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Sudden Onset

A Novel Thesis by Diane Keeney

Thesis Mentored by Linsey Abrams

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine
Arts of the City College of the City University of New York.

I. THE PURPLE HOUSE ON ASHFORD STREET

Before the reign of transient youth, continually flocking, festering, fleeing, before any of us can remember—the house on Ashford Street was painted white, or maybe yellow. It was inhabited by an industrious and religious family. They must have built this house. This family worked every day, save national holidays and holy days, but even those days lacked a sense of non-judgment and ease. There was no warmth or magic to this life, this house. Night daily descended upon it. No one slept to dream.

[IMAGE—FAMILY]

It is Friday, October 31st, 2008. The sun rises on the house on Ashford Street; the house is purple now. It has been purple since before any of us came here. A young man named Roman is sitting on the front porch witnessing the death of his ego for the 888th time as it becomes an extension of the patterns of his favorite bandana in luminescent gradients of green and pink, echoing the intensity of the sun's renewal. The sun, our greatest star. "We're all stardust," a voice without origin says with great satisfaction.

Roman sells acid and takes acid. He takes more acid than anyone in Allston ever knew, or ever would know. He keeps tabs rolled up in a red bandana that he always wears. Sometimes he doesn't have tabs, he just has a small vial and dropper. That doesn't fit in the bandana without looking weird, so he keeps it in his pocket.

Roman usually sits on the front porch, drops a few tabs, and quietly witnesses the collapse of space and time. In this state, he manages transactions. You walk up to him at any point in his trip, and in the middle of chaos he raises his two black holes to meet yours. You tell him what you want, he takes it out of his bandana or pocket, you give him the money, and he gives you what you want. You may hang around, not so much to trip with Roman, who does not have the capacity to care for who or where or when you are, but to talk to Diko.

Diko has a special aura that neutralizes the icky feeling of engaging in and forming a drug habit. When she isn't around, the Purple House feels like a crack den. Even Roman feels a fuzzy shadow in the left corner of his periphery when she is gone. Not that it matters to him, but it matters to his customers. If Diko ensures a

good vibe, it means good business for the house. He lets her have the upstairs bedroom and bathroom for half rent.

Diko, a former undergrad psychology major, recently dropped out of IM University. Her mom, a quack psychologist from New York City, who periodically misplaces her script pads when Diko comes to visit, is unaware of this fact. Nor are they aware that Diko is living and colluding with an acid head.

Diko isn't an acid head, but she knows her way around behind-the-counter and over-the-counter substances that are on the blurry side of legal. Her business attracts young adults who want to "safely" experiment in their college years, those who are convinced that if you can't get arrested for buying, selling, or taking it, it isn't real drug abuse. While the acid heads generally stay outside on the porch or in the first floor living room, Diko takes her customers up to her room, away from the lower law-breaking into the higher law-abiding realm.

Diko exits onto the porch with a cup of Columbian coffee and sits next to Roman.

"A fine day for a party," a voice says to Diko.

"Indeed," Diko replies, cradling her cup with both hands as she takes a sip and pauses to see, smell, and feel the warmth of the coffee outside of her as a sip makes its way deep inside.

II. CHAOS AND ARTEMIS

Nobody gets invited to the Purple House. People come and go; the doors are always open. When a bunch of people come around the same time, it is known as a party. Today is Halloween.

[IMAGE—PERRY AND JULIA AND BEER]

Bill, Kent, and Perry arrive fashionably late and sufficiently buzzed, radiating with the self-assurance of upper classmen. Though they recently moved into the neighborhood, they have been active members of the Allston scene since they first met 2 years ago in jumbo Humanities 101.

Bill studies theatre and is in love with himself. He has dressed in a tuxedo he wore to his older sister's wedding and calls himself James Bond.

Kent studies philosophy and smokes pot. He is dressed in the clothes he wore yesterday and tells people he is his Doppelgänger.

Perry is Chaos. A performance art piece in progress, he wears a canvas of old bed sheets that needs a touch of everyone and everything to be complete. Though he carries around some tubes of paint and glue for people to decorate him with, he prefers the more intimate and accidental additions from the house and guests—a spilt drink, dirt and dust, a shoe print, a tear, even spit. Perry has some boundary issues.

In the nighttime, Julia does not recognize these issues as something that might eventually get in the way of Julia in the daytime. She is drunk and dressed as Artemis, waiting on line for the bathroom. When Chaos approaches her, Julia unwittingly accepts him into her life and paints on him. He recognizes Julia as Artemis right away and is honored to be touched, and thereby irrevocably altered, by the defender of “wild virginity.” Artemis laughs. Before the end of the night, she glues a piece of paper towel with her real name and number on him.

Perry is stricken sick in love with Artemis. Not only do his boundary issues pertain to the space between his self and another self, but the space between his perception of reality and another’s. Most of those acquainted with Perry are not fully aware of these issues. If you ask Bill or Kent, they’ll describe Perry as some combination of strange, straight-laced, patient, and passionate. At 20, his hair is already thinning, but he doesn’t have a complex about it. On the plus side, his premature loss of visible vitality seems to safe-guard him against unsavory interactions with the more shallow romantic options on campus.

He dreams of her that Halloween night.

[IMAGE—DREAM POEM]

Julia isn't afraid of commitment, as long as it fits into her schedule. She has a system of categorization for life experiences that she has been perfecting ever since the summer between 8th grade and high school, when she decided that she wanted to be "balanced and happy." By now, her first year of undergraduate school, Julia has more or less a set system that includes rough percentages of experience that needed to occur in each category in order to achieve that balance and happiness at the college level. There is an opening in her social experience percentage that she thinks Perry can fill, and so she decides to pursue a more defined relationship with him.

They spend time together. They become animated at cafes and discuss the state of international and philosophical affairs, become slow at bars and restaurants and talk about their secrets. They go to parties and own the night. Sometimes they go for walks along the Charles River and keep quiet for the most part. It is a mutually pleasing affair while it is still new and undefined.

Over coffee, Julia suggests that they consider the direction of their actions. Perry pretends to be cautious, but agrees that what they share is more than casual and should be protected by some official agreement. They hold hands, look into each other's eyes, and become a couple.

III. OYSTER SOUP

It is April, 2009, almost six months since that fateful Halloween party. Julia is thinking about moving off campus and in with Perry and his roommates at the start of the next academic year. Despite the fact Julia is only nearing the end of freshman year, she already feels like she's gotten enough of the dormitory experience: co-ed floors, communal showers, cafeteria food, and cheap vodka in plastic bottles. She's had it better than most freshmen, living in a specialty housing Brownstone for Russian Studies students. Unfortunately, the Russian House is being turned into the Chinese House due to the changing tides in the academic and actual world. Julia does not speak Chinese, and so she will be forced to move into the larger, prison-like dormitories next year unless she finds an alternative.

Perry's more liberated college experience as a soon to be senior is more appealing to Julia. She just has to make sure that Perry's up to standard by September. Most of their time spent together now centers on a discussion of Perry's opportunities for improvement.

[IMAGE—BROWNSTONES]

The oysters are bulbous, like grey testicles floating in salty, brown brine. The soup is served in a little make-shift aluminum boat, no larger than the size of Perry's dainty hands cupped together. Julia tells Perry that it is called kaki-something-or-other.

Perry feels honored that Julia feels compelled to share this experience with him, but he declines to have a taste of her soup. He watches her suck up the first bulb, her lips parting then gently smacking with satisfaction. Did she even swallow? It was so slight and without sound, Perry isn't sure.

"Good?" he ventures.

"Mmm. Oh my God, Per, you sure you don't want to try this?"

"Yea, I'm okay, thanks. I'll wait for the sushi."

"It's not going to kill you. If you don't like it, you don't have to eat it."

Perry contemplates how, in the event that he didn't like the texture and taste of the testicle look-a-like, he could possibly *not* eat it. Oysters are an all or nothing food. *To slurp or not to slurp.* "I never really liked the taste of oysters anyway."

"Taste buds change."

You sound like my mother. "Seriously, Julia, enjoy your soup. I'm happy with just sushi."

Julia smirks dubiously and tilts her head mid scoop, an oyster resting on her spoon. "Okee dokey." She raises the spoon to her lips and slurps again; it is terrifying and perfect. She swallows and closes her eyes for a moment of satisfaction, then briefly looks heavenward and sits back in chair, blindly yet effortlessly lowering her hand and releasing her spoon back into the aluminum boat. She settles her gaze on

Perry and glows. Julia never looks more graceful than when she is eating or drinking.

Perry gulps down his tiny teacup of sake and refills his glass.

“Don’t be rude, Perry, you should refill my cup first before you refill your own.”

“Right, sorry.” Perry obliges Julia. “Where are my manners?”

“I don’t know. I guess your parents never taught you any.”

“I guess not,” Perry mutters. The jab is a trap. If Perry tries to defend his parents and the way he grew up, which, granted, involved more money and negligence than Julia’s, she will switch to attack mode and stay in attack mode for the rest of the night. She keeps him on his toes, and Perry always feels one false move away from failure. On the one hand, this is a daunting aspect of the relationship, and sometimes Perry wonders if Julia will ever stop finding fault with him. On the other hand, Perry feels inspired to be better a better version of himself, and he is grateful to Julia for that.

IV. A BLADDER'S MIRTH

It is time for a bedtime story, a tradition between Julia and Perry ever since she moved into his place in August. After having sex, or even instead of having sex, Julia tells Perry a story. Julia begins, "Once upon a time, a shoe, a bladder, and a string were walking through the woods."

"Like an actual bladder?" Perry enquires, snuggling in close to Julia.

"I like to think so," Julia replies, turning away from Perry, towards the ceiling.

"Don't you know the story?"

"Yea, but it's Russian folklore. Oral history. I'm just taking what I know and making it mine."

"Fair enough. Continue. There's a bladder, a string..."

"And a shoe."

"And a shoe."

"And they are walking together through the woods when they come across a river."

"Where are they going?"

"It doesn't matter. Stop interrupting. They're just walking. Like we're just living. It's a verb that these nouns are doing." Julia turns toward Perry with a look of stern warning, then back to the ceiling, where the story appears to be.

"Sorry."

"Okay. So they're walking in the woods when they come to a river. None of them can swim. They have to figure out a way to get across. The string says to the

shoe and the bladder, 'I think I'm long enough to stretch across the width of the river. I'll tie myself to this rock along the shore. Someone throw me over and I'll tie myself to another rock or something. Then you guys can walk across me one at a time.' The shoe is all for it. The bladder says nothing, but watches as the shoe throws the string across the river. It takes a couple of tries, but eventually the other end of the string gets to the other side of the river and ties itself to another rock.

Everything is set to go. So the shoe politely asks the bladder if he would like to go first. The bladder politely replies that the shoe should go first, since he made the effort of throwing the string across the river. The shoe thanks the bladder kindly and hops up on to the string. The string slackens a bit, but is still stable, and the shoe continues cautiously. About midway across the water, the shoe begins to panic. The string is sinking under the weight of the shoe, and they are both about to touch the water. The shoe yells to the string, 'Hey! Tighten up or we're both going to get swept away by this current!' It was true. The current was very strong that day. If the shoe and string so much as even touched the water, they were doomed."

"Jesus."

"Right, so the string gets really taut, because he's panicking too now. But he gets too taut, and he winds up snapping in half under the weight of the shoe. Both of them fall in the river and get swept away."

"Do they drown?"

Julia looks at Perry and smiles. "I like to think so."

"And the bladder?"

Julia looks back to the ceiling. “The bladder thinks this is hilarious. He laughs so hard that he explodes.”

“So they all die?”

“Yes. And that’s the end of the story.”

“Very Russian.”

“Yes, very Russian.”

Julia and Perry kiss and go to bed.

Perry wakes up in the middle of the night for no reason. He sees a shadow in the corner of the ceiling. The shadow stretches its legs. It sees Perry and begins to move. Panic. Perry is frozen in place as he watches the shadow quickly crawl across the ceiling until it right over the bed. It jumps down onto Perry’s chest.

Perry screams, thrashing under the covers until the spider disappears. He hears Julia scream his name like a question. He jumps out of bed, stumbles out the door, and runs down the hallway toward the bathroom.

“What the fuck, Perry?” Bill cracks open his door.

Perry pauses to take a few deep breaths and lets the anchor sink in. He looks up at Bill. “Sorry man. It’s nothing.”

“Goddamnit, it’s like 3am.” Bill closes the door.

Perry slowly walks back to his room. He notices the lights are on. Julia is sitting on the edge of the bed facing the door.

“What just happened?”

“I’m sorry, it’s nothing. I just had a nightmare.” Perry realizes he isn’t telling the whole truth, but he fails to immediately correct himself and the moment passes.

“You jumped out of bed screaming. I thought we were being attacked.”

“I’m sorry, Julia. I don’t know what got into me.”

“Has this happened before?”

Perry debates for a few seconds before responding, “Yes.”

“I don’t think it’s normal.”

“No, I guess it’s not normal.”

“I mean, nightmares are normal. Everyone has nightmares. But...I don’t know. This seems a bit more traumatic.”

“Yea.” Perry suddenly feels exhausted. The adrenaline come-down. He climbs into bed and wraps his arms around Julia’s waist. She is still sitting up, looking at the wall.

“Perry, you don’t have to tell me exactly what’s going on, but, I feel like this may be a symptom of some deeper psychological trauma.” Julia took psyche 101 in her freshman year. She says “psychological trauma” with confidence.

“Honestly, it’s nothing at all like that. I’ve always had trouble sleeping since I was a kid. Sleepwalking, nightmares...I don’t sleepwalk anymore. I’m sure I’ll just grow out of this.”

Julia looks at Perry, his eyes are closed, he’s already half-way gone. She gets frustrated, “You have to take care of yourself. You have to be *more aware* of yourself.” *How else are you going to improve?*

“What would you like me to do? I’ll do anything. Just lie down. I’m exhausted.”

“Go to the doctor’s.”

“What doctor? The dream doctor?” Perry smiles, his eyes are still closed.

“I’m serious, Perry.” She stares at the wall and rubs her shoulder. “Promise me tomorrow you’ll make an appointment. Just go to student health services. It’s a start.”

“I promise. Now lie down.”

They do not kiss, but go back to bed.

The next day Julia wakes up with a bruise on her shoulder. Perry makes an appointment at student health services.

V. PRINCESS POLLY AND DOCTOR NUTTAL

“Mingus? Perry Mingus?” a Caribbean accent calls out amid the grid of uncomfortable chairs filled with uncomfortable student bodies, some coughing, some pretending to cough, most interacting with their cell phones.

“Yea.” Perry half raises his hand, cautiously looking around to see if anyone else perked up their head upon hearing his name. No one appears to care, though Perry is sure that someone here will remember hearing his name and, when bumping into him later in class or at a party, recall that they had seen him at the doctor’s office and wonder why he had gone to student medical services. Perry will have to make something up, like he had mono. Everyone gets mono. What if the other person had mono too? Then they’ll have to compare stories and relate to each other. He should probably research the symptoms of mono, and the treatments available. Maybe read some testimonials. Why can’t patient confidentiality start in the waiting room? Everyone gets a code name. Or better yet, a number. Then they just call your number and you head on in to the office. No one needs to know your name to treat you anyway. Your name has nothing to do with your organism.

“Hello? Perry? You can come wit me now.” Her eyes radiate warmth, green fresh warmth, that glows over her soft skin. She is petite and taut, swimming in her extra small scrubs, but not drowning. Small and strong. Young and wise with compassion. She could be anywhere from her early 20s to late 30s. Eternal.

“Yea. Sorry. Just, out of it.”

“It’s okay, hun.” The way she pronounces *o-kay* puts Perry at ease, like she is saying the word *i-land*. *Wel-com to my i-land*. Is that racist? It can’t be racist if it’s a positive thought.

“Just take a seat in room numba tree and the doctor will be wit you shortly.”

“Thanks. Thank you.”

Her smile originates from a place deep inside her soul. Perry unconsciously tries to mimic her facial expression, though his lacks her feminine Caribbean depth, as he looks down at her name tag. Polly. Polly the model. The princess. She could be anyone, anywhere. But there she is, the nurse attending Perry in the student medical center. He is grateful for the rightness of this one miracle, this one combination of infinite possibilities that he and she are a part of.

Polly slides Perry’s file into the slat next to the door. “Keep the door open, o-kay?”

“Sure thing.”

“O-kay, then. Feel better.” She is still smiling as she turns and walks back down the hall and out of his life.

“I will,” Perry whispers.

He waits until she turns the corner to have a look around the office: a dull red examination table, a dull white curtain half drawn around it, cabinets along the wall above and below a counter space inhabited by a box of latex gloves and some pamphlets about depression and STDs. A boxy old computer is sandwiched on a small table between a chair like the ones in the waiting room and a chair that is larger, plusher and on wheels—a doctor’s chair. Perry sits down in the chair that

looks like the ones from the waiting room and waits some more. He reaches for a pamphlet.

[IMAGE—DEALING WITH DEPRESSION PAMPHLET]

“Mingus? Any relation to Charles?” the doctor asks before he has a chance to look up from his chart and see that the answer is no. He smiles before redirecting the conversation, “Hi. I’m Doctor Nuttal,” extending his hand.

Perry looks down at the pamphlet, which he is still holding with both hands, then back up at Nuttal. “No.” A social misfire. Perry tries again, “Hi,” this time releasing the pamphlet into his lap and extending his left hand. Misfire. “Sorry.”

Nuttal rectifies the situation by extending his left. “Ah! A lefty! You must be a creative type.”

“Is that true?”

“You tell me. Are you creative?”

“I write poetry.”

“Well there you go. Theory proved!” Nuttal moves his chair from the other side of the desk to the front of the computer and takes a seat. He looks over in Perry’s lap and notices the pamphlet. “Interesting literature?”

“Yea. I didn’t bring a book, so...”

“Quite alright. Quite alright. I just need to log in here,” he says facing the computer, “we’ve moved into the digital age of medical record keeping, you know. I’m a little new to this.”

“Take your time.”

“Thanks.” The new digital age at IMU student medical services involves software from the 90s. Perry and Nuttal wait 2 minutes for the log-in screen to load, and forty seconds for Nuttal to type in his username and password. Another minute passes before Nuttal accesses the “Add New Client” page.

Nuttal begins to ask Perry banal questions about his physical being, his health history, and his family's health history. Perry is above average for his height, below average for his weight. He does not have any chronic illness, has never had any major surgeries, or been hospitalized. His mother has high blood pressure. His father is a polygamist. (The doctor does not appear to comprehend the joke and writes down "polygamy" in his notes. Perry sighs.) He is sexually active and currently has one partner.

"Great. Now you're in the system!"

"Great."

"So, it says here on the chart that you're here to talk to me about some vision problems."

"Well, not exactly vision problems. I can see just fine, at least, with my glasses on. It's more about...seeing things that aren't there. Usually when I'm just about to fall asleep or wake up."

"You're hallucinating."

"Yea. I've always had trouble sleeping. When I was a kid I used to sleep walk so much that my mom would have to put a chair against the door. One time I even left the house..."

"Do you still sleep walk?"

"No, but I have night terrors where I can't move, or breath, and afterwards my whole body hurts. And now I've starting to hallucinate. In the past month both the night terrors and the hallucinations have become more and more frequent. Just

the other night I woke up seven times while I was sleeping and had really bad episodes.”

“Has this had an effect on your school performance, or social activities?”

“Well, yea, not really school, but, social life, I guess. My girlfriend and I keep getting into arguments over this. She basically can’t sleep over any more because I frighten her when I wake up and run out of bed screaming because I see a severed head floating in the room.”

“Right. Well, more often than not, hallucinations are stress related. If you’re not getting enough sleep, if you’re sleeping at odd hours, if you’re overworking your brain at school or work, overworking your body, not eating right, maybe emotionally stressed...” Nuttal lets the last clause hang, waiting for Perry to identify one or all of the mentioned factors as the root cause of his parasomnia .

Perry does not comply. “Yea, but the reason why I’m stressed is *because* I’m having the hallucinations...”

“Right. And lucky for you, there’s an easy remedy. You just need to take care of yourself. I see a lot of kids like you...excuse me, young adults come in with all these problems. And I’m not trying to say these problems aren’t real, but these young adults come in looking for me to tell them that they have some sort of disease, or syndrome, or virus, that they need a diagnosis with a hard to pronounce name and a prescription. But there’s nothing I can do, nothing I can really do to help them. They need to help themselves. They need to take care of themselves. They need to stop staying up all night drinking and fueling themselves on coffee or whatever else. They need to stop trying to do everything and be everything and everywhere.

They're driving themselves crazy trying to have the optimal life experience, or what have you."

Nuttal barely pauses to take a breath as he concludes enlightening poor Perry on the reality of being a young adult living independently in a new and overwhelming environment. "I'm not saying you're the irresponsible type, and I understand you've been experiencing parasomnia for some time. You just need to get some rest, Perry. It would do you a world of good. Okay?"

Since Perry is Perry, he has no other option than to say, "Okay."

"Don't forget to take some condoms on the way out. They're free and you can take as many as you want. It's part of your student services fee, I think, so you might as well."

[IMAGE—FEMALE CONDOM]

VI. DISCONNECT

September 29th, 2009: Perry's phone

You have 1 new voice message. First new voice message, Tuesday, 11:11am: I can't do this, Perry. I can't live with you. I can't date you. This all moved way too fast, and it's just not working out. It's not what I want. I'm going to stay at Nastya's until I figure out a place to live. I'll figure out a way to get my shit out of the apartment. Please, just, stay out of the way. I'm sorry.

Message will be saved for 14 days.

September 29th, 2009: Julia's phone

You have 7 new voice messages. First new voice message, Tuesday, 11:15am: Julia. Pick up the phone.

Message deleted.

Second new voice message, Tuesday, 11:15am: Julia. PICK UP THE PHONE.

Message deleted.

Third new voice message, Tuesday, 11:16am: Julia. You have to call me. You can't do this. What's going on?

Message deleted.

Fourth new voice message, Tuesday, 11:35am: Julia, I'm worried about you. What's going on? Please just call me. I'm not mad. I just—

Message deleted.

Fifth new voice message, Tuesday, 1:26pm: Julia—

Message deleted.

Sixth new voice message, Tuesday, 3:00pm: Julia—

Message deleted.

Seventh new voice message, Tuesday 7:00pm: Julia—

Message deleted.

[IMAGE—LETTER]

VII. ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

It is October 31st, 2009, what should have been Perry and Julia's year anniversary. People have gathered at the Purple House for another Halloween party.

Perry is again Chaos, but the magic of his performance piece seems lost on the new batch of house guests. Few people actively or accidentally contribute to his costume. Perhaps it is because Perry is belligerently drunk on red wine and rambling about some girl named Julia who hasn't showed up yet. Or perhaps it is because the costume keeps falling off.

Perry runs into Diko. He asks Diko if she's see Julia. Diko has not seen Julia, nor does she know who Julia is.

"Who are you?" Perry asks.

"I'm Diko. I live here." She gives him the once over, "I like your costume."

"This is where we first met."

Diko isn't sure what he means. But it sounds like Perry could use a pick-me-up. Seizing the opportunity to expand her clientele and her research, and, perhaps, to some extent, feeling compassionate, Diko invites Perry upstairs for some alternative therapy.

Finishing his second glass of water and feeling the phentermine, Perry gets real with Diko.

"Julia told me that it's irrational to be afraid of things that aren't real. That if I have the ability to make up my own worst nightmare, then I have the ability to *not*

make it up, to ignore the urge or impulse or whatever it was that got my brain infected with these ideas. Or, at the very least, I have the ability to realize that I make it up and that I have control over it.”

“So you don’t think you have control over your ideas? Or are you just telling me what Julia thinks because you’re trying to avoid talking about your issues yourself.”

Perry sighs, “I guess I’m just a little on the defensive.”

“It’s a common reaction. You’re putting yourself in a vulnerable position. You just have to accept that you’re here for help, and that I’m here to help you.”

Oh God, Julia. I’m pouring my heart out to a 20-year-old drug dealer.

“Perry, if you want to make this work, you need to let go of anything or *anyone* that gets in the way of that during our sessions.”

Fuck. She’s a mind reader. Okay, “I think I have a sensitive and volatile imagination, and I think people don’t understand how real a problem that is for me. I haven’t met anyone who’s seen what I’ve seen. That sounds stupid to say. I’m sure there are people out there in war-torn countries who see severed heads and car explosions every day. I don’t know.”

“I understand what you mean, Perry. It’s okay. Try not to get off topic. Remember, we’re here to understand your brain. There’s nothing we can do about whatever’s going on in the third world.”

“I just mean none of my friends understand. Not that I have that many who I talk to about this.” *Getting off topic.* “Anyway. It’s like I take the worst of everything I experience or observe and it manifests without my control in some liminal part

between my senses and consciousness.” Perry really likes the word liminal and experiences a small joy when he hears it used in one of his very own sentences.

“What does your imagination manifest as? What do you see?”

“It’s not just visual. It’s aural. Sometimes I feel it too. I *know* it’s not real. Sometimes I even know it when I see it, or hear it, or feel it. But that doesn’t change anything. It doesn’t magically go away when I say to myself, ‘Perry, you’re making this all up.’ Even if Julia or someone’s in the room and I am fully aware of the fact that they aren’t having the same experience as I am, I can still...I can see them. They can see me. I can talk to them and they can talk to me. The only thing is, I haven’t tried to touch them, though I’ve physically felt them. I guess I’m scared of what that will mean. I’ve felt hands pressing on me, on my back, on my face. I’ve had smaller creatures jump on me and crawl on me. But, other than reacting to them, I’ve never initiated or pursued some sort of contact.”

“What do you mean, you’re scared of what it will mean? And you’ve *talked* to your hallucinations? What do they say? What do *you* say?” Diko can barely contain her giddy curiosity. Perry is a gold mine of a subject.

“Maybe that’s a bit misleading. I don’t mean that I have conversations with these things. Most of the time they’re not human, they’re not capable of speech. I’ve only seen a whole person once, and I just screamed my head off and the guy didn’t say anything. He just stared at me. Another time I just heard a scan of human voices. Like my brain was surfing a radio of voices of everyone in my building and then it settled on a single voice. And the voice said, ‘We’re here.’ And I just said something along the lines of ‘Oh, shit.’”

Diko can't help but smile. Perry feels cornered.

"I'm a wreck. I know it. Emotionally wrecked. Mentally wrecked. I *know* it's not real. I know it's not real and I know it's silly and yet I can't control it. They're figments of my imagination that are independent of me and yet part of me. How do I fix this? What if I get rid of them and I lose something else? What if there's more of a connection than I realize? What if I need help and I'm asking myself for help and I don't know how?"

"Let me help you."

[IMAGE—HAND-MADE CARD]

VIII. THE HAIR

It is mid-November of 2009, about 2 months after the break up and over a year after they first started dating. Perry sees Julia at a table as he waits on-line at Espresso Royale Café. Julia glows with a sense of situational control, a glow Perry once reveled in. Her movements are light, yet intentional. She smiles and nods. She shakes her head and smiles. She takes a sip from her cup and smiles. She looks down modestly as she returns her cup to the table and smiles again. The hunk of hair without a face sitting across from her moves to obstruct Perry's view. It isn't intentional, but Perry feels slighted. He secretly wishes they would sense his presence, that they would feel the starkness of his existence as a threat.

He considers walking up to them and saying something debonair and mood shattering, something to tip the scales, but Julia has already threatened to file for Aggravated Harassment if Perry doesn't leave her alone. She wouldn't, Perry knows that. And even if she did, is it really a crime to try and contact someone who broke up with you over voice-mail? You can't just leave a message and expect someone not to answer back. E-mails aren't a crime, text messages aren't a crime, trying to say hello on campus isn't a crime.

"Can I help you?" The barista is wearing a hand knit orange ski hat that casually sits on top of his soft brown curls and normal size ears. He looks like he doesn't have to try too hard in life. Or doesn't want to.

"Uh, yea. I'll just have a large coffee"—Perry looks over at Julia and The Hair—"to go." He fumbles for crumbled singles in his pocket.

“That’ll be \$3.90. Do you have an ERC rewards card?” Espresso Royal Café is more hiply referred to as the ERC.

“ER what? Oh, yea, I always forget that thing,” Perry draws the card from another pocket, and along with the crumpled cash, balances it on the counter.

“Looks like you’re already up to your tenth cup! You get a free drink.”

“Great. I’ll have a large coffee.”

“You can get any drink for free, not just coffee.”

“I’m okay with coffee.”

“Why not go crazy? It’s free.” A line is forming behind Perry and the barista has not a care in the world.

“What would you recommend?”

“A Cubano with 3 double shots of espresso. It’s the most expensive and caffeinated thing we have.”

“Sure. I’ll have that.” Julia looks over at the line and catches a quick glance of Perry, who catches her quick glance and quickly turns back to the man/elf. With a forced smile, Perry pretends that he has been engaged in a highly satisfying interaction that has nothing to do with Julia.

“Awesome. Let me know when you reach the next dimension,” says the barista.

“Will do!” Perry says with an embarrassing amount of enthusiasm and mini salute as he walks around the espresso bar to wait for his cosmic beverage. He watches Julia until his drink is called. When Perry leaves, she stays fixed on The Hair and is still smiling. The smile is strained, however, and her face looks flushed.

It looks like Boston, early fall, the start of a new semester. It's sunny and cold. Perry is walking in front of Marsh Chapel when he runs into Julia, who looks uncharacteristically disheveled and depressed—her hair is limp, blisters cover her lips, her clothes are mismatched. At first, she won't even look up. He tries to say hello. No response. Perry, suddenly remembering all the reasons why Julia is a complete shit, says something along the lines of, "Fuck this," and starts to walk off. Julia runs after and catches up to Perry. She apologizes, taking out a laptop from her backpack, then turning it on to reply to all the e-mails she ignored that Perry sent her over the summer. Perry says, "It's too late. They keep walking together until they get to a cemetery. A big owl flies down in front of them and starts saying something that Perry can't understand, even though it's in English. Julia wants Perry to take a picture of the owl, but he can't because it's bobbing around. Perry becomes frustrated. It's a male owl. Perry notices his female counterpart is watching silently from the tree above.

At Julia's new apartment with her new boyfriend and his friends as roommates, Perry notices a board game with owl characters on the table in their living room. He feels like a failure. It's understood that he lives there too, now. That he has nowhere else to go. That Julia invited him to live there, but she doesn't want her boyfriend to know how she really knows Perry, so she says he's an ex of their mutual friend. No one seems all that convinced and Perry gets the cold shoulder from his new roommates.

Julia's boyfriend is a doctor. He's handsome and has a full head of hair that's cut in a popular style. He knows how practical his life is compared to Perry's. He and his friends make epic magical baked goods—not just pot brownies, but they have

developed the science to lace it with acid and opium and amphetamines. Perry remembers he has orientation or class later that day, but he throws caution to the wind, sneaking in several brownies. He's rolling.

Next thing he knows, he's in the bathroom in the IMU Theology wing. He recognizes people coming in and out of the stall as his colleagues. He's half naked, and Julia's boyfriend is swabbing his back because his blood is thinning from the drugs and leaking out his pores. He says, "I can't take care of you anymore." Perry says, "No one asked you to." Julia's boyfriend gets up and walks out, and there is an understanding between them. Perry continues to bleed out until the light comes.

Perry's cell phone vibrates with a tiny tantrum fury against his desk. His head jerks up from the cradle of his crossed arms. He looks out the window and panics, it's light and dark enough to be either dawn or dusk. He wonders how long he's been asleep. He looks at his phone. It's 7pm. Diko is calling. Reality drops an anchor inside Perry's brain as he answers the phone.

"Hey, Diko."

"Hay is for horses. What's wrong with your voice?"

"It's coffee—it's complicated."

"You're a mess."

"Are we still meeting later? I'm out of Adderall."

"Yes, but I want to try something new for your session today."

"Do you mind if we skip today's session? I literally just slept the day away and I have a shit ton of work to catch up on. I just need some Adderall."

“You can spare an hour for your sanity’s sake. Besides, Roman’s out for the night getting supplies. We have the place all to ourselves for once.”

[IMAGE—MARSH PLAZA]

IX. WORMING

“Did you see her?”

“I think I’m going to be sick.” This isn’t what Perry means to say, but it is one of those rare and rarely documented moments of unconscious insight where the body knows before the mind and opts to speak for itself, straight from the stomach’s mouth, warning both the blurry Perry and the highly acute Diko that there was no time to think, only to act.

Diko deftly pivots, grabs, and re-stations the garbage pail from the corner of the room to the bedside. Simultaneously, Perry feels the saliva rapidly build at the back of his throat, a spasm, and a torrent of bile rise up his esophagus, over his tongue, and out between his lips.

“Atta boy!” Diko is pleased Perry kept his mess contained in the pail.

Perry heaves several more loads into the pail. The loads lessen with each heave, until Perry is able to cough and spit himself back to some level of internal stasis.

“Jesus. I need water.”

Diko has a glass ready, and kindly extends it, keeping her professional distance. Perry’s hands extend to grasp the cup and just miss the touch of Diko’s hands. Suddenly Perry is overwhelmed with longing for human contact. If only Diko would lay her palm against his cheek and gently rub her forefinger beneath his earlobe, like Julia used to do. “I have a bad taste in my mouth.”

“And that’s a surprising discovery?” Perry remembers that Diko more sarcastic than not. He finds this unappealing.

“No, it’s just...it tastes like grease. Like car grease. Not that I’ve ever eaten car grease before, but the smell...is that—is my vomit moving?” Perry looks with concern into the garbage pail. He looks up at Diko and it’s Julia. It is unbearably bright.

“Did you see her?” Diko peers over him, curious, momentarily blocking the harsh bedside lamp. She must have turned it on to break the cycle.

Perry groans and rubs some gunk out of his eyes. “Yea. Kinda. You were her in this one.”

“Wicked. Was it a good time?” She sits back into the folding chair, the light again temporarily blinds Perry. He winces and tried to sit up.

“Not at all. I thought I woke up. Something went wrong you turned into her and I wound up here.” Perry is suddenly afraid Diko might morph again. He feels unstable.

“Waking up in a dream is pretty a-typical for worming. Same goes for negative rehashing.” Perry detects a nano-glimpse of concern from Diko.

“Negative what?”

“Rehashing. When you sleep, you remember everything that happened to you, and you rehash it. Shit that doesn’t matter, like, picking a boogie out of your eye or something, that comes up and then gets filtered out, but the stuff that you’ve attached significance to, especially emotional stuff, that gets strengthened. Which

can be good, because you need to remember what matters. But it can be bad if you strengthen negative stuff.”

“So...basically, if I avoid negative experiences, I won’t rehash negative experiences?”

“Yea.”

“Oh good. I’m glad we figured that one out. I was worried that I was going to have to deal with negative experiences all my life and then remember them. Now I know I don’t have to if I don’t want to. Thanks.”

“I’m detecting a hint of sarcasm.”

You should know. “Really? Because my mind is genuinely blown, Diko. You just saved me a whole lot of trouble. I’m gunna get out of here and be happy now, okay? See ya. And thanks for the worms.” Perry, vindictive, sits up and swings his legs over the side of the bed. He proceeds to throw up mostly on the floor, somewhat on Diko’s bed.

“Jesus, Perr. Can you at least give me a heads up before you go up-chucking all over the place.”

“Sorry, I...I think I need a glass of water.”

“You need to clean this up and get your shit together and get out.” If there’s one thing Diko doesn’t tolerate, it is vomit.

“Please, Diko. I really...I don’t know what’s going on, but I think I had a dream about this. I think something went wrong. I really don’t feel good. You said I would see her again and it would be different. I think I’m going to be sick again.”

This time Diko manages to slide the garbage pail under Perry's projection. She leaves and comes back with a glass of water. She hands it to Perry.

"Sorry," he whispers before taking a sip.

"Yea. Me too...listen, Perry, the Worms worked fine. You were in and out in like 15 minutes, I saw it. But I think you have bigger problems. And I don't think you should take this shit anymore."

"You said it was safe."

"It is. No one's ever died from worms, and no one ever will. That's not how it works. It's just a dream supplement."

"So why can't I get a good dream?"

"I don't know for sure, but—"

"Wait, what bigger problems were you talking about?"

"I don't know."

Perry helps Diko clean up the mess he had made. With Diko's permission, he takes a short and unsatisfying shower in her bathroom—at one point the soap springs from his hands and out of the bathtub; he has to step out to get it—and leaves.

X. MARLO AND JULIA

"I got twelve e-mails this month."

"Forward them to spam," Marlo.

"I do. But I feel them in my spam box waiting for me. I can't not read them."

"What do you want me to tell you? He's obviously got a problem, and it's a personal problem. If you keep letting him in, if you keep letting him think he has some small chance of getting through to you, then he won't give up. He's at stalker status."

"Yea, but I don't *answer* the e-mails."

"Just the fact that you read them, that you let him into your head...he's still getting what he wants. He's infecting your life. He's infecting you with his sick obsession."

"Jesus, Mar. We dated for almost a year. It's not like he's some random creep who saw me at a café with someone other guy and started flipping a shit. We have a history together."

"What does that even mean? It's over. Forget history. You have no *future* together. You don't owe him anything, especially not your peace of mind."

"I feel bad. I can't help it. I feel like I really hurt him. Like I inserted myself into his life and the second shit got weird I dumped him. What if he thinks I dumped him for...whatever's going on in his head? I've probably fucked him up even more."

"That's exactly what he wants you to think. That you're in control of his happiness, his sanity. You are definitely not a terrible person and...it takes two to

tango, you know? I really can't believe I said that in all seriousness. You know what I'm trying to say."

Julia smiles. "I'm sorry to keep bringing this up. It's just weighing on me. I'm anxious around campus. I'm anxious at the apartment when Nastya's not there. I'm anxious when I check my mail. I'm anxious when someone calls and I don't know the number. Ugh. Maybe I need help."

"Maybe you need a restraining order."

"That's too much. I know Perry. He's not going to hurt me. He's just hurting."

"People who are hurting tend to hurt others, especially the ones they think are responsible for their pain. I don't want to rile you up any more than you already are, but it's better to be safe than sorry. You're more likely to get attacked by someone you know than a stranger."

"Is that a fact?"

"I don't know. It makes sense to me. Maybe you should just take a trip to the campus police department and see what they think. You don't have to name names. Just give them a hypothetical situation and see what they think."

"Yea, I guess that's a good idea." Julia somehow feels to embarrassed or ashamed to say that she's already threatened Perry with this possibility. Probably because she knows he knows that she couldn't bring herself to do it alone.

"I know it's a good idea."

"I wish I had your resolve."

"You had enough resolve to break up with Perry."

"What if I made the wrong decision?"

“There is no wrong or right, there’s the decision you made for the reason or reasons you have. And that’s legitimate. You just have to stick with it.”

“How do you know my reasons are legitimate?”

“Listen, just consider the possibility that there are many ways to the waterfall, and Perry’s way sucks.”

“Wait, what’s the waterfall?”

“Peace.”

“Balance and happiness?”

“I suppose that’s another way to put it.”

“How do you put up with me, Marlo?”

“From a distance.”

“Okay. Why do you put up with me?”

“I get really aroused when I help you.”

“Hoboy.”

*

A large mutant bat flies up against the window in an attempt to break in, looking for someone in particular. It’s dark, raining. Julia takes pictures. The flash scares the bat back into the trees. Someone’s trying to get into the front door. Julia goes backstage. A young man is alone, sitting on a ladder. Julia climbs up to where he is. She tries to kiss him. He declines, indicating that he prefers for his neck to be bitten and sucked on. Julia obliges, but it’s rough going at first. Her mouth is so dry. Her teeth finally sink in, her mouth closing around a thickening pool of blood.

XI. DIKO

November 29, 2009

Regarding grief following loss, not necessarily death...

My mother and I left Georgia when I was 5. My father didn't come with us. As far as I know, he is still alive. I have not heard from him since, and I do not think I could point him out in a line-up. I have what I think are memories—moments where I catch a glimpse of his face, perhaps outside in the park, or lounging on the couch. I do not hear his voice anymore. I don't remember it. And perhaps I don't really remember his face; it's only the face from the photographs that I'm rehashing. In any event, he is lost to me. Even if he is still alive. Even if he came here. Even if he is here. He hasn't come for us. It's too late—I'm not a child without a father anymore. I'm an adult who was a child who didn't have a father.

I realize now that my intervention with Perry has been misguided. Perry is mourning Julia. He has internalized his loss by creating a world of perpetual loss inside of himself—idealizing what he thinks he and Julia had, and then rehashing the break-up experience. Worming appears to only heighten this negative rehash cycle.

Instead of trying to recreate and rebuild positive emotions from the inside out, I must instead focus on creating an external displacement for Perry's love—

converting the mourner into the melancholic. I'll ask Roman for an MDMA hookup.
And I'll need to re-acquaint myself with Leo Zeff and the psychedelic therapy group.

It should be fun!

*

[IMAGE—DIKO'S MOTHER AND FATHER]

XII. SOME GIRL NAMED LEYLA

Leyla is some girl at a party accompanied by her two male friends; she has slept with one of these friends. While her two friends go about their own business, Leyla sits on a black leather couch with some guy who is sharing a mint Nat Sherman with her. Leyla doesn't smoke, but she smokes Nat Shermans. She inhales, exhales, passes the cigarette back and ponders her options for the rest of the night. It is a particularly dull party.

The friend Leyla has slept with spends twenty dollars to snort something called Dex, which, he is told by a rat-faced pusher, is better than cocaine. It is not. The male friend feels nothing except a slight nasal irritation. He tells Leyla it's better not to waste her money.

Leyla's other male friend, the one she hasn't slept with, tells her he saw Roman in the kitchen. This other male friend had bought acid from Roman for the first time only a couple of days prior. He survived, despite the unexpected bike ride through hell where he saw death in a four-door sedan at a stop light; he eventually, after some length of eternity, wound up at his ex-girlfriend's boyfriend and transitioned back to reality. To Leyla, this sounds like something worth her money.

It should be noted that Leyla, in addition to smoking a cigarette, has also imbibed several beers at the party, and had pre-gamed with a couple of shots of whiskey back at the dorm with her two friends. It is nearing midnight and, unlike Dex, which appears to last only a millisecond, acid trips tend to last six to eleven hours. Roman's acid tends to stretch into the tenth and eleventh hours.

Leyla walks into the kitchen, and, with a drunken sense of knowing, asks Roman for two tabs.

“I don’t have any tabs. I have a bag of teddy grams.”

Leyla isn’t sure what teddy grams are supposed to mean, but she says, “Oh, that’s fine.”

“Twenty dollars.” Roman takes out a bag of actual teddy grams and a vial of acid from his pocket. In full view of all the guests in the kitchen, Roman drops acid onto a teddy gram and he and Leyla make the exchange. With only a small pause to admire the adorable little vessel that would get her fucked up, Leyla throws back the teddy gram, grabs a beer from the fridge, and walks back to the couch.

About an hour and a half later, Leyla is alone on the couch noticing the intensity of the light in the periphery of her vision. It’s practically sparkling, refracting hints of neon pink and green. Leyla thinks this is pleasant.

Roman appears from nowhere next to her. “Hey, just a heads up. I don’t know how much I dropped on your teddy gram. Let me know if you start tripping balls.” Roman disappears and Leyla sits back on the couch to ponder what this might mean.

“I should go,” Leyla said to no one after an indeterminate amount of time.

She puts her hand against the wall behind her for support. Her hand sinks into the wall.

“Shit.”

She pulls her hand from the wall and holds it up to her face. She can see every line deepen, every follicle widen, every hair grow. It is awful. She puts her hand away and suddenly recalls an old adage from the recesses of her mind: "Never look in the mirror when you're tripping." She resolves to never look in the mirror.

With some effort, Leyla rises to her feet. The floor and the ceiling come closer.

"Nick." She needs to find Nick, the friend she hasn't slept with. He is across the living room with the other friend she has slept with. She stares at him intently. Eventually, he turns toward her.

"Leyla?" Nick asks.

"We have to go now."

The friend Leyla has slept with wants to stay, but Nick realizes the situation and agrees to walk her back to the dorm.

The stairs are difficult. They come too quick and they are too steep.

"It's hard to walk down stairs," Leyla notes. Nick agrees and patiently waits for Leyla a few steps ahead.

Outside is too dark. The people are dark; their intentions are dark. They loom over Leyla as they pass. The cars have mechanical eyes and teeth. They drive themselves. They also have dark intent, but luckily stay on the roads.

Out of fear Leyla stares straight ahead. She hears a clicking sound. It is persistent, anxiety inducing. Once Leyla notices the sound, it begins to grow in

proximity and volume. It is right next to her and Nick. Leyla stops. Nick stops. The noise stops.

“Do you hear that?” Leyla asks Nick without looking in his direction.

“Hear what?”

“That clicking sound.”

“I don’t hear anything.”

“It’s gone now.”

“It’s probably my bike.” Nick walks a few steps ahead of Leyla with his bike to demonstrate. Leyla watches the bike intently; she realizes Nick has been walking his bike the whole time. The bike is the source of the clicking noise. He stops walking. The sound stops. Everything is okay.

“Everything is okay,” Nick says. He is a good shaman.

“Yea.”

Leyla and Nick keep walking. They are walking extremely slow. They’re almost standing still. The moon sets, the sun rises. The sun sets, the moon rises. The moon sets, the sun rises. The sun sets, the moon rises. The cycle continues and begins to pick up speed. Leyla counts the days; it appears as if 70 years has gone by.

Concerned about the poor time they are making, Leyla looks over at Nick. He has aged considerably: his hair and beard have grown long and grey, cavernous wrinkles line his face.

“How long has it been?” she asks.

“I don’t know, not very long,” Nick replies.

“Don’t tell my mom where I’ve been. She’s probably looking for me.”

“I won’t.”

“And no matter what happens, don’t call an ambulance.”

“There’s no need for an ambulance.”

“Right.”

They arrive at Leyla’s dorm, the Spanish house on Bay Street, which, coincidentally, is located next to the new Chinese house. Luckily the brownstone dorms aren’t guarded and don’t require ID. The whole swipe and show process can be a major obstacle. The door can also be difficult, but at least the door can’t question your sobriety and report you to the campus police.

Leyla pulls out her keys and examines them. They feel bigger than normal. Underneath her hand, the ground approaches. She looks up at the door; the lock is getting farther away. “I don’t think I can do this.”

“Would you like me to try?” Nick asks.

“Okay.” Leyla hands Nick the keys. He opens the door on the first attempt.

In the common area, the TV is on and it appears as if there is a small gathering with beer. Her flat mate Adam is sitting on the couch; Justin is sitting in the reading chair.

Leyla is drawn toward the couch and sits next to Adam. “I’m tripping,” she informs him.

“Oh?” He puts his index finger in his mouth and then inserts it in Leyla’s ear. Leyla feels irrevocably violated.

“Hey, fuck off man. What’s wrong with you?” Nick steps in and wedges himself between Adam and Leyla.

“It’s just a joke.”

“It’s not funny.”

“What’s going on?” Justin asks.

“Leyla’s tripping. She just needs a good environment.” Nick replies, looking cautiously at Leyla, who has fixed her eyes on the TV.

“Don’t be a dick, Adam.” Justin gets up and walks up to Leyla. “She should be welcomed into the world with a hug or something.”

Leyla suddenly turns to Nick, “Don’t tell them I’m tripping.”

Nick doesn’t know how to respond. He nods. This is satisfactory enough for Leyla.

“Do you want to listen to music, Leyla?” Justin asks. “I have a really good mix on my iPod that I think you’ll like.”

“That sounds cool.”

Leyla is sitting on the couch with Nick. She has been listening to the Justice album *Cross* on repeat. She checks the time on Justin’s iPod. It is 2:30am. Nick is watching television. Adam and Justin went up to their rooms an hour ago.

Five minutes later, Leyla checks the iPod. It is 3am. Nick is sleeping. She sinks her hand into her sleeve and gently drags the fabric back and forth across his face. He wakes up. “What?” he asks, sounding a bit agitated and also a bit muffled by the music.

“You should go home. It’s late.”

“Are you going to be okay?”

“Yea.”

Do you ever get this feeling that everything is a waste of time? Do you ever get the feeling that everything is a waste of time, save this? Save this. Do you ever get the feeling that everything is a waste of time? Save this. Save this feeling. Do you ever get this feeling? Do you ever get this feeling? Save this feeling. Save this. You save this. Ever you save this, do you get the feeling? Save this. What are you writing? A mantra? I’m saying a mantra. Have you become religious? I’ve become depressed. I can tell. I can tell the bright lights and the superficial plots aren’t satisfying. They aren’t whole. They’re part. They’re part of a part. A fragment. A shard. Channel. Orange. The color orange. Taking back purple. I am the truth. Sut Ha. Sut. Ha. Sut. Ha. People go out on Friday nights. Exegesis. I know it’s not real. Why bother watching it? You’re going to like this movie. It doesn’t take itself seriously. Then what’s the point? They whole film says nothing except I AM A FILM. MONEY WAS INVOLVED. FUN WAS HAD. YOU BUY? No. No buy? I. No. Buy.

[IMAGE—ACID TRIP, 2 PAGES]

XIII. PERRY

January 28th, 2010

Sinking into that winter depression. Sleeping for the first half of the day and gorging on crap for the other half. Why do I feel so out of control and disinterested in my physical and spiritual well-being? I have proclaimed myself an outcast, superfluous, useless. Another dysfunctional robot that should be replaced. No sense investing in my sanity, in my happiness. Just get dressed, go to class, eat, sleep, and dream of stress and darkness. Wait for stress to push me into darkness.

*

January 29th, 2010

I hear Julia is off to study abroad. I guess I won't be running into her anytime soon. I guess she won't see my graduate.

*

Some girl named Leyla drowned in the Charles after buying acid from Roman. Diko says he's probably going to be convicted. She's probably going to move back to New York.

*

January 30th, 2010

I'm tired of maintaining social ties. I'm tired of being alone. I'm tired of reading and writing all day, and I'm tired of being unable to read and write. I'm tired of being in love. I'm tired of pretending not to be.

I want to tell you, Julia—we may never see each other again. I will have to move on, as you have. But I would have liked to have had a future with you. It is hopeless. Even if we meet again, we will be two different people on two different paths. I wish I could understand why I still want you every night. Just to have your body sleeping next to mine.

[IMAGE—DRAWING]

XIV. JULIA

January 29th, 2010

I dreamt that Perry and I were at my sister's house for a wedding. We were in the kitchen with my sister and my nephews. It was one of their birthdays. I brought a gift—a box of hostess zebra cakes in the shape of trees. There were zebra cakes everywhere, in the freezer, in the fridge, on the counter—some looked half eaten. My sister sighed and said she had enough zebra cakes, but I told her it would be good for the boys since they never go bad.

I left Perry with my sister while they started up some banal conversation and went out into the back yard. There was a big white tent set up. I peeked into the entrance. It was empty. I turned around—Marlo was standing beside me. I smiled and closed my eyes.

“Why are your eyes closed?” he asked.

“I’m imagining I’m somewhere else with you,” I replied.

“I know what you mean,” he said, and I felt frighteningly close to him

Still somewhat visible from the house, Marlo forcefully turned me back toward the entrance of the tent and forced me on the ground. We’re fucking and he’s pulling my

head up by my hair, ordering me to repeat my mantra. I repeat, "I'm repeating my mantra. I'm repeating my mantra..."

He pulls my head further back and shoves his tongue down my throat as I repeat my mantra. I choke on his tongue and he finishes.

We both get up and adjust ourselves, now in full view of the house and I realize what I have done. I am filled with dread that Perry saw us.

January 30th, 2010

I dreamt I was in the shower grieving over the death of my husband, whom I recognized then, but not now. I'm hiding from my children. The water turns to blood. Scalding. Nauseating.

I wake up screaming, startling my husband. He tries to comfort me. I go to the bathroom and wash my face. The blood is running down my legs. I look up in the mirror and, with pain and despair, I realize that I am losing a child.

I collapse to the floor.

I wake slowly, surrounded by off-white. I blink and adjust to the fluorescent lights. I am restrained to the bed. I begin to cry and scream.

I remember blood first. My own blood, then his. His more than mine. A knife in my hand, and I don't know how it got there. But it's bloody. There's blood everywhere.

All over the sheets. And I just washed them yesterday. Sick of his smell invading my dreams, my body. I vomited and stop crying.

XV. ROMAN

I wonder if butterflies know where they've been. I wonder if caterpillars know what's coming.

"Hey." Diko exits onto the front porch with a cup of Columbian coffee and sits next to Roman.

You get used to one way of life: crawling in the trees with an abundance of legs and eating from an abundance of leaves. Then, one day you feel so tired you weave yourself a comfy little cocoon and go to bed early. Roman is smoking a cigarette. He looks over at Diko and nods.

"I slept with him last night." Diko takes a sip.

The next thing you know, you've broken into the light with a pair of wings. How long has it been? Hours? Days? Weeks? I suppose it depends on the species. "Perry," Roman is not asking.

"Perry," Diko confirms.

"Is he still inside?" Roman turns toward the door as if Perry might be standing there, listening.

"No, he had a bad come down."

Roman turns back toward the road and takes another drag. *You can barely fly of your own will, you're so new and light. You're not as grounded as you used to be.*

"Was he worming?"

"No. I switched him to E."

Suddenly the wind sweeps you away. You don't know anyone. You don't know yourself. Where is your mouth? Where do you go? "Oh" Roman says, and Diko feels how irresponsible she must seem to him.

Two cop cars pull up in front of the house. Diko quietly says, "Shit," putting her coffee cup down and quickly walking inside to clean up from last night. She leaves Roman by himself. It is the last time they will ever see each other.

At least the flowers seem more attractive.

XVI. FUNG WAH

Diko is the last to board the Fung Wah bus at South Station, just outside of Chinatown. The Lucky Star, Fung Wah's top competitor, idles at the next gate. Both busses run every hour on the hour from Boston to New York for \$15 dollars. Both companies violate major safety codes and have been involved in fatal accidents. It's also rumored that both companies are run by opposing gangs that aren't afraid to kill in broad day light. Six in one, half a dozen in the other. For arbitrary reasons that are akin to brand loyalty, Diko always rides Fung Wah.

It's nearing noon on January 30th, a Saturday. Normally, Diko likes to ride out on weekday mornings, when the bus is less crowded and she's almost guaranteed two seats to herself in the back. Circumstances are different and the bus is packed today. Diko spies the only seat available and situates herself.

Her neighbor is talking on the phone. A young man, perhaps in his mid-thirties, smartly dressed in fitted pants and a turtleneck sweater. A lean build, tan skin, thick hair. He looks familiar. His voice, his language sounds familiar. The man spoke softly, sweetly. Diko thought she heard some Russian words, but she wasn't sure.

The man turns to Diko as he puts away his phone. Diko realizes she has been staring at him.

"Hello." The man smiles.

“Hi,” Diko says nervously, impulsively nodding her head in the young man’s direction and then turning back toward the front of the bus. The last thing she wants is an extended and awkward exchange for 4 and a half unescapable hours.

She feels a tap on her shoulders. *God damnit.* The young man is holding out a banana in his left hand, another banana rests on his lap in his right hand. Diko examines the situation. The man is undoubtedly from the Soviet Union. He’s not Russian. He’s not Georgian. He might be Muslim. What does it mean when a Muslim man offers you a banana? Is it some sort of sexual innuendo? Will he ask for my hand in marriage by the end of this trip?

Diko’s stomach groans, *OOOoooooooooO.* She hasn’t eaten today. She realizes she didn’t eat much yesterday. She smiles, embarrassed.

“You’re hungry.”

“Yea.”

“Take the banana. I have plenty.” He opens up a small, black duffle bag by his feet. A bunch of bananas in a plastic bag rest on top a pillow of clothes.

“Thanks.” Diko reluctantly takes the banana.

The young man points to himself, “Ramil.”

“Thanks, Ramil...Diko.”

“Diko! Garmarjoba, Diko!” This man is far too excited for life.

“You speak Georgian?” Diko is surprised. No one’s ever guessed her ethnicity. She’s not even sure she’s ever met anyone not from Georgia who actually knows the country Georgia exists, let alone the language.

“No. But I traveled there once, years ago. A beautiful country. Were you born there?”

“Yea. But I left when I was very young. I don’t speak much Georgian either.”

“Po-russki?”

“Ne mnozhka. Mama moja russkaya.”

“Aha. So your father is Georgian!” Ramil is delighted by his deduction skills.

“Yes.” Diko suddenly feels her gut sink. She looks down at the banana. She doesn’t want to talk anymore about her family.

Ramil looks at the banana. “You should eat the banana. It’s going to be a long trip.” He begins to unpeel his banana as encouragement.

“Thanks.” Diko unpeels her banana and takes a bite.

“I am from Kazan. Have you heard of Kazan?”

“You’re Tatar.” Some ancient, orthodox ancestor momentarily possesses Diko with a sense of mistrust. She shakes it off and continues to eat her banana.

“Yes. Born and raised in Tartarstan. Now I live in Moscow.”

“Moscow? What do you do in Moscow?” Moscow—an expensive, large, and very xenophobic city; a place for ethnic Russians born into money.

“I am a doctor. I live there with my wife and children.”

“No shit?...Sorry. I just...I’m just surprised” *that you haven’t been beaten to death. Damn it, say something normal.* “Of all the buses...why are you in Boston?”

“I have cousins in New York. I’m staying with them for a couple weeks, but I wanted to see more of America. They told me about this bus, so I decided to take a little trip.”

“Alone?”

“Alone.”

“How do you like Boston?”

“It’s smaller than New York. A bit easier to walk around. But it’s still a city. I prefer to take vacations with my family in the country. The city...any city, any place, has its own energy. But the city has an unnatural energy, it’s too big, too many, it feeds off the people and it drains them. The pace wears people out. It’s like an overactive heart, and we’re the cells being pumped through the system too fast. We wear out faster. We die faster.”

“Yea.” Diko finishes her banana. Ramil happily extends his palm toward her, and she drops the peel into his hand. He throws it into the plastic bag with the other bananas. “Thanks.”

“Do you live in New York?”

“No. Well, yea. I’m moving back to New York. My mom lives there.”

“Is she happy you’re coming home?”

“I haven’t told her yet.” *I’m not sure I’m going home yet.*

“I’m sure she’ll be happy. Mothers are happy when their children are near.”

And fathers? Diko raises her eyebrows, “Mhmm.”

“You and your mother should come over sometime to my cousins’. You can brush up on your Russian and enjoy some good Tatar hospitality.” Ramil rummages through his black duffel bag and pulls out a pen and a business card. “I’ll write my cell phone number and my address here on the back.”

Diko takes the card and puts it in her wallet. "I'm sure she would love that."
I'm sure she'd spit on the very idea of me sitting on a Chinese bus next to a Tatar,
sharing bananas. "I'm going to take a little nap, if you don't mind. I've had a rough
couple of days."

"Not at all."

Diko pulls a xanax from the change purse of her wallet and drops it at the
back of her throat and swallows.

XVII. THE PEOPLE EXCHANGE

Julia leaves for Samara, Russia in early February. She intends to stay through the end of June, studying Russian language and immersing herself in Russian culture through a work study position in a renowned veteran's hospital. The study abroad program is not directly linked through I.M.U., but through a multi-national non-profit organization called "The People Exchange." Normally I.M.U. is notoriously strict about keeping students within the confines of the opportunities offered through the university, but the powers that be in the administrative office have agreed to accept the extra-university credits Julia will receive as a consolation for their turning the Russian house into the Chinese house, and also combining the Slavic Studies Department in with the Romance Languages Department as if that made sense.

Julia travels alone. She prefers to be alone, outside of her comfort zone, blazing paths for the future Slavic studies student's at I.M.U. She does not know much about Samara, other than the fact that is a relatively large and industrial city. But it is certainly not Boston, U.S.A. It is a place where she has yet to make an egregious mistake in the form of a relationship. It is a new place, a new opportunity to be seen as the person she wants to be.

Julia's plane arrives past midnight at an unbelievably small airport. The passengers are released onto the tarmac, where they are directed onto a bus that is too small for everyone and their luggage and taken them to a terminal that is basically an empty warehouse with a couple of benches. Julia is picked up by her

host “dad,” Sasha, who turns out to be 26 years old. He is accompanied by his friend, Nikolai, who has a car. Sasha once had a car, but then he drunkenly drove it off the road. His license was revoked and he couldn’t afford to fix the car. Sasha does not tell Julia this.

Sasha is learning English and asks Julia basic questions about her travel, her place of origin, and her studies. He speaks better English than Julia speaks Russian, and so the conversation continues in English. Nikolai does not speak much English besides “Hel-lo” and “Haow aa you?”; he intermittently laughs during Sasha and Julia’s dialogue at the sheer absurdity of the syllables.

Once home, Sasha gives Julia a tour of the apartment: one kitchen, yellow in color and 70s in style, two bedrooms, one with a small laundry-balcony—Julia’s room, the other, unremarkable—Sasha’s room, a bathroom with a tiny shower, toilet, and a rug in the image of a teddy bear’s head. There is also a living room, but this room has been converted into a bedroom for the other American in the program that will arrive in a few days. The door to that room is closed. Sasha thinks it’s rude to enter someone’s room without their permission. “We’ll have to wait for our friend Jeremy to arrive.”

Sasha invites Julia to unload her belongings and join him in the kitchen for a welcome dinner. Julia is not necessarily hungry, but she knows this is customary—you must eat when you have arrived at your destination, and then you can sleep. Sasha fries some already cooked spaghetti with vegetables, ground beef, and some clear oil on the stove. He brings out a small box of red wine. They partake in the meager feast and continue politely to talk about basic themes. Music comes up.

Sasha really likes Radiohead. Julia likes Radiohead too. Sasha goes to his room, brings out his laptop, hooks it up to the Ethernet (which is only available through a single cable in the kitchen) and they watch YouTube videos of Radiohead live and comment on how amazing Thom Yorke is.

After a couple of glasses of boxed wine, Sasha begins to sing along to the videos unabashedly. Julia appreciates this, and, despite his accent, he manages to pull off a close approximation to Yorke. The moment is surreal, in Samara. Julia is filled with a good feeling about her decision to come here. She sleeps well that night.

In the morning, Elena arrives from “The People Exchange” office in Samara to greet Julia at Sasha’s apartment. Sasha is gone for the afternoon to go job hunting. Julia does not know how long he has been unemployed for, but Sasha seems like an enthusiastic and hard-working person, so Julia has high hopes for him.

Elena looks like a beautiful little alien: she is small, taut, with far-set, blue eyes and wild, tight brown curls that dance on her head as she talks. She informs Julia of her placement at the Hospital for Veterans of War, which starts the following Monday. She should report to the head doctor, Meinkoff, tomorrow at 8am. Julia asks if Meinkoff is German. Elena looks at Julia like she has three heads and informs her that Meinkoff is a Russian name, and then continues to inform Julia that she will be working at the hospital from 8am-4pm Monday through Friday. Russian lessons will be Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6-8pm.

Julia is pleased. She asks Elena where the nearest internet café is, so she can e-mail her friends and family about her safe arrival. She does not feel comfortable

using Sasha's computer without his permission, nor is she entirely confident in her ability to use the Ethernet. Elena directs her, and Sasha spends the equivalent of 2 dollars for an hour of time online. She emails Marlo and her mother the basics: safety and excitement, though missing home. She resists checking her junk mail until the very end.

*

You're always in my thoughts and are so important to me.

PerryS

XVIII. PO-RUSSKI

Roman,

I met with a Tartar on the Fung Wah bus. He gave me a banana. He told me the city was bad for one's health—it steals the energy from people. How's prison? How's your energy?

I live nowhere. Everywhere. I didn't bring anything with me to New York, except for some money* and a book—the short stories of Nickolai Gogol. I'm reading "Nevsky Prospect." I love that story.

"It seemed as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed these pieces together with no rhyme or reason."

Yesterday I slept on the subway. Pretty cool. It was warm. It's cold outside. Terribly cold. Is it warm in prison? I hope it's warm.

Write me at the P.O. box listed. It's safe.

Write me!

Diko

* The money is yours. I took your stash before I left. I won't spend too much of it without your permission. I can sleep in subways.

XIX. CULTURE SHOCK

Monday morning Julia arrives at the Hospital for Veterans of War. It is surrounded by a thick stone wall with a single gated entry. A large rocket looms over the wall from inside the compound. Two armed guards in camouflage stand at the gate by a little kiosk with blue-tinted windows. Julia didn't know there would be guards. She approaches them.

"I'm a volunteer. I'm here to work." Julia realizes she has no idea what to say or how to say it.

"You're a what?" one guard asks, incredulously. Both guards look similar: shaved bald and wrinkled like they've been smoking in the sun while drinking vodka since they were twelve. Though, this one is a tad shorter than the other. He seems to be in charge. The other one is eating candy. Maybe that means he's really the one in charge.

"A volunteer...vol-un-teer." Julia wonders if the word means what she thinks it means. Or if she's just saying the English word with a Russian accent.

"Volunteer, Dima. She's one of the volunteers. I think there's supposed to be two or three of them," the one eating candy chimes in, pronouncing the word the same as Julia.

"Do you have I.D.?" the short one asks.

"I have my passport."

“Let me see.” The short one takes the passport into the kiosk and scrutinizes every page, taking notes into a little log book. The tall guard smiles at Julia and silently offers her some candy. Julia takes a piece. The guard nods in approval.

The short one comes out of the kiosk. “You need to get a hospital I.D. for next time, okay?”

“Okay. Thank you.”

“Okay.”

Inside the hospital, Julia experiences the same back and forth: *I'm a volunteer; What?; Vol-un-teer?; Vol-un-teer?; Yes; I don't understand.* It seems as if no one in particular was expecting her, which is odd, since Julia sent a resume and cover-letter in Russian through The People Exchange. Elena informed Julia via e-mail, even before her arrival, that she was *chosen* for a position at the hospital.

“Meinkoff. I need to speak to Meinkoff.” Julia implores a young blonde nurse in the hallway.

“He’s very busy.” She seems to be in a hurry, but notices Julia is on the verge of tears and takes pity. “Why don’t you come with me?”

The young nurse is in charge of some sort of air “terapija.” Old people come into her room and inhale what Julia understands to be a sort of special, wet air. There are five machines, each with a generator the size of a breadbox, and a tube the thickness and length of a garter snake. All the equipment has that left-out-in-the-sun-too-long look. Five or so patients come in at a time, they sit down, they insert

the tube into their mouth or nose, and the nurse times them for 2 minutes. When their two minutes are up, they remove the tubes, thank the nurse, and leave. The next batch comes in.

The nurse tasks Julia with cleaning the removable plastic tips of the tube, which are apparently reusable. Julia is no doctor, nor even a medical student, but she doubts the hygiene of this practice. Still, it's a job, it's a purpose to be here. She washes the tube tips in a small tub of antiseptic fluid and sets them on a white towel to dry. It's all very simple. The nurse praises Julia, and even though Julia knows it means nothing, it helps.

At home, Sasha is drunk. He got the job at the auto-shop last week, just as Julia predicted. But no cars came in.

XX. MARLO, BRIEFLY

Julia,

I miss hearing from you, so I want the internet to get fixed in Samara. I talked with Igor (this dude at a bar) last night about Samara, and I tried to make him teach me some cool Russian, but he said people will like that I speak English. Igor might have been lying to me, but he was a good guy. He helped this really drunk girl Chris was trying to get with into a car and sent her home. Smart move, Igor! He also bummed me some cigarettes.

Please tell me more about your life! I miss hearing about things in e-mails! The phone is good too though I don't know when to call you and I need to find a calling card. Your life is more interesting than mine at this point, so please tell me more! I even like it when you complain about things too. Don't worry about your drinking/smoking I say. I still think you'll be able to replace things, unless you're looking to die, and then you can do that too!

Love,

MARLO

*

Hey, I think maybe you should call me sometime. Or I need to get a new phone card and call you. I'm in desperate need of advice. Or am I? I'm a bit sick and running late for work. I'm usually free after 9pm here. Or make that 10pm. You don't have to call me though.

Julia

*

I'm happy for you that you've found someone in Russia though at the same time unhappy because it means we won't work out. That's fine though. In a way we both knew we were doomed if you were trying to hold on to a manic passion about me and I was making a promise about visiting you that wasn't going to happen. It's hard for me not to be an ass right now.

I just wish you would have told me you had feelings for him or that you would have cut things off with me earlier if you thought there would be a possibility of another person taking my place. Please don't call me melodramatic after this e-mail.

I still love you and I'm here for you, but I can't be in a position where half the time you seem like you Love me. It's hard for me to define this right now since my chest and teeth are hurting and I want to cry I I'm scared you'll show this e-mail to people and show how weak, stupid, and mean I am, but what I mean is that at this point I love you like I love my friends. I will do my best to be there for you whenever you need me. I hope I find someone to make me happy as well.

Love,

MARLO

ps I really don't like that I feel like you clinged to me until someone better came

along. Telling me you were going to save yourself for me on your birthday and saying you loved me and all this really stopped me from looking for someone else. And I know that's ridiculous since I was being ridiculous for believing the things you said when you were drunk, which is most of the time there. But, I'm glad you did tell me because it means that now I can move on.

*

Alright, now that I've calmed down a bit I've realized what an Ass (with a capital A) I'm being. We still are through for now (and I don't know what I mean by that), but you seem like you're happy there as far as I can tell and that's really good for you. It is the place for you right now and that means you should spend as much time there as possible. See if you can get a job or a visa with Denis. Marriage isn't an end or anything. Good luck! Ugh, I hate this position. I feel like a terrible person at the same time that my heart is breaking...

MARLO

*

I can't not think about you. I can't not love you. I can't not wear your sweater all the time and identify our relationship with every song I hear. I didn't wait until "something better" came along before I broke it off, I didn't even break it off. I just told you "I think Denis loves me and I don't know what to do." I don't even know what the hell is going on half the time between us. Though, to be honest, I figured you'd had enough of me and my shenanigans, which at this point (after a day's reflection), is understandable. I asked you to call me because I wanted to know how

you felt. And I cried because I figured you'd already become numb and you didn't care. And I knew you weren't going to come to Russia...and I realized this country, whether I like it or not, has become a major part of my life...and if I can't share that with you, then that's a bad sign. But on the other hand, I don't want to doom myself to something or someone just because I don't know what else to do at this point. I feel like I'm drowning in a lot of uncertainties about myself and other people, and I'm just desperately clinging to anyone who's willing to show me some compassion (and maybe devotion). I don't know. I'm sorry. I really am. I don't want you to be in pain. I can't really say I want you to find someone else, because I'm jealous and insecure and insane, but at least you're moving to New York...so you'll be a couple hundred miles closer.

You keep saying I'm happy, but I don't really know. I've been crying a lot. A lot a lot. Like every day a lot. Sometimes I don't really know why. Just something welling up inside me and everything collapsing around me and I just don't want to exist and deal with everything that happened and everything that will happen. If that makes sense. But at least I'm kept relatively busy here. And I'm tired at night. I just don't want to stagnate...

Bah, I'm going off on a tangent about myself when I meant to comfort you and thank you for taking care of me. See, there. I'm crying. Eight words made me cry. Thank you for taking care of me. I don't get it. I feel like I'm dying and saying goodbye to you. Fuckin' a. Well, maybe I should say goodbye. But I don't want you to worry about me. And I don't want you to save me (though sometimes I think I do). I just

want you to be happy, and I want to be happy for you. Ok? I'm going to go lie down
now.

Love,

Julia

SUDDEN ONSET

A Chapbook by Julia Stein

I. Davaitе Posnakomites' (Let's get acquainted)

Dimon at the Door

The Dreamer answers the intercom:

"Hello?"

"Who is this?"

Dimon knows it is the Dreamer,

he has a plan for her.

The Dreamer knows it is Dimon,

the macaroni and meat

she ate for dinner

decides to perform

acidic somersaults up her esophagus.

"The Dreamer. Who is *this*?"

"Dreamochka. Eto ya, Dimon!

Don't you recognize my voice?"

~~"Of course I do.~~ What do you want?"

"Is Daniil home?"

~~"You know he's not.~~ Nyet."

"Will he be back soon?"

~~"You know he won't be.~~ Nyuh-uh."

"I see.

You see, Dreamochka
I've forgotten this thing
there where you are
where Daniil lives. Daniil and I
are very good friends.
I am just passing through ~~from the other side of town,~~
just five minutes
quick
I need to get this thing.
You see?"
"A-ga..."
"Can I come up? Five minoot."
"Okay."
BUZZZZZZZ...BOYUSSSSSSS'.

Dimon and the Dreamer

Dimon enters and compliments the Dreamer. He looks for the thing he needs. He looks in the kitchen. He looks in Daniil's room. He looks back in the kitchen, under the stool. He looks for five minoot. He does not find the thing, but things are things, and this is no big deal.

He suggests, since he is there, and she is there, and he has Spice, that they smoke up a bit before he leaves. The Dreamer is skuchno. She likes being complimented, and there is something attractive in the way Dimon is nihilistic and always wears big, black headphones.

Dimon and the Dreamer and Daniil

As Dimon prepares a makeshift piece from an empty liter bottle, Daniil returns home—unexpectedly early and upset. He is drunk (this is not unexpected). He is unattractive in the way he is wary and always wears skull caps that are too small for his head.

They all smoke Spice together.

They are all terribly high. The High is Terrible.

Silentium.

In a sign of solidarity against Dimon, Daniil invites the Dreamer to sit on his lap. Or perhaps the Dreamer just sits on his lap. In any event, a wall is built and Dimon disappears.

Daniil and the Dreamer and the Terrible High.

Without a witness, the Dreamer begins to panic. She does not want to be alone with Daniil and the Terrible High. People are hurt. Hurt people hurt people.

“What’s wrong?”

“Boyus”

“Of what.”

“Of you.”

The Dreamer eyes a knife on the kitchen counter. Daniil eyes the same knife. They eye each other.

“Did you let him in?”

“Da.”

“You don’t do that anymore.”

The Dreamer eyes a frying pan on the stove. The frying pan is a good choice in defense against the knife.

“I want to be alone.”

“I want to come with you.”

The host follows the dreamer into her room. She lies on the bed. He lies on the floor.

The Dreamer dreams of her dead aunt trying to make a snow angel in the middle of traffic and wakes up v depressii...

The Dreamer v Depresija

The next morning the Dreamer smokes a cigarette on the balcony. She notices The One Who Got Away's sweater hanging on the cupboard; it is forgotten, and subsequently frozen. She sits down on a stool to focus better, filling in the fabric with his flesh. But she has forgotten his flesh, and the sweater is frozen anyway.

The Dreamer showers to wake up. In the shower, she remembers how they used to bathe each other. The One Who Got Away was morally opposed to jizzing on her after a blow job, even in the shower, when it would have been easy to clean up.

The Dreamer sighs into the streaming water. She wants to be able to love someone she doesn't wind up despising.

II. Davaite peremshaetes' (Let's intermingle)

Daniil and the Dreamer Discuss Baptism

Daniil and the Dreamer are splitting a two liter bottle of beer into two tea cups. A plastic bag of salted fish between them. The salted fish look like papaya, but they taste nothing like papaya.

A religious man in a big, coniferous hat comes on the TV screen. He tells the nation-folk (the Dreamer points at Daniil), the lay (neither point), the lost (Daniil and the Dreamer point at each other), the drunk and getting drunker (neither point), that the mighty reka has been blessed. The waters are holy for 24 hours. Anyone who bathes in the reka, in the next 24 hours, will be blessed.

"Why only 24 hours?"

"The reka runs fast. The blessing wears off, I guess."

"That makes sense...he must be terribly powerful."

"Who?"

"The religious man in the big, coniferous hat. To bless the whole reka. Doesn't it run from T---- to A----?"

"Yea." *Daniil fills up the Dreamer's tea cup.* "He does it every year after Novii God. I've always wanted to go."

"Don't people die?" *The Dreamer fills up Daniil's teacup.*

“Some people. Foolish people who get too drunk and go out at night. They slip under the ice.”

“Let’s wait until morning. I’d like to go too.”

The Dreamer thinks to invite Dimon. But Dimon always sings Hava Nagila when he gets drunk.

Danil and the Dreamer Experience Domestic Violence

The Dreamer asks Danil, “Why are you drunk?”

“Because I am stuck.”

“Does drinking make you unstuck?”

“No.”

The Dreamer tries to take the bottle away from Danil, but Danil grabs a hold of the Dreamer’s wrist. The Dreamer releases the bottle, but Danil does not release the Dreamer’s wrist.

“Do you love me?” *Danil asks the Dreamer.*

“Of course I do. Please let go of me.”

“How do you love me?”

“Like a friend. Please let go of me.”

“Will you marry me?”

“If you want. Please let go of me.”

“No. I want you to want it.”

“I want to go home. Please let go of me.”

“This is your home.”

“This is a mistake.”

Daniil takes the bottle and cracks the Dreamer in the jaw.

Daniil and the Dreamer go to the Dentist

“Have you ever seen a UFO?”

The Dreamer considers this an inappropriate question for the Dentist to be asking.

Even if it wasn't inappropriate, her gums were full of local anesthetic and surrounded by cotton balls.

“He means a flying tarelka.” *Daniil strains to peer over the Dentist and down the Dreamer's throat.* “You don't suppose that's too much blood?”

“I mow wad he mean.” *The Dreamer savors the blood pooling at the back of her throat and swallows.*

“Please don't talk. You've reopened the wound.”

III. The Origin of Dimon

It seemed as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed these pieces together with no rhyme or reason.

Long Before Dimon

A fortress was built on the reka back when danger could be warded off by stone walls. This fortress had the same name as a city several hundred miles from where the fortress was built. The city in which the fortress was built had a completely different name than the fortress. Consequently, people were confused.

*Several hundred years later, in the age of No-More-Confusion, a dam and a hydroelectric station combined to form a reservoir. The reservoir covered both the fortress and city of long before Dimon. A new city emerged. The city was named *Something Foreign, Fast and Greasy*. People were still confused, but they were too embarrassed to say so.*

God, or something like that, bore witness to this confusion. It was confusing to him that people would still be confused in the age of No-More-Confusion. God tried to rectify the situation by dividing the city into 3, a holy number with a lot of potential.

“Let the first part of the city be called Car. And let my people make cars there.

Let the second part of the city be called Industry Central. And let my people make ammonia and nitrogen fertilizer there.

Let the third part of the city be called Everything Else That Was Established Already.
I think that is pretty self-explanatory.”

Consequently, a war broke out.

Dimon is Born

Before the war, God invited Dimon Papa and Dimon Mama to move to Car, Something Foreign, Fast and Greasy. He wanted them to make cars and make children that would consequently make cars. Dimon Papa and Dimon Mama did as God pleased. But the cars fell apart on the roadways and the children started exploding in train stations.

Dimon did not explode, but we cannot say the same for his brothers and sisters. It was a very unfortunate affair.

God Has a Back Up Plan

God had a feeling things might not be as peachy as he hoped in Something Foreign, Fast and Greasy. To be honest, he didn't really have any hope for the city. It was more of a side project that took on autonomous momentum. God was pleasantly surprised at the progress his creation was making, so he set them free of his guiding will. This is not to suggest that God did not know the fate of Something Foreign, Fast and Greasy. The

crash and burn was part of the plan. But as a wise man or woman once and forever says: it's about the journey. Not the destination.

Long before long before Dimon, another fortress was built at the convergence of the mighty reka and the not so mighty reka (which was not far from the fortress that was built long before Dimon). God sent a Great Saint to oversee the construction. The Great Saint declared the site the future of a Great City. God was pleased.

The Great City grew on bread and salt and welcomed the poor and rebellious. The bread and salt multiplied and morphed into beer, macaroni, iron, chocolates and matches. The Great City was so great that it was compared to other great cities on the other side of the world (New Orleans and Chicago). Even during the Great War against Dark Forces, the Great City was a beacon of hope and solidarity: a blood stained and bullet ridden flag unwavering.

After the Great War, the Great City was tired of being so great. The citizens of the Great City took a great big nap inside themselves and let some godless Robots run things for a while. The godless Robots had no idea how to run a city according to the needs of human beings, especially when it came to adequate food production. They just made guns and more guns while the sleeping citizens starved (a bunch died). Eventually the Robots had made so many guns, there was nothing left to do but declare war and start firing. A bunch more sleeping citizens died.

When world war became obsolete, the Robots stopped making guns and started making spaceships. The Robots then declared war on the Stars and sent the remainder of sleeping citizens into space.

The Stars did not understand the concept of war. Only infinity and love. Some stars took fancy to the sleeping citizens and accompanied them home. One such star was named Mechtatel', and she very much fancied Daniil's father.

Someone Who Saw Your Father 2 million Years Ago (The Dreamer)

The Citizens Wake Up

Aluminum, Beer and Chocolate. The land of Daniil.

A Dog Bites Dimon

Dimon searches for a synagogue. With the help of the Dreamer, he finds a church. The church is closed. Dimon and the Dreamer climb the fence. A guard dog bites Dimon. Dimon curses Aluminum and life. He leaves the Dreamer.

III. The Dreamer Goes on a Vacation

The Bus Ride There

The Dreamer expresses a desire to leave the Great City. She goes to the bus stop and approaches some bundled up women selling some sad looking vegetables in bowls and jars. She expresses her desire explicitly to them. They tell the Dreamer about a paradise of peace and beauty called Cauldron, where Muslims and Christians live side-

by-side in peace. It is an 8 hour bus trip from the Great City. The last bus leaves at midnight.

The Dreamer goes to the liquor store and buys two bottles of vodka.

The Dreamer returns to the bus stop and waits for the bus to Cauldron. She has 2 bottles to kill.

One bottle later, the Dreamer befriends two alien girls who also express a desire to leave the Great City. They also expressed this desire explicitly to the old women with vegetables. They also bought vodka.

Two bottles later, the bus arrives and the girls sit next to each other. One of the aliens has bleach blonde hair and fluidly opens and closes her fingers on both hands as she talks. It looks like her thoughts are blossoming, which is beautiful. Only, her thoughts leave no impression. The other alien is dressed in dark, man-ish clothing. She is a socialist.

Three bottles later, the Dreamer discusses the inherent flaws of socialism in a volume audible to everyone on the bus.

“People say it’s good in theory. But it’s not even good in theory. Socialism isn’t science!”

The Dreamer walks up to the front of the bus and asks the bus driver to pull over so she can pee. The bus driver tells her to sit down and stop drinking.

The Dreamer sits down and vomits neatly into the plastic cup she had been filling with vodka. The Dreamer falls asleep and the cup falls to the floor.

Cauldron

The city is fairly empty and icy. In order to combat the emptiness and the iciness, the Dreamer and the alien girls go in search of a liquor store.

The Dreamer and the alien girls come across a steep staircase sheathed in ice. The Dreamer does not wish to descend, but the alien girls are convinced that the descent is necessary. Arm and arm, the alien girls begin to make a slow descent. The Dreamer watches.

The alien girls fall down the staircase sheathed in ice.

The Dreamer says out loud, "I should go get help." She does not say this loud enough for the alien girls to hear at the bottom of the steps.

The Dreamer turns around and walks away.

At some point, she comes across a liquor store and buys a bottle of vodka.

An Incident at the Mosque

There is a beautiful mosque in the heart of Cauldron. Some consider it to be the heart of Cauldron. The mosque-heart is ancient, surrounded by the graves of what would be the equivalent of Muslim saints. The mosque-heart is open to visitors.

The Dreamer sees the grand dome of the mosque-heart from afar. She walks towards it and desires to see the inside. She approaches the official-looking Muslims at the door.

The Dreamer is denied entry into the mosque because there is a bottle of vodka in her bag.

The River Cauldron

There is a river that runs alongside the mosque-heart. The river is sheathed in ice.

The Dreamer wonders how thick the ice is.

The Dreamer walks out onto the ice until she hears a creak. She begins to jump up and down with the full weight of her body and bag (which contains the bottle of vodka). A few more creaks, but no cracks.

The ice is unfortunately thick today. It is time to go home.

The Bus Ride Back

The bus is nearly empty. A young, handsome Muslim decides to sit next to the Dreamer. He offers her a banana.

The Dreamer is fairly ignorant of Islam. She wonders if this is some sort of symbolic exchange. She is also very hungry. Even if she wasn't hungry, she'd take the banana and the symbolic exchange along with it.

"Thank you." The Dreamer takes the banana.

"You're welcome." The young, handsome Muslim looks indicatively at the banana in the Dreamer's hand, and then at the Dreamer's mouth.

The Dreamer takes the hint and unpeels the banana. She takes a bite. It certainly tastes like banana.

"Mmmm." The Dreamer says.

The young, handsome Muslim is satisfied and smiles. He too begins to eat a banana.

The Dreamer Returns and Immediately Regrets Everything

The Dreamer returns home to find Daniil drunk.

Daniil produces a little plastic strip with two pink lines.

“I found this in your room.”

“Why did you go into my room?”

“Dimon said he left his cigarettes on the balcony.”

“Oh.”

“What were Dimon’s cigarettes doing on the balcony?”

“He was probably smoking.”

The Dreamer takes the little plastic strip with two pink lines and goes to the balcony.

She throws the little plastic strip with two pink lines out the window.

IV. The Future is Foregone

The Dreamer and the TV

The Dreamer drinks a can of koktail alone in front of the TV.

A series of Spanish soap operas pass by. The soap operas are dubbed, but the Spanish is just as loud.

Nothing makes sense. Everyone’s getting slapped.

“This is terrible. Where is Daniil?”

Daniil is at his new job. The autoshop down the road. No autos have come today.

“I bet he’s skuchno.”

The Dreamer is skuchno.

The TV is terrible.

The Dreamer goes into the kitchen and gets the frying pan. The frying pan is a good defense against the TV.

The Dreamer returns to her room and takes a swing at the TV screen. The echo is awful, alien, hollow. The TV does not crack. The Dreamer tries once more. Her ears ring. The TV is intact.

The Dreamer goes to the balcony and throws the frying pan out the window.

The Dreamer v Depresii

The Dreamer smokes a cigarette on the balcony. She notices his sweater hanging on the cupboard; it is thawing. She sits down on a stool to focus better, filling in the fabric

with his flesh. The fabric fills. The sleeve extends, a hand pours out, points out the window, where the frying pan has gone.

“Would you like to go to America?”

“Da.”

“Then go.”

The Dreamer is svobona v Amerki.

EPILOGUE

Dear Danil,

Forgo. Forgive me. I always knew I would fly.

Two million years ago your father saw me.

He fell in love with my tongue and my flying tarelka.

Today he drinks alone along the shore of the mighty reka
and keeps my dreams safely guarded in the old dacha.

Please kiss him for me.

Hug,

The Dreamer

PS He followed me here.