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It was mid-afternoon, but the classroom was dark. The soft sounds of children’s snores filled the air, with an occasional sniffle from someone crying. That someone was me. I could taste the salt from my tears running down my face. All the other kindergarten kids were napping, and I was the only one left at the table with my bowl full of soup. I hated soup. My teacher Mr. White, who seemed like a giant to me, kept coming over to check on me, with his deep trombone like voice saying the same thing each time he came over. “Finish up your lunch, then you can nap.” He sounded more sinister than sincere.

The same scene took place weekly. Before I would see it, I would smell it, that repugnant aroma, and know exactly what we were having for lunch. It would fill the air like a thick cloud of smoke and my eyes would immediately start to water. I dreaded whenever soup was being served for lunch and everyone knew this. My classmates would giggle and say, “Eat your soup, Derick” in the singsong way that kids do. I would just sit there while everyone ate their soup, staring into my red bowl of brown oily liquid full of beige orbs of dough and flimsy vegetables. Now here I was once again, sitting at the table with my back to the rest of the napping class, in the dark, crying, sounding like a baby goat, hoping someone would save me. But no one ever did. I had to eat the soup.

I despised cold soup, but I had to eat it quickly. Sleep was starting to come over me like a warm blanket. If I closed my eyes before the soup was finished, slap! I would get the ruler to my hand (this was Catholic school in the 80’s). A spanking was worse than eating soup. I held my nose to escape the nauseating baby diaper smell of the soup. I shoved spoonfuls of vile liquid and soggy vegetables into my mouth. No chewing, just swallowing. After that came the hard part, the dumplings. It was always around this time that Mr. White would appear like an evil teacher genie and say, “Eat it all. Then you can nap.”

The dumplings looked like deflated basketballs, dety but somehow not any softer after sitting in liquid. In order to consume them, I would have to break them into pieces. They were hard to chew and tasted worse than they looked. With each bite, soup squeezed out them like spoiled bread flavored starbursts. To this day, I can’t understand how something made out of dough could be so tough, like jerky.

After I was finally done, I would show Mr. White my bowl, and he would allow me to lie down. We slept on cots made of some type of funny plastic thread that was supposed to be easily wiped down if a youngster had an accident. Of course, since I was the last one to lie down, I had the most out of shape cot. It smelled like bleach and urine combined. As soon as I lay on it, I sunk in like quicksand. But after my weekly soup standoff, I didn’t care—I just wanted to close my heavy eyes and nap like the rest of the class. I would lie there smacking my mouth, trying desperately to get the gross taste of that sewer water off my tongue and before I knew it, I would fall asleep.

After I got out of kindergarten, I vowed never to eat soup again. I am now 28 years soup-free. However, I did learn something that year, one of my first life lessons and probably one of the most valuable. In life there will be things that you have to do that you won’t necessarily like, but you have to do them anyway. The world does not care if you cry and complain about how much you don’t like it, it’s still going to give you soup. And at those moments you’re going to have to hold your nose and eat the soup. Only then can you take your nap.
allows us to work from the ground up.

i am watching them march,
jeans loose upon their legs,
skin stretched tight across their backs—
scowls clinging to their faces
as if anything less than a grimace
would account for peace.

“the right of the people is to be
secure in their persons.”
these are the words of our founding fathers
dressed head to toe in white privilege,
without forgiveness, yielding sickness,
demanding a new world
out of one that has long been created.

“the right of the people is to be
secure in their persons.”
but how can you expect this nation
to stand with their feet firmly on the ground
when there’s a virus running rampant—
symptoms include knocking knees,
being up in arms, and...dismantling statues?
how can you expect security when there are
people being shot here,
when there are people being banned here,
when there are thousands of men screaming
that they shall not be replaced when any
would be ashamed even to be in their space?

in other terms, let me tell you about the tree:
there’s a beautiful oak with
its roots buried beneath the country;
she is tall and blooming and proud.
but have you ever heard of the trumpet vine?
it seethes and warps and curls its way around the trunk
it will blare its brassy tune until the world collapses around its figure,
using the magnificent oak for support,
taking and taking and taking
all while killing her in process.

“no person shall be...deprived of life,” they say
but we’ve become lost in the law,
stuck to the foundation instead of being
willing to build.
progress is not just repeating yourself.
we may come back to our rudiments
but never to begin again.
our buildings have fallen before.
new york city has been brought aground,
but we must learn to take in the view.
behold the scaffold—
persevere beyond preceding generations
of evolution and learning
so we may see clearest.

it’s easier to say we the people.
it’s easier to preach love
than to feel it on the bottom of
your aching feet,
at the tips of your finger,
even when they’re curled into fists.

there are people forcing us to remember
something we could never forget.
when our president is emboldening hate,
we’re left wondering
how we could have possibly ended up here,
instead of looking how far we’ve come.
Portrait in Dread Marble
EMMANUEL CARRILLO

Sullen cloth grey, please smother me tender,
For later today I shall paint myself gold.
Aching bones lay strewn fresh in surrender,
Awaiting what may be a heart beating cold.

Peel my dead skin, see chalky lead vines grow,
Mold hesitant grin at their familiar hue.
Rest your soft chin on me as faint words flow
Above the deep din that has trapped all but few.

Clumsy feet trip, one fall so eternal,
Beneath a sun drip where the grass grows azure.
Tangled hands grip when a pale nocturnal
Light brushes your lip, bringing forth a soft cure.
Mr. Liaison was a mousy man with round spectacles who liked to call meetings “important.” Everyone thought that’s what managers are supposed to do. He would arrange muffins for morale and coffee for productivity. And everyone was invited; it was all-inclusive and well known that everyone should be treated as equal no matter what the topic of discussion was. Even the janitor would have received everyone’s attention if he ever decided to say anything. Mr. Liaison’s secretary, who went by her first name, Yuda, was always by his side, because that’s what secretaries are supposed to do. And the whole office came to the meetings, because that’s what employees are supposed to do and also, because free muffins.

The truth was that there was not anything in the office that particularly needed doing. For a couple of years, the work had either been accomplished by new software or overseas workers. Everyone in the office had assumed they would lose their jobs long ago, but by some bizarre act the office stayed open. Secretly, the key was Mr. Liaison. As the manager, he should have filled out the forms that corporate sent him to designate individuals who would be redundant. But he didn’t and instead, he stopped liaising with corporate at all. His aging computer was dusty and the phones were always quiet, and everyone in the office got the impression that someone had hired Mr. Liaison because of his last name, rather than any real commitment to his position as a liaison.

One day, the phone rang. From the boxy phone on Mr. Liaison’s desk, the sound was flung through the glass wall of his office, across the large rectangular space and around the three long rows of cubicles. Inside, a score of workers in their gray cubicles awoke from their work and fell into the open door. His right hand was in the process of pulling out the key, his left holding a folder with blank pieces of paper concealing a disc with the latest real-time strategy videogame. Watching this morning unfold was probably going to be very tragic and also unfold was probably going to be very tragic and also.

Mr. Liaison was reclining in his desk chair reading the daily paper, spectacles on the end of his nose, when it happened. Just a moment before, he had picked up his mug of coffee and was presently holding it to his lips. He was so surprised by the digital two-tone undulation—the abruptness of it, the sheer impossibility!—that he catapulted forward from his reclined position, first pouring coffee down his chest and then sloshing it in his face as he stopped dead, upright. The mug still held out in front of him, and the paper in his lap, Mr. Liaison sat rigid staring at the phone, wondering whether the ring had rung in real life or only in his mind. After what seemed like ages, the ring resumed. It was really rings! Mr. Liaison all but threw his mug on the desk as he rushed to shut the door and blinds of his office. He wasn’t going to answer—he needed time to think.

Outside, Jay thought about getting back in the car. He still had one foot by the pedals but he also had one foot on the pavement in between the carriage and the open door. His right hand was in the process of pulling out the key, his left holding a folder with blank pieces of paper concealing a disc with the latest real-time strategy videogame. Watching this morning unfold was probably going to be very tragic and also unfold was probably going to be very tragic and also.

So now it was Jay and Yuda, lightly yet urgently knocking on the glass door of Mr. Liaison’s office. The corner of his window shade lifted up, revealing a rather terrified eye, and Mr. Liaison let them in hurriedly, shutting the door behind them. Today, there was no pretense of normality.

“What should we do?” asked Mr. Liaison in a hushed tone. He pointed a coffee-stained finger at the dusty intercom and fiddling with the plugs and switches on the back. The machine gave a small robotic whistle and its green light flickered on. The group looked at each other anxiously, even hungrily, and waved over the other employees as they craned to listen. Ever since the work orders had been replicated for the third time at the beginning of this year, tensions had been somewhat higher, and many wondered who would be to blame when they were inevitably exposed. Now, with Mr. Liaison’s distraught, stained appearance and this secret conference in his office, there was blood in the water.

They heard Mr. Liaison clear his throat, and the phone pick up from the receiver. A single tone played twice, as he presumably hit the message button, and then turned on speaker. There was a plastic click of the phone being set back down. “One new message. To listen to this message, press one. To—”

“Hi, Mr. Liaison? This is Alfred Hooper from HR in the head corporate office. I’m calling with some—”

There was a sound of papers shuffling, “some rather interesting news. If you could give me a call back as soon as possible, it’s very important that we get in touch. Please call me, my number—”

At this point the group gathered outside was whispering hurriedly. Shhh! Someone signaled that audio was coming.

Mr. Liaison, hearing his own urgent voice reflected in those of his conspirators, realized that they all needed to calm down. He pushed the wet leather chair away from his desk, sitting against its edge, removing his glasses and cleaning them with a cloth from his pocket. Taking a deep breath, he set the spectacles back on his nose and said, “I guess we’d better have a listen, then,” and reached to play the message on speaker.

In the rows of cubicles, the employees had been talking nonsense. There was a group by the break room and a pack in the meeting room, all whispering and glancing nervously in each other’s direction. A few more enterprising workers had approached Yuda’s desk outside of Mr. Liaison’s office. The small troop was examining the intercom which allowed Yuda to converse secretarily with Mr. Liaison about calls and appointments that had long since ceased.

“I doubt it even works anymore,” one said to the other. “Here, let me try!” urged the next, grabbing at the dusty intercom and fiddling with the plugs and switches on the back. The machine gave a small robotic whine and its green light flickered on. The group looked at each other anxiously, even hungrily, and waved over the other employees as they craned to listen. Ever since the work orders had been replicated for the third time at the beginning of this year, tensions had been somewhat higher, and many wondered who would be to blame when they were inevitably exposed. Now, with Mr. Liaison’s distraught, stained appearance and this secret conference in his office, there was blood in the water.

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At this point the group gathered outside was whispering hurriedly. Shhh! Someone signaled that audio was coming.
“Oh, hi! Mr. Liaison. Well, I’m glad you called. See, we’re running a new program that handles complaints among our offices.” Alfred’s voice flowed coolly over speaker and out of the intercom. Mr. Liaison held his breath, as did everyone else who was listening. “Mr. Liaison, are you there?”

“Yes! Yes. I’m here. Has there been, um, a complaint?”

“Well that’s what I wanted to call about. No, actually. In fact, none in two years! I see here that in the past, the record of office 243 was substantially worse. In fact, your office was responsible for a large portion of client complaints, but, ahm, well! Not anymore! You see, this represents the biggest turn-around of any branch in the company and so I am calling to commend you, Mr. Liaison!”

“Oh, Jesus!” Mr. Liaison could not help but exclaim in surprise and relief. Jay was struggling to conceal his chortles of amusement despite his remaining embarrassment and Yuda was rolling her eyes. Outside, the group was glancing amongst themselves in amazement. There were whispers inquiring about the raise this would entail. Mr. Liaison was their leader!

“Sorry! Mr. Liaison!” Alfred was confused.

“Ahem! Alfred, thank you! It’s been a tremendous effort, but I couldn’t be happier with the work of all the staff here in office 243.”

“Well, I should think so! I’ll have one of program organizers call your secretary with the specifics. But this should entail a nice bonus for you and your employees this year.”

“Very good, Alfred. Thank you!” Mr. Liaison managed to get out.

“No problem. Goodbye, Mr. Liaison.” And the line clicked. Mr. Liaison collapsed with shrunken flow coolly over speaker and out of the intercom. Mr. Liaison held his breath, as did everyone else who was listening. “Mr. Liaison, are you there?”

“Ah!” Alfred, thank you! It’s been a tremendous effort, but I couldn’t be happier with the work of all the staff here in office 243.”

“Very good, Alfred. Thank you!” Mr. Liaison managed to get out.

“No problem. Goodbye, Mr. Liaison.” And the line clicked. Mr. Liaison collapsed with shrunken shoulders into the armchair in the corner of his office, sighing heavily. Suddenly, a cheer went up outside. Jay opened the blinds to the sight of his colleagues high-fiving and laughing and pointing at him and Yuda—and clapping for Mr. Liaison.

Jesus. All Jay wanted was a full day of real-time strategy videogame.

Mr. Liaison got up brightly. “Mandatory meeting! Time to get out the muffins!”

Race-ism

OMAR PADILLA

From slavery to enslaving us in prison, this plantation, a new caste system, the United States created a constitution where all men were equal, but labeled anyone that was not white beneath them. The new Jim Crow: slowly, but surely, America is going back to when whites were lynching blacks. Trump criticized Barack for being the first president who’s black, diverting the real issues, like our own people dying in Iraq and white police killing unarmed blacks. For 400 years of slavery, can’t get nothing back. They promised 40 acres and a mule. They want us to keep our mouths shut and continue to play the fool, while the opioid epidemic affected white America. What you want us to do?

Now you panic, since it happen to you. Do you even care about what we been through? No jail time and you want to be treated, while the police raid our neighborhoods, locking up blacks, thinking it’s cool.

Look at how we get mistreated. Some have the complexion for the connection; others born into a system defeated. Judged on the color of our skin, it feel impossible to win. In the end, regardless how anyone feel, black is beautiful—and that’s keeping it real.
In Defense of Muzak
HENRY SHEERAN

It has to do with not being postmodern anymore, because it makes too much sense. Say you're reading DFW at Gate C12 at LGA on a Thurs, and the oily music slips like melting butter out of the perforated metal portal and it's really better than most pop music because it holds itself back, it has space and weight and movement and is slick like unwashed hair or tile-wax, and for all these reasons and more it makes sense against the super-secure humming of the walls, so much sense, in fact, that I get mad whenever it's cut off by the brutal and doubly-loud announcement of delay, which is of course ripe with throat clear and the listing of numbers but isn't that part of the fun? We have ascended and progressed!

November 2017

Untitled
TEJAN RAHIM

Medium format film (Portra 800)
Two Wheels
MIGUEL VOLAR
Photograph, C-print, 24 x 24

Fulton Street
WENKAI WANG
Digital photograph; Leica M8, 50mm f/2
Canyon Lights
JIMI STINE

APSC-II digital camera sensor (DSLR)

Sprawl
ELAINE LO

Charcoal and ink on paper, 2.5 ft x 3.5 ft
What is America?
RAYVON GORDON

What is America?
A shimmering speck of hope.
A shot of opportunity submerged under a bundle of disappointment,
where the strong-willed tree-top and
the weak never grow.
Overtaken by toxins, derailing a dark road,
America is the people looking at the picture from all angles,
capturing collective moments through
smoke and mirrors,
materializing its worth and value through
sheer love and remote perfection.
Its life reveals, reverses, and reveals in us.
America announces freedom; we’re all enfranchised,
But we suppress in order to capitalize.
Fatigued honorable men garbed in fatigues,
armed and refined from nightmares overseas

where dreams take pride,
while we’re too choked from tears our crying babies can’t conceive,
the life fashionably promised,
yet buried under weeds.
Once confronted,
America bobs and weaves.
Pledging lesser than less,
of what once was a remarkable creed.

Though in allegiance we bleed,
we ambitiously retrieve lost treasures
as past suffering ancestors tilled on their bending knees.

Bodysong
HARRY FINK

PNG
Seasons of Love
KYLIE MCMANUS
Digitally edited graphite drawing, 12 x 9 inches

Oyêh Times Three
SALLY YÈRIN OH
Oil pastel, acrylic, and thread on vellum, 24 x 18 inches
Just keep drowning and washing up on shore
Soon broken waves will grow tired of you fracturing their sleep
They will call out to their sleeping brethren who rest away from land
to stuff you into heaven like the ocean fills dying lungs

Lungs
ARJUN PARIKH

Piss-tol
SCOUT ZABINSKI

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12 inches
A Spectator Looks Over an Avenue  
KAYLA HERRERA-DAYA  
Silver gelatin print

Life in Product  
KAYLA HERRERA-DAYA  
Silver gelatin print

Banal Block  
KAYLA HERRERA-DAYA  
Silver gelatin print

Lonely Crowd  
KAYLA HERRERA-DAYA  
Silver gelatin print
He reminded me of Ché.
His dark hair, fair skin, dark heavy pocketed vests,
dark purple textured berets and worn out cuffed pants.
A young Ché.
A crystal hung from his neck as we quickly strolled through
125th Street.
A young man who was on a wave length.
A displaced namesaken wave length.
Never here nor there. Somewhere, some place without a trace.
A nomad.

There I sat, hearing songs of La Lupe as his arms were crossed.
Guarded and bombarded with sleep deprivation as he sat adjacent to me.
Somewhere between these lines, the drums of Cuba played,
which had nothing to do with Ché, but everything to do with Cuba.
La Lupe effortlessly and soulfully sung from a whisper to a yell.

I thought, What in the hell am I doing here?
I fretted from smiling.
There I was:
Lips dry. Lips painted and stained red. Lips peeling as teeth stained yellow.
My waist was wrapped with a leather strap that was swaddled two to three times, tightly cinching my ribs.
I sat gasping for air. As my lower belly spilled out. I readjusted my belt, nervously.

Somewhere between this mix, the drums of West Africa and the blaring hums of Cuba called my name. I
looked like 1959. Although we were in New York City, somewhere in the Lower East Side, on subway lines
that stood on the Guggenheim.

I felt and looked foolish. I looked like 1959 lost in time. I was giddy inside, and masked it with a serious
mood and loads of questions to mention and reveal how cultured I was. But I was not. I was nothing like
what I wanted to appear as. I was nothing but a bore. We sat on a bench as I would watch you yawn and
spawn your finger rings that glistened on each knuckle. I was not interesting, or engaging. He reminded
me of Ché.
“McCarthy!” yelled the Rikers Island C.O.
I walked to the desk, knowing there was usually only one reason the C.O. would have called me to the desk at 8:30 am. I approached the lugubrious, big-bellied officer and he said, “Pack up.”

“Where am I going?”
“I don’t know,” he replied, but I knew.

About two weeks before, after I left the visit room, three other inmates and I were simultaneously strip searched by one C.O. During this search, a small balloon fell from one of the guys and landed near me. The C.O. did not see it fall but discovered it as we left the search area. The balloon that the C.O. recovered contained an ounce of marijuana and, since he found it close to where I was standing, he said it belonged to me. I was given a misbehavior report and subsequently found guilty and sentenced to ninety days in solitary confinement, what we called “the box.”

“They packing you up, scrap?” said Killa, a thirty-year-old guy from Brooklyn whom I had become friends with in the dormitory. He had dreads, a scar down his right eye, and an aura of “I seen it all, done it all.” Killa was locked up for a gun charge and had been sitting in Rikers for a year and a half. He was a persistent felon trying to get a cop-out for three years, but the D.A. wasn’t going lower than seven.

I had only been at Rikers for three months and I was already going to the box. I was nervous and didn’t want to go.

“You want to know a trick not to go to the box, though?” Killa continued.
“How?” I said anxiously. I’d try anything to not go.
“You’ve got to boof a battery,” Killa said. “That way you can’t clear the mag. And if you can’t clear the mag, the box won’t accept you.”

At Rikers, inmates tend to hide small amounts of drugs or razors in their rectums, which is called boofing. They do this because the C.O.s are not allowed to give us a cavity search, so once something is up there, it can remain undetected.

“McCarthy! Are you ready!” yelled the C.O. “They’ll be here to pick you up in fifteen minutes.”

I was going to try Killa’s idea; anything was worth a shot to keep me from going to the box. I had never boofed before in the streets, but I had learned how to do it in jail. It was a must-have skill if you were going to carry contraband. At first I thought it was going to be painful, but it’s not. It just feels a little uncomfortable when it’s in you, like you have to take a shit.

I grabbed a battery, put it in a finger of a plastic glove, put Vaseline on it, went into the bathroom and boofed it. I then quickly packed all my property and gave all the homies my food.

“If I’m not back by dinner, then it didn’t work,” I told them and left with the C.O. who came to escort me to intake.

I sat in intake for two and a half hours, until the bus that would take me to the box arrived. When I boarded the bus, there were two other guys on it. The bus stopped at two more buildings and picked up three more people; it was six of us all heading to the box.

“I just left the box last month,” said a fat, dark-skinned young kid, around nineteen years old, with nappy cornrow braids.

“You know they stay with late night in there,” remarked another young kid. Tall and light-skinned,
he was maybe nineteen or twenty years old, with a full beard. “Late night” is what we call marijuana.

“My weight is up; I’m gonna get my whip ASAP.”

[302x79]I noticed this wasn’t the regular mag that I was used to seeing. This one was different. As I walked through it, it rang. beep, beep, beep, beep, and red lights lit up on the sides.

“Walk through it again,” she said, as another C.O. came over to observe.

“Beep, beep, beep, beep.” This time I noticed that the lights would only light up on the area where it detected metal, which was my waist.

“Do his records say he has metal in him?” Smith asked Hernandez, who already was looking through my folder.

“Nope. He’s got something in his ass,” replied Hernandez. “Put him in the isolation cell and let him sit there for however long it takes him to get it out.”

I felt embarrassed as Smith escorted me five feet away to a cell with just a window and a toilet with a screen in it to prevent anything solid from going down it. I figured that the C.O.s were bluffing and wouldn’t let me sit in here long, so I just waited and looked out the window. When I saw the bus that had brought me there drive off, I walked through the mag again. I was placed back in the cell with the property I was allowed to keep: three pairs of socks, boxers and t-shirts, one pair of basketball shorts, shower slippers, some cosmetics, and a few magazines.

C.O. Cole in and handcuffed me to the railing on the tier. He was of average height, a stocky, bald, black man in his thirties. He went through my property, separating what I could take inside the box with me from the rest. He said, “I’m surprised the C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised. The C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised.”

“Walk through the mag,” she said. As another C.O. came over to observe.

“Hey, you little bitch!”

As soon as we walked through the door, it hit me like a punch in the face—the stagnant aroma of marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised the C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised. The C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised.

“Name?” C.O. Hernandez asked me. He was a tall, lanky, Spanish man in his late forties who spoke with a thick accent. You could tell, by the way he spoke to the C.O. who had driven us there, that he was a maser.

“McCarthy,” I replied, and he looked through the folder he had in his hand until he found mine with my picture on it.

“Book and case number?”

“You’re going to clear the mag, now!” Hernandez asked me and nodded his head. He brought me out and I walked through the mag. This time, I knew there weren’t any flashing lights or beeping. He perfunctorily walked me up to the second tier and put me in another empty cell exactly like the one I had just been in, only this time the toilet didn’t have a screen in it. He left and came back with a tray of food for me: brown rice with ground beef in it, soggy vegetables, a yellow mush that I couldn’t decipher, and four slices of bread. The whole tray had a repugnant odor to it. I ate only the bread, which left a funny aftertaste in my mouth. Then I pushed the tray out of the bottom of the door and fell asleep on the floor.

I awoke to someone yelling. I got up and looked out the cell door window. There were five C.O.s dressed in protective riot gear. They had helmets with eye visors on them and protective padding on their chests, knees, elbows, and shins. One of the C.O.s had a shield and another one had a video camera. He was taping two officers who were dragging an inmate. The inmate was handcuffed and his feet were shackled. His limp body appeared to be dead as one C.O. dragged him by each arm, leaving behind streaks of blood on the floor.

“You ain’t so fucking tough now,” one of the C.O.s said, infuriated that the lifeless body wasn’t responding. The C.O. punched the inmate in the side of the head. “Huh, you little bitch!”

All I could do is watch in astonishment until they were out of my range of view. I shook my head and sat on the toilet. Suddenly, my cell door opened. I jumped to my feet, thinking that I would be assaulted next just for being a witness. C.O. Cole came in and handcuffed me to the railing on the tier. He was of average height, a stocky, bald, black man in his thirties. He went through my property, separating what I could take inside the box with me from the rest. He said, “I’m surprised the C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised. The C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised.

“Floor card is a small card with my picture, book and case number, birthday, arresting charge, bail amount, classification, and any other important information that an escorting officer would need to know: for example, spitter, cuff to the front, double escort, slips out of cuffs. This is assessed by various incidents that an inmate may have had. The housing unit doors opened.

As soon as we walked through the door, it hit me like a punch in the face—the stagnant aroma of marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised the C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised. The C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised. The C.O. working the floor didn’t catch a contact high every day. It looked just like fresh marijuana, cigarettes, and wicks burning. I’m surprised.

He’s going to thirty bix bell,” C.O. Mendez, the officer in charge of the floor, told Cole. Replacing the c’s in a word and the s in six with b’s is how the Bloods spoke as a form of disrespect toward their rival gang, the Crips. Being around and talking to time there we were allowed to wear personal clothes in the box; instead, we had to wear a brown one-piece jumper whenever we came out of our cells. I was allowed to keep: three pairs of socks, boxers and t-shirts, one pair of basketball shorts, shower slippers, some cosmetics, and a few magazines. Cole then gave me a brown jumper and a small white towel, two white sheets and a pillowcase wrapped up in a battered blanket.

“Put on the jumper and get ready to leave,” he said. We weren’t allowed to wear personal clothes in the box; instead, we had to wear a brown one-piece jumper whenever we came out of our cells to go anywhere. I took off my clothes, put on the jumper, and wrapped my property in a sheet. He handcuffed me.

I didn’t know what to expect as we walked down the steps toward a large glass door. The only thing I knew about the box was that it was the mecca of gang activity. Gangs probably made up 80% of the box population. If you weren’t a gang member going in, you’d likely be one coming out.

The door opened and we approached a giant bubble, an area where all the information on the inmates in the unit is kept and where a C.O. who controls the opening and closing of all the cells sits. This area is enclosed with glass on all sides; hence the name “bubble.” Cole handed my floor card through a small slot to the C.O. inside. A floor card is a small card with my picture, book and case number, birthday, arresting charge, bail amount, classification, and any other important information that an escorting officer would need to know: for example, spitter, cuff to the front, double escort, slips out of cuffs. This is assessed by various incidents that an inmate may have had. The housing unit doors opened.

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They have the same friends we had and were faced with the same obstacles we faced growing up. A lot of them had even dabbled in criminal activity but had been fortunate to never get caught, and later got jobs as Correction Officers. They understand what we're going through and how easily it could have been them.

Before we could start walking, Mendez cupped his hands around his mouth and roared, “Dead man walking!”

Suddenly, the whole house erupted: “Who dat, who dat, who dat!” People were banging on their doors and staring out their windows. “Who dat” is a term used by the Bloods to state that someone is an enemy or a fake Blood and will be assaulted.

Since I was a member of the Bloods at that time, I yelled back “Never who dat!” while being escorted up the stairs to my cell. “Blood up! Blood up!”

Cole placed me in my cell and signaled to the C.O. in the bubble to close the cell’s electronic door. Once it was closed, he un-cuffed me through the slot. The cell was different from the one in intake. It had a desk that was part of the wall. The bed was in a rounded rectangular hole carved out of the wall by the window; it was just a flat plastic mattress without a pillow. What was the worst part was the smell. It smelled like a combination of rotting food and wet skin. There was a toilet and a sink with a scratched-up, foggy mirror made of metal, not glass. The window had been closed, so my cell was hot and stuffy. The homies started yelling up to me, talking from under or the side of their cell doors. They all introduced themselves to me. To my surprise, I already knew a few of them.

Mendez came to my cell door and said, “What’s poppin’?”

“That 5.” I replied. The Bloods used certain numbers to represent themselves: 5, 21, 59, and 31. These numbers were considered to always be poppin’, “All right, you need the phone?”

“Yeah.”

He pulled a grey flat phone from his pocket, plugged it into a phone jack on the side of my cell, and slid it under my door.

“You only get one six minute call a day,” he told me, in an affable manner.

I made my phone call and started to unpack my stuff. While I was unpacking the S.P.A. (Suicide Prevention Aide) came to my door and slid some magazines and contraband all day long. The S.P.A. was a short, fat guy in his late thirties with a receding hairline and waves in his hair. He wore black fingerless mittens; I would later find out this was to prevent him from passing things for us, but it didn’t work.

“That’s from Ado,” he said and left. Ado was one of the homies I knew from Queens. He was in his mid-twenties, light-skinned, chubby, and had a chipped tooth. He was locked up on an attempted murder charge. The last time I had seen him was at court and I had forgotten that he had been in the box for the past eleven months. Inside the magazines was a stick (a small marijuana cigarette), and a note from Ado that read, “Yo Bali. If u need anything else holla @ me. I got u home. I’m in 1B cell. Use my whip a the night. I’ll get u our locker tomorrow.”

I put my ear buds on and lit the stick.

When you first arrive in the box, you must do something called “getting your weight up”, which is essentially having clout. In the beginning, the C.O.s don’t know you, so they’ll shit on you; this is called “not having your weight up.” You’ll come out last for the showers or you might not get one; you’ll get the phone last; you won’t get to do paperwork; or your food tray might contain a smaller portion or the food will be cold; plus a lot of other disrespectful things that might happen when you deal with a C.O. Getting your weight up is not hard to do but it is not easy either; everyone in the box does not have their weight up, and some never will. Getting your weight up has to do with a combination of things.

First, the guys who have been in the box the longest or those who already have their weight up must jack you. “Jack” is a term that we use to express that we accept and respect another person and/or their actions: “I jack the way he is handling that.” The C.O.s must see that other people with their weight up jack you. The S.P.A. and other inmates must jack you. You must make small talk with other C.O.s so that they can jack you also. Secondly, you must not tolerate any disrespect from anyone. Any aggression or disrespect toward you from another inmate or C.O. must be handled swiftly and possibly with violence. You can accomplish this in a few days, a few weeks, or a few months, but once you are jacked, you must start to get your weight up. There are other ways to get your weight up, but these are the most common.

There are different levels of having your weight up: the first level is having your weight up a little bit, meaning that you can do little things like getting the phone next if certain people aren’t waiting for it, or maybe a little extra food on your tray, and a few other small things. This level is normally achieved by association, hanging with someone with their weight up. The second level is having your weight halfway up: you can pick what shower you want to go into; the S.P.A. comes when you call him; you might be given some drugs if they’re in the housing unit; you’ll get extra food on your tray, unless the food is short; you’ll be able to have your whip. The third level is having your weight all the way up, which means that you do whatever you want. The C.O.s come when you call them; you can pick when and what shower you’ll get in. You’ll always have extra food; even if it’s short, they’ll call the mess hall to get you more. You get the phone exactly when you want it; they’ll make you up to go to rec; you’ll go to the barbershop every week. When they search your cell, they will not take anything from you; the S.P.A. will cook for you. Everyone, even captains, stop at your cell to talk to you and you receive some of every drug in that come into the house. Basically, you run the place.

About two weeks had passed and little by little, I had started to get my weight up. I started being able to pick the phone I wanted to use. I would get a little extra food on my tray and I wouldn’t get skipped for the phone. The C.O.s were even starting to jack me.

C.O. Barsdale worked the 3-11 shift when Mendez was off. He was a tall, dark-skinned, husky man in his late thirties with 360 waves in his hair. He carried himself with a don’t-care-about-inmates attitude. He had been on vacation for two weeks and now he was back. He had seen me when I first came to the box, but had not around to witness me getting my weight up.

It was dinner time and Barsdale, along with the S.P.A., were giving out the food trays on the top tier. Barsdale raised his hand to open my slot and the S.P.A. handed him a tray with four pieces of fish and mashed potatoes on it.

“Take those fish off the tray,” Barsdale told the S.P.A. You’re only supposed to get two pieces of fish, but since my weight was up a little bit now, I was getting four. The S.P.A. took the extra fish off my tray.

“Barsdale, what are you doing?” I said to him, but he ignored me and placed my tray on the slot.

“Barsdale, you violating,” I said again with anger in my voice.

“You’re only supposed to get two pieces of fish, but since my weight was up a little bit now, I was getting four. The S.P.A. took the extra fish off my tray.”

“Barsdale, what are you doing?” I said to him, but he ignored me and placed my tray on the slot.

“Barsdale, you violating,” I said again with anger in my voice.

“Are you gonna take the tray or not?” Barsdale asked me, as if he was doing nothing wrong.

I took my tray and sat on my bed, fuming mad. How dare he disrespect me, I thought. I got on my vent and called down to eleven cell. In the box, a
group of four cells are connected by a heating vent; two on the top tier and two on the bottom tier. On the top tier, I was connected to 37 cell, which had an older man named O.T. in it. On the bottom tier, I was connected to eleven and twelve cell. In the eleven cell was the big homie named F.D. A big homie is someone with a high ranking in the Blood gang. F.D. stood for Father Divine; he was a forty-something-year-old fat man with grey hair and a receding hairline, but he was a gangster. F.D. had been sentenced to a three to six in 1999, but continued to receive additional sentences for crimes he committed while in jail: various assault charges, weapon possession charges, drug possession charges. He was in the box because when he had come down from an upstate jail to Rikers for Family Court, he had cut a Crip. Twelve cell was empty.

"Yo, F.D.!” I yelled into the vent.

"What’s up, lil’ bro?” he replied.

"The C.O. deaded me on my extra fish, homie.”

"You didn’t get your tray, scrap?”

"Nah. I got my shit but Barsdale tells the s.p.a. to take the extra fish off my tray. He violated, yo.”

"You got your food though, right?”

"Yeah, but that’s not the point. Barsdale violated.”

"Don’t worry about that, lil’ homie, I’m a talk to him when he comes down here.”

"All right.”

I was still upset. I walked around my cell thinking about it. O.T. could get back at Barsdale, I wanted to fight him. How was I going to fight Barsdale? I wondered. I can’t get out my cell this time of night. Maybe I should splash him. (Splash) is when you throw a liquid, normally urine, on someone. This is commonly done by filling an empty toothpaste tube with the liquid, positioning it under your door and when the C.O. walks by on the bottom tier, you stomp on it, causing it to spray out on them. Finally, I knew what I was going to do.

I sat in my cell and waited patiently until Barsdale finally came around and asked me if I wanted the phone.

"Yeah, let me get it,” I said. Barsdale plugged the phone in on the side of my cell door and slid the phone underneath my door. I made my call and waited for him to come back.

"You done with the phone?” Barsdale asked me.

"You’re not getting that back,” I said calmly.

"What! Let me get that phone.”

"You want this phone, you have to come in here and get it.”

Barsdale walked away from my cell and yelled, “This fuckin’ lil’ bitch in 30 bix bell is holding the phone, so the s.p.a. is dead for the night.”

Immediately, homies started yelling up to me to find out why I was holding the phone.

"Yo BAli, what’s up?” Ado yelled up to me. “Why you sticking up the phone, Blood?” “Sticking up” is a term that we use whenever you hold onto something or refuse to leave an area, for instance, “sticking up the shower.”

"Barsdale violated.” I yelled back from under my cell door.

"What’d he do?”

"He violated my food and tried to play me.”

"All right, homie. You know they gonna come in your cell to get that phone.”

"Yeah, I know. I want Barsdale to come in and get it,” I said. “Yo Barsdale! Suit up!”

C.O.s were not allowed to ever open any cell or area where an inmate was, unless that inmate was cuffed. Whenever an inmate refuses to get cuffed and the C.O.s has to physically remove him or an object out of his cell or area, they bring in what is called an extraction team: a group of randomly chosen C.O.s are the biggest ones on duty. They wear helmets and riot gear paddings and carried wooden batons. They enter the area, subdue the inmate, cuff his hands, shackles his legs and drag him out. All of this is done while another C.O. records the incident with a video camera for security purposes. Of course, while they’re extracting the inmate, they’re also beating the shit out of him—but somehow the video footage is always unsteady and never shows that part.

I put on my brown jumper on, tied my sneakers tight and waited for the extraction team, hoping that Barsdale would be on it. Suddenly, I heard someone calling me from the tier.

"Bali! Bali!” I looked out my cell door and saw Money A, across the tier, in 47 cell with his slot open. Barsdale opened his slot to give him something and Money A stuck his arm out of it so Barsdale couldn’t close it. Money A was a brown-skinned homie, in his early twenties. He had gold and diamond caps on his front teeth and wore diamond earrings in both ears. We had started talking on our way to court the previous week and we just clicked. He was from Far Rockaway, Queens and was flash: my type of guy.

"We sticking it up, Blood. They take you, they gonna come and get me too,” Money A yelled and then started laughing.

"You guys really think that y’all tough, right. Just don’t bitch up when we come in there,” Barsdale yelled up to both of us from the bottom tier.

"Suck my dick, Barsdale!” I yelled down to him.

He made his way up to my cell door and said, “All this for some fish?” He looked more annoyed than angry.

"Yup, you played yourself,” I said.

"I should open this door and whup your ass.”

"Yeah do that. Come in here and I’m going to fuck you up,” I said with my one-hundred-and-twenty-pound frame shaking from all the adrenaline.

"You gonna give me that phone,” Barsdale said and grabbed the phone cord outside of my door. I grabbed the phone and pulled it back. The cord popped. We both yelled obscenities at each other until he laughed at me and walked away. F.D. heard it and was flashy: my type of guy.

"You gonna give me that phone,” Barsdale said, pointing to the tray the s.p.a. was holding.

"Nah, Hayes, ain’t about no fish,” I explained. “This is about respect and Barsdale doesn’t respect me.”

"What now?” he asked.

"I want him to suit up, come in here, and fight me.”

"Listen, young man, if we come in there it won’t end well,” F.D. warned.

"I don’t care. Tell Barsdale to suit up, come in here first, and I bet you I’ll knock his head off.”

Hayes shook his head in disappointment and walked away with the s.p.a. I got back on the vent and told F.D. what had happened.

It was getting late and the extraction team hadn’t shown up yet, but we knew they were coming because out of bad left the housing unit and another C.O. had taken his place. The house was as quiet as a library when suddenly someone yelled, “Here they come!” I jumped up and ran to my cell door. The whole house erupted and everyone was banging on their doors and yelling at the extraction team.

I saw five C.O.s and a captain come into the housing unit wearing riot gear. One C.O. had a shield, one had a video camera, and three of them had batons. The
The captain was carrying handcuffs and leg shackles. Two of the ones with batons were probably the biggest C.O.s I had ever seen at that time. The third C.O., I’m sure, was Barsdale, but I couldn’t see his face because he had the visor down on his helmet. I could tell that the captain was Hayes; the person holding the video camera was a lady I didn’t know. They marched up the stairs to Money A’s cell and aligned themselves on the right side of the door. Hayes stood in front of the cell, positioning the shield in front of him.

“I’m giving you a direct order to remove the towel from your slot and allow me to close it,” said Hayes. At that moment, a splash of liquid came out of the cell’s slot and hit the shield. Hayes moved to the side and handed the shield to another C.O., who positioned himself in front of the cell. The shield then started to spark and blue streaks of electricity danced across it. I was shocked (no pun intended) to find out that it was an electric shield and immediately felt scared for Money A. How was he going to fight against electricity?

The C.O.s were positioned to enter the cell one after the other and Hayes was in the back with the camera lady.

“Open up 47,” Hayes said into his walkie talkie. I didn’t know this at the time but, when you get extracted, the key is to try to make it out of the cell before the C.O. with the shield. You could hear the crackling of the electricity. I was shocked. “Who’s inside?,” said Hayes. “F.D.,” someone yelled to the intercom. “Next!” yelled from my cell door.

I waited and waited and nothing happened. It hit eleven o’clock and the lights on the tiers went out. It was over. They weren’t coming to extract me or F.D.

“Yo, F.D.” I called into the vent.

“Yo, F.D.” responded.

“What do you think is going on? They’re not coming to get us?”

“Looks like it.”

I was disappointed. I laid on my bed fully dressed with my sneakers on and slept. Before I knew it, I had fallen asleep.

“Waterfall!” someone yelled to warn the house of what was about to happen. “Waterfall!” is what we call a search. I jumped out of my sleep, forgetting the water on the floor. I splashed my way to the door. It was about eight o’clock in the morning.

“Yo, Bali, get up! They’re coming,” F.D. yelled.

“Yo,” F.D. responded.

“I’m giving you a direct order to remove the vent to warn F.D.” Hayes said into his walkie talkie.

“Next!” I yelled from my cell door. “Next!”

However, I didn’t want to get electrocuted so I had to come up with a plan. I decided to flood my cell; if there was water on the floor, they couldn’t use electricity. I stuffed my towel in my toilet and started flushing until it overflowed onto the floor. I continued to do this until my entire cell floor was flooded. I was ready.

I waited and waited and nothing happened. It hit eleven o’clock and the lights on the tiers went out. It was over. They weren’t coming to extract me or F.D.

“A.C.O.,” I called into the vent.

“F.D.,” I yelled.

“A.C.O.,” I yelled again.

“F.D.,” I yelled one more time. “I heard your door opening then a lot ofussing.”

“Stop resisting! Stop resisting!” There was more fussing for about forty seconds, then F.D. was taken out his cell. I looked out my cell window, but I couldn’t see him. They were coming for me next. I wanted to make them pay for what they did to Money A.

“Next!” yelled from my cell door. “Next!”

I was immediately slammed to the ground in my flooded cell. A knee was on my upper back while my head was being held down. My cell floor contained about two inches of water and with my face in it, I felt like I was drowning.

“Stop resisting! Stop resisting!” the C.O.s yelled, while pulling my hands behind my back in efforts to cuff me. I was struggling to keep my face out of the water and the feeling of drowning caused me to panic. I wasn’t resisting; I couldn’t breathe and my body was reacting on its own because I needed air. Someone was trying to grab my legs, but I was struggling like a seven-year-old boy being forced to take a bath. Somehow, through all of this they managed to cuff both of my hands behind my back. One of the C.O.s then took my left hand and twisted it forward. I felt a crack in my wrist and the pain shot through my entire body. I screamed and my body went limp. At that moment, they shackled my flaccid legs and picked me up. I was soaking wet.

A C.O. held my arm on both sides and they quickly walk-dragged me down the tier toward the steps. My legs were shackled, which prevented me from taking long strides. With each step, the metal shackles jerked around my ankle, causing excruciating pain. It was extremely difficult to walk, let alone quickly, but the C.O.s did not care.

We went down the steps and out the housing unit. We kept walking in silence. I was scared out of my mind. What are they going to do with me? Lord, please don’t let them kill me in here. I can’t die in jail. Not like this.

We finally arrived at the medical unit. They took me into a room with an examining table, propped me on it, and handcuffed my already-handcuffed hands to a wall. I sat there in pain from my wrist and my ankles. I knew what was next, so I braced myself as best I could. The C.O. with the camera had left and it was just me and the three other C.O.s. They took off their helmets and to both my surprise and disappointment, none of them was C.O. Barsdale.

“Look at my uniform,” a light-skinned, husky man with dreads said. “I’m soaked.” He looked down at his clothes, then up at me and punched me in the face. My ears rang out. Another C.O. punched me in the stomach. I hunched over, yanking the cuffs and hurting my already hurt wrist; the pain caused me to sit back up.

“Oh, he’s a tough guy. He wants more,” another C.O. said. He was short and muscular with a low haircut. He swung at my face but I moved and hit his collar bone. He grabbed his baton and hit me in my shin.

“Wronged. The pain from that hit hurt so much that I started to tear up.

“Oh don’t cry now, after you fucked my uniform up. Your mama ain’t here to wipe your tears, bitch,” the other C.O. said. He was a large, bald, white man. He reached back to punch me. I closed my eyes and tried to brace myself, but the captain walked in.

“That’s enough,” he said. “The nurse is about to come in.”

I had never felt so relieved in my life. The nurse entered the room and the C.O.s uncuffed me, so the nurse could examine me. The nurse was a grey-haired West Indian woman in her late fifties; she reminded me of my grandmother a little bit. She examined different parts of my body. When she touched my wrist and shoulder I tensed up.

“We will put you in to get x-rays,” she said in
a caring but nonchalant voice. The three C.O.s remained in the room as she continued to examine me. She asked me a few questions, but none of them were about what had happened to me. I'm sure my injuries were consistent with that of an assault, but I said nothing and she didn't ask.

The C.O.s escorted me to another room where the x-rays were performed on me. After that, I was taken back to the examining room, where the nurse examined my results.

“You have a hairline fracture in your collarbone and wrist,” she said and started to wrap my hand in a plastic half cast with an ace bandage.

“Take these for the pain,” she said and handed the C.O. a bottle of pills.

“Tell sick call if you need more and I will schedule a follow up with a doctor in two weeks,” she said. “Take it easy, Mr. McCarthy, and you'll heal just fine,” as she walked out of the room.

The C.O.s then cuffed me to the front and we left the clinic, this time without the shackles on my legs but still with two C.O.s escorting me. When I got back to the housing unit I was put in forty seven cell. As I was being escorted up the stairs, the whole house erupted in cheers.

“yeeaaaahhhhh! soo woo! soo woo! bbdttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
1. I am me and you are you and you love me. We look good together and I constantly Instagram photos of us with captions that are probably more annoying than cute. I’ve lost at least 17 followers because of this, but we make such an attractive couple that I almost don’t care as much as I say I don’t care. So we grow old together, slowly abandoning every position but missionary and the occasional doggy which makes me feel like the dirty little whore that I once was. You age faster than me and one day, as I wipe the shit off your ass, it occurs to me that I am me and you are you but maybe I didn’t love you as much as I would have liked to.

2. I am me and you are the best version of yourself. A little longer, a little thicker, and a little taller. I’m not good enough but I’m good and sometimes I’m enough, and you don’t realize that your parents hate me, no matter how many times I tell you, until we find out that I can’t get pregnant, and your mom wants grandkids more than she wants your happiness. So we break up. I get a dog, you marry one, and we don’t even hate each other.

3. I am me and you are dead. I don’t believe in life after death.

4. I am you and you are me and you finally learn to appreciate me. I don’t hate you for being better than me, because I am you and you are me, so I know how to make you come. We have two kids and the younger one ends up becoming the President of the United States of America. We make the world a better place because I can make you come.

5. I am a less egotistical version of myself and you are you. When I cheat on you and you get over me much quicker than my dad expected, much quicker than I was ready for, I don’t get obsessed with you just because my head is so far up my own ass that I can’t wrap my mind around the fact that someone like you can fall out of love with a goddamned angel like me.

6. I am me and he is you.

7. I am me, and sometimes when we make love I close my eyes and pretend he is you. But I figure it’s okay because sometimes I also pretend that he is a complete stranger. I make peace with the internal struggles I have to face to get through the day instead of making my shrink rich, and his wife starts doing grocery shopping at Trader Joe’s instead of Whole Foods.

8. I am God and you are an atheist.

9. I am me, and you are far away. Sometimes I look for you in people that I meet, sometimes I still write about you. You are unaware. This is how I like it, this is how I want it to end. With me writing a poem about you, somewhere over the Atlantic. Somewhere post-us.

10. ...
He thought and cursed his henry sheeran.

You Wouldn’t Believe These Simple Tricks

HENRY SHEERAN

CARDI JENNER LIP KIT PORNHUB
SWELL BOTTLE FRANZIC SHAKE
SHACK SHOULD I INVEST IN THIS RELATIONSHIP NAH SWIPE THE FUCK LEFT ON THE TOKYO SUMMIT NETFLIX CAT ON TWITTER LOVE WINE
WASHINGTON HEIGHTS HAMISH WHERE’S MY UBER? DID YOU KNOW THE ONE THING THAT GIRLS LOVE MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE? LOOK AT THESE DOG COSTUMES HERE LOOK LOOK LOOK AT HIM THERE ARE NO MORE BAKERS ONLY CUPCAKERS NO MORE BUTCHERS ONLY BURGERS NO MORE RESIDENTS ONLY TOURISTS NO MORE HOMELANDS ONLY HOTELS TSHSHARER FIRE RUMBLE BEES ARE DYING FROM ASSAULT RIFLE ANTI-SOCIAL SOCIAL WHITE SUPREMACIST CLUB EVEN OUR LIVING PARENTS ARE DEAD TO TAYLOR SWIFT MIRROR WORLD WALT DISNEY AND A DOLPHIN IT LEARNS MERCEDES I HAVE THE BENDS OF ROADS ARE STRAIGHTENING INFINITELY SO WE CAN GET TO WORK FASTER

THEN I TOE SHE WE ARE ALL PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS WELL-VERSED IN COMMUNICATIONS BUT SOON NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO SAY HI AND WE WILL BECOME A PARASITE STATE WHILE THE WORLD MELTS AND RESOLVES INTO A DO YOU LIKE ALLUSIONS PROBABLY NOT BECAUSE FATHER BUZZFEED TELLS US WE ARE ALL ABSOLUTELY DIFFERENT AND EVENTUALLY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SAY HI TO EACH OTHER I MEAN I AM AN INTROVERT RIGHT WELL IS A WORD FILLED WITH INTRO AND IT RUMP IS ANOTHER WORD FOR BUT WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN THE SPEAKER AND POET HAVE MERGED INTO ONE DELICIOUSLY BLAMABLE ENTITY FIVE YEAR PORTFOLIO LONG TERM GOAL WASHINGTON REDSKINS SCALING STANDING DECK START UP SOLDIERS AMERI CAN’T TAKE ANY MORE OF WHAT IT NEEDS NOW PRINT THIS POEM THEN THROW THIS POEM OUT THEN PRINT IT THEN THROW IT OUT AGAIN

The Herng-hunerngh

DAVIS CLOUD

Many years ago, it seems, there lived a poor man called Nikolai Ivanovich Popovovitch to whom events such as this one, extraordinary or otherwise, rarely if ever occurred. Nikolai was a painter of only meager talent and consequently had a difficult time feeding himself and his wife, Irina Popovonvna. A wife of the meaneast sort, Irina often beat poor Nikolai and shouted at him, “Your paintings are awful! Nothing you paint looks like anything it should!” Which was true, except for when Nikolai painted food.

As Nikolai’s career had gone on, and he had grown hungrier and hungrier, he had gotten into the habit of eating those paintings which had gone unsold (nearly all of them). Soon enough, he realized that it was the paintings of delicious foods which tasted hungrier and hungrier, he had gotten into the habit of eating those paintings which had gone unsold (nearly all of them). Soon enough, he realized that it was the paintings of delicious foods which tasted best, and so Nikolai became extremely skilled at painting still life of piroshki, shashlik, beef, cakes, pelmeni, and, most frequently and most deliciously, borscht. These paintings might have sold quite well (an amount neither man could begin to imagine, never mind risk gambling on a swimming race). The race commenced, and though Osip was ahead a length for the first two thirds, in the final stretch Osip pulled ahead and finished first.

“Ah! Nikolai, my friend, it appears you have lost! Shall I come round to collect my winnings in—”

Osip ducked under the water in pain and grabbed his foot, then swam to the riverbank and climbed out. He cradled his wounded foot which was now bleeding quite a lot.

“Pizdec! I cut my foot on a rock! We will have to settle this next week. I need to have my wife stitch this up, I think. Are you finished swimming? Or will you stay longer?”

One morning, Nikolai was swimming in the river that ran through his village with his neighbor and friend, Osip. Though Osip was a known Jew, the two of them had become friends through a shared intimacy with suffering; and their conversations were comprised nearly entirely of complaints hurled at one another, each one trying to prove that he was hungriest, or that he had the worst case of gout, or that his wife had beat him the most that morning.

They often swam together and would race up the river against current, and then float back downstream arguing about who had won before the race began anew. Though Osip was the stronger swimmer of the two, today Nikolai was winning more than usual, and the two friends resolved to have one final race on which they would wager 50,000 rubles (an amount neither man could begin to imagine, never mind risk gambling on a swimming race). The race commenced, and though Nikolai was ahead a half a length for the first two thirds, in the final stretch Osip pulled ahead and finished first.

“The race began anew. Though Osip was the stronger swimmer of the two, today Nikolai was winning more than usual, and the two friends resolved to have one final race on which they would wager 50,000 rubles (an amount neither man could begin to imagine, never mind risk gambling on a swimming race). The race commenced, and though Osip was ahead a half a length for the first two thirds, in the final stretch Osip pulled ahead and finished first.

“Ah! Nikolai, my friend, it appears you have lost! Shall I come round to collect my winnings in—”

Osip ducked under the water in pain and grabbed his foot, then swam to the riverbank and climbed out. He cradled his wounded foot which was now bleeding quite a lot.

“Pizdec! I cut my foot on a rock! We will have to settle this next week. I need to have my wife stitch this up, I think. Are you finished swimming? Or will you stay longer?”

From in the river, Nikolai called back to Osip, “I think, my friend, I shall stay a bit longer. Get well soon so we can race again!”

Osip laughed and limped off to fetch his clothes. Poor Osip, thought Nikolai, but he should have known better than to try to walk in this river!

Nikolai swam for a while longer. When he was finished, he climbed out to look for his clothes, but they were not where he had left them and all along the riverbank they were nowhere to be found.

That scoundrel Osip! He thought and cursed his neighbor. Whatever kind of schoolboy joke is it to take a man’s clothes when he is in a vulnerable position? Now I have no choice but to run home, nude as the day I was born!

Nikolai had no choice but to run home, nude as the day he was born. Cupping his hands over his
started walking. He put his hands in the pockets of his coat to cover his nakedness. You'll catch a horrible cold running about like that, man.”

“Goodness. Can you stand on your own? Are you all right, sir?” The passenger said as he helped Nikolai back onto his feet. “You’ll be late for your carriage.”

“Lord! Lord! Your herng-humerngh, sir! You accidentally gave me yours!” But the carriage was already out of sight.

There was nothing to be done. Nikolai started to walk home again, thinking carefully.

Perhaps, he reasoned, Lord Yevgeny had meant to leave the herng-humerngh in his pocket. The more he thought about it, the more sense it made, actually. Who in their right mind, after all, would give his wife the good news: Heaven had declared that the two of them should never again go hungry!

Nikolai, ashamed by his wife’s words and somewhat offended by what she was implying about his abilities, started to argue with his wife, and tried to convince her, as he had convinced himself, that God had placed the herng-humerngh in his hands.

But Irina would not be reasoned with. She began to beat him and so Nikolai sulked back onto the street, defeated, to find Lord Yevgeny.

He wandered for some time, scouring the village up and down in search of the mysterious nobleman. Such a man, it seemed to him, should hardly have been in a village such as this in the first place. The odds of him returning seemed unlikely at best, especially if he had indeed meant to give Nikolai the herng-humerngh.

He kept his hands in his pockets as he walked, imagining all the possibilities of the herng-humerngh. That foolish woman. She wanted money? What good was money when you had one of these! Perhaps, though, she was right. “Ill gotten treasures have no lasting value, but righteousness delivers from death.” Still, he thought as he passed by a restaurant, one cup of borscht couldn’t hurt. He turned and went in.

The restaurant was nearly pitch-dark, save for a lone candle. What sort of fool runs his kitchen in this blackness? Thought Nikolai. At a table in a far corner sat Osip, sipping from a cup of vodka. Nikolai, angry, remembered that it was Osip who had gotten him run over in the first place.

“Osip! You rascal! You feign injury and then steal my clothes! I was nearly killed because of your stupidity!” Osip looked up from his drink with a confused face. “Nikolai? What are you talking about? I have done no such thing!”

Nikolai was furious. “You expect me to believe that my clothes disappeared on their own? And if your foot was so badly injured, how did you manage to walk to church first in the place? What a cruel joke indeed.”

“What are you speaking of, Kolya? When did such things take place?” Osip said.

“This morning at the river!” Nikolai said, “When I left the water, my clothes had gone missing.”

Osip began to laugh, “But Nikolai, such a story is impossible. I was at church this morning!”

Nikolai didn’t understand why Osip was saying such things. Why would a Jew have been in church? And what reason had he to be spinning such tales?

“But why would you have been in church Osip? And...and what about your foot? You cut yourself on the bottom of the river. That gash must have needed at least a dozen stitches!”

This only made Osip laugh harder. His obnoxious horse laughs filled the dark restaurant as he reached down and took off his shoes. Osip peeled off his socks and held up the soles of his feet for Nikolai to see: nothing!

“Nikolai, my friend! It is Sunday morning! How could I have cut my foot swimming in the river when I was at church...with you! Ah ha ha!”

Nikolai thought, how strange, but I suppose it is Sunday, and if it was in fact Sunday, which it is (Sunday, that is), then there must have been Mass, and a man as pious as myself would most certainly have been there, at church, and if Osip were in fact there at church this morning with me (as I assuredly was), then what reason would a Jew have to be in church if not for his own lack of Jewishness, which certainty is the case, as what else could Osip have been doing in church on a Sunday morning if he had not, in fact, been there that morning in church with me myself, had he not?  

45
Yes, of course, how strange indeed. Then, as that were the case, as it was, why then had he (Nikolai) been out in the first place? He had been looking for someone.

Nikolai put his hands in his pocket and felt the herring-humerngh. Something about the Lord… Yes, of course! He was going to see Father Yevgeny at the church, for a meeting.

“Well, Oisp…” He said over his friend’s laughter. “I would like to stay and have a chat, but I’m going to see Father Yevgeny at the church for a meeting, you see.”

Oisp stood up to shake his friend’s hand, his bare feet on the sticky restaurant floor. “Nikolai, it was quite nice to see you, I hope your meeting goes well with the Father.”

“Yes, I should hope so as well.” Said Nikolai, who nodded, and departed from the lil’ restaurant in the direction of the church.

In the summer months, the journey to the church was nearly twice as long than during the winter, as one would have to walk all the way up the river to cross the village’s only bridge and then back down to the church. Thankfully though, in winter months like these, Nikolai could freely walk across the frozen surface of the water directly to the church.

When he reached the opposite side, Nikolai looked back across the river at the path which had been worn into the snow by that morning’s churchgoers. “Nikolai, it was quite nice to see you, I hope your meeting goes well with the Father.”

He opened the doors. No, they had not been going over the same short section many times, they had been singing and repeating the whole of the Lesser Doxology. Yes, now that he could hear the words, he knew what it was.

Nikolai descended the stairs to the church basement, where the priest’s office was, and knocked on the door.

Father Yevgeny’s familiar voice called for him to enter and, when Nikolai did, it remarked that this was a pleasant surprise.

“Surprise, Father? Did we not have a meeting scheduled at this time?”

Father Yevgeny considered this, but said that they had no such meeting scheduled, to his knowledge, though he had some time to talk if Nikolai would like.

“I would like that very much, Father, though I could hardly say what we should talk about, as I believe that you were the one who requested a meeting with me.”

Father Yevgeny said that actually, as he recalled, it was Nikolai’s wife, Irina, who had arranged the meeting.

“Hmm? Yes…perhaps you’re right. Yes, yes, of course. She wanted me to give you this. Irina hopes that in presenting you with this offering, we might receive a blessing from God.”

Father Yevgeny examined the herring-humerngh that Nikolai had presented to him, but said that he wasn’t sure what use the church would have for something like that.

“Please, Father, if you would only accept it as a token of faith, my wife and I would be very pleased.”

Father Yevgeny chuckled at Nikolai’s blasphemy and said that he had a feeling that if Nikolai were to return home, he might find that the Word of the Lord had provided him with an even more satisfying gift.

“What good is God to a starving man? You claim to speak for God, but have you ever even seen him? Every Sunday, you grow fat on what the congregation puts in the offering bowl, while all I have is this damned herring-humerngh! Good day, Father!”

The choir had stopped singing when they heard Nikolai slam the priest’s door, and they watched in silence as he stomped out of the church without even looking at them.

Furious, Nikolai went back through the village and returned home.

“Kolya!” Irina cried when he came through the door, “Come and see!” She grabbed his hand, smiling, “Not now, woman!” said the still-raging Nikolai, and he smacked her across the face. “I’m going to my studio to prepare dinner! I will not be disturbed!”

He stepped over his wife and went to his studio, a tiny, windowless room the size of a closet, and bolted the door behind him.

Nikolai felt around in the dark studio, blindly running his hands along the canvases which leaned stacked against the walls as he searched for a candle. He flailed his hands out in front of himself, grabbing at the black and empty air.

He cursed his poor foresight. What sort of painter runs his studio in such blackness? Irina banged on the door shouting over and over “Kolya! Kolya! You must come look! Come see!”

Frustrated, hungry, and blind, Nikolai screamed at her to shut up.

He found the candle and struck a match, finally ready to paint. But in the new light, Nikolai could see, to his horror, that there was something terribly wrong.

Though each canvas had once been painstakingly adorned with his bland works of art, it seemed that his passion had all been for naught. Where there had once been two lifetimes’ worth of beautiful paintings of food, there was now nothing! This godforsaken herring-humerngh! It had brought him nothing but misfortune.

Nikolai ripped open the door and screamed at his wife. “Wife! What have you done? My paintings are all blank!” But Irina laughed and, smiling, fed him a spoonful of borscht.

“Husband! It’s a miracle! Do not speak! Just eat!” And goodness! The borscht! The beets soaked smoothly into each taste bud, so smooth that one hardly needed to swallow. Its broth had a distinct and muted sweetness with just the right tangy overtones of a sour cream dollop. The vegetables had nearly dissolved, lovingly wrapping their flavors around the beef with an almost wine-like roundness that filled the palate with an aromatic consummation of nature’s gifts to man and carried across the teeth and down the tongue by a pinch of salt that was made effortlessly soft by sunflower oil that warmed the belly. Shredded purée of beets nestled themselves among the mouth’s crevices, cushioning and gently caressing at regions of flavor and scent which might never have been discovered if not for this graceful stew. Thick (not too thick) cream mingled with salsa, gently lapping at the tip of the tongue, each tiny quiver brought with it the hint of fresh dill and—was that?…Yes, of course it was—just a dash of lemon juice that married the sour cream to the tender carrots. The carrots pushed themselves through the cracks between one’s teeth, refreshing and guiding with a firm but warm hand towards the black pepper, which in turn showed the way back around the smooth and familiar sweetness of the beets, which soaked smoothly into each taste bud. As sweet as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be: borscht without end. Amen.
In the house where my mother lives now, I find small pieces of home everywhere. There is detergent in the laundry room from my grandmother’s house. The instructions are written in a language that I struggle to read. The level of the liquid has not changed since she first moved there, many years ago. I know my mother does not use it, has not used it, will never use it. Maybe there is a level of comfort in seeing it there every time she does the washing, next to the detergents that she actually uses. The ones that have instructions in English.

I came back to visit her one New Years and found the cap sitting next to the bottle, the room smelling like my grandmother’s laundry room. It had only smelled this way one other time. When she had only smelled this way one other time. When my grandmother died, my mother washed the sweater my grandmother had knit for her with that detergent. She wore the sweater when people came to sit shiva. In that yellow sweater, her long hair

...I stick it there in the conversation like a bathtub plug, and then I say it a few more times, with the best enunciation I can, because you cannot enunciate perfectly while sobbing and I’m choosing to enunciate. You cannot have it all. That’s one of the things I’ve learned.

...That kitchen could be split into different worlds, the sounds of home to her beautiful kitchen on the other side of the ocean.

...That kitchen could be split into different worlds, the sounds of home to her beautiful kitchen on the other side of the ocean.
are defined by the vantage point from which they are viewed, and decide that encompasses all jobs. Like mothers, and daughters, like the sleepy John Mayer song lawn knows how to play on guitar. Still, maybe my sitting in the front seat means Snir is not my driver at all. Maybe I am his co-pilot, in which case this is the cockpit, and Gila and Ilanit should sit back and shut up.

"This is supposed to be exhilarating," Gila says with an eye on the speedometer. "I could go fast, but then there’s a risk the car might flip." Snir replies. He looks over at me. "Say something to that."

Ilanit perks up. "Are you trying to start something with my Dana?"

"She's married, Snir," Gila sings songs.

"Risk," I seethe between clenched teeth finally. I don't want to open myself up too much. It's such a small word. It can already slip through the cracks. I think of the stray kitten who goes in and out of our condo’s garden back in Tel Aviv, the way it snakes its way back out again, its inflated tummy tight against the ironwork. There was something painful about watching it go.

I feel very tired remembering the kitten. I turn to Snir:

"Risk. That’s what exhilarating means." Snir relaxes, relieved at my having said something. "We’re supposed to be exhilarating but safe," he explains. "That’s what we actually advertise. So we expect to be exhilarating, but safe."

"Risk," I say, because I realize his name, like the word risk, requires no opening whatsoever, because you can never say the way you can a za’atar seed through the gaps in your teeth. "Who named you?"

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Snir shakes his head. “Exhilaration without risk, remember?” He’s making a joke. We’re joking, us two.

“We decided that was an oxymoron, Snir.”

“What happened to the woman who only had one thing to say, eh? Like Rain Man, eh?” Snir asks and mimics for me: “The Bedouins say a woman’s honor cannot be regained.”

It was true. I had read it in a textbook in high school. I was not a particularly good student. Yitzy Fisher used to give me his notes before exams, and on those nights I would sit before my desk, having sipped a glass of strong Turkish coffee, and stare at Yitzy’s spindly-scowled notes until I could hear the blood buzzing like mosquitoes in my ear and had to abandon the notes entirely, retiring to my bed to lie in silence with the caffeine-intoxicated pulse shooting down my shins. But I remember that phrase, probably because it was the first sentence of a chapter. A Bedouin woman’s honor cannot be regained once lost.

“Nu,” Snir prods, tossing out his cigarette and removing another from the depths of his cargo-pant pockets. “You should go inside. It’s very interesting, the history and everything. The Bedouins love caves. They associate caves with fertility, or something like that.”

I shake my head resolutely, and watch my friends remove another from the depths of his cargo-pant pockets. “Why don’t you ask me why the Bedouins say that, Snir?” I say without looking at him. “Most people would ask.”

Snir tosses out his cigarette. “I never ask.”

I am aware of the bleeding as we head back to the SUV. Snir walks me around to my side and straps on the seat belt. He does the same for Gila and Ilanit, who quiz him about our private conversation by the caves. I am concentrating on the bleeding, on the sense of exit, and I am trying very, very hard to make meaning, from the hour, from the day, from the month. I look up at the sky for a moon, because the Hebrew calendar is a lunar one and I am one, but the sky is of a moonless opacity that only those in the Negev ever know, and I come up empty.

“The stars will come out soon,” Snir says, following my gaze. “You can take a picture when we get out for the drum circle, but these things never photograph well.”

Ilan calls me, and I ignore the call and roll down the window so I can stick my head out like a happy dog. I pity him for having thought to call me. Maybe there was a slender brunette on his singing show and he found her a little too pretty and then felt guilty and called me. Maybe he savored a cigar last night without me at home to comment on the smell, and then thought to call me this morning.

We moved into the condominium a few months ago. When our realtor asked why we were moving, we told him we were expanding our family. I liked saying that. It felt good to be typical, to be a statistic. Ilan chose it for the floor-to-ceiling windows; I chose it for the teenage girl’s bedroom down the hall and the way the realtor patted my stomach without asking when we came to it and said, “Perfect, isn’t it?”

I can’t believe I’m saying this, but we’re on our way to the drum circle. It’s a bumpy drive to the Negev. There’s so much sand here. I can’t believe I’m saying this, but we’re on our way to the drum circle. It’s a bumpy drive to the Negev. There’s so much sand here.

“On our second day there, I woke with a strange dread present within me and padded over to check in the master bathroom. It had happened again. Since then, I’ve slept in the teenage girl’s bedroom across the hall, using the bathroom in there instead. After peeing each morning, I stand to the side before the mascara-streaked full-length mirror and check my concave stomach to see whether the dread has dissipated.

My mother visited me two weeks ago and noted the crusted mascara on the glass. She asked how it never bothered me. I could have said something about the previous girl who had applied it or, Dr. Oster, years ago, about how desperately close she must have been to the mirror, how her dipped eyelashes must have fluttered against the glass like tar-covered insect wings. My mom told me to clean it up, and gave me two thousand shekels, because she loves me.

Ilanit and your girlfriend is named Ilanit?” He asks, a masculine tense. And then in the feminine: “And Ilan loves Dana.”

“Also, you should know Haya Rubin’s son Gilad hanged himself,” my mother said to me, as a warning, as a goodbye, as an I-love-you. My mother says this to me whenever she hears of anyone’s child trying to off himself, and then there is the look she shoots me, admonishing, as if to say I shouldn’t get any ideas.

At night, Ilan comes in and checks on me before he retires to bed. He no longer asks why I don’t come back to our room. When he leaves, I sit still in bed in this teenage girl’s room and pretend her anxieties are mine. I pretend to fret over boys who don’t text me back and calories I may have consumed.

Now, Ilan calls Gila, who informs him that yes, I have my phone. I steal the phone from her. “Hi, motki,” I say. Snir’s ears flick back once more. “The reception in the desert is not very good.”

Snir smirks knowingly. “Oh,” Ilan says. His voice sounds strained, as if he’s genuinely concerned. “But you are having fun. That is good.”

“Yes,” I say truthfully. “It’s…bumpy.” We asked who else is in the group, and how the hotel is. It’s a big group. “It’s a big group,” I say. “An American family is here for their daughter’s bat-mitzvah.”

“That’s nice,” he says gently. “I think so, too.”

We go on for a little longer. I can feel the trickle becoming more regular, and concentrate hard for a moment on what it is Ilan needs to hear from me now right now so that he can return to his half of the his-and-her sink, his brunette on the singing show, his tidy new condo.

This weekend has been nice,” I say. “I feel refreshed.”

Ilan smiles, I am sure. I can feel his relief through phone. He tells me he loves me and that he will see me when I get home.

Snir is talkative now, and I blame myself and the way I said his name earlier. “Your husband is named Ilan and your girlfriend is named Ilanit!” He asks, a smile playing on his lips.


“Ilan loves Dana,” Snir conjugates in the masculine tense. And then in the feminine: “And Ilanit loves Dana.”

He gets it. “Yes. Exactly. I’m going to write that down when I get back to the hotel.”

“That’s good. You can teach your children to read with that book one day.”
Your children. The three of us—Dana, Ilanit and I—bristle involuntarily at that, and I'm momentarily grateful for their being here.

“Yes, I can,” I tell Snir. “I can teach my children to read with Ilan and Ilanit.”

There’s a rumble. I can’t tell if it’s from within me or far away. “What was that?” I ask Snir.

“Cars,” he responds. “We are adjacent to the main road.”

“We are?” I thought we were deep in the desert.

Snir smiles at me. “Exhilaration without risk, remember Dana? There’s even a terem just a few kilometers away, in case of injury.”

Exhilaration without risk. Our familiarity, this little joke that we’ve spawned and now balance between us like some precarious little thing, like a tennis ball, like a child, is funny.

“Snir.”

“Yes?”

“Could you take us out onto the road, onto the freeway?”

“What? This is a Jeep, for Jeeping.”

“Not a Jeep. It’s an SUV made by Jeep.”

“It’s practically a mini-van!” Gila calls from the backseat with a huff, and whispers loudly to Ilanit, “We better be getting a discount. They’re robbing us, robbing us of an experience we paid for.”

“It’s a mini-van,” I agree. “It’s meant to be on the road, to go back and forth from dance recitals and the grocery store. It’s a mommy car.”

Snir jerks the car up a particularly jagged plain, and the car jolts forward. He attempts a thrilled look, but it fades quickly and he glances down for some indication of a flat tire. “We are Jeeping in this car,” Snir says. “Therefore, it is a Jeep.”

A thing is not defined by its function. That’s just not true,” I say, because I need it not to be true. I need it not to be true in the same way I know it to be true, because here I am a vessel who cannot contain, and therefore not a vessel at all.

Snir shrugs. “I think it is. We aren’t what we hope to do or will do or wish to do. We are what we do. I am a Jeep driver.”

I don’t feel the trickle now so much as the spread, the slow inevitably of it hot and damp in my underpants. The car makes a rumbling, dragging sound, and then it stutters to a stop, and Snir curses the car and bangs on the steering wheel.

“Motherfucker. We have a flat.”

I am lightheaded, but still cynical. “Is it no longer a car then?”

While Snir fiddles with the tire and searches for a spare he will not find, I extricate myself from the seatbelt and go flat on the dune. Perhaps I should have been horizontal all along. The spilling slows, and I doze off listening to Snir yelling at his co-workers on the phone.

I wake to the sound of a Jeep nearing. Snir heaves me up from the dune and, the realization dawning visibly on his face, offers me his sweatshirt to tie around my waist. Dana and Ilanit grumble about wanting a refund as we all pile into the backseat.

“At least we are really jeeping now,” Snir mutters to Gila and Ilanit. “We’re in a real Jeep, and we’re jeeping.”

“And I’m not a mother,” I concede, so quietly that only Snir hears.

Snir reaches over to hold my hand. I rest it in his for a moment before quietly returning my hand to my lap. When we pull back up to the campsite, I spot Ilan’s Mazda waiting by the main tent. Ilan is fiddling with the radio, but his face breaks into a smile when he spots me.

“Surprise!” Dana and Ilanit cry. Dana squeezes my shoulder reassuringly. “He booked a suite at the hotel weeks ago, motel. You’ll have to get deep-tissue massages without us!”

Snir gestures to Ilan with a wry smile. “There you go, Miss Bedouin.”

I don’t look back at him as I walk across the parking lot and let Ilan get the car door for me. The radio is already set to my favorite oldies station.

“Missed you,” I say, leaning over to kiss him. We hum along as Ilan drives out of the campsite.
The Myth of the Boy Who Defied the Sky and Escaped Only with a Broken Pole

FRASHANTH MOTURI RAMAKRISHNA

Stories travel omnidirectionally from their origin. Somewhere—perhaps at a shelter around a fire or at a hostel over a hot meal while Appalachian fingers pluck away at ukulele strings—a bearded sage, the trail personified, weaves for his audience this tale: Salisbury is a small town of fine tastes and high education. The people there enjoy comfortable lives of a sort that one might readily imagine stock the jacketed, boarding-school, historic villages of New England. It’s the type of place where uptown New Yorkers own country homes, which lie dormant until spring gives way to summer and leisure implies golf carts and caddies. Collared shirts of the Polo brand complement clean shaves and smart cuts as they stroll the sweet streets. Grass is always handsomely trimmed and bushes elegantly groomed. Everything is quaint and in its proper place.

If there were ever a town to which the word “colonial” would apply, it would indeed be little Salisbury, 276 years young, tucked away in Connecticut’s most distant North West corner. The Town Hall, rebuilt after its Jeffersonian colonnade and Doric columns crumbled to ash in the late 80s, stands resolutely, protected by an armor of white clapboard. Main Street is bisected by the Salisbury Congregational Church, its belfry and Palladian windows overlooking barns, mills and wholesome saltbox houses. One such house, to the right of the Church and still further to the right of the Town Hall, on Lock Up street, is owned by a woman named Vanessa Breton. Almost every day, weary hikers, slightly rested from their stay at the home of Vanessa Breton, set out onto Route 41 to resume travel on the Appalachian Trail.

One late morning in the beginning of June, a young fellow by the name of Orwell counted himself among their number. He had spent the previous night with Penguin, Tight-End, Sniffles and Fresh, trading stories about Pamby and Mad Tom, while doing his very best to internalize a new language to which he was only just being introduced. “Yellow blazer!” referred usually to the lazy, cheating hiker who passes himself off as having put in his miles, when really most of his time has been spent in cars and bars, hitchhiking from one trail town to the next. “Pink blazer!” referred to that love- or lust-struck soul who crosses paths with a woman whose hold he cannot shake and who, hoping to meet her once more, follows in her wake. Penguin mentioned a young man he had hiked with who suddenly, on account of “seeing pink,” began hiking 25 miles a day instead of 15 and would likely continue his pursuit into New Brunswick on the International Appalachian Trail. To “banana blazer” was to “pink blazer” in reverse. Orwell had learned about “flip-flopers,” “toboes,” “slobbers,” “troops,” “troopers,” “slackpackers,” “ridge runners” and “trail angels.” He had picked up a few phrases he would henceforth keep close: “Hike your own hike!” “The trail provides.” Now, equipped with new poles generously gifted to him by Vanessa, Orwell danced down Route 41 to “Mystery Train” by Ron Jovi. As he did, he was stopped by a bearded thru-hiker who introduced himself as Long Haul and needed directions to the local pizza parlor. Before parting ways, Orwell asked Long Haul why he had stopped his hike so early. There was a storm coming, Long Haul said—“a nasty one just out yonder.” He did not want to be around when she hit. There were thirteen miles between Orwell and the shelter at which he had agreed to meet Sniffles. Along those thirteen miles were Bear Mountain, the tallest climb in Connecticut, consisting almost entirely of steep exposed bedrock sanded down to a finish by millennia of violent elements—and plenty of unguarded ledge, which one certainly would not want to be walking without the guidance of daylight. These were thirteen miles to which he was committed, and he would not be deterred. He simply had to be sure to outrun the darkness.

Two double-turn blazes in quick succession confused him. The Trail was teasing, playing tricks, tossing him forward and backward, hither and thither, North and South—while the storm prepares her invasion, swirling and gurgling and condensing “just out yonder.” It was this active paralysis, this vigorous stagnancy that would have been portentous to him of a fierce impending clash, and perhaps of the unification of his spirit and that of the turbulent and capricious sky-goddess whose shrieks had not yet reached him. If only Orwell had been outside of himself, hovering just above his busy body that couldn’t seem to find the correct turn and keep reappearing at the same dead end! For as he sat, disappointed by his navigational deficiencies, waiting for some savior to happen upon him and take pity, she was hurling towards him with a speed and magnificence beyond that of any man. But, alas, our young, bull-headed hero refused to yield to a danger which he had misconstrued as possible rather than probable. So, when old, indubitably wise Doc and his animated daughter Toons, perhaps the most fabled duo next to Fresh and Karaoke (who had once seduced a bartender with his German charm and thither, North and South—while the storm extended, could no longer be erected; there were no available trees that she revealed herself to him. And how glorious she was! Roiling and whirling with ever-thickening turbidity, she bellowed from above, cracking her electric whip and asserting her undisputed power. Orwell, shuddered in intimidation, but quickly regained composure. Straightening his back confidently, raising his chin, he confronted sky. He met her gaze. He looked her straight in her eye and, assured by his buzzing companions beside him and his stoic supporters behind, all committed to weathering her tyranny, accepted her challenge.

That first collision of wills was almost mythic. There stood an unlikely adventurer, small, unimpressive by all accounts, a novice on foreign terrain, confronting an ancient beast feared by all other beasts. But bull-headed as our young Orwell was, he thought not of surrender. In any case, surrender was not a choice. All midpoints had been made and his surroundings were unarguably terra non grata. His pathetic tune, beyond the protection of which the ends of his hammock would not extend, could no longer be erected; there were no available trees that could withstand the murderous downpour. He was forced to press on, but he was not forced to do so with such spirit. Even after a misplaced foot, pounded by smoothened slick bedrock with a hiking pole snapped cleanly in half, his stride did not stutter. In fact, he felt more alive in the knowledge that at that moment his expiration date could have instantly and unintentionally been amended to present: a stranded walker impaled by his own equipment!
But this mortality was not morbid in tone, nor was it fatalistic. It was spontaneous and exhilarating. It was essential, primordial, savage even. “The domesticated generations fell from him,” just as they had from Buck, Ghost Dog of the Yeehats. He no longer answered the booming dual voices of Astrape and Bronte with words: “I’m still here! I’ll always be here!” The wails and woots and chest rhythms that had been pressed into him by eons of civilization came surging forth. “They came to him as though they had always been his.” And now, the rain having soaked him to the bone and washed away all but the purest of hereditary instinct, running along a trail transformed into a stream whose current was always opposite his own, he howled. Oh, he howled! He howled the howl of howls past, unknowingly harmonizing with the dual voice with which he had thought himself at war.

When peace was restored, Orwell found himself walking along a sprawling ridge, watching the canvas before him drip with sunset. He watched until there was no color left. Rather than brace himself against it, he greeted darkness as an ancient friend.

The sage stands, evaporates, and diffuses into the trail. The story remains. And the hikers he told it to? Some of them travel south, some north, and some return home, all relaying a memory-meddled version of the myth of the boy who defied the sky and escaped only with a broken pole.
Linoleum guardrails
and a plastic straightjacket
Your stovetop is dusted with rust
and past tense aggression.
A toy that forgot to deploy
your parachute apron,
escaped the nest, found the coop;
did you not learn your lesson?

I don’t mean to place blame on the captive
or ignore the sinner.
And I’m sorry for smashing the plate
as you served the dinner.
I swear I come as your sister,
a handmaiden in arms,
as an aid to the maid
of the testicular snake whisperer.

Sweet Volkswagen dragon,
bitter virginal mother,
you curse his sperm and your spawn.
Rusty chastity belt
Lick the wound, the milkman
and your shopping list swear words.
Prostrate on kitchen counter,
you are crying for help.

Lift your leg and your finger,
dust your chores past the door.
Remember Betty—
“*No woman
gets an orgasm
from shining
the kitchen
floor.*"
Girls on Boardwalk, Coney Island, 2017
LEXI ROTTENSTREICH
Film, 8 x 10 inches

Perspective
EMMA COMRIE

Digital photograph; Canon EOS Rebel T3i, 35mm f/3.5

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Reaching for the Wave
GRACE HALIO
Digital collage, 35mm B&W film, watercolor
I May Be Younger, But I Look After You
SALLY YÈRIN OH

Sharpie and ballpoint on cardstock, 10 x 10 inches

Millennials
MATIÁS ALVIAL

Ink and watercolor on paper, 15.5 x 12 inches
we pretended that the ginkgo nuts were bombs
filled with lethal gases,

that the branches were stairs
leading to our home with green walls
and windows you could see out of but not into,

that the grass was a forest
where fairies built homes
and leprechauns swam
(the worms were their god),

that sticks could be wands,
but only at 3:25 p.m.
after we’d left our books at the foot of my bed,
and eaten green apples with marshmallows
under the table,

that skirts would be illegal
as soon as the fire ants invaded
and we’d have to run away soon,

but we had a green home with a forest below
(the worm gods would save us).

so let’s meet at the swings—
the green ones.
Kerun

WENKAI WANG

Digital photograph; Leica M8, 50mm f/2

Priede Garkalne / A Pine Tree in Garkalne (Longhill)

MIKUS KANNENIEKS

Film, 35mm
A Beautiful Day
ROSSALANE CHOW

Acrylic on canvas board, 11 x 14 inches

Vision
IRIS SANG

Digital collage
The window to the fire escape is incredibly hard to open and every time I do, I have shoulder pain for the remainder of the night. But still, I open it, slide one foot through the gap, followed by my crouched body, as the other foot drags in my wake. It is 8:30 p.m. in September. The sky is a new blue but not the darkest kind. I spend most of my time looking right, away from the city, down the smaller portion of my block at the people who emerge from the subway to pass through and are now almost home. None of them can see me because of Meserole Street’s trees. My fire escape, in particular, is enveloped by the street’s biggest tree, and for this I feel lucky.

From my perspective at the center of the street, equidistant between Humboldt and Graham, I see all of the garbage cans stretched out alongside other buildings, almost like an extension of my own limbs. Through the iron slats beneath my feet, I see Tommy opening my building’s trash. Tommy isn’t his real name, but I call him that in my mind; it sits right. Looking down, I see his black cap swivel: open can, take bag, turn body, place bag, dig. He finds the bathroom towels I threw out, (I ordered new ones and these were cheap and mascara-stained) stands up, scans the sidewalk, and walks away, leaving the towels on the ground only to return a minute later with a plastic bag he found floating, American Beauty-style, up the street. He looks for a while at some hollow metal bars (my disassembled, terrible old hamper) before abandoning my bin for the next, toting the dirty towels in a plastic bag.

On the other end of the street I see a local man who looks exactly like a Hispanic Ernest Hemingway, a resemblance so unnerving that it merits a conspiracy theory. I have seen him around for the past two years, sitting on stoops looking rather poetic in blue shirts and white pants, his black hair—thick for a man his age—carefully combed and his beard spotted with grey. He often sits in front of the bodega on Graham and Meserole. Recently, I noticed that every now and then he leaps from his squat for a fallen cigarette butt. A few weeks ago I saw him exiting a minivan at 10 a.m., standing for a while beside the open back seat door. Today I see him sitting in that same minivan again, drinking from a flask in a brown paper bag. For a moment I check in on Tommy on the other end of the street and when I turn back to the minivan I see its front seat unoccupied; Ernest, I assume, has gone to sleep.

Before living here in Brooklyn, I was a child growing up in Oyster Bay, a small town on Long Island. There were no fire escapes, nobody lived in apartments. From suburban windows you can only see some other house’s cedar siding or a forested yard. After all, wasn’t Long Island once a forest or a swampland? In town there were no street-side personalities—excluding “the Townies,” the people who did drugs near the pavilion in the park, whom I had never seen but had learned to visualize as zombies—only ice cream shops, family-owned taverns, hardware stores, framing businesses, that sort of thing. The walkable part of Oyster Bay, its “downtown” extends entirely from one intersection. Beyond that there are winding roads with large houses, packed neighborhoods with houses that are slightly less large, the bay, and its abundance of motorboats.

“Poverty” was simply a word thrown around in history class, grazed over in English when we read Oliver Twist. Most people in Oyster Bay were at the very least middle class. There was a sprinkling of poverty, a few families lived in very small homes, a few in apartments or low-income housing, mostly immigrants. This wealth gap gave way to a petty kind of racism in the town, not the kind of racism...
and he laughed

groceries. My father likes to recall to me his youth, never heard my parents struggle with the bills or the when we were less secure financially, and it feels as found her niche in set-dressing. I remember the times with lots of open space.

the medium house to a large house in a neighborhood to grow throughout my childhood. We moved from in the middle of the night when Obama was re-elected was not the case. I remember my mom waking me up to celebrate.

in the middle of the night when Obama was re-elected was not the case. I remember my mom waking me up to celebrate.

the best; I didn’t know anything about them but they had covered and when the cashier asked for the transaction came and went. I swiped with my Amex, at the receipt in her hands, and reluctantly gave it to the cashier, just a teenager, canned the registers for the manager. I thought about covering the remainder, but I worried I might embarrass the woman, that she might think I was trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. I, a white trying to play the prototypical white savior. 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address, saw my small pale self in the back of his car with no option but to listen, and decided that he would give me what he thought I deserved: a lesson, a little spanking for the sins I had committed by living peacefully in a place I now know to be home. I could not see his face in the rearview mirror but I could hear he was smiling. He felt, to me, diabolical. The lu-lu’s did not help.

After slaming the car door I flung myself through my building’s breezeway as if my clothes were ablaze, climbed up a heap of stairs, three steps at a time, propelling myself with a push against the railing. Once inside, I spun into my bedroom and bee-lined to the fire escape for a smoke, grabbing a sweatshirt along the way. I let the sleeves dangle past my palms, zipped myself in, pulled the hood over my head and then the strings to secure it.

I flicked the lighter. The city was still wet but the rain was slower, more of a dance than a rat-race. My hoodie and the tree above left me with the impression that I was immune to falling water. The only time my hands got wet was on the street sale day when I plucked a Ralph Lauren shirt from a woman. Slower than the rain were the moments when I could not see his face in the rearview mirror but I could hear him smiling. He felt, to me, diabolical. The lu-lu’s did not help.

Standing in Ernest’s favorite bodega around lunchtime, I sense the immediacy of my skin. It contrasts, slices the room into cubbies that are lined up in their yellow reflective vests in front of the coffee machine and the snack-stocked shelves beside it. The men face the counter with their hands behind their backs and wait for their lunches to be shoveled into aluminum containers that will leak browned grease. A few neighborhood faces float between the counter and the men, as do I. I came for a pack of spearmint Orbit. Canas deusty Enfamil formula roll around on the bottom shelf of the counter. A gum is stacked crookedly on the shelf just above. As I wait for someone to appear at the register I look down at my shoes, blue suede flats with a ballerina bow, and my small black purse, the only absurdly expensive thing I own. Why must I be such an ass? I think about my blue eyes as they press against the glass, scouring for the right gum. I turn around to join the construction men in the waiting game and they look at me all at once. It is clear that they all had already been looking at me as I scoured for gum, and I think about my blue eyes and my paper skin pressing against their eyes, all brown and doe-like, and their skin, all brown and smeared with sawdust. I feel like Bambi, if Bambi were a shameful, bumbling idiot. One of the neighborhood’s familiar faces scans me from the side of his sunglasses. The cashier appears. He looks nervous to speak to me. I smile as frequently and truthfully as I can, being sure the grin extends upwards enough to make my eyes squint. I read somewhere that your eyes are the key to making a forced smile look true.

I leave the bodega and walk south on Graham, past the half-done condominiums and the former scaffolding, watching the symmetry of the moment unfold. I also longed to tell the smoking man about my day. I felt like he was there for all of it and now I was alone.

On my walk home I peer down Montrose Avenue, a main road that cuts perpendicularly through Graham, to see if the street sale has furniture today. When the weather is good, families set up tables and sell jewelry, random clothing, furniture and housewares. A former friend of mine bought a vintage Ralph Lauren teddy bear from a street sale from them once for three bucks. She researched it and found that it was worth fifty. If they had been asking fifty for it, or even twenty-five, there was no way she would have bought it. I am qualified to make such an assumption about her because there is a reason I call her a former friend. Maybe she would have paid that much at an East Village vintage shop she read about online, but not here, not at a desperate sidewalk sale. One day recently the children from the families set up their own table and sold toys so that they could donate their earnings to the hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico. It made me wish I were a person with a reason for buying toys. Anyway, the sale has no furniture today and I head right home, through the breezeway, up the stairs, and out onto the fire escape.

My apartment is an icebox. We think maybe the freezer is set too cold, but as I write that now, it sounds like a barbaric hypothesis. It is nicer to be out here, in the sort of sunshine that permits but does not require a jacket. Today, for a change, I interact with people on the street. The UPS man, who is laughing with someone through a pair of headphones, waves up at me. Others pretend not to see me on their approach but turn back around once they have passed. We make eye contact. I smile to a bagel delivery guy on a bike; he seems to marvel at the sight of a person on a fire escape, like one would a rare bird. Ernest’s minivan is parked directly in front of my building and I am sad to learn that it does not have a sunroof. Tommy Howard’s by a slew of trashcans across the street. When I brought out my garbage the other night, he took the bags right from me. After that, I also saw him smiling and waving at a woman through her first floor window. They are friends. I have seen them sitting together on her stoop around teatime. My eyes lag behind the sound of a car headed west and I look up towards the city. Then down towards the street, I see the bodega. My boyfriend and I have a good rapport with a woman who works there. I do not know her name but let’s say it’s Lucy, short for something longer and sweeter. This past summer, my boyfriend and I drank iced coffee like mad and I think she found our ritual fascinating. Her English is not the best; the mutual admiration between us grew out of responsiveness through laughter or hand gestures. Lucy is standing outside the bodega wearing a hairnet, talking to someone on the phone, crossing her bare arms. There is a chill; I imagine she has goose bumps. Something about her expression reads uneasy. Her eyes never leave mine. It feels like the fact that she has been making food at the bodega the entire time I have lived here, two whole years. She must be in her thirties. She must have started working there long before I moved in, you can see it in the way she moves around the kitchen, her posture feels molded to the job. Almost every day I panic silently about figuring out what I am going to eat. After work, I often stop by, to see if the street sale has furniture or jewelry. Two options is to cook and serve food at a corner store. Most of the time I have lived here, two whole years. Lucy goes back inside and I dart my gaze back to see if the street sale has furniture. I do not know her name but let’s say it’s Lucy, short for something longer and sweeter. This past summer, my boyfriend and I drank iced coffee like mad and I think she found our ritual fascinating. Her English is not the best; the mutual admiration between us grew out of responsiveness through laughter or hand gestures. Lucy is standing outside the bodega wearing a hairnet, talking to someone on the phone, crossing her bare arms. There is a chill; I imagine she has goose bumps. 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and became friends over their shared interest in caring for cats. Pedro has lived in the neighborhood his entire life. He looks to be in his early 60s. I see him around sometimes, always looking jolly or talking with old friends, but mainly I see him standing in front of his house. He helps people find parking spots—alternate street side parking is a labyrinth. When it rains, he puts on a jacket and heads outside with a broom to sweep the water and the trash into the sewer. He sits at a local bar, the Tradesman, every single Friday at 3:15 p.m. Every now and then my boyfriend will stop by and they’ll have a drink.

During one of these rendezvous, Pedro reminisced about living here in the 1970s. A few blocks east of Graham Ave you will find East Williamsburg Industrial Park, a sprawl of factories, warehouses, and old roads. There is a main road in Industrial Park that connects to Graham Avenue called Johnson Avenue. Back in the day, Pedro said, Johnson was not lined with cement factories like it is now, but with slaughterhouses. The people in the neighborhood caught on to the slaughter times. After work, they would go to the dumpsters and dig for cow bones, go home, and use them to make soup for dinner.

Beyond the iron-barred walls of the fire escape I see trash. An abundance of it, everywhere. It encircles the bays of trees in the sidewalk. On narrower streets like mine the wind spins it up and throws it back, making it unavoidable and ceaseless. There will never be a day in the neighborhood where any street is garbageless. Maybe it is better that way. I reach for the window, push it up with the strength of my shoulder—collapsed into its socket—and slide my way back into the apartment, the floating white box that I occupy alone.
Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called "the pledge." The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird, or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But, of course, it probably isn’t. The second act is called "the turn." The magician takes the ordinary object and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you’re looking for the secret— but you won’t find it, because you’re not really looking. You don’t really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn’t clap yet. Because making something disappear isn’t enough; you have to bring it back. That’s why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call "the prestige.""
show two men performing what’s known as ‘the cups and balls’ and may be the earliest record of a magic performance.”

—Matt Soniak, “What’s the Oldest Trick in the Book?”

In 2009, the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that around 135 million Americans (about 45% of the population) have or will develop a chronic disease in their lifetime, that 7 out of 10 deaths among Americans are caused by chronic diseases, and that mental illnesses and chronic diseases are very closely related in that chronic diseases can exacerbate symptoms of depression and depressive disorders can themselves lead to chronic illnesses.

“A typical cups-and-balls routine includes many of magic’s most fundamental effects, such as vanish, appearance, and transpositions. A convincing performance also requires many of the art’s core skills, such as misdirection, dexterity, and audience management. Because of this, learning the cups and balls is often considered an almost complete education in modern magic entertainment.”

—“Cups and Balls,” Magician's.

After years of unexplained pain and fatigue, I finally received answers: insomnia; asthma; anxiety disorder; chronic pain disorder; fibromyalgia; arthritis; migraines; manic depression; Bipolar 2 Disorder; haphaephobia; gastritis. Disorder, disorder: I was left feeling confused and disorder, disorder; chronic pain disorder; fibromyalgia; finally received answers: insomnia; asthma; anxiety disorder; chronic pain disorder; fibromyalgia.

For days, weeks, months, years, I experience the same routine: undergoing immense pain and trying my best to understand what is happening to my body, while keeping it a secret from those around me. Before I know it, I’m nineteen and in my sophomore year of college. I’m out with three friends of mine and we’re running late for a party in Brooklyn. I have on four-inch heels and an itty-bitty dress and am trying my absolute hardest to keep up with the group that seems to be miles ahead of me. They don’t know the extent of my illness, just that I have bad knees that give me trouble sometimes. It would take too much to explain everything to them, mostly because I don’t yet understand it myself. They are good friends but sometimes they forget that I have limitations and sometimes they simply don’t care.

“Come on, pick up the pace!” one of my friends calls from a block ahead.

“You know she can’t. She’s got bad knees—her fibromyalgia!” another shouts back to him. They laugh together as if it was the funniest joke they had ever heard.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to laugh at you,” he says. “It’s just crazy to me a nineteen-year-old girl has arthritis. I’ve never heard of that!” I laugh because it’s fibromyalgia, that’s all. It’s always just fibromyalgia.

The curtain rises. There stands the magician, the man of the hour, the god we have all been waiting for. Beside him is his lovely assistant and a large, body-sized cabinet. In his hands he holds three blades. He proceeds to lock his innocent assistant into said cabinet. He slides the blades into the box, one by one, dividing the poor girl into thirds. A volunteer from the audience is called up to the stage to push the segments out into an impossible arrangement. The assistant is seemingly cut into three, her body contorted and held in the three smaller boxes. Then the magician pushes the three parts back to their original position, removing the blades. He opens the larger cabinet door and out walks the assistant, completely unharmed and intact. The crowd goes wild.

I am in my NYU dorm room, in bed alone, on the phone with my mother and most likely crying. It has been raining for the past three days, and my knees are so swollen and painful that I can’t even get out of bed. Throughout this journey of unexplained pain, I have lost my vibrant self and am now giving out two men performing what’s known as ‘the cups and balls’ and may be the earliest record of a magic performance.”

—Celine Armstrong, “Answers to 14 Classic Magic Tricks”

Since the first incident with the muscle spasm in my neck, I have had a recurring dream in which I lose my body. What I mean is I shed myself so completely I don’t even exist anymore. Layer by layer my skin, my body, my home is whittled away until there is nothing left but the core of me, the essence, the thing that makes me tick and keeps me going when every cell in my body seems to be telling me not to. I have dreamt this time and time again, but still I fail to grasp what message it is trying to relay.

“Another wildly popular, yet minimally understood trick is that of the Zig Zag Girl. “This trick is actually quite simple. When the assistant steps into the box, she turns her body sideways so that when the blades go in, they slide right past her body. When the midsection of the box is pushed out, only her hands go with it, but the black lining of the box gives the illusion that her midsection has been completely sliced. The black stripes on the box are usable space. They are not very visible when viewed from the side or on TV – thus making the box look smaller.”

—Daniel Kraker, “Fibromyalgia Syndrome: A Common and Chronic Condition”

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I have gained a little more than fifty pounds. The weight has distributed nearly everywhere: my breasts, my face, my thighs, my stomach, my back, everywhere except fun places that need it the most, like my ass, for example. I can no longer fit any of the cute little dresses I used to love. Everyone around me claims they can’t see the difference, that I haven’t changed that much, that it’s all in my head. I play along everytime, smiling, concealing the discomfort, transforming the inner pain into pleasantries. But what they say doesn’t matter because I can tell the difference, I can see it. I remember who I used to be, and I can hardly recognize myself anymore when I look in the mirror. I barely even want to look.

I’m beginning to feel like a hypochondriac again, making up phantom symptoms that only exist in my mind. For years, I spent my life waiting for the bottom to drop out, for the other shoe to fall off, for the floor to give way, or whatever other metaphor you want to use and time after time, it did. Over and over again, my body gave out in a new and old ways, inventive and patented, common and uncommon. Even with a dozen diagnoses, I still spend so much time fantasizing and anticipating the next one. Some days, I wonder whether this some elaborate trick I am playing on myself.

“If you think about it, we are all magicians, performing tricks out of necessity and the need to communicate in order to survive. Each and every day, we all do our own kind of magic, a plethora of small, yet meaningful, tricks and illusions. With each rise of the sun, we become magicians, moving through public space in the masks that we use to cope, to cover over our pain, our inner truth. We are all cloaked by some illusion that promises that we are normal, just like everybody else, just fine.

“I do believe in an everyday sort of magic—the inexplicable connectedness we sometimes experience with places, people, works of art and the like; the eerie appropriateness of moments of synchronicity; the whispered voice, the hidden presence, when we think we’re alone.”

—Charles de Lint

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I have transformed from a thought to an element, to living matter, into a stature that’s most elegant.

I have transformed from an ignorant to intelligent individual who doesn’t deal with anything irrelevant.

I have transformed after being transmitted from the heavens down to this lower plane of existence, and I kept transforming while I was in transit, through outer space searching from an inhabitable planet. I have transformed into something you can’t transcribe. Imma transcend for them telling me that I can’t rise.

I have transformed from the day that I was convicted for my transgressions and got transported to prison, sitting on that bus thinking about how I was living. My life like a savage—blind without a vision. Wanting something more for myself, I began to listen to the advice people around began giving: hanging with better crowds focused on better things, reading books ’bout places ‘round the world I never dreamed, envisioning possibilities that I could never see, like graduating from college, acquiring a degree. Now I can be everything in this life that I ever wished and they pissed, ’cause they see me and realize just what they missed. There are so many things I want to say, but I don’t want to ramble on.

So I’m just gonna leave you with this: I have transformed.
Contributors

MATÍAS ALVIAL is a student, originally from Chile, at New York University concentrating in “the aesthetics of commerce,” the intersection of the creative and commercial aspects of business. His studies focus on the relationship between creativity and money, and how artists thrive in a capitalist society. His work is characterized by the use of vibrant hues and surrealist elements. These characteristics emulate the eccentricity of his creative and curious mind.

CASSIE ARCHDEACON is a senior concentrating in the interaction of art and everyday life, and minorin in creative writing. Upon completing her undergraduate degree at Gallatin, she hopes to further her study of writing in graduate school.

HANNAH BENHAMO is a freshman at Gallatin studying intersections between aesthetics, wealth and literature.

EMMANUEL GARRILLO is concentrating on the ways that space and art interact to promote empathy in urban settings. He is currently continuing his studies at North Park University in Chicago.

SAM CHENG is currently looking to pursue photography, international development, human rights and sustainability at Gallatin. She has contributed photographic content for Washington Square News, Embodied and Package Free/Trash is for Tossers.

ROSALANE CHOW is currently a first year in Gallatin focusing on art history, studio art and business. She plans to study archaeology in Athens this summer.

DAVIES CLOUD’S phone number is (617) 686-8538.

EMMA COMBIE is currently a first-year student at Gallatin and has a strong interest in studying social and developmental psychology, media studies and photography. She has been involved with photography and film throughout high school and her first semester at NYU. She traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil last spring to shoot a documentary about the social and economic impact of the 2016 Summer Olympics.

MARK ETEN is concentrating in ‘Innovation by Design’ which sounds really fancy. When he is not attempting to operate all manner of vehicle and walk each continent (as of this writing, helicopters, trains, Oceania and Antarctica remain), he may occasionally write things that make sense.

HARRY FINK is a junior from Slidell, Louisiana. His concentration focuses on anthropology, history and environmental science, although he is still working out the details.

ZAINAB FLOYD is concentrating in “Afro-Caribbean women of post colonialism through film and fashion.” She is a GUIDE scholar which is a scholarship program that helps high achieving BMCC students with transitioning and succeeding at the rigorous undergraduate liberal arts programs at NYU Gallatin. She has shown work at the Studio Museum of Harlem, and was featured in the Huffington Post and The Jamaica Teenage Observer.

RAYVEN GORDON is a 34-year-old creative writer and artist. He was born in Brooklyn and raised in Queens. He enjoys writing poetry, drawing and listening to all genres of music. He plans on publishing his creative writing projects and artistic endeavors in the near future.

GRACE HALIO will graduate from Gallatin in May 2018 with a concentration in “intervention in the public sphere through journalism and contemporary art.” Her studies examine the ways in which public art can serve as a means of actionable education in regards to tackling social and climate injustice. Wherever postgraduate life may take her, she will continue to make mixed media art in an effort to create colorful and tangible shared experiences.

KAYLA HERREBA-DATA is a first-year student interested in social conflict of the 20th and 21st centuries in the United States and would like to pursue this through journalism and dramatic writing. For her, photography is a serious hobby that inspired her interest in journalism and film writing.

LEIHOU HAN is a freshman at Gallatin interested in language, poetics and the inexpressible human soul. He spends more time in the music practice room than doing his actual coursework and sometimes still wonders whether he should have gone to conservatory instead. His novel attempts at photography are a way for him to resurrect his childhood passion for drawing.

MELISSA KAYVONCU concentrates in “multimedia writing” with a focus on aesthetics and politics. She will graduate from Gallatin in May 2018, and finds writing about herself in the third person to be preposterous.

MIRUS KANNEKERS is a transatlantic photographer based in NYC, currently finishing his degrees in both Courant Institute and Stern School of Business. A mathematician and visual artist at heart, he draws influence from the arts and sciences in his continued exploration of the mystic.

ANAIS KEISLER is a junior in Gallatin concentrating in narrative theory and psychology, and is interested in international story telling through art, literature and writing. She is excited to have a piece published in The Gallatin Review after working as an editor for the last two years.

AERI HWADO KONG currently studies “expressionism in the modern climate,” focusing on lyrical poetry in the age of technology and cultural diversity. Her interests include visual arts, linguistics, social justice and translation. She will graduate in 2018.

ELAINE LO is an interdisciplinary artist and designer and will graduate from Gallatin in May 2018. She studies the intersections between art, technology, and culture and is interested in their relationships to environmental and social justice.

DERICK MCCARTHY is a 34-year-old thought leader, opinionator and influencer. He was born and raised in Laurelton, Queens. He has endured many hardships in life, but has managed to overcome them through his love of learning. His writings focuses on expressing his personal experiences and thoughts on life.

KYLIE MCMANUS is studying the intersection of art and design with people and cultures. She is currently interested in architecture and how it relates to cultures and communities especially in terms of visual design. This semester, she is studying abroad in Madrid to learn more about art history and architecture internationally.

SALLY VÉREN OH is a clothing designer, visual artist, and sociologist pursuing her interdisciplinary Master of Arts degree in visual communication, social entrepreneurship, art theory, cultural analysis, gender studies and Asian American diasporas. All the while, she is creating a body of work comprised of clothing, fine art, video and poetry. Sally is interested in how the intersection of art, design, activism, and entrepreneurship can be utilized to create positive social change.

OMAR PADILLA is a 36-year-old from Brooklyn, currently based at Wallkill Correctional. He loves to write poetry and exercise his mental and physical attributes. He is currently in NYU’s Prison Education Program working toward getting his associate’s degree in Liberal Arts. He writes, “Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to display my work through my art.”

ARJUN PARIKH will graduate from Gallatin in May 2018 with a concentration in “African-American studies and government.” He is planning on applying to law school and hopes to become a civil rights lawyer. This is Arjun’s first time being published and he is excited to be included in The Gallatin Review.

KRIZAN PENDLTON is a 29-year-old musician and aspiring writer. He was born in Albany, New York and he grew up between New York’s capital region and southern New Jersey. He binges classic martial arts films and is an old-school hip hop junkie. He has recently received his associates degree from NYU’s Prison Education Program and is looking forward to earning many more degrees.
TEJAN RAHIM is a junior in Gallatin whose concentration focuses on photography and how people experience their realities. In addition to photography, he is also interested in other artistic mediums like metal and glass.

PRASHANTH MOTURI RAMAKRISHNA is a sophomore studying applied mathematics and cyber security. He spends most of his time working on esoteric projects of minimal usefulness. Occasionally those projects get published.

LEXI ROTENSTREICH is a rising junior at Gallatin, concentrating on film and television writing. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, she uses her photography as a means to capture the essence of her home and its culture.

AMBER SALIK will graduate in May 2018 with a concentration in “creative and alternative healing” and a minor in “child and adolescent mental health studies. Her work has been featured in the Gallatin Arts Festival (2017 and 2018), Confluence and Rational Creature, and she is excited to see where her art will lead her after graduation.

IRIS SANG is concentrating in “film as literature,” mixing film production, cinema studies, comparative literature and creative writing. She has cooperated with Island musician Olafur Arnalds for film projects and was the finalist of Nikon Photo Contest 2017.

HENRY SHEEAN studies playwriting, dramaturgy, and German, and just named his colloquium: “Why Tell? Narrating Responsibility after World War II.” He is active as a producer with both Gallatin Theatre Troupe and New Major Records, and would like to thank Matt Rohrer, whose class challenged Henry to break through to new forms and ideas. Keep an eye out for a site-specific play about weightlifting which is in the works.

BLAIR SIMMONS is a 3D artist, computer programmer, teacher, freelance designer, playwright and a Gallatin MA candidate who studies performance theory and innovative technology. Her personal 3D work displayed in this publication concentrates on queerness and bodies. Her most recent play, Staging Wittgenstein, was performed at the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

JIMI STONE is a Gallatin Senior studying narrative design for interactive media. He likes hiking, video games, ice cream and sea otters.

MIGUEL VOLAR is an artist who communicates with images, words and sounds. Currently he is studying photography, documentary film and sociology.

ANNIKA VON GREY is building a concentration around “Eco-Psychology” with a focus on environmental crisis management. Annika was introduced to her love of poetry writing via her musical project von grey.

WENKAI WANG is a Gallatin sophomore whose concentrations are philosophy, animation, graphic novels and filmmaking. He published an independent short animation Red last year, and now he is focusing on his new graphic novel 24 Hours.

EMILIE WEINER is a freshman at Gallatin hoping to incorporate the fields of psychology, media, marketing, fine art and social activism into her concentration. She is also planning a minor in environmental science. She has performed at many poetry slams and readings, and she has shown her art in professional gallery spaces.

SCOUT ZABINSKI is concentrating in “the psychological quilt of fine art fibers,” and studying the ways psychology links human perception to the history of art and social interactions. She has studied in Florence and works for both the Joanne Artman gallery in Chelsea and hyperrealist painter, Nick Sider, in Harlem.
Working
BLAIR SIMMONS

3D-printed curable photopolymer resin
Photograph by Ella Barnes