the amygdala and other organs of importance

-jessie

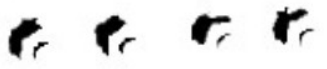


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a winter night, an empty parking garage

on the walk home
I feel alone, more alone than I was before,
it feels like yelling into an empty
parking garage, and you hear the echo
and you realize how vast
this structure is

your voice is ricocheting, bouncing off
every surface it can along with the flourescent
lighting, it seems like
everything is just an extension of you,
nothing and you, stretching out forever
-
you know that's not true, but you
can't prove it, it feels like that
knowledge, that you're not alone
is coming from the same guttural part
of you that clings onto life

it's cold, the breeze keeps blowing open your
jacket and running across your torso, biting
at your bare arms
underneath the jacket sleeves,
I'm thinking about my friends who
I left in each other's embrace
and how warm
it is in my own empty bed

the streets are also empty, it's late
your footsteps make a satisfying rhythm
but the volume is disquieting, bouncing
off the rowhouses that have been flipped

and converted and remodeled and rented out
people's entire lives are jammed
into these buildings it feels like,
spilling out the windows onto
the street like the light from
a lamp someone forgot to turn off
or maybe they're reading or
lying awake and staring at the ceiling
and wondering if they're alone and
clinging to the knowledge that
they are not
it feels like one big
structure collapsing in on you, burying
you in rubble, coating you in
what remains of the image
of a parking garage
and your voice isn't echoing
anymore, it's just you and these
words, this rubble,
stretching out forever

i used to get dmt in the mail

in the song "michael jordan" by chicago
rapper king louie there is a crowd cheering
faintly in the background for ambiance

one time it felt like they were cheering
for me because I had just smoked dmt,
there were geometric shapes everywhere
and colors were so vivid and it
felt like the crowd was cheering me on
as I keeled over alone on my couch,
losing control of my body

I didn't break through, like you're
supposed to, I got close, and
for a long time when people were talking
drugs, I would lie and pretend
or imply I had broken through
when I smoked dmt
because I am insecure about this

a couple of months after I smoked dmt
I had stopped doing drugs
I had had a mental health crisis
and basically it scared me to
the point that I no longer
wanted to smoke DMT with my body,
my mental health being what it is

and sometimes I think a lot about that:
my body being what it is, I can't stop
trying to find my limits and pushing through
them into something I'm not, and it feels

like pushing a boulder up a hill forever, and when
eternity finally ends I feel like I will become
more than what I am
like when michael jordan did all those
things on the basketball court and
people cheered him on because it's beautiful
and exhilarating to feel like we can be
more than this

queens, the east river

we're standing on some river, the lot of us
a week later I'll tell a friend I was just there!
but I was confused, it was a different bridge, a
different river
.
someone cracks a joke, we laugh, someone cracks
a joke in return, we laugh again and it goes
on like that for a little bit, it feels like
maybe things are ok
.
there's a whirlpool in the river,
near the shore, rip currents and the tide
and the wake from passing boats
crashed together into this
.
I think about other places I've been, other
rivers, places like this, people like this,
and it feels like the rip currents and the
tide and the wake from passing boats,
have all crashed into this too

and sometimes it feels like I'm going
under, into this, whatever, wherever
this is, someone says "ahh lake michigan"
sarcastically and we all laugh again
.
the lot of us are trans and
I don't feel like I have to identify
the rip currents and tides and wakes that
define our lives because of this
.
and the river is beautiful, light shimmering

through the tiny crests of the waves
there are two massive bridges and the lights
of the city linger off to the west
.
sometimes I want to scream or plant
a bomb somewhere or even to just
die, when I'm thinking about the
rip currents and all that
.
other times I don't think about
all that, and
I look at my friends and it doesn't feel
like it even has to make sense

a gray morass

my life is a gray sludge
a gray ooze
a gray morass

it feels like someone has taken
all the gray and shoved it into
my fucking head and all that's
up there is slowly fading into
a flat mass without color

if I'm telling the truth
it doesn't even feel that bad
I've been worse
but I feel like there's a molten core
to the mass in my head waiting to
break loose and roll around and fry my synsapses
until I lose motor control and collapse
as all the gray flies out of me, seeping out of my
pores, running in streaks down my face like
a dull mascara, and frankly, that doesn't seem pleasant

I'm trying to force myself into the morass now
like a pool in the path of an approaching forest fire
and frankly, even this metaphor is slipping
into the morass and I'm realizing
how much is sinking
and it feels like I'm too deep
it feels gray
my lungs are burning
but I'm not concerned
it feels gray

Life in motion

Sometimes I'm worried something will drop down, out of the ceiling, and kill me, a little piston through my skull, like No Country for Old Men. But honestly, other than that, the conveyor belt has been good, simple. Before this I was so aimless, like a glassy eyed cow out to pasture, no thoughts other than how nice the next mouthful of grass is going to be.

There's two smaller conveyor belts next to the one I am on. One heading faster in the same direction and one on the other side running in the opposite direction.

I look up into the distant overhead light of the structure, I smile, what a beautiful day. A few hundred yards down I can see my breakfast and a math problem headed towards me. A blueberry muffin and some coffee! I solve the math problem and put it on the outgoing belt. A steady stream of arithmetic problems keeps me busy until lunch. And then a steady stream of more open ended philosophical questions that feel like solving some sort of captcha will keep me busy until dinner.

After dinner is where the real fun begins for me! I wonder what I'll get today? Video games? A movie? A few more chapters of that novel I've been loving?

Hours pass.

I place the last philosophical problem on the outgoing belt.

Dinner!

But there's nothing with it?

Something down the line catches my eye. I start to walk towards it without thinking, moving forwards, forgetting the alarm. A piercing high pitched whine causes me to clutch my head and double over briefly.

The item down the belt gets to me, a letter.

"Are you afraid to die?" it says. There's a polaroid with it, a photo of my twisted corpse, eyes glazed over, a little hole in the center of my skull.

I can feel the nerve endings of every part of my body at once, they're all collapsing into my stomach.

The light for the structure switches off.

Guide lights along the belts snap on. It stops moving for the night, but no bedding comes, I try to sleep on the metal floor. The grating meant to provide traction digs into my ribcage as I obsess over the letter, I barely sleep.

Math problems start coming down the line in the morning. I can't solve them. I've never learned calculus! Another picture of my dead body comes down the line. Someone has scrawled "you lol" on it, there's an arrow pointing to me.

"I want to leave!"

"I want to leave!"

I'm screaming to no one.

"I want to leave, please," I double

over onto the floor, “please, just get me out of here.”

I curl up on the moving belt, problems pass by unsolved, maybe food, I don’t know.

The alarm starts to go off. I can feel it in my head, growing in one cortex, spreading until it rattles through my brainstem into my body.

I try to do anything

it gets louder

after some time I start to wonder if I am going to die in the same way someone wonders if they have any food left in the fridge.

Life somehow manages to continue. The light shuts off, it comes back on. I can feel a pit in my stomach as the alarm forces me to writhe. The overhead light shuts off and the alarm stops. I’m covered in sweat, I can barely stand. I grab some food passing by, something like oatmeal.

In the morning, the same oats come down the line. Some sleep last night helped me feel like a human again. No problems come to me on the inbound belt.

Another letter.

No picture this time.

It says “Tell me how you want to die! Or you’ll get the alarm again lol”

I write a plea to let me live and put the letter on the outgoing belt. 15 minutes later the alarm starts. I can feel my self leave my body as I writhe again on the

slowly moving metal floor for another day. In the morning the light flickers on, and then a loud pop. It goes out. The alarm stops. The guide lights come to life. Nothing is moving. I start to run forward. The alarm stays silent. I run down the belt until I can't. Leaning against the guardrail, I pass out.

When I come to the guide lights have died. Groping in the dark I try to stand. I don't see myself as living anymore. It feels like I'm just forestalling a more permanent death.

I flicker back into unconsciousness.

The structure is gone when I wake up. I'm somewhere I can't place. All I can see is horizon. As I try to approach something real it only grows more distant. Alone and scared, I don't want to die like this. Fixated on the horizon still, I lose you, I lose me, I lose us. Through you we find ourselves. I repeat this until it becomes meaningless, nothing, a series of sounds in a void. I'm so tired of living alone, scared, stuck on the horizon, hoping I will find you there.

sparrows

he wants to be picked up, you say
as a sparrow jumps towards your hand
maybe that's technically walking, for a sparrow
it thinks you have food

winter has been creeping into the days now
and I wonder if sparrows can feel fear about that

when it sees your hand is empty,
it goes back to picking up and
dropping disintegrating leaves and
eating the occasional bread crumb

you insist he still wants to be picked up
despite his growing disinterest in your hand

I scrape the metal cafe
chair against the ground as I stand
up to throw away an empty cardboard cup

the movement and scraping metal seems like
it should scare the birds, but it doesn't, they
have grown acclimated to this sort of
fear, but I know if you were to try
and pick one up it would
fire off some survival impulse
that will prove to not be fully calloused over
and skitter away with
a short flight, which this one does promptly
as you reach for it with intent

on my way back to the table

I see this and smile
you look up and smile back
a breeze comes in and
chaps my nose and cheeks and
I stop smiling
as my body responds to the cold

across the atlantic

sitting on the edge of lake michigan
it seems like an ocean, the scale of it
all creeping beyond my understanding, and
we're sitting on the concrete steps
next to the bike trail next
to the aids garden

the mayor, a lesbian, opened this
garden 2 years ago, 7 years after
we, you and me, were allowed the right
to marry, and it all feels a little tacky
and contrived and sort of like an insult

but lake Michigan has nothing to do with all
that, and 5 minutes later a bike cop goes
past scanning for the homeless and
destitute, and the lake is still vast and
such a pure blue, like some rothko painting
where he mixed egg yolks and strange pigments and
other odds and ends to make something beautiful

navy pier juts out to the south
that feels like an insult of sorts too
but it's distant and the lake goes on and on

you feel the nip of the fall day and you
can only imagine how cold the water is

the horizon is buffering a different
shade of blue against the water, the
blue eventually turning
black, and you're shivering

I offer you my coat and you say no
you'd rather just go home, and as
we walk back, it seems like an ocean

i need a million dollars

your savings are drying up
someone is singing something in
your headphones and your bedroom is lit by the
morning sun even though your blinds are drawn

saying this music, the music
in your headphones involves singing
is a misnomer, the vocals are more
of a garbled scream

you should make coffee, you
should have breakfast, really
you should do anything other than listen to
music on your phone and roll around in bed

your savings are drying up
and you spent 8 dollars on breakfast
which you eat at your desk, your
blinds still drawn

frankly,

I had a coworker who loved saying
"can I be frank" as a way to
cushion some of the harder things he had to say
I'd always say of course, and he wouldn't
smile, or bullshit me, he'd look somewhere
to gather his thoughts and then he'd say
whatever hard thing he had to say

and that this is still what I remember
about him feels silly to me
it feels like we always remember the
things in between the bigger things
more vividly than the bigger things

he was kind and honest, he quit
one day and as we walked to his
bus stop like we did most days

he changed his demeanor slightly
he talked about how hard life
was but how he still had people
he loved and don't get him wrong
this shit is hard
we meandered
and lost focus and talked about
odds and ends and things that didn't matter
but it felt human and good even though
we had probably lost sight of the big stuff

every time I think of him, I think of
that last walk together
it was the middle of winter, so it was already dark

he turns to me and tilts his head, there's
a train passing by overhead that we wait for,
he says can I be frank and I say of course
and there's light twinkling everywhere
on this winter night,
he says something
about an old apartment and dust and I don't
remember the whole thing,
I smiled and felt human and the
big windows on the old meat plants
were dotted with irregular stars,
streetlamps, and passing cars, and
the occasional flickering stop light
it was cold and dark and the lights
were bouncing off and spreading across
every surface they could reach
and my friend said some more
and he asked to be frank a few more times
and, can I be frank?
I don't know what I was feeling if not
some sort of love

