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A (a)unt

(TITLE)

BY

Daniel Paquin

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of the Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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Introduction

What brought about this particular project was a drive in me to explore my relationship with my writing and in doing so discover how authors interact with their own works during and after the writing process. In this sense, the project itself became more of an experiment, a way for me to see what parts of myself I put into my work and how close I could get to those parts without crossing the boundary from fiction to nonfiction. The easiest way for me to do this was to base the main character, the unnamed journal author, on myself. However, I quickly found this problematic because whatever part of myself I put into the work became its own entity. Thus, the relationship between myself and my work looked as if it had a hard and fast divide. Whenever something hit the page it was no longer me.

Eventually, another level of separation began to emerge. My choice of a series of journal entries for the main portion of this work presents an odd series of questions both for myself and my readers. A journal is meant to be read by only one person; the author is both the reader and the writer of the work. The very concept of a journal is a way of immortalizing a past self; the author will never and can never be the person he was when he first wrote in the journal. Michel Foucault explores this very issue in “What Is an Author?”, saying, “Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker.” While I may have chosen what to write initially, my own interpretations of my work change the more I write. At this point, I am no longer the author who wrote this work nor the narrator within the work who “wrote” the journal entries, and I can never be that person again.

Even if I based the narrator on myself, he is not me. Once he hits the page, he becomes his own person. The same holds true for the timeline of the work. While the work takes place over a series of weeks, I wrote everything in far less time. In this way, I cannot view the narrator and “writer” of the journal entries as myself because I wrote the narrator writing the journal entries at a past point in time and every time I return to the work I find that same narrator forever stuck in the present of those journal entries. With this in mind, it would seem that my project was designed, whether I knew it or not, to further complicate my relationship as author with my work. The choices I made in trying to write a character as close to myself as possible in a series of journal entries serve to question the ties that bind an author to his work.

To further complicate matters, I purposefully chose events and occurrences in my life that have no explanation that I could ever hope to provide. My reason for this was to seek out answers in my world by exploring these events and occurrences in a fictional world based on my reality. Along this same line, Roland Barthes comments in his essay “The Death of the Author,” “The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or
woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author ‘confiding’ in us.” What Barthes is getting at, and what I myself was seeking, was to show that even though I am the author, I am not through my work confiding in my readers. While my role as author would normally mean that I do indeed possess the answers to questions brought forth by my work, my choices in what to include in the work show the exact opposite; I am not some ultimate holder of explanations. My work brings me closer to a level of understanding like that of my readers. I am seeking answers just as readers are. By choosing events beyond my own understanding I’ve ensured that my work is as open to interpretation as possible, both to myself and readers. I am the author and yet I have no power over the words on the page. I may have chosen them, but their very meaning eludes even me.

At least that’s what I wanted to achieve. Of course I have some planned meaning behind most of what occurs on the pages of the work even if it is only what happens when. An unavoidable part of the writing process is that I, as the author and writer, have some (semi)clear vision of what will unfold on the page. To combat this, if I can use such a term, I tried to layer the narrative with as many interpretations as possible in order to give my readers some stake in the story. The events of the work unfold in the order I have written them in, but the final opinion of why those events happened remains with the reader. It is not my job as the author to make the narrator understand just as it is not my job to make my readers understand. While I may have chosen the words I’ve tried to do so in a way that allows readers to read into different sections of the work in different ways, hopefully bringing about different interpretations.

On top of all of this, I wrote the series of journal entries devoid of any proper names, either for people or places. The choice to avoid proper names was an attempt on my part to show the readers how irrelevant concrete details such as names are to the narrative and the narrator. The journal writer knows who and what he is writing about; there is no need for him to introduce things as if he did not know. Considering how open to interpretation I tried to make this work, the lack of anything identifiable furthers the distance I am putting between the journal entries and the journal writer and myself.

What all of these choices combined to form was a series of journal entries that introduced more questions than they could hope to answer. Bits and pieces of the work are (seemingly) more real than others and the fact that they exist side by side with things that are (seemingly) completely implausible serves to draw some comparison between the two. If both exist within the realm of fiction, what’s to stop the implausible from seeming as plausible as the so called “real?” Even from my own viewpoint as the writer and author, it strikes me how the elements of the work that I know to be completely real to my life often seem the more fictitious when compared to the embellishments of my own experiences.
All totaled, this experiment has given me ample opportunities to explore the realities of writing and being a writer. Paul Auster said it best in “Ghosts,” part of The New York Trilogy, when he wrote, “Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he’s there, he’s not really there.” With a work as layered as mine, I can only speculate what readers as a whole will get from its pages, but my hope is that each reader will get something completely their own, something only they could ever hope to fully understand.

Bibliography


Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, without whom I never would have had the courage to take any of it this far. She may never read this work, or anything else I’ve ever produced or will produce, but if it wasn’t for her, I’d still be scared of the blank page.
The following people were instrumental to the completion of this work:

Dr. Letitia Moffitt

Dr. Marjorie Worthington

Dr. Roxane Gay

Jacob Dawson

The following bands were listened to during every part of this project:

Seabound

Mind.In.A.Box
H(a)unt
I awake and find myself still sleeping.
Sunday

It’s only in retrospect that any of this will matter.

Monday

While showering this morning, I passed out midway through washing. Given that my apartment shower produces nothing but freezing water, I awoke surprisingly warm. The shower was no longer running. At first this didn’t strike me as odd, and once I recovered I stepped out of the shower and wrapped myself in a towel.

I checked the door to my apartment. Finding it locked, I checked the windows as well. Finding those locked, I sat down on the floor in the middle of the living room. How long had I lain in the bottom of the shower? It must have been some time. My body was dry and it was only then I realized that I must have grabbed the towel more for privacy than for drying. But why? It was obvious that nobody had been in my apartment, but this left the mystery of the shower without explanation.

I quickly checked the ring of keys on my bedside table. My apartment key was still attached. I thought about whom I might have let borrow my keys, but nobody came to mind. The keys sat in my pocket all day when not in use. I have no spare key. It is all but impossible to lock myself out of my apartment so I’ve never given much thought to the need for a spare key.

None of this, however, was getting me any closer to figuring out how my shower turned itself off. Maybe that was just it. Maybe the shower head turned itself off. Would an apartment shower head have a timer or something of the sort? I have never once paid a water bill, so the idea didn’t seem that farfetched. I pulled back the shower curtain in order to check the faucet. A small spot of red streaked across the white bathtub and I
instinctively checked the back of my head with two fingers. When I pulled them away I found small spots of blood. With the same two fingers I pressed on the spot on the back of my head. A dull ache, the onset of a bruise, sent a spasm of pain through my scalp and into my eyes. I winced through one more push on the bruise before I licked the blood off my fingertips.

The streak of blood in the bathtub started at the back of the tub, where I hit my head when I passed out, and only made it about halfway toward the drain before its red was lost to the white of the tub. I swiped a finger in front of the streak, expecting to find wetness of one kind or another, but found none.

Remembering my objective in inspecting the bathtub, I leaned under the faucet as best I could and stared up into the small hole of darkness. I watched a single drop of water collect just inside the rim of the faucet. It hesitated before falling straight into the drain below, not a sound as it passed from one darkness to another. Not seeing anything that struck me as a timer, I sat on the edge of the tub and listened to my apartment. It said nothing, simply waited for me to make up my mind about how best to deal with the shower.

In the end, I decided there was nothing to be done. I rose from the edge of the bathtub, wiping a finger under my nose to brush away an itch. When I pulled my finger back, a line of fresh blood ran from the fingernail to the last knuckle. I held my other hand under my chin just in time to catch the next few drops before they fell to the floor. Moving to the sink, I saw in the mirror that the other nostril was beginning to produce blood also.
It would be more than thirty minutes before the blood stopped on its own. I ran the water in the sink to try to wash the blood specks down the drain and it occurred to me that I should probably do the same in the shower. While the blood in the sink washed down easily because it was fresh, the blood in the shower needed help, so I leaned in and used my hand to wipe it down the drain with the help of cold water from the showerhead. I took a quick cold shower just to be sure and left my apartment.

Tuesday

It’s not so much the coffee I hate at the coffee shop as it is the coffee snobs who hang out at the coffee shop. I like to think I’m even snobbier than them because I don’t even drink coffee, but this doesn’t help me figure out why they’re snobby. Besides, I only hang out at the coffee shop for one reason.

She comes by everyday just after noon. Large black coffee. Long straight hair. Brunette. She always adds something to her coffee, something not from the condiment bar. She pulls whatever it is out of her pocket. Removes the lid from her coffee. Pours it in. Replaces the lid. Leaves the shop. Never says a word to anyone. Doesn’t even have to order.

I first noticed her sometime last semester. I followed her across campus, into the coffee shop, patiently waited while she ordered her coffee, out of the coffee shop, back across campus. She entered the Science building. I didn’t.

I hope her eyes are green.

Wednesday

Mom called today. She talked for half an hour while I wrote my paper for class. I don’t remember what she wanted. Something about the dog getting sick again. Chewing
I awake and find myself still sleeping.

Her chest moves slow, steady, soundless with her breathing.
off all of its fur until it began to rip large chunks of its own flesh from its legs. She’s taking it to the vet again. The conversation ended when I told her that the dog should be put down. Not to ease its suffering, but to ease mine.

Thursday

When I woke up this morning I think I hallucinated. Well, at least that’s the closest thing I can think to call it. There were these dots that hovered in the periphery of my vision, just out of direct line of sight. When I’d try to move my eyes to catch them for a better look, they’d be gone. Moved with my eyes. Kept themselves close enough to be annoying but far enough away for me to not be able to do anything about them.

They disappeared before I left my apartment.

Later, at the coffee shop, when she showed up, she talked to me.

She said, “Hi.”

Then she left, giving a nod as she did so.

Friday

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about why I’m keeping this journal. It seems to be nothing more than a waste of time. I don’t write anything important in it. Maybe that’s it. Maybe nothing in this journal is important now. Maybe it will be important.

Maybe keeping a journal isn’t for the now. It’s for later, those rare moments of retrospective reflection that strike from time to time. Then I’ll have something to look back on, something to compensate for a poor memory. Memories aren’t real. They’re figments of the imagination. Of my imagination. This journal is real, tangible, concrete. I can hold this in my hand. I can’t hold memories anywhere. They don’t exist. They’re lies.

Memory can’t be trusted.
This journal can be trusted.

It makes the now different from the then. It makes it better. More real. This journal is my memory. If it isn’t in here than it doesn’t exist. Never did exist. Never will exist.

But what if somebody else gets this journal? Are these still my memories? Do they become the person who has this journal’s memories? What if that person starts to write their memories in here? Is a new person created out of the memories of both of us?

This journal is my own. Nobody else’s. This journal holds dear what I hold dear, what I have held dear, what I will hold dear. I am this journal. This journal is me.

**Saturday**

I found her *house*.

**Sunday**

Last night I listened to my next door neighbors argue through the wall. They were shouting about some guy named Michael. The girl was crying. The guy kept saying, “It’s 3 am. I’m not talking about this now, you fucking bitch.” I was lying in my bed staring at the ceiling. She kept choking out words, most of which I couldn’t make out through the wall. His only response was to try to negate the entire discussion. “Not now. Not ever” “You knew what you were doing.” “Don’t say his name in front of me.” “Is this what you wanted?” She just kept crying.

I imagined their bedroom laid out in a way similar to mine. This meant their bed was right on the other side of the wall. I pictured the girl sitting on the edge of the bed. Mascara streaked down her face. A box of tissues on the bed next to her, a growing pile
I awake and find myself still sleeping.

Her chest moves slow, steady, soundless with her breathing.

I crawl over her, out of bed, and head for the bathroom.
of them on the floor. Her sobs seemed muted, as if she knew to let them out was to anger
him even more. That's how I pictured her. So close.

I reached out and stroked the wall. Wiped the tears from her face. Tried to ease
her pain. Through the wall her tears seemed genuine. I wanted to ease her sorrow, make
him stop yelling, prevent the tears from falling from her eyes. No one deserves to be
treated like that.

I pictured him raging, storming from room to room, at each turn reminded of the
times he has spent with her by pictures, knick knacks, mementos, keepsakes. Each item
threatening to force him to forgive her this transgression. Maybe he wants to hold her, to
feel her body against his like he used to. Maybe he wants her out. Give himself time to
cool down, to think this through. Maybe he wants to beat her, to hit her until her tears are
from real pain, the pain she caused him, not from the pain of being caught.

I found myself jealous of them both. I let my hand slide down the wall, pulling
away from her tear-streaked face, away from the argument. I have no one and these two
have each other and that's not good enough for them. They have a life in each other, a
means to express themselves through another person. These two have found each other
among the random masses of people and still they fight, they hate, they swear, they
threaten violence.

Their argument ended sometime around 5 am and I only know this because I
remember her saying, “It’s past 5. Can we just talk about this in the morning?” I couldn’t
hear what he said, but a door slammed and she started crying again, so I’m assuming he
slept somewhere else.

Wherever Michael is, I hope he knows what he’s done.
Monday

Today in my psychology class we discussed why children invent imaginary friends. I kept my mouth shut throughout the conversation because I’ve never had any imaginary friends. I called Mom after class just to make sure, but she told me I spoke very little as a child and never gave her any indication I had any friends, imaginary or not. She said something about wanting to send me meatloaf through the mail, but I hung up.

Somebody in class said imaginary friends were the means by which children developed early social skills and that their imaginary friends were eventually replaced by real friends. Somebody else suggested imaginary friends were how children learned to cope with their own emotions in a reliable way, such as when a child blames their imaginary friend for drawing in crayon on the wall. If their parents catch them and get mad, then the imaginary friend experiences the guilt of the action and the child studies it until s/he begins to understand what the guilt stems from and why they feel it.

I used to draw on the walls with crayons and blame it on Beetlejuice, even though I knew I was guilty. Not sure if this disproves the theory, but it hardly matters.

The professor said both were likely possibilities and more than likely the most plausible answers. She then asked what would happen if a child didn’t develop imaginary friends when they were young. The same girl who said something about social skills said children without imaginary friends were likely to grow up socially stunted and have very poor social skills. The guy that said something about experiencing emotions said something about being emotionally unstable as an adult. The professor nodded to both as if thinking them over, but then released us early without further comment.
Tuesday

Class the other day got me thinking about my childhood. I don’t remember much. I feel like I didn’t have much of a childhood. As much as I can remember, I grew up pretty quick. I don’t remember playing on the playground at recess. Sleepovers. Losing my baby teeth. Chicken pox. Mom has never mentioned my first word or my first step. I’ve never seen any pictures of myself as a baby. Come to think of it, I’ve never even seen my birth certificate.

I only wet the bed once. I’ve heard of some people who wet the bed into their teens, but I’ve never had that problem. I wonder if wetting the bed now would rekindle some of my childhood that I missed out on for whatever reason. I’ll have to start drinking a lot of water right before I go to sleep at night. I don’t know why I chose wetting the bed as the best way to reconnect with my childhood, but I suppose it has something to do with the guilt that comes along with the action. Of course, this probably isn’t the best thing to do since I live by myself. Mom won’t be around to make me feel the guilt and my own feelings won’t be at all guilty.

I imagine at first I’ll feel some form of success and be happy about the fact that I wet the bed. When the smell hits me along with the knowledge that I now have to wash my bedding, I suspect my happiness with transform into some sort of resentment at my own deed and spiral downward towards a small amount of self-loathing or hatred.

Never know until you try.

Wednesday

I saw the dots again this morning. Instead of trying to focus on them, I studied them out of the corner of my eye. When I woke up in my dark bedroom, the dots had a
I awake and find myself still sleeping.

Her chest moves slow, steady, soundless with her breathing.

I crawl over her, out of bed, and head for the bathroom.

The mirror above the toilet reflects everything in the room except me.
faint white glow to them. They pulsed to the rhythm of my heartbeat. I got out of bed slowly so as not to scatter them and when I turned the light on the dots turned black. Still they pulsed. They don’t just hover around the edges of my vision; they move. It seems random and sporadic, but the dots seem to be alive. I spent close to an hour standing in my room turning the light on and off, watching the dots change from white to black and back again. Then they slowly faded away.

I’m not sure where these dots come from or what they mean. I’ve never seen them outside of my apartment and they don’t appear when anyone else is around. I did some reading on ghosts, so-called “spirit orbs,” and these sound close to what I’m experiencing. The only problem with this is that the dots I’ve been seeing are in my vision, while most spirit orbs are caught only on film and not by human sight. I’ll keep trying to figure this out.

Thursday

She showed up at the coffee shop just after noon today, as always. Ordered her coffee black, as always. Slipped something inside, as always. Left without a word, as always. She made her way across campus towards the Science building, as always.

I decided to wait for her to come back out again. I sat on the bench opposite the doors for five hours. She never emerged. On the way home I found a piece of paper on the ground. It was folded like one of those cootie catchers from grade school. I opened up each side to see what was written inside. Nothing. Whoever made the thing must have dropped it before they got a chance to finish. I kept it anyway.
Friday

I’m not sleeping again. It has been four days since I got any sleep. I started to nod off in the shower this morning, but then the water turned ice cold and woke me up. On the way to class this morning I ended up in front of the Science building instead of where I needed to be. My building is on the opposite end of campus.

I missed class all day. Sat on the bench instead.

Saturday

She hasn’t left her house since she went in on Friday night. I know because I’ve been sitting in my car down the block. I can see her porch in the side view mirror. I wish the little notice that “Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear” was more true than what it actually is. She lives alone.

No car. Looks like a two bedroom house. The blinds on the windows are always down.

I walked by her house a few times, walked up and down the block, opposite side of the street. None of the lights appear to be on. The cootie catcher now has words written inside one flap. “Kiss Me.” That’s all it says. I don’t remember writing it, but it’s been sitting in my pocket all day so I must have.

Sunday

I wanted to stay outside her house all weekend, but it got really cold around three this morning. My apartment feels like it’s not mine anymore. The dots of unknown origin wait for me to wake up. The shower supplies only cold water. The small amount of food I have moves when I’m not home. I found my peanut butter in the fridge when I woke up
Her chest moves slow, steady, soundless with her breathing.

I crawl over her, out of bed, and head for the bathroom.

The mirror above the toilet reflects everything in the room except me.

It turns to liquid and splashes to the floor.
at noon. I say woke up because I must have slept. I can’t remember anything from when I got home until after noon. The milk was in the cabinet above the sink.

**Monday**

We continued the discussion of imaginary friends in class today. The professor had us each write down a few important details about our imaginary friend or our most prominent imaginary friend for those who’ve had several and read them to the class. Some girl had a unicorn named Summer. She said Summer first appeared to her when she was four, the year after her father’s death. Somebody else said their imaginary friend first appeared after a loved one’s death, and the professor asked the two of them to get together before next week and compile a list of the similarities and differences between their imaginary friends.

The majority of the class found that their imaginary friends manifested either during times of stress or periods of a lack of peer interaction. One guy said Joey first appeared after his best friend moved away in the third grade. Joey could do the same things as the absent friend and disappeared the following year. The professor asked these students to get into pairs and do the same as the two who lost loved ones.

She dismissed class without giving me an assignment.

**Tuesday**

The walls in my apartment are moving. I woke up this morning after only two hours of sleep and found everything that had been against a wall was at least two inches away from the wall. The bookshelves. My bed. The microwave on the kitchen counter. Everything. It’s like the walls pushed everything away from them.
I checked all the locks again and found them all still locked. I was going to stay home and move everything back, but the floor beneath where all of my things had been the night before was wet. Sticky wet. The walls behind things had the same wetness. I tried wiping it up. It soaked the kitchen sink rag. The towel I use to dry dishes. The towel I use to dry myself after a shower. Every extra rag and towel I own. I put them all in the bathtub and went to the coffee shop.

She never showed. I waited for four hours. Without my computer. I read the advertisement on the table at least fifty times. "Feeling lonely? The Student Help Office can help you meet people today. Just stop by our office and talk with a counselor. College doesn’t have to be a solo experience. In fact, there’s no reason it should be." I left the coffee shop only when I could no longer resist my hunger pains.

I absent-mindedly walked around campus, not wanting to return to my apartment for food and not having the money to buy food on campus. I ended up outside the Science building, but a couple of people were sitting on the bench so I kept walking. My walk brought me back to my apartment where I found all of my furniture and other things back against the wall. The towels and rags were still in the bathtub, but they were all dry. Crusted and stuck in the heap I left them in this morning. I ran the shower to try to break them apart and I got in and took a shower with them.

Wednesday

The skin around my fingernails has started to peel. All ten of them. Overnight. They’ve been bleeding. When I woke up this morning they were crusted with blood. Underneath my nails there was black brown. Dried blood.
When I got into the shower it ran a faint red. My toenails were crusted with blood as well. I sat down in the shower and let the water flow over me while I tried to remove the color from underneath my nails. Long stripes wound their way around my arms and legs. Scratches. The blood underneath my nails is mixed with torn bits of skin.

After my shower, I cut the ribbons of flesh around my nails with scissors. I don’t have any hydrogen peroxide, so I dipped my fingertips in rubbing alcohol until the blood stopped. The pain went away after a few minutes but the blood didn’t.

Thursday

My neighbors must have made up since the fight. Or else whichever one of them still lives next door found someone else to be with. The sounds of their sex easily drifted through the walls to my bedroom this morning. If I had to guess, I’d say they went on for at least four ten-minute sessions. The sigh the girl made after each session didn’t sound pleased.

When I showed up at the coffee shop later to avoid the sounds coming from next door, she was already there. Sitting in my usual spot. The table seats four and the only time I’ve seen it without four people sitting at it is when I’m sitting there. Nobody was sitting with her.

She had her coffee in front of her, but she didn’t drink it. Her hands had her interest. Something in them, something held under the table. I took a seat far enough away from her table so she wouldn’t notice me watching her. She was folding a piece of paper. A cootie catcher. She put it into her pocket after she tried it out and then got up and left. Her coffee was still on the table. I waited a few minutes to make sure she wasn’t coming back for it before I made my way to the table. Just an empty cup.
I crawl over her, out of bed, and head for the bathroom.

The mirror above the toilet reflects everything in the room except me.

It turns to liquid and splashes to the floor.

I hold my breath as the bathroom fills with the liquid mirror.
The sounds of sex are still going on as I write this. Only now it’s not several ten-minute sessions. They’ve been going at it for over an hour. And she keeps saying what sounds like, “Michael.” I’ve moved my bed into the living room.

Friday

The dots were in my apartment when I woke up. In the fridge. In the toilet. They went away when I left my apartment. I stood outside my door in my pajamas, trying to will them away, but when I opened my door again they were still there. They’re not actually doing anything. They’re just there. Everywhere. And yet, when I try to look at one, it’s gone. Nowhere.

Saturday

Moving my bed into the living room wasn’t such a great idea. The room is too open. There’s too much space. Too much openness. I tried sleeping last night, but it didn’t work. I couldn’t lie still long enough to even close my eyes.

The dots finally disappeared sometime today, so I figured that it might be okay to try the shower. Nothing has moved in the kitchen for a few days. The shower gave hot water today. Even with all of these things not happening, sleep still wouldn’t come.

I kept picturing her. Not as she is. Not as she looks in the coffee shop. Without a face. I saw her body, her form, but without a face. She stood at the end of my bed. Watching. Staring. Or just standing there. Without a face it’s hard to tell.

I’ve locked myself in the bathroom. She’s right outside. I can see feet through the crack between the door and the floor.

Sunday
My mom showed up unexpectedly today. I was lying on the bathroom floor. I heard knocking on my apartment door. When I opened the bathroom door my apartment was empty. My bed was back in my room. All of my towels and rags were clean and put away in the closet. It’s like none of it ever happened.

I took my mom to the coffee shop so she could see where I hang out. She’s always doing that. Snooping into my life. She didn’t even get a coffee. Just sat at my table, talking. I’m not even sure what all she said. She just kept going. It wasn’t all bad though. She went grocery shopping for me. Filled my cabinets and fridge. I hadn’t realized how empty my apartment was.

We went out to eat. I can’t remember ever eating this much, let alone still being this hungry afterwards. Mom even said she thought I might be sick because I ate too much. I feel fine. After she left, I took another hot shower. I made myself dinner. I slept in my bed. The neighbors were quiet. Everything was quiet. Everything was fine.

Monday

I realized today that I might not even be enrolled in my psychology class. This is the fourth week in a row the professor hasn’t called my name during roll. The class is only a little over twenty students, so I thought someone would have asked me about my presence, but nothing so far. Even the professor hasn’t asked.

I waited until the end of class and followed the professor to her office to speak with her. She walked in her office and shut the door behind her. I knocked for over ten minutes before I gave up and left.

Tuesday
It turns to liquid and splashes to the floor.

I hold my breath as the bathroom fills with the liquid mirror.

I open the bathroom door and swim down the hallway toward the bedroom.
I sat at the coffee shop today, at my usual table. She showed up right at noon, but I didn’t follow her. I let her leave the coffee shop alone. Something felt off today. Some part of me didn’t want to follow her and that part beat out the others. Instead, I sat in the coffee shop the majority of the day and watched people. I’ve never paid much attention to the people in the shop. It’s a mutual agreement, but they’re a fascinating lot.

There appears to be a complex set of unspoken elements that exist. These practices are the same regardless of which group of coffee snobs I watched. The most notable is that there seems to be some aversion to being seen with someone who doesn’t have a coffee in their hands. A person joining a group will walk past a group of peers without any form of acknowledgement. Once that person has obtained a cup of coffee, regardless of what kind, they will approach the group that had previously appeared to not notice their presence and engage the members in conversation.

I’ve never had coffee, so I’m not exactly sure what the attraction is for people. It can’t be the smell. Whatever aroma coffee possesses is lost on me entirely. Coffee lacks any sort of carbonation and only seems to come in one color, so the sense of sight and sound are out. Also, coffee machines sound like they’re torturing babies to get at the coffee. The sound is hideous. And yet, these people and so many others show up day after day to get their daily dose of bean water. I guess I’ll never know.

**Wednesday**

The skin around my fingernails and toenails is finally healed. It’s at the point now where the scabs and protective skin are being pushed out by the new skin underneath. I sat outside and picked the scabs and skin today to try to make room for the new growth underneath.
I think I might have made them worse. A few of them have started to bleed again and the rest are too tender for me to do anything with them. I let them soak in warm water this time instead of rubbing alcohol and that seemed to work. At the very least, it didn’t hurt.

I think I’ll go wrap them in paper towels before I go to bed. Maybe that will stop the bleeding tonight.

**Thursday**

Her eyes *are* green.

**Friday**

The point here is not for me to set down every little detail of my life. That would take too much time, too much paper, too much ink. And, by the end of it all, the only thing that would exist inside of this journal is my writing of the journal. Writing about writing about writing about writing. Nothing would actually happen.

I know I’ve said this before, but there will come a point when what I’ve written here will matter. Maybe it will matter to me, maybe to another, but it will matter. I’m sure of it. I have to think so in order to continue writing, in order to keep forcing myself to do something each and every day. What I write in here is what I want to remember, what I want to ponder over in the future, or even right now. I’ve been swinging back and forth with the idea of going back through and rereading what I’ve put down in this journal so far, but it doesn’t feel right somehow. I’m not the same person. Or maybe I am the same person.

One of those options scares me, but I’m not sure which one.

**Saturday**
In light of how little I’ve seen her lately, I think it’s about time I try to recall, from memory, what it is exactly that I see in her. It’s started hurting me a little that I still don’t know her name, but I can’t work up the nerve to talk to her and nobody at the coffee shop seems to talk to her either. I suppose I could always make up a name for her, but what if that name takes hold and I’m unable to use her real name when I find it out?

I’m not sure it’s such a good idea to give her a label of any sort. I barely know her after all. I mean, sure, I know where she lives, but that really doesn’t help me figure out who she is any more than knowing that she drinks coffee shortly after noon every day. I could describe the way she walks, the motion of her hair, her hips. Or the way she brings her coffee to her lips.

But these are just parts. They’re not her. The chances of me nailing down what exactly it is about her that makes me feel this way are nonexistent. I think it’s better to keep her image to myself at this point and let the words written here dwell upon other things, things of which words can and do have an effect.

Sunday

I hadn’t planned on leaving my apartment today and I should have stuck to that plan. When I opened my door I found a used condom lying on the ground just outside. I guess it’s important to note that when I say outside I don’t mean outside as in outside with trees and squirrels and such. No, I mean outside my apartment but still inside the building. Like somebody had sex right outside my apartment sometime between when I came back last night and when I opened my door this morning.

I’ve never really paid much attention to things like this, but while I’m on the subject it strikes me as odd that used condoms end up anywhere except for in the garbage
It turns to liquid and splashes to the floor.

I hold my breath as the bathroom fills with the liquid mirror.

I open the bathroom door and swim down the hallway toward the bedroom.

The floor is deep, limitless, and light radiates from its depths.
or in the toilet. I guess you could always leave a condom around to let people know that
you had sex, but without leaving some identifying mark what's the point? No one will
ever know it was you. They'll know that somebody had sex outside a stranger's
apartment, or in a bathroom stall, or in the middle of a street, but the only feeling seeing
something like this brings up in me is disgust. There was no jealousy when I saw that
spent latex outside my door.

I feel a little sorry for the person who does eventually have to clean it up. By no
means am I ever going to pick it up; it's not mine. I haven't needed one since high school
and then I always made sure to properly dispose of them. I didn't just leave them strewn
about everywhere. It's not sanitary, for one thing. Now, if there was any chance that I
could do anything other than watch her, I might consider taking the precaution of having
condoms on hand. I haven't got the nerve to do more than watch her.

I fear that watching might not be enough for much longer.

Monday

Rather than spend my day doing nothing, I decided that even if I'm not actually
enrolled in my psychology course that I might as well go. Nobody seemed to notice my
presence before, so the odds of being noticed now can't be that good.

The conversation about imaginary friends has shifted onto the topic of when
imaginary play for children becomes a problem. Since a child's natural development
stems, in part, from the extensive use of his/her imagination, with or without the
accompaniment of others, at what point does a parent begin to suspect that more than just
play is happening? The line between play and problem isn't so easily discerned. A few
students seemed to think that the use of a child's imagination within a group was more
natural than alone, but a few others contested this, saying that a child doesn’t simply shut
off his/her imagination when friends leave.

At this statement, the professor asked the entire class how often they use their
imagination now and whether or not they do so in the presence of others. Most of the
class said that their imagination was a part of daily life. Very few seemed to think that
their imagination got much use at all, especially in any of their classes. Even the
professor chuckled at this. I didn’t laugh because I didn’t think the comment was all that
funny. Just because you don’t like how you’re imagination is being used in the classroom
doesn’t mean it isn’t being used. It’s not so much that my imagination doesn’t get used,
but I’m never fully conscious of when my imagination is at work, when parts of my life
are concocted without my knowledge, and when they aren’t, when they’re real.

I suddenly had the urge to say something, to express my opinion on the matter, to
let those in the classroom know not only was I here, in the back of the room as always,
but I had something worthwhile to say, something to add to the conversation. I raised my
hand, but the conversation seemed to be going too fast for anyone to notice. The taste of
bile stung the back of my throat, but still I kept my hand raised. I could feel the heat
coming off my ears, but still nobody paid me any attention.

The conversation wrapped up and the class left with my hand still raised.

Tuesday

The coffee shop is starting to lose its luster. For whatever reason, I sit in the
coffee shop well before and well after she shows up. I get nothing out of being there. I
talk to no one. I order nothing. The hours spent in the shop for those brief few moments
when she enters and leaves aren’t really adding up to much of anything. I mean, at the
I hold my breath as the bathroom fills with the liquid mirror.

I open the bathroom door and swim down the hallway toward the bedroom.

The floor is deep, limitless, and light radiates from its depths.

The pictures on the wall sprout fins and swim around me.
end of the day, I know where she lives. Isn’t that better than waiting around to see her acquire coffee?

I guess there is something about a natural habitat. From what I’ve gathered so far, the coffee shop is one of the few places she actually stops, even if it’s only long enough to pour whatever it is into her coffee and replace the lid. I suppose I could always try waiting at her house and following her from there. I first saw her in the coffee shop, so that’s usually where my following her starts. But her day starts elsewhere. At her house, and from there, where? Is she simply that late of a riser that a noon cup of coffee is the first thing she does with her day? This seems rather unlikely since a good portion of classes start before noon, but it’s not unreasonable.

I suppose the logical thing to do in this case would be to start when she starts. Where she starts. For all I know she could be a runner. She could get up with the first rays of the sun and spend her first few waking hours with those others who begin their days with a workout. But if this is true, then how do I follow her? I’m not a runner, so keeping up with her isn’t an option. I suppose I could always follow her in my car, but the average idle speed of a vehicle is guaranteed to be higher than that of the average morning runner.

Then again, she might not be a runner at all. Although, with a body like that I find it highly unlikely that she doesn’t in some way strive towards some ideal of physical perfection. Also, a mid day coffee would keep the metabolism going through classes where eating isn’t possible. Even with all this conjecture, the chances of me finding out anything more about her dwindle down to getting used to her routine. I could sit here all
day and think about who she really is and what she does with her time, but I’ll get nowhere. No, better to take action than let my chances slip by day after day.

**Wednesday**

It seems like it’s been forever since I did any research towards discovering what those little black/white dots that hover around my apartment are, but their sudden reappearance this morning prompted me to do just that. What I first thought to be ‘spirit orbs’ must be something else. Again, the ghostly manifestations called ‘spirit orbs’ are supposedly the spirits of those that have died and not crossed over, and I find it hard to believe that this many souls are trapped in my one-bedroom apartment. There’s barely enough room for me.

And if this first guess is not true, then I must return to the only logical explanation, that they are hallucinations. So, am I hallucinating these orbs? Or are they really here? Food must be ruled out as a cause for hallucinations. I’ve already thrown out everything in my fridge and cabinets and replaced it, and that lasted for a while, but the return of the orbs this morning seems to indicate that food was not the cause.

Any further research has brought forth nothing more than ‘spirit orbs’ and hallucinations, so I guess my intent at this point is to discover exactly what these hallucinations stem from and if there’s a way to stop them. It’s not that the hallucinations are of any malicious intent. I’ve yet to be hurt by them, and their presence isn’t really that annoying or distracting, but the appearance of the orbs usually signals something else, something I’d rather avoid. I’ve actually slept a good deal the last couple of nights and I’d like this to continue. That’s why I’m getting a tad worked up about the hovering dots
that even now remain just outside my vision, shifting from shades of white to shades of
black and back without losing their circular shape.

Perhaps a series of experiments are in order. I’ve already tried leaving my
apartment and returning, so I know that the orbs seem bound here for whatever reason.
I’ve also already discovered the effects of shutting my eyes. Nothing happens. The orbs
remain, so it seems that they’re not in any way connected to my sense of vision. They
don’t smell. They don’t make any sound. They don’t seem to occupy any space, but then
again, they always seem to move out of my way, so maybe they do. Capture? But how
and with what? And what would I do when I had one? Even as I write these words I can
see the orbs begin to float further away from me, so maybe capture is the only option. I’ll
have to return to this at a later date, after I’ve figured out exactly what it is I’m dealing
with.

Thursday

She sat at my table today. I was minding my own business, peeking at her from
behind my computer screen and I lost her behind a group of coffee snobs. I returned to
my computer thinking she had left the shop until she sat down next to me at the table.

“What are you doing?” She didn’t even look at the computer screen. She just kept
staring at me. I noticed she didn’t have her coffee.

I rose to leave, hastily clutching my things, and she rose with me.

“Where are you going?” Again, she kept staring at me. Also, some of the coffee
snobs were starting to look our way.

I stuffed my things in my bag and left the coffee shop. She followed me. All
around campus, she followed me. And she kept asking me questions.
I open the bathroom door and swim down the hallway toward the bedroom.

The floor is deep, limitless, and light radiates from its depths.

The pictures on the wall sprout fins and swim around me.

Each picture holds a memory of us, a space in time to be remembered.
I was trying to cut across the quad and lose her in the large groups of people that had just been released from class. I thought I had lost her so I cut into the Science building and hid in the first floor bathroom. I went into the stall furthest from the door and knelt on top of the closed toilet. The only other guy in there left and I heard the door shut. I held my breath for a while, more from the odor coming from the closed toilet under me than from the worry of her finding me. I could hear the dripping of one of the sinks, a slow, steady drip that didn’t seem like it would ever stop. And then it did.

The drip stopped and right as it stopped I heard the bathroom door open. I heard a few steps and then the door closed. The steps made their way towards the stall I was in and stopped right outside. I leaned down on the toilet to try to see the shoes of whoever was standing on the other side. I had my head between my knees before the shoes started to come into view. And then I slipped off the toilet. When I got up off the floor, the person on the other side was gone.

I exited the stall and found a guy taking a piss at one of the urinals. He said something, but said it without turning around, so I wasn’t sure what it was. I left the bathroom and came back to my apartment. I didn’t see her again.

Friday

Another flap in the cootie catcher has words inside. It says “Kick Me.” Again, I don’t remember writing this.

Saturday

I had planned on sitting outside her house again, but after the recent incident I decided that it might be a good idea to back off for a while. Instead, I bought light bulbs. While this seems, at first, as if it shouldn’t take an entire day, in this case it did. It’s been
the oddest thing over the past few days, but sources of light all around campus and especially in my apartment have been going out whenever nobody but me is around.

A few days ago when I used the restroom near the coffee shop all of the lights went out at the same time. I thought nothing of it more than what a nuisance it is to try to finish pissing in the dark, and the few dribbles that littered my jeans when I left the restroom can attest to that. Later on that day, the same thing happened in my bathroom, and for a moment I remember being something more than annoyed, but I let it pass and replaced one of the bulbs with the last one under the kitchen sink. This provided very little light, especially when I took a shower, but it wasn’t a complete hindrance.

The next day, while on a walk around campus, the light poles spaced around fifty feet apart started to have the same problem. It was all but dark when I took my walk, so the light provided by these poles helped me avoid the intricate series of cracks and chipped holes that litter the campus’ sidewalks. The manhole covers and sewer grates are easy enough to avoid with almost no light. Anyway, I was right under a light when it went out. I didn’t think anything of it and kept walking, but the same thing happened when I was right under the next light pole. When it happened a third time, I stopped and looked up at the light above me. The last few remnants of light were leaving the what I imagine to be a large bulb that is contained within the top of the pole. I looked back and saw that while the second light that had gone out was still unlit, the first had returned to life.

I walked to the next pole, and stopped under it just as it went out, and looking back I found the third light still unlit, but the first and second were once again lit. This continued all the way across campus and all the way back to my apartment. After I
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entered my apartment, I looked out the window to see if the light on the front of the building was again lit and found it still dark. I waited a few minutes until somebody else came outside to smoke before I left the window. The light came back on for the smoker, who chuckled a bit as he lit his cigarette against the wind. The lights in my apartment seemed to be fine.

Today, the one remaining bulb in the bathroom went out while I was in the shower. At the exact moment the light went out, the hot water in my shower disappeared and I quickly rinsed with what amounted to barely frozen ice. Also, I got shampoo in my eyes. After I dried off, I found that all of the lights in my apartment didn’t work. I thought maybe the power had somehow been turned off, but the little numbers on the microwave still showed the time. Even the light in the fridge was off, although I could still hear the cold running so I knew my milk wouldn’t spoil. So, I wrote down the type of bulb used in each room and went to the store to get new ones. Why isn’t there some standard of light bulbs, only one type that everything uses? I had to get nine different types, the most expensive of which was the fridge’s.

I still haven’t figured out what’s wrong with the lights. I can see the beam from the flashlight fading and I’m out of batteries, so I guess I’ll just go to bed.

Sunday

The lights don’t work.

The hot water doesn’t work.

The orbs are here again.

My milk is bad.

All of my furniture has been moved.
Monday

I didn’t want to go to class, but it’s the only one that I find interesting, so I went anyway. Everybody talked about the same thing as last time. Imaginary play. Nobody noticed when I entered. Nobody noticed when I left in the middle of class. It’s like they’re not real, like they’re only in my head. They all sound the same. I couldn’t tell who was saying what, but that didn’t stop them from talking.

Nothing stops them from talking.


I found myself in the coffee shop. It was noon. Empty. Voices all around, but no bodies. Open space. She poured whatever it is into her coffee. Turned to me. Waved. I waved back. She left. I came back to my apartment. A blank piece of paper sat in my mailbox. It had creases, a definite pattern. It had been folded. Unfolded. Slipped into my mailbox. Taken out of my mailbox. Brought inside from outside. There’s no address, no name. Only folds. Lines. Creases.
Tuesday

The headache won’t go away. I’m twelve tablets of generic Tylenol into my day and nothing matters. The silence of my apartment was too loud. The voices of coffee snobs were all whispers and caffeine. Birds dive bomb with chirps. Leaves taunt me on the breeze. Squirrels run nails across chalkboards. My own footsteps betray the rest of my body, carrying me when I want to be still. Stillness brings nothing new, but moving has the possibility of carrying me beyond my own limits. Even these words hurt to think, to write, to see.

This is pointless, shallow, painful, above me. She. Wasn’t at the coffee shop today. Might have been. Not sure. I think I was at the coffee shop today, but everything is a blur. I can’t remember where I’ve been. What I’ve written. Who I’ve seen. Who’s seen me. Hopefully tomorrow will be better. There are ways things shouldn’t move. And yet, they do.

Wednesday

Maybe this cootie catcher is hers. She was folding another one in the coffee shop today. The one in my pocket is still only half filled in. She folded a single sheet of paper. Took a drink of her coffee. Creased. Took a drink of her coffee. Unfolded. Took a drink of her coffee. She took the cootie catcher and left the empty coffee cup. I threw it away for her.

Following her has become automatic. After the coffee shop she heads towards the Science building. I ventured inside today, but lost her in the crowded hallways. A large snake slept in a glass box lit by heat lamps. Several large spiders didn’t move in their adjoining glass enclosures. Nobody stopped to look at them. Like their presence is
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Each picture holds a memory of us, a space in time to be remembered.

They clear the hallway as I swim past and form a school behind me.

The light beneath me blinks out and the pictures scatter.
nothing more than a picture hanging on the wall. Like they’re not living creatures. I considered letting them loose in the building, but their cages were locked to prevent this.

I still haven’t figured out her schedule yet. She’s always in the Science building by one in the afternoon, so she must have a class at some point after that, but finding her class is proving to be difficult. It’s not like I can just pull her schedule up online, though that hasn’t stopped me from trying. Even her presence in the coffee shop is a mystery. She never talks, never orders, just slides money across the counter and a coffee is slid back. It’s amazing I can hear her voice playing in my head throughout the day considering how little she’s actually said to me.

I’m torn between continuing to follow her and trying to speak to her. There’s some sort of waiting game being played, and I think I’m a part of it, but I’d like it to come to an end. If I speak with her, let her hear my voice, tell her how I feel, maybe she’ll become less of a mystery. Then again, watching her a bit longer seems like a better option. It’s safer for me, provides a buffer between the real her and the her that exists only in my mind. They’re the same thing, but I still imagine there are some differences between the real world and the world that exists in my head.

Thursday

I’ve heard two separate facts that I think are interconnected. One is that everybody has a twin somewhere in the world. The other is that there is somebody out there for everyone. It seems to me to be true, from the combination of these two singular facts, the twin must be the person out there for everyone. Who is more perfect for you than you? It’d be like looking in the mirror and having the mirror look back. But I also wonder if the twin can really be considered a twin. Doesn’t there have to be some form of
interconnected heredity in order to be a true twin? I understand two people can look startlingly alike, but that’s not a twin. That’s chance, coincidence.

And then if the twin isn’t a true twin, then the perfect someone that must be out there for everyone can’t be the twin. So maybe the two statements aren’t interrelated after all. Or, and this seems more plausible to me, the fact that somebody out there looks exactly like you but isn’t related to you means that they are the perfect someone, but not your true twin. So the saying should be that there is a person exactly like you out there and they are your perfect someone. But where does that leave her?

Friday

When I woke up this morning, I had the distinct feeling that something was wrong with my teeth. I can remember brushing them the night before, but the movement of my tongue across their surfaces brought feelings of disgust. They’re not smooth. They’re rough in texture, not like teeth at all. My gums are bleeding from the texture. I woke up to a mouth full of half-diluted blood. Brushing my teeth has proven to be troublesome. After the first brushing, the texture remained. Course sand paper across my gums.

I found the bristles on my old toothbrush of little use to the hygiene of my teeth. They spread out in every direction and were themselves frayed at the ends. The new toothbrush I opened, by contrast, was in perfect order, as it should be. So, I spread more toothpaste and got to work. It’s been well over an hour and I’m through half a tube of toothpaste, but my teeth are still rough. My gums, however, are not only cleaner than they’ve ever been, I’m sure, but are also very sore from the repeated brushings.

My tongue feels like I tried to eat gravel. Or glass. The mouthwash swimming between my teeth, across my gums, and drowning my tongue reminds me of when I
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The light beneath me blinks out and the pictures scatter.

A shape, slow, steady, soundless, propels itself toward the bedroom.
dipped my fingernails in rubbing alcohol. The blue liquid had turned slightly purple when I spit it into the sink and a few drops of it stained my lips. There’s something still not quite right about my teeth, but at this point I can’t bear to open another toothbrush to correct it. I had to throw out the new one I opened this morning because its bristles were choked with too much of what appeared to be sand to do any good.

Saturday

I’ve decided today was the day to find out how she operates. Her weekend schedule is more than likely different from her weekday schedule, but I needed a place to start. Lucky for me it’s been relatively mild outside, so my night spent in my car wasn’t too bad with the window slightly open. A cool breeze brought the scent of what I thought were hamburgers from somewhere up the street, but I got a late start, so I was forced to try to suppress my stomach.

I was afraid that her weekend schedule would be what it was the last time I sat outside her house. If it’s a regular occurrence for her to not leave her house on the weekends, then my time is wasted. However, my fears were quickly relieved early this morning. She wasn’t going outside for a run, but she left her house and began walking down the street. Her attire seemed ill fitted for any type of strenuous activity, so I followed her on foot. She walked at a moderate pace, nothing that I couldn’t keep up with, but I kept my distance to about half a block on the opposite side of the street to avoid her suspicion.

The calmness with which I’m writing this now feels wrong, considering what happened, but I suppose the time I’ve spent aimlessly wandering between then and now has calmed my nerves enough to keep me from becoming erratic.
Having never attempted the walk between my apartment and her house, the thought of doing so never crossed my mind as she made her way towards campus. I figured that she must be going to the library to do some research, but her lack of any form of bookbag quickly shot down the idea. The most perplexing turn taken during our trip came just before campus. Rather than crossing the street to go onto campus, as I originally thought she would, she crossed in the direction leading further down the street running closer to my house. I must state again how little the idea of where she was headed was formed in my mind.

Her pace never quickened or slackened as we neared our destination, and I kept my distance even though she never once looked over her shoulder, let alone anywhere other than straight ahead. It only dawned on me how close we were getting to my apartment building when I began to feel like I was walking home from following her to the Science building. Familiar aspects of the walk that I usually only noticed absentmindedly began to take a toll on my attention and I was closer than I wanted to be, well less than a half a block, when I noticed she had stopped.

The most important thing for me to point out at this point seems obvious to me now, but to me then I found it quite disturbing and alarming. She had stopped across the street from my apartment. She hadn’t merely stopped. She was starring at my apartment building, but from my angle it was impossible for me to tell exactly which apartment she was staring at. She made it far easier for me to figure this out soon enough anyway.

After what must have been only a few minutes, although it felt much longer, she crossed the street and headed down the driveway of the apartment building towards the small parking lot in back. The cement blocks acting at individual curbs are numbered in
order to designate where each apartment tenant should park, and it was at this point that I realized that on a Saturday morning before noon the only parking spot likely to be empty would be mine. On any day of the week before noon this holds true.

I won’t say I wasn’t a little bit frightened about the possibility, but I think flattered is closer to the reaction I had to the thought of her looking for me. It was difficult to get a good look at her down the drive, but the placement of my parking spot at the very end of the row helped my vantage point from across the street be of use. She did indeed stand in my empty spot for much longer than she had stood staring at the apartment building.

As I said before, I was frightened and intrigued at this point, but on the walk back to her house the questions began to set in. Why was she following me? How had I not noticed before? How long has she been following me like this? What are her intentions? I tried my best to remain calm on the walk back and keep the questions in check, but it became harder and harder the closer we got to her place. My car was parked just up the block and we would walk past it before we got back to her house. Would she recognize the car as mine? She had spent a good deal of time standing in my empty parking spot, but this certainly doesn’t mean that she knows anything other than the number of my apartment, which is in and of itself a question for another day.

There was no possible way for me to reach my car before she did, so I forced myself to hang back and try to gauge her reaction. At this point, I remembered I was on the opposite side of the street, that is, on the same side of the street as my car. If she noticed my car, if she scanned up and down the street upon seeing it empty, she could see me, would see me. I wasn’t ready, still am not ready, for her to know that I’ve been
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The light beneath me blinks out and the pictures scatter.

A shape, slow, steady, soundless, propels itself toward the bedroom.

A flash of fins and the bedroom door shuts.
following her, so I crossed the street and walked the last few blocks on her side of the
street.

She walked right past my car. Never even gave it a look. Just walked onto her
front porch, unlocked her door, and let herself in. I’m not sure how long I stood staring at
her door, or staring at my car, but I know at some point I got into my car and came back
to my apartment. The rest of the day was spent letting the realization settle in, and once
that was done, considering my next move. As I’ve said before, I’m mysteriously calm as
of now, but a large portion of my day was far less so.

Sunday

This felt like a waste of a day, but I couldn’t force myself to do anything other
than peek out the blinds in the living room every few minutes. She knows where I live. I
had the distinct feeling all day she was across the street waiting for me to look out, but
every time I’ve forced myself to look there was no one there.

I skipped a shower today, and the only reason I’m making a note of this is
because the nervous sweat is starting to film across my back and forehead. I keep wiping
my forehead and rolling little bits of gray half-dried dirt and sweat between my fingers.
How long has she been making these trips? Is she outside right now?

No, again, she’s not out there. Yesterday, she was out there. Today, she’s not out
there. Or maybe she is, hiding somewhere, watching me every time I look out the
window. Watching me watching her. Maybe she knows I’ve been following her. If she
doesn’t, then she’s been following me for some reason completely unconnected to the
reason I’ve been following her. Now I’ve got to know her, got to know what she sees in
me, what she sees that makes me suitable for following.
I could always go to her house again. She didn’t seem to notice the presence of my car. I can’t return to the coffee shop. She knows I go there, what table I sit at, probably that I don’t drink coffee. Has she been watching me longer than I’ve been watching her? The possibility exists, but seems a little out of the ordinary. Then again, I did follow her to my apartment building yesterday, watched her stand in my empty parking spot. It’s impossible to tell how much she knows, how long she’s known it.

But if I change my routine, won’t she notice? If she’s been following me long enough to know what I do, then she’ll know if I change it, and from there she could figure out that I followed her yesterday. This returns to the question of whether or not she knows I’m following her. If she knows, then it stands to reason that she knows about yesterday. Maybe she was trying to make a point. What point? If she doesn’t know, then yesterday’s walk had some other reason. Something other.

The street outside is empty, but the light pole near the street is out, so I can’t be sure she’s not there. For the sake of safety, I’ve kept all of the lights off today and I’m writing this in my bathroom, the only room without windows. It’s hard to write while holding a flashlight, but I think I’ve managed.

Monday

I did make it to class. It’s still about imaginary play, both in childhood and now, but other areas of interest are beginning to emerge and it looks like the professor is splitting the class for some unknown project, though I doubt that anybody else realizes this. I suspect I’ll be left out again, but it’s still interesting to see how these people are dealing with the thoughts of imaginary play begin pushed aside for the reality of adult life. Two camps have distinctly emerged at this point, and both are to be expected.
The light beneath me blinks out and the pictures scatter.

A shape, slow, steady, soundless, propels itself toward the bedroom.

A flash of fins and the bedroom door shuts.

I swim against the current, arms outstretched, reaching for the door.
One group believes imaginary play is something that ceases to function around the time a child leaves grade school, while the other group believes imaginary play never stops. Now, while I’m inclined to side with the second group, those who believe imaginary play ceases early on in life have some interesting ideas. First and foremost is their specific definition of what exactly imaginary play means. According to them, the imagination never ceases working, but imaginary play ceases when a child can fully discern the difference between what their mind fabricates and what is actually a product of their surroundings.

It seems that around the time a child enters middle school, something around sixth grade, the school work begins to take importance away from play of various types, meaning recess is slowly cut out from the daily routine and turned into longer and longer periods of organized physical education. I remember small parts of grade school, and I hated P.E. I used to play all the time at recess, but by high school I didn’t put forth any effort at all.

So, according to this group, the education system is centered on getting children to leave behind their notions of imaginary play and adapt to the strict rules and limitations of the adult world. If this is true, the general sense of time needed to succeed in this transition takes close to a decade, if you start from seventh grade and end after four years of college. Those who refuse or for whatever reason are unable to effectively complete this transition are considered, depending on the manifestations of their inability, to have any of a number of mental disorders.

The other camp cites such people as those who write novels, direct movies, act, or take part in any manner of jobs lumped under ‘entertainment’ as the main reason why
imaginary play never ceases. According to this group, the entire entertainment industry is centered around giving those people who for whatever reason are unable or refuse to leave behind the connection to their childhood imaginary play some part to play in so-called adult life. They also cite the ever growing entertainment industry as evidence that more and more people are refusing to leave behind their imaginary play.

The professor seemed oddly detached during the discussion, perhaps to let the class, myself excluded, reach some intended conclusions on their own. When class time was up, she dismissed the class without ceremony and quickly made her way towards her office. I let the class file out ahead of me. A good portion of the next class filled the classroom by the time I left.

Tuesday

Even though nothing in the coffee shop has changed, I still feel like there’s something wrong with the place. The machines making whatever concoction is called for still scream as they did before, but there’s something else there, something that shouldn’t be there. Hordes of coffee snobs still snob their coffee at one another, but now it’s all whispers and steam, no sugar, no cream.

There was no sight of her today, but I still had the distinct feeling of being watched. I took a walk around campus some time after noon, just to see what would happen. Nothing. No lights flickered. No staring eyes. No overheard voices. I did stay away from the Science building, but somebody was sitting on the bench outside, so I wouldn’t have been able to sit there anyway.

Wednesday
My shower produced that sticky wetness that was behind my furniture. It ran down the walls of the shower and stained the shower curtain brown in some spots and red in others. I didn’t even try to clean it up this time. I had to buy all new towels and rags after the last time because I couldn’t get them unstuck, so I just let the sticky ones sit in the shower this morning.

I was afraid the sink in the kitchen would produce the same stuff, but it didn’t. Instead, I got a glass full of rust water. Small flakes of metal swirled through the cup, but never settled on the bottom. I left the cup sitting on the counter.

I guess the sticky wetness should have worried me a bit, but it didn’t. It never left the shower, so I didn’t have to worry about it following me around campus, or even out of my apartment. The only thing that I had a problem with was the fact that the sticky that hit me before I left the shower had been ice cold, as I expected whatever came out of the shower head to be, but it steamed as if it had been hot.

The mirror is still fogged, but it’s not any type of fog that can be wiped away. It’s more of that stuff. It just settled there, I guess, on the mirror. I just shut the door and held any need for the bathroom until I left my apartment.

Thursday

I spent the majority of the day at the coffee shop. It’s been a while since I’ve done this and, while nothing happened, it was strange to see her collect her coffee and then pour her own secret ingredient in it and leave. Either she didn’t notice me or she’s better at following me without being noticed than I had originally thought, which is always a possibility.
A shape, slow, steady, soundless, propels itself toward the bedroom.

A flash of fins and the bedroom door shuts.

I swim against the current, arms outstretched, reaching for the door.

The door turns into a whirlpool and sucks me into the bedroom.
It’s weird to think about how much things have changed even though nothing has changed. I still can’t talk to her, and I still don’t know a single thing about her save that her eyes are green, but there’s this cloud of doubt hovering around. Like everything I’ve put into getting to know her has been for nothing. Or, and this is the possibility I like to think about more, she’s been putting just as much effort into following me as I have her and soon we’ll be forced to talk, if not about what we think of each other then something.

I’ve considered copying everything in this journal longhand and giving the copy to her. She could see what I think of her without me having to actually speak, which seems to be the overwhelming problem I’m having right now. While copying everything seems great in concept, there’s too much in here that I don’t want her to read. In fact, I scanned most of the early parts of this journal and I can’t believe what’s on the page, let alone the fact that I wrote it.

All this business with the orbs or dots or whatever. I’d have to leave all that out. It makes no sense to me. How can I expect it to make any sense to her? Speaking of which, I think I’ve devised a way to capture one of the orbs. I need to do a little bit more research to figure out what types of tests I can and should be doing, but after that, I should be home free. Maybe this weekend.

Friday

I’m sitting in my car in my parking spot behind the apartment building. I will not go back into that apartment. I was right before when I said the walls were moving. And not just moving, but breathing. And more than that, the walls are producing the orbs.

When I woke up this morning the orbs were back, which isn’t that much of a deal since they never really do anything, so I tried to ignore them as best as possible. I think I
remember thinking something about how many more of them there seemed to be until I left my bedroom. Yes, I moved the bed back a few days ago. The neighbors have been quiet for a while. Anyway, the living room was filled with the orbs, again, more than normal, but it wasn’t until I went to the bathroom that something seemed more wrong than normal.

The mirror was rippling. The whole mirror. Waves ran across its surface. And then one of the orbs slipped out from the center of the mirror, sending a ripple outward that forced the edges of the mirror to spill over onto the wall. The orb just floated there at eye level. I backed out of the bathroom without losing sight of the orb and realized that I was looking at the orb. Not out of the corner of my eye, but right at it. And it followed me out into the living room.

In the living room, the same thing happened. The wall didn’t exactly ripple like the mirror, but the orbs were coming out of the walls and just hovering there. Without actually knowing why, I approached the largest section of blank wall and ran my hand across it. It shuddered. There’s no other word for it. It didn’t ripple. It sighed.

The wall felt like it was alive. No, it didn’t feel like an animal, at least not like any animal I’ve ever felt, but there was something more than wall underneath the fake wood paneling. I guess I forgot about my hand being on the wall because I didn’t feel the orbs begin to cloud around my arm. I’m not sure if I would have felt them at all, being what they are or aren’t, but there came a moment when I couldn’t feel my hand.

At this moment, I found myself wrist deep in the wall. The feeling of the wall being a living thing was still there, but it wasn’t just in the wall, behind the paneling. It
A flash of fins and the bedroom door shuts.

I swim against the current, arms outstretched, reaching for the door.

The door turns into a whirlpool and sucks me into the bedroom.

Light filters through from above, illuminating the bed.
was in my hand, around it, through it. I didn’t think about it, I just pulled my hand out of the wall and left. They can have the apartment.

Saturday

I tried to sleep last night, but my car’s not big enough for me to lie down in. I ended up somehow wedged between the front and back seats this morning, but other than this shooting pain in my neck and back I didn’t feel anything special. I need things out of my apartment, I need to use the restroom, to shower, to change clothes, all of the things I can’t do right now.

I drove by her house earlier to have something to do other than think about my apartment, but not much came out of it. I didn’t see her walking anywhere along the same route we took last weekend to get from her house to my apartment building, so maybe she doesn’t have a set schedule for the weekends.

Sunday

Two days without a bed, food, an actual restroom, and a shower was enough, so I went back inside my apartment today. Nothing. The orbs were gone. The mirror is a mirror. The walls are walls again. It’s like nothing happened at all, like I imagined the whole thing. I know I didn’t.

The only thing out of place was the cootie catcher that I found weeks ago. I hadn’t realized I didn’t have it when I was in my car, but I found it sitting in the middle of the living room. I half expected it to be covered with that sticky wetness when I went to pick it up, but it wasn’t. Just paper. I opened its flaps in order, seeing the two phrases that I
don’t remember writing and are now all but familiar to me. The third flap, however, held words of its own:

“Kill Me.”

Monday

I went to class today with the intention of bringing forth the experiences I had this past weekend to see what others made of them and to see how they figured into the conversation of imaginary play, but it never happened. I showed up to class and sat in the room for the whole period. Alone. Nobody else showed up. There was no sign on the door. No notice about class being cancelled anywhere I could tell. The professor’s office was empty, or at least she didn’t answer her door when I knocked.

After class, I went and sat in the coffee shop to see if she’d show up today, which she did, though she didn’t get her coffee. She stood across the shop from where I was sitting and stared at me. I didn’t want to, but I stared back for lack of anything else to do. I didn’t have my computer, so I had nothing to hide behind. Nobody else seemed to notice her presence, or if they did, they didn’t let it show.

I’m pretty sure she knows I’ve been following her.

Tuesday

If she knows, then there’s nothing I can do about it, so I’ll have to continue to do what I’ve been doing and hope for the best which means I waited for her in the coffee shop again today, and she showed up just after noon like I expected her to and when she left the coffee shop I followed her across campus towards the Science building and when
she entered I entered also and tried my best to keep up with her as she navigated the hallways packed with people, but her knowledge of the layout of the building is better than mine and I lost her somewhere on the second floor and none of the doors had windows on them so there was no chance of me seeing her sitting in one of the classrooms, so I gave up and went back outside and sat on the bench opposite the main entrances, hoping that she’d come out this way later in the day, but I knew she wouldn’t because she never has before and why would she change her routine now unless to show me that she knows I’m following her, even though she gave no hint of knowing I was following her from the coffee shop across campus towards the Science building where I lost her in the hallways packed with people and maybe she was counting on the doors not having windows so that she could get away without being seen which would imply that she knew I was following her or maybe she just went to class and I’m being a little too paranoid about this whole thing which is a possibility because I haven’t slept in a few days because I’m worried about the orbs returning and carrying me into the walls of my apartment which might be the only way for me to figure out what exactly the orbs are and where they come from and what the deal is with all of the stuff that’s been happening in my apartment, including why the peanut butter has been in the fridge every morning for the past several weeks even though I keep moving it back to the cabinet above the sink, but luckily for me the milk has stayed in the fridge so I don’t have to worry about it spoiling while I sleep or when I’m not home which seems to be a lot now that I’ve got to figure out what her deal is and also I just don’t want to be in my apartment more than I have to because hallucinations or not there are things going on in there that I don’t want to be a part of any longer.
I swim against the current, arms outstretched, reaching for the door.

The door turns into a whirlpool and sucks me into the bedroom.

Light filters through from above, illuminating the bed.

She is still asleep, unaware of the shape circling in ever tightening passes.
Wednesday

It’s at this point, right now as I’m writing these words, that the orbs are beginning to appear. I’ve been sitting in my apartment most of the day and nothing. She showed up at the coffee shop, but I didn’t have the heart to follow her today so I came home. And now, here they are. Just floating. Like they always do. I want to take a swing at one, but that just seems silly.

So, here’s my plan for actually catching one. The first thing I need is a jar big enough to hold one of them, which isn’t a problem since I’ve taken to eating nothing but peanut butter the past few days even though it’s crunchy and the outside label says creamy and I hate crunchy. The container is plastic, but I don’t know where to get a real glass jar, so this is gonna have to do. I’ve noticed that they seem to be attracted to the cootie catcher, so I figure I’ll just drop it into the empty jar and wait for an orb to go in and then close the lid. Easy enough.

It didn’t work. I screwed the lid on as tight as it would go and held the empty peanut butter container up to the light to see if the orb was doing anything, which it wasn’t, when the orb just floated out of the container, leaving the cootie catcher inside. Apparently, I need a new plan. And more peanut butter.

Thursday

The coffee shop was more crowded than it usually is and I wasn’t able to sit at my regular spot so my view of the counter was obstructed. There was another one of those pamphlets on the table and I read it a few times through while I waited for her.

“The Student Help Office is here to help you through whatever it is that you feel is wrong with your life. Tired? Come take a break and play video games with classmates.
Lonely? Come take part in games and programs designed to help you meet people.

Having trouble with your course load? Come and meet with one of our mentors who will help you develop an individualized plan to keep you on the top of your game. Here at the Student Help Office your concerns are our concerns."

I took the pamphlet when I got up to follow her, and I’m still not sure why, but it’s sitting here right next to me, though I don’t want to read it again. I watched her go into a classroom on the second floor just before one in the afternoon so I waited down the hall behind the large glass cage holding the sleeping snake, but when the class got out an hour later I didn’t see her in the crowd. I waited to see if maybe she’d stayed behind to talk to the professor, but he came out and locked the door behind him and there was still no sign of her.

Friday

I decided to take some pictures of her today so that I could include them in this journal, but it seemed that every time I raised the camera to take a picture something would get in the way. A large group of people gets out of class early. The sun comes out from behind clouds and reflects off of a large rain puddle. A car stops unexpectedly to let out a passenger. A delivery man pulls up and leaves his truck running. I think I managed to get a few shots, but I’m not that happy with them. I’ve put them in at the photo lab and I’ll go pick them up tomorrow sometime.

Saturday

Two things of importance happened today, and I must put them down in order so that I can make sense of them. She left her house early in the morning just like last weekend and I followed her on her walk, ending up back at my apartment building,
She is still asleep, unaware of the shape circling in ever tightening passes.

I swim toward the now rising bed, chasing after her and the shape.

The door turns into a whirlpool and sucks me into the bedroom.

Light filters through from above, illuminating the bed.

She is still asleep, unaware of the shape circling in ever tightening passes.

I swim toward the now rising bed, chasing after her and the shape.
across the street, but I left my car parked in my spot and walked to her house earlier in
the morning, and stood across the street and stared for at least a half an hour, it must have
been, before she crossed the street and entered my building.

I waited outside a few minutes, but I couldn’t see my door from outside, so I went
inside, even though my door is the first on the right down a few steps when you first go
inside and there’s no way she wouldn’t see me if I entered, but she was just standing
there, facing my door, not moving.

I don’t know what made me do it, but I reached out to touch her, just her shoulder.
She turned around before I could touch her and asked me a question: “Why?” I asked her,
“Why what?” but she just kept asking me, “Why?” so I turned around and left the
apartment building. She followed me, clear as day, across the street, down the block,
through campus, all the way to her house.

When we showed up there she went inside without another word.

The other thing of importance concerns the pictures that I took yesterday. She’s
not in them. Any of them. It’s just a group of people, the sun reflecting off of a puddle, a
delivery truck, whatever.

Sunday

It only struck me today that I had actually talked to her yesterday, even if it was
only a two word question in response to her question. I don’t feel like any real
development has been made, but I won’t get another chance to talk to her until tomorrow
at the earliest, so I’ve been thinking about this all day.

She was outside my apartment. Right outside. Had she knocked? Did she care that
I was following her? She hadn’t looked for my car, but I suppose she could have seen it
parked behind the building from where she stood across the street. Is that why she went inside the building? What would she have done if I had been inside my apartment and opened the door?

What would I have done?

Monday

I skipped class and sat in the coffee shop. She ordered her coffee and instead of waiting for her to leave so I could follow, I approached her at the counter. I asked her why she was following me. The girl behind the counter just stared at me and asked, “Can I help you?” I told her that I wasn’t talking to her and moved away from the counter to a nearby table.

She sat down with me, cradling her coffee between her two hands, and I asked her again why she was following me. She didn’t say anything, just kept staring into her cup. It was weird to be talking to her, but not for the reasons I would have thought. She didn’t seem scared that I knew she had been following me and I didn’t care that she knew I’d been following her. I wanted to know why. I still want to know why.

She took out a small vial, the one full of whatever it is she always pours into her coffee, and I took it from her. She didn’t really protest, but reached out for it only halfheartedly before pulling her hand back to the coffee. “What’s in here anyway?” She didn’t wait around to answer. Just got up and walked out of the coffee shop, leaving her coffee behind. The steam still drifted out of the small hole in the lid, so I took the coffee and popped off the lid. The cup was empty.

The small vial was empty also.
Tuesday

I waited outside her classroom today instead of in the coffee shop. She showed up a little before her class at one, and, seeing me, she cut down another hallway filled with students. I followed her through the Science building, up and down floors, through labs where others worked on experiments. I lost her on the first floor near the main entrance, so I decided to go outside and sit on the bench.

She was already there, sitting on the bench.

I sat next to her and said nothing. She didn’t have her coffee, either because she hadn’t gotten one today or she had lost it somewhere in the building. We sat in silence for a while, and I traced the progress of the shadows across the sidewalk at my feet. I made sure to keep her just out of my direct line of sight so that I could make sure she wasn’t trying to leave without staring at her.

It’s odd that I finally had her with me, alone, and I didn’t say anything. There’s so much I wanted to say to her, to tell her, express to her, but it didn’t seem like the right time. I was too worked up by her following me, by having to follow her through the building. Finally, I did the only thing I could think of. I pulled the cootie catcher out of my pocket and handed it to her.

“Here. I think this is yours.”

I left her sitting on the bench.

Wednesday

I suppose I should have asked her what her name was.

Thursday
Light filters through from above, illuminating the bed.

She is still asleep, unaware of the shape circling in ever tightening passes.

I swim toward the now rising bed, chasing after her and the shape.

I see the shape slip into bed next to her and she pulls it close and kisses it.
I think catching one of these orbs is going to be impossible. They always seem to pass through whatever I try to catch them in. Plastic peanut butter jar. Glass jar. Plastic sack. Trashbag. Bathroom door. Fridge. It’s weird that they can pass through everything in my apartment, but can’t leave the apartment.

They come from the walls, from whatever living thing is in them. They flow in and out of the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the mirror. But no further. They’re part of the apartment. Not spirits. Not anything real and not anything imaginary. They’re the in-between.

**Friday**

My apartment isn’t someplace I wanted to be and neither is the coffee shop, especially since she didn’t show up today at all, so I decided to walk. The lights kept going off when I walked under them and I didn’t even look back at them to see if they lit back up when I was far enough away. It’s just like with the orbs, it happens. I can’t do anything about it and I don’t see the point in trying anymore.

I don’t even turn on the lights in my apartment anymore because I keep getting stared at when I buy the same bulbs every few days. It’s just not worth the effort. The only thing that matters to me now is her. At some point during my walk, I realized I was heading towards her house, which was fine, so I kept going. I didn’t really have an aim to end up there, but since that’s where I seemed to be going, I thought I might as well see what she was up to. As it turns out, not much of anything.

By the time I got to her house it was dark outside, so I couldn’t see much save for when cars drove by and their headlights gave me a brief glimpse. No lights in the house were on, at least not from what I could tell, so I just stood across the street.
The cars started coming less and less frequently and the moon was hiding behind clouds, so there really wasn’t much to look at. Until she stepped out onto the porch. It wasn’t anything I really noticed at first, I mean, there were no lights coming from inside when she opened the door and I couldn’t hear her footsteps on the porch from across the street. I only noticed her on the porch after I’d been looking away for a few minutes.

She just stood there, arms folded across her chest, in what looked like pajamas, but again, from across the street in the poor light I couldn’t exactly tell. I’m not sure how long we both stood staring at each other, but I guess she got tired or bored or something because she went back inside. Again, I didn’t see her go. She just wasn’t there anymore.

Saturday

I didn’t sleep last night, so I opened the blinds on every window in the apartment as soon as the sun came up. I wanted to see if she’d still stand there if I watched her stand there. I also opened the door just enough so that if she knocked the door would open a little more and then she’d be able to see inside.

I’m not sure how long I stood at the window, but it must have been a while. I watched cars go by most of the day, watched a few squirrels fight on the apartment building’s lawn, watched small groups of people walk up and down the street, not much else happened most of the day. I stood there until the sun went down and the streetlights came on, all except the one right outside my window, but she never showed.

Sunday

Same thing as yesterday. No show.

Monday
She is still asleep, unaware of the shape circling in ever tightening passes.

I swim toward the now rising bed, chasing after her and the shape.

I see the shape slip into bed next to her and she pulls it close and kisses it.

The bed breaks the surface and disappears into the light.
I decided I might as well go to class since not much has been happening, but not much happened in the class either. I showed up late and found everyone writing in those small notebooks they sell at the bookstore, the exam notebooks. I didn’t have one and I didn’t want to take a test anyway, so I sat outside and watched the professor at the front of the class through the window beside the door.

She just sat there reading a book. It was too far away for me to read the cover, but I don’t remember her ever turning the page, so either she wasn’t really reading or she was really concentrating on the page in front of her. Eventually, members of the class began to turn in their exam books and leave the class, but nobody said anything to me when they passed.

At some point I fell asleep because I remember waking up to find the classroom empty and the lights off. All of the classrooms were empty and only the nighttime lights in the building were on, so small patches of light sat between larger patches of darkness. I left the building, guiding myself by running my hand on the wall, not because I couldn’t see down the hallway when the lights went out as I passed, but because the wall felt like a wall. No orbs. No breathing. Just cement and paint.

Tuesday

She didn’t show up at the coffee shop again today, and I’m beginning to question whether she’s worth the effort anymore, but even as I write these words I know she still is. There’s got to be something that I’m missing, some element of her character I haven’t seen yet. I’m thinking it’s time for me to see how her weekdays go before classes, before her coffee, before I enter her day. Her weekends gave few clues, little results.
Classes aren’t important anymore, not for me, not for her. Tomorrow I’ll start my
day outside her house and see what she does and where she goes in the morning. She
lives alone I’m pretty sure, and she never talks to anyone, not that I’ve seen, so that just
leaves me, the one person she interacts with at all.

I suppose she could talk in class, but I’ll never be able to figure out for myself. I
could follow her into a classroom, but what would I do if the professor noticed me? I’d be
captured by everyone, even her, although I’m pretty sure she already knows. But if it goes
the same way as my psychology class goes, then no one will notice and I’ll be able to
watch her in silence. How many people are there in her classes? There seemed to be a lot,
making an exact number impossible, but what if there are only enough desks for those
students? I can’t just stand there all class, even if no one notices me.

Class is out of the question. Her house is the only answer.

**Wednesday**

The day started early, the sun barely over the horizon by the time there was any
movement in her house. It’s weird how I can be staring right at her house, at the bedroom
window next to the front door, and not notice her open the curtains until after they’re
open. She stood there for a few minutes in nothing but a bra, but I couldn’t see any lower
because of the windowsill, so I’m not sure.

It was enough.

With only one curtain open I couldn’t see much of what she did in the morning,
but what I did see I expected. She took a shower at some point, and I only know this
because she came back into her room wrapped in a towel with another wrapped around
her hair. A semi drove by and I missed her getting dressed, and after it passed she was
blow-drying her hair. Then came her makeup, which I never noticed she wore, and a last inspection of her clothing for the day.

She left her house before eight, before any classes start, carrying a backpack and her purse. I kept my distance to around a half block on the opposite side of the street and walked the familiar path towards campus. I half expected her to veer off towards my apartment when campus drew near, but we crossed the street onto campus and I had to change how I was following her since hardly anyone else was out.

At some point I had to duck into a building because she looked over her shoulder, but I don’t think she saw me. I’m not sure why I should care if she saw me or not. She already knows I’ve been following her. I’m tired of following her, of watching her do the same things day after day, without actually getting to know her. I need to say something to her, but I don’t know what to say.

She went into the coffee shop and got her coffee while I waited just outside the doors watching to make sure she wouldn’t see me when she left. She gave me no indication that she’d noticed, so I continued to follow her from the coffee shop across campus. She didn’t head in the direction of the Science building however. Instead, she headed for the opposite side of campus, towards the building all of my classes are held in.

Second floor, down the hall, same classroom that my psychology class is in on Mondays. I waited outside for the class to end, for her to exit. I sat on the floor opposite the door and watched the same professor from my psychology class lecture through the window running the height of the door. I couldn’t see her in the front row of desks.

When the class was over, I recognized everyone who left the classroom from my psychology class on Mondays. Glancing at the clock on the wall, I realized that this class
The bed breaks the surface and disappears into the light.

I swim toward the now rising bed, chasing after her and the shape.

I see the shape slip into bed next to her and she pulls it close and kisses it.

The bed breaks the surface and disappears into the light.

The pictures swarm around me, preventing me from reaching the surface.
ended at the same time as mine. It’s only now as I’m writing this that it strikes me there may be some connection between my class and her class, but at the time I put it out of my mind in order to follow her further.

I was more than a little surprised when she actually exited the classroom because I had expected the professor to lock up the room without me seeing her leave. She looked right at me when she left because I had forgotten to move around the corner at the end of the hall, but she smiled a little and it didn’t seem like anything more than when she often saw me at the coffee shop.

She slowed her pace a bit for the rest of the day, almost as if to let me catch up with her, but I hung back just enough to let her know I wasn’t quite there yet. She knows and that’s enough for now. The words will come soon enough.

The rest of the day presented nothing of merit. A few more classes, another visit to the coffee shop, which struck me as odd because I’m only used to the one, and then a walk home. After she entered her house I made my way home and actually said hi to the orbs that waited just inside my door.

Thursday

Decided to test out the coffee shop again today and she showed up and actually sat down across from me at my table. It didn’t feel like a big deal, perhaps because of what happened yesterday or because I actually slept last night. Neither of us really said anything, just sat there for a while. She drank her coffee. I tried to keep myself from staring at her.

When she finished her coffee she threw the cup away and stood by the table looking at me. She was waiting for me, so I followed her, except it wasn’t exactly
following because she made sure that we walked side by side across campus. If I slowed my pace, she matched. Her green eyes held a soft twinkle I hadn’t noticed before.

We must have walked in silence for most of the day because I remember feeling hungry right when we arrived outside her house. We were on the same side of the street as her house and I could see the house itself wasn’t in the best condition, but it looked stable enough to be livable. She was already on the porch opening the front door when she turned and told me, “I leave the door unlocked so you can come inside whenever you want.”

Then she went inside and shut the door behind her.

Friday

My apartment feels smaller than it should, even with the furniture moving away from the walls. The walls are breathing again, but it seems to be labored, slow and ragged instead of rhythmic and steady. The orbs are agitated, darting around the apartment at each other, at me, instead of floating around in random motions. One was inside an empty peanut butter container on my counter when I woke up. I recall throwing the container away after it failed to hold an orb, so I picked this one up and threw it away also, leaving the orb that had been inside floating a few inches above the counter.

Even with that sticky wetness behind all of the moved furniture again, the shower I took wasn’t all cold, and fluctuated between ice cold and scalding hot without ever settling where I wanted it to.

When I got out of the shower, I noticed a large swarm of the orbs in the middle of my bedroom floor. I could see a piece of paper through them, but didn’t know exactly what it was until I got closer. It was the cootie catcher. The last flap had been filled in.
I see the shape slip into bed next to her and she pulls it close and kisses it.

The bed breaks the surface and disappears into the light.

The pictures swarm around me, preventing me from reaching the surface.

I let them pull me back down towards the dark bottomless below.
“Keep Me.” When I picked it up the orbs that had been around it kept close to it and swarmed me while I read the new flap. It’s like they didn’t want me to read it, to have it. I got dressed and left the apartment, the cootie catcher in my pocket.

Even though the sun was out today, the light poles lining the sidewalks around campus lit up when I walked under them and I probably wouldn’t have noticed this except for the fact that I kept looking up whenever I’d hear planes passing overhead, something that doesn’t happen that much here. Nobody else seemed to notice, but I didn’t really care because there was no need to. There was something there, something with her, something that made everything else seem less important.

She invited me inside her house whenever I wanted. I sat on the bench outside the Science building for most of the day thinking about what this could mean. The more I thought about it the more I realized that her inviting me inside was more than I’d ever given her. Sure, I opened the door, but only enough for her to notice if she knocked. What if she never knocked?

When she came out of the Science building, she sat next to me on the bench just like she’d walked next to me the day before. No words, no awkwardness, just her presence next to mine. The light above us on the pole was on the whole day, giving the bench an extra light that made everything else look darker even though the sun was out. She didn’t have a coffee and when I realized this we both got up and walked side by side towards the coffee shop without saying anything. She got her coffee and I waited next to a group of coffee snobs.

After she added whatever to her cup, we continued walking around campus and ended up going in the general direction of my apartment. About a block away, I turned to
her and told her that she could come inside my apartment whenever she wanted to, that I
would leave the door unlocked for her just like she told me she did for me. She said
nothing, just continued cradling her coffee between her hands, but I could see her smile.
When we reached my apartment, she said goodbye and continued walking in the direction
of her house. I watched her go until she turned the corner and I couldn’t see her anymore.

Saturday

When I woke up this morning I kept my eyes closed for just a few minutes longer
hoping that I’d feel her next to me, but when it didn’t happen I got up to use the
bathroom. The mirror on the wall moved like a collection of broken glass instead of in
waves like it usually does. The different pieces kept slicing into each other, pushing one
another onto other shards, and I could see the orbs somewhere behind them pushing other
shards of glass towards each other.

The movement of the walls was irregular, moving in quick bursts and slowing
down for long periods of time afterwards, pushing different pieces of furniture away from
the walls as it did so. The food in the kitchen was all over the floor, open and spilling, the
milk curdled a little and the peanut butter streaked across the walls, cabinets, and fridge.
The orbs that hovered throughout the apartment kept getting in my way, and I found
myself unable to move through them.

Whenever I’d go to do anything, they’d crowd around the object of my action.
Putting on my jeans took longer than normal because they kept removing them from my
hands, dragging them across the room. I checked to make sure I’d left the door unlocked
like I told her I would, but I found it locked and when I tried to unlock it the orbs took
turns locking it again. I decided to leave and go to her house, but the orbs tried to prevent
me from doing so. They kept taking the things out of my pockets and once, when they took the cootie catcher I always kept with me, they tried to tear it up, to keep me away from it as they did so.

It’s like the apartment doesn’t want me to have the thing I most want.

Eventually, I made it out of the apartment and listened while the orbs or whatever shut and locked the door behind me. I had my keys with me, but I wasn’t too concerned about getting back in quite yet. The sun was out again today and I enjoyed myself with a walk around campus, aimlessly letting my legs carry me first to the Science building then to the coffee shop and then past my building on the way to her house.

Once there, she met me outside, almost as if she was expecting me, and we silently walked around town for several hours. I felt at this point that everything is going to be all right, that she’s willing to wait for me to talk, she knows what I’ve been going through and she knows what she’s been going through and waiting a bit longer isn’t going to kill either of us. We walked around with no particular aim in mind and when we passed by her house again she said goodbye and went inside. I continued on my way home, thankful for the awkwardlessness of the walk and only slightly stung that I hadn’t the nerve to go inside quite yet, but words should come first.

All in all, it was a nice day.

**Sunday**

I slept in my car last night because I couldn’t deal with the orbs. Whenever I’d unlock the door from the outside, they’d lock it again. I’m assuming it’s the orbs and not something that I haven’t seen. When I did make it inside, I found all of my things tossed around the apartment. All of the food in the cabinets and fridge was smeared on every
The bed breaks the surface and disappears into the light.

The pictures swarm around me, preventing me from reaching the surface.

I let them pull me back down towards the dark bottomless below.
available surface, not just in the kitchen, but in all of the other rooms as well. The same for the cleaning supplies in the bathroom.

I grabbed a few things that didn’t look too messed up and went out to my car. It wasn’t that cold last night, but it looks like my car’s gonna be my new home. Until I go in her house, that is, which will hopefully be soon.

I just need to get up the nerve to do it. Just walk inside, but I need to talk to her first. Tell her how I really feel. How I’ve felt all along. Make sure we’re on the same page. That time will come, but apparently it’s not now, not quite yet.

Monday

I went to class today for the simple fact of comparing it to the class she has on Wednesdays. The people are the same. So is the professor, the room, the building. I’m not sure how much more similar they can get, but there’s no way of me finding out without being in her class. It’s not that big of a deal.

The rest of the day was spent waiting around on her and then once she showed up we walked in silence again. I really want to speak to her, but when she shows up there’s no need for either of us to actually speak. We just walk and enjoy the others’ presence. I’m worried that if I say anything, I’ll wake up and none of this will be real.

Tuesday

There’s no other way to explain it. My apartment hates her. I left the door unlocked again, but she knocked anyway earlier today. Since I knew the orbs had been locking the door when I wasn’t looking, I got up to let her in, but as soon as I opened the door the orbs swarmed her. They pulled her inside and pinned her against the wall. I tried to grab an orb and actually did, something I wasn’t really expecting, but I grabbed
handfuls of them anyway and threw them off her, but more kept appearing from the walls, the ceiling, the floor, and kept her pinned to the wall, pushing her and pulling her inside like they had tried to do with me.

I managed to pull her out of the wall, which was much easier than actually trying to pull the orbs off of her, but the entire apartment was against us both. The furniture began to move on its own, tottering back and forth as it pushed us towards the nearest wall. The mirror in the bathroom broke off the wall and the shards began to cut their way across the floor towards us. The orbs kept bombing both of us, trying to get us against one of the rippling walls.

We tried to make it to the door, but it shut and locked us in and it took however long to finally get it open enough for her to slip out, covered in bruises and blood. I tried to follow, but the door slammed and the orbs knocked me down. I woke up on the floor with the orbs still around me. They hovered there without moving, but every time I tried to move they’d force me back down. It took over two hours for me to finally sit up. All of the doors inside the apartment were closed and so were the blinds, so I couldn’t see outside.

I’m spending the night in my car again to avoid contact with the orbs, but I’m gonna have to go back in there at some point. I’m still not even sure how I managed to make it out here, but when I did, she was already gone, walked back to her house to nurse her wounds I assume.

Wednesday

I waited all day in the coffee shop to see if she’d show, and when she didn’t I took a walk by her house, but I couldn’t tell if she was inside, let alone how she felt since what
The pictures swarm around me, preventing me from reaching the surface.

I let them pull me back down towards the dark bottomless below.
happened the day before. I thought about knocking on the door, but what if the same thing happened when I set foot inside her house as when she stepped in my apartment? But how could the same thing happen? The orbs are only in my apartment, not in her house.

I wonder if she actually saw the orbs, the breathing walls. As far as she knows I did those things to her. Maybe that’s why she left, didn’t wait around for me. What if she thinks I hurt her like that? Surely she has to know it wasn’t me, that I helped her escape. Maybe that’s why she didn’t show up at the coffee shop today. She’s avoiding me.

No, that can’t be true. I’ll keep hanging around the coffee shop and the Science building and when I see her I’ll explain everything. I won’t bring her back to my apartment, that’s probably not a good idea to repeat. But at least she’ll know.

Thursday

She was already at the coffee shop, sitting at my table, when I got there. I still don’t like the smell of coffee, so I just grabbed a soda from one of the machines outside and we sat outside on a bench, her with her coffee, me with my soda, and let the silence settle around us.

Her hair moved with the wind, but it seemed to have some life of its own, as if it moved with the wind only because it wanted to, and I secretly wanted to see her hair move on its own. Her green eyes watched me between sips of her coffee and I watched them watching me, content to not do anything else for the rest of the day. No words passed between us, but that was fine. None were necessary.

Around the time the sun began to hide behind the buildings and trees she rose to make her way home and I rose also, although I knew that I wasn’t at the point of going
home with her yet. Her offer was constantly in my head and I wished that my offer hadn’t ended in the way that it did. Even then I could still see the minor bruises that lingered around her eyes and on her arms. I tried to say sorry, as if I knew that the orbs would react that way, but she hushed me by leaning in and kissing me on the cheek.

Then she turned and walked in the direction of her house. I sat back down on the bench and watched the wind play its way across the leaves in the trees and those on the ground, listening to the distinct sounds of each. The moon was the only light I needed to get home, and my car was less cramped than I remember it being.

Friday

She met me at the coffee shop and I say that she met me because she skipped her coffee at first and sat down at the table with me, this time right beside me instead of across from me. I was a little surprised by this, but pleased enough that my surprise didn’t show much. When she rose to get her coffee, she left her things at the table and slipped a piece of paper into my hand.

It was another cootie catcher, but this one looked far newer than the one that I’ve been carrying around in my pocket. I opened it and found the same four sayings written across the flaps inside that had appeared in the one I found on the sidewalk. When she came back with her coffee, she opened her bag and showed me a large collection of cootie catchers, each of these filled with the same four sayings as mine. I wanted to ask her why, but before the words could come she kissed me, this time on the mouth instead of the cheek, and I forgot what I was going to say, not that it mattered.
I let them pull me back down towards the dark bottomless below.
I kissed her back, and for once didn’t care about what the coffee snobs might be saying behind their steaming styrofoam cups. I can’t be sure how long it lasted, but it felt like forever and I was disappointed when it stopped, but I told her that I’d meet her on the bench outside the Science building tomorrow and we’d go to her house together. This idea thrilled her and she kissed me again and spilled her coffee all over the table, and it formed a circle around the cootie catcher she had just given me, the new one, which didn’t touch any of the brown liquid.

Saturday

I haven’t slept in my apartment since the other day and all of my trips inside have been as short as possible. The walls breathe in and out the orbs that crowd around me and try to prevent me from accomplishing my task, be it using the bathroom or showering or getting new clothes or grabbing the small amount of food that hasn’t yet spoiled and when I complete my task they crowd around me closer, as if they intend to suffocate me before they’d let me leave again.

This morning I took my shower in less than ten minutes and managed to cut my time in the apartment to just under twenty minutes, but the chore of making my way across the room towards the bathroom took more out of me than I had originally realized. The mirror in the bathroom isn’t even holding itself together anymore. Now, it’s nothing other than a violent storm of liquid glass that strikes out at me when I stand too close. Even the orbs seem to be staying away from it now.

I met her on the bench outside the Science building and she took my hand in hers and led me across campus, off campus, down the street that by now I knew led to her
house. We stopped outside the house on the sidewalk. She let go of my hand and stared into my eyes. I got the impression that she wanted to say something, but then it didn’t feel like anything needed to be said. I knew what she wanted because I wanted it too. I’d wanted it for as long as I can remember. She waited for me and followed me up the few steps onto the porch.

On the porch I turned to ask her about the key to the door, but she was a step ahead of me, guiding my hand into my own pocket where I found a single key. The cootie catcher that had become barely readable and strained across the creases fell out of my pocket, but neither of us paid it any attention. I took the key from my pocket and unlocked the front door.

I opened the door and stepped inside.