

Substitute Teacher

Bill Mohr

I liked that movie for one and only one reason. I knew it was my brain that made Frankenstein's monster a sweet person. You have to identify with something in a movie. That brain is what keeps the movie going. Without it, the lightning storm is just another long night at the dog pound down the street. But my brain, which seems to be used only because it's convenient, is actually the lucky choice, or a case of no choice being perfect timing. And I'm not bragging.

A lot of brains, if given a second chance at being a brain, wouldn't know what to do. They'd stare at the first thing they remembered seeing before, trying to put the story back together again. But my brain knew that it was a different game now, different rules, and I was going to have to improvise.

It didn't bother me that my life was on the line the second time around. That's why I had a big advantage at dying so quickly the first time. Most people don't know how to gamble — they panic when they bet. They're guessing. But a brain like mine knows that the secret is whether or not you should trust your first hunch.

My brain knew that Frankenstein's first hunch was a dumb move. He never should've put me in an adult body. A six year old or a three year old, that would've been perfect. There's no way they could've fooled me then. Growing up, I would've known their tricks. For quite a few years, I tried to be a good boy. My father taught me the intricacies of ovens and soon I invented new ways of making bread rise. He wanted me to tell him my secrets, but I didn't love him that much.

Certain things can't be disguised. Or imagined. Each time I see the movie I'm more convinced. Maybe you don't believe me, but I've never met anybody else who thought it was his brain. Hey, and I know a lot of words too. They never give me the lines which show the extent of my vocabulary. Maybe you've noticed that so far I haven't mispronounced a single word. Or stumbled once, even though this audition is a cold reading.

I'm not perfect. I'm not claiming I'm perfect. You ever heard

the expression — no such thing as a stupid question. Welding class, air-conditioning repair class. They encourage you to ask stupid questions so they have something to tell the other teachers eating lunch. And this is true. I know because I taught for a while. A substitute teacher. You know, a warm body. The kids liked me. You can't fool kids. That's what I liked about them. They knew who I was and not one of them ever squealed. I never had a single note from the principal's office: "Will the substitute teacher in room six please leave the smartest student in charge and report to my office immediately." The kids knew and they didn't need to brag about it. So I'm saving my money and when I have enough, I'm going to take some time off, pump iron, repair my motorcycle, and, best of all, learn to play music. You know I hear music but I can't remember it very long. It's not music that has words — it's just melodies and I hear them a few times, but then anything can distract me and I forget it. And I know that I'm not stealing it. It's not somebody else's music. It's something I'm hearing for the first time. From another world I believe. But then again, I've had better luck than you, so I could understand it if you don't believe. This is the way I like it. It's a real melody, not a fake one.

The only important question left is how a brain works — how it identifies what's important and what's not important. And to do that, I have to have a real brain to work with. That's why I brought this brain along with me to show you how much progress we've made in understanding exactly where these connections get made. This is the happiest frontier, the non plus ultra of wilderness. Connections isn't really the exact word I want, just as we're not really certain — the Doctor and I — how each area manages to enjoy — tolerate! — the existence of so many other areas in the brain. It's hard to believe how many solitary obsessions the brain possesses. Right now, for instance, at a spot smaller than the very tip of a cat's claw, is a — how does he put it — a peninsula in the brain that attempts to control every sexual memory of an organism. These memories are not the production of the brain although the brain does use them in the production of other memories.

Now in front is a wad about the size of a rolled-up band-aid and this is the central opinion storage area. This is each brain's opinion of all the brains that this brain has encountered. The rankings from Hall of Fame to Bush League, from the subtly certain to the deceitful. No brain puts itself in last place. Not even a suicide. Most suicides put themselves in first place. That's why they volunteer to stop thinking. That shows Dr. F. fucked up. He used the foot of a suicide. Haven't you noticed how

this foot has been twitching the whole time I've been talking. This foot remembers that the brain said jump. And it was the other foot that moved. A little off-balance and you don't get a second chance.

You can't understand how difficult it is to talk about your own brain this intimately — let alone someone else's. And I am shy. That much is known about me which is true. I can overcome it for brief periods. Sometimes I can teach three or four days in a row. At different schools of course. That's one of the subtle advantages of being a substitute.