do next. And a heart which now returned to the consciousness of knowing only abuse without reprieve.

*“Oh aching heart, in the quiet looming of my mind, I was no more than a servant and would no longer hear the motor of the kitten I had once had, to give me peace.”*

Knowing God would not answer the prayer, every part of me still prayed for many nights afterwards that Sam would come back and take me with him. To that better place. That place where my heart was already waiting for my broken mind and body to finally catch up.

Instead, my body did as it always ... it lay on my bed and cried, desperately wishing Mother was just playing a cruel joke and Sam was hidden somewhere in the house. He was not. Not knowing how he died made it worse. It was important to me that he did not suffer in the end. It became difficult to keep Sam within my thoughts – within a mind relentless in its pursuit of insanity – without the anger interfering and pushing away the images of his playful character.

Several nights were spent lying awake and trying to remember him. My brain struggled for the perfect picture. Daydreaming about what he once was by closing my eyes and concentrating. Squeezing my eyes shut while doing so until they hurt and I saw the white dots floating in the pool of black.

My mind would hold the image of him for a few seconds, and then it would disappear, but not before I glimpsed his small face slipping slowly away in front of my solitary deserted and desolate eyes.

Sam's body was gone. Mine was wasted and still here. My heart, mind and soul told me over and over that Sam was the lucky one. This gave all of our parts great comfort. So, while my tender skin pricked and still burned where Mother threw the lit matches that stuck sometimes in order for me to stop crying over Sam – I hated my body. I hated it so much I wish I could give it all back to wherever it came.

✚ by Gregg Tyler Milligan, <http://www.godmustbesleeping.com/>.