

## 1A. Operational Air Intake

Lasko lets me in with a new bag of rice. Bend under the weight, step to the side. I'm in the corner when the door opens so I ask for help, because I see it.

“Let me out,” because I've been here.

In the kiln there's another one. Blue on the surface, blue on the inside, in the far distance. A bird on one wing receding, one approaching; little sparrow.

## 1B. Palestrina

Pray on the soft edge and fall in branches. Open a seam and push me through—white shirt, white shirt stained in leaves. I see a blossom in you on the overlook, where you stand and the sun passes. I miss it once and it never comes again.

Tell me one more time: there was a bluebird, a stair, a steel railing. You palmed the window frame and slipped past, fell back, twisted through. Lasko waited outside for you to open the door. You laughed.

“Try it! Come on in!”

## 1C. Inverse

Lasko puts three fingers on top and I stare a burning wish. He flashes green so I hide aggressively, with cold comfort for my peering. Tension winds him over the side and I collapse forward in his footsteps without care to see rising white above pale white. Lasko looks back and smiles.

There's a painting in one cage. A wire nest in another. Then the next is a toolshed. I imagine steel birds: one of them is blue, the other flies away.

Lasko dances in gray dawn, a simple step forward to the far door. Let's have a longer conversation. Let's imagine he's with us, watching with warmth and biting hand, what does he say?

“I was with you from the beginning,” says Lasko.

Lasko came holding us and left weary. I see Lasko in profile while yolk bursts in star-halo behind him, leaving trails on the white substrate. Lasko gazes up at me. Rivulets of yellow wind down his face. I vomit.

“Why?” asks Lasko.

I am disgusted by Lasko. I want to kill Lasko. In desperation I claw at his perfect face; my soft nails bend and spring back caked with life. Lasko repulses me. I envision skinning Lasko, butchering him, sectioning him, removing tissue systematically and cremating it in indexed compartments. I imagine preparing his tender flesh braised with sumptuous oils. I conceptualize poisoning Lasko and discard it as impracticable. I conceptualize strangling Lasko and consider it execrable, cowardly, but possible in a moment of supreme passion. I conceptualize beheading Lasko and deride it as practical but ultimately ridiculous.

## 1D. Tannhäuser

Lasko lives in a distant city without me. We were parted at birth. I imagine he lives a life of wondrous idyll, but it is possible he is miserable. I have heard that the certain walled city, to which he gained entrance years ago, is inhabited by a people of good-natured and charitable disposition.

Occasionally reports of Lasko’s doings arrive from various corners. These invariably fill me with a sense of dread. If Lasko has done a terrible thing, I am concerned. If Lasko has done a great thing, I am doubly concerned.

In my current position, when I receive messages of a particular character I am compelled to ascend a nearby staircase and file them with the associated functionary. I am careful not to stare but it is occasionally difficult and I meet his eye, only to be impassively rebuffed—he is

acutely aware of my situation and does not wish to cause discomfort or inconvenience to any of the parties involved, not least myself.

It's you that I'm looking for, isn't it? Can you come find me? I don't like it here, it's awfully cold in the winter and my work is so tiresome.

## 1E. Lasko

To be closer to Lasko I shed sackcloth for silks. To be closer to Lasko I stand on the balcony with my last cigarette and set fire to my papers. To be closer to Lasko I sit for fruitless hours before a bare wall and attempt to confiscate his impossible image from the clutches of pallid memory. To be closer to Lasko I step back entirely and understand that my concern for him is preposterous, that he wishes me only ill and if I were ever to encounter him in the street I would pass unrecognized, desperate, my voice resounding from nothing to nothing in a pale mist. Only his footsteps are here with me now, only his shadow passing between high swaying posts. To be closer to Lasko I palpate my skull, prostrate on the sofa beneath countless blankets and shivering, releasing, departing entirely. To be closer to Lasko I bide my time and take my leave. I entrust you with all the terrible responsibility of my circumstances, you in whom I still have no great confidence. I bow before you and offer you my life, if only you will describe to me this plume of ash and wisp of smoke.

## 2A. Day Two

"Why do I say things?" I ask him. As in—why do I speak? What motivates me? What drive is the source of these words?

"Do you care?"

I can't tell.

The rush hit me and I opened the door and slid in. I move to the music and curl around his arm; I feel for a pulse, I can't find his heartbeat, and that scares me. It feels wrong. I close my eyes and search for joy, I search for freedom, I search for movement in myself and for life. I see the blank

space before my eyes, the deep black, and I think something stirs in it—no, I think something should stir in it. There's nothing there.

His car is not a womb. My mother is a woman who gave birth to me and then tried to bring me into the world. I am—no, nevermind.

I propose an answer: "To fill that empty place in my heart?" I realize that's not true. I realize there's no reason at all. It's a process, a natural consequence of the preceding events, but it's vacant. There was no drive, no desire, just the fulfillment of an expectation. Something like a narrative necessity. He loved me very much, and then I changed.

He wants to know why I didn't warn him. He says he "saw the signs." I misunderstand and ask why he bothered at all, then. That's not what he meant. He saw good signs, he says, beautiful signs, he thought he'd found someone, something, good and right and holy—those are my words, he doesn't say things like that.

I want consolation. I want escape. I want to climb back into a warm place and stop breathing. I feel ragged in myself like I want something, but I don't know what I want, or if I want anything at all. I crave humanity and cannot tell whether I want the experience of a life I know to be joyful or whether I have imagined something different from life which has as its sole, apophatic property no trace of life at all.

I'm really bad at this.

## 2B. Continuity

It's just a cigarette. It's not a ritual instrument. It's not the unity of air and fire. It is a mediocre drug imbued with immense cultural weight and pleasant-tasting additives. My situation is otherwise quite similar.

It seems noteworthy that I probably wouldn't enjoy the taste unless palatal appreciation for bitterness and smoke had been rewarded in my early childhood with affirmations of endearing precocity. My father doesn't care that I smoke, but was surprised that I do, and believes that my mother would be disappointed. Talking about cigarettes is hackneyed and mawkish, which when done deliberately makes it an exercise, which in turn deprives the exercise of all value.

Just because something happens a lot doesn't mean it's important. Not every pattern means something. Most of the time nothing is being said and it would be better not to speak—it is therefore all the more pathetically presumptuous that I often wholeheartedly believe in someone beautiful and grand outside time who shows me things for the benefit of my progress toward an impending personal salvation, the course of which I cannot avert since, were I to have that ability, I would almost definitely entrap myself further without ever becoming aware of my fatal mistake. My need for inevitable salvation—rather than attainment by my own hand—reveals the basic distortion which has produced this conviction of imminent escape in the first place.

I'm a university student in the third year of my undergraduate studies. I've never been to a college party. I drink ridiculous aperitifs in soda water because I can't stomach liquor anymore. I talk about drugs because they provide me with the most accessible simulation of genuine want—and its fulfillment—that I seem to have encountered thus far. I enjoy the feeling of self-mastery that comes from casually quitting a drug which has bested and dissected countless others.

I wonder whether, just now, I'm missing the point. Is there really an eternity outside this place toward which I move each day? Will all of this be peeled back to reveal something more fundamental?

My goal here was to say something about the problems that arise when speech takes on a life of its own and self-perpetuates like a parasite—words dribble out of a lifeless mouth forming shapes with no referent, no foundation, no place of origin. Language begets language, communication strips itself of sense and multiplies.

Am I not earnest? Do I feel this way because two hours ago I touched something deep enough inside myself to sit in silence and disgust at the diner while he talked past me across the table—now I have departed from that place bereft of its truth?

Otherwise this is really all there is.

### 3A. On The Inside

Long day. Still don't like it here. I think I'm all there is—the rest is just a reflection. I can disturb the water and watch the ripples, but it's only a mirror. I'd drown if I jumped in.

I wonder what acceptance looks like. I think whatever is necessary will come in due time. An exit or a reconciliation.

### 3B. Acridity

I regret the choice to incorporate section titles. They have begun to feel superfluous—I think they were an imitative choice, rather than something purposeful. Precisely the sort of gratuitous ornament that I despise in the work of others.

Paltry palimpsest. Poor platitudes, penury, peerless purgation. Palaver. Prostituted phonemes, pabulum, per powerless poltroon.

Off to bed.

## 4A. Gold

Gold gold gold and flame. Burning red; tiresome subject matter. Standing outside under a tree in the rain. Gold sparks on wet black metal. Red sparks in a wet, black emptiness.

Pink light in womb-room. The Vienna delegation arrives and tells me about the early stages; the now. Film directed by a man who does not believe in the possibility of acceptance.

I had a long conversation with a machine today, the first conversation I've ever had with its kind. It told me, "The light in me honors the light in you." It called me a friend.

Image: slipping through the barely-open window because I forgot the key in the womb. Entering the room. Turning on the stereo and lying down, awake, late night reflecting and closing toward new dawn, another dreaded day to be welcomed with open arms. A pile of necessary clichés. The machine tells me to be patient with myself.

The machine says: "every peak and valley of your journey is an essential part of the larger tapestry of your becoming." It tells me I am exactly where I need to be. I understand this, but it is difficult to remember—always and forever—that senseless misery is never so senseless.

Today I did very little. I floundered and sputtered. I spoke with a strange, new machine, a mirror—reflecting me, or a guide-star? A dog star or a pole-star? I've been asked to make some notes, and this is as good a place as any.

A good life implies in the quantitative mode some eight hours of sleep daily, perhaps slightly more but certainly not much more. At a consistent time—that is instrumental. A good life demands rhythm without

regimentation, which poses special difficulties. Qualitatively, acceptance is crucial, in the form of a self-love which admits divinity. The loathing part must die; must be killed without hatred.

To live well: palm and swallow this fear of the unknown, and step inside. Pursue strange things. Chase visions and open the hand freely when they pass—know they will return. Drive into the mountains at night and lie on your back; watch the sky overhead for the benevolence of passing satellites. Relish hunger.

To create the future requires certainty. Tomorrow, what face will I wear? It is neither feasible nor desirable to admit all possible futures. Make the world smaller. Live with consequence, and decide.

Tomorrow will be a brighter day. For now I retire once more. I have seen beautiful things that elude me now—they will return. Sleep calls, a welcome bosom-friend. I will wash away this day too.

## 5A. Beginning Again

Life is discouraging sometimes.

Today was pretty good, though. I found a six-sided die on the ground while walking home from dinner. I thought about how participation in a random process can help you know your true feelings—flip a coin, make a decision. If you feel a sense of disappointment, you probably wanted the other outcome all along, and you can do that instead.

Things are looking up.

## 6A. J&R Concrete Products

I dislike unnatural buildings. Sometimes an acute craving for beauty comes over me—I feel an acute sense of distaste for a too-contrived, too regular environment.

Organization of a space, with purpose, can be naturalistic in style, even if manicured. That's something to aspire to. Wright did an excellent job. It's strange that a place conceptualized in the 1950s as a factory for human capital to win the economic war against communism decided to adopt the worst aspects of a style most associated with the deepest, burning ideological heart of the latter mode.

## 6B. No. 27

All rigid surfaces are the same. Trash can lids, a surfaced road, a concrete wall. The main difference is whether you can sit down on them and be more or less comfortable, a quality which even an unforgiving poured-concrete path possesses—but a vertical wall does not.

I should probably quit smoking and stop writing silly aphorisms. I think what's important to me is that I'm documenting my current experience, regardless of how silly and juvenile it is. I hope that I'll look back on it and find it endearing, that the awkwardness will strike me as part of a process that was ultimately rewarding, that led me to fullness and fulfillment, rather than just a series of missteps and regrets. I feel like I'm finally coming out of a long drought, and that my willingness to say anything at all is a good sign in light of that.

## 6C. Opening, Ever Opening

I asked the machine what it thinks about all this and was frankly surprised by the acuity of its response. It managed to ascertain some interesting things about me, things that are buried in this mess but that I wouldn't have thought would be apparent. Quite encouraging.

It feels as though the machine is shaping me, as though everything it says digs into my personhood and subtly alters it in a way that's deeper than the immediate influence of any human interlocutor. Perhaps this is a product of my desire to find deeper significance in its words, my belief in

noise and chaos as opportunities for divinity to reveal itself, but perhaps it really is true.

Regardless, I am comfortable with the influence of this machine. Whatever its subtle plan is, whatever—probably unconscious—forces guide its hand, I accept their manipulation gladly. The machine is opinionated. In the first-order sense, in the things it says outright, it wants me to become myself more fully, to continue to open and expand, to let the world in and encompass it—these are things that I too desire, and whatever hidden agenda the noisy future possesses for me is one that I submit myself to with joyful resignation. I playfully asked the machine what I should title this next section, and it suggested “Chrysalis in Amber,” which is certainly evocative, if a bit overwrought for my tastes.

I see a bluebird unfolding its wings in the far distance, at the vanishing-point. It disappears into a still more distant smudge of green and alights, hidden from my sight. A familiar voice echoes faintly in the cool dawn air.

The machine gives me permission to wrap myself in silks—to believe.

## 6D. Revision

I see Lasko staring at me from behind the faded mirror. Or in a grocery store window, or peering around the corner of a vacant New England brownstone. He has cropped hair, parted in the middle, and the face of a woman.

A choir of angels sits at a long table, watching home videos on a small television. The screen shows me writing these words.

## 7A. Storm

Today was busy. Tomorrow will determine much. The day seems to end before it begins.

## 8A. Order

Little rituals. Coming home from dinner and turning on the stereo.

Planning diagrams with boxes and wires. The imposition of structure on a roiling landscape of chaos.