

01.

On this last day, which is also all days, I take my lunch at a time that doesn't matter and sit on the curb outside the office. Across from me lies a road in disrepair, marked by potholes. No one is coming to fix it. This was not told, but implicitly understood. It is a road among roads that constitutes both the boundaries and the entirety of the town itself. It could be anywhere, and so it is nowhere. No one passes through because there is nowhere to pass through.

A sudden desire to re-stage a scene I once saw:

I always know where I am by the way the road looks. Like I just know that I've been here before. I just know that I've been stuck here, like this one fucking time before, you know that? Yeah. There's not another road anywhere that looks like this road, I mean exactly like this road. It's one kind of place, it's one of a kind. Like someone's face. Like a fucked up face...

A colleague is sat next to me. Inside, she never speaks much, preferring to carry out her responsibilities in silence. I do the same. Together we circle endlessly around the Dust Free Room, but we are never let inside. I do not know what we have done to receive this punishment, but surely the sin is commensurable.

On this last and only, eternal day, she says, waving her hand in an encompassing gesture outwards toward the road: *This reminds me of the time that I died.*

Stilled as if in company of a skittish animal-- both me and the stroad and the container that holds us but does not carry us, does not allow for transit, which in itself implies a door/a window/an out-- we all wait for her to continue. And she does:

I was in the hospital, best place to die, apparently, and I didn't know it and they didn't know it but I had a uterine fibroid tumor. I fucking bled out on the toilet! I was medically dead.

And in a time that was not time and a space that was not space, I saw this never-ending, empty road. The weather was imperceptible, but I understood it to be summertime. Endless summer vacation! The sky was blue and clear. It felt like being in the womb or something, with no distinction between skin and not-skin. There weren't any other signs of life that I could see, just the asphalt and the sky.

How bittersweet, that all which is generally relegated to the edges of perception is rendered most stark in its absence.

In some amount of what we might call time, I see a man walking towards me. I tell him, I'm so glad to see you. I was really getting scared. And he says to me, Why don't we sit on the side of the road?

And so we sat and talked, and I'm no storyteller, you know, but even if I was, there aren't words that could give voice to what was said. I ask him every question I ever thought of and he tells me every answer, that kind of thing. And maybe the information was something I had to sacrifice, in order to return.

This world without shadows... it calls upon some distance, measured in time, that can only ever hope to be approximated, and a voice of remembrance that can only be brushed against with porous breath, an echo of an echo of an...

Him: It's about time you get going back.

She: Back? Back where?

H: Back.

S: No, I don't want to go back. It's too scary. It is too painful.

H: If I promise you everything will be okay, will you go back?

S (hesitant): Well, I don't know.

And then I woke up, and I got a bill, and all that pain and nothingness cost more than a degree in philosophy.

02.

This is the last day for many, but not for us. For this is not our voice, or anyone's voice, but the voice of the record. Do you feel my gestures, their reverberations?

I've made up my mind to follow you anywhere. There has got to be more than this, and if there isn't, I want to find out with you.

The little things I keep around provide me with a connection to you. Remember that even when we are apart, we are always connected by underground wires.

I'm glad you're here (for now) and that we are together. We should use the time we have left. Do you want to write a script? Ok.

EXT. NIGHT

(Commanding) Dust circles, clockwise and peripheral.

INT. _____

Circle thwarted, intensifying spiral.

[and so desire draws a small circle, enclosing its victims in their own private universe]

What is the value of I ? And I told you and you told me for the nth time that the best thing about me is you and it makes me feel good to know that because we're dying and we're I and I don't have to care about our value anymore. What is the word made flesh ?

And that last day, at the end of the Millenium, began the end of being born and the start of dying. There were fireworks that sounded like bombs but looked like stars and the dog was so scared that she threw up in her cage.

03.

On the last day, before I know it as such, I stare at the last balloon left from a colleague's going-away party. It rocks back and forth beneath an air vent hidden just around the corner.

A security guard that I do not recognize arrives, sopping wet, to ask if he can hang a flyer in the lobby. He should know that we are prohibited from hanging anything at all, and because the structure does not allow for windows, it would seem to be a futile effort to advertise here. I tell him as much, but he insists on leaving it anyway. His long coat is dripping on the floor and I can hear it amplified because the lobby has been so empty and quiet save for the hum of the air conditioner.

He turns to leave but hesitates, seeming to register the balloon in the corner.

Do you want to hear a joke? He asks

Sure.

What is the similarity between a balloon floating in mid air and a vagrant?

I don't know.

Guess.

A long pause. I feel a bit uncomfortable under his stare. I really don't know.

They both have no visible means of support!

He doesn't laugh or even smile, but gives me a wink and I smile but it's not by choice.

In the absence of the sopping wet drip sound, I feel the hum of the A.C.'s machinic breath within my own, and I can almost imagine a word, or a letter, or a blank in the shape of a letter, forming from a prolonged accumulation of something singular layered on top of something else that is the same but not quite-- not yet. Some barrier: I is the thing between me and it. I remember reading once that Imagined sounds vibrate the inner ear too. An echo of an echo of an...

First the drop, then the sensation: humming, circular, and strange.

04.

At the end, I'm asked to fill out a survey. My testimony will be used to make sure that the show continues on forever, that the actors will play out the script over and over and over again. Maybe for every single person in every place in the entire world, to create in us a container for its memory so that it will never die. And also maybe generate a profit-- no, a purpose-- no, a value. The end is just the beginning, I am told, and if we make new containers maybe we will never die. Maybe we will have a purpose, a wholeness, an inextricable value, in eternity. *But isn't wholeness the same as death?*

In the survey, I write that I heard about the show from a flyer that I saw plastered on the boarded-up windows of a theater that I could have sworn was open the last time I walked past. How long had it been since I went to see any show? Too long; a distance measured in time...

The flyer intrigues me because I recognize the words, formed in simple black type upon a smooth white sheet. The recognition comes less from one particular remembrance than a reassemblage of them. It says:

The Voyager Theater needs you! This is a call for any and all artists-- working or hopefuls. The one and only call is today! If you miss your chance now, you miss it forever! If you think of your future, you should be one of us! Everyone is welcome! Our theater can use everyone and find the right place for anyone! But hurry, because it is the last day! At midnight the doors will be shut forever and never open again! The Great Theater calls to you! Will you pick up?

Just when I thought it was too late for me.

And so I tear the last slip off the bottom of the flyer, upon which is written a phone number that directs me to an automated voice message that gives me an address.

I decide to join the show, which may be the last show, inside a red and white star-striped circus tent which has no windows or doors to close forever and never open again. I watch the actors act and the puppets dance and a young girl recites a poem. It's an ode to The Tent-- a motif which reappears throughout the show, serving as both the setting and a prop, used the way one might wave a flag, or a ribbon in rhythmic gymnastics.

To be here is to remember something long forgotten, to carry out an automatic gesture with full intention, attention, and force: to finally follow through.

We're coming to the end, and I'm running out of characters. But I can at least paraphrase the poem that I recite, which goes like: ode to the tent...who would choose you..the unhoused, the protester, the refugee, the student...who would destroy you...

The show ends with fireworks and the atmospheric rumble of a storm.

05.

At the end of an era, I spent a lot of time as a dog.

I imagined that I was a dog in space, my humble spacecraft a camping tent. My father bought it, and said that we might go camping one weekend, but he couldn't get off work and so instead he set it up for me in the middle of the room and from that point on I never wanted to leave it. It seemed the perfect container for all that I imagined but could not touch, could not make real.

Seeing as I was all alone there, I had a lot of time to think. I can tell nothing of these thoughts, because I understand nothing, and it is more like the thoughts are telling me: entities made manifest. I can tell no thoughts of mine, but for narrative purposes I can tell of the record, which says:

From this vantage point I finally see that the light of the stars is a dead light. I am *here* and you are *there*, and I repeat this phrase infinitely, but without repetition. The read on the speedometer is 18,000mph.

From this vantage point I see a woman sitting so still against the wall of a structure without doors and without windows, in a place that could be any place, and from one minute to the next, her *Here* is an approximate 16 miles away, not accounting for the Earth which moves around the sun which moves through the solar system which moves through the galaxy which moves through some imperceptible but incessant expansion with an indifference that could be called brutal, violent, death-giving, and totally alive.

In this space craft-- a structure with no doors and no escape valve, but many many windows-- I see outside a cluster of stars shaped exactly like my favorite toy left on planet Earth, and I'd been longing for it just seconds before my eyes registered its likeness in the patterns laid out before me.

The cage rattles rhythmically, reminiscent of an automaton's heartbeat. I would like to place my cheek upon its breast. It is an inborn trait, to seek out the calming effects of another's heartbeat.

I will start with the facts, so perhaps you can remember easier: I am passive and obedient, but still I dream. I bark a lot, but I bite only myself. My name is long forgotten. I was chosen to die.

There is only one truth in fiction, and in its revelation we find an answer to the question: whom among us is innocent?

06.

After, on my way home, I see a man-- shirtless and delayed, wandering at an intersection. He grips my attention, but I can't look at him directly. Coatless figure, skinny arms and off-kilter gait,

I feel that if I look at his face I will see only a blank. I convince myself that it won't be true so long as I don't look, and so I avert my eyes. Observation changes the outcome, I tell myself.

I can tell it had been raining before. I stare at the soggy sunbleached remnants of to-go cups, packaged foods, broken bottles, deflated balloons gathered alongside the road where the sidewalk tapers off and I have to begin walking on the asphalt. Billboard skeletons through which I see only the white sky. Crosses on the side of the road leading towards my fathers' house, in memory of two people stabbed to death inside the grocery store a month prior. Every piece of trash, every walk home, every road, every day is the same. But there is no repetition.

The only book in this house is in the bathroom and it is supposed to help pass the time on the toilet, waiting to shit or die. I find this book to be the only distinguishing element that separates *Here* from purgatory. I say purgatory and not hell, because hell is here on Earth, and we are dying forever, and in hell at least there are stories that help constitute the Forever.

I open up the shit book, and the page I turn to begins with a joke: *Why is a dog like a tree? Because they both lose their bark once they're dead.*

07.

In the end, why not at least act at all times as though I have hope? If not for I, then maybe for something else-- something carried within the gestures of persistent failure and reach.