Late summer was the recycling time.

They woke in the morning, smiling, and spent their hours doing whatever it was they typically did, and in the evening they leaned against walls or chairs or doors and they fell smilingly asleep. While they slept, the man came, visiting them one by one.

(Don’t fall asleep, the young ones sometimes whispered to each other. If you stay awake, the man can’t find you. But they always drifted, and he always came.)

First he took the feet, paper toes clad in paper shoes.
And they sleepily balanced on the stumps of legs, and they smiled at the man as he softly undid the feet from the shoes and laid them flat, one atop the other, in his briefcase.

Next the lower legs, from shin to ankle.
And they wobbled on their knees, and they smiled at the man as he placed these parts of limbs atop the others, arranging them carefully in his case.

Then they lost their upper legs. And their hands. And their forearms, and elbows, and shoulders.

As he lay them on their backs, still they smiled up at the man. He made sure not to wrinkle or rip the bodies as he disassem-
bled them, putting aside the parts that came to him creased or folded. (He would deal with those later.)

As he gently separated necks from torsos, disarticulating bellies from chests, he would look back to find them smiling.

Finally, he came to the heads.

He reached down and unhooked paper straps from paper ears, untied paper ribbons, gently loosened paper buttons from paper lips, and one by one he pulled off the smiling faces. Underneath the faces were the masks.

Some were demonic hannyas, folded from thin paper pressed from hinoki cypress, and covered in glue and crushed seashells. Some were long-beaked doctors, smelling of roses and beetles and camphor. Some were silent dark morettas, woven of paper made from soft black silk and eyelashes. He found masks of paper made from banana leaves, and grasshopper wings, and gold flake, and bamboo, and skin. Tiny smooth ones and wrinkled old ones.

And one by one he took them off.
And he turned them around.
And he looked inside.
And he lifted the masks.
And he placed them over the place his face should have been.
And just for a few seconds, he became a demon, or a queen, or a god, or a clown, or a very bad man, or a very good one.

And each time he took the mask off again, and he folded it flat, and placed it in his briefcase, and closed the case, and locked it shut.

When he got home, the faceless man unlatched his case and gently stacked the paper in piles of parts: legs, and faces, and hands, and the rest. (The masks he put aside.) And then he went to sleep.

When he woke the next day, the man gathered the piles of paper parts and tied them all together with a thick ribbon, and after breakfast he went out with his package. All afternoon he drove, until he came to the tallest point that he could find and got out of his car. He unbound the stack of paper parts, waited
for a powerful gust, opened his arms, and thrust the broken bodies into the sky.

As they caught the wind, legs found torsos found arms found hands found faces, and soon the ground was scattered with new paper people. As they learned their articulations and tested their jointings, slowly the puppets got up from the earth, looked to see the other smiling faces around them, and made themselves a world. (Always, they were smiling.)

The man without a face got back in his car and returned home. After he arrived, he opened his briefcase and gently lifted the pile of paper masks he had left there. (The new people would slowly grow new masks of their own, and those would stay hidden until he harvested them in the next recycling.) He carried the pile to his kitchen, retrieved a pair of scissors and some tape from a drawer, took the first mask off the pile, cut out one of the eyes, and taped it to himself. And then he took the second mask, and did the same thing with another eye. As he worked his way down the pile, the place where his face should have been gradually became a patchwork of chins and nostrils, moustaches and dimples, and too many lips and eyebrows where they should not have been. When he was done, he walked to the bathroom and looked in the mirror out of the eye of a demon and the eye of a clown. As the taped paper parts sank into his skin and rearranged themselves into a horrible beautiful symmetry, he found himself satisfied with what he saw. And so the man walked to his bedroom, and turned off the lights, and went to sleep for another year, now that he could smell and taste and feel and see his dreams again. And when his paper sensorium wore through, in exactly a year he would wake into another recycling day, once again faceless, and do it all over again.