

Life’s Riddle

Cyril Moore reached out and almost broke the alarm clock. “Five more minutes,” he groaned, wanting to sleep more but he knew he couldn’t be late for work one more time and stumbled out of bed. In the bathroom he squeezed and squeezed the toothpaste tube for more and brushed looking in the mirror, longing for whiter teeth. On the weighing scale, he wished he had lost more weight. He dressed. He ate an apple on the way to work, craved more—perhaps, eggs and sausages—then he remembered the numbers on the scale.

His workday was one more day of ordinariness, nothing new, more of the same.

Heading home, Cyril stopped at the ATM and his bank balance left him wishing he had more but he wasn’t sure how much will be enough. On the train, he stepped on chewed gum—faded pink, it was—but he was too dejected to scrape that stickiness off.

That night, as Cyril slept and dreamed of more of everything, the gum slid from his shoe and grew and grew and blew itself up until it was a faded pink cloud that took the shape of a full-grown man, only much bigger. Sometime later fingers, fatter than Cyril’s thighs, picked up the alarm clock, pinched it flat as a pancake and flung it out the window.

Come morning Cyril slept for as long as he wanted, waking to find Gum-Man, floating near the ceiling, waiting, twiddling all twenty of his fat fingers.

To make a long story short, it is six months later. By now, Cyril has white, perfect teeth and a scalpel-sculpted perfect body. He doesn’t work anymore, doesn’t need to. His bank balance shows so many zeros no ATM can display it on screen. Cyril’s fiancé—everything he’d imagined her to be in his dreams—is pretty and adores him.

To make this story even shorter, it is one year later and a familiar feeling twisted Cyril's heart. He can't sleep at night—his too-much money is not enough, his too-white teeth are now so glaring he wears sunglasses, his too-pretty fiancé is well, simply, too pretty.

Cyril takes to riding the train all hours scanning the floor for chewed faded pink gum. "Take everything back," he wants to say to Gum-Man.