



June of 2020

a quarantine journal by
DOUGLAS W. MILLIKEN



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This limited-edition book was created as part of a fund-raising effort for **Black Girl in Maine**, a project founded by educator, activist, and storyteller Shay Stewart-Bouley as a means “to share insight and commentary on diversity issues ranging from race to class, gender relations to sexual orientation, workplace issues to lifestyle choices.”

To learn more about Black Girl in Maine and the social-justice work of Shay Stewart-Bouley, please visit:

www.BlackGirlinMaine.com

Thank you for your support!

E-Book Edition

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Foreword

The reason I began keeping a daily journal is because my partner had to stay (and, as of this writing, is still staying) nearly two hours away in New Hampshire to assume the role of an *ad hoc* doula before, during, and after the birth of her sister's second son. A similar arrangement had been in place when the first boy was born two-and-a-half years ago, but that was in the era before COVID-19: it was easier to travel then, and the idea of contagion was mostly limited to avoiding sneezing on the baby when he's passed out on your chest. This time, my partner and I both knew it'd be a long, indefinite stretch before we'd get to see one another again. Months in quarantine had already made me excessively stir crazy, anxious, and depressed despite the medications I take to combat these exact demons, so the knowledge of that continuance while in near-total isolation was a threat I couldn't blindly wade into. Keeping a journal, then—written as a series of formally identical declarative sentences—became a way to not only record something relatively comprehensive of these days of deep solitude during a very surreal historical moment, but to also, if not overcome, at least do battle with my hectoring sorrow. (Also, on a purely domestic note, so much was happening in the garden my partner and I had meticulously, with such joy, constructed together, and if she couldn't be here to see it, I could at least document for her

the botanical phenomena of what happened, and how, and when.)

The reason my journal exists as a published, tangible book has to do with a sense of personal accountability and a responsibility to my community. Our nation was founded upon a monument of repeated atrocities and attempted genocides, the descendants of whose survivors continue to experience variations on these same brutalities, subjugations, and exploitations. The evidence is everywhere, from sports mascots to Birther-ism, Confederate flags to the daily news, yet so many (predominantly white) people cannot see the system of oppression they not only live within but directly benefit from. As an artist, I feel it is my responsibility to use my abilities to help make positive social change, to advocate for those who our society has consistently terrorized, silenced, and ignored. But my talents have limits. I can write narratives that, when successful, make a reader feel the experience of being left out in the cold, of being excluded, of being used. But to write directly about the injustices of our society? Without fail, my tone is always either didactic or aggressive, neither of which is a very good tactic in the pursuit to change people's minds.

And that's fine: it's stupid to expect myself to be good at all things literary. And too, as in any successful movement, there's more than one way to be a participant (the people who congregate in the streets to protest are not necessarily the same people organizing on-the-ground demonstrations, who in turn might not be the people best equipped to speak directly before our legislatures, who in turn might not be the people with the financial backing to post bail for protestors falsely arrested, and so on and so

forth). So I'm contributing in a way that, in my estimation, makes the best use of what I'm good at: I'm sharing my experience of what it feels like for one person to be alive in a summer of loneliness, quarantine, and upheaval, and donating the monies raised in this effort to someone who *can* speak eloquently about social change, who has the skills necessary to educate rather than alienate, and who's doing the work and doing it well with a successful voice and method.

Shay Stewart-Bouley is that person. An educator, a writer, an activist, and a mother, Stewart-Bouley is maybe best known for her blog *Black Girl in Maine*, which began as a means of documenting her experiences as a Black woman living in a very white state and has, over the years, grown into a social-justice platform employing several additional writers of varying intersectional identities. (Also, her TEDx talk “Inequality, Injustice...Infection” is a lightning storm you'd be foolish not to witness for yourself.) One of the things that makes Stewart-Bouley's advocacy work so successful is not just her broad range of knowledge on the subject but also her strength as a storyteller and her ability to harness the sea-changing effect of a good story told well: data points might be the evidence, but the human narrative is the proof. What's more, she accomplishes this, not by successfully managing and dividing the personal from the public, but by sharing them in tandem and, as a consequence, illustrating that the social illness of white supremacy does not just exist in the abstract of culture but in the reality of our homes, among our friends and within our families. She also explores something too often overlooked: the experience and celebration of Black joy. Shay Stewart-Bouley is a dynamic

and dynamizing powerhouse of activism, and it's an honor to have this opportunity to help financially support Black Girl in Maine and maybe introduce her to an audience who otherwise might not know about her or her work.

With all that said, please, enjoy this month-long record of events, keep in mind the unpremeditated nature of journal writing, and support however you can Black Girl in Maine and any other facet of the Black Lives Matter movement, in whatever ways make the most sense for you. As journalist and activist Shaun King says, "The only justice we get is the justice we fight for."

—July 5th, 2020
sheltering-in-place in Saco, Maine



Week 1



1.

The day is a cartoon of a writer in solitude clichéing his hourly time-kill in solitude.

The day is a cartoon because later will be a nightmare.

The nightmare is recognition of the dependence that's disguised when not alone, when not faced with the indefinite hiatus from my partner's presence from one day to the next to the next.

The nightmare is a nation in love with its own cognitive dissonance.

The love is an addiction to breaking its own heart.

The micro and the macro, though, so seldom look the same, no matter how much an atom resembles a solar system.

The atom is not the universe but an atom.

The cat is a tourist in her own surrounding yard.

The yard is the maroon's perimeter where my leashed cat walks me, who is leashed

—This is what passes for exercise in the summer of 2020

—One man and one animal strung ridiculously together with a nylon cord, exploring their external homescape while the partner is away, doing the work that's necessary for necessity.

2.

The day is a hangover due less to tranquilizing doses of bourbon than to the dumbest approach to sleep, which ultimately never comes.

The cat is convinced there's a chipmunk under the stoop because she one time saw a chipmunk under the stoop.

The partner is a mother to her nephew and his mother, taking care of their needs as she awaits a new nephew.

The soundtrack is barely comprehended in the background—hours yet also profoundly missed—it hurts me each time when I realize what I've lost—since every song I forget to hear is also my favorite song
—*The extinct the elect the chosen the true*

*The truth regarding this sequence of words.*ⁱ

The grenade pops out an eye before puking its chemical feather, and I cannot believe, I cannot believe, I cannot believe.

The rubber bullet takes down a child standing alone in a park.

3.

The weather is a flirty thunderstorm that we both know is
not coming over.

The day is a frustrated cat chewing apart a tax document foo-
lishly left out on the table

—Sometimes a metaphor is also a literal truth

—Sometimes I wonder about these cycles of necessity
and destruction I bitch about while neverthe-
less setting in motion

—Regardless, I kinda actually needed that paper the
cat fire-eyed tore to confetti.

The news is a heartbreak I can't begin to articulate yet also a
hope I don't dare to speak.

The soundtrack is the future of punk that never came, with
every single record ending too soon.

The mod wheel controls the sample velocity which in turn
controls the sound that you hear.

The sound that you hear is a man trying desperately to play a
clarinet

—(This is a false correlative:

—The mod wheel is connected to a keyboard

—The clarinet is connected to my face

—Both, though, are sound-makers I'm trying
to play

—The desperation in either attempt is real).

The cat is a need that is obvious and incoherent.

The punch line is a dinner that's really a snack even a child
would recognize as a joke on one's self.

4.

The day's metaphor that is literal is a hornet trapped in a room, hammering its head against the windows while somehow missing—again and again—the one glass sash that is open.

The neighbor says an arepa is “like” a Mexican calzone.

The morning's reports of the previous night are surprisingly few and relatively subdued.

The morning's silence is anything but a comfort.

The pears turn to mush beneath the compost's closing lid.

The cat forgets she's afraid of the outdoors and begs me to set her free

—To hunt down the phantom of an animal she once saw

—To flatten herself in the grass at the sound of a passing car, then freak out, then run.

The partner has an answer I'm waiting to hear.

I'm waiting to turn a stump into a garden.

5.

The chipmunk is a drug the cat can't ignore.

The friend in New Orleans wants to steal my garden, and you know, I'd probably let her do it, if only because allowing her to steal my garden would mean having a chance to see my friend again.

The friend has been gone for almost one year and I miss how time dissolved into a whole lot of nothing much whenever she cracked open the air with her laugh, and I feel like a schmoe for tearing up while I write this simple sentence of love far removed.

The idea of seeing any friend again makes me dizzy with a longing that did not exist before this quarantine year.

The friend in New Orleans tells me

—*I love that gardening is part of your love language*
and how can I deny this fact that's obvious, yeah, yet
I somehow never knew, for behold:

The stump is now a mountainside of dwarfized evergreens

—*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Chirimen'

—*Picea abies* 'Tompä'

—*Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Blue Moon'

knitting roots into the soft rings left exposed when our eighty-foot *Abies balsamea* sheered and collapsed in a windstorm on November 1st, 2019 (the day my oldest sister flew home to the Oregon coast after her annual visit to Maine)

—To memorialize a tree we loved then lost,
we've turned what remains into a forest-in-miniature, a landscape in the
midst of our landscape.

The soundtrack is a dirge of horns and reeds translating a

song written by someone I love.

The translation, of course, is an adaptation: not the thing itself, but a response to the thing, their languages similar yet nevertheless distinct.

The distance, as a consequence, is so great as to be immeasurable—can the message from one ever reach the other?—and my partner is so far away.

6.

The morning is a dove flashing through a diamond of light
before alighting in an ash tree and singing its four-
note song of solitude.

The solitude is broken when another dove so mournfully
from a phone wire sings four notes back.

The solace of doves: who knew?

The new nephew is born at 2:39 PM.

7.

The joke is that, after five months fearing the partner's sister might prematurely enter labor, the new nephew is born one day shy of his original anticipated date.

The joke is that his birth was spurred by the partner's sister low dancing to Lil Jon.

The gratitude is for, in the night: rain at last, storming among the thrashing tree leaves and flashing to illuminate our municipality in quarantine, pounding so hard against the too-dry earth that the drops mostly bead up, collect and roll downhill, form rivers in the streets and whirlpools down the sucking mouths of drains burgling to the sewer, yet not so hard that some—enough—soaks into the ground and the network of roots thirsty for a sip, which most days anyway is all I want: a little water to keep things alive.

The gratitude is for the family that continues to grow

—Makenzie Kay in 1992

—Jameson Joseph in 2006

—Caileb Joseph in 2008

—Jacob Douglas in 2010

—Liam Alexander in 2018

—Linden Olive in 2018

—Aidan Ellis in 2020

even as the world is on fire.

The fear is for the family that continues to grow even as the world is on fire.

The fear is that they'll fuel what's burning instead of fighting to put it out, and in this blindness, themselves be consumed.

The fear is that I'll have helped them do it.

Week 2

8.

The wind through the window like some kind of cool whisper is the kindest touch I've felt in days.

The gossamer lift and banner of the curtains gives shape to this gentle wind in the room.

The *Achillea quinquefolia* open their first white pincushions of stars: tiny *Nubecula Minorae* balanced on shaking stems

—While the marsh marigold rise in a slow-moving tide to flood—to engulf—the feet of our *Hydrangea paniculata*

—While a Philly cop metal-batons a Temple student in the face and entire Seattle neighborhoods disappear in a teargas cloud

—While the mother of two friends dies of cancer in her sleep and neither could be with her while the last of her light burned

—While the cat tries with a worrying desperation to wrap her paw around the handle of my hammer, something dangerous I've left on the table.

The soundtrack is a day-long attempt to escape the anxiety of now.

The soundtrack is an earworm on loop, reminding me of what I already know

—*I think we're alone now...* ⁱⁱ

9.

The dream is of friends and libraries and books—libraries in foreign countries and libraries that double as hospitals, where the books are arcane or being written as they're bound and sometimes, we are the binders—and while we don't wear masks, we do wash our hands after touching any little thing (a handrail, a plastic fork, the key to the elevator) as, like the worst kind of companion, an undercurrent of fear runs hot and cold throughout the scattershot episodes linking together my night, but at least we're not alone.

The dream is a confounding roadmap of desires that makes me miss my friends.

The rubber bullet is the size of your palm and is not made of rubber.

The S.W.A.T. commander in Columbus, Ohio lobbies for the use of deadly force against demonstrating civilians.

The hammer on the table refuses to acquiesce to the persistence of the cat's gripping paw.

The time is only 9:30 AM

—I have not eaten

—I have not dressed

—I have only just gleaned the headlines of the day

—And all I really want to do is vacuum the floors and fold the laundry and listen to the birds outside my windows singing the forgotten history of how the world once was.

The urge for domesticity is a wincing kind of entitlement.

The urge for self-flagellation is a wincing kind of entitlement.

The urge for masturbation, though, is actually kinda okay

—We've all got something we like to play around
with

—And there's really nothing wrong with the most
elementary approach to soothing your frac-
tured self.

The blue jay in a strange flirtation hops from spruce limb to
limb until he's right above me, at which point he
drops—like the most bizarre gift or symbol—a mu-
shroom at my feet.

The Bright Boy live-stream tonight is on fire.

10.

The day marks the disembarkation of my oldest sister from her 15-year home on the Oregon coast, of the transcontinental drive she's about to begin—with or without her son—that will lead her back to the state where she was raised yet to no place she's ever lived, to start a new life here at the edge of another ocean: a sun that rises above the water instead of one that sets.

The timing, it goes without saying, could not possibly be worse.

The timing of the world's windfalls and punishments hasn't ever given a damn, though, about any human's qualitative evaluations.

The hope is that this is the most uneventful road trip of her life.

The memory is ungrounded from place—is similarly detached from time, though I want to guess the summer of 2002—of sitting in an early summer upstairs window and watching the street below, the parked cars shouldered up to the curb and the people now and then passing by on the walk—bricks uneven from the humping roots of elm and maple shrugging up from below—a quiet urban anti-drama unfolding beneath the stippled light littering between the street trees' leaves, branches arching pendulous from one sidewalk to the other in the incidental architecture of a tunnel of green, of green shade, of green, while someplace unseen in some other room, a countertop radio almost too low to be heard plays an NPR interlude performed by Billy Bang.

The way James Baldwin makes me love his characters is un-

like how any other writer can make me love their characters.

The peas in the garden one day make white flowers like ornate folds of Japanese silk, then the next day make of these tender flowers pods no longer than the first joint of my thumb, which by the next day are as long as my middle finger, which by the next day are already too old and fibrous to enjoy.

I put my life into the words and into the ground because where else can this life in me possibly fit into the world?

The scent of peat moss so often finds me—the smell and the memories attached to this smell, somehow comforting in remembrance of cold days at work—when I least expect it, where it shouldn't ever be.

11.

The morning feels like a cloud in the night drifted as a
Tarkovsky-esque vapor through the open windows
of the house.

The morning, again, is the flirtation of a storm that honestly
feels more like a threat.

The protesters who've lost eyes to police "suppression tac-
tics" number at least eight and through social media
have all become friends.

The eight one-eyed protesters have been offered customized
bionic eyes, free of charge.

The notion of a bionic eye—in this moment, to this writer—
is suspect, but I sure do want to believe.

The new nephew, as seen in photographs, looks like an ex-
hausted Wallace Shawn
—(So many new babies look so much like Wallace
Shawn).

The knowledge that someday I'll get to meet and carry
around like a football tucked in the crook of one arm
this eight-pound burpy Wallace Shawn is delightful.

The afternoon makes good on the morning's threat of rain,
setting the propane tanks singing like kettle drums
and driving the cat mad because I've closed all the
windows (her sovereign domain) to keep out the wet
and still, everything inside—this table, this page—
feels partway soaked through from the Tarkovsky
cloud drifting through in the night.

The pale lavender blooms of the *Rhododendron maximum*
shiver beneath their umbrellas of new leaves: lime-
green above the oxidized chromium of old growth
stiff below.

12.

The partner comes home for a visit today.

The partner comes home for a visit today.

The partner comes home for a visit today.

13.

The windows throughout the house each bear a mural of a different galaxy depicted from a lateral point of view—a broad, flat disc tapering at the edges and densest at the center, each stellar system an out-of-focus ovoid blur—incidentally painted by the fastidiously observant/obsessive cat pressing her wet nose to the glass.

The murals are a testament to the persistence of her curiosity regarding the world outside her world.

The murals are a testament to how infrequently we think to wash our windows
—How dope would that be, though, if these were in fact maps of galaxies we've never seen, that we cannot comprehend, that the cat-as-cipher has charted with her wet-ass nose?

The partner sleeps in while the 8 AM squirrels bury their larder among the clover of the lawn, while the breeze makes salutatory ghosts of the curtains, while the cat glowers at me for the grim audacity of my having farted.

The *Seattle Times* reports on a survivor of the corona virus receiving a 181-page hospital bill for 1.1 million dollars.

The mayor of Boston declares racism a threat to public health and reallocates 3 million dollars from the police department's overtime fund: less than 1% of the BPD's annual budget and apparently not quite enough to cover the hospital bills of three survivors of COVID-19.

The partner and I wander the neighborhood, Sherlocking with our noses to track down the source of the most powerful perfume of *Rosa rugosa* threading the bak-

ing air, yet despite our efforts, come up empty handed: the shittiest flower detectives.

The dining room, pointlessly, smells of fresh-cut pine.

The propagandists at FOX News get caught broadcasting lazily doctored images of the same AR-toting asshole superimposed onto multiple and various photographs from Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone to once again and so obviously shift the narrative and pin the violence on the protesters and not the police.

The henna of my partner's hair catches hold of the sun like thieves resplendent in the copper they steal and it's all I can do to not bury my face in the solace of her locks and deny the existence of any world beyond the scent of her, the warmth of her, the feel of her.

The irises and lysimachia and tradescantia get divided and transplanted less out of direct necessity than as distraction when the partner packs her car and pulls away, heading back to New Hampshire to resume helping her sister's family: digging holes as numbing Bactine in the wound.

I'd rather sleep than face most days.

The visit home was twenty-four hours on the nose.

14.

The *Chamaecyparis pisifera* in our mountainside-forest-in-miniature has become home to a spider—its body no bigger than the nail of my pinky—nesting in among the blue quills.

The raspberry blooms have finally resolved into tight green fruit no bigger than the spider nested among the quills.

The *Sambucus nigra* has at last opened the barest few flowerets after holding buds, bountiful and ready, for well over a month: among dozens of galaxies aloft on indigo-black stems, a few anisette stars ferociously being born.

The morning is a headache I can distract with outdoors.

The blue jay sharpens his peak on the branch upon which he stands—the wag of his head back and forth against the bark like the ritual gesture before the ceremonial thrust—then drops to the ground at a velocity somehow greater than gravity's, pogos three times across the open lawn and disappears into the gnarled fortress of a smoke bush: liquid blue disguised in burnished copper leaves.

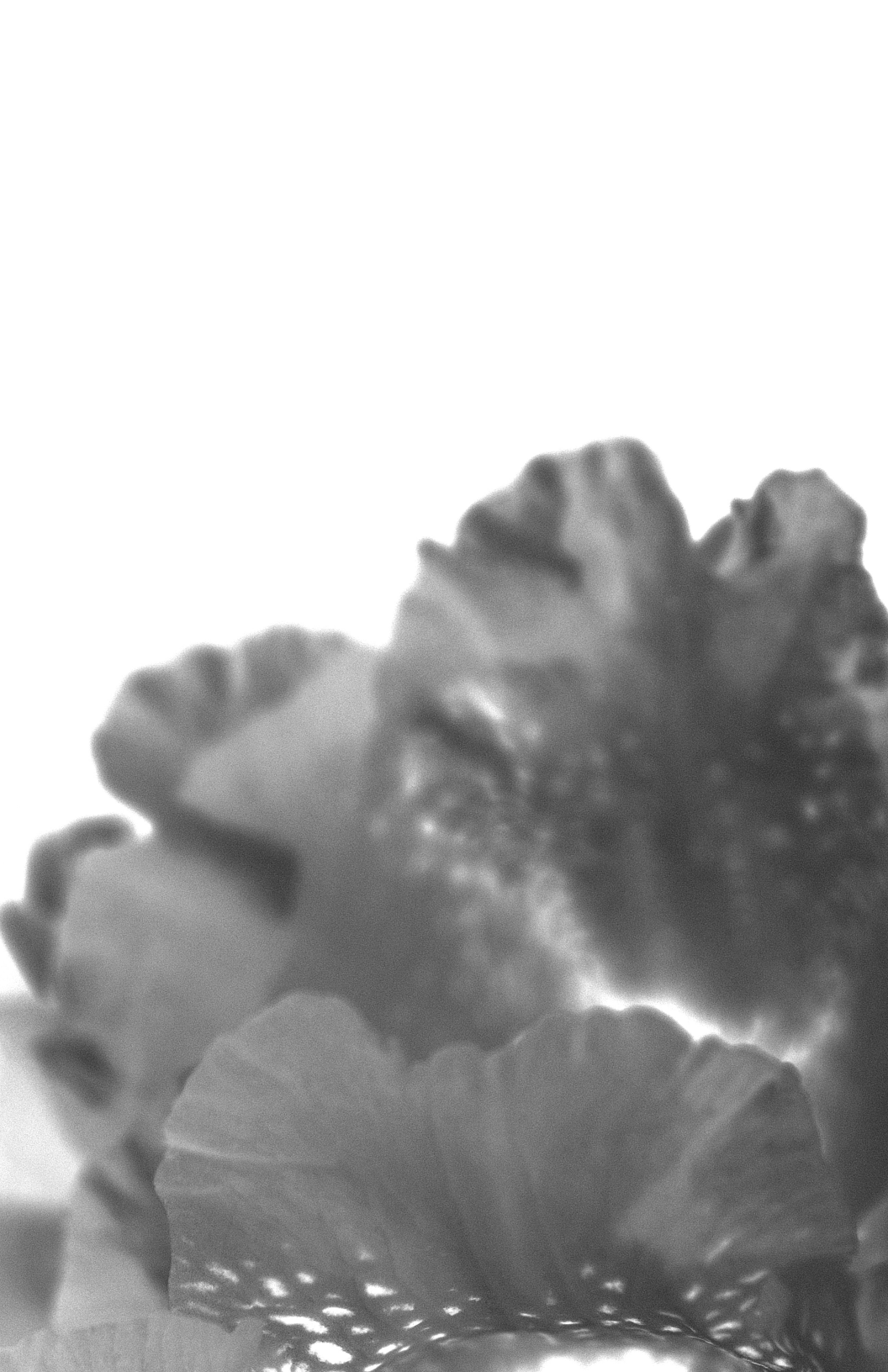
The good people of Atlanta set fire to the Wendy's where Rayshard Brooks was murdered by police.

The neighborhood, meanwhile, smells deliciously of charcoal: a species united in its passion to burn.

The occasional and sudden realization of the physical smallness of the things I love—the partner, the cat, the wistful-eyed dog I've seen just once in fourteen days—strikes me like a hammer blow to the throat—that's where I feel it first, this aching—this know-

ledge of their vulnerability and how little I have with
which to protect them, that I might be powerless to
stop the mountain when the world rolls over to crush
us.

The world rolls over and the mountains come down.
The artemisia muddles nicely into the Bota cabernet.



Week 3



15.

The artemisia muddles nicely into the Bota cabernet, and while its legendary effects of course do not manifest, I sleep for the better part of ten hours, which in its own way—for me—is legendary enough.

The hammock becomes a training ground for baby squirrels in love with walking upside-down.

The adults, meanwhile, are eating the alpine strawberries sown wild throughout the yard.

The nephew's twelfth birthday was this past Friday and I feel like a bastard for thinking it was today.

The brother—his father—has begun eating out at restaurants and I'm nauseous with worry the stubborn sonofabitch'll get himself and his boys infected.

The sister, in her drive across the US, traversed the Continental Divide yesterday and ate at a barbeque joint in Rawlins, Wyoming, and I am nauseous and nauseous and insane with binding nausea.

The video is of Native Americans dancing in a circle around the toppled statue of Christopher Columbus, and this video is one of the most beautiful things I've seen in days.

The video is body-cam footage of Rayshard Brooks getting harassed to literal death by Atlanta police, and the video is a horror-hypnotic variation on the theme of four centuries of American war against Black lives.

The video is of a naked white man playing grab-ass with police—running circles in yards and around trees and down a barricaded street—after killing two women and a child, and the video is the disgusting-disappointing variation on the theme of the endless

lengths the American police state will go to protect the dominion of white men's lives, no matter what violence they might have committed.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, unequivocally ruled today that no one can be fired from their job due to their sexuality or gender

—But what about denied employment?

—Or housing?

—Or basic social services?

The Tallahassee PD, meanwhile, recovers the body of teen-aged activist Oluwatoyin Salau, missing for nearly a week.

The soundtrack, meanwhile, keeps the sick feeling constant of never knowing how to feel good about one thing and awful about another when they keep entering the stage in macabre lock-step, everything good twinned by its world-destroying shadow, as if each might in fact be the other disguised in some nightmare drag show, strutting to an infectious beat

—*But death's just death no matter how you dress it up.* ⁱⁱⁱ

16.

The morning is the palest vapor of blue clinging fast to the horizon while a train moans its freight through the center of town.

The morning is the wonder of a cardinal awakening to discover the world from darkness has returned.

The drive to New Hampshire is an uneventful glide soundtracked by strange rock music and even stranger hip hop, where the greatest obstacle is the struggle to buy gas.

The nephew whose name is Liam becomes a pterodactyl when I walk through the door, screaming at a frequency at the upper edge of the human ear's perception as he scales my legs and torso, steps on my face, and places his hands victoriously against the ceiling.

The nephew whose name is Aidan and who looks like Wallace Shawn opens one ineffable storm-cloud eye and pisses through his jumpsuit.

The hillside is awash in paintbrush blooms the color of burnt orange rinds that inexplicably make me want to cry.

The dog growls at his foot as it scratches his itchy ear

—In a way, I can sympathize

—The overwhelm of physical touch.

The feather that sticks to the back of the partner's knee all day.

The green pungency of ferns as the partner and I pause in the forest to breathe, just soak it in, just breathe.

The ache of parting is sometimes so great, it almost feels like it'd be better if I'd never come for a visit, if she'd never come home for a visit

*—but I say to myself you are not a child now
if the night is long remember your unimportance
sleep^{iv}*

The cat, to prove in her own way that she missed me in my day of travel, loses her mind when I walk through the door.

The evening is a vampire blue under which—stocking-footed in the yard with the cat oblivious and purring in my arms—I watch the bats in feeding orbits above.

17.

The contorted hoya explodes with blooms while I'm traveling to and from New Hampshire: another nebula of stars compounding stars, waxy and pink as strawberry Starburst.

The neighbor's son desperately needs a new serpentine belt. The in-the-blood, in-the-bones anxiety of today keeps me fidgety and unable to focus too long on any one thing.

The open flowers of our two smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*) and one smoke tree (*Cotinus obovatus*) have finally produced their purple-furred threads of pedicels and peduncles, thus initiating the first amethyst clouds of their namesake illusion that will blur the air above their boughs for the next month or more.

The upper register of the clarinet is no longer a complete and inaccessible mystery to me.

The number of statues of Christopher Columbus, of Robert E. Lee, of other slave-trading pieces of shit that have been toppled continues to climb, and this makes me giddy with a celebratory draw.

The US has only 4.25% of the world's population yet 27.37% of global COVID deaths.

The sister continues her eastward trek through this infected landscape, while restaurants reopen, while people remove their masks so their faces don't get tan lines at the beach.

All at once, all these things exist in my head and spill over in a slurry of way too much.

The soundtrack is a dog's whimper and a screaming match among the jays.

18.

The sorrow is a caricature of despair that has little to do with anything more than having fallen into an afternoon nap.

The lawn needs mowing and then gets mowed.

The partner comes home smelling inexplicably of pines while I'm still in the shower washing grit and leaf bits off my shins.

The house sparrows enact their dramas in the shade among the rhododendrons while a flycatcher nimbly performs an aerial dance to snatch up a slow-hovering beetle, while the partner drifts to easy sleep in the hammock within the smoke tree's dreamish bower, while I forage for alpine strawberries in the grass and worry about being worried.

The upper register of the clarinet is accessed by overblowing the reed—by physically manipulating the placement of your mouth and how the breath you exhale interacts with the instrument—thereby creating, with every finger position along the tree, a 12th of each note in the lower register, much like playing 7th-fret harmonics on a guitar.

The notes of the upper register exist—are already being played—in the notes of the lower register, subdued in the air of each deep note (or anyway, this is what I suppose, what I think I already hear).

The partner asks if I'd like to watch a movie, and after teasing her that she just wants an excuse to curl up against me and fall asleep while my cinephilia keeps me rapt and immobile, I put on *Mysterious Skin*, an hour and forty minutes after which I'm holding her as she racks

with sobs and Sigur Rós (perhaps manipulatively)
plays over the end credits, and once again I have to
reconcile myself to some basic truths

—The partner experiences her emotions appropriately,
sincerely, and without filters

—Having adopted a *bushido* approach to getting
through a life founded upon and further defined
by clinical anxiety and depression, I do not

—By which I mean: in the fall of 2011, I
made the decision to bury my life and
go to war

—My war was the struggle to write every story
I had within me, no matter the sacrifice or cost

—The life I buried was everything outside
my notebooks

—The size of my partner's eyes—the pre-lingual hurt
and need they project like twin reel-to-reels—
leaves me rubbery with the knowledge of
how little I can help her after having brought
her to this place

—My preamble to this film before hitting play: *this is
a good, weird movie*

—A “good, weird movie” about childhood sexual assault

—It's possible I've taken this *bushido* bullshit too far.

19.

The impulse to live as if already dead was a survival mechanism I adopted in a moment when all other options appeared to be zeroing down to an infinity of locked doors

—Of all the things I loved in the world, my writing—
my ability to construct of language the feeling of lived experience—was the only thing that was consistent, that had not betrayed me yet

—Every other thing I'd ever devoted myself to—
friends, lovers, family—were momentary joys followed by subjective eternities of mourning

—In that low moment at the downswing of 2011, it was an easy choice to embrace the invulnerability of a ghost, to pledge myself to the one battle worth winning, to plant in the ground everything that did me harm

—A tiny, quiet suicide

—Incomprehensibly, it worked

—Mostly

—I became the writer I wanted to be, disciplined and dynamic and seeking

—But I also became something else

—Less interested in the stories I knew I could tell

—Less interested in characters who in any way resembled me

—Instead of wanting readers to feel as I felt (miserable), I wanted to know how it felt to be someone else

—Not as any form of escapism
—It's opposite
—A return to the world I so intentionally buried
—In its way, my war returned me home
—But I did not return unscarred.

The puzzle cut into one thousand identical pieces can be put together a million different ways, but only one way is complete.

The victorious samurai nevertheless has left something of himself behind.

The partner weeps in a devastating moment in a devastating film, and I choke up when Freddie first undergoes

The Treatment in P. T. Anderson's *The Master*

—An addict and a charlatan in the belly of a ship, simulating epiphany over cups of peach preserves muddled in turpentine.

The puzzle of me is not assembled in quite the right way.

The totality of pieces, in fact, can't be accounted for.

The bits of myself I lost along the way.

The missing pieces are the ones that make me me.

The unrecoverable.

The internal unknowns.

This is how I got to this page on this day

—I buried my life and went to war

—My war was the recovery of my life.

Happy Juneteenth.

20.

The day begins a few minutes after 5 AM when I awake from what seemed to be a pretty cool dream that's immediately pushed aside, forgotten and supplanted by the remembered argument the partner and I got into with one of our neighbors the previous night, an argument that began with our neighbor proclaiming "My problem with Black people is..." and ended with her incoherently screaming at us as she backed inside her front door.

The desire to return to sleep is no match for the reprise of my anger, so I get up and feed the animals and eat some cereal and read the passage from Geoff Dyer's *But Beautiful* about Lester Young wasting away in his Broadway hotel room, then fall back asleep and awake again nearly four hours later tangled in the sweaty comfort of the partner's supple limbs.

The partner and I walk the neighborhood to the soundtrack of the blue-eyed dog's heavy panting, guiltily relishing the perfume of multiflora roses binding and climbing every wild space they can infiltrate, building sweet-smelling matrices of thorns that'd strip the skin off even the most battle-hardened brigand rat.

The partner buys me a bottle of wine, tries to kiss me through her mask, then drives back to New Hampshire with the wistful hound and some small part of me I won't get back until she's returned.

The soundtrack is Busdriver's *Thumbs* mixtape and then his *Perfect Hair* album as I give the entire garden—from the bonsai mountainside to the blue campanula that might very well have been growing here since before

either one of us was born—a much-needed deep watering, taking note of the newly opened blooms on the potato plants and *Kalmia latifolia* and the first suggestions of blossoms on the scabiosa and gaillardia and echinacea while Driver tells me everything I want to hear in the weirdest way I love the most

—*Let me show you with teeth in my guns*

Let me show you with grief in my puns.^o

The partner calls me and we talk about the neighbor (who apparently/conveniently does not remember our argument), then recount how the remainder of the day passed in each other's absence (she ate ice cream, swam, and played with the dog), then discuss how and where we'd grow flowers if our bodies could somehow grow flowers

—She would produce and shed tiny tear-shaped petals from her sweat glands, leaving an otherworldly trail perpetually in her wake, imprinting evidence of flowers in every hand she shakes

—I would blossom from beneath my fingernails
sprays of flowerets like the constellations of an elderflower, wavering on their stems while I finger the keys of a laptop or clarinet

—We suspect our friend “Orange Guy” would grow something like a crown or halo—a massive centaurea bloom surrounding the cap of his skull—or maybe a viny twist of trumpet flowers garlanding above each eye.

The wine my sweetheart bought me is delicious.

21.

The day is a crest of laziness plastering me uselessly on the shores of my life, which is likely just a “clever” way of saying I skipped dinner last night and nibbled on whiskey for hours while re-watching *Luke Cage* so now feel hungover without benefit of having gotten drunk.

The day is the taste of shoe leather gradually replaced by the chill of an evening cloud.

The partner before she left again for New Hampshire prepared a meal of Korean meatballs and coconut rice for me to deliver to our friend with the crown of centaurea encircling his brow, but I accidentally eat all the rice not knowing it was for him so deliver instead only a quart jar of cold meatballs—which in abstract seems strange but in practice isn’t that unusual among the parties involved—and we get to hang out on his stoop and joke about how weird we’ve each become in our isolation, but then a chill cloud drifts in from the ocean and settles over the peninsula like an unwarming mother hen onto her nest, my friend gets cold, and I leave before remembering to ask him where and how his body would flower if his body could somehow bear flowers.

The cloud that swallowed Portland has after four hours made its way down to Saco, salting the air and goose-pimpling my skin, but my whiskey-mouth still feels like a dirty shoe.

The cat meows in complete, complex sentences her desire to go outside.

The cat meows in complete, complex sentences as I walk away from the door.

Week 4

22.

The dream is mostly pretty fun—high-adventure involving a conspiracy of Russian spy ghosts with the cat accompanying me like a free-range feral familiar through a 90-level cemetery maze that includes a dirt-red and menacing herd of longhorn steer in the back pasture behind my favorite Italian grocer—but the dream also contains an exchange with our ill-intentioned president, who is surprisingly cordial and offers me a Scotch and soda before leading me into the Oval Office (where the cemetery maze begins).

The dream is worrying because I accept the Scotch and soda—directly from the unwashed paw of the Typhoid Mary of COVID-19—and down it in a single draught.

The consequence, of course, is that I contract COVID-19 from the president in my dream

—*Certainly, the demons were in his head. Gumdrops in a dream were not gumdrops, but a dream. But as long as you don't wake, they're candy. You can eat them. If they're poison they kill you. Then you awake, still alive. But in the dream you're dead.*^{vi}

The upside to being a viral time bomb in my own dream: navigating a maniac's graveyard tower, invincible with the foreknowledge of death as my warrior cat bounds alongside me, level after labyrinthine level.

The roster of new blooms, meanwhile, today makes a sudden spike: thalictrum, lysimachia, echinacea (not the giant one, the tiny one with green petals), gaillardia, ibiris, as well as some mysterious furry-stemmed nightshade with pale yellow flowers throated in deep purple.

The train running through town on nights when the fog is
heavy sounds like something dead screaming from
the other side

—Why is it easier to have faith in a reanimated beast
tearing apart the darkness than in a mile of
linked cars full of lumber and suburban ac-
coutrement, tanks of crude oil and super-
cooled liquid nitrogen?

—Because it's a primitive evil, simple in its
undead

—Something that can be banished.

The men who killed Breonna Taylor

—Jonathan Mattingly

—Brett Hankison

—Myles Cosgrove

are still free to walk around and observe the world
and breathe, to laugh with their friends and eat Door-
Dash takeout, to fall asleep without fear in their beds.

23.

The fresh-water pool fed by a creek is colder than I was led to believe, so I wade in up to my thighs then topple forward, drift beneath the surface with the momentum of my fall until there's no longer a difference between me and the water—where I end and its cool begins—then surface to the joyous squeal of my nephew who is Liam splashing in after me, the laughter of my partner

—*There are few things that make me happier than watching you swim*

to the low m'birá *pong* of complaint from a bullfrog hidden in the rocks.

The partner and I nap after lunch (I dream about reading a book, then just dream of the book: the words, the ink, the pages), then spend an extra hour cozying in bed with new nephew Aidan, who sleeps on my chest like a beery, exhausted friar in the moss and from whom I conjure his first two fits of laughter while tickling his most tender cheek

—His ridiculous, untoothed smile

—His panting, unpracticed chuckles like fast and breathy hiccups.

The prospect of ever being a father ranks among my least desired personal phenomena, but I certainly enjoy the no-frills silliness of being an uncle: the dedicated weirdo swooping like a backward flying wood duck in and out of my nephews' lives.

The flesh-and-blood uncles weren't ever a part of my upbringing (one due to circumstance, the other due to indifference), but there was a kind of uncle *pro tem*-

pore who lived a mile or so up the road from us, a lean and freckled hippie named Alpo—crowned with a cloud of curly red hair—who gave to me when I was four my first real book, *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials* (a book I still own after all these years), a compendium of beautiful, life-like illustrations depicting aliens from classic works of science fiction (the Ixchel from Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, the Guild Steersman from Frank Herbert's *Dune Messiah*, the Overlord from Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*) that for far too many years I believed were photographic evidence of actual, documented aliens

—Or maybe when I say “for far too many years” what I really mean is “for not nearly long enough”

—As in: I wish I could have held on a little longer to the surrealistic world Alpo suggested by his very nature and, by giving me this book, invited me to take part in, to investigate and explore

—As in: I wish I was still so easily given over to the far-reaching potentialities of reality, willing to dissolve myself in a version of the universe where humans weren't the center, beginning, and end

—Because isn't that what a good uncle or aunt is for: to demonstrate a path alternate to that proposed by every other adult, to take emphasis away from that which is known and redirect

it toward that which could be, to nurture exploration and encourage imaginative play, not as a game but as a way to exist

—It was a wonderful decade, believing a planet like Solaris was real

—I'm glad I was given the opportunity to believe.

The cat goes bonkers when I finally come home, so I carry her around outside among the garden beds where we discover a swarm like none other I've ever seen of European chafer beetles hovering all around one of our gargantuan Norway spruce

—I'm glad the bats will be out soon to feed

—I'm glad the beetles only live for a few days

—I'm glad that since the world entered quarantine, our yard's become an *ad hoc* bird sanctuary where so many pests get gobbled up by robins and cardinals, cat birds and blue jays.

Nevertheless, through the open windows: the worrying scent of fresh-cut spruce drifts in.

24.

The swarm of chafers is gone by morning, leaving no evidence of damage in their wake

—Perhaps it was only an evening reunion of the Hatch of 2020

—Perhaps the bats had a beetle-y feast.

The morning otherwise is a sticky cloud pressing heavy against the ground, in no way cooling in its moist density: a gooey vapor like a glutinous dough clinging to every surface.

The City of Louisville—with a population over 600,000—reduced its number of polling stations to one (one polling station for 600,000 voters) in advance of yesterday’s primary election, then closed the poll early without explanation with several thousand voters still lined up and waiting outside the doors, thus demonstrating unabashedly that voter suppression is a proud and living tradition in the United States of Shameless Connivance.

The City of Louisville, incidentally, has the largest Black population in Kentucky.

The frustrations of the day entangle and conflate—the pole-saw’s blade bending partway through a cut somehow enfolding into Mitch McConnell being Kentucky’s senator and yesterday’s blatantly manipulated primary deciding who will run against him (a real candidate or a patsy) in this fall’s general election, the thunderclouds scudding past low without shedding one desperately needed drop somehow symptomatic of Breonna Taylor’s murderers still roaming free—so that when I catch myself snarling at my computer

screen, I'm not even entirely sure what I'm mad at, the program that keeps crashing or the world and its willful, perpetual, universal cascade failure or if I even need a "what" to be angry at.

The oldest sister and her son arrive today in Maine, thus completing their trek through this infected nation —I have no idea when I'll be able to see them now that they're here

—Mostly I'm hoping soon her son and I can improvise a duet on trombone and clarinet (assuming, of course, he's come all this way with his trombone in tow).

The neighbor (not the one with whom the partner and I engaged in verbal combat last weekend) joins me beneath the low-bending boughs of my Norway spruce so that we may sample a trio of rye whiskies and decompress communally from our separate lives in isolation.

The partner calls to update me as to her schedule of comings and goings (as nebulous and uncertain as ever) as some factor of rainbow stretches wide above me (double? triple? just one but very visible in its repetitions through the spectrum?) and before we hang up, I see them coming: a multitude of chafers congregating to swarm among the low-bending boughs of my Norway spruce.

25.

The knowledge that so much of my daily struggle is biochemical—that having lived so much of my life in a self-defensive crouch has broken the OFF switches in my brain that would otherwise stem the flow of depression- and anxiety-inducing neurotransmitters (hence the twice-daily cocktail of norepinephrine/serotonin reuptake inhibitors that increasingly feel like not nearly enough)—does not in any way temper how hard it is to get through a “normal” day (make the coffee and water the plants, feed the animals and feed myself, read, sleep, write, erase), let alone days that begin with news articles like today’s about charges (at last) being filed against the three people responsible for the death of Cornelius Fredericks, a 16-year-old Black boy who lived in a Michigan youth home, who (for the crime of “throwing some bread on the floor”) was restrained under the weight of three staff members for twelve minutes, during which time Cornelius first repeatedly screamed “I can’t breathe” and then went limp and unresponsive, after which time staff waited a further twelve minutes before attempting CPR or calling for medical assistance.

The name for what is happening is The War Against Black Lives.

The police are only the front lines.

People who look like me are killing people who look like my cousins, who look like my best friends, who look like my heroes.

Yet I’m expected to put on clothes and brush my teeth as if everything is okay?

Today, I reject the concept of “okay.”

Fuck the format.

I reject the hope of ever feeling okay.

Today, Tamir Rice would have turned 18.

26.

The objective for the day is to with intention checkout—no news, no social media outrage—so as to give my head and my heart twenty-four hours of much needed rest from all the things that turned yesterday into an unstoppable mid-grade panic attack (wish me luck).

The partner arrives early for her weekly one-day visit, and she has slept poorly (having spent the night in the company of a restless infant) and I have slept poorly (having spent the night in the company of a brain that refused to turn off, cycling through an endless rolodex of anxiety), so it is with dum-dum ghost brains that we

—Go to the landscape nursery for a bevy of new perennials (alcea, delphinium, monarda, enormous pink campanula that look like they're straight from *Alice in Wonderland*, variegated polygonatum, stately veronia)

—Reshape the bed on the house's western (blind) side with chunky rounds cut from the trunk of our wind-fallen *Abies balsamea*

—Fold the roots of our new acquisitions into the sun-warm soil and transplant several others and being dumb and ghostly in the garden with my one and only is all I could really want from this day.

The buddy across the street wanders over to talk about our nation in decline while I'm watering in our new flowering friends, so now I'm sunburned in the face and my eyes feel like they'll soon explode under nervous pressure so I guess there goes my attempt to shed the world for one day, so fuck it, let's say aloud the other

awful thing I've been make-believing isn't there:
The dog might have cancer on his asshole, which is horrifying
but also, in its way, darkly funny, and that's pretty
horrible too

- Yon *perro* has dedicated so much of his life to nib-
bling at his sphincter
- The prospect of his anus at last biting back is ab-
surdly apropos and makes me want to vomit
then cry then vomit on my tears
- I do not want my dog to die of ass cancer
- (And that might be the nicest thing I've ever said
about that smelly self-abuser).

The act of composing new music is the only consistent res-
pite in these days of murder and contagion.

27.

The morning's ration of strawberries picked from the garden hits the glands behind the jaw with a delicious electric zing.

The partner gets word she can spend an extra day at home: one more delicious electric zing.

The partner paints the front door orange while I wander barefoot among the garden beds, the drought-dry grass crispy underfoot but the clover and ajuga and every other native groundcover lush and thriving beneath my crooked hobbit toes.

The partner paints herself orange too in such unlikely places without intention or even noticing much.

The *Hydrangea quercifolia* opens its first tiny flowerets, as does the broad, dense swath of creeping thyme footing the *Buddleja davidii* while the nearby and enormous echinacea unpetals its first pink bloom.

The breakfast of sautéed chard and eggs is perfect and the afternoon nap is perfect and the suggestion of a breeze dulling the edge off this heat is perfect and while so much of this day's perfection is based on a much-needed extraction from and ignoring of the world and its broadcasting atrocities, these things, too, are perfecting manifestations: good food, the caress of moving air, the company of my partner and her body sleeping off the afternoon beside me.

The fact that right this second we are sharing a corner of a table, each nose-down in our individual work, is another tiny form of perfection.

The sugar ants marching the speckled stems of the magnolia betray the infestation of scales clustering on the ten-

der new growth

- Scale is an insect that looks like a blister swelling from the soft, new wood of a tree, its preference being for magnolias and *Liriodendron tulipifera*
- The scales drain sap from the magnolia and excrete a sticky sheen with the ironic designation “honeydew”
- The sugar ants indulge their sweet teeth (their candy mandibles?) and binge on the scales’ excretions
- Where the ants gather, heads together, like meth fiends at the chemical trough: that’s where you’ll find the scales
- There are various means of treating for scale (dormant oil, insecticidal soaps, permethrin, etc.) but I find manually to be the most immediate and effective method
- A scale crushed under a thumbnail ejects a single droplet the color of strawberry rhubarb pie.

The newly painted door glows in the dusk and makes us want to paint the rest of the house.

The evening is a musical goof-off fueled on ice-cold white wine.

The partner leaves early tomorrow.

28.

The cat sits in the kitchen window, gazing out across the neighbor's yard where two neighborhood cats (domestic lions from different households, neither of which attach to the current leisure lawn) spread out in the crunchy grass: a silent morning palaver of The Cat Club for Cats.

The partner and I engage in simultaneous sneezing fits—I inside, looking out the window, while she loads up her car—before she heads back to New Hampshire for another week of caretaking duty.

The cat and I together spend a lot of time staring out windows each day.

The new-normal solitude of summertime 2020 turns us all a subtle new strange.

The end of my social-media moratorium begins with a short documentary video of my friend and three others talking about their experiences being Black, queer, and alive in Maine, quite possibly the statistically-whitest state in the US, and the four of them are so heartbreakingly powerful and beautiful in what they say that I'm okay breaking my two-day no-crying streak, my checking out for a weekend is not a privilege everyone can enjoy, and while I'm glad for my healing hideaway from this world none of us can escape, I'm glad too that this was my return.

The very next post is the president sharing a video of, and expressing gratitude for, supporters in Florida chanting "white power."

The soundtrack, meanwhile, is Miles blowing "All Blues" and it's nowhere near blue enough.

The threats finally become reality as the storm clouds pile in darkly to break open in long hours of moderate rain—light enough so the parched ground can drink up each drop rather than roll it all directly into the sewers—while thunder grumbles like a satisfied Titan in the distance and the cliché of petrichor perfumes the night air.

The storm-lit lilies are nearly incandescent, deep blazes of orange effulgent against so much green.

The same could be said of the ibiris in their luminous pinky-purple, nearly identical in shade to my favorite marker when I was a kid, a Muppet kind of fuchsia, perfect for coloring Prairie Dawn or most any Fraggles or Yup-Yup Martians.

The partner yesterday said one of my new songs reminds her of the soundtrack to *If Beale Street Could Talk*, and I'm not sure she could have paid me a more perfectly kind compliment.

The song is called "For Cornelius Fredericks & Elijah McClain."





Week 5

The brother was born forty-five years ago today with a hammer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, destined to split open both big toes over and over again, to leap from our hayloft into a cresting wave of snow more than two-stories high that arced in a shield around our house and ell and barn, to use the edge of his boot to carve in the muck of our dirt road channels connecting one April mud puddle to the next to the next from our hilltop farm to the lowland potato field a quarter mile below, to run away at 17 and get caught in Mercer, Pennsylvania and policed back to Maine unapologetic if not also to some degree humbled, to dedicate an entire summer to catching trout after a business partner robbed the tool trailer in the night and absconded to Massachusetts thus strong-arming their outfit into bankruptcy, to build the most elaborate houses for his broods of hens (in some ways nicer than his own home) and nurture a storm-conceived sourdough culture like it was his own glutinous child, to raise two boys so distinctly strong and weird as to be something other than human children and more of the ilk of masterful aliens sinking free throws and conquering imaginary worlds, to lose himself down years-long wormholes of fascination (fly fishing, the cultivation of specialized botanicals, certain video games, Texas Hold ‘Em, preparing the perfect steak *au poivre*) then walk away from it all without a backward glance, to fashion swords out of wood then learn how to dexterously wield them, to perfectly hand-cut overlapping 45s in the finest

crown molding, to be my brother whether he likes it or not.

The brother would rather I not mention all of the above.

The soundtrack is anything that makes me feel unstoppable.

The night's rain has persisted throughout the day, sometimes as thumping elephant teardrops and sometimes as the heaviest mist, and I can almost hear the parched earth greedily sipping it all up.

The gross example set by those who partook in this weekend's reopening of bars across New England's tourist towns—carousing elbows-to-assholes without their masks as if every bar-lined street was an Irish pub on St. Patrick's Day, leaving in their wake a litter of takeout bags, pizza boxes, and plastic cups smashed into the sidewalk—will, with any luck, convince the gubernatorial powers-that-be what all the logical arguments from doctors and scientists could not: in a nation of avaricious self-involved toddlers, it is too damn soon to reopen.

The middle sister and her husband have spent this entire quarantine month bottle-feeding first two, then one, then no undersized kittens rejected by their mother, and though for a while it seemed as though the stronger of the pair (one-eyed, shaky-pawed, world weary) might survive, the smallness dies quietly in my sister's arms over the weekend, slipping from entity to objecthood with the cruel ease of the world coming down.

The rain-wet and heavy leaves make the Japanese maple look like a shaggy Sesame Street creature lurching in the shadows between the Norway spruce and blooming smoke tree, which themselves look like shaggy Sesame Street creatures.

The cat sleeps piled up like a car wreck on a pillow that by all rights should be *my* pillow.

The cat migrates from the pillow to my shoulder as soon as I write the previous line, and now we're cuddling, sure, but also now neither of us can use the damn pillow.

The bats swing in convolutions to gather the chafers to their kiss.

30.

The month is ending and the rains persist, which I love but which also make me terminally lethargic—so much daylight squandered while I drift in and out of sleep with the cat equally doped out in the cradle of my arms, all four of her feet cupped in the warm curl of my hand—but maybe my ambitions don't need to extend much further than the hazy slowness of hibernation.

The exception, of course—my one ambition—is driving north to Yarmouth and masking up to visit-at-a-distance my oldest sister and her son (who indeed arrived with no trombone in tow), quarantined in a vacant property of her father's, the two of them lying low in recovery from their two-week crossing through the United States of Preventable Death, just as dazed still by highway as I am by the rain and grey and the music of moving water: a river flowing from the sky.

The soundtrack is a river flowing from the sky.

The first of the astilbe opens its mountain-cone of cherry flowerets in the rain as the raspberries grow fuller and by degrees more red while too, the lilies with their platter-sized clusters of blooms bend low beneath the weight of clinging water, nearly kissing the ground as the new monarda blossoms pop like taffy-pink, speckled spiders.

The strawberries, washed in rain, are delicious.

The cat purrs atop an envelope on the table, watching through lidded eyes while I teach myself how to growl through the clarinet—to drone one ragged

note in my throat while playing others on the instrument itself—and though in some ways it sounds hellish, I must admit, it does too sound like a beastly antediluvian purr.

The month is ending and the impulse is real to tighten a neat bow around these thirty days—to thread together the wild eyes of the cat to the garden we both observe through windows to the metaphors of galaxies and constellations to the violence surrounding to the loneliness surrounding to the woman I love who is far away and who inexplicably loves me best to the family I've made to the family I've inherited and how much I miss them all—and while I guess I did just indulge that impulse, the urge I feel most strongly is the urge to submit to the endlessness of endings, to continuance, to this journal ending as it began *in medias res*, how the family and loneliness and love carry on forward and back so why attempt the fallacy of completion when really, what feels best is one last unresolved run-on sentence that concludes with the cat now sitting primly on her envelope, eyes contented and shut and self-assured with nothing but her animal ignorance to justify her certainty of the world carrying on.

The one tooth aches from biting the mouthpiece.

The month is ended.

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