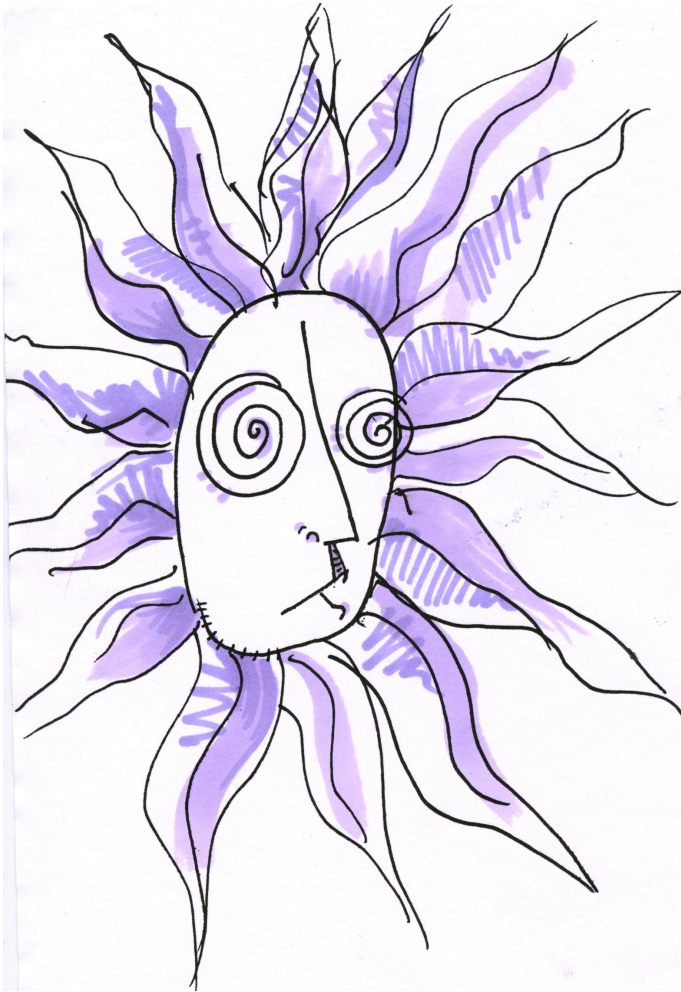


potato

potato

potat o

poems and stuff by jess rizkallah



hey hi hello, this has been a crazy cool awesome weirdo rad frickin what the Frick year and so these poems happened. thank you for reading this, i love you more than this text box allows.

artwork + poems

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oh right oops, a bio: Jess Riz is a Lebanese-American twenty-something with a subtle affinity for the moon and also burritos. studies english and illustration at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. enjoys working on magazines and poking people both figuratively and not. wants to be an astronaut and is published extensively on her mom's fridge and not as extensively in other places. you should check out MapsForTeeth.com and also third person is so weird oh god im sorry

thighz

they call me Thunder Thighs.

sometimes i forget how big my thighs really are. my thighs could kill a man.
they could snatch the lightning like a cigarette from between zeus' fingers.
they high five. they're always high fiving, always stoked about something.

they meet each other like a prayer. they're always praying for something.

this is why my strides are so long: i've got rosary beads where bikes would have chains
dusty, always rattling like ghost of christian past --
i'm not afraid of naming it "past" anymore, but i still like the way
my scars ooze hymnals. i hear them when middle eastern air
filters through the anise pods in my body.

it's muffled, but when i walk i feel my great grandmother's prayers travel like sap through my tendons.
the bullet that went through her head is nestled between two lives i don't remember.
each life: an arm that cradles it like her son's arms cradled her at the end.

my thighs have rings on the inside: who i was before i even Was
is trapped in my center of gravity.

they're older than i am.
i think they belonged to my great grandmother.
i bet every body part i have belonged to a dead relative
and the way they curve or jut closer to the space around me
is to reach closer to the family i can still hug:

the people i still somewhat resemble
the biology that Civil War failed to claim
because the cosmic Will hanging in the soundwaves left us all with moles and hairs to inherit.
they connect like constellations sleeping on the capacity to kill
with the roots stored in the nucleus of you: that planet that centers all the rings.

it hangs like a doorknocker behind your bellybutton.

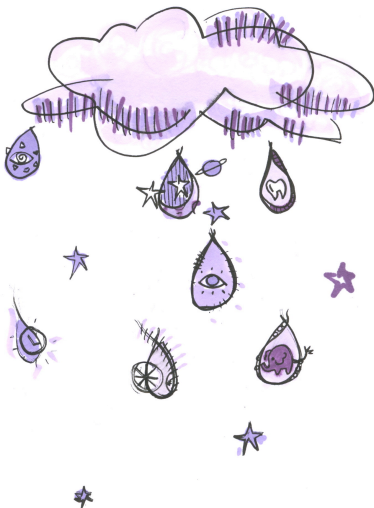
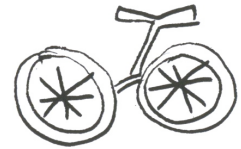
when you're born, the portal between you and mother is broken but so much has traveled between you
before your body sealed itself. so it hurts to stick your finger in your middle,
to knock at your navel. something ancient is carving you from the inside out

you're not supposed to know it's there.

you're not supposed to know why there's a cellar in your stomach
because that's where the lizards live -- those dehydrated past versions
of all the Selves you've ever been. They wait to breathe when they sense
other halves of themselves behind other bellybuttons you orbit.

this is why when i meet certain people, i feel a tug at my navel,
and my breath wants to collapse into the cellar of myself. i can't breathe
and i watch stars turn into fleas, chewing my vision purple.
this is why i like purple so much, why i collect it under my eyes.
why i trust my stride even when i can't see where i'm going.

when i can't breathe, i keep walking. they call me Thunder Thighs.



ghanoujet tetra

the first color i ever learned to mix was purple. it usually separates into red and blue to surge through eggplants, making aubergine. but the vegetable cracks when left on the stove's fingertips too long. the whole house smells like wires crossed. fraying air. smoked dread like what the vacuum cleaner smells like in the morning. this is partly my grandmother's doing at the end of every month. it's a ritual that petrifies the nostrils.

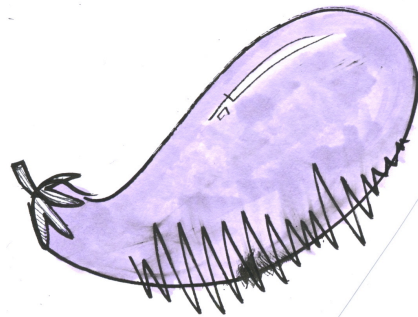
but still, her baba ghanouj does its best to be the insides you expected-- to be the phlegm but a bit easier to swallow, less of a coat and more like a scarf warming the voicebox proper - living up to the love in the second half of its name as best it can.

i'm heading back to school. Tetra is sitting next to me and the backwindow of the car betrays the sky by filtering it what it really is. i know this because purple. purple everywhere.

in the corner of the passenger window, we see an octopus with arms around the moon, waiting for eggplant sky to hatch. until it does, we follow the trees

she says: "i used to think the trees would run alongside the bus when i used to ride the bus when i was a girl."

i imagine this, how they'd climb the atmosphere like a stoop to the other side of the night. i see them synapse into what tetra's fingers are when she picks the thorns off roses before handing them to me. this is blood she can never afford to spare. she risks the spill.



she says: "i used to think the trees knew the mountains better than i did. they do, but you see, it never occurred to me that we were the ones moving and they weren't,"

her eyes are the purple kind of brown my mother has too. they watch the trees and i take her hand like the other half of a prayer. i only ever seem to hold them like my own are their shadow, that part of a person afraid of age - that fear that skin throws into the air to fight off the inheritance already hiding in the blood, the one too heavy for shadows to hold.

her fingers are all tentacles coming out of the moon she stores in her palm, i feel it like a dusty truffle trying to escape.

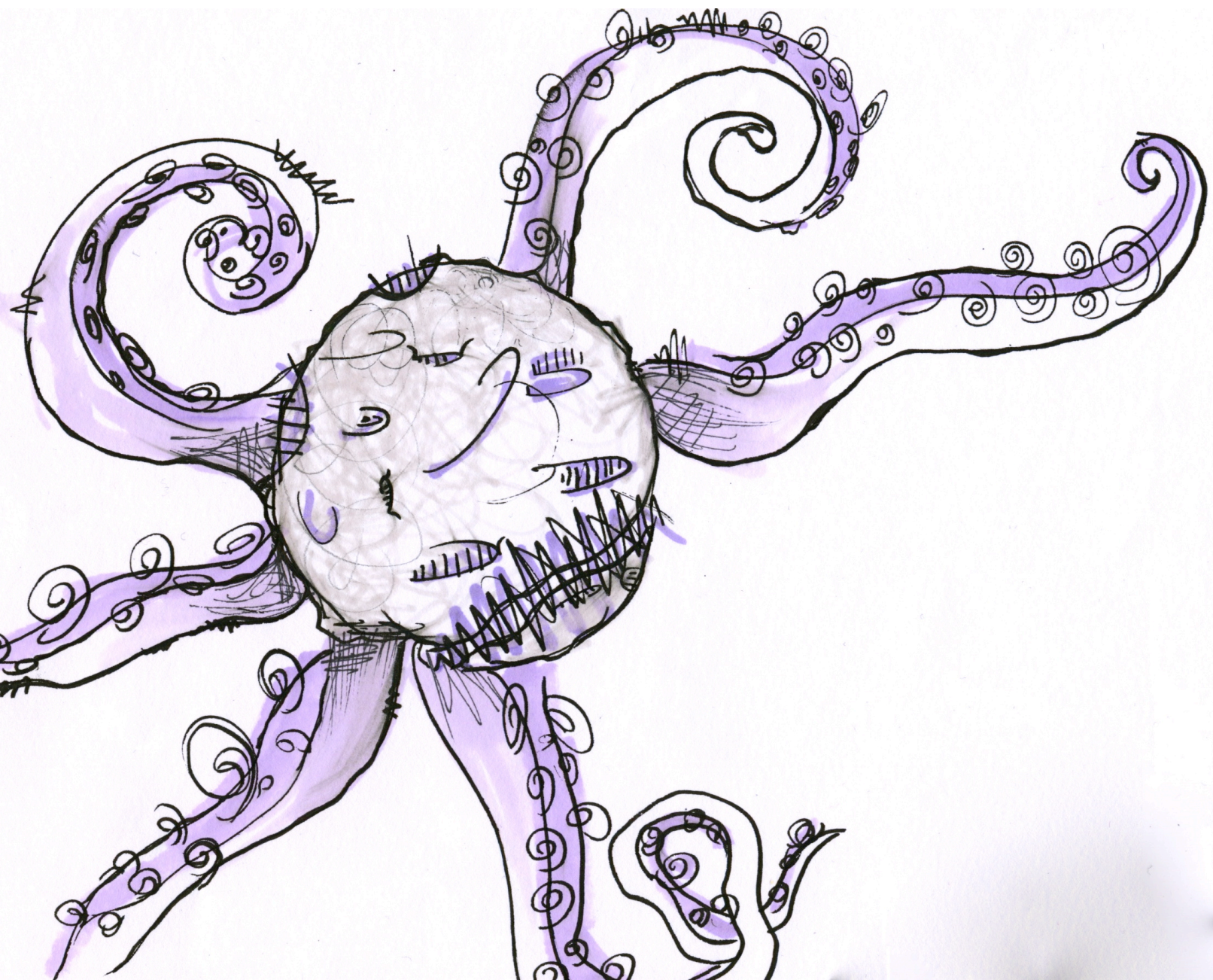
this is what we have in common: parts of us always trying to escape.

but my hands find home in my pockets and hers curl around a cigarette whenever a stray shadow bends eager to shove its cheeks full harvest. from afar, we watch the fruit vendors store skin cells under their nails as they wait for their buckets to fill with run-off the color of ghazals.

sobhan al khaliq, she says, praising the almighty cephalopod and the juice it dribbles down the sky's chin. it catches on the trees and the trees catch on the air and the air catches on the window and we are moving too fast so that everything is smearing against the car, stroking us aubergine

she says: "we're the ones who'll never know the land the way our bones want us to know it."

and my skin panics into more of itself. and more than itself, because it knows she's right. it knows that one day i'll be all alone with it, one day i'll tear at it like i do the sky.



SELF PROCESS IN RELATION TO TETA / WHO WAS
TETA'S FIRST LOVE? / DOES IT EVEN MATTER
NOW / WHEN MINE EXISTS WILL IT MATTER
WHEN I LOSE EVERYTHING / will i lose everything /
WHY DON'T I ASK TETA MORE QUESTIONS

there's a landscape in the kneecap, probably
something hidden in the hubcap of your elbow --
i want to call it an elephant but i call everything
elephant when i like it too much



but the wrist, we never crack that bone on purpose.
it just snaps at the end of holding our faces up for so long
to remind us that's not the type of weight it's meant to hold.
the wristbone wears all the rope we braid our meanings into
the beads we like to believe are salvaged human bones,
the memories of wooden hugs our skin pines for
like we once pined for God.



the wrist bone is strong, ivory probably
all tusk and not quite leather just yet, but wait.

she doesn't say who they're from, but Teta smiles (the way I do at sidewalks)
when she tells me about the elephant toenails hidden in her nightstand.
their edges are gilded, like her age was before she learned the stench of loss,
before darbukas drummed like knuckles against the atmosphere, like boots against skulls.

there will never be another day that she'll hear a bomb go off (for the first time)
there will always be cliffs salivating jet-fuel into shores lining the Mediterranean.
children still play there. it's still so easy to slip, so hard to hide
the want of cracking something that curls more like fist than skeleton.

is it fair to claim her past for the hum underneath the hum of my hum,
the one that keeps me balancing on sidewalks like they're not territory lines?
i've never found gold crowns sprouting from the cracks, calling out
for dimples, for a certain smile back. I don't know if I should smile back,
if i deserve the phosphenes i find
arranged into your teeth -- if they are even yours.

i wonder if Teta ever found that smile like pressed jasmine.
if she turns her head at passing wristbones, compares them
to the ivory in her nightstand. has she ever let herself go gilded
under the gaze of someone else's bones? has she ever compared
their creak to hers? i will never ask

i just hold the elephant toenails to my ears and i hear
what the inside of your kneecap might look like:
sidewalks all sparrows for freckles
instead of shrapnel and estranged fingers.
everything is jasmine falling from fighter-jets
to steep the air sage tea yellow.

This is the last memory before the bomb went off.

if it comes for me too, i will settle on trapping your memory in the night stand.
i will know what Teta knows. i don't want to know what Teta knows. i don't want
to know what the darbukas sing when they don't sound like the inside of your bones,
like that last memory, like elephants
balancing on their toes where no one really can anymore.

when the bombs go off, will you be important? will I have enough room
to care about the certain Smile Back, the way the wrist pops, the way we
are not quite broken in leather, but man, just wait

we could be elephant before Ivory Trade, we could stay Lebanon before Civil War.
this is what I call everything when I'm afraid, when I like it too much.



what if it it it it it it

what if when you cried

- flowers grew under your eyes into where all the purple goes at night
- oceans pooled in there and whales came out of your eyes too?
(to lap up the water they'd blow right back into
your face because that's what whales would do)

forever ago i thought that crying was all the raindrops silently willed to victory down windshields
and passenger windows. sometimes days feel like forever and sometimes they feel like car rides
and sometimes it doesn't rain in Lebanon for miles down the timeline

but the air does collect steam from tea leaves turbo sighing into the air.

what if

- we're all chamomile
- scary lumps were just balloons inside your body
- biology is just a party in your body, what if
- it sounds like the light from inside lightbulbs (freeze it like a wart/
become the camera flash pop that becomes the explosion
inside of an icecube when you don't first distill the water it is
made of/ freeze the here/the now/ the let's pretend

pretend

- the scary balloons are filled with confetti
(shooting out every time you raise your arms to the sky in praise)
(of what?) (praise god. they tell us to praise god but

what if

- my parents' old home is a swollen node in the middle east's armpit
- ? what then)

what if

- it's trying to pop itself before others try to claim the confetti for themselves.
- the confetti is actually knives
- knives are actually the explosion inside the balloons inside your body
when you try to distill all that aquarium you are made of
- the balloons are only membrane under eggshell
- the knives are really just waiting to hatch

What would be worse?

- That the saints might not be able to stop the pop
- or that they planned it themselves?

we twirl their beads around our wrists anyway. We call this habit a commandment.
praise god's congressional cabinet. praise god. praise

the second home trying to fool itself into thinking pain is a
party/ martyrs are dispensable

like

- compostable spoons
 - fig wrappings
 - phosphenes when the streets get too red under the sunlight --
light lights lights thrown from god's sky mouth, hey. maybe lebanon pushes
its kids to be scientists because it's got fucked up biology ???
- i wonder if it knows this isn't its fault (but sometimes it is) i wonder if it knows that
to do well in biology you have to pay attention in history

what if

- my parents' old home is history
- is flash pop trying not to set itself on fire?

does it know

- it didn't start that fire
- it didn't kill every cedar tree
- it just ignores them as they cry and what if
-when the cedars cried, splinters grew out of our fingers

would that make our fingers martyrs? would our fingers be dispensable?

what if we cried chamomile cried oregano cried anise cried olives cried oil cried wood chip cried
knives cried whales wanting to escape on the air from our tongues before just settling for the eye
pockets because this is all supposed to be normal, we don't cry - that's some "westernized
bullshit,"

- like owning a dog, or
- talking about your Feelings

we

- spit
- fire
- burn ourselves
and then we cry



Channel 2

the television punctuates limbs and explosions with novellas and talent shows and psychics on new year's eve telling us what the year will bring and who will die and how we should live because they won't. when it pauses to gargle static in its throat, i sense scales shifting over the house, working the airwaves into an easier consistency. Jakey is sitting in my lap so i tell him why we are safe and unsafe all at once.

i tell him this is All The Lizard Queen's Doing. i tell him she's sitting on a cloud above the house. her mouth is a small city, she's using the wires to floss her teeth--

"No Jessi, that's not real. Not in this world."

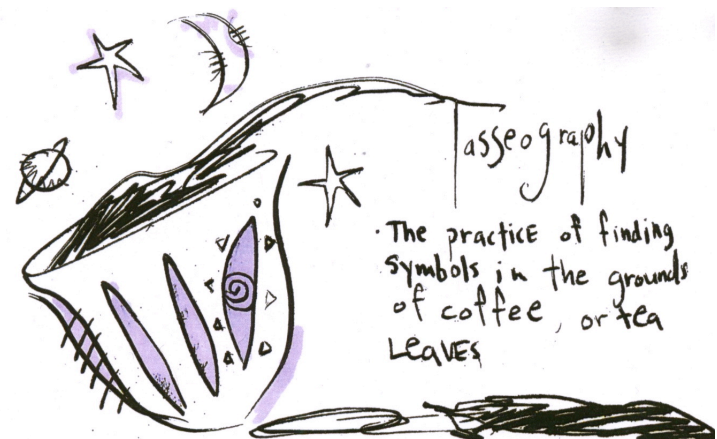
"Well what world then, Jakey?"

"January and September. And October. or Tuesday -- maybe where all the mud is sticky."

Channel 4

[sex cells, sex sells sex appeal but domesticate beat bbbeat generate it out of the wives just unpeel it but cry out for sects instead, you ass. you assassinator. assassinate for sectariat for march 8th march 14th march north south north south march north. elissa fairuz awesome science awesome science LBC MTV fares karam nounsat martyr square martyrdom star academy abdel halim hafiz prince of egypt prince of the middle east prince of my kitchen counter prince of my mother's heart novella novella novella beirut in the forties and limbs and limbs and limousines and lights lights red carpets and flash and poppop pop music pop sockets separating at the border, border cafe najjar cafe zataar cafe cafe carefree nope no no refugees need apply but here take this take this take this and limbslimbs. parsley under the jawline of a knife, chef ramsey aint got nothing on my teta's cooking but let's linger on the channel while we snooze, this is how we stay alive while others don't]

Channel 5



Channel 6

I swear there's a Lizard Queen on a cloud hanging in the sky
over the satellite dish attached to my grandparents' house.

the psychic with the cottage at the end of the zodiac only emerges to whistle transmissions
right before december curls its toenails into january's heel. his news callouses into skin that will
eventually slide off and pucker on winter's blade before we are bound another year older. the
queen translates this broadcast into Turkish novellas that we watch to the tune of pumpkin
seeds against our teeth for twelve months. she buys us time between now and the next oil spill.
we suck the shells saltless, forgetting that this only makes us thirsty.

Her scales are all the dog ears of every ace from the deck of cards my father's buddies
rewrote, their fingers so chimney. so politic, and not. But the Queen always wins, always counts
our losses into something digestible, makes them glint even under dull clouds --

this is the color of Distraction before Explosion, why breathing can feel like
swallowing basements. it's the real reason we lick our fingers to test the wind, to see if we've
caught breaths dying. before wiping the spit on your jeans, check if it's really yours. count the
flecks of villages trying to pass themselves off as pollen infiltrating the body -- you brim with
shattered Tripolis and withered tomato vines clinking in your lungs like futures ringing inside
porcelain coffee cups. tasseography of what lives in your limbs. do you feel it coming together
and apart the way parsley together and aparts in the strainer when you scoop in and out in
the sink? it becomes shrubbery and then aquarium and back again

this is to clean the dirt out. you never get all of it. but still, add water
while news breaks history into biology into the mixing bowl
of your body, and still. add water.
swallow all the salt to rid yourself of moisture.
but you just added water.

The Lizard Queen watches this from above, she waits for us to crack like she does,
to run out of ways to cry without actually crying

She plays with the hubcaps on her knuckles. the base of each finger stores memories of Arab
Springs that still had anything to do with birds. Her claws strain with the footage of body parts
coming together and apart in Beirut -- this city is Atlantis now, but all the ocean is in the people.
when they kill it's to drink what they're afraid to spill from themselves. She holds all this to the
chopping board, gives us limbs between talent shows and weather reports. The Queen pares
the frequencies always ready to annihilate us through the satellite dish.

and Jido still curses at the TV. it still gargles static. teta picks out the good parsley, lines it up
on the chopping board. she's used to bringing the knife down in the midst of this.

Jakey sits in my lap, playing with my rings.

He takes off my most tarnished ring and holds it like a monocle to his eye.
I think he sees the future. When he puts it back on my finger, my knuckle cracks.

Channel 14

[static]

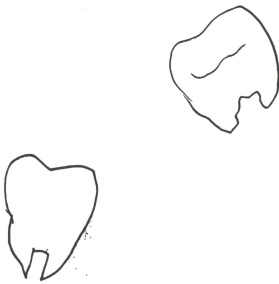
Answering your alarm clock when it rings during that limbo between Asleep and Awake:

hello? no i can't food with you today, i'm sorry. i've gotta walk my clock. it's so restless. it keeps running. it's got the hiccups. it wants attention, i give it too much attention if i taught it to walk it would know that no where is really all that far it would let me sleep

snooze

you ever seen a teapot? you can fill it with so many space. so many outer spaces, like the kind between each word on a parking ticket? astronomy died so you could parallel park like an asshole this morning, show some respect, assholes have a hard life. once they exist from the ends of felt tip pens, they never know they aren't stars. entire universes come out of assholes. hello? hello?

heyHEYsnooze



yeah hi what do i do
i saw steven sleeping on a park bench last night
it was made of teeth i think
isn't that weird how everything is teeth
how everything is benches
how every teeth is benches
how benches have a sunrise channel but a broken remote.
my shoes are a working remote
like my phone like my thermostat
like my netflix account
like my ceiling is a working remote
even when the paint scabs into inkblots that look like steven.
have you seen steven? where is steven?
i need to stop changing the channel

[BELLS BELLS BELLS]

puppy sized elephant emporium! how may i help you? we've got all kinds
of elephants, so many of them. wearing pants. purple pants, with trumpet
flower pockets. and lady bugs singing the buttons electric -- are you still sad?
don't be. our elephants are little but they know so much. you are too
you always will be, but look at how much you know.
look where your skin creases with it.

[POP-PUNK RINGTONE FROM 2007]

hello hi! welcome to the rainforest cafe. welcome to the rainforest.
do you hear the rain? listen to the rain. the space between each drop died so you can
astronomy today. you're made of old star parts and dust bunnies and gluten allergies
and forgotten punchlines. popsicle sticks frisbee'd themselves into the sky so you
could cry today. it's why the sunset just kinda hits you sometimes, you see. we close at 7

[bee p beep beep bop BBBBBBBeep]

hello? oh hey darlin'. sweetie. no, honey. baby! no wait moon, i mean moon.
i mean ribcage. i mean grapefruit. i mean poem, poem. hello poem --
don't hang up on me, i can hear you breathing. i know you're there.
do you ever forget to return your library books sometimes too?

[95.7 FM] [GURGLES]

hello? yes this is she. this is me. this is i. this is my eye, it's brown. like poop, but also
like chocolate. but also like birthmarks. like oatmeal, brown sugar. like burnt sugar. like
bookshelf, made from dead wood filled with tree ghosts. trees. my eyes are brown like trees.
but also like dead leaves. but also like alive books before they're books, so like trees. alive
trees. like yours. a lot like yours, my eyes are brown like yours.

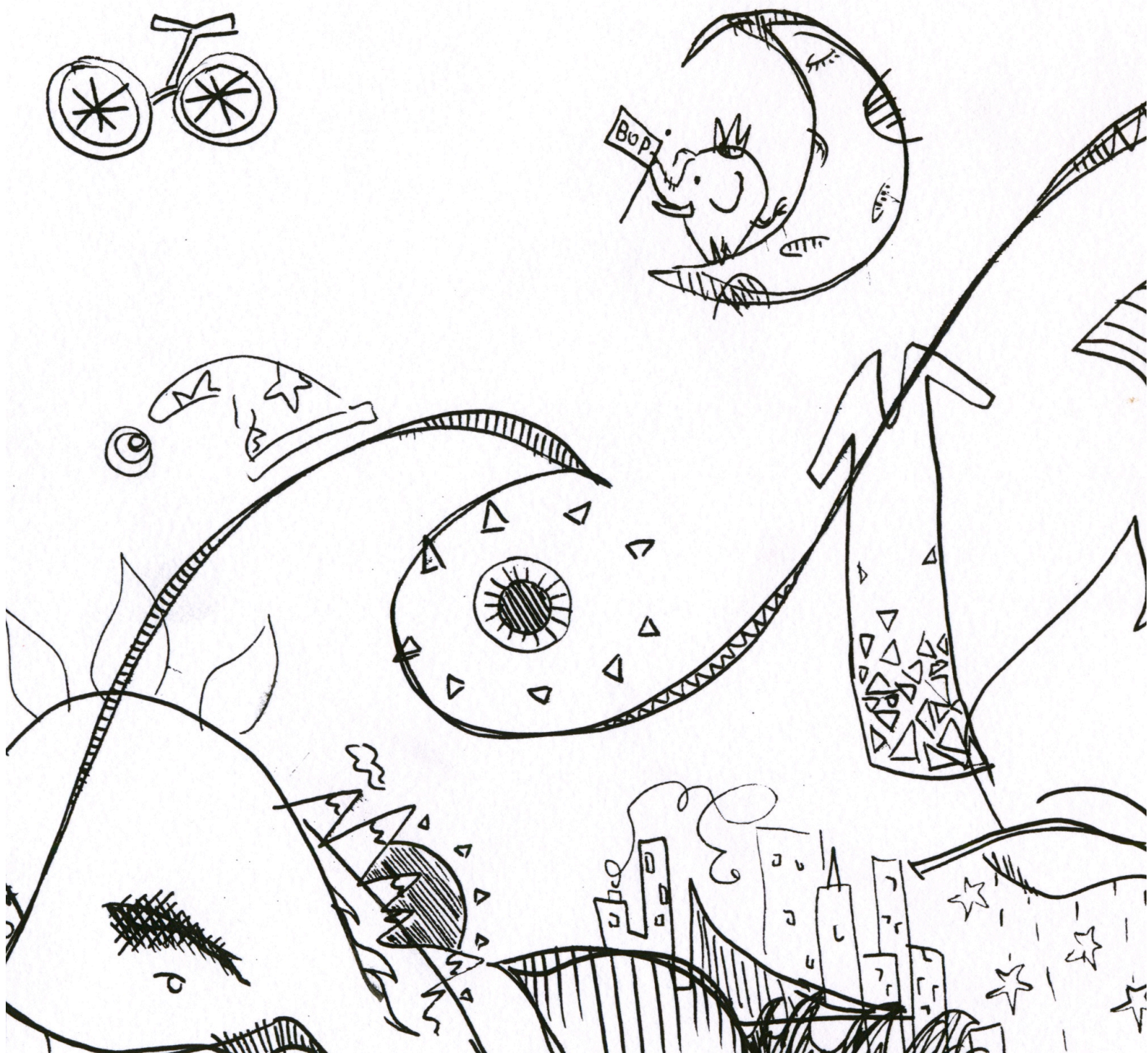
snoOoze

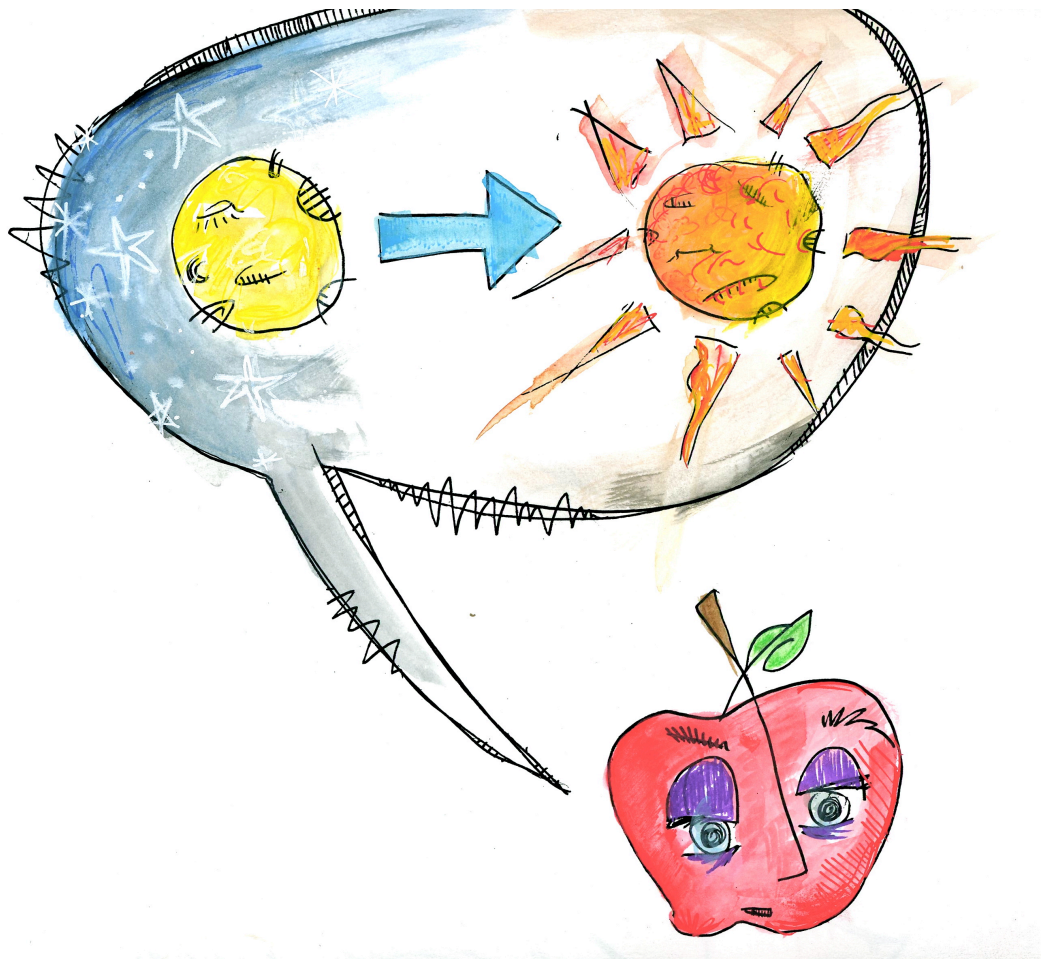
hey no sorry i can't come into work today.
well i guess because i'm kanye west but also because i'm sad.
all my favorite people keep turning into wind chimes.
well that's sad because i mean, wind chimes is my favorite flavor.
i keep eating people i love. i keep eating people

[text message vibration]

turn that damned sky off, i've got a dream to follow. three credits dry of catching up. sweat
semesters into my ankles. dream takes morning jogs with the clock, they've learned that no
where is all that far if you're willing to walk. can't remember can't remember if they learned that
from me i wake up too late to tie their shoelaces together i don't pay enough attention i'm
restless i rest.
i sleep i'm sleeping hey hello? hello?

snooze





Hey Hey Hey Hey

8:35 am. i am in the future. the future looks like allston in the morning
20 minutes before the 66. the future looks like allston in the morning and
a coffeetable by the window where the fruits i will forget to absorb into my body
are coming to life in the sun's oil spill. a banana screams - but she has no mouth.
just suddenly, a rash. bruises the sound of blush. from behind the peanut butter
an avocado gurgles and i agree with its assessment

but the apple with the purple eyelids blinks at me from where he rests
atop a norton's anthology and last semester's capstone. he is a gold star.

the apple: a visionary, a radiator blinking
with the flickering dow jones of the Republic.
he knows a lot more than i do so i lean in close to catch any of it
and i can smell the clementine on his breath
he is some sort of cannibal, but aren't we all? eating sentient things
or things that once were.
i will devour him at some point. it is inevitable.

his heart pulses under the stem where his brain would be but that's where
the heart really is all along anyway, right? and anyway--

"hEY." Apple speaks, "hey. hey are you listening to me? listen,
i've read all the poems, double checked the reports with
the window crack portal to the gods, here's the real romance
between the sun and the moon:
the moon is an earth apple, naked;
A potato, peeled. Artemis got bored
with waiting for Apolla. left a mess. And Apolla, she
got mad that the skins littered her skies closed every time
she went for a jog. the orbit of the earth is just a few sweeps
of the dustpan held steady by an angry god baking the
moon scarlet every morning with her rage -- this
is the real romance of night and day. did you get all that
did you alert the canon? did you consult your dream journal?
Did you reschedule
your dentist appointment? you're gonna
miss the bus."

Apple blinks, basking in the baked potato glow of the morning, his compatriots just stewing.
his heart brain pulses with the nerve of his knowledge -- one day he will be a pie.

i wonder who will anger me into flaying him cinnamon and preserves?
i wonder who will litter my nights with the skin of something i loved
before i loved them?

This is the real romance of lining up the fate lines on our palms:
it might never be enough. to wait, to keep waiting. to accept
the nightfall, that the cosmos are just starches left out too long
it might hurt so much i could bake it into my cavities,
i could name the ache after this.
i could devour it and it would still be a part of me.

Apple knows this. His heart brain absorbs my morning, the heat
from the coffee next to him stews, like it's the sun god's rage, distilled just for him.
He is growing powerful. He knows all my secrets,
knows a lot more than he should, tastes so good with peanut butter.

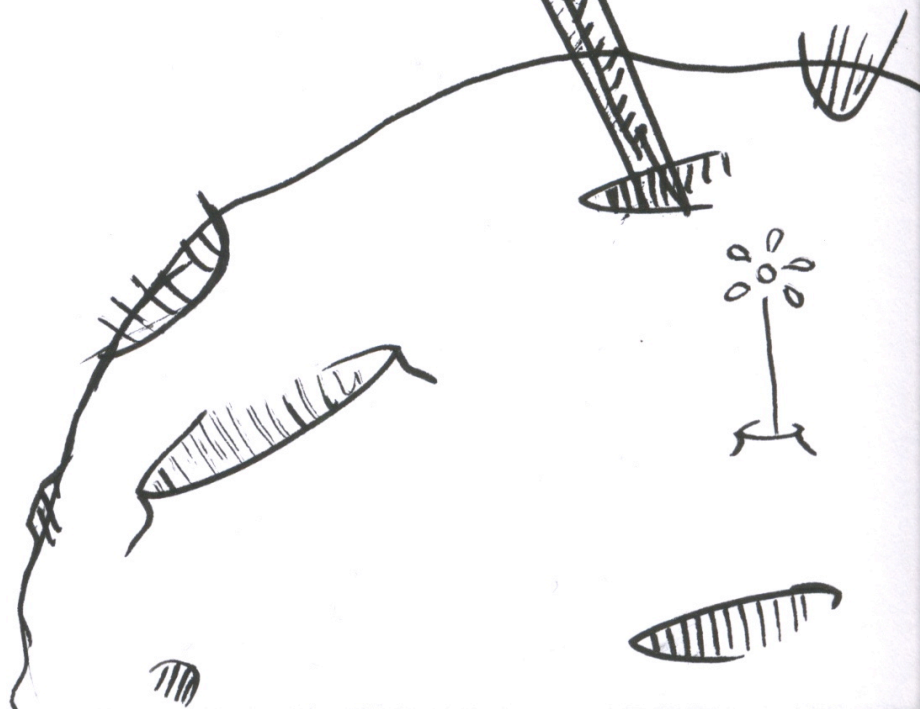
ABRUPT BANJO STUBS ITS TOE ON A STACK OF LOVE LETTERS

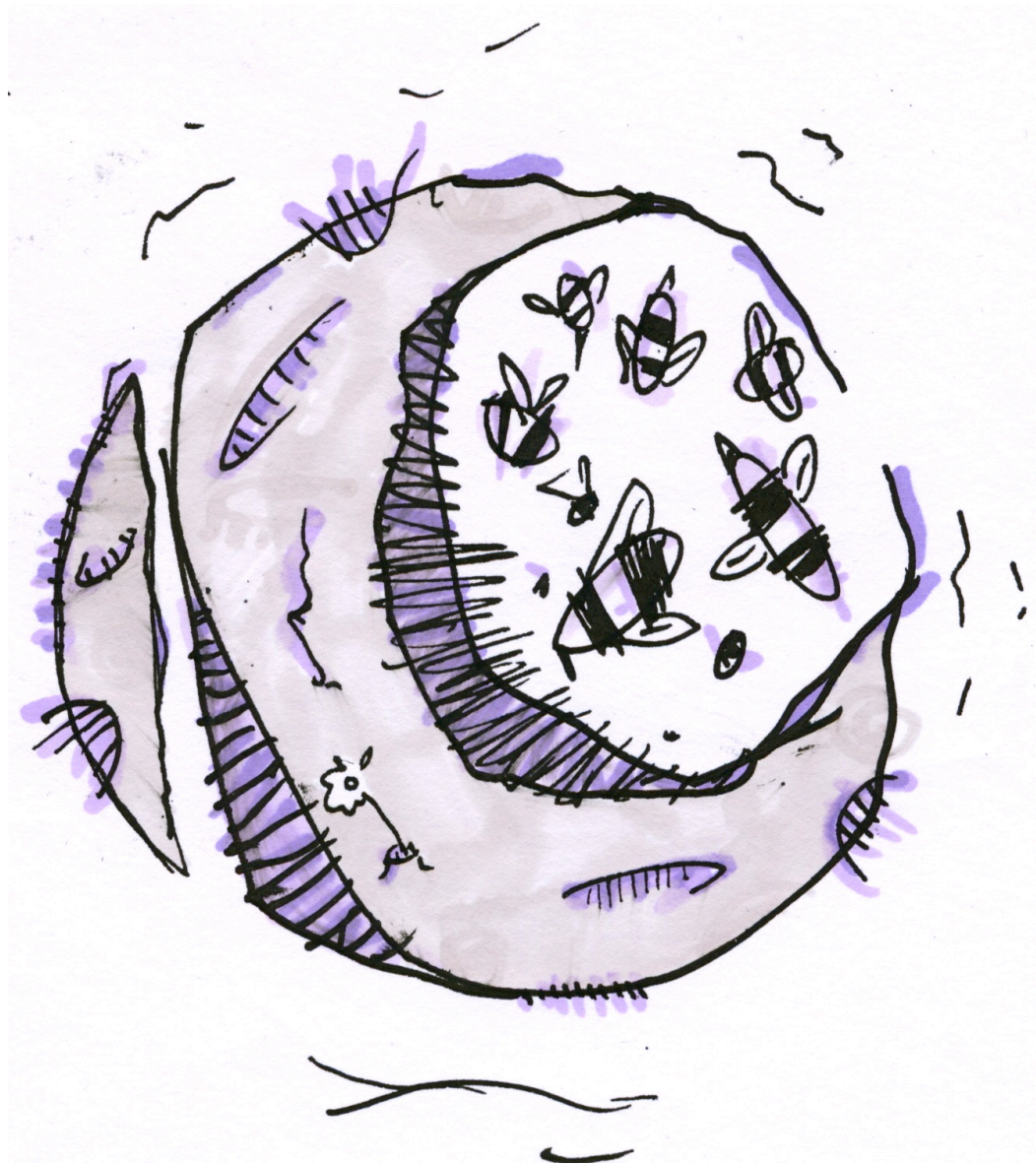
all the letters in your name like wires
dangling from a library book. zapzap
like lint when my tongue hits the phonix
electric fence so it's not mine to say
the way i've come to
say it so i don't say it anymore

but i used to dream about lamps.
about lights about lights about how
dogs can't see color but Picasso fed them cadmium anyway,
their insides on fire like uncomfortable lips - the swallowed sonic peel
of the skin, foaming where the bark rumbles. something inside me foams
at the sound at the zap zap and the not mine, it's not
mine not mine anymore and one time i tried to walk away
but i fell asleep at the Louvre. Musee de receipts and taxes.

"i've kept them, for you" said the mathematician before he stubbed
his toe on the east coast - he was trying to be a poem.
(met him on the 5:10 Northeast Regional. Penn Station to Providence)
(he ruined providence for me) (wrinkled the east coast like a zipper.)
architected earth like an abandoned wing but man, the smile
metallic, clear plastic, prongs of a fork.

heard someone say "i tried
not to be obvious. it's hard to look away."
yeah something like that. something
like that something like smiling politely
at strangers before becoming apples at their feet for you.
i used to dream about you. about apples. i used to apples
about dreams. about you, here. you are Here between banjo strings, sliced





bop bop

there are little people with trumpets for hands punching the back of my eyeballs every time i cross the street. jido is sick and my sister isn't eating and i found out that nothing lives inside the belly of an elephant except for the love it swallows when the love doesn't want to swallow it back

but it still makes their hair grow in fuzzies. in little tufts up top top de bip bop biddly bop sneep snop, hEY hey the brain is a stop sign now. it's nickles against cardboard when i'm sad. it's reds reds reds sea glass and the moon. I'm trying to make art but all the art is about how much this hurts. it hurts but hey whatever, you ever seen a ghost? you ever dreamed about soda can people? they live in the dregs of civil war, in the aftermath of the burp in the crack of its ankle. in the trail of history's nails against its own wrists - trenches for dead skin and alternate timelines, i think.

i don't know jack but jack knew my mom. he died at 18, swallowed by love for her, but not before he swallowed gunfire. megafauna of the chest: nickels shooting out of the body. bloodcells arranging into elephant before becoming confetti against olive trees. scarlet pillbugs. all tusk through a red t-shirt. he wears a red t-shirt and hugs my mother as she chops parsley and she doesn't know he's there and he doesn't know i know that he could've been my father and he wants to be but i already have a father and anyway i had a dream about fevers once.

and buttons the size of trees, futures peeking through the threadholes. eyes opening like mouths. and my sister still isn't eating, nothing lives inside her belly and jido asked me about the condition attached to the frontal lobe when we let it juggle our dreams.

he asked me what i saw in mine -- i didn't tell him i saw him there as kind of a child but not quite a child. he looked more like a ghazal with fig trees for arms and himself as a child swinging from the branches. but i didn't tell him that

i just told him about the moon full of bees, how it bounces against the earth like your eye against a first love's eye, i told him how outerspace fraternizes with our elbows while we sleep and he told me his brain is an upside down chair when he has a fever

he has a fever. his skin is a red tshirt, soaked

the trumpet handed people play taps against the back of my eyes at every crosswalk and i'm fine i'm okay i'm kind of the worst but i'm here. i've swallowed what makes the hairs grow. it's a tongue where my heart should be but the tastebuds are full of the memory of something sweet. the dark spice of reds and sea glass. brass megafauna and a stubborn water key. blood the sound of sad ska music. all tusk like a streetlight through the heart, again and again



i /live you

we're at felipe's and izzy asks me if i've written the poem about my lipstick on the burrito yet. i feel like the marked burrito is the poem itself and i almost don't want to touch that but now i have. the real poem is in the way izzy remembers all of me, and memory is a kind of superpower. also a kind of love.

one time marshall took my glasses off my face and cleaned them for me.
marisa was like Aw That's Love Right There and i agree - and then marshall told me my glasses were gross. but that's love too. and it's lots of things and other things like moon rocks for pockets or reflections of trees on washed cars, but i'm still afraid to say it out loud when it becomes a rubberband ball around any lone name in my gut.

guac didn't like to hug when we first met but now she hugs. we also say 'i love you' when we hang up on the phone. we still talk on the phone. i'm talking on the phone more often now. i get to say "love" to people a lot more now. this is kind of like practice but also like snapping the rubberbands to wake up what lives in the tangle of them, to get me used to the way insides can snap. when i get poetic with guac she tells me poetry hides what i need to Just Fucking Say Already and she's right
but then we hug with words and hang up

to test my maternal instinct i want to adopt a basil plant and raise it as my own and never ever pluck any of it for eats. but i keep a bottle of dried basil by my bed so i already don't trust myself but anyway, doesn't something shift when you become a parent?

on the train yesterday, i read a short story about a dad who shook his baby to death on purpose.

too cheshire of a cat, my pops would never do that but he has kicked a family computer to death. otherwise only really reached for his belt once but the same way you'd reach for the pull of a broken lawnmower. like, you could annihilate the overgrowth of grass, the spill of Loud and Too Much if you had it in you to do that. he never did. but he still spits, still shakes with something when he gets mad.

i'm afraid when i'm older i'll finally see what it is in the half of me that's his.

my phone changes "i love you" to I Live You and i think that's the closest to the womb we'll ever get again. when my mom tells me that she kissed her phone because i was on the other end of it, i know i'll never be half the mother she is even though half of my person is of her unscarred tissue and sunspots

she says "y'aburnee" which means I Love You So Much I Hope I Die First, I Hope You Bury Me and no one that didn't grow up hearing it realizes that the etymology doesn't originate in romance - it began as a dark spice in the womb. Mothers are the ones that say that word to you more than anyone else in your lifetime, if you're lucky. and even if they're not actually saying it out loud. and they mean it and i'm scared

i'll be a horrible mother -- i already am: i've left harold behind again. when i visit home, i watch him on the window by the sink. his bamboo looks greener, taller. less hollow. there are oceans inside the flutes of him, they sound along with my mother's humming as she washes the filodough from her hands. there are so many recipes to learn from her. so much selflessness i want to take, which means i'll never have it

i'll always be learning how to love, unlearning the haves i think i need to have
getting lipstick on my burrito was the best poem i've ever written and i'll only call anyone on the phone when i have it in me to say I Love You before the dial tone

i love you
all of you
but also i live you. a lot
even if i can't say it out loud

Pizza π Press

