





At first, the light outside McCarren Park was silver, and then it turned black and white, as lights turned on, with some stars. That part of Brooklyn at dusk is the most beautiful New York thing, topped only by SoHo streets at that time of day, where everything is pink as the light lowers across white buildings. My friend Hill was wearing an untucked button-down shirt and skinny jeans as we headed to Manhattan, looking for a chili place, to eat and to bury things in our beers—stray song lyrics and seven-digit numbers to nowhere—and then to drink those. After we ate we ducked into the subway at Spring Street, or Broome, and he handed me a metro card from his pocket, an unexpected score, flattened in his palm and then pressed into my palm, like a fortune.



I meditate when I wake up, and sometimes I hear a distinct word, different from my thoughts, and clearer. One morning it was *Maladroit*: clumsy or awkward—someone learning something new and not quite in her body, the kind of solid that looks liquid. Usually I have to hear the word more than once to get it. The word was *Merkabah* another morning, and I heard it again the next day as I leaned over a small red recycling bin, pulled out from under the kitchen sink. A *Merkabah* is a tetrahedron—a three dimensional eight-point star made from two pyramids, one pointing up and the other down. It's similar to the building elements used in Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome construction—a solid reference to a strange word. This tetrahedron architecture supposedly surrounds my body: the pyramid that points upwards begins at my knees, extending several feet above my head; the other pyramid extends downwards from my shoulders and reaches several feet below my feet. A custom pointy spaceship. If all goes well, I tune to some universal flow of energy inside this one-person capsule, and, in this way, I join with the entire universe. I'm part of the cosmos as I make the bed and answer emails. So, *not* so clumsy.



I met Hill in Seattle. We hung out at the same bars and went to the same shows—places like the Cha Cha and Linda's—or I'd hear that he had been somewhere just before me, like a premature haunting. He moved to New York before I did, with Astral, who was already on her way there. I knew them both, in Seattle and New York. He picked out a sad song for their wedding, and their marriage ended during his Architecture finals week at Princeton.

Once, Hill rode the New Jersey Transit with me from Penn Station. His relationship with Astral had just ended and he was looking thin. He was on his way to Princeton, and he stopped in New Brunswick at Rutgers to help me install my thesis show, the completion of my MFA studies—made from gathered and reconfigured street trash, rescued paper. Like children on scavenger hunts, Hill and I followed our individual impulses to piece together old cast-off objects into new forms. He picked up

stray pieces of metal, found everywhere around the industrial streets of Greenpoint and Williamsburg. I gathered my materials from sidewalk paper eddies. The paper piles moved, as if caught in contrary circular currents, and I arranged these in new piles in my studio. Hill said I made installing art look like dancing. I bought him a muffin and an espresso that morning. He left the muffin sitting on a chair, when he left for the train smelling like ethanol—high and sweet like air, and a little stale, like the mixture of invisible but not totally odorless tasteless gases, such as nitrogen and oxygen, that surrounds the earth; or the equivalent gases on another planet—mixed with early spring.

A *Hill* is a landform that extends above the surrounding terrain, often with a distinct summit, an upward slanting piece of land. Hill was like this for me. Maybe we existed on slightly different planes, but we met briefly. He has a narrow face, like no one else I know—extra-terrestrial—blue eyes, a tall outcrop of dirty blonde hair and a small patch of blond under his lower lip. Instead of calling me by my name, he called me things like *Incorrigible*. He was a poet in fact and sensibility then, but earth-bound things were still interesting to him: iron scraps and old piano keys rescued from piles of street garbage, which he collected in his messenger bag, as he walked or biked through the boroughs.



I was across the river from Manhattan in Weehawken on 9/11, watching through the picture window of my cousin's house, house sitting. On 9/12 I began self-medicating, drinking around five beers a night, walking through Brooklyn or Manhattan with my friend Dr. Al, a radiologist who also moved to New York from Seattle, and who read patients' medical charts—like reading their fortunes. Hill was often with us, or sometimes it was just me and Hill. He and I talked as we wandered and collected, impressing each other with our vocabularies. He taught me words like *Fecundity*: the ability to produce an abundance of offspring, new growth, and new anything. Hill and I talked about how Dr. Al, in his early 40s, the same age as me, really wanted a girlfriend. *Why are we not dating?* Hill asked me on something like night number seven, after probably my 35th beer in my post 9/11 drinking experiment. His white shirt blew around his body, as he stood a couple of steps above me. *I don't know*, I said before dropping into the Prince Street subway station.

That morning in Weehawken, I ate chocolate cake I found in the refrigerator, glued to the picture window, wearing only a cotton kimono. A big cat purred at my feet, and when I bent to pet him, the second tower went. I spent some time watching out the window, and then moving to the den, and watching the same thing on TV 15 seconds later. I didn't lose anyone I knew then, but I lost the 2,974 people I didn't know, who I said good-bye to, when I left for Seattle three years later.

Through the Weehawken window, I saw a man lying in a fetal position on the ground near my cousin's house. He was dressed for work. He lay still on a patch of thick grass. He seemed absent, as

if he, but not his body, was traversing some new dimension of space—empty, and so blue. In my now-sweaty cotton robe, I crossed the grass between our houses under F15s flying through empty space—and touched his shoulder. That startled him. He wasn't dead, as I had feared. He was just resting on the bluff, in deep sleep, on a blue day. The construction workers at a nearby house stopped hammering their two-by-fours into new walls after the second tower fell. Something happening a second time makes it feel real, not an accident. I took photographs, which I never looked at, from the roof deck in my borrowed kimono with a borrowed Instamatic camera, which I never returned.



I liked the Union Pool, a bar where I saw Tracy and the Plastics once. Hill liked Enid's, where the band The Fiery Furnaces had their first gigs, on McCarren Park. Sometimes we went to the Dog Bar on North 8th and Berry Street, named for regulars' dogs lounging on the floor inside, or out on the sidewalk, unaware of the gravity and nothing scraping the sky in one particular spot.

One night we met at Enid's, and we emptied our bags of what we had collected on the way, onto the dark-wood bar—his metal and mine paper. The bar held these things with ease, as if it were used to hard and soft things, not too big. Mine were pieces of orange and white parking tickets torn on a fold and imperfectly symmetrical, and Hill's were pieces of umber metal like letter forms from an extra-lingual alphabet. From Enid's, we walked his bike to my house on North 6th and Berry and tried to sleep together after making out on my couch, with just a wall of windows and some curtains between us and the sidewalk, moonlight in the cracks of ends of fabric on the floor, with pants and deflated white shirts, spit and underwear.

Hill naked looked pretty much the same as Hill with clothes on. I saw him standing in silhouette in the street light through the muslin. He was thin, light, and he lit up my Northside bedroom. I felt it. I hadn't realized how close I wanted to be to him till we came that close. He was tall and had one of those chests like a vodka bottle, a little sunken and smooth. He was thin all the way to the floor, but his butt weighted his profile, like a cartoon drawing of a man. We didn't have sex that night and we didn't ever date either. *You know you're beautiful, right?* he said to me while we tried and didn't do it. We didn't feel like a pair or like lovers that night, we didn't exchange more than spit and breath, we might have told each other why we wanted to be together but I don't think so. I wish we'd told each other why we thought it was a good idea to be together. That's all I remember, and we didn't say anything to each other the next morning as he unlocked his bike and left, and I walked a block for coffee. Unsteady, I explained to a friend what had happened and not happened. I spilled the contents of my full espresso onto the lap of the person at the table to my left, while a woman to my right said she'd also recently been drinking under stars and not sleeping with friends, and not sleeping at all.







Almost every night till October 2nd or 11th, I couldn't sleep. My building had a gated courtyard, and some nights I sat outside and looked up and made notes about the magical and the not-magical versions of the world under a Ginkgo tree that smelled like sex in the spring and like nothing that fall. I had to focus to breathe. I ate out, drank Buds and Rebel beers and walked and slept and walked through the rest of that month and into the next. I taught a class at Rutgers, 15-hour days door to door. On those days, I picked up trash and peeled street stickers off light poles, their new skin between my fingers to and from the subway, reconfiguring fragments of those into fallen fir tree branches—West Coast things—to redraw them.

I gave Hill a found envelope with a drawing of a row of small orange dogs blending with the municipal orange barcode sprayed across the bottom back. *I love it so much, I'm going to marry it.* He tucked the dog drawings inside his inside jacket pocket. Maybe things or people rarely fall together—in seamless devotion, even—but in the moments that they do, these are the things to savor.

At the end of each night talking in bars with Hill, I went home to hear more words in my sleep or during meditation. Maybe he and I even met in our dreams after hanging out in the real world. *Were you on Lake Washington Boulevard last night, pointing to a piece of dry lake grass at our feet, as if it were a sign? Don't you think that's trespassing, you in my dream?* Hill asked, as he stopped for a moment one evening on North 5th half-way between Bedford and Wythe to sit on a ledge outside Mikey's Hook-up, an old-school Internet café in the Williamsburg hipster mini mall. *The lake's a good place for me to clear my head,* I responded. *I thought you'd like a hieroglyph instead of a word for a change. All we ever do is talk.*

It's not that strange to think Hill and I met some nights on the *Astral Plane*. Our waking life was like a dreamscape—a big space opened up, like the *Heliosphere* above our heads: the bubble-like region of open space where *Plasma*, or solar wind, blows out from the sun and creates a clear barrier against outside pressures. This wind flows from the sun till it encounters the earth's magnetic field, and a bow-shaped boundary forms where they meet. In my dreams I've explored the outer reaches of the *Heliosphere*, passing through the magnetic field and entering a middle region bounded by its outermost edge, the *Heliopause*, a place to rest, breathe, a glass lip.

Hill and I spent our money on drinks and taxicabs, and sometimes to hear live music—anything alive. We saw the Pernice Brothers (twice) at the Bowery Ballroom, and Yo La Tengo at the Mercury, and Damien Jurado somewhere in the Lower East Side. We went to see The Sadies, a Canadian band, slow and sweet, at Maxwell's in Hoboken, to have a break from the New York City concert spaces, and to be across the river looking back for any reason. Hill never talked to me about Astral, but he

cried going home on the subway under the Hudson River. The train edged the tip of Manhattan, its orange and yellow plastic interior parts laid end to end, with a *Fecundity* of water.

For Hill's Birthday that year, a small group met at Double Happiness, a Chinatown bar entered through symmetrical double doors below street level. It was October 2nd, and, not being friends or lovers, things were not that easy between Hill and me.

Anyway, with beer and the night and stars, and detritus, you don't have to be grounded, helpless, you can be in the story, or an element in the story, using words and pieces of paper to make something new, leaving the world that is gone, gone.

When I left New York, a man with a van moved my boxes from 475 Kent Avenue—an *old macaroni factory*—to the Amtrak Station. Al was his name, and he drove us through the Lincoln or Holland Tunnel, winding Spring Street through SoHo to the New Jersey Amtrak, since Penn Station was closed—because of a *Code Orange* or a *Police Action*. There was another person putting her boxes on the train that day, a woman headed out of the frying pan and into Hurricane Katrina, but we didn't know about that yet. I saw myself in her, trying to begin again. Each of my boxes was given a black Sharpie number, one through 19 or 22. I left my boxes with the flirty port authority men—*Hey, Girl, where are you going in such a hurry?*—and I never saw box 15, or maybe 17, again. So, I lost the snapshot that my friend Jim had given me, with the first letter of my name cut out of its glossy top layer, a capital G in a photo of upside-down fir trees. I wanted that reference, from a time when I needed to see a part of me in the sky, even if that part was inverted, like a reflection.

I didn't lose Hill, like some people lost people, but when I moved back to Seattle, he stayed close to Greenpoint, the park, and our drinking experiment—something happening a while before our naked make-out session.

Hill makes watercolor and pen drawings in his sketchbook and exhibits these in galleries and bars, of those places we walked, and he makes drawings like those for a living—architectural renderings that show life on over-loved paper surfaces. He has a daughter, Sadie, who looks like him.

I live in a house in the south side of Seattle with a man and a cat and hang out with them in ways I couldn't with Hill. He and I text on birthdays, and I still hold a space for him, and the eight million other people in New York and their pets, to be sleeping and waking, spilling things, and making out.

When I consider all this—upside-down fortunes, things the phone can't do, and liquid radiology's of the heart—I remember a time when I was present, mostly, but not competently. I called my mother every night the fall I moved back to Seattle. It was her idea. We weren't that different. Maybe she knew I'd lost something, bending over a man in a back yard in Weehawken.

I went to see an allergist in Seattle. When she met me, she confessed she was really a shaman. I went to see her for a dairy allergy. She told me my mother, the daughter of a dairy farmer, left behind a part of her past by having me, lactose-intolerant. This shaman shifted my energy, to give me the enzymes to digest small amounts of cow milk and yogurt. She waved her hands over me, as I lay on a table, and sealed up a chakra that was too open and unprotected. She said *Vulnerable*. I heard *Awkward* and *Clumsy*.

Under open sky, I see an imitation of myself. It's the dream of *her* that walks that new imaginary world, preserved in dark and amber beer. Cupped. In this fake world I did real things that didn't quite take, but maybe they let me personalize free-range categories ever more finely—categories of *Pairs* and *Lovers*—parsing and curating and homing in on my natural idiosyncratic inclinations, until, eventually, I became a genre of my own, in some nonfictive world beyond category—*Me*.

I pulled from inside of myself a universe, a place where everything shed its cultural pedigree and blurred to sweet mongrel status. And if I found myself in this private world a second time, rendered in graphic flatness and shared New York references, wandering, I would pause to sit alongside an outline of myself, an *Isthmus*, with a friend on unsteady bar stools, with dogs and their water. I would dream up a word to bring evidence of that world back with me, here. *Sliver*: a small, thin, narrow piece of something cut or split off something big. A fragmented memory, like a still from a film that barely shows McCarren Park, as evening light slips through an imperceptible membrane encompassing a solar system, that creates a bubble against outside pressures, through which impressions are conveyed to the senses.

It's not easy to see, but some parts of the park on this evening are dark the whole time anyway. The rest of the parts go azure, and then it's night, and Hill and I walk with our heads together under the most fragile acid casein pigments and stars, and he's wheeling his bike between us.