

Andrea Khôra

Skin Hunger

I used to dream of eating.

Chewing mostly. Rolling over the stones and earth in my mouth. The musty peat smell leaked from my skin. I would swallow up more than I could ever hold. When we awoke that morning I was only half alive yet you licked the perimeter of my body to make sure I still existed. It was luxurious. It took seven and a half minutes.

That became how things were. Always checking for edges. Feeling the heaviness of a foot. A chair. Your last pair of clean trousers.

There were days when we walked tentatively over floating moss. Only then was our blessed weight a curse.

Did the missing objects biodegrade, giving back to matter what was always rightfully owned? Or was it paradoxically lost, dropping the weight of existence? The first Evaporations were media myths, caught between lines of celebrity gossip and a triple homicide. But it soon transformed into collective hallucination. A religious prophecy striving for realization. While the zealots tried to sew panic, we collectively rolled our eyes.

Forty days later, I returned from an overnight shift heavy with exhaustion but still buzzing with adrenaline. I collapsed inside the overstuffed sofa cushions. My unfocused gaze wandered around the empty room then landed curiously on the ottoman. It was vibrating. Nearly imperceptible, but there. Colors flowed in waves from the worn charity shop find.

Pulsation. Then, it was gone. There was no debris. No sound. No ectoplasm.

I called the report line from within the sofa. Then slowly started collecting objects. I would never again sleep alone. Piled on my body were books over blankets, a hair dryer, letters and paperwork, unused blocks of clay. They weren't much, but enough for me to feel my body. Heartbeats filled my ears. From that night forward, sleep only came in the form of heaviness and capsules.

We traveled through time exponentially. Doubling our speed every five seconds. You can practically hear the sound of the squeezing and stretching of space.

Maybe six months after the Evaporations, society changed with it. Our bodies have become zombie galaxies filled with black holes and dead stars. The pull beneath our skin nearly inverting us. The swirling dance of dense objects warping space. Islands in time steadily banging on the universe like a mallet.

We became preciously destructive.

There were pop up pain parlors where patrons paid what they could to verify their own solidity with metal shards. Instruments of life. That's where our eyes met for the first time. As I was gently rolling my arm on a wheel of nails, feeling their gentle pricks like goosebumps. The kind I used to get during the standing ovations at the theater. We were both uneasy and our eyes gave us an escape.

You nodded to me and we sprinted out the exit and down the street finally stopping 2 km later when we collapsed into a heap of heaving chests and sweaty arms and tangled legs. Scents of mud and sweat and musk. The cool emanations from the breathing earth calmed us and we melted into one another. We've been here for years and years. Is it too much?

Could it be too fast? These questions had no validity anymore so they evaporated from our minds like Paul from the grocery shop last Tuesday.

Lying on the bed with half your body over mine, you told me stories from times before with your fingers. I open my eyes and suddenly I'm vertical. In a box. An elevator maybe.

“Going down”
A voice radiates from the ether.

It creaks alive and falls downwards.

I begin to feel it. Vibration of my cells. Moving every atom. Further down still, it all becomes brighter. Trying not to cry as the seams of the universe burst open around me. I can feel the waves emanate from the space between the stuff I'm made of.

CLAP

Emptiness.

I can feel myself expanded.
Filling the space of the box.

Then further.

Aren't humans better in three dimensions anyway? You've got the better of me. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies.

One thousand trillion trillion years.

I could feel the labyrinth walls erect themselves gradually, once it was clear that it wouldn't be a small prick of a needle. While in free-fall, the lines grew around me, grey building itself from the steamy white mist of anticipation or expectation or what could happen next. And the space slowly collapsed. From vast expanses to right angles and curves. Only small choices to be made – left or right. Rarely a third choice of equal weight. The joy and spontaneous-ness and excitement of a foot misplaced was weighted down then like a noxious gas hanging ever closer to the earth until it was sucked down within it. No longer in free fall. Lost within a maze of left or right and grey walls with few windows into other bits and parts and times. I wondered if I should just level it all. Collapse it all. And start anew. But I remembered the safety of edges and lines and knew there would be less a chance of electrocution by eels or lightning or a fast change of heart.

But if there's a labyrinth now, what could possibly come next? A structure? A box? A coffin? Slowly cordoned in until there is nothing to do but face ones own death – face to wood.

Falling into the tesseract, to step beyond it leads into the unspeakable.

Pity sublated rage and I am left trying to figure out what to do with that limp little bag.

“Forgive me.”
“You didn't hit me.”

In chaotic movements, I coordinate any and all points of the universe wherever I want them to be.

Here it comes again.

Crackling and a roaring in my head.

Stocks of stimulants. We might have been heavily intoxicated; yet, as we now know, we were not.

Where is it all now? Smoke, ashes, photons, fable?

The sound of a low engine's hum.

“If he eats, he cannot get enough.”

“Well, haven't you noticed?”

“Don't try to explain it to me.”

The heaviness of our bones, our blood, the mess of connective tissue, webs of tendons, ligaments, veins, soft tissues, and cells. We're always aware now of the pumping of our collective circulatory system. We tried too hard to contain it.

There are times when the vibrating mind operates on a different frequency than the body. This is when we know it is coming.

Nothing happens. And it keeps not happening.