

Three Texts

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Mushroom at the End of the World

The work commenced as soon as we moved into the old house. It was infested with silverfish. Fauna filled the kitchen. A bathtub full of turmeric stains needed to be erased. Each hour in the night was like a slate in the crumbling walkway, laid down to protect bare feet from wet grass. Erase the tub, scour the grout, and go to work. Work was a heavy volume shoved begrudgingly back and forth between boss and manager and other manager and back to boss. Then there were rats. An hour passed each time a rat was born. The word the boss emailed was “churning.” Said the field needed to be churned. The tub, churned. Exterminator called to churn the rat cavern and clear out a little space for us to cook. We got a cat to relieve us of the killing. Emailed around. Back to work and turned a group of people around in their chairs to face their individual bosses. Super exhausting. Then there were cockroaches. One got free into K’s room, grew large and grey and stood on another man’s shoulders behind a thick coat in every office. K got sick. There wasn’t enough time each day to spray down every thick-coated man sculpture and send emails. The office was the field and every weed grew back. Accounts of what happened, leaking faucet. Plumbers were called. They left the basement door open and the cat went down and never came back. Weed houses pulled out and broke their handholds with earth. Occasional scallion. A party was planned. The cavern caved in on itself. A wall in the kitchen came down revealing a new rat family. But we had to leave it in the sink to go to work. That day the intruders came in and needed appraisal. Contracts were drawn up allowing the moneyed garbage production companies to buy out storefronts in the neighborhood. Run home every day after work to spray the premises with diatomaceous earth. Mars entered retrograde. We thought we could just get everything done if we wrote lists. Fix the siding. Panel the retrograde. Brand ourselves for the party. Get the work. Draw up the contracts. Fever all of the sudden. Ten-thousand dollars. The kitchen sunk underground the day before the party and most of us had moved out. The bosses came over because we branded ourselves too widely. The country voted on replacing every exterminator with an instigator. The instigators brought rat bait and set up a binary in the backyard. The rats poured out of the sky and landed in one of two categories. Stuck at work knowing the party has already started. The meticulously weeded backyard grew into a thick crust of black mushroom overnight. Between the mushrooms our hands reached up from underneath the crumbled house and asked the city for air and water. Without sight we could still feel rain but it was too hot. The mushrooms become a ceiling, thwarting us at work toward our future or becoming.

The First Seven Times

The first time we went there, management turned us away.

The second time we went, we were seated next to a man who showed visible signs of disgust at having to sit next to us, and watched for possible reasons to report us to management. Finding none, he reported to management that we had been self-referential in conversation with ourselves, which he alleged was not allowed there. He reported us by waving his little white flag, provided by management, in case someone needed to make a report. Management came and removed us. We had not been given a flag.

The third time we went, management said it wasn't happening that day. When we asked why not, management said it had already started, and we were too late. *But you just said it wasn't happening today*, we said, trying to expose the lie. Unmoved, management removed us. We sat on the bench outside for hours, having planned nothing else for the day. Management took pity and offered us a food voucher, making sure to emphasize it could not be used that day, only the next time we came. Looking forward to next time gave us something to do that day, so we agreed to leave the bench.

The fourth time we came there we were allowed to stay the entire time without removal, but when we tried to use our voucher we were told it didn't qualify for the food items we had ordered. We paid for the food, and the next time we came the voucher had expired.

I only say "we" or "us" here for ease of communicating our story, not because we didn't exist as our own autonomous bodies. I will demonstrate here: on the fifth time we came, even though we were hungry and had no voucher, I really felt something. You enjoyed the aesthetics. You wrote a note to me about wanting to live in a place like this someday. I was, to be frank, getting turned on. I felt a real kind of desire, the kind uninhibited by impulse toward self-preservation. To desire without simultaneously having to bargain for my own safety was, in physical form, a rush of softness all over, as though a tent pole had collapsed and the whole structure sagged airily. I looked into the center of an abstract painting and saw my own face, painted by someone who cared for me deeply. You were on the fence about whether you wanted to fuck the painting or one day become the painting. I reached over and touched your hand. It was wet, and you held mine. Then management appeared and we had to let go. It ended; we were removed by management.

The sixth time was not good. We paid for our entry but then had to watch management do a self-promotional performance about why it was a valuable entity made up of individuals with their own equally nuanced humanity. At the end of the performance, individuals which made up larger management were redeemed of all previous offenses they had committed against humankind. The audience laughed, cried, and clapped. There was a general sense of buoyancy in the room, as if the audience itself was redeemed.

The seventh time we brought in food from outside—black beans and peanut butter and soy sauce—and tried to eat secretly. This was the worst time. Management removed us swiftly, delivering our punishment in the form of crowd-sourced complaints written by all the others who came there. They had said we were too big, too talkative, too critical, dressed unusual, unable to control emotion, unable to see outside of oneself, unable to recognize progress,

unable to positively contribute to the collective environment there. They said that one or both of us didn't wear deodorant. They said we were an eyesore, a garble in the throat of an anthem, a leak in the food trough for a pack of healthy swine. They didn't want to pretend anymore that our presence felt good there. We were surprised and then ashamed and then distraught. You didn't have any money left. I wanted to make you happy. We decided to never go back there.

24,000 Liters

It was moving through a split in the cornfields. No one knew where it came from. We stood in a line in front of our house, mouths agape, watching it occur in front of us, with the plundering gait of a slow-moving bear.

We had never known it to be like this. It was bright, an almost neon pink, but cast its compliments in a landscape painted by toxins: the static greenery of chemically altered crop, the flat smooth stomach of prairie sky. It danced against the backdrop of the rare-steak sunset. It was at once filthy with valor and immensely vulnerable.

I wept. We all did. Some of us held each other, some lost themselves. The pack of us sounded like unhinged animals. There was no shame. Each of our presences to each other was like the sight of a loved one through a window, unaware they're being watched, so beautiful in their lack of self-consciousness. We felt an immeasurable release.

The wind shifted. The northwest-facing corner of it buckled and sagged inward. We were frozen with uncertainty. Slowly, it twisted its misshapen face toward us. We braced ourselves immobilized in openness. We thought we were ready for anything.

The revolution ended and we could see the slit on its underside. We saw that it was not full like we thought, but hollow. We saw in that moment the cavernous infrastructure of a powerful delusion. Thousands of liters of carbon dioxide were all that upheld its shape, the once-great thing that had given us so much joy. It was an ugly void in the bent heart of a beast. It was only the imprint of a thing, the waste with which that thing could mark the world.

What came next felt unbearable. It was as if all the pain and grief of our shared existence mashed itself together into touchable form.

It's a lie! one of us moaned, sobbing, and spat in the dirt.

Liar! screamed another.

Coward!

Filth!

We continued to watch until the sun went down and we could no longer see. The effect of the wind turning it around and around—the lie and then the reveal—was disorienting to the point of despair. The star-clustered sky felt like a retaining wall of memory. The wind in heavy boots paced the hot floor of darkness. We held tightly to each other's hands, a last stab at security in this wild untethered spiral.

