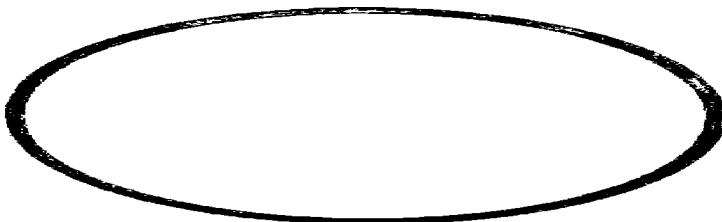


DESIRE PATH



**SIXTEEN
MEMORIES**



by kevin cunanan chappelle

O : FOREWORD

spirituality had always been an impenetrable veil—i recall my childhood as leisurely, suburban, but largely unsentimental. the death of my grandmother proved to be a profound crisis for my family's collective sense of purpose, abruptly putting an end to our weekly church visits. for me, church always felt obligatory and out of touch, but by this time, my parents had fully shed their identity as devout christians, increasingly alienated by and disillusioned with the dogma. my grandmother was a jovial and headstrong woman who often sang around the house with a piercing, operatic voice. she was also plainly disapproving of my mother: the youngest of four daughters, the only one born in the united states, and the one who most sharply veered onto her own path. with my grandfather long deceased, my mother's (and by extension, my own) already estranged relationship with filipino culture was fractured further. our tenuous sense of community felt to be in name only; her melancholy grew alongside mine.

to move through the world without a bigger picture, without a sense of having an essential role among others, is a lonely existence. my father was a grounding presence but stubborn and principled to a fault. his rigidity and

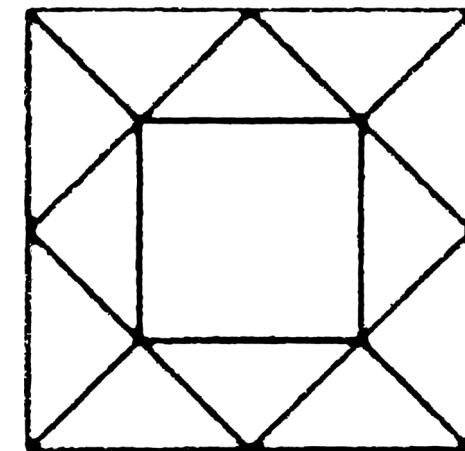
pragmatism were not welcome to my mother, who sought to make sense of ambivalence through the realm of spirits, of shadows. she desperately turned to ouija boards, hoping to maintain some sense of continuity with my grandmother's guidance and resolution. i perceived this as a distraction from her real life, a sad mirage in which she sought solutions in the wrong places. but i did not have the proper cultivation—the intuitive experience of the sublime—to appreciate her efforts. much of my time was spent alone at the computer, or else sitting in cars in parking lots defaulting to emotionally guarded conversation with friends. my ability to be attuned to the immaterial was apprehended by the culturally sterile and individualistic environment i grew up in. (my hometown was known for its water park and extravagant mall.)

many years later, well into adulthood, i found myself at wit's end, feeling increasingly morbid, afraid that i would die having lived a passive and materialistic life that wouldn't amount to anything beyond my short-lived, visceral experiences. this is when i found geomancy. i turned to the spiritual just as my mother had, somewhat out of desperation but also as a critical breakthrough.

having only been deeply acquainted with christian religion, i cast a wide net, studying how others across the globe and across time sought insight into realms beyond their own.

ancient geomancy is thought to have originated on the arabian peninsula—known in arabic as the “science of sand,” it eventually propagated through cultural exchanges with europe and integrated with medieval interests in kabbalistic mysticism. it was among the first spiritual practices that i became familiar with. what i found so moving about it, besides its elegant and intriguing esoterics, was how it mirrored many other cultures’ astrological and divinatory practices—from ifá in yoruba culture, to vedic astrology in india and i ching in china. while not a progenitor of any of these practices in a strict sense, geomancy was, in the context of my personal discovery of them, the key to understanding a syncretic interconnectedness of the world. one might call this “spiritual energy”—a shared source that different peoples tapped into and expressed through their unique cultural lenses. this realization was a gracious reminder that i, too, could access this source and find meaning through my own personal lens. it prompted me to reflect on my life in ways i had never before, with more articulate language and sharper emotional tools.

what follows is an ode to ancient geomancy—the backbone of my spiritual life—expressed through a collection of sixteen “memories,” each corresponding to one of the sixteen principal geomantic figures and their various symbolisms. i hope that you find some resonance with the sentiments expressed ahead, or at least are provoked in some way by their imagery. take this as a map of my mind, dotted with reveries and fleeting thoughts, through which i forged paths where there were none, and through which i realized i was already where i needed to be.



I : ONCE/ALL : CAPUT DRACONIS

i was born to an eternal sphere

relations inherent

ultimate pleasure is one of potential
in a single moment

at intimacies unknown

i felt unity

and then i had to live the rest of my life

form infinite
light enduring

the specter lives

for once and for all
there was no change except
wet dry dark light

II : MELON : AMISSIO

entered the kitchen through a void
a dusty and reclining california sunlight
my infrequent and innocent hands
 my knees
 my toes
considered the gridded valleys
of the linoleum countertop
i was left alone
 with the hollow townhouse's
 austere defiance

white walls
dense carpet
lola's birds whispering from outside
vhs still sputtering on the tv
 no sound
a land before time
 the smell of fried milkfish
 no dishes
in the sink above which my feet perched
 stumbling echo
 coming down
the stairs (maybe up)
and they never stopped

(someone is coming but they will never see me)

in this guise of anonymity, i saw
 a melon from the dream
 i would have once
 many years later
my younger brother eventually was
and that photo of him (also many years later)
 standing on the door of an open dishwasher
 what i didn't know
i would quickly learn shame
my first memory was a mistake
 a suspension
 an impulse

before i knew it my hands
soft and alien
 pressed against the melon's rind
how effortlessly it met the ground
 fissured and bleeding
 revealing its juices and fear
i heard a shriek
 then, i heard nothing
 endless footsteps

III : DECEMBER : ALBUS

i watched lola die on white sheets smiling
her mangled teeth and jaw
her face, already bruised
and shining against weary sunlight, tasted
the disinterested edge of our kitchen table

ang buhay ko'y unti-unti nang pumapanaw

what did she imagine while only
days before she sang for the last time
pleading melodies i only recalled
through static on an old cassette
that stale waft of crysanthemum
split the room

did she see floral patterns on the way
(her dresses neatly packed beneath the bed)
the same ones she saw
in the overcast jungle
of sapang bato where she serenaded
lolo's solemn face for the first time

hindi ka lilimutin magpakailan pa man

perhaps she failed to shift her gaze
towards the window in hopes of seeing
the insatiate palms of pismo beach
swaying proudly above layers of tar
we feared to become

IV : KUROHIME : VIA

twenty green ponchos
approaching summit

tireless children swinging
arms around rain-worn
rocks and branches
empty bentos in tow

downpour astounding
the middle of july

unsentimental fog stood
abruptly—ending our hike
one of many places
i didn't expect to find myself

(fine print on the strange recruitment website)

the other camp leader called for a quick rest upon the many accommodating boulders. exhausted, i considered how natural it was to displace myself. if i were to tumble down the murmuring volcanic slope, how many days, weeks later would my family wake up in tears?

i imagined myself sublimated into radiant mist fleeing towards the pacific, careful to retrace my path, overtaking shinano, nagano, takasaki, saitama, and finally tokyo (where only a few years later i would enjoy myself lost and tethered to a love in another continent and time.)

chills—at last
my first transformation:

*i was up to task—how freeing
to be a container without context
this relentless land
i could never call my own*

V : DENIM : CONIUNCTIO

you came with a half-eaten toothpick
in your mouth
we hadn't spoken all summer, but
wild grasses not so far from my house
cradled us under the squinting fall of dusk

later you would call this
our rekindling
i tasted pale gray flame and forgot
you were still buried under
frostbitten gasps silent to you, yet

the pillowy give of your thigh
the stubborn denim
the deepest comfort i had ever known
it was the last time
i behaved well with you

VI : DRAMAMINE : CARCER

my dreams diminished, clipboards and platters
everyone in their starchy blue polos

found me guilty for craving escape
dull movements never feel gentle

later at dinner guests sat impatiently
at overcrowded tables—it was a miracle
that dishes never smashed against the windows
reflected with saltwater and bourgeois peril

i poured pinot grigio for a wrinkled entrepreneur
he without shame rested his hand on my ass
thanking me as he would a friend
no response without desire

under jagged stars i called you choked up
shivering on the upper deck—staring into
extinguished harbor towns as you scolded me
you never wanted me to go in the first place

every midnight
i say a prayer for those still asail

VII : HER RECIPES : PUELLA

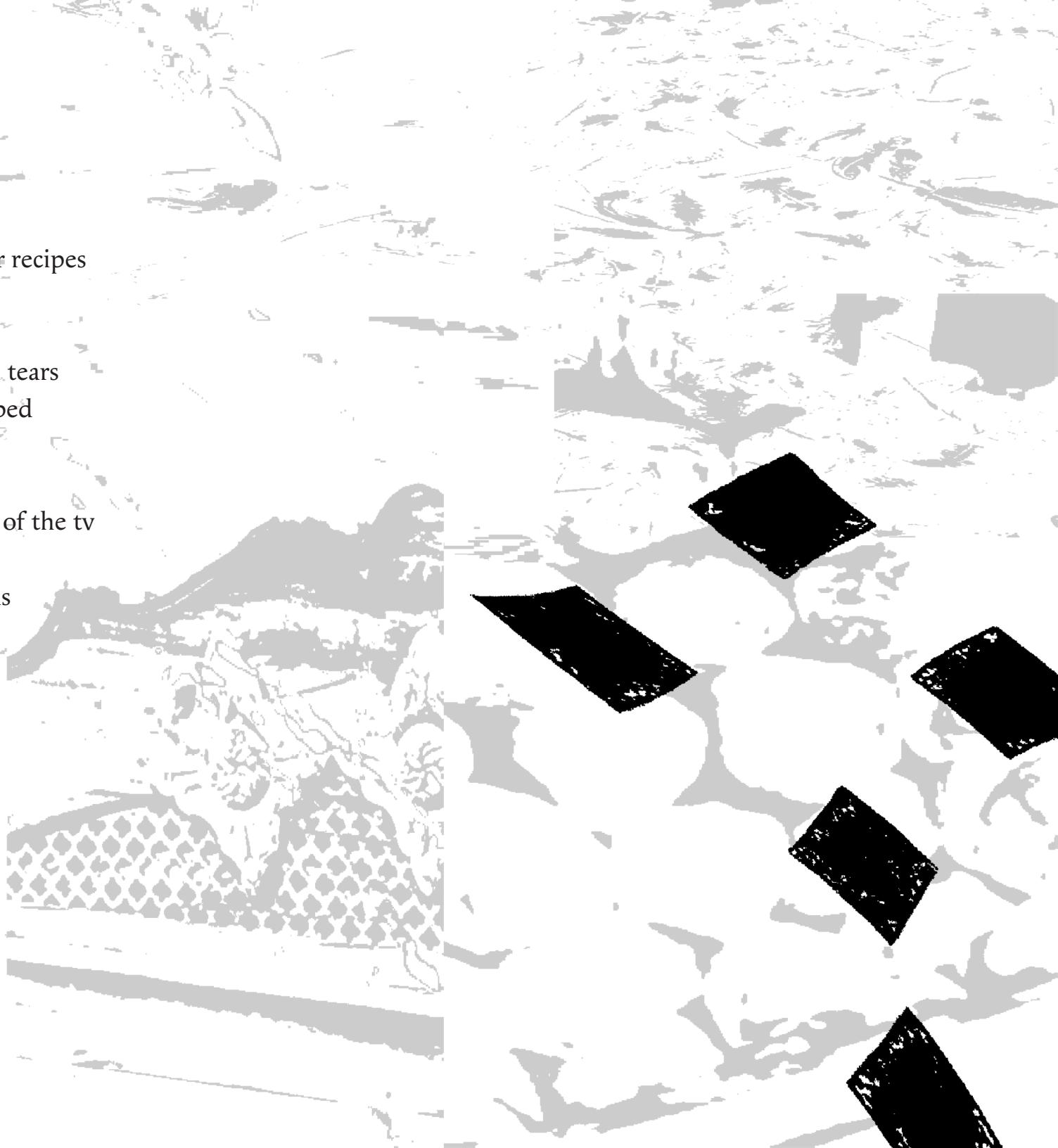
*excessive vegetarian servings
laid out in mismatched bowls*

i sent mom a dutiful photo of her recipes
fulfilled (eyes and stomachs
lining the co-op living room)
she received my eager message in tears
with a ouija board under her bed
maybe lola saw it too

in your black room—in the glow of the tv
you weren't watching
you were at a putrid crossroads
unasked questions of whether
to continue in darkness
or emerge in failure

years later:

*my brother and i consoled
you in the faint hotel room
tv static hushing sobs seldom
your mercy unspent*



VIII : BEAUTIFUL PLACES
I REGRET CRYING IN : TRISTITIA

1. latched bathroom, impossible breeze outside
2. forgotten plaza, you kissed my salty undereye
3. promising sand, fastest drive from south central
4. ivied concrete, we would soon see a hypnotist
5. bejeweled mirror, the bell tower rang suddenly
6. watchful cloud, i followed you home

with you, without you

IX : NEW ORDER : RUBEUS

springing from the top bunk
of a crowded room—immediately
you stormed out the backyard past
debris and thorny bougainvillea
(you knew what you wanted to know)

*burning clouds without origin
unfurl above grim cement*

we fled figueroa
weeds poking up against our reckless feet
how many times i wanted to relent
once and for all after tears
(not for you) then silence
how many times i stood before your headlights
ever expanding circles of forgiveness

my carpal bones ached a year later
i felt like a man and pitied myself
tamed and cowardly and violent
how dare you behave like that in my home
(blunt reminder)
all this because i had danced through a portal
and for a moment
understood a life of courage
i should have made a different mistake

X : MYRTLE AVENUE : FORTUNA MAIOR

unbelievably you gushed
in a language i couldn't speak
but i was grateful to understand
in my blissful fugue
our lives intertwined with the others
as quick as fate

you didn't see me puke on our friend
behind the photo booth curtain
they were dazed but not disgusted
finally undisguised
from my eternal twinned flames
(darker now, enduring)

later you would press your fingertips
against mine and it made me
misspeak—i kissed a great love
and you offered an apology, a blessing
that we were and will be

XI : DECADENCE : FORTUNA MINOR

you accepted me with many questions
hair dyed yellow as a lizard's scale
glimmers in your clip-on jewelry
love was endless again

without blinking i reunited
with the palms of union station
that shimmering karaoke room
waiting for that final moment
you say the words that i can't say

i became the iconoclast of our story
images of alignment now hazy
and forever decadent
the frailest golden hour

XII : BEARD : PUER

the smell of cigars but never smoke
in grandpa's apartment where he disclosed

my brother and i could not ascend
as he would—our tainted spirits
mongoloid blood more apt to serve
the most slighted, most vengeful

dad told me he was misguided, paranoid
(mail never addressed to him)

i considered all his rhymeless detours
from richmond to san jose
he followed an itinerant prophecy
nana flew proudly

his chorus of anonymous african masks
urged me to sing

in praise of their canny certainty
i couldn't make sense of their expressions
mouths agape on bodiless deities
their endless pungent quarrels

*i fear if i have children
they will look down at me from heaven*

XIII : STRANGE MIST : ACQUISITIO

we sat by a playground in chinatown—puddles from water jets disappeared from tarmac and ill-fitting tile. you looked singular, signature with your red frames and prosperous coils. i realized we laugh the same way, so i confided in you that i was changing too quickly—i was a strange mist—but i lied to you about my hope.

tentative droplets reclined
aimlessly onto leaves, cigarettes, old friends
 welcome premonition of clearance to come
under sun, everything melts, dries, burns
 but i increased in spite of myself

XIV : HAY BALES : POPULUS

texas autumn embraced
the driveway from simonton road
the wedding reception a religious affair

no reflection in the bathroom mirror
imagining my face grotesque and vampiric
as the last group photos were taken outside

i couldn't speak of the inevitable purpling sunset
a prom of cows loitered nearby as i stood
by swirled hay bales moaning in a lonely field

no longer did i want
ceremony or communion
there was a more hospitable truth
in the cows, their nonchalance
able to sit at oblique

yet abiding angles to each other

i would rather be hooved
cud dripping down my chin
seated at my assigned table with curiosity
no expectation and languid astonishment
later you found me and wept—refusing
to graze cautiously in my mind

XV. CONTACT — LAETITIA

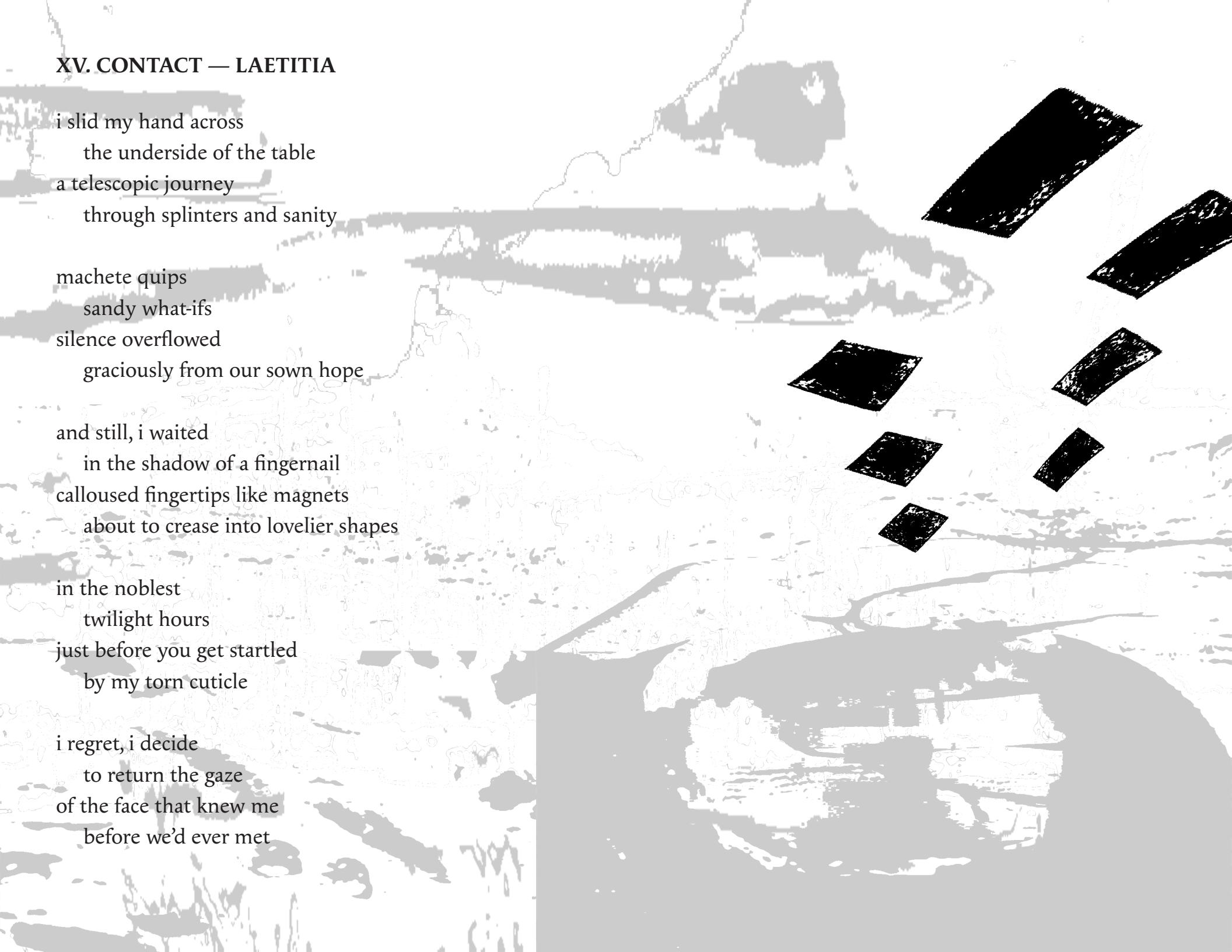
i slid my hand across
the underside of the table
a telescopic journey
through splinters and sanity

machete quips
sandy what-ifs
silence overflowed
graciously from our sown hope

and still, i waited
in the shadow of a fingernail
calloused fingertips like magnets
about to crease into lovelier shapes

in the noblest
twilight hours
just before you get startled
by my torn cuticle

i regret, i decide
to return the gaze
of the face that knew me
before we'd ever met



XVI. EVERY END — CAUDA DRACONIS

death will come to me brave and kind
like the angel i saw on my bedroom ceiling
black, blue, airless
i will become all the things i never did



