

Rest for Machines

by

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A Practicum Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Approved April 2013 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

## ABSTRACT

Rest for Machines is a short, fragmented novel about a woman named Tina Medina.

Rest for Machines

“WARNING! Hiking and outdoor related sports can be dangerous. Be responsible and prepare for the trip. Study the area you are entering and plan accordingly. Dress for the current weather conditions and unexpected weather changes. Take plenty of water. Never go alone. Make an itinerary with your plan(s), route(s), destination(s) and expected return time. Give your itinerary to trusted family and/or friends.”

Superstition Search and Rescue (SSAR)  
Apache Junction, AZ

White lettering on a black screen:

*In search of ...Extraterrestrials*  
*...Magic & Witchcraft*  
*...Missing Persons*  
*...Myths & Monsters*  
*...Lost Civilizations*  
*...Strange Phenomena*

Voiceover: *This series contains dramatic re-creations, and presents information based in part on theory and conjecture. The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanation, but not necessarily the only one, to the mysteries we will examine.*

A man stumbles through the desert with a full burlap bag in each hand. He holds the bags at waist level and still they drag. Based on the contouring of the bulge of each bag you might guess oranges or baseballs. Now a close-up of his bruised and sweaty face: he's blind. His nose is stuffed with black, clotted blood. He's muttering unintelligibly, crying, and frothing at the mouth, passing tall cacti. A lizard scatters. The man appears to be getting increasingly agitated, babbling louder and jerking his head more violently. The view from the ground near his feet toward the sky: buzzards circle. He passes a pile of bones and now he's shouting, and the totality of our view is his mouth, his open lips, cracked and purple, forming the perimeter of the shot. His lips stretch and contract as he screams, stretch and quiver and close, and when he opens his mouth to resume screaming bands of saliva span from top lip to bottom. Now a wide shot: one of the buzzards enters a dive but aborts its attempt a foot before contact with the man's head, and drifts leisurely back to the circle. Back to the shot of the mouth: all but the thickest band of saliva have broken, and even though he's shouting it's still not possible to make out the words, almost like the shout of a deaf guy, but not quite that. His lips quiver as he screams, and just when the last band of saliva breaks and spills over his bottom lip you move inside the mouth, and instantly the cause of his incoherence is clear: his tongue has been crudely severed near the base.

Now the man from behind, staggering in the direction of the sun, the bags cutting a zigzag into the sand.

“Mexico, 1850.”

Fast-forward through more agony, and now a scene in which the man drops the sacks and with some trouble manages to remove a heart-shaped pendant from his pocket. Your view is from the side, the man in profile, squinting as he brings the open pendant slowly closer to his face until it almost touches his eyeball, struggling in vain to get a last look at what's inside. (He must be newly blind.) Now your view is facing the man, the open heart eclipsing one of his eyes. Now your view is the view of the man (or what the man would see were he not blind), and you see that inside the pendant, of course, is the picture of a beautiful woman, a woman who becomes larger and larger as the man brings the pendant closer to his eyeball, until our view is only the woman's left eyebrow and eye, and here we linger a good ten, fifteen seconds. Even though she's smiling in the picture, her isolated eye reveals fear, the eye of someone in hiding, keeping terrified watch. Denied the comfort of seeing her, the blind man screams in rage and swallows the pendant whole.

This makes him feel better. He picks up the sacks and keeps walking.

It's sundown when he reaches the gate of a ranch, an enormous, silver gate on the front of which are the initials "MP." The gate opens, there's shouting, and soon a silent crowd has formed in front of the blind man, who sways terribly. Now a close-up of a child in the crowd, a tiny boy with no shirt, whose protruding ribs inform us that he is malnourished, poor. The boy has a lightning bolt scar in the center of his forehead. From the boy's point of view, it seems that the blind man, like some men in paintings, has eyes that follow the boy wherever he goes. The boy hides behind a leg, then slowly peers around it: the blind man is watching. The blind man is trying to say something. "Hi bah."

This means nothing to the crowd, which shakes its collective head. Now the man's legs give out and he falls to his knees and a few women start toward him, only to be held back by a very tall man at the front of the crowd in snakeskin boots, whose belt buckle matches the inscription on the gate: MP.

“Hi bah.”

The visitor lets go of the sacks and falls face first into the sand, and it appears he is finally, mercifully dead. Wait: now a close-up of his quivering left hand, the index finger running through the sand seemingly at random, and very slowly. For half a minute, we watch his finger and hear only the rough sound of the finger in the sand. The crowd is silent. Now he dies for real. Now the view is from above, the crowd slowly encroaching on the dead man. They untie one of the burlap bags and a brilliant gold light floods the sky.

The man with the MP belt buckle shouts directions and several men appear and carry the sacks in the direction of a distant hacienda, shouting at poor people to get the hell out of the way. Now the shot, from the ground toward the sky, is of the boy with the lightning bolt scar and the man with the belt buckle staring intently downward at something on the ground, presumably the dead man and what he drew, trying to decipher the inscription in the sand. The man and boy frown in concentration. The boy tilts his head. The man shuffles in a complete circle, not taking his eyes from the ground. The boy makes a circle in the opposite direction, and now at the same moment their eyes slowly widen, as though each has seen in a flash the very tip of a great secret, something so huge



that if uncovered entirely might bring not only riches, adoration, accolades, but also proof that he has a special mission on earth, a feeling he has always been ashamed of feeling but has nonetheless felt, and now that he's seen the flash he must uncover the rest, work at it, study the map, chart the terrain, record and interpret his dreams, he was right all along, he wasn't meant to just waste away, he's been chosen and why the hell not, he's suffered, spent so many nights waiting, alone, afraid of the possibility that this is all there is, boredom relieved by panic, but now he's seen the flash, the trailhead has revealed itself, he's finally awake, he isn't insane or expendable, and he can prove it. Nothing will ever be the same. And now the man with the belt buckle and the kid with the scar slowly turn to each other, and in the moment their eyes meet it becomes apparent to both that the other has had his own flash, they see it plainly on the other's entranced face, and two men can't share a special mission.

The man smiles an evil smile and draws his gun. But when the camera swings to where the boy was standing we see only his back and the backs of his skinny legs as he sprints through the big gate, into the grisly desert.

Now a shot of the inscription in the sand, a line that meanders through symbols that may be mountains or canyons, knives or rivers, the crudest of maps. The trail ends at what appears to be a heart. Below the map is written in Spanish the phrase the blind man had been struggling to speak to the crowd just minutes before, the last words he never got to say: *THERE'S MORE*.

Stock footage of majestic bald eagle in flight, screeching. Stock footage of the roiling desert sun, and now a giant saguaro with twenty, thirty arms like a head of agitated snakes.

Voiceover: *The Superstitions have been a magnet for generations of adventurers and treasure hunters. Many who come to the mountains seeking riches never return.*

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“Apache Country, 1540”

Three stern Indians on their knees, hands bound, surrounded by Spanish conquistadors in full ridiculous garb. The Spanish leader unravels a scroll. Close up: another crude map with a heart in the center. Now we pan out: behind the hostile gathering is a monstrous mountain ridgeline. We pan further out, and the men disappear. The mountains seem to lean toward the camera. Clouds obscure the peaks. More than mountains, they look like a series of jumbled, enormous, pointy stones. They say the ocean once covered this land. The shot lingers, the color slowly draining from the rocks. The sun is going down. The only sound is the wind. Back to the men: the Spanish leader shoves the map in the face of the eldest Apache and shouts something to a translator who shouts something to the Indian, who glances over his shoulder at the ridgeline and spits a wad of yellow-green mucus, veined with blood, onto the map. The Spanish leader shoots him in the head. Next Apache, same question. This Apache smiles and says something to the translator. Subtitles: *You wish to die.* The Spanish leader grins. He of course has a gold tooth. Suddenly there's a close-up of one of the peaks, on top of which stand several

dozen skinny rocks in perfect formation. The voiceover is the voice of the second Apache, who says the truth is that they have been lying to the Spaniards, but only for the Spaniards' own good. There does in fact exist a fantastic mine high in the cliffs, but no man will ever reach it, because of its precarious position and because of the protection of the God of Thunder, a wrathful and impulsive god prone to decapitation. The second Apache asks the Spaniards if they can make out the skinny rocks on the highest peak, the Enchanted Hoodoos, said to be the remnants of an expedition who sought the mine in ancient times, men who were turned to stone by the God of Thunder because of their avarice. Their heads were found in the canyon. Now back to the Spaniards and Indians, all of whom have turned to look at the rocks, and now a close-up of the leader with the rest of the men behind him. No one can see the expression on his face, which has gone pale watching the Hoodoos and listening to the story of massacre, a moment of private weakness, I've brought us some place terrible, I got carried away, I thought I'd be braver, the mountains more forgiving. Now jump cuts: the Hoodoos, the pale leader, the bloody spit, an empty desert road, the dead Apache's exit wound, the Hoodoos. Now the Spanish leader bursts into laughter and shoots the second Apache. Back to the Hoodoos and the sound of the wind, gusting and dying down.

Shot of a framed document on a black wall:

*Superstition Mts. Deaths and Dismemberments*

- *1880: Two soldiers traveling through mountains find gold in old mine and tunnel. Return to mountains month later, never found*
- *1892: Charles Dobie, beheaded*
- *1896: Elisha Reavis, beheaded*
- *1910: Woman's skeleton in high cave, traces of gold next to nude body*
- *1928: Mexican, unknown, suicide*
- *1929: Louisa Mae Walcott, hiking accident/suicide*
- *1930: Pepi Feliciano, suicide*
- *1934: Adam Stewart, bear*

“Denver, 2009”

A fat bellhop in a metal folding chair outside the glass doors of a hotel. His nametag: *Jesse Team Member Since 1985*. He yawns and checks his watch and we get a close-up of the digital time: *3:30 AM*. A taxi pulls up and a drunk couple staggers out. Jesse stands and opens the doors. “Morning,” he says and the couple totally ignores him. He sits back down. Now a close-up of his pudgy face. He chews the inside of his cheek. He sighs. The hat he’s forced to wear is purple with gold stitching and a short black brim. He yawns and checks his watch again: *3:30 AM*. He closes his eyes.

Cut to him getting home, a beige apartment with bars on the windows that looks onto a drainage ditch. The sun is rising. He shuts the door and throws the hat violently against the wall. He opens a beer. Now we see him from behind, entering a room and shutting the door. Now inside the room: the door has five locks, all of which he locks. There are no windows. He sits at a desk and our view is his pudgy face from below. He frowns in concentration, feverishly writing and erasing, scratching his head. He stares at the camera for twenty, thirty seconds, writing, erasing and chewing his cheek. Now his eyes widen. He smiles and begins to chuckle, slowly at first, until it’s full-on maniacal. Now Jesse from behind, shaking, laughing and crying. On the wall in front of him: a huge topographical map covered in microscopic handwriting. He opens a desk drawer, pulls out a marker, stands and circles something on the map again and again, crying and laughing, holding the marker like a knife.

Now a thin, middle-aged man sitting cross-legged in the desert in front of a campfire, studying a map and smiling. He looks naïve and enthusiastic. He wears a pinstriped suit and never takes his eyes off the map. “Adolph Ruth.” Two other men, unsavory-looking characters, look at the man, conspiratorially at each other, and back at the man. “Cowboy Guides.” One of the guides pours coffee on the fire, and now we see Ruth through the ensuing smoke, still staring at the map. His smile is childish, sweet, completely bewitched.

*Voiceover: In 1981 an event took place that re-focused national attention on the Superstitions, and preserved the legend of the lost gold mine to this day. On a scorching summer day, a Washington bureaucrat, Adolph Ruth, rode into the mountains, carrying maps he believed would pinpoint the lost mine.*

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Two old black women in rocking chairs, both in Kelly green dresses, rocking in unison.

Sure I knew Adolph, says the one nearest the camera. I knew his parents: Eleanor and Bill. What I’d say about him is that he wanted to be impressive. Grew up down the end of the street, and back then there wasn’t an outlet, so anyone lived down there had to go past here, going and coming. He always stopped there at the gate to talk. And I don’t mean have a conversation. I mean talk. Jokes, riddles, a lot of times just straight trivia, facts he’d learned, but the emphasis never seemed to be on the facts themselves but on the fact that he had managed to retain them, or how they confirmed a theory he’d been working on, or how he saw them in relation to other events or ideas. He was just a kid.

He didn't have any friends. For example the history of dance. Adolph would stop at the gate and ask how it was going, and I'd say fine, and I knew he just wanted to get to the point in the conversation where could be impressive, so I got to where I'd just start off asking if he'd learned anything interesting lately, and he'd act like he was trying to think of something and then his face would light up and he'd say, for example, that recently he'd read that early in human evolution, dancing was used to put groups of our ancestors into a battle trance, and that was why sometimes when you were dancing it felt like something was coming over you, and I'd say do you like dancing Adolph? Just to screw with him a bit. I knew that's not what he wanted the conversation to be about, but people need to get screwed with, I think. Softens them up in a good way. Anyway he'd tell you something like that and then take off down the road. Ok. See ya. And you know he's just a kid, and he has no friends, and you feel bad for him and you listen and listen, but after a while it gets old being the audience. I've seen things. I've been to dances. But I'm getting excited. He was an alright kid. His mom was sweet. No one deserves to find her kid like that, says the other woman. I just mean, says the first. I don't know. It's like he was scared of being invisible. More than the gold I think he wanted to be the guy who found it.

What do I think? Hell I don't know. They say it was the Jesuits buried it. Mexicans, Germans, aliens, Apaches. You never know. Does it sound unlikely? Yes. So do a lot of things. Is it likely there are bunch of things on this earth we aren't aware of or have the wrong idea about? Is a lot of what we think we know just parroting back things we've heard whose origins are by now lost? Is it possible certain people or the

government want you to believe it's not there? Is it possible someone found it and packed it out without saying a damn thing? So I say: you never know. People die. Things get buried. But, she says, sighing, what we do know is people. People aren't a mystery. You don't go into treasure country showing your maps. We're not here to help each other.



*Superstition Mts. Deaths and Dismemberments (continued)*

- *1936: Roma O'Hal, hiking accident*
- *1938: "Hematite" Frank found dead, traces of gold. Hiking accident*
- *1948: James Cravey, beheaded*
- *1949: James Kidd, suicide*
- *1951: Dr. John Burns, bullet hole in body, accidental death/suicide*
- *1955: Charles Massey, bear*
- *1956: Martin Zywotho, accidental death/bullet ricochet*

Black screen, voiceover: *I'll just tell you the story, what he told. He gave the secret location of the mine to the woman he loved and his best friend, Big Phil. He was on his deathbed with pneumonia, and he'd already suffered a stroke, so he was hard to understand. He said at the start of the trail there was an old, rock, Spanish house, where he and his partner would camp on the way to the mine. It was a day's journey by horse. This was the summer route because there was water all the way. At the start of the trail, the German said, there was a shelving rock on the north side. This was also an eye through which you could see the Needle. He said it was a steep, narrow canyon, a well-worn trail full of potholes, that tended in a north-south direction. Then you come to First Water. Then you come to Sombrero Butte, or Stone Hat. Then to Horse Rock, or The Man on the Horse. From Horse Rock to five mile water, on up to the mouth of the canyon. There was an old stone house at the mouth of the canyon that tended in a north-south direction. On up the ridge, high on this ridge, there's a large rock formation in the shape of a man's head that looks down on a mine hidden in the bushes below. This is the First Natural Face. The Second Natural Face looked up to the mine. This is the key. When you come to the Rock in the Shape of a Man's Head, you go on up to the old workings. You take the right of two canyons. The mine lies at the head of two washes. From the top of my cave you can see the old military trail, the German said, but from the military trail you can't see my cave. The cave has two rooms and faces west. The afternoon sun shines directly into the mouth of the cave when the mine is open. If you come to three red hills, you've gone too far.*

“Apache Country, Present Day”

Three young Mexican women, hikers, sit on the edge of a huge rock that resembles an upturned flatiron, a spectacular view of the desert below, the backs of their shirts soaked in sweat. Now we see them crowded around a map. The shortest and most intense-looking of the three points straight ahead, leading the way. Now a woman’s voiceover as they hike the switchbacks of a mesa of black, volcanic rock: *You’d have to ask my cousin Yvette. I don’t know much about it. You hear a lot of different things, and everything is disputed. ‘Hawk’ stories and ‘Dove’ stories, they call them. In one story a guy is a murderous fiend, a hawk, and in another one the same guy is a saint. Do I think there’s gold? I don’t know. I mean all the massacres and maps, would that be happening if there’d never been anything? Maybe. Some say the area is poorly mineralized. Some say gold is where you find it. I don’t know. People spent a lot of time up here, though. The Peraltas. Peralta’s Mine. And then the last time they came up here the Apaches massacred them. That’s why it’s Massacre Grounds Canyon. You have to ask Yvette. Ask her about the Stone Maps. The story goes that a cop was driving in the desert just south of here, halfway to Florence Junction, an off-duty cop from Oregon on vacation with his family, and then he had to pee really bad and pulled to the side of the road and climbed up a little hill I guess to get a better view of the desert, to take a more majestic piss, and then he tripped on something, a big slab of smooth rock sticking out of the sand. Yvette knows more. I guess the cop kept the map a secret for decades, because he knew about the legend too. He was trying to figure it out for himself. I guess he went back to where*

*he found the first Stone and found another one, and a third piece, a stone heart that was like an insert, that fit into one of the other Stones. I've seen them online. They look sort of fake, but that's also what makes them look kind of real. Some people think the cop from Oregon was in on it. Some people think there was no cop from Oregon. Most people think the Stones are directions to the German's mine, which may or may not be the same thing as the Peralta mine, which may or may not be the same thing as the buried Jesuit treasure, which may or may not be the same thing as the Cave of the Thunder God. Now we see the woman who has been speaking, a pretty, charmingly gawky Mexican with poor posture. She must be six foot two. "Yesenia Montoya." She talks with her hands and wears no wedding ring, standing in a grassy clearing, the Enchanted Hoodoos in perfect formation behind her. I'm Yesenia Montoya. Thirty-four. I work in finance. It makes me think how like, this is going to sound stupid, but it makes me think how hard it is to say anything accurately. To preserve anything. I mean the German is on his deathbed, desperately trying to give as clear directions to his mine as he can. He's not trying to be confusing. He's trying to tell his best friends exactly how to find the mine before he dies. The Rock in the Shape of a Man's Head, the Indian Circle of Rocks, the "spring by the wash at the end of which are three pine trees sufficient for household use" (she does finger-quotes). And the German is following the trail in his mind, so it seems clear to him. But then you read it back, and it could fit hundreds of places in these mountains, or nowhere. That rock right there looks like a man's head. And that's supposing the German actually did have a mine up here. That he wasn't insane or sadistic. That he ever actually existed. But supposing he did exist, and that he found gold in these mountains, I just think*

*how terrible it must've been not to be able to make sense at a moment like that. You're dying and you can't get it out, and it all dies with you. I guess that's why people have kids. One reason, anyway. That connection beyond words.*

Another of the three Mexican hikers in front of the Hoodoos. “Tina Medina.” Average height, short brown hair. She wears a white, low-cut tank top, accentuating very large breasts. She’s the slightest bit cross-eyed, eyebrows plucked to almost nothing. She giggles as if the cameraman made a joke. *What am I supposed to say?* Then with mock seriousness: *Tina Medina. Thirty-three. And yes I’m aware that my name rhymes. Get over it. How did I wind up here? I drove to the trailhead and walked up the mountain. I know, I know. Kidding. Yesenia got me out here, and her cousin Yvette got her out here. I used to do some hiking with my husband, so I already had these sweet shoes.* The camera swings to her hiking shoes, brown with pink accents. Her socks are pink too. *I’ve been unemployed almost three months. I used to be a waitress and before that all kinds of shit: janitor, person in charge of inner tube rental. Assess Yesenia’s level of gold fever? Oh wow I don’t know. Three out of ten? I mean she seems to humor Yvette but that’s also how Yesenia is. She’ll never make you feel stupid. She’ll always agree with you as much as she can.* Tina laughs. *They don’t include me in all the secret map discussions. I don’t know, I think they’re more interested in the history of it. I think they want to see where people have searched. No, we haven’t really found anything. Oh! Except the other day we found a huge hole. It wasn’t in the side of the hill, like a cave. It was in the ground, like at the base of a huge rock. Yvette told us not to talk about it, but I’m like, bitch, relax. Don’t tell her I said that. It was just this huge hole in the ground, and the rock all around had this weird magenta color coming out of it, and you could just feel something weird.*

*That’s something else about me. I get these feelings. These, like, sudden mental intrusions.*

*Anyway we come around the corner and there's this huge hole, and I freaked. I may or may not have screamed a little. But Yvette got her ass right in there. She put on her headlamp and got her camera all ready, and down she went. She's gone a minute. Then she's gone five. I tell Yesenia, I'm not going in there. Don't tell Yvette I said that. But I was like fuck no. I wouldn't expect Yvette to go in after me. Then again I wouldn't be in a gigantic hole. Ten minutes. Anyway she was in there a long time and finally comes out, completely unfazed. She comes out, flicks off the headlamp and goes, "It's clear." Can you believe that shit? It's clear. But I love Yvette. No I don't. I don't know why I said that. I don't know Yvette that well. She doesn't really talk to me. She told me she liked the color of my car but I think she was being sarcastic. It's pink. Whatever I'm not apologizing. What badass color does she like. But I guess I do owe her for getting me out here, indirectly. It's healthy. And I don't just mean you burn a thousand calories, which you do, but I also mean it puts you in a different frame of mind. That sounds stupid. I can't explain it. Call it nature, sure, but that just makes it sound stupid. It gets you out of your box, and then you start to see that you've been in a box this whole time, taking stupid things way too seriously, fighting with your husband, wishing you had more money, bigger house, more room, bigger closet, newer carpet, less debt, playing games on your phone, game after game, even when you want to stop you can't. Agitated boredom. They design those games to be addictive. It's all very stressful in a way you can't fully appreciate until you're outside of it, out here. It's like something ancient, and I know that's wacky. I don't know. Something's happening to me.*

*Superstition Mts. Deaths and Dismemberments (continued)*

- *1959: Stanley Hernandez killed by friend Ben Ferrer after thinking they discovered gold*
- *1959: Edward Piper, prospector, kills Steven Means, prospector*
- *1959: Edward Piper, suicide*
- *1959: Lavern Rowles, hiking accident*
- *1960: Franz Herrer, Austrian student, beheaded*



The third Mexican woman standing in front of the Hoodoos. “Yvette Juarez.”  
Very short and solidly built, round face, hair pulled tightly back. She wears a black tank top and has veiny, muscular arms. *Yvette Juarez. Thirty-nine. I’m up here for the exercise.*

The outline of a man, sitting in a chair in a dark room. “John.” His voice has been distorted. *I had nothing to do with the disappearance of the bellhop. Somehow my name got tied to the kid from Denver that went missing, and that’s completely false. I want to say that first. Terrible what happened to him. I’ve come across some really foul accusations on message boards, and I want to set that straight off the bat. Ok. I’m fifty-one years old. Originally from Santa Fe. I’m a retired science teacher, and that’s about all I want to say. Yes, I found the mine. I’ve explained it over and over. The map that I created and how it matches up to the maps on the Stones. The key is to line up the holes in the two big maps, the Horse Map and the Priest Map. Both maps have tiny pin-sized holes in them, which were too perfect to be accidents. Too perfectly made I mean. Smooth little holes. You put them one in front of the other, and behind both of those you put the Heart map. Then, you look through the two tiny holes. The tiny piece of the Heart you can see is where you start following the instructions on the back of the Priest Map. ‘18 Lugares’ means eighteen different places. Eighteen landmarks. Each one denoted on the map by a small triangle. It’s on record the Jesuits buried their treasure somewhere in this region when they got word a troop of Apaches was coming to burn their church to the ground. Anyway, believe it or don’t. I found it. The German found it too, but it’s like he said, there’s way too much in there for one man to pack out. And I tell you this: I don’t want or need all of it. I’m not greedy. I’d gladly tell everyone, keep three percent for myself and my family, secure naming rights and call it good. The reason I don’t? Safety. Think about this way: me and a bunch of guys are searching for the treasure, and I say I*

*found it, and if that's true, all these other assholes have to find something else to do with their lives, but if they kill me, if they kill the guy who found it, they can pick up right where they left off, searching. I'm not greedy. I'm not in it for the money. It's in my blood. I'm a descendant of Charles the Fifth. This was told to me by my immediate grandfather before he died. My grandfather knew the story of the treasure and told it to me as a little boy, though he never had the strength to search for it himself because he was shot in the leg by a coward named Octavio. My own father passed away last year. I wished he could've seen this. I guess I like to believe that he is watching me from somewhere, him and his daddy too, and that they're proud. Maybe that's kooky. Maybe I'm a kook. That's what I like to believe.*

The women bushwhack their way along the wall of a shallow canyon, led again by the short one, Yvette. Tina Medina is in the middle. She winks at the camera. The gawky one, Yesenia, pulls up the rear, and it's her voice we hear. *I work in finance. Junior VP at Morgan Raymond and Associates. We do mergers and acquisitions, private placements, equity offerings. Semiconductors and Application Software.* The women scabble over boulders in a dry creek with no difficulty. *How's finance? It's good. I mean not great. Someone once explained it to me like this: I do something I don't love at work so I can do things I love outside of work. I don't know. I have no reason to complain. I have a good job. I'm young and healthy, as far as I know. I get to feeling sorry for myself and I have to remember what other people go through.* Yvette is looking through binoculars. Tina swats Yesenia on the ass, and they laugh. Yvette glares over her shoulder at the girls, who compose themselves like scolded children. *I'm thirty-four. That sounds crazy just to say. I always said that if I turned thirty-five and hadn't found someone, you know, to be with, have kids with, I'd officially stop trying, you know, focus completely on my career, on other things, just so I wouldn't drive myself crazy thinking about it. Like a guy that's going bald who shaves his head.* She laughs. *Spare me the agony. Rip off the Band-Aid. I know a few women who've done the same thing, hit thirty-five and said the hell with it, I'm not going to let this rule my life, and they're really happy and successful, or seem like it. And I think that's a lot of what keeps me coming back up here. I don't worry about anything. I'm just moving. There's this concept of 'flow' in psychology. It's kind of something I'm into. God that sounds pathetic. 'I'm into*

*psychological concepts.' Flow is a mental state where a person doing something is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, total involvement, enjoyment. I used to feel it, or something like it, at work. Spontaneous joy, performing a task. They say it's what artists experience. I think maybe some people can get there with yard work. I don't know. I read a lot.*

Now Tina Medina and a man seated together on one side of a booth in a loud, crowded bar. She wears a green, low-cut tank top. Behind them on the wall: mounted deer heads with bras and panties hung from the antlers. We see Tina and the man straight on, as if we were on the other side of the booth. We don't see or hear the other couple.

"It's so great to see you two," Tina says, smiling into the camera. "I kept telling Emmanuel, we've got to get together with them again. I'm glad we're finally doing it."

Emmanuel checks his watch. He's a balding, handsome Mexican with a square jaw, dark circles under his eyes and bushy eyebrows. He wears a white button-down shirt, sleeves rolled to his elbows. His neck is muscular. When he balls his hands into fists, which he does every few seconds, a thick section of muscle activates in his hairy forearms. He smiles and yawns.

"No I totally know how that goes," Tina says. "You mean to get a hold of someone, but you put it off and put it off and next thing you know a year has gone by. Has it really been that long? Oh my god I was just saying that as something to say, but I guess the last time we saw you guys was Eric's wedding. Remember that babe?"

"Yeah," he says. "Eric got married."

Now there's a lull. Tina is smiling and nodding her head to the faint music in the background. She brushes something off the table. Emmanuel takes out his handheld device. Tina looks over her shoulder.

"Did Emmanuel tell you guys about today at the movies?" she says. "Tell them babe. That woman? It's so hilarious. You have to tell them."

"It would be too hard to re-tell. You had to be there. That type of thing."

“Come on you could totally do it. It was so funny. The woman with the duck? We were dying.”

“She was disabled.”

“But that’s not what was funny. You make me sound like a monster. I wasn’t laughing *at* her.”

Emmanuel signals to an off-screen waiter. The armpits of his white shirt are yellowed. Tina nods her head to the beat. Emmanuel balls his hands into fists. Drinks arrive.

“*Salud*,” Tina says, holding her glass to the camera. Emmanuel is already drinking when she turns to him. She clinks his glass and beer dribbles down his chin.

“Whoops,” she says. “Wait for the cheers.”

“I’ve gotta piss,” Emmanuel says. Now to the camera: “You too? Alright let’s do it.”

“Boys’ trip,” Tina says.

Once Emmanuel is gone, Tina leans across the table.

“He’s mad,” she says. “We drove all the way across town in the rain today to see that new movie, the one about the Rapture that everyone’s talking about, you know, the atheists mistakenly get caught up in the Rapture, and we decided to try a theater we’ve never been to, so of course we get lost and it’s raining and we finally get there and it’s one of those fancy theaters where you get a specific assigned seat, and it’s practically sold out and the only tickets available are single seats, and I was like, I’m sorry, I don’t want to see this movie so bad I’m willing to watch it next to that guy snarfing nachos,

you know? Emmanuel was pissed. He was like what difference does it make, we're watching the same movie, blah, blah, so anyway if he seems a little, I don't know, it's probably because we didn't see wind up seeing it. It's a Danish film. Supposed to be super fucked up. Everyone dies. Spoiler alert. Oh my god I'm so sorry. I hope you weren't going to see it. Wow. I can't believe I just did that. I hate it when people do that. I'm so sorry. Maybe not every single one of them dies. Maybe only one of them. I don't really know. I'm sorry. I don't think it really matters what happens. I think it's more about how it happens, or what it makes you think about. I'm sorry."

The men return. Tina gets up to let Emmanuel in the booth.

"Now I've gotta pee," she says. Now to the camera: "Will you come with me? Ok great. I'm so sorry."

Emmanuel sips his beer. He pushes the side of his head with the flat of his palm and there's a loud, satisfying crack. Now, one by one, he cracks his knuckles. Now for the next half-minute he fiddles with his handheld device with a straight face. Now he looks at the camera with a weary smile and says: "Chicks."

He finishes his beer. The women return. Tina takes her seat and we slowly close in on her face, which itself is slowly changing, her smile fading until she looks concerned, pained. "Oh no," she says. "I hate losing earrings. Let me see what does the other one look like? Oh my god." She starts digging in her purse. "I have that exact earring. I'm not shitting you." Emmanuel puts a hand on her shoulder. "The exact design and color."

"Check the floor," Emmanuel says.



“I bought them in South America from a woman who had the same name as my grandma.” She shakes the hand from her shoulder. “I’m sorry that is fucking freaky.”

“Maybe the crack behind the cushion,” Emmanuel says.

“Fuck,” Tina says. “I can’t find it. I must not have it. Still. The exact same one.”

“I’m sorry you lost it,” Emmanuel says.

“I’m sorry too,” Tina says. “I’m just saying. Weird.”

Now the lights go out and a black light comes on and the music is cranked up. Laser lights light up the walls. Tina gets a huge grin on her face, teeth fluorescent in the black light, nodding to the beat. A fog machine fills the room with fog.

“When’s the last time we danced,” she says, shouting to Emmanuel.

“No,” he shouts back.

“Oh come on. You know you want to. You love dancing. He loves dancing. He just wants me to drag him out there. Come on.”

“Stop,” he shouts, coinciding exactly with a silent moment in the song. Tina flinches and scoots away. She interlocks her fingers and puts them on the table. The two of them sit in the dark with glowing eyes, fog enveloping their faces.

*Superstition Mts. Deaths and Dismemberments (continued)*

- *1961: Hilmer Bohlen found by children, suicide*
- *1961: Walter Mowry, suicide*
- *1963: Vance Bacon, fall from Pinnacle Peak*
- *1964: Jay Clapp, beheaded*
- *1970: Al Morrow, boulder*
- *1973: Charles Lewing shot Ladislas Guerrero at Crazy Jake's campsite*
- *1976: Howard Polling, bear*
- *1977: Dennis Brown, gunshot wound*
- *1978: Manuel Valdez, suicide*
- *1980: Rick Fenning's skeleton found*
- *1981: Adolph Ruth, murder*

Again the three Mexican women, led by Yvette, crouching as they make their way through a low, narrow passage. Tina Medina's voiceover. *Yesterday we found something. I don't know what it was, but I know it was something.*

*Sometimes I think it's an elaborate joke, Yvette and her map. Like she's just fucking with us. I don't know. Can you have a joke with just yourself?*

*No. I don't think so. That's not a joke.*

*She must be serious.*

*I just don't see how she could be.*

*She must be.*

*We took the Black Mesa trail to the Lost German, and then we went off trail into a canyon that didn't have a name and then through like six more canyons. I get turned around sometimes. Not as easily as I used to. I've gotten much better. I can follow a trail. I know how to use cairns. I think Yvette might be taking unnecessarily complicated routes to keep me from knowing too much. Seriously. I wouldn't doubt it. Whenever I'm writing something in my notebook, she comes over and straight-up looks at it. To make sure it's not a map, I guess. Doesn't even try to hide it. Just comes over and sticks her face in my business. Once I drew a cock. She did not think that was funny.*

*It's like, relax.*

*It's also like, you think I'm not trustworthy?*

*I'm trustworthy.*

*I kept an awful secret of a person I didn't even like, even though the secret, if*

*revealed, might have bettered the life of someone I loved.*

*I'm not sure that makes me trustworthy. I can definitely, definitely keep a secret though.*

*Yesterday. We hadn't seen anyone in hours. We weren't following a trail. Hikers call it 'bushwhacking.' So we're bushwhacking, and we're going and going and then boom: Yvette stops. Like she smelled something. She was staring at a weird rock that was up on the ridge of the canyon. I'm sure she thought it was the Rock in the Shape of a Man's Head, from all the maps.*

*Look: I'm not an idiot. I wasn't literally born yesterday. I've heard of the Rock in the Shape of a Man's Head.*

*I have to say though that this one did look exactly like a man's head. For whatever that's worth. I mean a lot of rocks look like men, or men's heads, or parts of men's bodies. But this one especially. The eyes followed me all through the canyon. It was up on the ridge and I kept looking back at it.*

*Then Yvette told us to hang on and started up the wall on the opposite side of the canyon where the rocks, it's hard to explain, but it looked like there'd been a small landslide, if that makes sense, a bunch of loose rocks I never would've noticed if Yvette hadn't climbed up there. So she's up there, tossing rocks out of the way and looking over her shoulder, making sure no one's watching, and I can tell Yes is trying to distract me, asking like what fucking shows have I been watching, am I using a different moisturizer, trying to get me to do like partner stretching exercises, but I got to where I could see Yvette pretty well. I saw when she found it. I don't know what it was. I couldn't see it. I*

*just know she found something by the way she froze. Something she was looking for.*

*Then she put the rocks back over it, covered it up good, came back down and said, 'Thought I saw a Gila up there.'*

*'Right,' I said. 'Gilas.'*

Tina and Emmanuel in a car, Emmanuel at the wheel. Tina reaches for the radio.

“Don’t,” he says. “It’s broken.”

Through Tina’s window is urban sprawl: pawn shops, check cashing, guy on the corner flipping a sign, Laundromat, fast food, car wash, beige apartments, liquor store, empty lot, bus stop, cash for gold. Her voiceover: *Anyway these feelings I get, the sudden mental intrusions, which I realize is a stupid name but I think pretty accurate. I don’t know what else to call them. I think I’ve always felt them but I used to try to ignore them. I can’t really describe them, which is a lot of why I pay attention to them. Sort of like a migraine, if you’ve ever had one. Without the pain though. So that’s not helpful.*

*I guess the best example is the scorpion. We were on our honeymoon in Cabo San Lucas, which is a whole different story, but anyway it’s the last morning of our honeymoon and Emmanuel goes to check out and I’m alone in the room, getting our shit together. Toiletries, clothes, souvenirs. I check under the bed. Oh and I forgot to say I’d just gotten out of the shower, so I’m doing all this in one of the ratty grey towels this piece of shit hotel supplied. Oh and the door is propped open so Emmanuel can get in without a key after he checks out. I put on underwear, jeans, shirt. Then I sit on the bed and put on my socks, and I start to get this feeling. The painless migraine. Or it’s like ringing in your ear, but there’s not really a sound. I mean if I’m being honest it feels like the moment just before a bomb explodes, that too-silent moment, like all the air has been suddenly sucked out? No, I’ve never actually witnessed a bomb explosion. I guess I mean the too-silent moment before a bomb explodes in a movie. I’m sitting on the bed, holding*

*my shoes, and getting this feeling. It's sort of like people's descriptions of trauma time, you know, the way people experience time during something traumatic. Time slows down, basically, but also like the moments become discrete instead of continuous? Does that make sense? You start to register all the details? The wallpaper on the hotel room walls. The rug. The smell. Still smells a little like barf. (Emmanuel, not me.) The clock on the wall, the hands of which tick, but never change position. Always 4:18. Emmanuel made the joke that the room was a stoner's hell. Always almost 4:20. Kinda funny. I'm not sure if there's a sound associated with the feeling. Maybe the sound is the total absence of sound, or maybe it's a ringing. I don't know. Sometimes when I stop and think, am I hearing a ringing in my ears right now, a very soft one, it's impossible to tell. There's sort of like a general ring? But this is different. Anyway I guess it's not important what it feels or sounds like. What's important, or what feels important, is that my brain is registering it as a warning. Something in my brain is associating this feeling with the need to be hyperaware. Emmanuel hates it when I talk like that. Says he has no clue what I mean. I think he's lying. I think he feels it but can't understand it so he forces himself to ignore it, and now he's forced himself to ignore it so long it's gotten to the point he doesn't register it anymore. Which I guess is basically the same as not feeling it. So I don't know, but what it feels like to me is a warning. And usually I get the feeling and it goes away, and nothing happens. But this time was different. I'm sitting on the bed in Cabo, holding my shoes and getting this feeling, and then, boom, I knock the shoes together. I don't know why I do it. I just do it. It's not something I normally do. Then I do it again. And again. And then the next time I hit the shoes together, a tiny little neon*

*green scorpion, I swear to god, falls out of the right shoe. About an inch and a half long. Bright little guy. I'm telling you: I never knocked my shoes together like that. I do now, obviously. But before that: never. Especially not five, six times. Emmanuel of course has his own side of that story, which is fine, his opinion and he's entitled to it, although his opinion also happens to kind of, you know, totally invalidate my experience of life.*

*Falls out the shoe, skitters out the open door. Then the feeling goes away.*

*You tell me.*



Now Tina Medina in a tiny, dim room, with a young Mexican guy, sitting almost knee to knee in metal folding chairs. He has a long, thin face, pointy chin, big nose, warm smile, crooked teeth. He looks about twenty-five and kind of like a cartoon vampire. His security guard uniform is tight on his muscular arms. His nametag: *TJ*. Tina's mouth is moving and TJ nods inquisitively. She wears a pink blouse. Now a wide shot: they're inside a little security kiosk in front of the gate to a condominium complex.

"Falls out the shoe," Tina says. "Skitters out the door. Then the feeling goes away. You tell me."

"That shit *is* freaky," says TJ, smiling and shaking his head.

"Right?" Tina says.

Shots of abandoned ghost towns: “Dunmovin,” “Holy City,” “Leadfield,” “You Bet,” “Hard Tack,” “Gauge.” Voiceover: *The difference between professionally trained prospectors and amateur treasure hunters is enormous. Today, many treasure hunters hear echoes of the gold rush, and believe any one of a thousand tunnels perforating the western mountains could lead to the mother lode or lost mine.*

“Apache County, 1970”

A tan white guy in a white polo shirt tucked into white pants walks out of a cave with a feisty beagle off the leash. He wears big purple aviators and his hair is perfect. He sits on a rock and lights a cigarette. “Rob Vincent.” The dog jumps into his lap and licks his face. “Ringo.” The voiceover tells us that while preparing his book on the mine’s legend, *Gold Miners and Dreamers*, Vincent concluded that without mineral evidence, prospectors wouldn’t search these mountains for gold. Dreamers, however, might. I suppose, says Vincent, that people go looking for the mine for their own reasons, and I can only speculate what those reasons are, but I think that a great many of these people who search in such an unpromising location for gold as these mountains are going more for the adventure than they are for any serious expectation of finding a rich gold mine. Vincent lets the dog lick his lips. I think they’re going for their own reasons, as far their own psychology is concerned, but perhaps it’s an acting out of fantasy. It’s one of the few places in the United States which is unchanged. It’s a wilderness area. There are no motor vehicles in there. It’s almost like the old wild west when men went in with guns and fought it out amongst themselves, looking for lost mines. Maybe, says Vincent lighting

another cigarette and tossing Ringo a stick, maybe the threat of Apaches is in the minds of these men. Maybe the man finds when he's in the mountains that he becomes another person. He becomes more manly. Maybe the machismo effect is working in the minds of the men who dig so endlessly in these mountains, and fruitlessly. And when I say 'men' I mean women too. There have been some bad, bad ladies up here, let me tell you. He pets the dog. You see it all the time. Guy hears a story. Then the story starts to work on him. Then before you know it he's out there poking around. What could it hurt? And then: why not me? Then splat. Dead. I have no theories on the beheadings or suicides. My advice for anyone thinking of seeking the treasure would be stop and appreciate what's around you, maybe make some changes. Something to keep you grounded, right there in the present moment, like a dog. Here is a living, loving thing that requires and deserves your attention. Here is something good, and for it to keep breathing you have to be a part of the world, not just stuck in your own scary little mind.

Tina met Emmanuel four years ago on New Year's Eve, 2008, in San Diego, where her older sister Marisol had rented a beach house for the occasion. It seemed to Tina like a pity invite: their mom had just passed. Marisol can be such a judgmental bitch. Marisol is super religious and traditional and vocal about it, casually calling Tina by the saint name given to Tina at confirmation (*Amy*, after Saint Amata, a name forced on Tina by her godmother, a hyper-religious woman who chose the saint after intuiting, astutely, that Tina was having major trouble reconciling her beliefs and desires with the beliefs and desires of the church, Saint Amata having grown up rejecting God and morality before eventually converting and joining a contemplative order of nuns), casually ending conversations with a promise to pray for Tina even though Marisol well knows Tina decided against religion at sixteen, when she realized it had the effect/intent of convincing people to accept their lot of misery on earth without struggle, when she realized it was a method of understanding that would never help her understand. Marisol is constantly casually mentioning being promoted internally in the finance department at the Hilton San Diego. Marisol is such an obvious hypocrite but will never realize it, her beliefs so convenient, she has no problem getting shitfaced drunk but whenever Tina used to mention weed Marisol would say that marijuana is a federal crime for a reason and bring up the drug cartels, describe all the awful things the cartels did to innocent people, to Americans, sending body parts in the mail, decapitating women and children, stringing the innards of babies from power lines. Marisol is constantly criticizing Tina, the tiniest things, why don't you wear more comfortable shoes Tina, you need a dog Tina, why

don't you drive a bigger car Tina, haven't you seen the statistics on the likelihood of surviving a wreck in an SUV. Still, Tina went to San Diego for New Year's. She didn't want to be alone. She drove from Phoenix to be with Marisol so that she wouldn't be alone.

Marisol invited friends, girls like her. Marisol is married to Josue. He had friends too.

Tina arrived on the 31<sup>st</sup> in the afternoon. Everyone was drinking. Some girls with flawless bodies were in the hot tub. Death, sickness, the miserable wait and the little things you remember once it's over, the sound your mom once made when she was spontaneously, genuinely happy, and now a bunch of drunk adult strangers crammed into a beach house in party hats playing *Never Have I Ever*, a drinking game for kids. Never have I ever reused a condom. Never have I ever done anal outdoors.

"Little sister!" Marisol said, hugging Tina in the doorway, tipsy. "What's with the hair?"

The first night was a big group dinner at a Mexican restaurant. One of Marisol's friends ordered fajitas, and then burned the inside of her wrist on the hot plate. It left a huge mark, which everyone agreed would scar. The burn victim was drunk, and said, "I'll think they'll have to amputate!" and everyone laughed, and Tina again felt the inward, downward pull. The Mexican restaurant had a special drink: drop a shot of tequila into a glass of something that looked like vanilla milkshake, chug it all down at once and pound the table when you finish. Marisol ordered round after round for the table. The pounding caused the forks and plates to jump and the rest of the people in the restaurant to stare.

Tina nursed a beer. She was sitting between Marisol and Josue, who kept trying to tell the table he'd worked hard to get where he was, making a thousand dollars a day selling insurance, and now he didn't even have to call the clients because the clients called him, and Marisol kept trying to tell the table she'd been promoted from the purchasing department to credit brokerage, and so technically she was in charge of the largest ballroom in San Diego, which was kind of a lot of responsibility. Tina had no one to talk to. At one point she tried to remember the last thing she'd said aloud, and couldn't. She was sensitive about her isolation; one of the last coherent conversations she'd had with her mom was one in which Tina confessed that she had no one talk to, that it felt like there was so much that went unsaid, that everyone was pretending everything was fine when it wasn't, and her mom said, "You have your big sister," and Tina agreed and pretended to be comforted because she didn't want her mom to pass away thinking that her daughters weren't close. Now Tina was at a table of drunk morons. She took out her phone and pretended to be doing things, checked her inbox (*You have no new messages*), checked voicemail (*You have no new messages*), and then started playing a game on her phone and felt her mood darken further, pressing buttons, watching the screen, these fucking games, we can't stop playing them, we don't even like them, they're driving us out of our minds. Marisol and her friends had this inside joke where they put their index finger sideways between their lips. They did it a billion times and it never got old. Then on the fifth or sixth round of the special drink, one of Josue's friends pounded the table so hard the legs buckled, and food and drink went everywhere. "Call the waiter," Josue kept saying. "Where the fuck is that little guy." Meanwhile, one of Josue's other friends had

begun sopping up the spill. He did it calmly, expertly. Like a father, Tina thought. Tina asked Marisol the name of the guy cleaning up the spill. Emmanuel. “Does he have kids?” Tina asked, and Marisol asked Tina if she was fucking crazy. And maybe it was because Tina was a waitress and therefore sympathized with the waiter, or maybe it was only that Tina was in a vulnerable place, because of her mom and also because she was about to turn thirty (which she realized was a big deal because she spent so much time telling herself it wasn’t), or maybe, probably, it was that some things you just couldn’t explain, some things you see or smell or touch and you start to act or think a certain way and don’t know why, getting a signal, I don’t know why the sight of that hit me so hard but it did, a man on one knee with a napkin.

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They got home from dinner and Tina fell asleep and woke with thirty minutes left in 2008. In the living room everyone had gathered in front of the TV that was showing a replay of the new year on the east coast, the girl that made the amputation joke about the fajita burn, the guy that smashed the table and was the king of unsolicited shoulder rubs, the girl with the two thousand dollar purse that kept trying to force everyone into a conga line, the guy who kept saying, “Deez nuts,” and grabbing his nuts, the super buff guy that kept giving everyone workout advice and asking to feel people’s lymph nodes, the girl who kept showing everyone the internet video of a girl getting diarrhea in a crowded hot tub, the girl whose New Year’s resolution was sleep less and make full partner, the guy no one seemed to want to talk to who kept picking his toenails and had been described to Tina as having read a lot of books, the guy whose New Year’s resolution was stop

fucking around, get into business school, “make bank,” and really try to help people, the girl who kept bringing up 9/11 and who during *Never Have I Ever* admitted to having sex with a guy mainly because of the car he drove, the guy who was obsessed with extreme outdoor sports and called his dune buggy The Razor and apparently or allegedly watched incest porn, Marisol, Josue, Tina and Emmanuel. Emmanuel was there too, and once in a while he made eye contact with Tina, and other than that he sat off to the side and generally steered clear of the worst of it, the hot tub, the shots of grain alcohol, the up-skirt/down-pants photo contest, and sometimes Tina caught him grimacing to himself, and sometimes he went outside alone to look at the ocean, and several times he cracked his knuckles with great slowness and care, almost sorrow. Tina woke with thirty minutes until midnight and Marisol forced party glasses that spelled *2009* upon her, and Tina put them on and sat quietly on the arm of a couch. Emmanuel, on the way to the fridge, said: “You’re really making a spectacle with those spectacles.” He said it friendly, like he knew it was corny. Tina smiled and said, “Thanks,” and wished she was better at coming up with snappy things to say on the spot.

Then the countdown began. What happened was: the guy who’d smashed the table decided as a joke to start the countdown at sixty, just to fuck with people, but what wound up happening was that people didn’t feel fucked with, instead the countdown steadily gained momentum, all of them in a circle and chanting, staring at each other with expectant looks, like little kids doing something wrong about to get caught, little kids making a pact, little kids that don’t yet know not to get their hopes up, louder with each number, arms around shoulders, you dumb fuck who smashed the table and started the



countdown you are nothing, your cleverness is nothing, every shitty thing including confusion and fear and some dumb ass who wants to amuse himself at everyone else's expense is nothing in the face of a small, naked hope, and she knows how that sounds: naïve, trite, stupid, and she wouldn't say it aloud, but she believes it because she saw it and felt it on New Year's 2009, even against her better judgment, even though she'd spent the previous New Year's at her mom's bedside in the convalescent, both of them in party hats, even though she was cold and sober and wearing stupid glasses and these people had repulsed her just minutes before, even though she was by now almost thirty and fully aware of the things a person could lose in a year, the countdown was undeniable, all of them shouting, the pretense fully disappeared. It's not over. We can still change. 2009 won't be like 2008. With every other number Tina leapt into the air.

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The next day the girl whose resolution it was to sleep less announced that she had magic mushrooms. Tina wasn't against magic mushrooms per se, but what she was against was letting go of her conscious mind around a bunch of people she hated, so she went back to sleep. When she got up the only other person in the cabin was Emmanuel. He said that Marisol had gone to supervise the vision quest and offered Tina coffee. He said he was hiking to the top of a mountain, and invited her to come.

They drove to the trailhead, got out and stretched, and then Emmanuel told her to lead the way up, the trail being well-marked, and go at her own speed. In hiking it's called "fogging someone up" if you are leading the way and break wind. Emmanuel kept saying, "You better not fog me up," and "Did you just fog me up?" and Tina, despite

being out of breath and despite normally hating humor to do with farting or shit, burst out laughing every time. She had a feeling about him. She was excited to be near him. He was kind and charming and there was something else, too, that she couldn't quite put her finger on, something he seemed to be taking great pains to conceal, the way he watched the ocean and cracked his knuckles, a great fear or hope he'd only be able to share with a certain woman, who would keep him from being alone. He was sincere but not at all boring. He was funny. "Stop fogging me up." He brought water enough for the two of them.

On the way up the mountain he told a meandering story. Later, once Tina and Emmanuel were lovers, he would explain his reason for telling the story was that he was following a cardinal rule of the outdoors, talking loudly while entering remote territory, alerting wildlife to your presence, because animals attack when they're scared. The story went like this. Emmanuel's grandfather Trinitario, Trino to everyone who knew him, met and fell in love with a woman, Vera, way, way back in the day. Trino was a great boxer. He won tournaments on the naval base. Like all boxers, he tried to keep boxing well after he should have retired, but it was all he knew how to do, something about being in the ring relaxed him, even when he was getting his brains beat in, the footwork, muscle memory, something about doing what you've been trained to do. He was a boxer, and he hung on too long, but that's another story. Trino fell in love with this woman, Vera, when he was sixteen years old. It happened just like that: he saw her face. Then the dam broke. This was 1930, 1931. The dam broke a few towns over, and all the water drained into another lake, which was already full, so that dam broke too, and a wave of epic

proportions headed for the town where Trino and Vera both lived. It hit in the middle of the night. Luckily, both of their families lived far from the path of the water. Both survived, but the next day Trino was put on recovery duty. It was his job to search the floodplain for bodies, living or dead. He was gone two weeks. He never told anyone what he saw, but whatever he saw convinced him of the need to act quickly on what he believed. He got back prepared to ask for Vera's hand in marriage, but in the short time he was gone, Vera had been seduced by the wealthy rancher, Miguel Patino. Patino was one of these guys, ask ten people you get ten different stories. Ask the Patino family, he was a gentle giant, a benefactor. Ask Trino's family (Emmanuel's family), Patino was a womanizer and drunk who beat Vera for giving him daughters instead of sons. No one knows the truth anymore. Anyway Trino gets back from searching for bodies and Vera is engaged to Miguel, and what can a guy do? Nothing. Get over it. Which is what Trino did, or tried to do. He met his wife, Emmanuel's grandma, and married her a year later. Decades passed. They lived entire lives. Then Miguel Patino died. By this time Vera was almost eighty, and blind. Then Trino's wife died. Trino was eighty but he could still see, and a few months after his wife's death, and much to his family's chagrin, he got his walking stick and paid Vera a visit. Then he paid her another visit. He visited her every day, helping with laundry and other chores, spending the night, his mere presence lessening the general, pronounced anxiety she'd begun to feel as she lost her sight. Then one day, Emmanuel said, the priest came to see my grandpa. The priest had heard rumors about my grandpa visiting Vera, and was concerned that, even in their advanced age, they were somehow managing to commit acts that were indecent outside the institute of

marriage, setting the wrong example for their kids and grandkids and the entire small Catholic town, so the priest came to ask if my grandpa had anything to confess. My grandpa told him of course he had things to confess, cussing, spitting, the Lord's name in vain, and the priest absolved him and said anything else, and my grandpa said skipping mass on Sundays, and the priest absolved him and said anything else, and my grandpa said coveting my neighbor's jeep, and the priest absolved him and then came right out and asked what he'd come to ask: was he having sexual relations with Vera Patino. "And I told him of course I'm having sexual relations with her," Trino told Emmanuel. "What do you think I'm doing over there?" Everyone was astonished and grossed out, but eventually both families warmed to the idea of the old couple, reunited at last. Then Vera died. Then Trino died. Cut to Trino's funeral, a pretty girl in a shock blue dress pays her respects to Emmanuel, graveside. There's instantly something between them. He holds her hand longer than he should. She lets her hand be held and introduces herself as Vera's granddaughter. Sorry, she said. My black dress was dirty.

At this point Emmanuel and Tina took the final switchback and climbed on top of a rocky plateau, and there was the view: densely wooded canyons for miles, other mountains, the clouds. Cairns led the way to the highest point. "Wow," she said. "I know," he said. They basked. He gave her some beef jerky. He started doing some stretches and she copied him. "Amazing." "It's so beautiful."

Then they headed back down the trail, and Emmanuel picked up where he left off, only now the story moved faster because the way down took much less time. The girl at the funeral, obviously, became his girlfriend. It was a story everyone loved: our

grandparents dated in their teens and again in their final years, and now we're dating each other. It was a great story. But here was the thing: the relationship was a fucking disaster. Emmanuel said he would spare Tina the nitty-gritty, but suffice to say they were off and on, and when they were off, both of them had sex with the one person they weren't supposed to, so then when they got back together they hated each other and kept secrets and checked each other's phones. Every time they were breaking up, one of them, whichever one wanted to stay together that particular time, brought up the grandparents. *How could we not be meant for each other? We're doing what our grandparents were never able to.* It was weird. It bound them together, the story of their grandparents. It went from the thing that made it good to the thing that made it impossible to see the bad. We tried, he said, sounding genuinely sad. We thought we were doing the right thing, and then one day we woke up and it was like, what the fuck have we done.

•

They got back to the beach house and showered. Everyone who had gone on the vision quest was still questing.

"I need a nap," he said.

"Me too," she said, eyeing the sad couch where she'd spent New Year's Eve.

They talked now like people who'd shared something.

"We can share my bed," he said. "Just sleep."

"Hmmm," she said. "How big is it?"

"Six and a half, seven inches."

"The bed," she said, and punched his shoulder.

“Big,” he said. “You could roll over twice and not touch me.”

“Ok.”

“Ok.”

They got in the bed, which wasn't that big after all. She felt his leg against hers.

“Alright,” he said. “Nap time.”

“Yep,” she said. “Time to nap.”

Cut to the three hikers getting out of Yvette's car, a Subaru with the bumper sticker *Pass or Get Off My Ass*. A sign says *First Water Trailhead*. The women stretch. Now Yvette says she has to piss, and walks off. Yesenia touches her toes. Tina walks up next to Yesenia and touches her toes too. Now a shot of their faces from below, straining.

"Psst," Tina whispers.

"What," Yesenia says.

"Shhh."

Yesenia whispers.

"What did Yvette find last week?"

"Oh, ha. Nothing I'm sure."

Yesenia returns to a standing position and does a shoulder stretch. Tina does the same.

"Was it *The Rock in the Shape of a Man's Head*?"

"What?"

"Why don't you trust me?"

"Tina, listen. Yvette is...different."

Now an aerial shot, Yvette leaving the bathroom.

"I know she's different. Of course I know that. I just mean you don't have to treat me like...I don't know what. Like I'm wearing a wire or something, like I'm not part of the group."

“Tina, look, Yvette is severely depressive, and here she comes shut up shut up shut up shut up, hey Yvette! Ready to do this or what?”

•

Something is happening to Tina. When the mountains first come into view she shivers. The song that enters her head is *Kashmir*, a song she’s never liked. The jagged rocks and their shadows, the dead cacti. The song is at times pretty but also haunting, and when it’s over you don’t know what to feel. She can’t tell if the singer is moaning in pleasure or pain. The mountains are the remnants of a triple super volcano explosion. In the mountains you may find yourself thinking thoughts that don’t seem your own. The mountains are savage. When she’s in the mountains she’s aware of snakes, bears, boars, homicidal maniacs, gusts of wind, exposed cliffs, falling boulders, twisted ankles, dehydration, wildfires, flash floods, heatstroke, not making it out by sundown. The mountains might kill you or make you finally feel more alive. During the song, she can’t explain it, it’s like now and then the corner of the screen is briefly peeled back, and there’s a quick glimpse of something really gory, not part of the movie, and then it’s gone. Sometimes in the mountains she worries that the possibility of seeing something truly grotesque is the thing that’s attracting her here, that at the end of the day if she’s honest with herself, she’s here to see some something terrible, the screen fully pulled back, the gore exposed, but it can’t be that. It can’t be. Sometimes on the trail she can’t keep from imagining a bear tearing apart people she knows.

•



Cut to the ride home. Dirty faces, wild hair. Yvette drives and Yesenia sits shotgun. Tina leans forward in the back seat, talking. Tina's voiceover: *I don't mean to dominate the conversation. It happens without warning. The next thing you know I'm like, shit, I've been talking a long time. It's just that it always feels like I have a lot to say, like so much goes unsaid, so I'm like blah, blah, blah, let me finish, blah, blah. I hate that about myself.*

"I don't know how I got good at it," Tina says. "I guess it just comes naturally to some people. Foreign words. Words I've never heard. I won the spelling bee in fifth grade. Beat all the sixth graders. I still remember the word I won on: *tatters*. T-A-T-T-E-R-S. Tatters. It was an easy one. Although the double T is not common in the English language. Tatters was pretty easy but there were some hard ones before that."

"I bet there were some hard ones before that," Yvette says.

"Yeah," says Yesenia. "You totally have a knack."

•

She just got home. How's she supposed to sit down? She just literally scabbled up the side of a mountain and into a gigantic cave. She turns on a light and pours wine. Her arms and legs are cut and still bleeding. At one point, on the scabble to the cave, she decided to stop, it wasn't worth it, she was getting dizzy and real people die out there overexerting themselves in exactly that way, besides even without the scabble to the cave it was still a fourteen mile round trip, a great accomplishment, nothing to be ashamed of, and then she said fuck this shit, I don't want to be at home tonight wishing I would've gone all the way, wishing I would've just stepped the fuck up and completed

what I set out to do, and she told herself to lean into the mountain, focus on the next step, follow Yvette, don't be ashamed to crawl or scoot, test a boulder before you lean on it, you won't fall, you won't fall, you're having fun, you're alive. And she made it to the cave. She took a picture from the inside looking out, the mouth of the cave forming a dark perimeter. She can't send it to Emmanuel because he might interpret it as a passive aggressive comment about him being at work this late on a Saturday, and maybe he'd be right. It's a great picture. Someone should see it. The ceiling of the cave must've been a hundred feet above her head. The ground in the cave sloped up at a sharp angle, so the whole time they were in the cave Tina was wary of sliding out the mouth and down the mountain. Such a small percentage of humans throughout all of history have been in that cave. Seven miles to the base of the mountain and then that badass scramble. She imagined Apaches in the cave, keeping watch. She didn't quit. She thought of the story she'd heard about the human population dropping to several hundred people during the last ice age and how they survived by retreating into a cave. Inside the cave even her whisper echoed. She wanted to quit and didn't and has the picture to prove it. She sends it to TJ, and hopes he won't find it weird or pathetic. She hopes he'll appreciate it. She can't keep still. She watches the video of a British guy doing the most difficult rock climb in recorded history, and in an interview he says that at one point during the climb he expected to fall off the mountain, it was odd but he'd accepted falling as a good possibility, and still he thought to himself, let's give it a go, and Tina knows exactly what he means, she was half way up and felt her knees buckle, the doubt creep into her head, the vertigo, what am I doing on the side of a mountain when I could be anywhere else not

facing death, and then she said fuck this piece of shit I'm getting my ass up there, and did.

## “The Tampa Appointment”

Every year Emmanuel’s company chooses one analyst to go to Tampa and “do the numbers” for their largest client. It’s a huge client with lots of complicated accounting, so The Tampa Appointment, as its referred to by Emmanuel and his colleagues, takes an entire month to complete. Emmanuel, despite having been named Analyst of the Year two of the last four years, has never received The Tampa Appointment.

Now we see Emmanuel at work, wearing a headset and typing.

“Ok,” he says. “Let’s take a look at the figures the company gave us for future cash flows. Next year looks like forty-two-point-five-three-two-one-six. Ok. That’s high. Let’s make it forty-point-eight-two-four-two-two. Ok. What about the next year? Forty-four-point-four-four-four-four. Ok. That’s ok. Except I wonder if that number is low because of some future operating cost they’ve already factored into the model. Let’s make a note to ask them on the next call. Question: *is 2015 cash flow taking into account a one-time operating cost?* Did someone copy that down? Melissa. Good. Ok. What about the next year? Fifty-seven? We have to lower that. Unless there’s some revenue stream due to kick-in in twenty-sixteen that we don’t know about. Make a note. Ask them on the next call, but I highly fucking doubt it. For now let’s do forty-nine-point-eight-two-three-two-four-one-three. Ok. And that’s still a hell of a spike. Ok. Now where does that put the overall valuation. Ok. Still pretty low. Well we haven’t quite cracked it yet, but we’re getting there. Made some progress today. Good job, all. Good day today.”

Emmanuel takes off the headset and massages his temples. Now he puts the

headset back on and dials another number. His face lights up as he begins to speak.

Tina's voiceover: *I say I understand it, The Tampa Appointment, and I guess I do. He wants to be recognized for the work he does. He wants to feel valued, appreciated. I mean we used to have Waitress of the Week, and as stupid as it was and even though there wasn't any money in it, it still felt good to get. So I understand, but not to the extent that he pushes himself. You'd think it was a million dollar bonus. I mean we're talking about Florida, and not even Miami. You're giving yourself a heart attack for a month alone in Tampa. It's not that I don't understand. But then I wonder: is it only the validation and appreciation, or does he really just need a break? And a break from what? Me? If he got the appointment would he ask me to come?*

“How Tina Sees Yesenia”

If I had to describe Yes in three words it would be dependable, easy-going, private and tall. She’s also very driven. Sometimes I get self-conscious listening to her talk about her job. Equity offering. Liquidity event. I don’t regret my decision to quit my job because the work wasn’t fulfilling at all. Have you ever been in a chain restaurant in the middle of a weekday afternoon? Same CD on loop. Upbeat reggae covers of Peter Frampton. Standing by the door holding menus, waiting. Then when someone finally shows up, it’s the same old spiel. I can still do it. *Welcome to Famous Dave’s! Thanks for joining us. Just to let you know our special today is an entire chicken with all the fixins, just like you make at home, and that’s gonna come with four delicious sides of your choice, and cornbread.* Why anyone would come to a restaurant for the same chicken they make at home is beyond me. Yesenia is great. Sometimes a little too great, if you know what I mean. I mean: she agrees with you so strongly all the time it’s like, is she like this with everyone and, if so, does that cheapen our friendship? I don’t know. I don’t think it does. She likes getting along with people, so that’s what she does.

Is she my best friend? I haven’t actually thought about it.

I don’t know why I said that. Of course I’ve thought about it. I think about it all the time. She’s busy a lot with work, so outside of hiking we don’t do a whole lot together. I guess I’d have to say yes, though, she is. I’m not hers.

No, I haven’t explained the mental intrusions to her. I’ve been on the verge a

couple times, but for some reason I get really nervous, like I don't want to get it wrong. I don't want to scare her off.

Why is she single? She's single because she hasn't met the right guy, or because she wants to be. She could get any guy at any time. You've seen her. That face? Her nose is like a facial accessory more than something she smells with. Impossible to imagine snot inside. I'm sure she's just busy right now, not even thinking about it, and then one day some tall-ass basketball player swoops in, and we never see her again.

“How Tina Sees Yvette”

I see Yvette as a supermassive black hole. Just like this massive object in space that is massively powerful and destructive and dark and moving around all slow and creepily silent, something other things disappear into. She’s funny too in a bitchy way. Yesenia once told me that Yvette was actually really popular in high school. I know, right? Must’ve been a fucked up high school.



Tina doesn't regret the surgery. She thinks of it like a tattoo. She knows it was the right thing for her at the time, so it's hard to regret it. Her honest feeling: they're just tits. She can't let herself regret it or she'd spend everyday just stewing in regret. And is it fundamentally different than someone using anti-aging cream or make-up or hair dye or a guy who lifts weights not for functional strength but to look better at the beach or in tight shirts or naked? It might be more noticeable, more extreme, but isn't it the same impulse, trying to fit more perfectly the societal expectation of beauty? And of course everyone wants to think they are above that expectation, that they are one of the few people not being fooled, but that, Tina thinks, is the most effective part of the spell, otherwise, if you're so far above that expectation, why not skip showering and never get a hair cut and cut arm and leg holes in a burlap bag and wear that? She doesn't regret it. She hated them before. They were shaped weird. Conical. She kept her shirt on during sex. They were the first thing she looked at in the mirror. She didn't want to get it done when she was single because it would've made her feel desperate, or like she was doing it for someone else, and she wasn't. She did it for herself. She brought it up to Emmanuel after they'd been dating six months, and he fumbled around for a response, and she could tell that he was just trying to say the right thing, but also that he was intrigued. He didn't advise her against it. He said, 'I love you the way you are, but if it's something you're interested in, I support that too.' If he had been the one to bring it up? Oh hell no. But she brought it up and he didn't talk her out of it, so she brought it up again, and again, and by the time she had it done they had all these sexual plans, how they were going to use them in bed. She

did it for both of them. And it's not like they're comically big now. Just a handful. Some people think fake breasts are the defining characteristic of the woman who has them. Tina would try not to judge any person on any one body part, natural or not. Maybe someday they'll be a relic of the person she was, and that will be ok too. That will mean she has grown.

2008: Mom passes, meets Emmanuel on the final day of the year

2009: Engaged to Emmanuel in June, gets the surgery in November

2010: Marisol, on the second anniversary of mom's passing, attempts to reconnect, flies to Arizona from San Diego with Josue, knocks on door

"Little sister!" Marisol said, hugging Tina. "Awe this place is cute on the inside."

"Thanks," Tina said. Josue and Emmanuel did a secret handshake that turned into a hug. Everyone hugged.

"Well," Josue said. "If your mom could see this, and I for one believe that she can, I think she'd be mighty happy."

Tina asked if anyone needed a drink. They put the tv on and poured wine and sat down and Marisol asked Emmanuel how it was living with Tina, did she help around the house, did she pick up after herself, and Emmanuel just laughed, not knowing how to respond, and Marisol said because Tina was always so messy growing up, and in college and even after college. Tina smiled. She was wearing Emmanuel's hooded sweater. She wasn't hiding the surgery from her sister. She was waiting for the right time.

“So tell me about the engagement!” Marisol said. “Show me the ring! That’s nice. Simple.”

They told her about the engagement. Marisol made a face like she was going to cry, lips quivering, when Tina explained how Emmanuel proposed at their mother’s resting place.

“You big pussy!” Josue said, and punched Emmanuel’s shoulder.

“Oh you’re the pussy!” Marisol said, and punched Josue’s shoulder. Josue punched her shoulder. Emmanuel punched Josue’s shoulder. Tina got up to punch someone but by the time she made it across the room the joke had run its course.

Josue talked for a while about his marathons. He ran one marathon and was hooked. Running marathons put him in the zone. It was healthy but it wasn’t just that. It was a challenge, and not for the faint of heart. It cleared your head like a motherfucker. Marisol and Emmanuel agreed that they wanted to run a marathon before they died. Tina said she had no interest.

“Tina hates exercise,” Marisol said.

“No I don’t,” Tina said.

“Tina used to fake injuries to get out of recess.”

“That was one time. And my ankle really did hurt.”

Then Marisol talked about her new position with Hilton San Diego, which paid better and was way more responsibility, which she was kind of nervous about, but then again they’d hired her for the job so they must’ve felt she was ready for it. Tina thought about mentioning the theory that in a capitalist society, everyone is promoted to their

level of incompetence, but decided against it. Marisol went on about the background checks she had to do on people who were interested in renting out the master suites. It may sound easy, Marisol said, but it's not, I mean sometimes it's easy, if you get a client with good credit, but then there are those clients that have the money to rent out the entire hotel but lack the credit rating. That's where it gets tricky. Because the goal of her job was not to stop people from renting the master suites, on the contrary her job was to keep the suites booked, but she could never lose sight of the risk involved in renting such expensive rooms. She wasn't going to say how expensive they were, but they were expensive. Then she whispered in Tina's ear: "Two thousand dollars." And it may seem like an easy job but it's not easy, and it may not seem important, but it is important, because Hilton San Diego's bottom line pretty much depends on those very rooms, and if enough clients defrauded on their payment, there wouldn't be a Hilton San Diego.

"And if there was no Hilton San Diego we'd all be fucked!" Tina said.

"The economy is all interconnected, Tina," Josue said. "So if something like the Hilton failed, something else could fail too."

"I was kidding," Tina said.

"I know," Josue said. "I know you were. I'm just saying. It's not really a joking matter. These are people's jobs."

"It's just Tina," Marisol said. "I mean we love her to death, but it's like she's the first human to ever consider the meaning of life or something. It's like, 'Oh having a job is part of the conspiracy perpetrated by the government to control us, work is so alienating, employees are divorced from the finished product and therefore find no

meaning in their work,' like teenagers smoking a joint in the basement, am I right? It's like I went through my Pink Floyd stage too. Another Brick in the Wall, right? I know Pink Floyd. But then it's like at a certain point you realize that we created these societies, you know? We created them with our own self-interest in mind, and no one's forcing us to live in them."

"Hey!" Josue said. "Teacher! Leave them kids alone!"

"How can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat!" said Emmanuel.

Then they all got super shitfaced, and Tina put on Pink Floyd to show she was a good sport, and while they drank and shouted and danced Tina realized she hadn't said anything aloud in a very long time and began to feel like a non-essential part of it all, so the next time the conversation died down she tried describing one of her sudden mental intrusions. She began by describing an article she'd read about a woman who lived alone in the country, a woman who one night, in the middle of the night, got up to get a glass of water, stepped out to the dark hallway and got this sudden, definitive knowledge that someone was in the hallway with her, just to her left, waiting for her to look, and finally the woman looked to her left and there were three very tall men in trench coats, ghosts in other words, and Tina emphasized that she was comparing her intrusions to the feeling the woman had in the hallway before the ghosts, that sudden unnerving certainty that some shit is not right, imagine that whole experience but without the ghosts, and that's sort of what the intrusions were like, and Marisol said, "Holy Spirit," and Josue said, "More like sudden menstrual intrusions," and Emmanuel said, "Always, always back to this."

•

There's nothing to do in Phoenix. They went to an Indian Casino. Tina wore a windbreaker. On the way, while Josue and Emmanuel sang along to AC/DC and reminisced about the time they were listening to AC/DC and lighting bags of human shit on fire, Marisol asked Tina if she'd gained weight, eyeing Tina's chest, and Tina said yes. Marisol asked Tina when she was going to get to see her in her wedding dress, and Tina said maybe tomorrow.

"Not maybe," Marisol said. "Definitely."

They got to the Indian Casino. Kool and the Gang was playing. Tina loves Kool and the Gang.

"Can we?" she asked Emmanuel, and he said maybe. They parked themselves in front of slot machines and Tina went to the bar and from a distance looked back at the people she knew, their mouths slightly open, smiling a bit and frowning, staring at the machines and repeating the movements exactly.

"Kool and the Gang starts in twenty," Tina said, doing a little dance next to Emmanuel. "Celebrate good times, come on. You know that one. Kool and the Gang."

"Damn it!" Josue said. "All I needed was that one other fucking diamond!"

"I think," Emmanuel said not turning from his machine, "We should do what the group wants to do."

They played blackjack. They played video blackjack. They bet on a porcelain horse race. Marisol had her picture taken next to a fancy car in the lobby. Then Emmanuel and Josue bet on a basketball game and they all sat in the sports book.

"So you have this wedding under control," Marisol said.

“Mari,” Tina said.

“I know, I know, you don’t need help. You do have a dress.”

“Yes.”

“And you love it?”

“Sure.”

“Look at me. Do you love it.”

“Yes,” Tina said. “I love it.”

Marisol eyed her suspiciously.

“You have a photographer? And you’ve looked at his portfolio. Describe his portfolio. Are the couples in his pictures doing fun poses? Do they look like they’re having fun? It’s supposed to look fun. Not just staring into the camera all serious in love. That’s lame. Like Josue and me, our photog had all kinds of fun ideas. Like he had Josue put his hand on my butt, and me look over my shoulder like I was shocked.”

“Photog?”

“Make sure you get a fun one. And no pictures in meadows. Let’s see what else. You have the lasso, I’m sure.”

“No,” Tina said. “We talked about it but I think we’re just going to skip it.”

Marisol put down her drink. “Just going to skip it?”

“Yeah.”

“What if mom heard you talk like that?” Marisol said, and Tina thought for a second, and shrugged.

•

She was having a Catholic wedding for two reasons: (1) she and Emmanuel were both technically Catholic, as were their families, and they agreed that getting married in the church would be painless and save them a lot of explaining, and (2) she'd promised her mom near the end that she had in fact regained the faith, something Tina knew wasn't true but which she justified by telling herself that she hadn't given up on someday believing something.

The day after the Indian Casino Marisol picked Tina up early.

"Ok," Marisol said. "I found fourteen Catholic churches in the area. One of them has to have one."

"I'm not going to fourteen churches," Tina said. She wore Emmanuel's sweater.

"Remember the pictures of mom and dad in the lasso? Uncle Eddie and Aunt Josie? The one me and Josue used was an actual lasso, one they used in rodeos that had been blessed by an archbishop. We decided to do classic."

"I want a pink lasso."

"You can't have a pink lasso."

The rector at the first church said he hadn't seen a lasso in years, since he was at a real Mexican wedding, in Mexico.

"Are we not real?" Marisol said, and stomped off.

At the fourth church the rector said that the practice of lassoing was a bit, how would you say, outmoded, and Marisol smiled and said well as long as we're throwing things out why not marriage too, and the church, and rectors, and the rector said, whoa, whoa, and Marisol said whoa, whoa nothing, and stomped out.



At the sixth church the rector, a young white guy with gelled hair, said he'd never heard of anyone using a lasso.

"How is it used?" he asked.

"It's used," said Marisol, "To establish a bond not only between the two people on the altar, but between them and all the people they've known and loved who also used a lasso on the altar."

"That's sweet," he said.

"Exactly," said Marisol, and stomped off.

They got back to Tina's, tired and without a lasso. The boys were gone.

"Ok," Marisol said. "Chop-chop. The dress."

Tina brought the dress downstairs.

"It's cute. Plain. Too low in front. Let's put it on."

"No."

"Yes."

"I'm tired."

"I'm tired too. So let's go upstairs and put on the dress and both of us can call it a night."

They went upstairs. Marisol sat on the bed.

"All I need is you to zip me," Tina said. "Now turn around."

"Oh come on."

"Turn around."

Marisol turned around. Tina took off her clothes and slipped into the dress. She

walked backwards to where Marisol was sitting. “Ok,” she said. “Zip me.”

Tina saw herself in the bedroom mirror, took a deep breath, and turned to her sister. They made eye contact and Marisol seemed in beatific awe, mouth parted. Then her eyes went to Tina’s chest and her lips began to quiver.

“Mari,” Tina said.

Marisol waved her hand and turned to the wall.

“Jesus, Mari.”

Marisol was shaking. Tina sat next to her and hugged her with one arm.

Then, between sobs, Marisol said, “What would mom think?”

Tina pulled away. She stood up. They haven’t spoken since.

“Mari,” she said in her wedding dress. “Mom is dead.”

It's the morning after the hike to the cave. Emmanuel got home from work late and left early. She checks her phone: no response from TJ. And now she sees it: TJ at a party with people his own age, a circle of kids with drinks in their hands, laughing, flirting, and then his phone buzzes and he steps away for a second, away from the brunette his own age he's hoping to take home, and he checks his phone and it's the picture of a fucking mountain from someone who barely registers in his consciousness when he's not bored at work, and he says to himself, this poor woman.

“Apache Country 1970”

Rob Vincent again, same outfit, hair still perfect. He sits on a big, flat rock with Ringo, both looking pensive. Trance theory, Vincent says, is of particular interest to the man studying gold fever. The simplest definition of a trance is this: when a cognitive object—a thought, image, sound, or intentional action—is repeated enough times, the result is the disabling of a cognitive function. So basically, we do something, or something is done to us, or something is repeatedly occurring in our immediate environment, and the result is a partial hypnosis. For example, military drums have long been used to disable the fear of soldiers marching into battle. Ringo barks.

Self-induced trances, Vincent says, obviously, are things we do to ourselves for the purpose of disabling one or more cognitive functions. Go jogging, booze, do work, tv, read a book. Things we do to keep busy, feel productive, not think.

Ringo nuzzles his face into Vincent’s leg. Then there are the trances induced by others, Vincent says. Trance abuse. A hypothetical government repeats the word *freedom* so many times it disables the cognitive functions *unrest, rebellion, self-examination*. The priest leads the chanting of the prayer. The hypnotist says you’re getting sleepy. The lover repeats the word love. And it’s a scary moment when someone wakes up and realizes they’ve been under. Or maybe it’s scarier that some people never wake up.

And finally there are the trances that occur involuntarily and unbidden. A creature feels the beating of its mother’s heart and is no longer scared. You hear music and need

to dance and can't fight it. You hear drums and feel invincible. Gold fever. Something happening in your immediate vicinity is causing you to feel a certain way. Sort of like knowledge that bypasses your brain. You feel invincible and don't realize it's only because of the drums.

The important thing, says Vincent, standing and dusting his white pants, is for a guy to be aware. Recognize what he's doing, or what is happening to him, and ask why. Why is he doing this to himself? What is he afraid of thinking about? Why does he believe what he believes? What in his immediate vicinity might be causing him to feel a certain way? How well does he really know this person who has convinced him to believe a certain thing? How well does he know anybody? And again I say 'guy' because it's my habit, but god knows that some of the most ancient, famous, ruthless entranced people were women. *Maenads* they called them. The Raving Ones. Worshippers of Dionysus. Wild, insane women. Couldn't reason with them. The mysteries of Dionysus inspired them to ecstatic frenzy. They killed and fucked and mutilated and literally bled people dry. They wore fawnskins and crowns of vine leaves and danced with wild abandon. They wandered the forests and hills.

“How Well Does She Know Emmanuel”

He won't complain. He's the voice of reason, which is sometimes fucking annoying and other times the only thing capable of calming her down. He's the ideal deliverer of bad news if you're getting it, the ideal recipient if you have to give it. He's hard to affect. There are dark parts of him that seem off limits to everyone including maybe himself. He dances like a maniac and it's funny and fun but also she wonders if he dances like that because it's the only outlet he permits himself. He's always grimacing. Back pain. He has no brothers or sisters. His grandparents were born in Oaxaca. He's the first in his family to go to college. His grandparents worked in the citrus industry, pickers, irrigators and packagers. His dad was a butcher. His parents are alive. He sends them money for major expenses. He's achieving in a way his grandparents wouldn't have thought possible. He owns his own condo. He has seven suits. He contributes to a Chicano scholarship fund anonymously. He never has to worry about going hungry or the house getting cold in winter. He came from almost nothing and graduated college at the top of his class. He has his own office with an ok view of the Sonoran Desert. He paid for his Grandpa Trino's funeral. He carried his grandpa's casket despite his back, despite that it caused his back pain to flare up. (Tina imagines him wanting that specific pain to last as long as possible.) He went to his grandpa's bedside every night for the last two agonizing years of his grandpa's life (Tina heard from his mom). He fed his grandpa dinner. A year before his grandpa died, his grandpa got shingles, and thereafter when he

visited his grandpa Emmanuel had to put on a protective gown and mask and rubber gloves. His grandpa would writhe in pain and literally seethe, and Emmanuel's job was to stop his grandpa from scratching his open sores, Emmanuel's job was to clean the shit from beneath his grandpa's fingernails when his grandpa came out of the bathroom, Emmanuel's job was to carry his grandpa to the toilet when they brought his grandpa home for Thanksgiving, and help wipe. Terrible jobs. She loves him for doing them. She knows if the situation were reversed, if he were weak, constantly complaining, pouring out his emotions at every turn, she'd need him to be stronger. That's the bitch of it. But at the same time she's sure there's a happier medium. She's sure there are thoughts he feels alone with and she's sure he's been ignoring them, crowding them out with work, fighting them down, his grandpa and who knows what else, fighting it down and locking it up but you can't live like that, with something in the basement. It's no way to live. He likes watching people while listening to music. He grew up next to an abandoned Christmas tree farm. He's bashful about singing but he actually really loves to sing and believes in his singing voice, but the kicker is that he's a terrible singer. He has ok pitch but he sings in this flimsy falsetto. He claims not to have a favorite color but his favorite color is green. He cleans up his own spills in restaurants. His armpits get super sweaty but so do hers. He's a light sleeper. He grinds his teeth while he sleeps and doesn't remember his dreams. His nickname in high school was E-Man. His favorite number is zero. He was the first guy to ever call her *baby*, something she always found annoying in other couples and never would've anticipated growing attached to, missing. He says she exaggerates everything especially the bad. Maybe they're both changing. Maybe out of

spite they're becoming more the thing the other one hates. Maybe marriage is unnatural and she only wanted it because she was taught to. Maybe they're just very used to each other. Maybe it's gets harder with age to relax and have fun. Maybe fiery love dies and the task is to figure out a friendship. Maybe they're figuring it out. It's not on the whole a hostile environment but it is pretty damn uneventful and devoid of interaction. They laugh at the same things on tv. He buys her a birthday cake every year. They still go out to dinner. They aren't one of those couples you see at restaurants that go the whole meal and don't say a word. She initiated sex the last thousand times except twice when he was pretty drunk. It could be worse. Her parents were worse. Sometimes she rubs his back first thing in the morning, and then he rubs hers. They've had good times. They had a pretty good trip to Oregon here while back. Vacation sex. Silhouette of a shark in the curl of a wave. Home feels better when you get back. A change of scenery would do them good. They've been in this box. It's a stressful time. It won't always be this way. She can't start over. It's been bad and gotten better before. He'd make a heroic dad.



TJ has nothing to do at work but open the gate. He's bored. All he and Tina have done so far in his little kiosk is talk. It feels wrong. He recently dropped out of college again. Tina hasn't had a job in over three months, since the restaurant. She quit because it was awful. Hell no she does not regret it. But also, she thought by now something else would have presented itself as interesting or at the very least doable, and instead the whole idea of working, of a "life's work," seems freaky and robotic. She mentally refers to him as *gate man*, trying to keep his name out of her head to the extent that it's possible. She's afraid of accidentally saying it at an inopportune moment. She's thankful it's a hard name to accidentally say. If she ever did accidentally say it, she'd play it off by making a comment about TJ Hooker starring William Shatner. Gate man listens patiently and doesn't make her feel stupid about the intrusions. Her excuse for coming to the front gate is that it's right by the mailboxes. They sit in metal folding chairs, facing each other, filling the tiny space. She holds the water bill. Their knees bump. His breath is just slightly sour and she's surprised to kind of like it.

"Sorry I missed your text the other night," he says. "That cave looked dope."

"No big," she says. "I sent it to a bunch of people."

*Step 1: Write a letter to your significant other, outlining your complaints / issues.*

*Emmanuel,*

*I love you. You know that. I love being around you and making you happy, but lately, actually for a while now, it doesn't seem like I make you that happy. It seems kind of like I've lost the power to affect your mood. Am I still the person you want to be with?*

*I know I'm being insecure. I don't feel secure. You spend so much time at work. I know: The Tampa Appointment. But that can't define your life, right? I'm not trying to start a fight or belittle your profession, and I fully admit that my past jobs were all dumber than yours, but the point of it all can't be preparing financial statements for a grocery store chain in Florida, can it? And then when we're together all we do is zombie-stare at the tube.*

*I think about the story you told on our first hike, about your ex. My reaction was wow. This guy is super frank yet sensitive. He thinks deeply. And I still think that. But, now, and I'm not trying to start a fight, now I also think, is the same thing happening to us? Is history the only thing we have between us? Is this history a net, supporting us, or a web we're stuck in? Do you feel trapped? Do you still kind of pine over your ex? Would you tell so long a story about me to the next girl you dated?*

*I know you only told that story to scare away the bears, but still. You could've told any story, and that's what you told.*

*I see you staring at the tv not even paying attention to what's on. When I ask the score of the game you're watching you never seem to know. What has such a grip on*

*you? Are you thinking or just in a daze? Is it a good daze? I want to believe that good things, positive forces, are occupying your mind, but I find that hard to believe based on the look on your face. You don't know how you look in those moments but I do. You look afraid. Are you?*

*I know you're stressed and tired. But isn't sex supposed to relieve stress and be invigorating? Is it a chore? I'm not trying to be dramatic. It's just I spend all day thinking. I got the surgery for us. I'm not blaming you for anything. I wanted to get it. But a big reason I got it was that it seemed like something you wanted, and now we go weeks without sex, and I got the surgery and sometimes I feel ridiculous.*

*I'm not saying I'm blameless. It just seems like, since mom passed, and I know I'm being dramatic, and it hit me only recently even though she's been gone a while now, (maybe this is the first chance I've had to slow down and process everything), but anyway I just feel like time is too precious to spend pretending. I feel the days passing so quickly. I can't go back to being a waitress.*

*I know: bust out the violins. I'm fine. I'm trying not to exaggerate. I just feel a little bit out of control.*

Tina and her mom had this thing. After tucking Tina into bed, her mom would turn off the lamp in the corner, space heater, and the string of Christmas lights that hung year-round on Tina's wall. Rest for girls and rest for machines, her mom would say, and Tina would issue a series of mechanized beeps. One time in the convalescent, Tina turned off her mom's tv and lamp and got the sudden urge to revive the routine with the roles reversed but realized it would've broke both their hearts.

*Step 2: Now replace your lover's name with your own name. Now erase any parts that don't make sense. Now re-read the letter carefully. This is your letter to yourself. What you may find is that a lot of the anxiety you are attributing to your lover is actually stemming from you.*

*Tina,*

*Do you feel trapped?*

*What has such a grip on you? Are you thinking or just in a daze? Is it a good daze? I want to believe that good things, positive forces, are occupying your mind, but I find that hard to believe based on the look on your face. You don't know how you look in those moments but I do. You look afraid. Are you?*

*Is sex a chore?*

*I feel the days passing so quickly.*

*Step 3: Encourage your lover to complete his own pair of letters. Then share.*

It can't be blood thirst. It's not something that simple or evil drawing her to the mountains. It's something else: the frequency and intensity of the intrusions, and she knows how that sounds, words make it stupid. She hesitates to label it an *awakening* because she doesn't want to jinx it and doesn't want to be the type of person who says the word awakening, especially in relation to herself, and she doesn't yet know what she's waking up to, it hasn't quite revealed itself, and she'd never say that out loud. It's wacko talk, hazily defined, but if she were forced to be honest at gunpoint at the risk of sounding cracked, it feels like an awakening. Not like ones she's had before. Not like the sudden desire to go to nursing school or live a healthier lifestyle, things she did for money or other reasons that seem kind of trivial now, waking into different sleep. The mountains are bending her mind. It's related to her perspective of herself and the world, and it isn't comforting. She had a dream in which she was a cartoon character that suddenly realized she was a cartoon character, and the feeling of the intrusions is similar to the feeling of the dream. She knows how that sounds. It's telling her to listen. There's something behind the screen. It can't be blood thirst bringing her here, and at the same time it can't be beauty. It's not that simple or comforting. She knows to keep thoughts like this to herself. She gets home and looks at her journal and tries to work herself back into the mindset, imagining the rocks, looking at pictures, but the feeling won't be built from memory. She cringes at her own journal, the elevation of the language, the earnestness and audacity, feverish scribbles, forced epiphanies, but that's how it feels in the mountains.

“Monday”

Jog. Showered. Read. Nap. Made noodles.



“Tuesday”

Jog. Shower. Read. Nap. Read. Heated up noodles.

“Wednesday”

Jog. Shower. Read. Nap. Called Yesenia at seven. Left message. First time Tina heard own voice today. Ham sandwich.

“Thursday”

Got mail and saw TJ. Told him about “the other day.” Actually took place two years ago. She was at that place *Toast!* on Main and started to get just the weirdest intrusive feeling. She can’t really explain it. It was like everyone working there had the same creepy face and this feeling just swamped her brain. The sign on the door said *over 100 locations in the Valley*, and for some reason it just freaked her the fuck out.

“I’m not explaining it well,” she said. “I’m doing a terrible job.”

“No totally,” he said. “That shit *is* weird.”

## “How She Spent Friday Night”

*Bodhi* in Buddhism is an abstract noun formed from the verbal root *budh*, meaning to awake, become aware, notice or know. It refers to an elevated understanding of the nature of things. According to the Buddha the path to liberation is one of progressively coming out of delusion. Along the path, one is gradually awakened as she receives insight into the Four Noble Truths. These four truths explain the nature of *dukkha* ("suffering," "anxiety," "stress," "dissatisfaction"), its causes, and how it can be overcome. Said the Buddha: “Birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, illness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are *dukkha*; union with what is displeasing is *dukkha*; separation from what is pleasing is *dukkha*; not to get what one wants is *dukkha*; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are *dukkha*.”

The Pāli word *paccekabuddha* refers to those who reach Nirvana through self-realization, without the help of spiritual guides or teachers.

She called Yesenia and got the machine.

The term *awakening* also appears in conjunction with the phrase *religious experience*, a term coined by American philosopher William James, who stated that all mystical/religious experiences are: (1) transient (meaning both that an individual soon returns to a “normal” frame of mind, and that the event is outside our normal perception of space and time); (2) ineffable (the experience can’t be put into words); (3) noetic (the individual feels that she has learned something valuable from the experience, that she has

been provided knowledge that is normally hidden from human understanding); and (4) passive, in other words the experience happens to the individual, largely without conscious control. Although there are meditative activities that can make religious experience more likely, it is not something that can be turned on and off at will.

“Monday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Cereal. Read. Movie. Downloaded game on her phone that was like blow your opponents out of the water with your brother as you defend your newly discovered riches from evil pirates.

“Tuesday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Read. Nap. Made noodles.

“Wednesday”

At one-thirty Emmanuel came home unexpectedly. She was napping on the couch under a green blanket. He saw her and made his patented little noise of disgust, a sharp exhale through the nostrils. She'd already gone for a jog and read fifty pages and even if she hadn't so the fuck what. She made the noise back. They said nothing else. He made a sandwich and left.

Downloaded game that was like staying alive is the only goal in this quick and simple point-and-click shooter.



“Thursday”

Nap. Shower. Hot Pocket.

The day before she quit the restaurant was Wilbur Day. It happened once a month. Wilbur was the official mascot of *Famous Dave's*, a guy in a pig suit that took pictures with kids by the fake fireplace. The eyes on the suit were unnerving, nervous. On Wilbur Day Tina took the long way from the kitchen to the dining room, through the bar, avoiding Wilbur if she could.

She doesn't remember much about the workday except that there was a spider in one woman's salad. The woman was shaking furious and said, "Yeah there's a problem I'm sharing my spider with a salad," so loud a bunch of people including Wilbur looked over, and then the woman's husband said, "She's just the waitress, dear."

After work the guy who played Wilbur was in the kitchen. Danny. He looked a little bit rough but normal enough and handsome in the face but also really short. Five-three maybe. He had a bad scar on his cheek and a tattoo behind his right ear and looked about forty. He had on a denim jacket. Tina had been crying. It was stupid. Her boss yelled at her in front of the woman with the spider in her salad for not "giving the food a close last inspection," and then she still had to serve the couples' food and refill their water and ask if they saved room for dessert and write *Thank You!* on the receipt. When Tina cries it looks like she's been crying. Danny introduced himself and asked if she wanted to smoke a joint in the parking lot, and she said yes. She let herself accept because of his height. They went to his car. He drove a Dodge Neon. He put the pig suit in the backseat and they got in.

“We can ash in this thing of Gatorade,” he said. He lit a tiny joint and put on the radio. “You’re not ashamed to smoke with Wilbur?” he said, passing it.

“Nope,” she said, hitting it three times. “Can we turn the head around though?”

“Yeah.” He did it.

“How do you like being Wilbur.”

“How do you like being a waitress.”

She coughed and had time to consider her response.

“So much.”

“Really?”

“No.”

He laughed. “We smoked that fast. Want another one?”

She nodded.

“This one’s bigger.”

“I’ve heard that before,” she said.

“That’s funny.”

“That is funny. I am incapable of laughter.”

“What?”

“I’m high. My husband quit smoking and so I did too even though I didn’t want to. It’s no fun to smoke with sober dudes.”

“Your boss is a giant douche.”

“I know. We used to wait tables together and then he got promoted and started wearing the black polo shirt and wearing a headset. Who is he even talking to on that

thing? No one else has a headset.”

“I go to like fifteen *Famous Dave*’s and he’s the only one that makes me pay for my food.” Danny took a huge toke. They sat there and looked at the janitors inside, mopping.

“It’s not what I imagined,” he said.

“Me neither.” They laughed.

“Sometimes I’m close to freaking out in that suit. It’s so damn hot but I have to dance continuously. It’s in my contract.”

“You call that dancing.”

“Sometimes I look around and it’s like they’re eating *me*, or like my family, and I just have to keep dancing.”

“I got screamed at for serving a salad with a spider in it. The spider was so tiny. The size of...I can’t even think of anything that small. It’s like am I supposed to use a hand lens.”

“What’s a hand lens.”

“Are you serious.”

“I didn’t finish college.”

“I didn’t learn that in college. Magnifying glass.”

“Did you spend time in prison or something,” he said.

“Jesus,” she said. “Why would you say that.”

“Because you went to college but now you’re waiting tables.”

“Jesus. Am I giving off that vibe.”

“I went to college and I went to prison.”

“Oh. How bad?”

“Accessory to grand theft. I didn’t hurt anybody.”

“Nice.”

“I used to work for NASA. You know the Rover? The thing that descends from the space craft and takes images and soil samples?”

“I can moonwalk. I love weed.”

“Me too.”

“It slows me down,” they said at the same time.

“Whoa,” he said, lighting another one.

“I designed the wheels. On the Rover.”

“That’s cool.”

“It was ok. Better than this.”

“You have to not imagine other lives you might’ve had.”

“You make one mistake.”

“Those other lives would’ve sucked too,” she said, passing it.

“Yeah,” he said. “It’s just not what I imagined. Any of it. It’s like I wish I had a better job but then what good would that really do? I mean I wouldn’t have to wear a pig suit but I’d still just be doing some shit I don’t want to do to pay for a bunch of things I’m not sure I really need. Like I can imagine waking up and being sixty and thinking fuck, I should have been preparing for death this whole time. I should have been a Buddhist or at least an Esoteric. How could I have possibly thought that anything was

more important than preparing for that final moment, you know? I mean people way smarter than us figured out a long time ago that you need to contemplate the shit out of your experience and come to some level of peace about the reality of your death, or you will die terrified at the end and not ready to go.”

“You’re dead on,” she said. “Not all of it but a few things.”

“Thanks,” he said. “You want to get a drink sometime?”

“No thanks,” she said.

“Ok,” he said. “Thought I’d ask.”

*Superstition Mts. Deaths and Dismemberments (continued)*

- *1984: Hannah Mortensen, suicide*
- *1984: Maria Colombo, suicide*
- *1984: Margaret Orten, suicide*
- *1984: Florence Morris, suicide*
- *1984: Hannah Curtis, hiking accident*

“Monday”

Jog. Shower. Read. Nap. Heated up noodles.



“Tuesday”

Shower. Nap. Downloaded game on phone that was like blast your way through hordes of flesh eating zombies coming to feast on your brain. Sat on couch watching tv. Emmanuel flipped through presentation, cussing his subordinate Neil Honeycutt at discovery of every mistake.

“Goddamn it Honey buns...Neil you fucking moron...I can't fucking do everything...What the hell is this...Amateur bullshit.”

“Wednesday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Heated noodles. Called Yesenia and got machine. Downloaded game that was like prepare yourself for complete helicopter mayhem.

Tina met Yesenia at jury duty in 2011. Tina got her summons and found herself in a crowded room with no windows in the basement of the courthouse. It smelled like rotten citrus. Once in a while an old woman with a clipboard came in and read some names. The coffee was awful. No one had anything to say anyone else. The sound of pigeons came from somewhere. Tina was reading a week old newspaper she found on the ground when a guy sat next to her and said, "I've seen you somewhere." He had long curly hair and there was something off about his eyes, like he couldn't keep them still, eyes that would get him out of jury duty. She told him she didn't think so, one of those faces, then got more coffee and chose a different spot.

He found her.

"This is gonna sound weird but it's like I recognize your scent," he said. "What bus do you take?"

She agreed it was weird and moved again, this time to a chair between two people, a fat woman who watched Tina with naked hostility as Tina approached, and a tall woman about Tina's age, the friendliest face in the room.

"Please talk to me," Tina said. "That guy over there is following me around and creeping me out."

"Ok!" Yesenia said, and put down her book.

They talked about work, where they were from, the weather. Tina told Yesenia about Emmanuel and their honeymoon to Cabo, the college kids fucking on lawn chairs and sexy dance contests and, briefly, about the scorpion in her shoe.

“That would have fucked your shit up girl,” Yesenia said.

Yesenia told Tina a funny story about her mom, how her mom recently discovered porn on the home computer, freaky stuff, animals, feces. Her mom was really freaking out because no one else lived there, only her mom and dad, so her mom spent a whole few days trying to figure out a way to confront her husband about the porn and finally decided that there was no way, her mom would just bury it, live with it, hope she forgot her dreams. It was a long story Yesenia told about her mom, which ended with her mom finally pinning the porn on the guy who’d been hired to put in the new hardwood floor.

“Talk about laying wood,” Tina said.

Yesenia asked Tina if she had family in the area, and Tina felt herself have to swallow before saying no, or not anymore, I mean a few cousins but nothing really, and then she blurted out that her mom had recently passed, or actually not recently at all but it still felt recent, if that made sense, and then she apologized for unloading on Yesenia, she wasn’t always this much of a downer, but no she had no family in the area.

“You’re not unloading,” Yesenia said, and Tina thanked her and said it was just strange how long it took for something like that to start to dawn on you, the little things you suddenly remember, the memory of her mom gently shaking Tina awake for school, the way she hummed, the collection of sea glass, the way she talked to animals and babies, the songs she knew by heart and the ones she mumbled along with, the way Tina rubbed her mom’s earlobe when her mom held her as a child, the scarves and hats her mom crocheted, some of which were cute and some of which were not, the things she

said most often, “I’ll be darned,” and, “¿Que hay de almuerzo? ¿Albondigas no te dije?” and, “Eat it and like it or eat it and don’t,” the way her mom sent cards when there wasn’t a special occasion, just to let Tina know someone was thinking of her, the leopard print steering wheel cover, blah, blah, blah, all this shit, I get started and I can’t stop but I’m not always like this, and anyway I don’t know how I got started on it, oh right your mom found the animal porn, which is hilarious, I can just see her face when the video popped up on the screen, the girl getting drilled by the horse or whatever. It’s just strange. It’s like I find myself about to say something whose significance only mom would’ve understood, you know, something we saw together or an inside joke, and have to keep it to myself. Even just certain words. It’s weird. She wasn’t just a name. She grew up in Los Angeles and wanted to see the Dodgers win it all once more. I promised her I’d scream as loud as I could if they ever did.

Tina didn’t remember at what point they’d started holding hands. Both had tears in their eyes. The waiting room was completely indifferent. People had headphones in or were sleeping in the most uncomfortable positions imaginable or worrying about their own shit or playing with their phones, so Tina told Yesenia about the day, six months before the funeral, she was in her mom’s convalescent room and they were watching *Bonanza* reruns, the episode Ben Cartwright discovers, to his great surprise and dismay, that US government agents have been massacring and raping Indians on the prairie and not vice versa as had been reported. In the end Ben saves Hoss and apprehends the crooked government agents and earns the respect of Cochise and his people, and Tina and her mom were laughing at how ridiculousness it was and then her mom said that if she

“had it to do over again,” she’d try to do “something involved with the movies, something exciting.” And Tina just kind of ignored it, covered it up with laughter, and then they talked about something else, but now Tina couldn’t ignore it. What did she mean if she had it to do over? What does that mean? What could it mean besides that she regretted the way it all went down, cooking two meals a day and doing her own dishes, day after day after day and pretending everything was fine? Could it mean something else?

“Come here,” Yesenia said, and they hugged for a long time, both of them shaking and crying, and then they pulled away and looked at each other and realized where they were and what they were doing and both of them started giggling, quietly at first until it was full-on hysterical, and the old guy next to Yesenia said he’d have whatever she was having.

“Monday”

Jog. Shower. Read. Made noodles. Nap. On couch with Emmanuel, game on tv,  
the Memphis Grizzlies slaughtering the Charlotte Bobcats.

“They’re headed for the exits in droves, folks,” she said.

“You think it’s time to polish that résumé,” he said.

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know.”

“I’m on my own savings,” she said. “Drill master.”

“That’s not the point.”

“What’s the point,” she said, and then he muttered something and got his shoes  
and went up the stairs, and she said, “Let’s hear it wise man.”

Felt good to say. Shouldn’t have said it.

“Tuesday”

Jog. Showered. Read. Nap. Made noodles. Certain meditative activities make mystical experience more likely. Tried meditating. Couldn't. Foot itched. May have athlete's foot. Skin cracking between toes. Slight burning sensation. Spilled wine on rug. Told Emmanuel and he made his patented little sound of disgust.



“Wednesday”

Jog. Showered. Nap. Made noodles. Picked up rug from dry-cleaners.

## “Work Experience”

- Waitress/Janitor  
William H. Morris Chevrolet, Gold Canyon, AZ  
Hired as waitress for restaurant in showroom. Worked one weekend as waitress. Then William H. Morris’ granddaughter decided she wanted to be waitress. Tina demoted to showroom janitor. Punched time clock. Took out trash. Replaced trashcan liner. Swept showroom. Swept sidewalk. Mopped. Checked supply of toilet paper and toilet seat covers in stalls. Sat on toilet, crying. William H. Morris’ main advice was keep an up-to-date Rolodex with the birthday information of everyone you ever meet and send them all birthday wishes in case someday you need them.
  
- Shift Lead  
Typhoon Lagoon, Mesa, AZ  
Shift lead in charge of inner tube and locker rental. Job duties included cash register, patching damaged tubes, sweeping, mediating customer disputes, administering wristbands to renters of inner tubes, dispensing \$1 to renters of inner tubes at park closing provided renter has (a) valid wristband and (b) tube in good condition. Searched park for abandoned tubes. Crowd control during daily Festival of Waves parade. Developed new, more efficient pattern for customer queue. Helped form human barrier to keep customers out of water when park intercom announced “10-30-H-F,” codename for feces.

“Thursday”

Jog. Showered. Read. Downloaded game on her phone that was like use a gigantic slingshot to sling the rhinoceros at the bulls eye, controlling how hard you sling it with the 4 and 6 keys, 4 for harder, 6 for not as hard, which struck her as counterintuitive because the 4 key was actually pointing away from the target, but then again it sort of made sense if you thought of it as pulling the slingshot back to give it more torque or whatever. Called Yesenia and got machine.

## “The Honeymoon Period”

The term “honeymoon period” refers not to the honeymoon itself but to the few months everything is new.

The memory for Tina that stands out from the honeymoon period, besides the time they got high and saw the Existential Dreadlocks play the Ganja Room and the drummer had on a shirt that said *kill yo self*, was in many ways a very normal night. They stayed in and drank a lot of wine and watched a documentary about lions. She gave him a handjob. He ate her out. They rewound the movie and watched the parts they missed.

She felt stupid for crying during a documentary about lions. She felt even more stupid because the part she cried during was a ridiculously predictable thing for her to cry about, a mother lion breaks her leg during a hunt, and soon the pride has to move on in search of food, and the mother can't keep up, and the only lion that stays behind is the hurt lion's daughter, who keeps trying to nudge the mother on but the mother can't do it. Eventually the mother just sits down and growls at the daughter when the daughter tries to come near, saving her daughter's life. The daughter runs off alone looking back over her shoulder. She felt stupid for crying but that's how it happened, and Emmanuel said, “That's probably not even really her daughter, they just have to do their best to make a bullshit narrative out of the footage they get,” and she agreed and kept crying and felt it all coming loose, she said she missed her mom, she knew she wasn't supposed to say that but she did, little things, the memory of waking to the sound of her mom raking the yard

on weekend mornings, the aggravating way her mom would say things to the dog she really wanted to say to Tina, ‘You wish your Aunt Tina was around more often, don’t you Mr. Wiggles, yes you do,’ the way she described claustrophobia as ‘starting to feel the walls,’ the way she always, always made Tina feel guilty about not visiting home enough even when Tina made it home for days, even weeks, it always finished with her mom crying and hugging her too hard, asking why she couldn’t just stay another few days, walking out to the street as Tina drove away, waving. She told him about the day, six months before the funeral, her mother out of nowhere said if she “had it to do over again,” she’d “try to do something involved with the movies, something exciting.” What did that mean? Didn’t that mean she regretted how she’d spent her time, crocheting, keeping a clean house day after day after day? What else could it mean?

“Maybe it didn’t mean anything,” Emmanuel said, hugging her.

Later that night in bed, Tina, still drunk, told Emmanuel that she didn’t want to seem like a total sponge or something, or maybe what she meant was that she didn’t want him to feel like a total sponge, just having to soak up all her problems and baggage, I’m not one of those girls with just a shitload of baggage. I just want you to feel like you can talk to me, like if there’s ever anything bothering you or that you want off your chest or just some random thing bumming you out and you don’t know why, you can tell me.

“There is something,” he said.

“What?”

“When I was little, my father was famous,” he said. “He was the greatest samurai

in the empire, and he was the Shogun's decapitator. He cut off the heads of a hundred and thirty-one lords. It was a bad time for the empire. The Shogun just stayed inside his castle and he never came out. People said his brain was infected by devils. My father would come home, he would forget about the killings. He wasn't scared of the Shogun, but the Shogun was scared of him. Maybe that was the problem. Then, one night, the Shogun sent his ninja spies to our house. They were supposed to kill my father but they didn't. That was the night everything changed.”

“What?” she said.

“Nothing,” he said, smiling. “It’s from a movie. I’m wasted.”

“Oh,” she said. “So nothing then?”

•

They scrapped the church wedding and were married on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 on the roof of a fancy hotel on a warm, breezy day.

From the honeymoon itself the memory that stands out, besides the scorpion, is a feeling she kept trying to ignore. By the time they were married it felt like they’d been married a while. She couldn’t help feeling like they were doing it only because it was the next step, what others expected of them and they expected of themselves. It wasn’t just that, she told herself. It was also the feeling she still had that Emmanuel was holding something back, something that made him feel isolated, afraid, something that probably for stretches disappeared but always came back and that if he managed to share might somehow precipitate a new and more gratifying understanding between them. And it wasn’t just that. It was also that the most joyful moments she could recall were when

Emmanuel actively tried to make her happy. When he tried, even a little, he succeeded in making her love him.

On their last morning in Cabo, he left the room to check out and the scorpion fell out of her shoe. When he got back from the lobby the story flew out of her. She was hyperventilating. He went outside. “No scorpion here,” he said. He asked was she sure she saw it. He asked could it have been a lizard. “Ok,” he said, “But it didn’t get you, right? Crisis averted.” On the way out Emmanuel asked the guy at the front desk if they ever got scorpions and the man said they did, pointing to a sign behind the front desk that warned patrons of the presence of poisonous creatures, including scorpions, and Emmanuel told him that one had gotten in Tina’s shoe, but luckily she’d knocked out her shoes before putting them on, and the two men laughed and shook hands, and in the cab on the way to the airport Emmanuel said wasn’t it possible she’d seen the sign behind the counter without registering it and, with that in the back of her mind, decided to knock her shoes together, and she said yes that was theoretically possible, yes that was a smart theory but what she was telling him was that she did not see the sign and she’d never knocked her shoes together like that, not once in her life, and Emmanuel said come on not once in her life? and asked wasn’t it possible that subconsciously she was knocking her shoes together to knock out the sand, because they’d spent so much time at the beach, and she said who the fuck wore moccasins to the beach, and he said calm down and she said don’t tell me to calm down, you’re not hearing what I’m telling you: I got a strange feeling immediately before a fucking scorpion fell out of my shoe, and what I don’t need

right now is to feel crazier, not after spending four nights in teenage fuckfest. The cab driver laughed.



“Monday”

Called Yesenia and got machine. Jog. Shower. Read. Hot Pocket.

“Tuesday”

Looked at classifieds for the fuck of it. Jog. Shower. Tried meditating. Neighbor couple fighting. Slamming doors. Sounded murderous. She and Emmanuel aren't that bad.

“Wednesday”

She was at Thornton’s eating soup, facing the front door. A delivery guy came in with a bunch of boxes on a dolly. She was impressed with how he managed the door but otherwise paid no attention. His dolly squeaked. She ate her soup. The music in Thornton’s was barbershop quartet. The delivery guy walked back by, his dolly now empty, and on the back of his puffy black vest was the sewn-on picture of a man’s hand giving the peace sign, gaudy rings on both fingers. Below the hand it said *RIP DAD*. Then he was gone. She rushed to the bathroom and spread a toilet seat cover and sat on the toilet in jeans and got her shit together, and did not cry. Bless that delivery guy.

“Thursday”

Read. Shower. On couch with Emmanuel after work.

“If they give it to Harper again I swear to fucking god,” he said.

“The Tampa Appointment?” she said and he said nothing and started rubbing his temples with his thumbs in a circular motion but his facial expression didn’t change.

## “Work Experience”

- Human Relations Representative  
NuVasive, Inc. Phoenix, AZ  
Designed new cover sheet for company presentations. Tore staples out of packets of paper that had been stapled together so that papers could be “digitized.” Stuffed bags with NuVasive pen, NuVasive shirt, notepad and company brochure for distribution at career fair. Given enormous stacks of paper, told to go through and highlight every mention of phrase “appraised value.” One time, overheard her direct boss, Jackie, tell her indirect boss, Joe, “She’ll do it.” “Don’t,” Joe said. “Watch,” Jackie said, “She’ll do it.” “Jackie stop it,” Joe said. “Watch,” Jackie said, “Hey, Tina. Would you go and grab me a piece of candy from the dish at reception?” “Sure!” Tina said, and did it.

“Friday”

Nap. Jog. Shower. Called Yesenia and got machine. Looked at classifieds for the fuck of it. Downloaded game that was like compete in the world championship of archery! Compensate for the wind and hit the jackpot!

“Saturday”

Looked up Tampa on the Internet. She could spend the days at the beach.

“Sunday”

She keeps having this dream, she tells TJ, a head that suddenly appears. The back of someone’s head. Then it starts slowly turning to face her and there’s like a creaking sound. She wakes up just before she sees the face.

“That shit *is* creepy,” he says.

“Thanks. It’s stupid. I’m being a baby.”

“I could get you sleeping pills,” he says. “Prescription.”

“Thanks. Maybe. Have you heard of trance theory?” she says, and now a man peeks his head into the kiosk and Tina screams. Chuck: another guy that works the gate.

“I knew I was ugly,” Chuck says. “But I didn’t know I was *that* ugly!”

Chuck: pale, past middle age, terribly thin. Very wandering eyes. If Tina thinks she’s likely to meet Chuck she changes shirts. Chuck has an extreme case of eczema. He wears thick glasses and is always squinting like it’s too bright. His lips are white-purple, like the lips of a frozen guy. He looks like someone being held in an underground prison.

“Alright, *muchacho*,” Chuck says to TJ. “*Andale*.”

“Hey,” Chuck says to Tina. “*You* don’t have to go.”

Tina and TJ walk to his car, a souped-up Honda Civic with a gigantic rear spoiler.

“Guess that’s why they call it a spoiler,” she says.

“My brother gave it to me,” he says. “He used to race, and then one day he was swimming at the lake and almost drowned. Then he gave me his car.”

“Oh.”



“So what’s on your agenda?”

“Oh I don’t know,” she says. “I’m no fun.”

“I doubt that.”

“Shit!” she says and dives onto the ground. Now Emmanuel drives slowly by, talking into a headset, not even glancing in the direction of TJ’s car. TJ is cracking up.

“I’m sorry,” Tina says, sticks in her hair. “I don’t know. We’re just talking.”

“You like dove onto the ground.”

“Yeah,” she says, gathering the mail. “I’m sorry. I gotta go.”

“Thursday”

Downloaded game on her phone that was like blasting apart this wacky house of nagging grannies will keep you wrapped up for hours!

“Monday”

Jog. Shower. Read. Made noodles. Found website streaming twenty-four coverage of baby orangutan. Cute. Called Yesenia and got machine.

## “Work Experience”

- Waitress  
Famous Dave's, Mesa, AZ  
What she liked about waitressing was the complete lack of pretense. It's an honest job. The people that do it don't pretend they're doing something else, hugely meaningful. Serving food to hungry people. What she hated was actually doing it.

“Tuesday”

Her roommate in the convalescent home wouldn't stop screaming at night. The smells. The hours she spent alone. She once burst into tears while telling me about a blouse she bought in Hawaii. She started saying things like, “Fix the hole in the fence so the bird won't get out, Tina,” and, “Who keeps letting that dog in at night?” She got awful sores on her heels from lying in bed all day. She could only eat liquefied food and refused the spoon and gagged on the spoon when I forced it past her teeth, but she had to eat. She was losing weight. During an episode of *Bonanza* she said what she wished she'd done with her life. They amputated her right leg at the knee. She made me read her horoscope almost until the end: *you are a visionary and today you work towards building a successful future; this is a great day to try a more experimental approach to your love life*. She was a Scorpio. A good day was a day with a bowel movement. Euphemisms such as *bowel movement* had a new, vital importance. She asked if I believed in God. She became obsessed with the exact position of her dinner tray, moving it an inch one way, then back the other, then back the other and back again, and I'd try to help but I just made it worse. She started talking about her own mother. She wasn't just a name. Sometimes I'm so afraid.

“Wednesday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Certain meditative activities make mystical experience more likely. Tried meditating. Doesn't think it's possible to meditate in the condo.

Later she did this online contest that was like create nicknames for the cast of a new reality show and then submit your list to the show's creators and one winner will be chosen for a grand prize of \$500 and the cast members will have to use those names for each other! There were six people on the show, which Tina named: Uncle Baby (because he looked like an uncle yet also a baby), Circle Face, Lady Bug, Donkface, Grandma Baby and Ratfink. Called Yesenia and got machine.

“Friday”

Jog. Read. Shower. Orangutan cam. On the couch with Emmanuel. Emmanuel going over presentation again and again, looking for “nits.”

“Are you looking for work,” he says, circling something.

“I don’t know.”

He flips a page.

“Motherfucker,” he says. Circles something.

“Saturday”

Read. Nap. Been avoiding TJ since dirt dive. Found out she did not place in nickname competition. Called Yesenia and made plans to hike.



“Sunday”

Hiked with Yvette and Yesenia. At start of trip, walking old, straight jeep road, found herself and Yesenia lagging behind Yvette.

“Did I tell you about the other day?”

“Tell me,” Yesenia said.

“Nothing really. I don’t know. It was just weird. I was at that place *Toast!* The sandwich place on Main? And I started to get the weirdest feeling. I don’t know if you’ll know what I mean. It was sort of like trauma time?”

“I thought *Toast!* closed down,” Yesenia said. “Like a year ago.”

“Oh!” Tina said. “Yeah you’re right. I guess it was somewhere else.”

“Anyway what happened.”

“I don’t know. I just got a creepy feeling. I can’t explain it. Sorry for being weird.”

“Don’t be sorry!” says Yesenia.

•

Hiking is not a trance. It’s not baking. It doesn’t feel at all like escape. She doesn’t hike to disable any cognitive function, *despair, gloom, hopelessness, loneliness, morbidity* or *fear*. She feels those in the mountains. She feels everything, and stronger. Her awareness is heightened, not disabled. The signal is stronger, the intrusions more frequent, at times almost sustained, interpretable. She can’t explain it except to say hiking is that which most predictably causes the intrusions, and the cumulative effect of the

intrusions is a new, more complete, unsettling perspective of herself and the world, and she knows how that sounds and wishes it were less crazy or at least clearer, but it's getting clearer. It's not a trance. It's the complete opposite of hypnosis. The intrusions aren't analogous to the invincibility felt by soldiers marching into battle, hearing drums. There are no drums in the mountains. There's nothing in the mountains. It must be real.

•

Tina is the last of the three to reach the summit. She starts to pull herself over the last boulder and finds Yvette standing above her. Yvette helps her up.

"Thanks!" Tina says.

"No problem," Yvette says. "Good job."

"Where's Yesenia?"

"She's around," Yvette says. "But while we're alone, I understand you have a question for me."

"I do?" Tina says. "I don't think so. Not that I can think of."

"No?" Yvette says, smiling. "Could've sworn Yesenia mentioned you asking a question. Something about the Gila I was looking for here while back. Could be wrong though."

"Hmmm," Tina says. "Let me think, let me think."

"Yeah, think. But don't ask the wrong question. You never know what might happen. You don't want to ask the wrong question, do you?"

"No. Not at all. I don't want to ask the wrong question."

"Good."

"Hmmm. Can't think of anything."

“Ok. Well, my mistake. What a view, right?”

“Yeah,” says Tina. “Gorgeous.”

“Monday”

Jog. Shower. Orangutan cam.

Nietzsche: “If one had the smallest vestige of superstition in one, it would hardly be possible to set aside completely the idea that one is the mere incarnation, mouthpiece or medium of an almighty power. The idea of revelation in the sense that something becomes suddenly visible and audible with indescribable certainty and accuracy, which profoundly convulses and upsets one—describes simply the matter of fact.”

“Tuesday”

Looked at classifieds for the fuck of it. Jog. Nap. Shower. Cereal.

Watching tv with Emmanuel, hospital show. Commercial for New Year’s Eve extravaganza. Emmanuel looked at her and smiled. She kissed his cheek.

That night after they’d been in bed a few minutes, she said, “Do you ever miss your grandpa?”

He couldn’t have fallen asleep that fast.

“Wednesday”

Nap. Jog. Shower. Baby orangutans begin to develop the capacity for imitation at nine months, a full decade before they enter maturity.

“Monday”

It feels like a contest. It feels like you have to make your face sort of thoughtful and tilt your head. One room smelled like someone had taken a dump right there on the floor. It feels like you're supposed to say or at least think something deep or at least unique. It's harder than it should be. People sped by her and she felt like she was going too slow. Then you see the little kids with sketching pads doing decent sketches of complicated, beautiful paintings, and you feel like a complete failure. She sped past people and felt like she was out of control. Two assholes keeping perfect pace with her kept saying art deco, rectilinear, faceting (which kept sounding to her like face sitting), the golden ratio, pure abstraction, the love life and artistic process of Gustav Klimt, which may or may not have been the same thing. The museum is free on Mondays. An image that recurred in several paintings was the Giant Typhon, against whom the gods themselves struggled in vain. In the Naturalism gallery she realized she was surrounded by things people had painted trying not to go insane, and it occurred to her that this was the only place anything was being confronted, and she felt a little weepy and fought it down. One of the guards screamed at her for drinking water in the gallery. Disease, Madness, Death. Lust, Unchastity, Excess. Devouring grief. Several plaques mentioned insanity in a way that seemed to equate sanity with the will to live. Painting used to be about romanticizing other people and the landscape but then thank god the camera was invented and painting got taken over by people who needed to give form to awful and

confounding shit, and once in a while to the things they were scared to admit gave them hope. She passed the sarcophagus of Meresankh, an Egyptian princess whose name meant *the living one loves her*. The tiny etchings in the sarcophagus were so intricate. She understood so much she couldn't stand it. *For at least half of his working career the wide open mouth was a recurrent element of his paintings, an image that might variously evoke a cry or scream, a yawn or roar, a shout or unfettered burst of laughter. The screaming mouth, isolated from other facial features and divorced from any narrative or context, suggests existential agony.* A tourist had her smiling photo taken next to the final painting of a painter who checked himself into an asylum and watched a cornfield through his barred window for a few months then shot himself in the chest with a revolver and the bullet was deflected by a rib bone and passed through his chest without hitting a major organ, and he was somehow able to stagger to a boarding house where they were two physicians, neither of whom was capable of performing the surgery to extract the bullet, so the painter was left alone in his room to smoke his pipe, his untreated infection spreading until finally, twenty-nine hours after shooting himself in the chest, he said, "The sadness will last forever," and died. In the Naturalism gallery: the painting of an old man with his face in his hands; the painting of an old man holding a happy puppy; the painting of an old naked woman with her face in her hands next to a young naked woman holding a naked baby girl; the painting of a woman watching a man play the piano in agony while another woman rubs the man's shoulders. Acts of utter desperation. It made her want to fuck so bad. An Italian boy who couldn't have been more than sixteen kept crossing her path in tight pants and the only thing she wanted to



do more than look at the art was light into this kid on the hardwood floor, make him whimper, show him how it could be. Then the boy met back up with his girlfriend, and her ass was perfect too, and for a brief flash Tina let herself imagine how the couple looked and screamed when they were fucking on a hot day in a dirty apartment with the window open, and then they disappeared into the stupid, smiling retrospective of the British Royal Family and Tina went up a flight of stairs and through a glass door and into the Post-Impressionist gallery. *He identified with Nietzsche's concern to expose and dissect psychologically the immense gulf between the basic realities of our instinctive desires and the façade of 'civilized' behavior, the customs and beliefs people hide behind.* She passed an exhibit that was two tv screens side-by-side, a black man on one screen and a white woman on the other, talking simultaneously. At any given moment they were at different parts of the same script, their faces filling the frame, shouting, "I want to fuck. I want to shit. I want to love. I don't want to die. You want to eat. You want to shit. You don't want to die." *The transparent box encompassing many of his figures, known as the "space frame," implies a fundamental human isolation and/or entrapment.* "I want to eat. I want to live. I want to be warm." *What painting had never shown before is the disintegration of the social being which takes place when one is alone in a room.* She can't be gone. She wasn't just a name. If I sculpt her big enough, prepare her tomb exquisitely, use the right color or texture, if I paint a serpent at her feet or a swirling orange sky or a vase of wilted flowers or suspended carcass of beef or a black mirror on the wall or an open mouth, or a tear on her cheek, if I paint a rat in the tiny space in the margin or worms in meat or worms in a rat, if I replicate her face exactly or mold her

from a block of wax and put a real wig on her head, if I break her into a thousand geometric pieces to create the illusion of movement and convey the physical and emotional sense of the fluidity of consciousness, the lack of separation of past, present and future, if I paint her in her favorite red dress maybe you'll know her too, and what it's like to lose her.

“Tuesday”

Read. Shower. Nap. Jog. Went for long walk. Not meditative. Everyone in Arizona drives loudest fucking vehicle.

Subadult orangutan males (ages eight to fifteen) have fully descended testicles and are capable of reproducing but remain in a morphological state quite similar to adult females.

On couch with Emmanuel, noticed him mumbling.

“What’s up, mumbles,” she said.

“Don’t,” he said.

“Ok,” she said.

"Wednesday"

Slept bad. Looked at classifieds for the fuck of it. Read.

P.W. Bridgeman labeled the perspective of modern society as “operational,” meaning that the only concepts we value/understand are concepts we can equate with a system of operations, for example, we understand and value the concept of “length” because we know the system of operations we must follow to obtain the length of a piece of wood, the disastrous consequence being that, now, we no longer permit ourselves to use as tools those concepts we cannot equate with a system of operations. Called Yesenia and got machine.

“Thursday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Went to get mail. Chuck working gate. Cornered by sad old man at mailboxes who is perpetually getting over flu.

“I had it bad last week,” he said. “Felt it all the way down in my legs.”

“Ouch,” she said. “Bye!”

“Yeah. Medication made me hallucinate cockroaches. And it wasn’t that I was drunk because I don’t drink no more except the moonshine to clear out my chest.”

“Ha ha,” she said.

“Seriously,” he said.

“Oh. Well, take care!”

“I have trouble breathing. Whenever I’m on the phone people say man you’re breathing hard. I say, yeah. At least I’m breathing.”

“Friday”

Downloaded game on phone that was like can you run a day care? A fun-filled, colorful and interactive management game where you have to make sure all of the babies are happy!

“Saturday”

## “How She Spent Sunday Night”

Carl Jung's concept of an *awakening* was the process of realizing and fulfilling our spiritual purpose beyond material goals. Jung was transfixed by the idea that life was not a series of random events but rather the expression of a deeper order. Jung relays this anecdote: “A young woman I was treating had, at a critical moment, a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream, I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned round and saw a flying insect knocking against the windowpane from the outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. It was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaeid beetle, the common rose-chafer. I must admit that nothing like it ever happened to me before or since.” Jung's suggestion was that these moments of synchronicity were rare, and valuable, as only through them might a person come to understand her true spiritual purpose and fulfill her deep innate potential.



"What Kept Her From Sleeping Sunday Night Besides the Potential Return of the Slowly Turning Head"

What if she's wrong.

In 1958 Klaus Conrad coined the term *apophany* to characterize the onset of delusional thinking in psychosis, from the Greek *apo* [away from] + *phaenein* [to show], to reflect the fact that the schizophrenic initially experiences delusion as revelation. In contrast to *epiphany*, *apophany* does not provide insight into the true nature of reality or its interconnectedness, but is "a process of repetitively experiencing abnormal meanings in the entire surrounding experiential field" which are entirely "self-referential, solipsistic and paranoid."

What if the feeling of entering a trance is indistinguishable from the feeling of awakening. The soldiers hearing drums feel genuinely invincible. Hypnosis might feel like the complete opposite of hypnosis. Hard to say.

“Monday”

Got Yesenia’s machine. Baked brownies. Hates brownies, which is why she bakes them. If she baked for example pecan pie she’d scarf the whole thing and then hate herself. She took a drive to the Superstitions, past the famous ridgeline to the turnout along route 88 where the Needle suddenly comes into view. It was breathtaking but not the same in a car. Certain activities make mystical experience more likely to occur. Driving not one of them. Brake light is out.

“Tuesday”

Shower. Store. Jog. Read. Glasses of wine. Movie made her cry. Emmanuel got home at nine and looked at her, tissue pile on her lap.

“What happened to you,” he said, setting down a folder.

“What happened to *you*,” she said.

“Really?” he said.

“Really.”

“Really?” he said, “I’m the one changing,” and went upstairs before she could think what to say.

I don’t know what’s happening. Why aren’t you changing. I don’t want to be alone.

“Wednesday”

Ran into sad old man again.

“My rotator cuff is shot all to hell.”

“Ouch,” she said. “Bye!”

“I can pop it out of place.”

“No,” she said. “Don’t.”

“Wait,” he said, groaning. “There it goes.”

“Thursday”

Now a video on a laptop screen. In the video: the outline of a man sitting in a chair in a dark room. “John.” His voice has been distorted.

*I had a copy of the designs and mappings from the petroglyphs in my hand, and as I stood across from the Apache Thunder God, I saw that the drawing of the petroglyph was identical to the stone image in front of me. As the map indicated, and with some help from other texts I'd studied, I went across the ravine and up the other side of the hill. As I walked up the other side, I moved to a position where a smaller rock in the distance began to approach the head-shaped stone. I continued climbing and moving about until the other rock moved into precisely the position that I could see it occupied in the drawing. The smaller rock even had the same shape as the one cut into the petroglyph. When the smaller rock lined up with the stone head, as if to produce the appearance of an ear or backpack, I looked down.*

*There, at my feet, lay the sunken hole of the lost mine. I'd found it.*

Now a wide shot: Tina in bed, alone. The clock says 10:25. She sighs and shuts the laptop. She turns off the ceiling fan, the tv, her phone and the lamp.

“Saturday”

Made plans for beers with Derrick and Mel. Emmanuel not excited. She offered to cancel but he said no, it would be obvious she was canceling because he didn't want to go, and she said don't say I didn't offer and he said that's a bullshit offer in a grim voice that caught her off guard.

Mel isn't real. Derrick and Emmanuel went to the bar and Tina asked Mel how her and Derrick were doing, and Mel said, “So amazing.” Derrick got a promotion. They're going to Hawaii. Mel didn't ask the question of Tina in return, which struck Tina as strange. Was it obvious they weren't so amazing?

Emmanuel: yawning. Then after two rounds he said he was sorry for being lame and a douche but he had to get to bed early.

“Some of us have shit to do,” he said on the way home.

“Finding typos,” she said, driving. “It's eight-thirty.”

“Do not fucking do that.”

She came up fast on a stop sign and broke hard. A man and little girl stood in the crosswalk a foot from the front of the car, holding hands. The man was tall and skinny and had a full orange beard despite that his hair seemed dark brown. He was wearing a wallet chain, which even in the moment struck her as weird because he was in his mid-forties at least and wore a collared shirt tucked into blue jeans. For a few seconds nothing happened. A light rain fell.

Then the guy dropped the girl's hand and opened his mouth in a strange way, this

weird extreme under bite, jaw jutting out, squinting at Tina, kind of heaving his chest.

“What is he doing,” Tina said.

He stood there heaving and then all of a sudden did an agile little step around the car and then was outside her window, mouth still like that. He slammed the window with an open palm and let loose an extreme torrent on Tina, you miserable fuck you fucking piece of shit you fucking piece of fucking bitch you almost killed us both you fucking bitch, and then Emmanuel punched him. She didn't register Emmanuel leaving the car, and then he punched the guy in the side of the head, and the guy was out on his feet. He fell straight onto his side and didn't brace for the fall and landed in a creepy way, his arms locked across his chest, hands balled into fists and bent inward. Then Emmanuel was on top of him, using his knees to pin the man's shoulders. He punched him again and the man snapped up and said, “Honey!” and Emmanuel pushed him back down and punched him again. The little girl screamed. Tina kept both hands on the wheel.

"Tuesday"

Shower. Nap. Read. Made noodles. Called Yesenia and got machine.



"Wednesday"

Turning head last night. Jog. Chuck working gate. Called Yesenia and got machine.

"Friday"

Herbert Marcuse: "The social controls of modern society exact the overwhelming need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity [and] the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefaction."

"Monday"

The museum is free on Mondays. Art sounds like a good idea, giving form to your worst dread so that the viewer might recognize her own dread and thereby the total amount of alienation in the world is lessened, but it's also like maybe all it does is create new fear in the viewer, or maybe once the artist looks at the form she's created it makes her realize how fucked-up and confused and terrified and insignificant and fragmented and alone she is, or maybe she doesn't even recognize herself in the form she's created, or maybe one night she thinks to herself, if I'm trying not to go insane I'm already going insane. Hard to say.

“Wednesday”

Jog. Shower. Nap. Made noodles.

He was protecting me. He wasn't pulping that man's face with anger he had for me. Everything's fine.

I took my car to the mechanic. A brake light was out. I took it to Bob's Tire Corral. They do more than tires. They don't have a waiting room so I sat out front on a huge tire, and a heavy guy with slicked back hair came out in a dirty blue work shirt that said *Bob* in white stitching. He was writing on a clipboard with his head bent and the clipboard right near his face.

"You're Bob?" I said.

He didn't look up. "All the shirts say Bob."

"That's weird," I said.

"Not that weird," he said, still looking down.

"Fair enough," I said.

It's Saturday. Emmanuel was up early and I asked if he wanted to go on a hike. He said yes, he did, but did I forget the Tampa decision was happening today or tomorrow?

Now I was in front of the Tire Corral. The big guy with the clipboard still hadn't looked up. What happened next was one of those moments that I wait for, that I struggle desperately to fabricate, that I'm thankful for and terrified of, and that Emmanuel hates to hear about, that he hopes I don't bring up around others, that I used to bring up in hopes of getting him to reciprocate, divulge something intimate, and which if I'm being honest I sometimes brought up just to needle him, get at him a little bit, I was provoking him which is stupid and immature but it's hard to have a person make you feel like a part of you needs to be hidden. It's hard to respond with grace.

But today I wasn't needling him. Clearly he doesn't need provoking. Today I found myself talking about it even though I told myself not to. I had to tell someone.

"So I'm sitting on this giant tire," I told Emmanuel when he got home, exhausted. "And this big guy with the clipboard, I don't even know why he came outside, but he's next to me, not even acknowledging my existence."

"Imagine that."

"Supremely ignoring me. And then I get like this ringing in my ear. But not really a ringing. It's just like pressure. Like how it feels when you're deep underwater, but only on one side of my head. And it's all I can pay attention to. I'm sitting on a tire waiting for a brake light to get fixed, and all of a sudden it's like trauma time, you know? I think: something is happening. Or: something is about to happen. But then nothing happens."

"I mean, who knows," Emmanuel said.

"That's not the crazy part. The crazy part is that the big guy felt it too. I saw him. He looked up from the clipboard and started pulling at his ear. *At his ear*. The same exact thing I was just doing. Then he turned and looked at me with this astonished look on his face. We just gaped at each other. Then he went inside. Tell me that shit just happens."

"That shit," Emmanuel said, "Just happens."

I got back from the Tire Corral and called Yesenia and asked if she wanted to hike.

"Hang on," she said. Then: "Hey, sorry. I don't think I can make it out this weekend. We should definitely do it soon though!"

“Yeah!” I said. I wanted to ask if there was anything else she wanted to do. Then I loaded up *Dazzle Blocks* on my phone and for half an hour tried to beat my high score. I got close, but in the later levels the blocks start falling fast and changing shape. One mistake and it’s your ass. Then you try again. It’s easy for me to feel like a non-essential part of everyone’s life. I got off my ass and left the apartment. TJ opened the gate for me, and winked. Winking is ridiculous but I got a little wet. I miss him. I went to see the Danish film about the Rapture. I know Emmanuel wanted to see it. Maybe this was my passive aggressive way of getting back at him for the general decline, for not talking to me or valuing my perspective, or kissing me on the mouth. I don’t want to be the kind of person who behaves passive aggressively. I’ve never been the kind of person I want to be. The movie was in some ways exactly what I expected and in other ways not. The plot was exactly what I’d read: a couple receives instructions for departing earth before the apocalypse, they make their way to the secret underground chamber where they masquerade as true believers, and slowly one of them, the man, starts to get an eerie feeling about these people, a feeling that builds and builds until one night in the chamber, he thinks he witnesses a little girl being pulled into a room, kicking and screaming, and even when the little girl herself tells the man that nothing like that happened, he must’ve been seeing or imagining things, the man can’t shake the awful feeling that some shit is going down just out of sight. He tells his wife that he’s leaving, but the wife by this point is all-in. At the end of the movie, he’s outside the chamber in the middle of a giant cornfield. A piano is playing. The guy walks until he encounters an old farmer leaning on a shovel. Together they watch the sunset. “I don’t know...” says the man, silently crying,

and the farmer says, “Me neither.” It was good. Little cheesy. So the plot was not surprising. What was surprising, though, was the man’s last night in the chamber with his wife. I expected it to be heartbreaking. Before I saw the movie I could make myself cry just imagining it. But then when it actually happened, it didn’t seem sad, or difficult, or cosmically unfair, just what obviously needed to happen.

I left the theater and the sun was still out. I came back home and TJ let me in.

“Where you been,” he said, leaning on his open window.

“I don’t know,” I said, managing I think to make it flirty.

Because he’s close by. Because he’s one of the few people I see. Because he doesn’t take himself as seriously as everyone I know. He’s the gate guy, and he’s fine with it. He listens.

“You could’ve kept me company,” he says.

“Still might.”

Emmanuel was still at work. I sat on the couch and played *Dazzle Blocks* until I felt so bad about myself that I made myself read. *Bodhi* is an abstract noun formed from the verbal root *budh*, meaning to awake, become aware, notice, know or understand. Also from the same root is the Sanskrit word *buddhi*, the exact equivalent to the Greek word *nous*, a philosophical term for the faculty of the human mind, described in classical philosophy as necessary for understanding what is true or real, similar in meaning to intuition. Apart from referring to a faculty of the human mind, this philosophical concept has often been extended to describe the source of order in nature itself. One form of understanding encapsulated by the term *nous* is “sense perception,” a source of feelings,



impressions, or raw data about things, which needs to be interpreted in order to be converted into real understanding. Plato's more philosophical characters argue that *nous* must somehow perceive truth directly in the ways gods and daimons perceive. In *The Republic* Plato's Socrates describes people as being able to see more clearly because of something from outside themselves, something like when sun shines, helping eyesight. Plato tended to treat *nous* as the only immortal part of the soul. I envy and pity those that refuse to acknowledge the feelings they don't understand. I know they pity me too. I put in my headphones and went for a jog. I cleaned the front room. I snipped at the roses and swept the porch. I turned on the tv and got on the internet and put on music and checked my phone. I drank wine. I went upstairs and showered and it felt good. I got dressed. I changed. It was just getting dark. If I go to sleep before nine I feel terrible about myself. If I go to sleep because I have nothing else to do I feel terrible about myself. If I find myself desiring a dark room while the sun's still out I feel terrible.

I decided to bake. I've always baked. I bake things for people I know. It's unanimous that the things I bake are delicious treats. I've always baked with someone in mind, sometimes myself. It's more satisfying, though, when it's someone else. I wasn't about to bake for Emmanuel. I've baked so much for Yesenia I think it's getting weird. I bet she throws most of it away. She's so skinny. I picture my pies in her trash. I don't know other people well enough to bake for them. I thought about baking a pie for the big guy at the Tire Corral but then immediately knew that was ridiculous, creepy and probably offensive. I don't bake for random neighbors. I'm not trying to have those kinds of interactions.

I decided on a sweet potato pie. I needed milk. I left my place and TJ let me out. The whole Tire Corral thing was still working on me. I've always felt the need to keep these things to myself, push them out of my head, reason them away, because they are weird, but they've only gotten stronger, too strong to be nothing, my brain totally invaded by an uncomfortable sensation, and I think to myself, maybe other people are feeling this same thing, and maybe they'll feel less psycho and alone if they know I feel it too. But the few times I've tried to describe it, what I've found is people don't want to hear it. They don't get it. They're tired. Getting it would make it harder to accept what they've accepted as given. The general response is either (a) suck it up and worry about real things, (b) your wackiness amuses me, or (c) you're scaring me. Sometimes I think what scares people is not that they don't understand me. It's that they do. I went to the store in a weird mood. I drove by the Tire Corral even though it was way out of my way. I don't remember the rest of the drive. It's hard for me to feel like a participant. I'd seen the movie early and it felt like it should be the middle of the night.

In the store I ran into Yesenia and Yvette in full hiking gear, beat up, and dirty.

"Hey!" Yesenia said. "What are the chances?"

"Yeah!" I said.

"I was totally going to call you," she said, "Just a total spur of the moment thing.

Next time for sure, though."

"Yeah!" I said.

Yvette said nothing.

I got the milk.

I put the potatoes to boil and opened the book on trance theory. I skinned the potatoes and broke them apart. Trance: we do something, or something is done to us, or something is happening in our immediate vicinity over and over, and the result is partial hypnosis. Trance: military drums have long been used to disable the fear of soldiers marching into battle. Trance: *Dazzle Blocks*, the same noises and shapes again and again and I can't get my ass out of the chair, I keep hitting the button for "New Game," the bells, whistles and twisting shapes, I don't want to play anymore, I don't even like it, I see the shapes when I close my eyes. I added butter and stirred in the milk, sugar, eggs, nutmeg, cinnamon, vanilla. Self-induced trances: go for a jog, listen to music, yard work, get a career, play a game, bludgeon a man's face with your bare hands, read a book. Beat the mixture on medium speed until smooth and pour it into the pie crust. Trances induced by others. Trance abuse. The priest leads the chanting of the prayer. The hypnotist tells you again and again that you are sleepy. The lover repeats the word *baby*. Bake for an hour at three fifty. And then there are the trances that occur involuntarily and unbidden. I need to dance and can't fight it. A creature feels the beating of its mother's heart. You hear drums and feel invincible. Remove the pie from the oven. But if the feelings I get, the sudden mental intrusions, if these are merely examples of a naturally-occurring trance, a feeling I get in response to the repetition of something in my immediate environment analogous to the soldier hearing drums and feeling invincible, if this is just another trance and not a real awakening, why do I feel it strongest in the mountains, when there's nothing around? And what would account for the fact that I feel it here and up there, in completely different environs? What could the repeated cognitive object even

be? A thought I don't realize I'm thinking? How could I not realize there's a thought I'm repeatedly thinking? Take a clean knife and stick it into the pie. If, when removed from the pie, the knife is clean, the pie is ready to eat.

I read for an hour. I've read that reading is a self-induced trance but I'm not sure it is, or maybe certain books, those that allow you escape. Other books, though, the problems are yours, shortcomings yours, the mothers and sisters are yours. I drank more wine and put on the tube. Awareness is exhausting to sustain, and uncomfortable. Sometimes you just want a song you know the words to.

Emmanuel got home. I told him about the Tire Corral. Then I said, totally casually, "Hey I saw this thing in a magazine I thought was kind of cool."

"What," he said.

"It's just this thing. Seems pretty cool."

"What," he said.

"You write a letter to someone. Tell them everything you think is wrong with them. Then you switch out your name for their name. Then swap letters with that person. Pretty cool."

"What's cool about that?"

"I don't know," I said. "Just seems like a trip."

"Seems like work."

"Yeah," I said. "I could see that. But it also seems kind of worthwhile in a weird way."

"I don't want to write two letters."

“Yeah. Me neither. Just seemed kind of cool.”

The next day I woke up and Emmanuel was putting in cufflinks.

“Don’t you think it’s time for you to, you know,” he said. “Pull it together?”

“Me pull it together?” I said. “You almost beat a man to death.”

“Goddamn it,” he said, struggling with the cuff links. “I did that for you.”

“We need to talk. You can’t just bottle it up. That’s what happens.”

“I only punched him twice and he kneed me in the balls. You just won’t let it go.”

“We need to talk about it.”

“We just did.” He put the cufflinks in his pocket and slammed the door.

I went to get the mail. I took half the sweet potato pie so it wouldn’t be obvious I’d baked it all for TJ. There was no mail: it was Sunday. I stopped at the kiosk.

“For me?” TJ said.

“Maybe,” I said, not really knowing what I meant by that.

I sat and told him about the Tire Corral and he agreed it was spooky and worth thinking about. Then it was silent for an uncomfortable minute and I knew it was time for me to go, I knew it had been weird since I dove in the dirt, I knew I should’ve left but I kept picturing my living room, and stayed. Next thing I knew I’d been talking for a while, telling TJ the legend of the gold in the mountains. Once in a while TJ hit the lever and raised the gate. I told him about the shadowy figure that went by “John” who claimed he’d found the abandoned mine. I told him about the videos. Something about “John” was really haunting. No one on the message boards really thinks that he’s found anything,

I told TJ, but when you listen to him speak, it's hard not to think that he did. It's like you can hear in his voice that he isn't lying, even though his voice has been distorted. He sounds so satisfied, relieved. Watching the videos I find myself at times insanely envious of "John," then pitying "John," sometimes even scared of "John." Why scared? TJ asked. I don't know. The distortion, first of all. But also maybe I recognized myself in some of what he was saying, and it scared me. For example "John" kept mentioning his recently deceased father, how his father had spent his life in the same mountains, and "John" kept saying how he liked to believe that his father was looking down on him. That's sad, TJ said. I know, I said. And the crazy thing is that "John" is a science teacher, so maybe what scared me is that I saw too clearly how an otherwise normal person could want to believe something so bad they convince themselves to believe it. Is that possible? Maybe, TJ said. Because at first I thought "John" was an asshole and a fraud, posting videos just to antagonize people, but then I realized that, regardless of the truth, "John" had come to believe that he had found the mine. Maybe he did, TJ said. Maybe he did, I said. But probably not. Probably not, TJ said. So he believed it because his idea of himself required that he believe it, I said. So then I think, what am I forcing myself to believe in? Marriage? The American Dream? The American Dream is real, TJ said, cranking the lever. Yeah, I said, maybe. But what happens if you realize a belief you've always had has no basis in anything except your desire to believe? Can you still maintain it? Fight your way back into it? It would be hard, TJ said, and then I caught him sneak another look at my tits, and I imagined what we looked like from the outside, the two of us in this tiny kiosk, a woman coming up on middle age and a horny kid in the prime of his sexual

life, the woman talking her ass off, staring out the window and venting, clearly taking advantage of his desire to fuck her, telling herself that he's listening for reasons other than that, that he understands and values what she has to say, but finally she can't ignore it anymore, the mechanical way he listens and agrees, the glances at her tits, she finally has to admit that he's only listening because he's under her spell, and the woman is talking fast, getting out as much as she can, because the spell of course is temporary, she knows now that eventually it will wear off, and when it does she'll have no one talk to. I said goodbye and left the pie.

That night Emmanuel burst through the door, ecstatic.

"You got it!" I said.

"I got it!"

He put on music. He opened wine. He danced around radiating joy, doing crazy, uncoordinated things with his arms, jumping, crouching low to the ground, kicking, each song a different shaped tube through which he contorted his body. We drank. He hugged me and lifted me off the ground. He called his mother and Neil Honeycutt.

"I still can't believe it," he said, finally sitting on the couch, shaking his head.

"You deserve it," I said.

"Wow," he said, still dancing a little with his arms.

"Congrats," I said. "What now?"

"I don't know," he said. "Celebrate. Try to make it two years in a row."

I see him all the time. I see him in our house, in a vacuum, where he's part of the

scenery. I can't see him because of everything I'm thinking and feeling. I choose not to see him. I forget his tongue on the edge of my ear, the tip of his cock inside me, making me wait. I forget his shoulders, what it's like to feel his strength. I've made myself forget. I don't want him to come. I'm holding him too tight but it's my limbs doing it, my arms and legs clinging desperately, feet locked at the ankles at the base of his back, fingernails in the flesh of his shoulders, face deep in the crook of his neck, I don't want him to come.

He does though. We separate.

"I wanted you so badly, right from the start," he says.

"I remember how excited I'd get just writing your name in a notebook."

A little later I said: "I've never been to Florida." I shouldn't have said it. I should've let him bring it up, or not. I should've kept pretending it was fine.

He said, "Maybe you can find a weekend to fly out."

"Maybe," I said, just like that, not even missing a beat.

Ray Grasse takes Jung's notion of synchronicity (rare moments of coincidence as momentary peepholes into the design of the deeper order) a step further, claiming that, instead of being rare, synchronicity is all-pervasive, but only becomes visible to us in the case of the most startling coincidences, suggesting that these moments of awakening could occur at any moment, provided that we aren't distracted, that we're listening. Sense perception must be interpreted before it can be converted into real understanding. I start at First Water and head into Massacre Grounds Canyon. My legs are tight. I need new



boots. Mystical experience isn't something that can be turned off and on at will, however certain meditative activities can make it more likely to occur, however I've never hiked alone and it is terrifying and I can't feel anything and I keep thinking there's a bear around every blind corner. You're supposed to talk loudly and consistently to alert wildlife to your presence but I feel stupid talking to myself, and then when I try I find myself talking about the need to always inform loved ones of your plans and expected return time, beat the bushes in front of you to warn rattlesnakes of your approach, bring a first aid kit, the mutilated body of the bellhop was found in a crevasse near his campsite. I pass the Crying Dinosaur, a rock so huge and close you need a deep breath just to look at it. I keep going and I'm listening but I still don't feel it and the only choice is deeper, past Black Top Mesa, and then through a valley I wasn't expecting to encounter, tall grass and cholla cactus and a stream of rust-colored water, and here a fallen boulder blocks the trail and I'm forced to descend the canyon wall into a nameless, dry wash, now past a needle I'm sure is Geronimo's Head, a craggy, yellow rock that was once the site of Julie Thomas' camp, Thomas who was present the night of the German's famed deathbed explanation of the location of his mine, who had been a housekeeper her whole life and wasn't a person with knowledge of the outdoors. Nevertheless she heard the explanation and believed it and spent the rest of her life wandering the mountains, fitting the clues of her map to the landscape, and failing. She finally went mad, and now I get to thinking about the woman that got lost up here just last week and was found nearly dead, lying in the mud, dehydrated and suffering from hypothermia, a woman in her fifties from Colorado who'd already been rescued from these mountains once before, who believed

God had appeared to her and told her where to find the gold, and it's always the same question, you can ignore it or pretend to have it answered but it never goes away and never changes: what if I'm wrong. What if all I've been doing is getting further out, lying to myself, ignoring part of the data, convincing myself to believe. What if the feeling of entering a trance is indistinguishable from awakening. What if I'm alone. Klaus Conrad coined the term *apophany* to characterize the onset of delusional thinking in psychosis, from the Greek *apo* [away from] + *phaenein* [to show], to reflect the fact that the schizophrenic initially experiences delusion as revelation. In statistics, apophenia is a Type I error: the identification of false patterns in data. Pareidolia is a type of apophenia involving the perception of images or sounds in random stimuli, for example, hearing the phantom ringing of the phone while blow-drying your hair, the reason for which is that the noise produced by the blow dryer gives a background from which the brain perceives there to be the patterned sound of a ringing phone. But there is no ringing. Or the way humans perceive faces in inanimate objects, seeing faces where there is no face, for example:



which is really just three circles and a line. I leave the wash when the canyon walls level

out and find myself in a clearing of green boulders I've never seen. I head back into the wash and double back and everything looks different from this direction, not to mention the clustering illusion, which refers to the human tendency to erroneously perceive small samples from random distributions to have significant "streaks" or "clusters," for example most people thought the sequence OXXXOXXXOXXOOOXOOXXOO looked non-random, when, in fact, it was engineered to be maximally random, and also the study that found subjects more likely to report meaningful clusters in semi-random pictures after they had been primed to feel out-of-control, or had been induced to reminisce about an experience where they felt out of control, what if I'm wrong. What if I got carried away, and I know for sure I should have come to the boulder blocking the trail by now. I leave the wash and bushwhack the slope of the canyon and I've never seen this either, I don't know what this is, it's so terribly rugged. The mountains are savage. Now back in the wash and headed what I think is the opposite direction of the way I've come but I'm not sure, I have no compass or phone service and there's a rumble in the distance, and you just have to calm the fuck down, and just last month a man, an avid and experienced hiker, died out here after twisting his ankle and falling off a cliff. He was hiking and then he was dead and there were whispers of suicide, whispers that he had a death wish even if he wasn't fully conscious of it. Never hike alone, always come prepared for unexpected changes in the weather, always inform friends and/or family of your expected return time. No one is looking for me. The clouds to the north are definitely rain clouds and I'm so fucking stupid and now back in the wash and I write my name in the sand and head the other way, toward the peak that must be Pinnacle Peak even though it doesn't look like

Pinnacle Peak, maybe just a different angle, and the sun is going down and I didn't check the weather for tonight. I thought I'd be out by now. I don't know this canyon. "No," I say, and there's no echo, only a rustle in the bushes that speeds me back the other way, and if I just keep walking in one direction I have to make it out eventually, maybe not where the car's parked but somewhere. Maybe two hours of daylight. I think I feel a drop on my arm. And here, it's impossible, it can't be, is my name in the sand. Impossible, unless it's a circular wash which doesn't even make sense because how could a river be circular, unless another river was feeding into it and I changed rivers without realizing it, and now, yes, definitely a drop on my arm, and maybe an hour and a half before sundown and still no boulder blocking the trail, the rocks, the canyons, everything completely different from a slightly different angle, too rugged to cross, I've been so stupid, there is no signal, no illuminating intrusion, and I have to leave the wash but I'm scared. She was a great waitress. She loved baking. She loved gardening and going for walks along the canal. She loved to dance. I leave the wash. I pass through a valley of tall cactus and now a different creek, which, I don't know how, the trees maybe, the position of the boulders in the creek, something is familiar. I might have been here before, maybe not today but at some point and, yes, the canyon with the high walls of purple shale I told Yesenia looked like the entrance to a villain's lair and if I make it through this canyon, it should be, it has to be. It fucking is. High above me on the mountain on the right side of the creek is the cave. But the opening of the cave is so huge and there seems to be something like dust or vapor coming out of the mouth, and anything could be inside, and what if I can't make the scramble, it's the hardest thing I've ever done and that was following Yvette's lead,

but I'm doing it. And no fucking way can I spend the night here but I'm doing it.

“Hello?” I slip and fall forward and slide a few feet and catch on a boulder, which holds, thank god it holds, and the mouth of the cave looms above me and I'm crawling, and what if I freeze to death but I'm doing it, and what if I starve but I'm doing it. I should be climbing but I'm weak and crawling and afraid of what I might find. I'm tired and too scared to stand or look behind me. It's getting dark. Branches cut my arms and legs, the cave still ahead and above me, and again the dirt slips from beneath me and I slide and dig my hands into the mountain, I'm not brave, I've been so fucking stupid and finally, finally I'm at the mouth. I'm alone. I'm alive and dry and alone inside the cave, crying and laughing, all of it pouring out of me and bouncing off the walls and rushing back, louder now, all that I've held in, pouring out and rushing back, sentences as fragments, shouts as whispers, prayers as a single comforting word, my voice as my voice and others, all the others and I feel it now, I finally feel it, I knew it wouldn't disappear, not completely, not forever. It's all around me. I'm not alone. The earth is alive. It isn't just correlations between pieces of matter. It's not. It's a living entity that will, and does, surge and evolve through its expanding self, replete with dynamic flows of energy and light. Hidden knowledge and wisdom exists, there is an omnipresent, eternal, boundless, immutable reality of which spirit and matter are complementary aspects, and if you feel it and listen long enough, closely enough, you may feel the awakening within, you may sense the existence of all the levels of reality and the special power of the human being to access and explore these levels, you may co-penetrate yourself and the divine, establish and sustain a direct connection and bond all reality and experience to your unique, inner

awakening, and finally, finally be born. And if you lose me, if I don't make it out, if tonight or another night I take my last breath, if you touch my face and find it cold, if you dress me in my favorite dress and bury me and carve my name into stone, and cry, and think about a time we laughed together, and cry, if you find yourself suddenly astonished by my absence and about to burst into tears and you have to leave the room so you don't embarrass yourself and everyone else, if the hours pass slowly, if suddenly you remember the sound I once made when I was spontaneously, genuinely happy, if you find yourself alone or in hiding or cold or so tired of trying to cry as quiet as possible or uncomforted by your friends and their jokes or the game on tv, and if one day as you continue to live and eat and shit and fuck and drag yourself out of bed and to work selling or building or stealing or delivering or repairing or teaching about widgets, if one day as you're petting the dog or listening to the wind whistle down through the canyon or having a beer or watching a plane cross the sky or raking the yard or doing something I once loved to do or looking at something I once loved to look at, and you think you hear my voice, I hope you might listen.