

Hummingbird Drama

Year One

July 2020 - June 2021

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I'm happy to say that after one year, *Hummingbird Drama* is finally starting to become what I want it to be, what I *need* it to be.

Something Strange and Unusual

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Now, I'll tell you what I need: restless winds and hummingbird drama and weeds in the flowerbed and a porch swing. Just for a few simple moments, before I leave again.

Index Terms—yeehaw, wahoo, yeeyee

THINGS I CLING ONTO

I'm abandoning the hope of making this first issue even a little bit cohesive, because I've been having one hell of a time starting. So, I figured that I'd rather have one burning-hot mess than nothing at all. I've poured myself a cup of cold coffee, my nails are adequately bitten, and I am riding a wave of early-afternoon melancholy. What better time to start than this?

I'm 23 now, and I have no clue what to do about that. My lower back hurts more often than before, so I guess the iron fist of old age is finally beginning to close in on me. Youth was nice while it lasted, I suppose.

I recently moved back Home to two new books. One of them is *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* because I've heard great things about it, and the other is *Kafka on the Shore* because it sounds really great and because I want to embrace that "graduate student that reads Murakami" aesthetic. Seeing that I haven't properly finished an entire book in what feels like years, this is exactly on-brand for me.

THE MAN WITH THE UMBRELLA

Before I left Rochester, NY I saw a man with an umbrella in his hand. I wish I could understand why the image of this man walking with a folded umbrella at the ready in his hand is so permanently burned into my mind. It was a borderline zany scene, at best. Perfectly average at worst. I still remember the heat, the wind, the texture of the road underneath my bicycle tires. Most importantly, though (because this is a story about the man with the umbrella and not about me) how this rain-cane swayed methodically back and forth in this person's hand while he walked. What a beautiful, miserably average memory.

I'M JUST VIBIN' BRO

It really is a shame that summer ended before it even started this year. This feels like a *placeholder summer*. I can't believe I exist in it, sometimes, but here I am, sweating and wishing it was winter.

I held an impromptu dance party in my bedroom a few days ago that lasted a few minutes, and I'm honestly still riding the serotonin wave from it. I was Home alone so I wasn't worried about disturbing anyone, and there, barefoot on that off-white carpet, I existed in perfect harmony with everything.

I think that I *needed* to start writing again. My old blog felt expired, so I ripped it out of the ground to start this. It felt good, to do away with it. I just wanted to start creating

things again. Times being as they are, it feels like I have a personal duty to write things down. I know writing helps me, and having something to look back on is always a treat. Lest I become buried in a graveyard of my own words, I shall continue to write.

GOSSIP, NATURALLY

I have been keeping busy with a small research project and other miscellaneous things here and there, but I have been feeling very stuck, very trapped. I have never had a good relationship with free time. Recently, this has become more of an issue. I often find myself pacing around, waiting for some kind of divine intervention for inspiration, for 10 or 20 minutes of focus, for any kind of fixation that will keep my mind occupied, for *anything*. Then, when it finally comes to me, I gulp it down and think "wow, doing things actually improves my mental health!" then proceed to willfully ignore that thought as some kind of corrupt reward to myself for doing something productive. With a hand stroking my scraggly facial hair I contemplate my escape from this cycle, and with squinted eyes I see some promise.

Often, on my bike rides around RIT over the last couple of months, I would wave to the deer that roam around close to the roads. These deer have, it seems, no real fear of humans or their presence. I am under the impression that if I sat on a nearby bench with a deck of cards and maybe a bag of carrots, I would soon attract an audience of them and we would smoke cigars and play rummy. We would gossip about everything: the weather, how the algae moves on the creek nearby, and maybe even about the man with the umbrella. I just waved, though, and hoped that maybe they gossiped about me.

OOF, IT REALLY BE THAT WAY, HUH?

One of my only personality traits is being bad at responding to people, even people I really honestly care about. I am really horribly bad at responding. I will never read a message unless I am, at that moment, emotionally and mentally ready to respond. More often than not, I am almost never emotionally or mentally ready to respond. This is something I have been working on, and something I will continue to work on, because I don't want to sour a relationship just because I'm bad at responding to people. It piles up, though. I will go days without responding to anyone because I'm just so overwhelmed by it all. For some reason, the only place I am granted immunity from this is with emails. I am very good at responding to emails. Maybe because they are more formal? I like how email chains typically have unspoken ends. With texting, it feels very ambiguous: if I don't respond to something that (to me) was an obvious natural end to a conversation am I a piece of shit? And, if they don't respond in the same situation do I have any

reason to be hurt by that? I just feel like garbage if I haven't sent the last message because I don't want people to think I'm ditching them. And, it's much easier for me to just absorb the pain and always send the last message and feel like *I'm* the one being ditched, even though I know that is almost never the case but is instead something my insecurities lead me to believe. So, how does my lizard brain cope? By not reading or responding to anything. Great thinking, Greg, super great interpersonal skills... How about you go find some bugs to eat and a warm rock to lie down and maybe you'll feel better, you cold-blooded bastard.

DESK PORN

One of my dreams is to have a room in my home that has a really big desk in it. This desk would ideally be *very* big and *very* sturdy, and made of some rich, dark wood. It would be larger than the door, and have no screws, bolts, or fasteners. It would be carved out of one very large piece of wood: one unflinchingly sturdy unit of mass. It would be so ruggedly large that the house would have to be built around it, because there would be no possible way for it to have entered through any door or window. My hand would run over its surface and I would smile and think to myself "wow, what a desk."

JUST SAY IT

There are things that I'm afraid to write down. I have found that confronting such things are very productive, but very difficult. I once received advice from someone that if you are trying to write poetry, or any kind of meaningful prose, write about things that you are afraid of. I'm not talking about spiders or snakes or waking up late for class. I'm talking about the gray storm clouds that swallow heartbeat thunderclaps whole. The monuments you spend mulling over in your mind that you are too afraid to reveal to others. The letters and words and phrases you would never ever write because it would put you at risk for being forever misremembered as a horrible, anxious fraud. These things are essential for progress. It must be better to confront these things, right? Do they need to be tagged with disclaimers and warnings? Perhaps. A more appropriately label might be "this is a part of myself that I am working on, because I am always and forever will be a work in progress."

INTERSECTED

While I was driving today, I turned down a small road to drop my mom off at her friend's house. In front of me on the larger road there were two cars that, one after the other, also turned down this smaller road before me. I wondered "what if I sat by this intersection all day and counted the longest number of consecutive cars to turn down this road?" I suddenly became so happy that I was able to be part of such an unlikely event. Three cars, right in a row, turning down the same smaller road. It's an interesting problem, now that I give it more thought. For any intersection, what is the probability that a car will make a particular turn? I will leave this for another time, and simply harvest the small amount of joy it brought me and tuck it away somewhere safe for now.

TREES, AND HOW STURDY THEY ARE

"This looks like a good place to sit." We clambered onto the massive fallen tree whose roots were sprawled out at one end and whose foliage might have grown at some point long ago on the other. It was sturdy, and my open hand inspected its bark after I had managed to sit myself upright on it, my legs straddling a fraction of its circumference. It felt powerful, even now, and I considered the world beneath its tough exterior. Were wars waged there? Did people suffer and cry and forgive deep inside of this tree? What sweet things would lovers whisper to each other in this hidden world? That was just nonsense, though, and this tree was real.

EARLY RISER

Sometimes I'll look at my breakfast plate and think "now this is a breakfast that my grandpa would be proud of." One egg cracked inside a hole cut in the center of a slice of bread, and pan-fried on both sides with butter and salt and pepper. One beautiful egg-in-a-basket. Black coffee in a glass. Not a cup. A *glass*. There is something so emotionally raw about drinking black coffee in a glass. You might be proud of me, for finally coming to like coffee. And someday maybe I'll wake up early with the newspaper and wait for someone I love to emerge from the bedroom. And, after I lower the paper and meet eyes with them, I'll ask them if they want me to make them breakfast.

RABBIT BLOOD

*Little did the Rabbit know,
Painted on the winter snow
Was crimson Blood from heartbeat's end.
Rabbit never spoke again.
Wolves will eat the Moon tonight,
Rabbit's fur, no longer white.
Keeping time with bloody throbbing,
Rabbit kept his vigil,
sobbing*

AN EDGE

I still remember when it hit me. I was doing something on my computer, and suddenly the entire world became one very long, very dark well and I was clinging to its cobblestone edge while my feet dangled into the void below. I got up in a panic, and frantically moved around my room, hands pressed against my walls for support and my skin trembling with this horrible and mysterious anxiety. "I need to go, I ne- I need to move and go somewhere and keep moving and -" I managed to sprint down my stairs and hop on my bike and the world started to become slower, less frightening than before. Before I knew it I was sitting in an empty parking lot, relishing in the freedom of the wide-open space. I stared at nothing and waited for it to pass.

I'm not sure what that was, but I am afraid of it. I had a similar experience when I had gotten too high, but I was *sober* this time. This kind of anxiety had no place in my "regular" life, right? I felt so unhinged and disconnected from everything; nothing else mattered but movement and open spaces and *hanging on* until I could clamber back up to reality.

MAYBE REGRET IS RESERVED FOR THOSE WHO AREN'T HAPPY WITH WHO THEY TURNED OUT TO BE? OR MAYBE IT'S FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF?

BACK PORCH

Cigarettes and nail polish.

We will probably never get around to having any decent seating on our back porch, but it's just perfect for now.

"One more drag for the road."

Half-concerned remarks about the spider webs.

"Maybe it'll get the fly."

I don't think anything bad is allowed to happen back here. This small block of concrete is our kingdom, and is meant for music, conversations, and. Silence.

There's not much to look at, but it's just perfect for now.

A QUICK NAP

I sunk deep enough into those red cushions to find birdsong and bliss. My hand rested on the Sun's warmth and I sunk deeper. My mom sat near me, reading. I sunk deeper. The afternoon cradled my body in its reassuring embrace. I sunk deeper. I forgot about everything for a fraction of a second and I sunk deeper and deeper and deeper. When I woke up, I was molasses. Nothing had happened while I was gone. Everything was exactly where it was. I felt relief. Not even the Robins had noticed my hiatus.

ACCURATE, A TANGENT

I wish my microwave was more accurate. Like, wickedly accurate. I'm talking about precision to the thousandth of a second. I would slither out of my bedroom at 3am, pop open the freezer door, snag a hot pocket from the box, screech in a high-pitched reptilian tone (this step is crucial), and pop that baby into my space-grade microwave. With this new precision, I could get my hot pocket to just the right temperature. Let's say I wanted to do that. What would be the most efficient/reliable experiment method? I would probably start by finding the lowest temperature at which I get burned when I eat it. This might be tricky, because as my experiment grew longer I would be adding bias because my mouth would be damaged after every trial. So, to compensate, I would likely have to wait for my mouth to heal in between each trial to be completely unbiased. But, would I emerge from each trial with a stronger tolerance to the burns? I would have to make the assumption that I do not if I want to keep things simple, for now. I could revisit mouth-burn tolerances later. So, I find the minimum temperature at which I get burned and that would set the upper limit. Then, it becomes a matter of optimization. What makes a hot pocket most enjoyable? I don't want it to be cold in any regions, so I would also likely have to find the lower limit. I could do these trials over and over again though because I no longer am at risk of mouth damage. I might get full, though, and that would influence my perception of enjoyment so I would have to (in order to be fair) eat each hot pocket at exactly the same level of hunger in my optimization phase so as to not bias each trial in that sense. Now that I consider the heating process, I have no reason to believe each trial will uniformly heat each hot pocket, nor will it have the

same temperature distribution for each trial. So, I could just now assume a simple biased quadratic heat distribution for each hot pocket, where the origin is the center of the hot pocket. I make this assumption because hot pockets tend to be coldest in the middle and warmest on the ends, with some gradient in between. So, let's say I have found the lower limit where the origin temperature (which is the global minimum for temperature in the system) is not *cold*. To be rigid, I might need to define, quantitatively, *hot* and *cold* for myself, with the assumption that these perceptions will likely change from user to user. But I digress... I now have a lower and upper temperature limit and I begin optimization. I am looking to optimize a curve that tracks "enjoyability." The curve would peak when the following conditions are met: the coldest part of the hot pocket is just above my *cold* threshold, and the max temperature at the "extremities" would be just below my *hot* threshold. In this way, I could make my way across the hot pocket without suffering from either limit. The next step in enjoyability optimization would be to considering how the temperature profiles influence enjoyability: what profile would be most pleasant? I guess it would depend on how you eat the hot pocket. Most people start from one end and go to the other, but I don't see any reason to be so obsessed with that method. It is the most simple and straightforward, so for now we can stick with that. We would also have to assume that the timescale of consumption is so short that the temperature profile does not change during consumption. I will continue to consider this problem, but I think this should serve as a nice primer for further thought.

DREAMS

Before I fall asleep I write things down on my skin so that my dreams won't steal them. On my chest I record my desires. On the back of my hands I write ideas. On the inside of them I write secrets. My lips are for the things I never said but should have, and on my ears I write the things I heard but never listened to. On each of my fingers I write down numbers, because I like to think about numbers. On the area under my arm that I never properly wash, I write instructions for how to wash that area. On my thighs will be written stories I want to tell and on my calves I write the things that I am proud of. My eyes are a canvas for that first time I made eye contact with you because I never want to forget that feeling. I continue until each and every part of my body has words on it. And, when my dreams come looking for my stories, they will sit and read them. See, I have no control over them, but if my writing is worth reading I can keep them entertained and distracted until morning comes. While I sleep I can hear them laugh and cry and talk about me, but they will spare me my memories. And so I will continue to write stories to myself so that when it comes time for me to forget I will have the option to remember.

NURSE

There are rumors of vines that grow in the depths of the jungle, Slow, creeping vines that caress the gentle limbs of trees until they suffocate. These broken figures are forced to

watch the vines grow around them. A life that isn't worth living.

"Keep your worthless, broken apologies away from me." The nurse furiously spat, inching closer to the fresh block of stone on the ground below. Far beneath the earth, suffocated sobs could be heard, and the gentle wind caressed her as she knelt weeping above the fresh grave, whispering words of hate and regret.

WISHES

*Keep the crystals and the necklace,
Vanity will make me reckless.
What I want are sunshine kisses,
Autumn days and careless wishes*

JUST NONSENSE

I'm going to bubble over. Did you know that I was baptised in old coffee? I *will* bungle this, and I *will* think about it for years to come. I really can't stand how I linger on ember-thoughts, the dying coals at the bottom of the fire pit. Don't you see the flames!? These are here, present, licking the air and freeing themselves from their suffering. But, what is a fire without a bed of coals? I can't bargain with the elements, but I bring gifts of water and earth. The potter heats the clay and shapes from the flame a vessel to hold his tears. He places it back on the fire for the tears to evaporate, and he scrapes the residue from the inside of the pot and seasons his meal with it. He cooks it over the fire and eats it, juices dripping down back into the pot. The fire grows. He cries again. The cycle repeats.

WHAT IT'S LIKE

I recently pulled something in my back. This morning, while I tried to fold my blanket, I winced and groaned as I bent over, and sang another harmony on the way back up. This must be it for me. Consider this my retirement from youth. Now, I am destined to sit at dinner tables and entertain guests with how nimble I used to be. They will laugh and I will laugh and before I know it we are all laughing about how fragile things are. I thought about my grandparents, and how gingerly they moved around the house, holding onto banisters and taking their time with sitting down and standing up. I have finally inherited what is mine.

But no, I'm just sore. I am painfully aware of how out-of-shape I have gotten, and have recently been taking measures to correct for that. This is just a growing pain (I hope).

GIFTS

Cookie woman and flip-flop boy left for the ocean,
And they send us purple packages tied up with blue screams.
Don't let the wrapping deceive you, though:
These are gifts of whale-song.

WILD CARDS

I am going to die at this table. A handful of cards, head buzzing, spinning, panic. Candy-red wine and a two-of-clubs. I didn't even use up all of my buys. I still have letters to respond to. I can't die now. I still have a game to play. I can't die now. I still have things to learn. I won't die now.

BLOOD ON THE PAGE

I was so engrossed in the right-hand side of the page to notice the crimson smear on the left. This must be blood, right? I looked at my fingertips, which were usually the first to bleed. Nothing. My hands were free of any blood, up to my wrists, up my arm... still nothing. I rushed to the mirror to look at my face, but there was no blood to be seen anywhere. Expect for this page. I tried to rub it off, but it had dried by then. I feel like this is a testament to something, I'm just not sure what yet.

IT'S MIDNIGHT AND I HAVE EATEN AN ENTIRE BOWL OF CHERRIES

BRIEF REMARKS

Is that rain?
I think so.
It's a rag doll evening, and my limbs are weak with the weight of another lazy afternoon.

DIVINITY AND BLUEBERRIES

Quiet mornings on my bicycle, wrists tense, legs pumping up and down and up and down. I fought too hard to get up this hill to take it easy on the way down, so my breaks will have to wait. I imagine myself falling and my hands twitch; I reach for the lever to slow myself down, but I resist. I recklessly revel in the wind and my eyes are watering. Mourning dove dissonance from behind the trees mixes with heavy breaking. I'm embarrassed to say that my heavy, sweaty breaths kinda turned me on (yikes). There's no wind in this deciduous tunnel. I haven't been on this road before, but this must be the way. Right at the T. Right at the T. And follow it back Home.

THOUGHTS FROM MY BEDROOM FLOOR

*Morning fell from the palms of the widowed giants and
landed softly on beige carpets while the songbirds mourned
the death of the night.
A preacher could be heard behind the closed door, praying.
This is where things go to exist once they've been forgotten.
My jaw hurts, and it's time to get up.*

PICKING UP PIZZA (I ALMOST HIT A RABBIT)

Eating pizza out of a nondescript box and drinking apple juice.
Folk music, a puzzle (almost) and some kind of pleasant time together.

BACK SEAT PANIC

I had another episode of panic (or whatever the hell I've been having... I'm not really sure what it is, but its characteristic dizziness, mania, and panic have really been giving me a run for my money) in the backseat of my uncle's car today. It's really frightening. I'm afraid of getting it on my flight to Arizona. I managed to handle it pretty well I guess; I'll just need to have an action plan just in case it hits me. Ughhhh.

CLASSICALLY WET

Lacrimosa in the shower; it's dark on the back porch this afternoon.

IMAGES FROM THE PARTY

- "This is going to be my favorite hat."
- Red Bicycle playing cards. (disheveled, and maybe a beer can)
- Hands on knees, watching people smoke.
- Ants, everywhere.

AN OBSCURE MEMORY FROM A LONGISH TIME AGO

Glycerine eyes, a yellow couch, and words that couldn't seem to come out. Everything was so close. I could hear everything that you couldn't manage to say. You left so quickly.

REACH

I made some coffee tonight. Dinner-table musings are keeping me awake. I have things to prove, but I'm so weary. I think I want to be naked. Not for any particular reason, nor for any particular length of time. What to do, what to do?

SATURDAY MORNING

Kitchen: cleaned. Candle: lit. Glass surface: wiped. Speaker: bass-boosted. Pillows: arranged. Status: perfectly alone.

A BIT OF TROUBLE

The Old Spirit in the forest entered through my bedroom window last night. Quietly. Slowly. He stepped over my tense body and felt my delusions ooze out of me. My eyes must have been locked shut. I'm trapped here on the floor.

Before I fell asleep I whispered "My dreams, my dreams, spare me Midnight. A solitary reprieve for the first hour. Please, give me peace for these first twelve strokes." I flipped to my side, then flipped again and again and again until I was properly fed-up. I rolled right past Midnight, into One, into Two.

I like my dreams, truth be told. Though, I could use some rest. Dreaming is not resting. Sleeping is resting.

MUNDANE NUDITY

I have the incredible opportunity to be Home alone. I spent this morning cleaning so that I can properly enjoy myself. I think I need to do some more chores, though. I can't *really* find pleasure unless I have accomplished something. Damn shame. Regardless, I think I'll use this opportunity to play music as loudly as I'd like and be naked for as long as I please. Why not? I couldn't be more neutral about this urge; I have no real motivation to do so. I don't want to fulfill some kind of sexual desire, I don't necessarily want to revel in any kind of bodily freedom, I don't want anything in particular. I just want to be naked and... I don't know, make breakfast or something.

SOME BRIEF REMARKS ABOUT THINGS

I want to embrace these final moments. I'm only weeks away from starting something *big*. It seems so far away but I know it will be here soon. I'll be swept away into the thrills, the horrors, the love and the hate, into everything, into adventure. But right now, life feels still. I have nowhere to be, nobody to see, or any obligation. My eager body is being pulled into the vortex, though. It's hard for me to find peace in times of perfect, prolonged stillness. I get nervous if I'm not doing something. But I think, now more than ever, I'm obligated to push aside these feelings of anticipation. I don't know when I'll be back. I don't know what might change in my absence. All I can know is what is here, right now. And I'd like to enjoy that.

NOCTURNAL

*Open blinds and window panes,
On sunny days I hope it rains.
Moths are playing chess outside,
hiding 'til the Sun subsides.*

WHOA

My uncle said that I'm officially in my mid-20's and I haven't stopped thinking about that. So far, the best thing about being 23 is being able to indulge in that one line from Blink-182's song *What's My Age Again?*

WHAT

"Well that's just nonsense." His body was sprawled out on the carpet and his back was arched. "Of course the birds think I'm prude, I've never put my moves on a bird." He took another bite out of his apple and relaxed his back, lowering it to the carpet. "I'm not even that into birds."

OH BOIII

"Sir, I'm getting a strange transmission. Here, have a look." The alien handed the receiver to his captain. "My God. The earthling is lying on the floor listening to *Hooked on a Feeling* by Blue Swede and Björn Skifs at 5pm. The volume appears to be all the way up." The entire operations center was speechless. "Fucking beautiful."

MORE DREAM CONTENT

"You were in my *dreams* last night." What a powerful statement. I am becoming more and more of a proponent of analyzing dreams, given my history of strange dreams and my more recent history of restless and alarming dreams. "You were in my *dreams*." No, you weren't in my *dream*, you were in my *dreams*. To me, there is a huge difference. A *dream* could be anything, at any time, for any length. My *dreams*, however, tell a longer story; it feels more intimate and intentional.

GET READY

Hold on to the kite string tight, kid, everything is about to happen.

Hello, Goodbye, and Other Pleasantries

Gregory Nero

Abstract—This edition of *Hummingbird Drama* will see me through a rather intense transition in my life. I'll be moving west, starting graduate school, and leaving everything that is currently familiar to me to pursue something that I am passionate about. I am tremendously excited and equally as nervous. There's something waiting for me out there, and I'm ready to find it.

Index Terms—oh no, oh boi, here we go

THE IMAGING CHAIN PODCAST

My good friend Tom Caruso is starting a podcast about the imaging chain and other imaging-science-related things! I had the honor of being his first guest. [Check it out](#) and be on the lookout for more episodes!

BLACKBIRD REGRETS

I lost my thoughts this morning to the sporadic calls of the blackbird. Somewhere in the woods he yelled for me, calling me, inviting me into the treetops and the canopy of the forest. I couldn't join him, though, because I have a Zoom meeting soon and I can't really climb trees.

ATLAS

I am Atlas in the morning. The heavy dew rests on my shoulders and I sink my knee into the soil, bearing its weight. I am Atlas in the afternoon. The Sun's heat bears down on me and my other knee is forced into the arid earth. I am Atlas in the evening. The weight of another long day brings me to my belly and I rest with it on top of me. I will bear these burdens again tomorrow, and every day after.

I AM HAUNTED BY THE GAUSSIAN DISTRIBUTION

I was popping popcorn last night (at a very unreasonable hour) and I started thinking about the Gaussian distribution again. The corn pops started slowly, had a peak, and then tapered off. "Hm... I bet I could model popcorn pops with a Gaussian distribution," I thought, standing mostly naked in my kitchen in the middle of the night. "It really is everywhere."

HOW LEONARD COHEN'S *Marianne* BECAME EVERYONE AND EVERYWHERE I HAVE EVER LOVED

I clean the kitchen in the morning. I always play music when I clean. As I was washing dishes, *So Long, Marianne* came on and I thought of you, and you, and everyone, and everywhere, and my mistakes and how I have ruined love and how it is probably better to just move on already. But, with hands paused under running water, I thought about everything like that and I slowly sang along because it helped.

HOW TO CONFRONT SENTIMENTALISM AND BECOME EMOTIONALLY LIBERATED

The weight and necessity of small, mundane, ordinary things is extraordinary. I spent about a week cleaning out my room. A lifetime of possessions in a single place. Put these in the donate pile. Put these in the trash. I don't need these anymore. These are old memories, so let me indulge myself one last time and then be rid of them. What's the use? I want to remember, but maybe not now and maybe not often. I want to be *able* to remember, if I want. The things I kept, I kept. And, the things I pitched, I pitched. My room is cleaner now, and so am I.

FOUR BAGS

I made an Excel spreadsheet to help me pack. My Mom helped me on the front porch. These are just things. I am adding to the list. Underwear. Shorts. Books. One fork, one spoon, one knife, one plate, one bowl, one glass. Only the necessities. I have four bags that I can bring. It should be plenty of room.

GETTING REALLY EMOTIONAL IN THE HOT TUB

I didn't cry in front of you because I didn't want to ruin the moment. *Kids* by MGMT was playing and I felt so silly for my trembling lips and my tense throat. I will miss you.

LONG NAILS

My nails have never been longer than they were on vacation this summer. But, all good things must end, and when I got back Home I destroyed them. And now my thumb is wrapped in a Band-Aid and my fingertips are tender.

EYE TWITCH

I listen to the subtle signs my body gives me to tell me that it is stressed out. For example, my freshman year in college I got hemorrhoids. Not a great time. I often get cold sores, and more recently my right eye has been twitching. Thanks body.

THE RUBY RING

I dreamt about my grandfather's ruby ring, and rushed to the jewelry box when I got Home to find it.

SUDOKU ON VACATION

Strange, how I looked forward to that. I shouldn't be solving problems right now, I'm supposed to be relaxing. But this is the best I can do, sitting on a bed next to you in the middle of the afternoon working on this puzzle. I can't do arithmetic. I am the boat and you are the propellers. Structure and progress.

BLUSHING, I'M SCORCHED

I have no idea who you are but I think we should go to the dance together. I remember the back of your neck, how it turned red and then charred like a burnt marshmallow.

HYDRATE PLEASE!

It's only Monday but I've already managed to drink an ENTIRE glass of water. It's shaping up to be a great week.

WHAT A STRANGE COMBINATION

A tough grin and a bowl of orange juice. Gritted teeth. Frozen blueberries, floating and sinking. What sound does that make? It's sloshing and bumping around, for sure. A metal spoon. Electric flavors, zapped by the 9am alarm.

STILL HAVING SLEEPING PROBLEMS?

I get confused when I sleep on the floor. Unfortunately, I have been sleeping on the floor almost every single day for weeks. Fortunately, the confusion is stimulating and exciting, albeit disturbing. Sleeping is a balancing act nowadays. I am uneasy and my acrobatic dreams tilt and turn around me.

LOTS OF STUFF

Blueberry blessings live in small plastic containers. "I'll only have one, I don't want to have a bad trip." Backseat panic happened again and I scrambled to open that app where you sell eggs on a farm to calm me down. There's no open spaces in the backseat of a compact car. It's an assassin, this feeling. The knife is long and cold and sharp and it reaches everywhere that I can't.

CHERISH

The air is untangled here. I braid strands of the afternoon while I sit on the front porch. The fabric is soft and gentle, adorned with the rustling of trees and the chirping of birds. I run my hands over the blanket and press it to my face. With eyes closed I take in a deep breath and hold on tighter. This is how I want to remember Home.

SOME INTROSPECTION

So I've been doing a bit of thinking about how I cope with anxiety, sadness, and overall angst. It has been really challenging, recently, to be optimistic. It has been miserably difficult to enjoy anything. Considering everything that's happening, I can't really be surprised. It's frustratingly hard to be motivated about anything, and I feel very trapped. So, what's to be done? There are some "short-term" fixes, I've found, like working out, taking a shower, writing, cleaning, etc... But while these are totally valid ways for me to get out of ruts, to get out of BIG ruts I need something more. And I'm in a dummi-thicc rut right now. Like, I *really need to do something about this* rut. As I was mulling over my troubles in my bedroom earlier today, I experienced anger. I don't get angry very often, but it flared up for half a second and then disappeared. When I went chasing after that feeling, I discovered that the source of my anger was *myself* and my *feelings of sadness*. This felt really

backwards at first, but then I started to pick it apart. I don't like who I am when I'm like this. I'm simply miserable, quite honestly. I have so much I want to be doing and getting done but my own self-pity is getting in the way. I want to be making progress, but instead I'm staring at the ceiling for most of the afternoon. So, in a fit of anger my mind yells "GET UP" and this anger forces something out of me. And, since I'm almost never really angry, my mind listens. It's like a swift kick in the ass. Somewhere deep underneath all of the melancholy there is a little coach blowing a whistle yelling at me to do more laps, more push-ups, more of *anything but what you are doing right now*. So I will do my best to listen, because SOMETHING has got to change, because I'm really fed up with being a writhing sack of misery. Something else that seems to help is "collaborating with my sadness." This has proven to work for me in the past. Personification of sadness allows for the act of negotiation. If I can talk to it, I can get through it. It's a give and take, then, instead of all take. "Okay, how about I take a shower and we can just chat about how miserable you are making me." And more often than not, it complies. It feels nice, to compartmentalize and attack. Personify and conquer. Idk. Seems legit.

Revisiting this: Anger really isn't the best way to solve anything. It consumes and destroys. I never want to rely completely on anger for anything, and I never have. But, I can't ignore the fact that it did seem to help me for a brief moment. I think the important distinction here is that my anger was directly at myself, at an *emotion* that was already consuming me. And, considering how brief it was I don't see any real harm in it. Now, I don't want to depend on this tactic, so I'll stick to my other methods but it's just hard to ignore. Now, what I need to figure out is this: was my anger just severe disappointment? Or shame? I have a hunch it might be. How intimately related are these three things? Anger, disappointment, and shame... They seem pretty connected to me. So, perhaps it was just disappointment, which makes sense. Regardless, I'm feeling much better, probably because of the writing. Let's move on for now and take the W where we can.

SYNC

It's going to be okay. You reached over and grabbed my hand. I squeezed your hand, and stopped. You squeezed my hand, and stopped. Back and forth like this. On and off, one and zero. We couldn't seem to get the timing right. It was strange to me, but I didn't say anything because it felt so coincidental. I knew that it was, but I pretended for a second like it wasn't.

SOME TIPS

Visiting an elderly relative that has some kind of memory-degenerative illness like Alzheimer's is like going fishing. You bring pictures, trinkets, other relatives as bait and cast your line and hope you catch something. A smile or a flash of recognition or anything that seems familiar. And, if you don't catch anything you can't be upset because that's just how fishing is. Sometimes you catch something and sometimes you

don't. The first few times I went fishing I was really upset that I didn't catch anything. Like, I put in all this time and effort just to get nothing back. But, then you learn that this is how fishing works. It's part of nature. So I'd go back to fish and come up with nothing, and nothing again, but *sometimes* you catch a fish and it is wonderful and then you remember why you go fishing, for moments like this. And you pause on the bank and smile.

ANOTHER THOUGHT

This morning's thought comes to you from a place in my brain that has no name: Do worms have to try harder to dig uphill? Gosh, this is more complicated than I thought it was going to be. Let's just pretend that worms *can* feel how much they are exerting. I imagine that going uphill would be harder? Well, now I'll imagine that *I* am underground digging like a worm. Would I be able to tell? I think so, because my senses would probably be able to tell me if I'm upside down or right-side up or any combination of the two. Do worms have that? If we imagine the extreme case: a cliff. My hypothesis is that it would take the worm longer to climb up the inside of a cliff than it would for the worm to climb down. But this isn't a question about time, this is a question about exertion. Would it be *harder*... I'll have to give this some more consideration.

I LIKE WIDE OPEN SPACES

The flippant horizon is boiling over with storm clouds and it's starting to rain. We have been dreaming on this hill for days. My body, it feels so attached to the earth. My mind, hanging onto the minute hand about to strike the top of the hour, is falling. I bolt upwards. "We need to walk." Thus began a panicked promenade around the deserted campus.

RELEASE

Pink hands pry open premature flowers, petals peeling from perfect buds and falling, one by one in the morning. Thirsty, the air gags and the wind is silent forever. Gaping, the ground begs for the storm's mercy.

MAIL IN THE BOX?

Let this half-hour be a monument to everything I've ever known about this place. Sunsets and satin grass sing the day to sleep, and I squint as the last light filters through the tree's green leaves. On this hillside I rest, perhaps for the last time, as a child at Home.

MISMATCHED

"Don't wear corduroy in the summer." I walked out of the house in my red corduroy pants and cursed the season. My mom pretended to be disappointed.

NECK INJURY

For the last two days (dear, it feels like years) I have sustained a rather unpleasant neck injury from sleeping on my neck wrong. It appears as though I am not just limited to the troubles of the mind when I sleep, but also of the body. So, my last few days at Home have been... very still. It has been really uncomfortable, trying to pack and be productive while battling nostalgia and other departure-related feelings, but not being able to turn my head and look at things has made it infinitely more difficult. However, it has forced me to slow down, which I enjoy. I feel like I'm taking things in more deeply, since I'm limited to a snail's pace at every waking moment. It has gotten much better over the last few days, which I am really thankful for. I am just *really* hoping I don't do something to it again while I'm travelling to Arizona. I can see it now: a boy with a roller-cart full of luggage wincing in pain on the floor of an airport. Let's hope it doesn't come to that.

AT THE DINNER TABLE, PLAYING CARDS

Tobacco spit in prescription medicine bottles and eating cold Reese's peanut butter cups upside down.

SIX OF CLUBS

Sitting next to my brother playing Saratoga. Helping me. Six of Clubs.

TRANSITION

PRELUDE

The lightning storm clouded the sunset that first night. The mountains dissolved into the horizon and the entire sky became powerfully gray.

DESERT PLANTS: A FIRST IMPRESSION

What the fuck? I want to understand. What even is a cactus, honestly? How are they doing their cactus things, in the ground like that? It must be tough being a tree in Arizona. In all honesty, I'm afraid of desert plants, but I really admire them. I don't think they need affirmation from anyone or anything. They seem rigidly independent and I really appreciate that. But do they need love? This is a mystery I will linger on.

VINYL MORNINGS

Little breaths on an unfamiliar bed in an unfamiliar place. Small stretches, and then. Up, into the room. I drop the needle and feel the air change. The blinds are still drawn and the record is spinning.

THE GROCERY STORE NEARBY

I entered the store with nothing and left with two boxes of Eggo's and a black Bic lighter. "Not for smoking..." I thought. "Yeah I live right across the street. What's your name?" There was no music, no talk-show radio, but a *spelling bee* playing on the store's sound system. I looked at canned goods while a contender struggled to spell a word.

ANOTHER STORM

The trees raved in the evening wind. The dry air bruised the night's silence and I stood still for a few moments to think about my place among the turmoil and the beauty.

HERE I SIT IN MY ROOM I SIT AND THINK

I'm trading in my alarm clock for a train whistle. I'm a greasy mess and my glass desk proves that. I've got the perfect view. It's incredibly lonely! I've been making a lot of risotto. This will be quite the battle. Old math and new ideas. At the end of the day I can't help but smile because this is what I love; it's really strange. It's very peaceful at night. The Sun sets just over yonder. Candles and a hot shower and Oreos in bed. Imposter syndrome is a real pain in my ass. I still think that everyone hates me but that's just introductions. Stay positive, stay kind, brush your teeth, make your bed. It's a marathon not a sprint. There's smoke in the sky so I can't feel blue. I heard someone yelling outside last night, I hope he is okay. I have everything and nothing to do. I'm taking a multivitamin now so I'm doing great, thanks for asking! I still don't have shampoo, I haven't washed my hair in a week or so. The leaves shivered before the storm hit. Lightning struck the mountain. Thunder. Sweaty outside, cold inside. This has been some of Week One.

Crema, an Allegory

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Daydreaming about complex vector fields. Garlic makes my fingers feel weird. I really enjoy onions. Cooked, not raw. Though, I've never tried a raw onion. I wonder how much energy my body uses to replace the skin on my fingertips. I tried to ignore symmetry but failed. Exposure. Response. Don't forget to breathe!

Index Terms—sunset, angels, magic

AROUND THE CORNER

The candle cut a golden curve into the evening's pale wall. A saddle of light, mounted by the crying wind and the lonely sounds of nowhere. With stamping hooves the light flickered and whinnied. It's terribly dark here tonight and nothing seems to be working. Don't trust me dear, not tonight.

CRAFTSMAN

There's a lead weight hanging onto this afternoon. My mind is trying to keep up with the who's and the what's and the when's and maybe I should just forget how to care. Or worry. I have a sword on the anvil; I'm punishing it for being so sharp and flawless and I pound on it again and again and again and my hands are bleeding. Who would ruin something so perfect? I'll make another sword, sharper and faster than its predecessor. Then, after it cuts me I'll blame the sword and not the hand that guided it. This is all just to say that I don't know why I put myself through such painful thoughts. Sometimes I'm afraid to speak, out of fear of what I might say, like every word is a perfectly sharp blade and I'm just a clumsy fool who wields it. I'm lightheaded from these fantasies. They hang onto me like afternoons. And I'll pound and pound and pound on them until I'm spent, bloodless, and shaking in the bathroom.

FINALLY, SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

It's a huge breath, mid-afternoon, that weds the morning to the night. Rest, the priest of this sacrament, joins the two lovers, and with a final blessing releases the Sun beyond the horizon.

PRECIPICE

I can't help but feel like every single day is just a close encounter with something horrible and unbearable. But, here I am, many days after my birth. With fingers crossed and glasses sliding down my nose I press onward into the beauty of dodging yet another miserably bad event that could have happened but didn't.

IT'S ME! RISOTTO BOY!

I've taken it upon myself to start eating healthier. This means regular, well rounded meals, a multivitamin, and an app to remind me to drink water. To kick off my new journey, I've fixated on making risotto. But damn, I feel *alive* listening to Italian classics and chopping onions.

I WOKE UP THIS MORNING WITH BUTTERFLY LIMBS

He spoke softly. Cradling his slouched head in the palms of his hands, he let out a breath. "What's wrong with me?" Everything left him. Apart from it all he stared at the mountains and forgot about love, hope, and joy. Empty tidal pools were waiting for the next high tide. Dear, how long will it be?

ELECTROMAGNETIC WAVES AND THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE THING TO EVER HAPPEN ON ZOOM

I don't really wanna talk about this.

SOME RAMBLINGS TO KEEP ME BUSY

Lifting up the liting lilies, summer here just feels so silly. Greener grass is on the Moon, dry and burning afternoons. Sweaty arms and searing metal, thorns are simply pointy petals.

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

Deadpan eyes while I wait for the faucet water to get cold. I'm blending into the beige walls while the shower heats up. Small rocking, back and forth, while the water boils and the rice cooks. Bloody fingers are leaving red stains like the first round of edits. Look, there is only five days in a week. Look, there's only seven days in a week. Look, there's another week and another five days or another seven days and why isn't my calendar confused? There is something so blessed about the pain of late nights and early mornings. I should have payed more attention to my family, but I couldn't stop thinking about sign conventions. Weeks are consumed by five days, or seven days, or a couple of hours (at least?). My lamp has a hat, my desk has a candle, my neck has a beard, and my daydreams are tangled somewhere between the Venetian blinds. It's nearly night now (it's only 6pm?), and the simplicity of the blue-red skyline is here to save me once again. I haven't suffered for long enough to feel like my sadness is justified; Sundays are perfect for overthinking.

SOMETHING SAID

A bird visited my window this afternoon. A fine fellow on every account, he spoke slowly with very careful pauses; he tipped his head after each one. "There are just some things I want to say to you." This surprised me, because I've never met this fair fowl before. But, I wanted to hear him out, because it is not every day that birds visit my window to have a conversation with me. He said to me "How dare you." And I understood.

IT'S A MONDAY MORNING AND

While I was watching a lecture, my regular "You are a horrible person and have made irreversibly terrible decisions and have said miserably terrible things and you are just badbadbad" demon came to visit me, and so I looked at the demon and spoke softly and said "fuck you, no I haven't" and I continued on with my day. This is progress, I think. The important thing here is that I should be able to differentiate between mistakes I have *actually* made, or offenses I have *actually* committed and things that my brain just makes up to torment me. Learn and grow from the prior, prophetically learn from and discard the latter.

ENVIRONMENT, THE SECRET INGREDIENT

This morning, I had a perfect espresso. I showered, made my bed, did my hair, ate a decent breakfast, and drank an entire cup of water. The sky is perfect and cloudy and it's windy. See, I very well could have made the *worst tasting* espresso, but that's not what is important, really. (Unless it's like, *really* nasty). It's the environment, the things leading up to it, what's happening during the experience of drinking it, that matters. And, even though I'm stuck between here between the mountains, I can at least appreciate that I've made a pretty great espresso and that a new day is starting.

MUST BE LOVELY

Oh pastel evenings, let me down slowly. Gently, let me sink beneath lukewarm coffee. I'll hold onto the stains stuck to the slopes of my mug and let go before I fall asleep. I'm tired and sinking, but perfectly. It's all so grand, beneath the light of my lamp. Eagerly, I'll swim to the surface tomorrow morning and lose track of the Sun again and again and again. Here: this is where I am. Here, and only here. Again and again and again.

A MATTER OF HABIT

It's miserable, really, how quickly I run out of Band-Aids. I started bleeding this morning during my electromagnetic waves lecture. "... displacement field when ..." fuck "... dipole density if ..." ran to the bathroom "... when there is a charge present..." quickly now, quickly "... Maxwell's second equation ..." all settled. Wrapped around my thumb. I wouldn't want to get blood on my notes!

PLAN TO REMEMBER

Sometimes during the day, and especially during the night, I think about how I will remember these times. Years from now, how will I reflect upon this day? This week? These last few months? The next few months to follow? I hope I remember them as times of growth. I *feel* like I'm growing. It's wickedly uncomfortable, but with each week's passing I grit my teeth and bite my cheeks and say "There, I made it. Now let's do it again." I recently learned that the word "passion" means "to suffer." Maybe I'm just obsessed with thinking about the future right now. It's hard not to be. From my fourth-floor watch tower I rub my chin and think.

COLD SHOWERS

Getting up early and yelling, butt-ass naked in the bathroom. I feel so powerful today. Not very strong, or sturdy, but powerful. Goosebumps and a mirror that isn't foggy. Shivering, vibrating, dry. Folded laundry, a very large apple, and things to do.

EMPTY GOODBYE (FOR WHAT?)

I'm abandoning our ship. Gentle waters, I pray, keep your temper. Lover, I never knew you. The horizon is endless and our course has no direction. It is in vain that I must resign from our voyage. It hurts. But, the nets have caught nothing but ocean my dear. I cannot keep them open for so long. I am ashamed to say that I cannot wait for the horizon to seem nearer than it is now. Please remember everything we never had, not with regret, but wonder. Precious time, lift your anchors and set me on another course. I have never loved and I have never lost. The sirens are silent, so let me sail away.

Darning the Days

Gregory Nero

Abstract—It's Tuesday night and I have decided that it is Tuesday night.

Index Terms—cold coffee, sweat, back acne, shoulder acne, chest acne

CURLS

My hair is getting longer. I'm a disheveled reflection: locks of chaos behind a dirty mirror. Flippant strands are tempered by fragile fingers, carefully combing back dark brown sonnets as they surrender to soap and water.

I DON'T PLAN ON KEEPING THIS BUT MAYBE I WILL

"This is pretty miserable, ain't it?" The farmer gestured to the field behind him. "Nothin' grows 'cept them damned puff pastry thangs." Just then, the Pillsbury Doughboy himself materialized and sucker punched the farmer, flooring him.

PLEAD, PLEAD

Quarter past, the bells rang. Dry-erase the night, scholar. You have sticky notes all over your wall. Maybe this is the part of my life where I'm supposed to feel alone in the worst ways; I thought that was behind me. I feel naive. Mom, I think I need to find someone to talk to. Well, we *do* have health insurance. I spent hours counting to eleven. Nine, then ten, then... then... nine then ten then... then ten then... then... quick, exhale. Close your eyes. Slowly, scholar, slowly.

GONE SO SOON

This could be fun. Pretend to fall in love and forget the rest. Maybe all I need is a daydream or two. Maybe that's all I can handle.

JUST NATURE

I'll just float here and think. I'm sick of all of this sunlight. I'm writing Home: overnight ship me some melancholy please. All of my windows face west. Each and every evening I watch the Sun die. I have to. All of my hopes face east. Each and every morning I wait for a sunrise. I'm losing my patience. I will wait, though. I have to.

COUCH SLEEPING

Contorted, lethargic limbs lean on fake leather. One small blanket, and an elbow pillow. Ankles and pale feet hang over armrests. The TV was on. Thank you for turning it off. I'm skating on 4:00 AM's thin slumber. Soft, sticky breaths and warm skin. I'm perfectly caught here, until the blinds surrender to the daylight.

LITTLE SCRAPS OF PAPER THOUGHTS

I am pulling out little pieces of torn paper from my back pocket. Little notes and smiley faces and grocery lists and ideas. On one: "oatmeal, eggs, skim milk" on another: "this too shall pass; Persian" and another: "how to realize you aren't doing good and how to begin taking actions to become better." I'm really in a spot right now, friends. I am feeling so isolated and lonely and disoriented and lost in this heat; the sand is so abrasive and the air is devilishly unforgiving. I am here, though, and trying to make things work. I feel bad about setting imaginary finish lines for myself. "If I can just get to the end of this week..." Is that any way to live? Though, it can't be worse than pretending that I'm doing fine when I'm not. A little bit of fighting here, a little bit of fighting there. This is just growing pains. Keep your head up Greg.

ACKNOWLEDGING DISCONTENT

Today was candle wax and crystal facets of miserable. Sweet, burning, glimmering and deceptive. I don't know which emotion to trust anymore. Even the moments of bliss, in their refractive bliss, blind me and bind me to the fierce feeling of displacement. I don't know how I am.

I'M SORRY I ACCIDENTALLY LOVED YOU

Tick-tack-toe limbs get tangled on a lumpy mattress. Every night is something better and something worse. Listen, if I told you I almost cried over nothing, would you believe me? What's nothing, though... There's nothing there! It's just air, Greg. Just air. My tongue is burnt. Why do you feel so far away from me now? I am almost disappointed in myself, for manufacturing love. These kind of feelings cost hours, days, weeks. I'm rich with infatuation. What's it worth, though? Nothing. Infatuation is just inflation if there is no buyer. Supply without demand. It's simple dollars and cents.

JUST IF I

I don't know what I get so upset for. Well... I do... but part of me things that sometimes I overreact to situations because I want to write something moving or dramatic. It's like turning a simple pencil sketch into a gigantic watercolor painting. Maybe that's what expression is, though. I can't just go around doubting my feelings at a time like this. If I feel it I write it. That's that. It might only be a fleeting thought, but it's enough. I'm just a kid with a butterfly net, running around catching these tricky little creatures, looking at them for a bit, and then letting them go.

MY TRASHCAN IS FULL OF GRANOLA BAR WRAPPERS
AND MY DREAMS ARE STRANGE

Tin roof hammer nails, seeds in a package. Don't tell anyone. Vaporized by electromagnetic energy. My mom carried me to bed like she used to. Running around; Lawrence, that one shirt, on a bike, I collapsed and asked for help. Overwhelmed, mud in hands, squishing, injection, real pain. Huge demon, arm break, evolution, avatar, death, no hope, plans. Reoccurring, medical room.

BIKE THOUGHTS

I started thinking about the current state of my life while I biked to campus today, in an effort to escape the monotony of my apartment. I became concerned that my spirit is being crushed slowly, quietly, without my knowing. I mean, I can't help but think that this is how every eroded person suffers, until there isn't even room left for such a dismal indulgence. I don't think I am meant to be instantaneously ruined. There has been no *impulse* or *singular event* that, in a few brief moments, has managed to demolish my spirit, though I can think of a few situations where that *could* happen. No, if I am to fall it will be slowly. I guess that I just think that here, now... I feel more like I'm *surviving* instead of *thriving*. I'm fortunate, I think, that I know the difference. Thank goodness for that, because if I wasn't privy to these differences I would simply lead a life of blind dread, limping along, dripping, like syrup from a bottle. I was trying to think back to how I felt in Rochester when I first arrived. Was I experiencing these same things? Time are certainly different now, so it would be difficult to compare... Anyways. What's to be done? I need to figure out how to make this place feel like home. I'm transitioning from miserably sad to hysterically sad, which is nice. I don't feel like I'm faking it anymore. I don't like it here and that's that. (Well... *here* is such a funny thing. It can certainly be more than just a place. I'm not sure what I mean when I say *here*. I still enjoy what I'm studying and the program I'm in but everything feels so tainted because of the space and the whole situation. If things were "normal" I'm not sure if my feelings would change. Hopefully I'll get the chance to figure this out, if things ever return to how they once were.) It's tough work, pretending. But now that I'm through with that I can start to work on how to feel welcome. I need to be honest. I don't want to lose myself to this mess.

CLEAN FEELING

I washed my face this morning. I'm just getting warmed up here, ya know? I turned on the shower and there's a fizz and a hiss and this morning, I went gently into the cold water. I love feeling my mind suffer this brief physical panic. What does that make me? Every fiber is screaming but I'm smiling, letting ice melt along my back and over my shoulders and down my legs. It is so consuming. The kitchen is clean and my gait is careful, quiet, and strong in the morning's light.

ANOTHER SELF-CONFRONTATIONAL BIKE RIDE

On my bike ride to campus I had another "Hey Greg, you should really take some concrete actions to resolve your deteriorating mental state" conversation. I think I finally accepted

that this isn't just another "funk" or "thing that will just go away by itself." I'm really into it this time, I'm afraid. It's a damn shame, really, how miserable it is. I keep asking myself that really terrifying question "Is my mental health really worth this?" How can it *not* be, right? I mean, I moved all the way across the country to do this. It *has* to work out, right? This is what I *wanted*, what I *want*. Everything is just so... bleak. I can feel myself unraveling. Maybe I just don't know how to take care of myself. I always thought I had that under control. This might just be a caliber above what I'm used to. I just don't know. My brain is always spinning and I never feel at peace. My OCD is getting worse by the day, I'm pretty sure I'm developing other mental issues, I don't feel like myself, I'm not eating enough, I'm not drinking enough water, I've been getting more headaches than usual... It's just kind of a mess, really. Well, I'll figure something out I guess. I *have* to. Right?

IT'S FRIDAY MORNING AND I HAD PANCAKES

This morning has been pleasant. I dreamt about Bessel functions, the bedroom light that woke me up was not as blinding as it usually is, and I feel more focused than I did before. This is suspicious. See the strange thing about this is that I feel *guilty* about these moments of peace. Like, maybe I've just imagined all of the bad things, or that I was just overreacting. Do I really deserve this? A few minutes of clarity while I'm flipping pancakes? Yes, perhaps I do.

SOME SINUSOIDAL WISDOM

Consider nature. I exist in space and time. Where do my experiences and my emotions exist? Regardless... I am a superposition of plane waves. Up and down, high and low. Experiences, good and bad, all at once. I can exist in perpetual oscillation for eternity. Up and down, forever. THAT'S WHAT LIFE IS GREG. JUST A SUPERPOSITION OF PLANE WAVES. YOU ARE JUST A LINEAR COMBINATION OF EVERYTHING ELSE. YOU ARE JUST A SINUSOID. BALANCE MEANS HAVING GOOD AND BAD. IT MUST BE THIS WAY. Wow, who would have thought that my electromagnetic waves lecture would be what saves me.

PAJAMAS

Soft, red and pink on the shelf. Clean, candlelight, cradled by the night. At 10pm my mind is sterile, violently washed by the day. There's a warmth in my blood and soap in my eyes. Shampoo, toothpaste, moisturizer. Cleanse me of thoughts and baptize me in porcelain fonts beneath stainless steel faucets.

EVERYTHING'S A METAPHOR NOWADAYS

It's 5:30pm and I am a silhouette. Evening, why do you pretend to like me? I went for a walk just now. Just a few moments ago. There is a community garden right down the road. A fence protected tilled dirt and a variety of plants that all looked dead to me. I got lost in a daydream in between my strides, a liminal space filled with fresh green plants and grass and the feeling of Home.

I pictured myself laboring there in the garden, turning over dirt, turning over sand, turning over hours while the Sun sets. Daylight lingers here, reluctant.

LIVING NIGHTMARES

I woke up at 3:00 this morning and managed to convince myself that it was 3:00 in the afternoon and that I had slept through my classes and most of the day. How my brain managed to convince my sweaty ass in complete darkness that it was an Arizona afternoon I will never know, but it was real and viscerally uncomfortable and then, in a sudden flash of relief, wildly hilarious.

ESPRESSO ART CAFE

A white pawn sits at the table across from me, waiting for my first move. I swirl my espresso thoughtfully, or, what I hope comes across as thoughtfully. I'm biting the rim of my cup and thinking about all of the things I could be doing. I don't want to do any of them right now. Right now, I just want to sit here and think and swirl my espresso and look introspective. I want to spend my time here defiantly. It's not very often I get to sit in a cafe nowadays. Bouncing a knee nonchalantly, giving brief sideways stares to strangers at nearby tables, staring aimlessly at nothing... I miss being so perfectly absentminded.

Sorry For My Delayed Response

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Time is passing but I can't prove it. The bell tower has a similar problem. If I scream every 15 minutes perhaps I, too, will finally realize how useless it is to track a wounded animal.

Index Terms—holy shit it's november

SOMETHING MORBID

I had a dream that all of my friends were killed.
Dozens of bodies wasted in my backyard.
Guts and mashed-up bones were pressed like an
 espresso shot.
I could almost taste the gore and iron.
Hints of horror, medium-bodied, a painful finish.

AWAKE AND DREAMING

It's 3am and my chest is drenched in Moonlight.
This isn't lust, or desire, or infatuation.
No, this isn't some sweaty,
Heaving,
Heart-racing,
Head-spinning love.
It's simple and quiet.
It doesn't linger.

Cut me open with a silver blade and listen to my
 pulse.
Watch muted blood run over my bed sheets.
Here, I can escape from you and me and everything
 tangible.
Behind Venetian blinds my lover waits,
But not for long...
And that's what I love about Her.

DAISIES

My mind is being uprooted by the hands of a novice
 gardener.
I want to feel like the dandelions do.
Unbound daisies, hilariously cursing the earth.

POSSESSED

I saw a bald man dressed in all black drawing
 monsters in his notebook.
Legs crossed, he looked at me briefly, and I felt
 captured.
I saw a bald man dressed in all black drawing
 monsters in his notebook.

WADING

Hours drip like minutes from a leaky faucet.
I'll swallow this wristwatch whole.
It's deep in the shallow end of Friday.

DON'T RAGE AGAINST THE ABSURD

Chipped black nails, or something goth.
I want to sit on my collarbone and drink coffee.
There must be some relief from this madness.

NOVEMBER, PLEASE BE KIND TO ME

Autumn is just a metaphor now.
I cleaned my kitchen today, and my living room,
(Well, it's my home office now)
Is saturated with Sunday.
Back Home, I remember putting candles on the
 stove-top.
The finishing touch, after the counters were clean,
And the dishes were washed,
And the floor was swept.

I'm going to be alone awhile.
I started running again.
Quick breaths: my fingers and toes tingled.
The bone in my forehead vibrated.
Cold shower, silent, shiver, towel and goosebumps.

I'm trying exposure therapy.
Let it come,
And let it pass.
I'm still alive.
It's a tidal wave I need to ride.

I'm just a metaphor now.
Blank stares and words and line breaks.
For today, at least, I'm
A starving poet, trapped in the desert.

SOME BRIEF OPTIMISM

Finally, wind.
Chaos and beauty from places unseen.
I'm feeling better about my chances:
Maybe kites *can* fly here.

I LOVE BEING MELANCHOLY

Blindsided by the feeling of Home.
It's a Bon Iver morning.
Drip coffee, clouds, soft gray light.
Oh my, what a powerful feeling this is.

I slept on the floor last night,
One blind glance at the windows and I saw the sky,
All bleak and perfect.
Like rolling over in bed to a familiar lover.
Snowstorm daydreams, quiet and perfect,
With soft, soft, soft breaths.

Winter Is The Best Time to Die

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Home now. Trying to recover. The trees are bare here in Pennsylvania. Funerals and keeping it together. Rest, for a bit. There's more to come. Let's make sure we are ready.

Index Terms—paused

INTRODUCTION

I didn't get a chance to write much this month. The first semester of graduate school really kicked my ass. I ended up doing alright, but dang, it was tough work. I keep saying that the worst is behind me and I have reasons to believe it. The New Year is right around the corner. I'm eager to see what comes next. To make up for the lack of writing this month, I'm including a short story I wrote for a creative writing class back at RIT.

Trapped

He jabbed the knife into the side of a sycamore, and began to etch a heart.

"This will be here forever," he strained as he pushed the blade deeper into the trunk "to remind you of our love." He looked over his shoulder and grinned, eyes twinkling with unbridled excitement. The shredded bark fell from where the man was working and made a small pile at his bare feet along the floor of the forest. He was wearing a baggy, slightly wet orange shirt and tan shorts with spots of moisture on them.

The early night was silent and the milky canopy hung high above the ground in the moonlight. The birds had gone to sleep and all of the night critters crawled quietly along the forest's surfaces, watching. Only one thing broke this silence.

"And another!" He yelled, swinging the knife across the face of a rock. Sparks flew from the edge, and a chalky line was left on the surface of the great boulder next to many others. He got to work with the blade, muttering words of love and compassion. "We can never tell anyone about us, do you hear me?" His breathing was frantic as he slid the knife against the stone, and a layer of sweat was forming on his forehead. Curly brown locks of hair stuck to his neck and shoulders. "I'm in love with you, do you hear me?"

A creek was running nearby, quiet enough for a baby to sleep near. It sauntered through the ground like a white snake on this peaceful night, but upstream there was hysteria.

"Keep me close to you," he shivered as he sat in the water "and don't let me go." He was laughing now. Wide eyes looked nervously around, and his knuckles were blue from the cold. He emerged from the stream and took off his soaked clothes. "Don't look at me!" He went behind a large rock and sat in the dirt for a long while, rocking warmth into his body and grinding his teeth together.

Alone, he remained there. Pale skin stretched around ribcages and a spine, and his long fingers pressed into the

packed dirt around where he was curled up on the ground, naked.

"Listen, we have to get out of this place," he sat facing the rock. The worn blade was resting next to him. "We have to, we have to, we have to, we –" he caught himself on this tirade, and brought his knees closer into his chest. "Tonight."

He got up and started walking. He stumbled forward, tripping over rotten logs and sickly moss. The forest spun around him, and his firefly eyes flicked back and forth between his clenched hands and the dimly lit foliage passing around him.

He walked passed the sycamore, and picked up his pace, eyebrows pressed inwards on his brow into a look of profound concern. His jaw was ruining itself from sheer tension, and the night was no longer silent. He got to the rock with all of the blade marks and stopped for an instant before it. He vomited, and began to run. Naked, he sprinted between trees. Every tree had a deep heart carved into the side. "Let me out!" spit flew from his mouth and as he pressed onward with his escape. He continued, long hair trailing behind his head. He tripped into the stream where he had been earlier that night, and he sat in its current weeping to himself. He emerged from the waters what seemed like hours later, exhausted, and collapsed on the ground in the forest, forced into sleep by fatigue.

He woke up the next afternoon to birds chirping and the warmth of the sun on his body. He looked around, confused, and saw his clothes on a rock nearby, damp but mostly dry from being out in the sun. Next to them was a knife.

"What a lovely day." He stretched. "I think I'd fancy some time with nature." He put on his slightly wet clothes, picked up the knife, and began to walk around, carving hearts into the sides of trees and whispering words of love and compassion.

The Two of Clubs

Gregory Nero

Abstract—There's that one part of the walk where the road flattens and the banks open up and there is a subtle electric buzz from the wires overhead. And it's a long gray stripe just like the one from your pall and I just stand and stare at how beautiful and bleak the trees are. My lungs hurt from the cold air and my hands are fists in my pockets.

Index Terms—ceramic mugs, rat king, deadlift

CARRIED ALONG WITH IT

Let time erode me in the river of my absentminded sins. Let my skin bruise and let my ankles and elbows bump against the rocks and let me wash up on the shore after all of my aching and heart-pounding and let the water forget about me, its subject of torture, in some forgotten bend. Whitewater woes, shallow but deep, rinse and repeat.

THE WRETCHED SUN

I still feel so out of place here. Plucked from the soil and deposited.
I keep lists in my mind; heavy, heavy things. I can feel them tugging.
I think this is remembering.

DIVINE SURRENDER

"It's mourning, like sad." The doves on the wire cooed and the dew fell slowly.

CLOUDS BUT NO RAIN

Violin bow tendons, stretched between bone, wood, aching and creaking. I play a soft song when I move, chords and a clenched jaw. I am waiting for the melody to resolve, so I'll open some windows and pretend that the afternoon lasts forever.

REMEMBERING BIKE RIDES

Yeah sure the party was great and I think I pissed in your backyard because "guys go outside" and that's fine because I like looking at the night sky when I'm piss drunk. And it was probably cold but who cares and the clouds on my JanSport were bulging from my coat and my oyster crackers and everyone else's alcohol. And that was all well and good. But my god, they way I felt on the saddle of 2am, beneath shitty streetlights and dodging potholes and one hand on the handlebars and the other puffing on a black and mild (wine, wood-tip, no exceptions) was just euphoria. The road was mine and the sky was mine and I was mine and the stars look beautiful tonight.

Trapped in an Arcsine

Gregory Nero

Abstract—And I started to *actually* consider which way was West and which way was East and all of this time I thought that those trains were headed for the Pacific. They are going Left, after all! But there are also some trains that are going Right... And Left must be West and Right must be East... For just a moment I forgot that the Sun sets on the Western horizon. And the Sun rises just behind me, so all I get to see is the bashful blue horizon behind the orange mirrors of the city. It is a nice blue, though. Right before everything gets hot and complicated. I have a feeling that I'm going to get up early tomorrow. I want to spend more time in this little cranny of the morning where everything is just a bit more simple, and quiet, and cool. Here, I'd know exactly what to say and when to say it, exactly what to do and when to do it, and exactly who to be and how to be it.

Index Terms—eggs, potatoes, rice

SUPER PANIC MODE

There are gunshots on my phone and there is a huge crater in my chest and why are my arms shaking like that? I'm slouching, aren't I? Yeah okay but let's turn off that lamp and have a little dance party. Remember Varmahlíd? Maybe I'll get a little house there and run away and spend all day in that one gas station while I wait for my bus, reading Frost and pretending to like it. I'm just trying to find places that I feel save and I'm running out of ideas. Let's see: that bench next to the fountain, that one coffee shop (I'm a regular now), (any) big patch of grass (when it isn't wet), ... I'm not really sure that I feel comfortable anywhere right now, though. I just want to find *something* that makes me feel like I belong here but I'm just having a really hard time right now. "Or maybe I'm just being dramatic." The other night I drank *three* glasses of water. *Three*. And that was thriving. I don't feel like myself recently and that scares me. What if I lose track? Quickly now, write everything down: Who am I? What do I stand for? What's my favorite food and my most precious memory? Now, seal them up and hide everything on one of the shelves in the library. I'll sit beneath them in quiet corridors and wait to feel better. Hold my breath for me in two minute intervals. Anyway, I had something written about Myrtle Beach and tides and drippy castles but nothing feels good enough right now so that's about it.

PEEPHOLE OBSERVATIONS

There's a broken beer bottle outside of my apartment door this morning. February really is the shortest month, isn't it?

Everything in Hilbert Space

Gregory Nero

Abstract—My vagabond mind is churning, flickering, evaporating in this 3am fever. I saw endless shells, bodies for inhabiting. I am just a passenger in this scheme. Empty arrays, an innumerable amount, for eternity. Diffuse from one to another, leave one ruined and immediately cling to the next one. Swinging on the vines of consciousness, sucked into being temporary forever; what purpose do I serve, here, before the Sun rises?

Index Terms—temporary, fleeting, self, identity

IN REVIEW

I caught myself re-reading something I had written months ago. Something about a bell tower: time, a wounded animal? No, that can't be right. Wait, no, this doesn't make sense at all but it *feels* right. The author had a *reason* to word it like that. Surely, this is simply a comparison between the passing of time and a bloody, limping animal. But let's consider the author's perspective. There's something here that doesn't make sense. What was their motive? No, no, no. There's a contradiction here. A hunter looks at blood on the forest floor and rejoices. A wounded animal, the second hand, gushing with the red blood of time itself! Aha! But still, I'm disturbed by it. Why is it useless? I'm not convinced that this is cohesive, not even a little bit. These must just be words, slapped together in a "pleasing" way. A desperate attempt by the author to feel better, to write something *meaningful*. But still, there is a spirit to how the words exist, arranged in that particular way. Who am I to get in the way of somebody finding a moment of peace?

TEMPORARY TATTOO

Nowadays I'm just looking for things that are familiar. Anything to remember how things were before. (How *I* was before? *Who* I was before?). Precious memories, like ink on skin: Floor time. Thursdays. Opening shifts. Reading room. Hot pockets and falling asleep on the couch. (How many have I forgotten?) These, too, will dissolve after enough wear. Now they are just lines, incoherent and torn, crosshatched across my body. Now: I'm just skin.

Dearest Collector,

I'm writing to inform you that we can no longer harbor these memories for you. You see, it is quite a burden to us: there are just too many. I know how closely (especially as of late) you hold them, cradling them like infants, nursing them with words and daydreams... but we must retire from this profession. They will continue to grow up without our watch, and I promise that they'll visit. They might not be the same when they return: some sweeter, kinder, more compassionate; others, sour and

bitter and fragile. But that is the beauty of remembering. What you are doing is not remembering, but *hoarding*. Let go. Let memories be what they are: mere remembrances. You, dearest Collector, are a culmination of all of them. You will continue to inherit their treasures. Learn from them and grow from them, but don't grow sick from your obsessions over them. I hope you are well. Write often and keep growing.
-Yours.

HERE

And now, I am *here*. It's months later, and I've finally made it. (Say this wearily, but with some confidence and assurance.) What I mean to say is that, I have finally arrived *here* at this *place*. I am here. Now, let's be here, for a change.

SPEARMINT AND BLACK LICORICE

A loophole in my senses. I can smell this dream.

REFINED

Black coffee, percolating
Like thunder rumbling.

CANVAS

And so I asked the wind: how do I paint the sky?

FOR WHEN THE BEDROOM WINDOW IS OPEN

My walls have come to life with the fluttering of forgotten thoughts.
Oh how stagnant this air had become! But now: a breath, flourishing.
Imagine: trapped in a tower. Sticky notes, my valiant knight, rescue me from this heavy hour and kiss me.
I want to sing with the birds that live beneath the palms fronds.
Shade: light's futile attempt.
There's hair on my socks.
I'm desperate for another seven days.

UNRAVELLING

I feel so distilled and bare. Clawing at something in hindsight. Unwrapped, shaved, thinning out until I'm just a single thread wrapped endlessly around restless fingers. Cat's cradle with freshly sterilized hands. My core is cold and clinging to the heat beneath the sheets. Just get up already, you aren't going back to sleep.

AMBIENT

I'm ditching my work to listen to the piano. This isn't simple neglect, no, this is passionate abandonment. Espresso for here, please. Pack up my bags and sit by the door. Small conversations. Things clinking together. The air. Pages turning. Small things: for safekeeping.

HONESTLY if I got to choose an alternate reality to live in, I'd keep everything EXACTLY the same except I'd change the Sour Patch Kids slogan from "Sour, Sweet, Gone" to "Sweet, Sour, Gone". Just the slogan, not the actual flavor experience. So like, when people ate them they'd be like "Hm, the slogan doesn't accurately portray my Lived Snack Experience" and in that chaos I would thrive.

THURSDAY IS THINNING

Thirsty hours thickening into months; there will be thousands at this length. A threshold for thoughts. Thinking through theories. Strength is a thrilling lie, a theatrical thief, an unworthy oath, a theme of thorns. I'm trying to thrive beneath the beaten path.

LUCID DREAMING

This is my grandma's house. Maple syrup. Floor. Melting.

OUT OF TOUCH

I'm a phantom of winter. For once, I'd like to undo my blinds and see something other than blue.

INTIMATE THINGS

Only things that I can know: like, how when I wear that one pair of shoes and walk up the concrete stairs to the fourth floor of the library, I get a little *zap* of electricity when I grab the metal knob. Or, that my humidifier needs water, or, that the light in my bathroom is a warm-orangeish-yellow right now, or, that I've been having nightmares, or, that I light my candle at least twice a day.

SMALL SECRET COLORS

Walks to and from the University: passionate red, bashful orange, lackluster blue, peculiar yellow. Hiding between cracks and fence posts. Spring in the desert.

SPIRAL STAIRCASE

PEEL

(UN)GROUNDED

RIBCAGE SENSATION GRAB DREAM

A PROPER NIGHTMARE

ON HATE

UNFINISHED CRISIS

Spring, The Beheaded

Gregory Nero

Abstract—**Summer, The Executioner**

Index Terms—**busy**

Breathing
Starlight
Silence on the Mountain
Steady
Up
Cradled by Stone
Then, The Sun
Hands
The Dawn to Day

Odd Symmetry

Gregory Nero

Abstract—I don't know where any of my bowls are and at this point I'm too afraid to ask.

Index Terms—UNHINGED AND LOVING/HATING IT, heavyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy, heat, LEARNING AND YEARNING, this might get ugly

THEORIES, IN A FRENZY

Does this agree with reality? Graphite daydreams shaded by ink. Crumpled paper and sleeping with notebooks and binders and my pencil case. The skull is a cradle, then a swing-set, then a roller-coaster. My brain is spinning but I *love* it. This kind of blinding passion is what turns 7pm into 1am in the blink of an eye, and I hope that it consumes me. I'm counting on it.

THIS MORNING ON: MYSTERY HOUR WITH GREG

Am I nauseous because I'm lovesick or because I ate an entire Jimmy John's sub with spicy range right before bed? (in bed) Probably both?
Either way, I'm gonna throw up.

IF I HAVE TO CROSS EUCLID ONE MORE TIME I'M GOING TO LOSE IT

I'M TRYING TO TALK ABOUT THE DEADLY PRECISION WITH WHICH THE EVENING STRIKES THE ARMOR OF THE DAY. I'LL KILL THE SUN MYSELF IF I HAVE TO. AND I'LL TELL YOU THIS RIGHT NOW, IF I WERE ICARUS I WOULD HAVE BROUGHT A CROSSBOW TO THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE AND FIRED A GOLDEN ARROW AT THAT RAGING ORB BEFORE PLUMMETING TO MY DEATH.

HEY HOW ABOUT THAT?

Hey have you noticed that the mourning doves sound different here? Like, it's a different sound. It sounds like they are choking on something. Hey back off bro they are just doing their best out here. How'd u feel if u were just a bird in a desert. You'd be out here saying weird shit too. Wait. Wait a second.

REVENGE OF THE ARCSIN

What if I told you that I'm afraid of leaving this teahouse? Sit at the far back, shady, the street is miles away and perfect. Bitter gunpowder and a galaxy in my cup. I don't want anything to do with whatever is happening anywhere but here. Finally, something familiar: distraction. It all happened so so fast; the curtain opened, the magician pulling the tablecloth. Was that months ago? Finally, something familiar: heavy chest and tense neck and lead in my throat and that one thing where

I just stare at the wall foreverforeverforever. Windswept limbs on a prairie of mattress. Close my eyes and spins, SPINS! Maestro, cue up that shit that makes me cry. I'm going to indulge myself in this weight and sink into 2 am.

I NEED TO START A GARDEN I NEED TO START A GARDEN I NEED TO START A GARDEN

Like from that one song. I think I understand. I'm desperate (oh dear, am I desperate) for something alive and nurturing and water water water water, roots in a frenzy, in a panic, searching the soil of summer for something other than dry sandy dirt.

I CAN'T BE HERE RIGHT NOW

Revvng engines, the growl of a beast; sirens, the shrieks of an injured night; I can feel the uprooted and broken pavement pulverizing my teeth.

FEELING BETTER, TWO WHEELS AT A TIME

Weaving in between cracks and holes and rubble and glass and the sun link tracks. When the air is silent: *thud thud, thud thud, thud thud*. Gears clicking and a gentle rhythm. Breathing because I mean it. Left then right then left again. Let's ride to the end of Mountain.

LET'S KICK THIS OFF

Now that my hands are bloody.

Have I gotten what I wanted?

Two A's and a B(roken heart).
Or Something Like That.
Surely, only a fool would look love in the eyes and run.

My bed sheet likes to sit on the foot of my mattress; crumpled; I can never seem to stop it from running away; tides, storm, quickly; breath gone; you, suddenly; it's all coming now, it's all coming now.

BIG FEELINGS: BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

My pulse is syrup. Maybe I'm not strong enough for this. Constricted everywhere. Scratching skin and clawing at the color blue. It's more difficult than before. Am I forever damned to exist in the space between what I've done and what I didn't do?

NEAT AND TIDY

Let's put a bow on this already; wrap it up in my notebook and forget about it until I can't anymore. Then what? Forever is plenty of time to pretend. But if I can just get it all archived, written down, get it from *in here* to *out there* maybe finally I can move on from this. Nice and organized between sheets of paper, dense with spare-drawer thoughts. They stick to me now. Or, crammed between the pages... will the binding hold? How will I possibly fit everything? There's millions of things to say or think or do and; well, maybe there's not. Look at me go, like this is some kind of optimization problem. What are our free variables? Just please, let me reach SOME kind of *local* minimum. That is peace enough, for now. An exhaustive search for the global minimum seems impossible considering the lack of data. Over-interpolation is dangerous.

OH BO IIIII

BROOOO WHY I S MY P UL SE GO ING ZOOOOOOM
I'M SITTING D O W N OHH BOII THIS M U ST BE
YE ARNIN G.

THE SWIFT AND VIOLENT DEATH OF SPRING

My mask smells like tequila and tobacco. Black and Mild. Wine. Wood tip. Always. Lime. Sometimes. Strange, also this: my eyes are bloodshot nowadays. I got some eye drops. It makes me think: were those veins always there, or did I just never look close enough into my own eyes? Anyways, the eye drops. Truthfully, they rip my spirit from my body and pulverize it into pieces on the bathroom counter. I literally can't get enough of that shit.

ID

Hey do u wanna go pretend to be different people for an entire day? And maybe it'll stick and all of a sudden we'll never come back. Torn from the velcro of identity.

MMEERRCY!

Let's have some mercy ourselves, please. There is plenty of time to burn! Watch and listen closely as the rags of his mind twist and the juices of memory drip down his face and into a raging pit of retrospection. BUT HEY that's pretty overdramatic, don'tcha think? MERCY, my friend, have some mercy and let him exist in these words just for a few blissful moments of self expression.

[ACTIONS]

Okay, let's list the things we want. [list] Hmpf, okay now let's have a look at this. [looks] Well buster, I'm sorry to tell you that you can't have any of these things and you are just going to have to live with what you've got, which is now. Okay, now let's cry for a bit. [cries] And maybe this is regret. [regret] But I don't really subscribe to that! [unsubscribes] That's no way to live. [lives another way]. Growth mindset. [growth] Let's try again tomorrow. [anticipates trying]

FIRE HAZARD

So I'm 23 but I still regularly forget about water I've set to boil on the stove. I'm disturbed and impressed by this.

NEW RECORD!

Today I set some new personal records for myself: I cried in not only one, but *two* public bathrooms AND in my hotel room! Let this be proof that I'm always out here achieving, even on my worst (and boy, this was one of my worst) days.

AN ODE TO THE PEP TALK I GAVE MYSELF IN THE HOTEL
SHOWER IN FLAGSTAFF

Lost appetite, lost interest, I'm afraid of my favorite songs;;; Sick, sick, sick; BUT WE BOUNCED BACK AND WE R READY TO GET ITTTTTTTTTTTTT

SOME FUNK

Mom, I'm worried that I'll be stuck like this forever. Goopy, caught in a slime of chaos. My milk is going to expire soon and I under-cooked that linguine but it's good enough. Listen to this stone: *poink, poink, poink*. It's different than the others. I can't possibly be good enough for what I'm trying to do.

THE AIR HERE

Navigating between waves of heat and settling into summer. The mornings are perfect. Ironed, the air lays flat and thin between the folds and pockets of my lungs. I'm fabric and buttons unravelling when noon comes. Blue: the kind that doesn't give in and always forgets your name even though you've met millions of times. Though, coming back from up North I finally felt Home here. Up until now my favorite spots have been for hiding but now they will be for living. I'm reclaiming the Sky and the Earth and the Sand and sitting cross-legged in the grass while the day dilutes to an orange then a red then a gray. I'm green and purple and pink.

THIS GOT KIND OF SERIOUS REALLY FAST AND I SWEAR
I'M OKAY I JUST NEEDED TO TRY AND SAY SOME THINGS

If I sacrifice my mind for the blood of understanding I'll finally be worthy to drink from the font of enlightenment. Slaughter me, sage of wisdom, and paint the textbooks red in honor of what I've gained and what I've lost. I'm thirsty, and my gaping mouth erupts with sounds I'll hear but never understand. Passion, priest of mayhem, say a prayer for me and finish the rite. I'm blessed with exactly one minute of tranquility every morning before my brain reawakens to haunt me. I'm trembling in the corner, trying to ward off the obsessions and the ruminations and the nightmares but they always come and they always win and that's why I cherish peace when I find it. I'm begging, kneeling at the hilt of the sword of my mind: please relinquish me from this prison of thought. I'm contorted and squirming from this unending tirade of consciousness. Please, *please*, let me rest.

SOME POSITIVE THINGS (ADVICE FROM MOM)

I felt an oak leaf the other day. I put my palm on the trunk of a tree and felt the pulse of life in it. I finished one of my favorite books again. I have so many great friends and a family that loves me. I'm learning and I'm being challenged. I'm so excited for the future even though it's hard to see that right now. And I'm growing and I'm making progress even though it's hard to see that right now. And maybe I'll make coffee for myself tomorrow morning and I'll get to bicycle and read and write and I'm just really glad about a lot of things and this is just a small reminder to myself because I really got myself into Mood there for a hot second but now I'm back.

VIBEEEEEEZ

There's a really sweet song playing and I'm about to make cake in a mug. How about THAT. Cake. In a mug. And my comforter is in the dryer and it will be right on time for me when I'm ready to fall asleep and I just got some new body wash and my sweatshirt is tucked into my sweatpants and I did all of my laundry and I balanced my budget and I ordered something online and if that isn't one hell of a perfect Sunday then damn.

VIBE CHECK: WOW I'M ACTUALLY FEELING BETTER AND
I'M GONNA ROLL WITH THAT

I shaved my legs and now whenever I get goosebumps there's needles everywhere. It's enriching, being so intimately aware of what gets me excited. *Thinks about optimization problems* YES. THAT'S THE GOOD STUFF.

A BRIEF REFLECTION ON THIS MONTH

So this has been really great. Not easy or particularly pleasant, but really great. There has just been a lot of growth and learning and thank goodness for that. I'm far from stagnant; no, I couldn't be further away from stagnant. The tidal pools of my mind are rippling with the wind and there's new life taking root there, stronger than before. This isn't the end or the beginning of anything, it just *is*. What a beautiful place to be, *here* and *now*.

I'M DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO GETTING REALLY INTO
CHESS AND I'M SO SO EXCITED ABOUT IT

Intimate Delusions

Gregory Nero

Abstract—Hibiscus seeps bloody red into the tablecloth. Stained Glass Daydreams. Passion Fruit, Extra Passion. Fairy Blood. The Devil's Teardrops. The First Plague of Egypt. The Rose and Her Thorns. There's no limit to what I think I don't deserve.

Index Terms—peace, exhaustion, hurry, stillness, sleep, panic, everything

THOUGHTS ON UNIQUENESS

There's no such thing as a unique experience. Then I started to think about this just a little bit longer. What is a *unique* experience? Do they even exist? I got all caught up in the probability and forgot about the humanity! Yes, the apple tree is abundant with fruit, so is it selfish of me to slice one off for myself? What I'm saying is that it just seems *unreasonable* to assume that anything that happens to me is unique. I guess this can be a coping mechanism. *You're not unique, you know. This sort of thing happens to everyone.* So what? Am I resigned to fold and collapse on the table? What a miserable fate that would surely be. No, no, no. Humanity *must* be realizing that everything has happened before and that *I* get the opportunity to indulge in it once again. We are descendants of beauty, pain, heartache, remorse, guilt, misery, peace, love... Yes. Let me have these moments and remember them. I'm infatuated by every waking moment.

WHAT IF I SIMPLY STOPPED BEING UNCOMFORTABLE?

THE SCALES ARE JUST A DESCRIPTION

Red, bloody craters on my thighs. From goosebumps, needlepoint hair, euphoria and pain (in small amounts, maybe I like it). Skin, we lasted only until our feelings ruined us. My bathtub is hollow. I feel so hollow. Whisper this to myself and hope that it's not as true as it feels.

My bathtub is full of hair. I'm a puppet in the afternoon heat and a porcelain vase indoors. It can get so, so cold. Sleight of mind, I'm a trickster. I swear, I felt better yesterday... err, that one time, or that other time... right? Am I just giving advice because I'm trying to convince myself that I believe it? I'm cunning, dear. "I have to make this work, I have to make this work." I'm hopeful, dear. But I'm melting into the concrete and mistaking the silhouette of the mountain for a parade of clouds. I'm trying, dear.

On my kitchen sink a plant is thriving. On my kitchen sink a plant is dying (Or, in the process of dying? But maybe not?) On my kitchen sink, a plant is trying to thrive. Sprinting in anticipation for a green light. I think I need a red light, though. Just some time to wait and stop and forget why I starting this fevered rush in the first place. Maybe I want to quit. But then what? I just need to get away.

CRAVE THIS

The cassette: after the music stops
Click click click click click click
I just got back from the grocery store.
I want apples with caramel.
And a *GRILLED CHEESE*.

TEMPORAL RELIGION

Time is the unblemished lamb.
Sacrifice.
Slaughter the hours and minutes and seconds.
Carving around skin and lungs and bones.
Blood. There's so much blood.

I'M PRESENT AND ALIVE AND WOW HOLY COW

Someday this will be my last time here. And in this moment I was captured by how *fucking* awesome it is to exist. Bone and skin and cells and blood: thinking. How marvelous is that?

THINKING DOWN BELOW

Flying back east I noticed the trees. *What is underneath?* Shade. Something quiet. A place to sit and rest. Then I remembered the desert and finally understood. *The desert exposes you. There's nowhere to hide. No trees. No shade. It's just you. And the Sun. I have been under constant inspection. Grilled by the heat and violently, beautifully tortured until it was too hot to sit still anymore. Squirming, peeling away from any possible refuge, I submit myself to this inspection. I want you to look inside of my boiling heart and tell me what you see. I was afraid but now I'm excited. Clean, dizzy, scorched until I'm seared by the sky, purified by the brightest blue.* But of course, I enjoy the rest and the trees and the grass and the way the mornings sounds. And here is the dichotomy of my heart.

SAYING IS BELIEVING

On convincing yourself something is true.
Saying it,
And believing it.
Manifest.
Not quite pretending.
You become it.

TAUNTED BY THE UNIVERSE

I think I'm comforted by impermanence. It's almost hilarious, the situations that I can find myself in. Is this an alibi or a coping mechanism? Mindfulness, darling. Please, be mindful of this.

THIS IS A GOODBYE

I escaped from you on Vassar Street.
I was an alien on the planet of your love.
Dear, I'm leaving now.
Time, take the reins.

WHAT I FOUND IN ROCHESTER

Grounding and peace and reassurance and stability. I owe this to my friends, and family, and the grass, and the trees, and that night that I fell asleep on the porch. I'm renewed.

SOMETHING SAPPY

Lovely,
I'm thinking of a million and one ways to describe how you make me feel and not a single one of them is good enough. I hate that I'm leaving. I just want time to grind to a screeching halt so that I can relive this exact moment forever. I feel so silly for hoarding peace like this, reliving every second, and every hour, and how hours turned into seconds and 9pm turned into 7am. And the morning birds are telling me it's time to go but I don't want to. For once I don't care if I get lost if it means that we can be lost here together. And now it's days later but my entire being is so beautifully languid from remembering, no, *discovering*, how this is *supposed* to feel. Darling, thank you.
- Yours