

# RUMP-A-THUMP

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Something unusual happens while you're in San Francisco.

You're there to give a speech.

The seminar has adjourned for lunch.

You're the first speaker after lunch.

You step out of the tall stone building onto the dirty sidewalk in your new suit, looking down the steep street at a café below you, on the other side.

For the hundredth time, you picture the host standing at the front of the room in the pool of light at the podium, glasses glinting, beckoning you to come to the front and speak. Again, you picture yourself rising at the dim rear of the room, walking forward down the long aisle past the backs of people's heads, speech in both hands, like carrying something alive and winged, to the front of the room. Through the one opened window, tall and narrow, old-fashioned, black-framed, on the left, everything else the City has to offer bares itself into the room, like a breast. Again, you picture yourself turning around, seeing the wide rows of faces swaying into view, looking up at you, waiting to see what you have to say. You hear your heart beating. As you open your mouth you realize you know every sentence but your first.

Somewhere behind the steep blocks above you, you hear tires squealing. You look around. No one else on the sloped street is paying any attention to the squeals. They're all waiting for the crosswalk lights to change, staring straight ahead, heads shaved, or standing in the middle of the wide sidewalks, whispering to each other. Are the squealings a car chase? Is a movie being filmed? The squeals grow louder.

Three blocks up, a red convertible wheels into sight, straightening out, pale green car fishtailing in pursuit behind it.

The red convertible bumps down the street towards where you're standing, pale green car accelerating behind it.

Two blocks away.

At your intersection, a man in yellow overalls steps backwards off the curb, walking backwards out into the street, arms held out as if holding onto the sides of the air.

Twenty feet in front of him, another man in yellow overalls, facing forward, arms also held in a harp-playing position, heads towards the curb, steps down into the street.

One block away.

The backwards man is approaching the opposite curb. The space between both men spans the street.

The red convertible plows into that space.

The space sails up, long, wide reflections sliding off it.

Now you realize they had been carrying an immense rectangle of glass between them. Is this being filmed? The rectangle of glass, wide as the street, butted aloft into the air by the convertible, tilts over twenty feet above you. Horizontal now, it sails down the sloped avenue, fifteen feet above it, now ten, its plane passing through invisibility and bright reflections of the busy buildings above.

On the other side of the street, two steep blocks down, people sit in ones and threes at an outdoor café's tables, waiters with white aprons standing by some of the tables, writing down orders.

The broad glass sheet slips into invisibility as it loses altitude.

The dark-haired waiters continue writing down orders. Through the windows of the café, inside, you see others sitting at tables surrounded by movements of coffee and pasta, leaning towards each other in muffled conversations, see waiters inside snaking their hips around the backs of chairs, right hands up in the air, transporting plates.

A jagged line, white as lightening, etches horizontally across the café's front window.

Outside, on the sidewalk, one of the waiters standing by a table scrunches his mustached face, features full of the expression one makes when one's suggestion has been comically misheard.

His head pops off, starts bouncing on air.

An older man in a business suit, rising from his table, points at his male companion, reaches inside his jacket. As the gold watch on his wrist disappears behind the fold of wool lapel, his head pops off.

A young woman wearing a bicycle safety helmet stands up on tiptoe at the edge of the group of tables, wagging her right hand high in the air, left hand pressing to her ribs her cell phone. Her head and right arm pop off, bouncing alongside each other five feet above the sidewalk.

As the broad sheet of glass sails above the café's outdoor tables, the heads and arms it carries bounce rump-a-thump towards the rear, smearing blood on its surface.

At one of the tables, three impatient seated people, two male, one female, consult their big menus while the beheaded waiter's body remains upright beside them. One of the males glances up from the prices to repeat a question, sees the blood spurting out of the top of the waiter's neck, but because he doesn't expect to see that it doesn't register. "Why can't I have it served on the side?"

A waiter from inside pushes open the front door of the café, walking out onto the sidewalk with a glass of vegetable juice held beneath his right hand. He sees a half dozen headless waiters and customers staggering amid the tables, arms still jerking, but it doesn't register.

The broad plane of glass continues its silent swoop down the avenue.

A trolley car rackets out on its tracks into traffic.

Inside, at the rear, a man stands holding onto a strap with his right hand, folded-up Chronicle in his left. He's reading his horoscope.

The sheet sails over another outdoor café, the heads and arms rump-a-thumping off its back edge, landing on plates and people and poodles with pink ribbons loosely-knotted around their pearl-gray necks.

Nothing for a moment, then heads bending forward to inspect, bending further forward, freezing; then chairs getting pushed violently back; men screaming.

The plate cuts into the back of the trolley.

Slices just above the hips of the man standing at the rear, reading. Comes to a halt, finally, six feet past the man. The man lowers his paper. Looks down. In front of him, suspended in mid-air, are greasy red smears, and a small-circumferenced gold ring rattling three feet in the air.

He looks straight down. Sees a reflection of the trolley's curved ceiling passing forward out of him.

Looks behind him.

Sees reflections of the rear windows leading into him.

Lowers his newspapered hand until it encounters the glass plate at his waist.

His body has been bisected. Stomach, chest, head above the glass; legs, cock and shoes below the glass.

Because the glass has formed a seal at the bisection, both halves of his body still function, although now independently of each other.

At the front of the trolley car, the capped driver raises his right foot, settles it on the brake pad, and steps down.

Past the wide front windows of the trolley, on the right, the straggle of people standing by the next stop grows larger.

The slowing of the trolley slides the man's upper body forward on the

sheet of glass, separating it from his legs. His arms flail out like a surfer on a surf board, trying to keep his balance.

The black shoe presses down harder on the brake pad.

The man's upper body slides closer to the edge of the glass.

He looks frantically behind him, seeing through the horizontal pane his trousered legs standing perfectly erect, one knee cocked, yellow stain spreading downwards from the fly.

The people in the right front window of the trolley grow larger.

The man's upper torso slides forward faster towards the edge.

He knows he's going to die in the next few seconds.

Halfway down the trolley a woman with a kerchief over her hair, tied under her chin, starts to rise from her seat, gathering bags.

The man's upper torso swoops off the edge of the glass, sailing towards the woman.

As his life drops out of him, as he dies, he waves his arms around, trying to avoid colliding with the woman's back.

As she straightens up into the aisle, his torso slaps heavily against her back.

She swivels her head around, an annoyed, put-upon look at another's rudeness on her face, at first.