

ʔbédayne

by

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ABSTRACT

In the introduction to my thesis, I discuss how I use a writing technique in my creative work in order to cope with the process of writing autobiography. As an Indigenous scholar and creative writer, I have been influenced by Indigenous research methodologies that support the practice of autobiography. However, I have found that in order to write my own stories, to face what is sometimes extremely painful, I need to use a disembodied writing technique that allows me to assume a more objective position. I discuss my story and this technique in my introduction, and I demonstrate my practice of this technique in my collection of short stories.

ʔbédayine (the Chipewyan word for “its spirit”) is a collection of short stories existing in the same world and timeline, and that are hinged on experiences of sexual trauma and the ways that disembodiment instinctively works as a coping mechanism. I was inspired by my experiences as a troubled adolescent to write these stories, and as an Indigenous scholar it was crucial that I wrote these stories to come to terms with myself, and consequently making myself a better academic and creative writer. The first section of this collection begins with the protagonist, Ronnie, and her friend Thana, as they depart from their home town of Fort Smith. In their drive towards Edmonton, Ronnie recounts some of her experiences growing up in Fort Smith where the shame of their sexual experiences spurred their desire to leave. Once they reach Edmonton, both Ronnie and Thana’s experiences become overrun with substance abuse; chaos conceals the loss of culture. The theme of sexuality and sexual violence persists despite the move from their small town to a city. Ronnie's traumas are embodied in the impressionistic poetry and fragmented memories that each story possesses. Eventually, Thana exacts revenge for Ronnie’s experience of sexual violence, but this only continues to mask the trauma that they have experienced.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Kaitlyn Purcell.
No part of this thesis has been previously published.

DEDICATION

For my sister, Lorrie.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to have overcome the adversities that I faced as an adolescent, and to be able to make it to where I am today. I would not have finished high school, let alone university, without the love and support of my father and sisters who continue to inspire me to pursue my dreams. The support from teachers and the mentors for Indigenous students at Centre High school were a vital reason why I gained the confidence to pursue university education. I am so fortunate to have the support for my educational pursuits from my band, Smith's Landing First Nation. I must also thank my creative writing instructors who encouraged me to take the risk in writing the past that I spent so long feeling ashamed of. I owe my thesis supervisor, Christine Stewart, the utmost gratitude for creating the spaces to exist as an Indigenous scholar, and for the tireless work that she does for all of her students. I could not have accomplished this without all the love and support from my friends, fellow graduate students, relatives, and family. Most importantly, I would not be a strong Dene woman without my mother, and all the Dene women in my life, who helped to raise my sisters and me.

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INTRODUCTION: INDIGENOUS (DIS)EMBODIED RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

INTRODUCING MY PROJECT AND MY STORY

In the last few decades Indigenous scholars have expressed the need for different research methods in academia in order to subvert Western elitism, and the toxic environments that this has created in our universities (Tuhiwai Smith 129). Deanna Reder rejects academic conventions of objective research as she engages and discusses the importance of autobiography as a theoretical practice in her dissertation, *Acimisowin as Theoretical Practice: Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition in Canada*. Similarly, Shawn Wilson and Linda Tuhiwai Smith identify and resist traditional disciplines of objective academic knowledge that have undermined “alternate ways of knowing” (Tuhiwai Smith 69). Tuhiwai Smith, Reder and Wilson acknowledge and recognize different ways of knowing for Indigenous peoples and the importance of our stories. While I am grateful to them for this support, they do not consider the fact that autobiography (in the form of storytelling, celebrating survival, and testimonies) can be dangerous for those of us who are burdened with unspeakable memories. Sharing our personal histories can strengthen research and community, but our mental health and reputations are at stake when we unearth our own trauma. What happens when the stories that we must share are too difficult to bear?

Before I go on, I must take this moment to explain where I come from. I was born and raised in Edmonton with my three sisters and both my parents. While I was in elementary school, there was ongoing (and highly heteronormative) tension of desire and dislike between the girls and boys. It was clear that boys loved the prettiest girls, and girls loved the prettiest boys.

Those who were not the prettiest sat on the sidelines of these elementary romances. It was somewhere at this time that I realized I was not going to be one of the prettiest girls because I was too brown, and I was too big-boned. It seemed that there was nothing I could do to make others find me physically attractive. I had to move on to find other things to be proud of.

One of my fondest memories of being a child was when I was telling one of my older sisters, Lorrie, about the way space travel worked. Jumping around beside her, I used my hands to show her how the edges of the universe could send space ships backwards, facing the direction they came from, like a mirror. My sister laughed and told me that I was a very special kid. She told me that I was unique; weird. I loved creating art, and I looked up to my sister Lorrie who was an artist at that time. Hearing these words from her made me very proud of being weird.

Though I sensed that most children in my school did not think I was attractive, I held onto the idea that feeling of my creativity and uniqueness being acknowledged. In a school where most of my classmates did not look like me, I was proud of my long dark braids. Coincidentally, in the third grade, there was a new girl in my class. Her name was the same as mine, and she looked like me, too. Her presence and her friendship were welcomed, but it was also entirely confusing. After all those years in the same school, I had already accepted that I was the only girl who looked like me in my grade. To suddenly find myself sharing this category with another girl who shared the same first name; it was all so unsettling. It seemed to me that I was no longer unique both in terms of my name and complexion. This left me feeling insecure about my ability to be visibly unique and creative. It also left me feeling insecure about what being Indigenous exactly meant in the place I was living.

While I have been close with my relatives, the history and identity of our Dene culture was not recognizable to me for the majority of my childhood and into my adolescence. The

precarious relationship with my mother quickly deteriorated after my parents divorced each other while I was in the sixth grade, and we became estranged from each other during my years in high school. At that time, I went to with my father, who is Irish, and spent these years drifting even further from my Dene roots. This was the period of my life where I did not even know that I was Dene. When someone would ask me, “What kind of native are you?” I would not know how to respond to the question. When someone would ask me, “Are you Cree?” I would say, “Yes.”

While I became estranged from both my mother and my culture, I continued to cling onto my identity as an artist. However, the desire to be unique combined with my depression led to a series of dramatic self-destructive events. During this time, I lost so much weight that even one of the prettiest and kindest girls in high school told me that it looked like I was wasting away. But, at the same time it seemed like I was finally seen as a beautiful girl by other boys my age, and most regrettably, by men far older than I was. Sexual trauma and its resulting post-traumatic stress disorder became a central problem in my life, sending me to spiral in chaos during my late adolescent years. I was fortunate to have the unconditional love of my father, my sisters, and the friends who quietly ushered me back onto my feet. I have included these details about my life to expose the sexual and racialized systemic violence that I have experienced in my life, and how these have interconnected with loss of my Dene culture.

INTRODUCING THE CU(N)T UP

In my writing practice, I have found that when my own stories are too painful to consider, I must augment my subjective writing practice so that I can maintain a level of objectivity and distance, and so to survive re-living/re-writing those stories. I have found the dis-embodied

practice of the cut up, reframed and radicalized within a feminist sensibility as the “cu(n)t up” by writer Dodie Bellamy, as an essential practice to access my stories. After writing a traumatic story, the cu(n)t up process allows me the space to break apart those memories, playing with them in order to create new and more impressionistic poetry. In this process, traumatic memories become words on a page. Physically cutting the words up and replacing them on the page helps me to remember that there is distance between those difficult memories and my current life. Additionally, I consider my practice to be feminist and that my resulting poems are cu(n)t ups because with them I face and challenge the misogynist violence that my characters encounter.

How can we conduct research when the thought of past trauma creates physiological barriers that prevent us from remembering our most painful, but valuable, stories? I have struggled with this question over the years in university. To me, the depersonalized academic setting never seemed to be a productive environment for discussions of literature that possess intimate and traumatic stories. I wanted to know the stories of my fellow students and how those stories influenced their experience of the literature we studied. When I discovered a community-based learning class in advanced poetry, I was eager to learn more about different perspectives outside of the university. However, taking a class with the community-based research collective, Writing Revolution in Place, the year after my sister passed away proved to be very difficult. At this time, dissociating was the easiest way for me to cope, and consequently, it was very difficult for me to connect with others. I could not hear people’s stories. It took me two years before I tried another community-based learning course, and it was with the same group. While I had grown capable of being present while listening to others share their experiences, this class was actually far more exhausting. In class, there were several occasions where we had read or

discussed material that provoked some of the students and community members to re-live a past traumatic event. The class had to find ways to help hold each other up, whether it was through offering tea or food, or through positive reinforcement and affirmation. While I find that this form of learning is enormously productive, it has its own pitfalls and dangers. Inviting and evoking old trauma is a serious undertaking.

While I have struggled to create productive conversations around trauma in traditional academic classrooms, it was through reading Wilson's statement about his process for determining the fundamental principles of the research paradigm: "much of the knowledge came to me in an intuitive fashion" (69), that I realized I already knew one way to begin. After my sister had passed away, I was introduced to William Burroughs' cut up writing technique in a creative writing class. I was immediately attracted to his method, using it to work through moments that left me in a state of disassociation. I took my poetry and written memory of traumatic memories and created blocks of text to fill up several pages. Then I would cut the page into four, reassembling sentences by putting two different pieces together. This cut up method allowed me to transform painful moments into something that I could share with others. However, there is much to be critical of when looking at Burroughs. Burroughs was one of the founders of the Beat poetry movement. He and his fellow writers did little to encourage the females that existed in their group. Burroughs' murder of his wife, and the suicide of Leo Skir's lover Elise Cowen reveals the high cost of the male-centric Beat lifestyle. For me, life and death of Elise Cowen poignantly reveals the lack of respect Beat writers had for the women writers in their community. Leo Skir wrote of Cowen: "I couldn't stand her idleness, sleeping all day and being so grumpy all the time, and saying 'and like, and like, and like' all the time" (qtd. in Peabody 41). Cowen's mental health deteriorated until she jumped out of her parents' window,

killing herself at the age of 27. Afterwards, her parents destroyed most of her work (226).

Dodie Bellamy's *cu(n)t up* addresses this dark past of the Beat movement as she works to transform Burroughs' cut up procedure into a feminist practice that liberates women writing in a male dominated literary scene. Through her practice, Bellamy *cu(n)ts up* and plays with poems by male canonical writers in English Literature that have threatened to erase women (*pen.org*).

In my *cu(n)t ups*, I draw attention to the misogyny that exists in the streets today. I challenge those voices that threaten to erase women, women like Elise Cowen, like me.

WRITING AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS FICTION & SELF-DISCOVERY IS RESEARCH

In addition to the critical and creative research that has helped me in writing *?bédayine*, writing these stories as experimental fiction has provided me with enough security to write these experiences. Here, I must reiterate that *?bédayine* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of my imagination or used in a fictitious manner. By transforming my stories into fiction, I am provided with courage to continue probing deeper into my memories as a troubled adolescent. However, this sense of security was absent between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, as I was working through a transition from nihilistic adolescent to contributing member of society. When I was eighteen, I realized that I was still alive despite the trouble I had gotten into. I decided to try to go back to school. So, to be successful, I thought *I must become "normal"*. I grew entirely ashamed of where I had been. While this phase of my life was probably crucial in order to overcome my addictions and become a student at the University of Alberta, the shame associated with substance abuse and sexuality negatively affected some of my relationships with people who were still struggling themselves. Facing my

own history was arduous work, but it revealed patterns of violence and abuse, both internal and external, in my life. After coming to terms with my traumas, I experienced heightened awareness by realizing that I am not alone. Compassion for myself grew alongside my compassion for all people who struggle with mental health and addictions, and all vulnerable groups of people who inevitably struggle.

This growing compassion for others and for myself is vital to me as I remember my sister, Lorrie. Lorrie spent the majority of her life battling with addictions and her mental health. Two years before she passed, I spent the day with her at a visual art festival along Whyte Avenue in Edmonton. Being in that neighborhood reminded my sister of how she used to live in the alleyways behind Whyte Avenue as a teenager. At the time, her recollections only filled me with anger. I thought to myself, “Why would she try and spoil the day with her sad stories?” I sat in silent anger, not wanting her to talk anymore. It was only after she passed away that I realized I was not angry with her, but that I was ashamed to hear anything that resembled my own past. I spent some time ruminating over every moment I shared with her. I was saddened by this realization that my anger towards her came from my projected shame. I knew that I needed to make peace with my past in order to clearly observe the world. Since then, I have spent my time remembering and writing my stories, writing the parts of myself that I had been ashamed of. Confronting my own history was difficult, but it helped to illuminate some of the shared struggles of all women, and all people who suffer with their mental health or addictions. As academics, we need to be mindful of how and what we contribute to society (or not) through the ways that we conduct and write our research. We should aim to heighten our critical consciousness, dismantle toxic traditional academic ideologies, through the art of sharing our own stories with each other. These stories are a crucial aspect of research. These stories allow

others to understand why we do what we do, and they can allow us to be more compassionate with ourselves and with the world. Yet, at the same time, we must tell these stories in a mindful and careful manner that does not inflict harm on ourselves or others.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that by centering ourselves, we become capable of taking the next step in understanding the world around us. The labour of locating ourselves in our research is noted by scholar Renee Linklater in *Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies* where she states, “Everything about Indigenous research tells us we have to locate ourselves in our research. First, we write our own stories and share our position in the world before we write about the world. This is a big task because first we have to come to terms with who we are and how we come to do the work that we do” (11). However, if there are parts of our history that are too painful to look at, the task of coming to terms with ourselves can be too difficult to endure. In the work that follows, I demonstrate how I have learned to recall my memories in a process that honours my story and the stories of others and that allows me to survive the undertaking. When I began to write, I encountered the consequences of reigniting old trauma. By taking of Bellamy's feminist practice of the cu(n)t up, I was able to create the necessary distance. Although many Indigenous scholars such as Wilson, Reder, and Tuhiwai Smith are critical of the valorization of objectivity in academia, as an Indigenous writer, I found that the somewhat distancing and objectifying practice of the cu(n)t up procedure provided me with a method that allowed me to face my own trauma. Paradoxically, the objective method of the cu(n)t up actually allowed me to better maintain and honour my own subjective position.

Furthermore, writing these stories has revealed to me that there is more work to be done in the practice of autobiography so that we may protect ourselves from the very real dangers of sharing our stories.

ʔbédayine

FORT SMITH

a town that sits just above the border between alberta and the northwest territories, dene metis dogrib and the fur trade washed up on the slave river and some of the caribou eaters were sent here in the 60s, canadian government whispered a strange lullaby wanted their people all in one place and out of alberta, burned down their homes so they couldn't turn back, a lullaby drowning in fiction instead of living off the land they were living in a town with no running water and no paint on their houses and children pushed into residential schools poisoned families and lives generations of family buried in alberta while the rest of them were laid to rest in the northwest sundays spent with the creator and the church can still hear the whispering whistles down in the crypt now the town is torn and whole and smells like buffalo hide

FAREWELL

I spit out chunks of vomit into the grass. Always hated goodbyes and the way they twist my stomach and ask to be erased with a six-pack of tall cans. Smoke from Thana's cigarette dances with horseflies while her long black hair sways in the sun. Our green van is parked next to a little outhouse, and the dirt roads stretch out north and south from us. We are only four hours from home, but we still have maybe ten hours to go.

Thana passes me the water bottle from her backpack and asks me, "Did I ever tell you the story about the first time I drank?"

"Was that when you gave yourself a fat lip?"

"No, I was probably eleven and I stole a strawberry cooler from my sister's room. I thought it tasted pretty good, so it went down quickly. My mom found me covered in red puke in the washroom. And you know what she did?"

"What?"

"She laughed. Then she threw a towel on me and shut the door. I cried for a while before my sister came in and she helped wash the puke off. Never asked my Mom for help after that. And you know what? We need to look out for each other and always make sure to wash the puke off when it gets tough. Y'know, just shit like washing puke."

"I promise to wash the puke out of your hair, but you gotta promise me you won't leave me for some cute guy again," I laugh before gargling some water and spitting it out.

"We'll see who's talking once you have a guy crawling over you." Thana puts out her cigarette and jumps back in the driver's seat. I sit in the passenger side as the car pulls back onto the highway. I pull out my notebook and write.

loss turns to vomit can love bury these knots?

in love and lost the way. goodbye, family.

Never meant to wander, but I always did. Dad told me I was a runaway kid from the moment I began to walk on two feet. I guess when I was a toddler I was playing in my parents' closet and they thought I'd walked out into the forest or been taken by a black bear. Never was a good place having two over-reactive parents with a runaway kid like me.

My dreams have also captured me, causing me to wander into other worlds. Always did like my sleep. I remember lots of my dreams, even ones when I was still in the cradle. There is this one dream-inside-of-a-dream I've kept having since I was a kid. I first had it when I was just learning how to ride my bike, because I remember I also had another weird dream around that time where I lost control of the handles. But, this one dream-in-a-dream I keep having, it usually goes like this:

The dream begins with me waking up to the sounds of dogs barking and screeching. I go to the window but it's still dark out. I walk down the hallway to try and find our dog, Bebi, but the front door is open. The screeching gets louder, so I run outside. As I step outside the screeching turns to silence and I become surrounded with light. The wind grabs me, and it feels like I'm falling through heavy air. That's when I wake up.

Ever since I first had this dream, it comes back every once in a while. It changes each time, but I always end up stuck in that blinding light. I always write down my dreams, and it's easier when they're bizarre. Sometimes they're so beautiful that it's hard to get out of bed. I live for the dreams about swimming in the ocean with the blue whales, orcas, hammerheads, and dolphins.

Gravel turns to asphalt as Thana changes the CD, and she asks me to tell her a story.

“Well, you know how my Dad made me go to Sunday school? He thought it would be good for me after Mom left. I would have to wear these dresses and these shiny black shoes. And we would have to sit in the basement and read from the bible. Then they would give us weird things to do like colouring these religious pictures with crayons. Well, this one week after Bebi died I was really sad for a while and I went to the washroom during Sunday school because I needed to cry. But, then I could hear someone whistling outside the stall. I opened the door and there was nobody there. I went back outside, and everyone was sitting silently working on their drawings. Creeped me out and I didn’t know what to do, so I just went back to my seat.”

“Did you tell your dad?”

“Yeah, he was upset. I didn’t have to go back to Sunday school after that.”

“Creepy.”

Thana always loved my stories. Sometimes I would make up new ones, but she didn’t seem to notice. When we met, I was pretty much a loner since I had a hard time speaking and kids thought it was weird.

That day we met, it was around lunch in the tenth grade. Instead of walking home, I walked towards my favourite place in the trees. That week I was hanging out with my cousin Johnny and I told him about the nightmares I was having, and he gave me some of his mom’s painkillers to help me sleep. I took two and I guess I ended up sleepwalking or something, and my Dad found me lying on the couch drooling on myself. A few days later he found out that my cousin was stealing morphine from his mom, and he asked me if I had taken anything from him. I think I’m pretty good making stories, but I’m also pretty terrible at lying. He yelled at me and

told me not to turn out like my mom did. I spent that week scared to say anything. I didn't want to be my mom, and I couldn't even figure out how to be good enough to be anyone's friend.

That's when I met Thana. I was crying in the trees throwing rocks at the branches when I heard someone yell, "FUCK!" I turned around and saw her standing with a cigarette not too far from me. I held my breath, but it was too late. Her eyes found mine, and she started walking towards me. Two strange sad girls sitting in the forest talking shit about the town and our families. After that I was glad our families were messed up enough for us both to be friends.

If not, we might have never left that town.

As we pull into the first big town in Alberta, we are greeted by flashing hotel signs and colourful fast food restaurants. It's probably the closest thing to Vegas that we'll ever get to see. We find ourselves at a gas station. I load up on some Sour Patch Kids and Cool Ranch Doritos while Thana fills up the car. A thin guy walks into the store. The dusty blonde colour of his hair reminds me of Dylan from back in Smith – the boy with strawberry coolers and a copy of *Night at the Roxbury* on VHS. The boy who ruined high school.

When we were in the tenth grade, Thana was googly eyes over this boy at the ice cream store, and he invited us both over. I remembered feeling weird about going, but I knew it meant a lot to Thana by the way she smiled on the way to Dylan's house. In his basement, the white hallways were painted in layers of grease streaks left by fingers. They turned on the TV and Thana inserted a copy of *Night at the Roxbury*. Dylan cracked open three strawberry coolers for all of us before he fell into the plaid fabric of the couch. Thana joined him while I sat on the side in the recliner.

My hands were tight around the curves of the bottle while I strained to keep my eyes glued to the TV. The plaid couch seemed to move beside me, but I was too scared to look. Thana and Dylan's breathing seemed to get louder while my insides were shaking.

stars in thana's eyes created constellations and the astrologers in her ears explained why pluto had fallen into her heart and her hand made its way to his thigh. his dick shivered while wind moaned through the windows

I put my cooler on the table and stood up, "You know, guys, I have to— I should go."

Thana stood up and grabbed my hand. "Just come sit with us. Relax."

She pulled me beside her on the plaid couch with Dylan, and my hands started to sweat.

"I always thought you two were beautiful," Dylan said. I kept my eyes glued on Will Ferrel and Chris Kattan bobbing their heads and dancing in shiny suits. My hands gripped the edges of my shirt. Thana put her hands over my face. The shiny suits blurred into the dark and into the strawberry coolers. She pulled my eyes into hers, and then my lips onto hers.

After that day, it felt like everyone knew what we had done, and they probably did. I spent more time avoiding being around people, and I spent more time in the trees.

I shake the bags of junk food in the air as I jump back in the car. Thana laughs as I fasten my seatbelt. I read our astrological birth charts to Thana as she kept her eyes on the road as we jump back south on the highway.

EDMONTON

a city that sits on the north saskatchewan with history of fort makers and papaschase garden thieves and a people forced to move off their land so that people today can sit in their million-dollar homes while they look out their windows. and they say to themselves, "isn't this pretty?" in edmonton, there are parts of the city that some people might prefer to look away from. they look away from the migrating swarms of worn out looking folks east of city centre. black bags and shopping carts swim upstream towards the bottle depot each day by the 6 o'clock closing. they look away at night when they walk beneath the white breast in the sky, and they look away while teens wander alleys selling mom's medication cabinet. look away while a crying teenager runs out of an apartment building with only a towel wrapped around her. look away when a guy dressed in all black walks towards the bridge. look away when the teenagers sneak out into the night with their black jean jackets and glowing green hair.

HOME SWEET

I'm already used to the taste of shit beer. I sit at the bar with a glass of the cheapest draft, waiting for Thana to finish her shift. It has been a month since we got here, and I still feel like my mouth is frozen under the temperature of self-induced alienation.

Nothing feels right, what is this? Am I lost in my own skin? I feel like the more of a freak I am, the more I want to embody the parts of me that the world seems to hate.

Sad girl.

I'm just a child again, caged at night in my cradle. The moon pours through the trees outside of my window, and the shapes of my mobile twist against the wall. Am I crying because the shadows scare me or is it because all I want to do is dance with the darkness?

I finish my drink, and the bar manager asks me if I need another. Thana is off serving on of the tables full of big white men with large hands and bellies.

A couple sit in the corner of the bar. The woman has a puffy face, while the man has short spiky hair.

I say, "Yes, please," but he has already poured me another.

"Here you go, darling."

I nod and take another sip.

In the city, there is so much noise, so much fluorescence and weird stank everywhere. I miss the trees. Here it's all cement.

The apartment is close enough to the bar and we can find our way everywhere on foot. We each pay \$281 a month to live within a room big enough for a bed and our garbage bags of clothes. No TV, no internet, no phone, no need for extra costs and extra space-takers. My only excesses are my sketchbooks, pencils, and two books my sister gave me. One is on dream

interpretations since she always said I have the weirdest dreams. The other is called *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. She said it was better than any book I'd ever be taught in school. She was right.

My glass is empty, again. I just want to go home, but Thana seems to like when I'm here to walk her home. She says Dave creeps her out.

My glass is full, again.

Maybe I just need to become a full-time astrologist. Or a tarot-reader. I hate retail.

Thana is so lucky, she gets to just help people drink. I help people find the changing room. I help them pay for their cheap sweatshop clothes. I help them find their size. I help them decide which dress will turn on their boyfriend.

My glass is empty.

Thana is standing in front of me and says, "Ready to go?"

We wander back towards the apartment. My legs are still heavy from standing all day.

Thana puts her arm around mine.

"How many drinks did you have?"

"Not many."

"Don't you work tomorrow?"

I nod and laugh as the streets blur into the people sleeping by store fronts, and I let Thana lead me back into our little home.

The bus is as exhausting as it marvelous. The bus is a place of transport and a place that takes me to live in purgatory for 5 to 8 hours a day.

That person sitting across from me on the bus is wearing a puffy brown coat and her hair is bright blonde. Yesterday she called her mother who told her to fuck off. But I won't know and maybe I shouldn't care. Maybe I should be so full of myself that I float to the moon. Should I love her more than I love myself? Or is it the more I love myself, the more I will be able to love the world? Can I fill myself with enough love that the love inside grows to become the size of the universe? Will I float away then? Or will my love for the world sink roots deep enough to keep the rest of myself from stretching too far into the sky? Why am I so concerned?

I feel eyes on me.

I let the blurriness of thought disappear and I notice a beautiful tanned man staring at me.

He looks half white and half native. His eyes are lightness, and his body is gold. I look away for a minute before looking back at him. He gets off the bus at the end of Jasper Ave, but his eyes glance back at me as he leaves.

It smells like someone just lit a joint at the back of the bus. The skunky smell wafts towards me as we wait to leave the Jasper Place bus terminal. The smell marries another: au de toilette alcoholic. I am on a bus of addicts and it's 8PM on a Tuesday. I check my phone; it's at 14%. No use in listening to music, so I try to read some of my dream book.

Dreaming about the end of the world signifies a big change in your life.

The lights are dim, as the sun has already gone down. It looks like the bus is sitting in space, blackness everywhere except for the fluorescence inside this rectangular box. A child screams quietly on the back of the bus.

It's the first weekend both of us have time off at the same time, and Thana comes to me with

some little pink pills of ecstasy that she got from her coworker. I guess everyone here is all about their ecstasy, and her coworker thinks we should get in on the fun. Each pill has a little heart printed on them.

“She said these will make you fall in love with the world.”

I don't know much about ecstasy. I don't even think anyone from back home ever did anything like this. Thana takes me to a party and we swallow our pills.

*running is flying and flying is running and always
fly. love sits everywhere it was waiting 17 years
sings like broken sunglasses, tape around the head
dancing jaw clenching dancing jaw clenching until
glow sticks erase isolation.*

I wake up in an echo. I don't even know what the fuck is going on. I don't know when I lost control, or how many days I've been taking E. I'm taking pills on the weekend. Coasting through the work week; autopilot pill poppin' child. *I'm so high*. But today I woke up and the world is an echo. At work, it's all a blur behind a blur. I assume it's my drug habit. Or the lack of eating. No need to tell people what I already know. I remind myself that I don't care if I die. Better to die beautiful anyways, right? I'm not sure where I am here. Granite is made from the heart of my habit, infinite fractals of methylphenidate and amphetamines. I break bottles on the sidewalk and

run home, high as fuck.

Ecstasy, where have you been?

Food has become a distant memory and I begin to fall or black out at least once a day. I can't bend down, can't move too fast, fuck stairs (broke my toe the other day), lying down makes it more difficult to get up. I'm walking and falling and falling and falling. I look worse than a bruised peach. I'm old bananas. My teeth are turning yellow from all the drugs.

A guy from work with a large rounded face, fat nose, crinkled eyes walks up to me and he says that I need to stop. I need to put down the drugs. But I like to mash my brain. Mash it until it's fucking mush enough to wash down with a bump of ketamine. I tell guy to back off, because I've made friends with bad days, withdrawal symptoms, my body is doing strange things. It's floating in a fever. Floating in a nightmare, upside down I can't find my body because my insides are the surface of the sun, it feels like toilet paper rubbing against my teeth, an itch that only hurts when I rub it, my veins are screaming (*you fucking cunt whore!!*).

I've been living mostly in bed, or out meeting guy for pills. Sweating beneath a blanket. Eating is out of the question, but I must take in the bare minimum, somehow. If only Thanos could see me dumping out my dinner in the garbage. I like to pretend to be well fed and I walk around with sunglasses at night. I pretend it's my new thing. Pills are my new style. Is it something that blends between the colours of my dreams and right into the blue powder on my eyelids. I'm twisting into red, I ask you the same question four times and forget what we were talking about. Short term memory loss, I hope. *This is all just an experiment.* Let's see what happens when I take all the drugs.

Throw five in. Five more. Last time I took eight and barely got high.

The feeling floats over my body and I end up in Thana's car heading to legislature grounds with some of our friends. We play the ecstasy tunes; Lazersnake fills our bodies with a mixture of synth pop and vocals of some guy speaking strange lines about *get have fun* and *Christians on drugs*. I bounce around in the front passenger seat, smoking cigarettes with the window down. When we find the legislature grounds, the sun is rising.

Standing in a shallow pool, dark electric clouds sway into the pink of sunrise. They circle above leaving the piece above me untouched. A hole in the world.

The whole of this world.

Awful beauty that haunts; it speaks to me.

Back in the car, we head back home. We park on the road decorated with broken sidewalk. I have a cigarette on the front steps.

The whole world sits in the sky and the world is ending. Pink clouds swirl into funnels. Twirling pink fingers try to reach the earth. I run into the basement and turn on the news.

Tornados are sucking up cars in intersections, *people are dying*, the world is dying, and *the sky is falling*.

I wake up and it's 6:45. How did I sleep so long? *FUCK, I need to call work*.

I call my boss, but she sounds confused. My words fall into phone like a game of 52 pick up, my cards are flying all over and crashing into the ground. She tells me I'm not making any sense and that it's only 6:45 in the morning. I'm not even scheduled for work today. I guess I only slept for 20 minutes.

quasi-stars penetrate the "indian" that i was, sky evolves into an inviting shadow. allow light to enter the third eye, brightening holistic. phantom of her words. denesuline: "the real people".

i don't like thinking about the doubling of shadows as midnight approaches. the light bares healing stories.

moving out of slum indigo.

I think a week has passed since I saw the tornados, and I can't stop staring out the window, waiting for the tornados to come back. Unfinished ceiling matches my brain, and the poor lighting matches the dilation of my eyes. I like the nakedness of my space, the mattress with no sheets. This is my hole in the wall. The uncleaned dishes, the fruit flies, spiders, shadow spiders, and the sheets hanging over the window. I don't think I have a job anymore. Thana comes home less and less.

Took too many pills this month. Shredded thoughts. Don't care if I die here. Can barely stand, keep falling on the concrete of this room. I lay on the cement for a while before trying to crawl back onto the bed. I will get up later. Dreams amalgamate with walls:

It's 59:75, and I am late. I run to the washroom to get ready. I run back to the bedroom and go to check the weather through the window. I open the curtains. Through the window I can see tornados everywhere, demolishing the entire neighborhood. Houses have been turned into holes. I turn around and run. But it's too late. *Run*. The tornado is pulling me in. I am held by wind. There is silence as it roars until there is no more room in my ears. Run down. Air pulls me in. The tornado takes me.

I wake up.

Why is the world always fucking ending?

I turn over and the TV is still on. There is an infomercial for Slap Chop, “You’re gonna love these nuts!” It’s only 3:15 AM. I must have been sleeping for a while. I try to get up, but my legs still don’t work. I crawl towards the fridge, and I pull out a juice box and some bread. I throw the bread down my throat, chasing it with the orange drink.

I look up, and there are beer bottles all over the counters.

I count one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, fuck. I lose count, but I know I didn’t drink those. I use the fridge handle to pull myself up. Stars flood my eyes until everything is black, like it usually happens lately. I wait it out, gripping tightly onto the countertop. After a minute my vision comes back to me, and the bathroom light is on. It seems a mile away. I use the walls to pull myself closer.

Once I turn into the light of the bathroom, I find Thana curled next to the toilet. She is half-naked. Breasts exposed, and there are blood streaks on the door. She is partly singing and partly crying. It sounds like the saddest thing I’ve ever heard, sadder than a dog whimpering in pain. I use the bathroom counter to pull myself closer, and then I let myself drop next to her on the floor and brushed her hair out of her face. When I look into her eyes, mine begin to water. I hold her until I can feel her breath get slow. “Thana, I think I’m dying,” I whisper to her, “I could barely walk from the bed.” She looks up at me again and says, “You need to get off those pills.” I nod, taking in the smell of vomit and beer from her mouth. I say, “And you need to quit this drinking.” She nods, and she slowly stands up. She pulls my hand and I stand with her, but

the blackness comes again, and I tell her that I can't see anything. She leads us back onto the bed and pulls the blankets over. I play with her knotted hair while she rubs my cheeks.

I fall asleep and begin to dream: *The city is covered in the greenest grass and these yellow houses. A tornado is out and tearing through it all. Spit out and twisted. Vibrant deaths of childhood memories and soft beds. I run through the streets. It pulls me in. I am torn into pieces and every bit of me is spinning in circles.*

The next day Thana comes home from work with a bag of groceries and a gram of weed, “This will help us both sober up a bit,” she says as she looks me over, “And you are wasting away, you really need to eat.”

I nod.

She asks me if I've ever tried blades, and I shake my head. She takes two butter knives and leaves them tucked into the red coil of the stovetop. She rinses out an old Coke bottle, cutting off the bottom and says, “It's really intense, but I think we need to do it this way for this to work.” Pulling the hot knives out, she places a bit of the weed on top of one and wedges the other on top. She takes her coke bottle funnel over the smoke, sucking it all in. She holds in the smoke in for a second before letting it slowly drift out from her mouth. She prepares the blades for me, passing me the funnel. I take in all the hot smoke, trying to hold it in. Fire lungs force me into a coughing fit. Every inch of my body feels like a ton of invisible stones are pressing me down. I walk to the bed, and my eyes want to close.

“Thana, do you have any food?”

She laughs and opens a big bag of plain Lays, passing it to me. I smile and begin to eat. I give up on trying to keep my eyes open, but I can't stop eating and smiling.

I drift into sleep and I begin to dream: *The world is turned inside out. Our solar system has rearranged itself. The earth sits in the orbit where Uranus was. We stole its moons. One moon chases the other as they drift across the sky. Cold air swallows us. Heavy snow and ice. The sun is too far, it sends soft light. The world is going to end in darkness.*

HEALTHY NUMBERS

I think I must have slept for a week straight. Thana seems to spend most days working and feeding me. She says she doesn't mind and that what I have is harder to kick. I love her more than anything.

My nerves feel like electric shocks and weed seems to be the only thing that makes them go away. I've started to develop an appetite for milk and canned pineapple. French fries, too.

I won't be anyone anymore until I apologize for swearing

Days pass and I'm finally feeling like I can walk outside again.

in front of the sudden dial tone. The rug burns on my knees,

I start looking for a new job. The movie theatre seems easy enough.

a book with all the stories about his life. I cry.

Everyone seems to love the way my skin is stretched over my bones. (*Wow, Ronnie, you look amazing!*) Near death, I've become something that everyone loves.

On the way back home from a shift at the movie theatre, I feel eyes on me. I turn around, and it's that beautiful tanned man sitting in the back of the bus. I smile and turn back around.

Suddenly he is sitting beside me, and he says, "Hey."

I look at his eyes for a moment to say, "Hi."

He passes me a little piece of paper.

"Call me later?"

I nod as he gets up and off the bus.

The little piece of paper has his name and number on it.

Jake.

I wonder if I'm going to die tonight. Was never supposed to talk to strangers. But now I'm sitting in Jake's apartment on his leather couch. White walls, wooden coffee table. Clean, and no clutter. Far different than the mess that surrounds me at home. He pours expensive rum over a short glass of ice. He looks at me with his deep green eyes, "Need chase?" I smile while he's already back and forth from the kitchen with a bottle of Dr. Pepper.

I take a sip while he puts on a movie.

He tells me that he's surprised I texted him, and that I actually came over. It is hard to tell if he's honest or not, but I don't think I really care anyways. The shape of his face and warm tones of his skin and hair invite me into some part of myself that I want to see. I want to know where he is going to take me next.

We exchange some parts of our past. I tell him about how I was recently addicted to ecstasy, but that I'm fine now. He tells me that he has been part of some gangs before, getting in fights, and he was diagnosed with psychosis.

"Psychosis?"

"Didn't feel anything for a while."

Will he strangle me to death to feel something? Or maybe he is going to kidnap me. My face feels tense. He's probably twice my size, so there would be nothing I could do at this point. I take another sip of my drink and he asks me how long I was an addict for.

"Four months, maybe. Weed and sleep helped me kick it."

"That's good you managed to get out of it."

He takes his hand to my hair, lightly threading it between his fingers. I look up at him as his face begins to press into mine. My tongue sliding into his mouth.

He pulls away and says, “Less tongue.”

I nod, smiling, and kiss him but following the motions of his mouth. He stops again, but with our eyes locked he takes off his pants. I slide mine off. He is so beautiful, with legs thicker and hairier than most guys I’ve seen. He pulls off my top and throws off my bra, kissing my neck. He kisses me until I drift backwards into the couch. My underwear is on the ground. He puts his mouth all over my clit for a moment, then suddenly he is putting on a condom. I smile up at him as he puts himself inside of me. I moan as I grasp at the muscles on his back.

With myself still in him, he lifts me up and off the couch. I feel so small. He pulls me up and down over his dick, then starts walking towards the wall where he is able to push himself deep into me. I gasp, clenching onto the back of his neck.

I tell him not to stop until we orgasm together. His with a few deep grunts, and I tremble between him and the wall. He carries me into his bedroom and places me on his bed.

In the Tim Hortons bathroom, we stand in blue light. Three weeks since we first fucked. A guy enters the bathroom, and I laugh. He grins at me and Jake as he goes into a stall while we continue to crush pills into toilet paper. This must be the cure to everything. Jake passes me blue dust wrapped in a cotton pillow. His pretty face tells me that this will save me. I can't help but think and feel that this is true love, me and him. Two weirdos drawn together like metal and magnets. Eyes shatter eyes, and my body melts in ecstasy before the pills can even hit me. We leave with our stomachs turning, arm in arm. We take the next bus to Mill Creek ravine.

It is warm out and we stumble underneath the bridge. “I think we were meant to be, right

here, you know,” he says to me as I smile and say, “This is perfect. The air. The sky. And you are so beautiful. And I feel so beautiful. This is it.” I laugh with all my teeth, (*YES!*), and he pulls me in with his arm around my shoulders. I am in love, every cell of my body is glistening with joy, the air of all that is alive wraps around us. Each tree and star brush us with life.

*he falls in love for an hour and i fall in love for a month
blue dust filled holes and feather light wishes at midnight
falling from the moon and into the earth's atmosphere.
my body is on fire. pick me up again and name me 3AM*

We walk and walk until we find a patch of grass that sings the song of our high. We fall into it and into each other and laughed in our chaotic embrace.

These drugs fill holes of the worn-out roads that exist inside me. Every heartbreak, every terrible thing, everything that ever begged me to cry is erased.

I walk into the lagoon of my dreams.

My phone rings, and I laugh. It's Thana. She asks me where I am. “I'm somewhere in the trees ... Grass? ... This guy ... Jake ... Where are you?” I snort before she tells me to meet her at some address, and Jake says he knows where that is. We roll over and up and shuttle into the streets again.

We wander into a hole of a house where Thana is. She laughs at us and my eyes.

I fall into another dream: *“I'm driving through the night with the sky lit with shooting stars*

bursting downwards. The world is ending and I'm too far to reach my family.

When I wake up, I'm curled into Jake's body, and Thana brings me a glass of water.

ONE YEAR WITH STEVE

The street is dark and full of houses with wooden gates that have fallen over. A large man slowly bikes by with a small black bag dangling from the handle bar. We cross the street by the train tracks and find the bottle depot.

We walk around the building until we find a sign for The Studio.

Creaking stairs lead us up to a man who asks us each for five dollars.

The party is full of men with baggy hoodies. Rappers line the stage and fill the venue with words twisted with words over heavy beats. I feel silly standing here, so we find a spot in a room with couches and strange beams everywhere. We find a little glass room and stand inside of it, drinking our bottle of spiced rum and coke. We giggle at how out of place we are and how alien this place is from regulations and rules. Underage drinking, and no one gives a fuck.

I feel eyes from outside the glass walls.

I look up and there is a guy with dark hair and eyes, sitting on couch across the room. We look at each other for a moment before a second before I look back at Thana and giggle.

“Ronnie, I think that guy is staring at you.”

I turn back towards him, and he is still staring at me.

He motions his hands for me to come sit with him. I look at Thana and she nods her head, ushering me away.

I walk up to him, and he offers the seat beside him. His eyes say a hundred things, and there is a past that lives in his face and the hair and the large scabs on his face. He holds me with his bright brown eyes as he tells me his stories about how he is from Toronto, a product of rape left to be adopted by a Somali family with brothers that taught him the streets. He used to be a little white boy with dark hair and a broken heart. They taught him right. They showed him the

drugs and the way to beat respect into the streets. The people that were there, he showed them how to be scared. Alcohol in my blood allows me to rest my head in his lap and I stare into his eyes, he is so strange and amazing.

*smell of vodka and hennessey drawn together like two pisces
with open hearts and crowns of dandelions love at first love
is first painted in the way the summer wind tosses me*

He walks me home and tucks me into bed.

can we ever see the ocean

the way you hold my smile?

When I wake up, he is gone. But I'm still searching for his eyes, the ones spoke about the love that he never got as a kid.

LOVE IS

I look at the spinning city streets; the speed of the car is traced in a blur past the street signs. I sit in the back of a Pontiac Grand AM with a seatbelt wrapped over my body. A man with long peppered hair sits in front of the wheel; his face looks like a handsome brown cactus. A young boy with an oversized hoodie sits beside him, flicking his fingers across the stereo controls to turn up the volume as “A milli, a milli...” begins to blare. Swimming in a hoodie and in the seat as he grabs a cigarette out to light it, his body bounces in a cloud of smoke. Little brown eyes light up, and he looks at the driver and at the other cars as he begins to rap along with Lil Wayne:

“Motherfucker I’m ill!”

As we are making a left turn in a busy intersection, the right door in the back flips open. I clench my seat, holding my breath. As the car straightens out, the door slams shut, and I panic my arms about to lock it. The driver looks back for a second, “Ah, shit. Yeah that door doesn’t lock up too good.”

We drive into the anus of the city, across from China Town by the government buildings. I get out and light a cigarette. Copper glass reflects the sun residue, and the day residue dips into the edges of the sky. A young man walks up to me.

When I see him I smile. He has big dick in his pants and little bags of drugs in his pockets. He likes to buy me French fries and hot chocolate and he likes to open all the doors.

We wander, and he trades little bags for \$10 bills until it is pretty late, and we are standing in the white fluorescence of an underground parkade. A girl is crouched down with a glass pipe filled with white smoke thick like coffee cream. She guzzles the high and moves her body in a scattered rippling rhythm as she exhales. “Jib-tech”, she calls herself. A golden heart fucked with the crack fashion, tight tank top and cargo pants. She likes to wiggle her butt when she walks and

sings to the sky as she moves across the downtown sidewalk.

I meet a man who says, "I'd spend \$2000 for a night with you." Flattery darts over me before I begin to feel like a piece of furniture. I am the couch lost in the woods, and I don't have the mouth to say, "Fuck off."

We burn the broken furniture; pale wooden ghosts prod my knees. City park picnics with cigarettes and crack pipes, the Wiggling Body sells mom's Ativan and says, "Show me the way to the cigarette garden." Large hand on the back gently nudges. Show me the way. A kite slowly falls into the tree.

Under the influence of the pet rabbit that fell stiff in my hands at the age of six, hands that held lifeless long ears and soft brown fur. The influence of melancholy and insanity, I both regret and enjoy, and I apologize with absences and elusions. It feels better falling down.

Only pretty girls wither away. These boys love to see my bones, and they love the legs open lullaby. I sing better when I'm high.

Have you ever felt joy that burrows into your gut? Joy that makes your eyes shake and skin hold onto the summer night? Heroin could save me from this.

I like to see the moth written across his eyes. *I am your moonlight, baby.*

Slutty, sketchy, skanky, scum, the 's' kisses the space between my teeth. We are going to die anyways, might as well die in the hole of the high. Here, the whole world holds me. The jib-techs meet in the city gardens. It's safer being forest fairies, setting up tents in the river valley, filling the tent with that wicked wet-dog smell, the fog of meth.

"I love you," he said. My hollow cheeks blush. The drug dealer that needs me, and I need his drugs and to look at his pretty brown eyes. I keep wanting to get hit with feelings, deformed with ecstasy. I like it when your heart seeps into your eyes; I like to see it bleed.

2C-i TIMES THREE

I.

“Should we?”

“May as well.”

Placing one of the tiny blue pills into my hand, we look into each other’s eyes before Steve drops one on top of his blue tongue – stained from the free popsicles he received earlier from a guy with a broken freezer. He takes out a bottle of Diet Pepsi to swallow the small pill, hands the bottle over and I swallow mine. We look into each other’s eyes and smile.

“Let’s find someplace to sit and I’ll try to sell some of these.”

My eyes begin to wander as the small crowd of toothy asymmetrical smiles and the scents of unwashed clothes approaches (*laughs are exchanged, transactions are made*), I am slowly swallowed by the cement until a girl with black stringy hair walks by with her hips out and sings:

“You know it’s hard out here for a pimp!”

In the center of downtown, the lights grow brighter under the darkening sky, a parking sign flickers “OPEN” in fluorescent green, thrusting against my eyes, digging deep into the brain, lights that turn on and off within the tall buildings strobe and swim through the summer air, lightening, darkening, pressing inside my frail skull.

Fuck this. Shit’s getting too real.

I start walking across sidewalk. Steve is laughing with a group of jib techs and street kids. I find myself on a bus for two seconds before I’m back home, in my room, I flick the light switch on, and the kaleidoscope attacks her from all sides, tracers for tracers, sky blue walls are fucking the brains out of the lemon-yellow curtains, and the rainbow enters my body, tearing me apart.

II.

“YES??”

“YES!!”

Tiny blue pills jump from our hands onto tongues stained blue from the red, white, and blue rocket pops, followed by a stream of Diet Pepsi, black aspartame thrusts into the pit of their stomachs where strong acids suck on the pill until the chemicals soak into the small intestine, chemicals fornicate with our mind, body, third eye, giving birth to a bastard grin. “OK, GO!!”

A crowd forms a rainbow around us, pill poppers, toothy asymmetries, musk and shit stain stank, greased hair. Pills are sold for \$5 bills as it begins to rain for a brief millisecond, laughing, fist pumps, fisting the air, fisting with laughter, and “You know it’s hard out here for a pimp!” fists the ear canals of the pill poppers.

Our pill popping minds are completely wanked, and the surrounding skyscrapers become glowing phallic statues, the fluorescence flickers so hard that it pummels our pill poppin’ eyes, threatening the collapse of downtown. A nearby parkade sign screams at the top of its neon lungs, “I am open! ENTER ME! OPEN! I AM WIDE FUCKING OPEN!”

Increased heart rate, dilated pupils, toothy asymmetries, lip licking (*will the real pervert please stand up?*), mismatched bedroom eyes, the musk of the rainbow, the pill popper’s back tenses, arms crossed, “FUCK THIS SHIT, LET’S GO!”

Across cold cement, light punishes the peripheries, walking, floating, running, steps onto bus, bus departs, “Don’t fucking do it – don’t look out the window.”

You will realize that life is a tunnel and we are actually inside god’s vagina.

III.

FUCK YA

downtown's latest perversion:

a chemical amalgam of psychedelics forms the tipsy

brush strokes of starry night across empty cement

blue pills for blue tongues the unduly fluorescence

musk rainbow stank a tooth hard pimp

and the sky freckled with light is penetrated

by the tips of the westin and telus while pill poppin animals

muster by a bronze statue called "TRADERS"

and fucking fractals of jizz fly into eyes filled with sand

an empty pussy and loaded cock rifle through sweet

memories 3AM they received our messages

dialect of the late-night bed spread

and a plethora of trojan & durex

walking through the inside of a kaleidoscope

i'm so high

SISTERS

Joey screams, “We have to leave right fucking now!”

He is such a sweet guy. It’s scary to see his eyes so urgent, frightened. Everyone is flying out from the basement while a darkness pours back in. I’m still looking for my sweater. I keep my eyes all over the ground, searching, but I’m soon surrounded by people whose darkness is so deep that it blinds me. My eyes glaze over as I try to ignore the walls of laughless faces. I follow a blurry path out of the tunnel as their silence fills the room. I scurry towards the hallway near the stairs, but two girls are quick to jump in front of me. They break any thread of light.

“What you lookin’ at us for?”

Their faces and eyes are harder than anything I’ve ever seen before. One of them has her long hair lightened to caramel, while the other is wearing a hat, and baggy boy’s clothes. Both native. I don’t understand. Why do they want to hurt a cousin, a sister?

My mouth is too frightened to find the words, so I push past them.

Caramel Hair jumps on top of me. Her fists, vicious, pounding both sides of my head.

My body collapses into the fetal position.

Too weak to fight back.

One two. One two.

Her fists, my face, my head, and the floor.

One two. One two.

All I can see is my hair tangled in the light.

One two. One two.

She keeps punching me as the world spins until someone pulls her off me. Arms carry me outside, but everyone's voices are muffled.

My left eye is swollen shut. I can't stop crying.

What kind of pain did these girls have to live to hurt another native girl like this? We were supposed to be sisters.

We are supposed to be sisters.

tornado took a water bottle from her backpack

our solar system has rearranged itself

into a six-pack of tall cans

smoke stole the moons

i remember feeling weird

about the "indian" that i was

TAMPONS

You never know what might happen. Sometimes I wonder if my heart could burst or if my brain could implode. Or sometimes I wonder if all the trees can hear us. Sometimes I can't tell what my thoughts are.

my dreams have been the only thing that make them go away

I walk with Thana past the shops and stores, heading towards the parking lot where the dealer said he would meet us. I notice a young guy running out of the Esso, with his arms hunched around his coat.

“Don't you know that guy?”

Thana looks up, as a store clerk runs out of the Esso waving his arms in the air. The store clerk yells, “Hey, you! Come back here!”

The guy nearly runs past us but stops.

He says, “Thana! Shit, I had to steal these for my girlfriend!” He opens up his coat and reveals a large box of tampons.

I smile while Thana laughs, and the guy turns back and yells, “Sorry, I need these for my girlfriend! She's bleeding, man!” He looks back at us and smiles as he cradles the box and runs down the sidewalk.

WATERFALL

It's my first real Valentine's day date, and it feels like my heart is full of all the warmest conversations about world peace and love for all things. Steve smiles as he holds my hand as we make our way towards the mall for dinner and a movie. I'm wearing my favorite black boots and blue leather coat. The air is cold, but the ground is mostly dry. Steve's black hair is spiked with gel, and he is wearing his favorite patterned zip-up. It reminds me of the forest, if the forest turned into ice cream.

*i live for dreams about oceans decorated with broken sidewalk
he showed them how to be a cigarette dancing with a horsefly*

We get to the cross walk by the mall. Our eyes are drawn to the space to our right where a group of, what looks like, twenty kids swarming between the fence and a house. Small ones surround the tall ones at its centre. They seem to sway together in violent bursts and waves.

"I think they're beating someone up," I whisper to Steve, "We need to do something."

Steve pulls me closer towards to him and speaks in a low-hard voice, "There are too many of them, we need to keep going."

The light turns green and he leads me across and away from the group. I keep my head turned and my eyes on the space near the fence as we reach the other side of the street.

Little ones start to run out from their swarm in all different directions. The ones that must have been in the centre of it all start to run with their long legs past me and Steve. One tall native guy with short hair ran past. He looks more fit than most of the street kids I've been around. His

eyes lock with mine as he runs past, and they are filled with a hollowness left by anger. He looks like he could have been a very beautiful person.

I pull Steve's hand to turn around, lifting my other hand out across the street.

Our friend Joey staggers towards us with his arms holding his chest.

"Fuck."

We run towards him. His skin looks like it has been turned into chalk, and the edges of his face are sinking downwards. My body starts to shake and tremble. We put our arms around him, carrying him towards the light of the bus terminal.

I scream out, "Call an ambulance!"

Joey was barely able to lift his legs as we carried him into the warmth of the bus terminal.

All of the people waiting for their buses and bus drivers swarm around us. Multiple voices speak into their phones at the same time.

We have an emergency. An ambulance to the West Edmonton Mall bus terminal. There is a young man, he looks very pale. I think he's bleeding.

I stand in front of Joey with Steve at my side. Joey says in a weak voice, "I think they stabbed me," as he unzips his black puffy coat.

A pool of blood falls out onto the cement from the inside of his coat.

I feel my heart drop as the room starts to spin.

Steve pulls me back and away, "Ronnie, you shouldn't see this."

I stumble outside, trying to breathe between each sob. Two bus drivers come up to me, and one passes me a bottle of water while the other gently hugs my shoulder with his hand.

Breathe.

Standing at the bus terminal late at night with my first love. I'm anywhere but here, I am drifting underwater, the sounds above the surface are muffled.

Why am I drifting so far? Why did I love him so much?

I look up and my eyes are drawn to the bus where the-could-be-beautiful native guy is watching me from the very back seat. I point my finger up towards him.

“That’s one of them. The ones who did it.”

awful beauty that makes it hard to get out of bed

PSCILOCYBINDAZE

“Trust me, I’ll only get high if I eat a half ounce.” Kris devours his bag of shrooms while both Steve and I nod with wide eyes, exchanging glances. They start on their portions of wrinkly golden caps and dirty eggshell stems. Last time we got high, we laughed at my failed attempts to pull on my black saggy boots, so we fell over in the hallway, and rolled around until our stomachs ached and I pissed my pants a little. This time we sit with our jackets and shoes already on as we gnaw on woodchip texture that tastes like a bag of unsalted Spitz. We head outside, and the sky is a blue that sits in the garden at night whispering sexual innuendos. Walking down the street, turning onto Dawson Bridge, following the narrow wooden path over the North Saskatchewan, Kris is frolicking as he walks, smiling back at us.

“This is going to be so fucking cool, guys, this night is a glorious one. Feel the air, the fucking water, and those fucking trees. Look at it all, holy fuck.”

the kind of blue that sits whispering sew stank slipping and sipping, buried beneath midnight’s latest perversion, lost stomachs ached, nearly pissed their pants, gnawing on sheets, a sheet of plastic protects the mattress from unsalted spitz, trust me i’ll only get high if i eat its arms, the whispers, the echo of the golden caps and dirty eggshell stems.

We sit on a cool, thick blanket of grass. To the west, the cliff overlooks the river, out towards the city core. Quasi stars penetrate the shadows as midnight approaches. The lights become brighter, sky evolves into an inviting shade of indigo (*on psilocybin mushrooms, pupils dilate allowing light to enter, brightening, opening the third eye*). The grass comes alive with green, breathing on my ankles. Kris’s eyes are wide; he begins to roll towards me, rolling nearly

on top of my legs while looking straight into Steve's eyes with a burning intensity.

"I just want to fight, you know, I JUST WANT TO FUCKING FIGHT!"

"Man, we just have to chill, you know, just take in the high."

"No, I need to fight!" He inhales hard and looks at me, "Do you want to fight?"

Steve laughs, "Man, just cool off. She doesn't want to fight."

I look down at the grass and pick at the blades, but Kris rolls back on top of my legs. I jerk my body back and shuffle towards Steve, I can't hide how fear pulls at the sides of my cheeks. I pick the blades and green is breathing. Steve puts his arms around me, and talks in a hushed voice, "Shit, I am sorry about him." I nod slowly, still looking at the grass. Steve jumps onto his feet. "Okay, let's start walking. Maybe someone will want to fight you over there." Kris leaps into the air, smiling with his arms out, "Really? I need to fight – where are they? I need to *fight!*" He walks up to Steve with his chest pushed out, rapid heavy breath, moist flecks drop from his mouth. Steve looks at me and shrugs. I keep my arms crossed, wanting to coil into myself until I disappear away from Kris, who is now spinning, jumping up and down. Kris runs across the field, down the street. Steve grabs my hand and pulls me the other way, we run. My eyebrows lift, and mouth hang open, (*OHH!!*), my chest is pounding with joy. I can still hear Kris in the distance, (*WANNA FIGHT?*), we run faster away from the voice, cement fluctuates beneath our feet, shifting, it seethes at the feeling. Our thin unworn hands grip each other tightly, a soft reassuring touch. Giggling and skipping, I pull at Steve to stop and catch my breath. I laugh and jump into his arms. The smell of cigarette smoke and leather holds me close, the prickles of his face bury into my neck.

We keep walking until we find a beautiful large tree, freezing under the smell of pine. I look down at the ground around Steve's shoes, "I'm sorry I couldn't handle it, he was just

getting way too close to me.”

“Fuck, whatever, barely know the guy. He’s fucked for thinking he needs a half o.”

“Ya.”

We walk again at an even slower pace, eyes glazed over while looking out at the ground in front of us.

“Well. This feels so much better.”

Steve releases the grip of my hands but continue to hold his palm on mine, touching the tips of my fingers. I push my middle digit down his and across his palm, he brings his hand over mine and squeezes lightly. He looks down the road, squinting at the distant neon green red orange red: *7-Eleven*.

“Should we grab some candy?”

“Sure.”

The sign grows, illuminating our bodies and eliminating shadow. We turn into the store, stomachs fluttering, (*this place is too busy*), pulling the door we prompt the entrance bell. Every eye in the space touches our psilocybin filled bodies. We smile with closed mouths and briefly look over the store. I spot the 5-cent candies while Steve walks to the Slurpee station. I grab a small plastic bag and start to pick at the boxes with a tiny set of tongs, jelly frogs, whales, eggs, strawberry marshmallows, sour soothers –

“Ronnie!”

I almost drop the bag as I turns to see some of Thana's friends standing beside me, “OH! How’s it going?”

“Just stoned, grabbing munchies,” Thana's friend smiles, showing off his white teeth.

“Heh, nice. Ya. I’m messed,” I lower my voice, “We had some shrooms.” I cannot contain

my enormous smile. I nearly fall into a fit of laughter when Steve walks up with his clear cup of blue and white slush. He nods at the red-eyed guys and laughs while leading me to the store counter. I exchange hand gestures and farewell smiles with the red-eyed guys and can barely hold in bubbling laughter. I pass the candy and a \$20 bill into Steve's hand who then places it on the counter.

“How many?”

The cashier and Steve both look at me, convulsions of warm blankets break through me, eyes watering, I throw out a number, (26?!), I'm barely able to pull myself back together.

passing out pisces, keep going until you are covered with scarlet and violet, shaking eyes, touching, touching amalgamated drug habits, who cowered in the unshaven sky, who cut their wrists with blades of grass; the air falls over.

We find ourselves falling back onto a slight hill full of grass next to a few tall pines. Moonlight walks across the field and onto our bodies. I roll onto my side and place a jelly whale into my mouth. Teeth struggle to break down the gelatin, taste buds can't find the large plastic fish, (*um, this doesn't taste like anything*), I toss the bag aside, laughing until my stomach aches while Steve laughs, (*ya, this slurpee tastes like shit*), he rolls onto his side and looks at me, inhales, exhales, (*love*). Our eyes and hands wander across each other while I drink in the dark blue sky and the drifting clouds. Exhale, (*love*). We get up and walk back towards the comfort of a bed. Down towards the bridge, sidewalks are cast with an incandescent haze against the taupe shadows that graze our feet, streetlights are still fluctuating with an intense glare. There are red and blue lights pulsating in the near distance. We look at each other and stand up straight, (*relax,*

keep calm), as we walk close enough to peer through the haze of panicked lights. There is a cop car blocking the path ahead. Steve grabs my hand and we cross the road, (*act normal*), I squint my eyes to look back at the cop car. There is a thin naked guy laying on the ground. The cop, a blonde woman, she is alone and has her hands on her hips. She is bent over, looking at the guy who calls out,

“You’re a troll!!”

“Oh fuck, that’s Kris, dude better not see us,” Steve says to me as we awkwardly shuffle ourselves back home.

kris devours the ceiling, the walls, they start to munch on their portions of wrinkly strangulation, a kite falls into a fit of laughter, warm towels and daisy chains, just take in the mustard yellow, dim sum for everyone, the north saskatchewan listens to kris’s wide eyes, quasi stars penetrate the shadow sweeties, fist fights smiling ear to whale, eyes like wet dogs, on durex walking through the inside of a kaleidoscope in a fit of laughter when steve walks up with his clear antenna, dilated middle finger in the wetness of farewell smiles, downtown filled bodies.

Legs kick at the ground while the arms flail. Kris is a fish out of water kicking its way back into a green lake; his pupils extend over the hazel in his eye, his LED belt buckle emits a blue glow, “PARTY MONSTER” scrolls across the rectangular screen, a comforting numbness fills his pockets, numbness inside-out, his skin dilates, the summer air fills his pores, lilacs blooming on the trees, blooming in the palms of his hands, kissing his olfactories, his neck, behind the ear, jogging towards the little pub down the block, his legs fall into each other,

running on the spot, glare fills the street with a sea of light, ripples and waves close in around him, three figures in the distance stand in the small parking lot of the pub, lamps casts cider across the air, shadows emit presence, bar expands, shadows figures grow, eyes wide, heavy breath, eyes grow at an unequal rate lopsided, *want to fight?, want to?, fight?, WANT TO FIGHT?*, opened mouth, jagged teeth, pressured laughter, *WANT TO FIGHT?, something, something*, figures back away, the need buries itself into his hands, his feet, he jumps forward and pushes, the need exhales, tracers ripple as figures reproach, outlines quiver electric forget this this this coarse mesh hair large noses vulgar wrinkled skin thickened bodies expansive hands feet twisting bulging trolls everywhere holding handlebars wavering knees bikes on back cement embrace push off pants push off back dirty grin two men pores breathing quavering voice rolling hard stillness cold rolling pupils burst.

PSILOCYBINZOO

Can anyone ever really know themselves? These people that say shit, just to say that they said something, but they never expose their insides. Their words are nothing, and their insides are a tree falling in a forest when nobody is around. Comfort is an illness, and I'm only alive if I spend my days in a moderate level of pain. Or am I alive if I'm in absolute chaos and ecstasy?

There are some days when I can't tell what's real and what's not. There are ghosts of my words that live in her heart, and her spirit follows me. The crescendo of long nights that builds a silence so loud that I can't see the ground anymore.

I'm falling down the stairs, and I'm turning into the kraken in my dreams. I'm indoctrinated by the state of our deluded society, love is – love is – love is – love isn't real when we try and press ourselves into the molds of monogamy. I fell in love with chaos again and again, forming hexagons in my heart. I'm trapped in the "I" and I am nothing compared to the beauty of this world.

I arrive at the desolate zoo with Steve thirty minutes after we eat our mushrooms. A statue of humpty dumpty greets us (*HE FELL AND HIT HIS HEAD AND NEVER WOKE UP AGAIN*). We walk towards a pond where ducklings swim in ovals around and up to the hands of children.

We extend our hands towards the plump little mounds of dark yellow fur, our palms full of a quarter's worth of brown food pellets. Sweet puff balls on black webbed feet. Water starts to shimmer multiple times. Sun screams through the ripples. Their little black eyes burst into me.

"Let's go to the petting zoo."

I pull Steve's hand away from the little webbed feet towards a gate. I open it to see a goat, but I'm overwhelmed by its hooves (*What if it steps on my toes!*).

We go to the nocturnal exhibit but there is nothing to see. I can't stop laughing (*What a sad zoo!!*). Blackness and leaves and glass and nothing to see.

We head outside and find a trail that leads us up towards the birds. My hand is firmly held by Steve's, and I feel in love with him and the blue sky. We find some little cages lined up near a fence.

We see some small brown owls, and white owls, and then we stand in front of the last cage, I burst out laughing. A large bald eagle is sitting in a nest on the ground (*How fucking sad is this!*). I'm bent over holding my knees as my stomach squeezes inwards. Its face is too majestic to be sitting in this little box. What does it do for fun? It must be bored as fuck. I'd be poking out my eyeballs if I was able to spend my life dancing in the sky, then become trapped in a box, and the only window outside is a wall of bars.

I pull Steve away as I try to hold my insides from falling out.

"Ice cream?"

We walk towards the little ice cream stand. The popsicle pictures are vibrating with colour. I want to eat the gumball eyeballs of a Sonic the Hedgehog.

We sit on a bench huddled together as we unwrap the blue videogame character. His face looks distorted as his mouth is near the bottom of his chin. His eyeballs are on each side. I giggle and squeeze Steve's knees.

Steve pulls out the bag of mushrooms, and looks up at me, "Should we take some more?"

I laugh and say yes with my face squeezed inward.

We both chew down bits of stems as we stare into each other's eyes.

Holding hands, we wander away from our gumball eyeball feast and find ourselves staring at the elephant. Elephant to giraffe to the grass.

Toy store. Soft toys. Softness in my hands. Fingers across the back of a turtle. Fingers across the eyes of little elephants. Fuzzy hands.

Twirling fabric.

Laughter.

In a bed, I'm swimming over a blanket with a person who is watching a movie about a fat man dressed as a Mexican wrestler. *Who is he?* I poke his face. He is putting little colourful balls in his mouth as his eyes are glued to the TV. I wonder who he is. I poke him. I poke the little balls of colour. I poke his toes. He smiles at me, but he smiles suspiciously. Does he know who I am? I can't open my mouth, so I keep pressing my fingers onto his skin.

He pulls my hand into his as he laughs and says, "Please, stop."

I turn and look at the TV.

Bright red skin-tight suits. Blue shimmer tops. Mustached man. His face is one hundred faces. I like the grass when it appears in the background. The green is piercing, but in the way a close hug feels on the inside.

I look back at the brown eyed guy in my bed.

"Steve?"

"Ronnie?"

"I think I forgot who I was for a while there. I forgot who you were."

MISPLACED ENDS

Trees that sing their last song, precious moments before the pain, the last time they knew their name. I'm wondering where the trees go when their trunks are sawed in two. Roots that whimper for the last time. I'm so sorry. Have you ever seen the way two drunk lovers sit on the edge of the river, waiting for the fish to kiss their feet? The river spoke, "I've never been so alone." He said I should stop crying, he said I should laugh more.

It has been seven days since I bathed myself. I don't know where I've been going this whole time. The world is blurred. I keep slowly moving through the fog.

There are only lights and darks.

I'm standing at a bus stop.

"I like your hair."

A girl is standing beside me. I look at her. She is smiling.

"What?"

She continues to smile as she repeats, "I like your hair."

"Oh," I reply as I touch my head, "Thanks."

It's short, knotted, and covered in grease. Haven't washed it in a while. I smile back at her before hopping on the next bus.

ECSTASY GHOSTS

Thana had to force me to take a shower. I still can't remember how he broke things off. I was with him, and then next thing I know I am wandering around, lost inside myself and in the city.

Thana hands me two red pills. She swallows hers with a bottle of Diet Pepsi. She scrunches her face as she says, "Let's walk while these kick in."

The pills taste like they could be made out of the cheap rings that leave green rings around my fingers. The Diet Pepsi barely hides the taste. They slowly move down my throat, further towards my stomach.

We throw on our sweaters and shoes before finding ourselves walking past all the shopping carts and the battered convenience stores. Wooden stairs lead us into the river valley.

Each tree is full and green, the light from the moon looks as if it is shimmering between the silhouettes of branches. We hold hands as our feet take each step down the dimly lit staircase. There aren't enough lights and we I can feel Thana's grip get tighter when we pass through the darker areas of the path. Our feet move from wood to sidewalk, changing the tone of our journey. The lamp above us goes out.

Thana flinches and mutters, "Fuck, I hate when they do that."

My insides twist as my hands start a cold sweat, "Thana, pass the water."

Yellows of streetlights begin to expand; their beams begin to grope the pavement.

"I think it's kicking in."

"Ya."

Feet lighten, and the cement feels distant. Cement to wood to cement to gravel. Sounds from the river pulsate in my ears and I am in love with the world. We walk onto the river docks.

"This is fucking perfect," I say as I start to jump on the docks, "This is everything."

Thana jumps and laughs. She pulls me in and kisses me. Her beauty vibrates through my lips and throughout my body. Insides of my skin crawl with wonder and joy.

Love.

*wonder when i will see her again i've been grieving my sobriety
forgot to smudge today and for the last twenty years
wishing for the smell of incense and candles i can feel my heart*

Everywhere.

She pulls her lips away with a warm sigh. We hold hands as we look out across the river.

I sigh and nuzzle my head into hers.

Thana's body suddenly jolts backwards, "Did you see that?"

I look out, but everything is the same.

"The tower over there," she points out, "It just fell."

I squint, but there are only dark outlines of trees across the river with a few stars above.

"I don't see any tower. Maybe we should head back now."

She nods, but with eyes fixated on the area across the river. I squeeze her hand and pull her back down the gravel path. We stop where a lamp sits over black pavement. Thana's eyes dart around us as she says, "Can't you see all the people in the trees?"

I walk into the shadows, "Nobody's here. Let's just go back home."

I pull her back up towards the main road, and she remains silent except for making small gasps as her head twists side to side. Walking faster, her hand is tense in mine. Anxious fingers drain euphoria from my mind. Shadows consume edges of trees as her attention floats

towards empty spaces. Wooden stairs creak under the weight of our hurried pace. Yellow light from each lamppost looks near the end of its life. A group of teenagers sit near the top, I nod with a smile as we pass through their cloud of weed and cheap beer.

Drunks cry out from the convenience store while a dog responds with deep barking. Speed from the ecstasy floods my thoughts with the clamorous songs of anxiety. Someone is banging on all of the piano keys with clenched fists in my mind. I try to pull Thana to move her legs faster with mine, but her mind is stuck in the empty spaces of the streets.

We arrive at our apartment, and the familiar moldy smell mixed with the scent of curry fills me with relief. I lock the door behind us, trying to catch my breath.

The sheets have fallen off the edges of the bed, but I curl into the warmth of our fleece blankets. Thana remains standing on the other side of the room, so I ask her to sit down.

Her eyes are stuck on the walls as she says, “Don’t you see them?”

I just want this night to end.

“Thana, it’s just us here, you’re freaking me out.”

She finally lets her eyes look into mine as she frowns, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, just come sit with me, please.”

Her feet make slow steps towards me, edging around nothingness before she jumps into the bed. She stretches out on her back, smiling up at me. Her pupils are massive, making her eyes look like pieces of black onyx. Her lips are perfect, especially when she smiles. I giggle and kiss her forehead. I ask her, “Are you okay?”

“Yes, but it’s so strange. I can see people everywhere.”

“I don’t see anyone, and I don’t feel very high at all.”

She takes her hands to the sides of my face, rubbing my hairline. I close my eyes. I don't want her to stop.

She asks me, "Should we put on some music or a movie?"

I nod my head as I depart from her warm hands towards the CD player. I flip through my CD case until I find an album by I Can Make a Mess Like Nobody's Business. I put it in and press play. When I turn around, Thana's eyes are stuck in the empty spaces again. She leaps out of bed, slowly walking towards the corner where she crouches down and extends out her hand. I ask her, "What are you doing?"

"They're having a party in here! One of them is offering me a drink."

I sigh and walk towards her, ushering her back to the bed.

"Please, can you stop this. There's nobody here but us."

She nods as she sits across from me, smiling and extending her hand to hold mine. I hold her hand as I take a deep breath with closed eyes, letting the music gently cradle me.

When I open my eyes, I look back at Thana. A guy is sitting behind her, one of my friends from the mall. His arms are wrapped around her, and his chin is resting on her shoulder. They both smile at me. I nearly fall off the bed as I cry out, "What the fuck, Thana."

But, I blink, and he's gone.

*when we see things that aren't there does it mean we are psychotic
or is it because our third eye is the strongest organ in our body?
connecting dots in my mind einstein on methamphetamine writing on the
windows it was clear as the funnel clouds that I saw many nights before*

SALVIA

Spinning and flipping out, flipping off at the people we love. She's crawling in the unsolicited advice of men at bus stations. Smile, they say, and she smiles. Clouds made out of sleepless nights and the way that the night opens the third eye. Forgotten options, legs can't move. She only listens to music made by sad rappers and cocaine addicts. Hid GHB in her water bottle, aching for glow sticks and closed curtains.

Thana passes me the bong and I take a hit. Salvia smoke runs up into my mouth.

I disappear.

Floating in light.

It's blinding and suddenly faces of people flash past me. It feels like I'm picking a song out of a jukebox. Unfamiliar faces flood out until I suddenly see Thana and I reach out to grab her, smiling with my eyes closed as I pull her in. She laughs, and I open my eyes and I'm back in our room, on the bed. She asks me if I'm okay.

I laugh and say, "I want to do it again!"

PUSH AND BLOW

I arrive at the house with Thana and her new boyfriend, Matty. I clutch onto my plastic bag holding a six-pack of Smirnoff ice. The house is close to the university, the air is different here compared to the west end and the east side. The walls are painted with dark blues and greens. Wood trimming and hardwood floors match the air.

I whisper to Thana, “Whose house is this?”

“This guy Will,” Thana says as she pulls off her little white sneakers, “He graduated last year. I think his parents gave him and his brother this house.”

I pull off my slouchy black boots, but all I want to do is leave. All of the girls look so normal, so pure. Long soft hair, and complimentary clothing. I feel so dark in my black hair, black pants, and my deep blue pleather jacket.

We open our drinks upstairs in the kitchen. Names and faces blur in circles. Everyone here looks so much older. Mature and strange. Deep laughter about what they did last weekend.

One of the taller guys with dark clothes asks me, “Where are you from?”

“This place in the Northwest Territories, Fort Smith.”

“Ah,” he takes a sip from his red solo cup as he glances over my body, “Wanna talk somewhere more private?”

I nod as I take a sip from my bottle. He takes his hand lightly around mine as he leads me out of the kitchen. Thana smiles at me as we pass her, and I shrug my shoulders while grinning back at her. He takes me down the stairs, where the lights are dim. The room is full of people dancing to Snoop Dogg, and he looks back at me as he leads me through the heat of the dancing bodies. He opens a door to a small cement room with a washer and dryer along the wall. He closes the door behind us. I’m relieved he doesn’t turn the light off.

I take another drink and ask, “So, did you go to school with Matty?”

“No, I go to Scona.”

He puts his arm around my waist and pulls me into him. He has to slouch for his lips to meet mine. His face and lips are soft. I press myself into him, but he soon pulls his face back, looking into my eyes and says, “So, are you going to suck my dick or what?”

I laugh, “Uh, I’m not going to just suck your dick on command.”

“Well then what are you doing in here?”

I step back and out of his embrace. His face is vacant except for the slight furrow in his brow. I go to open the door, but he puts his hand over mine. “Sorry, this is too weird,” I say before I open the door and leave the room.

I run up to the kitchen and make a drink. I can't find Thana or her boyfriend, but Lil Wayne’s music slithers up the stairs. I follow the words back down and start to dance among the cloud of body heat. I start to sway with the music, my eyes closed so I can enjoy the words.

Suddenly, two hands push the front of both my shoulders and I’m falling. I open my eyes as the room flies past me and my body slams against the floor. Standing above me is a brown guy with a flashy white sweater. He smirks as he lifts his chin. I can feel others looking at me, but everyone continues to dance.

My body is stiff as it begins to shake. Tears choke me from the inside. I push myself off the ground and run back upstairs.

Thana is near the door with Matty, and her face drops when she notices the tears running down my face. She pulls me into the bathroom, passing me some toilet paper before she asks me what happened.

I sob into the toilet paper and curl into the floor, and I can barely say each word between the tears, “First... that one guy ... downstairs ... got mad ... I wouldn’t suck his dick ... and this other guy ... I was just dancing ... he pushed me to the ground.”

“Shit, well maybe just stay upstairs with me. Everyone here has been nice.”

I laugh and look up at her, “Nobody even came to help me. Nobody cares if a guy pushes a girl. Nobody cares if a guy is forcing someone to suck his dick.”

Thana’s eyes are full of sympathy as she put her arms around me. She speaks in a soft voice, “I know, guys are fucked. But, Matty ordered pizza. Once that gets here we can just eat and leave, okay?”

I nod as I blow my nose into the toilet paper.

*lost hundreds of nights blacked out
mountains are the tomb stones of earth
dipping toes and faces in her wake
call out in both sadness and laughter
scream into the wind between the trees
ancestor’s songs sit in the back of my throat
what do you want to say now?
there are homes in my eyes for you
the time the men carried me away
this happened more than once.*

HIGHWAY OF TEARS

I sit in the back of Thana's car, while Thana sits in the front with Matty.

Everyone pitches their tents in a field, and we start to drink as the sun quickly disappears. A group of people stand by a growing fire. Boys lift each other over the keg. Tequila in my flask. I find myself sitting under a lamppost with a cute boy. He is thin and has longer brown hair. Looks like he spends his free time playing guitar and writing beautiful songs. I want to hear his songs. It's too dark here, no moon or stars. I want to stay under the light with him while the others crowd the keg and the fire pit.

Everything disappears.

I'm standing in the middle of a living room, near the TV. I'm mostly naked. A guy's hands are all over me as I sway.

Everything disappears, again.

I wake up in a room, on a leather couch. Naked with a blanket over me. A guy with short dirty blonde hair lies on the other couch. He's texting on his phone and looks up at me.

I say, "Hi," but he looks back at his phone. I stand up, holding the blanket over me. My clothes are on the floor. I try to put on my underwear with the blanket still wrapped underneath my arms.

I ask him, "Where's my purse?"

"You didn't have it," he replies as his eyes abandon me again.

I can feel my stomach twisting. I need to leave. The tents. Party. Fire. Tequila flask. The light and the sweet boy. Naked and nothingness.

“Where am I?”

“Sherwood Park.”

My heart is racing. I have nothing. I am alone.

With his eyes still fixated on his phone, he says, “So, you going to leave now?”

I want to cry, but I feel as empty as I am alone.

“I need to get back to the acreage. Can you drive me?”

“No. You can take a cab though.”

“I don’t have my purse, all my money—I don’t know how to go.”

He hands me a twenty-dollar bill.

I feel like screaming, but I know there is nothing I can do. I am nothing to him, and there is nothing I can do to change his mind. He calls a cab. I go outside to wait in the heat.

I tell the cab driver that I need to go to 24 Range Road.

“That’s pretty far, I’ll need a deposit.”

“My bag was stolen last night, I only have this twenty.”

His eyes look back at me, widened before he rolls them and turns back around, and he says, “That’s not enough. I’ll drive you as far as that twenty takes you.”

He doesn’t care, either. I’m all alone. Naked and nothing. We pass open fields of pale-yellow wheat fields, and canary yellow canola. I hold my breath as I watch the fare rise to \$20.

He pulls over on the side of the highway. I get out and watch as he pulls a U-turn back towards Sherwood Park.

The sky is so blue, with soft small clouds. The sun burns my eyes. Black pavement makes me sweat from the legs up. I have to keep walking as quickly as possible.

What if I die here? Why do I keep doing this to myself?

Why does nobody care? Memories of how I got so far from the party swim in dark water.
My thirst makes me feel so weak.

*he left me crying by the river where i held the grass in my hands
depression erupting; sick world sick men sick dicks sick fucks
sick cops sick judges sick lawyers sick systems
a whole world left me there alone wondering
why a man's lust is worth more than a girl's sanity
it was such a beautiful day by the river where he left me
blue sky sitting in the water — it was so perfect*

I'm not sure how much time has passed. But a familiar car passes, going in the opposite direction. I can feel their eyes. I hope that they don't see me.

The sound of the car turning around send me into knots. A dark green jeep pulls up beside me, and it's one of Thana's friends. He calls out, "Shit, Ronnie, are you okay?"

"Yeah. I don't know. I just need to get back."

"What happened?"

"I don't know."

Someone in the back opens the door. He passes me his water bottle. I take a few gulps before putting it back down. Everyone else in the car doesn't say a word. We drive for five minutes and we arrive back at the acreage. I thank them for driving me, but my eyes are too lost to look up at him. My heart clenches onto my feet and the ground.

HANDEAD

There are four of us squeezed into the backseat of Thana's car, driving home some weirdos. I'm singing along to the music when his hands invade my ass. I tell him to stop, but he won't take his hands away, going deeper between my cheeks. I start to sob. Punching and shaking him off of me, but I can't stop crying. Thana pulls into a parking lot, kicks him out of the car and tells him to fuck off. We start to drive away but the ass grabbing dude starts yelling at us. But instead of driving away, Thana starts driving back towards him.

everything looks the same,

The ass grabbing dude's eyes are angry as he waves his arms and walks towards the car as Thana speeds into him.

the tower, the dial tone

THUNK. THUNK.

six hands of depression erupting

He rolls over the hood and over the windshield.

sun burns my eyes

as i say, "isn't this pretty?"

Two more THUNKs and he is lying on the cement behind us.

We pull out of the parking lot. The shadow of his body fades in the night behind us.

i just need to become a full-time shadow

I am soaring, euphoric.

kicks him out

tells him to go dance with his darkness

His body rolling over the windshield replays in my mind, again and again.

Each time with a new face.

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