

THE APARTMENT

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Who's there?

Me.

Power out.

What? How?

Not sure.

Torch?

Here.

Phone?

Half.

Yours?

Full.

Good.

Kitchen?

Why?

Wait.

For?

Not sure.

Ok.

Time?

Two...

...

Hear that?

Hear what?

Noises.

Where?

Above.

It's fine.

I'm sure.

You see?

A bit.

You?

I see.

...

Still you?

Yes.

Come closer.

Ok.

Still me.

Hear that?

Steps?

Yeah.

...

Still there?

Yes.

And you?

Yes.

Remember?

What?

Me.

I will.

The inhabitants of the city are concerned at first - there being a question of how healthy this unceasing thunder might be. How much static can a human brain handle? And the electrical appliances and wires housed between walls of painted plaster, those too? Violent thoughts, violent sexual thoughts, violent sexual suicidal thoughts – could any of these social evils be attributed the sky's blanket of fuzz? Or the sleeplessness, or sleepiness, or the deep gloominess, or electric manic happiness? Eventually, the inhabitants grow accustomed to it and amalgamate the sky's paranoia as

a subset of a greater more ineffable atmospheric conspiracy. To those born into it, it is as native as breath.

Around collections of flickering and pulsing lights heaped on the kitchen table you and your lover wait for the power to return, sleep-weary of thinking that without light her face may transform into something diabolical or worse: simply dissolve, never to be seen again. You wonder whether you love her and if it's too late to want to be alone. You ask yourself: if you don't love her could you live out the rest of your life in a relationship with her knowing that it is a relationship of convenience and fear? You listen to the tone of her breath in rhythm with her thought. You imagine the sound forming condensation on the ceiling and the mould a map of her soul.

In the morning the apartment no longer belongs to you. Green life has sprouted in the nooks and corners of the room. Dust, seed heads and bits of dead insects blow under the doors and drift through open windows, floating in clouds that when disturbed spiral away to the upper regions of the ceiling. Moist spider webs have spread mould shaped like the shadow of some alien flame, a slow fire taking centuries to reduce the place to slime and damp earth. You begin to scrub, sweep and spray, tearing the plant tendrils from the gaps between tiles. You paint over the mould spreading across the walls and ceiling. The chemical odour reclaims the apartment for yourself and your lover.

The power is still out and to forget the storm you hold your lovers body as though she might fall. In the unfamiliar space of semi-darkness you mine your collective memory for shared histories - reminiscing what you didn't know had been forgotten. You recall the lights of the city. Lights that blink or pulsate, static or moving as orbs, beams (both radial and singular), constellations of lights, walls of light assigned to the surface of buildings or to the sky where the murky fog had its own kind of light; lights dim and hard to see, others dancing for the attention of the inhabitants; entombed lights, accessed by a select few and deep within the interior of the city's layers; lights kept inside pockets, worn on clothes and on heads; new devices and machines for producing and distributing light.

There are boxes of blank paper and furniture now, jackets without buttons, clothes eaten by things called silver fish; objects more broken than fixed. Your lover is distracted by the overbearing presence of it all. She breathes in frustrated sighs. She collects some scattered papers, blank and lined and useless. "Let me help" you say and together you collect the papers and place them in a box. You slide the box across the floor into solidarity with the pile and think to rearrange it all or at least that corner of the room. You decide not to. You are afraid of spending the day a slave to thinking through the organisation of the detritus. You sit back down in front of the window, breathing upon it to create a fog that creeps over the silhouette of the distant city. The horizon disappears behind the wet dust and you watch it shrink back into air. She is moving something else now. Your mind is pulled back to the apartment. You offer your help. She begins to cry.

Could you...

What?

Love...

Another.

Given Time.

Will you?

No.

Time is...

On your side.

Somewhere birds are crashing through the trees. The apartment is filled with plants. The walls run with water from the humidity. You and your lover climb a fig tree where you sit and watch the colourful creatures fly in and out of the room and the steam rise from the undergrowth. What other animals might be lurking in the layers of greenery, you wonder. "From all this water, tomorrow there will be mould," you say. "Please forget tomorrow," she begs but you can't and you become distant to her. When was the last time I felt my life belonged to me? You ask yourself. I remember a time when my love and I could go out from the apartment, find new things, new objects and bring them back with us. Now things are not mine to choose.

There is no more light left in the devices you and your lover huddle around. Like those cities where the ocean was the source of ineffable mystery and truth, here it is the world of light where the drama of the human soul can be found. You sleep for the first time it seems in weeks and dream of the birds that you had seen during the day. "What could I have done differently?" You ask them but their dead pan eyes give no reply. How does life become so unrecognisable?

In the morning the apartment is gone. Your lover is nowhere to be seen.

You take the stairs down to the lobby of the tower. The lobby is not much larger than your apartment had been. Its ceiling is low and the space is gloomy, being on the south side of the tower. Leaves whisper raggedly to one another across the tiled floor before taking rest in the corners. As you expected there is a man at the letter boxes. He has grown a weary beard since you last saw him standing there, weeks, maybe months ago, reaching for his mail, somehow unable to stretch the final inch to unlock his box and collect his letters. Leaves form around his feet. Harried eyes blink slow and heavy from tiredness and the strain of the eternal exercise of collecting his mail. You would like to talk to him, to hear his voice, to tell him about your apartment, about the birds, the mould, the boxes of blank paper. You would like to tell him what you remember of how it used to be and about your lover, the map of her soul on your bedroom ceiling, your doubts about your life with her and your fear of change. But you don't. Trying not to stare as to avoid causing the man any more sleepless anxiety than he already suffers, you pass through the open doors and into the cold electric wind. Pools of water form in the disparate hollows of the aging carpark. You have seen the water as a mirrored sheet that spreads as far as human sight, you have seen it as a tube of torrential white moving pass the tower like a warning, you have seen it as an infant trickle, a crescent lake, a spring boiling green, a mist, a whirlpool and a ladder. Today it is a field of puddles.

You pick your way through them, toward the sound of her breath.

You find her standing by the highway.

As you approach her, her body registers your presence with a slow tight-lipped exhalation like blowing on hot tea. "The apartment is gone." You say. "It will return." She replies. "I hope so." "Look at this road." She says and you cast your gaze out across the thousands of coloured vehicles moving in and out, over and under and around each other with a decimal accuracy unfathomable to your biological mind. "It's incredible." You say. And it is. It's really incredible.