

EXCERPTS FROM MY GROCERY LIST

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Beard of Bees Press
Number 99 · December, 2013

I eat the carousel in my sleep. Wood-flesh and chipped paint slide down my throat. Horses canter the corral of my gut, an abyss as dark as a movie theater. The voice box of whinnies and pipe organ don't carry over well in subtitles—which is a shame. You see, my unborn child will emerge in a society too lazy for words. Her imagination will only be as wide as the big screen. While my innerchild's imagination will have the depth of a page. Locked in a book. Every word a hyperlink. Mental. Popping up everywhere before its time. Like a purple gluestick. Twisting in. Twisting out. Inside a temple. Outside a theme park. The water I sip in sleep tastes sweeter than holy water.

“I need to add something to my grocery list,” I tell the time traveler. He warns not to write the secrets of the universe. I will alter the space-time continuum. “Just mouth it to me,” he says, “I’ll remember it for you.” He tells me to be literal, but I know he is speaking figuratively. The first thing I do when I wake up is use the toilet. The second thing I do is go back to sleep. When I crawl back in bed I find an uncapped pen and the words *cadavers galloping into history* under my pillow, still warm.

Everyone but the aircraft has landed in our bed. While they attach heartbeats to seconds, you keep time with lungfuls. I swear I'll hold my breath till my face turns blue. If only it would keep the alarm from ringing. This is how you lose track of time. This is how I know you are timeless. Human flesh is the last breath's suitcase. If we convince traffic control to direct the plane this way, I'm not sure if it would crash or touch down. But I'm keeping the runway clear.

It is not often I wake up before you. Even less often you talk in your sleep. A truth is more easily lured off a tongue when the body's unconscious, whether from celestial body or hominid. These early encounters, these pre-dawn conversations, are as common as a comet striking Earth to donate debris to form our second moon-to-be. I may only get one question, so it had better be good. *Are you the man of my dreams? The time traveler?* You mutter, eyes closed, "What man doesn't move forward through time?"

There's a fireplace I once saw that makes me think of our fireplace. A toilet reminiscent of another toilet. Every automatic toilet flushes before I sit down, again before I'm finished. Then won't flush when I'm done. I wave my hands over the sensor. Same like I do to check you're still sleeping when I want to sneak off. The dial for the fireplace retracts from the romance. Steals the smell of hand-picked wood. I only flush at the sight of you on the toilet because I was so sure I'd beat you to it.

When toast catches fire, it's hard to look away. Even when knowing a hundred tons of meteoroids will hit the Earth's atmosphere today. (Don't worry, this happens daily.) There's an art to juggling fire. You put as much thought into it as lightning does to striking. There is a meteoroid as small as the strawberry seeds you roll on your tongue. There is a planet composed entirely of streams of lightning.

It's too bad that sometimes when you lean back, your head doesn't just hit a pillow. Sometimes when you lean in for a kiss, you miss the lips. Most moments are about hitting or missing, like: look there's a star make a wish...oh...you missed it. So, if there's an emergency please count me in. I couldn't save his life last time. I'd like another chance. Comets have a precise course of action. That I admire. But I don't think I could ever be so cold.

Your freckles turn red in the shower or maybe this is just when I actually notice them. I am holding a teaspoon of salt or sugar from breakfast. I forget it is in my hand until a torrent of bathwater threatens to wash it away. You tell me if one grain represents a star, my teaspoon holds only those stars visible to the naked eye. Visible stars in the sky make up .0001% of the Milky Way. But whose sky are we referring to? The tents-and-trails' or the tourist traps'? You bump my elbow. The white freckles splatter from the spoon, whirlpool before being taken by the black hole of a drain. There goes a millionth of the stars, but not my millionth. Here we still stand. Here stays my sun.

Some people come. Some people go. To and from the supermarket the same day each week, the same time. Others are less reliable. For instance, I am not orphaned. I am not widowed. Merely without eggs. Merely without bacon. I am not big on breakfast. I am in no hurry. The calculations take up most of the morning. If a star were represented by a grain of sugar, all the stars in the universe could fill a donut hole more than eight miles wide. I have a glass of cold milk. It is not cold on purpose. It will grow warm before the saccharine model is built. I pour it into a blender alone.

You are telling me a story but it is more of a list. It wants to escape its orbit, but the pacing might not be enough to push through the atmosphere. You put a firecracker in your mouth for a little boost. The fuse goes out on your tongue. Of course. Some things I remember. Some things I don't. Some things make more sense the second time around because they're more familiar than the first time. Like ingredients in a recipe. Makes more sense after I've tasted it. "Ginger and mangoes. Yes, I'm writing it. I'll pick them up before you get home."

The structure of light is condensed in our speech because of how little we know about it. The speed of light is 299,792,458 meters per second. I don't like to round, but I still repeat this to myself. I keep the alphabet on the hanger beside your coats. You put it on as you go out the door. There's a poem in my pocket from the last time I went out. It reads: *organic eggs, w.bread, rosemary, havarti, green apple, avocado (but only if 2 for 1).*



If I had to psychologically transport my taco craving away, I don't know what I would do with that mental space. Thunder and the stomach have that in common. They remind you of something you already know. Strike. Pang. Invisible. Distant. We eat birthday cake and beer for breakfast. We go to the museum because it is free for residents. We give a fake address. As frequent flyers we ignore forewarnings. It's just a little lightning. Glacial overturn. Only forty miles per hour. What blind faith we put in humanity. You trust them to hit the brakes for the red light. I trust them to cure nature with science. You trust me to save last night's leftovers for you. I know how you love broccoli. But I trust you won't break up with me either way.

Names fade from memory instantly but they were never really written there to begin with. If someone wrote on my brain with a Sharpie I think I'd probably remember it, but this is only speculation. Dust collects in every art exhibit. Nobody ever gives credit to the dust on display. No plaques are raised in its honor. No security guards inform you that you are standing too close. A bed collects approximately two pounds of dust, sweat, and oil per year. Perhaps more, now that you're here.

When nature calls, there's just as much skill keeping it clean in a foreign city as the wilderness. We sneak into the luxury hotel we haven't got a room for. Get caught up in the artwork in the stalls. They never caption them in here like they do in art galleries so I have no idea who painted this one. If all things lost their names we'd have this beautiful chaos. This unspeakable freedom. What would a stone be to me then? To spend decades in a river. To earn its place against my cheek.

Whenever we hike you bring some lyrics and one-liners. I make hand-made trailmix. There's no cooking involved. Just raisins, granola, walnuts, chocolate chips. When it gets hot we tie our long sleeves around our waists. The trail is short but you make it longer. You point out every plant along the way. When you don't know a name, you come up with one, like how we kill time making retro-inventions: geometric jungles, digital dinosaurs. I'd like someone to invent flashlight-in-a-can. Just shake and spray and light the way. We wouldn't have to depend on ominous street lamps that flicker out as we near them. But I wouldn't trade it for my can of whipped cream, which is my comfort food for such situations.

I made a time capsule in fourth grade that I can only find now in fragments online. Made it back when we thought we'd be able to purchase hover crafts and holograms at a convenience store by now. Back when we thought we would have suffered/survived semi-apocalypse by now. I search for it while camping. Four deer blend into the hill at sunset. A neon fanny pack dangles from a tree just out of the grizzly bear's reach. I need no map other than the bushes, the girl scout cookies, and a can of black beans which leads me back to those bushes. This compass only leads to another compass.

A battery-operated radio is something you ought to keep in an earthquake kit. I'm sorry. I've only gotten as far as packing the trailmix. (My poem commandeered the grocery list which is why there's some confusion in the fridge.) The ghost in my toes should have been the first sign that you were home. Paradise in the test tube could have been the second. Still fizzling. But no, it was the peas in the freezer that clued me in. Blocking my reach to the ice tray. I never even put peas on my grocery list.

When I find the freezer full of tape cassettes and floppy disks, I realize my time capsule is truly lost. And the melted ice cream is not yet checked off. You do not judge me for never making it to the store. You know I am busy assembling the list. An unmanned shuttlecraft connects with the International Space Station. It is someone's birthday somewhere. Time is the street on the return address. But you do not say so. You just hang the alphabet back on the coat hanger. Give me a look and I know.

We study waves. You are with sound. I am with water. I can count down to a wave's break but I will never understand the ocean. For this I am glad. You think ordering Chinese take-out and listening to the Voyager Golden Records counts as a date. Greetings in fifty-six tongues, over twenty-five songs, natural sounds as in surf, wind, and whales. If some interstellar intelligence overheard soundtracks of the ocean, they wouldn't understand it either. I hope the didgeridoo, panpipes, electric guitar, and mariachi band are at frequencies extraterrestrials can digest.

Sitting in the shade shares the thrill of running through sprinklers. Spinning in dark matter is not quite the same. We've been told many lies, the most recent circulating: an asteroid tracker provides better sex tips than any Internet article. The only advice I ever received from a celestial body is that lies over time make the most delicious truths.

You like to navigate with scissors and twine. You go where you can make use of things. My pockets are filled with hay. The barn is my playground. It is easy to sit on a roof. There are no better toys than the constellations we push at night. You slice some ancient's myth and tie a new legend together. I sprinkle horse feed for the falling stars as if at their wedding, not as if they just burnt to a crisp.

A photograph of a nude man and woman might be the quickest way to convey human existence to anyone beyond the termination shock. And yet NASA refused its inclusion from our time capsules cast off in space. You and I disagree with this decision. We celebrate nudity. Our fridge is foodless. What more can we do? We float at five rivers per hour. We swing in .25 hammocks per year. We taste either one or five oceans per lifetime depending on how we count tonight. Our planets. Our stars: To be determined.

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