

Z. ZINNIA JANE

Sutures

A chapbook.

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Pizza Crust

I was with you on the shore that day, when we watched the palm lines of the trees behind us read our paths into obscurity. I told you: yes, I can pray for a future, but I just don't know if I can believe. I just don't think it'll ever happen, I just don't think I'm worthy. She scribbles that part out with dark ink. I just don't think it'll ever happen, I think that these timelines, these frail embodied what-ifs that have infected us beyond salvation, are too dark for anyone to see through. You step in and there's no light, no stars littered amongst the skies, a nothingness—space as a swallowed void, the end of it all, the universe's final breath. You step into another timeline like you're playing some kind of game with the fabric, like there is something that you want, something that you're going to get no matter what, even if you have to carve inwards for it. Even if you have to vomit up the guts and stuff the plush back in to keep it all in place, all quiet, entirely resilient. The point, of course: I have no future. You don't need divination to figure that out. The question is: what are we going to do about it? What is there to do? You claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw and claw

to be let out of the cage, to be released from your inferior body into the greater world, the world where you can walk and you can talk and they all like you again. You're just breaking your nails off, and those wounds don't heal pretty. I'm the prized animal, the most popular exhibit at the place, they'd hate to lose me. They feed me microwaved pizza crust and they pat the top of my head and they show me off to their neighbors: look how extraordinarily grotesque this beast is! But no one can truly be convinced, so they stick their hands in. Silly them. Silly me. Who am I to talk about futures? I'm too many someones to talk about futures, too many potentials souping around in the body's soul. Well, fine. If you won't say it, I will—I was with you in the bedroom that day, when we watched the car drive out of the driveway and into the gray loveless distance. They'd hate to lose me and they're going to pay me double just to sit and stay and sit and stay. The treat's coming—they point and they throw, look, over there! But there's still nothing. Silly me.

Puppet Me

On the scorched Phoenix curb—

I watch:

a strangling, a mangling, a lightning strike touching its
landing gear down

over flesh already scarred, the love already branched out
across the skin

in its pale spirals.

The floridity we can't talk about

spills out of the side wound too fast,

because you know this

all already, you are here on repeat like a trapped divine
omnipotence,

you'll get over it, you always do, and don't give me that

not this time crap because you always do. It's kind of annoying,
actually,

how many times you have gotten over it, and we haven't even
reached floridity yet.

We're still, unsuccessfully, having a conversation. Stop
stalling, or your trauma

will have itself a fully developed brain before you commit to coping—and then, well, who knows?

Too late, lost cause?

Game over?

I get it. When we adjust the phrasing,

it comes out too multifaceted; the print is just a little bit too off,

only a *little* jarring,

only a little jarring of my soul to sit out on your shelf,

but we won't go there yet, we can still adjust the text, polish it up,

sell the story. When we fix it up, tune it into another frequency &

unravel its familiarity into some unmusical instrument strung with severed cords,

it does not have two contrasting definitions, it reads

we cannot get endure this & remain.

Wake up! You've been in a coma for twenty years,

and while you were out your entire family died in a fire and also

there was a zombie apocalypse and also

all the birds disappeared and the outdoor silence is too overwhelming now.

Some say if you lean into the absence far enough you can hear the answer to every dilemma

the universe will ever etch up for you, but I'm just not very superstitious. Besides, I think we're just unsewable, anyway, too thick to penetrate. Wake up, please.

For the love of God, wake up. In the name of God, wake up.
I'll do anything. I'll

embrace the floridity if it gets you to bring her back. So I
can't control myself anymore—

so what? They pre-planned the excavation, made a whole
binder

and everything, cremation orchestrated
down to the last tabbed & laminated page. It was always
going to happen like that. I'll do anything, I've embraced it.
I'll do anything,

I'll even ask the Unspeakable Horror to move if it's still alive,
and then I'll ask

the Unspeakable Horror a favor, and then I will tell the
Unspeakable Horror every truth

the universe will ever etch out for me— see, I'm selfish and I
know too much and I see what

cannot be seen—and I know the Unspeakable Horror will
never love me back—

there will be no grand union-decimating gestures even if the
delusion sounds convincing

when I'm off my meds—

I probably shouldn't call it or you an Unspeakable Horror,
but what else is there to call the haunting? I'm sorry, it's just
all too much, it's just all blurring together. I can't say it. I'm
a child's rhyming poem, or you are: Unspeakable Horror #1
holding hands with Unspeakable Horror #2,

swirling in circles on the playground, overjoyed. In the
original tale, if you look closer, between the texts—if you read
too much into it like you are so very skilled at doing—

they're not dancing, they're actually sparring. The first
Unspeakable Horror has a knife to

its counterpart's chest. The second Unspeakable Horror is planning another heist. It's

going to strike soon and then I don't know what will happen, I can't see *that* well. All I know is that

one of my inner worlds wants me to adore it all,

even if it hurt, a cinematic extracted torture scene,

but I'm only halfway there. I've completed every level

& now here is the last battle: I am just too good at adoring the beautiful parts, because it is so easy

to adore the horrors when they take on that particular false frame, the daydream

I'm devouring, and I am *not* very good at adoring the unsightly parts,

the ones they sent back to the creator. I don't think anyone is good at that part. Go ahead and prove me wrong.

Excess Loneliness

I'm trying to proselytize my loneliness
out into the world. I take the tools I do have—
the words—the punctuation landing in my chest
like bouquets of bullet holes—the grammatical errors
splattering up against the wall—my primary sources,
my persuasive essays—and I carve an explanation
out of the table scraps. I tell them
the amount of things I haven't done
nearly exceeds the amount of people I've been,
but they just don't understand.

I don't either, honestly. I want to be witnessed in
good faith but I am witnessed, instead, in small faiths—
little gasps of gratitude when the speeding cars
beaming up into the streetlights miss your vehicle
in their ascension—little gasps of gratitude
when you start choking and eventually cough up
the culprit, safe and sound—when things are scraped away,
when they grind sparks against destruction just to give
a last-minute cinematic dodge away, sending the fist

into the ice—I am witnessed and I am witnessed,
 chewed up to taste, regurgitated. The world
 doesn't like the flavor. My lover tells me
 I taste like old infested meat
 wrapped in artificial strawberry
 to keep the redness in, to keep the illusion
 of freshness from spilling out. My father tells me
 I don't taste like anything at all. Everyone
 in this situation is dead, and let's not kid ourselves,
 I'm not being witnessed at all, I'm being glamourised
 into invisibility, my frame turning transparent
 as I reach into the bookstore shelves. They still don't
 understand.

How can I make it any clearer? This isn't my best poem, I
 know that,

but I was always too scared of the leeches to dip into the lake,
 even when mama said *we can always salt them off, don't be
 scared,*

*I know it's cold, honey, but you have to jump in now
 or it'll dry up soon. Global warming—*even when the girl begged
 me to join her

underneath

the water, forever preserved by emerald and seafoam,
 even when I saw the unfamiliar tranquil presence
 reflected outward in the daylight, the holy version of me
 rubbing my face in this world's cruelty.

I want to walk through the hospital curtain
 separating me from the deranged sphere
 we call the *real world* and enter the Real World—
 the world where that holiness is tangible, not despised—
 but I never really walked until I was three years old

EXCESS LONELINESS

which made me a factory reject and now I
can't even walk at all, so these dreams
of a swift stride into a purer existence are a bit
unrealistic, don't you think? But I just can't kill the hope, I
just can't stop
loving.

Solar Storm

During the storm,
the empty swingset rattles with fury in the air—the same
discordant sound
the malignant liquid in her body made before the mercy,
the same clawing sound
of a frightened beast's nails against the raw of its captors.
There was a child in it
two hours ago, the little one,
her feet dangling over the gravel, her mind
fixated on the soaring and nothing else,
the sensation of being only a pendulum to the universe,
divined back and forth over the fallen bits of tree
that the sky spit out when the rain stopped.

Before the storm
there is a blanket of warm red light
spread over the yard. This happened in Arizona
too, back when I was that child—I used to think it meant
Mars was going to crash into the surface of the planet

SOLAR STORM

and take all life with it, the final deserved cataclysm,
my family reduced to bitter, cherry-tinted meat floating alone
in the cruelty of space. I was told, of course,
that my imagination was going to get me in trouble eventually,
that I was ticking down the days until impact, that my self-
destruction
was inevitable.

After the storm

I watch the pink skies, the clouds darkening
to a blood as they flutter across the atmosphere, closing in
on me,
tracking me down, ready to pour the spilled-over stew of my
scattered mind
all across the land. I try
not to compare it to anything else.

Maritime

What constitutes love? My mother slides the newborn thickness of

my skin right off with her shaving razor, and transplants my unwound body into a dress, my bones drying out brittle & I look at love as something that exposes you, vulnerability disguising itself as a deep red. If I can be piles of muscle on the splintery cabin floor, I can also be the contained image of royalty, and I can be what I am supposed to be; a warm cup of black coffee, a dreamless sleep, the softness

of satin, the written-out equation of what it means to be a girl.

What constitutes love? When I grow up I am going to be: loved. I'm also going to be a big, big fire, and I'm going to be the one that it extinguishes it, my skin burning my skin burning up

every unsightly part of me. *So a firefighter, then.* Or maybe I will be shallow water, with big, big teeth protruding from the pit-bottom of the lake. Either way, I consume. *Is that realistic? You still*

haven't answered my question: what constitutes love?

My mother puts her prayer-hands
around my neck, says she'll make me better. Is that love? If I
can be loved, I can be innocent, my life fresh & my eyes fresh &
my traumas

iced over. The old skin floating down underneath the water
& my purity building itself up bricked, flowing out of my dress,
my unformed body, the fragmented parts

of me unsightly, but we're getting there, we're moving with
the current. We're going to find love in the buckles of old shoes,
we're going to find love in the meat of the water's

body, or my body, or in the bodies of those I have loved. What
constitutes love? Love is a monster of bodies, love looks like a
little girl

daydreaming of a world in which the sky is blue & pain itself
reaches out and cuts her hair off. A world in which she has
transcended the limitations of a body & floods up the throats
of the

people who hurt her.

Contradiction

I'm fragmenting again like I'm announcing a union, like I have gifted new life to the crumbling space around us, like it is possible to stop both me & the cosmic seams of our planet from decomposing. This love dismembers me & places the severed pieces around me on the floor, mimicking my old form & I'm fragmenting again -- the world, in its eternal existence, has no constants beyond these two statements. Everything fluctuates, our atmosphere in a nauseating flux — *saviors and the inevitable decaying of all that is, the remains of our bodies floral-patterned from aerial view.*

(My grandmother had a man place flowers on her husband's grave every month until she, too, became just another body & I imagined her lifeless in the crematorium, each layer of her body burning off like roses being torn apart, each metaphor in mourning, each petal a skin, a muscle, a bone. They did not cremate my grandfather — his body lies within the Earth, forever reaching out for a body that is no longer a body, something that could almost be adoration but died on the tracks,

before it could reach the line of completion. This love is entirely unlike my love for you, my love for you like resurrection, like dying, like resurrection.)

(I often wonder if the man tasked with symbolizing her sorrow became desensitized to the concept of death. Every day in the cemetery, another grave, another flower picked from its human position in vanity to die upon the representation of dying. Every flower dies when it is removed from its growth; even the ultimate gesture of love and grief passes away eventually.)

I love you. I am always in a destroying love. I crave the ability to love in a way that does not fragment me & instead enhances reality, vivids the surroundings, the painted world. I wish I could love you in a way that does not elicit suffering, I wish I was able to love you without breaking apart, without my hand slipping from the embrace of lucidity.

(I loved those from my past like dialysis — the pain filtering out, the affection exiting my body, my living body, only to force itself back in through machine-born incisions. I hovered in the air, cables pumping love into my arms—)

(I love you transplanted. The people I used to be loved you. How can I not love you? I love you like surgical recovery, the knowledge that my life will be as eternal as death. I love you. I cannot imagine a persistence that does not involve your blood inside of mine.)

I love you and I want that to be something that keeps me alive. I want to get there.

Pluto

i.

I don't know, I like to think I'm lonely because I just haven't figured out / how to navigate this virulent world and its disguised misery yet but I honestly think it's more like a divine punishment,

like I did something wrong in my only existence / and I must suffer to atone. I like to think loneliness doesn't exist inside of seashells or within strips of driftwood or in the guts of a fish or in the water itself despite its lack of stability but I know better, I do know better, I know consequence more than my own reflection, blurring in my gaze—a person too lost, burnt metaphorically beyond recognition. I like to think these dreams of stars engraved into walls

by the secret moonlight & of soft hair curled around fingers
& of anatomical hearts carved into

wood with two letters in the middle, *me + you*, to symbolize the eternity of love—

I like to think dreams like this are viral, or perhaps they are a
controlled substance,

high risk. Feeling hopeful, my love? You might as well crucify
your lungs
with cigarettes—
same reaction, same addiction,
same inevitable cancerous end. Dreams cannot be dreams;
instead they must be yearned for,
the foundation of our desire to be loved, the one universal
experience that lies horizontal waiting for everyone in their
utmost vulnerability. So maybe

I'm lonely because I am flawed. Aren't we all? Isn't hope inherently flawed, its statistics roaring wild, the odds etched against it? So maybe I'm lonely because there is an aspect of my personality that bears a demonic body, so maybe I'm lonely because I don't know how to fix myself, to mold my essence into something that other people can bite into without a shatter or sickness. Yes, it always circles back to hope. I can't keep it up. I wish I could be proud of myself,

I wish I was skinnier

I wish I had light streaming out of my posterior plane, wings that could propel me out of the water and atmosphere, the ability to be satiated

I wish I wasn't broken, I wish my body didn't resemble my dyingfrail grandfather in his hospice bed

I wish I could climb up the mountain for you, I wish I could get my body to move in harmony with itself but

I wish I was sick enough

I wish my body was strung across the clothing lines, each limb draped over the cord, bloodless dry, and I wish I could put myself back together, I wish I could reinvent the physical parts of me / like I reinvented my mind's cycle. I can't keep it up. I just can't keep this

up.

ii.

Let me tell you a secret. I don't know who I'm writing this to. I want to say something fantastical, something that cannot be touched, like: *I'm writing this*

*to my lover, to the singular person that possesses
my trust, to the craved and crazed.*

*I'm writing this to the rare stone,
to the shining polished presence I'd shell out billions for. I don't
think I say that
enough.*

In contrast, I also want to carve my words into clay tablet curses: *if you're reading this, baby,*

*I'm dead and I'm going to take you with me, if you're reading this,
you have to get here yourself,*

*baby, and this world is living on borrowed time, anyway, we both
know that, we understand the inevitable perishing & we skip through
phases of grief like shreds of music. We're dead already, so in a way
this is merciful;*

*otherwise suffering as the one static aspect of my life, otherwise
loneliness pounding underneath me like gravel or pulse. There is
always another way out.*

Maybe it's multiple people. We talk about dreams of stars but last night I dreamed about

the first person to slither inside my rotting reviving core. We

were at

a carnival, on the ferris wheel together and I wasn't wearing
my glasses

so the lights in the dusk looked like the entrance to Heaven
melting and collapsing into itself & he described it to me,
the cityscape I couldn't see, the imperfect lines of sunset,

points where colors met. Then we were at
the animal shelter and he held a puppy up to my face & as I
looked into its eyes I despised it for its innocence so he guided
my hand over its soft patterned fur,
the texture reanimating, the feeling of its
little budding trust in me enough to hold the jealousy
underwater. Then we
were in the afterlife and I told him that my love for him
was like clinging to the living world but I know
dreams are defined as such for a reason.

I still like to think that we can meet in the sunset. Maybe it
can be fixed.

Maybe he's the one who can fix me, who can fade my lack of
value into something truly
desirable.

iii.

Shoot me in the chest and the smoke trickles out. Shoot me
in the heart. Go on,

do it, don't be scared. Shoot me in the heart & watch
the gravedirt crumble down like a child's sandcastle, like
microscopic shards of fate. I really, really want to deserve it. I
really want to believe

that I'm unworthy and I scathe anyone who dares to view me
as tangible, that there is something / in my coding or soul that
malfunctioned upon creation because I'm terrified to face the
real truth:

I'm just not good enough. I get it — you're tired of the
story about the outcast, the tragedies of difference. Sometimes
people are just not enough to satiate this world's ancient
hunger. Sometimes people have microscopic shards of fate
that puzzle-piece together to form something monstrous, some

representation of a loneliness that expands celestial. I wish this poem wasn't about loneliness. I wish I counted as poetic.

iv.

The climax of the movie and she's tied to the train tracks, they're pouring gasoline over her bound

frame, she's dangling off the roof and praying that there's someone who will save her—a superhero, a knight in shining armor, a cliché, an odd thing to imagine

when you're about to die but I doubt people are very creative when they're about

to die.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe those few moments before death do not involve recollection but rather revelation & we finally understand

how to bring forth a peaceful love but we don't live to tell the tale because—

well, you should know this by now: life can never be balanced with peace. There is a strict line

between worlds like sunset blurs. Have you ever wondered what it would be like

to extract the light from someone's body? To watch through their eyes

as the life inside of them

is extinguished? No, that's not right—to extinguish

implies fire, and humanity's destruction devours more like a tsunami—

very few structures survive fire,

water suffocates and leaves everything behind whole, the meat

still on the bone. I know most people say otherwise but it's possible

PLUTO

to push me into the deep end, to force me into evil, and if I
am so easily corrupted—
perhaps my loneliness was injected to keep other people safe.

Verses & Versions

I laugh and ask the depraved, sick version of me that is reflected in the mirror, each tooth sharpened to the breadth of a needle, if he would swim through Lake Michigan trying to reach the man he loves.

(Occasionally ‘the man he loves’ refers to himself, other times the world in its own personification, yet it eventually always loops around to the ultimate intangible experience. The harrowing ability to crave. This other me in the mirror is struggling with a love that has strangled the humanity out of him, and this is not true of the person facing the glass. This is very important to know. This tells the story, this grew the trees that would one day form the paperscrolls of his mythology. I’ve always believed that the most beautiful thing about mythology is the fact that someone out there will inevitably accept it as the truth, and then the lines begin to watercolor-blur between dimensions, obscuring the poles of the situation. Belief in something will make that creature real, animate it in the fleshbone. It isn’t worthy of anything, and I don’t know what happens after that. The mirror fuses like bone?

The two versions of me exchange realities and subsequent wounds? The universe finds its balance again?)

"I would," he replies, his words muffled through his brittle teeth. "I would," he says, his hand magnet-drawn over his heart like the confirmation of truth, "and I would drown in it for him, too. I would sink myself down to the garden of fish, the final resting place of each blessed seacreature, if it meant I could give him a cradling shred of safety."

My own heart's rhythm flutters. "Is that really a good idea?" I ask him. "Is it virtuous to hollow yourself out for another? To remove everything that fuels your life for a transplant into a body that is permanently sewn shut? Is it damning to place each holy cell that composes you around the one man who will never love you back like a shrine, like a memorial?"

"I don't know," he says. The admission has created an agony that is visible, that forces his body to resemble the fading consciousness in the eyes of a dying man. The light is there and it's dimming, and he's losing function, shutting down, and the body of suffering twitches before it stiffens. Then he adjusts his tie, and places his hand against his side of the glass. "But it's worth it. I couldn't survive watching him suffer. Could you do it? Could you live with yourself, could you live without devotion, could you bear to be alive knowing you could've saved someone, if only you were brave enough to admit it?"

My hand is forced over by the ghostly, divine force of my own mind to rest against his.

My smile feels like reanimation, like necromancy, like foretold resurrection, and I do not answer him.

Front Page

Interviewer: “Where were you around 7 AM on November 18, 2017?”

Girl: I was asleep. I keep telling you that I was asleep. I keep telling you that the birds were singing at night and the skies were casting light over us even before the sunrise. I keep telling you that I was dreaming about killing my father and that’s my alibi. Why don’t you believe me?

*We note that **The Interviewer** smiles here.*

Interviewer: “Let’s rewind a bit. Do you remember where you were born?”

Girl: I was born in Mears, Michigan, I think, but it might’ve been Kalamazoo, or maybe Phoenix. I remember that when I was born I almost suffocated, and then I suffocated and they couldn’t bring me back. That’s not relevant. I’m pretty sure it was Lincoln, final answer. Why don’t you look me up in your little system?

Interviewer: “Keep in mind that I’m the one asking the questions.”

Girl: Or what?

The Interviewer coughs, and wipes his mouth with his sleeve. There's a string of wetness that definitely needs to be recorded in the session's notes. Another calm smile plastered over void.

Interviewer: "Would you have made a different decision in her place?"

Girl: No.

Interviewer: "You answered that awfully fast."

Girl: Don't you think I've asked myself the same question? Remove your hand from over my mouth and peer inside. My jaw has been tamed and I can't hurt you anymore. I should've taken the gun out of the sock drawer. I should've kept my mouth shut. I am telling you all of this raw and without coating and I command you to believe me when I tell you that I was asleep that day until I heard the screaming and I'll admit if someone had to die in divinity's plan for us, I'm glad it was him but I didn't do it. I don't remember the wings or the singsong chirps but I remember his halo of dead pigeon and extinct plant matter and I remember the living birds circling above us. So, no. I would've done the exact same thing and I wish I could say that I'd do it stronger in comparison but that isn't very fair to either of us. I think my strength stayed inside of her and rendered me defective by the lack of it.

Interviewer: "Do you have a pen on you?"

Girl: What?

The Interviewer passes it a pencil, pushing it towards the Girl and letting it roll in the Girl's direction. He sets down a piece of paper.

Interviewer: Answer carefully. We've got time.

True or false?

Circle only one.

1. You were alive on November 18, 2017.

TRUE / FALSE

2. You are in love and in love and in love and this time it's really true you swear.

TRUE / FALSE

3. You are in love and in love and in love and this time it's really true you swear and you aren't going to let the miserable fatherwraith scraping your agony to the surface defeat you. You won't let him strangle you or lead you away by the hand. You won't let him take you.

TRUE / FALSE

4. You won't let him take you.

TRUE / FALSE

Print your name on the following line: _____

Print your name on the following line: _____

Print your name on the following line: _____

5. Did you write it three times?

YES / NO

6. Did he do it three times?

7. You obey too much.

TRUE / FALSE

8. You can't disagree with me. You're too scared. You'd follow my orders off the cliffside to avoid inconveniencing God.

TRUE / FALSE

Resin

But I tried to think of love

as something other than a body abandoned. As something
other than foreign skin

underneath half-torn amber fingernails. *As something other
than the photograph of my knees and head stapled to the ground,
now used to bait the fire.* I melt with the scorch of passion & the
forsaken remains of me find a way to beg—

*Think of love as reanimating the body. Think of love falling from
the edges of vessel wings
and into your hands, safely kept.*

Can you trust yourself? Can you hold yourself back?

*Could you stop yourself from deepening the wounds
with the hidden monstrosities we all know you have?*

I have buried myself in the tangible destination: the garden
plot, in the afterlife where everyone finds the missing pieces,
the crucial aspect of their desires—and I find myself gasping
for someone to touch, something to feel other than the
hardened ground / in both states.

I DO NOT HAVE A BODY. I am a body. I do not have a

body. I am a body. Push this into me, attached to your love. Push me into the wall. Tell me I'm a good body, satisfactory flesh. Tell me you love me and give me a reason to stay, hurt me and give me a reason / to stay until I can think of love as something to build on. A castle, a home among the galactic starbodies, a safe place to rest. A platform on which I begin the new beginning. Tell me that this is not the end of the story, tell me that I'm going to suffer immortality, give me your secrets to burn. These muscles / have reached their limit. This skin / has reached its ultimate potential. I cannot be hurt anymore.

Hypothetical Explanations for the Paradox

Healing is rare. Some scientists have argued that the conditions needed for healing — for example, a safe environment, a calm and equally weathered voice, a warmth extracted from something celestial, that loving quality in the humans we center ourselves around — are so rare that they are nearly impossible to attain. These researchers posit that frail, newborn hope cannot last very long if, from birth, it is pulled in unsavory directions and forced to submit to apathy.

Forgiveness has not yet evolved a fear of predation. Many attempt to study how emotions form in the human brain, but a developing theory questions the overall capability of emotions to integrate into one, singular personality. In simple terms, no one has ever truly been able to pinpoint why some people become prey and others end up lurking as the opposite. Forgiveness is another species of hominid entirely, and it is not predicted to survive past another few centuries as it always ends up submitting to its fate, never running away, lacking any indication of fear.

Those who have healed are too far away. True recovery may exist somewhere in the universe, but at a distance so great that reaching it would be nearly impossible. Divine miracles exist, and we, as a society, have seen them, but it seems unlikely that we're destined to evolve into safety any time soon.

Those who have healed are deliberately avoiding us. The hypothetical individuals perceive themselves as a contrast to humanity for any reason, and therefore refuse to contact the struggling despite being aware of our existence. Some suggested reasons for this avoidance have been that we are not useful to them, our existence is too primitive compared to theirs, or we're simply too unpredictable for their tastes.

True healing does not exist. This controversial explanation of the paradox insists that healing can never truly manifest in a human being, because our skin scars too easily and we don't get a new one unless we're lucky enough to have it burnt up, our bodies manifesting as suns above the flames. Humans can be stained, and irreversibly so. It's more common than one may think.

It is the nature of intelligent life to destroy itself. Solace is too busy desecrating its own potential to gaze upon what has already been desecrated.

How to Help a Chained Dog

I watch the stars cluster in the sky from the safest place on the rooftop, legs folded underneath my frame. I know that if I dangle them over the edge it will all be over. I can't explain it; my words don't come out quite right.

Too much vulnerability involved in living.

I like to think it feels similar to watching a horror film projected into a skylight at a drive-in theater. I bury my wonder inside of my own flesh as the on-screen lover bares her neck to the starving, inverted mercy. I'm not entirely sure if the comparison is accurate; I'm not allowed outside on my own.

I walk into traffic, I scream at myself until my chest is struck from itself within like ribs grating over damaged percussion instruments. I'm dangerous and I'm in danger but the only thing I want in this entire shattered universe is to see the stars that decorate the metal of our planetary cage. Earth-restrained, held down with the same straps they forced over me during the ambulance ride.

I don't want to be Earth anymore. I want to be let outside on

my own.

If I dangle my legs over the rooftop's edge, I know that the monsters will simply be unable to resist it. They've been chasing me since I was chained to that tree like a sick, sick dog; they've been chasing me for as long as I have been alive. Their clawed fingers will wrap around my ankles, each at an unsettling rhythm, with utterly inhuman movement that makes me finally grasp the truth: I could dissolve into a flock of mockingbirds if witnessed for too long.

I will be pulled down and devoured by the shadows that rest beneath me, shifting through our moonlight, and they will tell me that I deserve my fate. I'm not allowed to be:

- outside
- on my own
- within any aspect of society
- within anything blessed enough to compose reality, unless I repent.

Isn't that funny?

Isn't it funny, how they see me as a fate worse than succumbing to the demonic? I don't believe in any of that, but from what I understand: at least demons have a purpose. At least, in Hell, there is something to *do*, some fate unraveled for all inhabitants, even if that something is suffering.

I'm not supposed to be thinking like this. I don't want to die. They say I need to start taking my pills at the same time every day.

I swallow my medication and the pills scrape my throat and I'm still never going to be valued. How can medicine shield me? It can't, so I fold my legs underneath myself, and rest my palms

on the splintered wood beneath. The stars are beautiful above, and my future is entwined with what I see in the light of the dark: irreparable fear, irretrievable potential.

