

INTRODUCTION

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EGG

leaf

egg case *nutrients* *glue*

September

LARVA (CATERPILLAR)

cocoon

trees *soil* *wood*

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PUPA (CHRYSLIS)

cocoon

trees

soil

wood

June

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July

AFTERWORD

E G G

leaf

From our table, I can look out into the garden. Marble fountain gurgling clichés. Grass. Trees lining a cement walkway. Cement like the winter catching up with you on a road trip across America. The attached hotel bathes the whole restaurant in shade.

Breakfast comes
at the same time I start to see the leaves
outside shedding their thin summer skin.
It is not fall yet, but it should be; I have been
sitting in this cafe now for almost three months.
The end of June came naturally, then August.
The world takes on a certain glow this time in
September, how the leaves are golden now.

The waiter puts down a salad in front of me: no tomato, no cucumber, no dressing. “Just lettuce, then?” In the summer: Just lettuce. Please take my order. Please, no small talk. Thank you. All right. No, I’m good on water. Thank you. Yes, thank you, more wine. Yes, I know it is 8 AM on a Tuesday. Thank you.

Familiar-looking waiter. He looks like a cousin I spent childhood summers with because he had a house at the beach. I have not been to the beach in a long time.

A napkin folded over the waiter’s left arm. Bowtie slowly choking him. In another three months: dead. With the leaves. In the past three months: has he changed colors, too?

If one human year is seven dog years, what is three human months to a dog? Sitting across from me. Does not bark. Does not shed on his omelet. Ordered an omelet, three months ago. He does not look significantly older now. Should he?

Dog turns to
me, whispers *it’s cold in here, Dad*
and I say to him *I know* even though I am
comfortable under these restaurant lights.
Piano playing in the corner, but 8 AM
on a Tuesday, still. Three months.
Worms wriggling out of the piano as
it shakes with weights of memories.

McKinley Keener

The salad is cold and wet in my mouth and I swallow before I remember not to call it a salad. Lettuce. Iceberg, romaine, green leaf. Could use some vegetables. Belt loose: already hooked on the last notch. Will cut more later. Tired. Eyes are sewn shut across base of the lids. Three months: awake. Did not want to doze off at the wheel. Now: could use some sleep.

Dog barks. Too much pepper in his omelet. Have to leave. We do not actually stay at this hotel. Not anymore. Outside: spring again.

Time to go. Time to go home. Down steps to reach the subway, then swipe card. Funnel into the rush hourers because everyone gets into work late when work is located at the wrong end of your syringe. Down steps. Breathing is more difficult down here. Dog still by my side even though he is not on a leash. Both of us, walking: shells crunch underfoot.

September

[...]

ADULT

literature

the hawk-moths visiting flowers at dusk

The desert does not feel hot, like it should. Like Tennessee in July. I bury myself in the sand for two months. The end of August, then September. Loneliness sucks the marrow from my bones. Leave me hollow, love. Strip me clean.

Have been breathing in dust for too long. Gun in my pocket. Metal clinking my keyring as I walk. Walking nowhere. Loaded: will quench my thirst. I am sure of it.

Love, sketch half of my face like I have sketched yours. Eyes like flattened coins of heavy metal. Nose, a ski slope under snow. Lips the silhouette of a bird in flight.

Sleeping in the sand: easier encased in wood. I will tack the drawings of us side-by-side at level with my eyes when I lie down. Man-sized hole in the middle of the desert. You: throw the dirt back on top. No one will know what is beneath.

man-moth: newspaper misprint for 'mammoth'

When I am six
years old, my brother calls me half a man
and I am honored to be considered even that.
My brother's smiles are a kind of cold you will
never feel this side of the end of the world.
In the dark, I can hear him through the slate-
black cloth that is the wall between our rooms,
screaming at the same frequency every night.

I am always
climbing the wrong way up ladders.
Holes cut in the lower sides of ships
have only caused me pain in the past,
but now I am not adverse to drowning
with hands stretched towards the moon.
July, August, September, holes in shoes,
the eye of a pin that is too small to see.

My brother still
thinks I am only half a man at age seven and
eight and seventeen, but then I get into a
fight underneath New York City and he shuts up.
He does not clean up my bruises and neither do I.
My eyes are already bloodshot and sting like
sucking venom out of a snakebite but it does not rain.
I go to sleep later that night ignorant of my own fever.

moths flapping madly against the porch lights

Imagine this: You walk away from a ten-car pileup unscathed. A mass school shooting leaves you the only survivor, hidden in a single bathroom behind the nurse's office. When the Twin Towers take their swan-dive, you emerge from the rubble without a scratch.

I have kept my eyes open while the reject portion of a grave falls on me like tornado ash. At the bottom of a bottle, sometimes outside light glinting off the edges of the glass lip looks like stars. It still cannot compare to the sight of real stars, no matter for how long you manage to forget this. Too many times I have wondered if the space between puncture marks on the inside of my elbow is large enough for me to live comfortably. Enduringly, at least. Too many times I have thought, *hopefully*.

The space between letters on a page is much larger. It costs less. Why gnaw continuously on my own flesh when I could roll words around in my mouth instead.

AFTERWORD

Consider the weight of an average adult moth perched on the tip of your pinky finger. Your nose. A rogue strand of hair on your head.

Consider a stone soaked in water. Carried on the back of this moth. Decide, in that moment, how much water it absorbs.