

CONSORTS

Never underestimate a child's ability to make you feel small. He is searching for what I'm made of- a locus of passions or at least a paraphrase of want. He looks with doubt as to the existence of any network of aspirations at all.

I believe the kid can see my skeletal structure- the calcium improvisation pulled together not towards summit but girders bending away from each other in flight. I fiddle with my skirt. A better woman would disregard the child completely, but by some dulling of the mosaic I am unable to. Or maybe it's just because I'm a woodlouse.

Woodlouse wakes in the mid afternoon, dazedly kicking its six legs and antennae twitching, it recollects factoids of its own personhood, a self piecing together after dreams of nits, awake now but where was woodlouse a moment before? The bug exits its regular haunt in the flooring and scuttles towards the stairs, looking for Lakshmi. Woodlouse dashes around a corner, squeezing between dust bunnies, fibrous ashen clouds of tangled lint and hair, clustered women in a renaissance painting, he looks up- watching Lakshmi descend the steps and through a puddle on the landing. Lakshmi drags her feet. He scuttles forward rapidly, momentarily going up a wall then abandoning it in favour of the floor, making a game of weaving through the water tracks on the wood. Lakshmi stops in front of the kitchen door, he scuttles to a stop close beside her. What is it Lakshmi? No response. She stands idly in the doorway, watching Vishnu sitting on the kitchen floor, in front of the door open to the sea. Sunset on the beach, colours changing forever, sea light sedative.

She places her hand on the peeling wall, fingers touching the framed painting of Late Gene Reilkshya, the great pirate. Gene stands with his foot on the head of a bulbous octopus, face split in a grin. Behind him stands his daughter, of adult age, bent at the hips and held by a man, their faces covered by the leaves of an ornamental plant with great thick plastic looking fronds. It is said Gene was a great man of very low promise, born on the stern of his uncles ship, he was born with hair to his little baby bum. So hairy in fact, it is said he was pushed out of the heaving woman with his locks in a braid, wrapped around his neck. The crew assumed the baby dead, for no cries came out of its pink mouth and, disturbingly, he was born with his eyes open, not dissimilar to the large dead catfish stuck at the prow of the ship. Gene was alive however, and legend has it only blinked seven times in the three years following egress from his grandmother. Gene discovered the fabled isle somewhere in either the Indian or southern ocean, he could not remember, and spawned a race of incestuous interspecies children, with an unidentified amphibian, that would go on to become natives of the island for many many decades to come. Now here's where the literature divides on the view of whether it was salamander or platypus, the prevailing faction being platypus owing to the formers disadvantageous smaller

stature. Personally, I've seen the sketches and, don't tell anyone I've told you this but I think a third party comes into play (1*).

Lakshmi watches Vishnu sitting severely hunchbacked on the kitchen floor, hands busy pulling the caps off of very large mushrooms. Her shadow passes over Vishnu and he turns his head up to look at her, neck wrinkling and collapsing in folds. Lakshmi offers a smile and Vishnu snaps his head back down immediately, greatly disturbed by the powers of the woman to lie with the turn of the mouth. Bastard, thinks Vishnu. Lakshmi continues to smile at his back, she had long accepted that he was distrusting of women, the woodlouse asks Why? and is left in the dark. Lakshmi does not chose this moment to finally directly respond to woodlouse. Vishnu hunches forward over his mushrooms, *panaelous cyanescens*, face bathed in a wind from the sea, separating their wavy caps from thin brown stipes. A colander sits on his left thigh, a growing pile of mushroom caps occupying it. Vishnu curses the woman in a voice that could have been quieter. Having arrived at the dilapidated house two weeks prior, his initial reserve of Lakshmi had soon given way to repulsed reproach, nauseated by her composed face when she spoke, a moving delusion behind her corneas, someone so sure of their own narrative was certainly espousing a false one.

He had been running through the forest for three days, finally breaking through the leaves upon the beach. A swath of green glassy waters behind an expanse of sand stretching out in shallow dunes. Cherubim bob on the shore as sea foam, trumpets held up but for your passage, voyeur ... Vishnu struggled to stop his feverish body from running to the sea, rewarded a couple seconds later when he spots a dilapidated house twenty feet away to his right. He sobbed as he ran to the house, rushing through the empty doorframe, through to the kitchen, and collapsing on the counter, drinking from the tap as he cried. He crumpled to the floor in foetal position, mind enveloped in fatigue and unfounded security. It wouldn't be until sunrise that he got up to eat, finding Lakshmi in the upstairs bathroom, unconscious in the bathtub and her eyes rolled up into her head. Vishnu had shut and locked the door and gone back to the kitchen to pass out on the floor.

Here's the kid now, backlit, unobserved in front of the glass window, chin tipped up and a- *Look at me*, at her charming face in the reflection. Then she's caught herself, found her pose and is at unease with the rehearsal. Who am I? A face, a contusion arisen from the makings of no credited god. Arches of eyebrow not dissimilar from any other Indo-Aryan descendant on the street. A mere copy.

Chutiya. Excuses for the mediocre. Who am I?! Of course, I am Lakshmi, knowledged, bespoke, promising.....the most promising amongst all the rest... amongst ... who? ... no one else is here.... could anyone else be here? ... perhaps ... no no ... filling purpose, skeleton stretching out her shoulders, the young architect, the one who lifts up the sun in the east, want, drive, superiority... this is

clarity, I am the one ... I am Who ... who am I? ... wandering, wandering, gone ... it leaks from her feet ... alone ... Why ... why not abandon it then Lakshmi, give in that's all. The liminal works, the lonely minutes of poetry, it's words that's all, purpose, self, art, it's all just words, you don't need it, it's frightful curse....before the metamorphosis takes you, stop short now when you can disavow...building, bubbling in her belly..... Yes, Oh glorious, witness me forswear- but who bears the honor of witness? Who dare? She has leant forward and finally touched hands to the Glass ... these spirals accompany most interludes now.

Nauseated at the flip-flopping, forehead presses to glass. The kid whispers to herself, breath becoming fog. Pride. That's all. Even now she does not understand the primal pain that pushes her to climb it, her step on the spiral staircase ringing, stretching on toward destiny, ringing only for the ears of you, the passing spectator. The words are for the blessed, they are the blessing, what else could there be? Career? Child? Progress? All toys for the pubescent making play at immortalising themselves. In the beginning there was a word and that word was me. It's her, Lakshmi, who knows there exists within her the Creator, the roiling intelligent flesh, she is in part pure form and in part warped from pleasure, spitting out vapour words while other people are....she cannot walk down that corridor now, only in times of weakness does the universe beyond the hermetic seal make itself apparent- the possibility of something different. Somewhere between honest consideration and total bewilderment, far, far up, past carnal anxieties does she begin to have suspicions of the presence of the other among the ordinary states of her being. But it is too soon, she is not ready to look down that terrible corridor. There are, in her casted view, so many of these alien constellations. Purpose, self, art. It's all shitty, simple, boring words. That's the worst part. And yet ... there exists things beyond the celestial story, you know. Dark entrances into houses with no windows, awards, a line in a textbook, grabbing hands with no face, the annals of literary history littered with one name. It takes her, fattens her. and then swallows her. Each thought equal to a lifetime of peace. Yes, how big it is. (I am).

"I'm hungry." Lakshmi calls out to Vishnu.

"Eat these."

"You're crazy."

"Then leave me alone already."

Lakshmi turns away, mad, she walks briskly out of the kitchen and up to the first floor, kicking over Vishnu's shoes as she passes them. Overhead, Hindu versions of Buddha's enlightenment overrun the exposed concrete ceiling. Ten faces in the place of one, none have quite the right expression. Birds of prey peak out around his shoulders, expression sedate; mice dangle like bats from the banyan tree's aerial roots, leering. Laddoos roll across the mud, tessellated. The highest branches of the banyan tree stretch out, pulled and twisted upwards like taffy, transforming into lotus

stems. It is a perverse indulgence of genetic curiosity, a mangling of one of humanity's crowning moments in time. Lakshmi approaches the last room on the left, the only door in the house, grabbing the handle, she leans all her weight back, heaving the wooden door open. It is pregnant with water, swollen and bloated, filling the doorway. Palms woven with splinters, she walks into the run down room and goes to look out the window. Directly below her is Vishnu, cross legged on the floor, nubs of his severely bent spine visible, as he folds his body over the colander in his lap. Leaning out the window she can count down up to all twelve thoracic vertebrae.

Around him are small piles of mushrooms. He pulls the cap off of an especially large one, a part of its partial veil coming along with it, a ceremonial death veil, it is deposited in the colander. The veiled mushroom had been collected from the roof of the house, growing in a decade old pile of cow shit on the shingles (2*). The veiled mushroom sits with a smile, recollecting its past years on the roof, a voice in the colony, sprouting in divine magnificence from the cow shit, a proud penis erupting from the mycelial network, growing into the finest, largest protrusion of the fungal body. Beautiful sunny

mornings spent singing to nearby colonies, months spent in rapture feeling the cow shit mature, intimate talks within the colony about growth and self discovery, but above all, a chance encounter with a particular sparrow several years prior had sparked an uncontrollable fetishised interest in the fungus for all sparrows. Hailed in Hollywood tropes, a 'meet cute', the young sparrow had alighted upon the shingle jutting out beside our protagonist mushroom, tucking its beak under its wing to itch at a diseased patch of skin taken over by aspergillosis. The mushroom, overcome in body and mind, immediately dropped all its spores. Blushing to its gills it assured the sparrow this did not speak of its virility. The sparrow squawked not unlike a goose and took off. What a tease, thought our hero. The following morning the sparrow returned. Our rapturous mushroom watched with love in its eyes, mimicking the sparrow's song to draw it nearer. And so did the sordid love affair continue through the spring. Our mushroom grew to understand it was not a connection of the heart, but something far deeper. Gazing at the voluptuous songbird on many a yellow morning, a youthful wren ever supplying an up-skirt view, their relationship grew to a mutual understanding. A servicing of the two deepest, true purposes of a biological being, the sparrow came to find bugs to eat and the mushroom indulged in spore dispersal. As spring passed the mushroom bid farewell to its sexy fowl, a promise to find one another in the next bardo. The veiled mushroom cap lays recanting its fondest memory, one too racy for these pages, to be included in an endnote to preserve the sanctity of the love story

(3*), in the colander, its brothers oooing and awing, the younger mushrooms blushing. The colony hums its death song.

eat the Adversary, drink the between,
you, us, all false, and who we are -

else freedom of sufferance of eons in a body,
until surrender, spare only the silhouette of
the infant dragged along in the raft's wake
Lakshmi holds the unopened letter in her hand up to the sun, writing made visible
through the paper.

IST Ward, Salem (4) Gate,
7Y1 Karnataka,
Ooty, Winter, 35
General Delivery*

Dear Sir;

This mail address does not exist. Kindly desist or admit to voluntary abreaction.

Worth hiding from Vishnu? Worth investigating? Lakshmi was unsure what to do with the letter. Who exactly did he attempt contacting and would the contents of the letter mean he would be leaving the house? She needed him to stay until her collectors arrived. In the event Vishnu decided to take his leave before they came she would undoubtedly be screwed; it would be impossible to find someone by daybreak. Closing her eyes to the sun she wonders if she had been too hasty in calling them. No, it was a miracle he was here in the first place. The day she woke up to his frenzied scurrying around the house she had spent hours looking out to the sea, deciding there was a higher order to perceived existence that had decided to throw in its lot with Lakshmi.

But with each passing day she'd been growing increasingly wary of Vishnu. He did not make sense. He would lie about his age from one sentence to the next. He had introduced himself as Rahul but pivoted to Vishnu the next day. One night she had woken up to him sleeping on the floor beside her bed, facing the wall. He claimed to be running from someone. Did he know the house? He seemed to share a supernatural connection with it.

Charlie was a good boy. Charlie liked to look at himself in the mirror, falling into his own eyes, tumbling down the rivulets and over the folds in his brain. He longed to know what he was thinking, he would stare into the hole- the pupil of his right eye, now his left, back to his right because the mirror was foggy on the left. He was obsessed, he was such a good boy, what made him this way?

Charlie puts a hand to the mirror, tries to push against the surface, but he can't reach beyond.

"Charlie! come here!"

What magical entity lies beyond the stretch of his arms, languishing in the sphere enclosed to the other, does all that is other feel the same? Does all that's Charlie's feel the same? No, they don't. Therein births the yogic stretch for the other, not some

endogenous thirst for knowledge, only the perverse magnetic pull of anything but Charlie.

He had seen the world, had suffered the bite of mosquitoes when he'd tired of the bone chill at home, had peeled back the brain of women of the south when the women of the cobblestone seemed simulacra of each other. But he'd found them lacking, they were lacking that which he wanted, a feeling of true alienness of the soul. Charlie remembers nights and afternoons of drugs, men with their arms around him, love your brother as he is yourself, but that's the problem! Charlie doesn't want to take them into himself, he wants to be tugged across the earth by the skin on his cheeks, speeding along by the force of the magnetic pull of planets and at the very last moment to flip poles, south to south, repelling each other, a slim pocket of air forever shutting him to the outside. That is his true rapture, the rubbing of his sphere against the air trapped between his and the other's. And he'd found it. Here, in the holes in his eyes, or when he thought really hard about what smell he was smelling, and especially when he spoke to himself, this is Charlie talking, I'm speaking now, me, me, me, I'm speaking.

He was doomed, he'd found it, it would never leave him, it sits right here in his chest forever out of reach. He was obsessed, there would be at most a few days where he would forget where it was but the second he stretched, it would fall back heavily into his hands, the most natural feeling to a being born of nature, the most intoxicating chemical to a body flowing with fluids, Charlie was in love. Deep in his cavernous pupils, *the other* sat unseeing, unfeeling, unknowing who Charlie is. The last Charlie saw of the other was Charlie unseen by the other.

"What the *fuck* Vishnu?!" Lakshmi screeches, leant severely out the window, in his hands he holds her notebook.

"Who's Charlie?"

Furious, unbridled rage. Lakshmi screams at him to STOP READING and rushes downstairs.

"Boring!" His criticism cuts through the doorless house, she hears it as her feet hit the landing

and she yells out STOP, scrambling through the corridor, clawing plaster as she swings into the kitchen.

"It's the pretentious fear of going mad, the anxiety of influence. First you ask a couple questions.

One, what is the real cause of invention? Next, what is the true nature of order?"

Vishnu runs out the kitchen exit and she follows, fingertips just missing his shirt. Her knees buckle as he races out and around the house.

"Is this your diary?"

"Stop behenchod!" Knees skinned, she chases the rat as he runs circles around the house.

“Who’s Charlie? Is he your boyfriend?” He laughs, their third lap, breathless from running on sand.

“Stop!”

“Priority Order: Ideate on Disreputation of Opposition Party. Possible Avenues- Plant subliminal

messages that imply party members indulge in weekly blood transfusions with pre-pubescent males, revise middle school history curriculum to suggest party’s lineage is rife with in-breeding, WhatsApp forwards that allege Party leader shaves-”

He’s manic, giggling.

Lakshmi abruptly stops lapping the house and runs through the front door, straight down the corridor and out through the kitchen door, tackling Vishnu as he appears in front of it. He screams and falls. She pushes a bloody knee deep into his gut, clawing the book clutched in his dirty hands- Vishnu screams and lets go.

“Get off me!” He throws his elbow forward and hits her in the jaw, snapping her head back and pushing her off him. He rolls away in the sand, abandoning her book on the ground, bent over and wheezing painfully. Lakshmi darts forward and grabs her book, other hand up to her mouth, wiping blood across her chin. She looks up to Vishnu, backlit from the sun, silhouetted in front of the pale sea. “You’re dead, Vishnu.”

“What?” He dry heaves. “Because I read your diary? Grow up.”

“Fuck you. You’re gone tomorrow.”

Vishnu laughs and stumbles into the kitchen. At this moment Lakshmi looks back into the house and sees the letter fallen in the middle of the corridor, a bug with twitching antennae sitting on it. She gasps and jumps to her feet, her vision slides sideways and then fills with little black dots, her steps heavy as she tries to remain upright.

“Sit down, you’re gonna pass out.” He pads across the kitchen, tracking sand.

“Wait- Vishnu.” She leans on the doorframe, her jaw throbbing.

“What’s that?”

“Wait-“

“Is that a letter?” His voice pitched high.

Lakshmi throws her body forward, taking him out by the knees, he yells, slamming head first into the wood. She pushes a knee into his back and he lets out an “Argh!”. Lakshmi scrambles forward, crawling frantically over him, she grabs the letter, flapping it madly to shake the bug off.

“It’s mine.” She spins around on the floor, envelope clutched to her chest, knuckles white, her image better suited to the backdrop of a swamp in greyscale, skeleton hands of barren trees grabbing at her unkempt hair as she keels over, mouth open in the pitiful, frantic keen of a banshee.

“Let me see that.” He steps forward and Lakshmi slides her butt back.

"It's nothing." She throws her voice down low but her eyes divulge a vested interest. Vishnu stomps towards her, one arm clenched around his waist, hand massaging his lower back.

"It's not. Fuck, my kidney..."

Lakshmi collects her legs under her and pushes off the floor, beginning a staggered run, the doorway splits into two, she takes an uneducated guess and runs at the one on the right, making it through to the outside world. She keeps going, vision swimming with black orbs, her jaw over-sensitized with pain. The hostile light of the sky rushes up to her, eye and ear drenched in static, brain defying gravity as it propels *upwards*, pasting itself to the roof of the elevator as it free falls *down*, feet sinking into pale sand. A screaming follows her and it is Vishnu.

The shore is carved in large-scale moiré, the wind brisk and unforgiving, stripping moisture from eyeballs, the two humans flesh diagonals as they slanted towards the sands, barely upright against the low dunes. Lakshmi is going to throw the letter into the ocean.

Half a second later Vishnu flings a rock at her and it slaps into her back, felling the banshee. He appears over her, snatching the letter away and ripping it open. "NO!" Tearing at his ankles.

"What is this?"

What?

"Huh, Lakshmi? What is this?" He looks down at her, haloed by the sun.

"It's not yours?"

"No, bitch ... Argh." He sinks to his knees.

The beach swells with the sweet sound of flutes being fingered by the gentlest choir boys, earnest in effort and pious in intention. Soft, now brisk. Vishnu would be staying (5*), the collectors would take him not her..

"Fuck.....you fucked my only working kidney."

What?

Vishnu's knees give way, he kneels into a stumpy dune ascending to hollow sky. He lets his body fall to the side, both hands coming up to cup the left side of his lower back.

"You have only *one* kidney?" Her voice rattles- tiny, jagged pebbles in a plastic bottle. He groans in affirmative, face turned to the waves.

"What's abreaction?"

Lakshmi doesn't reply, face down in the sand, hands tenderly ghosting her sides.

Endnotes

(1) A peer reviewed edition of An Imprecise Guesstimate of Probable Affairs that Suggest the Hand of God and Not Evolution suggest that the answer is the hand of God.

(2)The cow, despite many warnings of an early bedtime, had dropped a considerable load on the roof. How else would the cow shit have gotten up there?

(3) On the last day of spring, the pollinated air thick with flower ejaculate, winds carrying the aphrodisiac, the sparrow alighted upon the shingle and began a melodic bird call. Our mushroom grew swollen, a burgeoning of a mature vulva, a stipe swelling to bulge and tear its partial veil. The white speckled sparrow rose onto its tip toes, chest rising to the sun, began to sing a song filled with trills and dips in the vibrato, the song grew pregnant with calls of longing and promises of passion. Abruptly, a second, smaller sparrow hopped nimbly onto the shingle and joined the chorus, pitched higher and matching the tenor with an alto. Our mushroom held its breath, listening to the bird song, an ascending crescendo of tweets and avifauna mewing.

Suddenly, the first, arguably sexier wren pounced upon the second, birds calls collapsing into frenzied screeching and wings wrestling the bird to the roof with talons. A caterwaul of noise ripped through the throat of the small bird, its body bucking under the bird, trying to escape. The sexy fowl dug his talons into the birds back and joined his cloaca to the females, its body bucking similarly. The rape finished with the mushroom finishing as well, spores and feathers hanging thickly in the air. The smaller bird jumped off the roof, and could be seen flying with a staggered pace, body dropping every few feet. The nubile wren rested for a moment on the shingle, their last moments together, before flying away towards the sea. The mushroom said thank you and good bye.

(4) Society for Abreaction of Love and Elementary Mathematics

(5) I suppose you want to know what swirl in the tapestry lead to our Vishnu spending his days wasting away in a house stripped of its doors. He is doing nothing, he is running from nothing, he is chasing nothing, its just been a depressive, manic couple of days.