

It constantly looks as if it is thinking of me.

And then you look up, and there is this canopy, so bulbous and mastroskaed within itself, as it were full of titanic, evil thoughts.

NNNNNNN, less like a head, and more like a shipwreck. When I look up into it, I forget all about up and down, and I remember Lyonesse, and how I had to swim out across the lagoon to fetch my club card. That wind, always that wind! Underneath me was the wreck of the Carpathia, resting on the sand perhaps thirty or forty feet below. The whole time I felt a poisonous brick just behind my tongue, and the urge to telescope my legs back up into my body. It felt like my paraphile shadow, like something groping up into my most private parts. I am just waiting for these trees to try to find a way in, to brush against me, to use me. It makes me retch just thinking of it.

Was there something similar, in Ytene? I think so, but not on this level. How the people of Loss can stand it, waiting under these things, using their shade, I am not sure. Things have only got worse, the longer I have been here. The New Forest, indeed!

What the pinæ pervertæ denotes is a world largely absent from the valley of Loss; that of the legendary, the world of must-nots, craggy cave mouths and atavistic forests and the constant, constant, struggle of landscape to murder everyone.

Everything about it is desexual yet sexual, static yet predacious. I wait for it to pounce and invade me, but it will not. I cannot enjoy my food because of it, the darkness underneath it, the monotheistic flora, the rot, the mist, the trap. Everywhere I walk my breath gets tighter, and I imagine, always imagine, that I am about to be ravished in the fastest possible manner.

Despite my trepidation, I have been forced to string myself up in its branches to escape Mr. Lights, keeping my legs still to stop the chestnuts rattling and silencing my tubes in its knotholes. Through them I imagine that I can hear the pulse of some interior lingam, horny for me.

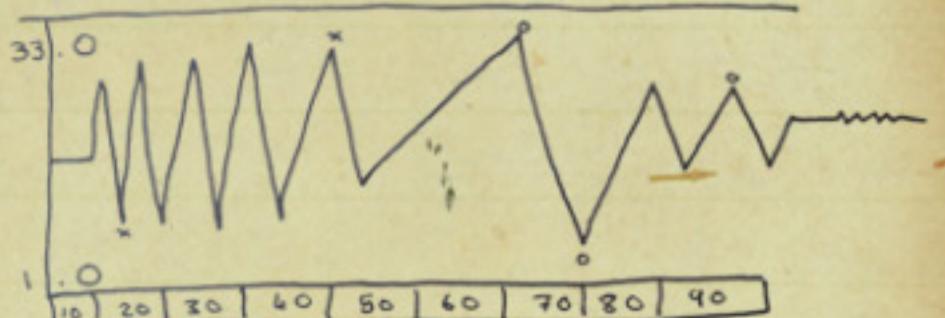
I feel violated by this place, the whole valley is a kink. Rosetto was right.

I had to stop writing, for a moment. I considered a lacunæ, but it seemed a bit trite. He was there, right below me, pissing up against my tree! I do not know if he is looking for Friend, or myself, but his limp is certainly worse, from where she kicked him, and I can imagine that he is tired, and wishing that he had the honour to give up on her.

These sentences are being written slowly, to calm my breathing. I thought that he heard me churning ink.

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I have never asked him how old he is, but he is still ursine, broad across the shoulders and tucked in smartly at the waist. He has his autumn of hair slicked back with decades of grease, accumulated by his aversion to washing (just like his daughter, just like everybody here), and his stomach has the density of a black loaf. I cannot help but see him as a servile wedge, designed to hold open doors for others with his taper. Like every single person in his community he wears his purple-dyed smock, and his hands and neck are embarrassed with the residue.

He let the bunched, dried fruit of his genitals hang for a moment. Even though I now know better, the slick he leaves behind on the trunk looks just like blood.

HHHHHHH I must walk (gingerly, shadowed) down to the monoculture tomorrow, before the sun is too high, and collect some samples for the Seedgao. I have yet to determine why they are unable, singularly, as a people, to grow anything other than beetroot (2). They eat it for all eight meals of the day, in differing angles and states of matter. They drink its pulp in long gags, they boil it, fry it in rounds, mash it into bruises, bake it on rocks until it is crisp, and dye their clothes with it. And yet, and yet and yet and yet, every single meal that I have been offered since I got here has tasted of meat! That rich mouthfeel that is unmistakeable to a palate seasoned like an iron

(2) I'm not sure if I can waste the ink on this; I'm not sure I could count as verdure.

Before I had eaten too many meals, it was a mystery. I thought that there were peaceful murders occurring every time my back was turned, I would walk past the walled gardens, into the Woods Of Interbreeding (3), and there would be these little slicks of maroon everywhere. On every corner of every surface there were guilty handprints. I even began to find them on my own dunnage, around the locks and joins. This excited me because it denoted, finally, the presence of a ritual. No civilisation can deny the horror of blood. My initial thoughts were that it denoted a taboo against menstruation, one of White's most feverish fantasies, but I saw men and women alike making their marks, on their queer architecture, on the trunks of trees, in the grass, and, very very rarely, on each other. After I had become fully accustomed to their diet, I decided to take my pisses in the river; I did not want them to know where I had been.

Parlay said that a human body is "a feast of signs" (4), and this particular course eluded me until I went out west, past the Catafalque Yard and over those peculiar mounds and saw them, finally, mile after mile after mile of beetroot fields, far larger in area than the town itself, which appears to attached itself to one side like a particularly virulent clumps of aphids. I walked amongst them, the plants on the boundaries have been left to go to monstrous, multi-chambered seed, and inside the stalks are the colour of stretched liver. They have been planted badly, too close together.

(3) I cannot think of a better name for it, at the moment, these people are stretching my imagination with their refusal to name anything.

(4) Quoted in Sir James George Frazer's Book Of Good Soil.

NNNNN I should have known! I have seen it before! When I first arrived here, when I was camped outside that preposterous gate. Every day was spent slogging back up the road to bring down more dunnage, and arrange it in a way that would seem hospitable, and then walking back up to the Diplomat to see if anybody had been drawn there. I became rather depressed, and then, on the first day of rain in weeks, there they were. Ten men in gigantic cloaks, standing in front of the gate in the mud, looking up at my possessions. They were a bizarre design, braced with some internal scaffold to draw the water as far away from their skin. It fell off them in petticoats.



At this point, of course, I had not yet studied the Lossian's absurd, ancestral hatred of water (5) in all its forms, and so I was rather startled when I saw them, stock-still, stood in a horseshoe around the Diplomat. I realised, then, that I had never installed it in the rain before. It works best in clement weather, and on that day it looked a little threatening, like the delicate snout of something marine come to nuzzle the landbound, and then snatch at them.

As usual, as with all primitive people, they did not know what it was. It never works as well as it could, even with the whole set unpacked and arranged just so, but this was even worse, they would not even touch it. Of all the places that I have visited, Loss is the only culture which does not associate the colour blue with calm friendship. All they care for is purple, the purple of beetroot, only ever purple!

I folded up my cloak, and strode as openly as I could from amongst the dunnage. I did everything correctly, diverting to the proper glands, making the proper show of gifts and obeisance, and keeping the proper distance. They watched me out of the side of their hoods, the long guttersnouts obscuring their vision.

That was when I wiped my visor, and looked down. Their feet were bare, and there, sheltering down their legs, was this purple delta. They all looked horribly wounded, the lividity of it, the quality of the bruise. I panicked, I must admit, I thought that some minor ailment had floored them all before I arrived, and now I would be saddled with the last few, sad refugees. I reasoned that they might just be mullioned veins invigorated by a deep breath, or perhaps the blood of another creature, sacrificed at a ceremony in my honour.

It was only then that I realised that it was the dye from their cloaks, poorly sealed in the weave.

NNNNN Perhaps, as these are the only people from Loss I have seen come into contact with water willingly, there was a hint of a ceremony here. Perhaps Mr. Lights and the others were ambassadors, or even sacrifices, to my encampment. I will have to ask one or all of them.

The next moment all but confirmed it, however. They were trying to impress me. As one the men's cloak's opened, and inside, standing up against their chests and groins, their eyes widening in horror (6), were their women. So very young, but I refuse to call them girls. They peered out at the scene before them. A settlement bigger than their own, built entirely of my luggage, stretching in henges up to the heavy clouds, every piece beautifully worked and ruby-red.

There was reciprocation occurring, here, in the very simplest sense, an exchange of gifts. This is key to any civilisation, and here I was, offering obeisance, and there they were.

I have never seen such a paltry welcome in my entire life. The symbols were all so tired, the girls in the cave of cloaks, the swap of menses to the male, the men's heads clandestine below the cowl. They were no braver, cowering back from the slightest droplet that hung in front of their noses. I could see their legs trembling as the beetroot juice poured down them.

(6) I believe that this was at the rain, rather than myself, though I suppose that I was sparkling with Molossus and refraction, and I have known people transfixated before.

Where have I seen such an obvious attempt at ritual before? (7) There have been so many, they have barely made a score on me, any impression whatsoever. It might have been Imok, flashing her blue eyes and golden crown, and legs spaced on hips like a tuning fork? She certainly knew all about ceremony, and had been chosen to come and meet me, out on the road from Nighthead. She was so weary, laden with the signs for which I had no reference. That was almost as bad as this display. And then there was Yonlad, and the carvings that his elders made in his septum, filled with sweet grass, designed to represent the petrichor that was coming, the apocalyptic smell of drying rain... (8)

But, I suppose, this time there was a Friend. Friend herself, and even then, under the cloak she looked furious. Her father's hand on her arm, she looked up at the sky, the ranked suburbs of luggage that I had dragged all the way from the ocean, the Diplomat and then at me, with such a look of loathing that I almost choked. My dear, Friend, the only vaguely interesting thing about this town which I have come so far to see.

I love her. I can still hear her father prancing back and forth, trying not to make a path back to the village (9), when I know that she is down by the river, pretending not to wait for me. I hope that I can get down without cracking my skull.

Now there are children running past underneath me in the darkness. It is some sort of rite, probably something important, probably something from Parlay's list (10), but I do not know what life event they are preparing for. All I know is that they are ignoring the missive of their elders, in the morning there will be tiny tracks, which will need to be brushed back into wildness.

(7) I have since found it - I never saw it with my own eyes, I was thinking of the famous scene in In Thy Cups.

(8) See my report in Common Rhinomancy, or the Nose-Prince.

(9) Another nonsense! Nobody in Loss will make a path, anywhere they go. When I ask them the reason, they only say "we will not be here long". It is a form of tiresome, ritual politeness that I cannot stand. How can I tell where the holy places are, where I should not walk, if there are no paths? How do they go to and from each other? How do they not make the most familiar places worn down?

(10) See Oscar Parlay's The Everyday Guide To Attempting Civilisation, Utilising The Tools Of Civility, Explained.



NAVIO DA FROTA
NÃO

SORGO

CONSTRUÍDO: 1953

CAPITÃO: MARTIM NEGAR

PORTE DE CASA: LAGOS

TRANSPORTADORA DE CARGAS ELEVADAS E BRUTO

Dear Rosetto,

I sincerely hope that it is you who finds this. I wasn't sure how to address you, who knows what you have decided to call yourself now. What did you settle on, in the end?

I think that this rainy afternoon would be best spent writing to you. Not one of them has come out of their houses today, and I imagine this weather is a sort of holocaust, to them. I have tried to cheer them up by telling them about the Summers Of Salad in El Dorado, how the avocados reached the size of sculpture, their skin warty with adolescence, but none of them want to hear where I have been.

I think I might be hating them, Rosetto.

Rosetto, I don't expect you to understand what I am talking about, but they have hung up more guttering, in the high, lonely passes where only I have been.

Over the last week or so, on the sunniest days, little groups of townspeople have been spiriting themselves off to consult it when I have not been looking. After a while I decided to follow a group of them; they ascended through trees and confronted a small tributary of the big river whose name I do not know. They froze as one, bobbing like deer.

I am so sick of this ludicrous taboo - I revealed myself all-at-once, running up behind them and splashing into the current. They screamed and gasped; and two of them visibly gagged, they tore at my mask, trying to stop my harmless atrocity. Part of me wanted to push them all in, to cup water up and over their heads and show them

look look not everything is poison how good does that feel I wish that I could feel it

After I had placated them with gifts, they let me walk with them. They were still wary, however, afraid that they were transgressing some forgotten not-not just by allowing me along.



We duelled our bladed shadows up the valley wall, the path narrowing to a vestigial ledge. I began to notice alcoves burrowed into the rock, most no wider than my arm, and angled outward like the vases of caryatids. Their entrances were stained with earthen things. I was glad that I could not smell anything. As I was about to ask what they were, Rotting, one of the hundred interchangeable beet farmers, grinned at me and motioned that I should make a lucky dip. There was a desperate naughtiness about his look. They clung there in the high air and watched me reach into one, while I fished they began to laugh, their sweaty arms flashing as they clapped, and I thought two or three of them might plummet in little rollmops. When my hand closed around something delicate, a slender little arm, no thicker than a smoking pipe, I felt it snap. I left it in there, opening my palm to them to show that I had raided no graves, and found myself presented with the sight of Rotting perched above another of these alcoves, his smock hiked up to his nipples, his head contoured and livid.

I had been thinking, Rosetto. With such a ancestral fear of water in all its forms, where do the people of Loss defecate? Where could such a quantity of biomass, the accumulation of two or three hundred souls, expunge half again of itself a year, on average? This figure is so key to anthropology, but is so often ignored.

Here was the answer, in these latrine-temples, I am convinced that the little arm I grasped was that of a goddess or god or trickster-spirit or nymph, and that a peculiar hatred of their own pantheon is at work here.

No wonder then, that they did not like the Diplomat, out in the shorn woods, surrounded by the titanic forms of my dunnage, they probably thought that it was an altar. All gods are to be ridiculed by these people. To look at the state of them, perhaps they could do with some divine intervention.

And so we continued, up through the attic defiles, and then under that overhang where the great falls roar. I had come before along a steeper route, and as I strode ahead they started to whine and fidget. They gripped at each other, scarred the air, kicked at the rock like animals and always kept their eyes on the outcrop above us, imagining the torrent above, and hunting for pendulous droplets, like knives about to fall from a shelf.

Of course, nothing broke through. The rock must be eighty feet thick and far older, I imagine, than their civilisation. What if one of them was soaked? Would they pitch him over the edge, a homo sacer hesitantly sacrificed in error?

This climb ruins me, Rosetto, it really ruins me. When we reached the gully, the new hanging of guttering had none of the sediment of the older, but it bore a long, tense trickle of water down from the rock above. They stared at it as if it were a ladder down to some hideous underworld. Then again, perhaps they have an overworld, they seem so happy down in their fetid sink, the idea of a breath of fresh air and rain might be their very own Styx, and the clouds Charon's skiff. (1)

I think I have a theory now, Rosetto, which I will share with you, on the literature of this people. These hanging chimes, these arrangements of what look like fetishes or lagniappes, are not in fact random, or even symbolic. They are, perhaps, representative, the closest to a language that is written in Loss. So, here,

Rosetto, My Theory

From these two gutterings, constructions of metal and string that hang like windchimes in the highest riven of Loss, I have attempted to create an abecedary, though given how each metal element hung from the frame, I do not know whether they represent semantic units or whether the whole thing is one primal sense, in the manner of



I will christen it, appropriately, Lesser Guttertongue - I cannot call it greater until I have discovered that it is not a bastardisation.

(1) Rosetto, read O Cão Preto by Rosinha Cavalcante for more on this. A very clever woman indeed, but so hurt by everything that came upon her!

What is clear, first of all, is that these hangings are designed, from their very conception, to be paired with water, the silvery cataract through which the water flows directs the flow down onto each separate construction, and each letter, if that is what they are, has its meaning, importance and "health" couched in its ability to shed water, like a roof, or a feather. There are no serifs or looptails here, only different variations of slope. I think, in the depths of the older guttering, there may be a bowl, which I can only guess marks an insult or a forbidden vowel.

And yet, Rosetto, they speak in English! A halting, moggly English, I admit, one which either points to a recent acquisition or that they are perhaps, as of yet, not used to the space their teeth occupy. Perhaps Praester brought his own cur-English with him, and they are only just beginning to remember his words. I will have to ask them, I think, to see if they remember any more of his verses.

What is important, however, is that their adoption of English allows me to make certain inferences regarding their syntactical development and collective folkspace. It has been a long time since I have used my English, not since Lancelot needed the practice; I had no idea what to expect when I arrived here, and prepared every tongue that I could, but ever since that rube with the handprints on his neck came out of the trees and said

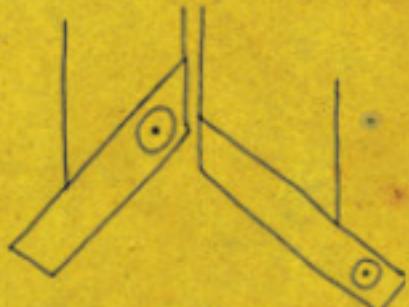
Where is your mouth, sir

I have been regaining my confidence. I think that even you, Rosetto, would admit that this work has been written with more than a little eloquence. Think about how awful my Latin was, Rosetto! My dog Latin, you called it! Those saintly palindromes and box-poetry, they always seemed too stuffy for me.

So, I put away my Islandscript, and my Hyperborean, and my Prehistoric German, and my Arbitlem, and Ar-cansasian, and look to this script, instead. Below are my representations of those individual elements from the guttering's composition that I can remember, and my thoughts on their meaning, gleaned through extensive interview, interpretation, suggestion and divination.



I think that this might refer to some method of telling the time, though I have yet to plot a consistent chronology yet, the days are so short, because of the height of the mountains, that it is hard to angular anything significant.



This piece sat near the very top of the chime-sentence, and appears to be a form of "shelter letter", both physically directing the trickle of water away from the more vulnerable "child letters" and providing a sense of solution or repair. I believe that, looking at the convex nature of it, it represents the valley, and thus the village, and thus the villagers. This piece is meant to be read by all of them.



Quite obviously representing children.



The way that the cursive, here, scatters the water, creating both an impression of steam and a real danger of contact with the droplets, means that it can only refer to that most dangerous of engines; fire. These people have been burning something.



This was in amongst the children - a wide bowl, which shimmers like a gas when the water moves over it. (2)



These tiny, black stones were hung above each "child-letter", almost too small to see. On closer inspection, they resemble crowns, or perhaps the hats of fools. They are so minuscule, and forked, that the water is speared, clinging in perfect jewels and bells.

(2) I will admit to you, Rosetto, and only you, that I did search for a prophecy about myself amongst the gently turning shards, but, of course, there was not one. My arrival was unannounced, as it so often is.

(3) Or in the case of these people, a vituperation against their gods. Why do they hate them so much, Rosetto?

(4) Now, now, now, **EEEEE** little Rosetto, there is no reason to be jealous! She is just a Friend, just a young woman who has been kind enough to show me around. She is not really anything at all.

So, the only two examples of this language are an old, calcified mess for which I have no reference, perhaps even a holy text (3), and the other some form of public order. With all this reference to children, crowns, hats and fire, I wonder if I will soon see a festival of some kind, a feast and thus cookery. I have been jonesing for such a thing ever since I got here. To make every person in the town climb up here, just to tell them about a party for their children! No wonder they all look so ashen when they begin to climb down.

Rosetto, what else have I done with my day? Well, I spent it alone, chopping down the last of the trees from between my dunnages. The civilisation that my possessions create out here has no need for green spaces. I did wander back through the town gates to rouse some aid, but everybody was at some sort of meeting, just as night fell. The Mayor has called it, and not invited me, again. I cannot find any of them, anywhere, one of their houses pulses slightly when I touch it, but I can find no way in, and hear no noise. But ROSETTO! Then I smelt it! The very first hints of a festival in gestation, the smell of meat beginning to cook! It is coming from off in the darkness of the woods somewhere, I will have to find its source another day! I was right!

This exclusion may be the eighth such insult they have bestowed upon their visitor. I have put up with the Mayor and become rather friendly with him, despite the stink of his ruff, despite his awful little son that my Friend, did I tell you about her, my Friend (4) hates as well. I have always said that the authors of utopias should be close to their rulers, my position has allowed me to see all of the failures inherent in the models. Loss is no utopia, Hythlodatus would not be proud to see it, but it is all I have, at the moment. There are at least secrets here. For the composer of a great Work, that is enough.

Now, Rosetto, I hope to see you again soon, and if the people of Loss remain this impenetrable, it may be sooner rather than later. I have repacked half of my dunnage, and I know the route back out again. My muscles will enjoy the unwinding. I have enclosed a little gift for you - I hope that it make you think of me, when life is so very difficult for you.

I still love you very dearly,

Until soon,

I knew, as I stood on the forekeep of the Sorgo, four days past Peshgumba and still the ship palsied by its swell, that I would miss those particular books that had sunk in their containers. As the Double Castle was overcome by the waves, along with another hundred pieces of dunnage that the translator had not secured properly, and at least half of my gifts (such gifts you would have had, Friend, if the captain had not been sexed at the wheel, and listed to port!) I remember wondering how long the steel would hold on the seabed, and then, when that buckled, how long the leather would keep, and and how long until lockpick crabs applied their delicate chelipeds to the latches and began rolling all of my carefully lain pages, my thousand-ton of pages, into scrolls, useless to anything but storms as winter reading.

And now here I am, on very dry land, at a complete loss for the quote I want. All my wit has gone abyssal.

The quote that I am looking for is from Hythlodaeus, I am sure of it. One of his boastful pub sermons, addressing the faults of some beautiful, fleeting people; he was the only man I knew who could fashion the dimples that a smirk requires out of just a nib. Perhaps I can remember it without the pamphlet.

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"without twere monst

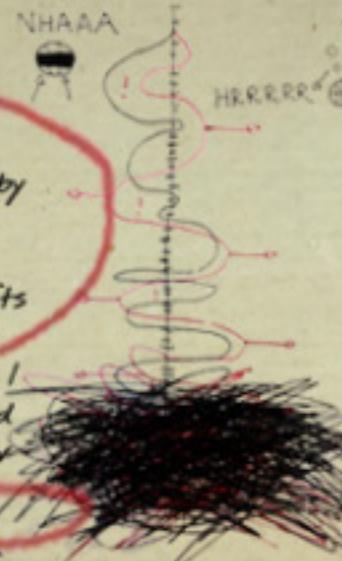
"we did not ask if he had seen

"We did not ask if there had been men, for men were not news. There is never any shortage of human beings, to snatch away each other's food, or breed whole populations, but examples of horrid beasts, lonely and mythological, are not so easy to find."

The people of Loss sit in a bath full of creatures. The fauna that I have almost seen in this valley adds fortifications to Alfred's theory, there is a Wallace Redoubt here, keeping the ecology safe, humongous and unique.

I have never seen such a plethora of new things to catalogue! Not even in the seas around Ring-In-Opal, lousy with new fish, every single one pierced through the junket with gold! (1) I can remember the ocean there, seen from the high ice at sunset, where the Ringfolk kept their elusive Mint, all of their wealth glinting from the inginal of every beast beneath the waves.

But I have had trouble catching their glimpse, I have to admit. Mostly I see these things outside the foveal, in the periphery of my vision when I am attempting to catalogue something else, a stolen dance amongst the older Lossians, or a snatch of family history from the brewers. Whenever I look for them deliberately, they elude me, I am lucky that they are so large. This is a valley of gigantics. An explorer has not been afforded this opportunity since the world was stupid. I wonder if this was how Praester felt,



when he gurneyed into Bodo, and saw monoceros fencing with his bow? I am almost too excited to begin my catalogue, and I do not have long until Friend will want me back in the river, there has been another funeral today, and her father is kept sweaty and inappropriate in the Catafalque Yard (2). She has nearly gone in up to her ankles now, and soon she'll dunk her head. I am very proud of her civilisation,

if she is going to be a psychopomp, she should at least look presentable.

I will, all very quickly, in the space of time that is left to me until I must oublieette my Work and walk with this sweet girl, with the little starling's feet that her belt leaves in her muffin-top, and her purple fingernails and teeth and lips, the congenital tinnitus, and the little scar on her lip that quivers when she is angry or aroused, and her skin as dull and void of blemishes as a boiled sheet, begin my bestiary.

So, yes,

(1) I am not the only one so taken by the people of Ring-In-Opal, Whale-Bane mentioned Olaf Jansen, or who I assume was Jansen by the description, losing his way there and spending some time amongst the Ringfolk. See my Work "An Account Of My First Trip Amongst The Whale-Treasurers Of Ring-In-Opal, As Told To Their Emissary, The Young Whale-Bane, With His Bead Of Piss, Handsome And Lite".

(2) He still will not let me near her if he can help it, he seems to have the ear of the Mayor. They spend so much time hand in hand, almost making paths in their discussions about me, their theological debates about my provenance. If I am breaking some taboo by loving her, then at least our love ripples outwards and makes some excitements in this dead place! There is some horrid, possessive jealousy at work in him, and he has infected all the others against me, indeed, almost everyone who has met with me has been beaten badly, I can see their backs saddled with deep bruises, and I cannot think who else could have hurt them so than him. Friend keeps defying him, however, when nobody is watching her, prising at my dunnage, walking between them, basking in their shade, and pulling at the seam in my neck again. She still, after everything, has not show any interest in the Diplomat, but I am happy nonetheless. She says that she does not like the colour, and that it makes her legs feel funny when she looks at it.

A Peripheral Bestiary
OF Loss And Its Surrounding Fastnesses
THE AMOEBA ON THE WINDONSILL
Or
The Scatterbird

Every land that I have ever visited has had birds in abundance. There was the Loftenroost, of course, with its rude, chain-smoking hatcheries, and Camelot's darkdoves, and even down in the very depths of Agartha there were beasts that saw the air as a disposable transcendence, sacrificing up into it, and then throwing it away for weightiness when their wings got strained, and the caves got narrow.

In most cultures they represent the altitudinous, the excarnate, and the divine.

But here, in Loss, I have seen very little in the sky. Only, here and there, now and then, flocks like flung balsam, dun puffs of powder accompanied by the sound of an evisceration and the terrified squawks of the scatterbird.



I first met one while walking through the long grass of the **EEEEEEES** meadows, attempting to interview the pregnant girl, Lantern. She had matured enough by this point to dip her swollen ankles in the river, and, despite all of her people's strictures, had begun to sluice her empty belly with the water. Every one of the ten men in her life were afraid to go, and had lapped at her ankles like surf, adoring her before she bobbed off to be alone, and conduct her quest. In her transformation I feel that she had left her people for good, and I only wanted to talk to her, for a while, and find out where she keeps the foetus, if not below her stomach I cannot help but be astounded by her vacancy.

But as I crept behind her, trying the keep my **NHAAAs** and **HRRRRRs** to a whisper, I came across this obese little thing. It was about the size of an eagle, but black and scruffy, and its belly hung past its basal phalanx. What a waddling, duggish thing! It looked up at me with piggy little eyes, like currants in a bun. It was alarmed by the sound of my chestnuts rattling, rattling, rattling with every step (3) and heaved up into the air about a foot, its wings still tucked away.

But, what a transformation!

What a sea change!

With a horrific clap of flesh rending, like a tree falling, it split open, and three, four, five, thirty tiny birds, each a keepsake version of itself, flew out of the black mass and scattered, their voices little quarks of the whole. They sashayed off into the morning sky, but I am told that they glide silently at night back to their point of departure, and climb back in together, like the inhabitants of a monastery.

The farmers will not eat them, not only do the birds ruin the beetroot crop, and so are decimated as pests, but their walkabouts make quaint paths, which the farmers scatter with seed every morning, whilst muttering unknown hexes to themselves.

THE HARLEGAIN
Or
The Pageant Weevil

I have talked extensively about this creature elsewhere (4) but it bears repeating, if the people of Loss ever had a Grendel, unfortunately, for epics everywhere, it is this insect. The rituals maintained and observed every month or so, the omnigenital education of the young and again, tiresomely, of the very old, just to prevent anybody treading on even one, is remarkable.



(3) Everywhere I go, I cannot help but announce myself; I can never be White's "invisible spirit", walking amongst them without touching anything.

(4) I think that I will call it 'The Weevil Hunt', when I finally batten everything down.

After that initial hunt, a day I remember only for the sunshine, I encountered the Pageant Weevils three more times in my wanderings.

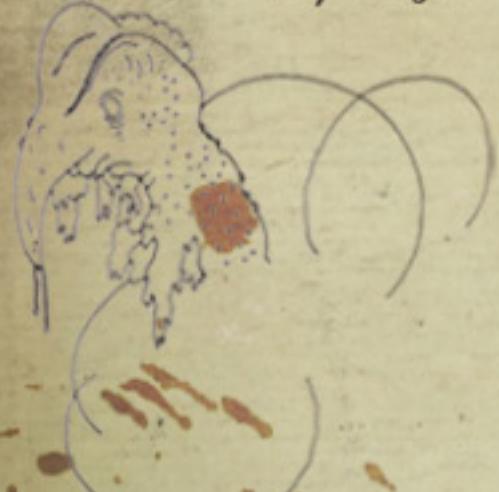
Once, when attempting to explore inside one of their clutters of houses, and failing to find any crack, seam or sense that there is any hollowness to them (5), I disturbed a nest that had sprung up in its lee. (6)

The second time, I found one that had already been sheared and daubed, scuttling in a circle in the woods, making a fairy ring with the bacteria on its palps. I put it out of its misery with the heel of my Work.

The third time I found one that had already

THE POET'S DISAPPOINTMENT

Or
The Turkey Dragon



Oh, how they have never talked of the Turkey Dragon!

How they have never sung a lay, or moaned in terror at the thought of this fantastic chimaera!

How they have kept silent about its titanic orbit, its sarcophagy neck rubbed bare of feathers!

About its gametes, how it maintains the Lesbos Rule, only hatching flightless females!

How we can all hear its moans, its tusk's narrowing the gut!

Of its Sisyphean, unkind habits of mating, scissoring listlessly in the caverns below us!

(5) I do not feel invasive, doing this; Friend must have the same curiosity, when she tries to drive a nail into the hinge of one of my larger luggages.

(6) I neglected to tell anybody, I remain confident in the eventual revelation that these things are harmless. How they will thank me, freeing them from generations of rubic ritual.

I have heard absolutely nothing about how it lives in the caves under the village, moving in a jejune flock of one, its clumsy, brobdingnagian skull stippled with cancer. How it descends from the mountains to steal the town's exotic cutlery, in great rattling hoards. I know that they all lie awake listening to it chime and clatter about, because I certainly do. How it makes nests of it all underground, thinking it treasure.

Every culture I have encountered has jigsawed beasts together into one. It does not take a lot of imagination. But here in Loss they resolutely refuse to mythologise. The Turkey Dragon perfectly represents their spirit, and what are animals for, living in the riparian borders of man's influence, if not to reflect man incompletely?

These people have a dragon, and they will not sing of it. Something so downlandish, so useless, so Lossian.

Lossian

adj.

The quality of disappointing reality stemming from great reputation or expectation.

LA SELLA DELLA VERITA

Or
The Bog Pony

Out to the EEEEEEEEN of the Town Hall, through that fence tied with strips of dried fish, is a field of bushes, under which are gestalt saunas which regurgitate men sweating out their poisons, naked and screaming and rolling in the grass. One must pass through this gauntlet to reach the close-clipped meadow where mostly children go. I wonder if there is some deliberate landscaping at work here, that requires the young to descend through this bellowing Tartarus (7), the saunas are for adults only, and the children are reluctant to pass through the scrub.

But still they go, to ride the bog pony, at first tentative and trembling, and then again and again, returning to their homes caulked in mud and a stronger stride.

This is by definition a juvenile rite, nobody over the height of five feet comes here, and so the delineations of tapoo gain another enclave. Another boundary, another not-not. I have seen parents bring the ones who are not yet able to walk, but they always scurry back to the limits of the arena, eager to be away. They pay the barest attendance needed to stop these almost-babes drowning under the weight of their own heads, occasionally you will see a man or woman running back to fish their charge, fondled and screaming, from the muck.

(7) NNNNNNNNNNNNNNN

Scattered across this meadow, in no particular order, are long pools of thick mud, each about the shape of an hourglass lain on its side. I first discovered them when I had eaten too much beetroot, in my earlier, more naïve days, and needed to relieve myself, when I came through the undergrowth I thought that I had found a field of garderobes. Though there was nobody there, I was cautious, and lowered the tide as quietly as I could. Unfortunately, the next day was some unannounced festival, and they all came and I watched from afar, trying to remember which of the holes I had stopped at the day before.

Once the children have chosen a hole they lower themselves into them, up to their midriffs; it is an odd sight, to see all these disembodied torsos scattered everywhere again. Some cold mornings, there is only a lone rider, and at others a whole brigade. But, regardless, the game is always the same. They *imagine* swift legs under them, as all children do, feign galloping, shout "hyaa" and "woah" and every command the steed of a heroine or hero would recognis

You may believe that such an exercise has no place in a bestiary, and I would agree, were it not for one curious thing that I seem to still be witnessing, after all this time. Sometimes, as they holler and thrash, the children seem to lose control of themselves, it is not quite a fit, but is almost as violent. It is as if something is bucking around below them, responding to the kick of their heels and the slap of their palm. Indeed, some of them will hit down into the mud, covering themselves from head to toe, until the bucking ceases, and they sit, their shoulders heaving even from a distance. Such violence should be beyond such abdomens.

One night I made my way to the field, and dipped my hands into one of these holes. Nothing bit me, as I was expecting, but as I reached further and further, to my armpits, I closed around a little nub of something, surrounded by a concatenate jelly. I drew it up, and was dismayed, is this all the bog pony is, a culture of mold and filthy water?

But, still, the children come back, again and again, and leave again with caked legs and wide grins. They are the only townspeople who smile.

Where do they go, on their chargers?

Friend will not talk to me about the practice, her days in the saddle are long fini

Until today I had been attempting to give a name to everybody in the town of Loss. Their reticence to do so themselves has completely infuriated me, I would stand and watch four generations of the same family fumble over their words, unsure at any one time of who was speaking to whom. They barely knew each other, could not refer to each other unless they could point with a simian finger. There is, of course, no cultural utility in this, their millpond community has merely seen no reason, apparently, to give things identities.

Flitting creatures, trees, boulders worn into accidental idols, each of the distinct mountains that ring their entire lives, all day, all night, the directions of the compass, the compass itself, me, nothing is labelled.

At first I found this idiosyncratic, laudable, even, but now I am tired of having to climb into the escarpments, just so that one of my interviewees can point out a particular *shrub*, vital to their story, in person. Names are vital to civilisation, without them, life becomes a haunting of itself, a phlegmatic bump against shrouded forms of things barely known.

I was conflicted when I first began to invent my own. I started with the mountains, slowly building up the range. I knew that they spoke mongrel English (1), and so began with English words that might serve to awe them, Mount Sunglory. Mount Beetcat. Mount Everglade (my favourite word in the entire, hopeless language). I grew in confidence, and went on and on, through to the trees, the subjects of my burgeoning bestiary and then the god-work, the parts of men and women. At times I became glutted with names, up to the hilt, and could not make any more. The first day of cosmiconomics, of naming the townfolk themselves, was an especially awkward one, what would I call each of them? I wanted to become their friends, draw on their inner selves, and give them a nobility, like those who sheltered me in Avalon. I remember the liquor that they had passed through my tubes, and the hundred names that they had gifted me, like a volley of arrows sticking in my back.

Unfortunately, the surliness of the Lossians meant that, for the most part, I was none the wiser about who they really were, under those smocks and nepotistic brows, and so I had to console myself with something more superfluous.



(1) It has a quality of the monobrow about it, a slow chewing of words, as if they are better kept inside the mouth, and made as tough as mutton, than used for anything as daring as poetry or speeches or the shout of fucking. I wish that I could capture it, the Cambium will not deposit their voices, and every time I try I receive only a reedy, sibilant guffaw.

Mr. Lights became Mr. Lights, on account of his hilarious, larval genitalia, more like those of a robin than a man. Friend remained, since that day she emerged from under her father's cloak, Friend. Slowly I began to build an etymology, which would bore most etymologists; were they to dig for its origins, they would be far too easily satisfied.

But, from today, I will stop. No more names. All of those that I have not named yet will remain essentially incorporeal. Today, Lantern, who I named for the avertail of bone-white hair that fell to her scapula, lost her baby.

Nobody approached me, or thought to tell me. The day was hot, as all days are here, and there was a zoo of insects in the air, thick enough that they tickled against me as I walked through them. Friend had gone out on her own, she does not like Lantern, for some boxed, feminine reason, and had become angry at the amount of attention the other girl had been receiving. I had decided instead to spend the day owing the children with my Work so far. None of them could read, but the size of the binding impressed them, and when I held up the cover and swung it open to show no room behind it, their eyes grew glassy and their murmurs hissing. There had been an illness swept amongst them recently, one that caused a small degree of gurning, the lower jaw hardening and loosening like a flag in a breeze, and a bad back. It seems to cause them only small discomfort.

I only knew something was wrong when there came another buzzing, the panic of the various points of reference I have for Lantern's life, her father, her mother, her four brothers, the ermine, constantly-snorting Maervilles who was reputed to be the father, went whispering back and forth behind me, upsetting the other villagers in their quotidiants. They kept disappearing out into the marky woods, though they carried no tools apart from their own hands, wringing, wringing. And then I heard a roar, a jagged, flinty roar, pickaxed from the lining of the stomach. I knew what was happening, then, I imagine, as I tore a page from my Work (2), let the cover timber and boom into the dust, and ran.

(2) Named for his Calibanic tendency to be constantly fascinated by the land around him, as if every tree were different and every cave a wellmouth.

(3) If only I had not dropped the *Herbiary* on the road, on my long, spiralling way into Loss! If only my back had been a little stronger! I could have saved her with some *creamhove*, as I did Miranda, on the beach, not so long ago.

I had not even thought about the desecration I had caused to my own Work, around pregnant women, one must always be ready with dykes against the flood.

Lantern lay a little way past the edge of the forest, against a fallen *pinae pervertae*, I could see that it dug viciously into her back like an unwelcome gland. We were, as always, far from any water, though I knew from her recent peregrinations that she was becoming less and less afraid of the river, child-growing had addled something in her brain, and she bathed in it, only up to her tummy, soothing the scoop(4) taken from her. None of them knew about this, except me, and so I merely watched her mother dip her rasping hands into the smooth, goreless basin of her belly. She was trying to calm her daughter, like all old women, everywhere, while Lantern grimaced up at her, her eyes crossed with the effort of not letting her child die. It was not working. Her father and brothers trotted back and forth like flies, looking up into the canopy with that peculiar Lossian awkwardness at seeing their own blood's genitals. It would be hard to guess what was to come.

This is not the day, with the lows of mourning all around me, to discuss biology or anthropology, and so I will try to be brief. Her condition fascinated me, and despite Friend's protests I could not keep away. All the other symbols of pregnancy were present, the linea nigra running from sex to sternum, the swelling in her breasts, and the staining of the nipples, and I had seen her out screaming in the beet fields, looking for something else to fulfil a craving that she did not understand. But that empty belly!

(4) Whenever I saw her, the sole pregnancy of all my time in Loss, I could never accept what my eyes saw. I often imagined that it was the glass between them and the world, that there was some smut clouding the lenses; but no, her stomach was still gone, no matter how I tilted or bobbed. The women of Loss do not bear children, as others do, as they come closer and closer to term their stomach shrinks, and concaves, from the bottom of their ribs down to their pubis. Thus disappear their womb, uterus, intestines, fallopian machinery, stomach, gall bladder, pancreas, diaphragm, and everything else, leaving only a missing oval, covered by taught, velvety flesh. What happens to the child, where it is grown, I do not know; Lantern was the key to all of that. But I think I might know now who she was visiting, every time she climbed up into the hills and caves, the landscape of Loss' legendarium, and came back cut and bruised. Maybe she climbed to find it, to ask it what it would grow to be, and did not like the answer.

At first, when she began to show, I thought that she was being starved, but she ate like a dog, and grew fiercer and fiercer, more impatient with her family and the others around her, more warlike, savage and lonesome, disappearing for days upon days. Her father whined like another dog, a smaller one, neglecting his duties as a forester,(5) while her mother carried on preparing meals, and dreaming of when Lantern herself was unborn and lost, and she went out to claim her. In Loss, as everywhere, I suppose, only the mother goes, cunning and deadly, up into her own mountains, to do battle with a hideous creature that will emerge as her baby, covered in the blood of their battle.

If this is not their mythology, it should be, and I would gladly give it to them.

In the mornings, the depths of her belly were in shadow, and the button formed a drain at the very bottom. I must not let her mother read this,(6) but she once lay out in the mud, letting the rain fill it like a sink, and laughing all the time. It was tight and shot through with youthful muscle before she had led Maervilles, as if on a string, to some solitary place and let him make a wetness. I do wonder how these primitives handle sex, whether they are as horrified by the seed burbling from their brooks as they are by the larger one that feeds the valley. I have seen no interest amongst them for anything illicit, there is no stealing away from the firelight, no hairless hands up skirts, no anything. It robs me of anything of my own. To be on the Zomia again, wandering past couplings of tribesmen on the steppe as bold as brass, the only things moving for a thousand Kilometres!

I do not know what has happened to spoil the child. I knew that she was near term, by my own calculations, and it could be any number of things that interrupted everything, her people's refusal to use water, even to sanitise a birth; Maervilles beating her when drunk on beet ferment, though I doubt that he would have the wildness to try, her own monomythic exertions, climbing up into the ravines, or perhaps an infection, vaginal or anal or perhaps that same inconsequential fever that the children have contracted in their play. Something pathetic and easily preventable, no doubt, has killed this child, and may yet kill Lantern, in the coming days.

Stupidity is the morality of evolution, and I saw it at work today, in the filthy, bolt-flecked hands of Lantern's mother, and the doltish specimens that peered between the trees, picking at their scalps.

(5) He has always been lazy, though.

(6) Not that she could.

I wonder if they have a god or goddess of stupidity, like Koalemos or MurtiMorti or Snap-In-Rags, its statue neglected and abused with the others, high in the mountain passes?

It is such a loss, even in Loss, for this little thing to pass on invisible. It would have been the first baby born in Loss since Rumb, the littlest of the littlest when I arrived. It would have emerged, and unlocked a whole suite of rituals and traditions that only a new life can unlock. I would have stayed to see it grow, making myself peripheral at all the ceremonies and festivities that would have to be thrown in its honour, I would have grown old here, cataloguing its life.

I would have given it a good name, even if its mother refused to use it.

Before long she began cramping, curling over like a shrimp with every phantom kick, grunting and slapping away her mother's hands. She called out half-slurs, not quite connecting the syllables, I do not know if this was because of the pain or this people's dissolution of proper English. I have to admit, I almost snorted with laughter, their social awkwardness,(7) even within family units, and their refusal to name each other, comes into such pale relief at times like this. There is no shushing, or cooing, or kind words, everybody looks thoroughly embarrassed at the proceedings, and even Lantern's mother wore only a frown as she tried to scry for the baby. Lantern herself began to gnash her teeth, and tears slipped from her eyes without her ever truly weeping, she began to windmill her arms, her muscles hidden under the coat of fat she had grown for this new arrival, that would be cold when it appeared. The men moved back, completely lost.

And then the blood came, all at once, without a noise, as nobody poured it in into her from nowhere, it welled up, and it was only then that she allowed two tears, in tandem, to burn across her temple.

(7) See my further thoughts in "The Roasting Dance".

Her forehead was furrowed in pain, her teeth bucked, her tongue trying to bifurcate itself, and I watched the pain transmit into a wave of frowns across the forehead of their family, the only indication that something awful was taking place. She blared once, not like an oxen.

I was having trouble breathing, I remember, and I fingered my tubes, looking for the blockage, and I tried to calm myself by *imagining* the child; far from these awful sounds. Perhaps it has made a nest for itself in the bole of a tree, or under a tor up in the highlands, or is bobbing on the foamy calms of the river, further upstream. This child was hypothetical, as I still could not fully believe this biology, this empty belly, and *imagined* birth. Perhaps this whole exercise is a cautionary tale for me, an improvised tragedy with an unconvincing chorus, or a demonstration of some myth that I am missing.

Lantern clenched her fists at her sides. Her father came forward to begin scooping it away, but she kicked him aside with a look that spoke of past molestations, the rising blood swirling and spiced like aerated brandy. She clawed her hands into hooks for towels, but did not bellow for them, as any other woman would do, a people who hate water have no need for towels. Her sides were working now, her ribs spooking against her skin, and her feet kicked into the dirt, raising glowing clouds around her, netted with sunlight.

It was at that point that I remembered that I had ripped a page from my Work for her, and as I handed it to her, taking care to keep out of the orbit of her stamping legs, and she began to rip it into long strips to dab at herself. I watched the words becoming bandages of nonsense, and realised that what I had given her was a piece that I had written about her, crouched watching her in a bush of sage when she was still in her first trimester. She had been lithe with a new courage, ranging into the river like an amphibian socket, searching for a ball.

Of course, she could not read, and she barely noticed the marks upon the paper as she made a papier mache around her own rim, glowering at all of us, snarling at us to move back even as she cried. I *imagine* that she was apoplectic at herself for letting this happen, even if she did not understand it completely. What is interesting is that she never asked any of us to leave. She let us watch her slosh around, kick, pile dry leaves and my great Works and anything that she could find into herself. Soon there were volcanic islands of clot that rose in the mire, which she plucked out and flung into the underbrush.

We only knew that it was over when she turned onto her side and let the last of the ichor drain off. On her back were those same marks, the saddle-shaped bruise that I had seen on the children, and I almost fell upon Maervilles, who would not look at her any longer, and had retreated to lean against a tree and pick for sap. I found it unimaginable that she would allow anybody to hit her, but there it was. Perhaps the pulping had muddled the child like fruit.

With the last drops of blood to the needles underfoot, Lantern scrunched everything up, from chin to hairline, and turned a shade of purple that I had only seen in war before.

She had failed in her quest, or perhaps she had won, perhaps the child was her nemesis, a Smug of coal and amniote, and she had sought all along to slay it. Whichever it is, the unseen battle had ended, and the carrion was drained, and the heroine began to tend to her wounds.

I later heard Mr. Lights speaking to Lantern's mother, he said that he would see to the child, if they ever found the body. Even now, a group of women are binding their ashen faces with scarves, to go out into the dark, pathless night to try and find the stillborn's hiding place. If Lantern knows where it is laired, she will not tell, she does not need a trophy. Not one other can share it, not even Maervilles. I can *imagine* now, at the close of the day, as she cries herself to sleep, the first stirrings of her stomach, as it starts to rise like a loaf back into everyday flatness.



The Widsith Institute

THE WIDSITH INSTITUTE

IAM ADVEHO VERUM, DEUS, VERUM, ADVEHO IAM

LOST TESTA PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

THE UNDERWEATHER VANITY

SHARD: THE WORST COOK M12

TRANSCRIBER: \\\Clerk/// Chester-Stokes

TRANSCRIPT INCIPIT

The fifth of June, 11,273 BC, a time when I kept records more assiduously, was the first night that I stayed in Loftenroost. I was wet and stained blue from the flight, and I took the offer of a hot meal graciously. The bird-folk had given me a roost right under the lintel, looking out over the sea, and I had been asked, as their guest, to watch for leopard seals while the broth thickened. The Loftenroost was a polyandrous civilisation in those days, and the male birds spent most of the night squabbling below the brahminësque females, who sat, grey and sleek, up in the rafters, inventing the sciences and language and everything that their people would need on their path to evolution. The males were too lazy to climb, and contented themselves with preening their oil-slick plumage, and smoking cheroots over the pot. I still smell it, even now; the zest of astringent smoke in my tubes, corking the rankness of their stew. The herb that they preferred was poulticed and crystalline, something that I found in the lining of the Herbiary, and all of them took my gifts with greed. Within an hour they had developed a sophisticated incensual culture, and those who smoked the most had already deposited a white cak, like false snow, at the ends of their beaks.

The Loftenroost was an insular civilisation, raised far above the waves due to their evolutionary fear of the sea (1). Not many ingredients washed up against that cliff, but their fare was important to their hardy little religion. When I conducted a Geertz Inventory, I was surprised at the proliferation of ritual objects built from tidewrack. All of their gods and goddesses gain their likenesses from the random carbuncles and weatherings in the driftwood and flotsam; their most revered deity, a spirit of double aspect which points to some theological schism, is formed from the gnawed carcass of a far-off child's toy. I think that at least some of the men believed me a goddess myself, washed in on the wind and the tide, and they honoured me with the first spoonful of dinner.

[[Illustrations relating to flight, food, sex and the development of a naval mythology.]]

It was then I met the Bathetic, stalking up to me so sullenly with his mother's beak in his rear end, to offer me a taste of broth. He did not understand the gesticulations to my tubes, or realise that I could not, must not, remove my mask to feed, or

(1) Many of its inhabitants were flightless from birth; whilst I was there, two young fell to their death on the rocks, heady on my weed.

or recognise the attempt at ritual symbology to let him know that no, I am not a man of honour. I am dangerous. Do not break the seal. He merely took a long draw on his cheroot and shrugged, before his genius mother grabbed his wing and poured the ladle down the right tube; she was obviously adept at regurgitation. If she had been more stupid, she might have drowned me. How gawkish he looked then, how gangly with the compost of youth! So much better than when I next saw him, though his mood had not improved.

Until I came to Loss, that mouthful of stew was the worst meal that I had ever eaten.

Today is my 96th day in Loss, and Friend took me by the hand down to the Mother Kilns, to cook me a picnic. Though I have not known her long, I was pessimistic as to the quality of her craft; apart from the beetroot fields, I have seen no evidence of cultivation, husbandry, bushcraft or hunter-gathering in this place. These things must be established, like a sum, before a cuisine can possibly be calculated. Indeed, I have only ever been served beetroot here, in every form that I could imagine, and some I still cannot. I have begun to long for the spare, mean meals aboard the Sorgo, and have even seen scrapings of Ship's Biscuit dancing in front of me, trailing sugardust, when I am trying to sleep.

But I cannot deny that I like her, and spending time amongst her primitive dismissiveness. She has never seems to care about my appearance, or how I walk, or the various cries and rustles my body makes, or my wisdom; she is very hard to impress, for a rube. She reminds me of Jenny, and that is no dreadful thing.

As we walked through the sandy soil to the NNNWWWW, stepping around the fallen tree that the stronger villagers are inching closer to the water, summoning up the courage to make a bridge, she gabbles incessantly about her home, lambasting and proto-cursing while her lip coruscates at the scar across it.

(2) The Catafalque Yard, with its hideous Pantagruels arching out over the lychgate, requires a longer treatment. I am astounded that a people of such small art could produce such impressive sculpture; the quality is comparable to Michaelangelo, and the proportions far more Egyptian.

I was content just to watch her, sometimes, as she told me about some history or legend or other. It was less often that she would listen to me, about my other Works, and how she will be immortalised, pressed like a flower, into this gigantic door, hammered with copper, that I drag around after me. Instead, she feigned boredom, and warbled on about how Urquous, the young man who is her immediate neighbour, was nearly battered to death by hailstones when he was only six. Without his name, it took her nearly ten minutes to describe him, before I realised who she was speaking of. What a name would do! Think what they could accomplish, in the time saved!

In fact, though I find her beautiful, in my broad, expansive tastes, the constant natter is becoming a little annoying. She is always trying to show me things, or take me to places, that I do not have any time to write. My Work grows no heavier. This is the first entry I have made in a week or more, and I only have the headspace now because I have convinced her to go outside the tent and keep watch for her father. He is spending more of his days in the Catafalque Yard, tending to the corpses, but he is bound to come looking, slopping a pail from the Juice Well, and hollering for her. (2)

[[Missing Section]]

AAAAAAA, he shouts. AAAAAAAAAA

Why don't you name your child, Mr. Lights? Then she might come when you called.

[[Missing Section]]

We started the day not far from one of the arterial springs which the aquaphobic Lossians avoid like a plague; we walked around its shining boundary with a light tread. We could still hear a hint of its hot SSSSSSSSS as we doubled back and turned and scuffed at our own tracks. I was exasperated at the agony of this progress; she is a bright girl, and I wonder why would she fall

prey to this ritual stupidity regarding paths?

It is as if she is scared that something is following her, from birth to death, which can be confounded by burying one's spoor.

Friend had brought a huge bundle of beetroots with her, and walked ahead with them trailing from her arms like shrunken heads, while on her own head she wore what I **imagined** was a wide-brimmed hat, inflexible and taupe. She told me as we went that she had been made to steal them, late at night when the fields were not being watched. The village girl that I have decided to call Lantern, on account of her white hair, has fallen pregnant, and all food stocks are jealously guarded by her kin. In fairness, she needs the nutrients; every day she wanders further afield, up into the mountains and the groves on some pilgrimage that only she and her foetus understand. When she returns she has a voracious appetite, but to me she never grows any larger; if anything, she is getting thinner.

We traversed a scree that had been formed by tumbling rocks from two warring, minor hills above, and it was then that I caught my first sight of the Mother Kilns. **NNNNNNN**No, that is not true; I had glimpsed them once before, on the day when it was announced that the local sport, called Passby or something similar(3) had come into season, and a match was about to begin. I am still waiting for that match, and for the sport to fulfil its true purpose; as a scattergraph of a people's fears, boredoms and sensibilities. But I still remember seeing a meal being prepared in celebration, cooked within titanic, shadowy forms billowing smoke under the trees.

[[A diagram of what one can assume to be a Mother Kiln; a gigantic oven in the shape of a leering Venus.]]

Disappointingly, they look smaller close up and lit by the sun. There were two of them there, in that scree, inexpertly carved from a pumice megalith into the effigies of squatting, tumescent Amazons. Giant women hacked from rock, all four of their nipples snipped off and greased by some prepubescent

exploration, and down where their nethers should be, between pillows of cracked, sooty thigh, is a metal tap. There are at least sixteen or eighteen of these kilns around the village, left far away from any structure and always in pairs, facing each other. A lazy fire is kept burning underneath them at all times, though nobody is ever seen to stoke them. When I asked Friend, I could not get a word in between her voice, jingling as it was like coins. As she yapped, she took the hat from her head, placed it as a bowl underneath one of the taps, and turned the handle.

A lurid fat, bright with a buttery glow, churned out of the tip. I looked up at the Kiln's carved face, while Friend's skinny, haired arms went to the tug. It was a serene mix of bitten tongue and sleepy post-coitus, or digestif. Friend filled the bowl from both Kilns, knocking off the long strings of fat with two taps, and set about mixing it with the dainty maul of her fist. It shone like a fish's head when she held it up to me, giggling.

I watched the look of happiness on her face, revelling in how dry the day was. **NNNNNN**No, she is not the most beautiful of women, nothing compared to the temple priestesses of some of the fitter cultures that I have visited, but she has this angry, frenetic *something*, my favourite word, *something something something*, which I want more than anything. From her stained teeth, each the colour and size of a baby grape, up to her dark eyes and limp, crackling hair, static at the slightest touch, and to the mole, I want her. The mole fascinates me precisely by its placement; right in the middle of the fleshiest part of the cheek. Moles are traditionally a sign of great beauty, a genetic bindi marking favour, like a cigarette burn from a god. In some places, parents pray for a favourable constellation on their child's skin, and in others women will only choose the most be-speckled for their husbands. Freckles are treated similarly, but with less gravitas; it is the planetary nature of the mole, singular and mighty black, which gives it its divinity. I am certainly not immune to this scarified horniness.

(3) I am always asking pardon! Everybody here mumbles into their chests, as if embarrassed by their own admissions!

[[A diagram of mole placement on a girl's cheek, of all the possible configurations, from France to England to Zheleznogorsk.]]

It is large and hairy, around the size of a Elysian obol, and she looks beautiful with it. I strike through the last paragraph. She is beautiful!

[[The last paragraph is not struck through.]]

Just as beautiful as all the others, I am sure of it! But then, I am not certain what the semaphores of traditional beauty are in Loss; perhaps Friend is just a runt, and they are hiding the truer Helens underground, like blonde grain stored for winter. Certainly, Lantern is more attractive by the definition of most; straight nose, clean teeth, smooth hair, just the right amount of asymmetry. But she will not even look at me, let alone talk at me. so enthralled is she by the birth-quest.

When visiting a new culture, a visitor must always share something. The giving of gifts is paramount, from both the visitor and the native, and if either break this contract dire curses are the only outcome. I have already given so much, but now Friend was cooking a meal for me. I reciprocated with a few herbs from the Seedgaol, some *cinnamon* and *burbage* and *wartdaly* and *mumilk*. She sniffed them and picked at the buds with hands that needed washing, and I do not think that any of them made their way into our meal.

As she began to chop and dice and splash and clatter about, trying to keep the fat loose in the embers, she told me about the recipes of her forebears, before the monoglut of *beetroot* upon *beetroot* upon *beetroot* arose; apparently there was once an abundance of crops grown, livestock reared, and seasonings and sauces and rouxs and a true cuisine, here, in Loss. Some of the braver ones even fished, from time to time. But things became sparser, the ground less rich, and the taste for *beetroot* became all-consuming, and of course she does not know why. Nobody has written any of this down, and even if they had, the heroes and heroines and villains would not have been given names; without them, every story would have slid into a grey glop, a mass of bodies rubbing past each other at different speeds, with no differentiation between them.

NNNNNNN Perhaps I am not even remembering this properly; it was many hours ago, and I was foal-like with hunger. I think that the meal that followed has hooked out a little of my brain, like an embalmer's finger, when it came up the wrong way. Friend was at times divergent, going off on tangents and stories and legends which had no bearing on what we were speaking of, and I have plucked three courses from those ergodics.

I stole these from her mental cookbook to feed my worst enemies and their children and the grandchildren of their children.(4)

The fat is implied, and is the base liquor, of every recipe. I am still not sure what they rendered to procure it.

The Nectar Cuff

A Lossian aperitif and accessory, worn only by the most prestigious of dignitaries; as far as Friend told it, the Mayor is the only living townsperson with his own, a very ancient example. I cannot help but feel that I myself should have been garlanded. Kanaloa would have given me one; I could barely walk for flowers around my neck when I first stepped onto his white sand.

There is a fruit which was nearly eradicated by the inbreeding of the Lossian diet, but can still be found in the more foetid corners of the valley. It is vastly shrunken, to hear it told, from its previous ripeness; still, they are apparently as wide across as a span of arms,(5) and when they are picked, destoned and sliced into rings, these rings form a sort of ruff which can be worn as decoration.

The fruit oozes juice without maceration, and in the past was the Lossian's main source of liquid, which is unsurprising given their hatred of water. I can only imagine the status

(4) The names are my own attempts.

(5) The fruit reportedly has a lurid green flesh, and hang so high in its trees, themselves bullied to the borders by these parasitic *pinae*, that a passerby can be killed when they become windfall.

of the wearers as great men and women, almost shamans, sucking on their heirlooms in which the juice has fermented into hooch.

I probed Friend tentatively about this practice, and about its origins. I hate to assume, but it is not unfeasible that Praester did make it here, and that on arrival he may still have worn his ruff, drowned and ripped; greater creatures than the Lossians have pilfered their culture from elsewhere. I wish that I had more of his Work, and the six fragments in my dunnage do not point to any end other than death somewhere at sea.

But I came here, under the sextant of his verse.

Is it so impossible that he came too, and left a relic of himself around the necks of Loss' royalty?

No, she says. I am the first.

But she is very young. The knowledge may be forbidden from her, and though it pains me, yet again, I must always assume a patriarchy, in a place as primitive as this.

The cuff is often sucked at celebrations, births and deaths, she says, or nibbled to stave off hunger and boredom, and additionally has an antibiotic effect, what Friend calls "the goods".

Lady Balls

From Friend's own mouth, transcribed and interpreted, as I worried about her fingers under the knife:

- 10 **tomb apples**, chopped;
- 80,000 **beet**, reduced;
- 15 squeezenuts, powdered;
- 15 slaughtered scatterbirds, or 1 abbot breast (hunted and diced);
- Gifted **herbs**;
- A quantity of cave salt;
- Eight thigh's worth of good, clean fat, reduced to silkiness (own or from a lover's middle).

Breast fat, especially from sad (6) girls, is apparently the best; a three month diet of ancestor's liver and random flowers will produce the silkiest lipid. The scatterbird dicings should be (6) How to make them sad is lacking from her repertoire.

boiled for three months to reduce to a golden syrup.

Fry the tomb apples, beetroot, and squeezenuts, and mix every ingredient into balls, which should be left to set and turn white again.

Friend did not know when in the year they were served; the dish reeks of ceremony, or supplications for spirits, but that knowledge has been lost too, it seems.

Syzygy Pie

A summer dish, prepared the previous winter.

For The Pastry

- As little water as possible;
- A quantity of cave salt;
- Male butter;
- Grist(?) flour.

For The Filling

- Any beast or bird, flying, swimming or crawling, cloven or not, hoofed or tetrapod, still living and sequestered in their own sweat;
- **Beets**, dried and grated;
- More salt.

Mix the pastry and spread, as a base, from the E to W and S and N, up the treeline and from one end of the valley to the other. Make plenty of holes above every dwelling. Crimps can be stomped out by every family. The filling should be caged together, and allowed to maim and eat every other filling in the proper way such things happen. Water every three days, and rub with **beets** and salt every six days. The temperature will be high enough after two months, and the meat ready to eat after four months. Allow plenty of sunlight back in, and divide the filling, and a roof of pastry, between every diner.(7)

After all this wonder, these parables of disgusting, ogrish meals once dreamed, what I was presented with were **beetroots** fried in lard. A meal that I have eaten around ninety times, since I came here, and a poor gift.

(7)There was apparently, once, a glacier that would store any leftovers for at least a century.

I had half a mind to take back what I have given her. Of course, I vomited, as I have every time, and of course she could not tell; she just smiled lopsidedly, and took the groans beneath my mask to be sighs of pleasure.

We ate without cutlery, with our hands, which is the local custom. As always I felt a little affronted; my fingers came away sticky, and I was one with the base fuel, reminded of my needs as a beast. Elsewhere I have been offered lemonwater to wash my fingers after a meal, but here they cram the food into their mouths without pleasure, disgust or reverence. Now, what was it that Parlay said? I am too comfortable to rise and go climbing about my luggage to find the book.

"Cutlery is a psychopomp,"

or something like that. It provides an intermediary between the more-mortal (the food, about to be swallowed) and the less-mortal (the diner, safe for the moment, the great swallower). Here, the base and elevated intermingle, and the grease glistens on the chin.

An essay, here. One day, when she is a little braver, I will show her fork, and ask her what she thinks represents the basic human procedure.

[[The script became larger here, more panicked, and urgent. He was being watched.]]

I think that I flattered her, when we sat to eat, and she must have thought that I was happy, because she agreed to come with me, against her father's wishes, to my encampment outside the village gates. She had been amongst my dunnage before, but never with me to guide her. As we walked through them I explained to her what was stored in each, and lied about how to open them. She ran her hands over the leather, watching the sun set between them, like a henge.

A perfect day, all told.

[[A lacunae.]]

Now this dreadful cook, the worst cook, has grown bored of holding vigil, and wants to crawl in next to me. She is watching me write, thinking that great thoughts are circulating around my cavernous skull. I remember now that I said that I would give her a lesson in what the stars mean, what Praester thought of them, and now she has climbed inside to see them. She is looking at me, right at this moment, over the top of the page, watching my mask for my intelligence, wiping at my tubes with my hanky, but I have far too much to do, and I will

[[The sentence ends without ever being finished, and the page was smudged with purple fingerprints.]]

TRANSCRIPT DESINIT

It was three days ago that I heard
whispers that there would be music. As
they say, I am sorry; I have not written.
Nothing has happened. There is still no
rain.

Until now I have seen absolutely no
evidence of luthiery, copses bred for bow
wood, diatonics, or even a decent singing
voice amongst the lot of them, but the
rumour has provoked the slightest ripple
of humanity amongst the townspeople;
the children are excited, and even the
elder ones are seen to be smiling,
revealing their balsamic teeth. A
banquet, then. A division of the rubes
into **rubric** and rubbed. The players and
the played. In Loss, this is a
particularly exciting superstition, as it
points to the existence, in this godless
society, of rites, the pollen deposited by
deities as they dart from people to
people.

So, I would be here for the germination.

I am not ashamed to admit that I
thought, quite rightly, that the ceremony
would be in my honour. I was the only
thing to change, from not-there to there,
in what I can glean of their people's
history for an awfully long time, and so
it would still be positively necessary to
think of myself as the anthropological
contaminant here. At first I was
appalled, that my landing here could
make such a crater in their social
consciousness, but I have since come to
terms with my responsibility. If they are
choosing to make their first songs, and
tauten their first guts, to my coming,
then I must make myself as elegant as
possible. Indeed, some of them now pass
me in the town with a wider berth, a
hush in their simpleton English as they
go.

Luckily, when the bulbs opened, and
they began to fritter out into the
woods, bound for a meadow which I
never knew existed, I already had
my Work and my inks with me;
I was engaged in a battle with
myself, trying to find a logic to

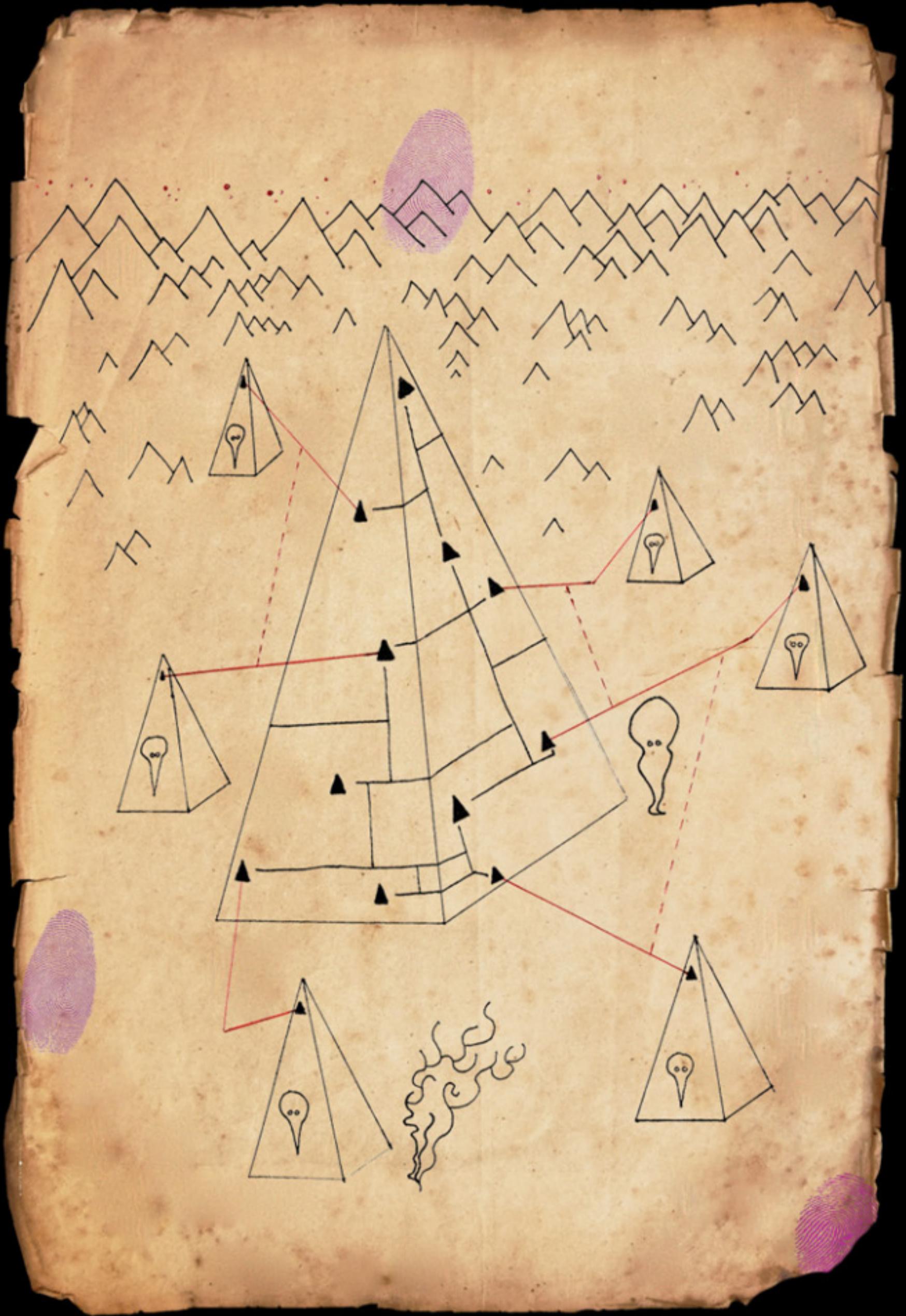
their fractal, lonely housing; I was
ranging about their perimeters,
mapping the prism of the main
trunk, the pipes that link each
"hearth-pyramid" (my own term) to
each cell, and the lack of any
comfort inside, just the room to
crouch down on one's knees, with no
space for a partner, one or two. I
started at Friend's cell, looking for
any sign of personality, a stolen
bouquet of flowers to lend the
mysterious stone some flirtation, or
even the scratches of nails.

I saw three of them slipping off, three
who have not yet deserved names,
trying not to attract my attention,
but I snuck after them, dragging my
Work after, making a path which, I
hope, some day their descendants will
follow to their first holy grove.



[1] No wonder Friend was as terrified as
I was that day, to lie down in the grass
as we waited for the Weevil Hunt to begin.

[2] Addendum: I have been back, have
not puzzled my way inside (there is no
door) but the slit that allows the light in
shows me that there is nothing; she is
content with the microwaves of the
universe, dancing in front of her eyes.



The grove's edge is full of townspeople,
the trees on the townward side are
thin, sheltering awkward potlucks of
families, hiding from the sun. I can
hear the river, and if I can hear, then
they certainly can; perhaps this is why
they are so nervous. I have deposited
myself in the royal green shadows, as
far back as I could, and opened my
Work. I am ready to survey my own
deification, a little awkwardly, but
completely, as I would for any
beam-raising, circumcision or
pontification. Though I am the prince to
be honoured, a coronation is a
coronation.

The Mayor is sitting not far off,
intently watching the dense district of
spindly pinee across the meadow. His
fat little son is sat behind him, and as
I watch them the man strokes the
trunk, his chubby hands coming away
argent with sap, and the boy licks his
fingers clean. Is this the birth of a
festive treat, a new Eucharist or
carnival cake, only to be consumed on
my holy day? Is it being invented, right
before me, now, a fumbling for some
significant manna? Is it poisonous? Will
it send the boy green?

NNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN
Now, here he comes! Out from the forest before us comes Wicker. One of the first amongst them that I named, a tall man, perpetually naked but cloaked in soot and his own charred flesh. Only his eyes, always pendulous with tears, never tracking, keep their colour, a dead blue, from what I can remember. He reeks of parboiling, and I had thought that all the others hated him; they scowl at him whenever he passes, and whenever he stops to sleep, [3] they conduct the first ritual I ever saw here, they would stand far off and spit, a ~~perfect~~ ~~black~~ ~~black~~

Every morning he steps over the boundary, and carries on his way, begging for clothes, shell-shocked by his now-distant immolation. [4] None of them give him a cloak, or a shift, or dye him something new; he is left naked as the day he was burnt. [5]



[3] He does not have his own cell; perhaps it burnt with him.

[4] Teach yourself New French, and see *Le Violence et le Sacre*, by René Girard.

[5] I now paraphrase myself; I have not yet seen them spark a fire. Perhaps Nicker's wounds have something to do with this.

NNNNNNNNNNNN Now, however, he emerges from the forest, and all mouths are at rest. Not one of them spoils the silence with a jeer. He creeps, on scarlet treads, leaving soles behind him the grass, gummy with gravied blood. I can see him wince, and even the winces hurt him. I imagine that I should go to him, and offer him some of my Greek balm, but it is deep in some unknown case, back in my camp, and I would not presume to interfere in the somatics of this cult.

There, under the other leaves, cloistered from everybody even in this loose bath of creatures, is Mr. Lights. He is the only one who notices me, and I see an undulation move along him, a blanching of the fists, a gritting of the teeth, but he does not come. He has been livid with me ever since I took Friend back to my tent, that time, when she had cooked that foetid meal. Even in this festival, I have no desire to be the Great Tempter; I did not deflower his daughter. I am sure he wants to ascertain that himself, with his own prying, but I doubt that she will permit him.

In the face of his ignorant sullenness I am making myself ornamental, a tiered shrine where only the hand moves on the page. The role suits me, sequestered in the dappled light, overgrown with shadow. I will mark the rituals as they come to me, as the players come, as the singers warble. I have checked myself for rips and tears, and have filled myself with chestnuts, new and untarnished.

Everything is quite perfect for a sunny day, my hundredth day here,(6) full of organology. I can just imagine it, a whole new phylum of instruments, catalogued, freed of any caught gullyfluff of tradition, and all named for my own quickness.

(6) They have quite forgotten, or muddled their calculations.



coming this way
coming this way
no talk to his friend
awkward loitering HNAA studied -
accidental theatre Anand Adalay-LH IIII
parents are moving
coming this way imperceptibly closer to their children, who look nervous and tapping out a beat that I am not privileged to chorus of belching - an artefact of our previous meal. Blank stares, purple mouths, stuffing mechanically - no decoration or taste - we drank beetroot juice - cordially ruby and weak, barely fermented

children scared of Wicker, who is roaming back and forth - I left jewellery for them, by the gates, rattle rattle rattle - he backs off.

brought my Semestress - left it sequestered for so long in the dunnage - now nobody wants it - nobody turns and listens to the notes

A clicking of jaws around me, as pilfered beetroots from the tables are chomped - mineral deficiency? Congenital defects? I asked Friend once to let me check her thighs - permitted me, giggled, none extant rustling in the trees - a drawing aside of blinds - smell of ichor - purple boxes - purple shrouds, vast tarpaulin - punched through with eyeholes - as tall as RaRa's palaces - beneath each an instrument. He is absent-minded, now - looking for his lost clothes in the trees - they are growing angry with him.

At least as pathetic as Ring-in-Opo, where twin prows of muscle in his smock - his hand shows its complexity as he flexes it. The first is unfurled - ten men and women run from the trees and pull, and then a young boy - 15 16 17 - not named - his face tectonic with hair, venting here and there in tufts off comes the tarpaulin, the boy goes to it - a huge, upturned leg, shapely as Berenice's, a monopod shading itself in this sun - no, not a woman, there is chitin in it. He raps it for blockages, and it knocks like hollow bamboo, no lacquer on it.

It is +14 of a man! - a weird far larger than any I have seen for another Valley Glaciers

P.A.R. They are having trouble with tarpaulin on the second - it is stuck on something beneath

He closes his fingers about the driven holes across its surface, twisting with a speed like a hyper-divination.

Wicker guides them, snapping along the lines of oxygen. He is absent-minded, now - looking for his lost clothes in the trees - they are growing angry with him. Forced to imagine music - too slow - can only think in steeplechase cacophonies, the instruments tripping over each other to race to finish.

T O C H A N Everything is slowing down. Where is the metre and key?

R Three men pulling it back across a swaddled table, revealing the pine

Very carefully, she flicks it - I bad NOTE
ringing, not beautiful on its string but forward
with Potential

A fat older woman approaches
the Timorphone - matronly,
efficient with beetroot, a dint of

They have fidget about herself where her
half beauty asps once gathered

Avoids the swing of
Wicker's arm, an
attempt at intimacy she
finds incredible
The cluck's her tongue -
then supplicating hands -
then after foot forward

Their bodies betray them -

Tapping of the feet between music and wider
culture - why do they even bother, with
this - few social rituals, if any - nobody
will look at me - The this really all for
me?

The cambium won't take a frequency -
all I get is a high-pitched whine, a
residue that I cannot shift from my tubes

Tiny boy, no older than six,
climbing through the wires -
catching certain strings on his
toenails, others on his molars

There is something deep at the centre,
past the wire - he is potholing his way
there

A group of boys has grown bored with
the interminable tuning, and have
begun to sharpen sticks and cut
themselves - perhaps they saw the
girls open, as if by magic - Lantern -
looking for monsters



C
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A NOTE
A clatter of metal,
apocalyptically loud, somewhere to
the EEW - they all ignore it -
their hidden cutlery - the Turkey
Dragon?
The Town Cryer involves
themselves - a held note,
which all the musicians prick
their ears to and repeat, over
and over The instruments are old, unused
- completely out of tune - the
sound is horrific
Wicker pelvises the notes with his hands,
where have they been hiding them?
They scurry from hole to hole, following the breeze
scale the arpeggio is wrong

A flock of scatterings flew across
from the NNE

What about the water permitted? Is that

The Town Cryer more insistent, frustrated -
sound sends the shallowest ripple through the
grass

All my hunts for him or her or it on the
catalogued elsewhere - went as high as my
mask would allow.

More frustration

Gries of rage from
the mountaintop

Wicker begins to cry at his wounds

The crowd rise to their feet

The highest pitches

AAAAAAAANNNNNNNNN

Another tarpaulin removed - an open cube of
Pinacae trunks, strung through in a web of gut
- which livestock made these miles of matrix?
There is no scale

I am still installed here, consecrated and then abandoned. It is hours later, as the sun finishes to fall, and I think that I am ready to write again. I sat and watched every one of them melt off into the woods, stalking off in every direction. Some of them rang with anger as they went, still others rubbed at their arms and sighed as the chill fell. The Town Cryer's last call was a reedy gasp, barely intelligent above the wind, as the players, if they could be called that, fumbled with their tablature, and then fell back, defeated by memory. They had forgotten how to play, or perhaps had never known how.

The tarpaulins were hurriedly dragged back, and the instruments were pushed back into the woods, the furrows they left now catching the bald, swarthy light on their peaks. The sap is still viscous on the tree where the Mayor sat, and the wind is moving in, made meek by the dicing the trees have dealt it. I feel like I am back in Parson's Shaw, and the boys that I met there have just boiled off to take up their hiding places, leaving me to chase them; they were an excellent triptych of summers. Of course, there is none of that potential, or hilarity, here. Something has gone terribly wrong, in the process of the ritual. If it was in my honour, which I find harder and harder to **imagine**, then maybe I am to blame. I should never have come here; I should have left them to it, let them praise me in peace. I could see, across their shorter-crust brows, the furrows of nervousness when they glanced my way into my shadows.

Let us **imagine** the hypothetical. Let us **imagine** that the ritual was not in my name. That it has been performed many times, without variance, in the way of such things. On the day that we finally kissed, Friend talked, vaguely, about the older times of Loss, when food was abundant and livestock truffle-hunted amongst the woodland boles. We may conclude, from her statements, that there was a true culture, then, one now dimly remembered.

What I am presented with today is something of a muscle memory, pomp and pageantry as nothing more than masturbation. Every ceremony is vestigial, a column holding no aqueduct, a bailey without a motte. The current incumbents of Loss' heritage, what little there ever was, have failed to keep the significance of their practices alive. The gestures are made, the sacred instruments are brought out of whatever storehouse entombed them down the years, the hoots are sounded, and the audience is gathered; but none there understand what it is they look upon. The hulking forms of the instruments, the percussion within them, is as alien to them as it is to me. Even the Town Cryer, which I have elsewhere designated a sacred mediator of the Lossian social system in the tradition of Baumgartner,[7] could not hold the note. What I witnessed here today was the purest and most fundamental snapping of a society's string since I watched the quarrying of Ys' dykes, the stone used by every citizen to build a statue of themselves.

I will spend the night here, harassed by the raw skankiness of this abominable wood,[8] and reflect on the abject failure of today, of everything. Perhaps a small story to cheer me, instead. A story about somebody who could sing, quite beautifully, and who knew how to honour me.

Her name was Berenice, and she lived in The Maiddan, the high palace in Diadem, a city where every cupola sparkled as a point in her own coronet. I had read the legends about her, before I made my flight to Diadem itself; that every night she washed her gorgeous hair, hair that hung down to her knees, and then lie back in her bed with it still wet and let the soap sparkle across the night sky, mopping at the Zodiac.

[7] See "Trumpets, Then Silence - An Essay", elsewhere.

[8] See "Up Amongst A Pervert's Limbs".

She had been a mopperwoman in her youth, before she became an empress, and washed the stars every night to remember from where she had come.

When I arrived I passed between the blue furnaces of The Crocodile Star and the Grandad Sun, the ceremonial gate to Diadem where supplicants must pass. A queue stretched up through the streets to her palace door, and over many years I waited my turn, and finally stepped inside.

She lay in her bed, surrounded by attendants, the windows to her balcony stood open, the curtains blowing, letting in brief glares of galaxy. She had been asleep for a very long time, since before I had arrived, a malaise that saw her thinner and harder every night, and I was called upon to try and wake her. On my Semestress I played her every sonnet and chanson I could remember, but nothing worked. I had heard in the queue-culture that the only way to wake her was to cut off her hair, but no matter how many times I sheared her it grew and grew back, each time longer than before.

I was at her side for nearly a year, before I grew tired of the parable. I scooped her up, before any of her dusty bannermen could stop me, and slipped over the balcony into the screaming, interplanetary evernight. Our fall back to Earth was cataclysmic; the crater is still there, I think. She landed on her chest, ripping open a gash that would never quite heal, and we both shimmered for weeks afterwards. Nevertheless, she woke.

I had never met anybody like her before; she was wild for me, quite unroyal, a scented animal who, when she was not twanging my rubber or polishing my head, sat back on her haunches and sang, a lilting timpanic that swirled around me like a numinous hydrogen...

When I finally made my first true tour of England, early in my career, I found it completely vaporous, unpoetic, and dead. I had read the fables, of course, the supposed histoyres by the bright thinkers of mostly every age, had studied the steeplechase tongue, and had even memorised the atlases that professed to chart where it could be found. I arrived in early summer, and by August could not wait to leave with the Bearded Portuguese nao which had hulked me there. Of course, I had not heard of Praester then, when I beached in Wapping he had already departed on the Cornish droll, bound for Scotland and round and around and around. Had I known, I might have chased him.

Instead I decided on a short walk, up to Carlisle, with as I trotted through London, I began what I now consider one of my weakest Works. I should have walked on without noting anything down, without making any pyrings, without a single squidge of red or green or black. I should have known that not every walk, in not every wood, can mean a thing.

The Plague Year became just a dreary encyclopaedia, I took no pleasure in my catalogue. What made such a Augean task necessary, however, and sustained me through its production, was the memory of two vignettes, glimpsed at precisely the same moment, one in each eye. Because of them, that particular London, in that particular summer, had to be imagined, no matter how little I cared for the vulpine, scrabbling thacae which lived there, and their protozoic stories of theft and opportunistic rape and doubly endless fires.

Let me remind myself my critics, reading now, then, later, when, of those vignettes.

Down the years, they have often accused me of macrophilia.

Oh,



Oink and chunder,

why do you have no pen for the inconsequential, and the personal, and the little?

Why can you only love the civic?

Why not tell the story of the peasants, of the ladies, of the mindless?

Even the story of a King would do, why only the lines of their halls, the angles of their ceilings, the views of their hills?

Why only architecture?

Now, I am far off from any such wittering or hindsight, I can make this stain.

Imagine the following hypothetical.

Imagine yourself walking through a temple. You see a mural. What is relieved there? Whatever colours the air or earth, I can predict exactly what you would see. The same, immutable processions of dreary bacchanals and perpetual hunts and courtships, trawled forth by a cast net of birch and ivy. You will know it so yawningly, and yet you will be compelled to coo at how meaty it all is. The boredom climbs up and up; if you were to look into the eaves, there would be the gods miniaturised, baublised into nothing. Watch them, joylessly clacking their ivory parts together, for the amusement of you, the hypothetical!

I am toothless with it. I have seen it all before, in each eye. I have imagined it in every configuration.

Now, imagine stepping back and gawping at the columns on which these quotidiens are preserved, and then back again, swinging your rump, out to the temple they support, the avenue, the district, the city, the island, the world. You can always imagine another, slight space behind yourself, from which to garner some perspective.

Architecture is all. Everything else is only mortals in heat.

NNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN

I digress, separately from my own digression, and it reminds me



What will I take?

What will I leave?

NNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN

I digress on a digression, digression!

PILE

This reminds me

London

I met a noblewoman who had stolen down from Islington to hang her tiny heir, upright by the chest, in the flow of the Thames. She had never even stolen things as a girl, but now she took a skiff's rope and his grandmother's scarves to bind him in place. Her husband had taken all the cord with him, when he left.

What she hoped was that one day, soon, despite never having done a washerwoman's day in her life, that the death would be soaked out of him.

She was very, very boring. took my leave, before she could ask me to go again, to see what remained of her son. I did her an absolute kindness by not telling her that we had still been alive when she brought him down in her sedan, and lashed him to a rotten mooring.

As I walked, I counted the yellow necks, like the spent skin of poultry, so soaked in lemon juice that they would never get rid of the smell, and evolution would become addled by the scent and pass it on to their children.

When the warships went out, they revealed beaches made of bones, pigs, dogs, horses, men and women all raffled together. There were never any skulls to be found.

Too many pulexic stories! All ground up into that grey cereal that hung about the streets that summer. I imagined that fresh air would do me good, and tried to rise above the clouds. Though I would be going north, ultimately, that day I instead climbed the hill south to Blackheath, to see the church there, to glut myself on its grandeur. I am sure the critics will be squealing now, in delight and bullying.

My route from the river took me up through Greenwich Forest, with its oaks and the Roman ruins left to the pigs rutting in their stylobates. But as I came out of the low leaves and the weeping galls, onto the heath itself and the church, each socket in my mask found a completely different architecture.

In the left, In the right,
a stack of dogs, a complex of birds
and pigs, taller and cows wider
than the than the
spire transept.

All dead, all legs a dessert pink.
All clubbed by ignorant rubes, believing
that they were to blame for the plague.
All collected here, from all across
London, and built as gates, onto the
world's yard.

A slurry of animals, all left to seep into
the soil at a rate intimately attached to
the rain, whenever it would come, that
summer.

I am glad that that particular London is
gone, now.

If I am a macrophile, then I am glad of
the designation. How can one compare a
drowned baby, tickling into coldness on the
Embankment grass, to these ziggurats? A
single dead man is nothing. There have
been millions and millions and millions.
There has only ever been one gate where
dogs, and cats and pigs and cows have
been the mortar. I was poleaxed by the
statement that day.

I have never been anywhere that
pork has been a myth, and have
seen thousands of animals killed,
mostly in my name, but now they
take on new footprints. Deeper.
Wider. More important.

I will not be ashamed of finding
beauty in the enormous. All those
tiny miseries, between which I have
been strung, have made me immune
to anything slighter. It took two
vernacular architectures to make
me weep, that day, and here in
Loss it took only one, tapping at
my window.

Loss

I should have known that this
would happen, eventually. I suppose
that I should be pleased that they
did not extinguish themselves before
I arrived here and captured what
little they have to catch. Perhaps
it was somebody's unique stupidity,
a pair of unwashed hands in the
wrong hole, an unnatural coupling
in the woods, a rotten tooth left
unpulled too long, a brace of
beetroot gone woody in the middle.
Whatever it is, something has come
amongst them.

It began amongst the children, some
months ago, with fevers and
stiffness. They became withdrawn,
complained of aching jaws, tender
backs, of collapsing to all fours
at all hours of the day, grizzling
to parents who did not listen. [2]
Most of them died within a week,
and their bodies disappeared into
the Catafalque Yard, whose
threshold I had never crossed in all
my time here, until yesterday. I
Knew that it was some sort of
cemetery, but had given it no name
out of respect, and hope, for what
few beliefs I thought that this
people might nurture.

NHAAL
W-1
HRP.

[2] See 'The Roasting Dance'

I had only ever seen Mr. Lights enter, by himself, and he still is the ferryman, pulling in corpses by elbow or the head, oddly squeamish for a gravedigger. At first it was the naked bodies of the children, dumped by their blank, abusive parents. I had heard them howl in the days before, and when they lay there I saw the wide, heavy bruises across their backs. They looked like the sores a saddle leaves behind.

Card up to maths - pale brows
Even then, with 'the knowledge' that these rubes had tried to thump the sickness out of their dying children, I felt very little. Another plague, and a subdivision of cruelties.

I could smell their hair burning, every time I removed my mask; Mr. Lights seems to have been cut to fit his new purpose as incinerator, as if he had been making fire all his life,^[3] and I imagine that even now he is authoring new rites behind the high walls of the Yard. Parlay would be pleased; the people of Loss have come into their own as a people, right here at the end.

The Mayor has kept the rest of them to their homes. I have heard whispers between the cells when I walk of an evening; some blame the weevils,^[4] some blame me,^[5] some the gods.^[6] There are so few left, and they hide from me if I try to speak to them. I have been sympathetic until now, and three days ago retreated to my luggage to permit them what mourning they can muster. Each evening I have left a fresh bundle of herbs against the gate, in the hope that they will gum up some accidental concoction on their fingertips, doodle at their gums, idly, and somehow cure themselves.

AAA
HNH

[3] I remember Otzi, terrified of my burning brand, threatening to cleave our entire friendship with his axe before disappearing up that glacier to die. The copper-plated idiot, we had shared a tent, a meal of chamois, years together, and he threw it all away, just because I offered him a burning hornbeam to seal his wounds! Rubes, everywhere!

[4] Though that lie is falling apart.

[5] Not as many as I would have thought.

[6] But none of them have climbed across the river and up onto the pass, to where they keep the statues hidden in their vases, to shatter or placate.

I have seen lax, chewed cuds, as they potter back and forth from the fields to their houses to the Yard, but some of those same masticators are now dead, and I imagine that I am useless.

Yesterday, I began gathering small inconsequentials from my luggage to cheer them. Tiny clays from Ur, munimified bread, masks and plastic road masks, I have tried to make it clear, when one of them approaches my gates in curiosity, that I do not require anything in exchange. They always bolt and waddle, though, when they see me appear at the corner of a case. Am I ill from their ingratitude, their superstitions without any art to them? Why can they not be more like the Hyperboreans, so greedy with my treats, or

wild for that cut red glass that I had gathered by the armfuls in Herculaneum, leaving behind only the chaff of obsidian? Cut red glass! Worthless, and yet they lapped it up like jewels! Why can't Loss civilise just a piece, and see that I am trying to ease their passing?

Unfortunately, I grew angry with this peeping nonsense, and shut the gifts back up. I closed a few more latches, battened down the Seedgaol, and broke a little more of my camp. I was almost too exhausted with the hauling to go into the town after dark, as had become my custom, but I forced my thighs this way, then that way. This time, I would find my way into the Catafalque Yard, and carry something elegant out of this mess; an account of a funeral.

Rituals have a way of leaking out of Keyholes and past walls and down the streets when death comes; they may sequester everything else from me, these primitives, but they cannot hide the light of their fires at night.

The whole, sorry settlement was empty, the houses as dark as they had ever been. Tradition had been broken everywhere, and new paths and desire lines thick and thin criss-crossed each other in the dirt, and wound out into the scrub beneath the trees.

I braved the *pinae's* canopies, and it was there, in the souppier night, that I found the Execution Venn.^[7] It had been scuffed out and repainted yet again, shrunk down and with new segments. The last time I had seen it, its edges extended nearly all the way to the residential district, and for weeks everybody had stayed indoors, terrified that they would be murdered if they stepped beyond the line. I never understood the practice, never saw anybody sacrificed for stepping inside any of the rubrics.

[7] See extensive other writings, elsewhere, marginalia etc. "Farm" in my notes.

[8] See Parlay's "A Study In Herds", 215-216, as usual.

[9] Hairy, holding hands; they might as well be joined at the beard.

I continue my theory that somebody is doing this deliberately, maintaining the appearance of a system, the illogic beneath it leading to misunderstanding, fear and stasis amongst the population. The easiest way, amongst leaders, to invoke ~~the~~ herding; I will corner the Mayor, and reveal my hypothesis. [8]

Two men now stood in the darkness around the edge, watching its depths. From the little peeps of glow around their mouths I knew that they had worked out what to do with the *weed* that I had given them. I did not recognise either of them,^[9] and when I stepped out of the shrubs they did not look up, or thank me. They did not holler or grow bestial as I crossed the Venn, stepping in every segment, waiting for them to try and slay me. I did not feel their eyes on me as I continued up the slope, through the starless canopy. They were nothing, two more without a story to spark between them.

I saw, dancing before me, that noblewoman and her son in London once again, but it was not a nightmare.

Eventually I beached against the high stone walls that encircled the Catafalque Yard, the penumbra of flames trading along its sheer edge. It is solid, uncut, and studded with alcoves, though I could not see any columbarium, ivy or memento mori. There was no lychgate, no ceremonial arch, no parade, no Kingswalk; only a slight fault in the rock, too narrow for any procession or wake.

[10] should note that I have not called it the Catafalque Yard until today; for cross-reference, it has previously been "

Light's House", "The Yard" or "The

I slipped through, head-first, to stand before rising terraces, like Karnak, each spangled with a pyre. The entire town was there, burning its dead, and all I felt was the weight of the times before, the blackening of the Owl House, the yawns of IMOK as the lights guided her to bed, burning Darger in his room with his dying drafts as kindling.

You see? It has happened before and before and before. Even one hundred of them, all arrayed before me as they were then, is not quite enough.

I do not feel like a predator
Away from me ran the soil, well-turned and abundant, though no dead worm it. The grass has grown in mattock's thick with their own matrices, and I stumbled my way up the slope, keeping to the aurora of each and every fire. Around each stood a eulogy of three or four, all of them adults. They seemed like small remembrances of families, a synapse snapping taught in each of them, but, of course, they were not touching. They stood awkwardly, boorishly, with a sort of threnody.

I imagined that, despite the transmogrification that death requires, especially so much of it at once, that the mourners were still wearing that moribund purple, but the flames were too high, and the smell was too awful, and the silhouettes too stark. None of the corpses still had integrity; they had leaked down into fuel for their own wicks, a fused remnant of their pubis and pelvis.

Between each of them ran Mr. Lights. I knew it was him, from the taper of the legs, in his arms he carried bundles of sticks, with which he stoked each fire. I don't imagine that any of the mourners spoke to him, and when he turned back up the slopes, I followed him, leaving the fires to their distant rippling. The upper terraces were dark, and cold in the

valley wind, we were no longer sheltered by the walls. I remember looking back, and imagining the fires as punctures in the night's cloth. That particular phrase, "the night's cloth", I remember inventing it, just in that moment, I think that I was trying to conjure some sympathy in my own gizzard. After all, I am used to seeing the world through punctures.

When I turned back I could not see him, and as I wrung the lights out of my eyes, I caught only his pattern in the night, the bundled sticks on his back, and for a moment I imagined that he was in mid-air. The sticks made poor wings, and as perspective returned I saw that he was climbing the flank of a gigantic, wooden statue. A colossa, a ricketbacker built up against the mountain behind, a scaffold of purple cloth in the shape of a woman.

And that was when I wept, not just for the size of it, but who I thought it represented.

I promised that I would not mention her at all, anymore. That I was finished with her childishness. I have not seen her in a week. She avoids me, furious at the letter to Rosetto that she found. I have forgiven her for breaking into my luggage. I have forgiven her for hitting me, for trying to rip clean my mask, for whisking off to the father she seemed to hate so much and sequestering herself in his smugness. I have forgiven her for coming back to me, a smile on her face, rubbing my shoulders, and playing with my chestnuts, as she always liked to do, and when my back was turned, pulling me over, trying to lie me down, when she knew full well what it would do to me.

I have forgiven her for everything. I love her.

For a moment, I even loved him. I have been waiting for months for an altercation, our battle, a drama which this lifeless little place sorely requires. It would give them the just-sos they are lacking, the morals they require, the gasps that their mouths have never stretched for. But now I loved him; as I was sure he loved his daughter. He was wrapped in a paean-cloak of purple cloth, like the Stoat Prince had swaddled himself in last year's ermine, and was constructing a naive memorial to her.

She was dead. I was sure.



He had clambered up onto the statue's bent knee, and hand over fist along its outstretched arm, forty feet above the ground. He dragged his livid carriage all the way along the ridge, to where a balustrade claw was clasping at the higher airs, weathervaning without fingers.

The wooden rafters of the hand, all that trickery usually hidden, was denuded, but before he draped the cloth across it as a sort of skin, he began lashing down longer fingers, adding foot after foot to them. I half-expected him to tie a sprig of myrtle when he was done.

I see now what Mr. Lights is, and what he means. He is not the custodian of the dead, some burakumin to be reviled and avoided. He does not bury them, or have any more to do with them than their careless families.

He is an architect.

Those facades down in the town, the empty boxes that they use to keep out the murderer rain, are not their real houses. Every day, death or not, he spirits himself up here, to extend, to widen, to add spires and cupolas and apses, growing his ancestors and his late neighbours out from the extremities into spindlier and spindlier accommodations. As I stepped forward, more and more resolved themselves, out of the floating ash, the older memorials almost as high as the mountains, built crouched or standing, their gestures, incalculable in the circumference, showing them as men, or women, and then I could see the particular drape of her face.

It was not her.

I still remember the questions that I asked myself, standing before that gargantua, that memorial that could never have been for Friend. It flapped around the jowls where hers were slender and downy, had no scar across the lip, flashed saturnine eyes when hers were merely martial.

I shall record them here, for future consideration.

1. Where is she, then, if she is not dead?
2. How can I not see them, from anywhere in the valley, on any day?
3. Why burn the body, and not these pyres, mortared with natron?

Questions for another mind.

Mr. Lights continued like this, unaware of my haunting, horking like a walrus from the smoke and the effort of dragging all that meat vertically. In that moment, I forgave him everything he had piled on me, an honoured guest, in my time in Loss. I forgave him his threats of lying me down for good. I forgave him his rebellion, his indictments, his rousing amongst the simpler bulk. I forgave him his suspicions from the start, stood before the gate in his greatcloak, his daughter under its roof.

I forgave utterly and completely this sole creator in all of Loss, this dour and ignorant wright. If he will not let me love his daughter, I will love him, instead.

I clacked off, up into the antiquary darknesses, hoping that the chime of my nuts would not give me away. Most of these bonfires, shivering with the potential of ignition, depict fat men, an inevitability in any society. The cloth constantly buffeted in the wind, and here and there it jeered through the scaffolding of old women, starving when they died, aeons ago. In hamlets at their feet were dilapidated heaps the size of cottages, children.

I tugged at the skeins as I went, wishing that I had brought something sharp with me. I have still not confirmed my suspicion that somewhere, deep inside these circus-tholos, are the original remains, dried and twisted, and that something transubstantiated lies on the flames in their place. To use fire for anything other than warmth requires a lateral state of mind.

I was there, in Gondal, when they caught the brush-fires, roaming devourers more like wolf than gas, and herded them onto the beaches, where they made the glass that clothed their first cities. Here, they don't have the same invention.

In my shortlime in the Catafalque yard before I saw the true nature of the statue, I had made my peace with her death, and even afterwards, for some reason, could not quite let go of that **imagination**, my brain had been configured to her being gone, of some slot once filled being empty, and could not be convinced otherwise so easily. When somebody you love dies, it is

~~the world turned red~~ exiling myself here, year after year, as myself and Mr. Lights survived all of this plague, whatever it might be, and built her up together. Her memorial would begin small, like her, and then as we veiled her and strutted her in more and more skittering angles, she would become the size of a hall, a home, a complex, a castle, an arena, complete with two sad gladiators. And after she was as large as gravity would allow, that this world could manage without collapsing, we would baldly, plainly, fight to the death. I would kill him, of course, bow to no audience, and then take my knife, cut a doorway into her Achilles Heel, and pass up through the stairways inside her that he and myself had built. I would find a hollow somewhere in there, one that kept me drowsy, and snuggle down forever.

I have searched for her all day today, to see if I consider her differently, with this prophecy built up around us. She is such a small thing, and perhaps she could stand to grow a little bigger.

As all my critics know, I like big women. I remember, I remember,

Bluetit Joan had

AAAAAAA

NNNNNNNNNNNN

Bluetit Joan

I like to tell Joan's story, if only because it is so very neat, the myths that we made are being taught to children even now, I imagine. I never finished my Work on her rather public pleasures [11], and so I will tell it here, finally. I imagine that it changes, every time I tell it, but I have never had the nous to check. She brought that sybaritic laziness out in me; our time together was ever so simple, the most classical of tales.

The Romans had loved her in their centuries. She wandered back and forth across Kernow, making new valleys every time she fiddled with herself. They called her Bluetit because the birds liked to roost on her shoulders, and in the winter her nipples dragged on the cold sand around what would become Porthtowan. When I found her, on one of my walks out from Dintagel, she had almost lost one to frostbite, and when she asked me to blow on them I had no choice but to oblige. The dour old King, I forget his name, [12] had sent me slay her, but he had always been paranoid, and hornless; he thought that she meant to eat them all. However, I came to learn that she was a most discerning feaster.

At first, I was just a mute comforter to her, but as we talked she told me about Lyonnesse, where the glaciers had stranded her. I had heard the stories before, from others, but I listened, down on the beach, as she plucked out the seams of tin from the ground and threw them in the sea, so the King would never find them. One day, as she teased out a last glimmering cigar of cassiterite, I found that I had come to love her.

She was terribly homesick, and made sad by this land of men who meant to send armies to ravage her in regiments, or bind her to a tiny prince that she did not love in return.

And so I led her, by the tit, rubbing it between my hands, west and back into the land, away from the sea. As we walked she talked again, about how her uncle was the tomb for the King of England, and all that the old fool in Dintagel wanted was another dolmen for himself. We stopped for a time amongst her fellows, in Salisbury, and she held a memorial for them, a long song that took all of September. The seasons followed us, and some nights the snow fell. I picked berries from the mountain ash, if we found it, and when she crossed her legs to eat, I would climb up inside, where it was almost too hot to touch, just to catch a little sleep.

It was the first time that I had been a parasite, and I have never again had the opportunity. It was wonderful.

NNNNNNNNNNNNNN

But Friend is not dead, or yet gigantic. She is hiding from me, somewhere out amongst the trees, not in her cell, not amongst the Mother Kilns, not down by the river, where she was doing so very well. She had come to hate everybody around her, had practically begged to leave. She still will not take to reading or writing, not even in what I remember of the Latin script, but there will be time on the road.

There were other victories. A week ago, when her father was burning the Mayor's son (a little turd, who we both hated), she had strode into the river up to her waist. She became the

[11] That sex-voice, lowing across the moor, vibrating off the pig iron that littered Kernow in those days like the droppings of some clanging god!

[12] The relevant Works are locked up tight in the luggage; there is not enough light to seek them by.

[13] There are Kingdoms heading out from Cornwall forever.

the colour of frozen cream, and puffed out her rhinarium in a stifled scream, but there she was, in the first bath of her life. Such progress!

When I returned to my luggage last night, and settled into my cloak to sleep, I imagined that I might dream of striding women, of cathedrals built of ranked perineums, their cruxes too high for me to touch, of Friend climbing out of all of this with me; I cannot remember whether any of it came to pass, in my overburdened brain.

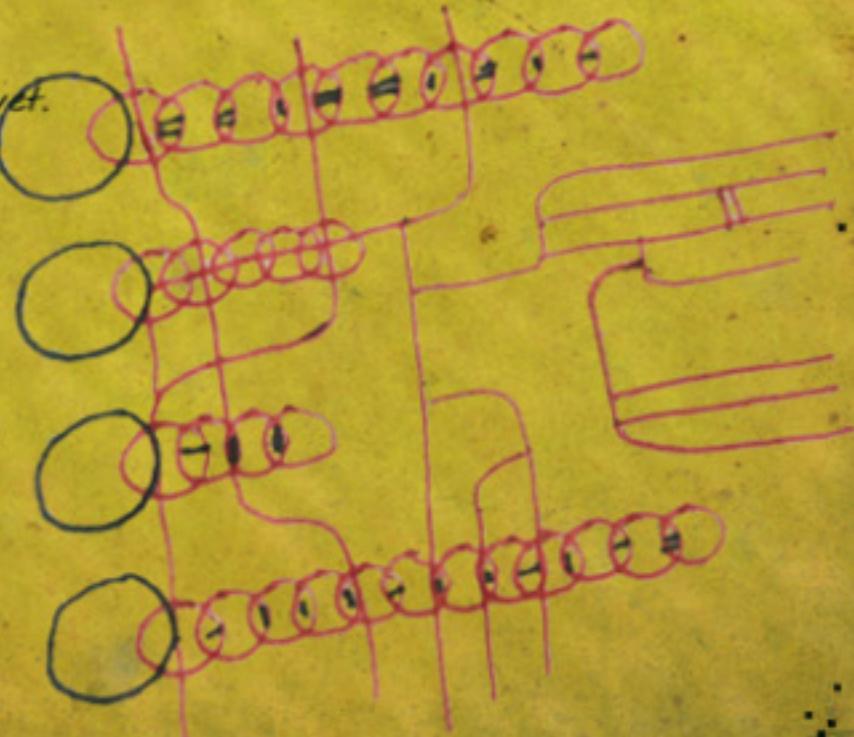
But I do remember waking this morning. It was near light, and the whole valley was full to the rim with smoke; the blunt sun was trying to agitate a dawn.

I felt a tap across my eye.

When I opened them, I saw it on the glass, a serpentine bundle of staves, a huge arm, hung throughout the trees by scraps of cloth, and sweeping all the way back through the gates of the town. Mr. Lights had been working through the night, and here was the result, left to wake me when the wind blew it. The old scarecrow, the old woman who I thought had been Friend, my sweetest, angriest, best Friend, had grown exponentially.

The staves ended in a single trunk lashed to the handle of my tallest luggage, and there, Knocking against my mask's eyeholes, was a nail of bark, accusing me of something incalculable.

He, apparently, has not forgiven me yet.



The River Upstairs: The Gods, The Moon
And Other Victims Of Loss' Monoculture

In as many instances as I can remember, I have called Loss a town. When I arrived it had the feeling of the municipal, a detachment from the world but not independence. It has a Mayor, after all, or at least a man who fulfils that function, and things are not wild enough here to call it a commune or a tribal. But having walked the length and breadth and edge of it, on each foot and with the feet of others, I now renounce it. Loss is only a vestige.

The lack of paths, trunk roads, squares or any sort of moot-space makes it truly difficult to calculate its area, but not so long ago I walked with Friend from side to side, all across it, through every point possible, and even allowing for my gait and, on bad days, my breath, it does not take us more than an English minute to know this civilisation intimately.

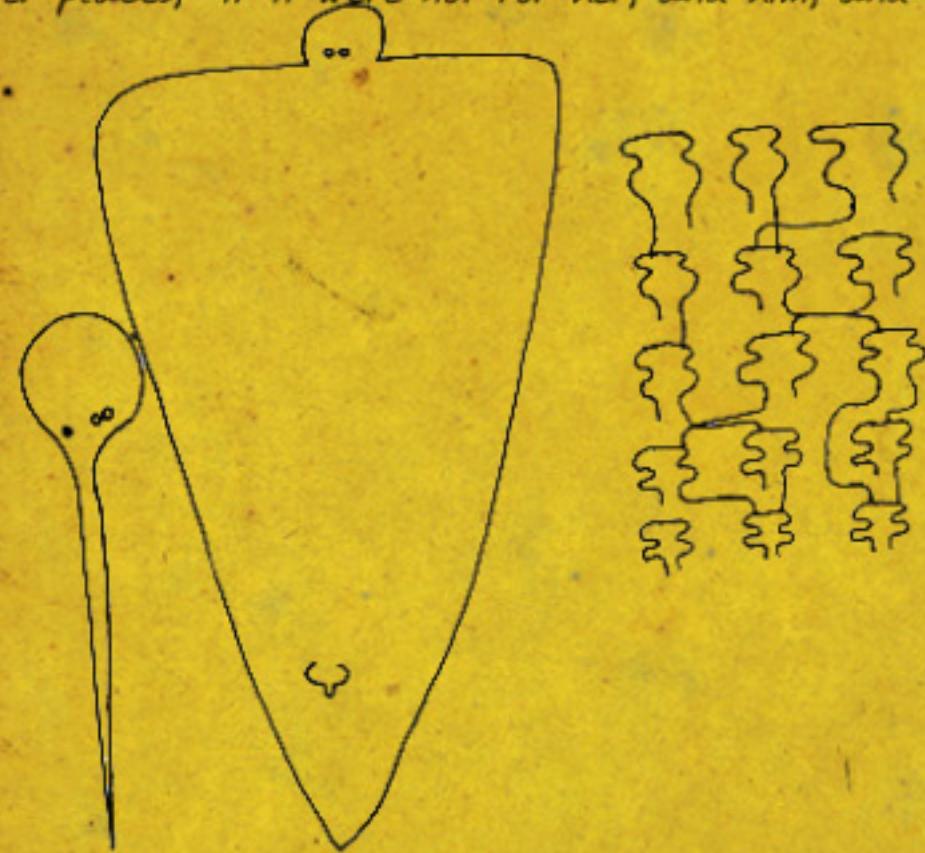
The cardinal points elude me, down here in the mercury pit of the mountains, but I think I have had the best chance of orienting myself. The valley cheats, some days, at its head, rising behind a jube of foothills, is the tallest peak. Yesterday the sun rose behind it, and other days it sets there, and other days I miss its passage entirely, but such a thing does not impress me anymore. I have seen daylight misbehave elsewhere.

What about the court of Emperor Dwayne, where through a skylight, a tiny window which only he and his honoured guests were permitted to frequent, the sun could be seen backing off and off, getting small but never truly setting, only taking its camouflage amongst the cosmos?

I remember him batting lazily at my outstretched hand, though why it was outstretched I now cannot recall; his fingers were fingers clacking with silver. I can hear the slaves now, throwing down the lesser shutters, and the courtiers leaving. And then his whisper, a pikish argot, with complaints about how lonely he got at night. He hissed, and asked me whether I would ever take a commoner like him. He was very handsome, in an underfed sort of way, and so I permitted him to tell me how his sun was very special, and unlike any other sun anywhere else. I could not break his heart by telling him that it was all the same sun, as far as I could tell. I kept him lovely and sad instead, and we sat there together, his throne room getting emptier as the light was evacuated.



So, wherever **EEE** and **NNE** and **NNN** and **ENN** are, I have seen Loss in its entirety. Eight months of walking the same scrubby meadows, the same ugly cultivars and empty eskers and drumlins, tongue-and-grooved by some dullard glacier. I have tried to collect the histories of every life here, but nobody will talk to me. I have been almost crippled by my wanderings in and out of caverns, down the aquitards to the hellgates through which water is judged. I have searched for magic, for machinery,[1] would even have allowed them a smidge of animism, if I had found it, but all there is is a morose, blasted hovel, and one of which, if I can be honest, I am already bored. I would have already left, for better places, if it were not for her, and him, and them.



Part 1: Her

"We experiment on our loved ones daily."

Oscar Parlay

She, if I can **imagine** it, is coming to like me more and more, I already knew that she had a wanderlust, a sapient spark in her eyes which told me that she might like to know things. I miss her in the days, now, when she disappears. It is not a feeling to which I am accustomed, and it makes my mien copper-thin; I have caught myself on the point

of talking to nobody, more than once, surrounded by only my own possessions for company, and watching the moraines turn purple or grey in the twilight. On that empty, logged plain, surrounded by an appalled jury of **pine trees**, I have begun to so look forward to those mornings when I will navigate the way back out of my cases and chests and find her standing by the gate, smiling and what I think is supposed to be beckoning. The days when there is sleet in the air, or heavy clouds, my own heart hurts, because I know that she will inhabit what little indoors there is here, until it passes, and not come for me[2]

She is very particular about what is allowed to touch her, and when we stand to look out over a view, or for me to sort through my inks to find the correct one, she will not take my hand. She looks at it sidelong, and I suppose that I cannot blame her; the difference in our digits has worried even me.



[1] I have heard the clatter of pistons and plates, almost every morning (see part 4).

[2] See my thoughts on rain, water and their appalled stance on both, in my accompanying essay, Sudden Fighter.

I still am not exactly sure why I find her so fascinating. When I think over the catalogue of men and women that I have met, she has nothing to give me that has not been given so many times before. She is pretty, but not beautiful, and I think that it might have something to do with how skinny she is. She is surely often, cruel, possesses few hidden pools. She has thin hips, a mean cage for children, and bad skin from a lack of hydration. She is small, and I usually detest small women, I think that she is of sexing[3] age, but it is so hard to tell in these primitive societies, and though she has cunning, a sort of prelapsarian darting in her terrifying teeth[4] and tiptoes, she could not be said to be educated. None of them could be.

She is funny, with a guffaw instead of a laugh, and can be spiteful if she does not get her way; her father must spoil her rotten, with what little there is to give here. She has hairy, serpentine legs and venomous armpits, and her hair needs every wash it has missed since birth, and I can barely understand the compact, gritty little words that seldom spray off her lips.

But there is something. Let us try and dissect it.

Parlay most famously said that the primitive brain is an emergence; I think that it was in Sudden Thoughts, though I know that similar ideas were expressed in A Study Of Herds, The Road-Russia and others. All of his time amongst rubes must have set his salt-cellular brain folding and unfolding, unceasingly.

The abstract was this; from out of simple, repeated processes, a larger complex is generated, its superstructure composed of these lesser, spiralled acts and thoughts and deeds quite accidentally. This superstructure is often imperceivable to the vessel of such an emergence, and the pattern is only appreciable with hindsight and minor godhood.

And so, here, I am sure that she will forgive me, we have a vessel. [5]

She certainly had structures in place already when I arrived. As the below will show, I would never try and suggest that she were amoebic.



[3] Sex is, if not a tapoo, then very certainly an afterthought here. A few weeks ago, I thought that I had seen two of the older youths making the motions required in the bushes near the Mayor's house; it was the white-haired one and one of the many unappealing boys that flock to her. It was hard to tell if they were succeeding; they held one note between them, and stuck out at an odd angle, their heads and hands and hips too far apart. I think, looking back now, that it must have been impossible for there to have been an exchange between them. When I disturbed them, there was no observation of the proper shames. They stared dully at me, still unable to find my eyes, and I was upset to see that they were not even naked; they had merely hiked up their smocks, and were scissoring in a way that told me that nobody in this town ever comes of age. They rose, her wiping snot from her cheeks and slunk off, with not another stain between them.

[4] Flashed at every opportunity.

[5] I will not require forgiveness, if she never learns to read.

Existing Structures In Friend's Brain

- Trees (and perhaps their hideousness)
- Wicker, The Burnt Man (though I have not seen him in weeks)
- Gates
- Houses (despite how restrictive the concept is, here)
- The fear of water, all water.
- A fear of making paths.
- A relationship to fathers, if nobody else.
- A proto-alphabet, high up in the ravines [6]
- The Town Cryer
- The Bog Pony
- Scatterbirds
- The Mayor, something of a leader, arbitrarily elected.
- Sex
- Childbirth
- Death
- **Beetroots**, only beetroot.
- The Knowledge of certain vases, high up in the mountains. [7]
- PERHAPS gods.
- Fire?
- The awareness of the importance of clothing, of belting one's waist.
- A fear of weevils.
- A spoken tongue, this pared and peeled English.

And, to add to them, since I have arrived:

New Structures, Gifted By Me

- How to skim stones, up to three skips.
- The wording of a proper phrase e.g. "I love you".
- A joy of walking, especially beside a river.
- The concept of a mask, of two faces (I was surprised that I had to introduce this one)
- Ink, and its purpose
- Chestnuts, and their musical application
- Music, come to think of it, I have heard none here.
- Hygiene and the importance of water (cleaning of teeth; attempted)
- An appreciation of the colour blue
- A fear of the colour red.
- Stories, other places, etc.
- An appreciation of luggage, and therefore travel.
- One letter, to accompany her spoken word. [8]

And so we see that, by combining these structures, the innate and the gifted, a certain something is produced. Whatever that something is, that pattern, it sets aside every disadvantage with which this culture burdens her, and brings her to the attention of somebody like me.

Of all the populace, she is the one who has shown the curiosity, the pep and the brilliance to approach me, to not be afraid of me, when every sigil and bark that she has ever heard tells her that no, stay back, this man is not one of you. I only hope that I can award her for her civility.

And so we walk this way, every day, and I admire her, despite how disappointing she should be. I **imagine** the new patterns that will complicate, over and over, arabesque.

[6] See my comments on the Guttering, elsewhere.

[7] See Part 4, "The River Upstairs"

[8] N is all that I have managed to get out of her.

Part 2: The Town Cryer

"Crown louder than the other cocks, and
splash your comb about the place,
therein lies government."

Oscar Parlay

On most of our walks we hear the Town Cryer. I heard it first amongst my luggage, on my very first day in the valley, and it narrates our explorations with a school of expression quite unmatched. Every time it roars, or croons, or bellows, I attempt to follow it, to source its seat and trumpet, but of course it is quite impossible. The valley walls make everything reverberate into mush, and no matter where I look, I see no flag, no Keep. All I know is that, whatever it might be, it sees us, and has opinions on our progress.

Perceived Cause For Town Cryer Utterance, With Tally

A Visitor At The Gate 1

An Attempt To Enter Somewhere Forbidden 1111

New Moon 11111

No Moon 11111

Rain 11111

Sex 1111

Flood 11

Puberty 111

Joy

Crescent Moon (Waxing) 111

Crescent Moon (Waning) 111

Births 1

Deaths 1

Sunrise 11111

Sunset 11111

Wicker Approaching 11111

Myself Approaching 11111

Gates Opening 11111

Gates Closing 11111

Storm 11111

Landslide 11111

Harvest 11111

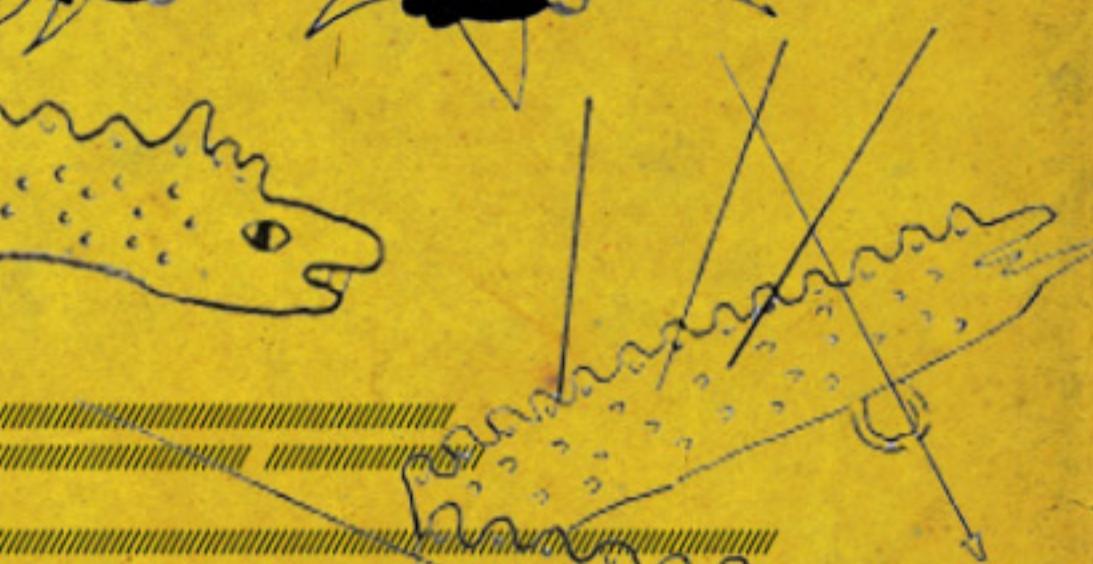
Tree Fallen 11111

Injury 11111

Courtship 11111

Feasts 11111

Miscellaneous (Unknown Event) 11111



I have spent too much energy trying to decipher it. It is without gender, neither vestal nor priestly. I cannot determine how, from its unknown eyrie, it can see every little piece of life that occurs down here, or know the seasons so minutely, or predict the meteorology before it occurs. The tone is intelligent, basically human, but far too grandiloquent to be just anybody. Despite its obvious importance, they pay it little attention; I am the only one who seems to hear it. My mind is drawn back and back, trawlingly, to a little nugget of Praester, one that I have never understood;

balain, great usurer, Keep'r of the main's mint
I am content for tabulate, yet ne'er see ye glint
ye debts we owe, us ashooar, art heavy and increas'd
ye hue and cry out our defaults, the posse too discrete

Many threads, and more. I am stupid with it all; I am not certain I will ever work it out. Most nights we walk on, and I am none the wiser, and she is none the happier.

Still, something concrete can come from my findings. The tally cannot lie to me. It is a Sincian creature, whatever it is, fascinated by everything that this people does, and all the various sciences of the world around it. However, like most things, it loves one thing above all others.

It loves the moon the most.

Part 3: The Teenage Moon

"What a nuisance, the moon! A roulette artefact, smoothed alluringly by revolution after revolution, unchanging and yet still absurdly populist. It is only the font of so much nonsense about women, wolves and Wallachs. Do away with the moon! Reading should be done before night falls, in any case. That is why I intend to move to Constantinople, and spend the long days catching up."



Another evening of walking. She was building up some calves, and complaining less about the trite distances involved. It was a beautiful night, and one in which I made a wonderful discovery. It was one of the few times in Loss that I have recaptured that feeling of lifting a rock and discovering underneath a colony of insects, iridescent and skittering before me.

I discovered that, underneath all the deadening shelter of wood and bone and brow here, underneath everything, there is a bastard sort of cosmology.

Of course, every night, as in other realms, there are always stars. As a people they shine no lights, and this makes things all the brighter. Every time we take a stroll I try and coax out of her something colloquial, some myth that I might possibly write down about the universe and its forming.

If one wants to know a people, give them a blanket and hot soup and take them out on a clear night. Perhaps, whereas I may join Castor and Pollux, Altair and Tarazed, she may not be so ptolemaic, and may take Tarazed and boss it onto Scutum. In every place that I have been, even the most rubic of them have known the stories, have been fascinated by the twinkle, have spent hours trying to identify the pocketful that they know by heart.

I have navigated, with the tip of her finger, the hundreds that I know, but she is never stirred to wonder, and constantly complains about her neck hurting. It may be that they have no constellations in Loss, and why should they? A star is not a waypoint, after all. I was nearly defeated, until that night, was about to immerse myself in their sludgey logic, and forget the beauty of the zodiac forever.

But then, that night.

She seemed to see the moon for the first time.

His Lord Dwayne would have been wrong about this one, too; there is only one moon. I have seen it many times before, in happier times and in sadder. It has that same eternal crud staining its cheeks, that same staring face, and yet, on that night, she seemed to catch it out of the corner of her eye, and be consumed by it. She stopped, and stared, and I took her hand, and she did not seem to hate it.

I remember, she brought a silver-spun palm to her face, not shivering despite the wind in the trees. During that hour that I ignored her, consumed by a fear that her father was about to crash out of the trees and end us, she became gently webbed in grey, was made classical. She looked liked a sculpture of herself in marble, and she barely moved. I could see a luminescence around the thin skin at the tips of her fingers, stained by twice-borrowed borrowed light.

After a while she began to talk, in that tumbledown way that she has; the accent of Loss is a broken thing, where an initial hum deep in the throat gives way to the consonants, which gradually become quieter and shorter, until the sentence, if that is what it can be called, dribbles into nothing.

I did not really listen to what she had to say; she talked more about the moon, and may have talked about its provenance, the seemingly unique way that it came to be, her people's belief that the start of their world was unique. I did not truly believe that she had the authority to mythologise, if nobody else in this place could manage it. I listened enough to note that there was no talk of menstruation, of a feminine perspective. She was absent of anything that might mark her as a woman, and in that the moon was not her ally. She carried on otherwise, with different canons.

I knew, and I still know, that she was lying, was trying to convince me that she was having a Joanist moment, a revelation of some orbiting truth that I was privileged to receive. As she talked, and we walked on, following it in its barely-arc, she rubbed at the mole on her cheek, the mole that I had never really noticed before, and before long drew a sequin of blood where the melanoma was worst.

I took this hand, and paired it with her other, and we walked for a while, me attending her *imaginings* as chivalrously as I could, following the moon as it hiked along the range of nameless mountains. She was gripping my arm so tightly, and did not seem to care that I was not really listening to her prattle, it was as if she was dictating to somebody that I could not see.

She gripped my hand so tightly that it still hurts in the palm, days later. **NNNNN** I have not checked to see if she has left a bruise.

But, in amongst the talk of pockmarks and the young loving satellites and how the sky could never be trusted, she achieved, in me, a surprise. She said a word that, in all my study of the English language, I have never heard before. Of course she has no letters for it, or anything else, but I think it might have been

teenage

or something similar. The Teenage Moon, that was what she called it, over and over. The etymology escapes me. The 'age' is certainly something, perhaps referring to its venerability, its unchanging features. Though 'teen' is another matter altogether. There is the word 'tien' in Old Saxon, an inflection of 'teri'; though 'ten aged moon' makes even less sense. When I asked her what these ten ages were, whether there were Ten Ages of Loss, and a history to be had, she backed off, rubbing at her cheek again, and started talking all sorts of lagan about pimples and warts and her theories on what state the moon's back may have been in.

A nonsense word. I refuse to canonise it.

It became pitch-black, in some awful moment while I puzzled through all of this; when I looked at her, she was just a matte hole in the far oilier night, looking up at me and deliberately sifting through more of her wisdom. But then, as we came out of the forest, I saw it, the setting of the moon. It was finishing its analemma, the last of these 'ten ages', in the same place that I had seen it bow down before, behind the little caldera, high on one of the more severe peaks, its summit jagged and corrupted by heritage lightning.

You need only break your way through this Work to see the calculations; this was the peak behind which the moon set every night, without fail. There was no variation, no peculiarity of the earth.

I had climbed to that caldera before. I knew what was there.

She took some persuading, the hike up was long, and there were several brooks that would need crossing, but in the end she came with me. I had been promising to introduce her to *atiacatl*,^[9] and I moved that schedule forward, extolling its virtues, the virtues of all the other food that she had never tasted. Before long she had forgotten all about the moon, and I no longer had to drag her up the mountain pass, to where the people of Loss sat on their gods.

Part 4: The River Upstairs

"Amongst the Cathayans, Nipponese and other Asiatics is sheltered the peculiar logic that the lonelier a place is, the more gods and goddesses and demons and sprites and nymphs must crowd there, bellicose eternally and just behind the ears. To this I say, dandybear. It is nothing more than a comfort for serfs, who without letters, or music, or conversation, frequent the lonely places with more regularity. Why would not a god, a sum of light and novelty and repetition, flock to the lower, hotter, spots of ribaldry? Know this, peasants that will never read my words; when winter falls, the gods have already found a people better."

Oscar Parlay

I was convinced, when I first edged along that parapet high on the jagged peak, following Beetrots Rotting and the other farmers up to read the messages left for them near the waterfalls, that the stone vases carved into the very cliff-face, fluted like the glassware of better civilisations, were reliquaries for the divine, or at the very least

[9] Though I have still not checked quite how withered the specimens are that I have brought with me.

tabernacles.[10] However, when I saw Beetroots climb atop one and relieve himself, I became party to a slightly bifurcated tradition, and a confusion as to the nature of godhood in Loss.

I have taken to calling this place The River Upstairs, and my investigations with Friend have only hardened my convictions. This is certainly where they keep their gods, but it is not a temple. It is a toilet.

Banishing gods to these calvaries, almost inaccessible to anybody with balance as bad as my own, would reveal either a deicidal or a deiphobic tendency in any society. This is in line with most popular scholarship; the more primitive a people, the more binary their approach to religion. A hostile natural world either excites, in the reptilian crevices that precede intelligence, the desire to placate or rebel against *imaginary* enemies. That the seesaw of proteins has tipped this way, to placing the gods ritually out of sight, and out of mind, is not surprising. It is one way to handle the problem of spirituality.

However, once this has occurred, most other societies make an evolution. The flues that worship usually clear in the human mind still accumulate muck, and must swept in other ways. A society might grow to be evil, or to be the most utopic individuals that have ever lived. Sacrifices of pigs, before tossed into the ocean to some pseudo-Poseidon, or left on some crag for the eagles to reorganise on a goddess' behalf, the scavenging of flesh used as a proof of some nirvanal appetite, are instead shared amongst the people. Muscle is built, enzymes are released, synapses are glutted. And thus art, and thus music, and thus



Society progresses, and the gods are left behind. Secularity provides as many comforts as it can, and the calvaries are overgrown, ruined, and later visited only for their picturesque.

In Loss, however, that evolution is not at hand. They have done away with worship, with templery, with vestments and all the trappings of ritual. They have prepared themselves for this secularity, and yet stalled at the last hatred, bound in loathing to these spirits which they themselves invented, so very long ago.[11] The vestibules up here, into each of which, I *imagine*, is placed a separate manifestation, were carved by hand and wind and adze, and are maintained as a public convenience, a place to which everybody from the town, down to the most decrepit elder, ascends daily to do their daily business. Some make wine, others make bread, but they all use their bowels as the mortar.

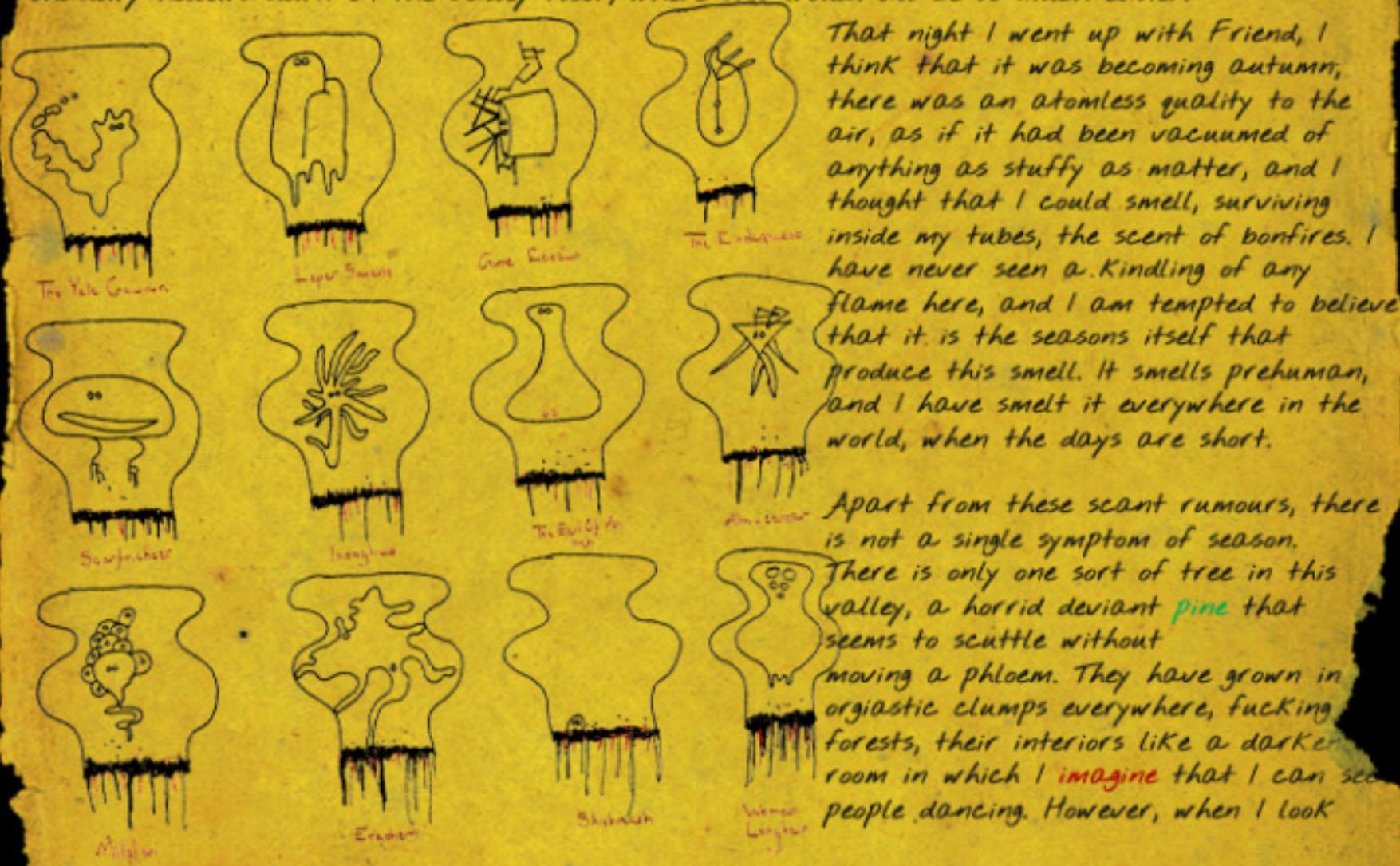
[10] At first I thought that they may be funerary urns, until Amerigo's death last week; the old woman's constituents made no travel uphill, on the day of her passing, but went straight to The Yard, the tomb-complex run by Mr. Lights into which I can find no entrance. Mr. Lights received her, undressed her, and converted her to smoke; I know now that burial is not the way of this folk.

[11] Or perhaps not so long ago; who am I to say, with not a jot of document?

For a long time, I was mystified by the absence of it all. I had never seen any of them urinating or defecating, and had searched for the latrine trenches, the garderobes, the evidence of effluvia of any kind. The only relic of the fact that these people had sphincters were a few lonely dags clinging to the thighs of some of the hairier men. It was not until I climbed to The River Upstairs that I understood where all of this material was coffered.

After that journey, I began to notice their disappearances. At different points of the day, the people of Loss ghost off in little groups, making the journey of a few English hours up to the treeline, and beyond, until they reach this narrow ledge. Of course, given their quite-separate hatred of making paths, the same route is never taken twice. This may be why I never found the way on my own in the first place, and sets in me an *imagination*. What installations, what museums, what shrines and districts are missing, stranded out in the tractless forests with no roads linking them back to the civilisation that built them?

With difficulty (especially amongst the old), they climb up onto one of the twelve pots carved into the cliff-face, evacuate, and quickly depart, back to whatever task occupies them in the creeping, buzzing days of Loss. They clasp hands unwiped, terrified of falling, and I struggle not to laugh, sometimes, at watching them shiver in the wind, envious of the thousands of shadowy hollows down on the valley floor, where this would all be so much easier.



That night I went up with Friend, I think that it was becoming autumn, there was an atomless quality to the air, as if it had been vacuumed of anything as stuffy as matter, and I thought that I could smell, surviving inside my tubes, the scent of bonfires. I have never seen a kindling of any flame here, and I am tempted to believe that it is the seasons itself that produce this smell. It smells prehuman, and I have smelt it everywhere in the world, when the days are short.

Apart from these scant rumours, there is not a single symptom of season. There is only one sort of tree in this valley, a horrid deviant pine that seems to scuttle without moving a phloem. They have grown in orgiastic clumps everywhere, fucking forests, their interiors like a darker room in which I *imagine* that I can see people dancing. However, when I look

they are stock-still, and staring at me. I think, sometimes, that I see the trunks bend double, rubbing up against each other. Some of them have had their bark peeled away twenty, thirty feet up the shaft, but I have not found the evidence of any creature that tall scratching its itch. Others, in the afternoons, are wet with a juice thinner than sap. What is more, when I summon the courage to walk in between them, I cannot see a single fallen needle, or pinecones splintered by their fall. It is just an evergreen sort of Sheol here, I think that these trees might contracept themselves, and reproduce only for pleasure. As we walked through a particularly despicable copse,[12] we heard a cacophony below us in the valley. It was the sound of millions of pieces of metal, falling from a high place, but no matter how hard I searched, I could not see the wink of it in the volume of blackness.

[12] She does not seem to mind them, and walks between as if they were not horrific, and staring down from the branches and up from the roots at her, horny and hoary with age.

No lights shone, of course, in the town, and the woods and fields and the river were similarly gone. It was as if we existed on a floating disc of changing texture and composition, now soil, now grass, now rock, which went nowhere, and did nothing.

Up we went, across the tiny streams whose presence must create the most awful fuss amongst the Lossians when they come this way (and at which even Friend, who I was educating about water's necessity, gritted her teeth), between boulders left Damoclean above the paths, through lofty meadows panted with diamonds of half-paths, the legacy of hundreds of generations of dilly-dallying, dancing Lossians, desperate to empty their bladders.

I remembered the way, from when I came before, and did not need her navigation, and by the time we reached the precipice, there was the faintest light over what I was uselessly calling the south.^[13] Perspective went a strange way, that night; the drop of thousands of feet seemed only like a step, and I certainly felt the persuasive sugar in my brain telling me jump, all the time that I was there.

I went back and forth, counting the urns, taking care not to breathe in too deeply, or touch their soiled lips. There are twelve of them, each as full of slop as the others. The older cock, the coprolitic leavings of Friend's ancestors, had hardened almost to rock around the rims down their sides. They were carved out at an angle, like the barrels of raised cannons on a memorial not yet finished, and apart from a slight cincture around their widest parts they had no ornamentation whatsoever. It was cold, I imagine, very cold up on that ridge, and Friend shivered in her smock, and watched me curiously, saying nothing. She thought that I was confused, that I did not know what occurred here. I, in turn, waited for her to mount one and give me a demonstration, but she did not seem to need to go.

I could see steam rising from four of the urns, recent deposits made only in the last day, and the wind was whipping off the stench almost immediately.

I traced the glaze down the lengths of each urn; here and there hard beads had stopped in their tracks, and a great abundance of streaked material had built up above them. When I stepped back to the edge of the path, I could not help imagining them as a rank of young men, virile with beards, staring up at the sky. I tried not to be reminded of Iona, as I would do those wonderful men a disservice in the imagining.

The colours on display were predictable, and here and there rivulets of red revealed either disease, tearing or beetroot; it is always hard to tell which is which, in dung.

I crunched back and forth, examining their outsides, too embarrassed by Friend's presence to delve inside, when I realised something. I followed the colours from the lip of each jug, down to the rockface, and down again to the ridge below us.

The sun was coming up, revealing its colour. It was not made of rock.

I stood there, on an esplanade built of human faeces, and imagined the first architects of this awful, stupid practice, perched high atop the pots, not knowing how many years of straining and voiding and liquid lunches it would take to build a walkway here. I tested it with my feet, stamping up and down, but it did not creak, or crumble. After that night, I am eternally grateful for the thickness of their diet.

It took me quite some time to build up the courage to place my hand inside any one of these cells, but Friend refused to take her eyes off me, and I took the plunge necessary. I chose the fourth from the left, and pierced the surface. It was still wet, and pliable inside, and I went in up to my elbow. I could feel the warmth through my gloves, and for a while I just stirred, the sun making shimmers in the grease. I would occasionally close my fist around something, but it was only ever fibre, some root or pip too stubborn to digest. Friend had backed off down the trail, hugging the rock with a hand over her mouth, and I grew suddenly the most terrible depression possible.

She came towards me, once or twice, asking me what I was doing, threatening to leave, slapping at my arms, before sitting down and staring out over the valley, ugly with mist. I kept sifting, *imagining* what novelty the sunrise was producing in her mind, and then I found her. The goddess.

My hand closed around a hard oval, part of the rock. There were holes along it, that I could finger like an ocarina. I thought at the time that it might have been a trepanned skull, an offering, but then I crept along its edge until I found a tapering branch, a pair of lips, another pair of lips inside, and then a sharp point.

I imagined arms holding staves, guns of thunder, necklaces of jewels, a vehicle of clouds, all manner of theologies. It was useless, of course, I had no idea what these gods may be, and she ignored every question I asked her, as I found this leg, this tentacle, this and that serene face. It was difficult to translate my gropes into idols, and so I stepped back, tried each in turn, and began to draw.

I stand by my decision to render them, and give them names. I chose English as the medium, to at least honour their traditions, but I made sure that Friend could not see what I was doing, no matter how hard she tried. Before that night and morning I might have welcoming this wrestling, her limbs slapping into mine, her teeth in my head, but now it only upset me. It was all so pointless, so hoarding. In exiling their gods to this high place, the people of Loss should have found other things before which to prostrate. But this tradition begets further tradition, and even though they show distaste for their former creators, they have given them power. They have cloistered them all the way up in the lonelier places, and yet make a pilgrimage to see them each day. They squat sneering over them, and yet still hide their forms inside these jars, making them mysterious, romantic, Delphian. A true insult would be to make them obvious, naked, ridiculous. They should have put them on the handles of their doors, if they had wanted to truly ruin them.

Friend did not show an ounce of hatred, to any one, in all the hours we whiled away up there. I do not think she understands the tradition. It is just the way things are, and so the gods still hold sway from their prisons, smiling up from the sewer, whatever their names are, whatever avatars they take.

We returned to the village, the hamlet, the skidmark, when the morning was still ghostly, before this lazy, thoughtless trace of humanity had woken. Friend had kept her distance, staring at my hands and holding her nose, and I was worried about the rattle of my chestnuts rousing absolutely everybody. I was still scared of Mr. Lights, closeted in his own quarters nearby, and I am sure that he would have had something to say, something gnomic yet idiotic, about his daughter spending all night up in the mountains with his monstrous outsider.

I took her back to her little house, some distance away from the main 'hearth-pyramid' to which each individual cell is attached. I said that I would stay, and guard her, and she only frowned and laughed, a rather novel combination that I had never seen on a woman before.

Of course, the poetry on which to end all this is obvious. I knew that, when she made me turn around as she fumbled for the hidden door, and disappeared inside a construction not much wider than she is, that she was interring herself in her own jar, varnished with sweat and condensation.

When I turned back, and she was gone, after she had told me quite categorically that I could not join her, I stayed for a while. At the height of each little house, one for each townsperson, there is a tiny slit through which her breathing showed, and the dreams began, and her sleep dripped out. I listened to her, *imagining* the space she must occupy. The house tapers at the top, and is only as tall as she can curl up, and no wider at the base than her legs spread. It is a punishing womb, one where she could never be comfortable.

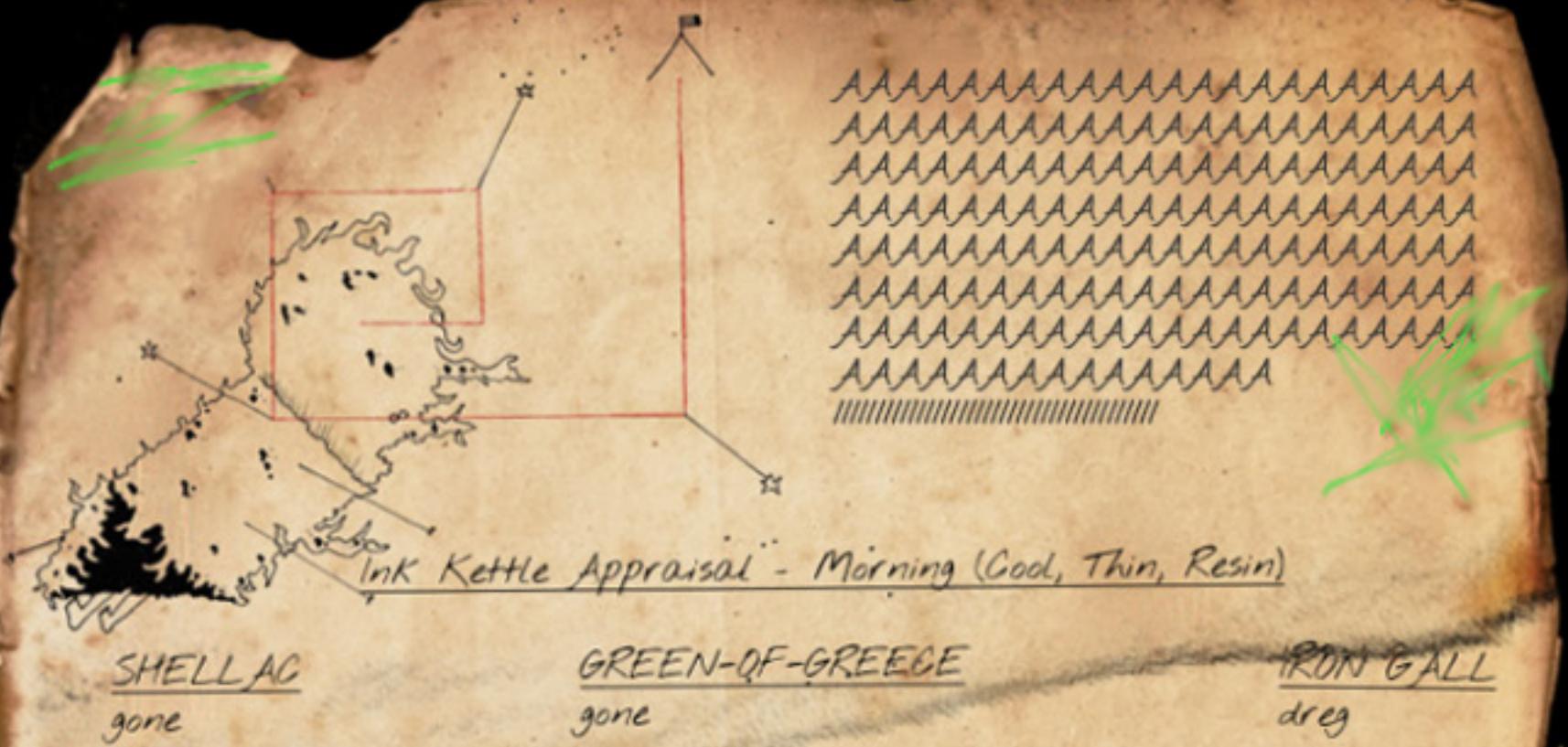


Why would she not want to leave? Why would she refuse, again and again and again? How awful she must feel! What brutalities they visit on themselves! How useless they make their lives! What dry love, how many the hours, filled only with making vegetables soft and the lobes softer!

There was no Kiss, not yet, and no holding of hands. I took myself and my stink off, before anybody could rise, to wait for days.

Parlay's Dream Formula (Ritual 10 Of 18)

Performed On A Young Female, Between Dawn And Some Time



What Is Left

water
larvae
eat
Parlay's Pedagogical Lesson #18: Muleship
dunnages #9-15, #112
Turn Day tomorrow
beetroot
hork
rub F (sores collecting, anomie, safe)
swail pinæ
beetroot
entomb chestnuts
go cropping
imagine Sardis

PP Lesson #11: May I Ask Your Name, Madam?
PP Lesson #11b: Picking One's Own
PP Lesson #26: Haptics (Tickling, Slapping, Sexual Greys)
PP Lesson #1: Utensils

PP Lesson #6: Home And Shelter (wait for rain)
creme de Pompeii

PP Lesson #8a: Riding And Mounts
PP Lesson #31: Talking About The Weather
PP Lesson #15: The Colour Cerulean
PP Lesson #33: The Prima Monstrua
PP Lesson #34: Keeping One's Distance (Countermeasure)