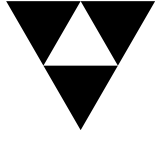


THE RACKET | 77





THE RACKET

Hey.

I've recently joined the ranks of the unemployed. And as one does when in this situation, I've been subjecting myself to the mind-numbing process of applying and interviewing for new work. Frankly put, in the wake of the pandemic, I'm finding it difficult to do so with any real conviction. I'm struggling, on daily basis, to reconnect with the subconscious agreement between employee-and-employer that is working.

We've pulled ourselves, to a certain degree, out of the wreckage of a terrible pandemic that forced billions of people to reassess nearly everything about their lives including how and where they work and why they do the kind of work they do. It's nothing revolutionary to say that a globally traumatic event, like the pandemic, forces a bit of a perception shift. Not only did the pandemic overturn everything we thought was built on a solid foundation, but it also gave us what felt like unfettered time to actually think about these about the systems collapsing around us. To see the gaping holes punched into our longstanding perceptions about how we existed and wonder when, if ever, those holes were filled, could they be filled with something different.

In terms of employment, we aren't just being asked to return to, what I see, as an outdated method of working, but to do so without any alteration to our pre-pandemic perspective. We our on the other side of a grueling moment in history and instead of everyone wondering, "how do we do this whole work thing differently," we are instead trying to fit what amounts to remarkably different shapes into the same old holes.

In each of my interviews and applications there's invariably some sort of question or comment that asks, "Why are you passionate about this job?" Why are you excited about this company or this industry or this role or this team? There's this feeling in each interview that I need to show this potential employer that whatever job it is I'm applying for is everything I've ever wanted to do. That regardless of the context of my life, my relationships, my issues, my problems—this job (amongst all the other jobs I'm applying for) will fulfill me both financially and emotionally.

THE RACKET

Why are we still acting out this scene over and over and over again? I understand that there are many people in the world who are doing something they love and find meaning in and though I'm not jealous of this, I applaud them for discovering what it is that provides that. But I'm almost positive that for the majority of us clocking in each and every day, work is the means in which we live the rest of our lives. Work provides us with the means in which we can do all the things we need and want to do. That's it. We have somehow gotten to this point where if we're even going to be looked at for a role, we need to exude our love for the field and the position. We need to be more than just a capable employee with the skill sets required for the position, we have to love what we're being asked to do. It has carry us through the day and linger in our minds as we drift off to sleep. And I think it is utter bullshit. A myth that we've been sold and fully absorbed to the point where we build our lives around the act of working to bring other people's dreams to fruition.

And here we are on the other side of what could be the greatest perspective shifting event in history, and we're still being asked to convince interviewers that a job is more than just a means to an end that our abilities make us particularly suited for.

Work doesn't need to define us. So why do we keep acting like it does?

'Till next time.

N

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police brutality, racism and violence
perpetuated towards BIPOC
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Just going for a hat with flowers.



WE HAVE A PATREON

We aren't in this for the money.

But there are costs in doing what we do.

Any help with those costs (and with the costs of future endeavors) would be greatly appreciated.

If not, we get it and we still appreciate you.

THANK YOU TO THESE FOLKS

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CONTENTS

HEATHER RASMUSSEN	<i>Untitled (Pile of squashes on skin)</i>	1
HEATHER RASMUSSEN	<i>Untitled (After Juan Sanchez Cotan)</i>	2
T.S. LEONARD	Earth, Wind and Mostly Fire	3
HEATHER RASMUSSEN	<i>Untitled (Pile of old squash on agave spines, Still Life #1)</i>	5
NORMA SMITH	Celebrate Your Ancestors	6
LUCAS BURTIN	<i>The Berliner, New Year's Eve in Berlin</i>	8
LUCAS BURTIN	<i>Ghost</i>	9
LUCAS BURTIN	<i>Chicken</i>	10
KIANA SHALEY	The Hotel Luau (Or My Father Returns Home)	11
DREW BENNETT	<i>Ode to Fallen Rocket</i>	13
MARISA LIN	<i>Elevator of a Thousand Dreams</i>	14
DREW BENNETT	<i>Hillside Nest Rest</i>	15
DREW BENNETT	<i>Jonas' Farmhouse</i>	16

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UNTITLED (PILE OF SQUASHES ON SKIN)
HEATHER RASMUSSEN

2020

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UNTITLED (AFTER JUAN SANCHEZ COTAN)
HEATHER RASMUSSEN

2020

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Earth, Wind and Mostly Fire

T. S. LEONARD

On a rare warm day in San Francisco, I met a philosopher
(I know, *I know*) writing a book about the classical elements

—earth, air, water, fire—which she said needed revision.

I don't know if there's a new one, or a dropped one, like Destiny's

Child, or if one (maybe fire?) gets brought to the front, like Diana
Ross to the Supremes. Or for that matter, Beyoncé. I can't say

I even understand carbon emissions. All I know is that she has
a point: shit's changing. We're gonna need a bigger

definition: a planet is a girl group. Earth is not a star.

And yes, things are heating up. [Insert forest here] is on fire.

"Everything's on fire" is now a common greeting.

Beyoncé on the radio sings "I'm lookin' for a new foundation,"
seconds after announcing she's just quit her job.

The song of the summer is the sound of collective resignation
to our new hot doom. A shake-up in the lineup looms.

The problem with apocalyptic thinking is how it prizes endings.

Darling, I hate to break it to you, but life will go on—

perhaps unrecognizably, and maybe that's scarier than all of this
smoke. Change is hot. I mean hard. Like mud, or wind,
or maybe we'll be dazzled by the talents of a new element,
another anthem of fabulous survival. We will learn
all the words, and try our best to sing along.



UNTITLED (PILE OF OLD SQUASH ON AGAVE SPINES, STILL LIFE #1)
HEATHER RASMUSSEN
2020
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Celebrate Your Ancestors

NORMA SMITH

What if
my ancestors beat me? What if
they owned my skin, my flesh,
my bones that still settle and knit
after each flogging? How

does the wind know
where it started out?

An origin story
is the clean slate, even
if it tells

Of a complicated mating
between hummingbird and fox,
between grizzly bear and butterfly

That has travelled
the ridge at the back
of some broken down
universe, still rising
at dawn and bedding down

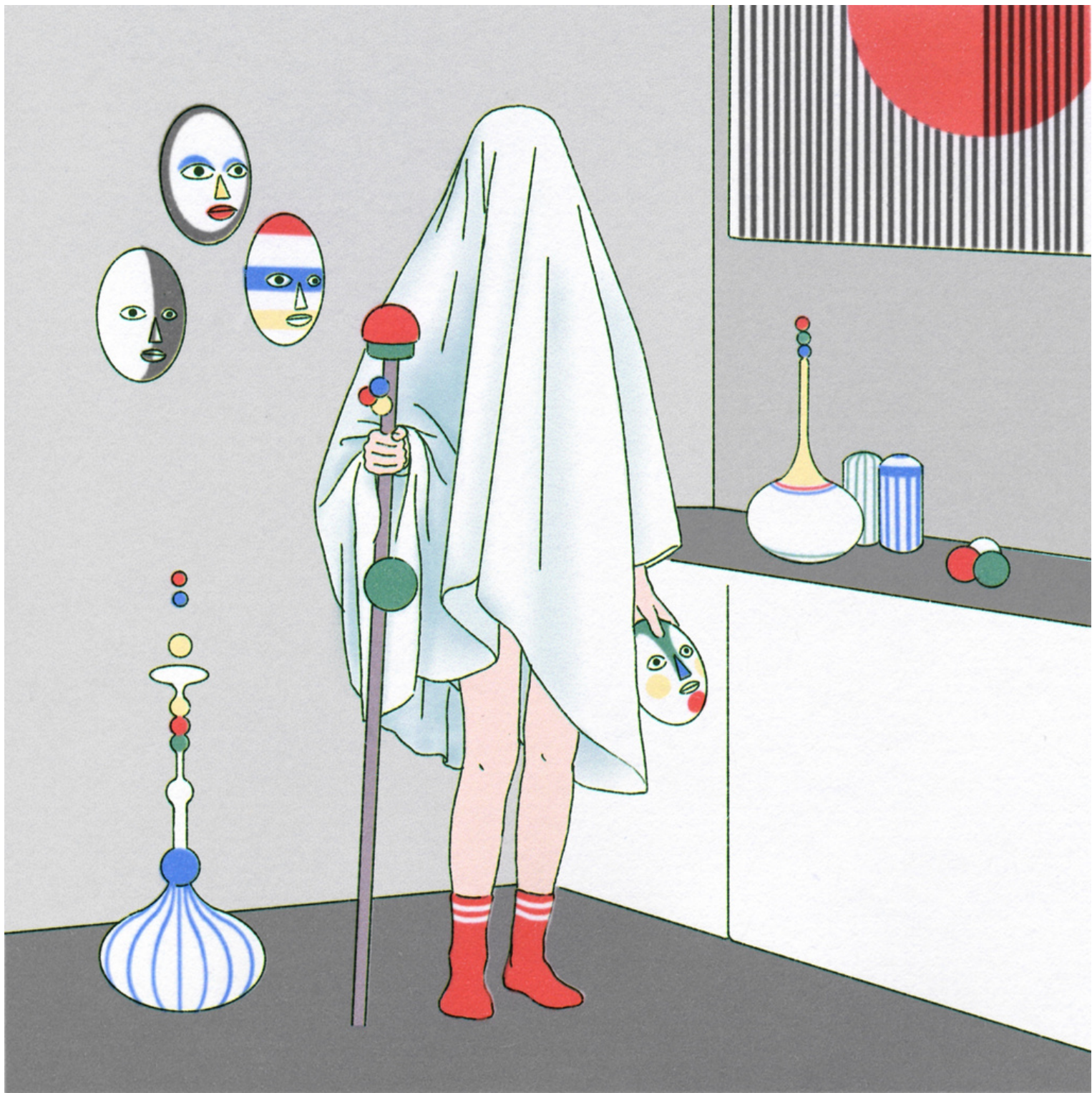
after the little ones are asleep
some long ago
early spring morning—

Mist of time. What if
my grandfather
traveled from the old country,
hired his landmen in the new country
to do the work and then refused
to pay them
what he promised? What

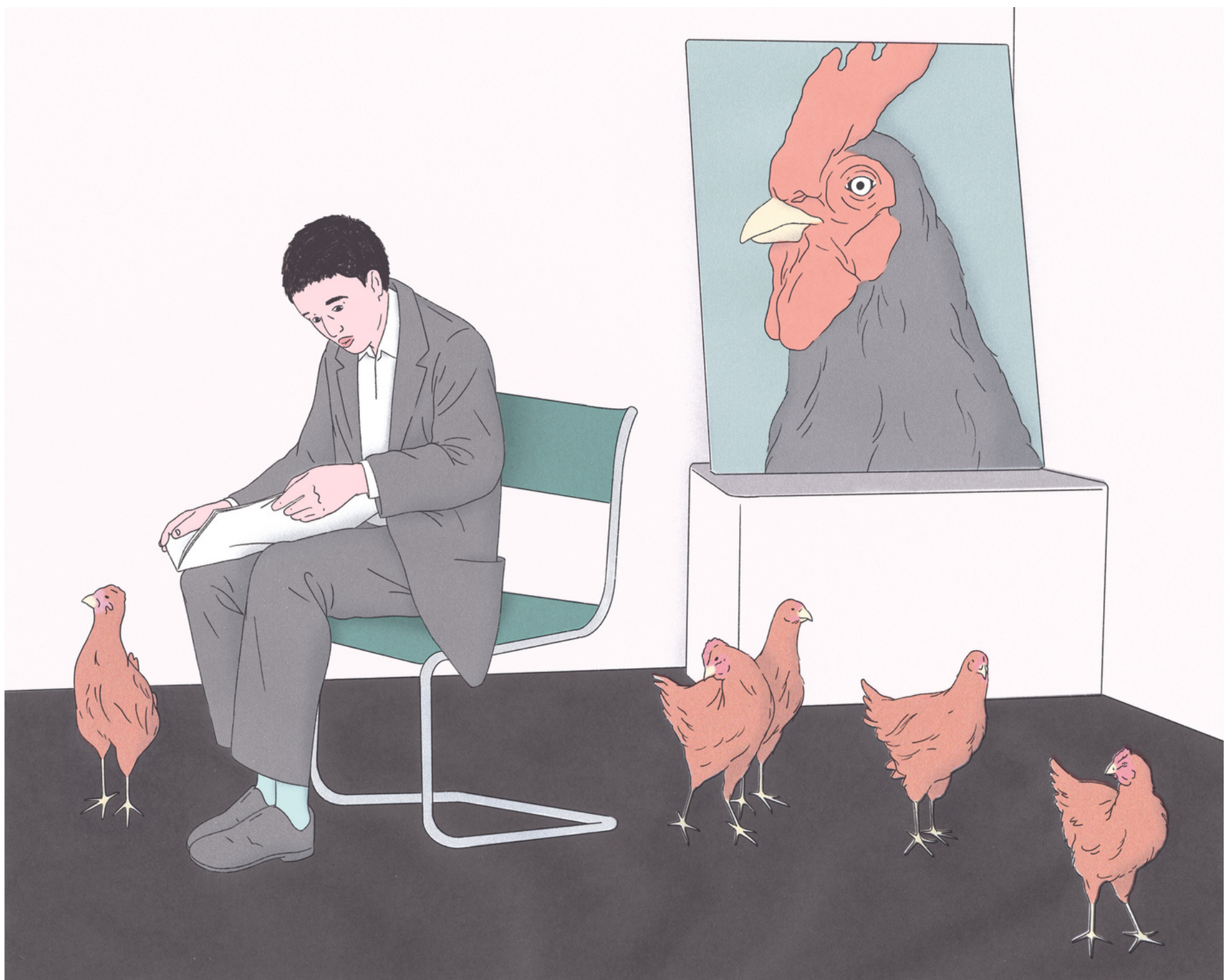
Can I celebrate except
the fact that, on his deathbed,
my own father confessed
this shame and
that he loved me,
after all? A surprise
legacy of doubt.



NEW YEAR'S EVE IN.
LUCAS BURTIN
2022
PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN *BERLINER ZEITUNG*



GHOST
LUCAS BURTIN
2022



The Hotel Luau (Or My Father Returns Home)

KIANA SHALEY

Please enjoy the cultural presentations.

Please enjoy the culture. Presentations.

Please enjoy.

Please.

– *Management*

It was written into the script. The native said, “Please enjoy the cultural presentations,” in his best pidgin English after strumming every song on his maoli nō ukelele.

Our cousin threw her Nikes into a bush, clipped on black extensions, and showed blonde girls named Britney, Madison how to pierce the plumeria and say, Aloha.

Cousin Jerry is a three-time world champion, and today he will climb this palm tree for our entertainment. Because this is authentic, he will do this with only a t-shirt and bare feet.

Jerry reaches the top and the crowd goes wild. Never before had they seen such spectacle: men climbing trees for coconuts and women to lei them wherever they turned. In the land of natives,

there are no inhibitions. A man grabs a woman
by her breast, prompting another to yell, Jump!
Someone helicopters their shorts and another hurls
their rum punch in an intoxicated fervor.

The drink lands on my father, his face drenched
in horror, wondering if he's brought another shirt
and when the Island became a punchline
of what he loved.



ODE TO FALLING ROCKET
DREW BENNETT
2022

Dream Elevator

MARISA LIN

It helped her think, the elevator. Its chrome jaws closing to shuttle her upward like a space capsule, into another dimension where the laws of interaction were different. Where people ate, spoke, typed—heck, even held their coffees differently. Between ground and sky lived her calculations, her mind perfecting a strategy based on one thousand and two hundred and five repetitions and counting, scenarios that informed continuous adjustments to her math. Step one: Doors open. Let Whiteman pass. Step two: Turn right, glance through window. Step three: Whiteman approaching, step aside. Wave badge. Proceed.

~

She was grateful for these moments. Alone, behind doors, she could breathe, think. Something about the room's travel lulled her, reminded her of the womb—of being held and carried, its tranquil containment. Hushed, like the flight cabin to the States. Or the stall where her urine forecasted a baby. How so much of her life had changed in small spaces. How upon exiting, everything was different. Rearranged by an invisible hand, an atom bomb with no sound.

~

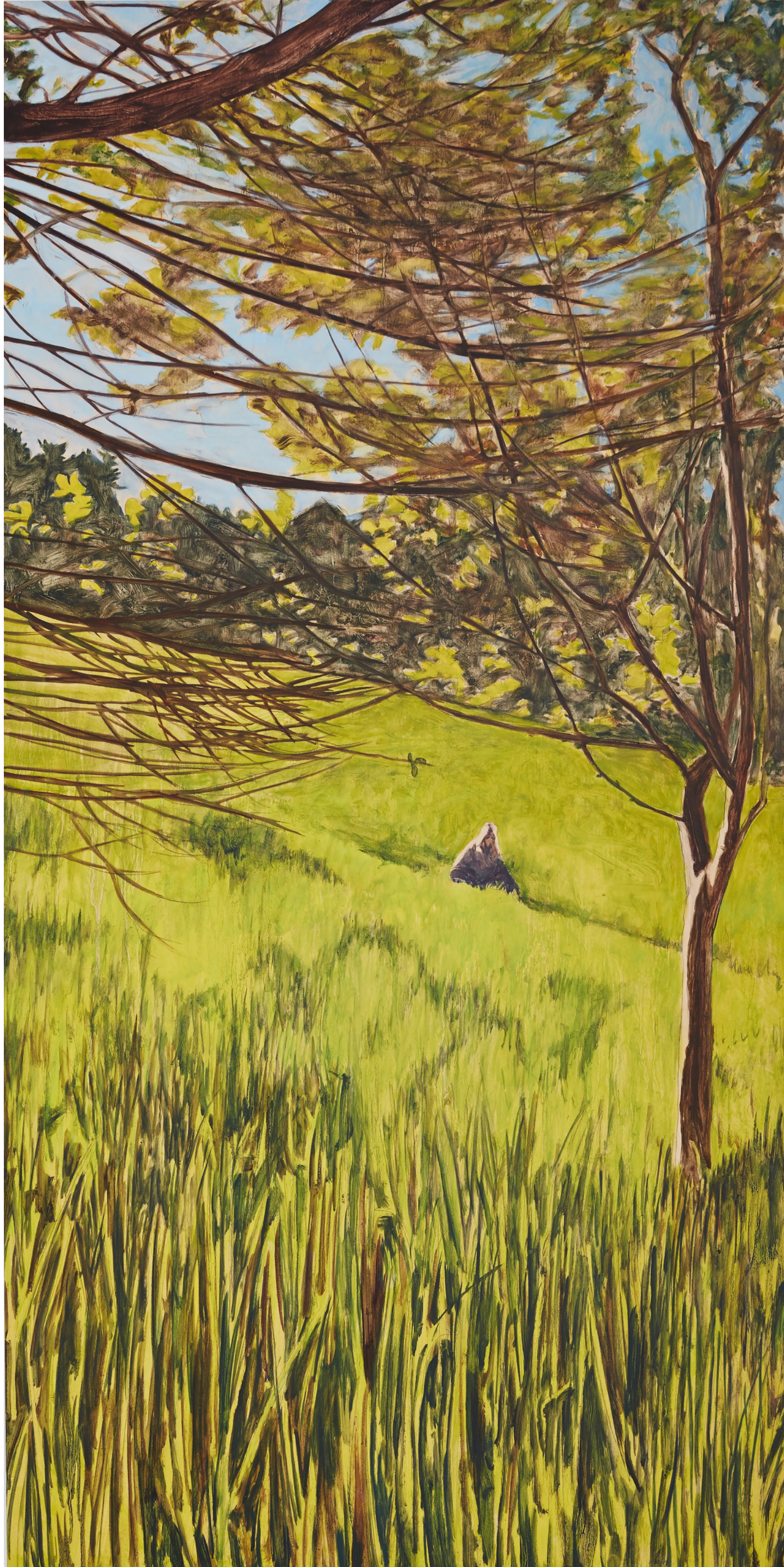
Yet she remained the same. As multitudes swirled around her core, her center remained taut to its origin. Sometimes the sky protested in pink, other times in gray, but the geese flew across it all the same. In this land's youthful light, new monsters replaced ancient beasts, fresh-furred leviathans now scolding her child for bringing home B minuses. But her toes, her toes, they squirmed with familiar agitation, ever suspicious of time.

~

—for there was never enough of it. Sleep always seemed to escape when she most craved it, leaving her an empty shell. Her 4 a.m. mind worked in thick brush strokes. No elevator was forever. But neither were dreams, this new country closing its jaws on her. The buttons her escape. Here in the elevator was a presence she could manage. Step one: Stand. Two: Breathe. Three: Pray. Not for deliverance nor understanding but ascent, a knife to cut her free.

~

*Press the numbered eye
Bright for three heated floors
Saw while you can*



HILLSIDE NEST REST
DREW BENNETT
2022



JONAS' FARMHOUSE
DREW BENNETT
2022

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