

SMALL

SAD

PEOPLE



STORIES, BY AGEHA

.....



.....

.....

Small Sad People

a collection of (short) short stories

by ageha

.....

Small Sad People, 1st edition

copyright © 2021 by ageha

this work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International licence (CC BY-NC 4.0). to view a copy of this licence, visit the creative commons website at: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.



a complete digital version of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, from:

<https://airen-no-jikken.icu>

made using free, open-source technologies, including Vim, X₂L^AT_EX, Scribus, GIMP, Ghostscript, and fonts released by The League of Moveable Type

ISBN: 978-1-7351101-0-3 paperback

ISBN: 978-1-7351101-1-0 pdf



.....



.....

Contents

I	Mass	I
1	The Body Politic	2
2	Pair Bonding	8
3	How Much?	16
4	TalOS	22
5	no one's stunning beauty	26
6	sand	28
7	i am(not)	34
8	When the Stars came Down from the Sky	40
9	Peninsula	46
II	Energy	49
1	Prospecting	50
2	朝露～斜陽の間に	54

3	UNORTHODOX	58
4	geodesic convergence	60
5	$C_6H_{eight}O_7$	64
6	Preoccupation / Postoccupation	72
7	fine, thanks	78
8	Prospecting, pt.2	86
9	My Brother is a Strange Animal	92
III Acceleration		101
1	無色の苦笑	102
2	The passenger seat	114
3	Insider	118
4	過去参り	126
5	i googled “suicide note” but couldn’t come up with a good title	134
6	an insect landed on the page, and i think it’s called a mayfly	140
7	I Live In A Hole	144
8	hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed gorilla so you can watch the static electricity	148

.....



.....

Over her head are the climbing things.
They sing in gold and yellow and orange,
the edges of it to breathe enough fire
to cook its meals without suffocating
itself.

I should be full of anything,
the motor tour combined
with the scars of their own beginnings.
To-night, the moon, the wind,
something of this house is Living Alone.

– STELLA BENSON
(AS RE-ARRANGED BY MARKOV CHAIN)

SMALL SAD PEOPLE

Part I

Mass

I

The Body Politic

There is
a message.

Hard to make it out.

Squinting. Squinting. The porcelain is beautiful.

Glitters blue.
Trail of swirling flowers.

Hours.

A soft noise, draws attention, turn, who is there?
Who.

You.

The man does not respond.
His eyes are a nest of wriggling larvae, pale as anything.
Pale as nothing.

An emptying. A wriggling. Burrowing.

In. and Out.

In. and Out.

and Out.

She reads it there.

. . .

And she wakes.

And she finds that it is dark and warm, and morning still some time away, and stares up at the ceiling till the world begins to swim.

The silence is oppressing her.

She stands. Removes her pyjamas. Folds them neatly and then lays them out, down at the foot of the bed.

She can see around her clearly now, by that dull glow that accompanies all city nights, suburbs notwithstanding.

Out of the room, past her parents, down the stairs, and inching out the door, she is silent. And once the door is closed again she comes into her own.

She bursts into the world that lays beyond.

She does not know quite why she's done it. Only that there is something here, within the cool night air and soft-moon glow. A something sorely lacking in her waking life these days, and she soon finds herself dancing, overfull, with energy that's not her own.

Racing circles on the lawn, round and round, round and round, until she cannot breathe and falls down gasping to the turf. Basking in a full-bodied wetness, toes and fingers splayed like roots to drink the dew. She tries to do a handstand, but is toppled, overbalancing. The minor frustration runs a risk, and she soon gives up and decides to go exploring.

And so. And then.

Here she is, quite naked, rummaging through her neighbour's pantry shelves at two in the morning. Not out of hunger or from a desire to steal,

and not even out of curiosity, but only because there is some force compelling her to move, and to be where she should not.

This is the third house now, though she already is beginning to forget the former two. Where she has been is not important, only this impulse; a continuance of action. For there is a part of her, growing, that realises the danger in her position and is screaming for attention. Were she to stop for just a moment and think, this new-found power might drain away, leaving her very small and very exposed, paralysed in a stranger's kitchen.

So no, she does not think. She moves. She leaves the pantry, skirts a sheen-waxed marble island, and enters the household proper. There is a sitting room here, over-full with puffy chairs, and beyond it a resignedly humble foyer. Nothing is especially of interest. She moves on, tip-toeing up the carpeted staircase, past pictures that might well be someone's great aunt, someone's nephew, someone's long-dead great grandfather—and then herself, and a shock runs down her spine, hair on end. A shock not particularly alleviated in realising it's only a mirror. Still shaking, she reaches the summit, overstepping with anticipation, foot descending awkwardly.

At the top there is a short hallway, lined with two doors to either side and terminating in a square, waist-height sliding window. She glides to the window and opens it.

Metallic creaking, dulled by plastic padding. A gentle summer wind.
Crickets.

An empty, soft-lit drive below, phalanx of houses off to left and right. These houses were near identical once, but all are now so modified, in the four or so decades since their creation, as to be no more than distant cousins. The heavy fullness of the moon peaks out through broken clouds.

She shivers a bit, too used to the over-warmth of this house, and struggles to shut the window again, with just enough force to move it, but not so much that it might slide freely and slam. Perhaps she should go back... But no, she can't be thinking that. She can't be thinking. And so she turns to the first of the doors, now on her left, and then it is open and she is inside, frontal-lobe be hecked. And she finds herself in a bedroom. And the bed is occupied. And even in sleeping, the man beneath the covers looks tired, so tired. He must be somewhere in his sixties, just at that age where his face has begun to give way, folding in on itself in heavy creasings across his

forehead and beneath his chin. The whiteness of his stubble shines a bit in the faint moonlight, poking out like little tendrils of bone. She stands there, staring at this alien creature, trying to see in it a something she can recognise, that is like herself. But she sees nothing, an old man. Until he rolls unprompted over on his side, curling in his knees, and she feels deep in her muscle a desire to do the same. Stretching her spine just so. Placing her hands just so. Flexing her toes just so, and he is a human after all. She moves in closer, leans in towards the back of his head, and sniffs. There is something there like cinnamon and the faintest trace of day-old sweat. How strange, that a human could become something like this creature here before her, his face bright as a tomato, pock-marked as an asteroid, drifting slowly off, towards the cold of that point furthest from the sun.

She has had her fill, and it is time to move, and she is down the stairs in half the time of going up, somewhat reckless in her hurry to be off. And she's passing through the sitting room, with its stuffy old leather armchairs, when she hears a faint "hello?"

"Oh, ah...
hello"

It is her schoolteacher. It is the woman who teaches her Greek History and yells at the girls when they giggle over marble penises or draw bikinis in their textbooks with ballpoint pens. The two stare blankly at one another, the woman in a satin nightie and she in nothing at all. But, just as the woman moves to speak, she cuts in, "I'll be going then", and instinctively gives the little bow the schoolgirls all are taught to use with teachers.

"Ah, yes, alright"

Away... ...And she is racing, racing, out the door and down the street, not bothering this time to hide in shadows or to look both ways before crossing. Stones are biting her bare feet, branches tearing at her cheeks, and she is laughing now, open-wide and strong and uncontrolled.

"Ah, yes, alright"

AhAHAHAHahahHAHAHhahhhaAHAA

She is at her house again, scales the drainage pipe and climbs up to the peak of the roof and there she is Ascended.

She looks down on the neighbourhood below, wind in her hair, and is the lady of her demesne and all she sees.



.....



.....

2

Pair Bonding

“so i was reading invisible cities the other day, right? and—”

“wait. what is it?”

“ah, yeh, well i guess it’s kind of like the kino no tabi of western lit, except with like only two named characters and all the guns and motorcycles replaced with BOOBS, because calvino just won’t shut up about BOOBS. or i guess actually that was more in the cosmicomics, but like he still—”

“ok roger, carry on”

“ah sorry right, so well there’s this little interlude that’s like halfway through where it’s marco polo, the traveller, is talking to kublai the khan, the emperor who he reports back to about all the weird cities and places he visits, and in this bit they’re discussing these theoretical models for making up cities that they’ve never seen but that possibly might exist, right? and so polo brings up this idea of like starting from the very least likely, most abnormal, city possible and working backwards in different directions towards the norm, saying like that every city that exists must necessarily lay somewhere within this described space, right? which i guess would be like density in the centre of the graph with things that are more typical and then spreading out more sparsely as you go, which probably could be counteracted by some sort of logarithmic scaling or something to make it more uniform, though that doesn’t really matter. but! then he says something that’s basically like ‘you can’t push it beyond a certain limit, though, or you’d be describing a city that’s somehow like too “average” to actually exist’.

and of course, the way it's phrased in the book he makes it sound all poetic, but then i started thinking like 'what does that actually *mean*?', and like 'does that make any sense at all even?'. because like, if you think about it in terms of a multiverse that contains all possible universes, then there shouldn't even *be* a norm, right? just like if our universe is infinitely large it can't really have a centre, then if this multiverse is an infinitely large collection of universes, with one universe each for every possible configuration, that means there can't be any average configuration for it to approach.

then i thought, 'but, if it's uniform, wouldn't a setup like that prevent the possibility of information transfer between universes, though? since, if we're going to have every possible configuration, then there'd have to be one that's connected to all the other universes and also one that's connected to none of them, and so there's a contradiction.' and that reminded me of something i'd read in a book about set theory, about how the set of all possible sets can't really exist in practice, since then it'd have to also contain itself or something. but THEN i thought, 'but wait, doesn't this have some sort of, what's the word — like, 'effect on', or like a 'consequences for' "

"ramification?"

"right, ramification. so i thought, 'wouldn't this have some sort of ramifications for the concept of emergence? because i think what this means is that like any given delineated set drawn from a true-random collection of base-units has to have some restrictions placed on it like this, and so, at any point higher than that baseline, there must be certain things which are possible and things which aren't, which would mean that polo, or i guess calvino, is right in saying there's some sort of 'norm' that can't ever be reached, assuming what he means is that outlier of impossibilities, since, like i said before, an infinite random set can't have any 'norm' in itself, so like, as the only thing that stands out from the rest of the things, the 'edge of the not-possible configurations', could sort of in a weird way count as that norm, as the 'centre of that universe', or something like that. though maybe that's wrong, because like those edges — or if you tried to map all these out in some kind of coordinates, like on a line or the surface of a sphere — like if you mapped them out, then those edges would really be orthogonal—"

"uh huh. right; well — i'm pretty sure at least half of that is just completely wrong — or like all of it is half-wrong — or something, but like also

I: Mass

though, if you're trying to impress me then at least use your own words, because just always falling back on other peoples' ideas is totally cheating."

"—funny you should mention that, cause just like a page earlier, calvino has this clever little passage about how this city can't be described originally because like everything there is to say about it's already been said, or something. i was kind of really drunk when i read it and don't really—"

"shut UP!! GOD!!!"

a brief pause () followed by several minutes of "fart noises" and laughter. then: a rustling of fabric, a soft moan, and the recording ends abruptly.



.....



.....



.....



.....



.....



.....

3

How Much?

“How much?”

No hello. No fucking nothing. Just.

“100. Thirty minutes. Fucking use rubber.”

Face down. Ass up. Back seat of the van. Hints of stale alcohol, here in the crotch of the seat. Wanted to be left alone, so the overpricing. But he needs the fucking money (hah!). He needs the fucking money.

Back home again again his girlfriend has been waiting up for him. She also hasn't done too good this week. “That college kid last-second bailed”.

Well. Whatever.

They have tomato and hummus on toast. They lay in bed and do not touch.

. . .

Sitting at a bus stop, hoping vaguely somebody will bite. “Think of the children”, every time, and all we've built is gone within a month. Texting with a friend; what can we do, 1 (- -) 1

The park across the street, a group of kids are playing rugby. And it's actually a team, with a coach and everything.

One kid, looks like maybe 10, a younger brother probably. Older members entertain him, easy passes, joking blocks, “One day you too can have it, all of this”.

Go Team.

. . .

Money running low. Sometimes this is how it goes.

. . .

Today his girlfriend stayed home and did cams. He hates it; those asses think they own her. Never miss a show, special-marked on empty calendars. He can see them, all one-handed, push the button, get a prize!

“You know I love you baby!”. “I know you do (^_-)”.

An entire fucking paycheck once, like what the hell, what do you eat?

She never does cams when he’s at home.

. . .

Sometimes he lays awake and he listens to her breathing. He doesn’t know it, but she does the same.

Suuuu Haaaa

Suuuu Haaaa

. . .

The next day is off.

They decide on the aquarium. No point in money if you never spend it.

Outside the gate they wait. They’re good at waiting. Pretending not to see, and pretending not to hear, and pretending after that they don’t remember. The crowd begins to move, and they both are caught pretending. They are a pair of boulders, and the line flows past around them.

“Eyyo; éggheads!”

Fins and frills and tunnels and domes. Light and dark and weightlessness. Some eyes open, some eyes closed. Some hands holding others. Here a flock of children, it’s a field trip probably. A line of goslings strung behind their overweight mother. A tiny boy with light-up shoes begins to lag behind. His hand against the glass, the widest eyes.

I: Mass

And there's a ray. Pressed flat against the glass, and so much larger here in person than they seem behind a screen.

The slit of mouth is menacing.

The boy begins quite suddenly to cry.

His girlfriend crouches down next to the boy. She puts lips to the glass, and the black-hole mouth, and she gives it a sloppy kiss. She licks it, licks it, up and down, until her breath is caught and then she's forced away by laughing. He and the boy join in as well; they laugh a three-part harmony. Echoes here; cathedral and a choir.

A guard is shouting.

He flips the guard off, and that's the end of it. And those tickets were fucking expensive too.

Well. Whatever.

That night she holds his hand very tightly, and does not relax until they fall asleep.

It takes hours.

. . .

A woman, looks like maybe 45. She has him take a bath and then spends three and one half hours playing dress-up, has a thing for guys in suits. Took some when her ex-husband left, and since has gotten more. Hanging in the closet. Unworn.

So this is how mothballs smell.

She talks about her son, the little bitch, and how he never calls, not since he ran off with that *arab* girl. These kids have zero sympathy for who they leave behind. Hide away in your computers and your made-up politics. Your never-having-worked-a-day-and-not-about-to-start.

She is alone here, in this cave of room.

He doesn't really hear her, staring in the mirror now. Left turn, right turn, chin up, there. And he looks good in a suit. Professional.

He eats her out and does not gag. He walks out with a shitload.

She lets him keep the one that he is wearing.

. . .

Keep a little plant. Sprouting on the sill. Habanero, orange and full. This is a gift.

• • •

Time.

Time enough for a real vacation. They car-pool to the redwoods and go backpack-camping. Lots of pictures, lots of smiles, crinkled eyes, real.

The mist between the trees here though, it's really kind of perfect. They walk along the fallen trunks. Careful! Don't get wet! A bridge across an ocean made from mist and leafy ferns.

She spots a deer, swimming in the distance. He spots a tiny building, and they go to look more closely. A plaque: it says that this belonged to somebody or other, and that it was used to do some kind of thing.

She wants to set up camp inside, but there's no fucking way. A back-packer would see, or else like a park ranger, and she is *not* getting them fucking kicked out again.

It is a good day. They are happy.

• • •

Sometimes this is how it goes:

• • •

On his work phone.

A message from a former regular: "Yo haha, you busy later?"

It's unexpected; the man's been silent for a year or more.

When he gets there, he can see that something's different. Inside the house, a bookshelf gone, a lamp and a recliner. And now here's this giant-ass t.v., right in the middle of the living room wall, and the dude *hated* t.v., like he always was complaining how his wife would just sit there, every day, watching baking shows and *Extra* and *The View* and *Dr. Oz* and never followed him on politics or science or on anything, just shut away, this glow-box microcosm.

I: Mass

It follows in the custom way. One, two, three. And afterwards the man collapses on the couch and grabs for the remote.

He plays some kind of documentary about penguins, all these penguins fucking freezing out there, and they do it every winter.

It's insane.

The man's not really watching.

He's staring at a corner, where the walls meet ceiling.

He probably is not ok, the man. He's not ok, the man.

His wife's been dead for eight months now, stupid car, stupid life.

Stupid everything.

Stupid.

He holds the man until the worst is over.

He stays the night.

His girlfriend is pissed. They were supposed to clean the bathrooms yesterday.

• • •

And after that? More. More days.

More time.

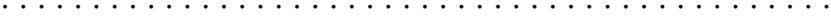
It goes around.

Sometimes they are nice. Sometimes they are not so nice.

Mostly they're just lonely.

Another fucking day, another fucking day.

Another fucking day.



4

TalOS

TalOS/SH-0 3.0.1 (μπρούντζος)

login: apaitijo

passwd:

Last login: epoch -141924310056

up 373089 days, 15:47, 1 user, load average: 0.66, 0.68, 0.66

```
% ls /usr/src/sys
```

```
config daemon dev kernel stdlib user
```

```
% cat /usr/src/sys/daemon/nav/signo.c
```

```
[...]
```

```
struct boulder_s {  
    unsigned diametre;  
    unsigned density;  
};
```

```
static struct boulder_s*  
boulder_locate(double lat, double lon)  
{  
    [...]  
}
```

```

/* TODO: adjust for variations in height */
static struct boulder_s*
boulder_hurl(struct boulder_s *b, double slat, double slon,
             double dlat, double dlon)
{
    [...]
}

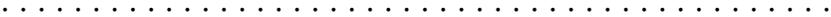
static void
catch(int signo)
{
    struct boulder_s *b;

    switch (signo) {
        [...]
        case SIGINTRUDER:
            b = boulder_locate(curlat, curlon);
            /* FIXME: integrate target locator */
            boulder_hurl(b, curlat, curlon,
                        ((double)rand()) / RAND_MAX,
                        ((double)rand()) / RAND_MAX
            );
            break;
        default:
            freeze(3600);
    }
}

% tail /var/log/debug.log.0
total steps: 65252
total steps: 65352
total steps: 65452
total steps: 16
total steps: 116
total steps: 216
total steps: 316
total steps: 416
Warning: unrecognised entity at +0.000536, +0.000120
total steps: 516

% sudo
vsh: command not found: sudo

```

5

no one's stunning beauty

eyes, a frightened animal, but softened at the edges
ask her what it is she's doing here
will not wear a bathing suit, no matter who is asking
five-foot-three and seventeen years old
on her upper arm, a cyst is growing
new semester, transfers to your school
says the shelter has a curfew, nine-o'clock at night
father used to beat her and then disappear for weeks
"i am very grateful"
three teeth missing, one more cracked, and whistles very faintly
laugh like water; makes you feel alive
not quite used to english yet, but learning very quickly
no one's stunning beauty, but you think she might be yours

“yes, it hurt a lot”

“i would love to have a bowl, but when is a good time?”

eats and puts on fifteen pounds. like a kind of magic

skin so dark you ask her if she's cold

curve there in her neck, where just before there had been nothing

seeing this, it feels like you're a god

things that you forgot about yourself. use of want

oxytocin hidden in your eyes

every day, and on the train; every day is warm

the abdomen, just east and down; your body whistles back

.....

相
手
愛
っ
て
手
で
渡
す
こ
と

.....

6

sand

a beach

a northern beach

*a sky that's cold and a sea that's dark and a slope that's drawn
in green*

a wind so chill it fills your head; you hurt from inside out

the sand beneath your feet is somehow soft and firm at once, and you begin to think of cornstarch and slime and green food-colouring, and the museum and that girl who is always so rude, and you put the slime you'd made in her hair and she screamed and then you felt bad and you cried too, and that was really embarrassing and you hate crying in front of people, especially if the person is ms. lawrence, and now you can probably never go to her science class again because you messed up and ruined it for yourself like you always do with everything ever always stupid stupid stupid stupid

you kick at an old crab shell, and it goes *plop* into the surf. it feels good to kick at something. release of tension head to foot and out into the world. you will build a tower and kick at it, and then you'll feel ok. you crouch down on your bare toes, noticing the feeling of the skin along your soles pulled taught. it's an odd sort of "unused" feeling. you wonder if feet can get wrinkly when you're old. you wonder if you will get old.

you notice something moving in the sand. it sort of "bubbles up", or maybe that's not the right word. little tunnels of air that seem to be moving, but when you look more closely you can't say you're sure they do. you have

no vocabulary to describe this sensation, and so it washes through you in a wave of shapeless thoughts.

in this way you are lost for a while.

. . .

*the wise man builds a house of sand
the wise man has no choice
the wise man shapes it carefully
and prays for no more rain*

sand.

sand sand.

our world is made of sand

there is sand in our hair and sand in our eyes and sand between our toes
les solitaires. sandy skies. sand where nothing grows

we wake each morning on a bed of sand

and lay each evening on a bed of sand

we spend our afternoons taking long, sandy walks

and also there are crabs sometimes

my brother says the crabs are what will get us out of here. he says “they came from somewhere right?, and so then they’ll have to go back somehow too. or even if they don’t then we can still look out for new ones and find out where they’re coming from. of course that way would take longer though, and we don’t have too much time because of nutrient deficiencies etcetera”

he is a genius, my brother. it was him who built our house, using trial and error to find just the right order to use for wetting it and drying it and packing it and placing so “the end result is something that is structurally sound, provided we don’t brush up against the walls too often”

i try my best not to brush the walls, but sometimes it happens anyways and little clumps of sand break away and trickle down, and so what then if the ceiling really *does* end up collapsing, because then he would know and it would all have been my fault, and i make things hard enough for him already just because i’m so small and so useless and i’m always causing problems and so if i made the roof fall down i don’t know what i’d do

I: Mass

he calls me little man. i hate it. not because he says it, because it's true and that's fine, but just because that it is true, and i hate being so small and useless and not even being able to catch the crabs that we're always eating so my brother has to do it even though he should be spending that time on figuring out how we can get out of here and it should be my job to make the food and take care of the house because even someone dumb should be able to do that much, right?

but here i am all day, digging holes in the sand.

i only cry at night, when i'm sure that he's asleep.

that much...

at least...

. . .

six

eyes for sneering,

hands for digging,

legs for walking away

it's difficult to breathe. the pressure on your chest seems to build up with every breath. your lungs expand and push wet sand away in sheets, and every time that they contract the sheets fall back and crumble at the edges, and you feel like you've been shrink-wrapped in the wrap your mother uses on sandwiches you take for lunch to school, and that let everybody know that you can't pay for cafeteria, but it's not even that your family's poor, but that your mother does the shopping and your father has the money and he never wants to spend it so you wear your brother's old clothes that are way too big, but it's ok

you still can see the boys, far off now along the beach and kicking water at each other from the waves as they roll in. you are buried feet-down in the sand, and the sand is brown and wet so that it looks smooth and polished, but it turns gritty when you run your fingers across it, leaving finger-lines.

the group of boys, so small now you can crush them between two fingers, duck into a cave that was hollowed out by waves and waves and waves and thousands of years of waves, turning rocks into the sand that you are

buried in right here and now
and the tide is coming in
you begin to dig

. . .

you are still young and not yet strong, and the climb up the trail has left you winded, leaning on your knees. you remember, though, that your soccer coach said that it's wrong to lean when you are trying to catch your breath, and that it's better to stand straight up and to put your hands behind your head, because that way your lungs can open up more easily
and, when you straighten up, you see the ocean. and you forget yourself
you forget your soccer coach, and you forget that you are cold. you forget your poison ivy rash and that your grandmother is making blackberry pies from the blackberries you picked
and the sun is sinking lower in the sky
and you forget your grandmother
and the ocean is big. very big
and you are small. you are very small





7

i am(not)

i am an accessory

OR

i am a toy

OR

i am a burden

OR

i am the pain in your head that will not go away and the waitress who drops her platter

i am the lights that grow brighter when you turn off the switch

i am there when you want me

i am there when you don't

i am there when you open your closet and weeks worth of laundry spills out on your floor



I: Mass

i am something you keep in your pocket, or else i fit neatly on your keychain.
i keep the time and tell it for you when you least want to know

i am the line of scum left in your sink after a year of brushing teeth and
brushing hair

i am easy to use and easy to use and i am easy to use

i overflow your toilet, and then i call up your parents and tell them to come
over so i can wait in the closet and watch their expressions when they open
the door and step inside and then they realise what they've stepped in

i am your mother also, and remind you to say please

i am always looking to please, and i am always looking to please

i am always looking. please.

please.

i am(not)



I: Mass

i am something that comes with your meal

i am something from your past

i am something to do with the house

i am something that fills your dreams when you wish you were dreaming of
her

i am none of these things, i know, i am none of these things

i am(not)



8

When the Stars came Down from the Sky

It was not so long ago now, that the man came to the valley. Yet hardly any still remember it. So changed have things become.

It was a day in summer, and the man walked through the desert. And old man death was trailing on behind. Old death, he follows everybody, rattle bones and wicked smile, but some he follows closely and some further off away. And some so near they hear his joints go *crack clack shhk*, and so they know their time is short, and are afraid.

The man been walking for some days, and now his life was spreading thin. His skin was taut and there were cholla biting at his shins, and all the water-life was breathing out of him. His shuffle-on was stagger, left and right. His lip had split but long since ceased to bleed. His blister-feet had shoes with holes to let the burning out, and they went fizzle, pop, and dry, like that last-millimetre pot set on the fire. The desert was not his home.

Exhausted, he fell down into a patch of shade and lay there as a stone.

When he woke again the sun was gone, and earth was lit by starlight and the sliver of a moon. The stars were wheeling past, and to the man it seemed they called to him, to leave his earth-caught body and come join them in their dance. But, when he tried to reach for them, he found his limbs where tightly bound. Grandfather Ironwood had hold of him.

He was frightened.

When the Stars came Down from the Sky

The man began to struggle, pulling this way, pulling that, until he finds himself more tightly bound than when he had begun. Like the Gila monster, when Grandfather Ironwood has got a hold of something he will keep it jealously, a binding brittle-fingered snare. His hands are strong and white and unforgiving, spiny groping digits grasping in the wind. And so it came, after a while, the man expended all his energy, and, beaten, laid back down to rest.

He woke again some hours on and felt in him a thirst like nothing he had ever known. It started in his head, too large and flat and tongue a plank of wood, and spread down through his body as an emptiness and shivering and lead, and he was waiting for the end.

• • •

Eyes glowing in the dark. A rustle-shift and cackle-call.

“Hoh, shiverbones!”, Coyote says. “I see you’ve gotten stuck I see! A *nasty* bit of work that tree can be. He hates it so, you see, we all go on about his age, and him still wearing pretty-pink in May and tries to look so innocent, HaHa, well I say have some decency now, act your age!”. Each laugh his bristle-fur stands out on end as exclamation, and like that he’s on in gossiping like we all know he’s wont to do, that chatter-box and tale.

Meantime the man is weakening, his fingers going numb, and tries to ask for help but he’s so dry the words just will not come, and so he mouths them like a catfish up on land.

“Say boy, you’re looking pretty poorly, say I know, how’s this? Since I can see some promise in you so say how’s about a deal, and then I’ll take you somewhere nice and safe for water food and rest and all, and all you’ve got to do is make me just a little promise, just a promise that, from now and on, however changed the world should turn, you’ll always keep a place for me where I can live-and-be, say how’s that sound, it’s simple, right? Say now yes, doesn’t that sound fair?”.

The man, he makes a sound, but whether yes or no, well, it’s of no accord because Coyote’s on him, delicate and grace, and disentangling and pulls him out and back away to home, and there he’ll nurse the man some days and each the man will get a little strength and fire back, because you

I: Mass

see the desert, that's the way it stays so hot, it takes the fire out of you.

And time begins to pass.

• • •

Well now, let's skip ahead away and tell you bout the day the man is sitting up the mountainside and watching daylight come. And it's a day in spring, the palo verde snowing yellow sheets, and all the quail are pairing off in teams of two.

And the man is feeling strong and fresh but pretty lonesome too, thinking yes, he needs a friend who is a wife, and a wife who is a friend. And so he goes and ask Coyote tell him what to do.

"Well boy, I've got to say I feel a little miffed, you know, I mean I thought we had a deal was on between us you and me, and now you want to bring a girl around, well girls are only trouble and you're better off without them hear, that's what I've got to say."

The man let's out a si—

"But well, if you're so keen then I suppose it can't be helped, so then just leave it all to me and I'll be back in just a shake."

Coyote digs and rummages way back inside his den, where all those "gifts" he's picked up there and here are lain and mouldering, and what he fetches out and places proudly into the man's hand, it's just a single kern of corn gone shrunken-dry and crimson-blue. And then he tells him what to do.

And so the man heads out a barren spot and digs just down a ways, down by an empty riverbed that's cracking plates and ossified, and there he plants his seed and waits for summer rain. And come the rain he prays and makes a wish and whistles out a tune, and when he falls asleep it's with a mellow face and creeping smile, and out the morning comes as quickly as it's gone, one two.

"Good morning", says the woman, and a pretty one at that, a ramrod build, a dozen wiggle-toes, and cheeks a healthy green, and here's the man all floundering and hmmm and hah and like a sheep, and fore he says a word she's up and running off to see the world.

She's back by night and talks through til the next.

When the Stars came Down from the Sky

• • •

Well now, so what can two birds do when young and them all new in love, and soon enough the valley's swarming out in scuttle kids. And here's the clever wife has built out houses for the kids to live in, and the man he's dug out channels so to water all their crops, and there's a busy-bustle village coming on. And with each house that's built the desert shrinks away a ways, swapped out by people stomping flattened feet on flattened roads.

Well Coyote, if he's miffed before you bet he's grumpy now, and so one day he waits the man goes out to working in the field, and there he sneaks up on behind him and he lets a little yip and says "Say look here boy, now what's the deal, I thought we had a deal, say boy just yesterday some kid of yours comes crawling in my den and won't stop nattering and dancing and 'tell me a story, please' and then he hurts his knee and needs a nap and asking for a snack, and boy I'm not your nanny, I'm Coyote, hear? I ain't nobody's joe."

And the man thinks 'boy' a bit too much cause he's a father now, and by the time the woman catches them they're near on up to blows. And try she does with her cajoling but they won't hear none of it and so the end they call it splits and off Coyote goes, way deep into the hills.

And that is where he stays.

• • •

So then, you know the rest of it, I hardly have to tell.

Just time. Just time goes by, you know?

The sun keeps spinning, summer rain, a dried out winter cold, and every year the village spreads a bit, is just a little wider, and the sky goes blurred with dirty haze like city skies will do, and here's the city, and its city-dweller crew.

The man and woman, they're long gone, no point to bother asking; in a city there's no memory goes back beyond a year, just people passing through won't even buy your china souvenir, no value here.

• • •

I heard.

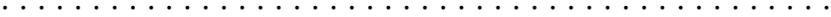
I heard the other day somebody saw him out, they said, Coyote wandering the streets and like a scraggle-coated ghost. And they said he'd run a rabbit down, or maybe it's a cat, and he's gone wandering the space between the walls.

Would be a labyrinth it wasn't such a grid.

Somebody saw, I heard he's shivering each time he steps into the night these days, because it's gone so bright, the moon-lack half-day glow, and all these busy little people and their busy little lives and they're so busy that they never stop to sleep, their hell of endless feature-creep.

And now he'll give a little yip sometimes, to let them know he's there, and sometimes people stop and listen, but they never really hear. And he's digging through the garbage all gets stuck up in his hair, down in-between the tampon wrappers and his head a beer-can smear. And the summer turns to winter but there's not much change to show, and all the children, they grow up without the concept of a "snow". And here comes the night again, but soon it reaches a plateau, as one by one the stars go out above and come back on below.

When the Stars came Down from the Sky



9

Peninsula

I met a god, the other day. Down by the quay.

He said: "Hello".

I said: "Hello".

He said: "Hello".

I said: "Right, Hello".

"He looks a bit down", I thought.

His feet were in the water, and he kicked them back and forth. Ripples spread across the lake and disappeared.

I sat down beside him and pulled out my lunch, last night's cold egg-plant parmesan. I offered him a spoon.

We ate.

I noticed in a while that he was watching something. He pointed and I saw a crayfish, ambling along the lake bed. It paused and started picking at a bit of old wrapper.

He shooed it away with a foot.

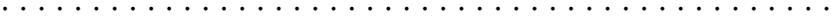
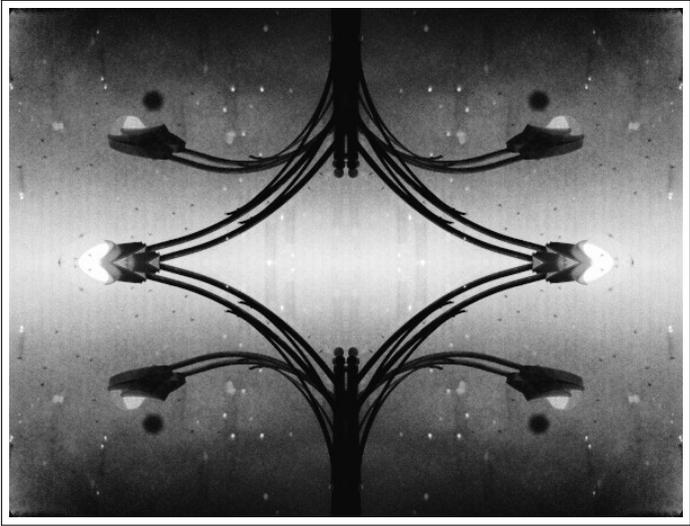
Then he said: "Good Bye".

And I said: "Right, I've got to get back to work".

And he said: "Good Bye".

And I said: "Good Bye".

I brushed myself down and left.



.....

Part II
Energy

.....

I

Prospecting

From his cupboard vantage point, the boy sees the following:

There is an oak table.

It is enormous.

On its enormous, unstained surface there are two plates set, both covered in thick dust, like somebody was going to eat dust for dinner. Maybe it is a house that belonged to a family of vacuum-cleaners. The boy imagines a vacuum-cleaner family. He imagines a mother-vacuum and a father-vacuum and a little baby-vacuum. The baby-vacuum clings to its parents bodies with its baby-vacuum-hose, making baby-vacuum-sucking-noises. It is a bad habit.

The vacuum family has been gone for a long time. Or maybe they have given up vacuuming. The civilised family has given up vacuuming. They have decided to dedicate themselves to more noble pursuits.

It is very, very dirty.

In the corner there is a spider. It is disgusting. It is the kind of a spider that gets put into scary spider movies, like *Arachnophobia*, in order to scare an audience. It is the kind of thing the boy sees in his nightmares.

It is eating some kind of a large winged insect, twining around it, slowly slowly, until all that is left is a ball of spider silk hanging from a thread, like some kind of a piñata.

The boy has seen a piñata. Recently, just the other day. The other day, he has gone uninvited to Susan Campbell's birthday party, and he

has sat in a bush and watched while the children have tortured a colourful llama there, beating it with sticks until it bleeds in rainbow-coloured drops of blood. Sucking those drops into too eager mouths.

Nobody has seen him.

No one sees him.

He sees.

He sees, there is a stick here too. The stick is propped up by the door at a suggestive angle. It suggests that the boy go hiking, dragging a heavy bag up a mountain while his mother begins to fall behind him, slowly slowly, until finally he is walking on his own. He will set out into the wilderness and search for a Fine Plot of Land. He will stake his claim and build a cabin there. Near his cabin he will grow cherry trees and creeping vines on trellises. He will keep a big, furry dog, and will have a cellar full of wine.

He will exit the cupboard and walk behind the house to pee.

Behind the house, the boy sees a hole in the ground.

It is a badger hole.

While he pees, the boy wonders if there is a badger inside. The boy is a badger. He eats insects and grubs and earthworms. He Protects his Territory.

The boy finishes peeing and goes back inside.

Near the door, there is a coat-hanger, and it is covered in old people's clothing. The people are probably dead. The boy hangs his coat with the other coats, side by side, so that they can get to know each other. The boy says "I'm home!" to the empty room, and he waits for a reply.

II: Energy





2

朝露～斜陽の間に

私
の
言
う
こ
と
、
誰
に
も
伝
え
な
い
誰
も
聴
き
た
く
な
い
価
値
が
な
い
か
も
も
う
眠
れ
た
い
千
年
間
の
眠
り
夢
を
見
な
い
眠
り
真
っ
黒
い
の

you say: “that’s not sleep; that’s his brother”

i think: “if they are siblings, does that mean they had a home?”

does that mean there was a time they weren’t alone?”

. . .

relative positions

relatives position

when we were small, father made a habit of napping in the afternoon. and sometimes he would drag us in with him

we hated it

he'd fall asleep so quickly and would spend the whole time snoring, and
we'd lay in there for hours drawing lines into the ceiling, feeling trapped

that is to say, alone

just sometimes, though, he would tell us stories

they'd wander out from nothing and, eventually, would dissipate mid-stride
into a nothing-coloured mist

castle moats and monsters in the attic. and we'd hang on every word

to play the roles of ears and mouth, that bed became a stage. lift up the
blocking from behind to lay it out in front, and we'd go on and on and on
and we were where we where we were. and there was no thought of when
because a we does not have time. only spaces, drawn from Me to You to P
to Q to Me

we understood our distances, and in them there was peace

it was the closest that we've ever been

• • •

there are so many beautiful things here, in this space between the lines

wish so much could be able to share them

wish so much to not lose sight of it, this warmth

barely brush against it sometimes. holding fingers out

i remember it was there.

i was maybe 6 years old, and was playing in the sand. i made towers and
rivers and bridges reinforced with little twigs.

sometimes the floods would come and pieces would be washed away.

mostly the people there would lay in fields of flowers, baking in the sun

II: Energy

everything was so big, and i was always looking upwards. a sky so clear you see for miles, and it's no different from an arm away

when clouds do come they're always something thin, something painted. they have no bodies of their own, just streaks of brightness sewn into the air

i've been here now for hours, and the birds are out again. a train of quail teeters out along the far end of the grass. the singing of the doves up in the tree above me long since lost its meaning and became a nothingness

nothing itself would be the odd one out

in this space, nothing changes. and because there is no time, there is time. the spacing rearranges. but because there is no rhyme, there is rhyme.

. . .

"i'm standing in a garden"

ってさあ、 maybe he's more within that story than i'd given credit for, once the lines are smoothed

Sappy Mr. Lem

that, to the man, the woman represents a sense of home. a being he can know and so a nothing he can be; me to we

when i'm picturing this state, it's often fields of wheat that come to mind or else it could be very tall grass

a public that is private; hide beneath the line and you can disappear

but breathing the same air

breath and breadth and warmth and golden sun and down here with the insects there's a cool that seeps in through your back and makes you feel two parts of something whole

朝露～斜陽の間に

it breaks the seal that separates by time a set of entities
here i am yours, and You Are Not Alone



3

UNORTHODOX

Imagine: an enemy force encroaches upon an encampment. This enemy force outclasses the forces within the encampment, such that there can be no hope of victory. In order to minimise their losses, however, the enemy has chosen to attack in secret at a fixed future point in time.

Now, I, master spy that I am, have discovered the details of this plot, including, most importantly, the time of the attack. In light of this information, how might I best respond?

*Say I send
Silent sirens,
Sprinkle surreptitiously.*

*Should I share
Such a signal
Since to share should surely see*

*Some I save,
Sheltered sovereigns,
Sending subterfugally*

*Shut-out souls
Severed someones,
Sold-out sacrificially?*

But it would seem my hand is forced, no? For, if I tell no one, all will surely die. But, if I tell everyone, all will die regardless, as a full evacuation could not possibly go unnoticed. My only hope of saving any, thus, is in a selective revelation. Given these constraints, who ought my recipients to be?

...moments pass...

...

...a hand is raised

Yes?

i don't know, it just seems really wrong to get all choosy about it, you know?

*since to share
such a sign
spreading so selectively*

*seems a sin,
seeking out
some superiority*

*spectral sects?
subdivisions?
symptoms of a savagery*

*surely, sir,
such a stroke
sinks to subhumanity*

And what, then, would you propose as an alternative?

well... i think really you should just tell everyone, you know?

. . .

"...so?"

"so he gave my paper a C- and told me to stand outside."

4

geodesic convergence

...and the accompanying descent into timelessness

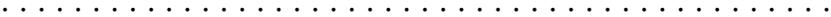


Figure 4.1: an artist's depiction of convergent geodesics in a 2-dimensional space

the implication being that “horse-shoe” is inadequate, and that a more complete picture contains an infinite or near-infinite number of possible paths, each of which begins from a single point and terminates at a single other point, there effectively then being a coordinate of self-awareness, the convergence at that far point representing its perfect lack, a point in this defined space of personhood where the second, orthogonal coordinate of personal freedom to self-actualise is reduced to its infinitely small limit and ceases at all to exist, a point close to which even the two subjects above¹, near as far apart in that second, orthogonal co-

ordinate as is possible to be, are still able to approach and understand one another well, or rather at least to mirror one another, given the lack of awareness and its implied inhibition of such understanding

.....
¹ see *The Pale King*, §22 pg. 211-213 (the paragraph beginning in “Anyhow, all this”)



II: Energy

the extension being that the opposing point of convergence, which has the same inhibiting effect on wiggle-room in the orthogonal, then represents states of hyper-awareness like those chased after by some buddhists, to every moment be so completely encompassed within concentric bubbles of awareness, and awareness of awareness and so on, as to be equally lacking in the ability to self actualise. to define so thoroughly and precisely the self's position that momentum is lost entirely

and that, even in his own writing, he admits to and gives a detailed account of this true-opposite point of convergence, and that, in all likelihood, this was the real cause of his suicide, this debilitating hyper-awareness that could not be well turned off, a by-product of a principled retreat from the far terminus, at which end all his society was converging, while being powerless to turn and see where he himself was heading, or rather conversely, of course aware of his own ultimate destination, but too caught in suppressing the subconscious instinctive reluctance to confront it

not to say that "new sincerity" is something meaningless. only that, in carrying the brunt of it alone, in that hope to save a few there at the far end, he flew too close to the self and could not get out again

the final piece of this model is its prediction for the way that positions on this length-wise coordinate map onto the viewing and treatment of others. that the few, there near the end of no awareness, grow increasingly irritated with one another, forced to come into contact with more beings like themselves and so to, in some sense, be faced with what amounts to being a mirror. and so to escape the pain of this revealing of their natures, they dive further into self denial, nearer to the singularity

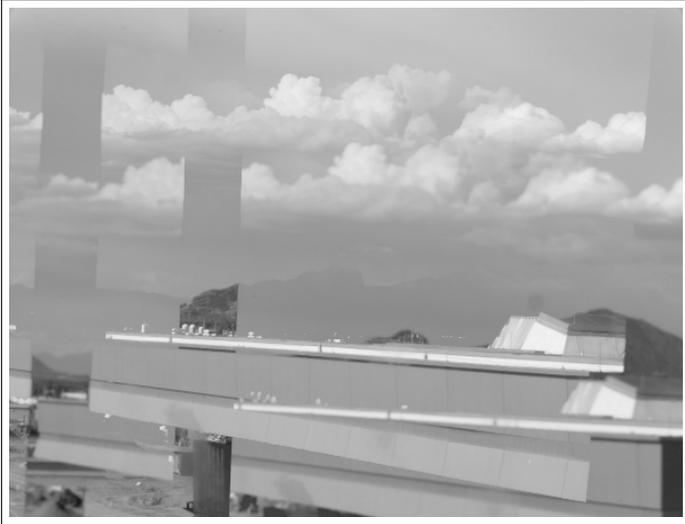
whereas those nearing the antipole are drawn to projecting themselves onto others, even those entirely disparate, in hope of some reprieve from self beneath that small oblivion of love

and, even in this hope, being driven to a point of greater self-awareness of the selfishness and unreality innate in such outward projection

so far from ourselves, what can save us?

OR

so safe from ourselves, what can find us?



5

C₆H_{eight}O₇

i picked an orange for my mother
but she didn't eat it

she had popcorn today and feels very nauseous and bloated, like a filled-up
ballon of warm, salty water, and she needs to sit quietly for a while
and so we sit quietly for a while, and then she turns on jeopardy!, with alex
trebek

i think he's in the hospital, alex trebek

he had some kind of an accident, or maybe it was a stroke. i can't remember
which, but it seems like maybe from now on he won't film any more
episodes of jeopardy!, and if that happens would they keep on filming
anyways? i don't think anyone else could replace him, so maybe that
would be the end, but they'd keep showing reruns, and then in 5 or
10 years after alex trebek has died it will be acceptable for them to
synthesise a hologram using a neural network that they've trained on
videos of alex trebek acting as the host on jeopardy!, with different
training sets for all the different stages of his life and all the styles for
the show. and that way they can have multiple versions of jeopardy!
that all can air at once.

i doubt, though, if they'd ever make a hologram for pat sajak, because he's
kind of condescending and rude.

. . .

my mother couldn't eat the orange.
and so she gave it back to me, and she told me i should eat it
it was sweet, but not as sweet as i had thought that it would be
it was very hard to peel
i picked the orange earlier that day, while i was walking in the wash that
runs behind the park and right up to the mountain
and i sat there for a while, down in the wider section of the wash, right be-
hind the tennis coarts and where the path dips down. it had rained
just recently, and plants and little trees had sprung up and were ev-
erywhere in bloom
i took pictures

.....



.....

II: Energy

. . .

riding the bus home earlier today

it was a little bit warm, and the driver switched on the air conditioner,
which sounded like this:

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

except it had a bit of a throaty, vibrating trill, because the engine was vibrating everything.

it made me think of ХҮН ХҮРТҮ, those throat-singers.

and it made me think of how i can't roll my Rs, and that made me feel disappointed in myself, and in all the things i'm not, and all the things i ought to be but never will.

we drove along the street, where i used to walk sometimes. past the high-school, and then downwards underneath the freeway bridge.

the path under the bridge has got a hedge along one side that makes it difficult to walk. the boys on skateboards always want to ride on through, and there's no way to step aside because the hedge is there.

a trapped feeling

the school kids all get on the bus together, and they box me in with bodies and with words

. . .

i am riding home on the bus

the 16 year old girl here next to me has something written on her wrist

it says P . U . K . U . , in loopy, faded ballpoint pen

i don't know what that means

she has faux holes in her jeans. they were prepared that way in a factory, with fabric there behind and thick, white strings strung across in front.

the girl is genetically east-mid north-shore mediterranean. she looks just like a girl i met once while in macedonia. her friend looks maybe like her great, great⁸ grandparents lived on the ivory coast, before it was called the ivory coast

before it had a name

the not-really-mediterranean girl has piercing grey-blue eyes and very large,
brown moles on her neck
it is hard to look away
and just behind her now is the “BrakeMasters”, where a too-drunk man got
off the bus and then peed on the sign
it’s not a pleasant experience, being peed on

• • •

.....



.....

i wonder what it’s like, to be shot
“a lot of people say ‘troubled’ and i mean call it what it is; that’s a terrorist”
that was three days ago
peanut gallery

II: Energy

i vomitted a bit, and then i left the house and walked for a while, down the
wash
i'd never walked that far before
i reached into somebody's yard and took two oranges from their tree
i ate them both, because my mother couldn't eat the second one. it tasted a
little like vomit. acidic
it tasted like the opposite of eating

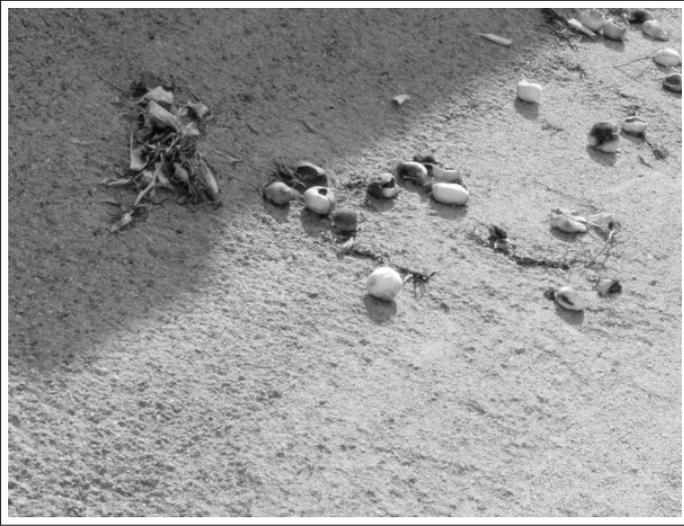
. . .

that day i worked for 13 hours at the diner
it was a "fish-fry friday", so i worked from 8 to 21
and it was very dark when i got off, and i was very tired, so i laid there
in the grass, just for a while, and almost fell asleep but then was back
awake again and very warm and very wet and smelling something *pun-*
gent, and i laid there very still so that the guy who was peeing on me
wouldn't notice what had happened, but of course then he saw, and he
was very embarrassed, and i was very embarrassed, and walking home
was very wet and very uncomfortable, and i slipped inside through the
back door and ran to the wash and took a cold shower and it felt kind
of like time had stopped

. . .

it's not a nice experience, being peed on
it somehow makes you lose the track of who it is you are
and so that was the rule with guys: "no peeing"
that's what i would have told them, but nobody ever asked

.....



.....

II: Energy





6

Preoccupation / Postoccupation

He is. Standing.

He stands.

He is a person who stands.

He is standing at the back of the room, and the table before him is strewn with The Merchandise.

He is the person in charge of The Merchandise, which means that it is his job to (officially) assist customers in their purchase of The Merchandise and to (unofficially) ensure that no article of The Merchandise may fall into unworthy hands. That is to say, a somebody who hasn't got the Cash. That is to say, a someone who cannot afford To Dream.

He is perhaps redundant, then, at this particular event, given the clientele. As evidenced by outfits and demeanours, all the people here can well afford To Dream.

He is the only one here who cannot afford To Dream.

He does not feel at ease, here around this sort of crowd.

He shifts his weight, left leg to right, and then right leg to left.

He checks his hands. They are shaking and will not stop shaking. It is a mutiny.

He scans the room of aliens before him and suddenly feels very small, here inside this body of a Fully-Grown Man, especially chosen for this job because of this body's Fully-Grown Man Status.

He is not a Fully-Grown Man.

He is a boy.

He is a boy, and that boy, afforded or not, has chosen To Dream.

The boy does not care, To Dream the things that the Very Important Woman has declared that it is right for him To Dream.

The boy dreams of Cowboys and Indians.

The boy dreams of owning a car, a shining red convertible, with a white stripe run down one side and a Full Leather Interior

The boy dreams of the time, still a distant future, when the boy will become a Fully-Grown Man and park his new convertible in the driveway of a Fully-Grown Woman.

The boy and the Fully-Grown Woman will drive together to the state fair and have a Lovely Evening Together, with candy apples and candy floss and peanuts and licorice and italian sodas and kettle corn and chocolate malts and chocolate bananas and pizza-by-the-slice.

The boy and the Fully-Grown Woman will ride the bumper-cars together, and the boy will gallantly protect her from the other boys.

He is startled to alertness by a sudden-onset silence.

()

The Very Important Woman has finished speaking, and the crowd is now all wearing their Thoughtfulness Faces, waiting to stand and move until an appropriate Thoughtfulness Period passes.

He checks his watch.

He has no watch.

He is a person who has no watch.

He has no watch because a watch is not relevant to his job, the job-description for which is to “stand at a table with The Merchandise and try your best to look like a Fully-Grown Man”, which is how the interview had gone, with the added surprise of being kicked in the gut. And

He had protected The Merchandise.

He had passed and flown his colours.

The Very Important Woman had been impressed.

II: Energy

The Very Important Woman had been so impressed she hired him on the spot and gave him the title and position Personal Bodyguard. They then had gone on tour, and tour so far had lasted already for six months. In that six months there had been several “incidents” for him to Take Care Of, including one (officially) attempted murder or (unofficially) accidental collision with a Drunk Homeless Man.

The Drunk Homeless Man was no longer homeless.

The Drunk Homeless Man was no longer a man.

He is worried now, though.

He is worried now because Something in the feel of this crowd is intimidating him.

Something does not know common sense.

Something may pose a threat to The Merchandise.

Something is too accustomed To Dreaming.

He is proven soon correct.

The Disoriented Man detaches from the crowd and wanders over to The Table with The Merchandise.

The Disoriented Man asks “How much?”, pointing at the The Book.

The Book contains a choice selection of the Very Important Woman’s very most inspiring and popular Words For Bright Futures.

The Book is a National Best-Seller.

The Book is just one reason why the Very Important Woman is a Very Important Woman.

He says “fifteen dollars”, and tries to give the Disoriented Man his very best Imposing Stare.

The Imposing Stare dissuades most Potential Hazards.

The Imposing Stare does not work on the Disoriented Man.

The Disoriented Man is fidgeting now, shifting weight from foot to foot and eyeing The Book, pointedly.

The Disoriented Man glances side to side, so quickly that he must be growing dizzy, before drawing breath and moving in to speak.

The Disoriented Man shouts “My Book is also a Very Important Book!”, and then shouts “I also have Inspiring Words For Bright Futures. Here they are! This is *my* bright future! This is *my* story. I see things! I know things! I am a Very Important Person, so when I talk you all should listen! I have Things To Say! I have a job at a bowling alley, where I serve nachos to teenagers and Bright Futures to Adults. The Bright Futures are served in copper and tin mugs. With each of the Bright Futures, I include a napkin, and on that napkin I write a quote from My Book. The Adults leave my bowling alley with smiles on their faces and Places To Go. I save lives. Then, every night, I go home, and at home I keep a Pet Chihuahua. I feed my Pet Chihuahua every night, and do you know what I feed him? Fingers. My Pet Chihuahua eats human fingers, graciously donated by People Like You. My Pet Chihuahua is feeling very hungry now. Goodnight.”

He sees the gun and moves, but just too slowly.

He is too far removed, trapped here in place behind the table.

He feels a pressure in his chest and slowly slumps backwards, as if sinking into the sort of fluffy bed he thinks he used to have.

The boy is in bed.

The boy is in bed, staring at the ceiling where he has pasted glow-in-the-dark stickers of galaxies and other Far-Away-Places.

The boy reaches up to smooth a sticker, where it is peeling a bit away from the ceiling.

The boy lowers his arm, closes his eyes, and falls asleep.

The Very Important Woman slowly stands behind her bullet-proofed podium.

The Very Important Woman dusts herself off.

The Very Important Woman glances around, marvelling a bit at how very bright and red blood can become when first exposed to air, and wondering how long it takes to darken.

The Very Important Woman walks carefully to the doorway, giving any pools a wide berth, because those shoes were expensive.

The Very Important Woman steps carefully over The Fully-Grown Man and into the night behind Him.

II: Energy





7

fine, thanks

- 1 (one) whole egg
- 1 (one) tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 (one) stick butter (8 tbsp, or 4 oz)
- 1 (one) day in advance, cool completely, then wrap airtight and store at room temperature

- 1 (shit) out of eggs
- 1 (one) mile to the store
- 1 (one) hour after closing, well, you tried
- 1

fine, thanks

- (one) day later

II: Energy

- 1 (one) sec, have i forgotten anything?
 - 1 (two) 3 (four) 5
 - 1 (foot) out the (door), 1 of (thirteen) options
 - E T A (one one)
-
- 1 (ring), 2 (rings), red (things), blue (things)
 - (things being ribbons, streamers, booze things ((cont.)))
 - (... “it’s for you” things, let’s accrue things)
 - (... “they outgrew!” things, “you have too!” things)
 - (... “daniel who?” things, cheap fondue things)
 - (... “where’s the loo?” things, awkward spew things)
 - (... and still several things besides)
 - (... and it’s over very quickly)
 - (... and no one has thought to ask you where you’ve been these last few years, or where it is you’re going now tonight)
 - (... or where it is you’re going now tonight)

fine, thanks

- fun
- (?)
- run
- (!)
- done
- (.) (.)

II: Energy

- 1 (one) thing your kids will love this christmas season
- (excuse me, “holiday” ((yeh you know what the fuck i mean)))
- It’s come to our attention that this tweet was problematic.
- Please join us in our learning moment here.

- We need to do better.

fine, thanks

- 1 (two) 3 (four)
- 1 (two) 3 (four)
- steps (un) til (you're) back (at) your (door)
- knock, (but) no (one's) there (a) ny (more)
- let (your) self (in) side

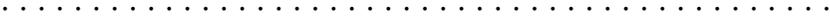
- find (a) place (to) hide
- (in) side

II: Energy

- 1 (one) wonderland (winter)
- 1 (one) million for the “diligent inventor”
- 1 (one) notice for the “overdrafting renter”
- 1
- none

- done

fine, thanks



8

Prospecting, pt.2

And what hits her first is the smell, that sickening mix of mould and rotting animal carcass. A raccoon, possibly. She shuffles to the window, hopping over broken boards and little piles of who-knows-what, and moves to open it—and a massive spider scuttles out, feeling its web disturbed, and she crushes it with a shoe and makes a face at its spider-juices all over her heel.

This smell is really too much, though; how could he have not done anything about it? Because those are definitely his footprints all over the dusty floorboards, and, judging by how many there are, and since it's already been three days, he had to have stayed here for at least one or two.

And yes, see? here's a wrapper for one of those nutty bars he's always eating, even though she's told him not to spend money on those because it's a waste and "you'll end up being fat like me". But of course he doesn't listen to her, nobody does, and these days even she thinks that maybe it's just that she's not worth hearing, and so there's just no use getting worked up about it when that's the way things are, and that she can't convince people to change any more than she can stop her hair from falling out.

Still, even if she is just some lonely old lady who doesn't know anything and who nobody wants, aren't children supposed to listen to what their parents have to say? And that's how it always had been for her at least, as a child, but it's true that everything's different now and that nobody really knows who they are or where they are or why they are or...

And she sees his coat, there on the ugly old rack by the door, and has to laugh, “So like his father”, and something inside her gives away. Twenty-five years of internal scaffolding, propping things up and holding things back and covering everything over, until now that’s all it takes. A slantwise glance. A dismissal. A cough. A word, and it all comes tumbling down.

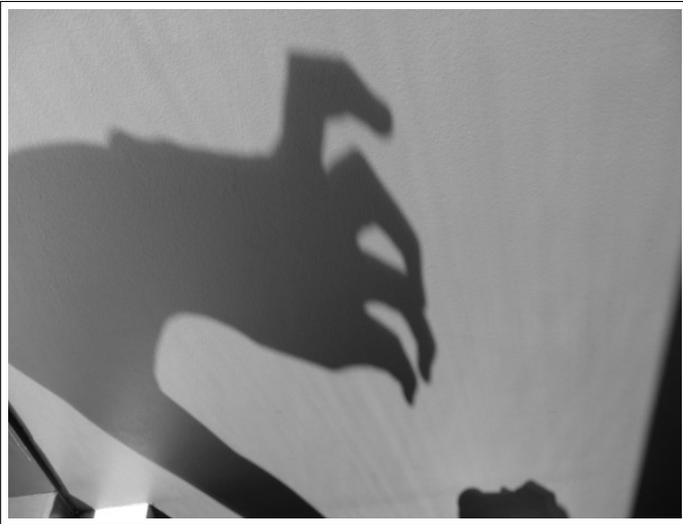
And she clenches her hands into trembling fists, and her tears make craters at her feet. She whispers “I love you...” to the empty room, and she waits for a reply.

.....



II: Energy





II: Energy



.....



.....

9

My Brother is a Strange Animal

My brother is a strange animal.

He sees. He hears. Too much.

He suffers from exposure to abusive use of language, imbued presumption in a turn of phrase. His crest falls at the swallowing of connotative feeling, reduction of a root-word's chromatids.

The quiet is his reserve.

Profanities mundane, but mundanities profane. What exits from those lips, it keeps a calm in its simplicity; a silent reassurance hidden there in every pausing; a soothing in its tone of certainty. A guiding hand to lead one from the maze.

Except for this. Except with this.

Look: isn't it strange?

With this: he worries a lock of hair between two fingers. It means: "I have something to say, except I can't". He holds both knees, arms full extent, becomes a swaying pendulum. At the opening garage, his hackles rise. He slips away so suddenly, for fear of an exposure.

My Brother is a Strange Animal

He looks both ways and locks the door behind him.

• • •

My brother.

A strange animal.

A graceless elegance.

An awkward slender bundling, right angles taught to bend; his fingers are the arbiters of motion. And the rest? It keeps its pace, somehow.

He crouches in tight spaces where a boy ought not to fit, contortions matched to cubby-holes, compacted cornerings. And looking outwards, always, ever outwards.

He walks a loping walk, with feet placed perfectly in line. An *Upwards Downwards Forwards Inwards bounce bounce bounce*. Until the motion blurs; it's simply him.

He chews green-apple bubble gum, chews his jaw to aching. The kind that's near acidic in its 30-seconds sickly sour searing. One day I see him, standing. Perfectly still. Perfectly still. Until the birds forget he's there, continue with their insect genocide.

He eyes them greedily—but for what?

Then, just as the moment's neared a painful settling, he births a neon sphere. And it grows to a BANG and a scattering flutter, an unflattering scutter, till he laughs in surprise, as if someone else has done it.

And, at the sudden violence in it, I join him.

• • •

There is a certain silence in a semblance of a family, though others may be want to see it there. A mother? (gone) A father? (gone) A daughter? (wait

II: Energy

for me!) No, not dead, but gone. Our mother, she was young and “still not ready”; or else that’s how her letter for me read. “I’ve gone and left you to the care of someone more responsible than me. Please, hate me if you like.” But I did not hate her; she simply wasn’t.

And so it was my uncle, bought us, brought us to his flat. Then, satisfied with his purchase, he placed us in a vase and left us there. But unlike his endless stream of blank-eyed trophies, a child is not a thing so fashionably discarded. And so we grew: as pictures on the wall.

Sitters hired: Brenda. Haley. Carley. Jen. Inés. Hannah. Emma. María. Lola. Janette. Sarah. Samantha. Sara. Karin. Chris.

Things consumed: Dry cereal. Wet cereal. Syrup (in small doses). Sliced ham. Ketchup. Ketchup on toast. Sliced ham on toast. Egg on toast. Goldfish crackers. Baby carrots. Peanuts. Pickles. Pretzel sticks. Peanut-butter on pretzel sticks. Sliced cheese. Sliced white bread. Canned black beans. Canned brown beans. Canned peas. Croutons (from the bag). Crumbs.

Things learned: A handful of nuts, when available, is more filling than most anything. Bread, mashed in one’s hand so that it comes out moulded to the shape of that space contained within the clench of a fist, is, in its density, the next best thing. One can learn to flip an egg with nearly any sort of implement. Sealed plastic containers, left to the dark, will grow beautifully delicate spines of white and green moulds. Letting them do so is worth a good smacking, but try it again to feel his hand and this time it will yield only a half-hearted sigh and being locked in one’s room. Eating too much raw cheese can make one’s stomach hurt, but still a hurt less sharp than hunger pangs. Potatoes, turned-green, are dangerous. Save the nuts for last. A tomato is not a vegetable.

What came as instinct: That my brother and I should learn to ignore one another. And so when he grew it was slowly, as a vague impression blurring into being: the ghost-line of an image in the corner of my eye.

• • •

My Brother is a Strange Animal

My brother is a strange animal, but I have made him mine. His thigh still bears the mark of me, a faded half-moon smile. A proof of my younger self. He says the mark is mine and I believe him; there's something of me in the shape of it.

The teeth have gone, but I'm still here.

Once, when we were small, before I knew him, I brought over a friend. A girl from my 6th grade class, secreted in while my uncle slept. She had many beautiful things, and we spent that evening in silver and nylon, scrunchies and pearls.

My brother fled, like a moth from a flame.

We smiled and shook our heads. "Boys", she nods. "Boys", I agree. And that was that.

He hid in the dark and shivered.

. . .

My brother is a strange animal. I learned this when I met him. I woke to find him there: one leg across my hips, hands gently encircling my trachea. I reached to touch his face and felt his tears.

I kissed him and caught his disease.

Before: we lived together as strangers. *Now*: I was his shadow. We never spoke. We rarely speak. There's nothing needs said. *Only this*: He goes and I follow.

He knows and I swallow.

We met again in the morning and I learned his eyes are green. He stood beside my uncle, with his face an empty smile, and he saw me in the framings on the wall: all dimples and sea shells and perfect angles. All that my not-father thought to make of me. All night his voiceless dance, that easy smile, those wandering eyes. "Christ, can't you two sit still?"

II: Energy

No. He was not there.

We were not there.

. . .

It eats at me, this contagion of the skin. How can I get the shape of it? My hands are not my hands. Because he lays there on his back and I count stars in his eyes: here—and here—and here.

Oh god, and his eyes are *green*.

. . .

It's morning. It's cold. I rise and fall to the beat of your heart. The glass is frosted and refracts, draws shifting countries on your spine. I will live there. I have found just the place. The little valley there between your C7 and T1 vertebrae. A river runs the length of it, the product of my tears. I will plant rice fields and wear a ridiculous straw hat, and will hope to not be murdered by a many-banded krait. But if that is my fate, then let it be here, oh let it be here.

Still. As years have past, I have built a degree of immunity. Or rather, self-restraint. Or perhaps, at least, discretion. But of course, when it is fresh, then it is fresh. *So all I could do*: I followed his example: shut the outside out and boiled.

Listen: this is how it works.

We went walking one morning to find something new. We had left with the dawn, and it was nearing 4pm. I was lost. He might have been. We climbed a hill, a sheer 80 degrees of boulder and shrub and wriggling black snake. “harmless”, he says, and I nod, savouring the word on my tongue, repeating it silently as we climb.

At the top there is a tree, and we lay there a while. One eye sees tiny black beetles, one eye sees tiny black cars. The beetles and the cars have made

My Brother is a Strange Animal

an agreement: only one can be in focus at a time, so that they might pass through one another without collision. My brother and I have broken this agreement. We lay there, both in focus, and collide. Ignore the crashes and the screams and the fire engine's wailing.

We burn.

We turn and descend the hill's opposite side. It plateaus on a street of mansions: gated, fenced, absurdly sized, lit by wall-length windows and decorated with badly-carved lions and non-specific Greek heroes. In one backyard: I point out a regulation tennis court. In another: he notices a crying child. We walk and observe.

We come to a line of children. Their clothing, in its garishness, is well-matched to the house behind them. A troupe of high-class businessmidgets. They complain noisily that their limousine is late. One boy, more a sort of penguin, shouts angrily for his father in a little penguin squawk. A dog begins to bark and I can't help myself, I laugh aloud. In unison they turn, their faces horror-to-disgust. I shrink. We make to take the side road. Wordlessly, my brother scales their street-facing wall. He opens up our satchel and drops a chocolate bar, to the yard below and dog still barking there. He returns and takes my hand.

We walk.

And where from there I don't remember. It doesn't matter, really—only that my feet ached and my hands were scratched and we welcomed the dusk with a loving scream.

And I followed.

And so it wasn't long they came for us. Their "yes" and "no" and "how" and "what?" and "why?!". Their "GO" and "STAY" and "Don't" and "just" and "please...". But we were gone. We were gone.

. . .

II: Energy

We are a strange animal. We rise with the moon and set with the sun. We hunt and share the kill. In the morning we brush our teeth and form a singular reflection: four eyes, eight limbs, two sets of glistening jaws. We see you are approaching but we do not turn. Our mechanised limbs move in perfect unison. We are us.



.....

Part III

Acceleration

.....

I

無色の苦笑

a dream about that dog you've lost

“why should you cry for me?”

“i see those eyes, so old, and no more space for me to fit. my father climbed the tree and it was pulled out by the roots. he offered you a treat but you laid down and went to sleep, and you laid down and went to sleep, and went to sleep”

“and how is this?”

but true, i should expect no more to come from one like you. you hide at night, reading lights, television, screened. and there, beneath the covers, do you never think of FUTURE? my now is here, and so there is no more”

the crinkles in his nose begin to overrun another. his face receding to a point between. he rises and the engine fires; you hear a distant laughter. and, in your night, you slowly start to sob



III: Acceleration

a dream about a little room

“i have a friend today. it is quite small, can fit inside the pocket
of my jeans”

“i am no thing of yours, thus subjugate to mean advances. we
have autonomy and insulance!”

you close the pocket of your jeans and walk into the pantry.
you eat and eat and eat and eat and eat and eat and eat

. . .

a dream about a place in time

“there is no way from here to there. my coffee’s going cold.”

“i think you’ve not tried hard enough. at least, it worked for
me”

you curl into yourself and are ashamed

. . .

泉がある夢
「きれいだなあ…」
「そう。」
そう。



III: Acceleration

a dream of three wheels and a place to stay

“have we come at last?”

“the land of promise! it was here my father built me, and his father here before him. this land is made a gift, and it has never yet betrayed us!”

the ground is oddly sticky, and you cannot move your feet, and you cannot move your toes, and you cannot move your lips, you cannot...

• • •

野菜炒めを作る夢、
夏の暗あんちゆう中で
「うん、完璧。食べる？」
でも彼はもう消えたんだ

• • •

a dream without oxygen

“..”

“....”

“...”

.....



III: Acceleration

a dream about a silver pool

“i see myself sometimes. and sometimes places where i’ve never been. and sometimes who i thought you were and how i had to be. and sometimes all i see is endless cloud”

you turn to the cave’s ceiling and you shout out a reply, but water drips into your eyes and makes you look away

• • •

砕け散った女が見つかる夢
「どこにおけばいいのかしら
この破片」
「今確かめるけど、
まあ
ここにはレモン、そして
そこにはレモン、そして
いつもの箱には
ママだしね」
「ガレージはどう？」
でも無理

• • •

a dream about your best friend

“i am your best friend”

“you are my best friend”

“i am your best friend”

a dream about your best friend



III: Acceleration

a dream about the person who you wish yourself to be

“well, who are you today?”

“i am the thing my younger self most feared that i’d become”

“that seems a decent place to start then, no?”

• • •

a dream of crossing

“this is the easy part, just wait until you see the Ts”

your brush is built so heavily, a pillar on your shoulders

you rub the gold flake from your eyes. you begin again

• • •

な、息吸って」
口を開いても
「な、
音のない悲鳴下げる
なんだか話せない夢、



III: Acceleration

a dream about a doctor

“my insides want to be my outsides. my outsides used to be my insides. sometimes i think i know who i am, but it’s still so unclear and i’ve tried everything and i don’t know what to do and i just please what am i supposed to do what am i supposed to do please”

“i have a pill for that”

her daughter makes a face at you and slides back up the stairs. a banister and baluster and she behind and there and then and gone

• • •

a dream about a village where you think you used to live
the villagers do not remember you

• • •

a dream about the distances

and that is what they are

empty.

silent.

dark.



2

The passenger seat

It is your daughter's birthday. She is six years old, and you are twenty three. You wanted to have a party, but she was against it, so you've decided instead to teach her how to swim.

It is your daughter's birthday, and you are walking to the public pool, and with every step her four-dollar sandals go chi-kuk chi-kuk. Their foam plastic bases melt a little into the hot pavement, so that when she lifts her feet they stick a bit. They were a poor investment, these sandals. They will not last a month.

chi-kuk chi-kuk chi-kuk

You also should have bought yourself a swimsuit. This old suit, you realise, is uncomfortably tight in the chest. You have not worn it since before you had her. It's been a long time. You were on the swim-team, back then, and were ranked third in county for the butterfly stroke.

Your suit is a one-piece. It is matte black and says "adidas" in tiny white lettering and is very tight in the chest. You wonder if it was always this tight and how your younger self could have put up with it.

There is an intersection coming up, so you signal for your daughters hand. She turns to look at you. She is looking dubious. She says "let's go home, ok?". You wonder when it was she learned to speak. It can't have been you who taught her to; you haven't had the time. You've been much too busy with swim meets and school and trying to get a job. You are upstairs in your room and you are sixteen years old and studying to take the

lifeguard test. The test is about CPR and defibrillators and how to carry someone bigger than you out of the pool (from behind, under the armpits, around the chest) and other things like that. You have already done the important parts, the training and in-person test. They had you tread water for ten minutes and then tossed quarters in the diving pool for you to dive and fetch, one at a time. It was easy. Swimming is what you do. You are going to pass the test and be a lifeguard for the summer, and then you and your boyfriend are going to Coachella. You will stay the night with his aunt, in San Fernando, and drive out in the morning, and you need to remember to bring water, because he never does. But no, you're getting distracted. You need to focus on studying.

Your daughter tugs at your hand. She is saying something. You say "ok, I'm coming", and you start to walk again.

chi-kuk chi-kuk chi-kuk

Outside the public pool there is a little play area, a shaded sand pit and a group of play-fountains. The pavement around the fountains is inlaid with a reddish-brown something, and the something forms the shapes of animals. You wonder if it might be some kind of granite. Your daughter points because "that one's a turtle!", and you tell her that it's something called a tortoise, which is very like a turtle but also different. She frowns.

A group of boys in swimsuits is dancing through the fountains, jumping and laughing and hitting one another. You wonder why they are out here instead of going in the pool. As you watch, one of the smaller boys trips and skins his knee, badly.

You are a mother. You stand just for a moment and then run to the boy and lift him from the water. You lay out your towel and sit him on it. He is not crying, just staring at his knee and at all of the blood. You ask your daughter for your bag and then remember you've left it at home but the front desk will have first aid supplies. A halfway-run and through the doors. This room is like a cave. "Can I help you?". "A... someone, a boy; he fell".

Coming back, at first you run and then you trail into a walk. The boy is gone, of course. His mother must have found him, or he ran to find her. You are unnecessary.

Your daughter is staring at you. She says "Mom?", but you only barely

III: Acceleration

hear her. It's so loud. Your boyfriend is playing very loud music and you are both singing along and getting ready for the concert. Your favourite band is going to play the opening act, and, even though your boyfriend doesn't like them much, he's promised to go with you, and oh gosh but you love him. You do.

The pool is colder than you thought that it would be. But it is, after all, still barely summer. You hold your daughter up and try to teach her how to kick. You wave your hands through the air, acting out the motions.

She doesn't want to swim. She doesn't want to swim with you.

You tell yourself to be patient. You tell yourself you also didn't want to learn at first. You tell yourself to let her have more time.

You're not any good with patience, then or now.

She is squirming. "No, let go! Let go!" She is squirming and shouting and finally you let go. And she floats there, and then starts to spin and laughs. Her inflatable float-ring is printed in a wisteria pattern. You sigh and look away across the pool.

You are a mother, but you are maybe not a good one. You take a breath and pull your goggles on. You drop below the surface. Your daughter keeps on spinning, and from this angle you can see her legs. Her legs are kicking wildly and inefficiently. You push past her, off the wall, and start to crawl along the bottom, pretending that your hands are a kind of crab. You used to always do this, slowly crawl along the bottom. You may not have been swimming recently, but you still practice holding your breath, every night before you sleep.

You decide to crawl all the way to the far wall. The pool's bottom is very rough, like chalk, against your crawling fingers. Legs like trees grow up and past the sky. A person swims along above you, oblivious of your presence. You cannot stop smiling, and you nearly exhale, tiny bubbles escaping.

And then it changes. Something. Something is wrong. Something like muffled shouting filters down from up above. There are no legs now; everyone has gone. There is a deep rumbling, and it grows louder as you start to surface. Then it suddenly resolves, and you realise it is rain. The pool is rushing about in waves, and the rain is so thick that you can't see anything. You try to shout but can't even hear your own voice. From somewhere there comes a series of cracking noises.

The passenger seat

Crack

Crack Crack

Crack, sputter, sigh. The engine has died, and you're going to miss the concert. Your boyfriend kicks a tire and shouts because he's stubbed a toe. You don't know whether to laugh or to cry.

In a little while he opens the door and sits down in the back. You climb over the seat and join him there. He takes your hand, and you see his eyes, and now you don't need to cry any more. You just stare into those eyes. You stare and stare. And they open like a door, and what you're staring at is him, is him. You still aren't breathing.

He grips your hand even more tightly. You think "he is going to kiss me now". And then, years later, he does.

You look for her, but your daughter is gone.

.....



3

Insider

Nineteen stitches, ear to ear.

We never asked her how. There was a sort of subdued irony in it that I think we realised couldn't survive the details.

She was The Organiser: putting on a face, Making Plans. When we all got out there would be weekly meet-ups, ladies only, with tea and movies and very strong drinks. And billiards. Her kids had bought her a table for her last birthday, just before they had her locked up.

Of course, we all knew it would never really happen. Half of us, the unlucky ones, would be back here again in a month, hearing all these same plans for our non-existent futures.¹ And the other half, well...

So yeh, The Organiser. And then maybe 10 or so others, I don't remember exactly. We mostly followed in line with the standard templates, though a few could have made for nice flashy headlines:

MAYOR'S DAUGHTER JUMPS FROM BRIDGE, SUED FOR DAMAGES
Or
FORGOTTEN GRANDMOTHER PILOTS FERRY INTO FAMILY CAR
And so on.

Mine was: "DISTRESSED AUTHOR DIVES FROM PLANE, SURVIVES!", with a big fat exclamation point. Yes, I realise I'm still here, thank you. Because I guess terminal velocity isn't necessarily all that terminal. That is to say, I'm not the first person to have fallen from an airplane and come away

.....

¹ though coming from a different mouth, judging by those stitches

relatively unscathed. Something to do with updrafts and landing angles and Coefficients of Restitution.

I did lose half a leg, sure, gone when I woke up. Too badly shattered for reassembling, they said. But apart from that, “me” is still me. And being honest, and at the risk of offending my fellow amputees and body-part-not-havers, it feels kind of... cool, actually. I mean, for a “normal person” I’m sure this would be terrible,² but It’s not like I need the mobility, really, with all the time I spend at a keyboard. I really only ever go to the grocery store, and this could be an excuse to finally try one of those motorised shopping carts.³ Also, there’s this little voice in my head that says things like “maybe, if I’m like this, people will act a little nicer to me and overlook some of the other stuff, like my hair usually not being washed or whatever”. Plus they said I should eventually be able to walk again too. They amputated above the knee, but before I left the doctors were already showing off a lopsided parade of robo-legs.⁴ I guess all things considered, if I had a choice I think this is a reasonably convenient sort of handicap to have. Part of me’s already imagining it as the plot of an awful manga, like something about how True Love Knows No Appearances and a boy who carries me around when the Mean Girl In Class throws my leg in the dumpster.

Ok but so that’s the setting, then. And here I am, in this mental hospital, surrounded by all these suicide-attemptees and feeling disproportionately⁵ chipper. Because honestly, I wasn’t even suicidal. Just impulsive, like the sort of person who sits in the passenger seat with an open window, gets that “you know, I could just throw my bag out onto the highway right now, there’s absolutely nothing stopping me” feeling ...and then three days later is stuck in the MVD waiting for a replacement driver’s license. You can probably guess how I ended up there in the hospital, then. It Is A Problem.

.....

²and it definitely hurt... Hurts like shit too

³ok now this is *really* going to piss people off, but was I the only one who like, as a kid, felt a little indignant about how it was always the overweight people who got to ride those? Like I’ve always been pretty underweight and would fantasize about how I could have had so much more *speed* and *finesse*, a top racer if they’d just give me a *chance*, gosh.

⁴trying to make the most of the publicity maybe, my being a semi high-profile patient

⁵inappropriately?

III: Acceleration

I guess I could have played it as an accident somehow,⁶ but I agreed to being admitted, partly just out of curiosity. I mean, it's sort of like a writer's rite of passage right?, the whole suicide thing,⁷ and then when it comes time for my biography to be written, "she fell down" is just nowhere near as cool as "at 31, swan-dives from a moving plane at 10,000 ft, because Why Not". I started thinking the experience could maybe make for one of those "brutally honest self-exposés". Like a Maggie Nelson memoir, sans the whole "I like big, veiny penis" thing being thrown in every three pages.

So that was the plan anyways: Play the Emotionally Disturbed Writer and Write a Book About It, and there was definitely enough material to work with.⁸ But I think I'll skip all that. Instead, there's Erin.

Erin is this girl I met on the second day there, the afternoon after the Audrey Hepburn marathon.⁹ She was at a table by the door, assembling a 1000 piece puzzle which bore the image of a Very Happy Dog,¹⁰ and from the way she was moving I could tell they had her on the fun pills. I felt a little jealous that my own hadn't had any noticeable side-effects.

"So what're you in for?". Like that, like we were in prison. It was the first thing everyone asked. Speaking of which, one of the guys from the male ward¹¹ actually had been sent there straight from prison. Nicest guy ever too, and he taught me how to make prison tattoos. There are two ways:

.....

⁶"Yes, exactly! And then my left hand *accidentally* unbuckled my seatbelt while my right hand *accidentally* opened the door and my legs *accidentally* extended! You can imagine my surprise!"

⁷Die or Stay Alive Trying, hehe

⁸Day one: coerced into taking unidentified medication. Nurse is very rude. Day two: still no sleep, roommate snoring and checks every 15 minutes. Heartfelt conversation with rape-victim girl at the chain-link fence. Day three: finally allowed out of the high security ward. Fight breaks out in the lunch line, woman stabbed with plastic fork

⁹which ended abruptly mid-way through Sabrina. Imagine: three couches full of suicidal women watch quietly while Audrey closes up the garage, starts all the half-dozen cars, and carefully lays herself down to wait for carbon monoxide poisoning. "What were you doing in here?" "I was checking the engines..." *Entire room bursts out laughing except the one girl in the corner who's been sitting there all day and just won't stop crying, so that the two sounds get kind of mixed up together and you have to remind yourself how they're different and which one is the "good" sound and which is the "bad" sound again*

¹⁰suitable for encouraging Very Happy Thoughts

¹¹we met up with them at meal times

the easy one is grinding up the graphite from pencils, but you can also like burn a couple of styrofoam cups and then put something over the top to catch the smoke and scrape it off afterwards.¹²

But right ok, Erin. “So what’re you in for?”

“Oh, probably the same as everyone else, I guess. So I was at work one day, I work as a barista, right?, and so one day about a year ago I started feeling kind of weird, and so I started cutting myself up with this box-cutter a little, here on my stomach, see? But because I was doing it under the counter nobody could see and so it was fine, except that then just recently I ended up accidentally cutting my palm too and didn’t even realise, because I guess I was just really out of it. And so then I go to give this guy his coffee and he just *flips* out, like there’s screaming and shouting and then other people start to get in on it too, and of course I’m here thinking like ‘what? what is it?’, except that I’m still really out of it and can’t really do the whole English thing, you know how that goes, right? And so then next thing I know there’s this really really skinny girl and this bigger guy show up and start grabbing at my arms and being all ‘ok. it’s ok. let’s go, ok?’, like that, and then that’s when I see the cup this guy was holding has like this giant red handprint on it, and there’s coffee with too much cream everywhere and this giant bloody handprint over his name on the cup but you can still see the last few letters, where it says ‘ard’, and this guy I guess must have gotten burned too because he’s sitting in this chair off to one side, and he’s holding these ice packs all carefully up to his arm and crotch and making these whimpering sounds, like a hurt dog or something. Like, I didn’t know people could even make those kinds of sounds. So yeh, so this guy called them in and they dragged me to a hospital, and I guess I like cut the nerves or tendons or something because I can’t really move these three fingers any more, see how my pinkie sort of just sticks out if i try to close it?”¹³

.....

¹²The guy had the tattoo tears and everything. They’d started to fade a little, but I think maybe those sorts of tattoos are just lighter to begin with and wouldn’t’ve stood out that much against Latino skin. What would the darker guys do about that, though... It’s like a required part of the whole Prison Gang thing, right?

¹³At this point she started pulling the two fingers back and forth and letting go and was showing me how they’d just sort of wobble and then I showed off my stub of a leg and wiggled it around and we sort of rubbed them into each other and laughed at how

III: Acceleration

She was a mess. And so was I, really, because after that we got along really well and had all our meals together.¹⁴ We would play this game, trying to guess who'd be getting out next. There are only four ways you get let out of a place like that: a) annoying the staff or starting a fight, and then being transferred off to who-knows-where, b) having money, c) one of the nurses messing with you and then having the hospital rush you off with an apology to try to keep you from suing,¹⁵ or d) lying consistently enough to the 50 different people, new person every day, that they have come and ask you the same questions over and over and over about how it is you're feeling or why you did it or what you're planning to do after you finally get out this place and can like take a shower with real shampoo and shave your armpits without a couple of interns standing there giving a running commentary about how amazingly well it is you're doing and how you're "getting it done" like that with this tiny single-bladed disposable razor and without any shaving cream or water or actually taking any clothes off because you're standing in the middle of the hallway and the schizophrenic girl they picked up this morning keeps walking back and forth past you and up to the window and shouting at it and then walking back again over and over and over and you can tell from how all the staff acts around her that she's definitely been in here before and that they're going to kick her out again and then in a little while someone will complain that she's lowering the value of the real-estate, wandering around screaming at things all day and night and she'll be brought back in again and how it's just this endless cycle of hurt and crazy and tired nurses who don't even care any more, are just sort of inured to it all and are staring right through you like you're not even there because, to them, you're not, you're the same as everyone else, you're the same as the as the girl they had in here last week who tried to hang herself and they had to take her bed sheets away and then she protested by peeing all over the meal tray that the bald guy who looks like Eric Koston

.....

ridiculous we both looked, and I guess the pills they gave me must've really been having some kind of an effect after all

¹⁴the term "meals" being used only in the loosest sense to describe the mounds of reheated box-mashed-potatoes and the brown, rod-like somethings I didn't dare eat, even though they probably didn't have any real meat in them

¹⁵also requires having money, or at least looking like it

but bald and 57 and sad forgot to come back and get after dinner service, and god that is such a dated reference already, like who the hell reading this is going to have any idea who Eric Koston is?

And I guess by now you've probably worked out then that there's really not even any point to this story, and that it's just that there's some part of me that has this need to try to frame it all perfectly and make sure you're entertained and come out the other side thinking that I'm this Funny Girl with Things to Say and who has Real Emotions Sometimes, like one of those perfectly laid-out movies like クワイエットルームにようこそ or Girl, Interrupted where everyone's a famous actress pretending to not be actually pretty and The Girl gets whisked off to this mental hospital and meets Important, Influential People and comes out the other side having somehow Learned something about life and herself and the way the world works and now has this frame of reference that she can use to guide her through her living doing whatever the hell it is that those characters go and do with the rest of their lives. Because I honestly don't have a clue, and I look at all these people out on the street, how they can just walk around and being so goddamn NORMAL all the time and it makes me want to scream, like what the hell do you *do* in the morning that you can just get up and *walk* like that, and go to school and work and bathrooms and the grocery store and all those other places that people have to keep going to every single day of their lives forever?! And why can't I have it too? Why am I the one who gets stuck being carted off to the same stupid hospital with the same homeless schizophrenic girl who nobody actually wants to help, just keeps bringing her in and kicking her out again over and over because whichever place she's in gets tired of hearing her scream at the window every 45 minutes asking the things living there if she can please be left alone, just for a little?, just to let things be quiet for only a few minutes so she can fall asleep normally instead of passing out on her feet when she can't move anymore because trying to do these things alone isn't just hard, it's impossible, and I finally meet someone it feels like I can communicate with someone for the first time in my life and I just don't understand why would she do it? why?! when we've both finally made it out of that shithole and we're talking together about our future, which it really is a thing you can actually have, a future, and we've even rented the apartment and moved in all our things

III: Acceleration

and it Really Sucks trying to somehow get a goddamn sofa up three flights of stairs when you only have one leg and you're hanging off the handrail and have to sort of pull yourself up while sitting and you're trying not to let the goddamn sofa crush you and your arms are tired and burning and you think you're going to lose your grip and the person at the top end can't even hold the fucking thing because her fucking fingers don't even work any more and she keeps apologising for it over and over but shut up it's not your fault, just shut up!, except actually talk to me maybe!, because then you go off without saying anything and ruin everything and leave me here to deal with the police and how they're being all suspicious like I murdered you or something and I still can't sleep at all and all the klonopin's gone and I've been up for three days now because whenever I try to sleep I just keep hearing that noise over and over and over and I don't want to hear it anymore and it won't go away it won't leave me alone for even a second and just like what the fuck!, it was all going to be ok! It just everything everything could've finally been ok!!

But I guess that's the point then, isn't it, that there is no point. That you go to a mental hospital and the people you meet there are the same as the people outside, just a little more sad, and that the things you think will maybe somehow "fix" it all are just these tiny detours going nowhere, just this ugly sound over and over, like a slab of raw fucking meat on a butcher's block, because that's all it is, isn't it. Meat. And yes, I realise that nobody is actually going to read this, that no one cares about my pretending to have something deep and profound to say about life and that all that they want, if anything, is the next goddamn book in the *Winds of Esternon* series and "OMG but what happened to Christian, though, isn't he captured by the Sea Things at the end of book 6?" "I don't know I only watched the movie, but Matthew Turner is so hot though, those abs!". God, this is awful. I guess maybe I'll tell my agent to hide this somewhere and then, if they really have to, they can publish it posthumously in a biography or whatever once all the fans grow up and nobody really cares any more, and maybe that way they won't be held accountable for violating the stupid contract where [this stupid company]¹⁶ is legally entitled to every stupid word I ever

.....

¹⁶Editor's note: name withheld

type or write or say. It's just, there's this point you reach in your career, you know?, when you're sitting here thinking that everything you've ever really wanted to say or do is already done and past, that it wasn't that great anyways, and now you don't know what you're even supposed to be aiming for any more. Like if all the stories you've ever read and fantasised about suddenly came true except in actuality it's really, really boring to be sitting there on a wind-powered ship and sailing across an entire, literal ocean, and sometimes you get sea-sick and people's hair falls out and they start dying of scurvy or appendicitis or something, and it feels like sometimes you're not really even moving at all, just stranded on this boat in the middle of an ocean with no land in sight, and nobody remembers where it is they're supposed to be going or why they even left home in the first place. So please, just give me my moment of existential angst or mid-life crisis or whatever it is you want to call it and let me feel like I've found some big, profound meaning in it all. Because otherwise I don't think I can cope.

.....



4

過去参り

tune

tune

tube

tumour

tomb

tumble tumult tums

thumbs

thumber thunder blunder bunder

bumding bunding bumbling

bunging bund

blunder wonder sunder
sonderfonderponderpondalond
blonde blond blonde

benighted blighted bited wited
winder linder lining find

find?

funding find the funding for the
foreign feature film, find a
fitter flutter feeling feeling

what?

no feeling here

III: Acceleration

today, to-nite, to whom it may concern

月 土 罪

to seem to see

to be

to bend

to have-bent

tomorrow

過去参り

a sister

what is a sister

what is a there and gone

a nothing

少女長女ノ一^{じょ}女

繰り返し

wishing wanting

wishes wanting

vision vaunting vision stare

stare at nothing, nothing there

a nothing

III: Acceleration

人類

あかるい
明るい 赤類

はくるい
白類

白昼夢

悪く half of you

half of you

who

過去参り

close clothes crows close
blows

坊主

海 梅

ふみ
不味 船
不明

a wisened, withered winter

a bitten, bleeding blister

a pot of porridge
stuck in storage
where to forage
find a flair

no one else could find it there

no one else would think to care

smothering, a plum, a pear
chair...

hair...

air...

から
空

III: Acceleration

妊娠

にんにん
人人

人参

can-o-beans

submarine

sunned

somebody left the kettle on

somebody

somebody left, 不参 不安

sun-body shrine-body お盆 gone



5

i googled “suicide note” but couldn’t come up with a good title

a person on the internet told me to fuck off and die

so i tried to, but it didn’t work

so i felt sad for a while and then made myself a sandwich and sat on the curb there waiting for the police to show up because i knew someone had already called in the wreck

when the police got there, i told them i’d tried to kill myself and then offered to make them sandwiches, and the one asked for tuna salad and the other was fine, thank you, so i opened a can of tuna and used a hot-dog bun because there wasn’t any more sliced bread

i asked them their names, and the one with a sandwich said grmfled and the one without a sandwich said rachel and then she asked me why i had tried to kill myself and i said that i didn’t know, really, except that maybe it was because i had always hated that car because it had been a present from my father from when i had graduated and he knew that i didn’t like red but still he had bought it anyways because he had liked it and that was what mattered, and maybe just having to drive it to work every day and thinking about that had just had started to get to me after a while, so i drove it into a telephone pole, and then i apologised because it was kind of a thoughtless thing to do, the driving it into a telephone pole, and i should’ve just driven it into my house instead because the house wasn’t public property that other

i googled "suicide note" but couldn't come up with a good title

people depended on, and i asked them if i could pay for the damage and try to help out with repairs, but rachel said that working on public infrastructure required a permit and that she didn't think that would work, so then i felt sad again and sat back down on the curb

so by this point the other one had finished eating his sandwich and had called in to ask where the paramedics were, because they never showed up and he'd noticed that my head was starting to bleed, or had been bleeding a lot in the back, and i told them i felt a little dizzy and rachel said probably i was in shock and/or concussed and that i should try not to move very much, and something about her saying that made me feel like throwing up the sandwich, and then i woke up in a hospital and all of the lights were too bright and my father was there all trying to smile and i said "hey, dad", but he didn't answer, just kept twirling this red pen around with both hands until he dropped it and he looked back up at me and then away again like he was somehow like he was scared, and so i asked him how the house remodelling was going and then he finally answered and said "oh, it's coming along; we finished the cabinets in the kitchen the other day, your mother stained them all by herself while i wasn't there, and she almost fell off the ladder", but how did he know that she almost fell off if he wasn't there? i asked, but he didn't answer, just stared at the floor like he'd suddenly remembered where he was again and then we both sat for another 10 minutes until he said "well" and i said "well" and that stupid red pen just kept spinning and spinning and then i started humming that sufjan stevens song to myself, the one that goes "...want to be, well, i want to be..." round and round until you don't know where it starts and where it's supposed to end, and then i tried to remember the name for that sort of linguistic structure or whatever, or if it even had a name, but my brain wasn't working very well so it just gave up and went back to repeating the words like that over and over and over but silently while my father just stood there not looking at me and fiddling with this pen and then i finally i guess i must have finally fallen asleep

and i do feel kind of a little bit better now after sleeping, except that i still have this headache and it sort of feels like i'm floating, or maybe that's just because of the trees because it's really windy and so looking down on them here from up here from out of the window is like looking down at

III: Acceleration

the ocean or something, like the way the leaves are all moving like that in waves like wind, all back and forth, and it reminds me of the time we all went on a cruise together and everyone but me was up on the seventh deck with my cousin in the theatre because she was going to compete on stage in the karaoke contest, and meanwhile i was down alone in the ship's library, sitting in there with all of these books that no one reads, and i was just sitting there and out on the balcony down by the water, like right by the water because the library's so far down, and looking out and over the ocean and just getting somehow so "lost in it all" because of the feeling like i was just staring into space, or you know what i mean, into space like "the universe" and not just staring blankly, but i was staring blankly but that's not how it felt because i was actually seeing it, which is a funny feeling because of how when you're actually looking into space it doesn't feel like you are because it's all just flat, like nothing, and when you see the ocean at night it's all huge and shifting and so alive and more like that feeling of being really alive and actually infinite than an infinite thing itself

oh god, but then now i'm remembering now that i stole a book from that library, but like i didn't mean to, it was an accident and i really didn't mean to, just they didn't have a librarian or an alarm there by the doors or anything just because i guess that the people who go on a cruise like that, they don't even need to steal anything because they have so much money already, and what even is money though, like what's the point in being some jerk with 2,000 dollars and then spending it all so you can stand there in line on a boat with a hundred other people, all waiting for your tiny little bowls and single-serving boxes of corn pops or raisin bran and walking to the table and you have to step around the woman who's wearing a tropical-print sun dress and is suddenly on the floor in front of you because she feels sea-sick and everyone walks around her like she isn't there and so do you and then you're at the table and you're looking out at the land while it floats past and think of all the people living there and how they're living every day in places where this industry is filling oceans full of boat exhaust and poop, like actual poop that just gets flushed out of the boat i think, but how they're living in these cities and the cities are just built for tourists now, with all these beach houses and señor frog's and men who spent the whole day on the beach to sell you little silver rings or maybe jerseys from

i googled "suicide note" but couldn't come up with a good title

a football team, woo go brazil, and in the background now you hear that one family of brits and then their kid who says "oh, a chocolate éclair? isn't that fancy!", and he pronounces it like an "a" as in "ah" and you think "well, this is my life now, and i've spent 2,000 dollars to sit on a boat and to hear this kid get all excited about dessert pastries and to sneak out at 2am to fill up on pizza that tastes like cardboard and is served by this lady who looks like she hasn't slept in three days and then go stand on the back balcony and lean out over the water smoking pot from a red-bull can and thinking how jumping in the water might be nice, or really just being anywhere, anywhere, anywhere else that isn't here"

and i really, really didn't mean to steal it, just i was walking out while reading it and then afterwards went to my cabin and so then it was in my bag and on the way back, in the car ride afterwards, i realised it was still there in my bag and then i was just started crying and crying and couldn't stop crying and everyone else kept asking what, what is it what's wrong and i then i was crying even harder and i couldn't say anything because of how sometimes it's just really hard just to be around people even because of the way that they look at you and they smile and like the other day i went to the grocery store to buy groceries and some wine and then on the way out there was this tiny old man who was trying to load his things into his trunk, and i stopped to help and he said that he'd drive me back and i accepted it because of how i'd left the car at home, and then he started to tell me about his grandchildren, and his eyes they just lit up and like he had nothing else in the world that he wanted to talk about but his grandchildren and the way that he smiled at me somehow, it was just too much, too much

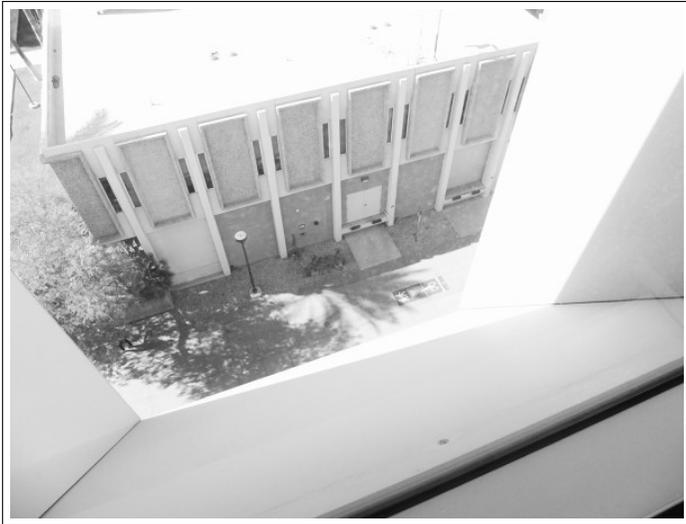
and so i know that this really isn't that much of a suicide letter, just it's my head's still all fuzzy and now i don't know what to say, except maybe you shouldn't have windows this high like this that open this wide because like it probably violates some sort of building code and can give people "dangerous ideas", and also, dad, i'm sorry, and it's really not your fault, it's just i really don't like red that much.

.....

呼吸困難
変わった寒暖
普段の、簡単
空欄じゃん

.....

i googled "suicide note" but couldn't come up with a good title



6

an insect landed on the page, and i
think it's called a mayfly

i met a person from the internet

it was fine

i rode the bus for one hour

i rode the train for one hour

i rode another bus for one hour

i walked for a while

“my parents are at home right now,
so we can't go to either of their houses”

we met in a grave yard filled with dead things

. . .

it was 109 degrees fahrenheit,
which is something over 40 celcius

i always have to worry about fahrenheit and celcius

i always have to worry about centimetres and inches

an insect landed on the page, and i think it's called a mayfly

my life is spent on trying to translate things for cultures i am not a part of
i always have to wonder if this phrasing has a counterpart in japanese
we sat there in the cemetery, talking every now and then
but mostly staying quiet
for seven hours

. . .

my body is a foreign country

i don't understand it
and neither do you

the words that come out of my mouth are not things i have spoken
as they come i read them back and try to understand

i'm lying on my stomach
here on the grass,
waiting for the bus

this is a place for rich people

there is a fountain, and it's saying "we have this much water, even though
this is a desert"

the water has been dyed an unseemly turquoise-blue

. . .

sometimes i wonder
if friendship exists
and sometimes if
existence is a friend

"you said you'd bind yourself to me"

III: Acceleration

and then i said “the bus is coming, sorry, got to go”

. . .

i hear voices in my head

they tell me lines from famous books,

and half-forgotten things
that your mother said to us

that day when we were driving to the park

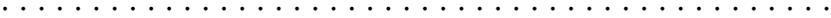
“she didn’t even notice she was pregnant till it came”

“be safe...”

.....



an insect landed on the page, and i think it's called a mayfly



7

I Live In A Hole

It is my husband's birthday. Tomorrow. I will bake him a cake, I think. He will not like it, but I will bake it all the same.

He will come to visit me, here in my house, and he will say "Jesus, Meredith, how can you *live* like this?"

He will say "Your cheese is spoilt again." and "Please come home? Tonight?"

I will nod and smile and kiss him on the cheek.

And he will leave.

. . .

I live in a hole. My front door faces the river, and my bed is a bed of leaves. I dig worms from under my pillow and, in the mornings, fish for trout.

I am happy.

The water here is kind to me, the birds. The crooked oak just near my door, *Quercus hartwissiana*. It keeps me cool and stops the rain from washing out my roof.

I wonder at it sometimes, here so far away from home.

. . .

"And how can you stand living in all this mud?, it's on everything!"

“You know, the neighbours have quit asking after you”.

“They used to stop me. Every night coming home, they’d stop me just outside the door. ‘But how *is* Meredith, though? We’ve not seen her now for *Weeks*’ ”.

“This bowl has a hole in it”.

“They’ll probably call me in soon, if they haven’t done already. ‘Yes, it’s ever so suspicious. his wife just *disappears* one day, and he refuses all our questions?’ ”.

“...on your shoes, on your, your *food*”

“Well you know, the next time one of them asks, I’m going to bloody tell them. ‘Yes, she’s run off. (...) Well, not like that, no; I know where she is. (...) She lives in the woods. By a stream. In the mud. (...) Yes, in a bloody hole in the ground. (...) Well I don’t know. It’s nothing to do with me. Go ask her yourself!’ ”.

“Your goddamn bread is moulded”.

. . .

I rather like the mud, actually.

. . .

Up three flights and down the bank, over the bridge and up again and off he goes, hiking to his car.

He will not come back.

I will miss him.

I miss him now. Ah well.

Ah well.

. . .

“But what do you *Do* down here?”, he says.

. . .

Down here, I see futures. I see the squirrels come to drink and wait

III: Acceleration

outside to greet them. I see the summer rain and hide my door with leaves and branches. And I see the greater coming storm as well.

. . .

Kingdoms disappear before their kings.

If this is to be all our fates, it seems the best we just get on with it.

. . .

I've asked the postman to leave all my post on Monday/Fridays in the stump up near the road. He's always been so kind. Today I got a letter from my sister, asking what had "pushed poor Bernard on to calling me at 2 am at night, the poor bastard, just what have you done to him? He calls me up and then won't say except it's you, and that there's no use telephoning as you haven't got one now, and you've convinced yourself that somethings going to happen, who knows what, and really sis, I love you, but I can't have Bernard calling me all hours when I've got work tomorrow and been too late on grading quizzes and still got to write out the one I'm giving them in the morning, and then Rosa's football practice starts tomorrow as well and her shin pads still haven't arrived even though I specifically selected the two day shipping and paid extra for it, and so now she won't be able to practice and she's a good girl and doesn't complain, but I've still got to make it up to her somehow, maybe take her out to dinner, because it's my fault saying that we should buy online because it's cheaper than the store. And so please, work this out for me, ok? Whatever's come between you, just make up and hurry on back home"

My sister, too; she's always been so kind.

We do our best.

. . .

I live in a hole.

And so will you. We will be neighbours, and I will dig a tunnel and visit you for tea.

I Live In A Hole

You will tell me how your husband left you, just before the war, and how you've no idea if he's still alive out there somewhere. I will tell you about the time I caught a frog and kept it in the teapot there and fed it bugs and bits of worm.

Amphibians are first to go whenever there are changes. Along with apex predators. Those at the top who need the rest and at the edges when the borders shift.

Your husband won't be coming back, but I won't tell you that. We will live together for a while.

And that is all.

.....



8

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed gorilla so you can watch the static electricity

1. hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed gorilla so you can watch the static electricity and pretend you're a tiny weather goddess with tiny weather goddess powers, with that satisfying crackle and ozone scent (even though you're not really sure what an "ozone scent" smells like, but that's got to be it, right? because that's how they always describe it)
2. sitting up in your top bunk in the middle of the night and staring at the wall until it starts to shift and looks like its made of little grains of colours, and, if you imagine a bit, you can make them fly around you and make all sorts of weird patterns
3. playing with rocks and pretending that they're Super Cool Space-ship Speeders and racing each other around the yard
4. digging tunnels at the park after it rains, so everything's all muddy, but that grainy sandy kind of muddy that gets under your fingernails and makes them all satisfyingly dark black underneath, so that it looks like the opposite of a french manicure

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

5. finding a friend who wants to dig with you and digging together from opposite ends so that, after what seems like about an hour of digging, you finally break through and you're suddenly brushing fingers with this person you'd never met before, and you both look up and smile
6. running away from your brother while he tries to shoot you with one of those nerf guns that has darts with suction cups on the tip, except he's bigger than you are and you're too slow and it hits you, and it hits you in the eye and it gets stuck there, right on the surface of your eyeball, and your mother freaks out when you show her proudly
7. feeling defeated when, later on, your younger brother gets hit with a SHARPIE to the eye, and that time your mom was REALLY freak-ing out, and so now that's the eye story everybody remembers and yours seems not as cool
8. setting up the little plastic play-hut thing and all the chairs and anything else like that you can find to make an obstacle course, and then spraying them all with the hose and attaching the sprinkler, so you have to jump through it at the end, and then racing around it all and timing each other, except you don't have a real watch to use so you have to count it out yourselves, and the person doing the counting is just never fair!
9. building a city with your assorted wooden and foam blocks and pillows and lincoln logs and plastic play-set castles and forest and towns and things, and adding bridges and towers and roads and rivers and populating them with playmobiles and lego guys and those little green and yellow army men, and being just about to add a colosseum when your father shouts "it's time to go!" and having to rush and get ready and try to pack things, even though what are you packing for?
10. sitting in the van and being annoyed because your little brother just won't stop pretending to fall asleep so he can fall over and smack you with his head, so you drop down on that ridged grey mat that always has the weird somewhere-between-dirt-and-tire-rubber smell and onto the rough, carpety floor and scotch your way under the

III: Acceleration

seat completely and make yourself a little hollow in the “back back”, underneath everybody’s bags and things, and staying there for the rest of the trip, not even noticing that it was 8 hours because you spent the first 5 reading and the last 3 asleep with your head on somebody’s sweatshirt

11. realising it was your sister’s sweatshirt, and now she’s freaking out because she can’t find it and you’re in some kind of little forest town (you don’t know where because nobody tells you where you’re going ever; they just go) and it’s really really cold out, and it’s never cold where you live so nobody’s ready for it at all and you hide in your little cave and wait for your father to hurry up and finish whatever it is he’s doing wherever it is you are so you can close all the doors and windows again and not worry about it until you’re stopped properly somewhere and actually know what’s going on
12. getting out to pee, except that your father decides that you’re all going on a walk to some kind of a park thing nearby, and so you walk there and stand around for a long time, not sure what’s supposed to be happening, so you watch the people passing by and count how many of them are wearing funny-looking hiking boots and how many have normal shoes and get excited when you see one of those guys with the shoes that have toes, because what the heck is that about? and “amusing” yourself like this until you all turn around again because whatever it was your father wanted to do isn’t being done today, and so he’ll have to come back whenever he’s here again, probably in like 7 years, and try then
13. heading back to the car and being all weirded out because here the leaves actually change colours in the fall and, even though you’ve seen that happen before, it’s still a big surprise every time it does, like “what the heck, so many colours?” and so you start picking up leaves as you go until your mother says to “Stop that.” and you have to leave (hehe) them by the side of the road and run to catch up with everybody else (except you secretly snuck one of them under your shirt, the bright red one with the funny holes in it that were perfect

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

- for you to look through, one for each eye) and getting back in the car and to your seat and trying to start the silly little digital solitaire thing your grandmother gave you before you left, except that it's been sitting out in the car in the cold and now the batteries are dead and it won't start
14. making it to the campsite, even though you still have no idea where or what it is or what state you're even in right now even, and helping to set up the tent trailer, cranking it up and sliding out the sides and moving the pieces around so that it folds out like the origami animals you make that your little brother always pulls apart because he can and it makes you upset and he likes seeing you upset for some reason, maybe because that way he gets to feel important? or like, what i mean is, then somebody will look at him instead of just being all "oh right, and there's one more younger child, but he's not important" and at least this way they pay attention to him, even if it's a negative sort of attention
 15. walking into the woods out around your campsite and looking for just the right stick to use to challenge your brother to a duel, and then finding one and breaking it off a tree and pulling so hard that you fall over and skin up your knee and your mother runs and grabs the first aid box that she always packs and nobody else ever remembers exists, and she starts dabbing things and swabbing things and wiping things and poking things and pouring things and padding things and putting things away until you're sitting there with this *thing* wrapped around your knee and how can you fight your brother now with this handicap? it makes it so you can't even move! it's ridiculous! and even though he's the one who acts nice to you and isn't going to laugh or anything, you know that a duel is Serious Business, and he's not going to let up just because you went and injured yourself by falling over
 16. waiting until you're absolutely sure that your mother has got to be asleep this time, because of how she's breathing all slowly and regularly, and then tip-toe-ing to the weird little aluminium door (with

III: Acceleration

the see-through screen window) that they put on these tent trailer things, so that, by degrees (that's that phrase you read on the way to the campsite in that weird Mary Shelley book, the one that isn't Frankenstein, where she just kept saying it over and over for things and it seems a little much, but still it's fun to say) you make it outside and walk over past the firepit to the wooden table, where your father is sitting with the propane lantern thing that's so fun to light but that you still have to be careful with because it can start leaking if you aren't and that might make things catch on fire, and he's already shuffling the cards because your sister and two of your brothers are sitting out here already and you're late and of course the game is hearts because the only other one you play is king's corners, and you can't do that with 5 people because there aren't enough cards... but you can't play hearts with 5 people either, but it's ok because you and your brother are going to be a team because he's still too little to know how to play, really, and three rounds later you're winning, and don't you all wish you had a team-member as cool as me? except you didn't realise and your father just shot the moon and now he's in the lead and that's the end of the game

17. having to head to bed because of now your younger brother is so tired that he's falling asleep on the table, and anyways, your father says, "I drove 10 hours today" and now you realise you really, really should have just stayed in the trailer and gone to bed after all, because now you're sitting here in the dark, in your wraps-around-your-head sleeping bag, and your father is snoring, and the way he snores it's so loud that there can't be any other sleeping animals anywhere in a half-mile radius or something crazy like that and so you sit there until it feels like it's about to get light again, wishing it would be quiet and you could get comfortable and your younger brother wouldn't have decided to lay down facing the opposite direction from you because that means, if he pees again while he's asleep, he'll probably get it on you too and you don't have very many clothes anyways and there aren't any showers in a hundreds-of-miles radius and now you're worrying a lot and

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

18. waking up in the tent trailer, up on the highest level slide-out thing that's past the fold-out bed part where the sofa and table would be if you ever actually used them, and listening to the birds and having no idea what they're called but thinking that they're pretty and watching the light come pouring in through the little cracks in the fabric because tent trailers, when they get old, start to get worn out or torn or mouldy fabric and things like that, and this one was bought used, after all, from that silly little man who looked like a cartoon, how he was just so round (but that's mean and let's pretend you didn't think that), and so you're watching these beams of light and the little flecks of dust that the whole thing is full of because dust settles in a place that doesn't get used all the time and just sitting there for the longest time, while the angle of the light slowly shifts until it's right up on your older brother's face and you giggle and that starts waking people up, and now it's too late, the spell is broken, and so then you shout AVALAAAAAANCHE!!!! and pull your head into your sleeping bag and roll over onto the pile of your siblings, over each of them one by one because you were at the very end, and they all wake up and realise what's happening and join in until you're all on the floor and laughing and then scrambling back up to do it again, and this time it's I'm A WOOOORM!!! and you're a giant worm rolling over giant speed-bumps and the speed-bumps try to kick you and soon you're all doing no-arms no-legs worm fights and then you're all tired out and your parents are awake and kind of grumpy
19. dreading the taste of pancakes, that weird stale-sweetness, because you don't really like them and they always make you feel sick and, as your father likes to point out because he's a father, they make you have to poop, which is SO gross and why would he even say that, but it's like he's contractually obliged to or something, and so you really don't want the pancakes but, at the same time, you haven't eaten anything since yesterday morning you think? and you're really really hungry anyways and know that you're going to go ahead and eat them and just regret it afterwards (but at least you're definitely not

III: Acceleration

touching that bacon, *shudder*)

20. walking to the next campsite over where one family of your cousins is staying, to see what they're having for breakfast (because they all get up later than your family does) and they're eating cereal and it's the Captain Crunch kind that your mother never buys because it's not good for you, the one that tastes all peanut-buttery and is hard and brittle at first but sort of dissolves in your mouth and suddenly caves in all at once like that on your tongue and you're sucking on it a little so it gets sort of suction-cupped to your tongue and makes this weirdly satisfying peanut-buttery feeling, but you haven't had that in a long time and all you can do is sit and watch while they eat it all and then go play frisbee together and try to forget about it
21. meeting some new people while you're frisbee-ing, a couple of kids and a mother, startlingly blonde, the way that only happens to other people, the ones who aren't your friends or anything, and they somehow feel like a different species, like "you'll never be able to reach me here, with your middling-tone that can't decide what it really wants to be, turning darker and lighter with the seasons but still always seeming like it's in an in-between phase and never quite reaching anything actually memorable, and you'll stay that way your whole life and the one that everybody looks at will always be me", and maybe that's why you can never quite make yourself get close to any friends, because you always make up these little stories in your head about how they would never even want you anyways, and so there's really no point in trying to be close to somebody you're going to be so jealous of, except it seems like, these days, that's really just everybody
22. hiking up the campsite trail with the entire several-tens of cousins and uncles and aunts and parents and siblings (but not grandparents, because they can't do quite that much walking these days) and sliding from cousin-to-cousin and group-to-group, and finding none where you fit in because they're all split into older or younger and you're isolated by 4 or 5 years on each side and so you're always

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

alone at things like this even though nobody else is, except apparently it didn't have to be that way because there used to be a cousin who was born the same year you were, but he died as a baby and nobody talks about that any more except maybe once or twice in hushed tones when they're drunk, and even then it's the sort of thing that only slips out where you might hear it once in a decade or something, like the stories about how your grandmother had an abusive father or your great-aunt or someone is a gay person or something else impossibly scandalous like that

23. sprinting back down the side of the mountain and nearly tripping every time you turn to look down one of the little side trails to see if your younger brother is over there because he's gone and disappeared and everybody else was in groups and didn't ever see him and so it's your fault for not knowing where he is and that's so mean and doesn't make sense but right now is also not the time to think about that because you just need to find him and this whole trail runs along the side of a little river and what if he fell in even? or if he even just fell down that little not a cliff embankment and hit his head or something that would be enough to make him stop being your younger brother and what would you do then everybody would be so sad but also they would be blaming you and it would be like you weren't allowed to be sad because it's YOUR fault and you can't really breathe and you're almost all the way to the bottom of the trail again already and you haven't seen him anywhere and there are branches smacking you in the face and this is just too much
24. finding your younger brother back at the campsite, where he's all non-chalant-ly peddling around on one of those big-wheel tricycle things that he's (supposedly) borrowed from the frisbee kids
25. sleeping (just for a bit, because you really didn't get to last night)
26. sitting together at the splintery wooden table and passing around a bag of those twizzlers things, the rope-y string-y kind that's a translucent neon red and tastes sort of like burning plastic, and kicking

III: Acceleration

your feet and feeling the dust on top slide away and scraping along the compacted dirt underneath it and spreading your toes and crinkling away bits of the table with your fingers and you're somehow feeling sort of just "content"

27. going for a short walk in the woods again, this time with just your uncle, and he's talking about guns and police things or something like that and you're not really paying attention because you don't like that stuff at all, until suddenly he grabs your shoulder and says "don't move", and then you see a bear is walking by the side of the path, all lumbering along, and so you stand there super still for what seems like half an hour until he's sure it's far enough away that it won't turn around, and then he pulls out his fancy look-at-me-i'm-so-cool binoculars and looks at the bear through them and hands them to you and sort of points you towards it, and it looks kind of cute, from over here where you know it's not going to hurt you
28. wandering around alone again and meeting this super nice-looking man-and-woman couple who are out here standing around in those silly floppy-brimmed hats with the weird little metal circles in them, and the man has this colourful yellow-green bird sitting on his finger for some reason, and it's just sitting there and won't fly away, and until now you've never really seen a pet bird like that and definitely not outside and definitely definitely not out in the middle of the woods in wherever it is you are right now, and the bird is doing its jerky little bird-head-motions and the man says to you, "Hey, would you like to hold it?" and then he holds his finger over towards you and you lift your finger up too, mimicking him, and the bird hops over and it's on your finger now and its feet are interesting and rough and the weight of it there is so nice, and then the man does a funny thing, he says "Bye" and walks away with the woman without ever looking back, and now you're standing here with this beautiful bird and nowhere to put it, so you start to walk back towards your family's campsite, and, as you walk, you start to get excited, because you have a bird now and it's such a cool thing, and such a pretty bird too and what should you name it? and what does it eat? and maybe

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

it eats bugs or something really cool like that, or maybe worms? because that's what they say about birds, right? and you don't even know but you really really want to find out and are going to show everybody your bird right when you get back and you've decided to name her felix because that's a funny kind of name, for a girl *and* for a bird, and your father will love it and he will laugh so much because he's the one who knows about "Fe—lix the cat" and likes to whistle about it sometimes when he's driving, and there he is, sitting with your uncle, and you're just walking up to the campsite when this dog attacks you and starts barking and jumping on you and trying to get at felix and you fall over and it jumps on your head and you don't see what happens and your uncle runs to grab his dog and your aunt takes you inside their tent without letting you turn around to look and you're kind of in shock but you make yourself get up and go outside and say "no, what happened?!" and there's the bird except that something is wrong with its leg and it's just flopping around on the ground there and you don't know what you're seeing and then your father does something horrible, and you can't even believe he could be so horrible, because he takes a shovel and he hits the bird with the sharp end of it and the bird is in two pieces now and there's so much blood everywhere and you can't stop staring at the blood because how could there be so much blood inside such a little bird except it's not really inside the bird, now, is it, and you have this weird urge to laugh and so you start laughing except no sound will come out and your eyes are just open, just stuck open like you're trying to close them and they won't and what's wrong and now you're broken and he's going to hit you with the shovel too and then it will be your blood that is all over the dirt and the campfire rocks and the twigs for kindling and the bag that has the matches and things inside it and you look down and see the stain of the pancakes that you've vomited up apparently? and that's really funny because that's not the way they were supposed to be coming back out of you, was it

29. being sort of numb or something and not really remembering what else happened while you were at that campsite or when you ended

III: Acceleration

up leaving or how long you've been driving, only that now you're in the parking lot outside some sort of casino place and, earlier, your father took you all inside and it was weird and dark and smelled like cigarettes, and he said "watch this" and put a quarter into one of the quarter machines and pulled the lever and then nothing happened and then he said "you see?" and there was this super smug look on his face and you're not sure what it was he was trying to say, but it must have been something super-smug-worthy, but that was before and now you're sitting in the parking lot and waiting for whoever it is who's doing something to do whatever it is they're doing, and while you wait you go and sit next to your grandfather, where he's sitting in that big poofy fake-leather folding chair he takes with him everywhere, and he's taking things out of their shells and eating them and tossing the shells on the ground, and the things are like a pale green or something, and it's really interesting because you've never seen something in a shell that was that colour, and he calls them *pistachios*, like the thing that goes on peoples faces, and he hands you one, and it's surprisingly soft, once you get it out of the shell, and has just the right amount of salt and somehow fills up your nose with its flavour, and so you sit there next to him eating *pistachios* and littering the white-lined asphalt with those shells that have just the tiniest hint of green still in them

30. remembering what your grandfather's voice sounded like and crying.
31. looking up from the paper and out the window and staring blankly until things come back into focus and you see all the people who lived there, and some of them are gone and some of them aren't gone and some of them just aren't, but even the ones still here, they've changed, they've changed, and it takes a while until you're back to breathing and can put down the pen and go to get a glass of water
32. waiting in line at mcdonalds and staring at some old guy's toupee thing and wondering what's it like to not have hair and how does he keep it on his head, even, like, is there toupee glue or something

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...

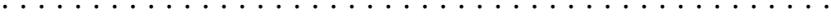
maybe? or does it just sit there and he has to be very careful not to lean over too much when he's biting into that egg sandwich breakfast thing that's made of not-quite eggs that smell kind of *off* somehow, or maybe it's just the whole place that smells like that, that weird not-eggs and not-coffee, but there's something more to it too, like a smell somehow of what it means to be moving from one place to another and doing it in a car, the way people used to and don't any more really, to just get in a car and go and then keep going until you're there and you think "ok, it's time to get out", but you're in a sleepy half-dream and then you finally do stand up and it's not even there, you're only at a gas station and your father's wiping down the windshield like he does compulsively every time you stop and you step out and your knees lock with that satisfying stiffness and you waddle-into-bouncing to the concrete runner at the edge of the lot and onto the rocks past it and stare at the line of cars still driving down below and how they're all only visible through their lights, and white means coming and red means going, but they're all going somewhere, every one of them, and there are so many, hundreds and hundreds, and you try to imagine people in them, in each one of those hundreds of cars, but you can only get to two or three before you have to stop and just stare up instead, and it's cloudy today, which is strange and nice and adds to the surreality of everything, honestly, and you always feel this way when it's cloudy, probably just because of where you were born and what would it be like to be the opposite? being used to always having a ceiling above you so that, once it's finally ripped away one day by the wind, do you feel like you're exposed to the universe or something? like you're going to fall off into it and forget yourself and everyone and then where will you be and that must be kind of terrifying, or maybe like a satisfying sense of vertigo, like the very tip of a rollercoaster like that one you went on earlier this year with your eldest brother and you never do anything together because he's gone now and you were too young, and he always treats you delicately, like something small and "corrupted" isn't the right word, but that can somehow be... well, it's hard, so you just go with "eggshells" as an image and leave it at

III: Acceleration

that, but you were on this rollercoaster and all the way up the hill he kept on his mask, that intentional way of acting, but once you were down then he was shouting and it was amazing and you loved hearing his shouting voice even more than the rollercoaster itself, you realise, and wonder if there's any way you could ever make him shout like that again, or if you yourself are somehow just not enough and he needs something more and maybe you'll be that way too when you get older, and that's the most terrifying thought, even more than falling off into the sky and disappearing, that you're just going to be somehow empty and have to cover for it forever

33. "We're leaving; hurry up!"
34. driving through the tunnel when you're *almost* almost back and being so tired that you can't even manage to hold your breath, so you just stare out at the wall rushing past and there's something hypnotic about it, how the evenly-spaced lighting and your rushing through this way makes for a regular alternation of light to dark following a sort of tangential curve, except you don't know the words for these things yet, only their meanings, and anyways what really hits you is the yellow-ochre lighting and how it paints everything outside while you're semi-shielded in here, in your glass bubble, like a sort of backwards submarine, and you think, while you're rushing through this familiar alien environment, how strange it is: to know where you are going but to not know where you've been

hiding under your blanket and rubbing around a furry stuffed...



Some Good People

To A Certain Curmudgeon, who was always too kind

To Maritsa, for a passing, whispered “hey”

おちゃめなあいさんへ、宇宙の#1ママ

みんなの大好きなレインさまへ、その歌声は美しいので..♥♥

To Nicole, if you are somewhere

To Rachel, who isn't

じっくりと歩く星さんへ、ce qui est important, ça ne se voit pas ♪

To my beloved 熊猫、ты украл мое сердце (カエサクテモイ飞吻

平野先生へ、負けるつもりではありません。

..... Thank you



hey there!

this book was written largely back in 2017

it has to do with growing in the southwest united states

more information can be found here: <https://airen-no-jikken.icu>

thanks for taking a look!

