



Lynne Lighter

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Friday, July 19, 2013.

It's nearly Saturday now and I'm still in Thursday's clothes. Even my shoes. Nothing has come off between Thursday morning and now. And none of it is as clean as it was when I put it on.

My excuse: I woke up this morning in an office.

From the front door of that office, there's a track that's exactly 720 steps away (I counted twice). Since I already had my shoes on, I decided to go. But I saved a few steps by leaving from the back door.

I ran one mile, returned to the office, swallowed some amphetamine, turned on my computer, and started work for the day.

Work for the day meant writing a chapter for a research methods book. My first keystrokes toward a completed chapter happened at 6:05 a.m.

At 6:30 p.m., while still working, I looked down at my arm and saw a tick burrowing into it. Halfway down my left forearm.

If that arm didn't belong to me – if it was just a hunk of meat sitting beside me on the desk – I wouldn't have been bothered by this.

"Oh, I'll take care of that later; the tick's not going anywhere", I would have thought as I returned to the keyboard.

But because it was *my* arm, and because it was the most disgusting thing that has ever happened to that arm, I shouted: "Fuck! This goddamn school and its deer infested wilderness!"

I shouted that to no audience.

For whatever reason, I immediately sentenced that arm to rigor mortis; as if it were wrapped in a cast... and the slightest movement would break its bones. Using my still-mobile arm, I started riffling through my desk drawers, looking for a lighter.

Found one.

And then I attempted to take a few deep breaths before I began.

After taking two extremely shallow breaths, I positioned the lighter beneath my arm, directly under the tick, spun the striker wheel, and tried to hold it steady.

This lasted for about one second. “Holding steady” is tough when I’m looking at a fire touching my arm.

So I took a couple more shallow breaths, repositioned the lighter, spun the wheel, and shut my eyes. This time I tried to focus on my breathing.

“My breathing” meant sucking air in through my teeth and making way too much noise. Trying to hiss myself into one of those “I’m going to walk across hot coals” trances.

It kind of worked.

I was able to stretch the single second of my first effort into what must have been twenty seconds.

When the smell of cooking human being was a bit too much to meditate away, I let off the fuel lever and started making a different kind of noise. The kind one might expect from an elderly person having a wet dream.

As soon as I was done making that noise, I looked at my arm.

I’d roasted it until there was no trace of hair. I’d burned the roots clean out. But the tick never decided “Christ Almighty it’s hot; I’m gonna find myself a different piece of person to eat.”

That’s what I thought would happen. Because that’s what my dad told me would happen.

My dad must have at least eight y-chromosomes. I’ve never met a truer representative of the gender. I’m still a child compared to him... which means if there’s some sort of ridiculously manly solution to a problem (any problem at all), that’s the solution I grew up believing was (approximately) true.

But somehow, despite all my hissing and determination, there it was: a tick that hadn’t budged.

So I decided to Google “what to do if you have a tick” (while my skin was doing things like bubbling).

The CDC website felt like a reasonable place to start.

It told me to avoid folklore remedies such as burning the tick out. And to just “remove it with tweezers.”

So I returned to my desk drawers, riffling through them a second time, thinking “if I was able to find a lighter, there has to be a pair of tweezers in here too.”

I was right. I found a pair. And I used them to remove the clump of cinders that was once a tick.

And that felt like a good place to stop working for the day. I had no interest in returning to my methods chapter. I saved it, closed it, and started writing my friends.

“Oh my God! Did you get its legs?” everyone asked me. And then they continued: “try to keep its shell preserved” or “make sure you don’t break its head off” (as if I hadn’t already gotten it out).

My response:

“Oh, don’t worry; I was careful to extract it with all of its anatomy intact. The whole thing in one perfectly preserved piece. That way I can take it to the taxidermist and get it stuffed. And give it a name. At first I was thinking Seth or Curtis. Or maybe Darryl. It really looked like a Tristan, but that just felt too trendy. But then I got to thinking: you know what? I’ll bet my bottom dollar this little rascal is a girl. So I gave it another look and wouldn’t you believe it: we’ve got ourselves a Bethany! Or a Deborah. Or maybe a Madison. And I’ve already got plans to dress little Madison up in silly sweaters every Christmas. We’ll have so much fun together, she and I!”

No, of course I didn’t stabilize its neck and preserve its legs. I burned it up until it was practically unrecognizable. When I was done, I tweezed out a hunk of ash. I’m pretty sure the little charcoaled legs were whisked away by the draft when I blew on my arm to cool the burning.

And I’m not going to be spying on my arm for the appearance of a rash or testing my joints for achiness or monitoring my liveliness for uncharacteristic lulls. And I certainly won’t be going to the doctor to get tested.

“But then how will you know if you get Lyme disease?”

Oh, please. I’ll be lyme-less and fine. Although, if it turns out I do have it, Old Lyme, Connecticut, the eponymous town, is only about an hour south of me. Maybe I’ll consider relocating.

In the mean time, I do have to applaud two of my friends (Fred and Maria) for responding appropriately.

To paraphrase Fred: people just want an excuse for why they’re tired or depressed, so they blame it on Lyme disease. They convince themselves that’s what they have whenever it’s convenient.

And in the words of Maria, after expressing approval that I had opted for the manly mode of extraction: “the ridiculous thing is when people carry the ruined tick to the doctor and ask that it be tested for Lyme. Who cares if the tick has Lyme?”

Maria then mentioned a research study her company was about to start. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, they’ll be applying platelet rich plasma to their first two burn victims. Three days from now. She asked if I might be one of them.

Unfortunately, no. And it turns out neither of her subjects inflicted their burns as a folklore remedy (unless blowing up a truck with a lit cigarette constitutes folklore).

But now that I know she’s doing a burn trial, I’m tempted to give Madison a sibling.

I’ll trade my office floor for the thicket. And in the morning, when I wake up with a Darryl all hunkered down on my calf, I’ll throw on some marshmallows and graham crackers and really get that limb prepped for her study.