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Restless Legs

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I don't think I should have to consider my legs if I don't want to, but tonight they are insisting. Like nagging toddlers or hungry cats, they are demanding my attention, drawing me from attempted sleep, forcing me to move. I remember the first time I saw a commercial for a medication meant to treat "Restless Leg Syndrome," an ailment described as the uncontrollable urge to move the legs. "Come on," I thought. "Ridiculous." I decided it was a condition manufactured by the pharmaceutical companies to sell a new drug. On a deeper level though, I did not want this syndrome to exist. For one thing, it interrupted sleep, and I had enough problems getting a solid night's rest. And the idea that the legs could will the mind implied a lack of control I did not want to accept.

Yet here I am, one o'clock in the morning a gnawing inside my left calf. I've been lying here for over an hour, waiting to drift away, but I keep being sucked to my leg. It's lying there, outstretched beside its mate, thick white socks on my feet to keep them warm.

But I cannot find comfort. There's something in it, on it, like a thick rubber band being pulled, or a piece of rope being twisted and twisted and twisted again. It's vaguely located, a darkening, a doggedness that only relinquishes when I shift. I bring my leg just a little to the right, and it is enough: the feeling dissipates like cockroaches in a nighttime kitchen vanishing into corners and cracks when a light is turned on.

I relish the — what? — the absence, the normalness of ignorable legs. I twist onto my other side, adjust the pillow beneath my head. I am drowsy. I extend my toes and bring them back, then try to stop noticing my legs and fall asleep, but within minutes, I'm feeling it again: the same calf, the odd tug. I try to pinpoint it. I try to name it: pressure, ache, twinge — no word is right. I kick my leg, shove it underneath the other one and press as if to squeeze out the feeling, but it's still there, a kind of physical tinnitus of the limb.

My leg is, in fact, restless. I jerk it to the side, stretch it down to the edge of the mattress — when

the feeling comes, there is no choice but to move. Even a few inches will do, and the sensation subsides, but only for a pause. I try to sleep, I want to sleep, but it returns dependably to rouse me, and I start again, bending my knee, unbending it. I offer up a challenge: my will against my leg. It isn't real, I tell myself. It's a phantom. I will not move. I will not move. But it persists, drives deeper, daring me, smirking, and in less than a minute, I cave. I can't help but slide the calf. It's in there, alive. It is half past one now, the night draining away.

*-this refers from the word "asleep" in Sally Bellerose's essay **Ballast** (<http://referentialmagazine.com/contents/non-fiction/essays/ballast/>)*

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