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As Real As It Gets

0.
//foreward

Beatrice Rubio-Gabriel

When I was asked to write about this show, one of the first things that was flagged was the tight turnaround. However, I was excited to write for Matt and Sam, and so I took it on board without hesitation. For better or for worse, I have garnered a reputation for being a queen of clutch time. The fourth runner of the relay and a master of achieving last-minute deadlines when we have decided yet again, to bite off more than we can chew.

The art world seems to move like this. It's either too fast or too slow.

My mental health for the past year or so has taken a deeper dive than I would have cared to admit. It took almost a month to shake the virus out of my body when I caught it earlier this year, and within that, my own sense of self slowly began to disintegrate as I stopped being able to do things that I wished/needed to do.

Shortly after, I started a new job and I am very quickly learning that I am not made for the office. I am sure my supervisors are noticing that too, if evidenced by a text sent to me last night, *'I would like to have a conversation about you with a few things when you come in tomorrow.'* Before I had even left the office I had already decided I couldn't come in tomorrow so it was a little bit awkward replying that back to such a tense text. She's nice and all, but the job moves like clockwork, and I don't know how to be a cog.

I'm sitting here in a self-imposed isolation with no other way of knowing how to take time off. My mind is breaking and I'm pretty sure my body broke yesterday, yet I still feel *so guilty*. As I continue to move through the world in a way that is full of care and emotional sustainability, I am constantly reminded that we reside in unkind structures - the act of being kind, and kind to oneself is seen as messy, inefficient. I suppose in other industries, a little bit selfish. Mostly chaotic. But I am sitting here and I am writing. Riddled with the guilt by the simple act of trying to take care of myself, my mind is at least taking its first breaths once more.

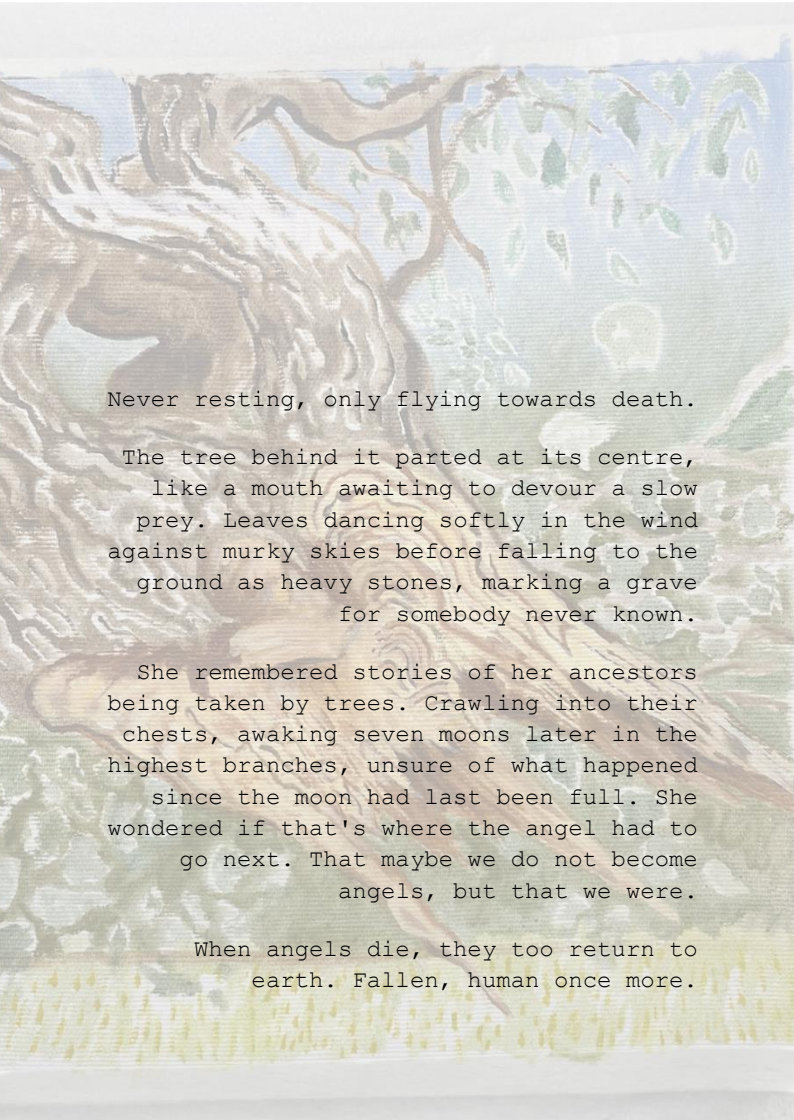
I.

An angel is dead, she thought, still quite unsure how it was possible.

But there it was, slumped against the tree, decaying. Wings the colour of parched leaves with lines singing its age and demise. Half of its body had cracked away, splintered like a broken tree branch. Its insides hollow, and what remained of it, petrified.

She couldn't understand why or how it may have happened. Eternal life and all.

But even immortality was not immune to nature, it seemed. Nothing was. Immortality is simply paced a little more evenly to nature's bigger journey. And even angels got tired, she supposed. Working away until their wings dried out, no longer able to sustain soft feathers.

A painting of a gnarled tree with a hollowed-out trunk, set against a blue sky and green foliage. The tree's trunk is thick and twisted, with a large opening in the center. The branches are thin and delicate, with small green leaves. The background is a mix of blue and green, suggesting a sky and foliage. The overall style is impressionistic and somewhat ethereal.

Never resting, only flying towards death.

The tree behind it parted at its centre,
like a mouth awaiting to devour a slow
prey. Leaves dancing softly in the wind
against murky skies before falling to the
ground as heavy stones, marking a grave
for somebody never known.

She remembered stories of her ancestors
being taken by trees. Crawling into their
 chests, awaking seven moons later in the
highest branches, unsure of what happened
since the moon had last been full. She
wondered if that's where the angel had to
go next. That maybe we do not become
angels, but that we were.

When angels die, they too return to
earth. Fallen, human once more.

II.

Beware water.
One day, it is a wave that will take
you away.

The ground quivers,
air in shuddery breaths
opens wide to birth portals
into other worlds
outlined by the light of the cosmos
breathing shakily she
steps forward into the dark
floating u
p
the fabric of the universe
is not a blanket but a soft ocean yawning
open with stardust twinkling across an
infinite black sea of as they die death
over death in sharp and brilliant blinks

piercing the sky over and over like the
deafening of her heartbeat before **d r o p**

the heavy plummet down d o w n d o w n
d o

w n

w

a r

d

s- spinning and spinning as
lifetimes swim before her eyes circling
her mind in hazy circles of other places
that could be and the slow heave of time
and space before a s l o w
exhale into heaven and hell and the waves

crashing against the shore become
precious water droplets of worlds within
worlds entire ecosystems thriving in a
single bubble of the sea and its depths
its dark now pulling her under and the
sounds of her breath being stolen from
her lungs piercing through her ears like
lightning and with each bellow of the
beast in the underworld and the trumpets
of angels she too e x h a l e s

Beware water.

*One day, it is a wave that will take
you away.*

III.

Other worlds are simply fuller versions of this one. Colours inbetween colours and notes between notes, and the lines of where one thing ends and another begins dissipated into the truth of it all.

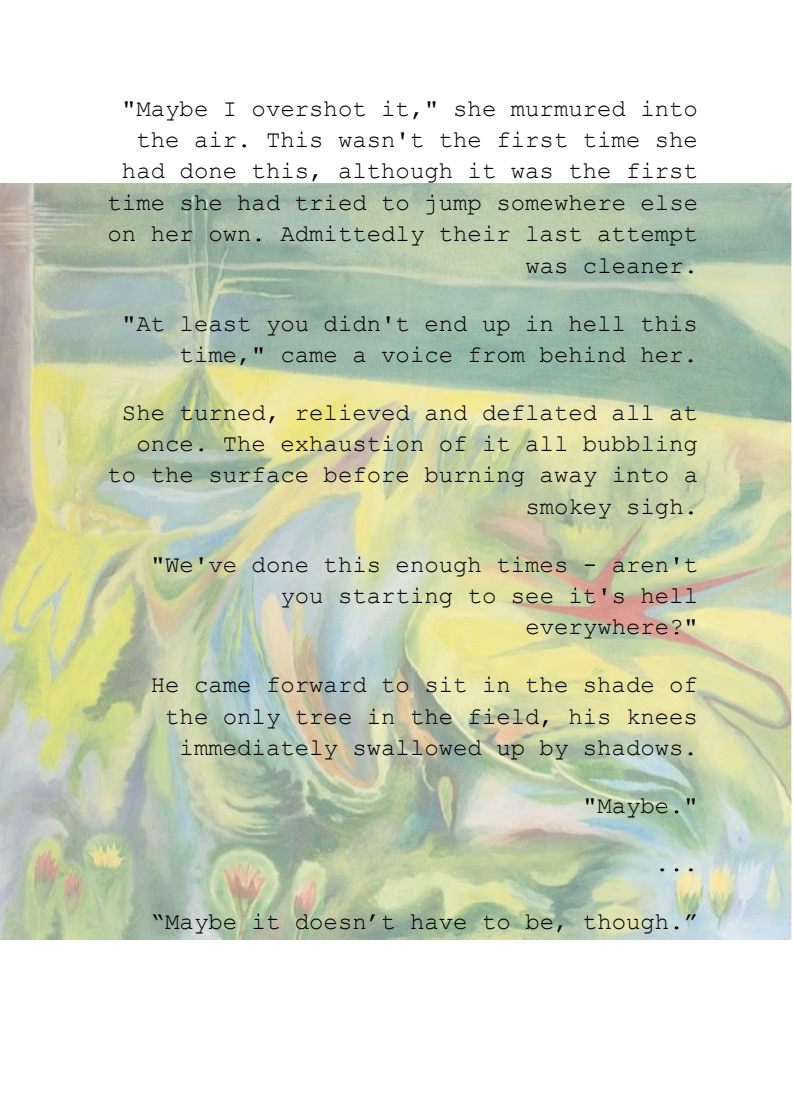
This is too much, she thought.

Too much green, too much ground and not enough sky - an ever-stretching horizon where her eye did not know where to go. Just too much of everything, really.

Standing on a field that moved like water, the grass came up to hug her ankles in uncomfortable, sloppy kisses. The flowers melted together and tinged the soil in shades of red and purple, and the sea and sky joined together in a hug, enfolded, until becoming mirrors of themselves.

The world had become too much.

Clouds swam beneath the bottom of the lake, chrysanthemums bloomed in murky bubbles, and she thought to herself, surely death was actually fuller than life.

The background is a soft, painterly illustration of a landscape. It features a tree on the left side, a field of green grass, and several flowers in shades of yellow and red. The overall style is gentle and somewhat ethereal, with a muted color palette.

"Maybe I overshot it," she murmured into the air. This wasn't the first time she had done this, although it was the first time she had tried to jump somewhere else on her own. Admittedly their last attempt was cleaner.

"At least you didn't end up in hell this time," came a voice from behind her.

She turned, relieved and deflated all at once. The exhaustion of it all bubbling to the surface before burning away into a smokey sigh.

"We've done this enough times - aren't you starting to see it's hell everywhere?"

He came forward to sit in the shade of the only tree in the field, his knees immediately swallowed up by shadows.

"Maybe."

...

"Maybe it doesn't have to be, though."

IV.

Sometimes there
is an immobile
death that
remains unspoken
a living
immobile silent
death breathless
clothed over
your face like a
shroud like a
veil like that
thin sheet of
blanket you were
birthed into the
world with
before being
pulled into the
air b r e a t h e
and take your
step once more.

Dear xxxx,

I think I'm going to make myself some new feet.

I have been
and the
has woven
bones and
my spine but
fine, really I

Death and sleep
are brothers but
grief and
silence are
loves, did you
know?

very tired
exhaustion
itself into my
the nerves of
I'm sleeping
just---

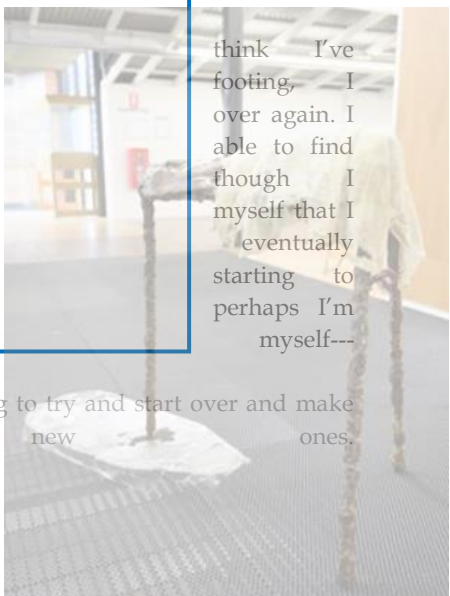
I'm just---

very tired.

Every time I
found my
lose it all
haven't been
my feet even
keep telling
will
and so I'm
think that
just lying to

think I've
footing, I
over again. I
able to find
though I
myself that I
eventually
starting to
perhaps I'm
myself---

So tomorrow I'm going to try and start over and make
some new ones.





V.

"What is it?" She turned the thing over in her palms gently, appendages morphing over the back of her hands as she did, her fingers coated in petals of oil spill.

"I think it's a flower."

"Right."

"I think it's pretty."

"Right."

"You don't like it." More a statement of observation than a question.

She sighed. "Did you really have to bring
it back with you?"

"I was just trying to do something nice."

She stopped turning it over and it
trembled as it lay still on her hands,
now her wrists, too, unsure where to swim
to.

"I mean, I really appreciate the gesture
but--"

"It's not what you needed."

"No."

"Well, what do you need?"

"I don't know."

VI.

I'm going insane

You're not going insane.

*Then why does it feel like I can't do
anything right?*

I don't think that means
you're going insane.

I just want to be okay.

I know.

Why is it so hard?

I don't know.

Does it get better?

You get better every
day.

I'm only failing every day.

Ah, but you are failing upwards.

?

When you try and fall and
get up and fall and-

See, that's insane.

I suppose so. But you do
move upwards.

I suppose so.

Perhaps we're all insane.

I think I'm just tired.

I know.

The day sucks.

I know.

But it's beautiful.

You're insane.

I told you.

Are you ready to go back,
now?

I don't know.

That's okay.

I don't think I want to go back.

That's okay, too.

Ever.

You have to go back at some
point.

Okay.

You can do it.

Okay.

I'll sit with you until you're
ready.

Okay.

...

Thank you.

VII.

The sky burned in hell's blush, marbled through with murky violets. She had been here before.

"Good grief," she muttered beneath her breath. It'd been a while since she'd been here.

The willow tree had withered into thin, sharp spines of itself, leaves now the colour of a murky lake, branches arching across the sky ready to swallow the world whole.

Hell was pinker than she remembered it, but it was still as discomfoting with faces etched into the clouds of the sky, mouths open to heave forth lightning and great serpents into the air. Still with that ever-raging storm. Still so cold it was already frozen over. Always too close to the doorway of her mind.

Eye sockets formed portals to the heavens, empty caverns woefully asking her how she was back here again. She usually found herself here alone, ~~save for the last jump she made,~~ but she found herself returned to the depths of her mind, this time, alone once more.

The sky exhaled in a smoky breath and the wind sang through her hair

We knew you would be back.

She sank at the base of the willow, the ground soft as a marsh, quicksand bubbling at her toes in pebbled flames. She buried her arms beneath the soft earth like a blanket, and closing her eyes, prepared for a long sleep.

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. .
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"You're doing the thing again."

She opened her eyes weakly before deciding they were better off closed.

"Yes, I'm doing the thing. I always do the thing. You know that by now."

"Come on. Get up."

...

"Get up."

She sighed, her breath exhaling out in a misty serpent, before reaching out a hand from below the hungry soil.

VIII.

//epilogue.

They call it growing pains. That tumultuous process of figuring out what's happening, what you're doing, how you want to do it, who you want to do it with, who you can even do it with, who holds your space, are you even holding your own space, how can you hold that space of others whilst never letting go on your own, and that, it's okay to let go of your own sometimes, and you're just *g r o w i n g* but FUCK they sure are growing pains.

they *hurt*.

Just like cutting out a cancer, pulling out a hangnail, ripping off dead skin, plucking out hair, stitching together bones, breaking teeth, and replacing all of these parts of you like a sinking ship
of Theseus

it fucking hurts.

She sat there at her desk. No longer some
otherworldly being to jump between
universes, no longer someone imbued with
superpowers, no longer a spirit who can
hear and see other spirits, no longer a
carrier of stardust.

Just a keeper of dreams and nightmares.

She got up to smoke a joint. Cancer cut
out, wound still oozing, blood and pus
still running down her shoulders over her
waist, down to between her thighs, her
fingers the only things clean.

She was so tired.

But at least, she hoped, maybe tonight
she wouldn't wake up screaming.

The next morning dawns and we try all
over again.

So often when we struggle with mental health, we build a world for ourselves where we don't have to go through such struggle. I think what is so beautiful about the premise of this exhibition is that it attempts to build that collectively. Surely if we combine all of our fantasies, something kind will emerge to position itself against this world.

I am not writing about this show, but I am writing with it. My own fantasies and struggles. Mini worlds about worlds and a collision of possibilities. I'm not going to say that *I hope you enjoy reading these as I have enjoyed writing them*, because you largely might not be able to understand them. But I hope you resonate with some of them.

And in that, I hope that you might bring your own fantasy into mine and into ours. And maybe we might begin to build new worlds together.

B