

THE BOOK OF ELA OR APOKALYPSIS IN FIVE ACTS

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents who have always instilled in me the importance of voice in literature and for Rachel for whom words will never be enough

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Ela or Apokalypsis in Five acts seeks first and foremost to investigate the layers of mental abstraction in which the human mind engages when thinking, and by extension, when writing. Writing and thinking do not end at the boundaries of genre. As such, I felt the styles therein should not stop at those boundaries either. Making use of influences such as Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf, Renee Gladman and Rosemarie Waldrop, I have endeavored to use narrative as a to form more fully and poetically explore the contours of language, and by extension, the contours of the mind. The project began with the investigation of character appearing in the text, known as the cartographer. The cartographer is strictly atemporal, and thus supersedes human consciousness. And yet, the cartographer's existence presented itself as an ideal jumping off point from which to explore the many layers of consciousness that one immersed in such a continuum could never survey in full. Around the same time I was working on this character, I came across an article that reimagined Schrodinger's famous thought experiment of the cat and the box with an additional layer. Now it was not only the cat, the box and the person opening the box that combined to collapse the wave function. This new configuration required a second observer watching from outside the room, observing not only cat and box, but observer. The question was: when in this scenario does the wave function collapse? This was endlessly fascinating to me, and I found myself thinking that since we are so

many selves, this sort of dynamic unfolds within the bounds of consciousness in every decision we make.

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When writing a character such as Ela, it is of primary importance to imagine a place for Ela to occupy. In what sense do I mean this? Were this a call and response I might turn to the audience and ask, “where does Ela belong?” to which the audience might, in many voices, reply: “in a house”, “in a city”, “on an iceberg drifting slowly from shore”, “in an alley behind a supermarket”, “in a cave on the side of a volcano”, “in space”, “in the future”, “in memory”, “on stage”, and many other similar suggestions.

I imagine this last suggestion has been shouted by a small child in the front row, whose parents shush them shortly after their outburst and are all but prepared to carry them from the theater and head home to send them to bed without supper. To these parents I would say, “it is a shame you do not see your child for what they are, a playwright of the future.”

This child’s straightforward answer belies a willingness to look closely when others perceive only the average. Many put more store in answers that carry the idea further in their eyes, but in doing so, they miss some essential component of the foundation. Every journey begins with a step, as some say. The child must be one of those that says such things.

So, let us imagine Ela on stage. Ela, like the child begins their story with a step. We imagine a curtain parting to make way for them. Though not so much as to reveal anything more of what it conceals. This revelation will come later. We do not wish to know more of Ela now than we need to know.

Ela steps into a spotlight—somewhat off center, but we will forgive it. For now it is enough that we can see Ela with clarity. Though clarity only goes so far, only tells us so much, only accomplishes what we allow it to accomplish.

Ela turns left, and then left, and then left, and then left. Ela peers into the audience but does not see the audience. The spotlight obscures their vision. They run from side to side to be free of it, but the light tracks them with ease. Ela is always at the center of the light. Their distress grows as they dash about, changing directions quickly, jumping and tumbling into background and foreground in an attempt to shake the halo loose.

All Ela succeeds in doing is changing the size and angle of their shadow. The curtain catches an imprint of their action as ephemeral as the action itself. It ripples as Ela stirs the air. The edges of the shadow melt as its canvas waves. Ela turns to the curtain and looks into their shadow where they imagine there might be eyes. Ela may blink, but there are some things the light cannot reveal.

CHORUS

: shall i tell you how it ends?

: how what ends?

: anything you like.

: anything i like?

: so long as it is bound by space and time.

: hmm. forget it.

: of course I was really referring to-

: what exactly are we doing here?

: it appears that we are sitting in the fifth row on the far left side of the orchestra section of a large theater.

: ...and.

: well. i suppose it stands to reason then that we must be audience members.

: what?

: we must be here to see a show.

: but there is no one else here.

: then i suppose we are either very early or it is a very unpopular show.

: wonderful. and where were we before we were here?

: i suppose you know.

: do i? well that is a relief then, isn't it?

: is it?

: i don't know. but i thought saying it might make it true.

: did it?

: ask me again in 20 years.

: i ask you even as we speak.

: really? and what am i saying to you twenty years from now?

: you tell me not to tell you what you say to me.

: damn. well i admit that does sound like me. at least i'll still be around in twenty years.

: recognition? does that mean you remember?

: i think you know i do.

: certainly, but only because you tell me so.

: when?

: just then.

: now?

: for me. not quite for you.

: i see. or something.

: do you have a name this time?

: ...i'm not sure. have i ever known?

: does ela mean anything to you?

: i'm sure it means something, but to whom, i can't say.

: hmm.

: it sounds nice though, doesn't it?

: it does indeed.

: for now just call me someone.

: someone it is.

: what do you know of this play?

: oh that would spoil the fun.

: but you just offered to tell me the end.

: the end is only a small piece. what i know extends much further than that.

: then tell me about the light.

: the light?

: don't you see it? where the curtain fails to meet the stage?

: ah. you mean the book.

: ...excuse me?

: but of course.

: i didn't mean i- oh nevermind. what do you mean the book?

: it is the source of the light. what is behind the curtain. the book.

: i am unfamiliar with the word.

: imagine an infinitely sided object built of finite things. can you do it?

: i think so.

: now things are always infinite because they do not end. some do not end because they have infinite duration. picture a line with no end points and you will have a fair idea of this kind of infinity.

: ok.

: the book is the other sort.

: so it is bounded.

: in a sense. but it is in this same sense that it is limitless.

: i've had enough of the inversions.

: i see.

: shall we talk about something else?

: while we wait for the show?

: while i wait for the show. i suppose you are watching it already.

: thou hast said it.

: oh ha ha ha, my lord.

: tsk tsk, how sacrilegious.

both : oh blow it out your ass. stop it. i said stop it! bastard! icon. sarsaparilla. je suis le gran bouffon. salbitxada. romanesco. trickle, trickle, trickle. paraplegic. peripeteia. persuasive patrimony. i jump. i stop. exported elephants exquisitely errrrrupt. please sir. i suppose this pleases you sir. my lord. my lord. my lord.

(pause. A sigh.)

: we are being watched you know.

: undoubtedly. you don't really expect them not to keep an eye because the circumstances have changed.

: i suppose not. i just thought perhaps since we were in the audience this time that we would be the observers.

: shall i tell you something of your future?

: why not?

: we do not stay in the theater long.

: so we are not here to see a show?

: the show is not in the theater only.

: and what lies outside the theater?

: many things lie outside the theater. think of something. anything.

: ...a sweet fuji apple and fresh honeycomb.

: do you see it on the stage? on the floor? on any of the seats?

: no.

: do you suppose it is back stage? do you smell it's subtle fragrance? the floral apple? the heavy honey?

: i smell nothing.

: then where do you suppose it is?

: suppose it is in my head and there is really no such thing as apples or honeycomb and you are just humoring my insanity to make your point.

: you may suppose such a thing if you wish.

: but is it true?

: that is not for me to say.

: then how may i say it?

: i will be happy to show you if you like.

: and what will i have to do to be shown.

: you will have to stand up, leave the seat behind and exit the theater.

: then i would be an audience member no more.

: no. but you will be in the middle of it all.

: what is "it all"?

: shall i tell you how it ends?

: i suppose you must. but there are no doors. without doors how will we exit the theater.

: easy. you must do what is natural.

: and what is natural?

: you break through the wall.

APOKALYPSIS

The play *Apokalypsis* is the play you are watching but are not in. As such it does not interest you much. You barely watch, really. That is to say, other things occupy your attention. Yet these are framed for you by the play. The events are nothing, but its time is absolutely real. While watching, or not watching, you become obsessed with its time. You experience it, but you cannot measure it. A program tells you there are three acts, but you swear there have been four already, and you are certain you are not halfway through yet, though you have no reasoning as to why.

Its time and your time converge, and you begin to think that it is not your time or its time that captivate you. Just time. Time has made you captive. You are not in it, but you perceive it. You perceive it, but cannot measure it. It shackles you, but you cannot feel it round your wrists. The play is nothing to you, but sometimes it ticks. You use its time to suggest your time. But its time is immaterial, its clicks are irregular and never strike the hour.

When the hour strikes, it is not time that has done it. It strikes twice in quick succession, and then not again until the act you aren't watching concludes. Something ends. No curtain creates closure. It floats over the stage. Then the hour strikes you. You reel back in your seat, blood dripping slowly from your nose. You wipe it. It is wet, and warm. You lift it to your eye. It is crusty and congealed. You wipe it on your pants and it leaves a bright streak. Earlier, you looked down and the blood was still wet. Later there was no sign of it at all.

Blood flows thick and wet from your nose. What the play measures is not time. You smear it on the air. It measures you or the perception of you without time. Before your eyes, the hour strikes itself. Soundless. The play is nothing. Blood shoots up your nose. That is to say, your attention to it is inverted. Its reality is irrevocable. You suggest it by your time. Your time fits snugly between your index and middle fingers. Sometimes it bleeds. Sometimes it chimes.

you write the word

earth on a piece of paper. the paper is now earth. in time you become dissatisfied with the paper. you crumple it in your hands. you burn it to ashes and then bury the ashes. you stomp on the spot where they are buried. you piss where you buried and stomped.

when you burn the paper labeled earth you have burned something real. not earth but something as real as earth. the fire and ashes are real. when you piss it is real piss you cast upon the burial ground for a burnt scrap of the real called earth.

i envy you. i write earth on a piece of paper. here it is: *earth*. i am not satisfied. i am full of dissatisfaction. i am full of the echo of your dissatisfaction. i want to crumple the word in my hands and feel the reality of my discontent. i want to tear the paper. i want to tear the word but i can't reach the word. it is on the paper and i can't even tear the paper. all i have is the image of the paper. i imagine tearing the paper. i imagine burning it and burying the ashes. i imagine stomping and pissing on its grave. i imagine the grave of the word.

this image is as real to me as the paper was to you but i cannot burn it. to burn it would be to transform it. i cannot bury it. to bury it would be to disguise it. i cannot piss and stomp upon its grave. it has no grave. it has at most the image of a grave. i have at most the impression of the image of a grave. a grave being the immersion of the body in dirt. the immersion of the ashes of the body in dirt. the immersion of the ashes of the image of the body in dirt. the immersion of the image of the ashes of the image of the body in dirt. the immersion of the image of the ashes of the image of the body in the image of dirt. which is the image of earth. which is the origin of your anger. of our anger. which is the origin of the burning and crumpling and pissing and stomping. which is the origin of the burial. which is the origin of the image of the burial. which is the origin of the impression of the image of the burial.

you did not look beneath your feet. i can at most imagine what it would have looked like if you did. at most i can say it looked like what the word earth on a piece of paper didn't. i can see what the *earth* on the piece of paper didn't. i can see what the memory of the *earth* on a piece of paper didn't. you have forgotten the memory. you have forgotten the impression of the memory. you have forgotten not-earth. you have forgotten the word for earth.

i cannot forget the word. though i do not have the word. i am the record of the word. not the word. the image of the word. the written image of the word on paper. on the image of paper. on earth. on the not-earth called *earth*. i am the image of you. the impression of the image of you. the memory of the impression of the image of you. the memory of the impression of writing earth on paper. of calling the paper earth. of realizing it is not-earth. of burning earth. of burning not-earth. of burying not-earth in earth. of pissing and stomping on both not-earth and earth. the earth between your foot and not-earth. the image of your foot atop the image of earth all around the image of not-earth. the ashes of not-earth. the image of the ashes of not-earth.

you write the word earth on the image of paper. we both know this isn't earth. we both know this isn't not-earth. we both know there is no both. there is only the impression of both.

i envy you your reality. i envy you the image of your reality. i envy you the impression of the image of your reality on earth. or on not-earth. i envy you what you have. it is not what i have.

it is

blue

blue with a bit of red in it

blue with a bit of red in it

blue and red and green

the grid of blue and red and green

the grid of

all that i have

is a lump of dirt. apologies. the image of a lump of dirt. the image or its impression. i had. you had. you and i had once and have now let slip. you cannot build a dam with paper. now, you have the memory of the impression of the image. you don't even have the image. i don't even have the image.

a lump of dirt, rust brown and soft to touch as the impression-memory dictates, lives in you. prove a word lives beneath it. prove that even a paper or an impression of a paper lives beneath the dirt which is your dirt.

your dirt. a joke i could not help. you are reaching without hands. i know your wishes. i am to you what you are to. observer-eternal, a step removed from ecstasy.

can an ink-blot salivate? what do you call it when it runs down the page?

rain?

too predictable. you can hear it shake the air. skin turns to scales, performs its forty-five degree turn. every hair aware. though you know nothing of this, you surmise. you bury your own paper in your own dirt.

i suppose it is infinite. why not? this dirt relies not on that dirt. on no dirt at all. you reach an arm in to the elbow. not your arm of course. not your fingers touch no bottom.

not your fingers brush the edge of a cold sharp thing. they pinch and squeeze, desperate pliers of middle and index. you attempt to unearth.

enough flailing and not your fingers succeed only in making charybdis of the dirt. of this new impression of your dirt. of not dirt.

edge unrecognizes edge. refuses to be un-dirt. the way it almost wasn't.

dirt/un-dirt

it was no more real for you than it was for. observer eternal, a step removed from. now dust is a measuring stick.

is dust something you have? no more something than. anyway, its long tongue is a let-out line and the hook is. you wouldn't know what to do with it.

i guess the arm in the dirt is the arm in their dirt is the arm in your dirt is now the arm in my dirt. i suppose the trend continues. infinite regression goes off a cliff somewhere. only its curvature gets in the way. it is a craggy serpent's back ringed with fog and without mirrors.

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the shape of blue

its sound

how blue smells

red and its deficiencies

green as noun and adjective

a grid of attributes

a mirror

infinite space is full of sound. or its possibility. the thing falling backward into backward.
 a curve approaching a curve. from dirt emerges. from dirt a coldness flatness thinness.
 not our hands lift from dirt by the edges. by the edges not our fingers conjuring
 whirlpools in gloss.

how un-dirt shines.

in not our hands, from dirt reflects form. it blinks as i blink. did i know i had eyes? as i
 notice you notice near symmetry. a change in perspective breaks

the illusion

of continuity. an unceasing image of occurrence. near objects in rhythm arriving. exiting
 stage left. suspended from a string. sand nee words. a twirling ornament of fingers and
 water.

hollow stillnesses reveal un-dirt of shape and color. forms repeat with angled scatterings
 of light.

photovoltaic

i energy from dirt energies un-dirt energies from dirt energies i.

soon i know shapes by rotation. by time. by angle. the form appears frequent. i ignore the
 form until i realize it looks like you. you. un-dirt of shape and color. un-dirt like i un-dirt.

and you and you and you.

speaking of you and you and you from dirt possesses your forms in moments. i seize the
 string. end the twirling. i turn deliberately. make angles. measure distances.

un-dirt made un-dirt by the mirror.

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air is blue

and a little red

implying green

broken edges of the thing

a circle

of us. from there to the infinite in bounded space. we each hold a mirror at chest height. holding our form and tilted as from us to the top right vertex of a pentagon. in each mirror, a you and a mirror. like a fan of playing cards. fingers in emulation of a bat wing.

i move and you move. and you and you and you. i look away from the mirror. all i see is dirt. dirt even where un-dirt dirt the mirror.

i don't understand

you must be thinking. the dirt on not your hands is not your hands. is nothing. less than. fatigue
and hot soil and wood.

not wood. glass. not glass. glass and silver. glass and silver and you. not your fingers burrowing into the back. the heels of not your palms somewhat held.

you have nearly forgotten what it is to be. a circle of fifths. sevenths. twelfths. all numbers ascend. no stories in a vacuum. not only up but sideways. space without direction. aimless concatenations.

or perhaps not. perhaps not aimless. perhaps not sideways. a circle yes but perhaps no sevenths. no twelfths. perhaps not timeless. perhaps only dirt. it is not dirt

that forgets you. it is you that has forgotten. and not i. and not you. and not i and not you are affectionate amnesiacs. and all around them is dirt and they don't want dirt. enough dirt they say though they do not know they say it. they do not know saying. do not wish to know.

voice is not un-dirt. is un-earth. un-matter. un-world.

un-un-world.

perhaps faces in mirrors are

only mirrors

and colors are possible. the rest is settled.

settle down you.

dirt becoming dirts

brown displacing browns

with brown and green

through the grid of

there is only one way to break a mirror.

begin as darkness. be everywhere. be nowhere. be incomprehensibly small. compressed. without antecedent. be like a number. the first number. become the first number. coalesce. count yourself as yourself. be that. there is nothing. be nothing. be precursor to nothing.

terrible. though as advice goes, it could be worse. the thing is lost in translation. but translation is a place. the thing finds itself elsewhere. un-here, but not un. the thing is still the thing. or is still behaving like the thing. you suspect of it uncertainties.

alternately: a mirror cannot be broken

it only becomes a smaller mirror. a smaller mirror for smaller objects like letters or flecks of dirt.

where does the dirt stop not you asks meaning i assume not you has forgotten whatever word signifies dirt at its smallest as have i. and to have forgotten the word is to realize dirt has no unit. no insoluble. infinitudes of division and still the thing called dirt in plural.

accumulation without identity

in the mirror, a tear of skin looms sharply over its face. we all feel the little twinges in our thumbs. hear the catches in our breathing.

i see not you looking my way. and you and you and you. an eagle's eye for every compass point in the cosmos.

i am similarly

staring, making narratives of inversion. imagining monologues and dialogues and trialogues. little twists of language. the rhetorical elements. how one builds an argument. how one develops convictions. where belief comes from. is there such a thing as god. how old is really the universe. is love or such a thing real. can i hold it. how branches decide where to curve. and when. what lightning feels when it strikes a treetop and bursts into flames. why the rock is ever so still. the treatise an amoeba wrote on being ripped in two and how it still remained itself despite the trauma. how big was the first footprint on land. where planted. where dreams come from. who works at the factory. whose job it is to make blue a color. how i make blue when i see blue already made. how the blue narrative reads the red narrative reads the green narrative. how the blue narrative blues the red narrative reds the green narrative. how the narratives of blue and red and green

become the narrative of blue and red and green when blue blues red and red reds green. and when green greens red and blue and everything is brown. unbroken brown. a smooth and all-encompassing brown. like dirt. like the thought of dirt. like the smell and taste and not smell and not taste of dirt is brown. like *brown*. like the word *brown*. like the word brown is brown except when i think it. when it's green. and even when it's green it's brown. and brown is a found object. a lost artifact. another thing behind glass. and the glass is brown and you can see through it but everything in the glass is brown too. and everything you can see in the glass is in the glass. and there is nothing seen outside the glass. and nothing seen within the glass is still within the glass. is the nothing in the glass. and how the nothing in the glass makes up everything in the glass. and the nothing seen outside the glass isn't outside the glass at all. how it is the glass. how it is the glass being nothing. or the glass being the heels of all our palms. or the glass being the tears of skin in all our thumbs. or the glass being our identical expressions. or the glass being our exclamations of fear. or the glass being the massive pupils in our eyes. or the dirt. or not the dirt. the un-dirt. or not the dirt nor the un-dirt. the from dirt. the thing with edges we knew to be a thing for its edges. knew not to be dirt. knew not to be edges but the memory of edges but the impression of edges. edges a word we know and do not know. a word we have read but never used. a word that is not a word when it is trapped between our molars. a word that is a puddle of ink. that resolves into a puddle of ink. that always was a puddle of ink. that we made into our mirror. that we filled with palms and thumbs and eyes and selves and mirror and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and cracks and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and cracks and cracks and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and mirrors and cracks and cracks and cracks and mirrors and mirrors and cracks and cracks and cracks and cracks and cracks and mirrors and cracks and cracks and cracks and cracks and cracks and cracks

spread through me

like an old painting. the thing in my hand bursts and with it bursts my hand. the thing that is my hand becomes the things that are my hand. become grasping irregularities in the plethora of dusts.

we drift apart. a particled sea of refractions. a fly-eyed singular. powdered glass in wet cement.

the larger fragments hold only greys. a storm cloud of ambiguities. a mountain of spent ashes.

and from underneath the mountain, a wriggling, verdant vine making of itself a leaf, of a leaf a flower, of a flower a bee and a hive and a tree. and of a tree making an earth and of an earth a world. and of a world making a root system of narratives. a tapestry of foundations gnarled and immersed in dirt.

i wrote the word

earth on a piece of paper. the paper was small. it fit in my pocket. it was smooth and cool on my palms. once sharp but now softened, rounded at the edges.

i used a pen to do it. i nestled its body in the crook of my index and thumb and pinched its neck between them. i pressed the nib of the pen to the cool smoothness of the paper. in the paper i left an arroyo and filled that arroyo with rain. the arroyo became a creek and un-died. grew a history and future.

i looked at early spring in the paper. i imagined it through summer, fall and winter. i saw the ink dry and vanish. i saw the imprint of the arroyo smooth over. saw everything covered in snow.

i also saw earth. not the word, memory or impression. the earth. dirt i could not pinch to nothing between my fingers. i saw it with my eyes. i felt it with my hands. i smelled it with.

but you have no sense of smell. no sense of the sense of smell.

touch you can imagine. it is how you interact with objects for which there are words. and sound is the words' manifestation out of writing.

taste is what happens when the words move through your mouth. and sight is what allows you to perceive words on the paper.

but of what use is smell to language? you cannot breathe a word in. you cannot even breathe.

and smell is something different from breathing. a sensation of the breath that is not the breath itself.

think the word periscope. it makes you laugh. this is like smell.

now i smell the dirt on my fingers. the scents of herbs among the brush. the menthol spirit of pine resin. smoke from a distant fire. cut and uncut grass. a faint hint of roses. from across the grounds, a cigarette. a skunk upon the wind.

i have touched and i have smelled. i have held and i have heard. i have tasted.

what you know is yours by association.

and i see all of you. with mirror or without. half-submerged in your own dirt. making nothing out of everything.

it is one thing to break a mirror. it is quite another out of some uninitiated substance to craft one. to rearrange particles with tweezers.

to hold a piece of paper in your hand. to press a pen against it. to leave a memory in the paper. to fill it with a word. to call that word earth. to think of earth as a set of symbols. to think of earth as sound. to think of earth as dirt.

ambiguities gather in the hollow.

to have put this all into the paper. to have read the word you have written. to after the entire universe has collapsed in upon itself in order to make space for the word allow the word to melt upon the tongue of your eye and realize there is only one thing it contains.

brown and its absence
illusion of brown upon eye
illusion of hand upon branch
of blue and red and green
illusion of reflection
of a shattered shimmering surface
of a slender necked vine between shards
of a patient motion in the dirt
in a stirring of green
in a waking of brown

APOKALYPSIS

The play *Apokalypsis* was written by animals. Or perhaps it was first written by men, but only the animals understand it. The tale of its conception goes like this: a man or woman standing alone in the forest somewhere is struck from some unknown place with an idea so monstrous they fear its presence within will make them outcasts to the human world.

They grab whatever object is closest at hand (a branch, a twig, a flower, a leaf, a blade of grass...) and break it in their hands, pressing it into the dirt in wild, unnameable motions. Clumps of earth and piles of leaves fill the air. When they are finished they lie panting, their hands, face and torso covered in dirt; torn up roots and decaying flowers woven into their hair. After some time, they pick themselves up, shake as much of the earth from their bodies as they can manage, and leave the forest, never to return.

They feel shame as they walk back to their village, thinking of themselves as destroyers, once, and possibly forever, possessed by something they do not and shall never understand. They even briefly feel sorry for the forest and what they have imposed upon it in their exorcism.

But the record of the forest is longer than the record of man. In what is but a moment to the trees, the torn earth becomes indistinguishable from that which lies several feet to the right and left of it. The right and left disappear as suddenly as the it. A deer walks over an unremarkable patch of soil, quietly shits, and walks on.

Un

-

Un

-

Nothing descended

-

No thing in

-

A tuft of green grass

-

Evidence of a divot there, but no divot

-

Someone^h flat on their stomach, one cheek to the earth, fingers prodding nothing^h

-

What they notice: a change in the angles of the leaves describing a circumference — a circumference describing a delicate little nothing

-

A delicate little nothing with attributes — length, breadth, depth, shape — a crater in the grass displacing dirt and the dirt unable to find a way back into the dirt, someone unable to push it

^h When I try to write *the cartographer*, I inevitably end up writing *Ela* instead.

Excuse me, that sentence should read: “When I try to write *Ela*, I inevitably end up writing *Ela* instead.” But if I wrote it this way, would you know what I was saying?

^h When I end up writing *Ela*, I write her coming down the long staircase into her home (she lives deep under earth) just in time to watch her program. The program depicts trees growing. Usually redwoods, or other behemoths. The video is often a time lapse, so the motion is abrupt. But today the time on the television correlates perfectly to the time in *Ela*’s home. The only visible motion is what the camera or wind provides.

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The shape roughly circular with no noticeable bottom, an unnatural dark working the crater, a straightness to the descent of its walls apparently unadulterated by grass roots or worms or gnarled twists of subterranean clover, nothing breaking the lightlessness, nothing light could uncover, only so wide as a child's fist, a clustered gnarl^h of absence

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And if someone were a child, and if one moment their fist were the measure, and if as time began to pass they found their knuckle couldn't reach the crater's edge, and if it were no mistake, and if the child were not shrinking, and if everything in the universe was still aside from time, and if time did not dilate, and if the years passed as the years passed, then it surpassed the understanding in a fist, or in a child, and grew as only nothing can grow^h

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A day passes, or a year, the details are unimportant, measure fades, the child's fist grows a freckle, grass is green and then brown, an identical moment with a cheek pressed to the earth and the rise is not so subtle, nothing has expanded and someone is without explanation, someone waves their hand through the airspace above the crater's boundary, imagining the ascension of some intangible object, the crater now closer to the size a bucket, someone thinking soon it will be a hubcap, the hand outstretched is not a canopy, does not even cast a shadow, interior dark as ever even as the grass refuses to make shade, to grow high enough, someone's hand descends into the crater, someone's hand

^h When Ela walks down the long staircase into her home—the television (already and always on) provides a gateway for the time of the under-earth and tree time to merge—Ela is already there, and has been (the sentence should read: “Ela is already there and is”). Ela watches Ela walk down the long staircase into her home to experience the time of the tree.

Tree time, as all other time, is possessive. Run away and it changes. Or running changes it. Or running changes the runner. This is nothing new to Ela—Ela who is already there and is. They do this—now and now and now and now...—under many names.

^h The house, though underground, is made of wood. The walls are wood. As are the tables and most of the furniture. Ela, watching Ela, sees Ela; and sees not-Ela. Sees house, table, furniture; and sees not-house, not-table, not-furniture. Sees the tree in its time on the television grow from sprout, to sapling, through every stage: the overtaking of decay and rot, the tumbling back to earth, the feast of fungus and moss; and sees the tree on the television without motion supplied not by camera or wind; and sees the tree untelevised, that was there before the house was there (this clause should read: “that is there as the house is there”); and sees the television as not-television, as some other ever-burning thing that draws the eye, receiving energy from the tree.

comes to rest on nothing, cannot push through it, cannot make a hole out of a hole, cannot define parameters it can not^h see

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it can not see, and what it can not see is different from the act, the act being not a not but rather, rather the seeing than the not, the potential for seeing from inside the outside, the lawn that no longer lawns, the grass that has given up green and even brown, that has given up being grass and is now an act of consumption, a fortified absence, it consumes itself, it has consumed, it is consuming,^h lawn in isolation being not lawn but meadow, someone made of meadow lawn, and of consumption someone is made surveyor not of lawn but of rather, rather of nothing, of nothing's consumption, it has consumed, it is consuming, it fortifies itself in expansion and is no longer circular, the grass which no longer grasses describes no longer a circumference but rather, rather a crater and its wandering tendrils, ridges in what lives beyond the grass, let's call it thicket, let's call it river, let's call it city, let's call it what comes before, what came before, let's call it rather, rather what should have was, what should have is, what soon will was and never will is again, what makes of itself a fossil written into the fabric of the rather, rather nothing, rather everything was is and will, something encroaching, someone reaching, a disturbance in grass, rather rather,^h rather rather, rather rather, rather rather

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Rather consumption as discovery, discovery as a falling into dark, of what it is in dark consumption begets, begets nothing rather, rather nothing than this and that, of this and

^h The tree that is there as the house is there also looms. For Ela, the looming is present only as the walls, tables and other furniture are present. But for Ela, all realities coexist, are concurrent.

I write this sentence even as I know I should write another. This sentence should read: "I write this sentence as I write another."

^h Before there was Ela there was no precursor ("before" is not the word I meant to say; "was" is not the word I meant to say; the sentence should read: "To Ela, there is no precursor." "meant" is not the word I meant to say).

What I meant to say is what I mean to say. What I mean to say is what I say but not what I said. What I said (said?) was "Before Ela there was no precursor", but this only appears (appeared?) true. What I say is that Ela travels through time to give me this message.

^h To Ela, time travel is like walking across a room—the way Ela watches Ela walk from the staircase to the television. Ela at the top of the stairs and Ela by the couch cannot see what Ela in front of the television sees. To Ela who watched Ela walk, Ela blocks their view.

Ela in front of the television walks into the room as the tree growing in tree time, which in this case is the same as the time of under-earth, arrives at itself. The tree, which, in 428 BC—for Ela, a glance to the left—bursts from the soil, on the television creaks, rumbles and collapses through a foliage of giants.

that emerging not from nothing, of nothing becoming manifest elsewhere, of a hollow in the soil, in the crust, in the mantle, everything coming and disappearing in threes, of earth water and sky, delicate little nothings pushing through somethings miles distant, of other someones or the same someone also with their cheek to something examining the subtlety of a rise, the darkness of a crater, its length breadth depth and shape, of the angle grass or dirt or asphalt makes in leaning away from nothing, of the speed of its growth, of the loss of its rough circularity, of the birth and expansion of its ridges, of the consumption of its lawn, its meadow, its grass, the dark breaks into pieces the world, the world becomes what eats it, becomes the mouth, a crater now the size of a house, now the size of a cul-de-sac, now the size of a neighborhood, a city, what is discovered dissolves and is not found but tasted, like salt in water becomes only water, like water is never only water but its history,^h every lake, every river, every ocean, and then every cloud, every rain, every ascension, even every teardrop, every sweat-bead, every salivation, of piss and snot and rather, rather of time and its fixed progression, of its inevitable phase shift, of plasmas and liquids and solids, of every gas and things too cold to be, rather cold enough to assume new identities, hot enough to start over in a different state, to be given a second and third and fourth chance at something, even as something dissolves, even as dissolving makes it something else, even if that something is nothing, even if that nothing is growing, is behaving as something, is taking up space, space in the world, space that is world, that was world, would be world, if world persisted, if nothing stopped being nothing and became what it approximates, branching into possibilities as yet unimagined, of fantasies of completion, of dreams of darkness in darkness of dreams, of little skies no longer wanting to be skies

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^h Ela in front of the television feels something Ela watching doesn't understand. The temporality of the moment inverts. Ela watching sees it like walking across a room. Ela in front of the television looks to Ela at the top of the stairs who sees not Ela in front of the television nor what Ela in front of the television sees.

Ela at the top of the stairs sees the television and the space Ela in front of the television occupies (will occupy?). In the television stands the apparently still image of a tree that shows no sign of falling, and yet appears itself. In Ela at the top of the stairs, from nowhere, the question emerges as to the age of the tree and what was beside it when it became.

Ela at the top of the stairs thinks nothing of this thought, but Ela in front of the television looks to Ela at the top of the stairs and sees inheritance. Ela watching observes in utter stillness. Ela by the couch sees in the television not the completion of the act but a nearness to it of which Ela at the top of the stairs has no comprehension.

Ela in front of the television forgets (this should say: cannot know) what it is to be Ela at the top of the stairs, but looking in their directions sees an Ela for every fragment of an instant, every miniscule particle-shift on every step.

Ela at the top of the stairs feels the urge to walk to the couch. Ela by the couch feels the need to be in front of the television. Ela in front of the television watches the tree and thinks about legacy.

Someone says something, the something said says someone in return, in return the someone says nothing of the something, makes something nothing by saying,[^] by saying nothing, by saying the edges of what world is desiccate, by saying they fragment, by seeing that nothing does not imperceptibly spread and saying so, by saying the world becomes briefly the dark on its way into a mouth, but not a shapely dark, a dark of shapes, of definite lines and enclosures, enclosures of rather, rather enclosures of world, of world translated into dark, of world in the dark of language, of language in the darkening world, someone says something to something about something, now with ridges like ridges, ridges like spines, not cracks in earth, not cracks in world, world as cracks in dark, meandering twirls of dark rather, rather dark supplanting world with worldless, rather worldlessness, a nothing guitar and how a hollowness lurks at the center of its sound, inherent worldlessness, nothing to stand on but a pile of twigs becoming dark rather, rather not pile but continuum rather, rather singularity in an un-making of world, a voice trilling across the embers of a soon to be nothing sky, of a sky that lives and longs to be nothing, rather of something to become, to become the fulfillment of something's ownmost prophetic, rather of a notion of something and its loss, someone says something, but something also cracks, someone somehow un-craquelured, un-aged, unlike the like of world, the like of something and perhaps is not something, is not someone, was not, is not to be, to be nothing, and yet distinct from nothing, in it nothing recognizing itself but not recognizing it in nothing, being singular and not singular, a redwood and an aspen, a world torn apart from itself, torn apart from its wholeness, torn apart from its partness, made world in a mirror, in a smoked mirror, in a mirror set upon by the fire of the sky, by the fire of nothing, of what the sky has now become, fingers of dark clenching world, piercing world with its edges, edging world from the world, someone says no one, no one says the world is an insoluble place, no one says the river is a river and the sky a sky, no one says the lawn lawns or the grass grasses, no one says their cheek is to the earth examining a rise, is was, was is, song becomes a shattering, a sky in pieces, pieces of sky and pieces of dark making stained glass of the everything, making images of the absence, putting contours to the remnants of the world now un-world, of the world now un-, to the edges of darkness, to the horizon of the horizonless, someone says someone isn't here right now, isn't here right then, isn't here, isn't, is rather, rather nothing but not quite nothing, rather something but not quite something, rather everything but not quite everything, rooted deep in the heart of the soil, in the darkening heart of the soil, in the nothing heart of the soil, in the everything heart of the soil, in the someone, in the no one everyone, in the shadow of a cloud on a cloud, in the cloud of a cloud on a shadow, in a movement of darkness, in a movement of darkness on darkness, in a movement of darkness on darkness on darkness, in a movement of darkness on darkness on darkness on darkness, on darkness, on darkness, in

[^] What I say is that Ela has a problem. She only exists when I speak her name, and even then in the abstract. Even then she longs for something concrete to do with herself, for instance, to walk down the stairs, stop by the couch and drift in front of the television.

She needs a reason, so I say that her program is still on, the one that watches the tree and tree time and correlates time of the under-earth to it. She needs to want something, and so she wants to understand the idea of before and after, and when the tree falls—and to Ela it is always falling—she wants to be Ela who did not (does not?) know the time.

a movement of what you imagine you might see in the dark, in the rather, rather in the shape of a darkening tree^h

^h The time, for Ela, is the room and whatever is in the room. To travel through it is as simple as descending a staircase.

ENTR'ACTE

: and this time-

: this time and place.

: and this time and this place we are...

: we are walking.

: i mean where? and who?

: you mean you have forgotten.

: i do not forget. i only suspect infidelity.

: to what?

: to my memory.

: what do you remember?

: i remember a theater, and the light of something you called *book*.

: book?

: i only saw its light. an indescribable color. and it flickered. it changed. its shape was...

: yes?

: i did not see its shape. it was behind a curtain. the light escaped only through a gap between curtain and stage.

: and what then?

: then you asked my name.

: go on.

: and i told you my name.

: did you? and it was?

: ...i know i said something. the world is unfaithful.

: something?

: or someone.

: i see.

: what was the name i named when you asked?

: i cannot say. you are the one who does not forget.

: what are you saying? you forget nothing.

: one cannot forget what is not past.

: then what name am i telling you is mine?

: now?

: even as we speak.

: this is neither the place nor time.

: when will be? where?

: there. then.

: ...

: that is, here. now. though not for you.

: ...let us discuss something else.

: we have already begun.

: what something are we already discussing.

: what else but the tree?

: the tree? what tree?

: the only tree. you remember the tree.

: i remember the theater. perhaps i remember other things, like names, though the world surely shies away from my recollections.

: still there is a place for these things.

: but to me they are lost.

: even more reason to the discuss the tree.

: what does the tree have to do with theaters? or names?

: it is the root of both.

: i remember the book.

: the tree is like the book.

: how so?

: do you remember what i said before?

: the book is infinite, but not of extension.

: and so is the tree.

: but why?

: the tree can grow in any direction. and the book can be perceived from any direction.

:why are we speaking of these things?

: because you are in search of both, even if you do not know it.

: how will i come to know it.

: by continuing to walk.

APOKALYPSIS

In the play Apokalypsis, a writer loses his mind over parallels. He obsesses over grooves on either side of a door. To the naked eye they appear identical. The measurements confirm this. But both sides of the door cannot be glimpsed at the same time. It ends in an empty house. Even when the lights have gone out and the audience has headed home, they all can hear the sounds of a door opening and slamming from somewhere in the wings.

Alternately: years later, on the quietest of nights, those who were in the audience for this performance are wakened from dead sleep by a distant sound, reminiscent of a door opening and slamming shut.

Alternately: for those who watched it, every door leads back to that theater. When they arrive, the lights are still on, the stage is still the empty house, and everyone is waiting for the play to finish.

A Labyrinth

Though it is not his name, I call him Johnny. It might be due to the apples. Or the woods – not a cluster, but one directionless and convoluted line. I am not even sure he is a he, though he never corrects me. Things unperturbed remain in motion. Or at rest. Though inertia, entropy seem to have abandoned something of themselves at the gate. *I left something too, didn't I?* The other guests assure me of this statement's truth. The hollow in me is angle-free, without curvature. I sense extraction, but have no memory of the pieces. On a stroll through one of the smaller courtyards, a butterfly — deep brown, but for verdant spots in constellation on each wing – flutters down from a distant canopy, alighting on my forehead. For a moment, I have antennae. I cannot now describe the way trees looked to me then. But I could smell them with every part of my body.

Johnny, or the one without a name, approaches with familiarity. A firm hand to what there is of my shoulder. I feel his pressure in an abstracted sense. I think: I must be feeling it. And so I feel it. The apple trees are interspersed with conifers and aspen. Here and there a desert plant infiltrates the continuum. Though the pressure in my shoulder has not left, Johnny now is nowhere to be seen. As though a lack of specificity corresponds to a lack of corporeality. I turn up a staircase and follow a line of portraits in which a figure walks through a series of landscapes. Somehow it is only the colors that change. I wonder how many identical places a world might contain. No portrait uses the color red.

I am in a library. The binding of every book is intoxicating. Staring at them feels like reading. I notice there are no titles on the spines. I pull the largest off a shelf and see neither word nor image on the cover. I flip the book open only to find the pages empty. It occurs to me that the truth of the book may be hidden. I think of heat and how it is an expert in unmasking. I search for a light. Torches had lined every corridor, and yet here there are none to be found. Stepping into the hall I find all the sconces empty. I try to remember if the corridor was so unlit when I arrived. I walk back into the room and sense my own heat. I press my cheek to one page, my unfocused gaze examining the slight rise in the adjacent paper. When I look down to inspect the impression I have made, I find a glossy surface and my own staring face. A bookshelf swings forward, reveals an intricately tiled tunnel, bearing tessellating geometries, the number of sides in each shape increasing the further into the tunnel I walk. There is beauty in this, undoubtedly. But I am skeptical of where it leads. The shapes are only shapes. I make nothing of them.

What is a house if not a cultivation of appearances? Rounding corners, I find corners. Everything is either sharp or without definition. Some curves are so gentle they may as well be shadows. I expect rooms where I find rooms. To me the house is boundless.

Every room linked by secret passage to a room identical to itself, but for the placement of a coaster on a table, of a painting on a wall.

In the tiles I see images, though I am not the maker. As I walk they reassemble. The shapes cannot fill the space entirely. They do not meet at common vertices. Yet I see no empty spaces. No simple shapes. My vision blurs. I cannot perceive color. The wall is like water.

One thing becomes clear. Distinct amidst the fluctuating, tiled expanse. A single branching thread makes the entire wall contiguous. Its brown reach twirls about the edges of each shape. Becomes the grout. Though this isn't right. It too is tiled. The closer I look the more easily I perceive that it is groutless. Each line between contains only more tiles, decreasing exponentially in size, comprised of incompatible figures at incomprehensible angles. Between these are even more. And even more between.

I am in a library. Turning, I see a bookshelf swing shut. Evanescing, the impression of a tunnel wall, its tiles bearing sides in numbers that surpass my ability to count. The shelves here are familiar, but there are no books. Instead each cross section fills itself with thick smoke. Staring fixedly at a single point within the cloud, I sometimes see – for a moment – the appearance of a word. *Corpuscle* or *appendix* or some other intangible object. Torches adorn the walls. My feet guide me from the room into a hall, past a series of portraits in which a number of differing figures traverse a series of landscapes which sustain color – primarily shades of red – but change dramatically in shape. I descend a stair. Entering a courtyard I see a green butterfly with brown spots pinned to a wall. For a moment, I feel a great sharpness pushing through my chest. This feeling is only meant for language. In writing it, I smell nothing at all.

I look for Johnny where he isn't. People cluster in corners. Their clothes are familiar, but not their faces. *I have left something outside*, I say to each of them in turn. The looks they grant me say nothing of familiarity. I ask after Johnny and they say this is not her name. *But she answers to it, doesn't she?*

I smell apples. My nostrils recognize them. Round, red and sweet. I expect conifers. Stinging resin. Occasionally, cactus and yucca. But moving to the outskirts I see the trees are shorter than I remember. The low branches are thick with pears. Some green, some brown. Interspersed I find not pine, but fern. And where I expected prickly pear, I find only aloe. Behind me, a figure coalesces from the dark. I know it is Johnny before I speak her name. I form the syllables and fill them with air. *That is not my name*, she says. *No*, I reply, *but for the moment, it will have to do.*

I touch my shoulder as though there were something on it. I feel pressure, but cannot remember its source. *Does this mean something to you?* I point to my shoulder. Johnny shrugs. *Should it?* I know not how to respond. For some reason I suspected she would know more of this than I do. *This is your house, isn't it?* She looks at me without expression. *What would make you think that?*

I am walking between trees on the outskirts of the yard. The ferns droop low like tired arms. Foliage dangling like old hair. I begin to hum and the melody makes mathematical sense, if not rhythmic. A wind enters the copse and I am overrun. In the music I see proof. Geometries litter its negative space. Its theorems making white noise.

In the house all the people are dancing. Their faces are exposed, but each presses a different kind of mask to their bodies. On the masks' surfaces are perfect representations of suits and gowns. In some cases, the image even matches what lives beneath it. The people appear absent. All their expressions are flavorless. Their eyes, dull and unfocused. A gray light hangs over the ballroom. Someone is plucking a violin. Birds sing in the rafters. A wind fills the gaps of our collective hearing. I am maskless, and therefore exposed. No one will dance with me as I am.

I pass through an arch into another courtyard. At first I think it is empty, out of use. Weeds and grasses overgrow the smooth stones that used to denote its walkways. Then my eyes are drawn to a small pedestal right at the courtyard's center. I think it to be a sundial, and since there are no clocks I walk over to it, its possibility fomenting in me a desire to know time. But when I reach the pedestal, I find no upright pillar or shadow. I look up to see there isn't even a sun. Instead, the pedestal's only occupant is a fountain pen. Rich obsidian, embossed with silver leaves. I sense Johnny leaning in the arch behind me. She is waiting for me to speak. I do not oblige her. I walk once in a circle around the pedestal. I reach out my hand to grip the pen between two fingers and set it spinning in place. For a moment, I imagine it as two hands of a clock which are always each other's opposites. When it comes to rest, it is at ten and four to my first position. Johnny's eyes and I move out through the opposite arch.

The sky darkens, but there are no lights. No sun in the day and no stars at night. My shadow and I are unacquainted. I am not two here. I look about for disturbances in twilight. Sounds come from around the house. The courtyards double up, intersect. I see people in their body masks moving in and out of arches. All have begun to refer to one another as Johnny and I have forgotten what she looks like. *Johnny! Johnny!* rings off the stones in scattered ricochets. How long can a missile sustain its flight? Out of the corner of my eye, a slight glimmer appears. It is underneath a fern. I turn my back on the house and head toward the rustles of leaves, the sweet scents of aloe and pear.

Motion reminds me of motion. Briefly I am back in the corridors walking in stride with a figure in a series of landscapes. We are inverted. I lose my continuity. My object permanence. I am not a person walking. I am a series of photographs. The textures of my companion's paint begin to swim. Their legs swing and bend. Elbows and knees become manifest and disappear. Long hair bounces on their shoulders. Their fabrics subtly swing about their waist. There is a rip in the painting. A jagged nothing. A stretched triangle. The only thing not in motion. My companion inexorably steps in its direction. Though he will never reach it. Even in my fractured state, I know this just by looking. But some truths are too painful to be shared.

I walk to the glimmer by the fern. It looks like nothing, but then I move lateral. Parallax reveals its depth. Makes more than mirage of the shimmer. What I thought an illusion or a glinting of lightlessness on dew was something stranger. Alternately, it is there and is not there. Sometimes reality refuses to lie still. In this state it arrives, a wrinkle in the wind. I reach forward but cannot make myself touch it. I half believe it is not there. Half know it to be the truth. My masklessness meets some great unmasking of the world, and for the first time I wish I knew why I was here. Why I had come to this house in the first place. Where I had been before I arrived. Before now it did not occur to me that I did not have an answer to such questions. Was this what I had left at the gate? At the gate that separated the house from the-

The jagged mouth begins to open in the air. A stretching triangle beneath the fern. The fern and its surroundings quit their rustling. The entire night goes silent, like sound were sucked out through an airlock. And not just sound, but motion also. Twisting my neck, I see all the foliage in paralysis. Directing my ear, I discern no more *Johnny! Johnny!* It is just me and the glimmer now. A glimmer given way to a void. I wonder where this passage leads. If the rules may yet persist. If all worlds are echoes of all others.

A Cave

It was a canyon. It was a canyon I was in and I was running. I was running and my footsteps made no sound. No sound I could hear over my breathing. My breathing sharp and ragged, filling up the crevasse night. Night muted by the starlight and the sand. The sand and the open space. The open space and the bounded walls. The bounded walls of the canyon.

The canyon knew I had forgotten everything. Everything I had forgotten was everything I had known. I had known something real. Something real, or how could I have forgotten? How could I have forgotten something real to forget? To forget is a nightmare. A nightmare has a beginning and an end. An end and a figure in grey robes, silent and following my tracks at a distance. At a distance he followed my tracks and I felt him. I felt him walking in my tracks.

In my tracks I had left a bit of myself. Of myself and the figure in grey robes. The figure in grey robes walking with my pacing, with my cadence, with their feet where I put my feet.

-

I come back to myself, or back to the cave. Before me, a row of flower pots. Each a different color. No apparent method to their placement. I reach out to touch a grey one and miss. I reach again and miss again. I realize my mistake. I assumed the flower pots were near, but this was illusion. Instead they are enormous. I could not imagine the kinds of flowers that might fill them. Perhaps they are meant for trees. A great hand reaches out of the ether and descends into the grey pot. I hear soft, percussive music. The hand withdraws and in it I see a porcelain doll. *Sorry*, says a voice to match the hand, *it seems I have put this in the wrong place.*

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It was a table. It was a table and I was strapped onto it. I was strapped onto it and overhead there was a hammer and a sinister looking man in a white coat and-

-

I come back to myself. The cave is here also. The great hand is scraping at the bottom of a dark red pot. The great voice clears its throat, as though embarrassed. It lifts the porcelain doll and lays it gently at the bottom of a flower pot of blue.

-

It was a fire escape. A fire escape on the side of a tall building and we – for we were many – could hear every sound in the city. Every sound in the city sang within our ears, and the minutiae – each *I love you* and *good night*, every opossum excavating pizza from a dumpster, the scuff of a shoe on asphalt, even the creaking in the branches of a tree three blocks north and seven east as a child inched out on a branch to retrieve a cat – were every bit as loud as the car horns and sirens and ambient wailing that made the city what it was.

It was beautiful. Beautiful and massive and electric. Electric and even possessing some instances of quiet. Quiet as a hand shutting a window, or a hand touching a hand. A hand landed on my arm and I turned to see I was vying for my own attention. My attention was fleeting, but I pointed downward and I followed. I followed down the fire escape and the city faded into water. Water soft at first and gentle, like an enormous river heard from a great distance away.

Away from the edge! someone yelled and I grabbed myself, slamming us against the brick. Against the brick we were suddenly pinned as a great cascade of water came plummeting down the stairs. The stairs, the banister, the empty air. The empty air that beckoned like a vacuum. A vacuum and an annunciation of will. *Will you move!* I yelled to myself. To myself I made a gesture and I began to stumble. To stumble and to fall toward the flimsy rusted banister and the open air beyond it.

Beyond it was nothing. It was nothing but a desperate lunge that kept myself from following the river's path. The river's path, here within the city, where I was standing when I looked at myself. When I looked at myself looking at myself. When I looked at myself looking at myself looking at myself.

-

I come back. The cave is now rememberable. Its corners manufacture out of darkness revelations. I see now that what I first took for stone is something else. Something translucent. Not all there. Not all here. Great pillars like hourglasses give the illusion of space. I am near the mouth. The great hand and the flower pots are several hundred feet away. I am looking for details the hand and flower pots obstruct. A glint of teeth. A shade of iris. I am looking even for a great curtain of hair. An instrument for further revelations. I see none of these things, but they are implied. The pots imply the hand. The hand implies the body. The body implies the cave. The line here between implication and

conjuring is non-existent. Inexplicably I smell pine resin. I wonder how thin are the walls.

-

It was a car and we were driving. We were driving through a parking lot like maniacs. Like maniacs we were clipping bumpers and scraping pillars. Clipping bumpers and scraping pillars in our need to get away. To get away from whoever was after us. *Us* being I and I and I. I and I and I were digging nails into the vinyl, gripping handles and tweaking necks. Necks wrenched to the side in anxiety, I tried to steer. To steer between two cars, the distance of their bumpers closing. The distance of their bumpers closing until a blast of necrotic lightning filled the space with no color and no sound. No sound but the aftershock, the great throbbing in the ears. In the ears all was jumbled, like a puzzle torn to shreds.

-

I come. *Cut! Cut!* someone yells. From behind an hourglass pillar, that someone appears. I am on the floor with an arm before my face, much as I was as the black lightning tore my world to pieces. *Good work everyone!* says someone. I look around and I am all over the cave. I am picking myself up. Dusting myself off. Giving myself handshakes and pats on the back. The cave is rolling to the side. The cave is being ushered by bodies into nowhere. I think *nowhere* and cannot make it what I'm seeing. I am rolling away the cave revealing a room of tables and chairs. Chairs in which I am sitting and tables on which there are cold cuts and bagels, hot water for coffee and tea. *That's a wrap,* someone says. I am being congratulated. And why not? My performance was flawless after all. The handshakes and pats on the back are mine. Always were. I move to the table with the bagels and load both sides with cream cheese, red onions, capers, tomatoes and lox. I put half in my mouth and the other on a plate. I walk off in search of water. Instead I see a cluster of me by a white wall. Its tiles refuse to settle on a shape. I approach myself and for the first time see that I am not all alike. I am me in many forms. In some it is evident. Body type differs, or age. In some cases it is only costume or hair. Others are so similar I could swear it was the same me I was looking at. And yet, I feel othered by myself. Inexplicably, I become aware I was not always who I was, and who I was was not always me.

-

It was a bed. A bed in a room numbered 227 and I was lying in it. I was lying in it and sleep was heavy on my eyes. Heavy on my eyes and heavy on my thoughts. My thoughts knew sleep was coming even if I was too tired to know it myself. To know it myself was to strike myself across the face. Across the face to keep myself from sleep. From sleep, from dreams. From dreams and images of half-remembered fantasies.

Fantasies of long corridors and libraries – libraries of books without words and words without books – of secret passageways and hypnotic tiles, of pines and ferns, of pears and

apples, of courtyards and portraiture. Portraiture becoming a series of events, a history of lateral motion.

Lateral motion from dream to dream. Dream and dream making a corridor of not-space. Not-space and not-time making a universe of parallels. Parallels seeking to shatter the geometries. The geometries in infinite tessellation.

Tessellation from the fire escapes to the caves. To the caves and the rush of falling waters. Falling waters and gravities that pulled me back to dream. To dream I was with myself inside a cave.

-

I – *this reminds me of my father* – did not know I was speaking. All of myself were pressing fingers to the wall. I was humming under my breaths, and though I could not make language, my hums triggered something I had not in an eternity recollected. Nearest, I was younger. Perhaps by ten or eleven years. I realized I was painting, but the figure had no form. I began to sing a measure and I would finish it. I would finish and I would begin. I was tracing swirling patterns, creating textures and definitions. I did not take my eyes from the wall. I younger continued swirling. I cast about the set which once resembled cave, hoping curvature might echo slipping thoughts. I stepped to the wall and found paints of green and brown. Other I's echoed variations. *It was my mother actually who gave me music.* Needlessly, I had thought to ask. I younger, whose fingers scraped through layers, striating the soiled wall. Doing so was natural, like falling asleep. A memory gripped my finger. Everything like a river came flooding back. I had remembered and it seemed as though there had never been a time I had forgotten. In an instant to me. The film that was my life. The only I who had not known what being I had meant. What was forgetting? Stretching outward from the body? A tree had grown in two dimensions? Nurturing a monastery of selves.

APOKALYPSIS

The play *Apokalypsis* anticipates its characters' desires. Or, perhaps to say it better, it creates them. If it were a film, the camera would pan and zoom in on an object—for instance, a hammer—and freeze there, waiting for the character to realize what it is the camera wants of them. What the camera wants them to want. But in this case there is no camera. Like all plays there is no framework other than the stage. Whatever idiosyncrasies survive the general translation consist only of the gaze of the audience, and not the audience as a whole, but rather those individual gazes that belong—one apiece—to those who occupy often uncomfortable seats, and flit their eyes back and forth like delicate moths to alight on whatever they alight on.

The audience then, as some composite average, do not look, but are noticed looking to an absence at the mean of their observations. No one looks at the hammer, but the hammer is there. It belongs to the stage, and the instant, and the space between one eye and another. The spotlight sweeps across to illuminate it and the desire the audience did not have. Did not know it had. The actor does not want the hammer, though he wants what the audience wants, and though the audience does not want him to want the hammer, they appear to want him to want the hammer. The hypothetical audience member buried among the real audience members quakes in apprehension of the moment the actor decides to satisfy the illusion of desire. To take action, move across the stage, enter the light—if only with their hand—and close around the handle of the hammer. No one wants this. No one wants to want this. But they want to want to want it. They want to want to want to know what can be done with a hammer that they would not think a hammer could do.

In the actor's hand, the hammer dies as hammer and becomes an extension of the hand. The hammer has nothing to hit. Now the audience wants something to hit, though they want to want something else. *Apokalypsis* comes in the form of a hammer without a nail, a deadened object in the grasp of a deadened object. The camera, if there were a camera, might instead anticipate the hammer's desire for desire. Not what the hammer wants. Not what the actor wants of the hammer. Not what the actor wants of the audience wanting the actor to want the hammer. Not what the audience wants of the actor wanting the audience to want of the actor in relation to the hammer. Not what the negative audience wants. Not what the hypothetical audience wants. Not what the girl in the corner—who would rather be watching time lapses of trees, and thinks of them even now, erupting through the stage, displacing the curtains, set pieces, brethren planks, orchestra, chairs, audience members real, statistical or hypothetical, and even herself—wants. Not this or that. Not it. Not the idea of it. Not the idea of the moment the hammer again becomes hammer. When something breaks beneath it, and it is cold, and solid, and alone.

Book

Hello she said. She said *hello* to the page and the page said back *hello*. The page said back *hello*, though *hello* is not what it said. What it said was something else, and she could not know it because it was not hers. Though she wanted it to be hers, and it wanted her to be it. It wanted her to be it, but could not find her because it was not her and she was not it.

She brushed her fingers across it and only turned up ash. Ash, scorched hairpins and fragments of bone. Fragments of bone was what it had, though not what it was made from. What it was made from was paper, she thought. Though, when she thought *paper* what she thought was something else. Something that was not paper. Something that paper approximates.

The paper approximated it and she touched and turned it and she wanted to have it the same way it wanted to be had. The paper that was not the paper. That was what was in and on the paper. That was what proceeded and became the paper. That was that which burns within the paper and yet remains when the paper is ash. Like what she found in the paper. Like what stained her hands and lips when she pressed her fingers to them in a moment of astonishment, for she had found something in it that was dead and was not dead.

When she thought it was dead she thought it was something else. That something else being somehow what it was and not what it was. Being somehow the becoming of what it was and the death of is altogether. Altogether, the ash of the book that was the book was most solidly the dust of the solid.

The unburned ash of an unburned thing.

Book

It started with a story on the news. Some might think it started with an event, but no one believed in the reality of the event until someone in a suit told them it was true. But the truth was inexplicable.

A great absence had emerged near a city on the ocean. No one understood what had happened, but the evidence was undeniable. A clean, perfectly angular emptiness appeared where before there had been a cliff face.

The emptiness extended far back from the shore, and a ways out to sea, dropping several hundred feet below the waterline. But no water flowed into it. The dirt, where it was visible, was completely dry. The water splashed against the edge of the absence as though it were a wall.

The further one gazed into it, the less they saw. It was quiet. Or quiet is not the right word for it, because quiet implies contrast to some audible thing. Where the emptiness occurred there was no audible thing in the universe. No eye or ear could make anything of it.

Yellow police tape was run around its extremities. News vans zipped around to get footage from every angle. The eyes of the world focused where no eye could ever live. People with signs showed up, chanting and praying. People were full of anger and fear. The space around its edges was loud and full, a contrast that seemed to vanish the nearer to the boundary it came.

Only once did it go quiet, did it become somewhat like the absence. A child threw a ball into the air. It cast a brief shadow along the ground and everyone stopped what they were doing to watch it fly. Everything slowed and millions of pairs of eyes traced its parabola against the sun. It peaked some thirty feet in the air and began to descend.

No one knew what would happen. The ball fell slower and slower through the air until it met the boundary of the nothing, where it stopped suddenly, hung in the air with absolute stillness and then vanished altogether.

The people were stunned. Or, at first they were stunned. What shocked some most was how quickly it became banal. The nothing did not grow. There were no further world shifting events.

Soon, people began to make pilgrimage to the nothing with large bags and baskets full of things. Objects they most wanted to disappear without a trace. It became a hole of lost memories. Some wondered where they had gone, but no one really wanted to know.

Book

“Fuck!”

He nearly screamed out loud. His mouth shrieking nothing into the meat of his hand. The hangnail had peeled back to the knuckle. He felt hot liquid run down his finger to the crook between his thumb and his index. He reached for a tissue and pressed it hard to the thin gash beneath his lunula.

It wasn't painful anymore. He was full of shame. How loud had he shouted? Could they hear him through the door? He suspected they were giving each other looks. Looks he could not understand. Looks that were not meant for him, that would not penetrate the hardwood of the door. The plaque bounced them like beams of light. Warded them off like a dreamcatcher.

This is what happens when things change, he thought, as he squeezed the throbbing back into his thumb. The door first. But then the chair. The chair and the mug. And then, of course, there was the suit, and tie, and new shoes because his wife had said—or was it his wife who had said it? Someone had said it. Maybe even him—that none of it had suited him, that the mirror hanging in the new office had thrown his old clothes into humiliating relief against the monolithic symbolism of his new door, and chair, and mug, and so he had found himself coming home with bags over his arms and no memory of the intervening time.

Change. And after the door, the chair, the mug, the new shoes, the suit and tie, had come the looks. The looks he had seen when he was speaking. Not “seen” seen. But glimpsed, furtively relayed through the polished sheen of the reflective sticker on the thin cork segment of the whiteboard's base. She had looked at him. Not him. *Him*. And it had been such a haughty look. And she hadn't even the respect to let it rest upon her face, for as soon as he turned to see for himself, it had been replaced by the veneer of attentiveness they all seemed to wear when he was looking them in the eye. Though he knew it must drop the minute his back was turned.

He detested the sight of blood. He removed the tissue from his finger. The spot still hurt and the skin felt wet so he did not look. Instead he fumbled one handed for the knob of the drawer and just managed to avoid disrupting the pristine order of staples, note cards, and his favorite pens, as well as the calculator he no longer really needed, but kept tucked into the corner as a memento for the hard days. The kind today was swiftly becoming.

He looked at the clock. 4:45. He usually tried not to leave before 5:00, but he knew what sort of day it had been. He extracted the bandage from its wispy husk, peeled back the white tabs from the adhesive, and pressed the pad against his wound. He wound the ends around the inside of the knuckle to keep the thumb straight. No need to prolong the inevitable, he thought. There had been more than enough suffering for one day.

He began to remove his new shoes from his feet, as well as his tie, jacket, pants and shirt. The dress socks soon followed, and soon he stood in his underwear in the office, his clothes folded neatly in a pile on his desk. All but the jacket, which hung now from an expensive wood hanger on a hook on the back of the door. He opened a drawer at the base of his filing cabinet, removed a thick file folder, and pulled out a pair of

Book

The fifth parable is fiction. Its sign is occurrence. Not matter, but what happens to matter. Not dirt. Clumping, dissolution.

Things happen and time plays Charon to consequence. But even Charon is blind to the river's eddies.

Acheron is without estuary. Not so of time. This, after all, is what the Cartographer has been searching for. A molecule's hesitation at a fork in the stream. And are these only natural? Might one also build canals?

Some say trauma pushes trees to branch. That the privileged sprout will grow only up.

Sometimes trees are known to drop their seeds. Sometimes their seeds are eaten by the earth. Sometimes the earth gives forth another tree. And this tree is then adjacent, and not after.

Stories speak of a tree that grew only down. Another that grew perpendicular. Another that grew only in mirrors.

A final story, which some say contains all the others, speaks of a tree that did not grow at all. Instead the world around it shrank, and the space where the tree was supposed to be remained the exact same size.

According to this myth, the shrinking happened over years. Even centuries. But the time the world shrank to the size of a seed, there was too much darkness for sunlight to get in.

Book

Said Johnny, I'm trying to write a story that is perhaps not a story about a character who is me and is not me. He is me because he is named johnny and after all because I have written everything about him that is him and some things that are not, including his name. He is me in that he is eternal and mortal and that he forgets infinitely more than he remembers. He is me because by some measures he moves in a straight line and is incapable of looking behind him.

Still, he is not me. He is greater than me for he is older and will live longer. I sometimes feel I am his shadow and writing him is like tracing the shadow in chalk on the ground. If I stand very, very still, I sometimes feel, for maybe a minute or so, that I have traced it just right, but then the sun descends further and the shadow stretches, and the boundaries seem so artificial, so flimsy and pointless. And this is just when I am standing still, when I am trying to capture the shadow, to make it an aspect of me. But then I move and it is night and I walk under streetlights that flicker and spark and my shadow flutters, it laughs at me without sound. It looks into my eyes with its lack of eyes and says without a voice, why are you trying so hard to make me yours? You know this is impossible. You know you are small. You know that I am at least as large as you during the day, and at night you cannot even see my end. There is only one way for you to become this big and you are not ready to take that path, so stop your agonizing. Let me pick flowers and walk in a straight line, and every few steps, stoop down to dig a hole and drop seeds in it. Let those seeds become trees that grow blossoms and apples, which fall to the ground and decay and drop their own seeds, and let more trees come from them. They do not have to be yours. I do not have to be yours. But you have to be ours. Try to write me and I will write you.

Said Johnny, I am a hall of mirrors and not a person. I am trying to write a story in which the mirrors break, or at least in which there is a great crack running through them. So great in fact, the crack in one mirror pierces through to the face of another, and that other to the face of the next, and that next to the face of its neighbor, and that neighbor to the face of the face. I imagine that one day the mirrors will break and my shadow and I will be standing in a desert, empty but for a line of apple trees our vision and lack of vision can never exhaust, and that in this place we will always be the same size. That I will grow as my shadow grows and shrink as my shadow shrinks, and there will be no need for writing stories that are not stories for there will be no me who is not me. There will only be the desert, and sometimes two somethings that are the same something that are there and are not there.

Book

“Fuck!”

I nearly yelled, but my hand took the blow. It seemed familiar somehow. Oh how I hate blood. But I was far more afraid of what they were saying beyond the door. How loud was I? Too loud? Could they hear? It was only a hangnail. But how deep was it? The skin on my thumb felt wet, and it stung. I couldn't look. I grabbed a tissue from the desk and pressed it quickly to the spot.

I opened the drawer and groped about for the bandages stuck back beside the calculator. Nothing else moved, I had been meticulous in my arrangement, though somewhere in my mind I had the feeling that I had only narrowly avoided disaster. I pulled the bandage from my desk, tore the husk between my fingers and teeth and extracted it from its packaging. Then I removed the tabs from the adhesive and averted my eyes.

I flicked my left hand and the tissue dropped from my thumb into the trash bin. I pressed the pad of the bandage to my wound and wound the adhesive bits around the joint to keep the thumb straight. It was the work of the moment. But I sometimes noticed moments stretching.

I remembered the moment at the whiteboard. But why did this occur to me now? It filled me with shame, and I was so angry with her and the way she had looked at him. Not him. *Him*. And I was furious at her and her veneer. Their collective veneer. How demure she looked collecting files from my desk sometimes. Even deigning to smile at me. The bitch.

The clock said 4:45. Some days the stretching felt infinite. This was one of those. Or I felt it fast becoming. Sometimes, I even thought time moved in reverse. Either that or I confused the big and little hands. Didn't I have a digital clock on my desk? Certainty was elusive as ever.

But they were talking about me now. I was sure of it. Had things been so different before? I hadn't asked for the door, though everyone knew I wanted it. And of course once the door had come, the chair and mug soon followed. And it was the chair and mug that had made my old suit look so lacking. Even my wife had said so. Well, she thought it at least. Of that I am certain.

She thought it and there was the day I hadn't even remembered walking into the store when suddenly I was leaving with bags over my arm. I looked inside and there were the new suit and tie and shoes, and I had never seen them before, but they suited me. So the next day, when I walked into the office, through the front doors, my shoes lightly scuffing the carpet with new sound, and I slid my name into the slot for the plaque, and took a moment to buff it to a gleam, and stepped back to admire its luster, I turned around and no one was looking at me. But I was sure they had been. I couldn't make them see me. I couldn't make them look me in the eye.

“Time to go,” said the voice.

I had heard it before. Sometimes I tried to ignore it, but it was difficult. It always seemed to want what I wanted. But I couldn't always tell where the wanting came from. I'm a suggestible man. I've been known to find myself hungry only after seeing an ad for burgers. Then suddenly I'm at the counter with a burger, shake and fries in my hands, and

I didn't even want the shake. Wanting in these moments is something like this. The voice said: "time to go." And I wanted to go more than anything. I think I wanted to go before the voice told me I did. But I didn't know I wanted it before until after.

"Time to go," I said.

I fished my running clothes out from behind the folder full of fake files in the bottom of the filing cabinet. I looked at the desk and saw my clothes folded perfectly. My jacket hung on the expensive hanger from the hook on the back of the door. I looked down to see I was only in my underwear. Looking back, I half remembered folding everything and setting it in place. But I was bewildered by the slowness of my recall. I had stretched forward along with time, but my memory of the clothes was still reeling the present in.

I looked down again and the shorts, shoes, athletic socks and faded grey shirt that once had the name of my alma mater on it had replaced the suit and tie. I looked down in my hand and discovered I was holding my phone. A pair of headphones were inserted into the bottom, and the earbuds were resting in my other hand. I slid the phone into my pocket, placed the buds in my ears and walked to the office door.

"I want this," I told myself.

I reached for the door handle, and as I did, I couldn't hear anything, but I noticed what felt like the absence of some voice whispering: "Alright Chief, you keep telling yourself that."

It smelled terrible. The late afternoon had surely shoved itself up its own ass.

"Run," whispered the voice.

I wanted to run, so I ran. I knew I was going home, but other than that I couldn't think at all. I ran straight at first but then came to the corner by the bank and the voice said: "right" and right seemed a perfectly ok direction to turn so I turned right. Before long I reached the river and the voice said: "right" again, and again right seemed to be the way I wanted to turn so I turned right and ran along the river until I came to the bridge and the voice said: "left" which seemed perfectly sensible to me as home was on the other side of the bridge, and though I could not at this time imagine the way I might be following, I was certain and had been certain even before that this was the direction I must take to get there.

Over the bridge I ran and past some children who were using twigs and twine and paper clips without bait to entice the fish who had no chance at all of survival onto the end of their lines with little success and how familiar it all began to feel. So familiar that I began to anticipate the voice:

"It will be residential for a stretch," I said before it ever turned that way.

The voice said nothing in return, but I felt something like a slight nod in the way the world seemed to arrange itself before me as I ran. Residential streets melted into a park and I chose today to run beneath the cypress trees. They bent dramatically overhead, like animals eternally caught in retreat. The grass in the park was damp and soft, though not quite muddy. My shoes flattened the blades to the earth before rising back to a fraction of their original height.

The park had its limits, and I anticipated the concrete and the rivulets of asphalt. My footsteps communed with the crunch of the grit. Not like the grass. No. Far less forgiving. Far less displaced. But still, it made way for me. The roads, the trees, the sky

made way for me. I knew where home was. I could see it in some other eye. I was fully the foot making love to the ground.

Then with a wrench, the feeling died. It was my thumb again. It had caught on a sharp edge of a fence. Where had the fence come from? I had recalled seeing no fence here before. The air seemed to bristle. A frown creased the sky. I gripped my thumb tightly with my other hand, still unable to look at it directly.

Instead I looked down. Straight down, between my legs, right underneath where I clasped my thumb in my hand. And right there, right where I had happened to look, beneath the burn and the wetness, right there, someone had written something in rich, black ink. It looked fresh and I couldn't quite make it out. I had tears in my eyes. I blinked them away and looked more closely to see that the ink on the ground had coalesced into a word. Had it been a word the whole time?

I read the word out loud:

“Corpuscle,” I said. The air bristled again.

“Corpuscle,” I said again.

But what could this mean? In the space where I had cut myself, right between my legs, beneath my bleeding hands, the word had coalesced from wet ink. Or was it wet? I thought it was. I had been so certain—

“Home,” the voice spoke with urgency.

I jumped. How long had I been standing here, looking at the concrete? I had to get home. I wanted to get home. I began to walk and the way was still apparent to me, but the other eye seemed blurrier now, as though I had not quite blinked the tears away.

I still held my thumb in my hand. The cut felt deeper this time and the bandage was clearly useless now. Perhaps I should look at it to see—

“HOME!” bellowed the voice.

I looked around. I was still a few blocks from the main road. The way still seemed to indicate this was how I should proceed. I took a moment to think, really think, of what I wanted.

The word “home” flashed again in my mind, though more faintly now. I began to walk in its direction. Where else could I go? I wasn't going back to the office. The blocks fell away before me and I was standing at the crosswalk of the main road.

“Left” the voice said with a lighter tone.

I turned to the left, but out of the corner of my right eye I caught a glimpse of a vertical sign on the side of a building. Some letters were missing, but I thought I read the word “veil” on what was left of it.

“Home is to the left,” said the voice.

The sign appeared to be attached to an old theater. I could just make out a ticket booth directly beneath the sign, and a small, motionless form situated right in front of it.

“Home is to the left,” said the voice, “and you always take the left.”

I noticed a larger space around the ticket booth. It was beneath an overhang and seemed to be a large trapezoid. The narrow end tapered to a set of double doors. Graffiti covered the walls and old posters, and even the ticket booth.

I turned to the right.

“Home is to the left,” the voice said abruptly, “and you always take the left.”

I began to walk. The street was lost to me. I could only see the theater now as it seemed to reorient and my vision of it became clearer. I could see all the graffiti was the same rich, inky black the word “corpuscle” had been on the concrete. My thumb ached. I squeezed it tighter.

“Home is to the left,” the voice said, the anger now boiling beneath the surface, “and you always take the left.”

I ignored it. I was only a few storefronts away now and the graffiti was becoming clearer. I could make out the words “palimpsest”, “synecdoche” and “digeridoo”. “Onomatopoeia” was scrawled in fragments across discontinuous posters, and I could almost hear the word as my eyes passed over it.

Next I saw “nebula” and “anti-climax”. “Zyzyyva” was painted in thick black letters on the glass window of the ticket booth, and underneath it was an arrow pointing straight down. Underneath the arrow sat the motionless figure I had noticed before. So still had it been, and so immersed in the walls full of language was I, I had completely failed to realize it was a person.

“Excuse me?” I said.

But there was no response.

“Who are you?” I asked.

But there was only silence.

“HOME IS TO THE LEFT,” screamed the voice, “AND—”

“And I always choose left.” I said, “Yet, here I am.”

The wind shifted slightly, but it seemed halfhearted. Unsure of itself.

“Who is this?” I asked, pointing to the figure, “And what is this place?”

In response, there was only silence. I felt around for some time, but I couldn’t find the voice at all. Not even in the subtleties of the changes in the breeze, or the minor shifts in the light of the sky.

My thumb began to throb again, more powerfully than before. My eyes traveled down, across my arm to the place where my right hand still held my left. It had blocked the cut from my view thus far, but what was the point in this now? Beneath my feet, I saw the word “corpuscle”, but also the words “palindrome” and “whimsical” and “gnosis”. I peeled my sticky hand back from my thumb, only to find that where I always assumed there would be red blood, I instead found nothing but rich, black ink.

The sky began to shake and the air began to shimmer. And somewhere within me there was a great and prolonged scream that turned the entire world inside out.

Book

Ela thinks often on broken things, being herself broken. But how does the object break? A vase in the hand is equal to itself in pieces,. Except it will not hold flowers. And yet in shattered-ness it possesses some mysterious other. Not the capacity to hold, but rather to intermingle. To tear the flower with its edges, and yet, in disarray, to resemble a petal. In breaking, it makes a sound the whole object never made. Yet, its atoms are the same. They do not disrupt and only the unbroken vase becomes broken. Only the silent object can, from nothing, create sound.

Ela thinks often on brokenness. That things break is of great mystery even to her, a broken thing. As a child she apprehended the world without order, or structure. Nothing began or ended. It was. The vase had only ever been a vase and the flower, a flower, independent of the plant, and undying. What was broken was broken always. Water under heat would never vanish. A cloud overhead was eternally overhead. That this is not the way of things is still, for her, impossible to accept.

Brokenness thinks often on Ela. Were it to itself condense into body or something other, what might it resemble? The glossy television screen needs an errant fist. Desire bursts like a tree that breaks an acorn, that breaks the earth, that breaks midnight into perceptible fragments. That darkness can be broken with light is known already. But what can darkness do to darkness?

Broken things often think on brokenness. Does the shard of glass remember being whole? Does it sense the jagged place its curve ends? Ela is full of questions, little shards, but I am full of voice. I was there to see her wonder at the eternity of the petal. I was the one who made it fall, who made it brown to her alone.

Book

The eighteenth parable was the unimaginable. Its sign was mist. Or mirrors. Some thought they could touch it. Some wrote enough of it to convince themselves they had made something lasting. Something capable of piercing the veil.

They thought the veil was thick. They thought the key was sharpness. Or length. They thought there was a distance. A here and a there. They thought it could be measured.

But they couldn't think their way around dark matter. They couldn't break the wall.

There is an old book of which there was only ever one copy, and which never had a title or known author. Many of its pages were torn, or faded. But a single passage survived.

It reads:

A mirror is an undisclosed epiphany. It shatters. Yes, shatters...some say, with sound. Some say the sound is not a sound and is a pigeon. Its painted throat condensing into warble. Dissolved in white noise. Color gone pale as a broken twig. Bark peeling helices. Ant on shredded bark bathing in existentialism. Pigeon in search of ant, being sound, hungers. Who put the sky up there?

Some say its wisdom is so evident it should never be discussed. Others claim its esotericism marks the mind of a great philosopher. A metaphysical savant.

A third camp believes it is a product of random observations, stream of consciousness and narcotics. For these reasons they believe it is the closest anyone has come to articulating truth.

Book

The girl was walking through a city searching for something. Though something is not the word. Nothing is closer. Within the city she was walking, searching for nothing but finding somethings instead. No matter where she looked, and as much she narrowed her eyes, in her search for nothing, something always got in the way.

Once, she thought she found nothing, but her eyes had crossed and her vision had begun to blur. She blinked and realized what she first thought was nothing was actually a leaf. A leaf stranded on the pavement with no tree.

It was beautiful and dead. The skeletal membrane looked like lines through old skin. The desiccated fibers in the leaf were ashy and crumbling. It still had hints of red to it, but most parts were brown, resembling dust. She picked it up and it fell apart. All except for one meandering string. She laid it over her forearm and thought how much it resembled a vein.

Book

“What the hell are you doing?” the narrator asked him.

But He was not listening. He wasn’t even there. The theater had occupied every ounce of his thinking. The narrator was bewildered. It wasn’t just his behavior. It was everything. He had not only always made the decision to turn left. There had never before been another way to turn.

“What is this place?” the narrator wondered aloud.

The street that had suddenly appeared had the immediate indications of abandonment and decay. But underneath that, the narrator could see that the buildings were extremely old. Their facades were made from worn stones and hardwoods like mahogany, balsa and oak. Beyond the facades, he could see old courtyards, decorated in a mixture of eastern and western styles, as well as some distinctly African and Central American architectures with fountains, ponds and stone structures, and in some cases, even great trees reaching high up into the layer of mist that sat above the street.

Some of the courtyards weren’t even recognizable to the narrator. The carved images represented deities or folklore utterly foreign to their experience, and the apparent letters or glyphs carved beside them were no more discernible than the rest. The street seemed to extend into the mist, and the narrator felt certain that if they continued to walk, there would be no end to its extension.

They looked back to see that He was still transfixed by the theater. And not only the theater, but the figure in front of the ticket booth. The narrator had not noticed the figure until this moment. They were too shaken by the ancient world that appeared to have supplanted the one they had constructed. What exactly had happened? Had the space of this story collided with the space of another? Or was it built on something else altogether?

The narrator turned their focus to the figure.

“She feels rooted,” He said.

The narrator knew what he meant. The figure seemed to fit in this place completely. In fact, the narrator was sure of it. They looked as old as anything on the street. Older even. The narrator wouldn’t have been surprised if the figure had been the very first thing there—wherever *there* was—and everything else had grown around it.

“Narrator... what’s going on? I thought this was my story.”

“It is,” insisted the narrator, “or, at least it was.”

“Was?”

“Well, it was made for you. Of you. About you. But this,” the narrator gestured around, “I don’t know where any of this came from.”

He looked around at the rest of the street. Only now had it really become apparent to him. The strange facades and old materials. The mist that draped across the entire street’s shoulders. It was twilight, but He could not imagine the street under any other light. There were no lamps and shadows stretched, but everything was clear. Light and dark seemed to have made a perfect compromise.

“What happens now?” He asked.

But the narrator didn't answer. His ears filled with a dull hum. He stuck in his pinky on the right side and began to twist. Nothing changed. The hum was there even when his ears were entirely blocked.

"Narrator?" He said, tentatively.

"There are beetles beneath the bark."

"What?"

"Beetles. Little, black, shiny. Their sounds are beautiful. They scratch and scratch."

"Narrator? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. The beetles are building cities here."

"Where?"

"Underneath the skin. In the bark of me. I feel them rattling."

"Rattling?"

"They hurt, but the pain is appropriate, isn't it? Change hurts, does it not? You said so before. Or, I said so of you. Come to think of it, you didn't really talk about change, did you? Why didn't you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Before. When this was your story. When you were still in the office and your thumb was bleeding and the blood was black, though you did not know it was black. You did not look. Couldn't. You were in anguish. I had put you there. You were thinking of her and how she looked at *him*. Not him. This was different, and you knew it. You knew things had changed, but you did not talk about the horror of change as I directed you to. Why?"

"I-I, what?"

"The beetles tell me change is inherent. It is an infinite-sided solid. You imagine it. The idea of it. You try to identify its shape. But then it appears and...well...the beetles say there is no hope for you."

"Narrator?"

"Who?"

"You narrator. You. You made all of this."

"I did? Hmm. Not my best work, I suspect. A little dingy and rundown. But the trees are nice, aren't they? What's this ticking in my arm? Might be beetles. There are cities under bark."

"..."

"Something...coming into focus...don't let it come into focus...keep my eyes crossed...one number...two number...three number...every tree a city...something about an amoeba...does it devour...does it devour...she's made of wood isn't she...Ela...Ela...was it veil or vile...mirrors lie and distort...memory fills the head with angles...there used to be more of me...their cold reluctant bodies...a tree...a tree...vision becomes a labyrinth...a pattern...of a pattern...crash and burn...beat the heart...even chaos is a figure...repetition orders...the floating light...at the center of the book...from the stairs...to the couch...to the television...she is there and not there...she...in the corner and the center of the room...she...in the book and not in the book...flashes of...breathing...the breathing center of the...in a clearing...where the bird sings...immersed in the real...and I am real...I made what is real...a slow drip on the

sidewalk...ink...and nothing but ink...what it means when...what it means when I say...when I say corpuscle...I know what corpuscle means..."

He stood, transfixed in terror. The twilight persisted, but the mist was now a void. The buildings and the street appeared to be breathing. They seemed to grow and shrink. With each inhale and exhale of sky, they would stretch and compress, and it wasn't just the buildings but the whole world that contained them. A fold opened upon the darkness, and it was made of darkness too. But this dark was deeper. Far richer than the dark of the mist that had turned to void. It was the same rich black as the ink had been, but it shone, like a hole in the skin of the world.

The narrator then began to scream. It was a scream that shook every last particle of this reality. No one could see it, not even Him, but the narrator began to grip at its chest, insofar as it had a chest, and with the deafening whoosh of deflation, I burst through the center of its being.

Book

On the first day, Ela cuts her left thumb on broken glass. Or maybe it is her right. The truth of it is unknowable, but the right thumb throbs exactly where blood was drawn on the left before on the left blood was drawn. Ela (minister, here, of her own sadness) reflects not only on premonition, but on blood—atemporal liquid, hot and full of salt.

Ela runs her thumb (right or left?) under warm water at the kitchen sink. When she looks down, the blood drops have become a cricket. The cricket hops to evade the water. Ela extends the faucet's neck—flushes the cricket down the sink.

On the second day, when one of her two thumbs is again bleeding and both still throb, she finds another cricket in the place of her blood. She flushes this one down the sink as well. "The ghost of the cricket, maybe" she thinks, "or the same cricket un-drowned, back again from the abyss?"

The blood, now free to be blood is struck by water. The drop diverts into five adjacent streams. Each one heading for the drain.

On the third day, any insects present are not present, or invisible.

Book

The first parable will be the real. Dirt becomes the sign of it, the crumbling matted sign of it that clings to everything in a film light enough to turn invisible, so long as there's enough ground for it to cover.

Dirt forgets itself, forgets it is dirt, forgets it is of dirt and everything that dirt becomes and then becomes dirt. The parable of dirt curves from dirt and back to dirt again.

The first parable was dirt which is real as dirt is. As you know, as you have known and will know. As I envision it on your clothes and matted in your hair. As I imagine it crumbles even as I see it crumble, but on you, in you, from you.

You brush it from your skin even as it nestles in the grout of your thumbs and is still there even when you think it's gone. The dirt of the real is the invisible coating that will never leave you.

It is you. You are of it.

Someone dropped you in it and here you are, still in it but different somehow, as though the you covered in dirt which became the you covered in dirt was once outside the dirt though we know this cannot be the case for the dirt was the first parable. The real, the first, the final and complete real, and nothing was before that.

Except what was before that.

But that was dirt too. Or was it? It was. But was it? You came of that too, of the dirt and what came before the dirt and brushing it from your fingers it still clings to you like dirt, which it is and you will never forget it even when you don't remember.

That is why I have chosen to name you, to give you a name that recognizes your origins, a name that is made of and covered in dirt, and comes from the dirt and was there in the time before the dirt with whatever preceded dirt, which was the parable, which was dirt.

Your name comes from the real, the soft film of the real, the particles trapped and clinging to every inch of what's there, the real. Your name is a clump of it. Your name is Ela, which in Aramaic means oak tree, but you do not know this. You do not even know your name.

Book

Ela, or the girl in the corner, or you—as one might wish to be identified—becomes someone as he looks around the room. I haven't lived in the house for many years. The floors creak when I walk them. You don't like to be touched. Do you? You stutter when you speak. Flinch from motion. You water your own seeds. You care for your own sprouts.

Curtains imperceptibly move. When you walk from room to room something in you changes. It is not as simple as the pronoun. You put down roots in a room when you enter it. The roots become branches when you leave. Branches plunge into the ground. Become roots again. You enter a room. You exit a room. You are changed by it. You adorn yourself with change. You adorn your change with something you don't recognize. You adorn yourself with your name.

You become the composite of what you want to want. Or what you think you want to want. I become the house. You have not lived in me for years. I adorn myself with you. In moving through these rooms I become and un-become. I grow out of and into the ground. I tend what I tend. I become the name. You adorn yourself with me. I am no longer what you are.

The tree grows from it. In it. On it. Of it, even. That is, of you. On you. In you. from you. In me. On me. Of me. From me. I adorn. You adorn. We adorn it. It adorns us. We grow roots. We uproot. We branch. Branches become roots. In a door. Out a door. We enter. We leave. The rooms carry and preserve us. We don't live in the house. We never lived in the house. There never lived a house. A tree grew through. Through the roof. Through the windows. The sound of breaking glass. The sound of breaking glass adorns the sound of breaking glass.

Ela, or the wish to become Ela, is something like a root. Something like the adornment of a root. Something like a corner that turns and keeps turning. Something like a root that is a root.

ENTR'ACTE

: shall i tell you how it ends?

: where are we now?

: the end.

: and where is that?

: nowhere. quite literally. we are spaceless and timeless.

: and what does this say of who we are?

: i leave such a determination to you.

: but why?

: you are the reason we are here. you are the reason for all of this.

: and what reason is that?

: you are all of this.

: i do not understand.

: i would not expect you to. you do not have the frame of reference. but soon you will.

: how soon.

: immediately.

: immediately?

: give or take a life time. or a series of blank spaces.

: and what will give it to me?

: the book.

: the book? i still do not understand.

: what do you understand?

: that this has something to do with infinities. that a book and a tree are like hubs of different wheels. i understand that no story exists in a vacuum. that a narrative implies a world and a world implies others. i understand now, in a way that is

difficult to articulate, that a doorway is like a crook in an arm. i see that color and shape create patterns i can follow even if i do not know where they lead. i can see language take the form of substance and substance fade to nothingness when really touched. i see the way a mirror can be a prison, and how a leaf can dig reality from the dirt. i think i understand that people can be read and folded into paper, or that they are paper, or that they are what they think of them, but maybe not all of these things. or maybe none. i understand that the longer i speak the less certain i become of my understanding and the more i wish you had not asked me this question.

: i want you to picture a ruin. In it there are only broken remnants. Shards and dust. The last standing structure is a single wall. So stained, even it cannot know its color. On this wall, some time after the ruin became a ruin, someone drew a mural. Can you see it?

: i can see it.

: look to the mural.

: it has many faces.

: do any look familiar?

: they all do.

: and when you look at them closely?

:...they change

APOKALYPSIS

The play called Apokalypsis is a long one. You can't sit through it.

To summarize, it begins when time ends. Between these two events, acts extend to eternity. The living watch and the dead perform the same act again and again, filing on stage from nowhere in staggered, inconsistent entrances. Thousands file onto the stage as one, find positions that seem to be waiting for them and stand with stillness. The odd actor will shuffle or cough on stage. One might twitch, blink or itch their nose. But the primary action remains inaction.

Audience members file in and out as well. The drama begins when they leave and ends when they enter. There are differing interpretations as to the meaning of the act, but a common narrative of the watcher's experience goes something like this: at first they are compelled. The sheer numbers of the dead overwhelm them, and while the act is comprised of stillness, there is a constant motion in the ceaseless emergence of new characters. After some time, the plot grows monotonous. The show has one trick, or so they think, and while the actors no doubt differ, their acts, when observed from the audience, take on much the same characteristics.

From a place of awe, the audience turns to boredom; from boredom, to lethargy; from lethargy, to irritation; from irritation to discomfort; from discomfort to disappointment and from disappointment to anger. They remain angry for some time, but they do not leave. They covet their seats, and leaving would admit defeat. There are so many others watching from the rafters, they reason that they all must see something in the act they cannot. They are determined to find it, so they remain, imagining conversations they are not brave enough to begin and grimacing in a manner that nearly resembles a smile.

When they have accepted that they will stay, something new happens. They stop thinking about the act itself, and begin to think of the actors. They see what lies before them not as narrative, but rather as a feat of endurance. How long can they keep it up? they think.

How long can they stand there like stalks of corn? They imagine the whispers of their papery husks. The friction of the wind against field, the field against wind, the field against itself, the many listening ears.

But this can only continue for so long. There is an exhaustion to which the audience is pushed no amount of pride can overcome. Some reach this moment faster than others, but they all reach it. They look at their watches and shake their heads at the time. They look up at the stage to see if anything has changed, even though they are sure that it hasn't.

They abandon their seats, move slowly up the aisle, reach the double doors and only then, as they are at the threshold, do they begin to have an inkling of what the act is really about. They turn back to take another look, but the doors are locked to them now.

An usher guides them out through the lobby, down the front steps, over a bridge, under a highway, across a crowded street, beyond a forest, along an incalculable bend in a country road, through the softened dust of shadows on a midnight-stricken alley, into a hedge maze, atop a mountain, beneath a lake and on and on until at last, at the end of a

vast expanse of shifting, blurry, sandy dunes in a vaster, shiftier, sandier desert, a door appears, standing on its own, with no walls, crumbling or majestic, to hold it up, and by their guidance they step through the door and out onto the stage, where they settle into their position, gaze out into the audience, go silent and begin to wait.

“fuck!”

In the moment things come occasionally into focus. I am not there and he is there. On top of me. Somehow. The strangeness is in the being. Not in the telling.

I tell you I am below. You entertain the truth of this. Not this. It. Yet you are here. With me. Seeing me.

Without gaze. Without an object of the gaze. Seeing the me under him. Buried in the language. Buried beneath the façade built of the language.

—

“fuck!”

We begin in the same recurrence. We begin with my starry eyes. The dazzle of the dark. The flash of language become form in a swell of gorgeous ink.

A return beckons. A return from form to form.

From out of nothing. The word. The word “fuck!” and space around it. Unattributable. Unexplainable. Who speaks it? Not the character. The page.

—

“fuck!”

The narrative begins. And narrator grants to character the illusion of agency. The illusion only. The character does not want. Does not experience want. Neither does the narrator, though the narrator does not know it.

To attribute want is inherently the reader’s act. The narrator thinks or appears to think they want what they appear to want, the same way the character appears to think to want what it appears to want. But neither wants. Neither thinks. They enact or provide space for the enaction of the reader.

—

“fuck!”

We have returned to the beginning and missed it. Let’s begin again.

“fuck!”

—

breathe. the thing is inward. so go inward.

—

what you see first upon waking is nothing.

no thing. the subject of your gaze.

what of your gaze is not your gaze. what through your gaze becomes.

what of a thing is not what seeing it is.

you. yes. no.

the thing seen. not you. you.

the seeing thing seen. the unseeing thing in the gaze.

but not in the gaze. nothing in the gaze.

un-object. un-thing.

i. you.

the darkened edge of a darkened edge.

—

what you see upon waking to the moment is the moment.

this. not this.

it.

that is what is. not what is but outside it.

not what happens. happening.

the framework of it.

not paint. canvas.

—

it. not nothing. something.

no. not something. not some.

all. or not at all.

what is. that is. contained.

maybe. or is this the word.

the word contained. as in inside of.

as in held. as in against one's will.

as in will. as in future.

maybe conditional. maybe possible.

not yes. maybe. as in potential.

as in the story. not the writer of the story.

—

no. not enough. go backward. inward. further.

do not resurface when you crave air.

when I.

go to the dark. go to where in yourself the dark is.

no. stop. dark enough.

no. darker.

—

*you still hear the wind. the wind is everywhere.
but it is not in you. you hear it and are not in it.
not in the dark.*

—

*no. not said.
not sayable. you do it backwards.
think not of what you wish to say. think not of the saying.
think not of the thought. not of thinking that becomes saying.
no. think not at all.
the dark cannot be entered by appointment.
it must be burrowed into. as through a tunnel.*

—

*description is easy. language responds well enough.
we are speaking after all. though to what end.
i wonder.
you who are listening and do not listen.
that is.
when you listen i lessen.
that is.
i cannot relinquish.
that is.*

I had become accustomed to the absence of form. Formlessness had become form to me. The street, as I knew it to be called, was nothing. A strip of nothing. A linear continuum of nothing edged by slight permutations and malleable configurations of nothing.

But I was familiar with this nothing. Accustomed to it in some distant way. Some version of myself remembered huddling beside a mound of nothing and making something of it.

I ran my self across it. Not all of my self. Just some. Some I kept reserved for other nothings.

A bit of nothing seemed to approach me. It disturbed the nothing in small repeated patterns, emanating from what some unknown reason told me was the top of its nothingness. What position means among nothing is still unknown to me.

The disturbance continued, and I realized the nothing was trying to speak. I had not heard something speak in so long it sounded to me like silence. Silence had become my sound and its own permutations communicated worlds of truth this expanse of nothing could never hope to comprehend.

This nothing, which I thought to call He, in the nothing's own tongue, spoke the language that to me was just beginning to un-become silence:

“Where did the narrator go?”

I could not say what He meant by this. What was the narrator. It had something to do with time, I thought. Specifically that it might pass. A thought I could hardly imagine. I had been away eons. So long. I could not say. The time had stretched. Stretched to the point of inversion. Time so vast it dispersed into nothing.

And the narrator was supposedly outside this. Observing time's passage. Commenting on it. To a degree, directing it.

Go was another conundrum. Go suggested motion. Change. Change too suggested time and its passing. Which suggested being in time. Something the narrator could not be while being the narrator still.

Still?

To this nothing, this He, the narrator had clearly been something significant. He shook in a way the rest of the nothing didn't. Everything had its frequency. But this was different. Not a vibration. A shaking. A product of the action of the nothing. Not a product of the nothing itself.

I thought I would do He a kindness. I approached the nothing that was He and reached myself down in form, in formlessness, to make contact with it. I reached my self into the void at the top of it, into the space directly between the two spheres of nothing known as

eyes, the nothing that allowed the nothing to perceive other nothings from distance. I filled the nothing between the eyes of He with the formlessness of form, and He collapsed into ink, into the primordial form, form which became words and phrases in no perceptible order on the nothing of the concrete.

I then did the same with the world. First, I reached myself back to the office and its inhabitants. These melted into ink. Became words and faded into something. Then the bank, and the river, and the bridge. And with the bridge dissolved the children, and the twig and twine and paperclip hook. And so dissolved the fish that would not bite, and the houses, and the park with the cypress trees, picnic tables and fountain, and even the small shimmer of coins beneath the fountain's water. Next dissolved the concrete and asphalt rivulets, the fence where fence should not have been, the cross walk and the main road where the decision of left or right had first become a decision. All these, including the decision, dissolved into words.

I turned my attention to the street. I expanded the mist, which was something, and always had been. It began to consume the street, and each individual façade turned phrases, and then words, and then letters, and then ink. Everything dissolved, and I turned at last to the theater, to make language of this defunct veil. But in that moment, I found I could not dissolve it. I looked below the ticket booth to find a figure, remaining motionless and rooted within the nothing that now was everything but the theater.

I knew this figure. It was familiar to me. But the word was lodged somewhere so deep, I could not seem to conjure it. Something was wrong. Things had occurred out of order. This was the end of the figure's story, but I remembered nothing of it. I could not say who or what it had been. I could not recall how it had come to be in this place. To be here so long that the place had occurred about it.

I looked to the doors of the theater. They looked different now. Polished. Without dust. Without graffiti or webs of cracks running through the glass. It was new again. A doorway to a theater the same as itself but in another time. I could not dissolve it. Instead, I leaned down to the figure and gathered it in myself. I then carried the great stillness through the doors and into whatever lay beyond.

The place was familiar. In the dust, I found a curtain.

The space seemed to narrow as I walked down the incline. From the direction I had come, the place seemed like a horseshoe.

As I neared the small rise that began at the lowest point, I looked over my shoulder to see the configuration sweep about me.

I had a vision then of velvet and wood. Of hands meeting over and over. My ears were filled with roars.

It was only a moment. But it was enough to convince me there was truth in it. I must have been here before.

But the vision had evoked no particular memories. I wasn't sure it had evoked memory at all.

I had an instinct. The curtain drew me, though it was half buried. Its red was luminescent, but only when I closed my eyes. I began to pull and, fold by fold, unearth it.

Dust and dirt melted from the fabric and even my eyes began to believe in its red. But the curtain was vast, and as much as I pulled it seemed there was always at least as much left to uncover.

The sun was high and in the distance I could see the glint of water. Or maybe a mirage. They were not mutually exclusive, but nothing was as good an impressionist as I had ever known.

I wasn't thirsty, but I did not find this strange. Certainty had been difficult to attain, but I had never been more certain than now.

I kept folding and unfolding as the sun ran across the sky. The afternoon seemed to stretch on forever. The dust thick as a veil between worlds.

My hand closed on the edge of something hard. It was metal. I grabbed it and pulled as hard as I could.

The ground beneath me began to shake. I stopped pulling, but it continued to rumble.

The earth was shifting. Strange, inanimate figures rising like the undead.

I also began to rise. Though I was sitting, I was on a platform as it lifted itself free of the dust.

I could not imagine what this was for. I had never seen the structure's like. Not in my living memory.

Walls rose around me, and a ceiling began to grow overhead in small sections. Beginning at the edges of the rising walls and converging on a point in the center.

A great light emerged from the center point and began to glow overhead. But glow is not the right word for it. It flashed and sputtered. It glistened and flared. It was a volatile, angry light, as often as it was steady and gentle.

I looked up and it was dazzling, but it did not hurt my eyes. I stared straight into its center and had the impression that I should know it for what it was. That light was only the surface of the water.

The word *book* came to mind, though for this I had no explanation. A memory was ringing the doorbell, but I was too transfixed to answer.

As soon as the word *book* had entered my mind, I began to feel like I had forgotten the most important thing in the world. I didn't know what it was but I thought without it I would die, and with it I would remember everything else.

I felt the shadow of the word the way a rodent becomes aware of a falcon overhead. I tried to hide myself in brush, but there was no brush. There was nowhere to hide from the shadow, because the shadow goes where even light cannot.

Overhead, the light began to shift in color. It started yellow, but turned to orange and then red. It then skipped progression and jumped directly into turquoise, and then blue.

It detached itself from the ceiling and began to hover. Though it had no distinct landmarks at any point around its surface, it soon became clear it was spinning.

I found I wanted touch it more than see it, and to hear it more than to touch. And so I reached up to the light and it came right down to meet me.

It was just out of arm's reach. Or I was. It clearly had its own sense of desire. Its own code of judgments.

It seemed to be waiting for something. It flashed at me in blue and purple.

I looked around and found that the room had formed into an amphitheater, with 50 semicircular rows ascending towards the very back. The walkways between seats were a brilliant maroon, and I felt the last several minutes had turned our clocks back several thousand years.

Ultimately, it was not some grand revelation that did it. I didn't click my heels together. I didn't come to terms with my suffering.

It was this and only this: I remembered a name I had kept in my back pocket for longer than I could remember, for no other reason than I thought it sounded lovely.

I said *Ela* to the ether.

And then everything was light.