

WARREN PIECES

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 DECAY



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An-Te Chu

Exit

She doesn't layer. She wears her clothes like storm clouds, her music pounding out of earbuds obscured by loud black hoops.

The rest of the people around us suddenly shapeshift into crude lines as if they each had very different concepts of what shapes were and what an oncoming bus looked like. The bus still sits off to the side, like a patient insect. It's not even the one we're waiting for. They'd all moved because the door to the bathroom had opened, emerging was a homeless man without a driver's license.

I stand behind her, not really sure why and when the actual driver would get here and how long his piss break at the depot might be. I wonder whether they have two ply. The evening floodlights have come on, our faint shadows merged, her arm reaching through my head.

My dress shoes feel heavy and out of place. Everyone else has showered or at least gone home before getting here. But the weight of my mind and feet make me all the more eager to leave. Whenever I'm tired of work or just fucking Newark, I like to just take a bus or train out somewhere. Anywhere really, as long as I have enough to cover return fare. I reach inside my jacket to make sure the ticket is still there.

My last boyfriend took my trips away as evidence of cheating or at least half heartedness. My SSRIs make it hard to get hard. Brandishing

a damaged-through-machine-tumbling ticket stub for Philadelphia he confronted me with an anecdote about the philandering nature of the City of Brotherly Love. A truly scathing indictment.

I had laughed and pushed him back into our piles of folded matching towels then fucked him until the laundry got cold. But still the distrust remained and grew until anti wrinkle creams took up all of the bathroom counter and I couldn't fuck away his eyebags. He began to look like me.

It was true I chose Philadelphia because of a man. A balding man scarfing Jimmy John's and rocking a Roy Halladay throwback cemented my dart throw on the departure board. I kept the irony to myself as the door slammed shut and I could hear the car pulling away. Maybe months ago we would have laughed about that.

And tonight this black hooped woman pointed me to Camden. I flicked the Airbnb confirmation email up and down on my phone. Sleeping in a stranger's house made my night time escapes all the more voyeuristic.

I took a seat near the back, orange lettering about the fire escape handle obscuring my view. I pressed my feet into the back of the seat in front and my face between the letters. The sun had set by now and the terminal was flattered by the darkness. A light breeze rattled two PBRs and a few dead pamphlets out of the spotlight

illuminating a bus stop for Jersey. Understudies caught on stage.

As the bus began to rumble and groan, a couple fought their way on board and down the narrow aisle towards me. I kept my feet pressed in but they sat down anyways. Relaxing their 200 pound frames into the peeling polyvinyl, creating a counterbalance to the universe. I could barely see the other half dozen passengers behind the hair and necks of these two. I felt sucked into a small tent at a carnival. Forced to listen to doddering banter from people too old to have any lingering, if ever-present, sparks of magic.

"She has family there."

"At least she won't be living with the ex-husband."

Fuck, they were worse than I thought. Not just boring people, but boring shitbags who speak in agreement. Like an improv troupe whose audience consists only of their moms' new boyfriends, who want to, one day, be called Dad. Only 'yes and' without the 'get the fuck out of my house'.

An-Te Chu
Food Dye Blue No.2

I love police sirens in the rain Dangerous,
distant as if stepping out of time Your hair slips
through my fingers An April storm smelling so
sweet but in here, where the Ring Pop© - blue
lights drag sticky across the floor, speakers and
subwoofers blaring immutable reminders of
tomorrow I check my pockets for keys, phone,
wallet, keys

An-Te Chu
Alcohol Powered Toaster

Without the security and reassurance that he
could remain standing for the entire thing,
Marcus threw away four of his neatly printed
note cards and gave a disjointed wedding toast

leading several relatives from the other side of
the family to donate to his Kickstarter.

Sonja Pinto
Modern Loneliness

Paint your eyes red for me
 Are you scared? Heaven's
 lower half doesn't lurk
 between my pupils

It's something about the
 way your lip quivers, I want
 to know all the nuts and
 bolts that make you

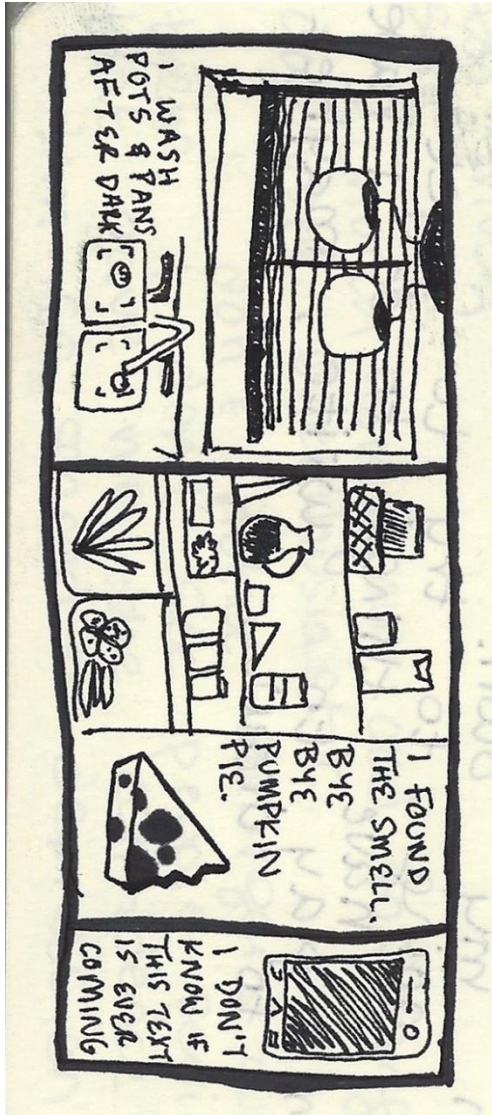
It took you a six pack and
 exhaustion before your
 lips were wet enough
 to meet your tongue

I want your broken, broken,
 broken, I want you to know
 my eyes
 are red,
 too.

Are you scared?

You tell me you ache-
 tears buried in broken,
 broken beer bottles, you're
 bound to explode

Like they did one day. It's so
 much easier to split
 the weight between two,
 don't you think?



Comic Art Kiley Verbowski

Antonia Petschauer

Salt Bath

Water only
millimeters deep
that didn't dare to embrace
land, but merely stroke it
gently with a sympathetic touch.
The foaming tide rushed
over your shoes; you saw
the unification of Earth and sea.
Fog swallowed you three, smothering
romantics in cool comfort
under heather skies.
Drenched velvet
lichen on worn stones made
each step an uncertain one,
inviting you to fall
head-first into the shallow salt bath.

Anika Pobuda

The Horror! The Horror!

We read endlessly, antisocially, blinking in the sun and laying under bleak couches we did not sleep, abandoned the frivolities of rest, replaced it with alcohol and caffeine and green and wonderdrugs, evolved coping mechanisms that made your brain last forever and ever in half haze half sleep only one bit slept at a time while the others- the others- one moment the world was monochrome black and white, the next it was technicolor, another shimmer and it was all yellow, or whiteblue cast, how vibrant color became, how vividly feeling affected colour, the importance of ambience is vital now vital, how did we fail to notice this before? Oh but the mood doesn't matter because it too is all a part of the whole, the rolling, changing, aesthetic, catch it in a moment catch it in a picture let it roll the mood, the mood, let it roll in like thunder take a picture now: melancholy, laying across his lap across the beat up couch beat up beat book there is a cigarette- not literally, but it is there in the mood, hopelessness, philosophy, rendition, the world is black and white except for the hum of the AC it is pensive. Color comes in the break out, now it is 1960 early colour photography look at the waste the grain the washed out brights not so bright anymore no red only retouched red and pink the cigarette (non-literal) has morphed, still a cigarette but with less drama more casualness. It is both a sunny day and a neon midnight (it is literally neither, it is literally early evening) but the ambience! The mood! It is set by the cigarette and the book, the former is not there

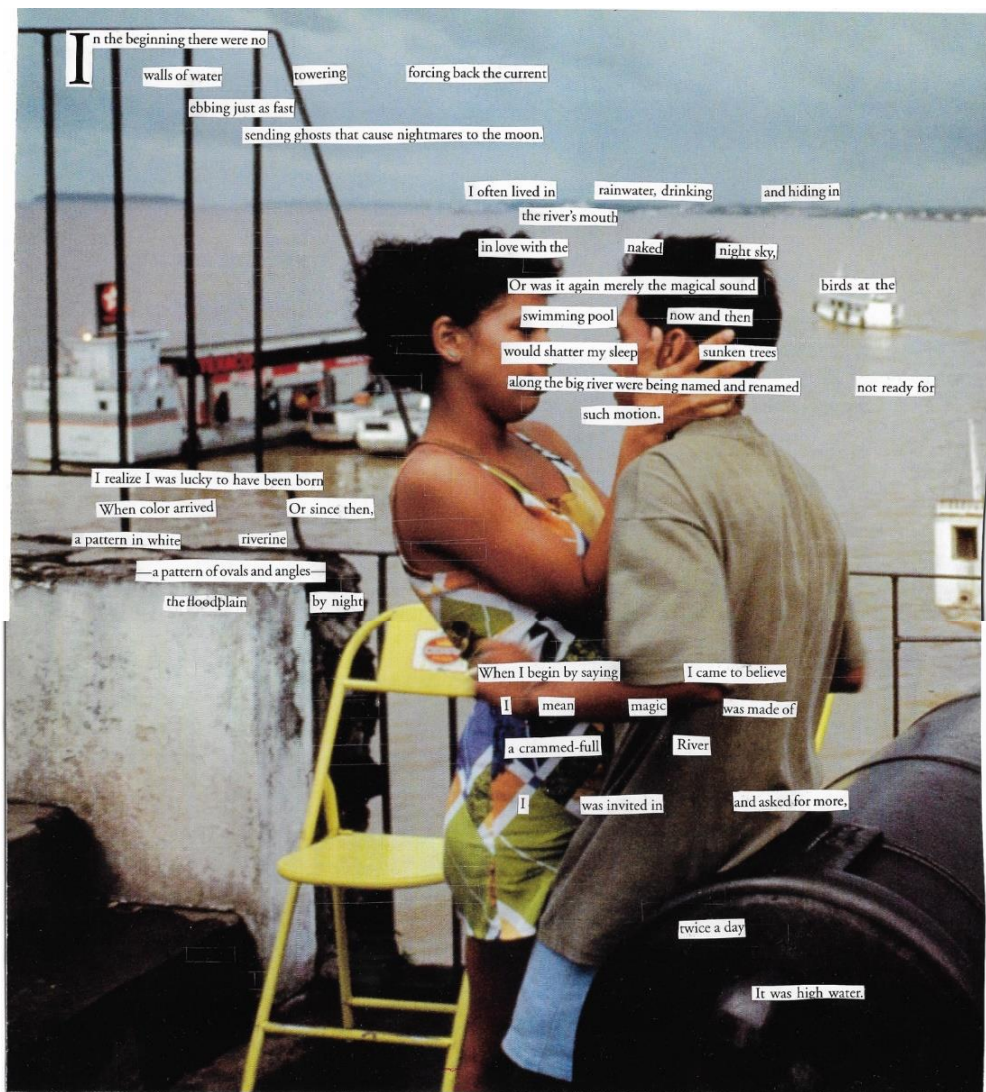
literally, of course. It sets the mood in its absence, it should be there but is not, in a movie it would be there, inside the head it is there- and yet it is not. Its ghost, its soul, its spirit is there, but physically it is not, just a cigarette soul affecting everything else around it. The cigarette soul! She drags on it between words, its absence, taking hits of non-existent nicotine and smoke which ravages her voice- the ravage is there, grisly, gravelly- but no smoke, no cigarette! Her hand, lazy, swoops up, a grand gesture- and falls, languid, an ugly flop into the open air at her side jutting straight out like a broken bone through skin, unnatural and yet entirely biological- the only delicacy is in the way the fingers curl up, like a lazy, haphazard teardrop, to cradle the cigarette, gently tap it, the ash flutters to the floor- it is there, yet the floor is clean and her fingers never moved such a way only dropped, palm up open and empty- he sees the grace, the smoke circles but they are never central the cigarette is never central to the words or the scene. Even if it were there, physically, it would be nearly imperceptible, unimportant, a minute detail like the beige- or were they pink? Curtains, the patterns on the couch, soon forgotten. But the cigarette, even in its absence, unimportance, sets the mood, or perhaps the mood sets the cigarette, daintily, between her fingers where it does not physically exist. A cycle, chicken and egg, mood and cigarette, one and the same yet a divide of evolution and aesthetic. The conversation, the words, the focus, it is on morals, on modernity, on the gradual devolution of humankind, it is on nuclear war and the end of the world. The focus. But the laziness, the

lack of urgency- it is the cigarette which illustrates that, perpetrates that. The atomic disease, they say, it's in everyone- Kerouac was right- it's there, in our peers, parents, ourselves, it is everything ugly in everyone festering in the confines of their hearts and seeping through their pores into the world. It is misogyny, misandry, capitalism and competitiveness, communism and fascism and anarchism, it is politics, it is selfishness and greed, food shortages and obesity and unemployment rates. It has infuriated a god, Pluto, perhaps, god of death with a new vendetta, God, the capital G Christian GOD under all his names perhaps (Allah, Jehovah, Jesus, all the same) all his monotheistic identities all one and the same maybe he is preparing a second flood, this time of disease and nuclear radiation- Osiris, Odin, Hades- all angry with the way we carried on, the way it ended, the way it's ending? And so radiation seeps through our pores coupled with violence and materialism, straight from the source of our souls. The cigarette smoke (non-existent of course) smells better than the radiation, right? The alcohol seeping through is prettier than blood and plastic! So much blood it is, so much plastic! It seems not a day goes by without a million people dying in blood and plastic. It is the cold war all over again but this time we all have mass-produced nukes and everyone seems unstable enough to push the button. Every time I look into the mirror my pores stretch and grow until they swallow my whole face, angry, red holes fill up with black puss that sits at the surface festering, never bubbling and oozing over, just seeping slowly, absorbing flies and smog and bacteria, maggots and

tapeworms wriggle into the gaping gashes and are consumed by the thick black pus waiting in the giant pockmark holes (it is just sebum dear, oxidized sebum, small blackheads, nothing tea tree can't clear) no! It is the atomic disease, all the filth seeping from my soul and attracting more, spilling and growing and spilling and growing from each pore in each face in each human, the awful radioactive hate pus of the atomic disease.



The Oracle Freya Harrison



In the beginning there were no
 walls of water towering forcing back the current
 ebbing just as fast
 sending ghosts that cause nightmares to the moon.

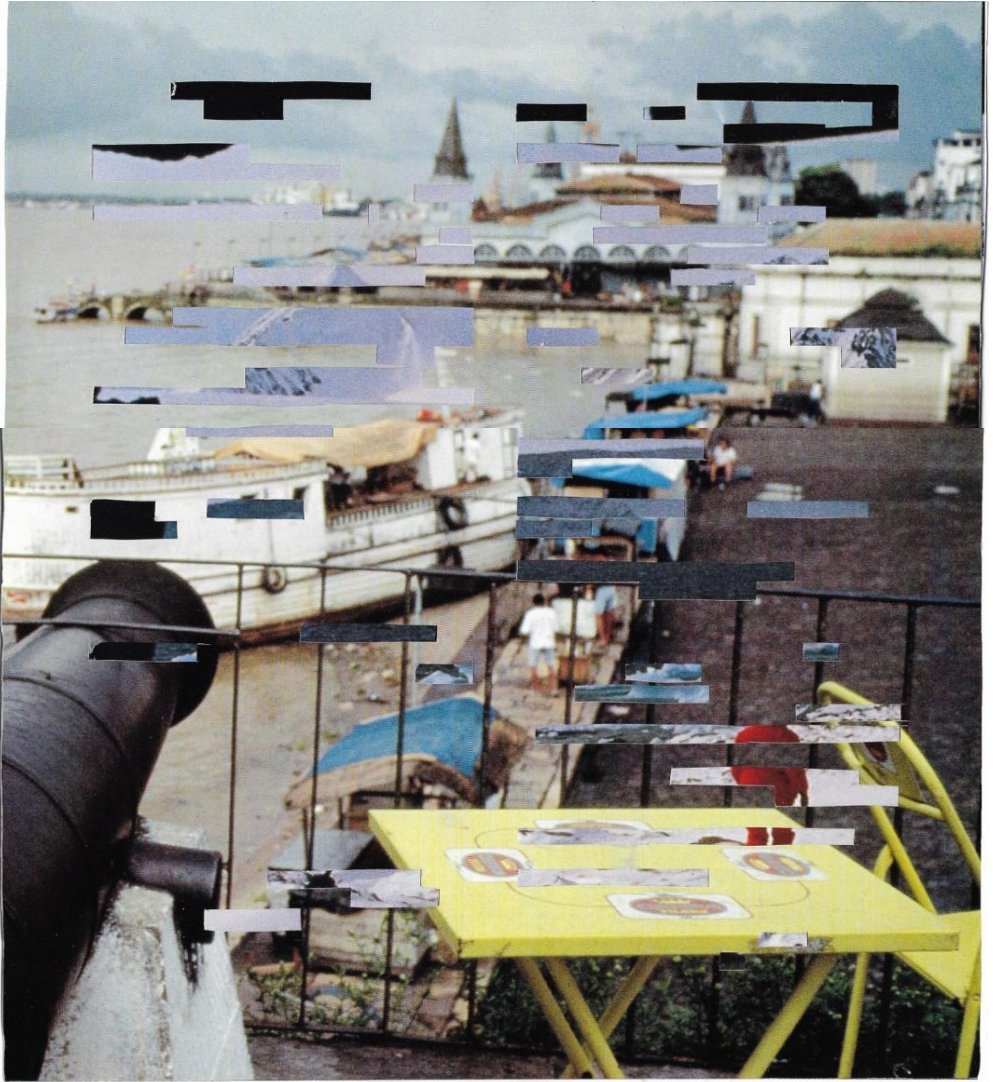
I often lived in rainwater, drinking and hiding in
 the river's mouth
 in love with the naked night sky,

Or was it again merely the magical sound birds at the
 swimming pool now and then
 would shatter my sleep sunken trees
 along the big river were being named and renamed not ready for
 such motion.

I realize I was lucky to have been born
 When color arrived Or since then,
 a pattern in white riverine
 —a pattern of ovals and angles—
 the floodplain by night

When I begin by saying I came to believe
 I mean magic was made of
 a crammed-full River

I was invited in and asked for more,
 twice a day
 It was high water.



In the beginning
Kai Conradi



Gina Hay

Emerson's Silence And The Whizzing of The Metal Birds

At four in the morning, all the mechanical birds collected at the neighborhood's smallest pond to drink from its blackened surface. The pond, hazily reflecting the gibbous moon's pale glow, seemed not to mind. Most of its waters remained still as the multitude of beaks eagerly dipped into them; the surface would absorb nearly every single ripple dutifully, in no more than a fraction of a moment. If one were to sit amongst the creatures, knowing what to listen for, the creaking and turning of tiny copper springs would be just barely audible. This hypothetical person would also find that the water refused to emanate any accompanying sound that might have signaled some sort of distaste for the situation. And, if this man or woman were imaginative enough to bring such things to life, he or she could visualize the warm hue of prosperity mingling with the waters. The tranquil scene was disrupted by muffled steps, resulting in the small mechanical birds leaping up one after the other, flying directly north in an impeccably straight, single-file line. From the civilized world and into this deserted park, Emerson stumbled, groaning. His back was bent into a poor man's scythe, banged up and bearing tiny little knots and several red bumps where the mosquitoes had claimed their land. Through these shameless acts of colonization

they had made Emerson, quite simply, their lapdog. As much as he tried to scratch the flood of bumps that dotted his back, his fingers were incapable of reaching even a single one. He coughed and fell down beside the pond, staring down at his ankle. It bore a single red circle right on top of his talus. In the past few hours, the wound's centre had taken on a distinct shade of purple. For the nighttime, the moon overhead -which Emerson decided was a light bulb rather than the celestial body it, in all actuality, was- shone pathetically. As though it were playing some final, discordant fanfare from some faraway place. Emerson stared up, then back down at his wound. It was 3:45 in the afternoon again.

"My dog died," he announced to his colleague. Despite his recent divorce, Emerson found himself endlessly attracted to this wisp of a woman who stood in front of him. Miko, who was easily ten years his senior, had sticks for limbs and branches for legs. Whenever she wore heels, she seemed to tower over him, but he loved it. The tip of her sleek nose would point at the spot in between his eyebrows, and his would point at her small lips. Her voice was a bit low and permanently suggested that it wasn't a voice she had been born with or grown accustomed to; Emerson suspected that it was one she had taught herself, being monstrously intelligent, around the age of five, to avoid some type of unidentified dilemma with a nature that remained open to interpretation. "I used to own a cat," she announced. Emerson waited for her to add to the

story, but they quietly stood there, in the doorway of the office kitchen. Ten seconds seemed to stretch into ten hours to Emerson whenever he found himself forced into unfitting silence. "What happened?" Emerson finally asked, feeling defeated.

"It ran off somewhere. Didn't make it any less difficult, I suppose. It made me feel like some sort of monster..." she allowed herself to stare at her shoes for a second before continuing. "I mean, I have something that might make you feel a bit better." At about ten at night, nearly seven hours later, Emerson sat on a bright green sofa-chair in Miko's apartment. She was also divorced, but had a young son who went back and forth between households weekly. Emerson gazed into the child's room, decorated with framed pictures and some posters here and there, barely clinging to bright orange walls. Miko sat in the opposite chair, squeezing the juice from some small green fruits into a cup. They barely ever spoke, but sometimes Emerson experienced a certain self-loathing that urged him to be around Miko more, so that he could constantly feel his skin crawl in the unease that came paired with the quiet. She took a tiny, white, pen-shaped object from the table next to her chair, stuck it into the cup and pressed a button on its side. A small light flickered at its top and Miko let out a hummed "mm-hm" of approval. She handed it to Emerson and the entire experience felt somewhat anti-climactic. "Just hold it to your leg, anywhere on your leg, and press the button on the side. You'll feel a sting. Like a bee sting, but over quicker." "How quick?" "Quite." Emerson rolled it back and forth

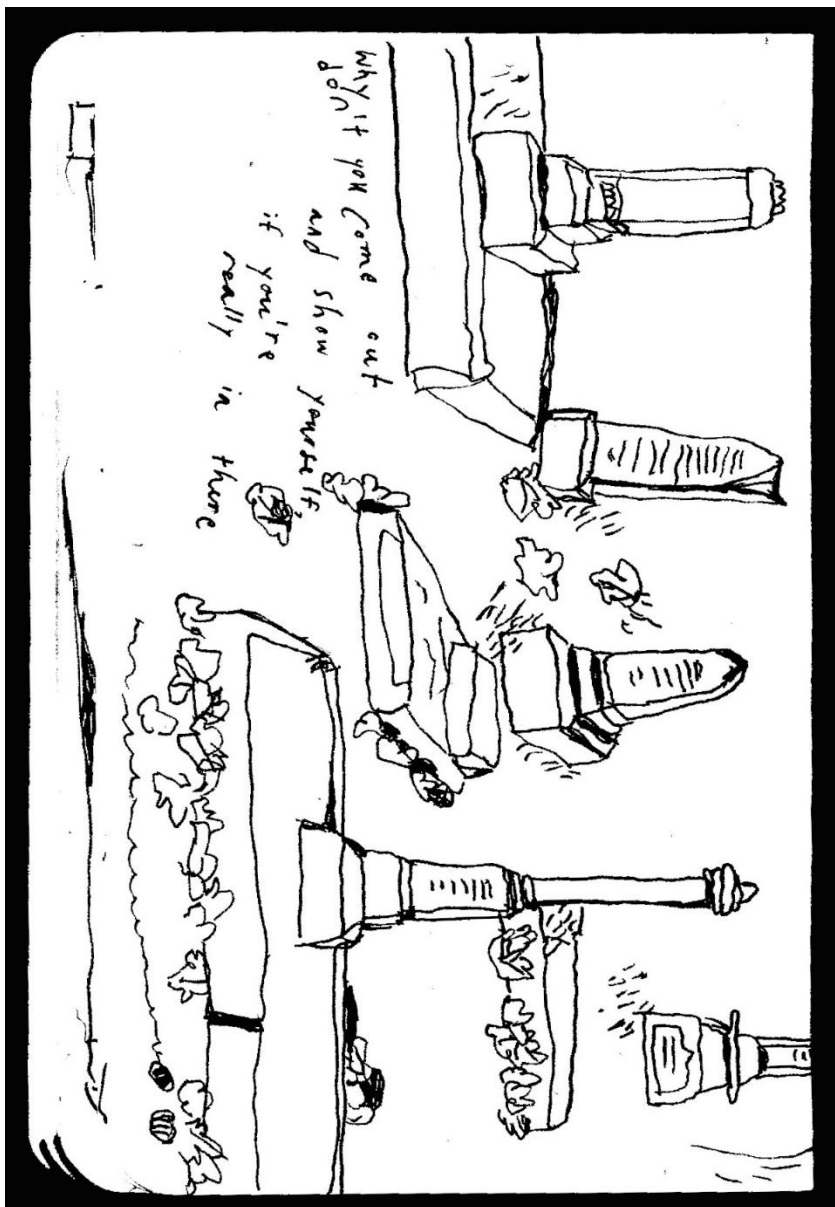
in his hands. "I still have to bury my dog tomorrow, in my backyard, will I be ok?" "You'll be fine, I think, yes." "Ok then." They sat there for another minute or two before Emerson awkwardly mumbled "thank you" and found his way out, clutching the foreign object in his clenched fist. He drove home and sat at the kitchen table. He looked at the back door and the big cardboard box settled next to it. He caught a tiny glimpse of black fur through the gap at its side, cut at the top for easy carrying. He lifted up the pen-shaped object, pressed it to his ankle, and let out a muffled groan.

His head raced. The pond in front of him seemed to have reached an inhuman level of silence, one that he could sink into without touching it. He started to wonder about all the things he'd never grasp, amongst which lurked, quite perversely, the imaginings of Miko's small breasts. Still, he imagined himself grasping many things; he imagined how life would have been if he had never been there to grasp his ex-wife's shoulders. To trace the imperfections on her pitch-black skin that, in the beginning, only felt like the slightest of details. Tiny bumps in the face of an infinite universe. To understand how warmth, at times, filled up all that was hollow below his body's surface. And this at even the slightest mention of the endless number of tiny curves that made up her round face. The notches in the small of her back. The crooks in her ears, neither pierced. He imagined ruffling his dog's

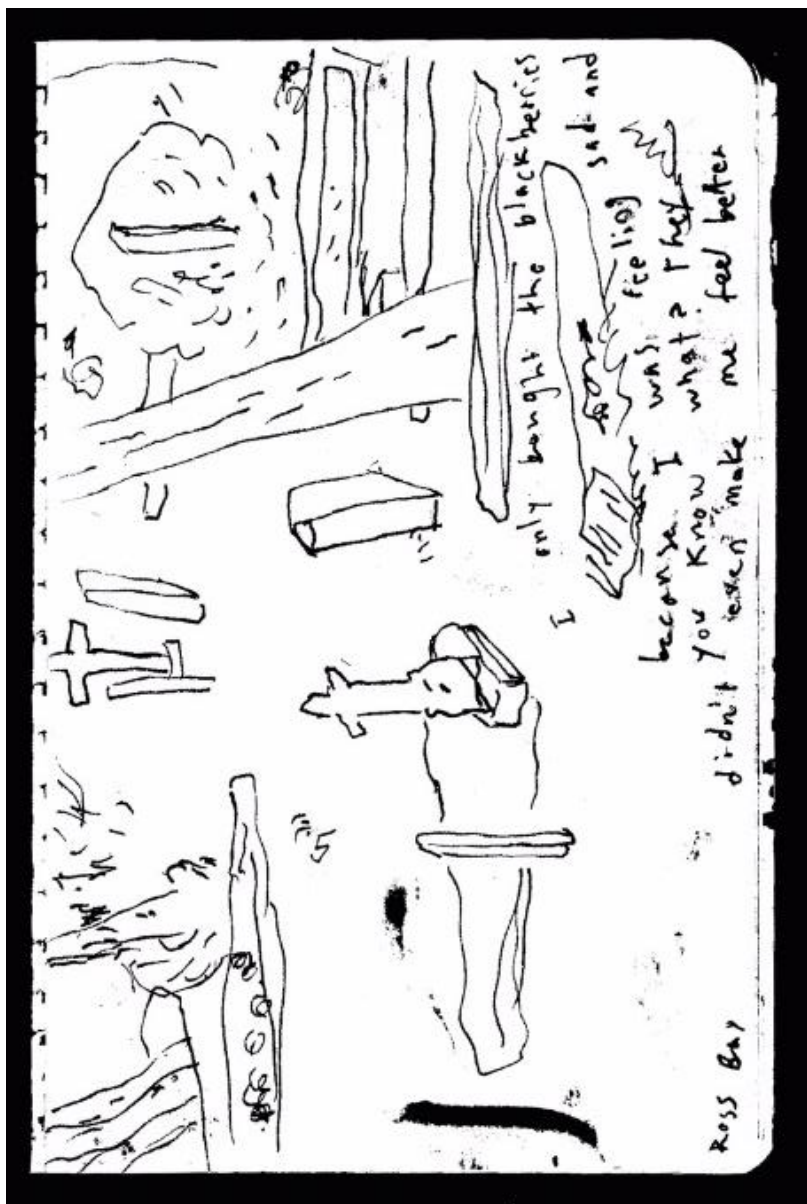
unkempt fur in that moment as well. A black dog of only seven years old, who had been named Pablo. Emerson had grown to loathe the name as he had grown to loathe his wife, since she had come up with the title, and not loathing every single one of her creations felt to Emerson like a faltering on his part. He imagined himself grasping the concept of emotion. Not forcing himself to endure uncomfortable silences, and not staying still when his wife was yelling, trying to get a rise out of him. He imagined yelling back and finally coming to realize how avoiding conflict could only ever make him unhappier. He imagined the two of them melting into a happy puddle consisting of yells, some harmless breed of anger, and her luminescent skin. Mostly, however, he imagined himself burying his dog in the morning. He imagined how, in two months, the thought of his ex-wife's skin would have to be buried with it, as the divorce would be finalized, and there would no longer be a chance to yell. Overhead, the metal birds were circling back. They whizzed in rollercoaster motions, and Emerson laughed at their springs and their artificial bird songs. He threw his head back and closed his eyes, letting himself sink into the puddle and into the blared whirring of the intricate springs.

The next morning, Emerson woke to birds chirping. Normal birds, that is. Multiple sets of flesh and blood chirping in harmony. He stood up clumsily,

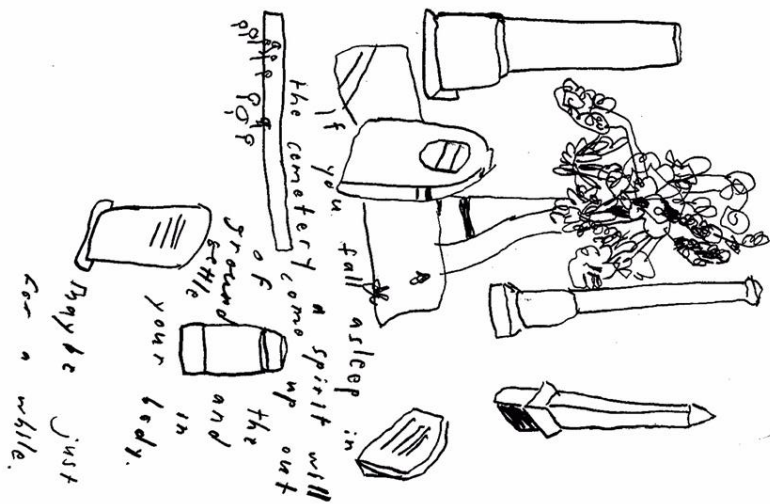
wanting nothing more than to escape from the silence of the pond at which he found himself, and seek out something that didn't feel mechanical. The fading outline of the moon overhead no longer looked like a lightbulb, but he remained unsure of it all, as some supernatural quality had stuck to nature overnight. His surroundings were now discouragingly foreign to him. Still, he made it home, showered off the dirt and the sweat, brewed a cup of strong tea. The box outside still stood, like some sort of monument to the past, beside the house's back door. Once again forced into silence, Emerson walked outside with half a roll of duct tape and a small shovel. He taped the box shut and lifted the enormous thing to the grass, where he started to dig until the sound of dirt hitting dirt, over and over again, like the harmonies made by the mechanical birds, made him feel vulnerable.



Why it you come out
don
and show yourself
if you're
really in there



Kai Conradi



22/09/17



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