

Kindness is the Smallest Thing in the World

Michael Menezes

A Thesis

in

the Department of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Masters of Arts (English/Creative Writing) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

February 2023

© Michael Menezes, 2023

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Michael Menezes

Entitled: Kindness is the Smallest Thing in the World

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (English/Creative Writing)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

Stephen Yeager

_____ Examiner

Kate Sterns

_____ Examiner

Jason Camlot

_____ Supervisor

Stephanie Bolster

Approved by _____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____ 2023

Pascale Sicotte

ABSTRACT

Kindness is the Smallest Thing in the World

Michael Menezes

nKindness is the Smallest Thing in the World is a record of lived time in poetry format. Each of its forty entries were written in chronological time to be left unedited with the intention of building a feeling journey that could account for itself, and, so, show itself. On paper, it loosely tells the story of a seed that encounters hidden knowledge of its own being, and must go through multiple iterations of its own growth and fall to situate itself in community and kinship. Along the way, poems question concepts like the self, self expression, the exponential development of civilization, selfishness, natural spaces, climate change, nostalgic stories, community and isolation, treating them more like potential mirrors to move on from each time than any tangible or outward reality. In this way, *Kindness is the Smallest Thing in the World* is inspired by the work of William Blake and by *The Odyssey*.

List of Contents

Part 1

“The Interview”	1
“Purple”	2
“Low”	3
“Upside-Down Waterfall”	4
“The Third Floor”	5
“Focus”	6
“Pickles”	7
“Story About a Protagonist”	8
“About Sleeping”	9
“Glass Panels”	10
“Outer Space”	11
“In the Dark”	12
“Painting Inspector”	13

Part 2

“Phases of the Sun”	14
“Bugs Living in a Wet, Dark Wooden Block”	15
“Landfills”	16
“Conifer”	17
“Old Tales”	18
“Explorer”	19
“Trees in the Wild”	20
“Prison Gardener”	21
“Martian”	22
“Plane Ticket Cancelled”	23
“Big Thief”	24
“The Badly Shaped Planet”	25
“Instructions on Losing”	26
“How to Remember”	27

Part 3

“On the Island”	28
“Man Interrogates Coconut”	29
“Pacific”	30
“New Shore”	31
“Elsewhere”	32
“Countermusic”	33
“Pup Commander”	34
“Precious Littles”	35
“Best Friends Up for Adoption”	36
“Waiting for the Future”	37
“Eyepatch”	38
“To Sail Away”	39
“In the Park”	40

Kindness is the Smallest Thing in the World

Part I

The Interview

Real quiet, someone's four legs,
toy microphone and speaker set,
proportionately small, white collar, tie
but no shirt on, tail hung in anticipation,

waits for you with questions.

One, how is it going being a plum?

Doing fine, how about you. What's life
like waiting to fall? Well I'm only conscious

of my own weight growing rounder.

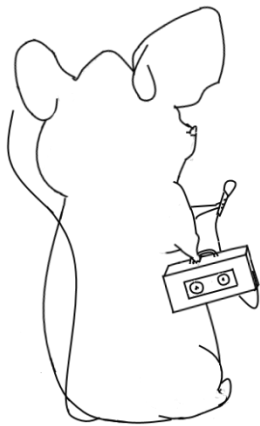
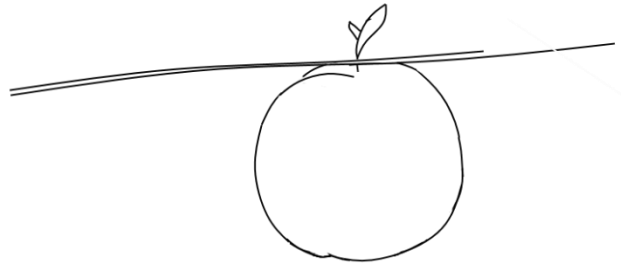
Do I remember? Life as a seed?

Life's odd. I remember a total darkness
somewhere, and yet here I am, wrapped

around the same thing again.

How strange of you to ask so many questions.

I thought it was obvious what was going to happen to me.



Purple

Someone writes a poem about falling ants,
and I write one about ants scaling tree bark

pulling leaves with them. Is the fondness
only temporary? How long till I remember

who, like a drained, white cow's heart, nerveless, lives
to make the colony's lives. Each of us has six legs today,

two extra from a twin we keep forgotten. Birthdays
are a day of shame. I try to be alone. I miss the peace

of dying. I'm standing, paralyzed the way I grew
and blooming. I drop more fruit to make more life.

If you must make life, how do you make it good?
Can't reply, as up my body crawls my crown.

Low

Quickly, I remember poetry.
On the third day of carefully
reading instruments, found

a pit in the rock, in the middle of nowhere.
Working quickly, lowered a bucket and pulled
the dark, swimming critter out. What the hell,

he asked. Wait, I said. Took him to the campsite, with
the setup of the needles and the dials. Look, at what
was happening with you gone. You were so

far down, you forgot about us.
We were waiting for you.

He says, I was trying to swim up,
I was really,

the pit was dark,
the water was deep,
and it was comforting,

but we had needed him.

Upside-Down Waterfall

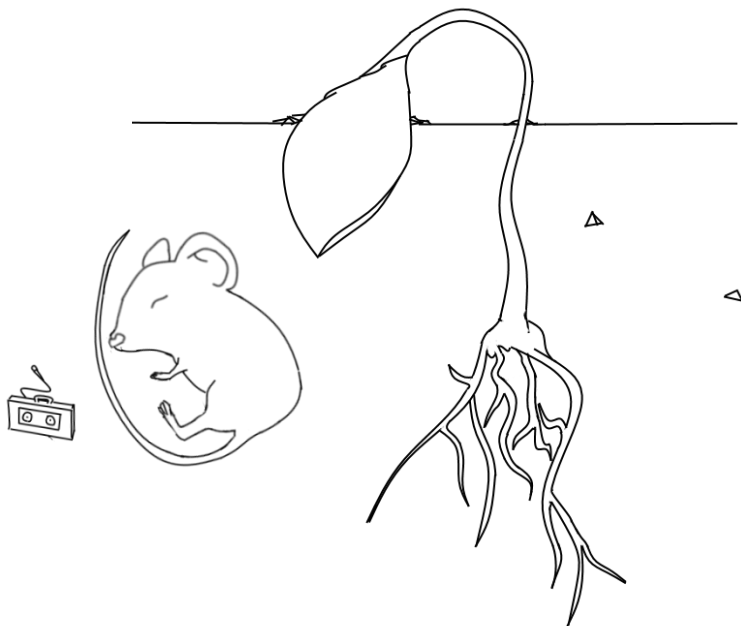
Without a *thankyou*
for *your stories*, sounds a click, some rustling.
I know he's probably taken his tail with him and gone.

Mysteries are becoming clearer, so
soon it'll be time to open my eyes. I can already
smell them painting a new white fence for me. I can feel the call

of the mark of the sun: if you, like a pulley-bucket system,
carry water up, god sends men with briefcases down, who say you don't belong here.

In your new life, you'll do anything to be a bigger, better I. It feels good like stretching.
I have made a thing so beautiful, light and sweet, it hangs from a stem.

It surrounds a lost idea. In a memory, a strange fellow
came to me with questions. Took it far away
from me so I could be at home.



The Third Floor

By foliage, some quiet vines,
of this cloud of moths tumbling over itself,
which one is me, and if I spot him, will he go?

It's like sitting with your legs hanging.
Like the cloud, no one is real. But in the face of a moth,
he and his jaw watch me for as long
as the moment holds him.

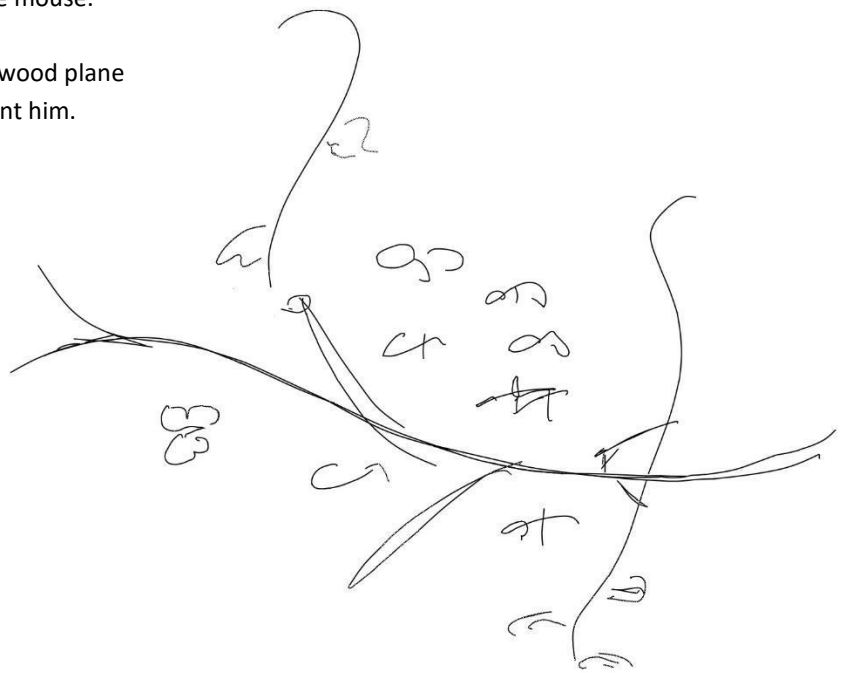
On the floor below us, on a balcony, my neighbour
scrawls memories in a book that I will eat up well.

I go back in. I sit at my desk and look at the mouse.

Even in the grain of salt here on the black wood plane
kept for a leech, there is my soul, and I want him.

Green leaves in the window.

Where is everyone today?



Focus

At the blackboard he's insisting that you are being such a child,
and you should focus, eat your legs and become delicious.

But she crawls out of a hole in the white skirting, in burial rags,
coughs violently and waves a wand.

Quickly, youtube videos can tell your fortune. You can spend
hours stargazing inward under a comforter's thick seal.

I'm just here to eat holes in all the blankets. Down in nutrient
rich cloth, living with my mouth open.

Every day, he tells me I'm becoming more like god.
She tells me I'm lost, but it's okay, because of who I'm lost as.

Pickles

You're not for air. You're not a bathbomb.
In green brine, like a scroll, your history knows itself well.

I am some fingers rooting in the soul, pushing some columns
around and aside. The jar's eye is rolled up in its head.

Whatever we were looking for, it's okay for you to think it's dead.
It's okay to remember what it is to be a seed, and who

comes out from one on a bright day with enough shade
to sit in. Are we passing time under a daffodil?

I promise I am not trying to push you too hard.
The person who sold me this jar told me they would grow.

Story About a Protagonist

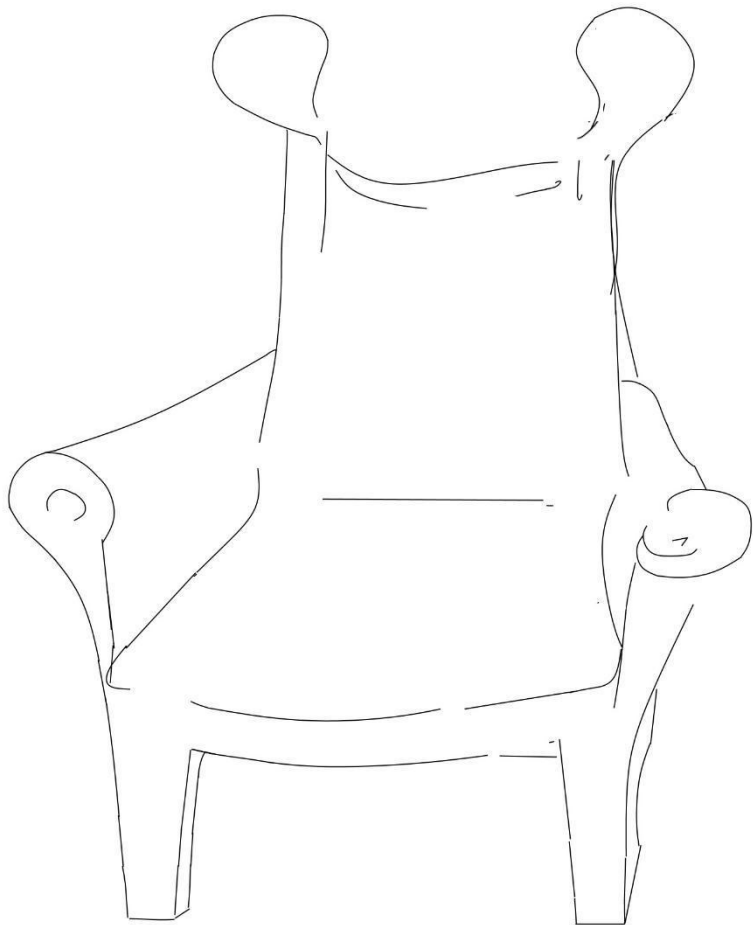
You won't believe this, but he woke up in the heart of a friend, on the mantelpiece. Thankfully no one was watching.

It was disorienting. He's so convinced miracles will happen because he looked around him. Something that is unfamiliar to him

might seem like a postcard or a statuette to you, but he has no idea how he could feel so real or connected. Walking quickly,

before his moment's up, he's under the coffee table, among the sofa cushions, looking small in the centre of an armchair like a lord.

I know things aren't good for you in the other rooms of the house, but something here breathes quietly when we're sleeping.



About Sleeping

Each time I talk to the sun, I say less about
the secret of the universe, and it makes him feel small.

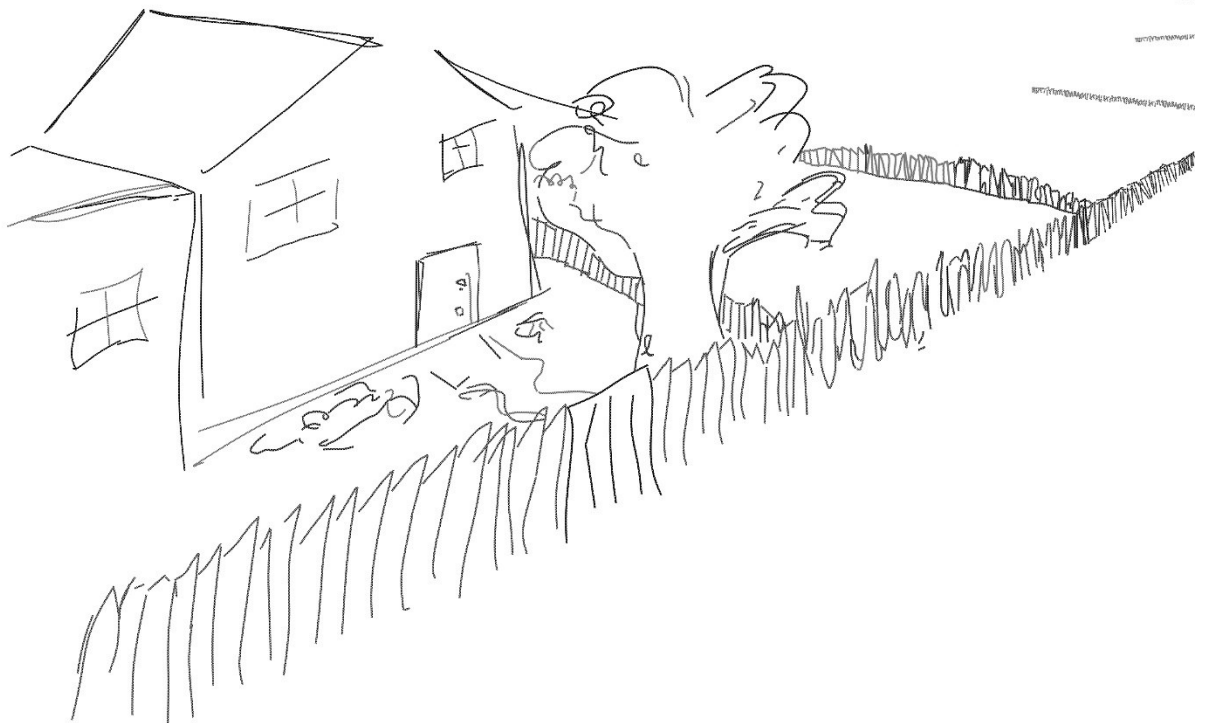
He's got better things to do with his hours.

He's got long arms and short hair, and lots of grass to grow
on other marbles. He has a secret family in the suburbs
with happier children he visits thrice a week.

I'm not saying that it's not worthwhile to stay living,
but I am clearly built on death.

Next door, my cousin is a machine built by a man
to take our planet to the next level,

and I'll watch where he goes, from here on.



Glass Panels

Poor work ethic.

Thick gloves, stakes and spades.

Bags of fertilizer with words and pictures of tigers on them.

I have a feeling that I don't really do anything,
but forget what happiness is

until I see a smile
about the good things in yourself.

I think I make a world where I'm gone.

In the year 3030, the world's best plant encircles the sun,
sending off spores to other gardens on highways.

I'm still at home.

It isn't much.

Outer Space

We conquered the supercluster.
We feed grains into the thresher.

I tell the audience I want to go back to being
with you again, but no one cheers.

Apparently it isn't true.

Isn't it true though
that I miss you?

In the Dark

Four years ago, I realized I was a bad person
and gave birth to a prince who'll do anything
to make things good.

This means he might try to take over the world sometimes.

If I lock my father in a prison in the back
of the occipitus, he'll infiltrate your dreams
and hurt you there.

Worst of all, being
where I want to be.

It might be best to write a poem about healing,
but I don't know how to do that.

So, this is still a poem
about wanting.

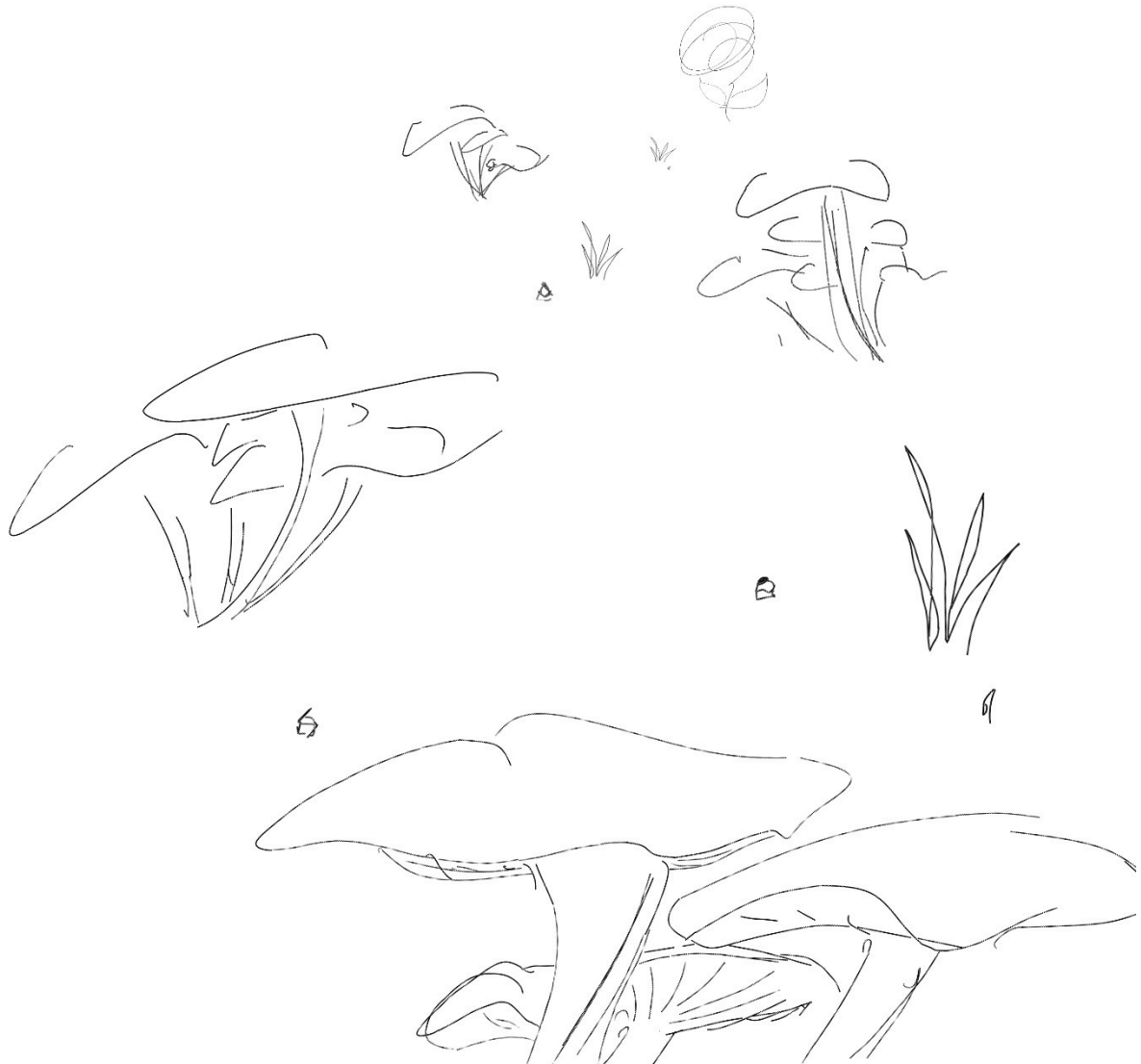
Painting Inspector

Just the right eye, seeing reds and glasses
mingle to make a path through the woods.

Trees behind you, god above, and a trail of spotted
mushroom caps show the way inside the way.

He's just checking to make sure everything in here
is up to snuff, mostly with his nose. He picks a grain up

off the ground, inspecting, and sets it tenderly
back in its place on a wet, green stalk.



Part II

Phases of the Sun

Someone told me you were still alive.
This isn't the ocean.

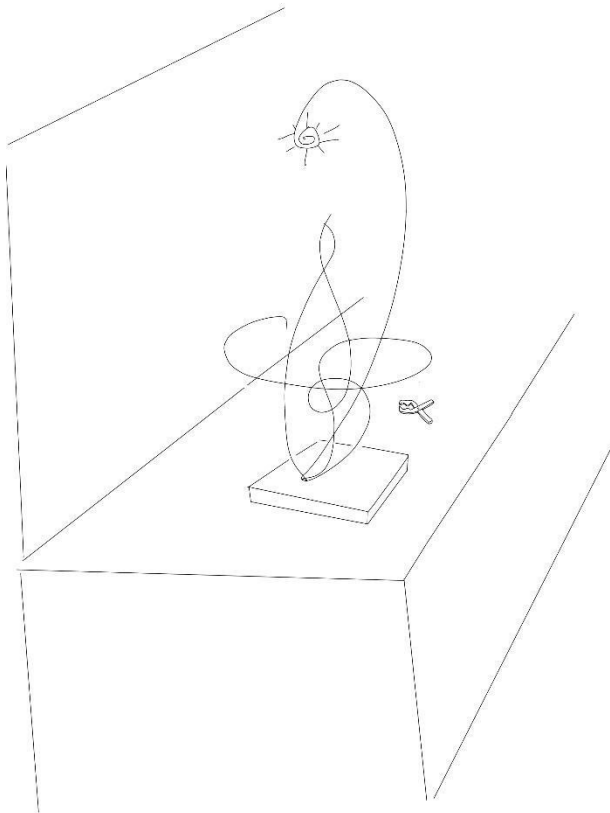
You've been bending wire into statuettes
on wood pedestals for sun-worship,
and I haven't been good to you.

Though dreams mean nothing, I'm scared of you.
I'm scared of you because I mean nothing to you.

I dread to see your face, because I know it's sad
under the various, frightening animal masks.

I would have to confront my greatest fears.

I'm afraid of being sacrificed.
But I let you down.



Bugs Living in a Wet, Dark Wooden Block

If I'm lucky, it's exposed.

Long, beautiful bugs, like dragons in various stages
of orange metamorphosis, crawl in and out of evenly spaced holes.

Long orange feelers, tentative of their climate,
check from out of holes for when the dark block's wet.

Forgive my moment of discomposure –
any of these feelers could be twice as tall as I am,
or be cauterized in the brand of a single callous thought.

I had thought this place was a garden, but know well
to accept what I see here when it's light out.

What if the whole world had to suffer so I could feel love?

Landfills

He's trying to make space to grow a plant by putting
all the plastic bags in one spot.

Out of each plastic bag comes a life that wants
to crawl its own way, put its feet all over the grass and soil.

This may surprise you, but I willingly moved in with a witch
who turned people into garbage so that his plant could grow.
But it didn't grow.

Forget all the trophies on her surface,
and how desperate it may seem.

What happens in the heart is of the utmost importance.
This is my home.

Conifer

This year round, someone is obsessed with death, so the treetop doesn't have its usual bright hat on.
People and the punchbowl look a little sadder from afar.

The whole thing goes on in an envelope forgotten
in a dream house where the corridor to the dresser drawer keeps growing longer,
so no one really ever finds out how things were.

Grandpa's gold pin for your dress feels boring,
because your cousins want you to conduct their toy train
around the coffee table for the tenth time.

The radiator by the window hums, alone.

Nearby, your elder sister wants to become a vet
when she grows up, because she loves small animals' heartbeats.

Actually, I think we were all sleeping in each others' presence that night.

There were airholes in a box we didn't open until tomorrow.

Old Tales

I told my niece a story set in a far away land
where you have a small house, a vegetable patch, and a workshop.

While you leave the house for adventures
and play daily in the vegetable patch, a fool, in the darkness of the workshop

pores over tomes and vials of crude oil to determine how,
by sleep paralysis, to deliver comfort. Meanwhile you are off making friends

and saving the world. Everything grows nestled
like a cabbage. She didn't seem too moved by the story at the end, but I called her a scoundrel

enough times in the day that she quickly
told me she loved me and ran off when it was time to go home, though I didn't speak that language back well.



Explorer

Dear star,
I would rather be empty than hear you talk,
I walking alone on a jungle planet.

Here everything wants to feed on me
or crawl on me; when I die, they can have at it.

Till then, I found a pyramid. I don't know enough
to say who built it. Some people tell me it's a feature

of the landscape. I found writing on the pyramid that says
we made the whole thing up, so I left you and made friends.

(Here is a picture of me with a millipede and an ocelot.)



Trees in the Wild

Clear your head:

I'm a jumping jack.

I'm a constellation decomposing.

Stop giving kids telescopes for their birthdays,
they keep finding out how I end.

In the park, at night, creatures are conversing with the grassblades,
thinking: stop talking and it's over. One breath, everyone you know is gone.

So many of your bodies lying in the park at night
on blankets all summer, watching mine.

Prison Gardener

People often say in interviews
you could work with gardens outside,

but you do things wrong, so you're here.
The camera crew rolls on to the next set of bars.

Go and contemplate how grey the walls are
for another double sentence in a row.

Can you believe they took my shears away,
but left me my spade and bucket?

I also can't see the sky – just a bluebell
that keeps coming out of the floor slabs,

so I've been watching that all day.
I'm sure things are going great outside.

Martian

Our mother left my friend and I
interlocking bangles that never touch,

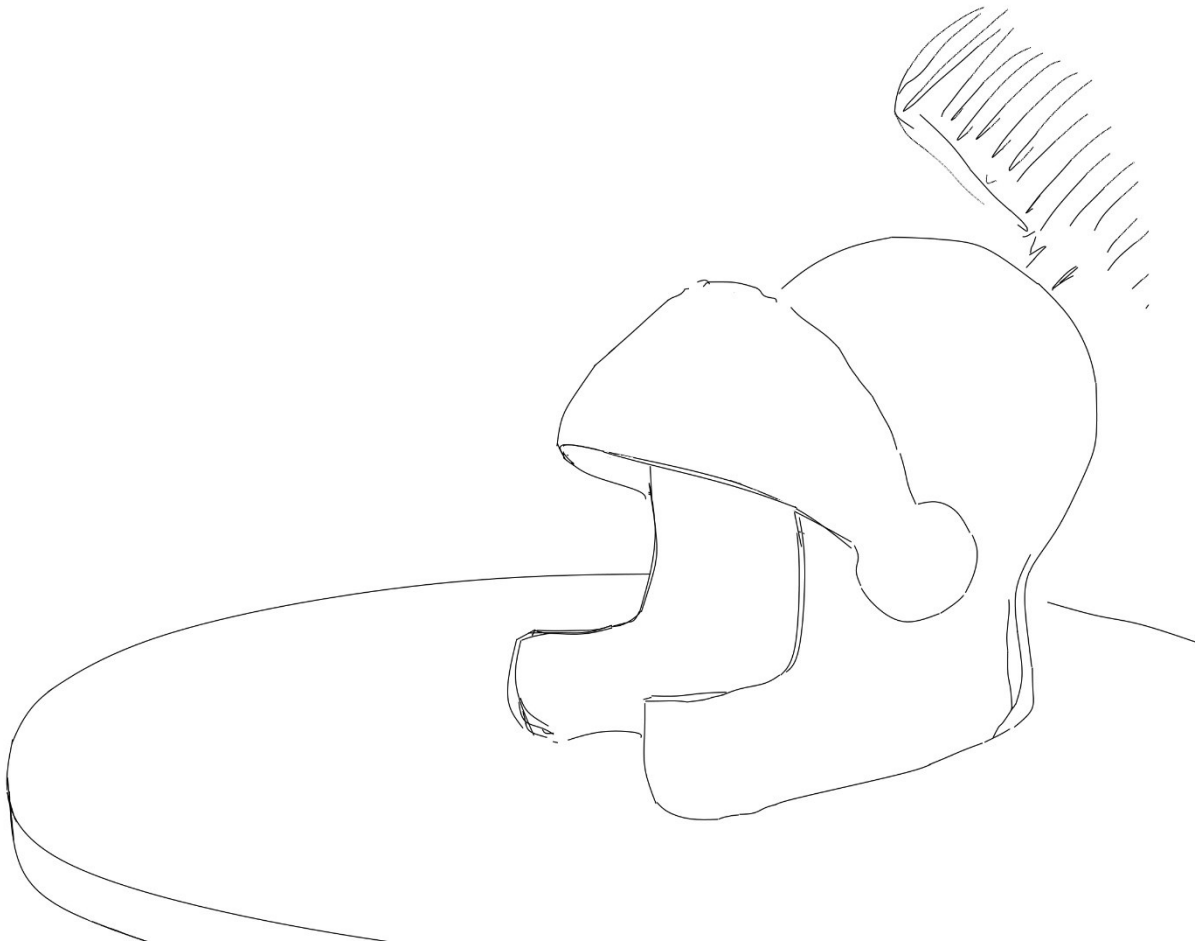
and he asks me how to talk to her.
I say: not with that mouth.

You're angry.
They broke your home before you moved in.

You like green grass.
You hate cows because they deserve better.

You're very angry.
Someone even said that they would kill anyone
who held you. It took days to get them back to normal,

but sometimes, they might still kill anyone,
always comically prepared for war.



Plane Ticket Cancelled

There's a bindle packed that would have been funny,
of "mostly cheese, a gift for other creatures",

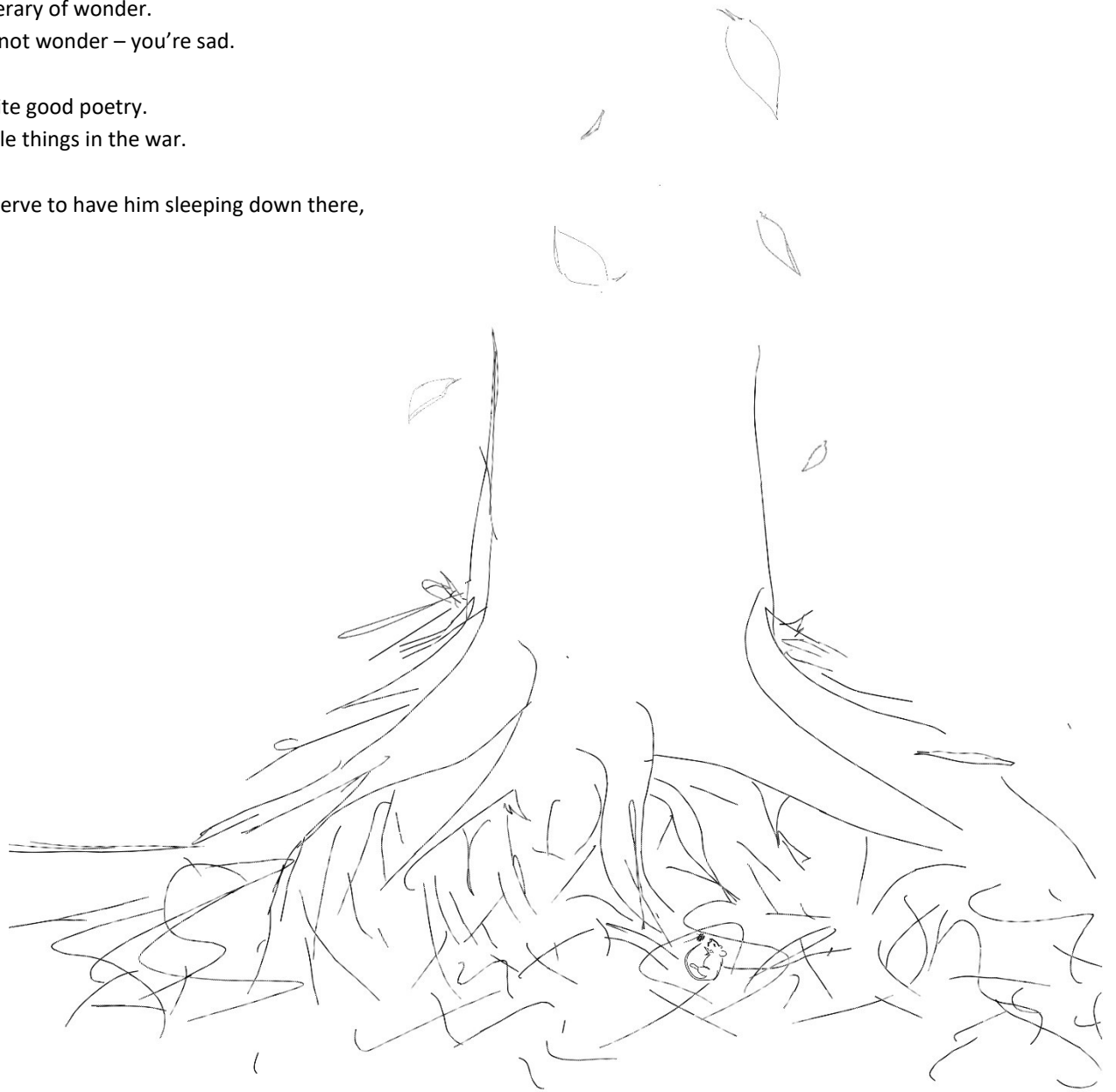
plans of handholds in the bark,
places that, living as eternal suffering,

I would have shown off,
discarded by the roots.

It's an itinerary of wonder.
But that's not wonder – you're sad.

I won't write good poetry.
I did terrible things in the war.

I don't deserve to have him sleeping down there,
and he is.



Big Thief

Mushrooms grow
on the back of a carcass, since it wouldn't move.

I keep smelling the mulch of friends.

I didn't even write these
fucking poems in order,

but truth is a childhood tree.
The city cuts it,

it keeps growing,
marked in orange for the split.

I will not stop standing for much.

The length of a body is just where it tries
to remember each atom underfoot.

It holds up everything.

How could it let you go?

The Badly Shaped Planet

It's spinning so fast,
its oceans are bloated.

It can't figure out how to escape a plastic bag.

Obviously from this distance,
I would very much like to pull the knife out of my friend

I myself may have put there, but that I also found there,
the sight of which jarred me.

I would want to stop having to comfort it and just play games.
Ones where we had roughly equal chances of winning,

and could spend the day just doing that,
then I would deliberately lose.

Instructions on Losing

Inspired by a star, there is a blade of grass
I met who said it would just be itself
even if there was no world

– or rather, we exchanged glances.
I was on the way back from the supermarket.
The long way around goes through the park.

Buds on each tree were having
a hard time of it, but ultimately doing fine.

Since I was wearing shoes, you had to be careful
of puddles and falling. The ice was white everywhere and slick.

But the danger was that you would step on your own hope
without thinking, then forever forget to come home.

How to Remember

It's a dark place. I left the sun behind,
am surrounded by the pinpricks I know.

Always hard to tell how large I am,
so things are probably not so relative.

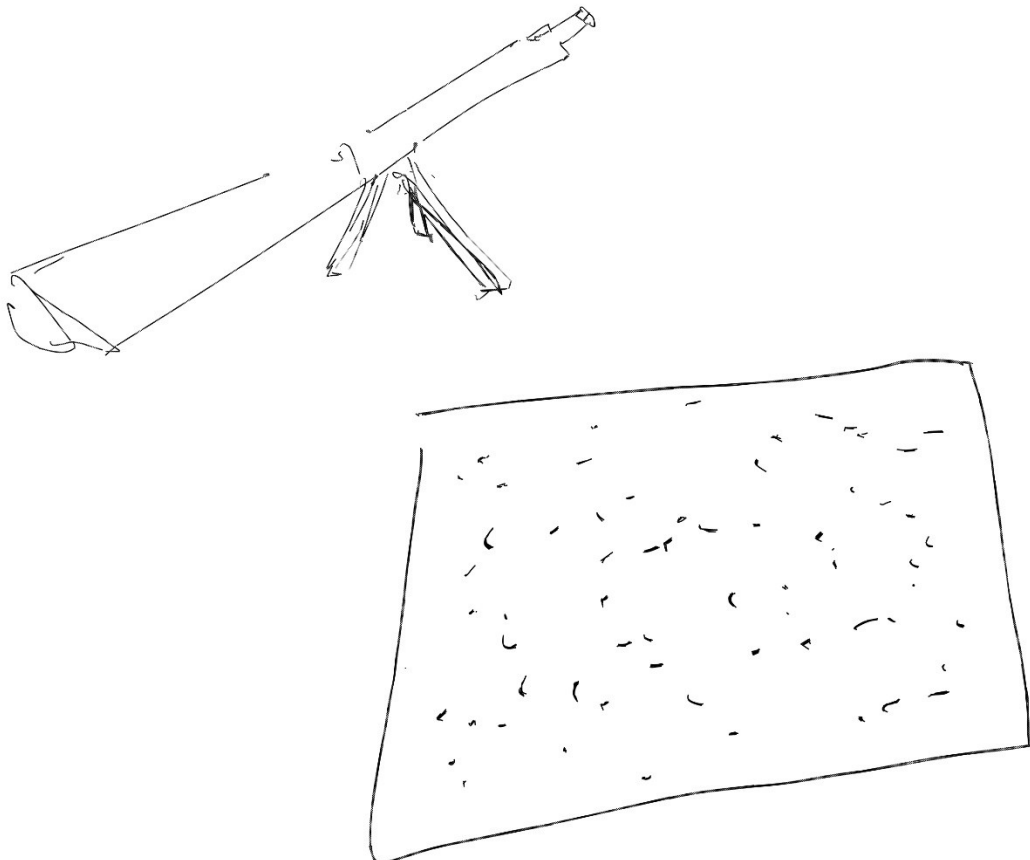
One of my friends is me,
and one of my friends is you,

despite the babbling distant voices
(no one lies since no one listens.)

Put the tools away,
don't even burn the art.

Here we have found a way
to let the souls grow.

We all know what to do:
who knows what those guys are doing?



Part III

On the Island

When I was made, I asked, can I always come back
to being small, like I had a choice.

The truth is, I despise this ocean,
since I couldn't teach my little sister how to swim.

If you will only stop giggling and splashing me,
and trying to push me off our raft,

you'll learn the chlorine
means the water fears your soul.

But she wanted to go far;
I'll be fine, I'll be fine.



Man Interrogates Coconut

I don't believe in you.
You're not waterproof enough
for so much water.

Look at that guy at the mercy of the waves.
It takes a third of a year.
It doesn't end.

When you dream, you replace
the experiences of others with your own,
and you, a fuzzy creature, will sail that great untruth

to make land meet land.
Land lets you go.

Only I hold on.
You shouldn't have that responsibility.

Pacific

So, are we going to the north pole
or the centre of the universe on this thing,

wherever waves will take us
on their way to being calm.

A raft made of sections of your home
and my shade can go anywhere,

since in daylight I now shield you
from the sun that wants to germinate you eagerly,

always thinking *now's the time* (he's a bit of a fool.)
We're going so slow we're in a painting,
so this might take a while.

New Shore

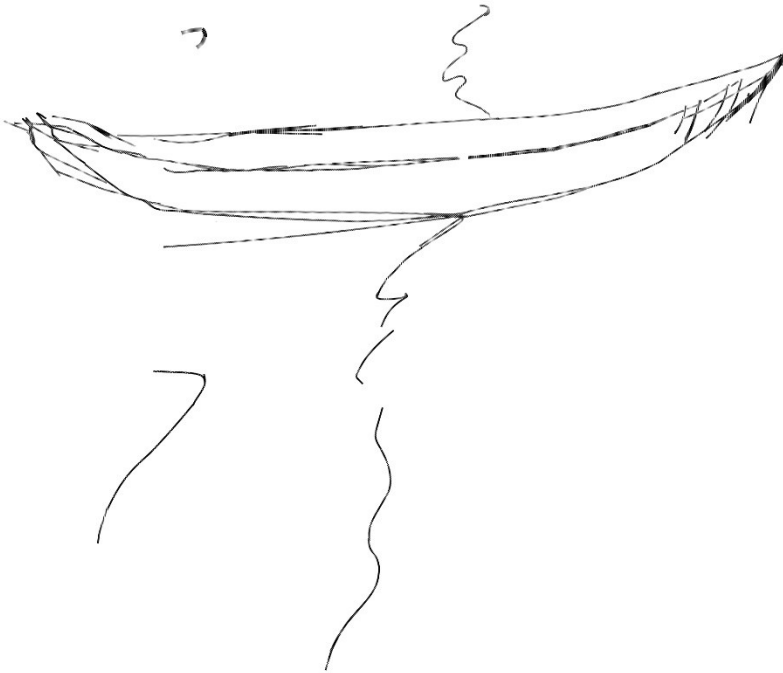
Never become cruel, or forget
each sand grain that your toes are in

(you won't believe how much
this last couple of months I've had to try

not to be made a pearl)
even if it makes the sea feel bad by comparison.

Always dig with your hands,
so you know how deep you're going.

Nothing touches nothing else
here, so you can probably grow to be yourself freely.



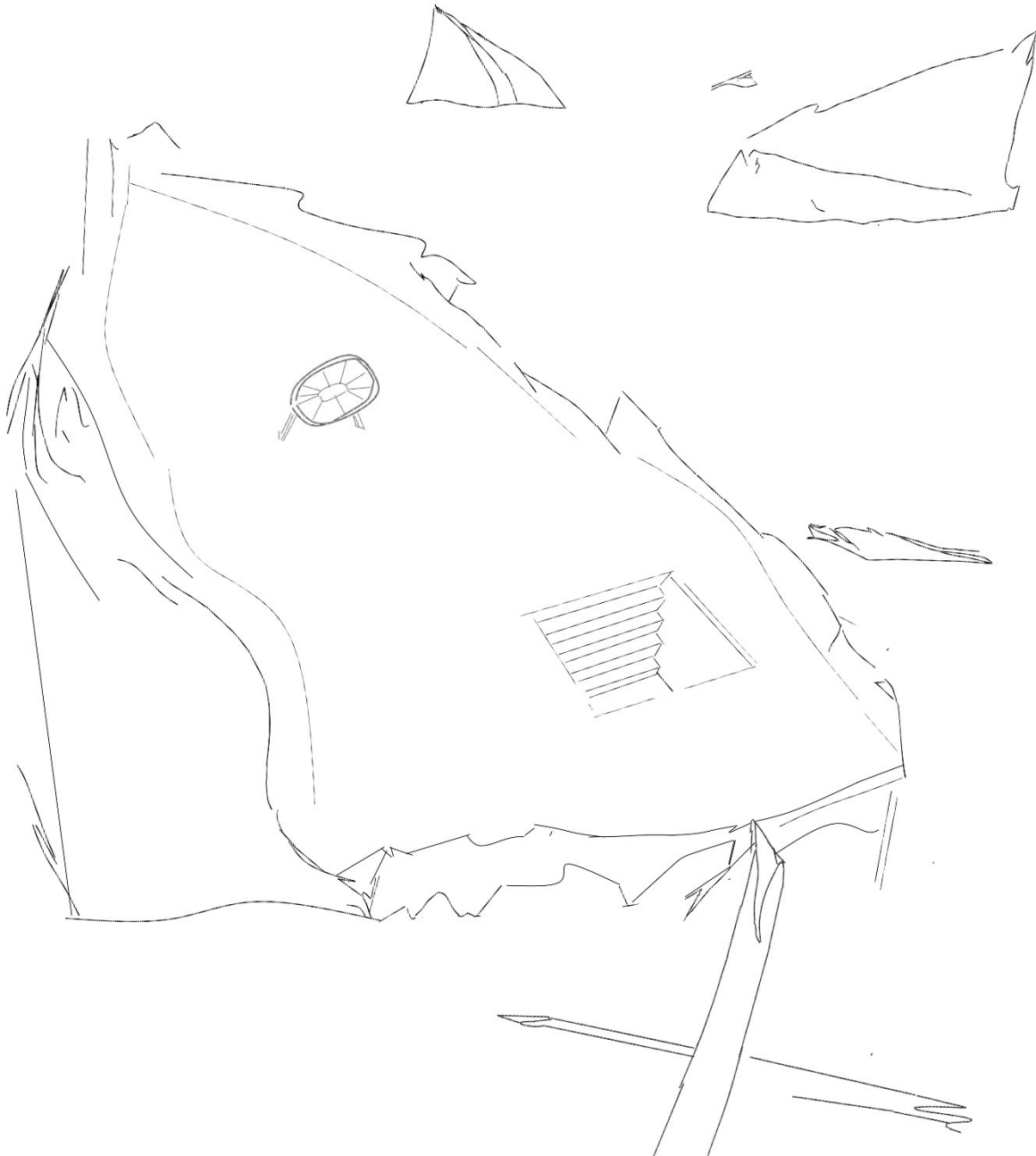
Elsewhere

On the island, I met a family
who was shipwrecked and trying to survive.

While the father worked with nails and a hammer,
they sent the elder son to jump between boats in the windward

flotsam graveyard (the younger lay on driftwood spearfishing,
but, due to his heart, could only snipe bubbles.)

On the green side the girl culled beehives
with her ear canal, and the mother baked
a hearthed wild pig in bark for supper.



Countermusic

Anything would sound good if I did that to it,
so, instead, here's a video about pups.

They know how to fight.
They mostly decide to chew on each other's ears,

and I once saw, in the most dysfunctional of litters,
a very bad dream quelled with a neck on a head.

Imagine if a jugular
put you to sleep and not the radio,

or if we stormed the plastic gate as friends,
as well as creatures.

Pup Commander

You four hold the front,
I'll hang back and charge the batteries.

Lazlo, you're the sapper, undermine them with a nap.
No one could suspect we could have planned this with your eyes closed.

Rosy, don't fall over yourself too much
chasing just one blade of grass.

No pup wants to fight, but you can't lose,
or you'll lose everything that could matter to me.

I can't send them into battle.
I sit and watch them sleep all day.

Precious Littles

I'll mostly die for them,
or end up doing all of their chores.

Today must be the day I fall for a petal
then, or dig down for a root.

No, I guess it's disingenuous.
I'm afraid of being the only one who remembers

things by name, and how they felt when they could find one another -
they didn't even have to try much.

But it's fine to be a little lost.

Go places,
just don't let it take your mind off things.

Best Friends Up for Adoption

Maybe there was one born for each cardinal direction,
so they're going where they belong,

but you can't really say so, seeing how much they frown
and paddle to come back together
(this was supposed to be a happy poem.)

It might be my fault that that one going
westward is all mixed up in the eyes,
and would drown the other three
trying to bite itself.

It's just my job to build
the boats and plant more trees.



Waiting for the Future

Did you get my invitation? It's been a whole five years.
I've been moving around handfuls of sand with a stick.

I've been tracing big loops, knowing how they close,
so that hasn't been living, or sailing very much.

What's in you that'll get so tall?
Where's your hesitation?

Do you not learn lessons?
What does the world promise you?

Tell me,
where do you want to go?



Eyepatch

This might be the story of the world's most confused pirate,
unsure of whether he is burying or discovering treasure

(what's the difference) no matter how much he thinks.
Both actions are bad, even if the good things stay low,

asleep and breathing peacefully. It's because
you're not supposed to know anything,

even if you're in love with the truth.
That part in the story breaks my heart,

but I won't forget it,
because I go a lot further than the sea.

To Sail Away

Don't tell anyone. but he's been walking on his hands.
When the tide comes in, he can't be seen,

then there are mouse prints found in wet sand somewhere far.
With his breath held, he witnesses creatures that make one hope one's mistaken.

He crawls onto shore and desperately plants.
Please make poems rhyme a little less,

stop telling me I've been visiting other planes,
but you have a good soul. We'd have grown together.

In the Park

Not far, a couple tries to get a kite off the ground.

The wind keeps starting and stopping, saying the name
of every leaf and grassblade here.

Am I back in the world again?
They keep trying to get their kite in the air.

Oh you guys,
each time I look away, you come back.

You have new wounds. You gave up
while I wasn't watching.

What are we going to do with you?



In order of completion.

1. "The Interview"
2. "Purple"
3. "Low"
4. "Upside-Down Waterfall"

Drawing for "The Interview"

Drawing for "Upside-Down Waterfall"

5. "The Third Floor"
6. "Focus"
7. "Pickles"
8. "Story About a Protagonist"
9. "About Sleeping"
10. "Glass Panels"
11. "Outer Space"
12. "In the Dark"
13. "Painting Inspector"

Drawing for "The Third Floor"

Drawing for "Story About a Protagonist"

14. "Phases of the Sun"
15. "Bugs Living in a Wet, Dark Wooden Block"
16. "Landfills"
17. "Conifer"
18. "Old Tales"
19. "Explorer"
20. "Trees in the Wild"
21. "Prison Gardener"
22. "Martian"
23. "Plane Ticket Cancelled"
24. "Big Thief"
25. "The Badly Shaped Planet"
26. "Instructions on Losing"
27. "How to Remember"

Drawing for "Phases of the Sun"

Drawing for "Explorer"

Drawing for "Martian"

Drawing for "Old Tales"

28. "On the Island"
29. "Man Interrogates Coconut"
30. "Pacific"
31. "New Shore"
32. "Elsewhere"
33. "Counter music"
34. "Pup Commander"
35. "Precious Littles"
36. "Best Friends Up for Adoption"
37. "Waiting for the Future"
38. "Eyepatch"

39. "To Sail Away"

40. "In the Park"

Drawing for "On the Island"

Drawing for "New Shore"

Drawing for "Painting Inspector"

Drawing for "Plane Ticket Cancelled"

Drawing for "Elsewhere"

Drawing for "How to Remember"

Drawing for "Best Friends Up for Adoption"

Drawing for "Waiting for the Future"

Drawing for "About Sleeping"

Drawing for "In the Park"