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Vito

This story starts with a self portrait,
from which we will jump into the moment.

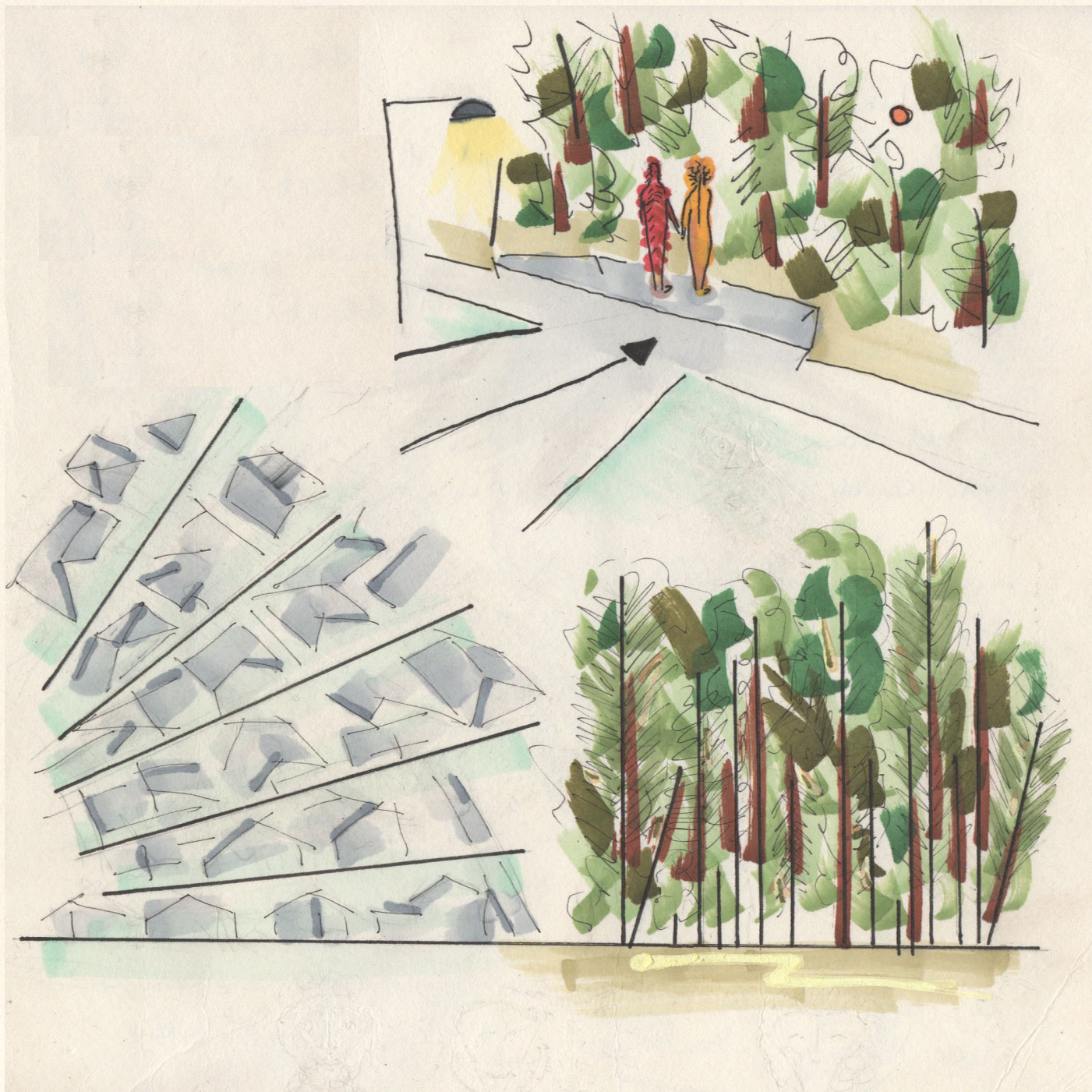


I stood at a dead end of a suburban paved road.
In front of me was a dense forest,
Behind me were cosy-looking houses.

Accompanying me was a woman whose name I never learned.
But let's call her -m-.

I was madly in love with her, And she was with me.
Not a new fiery love, but one that grows with the embrace of
time.

We had almost arrived at our new home, A treehouse.
We stood there for a moment holding hands staring into the
forest that promised us a future of peace, love, and happiness.



I could see the treehouse in the distance next to a small lake,
- It was beautiful.

The woman took a step forward, then turned, looked at me,
and gently pulled my arm.
- She was beautiful.

I looked down at my feet that didnt move, I felt feel sweat
dripping down from my nose.
My face twisted in a spitfire of grimaces and expressions trying
to figure out what I was feeling, while the woman stood still
expressing care and confusion.

“ If I go now I might never want to leave,
this is what I want is it not?
So just step forward you....
What world is behind me?
What if the world will miss me?
There is so much left to do with the world that now will be left
undone. “
poor world. I can't leave it lonely!”



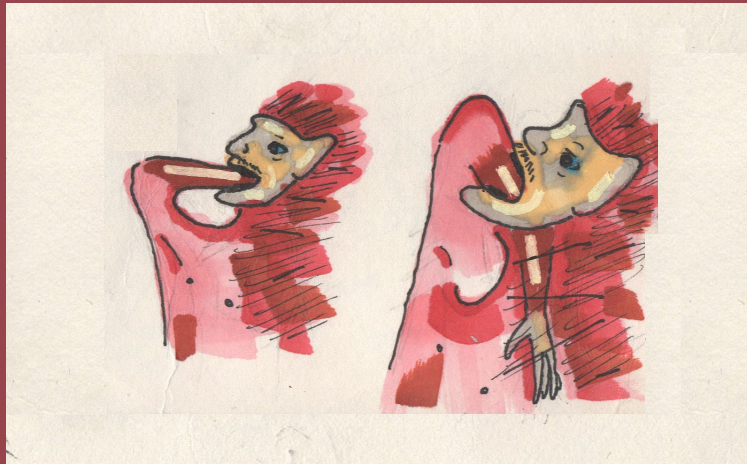
The solution turned out to be quite simple,
genius! if I say so myself.

When the thought occurred to me I was perplexed how I had
never thought of something so obvious yet elegant before.

I simply let go of -m-'s hand, reached into my own mouth. And
pressed further into my body until i could grab something solid
yet squishy.

Then, in a great dramatic motion I pulled as hard as I could...
and out I came!!

A head, an arm, an ass, feet...







There I was! In front of me!
I lifted myself off from the floor, dusted off my shoulders, and
shook my hand while looking at the corners of my mouth that
slowly became a wide smile.

-m- sat close observing us and relaxing in the grass. Then, with
a cheerful shout she gestured her own stroke of genius..

+ (more!!)

All four of my eyes widened in excitement, joy and appreciation.
But of course! And so my arm went back into my mouth.

3 of me! , 'again!' 4! 5!

We were all dancing and jumping around in excitement while i
reached into my mouth again and again.

+++++++ (more more more!!) , we frantically whooped and
waved. -m- hugging and kissing the new arrivals.

O how great the joy on the exponentially crowded pavement.



50...

I counted 50 of me once the glorious frenzy had calmed,
when I felt we were complete.
I again was holding -m-'s hand so she would not lose me in my
identically chattering and laughing crowd.

I started lining up in front of us.
One by one i was given a kiss on the cheeks, a brotherly
embrace, and a unique objective to seek out in play with the
world.

Then, I gently pushed my selves into the direction of the road
and houses.

We waved me goodbye until I was out of sight.
This repeated for a while, Until it was just -m- and I(singular) left.

I opened my mouth to show there was nobody still coming.
-m- stuck out her tongue to signal my ridiculousness.
Then, we headed together towards the treehouse.



Me, myself, and I had agreed on 10 years with the world until I
would have to come back and I would have a reunion back at
the spot between the trees and the houses.

My selves had the world
and I had my love.

So complete my love could be!
So bewitching was my peace!

All thoughts of chaos attempting to corrupt the here and now,
could easily be placed.

All feelings of restlessness or greater responsibility coming
from the irresistible and wondrous siren call of curiosity were
soothed by the realization that very likely I was already out there
engaging with it.

My treehouse and my love were the world, nothing else had any
reason to exist.



Year 1

Now, our lives settled comfortably in the moment. I felt very connected to time and space. Different from how I approached these concepts before.

Inside the house time felt frozen. Only -m-'s and my movements dictated its flow.

Outside, day and night provided a rhythm. But I felt no need to have any specific feelings for yesterday nor tomorrow.

I also noticed that I was not feeling any urges to perceive the things in space as either good or bad. I just experienced them as their geometry and interactions with my body. How they got there, How they got to be what they were, or what they could mean to me later, held no meaning to me.

Aspects of things that had no presence in our forest world were for another me to perceive.

All in all, -m- and I were having the time of our lives.



Year 2

In my opinion, -m- 's ears, eyes, and nose were the most beautiful I've ever seen. If I thought about it, if they looked so beautiful, then how they hear, see and smell must also be quite exceptional. Her experience of the world must be something wonderful indeed!

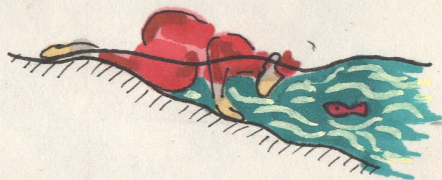
Wherever -m- would look I quickly followed with my eyes. Whenever she would pause to listen or smell, I would immediately freeze and try to figure out what caught her attention.

I had a great time being her shadow,
and she had impeccable taste in sights and sounds!

After a while of this, for some reason, -m- seemed to be less amused. She would look at me and squint her eyes or cover her ears with her hands... Later, while i was happily entangled with her senses. She plucked me off her, walked me to the door, gave me a gentle slap on my head, and then pushed me out and shut the door...

I moped around for a bit with slightly hurt feelings. Until a terribly ugly bird with terribly ugly senses flew past me. I recognized it as one of the few creatures that shared our forest world with us. I somewhat begrudgingly decided I should put my disgust for its perception behind me and also try and get to know it's view. Since it did share our forrest world, it should still be worthwhile.

I spend the following times excitedly introducing myself to the surroundings.



Year 3

In between spending time with -m- and my day-to-day activities I had developed a new hobby.

I'd close my eyes, and walk around until I lost my orientation.

Then walk a little further.

I'd crouch down, tilt my head towards the ground, and open my eyes. In front of me, unremarkable pieces of ground would come in sight.

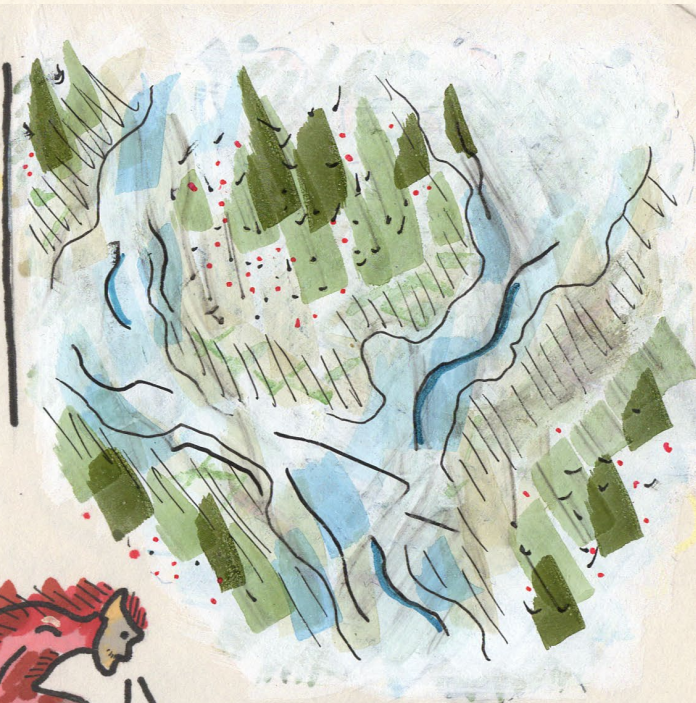
Usually, I would sit still like this for a "long" while.

During motionless observation, slowly :

Worlds upon worlds were revealed.

I'd quickly lose my sense of scale and everything down there would seem massive or tiny against everything else. I'd lose my sense of time and everything was swarming while it stayed perfectly still. Each piece of ground was a fascinating decor for forms and movement to happen on.

I was never disappointed during my hobby, there was never a view that would stay in a shape as just something to put my feet upon. This success, while I only had observed a tiny part of the grounds around my treehouse. Never ceased to amaze me, It even intimidated me slightly.



Year 4

At this time, -m- and I were spending a lot of time inside the house together. One time, a strange creature ran past me.

My eyes followed it in curious wonder.

It was nothing I had ever seen before, and the room felt ablaze by its activity.

It looked a little bit like me, but smaller.

I also recognized -m- in it.

Thus I found it wonderfully beautiful.

It kept running around the room carefully inspecting all solid forms by smashing into them.

-m- was standing behind the creature and smiled at the scene.

I looked at - m- pointed to the creature, then opened my mouth, pointed inside it. And then to -m- with my eyebrows raised in question.

This seemed to amuse -m-. She looked at the creature, laughed, and then shook her head and pointed below her belly....

Hmm.. This seemed quite strange.

I had to reflect on this information for a moment.

It seemed that -m- had performed her own act of miraculous genius. I can't say I quite understood her methods. They seemed a bit crude. But I have to admit, the idea to mix a little of -m- and me in it... bravo! She has skill.



Year 5

Occasionally, the plants in our forest exploded:

Filling the air with tiny parts of themselves.

Many a time I was shaken from my serene observations by loud popping sounds or a well-aimed seed colliding painfully with my forehead.

One such time, after hearing a pop. I spotted the seed while on its absolute determined trajectory towards my head.

Then, suddenly, for a short moment, there was a tiny flicker of light emitting from within the seed. And the direction of the seeds' flight kept glitching upwards. Almost as if something new within the seed was fighting against it for its own purpose.

Sadly, It was short-lived. Just a moment later I was clutching my eye in pain and the seed was lying still on the ground well on its way to becoming a new plant.

From then on, I took it upon myself to sit guardian next to the plants and eagerly wait until they would explode.

Sometimes, -m-'s miracle would join my activity, but quickly lose interest.

How I yearned to observe a seed fly up to the sky, and never come down.



Year 6

-m-'s genius and I were sitting across from each other, I would make a face, and -m-'s genius would mimic me. It would try so hard to copy my expressions of Joy, Fury, or despair. However, to me, each one looked the same. I would always feel amusement and care no matter what face it was trying to make.

A joyous but stern shout rang. A hand lifted us in motion. -m- had appeared and was herding us in a direction of her choosing with little calls and a cheeky smile, there was no point in resisting.

We arrived at a rock wall next to the lake. -m- positioned us in front of the wall, took some powders out of a bag, and started pelting us with it. If we would move any muscle she would correct us to stay still. -m-'s genius and I started showing her the scary expressions we had practiced earlier. But even my sophisticated and well-crafted faces did not affect -m-'s resolve.

After a while -m- stopped and came to stand beside us. She gestured to the powder and stuck out her tongue. We then rushed to the powder and took our revenge. Once we were finished -m- jumped cheerfully to us, and pointed to the wall with a big smile. There, we could see clear silhouettes of us where our bodies had stopped the powder. I didn't really understand. Why would we need another us on the rock? If I wanted to see -m- I could just go and look at her. But both -m- and -m-'s genius seemed happy. So I shared in the joy.



Year 7

Ice... .. Snow... freezing cold...
Unfamiliar concept to me but I was surrounded by them
anyhow.

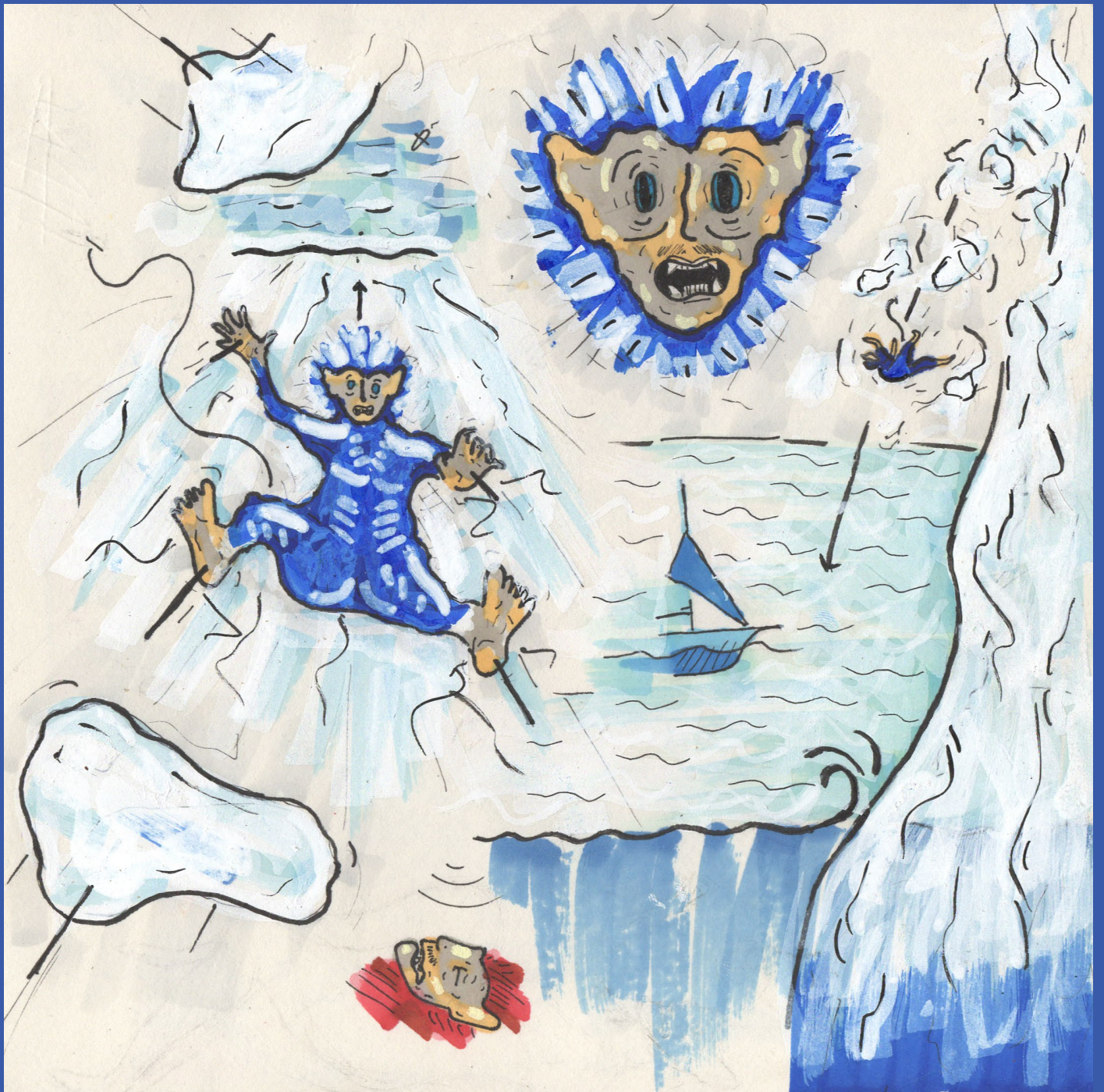
I was weightless and felt the wind rushing past my ear.
I was scared. I was absolutely all overwhelmingly afraid.
It was as if fear was the only emotion in existence.

Behind me, a great mass was rushing towards me,
Just in front of me, big blocks of ice were floating in the air...

-
There was nothing after that.

-
A new memory had reached me in my world.
It was fresh as if it had just happened.
I didn't understand it at first. But I later came to recognize it as
a memory of my dying.

I cried for myself,
I knew I would never reunite with this me.
It angered me that I only received the memory of my death and
not of the life before it. I wished for a chance to soothe my fear
in my final moment.



Year 8

I quietly suffered for a long time with my memory of death.
I resented its invasion of my beautiful world, and started
whispering calming words to my memory of fear.

I stared into the distance without seeing anything,
I heard the sounds of the forest without listening to it.
I felt -m- probing and caressing me ever so lovingly to find out
what had changed. But I waved her away.

Eventually, while I was broodingly walking circles around the
house. -m- stepped defiantly in front of me on the path made
by my repetitive steps. She stared at me with a furious intensity
that I could not ignore.

I stood still and looked at her for a while, she did not move.
The words crawled out of me painfully: "*!...HAD.. DIED...*"

-m- jumped back in absolute horror.
My throat started burning in intense pain.
I shouted. -m- screamed. Feeling the same pain.
We collapsed clutching our necks... I realized too late what I
had done...

I had never even once spoken to -m- before.
I had never felt a reason to. But now that the first word had
been introduced... there was no way back... our way of relating
to each other was destined to change.
Death's invasion of the now had now solidified.



Year 9

Every night, we lay together on top of the tree looking up at the sky and its yellow dots.

We would talk.

Talk about the past, present, and future.

-m-'s miracle had inherited my restless curiosity.

It would question us about everything it could think of.

With each question, and with each of our incomplete improvised answers, our world grew again beyond our treehouse. And beyond our love.

When -m- and I would meet during the day, our mouths opened in preparation for speaking, and our ears perked up to receive the words. But neither of us could think of anything to say.

Solemnly we would put our hands on each other's waists and shoulders and quietly slow dance around each other,
All this talk had scared us.
Our beliefs were stumbling clumsily when faced with language.

I never felt so far away from -m- before. I was afraid of our love becoming irrelevant, and the possibility of its death.
Worst of all. With our minds on words but nothing to say.
I was not sure anymore what -m- was feeling...
Was our world coming to an end?



Year 10

The glorious day had arrived!!
I was returning!!

-m- and I had constructed a great hall below the tree to receive everyone. It had a decorated entranceway coming from the street. We stood together in front of the building to greet me.

-m- was laughing and smiling with me in anticipation, but I could feel her shaking ever so slightly.

After a while, lights began appearing on the horizon, and the ground started rumbling. A great euphoria for what was yet to come started building inside me,

The rumbling and lights became shimmers of shapes and a loud shaking.

I extended an arm to -m- for a dance just between the two of us. And so dance we did. Sharing my euphoria while the swarming shapes kept growing in the distance. Numerous sounds started playing to accompany the shaking and our movements

We felt as if the universe was closing in on us, while we shared this timeless moment.



The first of me appeared in sight!
oh what a sight I was!

I was riding towards me on a big colorful object decorated with shapes and colors unlike anything that could be found around the treehouse. They gave hints to the life I had lived.

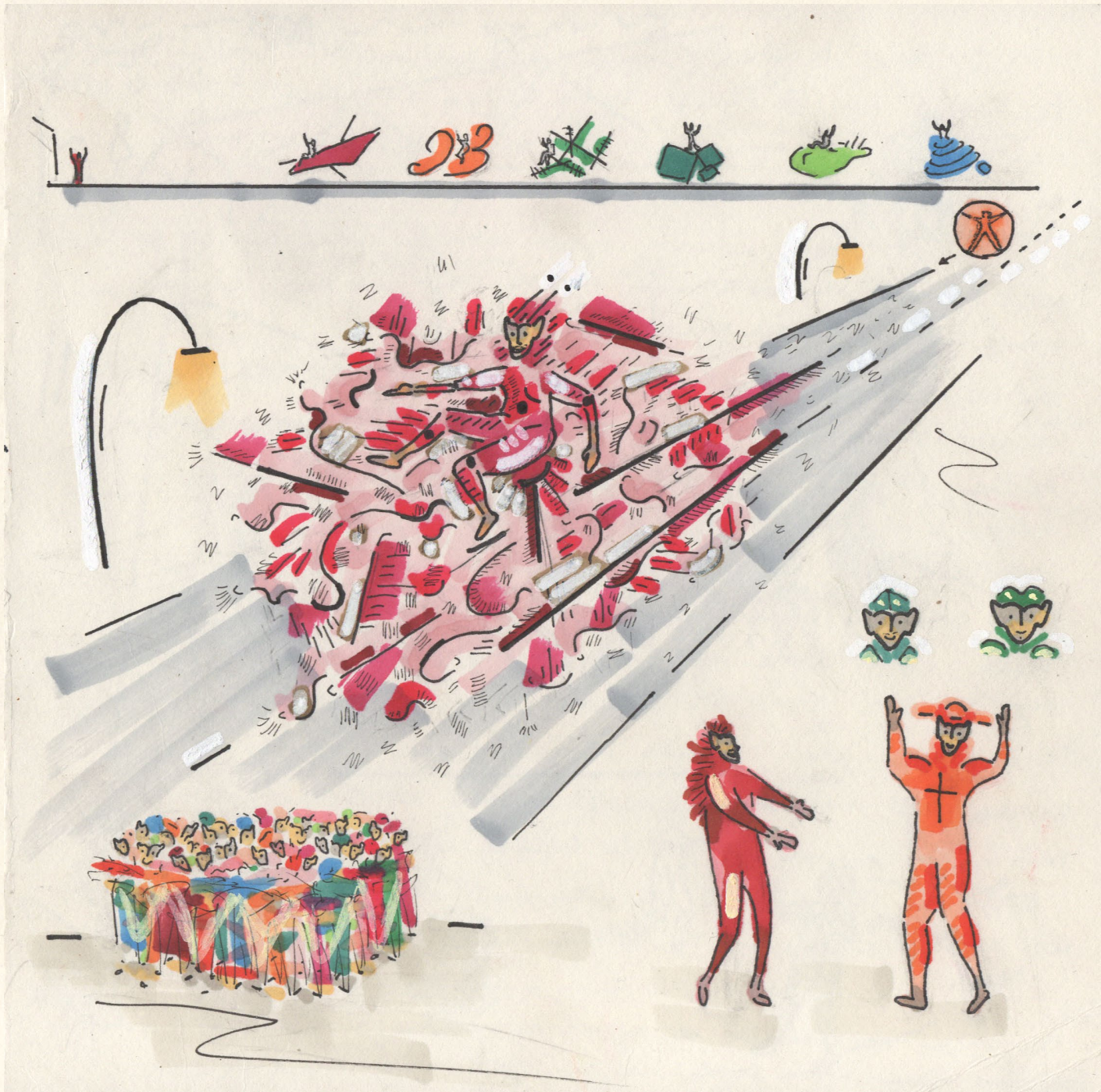
When we saw ourselves we shouted in excitement.
I looked quite different from myself, with a slightly altered body.
The years clearly affected me.
I slowly approached closer.

Behind me, the rest of me showed as well!
It was indescribable ... so beautiful was this moment and this sight ... it was like a fantastical bombastic parade. Each of me looked beautiful like his own. Their floats showed incredible worlds of origin. None looked even slightly like another. I was getting dizzy imagining all they must have experienced.

Still. We all were smiling with the same smile, cheering in the same tone, and moving in the same rhythm. We were an at the same time perfectly unified and perfectly chaotic thing.

One by one, I dismounted and stepped before me.
We all gathered together in front of the hall. So many hugs between long-lost friends, so many astonished and appreciating shouts about my seemingly new appearance.

We circled each other in a clunky mass making sure we all got to greet all 48 others.



We gathered together inside the building.
50 chairs were placed with 49 filled with me.

On the last one I had placed a block of ice.
From the solemn glances it received I understood that my
memory of death had reached the others as well.

I attempted to give a little speech welcoming myself officially, In
which I had little success. I kept interrupting myself and did not
really listen. But this was fine. I probably knew already what I
would have said.

The chairs were being flung in the air,
I couldn't possibly sit still! Not now when we were finally all
together again. The room erupted in play.

I taught myself games, having many participants to play with.
I had such skill! Boulderling laughter was ever present in the
room. It was true : I was being ridiculously funny! Anything I said
with even a faint tone of a joke was laughed upon before I even
finished my sentence. Great minds think alike after all.

We started to tell myself greatly exaggerated stories of my
experiences. perhaps, they were even entirely made up. This
was, after all, our only chance to impress with the seemingly
impossible, before the reunification of my memories would rob
us of the chance to dictate my perception of them.

I loved myself so much in this moment!



There was one not enjoying the moment...
She was sitting alone in the corner of the room with her eyes
dashing around from face to face. The I that had lived with her
at the treehouse noticed her first. I separated from the crowd.
I Crouched in front of her, and stared into her eyes.

"What's wrong?"

-m- smiled at me weakly with water building up under her eyes.
She waved into the room.

*"It's you.. You are incredible, I can see so clearly in them the
wonders they have experienced... compared to that. Who am
I? What is this house? You will now receive their memories and
for sure want to leave here.. Leave me... And you know what? ,
worst of all... I would understand if you did.. "*

She was crying, and I felt tears swelling up as well,
I couldn't imagine any version of myself that would not want to
be around her. However, it was true that the laughing crowd
around us had lived without her. And seemed to do just fine.
This troubled me deeply. I grabbed her hand

"But I love you! I'd never leave!"

*"You say that now, and I know You wouldn't. But you will be
reminded of other loves from other lives. And who knows what
you will think then?"*

I cried then too, and I realised how selfish I had been sending
myself out to be affected by the world. -m- caressed my head,
then pushed my arm away

"GO!, it's time."



...

The room went deadly quiet in an instant.

...

-m-s last words had echoed around the room. It had reminded us of what had to be done... Now the moment had come...

...

98 eyes darted across each other uncomfortably,

...

98 ears perched up, dreading to hear the next sound.

...

I stared into the room at the faces. Well... It seems they would all have to go back the way they came...

...

I swallowed slowly and opened my mouth to test its functioning... It creaked and squeaked loudly.

...

...“I’M NOT FINISHED!” I shouted and dashed to the exit, where I jumped in my way to block me from leaving, I started pushing and shoving myself in no direction in particular. I seemed panicked, I was standing motionless, I was angry, and I seemed relieved. I was everything except eager to experience the next moment.

After what -m- had said to me, I didn’t want to proceed anymore either. But I knew that I had no say in this.

One of me with an experienced-looking face came to stand in front of me, looked at me with compassion, and nodded. Then I calmly presented myself with a leg to be put in my mouth.

I quietly complied and started consuming myself.



After this, everything became a blur,
An overwhelming gluttony awakened in me.
All there was was consumption!

With each mouth full, glimmers of strange memories flashed
behind my eyes. They were delicious!

I reached around myself faster and faster, directing everything
towards my mouth, totally beyond myself by hunger. I would
grab clutches of bodies and swallow them whole, shivering
by the waves of sounds and sights that bombarded my
subconscious.

Then.. when there was only me singular left in the room, The
hunger faded.

Almost instantly, I collapsed to the floor.



I
BLACKED
OUT

























I opened my eyes after what seemed an eternity.

The sight that greeted me was that of -m- and her genius bending over me. My waking up seemed to scare them as if they were gazing upon a stranger, unsure who I was or if I would recognize them.

The memories were still ringing actively in my mind. I knew I was not the same anymore. But not a fiber in my mind would ever forget them.

I sat up, smiled my smile, and clutched both their heads in the palms of my hands, -m- let out a terrible scream of relief and even anger, and -m-s genius buried its head in my shoulder.

We held each other like this for a while.

I sat and reflected on my pasts. This moment, and our future. A single wondrous thought occurred to me, that soon overshadowed everything else...

“Wauw, I have so much to tell them!”