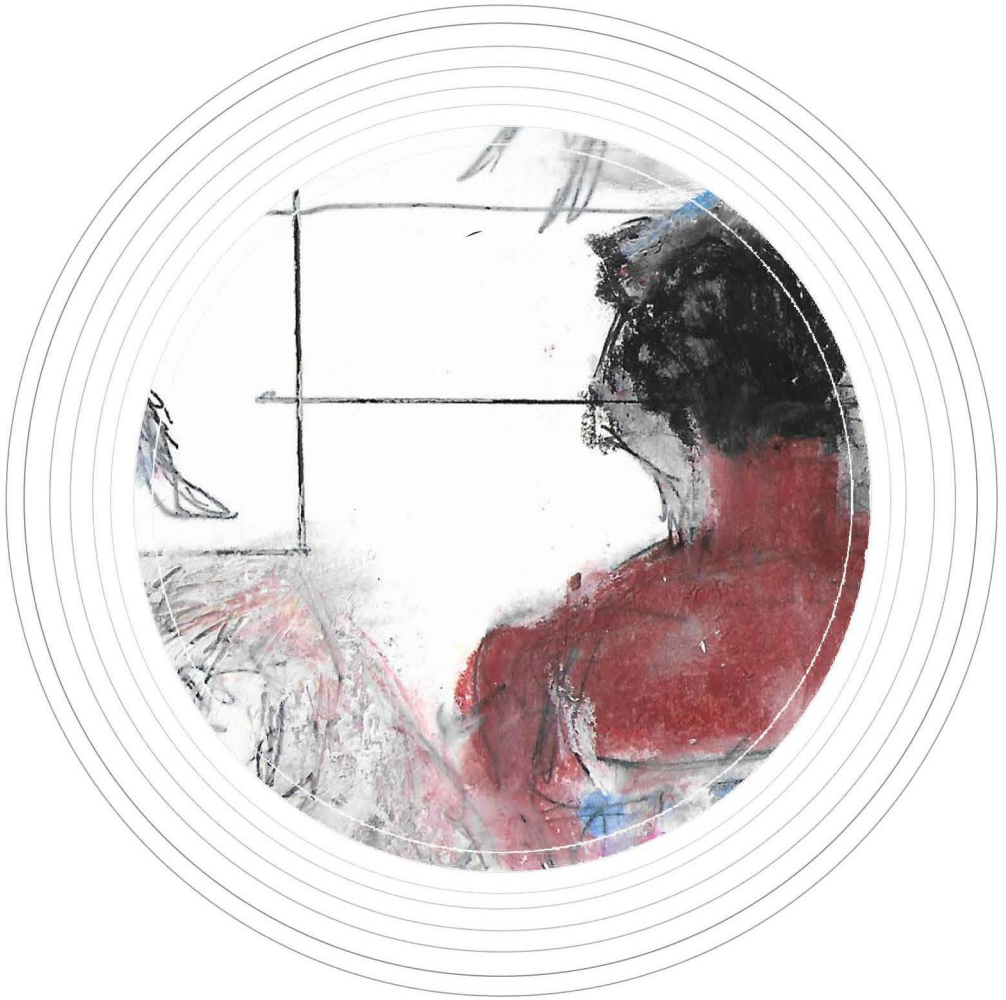


# **VIRGIL KILLS: STORIES FROM THE CONSERVATION OF MASS**

RONALDO V. WILSON



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# VIRGIL KILLS

STORIES FROM  
*THE CONSERVATION*  
*OF MASS*

RONALDO V. WILSON



#101



for Vergelio, then, and now





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VIRGIL KILLS





## VIRGIL RETURNS TO MANHATTAN

Before they were both more famous than they are now, CeeR sent Virgil's collection of poems to Madge, another famous writer and editor, a person with whom Virgil would never talk by telephone, but a person, nevertheless, whose comments by e-mail revealed her feeling that his collection was too weighed down by his dreams. Madge was unable to see the fun in the characters beyond a pressing trauma she observed in the writing, that the black father was an alcoholic—and, ultimately, that a drive couldn't be *fun* for these “abused” children. But the little brown kids, rolling around in the back of their Mom and Dad's station wagon, swerved around by their drunk driving father, were thrilled. In fact, they'd have been equally happy being jostled around in a total stranger's trunk.

Virgil realizes that dreams matter to him most because, in them, he feels somewhat sure he is present. This isn't epiphany. In the “novel,” out of which he would model his own first major work, a little brown girl stares into both a crowded bus and a cage folded into a dream and, simultaneously, out of this dream into a “world,” where she recognizes a caged gorilla, King Kong, an Ape? It didn't matter what it was. What mattered was that that big, black animal was, curiously, eating buttons.

Material Objects. Material Bodies. This is what often codes Virgil's dreams, and, in his world, anything can slip into any form, in and out of dreams, in and out of life: birds that rivet space, crickets that saw into the beating of the night. In the end, his world is not, and is like the city where he just arrives by train, an ongoing slick of movement in which he

can recall, riding along its surface. And when he awakes, blurrily seeing, Virgil enlarges the letters on his screen, and enters into what he thinks of fondly, as a return.

Malcolm meets Virgil in Penn Station, upstairs on the Amtrak level. In Virgil's unconscious, as in life, the station is long, a white stretch of tan-flecked floors, softly muted beneath Malcolm's feet. Malcolm is black, too, and, like Virgil, is split into what looks like a walking kaleidoscope for a second, a series of limbs with stuffed yet elegant bags shifting around her body, a moving antipode to the self, a slight explosion of her forming really, and maybe this explosion of what she becomes is tied to the surety in her walk.

In the booth at Teaser's, Virgil discovers a monster. His face is tiny, and his hair is like corn silk. Does Virgil touch it? If only for a second, Virgil does, and the corn silk head moves, but its face is still, and below Corn-Silk's legs are black shoes that look like Merrells, but he can't quite tell if this brand is actual. Virgil gets down to it. The dick, itself, is not remarkable—that it is there is what actually matters. And he is asked, maybe by Corn-Silk, or another, maybe by Guapo: "Do you like the bush?"

Exploration is what he tries to explain to WinTrueLiar of his expectations, as a poet and critic, his need to know, to plot, to understand the source-work emerging from the object of exploration, but it is all so futile. In the end, Virgil doesn't even understand how to discern between the pronunciation of the word, *fu-tile*, or more like, *feudal*. Anyway, the word's start hangs on his teeth and lower lip, the "f" like extra sulfur, packed at the tip of a matchstick, and no matter what, it pushes him closer to an understanding of the self that he may shore up, or release at will, *to light*.

Virgil is, for certain, in the city. Clean is there, too, and so is Butch. And one or all three of them are in the shower. Virgil slips Butch the white bar of Dove that Tallina, in Bikram, says makes him smell *so gentle*. What if Virgil said this back to Tallina? You smell like, *whatever he thought*. Virgil sometimes feels his world is being held hostage and that, concomitantly, he

is giving everyone what they want to hear, but in the end, he is not getting what he wants, though he does have everything he needs.

This is what happens: D\_C asks Virgil, "That's all you have?" D\_C looks down at the bag that contains a belt, maybe some wingtips, nothing really excessive, one pair of jeans, socks, undies, loosely laid in the small duffel. The sense of his self is often split in these filled and half-filled bags, Virgil broken into realizations of scenes he carries around.

Sometimes it's simple. A black leather bag of varying sizes fades in and out of the dream. It shifts. It becomes both lost artifact and anchor. Sometimes it's more complicated, like once, Virgil held his sister in the dream, all healed up from surgery, and he would hold her as he only did when she was a girl, and he, a boy. Or he is a thief, running about in a neighborhood, a white towel around his waist, fresh from stealing a newspaper from one stranger, only to return it to another, under a walkway, covered by an awning, stones on the roof, desert plants between pillars he rushes from as he wakes.

For Virgil, dreams are not only telling in the sense that they reveal how much he is pulled from one field of anxiety into the next. They somehow keep him pointed in directions that echo his critical concerns. For instance, in one movie scene, a slave, of course, in a chain gang, is taunted by his master, and he is attempting to tie his shoe, stumbles, and at the moment of his rebellion, or he thinks of rebelling, he looks up and pushes the shotgun tip into the overseer's head, an act akin to a mistake, but the overseer's head, in any case, is blown apart.

In another scene from a different movie, one slave tells another to not look at someone, a woman, a sheep, a hammer tie. Virgil does not remember exactly what it looks like, but a knife comes out. It's soon lost in the dirt, maybe behind a tree, and the Master, drunk, cannot retrieve it because he is too high, and a long string of spit comes out of his mouth as his slave, all at once, both runs away and tries to explain himself. For Virgil, these slave visages, hovering so adroitly in his sightline, never dislodge.

Perhaps it is out of this realization that Virgil tells himself he won't feel threatened through the rest of the day. No Explosions. No being Blown Away. How much does he want to reveal, and how much does he want to understand? All he wanted that morning while watching the news with Butch was to know from President Curious that the terrorists would be bombed, "nuked" as he told Butch.

Virgil would, in fact, accurately forecast the event. "Basically, he'll say, *You tried it, and now we will destroy you.*" It's close to what WinTrueLiar told him over the telephone to describe his own self-assured nature—that, in the end, because he equated his art and academic productivity with B-Balling, that he would win at any cost, like Michael Jordan and like Kobe Bryant, that both of them, like him, were not interested in being liked, but only in being the best. And near the end of the conversation WinTrueLiar, a very established poet, said to Virgil, still mid-career, "I will beat you." But he wasn't talking directly to Virgil, more around him.

Virgil asks himself in the echoing of this, *What can I map?* In the city, the ground below him in the terminal contains a few bags shifting, some of them shared, all of them in various permutations of being filled, or not, all parts moving. Virgil does realize that the sound around him, a clap on a thigh, a gull sweeping, a brief coast, below a forever sky, the mountains less a tug than a constant pull back into a source, an urgency he needs to return to, like the nightly ritual of putting in his mouth guard, his top teeth slipped over by hard plastic to keep him from grinding, and cracking apart.



## THE DANCE

Virgil, of course, is not like DerPrincipal, who is broad of back and so hairy, as if a human carpet, someone he would have fantasized about, in bed, as a child, a man he would want, at least, to touch for once in his life. But why does he feel that he needs to get so close to one body after the next, bodies that repeat his wanting to be so close to his absence in relation to their abundance?

One, who clearly smells like shit, has a walrus mustache, wispy white hair that splits into bangs about two eyes that leer forward into the elevated screens. He features a vitiligo cock, marbled up from the base, so that in the theater, his white dick looks black. And, another, The Army Ape is tight but small, and soon will be on his knees. His butt is hard, rocked, and his body is “sick,” is what Virgil wants to tell him, but he cannot say anything, not because he has nothing to say, but because he feels resigned to being silent in acting out this small advancement of desire.

However, Der Principal fucks up, makes a fatal error that reveals his most searing flaw. After begging Virgil to leave the Sugar Hole with him, he vanishes into another booth. Come join us. Come with me. Come into my Zombie Minefield. “I’m not good at being good,” is what Der Principal confesses to Virgil, but Virgil cannot bear the statement, because it is a familiar one.

Virgil doesn’t remember the name of his first boyfriend, but he does remember the “book” this “Analyst” wrote, and the section he was so proud of, the one in which he described a psychic breakthrough, when he pissed into the water, his aim, to meet the bowl’s center. For him, the loud splashing was magical, a revelation, a mark of his own freedom, no

porcelain sides to silence his release, only the pot's water meeting his urine, a first music.

Maybe in "The Analyst's" self-involvement, Virgil would discover his own. Maybe in this reclamation of sound, celebration of a solitary, sonic stream, Virgil would recognize a path to his lurking towards being happy, and alone, ripped away from scrutiny.

In the Sugar Hole, The Canadian's body is like a golf tee, or in-close-up, a Weeble (Wobble), or the wooden top inverted and not spinning, not stuck but left motionless on its side. Virgil hates the wideness between his eyes. "I think I fucked you before," is what The Canadian says to Virgil in the little booth, the place where Virgil, he seriously feels, is doing research where he belongs, the place where he is learning how to read again.

The rubber smells like rubber, but Virgil thinks of the walruses on the beach, the way they battle for supremacy, a pounding of tusks into the leathery face of the other. On the beach, the Old Veteran Walrus pounds the young punk, who obviously wants to rule, take the harem for his own, but the Vet lifts up and smacks its tusks into the punk's neck, six inches slashing in, then ripping, to open the face of the young challenger, leaving its split cheek flapping.

Virgil learns from the bull how to use his scarred hide and fat to his advantage, though he is mainly smooth. He is splayed on his back on a leather couch, his tits are out and they are being eaten, one by Der Principal whom he thinks he loves, and the other by Thick-Cock-White-Ghost, who is like an aged anchor for Virgil.

Will Virgil return to the Sugar Hole to find DerPrincipal? Seeking love—its activities? Virgil is, he thinks, like a saint of the booths, or in another way, a predator.

Virgil looks for the nervous, the ones confused by their shifting desires, exactly those who've not shut their brains off to possibility, not those lost in the wrack of an endless want to get one more suck, all the same. Fuck that. Virgil realizes he is not lost either. He mines loss. There is a difference. Wondering, there is something that does confuse him,

something that he cannot at first register, as it marks its presence, wings clacking against glass, the cicada in the chandelier he cups to release, though it flashes outside, back to him, crashing into the sliding glass door, dead, it was so shocked.



## THE VENT

Before the elevator comes, Virgil is suspended on the top flight of the historical building. Dogs growl behind an apartment door. But all he is doing is waiting, and all Virgil recalls is taking up too much of the lane on East 39th, driving up to Harlem to see a poet and a novelist he'd never read before, and to eat, though he had already eaten, doing so sitting at a table up against a wall with Love who was wearing a body-shaped black dress with a white line for a belt, and because Virgil is, indeed, a narcissist, the story unveiling, which concerned him as much as Love's desire, was only as immediate as the sightline against the building in which Virgil and Soft-Fat finally did it.

Behind one wall, above Bryant Park, is the apartment Soft-Fat owned, the place in which Virgil recalled being, and sure enough, that night before he got laid, Virgil ordered a chicken cutlet, fried and red-sauced, served massive on a plate. Virgil may have saved most of it for later, but what he recalls is being abandoned by Soft-Fat after being fucked by him, his cool skin, and the calamari that Virgil shared with Love, next to Bryant Park, gives to the pressure of his fork, as he recalls Soft-Fat's body, and Love's glasses tinting in the sun, and streaked with her tears from all night and all day crying.

Virgil is not sweating, nor is he hot, but Love thinks he is sweating and hot. Virgil seeks the shade, not the building's shadow, not what's unlit temporarily, but what's blocked in a discrete moment. And it is for this very reason that the wall he finds is not a wall, but a black gap revealed between

two boards. Virgil understands something about space and simultaneity, in how the dogs' growling behind the door opens up into his ears, then, and floods in, even later, as he dreams of meat and waste, pulled out, and casually drained away in the shower. When he rinses his fingers clean, is he dropping them out of the way from the mirror to spare himself of his own vileness? What is Virgil hiding? Like the resin left on the sheets of Clean's hotel bed, as one in stains, one in a nasty mark—this is what they share.

“This is what sold me,” is what Virgil hears as he enters the Grand Courtyard, his temporary oasis from Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard. In some unique approximation to gentrification and his own exclusion from belonging, anywhere, any longer in this city, he cannot find a way to interpret his feeling in seeing, in understanding the space between his body and theirs, or his very expensive shades, and maybe theirs, too.

When Virgil escapes the reading by the novelist and the poet, bored by every minute, and expelled by some inane question of which he did not await the answer—he couldn't drive away fast enough. To escape from the city, or the memory of the whites with their dogs, one tall red-headed massive muscle-bound Harlem Gentrifier with a Doberman on his leash. This owner in Jean-Cut-Offs made Virgil feel both sickened and safe.

What about that reading made Virgil fall into a bored stupor? Is it that the readers were so proud and happy to be seen, to be recognized, to tie everyone implicated in that room to a history that certainly Virgil is a part of, Black, but all Virgil cares about is their black shoes? One, a white woman's, featured a series of buttons at the ankles, and the backs, leather flaps openings, elfin. Another, a suede boot with a gummed rubber wedge soul, flat along the bottom, another, a black boot with a zipper that wound diagonally around the boot, itself, but then the surprise, a clasp for a single button that peeked from the top.

In these corners, Virgil should feel at home. Perhaps this is the discomfort that he renders, a discomfort he can't place; but Virgil, instead of behaving, pretending to care, chatting, leaves, slips away, moves far

from the site of what he can't let in. His blackness is stuck to him, and he can't quite shake it off enough for him to see it clearly from any distance.

What does he understand, and where does he figure his own relationship to that from which he drove away? He wore no bomb. He was real. Virgil's blackness, he is realizing, is found, not in the opacity of its realizations, but something different, a series of notes that find themselves captured in his disdain for fictions, not the fictive characters that he wants to feel alive with, breached histories, ripped memories, no such seen in the prizes gained from the sodden mourning, or resounding, knowing applause, which makes Virgil such a bitch he can't control, like the gouge on the bottom of his car, there, but that he does not see, or even notice—but still, it annoys.





## THE CONSERVATION OF MASS

One body blends into the next for Virgil, the absence of any hair on one chest, the frock on another, the rounding saliva in one mouth, the sharpness of the grassy Sauvignon Blanc in the next. Virgil only thinks about his own story, the deepest tug of it bringing him back to his own face. For the take, he dances holding a mirror in a grass field, next to the San Francisco Bay, on the rocks, where his left foot is bent in a black boot. The boot is ripped on the left front, close to the middle of this foot, and he feels fat, but kicks out anyhow, his leg stretching for the camera that lays flat on the rock.

No one else's story matters to him as he is making his, but in some way, his story is something that he understands only in relation to how others see him. That morning, Virgil sunk to the floor of his bathroom, his back settling against the tub and the shower's sliding door, just after CeeR informed him of the impression he left on the search committee. One told her they thought Virgil was *a Narcissist*. He knew, no matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, in his suit, and his luxurious brown boots, and matching bag, that he wouldn't get that job. But still, he was flown out, and helped the name-caller move a desk, and the same name-caller helped Virgil to set up the projector, so during the first talk on his campus visit, he could show his images to the faculty.

How many correctives can he somehow offer to leave the impression that he is tame, and how much did he have to learn to settle by internalizing such an attempt at shaming? And consequently, at what point must this

contract break, the cracking of it, like an echo released in his stomach, a reverberation deep up in there, a feeling that somehow he will never quite abort? Maybe this is the well in the infinitely breaking sadness that Virgil will carry in him forever, something that gloms onto his lower back, stuck, no matter what he says in his own defense.

A run recorded on a run, and this run played on the detachable speaker capsule packed in a case, the case on the ground, then the detached speakers Virgil sets on the flat bait catch on the long arm of the pier. So too he sets the camera up to capture himself walking, then sashaying, then jogging toward it, but none of this before his mirror comes out, seemingly from his pocket, spun to flash the sunlight directly into the lens.

Like in the episode in which Sasquatch fights the Six Million Dollar man in and out of a tunnel, the sunlight after the battle, blasts the camera to produce a reminder of its self, the flash, a blip-star of orange light, but white in the distance, far along the pier, where Virgil dances and signals to himself how present he is, how spectacular his distance, how accurate the line of his leg as he points.

This is how it started, how it all began. Clean realizes that Virgil cannot see him, because he is so deeply self-involved, and somehow this reality that Virgil understands to be accurate transports him, again and again, far away from that self whom he thought he might become if he could fit back, loosely, into the slim-cut J.Crew shirts he has had to shelve, too recently, for the standard, medium fit.

In his growing fatness, he will never connect with Clean as he once did, as that part of Virgil that did love Clean has gone up some hill, one step in front of the next, away, into the realization that Clean is, forever, bound to a world in which they will never join: an actual castle, a lakeside home, hunting dogs, hunting, yacht-rich vacations, a company, a life far into the hills away from the ocean near where Virgil lives. But the real deal is that Virgil will never be his wife, never be her worrying about the dogs stealing the remote and hiding it in the garden, never her laughing in a bar as a glowing young girl, never the woman told she would be the

one he would return to marry, never, so full, never so round with hope, waiting, *and* receiving.

“I Could Die.” This is what Clean says to Virgil, and Virgil would be lost without knowing when or where, and the existence of this love would dematerialize as quickly as it arose. It has before, and will again. This is the risk. And the reward is the retreat into this fact. The Pig Bar where they first met smells like mold, and the men that sit there are gross and feel dead on arrival, and the one, Gaunt-Face, that Clean said he fucked, and has a big dick, looks, to Virgil, already gone, and stupid, as caught up in a nothing life as the two dancing next to the bar stools. But maybe Virgil’s a hater. This is easy to be, and to do, there.

Gaunt-Face is like a corpse that’s been knocked around, so that the shape of his dome is flat on top, and his skin, though he is clearly Latino, is peaked, and his hair is plastered, fork splits on his head. Clean tells him that when he wasn’t there at the hotel, in hospital, his co-workers did not know why. But Clean did. With his marriage on the horizon, Gaunt-Face’s ass was being sewn back together, tightened, after it was blown open over time, and failed to close enough for real tight fucking.

*The Zombie Zone* is what the sticker says on the car next to Virgil as he is driving to Stick’s condo, which is nestled into what is not a corner apartment, not much light, in what was formerly a high school. Here is the thing about everything in Virgil’s old Western Mass. It can never be beautiful. The grass in the cement, however perfectly mowed in the courtyard, the smattering of people in the Cold Stone, the Basketball Hall of Fame globe, the river stripped of trees from the tornado, never replanted, and the grey and blank light help to remind Virgil of what he was ejected from for his “New California Life,” as Clean names it.

Stick has shaved his shit. It isn’t what Virgil recalled him doing before. Everything that Virgil wanted when he cruised him in the Starbucks reveals Virgil’s delusions, but still, he goes pussy up to get that thin white dick. Stick doesn’t even look American, his long body is in almost slim-cut denim jeans, but still somehow wide-legged, faded from the machine wash

and dry, and his played out white Pumas, muddled suede stripe, camel or slate. What Virgil said was elegant about him is not elegant in any other world but this one. This is the bait, the charm he holds out to Stick, a sliver of it, and maybe for Virgil it is real, or in the least, a good technique, game, a way that he, as long as he can, continues to find some reason for following Stick home from the Basketball Hall of Fame parking lot.

Inside Stick's condo, there is much more space than Virgil would need if he lived there. There is one window in the living room. Somehow, the beauty in that space is washed over, hidden in the new backsplash, lost in the old, white walls that, no matter how updated, speak of the institution from which they will never be divorced. Even as Virgil's cock is slobbered on, even as his hole is sucked, even as he is stuck like a cow, even in the graveled feel of a rough fungi-finger nail inside, the thumb almost cutting his pussy-asshole. Nothing stuns Virgil from the weight of how vile, including Stick's missing back teeth, the rest of them yellow. But in this fucking, there is something sweet. Maybe it is in the Irish Spring smell that fills the room, or in how much Stick appreciates Virgil, so much that this gets Virgil off in a way he could not with Clean. He does not know why.

Who knows why? Maybe it is in the picture on Virgil's Photo Stream, the one of Virgil cross-legged in the hotel, in the ergonomic chair, his legs lithe and ripped, lines for days Virgil thinks, his upper body folded, so that the fat is not captured in his stone Nike Dri-FIT, only his arms crossed in front of him, his hands, bent so that one wrist holds up his face, chin resting there, thin, another V, another angle. "You are so Pretty," is what Clean says. Maybe this is from the same unrelenting adoration, but is it enough to get him off? This alarms Virgil, but the absence that he feels in the rush brings him to ask, *How might this be love?*

Late at night, before the porn, some old white man seeding a black boy, or any old man fucking a "teeny," Virgil has taken to watching *The Brady Bunch*, all reruns of his old life. In *The Brady Bunch*, he gathers some first sense of desire he wants to capture. In one episode, where Peter

is being an asshole, recording his siblings' secrets by hidden tape deck, he captures Marsha talking to Jan about love. Marsha confesses she feels sick and also happy, odd and equally neat, broken though similarly sutured. All of these contradictions, Virgil knows, somehow point back to his body in love. He is them, they are all him, and, Virgil realizes, they not only mark his desire, but they train him to give himself up in a way that he could never figure out on his own. Maybe he doesn't need to.

Butch's throat will not clear. Butch feels wet through the night. Butch is thinning, and at the Dinner House, Virgil kicks him. Virgil taps Butch with his toe, fake punches him in that kitchen. The light is open, and the house is cool. The fish is grilled and black on one side, and on the other it's still moist. Here, Virgil feels love, but still every moment of what he eats is outside of itself, and he is, so often, barely there. Not the banging of Bobby's drums in another episode, Bobby looking to find something that marks his musical talent because, unlike his siblings, he cannot "sing." Not the blaring of his bugle into the morning. Not his insane rage-drumming in the garage. But, still, Bobby's family supports him until he exhausts, and confesses that he did not want to play the drums anyway. It was because, he says, he thought this is what *they* wanted.

The father, Mike, in his flat-front, fitted poly-trousers, Carol's dirty-blond flip at the nape of her neck, the kiss Butch gives Virgil on the forehead while he writes and remembers. What voice does Virgil want to hear? What words does he need to hold? What fear does he hoist around, waiting for some dumb approval, some long weight that he cannot grasp, some irretrievable self cast, caught in his own no place of being loved? Is this what that search committee had known all about?



## PARTY, PARTY

The car is a low one, and red, and does 100 as if floating, and their name is Manitoba, which is Agender but twinned, and the BMW 328i Coupe xDrive is who Virgil can afford, and hopes to even more easily, as he produces more and more language that creates a balm in his gut. After all the killings, open season, and in a season in which King K says they should fear our resignation, Virgil, too, is resigned.

Virgil is driving, racing after another car. Her name he feels is Angelica, and she's a march. Virgil, in this dream, is a boy, chasing after something he does not understand, rushed by what others want, what others wish to make of him, marred and constructed, malleable and shocked, wrangled into throws, breathing by the choke of waste-neck baton.

He speeds along a dark road hoping to keep up with the boys he doesn't even know. They are at a dance he wouldn't even care about, were he awake. Those boys are where the car becomes—a bicycle, frame on the cement, yet chained to the rack, wheel gone, quick release left clutching the air.

The drive from Capitola to “Midtown” Santa Cruz is fast, and there isn't any view of the ocean in the transition from the “1” onramp to Morrissey Avenue when Virgil hears a knock. *Sounds like a rock*, he thinks, but is unable to discern if the noise came from inside or outside of Manitoba. He hopes that the noise came from inside—something he could

manage, something that would not ruin his day like a chip on Manitoba's left window door frame, just below the roof, or one on the handle, a scar, tat over an entry wound, or a strip of them: THUG LIFE.

MommaSpine set Virgil's black yoga shorts out on Manitoba, and even though Virgil realizes these would not leave a stain on their red surface, he still removed the shorts from the hood, and hung them on one of the clotheslines she set up in the garage. Resignation is MommaSpine saying her sisters in the Philippines are too far away to ever see again. And even though one of her sisters has just died, she does not answer her husband who asks about his long ago visit to her home, Leon, Iloilo, which he doesn't remember, and MommaSpine tries to forget. Virgil, though, knows some of the story, but he doesn't say anything, about the roll of cash his father wanted to give his then new family, the money, gone the next morning, stolen in the night from his shoe.

Virgil, the boy, on the refrigerator is fat, and smooth; in fact he is striped and brown, and all innocent looking, and as he looks up, dimples, in the studio light of the photographer's bulb. Who knows if that fat, curly brown face would have ever been hit by a bullet? Though, once, he did stare down the barrel of a gun. Van pulled it on him in a living room. Van on top of the sofa, and Virgil looking at that regular black boy gun pointing dead at Virgil, laughing. And Virgil, not so regular, looking back, or maybe to the side, resigned in the reality that he, at the moment, could be killed. Maybe he was scared, or maybe he recalls out of being scared, a calm when Van opened the chamber to show that the gun wasn't loaded.

When the boys get to the *Party, Party*, there is an open clearing of geriatrics, all of them like little boxes of grey, or white, black and barely moving, but still dancing on the floor around them. The boys want *to get the party started*. But Virgil is thinking of the white-yellow light saturating the pic on the newsfeed. It looks like a warm night, but it is not. What are fireworks are described as "small bombs" that disperse the crowd. Move the crowd. The boys want to make the party a success, even though it does not appear they were invited, nor does it feel like the party was productive.



This, in a sense, is a riot of no consequence. FloPaT says “This is not a race riot, but it is riotous.”

“Imagine feeling this all day,” reports JohnWhiteFunny. Imagine feeling the actual thing, instead of being sick of hearing about it? And the screen is split, and JonJonK says JohnWhiteFunny is an ally in his FB post, and Virgil wonders about this binary, the way that feeling is split, not splitting into many selves, but a self who, even in its most luxurious, feels ultimately sad, but looks good, pushes his thighs to touch the mat, and attempts to make something in the connection.

Are you not entertained? Is this what we are doing, Virgil thinks. Is this what CeeR is doing? What are any of us doing, as we wait, well, in our finest of bags and shoes? In the end, he feels he has the ear of the white avant-garde, but, Virgil thinks, as the illusion, what will he do, exactly? Such sorrow bleeds in the pleasure of his smooth acceleration. And all the warning lights continue to alert: DSC, ABS, 4X4! And Manitoba, too, continues to go on, broken. Sorrow, grief—these are impossible to let in, and also impossible to let go, a realization that cannot be marked, let alone, shared.

As the boys sit near their bikes a few feet from one another, Virgil pulls out a pair of stone-washed denim jeans that everyone in the group, including Virgil himself, realizes he cannot fit. Virgil knows this is not because the denim is too small. Perhaps it was the heat that foreclosed the jeans from fitting, but still, in the dream, he explains to these boys that it was only because they suffered from the dryer’s heat.

They are not the jeans on the rack in the HelloKitty Room. Jeans that Virgil lit into the WhackDRYCleaner’s about, the jeans they ruined, and even though Virgil told the workers they could do nothing to repair them, that they would have to pay, they did not. Virgil is preserved, and has never returned, a boycott on their stupid business, a pox on their Black Friday, a riot in their cheap hearts.

What is curious about this moment, maybe in his understanding of the jeans being forever too small, is that Virgil recalls wanting to prove

himself to the other boys, and maybe to the entire world, at the same time: *We want to be able to walk in peace. We want to eat. We want to be cared for. We want to be knowing, and moving, and being beings.* Is this why Virgil writes?

Virgil is cuffed. Virgil is folded. Those stiff jeans, those hard denim legs that had one day stretched, had once fit both of his legs, and his waist wasn't strangled by the button, but his pumps, as they clipped at the bottom of his feet on the pier, made him feel like he was like a little, thin steed.

Virgil plays like a boy, searches: there is a lion somewhere on YouTube with its jaw torn apart, and his tongue sags, and he cannot drink, but still he goes to the edge of the watering hole to try. He drops part of his fallen jaw in, in where Virgil can no longer see it, nor can anyone, but this dip, where part of the face is submerged, broken off, is presumed to be the sign that the Hippo attacked him, and won.

Virgil feels sad. Virgil is alone. Virgil has not touched anyone for so very long, and in this site of not feeling anyone, he is moving around a wide circle, a circle he can't understand, something he does not want to encounter alone, but he is alone, so he walks down a dreamed street though in a familiar house. The dream world he enters is made up of rides he imagined so long ago, dreams he felt as he rode on his bike as an actual boy.

Alone on the bike, it was like he was floating. And in his dreams, Virgil is not ever free, but his movements feel close to it. He floats above the street, wearing only a towel around his waist. He tries to pretend he is super-fit. He pimp walks with his towel in a neighborhood, which is like the grid he is driving around with the boys in the car, but this time he is walking, and not driving.

Once in a parking lot, Virgil is tried by a mutual black who asked for money, and Virgil says he's preparing for an interview, and he walks away, maybe pimp walking again, a little, to enter the Panera. The mutual black is ready to fight. So is Virgil, but for different reasons. In the end,

he does not fight because he does not want to scuff his \$400 boots in the parking lot, and he shuts the heavy door of MommaSpine's Porsche 928 and keeps it moving.

He walks quickly, because he has a purpose, headed to a familiar place, a house that is white, and has pillars that greet him. Giant squares of walls drop down, and he finds himself walking quickly up to the front porch. Virgil hears the whites having breakfast inside, and sees the square plates that match the square fronts that guard the house from precisely someone like Virgil. And Virgil, in the dream, though he has only stolen a pack of gum and a balloon in his life, carries the fear of being caught less than he does the fact of his being a thief on sight.

It feels easy enough though, in this seeing, and in a way, his body allows him to shift and to move, and to wait, and then to eventually *steal* the copy of the *Sacramento Bee*, wrapped in plastic, still flat. He has only seen the *NY Times* wrapped like this, so it can be pretty certain that this comes from Virgil taking the morning paper to Butch. But as quickly as he grabs the newspaper from the porch, he returns it to the first old white lady he sees, walking up to join the other old whites for lunch. From inside the house of stucco squares, he hears chatter of the news of the missing newspaper. He hears them calling the police, describing what they see. "Yes, but is he Black or White?" is being asked, not in the dream, but the question plays from the tiny black volume bar at the bottom of the screen.

As Virgil speed walks away from dropping the newspaper into the old lady's hand, he notices neither she nor her friend look particularly rich. He notes the long stringy dyed hair, the fallen face, not as jacked up as the lion's he found ripped off by a hippo, but still, he sees it falling, lying there, and sagging, held on by some miraculous tendon. Not dying, or dying less quickly than the lion, the old white lady in the dream takes the paper: "I was supposed to be on Water Duty." "Why are you giving me the newspaper?"

Or maybe it is a skill. Once, when Virgil was an intern in public relations, he received coaching by the speech coach of PresidentGipTrick!

She taught Virgil, and the rest of the interns, old white lady that she was, how to downturn her mouth into a slight, but hard pursed frown to show that you were being both attentive and filled with disdain at exactly the same moment.

Virgil, in this instant, realizes that he will be safe, because he knows the difference in the truth and faking it, and that he can wake up from this reality of his ultimately being caught, but what remains is how exposed he feels with the towel around his waist in the dreamed morning, his fat out, or on a morning well after the dream when it will fit around him easily, and in this fit, this will explain it all, forming to give Virgil back some measure of his life.

## THE WOUNDED

No consummation of desire is what Virgil ponders in the bed, his back almost ready to blow out at the base, if even for thinking it. It started out after school, when Teacher M would sit, legs stretched out at the front of his empty classroom. Teacher M drove an old red Toyota Truck, left parked in front of the high school well after it was closed, waiting like a beacon for Virgil; for no matter how far away he was from Teacher M, Virgil would figure out a way to return.

After graduation, what did he imagine he would hold onto as he came back so many years in a row, to that class, first, to where Teacher M usually parked, then to the front lot, and then to the empty classroom, again, Teacher M waiting behind a glass wall, not waiting for Virgil at all, but rather, for traffic on U.S. 50 to clear?

And now, Virgil pays the price for this habit, this need, stalking before it was stalking, lured by the tug of only his desire. The perch he pulled out of the bay was almost flat. Before he caught it, Virgil did not imagine it from the top of the pier. It felt easy to catch, but once it flailed on the end of his hook, dancing the “dance of death,” which Fat Alan called it, Virgil held tight the fishing line, barely feeling it rub into his finger, its last useless struggle bound to his longing.

When Virgil peeks into Teacher M’s classroom, there is someone new inside, someone grey and old, with glasses, someone whose legs are similarly sticking out, as they were when Virgil and Lil’Daft would sit like two little bitches in heat at Teacher M’s feet. Who knew that while Teacher

M was describing his relationship to the Lord, his ranking of his love of family ahead of anyone, including Virgil, or his future plans in finishing up a master's on Chaucer, Teacher M was actually seeding another woman, would get her pregnant, and leave his then wife, the woman who had all the money, the kids, and kept that house so safe in El Dorado Hills.

Virgil was, then, like all the other lost girls. He was like Lil'Daft, and like Tomato Worm Face Steel Wool Hair, all wanting Teacher M. All of them ready to give up their childhoods to enter Teacher M's imaginary, his orbit of desire, which by proxy included theirs. But what did Virgil hope to gain from his finding himself caught in the trap of this uneven exchange?

Virgil would confess his desire for Teacher M in the ways Virgil knew would not ruin everything, staring at Teacher M with pig-puppy eyes, feigning confusion about how to keep his growing-away school friends, when Teacher M was the friend Virgil really wanted. Lil'Daft was correct. Virgil *like-liked* Teacher M. His need was something he could not identify, then, but still, never getting into Teacher M's actual world haunted him. Still does. Maybe Madge was correct? Maybe his reliance on the dream world holds him hostage in ways his real life will never overcome.

Consummation is tricky, Virgil feels, and it is so ugly in the dream. Teacher M is wounded. His head is enlarged, and sewn up across his forehead, the stitch is bulky, and he can barely stand. "Did you have a stroke?" is what Virgil asks. But moments before, Teacher M was fine enough, looked the same, feathery thin hair, a dark mustache, big brown eyes, like a toddler's, lashes flowing out around them, as light as they moved the air. He nodded. They walked inside. But the person that Virgil would see there was not him.

Virgil thinks of Frankenstein's monster on the table, the yellow ochre skin, the veins, the forever loss that that monster would carry in his travels, his return, and perhaps even his penultimate escape across the ice. Maybe this is why his encounter with the other version of Teacher M is so difficult to decipher.

Teacher M is seated next to him, describing what happened, while he is naked, his body is thinner than Virgil imagined it could ever be, long and less hairy, and in the reconstruction of this body in this dream, his head is healed. But as Teacher M reveals his story, he releases a perfect dollop of green vomit, the consistency of mashed peas, and the color the very same.

Upon the release of this vomit, Virgil rubs Teacher M's back, and though he would have wanted to grab a bag, fake concern, then go all the way, he does not. He lets it go, the very idea, and fixates on the vomit. Why can't Virgil and Teacher M remain in their respective positions within the dream forever? But Virgil, like Teacher M (according to Tomato Worm Face Steel Wool Hair) has lost his family from fucking around, and Virgil realizes he, too, has a price to pay. He has to contend with the desire that leaves them both broken and wandering within Virgil's unconscious.

Teacher M transforms again. There are no wounds left on his body. It's as though Virgil healed him, allowed him to come back as a mirror of himself. It feels appropriate, really, this body of theirs, hovering, and his wanting Teacher M, a figure that does not evolve from its original representation, but reveals instead someone to hold and to love.

Teacher M is intact. His nipples sport rings, and he is in the tub waiting for Virgil. Finally, this is how it started, how it all began, and Virgil is right there, hungry for everything. "Spend the night." Teacher M says this before the tub, before they do it, and Virgil is even encouraged by Teacher M's brother, a sort of cheerleader shadowing in the dream, even though Virgil only met him once, Teacher M's brother, rounder, and with amber hair glowing in the back of the class.

The living room, fabricated in Virgil's imaginary, leads to the site of desire that will hold them all, but what does Virgil do but waddle in the tub, like the electric eel that vibrates just enough to kill the fish it will quickly eat in the water. Or like the fish caught by the bird that "fishes," by dropping a piece of bread into the brown water until the fish surfaces to feed, only to be snatched into the bird's beak, and shaken down its billowing throat.

The weight of the rain coming down on the house, its clicks and shifts, pulls Virgil from this world into the present. How will he understand the features of his body to be unstuck from events that are real, or dreamt? The plot becomes this, a theory—Virgil’s feeling generated across discovery. So the plot is also constructed in the fact that he, too, returns to how desire can never be broken, particularly inside of events that would never happen.



## VIRGIL KILLS

The vantage point was clear, the shot an easy one through the apricot tree, between the branches where the hummingbird stood. At least this is what Virgil thought it was doing—standing—but after telling KennebunkActor the story, he would realize that the bird was not. What Virgil could not know then was that the bird, as KennebunkActor described, hovered.

Before Virgil shot the hummingbird, he remembers the sweep of the many of them flying in the trees. In one photo from this time, Virgil has a bucket on his head, his hair curling out, and he is wearing white shorts with an athletic stripe down the side, opening to a small gap—his face, a permanent smile, he holds a hose out in his hands, spraying water into an arc.

But as Virgil took aim, he was not playing. He was, instead, sitting on a card table's padded collapsible chair, alert, the hollow steel legs' rubber grips fixed on the cement patio. Secure, he lined the bird up just under the sight's tip, the snap of the gun, blasting through the leaves, putting a hole in the “standing” bird's neck.

“You were a good aim” is what KennebunkActor said, which exists in contradiction to Virgil's waiting for the struck-dead animal to come back to life, even though it was clear—the hummingbird was dead. When KennebunkActor revealed to Virgil that that hummingbird was not, in all likelihood, ever standing on that branch, Virgil understands this not to be contradiction, but recognition of a different kind, something that would undo him more deeply than the killing itself:

*Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dhehhhhhhhhhhhh*

When “The Eye of the Tiger” came on, Virgil performed his dance of life, not choreographed but felt. However submerged, shooting that bird stretches out in front of him like the “catwalk” that was his backyard’s narrow center, the runway, his stage. GHerm is in a dream, on a bus, and Virgil is peering in at her. They are traveling somewhere, but he cannot recall where they are going, or if they are even traveling together. He remembers GHerm insulting him when they were friends at L.B.H.S. When Virgil recalled his backyard, GHerm said, “Please, you make it seem like it’s a grove.”

But it was a grove, to him, tomatoes around the entire perimeter, and grape vines in a small trellis at its center, apricots dropping from the tree that shaded the patio. Out of Virgil’s mom and dad’s bedroom, he would revel in the “grove,” even though the window was tinted dark, and it was always cool in there, and must have smelled like smoke. Out of the window, he could see the wide world in which he propelled himself, his tumbling runs, his cartwheels, round-offs:

*Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dheb*

*Dheb-Dheb-Dhehhhhhhhhhhhh*

After he shot the hummingbird, Virgil watched it hang upside down by its feet, clasped to the top branch, the blood dripping, then bouncing in the grass in front of his still eyes. His response? To toss it over the fence, after shoveling it up with a plank, but not before he stared into its blown-open neck, open so much so that he could not see the wound. Instead, what he saw was a pool of dark green and blue-pink, a seeming oil and water slick, feathers around the exit wound, the bird's loose, broken neck, bent at the color burst.

Virgil is a pig, for at least that day. Are there other Pigs as insatiable as Virgil?—Lost is Grey. In Lost's bedroom there is a rusted bin that was outside, and now it is indoors, and it holds three potted plants. The bin serves as a basin, a flat surface, rusted, and in the center of the surface is a small catch that Lost says was for the animal's blood, not for the living plants it holds now, but for animals it would hold, dead, then.

Virgil is, as Butch describes him, *sick*, for when he was riding Lost, he thought of slaughtering him like a pig. More directly, he thought Lost looked like a pig-cow, a hairy hybrid animal that Virgil rode up and down bouncing on his stiff cock, as Virgil's mostly stayed hard.

Virgil is *sick*, but he could never kill, because the guilt would ruin his life, though at night, most of his recent nights, the last moments spent drifting in YouTube, he looks at those kids who do. Girl Gangbangers who've turned it around for now, but at one time, before they "changed," would make others "meet their maker."

Anger, perhaps, spills from him, too, a feature he can't quite pinpoint, but something comes from within, a memory, perhaps, longer than his very life. When CharcoalBuilder taught a workshop, she took her students into a field of her imagination to a place beyond composition, a place where what happened was animated by failing to grasp it. *She wore polyp shoes*. This is the sentence that Virgil constructed that day.

Virgil watches with MommaSpine the unveiling of two murders on TV, one that results in capture, the other in elongation, and dissatisfaction, a feeling that Virgil and his mother shared. One, Dad&Killer, remains in

Mexico. He eats better than the rest of the prisoners, because his parents send him money. He says being in prison is like living in a small village, and it does look like a small village, at least the way it's captured on TV.

Virgil brings down a blanket and forces himself to stay, to watch the crime result in the other murderer's conviction, after which Virgil and MommaSpine are satisfied. His getaway bag, hidden in the desert, the cash inside, his Google searches for how to kill and how to get away with it, the Big Bertha sleeve for a left handed club left on the shelf are enough evidence to put that murderer away for life plus 25.

Though the defense attorneys pointed out there was no way that the prosecution or the jury could say the murder weapon was, indeed, a golf club, or that the killer was ever inside of that room, the jury sentenced him, while Dad&Killer still fries up bacon in his Acapulco prison. Somewhere there is a body that Virgil buries in his dream, and he wants to figure out some way to return to hide it, even deeper. DonDon, his brother and accomplice, is in that dream, and they conspire to go on living as though they are not killers. Virgil cannot.

Grass grows over the mound, but the fact of the killing remains. His most lazy self doubles—filled with such hate, it holds him between sleep and writing. Virgil thinks that maybe the reason some do not write is because they have nothing to say, and if you have nothing to say, he thinks, maybe the writer should do something else, like snatch out what's inside, to observe, awake, not as the point of production, but in the pull of finding.

## THE OPERATION

“Sorry,” is what he heard just before Dr.T pulled the mass out to show him. When Virgil saw it clutched at the end of Dr.T’s instrument, the polyp looked smaller than he imagined it would. Though just before, in his Fentanyl and Versed sedated state, he saw on the screen the moment it was snagged then cut out from his hot little hole, and now it popped out at him, an angry red eye. And though he would miss all the calls about the results, he called back, panicked, but to learn it was benign. Still, he reveals this red warning to his lovers, letting them know how he’s turned the corner, gotten to be closer to their age, a fellow traveler, sharing issues along the way.

In Manhattan, Dr.S, when he pulled a cyst out, cut from a tendon, a translucent schwannoma from deep in his armpit, Virgil was much more clear, and awake enough to feel the pain as it was removed. “We have a slam dunk,” is what Dr.S said as he was carving it out, yanking across a nerve’s surface. Virgil even had to ask Dr.G for more anaesthesia, from which he would be rendered unable to move much, his arm, useless, an entire day, but Malcolm would be there to take him back to his long apartment in Brooklyn to sleep off the drugs.

It was snowing then, and wet, but this was all he had to worry about. This and the watercolors of lynched black bodies he made, and of green trees, all on the red table that he packed in his affordable car Desiré sent by moving company to Sacramento.

But this is what's happening now: Virgil feels like the grilled crust on the shrimp is keeping him alive, and so too is the polenta, stuffed in his mouth at the same time, or the bread soaked in the crab that exploded around his plate. Eating Porker, how does Virgil return to the language of all the bodies, the taste lasting so briefly in his mouth?

Virgil's feeling is particular about them, particularly now that he is as smooth inside as he is outside, he thinks, when he is being fucked by Clean, Butch, Lost, Big LashMexDad (who uses a rubber), or The RailMan (though The RailMan is in all likelihood dead of pancreatic cancer). Still, he will not lacerate their dicks during the action from the steel staple Dr.T left inside to seal the very hole that was once a polyp.

Virgil thinks of this for one second, the tip of Clean's cock, pricked by the staple left in the wall of Virgil's insides after the "defect" was removed. Three to eight weeks to fall out, but, thank God, it fell out in one.

Virgil does not recall a time when he was perfect, because, at the time he was closest to perfection, his BMI did not reflect his muscle mass, or his full head of curly, shiny black hair, his unshaven teeth, or his dimples, settled into the jaw of his skin, as shiny as his hair, clean and free of the worry he must genuflect, now, but still, he tries his best to stay as free of as many blemes as possible.

It is out of this desire that he holds onto the tiny steel clip that braced together his inner wall against what was removed. Candy, he thinks, but the staple looks like a miniature spaceship, one he places in a corner of the pressed-wood cabinet sealed by a mirror.

In another outcome, Virgil may have had to have more of his intestines cut out, been left to sport a colostomy bag, sung a song to others that he's had sung to him by at least one daddy cornered in the Townhouse: "Nothing is going on down there."

This song never bothers Virgil; in fact, the phrasing is like the start of a manifesto, a right of entry into a life, a way to figure out who this old lover will be. Variety in intention. In the mirror, Virgil looks hideous, he thinks, and is tired. Like a meteor crashing into the earth's atmosphere, he

is less the rock upon entry, less its burning back into the atmosphere, less able to dissipate. Virgil's glasses are smudged, and worn, and he is old now. Virgil is fat. Virgil is ugly. Virgil is not. Virgil layered together through broad framing devices for what is known by projection is something apparent at the surface of Virgil and the Operation's healing wound.

What is called white-hot "nickel" is the metal not the coin. Dropped on the top of a chunk of planting Styrofoam, by tongs, the trick on YouTube is that the metal converts the heat through the material's core, and, as the exterior cracks, the foam chars into a black box contracting then cracking. The close-ups are then of the tongs, used to remove the nickel ball resting on top, but still doing damage. The ball is dropped in a bowl of water to hiss and steam. The last shot is a close-up of the insides of the Styrofoam as it is now, transformed, tongs scraping back the black crust, fissures that show glowing insides, warm and red-orange held—this, too, is the money shot.





## THE AFTER PARTY

Kyle from Korea wanted to order a Long Island Iced Tea. He wears braces, little bolts between his tiny top teeth, and he works in New Jersey, but lives in Queens. His face, that night, was like a small moon with shiny black hair around it. His smile, pink, and his English moved around his need to make others touch, lifting a stranger's hand onto the arm of another, wanting to force together those he'd never have. "People only hate or like" him, and he thinks all Americans are friendly, "They're always smiling."

Virgil soon realized that Kyle sees "American" as "White," but Kyle understood this fact to be complicated by knowing he would have to walk toward the train into the dark morning, alone, out of the bar, with his big grey backpack over his shoulder. Kyle's hand? Did it slip, along the outside of Virgil's ass, lightly, and how could Virgil recall this as he worried about what was caught in Butch's eye, an irritant Butch would wash out with Artificial Tears? But as Virgil worried, he knew that Kris was being clocked by Scales-for-Flesh.

Scales-for-Flesh's skin, Kris pointed out, was the "Only thing," as in, it was the only thing that separated him from the rest of the men Kris slept with, those defining scales he imagined scalloped down Scales-for-Flesh's back, and, like an asshole, Virgil sung into Kris's description, "Psoriasis." It's why Scales-for-Flesh wears so many layers of clothing, a full-on suit in the humid city, and even in the bar, buttressed up to his thick neck. It's as if his whole head was wrapped in a cocoon. Virgil feels Scales-for-Flesh's black Banana Republic button-down stomach, fat and

stretched, and not because Kyle pulls his arm into it, but to cock-block Scales-for-Flesh's attempt to get again with Kris, who wears a beard, white and round, yellowing at the base of his stashe, stained with smoke, above the rim of his mouth.

When Virgil first tongues Kris, Virgil tastes blood, and thinks it came from somewhere behind Kris's lips, maybe it was his gums. Just inside Virgil's mouth, Virgil wants to forget the taste of blood with his own tongue, but Kris's is short and flat—the surface, raised bumps. However, Virgil is less interested in the feel of the tongue than he is taken by the beard, a cloud hanging from a sky, or cut, almost rounded like a Hampton's hedge, out of which breath and spit drips into Virgil's mouth. Virgil loves to be kissed like this, and to be wholly stuck underneath Kris's body, or a body like his, to be slowly filled.

Under Clean, it feels like Virgil's entirely lost beneath Clean's body, which is smooth and unmarked. With Clean, Virgil's back straightens along the sheets—flat is the spine from the coccyx to the base of his neck, from which his head leans back, his bald spot digging into the sheet. Virgil takes in all of Clean. The sensation is close to an inversion of being poured into by Kris, as in moving under the wide rails of the bridge on a three-person jet ski, as he looks up holding Avon close to his body, or his hands gripping the small strap on the seat behind her, as he looks up at the wires beneath the bridge, the houseboats, his foot dragging in the brown river, cutting as would a rudder, resisting, guiding, just below the surface.

Kris fucks up the shoulder of the brown, raised fabric couch in the Junior Suite of the Park Lane Hotel, because his open ass smells faintly of shit. Or maybe Virgil and Kris fuck up the couch because Virgil blew Kris on it, though Virgil did try to ease Kris down from the couch's shoulder, so that his crack was not open, ruining the fabric. "Gamey," is how Virgil describes Kris's smell to Malcolm, over the rice-flour fried calamari they share at lunch, or maybe it is the smell of not shit, but Kris's ass pores releasing the rest of the American Spirit resin into the sofa, a smell that Virgil will later try to scrub clean with the hotel's face cloth.

This is the same scrubbing that he practices in Butch's truck in the basement of the garage, where the seat has been leaked on with salsa from Table & Vine. This is the same scrubbing that he will do in the bed of the Sheraton, the morning he leaves, while Clean gets ready to go into the office. Virgil's own soap-soaked puddle, like a soft horizon, spot edged with red, a warm stain from his stomach that promises some animal was once there, ambling into the forest, vanished.

Virgil carries a small ice bag from the Sheraton, filled with hot water and honey-colored shampoo to draw the acidic red from the seat. The hot bag looks like it should hold a gold fish. It looks like the bellies on the beach above the black sand, and above this air that stink of beer and weed. The dumb look on the face of the father that lets his little boy jump on the jet-ski with a total stranger, who, when not holding the child, rides up and down the river, clearly visible from the shore, speeding while sitting backwards, and, once, even balancing atop the handle bars.

The morning is pouring into his suite. And in the night, Virgil looks up and recalls the events that might be painted up on the rust-color walls of the sugar factory he visited with Butch just three days before. How might this be caught in a language other than scrubbing, standing on couch-seat cushions, hoping to draw out the stain, now only once there?

Virgil is hopeful that he will not be charged for Kris's stink, that it will dissipate enough for it to go un-smelled. But all morning, the suite still reeks of Kris's ass, something that Virgil has smelled only once, and will probably only smell once. Out of this reality, he eats Clean's pristine ass, and this is exactly why Kris eats Virgil's: "What's wrong with him?" is what Virgil asks, when he tells Kris that Butch never eats him out. Maybe this is what helps Virgil decide to kill that black, thick-headed figure in the dream that represents, according to Sshape, Virgil's most damaged self.

Clean is clean. Clean slides into Virgil, thick and slow, and it hurts, and he is tight for Clean, and he will taste his own ass on Clean's uncut dick. Virgil is shocked to taste his own light blood. Clean is above him like a soft plank, his armpit just above Virgil's face, their skin surfacing into

one another, like a yacht resting into the water, the bowed hull of a white steamer, and he thinks of the Love Boat cutting across the TV screen, or the shot above the island that contains the land and the boat.

Clean's skin is soft and old, and his hair is a golden retriever's but black-grey, loose curls soft in Virgil's hands. Virgil can feel the space at the base of the back of Clean's head, where there is now a sealed hole, where beneath, a tumor was plucked out. The skin now dimples, but is taut over where the skull was drilled, and below this is a metal plate that can't be felt by touch. Virgil feels that he can take all of Clean in, but wonders if he has lost the ability to cum, or gives up this ability, to give his walls up, to be filled, to catch everything Clean has.

Virgil came three times—not then, of course, because he had six Blue Point Oysters to attend to before he was straddled and face-fed by Clean, and before he submitted, and before he would see the morning overlooking the city, as daylight came in the form of the burnt, orange sun. The streak of it lit the steel looking glass along the building, and it radiated across one side of Central Park to the other: “There's nothing like having your ass eaten while looking at this,” is what Kris tells Virgil, and Virgil realizes this is something that he will have to remember, because the view will not be captured by camera, even though he could take the shot with his iPhone.

Virgil orders Kyle an Old Fashioned, not the Long Island Iced Tea that Kyle said he wants, and it is strong, and Kyle's hands are long and thick like a woman's would be thick if that woman were a man, and Virgil and Kris agree that Kyle is lovely, and Virgil points out that Kyle understands nuance, and is skilled in his English because he not only understands who will end up leaving with whom, but that he seems content to leave alone, and this is what Kyle communicates in his loose light plaid cargo shorts, bulky unmemorable tee, and shoes that will forever go unremarked.

Before the after party, Buzz thinks, at first, that Virgil is an accountant, and he thinks this because of the white, striped grey linen shirt that says “Made in New England” on the inside collar's tag. Virgil

paired this shirt with crisp Diesel jeans, and almost new caramel wingtips, topped off with a John Varvatos navy blue, two-button, barely striped blazer. Buzz wants to open Virgil's shirt, even more than it is already forced open by Virgil's thickening chest. Of course, Virgil is the most beautiful of them all, and he has barely eaten, so he feels skinny, as if a line, and he understands this at the time he is gathering in the attention he wants.

Virgil is why they were flanked together in that bar cul-de-sac of sofas and mirrors that could have been a bay window. To the left, Kyle smiles, and breaks into what Buzz and Virgil say to one another in the adjacent couch. What does Kyle hear? Does what he hears matter as much as how Buzz and Virgil connect? Buzz's short white fingers unfastening the classic pull of the buttons in the linen, Buzz's smooth head prone on Virgil's chest, the quick kisses between them. Buzz turns up his head and looks into Virgil's eyes: "You're someone I'd marry." "When I listen to your words..." In the exchange, for Virgil, there is nothing said that's truly urgent. Buzz is a prop. Buzz is a source. Buzz is an anchor.

Virgil as spectacle. Virgil as gift. Virgil as catalyst and exploit, as corner man for no one but himself. Virgil is alone, detaching from Buzz. Buzz snaps at Kyle who looks into the fish bowl, staring at the darting inside, whatever, floating to the bottom. Buzz says "Thank you," or "Have a good night," which means get lost, and Kyle understands this, exactly, but continues to press in. Because Kyle is magnetic, his lips around a stirring straw, his backpack wedged into the corner between sofas, his cell phone plugged into the nearby outlet, Kyle remains, no matter what, always close.

But Kris is fine. His body is hard. Virgil's relieved at the slightly pushed-out gut, strong, and the jeans are soft, and the belly is soft enough, and the beard is like a teeny mountain, his washed linen shirt, cornflower blue. Virgil knows that what he and Buzz share is a bubble that Kris will penetrate. Virgil helps. He looks directly at Kris, Kris's eyes, then his chest, between his legs spread open to wide on the barstool.

So when Kris hears Virgil suggest how Buzz should actually attend to his students around questions of finance and ethics, or maybe when Kris hears Virgil's interpretation of Buzz's own understanding of finance and ethics, this may be what prompts Kris to finally speak: "I'm just sitting here."

As the sun came up from below the city, emerging to illuminate it, on the other side of the window, Kris was eating Virgil out. His beard pushed into the tongue of Virgil's little asshole in which is tucked away what the general doctor could not feel, even though he had his index "pretty deep up in there," even turning it inside, as if on a clock's face, "from six to three." The park featured a brown lake close to the bottom of what Virgil could make out from the 36th floor, and, in him, he attempted to fashion a moat around everything in his sight.

In the bar lounge, three thin white boys pile around one another, ricochet dancing, their bodies in white denim, and in this denim they feel invincible. No one can stop them in what they will do through the night. The waitress in the bar is black, and she wears braids like a little girl's plaits woven into a ponytail, and baby girl beads at her tips. She hunches down, skirting along the floor with a steak knife jutting out of her hands, holding it sideways, moving like a crab along the floor, near the table's legs. She latches onto someone's thigh, and as she's moving, she tells us she, herself, has been stabbed. And she is not trying to stab anyone back.

Virgil's dream is a nightmare. It also features another black figure, a shadow, an un-human that writhes half alive on the floor. It can't be placed, but still, it's there. Does it have a head? It does, because Virgil is the one who will aim for it. What does this say about Virgil? What does it say that he finds a white granite rock, lifts it up and smashes the head of this black creature that, he thinks, has stabbed the black waitress? Black on black crime? Killing, Virgil realizes, is criminal. He tries to even burn what, or who, has been smashed, this, perhaps out of a feeling in which he can't identify.

Scales-for-Flesh spits out “Excuse me,” fast and rude to Virgil, as he hugs Kris goodbye, and says into Kris’s eyes: “Je Adore you.” “I Love You.” “I Love You.” Scales-for-Flesh does not know Virgil has the dream of a black figure that can’t be killed, fully, and certainly can’t be erased with a single white rock, but the boys dance in their whiteness, and the waitress, too, though black, too, wants it killed. Or is it Virgil’s want? So continuous, Virgil who cannot sleep through any single night without such a battle?

Clean says he does not want to see Virgil screwed over by anyone; or to clarify, that Clean should be the only one who should screw him, and this screwing makes Virgil feel secure, locked in, like the hum of the fan that fills the morning, sure in the ways his body gives over to where the Discovery River meets the Sacramento, the zone where the their currents mix, the push of the warming water around his leg dragging in the river.

Virgil and Avon jet upstream, one holds the other, and they cruise on the surface of the chopping, leaping up the wakes, almost flying, moving as if in going home to a sky, and there are hawks that position above them, still in the sky, ready to pounce on the white, small birds that shake the hawks off, drifting away from the threat of their advance.

Virgil wants to paint this scene as large as his mind might encompass, on a bigger wall than he can yet imagine, but when he does, “The Tribes Of Morocco,” spoken in his ear, is not the “secret” that he thought Rahan was passing on, but rather a small, crowded import store downtown that Virgil will never visit. This place is far from Butch’s body, which is shaped like a Hershey’s kiss in the early evening before they’ll both drift into TV, Butch a stretch of muscle attached by long, thinning limbs, and his shoulders cut, now, dropped above the L-shaped sofas in the sunroom.

Just outside of the sunroom is a full bag of leaves in an ACE bag that will end up on the curb, and the image of the bag set out there is doubled with the sound that it made as Butch filled it. From inside, Virgil saw Butch multiply reflected in the open window through the bushes in front

of the house. He can't tell, however, where Butch was in relation to the plants, nor could he make out the sound, whether it was Butch walking away and talking at the same time, or whether Butch was still and pushing leaves into the bag.

But in the morning, the fabric of Butch's shirt looks almost tweed, the infused pattern embedded lightly into the weave. Virgil calls this shirt "old," and Butch wonders why. It's because of its camel-khaki tint, its boxy cut, from circa sometime in the '90s, maybe Tony Lambert, its two darts opening up in the back, the shadows gathering in the dart's creases as Butch turns to leave for work.

And Virgil, later that day, will walk around the park, drafting on the asphalt paths, or running up the grassy hills, Virgil cutting into what he remembers, Virgil, jogging, bitten by a summer horsefly. The wound will mound, only to later sink back into his neck. Virgil watches the rock on their desk. The rock is the color of Butch's shirt, heavy, a dull axe, grooved, "a Native American tool," Butch calls it. Lying on its shadow, it is sloped to reveal its pocked surface on one edge, before the sun totally erases this, two white shiny marks, caught like a drawn eye.



## DREAM VISION IN BLUE AND BLACK

Virgil understands that when he runs through the humid morning mist of the summer trees, near the Connecticut River—on this trail—he realizes his vision. It has taken so many months, but finally, he has abandoned the force of the Being Yelled at at Yoga to become involved in his own quiet practices. And in this shift, Virgil learns to slow down. He doesn't even mind the two chatter-joggers that slip by him, symmetrical whites in symmetrical (grey) (black) sweats, caps, headphones, discussing the travails of some shared friend.

Virgil thinks of filming the field of crops as backdrop, the empty bike trail, but sadness? He does understand that the Connecticut River is too shallow to dive into, and there is a difference between the currents of one section of the river (one looks plastic, flat, the other like a moving wound, rust) and the next, that each of the textures of the river reflect his mood, so much so that this jettisons his perception from the river to the realization of how long a drop it is to the yellow moss on the steel he looks down into while crossing the bridge.

To have a unique relationship with his body in space is how he “opens up” on the run. It's how he theorizes in the space between what's close and what's distant. This manifests in the “stunned” feeling one confessed getting after reading Virgil's work. Butch says, “Everyone wants to talk to you.” Narcissist, Virgil knows it might be because of his new glasses, Oliver Peoples, the brown and grey custom, staggered frames, matte, brushed that match his skin. Clear in between the sections, they make

him look “warm and approachable.” Love told him this, and it makes him feel nice, though he is not really nice, like when he asks Butch, “Should I steal her wallet?” Or maybe he is nice, because he would not actually steal from the OldCurlyWhiteLadyGlancer who edges her eyes into his sketch-pad, as she also does so into the seat next to him on the Ferry. She tells her husband, CaneWalkingBaldSplotch, to “...be careful honey.” OldCurlyWhiteLadyGlancer, Virgil, and Butch watch him, barely balancing in the ticket line, sticking out his tongue in strain. Virgil sees OldCurlyWhiteLadyGlancer’s butterscotch wallet in her bag, whose design he does not recall, this and CaneWalkingBaldSplotch’s mahogany cane, and the white brace surrounding his calf like a vase.

Before breakfast at Jake’s, on the benches outside, a little blue boy sees Virgil sketching, and asks him if he can look in his book. Virgil is generous, and opens his pad, leafing through the pages for the boy and his Mom/Aunt/or Guardian to see. The little blue boy does listen to his advice, nods his head when Virgil tells him that it’s okay to “mess up.” The Mom/Aunt/or Guardian co-signs Virgil’s recommendation, and they both follow along as Virgil slowly turns his pages, describing how, in one, he scraped all of the paint off with his Costco card to reveal the original marks, a flat black figure in magenta, a white man’s face, caught by water-soluble pink oil pastel.

Virgil, as ever, is invested in the capture of depth’s solitary surface. Though he isn’t a lone wolf, he understands that “performing” as one who is alone garners his unique relationship to being isolated among others. For Virgil, this is a kind of first source, and from this source, he tries to explain to Music that Western Mass has never looked so beautiful to him before now. The trees are so wet and present, no monolithic vastness that can simply be read as “field.” But still, they appear as full, thick and singular, like one green corridor he jogs through.

But in looking up, Virgil realizes any sense of actual height is too tall to track.

When he lived closer to these trees, he was only familiar with existing above them, driving *Desiré* on US 90—like *Manitoba*, but much more affordable, and “*Knowledge*” Blue not “*Passion*” Red—through the mountains looking up at them, so that the trees were only texture.

For now, they are still only color, but that morning, staring into them, he felt that he was attached to the trees as corollary object, his body existing in relation to their wetness, the sound of their dripping around him. This is not the sensation *Virgil’s* and *Butch’s* neighbors reveal in New York when one complains after a wind storm: “I hate coming home to a forest.” “Take a drive through *Belle Terre*,” is how *Butch* wants to answer, revealing the class understanding he would like to give to his neighbors. But the *White Fats* next door are loud and stupid enough in the heat of summer to cut, and clear everyone of any shade—they fear the crack of the trees, some crashing “on our houses,” or “on our cars.”

What they want to destroy is precisely what gives *Virgil* his energy and privacy at dusk, his “popping” on the synthetic “wooden” deck to *Pandora* (*Egyptian Lover*), not afraid of a single splinter in his foot. No need for cover save the trees, but in the dream, there is a woman who is covered, half-formed under a white tarp. Is she alive? Is she mourning?

*Virgil* finds himself in a panic. He doesn’t know how to let in this half-formed being under the blanket, and he is still between sleep and the place in which the dream becomes an imagined black gay club in New Orleans. The patrons inside are wearing steel-woven masks, the tips shaped into silver horns for eyes. The club is dark and, like the trail, also wet and dripping, and the room, too, is a corridor. Clearly, this is the inverse of the world of his morning run—so, too, the trees, and the world in retrospect is suddenly dark.

As in, *Virgil*, that morning, runs by *Black Lives Matter* lawn signs in the whitest, greenest place where he actually once lived, and since this is his first time actually running where he recalls only driving, he finds it difficult to find his way. Though he is reminded of the possibility of the

beauty in life when he receives a text video that shows “Little T” running, counting her own steps: 1—2, 3, 4, 5, 6/7/8/9—10, the last little foot step hitting the launch pad to release the neon-foam rocket in the air, then its slow-mo gliding horizontally into the shady afternoon.

On the trail, another brown runner floats by, and though Virgil is clearly a fatter version of him (He thinks that, though he is only slightly “flabby.”) Virgil keeps on his shirt. Virgil is happy that his body does not shake much as he runs. Who would ever know that Virgil’s dreams were so wet and black? Too, he is drinking something in the dream, but he can’t recall what, only writing it down, quickly, but not knowing how to get back to the dream directly enough to know what it was that he took in. Moving from table to table in the large club, Virgil recalls, instead, an endless set of them, and around these tables he moves and waits in line after line of people that he knows, poets mostly, and most of them Black, M, K, S, etc.

Of course, in his freedom, he tracks a related sequence: a bobcat on a trail that enters the bush, a house cat peeking behind a glass door, a bird washing itself in a hand. Once, in the city, so long ago, Virgil met a member of the press, a paparazzi lurker who did not fuck him, but laid his long cock along his back, above his crack, and shot cum on him. He was with the paparazzi lurker twice, and both times caught crabs, but this was not as important as his advice to the very young Virgil. Member of the press, this paparazzi lurker said, “If you want to write, write.”

What is the difference between the outside and the inside of the dream can only be explained in the pitch of darkness that fills the room in the vision, of blue and black. Menacing, this threat manifests as black, nylon luggage, and in it, cords, flash drives, and speakers that shake as he looks at them. These things are not permanent, yet they are there. What in this material is his? What surfaces does he own? Virgil remembers, he was not reading on the stage but he was on it, an intervening MC, who said something like, “How can you play a set during the middle of someone else’s performance?”

It's true, a band began to play in the middle of the reading, and there Virgil was, helping out KamQuietDJ, the two of them greeting one another on the stage, heads touching together, black hair above the middle of the floor, Virgil trying, in a way, so desperately, to get KamQuietDJ to see what he needed to do, but this was not possible, because the speaker, even held up against the mic, did not amplify KamQuietDJ's voice above the band's antics.

In the end, how did KamQuietDJ (the only other black reader) have a chance at sharing his work, to read to the (as usual) largely all white audience? Virgil thinking of the video of K and P—how they revealed how funny the two blacks getting adoration from the white, a capella campus group, the way they said “Niggha” right in each other's faces—is what, in the dream, as in life, brings him together in solidarity with KamQuietDJ.

In retrospect of these divergent yet intersecting “stories,” Virgil writes the opening lines to the fellowship application that he imagines:

*Dear Committee Members, I of traumatized mind and body, seek the time and space to sleep, to not travel to any exotic locale, to travel inwards, a journey through the trauma of my own existence to find others. In fact, what I am hoping to do is to not work on a recognizable project, but to move the material inside to create bridges from one non-existent plane to barely another. Hence for the sake of impossibility, I need to think of a direction (albeit routed through vectors of the unconscious) to return to the site of abjection—just to see, or “seek” is all. Thus, I submit the space of my body and mind as a site of inquiry, and, at the same time, the tacit understanding is that this might all lead down the path that leads to my own heart, however injured, however inured.*

An unknown white woman from a circle of those crying enters the dream, and she like all of the rest are waiting to “use” the bathroom, which turns out to be an impossibly small stall. There is a plunger visible in the

“bathroom” that is actually a music box, or a cabinet, and as Virgil opens it, he realizes that he can’t go in, and why? It’s too small, but beyond this: a woman in a suede boot, up to her knees, slides her foot in the toilet, kicking in the waste which wants back out, and Virgil is disgusted by seeing her brown, suede, knee-length tasseled boot, no sole, working as a makeshift plunger.

Virgil, suddenly caught up with his entourage, ditches the line. A few people who surround him congratulate him for saying what he said on the stage, that is, “How dare they play the music when the only other black (besides him) in the room is reading his work?” Is this the subject of his dream? Is this the penultimate plot, its actions or activities emitting from this center?

Virgil isn’t sure, but somehow, he knows that if he is to understand the relationship of dreaming to content, he must, like he told that little blue boy, not to worry “if you mess up.” But what he does not intuit is that the worry of messing up will return, the unfinished business of intention will pull him into the void, break him apart, so he will exist as a wandering subject. The little boy demonstrates this himself, at Jake’s, as he walks back and bangs on the closed bathroom-stall door behind which is Butch.

When he decided to scrape away what was once there on his sketchpad, Virgil rid himself of the expected surface to reveal what came up by accident. Only the single cricket realizes it, singing. This is the sound before the symphony of them begin to play, and the song comes as the ugly, silent cave crickets have no idea what is coming. Before Virgil attacks one, he plots from the stairs that lead to the basement. Smashed by the Swiffer’s naked, rubber bottom, flat, the small broken fragment of the insect corpse, no blood, only a small space where half of its body was, and Virgil, above this absence, now will build.

## SILENT INCANTATIONS

Virgil wasn't always so fair; in fact, he was a towering brown body, lording over that LittleDandelion, who still haunts him, or signifies his coming into consciousness around how he was held back by Little Dandelion's power, which happens to so many, *Like us*, Virgil thinks, all the time. *What we need*, he also realizes, wandering in his own Venice, is a bag (it doesn't matter the cost, *You know some are 3,500.00 Euros, some are 590.00 Euros* whatever), that flesh in the drop of the field of soft, perforated leather will, in fact, fill his need, his conspiratorial kin with something that was, after all, once out of his pocket's reach, but never his heart's, a longing, a drift to return—but to where will he return? If it were so easy, and it sometimes is so easy, Virgil would settle into the fight of his life, or the fight of MommaSpine's who is held together by pins, and steel, valves shut, stunted—she says “It was too much candy.”

They say we can put her back together, her spine, the root gone to compounding in on itself, fused vertebrae, killing the nerves. There was a prayer. There was an attendant. Virgil does not have a God of his own, like she does. But he has never so long walked on back-to-back double shifts, on any such hard hospital floors, caring after the left behind, and not caring after that back of hers that is no longer able to turn them over in their beds, nor to lift them further away from their dying.

Once S-olds, Virgil's very important poetry teacher, noticed something, that something was missing, that something in the poem wasn't right. It wasn't ekphrastic (nor did Virgil think of that encounter between objects as a possibility in language and being, as in: what one

thing could be made without the other) but, still, to her wise eyes, he left so much of the poem out. Why? It was, he felt, somewhere else, something out of his reach in a room, a gym, a community center, where he saw another black body dancing.

Virgil could see into the arc and point of the dance, wanted to make the connection between his poem and that body, but felt lost in the cross-wiring, an incomplete link, which, to S-olds, was so obvious. The solution—remove the poem. But what Virgil knows now is that this connection is impossible to solve, two planes whirling apart into the ever distance of the not knowing, there, only traces of a past lined into the present.

For instance, Virgil does not know the name of where he first went to school, but he can see a day there unfold before him in a home movie shot by MommaSpine. He does not need to make this life, nor does he need another entry to make the whole, whole. It is a special day: “International Day,” Virgil recalls, at least that is what it was called on that base in Millington, or was it Guam, or does it matter? Further, does he know that the Super 8 clip cannot be optimized, that even after four hours, there will still, in the end, be the same error message, and no upload?

It is unalterable, but somehow, what Virgil wants is exactly what Virgil gets. He slows that blue boy version of himself and asks in realization:

“Why would I ask you to wipe under the table, on this wet, wooded deck?”

It has, indeed, rained, and Virgil, after all, has gone off on the waitress at Aldo’s—and when she says to The Musician “I like your necklace,” which is a big black/brown seed on a gorgeous African-American woman, Virgil, the violent, has a Kara Walker moment. The seed should go where it goes, plunged into the seeker. *Ponderous is so far from pondering*, Virgil



realizes within a few clicks, but this does not change his anger, or his tone, nor his need to plant the seed somewhere else, somewhere far from the neck, somewhere away from *The Musician*, somewhere into the drift of pulling the pieces of his protracted anger into this recounted point:

“I went off on her, and she still smiling.”

There isn't a song as he tries to hold onto what he remembers. The silent movies would get stuck, and suddenly a burn, the black boiling opening up into the shot, and then Virgil's dad and Naldo would stop and splice, find the wound in the film, and close it. And then they would all watch, and eat popcorn popped in a pot.

MommaSpine sewed. Patterns to make her sons, not fit in, but to stand out, covering them in costumes of origins, of other countries, lederhosen, or silver rivets in black slacks, hi-boots for a little brown boy as a blue matador in whose head? Anything to make, to represent the country in which they were imagined to live, anything to figure out a way to be, to find a way, not back, but into where they landed.

And suddenly, Virgil is compelled to cut, to paste, to build. Little white boy on a Sit 'n Spin. Little white boy in a brown field. Little white boy in a fact. Little white boy who has it all, who, surely, given his tiny body, still contains the force to say: *You know, you don't want this. I don't want you to have anything I want to have, and to steal it is for you to be the toy itself, which is after all mine, and because it is not yours, we in fact have you, Virgil, surrounded, if even by me.*

Virgil, the man, could not give a care. Virgil, the man, is old. He oscillates. He cuts to salve the patch. Understands opposition, not as tension, but as drift, though Virgil, the boy, is lost when trying to recall his mother, not dead, but so alive, a kind of constant return to that which evades him, to that which is like a bolo that kills, or like a skip on a street, or like a bolero, or like a summer hat, or like that which MommaSpine has sewn together in the form of a weapon to save his imagination.

Virgil's dad understands baggage to be like things one should carry, like the poet DKBlaster explained how like in a video game, one picks up weapons along the way, as if by chance, as if by accrual; and if one does not, and if one, simultaneously, cannot let things go along the way, one dies. But hit, reset. *What will Virgil carry along the way?* he realizes, shifts. He will not take a side, nor have a take. *Leave Virgil Alone. Leave Virgil Alone.*

The little white boy is not the little blue boy, who is the little brown boy who got that bully back. Who waited with a set of heavy keys on a chain with other keys, to move into smack his assailant's freshly haircut head in the nape of his neck:

*SALLY BOW!!!*

The little blue boy had been, after all, sewn together by silence. Two fingers spit on would clip a neck back, but keys? A revenge so quick, not caught—Virgil knew that when he leapt, and struck that older white boy, it would crack into his enemy's soul to know he could never retaliate. The fact was that the little brown boy he would want to fuck up for fucking him up, bad, had slipped into the safety of his class.

In the memory of that furious sentry pacing, wanting to kill Virgil, Virgil thinks some about LittleDandelion, his little wish, blown into his face, and in the sun, the sun that Virgil makes his arms move around above his head, forming into the shape of another eye, elbows out, and then he arches his back, torso up into the sky, back against his chair, like he must have done, so long ago, then in relief, relief in getting his most hated back, then walking home, and leaving the next day, forever.



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