This year’s was to be a grand banquet of the International Scientists and Science Appreciation Society, where, after Dr. Hogben’s presentation “On the Coloration of Costa-Rican Tree Frogs” and the cheese plate, post Dr. Song’s “Consequences of ALBATROSS-14 Navigation Pathfinding Updates for Understanding the Shape of the Universe” and a first glass of wine, after Dr. Rossmanith’s talk “Music and Plant-Growth: a Meta-Analysis,” boiled goose or ravioli, post acknowledgements, memorials, and awards, after 23 years in transit and 7 years of waiting on light, at the same time as cheesecake, there old colleague of youth Li’s first report back from Trai Prithvee would be read.

…

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…

I knew I had arrived in Trai by some lights switching color, and a metallic jolting – not of falling or flying or touching ground but of the securing arms sliding into our landing gear. I stepped out into a warehouse with flood lighting and exposed piping, with neatly demarcated space for empty queues, conveyer belts, and a few uniforms gesturing tiredly through them.

The room was 68 degrees and smelled of metal and carpeting. For decoration there were a few flags, triangulated by colors. I’d filled out the forms over the past 13 years, and stuck them in the slots.

…

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Kavi Duvvoori

-Content: underlined suicidality (as in all writing, the “I” is of course fictional, whether it claims not to be or not, and this is unambiguously intended as a short-story with an imagined narrator)

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# Again I Discuss Something Brown

Could i have language? Have it, or even cup it for a minute in a palm? Could i find it, it me, somewhere where i’d stopped, given up on, forgotten about, looking. This is how i’m gonna start saying things; by not saying things, by saying things about saying things.

. ,

When they stop writing about love and death they find they are walking in a forest. It is around 3 in the afternoon; I can’t tell you who they are or what they are saying, but i can tell you about the leaves on the branches, and the loam and orange light.

,. .

*“I have nothing to say*

*and I am saying it and that is*

*poetry as I need it .”*

. ; , ,

This is a story that starts with two people in a room, which is how i start most of my stories when i want to say something, but i don’t want to squander the moment trying to come up with a better way to say what i want to say.

, - . - , .

And as we sat there, they chattered at us from the drawers, in the languages of lost things.

.

She followed the center of the concrete,  
triangling to a point past suburbia:  
the repeated trees, the new houses  
giving fresh configurations of known shapes,  
like walking into stillness, she stepped over leaves.

;.. ,; .;;., . ,; . ;

*“Again I discuss something brown.*

*& once again I'm willing myself dead or I'm coming to see*

*something narrow.*

*Once more I quietly chalk a strange tall bottle.*

*Finally I'm saying something between thick things.”*

, . , . . , . , .,.,.,.,.

She was following the center of the sidewalk’s triangle, over the orange and concrete.

-

That somewhere in the rubble could be a few sentences scratched on floorboards. That we could squat there speaking them and forget that the building has no roof.

* .

The repeating trees, the new houses giving fresh configurations of known shapes, like walking into some stillness she stepped over leaves.

: . ; ,

I want to die, i want to die, all the time (which is to say every few hours) i want to die. And i think i want to write for the reason that i want to do other things, which is that i want to not want to die.

. : ,

On investigating, “want to die” is a bit too abstract – it is not that i think i understand the abstract state corresponding to death (i.e. the breakage of the conditions that enable and sustain life), and feel a desire for that abstract state – but that i am fascinated by and drawn to the enactment of the breakage contained in “dying”, the 4th floor landing, the $4.27 cvs clothesline, the brief pause sitting on the hand-rail and wrapping rope into the iron spokes, the shifting forward of weight and the drop. This leads me to the suspicion that i do not want to die, but that i want to want to die. Other explanations discount the privacy of the performance and the sense, loosening noose and lifting it over my head, of a failure.

, ; - \* . . \* ,\*

Walking past cars and by shadows of cars  
each home offers her up some new form of place:  
a varying pattern made by a garden  
potted plants in new positions, another shade  
of yellow some house shows, behind its greenery.

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But as soon as the clothesline’s all packed up, before even, i find myself telling it: *the penciled-note for weeks in a back pocket explaining itself, what it was like that night-into-morning to find myself automatically planning, thinking about futures, and what it was like trying to and for once succeeding in convincing myself that those plans and futures wouldn’t be mine; that time i set a 4 minute timer on my smartphone for me to get it done or not get it done, and i did not and it went off, and i pulled the phone from my pocket, slid my finger over the thing and entered my passcode so it wouldn’t just snooze and go off again in another 5 minutes, and how i lifted my legs back behind the railing.* Each telling has different intonations; and i know who it’s being told to (or they change, as the story changes, but the nature of their silence dictates my tones of voice and my emphases). And then*, that friend seeing me on my way back from taking a restroom break,* with no time to finish up stories. And now here i am, telling the telling of it.

* . , .; .

This evening she was trying to remember the name of a fantasy book with a tree in it she had read one morning, or early afternoon, when she was maybe 10, in the library in the mall in Ontario where her grandfather had worked. Really she just wanted to remember anything that would let her look the book up – she could not even remember its author, or plot. The main character was maybe 12 – the age of most children who stumble into magic worlds then end up in a book – and everything happened in a massive tree that was a world, or world that was a tree. It was probably a trilogy. The tone was very mythic and big, but also understated. There were hints of references, perhaps Celtic or Norse – she’d tried searching “Young Adult Novel World Tree”, and more specifically with the Norse tree “Fantasy Novel Ygdrassil,” and there were multiple young adult or fantasy novels with Ygdrassil in them, but none of them could have been the one she remembered reading.

* - - - -

Consider a bird through a window; it is a small fluffed mass, vibrating, folded up.

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I worry that maybe everything i’ve written is a metaphor for depression or suicide. Or that maybe every item on the checklist or each noose is a failed piece of writing: the easy intensity of it, the manufactured catharsis, mechanical tragedy.

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*“people were mean to you*

*but i always thought you were cool*

*clicking down the concrete hallways*

*in your spiked heels*

*back in high school”*

\ \ . \,

As though on a snowflake or mandelbrot set  
with a step past a crack she steps back  
to a changed place where she was just before.  
Every evening she tries new repetitions:  
this admission to ritual, this walk into old things

, ; . /

Now, it’s late – or at least, at 6:22, which is when it is, it’s dark out. The room’s a little bit musty, as two months in i still haven’t fully unpacked, and i’m recovering from a cold: tissue box to the right of my laptop, garbage bin full – and i never even put a bag in it. I was listening to Grimes’ new album again, and now I’m listening to Glenn Gould’s 1955 rendition of Bach’s Goldberg Variations while i type, and am leaning at the screen and rocking back and forth to the piano a little bit, while unwrapping a Kit-Kat. I often listen to this album when i want something to zone out to, or as music when i try to focus on something else, as opposed to his 1982 recording of the Goldberg Variations, which i listen to sometimes when going to sleep.

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On top of bright pilings and branch shadows

she follows the centerline of the

sidewalk’s triangling form, poking sky.

As though one fixed point, lawns and homes

went by her.

, . , .: , .;

The grass is a maze and you will pass your finger through it; the grass is a city

in which you will not live.

, ..:; \ \*

“*but don’t hate her / when she gets up toOOoo leaEAVe”*

*\*a brief chair creak\**

\_-

i think i forgot to say something

Kavi Duvvoori

Fiction II, Fall 2015 (Matthew Hedley)

(These are two different and unrelated things. I may be (un/semi)consciously trying to bring out subtle resonances and deviously prove some point by placing them next to each other, but do ignore that if you can, as if it exists, it’s not a very good or a very interesting point that i would be trying to suggest)

(Also neither of these is finished, mostly because i don’t like endings, or plots, or themes, or characters, or titles, but i need to turn something in)

(also i id as asexual-spectrum, which might sort of be relevant; i.e. people who want to having joyful sex with each other is great, but it would annoy me if you used the words “erotic,” “eroticism,” “sexual attraction,” or “sexuality” – also “Oedipal complex” etc. – in describing the dynamics and relations between the characters in one of the stories, when i do not intend such dynamics to be present; you can still do that and have useful things to say, i just wanted to tell you that it will annoy me)

(sorry for these explanations. Maybe it’s an artistically intentional, metafictional gesture?)

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Content: an inexplicit suggestion of self-harm (also I forgot with my last writing to label a mention of something; I’m really sorry about that)

Mitchi was behind the windows with the dome of their head on the gentle lukewarm glass, looking at the pebbled ground and the leaves, the dry crusts of leaves wandering over shadows of leaves, and was trying to remember how to breathe without thinking about it, when Lee opened the door.

Mitchi didn’t turn towards the door, but their shoulders loosened down and head rolled up some as Lee walked towards them; and they turned their head a quarter of the way to Lee as Lee sat on the edge of the desk chair with a hand on Mitchi’s shoulder. Their shoulder stiffened into bone for a moment, then loosened, and Mitchi drew a hand to hair. Then Mitchi slipped back onto the stool and looked fully at Lee – the whole looking silence of them in front of the wall: taught lips turned slightly up, small nose taking a long breath out, skin under the sides of eyes raised and still, and the right thumb on Mitchi’s left shoulder rubbed lightly twice.

They both turned to look out the window as someone stepping over the leaves’ yell to another person through the window shouted through it. It was a nearly joyful, pointing shout, and footsteps ran on, and Lee and Mitchi continued looking out for a few breaths.

A sudden sobbing from Mitchi – simultaneously restrained and calculated – or more a gasping, a placing of their fingers on dome of head, and palms on cheek.

Lee sat behind Mitchi and leaned into them, the dome of Lee’s head into Mitchi’s shoulder, arms over stomach and ribs, and held. And there was a solidity there and it didn’t stop the sobs but organized them, redirected them into a shaking and clenching and shortness of breath, as Mitchi pressed Lee’s left wrist with the pads of their right fingers.

Mitchi noticed their rate of breathing changing to match Lee’s – sometimes a little faster, sometimes a little late, but centered around the slow expansion and contraction of it, returning to it; with broken breaths or shaking, Lee’s arms tightened and pulled Mitchi back. The confusion of it was – that if Mitchi wanted to be somewhere, this was where they wanted to be, but they also didn’t want to be here, so they must not want to be somewhere. Lee stayed there breathing.

Mitchi looked at the place where the wall met the floor – cream into gray, a strip of brown, a peeled up frontier of dry paint and varying inlets – and at Lee’s hands – the crenellation of blue sweater opening onto them, the tiny triangle latticework over everything, the faint flow of a few wisps of hair catching light – and at the floor past Lee’s hands – the wild roughness of the linoleum, the spots and debris. Eventually, Mitchi leaned forward and turned, as Lee’s arms dropped back, and Mitchi slid their fingers through the spaces between Lee’s fingers and pressed them a moment, and got up, and blinked tightly, and left.

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Content: casual description of gruesome things happening to bodies, casual alcohol

The way up was all rattling and the toggling of lights, with no time really to look around except in remembering.

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Ri’s nose was against the cold window and their slow breath made a patch of window that grew and receded with their inhalation and exhalation opaque as it trapped a mist of spittle. Through it, the fleet made a lattice over stars, each craft, like theirs, a little model of blue paint and gleaming protrusions, wings of solar panels made into parallel lines orienting the endless open space behind them. Ri tried counting craft by threes, even though they knew the answer – 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 39, 42, 45, 48 – but they didn’t get to 105.

“Now don’t fall through – the weather forecast said it would be pretty cold outside, and your eyes would get sucked out or something,” Lon ventured, halfheartedly. But there’s no real attempt to make a joke out of it, just sounds to hold onto in the black and scattered light.

Ri calculated a grunt, found the right noise – a sort of “MMhmmm” starting high-pitched then dropping a few notes – made it, and went back to staring. Behind them, people shuffled and found seats, perhaps pulled a screen from a backpack or bag or satchel, or talked, but in a hush that they couldn’t quite explain, that blew through the room like leaves and birds through the wind.

Lon joined Ri at the window, and watched the small glints and trailing streaks darting into the fleet, then dropping back to land. These were the last stragglers, sent up because, even the most elaborate, expensive, and lengthy initiative yet undertaken by humanity – perhaps the only ever actually undertaken by Humanity, as Humanity – would be delayed by a few families sleeping through their alarms, some overly thick rainclouds over Tokyo, a malfunctioning battery in Reykjavik, a pilot in Lima misreading runway slot C9 as B9. But the OGD Organizing Committee was prepared for this and everything was on schedule, after adjusting for “Unaccounted Delays.”

Ri turned to Lon, “Think anything bad would happen if I had a drink before the safety briefings?”

“No, I mean it’s not exactly new safety information, but I thought all cat-Rs are only available in Pod Lounge & Dining, after initiation?”

“Yeah, but they didn’t confiscate my vanilla extract.”

“.. yeah, I also want some, in fact, I hereby am blackmailing you for a shot of vanilla extract”

Ri’s dropped their backpack into the space between them and the window and with excessive caution slipped a small bottle out, pouring some into the large cap and holding onto the bottle in the other hand.

“To staying warm.”

“To keeping our eyeballs in.”

The streaks in the window had, with a rare few exceptions, ended. Speakers from every direction crisply announced, in English here and in 172 languages, Ri recalled, across the rest of the fleet, “Dispersal in 3 hours and 45 minutes. Please follow the lighted arrows to the nearest Presentation Room. Please do not delay or disrupt the briefing process by walking in directions other than those indicated by arrows, or by making unnecessary conversation. Nothing is more important to all of us than the safety of us all.”

|| . ;- ,

To tell the Tuesday of Ri’s second week would be to tell their first year aboard NORTHERN-GREBE, not for its triumphs or calamities but because that Tuesday was just when their structure of mornings, noons, and afternoons became the basic and repeated shapes of Ri’s daily living. They woke some ten minutes before 8:00 as intended, but did not, as planned, head to the Preening Room at 7:55 before the morning rush, but instead spent some thirty minutes with Fleet Updates and acquaintances phrases, reading and formulating opinions on the latest circulating Opinions, and reading some story, about somebody sitting at a café at and after its closing time. After a hurried preening, Ri found themselves with a few extra minutes to leisurely dress and head down to “EHL-uhn-DEE” for coPhi and uncaffeinated conversation.

Though in all the walls and sentences around there was some sense of the absence of ground, of the loss of directions and of the staleness of the air, this was just part of the smell of space-travel, one that Ri already thought utterly inane to remark on, but which they would not stop smelling, like street-dust or redwood or linoleum.

“ladskfjldsafj,” Stel hesitantly began. “Well, oiwjeqofj iowqfjo ijqwo fijqw jfo wi,” Stel continued, the hesitancy dropping away, revealing itself as just the defensive introduction of long-fermenting language, exposed for the first time to open air.

TO, WITH ABOUT A ONE IN THREE CHANCE, BE CONTINUED