

Night Ride on the Nymph Train

Due to their high volume of user traffic, I find that comment sections of celebrity Instagram accounts offer a near-perfect analog to the New York City subway. Somebody plays the guitar mournfully yet effervescently in the corner. Somebody else runs a dogfighting ring in a collapsed section of the F tunnel downtown. Somebody I know gets robbed at knifepoint, it's Monday in the afternoon, can you hurry this up God please I'm already late, she groans. You know? GOING PRIVATE, FOLLOW WHILE YOU CAN. Can Anyone Out There Hear Me? I am Beautiful Poised Ruthlessly Authentic Talented Unprecedented Pained. I play the guitar so uniquely and specifically anybody who listens instantly goes deaf, sticks a toothpick in their eye, drops dead of septic shock, it's tragic, it's viral, it's sublime. I Too, heard the caged bird sing, but I also heard it was lying, it bought that cage on EBay, you know the EBay seller just went public with the whole thing, you can go and watch the old livestreams see it isn't even locked, I mean. POSTING GORE. The only thing is, it's too clean here. The tunnels of the internet are perfectly manicured and crisp, and there's not a rat in sight. Instagram nearly tricked me, but they neglected that one little detail — the rats. Did you think I'd forget about the rats?

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Verses for the Mirror God

I live in the house with my mother.
 Together.
 Some people say we look like each other.
 I have her hair, her eyes,
 Her skin, her textures.
 I am like if you took my mother
 To the factory
 And asked for another,
 But this one in men's clothes.

My mother kicks me out
 I go live in a poem.
 Poems are great to live in
 Until it rains.
 My poem is beautiful,
 But it has no roof.
 I am always making things
 This way, beautiful
 But with no roof.
 It is not the way my mother would do it.

My mother comes to the poem

To visit me. She's like, you made this thing?
 It doesn't even have a roof.
 We talk about our differences,
 Our similarities.
 We can't help but resemble each other.
 But resemblance isn't a thing we do,
 It's chemical, a phenomena,
 Neither one of us completely
 Responsible for it, and neither one of us
 Completely in control.
 Perhaps it is better to say
 Resemblance dances between us
 Like a little elf, delighting
 And terrorizing us.
 Inside a book of puzzles, this question:
To what does the word "it" refer in this sentence:
"It is raining outside"?
 I'm looking at you, *it*,
 another little elf,
 The world is full of little elves,
 All of them are laughing at me.

I love my mother.
 I have her skin, her eyes,
 Her hair, her textures.
 I resemble her
 And this is my problem,
 My own personal little elf
 gnawing holes
 in my body
 Like a termite.
 To resemble anything
 Is to fear
 Becoming completely
 that which you resemble, to disappear
 into a oneness
 Which means you are no longer
 Anyone, in fact
 you aren't anything else at all,
 Just enough
 To be eaten by a termite.
 But I fear the opposite
 Is to be motherless, weightless,
 Abandoned

Like the *it*
When it rains outside.

I live in the poem with my mother.
We amuse ourselves
By taking each other apart
To see what exactly
we are made of.
In college Megan
Once took 5 grams of mushrooms
And sat on my bed
Recounting the nature of the universe.
All the universe,
Megan explained,
is controlled by little elves,
each piece of matter
Like a panel in a Rubik's cube,
Even the stars
and the hydrogen
Come apart, piece by piece:
All the world
Just a collapsable puzzle
for the elves,
For their frothing
Labyrinthine hands.
We think our ourselves
As in control, but really
All we are
Is their entertainment, the elves
built us
Like poems
Without roofs,
Occasionally making us
resemble one another
because they think it's funny, or maybe
It'll make for a good story,
A little beautiful
And a little cruel.

I don't understand my mother
But I look just like her.
What is this, this material
We are molded from,
Clay

That binds and
 Estranges, mysterious
 As the white matter
 in brains, what is this
 seducing us
 To generate
 And decompose?
 You take me apart,
 Rearrange the pieces.
 I become a mother
 And my mother becomes a poem.

Anja

It was March. I was living
 in the second-floor apartment
 near the center of town. Night
 Is the dominant feature
 Of my memories from this time —
 Driving home on the farm roads
 In the pitch black, coming back
 into the neighborhood
 At night, its little light
 Like a glass broken
 Into pieces,
 Functionless and pretty. March 8th was Z's
 Birthday and he wanted
 to go to the arcade, flirt with the bartenders,
 Order cheesy fries. I paced around
 Different rooms
 In the house
 At night, overcome
 With the feeling
 The Night
 Was standing outside the windows,
 That it could look at us,
 That it was watching.

My paranoia
 Is boundless
 And prolific, I was born with it
 The way some people are born dancers

or murderers. I'm paranoid,
But I make it look beautiful.
Anja, come meet us
At the arcade, seven o'clock,
And wear something cute,
Z's birthday
Is only once a year, after all. If The Night
Was a character
He'd be a man, a blue-skinned man
Like that family from Kentucky,
Whose inbreeding
caused a rare skin
and blood disorder
So they could only go outside
In the dark
After sundown. Tell me something,
You believe all this crap
They saying on the news? Anja twirls
a blonde highlight
Around a pointer finger
Painted pink. Z
Holding a virgin Shirley Temple, his smile
Like a unit of electricity, a stray
thread of static
escaping the wires of the memory.
Anja, pretty
Anja, who knows a guy
Who knows a guy
Who says this is all gonna blow over
In two weeks, guaranteed. It's March 8th.
March at 7pm
Has always felt
like a remote country, an archipelago
of kitchens and bedrooms
and lighted hallways, clusters
of fluorescent islands
floating in the dark. I used to have nightmares
About the sun never rising, the
winter never ending, and
Me
Stranded alone on my island forever. I worried
About my skin turning blue, my family's genes
Poisoning me with blue, and no human being
left to kiss me,

Just my cousin
 the Night. Share a bong with me,
 Then, if you're so
 Not scared, Anja taunts,
 Her flame
 reflects off the night
 I have created in my memory, cup-shaped
 Chamber of glass. I'm paranoid, I said.
 I'm paranoid, but I'm not scared.

I follow
 A cobweb of spit
 from Anja's mouth
 To mine,
 To Z's, to the bartender's,
 the fingers
 Touching the bartender's, the night,
 The Night,
 then
 Anja again.
 The world becomes a web
 And Anja
 Its spider.
 Oh Anja,
 This virus has made
 Filthy cousins of us all,
 The secretive pact
 Between me
 And every other living thing
 revealed: our deaths.
 When you got sick, I thought of praying for you.
 I prayed for you
 But I was thinking about myself.

Bad Minerals

I've just woken up from this dream about Ronan.
 Two years
 Since I've talked to Ronan,
 And now suddenly
 I'm dreaming about him.

Ronan
running down the terminal of Grand Central Station screaming
Deryn Deryn I'm Here. Ronan's face,
or what I dream of his face,
Liquid and
Half-metabolized,
a shape
Suspended in the webs
of delicate
biological reactions,
I imagine this
Is how it looks
When my body
Absorbs a nutrient, a toxin,
A chemical
Or a pharmaceutical drug.

I complain, but I could always
Have it worse. You think this is bad? Let me tell you
about another dream I used to have,
Where I am four years old
And being chased through an underground tunnel
By a creature known only
As The Bad Mineral.

Hundreds of times
I've had this dream,
I've never seen the creature,
but I've always known
This is its name. The Bad Mineral.
Why is it chasing me? I run
And run through the tunnels, which spread out
In all directions
Endlessly,
As though the earth has no magma, no liquid
No core.

My psychiatrist tells me
this dream is about control,
about a fear of unknown substances
in my body. The Bad Mineral, he says,
Is drugs, is change, the intimacy
Of change,
The pollution

of intimacy. Its
your antidepressant, you know the one
You're lying to me
about taking. I'm like, wow, hold on,
first of all,
I love antidepressants.
When I read the ingredients on their labels
Each word
sounds like the names of fairies. Sertraline.
Fluvoxamine. Sertraline
sounds like it would
take my hand, lead me
Through the endless tunnels
and caves,
Down and down we go, all the way
to the bottom,
the huge cavern
At the center of my dreams
Where the Bad Mineral sits.

I haven't seen Ronan in two years.
He was there one day
And then gone, like rain
In California. Like California,
I suffered. Cracks grew
On my surface.
I loved Ronan,
He did not love me.
These simple conditions
Created a landscape
Too desolate for life.

If I told you
What the Bad Mineral is,
Would you even believe me?
Some days I think
I'm afraid of everything.
Tsunamis, hurricanes,
Poison
In the groundwater,
Salmonella
unfurling
Through the tomatoes and romaine.
Each day

The world ends for a new reason.
The bad mineral
Is in our waters, our air,
It spreads in the soil
Down into the subterranean caves
of our dreams.
It's unclear
If I am dying, or if life and I
Have simply grown apart, slowly I watch
As it becomes
Less and less recognizable,
sometimes it feels like
We never knew each other at all.
I suppose
You can only pick one:
The end of the world, or the beginning
Of something else
besides living.
There's sulfur in the water,
There's water
in the desert.
The little world
Of my love for Ronan
Grows old and breaks down,
worms
and shiny beetles
come to live inside of it.
In California
My brother steps out of his house
In an air filtration mask.
Last night
I dreamt I was riddled with cancer, the cancer ran
All the way through me,
down and down,
I could feel it my bones
Like little tubers. I wake up,
The Bad mineral
holds me in its arms while I weep. Shh, it says.
It's okay.
I'm already here. Try to relax. You're so young
And still beautiful
And dying only happens
To things that are alive.

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Emma calls me late at night. Need you to help me move a couch, she says. A green sectional, one that she stole from her mother who is about to go to jail. You don't need couches in jail, you don't need mothers there either. The way Emma talks about the couch resembles the way a mother would discuss a child, maybe the child of a sister, a brother: this *thing* which is almost her thing. Of course I am remembering this which means some of the details are off, remembering is like holding up a mirror to the event and drawing it, line for line, each soft bubbling symmetry of it, until you have reproduced everything backward. The backward thing then becomes the truth, how awkward is that. I think crime works in a similar way, Emma told me when I first explained this, this interior of memory. You think you have been made or manufactured backward, and everything you do reflects off of your astoundingly misbehaving body. It is as though you are made of mirrors--you try to cause as much of a scene as possible, in the hopes some part of your body, even one, will exhibit its lowly symmetry. You are a mangled little backwards creature, the mirror inside of you, dripping and pissing on itself. It began to rain as we moved the couch, each particle of rain as exact as glass, the rain itself a mirror, my body merely the legs of some hulking, hairy creature shaped like a couch, and I suddenly I realize I have entered my life. All these years I have been moving furniture around, trying to get everything into one room. Here at last is the room, the life, the scent of its air. I lay down to bed and sleep on myself.