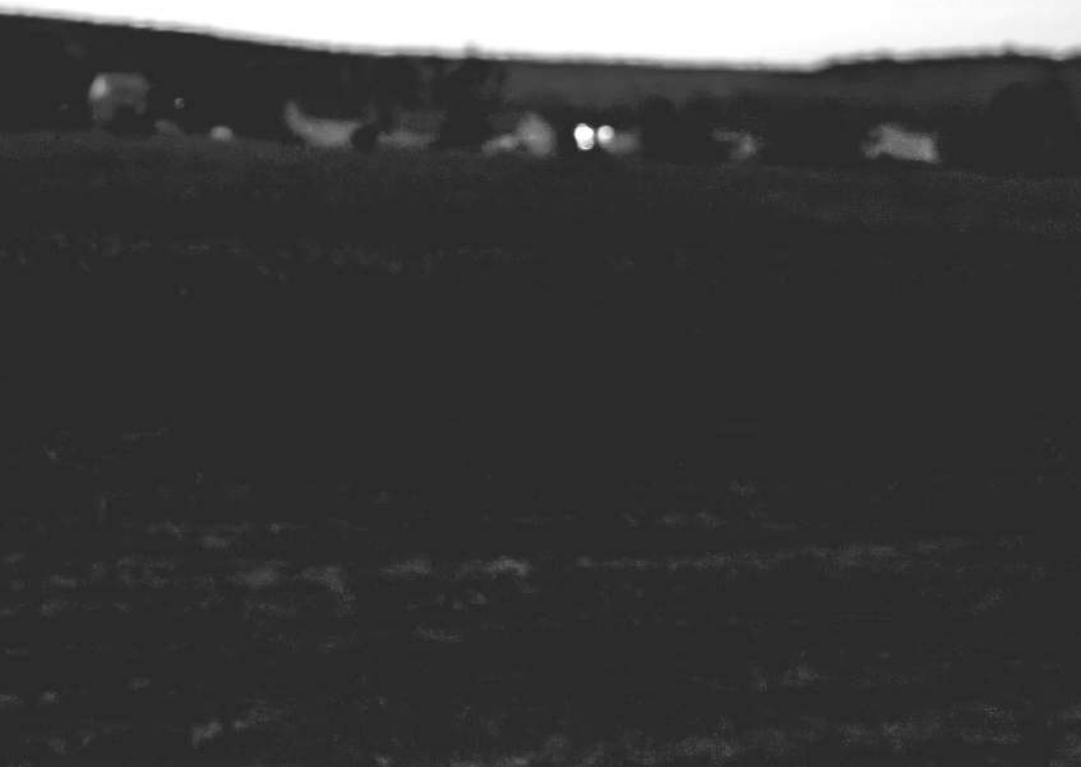
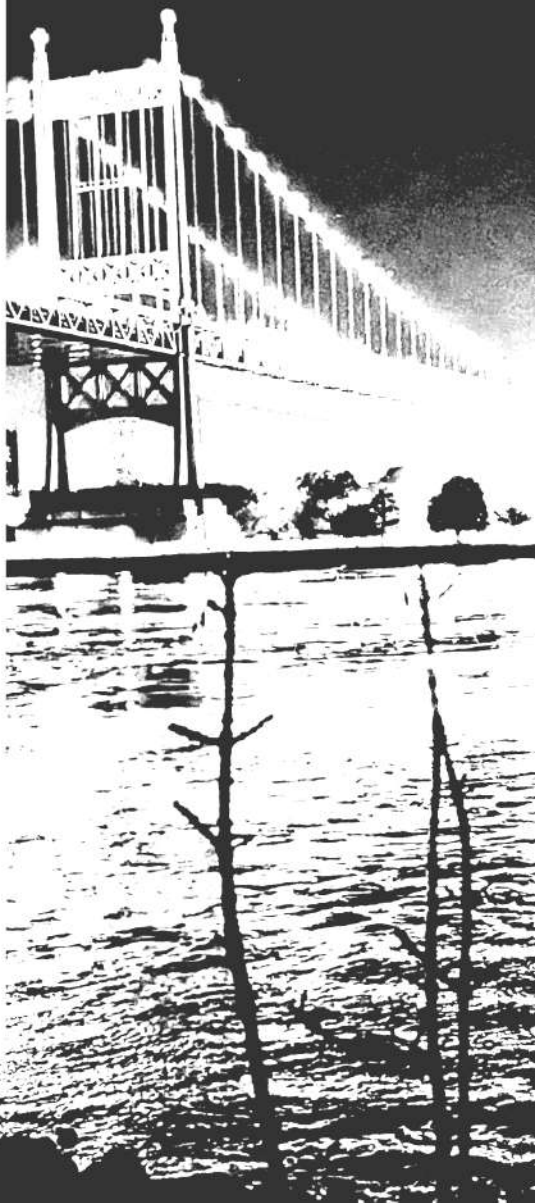


**american
detritus**
-jessie



- 1 . cornfields
- 3 . queens, the east river
- 5 . sidewinder
- 6 . the homefront
- 7 . to my neighbors laughing together
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- 54 . valued community input
- 55 . an addendum
- 56 . complimentary continental breakfast
- 58 . machinery
- 59 . infrastructure
- 61 . ashes of american flags, etc
- 73 . meme about guy being tortured
- 74 . morning again in america
- 75 . breaking bread
- 78 . industry and deacay
in the amber of
a setting sun
- 79 . about it
- 80 . synergizing efficient distillations of the soul
- 92 . did it hurt
- 93 . 5am
- 94 . foothills
- 95 . here, there
- 97 . maine
- 98 . 27 club
- 101 . across the atlantic
- 102 . 2am in the living room
- 103 . departing stamford
- 105 . after a downpour
- 106 . dog off leash in park
- 108 . approximating
- 109 . is this anything
- 110 . frankly,



to my sisters

cornfields

I haven't been here for a winter yet
and I left my warmest coat behind,
with my parents, among the
cornfields of the midwest

and it seems like whenever I try
to put my thoughts down about
this city I snap to a winter I haven't
lived yet and the biting cold you're
able to feel now when it's late at night
and you're stumbling around
with your friends

and I keep thinking about that
coat and my parents,

and I've grown my hair out now and it gets
caught in the zippers of some of my coats,

-

when I was younger, among the
cornfields, I tried to grow my hair
out and people laughed and called
me "Justin Bieber" and told me
to get a haircut, so I did, and I watched
my body turn into something I did not
want to own

it was like when you're walking home
and the temperature has dropped dramatically
and you're underdressed and shivering, it
all feels like a cruel trick your body is
playing on you, to make you feel this
cold, and if you think about it
you wonder why it has to do that,
to put you through all this

but you're with your friends
and the city is beautiful, and the cold
makes every streetlight feel like it is twinkling
off some sheet of ice,

winter will come and go,
and soon you will be walking
through the park, deep into the evening, and
the sun will still be out and you will
be engulfed, along with the park,
along with the city,
in the golden orange light of
the setting sun that is so beautiful

you're not thinking of that coat anymore
or the cornfields
where your body wasn't yours

everything this golden orange light
touches seems so beautiful

queens, the east river

we're standing on some river, the lot of us
a week later I'll tell a friend I was just there!
but I was confused, it was a different bridge, a
different river

.
someone cracks a joke, we laugh, someone cracks
a joke in return, we laugh again and it goes
on like that for a little bit, it feels like
maybe things are ok

.
there's a whirlpool in the river,
near the shore, rip currents and the tide
and the wake from passing boats
crashed together into it

.
I think about other places I've been, other
rivers, places like this, people like this,
and it feels like the rip currents and the
tide and the wake from passing boats,
have all crashed into this too

and sometimes it feels like I'm going
under, into this, whatever, wherever
this is, someone says "ahh lake michigan"
sarcastically and we all laugh again

.
the lot of us are trans and
I don't feel like I have to identify
the rip currents and tides and wakes that
define our lives because of this

.
and the river is beautiful, light shimmering
through the tiny crests of the waves
there are two massive bridges and the lights
of the city linger off to the west

.
sometimes I want to scream or plant
a bomb somewhere or even to just
die, when I'm thinking about the

rip currents and all that

.

other times I don't think about

all that, and

I look at my friends and it doesn't feel

like it even has to make sense

sidewinder

sometimes the jets go supersonic
a little too close to the city
and rattle the windows
on the white collar office that
I am visiting

and I wonder if these windows ever shatter

there's a group of men who find themselves
invigorated by the display of lethality
and they love to tell you
about how they rattle the windows

and do they ever shatter

this entire office still sees you as a man
even though you say you aren't, and you wonder
how much your word counts for in the face of all that
so you use the men's room
and you cry in your hotel

and do they ever shatter

you try to muffle sobs as
an f-16 tears past overhead
rattling the windows
your door shakes in its frame

do they ever shatter

the homefront

the way it moved through the air
caught my eye- probably trained
to look for shit like this by cons of
shit like it

and it crashed into a branch
and fell to the ground
a kid picked it up
an advanced weapon of war
but just a model of one
the ac-130 skyfortress
or whatever the fuck
and I'm thinking of raining death
and call of duty and black hawk down, etc

the kid throws it again and
it's surreal how it flies
like that, it's just a toy
but the wings still work
on the same principles

they laugh at it as it
glides to the ground
and they run after it

it's memorial day weekend
and I wouldn't be surprised
if some recruiter handed this
to this kid who is smiling and running
and I want to rain death
I smile at the thought

and what a gorgeous day on this
beautiful weekend
honoring the fallen
we're all dying
in service of something

**to my neighbors laughing together
on the street**

I walked past you
and it was apparent
you weren't all friends
in the traditional sense
more loose pieces that ended
up fitting together
in their proximity

someone said something I didn't
hear and you all laughed
a real laugh too
every single one of you
and I made eye contact
with one of you
as I smiled for real

I felt like the world
was a handful of loose pieces
all fitting together

providence, rhode island

I saw a flower petal fall, twisting
and it hit the ground and I checked my phone
and it's sitting somewhere now
out of sight
and I wonder if the beautiful people
who were so kind to me
know how beautiful they are and I want
to make sure I didn't stain them
with my own shit
we've all got our own shit
I said this to them
and they said yeah
and we moved on
we've all got our own shit
and this bus terminal
has a weird pink stain on the ground
and stubbed out cigarettes
and I'm hoping I didn't
get food poisoning from the hot dog
I ate on a table
that hasn't been cleaned in months
I've almost forgotten about that petal
on the wind, now out of sight

it's like a pigment being dipped in water
turning it a shade of yellow
or red or blue or mauve
or whatever and you're trying to combine
it all, but what you get is a horrible
shit brown
stain

or maybe an earth tone
it's all a matter of perspective
and when you step back
it seems to come into focus
a little more
and i can see the flowers
hanging in wreathes
off the gaunt frame

of a tree
bending under their weight
and i wonder how
it doesn't collapse,
swaying in the wind



4 star breakfast club review

everyone gets to feel
like they're in an indie movie
sometimes, and we laugh
like we're in some sort of indie movie
knowing we will probably not
see each other again for
a while, like the breakfast club
and please don't forget about me

I feel like an amoeba trying to
understand the curvature
of the earth through
the horizon and who's to say
an amoeba can't get it

and what is anyone ever
saying anyways, please
don't forget about me
the song is stuck in your head now
don't you
don't you
forget about me
you feel like you're having an epiphany
that you are already forgetting
and won't you
come see about me
don't you
don't you
know the words already
the horizon drops off
the face of the earth
and I am dropping off with it

I've heard of it

do you know that movie
where there's the guy
and the rock
and his arm is stuck there
under the rock

the rock is like society
and the guy is like me
in a metaphorical
sense

**trying to describe what it is
like to listen to "don't like"
by chicago rapper chief keef
for me**

for maximum effect,
grow up in suburban illinois
around 2012
and have parents who
disapprove of "gangster
rap" who you hate

pull up youtube,
search "chief keef
don't like", be sure to
click the "dirty" version
watch the video along
with the song for
maximum effect

the parental advisory sticker
overlay for an intro tickles
some part of your brain
that thinks it's still
cool to say "crap"

young chop on the beat,
chief keef in his grandma's kitchen,
you told this to everyone who would
listen, when you were younger:
they filmed this video while
chief keef was on house arrest

he was around 17, a kid,
like you were

the smoke tricks with the
blunts are cool and nonchalant,
no one is trying too hard
and the high pitched bells
make your brain
feel like there's an itch

you need to scratch
and then a drone and some
stabs come in and it feels
like you are about to explode
as the beat drops and
chief keef drops an ad lib
"nah"

the bass hits like a truck

for maximum effect
get stoned 4 years after the
song comes out and notice the
descending 808 pattern
that makes you want to thrash
your head through your
computer screen, you
can't unhear it

the lines about women make
you uncomfortable now, back
then it felt like it wasn't a big
deal, you were a kid, it's
gritty and real though
and you want to thrash your head
through the computer screen still

we smoke dope!
all day/all night!

the weakening of prohibition makes
this line feel a little different
(you smoke reggie/that's that shit I don't like!)
and so does your having quit smoking weed, you
loved to smoke to this song
and feel the looming threat
of the prison system
and the anger that brings up in you, and you're
dancing in your computer chair now, the lyrics
blowing past you

chief keef has killed people, surely,

pistol toting and he's shooting
on sight! it makes sense
right now, in your head, why this happens

you feel like you could kill someone
if you got put
in that circumstance

there's a line about raping someone
and I remember this is a kid
and I was once a kid too
and it didn't sound like
a line about raping someone
for a long time to you
for a long time you didn't really
even listen, you knew all the
words, and thrashed your head
to it all, but you didn't
really listen until you started
hearing that descending 808 pattern

chief keef says some more
and it's cool and sounds tough and it makes
you do what you think
is a nasty face, but is probably
really embarrassing, and frankly
I don't give a fuck in this moment
about anything and I think about
how angry I get at this situation,
society, capitalism, and all that

you don't want to think too much
anymore, and the 808s are
in a steam roller backing over you
and you're making a face
and moving your head really embarrassingly,

eventually chief keef's
voice cuts out, and the
beat keeps going for
a second and it feels
like you just lost something

and you're tired
and the world seems so
quiet and complicated and
a truck goes past your
window, it feels like all the
sounds around you should be
organized like they were
seconds ago, but it's all
freeform and loose and
it's not like it was then

The red mist incident

Standing on the train platform she tries to focus on her phone, but is instead fixated on her peripherals. There's someone singing, a love song, they're smiling, it's all very disquieting. They've started to raise their voice, belting every word. It's oppressively out of tune, piercing, so wrapped up in the joy of singing that it has lost all pretense to artistry. People are nervously smiling, their eyes flitting between screens and this seemingly unwell commuter. What if their mood sours? What if they have a knife? People's minds are racing, singularly fixated, until a train pulls in. She piles in with the rest of them, thankful the seemingly unwell commuter was a few cars down.

The steady rhythm of her commute that begins to build is set into arrhythmic palpitations by the seemingly unwell commuter crossing into her car.

You can usually tell the broad strokes of someone's life in context on the train; when they get on, where they're headed, what they're wearing, it can all be very intimate and revealing. Packed against each other we pretend we don't notice the intersection of our lives, we keep our heads in our phones, our eyes out windows, our focus occasionally darting to other passengers before darting away.

"Why do you build me up?"

"Buttercup, baby..."

They're still belting a song, frolicking as space allows, throngs of people clumsily parting and making way. Backpacks slam into bystanders, apologies are briefly muttered. Concerned looks are given.

The atmosphere starts shimmering around the seemingly unwell commuter, like they are being transported to or from another world. It's not very clear if they're coming or going.

They stop singing. Everyone's head jerks towards them. They're shaking, the atmosphere continuing to shimmer and distort around them. It seems like their spine has lost all of its curvature, it's gone completely straight.

Everyone's waiting for someone else to do something, anything.

"Are you okay?"

They start screaming, their head snaps back, the air around them looks like the wake of a jet engine.

"Yo man-

They explode. Every molecule in their body turns its bonds into something less stable and more kinetic. Their guts go everywhere,

pureed into a fine mist. The entire car is blanketed in red. People are screaming as it all carries them forward.

She has to wipe her glasses clean of viscera. She can taste iron in her mouth, she spits. People are pushing past, trying to get to the closed doors.

At the next station a mess of gore and humanity pours out. The train is put out of service, the police are called. The cold machinery of the world as we have built it takes over and haphazardly patches the hole torn in the collective fabric.

This was her stop she realizes, emerging into the sunlight. It's blinding, reflecting off the downtown office building's mostly glass exteriors.

It feels like a flash-bang has been going off continuously, but more of a video game flash-bang than anything real, her vision is a white screen, her ears are ringing, the only thing she can make sense of, allegorically, is her ammo count and health bar.

Hunched over, her hands on her knees, she takes deep breaths as the ringing dies down and her vision starts to return. The world begins to feel more tangible, real. Passerby are gawking at her blood-soaked clothes.

She can hear sirens approaching. She can't miss work, or at least it feels like she can't. It's unclear what to do. The sun bounces off a pane of glass tinted black and into her retinas and she sees spots and floaters after looking away. The sirens are getting louder. She ducks into the department store in front of her. Inside, the security guard meant to stop the homeless and downtrodden and undesirable from sullyng Target's good name hesitates upon seeing her, what the fuck is going on? She walks past without trouble.

Grabbing something that seems sensible and business casual and a new backpack off the rack, she makes her way to the dressing room. Inside she transfers the contents of her old bag to the new one and stuffs her blood-stained clothes into the corner of the stall.

Outside she can hear someone yelling. It sounds joyous.

"Isn't life grand!" She is able to make out as she leaves the dressing room. The security guard is jogging past her, towards the disturbance.

"Isn't it wonderful to be alive?" "What a beautiful day!" A quieter, firm voice, belonging to the security guard says something stern and unintelligible.

The reveler grows silent. The security guard says something else. There's screaming, shopping carts are abandoned, the air is shimmering.

Red mist blankets the northwest corner of the Target, thousands of dollars of inventory are ruined. She rushes out the door without paying. 3 blocks down the street there's a police line being set up and a red stain on the sidewalk and street and a little bit on a skyscraper.

She gets to her job on autopilot. Everyone is talking about the explosions. All over the city there were people kinetically turning into bits and pieces of molecules and spreading themselves all over floors and walls and other things. Only half the office staff has shown up. No one gets any work done, all the meetings get cancelled or end early because no one is attending them.

The world tries to make sense of it all. Some terrorist group had claimed responsibility, but that was pretty quickly disproven. Some people were throwing around claims that it was a new type of infectious disease. People online were calling it "Super Ebola" mostly as a joke, but also because there was nothing else really to call it yet.

A week later and pretty much everyone had agreed to call it "the red mist incident" or "the incident" but as time passes "the incident" becomes less and less clear as to what incident is being referred to.

A year passes. She still thinks about it. The gore covering her glasses, the splattered subway advertisements on the ceiling, flashbulbs going off and freezing her in time and place, dislocating her from the present. The most vivid of her memories is the atomic pieces of the other commuter that landed in her mouth. If whatever they had was contagious, she can't really finish that thought. Most of her days pass on autopilot still. Wake up, work, come home, sleep. She barely eats enough to prevent atrophy. The only thing she's really able to do is hold onto her job. It feels like her brain is just a computer program designed to get her to and from her cubicle.

She loses count of the days, eventually she loses count of the months, the seasons, a year or two.

One day, sitting on the edge of her bed, she notices her hands. The skin beginning to stretch and wear. No longer the hands of a child. She looks at the view of the city from her bedroom window. When did this all happen? It seems like just yesterday she was fresh out of college, an eager smile on her face, commuting, the taste of blood rises in her throat, she can feel it again. She can see their face disintegrate. They didn't have the time to really understand it, their expression was still blank as it happened. One moment they were there, the next moment they were not. It starts to feel like someone has put something new into the auto-pilot program running her life. An error, a bug, she can't get

out of bed. She gets concerned emails which waste away in her inbox, until she loses her job and they delete her inbox. The IT team bricks her laptop remotely so she can't resell it. Her mom calls, she hasn't said anything in months her mom says, is everything ok her mom asks, she says she's fine. She wonders what people would think if she was gone, if she died. The days are still a blur, transient moments linking transient moments to other transient moments.

It starts to happen again. The atmosphere shimmers. People explode. She doesn't know what to do. On her computer screen the mayor is telling everyone to stay calm. That the situation is under control. Someone in the press pool breaks out into a joyous song. Everyone panics. The air starts to shimmer. Cut to camera 5, zoom in. The broadcast flits to a test pattern as camera 5's lens is covered in a fine red mist.

She closes her laptop and stares at the ceiling. On the street below she hears singing turn to screaming as a store front also becomes covered in a fine red mist. Thousands of people die like this all over the city. The death toll worldwide is catastrophic, no none can comprehend it fully. There are eulogies and funerals and op eds and remembrances and society tries to mourn as the second red mist incident becomes less present. It feels like death is around the corner every day for her, a timer rapidly counting down like in the show 24, except there's no hero or plot or point beyond her own demise, her molecules separating, her innards splattered all over a subway car, probably.

A third red mist incident comes and goes.

A fourth. It becomes so omnipresent that no one really bothers thinking about it too much. They're used to it for the most part. Some people carry ponchos and raincoats with them, the more cautious wearing them every time they enter a crowded public space.

The broken auto-pilot program running her life collapses completely, the variables all turn to the infinite, her memory pours out, there's nothing.

She lays in her bed. She lays in her bed some more. She thinks about killing herself, she doesn't do it, she lays in her bed instead. The machinery she has left, the machinery that gets her out of bed and to the bathroom twice a day, that occasionally feeds her, picks something up. It feels like a radio frequency from god. It's beautiful, all- encompassing. Everything feels better, it seems so sudden, where did this come from? It's so wonderful!

In between the radio waves, a disquieting message occasionally makes its way through; the upset looks she gets from others as she

frolics to and from the store; the “Are you okay?”s she gets from the concerned strangers she strikes up conversations with, sharing every detail of her life. It’s all so beautiful though, the frequency she’s on makes it all resonate like an orchestra of wine glasses having fingers run over their edges.

It all makes sense. Why she had to go through so much. How deeply unfair it can all be. It all folds into itself and that folds into itself and so on and so forth until it’s all one beautiful piece of origami that she feels like she is holding.

She gets on the subway. It doesn’t matter where it’s going or what time it is or any of that. All that matters to her right now is how beautiful the motion of it all is, the vibrations.

Life is so grand! Life is so wonderful! Life is so full of meaning! Sometimes she can’t help it! She’s just got to burst into song! The other commuters put on their ponchos and rain coats, momentarily pausing in the business of their comings and goings as she bursts into a fine red mist.



blood and concrete

it is only the space
in between the couch
and this chair
a rug and
a coffee table
but it seems to go on

it always seems to go on,
this space between us

-

I smile at a stranger
who smiles back
and I think of the rug
and the coffee table
and I try to trace the shape
of a life

you're blocks away
on that same couch, probably
and it seems to go on,
all this pavement
and all these people

about a broken organ

you were born with
a heart that couldn't
sustain you
so they cracked open
your ribcage and
put someone else's inside

and you still have a scar
running down that fracture
like a fault line, it reminds me
of the rubble of our childhood
and wrecked downtowns and
where were you when
the towers fell and you are
too young to remember most
of that

I still remember
the machine in the hospital
you were in, in the lobby
it carried marbles
to the top of a twisting
track with loop de loops
and sharp corners and
funnels and I can't
remember the machine
that pumped blood for
you or anything else
really, and I don't
like checking but it's
been so long that I know
you are one of the only people
who has carried someone else's
heart for this long and
I've stopped turning
the pages on my calendar
but the days are still passing
and I wonder if my
own heart isn't failing
too

420 (how to roll a joint)

eyeball a little under a gram
you need slim rolling papers
throw it in your grinder
look at your email
on the open monitor
rent payment reminder
an email from your mom
about something that doesn't matter
grind it

I haven't talked to my family
in a while

open your grinder and set it on the floor
you're still a little stoned from the last three weeks
and get lost staring out the window
you forget what you were thinking about

you feel alone for a second and you are

grab a rolling paper
set it aside
you forgot to make a filter
you dumb stoner

fold up a filter
there should be a w in the center
pick the paper back up
pour weed from your grinder
evenly into the paper as you hold
the filter in the one end

I run the math on what my
savings will look like after I pay rent
this month

pinch the joint
and roll it slightly downwards to tuck
the paper behind one end
work the paper around the filter and weed

you need a job
keep rolling until you reach the adhesive
lick it and seal it and be quick about it too
hold it out in front of you
imagine how it will smoke
light it before you do anything else
watch it canoe to shit

chemical fire

if I don't have caffeine in some form
every morning or, to cite the literature
around every 36-48 hours
my life falls apart

my life seems to fall apart regardless
but it feels different
when it's this chemical

and I'm glossing over
a lot here, but sometimes
it's nice to feel all this,
caffeine withdrawal,
etc,
and know that I'm just a sack
of blood and guts and shit
that we don't understand but
can use cliché language to gesture at

-

my head is throbbing
and even the scent of this
brewing coffee has provided
some sort of release

I burn my tongue on it,
my life is falling apart
in slow motion now
into so many beautiful pieces

in the stratosphere

The air going to my lungs is thin. I can feel the totality of the vacuum above me. It seems like my eyes are already bursting out of my skull, my body essentially exploding, no longer bound by any external force, my entirety breaking down into molecules and atoms and viscera, right before this whole thing comes back to earth.

An unpleasant sensation in my head.

There's always a squished grape under these mats, the no-slip, grip-intensive, honeycombed, black, rubber, mats.

I hate squished grapes.

I hate grapes.

When I was little my sisters would cut open grapes and shove their pulp leaking carcasses into my face and I'd complain with a whine to my mom and she would tell them to stop.

There's one in front of me right now, squished, covered in coffee grounds. I try to pretend I didn't see it as I move the no slip mats to the storage closet.

I've been gauging the passage of time at this job with the size of the coffee stains on the felt of my shoes. It's all such a mess now that I can't really tell if the stains are coming or going.

30 minutes later I have to mop up the grape.

The coffee shop is always so quiet after everyone's gone. Even with my phone hooked into the speaker system that usually plays ambient jazz, it's missing the rhythms that make the day shifts pass faster.

I recently got "promoted" to solo closing and without a coworker these night shifts crawl even more.

3am, bleary eyed, in my dead grandma's deteriorating 2012 Buick. I'm making my way home. There's a crosswalk with a sign that has a child chasing a ball into the street. In my head I play out a hit and run, leaving a kid splattered on the pavement. I think of that grape from a few hours ago. I wonder if it would haunt me to kill someone like that. If I'd ever be able to tell anyone about it. Laying in bed with my partner of years, turning to them, breaking down, letting it all loose.

I'm pulling into my apartment complex, I turn off my headlights early to avoid waking my neighbors.

Looking into the mirror I can't tell if the rings under my eyes are from being sad or exhausted or just how my eyes are, or all three, probably all three.

I pop open the friday compartment on the pill organizer next to my bed. I force myself to salivate a little extra and toss back the six pills in my hand.

Rolling over I picture the smashed grape again. I almost gag.

When I got out of the psych ward 3 years ago I bookmarked some helium tanks on an online storefront. Your body doesn't know the difference between helium and oxygen. It suffocates you before you know what's happening.

"how do you feel today?"

"Good!"

"Any adverse side effects from those medications?"

"Nope!"

"Any paranoid thoughts? Mood swings?"

"Nope!"

the psychiatrist looks at me like he's expecting more

"I feel like I have my life back!"

he smiles

a week ago he prescribed me an anti-depressant. I knew I was bipolar and that this was no good, but he insisted. I only pretended to comply with his prescription and washed the pills down the sink. He caught on, ordered a blood test, it came up without an ssri, he marked me as non-compliant. They made sure I started taking it. My symptoms worsened. He marked down that I was bipolar.

"Alright everyone, circle up, circle up"

The floor starts to shuffle towards the common area; we're all on the highest dose of psych meds that various regulatory bodies will allow. I stop playing uno to join in the shuffle.

We talk about our feelings. How it's good to be sober. How it's good to take care of yourself. How it's hard and confusing to be alive. The counselor doesn't like this last subject too much, but can't stop it from seeping in around the edges.

"I don't know" I say, I break eye contact with the counselor, looking at the floor.

I look back up.

"I just don't want to be here, not like suicidal, but like in this position you know?"

I pause and make eye contact with the person I was playing uno with, I look back at the floor.

"like I feel like the walls are closing in or something, like I know the shape of my life now. I used to think I would be like someone people talked about. But now I'm in here." The counselor cuts me off and says that there's always time, that the best time to plant a tree is today, and that being in the psych ward isn't actually a bad thing, but in fact, a good thing.

I say something about statistical outcomes for bipolar people. It feels pedantic and annoying and not entirely true. It's hard to be alive.

Out of the psych ward, I'm laying on my back, looking at clouds, making shapes out of loose forms. I feel like I can reach out and touch them. Like I'm up there. The curvature of the earth is visible. My hometown beneath me like an ant-hill. The air thinning. Things are so beautiful from far away.

A week later and I'm interviewing at the coffee shop

"where do you see yourself in five years?"

I answer

"do you have any experience as a barista?"

I say no

"do you know anything about coffee?"

I say no

the manager grimaces, she says they really need someone, that I seem capable enough, that I'm hired. A month later she quits.

A bleary 3am drive

a smashed grape

another bleary 3am drive

another smashed grape

a shift

another shift

I'm holding my pill container sitting on the edge of my bed. They've kept me stable since the psych ward, but they also keep me flat, like there's a gray veil on everything, every color a little less vivid, like my senses are slipping away from me.

I was doing a lot of drugs around the time I was hospitalized. The fun ones. I wonder if I could go back to that. The parties and such, the upswings, the nice parts.

I start to cut my doses down, splitting the pills with a razor in between smashed grapes and bleary 3 am drives.

The veil lifts. I feel color start to seep into things, it's all so wonderful, it's all so beautiful. I can tell I'm experiencing symptoms of mania, but even with the slow weaning off of my meds some withdrawal symptoms are to be expected, mood swings among them. I stop seeing my doctors.

4am, I can't sleep. I've been browsing the internet on my phone. I'm on a page of quotes from astronauts about seeing the earth from space.

"When I watched the horizon, I saw the abrupt, contrasting transition from the earth's light-colored surface to the absolutely black sky. I enjoyed the rich color spectrum of the earth. It is surrounded by a light blue aureole that gradually darkens, becoming turquoise, dark blue, violet, and finally coal black."

I scroll.

"It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small."

I feel moved to tears, I put my phone down and cry looking at the ceiling.

I realize I haven't eaten all day.

I pick my phone back up and look at something else.

I loosen the sandbags holding the chair down, it jumps upwards, only held back by a few more stray bags of sand, they're already sliding off. The balloons above me should get me 30 or so miles into the air if I did all this right; the stratosphere, too high for any storms or turbulence, but I still won't last long up there.

Shortly before the psych ward, there's music pulsing, my hometown's only gay bar. It's the middle of the summer, I'm here with a few people I grew up with.

I pull a friend aside, Brendan.

We made fun of him in high-school, called him fat, made fun of his obsession with old hip-hop. He grew into himself eventually, so did we. Picking on someone started to seem like less of a social necessity.

I had been saying I was bisexual for a year at this point, it was unclear at this time why I wanted to be bisexual. I wasn't, I knew I wasn't. But a week ago some things had started to come together. Smoking a joint, hunched over my laptop, I saw a trans woman and she wasn't a punchline, wasn't depicted as some gross deviant, she was cool, she was beautiful, she was the type of woman I wanted to be. This was a lot to contend with and at the time I couldn't fit it all into my head, what anything meant. I was being very melodramatic about it all.

On the dance floor, I tap my friend on the shoulder. I pull him away from the pulsing speakers. I'm too many drinks in to count.

"Hey"

"what's up?"

"I'm trans"

"what?" he holds his ear towards me with his index finger.

"I'm trans"

he pauses, leans back, looks at me.

He leans into my ear.

"come on dude"

"what?"

"you're not trans"

I laugh. He laughs. I clap him on the shoulder, I black out. I keep trying to fit all of it into my head, I spiral. I start drinking more, smoking more, the spiral ends in the psych ward.

When I get out summer is over, everyone's back to their lives without me. I try to forget about all of it. I think Brendan is a lawyer now.

I purchase the helium tanks, the balloons.

I dig a lawn-chair out of the garage. I write a note. I'm tying the balloons to the chair, getting ready to inflate them, I look upwards and there's a sea of blue, not a single cloud. It all seems so clear.

What a beautiful day to fly.



clinically speaking

the belt I wrapped around
my neck until I stopped breathing
is still where it was when
I unwrapped it from my neck
and threw it across the room
and moving it feels profane

-

when I work up the courage
to touch it, I throw it somewhere
I won't see it

I don't want to think
I don't want to think
I don't want to think

is it an attempt
if you stand up on your balcony
and feel a pit in your stomach
as you grab the railing and you
head inside

-

I didn't go back out for months,
I blamed it on the weather

my brain feels like deadweight
when I try to make sense
of it, when I try to make
sense of anything,
and I hate my cowardice
branded as courage and how
porous it all is and how it
feels like nothing means anything
and it's all just a tangled
heap of wires in our skulls
but even that doesn't make
sense if you think too hard
and it feels like this dream
has disintegrated as I
lay in bed, staring at the
backs of my eyelids trying

to move limbs I have lost
control of, I used to panic
when this happened, and I
still do

-

I used to think
I might be dead or dying or
comatose or something,
but the feeling has grown
familiar, and clinically I now
understand it as sleep paralysis

and I'm looking at that belt
peeking out from behind a pile of clothes
and I remember how I used to panic

I don't want to think

I used to panic
I used to panic

a fun fact

did you know
that while a part of you is
infinite, your body is not
and to some people
it is just a thing in the way
of what they want

they can drop all of the poetics
and gestures to beauty and meaning
and whatever, feeling alive
and they can hurt you,
if they want to
and sometimes they do

stress fracture

I'm having flashbacks again,
and they run together
into some weight in my chest

and is it even worth saying
what's in them
there is no meaning in it
no release in knowing
only a hollow pain
that aches in your chest

and they strapped me to a bed and laughed as I sat
in my own piss and shit, and they gave me a catheter
without anesthesia, and the door was open, my parents watched,
and they all felt it was deserved, I let out an animal scream
that I can still hear, my body is disposable and broken,
the brain doesn't work quite right

every morning they took my blood pressure,
the last time I had my blood pressure taken
they thought my heart was about to fail, to leave
my body broken on the floor

and there's more
and there's nothing there
but words that feel hollow

you're not broken
you're never broken

-

I feel broken
I still feel broken

and I don't remember what it was like to operate
without this weight in my chest

through this life we accumulate
wounds that may not heal quite right
and metaphors that aren't enough
you're not broken
you're not broken by this

and they say this
but some people never come back
all the words are falling short

I was a woman and I said so
but they let that feeling run away through
a hole they tore in my chest, and I wondered every day
where it went

I worked up the courage to drive needle and thread
through my skin, binding it into something like what it was before
but it's not the same

you're never broken and I feel like a shattered
bottle on the sidewalk, being ground
into dust and who's to say what broken
even is, who's to say anything
a breeze scatters me across the city,
and I am hoping for some sort of effect like
light through prismatic glass,
casting rainbows onto the pavement
before this breeze dies down

todos

there used to be a novelty
in this, a sense that I was
living something exciting
when I wanted to die
on the edge of something,
but it feels more routine
now, just a part of
the lists of todos
and chores that pile up
do the dishes, clean
the bathroom, dust
the baseboards, don't
kill self

I'll deal with it later
when I have the energy
maybe a walk will help
I know it won't
I wish I knew what would
so I could put that off
too and stay in the comfort
of this misery I know
as intimately as any other
part of me
I don't want to leave

shelter dog

As the little fake feathers from the couple's throw pillow fall to the floor, they each do a series of quick calculations on how to get this dog to stop without making things worse.

They say "noo, Henry"

"No. Henry."

One of them starts clapping as they say the same firm words.

"No. Hen-

The sound of flesh impacting itself causes Henry to stop and snap to the sound. His ears flop back and he takes a couple steps in reverse, towards the corner.

"Aw, Henry" the other partner makes her way towards him, he barks and growls, backing completely into the corner of the living room, his nails clacking against the baseboards.

"Oh my god! Come on Henry"

"Honey, I'm telling you, we can't keep this animal." Henry barks again, trying to back up through the drywall. Her partner begins to start another sentence – she interrupts.

"Why do you call him that?"

"What?"

"You always say it like we didn't name him. 'the animal', is it so hard to say 'Henry'?"

"I do not think it is a good idea to personify it anymore than we have to."

"it?"

"Yes! It!"

"I can't believe you sometimes." She storms off a few paces into the only other room in their 1br apartment, shutting the door, almost slamming it.

3 weeks later the couple are at the shelter with Henry. There's a bandage on the man's left foot, hidden by a ratty pair of gym shoes. He's limping slightly.

"Hi"

"Hey! How are you!" The person working the front desk at the shelter, her name-tag says 'Hannah', pretty much knows what's going to happen from the look of things. Henry in the carrier, an upset couple, it's not too hard to piece together.

He's not going to tell Hannah about the dog bite on his foot, his partner couldn't stand the thought of 'the dog' being put down; that's

the middle ground they had reached before the bite not ‘it’ or ‘the animal’ but ‘the dog’.

“We’re here to return the-uh-Henry” he says. “Oh! Ok! Is there any reason in particular?” His partner cuts in, speaking too fast “We just realized we don’t have time to take care of a dog, and feel like well – we feel like we can’t give Henry the home he deserves.”

“No problems? Any bites? Aggression? Things like th-”

“No. Nothing like that.”

“Ok! Great! Did you bring the paperwork?” “Yeah, yup, I should’ve sent that over a couple hours ago”

The first 3 days in the shelter Henry doesn’t eat. He drinks sparingly.

None of the staff can comfortably get him to come out of his kennel.

On the 4th day he eats something substantial enough to not become a problem, which is good because problems in the pound tend to get euthanized. His little dog brain doesn’t quite comprehend that, or death, or anything more than the pit in his stomach overriding all the signals from his amygdala telling him he is in danger and cannot eat or he will die.

On the 5th day a new employee, Mike, kicks the shit out of Henry to get him out of his kennel during enrichment time.

Michael (Mike) interviewed last week and lied about running a dog grooming business out of his garage. His buddy was going to pick up his phone and verify this lie to the shelter. The shelter didn’t call. They hired him on the spot. He works the night shift Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and every other Sunday. He abuses Henry most of the days he is in. Henry begins to recognize everything about him; the sounds his black sneakers make on the cold tile, the cheap deodorant he wears, the unique way he carries the food-bag from kennel to kennel. Sometimes Mike skips feeding Henry and some of the other dogs, if they’ve been bad. If they haven’t acquiesced to his superior understanding of the world, or at least that’s how Mike sees it. There’s a squeak of a black sneaker and Henry begins cowering. He hears the bag of food and stops, stepping forward slightly, his stomach overriding his brain again. Mike skipped him yesterday.

If you want an animal you are training to behave a certain way the trick is to withhold reinforcement sometimes. If they always get the treat, or kicked, or whatever, they will lose interest in the behavior you are teaching them. But if you make it like a slot machine, it becomes addictive. Like those seemingly half dead people in Vegas pulling a lever over and over and hoping for a payout. It’s just instead of pulling a lever,

or whatever they do in Vegas, it's sitting, or rolling over, or any behavior you want to reinforce really.

As Henry sheepishly makes his way to his food bowl Mike spits on him.

"Fucking mutt"

Henry recoils and looks up at Mike, not understanding the disrespect in the gesture, grateful for the food.

"Pathetic piece of shit!"

Mike kicks the cage, hard. Henry yelps and scampers back. He can't bring himself to make eye contact with Mike anymore, he fixates on the floor.

"aww, did I scare da widdle puppy?"

Henry has dropped some of the tension he is carrying and is wagging his tail, unable to detect anything but sincerity.

"Here Henry, I got you a little treat." Mike reaches into the treat bag and Henry's tail wags harder as he approaches the metal grating on the front of the kennel.

After he snaps the treat into his mouth, Mike jumps up and kicks the cage again.

"Fuck you!"

He laughs as Henry's nervous system fires off a barrage of signals, inputs, outputs, all his synapses light up, but all this results in is a sort of tepid shit-brown emotion, like if you took all the colorful and vibrant ways you can feel and tried to do it all at once. The only thing Henry can do is shake until Mike leaves and turns off the light.

In the darkness Henry snaps the half chewed treat on the floor back into his mouth.

Two days later and Mike's sneakers are filling Henry with dread again. This time even his fumbling for the light-switch is familiar. It feels like everything in the world is screaming at Henry the second his cloying hands hit the plastic switch on the wall.

"Wakey wakey!" says Mike. At the sound of his voice the shelter grows silent, the dogs go on alert. Mike makes his way straight to Henry's kennel.

"Hi Henry!"

Henry is looking at the floor again. It feels like the entire universe has joined in with the whole world in screaming at him. There's not much of a volume difference but the sound is more substantial, dense.

The door on Henry's kennel swings open and the same cloying hands drag him in one swift motion into the hallway. Mike brandishes a

telescoping baton that he recently bought online. He's been dying to try it out.

The screaming in Henry's head stops. The world is so quiet that he can take in every sound. The barking of the other scared dogs. The hum of the overhead lights. He can smell the sweat Mike has worked up, his cheap deodorant streaking in beads down the sides of his ribcage.

Henry Jumps onto Mike and begins mauling his forearms as he knocks him prone.

"Fuck!"

Mike tries to knee Henry off of him but can't get the leverage.

"Fuck!"

A chunk of his forearm is missing, the meat flopping off the bone. Mike lifts Henry off his chest briefly. Then, half prone, Mike manages to slam Henry into the cinderblock wall of the shelter.

A flood of pain immobilizes Henry until the baton starts crashing into him. It doesn't stop coming. He keeps trying to stand but the baton keeps him down. His ribs crack, his left rear femur shatters, a gash opens on his side. Mike's eyes are wide, his jaw clenched. He continues bringing the baton down.

Soon Henry stops trying to stand, the world freezes, his body goes limp. His memory begins to jump. He remembers some people he loved, people who for the most part were incapable of loving him. Half conscious, he can hardly feel Mike's baton or foot or whatever fucking implement he's being brutalized with anymore.

He dies on the tile.

Cursing, Mike rolls Henry's body up in one of the shitty blankets the shelter has and throws it in the trunk of his shitty sedan. Over the next five minutes he bandages his arm and calls his boss, lying about Henry attacking him and escaping. His boss calls animal control. No one bothers to check the security tapes before the outdated system rewinds and overwrites them with new footage.

On a Friday, as he comes in for the night shift, Mike passes Hannah on her way out.

"Oh, hi Mike!"

"Oh, yeah, hey."

"You doing ok?" Hannah gestures towards the arm which has now been bandaged by a doctor.

"Yeah, yeah, no I'm fine, haha, you know how these dogs can be."

"Yeah" Hannah smiles knowingly.

She continues, "You know. I had a bad feeling about that one."

"What do you mean?"

“Well the couple who returned him, something seemed off.”

“Oh haha, yeah.”

“Well anyways, I’m glad you’re ok.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

Hannah smiles again, “Have a nice night Mike!”

“You too Hannah!” Mike smiles and waves with his right hand as his left idly runs around the outline of the baton in his pocket.



nice place, for this

the bathroom is bleak, there's
a metal pipe instead of a porcelain
back to the toilet and the shower
feels a little more than outdated
the whole room betrays the hotel's cheap past

a party in a room has gone
until 6am and the bass
throbbing through your wall
is quiet, but enough
to let you know that life is going on around you

-

you wonder what you are missing
and why it's always like this, and
what would it feel like for this
bathroom to be the
last thing I ever see, and you
can feel death in your head for
a second, why is it always like this
the thought comes and goes
it always does

you go to your bed and
write in one unbroken line across the page
"on the bathroom that would be
a nice place to die" and under it
you've scratched something out
before you wrote down
"write this in the morning"

-

the sun pouring through your curtains
and a chirping sparrow
remind you that life goes on
around this

faggot

you wonder if the car
pulling up beside you
is about to yell a slur,
they don't

you wonder if that look
on the subway is
"I am about to hurt you",
you don't find out

and did he just follow
me home, he's so close
what do I do is he going
to hurt me or kill me or what
what do I do, and I walk on
to the wrong floor and
turn around and walk past him
and he doesn't follow

-

and it feels like my heart
is falling into the pitch black
of some chasm, bouncing off the sides
and I know that in this world
you have to grow callous
or you die

coffee

I am making coffee
like I usually do
grinder to the fifth line
turn it on and
I pull out and fill
the kettle with filtered water
while that runs,
this is optimal

and I have been thinking that
an adherence to routines like this
is a sign I am autistic
and last night I felt like an
alien at a party and like
I would never be human
which also feels like a sign
I am autistic
but I have known a lot
of people who feel like this

the kettle clicks off and
I'm staring at the knob on a cabinet
and wondering what fixtures in
this apartment could hold my weight

and I'm pouring
the boiling water over the ground coffee
beans, there's a satisfying
crema that comes off
the steeping beans on the top
of the boiling water
it looks like chocolate
and I don't want to live which
is adding a distance to the tactile
pleasure of the coffee brewing,
I stop pouring to wait for
more room for boiling water in the beans
and I don't want to live still
but I know feelings are temporary
and fickle and always changing

I pour more boiling water and it makes that sound
boiling water makes and the smell of coffee
has saturated the room to the point I don't notice it

I drink the coffee on the roof
to try and feel like things
are beautiful
surrounded by a rising sun
and the skyline
and it is beautiful
but it is distant,
there are hvac
units running and their ugly
mechanical hum feels more
like my speed and I try to lose
the distance, to collapse into
their mechanical hum
and thoughts about how
ugly we can be to each other

in my apartment
there is a cooling carafe
of coffee on the counter
and I'm so pulled back it feels
like I can see the rotation
of the planet in
my head and people are
flying off
into space
and exploding in that vacuum

I'm here
and cold coffee is
going down my throat
life feels so distant

elliott smith superfan

I am listening to elliott smith again
in this same park, on the same bench

and I was just sitting near a parking lot near a courthouse
and some cops showed up and I got scared and left

No Parking

Violators

Will Be

Towed

at their own expense

and united healthcare's logo pokes over

the skyline, next to "M&T Bank"

along with steeples older

than this country

N

E

W

apartments

for lease!

call now

I don't call

-

I'm jessie

and that's michael

and that's his dog kaya

and he's not like those homeless people

camped out down there who the police

seem to begrudgingly tolerate

he had a \$2,000 studio in new york

in the 80's

and his clothes are fraying at the seams

and did you know that kaya

will bark at the crackheads and dope fiends and junkies

but not me

No Trespassing

Authorized Personnel

Only

and I would die for that parking lot

I would lay down my life

in service of that asphalt

what a wonderful dog
and I smile and nod
through inconsequential lies
and kaya likes me
but not those crackheads
junkies and fiends
who live in the park

I'm listening to elliott smith again
in this same park
on this same bench

There's a black and white
POW MIA flag above the
encampment the police seem
to begrudgingly tolerate, I feel like
we need to bring our boys home,
broken and traumatized

-

above the parking lot there was a billboard
with a black kid and a white mom
and it says "who adopted who", it was
blocking my view of another
billboard for an injury attorney
call now!
and I don't

I walked away afraid of the cops
and our boys are still over there,
god bless them
and god bless
this country
and god bless
the troops

and no trespassing
and no parking
call now, and I won't
but god bless you anyways
violators will be towed at their own expense



ingrown

you've got a small dick,
todd, or at least that's
what this guy in the hallway
is shouting at you
we were laughing
at first, behind our door
watching through the peephole
until shit sunk in
and that clarity cut too close

have you ever trimmed your
nails and gone too far,
it hurts like hell

todd, you goddamn
homewrecker, you ruined
this beautiful, or maybe abusive
marriage, he slams his fist
into the wall, and fuck you
todd, you small dick motherfucker
but god bless our boys in blue
who took his wife, todd's lover, away
in handcuffs

my dad always warned me
about ingrown nails, and when
I was young, I was very rigorous
about trimming them
and sometimes I still cut
until it bleeds from my nailbed

she was dragged away
and todd has a small dick
plus is a motherfucker,
and some people love to say that
"you can't save everyone"
but they never tell you
how much it hurts
to sit in silence after
and watch it bleed

valued community input

you yelled at me from
your car, something about
being a pussy, for making
you wait, at a light,
and looking like a faggot
you slowed down after
you had a second to think
but I was gone
and I thought about buying
a gun on my walk back
and how satisfying it would
be to put a clip into
the hood of your tesla

-

I live in fantasies like this
my entire walk home until
something real catches and I start
to choke up
I'm such a pussy
and I'm tired of these
humiliations and this shame
and all of it, I'm tired
of surviving
like this

an addendum

it's a day somewhere between
spring and summer where you start to sweat
until the breeze takes you down
back to early spring, and your mind
runs back to the winter that straddled
this year, and the last

it passed like nothing
like something incredibly dense,
but small
ripping a hole in some fabric
stretched too thin

-

earlier, you wrote a poem about
this park and you called it
beautiful

and on the way out,
you walked past a pavilion
or a gazebo or some
sort of fixture where
people were sleeping with a comfort
that you recognized from elsewhere

later, you went out for
lunch and on your way back
there were flashing lights
and a stretcher
and a crowd, that you tried not to join
in gawking
it passed like nothing

in the center of the park there is a
racist statue of the indigenous people
this country killed
the sculpture gestures to the beauty of nature
there's a preening buck at the top of it

it has to mean something,
it'll pass like nothing

complimentary continental breakfast

you load soggy eggs onto your plate
and your headphones are preventing you
from hearing the television
which seems to be orbiting around
a pitched manhunt for 6 people,
4 have already been apprehended,
thousands of miles in the south
after escaping from a prison
probably built in the middle of fields
that used to be worked by a
different use of the word
slave

and the "S" stands for streaming!
the beloved characters from
Sesame Street want you to know this

and 4 men have been apprehended
6 are still on the run and am I supposed
to be afraid of six desperate people
in louisiana, there was someone
collecting cans from the garbage on my
way to the park I am sitting in, I tried
to smile, or something-
my eyes swam around and I wondered
where a human would look,
we seemed scared of each other

something in the cosmos shifts
and the broadcast begins to circle
something new, tornadoes tear
through plains, destroyed hometowns,
and the changing or disappearing or
whatever the fuck is happening
to the gulf stream is maybe involved
if you think about it,
drowned cities and bloated corpses
in the heart of a dead empire
4 men apprehended

-

and I can't help
but hope that they get
away,
it seems impossible
this park is beautiful

machinery

I don't have
any cash on me, sorry,
and I forget what
we were saying,
you remind me
- I've been trying
to eat less of it too

I briefly picture
an act of sudden violence
being enacted on an animal
and I lose focus

-

I look across the
tracks from the platform
we are on, and I can
feel the breeze from
an approaching train
against the beads of sweat
forming on my body,
I've been trying,
the chill feels
nice in the heat

infrastructure

I went somewhere beautiful
to try and feel profound

-

and birds are chirping
as 18-wheelers pass by on
the adjacent highway

I mostly feel alone
and there's public art
being ignored by office workers
on their lunch break
plastic badges on their hips,
I don't find it moving
either

walmart, a green one
with a small H, unmarked
white trucks, sefrigo,
K & L, these logos are too
small to make out well
most of the time, and they are
all shipping goods along this
route, and sedans, and hatchbacks
and there's a less busy road on
the other side, lined by flags

and there are
office buildings
across from me
across the river
and there's debris
caught on the bridges
I'm trying not to feel like this



ashes of american flags, etc

I remember when the orb appeared over Manhattan. Most people noticed the shadow first, mistaking it for a passing cloud. A few of us looked up, and there it was; pitch black, round, about a half mile across, floating above the financial district. I was leaving my therapist's office, rounding the corner to the Canal St. stop. There were people standing and staring off to the south, tourists, transplants, the new york natives, pointing and wondering "what the fuck is that?". I was able to catch a train home before everything shut down. The president addressed the country, elected representatives offered various solutions, most involved jets and tanks and the police and helicopters and the army. South Manhattan was evacuated. We hit the orb with cannon fire, sidewinder missiles, shouted at it with megaphones and radio frequencies, but it didn't budge.

I've stopped seeing my therapist, it was a pain to get to her relocated office.

Presently, I'm waiting for a breakfast sandwich. The store is florescent, bright white light bouncing off of baby blue walls and neon packaging, it's suffocating. The windows out front would provide some more natural lighting if they weren't plastered with ads, smashburger coming soon! \$9.99 for a six pack! we accept EBT!

"That's what I'm saying man" someone at the register is saying this to the clerk.

"I don't know, I guess I could see it"

"like all this shit, stonehenge, the pyramids, all of it, it's gotta be these fuckers, for sure."

"how do you know it's a ship?"

"come on, it's gotta be" the customer throws his hands up a little bit.

"yeah, haha, I don't know" the clerk presents the card reader.

"I mean this shit is just like that one movie." he starts gesturing with one hand like it will help him recall the movie faster, "fucking, uh, district 9" he taps his card, the reader beeps. They talk for a second more. He says thanks, the clerk says no problem, see you around.

On the grill some bacon makes an audible sizzle, the guy working it chops the meat with a spatula, it makes a loud clang as he hits the metal of the implement against the metal of the cooking surface. I pay for my sandwich and an energy drink, I walk out onto the street. Someone drives by without a muffler. When I get to my apartment I make my way up 4 flights of stairs and sit on a metal beam on my roof,

looking out at Manhattan, the sunrise behind me, the orb still hovering.

You can't see the orb from the street in Brooklyn but if you get high enough, like my rooftop or something similar, it's there. I've been doing this a lot lately, grabbing breakfast, going up to my roof, looking at the orb. I wonder if my parents are worried sometimes, that the orb is going to kill me or something. I got a call from them last week but it didn't get mentioned, they seemed mostly concerned about me finding a job, about whether or not I had a partner, things like that, the usual bullshit. A lot of people have been evoking 9/11 but it hasn't crashed into anything or killed anyone, it just sits there.

The sandwich is good, the cheese has partially melted into mayonnaise and is running into the foil wrapping, some of it congealing into little yellow clumps. There's a big knot of bacon in the center that slips out when I bite it, but there's enough bacon that this doesn't affect the composition of the sandwich/make the ratio of bacon/egg/cheese too bad. I wash down another salty bite with the energy drink.

Soon, my sandwich is gone but I'm still looking out at the orb. I don't think I've ever seen anything so pitch black. I keep thinking about some article years and years ago that makes the rounds occasionally in different forms on different click driven news aggregators, but essentially scientists had discovered a darker shade of black, like a way to make an even darker black pigment than had ever been seen on earth. I think about this article whenever I look at the orb. The yellow of the sunrise is cascading across my neighborhood's rooftops, it eventually becomes an unnoticeable shade of white. It feels like I'm underwater, trying to notice everything at once, the plankton floating in place, the fish in the distance, the looming chasm below. I eventually space out, staring at the orb, wondering if it's gonna kill us all like people keep saying.

Back in my apartment, my roommate, Anne, has some livestream on the TV.

"-that's what I'm saying dude, how the fuck are you going to just fucking blow up lower manhattan. Ok yeah yeah, let's just make some of the most populous land on earth completely uninhabitable, let's fucking nuke it, even though it's not doing anything, and we don't really understand, yeah we should blow it up, sure."

There's a pause as he reads the responses from the chat.

Looking at his curated apartment background and then to our sparse apartment walls I feel a pang of something I can't place. Our living room is kind of bleak, no windows, only a standing lamp in the corner that isn't bright enough to really light the whole room. It's a nice enough apartment.

The streamer continues, "yeah whatever, ok, you don't know how to fucking think, I don't give a fuck, whatever."

I sit on our Ikea couch next to my roommate. She says hey, I say hi back.

The streamer hits play on the video he's been reacting to, it's some local New York politician who starts going on about how we need to evacuate the city, how we need to blow up the orb, how there is no need for mercy or caution. The streamer starts to get mad and pauses it again to monologue, my roommate mutes the TV.

"how are you?"

I think about answering genuinely but then just say I'm good, I ask how she is, she says she's good too. I point at the screen and say something about the streamer, she laughs, says "yeah". We look at the screen, he's gesticulating, mad, he's made his webcam shot the central focus of the screen rather than a little window in the corner. The TV is silent, still muted.

"A friend keeps saying they're going to go into manhattan, like the containment zone, I'm a little spooked Erin." she says.

"is it Griffin?"

"yeah" she laughs and looks at her lap. I want to laugh too.

"why the fuck would they go into the containment zone?"

"some activist thing I don't know, they kinda stopped talking to me after I told them not to."

We talk in circles about what to do. The streamer makes their webcam shot small again, the politician is talking but not making a sound, I can mostly fill in the blanks from the snippet I got earlier. Anne asks me if after her shift I want to go to the promenade across from the financial district, look at the orb. We've done this a few times, it's the closest you can get, the best view of the orb in the city. I say sure.

I feel like people have been quieter on the subway since the arrival, looking at their feet, sparks shooting off the track, the sound of metal on metal. The car fills up on the way to the promenade. There's a puddle of spilled coffee running back and forth under the seats across from me. It rolls back when the train starts, rolls forward when it stops. A few songs play through my headphones and I get off at what is now the end of the line. Southern routes have stopped running into Manhattan, across the bridges, under the east river, they stop here now.

The first few days, the promenade had been packed. People shoulder to shoulder, it felt like half the city was there. It's a little emptier now. Especially with the drop in tourism, cancelled trips, rerouted flights, the local economy shrinking, less annoying suburban

families wandering the big city five-wide going so slow you get mad. People have stopped moving here in a more permanent sense too, businesses are pulling out of midtown skyscrapers, leaving them empty. There was talk of the stock exchange relocating to D.C. even, trading firms preemptively building new offices and data centers down there just in case.

The sun is gleaming off the windows of the financial district, making its way to the horizon. Ripples in the river look like they're sparkling in this light. The orb is looming, a matte black, the sun pouring into it without a reflection. I text Anne, she's almost here she says.

While I wait, I sit and watch someone in a yellow vest take measurements of the orb from the boardwalk I'm on. A cop in a bunch of body armor walks past, he seems bored, his long gun is surreal up close. Someone is feeding pigeons. I try to think of what the birds make of all this. If they're roaming around lower Manhattan wondering where all the breadcrumbs went. A military helicopter roars past overhead, makes its way to the orb. It gets there and hovers, it seems to be doing some sort of survey.

Anne interrupts my train of thought, tapping my shoulder, Griffin is behind her. They sit on either side of me. We all greet each other, it's quiet for a second after. We look off at the orb. You can hear the sound of people's shoes on the wooden planks laid out behind us. Cars pass by on the road below.

"Griffin, you should just tell her." Anne makes eye contact with Griffin who seems to think for a second, surveying her face. They look down at the ground, then at me.

"So well, I don't know, it's kinda hard to jump into," they tweak their nose with their hand, briefly glance away from something. Another cops walks by, or maybe it's the same one, long gun, body armor, it's hard to tell. Griffin waits for them to pass.

"we made contact."

"what?"

"we figured out some shit, if you look in the higher ranges of the frequency spectrum. Like it looks like it's just noise at first, but it's definitely a broadcast"

"from the orb?" I point out across the river.

"yeah," Anne chimes in, it's clear they've already discussed all this together "it's saying something but it's hard to get a clear read on it from out here. Isn't that crazy, like fuck, it's talking!"

Griffin goes on. Griffin says that they trust Anne and I, after all we've been through. Griffin lived on our couch for a little under a year,

having run away from home, their shitty family, they had moved out and off the couch a few months ago, they seemed to be doing well. Griffin says they had some friends from a socialist org in the city ready to help, but they got scared and backed out. They want to go out, get underneath the orb, get a clean reading, send some of our own data to it even; before some fucking politician blows it up or scares it off. I laugh trying to dismiss it, Anne seems into it. We're deliberating when I start to feel a pressure differential in my head, my ears pop. Everything stands still for a second, we look at the orb.

There's a swell of sound emitting from it, a hum growing into a buzzing growing into bass heavy rumble that shakes the city. It ends with what feels like a kick to the chest and a loud whump, windows shatter. The scattered cops start telling people to stay calm and make their way off the promenade, people are screaming, running. Griffin, Anne and I get out of there, trying not to lose each other, glass crunching under foot. People are pouring into the subway, falling down the stairs, a string of police are jogging to the entrance shouting back away! back away! They close it off, say that the trains will not be running, people are coming back up, more orderly this time.

Things start to quiet down. Helicopters keep passing overhead, they're swarming the orb. A fighter jet tears by, they're always louder than I remember.

After scrambling for a few more minutes, we're standing in a park, talking about what to do. Some people are still running, looking around, not sure where to go other than away from here. There's a group of skateboarding kids arguing that they should be able to get a closer look with a team of heavily equipped cops. Traffic is at a standstill all over, some cars have been abandoned, windshields are cracked, side windows shattered. In the distance you can hear more jets, breaking the sound barrier outside the city limits.

The orb is still there, pitch black, peeking through a sliver of sky between buildings. I look at Anne, Griffin, there's fear in their faces. I don't know what I'm feeling, but I've never seen either of them like this.

"We should probably start walking" says Anne, pointing west, towards our apartment. Her voice is shaky.

"Are we all ok?" asks Griffin.

"I think so"

"yeah"

Griffin mutters, "fuck", they look off, through the gap in the buildings.

The cell towers are overloaded, so we can't get an estimate from our phones but the walk home should be a couple of hours. The weather is nice enough says Anne, we agree. For thirty minutes none of us say anything, walking in silence. Occasionally people are arguing on the street, what to do, where to go.

There's stretches of abandoned cars, people slowly walking westward with us. Most of the shops are shuttered, a few corner stores are open. There are people emptying out their homes into bags, packing up trunks of sedans and suitcases and backpacks and whatever they can fit their possessions into.

"We should get some water" says Anne, gesturing towards a corner store.

The store is small, the radio running, saying to stay tuned to this channel for the government response. There's a fridge lined with drinks, rows of snacks and sweets disappearing into the back of the store.

"my friends, my friends, are you ok?" says the man behind the register.

"yeah, is it ok if we get some water?" asks Griffin.

"oh, of course, you can help yourself."

We take three bottles up to the counter and he refuses payment, says we need to stick together in times like these, I agree, the others nod along.

Cars start to drive by, the glass on the buildings is more intact. I recognize a laundromat, a train stop. The laundromat is open 24 hours! the number is 347-564-8991! Call anytime. This is all painted on the windows out front. We tell Griffin they should crash at our place since they live only a couple blocks away, they agree but they need to grab some stuff first, just in case.

In our windowless living room Anne and I put on the news, it's all breaking shit about the orb, the shockwave it had emitted. Was it here to kill us? Does it know what it's doing? Is it an "it"? Is there anything inside? What is going on? We keep the volume low.

Our intercom buzzes, I press a button and unlock the door to the complex. It's Griffin, they have a bag with them. They put it in a corner and sit on the couch with us. They look at me, at Anne, Anne doesn't notice. She's watching the TV intensely, barely moving.

"You ok Anne?" Griffin asks

"What? oh yeah, just what- what the fuck was that, you know"

I laugh.

Someone on the street outside is yelling, you can hear it

through my bedroom window.

"yeah." says Griffin.

"and we'll have more as this story develops but for now we do not know-" the audio cuts out, there's a loud test tone. Plain white text on a black background scrolls across the bottom of the screen

MANDATORY EVACUATION ORDER FOR NEW YORK CITY AND SURROUNDING AREA, FOLLOWING COUNTIES AFFECTED: WESTCHESTER, QUEENS, BRONX, MANHATTAN, BROOKLYN, RICHMOND, NASSAU- it goes on, the entire southeastern corner of the state is being evacuated, large swaths of northern New Jersey as well.

The audio comes back "We're getting reports that the governor has issued a mandatory evacuation order, impacting the city and the surrounding areas- it seems in conjunction with the governor of New Jersey and Connecticut" The reporter saying this is in a makeshift studio somewhere in Queens. You can see evidence of how hastily it was constructed around the edges, the station had enough money to make it work though. "There will be an address to press shortly".

"This is fucked" Anne says, standing from the couch.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"We've gotta pack I guess." She looks at her room, calculating what she can take with her. New York is the first place that Anne and I feel like we have set down roots in, we talked about this all the time. It was so nice to be building a life we would say, we've just always been so transient we would both agree. I look at my own room, the backpack on the floor.

Anne asks Griffin something. They're staring into the corner. They look back over their shoulder, at Anne, me. They look at the floor, at our new rug, we had only gotten it a month ago, I wonder if it will be here when we get back.

"I'm gonna go down there still" says Griffin

I feel something burning in my head, some pressure. I imagine them dying, sneaking around in some subway tunnel somewhere.

"Absolutely not, what the hell are you talking about" says Anne. I can't find words.

"I don't give a fuck anymore. I'm tired of this shit, of going to work, of my fucking family, of fucking- having to sit around every day watching some fuck on the TV say some dumb shit about some fuck in congress or some police fuck or some general piece of shit. I'm fucking tired ok. I'm tired of living like this. I'm gonna go down there and I'm gonna talk to that thing, and I don't care if you come with me or not." They stop and look at the floor, they look back at us.

We sit quietly for a second.

"I'll go" I say.

"What the fuck? Are you serious Erin?" says Anne.

An advertisement is filling the silence. Anne swears under her breath.

"Shit, ok, alright- Fuck! yeah I'll go."

I throw what I can think to take in that bag on the floor of my room, Anne does the same with her own things. Griffin is clicking through some streaming service's menu trying to find what to watch for the 30 minutes we take packing, they never decide on anything. Before we leave they show us some gear they had brought: a laptop, some sort of broadcasting device, it should be able to reach up into the higher frequencies the orb's been using to send out broadcasts, it's just incredibly short range, we'll have to get close.

We head out into the night and make our way to north Manhattan, transferring from a bus to trains. The city feels like it's on fire.

Traffic on the Queensboro Bridge is at a complete stop as we cross it. The subway car is empty headed into the city, it's just us. We get off and head south. Soldiers and cops are going door to door, checking apartments, giving notice. The streets are filled with refugees who can't really put the words to the whole situation yet. There are streets and streets of abandoned cars in front of skyscrapers and luxury apartments as we make our way further south. The streetlights feel like punctuation to a meandering sentence through the city.

A cop stops us. He's holding an assault rifle of some sort, wearing a bulletproof vest. He looks us up and down and asks where we're headed. Griffin says our apartment is just a little bit south that we forgot a medication and need to go grab it. He asks us the address, Griffin gives some random number on a street they can place vaguely south of our location. The cop pauses, he waves us on.

We make our way past deserted centers of business, abandoned lobbies, restaurants filled with rotting food. I keep wanting to name movies I'm being reminded of, but it's lost its charm to point out that this feels like the apocalypse.

There are barricades set up on 14th street, no one is being allowed back across, not even if they lie and say they've forgotten a medication. Bored soldiers are standing in front of the barricades, talking with bored cops also standing in front of the barricades, some of them are on their phones. Occasionally stragglers pass through, headed north to staging grounds, to busses out of the city, carrying what they can. I feel the weight of my own backpack watching them pass.

"Fuck, yeah, we've gotta get through that I guess" says Griffin.

"I had guessed, yeah" Anne puts some venom into these words.

We talk for a second, maybe we can just walk through, just do it with confidence, maybe find a hole in the perimeter? Sneak around in some dark alley?

"Wait there's a subway stop a couple blocks back right?" Griffin looks at me for approval.

"Griffin, come on." Anne looks at me hoping I'll shot them down.

"I think so, yeah"

Griffin smiles.

We make our way to the station, duck under some tape saying not to cross. The turnstiles are shut off, we hop them. Without the usual throng of people and noise, our three sets of footsteps feel loud, they reverberate back to us off of the subway walls. We walk down the end of the platform. A rat runs across my field of vision, down some winding corridor. We pause at the edge of the yellow warning strip. I look at Griffin and Anne, I look at the rail below us.

For the past six months the biggest highlight of my life has probably been those breakfast sandwiches. I was laid off. I've been unemployed and too depressed to do much about it, letting my savings run out, wondering when I'll finally be asking for rent money from whoever cares. I think about the couple months of sunrises from the rooftop before the arrival, the breakfast sandwiches that went with them. I feel like something is missing in my head, like there's some part of my life that was supposed to fill up this part but it's not there. I think about the three years I spent at the job I lost, staring at a screen, wishing I was dead.

I hop down onto the tracks.

"Erin!" Anne hisses.

"What do you think we're going to do here Anne?" I say.

"I don't know, I just- this- fuck, ok"

She hops down too, Griffin follows, they fish a flashlight out of their bag and we start heading down the tunnel. It's darker than I thought. Our footsteps occasionally squelch in a stray puddle. I'm glad I wore boots.

This feels like that sequence from Cloverfield where they all die I say, Griffin thinks it's funny, Anne doesn't. Griffin says this is less like Cloverfield and more like Stuart Little, I say maybe it's like Baby's Day Out, they say they've never heard of that one. I give them a summary. They ask if we're the baby or the baby kidnappers, I say I haven't thought that far.

We pass the 14th street stop, things are less funny to Griffin and I.

We're quiet until we reach 9th street, our footsteps still occasionally finding a puddle. We hop up on the empty platform, the yellow warning strips feels strange on my hand as I pull myself up.

We get to the top of the station's dead escalators. The streetlights are on but it's the emptiest I've ever seen the city, it feels like an alien planet. Cars have been cleared from the side of the road. Windows everywhere are shattered from the earlier shockwave. All the vending carts have been packed up and moved elsewhere. The orb is close, it's hard not to look at it. A street has collapsed into the subway without the city workers here to maintain things.

The orb is massive, you can't really get a proper sense of its scale from a distance. I feel like a child looking up at a skyscraper and wondering if it goes on forever. My neck is craning to get a view.

"wait wait this should be good" Griffin puts their bag down, plugs something in to their computer, something with an antenna. Lights on it flash in a pattern as the usb plug makes contact with the port on the laptop. Anne and I watch them click around, type a few things.

"yeah, oh holy shit, this is a clean reading, let me just get this for a few seconds."

There's a bag blowing across the street, it says 'Have A Nice Day' and has a smiley face printed on it.

The orb makes a low hum.

"ah, fuck, we definitely gotta get out of here" Anne is panicking.

"not yet, we'll be way too slow if it's another shockwave anyways" says Griffin.

The orb lets out a series of bellowing creeks that remind me of a whale call. The bag is caught on a newspaper machine, stuck on a corner. I've lost sense of what I'm doing in the haze of everything. I'm just staring at the bag.

Griffin is fiddling with their phone. We stand in silence. It seems like the surface of the orb is shimmering this close, some sort of heat thing, like when you're dehydrated and looking at asphalt.

Tires squeal behind us, Griffin shoves their computer into their bag, Anne is staring at the orb, caught up in it all until someone yells "Hands! Let me see your hands!"

We're forced to our knees by a swarm of soldiers.

"What the fuck are you all doing?"

The orb is still bellowing.

"I- we, well, we forgot-"

"yeah, sure, we forgot, come on what the fuck are you doing."

I have my face pushed into the street while a soldier digs for zipties or handcuffs, I can feel cuts on my cheek.

There's a pressure differential in my head, my ears start to pop.

"Brace, Brace, Brace!" one of the soldiers yells. They all crouch and cover their ears. The bellow turns into something intense, I can feel my bones rattle. It seems like my teeth are going to fall out. We're all knocked to the ground. The bag goes flying, untethered from the corner of the newspaper machine.

"Get them the fuck out of here!" someone shouts.

The evacuation zone we've been dropped off at is in the northeast corner of central park, school busses, and greyhounds, and even the cheap bargain brands are all lined up on a field. It's surreal seeing people piling into them, ducking under trees, high-rises sitting empty in the background. The bus we're put on is headed to Philadelphia. Anne has a friend there, she's texted them, we should have a place to stay other than the gymnasium with cots we've been told is waiting for anyone who needs it.

The bus crosses into Newark, and goes through forests starting to sprout in the warmth of spring. We get off in center of town. Anne's friend, Sara, is nearby, we get on the subway to her place. The rest of the refugees without anywhere to stay make their way to a nearby high school.

Sara's apartment is small with the three of us in it. Griffin has to sit on the floor. We're recounting the whole experience to Sara, who's nice enough but seems a little scared that she might get wrapped up in all this too, having to evacuate somewhere. Griffin has been chiming into our conversation occasionally but they are mostly wrapped up in their laptop in a corner, a power cable running to a nearby outlet. It's 4am, the sun is going to rise soon, we decide to catch what sleep we can.

An emergency siren wakes us up.

Our phones start to go off on their own. There's an alert.

MANDATORY EVACUATION OF FOLLOWING COUNTIES

BY 9:00AM EST, it lists off the same counties. We all check twitter, people are saying they're going to bomb lower Manhattan. Anne turns on the TV, puts it on mute. The emergency sirens continue to drone.

Every fifteen minutes the sirens go off again.

I'm watching the TV, but it makes very little sense as a screen. It makes more sense as a bunch of lights going off at random, encased in plastic, doing whatever.

Time feels like it is frozen.

The power flickers, thirty seconds later the room shakes slightly. On the news there's a shot of a mushroom cloud over the south of the city, a limited yield for a warhead to be sure, but still a nuclear weapon. None of us know what to say. We watch in silence as the smoke clears. The orb is still there, unchanged for a second, and then it's gone. Not a trace, no sound, no movement, just gone, you could've missed it if you blinked.

"What the fuck?" says Anne.

I don't know what to feel.

For the next two hours we watch shots of a destroyed Manhattan. The news has been flying drones around the city. The stock exchange is gone, the bull is still standing. High-rises and low-rises and row-houses in the area are all just abstract assemblages of rock and wood on the street now. Trendy billboards are coated in ash, fires are burning in corners unattended.

"Griffin"

"yeah?"

"have you figured out what that thing was saying to us back there?"

They look up from their keyboard.

"Anne, I don't have a fucking clue."

memes about guy being tortured

I saw a photo of a man
being tortured in abu-ghraib again
on my computer used as a punchline
and I felt sick,
again

as a kid it was distant
iraq, what it feels like to be broken
like that
and I laughed with late night shows
about how stupid and evil george bush was

do you remember when dick cheney shot
a friend, and the friend apologized
to dick cheney for being shot

-

there's razor wire near my apartment
and when I look at the blades
on the braided metal cordage I feel
a flash of something like fear
at the public display of brutality

I'm looking at the man
under a hood, in a stress position
with a car battery wired to
his fingertips

I try to clear my head
but I'm thinking of the
razors near my home
and all the shit
we try to forget

when I was a kid
it was all so far away

morning again in america

it's a new day in america
it's always a new day in america
but today is too
and tomorrow and probably
the day after that, but one day
this project will end, this colonial
dream built and maintained
by genocide, and greased with our
suffering and it will be
our turn to dream

I still think about that precinct burning
and how it felt the morning after
and I want to feel like that
again but it's a new day in america
for now and it's hard to see past
the horizon and know that the
moon will come up and so will the sun
and so on until it's a new day
and we are no longer dreaming

breaking bread

you're a fascist and a flipped chair and
I didn't even expect him to get that mad,
but he was kind of being a fascist, but
ok if it matters that much to you
you're not a fascist, I don't even care
that much, but dinner was ruined anyways, and
I didn't even want to eat anyways
and I can't feel my stomach anyways
with the adrenaline

I could kill you old man
It's not like it used to be

but dinner is ruined, and getting cold
and wasn't it so wonderful, and thank
you, I love you, sorry about
that, no no, of course I didn't mean
it like that, just sometimes he's
a little you know, what's another
word for fascist, how do you say
that a creeping societal bloodlust
has gotten into your old man's head
and that you're starting to feel
indifferent about the whole family
thing, and if you think about it
you always kind of did
 and that chair is still
 glued back together
at the kitchen table and one time
you ran your finger over the break like you
do the scars on your wrist, but
the scars on your wrist don't
give you splinters, you
pull it out without wincing
it feels like you've had a bone or
organ or whatever, just you
know, something, a lot of things maybe,
pulled out of you over time here
but if you really think about it did
you even have any of that in the

first place, do you “own” a splinter,
what if you leave it in and your
skin grows around it and it sits
there like a bullet and when the weather
gets bad you can feel it and say
oh I feel it in my bones, and everyone
will roll their eyes like you do
at your old man’s jokes,
and it’s not funny
it’s not funny, I’m not laughing, I’m
not laughing

this is the most important election of
our lifetime, and you’re laughing,
cavorting with the enemy, fraternizing
as it were
It’s not funny
I’m not laughing
I could kill you old man



**industry and decay
in the amber of
a setting sun**

on the way here I saw a flag
an american flag
it was in some junkyard
it felt fitting

and I hate this country
with all my heart
but I felt some sort of pride
 at all the junk around it
trying its best to make
someone, somewhere,
some money

about it

I want to yell so fucking
loud that it tears a hole
in this shit, a fucking
bloody wound
and I want you to
drown in that
shit

I want every fucking
politician spouting
off about nothing
while my friends die
to know this crushing
sensation in their
chest

I want all of you,
or whoever the fuck,
still breathing to know
what it is like to be
afraid

I want to eviscerate this world
into a gory mess and
I don't give a fuck
what comes after
I just want you to
know this pain

synergizing efficient distillations of the soul

She had come out as trans a year ago at the office, which was embarrassing and full of ceremonies she felt were unnecessary and dehumanizing even if positive in intent. Going to the women's bathroom had become a daily ceremony that she had grown to especially hate. Its cold grey stalls and tile, the oversized mirror, the hum of the automatic soap dispenser, she had grown to hate it all.

She's fidgeting, looking at the floor of the stall, running various worst case scenarios through her head. She sees a small cockroach run under the stall door, a visceral disgust snapping her out of the anxious stream of thoughts. It scuttles erratically, antenna searching for something, she doesn't really care what. Struggling with her pants she lifts her foot up. She stamps down firmly, a loud thud echoing through the bathroom. When she lifts her shoe up she stares at its mangled body, there's a clear liquid leaking out from the places its exoskeleton has failed. She figures it must be something like blood. Replaying the sound of her foot crushing the roach in her head she makes her way to the sink, desperately hoping no one heard all the commotion.

She leaves the bathroom and heads through the breakroom, through a set of double doors, "Break" is printed on these doors in a hip sans-serif font, evocative of the latest corporate design trends. All over the office there are gestures towards being something hip and cool and not a cubicle farm for people working on a piece of software that she describes to her friends as an "advanced spreadsheet".

This job had changed her life when she got it. No more asking relatives to cover a gap in a rent payment, no more stacks of corn tortillas bought in bulk for pennies on the dollar, no more cheap, roach-infested basement apartments.

Her computer pings her with an email from the CEO about the mandatory wellness retreat he's been pushing for months. She looks over at the neighboring desk. "Chris Miller" is printed in a plain, black font on a faux-gold plaque and adhered to a chest-high cubicle wall. She tries to picture Chris walking through the double doors, smiling at her, saying hi. The image dissipates into a disassociative fog as she stares at the monitor in front of her.

An alarm goes off. Chris cracks open his eyes, sun pouring into the house through "temporary" blinds. His wife is trying to pretend she's still asleep for her own sake, her eyes closed, her face buried in her pillow, she shifts her legs slightly. He watches dust caught in the air, falling through rays of sun. His alarm is blaring. It's the third time his

phone has gone off. The other three times didn't wake him.

The time on his phone makes him jump a little.

Running out the door with a protein bar after five minutes of hurriedly getting dressed, he hopes his chronically late manager arrives later than him again.

Chris notices his hands trembling as he gets off the elevator on the fourth floor. He doesn't know if it's caffeine or nerves. He walks through the first set of glass double doors into the breakroom, past a sleek corporate logo, a tasteful and well maintained topiary peeking out from behind it, continuing through the double doors that lead to his section of the cubicle farm.

'Break'

He scans for his manager as he comes into the expanse of cubicles, the pit in his stomach fades. He pauses for a second to fiddle with the badge on his hip, a nervous tic. It's not there. This is against company policy. Chris digs through his bag and feels for a thin laminate pouch and keychain. He pulls it out, clips it onto a belt loop. He eyes the emergency exit, a utilitarian blemish on the otherwise modern office finish.

As he walks through the cubicles he makes eye contact with her. They both smile and wave.

"Hey Emm" he says, she says hi back. When she had come out, the name felt weird in his mouth, "Emma", but now it had become so routine that he felt comfortable playing with its form.

There's a neon yellow piece of paper in the ID pouch on Emma's hip covering a majority of the identifying information on her badge: Her deadname, or as the company liked to put it in correspondence, her "legal name", printed next to it a five year old photo of her from when she started, a beard growing in an attempt to compensate for the youth still in her face. Chris looks at this, at his own ID on his hip, the pouch sliding into an irregular position as he sits in the cubicle across from her.

He wishes he saw someone else on this badge sometimes; all he sees is an aging man from 7 years ago, smiling, eager, no mortgage burying him, no awareness of the anxiety ridden nights this job would cause him. He wants to say something to Emma as he looks at her badge again, but the words escape him. He swivels into position at his desk and stares at the login screen on his computer.

Their manager, Dave, arrives. He tries to stir up some fanfare, greeting people, asking about the kids, if they're working hard (or hardly

working!). His hair is always so well maintained that it makes Emma a little mad. A trimmed mustache paired with a coifed pompadour and undercut reminiscent of mid 2010s hipsterdom.

A few weeks ago, during a conversation over drinks after work, Emma and Chris are ripping into Dave.

"how much time do you think he spends on his hair" she says, throwing back some beer.

"too much, I don't know how he holds his job."

They laugh a little, they stare off.

"what a prick" Emma says, looking back at Chris.

He exhales heavily through his nose. He looks at her.

"Yeah, I'll drink to that."

"Alright, everyone!" Dave claps his hands "It's standup time."

A small team of people come out from the chest high cubicle walls, they huddle around a whiteboard with hundreds of post-it notes. Someone reaches out and moves one between a demarcated boundary drawn onto the whiteboard itself.

"Ah, Brandon, you got that done, excellent"

"Yeah." Brandon looks at Dave, beaming.

"Why don't we start with you?"

Brandon lists various details about his past day of work, the top level bullet points. Someone else does the same, another person. Emma lies about it all, she's been spending a lot of time listening to music and drinking coffee and staring out the office's floor-to-ceiling glass windows. She doesn't say "I don't give a fuck about any of this" during any of these meetings, even though she really wants to. After her Chris starts giving his update.

"You still don't have that done, Chris?" Dave interrupts.

"Well, yeah, yeah, I will it's jus-

"Emma could you help him out with that one?"

"Yeah, sure" She smiles at Chris. He winces out a malformed attempt at a smile back.

"I want this done before Friday, ok? That retreat is really gonna slow us down." Dave's blue eyes are intense next to his silver hair.

"got it yeah" Chris mumbles, he trails off and doesn't wrap up his update. There's a weighty pause before the next team member goes.

They eventually reach the end of 'standup'.

"And everyone, remember, Bill's coming today. He's gonna give us all a little to be excited about before the retreat!"

"When does he get in?" Brandon asks.

Dave says it's sometime in the afternoon, people are shuffling back to their computers.

In an empty cubicle, on an unused desk, there's an orchid Brandon had brought in along with some succulents. The robust succulents are thriving, but the petals of the orchid are mostly brown, some with a splash of fading purple. Every time a petal falls off, a piece of Brandon seems to fall off too. He still waters it. He jokes about it, that it's gonna come back, it's hard to know how serious he is. Emma looks at the orchid before she sits down, she wishes one of the petals would fall off in this moment, floating down to the floor, zig-zagging on invisible currents of air, it would be poetic. Instead it stays static, the petals attached, she looks at Brandon already immersed in his work. Overhead the air conditioner kicks on, the exposed ductwork letting out a slight rumble. She shrinks her arms into her sides and pulls her hands into the sleeves of her hoodie, the rumbling sending a chill down her back. Cold air brushes past her face.

Emma and Chris sit behind the gold plaque with Chris's name on it, huddled around his monitor. Half of the screen is a mess of code, the other half an app they are constantly reloading. Chris's hair is mussed, it seems like he hasn't showered in a couple days. Emma looks over at him, she knows that last deadline crunch hit him hard, he's probably still recovering.

Chris points at some line of code, says something technical, Emma interrupts.

"Are you ok, man?"

"What?"

"Like are you doing ok?"

"Yeah, yea- well ok, things have been a little rough, I think Michelle is mad at me about that last deadline still."

Emma's mind snaps back a week and a half, 8pm, a discarded pizza box on some unused desk. The office is empty. Chris is struggling with some code again, she's helping him. It seems like he wants to end every sentence with "I'm going to fucking kill myself", in her head Emma is saying something similar after every sentence. It was very important to "the end user" and Dave that the UI Rules functionality be finished and pushed out in an update the next day.

"Yeah, that fucking sucked, you saved us on that though, for sure." says Emma.

"Are you kidding? You were the one who fixed that `itemViewStore` thing" `itemViewStore` rolls off Chris's tongue like it's the name of a kid or a beloved pet.

Emma smiles, says thank you, she's very flattered, she points at the screen, says something technical about the code.

"Ah yeah" says Chris, his hands hovering above the keyboard, "how would you do that?" he draws away from these words as he looks at Emma, she sees something in his eyes beyond exhaustion. They both try their best to smile. An hour later they move the ticket on the whiteboard.

Chris is thinking about his mortgage, his wife. They'd bought a nice place a couple years ago, expecting a raise that never came. Dave saying he had "failed to meet expectations repeatedly". His wife, Michelle, is a teacher.

Michelle and Chris are sitting at their kitchen table.

"I knew we should have waited for that rate drop" says Michelle holding a piece of paper in her hand, it's been folded 3 times to fit into an envelope, it has an amount of money on it that her and Chris can barely afford to put together every month.

The house is beautiful, spacious, only blocks away from a train stop. It was old enough that there were the usual maintenance problems that came with age, creaking stairs, bursting pipes too antiquated and strange to find adequate replacements for, they'll have to replace the whole system. There's a tiny stained glass window on the stairs, on a landing, the light going through it tinted all sorts of exciting shades. Chris is looking at the sunlight on the floor of the landing, red and green and blue, he doesn't know what to say. Since they had moved in it had felt like the house had become its own character in their relationship, sitting with them on the couch, creaking in the wind, leaning into them on its deteriorating foundations. He remembers when he was twenty-two and in a squat, hanging with a bunch of guys who would "never sell out". Michelle is holding a pen with the company's logo on it, looking at it Chris wonders where all the time went.

There's escalating talk in the office chatroom about a lunch event today, Bill might be there. They're all headed to a new hip bistro a couple blocks away, it elicits comments about the "up and coming" neighborhood the office is in. This lunch is on the company says the office manager. People react with the confetti emoji, the thumbs up emoji, Emma uses the fire emoji, Chris follows her lead and also fire reacts the message. 11:59am a laptop snaps shut, Emma looks over, it's Dave. She snaps her laptop shut. Dave looks over at the sound, makes eye contact with Emma, he glances at the team, all of them now also shutting their laptops.

"Alright, we ready for lunch?" Dave says, loudly.

"You know it!" says Brandon.

The bistro they go to is undeniably hip, chic, it serves some sort of fusion cuisine, the cocktails are expensive, the waiter is clearly the type of person who would never associate with tech types if it were not necessary for their job. The tech types seem to enjoy pretending they fit into this aesthetic in a way that is authentic, that they would hang out with the waiter, people make overly familiar comments and jokes towards them. They make overly familiar comments and jokes with each other.

The courtyard they're in has red brick walls on all sides, the bricks seem like they're from some part of our collective subconscious, the platonic ideals of a brick. There are trellises wrapped in vines propped up against the walls. Two of the trellises frame a mural of a local rapper who is now making radio hits. Trays of \$20 appetizers start pouring out of the kitchen to the table. Someone is loudly carrying on about a property they own in the "south side".

"It's super cheap down there!"

"oh, really?"

"yeah! I've already made back the down payment. It's a little annoying though, you don't get a lot of high quality tenants on the south side." The man saying this is white, turning red in the slight heat. He's got a high and tight haircut and a polo on. More people in the office can tell you where he went to college than his name, he graduated 20 years ago. He continues on about his working class tenants. Chris makes a note in his head to complain to Emma about this guy later.

Emma timidly dips a pretzel in some mustard and eats it. Chris is talking about getting a second beer with someone next to him, he wonders if it's appropriate on a business lunch, the person he's talking to says "yolo" about this. Emma asks the waiter for a beer for herself. Chris has that second beer and a third one. The office has all had enough to drink that there are a few people loosening up a little more than is polite for a work function.

"I saw someone smoking crack on the red line the other day" is being said at one of the long stretches of tables.

"Oh no, kids are so hard sometimes, I understand where you're coming from!" at the other.

The conversations all start to run together in between overpriced and underwhelming dishes: Yeah so I caught her sneaking out a couple times, it's crazy what people think they can get away with, like it isn't public transit, I was looking at the company policy on this the

other day, yeah but I just can't stay mad at her, which you know, it's eased my mind a little bit, and I'd just think we could stop the homeless from being on the subway, just arrest them you know? I'm so excited for the retreat! that's so sweet, how would you know they're homeless? Kids really are so hard sometimes! well you know, you'd just know. Where's Bill?

The main conference room in the office is evocative of a college classroom, a nice college classroom, the type the engineering programs have. Everyone is crowded in for Bill, some people are standing in the back, unable to get a seat. There are two projectors hanging from the ceiling, pointed at a wall of expensive looking whiteboards. The color scheme of the room is modern, grey and dull. The door towards the front of the room swings open, it's Bill.

Bill's hair is similar to Dave's, the same striking silver, well maintained, but out of touch with the latest trends in hair styling, and he uses a lot more gel. He's wearing a t shirt with the company logo and a sports jacket, a tight fitting pair of jeans. He's holding a plain white bottle in his right hand, he takes a drink before speaking, an expensive watch pokes out from the sleeve of his jacket. He wipes his mouth.

"How is everybody?"

"good, Bill!" says Brandon, some other colleagues let out tepid greetings.

"oh come on, how is everybody!"

The room claps, someone shouts a little too loud. Brandon says "good, Bill!" again but this time no one really hears him amongst the rest of the crowd.

"there we go! Yeah!" Bill puts his bottle down to clap. He picks the bottle back up and drinks from it, he tilts his head back, closes his eyes, it feels like it is bringing him some sort of sexual pleasure to finish the drink. He tosses the bottle into the garbage.

"Sorry about that." He looks out at the crowd, "So, as you may know, there's a retreat tomorrow."

there's a smattering of unexpected applause.

"Yes, yes, it's exciting. I'm looking forward to getting to know you all a little better when we go upstate! Just a second" Bill leans into the ear of the office manager, whispers something, he stops, the office manager leaves the room. He looks at Emma. Locking eyes with him, she sees something empty, something missing. He continues to scan the crowd.

"You, what's your name?" he says, pointing at Brandon.

"I'm Brandon Cooper, sir!"

"Ah I like your attitude, kid!"

Brandon beams.

Bill continues, "Now, Brandon, do you know what the problem is with the world"

Brandon stammers, he's having trouble forming a sentence.

"That's ok, it's a hard question." Bill smiles, his dead eyes land on Emma again "The problem with this world is that we don't center ourselves. We spend all this time, all these days, all our lives, worried about everything but ourselves. We tell ourselves it's because we want to help, because we want to do good, because we are kind. I think this is untrue. I think it is because there is something wrong with us, something deep down that says we are not worthy of ourselves."

Brandon has started beaming again. The room is silent.

"And selfishly we try to escape ourselves, we look for ways to spend time doing anything but live in our own head, staring down what we are: human, flawed, imperfect. Well this weekend, we will see we can be so much more! This retreat is going to help everyone here so immensely."

A silence lingers, people are looking at each other, Brandon starts a clap that washes over the room. A good portion of the crowd are still inebriated from lunch. Bill leaves and passes off the presentation to some no name middle manager who fills in logistical details and answers questions. After the meeting ends at 3pm most of the office clocks out early, leaving for home drunk and sleepy.

Emma's studio apartment was expensive but she still hadn't furnished it. A laptop on a cheap particle-wood desk lined against a wall, a cheap chair in front of it. A foam mattress-in-a-box is laid out on the floor, the sheets have come off of one corner. The setting sun is pouring through two large windows. The distant rattle of a commuter train is audible.

When she gets home she heads straight for the bed and lays down, not bothering to fix the sheet coming undone. She tries to sleep but can't. She stares at the ceiling. She stares at her windows, 23 stories high. Sometimes she wishes they would open all the way, wide enough for her to fit through.

In the dark she browses twitter.

She gets bored of twitter and pulls out a fifth of vodka from her kitchen cupboard. She drinks until she's hammered, the retreat crosses her mind a few times, she's decided she's not going.

fuck it, let them fire me

Sitting on the bus upstate with Chris, Emma feels like a coward. She adjusts her feet and kicks a rotting orange peel on the floor of the bus.

"fuck" she says.

"what is it?" asks Chris.

She points at the decayed peel. Mold has sprouted all over it. Chris scans the bus.

It's a nice bus, plush seats lined with leather. Consoles with lights and an air conditioner above them like some sort of airline. Cornfields and windbreaks pass by in the background. He spots a trash can, goes over, grabs it and scoops the orange peel into it. Emma thanks him, he says no problem.

An hour later they pull into the campground, it's already night. There's a ring of wood cabins in the distance, cut into a clearing in the forest the grounds occupy. Nearby there's a larger building, it's the mess hall says Dave, he reads out Cabin assignments. The cabins are mostly divided by team, Chris, Emma, and Brandon get assigned one together. After he finishes reading off the list, Dave tells everyone that it's a little late so they're short on time, they'll have to improvise on dinner, which will be in an hour. On the way in there had been a stark white facility just inside of the property. Emma tells Brandon and Chris that she'll meet them at dinner, she's going to go for a walk.

Brandon and Chris make their way across the campground to the cabin. Cicadas buzzing in the surrounding woods, the sky black, dotted with light. Chris's shoes are sinking slightly into muddy grass as he walks.

"Wow." Brandon has stopped in place and is looking up.

"What?" asks Chris.

"I've just never seen the stars like this I guess."

"Really?" Chris stops walking too.

They're both looking now.

"yeah, or at least I guess I just don't remember ever seeing them like this."

Out here you can see not just the stars, but the star dust that makes up the milky way, a light purple hue saturating the background. They stand still for a second. The cicadas continue on.

Emma had packed light, just a small backpack, currently slung over her shoulder as she meanders towards the industrial building she had seen earlier.

She eventually gets to an entrance to the facility, and peeks

through a thin window on a door. It seems to be some sort of food processing plant, white plastic bottles are strewn everywhere. There's a large fixture in the center, she can't make sense of it. She imagines it's very loud when it's up and running. A conveyer belt a little over the width of a human body leads into an opening in this fixture. There's an overwhelming smell of ammonia. She tries the door but it's locked. She can't make sense of anything it feels like. Pulling out her phone she checks the time and begins to head back.

She passes through a spot of rough terrain, knotted roots poking out from the mud, Emma trips. Mud lines her shirt and her knee scrapes against a rock. She looks down at her knee, now skinned, a dermal layer missing, flaps of it still hanging on around the edges of the bloody red mark in the center of her kneecap. She does the best job she can of getting the mud off and makes her way to the mess hall for dinner.

In the mess hall middle managers are handing out meal replacement shakes of some sort. Emma recognizes the bottle as the one Bill had drunk from at that meeting. She says something about this to Chris. They both take a drink. It's meaty, hearty, kind of gross, but covered up with sugar and cocoa, it tastes like a bad milkshake. The liquid itself is brown with a few larger specks of red throughout. They wonder if chocolate is the only flavor.

Their cabin is sparse. In the corner is a stack of white buckets next to an old wooden chair, three cots sit in a row like they're in a barracks of some sort. Brandon, Chris and Emma are all sleeping. There's small windows on 3 of the walls, they don't open. The door is firm and closes tightly in a way that Emma finds satisfying. Overhead there's a large vent of some sort, Chris had made some comment on it, how strange it was, Emma couldn't figure it out, Brandon said it was probably a "nature thing".

Late in the night the vent starts to hiss, this wakes Chris, who sits there, awake. He decides to go for a walk and gets out of bed. The door won't open, like there's some deadbolt holding it back. He jiggles the doorknob a little, no luck. He starts to feel faint, and pieces something together but he's not sure what. He shakes Emma.

"What?" says Emma, half asleep, she's having a hard time forming words.

"I think there's a carbon monoxide leak or something" Chris points at the vent.

Emma doesn't want to be awake, she doesn't want to deal with

this, she sits up and feels lightheaded and ill. Chris might be right. She really doesn't want to deal with this. They try to wake Brandon but he seems to be out cold. They keep trying the door, and something like panic starts to set in.

"We need to get out of here."

"yeah."

Emma looks at the window above her bed, she grabs the chair. There's a loud crash as it makes its way through the two panes of glass. She uses one of the legs to clear out the shards on the bottom.

"We should get Brandon out of here." says Chris

"oh, yeah, we should"

They roll him out of bed, onto the floor with a thud, his arms seem stiff. Emma climbs through the window and they start to slide him through. His back catches on a shard Emma was unable to clear, it tears through his collared shirt, rips through his skin, his blood feels warm on Emma's hand and she recoils.

"Oh I think he's been cut" she says

"Fuck"

There's a rustling in the woods, from the direction of the facility. Emma guides Brandon's body to the ground as Someone emerges from the forest.

"Hey guys!" He says, he's walking fast towards them.

"Bill?" says Chris, halfway out the window.

"Is Brandon ok?" Bill points at Brandon. Emma looks down.

She looks back at Bill, holding a gun. She cant make sense of it, the hunk of metal in his hand.

BANG

Chris collapses.

Emma rushes Bill, knocks him to the ground. The gun flies out of his hand, into the grass, sinking in the mud.

"Fuck you!" says Bill, scrambling for the weapon with Emma. Emma knees Bill which stuns him, she grabs the gun, it's heavier than she thought. She stands slowly, keeping the gun on Bill.

"Come on Emma now lets be reasonable" says Bill, stepping towards her, she steps away. She looks into his eyes, they're cold, black, but there's a detached amusement in them.

"Shoot the fucker!" Chris shouts, in pain, clutching his stomach.

Bill's eyes come to life, something like fear.

BANG

The recoil startles Emma, the violence of action. Bill crumples over.

BANG BANG BANG

She puts three more bullets in his body. She steps towards it.

BANG BANG BANG CLICK

She drops the gun. Her hands are shaking. Bill's smartwatch, poking out of his sleeve again, makes a strange noise. Emma makes her way over to Chris. She kneels next to him.

"are you ok?" Chris is having a hard time getting the words out.

"I should be asking you that" says Emma, smiling

Chris coughs up blood trying to speak.

"Chris, I'm so sorry." Emma can feel tears, his warm blood as she puts her head on his chest.

"It's ok" he runs his hand through her hair

An alarm goes off in the distance, from the direction of the facility.

"I think you need to get out of here."

"No, no" she looks at the wound in his stomach.

"Emm."

They embrace, she squeezes him as hard as she can.

"You need to leave" he says, letting go. She's still clinging on. She can feel him losing control of his body.

Eventually she lets go too, she sits back.

She stands up.

"I love you, Chris"

Chris smiles.

There's shouting in the woods.

"You need to run"

She looks at Chris one last time and takes off through the campgrounds, into the trees. She goes until her body can't carry her, until everything hurts.

She stops 50 yards from the highway, and looks up at the stars through the canopy, the purple streak through the sky; she thinks of the petals on Brandon's orchid, of Chris, dead in that field.

She puts her hands on her hips and bends over, catching her breath. It feels strange to not have her ID on. She pictures Chris fidgeting with his. In the background a car flies by with a dopplered woosh. A breeze rolls over her, leaves skitter along the ground.

She crosses the last 50 yards and sticks her thumb out, headed anywhere.

did it hurt

you are running through
my head again and
aren't you tired?

-

would that work
on you, would that
make me enough,
and does it hurt?
to fall like this,
into a ghost and
onto the floor
all the way
from heaven

5am

my eyes are swollen
there are bags under
them and I am in
a strange city and the
light in this bathroom
is weird and I'm wondering if
I even have a home
or anyone who gives
a fuck about me
and I don't like my answers

foothills

the hills roll into each other
roll into larger hills into mountains
out here
and we all laugh at a joke about
how it's beautiful but
we would still be trans
and they don't really let
people like us live out here

and that factory killed that forest
until industry left this place
that building wasn't a pile of rubble before
and the sun rolls behind the hills
behind the mountains
spilling red into the sky as we pull
out of this town
and into
those same hills

they really don't let
people like us live out here

the terrain is collapsing into itself
and the surrounding forest is growing dense
and the town is collapsing into it
that building wasn't rubble before

here, there

"the perfect place" is scratched into this railing
and someone scratched
an arrow under it
and then they scratched
"is right here"

and I'm not a kid
anymore, I haven't been
for a long time, and I'm looking
at the skyline of this city
and thinking about home,
I'm not sure there ever was one

-
the perfect place
is right here, and
management has removed
this graffiti
or maybe I just can't find it
the city is drowning
in orange and clouds
slowly drifting to the southeast
it's so obscenely beautiful
a clock tower lights up in the foreground
a moped passes by, spewing exhaust
and the noise of an engine

the orange is turning to red
as I write this
and think about home
and if it's not right here



maine

I still remember the first time I saw you on the train platform in biddeford. It wasn't love at first sight so much as deciding I would love you. You were pretty, smoking. You smiled when you saw me.

She has brown hair, would hate being described, funny, smart, gets the stuff in between the big stuff. Made me feel human.

I said I love you that weekend without meaning it, just to hear it, how it sounded. I grew to mean it. She never did.

I can't really remember the weather there anymore, hot days, cold nights, but none of the specifics.

The town is mostly nothing, a restaurant or two, a church or three, a department store where she worked. I had rented a place across the river running through the heart of the town, dividing rich from poor.

That river was gorgeous. I wish I had kissed you when we stood in front of it.

On the train platform, waiting to go home, I saw a cigarette butt that I recognized as yours. I wrote you a poem about it. It wasn't good.

My apartment felt empty when I got back.
Eventually you were there.

27 club

Kurt Cobain croons “and I love her”
through my headphones. I’m not sure
if it can be considered crooning, what
Kurt Cobain does
My headphones pick up the sound of the
environment and use the latest in
noise canceling technology to
cancel it out
I make eye contact with a man
across from me, my eyes snap to the
roof of the car, the little crevice where the ads live
Kurt Cobain continues to croon
or whatever
I hate how these seats face
each other, this always happens
Make \$30 an hour with the NYPD
an ad in a foreign language
some government PSA of some sort
it looks like
Wearing a \$300 dress, that’s Kubi
what is kubi
does it matter
I scan the car,
people swaying in rhythm with the tracks
ding the NYPD would like
to remind you, if you see something,
say something in the lobby of the hotel
where you held me like that for the last time.
There was a soldier with a long gun
talking to a cop
I had not really seen a gun like that before
up close
it didn’t seem real pointed at the marble
and leather and occasionally flagging
the desk and ankles of
the security guy at the hotel
The person holding it looked like
a kid
I remember crying about Sophie Scholl,
just reading her wikipedia

page, about how she died, what
she said before the nazis hung
her, and how moving it was
and how she was only a kid
I put the song on repeat
Kurt Cobain
or can call I him Kurt
continues to croon to me

We went to a musical about Sophie Scholl
and her comrades and it was like that
movie where they make a musical about
hitler that's supposed to be awful
but instead of being secretly good this
play was just awful, the whole thing
was about Donald Trump it felt like,
wishing Death to one president doesn't
seem like enough, Death to every president,
Death to everything? Maybe just the bad stuff,
Death to america, but honestly what's
with all this
death and violence stuff, it's about love

If I'm being honest
I'm not sure what any of it is about
ding the NYPD wants to remind
you we have the right, the right, to
search your bag on the subway at
any time for any reason and you
know who we're mostly doing
this to and does this make anyone
feel safe? crooning,
 Bright are the stars that shine
 Dark is the sky
Kurt Cobain, Kurt, is saying this
into an 8 track tape recorder in the 90s
and someone in the 2010s will take this
tape and digitize it and distribute it
and it will play through my headphones
over what feels like a threat from
the NYPD and he continues, I know
this love of mine, will never die, and I'm

thinking about you and I in that hotel
and I love her, and I love her,
and I love her
it feels like some tape recorder somewhere
is skipping

across the atlantic

sitting on the edge of lake michigan
it seems like an ocean, the scale of it
all creeping beyond my understanding, and
we're sitting on the concrete steps
next to the bike trail next
to the aids garden,
five minutes later a bike cop goes
past scanning for the homeless and destitute,
you feel like there is some grand insult in this

but the lake is so vast and
such a pure blue,
like some rothko painting
where he mixed egg yolks and pigments and
unnamed oddities together to make something beautiful

navy pier juts out to the south
and that feels like an insult of sorts too
but it's distant and the lake goes on and on

you feel the nip of the fall day and you
can only imagine how cold the water is

-

the horizon is buffering a different
shade of blue against the water, the
blue eventually turning
black, and you're shivering
I offer you my coat and you say no
you'd rather just go home, and as
we walk back, this
lake seems like an ocean

2am in the living room

seeing the tears in your eyes
and hearing a crack in your
wavering voice
as I told you that
I am not sure that
I want to live,
I felt that pain, and
I realized that
I didn't want to leave you

-

and this life is so short
and strange and I can't
make sense of anything, sometimes
it feels like it has all slipped
through my hands
and broken apart at my feet,
I looked into your eyes
and you were there
and I felt that pain
and I didn't want to leave

departing stamford

I am on a train
to a place I have never been
and she never loved me
or at least she
never felt “anything”
and I'm not sure of
the implications there

-

and soon we will, probably
not speak for months
and then years, probably
and I will look at
some shitty energy drink
or something dumb
in some awful place
and I will think about her
and all the times I said I love you

we are pulling away from
another station
and I am thinking about
all of that time
and all of those words
I don't feel anything
I don't feel anything, and
it feels like a prayer

-

the next stop is bridgeport
the doors won't all open
she didn't feel anything
make sure to find a conductor
or they won't let you off

5

TODAY IS
5/22/2025 7:00 AM



after a downpour

it rained the last two days
in this place I just moved,
this city

and you seem so small
it all does

and there's drops of dew on grass
intermingling with
the leftover muddy rainwater
I'm hoping it doesn't
rain on me here

-

and I realize I'm not thinking of you
until I read this back
before I write more

I don't love you anymore
or I don't know what I feel
it's all so small it's hard to make out
it rained the last two days
I didn't think of you

dog off leash in park

yesterday a man yanked
his dog by the collar away
from me and walked down
the row of benches to a
woman who was so beautiful
and his dog ran up to her
and oh so sorry, this feels
like some sort of movie ha ha

I think you should be put
down, you creep motherfucker

-

do you want to get coffee sometime
please tell me I'm beautiful
so I can tell you I'm a lesbian
and that you should be put down
but take a girl out to dinner first
sorry I'm still working on my coy
giggle, and my facial hair is probably
offputting, can you at least
lie to me or something
you creep motherfucker,
I could love you



approximating

I'm having a hard time
understanding anything
the words I'm using feel like
the bottom has fallen out
the syllables all seperating
into vowels and consonants
and subvoclaizations
or maybe nothing,
and I don't know what
there is to say or do
or anything or if I even
would want to or why
I'm here in this spot with these
things and these people
who seem just as confused
in their own way

I'm stumbling through
something and it feels
like living
in its own way
until the bottom falls out
and I'm on the floor
in this mess

is this anything

I am looking at
something that
I have forgotten
the shape of
and I am telling myself
that I should remember
this something I am
looking at,
because it is
beautiful and
I feel like
this means more
than what
this is,
do you see
what I am
saying

frankly,

I had a coworker who loved saying
"can I be frank" as a way to
cushion some of the harder things he had to say
I'd always say of course, and he wouldn't
smile, or bullshit me, he'd look somewhere
to gather his thoughts and then he'd say
whatever hard thing he had to say

and that this is still what I remember
about him feels silly to me
it feels like we always remember the
things in between the bigger things
more vividly than the bigger things

he was kind and honest, he quit
one day and as we walked to his
bus stop like we did most days

he changed his demeanor slightly
he talked about how hard life
was but how he still had people
he loved and don't get him wrong
this shit is hard
we meandered
and lost focus and talked about
odds and ends and things that didn't matter
but it felt human and good even though
we had probably lost sight of the big stuff

every time I think of him, I think of
that last walk together
it was the middle of winter, so it was already dark
he turns to me and tilts his head, there's
a train passing by overhead that we wait for,
he says can I be frank and I say of course
and there's light twinkling everywhere
on this winter night,
he says something
about an old apartment and dust and I don't
remember the whole thing,

I smiled and felt human and the
big windows on the old meat plants
were dotted with irregular stars,
streetlamps, and passing cars, and
the occasional flickering stop light
it was cold and dark and the lights
were bouncing off and spreading across
every surface they could reach
and my friend said some more
and he asked to be frank a few more times
and, can I be frank?
I don't know what I was feeling if not
some sort of love

