

“Sayden, close the window, will you? You’re letting the wrong kind of air in,” my mother shouted to me as I stood looking out over the matted field. She always talked about the right kind of air and the wrong kind without explaining what either of them actually was. Good and bad often go like that. We think we know what’s good and what’s bad but not what makes them that way. My little sister got a horrible flu once as a baby and we all thought she was going to die for a full two weeks. That an inevitable spell of death had been cast. But then a doctor moved to town who knew just what my sister needed for her lungs- and right in time. My sister grew up even stronger than she might have been, and my mother? She married that doctor. Some curse that flu was.

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Mama used to spend hours at the sewing machine. The *click tack click* of the needle swooshing up and down became my rhythm in the evenings, the pace at which I used to wash up supper, sweep, and slowly let my eyes grow tired. I would lay out, splayed on the floor like a puddle in front of the fire. *Click tack click*. My fingers would trace invisible rivers and roads on the warped wood floor boards as my feet flopped fearlessly behind me – they’ve got a mind of their own, as my mom used to point out. Always running the other way than they should. *Click tack click*. And then, there were the moments the branch would scrape against the window. Or a goat on a neighboring farm would bleat. At those moments the illusion of peace was shattered – the idea that mama and I were simply enjoying our evening, living our routine, it was laughable in those moments.

Seasons don’t often go the way we expect them to. And I suppose the problem with that isn’t the seasons, it’s our expectations. We become disappointed when it rains in the dead of summer and there’s always a kind of awkward discomfort in an unusually warm January day.

In the moments that we let ourselves get too excited, we forgot to pretend that we weren’t waiting. To pretend we weren’t counting the seconds, lamenting the 24 days since Papa said he’d be home. *Click tack click*. We never spoke about it. We’d just let the hairs on our arms retreat to their slumber, we’d fold the excitement in our chests back into some deeper cavity, and hope it didn’t return again. Because pain only comes from expectations unmet. If you aren’t hoping for something, you can’t be hurt. And so we didn’t hope, and we didn’t wait, and we just sewed. January could do whatever the hell it wanted- it was no matter to us.

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Of course, we didn’t know then what Mama had stirring inside of her. How could we have realized that just 2 days before papa left, he and mama had laid together and created a little girl. Pulled her essence from the stars and planted it in a small cluster of cells, cells which would grow to be my baby sister Lorela in just 9 short months. We had no idea we’d spend those 9 months in a suspended agony, waiting and not waiting, sewing and watching a human grow in the cavity another had left.

Spiders are lucky. They have 8 legs, and the stuff that comes out of their butt can actually be used for something, instead of just being flushed away to disintegrate underground. Perhaps we would have more of a sense of purpose if our waste was useful. Maybe it would put an end to our miserable cosmic insecurity if we could also build cities from what we digested, constructed art from the leftovers of our sustenance.

For years I let it slide out of me and just waste away. Pathetic. Every trip to the bathroom became a morbid reminder of the inescapability of mortality, the fickleness of joy and the triviality of pain. I lived like that for almost a lifetime until the ever present reminders of a looming death became louder than the clamours of life. I couldn't shake the feeling that there could be a fuller way to live, free from the shackles of an expiration date. And the more people who called me crazy for wondering out loud what most of us only cower from in the throws of our flame retardant sheets, the more I became manically driven in my quest for immortality.

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The hypnotic music still pulsed in my ears as Corneil stood in front of me, pulling my chest to his. His hands, made of Okinawa grade 200 steel felt cool on my bare waist, and his mouth blew a sweet strawberry vapor into my ear. I could feel something resemblant of a heart beating as I ran my fingers over Corneil's daggered shoulder and down his back.

"I've wanted this for longer than you know," I whispered lightly, my words barely escaping my lips. If Corneil could have spoken, I like to imagine him saying something just right in return, like, "All I know is I want you right now" or "you have no idea how hard it is for my finger knives to resist your sweet peachy flesh." But I did not need these words from Corneil to feel his body with the fullest force of raw desire. I did not need Corneil to be human to feel more animal than I had ever felt.

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Of course, it would take at least 100 years before anyone realized what a genius I was. It would take at least 50 more after that for the world to run out of coal, for the sunlight to be entirely blocked by the thick haze produced from burning it all. Solar power, fossil fuels – even hydro electric rendered nearly useless based on the heat evaporating 25% of the world's water source.

My breakthrough wasn't as spectacular as people like to imagine it was, though. I simply found the, may I say *fatal*, trap the other immortologists at the time kept driving themselves straight into. While there were many different approaches circling around at the time (stem cell transexocution, cytoplasmic aphigmia, even boreosticity therapy took off for a while) the end goal was the same, and fundamentally flawed at that. These foolish empty egos of immortalists wanted not only to live forever, they wanted to do so in a fully *human* body.

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Corneil and I lay intertwined now, his spaghetti like legs woven in my normal human ones. Strawberry vapor filled the room, steaming up the window and inevitably leaking through the door. I knew I'd get a harsh confrontation from my roommate Marty in the morning. She never

liked when she had to smell the strawberry vapor. But really I knew she was just jealous, jealous of the raw intimacy that Corneil and I shared.

These thoughts swam through the periphery of my mind until Corneil moved his grade 200 steel hand to just the place I liked and I was overcome with the burning ache of passion, a rush of desire so sweet that there was no more room inside of me for Marty and her juvenile resentment.

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Metal wasn't cheap back in those days. It was right after President Batel issued tariffs on imports from the L-PAC Alliance and their 14 sister colonies. Really the only thing that was cheap in those days was tobacco, since the tropical rains that year did something special to all the tobacco fields and the farmers found themselves with more crop than anyone wanted to put inside of them. So I had to get resourceful with my materials while of course keeping in mind that I was building myself a body to exist in for eternity.

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"Corneil" I whispered, my breath joining forces with his vapor in a spiral dance toward the ceiling. He held me tighter between his fleshy noodle legs, letting me know what we both were feeling in a way words never could have conveyed.

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I suppose it would be dishonest of me not to admit that after my first surgery at 97, I did long, however briefly, for the rawness that came from being fully human. I knew that my Okinawa steel arm didn't take that humanity away from me, but somehow I felt like it compromised a small part of it. Of course it was my own humanity I was fighting to begin with, so this new nostalgia for intimacy left me somewhat perplexed.

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Being with Corneil felt like flying- not just through the air, but through time, floating through thoughts and feelings and memories I had never and would never experience. To press myself into Corneil was to immerse myself in a multidimensional depth of experience, to *understand* in a way that no book could ever teach. I've been with my fair share of boys, some tender and some not, but no matter how many nights we spent tangled up together, speaking of our love until the sun came up again, words always seemed to be the barrier to a withheld land of closeness. By conflating our energy to the constraints of language, we unknowingly diluted what we felt, and therefore what we *could* feel.

With Corneil the limits of human intimacy didn't exist. To talk to Corneil about the weather or my love for that matter would be no better than talking to the rusted siding of my house. But to *exist* with Corneil- to simply be with him in the purest form, felt like I could express more than I ever knew I had in me. Corneil could tell me more about the universe through the brush of his shiny fingers down my thigh than I ever knew I wanted to understand.

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The undeniable truth of water is that as much as it is a mere negotiation of molecules, it is also a story. Water serves as a glue, binding together everything that has ever lived, connecting the tissues of history in a single effortless dance. Water represents an ambience between atoms, an unbeknownst force trapped in the depths that pulls us towards the Earth and simultaneously repels us. It is the balance that holds us in place, connecting the dots of time with a single thread, as a good story does.

And I suppose, that is why now, more than ever, water feels like an enemy rather than a friend. A long awaited saviour arriving with far too little, and much too late; a haggard knight stumbling in with nothing but a foam sword. I will likely never find out what transpired on that muggish day in January. I recognize the seeming frivolity in the hours I wasted pasting together clues that did not match, stories that had no link, droplets of water from different oceans, only to make a mess of the grand carpet.

But to believe in anything at all is to believe in the story – the cosmic story. The humility of the inconclusive is a comforting reminder that we haven't reached the end; a testament to the fact that we are all somewhere in the middle of an arc greater than ourselves. The pieces always reveal themselves if we let them. It is our only job to understand that they will.

Sometimes you go to the ocean and sometimes you have to let the ocean come to you.

that our motives and arcs and possibilities focharacter flaws are very much alive, that our humanity is intact.

But that doesn't matter, does it? Different oceans, different droplets, different scale. It's all the same energy. And that energy – is now one of desperation

Perhaps I only remembered it because of its slight breach of expectations, subtle deviance from the norm. It feels shameful now, the hours I wasted pasting together clues that did not match, stories that had no link, droplets of water from different oceans.

But that doesn't matter, does it? Different oceans, different droplets, different scale. It's all the same energy. And that energy – is now one of desperation.

I have a faint memory of an unusually warm winter day that tugs at the edges of my mind. I've searched for its significance in every way imaginable- old photos, journal entries, I even called up my half deaf uncle Poter to see if he could remember why this foggy vision wouldn't leave me alone. The hardest part is, I can never think about it dead on, or it disappears, the same way you can never quite catch those purple light spots on the back of your eyelids, or hang on to the feeling of sad before it slips away into numbness. I know so little about this muggy winter day that I couldn't even tell you what part of the world it's from or even what year it was in. Hell, I couldn't even tell you if I was there or not. But what I do know is that it isn't made up. When I've tried to explain this to people before, I've mostly been met with blank stares or worse- lengthy explanations on the immaculate tricks of the imagination. But I know this day to be true with the kind of blind belief that Pastor Jenkins has for Jesus and Dr. Schifton holds for calculus. If I were to doubt that this day was real, even for an instant, all basis for truth in my life would disintegrate into an expansive ocean of uniformity- nothing would be more real than anything else.

It saddens me to realize that most people live their entire lives treading water in such a monotonous pit of uninspiring faithlessness. But I also realize I have no control over the visions that come uninvitedly clouding into the borders of my clarity. All I can do is choose to believe them or not.