

More Later

by

Sam Friedman
Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in English

To Douglas, thank you for showing me all always. Thank you for teaching me space, voice, passion, thread, and heart.

To 35 Home, thank you for being my people. Joey, Ben, Kafilah, Alex, Matilda, and Aili, thank you each for helping me be myself, for showing me every day how to live a life full of joy, intention, and love. Whoever wakes up first, wakes all of us.

To Mom, thank you for teaching me to never do anything if you don't love it and it doesn't make you happy. This is for you.

To Dad, thank you for always reminding me to ask questions and go further. This is for you.

To Yonit, thank you for inspiring me to do what matters. I'll always look up to you.

To Baba, it will always be you. This is a page for our book. I love you.

To Zaide Raph, Bobbe, and Zaide Herman. I miss you more than you could know. Nothing fills me with more pride than to know that everything I do is channeling all of you.

To Gram, thank you for dancing with me. I will always remember that.

To Noah, I know it was never a goodbye. Our room will always be the room.

To Dan, Steve, Rich, Brad, Abby, Karen and Keira. You all taught me to care about learning, listening, and putting love into everything you do. I'm forever indebted to you.

To my family, my friends, and everyone in between. Thank you for everything. You are my heart.

*The word hand anchors
your hand to this table
your hand is a warm stone
I hold between two words.*

-“You Begin,” Margaret Atwood

September 12th, 2017. 5:49PM:

ok ok ok I'm gonna keep not writing or writing like this until I break through and am able to write (again). Why am I stuck? I haven't been able to begin except for the couple poems I brought in a few weeks ago and what am I stuck in? "Begin again"¹ should be inspiration. I need to be able to begin again each time I open computer/diary/eyes and not feel stuck or bound by whatever expectations. I don't want to think that I'm just not doing this because I feel pressure to have it be great or something, I don't think that's the problem, I think I just can't do it because I haven't yet believed that I'm a good poet and workshopping the pieces didn't really help much at all. Everyone said I have this simple childlike way of describing the world and that doesn't really feel great to hear, although I guess it is telling about something although what that something is I'm not sure yet. I know that in my core I want to be able to do this project and I know that I can do it, but right now it's like how things were before the conversation with Jordan this summer where I could know in my logical self how things were supposed to be or what my realities were but my emotions or fantasies or ramblings just put me on another track where everything seems against me and nothing is going to work out. I need that catalyst to begin to change and start putting my selves together so that I can keep going. I wonder if anything has to do with that it's my last year. I'm sitting in my room right now and the yellower lamp is on next to the bed but I'm sitting on the futon with my feet up on the milk crate. The

¹ Thank you Sallie. Sallie starts every journal entry with "begin again" at the top of the page. A reminder to do so.

windows are open a little bit and I should probably water the plants. I still can't believe that the cactus died I'm so mad and I should get rid of it but for now it's with the other plants just wilted completely over on the side like the St. Teresa in Ecstasy kind of or like Christ when he's taken off the cross just completely letting his weight fall on the people or the pot holding him up. Maybe there is a poem in there about dead cactus/Christ or something about something/one dying that isn't supposed to even though it's possible. S's friend Bowen who died yesterday and had been sick and dying for a while. Then she shaved her head. Who knows what to say? Maybe this is how I'm supposed to be journaling, just going and going to find these kernels of poems. I think also what's holding me back is I don't want to be a poet and so doing a yearlong project on my creative writing feels strange or wrong. Also being rejected from D.V.'s advanced workshop really sucked and I still haven't gotten over that I guess. That made me feel like poetry wasn't my thing or wasn't supposed to be if I couldn't get into the advanced class. Then when people say my writing is simple-sounding that just makes me feel stupid. Also in general wondering if music is the thing I'm supposed to follow in life etc etc because it makes me so happy. I've written this or thought it 1000 times but reconciling wanting to help people and wanting to make music or be in music business but that feels very selfish and self indulgent and teaching high school English or something like that doesn't feel that way. Ok enough on that. Haven't called Noah yet this year, which feels wrong. I can feel myself slowly reverting back to Sam from the years before where I'm scared of

everyone and think that I can't talk to people or go out or anything. Not sure how to stop myself from doing that. Ok gonna go back to describing the room.

The shades are up and they're pretty translucent which I like. My two windows are right next to each other, facing the backyard/the other houses. I guess facing north? Not sure but I get good light all day long so I'll be sad when winter comes and there's no more light. My bed is pretty made, the comforter is yellow not bright yellow but sunny or lemony yellow. The sheets are a light light blue I think or grey blue. Pretty weird being colorblind when I'm alone and no one can tell me if I'm seeing the right color or not. Wooden floors and the plants are on a low wooden table. Next to the plant table is the chair from home that's light wood and canvas, it's in front of the closet with the sliding doors which has the dresser and some shirts hanging up. That's next to the other closet with the mirror but that closet is mostly just for storage. Never been able to journal like this before. Sense of urgency? Fear of failure? Analyzing myself while experiencing myself. Is that a bad thing? Who's to say. Feel like I need to cry but not in a way of sadness or anger but just this bubbling up and out of who knows what its just like enveloping me and crystallizing me at the same time somehow. I often have this feeling that's an intense sense of love, joy, glee, melancholy, and it feels very physical and bubbling and rocking and I'm never sure if other people feel it too. Someone was telling me the other day about a study they heard of where not everyone gets goosebumps listening to music which I thought was crazy because I assumed that was something everyone felt. I also remember

thinking this week about how not everyone probably always has music playing in their head unless they are listening to music for real. Like other people probably daydream with other sorts of thoughts or distractions. Not sure how this project that I'm doing is going to be unified in a way that isn't just like a museum of me or a preservation of my brain in amber. Is that enough? A book dedicated just to how I look at the world, no arguments or takeaways other than that?

More Later

The Pygmy Forest

December 27th, 2017. 5:32 PM:

While I was reading something was stained or stuck to the page and so I scratched it off. In the process of removing I also took off, by accident, the little horizontal line on the bottom left of the capital N. It was the first N in New York and I couldn't stop looking at it afterwards. I have the taste of the dark chocolate in my mouth still which always comes out in spit unless it is a long time after you eat the chocolate. The wine is in my head a little bit as I haven't had enough water today and the ringing in my ears is back but only in the right ear and less so if I turn my head towards the pillow. I am lying down as I write this but was sitting up when all the other things happened to me. I also learned a new word: postmeridian.

It means afternoon or after noon.

The pygmy forest was underwhelming except for that the forest is so small because underground iron combined with subsoil to form a concrete sheet or something like that so roots can't grow past this layer, which is why everything is small. It's not just that the soil is so dry.

Sometimes it seems like we are all there is but today it felt really apparent that we are tiny little things and the Pacific is big and redwoods are big and I'm a small thing reading a book by another small thing and drinking red wine, an even smaller thing.

Poor Soil

He throws his apple core onto the ground and claims “it’s compostable”
which is true, I suppose.

The venn diagram of when food is on the ground “to be composted”
and when food is thrown on the ground as trash is a circle, though.
We get into an argument about being able to pee in the woods.

The warm steam that rises from the trail of urine
through the cold air—he aims for the apple core.
Just imagining the combination of acids,
the musty sweet smell,
the dirty, browned apple against my teeth—
is enough to send me back to the trail.

Chest-high tree sits on poor soil, crushing its lungs.
The pygmy forest’s seeds have evolved
to open and germinate in high heat conditions
because of the persistent wildfires.
They are the first to grow after it burns.
Putting out fire with more seeds.

The Little Stone

Out of five stones skipped
Four sink

Plop, plop, plop,
Two short jumps
Following one long stride

Stone
st one

St ne
 o

Grow Down

The pygmy forest five miles from the redwoods
They look up at them every day
And know that if only they had fallen somewhere else
Things would be different
Grow down, put their hands in wet concrete.
Sit and watch
As the people come to build the redwoods
Add windows
Balconies
A rooftop garden
Infinity pool

Imagine—a forest so large
You could drive through

The Orange

has a thick peel
that I cannot dig into
at first
but I know
that the porous skin
and the pithy interior
leads to flesh
so wet
sweet
and the seeds
within the segments

I break them open
or plant them
in a patch of grass
pushing
 seeds
 down

into dirt, so thick porous sweet
dense soil purpose I pack down

the thumb on the ground pushes seed
the teeth chews flesh bitter skin
the orange peeled white tendrils
removed

and I now sit
my fingernails
aromatic
breath
sweet and tart

The Party

slippery eel that
feeling of fleeing

run drunk down a street

you kiss your teeth at
missed mess-ups

drunk rundown sweet

laugh through strange talks
with

strangers
run drunk trip over feet

crawl into sickbed
afraid of drunk you

Looking

Into the telescope through the dark window
I use my left eye and my right hand—
Pushing the hair out of my face to look
Into the glass and through it
Night is dark, it is 7 here and 10 at home.

My bed here—not really mine—white
with a decorative floral pillow atop plain
white naked pillow.
House instructions: we aren't supposed to
Sleep on the floral pillow

I can't wait to go home I don't like being uprooted
The pygmy forest, the sandwich with olive spread, wrapped in tin foil.
The red wine in the large glass
The telescope

Coffin

The Coffin

In the kitchen scuffling mice have hidden in the space between the bottoms of the cabinets and the tiling. Other than that they don't really intrude. The kitchen has its own set of stairs—one that goes straight up to the second floor.

We think this was for back when the house would have wanted to remain unseen. Up in the attic with the yellow wallpaper is where I have stayed. The yellow isn't peeling. Yellow is dusty.

On *The Little Prince* and Tattoos

IsThisTheRightChoice
Going Out
OfMyse
If To Take
C ontro l O
f My B
o dyMyGrowthAndAnyS e n se
AsTo WhoI MightEvenBe?

Reading *The Little Prince* as a kid feels right because it affirms your ever-present suspicion that adults don't really get it, that the way you experience the world is right and real and more than they seem to understand. Even if your parents are the ones who taught you how to read these pages in the first place it is still *your* book and *your* realization. Then, when you try in high school to write a paper comparing *The Little Prince* with *Where the Wild Things Are* and find yourself not only crumpling at the keyboard but also outright flailing to intellectually argue something that determined your own sense of self, it seems like you are starting to think it's a drawing of a hat and not an elephant swallowed by a snake.

DecoratingMyselfBy
Forci ngM
emo ryD
ow n M yTh
r oatTe a r
i ng A
P ageFromABookThatW a s Me
antF orMe AndEverybody

The tattoo begins as the end of high school, Pierce is giving himself a tattoo that says "Quid pro quo" and you don't really get what it means but it's cool that he's

just getting a tattoo and not going to Stingray or Chameleon or any of those places to get it done professionally. Just the needle, just the ink. You've been trying to think for a while about what you would get if you ever got a tattoo but it's so hard to pick anything that means enough to you. You start looking or thinking about things from when you were younger to try and figure out if anything could become an image for your body. Remembering the paper you wrote for your class Outsiders in Lit, the one you thought was going to be so cool, eloquent, meaningful, but it ended up confused and not diving deep enough into any of your source material.

I Will Never Be The Same
 At Least Still
 Hop e No
 tl W i ll R
 e membe r T
 o Be K
 i nd Tender Loving And W i se
 Hope Im No t Overreaching

You remember the elephant swallowed by the snake, the reminder to see things creatively and to not become "an adult," your senior year, graduation, it all seems so perfect. You text Jenna a picture of the illustration asking, "could you do this on me?" and she says "whoa! yeah, definitely" and you say "tomorrow?"

And the jabbing is

Is so irr

irregular

so sometimes it hurts dully and you feel like you're outside of yourself

but you can see the tattoo coming together

she starts with the

with the top of the elephant and works

her way around the tail, feet

eventually tusk and trunk

you don't realize that you may have been rocking back and forth or shaking or

sweating or

The Coffin

Nail nail nail nail nail nail nail
Simple pine-wood
Closed-casket ~~nail~~
Two long-smooth
handles for pall-bearers ~~nail~~
Everyone shovels dirt on-to the grave
Nail nail nail nail nail nail nail

MomAndDadAreGonnaB
eMadM ayb
e?D oes
Th i s Mea
n ICant B e
B ur i
e dInAJewishCemeter y ? Wa
sThi sWor thItOrAmIBad

A Falling Little World

is my name for dandelions, I think to myself, as I go walking on my hometown street. It is not yet the time of autumn when tourists come to my hometown street to take pictures of changing orange colors. I do not take pictures of the leaves because by the time I am ready to buy a camera it is winter. Dandelions in winter, I think to myself, would not be a great photograph. Commonwealth Avenue has been under construction and, my mom says, will be for at least another year.

I can walk up and down and wonder who is a new BU student with or without construction, though. Orange traffic cones. Here, no one honks because everybody honks. Watching the Harvard crew and the MIT crew row down the Charles river is not my favorite thing to do, but I do it because here it is fall, and in winter they will not row.

The falling of Boston is a long process that happens before I am ready.

Beneath the BU bridge the boathouses are not ready either.

The boathouses and I prefer sitting on our hometown one-way street.

The tourists come to our homes and watch the change.

Letter from Gram

Dear Sam,

*May the Sounds of the Shofar Herald a Year of Peace,
Happiness and Good Health*
Have a sweet year!
Much love,
Gram

It was wonderful being with you. Thank you for dancing with me. I will always remember that.

After my father's father died, he was standing in the room that used to be his bedroom, looking at his father's certificates, accolades, trophies—and how in that moment it felt natural, a raw physicality of grief, to reach to his heart and tear his shirt. I remember meeting him in the airport after Zaide passed, and he had pinned the torn shirt piece to his clothes. So everyone would know he was grieving. This summer, walking down Commercial Street with Aunt Andie and Uncle Mario and they told me everything they thought I knew but he had never told me. Gram's time institutionalized. Electroconvulsive therapy. Zaide and Dad wrestling, fighting, always in some kind of battle. The road trip—Zaide pulled over and threw Dad's stereo out of the car window.

Places to go when I cannot think about this:

- Amory Park, before they cut down the tree that everyone climbed on
- The blow-up mattress on Pierce's floor
- Inside the computer screen where it is light and loud
- Trip to North Carolina on the sand dunes

The light is wet, the ground is shaky, the sand is stable and the dunes are hollow. With cousins and the memory becomes cinematized and warm although it was rainy and brisk. *Something about being an age where you don't have or have a want for the vocabulary to compare what you see to what everyone else sees. You just see it. True joy in only living as the world around you is.*

10/24/17, 11:56AM: "Can I share a joy with you from last night?"

A funny endearing thing I heard someone say today. I'm not sure if I'm moving past/through a block or if I'm just digging deeper, right in front of the block.

What do I need to hear and who do I need to hear it from? Somehow I have told myself I can't do work when I'm alone but I also can't do work when I'm surrounded by people. Can I never work, create, write?

Anyways since that moment in Brookline Booksmith and the moment in Intermediate Poetry with E.H., I feel like I've gone down some interesting/possibly meaningful roads but none of these roads have been explorations into myself. Like the poem about the supermarket. Barely grazing my own surface and yet that poem was so meaningful to me. Maybe the focus shouldn't be on myself/my experience but on the world through myself since I can't experience it any other way anyways. Like the poem about the red wheelbarrow, the ways we experience self/narrator/poet comes through in the selection of objects, and even more, on the "So much depends". We, the audience, can glean/glaze our own meanings but we know that there is a person who decides that these things are important to them first. Am I making sense? Yes, so much. I think that this history of mine of not writing about my experiences has everything to do with subterranean emotions and not working on accessing myself. That journey, intrinsically related to this one, has also only begun recently.

The Grocery Store Poem

I cracked my head open on a folding table last night.
It was really just a tiny scrape, but it bled like how I imagine a large head-cracking
would. Fall-off-the-back-of-the-bleachers style.
The blood first just slid down my head,
around my neck, slithering through my torso.
I like the idea of my skull bringing my brain closer to the world.

The sunset today is going so quickly.
Sometimes I wonder if
being colorblind makes me
miss beautiful things like sunsets or paintings
or paintings of sunsets.

Maybe I should start defining my world without color.
Roses are bloody, violets are frigid.
The sunset really fades quickly now.
It is this beautiful mix of peeling open a tangerine,
hitting a baseball head-on,
and the seals at the aquarium.
(orange, yellow, purple)

sometimes I go to the grocery store
to stand in front of the produce,
memorizing how eggplants are purple but beets are purple (I think) too,
how lemons, bananas, and onions can all be yellow
carrots, oranges, clementines, mangos are orange
sunset doesn't look like the produce section, though
it kind of spreads and shakes like a broken skull, bleeding in the kitchen.

I'm sorry I couldn't sleep over last night.
I was too focused on making sure my head
didn't bleed radish
all over again,
I wanted to get my space.

I reorganize myself into produce sections,
distinct blocks of color kept fresh in auburn refrigeration.

If I didn't break my skull every once in a while,
I don't know how I would make time for myself.

The Coffin

is six feet long and deep and four feet across bigger than most cages it has battery powered Christmas lights which will be changed as necessary a small four-paned glass window for the amazing view and a fold-out futon if guests ever turn up unexpectedly

Crying Poem

Holding your body back
Letting the shaking

the tremors undulating

Breathing loud enough for you
For you to hear and mimic
Carving the softness

In your bed for us to lie in
Slowing you down and

helping you untie your knot

Or at least sitting with
While you pull at
Different strands

The moments of quiet
Where your breathing goes
to nothing
and I can see you slipping
inside
self

“Misc.”

My coffin
Sits in the attic
Made of cardboard
Written on its side in marker
From when we moved
Inside: Photo album
from the trip to New Mexico
Plaster cast from the broken leg
Sealing wax—dark red
and a streamer
or two

Old Skin

Oh, their skin
And how it crinkled
When they held
Each other

His hand on her
Wrist, her hand
On his lapel

The gown,
The tuxedo
The looks away
From each other

Oh, they're old, skin
Held on with
Paper
clips



11/5/17

*Difference between being told you are good and telling yourself you are good/
feeling that you are good
and the wonder that accompanies the space in between
Hearing something for the first time—a new song
The right words the kiss on top of the head
Journaling what you did that made you happy
Newness of happy
Remembering fitting into a cardboard box to feel big because
you took up the whole box*

The Window

Mom always talks about the wedding when you were 2 and watched the wedding band the whole time

and so you believe her

Dad loves to talk about you being a baby tapping out rhythms on your tummy to fall asleep

and so you believe him

*

ok maybe not poems *as such* but something about how part of your attitude towards music comes from constantly being told that it has been part of your life for so long. Like if I was doing musical things when I was a baby then why *wouldn't* music still be the thing I'm supposed to do now? But if that's the argument I'm making I would be fighting myself because I can feel at the same time that it's still tugging at me. Something about not wanting others to be right or wanting to determine for myself what to do? Kind of like doing something and saying "I'm doing it because *I* want to not because you told me to." Journaling away the urge to write poems. But not even because I'm barely journaling! Again, who's to say? Right now the task is to start creating weaving threads so by the end of all this I have a blanket or scarf. Maybe even just a piece of cloth. "Cut from the same cloth" <- how do I fit into my family or the stories around me?

"I'm scratching this itch
But not because you told me it's itchy
That it's been itchy forever
That my grandfather was itchy too
That I've been scratching it since before I could think"
Something less stupid than that

A poem that is about distancing myself from music (without saying it) could just follow a piece that was more journalistic/about poetry more explicitly. All about the window without looking through it. Disintegration.

Too

Building a window for me to look through
Cutting the glass just to my size
Painting the frame
Painter's tape on the glass so
As not to stain it
Marred glass undoing the whole
Window

The window of cut glass and painted wood
Goes into the wall, which has two more
Windows like the newly built

The wall of drywall, insulation, eventually wood too
(not to mention wires, pipes, mice)

The wall building to go along with the
Three other walls so the room can be finished

—to say nothing of painting the walls, laying the
wood floor too. not to mention furnishing with a chair
or two, a light too

Accrue

Hard wood floor touches the rug—
The rug purchased from a store in a basement
The shopkeeper claimed it to be—
“handcrafted, handwoven, handknotted”
The rug spreads across most of the room
Creamy eggshell ecru
Reaches the foot of the bed
A hand-me-down
From Dad’s work friend’s son.
The bed, covered with lemon sheets
And murmured blue comforter.
Two pillows
One knitted blanket, folded purple and fir green.
The bed sits beneath the window
With the paper shades pulled up—
The shades that spill light onto plants
Or a glass of water,
a coca cola glass.

And the light outside, which goes earlier and earlier,
Brightens all it reaches—
The construction next
Door the radio, faint through the closed
Window keeps eyes awake in morning.

Landslide

Breathing in on your in, holding on any way I can. I wish we could sing this together. Moving slowly so we don't have to move. Staring into mug, steam in face, unable to look up and across the table. The tree fell on our house, we are waiting for it to break the house open.
This is a mirror song

Untitled

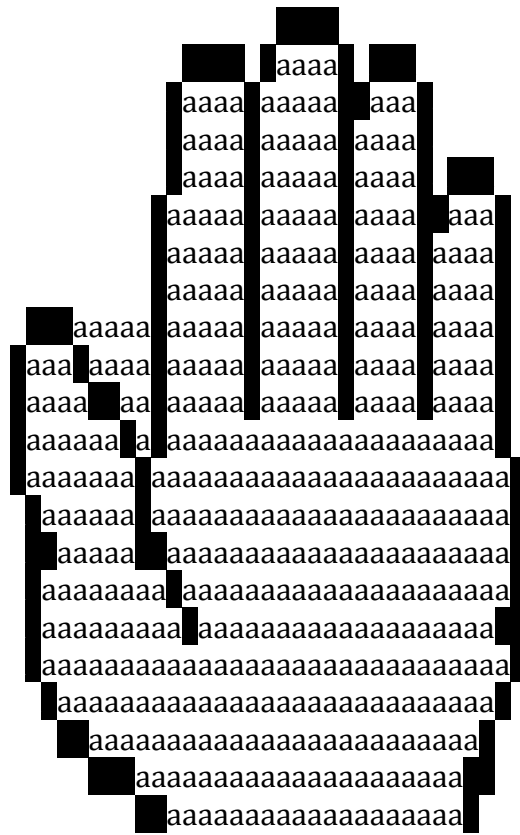
Walking to a muddy forest
Where my shoes are unfit
It's so hard for me
To admit you in
To harmonize
For you I've hardly begun

Let's keep ourselves inside and
Leave the shoes by the door.
I'll put on a pot of water

Out there it's weather for no one.
Take off your coat, you must be freezing.
I was just here at the kitchen table, reading.
just light reading, I'm in between books.
Do you have anything you would—
thetea

The Hands

(Demo)



i

The wooden sticks
On the taut plastic
Metal cymbal
My four limbs
Drum

ii

Upright in the living room corner

Tinny and dark

Atop—old photos, passports, wedding portraits—piano.

iii

Pulling myself out of myself
Surprised by volume
Strengthening
The tenderness of my voice
How the chords shake
And the lips quiver
When I am quiet and enough

Jordan

And when I wake up in the morning
To leave I do it quietly
Take the blanket off myself and step
Over her body to get off the bed
She is quiet on her side

Sleep paralysis,
She dreams stuck and cannot get out
Signaling to me by
Moving one finger or
Changing her breath

I whisper her name to her
And she raises her eyebrows,
Without stirring

I whisper the I love you
And the faintest smile,
Without waking dreams

Jenna

Jenna could have drawn
a murmur of starlings
a cup of ice
—it would have been enough

The needle, its tip
Dipped in ink and tied
Together to the eraser end

Jenna could have drawn
a nail in the wood
a window's sliver
—enough

1 2 3

Stuck in an eggshell.
Pecking myself out
Wet, naked,
These poems are body
I explore through the moments
Something feels not quite right
Cannot find it, though
While looking at my moles
And beauty marks

Take This

The hand-torn peach
Your anger is yours and growing
The falling photo that shows the note written on its back

The notes people have written on your back
And the photo they look at you as
Gruesome and bruised

They ask you to hold the camera,
High enough and with both hands
so that you may aim the lens at
your back, covered in inks and pencil leads
They will focus the camera, on one sentence
perhaps or even a letter
That rubbed you wrong when they wrote it in
A final focus,
a turn the flash off,
And they ask in the way that is really a statement

You can pay for the developing at walgreens?
They take their hands off of yours, yours on the camera

Sluice and Funnel

I become my hands
that hold onto you
I often imagine I am teething

You back to here
even though you are
still here
right
here

I cry and then you stop
to take care of me
and we go back and forth

Sluice and funnel
try not to spill or drip
our forms

The burning of tears
that they stay hot
on our cheeks.

Or turn into screams
I cannot contain
wails
moans
tethering

Touch Here

That was a good moment of touch because it let me know I was here

and here we are

sipping beer and playing sardines

here, in our house,

we play for dessert

and we cook for each other

everyone brings a plus one to dinner

alex makes his cous cous

kafilah makes fried tofu

ben has been brewing kombucha

but he likes to drink white russians

the moments where we touch are the moments I'm aware of

which photos I choose to hang up

and which stay hidden in folders and desks

the moments we touch are the moments I'm nervous

or doubting

doubting myself and doubting my body

making sure my body and head correspond

which they rarely do

when we touch I forget about this house
I forget that my room gets so hot
which is why I haven't gotten a rug yet
the hardwood helps me cool down when
I touch it to my feet or ankles

jordan says that when you get too hot you put
cold water on your wrists
the nape of your neck
your ankles
and your whole body understands

the room is hot because I am touching it
my touch is enough to boil
wilted plants—
flowering jade
night blooming cereus
aloe vera
moon cactus
I touch the plants I am here i know.

The Phone

Some dirt falling

I've covered the receiver in soil
So as to avoid miscommunication
Any time I want to talk
I have to dig it up
Cordless, battery-powered
Under potting mix
I'll move it to the garden once
The weather warms up
And yes,

I do anticipate
Some dirt falling in my mouth
When I answer the ringing
In the ground

But such is the phone
And so am i
Still so
Underwatered
Susceptible
To pests and restlessness

On Voicemails

Looking at voicemails you've collected like trash, like bottle caps bruises and receipts, makes you feel meek and ashamed. Seeing the full expanse of messages left by your dad or home or gram and how they pile up in this phone-sized bank of people wanting to talk to you and you not being free or being tired or asleep, distracted, upset, and everything more, you want to turn over and restart again. And yet the process of listening, relistening, transcribing, brings imagist beauty lens into the fold. Voicemails become crystals, tiny snippets of conversations we wish we could have, the things we find most important to say while still finding ourselves taken off guard in saying anything at all. In voicemails we might say something as compact as "hey, call me back," when on our end of the line we are shaking, holding everything back and boiling our worries or fits of passion down to these four words.

Hello this is your family calling give us a call

Polaroids

#1

A child puts a paper boat
Down into a creek
And walks away
The boat sops up creek
And melts into water

#2

Hair in the drain
Waterlogged
Hairs collected
In the mouth
The drain cannot
Swallow

#3

The mushroom
That grows under
a tall tree
sprays spores
That float, like
dandelion

#4

The nail clipper
Cannot save my
Toenail, ingrown
Curling under the flesh
The foot growing swollen
Tender and pink

#5

Needle that pierces
Only the first layer of skin
And emerges clean

No blood
Like a nametag
Stuck thru a shirt

On Voicemails

When the voicemails are from people who were hoping to catch you for a longer conversation, especially an unscheduled one, they tend to ramble more, try and fill you in rather than just asking to talk when you can. This oozy, floating, improvised speech flows in ways that feel antithetical to those crystal ones that use as few words as possible to achieve their goals. The longer, wobbly messages, though, are the memorable ones, the notes and poems that make you want to call back, hoping they don't pick up so you can leave a message too.²

² *Hey Sam it's Joey uh just calling to say hi uh wondering how you're doing um yeah I'm on my way to Los Angeles right now city of angels uh to primarily see Marshall yesterday was his birthday um and he's in for a couple more days before going to Chile with Julia um and my friend Eian's also down here so so I was taking a couple days off work for this little trip um I'm working at Dylan's dad's Italian restaurant and that's been kinda fun um but yeah I've been having a fairly laid back summer workin hangin um would love to hear about um the life you're living work you're doing New york city et cetera um so call me whenever bye*

Polaroids

#6

Biting a carrot
And knowing
Your mouth uses
Equal strength—
To bite clean
Through someone's finger
Bone and all

#7

A skinned knee
under running water
Of the faucet
To clean the light wound
Hydrogen
peroxide
That bubbles and foams
Before the band-aid

#8

Drawing in pen
ink that stains
The finger
The pen
That breaks in
The breast pocket

#9

The phone
Unplugged
its cord left
Dangling
Curled
coiled pig's tail

#10

And the branch
That taps against the window
Asking to be let in
From the cold
From the winter
To my room
Where I am

Operator

*A vacant seat amongst the row of vacant seats
My hands that shake as I take the headphones
The attached microphone
And place it over my ears
The switchboard is simple in concept
When you get the call, you connect
The phone plugs into the appropriate jacks
To connect one to another*

*I wait for someone to call
To pick up the phone, the blinking red light,
And I'll patch you in across the wire
To whomever
Now, the difficulty,
The difficult part,
Is in remembering to hang up
Once I've put you two together*

*I know you can hear me
Breathing on the line
So I hold it*

*It's strange, the voice always sounds so familiar
—which I would hope they say about me—
but the sharp splinters
the hum of a string of lights plugging in
seems to be coming from outside the phone
my other ear
I can hear the two pairs of feet
Softly tapping out a waltz
A one two three across the floor
I can hear their pressed palms
And the swish swish of his pants
Legs grow restless
On my end, I'm still
in the chair. Still with
the headphones, microphone,
hand on the wire*

*I find myself wishing
The room had a window
—a light so clear—
I would cut it myself*

*I sit at the switchboard
Plug myself in
Sound of a needle over open flame
Roots trying to break
through the layer of soil
A pallbearer*

*The coffin's weight
Prying the nails out
Tucked in the lemony comforter
Soft wood*

*The window
The phone
The hands
The switchboard built into the tree
And how I hold myself up to the receiver
Sound of breathing
I hold*