

In Hindsight

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to the person that was
and the family that put up with him

Poetry

it came quietly on a gray morning
dancing on the wings of moths
and the drums -- the drums!
i heard them beating in the dark

blackbird

fly away blackbird

fly away free

fly to somewhere far away

i can never be

fly away blackbird

across a shining sea

fly to someplace long forgotten

and far away from me

my black beauty

she laughs in the sunshine
and dances in the moonlight
her hair is sleek and shiny
running rivers in the night

with heart and soul care free
leaves spinning in the fall
bound to no one creature
when she belongs to them all

no master and no pulling reins
winds rush unchained and free
a wild heart but not to give
not to the sun or stars

or me

in love with her
she invades my mind
every waking minute
i cannot escape
what rules my heart
and wins me with it

my favorite night

the best kind of night

is quiet

and unspoken

when

there are no words

or whispers left

nothing in the air

between us

but our love

no room

for other things

and no more

space but for

ourselves

bright eyes

quick blinks

in an onyx sea

the bright eyes

of sleepy stars

i found myself once
and met a stranger
standing in my skin
i asked his name
but he did not reply
only looked at me
like i was someone
that he once knew
and then he was gone
taking me as he went

i kneel before
a false idol
pray to a
dark god
lift my hands
in black prayer
as i wait
for the call

night
has finally come
her hair loose behind her

i look up
and see nothing
only my reflection
lonely in the black water
looking back down
at me

keep the door closed
when you sleep
or the night
might just sneak inside
slipping through
the cracks in the wood
dripping down
the walls
along the floors
under the covers
of your warm bed
and into your dreams

i do not know clever running rivers
the feel of them or their smell
nor do i know of babbling brooks
and the whispered secrets that they tell

i do not know the surging seas
nor have i heard their mighty roar
least of all do i know these ancient oceans
even as i walk along their shore

i can't stop this
black melody
beating in my breast
a twisted music box
playing in my chest
such a wicked tune
my heart's
sweet unrest
singing with terrible cadence
dark hymns of the blessed

i find solace
in silence
but not happiness
the calm
of an empty road

thorns

i've never wanted for

a rose without thorns

because

i've yet to suffer

a love without scorns

this evening

the fog returned to me

like an old friend

i did not expect to see

melting skies

the skies melted in the summer heat
and spilled like glass into the sea
brushing shyly up against bare feet
and wrapping gentle arms around me

i dug my toes into soft white sands
burned to gold by the sun
let their warmth slip through my hands
and slept until the day was done

am i alone

again?

yes

it is

quiet

train station

metal screams

in pain

a blast of hot air

a last cough

choking

smoke and burnt skin

a contracting

birth-shudder

beneath numb feet

something rouses

the sleeping giant

blinking hard light

holds its breath

and exhales

is there space
in the place
where you stand
is there still room
in that mind
you call your own?

monsters

i'm good friends
with the monsters
under my bed

i know the different
whispering voices
in my head

i can tell you
the name of
everyone i see

when i look in mirrors
and find others
looking back at me

unwelcome

there is a darkness here
thrashing along the floors
writhing up the walls
like an unwelcome shadow

there is a madness here
creeping into the corners
settling into the cracks
like so much dust

entropy

all threads unwind

all ends fray

all things unravel

to the end of days

still alive

the needle scratches

confessing

in blood

across my skin

and i relish in the sting

in the sweet

red pain

that reminds me

i am still

alive

evening

it is dark

again

and my shadow looks back

over my shoulder

skittish

at the sound of footsteps

i cannot hear

sweet dreams

the sweetest dreams
always find me in my sleep
like little birds
fluttering around my head
nesting in my ears
and singing sweet nothings
to life in my mind

a mouth full of knives

kiss the girl

with a mouth

full of knives

and whose lips

taste like blood

confession from a past lover

to think that i
broke your heart
just to keep
a piece of it
for myself

conversation before a mirror

who are you?

i ask

but i fear

the reply

rainbow sherbet

it's a rainbow sherbet

kind of day

today

sticky

and sweet

with the kinds of colors

that swirl

and then melt away

under warm skin

a warning

do not trust

the cats in your dreams

they are quicker

than the moonlight

and cleverer than shadows

if they should ask

your name

do not think to answer

they bore

so quickly

and prefer to play

with their food

what is that thing
that i see
moving behind your eyes
that empty thing
looking at me
hungrily
is that you in there
darling
are the teeth
on my neck
still yours?

no one can see

these scars of mine

they're in the places

i showed no one

but you

hurricane

i will not

cry you

a river

no

i will bring you

a hurricane

i wish
that these clouds
could stay forever
but they vanish
when i wake
like my dreams

your embrace
is the grave
i threw myself
into willingly

i write these words

so i might

relive

my memories of you

one day

reading

how you became

just another

foolish poem

of mine

there is gold
hidden
in all my
secret places
so come
and
put your
mouth
where my
money is

two wrongs

don't make a right

but let's pray they might

just for tonight

my name

write my name

with your lips

on my skin

it's the only time

i like how it's spelled

scream my name

with your hands

in my hair

it's the only time

i like how it sounds

you said that you'd
pick me
in the end
but i did not know
that meant
you would pull me
up hard
and
tear out
my roots

coca-cola

she tastes like cherry coke

and vanilla

sweet

like an empty summer

and lazy sex

sticky

on the tips of my fingers

warm

like the sugar

that i lick away

i do not know
where my blood
has been to
or where
it has been
all i know
is that it is
here
in my veins

coming undone

i'm coming

apart

at the seams

because i'm tangled up

in you

and you keep

pulling me

to pieces

do not pick

her flowers

they are not

for you

dreams are like
unslept beds
inviting
with the promise
of pillow talk
messy hair
and rumpled sheets

gold

we are the gold

that rose from the earth

without seed

plow

or master

but tall

and as radiant as the sun

his shape

he is twisted

and bent

out of shape

but still i love

all his jagged edges

because this way

he fits perfectly

into all the

broken places

inside of me

hope is

hope is

the thing that lies

with whispers in the dark

hope is

the thing that flies

away on many-colored wings

hope is

the thing that dies

a slow death of quiet hunger

hope is

the thing that cries

itself to sleep at night

i am the storm and the fury

i am the thunder
and the lightning
and the rain that cracks the stone

i am the fire
and the drums
and the wrath that shatters bone

i am the sea
and the clouds
and the waves that break the shore

i am the salt
and the winds
come clawing at your door

i don't
fear myself
anymore
i fear
what i may become
if you should
leave me here
alone again
with myself

i see strange things
rising
out of the nothingness
and i am afraid
because they are all
wearing
a face of mine

if i grow to be
half as just as my father
i will have died
a far better man
than i ever hoped to be

i don't fear the darkness

because i've already reached down

elbow-deep into the mud

and felt the things inside move

let them crawl over my fingers

i've touched its breath and

felt the beat of its heart

warm and wet and slow

mind your tongue

darling

my kisses

have teeth

of their own

name

i cannot wait

to use your name

to taste its curves

roll around my teeth

and glide over my tongue

to whisper it

to the warm night air

and then scream it

in beautiful agony

at the stars

night terrors

these daytime

thoughts of mine

may carry weight

but my dreams

they hide terrors

possession

who wrote these words

into my head

because

i would claw apart my skin

and crack open my skull

just to dig them out

of where they do not belong

quiet

i know what it's like to be quiet
to be the one to sit in the silence
because i've sat in that place before
and waited for the words to come
gathering around my feet
like curious birds hungry for
all the lost pieces of my mind

someplace out there

i found the sea

who wove and danced

and sang to me

so i chased her

into the sun

and vanished

when the day was done

do not look for me

here

not when i have wandered

in my own words

for a thousand years

and not yet

found myself

the dead

weep not over

the dead

they waste no breath

on you

wait not on

the lost

they lose no sleep

over you

show me your
favorite places
take me to all
the spots that
make your pulse
quicken
and your breath
catch

wanderlust

i've traveled to all the
deepest ports
in the old world
gotten lost in golden jungles
and rivers of fire
without ever leaving this bed
ran calloused hands over
australias and zanzibars
el dorados and xanadus
crossed the equator and back
a thousand times
stood at the gates of shangri-la
with breathless abandon
and stepped into the new world
left behind the one i knew
and buried myself
deep inside the sweet blackberry
of the dark unknown

make my skin
your diary
tell me
all your secrets
run your hands over me
and press your fingers
into my pale pages
until they bruise
write down all your
agonies
and
ecstasies
in me
seal them with this blood
your tears
and
the key to my heart

falling

i've fallen

for you

but i know

you won't catch me

and that's okay

because i think

it was the

empty space

between your arms

that i fell for

to begin with

some days
i wish
for it to end
to lay down
in the quiet dirt
and pull the soft earth
over me
like a blanket
but the world
she pushes back
against the soles of my feet
pinching my skin
to wake me
and saying

no
not you
impatient child
not yet

i know what
dying
feels like
it happens
every time
i see you
laughing
with him

leave your lies
by the door
they won't work
on me anymore

there is something
terrible
behind your dark eyes
and i cannot wait
to know it
to fall
into those depths
and lose myself
among the shadows
of your darkest places

haunt

you haunt me

not with

the gentle memory

of faded kisses

or the lingering

warmth of fingers

no

you are a

vengeful ghost

unwilling to be

forgotten

i would ask you
tonight
to kiss away
all my bruises
but i always
seem to forget
it was your lips
that left them

never lose
your imagination
we could always
do with
a little more
magic
in the world

full lips

your lips

are full

of all your

kisses

lies

sighs

and all the other

thousand little

whispered things

i love about you

i don't think i can be
anyone
but myself anymore
because i've spent so long
trying on
other faces
and this is the only one
i found
that fits me

how i wish now
that i hadn't given you
all of me
because when you left
you took me too

this tragedy

we wrote

together

has left

paper cuts

on my heart

you laugh at me
call me names
because my skin is dark
and stained
with work
while yours is pale
and unmarked

but i laugh back
because my skin is dark
with the ink
that runs in my veins
and under my skin
because my body is a book
and i have spent years
making my pages
with pride in myself
and in the blood
i use as ink
but i see no color on you

you have left your pages
unwritten

i met with my fate once
and she offered me
a glass full
of midnight darkness
but when i
would not drink
she took me in her mouth
and gave it to me
in her kisses

i waited until

loneliness

found me

crying

in the corner of the room

you are my favorite
lazy sunday afternoon
wasted in bed
twisting
long strands of sunlight
around my finger
and tracing
lazy circles over your horizons

i looked to the sky

and saw you

my salvation

but as your shadow

fell over my skin

cold

i remembered

what i had forgotten

about you

that angels

are not the only ones

with wings

i'll wait for you
to finish
here
at the bottom
of your next drink

i don't write
with ink and paper
anymore
now
i carve these words
into my skin
with your love
and trace the scars
we leave behind

won't you

bleed yourself for me

i want to taste the

poetry

running hot

and red

under your skin

these bad thoughts
never run for very long
maybe like me
my demons
don't like the exercise

i'm done now
i don't think
there are any more
words left in me
not now
after i
wrote myself empty
with these
poems of you

death visited
and stayed
longer than he should have
lingering
not with hunger
but only curiosity
pressing thin fingers
into warm flesh

aeolian

this wicked breeze

blew into me

like the exhale

of some god

or demon

and it moved me

body

mind

and

bones

i went looking
for the soul of america
and i found it
in a dark-skinned boy
that played
by the side of the road
kicking a can that he found

found it
in a bird-eyed girl
who wrote poetry
in a language she learned at home
giggling in her mother's dress

found it in me
under all of this
coloring book skin
that i filled in by
drawing outside the lines

a forest fire
does not crave
a dropped match

the ocean
does not envy
a broken dam

i don't need you anymore
now that i have myself

maybe the reason
we forget all the
best places
in our dreams
is so we don't
go looking for them
when we wake

you've left stains
on my heart
the kind that won't
wash off
so easily
not with sleep
or wine
or time

i've spent my whole life
gazing into fires
wondering where the embers go
when they die
and if there might be
room enough there
for me

i hope that i
am your poetry
your heartbeat
and your words
so that i just might
steal away
your breath
and capture your
heart
in the same way
you do mine

i miss you
in a thousand different ways
because you touched me
in a thousand different places
and left behind
so many pieces of you
in me
that now i fear that i am
more you than you are
and less me
than i was before
i met you

don't trust my lips
because these
fickle words
would lie so easily
and take any shape you'd like
just to keep you here
but
listen to my body
and feel the
sweet truth
in the warmth of my skin
and in every movement of
my flesh against yours

love yourself

to death

before

someone else

tries

please

just tell me

you love me

one more time

i don't hear it

from myself

anymore

being buried alive
wouldn't be so bad
if it meant getting
lost in you forever

wake your saints
and your sinners
i've come for you
and will take
no prisoners

crash your body
into mine
remind me
you are still real
and not just
another dream
of mine

this morning
the fog curled playfully
around my ankles
rubbing up happily
against my legs
and pressing its wet nose
into my palms

i am

ink and paper

dark veins

cobwebbed

under pale skin

cut me free

and then see

that my blood

runs black

run your hands over every inch
of my searing flesh
hold my wrists fast
so that i may not escape
because i'm a shooting star
and i long to break free
to rush headlong
across the midnight sky
like fire and lightning and blood

give my back my
sleepless nights
you have taken my
everything
now
even my dreams

how fitting it seems
that this world ends with fire
that which once gave man life
shall now light his pyre

read
they tell me
so that you may learn
but i don't want
to learn
any more
not from the other voices
i don't want
their words
when i still don't know
which ones are my own
because they crowd my head
like flies
and god
there's little enough room
in here
as it is

save a smile

just for me

a shy one

only i can see

wrap it up neat

in a little bow

and hide it somewhere

only i will know

don't think yourself

less

for the wounds

you have endured

even the moon

has her scars

she breaks me
slowly
pulling
off all the
parts of me
she likes best
and leaving me
here alone
with the rest

come closer
and bring me those
poison lips of yours
kiss me with them
as
hard as you'd like
i want to know if
they taste as sweet
as they look

hold me
close
tear me
apart
and then get drunk
on the love
that spills
out of me

you sang your way
into me
plucking at my heartstrings
beating drums against my heart
writing lyrics on my lips
until
i finally knew what it meant
to be someone else's music

i've stolen the wings of butterflies
plucked the feathers off birds
and torn the leaves from trees
all because
i can't stand to see the things that fly
when i'm still trapped here on earth

you've never

wanted love

because

you've never

wanted for it

leave dreams
to the dead
they keep
lower hopes
than the living

it was not the clouds

that caught icarus

when he fell

but the waves

don't stop
darling
keep writing
your poetry
here
on my skin
with yours

1.24.18

my grandfather died today

and i know i'll wake

the day my father does

finally knowing

what it feels like

and no one

to share it with

anymore

cynic

i'm a

bad cynic

most days

i still even

believe in myself

it's dark

but i'm thinking of you again

and the moonlight

that steals in through the cracks

in the blinds

it feels like you in my dreams

eulogy for a hummingbird

under the golden light
of a dying day
i found a hummingbird
with the life
squeezed out of him
until it burst
his tongue was grey
and impotent
and hungry ants
had eaten his eyes
i lay him down
not where the earth
pinions his wings
but where he may know
not birdsong
but the babel
of other winged things
and the hushed
sleep mumble of waves
as they dream
around him

and my heart
is a haunted house
still echoing
with your ghosts

i'm trying
to move on
but this love
is a muscle memory
now
and my heart
can't seem to forget
the way
it used to beat
for you

show me where it hurts

everywhere

screamed my heart

she's in my blood

sow seeds

where you wander

and you will never

walk in a land

without flowers

i try to whisper

her name

but my lips

still only know

the shape

of yours

but dreams
are only dreams
and love
is never quite
what it seems

busy bodies flitting
leaving flower kisses
sweet as honeydew drops
that linger on soft petal lips
and vanish like happy tears
drying in the midday sun

bad poetry

so let's fall
for each other
a thousand times
over again
staying up late and
writing bad poetry
we'll never send
pretending that
love
isn't just a
four-letter word

bacchanal

this moonlight is raising
bacchanals in my blood
again
she's silver
and as sweet
as cranberry wine
in the summer
that drank in the cool
darkness
of a hundred centuries
dreaming beneath the earth

i watched it fall
heard it break
still i keep
cutting my fingers
on all the sharp edges
of this mess you made
of me

can someone please

tell me

where i might buy

an ounce

of sleep?

or maybe instead

just a handful

of dreams?

the weight of hands
unknown hands
rough and over-strong
heaviness that sinks
like old blood
beneath floorboards
a shadow twitches
spider puppet-like
staining the window
across the ocean
the sudden emptiness
between stiff fingers
of something dropped
silence shatters
into a thousand stars
and scrambles madly
over pale-faced tiles
for a hiding place

someone is screaming
it is me

you've gone

and every night

i find myself alone

again

under cold sheets

with nothing

but restless fingers

and empty dreams

to keep away

these thoughts of you

if only i knew
your voice
and your love
before i knew the name
and the face
of the darkness in me

tonight i'm drinking

deep

oceans of you

sipping on the memories

of us

intertwined like snakes

in the garden of god

beauty

i've wandered to the furthest ends of the earth
peered over the edge at bright fulgent stars
whirling like fireflies in a darkling sea

i've sunk beneath waves innumerable
and sojourned in the lost temples of atlantis
reveling with the quicksilver dolphins

i've fallen asleep in the lap of mountains
waking as they raised the sun between them
like a cup overfull with multicolored flame

i've walked the gardens of shangri-la
among statues of marble and gold and stardust
that recited poetry long-forgotten when i drew near

but never have i seen a sight as breathtaking
as when all the women of the world
rose as one and sang with many-tongued voice

i, too, am beauty

sinner

i'm a sinner

i know

but god

i think i just might

taste forgiveness

when i kneel

and pray to you

with this heathen

tongue of mine

your love
goes to secret places
deep inside
me
to all the hiding spots
fingers
kisses
and sweet
empty words
cannot reach

black eye

i shiver sometimes
when i feel the cold weight
of those eyes above me
of that black eye
that watches me
through the spaces
between spaces
unblinking
and eternal

unrequited

you brought me the night sky
when the only stars i wanted
were the ones in your eyes

you found me a rainbow
when the color i missed most
was the blush of your cheek

you stole fire from the gods
when the only warmth i craved
was that of your hand in mine

you gave me everything
when all i needed
was you

mother

she was there
before i began
knew me
before i knew
what i was
when i was
just a thought
a feeling
and the echo
of her heart

goodbye

i said goodbye
to her yesterday
laid her down
in that gentle dirt
waiting
to swallow memories
and grief
whole
spitting out her bones like
sweet jasmine
blooming
in the springtime

Prose

A Mouse in the Bedroom

There is a mouse in your bedroom.

He has been there for some time now, and you hardly even think about it anymore. He had planned and promised to stay for a week or two at the most, but something unexpected came up, and you haven't the heart to remind him. After all, he is surprisingly clean for a mouse, and much more courteous than the human roommates you've had before.

Besides, all he asks for is some water and a bit of food, and you already enjoy his company so much that it is a small price to pay.

He tells such wonderful stories, and every night, you go to bed half-wondering where he might have heard them; perhaps in foreign bedrooms, with other friendly company willing to offer room and board.

Occasionally, he talks about the places he has been - places even you, with your passports and passenger planes - have only seen in photos.

For him, it is as easy as stowing away in an open backpack or tucking away inside a bubble-wrapped souvenir. No one wonders where a mouse has been, you realize, and you include yourself sheepishly. It's no surprise that he knows all the best spots in town, and your human friends are always impressed by your Friday night dinner suggestions.

At night, you can hear him scratching and moving about behind the walls, fainter than the whispers of the next-door neighbors. It bothered you a bit at first - though you would never have dreamed of telling him so - but now you can hardly fall asleep without the sound. After all, he is more than considerate about your sleeping hours, and makes as little noise as he can.

But he rarely comes out during the day, and if he ever does, you never seem to catch him. Instead, your talks take place over dinner plates, and run until the moon itself is an emptied plate hanging in the sky. You do not know where he goes while the sun is up, and you have yet to gather the courage to pry. Though he is kind enough to bring back trinkets for you without your asking - coins and rings and

occasionally a small diamond. Jokingly, you had begun to call it his rent.

Several months later - when the streets of the city are no longer as winding, and as the faces of strangers around you finally begin to soften - he vanishes. He is gone for almost two weeks before you allow yourself to worry. You are only a human, and cannot speak for the habits of mice, says a voice of reason that you promptly ignore. Just when you decide that calling the police may not be out of the question, there is a small knock at your door. He is there with a demure white mouse that he introduces as his betrothed, and meekly, he asks for his old room and board.

Later that night, when there are a hundred mice in your living room for the wedding, and as his shy fiancé wears a veil cut from one of your best napkins, you present them with a wedding gift of your own.

Yes, there is a mouse in your bedroom - and the rest of his family lives in the guest room.

The Girl in the Stairwell

There is a stairwell that all the students avoid.

It is in one of the crumbling humanities buildings, lost somewhere between Japanese haikus and Greek tragicomedies. Like it is in all such places where lights blur, and gleeful shadows dance of their own accord, histories have sprung up around it like wildflowers.

A favorite of the student body's is that she was a freshman who had taken her studies too seriously, and - after her first exams - had taken her own life just a little overeagerly. Others swear that she was pushed down the entire flight of stairs, and that whoever had done it had simply left her there when she had not moved; left her there for days and weeks and months, until her bones and her anger had sunk into the concrete. Some even whisper that she had been there long before the college itself, and that they had raised the buildings in the forest clearing to please her.

Whatever the truth is - if there was ever a single truth to begin with - she is still there now.

Even during the summer months, with the afternoon sun at its zenith and summer-schoolers broiling in their classrooms, there is a chill in the hall just outside. In the dead of winter, a draft blows, nonstop, out from beneath the sill like a distant whistle, though there are no windows in the stairwell trapped behind the closed door. Most students are smart enough to avoid using her stairwell whenever they can, even if it costs them precious minutes of class time; they have also learned to keep footsteps light and cheerful conversation hushed until they pass her door, wisely waiting until their gossip is out of earshot before resuming.

But every so often, someone is running late, and rather than waste any more time winding through labyrinthine halls, they would risk disturbing her instead.

It is always as cold as a winter morning inside - regardless of the time of year - and it echoes as though it were many times larger. Those lucky few who have passed through without incident have never described it the same way twice.

A church graveyard. A library. A museum. A bedroom.

Some days, she is at the top of the stairs; other days, the bottom. And at certain times of the day - perhaps when she has classes of her own to attend - she is not there at all. But there is always something there.

The faint sound of light footsteps following close behind, shy and nervous; a melancholy sigh, and the lonely lavender scent of someone standing near enough to touch; the cool breath of a long, satisfied exhale against the back of exposed necks.

And sometimes, late in the afternoon - when the deliberate, crawling shadows are thickest - it is the sharp scratch of a shoe against concrete, the rustle of a dress, and finally, the weight of a cold hand on an unsuspecting shoulder.

Wordless

They are here.

Small and almost too fast to see, but here, nonetheless. They've always been the mocking shadows in the corners of eyes, and the surreptitious rustle of empty rooms. There's a strangeness whenever they're near, but it never lasts long enough to notice - it is what they do, and it serves them well in the hunt.

They're cautious at first, starting with the words that have already been forgotten by most human minds. And they're clever, too, having already stolen away the only ones that could have identified them. The words that could have pinned them down and trapped them long enough for a hammer to rise and fall with deliberate precision. Those, they stole long ago, without us even noticing. Not that anyone could have remembered them to begin with. It's been a long time since we believed in them. But even with what they've already taken, hunger gnaws inside their black, beetle-like bodies; old, stale words cannot satisfy them for very long.

After all, like us, they prefer fresh meat.

So, they start small, taking the ones that they know most people won't miss. The too-specific ones. Abandoned translations, and the ancient, scientific designations of organisms that students have long since given up studying.

A scientist peers through a microscope, and suddenly finds that she can no longer remember the full name of the squirming microbe she studies. It is late in the lab, and she tries vainly to rub away the lack of sleep from her eyes. But it does not go, and the word remains fuzzy in her head; it is like trying to catch a fish with a silk net. So, she shrugs with appropriate indifference, scribbles something close enough, and thinks no more of it. From the darkest corner of the lab, they watch her, making certain that she suspects nothing before

gorging themselves on what she could not remember. It is so much sweeter than the old words, and they crave more.

Far away, in a distant bookstore, a man brushes tenacious dust off a yellowed page and begins to read. Used bookstores are one of their favorite places to hunt, and they can hardly contain themselves. The man pauses half-way down the page, frowning; among the conga-line of a sentence, one of the words seems hazy, and the man rubs his thumb against it half-heartedly. But it grows no clearer, and he cannot for the life of him think what it may have been. It is an old book, he knows, and the ink must have smudged years ago. And there are still so many words in the world that a single gap in a single page gives him no pause. So, he settles back against the bookshelf, paying no mind to what he has lost. And from in between the cracks in the shelf, they watch him, sharp teeth tearing and black eyes burning as they rip it to shreds.

They were clever at first, never taking from the same place twice in a row. A museum's archives, then an astronomy lab all the way across town, then an abbot's personal library in a monastery on the other side of the world. Wherever they go, they descend like flies on something dead, with wings like insects that beat dryly in the air. It is enough for some time. But they grow hungrier with each sweet new word, and in their hunger, boldness festers. After so many years unseen, they no longer remember the fear of discovery.

A man looks down at his daily crossword in the park, scratching his chin in uneasy contemplation; he distinctly remembers filling in 12-down, but the ink of his pen seems to have faded, and the answer swims before his eyes, unplaceable. He is debating looking up it up to make sure when out of the corner of his eye, something fat and dark crawls along the edge of the stone bench on which he sits. He slaps it away in distracted irritation, but there is the hot stab of pain in his finger, and he pulls his hand back with the quick regret of a man who fears he has reached inside the maw of something hungry. His finger is beaded with scarlet jewels, and there is the unmistakable mark of a

jaw too small to be from any creature he knows. A shiver whose source he does not question runs down his spine, and he rises, half-aware that something lurks nearby which he does not wish to stumble across. He folds his crossword quickly and leaves, sucking his finger. Hungry black eyes watch him go, resentment burning as low as embers.

It happens like this everywhere.

A young woman abroad is beginning a letter to her mother when a not-quite-cockroach scuttles madly across her desk. She screams, knocking it away with the back of her hand before locking herself in the bathroom. She will speak to her landlord, she resolves while crouched safely atop the toilet lid, once her heart has stopped its racing. It is nearly an hour before it does so. The bathroom door opens quietly, as though afraid of whatever may hear it, and the woman's sock-muffled feet make soft shuffling noises as she returns to her desk. She does not even realize that the letter is missing until the next morning, long after they have feasted.

A man reclines on warm beach sand, one hand behind his head and the other holding a book open. It is the end of the summer, and the sun is bright but merely warm. He shifts on his towel, flipping so that he may rest on his stomach instead. At the same time, there is a restlessness in the sand near his arm, and something rises out of the golden dust. He has lived here long enough to know all the odd things that live on this beach of his, and the thing that comes out of the sand is nothing he recognizes. It dashes for the hand on his book, and he strikes with the savage rage of a man killing an unwelcome insect. Its fat little body is hard beneath his palm, and with a sickening, momentary pressure against his skin, it sinks back into the sand. The day suddenly seems cold, and he leaves his beach with no more intentions of returning any day soon. The book, a rare translation, is tucked securely under his arm. At his back, they stare out of the sand, seething with hungry anger that send his skin prickling for reasons he does not dare press.

There is a slow stirring in the public consciousness; strangers glance at each other, reading the same suspicion in one another's eyes and fearing to confirm it out loud. Something has happened but no one can find the words to place it. Because they have finished taking all the forgotten ones. Soon, even the simplest ones begin to fade.

A boy stands in line, his foot tapping impatiently as he looks up at the back-lit menu. It is his turn to order, and he steps forward. He opens his mouth to speak, and finds, to his surprise, that his voice has left him. He looks down at the menu tucked beneath the glass countertop, but even it has begun to run like a rain-soaked poster. The woman behind him grows impatient at his indecision, and she scoffs as she looks up at the menu. But he is no longer alone, and panic ripples outward as noiselessly as a shiver.

This is their deepest cleverness. They know how hard it is to remember something when it has been forgotten already, shut away inside a box and relegated to the dustiest corner of the attic. So, they wait until one is too distracted to notice that what they've read has vanished as quickly as it came. Until one can no longer remember the very first they read, because it's already been stolen.

Memory

Like all things, it began as something else entirely.

In the beginning - perhaps before it knew what it was for itself - it was only a forest, thick with low-hanging mist, and heavy with the musk of animal memories that escape the grip of words; unknowable, and ancient before anything in the world knew what ancient could mean; undisturbed for so many that even the steady sand-trickle of time had no more weight than the tug of a vaguely remembered past-life.

And yet the thought of it - the very memory of it - had sunk into the dirt like spilled blood. It had stained the soil until the forest pulled it up thirstily, drinking through the hard roots of trees that rose like nightmare visions. It was certain of its own history without need of a mirror - self-assured in the writhing bodies that were born and lived and died and then faded to bones that turned to dust beneath the undergrowth. The urgency of human words had no place under the rippling green shadows that cast orgiastic figures against dying sunlight. There, the only sounds that mattered were the springtime birdsong and the child cries of deer and the slow groan of ancient, tired things in the wind.

It was only when the jagged teeth of saws and the hungry bite of axes came that the forest shook itself awake. It did not know, at first, what had happened; it could not - not when it was still sluggish with the heavy dreams of a hundred thousand lifetimes across a hundred thousand years. And so, it fought like a beast roused, throwing itself madly against the intruders with teeth and claws and bodies of its own. But its teeth and its claws broke against the indifferent steel skin of the things that swarmed like beetles over the forest, and its bodies split beneath their pincers. They dug without rest, ripping deep scars in the earth that scabbed over dark and hard.

Desperate, it turned and twisted back into itself - the only haven that remained; deep within ruined roots that had drunk tainted

rainfall through bitter soil for a hundred thousand years, it found itself anew.

Then humanity dug into it with greedy fingers and tore up the roots, until what remained was the graveyard of fields after harvest. Progress paved its way with the dead black tongue of asphalt, raising mile markers from the dirt like headstones. The only prayers they knew were the hot screams of shrill horns already fading into nothing; gone were the solemn midnight eulogies from pallbearers that had once lingered at the edges of the forest, crying when the moon was white and full. The only mourners were the bodiless eyes that watched warily from between the thin ribcage of trees. Death was sudden now, and violent, brought down on the backs of shadows that rushed like bright-eyed nightmares through the darkness. Memories were all that remained now, held tenuously in the burst bodies of the forest that lined the road.

But memories can be hard to kill.

And they so rarely linger in the places where they were born; soon, it followed the winding black ribbons home, like starving wolves led to blood.

Sometime in the spring, with a heady green haze sparkling like gold dust in the sunlight, a man spent an afternoon washing away what remained of the deer-shaped thing off his truck. That evening, when the sun hung low and red through the trees, his wife found what remained of him. She could not explain what had gored in their home - gored and thrust him into the wall so angrily that it had taken two men to tear him down; she could not explain how it could have possibly fit in the narrow hallway lined with solemn heads. Though she recognized the angry gouges it had left in the walls; recognized their pattern and knew that they belonged to the twisted horns that crowned the head watching from above the fireplace. But she did not mention the horns. Not when the head's unblinking eyes sought her with the eyes of the forest itself.

Two days later, a man - half-drunk, and only vaguely remembering the hard thud of the mountain lion-shaped shadow he had struck that evening - awoke just before dawn to the hot exhale of something vengeful over him. He could feel its weight in the darkness that surrounded him, pressing down on the bed with terrible heaviness. The next morning, when the night's screaming and the wet, running rust of blood had brought the police, they still could not explain how it had gotten inside. Not without leaving a trace. All the doors and windows had been locked, reiterated the Animal Control officials, and there were no tracks anywhere in the house. No sign that anything else had been inside except the torn body of the man on the bed, and the single pawprint floating among the scarlet wash.

Later in the fall, when the withered bodies of leaves lined the roads and choked the gutters, the memory stirred again. This time, it was with the black wingbeat of forgotten fury, and the scream of something that struck the window like thunder. The sun had risen pale that morning, and through the fog of the night before, impassive trees watched the figure of a woman stumbling madly through the streets. The red heat of blood poured freely through clawing fingers from a ruined face that had seen - that would never see again - only the suggestion of the winged thing that had ripped through the bedroom like madness itself.

It took many years - more raindrops in the tugging river of time - but slowly, a part of the peace that the forest remembered returned, clawed back with nails that were red and broken at the ends. It was slow at first, and the occasional nightmare would still tear through the silence. Although, they were careful in their movements now, slow and certain not to strike anything beneath the bright, watchful eyes among the leaves. Eventually, even those bad dreams stopped, and the forest ran its green fingers cautiously over the cold black tongue that lolled in a mouth with broken trees for teeth. It was only when ambitious spring flowers split the black road - poking colorful heads through in search of the sun - that the memory of the forest returned,

shaken loose from the dirt of the years that had buried it. But what it raised from beneath the soil was no longer itself - nor ever again.

When it returned, it did so twisted; the sunlight that found its way through the boughs danced oddly, and the shadows that crawled along the soil were longer now, and cruel.

Curfew

The sirens begin to scream in the winter air, sharp as glass. Wincing, we look up in unison at innocently winking stars above. Our movements are simultaneous, as though we belong to a single consciousness. Though it is long past dusk, the park is full of revelers on the brink of celebrating the holidays. Full of now-frozen figures that look up at the desperate sound in a weary, united understanding. After several more screaming seconds, it finally rouses us; wordlessly, we begin to move. Quickly, but no longer with the rushed, desperate panic that marked the first few years. Most return to their cars, rolling up the windows and huddling together as best they can as they settle in for a long night.

Not all of us are so lucky.

There is no time to run back home. Five tall figures head towards the nearest house, silhouettes reaching up the sidewalk like desperate fingers. We walk in unison, the way a family does, though we have never seen each other before tonight. The owners of the house - an elderly couple none of us recognize - watch our approach with a familiar but distant resignation. Around them, the eager mouth of the open door stretches with frog-like wideness.

All the while, the night keeps screaming, as though in pain.

We enter like guests for a wake; a procession of thin, shuffling shadows, each as unwelcome as the next. With slightly shaking fingers calmed only somewhat by practice, we begin the ritual of closing all the doors in the house and of pulling shut each window. The couple checks and then double-checks that all bolts are drawn, and all windows airtight. Secretly, we pray that it is enough to guard the house from the traitorous air that presses up against the glass like the hungry exhales of some stalking beast. Once we are finished, we gather in the living room, where there is the most room for everyone to sit comfortably. The lights have already been shut off, and we can

only stare at the memories of one another's faces in the dark. All around the city, families and strangers alike do the same.

Then we wait.

Wait for the screams of the sirens to fade like a drowning man's last gasp, only to be replaced by the strange, otherworldly noises with which we have all grown acquainted; wait, huddled together like frightened children, as the shapeless shadows drip slowly over the house, and run long, dragging tendrils against the outside walls. They sink down as weightlessly as clouds, translucent bodies adorned with halfway reflected stars. Hungry, searching, and as mindless as locusts, they descend with no more fanfare than the whisper of cool air that ruffles the curtains in still-open windows. We can feel them more than we can see them - groping their way blindly like bad dreams up and down the street; feel the cold wetness of something like the ghostly fog that gathers in narrow alleyways after it rains.

Wherever they go, the living things vanish, eaten up in the span of a single breath - as though they had simply been thought out of existence. Closing our eyes, we can do nothing save listen, imagining too clearly the gentle rippling in the air outside that is not the heat, and the bodiless darkness undulating like ribbons that is no longer just a trick of the light.

Somewhere far away, we hear an impromptu chorus of scream rip through the white noise, cut off as suddenly as it came. The bright points of wide eyes find each other in the darkness - counting the pairs looking back - and we know without saying that the sun will rise tomorrow over one more empty house; the folly of a forgotten attic window, and the noiseless terror of liquid shadows that pour in eagerly through the opening like nightmares.

Even after all these years, we still know them only by the emptiness they leave in their wake. It is the same way one can only ever know a body against the night sky by the way it blocks out the stars, or a shadow by the cold mockery of shape it leaves on the ground.

It is two hours before we feel the thick shadows rise at last, dissatisfied. Slowly, warmth creeps timidly back into the house as cautiously as a secret lover. Several minutes pass before the sirens that mark the end return - mournful, keening, and rising out of numbness no one ever notices until it is all over. Soon, those sounds fade as well, and silence settles again like a lake once disturbed. Outside, doors open experimentally, and human-shaped shadows step warily back into the glossy night. The evening has been returned, but all hopes of festivities are long abandoned. The new shadows pause, blinking as though in surprise, before disappearing into the darkness.

In the tense, held-breath quiet of the living room, we look at each other one last time, afraid to speak of the thing we heard in those last few seconds before the shadows rose. Afraid that if we spoke of it, it would be real, and not just another nightmare to be forgotten with the rising sun. Because among the screaming cacophony of noises we remember only after the fact, there was another - low and terrible - that chilled what human blood there was in the house.

Familiar, and all the more terrible for its familiarity; the slow clawing of something resolute against wooden panels, then, quietly - as though we had not wanted to hear it at all - the click of an unlocking door, and the curious creak of hinges.

The Arrival

It arrived at midnight, screaming noiselessly across the black sky like the wrath of God.

When it came, it did not land in front of the White House, like the movies always said it would; nor did it land in front of Buckingham Palace, or the Kremlin, or anywhere else Hollywood had promised. Instead, it landed - quietly, and with only the faintest fuss of light and sound - several *kilómetros* outside a little village in Mexico.

The village was fast asleep when it fell, save for the old *loco* who had babbled for years of the things that writhed in the curtain blackness of moonless nights. Bloodshot eyes followed the light of the falling thing for as long as they could, until the strange, oily kaleidoscope colors finally melted away into the hungry shadows of the many folds in the land. Content with the soil there, the thing nestled itself comfortably into the bosom of a small hill, unseen as it cooled in the breathless night air.

And for several long, thoughtless days, it simply waited.

Waited, perhaps, for the sharply esoteric gaze of the NASA astronomers that had tracked it from when it was still only a blip of light tearing through the infinite dark; waited for those red-rimmed eyes that had pressed up bruisingly against hard plastic eyepieces to watch as it had twisted and danced and mocked and then vanished somewhere over the Pacific Ocean.

But it was not the eager, entitled curiosity of scientists it claimed first.

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The boy - a *vaquero* no older than thirteen - had slept little.

It was the same, he thought dully, as it had been for too many of that past week's nights; early morning was nearly upon the land, and his

mind was still defiantly awake, staring up at the shadows that trickled playfully along the low, dark ceiling hanging above him. He and his prickling eyes had given up many nights ago trying to find restful sleep in the few remaining corners of the bedroom he had not yet scrutinized; instead, he chose to stare unwaveringly forward each night, waiting until the rosy light of dawn came in through the holes in the walls.

The urge to blink came again, and the boy did; the brief stab of relief stung beneath his eyelids.

Odd, technicolor dreams had plagued him every night for almost two weeks now, their advent signaling another handful of troubled hours spent passing the time by trying to guess the identities of the many faceless things howling outside. It was difficult to sleep for very long - he had yet to manage more than four hours at a time - before the strange lights and the throbbing otherworldly music woke him the way they always did. Then he would stare imploringly up at the ceiling, heart beating the raid drum until the queasiness and dull pulsing behind his eyes had finally gone away. When it was over, whatever dream it had been had already sunk into the single, unremembered mass of virgin wakefulness, and all his body seemed willing to remember was the urgent, incoherent memory of fear.

In the bedroom's darkness, two bright pinpricks of reflected light glanced quickly to their right; atop a narrow metal bed, a dark mass rose and fell in time with the soft, vague sound of breathing. It had the same calming regularity as distant waves, and for a moment, the boy closed his eyes. *Mamá* and *Papá* knew nothing of his lying awake; it had been difficult enough already trying to hide the dark stains of sleepless nights under his eyes from them, without trying to explain the *sueños* that even he could not begin to understand.

After all, thought the boy with sudden resolution, they were only dreams. There was no way that something so colorful could ever be a nightmare.

An unnoticed slackening in the darkness between the cracks of the brick house sent a rush of excitement through him; morning had finally arrived. Watery, rosewater pink clusters of light in the wall provided more than enough illumination for him to dress himself, and he did so with the precise efficiency of a child the morning of *Navidad* who has laid out all his clothes the night before to save time.

When he was done, and the door was opened to a thick sliver of dull grey light tinged with pink, he permitted himself to look back at the shapes on the bed. *Mamá* and *Papá* had trusted him alone with the herd for the first time that morning, and past the sleepiness that clung to him parasitically, he felt the sudden weight of his newly bestowed status as a grown man. He shut the door to the squat brick house behind him and stepped out into the insubstantial world, where a tender new sunrise was just beginning to trickle honey-like over the jagged shadows of the low mountains prowling around them. By the time he had gathered the herd - helped along by encouraging nips from a little brown dog who had roused herself at the first sound of the boy's quiet tread - it had become a giant's eye, pale, white, and peeking over the edge of the world at him.

It was beneath its observant gaze that he set off, the herd pushing resolutely forward before him. The boy had no notion of giants; instead, he was grateful for the first stirrings of warmth, and for the growing brightness that he knew would soon burn away the last remaining wisps of that morning's mist. A thin, split reed served its part well as a swarm of bees in his hand, and the sullen few of the herd that lagged drowsily knew its motivating sting.

The little brown dog joined them dutifully, chasing away frightened butterflies and investigating any suspiciously absentminded stragglers. Soon, the squat brick house was nothing more than a dark smudge in the distance, and the herd pressed on in the direction of the hills. There, the boy knew that the sweetest new grass would be breaking through the soil. He hummed tunelessly in time with the quick bee's hiss of the switch, and the herd lowed mindlessly to itself in a

parody of quiet conversation. Even the little brown dog kept in a tight, rhythmic circle around them, panting noiselessly and occasionally burying her nose in any particularly irresistible puddles of mud. Together, they moved like a single being over the sloping land.

By the time they stopped to rest - deep within the uneven heart of the hills - a golden heat had stolen into the soap-water warmth of early morning. The boy paused, basking in an especially bright patch of sunlight. The herd shared his sentiment, and they followed the dancing ribbons of warmth eagerly into a crease in the land. There, sunlight had gathered as heavily as gold-dust, and they huddled greedily up against it.

When the boy saw it - glinting invitingly at the edge of his vision like a mirage - he thought it was only a rock; the land was full of rocks here, with most peeking half-hidden out from between the weeds like the final stubborn tooth of withered old *abuelos*. Others - some the size of a young bull - had to be pulled out by groups of men, and sometimes even teams of horses. At thirteen, the boy had sacrificed enough of his own afternoons helping to carry stones and rocks out of the *campos*, so that they would not damage the blades of the plow come planting season.

It was with these safe, familiar thoughts in his mind that the boy convinced himself to step closer.

As he neared, something long dulled in him waved its appendages impotently; there lingered an ancient and forgotten certainty in him which suggested feebly that the thing laying in the distant shadow of a small hill was no stone, nor anything else to be trusted. From the distance at which his hesitant legs held him back, he could see that it was too smooth, too round - too perfect - to be even one of the odd boulders that he occasionally saw when out riding with *Papá*.

This was it, screeched the fibers of his muscles in wordless concerto, pulled as taut as the guitars of the whiskered *mariachis* in town when

the music was desperate and fast. This was the thing that had spoken to him in colors and smells and with an ugly metallic taste in his mouth that reminded him of the times he bit his tongue on accident; this was the thing that had tried to whisper secrets to him, and he feared remembering what they had told him.

But there were other things lost beneath the dirt, and his quick, jackrabbit's mind could not help but chase the searing afterimage of a strange lightning-thought which reminded him that precious metals also sometimes ran in rivulets deep within the argentine earth. His foot shuffled a centimeter closer, and the boy's shadow stretched itself longingly towards the thing.

The herd lowed in protest where he left them, thrown by the sudden change in attitude. Only the little dog followed without hesitation, her sharp ears alert as she kept by his heels. Multicolor images of Mayan and Aztec temples built entirely of gold - and more importantly, of the many little clay jars of *cajeta* such gold could buy - ripped like fireworks through his mind. The boy's uncertain shadow came to a stop and straightened itself shakily before the thing; dark water rippled madly across its surface.

The thing had glittered with the invitation of buried gold, but it was only was a dull, whitish material; dead and flat, it was laced throughout with insipid grey cobwebs like the veins on the hands of *abuelas*. Had the boy known of the Grecian marbles loitering in the faraway foyers of distant museums, it might have been an adequate comparison. But he was only the son of a poor cowherd that had looked upon no higher finery than the false diamonds sometimes sold at the nearby, dusty *mercados*. Standing before something that glittered with unnerving eagerness in the light, disappointment sunk boy's spirits like a swallowed stone.

The thing was perfectly round, rising part-way out of the earth like an acorn abandoned by a forgetful squirrel. Around it, a precise circle had been drawn in the new grass, which had shriveled and melted into something the color of ash that stuck with tar-like resilience to

the sides of his boots. The pale surface of the thing had the wet glint of damp flesh, and the boy swallowed down the bile-like certainty that if he were to touch it, it would give beneath his finger. It was much smaller than he had initially guessed - small enough that he thought he may have been able to wrap his arms around it, had he found the courage to try. Though much of it was buried securely beneath the soil, it seemed to have done no damage to the land itself. There was not so much as an indentation in the dark earth, as though when it - whatever it decided to be in the end - had struck, it had weighed nothing at all.

The little dog stayed back, eyeing the thing warily from a safe distance, a half-puzzled expression on her face and a soundless growl rumbling low in her throat. Her trepidation gave the boy pause, and he looked to the herd. They had no such reservations; instead, they stared vacuously at the thing, sniffing at the circle of sticky ash and lowing conspiratorially to one another. They did not seem to fear it, though he saw none of them approach it any closer than a meter. Gradually, even they seemed to grow disinterested, and looked instead to the boy. A single tail swished thickly through the air, expectant. It was a small comfort, but the boy felt his boldness growing, nonetheless. He moved closer, curiosity quickening sinfully in his stomach.

The thing regarded him serenely, and his feet were cold in the shadow it cast on the clinging dirt. He blinked, rubbing his eyes with a grimy hand; the sleepiness he had all but forgotten about in the excitement of the morning had returned now with the sudden dusk of a stray cloud in a sheer blue sky. The tip of his makeshift switch dragged in the dirt, and the boy did not hear when the little brown dog's growl dropped to a nervous, desperate whine. In the uneasy light, the thing seemed to shimmer and change, as though it had forgotten itself and was now struggling to remember. Needles prickled under the boy's skin, and his little form wavered as unsteadily as a dying candle.

The herd was silent behind him, watching in a solemn semicircle as he drew close to the thing in the way a sleepwalker considers a precipice. There was the blur of a reflection in its strange, gooseflesh surface, and the boy stared at his double as it raised a small brown hand, and pressed his palm against the sudden, wrathful coldness of the thing.

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That night - when the herd was still wandering aimlessly through the hills, and the little brown dog had run barking all the way home - the old *loco* found it waiting for him in the darkness. Unmoved, it rested as innocently as a secret moon in the dirt where it had fallen. Its shadow lowered sternly over him, and he knew its size only by the empty outline it cast against the glittering stars. Anointing himself with the ash around the thing, the old man gazed at it in wonderous fear.

And then, sinking to withered knees that blooded the hard earth before it, he began to pray.