

Part A: Portfolio

Pink Concrete

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by

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Reflective Journals in First Year

Reflective Journal 1

My fear of being seen and hated, meant I would hide my writing, and when I don't have time to overthink, the emotion comes out...

We were given 5 minutes to write a creative piece using a prompt (a theme, a line) and we had to read out our writing to a group of 10 people. I found this exercise very confronting. I have not shared any of my writing with people, besides some teachers in high school. I have hoarded my writing, wanting to keep it away from criticism because I didn't want to let this dream of becoming a writer go and it felt so flimsy, something that would turn into smoke if they looked too closely.

Now I had to be vulnerable. I had to dive in and allow everyone to see me - clearly, especially as the time limit paired with prompts, brought up memories about family and lovers, ensured that all I could do was lay the truth down upon the page, bringing up loss and unresolved issues. I caught my voice catching on tears as I read some of my pieces out loud.

And when I read out my poetry to the group: silence, the gaping hole response. It made me feel invisible because yes, I am obtuse, short and different, but I want to be acknowledged, even if its hurtful. This is normal for me, this is how I think, and it's frightening being met with just the silence, not even that it is bad for this reason, but that it is not understandable. When it sits so clearly in my mind, blaring letters, this is what it means, this is why you care, but blank faces.

This was the first real understanding that I am not for everyone and most people will not understand, but I learnt that if I clean it up, get vulnerable, the emotion can take them there anyways, silence and all.

Reflective Journal 2

Understanding is held in a hand that you can throw, but its meaning is twisted in your throwing, in my catching, in my history, in my moment, in my thoughts. But all that can change when someone else holds it, when it is not thrown, but evaporating into smoke.

I gravitate to pieces/writers that can create this fluidity, this weirdness that doesn't have to be explained, it can exist outside of our norm, it can allow an understanding of something foreign, something abstract, because it is there. They create movement which tears open a gaping wound and this bleeding wound has to be accepted, as they can feel the hot blood spilling out from the page, the reader must find space for understanding, they will swallow.

"Orbit" by Noy Holland, is a scattered piece that collages images together, resurfacing fragments, digging them up, creating this heavy breathing, panting movement with repetition and acid like imagery:

- *"Bingo chewed up her slippers. Bingo chewed up a rhinestone shoe Mother used to dance the Charleston in..."*
- *"We planted the rhinestones two by two...in the garden. We grew."*
- *"No motherlight. By twos we planted bright stones to lead us out from the garden."*

Holland, keeps the reader off kilter, referring to Orbit as this apart character, even animal like:

- *"Orbit waked up screaming."*
- *"Orbit stayed out in the garden. I would leave Orbit out in the garden. A house is so dark inside when you have been out in the garden."*

and then the daughter character moves on to own Orbit, to speak from its lips:

- *"I think I would please my father as I have pleased father once..."*

This confusing shift in perception creates movement, this unsettling, that hints at the abuse, but keeps it hidden, under the layers of description, the shift in perceptions, it hides the understanding, throwing it lightly in an abstract arc, catching the reader with their pants down, plunging that uncertainty deep up their closed sphincters, but with a bedazzled bow it hurts less, and tastes better.

"Milka Cow" by Bessora was a linking of abstract pearls along a necklace, creating a pied piper story that takes you down a river of unknowing leaving you with something half opened, half not there but the reader is okay that they don't fully grasp the understanding, because Bessora creates understanding as the fluid squishy thing, making the reader play with its movement. Bessora doesn't tie down its multitude into one thing.

The absurdity has allowed the story this bend, this morph of imagination into more than a singularity, it melts at what is possible and impossible, what means something and what means nothing because it will reflect upon one person in this way and shadow across someone else in a totally different understanding.

In my feedback session I see this, people pull at the threads that are closest to them, they will connect with one half of the absurd, changing it and it becomes theirs in this, and I love that my absurdity, enables the reader to own it, they have to swallow, hold some understanding because it sits there, they must construe it and in this they change it and by changing it, it sits like a barb in their skin, in their thoughts.

Reflective Journal 3

We had to write from our bodies in Stacey Hardy's Seminar, and it was the first time that I felt more understood, there was less of that open mouthed silence in my feedback session and it's because my female body could speak and the emotion tied to it, couldn't help but slip out.

I have always felt that I should hide my body, that it will cause something bad to happen and this is how I feel about my writing. I am scared that in being truly myself, they will see me and they will hate me, that I will not be good enough. And in this seminar I had to write skin deep, close to this edge. My painted mask is paper thin at my body, I can't hide myself, my flesh stands there for all to see - I am. Although sometimes I wish I wasn't here. I hate that men can perceive me. And I chose to hide, I chose to look down when they peer at my body as I walk past instead of questioning their looks, I look down, I hide.

My writing does this, wraps my thoughts in metaphors, these half-baked heavy things that plop out of my fingers onto the page as short lined poetry, I hide in the incomplete, in the absurd so that the reader can't call me out on my actual thoughts and in this I am untied, I am free, fluid and not perceived.

"Second" by Lidia Yuknavitch mingled fantasy to make the normal more palatable, less painful to read or to write? Yuknavitch shelters the cruelty in a child's perspective, it both makes it less painful to read and more once you swallow the suggestion.

"A Question of Power" by Bessie Head, uses science fiction absurdity to dull the pain of a philandering husband, the discarding of her body as nothing but something owned. The author uses robots to humourize the ridiculous power struggle or lack of it really. But then the voice of the man speaking is cruelly true, common phrases I have heard and will hear:

- *"My darling if you call me I'll come to you. I don't like woman like that; they're so cheap."*
- *"They all know what he's after. It's got nothing to do with the prophecies. It's just sex"*

Head and Yuknavitch, write in a hidden manner, they layer it because this message is not something plateable by the norm who choke on it, change laws and make excuses that it is for our protection, so when we are writing

about the inequalities of my simple body, I have to hide, I have to hide even my voice because it is too loud, it is too soap boxy, but actually I do have something to say.

I need to give my writing more time, it can't be the plop, the unstructured poetry, littering the page in a long thin rat tail, because I need to finish the thought, instead of hiding in the unsaid. I have to speak all the time, because that is not the norm. I have to look up and make eye contact with the men staring at me, I have to look up and stare my strange down my readers' throats.

Reflective Journal 4

We were tasked with writing the unknown, the pieces in-between the unsaid things, the itching thoughts that need to be expressed. *Mxolisi Nyweza* chose poetry in his seminar that was obtuse, the meaning not a tangible thing but a feeling.

"Blind Panorama of New York" by *Garcia Lorca* is poem that feels so untouched by reality, and yet it all connects back to a feeling of being in New York, this city we all hear and consume in western media:

- **The abstract:** *"But no it isn't the birds, because the birds will soon become oxen. They could become white rocks with the moon's help."*
- **Small milestones that remind:** *"An abandoned suit weighs so heavily on the shoulders."* & *"We forget the mind has boroughs."* & *"...and all I've found are sailors leaning over railings."*

These milestones are few and far between, Lorca lifts often into the magical and the absurd:

- *"Where Chinese and caterpillars devour the philosopher"* & *"discovered tiny swallows on crutches that could pronounce the word love"* & *"The Earth and its timeless doors which lead to the blush of fruit."*

The meaning, the questions, the emotions, the word's taste is felt. And my fellow students wanted more clarity, while I was happy to keep playing with the flexibility that Lorca creates for the reader. There is so much to feel, so many suits, to try on, the lapels written over with treasure chests.

Where is the line? This line I keep trying to hold onto, between the real and abstract, between my imagination that wants to fly, but it's a flight strange and stilted, moving in space in glitches, stepping on unknown stones, building something that stands but, like my poetry it looks like it will almost topple over, its long skinny legs, the understanding swerving in the air because the foundation isn't there. I am so scared of being seen, that I write from my hip, in rushes, in gasps, because it is hard for me to get it out, I want to look down, to leave the words floating.

For this seminar I tried to write an epic poem about the guilt I feel at being a privileged white woman and the uselessness of that feeling, that it is still an escape, because it feels like I am doing something but really, I am sitting quietly by. But I had to hide that purpose, I couldn't really own this ugliness, so layers of metaphor and unfinished thoughts later, my reader could only see scattered suggestions that buzzed around their head.

"From a naked bone" by *Managaliso W. Busani* writes about the women in his life, these ordinary, normal roles, but he does this by writing the in-between moments, the ordinary becomes something evocative, a boy listing food creates the warmth of a mother's arms. Busani captivated on the moments that mean something, he didn't step over the in-between he lay there and built his foundation, on those unsaid things, these are were the meaning, the why, drives us, because it leads to the next moment, it is the decision of what means the most to us, that space in-between. Busani stands behind his writing, you can feel him there, this vulnerability is his foundation, this speaking of the unsaid.

In my feedback session most weeks, there are a few lines and moments in my pieces that classmates pointed out "it's too rushed, the metaphor isn't working" and when I first heard it, I bolted back into my known, this need to protect my idea of style I shout in my head. But this time I went back to the piece instead of throwing it in the drawer and keeping my opinions true. I re-read and re-read and yes, my style does jar and the moments

in my writing that are picked on are those moments when I need to gap a feeling. I struggle over the divide, between two thoughts, between my own and the page, between one thought and its connection with another, why does it mean something to me, and when I can't find the right fit, I jam my old metaphors down there, rely on comfortable structures and old brushstrokes full of blush.

I need to take care, make each word count. Debs (a MACW classmate) keeps taking me by the hand - here at this point what are you trying to say, why are you here, don't lose the poem in your wandering imagination, bring it to the reader's faces, allow each word to sit alone and mean something. I don't need to hide the gaps, this is the point where I should write, grapple and try rather than plugging the holes with stale, easy bread.

Reflective Journal 5: The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka – The Why

Kafka wrote very clearly and directly about something strange, impossible – a man turning into a cockroach – and he centered the plot around this one idea, this enabled him to bring his readers with him, he made this impossible idea, understandable, probable for his readers, they could relate to the context of cockroach.

“He really didn't know what he had in mind, but he raised his foot uncommonly high anyway, and Gregor was astonished at the gigantic size of the sole of his boot. However, he did not linger on this point.”

Kafka's main device for action is the mere sight of the monster, each plot twist and turn are tied to that one idea, it creates a harmony, a balance that the reader can comprehend.

This single idea enables Kafka to break down stereotypes in this book and exaggerates others:

- **Exaggerates the plight of the working man in a capitalist system.** The first chapter is a homage to the pressures of the working person, from the stress of having to provide and the understanding that poverty is a misstep away, this is all exaggerated. The employee becomes an insect in the wheel of capitalism
- **Tears apart the notion of unconditional love in a family.** A person who was the provider, becomes useless and eventually his family kills him, their inability to understand him, kills him. Think gender based violence, lack of LGBTQA+ rights.

Again my feedback was a resounding “we do not understand what you are trying to say, but we do feel something.” I am losing them in the abstract style of writing that layers onto an abstract idea. I need something to ground in.

And after feedback week and Kafka, I understand I can use poetry in my writing, but I need a plot, I need an idea to hold my imagination together. I need to first think about the plot, the path. The why, before letting my fingers trace over the paper, that's when I create something perfect for my mind, but it gets stuck in my brain and comes out like a scattered dropping of poetry– a plot, a story, the why will bring me back.

Reflective Journal 6

A direct extract from my reflective journal post *Jo-Ann Bekker's Telling it Slant Seminar*

“I want to hide an idea in the story, a way to convince and yes manipulate my audience, I want my writing to change their minds and a soap box is not the way to achieve this. I know this because a soap box has gotten me staring into glazed eyes, their view solidified and mine fluff, words echoing around them.”

I don't believe this anymore, if I write what I want, without hiding behind structure, give my imagination space to play, give it the time then I can build the soap box in the imagination, it can become something that tears and burns the pretence down in violent colour and loud noises. Science fiction is inherently created to be able to tell

it slant, taking humanity away from their own worlds to change perception, but there is an honesty in how blatant it is allowed to be in science fiction. I can create “They” that orders dissections from afar, writing the death warrants we tell ourselves governments don’t make every day. I can be absurd because this is more relatable to the reader than they think because we grapple with the absurdity of our own existence every day, we make it seem normal that humans sit behind screens and type messages to each other and this moves economies. Instead of hiding my message I want it to be my voice, which is inherently slant in its blatant honesty, instead of hiding this honesty because I am scared, I need to speak in the way I am comfortable and that is through an imaginative dunking, where metaphors lead into emotions and violence, the plot is my soapbox, creating a world I want to break.

It was Paul, my supervisor, my fellow students, every lecturer who tried to get me to move away from my poetic formatting, these long thin three or four line stanzas that seemed to fall off the page. But it was *The Outing* by *Lydia Davis* that has stolen my heart, with her one paragraph story, and I started writing smaller pieces in this format and it clicked – keeping the words together made it slip into the reader’s brain easier, the jagged edges made the reading feel slippery, thoughts escaping into smoke.

The Outing

“An outburst of anger near the road, a refusal to speak on the path, a silence in the pine woods, a silence across the old railroad bridge, an attempt to be friendly in the water, a refusal to end the argument on the flat stones, a cry of anger on the steep bank of dirt, a weeping among the bushes.”

Reflective Journal 7: The Voices in My Head

Samuel Beckett, I fell in love with him workshopping *Waiting for Godot* in high school. This absurd dialogue run through with rhythm and patterns until the audience is holding a burning hot fire in their laps. *Paul Mason’s* Beckett seminar had me reading Beckett aloud again, my vocal cords tripping over the tight writing. Beckett is strange and he doesn’t hide this from the reader, we are getting a look into how his brain is wired, you can see it tapping out it’s circuit in his writing.

Beckett plays with writing like it is taffy “meet me here, my dear reader and for god sake bring your opinions.” There is no spoon feeding plot, ideas, characters, he makes it difficult with his original voice, placing missteps for the reader to catch or not, his words are strange enough to become universal.

My writing is imagination built from thin air, its insubstantial with emotion the only thing tying it down, and this is how I feel, this is how I see the world. But rather than exposing myself, I hide my work, patch over the thin bits with glitter and look for balance when I need to fall a little more, open up and let my voice breathe, stop trying to fit my writing into what I think will land, what I think will move my reader.

“True refuge long last issueless scattered down four walls over backwards no sound.” – Lessness, Beckett

Heiner Mueller, satisfies my need for the violent dramatic, this offhand profanity that dunks the absurd deeper. Mueller twists the norm darker, makes it this gruesome divider that is almost funny in its pain, a bloodied smile creeping out. Life is ugly, it is cruel and we dress it in normality far too often, Mueller undresses it in *Hamlet Machine*:

“WILDSTRAINING / IN THE FEARSOME ARMAMENTS / MILLENIA10

Deep sea. Ophelia in wheelchair. Fish wreckage corpses and body-parts stream past.

OPHELIA

While two men in doctor’s smocks wrap her from top to bottom in white bandages.

Here speaks Electra. In the Heart of Darkness. Under the Sun of Torture. To the Metropolises of the World. In the Names of the Victims. I expel all the semen which I have received. I transform the milk of my breasts into deadly poison. I suffocate the world which I gave birth to, between my thighs. I bury it in my crotch. Down with the joy of oppression. Long live hate, loathing, rebellion, death. When she walks through your bedroom with butcher's knives, you'll know the truth.

Exit men. Ophelia remains on the stage, motionless in the white packaging."

While *Ursula Le Guinn*, creates the strangest worlds and writes them like a journalist with a third person clarity that stings. Her imagination soars, but this anthropological tone becomes something the reader can hold onto as they fly.

"Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing.

*In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. A little light seeps in dustily between cracks in the boards, secondhand from a cobwebbed window somewhere across the cellar. In one corner of the little room a couple of mops, with stiff, clotted, foul-smelling heads stand near a rusty bucket. The floor is dirt, a little damp to the touch, as cellar dirt usually is. The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten." - **The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas**, Le Guinn*

*Masande Ntshanga's seminar **Voice, Context and Intention**, was a turning point, because both Ntshanga and Nathan Trantraal (supervisors) said that I play it safe with my voice, I do not expose myself on the page, I distance and distance through abstract style, the over description and strange formatting, this coupled with science fiction base turns the reader around too much, I hide in the blur, my meaning poking its ear out scared to be judged as flimsy, as inconsequential as I feel.*

Victor LaVelle's essay, speaks about the bravery of filling up his writing with the real, with the people, places that fill his life, he doesn't shy away in obtuse, sleight of hand, he just says it. My format, the strange science fiction, can't be real in the same way, but the emotions these are my real, my writing is best when my edge, those suicidal thoughts, can breathe. It is these intrusive thoughts that make me see my world, this is my perspective, inherently disgusted with my world, with myself this is the inevitably I slip back into, my factory settings. I can share this only by making it understandable, taking it away from the reader's lives, making it seem big enough for all this rage I feel. This is my voice and I will let its imagination soar.

Reflective Journals in Second Year - Thesis

Reflective Journal 1: Writing Madness

Bad Brains by *Kathe Koja* is visceral; it feels like oil paint splattered onto my mind. Koja moves from the normal and descends her protagonist into madness, where painting's move, where uncertainty/unreality is the only driving force. It is a bloody painting that unwraps the skull layer by layer until the head is unrecognizable, something abstract. Koja begins with a normal stability and then slowly the silver grips the reader and protagonist into a world that is crumbling, falling apart as the protagonist searches for something to hold onto. Koja writes defined voices with such clarity, the characters, although stock, have so much individuality that it grounds the novel, their perceptions through dialogue shed light on the protagonist's uncertainty, on his actions that slip into crumbling. Koja unwraps the protagonist slowly. It is a syrupy fall over the edge, but almost painful and as the honey collects at the base, it is strange and morphed, cruel. Violence hiding in uncertainty.

Fever Dream by *Samanta Schweblin* starts with uncertainty, using a fever dream to unsettle and confuse the reader, but it's an intoxicating confusion, one that unwraps in hints and clues. Schweblin creates a puzzle the reader tries to calculate out. Schweblin uses a narrator, a young boy to move the dream forward to expose and create significance in the small revelations, this voice creates the tension in the ordinary makes a child who puts her hand on the ground touching mud frightening, violent even. The reader is kept within, understanding the clues before the protagonists themselves, it gives the reader the sadness and power of an outside view, yet without the ability to change the outcome, creating a tension the reader cannot look away from.

These two novels move quickly, they are gripped in action, it is a river that rushes forward sweeping the reader under, we drown in the sweat as the authors tightly wind us toward the ending, it is a tension riddled crash. While Koja plays with density, long paragraphs that tumble with information, Schweblin plays with light thin lines that trail down the page in a long tail. My thesis is written like science fiction *Frankenstein* of *Bad Brains* and *Fever Dream*, the pace is a headlong rush, merging thick paragraphs with small poetic bursts, and labeled dialogue. I play with the uncertainty at the beginning and the ending, my concrete violence is dense while nature is my light. And while both Koja and Schweblin used the backdrop of normal as a way to expose the strange - the action happens in our world, in a society we can recognize - making the break in this normal even more jarring, more frightening. My thesis uses a backdrop of strange, a concrete world of meat bodies and Control.

I try to do too much, style, plot, structure it's all a bit strange, and it's a balance between losing myself in the desperate "please like me" voice in my head that lets my fingers package in toppling metaphors or reducing my imagination to a laundry list of action. But I might be able to pull off this Frankenstein monster.

Reflective Journal 2: Pulling off the Frankenstein Monster

Ursula le Guin is the answer to pulling off this monster, her stories are wild with imagination and strange societies. Le Guinn can build worlds in seconds, making the reader comfortable with the rules, explaining them only to break them in a short story that punches. Le Guin does this with the purpose of exploring some aspect of society; in ***Semley's Necklace*** she plays with what it means to be a woman in power (or a princess), what duty that entails and the higher cost of it when you are a woman; while in ***Solitude***, Le Guin explores our need to never be alone, the ownership this creates, the limitation and in ***Small Change*** Le Guin challenges our grief. These defined themes/meanings are explored with strange abstract worlds, where the protagonist is off kilter, collecting information like a blind man and yet Le Guin's meaning is crisp, clear. Le Guin does this by writing to her theme, her why, her meaning, she is precise, tying the uncertainty back to the same point.

Chinua Achebe writes from his why in **Things Fall Apart** and by writing the history from a different perspective, he has made the normal strange. This innate why enables Achebe to write a simple bare style, with metaphors that drip and layer over each other, constantly hinting at wounds barely scabbed over, with the weight just behind the skin ready to crumble our society with one push. Achebe like Le Guin keeps the plot tight, writing with calm severity around their why, keeping it fueling the word, the sentence.

My why, my meaning is the **inevitability of a woman**.

Women are.

Inherently we change the environment around us, we build communities that can care for our children.

My thesis builds a man-made concrete world and tears it down with a feminine nature, but I need the entire world to see this nature slowly, I need it to become like disease spreading behind closed doors, this nature needs to be light and pervasive. I took inspiration from **Clarice Lispector's** voice in **Near to the Wild Heart**, she writes in the third person, yet it feels like such a close, inward voice, it's the voice I use to coax myself out the bathroom, gentle and holding, this is the voice that will sweeten Control into a figment, a sweet mother's voice cooing in nature:

- *"Down below, the sea shone in waves of copper, stretched out, deep, opaque, serene. It came dense and rebellious, rising in spirals."*
- *"The water trickled over her feet, which were now bare, gurgling between her toes, escaping as clear, as clear, as some transparent animal. Transparent and alive... She had an urge to drink it, to bite it slowly."*
- *"While straight, thin, free-lines were like thoughts."*

And while Le Guin and Achebe as my only inspiration would see me cut down the thesis to the bare bones, simplify the structure into something stock standard, it is **Kathy Acker's** audacity to be entirely different, to write **Blood and Guts**, full of child pornography, vaginas scribbled onto the page like maps, where poetry merges with prose in a tumbling soapbox that cuts other stories down. Acker ensures I balance the normal induced panic with true vulnerability. This true vulnerability, where I write from my centre, my ugly truth, myself unhinged and laughing on the page, instead of hiding myself under the metaphors. I need to write like Acker with the brazen harsh truth, Acker writes the pain, writes the abuse, cuts down stories into their atoms, slicing them in front of our eyes but she does it with her own style, something entirely her own, an original voice she had the courage to expose onto the page:

- *"We took a taxi to Bloomingdale's so we could be straight. I was dressed in a red wool suit and a light brown coat. It's necessary to be straight when you steal."*
- *"Because I work I am nobody."*
- *"It ain't money, the world of alienate action. Anyone can do absolutely anything he or she wants. It's all absolutely free. In the brilliant sunlight."*
- *"The Bear's vision of blackness, The night was black and the universe was black. You weren't able to distinguish any forms in this night. A Black band separated the black earth from the black sky. All over was just blackness, a layer of blackness."*

Acker is my reminder that when my uneven structure feels personal to me, when it creates an emotional response from me I need to keep it, I need to keep my imaginative voice flying, because despite Nathan Trantraal's scepticism at whether I can keep this style up over a long period, I can and have because this is how I think, this is my ugly centre, a scattered brain, dipping into morose sadness and violent colours that pull me out, I am a balancing act hanging between the fall.

While *Amos Tutola's* dark and twisted imagination in ***The Palm-wine Drinkard***, is my reminder that the reader can handle weird, they can grasp the abstract, the taste bitter at first but slipping like golden liquid as they let the bottle tip down their throats.

Book Reviews

Book Review 1: Ice by Anna Kavan; Peter Owen Publishers; 2006

Kavan's *Ice* is a corkscrew that pierces the world we know into ice shards and reflections that sting. Kavan builds structures and demolishes them in the same sentence, her imagery feels real, a taste, a touch away, and then she tatters these images into illusion. The reader pants through the pages turning them quicker and quicker as Kavan builds to break.

Kavan distorts around one repeated plot - a woman in distress needs saving, but each time, the saving is limp, restarting the search and capture. Kavan plays with a common male voice, tying the two male characters in twin-like protector and abuser roles, a sinister kindness that oozes in tension, wiping a woman into an object so effectively.

"Her face wore its victim's look, which was of course psychological, the result of injuries she had received in childhood...It was madly attractive to me in a certain way."

"A little blood had trickled out of her mouth. Her neck had an unnatural twist... I felt I had been defrauded: I alone should have done the breaking with tender love; I was the only person entitled to inflict wounds."

Kavan removes time, building tension with ice, an abstract moving doom, written in descriptions that alight the face.

"Cold coruscations of rainbow fire pulsed overhead, shot through by shafts of pure incandescence thrown out by mountains of solid ice towering all round."

"As fast as the frost-flowers were cleared from the windscreen they reformed in more opaque patterns, until I could see nothing through them but falling snow; an infinity of snowflakes like ghostly birds, incessantly swooping past from nowhere to nowhere."

Ice is a cat and mouse game, playing violence against rescue, ice against life, it is a building storm that takes the reader blindly through beaten and bruised. Kavan tears apart our world, making it something thin, translucent and breakable, dictators fall, societies turn on each other. Kavan keeps a woman's body at the centre of this, the game written across her skin, as the world unravels, the battlefield is fought on her body.

"...my lights picked out like searchlights the girl's naked body, slight as a child's, ivory white against the dead white of the snow, her hair bright as spun glass... Motionless, she kept her eyes fixed on the walls moving slowly towards her, a glassy, glittering circle of solid ice, of which she was the centre."

Kavan plays with the unreal, the reader is never certain if the action is true, if this torture or that tearing is actually happening because it is written from the male perspective who continually drifts off into the unreal, separating the violence from himself because this is the shroud of unreal that allows.

"They did not seem to me like real tears. She herself did not seem quite real."

I will reread this horror again and again, Kavan mirrors back my feelings of imprisonment as woman, she highlights our place in society with blatant honesty. It is hard to bear but the cracking of this world into shards of ice feels like a release, a freedom.

Book Review 2: Freshwater by Akwaeke Emezi; Grove Press; 2018

Emezi writes a gender fluid novel that moves elegantly between multiple identities, sexualities, the normal world and a world filled with Gods encased in human skin. Emezi writes with power, blood, thirst, these identities live in bright violent glares, Emezi packs and packs the story, buries it in magic and doesn't let you take a breath of normal; the reader must submit to the overflowing as the protagonist is overflowed into madness.

"I don't even have the mouth to tell this story... Besides, whatever they will say will be the truest version of it, since they are the truest version of me. It's a strange thing to say, I know, considering that they made me mad. But I am not entirely opposed to madness, not when it comes with this kind of clarity."

Emezi's structures the novel around a female God who gives her daughter to the world, but no-one (no human) can hold her, she cannot be found, living in the human skin, bubbling and changing, breathing in multiple awakenings. This makes the strange something to be worshipped something we cannot tarnish, cannot smooth over with our normality.

"... that the python was sacred... it is the source of the stream, the flesh form of the god Ala, who is earth herself, the judge and mother, the giver of law. On her lips man is born and there he spends his whole life. Ala holds the underworld replete in the womb, the dead flexing and flattening her belly, a crescent moon above her... and of its egg, they would say you cannot find it, they would add, you cannot touch it. For the egg of the python is the child of Ala, and the child of Ala is not and can never be intended for your hands."

Emezi aligns sexual identity's inevitability with the inevitability of madness, it is something uncontrollable, god-like in its certainty, it is something that is. Emezi makes madness normal for the reader, a thing that they can hold, relate to – something built deep within us as a seedling watered by our loss, harm, grief. Emezi writes her protagonist through the depths but in finding these multiple voices, the protagonist understand herself, grows into the god.

"We were sent through carelessly, with a net of knowledge snarled around our ankles, not enough to tell us anything, just enough to trip us up. There are many neglects like this – little gods going mad around you, wandering the beaches with matted hair and swollen testicles. Unrecognisable, laughing through brown teeth as they grub through rubbish heaps, breasts stretched and groaning. That's what it looks like when flesh doesn't take, when you can see them rejecting the graft of reality."

I love that the main character finds peace in her dual identities, and this exploration of what it means to be queer, how you have to recognize different parts of yourself, discover them and become them entirely till you slip into the next changing. Freshwater is a voice for queer people that is truthful in the pain we experience trying to fit in, when we clearly don't. But it is Emezi's ability to find joy, large and booming, to give her protagonist peace when she accepts and loves her strange that makes this novel truly groundbreaking, because rather than dissolving in her strange she becomes bigger and god-like in it.

Freshwater is tumbling down the looking glass of reality, it speaks truth through madness and holds the reader in captivity until the last word, feeling the bruises bloom across their skin, the assault drawn across their bellies, it is wonderful, I will be reading far more by Emezi as she doesn't bridge with the usual troupes, she builds and creates something valuable in its individuality. I hope soon these queer stories will become something normal, something I won't have to comment on in future.

"But she couldn't remember any of it and she couldn't remember saying yes because she couldn't remember being asked."

A novel to worship.

Book Review 3: Ghosts by Cesar Aira; New Directions; 2009

Aira writes a simple ghost story dripping in creation that moves from existential musing to dream, with fables inserted like jewels. It is Christmas in Buenos Aires (hot) and an unfinished apartment block is brimming with naked male ghosts, construction workers and the overseer's family.

"Suddenly a wind, a typical dream-wind, so typical that dreams might be said to consist of it, arose and blew the building apart, reducing it to little cubes the size of dice. This was the transition to the world of cartoons. The building was reconstructed somewhere else, in another form, its atoms recombined. Then it disintegrated again, the wind scattering its particles, one of which came to rest on Patri's open eye, and in its microscopic interior, an entire house was visible, with all its rooms and furniture, its candelabras, carpets, glassware, and the little golden mill that spins in the wind from the stars."

Aira builds his plot much like the unfinished apartment block the novel gravitates around, the foundation is a touching into each major characters' minds, a forming of an interweaving net, a family, a workplace connected.

"He also felt that the inevitable stillness of a supermarket queue put him at a disadvantage. Movement was his natural state, albeit the movement of flight. To him, stillness seemed a temporary exception."

"She felt depressed, because of the heat, because of all the work she had done already that day, and what remained to do, because of the end of year, and her husband, and so on, and so on."

But it is Patri the adolescent woman whose sexuality, innocently coming of age brushes against ghostly penises, that the story is riveted into dizzying heights around.

"Only at odd moments, from a certain points of view, could you see the foreskin at the tips of the penises parting to reveal a tiny circle of bright red, moist skin."

Aira plays on the wrongness of this pairing (young woman and dead penises) to create a commentary on the female's role in the household. Aira laboriously follows the mother through her wifely duties, and it is this tedious tiring female life which is juxtaposed against the male ghosts' freedom which pulls Patri into dizzying heights, where real and unreal feel like something she can create.

"Since Patri was given to building castles in the air, certain chimerical spectacles could lead her to utterly misguided belief that reality is everywhere."

Aira creates breaking point at once both so normal and yet so strange, even mystical, fantastical. Ghosts is a novel that rings in your ears for many months, the descriptions both fairy dust and deep kicks to the pelvis. Aira has me thinking of ghostly penises each time I see scaffolding; it is a strange freedom tingling at cunt as I remember Patri's dizzying heights.

"Absorbed by the sight of ghosts, Patri had come almost too close to the edge. When she realized this. When she realized this, she took a step back."

Book Review 4: The Book of Chameleons by Jose Eduardo Agualusa; Simon & Schuster; 2008

The Book of Chameleons, speaks to the stories of outcasts, lays out their dreams until they emerge interconnected in a brutal truth. This simple revenge novel is spoken through the eyes of a chameleon, watching from the wall. The chameleon becomes the recorder and protector of these outcasts, he is the weaver of their interconnection, kissing their stories into something solid as he watches from the wall.

Agualusa drowns the reader in description, yet his punctuation creates immediacy in the setting and builds pauses in blossoming anticipation. Agualusa has the reader moving through the multiple minds yet each character is tinged with the same loneliness, the same covered wound, it shines out in the tone. Agualusa's mastery is that despite this consistent inward tone, each character is stark and distinct, their history and motives brilliant in vastly different colors.

“This’ said the albino by way of introduction ‘is Cornelio Buchmann. Your Grandfather.’ There was another showing a couple in an embrace, beside the river, with a broad, endless horizon in the background. The man had his eyes lowered. The woman, in a floral print dress, smiled at the camera. Jose Buchman held the photo and stood up, so he was directly in the light of the lamp. His voice trembled a little. ‘And these are my parents?’ The albino confirmed that yes, they were. Mateus Buchmann and Eva Miller, one sunny evening, beside the Chimpumpunhime River. It must have been Jose himself – the eleven year old – who’d captured that moment... A few months after that photo had been taken, with the river rushing serenely toward its destination and the grasses high in the middle of the solemn evening. Eva left for Cape Town, on a trip which was due to last a month, and she never came back. Mateus Buchmann wrote to common friends in South Africa asking for news of his wife, and when he had no luck, he left his son in the care of a servant, a blind old tracker, and set off to find her.”

Agualusa can create an entire moving, intricate and breathing history in a simple paragraph. His moments are heavy with life, dripping like honey, keeping the reader wrapped around his finger as he releases hints at the mystery in slow droplets. Agualusa writes like it is not real, you feel like you are sitting on your father's lap as he entangles a story slowly until he bounces you off onto the floor in a tumble of truth.

Agualusa builds his images slowly creating a base of extracts that hang in a butterfly distance from each other, and then layers the repeating images over in a slow curl of petals, touching each other and finally uncurling into a flat thing that the reader can pour over with their magnifying glass, seeing the intricate connections. He shocks at and surprises at just the right moment, the pace absorbing and wild.

“By then it had started to rain. It was as though it were raining night – or to explain myself a little more clearly, it was as though falling from the sky were the thick fragments of that sleepy black ocean through which the stars navigate their course. I kept expecting the stars to fall and shatter on impact with the window, with a flash and a crashing. But they didn’t fall. I turned out the light. I put the pistol to me head,

and I fell asleep.”

A novel brimming with the outcast's loneliness and one I will be peering over for many years to come, catching the suggestions and links I missed previously in the bedazzlement of story and metaphor married together in a breathless balance.

Poetics Essay

I, like Simone Weil, write to figure out what I think, how I feel, this pen is my structure, the manner of my understanding. I cannot know the world, know a person, know an idea without writing it down, without claiming it in some small way as mine, holding it by throat on the white page.

Writing is my context, I build it from thought shards, these icicles worm their way to my fingers, standing at attention waiting for me to acknowledge them. If I leave them, these moments of clarity unwritten, then I will forget them, they will not change me.

I want my writing to change me, to constrict me.

Because like all naïve authors/venture capitalists/optimistic pig-tailed girls, I want to do something that makes a difference to contribute. I want this world to be fairer. And I am so tired of hearing that this impossible, that life and our innate humanity will not allow a fair society, we must accept what is.

And I don't want to.

I want to imagine more, to breathe in new worlds where we can create anything. I want to burn the boxes, this separation we worship.

But sticky norms are hard to burn, they float like smoke, infecting the next person's eyes, feasting on their host.

To subvert, to remove the power society and the norm has, is to disregard it, play in another form, crush the idea. I fling my imagination out a window and oh how it will fly.

I look up as I swim toward the sea's surface, blue contains me in its eye, the sky beckons through the ripples of surface tension. And I breathe out. The ocean changes, becoming something solid, a mass of rope coiling around my limbs. Blue whitewashed into transparency.

Something alien has been captured.

And it will not be returned politely.

My fingers touch the page and the debt writes

Literature that grandiose term came to me in bathrooms.

I was a strange child, prone to a sadness that hung around my neck. I am now a strange adult, prone to a sadness that hangs around my neck. But now I have been socialized to smile (hasn't every woman) to hide myself behind a veneer of thin confidence because other humans don't like being around you when you are sad:

1. "You can't sit with us"
2. "Your need is too..."
3. "I don't know how to talk to your silence."

We are afraid it's infectious this horrible sadness.

So, I sat in the bathrooms, because my sadness was not the norm, and my raw face too emotional. But books, literature doesn't care what and who you are, they will open their pages offering up characters, lives, that seem so real, literature didn't care that I could not contain the slipping sanity. Literature shared all, became my most dependable friend. I was changed by it, learnt to fight the dragon, to reclaim my crown, to follow my heart.

I loved sharing in someone's life, breathing through their minds, literature does this, I could be anyone.

But can't I really be anyone. There is a limitation because literature (humanity's mirror) is distorted, we are distorted, there is a gap, there is something not right here, there is only one story being told. Stories about perceived minorities (queer, black) are silenced.

This is a broken society, an axis consuming its own debris into contained packages of delivered glossiness. A machine fueled by silence.

"Man no longer has a voice, and on occasion, when he forcefully manages to make a sound with his tongue and his parched lips, only gibberish noise escapes his mouth to confound the world." (Nyezwa, On Duende)

But I want to write, to speak, to bleed across the page my denial of this norm, of this silence. And if my voice is heard, if I can actually expand my reader away from the norm, take them into a world where the expected is forgotten, where the unstable rules. My voice could create that *"noble plasticity"*¹ of thought, which breaks our minds away from the structure, to see the people, the real solid humans behind the boxes.

Then my voice would be heard.

A voice heard is accountable.

As

"...it is not just our minds that have been colonized, but our imaginations." (Hooks, Narrative Struggle)

As

"Layers upon layers of half-truths and naked lies have masked the face of the modern man and disfigured his relationships with himself and with the world." (Nyezwa, On Duende)

As

"The society whose modernization has reached the stage of integrated spectacle is characterized by the combined effect of five principal factors: incessant technological renewal, integration of state and the economy, generalized secrecy, unanswerable lies and eternal present." (Guy Debord)

This broken society and my attempt, my desire to change, creates a debt, as Cristina Rivera Garza said in her essay *The Unusual: a manifesto*;

"If we write, we are in debt. If we write, we owe. This debt transverses all writing; it shapes it. It gives it life. Legitimacy."

The broken structure, its echoing silence, is my why, is my debt.

"MY POETRY is whatever I think I am... I make poetry with what I feel is useful and can be saved out of the garbage of our lives." (Amiri Baraka)

The norm is tight around our thoughts

Our norms, (society's imagination) is a sticky thing wrapping around our mouths in deep growing cotton wool.

The norm consumes us tying our burning pyres to one idea, one myth that society centers around white, cisgender, straight people, that this is the palatable normality.

"God like the alien, reveals our inability to stray too far from identifiable norms" (Wan, Aliens as a Form-of-Life)

¹ The Beautiful Voyage, by Guest

The marginal, the deemed 'other' are unheard, buried beneath our feet, their murder is commoditized because as Society said in her essay Rationalizing, "How can we change society? It's too big... it's not so bad... it's the norm, so fucking shut up, everyone is doing it."

We confuse norm with reality because it's so old, this axis wiping away the other.

And as Kathy Acker pointed out in her essay The Killers *"In Moby-Dick, Melville speaks of reality as the interstices through which all of us fall."*

And because we believe that the norm is our only reality it infects each aspect of us, tying us to the grinding axis that mutilates mutual respect, creating others that are somehow lesser.

We cannot escape the interstices this axis creates, how it ties humanity into pre-definition because this reality appears unchangeable because it worked for so long, it hides the flux, the chaos, the movement, makes change, this everyday grain of beginning something scarce.

"Realism is simply a control method. Realism doesn't want to negotiate, open into, even know, chaos or the body or death, because those who practice realism want to limit their readers" (Acker, The Killers)

Humanity builds worlds from imagination's yoke. But only one voice has been allowed to speak, only the norm had access to that storeroom of lips, tongue and vocal cords (i.e. published literature, media, news channels, history books, bibles, social media etc.)

This voice was all we heard in that man-made silence, becoming the herd's imagination, slipping into tangible substance. This voice is a structure built to repeat and repeat that oppression, because once you define something as normal it makes the rest weird, strange, even scary, and once we fear something, we will try to destroy it.

"Access is power... Access is given... Access is problematic." (Perez, Unincorporated Poetic Territories).

"In other words, behind every literary or cultural issue lies the political, the realm of political power. And whenever we talk about narrative, narrative structure, we're talking about political power. There are no ivory towers." (Acker, The Killers)

This structure, this norm has built its nest behind our eyes, peering out with steel strings of compliance. Each of our words are laden with that history, English, my mother tongue is dripping in blood. I must subvert my own tongue, teach it how to speak differently, create words/worlds that lay this blood bare, ooze it out from the page, staining the readers' fingers.

Yes, Acker is right there are no ivory towers *"For everything begins in the dark past, and goes back to where it came from, and must always end there where every thing, including its own particular death, began."* (Nyezwa, On Duende)

And when this dark bloody past, this creation of other is ignored, refuted, treated like the fucking tooth fairy something childish and unreal, this is when our literature, our poetry stands empty, lacking.

"It is difficult to get news from poems yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there." (William Carlos Williams)

Chaos in its abstract form will be my tool

Chaos creates. And we need new ideas, new structures, we must dismantle each fabric, those hanging curtains of blindness.

This is why I have been drawn to science fiction because it imagines realities beyond our norm, places the stage so apart from ourselves that it can ask the hard questions, it can distort the message, becoming a small lever in the mind, a hole cut through the skull, to enable the reader to change, to pose ideas that the reader within their normal context would not be able to explore.

I was struck dumb with Vicente Huidobro's theory of Creationism, this idea of *"a created poem: it is a poem in which each constituent part, and the whole, presents a new fact independent of the external world, detached from any reality other than itself, because it takes place in the world as a particular phenomenon, apart from and different from other phenomena."*

This creation would not be infected by the norm, rather enabling an abstract loosening of reality so that I can make something, untouched, possibly true. I want to eat away this world, mutilate the voice, the scaffolding, singe away the infection by distorting the norm into something abstract. I want to be an anarchist with words and set things aflame.

But how?

Because *"I can't write a poem simply from good intentions, wanting to set things right, make it all better; the energy will leak out of it, it will end by meaning less than it says."* (Rich – Someone is writing a Poem)

I try to hide my good intentions with the abstract flower arrangements of words, skirting the issue, playing with images only I can see, rather than trying to engage with reader, it as if I am scared that they won't get it, so I hide my ideas deep within a structure that breaks down as you read it because I can't bear the reader to grasp it, to be able to judge me, I don't want to give them the breath disagree with me.

I don't want to engage in an argument, because it always ends in these similar and un-seeing arguments like All Lives Matter.

But then how can I change or constrict the reader if I am too scared to hold their throat with my words, too scared to open up my veins and tell anything straight. I hate linear, so I hop around through my work, creating fluidity, while my language is a strange overflowed rush which makes my work pretentious and inaccessible. This is unforgivable, given my debt, my why.

I was drawn to Mxolisi Nyezwa's idea of "posting" in his essay On Duende and Maskandi. This is like leaving landmarks, self-referencing of ideas, that engages the reader because it makes it personal, giving the reader context. This posting creates a background, a basis for the why, the debt, it enables the reader to understand my motivation and locks it onto something more solid than my typical style. If I create these postings then I can fling myself further into distortion and abstract, because I am giving the reader a life raft, an idea, a purpose to hold onto, informing the random structure of shifting sand with a pattern.

Nyezwa's posting:

"...I want to describe myself like a

painting that I saw

a few feet off, and close up

like a word that I finally understood, like a pitcher

I use every day,

*like the face of my mother, like a ship
that took me safely*

through the wildest storm of all.” (Bly 1975:73)

This poet immediately places the reader in the piece, facing something, inquiring about themselves because they imagine also watching their own portrait but the poet creates a place, a substance, then veers towards a feeling but describes it by referencing/ posting/creating a context like a pitcher, the face of my mother, yet these descriptions are not complete, they are still abstract, but the context and the referencing draws the reader in engages their feeling.

Our society, our norms have created structures that silence and ignore creating holes that slip us back into complacency, into defeatist Alice in Wonderland acceptance of this strange silence. The norm waits at the bottom of the drop, with cotton wool to seed into our mouths.

My writing needs to acknowledge the broken pieces, *“I need the gap in it to show. As these gaps began to occur, a new sense of isolated wholes, of complete gestures, began to replace old ideas of a constructed, even coerced, coherence.”* (Lauterbach, Use this word in a Sentence)

I believe writing this gap will inherently create.

Writing the gaps creates chaos, it castrates the norm away by focusing on the silence, the forgotten. These gaps are inherently full to the bursting with flux and change, it is only our norm that remains static, that tries to place a hand over my words.

This is chaos, where my words can bloom and become a tree, a truth, a society, they can be anything, they can build imagination’s arsehole, because I am not limited by what is perceived to be the reality.

I am giddy with Chaos.

It is the most tempting realm, I want to fling my words through brains, watching their sharp edges rip at these skin bags of denial, I want to cut away the act of forgetting, build and build voices out of silence, wrap my creations in lines of black typed more, watch how their voices drown out the norm.

“... every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome” (Hooks, Narrative Struggle)

I want to disturb my readers, shake them into asking Why? To feel the doubt, scratching against their bones, the creation expanding against their ideas, drowning them in *“something meant to disrupt the apparently smooth surface of things.”* (Evenson, The Crazy Party Guy)

There is a painter Marlene Dumas, who paints how I want to write. There is no structure in the portraits she paints, it’s as if smudges and faint lines are trying to collapse a human into its emotion. Her paintings are the suggestion of form, the abstract plays with a raw feeling, the inner struggle, so undefined in physical norms, but now splayed out in an utter creation of something that lives and breathes apart from the subject/reality.

Writing is my movement, my embodied change, breathing in zombie pieces as I paste and move through my history, clasp and changing the real into abstract and back again, moving through my words because I can swim in their un-containing emotion.

- *“... for writing is first and foremost ENERGY and CONNECTIVE TISSUE – a relation. It’s not the textual objects but the bonds that matter.”* (Lauterbach, Experimental)
- *“...I think writing is about time. The writer is playing – when structuring narrative or when narrative is structuring itself – with life and death. He or she is maneuvering between order and disorder, between meaning and meaninglessness...”* (Acker, the Killers)

This unstable flux, this chaos is change, is creation. *"A kind of atmosphere has made itself known to me. It will take a long time before I see it clearly, but this "trying to see it" is why I am writing the novel in the first place."*
(Cain, Slowness)

I build temporary realities, creating the destruction anticipation

A spider's carcass, eight legs bent into sky high submission. A black smudge dashing its brains against cold white tiles.

*"I wanted to fall off my little ledge."*²

creating

*"Layers of bricks between sounds."*³

my falling body

soaks in chaos

hung suspended

as

"The ocean comes apart

*Shaken by the wind from whistling fishermen"*⁴

"I CRY want to rise higher than the fountain snake in the sky

for earthly gravity

*no longer exists at school and in the brain."*⁵

But, the quiet

"...evening had swallows in its wake. Owls

*Shared out the sun and were heavy on the earth."*⁶

² Roy, Experimentalism

³ Juan Larrea

⁴ Vicente Huidobro

⁵ Tristan Tzara

⁶ Paul Eluard

There is always an edge. I hear this phrase in my head, repeating and repeating. Edges these, little deaths of past selves are as likely as the moments of pure life, those living happiness shards, sit arm in arm with the breaking. This is our pattern we build to break; we live and die, the wave rises and falls, breath rises and falls, it is circular, and the edge is never ending, it waits around every corner.

We forget this in the normal smog, we forget that chaos and change screams awake at each edge, in each gap. And the gaps are overflowing, the edges morphing us in change which waits around every corner, at every breath we can make a new choice. But it is in pulling these edges together pasting them next to the moments of light that we know ourselves, know what we have built.

"The present cannot be the past's death. It is the absence of any need for denial. From such openness, the future is born." (Berry & Di Leo – 12 Theses on Fiction's Present).

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Reader Report Reflection

I started this course believing I was not a writer. I knew that I loved to write, I knew that it was innate to how I perceived the world. I had written a novel previously, it was an outpouring, uncontrollable imagination spew.

I was often scared and doubted myself throughout writing it, but I took comfort in my reading. I picked up all the classics, modern and old, rewriting the words into notebooks alongside my own, retracing the sounds, the rhythms, the symbols and their little links, the pauses. I collected pieces rereading them with reverence, my fingers curling over the lines sunken into the page.

I didn't understand what I was doing, it felt natural to hide in the skirts of other writers peering behind the curtain to see how they built the illusion. And yet, even after finishing my novel I still didn't think I was a writer; it was a hobby, it was something extra to me, a backpack I could take off and on. I denied what was innate, and said it was not that important to me.

I applied for this Master's in Creative Writing (MACW)⁷ course because I wanted external validation on my first novel and an application was probably the only way, I was going to get someone to read it. It is sad and stunted that I needed this external validation to believe I could try, to believe that I could learn to control this compulsion, to believe that I could become a writer. In our first course contact week,⁸ lecturers and supervisors kept saying again again that we were already writers, that this is what we are. I was scared of this, that they would find out I was not really meant to be here.

Writing, taking those solitary thoughts that are too much for my skull and making them real, something tangible; this is how I move through my existence. I take pieces of myself and paste them to the page, otherwise the thoughts build up like snow around a car until you are suffocating in an icebox. And by removing this part of myself to just a hobby, a silly backpack that I can pick up and put down, was just me running away.

This MACW course gave me the tools to tap into what I am, that I have a why that I must write to and that I have an audience for this why. By sharing pieces of myself, I make them real again, something I can study, tracing their edges, their dark underbelly, the light hillocks. I sat with my fear for two years slowly, piece by piece, cracking it open. I learnt to love my voice and believe in it without needing external validation, without needing the gold star of acceptance, because I accept and love what I am trying to build with my writing.

I hoarded my writing, hiding it deep in memory sticks and notebooks, words covered in dust and lost in old space-cases. I shared some of it once, with a girl I was in love with. I could not help but write for her, chasing the number out of ten she would give me. I would change and perfect the poetry to her taste, changing style, tone, and plot to make the little number out of ten increase.

She left me one day - she stopped coming to our lunch spot in the middle of the music room pathway, I stopped sharing my writing, keeping it, once again, behind my walls. I was a solitary princess fighting the dragon alone because the prince forgot his damn sword. Being alone in my mind is daunting, it is an open page that sputters and then runs smoothly; there is no pattern, just the overflow. There is always a pause, after I read back a sentence, where I ask myself - did I really write this?

This dislocation from my writing is a survival instinct, to remove myself from my truth, sanitize it so that I do not have to stand behind my work.

⁷ MACW 2021 at Rhodes University

⁸ Full-time and part-time students gathered in Grahamstown to discuss the course, read together, share our application portfolio's and get feedback from our peers and lecturers and supervisors. This was before the Covid-19 pandemic, January 2020

MACW built a community around us specifically to enable critique of the work, to remove our preconceptions and the little lies we keep telling ourselves. I could no longer be the princess fighting the dragon because that is quite the lame metaphor and my fellow students and supervisors would tell me so. This process of sharing my work saw me sweating through my t-shirts and jeans, a sitting puddle congealing in stress and I wrote like it, I hid further and further away, wrapping my writing with adjective soup. It looked really pretty but was flighty, insubstantial, devoid of meaning. I heard a lot of silence in response because the packaging was enticing until it was not. I could keep my reader for a while but the lack of reveal, the abstract that did not build into something, left my readers lost as though they were holding glitter in their palms - where it sticks to them in a bizarre way; they cannot grasp it, they cannot toss it to someone else, it is just a niggler sitting there in its shine.

I tried to write for that score out of ten, counting all the negative comments, tallying them and writing to this, trying to make my reader love me. I wanted to possess the reader, know what they want before they do, and serve it up on a plate to get that sweet nobby badge. This did not work because when you write to satisfy others it becomes an unravelling thing held firm only in the external validation - it cannot sit and spew truth, rather it is just an empty puppet.

The course pushed us to work to deadlines to create pieces that were inspired by different styles, authors and themes. This made me try new structures as I leaned into my voice. Due to the rapid pace at which we had to submit the weekly assignments, I did not have the time to hide my voice in fear, I did not have the time to pander to my audience. Through the tired writing, I started to feel in my body what I liked, what I connected to. I started to feel a physical hole when I read my writing shrouded in an illusion that means nothing, it itched to read it aloud, my voice stuttering over the lines as I can hear the silence waiting for me. And I did this day in and day out, week in and week out, the same voice but shrouded in fear, I was banging my head against a wall, counting the negative comments rather than growing from the positive feedback my fellow students gave me. Our reading and feedback circle⁹ did slowly pull me out of my hiding place, making me feel safer to share my vulnerability. I started hearing that my imagination, the strange darkness, the gross visceral and lightness, worked well together. They picked out pieces and paragraphs where I shared myself more and wrote with penetrative effective emotion. They were drawn to the authenticity with which those passages were cultivated.

I started lounging in the gaps, that unknown chaos, writing from those parts I thought too disgusting, too revealing, tapping into my loss, using emotion to become a why. And when I read these pieces I suddenly did not care if my readers would be silent again or not. This is a badge of honor as I now find myself in a position where I am, daring the reader to figure out what is happening in my head as opposed to the other way around. To my surprise, there was less silence and more positive reception when I owned my space in this way.

MACW broadened my reading, exposed me to more experimental and strange writers, like Kathy Acker, Anna Kavan and Akwaeke Emezi. These are women who have written the female experience through abstract imagination, working and teasing with what is real and not, making them merge, playing with insanity, tearing apart troupes and deforming them into Frankenstein cuts. It is a splashing of soapboxes with women screaming as loud as they can. I found that I could also be strange; I could be abstract, I could play, there was no limit!

I found my voice when I stopped hiding my why and let it flow out of me. I let that subconscious gap, those unthinking connections into chaos, write. These gaps within myself, the unknowns that I have not explored, they

⁹ Each 2nd week we had to choose pieces that we found enticing to read aloud with our reading group (4 fellow students), this enabled us to understand what inspired each other and gave insight into our voice. And we meet every other week with our feedback group, where we provided feedback on our fellow students' creative pieces, it was an interesting structure because you could see how our chosen readings informed our creative pieces and it enables us to explore different styles through each other, we broadened our writing toolbox together.

are holes within my self-knowledge, it creates an edge I peer over, it's like staring into a black-hole wondering at the limit, asking to understand. These gaps are made from pure emotion, it is the unnamed parts of ourselves we are told not to look at, told they are weak or ugly or wrong.

I was called out;¹⁰ told I was hiding, and it was not until it was said out loud, did I recognize the blood on the wall from constantly banging my head against it. I was challenged to be simpler, to own what I was saying instead of hiding it. But it was the wildness of the abstract/fantastical writers like Amos Tutola that made me value my strange style; this mingling of the metaphorical and visceral description, that floats and then becomes jagged as it bursts into poetry.

I saw the effect of this slow repetitive training. Due to consistent practice, my writing muscle has gotten stronger. When we had our second and third contact week, my writing had become more solid, it simply is what it is. I had gotten better at making my imagination more accessible to the reader instead of leaving them floating in the abstract.

A common theme in my feedback was that my abstract style did not make sense. During our third contact week where we shared the half-way point of our thesis, often lecturers and students felt they could not see the full picture. As they read each chapter, they felt like they were missing something. And it is because I need to give my writing the space to grow into its meaning, I need to link the abstract pieces together - creating a mosaic that moves with a plot and exudes the why with each sentence. My style is not cohesive with the short story structure, I do not have that level of control yet, I need the space to build on my layers and grow the imagination to that why, and with my grandiose ideas on this project I needed to build a world weird enough to contain them.

I knew I had a good idea for the novella, but I had no idea how I was going to stabilise my voice given that natural knee-jerk reaction to hide. How I was going to grow the plot to the ending, was a difficult and constant worry for me as I had no real understanding of my why. It leaked out somehow, but I did not have a full grasp of it, it was just smoke.

Enter *Chwayita Ngamlana*, my supervisor. I knew I wanted to request Chwayita as my supervisor after her seminar, where I was exposed to her novel *If I Stay Right Here* - a collection of snapshots that play with the abstract yet balance it to create an intricate study of a relationship and the people in it. I further knew I wanted her as my supervisor after she laid into a piece, I was proud of in her Writing Sex seminar. She gave me constructive criticism that I responded to, I felt that the piece was improved by her suggestions and her delivery managed to worm its way through my stubborn head banging. Finally, she chased me for the edited version. I knew I needed someone who would follow-up, because that knee jerk reaction to hide would see me try to distance myself and fall back into my stubborn avoidant style.

Chwayita was my sounding board to each chapter, she became an insidious suggestion creator, dropping hints and making comments about what did not work in an offhand way that I would consider for days before trying it, actually revisiting my writing, and playing with it. This supervision brought me closer to my writing as I could recognize my voice and feel myself sitting there. I started having to tap into my vulnerability as Chwayita kept asking why, what is the purpose of this plot device? Why is the mother a valuable character and how does she move the story forward?

¹⁰ Masande Ntshanga and Nathan Trantraal (MACW lecturers) both called me out in Ntshanga's seminar, they believed I was hiding my true meaning, scared to let others see it, to stand behind my work in case I was given a low score out of ten

I kept finding my why leak out as we constructed each abstract layer, making it easier to jump into the next imagination flight. The supervision enabled me to share my writing process with someone, it made staring into the gap and falling over the edge easier, because Chwayita could relate and provide context to the feeling. This supervision never became a score out of ten, it became a safe place where we could both share of ourselves, get vulnerable and then through this, tap into our why, explore that black hole, find paths and words to make sense of it. It was only by being vulnerable with Chwayita, where I was able to face my walls, understand that knee jerk reaction to hide better. I was able to write from that place, because I trusted that she would not reduce the exchange to a score out of ten.

The draft thesis reader report¹¹ provided a crystallization of my why, the reader picked up on the major theme. This level of understanding was indicated through certain passages, one of which read: “...*monstrousness and futility of repressing the inevitable, of denying what is natural and what should bloom. In this, the Woman is not so much a character as a force – both reactive and innate, mutation and corruption in response to being denied.*”

What is strange is that I understood this in a half-baked dream way, in small leaks and drips. My writing is still fueled by the compulsion, it is a separation from my waking mind and even as Chwayita has helped me build a closer connection to my writing, it was only in finishing the novella, reading it back, and editing it that I could pick up on the hidden themes that the reader had debunked with greater clarity.

The reader felt like the style poured from the page in a ravaging storm leaving them spent at times, and while they were complimentary of my ability to build worlds and my style’s raw insistence, they felt I needed to work on balancing my descriptions and that a rework on the punctuation was vital.

The reader highlighted several aspects of theme that were written incompletely such as substance abuse and redundancy of the masculine, which although evocative are not deep enough to really land making them distractions. Furthermore, the reader identified my crutch in the plot immediately - I use popular tropes about a strange girl who is forced, in some way, to save the world and take revenge against those that treated her poorly.

This clarity and focus on the theme enabled me to edit my thesis into something simpler to understand and took me deeper into my voice. I started with the first layer which included reworking the punctuation - using Beckett as a reference and using a fine-toothed comb while speaking the punctuation aloud. The process was humbling because there were so many weird commas. They filled up the page, breaking my style’s natural rhythm. I then removed all those references to our own world and looked at the subtle themes, removing substance abuse but rewriting the redundancy of the male through the theme of the inevitability of a woman. It was those crutches that she was hurt when she was younger, different and now must save the world that were quite embedded in the story, in her relationship with her sister, in relationship with her why. I tried to rework it closer to the denial theme - the woman is hurt when her mother, her sister, and the people around her deny what she sees, and in this she bursts forth, forcing them to see her and no longer deny her existence.

The balance in adjectives was also needed in the movement between the concrete and greenery. I need to be more intentional about placing my milestones throughout the beginning chapters so as to grow the greenery and the meat bodies' denial of said greenery. The reader suggested I read *Dra* by Stacey Levine which is a simple recount of a strange world full of employment offices, administrators, anxious hurt employees and the strange characters that run this mechanical system, from the train conductors to lovers wandering the hallways. Levine

¹¹ My draft thesis was shared with a reader, who provided a review of the work and outlined areas for improvement

makes it close enough to our world that we can recognize it, but she slowly subverts away from it, delving deeper into the strange layer by layer and character by character. Levine writes with simplicity, like she is peeling off your skin inch by inch. It is methodical in its stripping of the protagonist into a smaller and smaller meek ball, which is pushed and shoved around the plot. Levine balances the strange with her simple language and her timed milestones that anchor the wandering movement, like the character of the nurse whose relationships with the protagonists are revealed as the protagonists encounter other characters who then inform the memories and desires of the nurse. The relationships in turn inform society, creating a world where an employee's only comfort is a one-sided relationship with her nurse.

Levine has this ability to keep the form simple, paragraphs that quickly set the scene, gravitating the reader into a position where they can understand, despite Levine moving the story through a labyrinth of different characters and situations. My thesis is still riddled with identifiers in the structure: using italics to identify the woman's voice, bold dialogue markers, lines to separate location and timeline, and administration reports in a different font. Levine's style feels like a gauntlet, it is a reminder that I have much work to do to control this compulsion.

This course gave me the tools to grow this control, has shown me how I can grow the very understanding of myself and the way I perceive the world by simplifying to that root, that why, my inevitably.

Reading List

1. **"Orbit"** by Noy Holland; *Spectacle of the Body*; Knopf; 1994
2. **"Milka Cow"** by Bessora King, Adèle, (ed.) *From Africa - New francophone stories*. Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 2004,
3. **"Second"** by Lidia Yuknavitch; *The Small backs of Children; Fiction Collective Two*; 2015
4. **"A Question of Power"** by Bessie Head; *Waveland Press*, 2017
5. **"Blind Panorama of New York"** by Garcia Lorca; *The American Poetry Review*; 2010
6. **"From a naked bone"** by Managaliso W. Busani; *Rhodes University*; 2016
7. **"The Metamorphosis"** by Franz Kafka; *Tribeca Books*; 2010
8. **"The Outing"** by Lydia Davis; *Wordpress*, 2013
9. **"Waiting for Godot"** by Samuel Beckett, *Saylor*, 2020
10. **"Lessness"** by Samuel Beckett, *Front Desk Apparatus*, 2020
11. **"Hamlet Machine"** by Heiner Mueller; *PAJ Publications*, 2001
12. **"The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"** by Ursula Le Guinn; *The Unreal & The Real; Clays*, 2020
13. **"Bad Brains"** by Kathe Koja; *Roadswell Editions*, 1992
14. **"Fever Dream"** by Samanta Schweblin; *Penguin Random House*; 2017
15. **"Semley's Necklace"** by Ursula le Guin; *The Unreal & The Real; Clays*, 2020
16. **"Solitude"** by Ursula le Guin; *The Unreal & The Real; Clays*, 2020
17. **"Small Change"** by Ursula le Guin; *The Unreal & The Real; Clays*, 2020
18. **"Things Fall Apart"** by Chinua Achebe; *Penguin Classics*; 2001
19. **"Near to the Wild Heart"** by Clarice Lispector; *Carcanet Press Limited*; 1990
20. **"Blood and Guts in High School"** by Kathy Acker; *Grove Press*; 1994
21. **"The Palm-wine Drinkard"** by Amos Tutola; *Grove Press*; 1993
22. **"Ice"** by Anna Kavan; *Peter Owen Publishers*; 2006
23. **"Freshwater"** by Akwaeke Emezi; *Grove Press*; 2018
24. **"Ghosts"** by Cesar Aira; *New Directions*; 2009
25. **"The Book of Chameleons"** by Jose Eduardo Agualusa; *Simon & Schuster*; 2008
26. **"If I Stay Right Here"** by Chwayita Ngamlana; *Jacana Media*; 2017
27. **"Dra"** by Stacey Levine; *Sun & Moon Press*; 2000

Masters in Creative Writing, Thesis Submission

Part B: Thesis

Pink Concrete

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

Rhodes University

by

Jill Curr

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Chapter 1

Pink concrete is mined here.

Meat bodies live to break their planet into smaller chunks, building large structure-cities.

Meat bodies eat dead meat bodies, using the leftover liquid to mould concrete higher. It gives the structures a pinkish tinge.

Meat bodies take Control in the mornings, this curbs their tendency for high flesh rates.

Pink concrete at my back around my throat, I see their fingers crawling out of the walls, nails red and sometimes I see other meat bodies touch them, like little nipples they gently fondle them as they pass by, like a breeze. Mother said they were just greeting the dead meat bodies respectfully. But I think Control likes it, likes touching the pink concrete.

*My feet shoved into pink socks
protected with plastic sandal straps,
- this morning?
yes, this morning
- feet dry
calm?
maybe,*

Roommate is smiling as she looks askew at my pink socks.

“That is not a respectful colour, think of the dead, their sacrifice?” They all talk like this, with a reverence for the dead they ate, can you hear the proper tone, the polite accent, fluty and light.

I just nod and keep wearing them, roommate smiles a bit wider her checks stretching too taut, they look paper crisp, a foot step away from shattering. I like it.

“Why are you licking your lips like that?”

I keep licking my lips, my eyes penetrating her.

“That is not very nice when I have asked you.”

I turn my back and she leaves. We eat dinner later, red sludge from a grey tin on our plastic plates. I like the silence, she smiles in-between bites stretching and stretching her flesh tighter. At 9pm we go to our bedrooms, metal doors closed.

I like it better here in the dark with my own, the meat bodies out there are moving concrete, their skin grows dusty - with each breath closer to the meat can.

I change my socks before bed

green

I touch my green in the dark bedroom, it curls in long vines, wrapping their feathery suckers against my thighs and arms in green rope, they squeeze at me, leaving blushing red streaks. I wrap them

tighter, they know their mother, snuggling at me, licking at the sweat congealing beneath my arms. Their green mouths open and close like fish, sipping at my sweat hungrily. My green wants more, pink concrete makes them thirsty.

I made him, my lover

my ocean

for my children.

I built him from my sweat, from myself.

The wet puddle grows in my dark bedroom, a river rushing shallow over black pebbles holds my feet, dragging me from my bedroom and out the apartment, gushing a waterfall over the railing 100 floors down, depths feel light on my cheek sunlight shards pierce and wipe a smile across my face, blue up and down my skin my body taken deeper to dark forests of green kelp, he wraps around my legs, emerald and black, saltwater leaking into my mouth, staining my tongue with edge deeper, blue black blue.

I made him, my lover

my ocean

my green children suck and suck on my ocean, the water swirling them in a frenzy, their vines curling and playing in the waves, pink concrete forgotten for a moment.

The young woman, her fingers clutch white around metal bars with her neck held out over the edge, it's a long thin neck, freckled and pale the right angles distort it. She stands at the apartment railing 100 floors down, her hair falling to her waist red and flickering damp in the fluorescent lights. Pinkish walls at her back. She is alone, in green and blue, a slow shudder runs up and down her spine replaying its curl and taut linkage against the rails, her slim body waving against the height like a flag.

A heavysset man, wearing a guard's uniform of navy blue black overalls and black boots with a tight leather belt walks the apartment block. 133 floors, 40 squared apartments per floor. It is density sitting in concrete and steel finishings. Guard-man 1 has the baton at his hips, it swings in loose figure eights as he walks counting out polished steps. It's 3:00 am, Guard-man 1 is smaller with sleep and half-awake silence. There are checkpoints, a metal keypad bolted into walls at each fire-escape. Guard-man 1 inputs a code, the alarm stirs, acknowledges and rings a low beep. Pinkish walls are in order but still sometimes sleeping bodies stir and fall.

The woman gyrates against the bars. Her hair flowing - suspended in her ocean, green vines wrapping around her like tentacles, they grow thicker as ocean feeds them. The woman is a mass of writhing blue and green – a waterfall never breaking held in pause over the 100 floor drop. Sunlight on her cheek in spite of the night sky. Guard-man 1's feet clatter down the fire escape to the women's floor. His hand pushes against the heavy door. The wind wants to push him back. His black boots dig into the concrete and he pushes forward. The door big heavy pink wavers open. His eyes lift seeing the woman. Her body held over the edge floating over the drop as if in water. Guard-man 1 runs, his boots flat and loud on the corridor, arms outstretched reaching, gravity bending out the way.

But the woman hears his boots, her eyes turn to his – green.

My green unreal like vines curl their fingers out my eyes and suction onto the guard-man's face, I suck and suck, pulling him in close to the edge, my green cliff, look here pear over, see my lover, this blue ocean I made for my green babies, feel my nipples at your teeth, my vines tight at Guard-man 1's nerves, peeling out the Control, squashing the nerve sized robots in my tiny roots.

A smile widens the women's teeth into sparkles, her body small compact and thin, a short straight-line flings itself back in front of her metal apartment door. The ocean crumples into unreal. Her line disappears into the apartment. The guard cries out his body reaching for her, and curling around air.

Guard-man 1 shakes his head, what had he seen, it was impossible. He knocks quietly on the door the woman dressed in green vines and trailing an ocean and went into. His breath pulling in and out faster. He presses his ear to the door. Knocks louder. Nothing. He shakes his head again. Looks at his watch, 3:00 am and then with water logged movements he backtracks. His Control regaining balance. Guard-man 1 enters the code at the checkpoint.

But he looks at his boots. They are wet, it doesn't look like the leftover pinkish grey sludge he usually washes them with.

Roommate: "What is that knocking? Are you okay?"

Woman: "Yes, it's all okay, you were just dreaming."

Roommate: "Why are your socks wet?"

Woman: "They are not, it's just a dream go back to bed."

Roommate: "But I heard knocking and your socks are wet."

Woman: "You didn't hear anything, it's just you imagination."

Roommate: "I thought you said it was a dream?"

The woman smiles at her roommate, her teeth sparkle. The roommate looks down, she is scared of that smile and the green light that sneaks out from under the woman's bedroom door.

The next morning the roommate wakes up and finds green socks drying in the living room. She shivers.

Chapter 2 Salted Prayers

The woman scrubs plastic dishes in a single metal sink, her roommate adds another meat encrusted dish to the weekend pile. The woman's fingers are slightly pink, she moves the steel brush violently against the plastic, spitting hard, in thick gobs on the crusted fatty bits to dislodge them.

The roommate's fingers are dusted white with chalk.

The roommate teaches during the day, white chalk on a pink board and naps on their plastic couch in the afternoon. She smells, chalk rising from her body like ash, it wafts into their apartment seeps into the corners. Mixes with meat.

The woman scrapes the encrusted dish, she gags slightly the smell itching, curling down her gullet. The roommate sleeps, her shirt stained with sweat, children are unruly at that age, boys will be boys. The roommate is always smiling, always. Meat bodies like it when the female meat bodies smile. The roommate sleeps, on and on, a sunset passing over their small balcony lighting up the city in pinks below.

The woman packs away plastic dishes and vacuums the plastic carpets. She tries to ignore the meat stains collecting in the corners because only last month she was scrubbing at them and her knuckles are still raw. The fat sinks low into the floors, pink concrete is parched.

The woman's movement is forced on her face, she does not smile, her red hair swings loose from a pink hair tie, she swats it away in irritation, her face a grimace, muttering under her breath. She walks on quiet tiptoes because waking her roommate is its own uncomfortable ending.

My roommate likes to listen when those satellites blare out the upgrade, touching her lips in trembling expectation. It grates at my skin, feels like a fly buzzing at my throat, I want to scratch and scratch when she starts to move her mouth into that wide smile. Her smile comes before the satellites even utter the static expectation. Control (those nerve sized mite-robots) cumulate just under her gums and can't wait to hear the upgrades filter through atmosphere, they want to suntan in it, that's why her pink gums show when she smiles, they want all the upgrade sun they can get. Her teeth whitened every day in upgrade are starting to point.

I can't help myself, sometimes I brush against my roommate, skim my fingertips at the nap of her neck, she balks rigid in fear every time, her smile almost slips. Control doesn't like touch.

*touch, I think the word
and I have salt at my mouth
seashell at my ear
shudder
in his grasp
this piece of me cradling my body*

*my legs buckle out from under me, my hand reaching to close my bedroom door, it drops too quickly,
my door swinging open*

He smiles breaking open a beach at my feet, ashy sand dusts across my belly fingers sticky with sun cream, rainbow umbrellas catch at the plum light, swaying my body drunk with light kisses. Curling closer into a green towel, my fingers brown, the white scars on my palms stark and there is a smile close by as he flickers his wide blue teeth at me, sweet fruit tearing as I let him eat my body, pulling

me apart, planting his ocean deep, a seed in each of my eyes. My plum belly smiles, I stroke my breasts as he lays his head on my thighs, washing over me in slow rhythms, blue waves crashing in white lips, the dark green peeling out in smiling kelp, he holds me in sweet shallows.

He my ocean, my lover knows each inch of my flesh, I created him from my sweat, he is me. And I writhe as he touches me just right, giving water to my flesh, making me bloated with green just waiting to escape.

The roommate wakes and follows her shadow off the plastic couch to her bedroom, the metal door clatters behind her. Closes tight shut.

The woman lies on her bedroom floor, the room dark velvety, midnight water twirling her in an embrace, green vines playing in her shallow blue pools.

Evening gets heavier, stars swings across the smog filled sky unnoticed, peering down on the pinkish structures. The woman lies steady as her room sways in deep currents, eyes a blank open, her freckled face a starry map, a sharp chin swallows her smile, she is a waif, all long hair, elbows and straight lines.

Evening's solid pressure continues until the upgrade begins. Satellites are placed at the tips and tops of each and every pink structure, they blare out the upgrade codes, it's a tin sound, crunching through the air, tight and stomach churning. Satellites speak and meat body faces turn, smiling as is the practice. Upgrades are a time for wide open teeth.

Sound waves fall across the woman's face, upgrade codes trying to tie her down, Control's fine humming tune, it sings from plastic satellites. Aligning with the most recent updates, nerve sized mite-robots take their orders and squirm deeper into the blood, piercing nerve endings, brain matter. These nerve sized mite-robots pound out instructions, the correct behaviour. Meat bodies smile and are thankful for Control.

The roommate completes the update in her bedroom every morning. The steel door locked and sound-proofed, she swallows a small metal pill before the tin sound starts (a mite-sized robot replenishment) and as the satellites wail she screams, opening her mouth wide feeling her gums fizz. She counts her tears and begins her morning routine, this lump she must push to get her female meat body moving and productive.

The roommate, washes her body, wraps her hair in a blow-dry and marks her eyelids with the white circles customary of teachers, it's a reminder that teachers are always watching. She applies red lipstick and injects her lips larger. She locks her genitals and breasts in metal undergarments and layers over it with a white dress and a matching cardigan.

She practices her smile in the mirror, counting the seconds and minutes to train her cheek muscles for an expression sticky with calm.

The roommate unlocks her bedroom door walks through to the living room and finds the woman, lying on the floor of her bedroom but the roommate blinks and

She sees.

The woman floating in bed of blue water, sleeping peacefully. Control's fine needles stutter, the small robotic minuscules, do not know what water is, this is a concrete planet, what the roommate sees is

not real. Control says so. But there the woman lies in the arms of her ocean lover, naked on her bedroom floor.

The roommate whispers the woman's name, nothing. The roommate raises her voice, nothing. Her hand outstretches and squirming she breaks the boundaries Control. The roommate touches the woman, trying to shake her awake. The roommate isn't smiling. The woman stirs, uncurling her green gaze.

"Didn't you hear the upgrade!"

"No."

"Well you must do two upgrade sessions to make up for this." She motions to the woman who lies naked on the pinkish floor. "This is not done. I think we should also check on your Control concentration."

"Okay."

The roommate puts green socks in the cupboard and hangs up the woman's wet plastic sheets. But sometimes she blinks, Control loosens and she is hanging an emerald dress of kelp up in the sunlight. She shakes her head. Control regains balance, fixing her sight, to see only plastic sheets.

Chapter 3 Blue Feathers

*Sisters, birds with deformed wings bone curling against bone, Control screams, whispering in our eyes
"Don't touch."*

*Sisters, their skin pink and prickled with half grown feathers, close and needed together and bone
against bone they were together, hearing the other breathe, eating and watching from the nest
together*

always together

we liked it I held her, she held me and we knew each other

was it apart

was it flight

we were together, and I knew that she saw me, she saw green

*we smell wet rain and taste damp soil on Mother's claws, moss clinging to our branch, mouths open in
unison.*

Sister: "Hi, can you hear me?"

Woman: "Yes yes yes! I can hear you, it's been so long, oh I can hear you... okay good. How are you?"

Sister: "I am good the kids are good and we are doing just fine, nothing to complain about. How about you?"

Woman: "Yes all the same, I really miss you and sometimes only sometimes I get lonely. Yes, I can hear you... Can you hear me? Okay. Did you hear what I said?"

Sister: "... Just breathe and take your Control."

Woman: "Well at least it's snowing, remember, remember how we would dance in the snow, tasting it at our faces like blue feathers, we would lick at it, bite at our frozen fingers, trace its fluttering arcs across the sky, we made patterns upon patterns circling around each other with long straight sticks, marking the icicles around our feet, watching the sunset paint a pink kaleidoscope across our boots. Do you remember?"

Sister: "I remember you scared Mother and me with your stories. Just take your Control."

Woman: "You don't talk to me like you used too."

Sister: "I know."

Woman: "Can we apply for quota visit, I just need to see you."

Sister: "Bill says it's too soon and he doesn't want to ask for too many favours, it causes trouble."

Woman: "Bill always says that, and remember he said separation was a good idea, remember when we were five, they said we were too close, they said that and then Mother had to make a plan. Don't you remember how they mocked under our breath, "Those Lovers" I think it's because I would hold your hand when you got scared and you used to get scared a lot. That was mean, they were mean, they kept saying it, told Mom that she had freak children always pointing at our lips "Look they kissing!" And once a boy whispered under his breath when I passed "Cunt."

Sister: “And that all stopped when we were separated, so it was a good idea. Bill lives here too, he is my husband and I don’t want my past to stick to him, we are different people, we are not the same person. I need you with your feet on the ground, this is hard here, I am tired and... just say you understand?”

Woman: “But do you remember that?”

Sister: “Yes, I remember how you got bullied, but that is in the past you need to be careful; you are living in a different place, I can’t take care of you. I need you to be strong, I am so tired.”

Woman: “Well maybe I will soon be able to take care of all of us.”

Sister: “What do you mean?”

Woman: “I mean one day I will take care of you and the girls take them to the beach. Do remember that.”

Sister: “No.”

Woman: “There is 5 more minutes, please just listen.”

Sister: “You know I don’t like it.”

Woman: “But once you did?”

Sister: “Once.”

Woman: “Just listen, please.”

Sister: “Okay.”

*there is a hole near the ocean’s toes
we made it
and clear water breathes through its bottom
filling up with translucent light
playing in sand tendrils
as our little fingers morph
cupping and smearing the damp sand
seeing it squeeze between our fists
out
our mother showed us
we built sandcastles
with turrets that pondered blue sky
and dripping sand like caramel as we twirled our fingers
through the hole near the ocean’s toes*

The Girls: “What’s the ocean Mama?”

Sister: “Nothing. It’s just her imagination, don’t listen.”

Woman: “It’s okay I can remember more, let me talk to them?”

Sister: “Okay girls it’s time for Bed! Just take them Bill. I told you I didn’t want them around here for this. I told you to keep them away. Take them.”

Woman: “Please I can help them.”

Sister: “No. Stop it. You know this scares me, it scares everyone. You know I don’t like it when you make it real. I said I don’t like it!”

Woman: “But its me.”

Sister: “Just fucking quit it. Don’t you think I might need you? Can’t you just help?”

Woman: “I am helping.”

Sister: “No, you are just fucking your own imagination.”

The woman puts the phone down, the line is already dead.

She stares out the window. The woman phones her sister every day at 1:00 pm, they have 15 minutes to talk per the family quota. She could have longer phone calls if she didn’t phone every day. She stares at the pink block buildings, her skin crawls.

I will make them all see me, they will know my green and she won’t think it’s a bad anything anymore when they can all see me. She will think it’s normal.

Chapter 4 Fire Lighter's Tongue

The woman's pinkish grey building opens onto the main road, there are cars and trucks passing at 80km speed barrels. The trucks are like small buildings on wheels that peer into first story windows, white rubber squeaks across concrete road, it sounds like skin tearing, but the roads are immaculate not a drop of red, accidents don't happen under Control.

Guard-men step into the road to help the apartment residents cross the road. One holds out their hand in front of your chest, while another guard-man takes his long and large pole, with a stop sign that is big enough to blare, in even the face of building trucks, and waves it manically, sweat instantly at his brow, the dark uniform looks stretched as his body flings itself into momentum. Red sign flies like a flag, small against the pinkish structures but somehow the driver's robotically engineered eye recognizes that colour that bright red shattering and plunges his mechanically enlarged foot onto the plate sized brake pedal. The building stops.

And only now, is the woman allowed to walk across the street to the local shop. These local shops are different; they are cheaper and have the old can meals, metal slightly tea coloured. The woman picks up one spicy flavour and four regular flavours. There are no plastic meals, and certainly no fashionable meals, the ones packaged in soft cured steel lace. The woman shuffles through to find a yellow lighter. The owner of the shop looks at her funny when she puts the yellow lighter on the concrete counter, his eyes peer at her.

"ID please."

The woman takes out her small plastic wallet, it shines with black glitter and she peels it open to hold out a metal card, her emblazoned picture smiles up at the clerk's frown. Certified Fire Handler shouts out in white bold official letters but it's her presently unsmiling face that has him worried.

"You don't look like your picture."

The woman smiles and lifts her eyes to meet his. Her eyes are green crumbling into blue, a depth lurks there, a darkness that inches out its small fingers crawling toward the viewer, sucking their attention deeper. He softens, a putty face curdling in her heat. The owner takes her card and swipes it across the counter, her bank balance splashes across the large screen behind the clerk and she does the appropriately shame filled walk, slightly bent head and apologetic smile of a person earning below 5 carrots. Meat bodies earn at least 5 carrots at an allocated workplace, anything below and you are a outskirts meat body, working for yourself.

The woman dips out of the fluorescent lights and grips the plastic lighter, its yellow looks stark against her pale fingers, long thin scars trace the wrinkles at her palms, fine white lines, careful tattoos of harm. She holds the yellow lighter tight, the metal head, digging into her thumbprint.

The woman walks along the tin path that sidles the concrete road, it is fully enclosed with a fine diamond-metal netting, a necessary strength as car-buildings blare past. The cage shakes and her feet feel slower against the concrete, the soles of her plastic shoes grip a little too tightly, melting in the hot morning sun, the air feels tangy. Metal steaming in a pot as meat bodies curl around their blessed structures. The pinkish structures carve high overhead, waving in the wind, there are millions of them, pink concrete grows fast and strong here. The meat bodies are good at building.

The woman doesn't touch anything keeping her arms crossed at her chest, she wears no steel bra, and her cunt wags under the clothing, smiling in unconstricted breath, she wears a black plastic top, wide

leg pants and pink socks. Sweat pools at her armpits and drips slowly down her sides, washing over her breasts, kissing her hips in drips and collecting in small lakes at the crevices in her crossed arms.

Her ass licks at the plastic pants, a brazen stickiness. Meat bodies pass by and look at her ass with disapproval. They all hold matching plastic umbrellas, all of them, tidy geometric sun shields, whose automatic fans moves a fine concrete powder across their owner's flesh, keeping the sweat at bay.

And layering the cement thicker! Walking statues.

The woman doesn't smile as meat bodies pass her, they all smile back, their white teeth gleaming under red lipstick, it looks like a wound carved from their cheeks.

She walks out to the edge of the city and the morning heat gives way to the late afternoon cold, her hair scatters in the rising wind, long copper strands escaping in vertical drifts, hanging like a breathing helmet.

The tin pedestrian road opens out to a path that overlooks the garbage heap, a large white sign hangs in the grey smog. Disposal Permitted Here.

*disused metal heap
rusting in grey shrapnel gleaming
glass scattering the floor like pebbles
and plastic
clean and coated in human slime
sweat
faeces
urine*

The woman slips between the railings to sit with her legs over the edge. The dump opens out before her, a grey mass stirring in collapse.

Evening cold brings the sky closer, adding a damp taste to the metal tang. The woman fits bulbous soundquiets to her head. She has painted these bulky soundquiets bright pink, like candy floss with extra glitter. The woman hums soft and low, it repeats as she closes her eyes again and again. Her sight hyperventilating with expectation, her green, see how it comes. She holds onto the railing with one hand, salt at her mouth her head fizzing in green.

an itch grows at my cunt,

*it's him
- it's me
blue fingers at my pussy's lip
his sliver tongue
- my sliver tongue
I am tied
again and
again,
blue fingers at my cunt's lip
pleading for more green,
insistent
they will see*

*green bubbles over the real
like hot water boiling
concrete dissolves
as he pleads for more
they need to see me*

The woman's neck cracks forward, it sounds like a shotgun as she fastens her eyes down to the dump, her arms hang limp, fingers reaching through the railing, her body the remnants of a storm, as her legs widen.

*the water is shallow with low-tide and still
kelp is thick in long strands
lying brazen just below the water's lip
their sliver mouths, close to surface
flat things
preening up at my skin*

He, my ocean lover burns salt at my lips, pleading for green, green everywhere to hug close to his blue water. I can't, I whisper, it would take all my flesh. His waves crash over me in argument's sweet pain, small salt holes burn through my plastic clothing leaving a lace like brand at my skin, his expectation, my expectation a command as his blue tongue, my blue tongue kisses at my pussy's lip. "See how easy it is." As he patterns my flesh.

The woman sits at the dump's edge too long, the evening cold solidifies and the metal satellite clangs out the upgrade, her plastic clothing is wet and degrading.

An outskirt meat body underbelly starts to grow in the dump, it's a sinister movement, quiet feet, slowed breath, meat bodies finding value's suggestion amongst discards. One outskirt meat body sees the woman, his body and clothes washed white with ash, his fingers red around the nail bed, he cuts his hands often on the rusting metal.

He sees the woman sitting at the railing, her limp body slithers through, landing amongst the glass, her hands pull her hair away from her face. The woman's eyes see him – green spiders crawling closer – he shudders, he has heard stories about a green eyed thing that roams around, they say it makes people mad, people see things after, after she comes near. Luckily for him the grey smog soon eats her. The outskirt meat body moves in the opposite direction.

The woman walks through the dark solid evening and starts to flick her lighter, initiating a long flame, it projects outward like a tongue, she walks and walks across the dump, lighting any plastic she can find, watching it burn in sparks.

I smell roses, their bright red lips perfume outwards, I watch them bloom, catch their smoke deaths, collect their petals red, sparkling. I breath them in, they scorch my cheeks, thorns pricking my flesh open, I like the cuts, I hold the roses closer, more and more they pile up in my arms, scratching and kissing.

His hands wring around my neck, in cool blue. "You love it, see how you bloom."

"See how I burn." His hands at my face. My hands at my face.

“We will burn together. We are one.” He rubs (my hands rub) salt deeper into my skin, green fizzes out he rubs harder, scraping and scraping, green fizz oozes in droplets down my arms, in rivers down my arms, it collects in pools at my feet like blood, sticky.

The woman’s footsteps are submerged in plastic smoke, her feet drip in green, it marks the dump with tiny grass beads, green reflects off the burning plastic. Her pink glitter soundquiets glisten in the smog, casting pink reflections as she teeters out from the dump’s depths. This is her temple, where she feels at home, it’s because of the slips in real. The woman can easily grow green here, unreal comes through closer at the discards, at the edges.

Morninglight leads the woman out the dump and back onto the tin road, she walks with her arms crossed, her black plastic pants revealing pale freckled skin, her pussy cold in the draft, she looks half extinguished.

The woman crosses the concrete road illegally; a camera takes a picture of her, it comes out a blurry green smudge.

And walking towards her apartment door, she sees her roommate (redlipsticked and full undergarment armoured) locking the door.

“Out on plastic duty again.”

“Yes.”

“Well that’s good and all, but remember you weren’t back in time for the upgrade, did you listen to it?”

“Yes.”

“And you took your Control?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I got permission to increase your intake, here are take two Control pills. Here. Take them!”

The roommate places two metal pills in the woman’s hand. The woman’s white scars smile up at the roommate, the roommate avoids looking at them.

“Okay.”

The woman takes the pill. The roommate smiles and leaves for her allocated workplace.

The woman spits the pill out into her hand and closes the apartment door behind her.

Chapter 5 Scrap Steel Structures and Bathrooms

Come closer, look here, see what I grew, isn't it pretty. I hold up a red rose to my sister's small face, she looks at me strangely. "I can't see anything."

"You saw it yesterday, just look closer, ignore your Control. I made it for you."

"I said I can't see anything, and we are not allowed to ignore our Control."

"We always ignore Control, who said you have to stop."

"My teacher said Control is the only thing keeping us from being bad. I don't want to be bad. You need to stop too."

"But this is me."

My sister walks away and I drop the red rose.

The woman grew up in this neighbourhood, she knows the garbage dump. She loved climbing through it with her sister. They would build their own structures from the metal scraps, tying twine around deformed steel, piling things higher and higher, waiting for them to fall.

The woman and her sister played a game, built steel structures, built them with innate flaws, timing their collapses, the winner built the highest structure that fell the quickest. Their hands bled as they built skyscrapers, from old plastic chairs, car engines, tin roofs, tangling it all with loops and loops of wire. Their small voices counted in seconds as their feet hit back down after clambering to put the final tippy toppy piece on. Counted the seconds till it all came crashing down, sometimes when a structure wouldn't fall their small fists would beat it senseless until it crumpled in on itself. The woman and her sister played in the dump again and again, building to break, shining metal falling in destruction symphonies. The woman often won, having to console her sister as she lost yet again, the woman tried to touch her sister, comfort her, she was always slapped away with quick death stares.

"It doesn't matter, it's silly anyways."

They still played everyday though.

The woman, as a young girl was small, but her arms, stomach and legs had carved muscles etched on them, she was a sturdy thing, healthy. Her sister was taller but she stooped, her head was large and sickly looking, her bones screaming out against the skin. The sister struggled to read, struggled to count and got scared easily, the woman (as a young girl) would sit next to her sister and count out the numbers, count out the letters till her sister understood.

The sister understood other things better, understood the outside better, she walked with more concrete, smiled prettily everywhere she went.

Meat bodies were once social creatures, but Control changed this. The woman's mother would remind them as she wiped her daughters clean. "No one touches your flesh. You cannot touch another meat body. It is impolite and we are polite, aren't we?"

In the cold grey bathroom, the mother unlocks her daughter's metal undergarments, has them shit and pee through the bathroom hole. And cleans their bodies with her flat wide palms, spit and a fine grey powder. Mother, wears tight plastic gloves, they strain against her sharp nails, spit gobs onto her palms and she smears them with concrete baby powder, over and in-between our genitals, our small flat nipples.

"Yes, we are clean, polite meat bodies."

Mother liked it when concrete was on us thick, she narrowed her eyes when she saw us sweat, giving us extra concrete to apply.

Mother cries a lot.

sitting at the polished metal dining table, furiously deleting warnings from her screen. It beeps each time I am reported on. I like trying to hold their hands, meat bodies swing their hands from their arms with nothing to do as they walk, I want to help them. I want to give them some green, tag them for the future. I sing sometimes, and point at the small leaves blooming from my nose. Meat bodies report me to their correction facilities, again and again. Mother tells me to stop, tells me to behave, but this is me. I am green, why won't they see?

There are a lot of reports, Mother scolds me and my sister wails in the corner that I am giving her a bad reputation, don't I understand that, we are linked she yells when I smile in her face. But I like it, can't you see it, all this green, look it fizzles out of me. I can't stop it, it is me. My sister looks frightened and Mother pulls me away telling my sister not to touch me.

I made my sister sit outside each evening in the cold to play chess. I had made our own board and painted it pink and black, with extra glitter. Other meat bodies would spit on it when they passed by saying something about having respect for the dead, my sister's ears would burn red and she would pull her hood closed around her.

Teachers came to visit with their friends these white suited men with dark blue circles painted around their lips. They would sit in front of my sister and I, counting the words we speak, the breaths we would take. They made us draw pictures on white plastic with red crayons. I smiled, because they liked it.

White suited men sent Mother a report after numerous visits, they had cross-referenced their collected data samples with historical data spanning a 100 years to predict that the woman must be removed from her family. She was an anomaly that needed careful scrutiny and a special kind of support.

Green Family Division, Report Extract 05: The girl meat-body is robust and well-developed physically, but her mind is concerning, she will be placed in a local correctional school. We recommend increased Control doses and limited visits with her mother and sister to ensure she can no longer affect them."

Mother stopped crying, her face dark, eyes slitted. But the white suited men had faces that smiled wide with frank concern and their final words were loud enough for me to hear. "Don't worry the choice is ours, she needs special care."

Chapter 6 White Scars

"We don't want to play with you."

"You can't play with us."

Teacher: "I am not sure why, but they don't seem to like your little red-head. They think she is odd. She holds bits of plastic to her head and rustles her arms around, she says she is a tree."

Mother: "What steps are you taking to rectify this?"

Teacher: "We are administering three Control intakes a day now."

Mother: "How long had you had her on the increased dose?"

Teacher: "6 months."

Mother: "And it is not working, so you are phoning me?"

Teacher: "We were just wondering if there is any clarity you can give."

Mother would knock on my door after I was finished playing. My legs in the air and my small hand at my little flower pussy circling and circling. I would coax with spit and friction the green out, it grows from my little flower, spiraling and spewing out in moss and vine. Mother would collect the green samples off my bedroom floor and grow them in jars around our house. She said they were my babies, that she would take care of them. My sister was scared of them cause they would try to hold her hand or touch her face.

Mother: "I have not been allowed to see my child for 3 years, what clarity can I give?"

Teacher: "That is an emotional response."

Mother: "Fuck off."

Teacher: "That has been recorded and a report will be filed with the correction facility."

I would peer over their shoulders, whispering little orchids, daisies, ferns and lilies into their ears, these meat body children. They became my little listeners, their Control stuttering as my green grew in their ear canal. Little chubby hands would scratch at their ears, trying to dislodge the green.

The meat body children who escaped my green would ignore my little listeners, pushing them down, calling them names, smearing their piss and shit along their faces. Control punishes abnormal behavior.

Meat body children would shriek as I came close running their little legs off, pushing other meat body children in the way. I was surrounded in screams.

Some little listeners could hide it, I would plant my seed into their ears in dark playground corners where no one else could see, their ears prick up for a second as my green whispers in. But these little hiding listeners didn't scratch, they wouldn't stare at the grass I had growing in their armpits, wouldn't

stare into space mouthing green under their breath. These little hiding listeners kept their secret well, beating my little listeners more than the others in case a finger was every pointed at the green behind their ears. But I could tell, their eyes were out of Control.

Wet earth. I taste it at my swollen mouth, a meat body child elbowed me down when my mouth reached for his ear. The wet mud hits my chest, wet dark sodden damp, my mouth filled with salvia. My hands curl down into fists, the mud gives way in a sweet squelch, I squeeze the damp brown soft. Green grass pokes their heads up, tickling my eyeballs.

Woman: *“Look can you see?” “Can you see this?”*

I pulled the closest boys’ hand to my chest, put his hand against my small new breasts.

Woman: *“It’s wet! Can you feel that?”*

His hand touches my t-shirt, it comes away with mud, but he looks confused because the Control pill he ingests disintegrates in his intestines releasing an army of nerve sized mite-robots which swim through his blood system. Control knows only concrete, the pink tinged crusty, baked stone concrete. Concrete does not slosh and slush, does not smear and squeeze.

My feet slosh in the mud, spraying their faces, the crowd doesn’t flinch, they stare at me. I laugh and dance with my eyes blazing green. The mud sprays in a mist, my feet pound into the earth as I jump and jump. My knees pounce higher and higher. I mud dance, mud splashing them with dark wet brown, the droplets hang off their eyelashes. They stare, their faces still not smiling.

How can they not dance? I lay on the ground, belly first and yell loud:

“Can’t you see this? Feel it? It’s beautiful? Feel it!”

The teachers with their white eyes, find the circle, push through and say something strange: “Get under Control young lady!”

Aren’t we always under Control?

I can’t phone my sister again, already made my quota call in the morning. My bedroom door is closed, I can hear my roommate unlocking her metal undergarments, they clang when they hit the concrete floor. My green babies are growing, I play with their flesh before bed cooing at them in my mother’s voice. Their green flesh curls and licks at my fingers, they know who their Mother is, they know who made them.

Curfew has passed it’s the dark comforting time. My palm itches.

It’s the white scar that started it all.

I take a razor from my bedside drawer, my thumb grazes it. I feel better and worse. I put the razor to my left palm, I count the extra lines; the scar tissue rings. I am a tree cut in half, I cut myself, I need to spoon my sap out, let it grow, let it eat at the concrete.

I reach the white scar that started it all.

I was crying in the corner on my first day of school, pinkish-grey at my back, my knees had buckled. My sister whispered over the fence, they separate grades by force, the meat body children were watching her, but she kept leaning over the fence.

And asked me "Are you okay?"

*I nodded and got up. I reached for her, I wanted to put my hand to my sister's face to thank her. But the meat body children were watching, she pushed me back, away
and
falling
my palm scaped against the metal railing
I held on too long
My sister was always the strong one.*

Green Family, Report Extract 006:

- Both youngest and oldest girls remain alive with no suicide attempts.
- Oldest is growing into her Control, despite her Mother's influence
- Youngest struggles to accept Control and has shown signs of hallucination and heightened emotional responses

Request for a Necessity Visit lodged by the Mother: Denied

Chapter 7 Touch

The woman stares out the hard-plastic window, a small car drives past her apartment. A white hat wearing man sits in the plastic passenger seat. He sees her and quickly takes the white hat off his head, putting it over his face.

The window frames the woman, she is naked without her metal undergarments.

The white hat wearing man saw her. He hadn't seen a cunt so hairy, angry and red, it leeches against the window, sucked at it, a mouth gaping down at him.

I fish, oh how the fishies swim past, they try not to look but my pussy, these hard nipples. How can they not? Their penises are wrapped in plastic, sitting limp and snug in their sausage casings. Control gives male meat bodies limp dick. I catch these curious fishies on the road, I catch them with my pussy. I feel their Control slip, the tightening in their belts as they cover their faces, I make them see me.

He likes it when I unwrap my meat, he licks my red raw, salt burned skin. His tongue tracing me, salt licking down my thighs. He counts my freckles, pasting shell fragments over my eyes, his fingers trace their currents over my stomach, parting my legs in blue floods. We eat at each other, tearing juices into more, green flesh blooming as water clings to me.

His touch is all over me, a sticky resin, he holds me down, wrapping kelp at my ankles and wrists. He likes to whisper that I am his. My pussy full, wet with green it grows in my belly as my ocean swings through me, I am thick and pregnant, green blooms in my womb and as we lap at each other we make more, we make many, green flesh breathes out from my red raw cunt, these, my babies plop out. We fuck again and again, till my room is full, my babies, green flesh, growing bigger fatter in glass jars.

My sister held me once. We were trying to sleep, tomorrow we would be separated. Mother said they were going to leave me. I cried, they watched me.

My sister held me that night, climbed into my bed and put her chest against me back. She didn't put arm around my shoulder that stayed at her side cemented down.

The grey concrete I remember when they layed it, like an egg they layed it into my mother's words, they layed into her pussy, I was born choking, concrete down my throat, between my thighs filling my belly button.

I cried, my back shook, my sister got scared, she went back to her bed.

Before they left Mother said I would be fine, she would come back and teach me how to grow my family, remember our green plants she said, I will come back and teach you how to make them big and strong. She held her hand to my cheek.

The roommate enters the apartment, the windows have been cleaned. She purses her red large lips and knocks on the woman's steel bedroom door. She tries to open it.

Woman: “Don’t!”

The roommate pauses, her hand touching the door, it’s now slightly ajar. Green wafts out the bedroom like dense smoke evaporating in the kitchen’s florescent light. But the roommate stares at it, she hears the woman’s warning again and again.

“Don’t!”

The roommate’s hand feels stuck, her red mouth a large smile but her eyes water, she can’t blink. She looks like a tumbling over L held up by her shock, her large breasts swing below her. The momentum dislodges her metal name tag, the pin sliding out of the white plastic, blunt force trauma, metal hits concrete and the roommate snaps up.

The woman holds the nametag, she is smiling as she offers the small metal piece back to the roommate.

Roommate: “What are those...?”

Woman: “What?”

Roommate: “Those things...”

Woman: “They are my babies. But I don’t think you’ll like them.”

Large glass jars clutter every available surface, the woman’s flesh sits in them, growing green. Her babies squirm and bulbously greet the roommate, they peer their faceless flesh to the side of the jar and wave their pointy ends in welcome.

The roommate tries to step back into the florescent light, but the green follows her, sticking to her skin like resin. She tries to rub her arm with a plastic cloth but the green deepens and something vine like moves in her arm. A green leaf parts her meat body flesh, the roommate pulls at the succulent green, it doesn’t come away from her skin, she pulls harder.

Woman: “You can see it can’t you?”

The roommate, her eyes wide nods yes and runs to her bathroom. Something is stuck in her throat. The woman follows her in slow steps.

Roommate: “What is happening? Please help me?”

Woman: “It’s okay, this next part will feel weird. But it’s okay.”

The roommate vomits. Grey pours out of her mouth like concrete, her lipstick smudges, one lip deflates and her white rimmed make-up dissolves as sweat eats away her grey powder.

Woman: “Control is leaving your meat body. It will feel more normal in a while.”

Roommate: “This is not normal, Control is normal – put it back!”

Woman: “I can’t, you saw my green.”

The roommate tries to stop the vomit, putting both hands over her mouth, but the grey sludge pushes out, squirming like worms to get away from the roommate.

Roommate: "Make it stop."

Woman: "I can't. You saw my green."

Roommate: "It's because of them, those things in your room, isn't it?"

The woman shakes her head and tries to back away from the bathroom slowly, but the roommate notices.

Roommate: "It is because of them!"

Woman: "No, don't!"

The roommate shakily stands and follows as the woman runs to her room. The woman tries to lock the door, but the roommate puts her foot in between. The woman slams the metal door and hears bones splinter. The woman slams the door again, blood spurts from the roommate's mashed toes.

The roommate screams and pushes her body against the metal door with all her weight. The door opens and the woman stands crouched, her hand's claws and teeth barred in front of her green flesh babies. The babies are screaming in a soundless flesh whine, rubbing their bodies against the glass jars in frantic circles and pulses, tears slide out of them like sweat, this sticky ocean fills up their jars overflowing and flooding the roommate's ankles in ringlets of black sand twirling out like eels.

Roommate: "Fucking stop it!"

The roommate stands braced against the flood, her legs and feet wobble as the blackened ocean grips at her, she struggles to stand, the green babies cheer as the roommate totters.

There is a harsh knock on the door.

The woman and her babies still. And taking the pause the woman flings the roommate out her bedroom and slams the door locked. The sticky ocean still pours out its containment, the roommate stumbles through the water, her head lolling as concrete vomit escapes in slow dribbles. The roommate hurls their bucket fire preventor onto the water, the thick concrete dust flows out, eating the ocean dry, but the blackened water still grows. The roommate hears the soundless flesh whine and chuckle.

BANG "We need to talk to you guys, c'mon come out."

The roommate's face falls. She wraps her fingers around her eye sockets and lips to try reduce smudge, but there are pieces of grey vomit on her white dress and her hair is limp with sweat.

She swallows more vomit and successfully mutters "Coming" and as she walks across the floor, she opens the door in one movement. It's too quick and the security guards look alarmed.

Roommate: "I am sick, bad packaging again, please can we make this quick?"

Guard-man 2: "Sure, sure. Um, yeah, there has been a compliant, here take a look."

Guard-man 2 hands the roommate, a small tablet with an enlarged image of their window and the woman stands there, her pussy kissing the glass.

Guard-man 2: “And Guard-man 1 has been really sick, he keeps vomiting up his Control. He said that the last person he saw before it started was her, you know the other one that lives here.”

Guard-man 3: “Have you felt anything weird?”

Roommate: “What did they do with Guard-man 1?”

Guard-man 2: “He was taken to the correction facility.”

Roommate: “Well, I haven’t felt or seen anything weird.”

The black ocean creeps out under the apartment door and licks at the roommate’s ankles. She doesn’t look down. But the Guard-men do.

Chapter 8 Green Flesh

Mother came today, they finally allowed her the necessity visit. She smoothed my hair against my skull and touched my cheek with her palm quickly. It's been a long time since I was touched, I leaned in a bit and her face stumbled.

Mother walks around the apartment and asks a few questions, about my roommate, about my job at the dump on plastic duty, about the apartment block and she asks if I am eating enough? I say no. I don't like eating.

"That's is a weird thing to say."

Mother wipes her finger across the plastic cupboards, her finger comes away coated in a pink grease. She puts the finger in her mouth and sucks, her cheekbones smiling in sharp corners.

"You don't have to be alone."

Mother said this on the second day. It's morning and she is sitting at the table, her feet crossed at the ankles her palms face down in her lap, not an elbow near the table. I sit on the opposite chair, my feet scooped underneath me. Mother eyes my crossed legs, my black plastic skirt is short.

"You don't have to be alone."

Mother says it again. I put my elbows on the table. "We are all alone."

"We are together, aren't we?"

"That didn't last long."

"I had you for 5 years!" Mother's words spittle at her lips. She stands up and touches my face again. Apologizing.

Mother takes out a sliver plastic suitcase from her larger luggage and sets it on the dining table. Her long thin fingers shake as she opens the case, inside sharp steel glistens in the fluorescent light. There are knives in every shape, they cut at the air as she removes them.

"Give me your left hand." Mother's hands are white and flat, thin white scars etch her palms. She puts latex gloves over her flesh, they blare and feel funny as she grips my hand. I remember how she used to wash us with spit, concrete and those gloved hands. She digs a large knife against my hand, blood drips out as she scalps away a small meat piece. Its red and pulsing as the blood drips down my arm. Mother puts the small meat piece on the plastic table and takes a smaller knife to butterfly the flesh into interlocking lace. Mother then takes a glass jar and places the now lace like meat at the bottom. She gestures to me to come closer. "Spit."

I stand so I can lean my head over the jar and spit. Mother smiles her teeth shine white.

"You won't be alone now. This will grow, become a baby just like you were."

Mother comes from a long line of flesh manipulators – female meat bodies could always make their own babies from their flesh, until Control made them forget. Mother like her sisters and mothers before her, kept a written history taught each other how to make meat bodies from her own flesh, grow them into babies and let them slowly nibble her breasts away until they can eat dead meat body flesh.

Dead meat body flesh, the usual supplement, is not good for young flesh, they need living, bright red, bleeding flesh to grow.

Mother's written history beeps onto my screen and I read the red writing. There are numerous steps and diagrams, with anatomical names and lines drawn out. My palms itch and I want to keep drawing on them with the small knife Mother holds in her hand like a pen. Mother smiles.

“You like this don't you? I liked it too, so much I went against Control. My mother and her mother before her kept the secret, we wrote it down, even though Control tried to make female-meat bodies forget. They never used the knowledge though, they were scared. But after my partner left, I wanted more so I used the knowledge written down, our female birthright. I made you from my flesh. This is why you are different, because I wanted more.”

“What about the other children, my sister are we all grown by female meat bodies?”

“No. Control has a different system.”

Flesh playing happens in clean white rooms, light is an imperative. Flesh playing requires steel objects, they sit next to the flesh, smiling up from disinfected metal trays, shiny surfaces in florescent light. There are machines that cut flesh smaller and smaller, meat bodies watch the pieces, watch them squirm. White reports are dictated down in calm words. Important information is whited out to ensure its safety. Hands are covered in plastic, mouths breathe through filters. Flesh is a quickly dangerous thing, some pieces can skip down a throat and eat a meat body into a triplet within 3 hours as flesh multiplies when set free. Meat bodies under Control have been playing with flesh for centuries, they look at it, grow it faster and slower, stunt it, bloom it, clone it in every shape. They have tried every combination for constructing meat bodies and the most stable is a 9-month propagation from vaginal wall flesh. Luckily the vaginal wall flesh can be taken from the female meat body at any age.

“Look here, Mother, look here.” I am pointing at the garbage dump. She looks at my finger, her eyes narrow. “There is nothing there.” She push's my hand down, it's quick and quiet. There are people around. Control does not like touching.

Control a mass system, is spread into multiplying nerve sized mite robots which sit astride each meat bodies' nerve endings, they whisper to each other through soundwaves, calculating the most appropriate action for the masses, updating their little mites every morning with the schedules and timings for each meat body's action. Control is the meat body puppeteer. It doesn't like to touch, Control likes to separate, to divide and multiply in a timely and controlled manner.

Control's little mites shit out concrete, laying it under meat body skin, its spreads white and dusty. Concrete marks us recorded with the appropriate Control levels but flushed cheeks, sweaty armpits, hairy pussies, this is not white enough, not dusty enough. Control expects higher levels, they watch others and make sure there are no holes in its system.

“You touched her! I saw it.”

A female meat body with a teacher's white eyes is pointing at Mother and raising her voice above a whisper. Other meat bodies' heads swivel, they are looking at us, their hands outstretched as their skin sniffs at us. I can feel the sweat at my armpits, it runs down my skin. Mother's eyes tighten, their hands are cement claws, white dusty and coming closer. I can hear them reaching, it sounds like itching across my skin, like they want to peel up my skin and see underneath it. Their nails glint pointed, and I start to cry. Mother tries to put her hands over my eyes, wiping my face with her plastic skirts. The voices are louder, the space tighter.

Incidence Report: 000 001

Mother and child were not under proper levels of Control. They behaved strangely in public. 20 citizens quietened the two uncontrollable meat bodies by force and took them to the nearest correction facility for an emergency Control injection.

Chapter 9 Correction Facility 1

There are prickly pears on my thumbs, on all my thumbs, on all 10 of them, see how they grow, sharp green with black fluffy pricks. Can you see them?

The woman asks the same thing every day, the white clad deathmen don't nod, they show their teeth and they administer Control, an injection to her arm, they wear plastic and breathe through filters.

The administration believes the woman is infectious, her imagination is catching and they have taken her to Correction Facility 1 for further study. Incident reports indicate that the woman disturbs how meat bodies ingest Control both physically and mentally. Her and her green flesh babies, both dilute Control, make it weaker. The administration chose to contain all meat bodies who have prolonged contact with the woman to study the long term effects.

Roommate: "What are you doing, no take her, I didn't do anything, I didn't do anything, take her!"

Sister: "Hello, how can I help you... no, I won't go, no, please let me say goodbye to my girls, no, I haven't seen her for years, no, I can't leave them, no please, my girls need me."

A poisoned apple, a poisoned prickly pear, can you see them on my fingers, can you see them grow. Look at their black fluffy prickles, that is me. My unreal, see it grow, look I can grow it, it's easy to grow, just think you can see, and bloom it grows, do you want me to show you, I can whisper it in your ear.

"It's like fucking a switch." White-clad deathman 4 fiddles with a piece of the woman's flesh, her growing baby.

"One hour in a jar with her mutant flesh and then bang it grows faster and bigger. Just like a fucking switch."

Post-mortem report: 000 002

White-clad deathmen 4, a true leader in his industry, with 10 years of experience working with dangerous flesh samples, has succumbed to an insistent sample and been dissected. His remains were sent in commemoration to the new scientific structure. Rebuilding material depot took delivery on March 20, 3021 at 8:00am.

Whited out post-mortem report: 000 002

The woman's babies, her growing flesh samples, exude a glow, a strange shiny colour, [unlabelled and undescribed for safety reasons]. And any other flesh samples that interacts with her babies change, they start getting bigger and glowing [deleted for safety reasons]. White-clad deathman 4 behaved inappropriately, as his Control no longer affected him. He was dissected and studied, his remains were given to the rebuilding depot on March 20, 3021 at 8:00am

The word they are looking for is green, green green, like mother's fingers. My green bubbles from my head, I blow it real like chewing gum, green green, they can't even think the word, but I am bigger, I am big, I am large like my ocean, they will notice me.

White-clad deathman 4 experimented with normal, grown cleanly flesh and its interaction with the woman's glowing green specimens. He found that flesh grown for an hour near her children changed and would only return normal with three Control injections to the nerve. Flesh grown for one hour in the same jar as her specimens needed a high intensity week long deep Control soaking before returning to normal, and even then the flesh would flinch larger if her children were brought into the same room they occupied, perking up in interest.

A piece of the woman's flesh started to like him. The green flesh would turn its most pointy side to him each time he passed its jar, and sometimes it would make slow cooing noise by rubbing its skin folds together. The jar was left sticky and marked after.

The administration dissected and studied White-clad deathmen 4 after an old security guard who usually slept through his shift had the shits and caught White-clad deathman 4 on the security cameras, caught him with his own eyes, rubbing the woman's piece of flesh on his penis.

The sister in her own white padded cell, smiles and practices her update routine religiously. She tries to comb her hair and manage her appearance through the small two-way mirror. She sits quietly and takes her extra Control with much thanks; she enjoys the extra rest, she often says this to the White-clad deathmen, guards, assessors, report takers, and her husband Bill over the allocated phone calls. She is calm and unemotional, Control fully absorbed.

But when White-clad deathmen ask the sister to interact with the woman, she resists.

Sister: "I don't want to meet her today."

White-clad deathman 5: "Why not?"

Sister: "She is not well and it affects me."

White-clad deathman 5: "You seem to handle it quite well. How do you do that? How do you resist her?"

Sister: "I don't see it, I choose not to see it. Believe in Control. Are these not the words we speak every day? Control gives us strength."

White-clad deathman 5: "Don't see what?"

Sister: "The things she speaks of."

White-clad deathman 5: "We don't see them – 6 you've never seen a prickly pear on her fingers, have you?"

White-clad deathman 6: "No sir... I haven't, don't know what that is."

The sister's smile widens "No green glow?"

White-clad deathman 6: "Oh yes, sometimes I see that."

White-clad deathman 5: "Okay, 7 take away White-clad deathman 6 to the dissection room. And little lady, it's time for your visit."

Sister: "I said I don't want to go. I am in Control. Let me go home. Let me go back to my girls."

White-clad deathman 5: "That sounds a bit emotional? Doesn't it 7."

White-clad deathman 7: "It does, Sir."

Shuffling and muffled shouts, white-clad deathman 6 is taken for further dissection and the sister is dragged to the woman's padded cell.

The sister visits the woman with a calm appearance but she smooths her plastic skirt a lot, leaving behind a trail of sweat. She stands as the woman sits cross legged on the floor. The woman's copper hair hangs down, scraped away from her face in a loose ponytail, she is glowing green.

The sister does not look directly at the woman, choosing to stare above her head at the white padding. They exchange pleasantries.

Pleasantries, she ignores me and my growing babies, she doesn't want to see. But how green I glow, I am brilliant, and soon my babies will sprout and she they will surely notice me again, will want to see what I grow again. My green is big and thick with deep roots that tangle their toes amongst the correction facility's foundations. My sister makes me smile, she is strong, ignoring me, but she won't be able to for much longer, the dead bodies will pile up, I will infect them all, burst green from their meat bodies.

"I will break it all my sister, don't worry, I will break it all, I will break you, you will become more, you will be able to breathe and live free become green, we will be everything together."

My sister just shakes her head smiling. I think she wants to cry. I nod my head. Pleasantries.

Chapter 10 Stabilizing Roommate

“I didn’t ignore it, don’t you see, I looked at it.”

The roommate says this every day, she keeps herself together until she must speak then it blurts out, she claps her hands over her mouth, smashing the words back down her throat, but they’ve already bubbled out. They float around her cell, the administration continue to increase her Control dose. She takes the extra pills happily, sleeps more, and whispers

“I didn’t ignore it, don’t you see, I looked at it.”

Roommate: “Hi, you must be her sister.”

Sister: “Yes, I am.”

The two women match each other in height and hair colour, brown, but the sister’s hair is a deeper chocolate, she had the brunette mark of attractiveness, higher than mousy brown. They both wear the uniforms of their profession, teacher - white eyes and red lipsticked and mother - warm grey cloth nipped in at the waist with thin black belt.

Sister: “You know you have to ignore it, right?”

Roommate: “I am sorry, ignore what?”

Sister: “You have to ignore her eccentricities, as if they are not there, as if she is not doing it, don’t let the mask slip.”

Roommate: “What mask?”

Sister: “Your smile and your Control – keep them. Ignore her, ignore my sister.”

Roommate: “Why?”

Sister: “Just ignore it, ignore her.”

Roommate: “We will just perform the update more. Don’t worry. I am a teacher and I have read her history, I know about the trees. I handle Control deficient children all the time, I can handle the woman. It’s my job as a stabilising roommate. Come let’s eat together.”

The three of them, woman, sister and roommate eat their cans of meat body together. It is silent, as meals should be, digestion of flesh is a tricky thing.

Subject 1, woman’s roommate interview extracts:

“I don’t know when it started, well I always thought the whole family was really weird. First the sister arrived and told me to ignore her, to ignore that woman? I would like to see someone try. I have been taking extra Control since she moved in. I made that clear in my reports. I requested more...”

[Session ended. Control bath administered, full immersion in 1 minute intervals for 30 minutes.]

“She was always weird, I read her school transcript, all the children ignored her, would run away, cry if she came near. I can’t remember reading what happened to the boy she spoke to all the time, but it was red and shocking. I have always had high Control standards, that is why you made me a stabilising roommate. It’s on my file, check my file. I am a model citizen. It’s just that she started doing such strange things. And I live there. I don’t want that in my home. We updated together. We updated all the time. And it helps, but then I started to see it.”

“Green tendrils where she stepped – vines, curling around her toes.”

“Puddles of water dripping in salt, chasing after her feet in small waves, crashing against little beaches that sucked toes in.”

“Uncurling ferns, wrapping around her body and quick flashes, between blinks and it’s not there.”

“We updated with loud smiles, but I still saw it... I see it sometimes when I move, when I slip, I see it, don’t look at it, don’t look at it... don’t see... shut tight, tight tight, not green, not green. I still see it. Make it stop, I need more Control, give me more.”

[Session ended. Control bath administered, full immersion in 1 minute intervals for 40 minutes]

Chapter 11 Dissections and Reports and More Dissections

My thoughts tingle, a green fizz flying in spurts from my head, my arm hair grows in small green breath, my toenails darken sprouting thin roots, they curl and dangle from my stationary feet.

I am tired, so tired, my roots keep stretching deeper, their fingernails pulling through the correction facilities concrete, I feel bloody and bruised, my body deep, see its depth, green consumes the foundations of Correction Facility 1, like vine leaves crumbling the walls, I eat and eat deeper into the planet, growing in sweaty inches, my eyes closed I pant green.

My eyes burn an ice burn, I feel them sitting in my head, heavy marbles containing an ocean, my sinuses bloated with dark water, it broods and pierces out, blue. I can taste it at my tongue as it drips down my throat. I use the blue to grow, feeding my green with my ocean.

“Sit up on a chair, not like an animal.”

The guard-men stare at her, sometimes for too long, they bark at her, sometimes they spit. Something about the woman makes them hate her. They watch the woman sitting on the floor, her copper hair has grown to her knees and its slowly turning green, her hair arm is longer and greener too, her feet and legs are covered in dirt, her toenails are long and thick, they curl over her feet and lie in a pile like wood shavings.

The Guard-men have Control coursing through their blood, their brains, their teeth, their fingernails, these nerve-sized mite robots know what is possible and the woman’s green is not possible, Control strains to pierce the Guard-men’s eyes with more reality, tapping at their brains that this is not real, it can’t be real, you shouldn’t be able to see it, so don’t see it.

But the guard-men can see it, the woman sits there in her green, it bubbles and fizzes out of her, in soft mist, licking at their flesh each time they come close to the cell. They can see it, see the women slumping into soil, damp and thick rising up to support her spine and those prickly pears growing from her head like a crown. The Guard-men do not utter it aloud, they ignore it, listen to their Control, sneak higher doses.

The Correction facility watches its staff members closely for signs of green, any abnormal behaviour results in a dissection, it’s mostly the guard-men that get dissected as they have to feed the woman, bathe her, get close, it takes a toll. There have been a lot of dissections lately.

Guard-man 110: “Fucking sit up.”

Woman: “Come closer and make me.”

The woman’s green eyes lift, the three guard-men entering her cell flinch. They see her arms stretch towards them dripping in bright red petals, her thick vines inch closer like large tentacles their thick green width, writhes and tenses, engorges and rushes at the three guard-men. They manage to fling themselves through the door as it slams shut. They hear the women’s cackling laugh erupt and cascade down on them in a mist of fine droplets. The guard-men shake their heads and rub their eyes.

Each guard-man pretends their Control is still effective, they compose their faces and write their daily reports, they try to make the events more controlled. They lie, because they do not want to be dissected.

Guard-man 110, daily incidence report:

“The woman grew aggressive and when we politely asked her to calm down, she reacted and leaped off the floor trying to throttle 112. We exited the cell and secured it. I request two days without food as punishment.”

Guard-man 112, daily incidence report:

“The woman was aggressive as we entered, she was crouching on the ground and growling at us. We asked her to sit in the chair. But she refused and when we were leaving the cell the woman lunged for 110’s ankle, she grabbed hold and me and 113 had to forcefully remove her fingers. We exited the cell and secured it. I request three days without food as punishment.”

Guard-man 113, daily incidence report:

“The woman was quite still on entry, 110 went to check her pulse at which point she tried to bite his arm. We exited the cell and secured it. I request four days without food as punishment and again suggest that the woman to be kept in more restraints, specifically a gag at her mouth and steel wire to secure her head, pelvis and thighs.”

The administration acknowledged the large variances between these reports by dissecting guard man 110, 112 and 113.

Chapter 12 Green Tides Turn

I can feel the concrete trying to fight me, I eat it, my green roots stretching out like long thin arms under the correction facility's pinkish structure, my green cracking the thick white concrete. Correction facility 1 is riddled with my green. My leg thick roots stretch down and around the concrete foundation, circling the structure's throat all the way to the 1,000th floor. I can feel my babies purr as my vines curl their leaves toward their test tubes, I blow them kisses, blood kisses, dripping pieces of my flesh back into their mouths, caressing their small plump flesh.

The guard-men don't like to notice, my sister sometimes does, touching the ground in an afterthought when my vines move under the floor of her cell. I like when she touches me. I like decorating my sister's cell. I fill it with sunflowers, lavender fields as my vines curl into a thicket around her, pouring honey into her eyes. Control's nerve sized mite-robots spill from her, as the sunflowers curl their faces to bright orange orchids fluttering their petals in a dance, scattering orange light across my sister's face. I like to move closer, vines skimming her head, fluffing at her hair, or slinking into her hand as she sleeps. I like to tell her she is not alone, sometimes she smiles, but she doesn't tell anyone she can see it, she just takes her Control and stares at the wall, like she doesn't see me.

The guard-men can see the roots moving and cracking under their feet, but its slight and they are getting used to ignoring me. They have to, there've been a lot of dissections. I hear them muttering about it under their breath. It used to grind my teeth, I can feel as they pull and tear at my babies, but they can't handle a little dissection? Can't they just sew themselves back together? Flesh is flesh.

I can feel my babies like lost limbs their movements ghost at me. I liked when they ate at my breasts, I liked when we were close, growing in my dark bedroom. But now my flesh grows alone in plastic test tubes. And these meat-bodies can't handle a little dissection. I cut pieces off my breasts for my babies, cut my breasts with a dull knife, blood oozing out slowly, a rubbing that tears, my nipples were the first to go, but they grew back as I made more mine, my flesh could provide. I would sew the torn breast together after every meal and seal the wound with boiling plastic.

A lot of the guard-men had to be dissected and I don't think they put them back together. I don't think they know how. It was a lot of dissections, I started to feel for the guard-men, my growing became quiet in sympathy. They like it when I am quiet, they can ignore me like that, when I sit in the chair, eat my food, watch the screen and sleep at appropriate times. The Control in them likes it even more, it can package over the cracking walls, the green roots growing from my fingernails, the plum trees sprouting from both my thighs and the fuzzy prickly pears at my head, their green spikes glistening. If I am still and quiet their Control can package over me, their little mites tuning nerve endings till all the guard-men believe for just a few precious seconds of the day that it is just a padded cell with a quiet red-haired woman staring at a wall, she eats her meals and doesn't cause a fuss.

My flesh babies escape using their slimy, newly developed, disposable thumbs. I cheer in a shaking the planet feels, as my babies crack their plastic test tubes and roll off the stainless-steel counters. I can hear the white-clad deathmen back away in a run as the flesh crawls in a slinking slurp toward them, their disposable thumbs waving in the fluorescent light. I laugh loud, I can't help it, as I feel my flesh babies grip at a running white-clad deathmen's legs, I can feel them squelch and creep up his shuddering meat body, sitting over his face. I can hear the panicked running, the alarms. The littlest even managed to plant her disposable thumb as my first seed. I can pull it into the concrete, I can root it, sniggle in and pull its slimly little seed deeper.

Chapter 13 Dump for Solace

Unease is slowly growing up the administration command chain, Correction Facility 1 has now performed over 200,000 dissections, without conclusive results.

The dissection room is white tiled with a steel drain in the far-left corner. The light is bright as the flesh-workmen hover over the relevant meat body lying on the steel mesh. Flesh-workmen have bright headlamps and use sharp scalpels to make their incisions. Meat bodies are wrapped in a clingy plastic which morphs around the cuts to preserve thin slices of flesh, eye, brain and bone. The meat bodies' blood exudes out in slow droplets that eventually slide down the drain as the volume of dissections grow.

I sit squat beneath the dissection room, consuming the dead meat-body flesh that pours down the dissection drain. I infect the flesh use it grow more green to grow my babies bigger and bigger. The white-clad deathmen don't understand that their dissections are feeding me. I lap and lick at the blood as it slides on the drain.

The fertility department has been growing meat bodies in excess to support the staffing need at Correction Facility 1, but there are still no conclusive results. Correction Facility 1 is occupied by rosy faces, there are no white Control balanced cheeks there. And the Superior Meat Bodies are starting to suggest that the remaining staff may be lying about their symptoms to ensure they are not dissected.

Talk turns to the woman in high up concrete structures, the ones that overlook other concrete structures. Superior Meat Bodies with extra Control in their bloodstream wonder at her ability to dilute their power source.

"She can't really be real. Control is effective. The underlings must be exaggerating."

"The reports are starting to get hyperbolic; mass hysteria has been used a couple of times."

"Each dissection has indicated that Control has been damaged or rendered ineffective."

"Control is effective, it's been centuries and centuries goddamit. The updates will handle this soon enough, we just need to keep learning from her."

"White-clad deathmen 1,114 has submitted new analysis, we will project it out this evening in the call to update."

"Good, then that is sorted."

I breathed outside today. My green thick vines grow stronger as my flesh babies keep leaving seeds around the correction facility for me, we kiss, lick and touch each other in green flesh, creating more flesh, more green that bursts against the thick concrete, eating the white away.

My babies are smarter now, their escapes unnoticed as they leave behind their skin shells for the white clad death-men to play with. They slurp under the locked doors and burrow into concrete growing towards me, leaving seed pieces to bloom behind them.

And today my vines crumbled the concrete away and I poked my green roots out into the open. I saw my beloved dump, knowing I can grow here unnoticed for a while, I will be safe amongst the discards. I grow and grow, the light shining on my green flesh and my fingers reach up swarming my flesh higher in a green fountain that keeps gushing. My ocean helps, pouring his salty water down my throat feeding me taller and taller till I stand like the old structures my sister and I built, but I will not fall.

My baobab body stands thick and tall in the dump, my branches an exact copy of my roots, stretching out in a height above the grey smog. Delicate green leaves canopy over the whole dump, their fluttering whispering in green refraction. The wind pulls my leaves down to the concrete carpeting green mulch which sings to my hidden vines, they poke their heads out in long thin roses, their red petals bright and shining.

My dump blooms in a rose wildfire, it eats the concrete into a thick dark soil.

Incidence Report: 010 000

The meat body underbelly in dump 104 have been found holding hands and dancing in a circle. Residential meat bodies reported the sound of laughter, which continued to grow louder over 5 days, the number of reports that corroborated this sound grew to 10,000 which instigated a formal investigation. Official meat bodies entered the dump, following the echoing laughter. There was a meat body underbelly of about 100, who had stripped off their clothes, exposing their ash coated bodies and were dancing in a circle around a very large [word deleted for safety]. Their mouths wide open with laughter. Officials tried to subdue the meat bodies with constraints and gags, but laughter spread and 10 officials started laughing uncontrollably. Eventually officials were able to subdue the crowd with violence and the surviving meat bodies were sent for dissection.

Chapter 14 Quest for a Cure

I am much quieter. I think too quiet. I am away, feeling my baobab arms stretch higher with each pulse.

Guard-man 2024 poked me with his plastic baton today, I jolted back into my meat-body skin. I was holding a plastic spoon with red sludge dripping off in a slow tilt. The thick white plastic baton pressed against my ribs just under my breast. I turn my eyes to the Guard-man 2024, he is in the cell alone, quite brazen he is, the guard-men who remember have been dissected.

My smile is slow. I bite my lip between shell sharp teeth, it starts to bleed, red. His eyes are staring at mine, green spiders crawl out, their webs fastening to his iris, green. His baton lifts slowly and wipes away the blood from my lips. I kiss his thick plastic baton and with a smile I bite down. His Control stutters in his veins, in his nerves, my vines wrap around their metal nerve sized bodies. He sees the cell without Control's manipulation.

A mangrove kisses at soft clear water, my body grown into a tree with vines that overhang a bloody canopy of red petals. The mangrove roots spill down into my ocean's depths, the water translucent, reflecting green in sunlight patches as fish dart down, there is no end, the water and roots billow downward, a nothing in full clarity. My vines curve and eat at the ceilings concrete squeezing it into green.

Woman: "You see why I have to be quiet, I have to grow."

Guard-man 2024: "I... I can't see anything."

Woman: "They told you to say that didn't they?"

Guard-man 2024: "Yes, I mean no."

Woman: "Are you scared you will be dissected?"

Guard-man 2024: "Yes."

Woman: "But look at it, it's so beautiful. I made it all my lover, my babies from my flesh, see what I can create, this is me in partial bloom, just you wait to see how much I can grow."

Guard-man 2024: "This isn't real, this is just... just your imagination."

Woman: "The handbook is getting better. But are you sure that you can't see anything?"

Guard-man 2024 shakes his head and pulls his eyes away from the woman's green spiders. He wipes his thick white baton against her white plastic clothes and walks out the cell.

Incidence Report: 020 000

Guard-man 2024 was booked for dissection after a two month posting at the woman's cell. Guard-man 2024 did not report his delusions to his superiors, as such we are unsure when the delusions started. From over 300,000 recorded dissections, it is estimated that after 1 month of exposure to the woman, a meat-body's Control is damaged. Population wide experiments have now been authorised given the threat this poses.

White clad death-men have been studying the roommate closely, she is more complaint.

In another white room, they record the roommate and ask questions through a metal screen. She has become quieter, but still mutters "I didn't ignore it" in 5 minute intervals.

White-clad deathman 3040: "How are you today?"

Roommate: "I didn't ignore it, I have been good, I didn't ignore it, there is a small puddle in my cell and its growing makes me nauseous."

White-clad deathman 3040: "We have spoken about the puddle before, and the vines moving in the walls."

Roommate: "Yes I know we spoke about it before, I didn't ignore it, but it's getting worse, my feet are always wet, the water is blue with green roots growing in it, I don't like looking at it, it's whispers things."

White-clad deathman 3040: "What things?"

Roommate: "I didn't ignore it, she says that I am safe and that the water will help me, will take me away from here, she says I am safe with her, that she is building something for me, I am scared because I want to dive into the water, I want to take my clothes off be naked and touch my flesh to the water wrap the green vines around my throat and squeeze myself down and down. I want when she whispers, I want touch, I want to lick, touch my nipples. I didn't ignore it"

White-clad deathman 3040: "You want to stop her don't you?"

Roommate: "Yes, I didn't ignore it, I didn't listen."

White-clad deathman 3040: "We can help you stop her, but you need to agree to a special type of dissection?"

Roommate: "Yes anything, I didn't ignore it."

White clad death-man 3040: "We will dissect your brain stem cell out and implant a larger Control device, which will link your Control to the most updated software version in real-time. It will limit your ability to choose, but that wasn't really an option under the previous Control version, so we aren't changing much."

Roommate: "Yes, I agree to the procedure, I didn't ignore it."

My babies saw it, they snuck into the white tiled dissection room, they saw the roommate on the table, her skull sawed open and the brain stem cell sucked out, it looked like grey milkshake as it poured down the drain in the corner. A metal brain stem cell was implanted. The white-clad deathmen congratulated each other as they attached the roommate's nerve endings to the device. White-clad nurses sewed up her skull flesh with plastic. My babies kept watch over the roommate, they like touching her, they

always wanted to touch her, when they were in my room, they asked so many times if they could meet her, if they could be her friend.

The flesh healed and they put the roommate back in her cell. I had something waiting for her, to make her feel better, something beautiful for her to see. I filled her cell with a frozen lake and fir trees covered in snow.

Incident Report: 030 000

When the roommate entered her cell, she started floating around like she was gliding on a slippery surface. Guard-man 4025 tried to restrain her, but slipped and cracked his head open. The roommate kept gliding through the puddle of blood. The roommate has been booked in for a replacement surgery tomorrow morning.

Incident Report: 040 000

Residents around correction facility 1 have been complaining about hearing a ghostly laugh in their apartments. Some have reported seeing green grass grow on their apartment walls. The necessary dissections have been requested.

Chapter 15 Green Petticoats

I grow faster, my vines muscle in thick strands consuming concrete, it sits in my belly bloated. Dry white eaten down and with a touch of my ocean becomes green. But there are leftovers, the concrete so dry sticks, rubbing close to my meat, knitting into my insides. Green making will consume.

I sit in my cell and vomit away the concrete, in thick bursts, splattering the plastic walls. My ocean's blue licks it away, becoming sand particles that float diluted. I made my lover insatiable, he will eat what I feed him. I will feed him all of it, the poisonous grey concrete, I will stuff it down his throat, he will suck at my tits as I squeeze out the concrete I consume, he will eat the remnants the pink grey stink.

I touch him less, I like him less but he still wraps his fingers around my ankles with kelp, kisses at my toes in slow requests. I am growing green, my body spits out the pink and I am not here, my shell sits with my ocean and he peers closer, filling up my eyes, my skin, wanting the beginning back.

I made a lover to help me, I needed someone to help me so I made him from myself just like I like it. We were lovers entangled and delirious in birth after bloody birth. I loved how he kept filling me, I could chop off flesh pieces and he would lap at the blood, I sewed the flesh closed and he touched his small child with his delicate water, lacing me tight in his arms, my arms, again and again he spread, I spread my legs, the blue would lick at my clit, bite it and I wanted to be more, to tear at my body for more, I made him so he would tear me into more, would not stop. I liked being full, my ocean barely contained underneath my skin, the sky whispering its wind across my cheek, finding my swollen eyes bruised with storms. I was broken in my currents, all blue and I could be gone, I could be somewhere else not wading in concrete, not feeling robots bite at my nerves. I am numb blue nothing in his arms, my arms and from my bloodied flesh sparking green, its little grass hairs poking up at me, small soft delicate green.

But now I need him to be apart, to eat the poison concrete for me. He cries, I cry as the concrete crusts my ocean. I need to cut him away from me, I keep trying, but he is me, made from me, our flesh interwoven. But he will do it, I will make him apart, so I can keep growing.

My dearth grows.

Correction facility 1 is mine, my vines lattice through each wall, a green network that warrens closer, my body at the centre, the root. White-clad deathmen, guard-men walk hunched their eyes partially closed, trying not to see that their building has become a green weaver's nest, the windows carved from my green arms. They have extra Control injections each day, so from 8am to 5pm they see their fluorescent lights, the white clean plastic walls, the neat dissection room with waiting meat bodies stacked in rows.

But its tiring ignoring what you can see.

And at 5:10pm my truth sits glaring like toad on their face. My green has the walls, has the cells, has their machines in its grip, my green is them, I cut at the meat bodies with my shell teeth, dissect them into chunks, already infected with green, they will burst in prickly pears, splatter the concrete with my green.

My babies grow and clamber out poking their little prickly pear heads from the concrete, growing along drain pipes and venturing their little toes across roads, into my dump and in an ever wider

circumference as my vines broaden and reach under, eating and digging away the concrete in mountain heavles full.

They like to make sure that my green petticoats have eaten enough of the concrete before slurping their way forward, they're still young. I keep a beady eye on them, my vines ready to pull them under as the building trucks pass on the roads. I have toppled a few trucks like this, the little ones need me, and the concrete shattering makes it easier, I have the crash sites wrapped in my jungle within days.

I am growing fast now, it's getting easier. My body sits in the cell and vomits Control into my lover's mouth, he chokes, I choke but I force it down, again and again.

Chapter 16 A Million Dissections Completed

My baobab body is tall. My dump, a red rose garden encircling around my fleshy baobab roots. Green hedges pull the rose bushes into an order, with soft juicy grass fanning in the pathways and flowing like water into large grass lakes, the deep green sparkling like a soft fur.

Meat bodies come closer they peer over the dump and shaking their heads they try to ignore away thoughts of picnics. They start coming more and more, they don't know why. But they like seeing the green, it leaks into their Control over time, my green fizz growing in their heads, stalling the nerve-sized robot hands as they try to pierce their nerves.

A small meat body came and sat on my grassy lake, her feet swinging in bruised grass ends, she lay down, her dress fluttering over her head as she watched the baobab tree whisper. Birds swung low, their bright feathers punching the small meat body into joy shouts. Her mother watched from the dump's steps, her Control shuddering.

A old man on his way home, walks down the dump's steps and sits on a wooden bench, cutting open his food can, he eats at the bloodied flesh. And looks out over the garden, he stands to smell the roses as teacher passes by, she stops smiling.

Incidence Report: 050 000

Meat bodies gather in the dump, eat their food and stare into space. Correction facilities in neighbouring areas have been assigned nightly dissection routes to collect these meat bodies. A notice is sent to their remaining families.

"Experiments are failing..."

"She is spreading, we are getting reports that meat bodies have been found to show signs of infection in outer region 702C4."

"Signs of infection?"

"Unauthorized touching, blank eyes and downturned smiles."

"But that is just the beginning, symptoms worsen."

"We need more data for the algorithm to learn how she spreads."

"The dissection rate must be increased!"

"The update is live this evening, we will see results within the hour."

The sister listens to the updates each evening, she transcribes the code down into her memory. Usually the updates are small, meaningless, a change to nerve in the eye or fingers to stop a husband

meat body beating his wife meat body. Today the sister heard words, she heard something write itself violently across her nerves.

“Report any Control abuses immediately to your nearest correction facility. Any Control abuses need to be reported immediately. Be vigilant! Vigilance First!”

The sister shudders, it is getting worse and I don't know how my girls are, are they safe, is Bill taking care of them, are they looking at it, at her green, I can't stop them from looking at her. I can't stop them, they might see her and start showing. Others will report them, they never liked us anyways, heard I had a weird sister and now look.

“Please keep them safe, please.”

I hold my palms pressed together, my sister used to like to see me beg when we were little, beg her to forgive me, when I didn't see what she was showing me. She would whisper in my ear, make me see things, it hurt sometimes. She would get mad if I left her alone too long, if I didn't listen to her stories, didn't nod when she painted holes in our real. She liked to see me nod, I nod now.

“Please keep them safe, please, they like you remember, they like your green, they took care of you, you have to take care of them. Please.”

My sister is scared, she is always scared. I can hear her counting the wrinkles in her arms, she counts and counts, the skin red raw. I hate hearing it, like a tap dripping, the drip pounding in my ocean filled skull, it turns my stomach. I vomit out more Control, he wipes it away from my mouth.

I try to make my sister stop counting, I tie her arms to her sides with my green vines but she ignores me, ignores my green and pulls her arms from my vines, counting and counting the wrinkles in her arms, her hands.

Incidence Report: 060 000

Dissection rate has tripled. Each meat body has identified at least one Control abuser in their neighbourhood.

Chapter 17 Coordinated Family Dance

My hand underneath the florescent lights glows pink, creases with small wrinkles, which catch the light and bend away from it. I stare at my hand, its safe. I count the wrinkles the shattered diamonds they create across my palms. I don't want to see my sister's green. She breathes over my neck, plastering my cell with her green, it writhes and consumes manically. My flesh is my own, I count the wrings and count my counts, multiplying time away.

I know she grows, but I am scared, so many dissections, what if they dissect my girls, those pieces of me. I love my little sister and I know she is hurt that we stopped seeing her. I ignored her, ignored her green when we were young and when she spoke about it on the calls. I denied her very being. I know she hates that, she used scream and stamp her foot when I wouldn't play with her in her mind. But I needed to keep my girls safe, keep them from being spat on, being told they were different. I remember how that felt, my sister made me different just by standing next to me and I hated her for it. My sister thinks she can fix it all, fix this whole world so that it is all green, so that there is no more Control. But I am scared she is losing herself in this growth, becoming mad, drunk with her large size, she is hurting people, using the dissections to get bigger, she is just as bad as Control. I am scared and sad because I didn't help her, and now look what she is becoming.

Bone shattering, I fell off my bed.

My sister had to take me in, she was the closest living relative and Control takes care of the sick.

White plastic plates, white plastic table cloths, fancy metal knives and forks. My sister's meat body family sits with clean hands at the dinner table. There are four lace metal cans and one stocky circular can with spicy written in red, this one is mine. We open the cans and tilt the red slup flesh out.

plop

Metal knives and forks tear the flesh into bite sized pieces, the coordinated family dance.

Our hands are very clean, my sister like my mother wipes and scrapes them down in the bathroom with buckets of spit. We stand in a naked row, the two children, husband Bill and me. My sister wipes and wipes, behind our ears, under our nails. She watches as we use soap concrete and spit to wash our genitals, cleanliness is her control. She is the bathroom ruler, the supreme ruler and only really a ruler in this one room, so she took her time, made sure we represented her exacting rule well.

The house had four bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. I sleep in one of the girl's rooms, I think the littlest one, the pink walls suffocate me at night. They chose not paint any of the walls. Bill said he liked the pink colour and the husband meat body knows best. My sister painted the bathroom walls white.

I told the girls stories at night. My sister told me not to but I liked to tell them all about my green, show them what I could make. Their shiny eyes saw me and In loved it.

I would whisper to them through the walls, listening as green wavelengths cut through the pink concrete and pierced against their little eardrums.

"A green planet hangs in midnight black sky, close by stars shine softly on its green flesh

A green planet hangs like an open flower with no stalk

it bursts in forests, jungles, grass fields, their expanse stretching eyes

*meat bodies live small across this green flank, like tics
they eat at the plenitude, sleep in their swallow nests
babies at their mother's breasts
mother's sew the green into their empty chests
and their bones bent green sprout more.*

A green planet blooms red in the midnight black sky."

"There was a woman meat body and who made the ocean from her sweat, her tears. The ocean and her had many babies. But babies need feeding, my ocean knew this. The woman meat body hugged him tight, and the babies ate his feet, those shallow waters green with kelp. And the bigger the babies grew the more they ate, the coral reefs, the deep waters. The ocean tried to squirm away, but the little meat body woman held him close, and the babies they bloomed green, tearing the ocean apart, their prickly pears sucking the ocean dry, their bellies full."

"You are both sunflowers, see how your faces follow the sun, look up, look up to your sun, your mother, grow big and strong, wave your yellow petals and green leaves, stand your stalks straight back. Look up my sunflowers, look up to your mother the sun."

I can hear her whisper the stories in my head, I know they are the same ones my girls dreamed. I feel her vines move under me, trying make my body more comfortable, I adjust away, curling my spine into the corner of my cell, my eyes bend toward my left hand, I count and count the wrinkles.

She doesn't like it when I ignore her, she bumps my hand, wraps it in green grass and smiles in her vines, but I close my eyes and count what I remember, the pink glow as the fluorescent light hits my normal skin.

I needed to clean the wound on my leg every day. The fall had cut into my flesh. I liked looking at the red slit, it drew me in, I remember what Mother showed me and my mouth fills up with salvia. My flesh is open apart, so easy to cut out, lattice and grow.

The little girls like to watch my clean the wound.

"Are you okay Auntie?"

"Is it better?"

Little questions, would fly from their mouths like dandelions, falling on my face.

"It will get better don't worry, my prickly pears will help me heal, see there they are, sitting in my wound, look can't you see?"

"No we can't. No we can't. No we can't." They would sing song together.

"C'mon little ones look, can't you see the green moss growing in the damp red wound? You can't? Well look closer."

They would peer their noses closer, eyeballs centimetres from the wound.

"I can see the green." The littlest one said in small quiet whisper

Her sister hit her over the head hard at this.

"No! Remember what Mommy said, she said it's not real, she said not to listen."

My sister would call us for dinner at this point in the nightly routine. Soon I healed and my sister was glad I wasn't there to tell her girls stories.

I can feel green growing in my left ankle, it's an itch, a scratch that feels hot, feels like a metal poker breathes in my skin. I don't look down at it, my sister presses her green down harder, breaking my ankle bone, I don't look down. She doesn't like me ignoring her. My green sister hurts me in my white padded cell, growing the same injury, she wants me to know her pain, she wants me to stop ignoring her. But I am scared, because she is hurting me. I cry and think of my girls, are they okay?

Chapter 18 Learning as They Stalk

Meat bodies are convening at the dump, they sit or stand in groups. Meat bodies touch each other under the baobab tree. The rose garden has grown, it tumbles out over the dump's borders and breaks the concrete roads into wild ferns, my thick jungle overlapping in plump green growing like streamlets till it bounds down and grips it all in a green flood. The vines curl and burst in red petals, with Venus flytraps arching their large mouths from apartment terraces now overgrown, dandelions fly high from under my green canopies playing with the wind's skirts.

Green squeezes at the pink concrete, spiderwebs into the wiring, plunges thick and deep into the foundations, pink structures eaten from the inside to become weaver nests, sunflowers whose stalks are riddled with caverns, green spawns into on the wind drifting like a haze, eating at the pink concrete it lands on. I am vast now, I have taken over most cities and keep expanding. I will build that green planet I spoke of to my little nieces. The dissections continue, feeding me larger and larger as I sit squat beneath the thousands upon thousands of correction facilities licking at the continuous drip of meat body blood.

Meat bodies breathe the women's green, feel it cling to their senses like grease, slowly getting stronger, taking them in minutes and seconds away from Control. As green rots in them, concrete is vomited into bathroom holes. Meat bodies touch each other, mothers kiss their meat body children, meat bodies hold hands.

Control abuse, extracts taken from informants:

"I saw two of them, two male meat bodies, I saw them interlink their pinkie fingers. I saw them. They live in apartment 11568KF and their names are R. Marlow and T.Mervin."

"My neighbour, I shouldn't do this, no, I know I should. My neighbour's little girl, just 4, was watching out her window at the sky, she watched for more than 30 minutes. This wasn't the first time and I timed her behaviour. I asked, I did ask before reporting. I asked what little girl saw... She said she saw birds, saw birds up there... flying."

"The old man sits in the dump, I don't know his name, but he wears a black plastic hat and his cheeks are very rosy. He sits there every day and sometimes he leans over and sniffs the garbage. No, I don't know his name, he just loiters around."

"My brother said that he could see the green today. Yes, I live in apartment 5895FR, he is my little brother and he said he could see it. I can't see it but he can and Mommy said it doesn't matter."

"I saw her, I saw her fashioning a flower crown, she put it on the other one's head."

"They were dancing, dancing in the rose bushes."

"I can see grass in my beard, I can see grass in my beard!"

“She collects shells from outside and brings these pieces into our home, she displays them in plastic containers on our front table.”

“My wife walks in the dump, she takes our children there and points up to the sky.”

“I saw them, I saw that they were close, too close, touching everywhere.”

“The required vigilance and community informants have been effective, we have caught far more infected than thought possible.”

“Some are reporting on others while exposing themselves.”

“But there have been no unrest casualties?”

“The accused once pointed out, walk to our Control officers with their hands outstretched.”

“The public is calling for a cure, a Control fix.”

“No conflicting reports?”

“All have provided confirmed confessions.”

“Any complaints?”

“None.”

Venus flytraps infest the bridges, the roads and the concrete walk paths, they stare at the passing meat bodies, their black tongues sniffing at the meat body sweat. It's easier to lure them in when they smell like meat, rather than dust. Flytraps open, salivate as sweat stains pass their claws, they count the control intake, the control efficiency and smile at the smelly meat bodies, wave their leaves at their downturned noses.

My babies are learning as they stalk.

Chapter 19 Outside Correction Facility 1

“Don’t come in!” Meat bodies scream as their parents, partners, children try to see why they are taking so long in their bathrooms.

More doors are locked in pink concrete structures, bedrooms and bathrooms, meat bodies try to hide the green sprouting from their veins, cutting and shearing the green, stuffing it down the bathroom holes.

Dissections are performed at each quadrant’s correction facility three times a day in 1,000 meat body batches.

The flesh pours down the drains, a blood mass curdling and bubbling down my green throat, filling up my thighs and legs as I wrap around all the correction facilities in green, building feeding tubes for my babies, they feast their traps on this bloodflow, growing stronger, larger as the dissections feeds them flesh.

Incidence Report 070 000:

Birth rates have been increased by 500% to balance out the now exponential dissection rate. Agencies have been mobilised to care for the infant meat bodies.

We wear uniforms and are told to wait in lines, lines for food, lines for clothing, lines for pain killers, lines for food packets, lines for review. Our growth is increased, we are the children needed quickly to staff Control’s structures. They pumps us with growth hormones, we are bulbous, growing to full size in just a few days, it hurts but it’s good to feel strong. We pierce for new veins each night, Control is pumped in intravenously, some little ones cry but they will soon outgrow crying so we leave them alone.

Ma shakes me awake, it’s now the second week I have not attended my allocated workplace. My plastic suit hangs up on the cupboard door, today I have to go in.

We enter the bathroom and Ma has brought the razor, I clean it with my spit and spray shaving cream onto my cheeks, the grass pokes out from the white plasticky cream, I tear across it with the razor. And put more cream on, I tear across my skin again and again. Ma is busy with the dye and she smears it on my hair, my breathing gets easier as we wipe away the green. Mom collects the discarded green pieces and ties them tightly into a plastic bag. We burn them on balcony. The correction facilities are checking the bins every day. Ma hands me her Control inhaler, she’s been saving it.

“It’s not that bad. I don’t need it, you keep it.”

“I don’t need to go into a professional office. And the agencies are pumping those nurseries with so much Control I will be fine.”

We walk together to the transport stop. A white face group stands there checking identity and travel logs. Their fingers and faces covered in topical Control cream, they reapply after touching anything. The white face group wears white uniforms and sniffs out green meat bodies, they get a Control dose for each infected meat body they bring in.

We smile wide with our identity and travel logs opened on our screens. A small white face girl sniffs at the waiting meat bodies. She comes close to Ma, sniffing at Ma's armpits, her little white face starts growling, spittle collects in cloudy clumps around her barred teeth. Larger white faces step toward Ma, they smash white batons to her head.

The little white face leans over her fallen body, putting her little white face into Ma's armpit, she sniffs loud and turns her eyes to me. I stare ahead and wait for my transport like the other meat body passengers.

Ma is bleeding on the concrete and I see little prickly pears, little Venus flytraps lift their heads from the concrete and sip at the red, their green bodies growing larger, becoming a crown around Ma's head and piercing into her temples, their soft feathery fingers trace down along her body. I shake my head slightly and feel the little white face at my right armpit, her white cream covered hands wring my suit jacket. Larger white faces come toward me.

Meat bodies stare ahead and wait for their transport.

They hit my head with their baton, my feet seem firm, they hit me again, my knees bend and I fall face forward, my right eye peers over my shoulder, I can see a green haze growing from my cheek and my spine itches, parting for the Venus flytraps and prickly pears, I feel their vines thicken, the roots spread over my body. White faces look down and spit on our flesh, they kick us and spit again and again.

Meat Bodies stare ahead and sweat, the green grows at their feet as the white faces beat us, the green escapes in spurts and splashes, flytraps and prickly pears sniff at the sweat. White faces beat and beat, their Control cream starting to slide off in flung clumps, as they wipe their brows. Meat bodies join in, tearing, kicking, biting at the green, a slow roar grows and I feel chunks tear at me as the green contorts my body and writhes, growing in petal bursts.

The transport arrives and the meat bodies enter the vehicle in single file, their hair and clothes are matted in green moss, they sit down and stare straight ahead.

White faces stay with the two green corpses, green spittle leaks out of their eyes and mouth, they paw through the green carcass and find a Control inhaler.

Incidence Report 080 000:

Control demand has increased, meat bodies are hoarding Control, forming mobs to gather infected meat bodies for the Control reward. Control factories are working on a skeleton staff due to the dissection rate, the coming Control shortage is concerning.

My green babies meet in the night, circling around the baobab trees, my babies grown tall with wheat hair, fingernails blooming in red roses and daisies sprouting from their eyes. They curl themselves from the dumps and dim places, dance in my green playgrounds, climb the baobab trees and jump, my ocean catching them, dressing them in emerald kelp, their shoulders adorned with shells. Their teeth shine, starlight points, needles they sharpen.

Chapter 20 White Face Warriors Fall

My feet are green. Look, look. No?
My feet are still green. You won't look.
Your feet are green, look down. No?
Your feet are green. You won't look.
No Control ointment for you?
Are you sure?
My feet are not green anymore.
It's because I use the control ointment.
Look there. See her over there.
She didn't use the Control ointment
Look at her, a green pile
Flytraps and prickly pears ate her
Look at her, see her bones decorating the green
Bones for necklaces and eyeballs for chewing

White face groups camp on top of the last pink structures, they don't look down at the vines curling around the structures' base, they don't look at their green feet and fingers. They keep Control ointment in their pockets and spread it on their skin thick. They inject Control into their eyeballs, spines and livers three times a day.

We keep the Control.
We keep Control alive.

Camps are built with Control packaging, they breathe under plastic and smear concrete dust on everything, snorting it through their noses and sucking on concrete chunks like lollipops.

Their dead are moved to the rooftop corners. White faces will not eat their flesh, they eat their cans of dead meat body and wait for green to decompose their dead. Throwing the body's down in a ritual frenzy.

We wait, till the green is thick on our dead and then we cut and kick and chop it apart, we pierce it with sewing thread and hang the green carcass in pieces, till green is burnt away, sizzling smaller in sun. The pieces drop like seeds, slither down the building, back to their mother's thick bloody skirts.

Control holds the white faces up, bones protrude from their meat body and their skin is taught like an overpacked sausage, their molecules are held apart and together by robotic arms, their movements mechanical, their eyes sharp, skin translucent. Structures are crowned in these Control high, meat bodies, they dangle from the edges and jump between structures.

Incidence Report: 090 000

Infant meat body 10200 in agency 112 has exhibited green disease symptoms, in his left ear. Dissection was ordered for his entire batch.

Each festival day, there is one each week, female white faces wake early and prepare the littlest female white faces.

Believing that the birthing centres are infected with green. White faces took matters into their own hands. The consistent, routine penetration of female white faces, results in children. They are kept in closed plastic containers with high potency Control aerosols squeezing out the oxygen, for their first three months. They are slow learning feeble children, but Control's children. Their skin is chalky, thick, crusty, white dusty. They are not held, they lick at the floor where water and soggy flesh are poured down for them. They crawl together for warmth the outer circle eating the toes of the inner circle.

White faces grow on top of the last pink structures.

White face chants are heard out over the city, meat bodies listen to the software updates and clap as the white faces chant their mantra in low deep voices, echoing against each other.

We keep the Control.
We keep Control alive.

When green gets too close, white faces dissect immediately and without haste, cutting and beating the chunk, drying it till they slither back down. Feet were the first to go, then hands, noses, lips, ears. Hair needs to be shaved, grass is a tricky kind of green, a permanent tattoo the white faces ignore and smear with Control ointment.

Control's children have no hair, they remain bald, their genitals smoothed over into small suggestions. But the green still liked their flesh. The first foot was dissected from Control Child today, White faces sang of it.

"It slithered in through his ear
like a snake through his anus
green came, he tore at it, coughed
and choked for three days, but green moss
grew on his left foot stump
the prickly pears bubbled his skin and the flytraps, curled close to his knee
in one day, after all his reserved Control injections were administered directly into the wound it still
bubbled with those poking prickly pear heads, those fat round green
we cut today, we sawed through it, we cut today."

All white faces feasted on Control in remembrance to the foot, they took double their doses and slept in Control's fluffy white cloud. The children even slept, they did not cry out, they did not shudder, they lay still.

Vines curled up the last pink structures higher, green creatures (the woman's babies), long legged and slender, woven of vine climbed, their needle teeth barred, their stomachs growling. Green vines grew thick, suffocating the last pink structures, melting the white face fungus in green.

The slender green creatures, pad softly into the white face camps, silently they sniff the metallic Control and stalk closer, they sniff at the white faces' throats.

Green creatures plant their seeds in the dim dark places, leaving behind small green nipples, little green thumbs, in the white faces' genitals, those dim dark places Control does not think to acknowledge. They sit like sweating nipples, suckling on the dead skin and small sweat drops. Green seeds sit squat and grow, eating at the white face flesh from the inside.

“The white face warriors are dying up there!”

“We don’t have the man power to help them.”

“But I am signing birth rate increases and growth increases every day?”

“By my calculations we should have enough meat bodies to find a cure.”

“Did you account for this exponential dissection rate?”

“Are you questioning me?”

“Yes.”

Incidence Report: 0100 000

The software update was late and empty this evening, the appropriate superior was dissected after showing violent tendencies when a co-superior questioned him.

Chapter 21 Green Everywhere

My ocean is blushing in pink, my waters muddied with grey and pink vomit, the concrete leftovers take up more space, bubbling into coves, a froth suffocating.

*My babies have eaten their full
seeding and budding
their long limbs, vine warriors
cracking the concrete,
like eggshells in a fist
we eat the concrete out,
leaving only green*

*which twists and twists, spewing out jungles
in tall vines and rubber trees*

*which bursts and bursts in daisy fields,
wild grass and willow trees*

Structures are eaten through, they stand on my spindly vine legs, apartments are nests blowing in the wind, plastic furniture, beds, all consumed in my green moss, clothes are petals, keys are pieces of shell.

My green is everywhere, it lives in their meat body mouths, their armpits, their dicks and cunts, little green nipples nuzzle and spread my green deeper, ripping at Control's nerve sized mite-robots, tearing their small metal limbs and pinching their bodies crushed.

Meat bodies frolic in the green carpeted streets, their hair entangled in vines, their arms swinging in random circles, their eyes glazed over. They do not smile, blank in serenity.

White faces are mine now, they dance at the top of my vine structures, their eyes ringed in green, my seeds have taken them by the throat. White faces with green ringed eyes sing and blow kisses to their closest baobab trees, their bodies dance again and again, green nipples scattering across their skin, thickest in their dim dark places.

White faces with green ringed eyes pound their feet, pounding the roofs into fungus, its pores drifting into the air, lifted into the winds. White faces with green ringed eyes fan my green higher.

Incidence Report: 0100 000

Superiors are kept in air tight bunkers at the planet's northern and southern ice caps. The infection is slowest here and kept at bay with Control sprays over the buildings, daily full immersion Control bathes and four Control injections directly into the brain.

"Green has been noted in the Agencies, it is now assumed that even our infant meat bodies are infected."

"How close are we to a cure?"

“We still need more data.”

“Dissection rates have dropped off. Less accusations, more infections.”

“We need more data. Sign the order to dissect infant meat bodies. We have enough agencies operational.”

“One white clad deathman has sent in a report from the Woman’s strong hold. He is infected but still sends in reports at 5pm every day. He believes that the roommate could be the cure.”

“We tried with her roommate, replacing several brain functions with Control machines and the results were inconclusive.”

“His methods are strange, he induces a hypnotic state which calms the infection.”

“Until there is a confirmed cure, continue with the necessary dissections.”

There are less of us in the lines. They are taking the younger ones away, we don’t see them again. No more infant meat body cries, the nursery is full and then emptied to quickly to hear them cry, again again, sometimes we hear small muffles but they stop quickly.

There are more inspections now. They take us to a well-lit white tiled room, there is a drain in the corner, the metal glows green. We are stripped naked and they spread our arms and legs, peering their lighted scopes into our underarm hair, then they scrape flesh from inside my opening. I bleed there for a week after.

The night before inspections we hold mirrors up for each other and slather stolen Control cream on the moss patches. We touch and hold each other at night, it makes us feel better. But we separate before the nurses enter for rounds, we don’t touch, we hide, our faces smiling. I think the nurses are hiding too. I saw two nurses standing very close to each other, two female nurses, their little pinkies interlocked and they stared at each other, they didn’t smile.

Sometimes nurses smooth my hair, an absented minded comfort, we both ignore it and sneak glances at the video surveillance.

There aren’t any windows and we are not allowed outside. There are less and less of us. I count the muffled infants and their vanishing, it’s now three times a day that a full meat body nurse is emptied.

Chapter 22 Sisters

I can feel my sister, her impatience breaks open the skin at my ankle, her vine fingers squeeze my bone in irritation, I don't want to look down at my ankle. But I know she is eating me.

I count the lines on my hand, it is still my flesh, not hers. My eyes don't see, they open and close and I count again and again.

My green sister grows around me, thick and fast, her vines cradle my body, water drips into my mouth as she leans her green over and around me, holding me close. I can feel her heart beat near my ear. I don't move, I lie foetal and still, my head at the angle, my arm up near my face, my eyes open and I only see my hand, I count the wrinkles, I feel her all around me. I don't look.

My sister always wanted her way, she would scream and kick when she wouldn't get it, neighbours complained and she was prescribed more Control, but it only stopped when Mother gave in. Her face pink and flushed her fists tight enough to draw blood. Mother gave in, looked at her. Those green eyes, they would peer at me while I slept, I could feel her breathing on me, stroking my hair. She wanted me in her green, away from anything else.

She bled once, in public she bled. She tried to reach for me over the school fence. Her face cross that she couldn't get to me. I had made friends that year, without her, even though everyone thought I was weird like her. I pushed her back and she scraped her hand on the fence and she bled, smeared it on the fence, reached for my skirt through the fence. I ran away, but they saw, my friends saw. I was alone with her again.

I liked being separated, Mother was sad, but I did well, did well in school, made friends and graduated into Mother status before all my other friends. I got bigger, had a stand-alone structure, Bill and children made me even bigger. I was safe and huge, settled. But my sister always gets her way.

She lived with us once, I was scared, scared she would get bigger than us, fill up my structure with her, take my children under her skirts, make Bill small, loosen his smile, loosen him into a small broken thing. I could smell her in the house, especially when she was changing her dressing, the wound smelt salty and clear, it would ink everything in the house, covering it all.

She made my girls see it, see her green. I found them sitting by her side as she unwrapped the bandage from her ankle, she turned the ankle towards them letting them see the wound as she spat on it and scaped at the scab. My littlest one pointed at the wound giggling "I can see the prickly pear, their little head poking out of you." My eldest scolded the littlest but I could see she looked a bit too long. I gave them extra Control after my sister left, holding them down in Control baths, they hated the full immersion, their little hands grabbing at my forearms as I kept them under. They got better though, the moss fell from their tongues and I scooped it out their cereal.

My sister's salty clear smell lingered in my structure, sometimes on calm days I would smell her in the dim dark places, the corners, under carpets, in the back of cupboards, at the bottom of shoes, she lingered, just like her daily calls. I would wince at the phone, but I answered every time, I listened as those green eyes pierced my brain flesh.

And they took me. They came in white coats, white-clad deathmen holding white batons and they pounded on our structure's door, neighbouring meat bodies peered out their windows. Bill stood in front of me until they handed him a screen, his Control registers the paperwork and he stands aside. My children cling to my legs, I am scared as the white clad deathmen stare at this touch display, their

fists curl around their batons. I scrape the children off my skirts, standing in front of them with my hands outstretched. White-clad deathmen inject Control into my brain stem.

I smelt her in the cell when I finally woke up, salt burned my tongue.

My sister resists, I hate it. It feels like Control on my tongue, I want to bang her head against my bosom, I want to bang it until her skull cracks open, I will read her brain flesh, I will read her, take pieces out and put my green in, she will be closer to me. She won't leave.

I am tired, my hands hold open her skull like a surgeon, I have stood over her, poking and prodding, trying to get the root out, that little Control root she keeps so close. I will make her. But sometimes I get mad, I have stood over her, protected her, turned the dissectors away, pulled at her brain flesh, tore out Control, those small fingers that turn her away from me, I pinch them into cracks and short-circuits. But she is quiet, counts the wrinkles on her unscarred hand. That pretty flesh piece, untouched and her own. While I, while I have torn pieces from myself, fed them to the world, I give and give, building her a sanctuary, a home where our babies can grow together, hold hands, I tear myself, ripping scars into my flesh, eating this concrete green.

But she doesn't give anything, her flesh is pristine, uncut, untaken, she is selfish with her flesh. I take a piece to remind her, to remind her that she breathes selfishly. The white-clad deathmen scratched her left her ankle for a flesh sample, I grew in the opening, my prickly pears tarnishing her flesh, taking something. I like to watch over her. I like to watch her wince.

She counts and counts, counting each time those two names cross her mind, counting the seconds away from her flesh. I keep bursting from her leg, pustules blooming into purple irises, their tall stalks, leaning over her foetal body, tickling her face.

Chapter 23 Feed it to Them

My ocean's sits at my feet, my waters are bloody with dark grey chunks, floating like a carcass, I vomit into his waiting gullet, my waiting gullet.

I don't like looking at him, his once sky blue waters are still seared into my vision like a sun spot, but his reaching fingers, my reaching fingers are curdling in blood, his touch, my touch is rough, dusty and cool – concrete touching me, touching my green flesh. His battered smile, my battered smile crackles in flaking sea shells, their outer layers peeling away, dead skin flapping.

He kisses my lips when I sleep, when I cradle the planet, eating at the last small concrete spots. He licks at my unconscious cheek, trying to make me smile. His hands sticky, wiping his pink bubbling on my skirt, he pleads and pleads, his hands sticky, grey coming off on my thighs in chunks, I slither away and away from him, making my body smaller, but his waves come up, currents tug me closer to his heaving coughing chest.

I feel sick, he is not apart from he, I feel the hot concrete come out, pouring down into my ocean's gullet, his hands, my hands weaken around my small body, he slithers into a calm puddle, its smaller, drying at the edges as the concrete sucks on my blue.

My ocean a puddle, diminishing, growing flaccid as my stomach roils again and again. The grey pink leftovers come up. I lay face down, smaller and disappear to my children, into my growing planet, where green burns the concrete in a wildfire, eating dust into green.

I choose not to perceive him, myself as this small puddle, the crusting smile, pink bubbles in pleading fingers.

I only feel the meat bodies frolicking against my green skin, touching each other as moss overgrows their kissing lips.

I can only feel the height as wind steals through my baobab eyelashes, feel the star light baking the midnight lilies open, feel only the wild wheat fields blurring in sunsets, feel only my babies, their petalled hair brushing against green jungles, storming through the rose bushes and climbing the baobabs for shelter, eating from my fruit trees, piercing open the blood oranges, and sucking dry the orange peel, their sea shell teeth bright with purple segments, the juice blushing their red lips.

I can't feel him, feel myself as this small puddle, the dry throat calling my name, pink bubbling from my own lips. I ignore this part of myself, I refuse to see it.

Mother came to me again. An unregistered visit, she walked along the concrete roads for two weeks, the building vehicles blowing concrete dust down her throat, she walked and walked. Leaving her screen at home. My sister, kept an eye on Mother through her screen, but Mother left her screen at home. Mother walked and walked for two weeks, she bought cans from road side convenience stores and slept in the pathways. Her feet bled, her shoulders rubbed raw against her plastic backpack, lips chapped and flaking, her face sunburnt, the tips of her ears nearly mauve, she walked and walked, leaving bloody footprints. Mother ignored other meat bodies, keeping her smile bright and her chin upright, making eye contact so that they didn't look down at her blood soaked feet.

She muttered throughout

“pull the skin apart
the seed is inside
at the flesh root
peel the muscle back
cut the ligaments
the seed is inside
at the flesh root

feed it to them
it is no longer yours
the seed passed down
feed it to them”

She muttered and muttered, walked her feet to the bone in two weeks. Sniffing me out.

Smiling her way past my apartment guards, waiting for my roommate to leave, she stood in my bedroom with the door closed and locked.

“I sniffed you out.”

“I sniffed you out, tasted salt and I knew I needed you.”

“I sniffed you out, after your sister’s father left, I was alone with her.”

“I sniffed you out, found you in an itch I had.”

“I sniffed you out, found you growing in my left thumb.”

Mother held my hands in hers, she lifted them to each of her eyes, wetting them with her tears and kissing them.

“I made you, you are my flesh, now it’s time to grow. I know what you want, I saw it in your green eyes, heard it in those strange stories, felt it as those prickly pears bubbled up under your skull. I watched you fizz green.”

“Close your eyes. Tell me what you see.”

My mouth feels light as the words tumble out from under my closed eyes.

*“Babies eat their mother’s breasts
mother’s sew the green into their empty chests
and their bones bent green sprout more.*

A green planet blooms red in the midnight black sky.”

“I sniffed you out my baby girl, and it’s not my flesh anymore, I need to give it back.”

Mother took off her plastic backpack and pulled out a metal saw, a long sharp thin knife and a grater with diamond sharp edges.

“These are yours now. You will need these to feed your own babies, they need more flesh than you can give, they will need your strength later. Control will try stunt you, cut your green short, nip it in the bud. Your babies need to be strong enough, babies need their mothers, need their flesh.”

The sliver flesh instruments glinted in my hand, Mother laid her meat body on my bed.

“Quickly before your roommate comes back. You will need to clean up.”

She held my wrist. “Take the long thin one and slit my throat.”

I did. The blood slipped off the plastics sheets, I collected the drippings in jars, and sawed Mother into pieces. I dried the flesh and fed my babies. Their little gulping mouths suckling on their grandmother.

Mother gave me her flesh in birthing me, her body was mine, I needed to release her and complete myself. She gave me all her flesh, like every mother does.

Sister: “Have you seen our Mother?”

Woman: “No, why is she not at her home structure?”

Sister: “Her screen is here, but she isn’t?!”

Woman: “Where are you?”

Sister: “In her home structure, I am standing in her empty home structure, where is she?”

Woman: “How would I know?”

Sister: “Because you do, she was talking a lot about you, saying she needed to visit you.”

Woman: “You never told me that.”

Sister: “Has she been to see you? The authorities are really concerned.”

Woman: “No, she hasn’t been to see me. Not since our last visit, 5 years ago.”

Sister: “C’mon, please don’t worry me, tell me where she is.”

Woman: “I said I don’t know.”

Sister: “You must, please I didn’t get to say goodbye.”

Woman: “You say shit goodbyes anyways.”

Sister: “You don’t care do you?”

Woman: “I said goodbye a long time ago, remember?”

Sister: “You are so fucking selfish!”

I can feel pink bubbling over my tongue, my fingers and toes are crumbling into dry hunks. I can feel my poisoned ocean crawl up my throat, cuddling close in my lungs, nestling his tired head at my heaving breast. I cannot pull him apart from myself, I feel the poison curdling behind my eyes.

Chapter 24 The Burning

White-clad deathman 5620 filed his latest report, he squints at the computer pressing the keyboard from memory. His fingers are thick with green moss, his lips are blooming in red roses.

White-clad deathman 5620 avoids the woman's cell, instead he walks around the vine corridors, visiting the roommate and writing his daily reports on computers uneaten by green in the dandelion room. He ingested all the Control held in storage, but it ran out.

Have to find the cure, have to find the cure, walking down the corridor made from green vines, need to find the cure. Look at my hands, they're green, there is moss in-between my toes, my hair stands on end, the mirror is fizzy with prickly pears, they grow from my skull, sitting atop my head like a crown. Have to find a cure, a cure to the crown, a cure to the sucking flesh, she sticks to us that is the problem, nuzzles under our skin, we can't scrape her away without scraping ourselves to the bone, even deeper, she sits squat like a toad, her green growing and growing. I hear her singing sometimes and dream of a green planet, I dream that green grows out my throat, that I stand like sunflower here in this vine laden correction facility, standing and standing still, until she chops me down, feeding my green flesh to her babies one petal at a time. Have to find a cure, stride up and down the dandelion room, past the ice covered lake. Have to find a cure have to find a cure. I walk quietly, she doesn't know I am here, thinks we have all been dissected but they forgot about me in the retreat to the ice capped concrete, they forgot about me so I can find the cure, it's here I know it is, under her nose, she wouldn't hide it anywhere else, the cure to green must be here hidden in her lair, hidden in the vines, hidden in our minds.

Have to find a cure have to find a cure stride up and down the dandelion room, past the ice covered lake, that is where the roommate hides, her wrists tied to a concrete piece the last remaining one. Guardmen restrained the roommate after she skated through their necks, think the woman likes that the roommate is trapped and can't go anywhere. The woman has built an ice lake around the roommate, I have to crawl across, hoping my weight doesn't give into cracks. Have to find a cure have to find a cure, stride up and down the dandelion room, its white puffs sitting next to large computers, I blow and blow against the keyboards typing out the report.

The roommate is quite sick, her eyes sunken in her skull, the Control machine reacts with her green skin, her body is trying to push it out, her skull is bulbous, her forehead protruding as her eyes sink deeper and deeper, white ringed holes peering out at me.

"I didn't ignore it."

Have to find a cure, you did look at it, you need to look deeper, we can change her. Roommate's hands are puffy with Venus flytraps, I hold them, green hands on green hands. We can change her, a cure, will you help me.

"Yes. I didn't ignore it."

My green hands close the roommate's eyes, she sits tied to concrete, green doesn't like the concrete it pulls away, pulling her flesh through the metal restraints, it cuts and bleeds, have to find a cure. Your eyes are closed, they are not your eyes, you live in Control in the small robotic minds, this is just flesh, this is not you, you are not this meat body, you are Control.

"I want more Control, I didn't ignore it."

Have to find a cure, there is no more Control, just the fragments left in you.

“It hurts, I didn’t ignore it.”

Have to find a cure, you can ignore it.

“I can’t ignore it, sits like toad deep in my belly.”

Have to find a cure, close your eyes again. The roommate’s eyes stare open at me from under her bulbous head. Close your eyes.

“I didn’t ignore it.”

Close your eyes, have to find a cure. I tape her eyes shut, her arms press harder against the restraints, cutting in deeper, new blood meets with the old drips, green likes it, likes the roommate’s flesh. Venus flytraps, lick at the cuts, blood dripping onto their black tongues. You need to look deeper, the Control is within you, just tap into it, breathe into it, let it become a fire that burns the green away.

“I didn’t ignore it.”

Have to find a cure, I bang my fist against the roommate’s bulbous forehead the Control machine rattles, a bruise grows blue and black on her head, fist indentation deepens, the blood tries to escape, squirting out her eyes. I bang my fist against her bulbous forehead again, have to find a cure, tell me you can feel it, tell me you can feel the Control.

“I didn’t ignore it.”

I bang my fist against her bulbous forehead again and again, she tries to move away, to duck but that forehead is large. Blood trickles out her eyes, nose and mouth, the green waits patiently below, green’s petals wiping her face clean, I bang my fist against her bulbous forehead again. Her head hangs limp. I crawl across the ice to the dandelion room, I write my report, transmit it over the dandelion connection.

Have to find a cure, bang my fist against her bulbous head again and again, have to find the cure. I see it, the cure, like a sun spot it hovers over everything, just out of reach, I chase it around my vine room, a cat following the reflection, catching it in my thoughts, then it burns away too quick. Have to find the cure, its bright, it sings in crackling embers, it consumes, I need the roommate to feel it, feel how Control burns through the green, she needs to feel.

The roommate’s bruises are thick, her forehead swollen around my fists, the Control machine is cutting through her skin, steal corners poke out of her left temple. More tape over her eyes, green skin comes away in my hand, have to find a cure. Close your eyes, what do you feel.

“I... didn’t... I feel green cracking open my meat body, I see prickly pears.”

Yes, yes you feel the green inside you, burn it, burn it down, like a wildfire, scorch the green breathing and living in you, burn it, see the fire, see it expand, see it lick.

“It hurts, hot, blistering heat, it hurts, ash sits in mouth, smoke curling down, the Venus flytraps scream, they’re screaming.”

Have to find a cure, have to find a cure, burn it. The roommate whimpers.

“It’s burning, the green is burning.”

The roommate stills, her eyes closed, the Control machine moves back into place, her head no longer bulbous, her cheeks and skin bloom in Control’s white. Her eyes still closed, the roommate smiles, as the Venus flytraps and prickly pears wilt.

Found a cure, found a cure, Control needs to see the green, see it so it can burn it away. We must stop denying it, accept the green, cuddle it close so Control can find it. If Control doesn’t think it is real, it cannot fight against her green. We need to see it and burn it. I know how to update the algorithm, I know how to make Control stronger than her green, see it and burn it, just a few lines of dandelion code, just a little acceptance and then the fire can rage. Found a cure found a cure.

Chapter 25 The Flesh Price

I can feel pink bubbling over my tongue, my ocean is heavy on my breast, he lies at my throat, suffocating, my ocean, my small puddle, his arms, my arms wrap around me, his muddy waters, my muddy waters choke down my throat and he holds me there, under him, under this pink concrete corpse, my corpse. His tongue is dusty, he licks my cheeks, likes the moisture. I sweat, trying to push him off, trying to pull him off me.

I brace my legs against my weight, my green planet's weight, my green stands behind me, I can feel my babies, my wheat warriors pushing their energy behind me, I wrestle with him, pull at him, try to tear him, a pink puddle apart, but liquid like my ocean morphs back and sags over me, I thrash, but he bubbles over my tongue, I can't scrape him off, he is elastic plastic liquid morphing over me, he is me, my nose squashed, holding the bag tight at my throat.

I cry out in my sleep, holding my head as he worms in, I am this dying ocean, this pink stain pressing over me, this is mine, he wipes away my tears and repeats that I am him, this pink stain pressing over me, this is mine. Can't you feel we are the same thing, he wraps his legs around my stomach as his arms, my arms circle my neck, he hangs from my body, my corpse.

I cry out, he muffles over me, pink bubbling over my tongue, coughs lining my throat, lining my insides with the leftovers.

She stands over me. My body is thick with sweat, the walls are laden with pink concrete vomit, it sits on my skin, on my hands, in my hair, down my breasts, between my pussy, the vomit everywhere, coming up in dribbles, in gushes, I can't stop, my stomach constricting.

Between the pink chunks, I look at her, my sister standing arms still, her left ankle flesh open, flapping, as purple irises gush out like an upside down river, she hobbles closer. Her eyes are dark. I am scared, she is close, bigger than I remember.

Sister: "Mother came to you didn't she, when she went missing?"

Woman: "Not now, sister."

Sister: "Yes now, we don't have much time."

Woman: "We have all the time, I can build and break it all."

Sister: "I know, I know you built it. But please tell me, Mother came to see you, when she went missing, she came to see you?"

Woman: "Yes, she did."

Sister: "You slit her throat didn't you, fed her to your babies?"

Woman: "Yes, I did."

Sister: "I visited for months before she asked me to stop coming, said my fussing was making her worse. She was getting smaller, paler, she would shudder as she sat up, as she turned her head. I would close windows to stop the breeze unsettling her, she said it felt like knives along her skin. She would count the scars on her palms. She said those scars were from you, as you hurt yourself, she said

it woke her up, the scars would write across her palms, your hands your knives, she would show me, she would count them. She asked me to stop coming after I came in and she was vomiting at the dining room table, she had a plastic container there, her white hair tied back, her hands, arms, feet, legs, stomach shuddered as blood came out in chunks, thick chunks, liver, heart and intestine pieces. I asked her, I pleaded, I threatened to report her, she stared at me blankly and asked me to leave to never come back, that she was now dead, her meat body needed elsewhere. I touched her, I touched her, put my head in her lap and begged. She stroked my hair and said "This flesh is not mine, it is hers, your little sister's flesh now, my daughter needs this, needs me." I need you I begged. Mother just turned back to her plastic container, resuming. I didn't go back for two weeks."

Woman "I slit her throat, she asked me to, and I cut her up, my babies needed it, they're strong now."

Sister: "You fed them strong, but there is a cost."

Woman: "What cost, I built it, my green is all."

Sister: "There is a cost."

Woman: "I will not pay it, he will, my ocean, he wants to."

Sister: "He is just your imagination, he was always you. It's not your flesh anymore, you gave it to them, your babies this green world, like Mother gave you her flesh to birth you, she had to pay the price by dying. You have to pay the same price, see how you too grow small, as your children grow, living on the flesh you gave them. It is their flesh now, you are a mother, we both understand this."

Woman: "No, he will, my ocean will pay."

Pink bubbles over my tongue.

Sister: "It's just you, he wasn't real, this is all you, all of it, the ocean, the green. There is a price to growing flesh. Mother always said. She paid it and you will too, look at you, there is no ocean just a pink puddle sitting inside you."

Pink bubbles over my tongue, I try to pull at him, but my skin pulls taut, he smiles and my cheeks move. My sister traces the gruesome smile, tenderly.

Sister: "Give them the flesh that belongs to them. Come let's feed your babies properly, so they can keep your green planet alive, you must sacrifice yourself like our mother sacrificed herself for you."

Chapter 26 Dandelion Report

Have found a cure, have found a cure, must go over, topple over and make a report in the dandelion forest, go over the ice, go over the ice, its breaking under my feet, swim swim through icy water, swim against the woman's current, I can feel her arms in the water, I can feel her green eat through my ear, the Venus flytraps and the prickly pears pierce my skin with seashell fangs, the water like blue ropes, holds me back. I swim and swim my eyes shut, my eyes shut, I swim and swim, reaching.

White-clad deathman 5620 looks back, the roommate lies sleeping, her wrists loose against the restraints, her eyelids closed, mouth slightly open, her head smooth and flat, skin a creamy Control white, the prickly pears shake in dying yellow while Venus flytraps scream soundlessly, their black tongues wagging as white-clad deathman 5620 leaves the roommate on her ice island, the green forests bending bark in protest, the wind whistling through his skin in accusation as the pines reach after white-clad deathman 5620. He struggles out of the cell, the walls alive, snake vines plunging at him, trying to rope him still, the correction facility shakes as white-clad deathman 5620 runs to report the cure in the dandelion forest.

Have found a cure, have found a cure, type it into the algorithm, let Control see what it needs to fight, believe so it can break, blow at the dandelion in Morse code intervals, that is how you type into the algorithm. My green fingers blur peeling into petals, grass flourishing at my cuticles making them thick soil dampened things, heavy as they try type out this intricate message, this lace, this fire, the icecaps must know, must know to spread this fire. Have found a cure, hear me I have found a cure, to the icecaps I have found a cure, I have found a cure.

A single dandelion flies away from the Correction Facility.

"A report came in, he has found a cure!"

"Someone told me the report was received via dandelion?"

"I think you are mistaken we received a report through our usual channels."

"Are our usual channels dandelions?"

"Why are we talking about dandelions?"

"He has found a cure, that lone white-clad deathman, he has found a cure."

"Have we tested it?"

"Does the math hold up?"

"Does the physics hold up?"

"Does the interface between molecular structures hold up?"

"Yes. We have positive results across all spectrums and multiverses."

"We will project the update tonight."

“But the report was received via dandelion?”

“How quickly can we transmit from this icecap?”

“But the report was received via dandelion?”

“We can transmit in little over 3 hours, 3 hours 15 minutes.”

“Is the transmitter warm, this is a broad signal we don’t want to overload it.”

“But the report was received via dandelion?”

“The transmitter was made for this, we can blast away.”

“But the report was received via a dandelion?!”

Incidence Report: 0110 000

The software update was late and empty this evening, the appropriate superiors were dissected after attempting to transmit a cure received via a dandelion from Correction Facility 1.

Chapter 27 My Sister's Green

I heard them call me, my little girls, I heard them call, it jumped me awake, my eyes left my hand, slipping to take in my surroundings, vines drooped tinged in yellow and red petals littered the floor, burnt. My leg still hurt, the purple irises in full bloom stretching my skin apart, the roots wiggling under skin, leaves tickling against my body. Something happened here, the air doesn't taste wet or moist, standing, I need to get to my sister, need to find my girls, we need to leave, this place isn't hers anymore, the air doesn't taste the same, a metallic sheen sits on my tongue. I remember this feeling, I rub my tongue against my teeth, the metallic sheen catching slightly. I remember the feeling, it tastes like Control. My vine door it falls open, a dry husk opening at a simple tap, the air is heavy with dandelions, but they glitter, shining metallic. I shake my head, need to find my sister, need to find the girls, I duck down and crawl trying to avoid the shiny dandelions, they don't look right.

My leg irises twitch to the left as I try to turn go right, I ignore it but the irises pull tighter, tearing a little blood from the open wound, I turn left, crawling, listening to the bloody twitches in my leg. I come against another husk, I tap it open. My sister, bone thin sits at the centre, vines, Venus flytraps, and prickly pears surround her in a drooping wilt, dried moss flakes at her skin, mushrooms tickle from her eyelashes, but, but oh god this pink grey puddle, spews out of her mouth, coating her body in pink slime, like a toad it sits at her throat, a tumour growing bigger and bigger. Coming closer, green is dying at her skin, separating itself, the mushrooms burning away as the pink comes out in splashes, moss blackened and falling in flakes, dead skin, dead green mulching away from her.

My sister isn't awake, but she roils and squirms, shedding mulch from her grey skin, she cries out, "I killed her!"
again and again
it turns me cold.

Have found a cure, have found a cure, but they didn't transmit it, I listened for the update and they didn't transmit my cure. I cry out, leaves clogging my throat. They need to transmit my cure, they need to transmit my cure. I keep crying, desperate, slumped against the dandelion forest. They need to transmit my cure, why haven't they, I am ding in green, she bends me, I feel it. The roommate comes up behind me, her face white with Control, her body untouched by green.

"Come we can transmit the cure from here, use the dandelions. Come sit up, you can transmit the code changes so Control can burn her away. Come along."

Have found a cure, have found a cure, I feel better and use my moss covered fingers, lifting them as the roommate instructs and we pulse the code deep into the dandelion forest, enabling Control to see the green so it can burn it. As I press the last moss-covered button, the dandelion forest gleams metallic and starts gushing out dandelions, they fly in metallic sheen and each thing they touch turns back into normal, green falls off like a dry husk, leaving behind my real flesh, the dandelions gush out of the forest slowly as the wind picks them up and scatters them through Correction Facility 1. Have found a cure, have found a cure and it is working. The roommate smiles very wide.

Sister: "Give them the flesh that belongs to them. Come let's feed your babies properly, so they can always grow."

I don't tell her about the dandelions, that Control that itches at my throat anew, she is dying and I want her to see her creation. I want to see it, finally I want to believe her just as I know it is about to crumble apart, I want to give my dying sister a piece of myself. She deserves that much, to be held by me at least once, to be taken care of at least once instead of fighting alone in her head.

I can feel pink bubbling over my tongue, my fingers and toes are crumbling into dry hunks. I can feel my ocean crawl up my throat, cuddling close in my lungs, nestling his tired head at my heaving breast.

My sister, lifts my body, this pink laden thing, prickly pears drop in rotten scatterings from my head, the juices purple and thick run down my face, my fingernails touch away burnt petals to the fall. My sister has to get my feet and legs loose, wiping away roots, vine tangles, they lift away like dead mulch, my green lives everywhere but me. I come away from my feeding tubes, come away from the green planet, it's still there my green, don't think it's going anywhere but this pink grey toad, these concrete leftovers eating at me, it makes my green sick, my green doesn't like touching this pink laden thing, doesn't like touching me. I am sick, my arms feeble, my legs pins and needles toppling over each. I come away, my sister holds my hand and leads me out, we walk through the vine corridors, passing the dandelion forest spawning out metallic, painful dandelion's they scare me, but my sister turns my head from the sight.

Sister: "Don't look, let's find our babies while we have a little time left."

Time left, it scares me, the dandelions scare me, they burn my skin, burn at my green.

Woman: "We need to close this facility, we can't let the dandelions escape, hurry now my sister, we have to stop the dandelions from spreading."

I drag my sister faster, the dandelions burn at her skin as we move through the facility. How can we keep the dandelions in. I drag and drag my sick sister, her babies will know how to keep the dandelions in, they will know.

Roommate: "Come back for me?! I can hear your footsteps as you drag her"

The voice floats out softly like a bubble.

Sister: "Your roommate is still alive?"

Roommate: "Yes I am. I looked at it. I looked at it. I burnt it all, they are coming for you next."

Woman: "Keep walking. We leave her behind."

Roommate: "You want to leave me behind, me? After all I did for you, washed your clothes, gave you your Control, if only you had listened. You want to leave me behind?"

The roommate's laugh feels hot, burning the air slightly metal.

We can't see her, I hold my bone weak sister and the voice tumbles around the vines, shivering leaves in dead fright, their edges burnt. We need to get out, move forward, move forward, drag leg and sister, drag, drag, drag, again and again.

Roommate: "Leaving me behind, leaving me behind, how cruel. You were always cruel weren't you? I looked at it, I looked at it, and I burnt it, I burnt it down, all of it, all the green burnt. Leave me behind?"

They are coming for you, it will burn, white-clad deathman 5620 sent them the reports, he said, he said he sent the reports, they were received successfully, it's only a matter of time, a matter of time, till you burn."

We can't see her but her shadow lingers when I turn back.

We need to get out, we need to close the facility stop the dandelions from escaping. I see the front door and I push it open, it falls like dead husk. We walk out into my sister's green planet.

It's a vine green ocean breathing in slow heartbeats, as trees, nests hold the meat bodies, its jungles edging into flower fields, edging to the savannah's golden rivers, mushroom structures puff out. Rose gardens and baobab's dot the planet densely, the canopy ringed in tropical fruit, while moss eats at anything left standing for too long. Sunflowers peak at us, as we leave the vine nest, their heads tilting down as my sister passes by them.

Feathery light fingers touch my neck and the back of my hands, its them, these green warriors, wheat hair glistening, shells glinting from their shoulders, arms and legs thick green vines, my sister's babies. Their faces calm, beautiful, petals dripped from their daisy eyes, mushrooms dangled from their ears. They take my sister's bone thin body from me, they stroke my hair and wrap their arms around me, we stand for a long time, silently weeping, it makes me feel light headed and giddy.

Behind us other green warriors close up Correction Facility 1 with dense vines, they grow them from their fingers and densely pack the Correction Facility in steal like vines that squish it smaller and smaller. I hear the roommate's muffled screams as the green warriors compress the building into a palm sized green encrusted rock. I can't taste the metallic Control and I smile.

These green creatures encircle their hands around my wrists, tight, too tight, I don't know, the sun shines onto us as we walk through the forest, whose old oaks are draped in jungle vine, with purple and blue flowers twinkling at their base, too tight, the grip loosens, but still too tight, I don't know, my lips dry but I can't not, it pulls out of me. "I need to find my girls..."

I stare out at the moving, breathing green, this planet consumed, changed irreversibly, find them, find them how? Where is my street, what would my structure be, find them how, how in this green planet can I find them, my voice quietly says it again "I need to find my girls..."

Feathery fingers and arms encircle my shoulders hold me up, pat my back in slow circles. I cry and they hold me as we move through this green, a baobab looms ahead, its sliver buttery bark glinting in the sunshine. Stubby branches stretching higher, dressed in iridescent green vines, whose fingers hang connected to the nearest baobab, yellow and purple flowers bloom from the vines, swinging in the wind's height. Red roses are soon brushing all around me, their petals plump lips caressing my skin.

"More dandelion reports have come in sir, corroborating the first assumption."

"They came in every 5 minutes, very precise, like its somehow linked to the computers. But they have stopped now."

"Do we have enough data?"

"We have a mountain of dandelion data, sir, quite literally."

“Is that a joke?”

“No sir, no sir.”

“Good.”

“Green masses are close to breaching our defences. We are running out of Control reserves.”

“No reports have been received by any other correction facilities or agencies in 5 months.”

“Fine. Dam you. Tomorrow’s update use that crazy dandelion report.”

Chapter 28 The Beginning

At the base of the baobab, my sister, her bone thin body lies quietly in green, a delicious monster curls its leaves around her, holds her, its rubbery skin thick comforting and close. I step closer, my skin moss green, and check her small chest still lifts and falls.

Feathery fingers touch at my neck, they are around me, arms encircling me lightly as they bend over staring at my sister, their mother. Fingers trace her bluish lips, the dark circles under her eyes, her extended stomach with its pink skin mottled in grey, her thin legs like dry white twigs. We curl together with my sister, all touch, green cuddling and kissing the white skin, they show me, they show me how to touch her, how to hold my sister.

More come, some with wheat crowns, others with prickly pears. These wheat and vine warriors sit around the baobab tree, looking up at the woman's small body.

And then I see them, my girls led in by tall creatures, their shells glinting against skin purple with irises, my girls, my girls, I peel myself away, reaching my arms open calling their names, the iris creatures lead them closer. My girls, their skin green moss, their hair thin jungle vines climb into my arms, we hold each other close for the first time, iris creatures kiss my feet.

"They helped us, kept us safe after Bill was dissected." My girls speak in unison, their hands and features move in tandem, irises peak out along their arms, dressing them in feathers.

"Is she going to be okay?" Their sing song voices call out and echo against the baobab tree, stars hang overhead in bright rivers, peaking through the petal canopies. My girls scrunch their faces, their blue iris feathers shudder and their mouths open louder "Is she going to be okay?"

Feathery fingers try to calm them, stroking their backs, tussling their jungle vine hair, but the question hangs a noose around the baobab.

They look at me, all the creatures look at me, with those green eyes, hundreds of her green eyes, those spiders that haunted my dreams. Their green eyes stare at me, asking for my permission, asking for my permission to slice my sister's throat and give the flesh back.

I nod my head.

I take my girls, turn their heads into my skirts and breast, take them around the baobab tree, the stars glint just the same on their blue iris feathers, but it feels colder, quieter.

"She is going to die, isn't she?" Their singsong voices gently ask, their hands green and blue lift up to my cheeks in unison, comforting me.

I pull them closer, laying us against the baobab,

"Feel this my girls, feel this, this is my sister, she built this, a green planet, she is not dying, my sister lives and breathes all around us.

But flesh demands repayment, and her babies need her flesh."

Feathery green fingers hold the sharpened shell and together green warriors slit the woman's throat, slit their mother's throat, blood, tarnished with pink grey clumps, pours out, pink clumps burn. Green

feathery fingers are not done, they carve open their mother's abdomen, pulling out the pink concrete toad in pieces, the cut her to pieces as they scrape the pink toad out in chunks, the woman's flesh scatters smaller and smaller as the pink chunks are tossed aside. Feathery green fingers collect their mother's flesh, fill their arms with it and blood dripping down their vine arms, they eat.

I hear the chewing and cover my girls' purple ears, we cuddle into the baobab close.

As we sit there I see the first dandelion falling from the sky, burning through all my sister's green. Soon the air is thick with dandelions and I watch as these shimmering metal dandelions burn through any green they touch. The baobab dissolves, the green warriors wave goodbye with blood soaked hands as the dandelions consume them in fire.

Incidence Report: 0120 000

The dandelion software update successfully cured the Green. White-clad deathman 5620 discovered that by enabling Control to see the green it could burn the green away, find each leaf with its nerve-sized robots and tear the green into kindling. Society has returned to normality, meat bodies have returned to their work allocations, birth rates have normalised, dissection rates are minimal and the structure building has increased exponentially.

Pink concrete is mined here.

Meat bodies live to break their planet into smaller chunks, building large structure-cities.

Meat bodies eat dead meat bodies, using the leftover liquid to mould concrete higher. It gives the structures a pinkish tinge.

Meat bodies take Control in the mornings, this curbs their tendency for high flesh rates and green illusions.

Two birds, their feathers - blue irises live in a concrete structure, their mother plants green in glass jars all around their house, her hands are scar ridden.

I am Mother, Whore and Child, a repetition that eats this slow sticky concrete again and again.