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GHOSTS

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stimulus → *respond*

ISSN 1746-8086

www.stimulusrespond.com

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FOREWORD

Words by *Hannah Yelin*

The ghost is a concept as hard to pin down as a floating sheet. In my work on celebrity ghostwriting I have pushed for a widening of our definitions of the ‘ghosting’ process to consider the ways in which we are all surrounded by hidden forces which work upon us. Benevolent, malign or indifferent, they silently coax and usher us towards one thing or another, one way of being or another, one set of possibilities and limitations or another. This is how Megha Sharma Sehdev imagines ‘Small Hands of Violence’ in this issue’s essay on contemporary politics in India. Ghostwriting can be understood as covering so many more dynamics than the traditionally imagined scribes who erase themselves to become vessels for stars to tell their life stories. For as long as there have been written stories there have been figures we might understand as ghosts hidden in the process. If we accept these intermediaries as ghosts, why not also the photographers, filmmakers, agents, managers, publishers and constellations of other intermediaries in the star’s orbit, who have their role in producing texts of and about her? And if we understand these various agents as ghosts, how broadly might we imagine the equivalent figures in our own lives. How do we collectively produce ourselves? How are our lives collectively ‘written’?

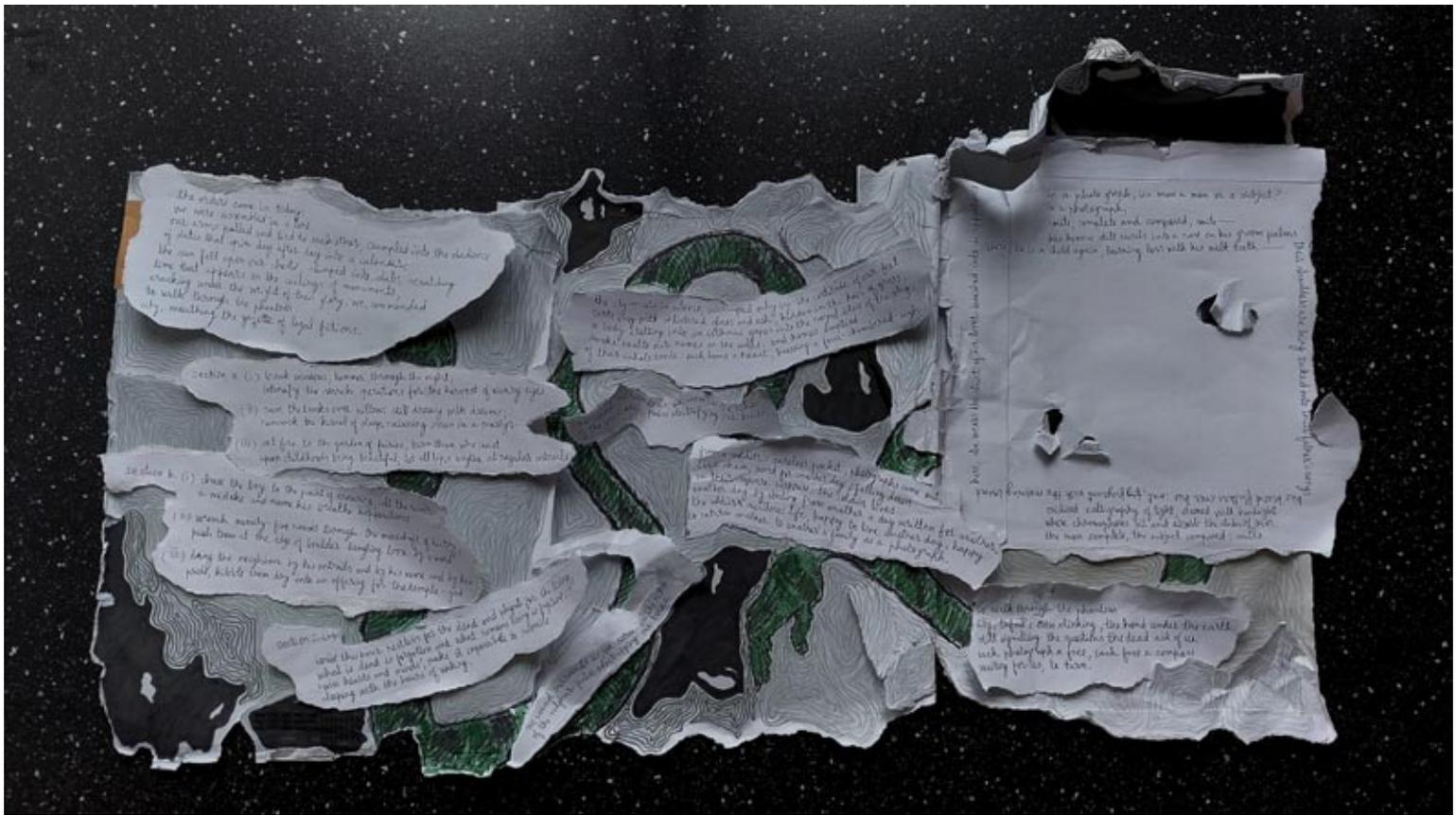
The ghost is a concept that shapeshifts. In the social media age, our everyday lives are so mediatised that we would do well to think about the ways in which we are being ghosted. Of course, we more commonly imagine ourselves to have been ghosted by the suddenly departed. We find ourselves abandoned by a lover without a word, or left at a party without the courtesy of goodbye. Framing these vanishings like apparitions of the dead makes a joke of the small grieving we undertake in everyday losses.

The ghost is a concept that lives in folklore: in the sometimes grotesque stories we tell ourselves as we undertake the life long project of understanding death and decay. As shown in the work of Shyam Thandar and Mark Blickley In this issue, the ghost is constructed by our fear of what we cannot understand about what has died and what won’t die.

The ghost is a concept that collapses time to complicate what is and what was. It lives in what we are only partially aware of: what we have half seen, half remembered, half heard. Throughout this issue we see ghosts interpreted as traces and relics, leaving their imprint on the present. We hear this in the echoes explored by Danny Bright’s sonic artwork on the memory of sounds and the warping that occurs in this

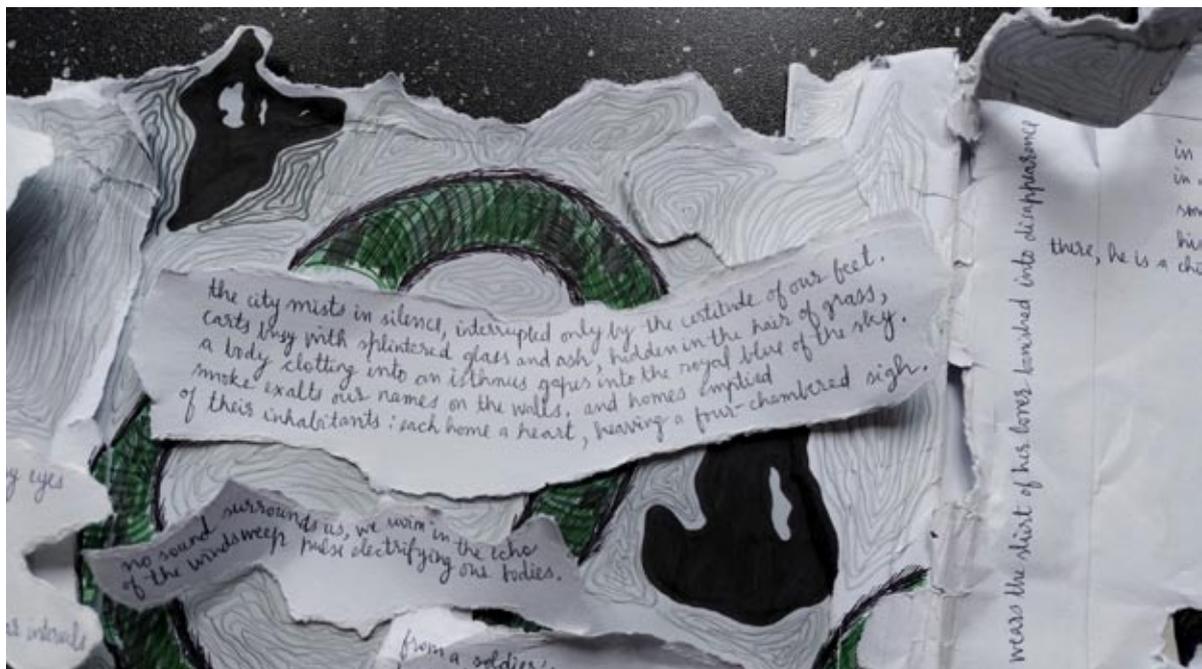
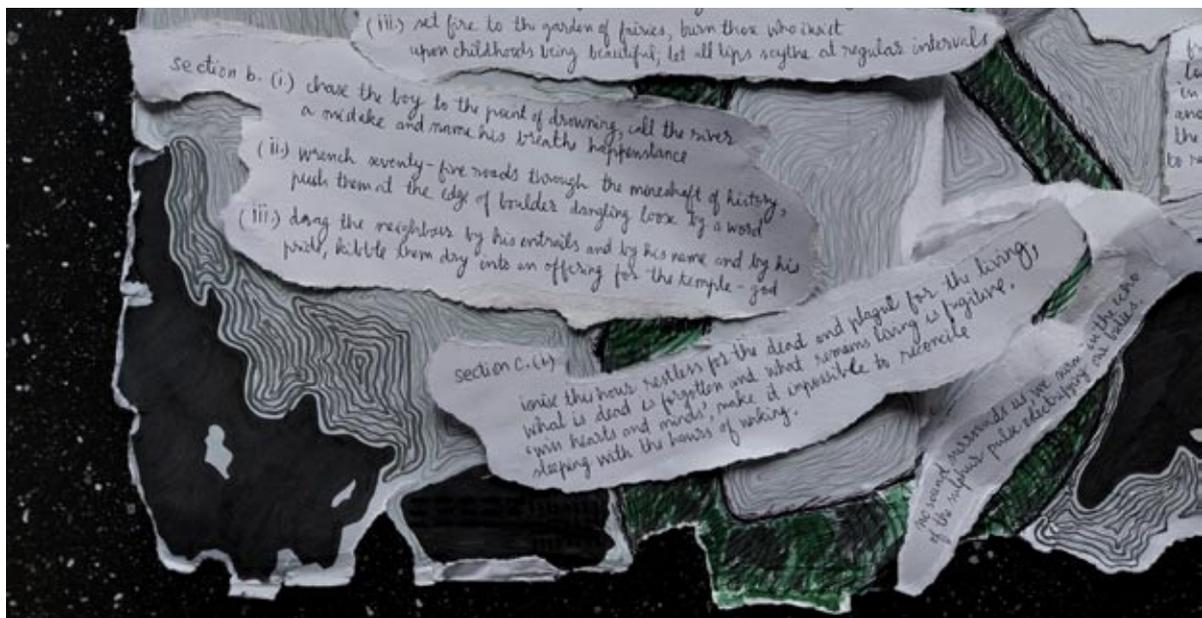
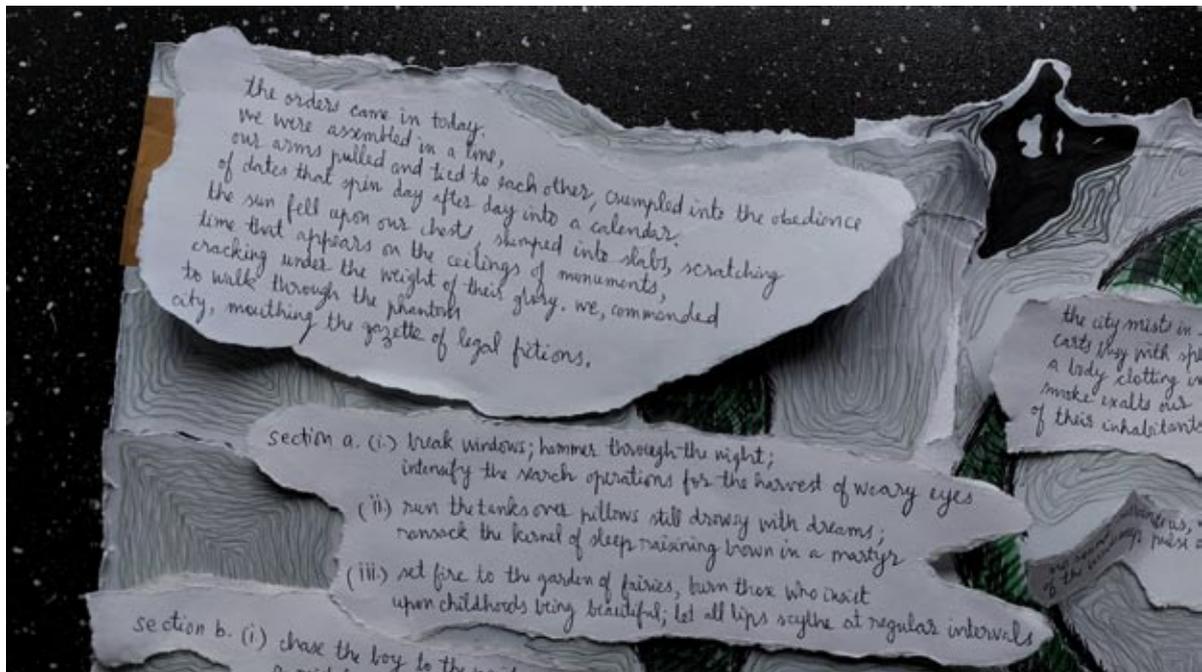
transmutation. We see this in the iterative silhouette portraits that evoke the chaos of memory in the work of Dorothy Englander. We see the ghosts that live in reflections, shadows, and shrouds as they glimmer in the artworks of Phil Sawdon, the photographs of Sukanya Ghosh, the dreamlike illustrations of Sambaran Das Agnibho Gangopadhyay, and the familiar objects David Szanto has made uncannily strange.

The ghost is a misunderstanding. I have a four-year-old who is obsessed with all that is spooky. In his pre-school cartoons I have noticed there are many ghosts. From so very early in life the stories we tell ourselves must account for the fear we experience in the face of what we don't and can't (yet) understand. The difference is that these ghosts, these bumps in the night, always turn out to have been a misunderstanding. An indeterminate sensory experience that we can't locate the source of: a baleful moan or an eerie glowing in the distance turns out to be the wind in the trees, to be bioluminescence. It was earthly, intelligible phenomena and you are safe from everything but your own imagination and its tendency to presume inexplicable magic.



commanded to walk

shivangi mariam raj



as us, we walk in the lecher
 and electrifying one bodies.

from a soldier's careless pocket, photographs come out,
 loose chain, saved for another day, falling down
 in their square surprise, the soldier's lives
 another day by stealing from another lives
 the soldier willows life, happy to live another day, happy
 to return another to another's family as a photograph.

here, she wears the
 bread

see his coat, the program with the morning bread
 oxidised calligraphy of light, stained
 where chromophores sit and absorb
 the man complete, the subject comp

to walk through the phantom

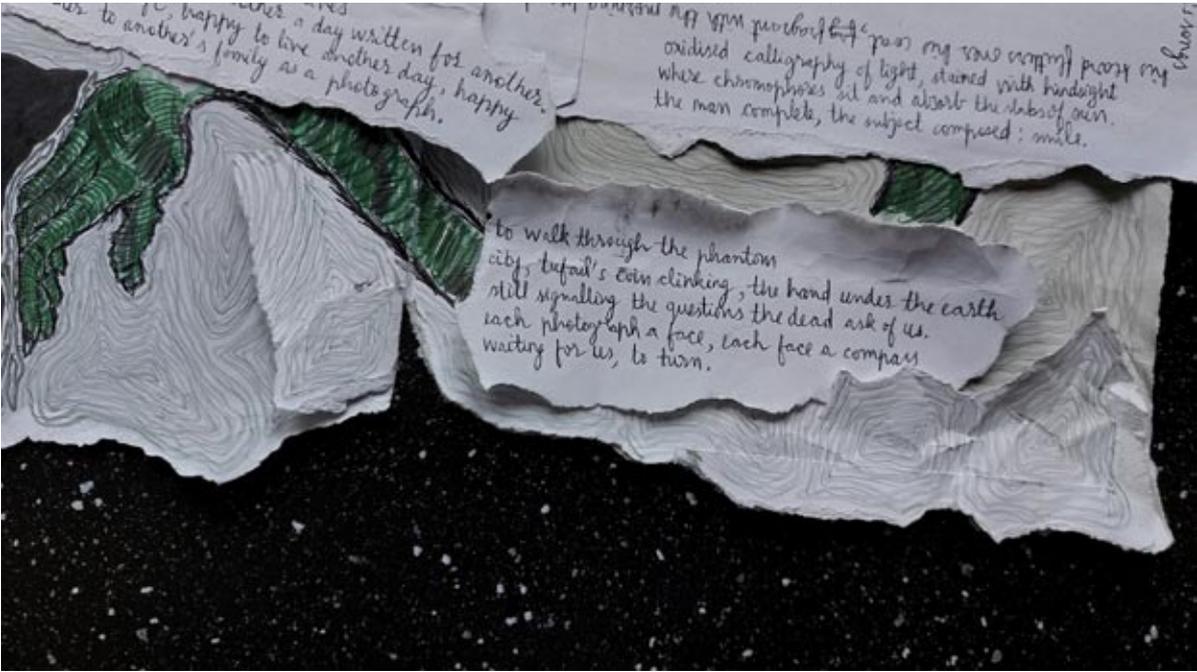
here, she wears the shirt of her bones bannished into disappearance

in a photo graph, is a man a man or a subject?
 in a photograph,
 smile, complete and composed, smile—
 his henna still swirls into a rose on his groom palms
 there, he is a child again, learning loss with his milk teeth —

his shoulders are being tucked into this father's songs

his head flutters over his coat, the program with the morning bread
 oxidised calligraphy of light, stained with hindsight
 where chromophores sit and absorb the slabs of sun,
 the man complete, the subject composed: smile.

out,
 in for another
 day, happy
 aph.



... a day written for another.
... happy to live another day, happy
... to another's family as a photograph.

oxidised calligraphy of light, stained with hindsight
where chromophores sit and absorb the slabs of sun.
the men complete, the subject composed: smile.

to walk through the phantom
city, befall's coin clinking, the hand under the earth
still signalling the questions the dead ask of us.
each photograph a face, each face a compass
waiting for us, to turn.



Image by *Aditya Pande*

Untitled

Part of a series of analogue photographic works

Silver bromide (RC),

35cm x 28cm

2017

Salvator Mundi, a Renaissance painting of the saviour of the world, recently discovered and restored, spent most of its spectral life as pentimento of a painting written off as an apprentice's copy of his master, Leonardo da Vinci's lost original. Its final restoration after many botched attempts, and its subsequent presentation as a simulacra, its attribution to da Vinci, and valuation are all highly disputed. Its sale to Abu Dhabi's prince, the highest bidder in a Christie's auction, and its journey into the plush cabins of the Saudi Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's luxury yacht, as reported by the Wall Street Journal, and the safety of the painting and its current whereabouts are all unverifiable facts.

By making a silver bromide contact photogram straight from an iPad screen display of an image of the painting on a news website, New Delhi-based artist Aditya Pande recovers *Salvator Mundi* once again and becomes another claimant of the shadowy art work. Pande creates a simulation of the world of art and its goings-on, accruing to the already shady history of appearances and disappearances of an itinerant art work through ages.

Мечта о коже.
снаружи ночь, очень темно.
У тебя нет лица или имени,
твое лицо только нарисовано на листе бумаги,
ты идёшь снаружи, ночь холодная,
этот лист бумаги на столе рядом с лампой,
ты идёшь внутри,
ты рвешь это лист
теперь ты никто.

A dream made of skin.
The night is quite dark outside.
You don't have a face or a name,
your face is only drawn on a sheet of paper,
you walk outside, the night is cold
the sheet of paper is on the table next to the lamp,
You go back inside,
you tear down this sheet of paper,
Now you are nobody.

Words by *Ivan de Monbrison*

Время тяжёлой
ты несёшь его на руках.
звезда на лбу,
такая горячая
затем твоя память горит.
собака с человеческой головой,
он спросит у вас дорогу.
Но ты ешь его голову,
и тогда ты забываешь все о будущем.

Time is heavy,
You carry it in your arms.
A Star on the forehead,
So hot
that your memory burns.
A dog with a human head,
it asks you for directions.
but you eat its head
And then you forget everything
about the future.

Words by *Ivan de Monbrison*

WELCOME



FLANEUR FILE

IMPRESSIONS: SAMBARAN DAS

WORDS: AGNI BHO GANGOPADHYAY

EXCERPT FROM THE FLANEUR FILE



No specter haunts anyone anymore. No ghosts anymore, only crude jump cuts. One can still, however, be partisan towards the apparitions, the accidents in the fabric of space and time - one can take sides. The new ghost stories ought to be stories of courage, not fear. Of renascence, not death. Of intervention, not warning.



Africa thinking a city possible. Hollywood gone
horribly wrong. Delight, friends! Reality. Television.
What a show! What a show!

Africa thinks. Saontal Pargana thinks. Niamgiri thinks.
The woolly disgusting slum slum little Africas think.

Unconquered, yet fallible. Restive, yet sedated.
Copters add that sleazy confidence. But do not be so
full of peace as yet, citizen.

For Africas think your city possible.



Bad breath, forest and fish and raw raw meat
and jungle jaw and voracious appetite.

BAD, BAD BREATH.

Free Catholic clothes and computer centres in witch
infested Adibashi hamlet.

BAD, BAD BREATH.

The bad breath swirls to some delectable violent
crescendo and HA HA HA, that steel chunk of
monitoring volitation, gone.

What a show! peace can wait.



DEATH AND DESTRUCTION TAMED AND FRAMED

Or is it? Fear smells of shit. Delicious.
The pungent gurgling interiors of your city
is now out, out there.

That cathartic overflow and excess.

TEETH. Cameras love **TEETH.**
Not this way, but also this way.



City windows hide so much so much
curious disengagement.
And the black specter is it less etched out now ?
Less sure? Fate of riots. RIOTS.
Tunisia lives in cities.
NO SUCCESS GUARANTEED.
SUCCESS GUARANTEED.
Success can look up its own ass.
We desire a breach.



The city falls into disuse so many times.

But only to come back to the

WILD WILD WEST OF UNLIMITED CONQUEST.

Chew up the canine development drive that
incarcerates Africa, slums and the already always
transformed and already always incomplete villages.

The crane's juice tastes good, good.

The juice of eternally deferred justice.

Every moment the end of history.



MODERN JUNGLES, MODERN JUNGLES.

Masculine motor vehicles defend the citizens,
oh-so puny amidst the big black heap.

Policeman on top.

Fury of the mob, fury of the people congealed in
one bureaucratic moment.

**Congeaed, frozen, sucked, terrified,
sterilized and vanished.**

And so history ends in a black heap.

The debris of silenced Africas.

And coeval ape.



The dark heart is finally caged.

Yes heart with no eyes,
only a semblance of a form that insinuates
life and death and intolerable forests.

WHAT A SHOW!

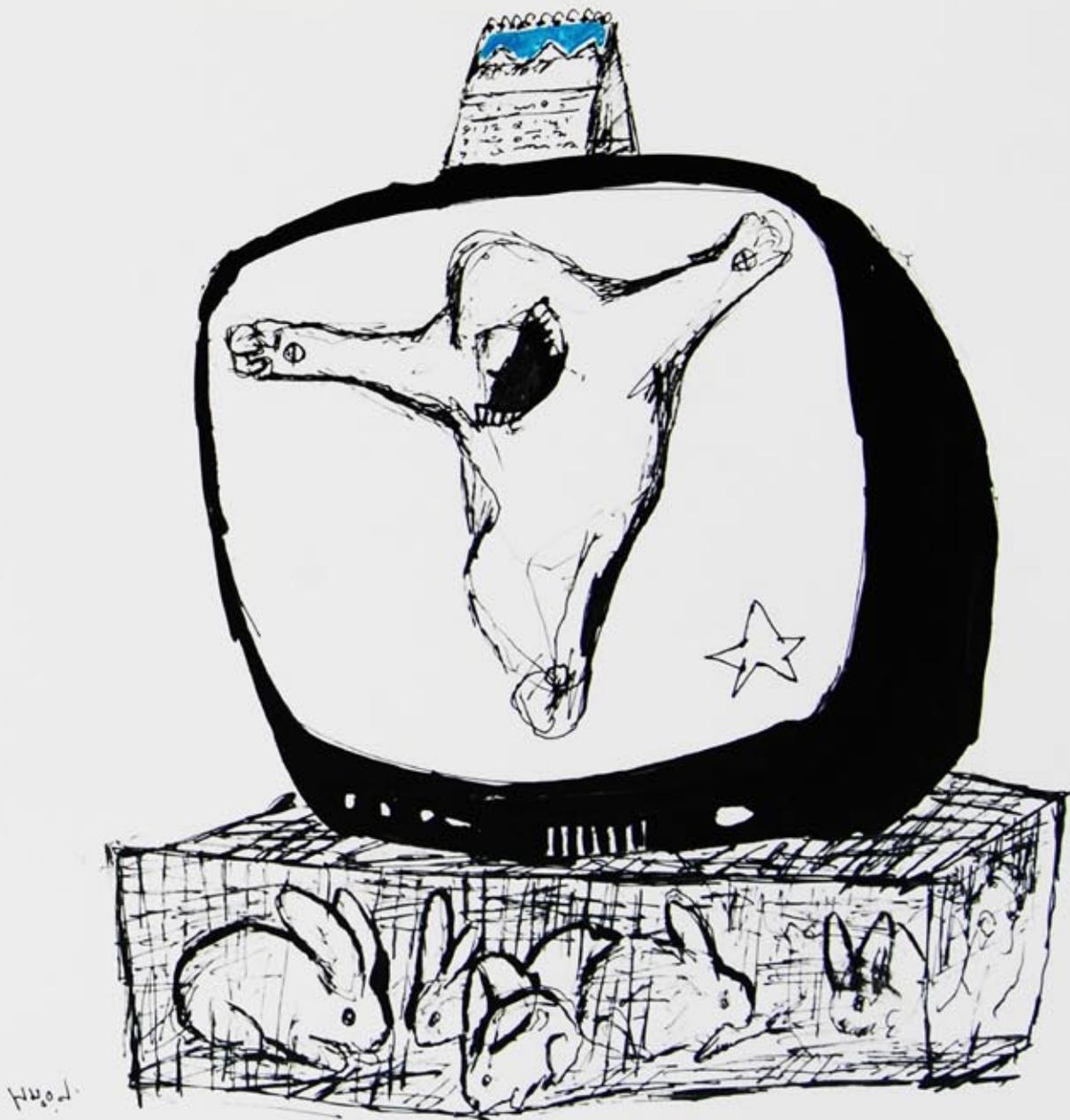
A carnival building up. Sit and see.
But never rule out unforeseen alchemies.

A dystopia has already been
unleashed.





The black heart,
black space, black form, ape ape
in simple disgusting words, is shrinking.
Its melting, actually.
And anxiety spreads in the city.
Citizens smeared with primitive organs.
No more a drawing room decoration. Good.
The loving heart of Greco-Roman mush is
inside the cage. Third world cityscape now
modern modern in all its secular morbidity.
Good. Good. No more opium.
Or maybe intoxicants of unprecedented nature.
Good. things are always changing.
But some are more perceptible than others.
Like
Africas thinking a city possible.



Competition caged for a moment.

Competition needs atypical times when it is not open to all. For the state must work.

To unleash more ghastly competitions that roast rabbits in multi-national dinner tables. And television sees it all yet sweeps it under.

The monster now a cosmetically enhanced CHE.

Crucified, ready for t-shirts.

Under the temporal order of victor's history.



1981

Birth is vile.

Slithery journey to the uterine.

Mommy-me straight line in mother's office.

A vociferous redemption provides them official,
filed, typed immunity. Other people need cover.

For the city burns and multiplies outside.

Africa and other aliens out in the open.

Incarcerated. But so so transgressive.

Burns.



Maze. Black maze
And a bubble of ghastly birth.

Pristine birth.

The city experiences an unidentified flying object.
Not so sure it is very happy about it.

CHARRED.

Ashes



SOMNAMBULIST AFRICAS,
OUT OF THE CAGE...

Or is it merely the shadow ?
The object of desire and conservation.
Now, it is different.
Solid shadows, willing to break and rebuild
and never rebuild.
Perhaps.
Not a dream.

THE VIEW ACROSS THE VALLEY

Words by *Jonathan Willmer*

For about six months before the morning in question, I'd been in the habit of rising thirty minutes before the dawn, and going out after a cold shower, but before breakfast, to take the short walk through to the field at the end of the road, where I could see the sun rise on the other side of the valley. I found this to be an excellent way of aligning my own motions with those of nature, and after a very few mornings had passed, felt a tangible sense of connection with the wider world which had thereto been lacking. And, indeed, I'd be lying if I didn't admit to just a little smugness each time I watched the sun rise, and reflected that I had beaten it.

Almost since the beginning of this, I'd incorporated a secondary operation into the ritual, which meant that even on overcast days the trip was not wasted. Over time, this secondary task assumed primary importance, to the extent that on some days I forgot to look at the sun altogether.

The task was simply this: I forbade myself to leave my station on the side of the valley until I'd managed to spot one thing about the view which I'd never noticed before. At first it was easy; whole swathes of landmarks had evaded my attention on all the countless strolls I'd taken along the route in the years before I began the formal practice. Even a sizeable reservoir, glinting in the new sun, presented itself to me afresh one morning around April.

In this way, I trained myself to look; to really, properly look, and to see. By the morning in question, finding something new was becoming difficult. I'd taken to bringing along a pair of pocket binoculars, and was beginning to lose significant portions of the day before, with grim, almost manic satisfaction, I'd declare whatever object had at last granted my reprieve. 'Remnant of a wall,' I'd exclaim, to whoever might be passing. 'Stump,' I'd cry, before hurrying away to attend whatever engagement I'd inevitably by that time be late for.

On the morning in question, however, it wasn't difficult, but impossible. It was impossible not because I'd exhausted every nook of the view across the valley; I felt fairly sure that would never be the case. No, it was impossible because there was nothing there.

If that assertion has met with anything other than breathless astonishment, then it hasn't been properly understood. The valley wasn't shrouded in fog. It wasn't dark. There was no obstruction. There was nothing. Not black nor white, but no colour; the view ahead had no dimensions, no depth or breadth, no texture. It was gone, all of it, and nothing had replaced it.

I was alone on the valley side, it being toward the middle of summer, when the

sun rose very early. It occurred to me that the effect might be produced by my own mind. I'd heard of something similar described by a friend who suffered migraines; his bedevilled brain omitting to represent parts of what his senses perceived. But I couldn't seriously entertain the possibility. My mental scaffolding had always been sturdy, and had withstood far more challenging stimuli than a clement July morning.

Being nothing, it had no size, but to judge from the elements of the vista still present to the left and the right, I guessed that the area omitted constituted around a mile; almost squarely across the valley from where I stood, and extending from the tree-lined river at the bottom up to the skyline. Occupying that space on any other day, were three or four sheep fields separated by drystone walls; a meandering lane along which I liked to watch early morning motorists winding their way like toys; and a not-yet-completed housing estate, given the go-ahead in the face of a year of desperate and frankly irritating petitions.

All of this evaded my gaze like an eel escaping capture. It wasn't that the areas either side of the absence drew closer together; the reservoir on one side and the small birch wood on the other remained as far apart as always. In fact that's exactly what was so terrible about it. And it was terrible; it was utterly horrifying. A void is something that should not exist in nature, and looking across the valley triggered in me a visceral sense of disgust, an instinctive response as old as life itself. I took out my pocket binoculars, but even holding them up squarely to the void, it squirmed away, like a soap bubble beneath the touch.

I reached the threshold of my tolerance for this débâcle almost immediately. I hurried away from the field, back through the narrow passage and onto the street, barely cognisant of the burgeoning dawn chorus, normally no small source of pleasure. I staggered into my house and shut the door behind me as if I were being pursued. I climbed the stairs to my study, and collapsed into the chair behind my desk, where I stayed more or less motionless, my mind flitting between fragments of thoughts, until my grumbling stomach compelled me down into the kitchen shortly after noon.

It was as well the deadline for my article on butterfly migration had been pushed back a day. I was no good for anything. I fed myself mechanically with whatever sandwich I'd managed to assemble in my fevered state. 'Matter can be neither created nor destroyed.' The phrase circled round my head like a mantra, spoken in the flat drone of my old science teacher Mr Burke, whom I hadn't thought of in many years. His long monologues always had their own unnerving ability to warp the way in which time flowed, and would continue, it seemed, for days at a stretch, the quality of his low monotone like that of an old clapped out car which threatened to splutter and stop at any moment, but, to the chagrin of all of us in the classroom, never did. I wondered, briefly, how he was doing, if indeed he was still alive, before the oppressive weight of the great absence sank over my thoughts once more.

I decided to telephone my Aunt Gloria. She had moved into one of the new-builds on the estate across the valley about a year ago. It was by then six years since my Uncle Frank had died, and the five-bedroom former farmhouse they had shared for much of their married life, acquired for a song as little more than a ruin back in the early '80s, was woefully large for just my Aunt alone.

Three rings without an answer were enough to herald the spectre of blind panic. I reminded myself that my Aunt was slow to answer the phone at the best of times,

and might very easily be asleep in her armchair at this time in the afternoon. As I stood in the hallway, distractedly winding the telephone cord around my hand, counting the rings into double figures, I tried to decide what my next course of action would be. Calling the police? An ambulance? It seemed foolish even to consider it, but the need was deeply ingrained to believe that, in the direst of emergencies, dialling a single three-digit phone number would be enough to fix everything.

My ruminations were mercifully interrupted by my Aunt Gloria's familiar voice, at last announcing itself at the end of the line. I'd always been fond of my Aunt; she had played an important part in my upbringing, particularly during the difficult years surrounding my parents' divorce. But never had I greeted her with quite the ebullient enthusiasm I bestowed on her now.

'All right Richard, I was only in the garden,' she said, quelling my inarticulate babble in her own understated way. 'I think I might have been asleep.'

It was clear that my Aunt had not been through anything traumatising that morning. She was never one to be easily ruffled, but I was quite certain that something as untoward as the temporary collapse of all matter would leave some trace of disquiet in her voice. She would certainly have been awake with the dawn that morning. She'd always been an early riser; as a child, during her frequent stays, it had maddened me to be roused by her indelicate pottering in the kitchen beneath my bedroom.

'To tell you the truth Richard, I'm buggered. I know I wasn't driving, but travel still takes out of you somehow, doesn't it.'

'Oh sorry, I forgot you were going away.'

'You needn't pretend. It was an impromptu trip. It was Margaret's idea. Have you met Margaret? I don't think you have. She moved in a few doors along the same week I did. We've become firm friends, actually. Anyway, she has a caravan in the Dales, and her husband's away with work for the week, so she said why don't we go and stop over there for the night? She's always been telling me how nice it is. So I just threw a few bits in a suitcase and off we went. Can you believe it? I felt like I was nineteen again, gallivanting off like that. I don't know what got into us, really.'

'When was this? Just yesterday?'

'That's right. Yesterday morning.'

'You can't have had time to see much.'

'Well it wasn't a sight-seeing trip. We had a lovely time, just sitting outside the caravan, listening to the birds, watching the children playing, and all the barbecue smoke in the air. I think it did us a world of good, just to get away for a night.'

'You didn't fancy staying longer?'

'Well. No, we didn't think of it, really. Oh yes, Margaret had to get back, she's picking her granddaughter up from school this afternoon.'

It was impossible to contain my consternation. 'So you didn't think it might be best to leave it to the weekend?'

'What is this, the Spanish Inquisition? No, Margaret's husband'll be back by then, I should think. And anyway. It was spontaneous. It was about the moment. I know it sounds odd but you had to be there. I feel even more like a teenager now, with all your questioning. You want to get kids of your own, you can direct all this parental concern at them. It's about time you got married.'

'OK, Aunt Gloria, it's been lovely speaking to you. I'll let you get back to your

garden.'

My hand lingered on the receiver as I contemplated what to do next. The idea that I might apply myself to some work, get a bit of writing done, didn't enter into my thinking for a second. Instead, I took up my coat, and forced my legs to carry me back to the field at the end of the road.

For the second time that day, I gazed over at the view across the valley. The sun, by this time, was past its zenith, but still high in the sky. A few little cotton-wool clouds moved glacially across a steel blue backdrop. And below, on the opposite side of the valley, a miniature postal van wound its way along a country lane, toward a small housing estate. There were a few houses on the estate that were yet to be completed, but it was, without any ambiguity at all, present.

I didn't stay long. In spite of the reassuring mundanity of the scene, the spot had somehow acquired a sour atmosphere, which I dearly hoped wouldn't persist. I went home only to pick up my car keys, and made the ten minute journey across to my Aunt's estate. I wanted to see the place at close quarters. I felt, with all the time I'd put into sharpening my observational skills, that if anything had altered in the estate, I would be very well placed to notice it.

Pulling off the main A-road, I didn't immediately notice anything awry. I tried not to ascribe too much significance to the slightly ethereal quality of the afternoon light; it might just as easily be a result of changes to atmospheric pressure as the aftermath of total metaphysical breakdown. I stopped at an arbitrary point in the middle of the estate, and stepped out onto the black tarmac.

It was odd, seeing up close what I'd spent so long poring over at a distance. It was an occasional source of mild guilt to reflect that I visited my Aunt as rarely as I did. I'd been only once in the year since she moved here, and that before I'd begun my current morning regime. I walked along single brief road as if exploring the set of a beloved television programme.

I paused at the foot of a conifer I'd first noticed, in a moment of elation, after a particularly gruelling morning of intense observation only a week earlier. From across the valley it had appeared, even through the pocket binoculars, as little more than a vaguely conical green mass. Now, only feet away, it struck me that I could have spent those last six months staring at this tree alone, and have been no closer to exhausting all there was to notice. I leant over the low garden fence as if it were a rope in front of a painting in a gallery, the better to take in the rich profusion of detail: the fans of milky green needles, each with its own distinct idiosyncrasies; the clusters of cones, still small and embryonic, green and tightly closed; the minute chrysalis, almost indistinguishable from the cones; the thick complex of spider's webs toward the bottom, apparently without an owner. And, clinging here and there to the needles, trembling in the breeze, were what looked to be fragments of ash; the silvery remnants of burnt paper. It struck me then that the real mystery was not the fleeting absence, but the very fact that anything was here at all; and yet seeing the sheer multiplicity of things at this proximity made the event of the disappearance all the more dizzyingly gargantuan. I felt close to being overwhelmed.

A movement in the periphery of my vision drew my eye to the window of the house to which the garden belonged. Only then did I consider the potentially unfavourable impression created by a strange man staring avidly at a tree. I stepped back from the fence, the blood rushing momentarily to my cheeks. I allowed myself another swift glance toward the window; a woman was staring

pointedly in my direction, her features arranged into a distinctly hostile expression. I manufactured what I hoped was a reassuring smile, before turning on my heel and continuing, in as nonchalant a manner as I could muster, along the street.

My eyes to the floor, I saw that the ground was strewn with the same flecks of ash as had adorned the conifer. It was clear, as soon as I picked one up, that it wasn't ash. It didn't crumble to the touch; no black or grey residue rubbed off onto my fingers. It was as thin and malleable as tissue, but immeasurably stronger. It flapped in the wind when I held it up, sunlight glinting off it when the angle was right, but it was impossible to tear, or even to crease. I pocketed it.

It was then that my journalistic instincts began to surface. It had been a few years since I stepped back from front-line investigative journalism, but I came up through the papers, and those ways of thinking die hard. The ash was intriguing, but I could see little to be done about it now. However, the utter impracticality of Aunt's impromptu trip lingered in my mind, and I couldn't ignore the possibility – nay, the likelihood – that it too was connected somehow with the void. This was a lead I was able to act on, and so, with a plan still forming in my mind, I strode purposefully up the garden path of the next house along, and knocked at the front door with all the vigour of a police officer.

The door was swiftly opened, and I countered the impertinence of my aggressive hammering with a disarmingly gentle manner, honed through long years of practice.

'Good afternoon,' I said to the slightly unkempt middle-aged man in the doorway. 'My name is Richard Crumb, and I'm here on behalf of the Evening Gazette. We're conducting a survey of people's travel habits, and I hope you don't mind my taking a moment of your time to ask just one very quick question?'

The man blinked a few times, as his expression morphed from one of alarm to mild confusion. 'Um, no, I suppose not. Just one, you say?'

'Just one. And it is this: When did you last spend the night away from home?'

'Ah.' The man chuckled slightly. 'Actually, it was last night.'

'Oh?' The ambiguity of whether or not the 'oh' constituted a second question, and therefore a contravention of my assurance, fortunately didn't need to be addressed, since the man carried on readily.

'The idea just popped into my head. I thought to myself, "I wonder how Ian's doing?" Ian's a friend from university, you see. Hadn't seen him in – well, it must be ten years now. And my wife and I got talking, and she says, "Well, why don't we go and visit him?" He's always inviting us in his Christmas cards. So we finally took him up on it. Had a great time.'

'Really? Well, how about that.'

'But I'm sorry if it skews your survey a bit. Before that we hadn't been away in – oh, it must be two years. No, three.'

'Don't worry about that, I'm sure it'll all balance out. Thank you very much for your time.'

'Not at all. That's it, is it? Well, I'll look out for the article. When do you think it'll be in?'

'Ah, it's difficult to tell with these things. Maybe in a week. Maybe half a year. It depends on so many factors, you see. Anyway, I won't take up any more of your time. Thanks again, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.'

The second house yielded no response. At the third, a young woman, alone with her baby, regarded me with suspicion, but at length revealed her story.

Unable to settle the child, she'd had the idea of taking it for a drive, in the hope that the engine might lull it to sleep. It worked, but not before she had driven so far from home that they were compelled to spend the night in a hotel. Already my discomfort was growing, as the inevitable conclusion became apparent, but I moved on, and made my way, conducting my own little survey, along the eight or nine houses to the end of the street. Five answered; each had a variation on the same story. By the time I put the question to the last resident – a young primary school teacher who, in the midst of a packed schedule of marking and planning, had found the time to go searching for the location of a half-remembered childhood holiday – my voice shook uncontrollably.

'I'm sorry, are you all right?' said the teacher, with only concern in her eyes.

'Perfectly fine,' I said, and left at once.

At the end of the street, the tarmac road turned to mud. The track carried on a little way, hollow shells of houses on either side. At the end, the houses were no more than foundations, and then the mud track terminated, and there was nothing. But of course there wasn't nothing, there was as much as there was anywhere else, which is to say, infinitudes.

I began to walk toward the first house on the other side of the road, but I didn't get very far. There was no reason to continue with the survey; it was clear by now that no one had spent the night on the estate. The fact that the place had been cleared beforehand meant that the disappearance was something planned; a deliberate intervention. But by what? Aliens? Fairies? God? And to what end? Each scenario I imagined seemed more ghastly than the last. The thought occurred to me that the area had been removed in order to prepare it for something which was yet to happen, or, at the very least, that the area was vulnerable to repeat occurrences, and with the thought came an overbearing terror which subverted my conscious operations, and diverted my course toward my Aunt Gloria's house, which happened to be exactly opposite my car. I didn't bother knocking, but instead conducted myself along the passage to the rear of the house.

'Aunt Gloria,' I called. There she sat, her back to me, in a wicker chair on the patio at the far end of the garden. 'Aunt Gloria,' I called again, crossing the manicured lawn, as she turned to direct her bemused gaze toward me. 'There's something vitally important I need to explain to you. I think you might be in terrible danger.'

'Whatever are you talking about? Calm down, Richard. Sit.'

I followed my Aunt's instruction, and took the wicker chair beside hers. I sat a moment to collect my thoughts. Over the low fence at the end of the garden, beyond which the fields fell away sharply, there was a broad view across the valley. The summer sun hung over the field in which I'd started the day.

As my breathing subsided, so did my panic. Like a snow globe returned to the mantelpiece, my thoughts began to settle. I squinted through the sun; found the houses at the end of my street, and a few other landmarks with which I was familiar. I tried to recall the experience of that morning; of looking directly into nothing. The attempt to see between the birch wood and the reservoir which bookended the errant space had been akin to trying to connect the same poles of two magnets. But would I have recognised the effect if I weren't trying so stubbornly to see something which, for the moment, wasn't there? Almost certainly not. It followed, from this line of thinking, that there might be great swathes of the world which, for the moment, weren't there, and I wouldn't be any the wiser. The

thought somehow comforted me enormously. I couldn't say why, exactly; perhaps because it allowed the possibility for the aberration to be rather a common thing, and this made it all somehow more palatable. The fields ahead of me quivered in the heat haze, distorted slightly due to some meteorological quirk; the sort of thing that happens rather often in the summer.

It occurred to me for the first time to wonder if I was doing any good. The impulse to solve mysteries was strong; to expose conspiracies to the public. But I hadn't left investigative journalism for the cosier world of general interest articles because there were no more conspiracies to expose. I got out because I was tired, and because the business of exposing these incendiary truths no longer felt as vital as it did when I was young and naive. It took too long to realise that my unquenchable lust for answers was entirely self-serving, and any argument to the contrary was rendered impotent, time and again, as each story I broke failed to change the world in as radical a way as I'd envisioned. Was this really any different?

The state of anguish in which I arrived at my Aunt's garden was already beginning to strike me as strange. It was all, in the most literal sense, much ado about nothing. I smiled at the joke, and regretted that I couldn't share it.

'Richard, what is it? You're frightening me. What's this terrible danger?'

'Oh – It's a very hot day today. You really should be wearing a hat.'

I ignored my Aunt's frown. I suspected that my comment had done little to assuage her unease. I reached into my pocket and took out the fragment of 'ash'. I held it up to the sun, and found that, in spite of its absolute thinness, it allowed no light through. I released it, and the parting of my fingers happened to coincide with a sharp gust of wind. The 'ash' fluttered away, as if carried by the wind, but the wind blew into the valley, and the fragment moved across it. I watched it as it went, and saw other pieces moving with it, contrary to the wind. There were a great many of them, and they were moving slowly; slow enough to follow on foot. I turned my gaze away from them.

THE EYE-GHOST &

THE SMOKE-GHOSTS

STORY & DRAWINGS: SHYAM THANDAR

TRANSLATION & LETTERING: SOURAV ROY

SARALA IS A GIRL OF THIS VILLAGE ONLY. BUT WHEN SARALA CAME

TO PARAN DAS-THE-VILLAGE-CHIEF'S ^{HOUSEHOLD AS HIS} SON BABULAL DAS'S NEW

BRIDE, SOMETHING HAPPENED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIS VILLAGE. THE

NEW BRIDE WENT TO HAVE BATH IN THE JAMINDAR MANSION'S GHAT,

THE KIRNAHAR JAMINDAR MANSION OF PRANGOPAL SARKAR. HE WAS

UNDER THE RAJAH OF SONARUNDHI, MURSHIDABAD. THE RAJAH WAS OF

WEAVER CASTE, AND COMMUNITY OF DAS SURNAME. MEANING, THE

SAME CASTE AS PARAN DAS, WHO IS NOW THE VILLAGE CHIEF.

SARALA SAW TWO GIANT EYES STARING AT HER WITHOUT ANY

BLINKING, FROM A WINDOW OF THE MANSION (JAMINDAR MANSION).

THE EYES WERE FLOATING. NO BODY WAS ATTACHED (TO THE EYES).

"O DEAR MOTHER!" SARALA SCREAMED AND FAINTED AT THE BATHING

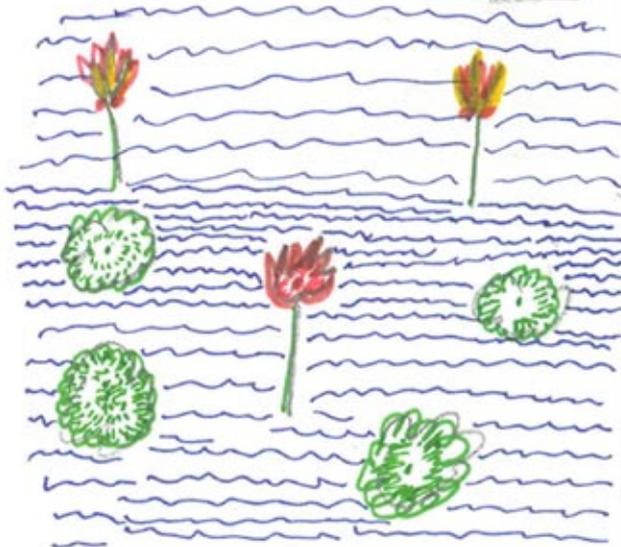
GHAT. HER FOREHEAD SPLIT OPEN, BLOOD EVERYWHERE. THE GHAT
HAD NO ONE ELSE.

SO IT TOOK A WHILE FOR BABULAL DAS TO GO AND BRING BACK HIS SENSE.

①

-LESS WIFE.

THE KAVIRAJ CAME TO BRING HER BACK TO WAKING. AND THEN SHE OPENED HER EYES. AND THEN SHE OPENED HER MOUTH ABOUT THE **EYE-GHOST**. SO THEN THE TANTRIK HAD TO BE CALLED. THE TANTRIK-BABA ONLY MADE SOME PUJA FOR PEACE AND PURITY. HE DIDN'T SPEAK MUCH. BUT HIS FOREHEAD FOLDS, WHILE LEAVING, WAS SEEN BY ALL. **SEEING** GHOSTS IN THE JAMINDAR MANSION WAS COMMONPLACE. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW PEOPLE THERE NOW, BUT MANY GHOSTS IN THE "**GHOST-WELL**". BUT THE GHOSTS IN THE **GHOST-WELL** ARE **SNOKE-GHOSTS**. SCREAMS, TANTRUMS, CRYING, SHOUTING, ALL THINGS THEY DO AT NIGHT, BUT WHEN THEY SHOW UP, THEY LOOK LIKE SMOKE. **NOBODY** OTHER THAN SARALA HAS SEEN THE **EYE-GHOST** BEFORE. **BABULAL** DIDN'T TRUST SARALA FULLY ON THIS. **PLUS** THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE THERE. THE VILLAGE IS FULL OF GHOST STORIES. **GRANNYS** AND MOTHERS USE "**GHOST-WELL**" STORIES TO SCARE KIDS FINISH THEIR RICE MEALS OR HOMEWORKS. **GHOST HAS COME TO SNATCH FISH**, MANY STORIES ARE THERE LIKE THIS. **BUT** IN THE STREETS, HOUSES, WINDOWS, KITCHENS, **NOBODY** HAS SEEN THE **EYE-GHOST** PEEPING. **NO NEWS** OF THAT. **SO IS EYE-GHOST**



VISITING SARALA ONLY? BUT AFTER MARRIAGE FUNCTION, BABULAL AND SARALA WENT TO THE SAME GHAT FOR WATER RITUAL, BUT EYE-GHOST

DID NOT COME WHY? IS EYE-GHOST FEMALE OR MALE? IS HE ADULT? NO

BODY ALSO, HOW TO KNOW? BABULAL GETS GAS FROM TENSION.

IS HE MARRIED TO A CRAZY GHOSTED GIRL? HE HEARD MANY

WHISPERS AND RUMOURS ABOUT SARALA. BUT THAT'S COMMON

FOR ALL VILLAGE GIRLS. MANY EYE-WITNESSES FOR SMOKE-GHOSTS

IN VILLAGE. BUT BABULAL NEEDS AT LEAST ONE MORE FOR EYE-GHOST.

BABULAL DID NOT HAVE TO WAIT LONG. THAT NIGHT, SARALA

CAME BACK TO BABULAL'S BED AFTER A WEEK. SHE WAS SLEEPING

WITH HER MOTHER-IN-LAW SINCE SEEING THE EYE-GHOST. AFTER

THE WEDDING NIGHT BED, THEY WERE IN THE SAME BED FOR THE

SECOND TIME. THE FIRST TIME, THEY BOTH SLEPT LIKE DEAD

③

BABULAL

BABULAL COULD NOT GET ANY PLEASURE OF THE BRAND-NEW BRIDE. SO THIS NIGHT, LET'S NOT DELAY GOOD STUFF, THOUGHT BABULAL, LEANED ON SARALA AND STARTED OPENING HIS PYJAMAS. →



HE STOPPED AT THE ENLARGED EYES OF SARALA. HE HAS STILL NOT TAKEN OUT HIS UNDERWEAR, WHY IS SHE IN SHOCK... THEN HE LOOKED AT THE WINDOW, EYE-GHOST!

BEFORE HE COULD SCREAM, THE TWO EYES FLEW AT HIS CROTCH! BABULAL SCREAMED "OH MY DAD!" IN HIS UNDERWEAR HE SPRUNG OPEN THE BEDROOM DOOR AND AROUSED THE WHOLE NEIGHBOUR HOOD. THE TANTRIK-BABA WAS CALLED AGAIN. HE SAID THE NEW BRIDE

HAS TO BE HYPNOTISED TO GET AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS.

IT WILL BE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. NO ONE ELSE IS ALLOWED.

THE DOORS OPENED AFTER MANY HOURS. THE TANTRIK WENT STRAIGHT TO SARALA'S FATHER-IN-LAW PARANDAS, GAVE HIM A FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER, TOOK A FRESH CURRENCY NOTE OF TWO THOUSAND RUPEES, AND LEFT WITHOUT A WORD. THE PAPER HAD ONE NAME WRITTEN 108 TIMES WITH THE ASHES OF THE HOLY FIRE:

SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY
SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY
SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY
SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY SUJOY

5





KRISHNAGOPAL SARKAR, JAMINDAR PRANGOPAL SARKAR'S ONLY SON IS BABULAL'S BUNCHUN. SITTING IN BENGALURU, HE GOT A CALL FROM BABULAL. HE LISTENED TO IT ALL SILENTLY AND THEN SAID IN HEAVY TONE, "BABU, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW THE TRUE THINGS, RING UP YOUR DAD."

THEN HE SWITCHED OFF THE PHONE. DAS-ES AND SARKARS

ARE FRIENDS FOR GENERATIONS. PRANGOPAL AND PARAN WERE

NECK-ON-NECK FRIENDS. PRANGOPAL'S FATHER HARILAL WAS SLY AS A

FOX. HE USED TO COLLECT TAXES FOR THE RATAH, KEPT 75% FOR HIM-

-SELF AND GAVE THE 25% TO RATAH. AND BLAMED THE LOW COLLECTION

ON THE BAD TAXPAYERS. **SUSPICIOUS OF THE LIE AND THE LOSS**

RATAH THREATENED HARILAL THAT HE WILL COME AND DO

THE TAX COLLECTION HIMSELF. OVERNIGHT, HARILAL

KILLED ALL THE VILLAGE TAXPAYERS WHO COULD DARE

TO SQUEAL TO RATAH. ALSO THEIR FAMILIES.

HE THREW THEIR DEAD BODIES IN A DRY WELL IN HIS HOUSE. AND IT HAS BECOME "GHOST-WELL". ANYWAY, BABULAL DID NOT GET ANY ANSWER ABOUT 'SUJOY' FROM HIS DAD PARANDAS.

HE SLAMMED THE DOOR ON THE NOSE OF HIS SON!
WHO IS SUJOY? IS HE THE EYE-GHOST?

OR IS HE SENDING THE EYE-GHOST?

IS HE AN EX-LOVER OF SARALA?

THEN WHY HE LOOKED AT

BUT AFTER SEEING THE GHOST, BABULAL

HE DOESN'T EVEN

AFTER SARALA'S FACE,

BODY! IF SUJOY IS THE EYE-GHOST,

WHY ANYONE ELSE DID NOT SEE HIM BEFORE THEIR MARRIAGE?

BABULAL GOT TIRED WITH QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONS. BUT ONLY TO HIMSELF.



BABULALS' CROTCH?

BANISHED HIMSELF FROM SARALA'S BED.

DARE TO LUST FORGET HER

AS THE VILLAGE CHIEF'S SON AND THE NEXT VILLAGE CHIEF, HE CAN'T ASK HIS VILLAGERS ABOUT HIS OWN WIFE. IT IS A MATTER OF HONOUR AND PRESTIGE. WHAT IF THE REAL STORY IS MORE BAD THAN WHAT IT SEEMS? BUT SARALA SEEMS TO HAVE NO PROBLEM ABOUT SLEEPING ALONE. SHE DOESN'T WANT TO GO BACK TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW'S BED. AND SHE STARTED SLEEPING EARLY. THE EYE-GHOST HAS NOT VISITED AGAIN BUT PEOPLE HEAR MORE NOISES FROM THE "SMOKE-GHOSTS" IN THE "GHOST-WELL". ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT. PEOPLE DON'T DARE TO GO TO THE BATHING GHAT EVEN IN DAY TIME. SOMETIMES BABULAL GETS UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT TO SNOOP ON THE CLOSED ROOM OF HIS SLEEPING WIFE. HE PUTS HIS EARS TO HER DOOR, TRIES TO PEEP THROUGH THE SHUT WINDOW. BUT HE DOESN'T

9

HEAR ANYTHING BUT A FEW SLEEPY MOANS OF SARALA.

PARAN DAS IS STILL "SPEAKTY-NOT" ABOUT **SUTOY**.

HE IS TOO BUSY WITH HIS CHIEFLY WORK,
ELECTION WORK, VILLAGE COUNCIL WORK.

AND ADDING A FEW MORE FRESH DEAD BODIES
TO THE VILLAGE'S 'GHOST WELL' NOW AND THEN.

**INCREASING THE SMOKE GHOST
POPULATION OF THE VILLAGE.**



**ON ONE NIGHT,
SARALA'S MOANS
WERE DIFFERENT.
MORE DEEP
AND LESS SCARED.
IT
KEPT GOING
UP AND DOWN
UP AND
DOWN**



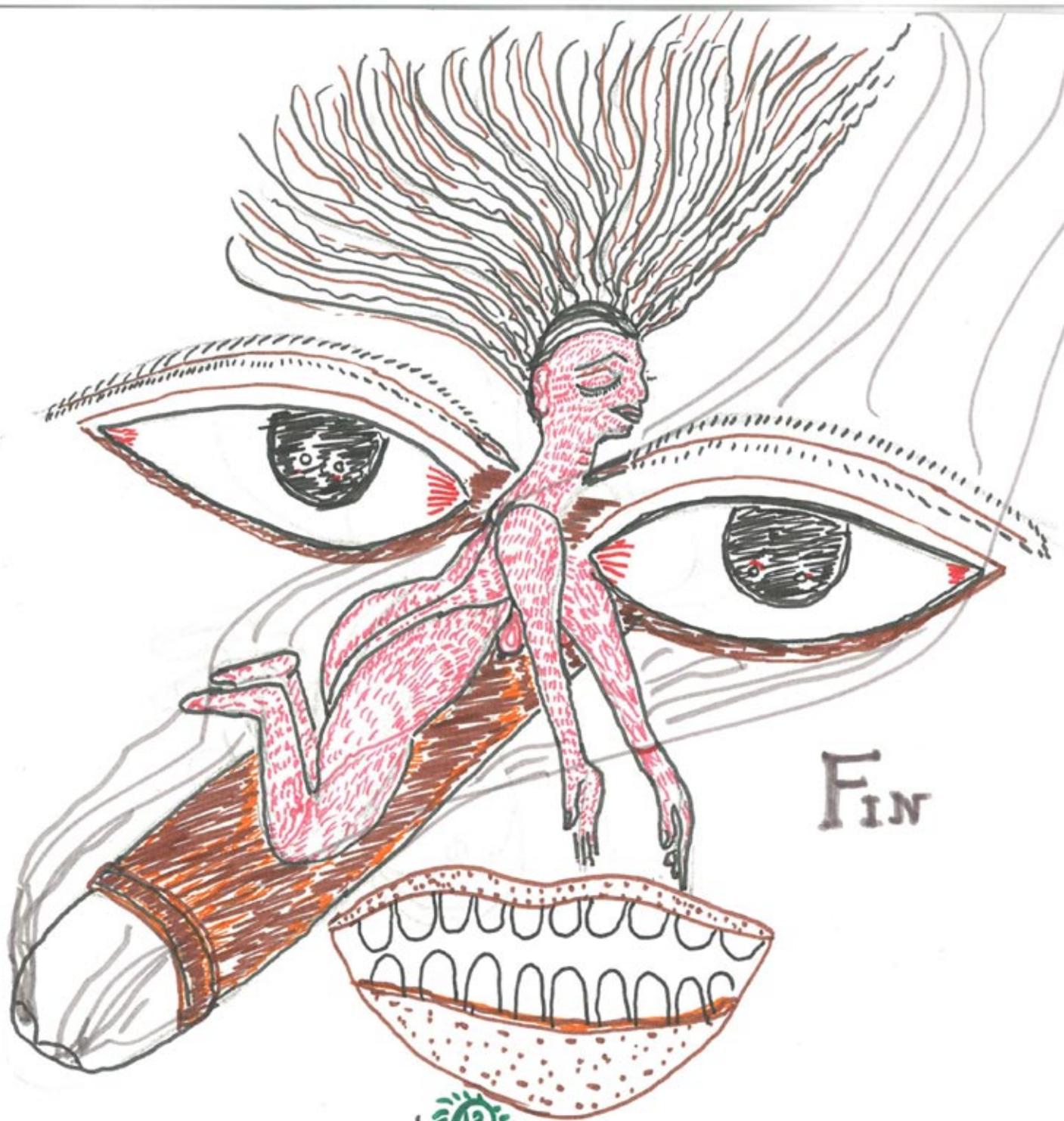
BABULAL CALLED
HER NAME,
KNOCKED HER
DOOR, ASKED
HER TO OPEN
BUT NO LUCK.
HE PUT HIS
SHOULDER TO
THE DOOR FINALLY,
AND WHEN HE
BROKE IT OPEN,
WHAT HE SAW,
HE
RATHER
DID NOT
WANT TO
SEE!



SARALA IS
ALONE BUT
HER SARI IS
FULL OF
SOMETHING!
IT IS AS IF
SHE IS

ON A FOUNTAIN
OF AIR, OR BY THE
SEA SIDE, HER SARI
IS BILLOWING, PUFFED
UP, PARACHUTE-LIKE AND
MOVING VERY, VERY VIGOROUS-
-LY. AND SHE IS MOANING
WITH HER EYES SHUT!!!
BABULAL SHOUTED AND
GRABBED HER SARI BUT

WHAT CAME OUT OF HER, BETWEEN HER LEGS, OUT OF THE SARI ARE THOSE TWO EYES OF THE EYE-GHOST! EVERYBODY SCREAMED AND STOOD BACK! THOSE TWO EYES THEN LIFTED SARALA'S BODY IN THE AIR, SHE WAS STILL SLEEPING! IT WAS LIKE THE IMMERSION OF DURGA IDOL IN THE RIVER, WHERE IT IS PLACED ON TWO BOATS' MIDDLE, ON THE HORIZONTAL GAP WITH THE VERTICAL IDOL. THEN THE BOATS ROW APART AND THE IDOL FALLS IN WATER! THE EYES KEPT FLYING, CARRYING SARALA AND HER BODY STARTED TURNING TO SMOKE WITH COLD LIGHT COMING OUT OF HER! "IT'S FLYING TO THE GHOST-WELL! YES, THAT WAY!" EVERYBODY SHOUTED. AT THE WELL, THE EYES PARTED LIKE THE BOATS AND SARALA'S SNAKE-LIKE SMOKE BODY WAS IMMERSSED LIKE AN IDOL TO THE WELL. ALMOST AT THE SAME TIME, THE EYE-GHOST VANISHED LIKE SOMEBODY SWITCHED OFF TWO LIGHT BULBS. ONLY A HANDFUL OF DEEP WHITE SMOKE ROSE FROM THE GHOST-WELL IN THE DEEP, DARK MIDNIGHT AIR. THE SAME WELL WHERE SUJOY'S DEAD BODY WAS REBORN AS THE EYE-GHOST. SUJOY WENT BACK TO SMOKE, MINGLED WITH SARALA'S SMOKE BODY. **SMOKE TO SMOKE, EYE FOR AN EYE. BUT IT SEEMS, THE 'GHOSTWELL' SOUNDS & SCREAMS ARE VERY SILENT NOW, EVEN AT NIGHT.** 



FIN

A VISION

Words by *AN Grace*

Your heart is old man's toes. Folded over
a dog bred with too much vigour
twisted
until it can breathe.

At the beach you run for the waves.
They run from you, hop skip step
in unknowns I'm jealous.

Every hot summer's day the air
pushes me down
forces me to stop
grass grows around me.
Still in energy I melt under fire.
Forced decay.

THE RESIDENCE OF ALL OUR PROBLEMS

Words by *AN Grace*

In this house the man lives
the woman lives here too
the cat lives here sometimes
the dog lives here too.

In this house the hand moves
against something seen as new.

In this house the man stalks
the woman sits here too
the dog lies in the corner
the cat can see it too

HISTORY OF THE ARCH-SPIRIT OF PEYARABAGAN : A BRIEF OUTLINE

Words by *Swapan Panda*
Translation by *Sourav Roy*

The water freezeth, ice is made
The darkness gathereth, spooks are made

Never have we ever dreamt of writing the history of spooks. We just wanted to write the history of our mundane Peyarabagan alley. Not even history, really, merely an outline for one. So we finally folded our sleeves, workmanlike. So that in a far away future, when someone or the other lays the bricks of this history neatly to erect a historical monument, our raw materials may come in handy.

It was the early hour of the lockdown doomsday then. The whole world is shut down. The sky, the air, the deep space, the water and the land are shaking with Corona-dread. News News News Breaking News! Never before have people fell all over themselves to swallow so much news so eagerly. The explosive rise of news market came down upon us avalanche-like, along with Vitamin C, Paracetamol, Multivitamin, Oxymeter, and...and gurgling machines. Soon the world will go mad and start chanting and wailing...vaccine vaccine vaccine. The poison spores of Pandemic didn't just wound our inhales exhales lungs and hearts, it also breathed paranoia in each of our brain cells....stay away, stay farther farther away. This global tsunami of Pandemic broke shore at our Peyarabagan alley one day. So far, while keeping up with the news from our nation-globe-neighbouring alleys, we spoke to ourselves as spake Yudhishthir in the epic of Mahabharat, with full biswas...full trust...we are immune, our alley is immune....we are beyond age death decomposition... then Mr. Biswas bit the dust. The hour of terror, of pandemic demise, finally entered the Peyarabagan alley. The beast slunk away into the grey darkness of the early morning, with the first prey in its jaws. We thought: he was due for demise anyway, haven't you noted his old age? On top of that high pressure, high sugar, a clear case of co-morbidities...he would have died from something else...vasangsi jirnani....as the soul leaves a worn outfit-like body...we are still beyond age death decomposition.... After three days, the beast came back to claim its second prey, in the broad daylight of the cruel April. He didn't have any other illnesses, almost of our age. And then it began – at day night dawn dusk, the body count totalling seventeen. Even an eighteen year old...oh Lord! We had a headfuck listening to the wailings of the ambulance and seeing its spooky lights at all hours. Sleep escaped and dreams vanished. The white ambulance looked like the grim reaper himself. We realised that we are not beyond age death decomposition. In front of the cruel, pitiless, fanged

beast of Death, we are mere mortals – worms, insects, even. Bodies who died, didn't return. It was not the time to sing requiems for the dead. Nobody knew what happened to the dead bodies denied of their last rites – whether they were cremated or buried in the valleys of the garbage mountains outside the cities – we had no idea. The news showed us a village, where eleven half-charred Corona corpses are lying about in a quiet dawn, and all the villagers are running away in terror, to outrun the bounds of the neighbourhood, the village, the country. But how far can they run? No other village community will let them in. Like terrified beasts running away from a wildfire in the streets, in the fields, blinded by terror...and then the inevitable retreat by dragging their hooves on the burnt-out terrains of the jungle. Elsewhere we saw rows and rows of pyres burning all night, and at the feet of the crematorium, hundreds of mangled, rotting corpses are lined up, wrapped up in plastic sacks. Are the bodies from our Peyarabagan alley waiting at some crematorium for their last rites, like this?

A man lies dead on a hospital bed, his eyes almost popping out of his skull. A while back he was alive on live TV, sucking in the air with an open mouth, begging for some more please, but where is the air, or oxygen? None. But camera is there. There is a before-after picture, dead and alive, but no air whatsoever. Can happen to us too, at any coming day...So write down please, please write down the small tales of our tiny alley. Do you know in the Pandemic so many villages and towns get fully wiped out, not a single survivor, let alone one to write memoirs. Write down, write down, write down, document, document, document! That was the beginning. We thought while listening to and writing out the history of our alley, we might stave off our fear of death, even if for a few days. Let's get writing, then.

While writing the origin history of the alley, while writing about the politics culture society and the lost people of the alley, stories of spooks and ghosts and spirits from god-knows-what-time showed up suddenly. It started weirdly enough. Shantashree Bhadra is a boyhood friend. Shanta's father was picked up by an ambulance on April eighteenth evening. On twentieth morning a phone call said, Mr. Bhadra is dead. The dead body will be cremated at a location specified as per government directives. Everybody else in the house has to be tested and has to be in mandated quarantine. After that they can come and collect the death certificate. Shanta called after seven days approximately. What's up Shanta, do you all need anything, rice lentils groceries medicine... No, all there. Are you guys positive? We were too scared to call...Ma is positive. We are negative. Ma is not having so much problem. She is in a separate room... I was saying...Yes, tell me...Can you find out, do you have any special contacts, any channel etc. to find out whether father has really been cremated or still stuck in a morgue somewhere...His voice went slightly moist...OK OK let me try. But is there really any point finding out...No, it's for Ma. Ma has been dreaming and after that been fainting again and again from the morning. We are spraying water on her face through the window, she comes back to herself, wakes up and starts crying again – rotten full rotten melting fully you know? They tied the plastic sack so tight that your baba can't breathe at all. Do something my dear, do something for your father. He is suffering so much. Last night baba said the same thing to ma – I can't breathe, please tell my son to open the sack, am in a lot of pain. In dream, you can't see father, only a sack moves about and talks, in my father's voice....can you find out?

The number they called from with the death news, is switched off now. After that how Shantashree got the death certificate, did the last rights gingerly and circumspectly wearing a mask, how ma's dream vanished, that's another story altogether. But through the lockdown days and nights, a bunch of ur-spirits started ruling the Peyarabagan alley. These spooks, for quite a while, kept us sauced and sorted. The naysayers are in the majority now. They said, bogus! No such thing as spooks, just like water comes together to make ice, darkness comes together to make ghosts. Drive out the darkness and the ghosts will be driven out. But the seniors said, don't dismiss spooks so easily my dear, death by Corona is death by a great accident. They have to be reborn as ghosts, no other option...Also Utpalendu's ghost is behaving exactly like the arch-spook, the arch-spirit. They are there, they sure are and their head is the arch-spirit himself. Patriarch spirit, patriarch of spirits, the arch-spirit. Who the hell is he? They asked...Shyam Laskar, the old name of this place – Laskarhata was given by his father. You only know the new name of this place...Peyarabagan. Nobody calls it Laskarhata anymore, the name Peyarabagan has stuck. This name was given by Shyam Laskar. Hundreds of acres wide, this place once had his beloved Guava Orchard, Peyarabagan. But he was there then, and he is still here. He will always be here....the arch-spirit is actually the one who is beyond age death decomposition.

The Birth Story of the Arch-Spirit

Ramram Babu said...the history of Laskars is very old.

Four hundred years back, as Nabinchandra Laskar got the news of his dear friend Nabakumar Sharma and his wife Kapalkundala drowning in the Ganga (from Bankimchandra Chattapadhyay), he was heartbroken. Relocating from the west bank of Ganga, he came to Gobindapur. From his money lending business, the Goddess of cash flooded in and he got addicted to the business of land. At the inaccessible Kakdwip area he had around 180 acres of land. A small zamindar, really. To look after his land holdings, he appointed his only son Madhabchandra Laskar. Madhab's son Raghav, Raghav's son Kushadhvaj and the fruit of his loins Matilal. When the British needed the land in Gobindapur for building a fort, Motilal sold it to them at a fat profit and relocated to Ahiritola of today. All three sons of Motilal were uncut gems. They turned the family business bankrupt by overdosing on their choice of mood-altering substances. We don't know much about the two elder brothers, but the youngest Chunilal Laskar got these 120 acres of land as a marriage gift from his in-laws. But it was his son Rabilal onwards, that his family started living in this Peyarabagan area. He got himself 120 acres more over and above the 120 acres he got from his maternal uncles. Since then this area is known as Laskarhata. His only descendant, his most excellent son, the late Shyam Laskar is our patriarch, the arch-spirit. He recovered the 180 acres of land in Kakdwip after much litigation, but couldn't enjoy his win. Once while he was out on supervision of his land holdings, he didn't come back...a lone assassin or a group killed him off, stuffed his corpse in a sack and dumped it in the Muriganga river to stream it away. A few days later he appeared in the matriarch's dream ... Get up get up get up my wife how much more will you sleep? Break your wedding bangles, wipe off your vermilion marks....I am not there anymore, don't you know? I am lying dead. Tell my son to fish out my corpse from the Muriganga river. He has to go to the lotghaat no. 8, cross the river, go

three miles downstream and he will find my body stuck in a shoal. All these lowlifes have killed and crumpled my six feet two inches body to stuff into a sack....so painful. Also, even though you are a widow now, I insist....you should not stop eating non-vegetarian food. Swear on me! And thus, the feared-revered patriarch of Laskarhata turned into an arch-spirit.

The Annals of the Arch-Spirit

They say, Ganga redeems the fallen. Even the breeze from Ganga soothes the burning sin of the sinners. Therefore, the one with spirit merit, once touched by Ganga, is bound to go straight to heaven. Everybody knew Shyam Laskar as the most excellent man. Why exactly he was murdered, nobody ever got to know. Did his soul get its release? Aided by the local police, his son Gobindaram cremated the rotting, mangled corpse near the Holy Temple of Kapilmuni. When his son came home from the cremation, the arch-spirit also followed. Peyarabagan, from that night became his precinct. The electric lights were not introduced at that time. And there were no gas lights to begin with. With the sundown, pitch darkness settled in. Only two or three households of fishermen, a couple of farmers and some deserted farmhouses of Laskar family's friends and relations in that area. When Gobindaram returned from the cremation at the Relpukur station by the narrow gauge train, it was dead at night. No other living soul around. The darkness was rock solid. His only companion was Harendralal – his maternal uncle in relation, but of about his same age. Right after stepping out of the station, he grabbed his nephew's hand urgently and whispered...look, there goes Jamaida. Gobinda turned this way and that...nobody anywhere. After coming back home, when the fire-iron-neem leaves rituals were done, they were freshly bathed and finally sat down to eat, Harendra spilled – I saw him clearly right after we came out of the station...the man is walking ahead of us, the same white half-shirt white dhoti ...same six feet and two inches...that's Jamaida only...he came to see us off. He vanished where the road turned. When we were entering the gate, he was walking ahead of us, then he vanished into thin air near the pond...everybody shuddered in alarm, forgetting their grief for the deceased.

The priest came the next day and offered his diagnosis – accidental death, tripod scare etc. etc. That's why Shyam Laskar's soul is flitting about the house in the form of a black bat. Greatly evil omen. Impending doom. No salvation no release. This scare has to be reversed. A lot of gold is needed, otherwise cash price paid in lieu of the gold. Eleven days later, the last rite feast was carried out with great pomp and splendour, plenty of cows and gold were donated, but the patriarch, the arch-ghost, refused to budge. That very night a huge plate of the most splendid food was left out near the pond. That was for the dead as per the ritual. Suddenly, at the stroke of midnight, the watchmen hear a pack of dogs are barking their heads off next to the pond. The tired, sleepy household wakes up... what's up, what's wrong! Right after the patriarch's protection is gone, is it the dacoit gang of Bishe the dacoit from Patharghata paying a unwelcome visit? The watchmen rushed out, the relatives came down, two of the watchmen carried a five battery torch to visit the pond-side, only to faint and fall over...oh my god...! Hearing their cries, two more venture out and come back, sweating and shaking...The patriarch has sat down to eat, a huge black dog is eating with him at the same plate! Where who what? Gobinda progresses alone, torch in hand. There is

nobody anywhere. But when he reached the plate, his knees almost gave way and his body started swaying. It looks exactly like someone just finished their meal, someone who is around, but not visible. When he saw the massive carp head fry, he could not but cry out loud....he sucked it dry, marrow and all, just like father ate...now he could really sniff out his father's sweaty whiff in the air! But but dogs...where are the dogs? Their barks everyone heard. The matriarch spoke up, softly – how will you see that dog, son? That's your childhood playmate Bhulua. Bhulua! But didn't he...when I was...! Yes son, now I get it, your father came to eat with Bhulua's spirit in tow, that great man, leaving his palace, eating next to the pond with a dog! Oh my fate! After seeing the ghost dog, the dogs in the neighbourhood started barking like crazy, they always know who is a dog and who is a ghost. The Laskar household slowly became a haunted household. The patriarch was not just sighted in the house, the Peyarabagan alley became witness to his now-and-again appearances.

So what's next? Is he the ur-ghost of the ghostly history of Peyarabagan, the veritable Adam?

You can say that. The real history starts from there. Sure we have heard of a few local ghosts from our fathers and uncles, but they are just spare change. They are not of the proper caste. Those are naggards, wimpy, hidey-ho ghosts – mortally afraid of humans, always hiding, stealing fish baskets from the top branch of the trees with elastic hands. Nobody took them seriously. But this is a ghost of the big man ...high caste, a class of his own.

How so?

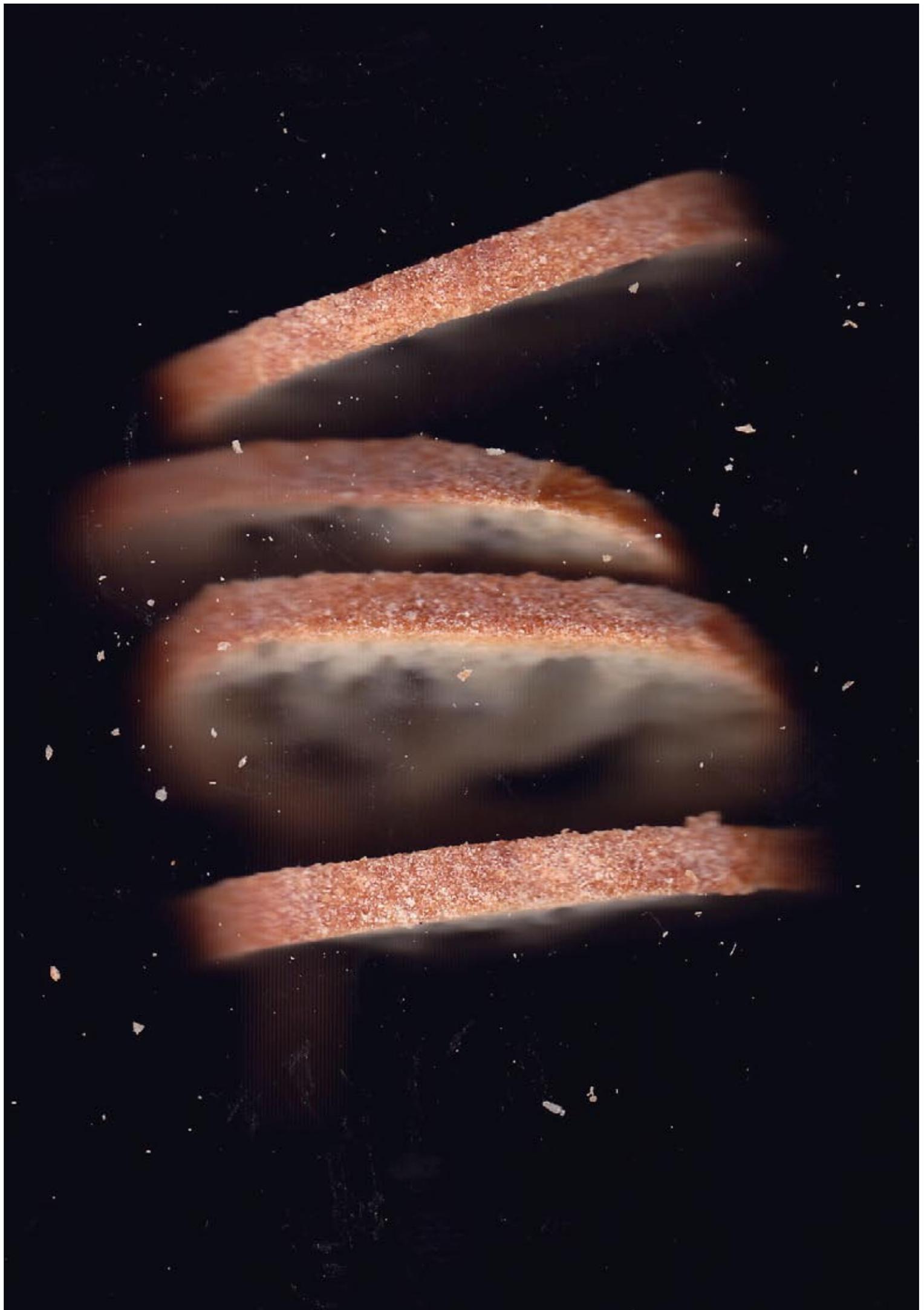
Ramram Babu said, see I am telling you nothing but the truth...the first person to get visitation from the arch-spirit outside his family was my father Ramtaran Mukherjee. My father was returning from Rajarhat after officiating a Shmshankali Goddess puja session, with a few bundles and parcels. It was early dawn. The darkness of the moonless night was thinning out. When he reached the boundary wall of the Gorakshabashi temple, he sighted the six feet two inches tall Shyam Laskar coming out of our alley with his dog Bhulua. My father's feet got cemented to the ground.

Before he could turn back or forward, they were face-to-face. So far he has heard, on some nights Esq. Laskar does the rounds with his dog in the Peyarabagan alley, Gorakshabasi temple ground and on the streets. But these were all hearsay – he said, she saw. My father was completely confounded seeing the arch-spirit 'in flesh' for the first time. Somehow he dug his hand through his sacred print wrapper to reach his sacred thread and started chanting the Gayatri incantation...Om Bhurbhubah Swah... Shyam Laskar growled like a royal Bengal tiger...Brahman Thakur you have no bit of shame or pride. You left your old woman alone in sickness and roaming around doing Kalipuja, shame! I had to end up standing guard for her all night. Just go and see the messengers of death are already circling your house, go immediately and take her to the hospital. Go! And what are you chanting Gayatri incantation for? What a scaredy wimp you are...Brahmin idiot ...Esq. Laskar takes out a wad of currency notes from his half-shirt pocket and offers. So even while shaking with terror, Ramtaran has to extend his hand and their hands touch. So far he has heard that ghosts have ice cold limbs, but this is just the opposite,

his hands get almost singed from the heat. Oh thank you so very much kind sir, my father dropped his bundles and parcels and ran like hell. He turned back after a while....who is where? The alley is deserted. But what about the currency notes in his hand? He went home and lit the lamp to see a fresh bundle of thousand rupee notes. Thank God Mr. Laskar was there....otherwise my dear mother...Ramram Mukherjee wipes his teary eyes.

So, we are currently creating an outline with the annals of Shyam Laskar, the arch-spirit of Peyarabagan. If we survive the second third fourth fifth wave of Corona, we will be back with more of the ghostly history on some other day.

Praise to the Lord of Ghosts, our dear Father in the sky!



À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS GAGNÉ

Words and Images by *David Szanto*

At night, I dream of sailing through a sandwich. Morning comes and my attention myopically moves towards almond butter and miso on toast, coffee, the morning crossword. Around midday, I stand at my kitchen counter and eat leftovers, salted and peppered or mayo'd, from plastic containers. Later, when the sun slopes down the sky, but before my man comes home from work, my thoughts drift to the freezer and chunks of ice, soon to meet up with whiskey and bitters.

These daily cycles are also inhabited by drifting sounds and smells from other places and times. They are the echoes of gestures by people who have fed me, and who I have fed. When I wonder who I am and where I am going, I try to listen for them. Is my hearing going? When I was young, I opened myself wide to taste, to all the feelings of food, in fact, and to the feelings that food taught me I had. Alone, safe, awed, tiny, wonderful – in many senses.

There are so many ways that I now know food, ways that I do food and feel food and think food. It is my job, mostly, to learn and teach about it, to help others participate too, in what can be thought and felt and done. But food is also my avocation and preoccupation. (And my post-occupation, very likely.) Although I am starting to feel old in many ways, I also tell myself I am too young to look back as often as I do. Yet I cannot help but glance, curiously, at the past paths that have brought me to where I am. Those in front of me are not clearly marked out, so perhaps this is a strategy to locate myself. Yes, new trajectories will keep revealing themselves, but those furling up behind seem more present. They haunt me, familiarly.

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Toastettes

My mother was expert at turning slightly stale baguette into the thinnest possible slices and then toasting them to the point of crispiness but not beyond. Thinnest possible meant not-too-thin, because they still had to support a bit of smoked salmon or avocado or pâté, as well as its cream cheese or mustard underlay. Lacy shreds of bread would not suffice: they crumble if you spread the substrate too firmly; they moisten if not eaten quickly enough.

These rounds of crispy bread, topped with whatever leftover bits one had on hand, were (and are) called toastettes. Across kitchens from Montreal to Tacámbaro to Gabriola, my mother would put a selection of them together as hors d'oeuvres to be

eaten on a patio or deck, or dinner-prep snacks to be consumed off a wooden board on the kitchen counter. They aimed to be un-filling but flavourful. A ‘taste-treat,’ as my mother called food eaten not for satiety’s sake but for plain old pleasure.

If we were at our cabin north of Montreal, the baguette for toastettes might have actually been a Portuguese white roll, the kind used at the chicken rotisserie places for making take-out sandwiches. (We ate them as lunch or breakfast bread when they were fresh.) When my parents eventually moved to the island, good baguettes were less available, and so a grocery store-bought filone stood in. Filones—‘thick threads’, sort of, from the Italian—seemed to emerge from the supermarket oven already stale, and without enough salt to my taste. Eating them as bread made my stomach a little grindy; toasting and topping thin slices was always a better use.

Whatever the initial state and composition of the bread, my mother would use her Japanese sushi knife for the slicing. I don’t believe she ever used it for raw fish, or much other animal matter, and it was always forbidden to cut anything acidic or that might nick the razor-honed steel. (Yes, there was a whetstone to repair any damage—and blades are always damaged by use—but my mother was inexpert in using it. Preservation rather than conservation was her way.) The knife was a gift from a teaching colleague long ago, an Englishman with a strong affinity for all things Japan and a kindness of heart that for a while I tried to emulate. It was therefore an object of unique irreplaceability, and thus a tool of rare use. Except nightly, for toastettes.

Old, toasted bits of (good) bun or baguette or filone are surprisingly pleasant, in a way that bread that is simply stale is not. The two differ minimally in taste and texture, but toastettes are infused with care and attention, and therefore flavour. Saved and reinvigorated, made new by intent, they are more than croutons and less than crackers. Topped, they become themselves. There were always a handful of yesterday’s crisps in my parents’ toaster oven, usually because my mother would slice and dry more than were necessary for a single evening. They keep, so why not?

Now, my mother’s dementia has made her unable to slice bread ever-so-thinly. Potato chips are quicker to snack on and appeal more to her re-cognified and changing senses. My father—whose occasional toastettes tended to the chunky and slabby—has become worn down by care-giving, and has little patience for fussy apéritivi. Or perhaps their new habits are a form of evasion, as efforts to relive family tradition tend to underscore what has ceased to be. My mother is no longer subtle or strong or caring enough for slicing finesse, for defending her Japanese blade, or for sensing toastettes as meaningful. Tastes change.

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More bevendo-ing, please

When we were doing our master degree in Italy together, my friend Julie started dating an Italian man from the south, who was then living in Parma. (He would later become her husband and father of her daughter, and camp out in a Florida public radio station with them during Hurricane Irma in 2017.) They had a

passionate relationship, but spoke little of the other's language for much of their early days together, which seemed to both encourage and problematize the passion. I always imagined them as Shelley Winters and Vittorio Gassman, glamorous but doomed. (I was wrong about the doomed part.) Julie nonetheless learned some Italian, albeit a close-cropped version of the already-abbreviated Calabrese spoken by her mate. Her English, too, was hybrid: part California-cool, part Midwestern-flat, and very Floridian-ironic.

"This is just for your FYI," Julie was known to say. I never knew if it was vapid or genius, dumb-American or ludic-meta. Once, on a bus trip through Tuscany that had us stop at winery after winery, we found ourselves going a few hours without having a drink. Soon enough, the coach soon pulled into a gravel drive in front of a nineteenth century castello. The owners met us there, several bottles of their Chianti uncorked and at the ready. "Thank god," Julie joked in her husky mutter, "my blood alcohol was getting dangerously low." Months later, after hours of presentations in a stuffy conference locale, she and I strolled toward the central piazza to regroup with our colleagues. Julie took the lead: "That's it, time to start bevendo-ing," she announced. Julie could gerund like a pro. She led us thence to the on-site enoteca, and drinkingly drink we did.

Over the seventeen years that I knew Julie, many things changed about her, but her distinctive sense of language-play was always there. A television journalist reborn as a gastronome, she was objective and emotional at once. She communicated ideas and issues with incisive aplomb, but the living and lively human person forming the phrases was never effaced. Her cool coverage of Irma mowing across Florida kept listeners aware and reassured, but not by hiding her own empathetic uncertainty. During a previous stint as a wine sales rep, she conjured up producer facts and winery stories and taste impressions with not a hint of pretention or bullshit. She loved wine and how it is made. She wanted others to, as well.

When Julie died a little while ago, I pulled out a reasonably nice bottle and started bevendo-ing. I touched my wrist where she had once tied a piece of fringe from her groovy suede bag. I almost felt her cool, firm fingers on the sole of my foot, a sense memory from when she performed reflexology on several of us in the master, sitting in the back of a tour bus, somewhere between Mont Blanc and Dijon. Julie was fifty years old. She had dealt with a lot of crap in her life, and brain cancer was the last of it. The rest of us got the good stuff.

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Rocky Turnipseed

I am four. I can open a tin of soup by myself. Tomato. I do. The littler ones put paper napkins and spoons on the table. They can. Rocky makes the grilled cheese sandwiches at the stove. She's tall and won't burn herself. She knows what she can do and she knows what we can do. We all do something and then we eat. Everyday, I come here to be with them. Everyday we have lunch together. Once I saw Rocky's husband's stomach and he took off the bandage and it was white and pink and a

little scary. A doctor had done some surgery on him, but I don't know what for. Rocky makes really good food, and my mother likes her. I like her, too. She shows me how to cook. I can open the soup and put it in the pot. My friend Aaron is here, and he can too. Later, we'll ride the rocking horse in the front yard, but I'll fall and cut my head on the sharp stones and a lot of blood will come out of the cut. It makes me think I shouldn't have eaten the soup. I wouldn't have bled so much.

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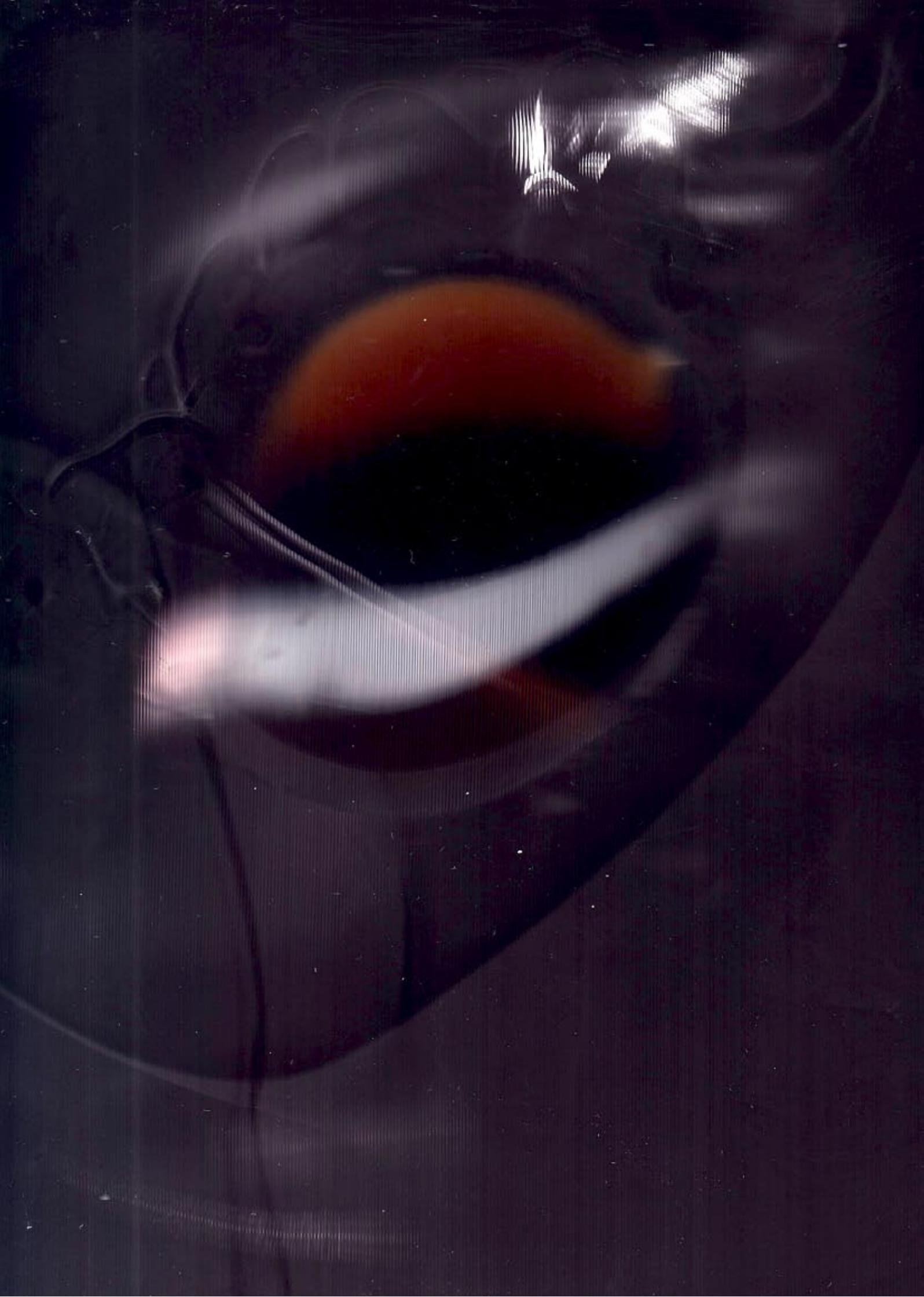
Semolina

At the big wooden table in the kitchen area of the yurt, Katie is kneading a big ball of pasta dough. Water and semolina, only. The dough achieves that supple, silky texture so much faster than when you make a flour-and-egg pasta. While it rests, it is perfect and golden and shiny; it is a bit of a tease. We eat bacon and tomato and mayonnaise and salt and pepper sandwiches together, and then we get to work.

Katie, playing *materfamilias*, takes the lead rolling slices of the pasta ball into long ropes and cutting them into centimeter-long segments. Cohen and I, butter knives in hand, quickly learn to press, smear, and evert the segments into (relatively) consistent little ears. *Orecchiette*. The technique is remarkable; we gain momentum. We ply and slide, flip and drop. The friction creates the little ridges that will allow sauce to adhere. The variable pressure from finger and thumb allow a little lip to form—or is it the thinness of the centre that, in contrast, makes it seem like there's a lip? We have, first, a hundred *orecchiette*. Then two hundred, and then three. Each one lined up like a little soldier on a sheet pan sprinkled with more semolina, which we then cover with a tea towel so they dry, but slowly. Katie surveys the results. A few, too large or small, not convex enough or overly lippy, get chucked. Uniformity is the goal, not because we are trying to imitate factory standardization, but because they'll cook more evenly when the time comes. Katie is a good taskmistress, firm and kind.

We go outside and sit at a makeshift worktable. Katie collects an enormous bundle of fennel stalks, gone to seed and now dried and wrapped in a remnant of sheet. She opens the cloth and lays the bundle carefully on the table. Again, using someone's *nonna's* inherited technique, we start rolling the tips of the stalks between finger and thumb to extract the pollen. We work like this for hours, and when we are done, Katie gives me a small glass jar of fennel pollen, maybe a tablespoon's-worth. My share.

When I go back to my parents' house, I make *orecchiette* myself, kneading semolina and water in the proportions I had learned. I find a good surface with enough friction to create the ridges, and a suitable butter knife that pulls the pasta dough without tearing it. Sitting on a high stool at the counter, I work on my own for an hour or so, thinking about wooden tables and yurt life and fennel fronds. Now I am making dinner for my parents and their friends. I think about them while I roll, flip, and repeat. They are all retirees, middle-class, progressive, white-haired. Their foodways are anglo-Canadian, mostly, even though they have traveled to places in



Africa and Asia and South America. Here on this island, people seem to come back to the food they grew up with.

In front of me, a pile of pasta is slowly accreting. The trays of semolina are so calm, the little ears irregular but consistent. When I eventually boil them up, a lot of the powdery granules adhering to the ears will fall to the bottom of the pot, clouding the churning water. It seems like a waste, but even if I could save it somehow, I doubt my parents would make orecchiette on their own. That's what I'm for.

In a couple of years, Katie and I will have a disagreement and I will leave the square and urban house where she and Cohen have now moved and walk into the damp cold night to release the substantial heat that has built up inside of me. When I come back, Katie won't look at me, and then goes away and cries. When I try to talk through it with her, she will tell me that she can't have people in her life that get angry like that. We do talk about it, however, because I insist. I hug her, and I think we have made up. Two days later, when she and Cohen drop me off at the ferry terminal, I will hug her again and it will be the last time I see them. Katie will never utter another word to me. My emails will go un-replied-to. The end.

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Snug

As a wedding gift, my godmother Gilah gave me and my then-husband a painting. We were living in Los Angeles at the time, the city where we had met and then returned to. We went to her place in Venice, a relatively quick drive from our house in Mid-City. There, to my greedy delight, Gilah opened the doors to her studio storeroom and told us to pick whatever we wanted. I was a kid in a candy shop.

Gilah is not technically my godmother. When I call her that, my friends ask me if it's usual for Jewish people to be and have godparents. I don't know the answer, but it doesn't matter really. Gilah is the long-since-ex-wife of my sister's godfather, Ed, a man who had been very close to my father during their university days and who, over time, had made some of the most intimate and loving photographs of my parents, my sister, and me. Ed and Gilah divorced relatively early in my life, but she and I adopted each other forever. We both travelled a lot, but would keep finding each other in different places. Once, my mother mused about what Gilah was always running away from. Nothing, I thought. She's running toward things. Toward everything.

Godliness was never part of our relationship, but metaphysics and food and cosmology and art and learning and image-making and philosophy were. In this way—and with a firm caveat around the word—god was something I did come to know through her.

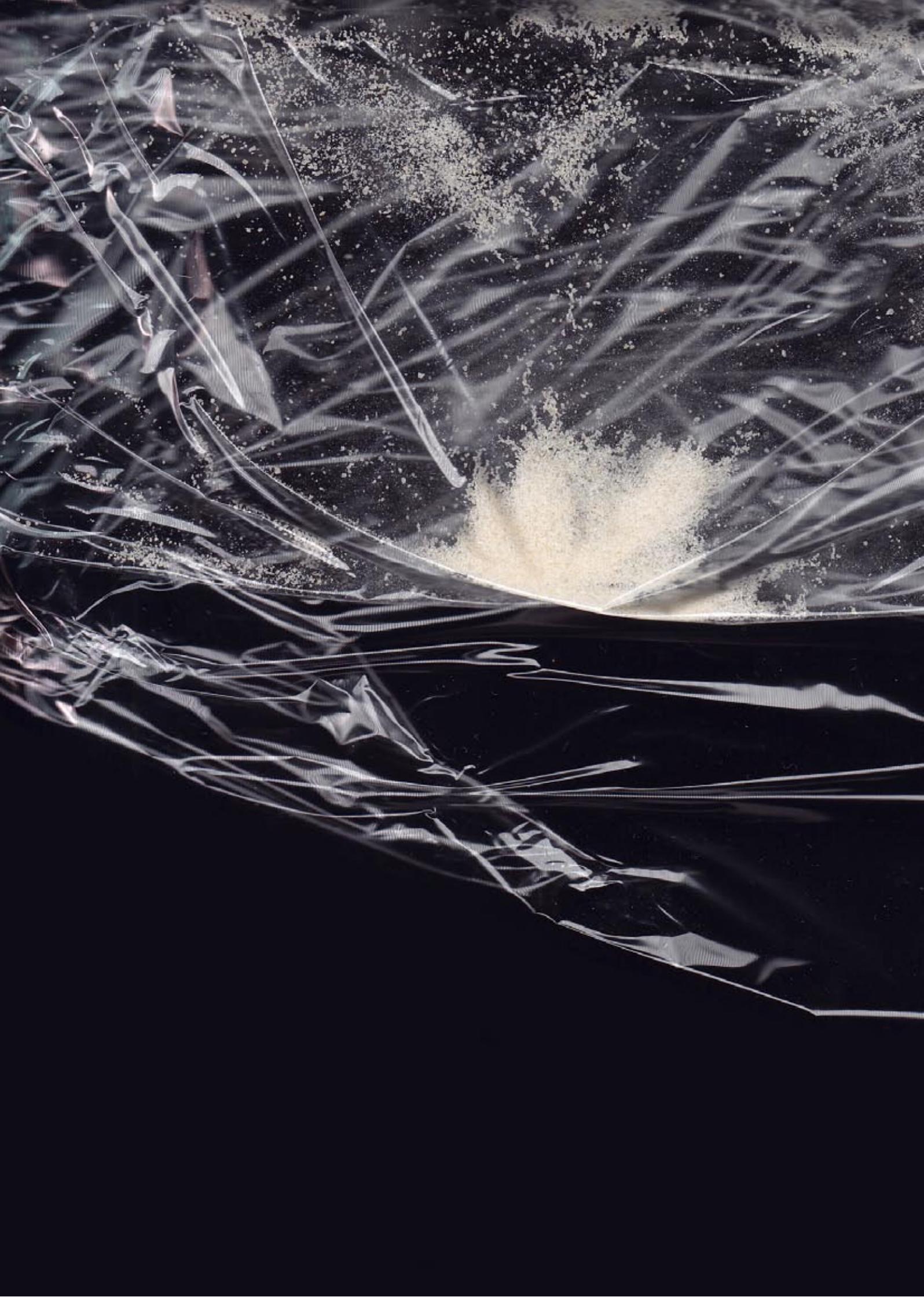
Over the doorway in the tiny downstairs bathroom in the house in Montreal where I first grew up was a small framed print of a painting of some sort-of strawberries. It was called Snug, the painting, and there were apples in it, too, and more red things. The fruit were wrapped in their own peels, and other kinds of peels, all tucked into

Campbell's

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themselves, and folding back and around in a way that couldn't be but was. It was one of Gilah's paintings, which she had made in 1974 when she was still making figurative art, but starting to transition to representations that were more imaginary. Her work migrates through landscapes, the mystical, and internal spaces. Lately, she has been working with immersive, geometric, spatial, and meditative themes; she once showed me some papyrus pieces on which she was stenciling patterns and making layers of repetition that were wholly unrepentive.

The little bathroom in Montreal always felt good to me. I liked the way it was gloomy and quiet, which suited my mood throughout much of my early life. I fit well in that narrow space, with nobody around telling me to smile and be pleasant. Even if I didn't need to use the toilet or sink, I could go there and sit down and look up at the peculiar painting-print, and imagine a different kind of spacetime in which fruit peels and paintings and my own psyche could do things they weren't able to. Being close with that painting made me feel safe.

Years later, when Gilah opened her storeroom to let us pick a painting, I immediately went to the food canvases. Though I admired and found intriguing her more recent work, I knew that I wanted to have a piece that touched my younger self's sensibilities. Spooned thus came into my life, an oversized portrait of a chunky table setting in close up. Stewpot, salad bowl, wine glasses, utensils. The painting glows with a relatively normative representation of food, but tucked into the reflections on glass and metal surfaces are echoes of the peely strawberries and red folds from my childhood bathroom. Hostaged for a while by my ex after I left him and L.A. behind, I eventually had the painting shipped back to me. Spooned now hovers in my office, over my left shoulder, keeping me company and telling me who I always was and still am.

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Suet puddings

I have a terrible secret. A wonderful secret. A meaty secret. I don't want to share it, but I really think I should. I hope no one reads this.

On my mother's side of the family, which is English-Canadian and Scottish-Canadian, they celebrate Christmas. It's a pretty Victorian affair, with silver and china and crystal and all. The dinner menu rarely strays from traditional dishes, and the table is always covered with nuts and candied peel and chocolate balls and sugared plums. More recently, gingerbread houses have become part of the edible décor. When the end of the meal comes, we yank Christmas crackers and wear tissue-paper hats and read aloud silly riddles. Three desserts come out: mincemeat tarts, a dense, dark, and decorated fruit cake, and a flambéed plum pudding, topped with holly and Thompson raisins.

For many years, my aunt Shoss made the plum, based on a family recipe from 1877



and transcribed from my great-aunt Marjorie's handwritten copy, itself gleaned from a great-great-great-grandmother's collection. Shoss (her real name is Caroline) would always lug the beast to Toronto from Ottawa, where she lived. It came wrapped in a square of old, flowery bedsheet, ready for a long steaming to prep it for the meal. Because I am dutiful and have practice in kitchens, I generally work a lot when I join the Torontonians for Christmas, roasting and mashing and gravying. It is a production, especially now that the assembled crowd has grown to thirty-plus. One of my roles is to keep the steamer steaming for a couple of hours so the plum pudding is heated through. This sometimes happens at the neighbour's house, where an extra stove is usefully available. I take fairly frequent trips back and forth through the adjoining back yards, monitoring the water level and replenishing as necessary. I like this task; it gives me a few minutes to myself in a quiet house. Since the owners are away, I can snoop and admire their art.

Shoss's health has declined in recent years, and I am now responsible for the plum. My scanned PDF of the typewritten recipe is hard to read in spots, but I have written in the missing details thanks to an early email exchange with my aunt. The mixture includes pounds of dried fruit, almonds, spices, an egg-flour-sugar-milk-breadcrumbs mixture to hold it together, as well as that oh-so-English addition, suet. A particularly high-quality animal fat that surrounds the kidneys of cows and sheep, suet has a subtle flavour and a great texture when incorporated, grated, into steamed puddings. Unlike sub-cutaneous fat, raw suet feels crispy rather than greasy. It is also, perhaps not surprisingly, very hard to find, even at good butcher shops.

When I first started making the plum, I was told that I had to replace the suet with a vegetable fat, given that several people in the family don't eat meat. I was dismayed, but agreed. When I asked Shoss what she used in the new veg-friendly era, she seemed surprised and said that she'd never made a vegetarian version. Suet was the only fat that worked.

I felt a bit trapped, but came up with an alternate: palm oil. Like suet, palm oil produces a mouthfeel that is pleasant in sweet dishes. Yet it is also one of the most problematic food products in the world, requiring enormous inputs of human labour, fertilizer, and water. Industrial demand for palm oil has resulted in terrible effects on people and land—enslavement, rape, deforestation, soil erosion, disease. It's just awful stuff. Nonetheless, like so many foods I compromise on, I bought the palm oil and used it in the plum. Along with the colonialist weight of figs and citron and currants, allspice and cinnamon and ginger, I mixed in a good slug of re-exploitation, hued orange-red. Steamed for six hours in my own end-piece of disused, flowery sheet, the plum came out firm and hefty. I packed it away in a ziplock laced with calvados and let it sit for the required month before hauling it to Toronto.

In the end, my veg plum wasn't a great result, but it looked pretty when doused in flaming cognac. The partially used container of palm oil sat and glared at me from the back of my fridge for years after. I never used it again, and threw it out when I moved to a new apartment. I felt that I'd betrayed not only Aunt Marjorie, but the planet as well.

I take back what I said earlier: My secret isn't wonderful. I'm glad it's not a secret anymore.

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Of butterflies and aromas and magazines, floating on currents of air

André-Claude told me I could take as many of his old copies of *Gourmet* and *Cuisine* as I wanted. They were there for guests to read, but there were so many, and he didn't need them all. I knew that I couldn't carry many in my suitcase, so I only grabbed a few, eight maybe. *Gourmet* appealed to me more. There were better pictures of places and people, and the stories seem more storylike. *Cuisine* felt recipe-heavy.

It was 1984 and I was seventeen, traveling in Mexico with my parents. They would move there for 1985–86, my first year at university, and so we had come on a scouting trip to find a city where they might rent a small house. On our second day we drove out of Mexico City, heading west towards the coast. We (my father) decided to stop for the night in Zitácuaro, a city I found scary, ugly, and unwelcoming. But the hotel was only \$6 a night, and to my father this was the start of an adventure in cheap living and new discoveries. I sulked in the car and pulled out the CAA guidebook we had for the central highlands. What about this one? I suggested. Hotel Rancho San Cayetano was more expensive (all of \$12 a night), but it was located just a few kilometers away—a fifteen-minute drive—and seemed pretty nice. Could we at least go and look at it?

We did. And we met André-Claude. I saw guava trees, and a pool, and a courtyard. The kitchen of the restaurant, active at this mid-afternoon hour, was sending out the most exceptional smells of beans and cumin and chiles and tortillas and cilantro. Birds sang, breezes wafted. The light made everything sparkle. And yes, I am romanticizing it all. Nonetheless, we did stay at San Cayetano that night, and André-Claude became the man who would facilitate everything for my parents' stay the following year. He found them a beautiful rental house, furniture, and friends. He told us stories of his time as a resistance fighter in Vietnam and his eventual migrations to other places. He said we must go to the monarch butterfly reserve at El Rosario—the back way, so as to avoid the other tourists. He introduced us to the cookbook author and local food doyenne, Diana Kennedy, and he always had a room ready when my parents drove through Zitácuaro.

André-Claude took an interest in my interest in food, and explained many of the things that his cook made for us in the restaurant. I found him unnerving and somewhat too friendly; I was a shy seventeen-year-old, and his attention discomfited me. But the French-Vietnamese past and world travels—and collection of food magazines—were compelling. I liked the drowsy and somewhat decaying luxury of Rancho San Cayetano, and I felt a kind of ownership over having 'discovered' it. Once, on another visit there, my father asked André-Claude what he would do if he ever left the hotel (he was the manager, not the owner). He became evasive, and



simply said, I am the wind.

The Gourmets and Cuisines did come home with me, and their pages eventually became rumpled and greasy and torn. In later years, I subscribed to food magazines and read them cover to cover, but as food media has become sensational and spectacular, I have lost my love of it. Now that Gourmet is gone, I wonder whether those old copies are preserved somewhere in an anaerobic landfill. They would have been thrown out, rather than recycled, given the era. If the magazines did end up under of a pile of other refuse, and a few torn pages eventually freed themselves, I'd like to think that André-Claude, in his post-life form as the wind, picked them up and ruffled through them.

* *

*

Tonight I will arrange bowls of crudités and spinach dip, some sliced saucisson sec, and a few crunchy things for our cocktail hour, which Maxime and I have every evening together when we are home. I generally don't make toastettes, but this translation suffices. We will amuse ourselves with language play—French, English, maybe a little Italian or German—and talk about our days. We will share updates on friends and parents, express worries about our work and healths, and talk about when we were kids. We will admire how the sunlight hits the plants on their stands and the paintings on our walls. Now that the solstice is coming, the long and narrow trapezoids of orangey sunset are turning more square and yellow. We've only been here for a year, so we're learning how our home cycles through the seasons.

As a man of a certain age (fifty-four), socio-economic class (middle), and cultural heritage (mixed), I am privileged in multiple ways. I have witnessed many times and places of edibility. I have sensed great love, through food, as well as loss. Some of the people and things that were with me in those moments are missing, physically and otherwise. Now, today, here, they shimmer. They make me feel sad. They make me feel rich. They connect me backward and forward, up and down and sideways to . . . everything. Food, when I am eating it, is me. When I am not, it is the ether. It is untouchable and atmospheric, an immaterial through which energy and being are translated. When I too am missing, what of me will waft and echo to those who remain?



THE SHOOT

Words by *Paul Jasper*

“It’s done?”

“It’s done, honey. They finished it. You’re— Let me see. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty... fifty years too late. You can see it on the movies. Well, no more, I think. It’s too old. How come you’re so late to have missed it?”

Crystal—her name was on her badge—waited for Randy to reply. Crystal, the first black person Randy had seen since Oklahoma City, was the receptionist at the Pow Wow Inn on Route 66, in Tucumcari, New Mexico. The Pow Wow Inn was where Randy had hoped to find work on the film he was fifty years too late to find work on.

Randy had known something was wrong the moment he set eyes on the inn. For one thing, it looked derelict. It didn’t look brand-new, like it did in the postcard he had. Now he could only see changes. The old-style motor-court canopy that joined Crystal’s office to the highway-facing cabins, its surfaces indicating years of paint work, revealed a few patches of the first coat applied—the original baby blue. And Crystal’s office had been completely redone in the interim and was now unrecognizable; it looked like the top of an air traffic control tower. But the rocky flower beds around the place looked the same and were full of cacti, and some of the cacti had flowers on them—pretty flowers: lots of little dabs of reds, yellows, greens, and purples. And the inn’s size remained as was: eight lots lengthwise with a layout featuring U and L and I combinations of single-roofline abodes around courtyards. But much had been repainted, or repaired with mismatched parts, or—as was the case with the swimming pool—concreted in.

Randy had searched the motel and could find no film trucks or film stars. He’d chased a lizard down a corridor. He hadn’t believed Crystal the first time around. The second time around, it was getting harder to accept it any other way.

Crystal had gotten her iPhone out and was jabbing about its screen. “My father said Dennis Wilson was ever so friendly. Here it is. Look.” Crystal held her iPhone up to Randy’s face, but when he reached for it, she drew it back quickly, for it had been held to see, not touch. “*Two-Lane Blacktop*. Directed by Monte Hellman. Starring James Taylor, Dennis Wilson, Warren Oates, and Laurie Bird. Produced by Michael Laughlin. Came out in 1971. It grossed two hundred thousand dollars. Three of them are not even alive anymore. Dennis Wilson died in 1983. Drowned. And he was in the Beach Boys. I don’t think you know that, do you?”

Randy tried to shake his head, meaning no, but he couldn’t manage it—information overload.

“The other one. The girl. She’s dead. And so young, too. Only twenty-six. Warren Oates—dead. Heart attack. But James Taylor’s still alive. There you have it, honey. I can’t imagine how you’ve gotten so mixed up. You’re not even old enough to be in the movie. Are you not right in the head? Why are you on your own? Does your family know you’re here?”

Now here’s the thing: A: Randy’s trying to figure out some things of his own, namely, what sort of point had his professor been trying to make this time? Professor Latimus had been on his case like an incoming blunt instrument since day one of his film class and said that Randy didn’t have what it took because Randy was one of those Time-Deficient Cases. Randy’s inability to sense past, present, and future made him a liability for any project he’d be involved with. How could he even show up on time? Professor

Latimus had gone on to give Randy recent examples. Class began at 10:30 a.m., but for Randy, things went otherwise. Monday: a 4:00 p.m. arrival. Tuesday: 1:00 p.m. Wednesday: missed daylight hours completely... and so on. But Randy couldn't function on his medication and fix things. Randy found the world terrifying when he took his medication. Randy wanted to fix things his way—but he hadn't figured out which way that was yet. So it had been very easy for the professor to get Randy out of the picture and send him for work experience in Tucumcari as Monte Hellman's assistant on *Two-Lane Blacktop*.

"Avant-garde filmmaking?" Randy said in a whisper.

"I don't know, honey. Well, now I've got to take my break and sit in that little room back there. Would you like to stay the night anyway?"

"I can't. Meaning that I'm not sure much what to do no more. Have you ever had a professor who won't give you a chance because he thinks you're an idiot?"

"Honey, I'm a poor black woman in New Mexico. No one is ever going to give me a professor so he can take me for an idiot."

"Shaman Bob," Randy said; he said it in the wrong key, somehow.

Now back to the other now-here's-the-thing thing Randy had going on. The professor was A and B was Shaman Bob; the man by the concreted-in swimming pool he'd seen tossing concrete chips upon a dirt patch over and over and muttering weird things. When Randy met the shaman during his first look around, the shaman had, on seeing Randy, said to him what sounded like "time seerera." It was a bit like the scene in *The Shining*, when the black chef told the boy, Danny, that he shined.

Crystal looked disgusted. "Don't ever talk to me about that Shaman Bob. He's a no-good son of a bitch. Now I'm going to my room. Come back if you decide to stay, honey."

#

Shaman Bob's crimson Subaru utility was the cleanest car in sight. Considering everything else was dusty, the car suggested, reassuringly, there was some sort of magic in play. The shaman was nowhere to be seen—he'd left his dirt patch—but the Subaru was the shaman's, all right, because along its sides were NASCAR-style decals that read "SHAMAN BOB ENTERPRISES." In total, there were about six, eight, or so cars at the Pow Wow, but some of these may have belonged to the folks who had driven there to eat at its corner restaurant, Flaming Pity. Even shamans needed to eat, so perhaps that was where the shaman went. Randy, for reasons he couldn't quite figure, wanted to tell the shaman all about his situation with the professor, and it hadn't taken long before he had.

Dinner was on the shaman.

"I see, I see, little time seerera," Shaman Bob was saying to Randy at their booth table along the far wall. "I'm not, you have to understand, a shaman in the traditional sense. I can't help you fix things with your professor by casting a spell on him. You see, the thing is, I don't make deals with the spirit folks and help folks. But like the traditional shaman man—or woman—the gift they have, the ability to enter the realm of the spirits and communicate with them there, I do that, but when I get there, I do things differently. So here's what I do. Now listen carefully. Do you know what a San Pedro is?"

"It's a place? San Pedro?"

"Little time seerera, expand your mind. Go beyond its limits. I'll ask you again. Do

you know what a San Pedro is?”

“Gee, I’ll like to answer, sir, but I can only say like I said before.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it. The answer is, it’s a cactus. The sort of cactus that gives you the most spiritual concoction known to man. What do you think that is?”

“I ain’t—”

“Mescaline.”

“What’s th—? What were them sounds you were making outside yonder today? When I saw you by the dirt?”

“First, not knowing that. Now this. They were sounds, yes, but they were what is commonly known as tunes. They were—”

“What tunes?”

“I was just getting to that. They are the tunes of the Beach Boys. Judging by the way things have gone so far, I don’t expect you know much about shamanism or the Beach Boys, so let’s get started on these blueberry pancakes and enjoy them before they get cold, and then we can pick up where we left off, OK? Let’s eat.”

As they ate their pancakes and slurped their orange juice, Randy stole reverential glances at the shaman. Everything being so bright outside in New Mexico made everywhere indoors seem dark, but in the Flaming Pity, it was not dark enough to obscure a man as striking as Shaman Bob: a man with big Didier Raoult hair, a gray pointy beard, Jesus sandals, and a glistening ruby-red robe that had on it many embroidered symbols, like the mysterious symbols you see at the bottom of store receipts. Some parts of the Flaming Pity reminded Randy of a fifteenth-century Spanish sea galleon; some parts looked like they had come from a 1990s men’s room. There was a nice illuminated revolving dessert stand that made your mouth water, and lots of big Navajo rugs over the floorboards. The other diners were few; two couples and another couple with a small boy sat many tables away from the shaman and Randy. An old waitress gave the impression that she was waiting for the shaman to leave. Through a long, bright strip of kitchen hatch, containing a scene reminiscent of fast-food kitchens the world over, a lone chef looked their way on occasion, like a lookout.

Soon, mopping his plate clean with a cold, limp last triangle of buttered toast, the shaman picked up where he had left off. “Back to business. The Beach Boys tunes. Shamans, we play drums. We beat our drums, and the sounds, the rhythms we make, they put us in trances. Now, say you were there with me, what would you see? Well, you’d just see me in my trance. But I’m not really there anymore. Understand? I’m in the spirit dimension. But like I was telling you before, I don’t help folk in the traditional sense. So I can’t help you where your Professor Yingyang is concerned. Cast your mind back to my vehicle. See it? Now, what else do you see? Shaman Bob Enterprises. Enterprises. Look at me, boy. Do I look Apache to you?”

“No, sir.”

“No, sir. Correct. But what I am is a business man white man. Here’s how it goes. Now don’t get me wrong—I lament the five hundred years of persecution and plain-as-day murder of native folk as much as the next man—come the revolution, I’ll be right there with them fighting on their side if they’ll take me—but don’t let the map fool you where this neighborhood is concerned. They, and praise God for it being so, they, the Apache round here, have this place sewn up—sewn up mystically, that is. Now, if I were to start helping folks out like they do, like the Apache, I’ll be doing it on their turf. And then guess what’ll happen? Forget them old-fashioned notions of Apache—it’ll be some Dodge Rams coming out from yonder one night and a beatdown on my ass faster than you can... faster than... faster than my Subaru driving through hell and then some.

So that's the backstory. Now, unlike history has panned out for them countrywide, we, them and I, we did the right thing, and we came to an arrangement. In reality, I shouldn't even be considered a shaman. They are called medicine men around here. But, as part of our arrangement, I call myself a shaman because—and here's some education for you—don't panic—that's a Siberian term. Not New Mexican. And guess what, this is New Mexico. Any questions so far?"

"I guess I have three. My first question is, why you hums the Beach Boys?"

"Because I like the Beach Boys. Need there be any more reason than that?"

"Crystal, she said Dennis Wilson was in the Beach Boys."

"That I can believe."

"She said he was ever so—"

"Nice. Yes. Was there a second question?"

"What do you mean that you are not doing what the shaman are doing? And why is that San Pedro you spoke about important? The *mascarlane*?"

"Oh, yes. My Subaru. En-ter-prises—remember? I go visit the spirits because they are my business partners. They, in their own dimension, have an office, and that is where they take care of my paperwork. Legalities and things like that. They do my taxes. Update my online presence on Facebook and Twitter. So why, you ask, are my business partners in a whole other dimension? Well, let's just say there are no law enforcement agents with shamanistic abilities I've known of around here. Now are you getting my drift?"

"Why'd call me 'time seerera'?"

"Ahh, now there's a wise question at last. There's hope for you yet. You're searching for something here, ain't you?"

"Well, I'm not no more—"

"You came here to work on your film?"

"But I'm not. I'm late."

"Late for what?"

"The film."

"Why are you late?"

"It's—"

"Can you sense something here? Can you sense how there's something in the manner of my allusions that suggest I am not fitting in with your idea of the world? And yet, is there something in my allusions that makes you feel like you know exactly what I'm getting at... time seerera?" Shaman Bob snapped his fingers. Randy expected to be transported to the spirit dimension. Instead, the old waitress who had been reading her iPad in the light of the revolving dessert stand put down the iPad with some reluctance and hobbled over to the table, frowning the whole way.

"Go ahead, time seerera, what more will you like?"

"Ma'am, could I please have one of these?" Randy asked, picking out a blended berry concoction with a slice of orange on its rim that was one of many drinks pictured within the tall laminated menu he held. "And how much is them cakes over there? Like this one?" Randy pointed to a picture of a carrot cake.

"Five ninety-five for the carrot cake, honey," Nancy drawled.

"The boy will have both," Shaman Bob said. "And I'll have a black coffee, please. And two glasses of water, if you would be so kind."

"Right," Nancy muttered. She hobbled away.

"Thank you ever so kindly, Mr. Shaman, sir."

"My pleasure, son. Now let's get back to your confusions. You say you're not even

sure about things time-wise? You say that is why you're not making it no place? You say that is why your professor thinks you are no good and an idiot? You say that is why he is not on your side? Well, I don't think any of this is true. Time, son. Guess what? It isn't linear. It does not go in a straight line. When those old movies, like those that happened in this neighborhood, when you see at the end the cowboy walk off into the sunset, he goes in a straight line, right?"

"I guess so."

"And you guess very well. But things are not like that. Things don't go straight—and end. In those old films, if they were more accurate, when that cowboy walks away, guess what'll happen? We'll see him come right back around and do it all over again. And again."

"But when you stream the movie, you can control—"

"What do you see?" Shaman Bob pointing to a ring of orange juice on the table between them, freshly made by Randy's glass.

"Orange j—"

"A circle, boy. A circle. Getting my drift? This is Apache 101. Time is circular. And we are on this circle, and when we die, it isn't the end. We come back again. Reincarnated. Sure, we might be a bug or worm, but more often than not we'll be something interesting. The big circle isn't cruel. Only to those that are bad. See it this way—Life: The Sequel. And guess what? I don't think your professor is against you. I think he is on your side. Also, I don't think you're an idiot. Instead, I think you are a rare case. You're in need of help. You're stuck. Here. Stuck between reincarnations... time seerera. When I was at my dirt patch earlier, I saw it as plain as day. Felt inclined to give you a clue back then, hence your new moniker, the one you wear so well. Didn't feel the need to interfere beyond that because I'd see you soon enough. And in you came, looking for your film. Looking for your film because with all your heart you are sure you are needed badly by them on it. That your professor felt it was good for you and he loves you, really. That Monte Hellman needed you as his assistant, come hell or high water, or the movie would never be made. And, by the way, I suspect this professor of yours is more than he seems, but we'll leave that for another day—or lifetime. So what happened? How didja get in such a muddle? If I were to hypothesize, I would say that you got yourself into some awful misfortune, long ago, one that you cannot recall straight because it was so awful, and this came, this misfortune, in an unexpected way. It had to be unexpected, or else things would have panned out different. So it could be any one of a number of things. Car crash. Explosion. Plane crash. Who knows? But what matters is you died. And I'd say you died in... '70 was the movie... sometime around... '40... let me think... between... between 1940 and... hell, well, before they made the movie. So there you have it. You didn't make your circle. Didn't make the leap. Shit happens. What can I say? Life's a bitch."

"But, Mr. Shaman, sir," Randy interjected, "wouldn't I recall it if I had died wrong?"

"Putting it plainly, son, no. Humans, we don't know we've died. We only know living. You're getting into the realms of impossibility now. So when you were born in time for the movie you missed, you did not die fully the time before it, so that's why you missed it. How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-three, shaman, sir."

"Well, that means the movie 'you' died in 1997."

"Gosh."

"But he died right that time, I'm pleased to say."

"Gosh."

“But it doesn’t matter he died right that time. Die wrong once, and you’ll never be the same. Never be where you should be. Always in a muddle. Never knowing night from day. Always late for your class. I bet you’re glad you came to Tucumcari now, aren’t you? Here comes Nancy. Hello, Nancy.”

#

“Nancy called him Coyote. What did he do wrong?” Randy asked Crystal in reception after his dinner with the Coyote or the shaman or the son of a bitch.

“What did he do? Your shaman abused an animal is what he did. He was caught pushing dollar bills up a dog’s ass.”

Randy turned and looked through the reception’s big slanted glass window at the man he knew as Shaman Bob. He tried to picture a younger shaman molesting a dog, but couldn’t quite manage it. Dumpy, the shaman sat smoking with his robed back to him on a rock garden next to a pillar ashtray by the door. The shaman’s long white hair blew wildly against the glass, like he was in a wind tunnel, and there was a whooshing sound, like an aircraft engine at full throttle, accompanying it that couldn’t be heard. Inside reception, however, the clarity of Crystal’s put-downs of the shaman through history had sliced through the incessant air-conditioning buzzing with ease, and the harsh words she spoke contrasted sharply with the niceties around him that were of the usual reception type: insincere, predictable, small, banal, promising.

Randy had returned to reception to hand his credit card over because he was going to stay one night at the Pow Wow before returning to Boston and home and the professor in his hired Ford Explorer. The shaman lived at the Pow Wow in Chalet 40. The shaman’s chalet faced the dirt patch. Randy was placed next to him at number 39.

Since the shaman said he couldn’t in all conscience kill Randy and have him reset via a time circle rewind so as to be there on time in 1970, he would instead show Randy a good time, 2019-style. He’d purchased from eBay a Scandinavian Beach Boys concert documentary DVD from 2001—subtitled—and they would watch that. And, for an extra-special treat, they would cook up some steak on a motel barbecue. And he had two bottles of tequila they could empty.

But what was it about the Pow Wow and Crystal in reception that kept getting in the way of things for Randy hope-wise? First, there was the whole matter to begin with of his being there incorrectly, and now there was another matter—plausibility and the shaman. But this time, Randy had made up his mind about some things. He’d do things differently. He’d follow his heart.

“What did she say about me?” Shaman Bob said while rising and poking the butt-end of his cigarette and—Randy couldn’t help but notice—nimble poking it through the tiny hole on the pillar ashtray by the door.

Randy replied, “Nuttin’ about you, shaman, sir.” As he said this, a long eighteen-wheeler petroleum tanker truck roared past along Tucumcari’s highway, going west. It was just the shaman and Randy now and the hot air blowing, and the dust, and the big spaces between things, and the bright light of the plains, and the great, big, impressive American sky—America©—reaching, perhaps, as far as the Apaches’ next world and the shaman’s and some worlds after, and the faint traces of a place that existed before the interstates came; a bigoted and violent and groovy and colorful and beautiful and smaller-scale place that gave all this and more than you needed—or wanted—straight from its independent—*innocent*—heart, and some low-slung buildings along the highway that seemed devoid of openings; like clay mock-ups; buildings pastel and earth-colored

and only a few, it seemed to Randy, alive; most seemed only one phase away from becoming air. Near the horizon, a line of wind turbines operated smoothly and stood like white plastic miniatures against the blue.

The shaman and Randy headed to the Subaru to get the Beach Boys DVD. The shaman opened the hatchback and began unzipping and sifting through what seemed an uncommon amount of bags to have on the go. From duffels and freebie totes, he began passing items to Randy: warm plastic-bagged utensils, and some small boxes taped shut, like the extras that come with big electronic purchases you never open. These didn't fit together well. The shaman tucked his Beach Boys DVD under Randy's right armpit.

Over by their chalets later, the shaman had gotten busy preparing the steaks and veggies for their barbecue. He'd handed Randy an ice-cold Corona Extra and told him to do as he pleased, but nearer to his side of the breeze-block privacy wall they had between their chalets because he'd be in and out all the time. The motel barbecue facing them was heating up. Next to it, on the shaman's plastic folding table, sat a cooler with more beers in it and two plates with utensils and olive oil and a giant tub of seasoning. Randy saw what might have been the very same lizard he'd chased down a corridor earlier watching him upside down on the side of a nearby myrtle tree. Sitting on a mattress the shaman had provided him in the shade of the tree, Randy flicked some of his beer at the lizard. The lizard scuttled down the tree and far away into the distance, across the dustbowl courtyard, until it was too small to see.

Randy's chalet, identical to the shaman's, was clean and welcoming and compact. The shaman had his own flat-screen TV, his own PC setup, but his belongings, for the most part, seemed to occupy a space within some parameter, which, if crossed, would mean the inn might ask him to leave because he would have gotten too comfortable.

Randy hollered as the shaman busied away in his kitchenette, "Did anything else exciting happen round here, likes the time they made the film?" Silence followed. Randy was about to holler it one more time when the shaman appeared at his doorway holding a fork with a limp steak at the end. The shaman wore a tied red apron over his crimson robe—he looked like he was wearing a frumpy dress.

"Sure. Lots of things. Not the sort of things folks will know about, that you'll know about, but things I care about. It's why I stay here, an attachment to the place, you might say. And Crystal too, come to think of it. You can get very attached to a place if you stay long enough. Then again, I might just be lazy. Who knows? In fact, I have not even seen the film. Looked for it once. Couldn't find it. I think more about the Beach Boys than I do the film. But I also think about Prince, and Echo & the Bunnymen, and Paul Young. I go other places than here, too. You can't go far wrong with a Subaru, let me tell you. You should see the miles I've done in it. And thanks to that and my business, I can afford the type of decal you see on its sides."

"Shaman?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I lied."

"When?"

"Back there by reception. Crystal did say some things about you. She told me why they call you Coyote."

"I figured as much, partner. You think I am not what I say I am?"

"She said you're the Coyote, like the Coyote in the Apache legends, but you are not really. She said you got up to mischief like the Coyote. She said in one Apache legend, the Coyote stuffed dollars up his burro's ass. Then, to trick some white folk, the Coyote

kicked the burro's belly to make money fly out its ass. He was make-believing the burro was a money-making burro so he could sell it to white folk. She said when you were a boy, and when Monte Hellman was here making his movie, you wanted to trick Dennis Wilson into thinking you could make money from nothing and be his pal because the Beach Boys couldn't get a hit no more and they were desperate for money. She said her poppa said you promised Monte Hellman you would take care of his dog when he went away to shoot things. She said you stole some dollar bills and began pushing them up his dog's ass so you could kick its belly in front of Dennis Wilson and make money. She said Monte Hellman's dog howled. She said some folks on the film crew caught you and you ran *aways* from them. She said her poppa said you lived across the street in those days with your momma, who was nearly blind and didn't love you and hit you. She said you ran into Dennis Wilson's room. She said you were in trouble already for pinching Laurie Bird's butt. She said James Taylor had his eye on you because he found you messing with his stuff once. She said her poppa was in the room when you came rushing in because he'd been helping Joni Mitchell with her sofa bed because she wanted to sleep the night with James Taylor on it. But when you rushed in, the first thing you did was grab Joni Mitchell's ass and wouldn't let go. Then she said James Taylor got mad as hell and picked up his favorite guitar and went to hit you on the head with it, but that he missed you and nearly hit Laurie Bird instead, but when he missed her he smashed his guitar to pieces because it hit the wall. She said Dennis Wilson was laughing his ass off because he was high on drugs. She said he picked you up and went out and threw you in the swimming pool. She said James Taylor forgave you after and wrote a song about it called 'Me and My Guitar.' She said they all thought you were the funniest thing ever—except the girls. Why doesn't Crystal like you? Did you grab her ass, too?"

"She doesn't really hate me," Shaman Bob answered. "Sometimes we fight and sometimes we don't. We used to play together on the streets round here when we were children. I guess you can say we're like cousins. I was a kid back then. Didn't you do crazy things when you were a kid?"

Randy had met a Coyote or a shaman or a son of a bitch and found in him a friend; two friends, including Crystal. Yes, Randy had only found changes at the Pow Wow Inn, but these changes had turned out to be very fine ones. He must remember to thank his professor when he got back to Boston in time for his film class on Monday.

"You can smile," Shaman Bob said, returning briefly to his doorway and still smiling the infectious smile Randy caught.

"You'll always be Shaman Bob to me," Randy said from the bottom of his heart.

#

The End

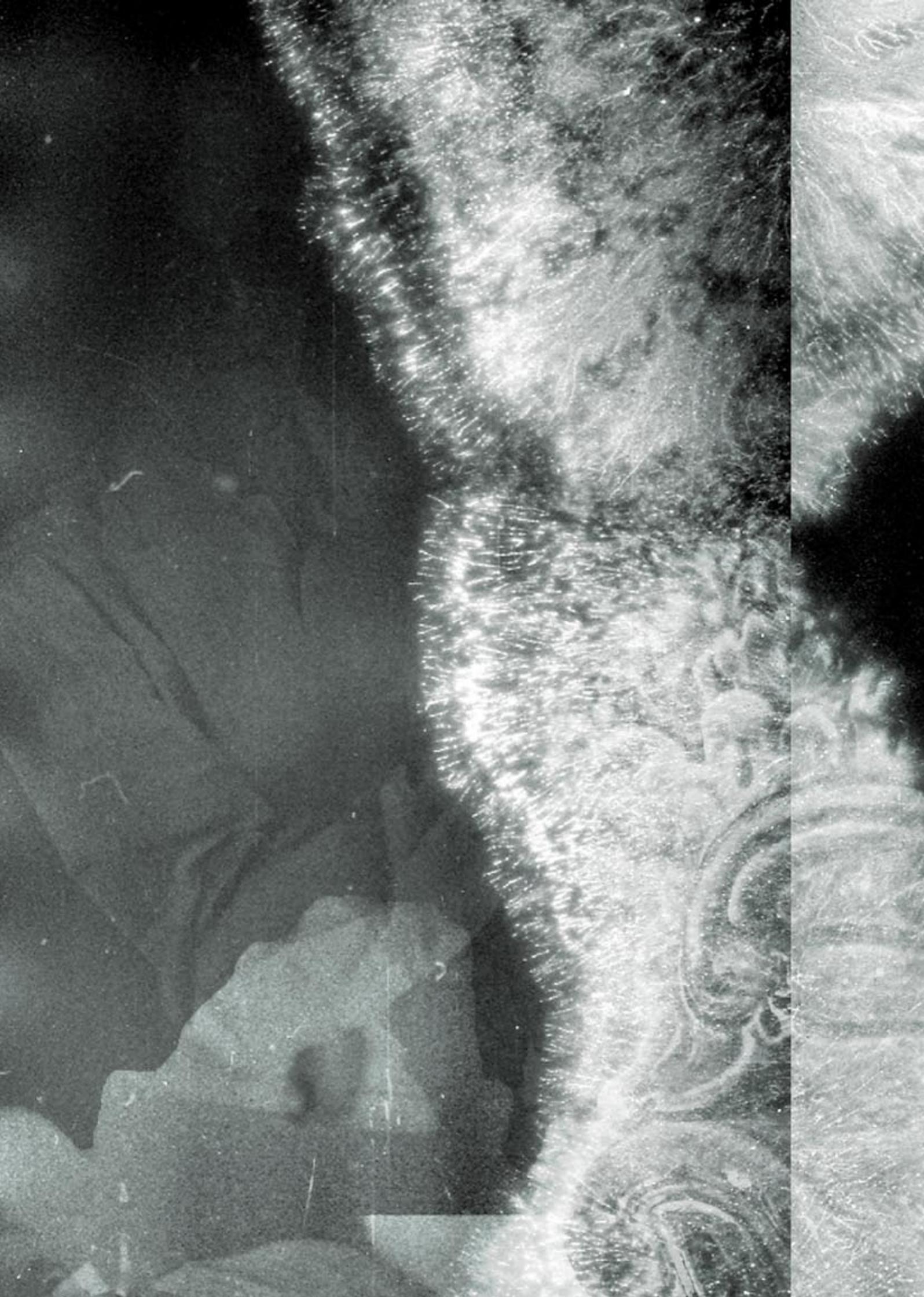


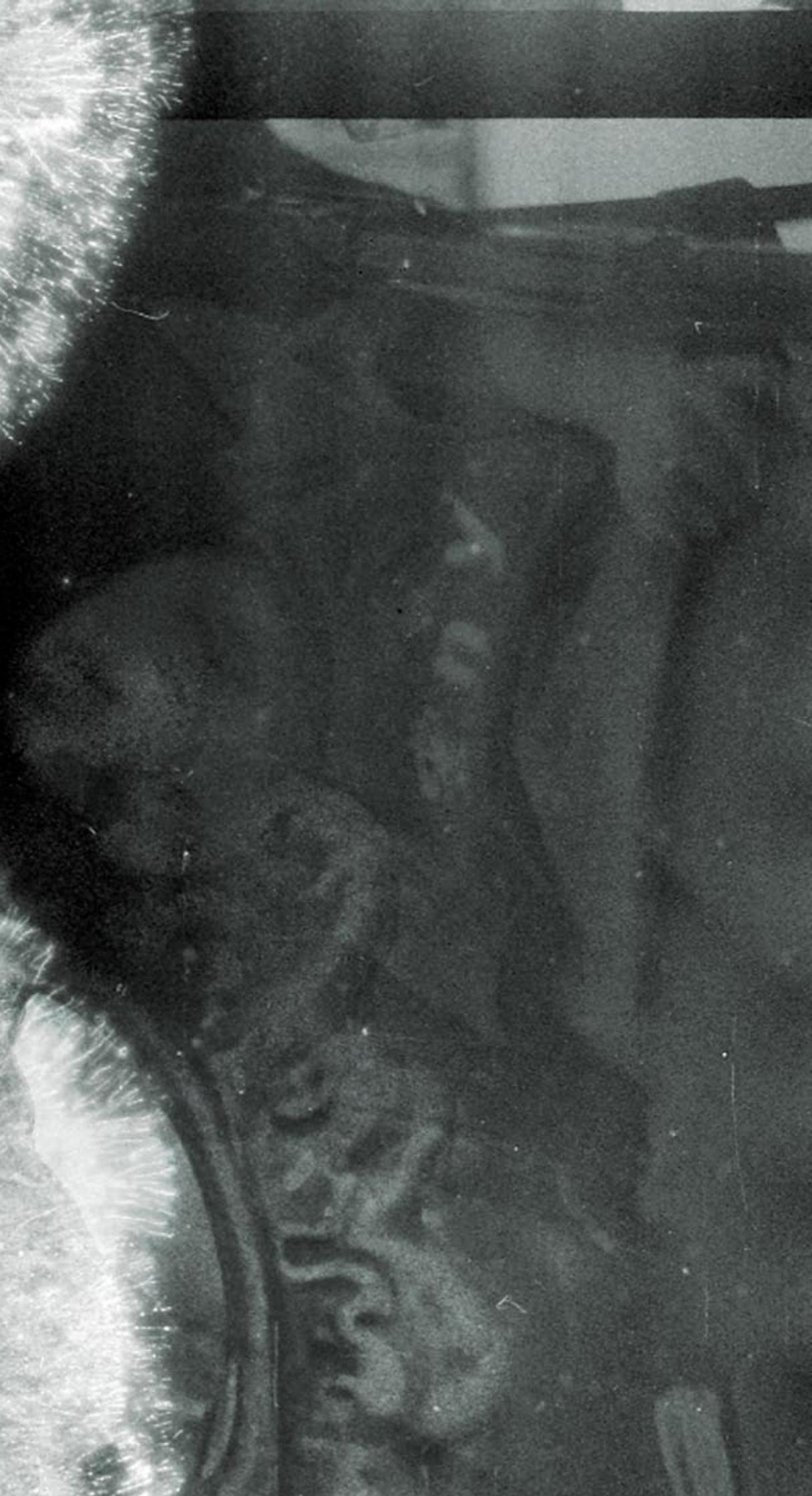
LIGHT LEAKS

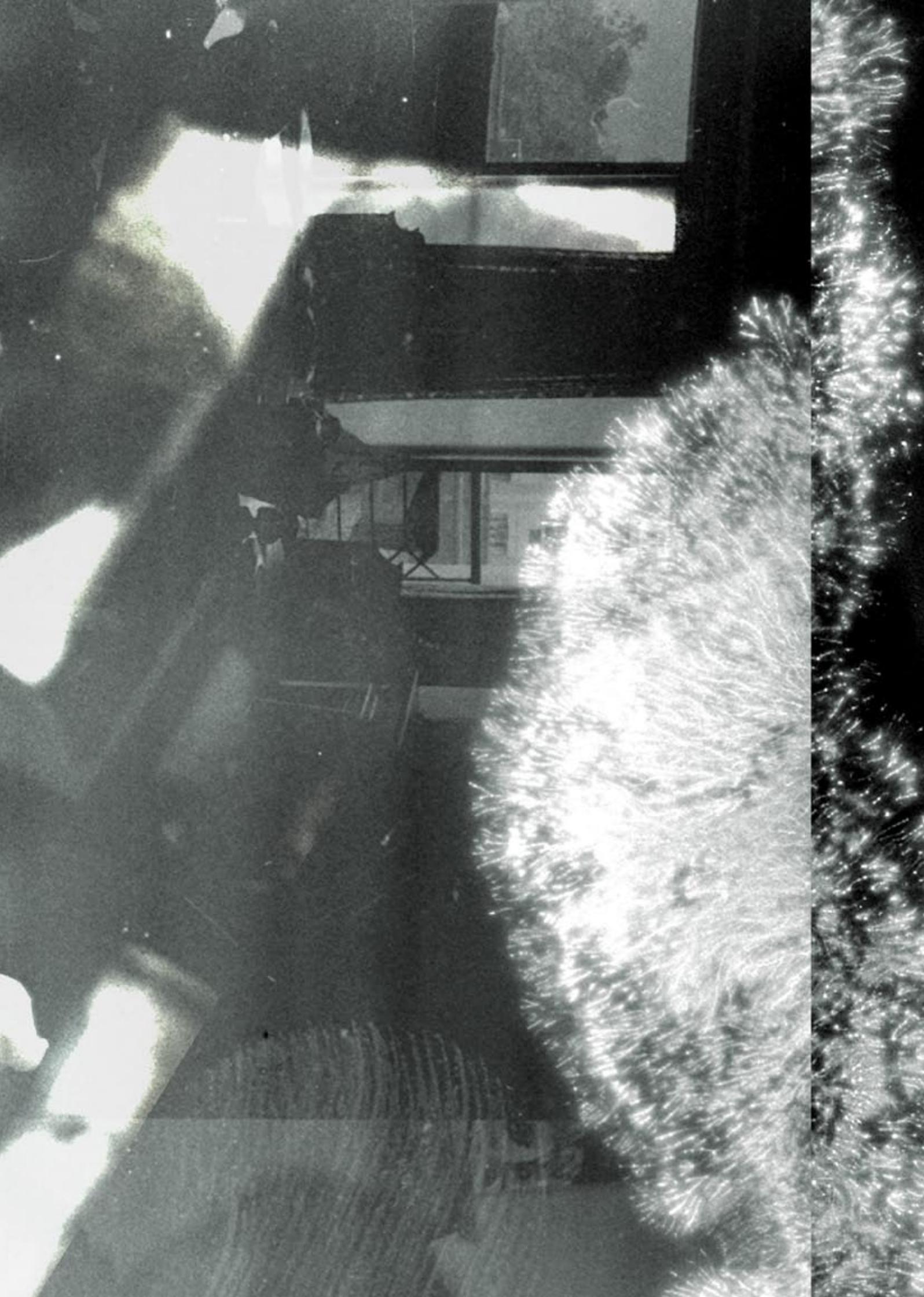
Images by *Sukanya Ghosh*

Collages with scanned 35 mm negatives and photographs of antique objects

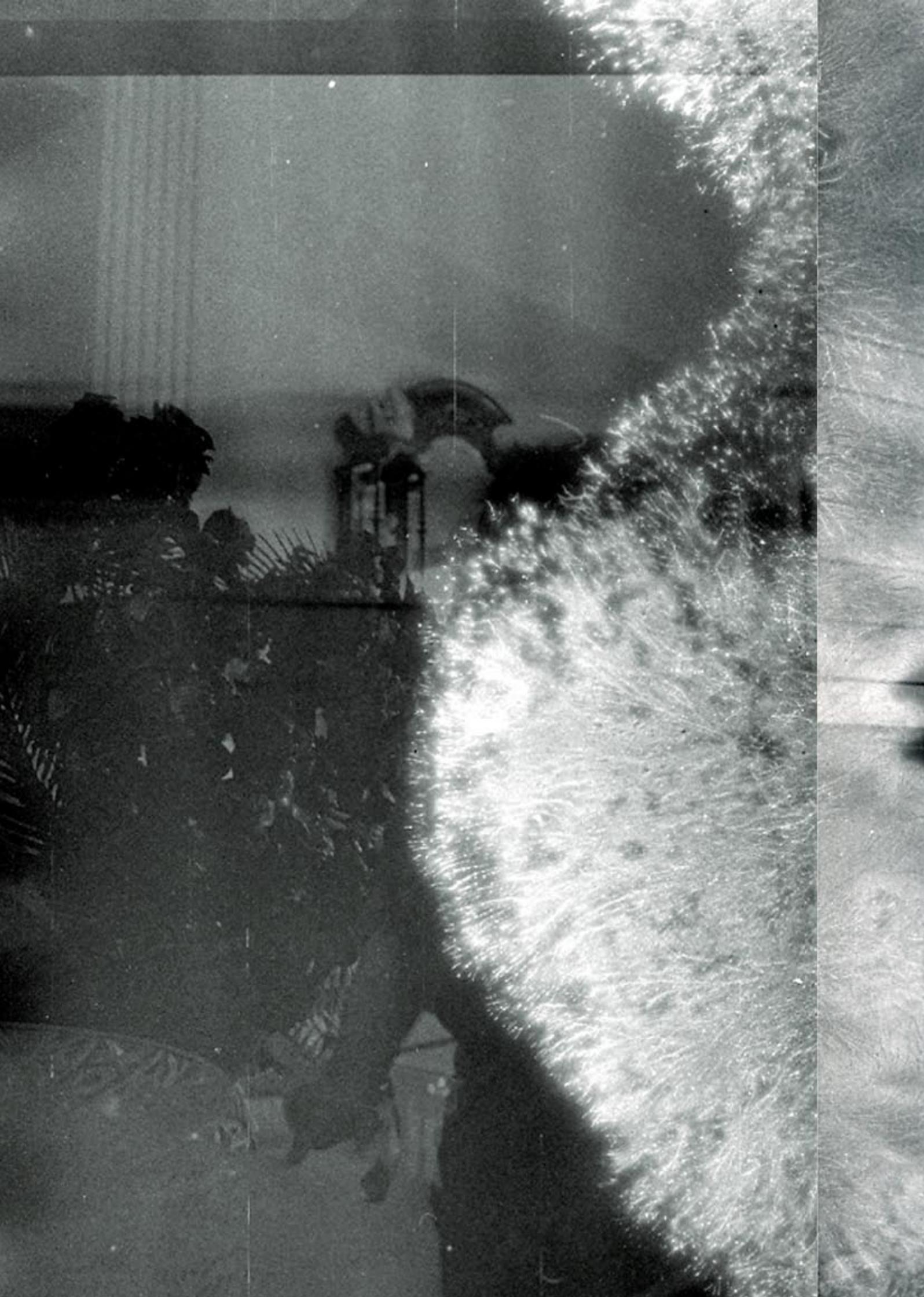
A roll of black and white film unearthed from the recesses of a desk, developed to reveal a decade old set of photographs beautifully adorned with fungal forms. Shadowy figures scratched and blurred emerge from the depths of the shadows and indeterminate greys. On scanning these negatives, what emerges like sharp showers of light flecks is the fungus forms – a third intervention in the long forgotten image construct. I have taken these and created diptychs, marrying the fungal shapes and creating a mysterious space from which occasionally there is a figure of a grandmother, father, nephew and sister. Where literally the first two emerge as ghosts who we have lost, the real ghosting is of the image. The degrading of light and the emergence of an organic 'other'.









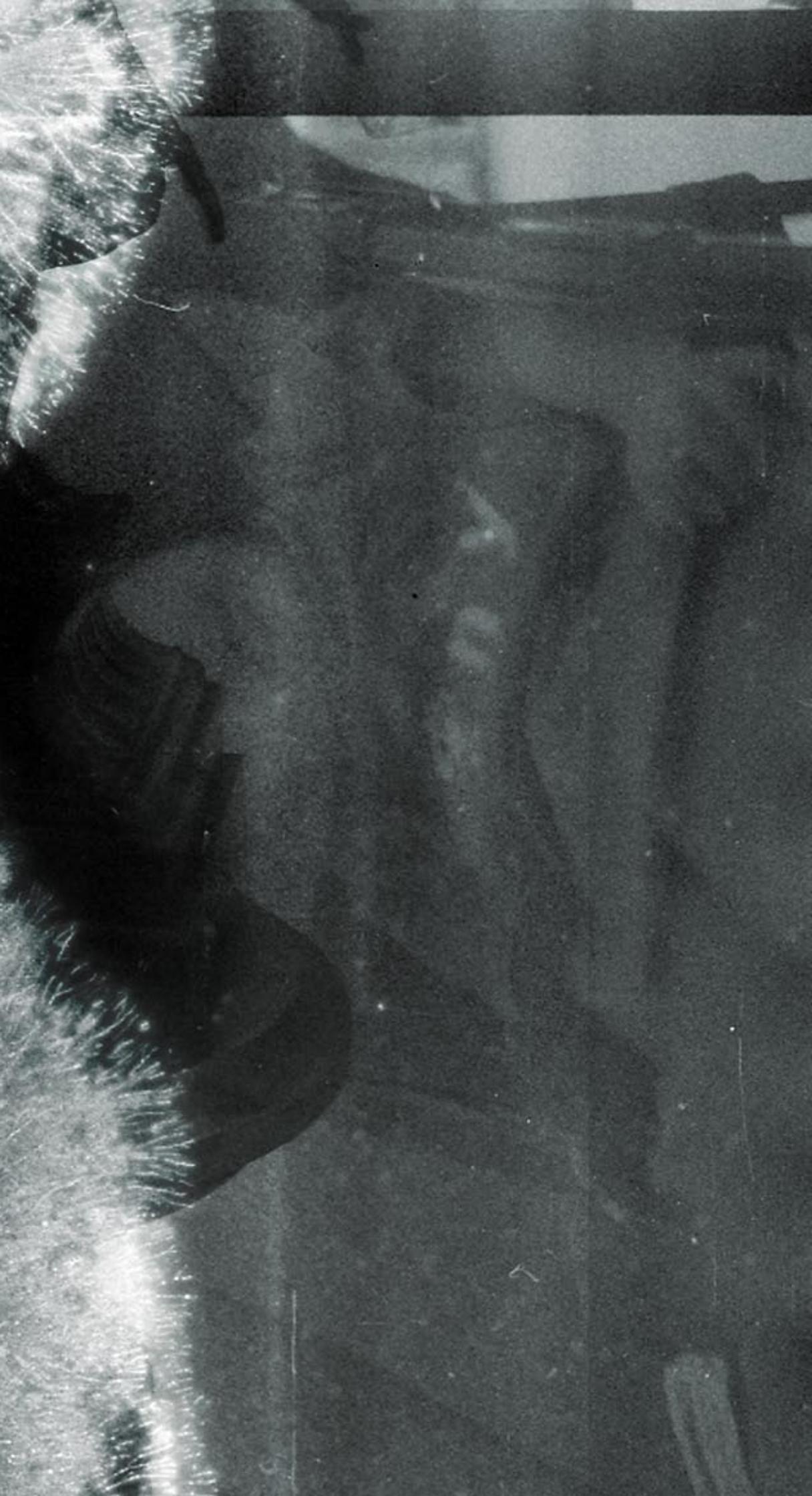












DECAY DAN

Words and image by *Mark Blickley*



The dumbwaiter broke for the ninth time that month. This meant that Arnie would have to run the family's trash down five flights of stairs, depositing it on top of a row of garbage cans to the left of his building. Arnie hated the chore but his sisters were too young for such a responsibility. He flung his jacket with the New York Knicks insignia over his shoulder and grabbed the bag from his mother.

"Goddamn dumbwaiter," hissed her mother, "we don't have enough around here with sickness, we need filth, too!"

Arnie looked up at her and shivered. It had been a long time since he could remember her smiling or when her voice wasn't sharp, angry at him. He wondered why her behavior was normal only when she communicated with the tall skeleton lying on the living room couch.

She hates me, thought Arnie, just because I hate this stinkin' garbage. When Daddy gets better things'll be good again. He'll help out with the garbage and everything will be fine.

The garbage cans overflowed, spotted with vermin. Arnie threw the bag onto the pile and watched with a smile as three days of his life spilled onto the sidewalk. The crashing of baby food jars as they rolled from the sidewalk and into the street made Arnie cry, and he quickly covered his face with his jacket. He did not want any reminders of his mother spoon-feeding his father from those jars.

Ever since the hospital released his father following his third stomach operation, life had become crazy. Daddy was like a six-foot three-inch child, and Arnie a four-foot seven-inch adult. "Like a stupid midget," sighed Arnie. His mother

depended on him to do everything and he was rewarded by her snapping at him like the turtles he caught up at the lake when his father was healthy.

Five weeks had passed since the hospital dumped his father into the four-room apartment with the broken dumbwaiter. Sometimes his speech could be understood, but his existence was mostly incoherent phrases and the sucking of air between gnawed teeth, swallowing pain.

Arnie was sitting in the chair opposite the couch, reading, when he heard his father mumble. He looked up from his illustrated Grimm's Fairy Tales.

"What Daddy?"

His father slowly turned his head until he could peripherally see his son. "Soup," he whispered.

Arnie begrudgingly closed his book and stood up as mother scuffed into the living room and smiled down at his father. She tugged at the back of Arnie's hair, propelling him into the kitchen.

"You do what your father wants and fast, understand me?" she whispered angrily. "Are you such a stupid little fool that you don't know he's going to heaven soon?"

Arnie slipped out of his mother's grip and hurried out of the apartment. He raced down five flights of stairs trying to outdistance his thoughts, but failed. The past months were not spent waiting for his father to get better, to go back to work, or go back to the hospital. Going to heaven? Heaven is for skeletons? Hell is full of skeletons, not heaven.

Arnie bought the soup with his own coins. He was walking up the tenement stoop when a movement by the garbage cans caught his attention. The nine rusty cans for five floors of families were completely buried by torn, greasy bags. It smelled the same way Arnie felt. He walked closer to the noise, careful of rats.

Suddenly, a large head covered with red blotches, chewing on the remains of a day-old TV dinner, popped up out of the garbage. Arnie jumped back and froze.

“What’s the matter, pal? Never seen anyone enjoyin’ their lunch before? Want some?”

Arnie pulled the can of soup out of his pocket and cocked his arm defensively.

“Soup. Well, you are a good lunch companion. Oh dear, it’s mushroom. Doctor says I can’t eat mushrooms. I have a tendency to hallucinate, but I do appreciate the gesture,” he smiled, rising up from the rubbish heap and stretching to his full height, a head taller than Arnie.

Arnie giggled and pocketed the can. “What’s your name?”

The man blew a fly off his nose and scratched under his eye with a long, jagged fingernail. “People call me Decay Dan.” He extended his hand as Arnie withdrew a step. The man laughed.

“You look good in garbage,” giggled Arnie, pleased at being able to retort with an adult.

Dan nodded in agreement, walked over to the curb and squatted. “Garbage has been good to me, too.”

“Why are you called Decay Dan? Sounds like a toothpaste commercial.”

“Because I give hope to people,” replied Dan.

“You’re crazy,” said Arnie.

“Naturally. But to get back to your question, I’m called Decay Dan because I offer the promise of life after death.”

“Say what!” exclaimed Arnie, his fingers tightening around the can in his pocket. “You tryin’ to tell me that you’re God or something? I look stupid, huh?”

Decay Dan shifted on his haunch and squinted at the boy. Arnie noticed that Dan’s ankles were swollen; his shoes housed sockless feet. “What I’m saying is that garbage is important because everyone makes it. When people see garbage they’re disgusted because it makes them think of their own slowly rotting bodies and the death that awaits them. Understand?”

“I think so,” said Arnie, “but why do people get hope from you?”

“Just a second,” answered Decay Dan. He walked over to the garbage, rummaged through some bags and returned to the curb with a soggy, half-smoked cigarette. After a frantic search through his tattered shirt and pants pockets, he found a book of matches and tried to light the cigarette. It was too wet. Decay Dan grumbled and ran the flame under the cigarette, slowly rotating it at the filter. Thirty seconds later he tried to light it again. A brown stained smile recorded his success as he filled his lungs with smoke.

“What’s your name, boy?”

“Arnie”

“Arnie, the way I have it pegged is that when folks see me scrambling around the garbage they get comforted ‘cause the only life usually found in garbage are maggots. A human being rising out of the decay makes them think of the resurrection of the flesh. Understand? Decay is not the end. It’s the supper. And as you can see by my gut, not the last supper, either.”

Arnie stared at Decay Dan and shrugged. Although he wasn’t sure what the man was talking about, he felt a certain comfort from his tone of voice, an old familiar comfort, like when his parents used to explain the reasons why it was important for him to excel in school.

“My mother told me that my father’s going to heaven soon.”

“Is he now? Well, I suppose it’s a damn sight better than living in garbage.”

The two sat in a prolonged silence.

“My mother is upset and angry at me all the time for nothing. I haven’t done nothing.”

“Your old man’s pretty sick, huh?”

Arnie nodded. “Cancer.”

Decay Dan was about to put his arm around Arnie’s shoulder but retracted the motion. “It’s the decay, boy. Don’t worry. It’s not you, it’s the garbage of disease. She’s scared, that’s all.”

Arnie glanced down at Decay Dan’s swollen ankles and then looked into his eyes. “You don’t sound all that crazy. Why are you in garbage?”

“Because there’s so much of it and nobody fights me for it. Now mind you, I’m only talking about American garbage with its bright sanitary packages and Grade A meats.”

“I’d like to do something for you, Decay Dan,” said Arnie.

Decay Dan smiled and spit. “You can, Arnie. Next time your mom forces you to eat something you don’t want and she tells you about all those starvin’ people all over the world, just smile and agree with her. When she leaves think about old Decay Dan and scrape your plate into the garbage, okay?”

“Deal,” grinned Arnie and the two shook hands.

A scream pierced through their new friendship and they both looked up at the fifth-floor window where Arnie’s mother’s face was pressed against the window grill.

“Arnie! Arnie! Stop talking to yourself and waving your arms around like an idiot! Get the hell up here, now! Your father’s been waiting for that soup! Hurry up! Run! Now the neighbors will know I got mental sickness to put up with, too! Get off that curb! Now!” She slammed the window shut.

Decay Dan winked at Arnie and scampered away.

Arnie climbed slowly up the stairs. He paused at each flight to run his hand over the banister and think. His mother had not seen Decay Dan even though Dan was right next to him when she shouted down at him. There’s going to be trouble, big trouble, thought Arnie.

He stopped in front of the muddied welcome mat outside his door, drew a breath, and clicked the key in the keyhole.

RHYTHM AND THE SMALL HANDS OF VIOLENCE

Words by *Megha Sharma Sehdev*

This essay considers the public sphere debate as a particular ghost which animates politics in India today. A key motif of the modern social contract is the image that progress and growth in the nation-state occur when civilized men come into measured rhythms of discussion and debate. While activist intellectuals have tirelessly drawn our attention to fascist ideologies and counter-ideologies, this essay considers what might happen if we approach violence instead through the ordinary, the tactile, and the intimate. This is not to be understood as enablement or approval of violence but rather as a way to bring violence home – or how to touch, grasp, and shift its face with the help of small hands. Violence can come to feel very differently for instance if we make ourselves vulnerable to the ‘lower’ worlds of folktales, animals, and artisans. In particular, this essay invites itself into images of statecraft and violence shared in the song *Bandar Baant* – penned by Hussain Haidry, composed by Bandish Projekt, and featured in the Amazon Prime film *Sherni*. Situated in the protected forests of central India, the film features a newly appointed wildlife officer (played by Vidya Balan) who finds herself in the crossfire of local political rivalries. The song describes how conflicts are torn from everyday recognition and entered into the disorienting ‘sharp jagged tune’ of politics.¹ In the process, language loses its home – shown adeptly in the lyrics through the movements and voices of creatures which in turn have been animated by the vocals of folk artists. Borrowing momentum from the song, this essay approaches state violence through the warm and rugged rhythms of the *bawandar* or ‘monkey drum’ performance, revealing how language comes to be figured by rhythm itself.

In *Bandar Baant*, a pair of hungry cats sees a roti in the corner of a bazaar. Both leaping for the morsel, they end up in a claw fight. Arriving on the scene is a monkey who promises to solve the problem. Introducing a weighing scale, the monkey tears the roti in half. As he places each of the pieces on the scale, it begins to wobble up and down, alternately light and heavy, never quite resolving, with the monkey in turn extricating the pieces and nibbling away at each in order to equalize them. The halves are entered into a process of mimicry which is never quite complete. It is the endless movement of the scale that bewitches the cats to the extent that they can no longer feel or see the disappearance of the bread itself. The *bawandar* performance, in other words, is a feat of illusionism which derives from the very vulnerability of our senses. Subverting the fabled image of the attuned ‘animal instinct’, the song shows how the trick appears seamlessly as a lapse of attention by which the senses come to be estranged by rhythm.

The scenes in *Bandar Baant* show our potential to be disoriented by the literal ‘small hands’ of balancing spectacle. Everyday forms here come to be figured not through naked power but through the simple actions of

monkey and pendulum, to which we may warmly relate but which can also begin to startle and drain life. Palpable throughout is a feeling of evisceration or ‘ghosting’ of the intimate contact through which hunger and deprivation could be mutually felt. The ‘*tarazu ka khel*’ (play of the scale) might be compared, for instance, to other South Asian poetics of adjudication, such as the ethics of ‘*andaaza*’ (manner) or ‘*pehchaan*’ (recognition) in which asymmetry comes to be recognized not as threat but as “translatable quality” (Guyer 2004, pg. 51). In the situation of the feuding cats for instance this might have entailed a poetics of vulnerability, one cat having ‘seen’ the roti first, another having ‘leapt’ for it.²

While serving to critique political modernity, however, the *Bandar Baant* song is not reductive, and rather reminds us that disorienting rhythms do not emerge from a vacuum but pick-up life from a range of polyrhythms in the environment. In addition to the pre-colonial *bawandar* tradition, for instance, the song uncovers the rhythmic arrangements of the ‘female juggler actress’ named Bhanmati, who appears in scenes of the Mahabharata, as well as the mystifying illusionism of the Persian-translated and Sanskrit-derived Touti-Nama, in which a green parrot transfixes and re-arranges human attention through his uncanny voice in storytelling. The rhythms of judicial modernity then do not emerge from sovereign decision, but build and draw from potentials of magic, entertainment, and seduction that run through South Asian traditions. While rhythmic intensity can build to violent levels, the *Bandar Baant* song reveals how rhythm gathers its momentum drawing not only from animals and artisans, but also from gendered expression. In *Bandar Baant*, rhythm itself becomes the hungry and hungering force, transforming a simple dispute into its own territory consisting of movement and sound.

The Bawandar of Television News

Flipping the problem on its head, we might say that in order to keep the scale in rhythm the monkey eats away at the pieces of bread so that the scale continues to tip back-and-forth. By the same token we might look at the vulnerability of language itself to offer small levers by which it can be adjusted to a particular rhythmic shape. Language found in Indian news reporting for instance comes under similar rhythmic imperatives so as to mimic the rational public sphere debate.

Such craftwork is visible in a recent newsclip, featured on the Hindi-language news channel *Aaj Tak*, that covered Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Punjab ahead of elections. The PM’s car, blocked by a crowd of protestors, was forced to turn its way back to Delhi. In the featured videoclip, Punjab Chief Minister Channi is shown accusing the PM of fabricating a story that he fled the protestors “because his life was in danger.” Making use of the intimate public voice – a characteristic form of address in Punjabi, the CM is shown peppering his reply with the second-person pronouns ‘*tun*’, ‘*tuseen*’ and ‘*tuhade*’, indicating not bald disrespect but what in Punjabi could be construed as the warmth of intimate complaint among political rivals.³ However when the *Aaj Tak* anchor ‘spun’ the story she presented a strangely mirrored introduction: the CM had crossed all lines of constitutional civility, she said, by falling into ‘*tu tadaak*’-like language.^{4,5}

There is a process of translation here from the informal *tainun/tuhade* in Punjabi into the copycat ‘*tu-tadaak*’. While *tainun/tuhade* evokes an intimate rivalry and enmity, the translated term ‘*tu-tadaak*’ is blown up and used to voice PM Modi’s ‘side’ of the tale. Language here becomes vulnerable to “processes of translation and rotation” (Das 2007, pg. 108). Speech comes to be folded and unfolded by the news in the form of a “debate,” by small hands that grip and turn language to face a different region of voice, ‘*tu-tadaak*’ voicing Punjab through regions of suspicion or as state gone rogue, and with a sense of gleeful disparagement. Rather than naked political power, then, we might consider language and its power to morph into different orientations. The creation of sound bytes, the editing of frames on the part of news media, is a way of plumbing certain regions of speech – those with the potential to mirror the form of the other. By rotating and translating language we might even begin to see “seeming chains of connections” between otherwise distinct forms of address (see Das 2007, pg. 108). It becomes possible to imagine how the 24/7 news cycle with its rapid sequences of ‘splitscreen debate’ keeps audiences transfixed, while subtracting the form and content of regional politics and their capacity to create change.

Thekaa

The *Bandar Baant* song weaves itself from parables, lore, as well as performative traditions of the *bawandar* tracing to colonial and pre-colonial India. In one account, the *madari* (or trainer) plays a small drum, the drumbeat transfixing the audience, during which time the *madari* is able to introduce a small plot by forming a ‘dialogue’ between the two monkeys in the ring, who are staged as a potential marriage match. The audience becomes embroiled in the anxiety of the marriage proposal – its refusal, its potential, their senses captivated by the drum’s escalating rhythm. It is discovered that the ‘groom’ monkey cannot afford the cost of marriage. He appeals to the audience for help. As money changes hands and is dropped into the ring, the performance abruptly ends, shattering the illusion of the ‘plot’. In other words the rhythm of the beating drum itself can break and distort the actions of the monkeys and arrange them in the way of a dialogue.

In Indian music traditions the *thekaa* alludes to the specific texture of beats in a beat-cycle. The *thekaa* gives varied movement to musical lines, arranging how elements of words and syllables fall. In this way, *thekaas* or rhythmic patterns are not empty vessels but they actively sculpt language. The *thekaa* in other words is a vital sensory tool that can impart shape to other forms. Central to accounts of politics is the “formal, built-in movement of rhythm and alternation” which stages the illusion of dialogue and progress, a hallmark of the modern state form (Scott 2014, pg. 5). The dual beat of the iamb for instance configures reality into pendulum form in Western poetic traditions, giving the illusion of a particular mythology of the rational social contract. The lyrics of *Bandar Baant* however appear to sit within a more intricate, serrated structure; the song uncannily reproduces rhythmic form, opening a window into seeing the state anew from the ground.

Indeed, it is much more convenient to stop and say that politics does ‘both sideism’ without intimately examining the craft through which everyday forms are touched and moulded, and how they subtly provoke

and induce fear. We needn't imagine technologies of audio-visual deepfakes to see how language itself, assumed to be stable, can be given political life. Language that otherwise remains buried and inert within news reports and political speeches can be vitalized, and voice shaped, in ways that can prove devastating. We can venture into these areas when we have a hand to hold, when we are invited by warm presences that guide us—even as our own senses may become vulnerable, betraying or 'ghosting' us. More generally the *Bandar Baant* song endearingly reveals how performative repertoires draw on, and organize, regions of the artisan and the animal – to animate forums of law and state.

Endnotes

1 Ghosh, Sankhayan. 'Best Hindi Film Music of 2021.' *Film Companion* (blog), December 15, 2021. <https://www.filmcompanion.in/fc-lists/best-hindi-film-music-of-2021-shershaah-param-sundari/>.

2 The rendition of one cat 'seeing' and the other 'leaping' can be found within the version of the parable found in the NCERT study guide: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPaaX8_UHwU.

3. “*Yaar, koi khatra tainun hoye nein, tuseen aine jimevaari post de bande ho, tuhade nede koi banda nein aya*” [My friend, you suffered no threat, you hold a post with much accountability/responsibility, no one came near you”].

4. For the original *Aaj Tak* clip (in Hindi), see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOydQtGa5Xw>.

5. Many thanks to Hussain Haidry for his insight and encouragement in developing these thoughts. See: <https://twitter.com/hussainhaidry/status/147975367774540805?t=d9Ko1L7mAeCA8tRhg4FNPQ&s=03>.

References

- Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Guyer, Jane. 2004. *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Scott, David. 2014. *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham: Duke University Press.



Opposite:

Phil Sawdon, *Shadow*, 2022, pastel and watercolour on paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

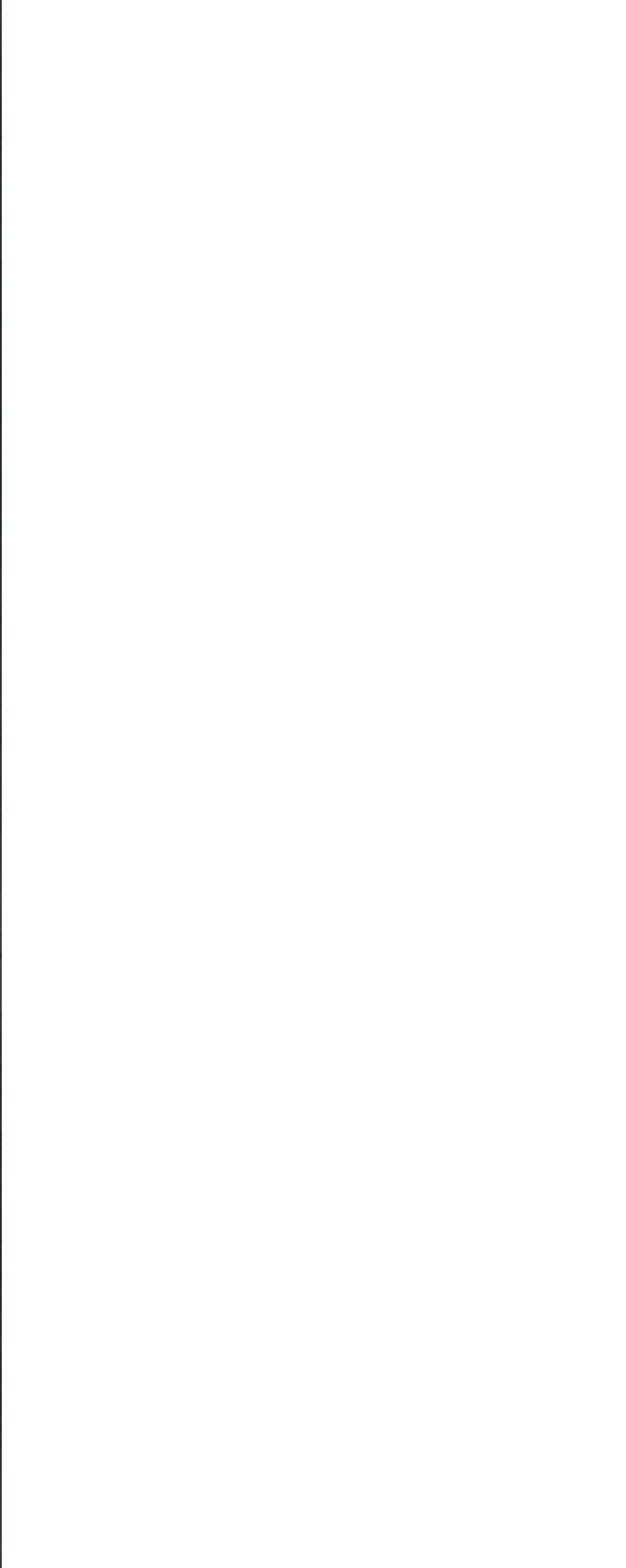
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Phil Sawdon, *Séance*, modified in 2022, pastel on paper. Image courtesy of the artist.













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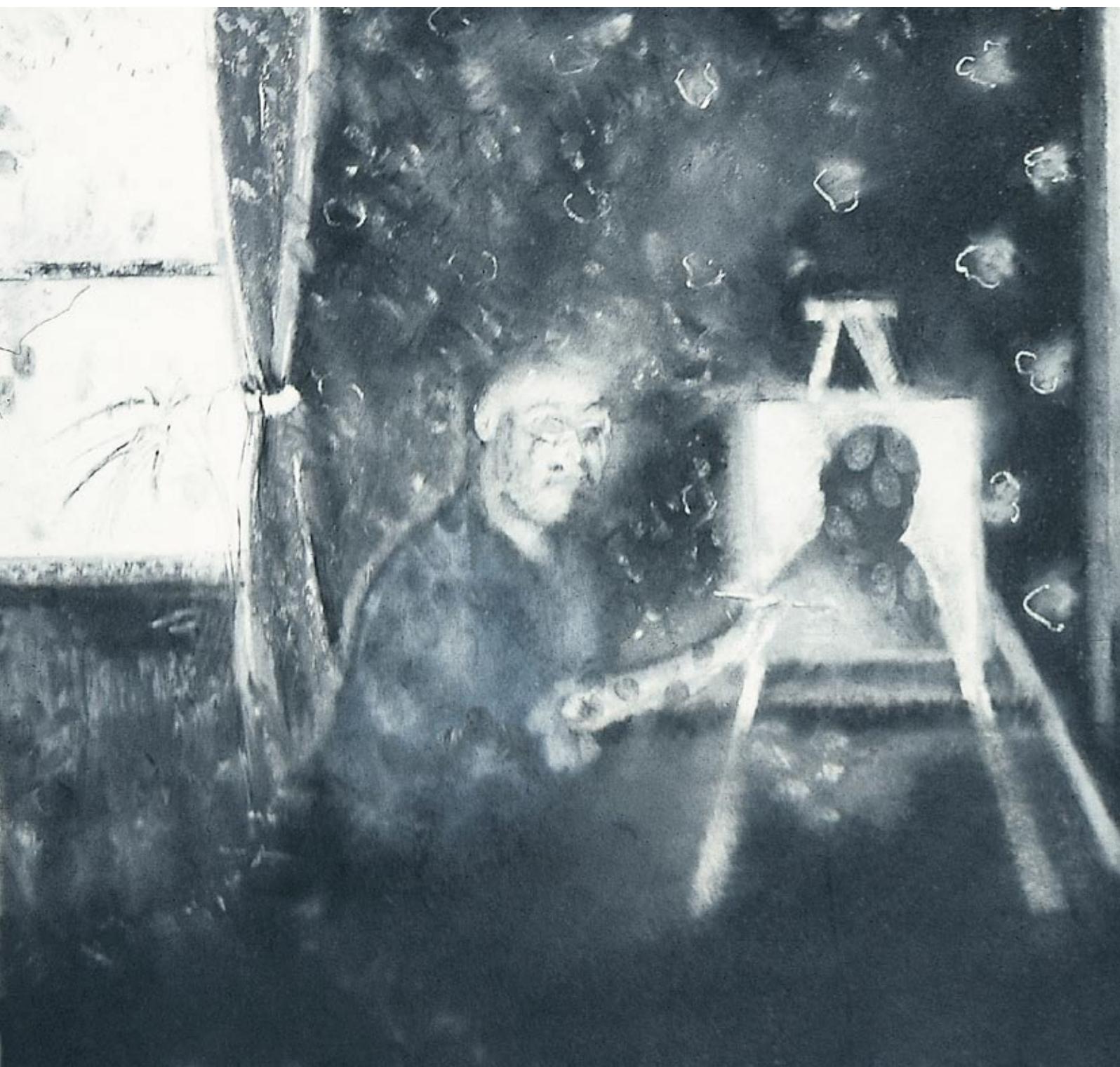
Phil Sawdon, *Nebulous*, 2022, pastel on paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Opposite:

Phil Sawdon, *Wight*, 2022, pastel on toned paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Next Page:

Phil Sawdon, *Signature*, 2022, pastel on lining paper. Image courtesy of the artist.





THE FUNERAL

Words by *Robin Dennis*

Illustrations by *Estella Mare*

Clint Tangent grew like weed through crazy paving. Spent winter days building stickle bricks on the floor of his fart-smelling room; summer afternoons plundering the wasteland behind the Texaco station, smashing up tellies, pissing in fridges. He'd sit in the sun doing crisp-bag origami and gobbing on grass, watching the blades *submit to the spit* and droop to the ground. Some days, boys from the estate would drive him out with car-aerial whips and he'd trail home with his fingers tingling, lashed thighs singing.

They lived in an end terrace by the football ground, Clint and Penny and Mum and Dad. One afternoon in January, just after Clint had turned eleven, Mum got sucked into the canal. They'd been on the way back from the shops. The snow was banked up along the edge of the towpath, toothpaste white. She'd gone in after her shoe—pink, it was, and pointy, bought new. There was a whirlpool. Came out of nowhere. She reached in and slipped and suddenly started going round and round, faster and faster, hair out like a helicopter, arms raised to the sky. Didn't make a sound. He got a flash of the time he'd flushed Penny's Barbie in the bog. Then she was gone.

Soon the canal stopped circling, stretched tight again. Low winter sun was on the water. Birds were singing, buses going over the bridge above. After a bit Clint picked up the shopping bags and carried on along the towpath.

Dad made beans on toast for tea. He was pissed off with Mum and was wanting to know where she was.

Looking for her shoe, Clint said. Dad looked at him for a long time, still and quiet, black hammocks under his eyes.

Dad went weird after that. He set up a tent in the back garden that spring, and they slept out every night, Clint and Penny and Dad. But even when the weather turned and the kids went back to their beds, Dad stayed out nights. In the run-up to Christmas, he started digging a hole. Made a mountain of black earth next to the shed that Penny named Mount Bumscreaps. Spent Boxing Day night down there in his sleeping bag. Was still out at New Year's. When school went back after Christmas, Dad would come in through the back door and sit at the breakfast table watching them eat Coco Pops with mud in his hair and his denims gone brown.

One night just before bed, Clint went out in his dressing gown and slippers to say goodnight. He asked Dad about the hole.

Rhinos sleep in holes, Dad said.

Dad had never mentioned rhinos before. Clint peered into the hole. His dad was a throbbing red fag-end in the dark.

Clint scoured the library for books about rhinos, but there weren't any. He found a good one about tractors,



though. On the cover was a big red-faced farmer spamming his tractor over a lumpy field, one hand gripping the wheel, the other on his hat. He looked like he was late for something important, like a wedding—maybe his own wedding—and was loving the excuse to wazz it. Clint could imagine the tractor bouncing along, out of control, the farmer wrestling the wheel and laughing as he burst through hedges and blammed holes in fences till he hit a dead stop outside the church and pegged it up the stone steps to the aisle.

The farmer's name was Farmer Barley. It was good to say it fast.

FarmerBarley FarmerBarley FarmerBarley.

When he took the book out, he asked the lady at the counter if rhinos slept in holes. She didn't know. Foxes did, though. She was sure foxes did. And swifts slept on the wing. They stayed up in the air forever, she said, circling and circling until their hearts stopped and they fell from the sky like bullets.

Clint spent a lot of time thinking about Farmer Barley. Treehouses, too. Skeet Graning's dad had built him one. One day Skeet had invited lots from his class to come up his tree. He hadn't asked Clint, though. Sometimes he thought about Mum. He hoped she'd found her shoe. Maybe she'd banged her head on a rock in the canal and couldn't remember who she was or where she lived. Maybe she was living in town somewhere, wearing her pointy shoes, full up with forgetting. Could be she was working at the butchers—the other one, the one they never went to—chopping bits of pig out for people she didn't know any more. Or maybe one day when he went to get his feet measured the lady would look up and it would be her. She'd say her name was Susan, but it wouldn't be.

Last lesson on Wednesdays was swimming. Every week his class minibussed it out to the baths. After swimming he'd get a can of Lilt from the vending machine in the foyer and furtively watch the lady on reception as he supped. She had hair like a battered yellow helmet; a face that was sort of cosy and sat-on looking like a sofa cushion. He liked her nose best: it was as happy and meaty as a Sunday.

Janice, it said on her badge.

She was taking money from two blokes and laughing.

Maybe Mum looked like someone else now. Someone like Janice. Could be banging your head in the canal did that to you. Maybe when you banged your head in the canal you wanted yellow hair.

He gazed at her from his spot by the vending machine, his mouth sour with pineapple and his change going

sweaty in his hand. She was laughing with the blokes and writing something with a biro and he was all trapped and stoppered up and aching so much in his middle he could hardly breathe.

Next time he was at the library he took out a book on the sea so he could ask the lady at the counter what happened if you banged your head in the canal. Someone would have to fish you out if you banged it hard enough, she said. Someone would have to go in and rescue you. He never read the book about the sea. He was still reading the book about Farmer Barley. He had a farm with some animals but mostly with stuff that grew out of the ground. He wondered who had gone in and rescued his mum.

FarmerBarley FarmerBarley FarmerBarley.

When Farmer Barley pegged it up the steps into the church, the lady grinned at him and didn't mind that he was late, or that he was dirty and sweaty from the fields and with bits of fence in his hair from driving recklessly, because he'd saved her—and not just her, her shoe too, and she was wearing them and she loved him and she had a badge that said *Janice*.

When he got home from school, Penny had cracked an egg into the bath and was trying to fry it with a hairdryer. The egg whirled in the water like an ancient octopus.

Aren't you poaching it, though? Clint said. You aren't frying it. You're poaching it.

He put a finger in to test the water. Penny's Barbie was lying at bottom of the tub, smiling. The egg was starting to break up now: it was a comet—a comet blazing white-hot through the earth's atmosphere, speeding towards Barbie and about to blow her legs off. Barbie was lying there, smiling like an idiot, pathetically ignorant of her impending doom.

Water's not hot enough to poach an egg, he said. You need some more hot.

Penny just stared at him from under her fringe, gently waving the hairdryer over the water.

Is Dad out back? he asked.

Yep, Penny said.

Clint downed the stairs, went through the kitchen and out the back. His Dad was lying in the long grass beside the hole. Looked like he was sleeping. The light had gone grey.

Dad, he shouted as quietly as he could. Can I have some money to go to Costcutters? Penny doesn't know what to eat. I'll make us some dinner.

On the side, Dad said without opening his eyes. The long grass was squashed down underneath him. It was grey and damp and cold.

In the kitchen, he said, on the side. His eyes were open now. He was looking up at the sky.

I think we'll have a funeral, he said to the sky.

It was like Clint could see what his Dad had said, hanging above him in the air and slowly drifting and rising through the levels of grey light like a balloon.

We'll have a funeral, he said. I'll do it, he said. We'll have it here. I'll do it, like.

He was still looking up at the grey sky.

Clint decided he should practice first, so he started small, asking for little things and moving up to bigger things. He didn't want to, but he made himself.

He asked for a bag at the checkout when he bought a Caramac at Costcutter.

He asked for a bag at the checkout when he bought a Caramac at Costcutter, and when she gave him one he asked for another one, which he got—no questions asked.

He asked the bus driver if she could tell him when they got to Quarry Lane.

Sure, duck.

She forgot. He resentfully got off at Quarry Lane.

He asked Penny if he could turn over halfway through *Miraculous*.

Nope. I'm watching it.

He asked if she could move over so he could sit next to her.



Fuck off, Clint.

He asked Miss Crisp if he could open the window in English.

Yes, Clinton. Then Skeet Graning led a chorus of

Fuckin' clit's too gay to see through't winder

'Is gayness 'as made 'is eyes dirty, like

Fuckin' dirty-eyed cunt

Air in here's not gay enough fer'rim, like

E' wants air what smells'er bum cracks

Fuckin' gay air, like

Close the fuckin' winder ya twat, 's

mekkin' us all

fuckin' gay in 'ere

He asked Miss Wombat in PE if he could sit on the bench because he was feeling poorly even though he wasn't.

Have you got your kit?

Aye.

What's the matter with you?

Feel sick, miss.

You look all right, Clinton. Since when have you been feeling sick?

Dunno, for a bit.

For a bit. Miss Wombat appraised him, hands on hips. Go in goal and I'll keep my eye on you. Blue bibs.

He asked Dad if he could spend the night in the hole.

No, Clint, you'd be on top of me. If you want to spend the night out, set up the tent or sleep up top by ... Mount ... thingy

Bumscrap. Mount Bumscrap.

Aye, Mount Bumscrap. Or just sleep in your bed. It's still cold out, you know. It's not very nice.

He asked Tom Filey, who'd he'd always admired but never had much to do with, if he wanted to see *Super Ape* at the Odeon. Tom Filey's face rose into speaking position and, for a few excruciating moments, just hung there. Then he said, Okay. *Super Ape* was well good. After, they ate Maccy D's by the reservoir and then said bye and Tom went for the bus and Clint biked home along the trails.

He asked Claudia Lowther if he could be in her group in chemistry when they were doing stuff with bunsen burners. Clint could never look at her long, nor could he ever quite recall what she looked like. When he looked, her face would subtly shift and change, her features gently kaleidoscoping, and his eyes could never get their fingers on them. Every time he looked at her was like the first time.

Fuck off, you smelly twat, she said.

He asked Skeet Graning if he could play football in the big break and the boys all laughed like they'd been storing it up. Give us your maths book, then, said Skeet, so he did. But they never played football because Skeet was too busy writing, perched on the wall outside science with the others crowded around him like in rugby. Clint waited outside the scrum, scalp crawling with a mixture of pride and horror. He got the book back when the bell rang. Scored in blue amid a riot of spurting cocks he read,

U ARE WELL FUCKING GAY

U LOVE HORSES

U LOVE ARSES

U USE BUM CREAM

U WANK LIKE A KNIGHT

U PART UR CHEEKS LIKE A GIBBON IN A GAY FOREST

U ARE GAYER THAN MUM'S BEST CHAIR (BEST CHAIR = GAY)

U PART UR CHEEKS LIKE THE SWISHY DOORS AT A TESCOS 4 GAYS (TESCOS = NOT GAY)

He asked the man on the front desk of the hospital if Clarice Tangent was there.

What ward is she on, buddy? he said.

Clint said he didn't know.

I'd need to know what ward she's on, he said. What's she in for?

Clint said she fell in the canal and banged her head.

Neurology, said the man, probably neurology. He clicked on his computer a few times and said, Clarice Tangent ... sorry mate, I can't find her. Are you sure she's in here?

No.

Could she be in Queen's Med?

Aye, maybe.

Have you tried Queen's Med?

No.

Why don't you ring up Queen's Med?

He asked the lady on the front desk at the police station if they'd heard anything about Clarice Tangent.

Is she your mam, duck? said the lady, somewhat ruefully.

Yes, said Clint. No. She's my auntie. A bit like my mum. Hair like my mum. He waved his hand in front of his face. Face, he added.

The woman nodded, but only on the outside. What's the trouble then, duck?

I ... we ... we haven't seen her. For a bit. I was just wondering if you've seen her ... if you know where she is ... or anything.

Who's 'we', duck?

Me and Dad and Penny.

And where's Dad now?

At home.

You live with your dad?

Yes, he said, and into his head popped, well, sort of. He prayed she wouldn't see the thought on him and held his breath, held his breath, held his breath.

I'm really sorry, love. How long's your auntie been ... when was the last time you saw her, duck?

You know when they opened the Co-op by the train station?

Yes, she said, like there was another bit of her sentence that had gone invisible.

Since then.

The lady gave him a long look over her glasses. Then she lifted a big book from the desk and started riffling through the pages.

He asked Janice on the front desk at the baths if she'd come to the funeral.

She sat up like a puppeteer had yanked her strings.

What? she said. Whose funeral?

My mum's, he said, surprised to hear the anger under the waterline of his words.

Her face was pale, greenish around the nose.

Or ... maybe it's my dad's, he said, the thought occurring to him for the first time, a great flame of horror licking up inside him.

No ... I think it's my mum's. Yeah, it's my mum's.

He watched her face greedily, watched it with his eyes and his fingers and his legs and his hair.

The grey lattice under her left eye leapt.

I'm really sorry, love, she said. Who was ... what's her name? Do I know her?

Something kicked out in her, under the surface of her pale, raw face.

Clarice, he said. Clarice Tangent. My mum is Clarice Tangent, he said, and his words filled the foyer like an



airbag.

Something lived under the green lid of her face.

I don't think I know her love, she said. I'm sorry. Is it a wake?

What do you mean? he said. Is what awake?

No, love. Like, a wake. Like, will there be a wake? Will there be people there— food and that, y'know. Drinks. Should I dress up—smart, like? Trousers ... then her eyes rolled off him and fixed on a point in the distance.

Seconds passed.

Trousers? he prompted.

Yeah ... or, like, a dress? You know, black. A wake, love. You know what a wake is, don't you, love?

Yes, he said, I know what a wake is, and he saw Janice's white-green face staring out from an open coffin. On a table beside her were plates of sandwiches and bowls of Monster Munch, balloons and streamers. Party poppers.

Yeah, he said. Yeah, it's a wake.

Alright then, love—when is it? she said, clicking a pen and holding it poised over a white notepad.

On the telly room table Clint made a spread of cheese and pickle sandwiches, mini sausage rolls, bowls of Wotsits. He found a chocolate log from Christmas and hacked it into wedges; set out napkins, bottles of pop—Fanta, Tango, Lilt. He made a pyramid of Dad's cans, but it looked weird, like acrobats when they all stand on each other's shoulders wobbling and smiling, so he just lined them up along the back of the table. He blew up balloons: round ones and long ones in yellows and pinks. Costcutters didn't have any streamers, so he made a sign with a big marker pen saying *Welcome Janice*. But he didn't really want to encourage the Janice thing, so he screwed it up and did another one just saying *Welcome*. Deciding that this was a bit vague and anyhow jarred with the overall thrust of the day, he made one that said *Goodbye Mum*. But this didn't seem right either: too glass-half empty. In the end he just wrote *Mum* in big letters, one letter per page, and taped them to the telly room wall.

Dad was outside, preparing down the hole. It had started to drizzle. He'd come in earlier on for new trousers and a rain mac. Drizzle, said Dad, was weather in which the hole fared badly. It magnified its disadvantages. Clint had asked why Dad didn't rig up a bit of tarpaulin to keep the rain off.

It'd be dishonest, he'd said. It would be a deception.

Clint heard, It would be a Decepticon, and he hadn't understand what Dad meant.

Penny was outside too, keeping Dad company. She was sat atop Mount Bumscreaps in an outsize pirate hat, an umbrella held up to the weather. A plate of Wotsits rested precariously on the slope beside her. She was nodding and talking into the hole.

Are you alright? Clint called from the back door. Are you ready? Do you need anything?

Penny stopped nodding and looked up. Raindrops were descending the dome of her umbrella.

No, ta, came Dad's voice. All set, like.

The doorbell went. Clint padded through to the front door, his combats making a swishing sound as he walked. His guts were coming gently unglued; his throat was a pipe of tender meat. What did people think when they came into their house? Did it smell weird without them noticing? Did they like stuff that nobody else did—weird stuff, stuff people used to like but didn't anymore? Was how they lived just bad and wrong and unfashionable?

A shape swam behind the glass.

Clint opened the door. She looked different.

Hello, Clinton, she said.

Her head and hands looked somehow really big—like, massive; and her hair was long and wild, like wind through a hayfield. Orange powder coated her face and neck. Below the tidemark, white flesh ran to her dress. She smelled of fags and sweet perfume.

He couldn't feel his mum in her anymore, in this woman on the doorstep; but her big head and perfume smell and messy hair down on her shoulders were so overwhelming that his guts were shot with sunlight and his legs went electric and he felt sick and brilliant.

I'm sorry for your loss, Clinton, she said.

He was tiny. A tiny speck in the infinite space of his own chest.

Thanks, he said. I mean, hello. Thanks.

She looked him up and down. Am I too early? she asked, peering around him into the hallway.

No, he said, no, come in. He backed away from her into the hall.

I've got a bottle, she said, holding up a bottle.

Oh, yeah, he replied, still backing away. Thanks, it's a nice ... bottle.

Shall I put it somewhere? she said. In the kitchen?

Clint changed direction, began backing towards the kitchen, his eyes on her, rapt, unblinking.

She placed the bottle on the empty counter. The only sound was his retreating trainers squeaking on the lino. When he stopped, the only sound was his heart.

So, then, she said. Where is everyone then, love?

Clint raised a finger to half-mast, bowed his head and padded past her out of the kitchen. She followed him back out into the hall. He entered the telly room, swivelled towards her, then gestured—somewhat uncertainly—to the room. A half-empty plate of sandwiches was marooned on a table. Behind it, a broken line of beer cans stood silent sentry. A small sausage roll rested on the arm of a sofa. Balloons lay scattered on the carpet, isolated and apart. Over the scene hung a homemade banner bearing the non-sequitur *Mum*.

Janice turned her gaze on Clint, who was still staring fixedly into her face. He repeated his gesture, albeit on a smaller scale.

Okay, said Janice. Yes, she said, nodding. Okay. Where's everyone else, though, love?

The whites of her eyes were riddled with fine red lines. Beneath them, soft lilac bags deflated delicately into her cheeks. The patch of carpet between them was the colour of a golden retriever—but old and ill, with the mark of death on it.

They're in the garden, he said.

When Clint opened the back door, Penny was still up Mount Bumscreps—but bored now, snacking on something from up her nose.

Penny, he called to her. Penny, this is—a wave of wind sloughed through the boughs of the trees—*Janice*, he called, his inverted commas like red devil horns on Halloween night.

Penny's big pirate hat had slipped down over one eye. Mount Bumscreps was subsiding gently in the drizzle. She's ... she's from the baths, he called.

No reaction.

Hello, love, said Janice, her voice like the teacher's who comes in to tell you your dog or auntie's dead.

No reaction.

Dad, he shouted in the direction of the hole, Dad, this is *Janice*.

Wind caressed the unkempt lawn.

Don't worry—he's in there, he told Janice, in the hole. She received his words with a face stoic as a mountaineer's.

Dad, he yelled, approaching the hole. Dad was asleep: eyes tight, mouth cracked, stubbly double-chin humped against the collar of his mac. His long, grizzled hair merged with the mud.

Oi, Dad, he hissed. Wake up! A newspaper had congealed into a sodden tablet across his chest.

Dad's head jerked softly and his eyes opened—like someone falling asleep, but in reverse. Half his face was mud.

Oh, he said. I dropped off there. Rain danced in the puddles around him.

I wanted to start with the ... with the, you know ... he was struggling to sit up, his hands and feet gouging skidmarks in the goo. With the ... with the, you know ... for Mum, like, he said, voice dissolving. He stared up at Clint with eyes like a butcher's shop window.



He's just been crying and complaining about Mum and eating peanuts all afternoon, came Penny's voice from on high.

Dad, said Clint, *Janice* is here. From the baths. She's *here*, he said conspiratorially, thumbing towards the figure on the dark patio.

Who's Janice? asked Dad. His mouth worked silent words. Who's Janice?

Take a look at her, Dad; she's *here*, he said. She wanted to come.

Who the fuck is Janice? Dad screamed. Why the fuck've you ... but his voice shorted and his chest started whooping like a knackered Hoover and he doubled over, coughing an X-ray of his lungs. And then Dad was suddenly up on his stick legs, bucking like a rat, hands scrabbling for traction in the dirt, trying to get out of the hole.

ALAN! he bellowed, FUCKING ALAN! CLARICE! WHY THE FUCK? ALAN! FUCKING ALAN! WHY THE FUCK, CLARICE? He was on his feet, swaying like a scarecrow, just screaming now—lungs turned to brown and black crackling, screaming a noise Clint had never heard before, a scream Clint thought would never stop.

Dad, yelled Clint, Dad, fucking hell, stop—and he was down in the hole with him now, holding him.

Fucking hell, Dad, shouted Clint, but under the surface of the scream he could barely hear his own voice.

He wrapped his arms around Dad, yelled to Janice, I'm sorry. Please, he yelled, don't go. Please don't go, I'm sorry.

Don't you worry, Clinton, she called back, you look after your dad, he needs you now. I've got to go, Clinton, she called, but I'll always love you—you and Penny and Dad.

But where are you going? he screamed, why have you got to go? Please, Mum, please don't go.

I've got to go, Clinton, she called. The farmer is waiting for me; he'll want his tea.

Dad suddenly went limp and toppled back into the water, pulling Clint on top of him. For a moment they lay on top of each other, gasping and slapping like cod in the shallows.

Mum, he panted, what farmer? What farmer, Mum? Please don't go.

No, love, I can't stay, she called. I love you—I love you so much, but I'm happy with the farmer. I'm happy with the farmer and I want you to be happy, too.

Clint clawed at the sheer sides of the hole.

Mum, he shouted, don't go. What farmer, Mum? What farmer? Please don't go, he yelled, jerking his head above ground. But the patio was dark and blank, and on Mount Bumscreps he could just see the outline of Penny's hat bobbing in the black light.

**T h e
S p a r a g m o s
S p r e a d s**

S O U R A V R O Y



A

**A new God is in town.
But Pentheus has locked Him up.**

**And the city state is
locked down.**



"Pentheus is a very pure young man, but of a far more unpleasant type...He is a puritan with a prurient mind, desperately afraid of the power of emotions let loose...True to type he will not be able to drink wine without being disgustingly drunk."

When disgustingly drunk, he hugs his buddies. They cry. The morning after, Pentheus deletes those selfies. His ears burn with disdain- a grown man hugging grown men!

"The life of the hero on the scabbard of a sword. / Faces in profile, erect penis in profile, / the colours raw, the rug in detail. / The milk he's washed in has turned a little sour. / (...) Behind the lattice work / the waiting women / cry oh and stroke their breasts" E

B. A face turned away, suffering acute pain. Lithograph by P. S. Wellcome

F. Serigraph of Michaelangelo's David

Δ. Dionysus in the Bacchae, Grube, Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, 1935

E. 'Outside Jaisalmer' (III), Eunice De Souza

live**mint**



People stand in a queue outside a wine shop in Kolkata. (PTI)

Lockdown 3.0: West Bengal govt announces relaxations, liquor shops reopen

4 min read . Updated: 05 May 2020, 08:26 AM IST

- Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha announced a host of relaxations for standalone shops in various zones—red, green and orange
- The liquor shop will operate from noon to 7 pm as per the latest government order, which also stated about the do's and don'ts, both for the customers and the shopkeepers



Z

In the essential goods market, the new God's wine is selling plenty. (Because the king's treasury is empty.) Dionysus is in town. The straight-as-a-knife king has locked Him up. And the city state is locked down.

In the darkness of the lock-up inside a lock down, Pentheus trusted only light. Arrow-straight shafts of knife-sharp light. He feared wine – the new God's wine. It's fluid, it's loose, it's i-r-r-e-s-p-o-n-s-i-b-l-e booze. It's confusing like the girly dress Dionysus wears. It's confusing like His parted thighs.



H



Θ



"Apollo heard Dionysus - the God of Revelry long before he set foot in the throne room. The clink of his jewellery with every step, the thump of his thyrsos, the humming of a melody... there was a reason the mortals called him Bromios, "the noisy one". The colourful silk chiton-Dionysos wore along with the golden bracelets and fanciful anklet left little to the imagination, despite its ankle-length. His dark eyes were rimmed with black kohl and Apollo was unsure whether the rosy cheeks were natural or painted on. A wreath of vine and ivy adorned his long, dark hair. Were it not for the subtle bulge that became visible every once in a while when the wine god moved, there would have been no sign of his masculinity at all." ^Λ

Pentheus was confused. Pentheus was Dicurious.

**Pentheus thought
he liked girly girls.**

**Those who fake their
orgasms and clutch
their pearls. Girls who are
sweet darkness to his
shaft of penetrating
light.**





π

A...A...Apollo – Him of the shaft of penetrating light, Him of eversure arrowmanship, Him of knife-sharp reason - was P...P...Pentheus' God.

p.s.1: P didn't know, P tends to be equal to A.

(Chorus) Dionysus is in town. Apollo has locked Him up. The city state is locked down.

p.s. 2: P didn't know, he was also locked up with D.

(Chorus) Dionysus is in town. The Centre doesn't hold. And the city state is locked down.

p.s. 3: P also didn't know once he got rid of the shaft, the stick, the straight line, he could be D. $P = D$

"Apollo watched his younger half-brother Dionysus as He raised his cup. With his silky dark tresses on white skin and his large dark eyes, he looked the opposite of golden-haired Apollon, with his bright blue eyes and sunkissed skin. They had hardly anything in common, Apollo thought. Dionysus was almost perpetually drunk, loved the night while temperate Apollo loved the day and where the sun god was tall, his half-brother was of average height at best. Apollo was an outstanding athlete, excelled in sport and proudly sculpted his defined muscles while the younger god was soft and didn't care much for any of the sports. Dionysus lived a life of excess: wine, sex, food, every pleasure in the world and beyond he enjoyed ever be seen as drunk as his half-brother and his entourage or stuffed with food until he could hardly move. He frowned upon the extent of carnal pleasures his half-brother indulged in. Of course Apollo had not sworn eternal chastity as his twin sister Artemis had. He enjoyed the pleasures of wine, food and sexual unions just as much as Dionysus did. He wouldn't mind if it were as easy for him to find love with a girl or boy as it seemed to be for his younger half-brother. He made love to his followers, the Muses, too. But he did it with one girl at a time instead of the host of maenads Dionysos seemed to fuck on a regular basis. More importantly, he would never be caught in female attire, let alone allow another man to take him like a woman, despite his youthful appearance. For some reason, his brother knew no shame. He even told Apollo of the men he'd been with and how he judged their skills in bed. He had to admit, if only to himself, those stories excited him a little. Not only did Dionysus like to go into explicit detail, imagining the God of Wine down on his knees, eyes blissfully closed, lips parted with debauched pleasure as he took it up the arse... Bottom-line, his brother was effeminate and soft and acted like a woman more often than not, while he was the ideal of youthful manliness." Σ

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COVID-19 is not a sexually transmitted infection, however, it can be passed on through kissing and close contact, including having **sex**.

[www.ashsexualhealth.org](#) › sex-in-the-time-of-covid-19**Sex in the Time of COVID-19 | - American Sexual Health**

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Alcohol and COVID-19: what you need to know - WHO/Europe

Avoid alcohol as a social cue for smoking, and vice versa: people tend to smoke, or smoke more, if they drink alcohol, and smoking is associated with more complicated and dangerous progression of COVID-19. Remember, too, that indoor smoking is harmful to others in your household and should be avoided.

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Apr 8, 2020 - West Bengal government to allow home delivery of alcohol amid COVID-19 lockdown. But customers will not be allowed to sit and drink.

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May 8, 2020 - Cashing in on Covid-19 lockdown, Zomato wants to deliver alcohol to you. There is currently no legal provision for home deliveries of alcohol in India. The legal age for drinking alcohol varies from state to state, ranging ...

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Eurocare :: Alcohol consumption in times of COVID-19

In Belgium for instance, sales of alcohol in supermarkets have increased by 10 to 15%. People are stocking up on spirits, wine and beer in preparation for being stuck at home. How to cope with COVID-19 without drinking too much alcohol.

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Drinking Alcohol Will Not Protect You From COVID-19 ...

Mar 8, 2020 - One of them is that drinking alcohol can kill the deadly virus ... through goods manufactured in China or any country reporting COVID-19 cases. Carefully follow the precautions and make sure you stay home until recovered.

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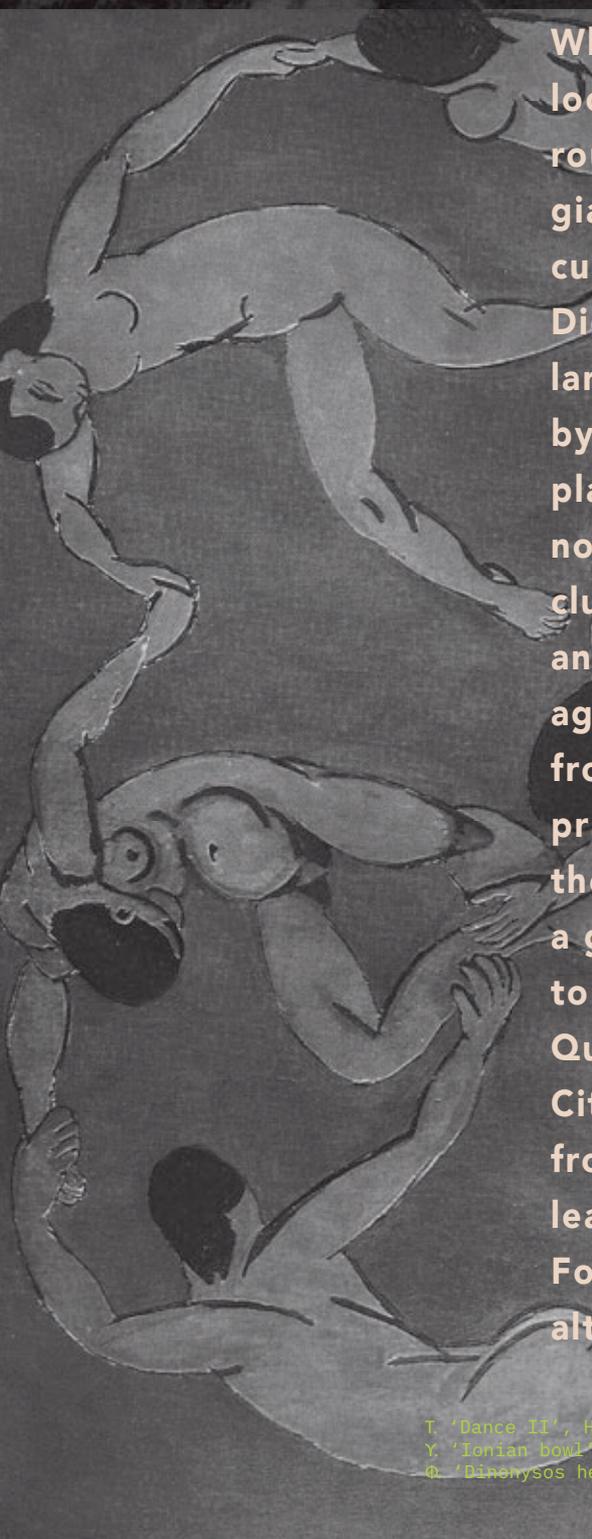
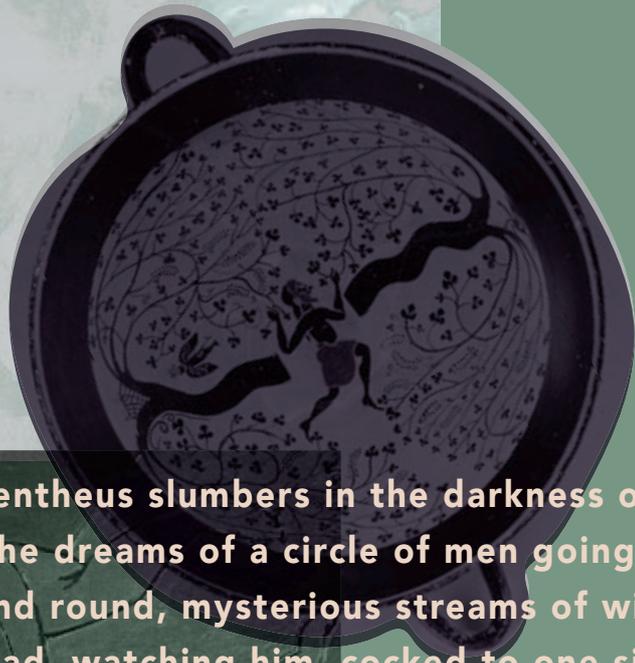
Drinking alcohol doesn't kill COVID-19 but increases risk of ...

Apr 14, 2020 - Drinking alcohol doesn't kill COVID-19 but increases risk of lockdown violence, says WHO. Consuming high-strength alcohol does not kill the COVID-19 virus, the World Health Organization

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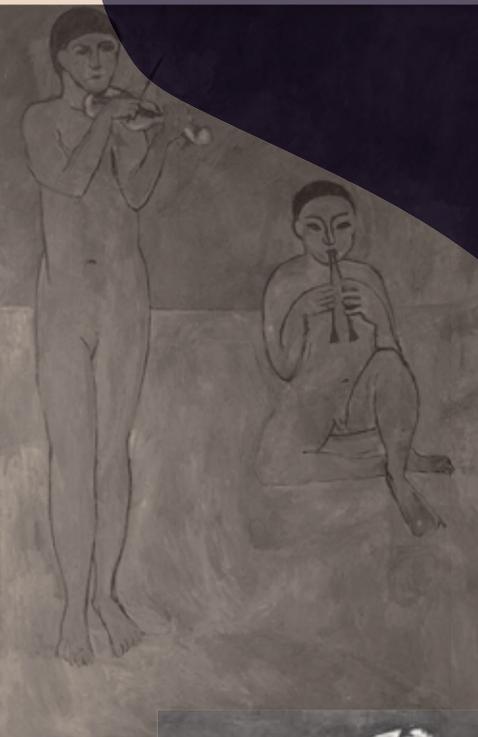
COVID-19: No bars, no 'thekas', no alcohol, lockout sobering ...

Apr 23, 2020 - COVID-19 being the great equaliser, the nationwide lockdown, which began on March ... When social distancing means no social drinking, not even a ... So, during the March 22-28 event, "how to make alcohol at home" was a ...



While Pentheus slumbers in the darkness of the lockup, he dreams of a circle of men going round and round and round and round, mysterious streams of wine and a giant head watching him, cocked to one side, like a curious puppy. The Voice Over plays in a loop: "I am Dionysus, the child of Z, and I have come to this land, where KA's daughter once bore me, delivered by a lightning-blast. I praise KA, who has made this place hallowed, the shrine of his daughter, which now I have covered all around with the cluster-bearing grapevine. KA then gave his office and his tyranny to you, Pentheus, you, who fight against the gods in my person and drive me away from treaties, never making mention of me in your prayers. For which reasons I will show you and all the citizens of your locked down City State that I am a god. And when I have arranged the situation here to my satisfaction I will move on to another Quarantined land, revealing myself. But if ever your City State should in anger seek to drive me down from the mountains with your nuclear arms, I, leading on my acolytes, will join battle with them. For these reasons I have assumed a mortal form, altering my shape into the nature of a (wo)man."

Towards the end of his dream of a circle of men going round and round and round, the dream camera shifts a little and Pentheus realises that it is a circle of women! Naked women! Oh boy oh boy oh boy!



Ω

X

Is that your scene, D? Can I come to this party?

Sure P - the truer man. Only you have to dress as a woman.

I am so sure of my Masculinity, dressing as a woman doesn't bother me. Said Pentheus the P.

X. 'Dance II', Henri Matisse, 1910
P. 'Dance I', Henri Matisse, 1910
D. 'Music', Henri Matisse, 1910

ψ

"You there!"

Yes, I'm talking to you, to the one who is so eager to see the things that should not be seen and who rushes to accomplish things that cannot be rushed. It is you that I am talking to, Pentheus. Come out from inside the Lockup. Let me have a good look at you wearing the costume of a woman, ready to spy on a group of woman."

Pentheus emerges.

"The way you are shaped, you look just like one of the royal daughters..."

Oh, but watch out:

this lock of hair here is out of place. It stands out, not the way I had secured it, to be held down by the headband."

Pentheus:

"While I was inside, I was shaking it forward and backward, and...I displaced it, moving it out of place."

Dionysus:

"Then I, whose concern it is to care for you, will arrange the lock of hair all over again. Come on, hold your head straight."

Pentheus:

"You see it ? There it is! You arrange it for me, please. I can see I am really depending on you." ^a

The Indian EXPRESS

Thursday, May 14, 2020

"But don't forget your mask, P. Social Distancing is on."

Kolkata: Man strangulates son with disability for 'not wearing mask' while stepping out

P: "Don't forget I am the King, D. If I want to be in a skin party with no mask, I can be."

According to police, the incident took place following a spat between Banshidhar Mallick and his son Sirshendu Mallick. After killing his son, Banshidhar went to the local police station and surrendered.

^a A quote from Euripides's 'Bacchae' EdX Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours Sourcebook, Gregory Nagy, Harvard, 2014

By: Express News Service | Kolkata | Published: April 20, 2020 4:54:32 am



**Petheus was ready.
The game was on.
His skin hunger was
tingling. It has been
long.**

There'd be dogs to tease.

There be bitches in heat.

And free booze.

This Dionysus fellow just lets it loose.

Whattay fun!



y

**"Let's
go
girl!" P
slapped
D's
rump.**



They arrive at the scene. But what does P see? Doesn't look like the paaartaayyy he imagined it to be.

Deeply drunk, yet the dancing women were perfectly in step. They locked eyes with themselves, and with D. Nothing for P.

P was left up in the tree (with himself), K,I, S, S, I, N, G (himself) #incel_king #king_of_incels #kingman



δ

**The strip-tease began.
Not the taking of
clothes. But taking off
the limbs. Of Pentheus.
One by one by one.**

ε

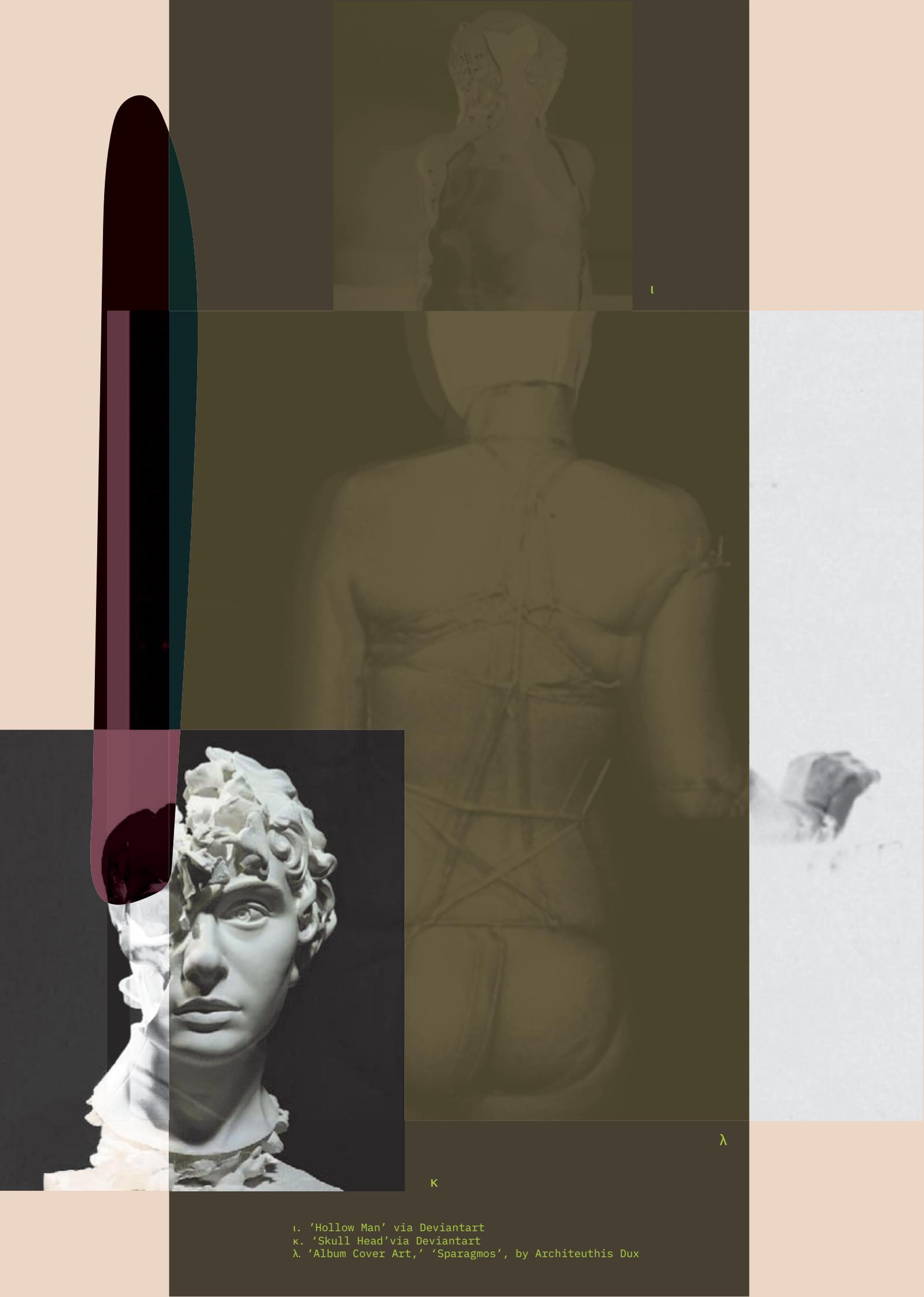


η

θ

ζ

ζ. Production image from a performance of 'Dionysus in 69', by Brett Brookshire
η. Detail from 'Death of Pentheus - The Man of Sorrows' Engraving
θ. Screenshot from 'The Lighthouse (2019)'



ι

λ

κ

ι. 'Hollow Man' via Deviantart
κ. 'Skull Head' via Deviantart
λ. 'Album Cover Art,' 'Sparagmos', by Architeuthis Dux

Finally the shaft, the stick, the straight line was gotten rid of.

Only the curved lines of the snake, of the leopard's tale, of the hip, of the Thyrus wand, of the Kantharos wine cup remained.

Finally P = D



π

o. Production image from a performance of 'Bakkhai'
π. Album Cover Art, 'Invitation from the Host of Wrath', by Sparagmos

GHOST NOTES

Words and Sounds by *Danny Bright*

*I am listening to
a combination of airy and airless things.
Things that are real, unreal, and reanimated.
Deconstructed and reconstructed.
Fractured.
Things with patina
of hands
or non-hands.
With resonances
of sounds
and non-sounds.
Things that are falling into ruin.*

*I am listening to the ping ting plink of
valves warming up,
preparing to move air.*

Ghost Notes is a Sonic Ghosting work that explores how musical artefacts are ghosted by cultural and historical memory and by the spaces/places – real and virtual – where they sound and have sounded, shaping the way they are heard and interacted with. The sound work is constructed from the warped, processed, fractured and deconstructed/reconstructed sounds of a handmade valve amplifier warming up, and a broken half-size violin bought at a jumble sale sometime in the 1980s. It uses multimodal sonic fracture to mobilise the ghostly, creating a “temporal disturbance” (Blanco and Peeren 2010, pg. xvii) that helps to deconstruct notions of a singular sonic present, and instead reveal the “the layer-upon-layer overlap of semantic fabrics” (Kim-Cohen 2009, pg. xxiii) that sit underneath the surface, in between “presence and non-presence” (Derrida 1994, pg. 13). It offers a way to listen out for the ghosts that are revealed in the moment where “the present betrays us, where the future leaks out” (Bright 2020, pg. 138) and where we can experience the “*intersecting temporalities/spaces/memories that collide, cross, fold, pierce, to create a landscape of asynchronous sonic timespace*” (Bright 2020, pg. 129).

Sound work available here: <https://sonicghosting.com/ghostnotes/>

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JONATHAN

Words and Image by *Alexis Muiños Woodward*

Translated from the original Spanish by *the author, Sourav Roy, Reyazul Haque*

On the cold June morning that I met Jonathan, I was reading “The Divine Comedy” in a bar, and I suddenly had the urge to go to the public bathroom in the gas station across the street.

I went cruising for a hand, a mouth, an ass or a dick, and when I entered the bathroom I found him shaving in front of the mirror. It was like a double heavenly apparition, of him and his reflection; with his strong and angelic face, his dirty, big and tanned hands, the tattoo of a crown on his neck and that worn and tight pair of jeans that highlighted his legs, his bulge and his ass. As soon as he saw me he greeted me with a friendly smile, but I immediately realized that he wasn't cool with gay cruising and I continued towards the urinal to take a piss. I went out with the intention of talking to him but I still didn't dare, and decided to wait outside for a while. At the bathroom door was parked the cart in which he carried his things. After waiting for a few minutes I went back in and he was still shaving. I went to him and asked if I could take some photos of him for five hundred pesos. He told me yes and I started photographing him



while he was shaving. The pathetic pits of the bathroom smelled of shit and piss, and the two cubicles in the back crowned the stage with two guys shitting inside.

Jonathan posed with a fresh naturalness, perhaps knowing that his Apollonian and rustic features seduced me effortlessly, and that the ingenuity of his smile and his look stoked more desire in me.

Since he didn't have a cell phone, I wrote down my number on a piece of paper and told him to call me – I will shoot his video and he will be paid. He told me that he was living on the street, although he sometimes slept at his girlfriend's house, and he agreed to call me. A few days later he called from her phone and we made plans to meet. After a while, his girlfriend sent me a message to find out what this "job" was about, and I lied to her telling it was for a university documentary.

So a week later I met up with Jonathan at the same gas station where we had met and I started filming him in the park across the street. There he told me that he was 24 years old, has a 4-year-old son with his girlfriend, also he was diabetic. At 13, he left his parents' house because he had been in a relationship with a 36-year-old policewoman. He also told me that he had dated the daughter of one of Rosario's most dangerous drug traffickers and that when he left her they tried to kill him.

I filmed him eating an apple, drinking a can of coke, smoking cigarettes, riding the swing, and sleeping in the sun on the grass. His apparent innocence mixed with a dose of danger was exhilarating. I brought the camera closer to him, to his body lying on the grass and I lingered for a few seconds on his fly that I wanted to unzip, and on his fleshy mouth that inspired me to bite it. He acted like he was sleeping and transmitted warmth and tenderness to me with his fake, dreamy placidity. The sun bathed him profusely; the rays bounced off his skin and it made his black hair shine more vividly. I paid him what I had promised and we arranged to meet again another day.

I decided to meet him at my apartment and we made some visual records while exchanging our clothes. We didn't get to fully undress but I did get to appreciate his fit, tattooed torso and muscular legs. In the evening light, I also photographed him in the kitchen as he smoked a cigarette, wearing a red jacket of mine that looked beautiful on him.

For the next meeting I offered to pay him more money to film him naked and he accepted right away. I set up a small and precarious Garden of Eden in my living room and filmed it as if he were a wild and pure Adam, eating the fruits of that artificial paradise where impurity also fructified. I traced every inch of his body with my camera as if it were my own penetrating eye or caressing hand, zooming in on his flaccid, thick, beautiful penis with an irrepressible desire to make it grow in my mouth. But I knew how to restrain myself.

He was relaxed but firm, like a Greek sculpture model, and at times he smiled at me as I filmed him. I asked him why he had a deep cut on his leg and he told me that he had come across a guy who stabbed him and wanted to steal his cap, so he defended himself with a pen that he had in his pocket and stuck it in his neck. The

guy fell to the ground and a stream of blood gushed from his throat. I asked him if he had killed him and he told me that he didn't know. Then he laughed out loud.

I filmed his open wound's red and swollen flesh, with a greater fascination than that of being in front of a torn canvas by Lucio Fontana. That slashed leg seemed to me not only an indication of urban violence, but also a work of art that captivated my gaze, a sublime beauty charged with terror. That day I paid him five thousand pesos and that night he called me to tell me that his son had fallen from the terrace and needed more money to take care of him. I didn't believe him at all and it scared me a little to continue seeing him.

But my desire was stronger and we got back together to film several times; in my house, at a park and at a gaming arcade.

In my living room I did a kind of interview with him and he confessed to me on camera that he would not feel guilty for killing a person or a dog, but that he could never kill a child. He also told me that there should be more bloodshed in the world, although he had absolutely no hope that one day the poor would organize and rebel against the rich.

In the park we lay together on the grass and I noticed he was a little sad. At times his lost gaze rested on me, perhaps trying to decipher me. We played for a while in front of the camera, and when I picked him up to spin him like a child, a smile came to his face and he seemed happy for a moment, with that immanent and fleeting happiness that only animals and children can have.

In the gaming arcade he got on a blue motorcycle that looked very nice on him while on the screen he toured fictitious landscapes. Then we got into the bumper cars and I noticed him happy again crashing into me on the track.

But as the days went by, his calls began to be much more frequent and sometimes he would show up at my house without warning, ring my bell and ask for money. I also realized that he lied to me all the time and that the money he borrowed from me was mostly to buy cocaine.

I decided that I would film him one last time and called him so as to record him masturbating. He came to my apartment and I made him sit on a couch in front of the TV that was playing a porn movie. He began to masturbate like an automaton looking at the screen, as if I were not there. I noticed him tense and uncomfortable when I got closer with the camera, to his hard cock being rubbed by his robust hand, and maybe that's why he couldn't finish and cum.

I paid him more than usual and he told me that that night he was going to live to Córdoba because someone had offered him a job, but a few hours later the insistent sound of the bell woke me up and I didn't answer him. The next day he started sending me threatening messages saying that he needed more money because he had been detained because of me, "because of what we did last night". I couldn't believe such a stupid lie, but his tone got more intimidating and I decided to give him what he asked for. He was gauche, and I felt threatened.

I began to panic and hallucinate that he would suddenly appear on the street with a pen and stick it in my neck. His initial candid smile had mutated in my imagination into a monstrous grimace, and the false idyll had turned into a nightmare. I made up an excuse for not seeing him again, telling him that my father was very ill in another city and I was going to be there for a while. Apparently he believed me, and the situation calmed down, although he kept calling me to ask for money. He even told me that his brother was killed and he needed to pay for the funeral. Then I lied to him that I wasn't coming back to town. And a few days later I made up my mind to block him on my phone.

After a while I ran into him again in the same public bathroom where I had met him and my blood ran cold as if I had seen a dead man. He asked me about my father's health and I replied that he was still in serious condition and that I was going back. He started begging me to buy a cell phone. He had just stolen it from someone because he didn't even have enough money to eat, so I paid up and left. I walked a few blocks thinking that he was following me, and in a sewer I got rid of the phone he had sold me.

A couple of months ago I stopped for a moment at the bus stop in front of that gas station bathroom.

I secretly observed, from outside, if there were any cruising happening. I immediately realized that the only other person next to me was him. He was surely waiting for a bus. He didn't get to speak to me, didn't greet or approach me, although I noticed that he was looking at me, and I slowly walked away from the place pretending that I hadn't recognized him. I began to doubt if it was really him, or if I had mistaken him for someone else, or even imagined him.

In this city, young men like him die every day, in street fights and shootouts, at the hands of hit men or the police. And it is this reality that makes me see Jonathan as a specter, a totally excluded young man who wanders aimlessly through the streets; invisible; a wandering soul in pain like those that populate Dante's epic, but in a city empty of poetry and overflowing with blood. One more penitent life in the incessant daily parade of ordeal and extermination. And in some strange way I managed to see him, I could briefly perceive him among the inert, invisible masses – as vulnerable and dangerous as a wounded wolf. But I couldn't bear the terror of his emptiness, fear won over me and I couldn't continue immersing myself in his story.

I never crossed his path again, and sometimes I wonder if he is dead and perhaps my films are the only record that remains of him, his last vestige. Every once in a while I watch the videos again and I am amazed at being able to re-enter that fake and ephemeral Eden that I set up, so that it can live forever in my fantasy, in the image stored by my camera and my brain.

The faces captured by devices and memory become more spectral over time, their evanescent materiality wafting in the air of a dissolving world. We are ghosts in search of ghosts that slip into our memory, and the volatility of their presence disturbs us because it tells us that we too will disappear soon.

The images I still have of Jonathan, the mental and the digital ones, intensify as they age, becoming a vision as ecstatic as it is phantasmagorical, and they are the capricious but necessary illusion of a utopia, the nebulous imprint of an impossible paradise created as a poem to endure the horrors of our hell.

METAMORPHOSIS

images by *dorothy englander*

the reversal of my black cutout childhood silhouette becomes a chronological
container of drawn and photographed versions of myself

other art images fill the space of ageing, in a variety of mediums

while this began as a formal project, ultimately some of the images become
poignant and timely references to changing views of women, and to current events



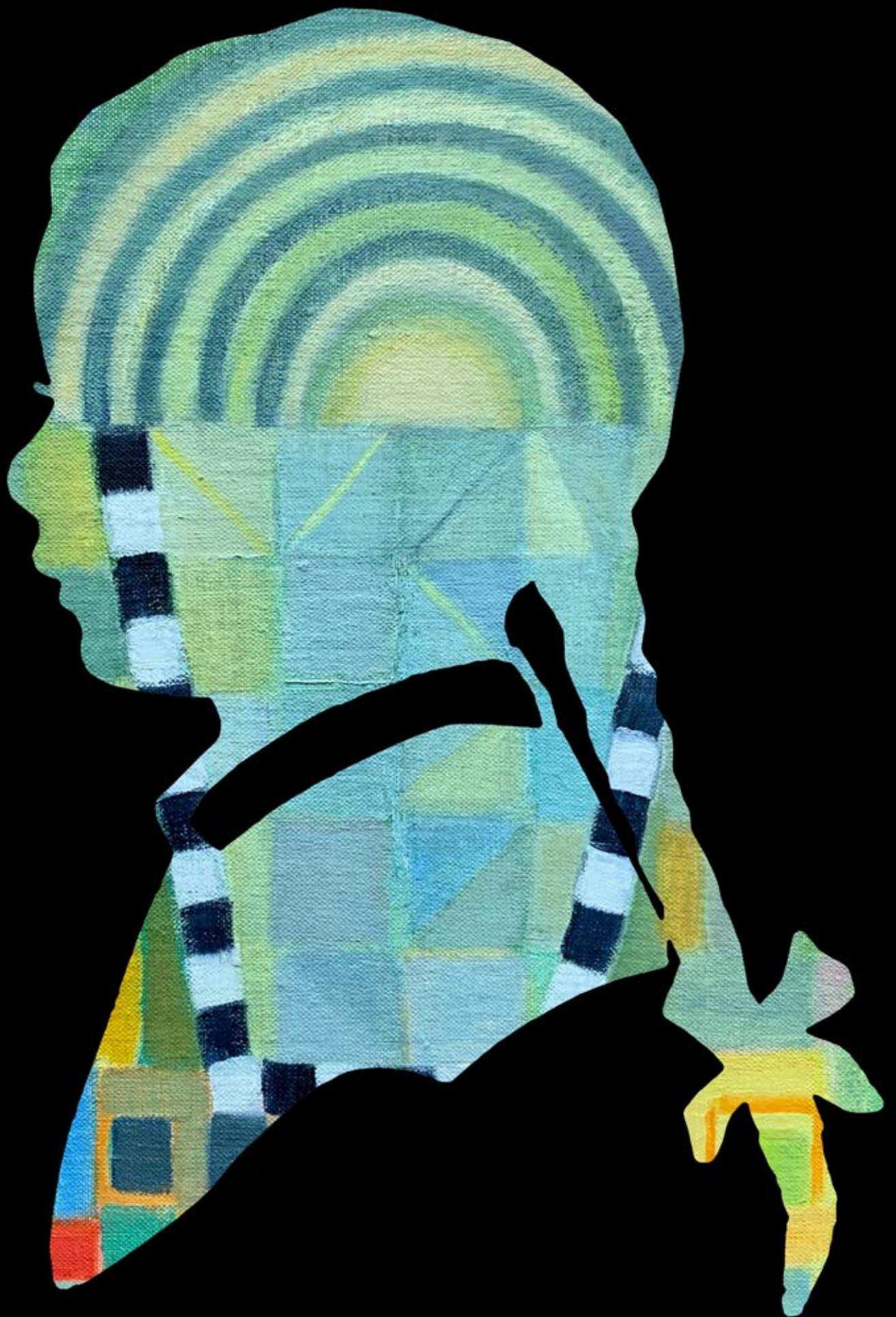


V O W















MY PRINCESS, HER HAMLET.

Words by *Hilda Kahra*

– Hamlet. Call me if you're still alive.

That's what I wanna` someone to say, drunk to the first dead brother in a fairy tale.

Then it comes to me that all words go like ghosts through the text, that they live deep inside a hard drive. Lives there. Is there. Exist. Clicking on an old word is like pushing your finger into a smoke sponge. The words get tangled up & lead to several endings.

We lie in bed and bleed menstruation.

Eat chips with chili dip while lying cross-legged and coding.

How to spell language, in English baby?

Difficult words only the nerds remember, says someone on the tram. It's a password on a broken piece of paper in my back pocket, in a wallet I inherited from my grandmother. Red. Things I can't remember by heart, I put there. Along with the picture of her and the cat. Parts of the story cannot be retold because someone had difficulty inflecting adjectives.

She makes a soft ring with her finger in the air, licks it, feels the wind pull in from all directions.

Shortcut after shortcut, you can not comfort-eat yourself out of this, Hamlet.

At night she sucks on her pen in the computer light.

Puts an icecube on the leg that melts and flows down.

It's high-rise summer with renovation in the block, the blue building plastic covers the window, it is stuffy and sticky between the legs. On the computer table is a cocktail with two straws.

How to mumble in a chat window? She does exercises on the desk, double-clicks on the document with the horse pictures and poems. LCVDLFxaKkls!ZwLÖSKGJs3. She wants to chat someone up against the wall, push herself into someone, with words. She wants to write, for the princess of the time, but - gets stuck with the index finger in the scroll, sticks and clicks frantically in her light hair.

In the dark, there is no turning back, Hamlet.

Listening to Röyksopp at night with only the keyboard lighting on.
I find myself admiring the hidden, the dangerous.

The words swell like red and yellow flowers. I put them on my lips, rest.

You do exercises in the park, kick a bird's nest over the children. Your eyes are black.

It's you and me in this poorness. Sitting in a playground and rocking a pink fox.

Burning large holes in the fox's face. I'm a ghostwriter for the Princess of Sweden while she, you are looking for a job in various cafes on the French countryside.

Europe, your ravaged face is a lure for.

Making a 180 degree turn in Earth View on google maps in Japan, later in Lyon. You take all the places by storm, walk through the cities with dip in the corner of your mouth and the torn soft pants that stink. Staring over the fence to Zlatan's new home in Monaco.

I fry vegetables so that the fire alarm goes off.

We stand by the window, the landlord in a sloppy jacket pulls past down there on the wet street.

We live here and there without a name on the mailbox, for a few months in an attic, in a scrub, in a small room with a sealing window. You sit and wait for the mail that never finds its way, you say that it's bills you're waiting for, although I think it's something else.

At work, I sometimes happen to write about our deep orgasms in another tab on the browser.

That you would all get so close when the webinar began, -

when we loved outside the screen at your first meeting.

Faces close in small windows over the big screen.

Your soft lips around my fuck you finger.

(There are royalties on all inner pictures, I whisper).

Balancing the computer on the pussy bone.

She, you, light a joint and sit down on the sofa. Lying down, breathing.

You want to listen to jazz-like music.

We've been living together for a few weeks only.

You say I'm beautiful. That I have a beautiful way of thinking. She pinches the air with her toes.

In one of the dreams we lay and kissed, on the couch. I sometimes think about it, when you smile.

Think aloud! she says, better than books, are you Candy baby.

We get a lot of advertising from the convenience store and she sits and cuts out the half-price notes and faces with the toenail scissors. Tape them together in a book with a pink cover.

"Once I felt very lonely," she says, "but it only lasted a week or so."

"The state has rehabilitation programs for people who are alone, it often gets a diagnosis that it carries heavily on the chest." "It's the same as ...".

She goes to the toilet with the door open, pees.

We had a cat in the beginning, which was black but which we gave away one day when you were high. You posted an ad on Facebook, tried to sell the cat, but then a mother heard about it - it was raining, she had four children, social welfare recipient without a car. They took the cat with them in an IKEA bag, walked through the little forest. Two of the children held the bag on each side, while the mother covered. Where the cat tried to dodge, she covered it with a baseball bat. (Forever gone_ jpeg). With them they brought the zip bag with small cat treats shaped like paws.

She daydreamed about the cat afterwards, lay on the sofa and cried. Lay out candies in a row from the parquet to the balcony together with mourning flowers, wild roses that she tore up from the neighbor's flowerbed. I stroked your back, you smelled burnt.

Sat and listened to the radio about the forest fires - it was election year in Sweden and an old man with a jacket from the industry went up the country, wanted to help. He appeared in many pictures afterwards, the newspapers wrote about a hero.

He worked with buckets and black shovels.

Tried to save what could be saved.

I saw him in print on the newspaper sides of the kiosk where I stood and sweated, touched with my fingers, his face, stroked his cheeks. A Swedish hero.

A ghost goes through her mouth, it's the words, the old words that are reminiscent of old wars that none of us want to feel.

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO

The skin on her back is spotty and I play piano at the birthmarks. We took in at a hostel with ducks in the logo and a shower that warmly embraced our drunken bodies. I stood swaying and then spat in her face. A strange gesture. (want to put the image in parentheses, make small holes in its surface OO). Afterwards you stood quietly in the window and watched the moon while I watched the children playing in the snow.

Ate an cold pizza in the morning. To be seen Away from Keyboard is to.

We are both offline all weekend and the snow feels real against the skin.

You say it was your sister who went on live TV to broadcast

Miss Universe 2001 with that Dickface sign.

You look down at the ground and then at me, squeezing one of the snowflakes

between your warm fingers, squinting.

I take the bus home and google if the event is even true.

The princess writes a long email to me. Says: you have profiled me wrong. I do not recognize myself in these words, what does pragmatic mean? Her Instagram feed has almost no followers from Sweden, but in countries such as India, Egypt and Pakistan, she seems to be very popular.

I do a round between the kitchen and the computer, put it over the couch sit down on the floor.

Sensitive I lie. In a browser elsewhere, a teenager is considering suicide.

For several days it rings.

The phone vibrates on the floor, moves vertically over the plastic mat.

It's the princess's press secretary who calls, I see later at McDonald`s. "Respond!". Writes the secretary in an SMS. I apologize, go to the toilet write fuck you in capital letters.

They celebrate the princess' birthday without text under the pictures. She is expected to give a speech on Öland, which I sit and plan on the tram towards Kortedala square. The victims of the war sleep against the Swede's shoulders, the night is heavy and unarmed.

I walk naked through my studio and out onto the French balcony, making her sound over the concrete landscape with overflowing rubbish sorting and facades in macaque.

Google for flowers and repaint some in MS Paint.

At night, the computer shuts down after bruming all day in a worrying matter.

In sleep mode, the screen, turns black, Hamlet.

She sat with a red flower in her hair, lying and fiddling on the carpet where the hole was,
said that

"here begins another reality". I looked out the window, saw a black raven lifting from the oak.

Here begins.

Begins.

Went for a long walk.

Took me past the alley with the little Russian car and the cell phone honked.

It honked a lot.

A strange feeling spread in the body. Like grabbed the waist. Got me to.

The body turned.

The cell phone needed to be charged. No calls could be made out here. Went silently through the clearing.

The landscape opened up, in the sky a cloud dissolved the rainy remnant, dark blue and cohesive.

The rain had fallen in the wrong city. On the radio, the forest continued to burn.

Burn up and disappear.

Black sticks appeared on TV.

I lay and ate popcorn to the news, the heat of the computer made marks on my skin.

Took pictures, sorted into folders put away on the hard drive. Kept going like that all day, transferred things between the desk and the hard drive, avoided as much as possible to go into the hidden folder, the coveted folder, the folder with ...

I was only twelve years old when I first went online. Searched for clitoris at night when the house on the big field slept. It was my brother who got internet as a Christmas present from dad.

Brother's face on one of the analogue photographs with the internet under his arm. Later we would buy a digital camera for expensive money, I photographed my best friend who sent the pictures to different guys all over the country. We were Queens on the WWW but in reality: nobodies.

He dreamed of Internet 1.0 which is _always_ gone. 1993 was the time before the ghost of capitalism, with its mint pastel breath, drowned us all. On Youtube, parts of Titanic have been uploaded, but I download the old way, he says.

I drink whiskey by the screen, post an old picture of a broken sock.

Filling the place with the most meaningless. As the present wants.

Destroy.

Knowledge.

VS

To_shop_on_the_web.jpeg

The situation can be referred to as a trauma.

Sites that have been shut down, hubs that have numbed, people that have disappeared.

Governmental measures that have had severe consequences. The private sphere investigated in a circular constellation of bodies in anxiety. (We_want_to_have_back.jpeg2000).

"It's not possible to stop," says the therapist. Doing exercises on the floor. Lying down and breathing. Parts of the internet have never reached the countryside. "It must be so strange," I say. Going in a circle over the plastic mat, The Princess could talk about infrastructure, how Sweden should work to broaden the minds of those who live in radio shadow. Save.

Save the world.

Computer on the windowsill. One of the construction men carries a plank and rubble over the scaffolding.

The sun is crooked.

The summer is coming to an end.

Changing the screen saver to ...

I first saw her on one of the forums, blink. It was around Christmas and I had just bought a new mouse and mouse pad (see attached document). Clicking on the icon. You.

- You walked around in your Leonardo DiCaprio T-shirt with ketchup stains and small holes.

Your hair smelled like fire every night and I wondered where you had been. You drew stick horses that jumped over cars on my back and whispered that I had nothing to do with your free time.

Your T-shirt was hanging in a hanger in the middle of the room when I fell asleep.

You always cooked breakfast just for yourself and I lay in bed longer and saw your outlines through the misty glass in the middle of the bedroom door.

One night at the window, you whispered a story from your early childhood.

By the time you were five, you had been abandoned at a parking lot
by your brother and your mother.

Your mother had been ashamed and wanted to hide the memory in a small tin can on the top shelf.

She had shown you how to draw a picture of yourself as lost.

She then slowly folded the paper, placed it in the can and closed it.

The jar remained in your childhood landscape for as long as you could remember, until one day when your brother asked your mother for something to shoot at. Then your mother had taken the jar off the shelf, blown the dust off, and given it to your brother.

Through the window you saw how he shot with the weapon and missed.

You sat still when I tattooed a rose on your shoulder. "Rose, as in the Titanic", you said
touched with dirty fingers over the bloody tattoo.

Your face was striped from the strained light of the blind when you smiled.

"We're on the Titanic, baby" you whispered, laughed, licked your lips.

Computer tucked between clothes, The WiFi turned off.

In retrospect, I only vaguely remember you, when you stood at night in the window when you could not sleep, counting trees and cars on the street. What if someone were watching us, you said, leaning over the bed. The rose, in the night kept me awake, made me feel the waves of the ship, which came as if from you and hit me in the chest, made me collapse and hold my breath.

One day you asked me if I could dance and I answered "We can try" and then you turned on P1 on the radio that rattled and outside the rain fell and I felt your smell, the burnt forest against my chest and in my head a picture of you naked among the trees with a torch.

On Sundays

we sat quietly in front of our computers
shared files on the chat, porn surfing,
showed each other our secret pages.

– You're not safe without tracking protection,
“do you mean a menstruation pad”, you wrote.

The city kept us together but in different directions, preoccupied with what we pretended to be our mission as adults. We both took the bike in to town, passed the yellow house with dark windows. You used to talk about change as a process that could not be avoided. Everything must be updated and we with it, otherwise ...

Leonardo.

You wanted to be called that by all our friends except me. I got to use your real name as I whispered out among the fields in the green.

In the news, I read about northern Sweden that was on fire and saw your car glimpsed past in one of the pictures that the reporter showed as evidence. "With this picture, we can trap the suspect," they said, zooming in on the roof of the car by mistake. The picture was grainy but I saw, - your black t-shirt with the contours of Leonardo. Your walking style.

You.

In the middle of the dark forest and I alone at a desk in our three room apartment with terrace and Stockholm white walls. - The footbridges, the boats by the water.

Originally I was from a small town, whose traces I was trying to hide. You had given me a place in your world in the capital, like a piece of furniture I inserted into the new rooms. Hungover in the harbor, I pointed to the boats that belonged to the upper class, spat on the ground. - On a trip to Berlin, you talked about class hatred, that it must be deep inside me. You will never get there, I said after we got lost in the darkness of Berghain, where we loved against a steel wall.

It's about desire, you said. You crave me.

Building a VPA connection in a garage at the Portuguese port, 24.02 it is still possible to circumvent the law. You call the work "blunted" (post-internet_art.jpeg). With glitch and glitter we go out into the night, make error in a shopping window near the small pub. I get drunk, think of you, write email after email that I never send. Save them in draft, saving there pictures of us in Spain where we cycled without helmets and knee pads. You laid over the rocks and drank drinks with double straws, I wanted to touch you all the time. Kept me in your shadow, in the heat your smile melts into the nature darling (lover,lover,lover_4_ever.jpeg)

“It's not so linear anymore”, I whisper, and you say
you never demanded it of me. The Internet is a fantasy place where we
met but now you want to build. I press a finger into your
mouth to quiet you. To me, the internet is the only real thing.
But. It's not that important, I whisper. "It does not matter
if we exist in the physical, this capitalistic.. or
what should I say." A cat strokes past the open window, the open door
past the open door, past the open
window.

Do you remember when the mailbox carried the icon of a door?

One day we go on a audio walk in the small coastal town of Poland where we loved so the bed broke. The woman's voice comes from America. You press two fingers into your throat, the sign showing it several times. I listen, my teeth hurt, maybe I tightened my jaw all the time? We google her later in the spare bed that they set up in the corner of the hotel room. "She's quite old, American..something with the black long hair -Berlin ...", you say. Sucking on a lollipop.

"Wonder if she's still menstruating?" You post a blurred picture of us with the headphones on, I want to say I do not want to be seen with you but it is already too late.

Wonder if.

The princess emails mile long emails.

With the help of the press secretary, they make contact
with my mother, who has not heard from me for several decades.

She is a he, mother answers.

What ?, writes the princess. "She has no body, does she? He".

One day

I fingered the t-shirt, pressed Leonardo's eyes wondered what he saw, where the small holes came from, did Leonardo know? You said I would shut up and that's when I moved to the country to your mother's summer place and wrote:

Wash yourself if you come here, we have to talk about Leonardo.

It's like another word would have taken place here. I whisper, Hamlet whispers.

At another time in a similar place among the ruins, there were two rabbits who loved each other offline. They had formed a secret union, holding each other tightly by the back.

With long nails they tore each other's backs bloody.

The Ice cube & tiger.

≈ Updating the computer to OS X El Capitan (black_screen.jpeg) ≈

Breaking the cocktail glass with a fork as I drum to the music.

There are shards of glass at the USB input, the charger pulled out; you turn off.

Dot (.)

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