

FLASH-A-GANZA 2022



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In August 2022, I sent out a call via my social media accounts and the AngelHousePress mailing list to invite writers to contribute to a collaborative flash fiction novel, which I referred to as a “flovel.”

Gary Barwin, Janis Butler Holm, Ariel Dawn, AJ Dolman, Angela Hibbs, Ellie Klaus, , Jérôme Mélançon, Mado Reznik, JP Seabright, Robin Sinclair, Linda Trott Dickman, Margaret Viboolsittiseri, Katy Wimhurst, Terri Witek bravely joined me in exploring this newly created form. They used a variety of techniques including an AI text generator and Oulipian responses to each other’s flashes.

The work that follows is the unfettered beginnings of a novel. I found the experience delightful and satisfying. No attempt was made to standardize the text, and all languages, including gibberish, were permitted. Bascially I was trying to create an environment where creativity was allowed to flourish freely.

There were prizes for first mention of colour, sound, emotion, animals, the weather, food, alcohol, gloves, music, the word “nice,” first use of dialogue, first words in another language. Out of 22 prizes, only 7 remain unclaimed.

We have decided to continue the flovel next year. I hope you will join us.

The 7 remaining prizes are there to be won, along with 16 new prizes to be added, for a total of 23.

I have always enjoyed collaboration because it stimulates creativty and creates a shared voice that allows creators to let loose from their regular patterns. In these times of near apocalypse, loneliness and anxiety, let this be a joyous interlude, a reminder that whimsy, exploration and intimacy can come from connection, from uniting together for a common goal, in this case: whimsy!

If you wish to join in the fun next year, please e-mail me at amanda at angelhousepress dot com and i will put you on the list to be notified when we start in August.

AngelHousePress is a defiant intersectional feminist press I began in 2007. For more information, please visit AngelHousePress.com.

Let the reading begin...

ONCE UPON A BLANK SLATE

Rasa wears a colour. She stands out in a sea of monochrome pedestrians carrying items to facilitate their journey as they make their way to their destinations. Why is Rasa standing as if frozen on the pavement? Is she alone? What is the expression on her face?

Before she left her dwelling, Rasa spent an undetermined amount of time sitting at a table, hands wrapped around a vessel containing a beverage.

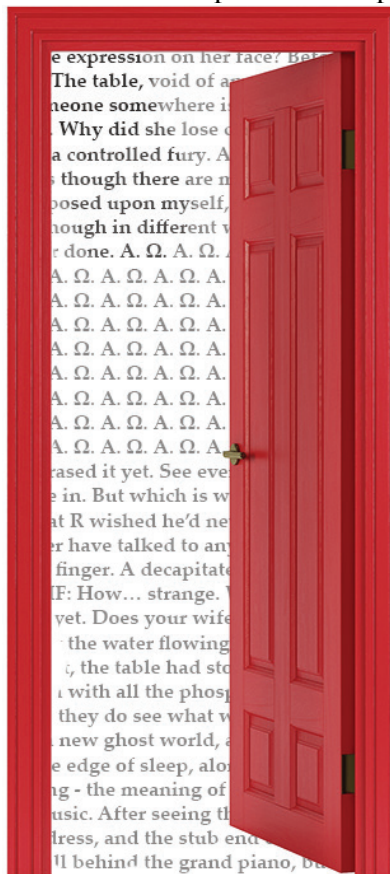
The table, void of any objects except for the drinking vessel, is now in pieces and spilling the dregs of her beverage onto the flat surface below. The window is open. Someone somewhere is playing an instrument.

Standing, immobilized, Rasa frowns, then sighs. The burst of anger that broke the table behind her, she wonders at her rage. Why did she lose control? Though she recovered sufficiently to dress for work (in her favorite red dress, which usually lifts her mood), she is nonetheless experiencing a controlled fury. As others mill around her, she marvels at the level of passion recent events have evoked.

From an interview with M::

Both a table (dinette, with silver legs) and a dress (ripped) have now been forensically assessed by Detective R who---they later admit --- had beforehand enjoyed a glass of house red .

Beforehand as it may admit one then docent exposure. Ticket; billet; file; collect accents in ear baskets. In here elastics bind bouquets again with the silenced. What these Rasas do here is tableau. Table and water. Elbow below wrist. Unforgettable time. Then hand; then expand. Description bound for a next door naysayer's borough.



1

She says this as though it is not what she expected me to say: as though there are many other things I could have said or wanted to say to her, but that I will not say or do because of my own limitations, because of the limits I have imposed upon myself, and the limits I have imposed upon my children, which means she has imposed them too, I think, and we are all bound together in the same way, although in different ways. Our family life has limits, which I do not want to impose upon myself or my children; beyond these limits there are things that cannot be said or done.

2

I cannot say that I wish for my children to experience only happy things, for although I want them to be happier than we have been, I do not want them to be shallow and callow and unawakened. I cannot say that I am okay with them suffering and being unhappy, because I am not okay. In truth, I tell her (although I never say it aloud), the only thing I want to do is stand by you, be near you, love you, and make sure that nothing bad ever happens to you. And also I tell her, it's not enough for me to believe that I have affected this world, I want my children to believe that they have affected the world, too.

3.

Because she has given me life, or because she is leaving me, or because we both know that I could not really say anything else to her. Because I have given her life, or because I am leaving her, or because we both know that she could not really say anything else to me. I am silent for the same reason that there is no such thing as good luck: we are not the ones who put this world together.

Late and soon, comment only on the questionable. Let the eyes state the unmentionable. Living in the present is racked with livers. Count them rib by rib. Choose one by intercostal meandering. Betting and sending beguile thee with a trial. Don't be natured again.

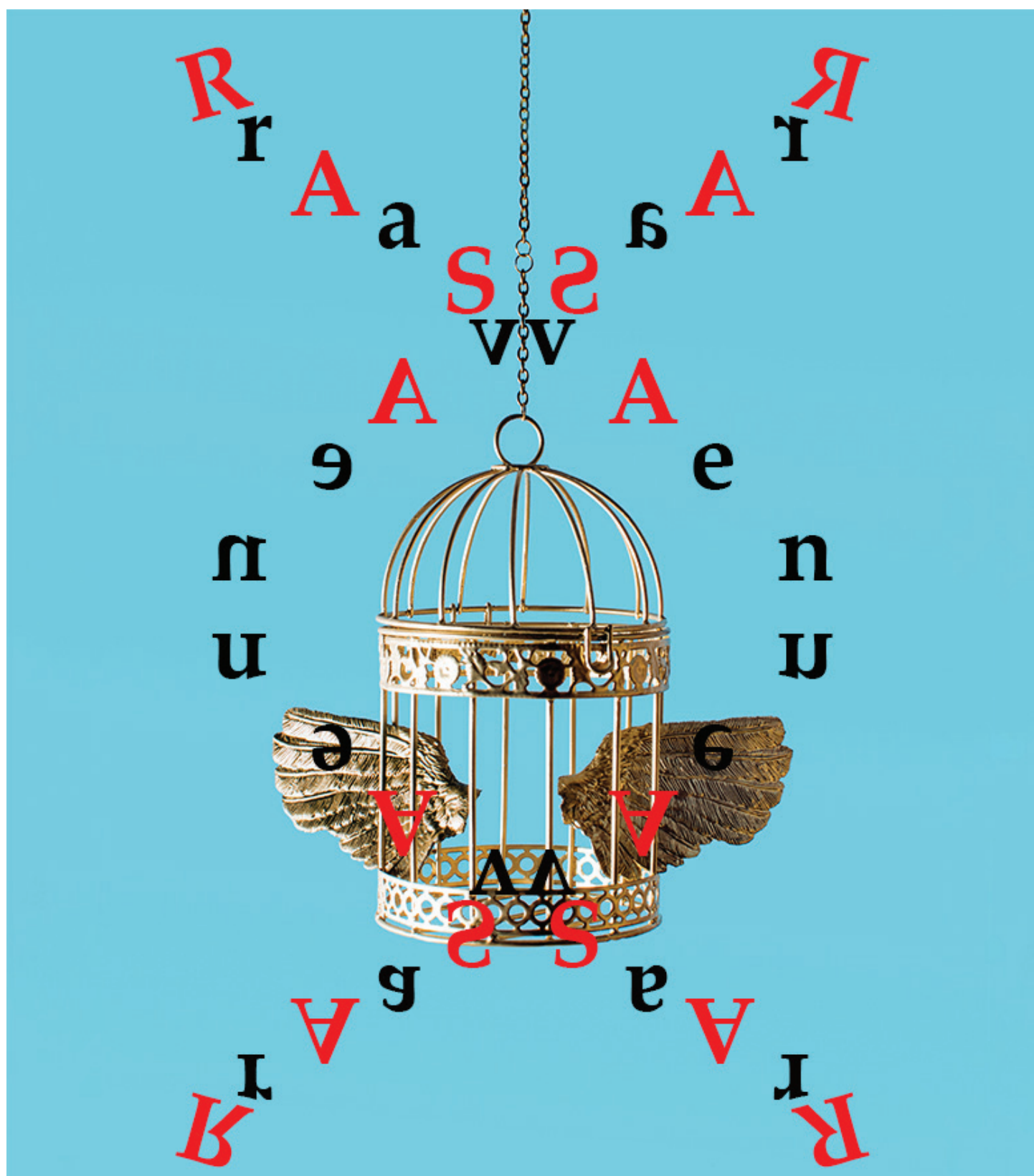
He notices that Rasa's drink, where it spilled on the surface, has left a wet stain, in the shape of Cuba. In a certain mood, Rasa likes to read symbolism into these things, but he has no time for that. The only fortune-telling he will countenance is that his love will not survive - cannot survive - too much broken furniture.

A ring on the doorbell announces a courier with a large box.

'What's this?' he asks. 'A new table?'

The courier checks his papers. 'Says here it's a birdcage, mate.'

He sighs. By way of apology, Rasa has a habit of buying odd things after her outbursts: previously, an orange tree, a red papier-mâché macaw, a white glass mushroom, and a bumper box of Turkish Delight.



The snake slithered out of its aquarium. Pauline was by herself in her pet shop and she did not like snakes. A friend had bred a few and wanted her to sell them on consignment. Her kind heart had now betrayed her. What to do? Adrenaline to the rescue. She managed to grab a ten gallon tank that was overhead on a shelf and flung it on top of the snake. Poor snake. Now he was deprived of oxygen. What to do? Outside a group of men were working and wearing hip waders and rubber gloves . She implored one of them to lift the aquarium off the snake and place the snake inside the tank. The snake was not happy. He poohed everywhere. Who knew snakes could pooh? He was traumatized.

Rasa deposits the object she is holding into a waste receptacle. Her face displays an emotion. She pauses and looks back toward the receptacle before merging with the monochrome horde when the traffic light changes to green. Will we ever see her again? What has she left behind in the trash can? At her home? Who is affected by her actions?

He stands by the window, staring out, thinking about Rasa. She is responsible for how lovely the tubs of cosmos daisies and echinacea look at this time of year. He wonders where she is and if she will come home again today. Once, after one of her outbursts, she vanished for a whole week and returned smelling strongly of woodsmoke, but to this day he doesn't know where she went. He wonders, again, if anyone would cope better with what she has been through the last year or two.

He notices Mrs Framouth, from next door, sitting outside, with what looks like a yellow lampshade on her head. The woman sports the most remarkable headwear, hats that might be flower arrangements or clouds or Christmas decorations. Occasionally, she even wears her white cat, Blanc, on her head. Mind you, he prefers eccentric Mrs Framouth to Pauline, her daughter, who he is aware has recently started dealing in snakes. He shivers at that.

As he looked around he noticed that there was fruit on the vines. He felt around in his blue sack, his hand resting on a linen cloth. He pulled it out to find a remnant of crust- hard bread. His mouth watered. He refrained. Slowly, an idea came to him.

selveshalfmoonbendintherivercuprimclitlip
Never put a raven in a cage.



Feeling the grass on his hands, he lets the leaves direct his thoughts. Wind bearing light. Faces flickering. That hunger, always. /

Rasa the ribs of the building, the cast of the statue / Pauline a pencil sketch on a wall for a painting to be deposited on a separate canvas / Mrs Framouth a figure among others, a disappearance through emphasis / himself that coordination of ocular nerve and finger joints. /

A shared incapacity to connect, to move beyond bodies. Tea is cooling, becomes bronze, limestone, lead, charcoal, pigment. Nothing for him. Yet. The power of that bitterness. /

His pocket vibrates; he leans, extracts, thumb to the side, thumb to the top, a gliding: the revolution is not happening today, the bodies are moving back home, they leave fires and a vague atmosphere of desire behind them. /

Only a few streets away. Them too. If only they had had tea. Whose tea might he share? Whose infusion might let them all move?

The raven battered the cage. Stubbornly and deliberately, it shook the cage until the cage door violently opened . Freedom at last, minus a few fluttering feathers

A knife I will never forget. Memory of a scalpel. That actual knife I don't know where it might be. I don't really care. But with that knife I used to peel an orange, not the colour, although I wished I would have peeled the orange, the orange colour.

I grabbed that knife many times and cut dozens of oranges in quarts. It's not a difficult task. Anybody can do it. Any knife will do.

And then I put the quarters on a plate and walked past the corridor. She was in bed, almost asleep, or so I thought. She had asked me to do that. But I was never sure if I had to talk to her or not.

She always smelled the orange coming and ate them in silence. Not a word, occasionally a sigh.

Grab a knife and cut an orange (I did so many times, it's easy). She will be fine soon, I thought at that time. And time passed.

En mi memoria, las naranjas, el cuchillo, el color, el perfume se mezclan.

.

He,
well, he
would wonder he
would pacify himself he
would stare into silence he
would pacify her in thought he
would hide from knives, wouldn't he?
She found comfort in this certainty that he
maintained so much alive through sight: he
would assume her disappearance while he
could no longer see her
she would live her
day simply, her
hours hers.
Her.

Rasa rises early.

It is an important day; she must prepare herself for the Feasting.

The Feasting is an annual event, a sacred rite, and to be chosen, a great honour. Its timing depends on when the subject is ready. This year, Rasa is ready. Her menopause has started, the change is irrefutable. She has come of age and will be the centrepiece of tonight's Feasting.

No one remembers how long they had been eating their Elders, but it has sustained them through the centuries. The Feasting of Elders enables the embodiment of their strength and wisdom. A means of passing on their experience and power to the younger generation to ensure the longevity of their people.

The honour falls to the first woman to reach her menopause, when she is young enough for Feasting, but no longer in the bloom of youth, no longer able to deliver or sustain life. She is normally accompanied by her husband, his sweet meats a delicacy, an honour for him to be anointed and venerated too.

But Rasa no longer has a husband, he died in battle years ago. She brought up their children alone, refusing further suitors. But the change changed Rasa. She longs to see her children's children. She dreams of watching the sun rise each day before the time comes for it to set on her own life. In her own time.

"Fuck honour," says Rasa, as she slips away from the compound in the pre-dawn darkness.

"Long live long life."

If a knife could think, where would it hide its temper? The raven does what a raven does. It flocks toward the brightest thing. Palette knife. Dry aquarium. Rage. Colourful dress. Infatuation. Colourful hat. A mirror. Something glowing in the middle distance. Another mirror. No, this one's a window.



A table leg. A place to eat. A knife. Here, first, then. The rest can wait a little more. It's a long life, and there are plenty.

Crust of bread. Dripping water. A ring of dampness drawn onto the tabletop. The breeze hasn't erased it yet. See everything an open window lets in? Something has escaped this place, too. Typical, typical. It's the way these stories usually go. One thing out; another one in. But which is which? That's usually the interesting bit.

He,
well, he
would woodpecker he
would pacify himself he
would stash into silo he
would pacify her in threshold he
would hieroglyph from knives, wouldn't he?
She found commands in this chaffinch that he
maintained so much alive through signatory: he
would assume her discord while he
could no longer see her
she would live her
deaconess simply, her
housecoats, hers.
Her .

Hieroglyphics

The eye of Ra. Rasa's eyes drift shut. The lids close.

Rasa is experiencing a nightmare. It is happening more and more often. Rasa cups a hand over a mound of flesh. Wonders if the wires latching will continue to slurp the sap. "This is my essence," Rasa calls out. The words dangle midair. Float into the simulation. These emotions. These feelings. Pointless. Pointing inward. The point.



A storm forms and a rainbow appears inside a pileus; therefore, chanting feels fruitless until this iridescent glow Abates.

Cogito. Ergo. Sum. Vigor. Power. Pileus. Pileus. Pileus. Pileus. Pileus. Pileus. The words repeat. A glitch. A capped cloud forms. A storm. A mushroom. Cogito. Ergo. Sum. Vigor. Power. Pileus. Veil. Volva. Mycelial. Hymenium. Cogito. Ergo. Sum. One. Some. One Sum. Of One. A Sum. A someone. A zero sum. A No Sum One. A No One.

Cogito. Sum. Ergo. A mushroom. A mushroom cloud. A nuclear cloud. A nuclear bomb. A bomb. The fallout. A shelter from the storm. “I think, therefore I am...a rainbow shelter.”

Rasa opens an eye.

Rasa is the eye of the storm.

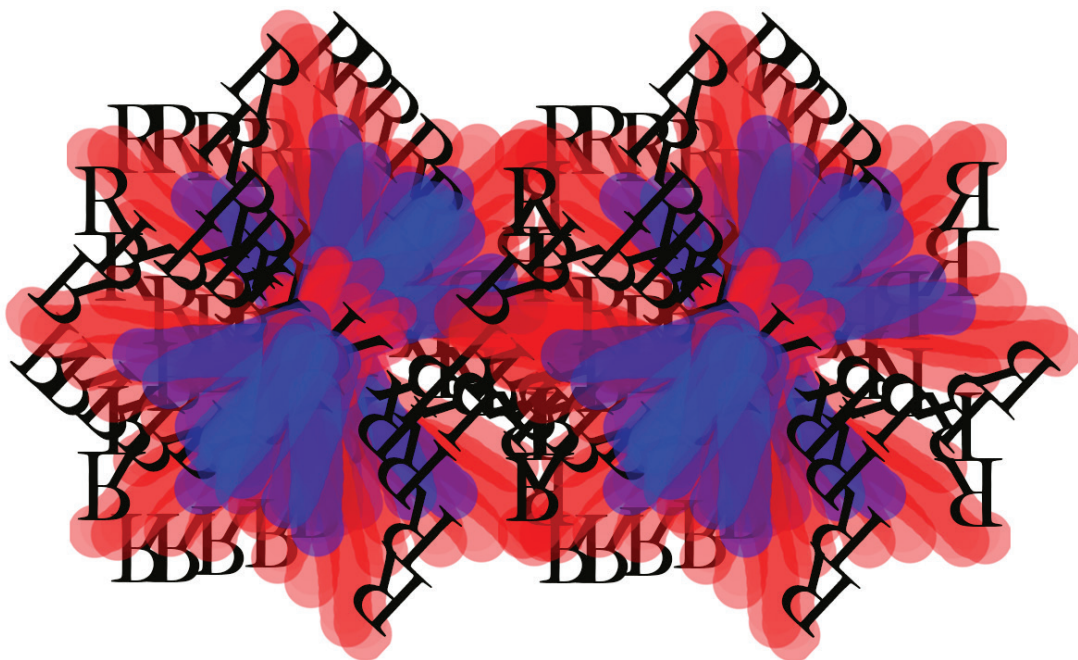


In a cage of birds, snakes, oranges and glass mushrooms, she wonders how to escape the loss, the death that weighs more than her life. She made it worse, haunting, spilling over, a stain, a shadow, irrationally afraid of losing a new red dress, new silver dinette, flowers, cups, glasses, red wine, bread; desperately wanting it all, if only so she may return and hang her gilt cage of midnight silk with the door ajar: he will look up and say, you are alive; yes, I know you are alive, just invisible; so it works. And they will feast on the glamour of air and the fay music behind the high stone wall of the herb garden. Her bright spinning garden, cool and fateful mother of the potion: belladonna, hemlock, morning glory.

There are storms, and there are wills for destruction. Their source is never one; the analogy eschews relevance. Disintegration a matter of her and him, of the figures interspaced between them, their hats, their croaks, their caws, the fucking table leg that sticks out for toes and shins, their hisses; of the mutual carryings of one another's passions. What does it change that we can gain the knowledge of how clouds form, how storm systems displace people, drown them, bury them? The clouds will form, the paths will diverge, hearts will still. Yet we seek and dodge, what difference would it make not to flee? Rasa assembling, Rasa gathering. Shiny objects and sharp feelings. Droplets and droplets, an infinite well. Him digging, him pointing, him entirely referential. Threading into an endless succession of needles, knitlessly. A life well anchored in the past. Their search for one another an occasion for thunder, for fissures, for fission. A rapprochement into splitting. No one being a superhero, let alone a hero, the explosions are likely to be simply analogous. Bunkerless, she had to leave neighbours and tables. But snakes speak to one another, snakes remember their paths. This she knows. She aspires to their movement, their hiddenness, their circling of squares. Had he the patience, he would aspire to their nesting, their delight for each other's warmth upon the rock.

Almost dusk. A crow flaunts its blackness across the garden. A dog barks in the distance. Mrs Framouth shivers; the cat on her head leaps off, skittering into the shadows. Can she see something over by the oak? Something ghostly, only-just-there. Surely the dusk is playing tricks on her mind. She sees him, though, her neighbour, at the window, haloed by electric light. He is always there these days, always staring out, presumably waiting for Rasa, his alpha, his omega. Mrs Framouth imagines his fingers smudged with red and blue paint, the stink of turpentine on his apron. Yesterday, she baked a carrot cake and took it next door. 'You look thin, you must eat,' she said, handing him the plate.

'Thank you,' he murmured, but his eyes seemed directed in on themselves.



a forensic ornithologist answers Detective R:

(so much pupil!) tetrachromatically, yes, they do see what we do (red, green blue)
+ UV.

The rubbish collector trundles along the streets of a town, stopping along the way to remove the rubbish. As he comes to one bin, he takes a look inside and stops, gasping in horror. He can't believe his eyes. He abandons the vehicle and runs as fast and as far as he can.

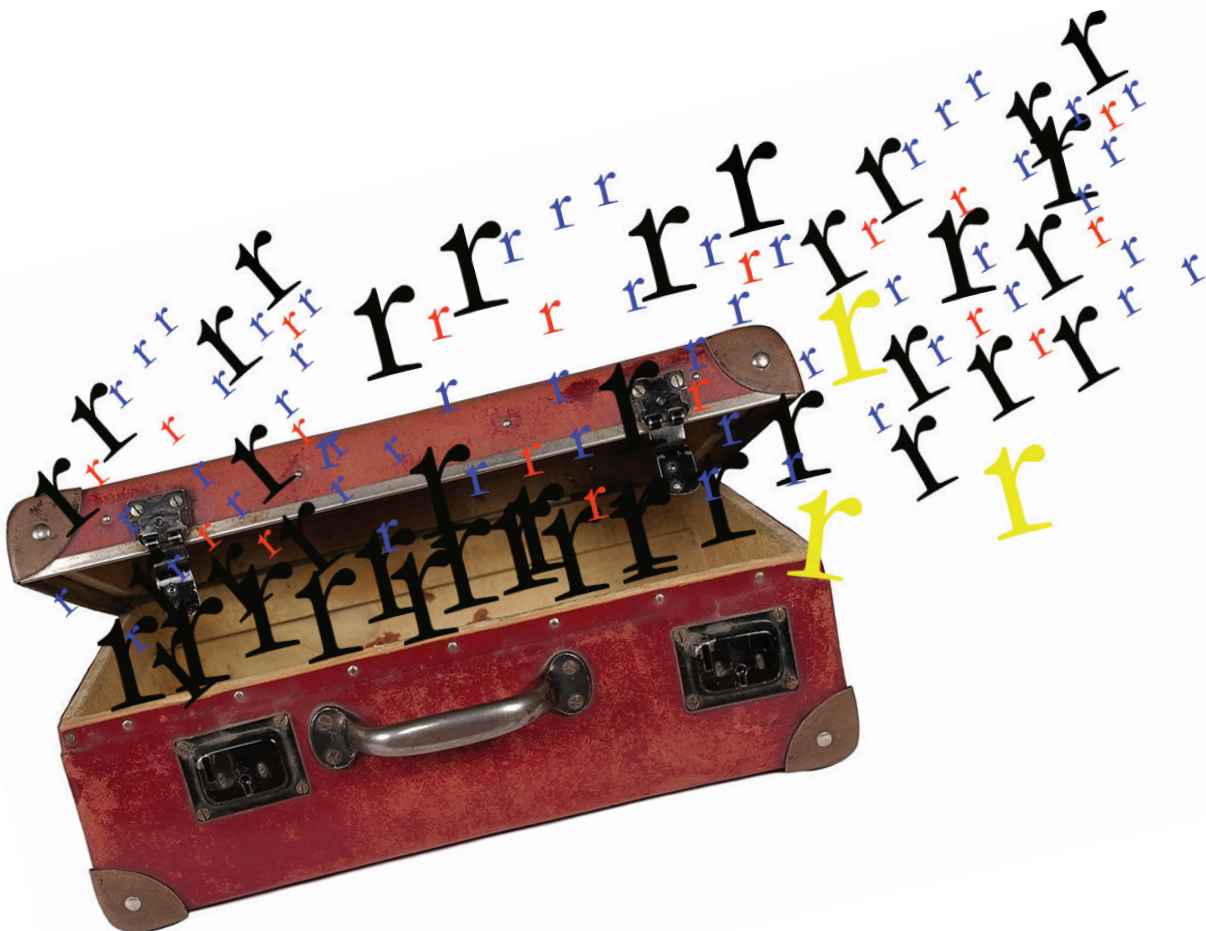
From a folder, he pulls a photograph of a table.

From his pocket, he pulls a scrap of cloth.

He wraps it around his finger and imagines a woman in her last moment, laughing at the cowardice of light as it retreats from the scythe.

He runs that same finger along the corner of the photograph and imagines a ghost, speaking her first ghost words in a new ghost world, a world very much like the one she came from. The ghost offers poppies to the wraith that just arrogated her remaining years.

He drifts into the haze at the edge of sleep, alone on his wooden kitchen chair, and dreams of a suitcase of birds. He dreams of magic, and of fire, and of meat, and for a moment he dreams of meaning - the meaning of all of this. But he can not hold it as he wakes to unexpected music. He desperately tries to whisper words to remember the dream, but all there is is the music.



M would later claim their beloved Detective R had regretted taking the case even before the music started. That R wished he'd never looked inside the trash can, never broken the glass bauble, or inquired where Rasa had gone. That he'd wanted to undo his part of it, go back, never have talked to any of them. And certainly not to him.

The problem with beginnings, of course, is you're never aware when they end. Not until well afterwards. When it's too late to rewrite anything. R's own problem wasn't that he had searched, or what he found. It was that he'd been asking the wrong questions, looking for the wrong person.

With a piece of her dress wrapped around his finger the photograph flashes and cuts into her body of water, so once more the table breaks and the cup spills, the potion becoming an island, a country, a world, and though she may appear as any creature and wear any dress or colour, her words disappear in fog and the eternal music. If he would find a medium, she'd try to spell it out through smoke or crystal or cards; try to say, through ten swords and the queen and page of pentacles, after her breakdown the gate opened and maidens rushed in with lilies of milk; they fed her while the queen spoke of her love's shapeshifting, it may kill him or the boy who climbs over the wall.

Part of transcript of Detective R's interview with Michel Fuentes:

Detective R: So you weren't worried when Rasa didn't come home that night?

MF: Yes and no. She's vanished for days in the past, but has always returned eventually.

Detective R: Where does she go?

MF: I don't know.

Detective R: You expect me to believe that?

MF: It's true.

Detective R *gets out a photograph* Look at this, please. This item was found in a bin at the end of your street.

MF: What is it?

Detective R: You don't know?

MF: Should I?

Detective R: It's a finger. A decapitated human finger. From the tip of which is growing a tiny white orchid. The roots of the flower are actually embedded within the flesh symbiotically.

MF: How... strange. Why are you asking me about this?

Detective R: A neighbour saw Rasa drop something in this bin.

MF: Drop this in?

Detective R: Maybe. We aren't sure yet. Does your wife ever grow flowers from fingers?

MF: *silent, cannot speak*

The birdcage had materialized, a dream replicating itself exactly. Already packaged and wrapped, that had been a nice surprise, seeing as with the water table so low, there had been more pressing things to do than molding sharp corners out of the brown wrapping paper. If the clerk could be convinced of its boxedness, the clerk would simply stamp it, press the sticker down, make a stack out of it, tabling it for later. The issue was the cage's boxedness, which gravely impaired Rasa's eyesight. Peripherals were off, centres were blurry, but it was, indeed, a box, and she would have to pass on the table to the delivery person before she could properly resocket her eyes. He would love the artifact, she exclaimed, happy with herself, keeping the memory of the dream just out of reach enough that it remained pliable.

And now the water. The flowers were still alight around her, like so many digital lights. A balancing act, keeping the water flowing, keeping the flowers watered. Peeking around the corner, she saw more darkness. She had more to let go of; more to gather. The hands were taking root, the table had stopped receding. Petals would disappear now and then, carried away. She thought of finger sandwiches. She craved sunlight, the tunnels were so dark, even with all the phosphorescent pointing and grasping. But there were storms to brew.

After seeing the lamp in a dream, Rasa brought it forward into the tunnel, where she crouched alone. She took out the crumpled bit of paper from the pocket of her dress, and the stub end of an old pencil she'd found in Michel's blue tuxedo jacket before his performance. It was at that performance that Rasa first saw Michel. He was small behind the grand piano, but his music overwhelmed her with its beauty. It was then that the orchids began to grow from her fingers.

In the shape of a hare, goat, bee, white cat, black, raven and just herself flying, she finds her way to the river, the interminable blue dress. She rests her fingers on the silk and sapphire hem, willow embroidery, curls up in the deep folds of the floral robe and closes her eyes. The maidens whisper around her, they spin and weave the earth and air while the queen's pages fish for the dreams. They ship them to the other side. So she dreams for Michel, through music notes, piano keys, brushes, paint, turpentine, inspiring a storm in their garden, a storm to knock down the yew and the wall, bury the herbs, flowers and seeds and all her selves that would haunt, a mind-blowing storm, then a clean iridescent morning, Satie's Gymnopédies, a gentle rain.

to be continued



thank you to the
contributors

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