

**ecology
in
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ques**





My eyes leave ghostlike artifacts flashing faintly in the background; last night I didn't sleep. I microwaved the wrong mug. Even the handle is burning my hand. My coffee tastes like melted plastic –I'm trying to spit out shreds that aren't there, or that are already liquefied.

This morning, my throat scraped like dry sponges. The stall over, someone wearing white Nike high tops and seemingly Jordache jeans was grunting rhythmically in time with his own bowel movements. I am sitting half- catatonic and masturbating. At this hour, it's more something to do than something to feel. I'm smearing the semen like grout, leaving little globules on my thighs.



After reading *Akira* when I was about 15, I had a sort of preoccupation with crumbling, billboard-infested Asian skyscrapers and their lawlessness. Towering pomegranates, full of chambers enclosed by the dark.

Some are ceiling to floor with rusting cages partitioned by plywood. These arils are pregnant with the mixing juice of tenants, cockroaches, mice; dripping through the iron grid, staining the checkerboard tiles. Staining the coats and teapots hung from iron bars.



He is watching the storm
roll in through the windows.

The windows are big

and Scandinavian-modern.

The whole strip mall is a little
handful of painkiller-

dependent suburbia.

But a rather clenched

handful, squeezing paint

until the crust is stuck
in his palm lines. The storm
looks painted. We still

got the sale price because
I looked Halloween-y.
They told me *hasn't anyone told*

*you you look like the rich kid
who tags along to a bank
robbery to see what it's like.*

My parents don't pay
for shit. If he set up a heist
he'd probably put out an ad:

Actors needed, 20-50 year old

Hispanic male. Non-union.

Last time I was here

I was with a melodramatic

bleach-blonde girl

with sledgehammered teeth

who now lives in Colorado

on an Indian reservation

abusing tramadol

in the mountains where

juniper berries grow rampantly

and the petrichor is mentholated.



I am sitting on the floor in the bathroom on a wet towel, light brown with speckles bleached pinkish. The insides of my thighs are stagnant wet. As is the air that smells of unrinsed conditioner. The mirror is unfogging in a sort of jazz album cover pattern. There is a neon green police lineup on the countertop. Propped up tallest in the middle and shortest on the ends. Four ACT bottles and one, Food Lion brand, all the way at the very right end; the runt of the litter, labels written in a rounded sans-serif, deadpan, hands crossed in front of his waist, *please do not touch the display items*, furniture store font.

Maybe they're laughing at me. Maybe my teeth are the laughingstock. Two dentist parents but bad genes. In the creek, the water runs over the mica and the feldspar.

I cannot use that mouthwash because bubblegum flavor makes me cry. It's the same pink as the grapefruit acne wash, as my face, as the calcified toilet ring. I was told we live on a large granite slab, clayey world-turtle. I read somewhere that fish are choking on all those plastic acne beads: that's how my mucus feels; the runny crying mucus that's oozing out of my face like soap bubbles filling a sponge.

I don't think there's a way to give proper justice to the sound of blowing the nose while crying. How do you capture the desire to get everything out. To fully eat a Jello fruit cup without a utensil requires harnessing its momentum. In those moments, I am aware of the limitations of what is inside my mouth; the flesh, the gelatin, originally flesh-covered bone, and the fruit, if only in name.



He does one thing over and over and only now realizes he is quite far from good at it.

The sun visor in her car is broken, falling in front of his line of sight. It takes an active effort

for him to look into nothing. The sun has been down for hours now and they park at their favorite spot

if only out of convenience. It is a small city-owned

bubble off of a service road

next to a corporate complex. Everything is there;

the company buildings, apartment buildings,
grocery stores, restaurants, swimming pool.

In the grainy black it is a citronella lamp
and the mosquitoes flutter in and out.

Some are just out of school and don't know better,
and some are middle-aged and single, supposedly,

and walking their dogs on the side of the highway,
but the bubble of a parking lot is surrounded
by trees and a gravel road

and seems forgotten. She parks perpendicular
to the parking spot, saying *let me do a spider*

check before you get in the back. He is taking deep breaths. He is tired, trying not to say crass things

like his father does when he's to the point of falling asleep mid-sentence, which is most evenings.

Spiders won't bite you if you don't panic, he thought.

They are patient and eat mosquitoes and build

dreamcatchers. I have not remembered my dreams in a while now. It seems that is a good thing.



Sometimes I wish I could just be locked in
a car trunk forever, pitch black riding
asphalt riptides and waves. I wouldn't talk
to the driver and he wouldn't to me,
while I gasp goldfish through the circle gaps,
aluminum panels punched polka dot.
Maybe this is the most effective form
of meditation, or contraception:
when the tires compress rocks into their treads,
rustling over leaves rusted orange,
my skin itches and vibrates, contracting—
molting resonant, cicadan harmonic.
Every instar, insects replace a number
of neurons; I wish I could do the same.



It is manic cold outside and my goosebumps feel like metal echoes. I am driving with the windows open so I don't fall asleep but it's not very effective. My teeth are chattering in recursive drum rolls and I can't help but wonder how much enamel chips off every time. I bit into my lip. The blood tastes like mint gum with the flavor chewed out.

I look up and the trees look as if they are circling me. I know that the stars always circle me. When I close my eyes, the stars dance like static. Pine needles are falling into my eyes and small branches crack under the weight of the windshield wiper, molting. My tears do not freeze.



I am trying to learn the stars, but my eyes are full of judgment. Fridays are supposed to be cold, and this one is—I feel a light tinge on my palate reminiscent of pickled pears. The pear blossoms have not yet arrived. If they had, they would be suffocating.



IKEA boxes make makeshift end tables.

Tiles in Carrara or Calacatta

or something Italian, with a glass

tub sliding door. I thought it character-

building to have a leaking radiator

and silverfish wriggling phosphene.

Or like my grandmother's tiles, calamine

pink, that bulged an air bubble like my

blistering flea bites. Nevertheless,

I've always thought it cozy to sit

in a locked bathroom, pitch black. Light

seeping in under the door in such minute

amounts my body drinks the oversaturated

Polaroid postprocessing, back small

on cold floor. My arching reflex
is reverse cat, but my tongue flits
between bony finger earthworm segments,
sweat residua acrid like salted fish
coming back to life. The pretend rainfall
makes my back hair stand on end. The droplets
pop when they hit the porcelain, bouncing.



The people are dancing on the courthouse steps. I see their hands making shadow puppets on the windows. One person is wearing red. Sky sepia from sodium lamps. The branches are being weighed down by the snow and a snowbank falls from the roof. Hitting the ground, plumes rise, wisping like swallowtails.



Ren Hang was surely not afraid like me.

To kill simulacra—enormous ones,
dancing in funhouses and behind red
smoke bombs. To let tongues extend, budding
like torch lilies. A false blue glow on
the palate, belonging to that mouth,
because he had an old camera that
oversaturated the light of people
as if a pearl of a marble dragon.

I've thought for so long that the art depends
on the materials. And it does, in a way.

The body is not supposed to blossom here.

In public. Or so they say. I've seen this
picture before, of the nude python lady

under the mint leaves, yellow and green.

I'm trying to remember the vibrance

and the rule of thirds. And the last time

I appreciated a body

for its own sake. I'm trying to think if

I've loved; the way Ren does his mother

and her rubber chicken. My parents have

never read my poetry. They asked

if I could add some pictures to make it

easier. I probably could have.

I'm not fond of the idea that pictures

can trigger an entire memory.

Ren means indefiniton: he deserves

exactness, somehow; at least remembrance

or dedication. I'm sure he's already

gotten it from someone else. But he taught

me how to let the winds blow past. How

the hurricanes are only periwinkle
silk and feet stretched outwards like swallowtails,
all crying in harmony. He asked me
whose funeral pyre surrounded me
at the otherwise dark seaside at midnight.





Devilwood grows rampantly on my mother's land. Its matte black drupes fall from waxy branches, shriveled and dry. It always seemed to me like an apathetic plant.

In China, osmanthus grows swathes of revered blossoms. I know where my ancient mothers settled, and supposedly the autumns there are peppered with humble orange petals; shattered butterfly wings that smell of apricot.



This morning I ate a banana,
yellow yellow green green
green. It was unripe to the point
that the stem wouldn't break
open and I had to unzip it
like Bananagrams. The starchy
grainy diffusion feels
like spores or radio static.
Hockey skates over radio are wind

over airplane wings. Can you
call it wind if you're making it;
if you can say that fish

choke. Can we capture the quiet
of a coffeeshop on a cold day.
There is a mousy, brown-eyebrowed

blonde Burberry-pencil-pouch
girl contorted into her chair.
Across from her there is a guy

with a fishing visor, a sweat-
wrinkled fraternity shirt. The girl's
perfume smells like Japanese

scented erasers or muscat

gummies. Mixing vinaigrettely

with his open Red Bull and maybe

I am the one who is choking.

Even watching cinema, I have to listen

to music. —Imagine Ferg

talking to (through?) a young

Chang Chen circa *A Brighter*

Summer Day. —Imagine young Ferg

mobbing in Taiwan, soaking

in the rain and pushing his bare

catfish feet into and off of the mud.



Water poured onto old storage boxes
like the moths hatching larvae

in the upstairs closet. The mauled
and regurgitated innards hadn't been touched

in years. At first it sounded like rain.
Cardboard mush wrung out brown water

and the dust ribbons made web-like
glue. The wall is open now and a man

I don't know is touching fiberglass
insulation with his bare hands, fibrous

and barbed. The fumes smell like diamond
burs grinding my teeth off down to the root.



April was once named for Nero

who has the mouth of a lion.

His mother, if anything, was perseverant.

Her bedroom smelled black. Black
coffee, dust mites, char. The TV was left
running on half-mute when she carried
the urn of a man she knew.

Alabaster the color of honey. Shimmering
in the nascent sun, smelling of fat.

She had left a Boston roast in the fridge
too long in the crisper drawer
because there was no space elsewhere
and the fat smelled of hollow Ogygian
celeriac. That night, she made sorrel gazpacho

to rid her hands of the smell.

The table was quiet. Kiwifruit

for dessert. Metal sound of spoons

was muffled. Soft furry rinds.

The dark seeds were flossed out

from between her double canine.

Nero's late father was unremarkable.

Many would tell you that he was dishonest

with sagging cheeks and jowls.

His widow came from a long line

of sharp, pointed faces. *Latch on to a man*

like a lamprey, efficiently and selectively,

said her mother when she was a child.

After flossing, she saw a cockroach

laying its smooth pillbox of an egg case,

latching it to the countertop with its

saliva. Blemished the marble.



Somebody is making out with their reflection
in the glass, a little askew, and I think
Jesus Christ, my lips are chapped

and bleeding. And what about those little
micro-jagged edges on the glass. And once
the lip skin starts peeling

it unravels in little sea snake
ribbons, or like how I imagine algae
peels off bleaching corals.

And the boxfish, eating that algae through
its sphincter of a mouth, filtering
the water. And, boxfish-like,

we flailed our febrile limbs, sweating out
toxins. Our tessellated mouths aqueduct
saliva. And, last week, mucus:

Green and eutrophicating our gills.
But we didn't inspire anyone
with our streamlined forms.



Light is beating down as reflections off glass windows. It gleamed off the porcelain tiles, as if Delphic fumes rising from the drain grate, but when our mannequin heads were about to speak, we had to wait. Hands between our thighs, our tears calculated, fearful. I am fearful of the sun and of the future.



Last night, the sky shone mauve, or puce, and the trees were blacker than normal. The last time I'd seen that was when I tried to drink bleach but got scared of the taste, my esophagus ingesting what felt like plastic. The mauve, or heliotrope, shone blue-grey through the window onto the tiles, where I faced the sun's reflection. I cried at the sky and I saw crucifixes in the grout and I planned to give myself stigmata but never did.



I was steaming, but not upset. Tired steaming. The elevator creaked and smelled as if I'd licked the metal, and of incense. It felt like I was a patient waiting for the therapist's couch, standing outside of the door, nauseated. I used to read *The New Yorker* in my old therapist's office. It was lined with white noise carpeting and white noise paintings over ocher wall paint. My reflection in the elevator wall looks like tinnitus.

On the way home, there was a 6-point buck standing about 2 feet in front of me, at first just staring. He stomped and snorted when I walked past, but didn't move. Moving less than if hit by a car, left to rot; snorting and flailing with 4 broken legs. I'm afraid of the trees swaying in the breeze, waiting to break.



Magnolia tree off the patio.

Already bloomed and shed its low petals

white and children's shampoo pink. It's still cold

February, wet. Fifteen years ago

there was an all-encompassing blizzard.

Around here, we don't often get blizzards

but this was when the polar bears only

were a little bit green, algal, mangy;

my mother held the splintering trunk up

with ratchet straps on branches mangled green

with bare flesh wounds. Creaking wood, metal clicks

audible from the veranda covered

in snow blemished with my young flat footprints.

It took five years before its flowers stopped

blooming brown. It took ten years before
its trunk straightened and the first grey strands grew
into my mother's scalp. Now the petals,
white and children's shampoo pink and purple
on the fringes, purple of unroasted
eggplant, float on top of the bright water.
Water so bright cyan it gleams painful
haloes that came through the overcast clouds.
In Biei at times, the water is matte
cyan. Dammed volcanic mudflow ran off
into the manmade womb of the newborn
lake. Dead larch and birch trunks dot the surface.

Is it impolite to let store-bought meat
rot? The fridge smells rancid and stale. The wind
is blowing hard outside and crumpling
into the steadfast door. Magnolia

branches are burdened into bowing.
I can hear the bark scraping on itself.
The past-warranty fridge ice machine fails
loudly. I already have a migraine
from the wind and the clouds. I used to know
a self-made camgirl but didn't know how
she made her pocket change. A year ago
we talked on the top of a parking deck
at five in the morning; it was barely
drearier than now. Barely more unstable
than now, I was convinced she was going
to murder me and leave my flesh to rot
or put me in a scent-proof garbage bag
in the creek. In passing, I had told her
that I wanted to die and she said *yes*
my mother is dying her hair fell out
she is tired and I'm tired I don't

know how I'll ever travel anywhere
see anything and I said *most people*
don't. It was cold; I'd forgotten a jacket.

You couldn't see any stars because of
the streetlamps; gargoyle facefuls of wind
broke it into sparse airstreams like whispers
when a corpse hollows itself and ink-black
armored harbinger plecos cleanse its innards.

A blackthorn tree tangles around rusty
square chain links that block in the sloe-eyed cows.
Its white blossoms wilted in the snow.

Now the leaves are rusting, marred by powdered
vermilion spots spreading their spores across
the countryside. It will only get colder
and the sleet will envelop the dying
plants and cows, skin pulling gaunt under

cheekbones.

Brown grass is crumpling and pulling thin
even partway up the mountain. The mountain
looms on the crumpled horizon as clouds
cast down shadows dancing mad swirling grey
jewels encased in a kaleidoscope.

Here the mountains look like rows of shark teeth
blunted by wear and bleeding mud downpours
like where the Sierra Nevada enclose
the oversized neon clown in front of
Circus Circus Reno, bulbs flickering
outgrowths as if metal was growing gall.

With large troubled cartoon eyes, as if trapped,
he was the brightest sign in that dusty,
quiet shantytown where the dusty ranch
sands stick to suburban plywood glue.

When I think back on it, only the wisps

of the memories remain. Asbestos
crumbs fray off the sides of ceiling tiles
that have to be moved, sitting on my clothes
and in my throat like wisps. His shirt was slime
snotgreen striped with heather grey. I exchanged
it for one of mine, accidentally.

It took three washes until it smelled like me
and Gain instead of him. The cloying smell
of detergent flowers, matte and candied,
reminded me of blooming azaleas
drowning in wet chartreuse pine pollen spores
that stained the roads and vinyl siding
neon, gummy adhesive. Meant the air
was about to steam. But in the desert,
through the window, everything looked orange
by dint of the sun's omnipotent glare.

The hotel room was cold; he was from Texas

so he kept it cold. It was Saturday
and he was from Texas, so football was playing
on the TV louder than necessary.

This was his room. When he paid, I hid
behind him, away from the tired gaze
of the receptionist's stone countertop.

After it happened, I had pozole
rojo in a casino restaurant
with a neon sign of a cowboy hat
and a margarita glass. I once read
the Aztecs made pozole with the flesh
of human sacrifice as a sort of
primeval Eucharist. I thought *what better
meal to wish the death of he who now sits
across from me?* And when I ate that pork
as replacement flesh I thought of myself

as powerless as Circe against moly;
I could not stop it happening again,
and I could not stop him becoming
a schoolteacher. Only just now comes spring
with its azaleas bubbling in
and out of bloom, my head is transponders
moontalking but I find solace in the stopped.
At the end of the long road, there's a lake
and a metal crash barrier gate. Trees
are swaying, nondescript deciduous
trees, green and yellow. Everything is alone
in its oneness except for the insects
holing into the tree flesh and the earth.