Origins
Angelina Parrino
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This is a story.

It is written in images.
Image

**noun**

- a physical likeness or representation of a person, animal, or thing, photographed, painted, sculptured, or otherwise made visible.
- an optical counterpart or appearance of an object, as is produced by reflection from a mirror, refraction by a lens, or the passage of luminous rays through a small aperture and their reception on a surface.
- a mental representation; idea; conception.
- a mental representation of something previously perceived, in the absence of the original stimulus.

**verb (used with object), im·aged, im·ag·ing.**

- to picture or represent in the mind; imagine; conceive.
- to make an image of; portray in sculpture, painting, etc.
Translation, however faithful, is still fiction. – Deleuze?
Prologue

A young woman enters a room. It is modest and rectangular, measuring 6 x 7 feet, bordered by windows. The walls are cream with a slight blush, and you can tell they’ve been painted over many times. She measures by walking the perimeter, though her feet are small. She doubles them to equal one foot. The floor dips down on the farthest side, and she makes a note to walk with delicate steps. Always feeling the ground beneath. There are many rooms in this house. This one is her favorite. It reminds her of a Florida room—a solarium, or winter garden. She sits down at a wooden table that looks like it’s made of pine and ash. She is directly across from three Oriel windows that allow for a panoramic view. The presence of so much glass makes it possible to enjoy the outside world, while being protected from wind, rain, heat or other adverse weather conditions. It is 5:39 pm and the sun sinks languidly like a diving toy in a swimming pool. It falls to the bottom and is gone. She remembers summer lessons at the catholic university near the house she grew up in. Seven years of swimming, four years of diving. A headlong plunge into the water. Her instructor was one Mrs. Susan Hollis. Overly golden with yellow-blond bangs chopped to her forehead; she always wore a blue Lycra swimsuit. Royal blue #4 with a cross back. To advance to the next level, each student had to dive to the tiled floor, 11 feet down to retrieve a slick, plastic egg. She never quite made it, always afraid of running out of air. Involuntarily, one always draws in breath, draws in water. The throat relaxes after a person becomes unconscious. The lungs fill up. She resolves that when she goes home she will make the dive; risking the chance of not being able to breathe. She thinks of an artist she likes, and a story he tells about almost drowning as a child. He is 6 years old when he falls to the bottom of a lake. He describes it as being the most beautiful world he had ever seen, full of color and light. He sees it every day. The real thing is under the surface, he says. She shifts in her chair, crosses one leg under the other as it starts to go numb. Her body stills for a rare moment. She leans back and looks at the ceiling. She is floating in a light turquoise pool with white-painted sides, looking up. Water covers her ears gingerly and voices become faint vibrations. Sound waves go straight to the skull bones. It is hard to pinpoint the origin of sound; it is everywhere. Her body is light and the water holds her in place with invisible hands. She feels safe; she feels at home. The daydream breaks and she rolls her
head forward again, out of the water. She notices her appearance across from her, and the large black walnut tree that complicates her reflection. She loves this room. Moving pictures play on the windows every night—a cast of illusions. A shadow is a real image. It occupies all of the three dimensional volume of herself. The shadows spill into different frames, lengthening their limbs over the clouded glass, stretching out after a long day. The windows haven’t been cleaned in the time that she has lived here. The idea of never cleaning them becomes appealing. In the foreground of the room, a band of light passes through, revealing the particles that dust the faux ash and wood surface; tiny, air-borne particles made of dirt and animal dander, insect waste, sand, dead skin. The light hovers in the corner for a minute, and she notices a mud dauber that has died in a web. It is a solitary wasp, opposed to a social one. Funny. It builds its nest out of clay and mud. She can’t stop the bugs from getting in, but she doesn’t mind them that much. There is only a thin division between the inside and outside. Here, and there. Outside, trees lose their shape as dusk colors in the spaces. She selects a song called “Circles” to listen to. Sound fills her ears like water.

All the circles that we move in
Remind me of the love we’ve wasted
If we’re searching for the same thing
Then why are we still suffering?
Ooh, ooh ooh

Her papers are a mess and she is frustrated with her inability to condense the information that covers the table. She turns inward, leafing through the file folders in her mind to select a clip. Which one comes first? She can’t remember, can’t find the origin point. They are just as unkempt. She decides to draw instead. She pulls out a pad of thin, white paper. She uses an old compass to draw a circle, remembering that a circle map is used to brainstorm ideas. Upon making this realization, she also decides the map should be a clock. The hours will be defined by the months of the year. They don’t follow the curves of the circle like they should. She puts a 1 and labels it “March”. She continues to plot points, writing 2-12, labeling the subsequent numbers with the following months. She pulls her phone out of her pocket to make a call. A male voice answers, he’s been distant lately. She questions him and he insists that time is inflexible, that life is based on a specific series of moments.” From birth until
death, our lives are shaped by time, there is no way around it,” he says. “What about choice? She argues. What about love?” Annoyed with the absurdity of the thought that she could restructure experience, she hangs up the phone. She shoves the unfinished drawing in a random drawer and exits the house, walking outside. The door clicks behind her.
A door opens onto a small porch. Two young girls rush out. One is wearing a yellow raincoat, the other a black garbage bag with holes for arms. A bungee cord is cinched at the waist, creating billows of plastic that form a repellent dress. Preparation is half the battle, is what they’ve been told by their parents. Come inside at the first sign of lighting, they say. Lighting cracks and they take three steps forward.

The young woman finds herself standing at the bathroom counter, hands pressed into the white acrylic. She catches her gaze in the mirror; hair is pinned in curls to half of her head in an irregular fashion, the other half hangs frizzy and loose. She sighs at herself and shakes her head, yanking the bobby pins out aggressively.

She’s unable to pinpoint what she’s been doing. Late to class, she picks up the phone to call her dad. He’ll be upset if she doesn’t—they haven’t spoken in three days. He picks up on the fifth ring. She is greeted with a warm, built voice and a Louis Prima song. “I eat antipasta twice just because she is so nice Angelinaaaaa” (he continues to sing). “I was just flying on the roof,” he says to her. “When I was a boy I would dream that I would fly every night. If I flapped my arms fast enough I would keep going. I used to have the same dream. I always wondered why no one else could do it. I’m going to fix the house up so tight that it floats.”
There are three steps down to the lake that is quickly forming at their feet. Dirt has mixed with water and it comes close to lick the soft parts of the wood underneath the porch; verisimilitude spreads and saturates its aging surface. It too has body. It too has carried its years. The water grows and spans outwards like an algal bloom, pushing past the live oaks that remain evergreen, past the declining pump house, past six pines planted on arbor day, and the barbwire fence that creates a division between one world and another.

At lakes edge the earth is suddenly missing, gives way to another medium and appears again at the shore beyond. Hence “lacuna” is derived from “lac” or lake, and signifies something missing or omitted, a hiatus.ii
2:

It is spring of 2019. The month is April and the air hangs around a lazy 70 degrees. This is the second real spring she’s ever experienced; Florida doesn’t have seasons, people joke. Sunny and seventy-five, all year round, says everyone who is not from Florida. Her phone buzzes and she pulls it out to open a message. In it is a picture of a soft, white flower, clipped and floating in a bowl of water. “Your gardenias have bloomed, they are everywhere!” her mother has written. Her parents planted the tree when she was born. It died when the storms came. They moved it, and years later it exploded like an invasive species. Gardenias marked a theoretical spring. Her parents would place three to four flowers in bowls of water, one bowl in every room.

Back at home, her dad is on the roof again, fixing leaks. The distance between them is 670 miles. A cakewalk for some—but for him, it is the equivalent of being on another planet, as he likes to remind her. He’s busy mourning the loss of his little girl. Her mom says he misses her so much that he can’t speak to her. They alternate between days of conversation, and days of silence. He’s lucky I didn’t go to the west coast, she thinks to herself. At 73, he is far too old to be doing this. Taking care of something requires a lot of work, he says. She recalls that a few years back he fell off of a ladder. Something happened, his hands stopped working. They don’t talk about it; He’s been doing this for 25 years. Hurricane season is approaching and with the rain will come an ensemble of leaks. Roof leaks MUST be repaired from the outside, to ensure they are corrected. However, in the advent of unfavorable conditions, or for the simple reason of not wanting to climb up on a roof, they can be temporarily patched from the inside. Their roof is now two-tone, as half has been replaced due to its shortcomings, often resorting to the second option. The rain falls in veils and they grab course towels with an urgency that doesn’t make sense, searching for the source. Some leaks are thin streams of water- others, pools that rush outwards, damaging the floors that their names have been carved into. Fix one, and another begins.
She goes inside and rifles through old home videos. Her mother has converted them to discs. This will be the first time they’ve been viewed since they were recorded. She selects one titled “summer of 1999” and holds it to her chest. It feels special. She opens the plastic DVD case and places the silver CD in the disk drive of her laptop. The title page pulls up and fragments of video play at the same time. She selects the first one.

The rain comes in waves but the girls are prepared to swim. Water rises and swirls but they move against the current. It pours into their rain boots and weights the space around their feet. They squeal and play, completely unfazed. The youngest girl says to her sister “I was scared at first, but now I’m not. It’s kind of exciting”. Hope wraps around them. They look back and at the center of the lake stands their small, wooden cabin. It appears as if something out of a dream, raft-like and floating in an expanse of water. Inside their parents desperately try to mop up the water that comes up through the floorboards, softening them. Outside they trudge along. There are objects everywhere, they dip into the surface and vacillate with the drift. One girl falls in and sinks to her knees. She laughs and puts her head under.

The water goes up, everything else goes down.
The end of May ties itself up tight and rolls her in with it. She packs her car with all of her belongings and begins to drive. 670 miles to be exact. Her heart picks up all the weight, all the miles like an odometer.
A day later the water recedes and the ground absorbs the liquid like a swollen sponge. Objects litter the floor. The girls run to collect them, competing for the best ones. They look for things that had been lost: one lone shoe, a chair that had floated away, a beloved toy.
4:

August begins and she moves into a new home.

It is the end of a long day. She approaches Claude St. It is the same turn she always makes, nothing changes except for the diurnal course. As she feeds the wheel through her hands, a familiar feeling crawls into her chest and knocks around. It swells and grows in mass, soaking through the three layers of the heart wall that enable the heart to contract. The car radio beeps; her heart beats. She touches her chest in the place where he should feel it too. Isn’t it strange to feel something that has no form? “That’s good”, she thinks. She types it into her phone and texts it to herself. The phone pings back and reminds her of a conversation they had about a month ago:

A:

“And through the transformation of memory, experience is broken down into these things (shape and form). So they become triggers. I’m not explaining myself well. So say you have what you assume to be a concrete memory, which is never actually an accurate representation of the experience to begin with. It lacks a truly original referent because it is experienced through ones unique perspective, but at the time of the experience you have concrete details that help you to organize and understand the event. And then its encoded and stored in your brain. But over time the memory is being reformed as it is being forgotten. That’s why false memory is so interesting. As memory is breaking down I like to think it transitions from being this seemingly real idea/experience to this intangible language of form and shape and color. Oh and smell and sound. Basically the elements of sensory perception. And as it transforms it picks up new bits of information that maybe weren’t present before; in the spirit of loss something else starts to grow. But does that make it any less real?”

S:

“Maybe I need to rethink my idea of form and shape and color.”

A:
“So say you’re walking down the street and something triggers this experience. Color or sound or smell. And your body and mind respond and bring you to that memory in its present form, tied to a concrete object. And an entire fleet of emotions. In a way I’m contradicting myself. But at the same time shape can be incredibly abstract because it’s removed from the original referent.”

S:

“But you’re thinking of form according to Plato 😊. His idea of form is the shiftable spiritual inhabitants of physicality.” This concept that the physical world isn’t really the real world. The physical realm is only a shadow, or image, of the true reality of the Realm of Forms. The forms, then, are abstract, unchanging concepts or ideals that transcend time and space. What you’re describing is the potential for the perfect form to manifest in different examples.iii Egg, house, car, man, woman, ship, bird, cloud, horse, table and chair—all of these are representations of putatively independently-existing abstract perfect ideas.iv

A:

“Oh it totally relates to Plato and the Realm of Forms. But not just the form in its physical manifestation; rather, the halo that surrounds it. Plato would say that peoples’ attempts to recreate the form will end up being a pale facsimile of the perfect Idea, just as everything in this world is an imperfect representation of its perfect form.” I was going to say that maybe these sensory experiences are a perfect form (beauty, redness, love etc.) broken into pieces, in a way connected to an idea of a fragmented soul in which we are made up of a collection of experiences and people. And that’s why they feel so familiar. Idk

S:

“But is this term shape really meaning “form”?”

A:

“I feel like that’s how I interpret the world. Like whatever is happening in the space between us has a shape. And shape refers to both the outline or exterior surface. Everything has the potential to have an abstract existence that is still present in the physical world. Meaning that
memory can split itself into many parts, physical forms, triggers, whatever you want to call it."

S:

"Interesting. I don’t think Plato considered art definitions when he talked about his philosophy of the perfect form, so maybe he needs an update."

A:

"Well he’s dead, so yeah.

S:

"Idk. But I like waking up and thinking about this stuff honestly 😊"

The conversation fades out and she scans her empty neighborhood for a white Subaru...lately she sees them everywhere. Must be a sign. She shifts her car into park and settles into her seat for a minute too long. The heaviness of hours moves towards her legs. She turns on the radio and plays a song that reminds her of him.

Is your favorite color blue?
Do you always tell the truth?
Do you believe in outer space?
Now im learning youuu

Is your skin as tanned as mine?
Does your hair flow sideways?
Did someone take a portion of your heart?
Now I’m learning you

And if you don’t mind
Can you tell me
All your hopes and fears
And everything that you believe in
Would you make a difference in the world
I’d love for you to take me to a deeper conversation
Only you can make me

She tries to remember; review his face and its movements. Despite her best attempt it has started to slip into the space between them. The sky deepens and a flicker of light illuminates his ghost on her porch. It goes out
immediately; the residue of his memory coats everything. She blows his ashes from her lungs and turns towards the house she now lives in; the house he promised to visit. She vows that tomorrow will be different, knowing that she will meet him at the same time tomorrow night. Her energy changes and she skip-runs down the path and up the steps. As she twists the key and wraps her hand around the burnished doorknob she remembers every moment she has ever lived. Pushing the door open, she trips into the interior. The mouth and throat of the house are the most vulnerable parts. As she moves through the slender hallway, shadows greet her as they always do at this time. The motion of cars past the door window highlights a circle of flaking paint on the cream wall. Without thinking, she digs her fingernail in and pulls off a piece. As the circle grows the wood beneath is revealed.

*She is five again; high-strung and ahead of herself. The steps to the door are splintered and waterlogged; as she bounds up the stairs her foot catches on the third step. She falls forward.*

Tracing the scar underneath her right eye, she feels the separation of bone underneath.
A young girl in a dress runs fervently through the grass. Twirling and jumping and spinning, she dodges rocks and spiky plants as she flies across the uneven ground. Often running in circles until she collapses.

She runs past the orange tree. Through the front yard where she would create things: a makeshift house out of sticks, a fort, a play area with items lined up around the edges. Past the crudely made clothesline. She detested that clothesline. She yanks the clothespins off of the plastic wire with such force that she breaks them.

In the backyard, there is an old table. She stops abruptly at the backside of the house to meet her mother and sister as they pad down the wooden steps. The girl and her sister get on top of the table and take turns singing and dancing. "Okay, that's enough. Look at mommy now" the mother says as she moves to sit down on the table, pulling the smaller girl in purple pants to her side. They begin to sing. The older sister videotapes.

"The world is a rainbow
That's filled with many colors
Yellow, black, and white, and brown
You see them all around

The world is a rainbow
With many kinds of people;
It takes all kinds of people
To make the world go round

Now you be you
And I'll be me
That's the way we were meant to be
But the world is a mixing cup
Just look what happens when you stir it up"

The camera drops to the ground, and everything blurs.
She leaves the scab of paint and continues down the hall past her room. As the light pulls itself across the wall and over the double hung windows a granite sky appears. She pushes the door open and watches it turn light into the horizon, a thin sliver stitching into gray to form a seamless backdrop. As a kid she thought that heaven was an actual castle in the sky. Like in the 1989 animated film “All Dogs Go to Heaven” or the English Standard Versions Revelation 21:21. Peering out the car window to observe plush Cumulonimbus clouds pillow together, she’d ask her mom if heaven exists, breaking contact with the rolling white. Her mom would laugh and reply that heaven is what you make of it; a story we agree to tell. “For survival”, she says.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

She thinks her heaven might exist in different places; in the Mariana Trench and the seven miles that it goes deep. Where life is adapted to pressures 1,000 times that at sea level. She stands at the brim of the doorway and the tide comes close to kiss her feet in cool dejection. It invites her presence and then retreats just as fast, called on by a wanting moon. She stills and draws the screen to a different sunset bathed heavy in cerulean. She remembers having nightmares about water: she is lying in a Victorian basement that is completely submerged; she is standing on an unfamiliar shoreline as waves rise; paralyzed. In the front yard of a beach home that isn’t hers one hundred duplicate houses stretch as far as she can see. She looks down and the salt water creeps up to her knees and the houses sink. The dreams have finally stopped, but now the water is everywhere.

Like pools on the asphalt after a hard rain, footsteps break the surface. They settle in again. It is dark. She thinks of Sylvia Earle, the first person to walk the ocean floor. Earle talks about the experience of going down. She describes going through the sunlit area and into what is known as the “twilight zone” where sunlight fades and darkness begins to take over. “It’s like the deepest twilight, or earliest dawn, she says. You can see shapes, but not really distinct forms. And this begins at about 500 feet. And by the time you get down to 600 feet, 200 meters or so, it’s really, really dark. It’s like starlit circumstances. A thousand feet and below, it is truly dark, but still, enough light penetrates clear ocean water in the
middle of the day — and that’s when I made the dive, right about high noon in September — I could see shapes even at 400 meters, at 1,250 feet or so. That was exciting, just to be able to realize that that glow, that soft glow, was the sky above, separated by 1,250 feet of water.”
October came around and as the leaves began to rustle and blanket the yard like crisp confetti, the girls would stretch dollar store cobwebs across the gold-plated mirror in their parent’s bedroom, giggling to each other in secret.

“Guess how much I love you?”

Though the weather only shifted in the slightest, they fell deeply in love with the way you could be anything you wanted, if only for a little while.
She plants a garden in fall, knowing it will die. She does it anyways, questioning whether it is an act of unconditional love or of delusion. Earlier today, as she lingered in her car a moment too long, she decided that this new home was also hers. She’s been behaving like a guest, worried about stepping on others toes. She thought she might only stay for a while, as if she was traveling and renting a room from a stranger. She didn’t’ want to be a burden; didn’t want to stretch out and feel the floors and walls. A month passed, and she kept her belongings in boxes. A mattress on the floor, no support, and paintings stacked in the corner.

“I am my own house, she thinks. In it there are many rooms”. She opens a single crate and places small objects along her windowsill: a music box with a nautilus shell, a shimmery butterfly clip, one glass bottle with a pressed rose, a wooden icon of San Pio da Pietrelcina, a flake of Black Anthracite. She winds up the music box and lets it play.

Somewhere my love  
There will be songs to sing  
Although the snow  
Covers the hope of spring

Where are the beautiful days?  
Where are the sleigh rides to dawn?  
Where are the tender moments of splendor?  
Where have they gone, where have they gone?

To plant her metaphorical stake in the ground, she pushes a small shovel into the earth. It resists her. She spends the weekend hacking at soil that is too dry; it hasn’t rained in months. She misses the sound of the rain as it falls in symphony on an aluminum roof. She hasn’t bothered to change her clothes or put her belongings inside, and the yellowed dirt stains her pants in aberrant blooms. She gets comfortable; the blooms follow the movement of her body. She moves between half-formed thoughts that sprout as quickly as she clears them. This plot is suboptimal; weeds and dead grass knit together like wet hair that hasn’t been combed. She tries to detangle them. She wonders if stuff can grow here, if she cares for it enough. I guess this is the delusion again, she thinks.

Somewhere a hill  
Blossoms in green and gold
And there are dreams
All that your heart can hold

She waters her garden and hopes that it will live. She thinks that maybe, if she gently touches each new plant, they will know that she will be responsible for their life. Finding forgotten curios buried in the garden, she wonders whom they belong to. Who lived here? She is part of their lineage. She thinks about what it would be like to care for something that would be hers only briefly. Rebecca Solnit talks about how we struggle to appreciate what we can’t see. We forget about the potential for something to grow. *My garden; it has a nice ring to it,* she thinks. Her mind drifts to the shoreline, and how it thrives amidst indefiniteness. At first, she thought that chaos was the right word, but it isn’t chaos that happens at the edge of the sea.

Someday we’ll meet again, my love
Someday whenever the spring breaks through

The shore is a pattern, one of many natural patterns—a brief pledge between land and water to meet again and again, always under different circumstances. She feels called to return to the shore, as the water returns to the sand. It is a promise to endure in sub-par conditions. She is most at peace when she lays at this meeting point, body half in, half out, just enough so that the tepid, salty water pools around her shape. She lays her hands out at her sides, presses her fingers into the wet sand. She has never made a snow angel before, but she has done this a million times—always surprised at the excitement that comes with the momentary imprint that is left. She curls her fingers and digs her toes in, lays her head down and allows the wet sand to cup it. Figures around her lose their details, and she can hear the ocean in her ears. She hears the ocean every day of her life. She knows that coquinas hide about an inch below the surface; small, wedge-shaped marine clams that are variously colored. A constellation of jewels suspended between quartz crystal granules. When she was younger she always tried to scoop them up. They tickled her hands as they squiggled around, trying to find their way back home, pouring through the spaces of her fingers.
A pair of bare feet moves cautiously across sodden ground. On her legs are quarter-sized bruises; they flower in shades of purple and black. They belong to the body of a woman. She walks slowly as to understand each step, each echo of herself. She steps on something in the dirt and it cracks sharp, cutting her foot. Blood pools in lakes. She bends down to pick it up, slipping the object into the pocket of her white dress. She draws a cross in the dirt with her toe to mark the spot and as the dirt is brushed away a tiled floor is revealed. Her image reflects in the open spaces. The frame moves back and she is seen pacing in a room; the floor is covered in damp matter—there is no door but the outside has already pushed in. With each step an aperture opens, and she tries to avoid the fall, rising up on her tippy-toes. She stretches her arms as if beginning to dance and spins into a soft wall. Steadying herself, she fishes a knife out of her pocket and cuts out a square from the wall, making an opening. She rolls the object around in her hands and memorizes its facets. She places it inside, sews it up fast. It is clear that the thread is delicate and can be broken. She sits in a chair and remembers the dead bird that she found in the parking lot last week, how she carried it around in her car for three days. I wish I could shoot this feeling with an arrow and kill it, she thinks, pushing all the air out of her body. She leans back in the chair and blackness spills across her vision, leaking at the edges like tears.
The sky falls on the garden. Moving inside for the first time that day, she drags herself to the bathroom to peel off her clothes. They are left in a raised pile at her feet—the shape held still in soiled garments. Twisting the chipped glass knob towards hot, she climbs into the ceramic tub, anticipating the feeling. She stands in the shower and leans back. It pours over her face and her body is lifted up. She is floating again, after that summer that almost killed her. She runs down the length of the beach; promising to run until she collapses. Reaching the end, she yanks off her shoes and socks as they cling in defiance, walking straight into the salty water in her clothes. The ocean has never been so quiet and she dunks her head as an act of baptism. When she comes up dirt runs in rivulets down her legs. Light flows through the lunette window. It goes down the drain.

That evening she throws on a blue corduroy jacket and rushes out of the house for a party she had decided not to attend. In her hurriedness she notices the moon. A waning crescent; at dawn they will call it an old moon, already on its way towards death. If keeping with the Gregorian calendar, 96 days remain until the end of the year. She stands on an empty street edged with dark houses. Where is everyone? The question echoes.

*Play for me ghost. Play for me now.*

She wades through ghosts and sits down at the maple-glossed counter. Glass stacks the shelves on the back wall and an unnamable song wafts through the air.

To clear the leaves of fallen thoughts, she closes her eyes and shakes her head. The verdant trees have grown bare fast; mounds form on the ground and there is a temptation to kick them, scatter their peace. The clock strikes twelve and she prepares to leave the bar. Though she’s just arrived, her time is up. She has a plane to catch in the morning and her suitcase is an empty shell. A raised ledge appears and her boot catches. She falls into a familiar feeling, fringed with the mottled amber, honey, and brown of his tortoise shell frames. Lines crinkle at their corners like a paper airplane. He folds it, and slips it in her pocket for her to find later. Looking at him, she notices her reflection in his broken glasses. One side is awkwardly glued back together.
“If I didn’t leave then I’m afraid I’d stay forever” is written on the wing in black ink.

He sits on the empty stool next to her, feigning coincidence. They talk casually and she laughs hard, noticing the ardor of an old friend. She thinks she must have dreamt his voice last night. It sounds like music, each note new. Fresh water decants in her lungs and unfurls across the raw surface in waves. He knocks over a glass, gets up abruptly and leaves. She scans for him, hoping he’ll come back. She tries to swim through the noise and his fingers catch hers in his, keeping them there. He asks her to tread water. He turns around and lingers for a moment, raising one hand, releasing hers. Smiling, she raises her hand to mirror his. She pivots; buoyant, and ambles home.

He walks through the forest and finds her house buried in the woods; he lets himself in when she isn’t home. In the dining room there is a pine and ash table; he sits as the sun goes, says it doesn’t feel right without her. Rothko Chapel Part 5 filters through the room as he taps his foot wildly, his shoulders rounded and head curved down. Dark curls veil his beautiful face. Feral roots take in the garden and as they grow he tells her that he doesn’t love her. She comes home; three notes form a chord. The chorus repeats. She clips flowers to place on the table: Bleeding Heart, Blue Star Creeper, Artemisia ‘Sea Salt’, Blue Jean Baby. In the evenings they lie in the bed on the floor, making up a story together, sentence-by-sentence. His eyes gleam with innocence, and then grow hazy. Clouds pass over. He tells her about being trapped in a snow tunnel as a child, and the time that he lost his dad’s bike. His shame shines on his skin like sweat. It beads and he tries to wipe it off.

Curling into her neck he breathes and places his hand on the bend of her waist. His lips rest on her throat. He wraps around her a sharp soft nest made of sticks and odd bits in which she fits perfectly and feels safe. The edges are split and she doesn’t notice the scratches that have started to accumulate. Time lags and she takes his finger in her mouth. It tastes of salt and dirt. His heart skips one beat, and then another. He says it does that sometimes. A heart murmur: made by turbulent blood in or near the heart. She can feel it quicken and reaches out one hand to touch the center of his chest, slowing it. Sleep pulls him in, and he mumbles something about bones and not being able
to find them. As she closes her eyes she sees his silhouette slide through the door.

*Lover, where do you live?*
*In the skies, in the clouds, in the ocean?*

*And if I ever see you*
*Again my love*
*All I’m ever gonna do*
*Is send shivers down that spine of yours*
In October she travels to Portland to visit a friend. It is her first time on the west coast. Her friend takes her to a beach that feels like a nightmare, somewhere between awe and terror. The passage down Highway 101 is long, abbreviated by the queerish allure of leaves that float gold. They bow on an ebbing yellow sun, dip down with the undulating pavement. Images flume and blur on the windowpanes of her friends' aging Toyota Matrix and she watches them die out fast. They arrive in the parking lot and as they exit the car two dogs bound after them: one a small, white mutt, the other a Blue Merle with mismatched eyes. They take to the path, through the heart of an old growth forest. The wind stirs. Their steps are airy and sync with the ground beneath them, dragging topsoil as they follow the trail. They come across a log plated with mushrooms. It reminds her of the one across the fence in her backyard at home; her sister and her would disappear for hours. It seemed so far away. She positions the dogs and snaps a photo with an old film camera that hangs around her neck, fingerling the embroidered Levi strap. His mother's camera. She imagines his honeyed gaze in a puddle near her feet, and the time they tucked away under an ample pine, the ground soft with needles. She steps in his reflection and keeps walking. They follow a stream that runs to the ocean. It spills into an open plane. She stands on the beach and knows that she has been there before. She slips off her sneakers; her black wool socks, and presses her toes into the cold, packed sand. She notices her footprints and how they follow her. She follows them back, heel to toe. It is safe to wade, but no one goes further. She drags her big toe through the sand and draws a map that gets washed away. That night she has nightmares about water for the first time in years. She is standing on the shore of a strange beach and a twelve-foot wave rises above her, consumes her.

On the drive home they get stuck at a stoplight, she looks out the window and sees a large butterfly pattern on a billboard. The next day she gets a tattoo of a Cloudless Sulphur, a large yellow butterfly found throughout most of the mainland United States, etched into her skin. During fall, sulphur butterflies abandon their breeding sites in the northern reaches and travel south to Florida to wait out the winter. As he works the tattoo artist tells her about how butterflies are actually dodgy little creatures, how they drink blood from the carcasses of dead animals. He
wraps her arm up in a thick white bandage. The butterfly molts and takes weeks to heal.
In December, she ignites small memories with a match. She never knew what winter was until she moved. She likes the idea of changing with the seasons. She thinks about the seasons of her heart, and how those have changed with time.
I’ll come down someday soon
Sweeter things are a pink moon
Want to be crying, spewing blue
Someday

Parts of me feel parts of you
Sinking, crying, drinking you
Dreams of dying, haunts of blue
Someday

Dark blue paints the sky and she wakes up to her alarm ringing red. It pierces the air but she lets it ring. Drawn on her screen is the time: 2:56 am. It has become familiar over the past few weeks. It is the middle of the night, still shaded with black: the absence of light. Onyx mars, jet, bone. She groans and her dad’s voice reminds her that it’s not healthy to lie in bed when you can’t sleep. It’s not healthy to lie. Encourages the insomnia. It’s a habit. “Read a book or something”, he says. Its 2 am and his laughter loops through the house as he watches a comedy show on TV. Her mom has a warm glass of milk. She doesn’t like warm milk. She rolls over again and doesn’t get up, wishing she were the type of person that would. From somewhere indiscernible the twitter of a cardinal breaks neatly. Where are they coming from? She thinks. Isn’t it too early for the birds to be singing?

She rolls over again to a face she used to know. His eyes dart up to catch her gaze, and then fall down just as quickly. She notes something sad that she hadn’t seen before. He lies down on the left side of the bed, she on the right. When he talks he slips and calls her home “ours”, catching himself two times over. Two towels hung damp in the bathroom; two toothbrushes in a ceramic jar split from use; oatmeal at the table in the morning, it’s nice. “I’ve always liked pretending that I’m observing a stranger when I see you. He says. I thought people like you only existed in books and films.”

She used to have the corner, now she has the whole bed. She recalls an evening they spent together, sitting in the car. She knew then that he would leave; despite the way he gripped her hand white.

“I know that someday, the pain will all stop. I can’t wait for that day.” He halfway smiles between tears and her
insides crack. He sits there, stiller than he’s ever been. Usually he can’t stop fidgeting. She can’t stop herself from crying too. They leave the car and he goes to get sweet tarts from a vending machine, saying, “That’s what you do for someone you love”. His eyes are desperate. She holds out her hand and he pours the circles into the middle of it. His fingers hook hers and they walk into the dark. They slide through as she grabs at their shape.

“Follow the love, wherever it goes,” says a close friend. It’s the only thing that matters.

“I think the reason I am telling you this now, is that I realized (incidentally while out during a snowstorm), that life is long and we are young.” His voice uncouples from his body and grows distant.

She finds him curled on a dirt floor. She kisses his forehead gently, leaving him to sleep. Next to him, she digs a shallow hole in the ground with a metal spade, about a foot below. Breaking through weeds she twists the spade deeper so that it cuts the thick tubers that blanket the bottom. The spade chips a granite rock and an acute pain pierces the center of her sternum, spreading hotly. She reaches into her chest and pulls out a ball of tangled roots. The thin roots lead to glossy-leafed, dark green ivy that covers every inch of her ribcage. Hedera helix: commonly known as English Ivy. It is a plant that can attach itself to nearly any surface using a strategy involving natural-forming glue and shape-changing root hairs. They cling frantically and she yanks them with force that tears them. Placing them in the hole she covers the knot with earth, pressing down gently with her foot.

The dreams that drift through her have been strange lately, too real. Her mother recently sent her a book that talks about the peculiarity of seeing. “You Are The Universe: Discovering Your Cosmic Self And Why It Matters”. She laughs and rolls her eyes, reading out loud: “The brain has zero light inside it, being a dark mass of oatmeal-texture cells enveloped in a fluid not terribly different from seawater”, it says. There is no light in the brain, no pictures or images, either.

She fishes around in her bedside table for a folded piece of paper and a pen. “Our memories will always be ours. And they will always be my favorite” reads a handmade card that came in the mail yesterday. Drawn on the front are two
flowers, one a gardenia – the other a morning glory. Most morning glories unravel into full bloom in the early morning, and close before the sun goes down. However, some species bloom at night. They grow behind the house at her Florida home. They will always be her favorite. On the back of the card she sketches a simple diagram, three words connected by three curved lines that circle indefinitely: process, love, change. There is no particular order.
She comes home and opens the drawer, takes the card out and a scalloped leaf the color of pale linen. Cramming them in a marigold votive that anoints her dresser, she ignites them with a click and flame lighter. She watches the card and leaf burn wholly to ashes. The wick doesn’t catch but the candle glows blood-orange. Startled, she stops crying and stares as the reaction intensifies. The flames flare and lick the sides of the glass. She blows on them and they seethe in luminous fashion, splitting in two. It is self-perpetuating, continuing to burn as long as there is fuel and oxygen around it. Desperate to quell the fire she dumps water on the blaze. The flame pitters in small gasps. It unwillingly goes out.
The month is February and she travels home for her mom’s 65th birthday, camera in tow. They only have candles with the number 47.

As the plane stills on the runways she slips her headphones over her ears, covering them in water. She selects a song titled “Sorry for Not Answering the Phone I’m Too Busy Trying to Fly Away”, made up of birds and simple sounds; seems fitting. She pulls out a small cream notebook, inscribing “Short Poem” at the top of the page. She chews on her pen cap and writes.

Short Poem:

My glass heart
sits on a shelf
me, in an olive gray puffer
il cuore mio di vetro
it sounds better
in another language

The plane jolts, it’s been static for a while. They haven’t left the ground and she exchanges the notebook for her laptop, transcribing fragmented phone notes into a word document. She categorizes them by type:

People

Dad is on the roof again fixing leaks. He is too old to be doing this. Marriage on the beach in Puerto Rico. Marriage to a professional soccer player. He remembered her birthday. Takes four months to kiss her. Wedding in the yard. You were conceived in this house, he likes to remind her. She cringes. Details

Last night,
I saw an old couple on the plane.
They pressed their heads together,
in one word.

I thought I might want to die with you someday.

Hupart duprAt
Places

There is something about hearing a sound in the distance and never finding it.

Snow falling silently

The faucet dripping

The earth remembers,

four seasons.

Things

I keep having this vision:

My body, breaking apart

into butterflies

A red heart/beat

egg carton, glossed

paper airplanes, painting

is a box. My brain,

on a good day

feels like jazz
Standing at the edge of the sea, she tenses her toes and curls the sand in their crevices. She talked to her dad on the phone today; at home they are getting an entirely new roof, to stop the leaks that keep springing up. Diverting the water just isn’t working anymore. Her other house is an empty frame; everything packed up and cleared clean. She looks down at her wrists. She takes turns touching the blue-green veins on each underside. They split open and water pours out of them. It runs through her fingertips.

Two plus ten equals twelve. She counts:

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

and lets it flood her, thinking of Roni Horn’s monologue Saying Water, muddled with her own thoughts.

I want to be formless, move through, but instead I knock into every sharp corner, bump my head on the same table 10 times, like when I was five. And for a moment I forget that it’s right in front of me. Everything goes slant and I hear the ocean in one ear. I remember that everything is perception—sensation. I don’t know how I can help him or myself. Lately I’ve been thinking about church and I thought I might like to go just to experience the light
that comes through the window at a certain time of day and if I can feel it on my cheek. I try to remind myself that I am real. An exterior sliding through another body into a formless one. Only that it’s everywhere, differently. I remember having nightmares about swimming through a pond tangled with the most beautiful and grotesque things. I had to go slowly; be careful. I don’t remember what happened when I got to the other side.

She walks into the ocean and stares out at an invisible horizon; a division between here and there. She lifts her arms up high, reaching them above her head. She flexes them with poise and prepares to dive. A swan dive, always her favorite during lessons with one Mrs. Susan Hollis. Light reflects and her image dissolves into a trillion constituent parts. Her toes dip beneath the glass surface and her body disappears. Minutes pass. Sparkles discard over the open water.

HOW THE BRAIN FORGES NEW MEMORIES (by replaying events in bits and pieces).

Memory researchers now have evidence that the brain employs its own “play-back” mechanism to cement key neural connections in place and form long-term memories.

THIS PLAY-BACK REACTIVATES SOME OF THE SAME NEURONS THAT FIRED WHEN WE FIRST EXPERIENCED AN EVENT, HELPING THE BRAIN FORM STRONG AND PERMANENT CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEM.

THE END.
1:

‘Find some way to let her live. Even if you don’t tell them.’

She makes a note to herself,

closing the book.
Discography


Phil Bodner, “Lara’s Theme (Somewhere, My Love)”, track 4 on The Brass Ring, Dunhill, 1966, compact disc.


Roni Horn, “Dia Center for the Arts presents Roni Horn saying water (the river Thames for example)”, Dia Center for the Arts, 2001, compact disc.
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“REVELATION 21:21 KJV And the Twelve Gates [Were] Twelve Pearls; Every Several Gate Was of One Pearl: and the Street of the...” REVELATION 21:21 KJV "And the twelve gates [were] twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the...". Accessed March 10, 2020. https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Revelation-21-21/.


Endnotes


vi “REVELATION 21:21 KJV And the Twelve Gates [Were] Twelve Pearls; Every Several Gate Was of One Pearl: and the Street of the...,” REVELATION 21:21 KJV "And the twelve gates [were] twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the...", accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Revelation-21-21/


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