

Monster Theory



There are no monsters here, only
a scar where there was once a body,
only the way a boy turns up his collar
to hide the electrodes in his neck,
the way he pulls his hat down low
to hide weird angles of his forehead.

Because a boy learns to be a man
by his father's example.

I tell my son there are no monsters,
only our collective fear of the dark
and when I close my eyes at night
my father wears broad shoulders
and a nice jacket. He holds his arms out
in front of him as he walks toward me.



GLITTER FACTORY

Do you believe in chemistry? Not people but polymers,
aluminum metalized polyethylene terephthalate—

these syllables stick in the throat like the stuff itself
clings to fingertips, sifts into parquet, drifts between seams

as the black sky's glitter falls sometimes towards us,
is lost in bangs or glimmers in toothbrushes. Secrets
abound in the factory: formulas, vapors, obfuscations—
a millennium of waiting for our sparkle to biodegrade.

We're a very private company, a subtle corporate personhood
behind the silver's keen refractive sheen. Vague faces
in a foxed mirror, we've vanished when you spin around.

In this Year of Glitter the factory's gained new customers

but we mustn't name them. Suffice it to say we have friends

in the whitest places. We're the brains behind the nation's
most dazzling invitations to the greatest golf courses, hotels,

estates, where our products are found not only on surfaces

but enter the mix of lipsticks, the elements of jet planes,

handguns, limousines. We can put a shine on anything—

Think Well of Us

Though we rats fled this ship
before it sank, what little time
we had we spent gnawing rinds,

squealing. And, yes, we saw
it coming, closets of unworn
winter clothes, a bonanza for

moths. Even so, woke at noon,
ate oranges by the bagful. Can
you forgive failures, operatic

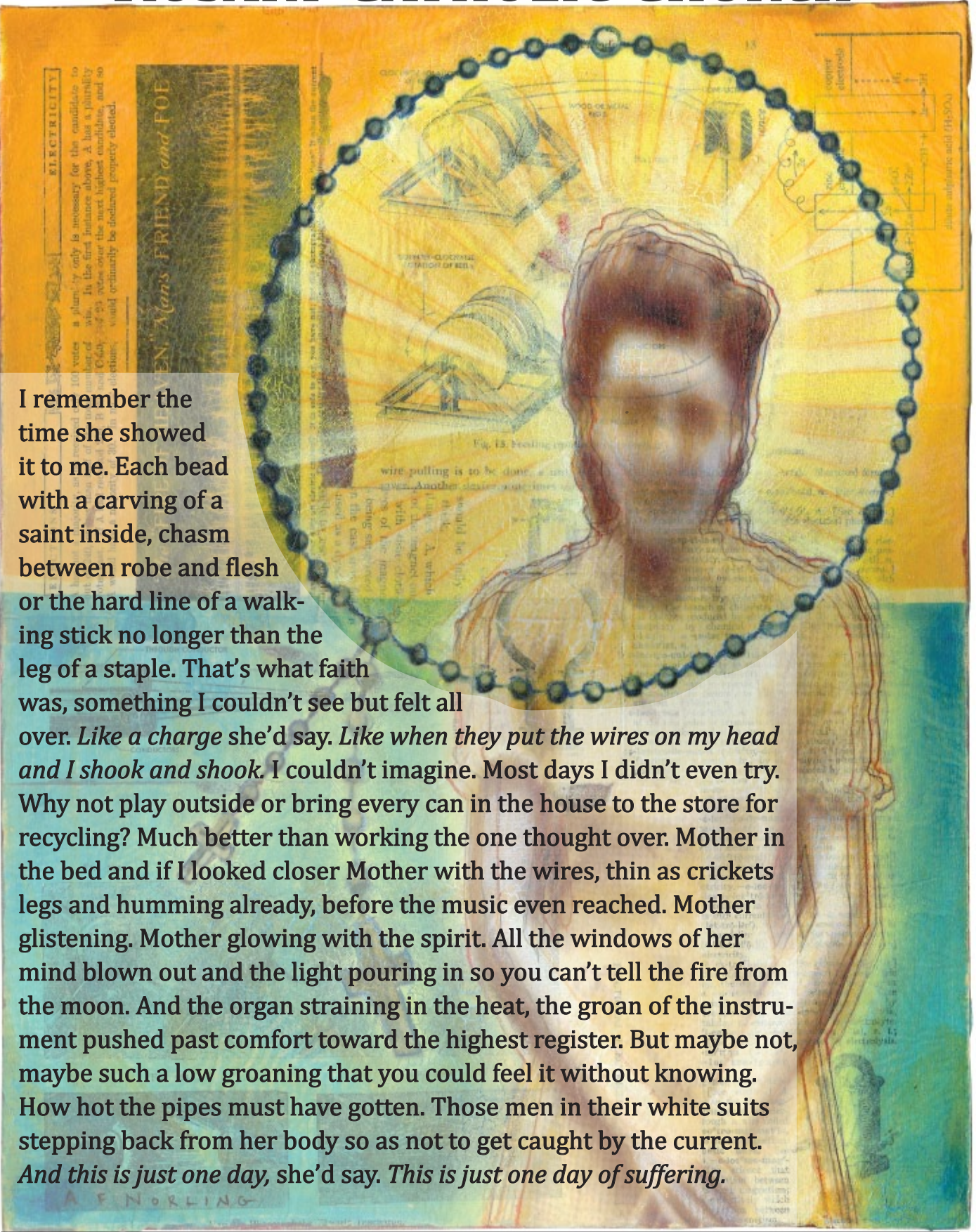
at this distance—Salton Sea
gone desert, fire ants lacing
floodwater with red ribbon.

Heat-buckled concrete tripped
us, but we caught ourselves,
kissed the top of your head in

the carrier. I know, we can't
leave you here. But we will.



ROSARY CATHOLIC CHURCH



I remember the time she showed it to me. Each bead with a carving of a saint inside, chasm between robe and flesh or the hard line of a walking stick no longer than the leg of a staple. That's what faith was, something I couldn't see but felt all over. *Like a charge* she'd say. *Like when they put the wires on my head and I shook and shook.* I couldn't imagine. Most days I didn't even try. Why not play outside or bring every can in the house to the store for recycling? Much better than working the one thought over. Mother in the bed and if I looked closer Mother with the wires, thin as crickets legs and humming already, before the music even reached. Mother glistening. Mother glowing with the spirit. All the windows of her mind blown out and the light pouring in so you can't tell the fire from the moon. And the organ straining in the heat, the groan of the instrument pushed past comfort toward the highest register. But maybe not, maybe such a low groaning that you could feel it without knowing. How hot the pipes must have gotten. Those men in their white suits stepping back from her body so as not to get caught by the current. *And this is just one day,* she'd say. *This is just one day of suffering.*



Almost Spring

You're nothing like a ghost,
nothing wispy. You don't even resemble
air or mist. Instead, your weight across
my arm is all I have—laced with cold, garnished

with a name you'll never tell
anyone. Still, almost child, they lay you
in my arms like you could cry yourself back,
like you even knew

how. For a second, I think of opening
your eyes, but falter, afraid to know
whose they were. I want to hum Brahms'
lullaby, but you are not

listening. I count
backwards from February and try
to erase this. I get to June.
You're still quiet, still heavy, still.

Dear Atom Bomb,



I confess—you were my high school obsession. You bloomed inside my chest until I howled. You shook me with your booming zillion wattage. You were bigger than rock and roll. I lost days to you, the way you expanded

to become more than even yourself. In Science class movies, you puffed men like microwaved marshmallows, raked blood from their insides, and always I could feel your heat like a massive cloak around my shoulders.

You embarrassed me. You were too depraved for dignity, not caring whose eyes you melted, whose innards oozed; you balled up control in your God-huge palms and tossed it into the stratosphere. Oh, Atom Bomb,

I miss you. These days my mind is no incandescent blur but a narrow infrared beam spotlighting bounded fears: cancer in a single throat; a shock of blood on the clean sheets; a careless turn from

the grocery store lot into the pickup with the pit bull in the bed. Oh, Atom Bomb, come back. Take me away from the twitch in my leg, the cracking lead paint, the lurking salmonella. Sweep me up in your blinding

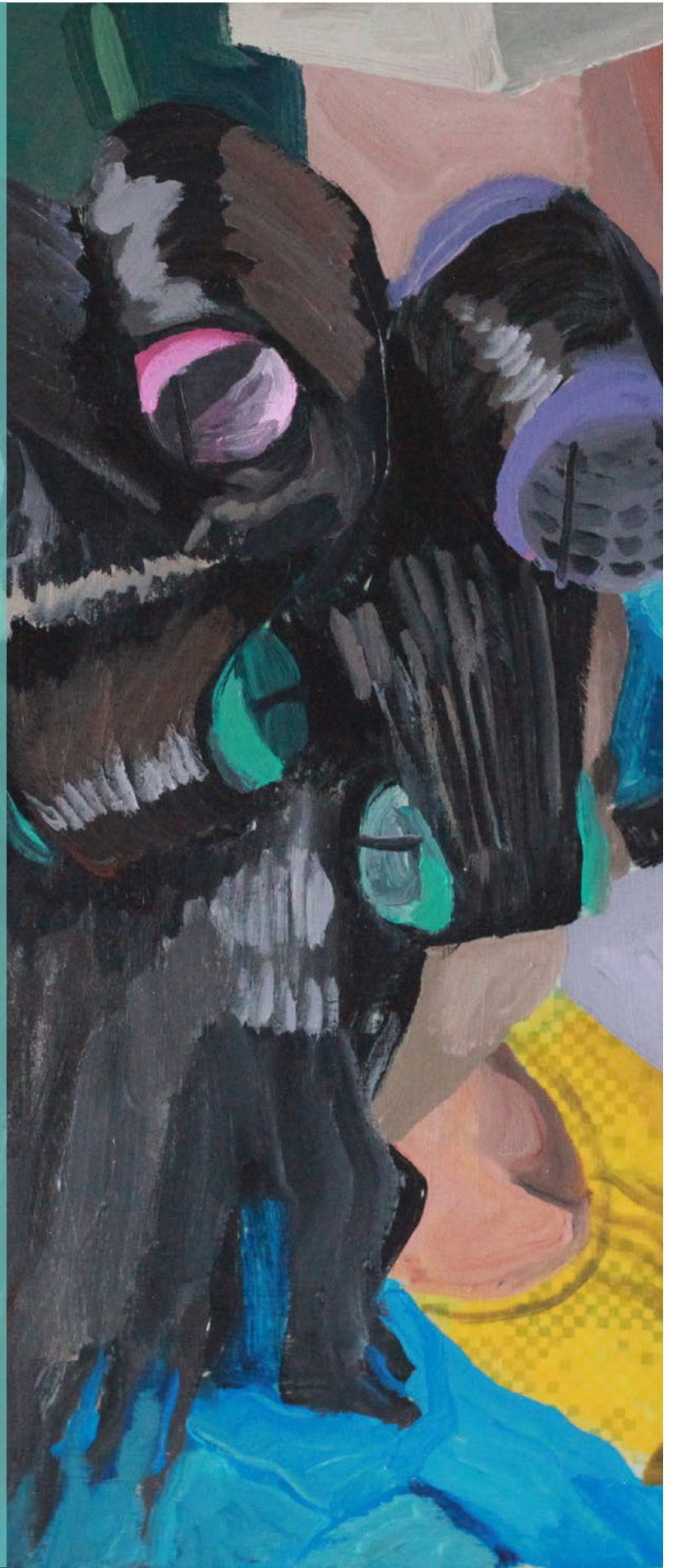
white certainty. Make me sure once again that I'll live till the world's brilliant end.

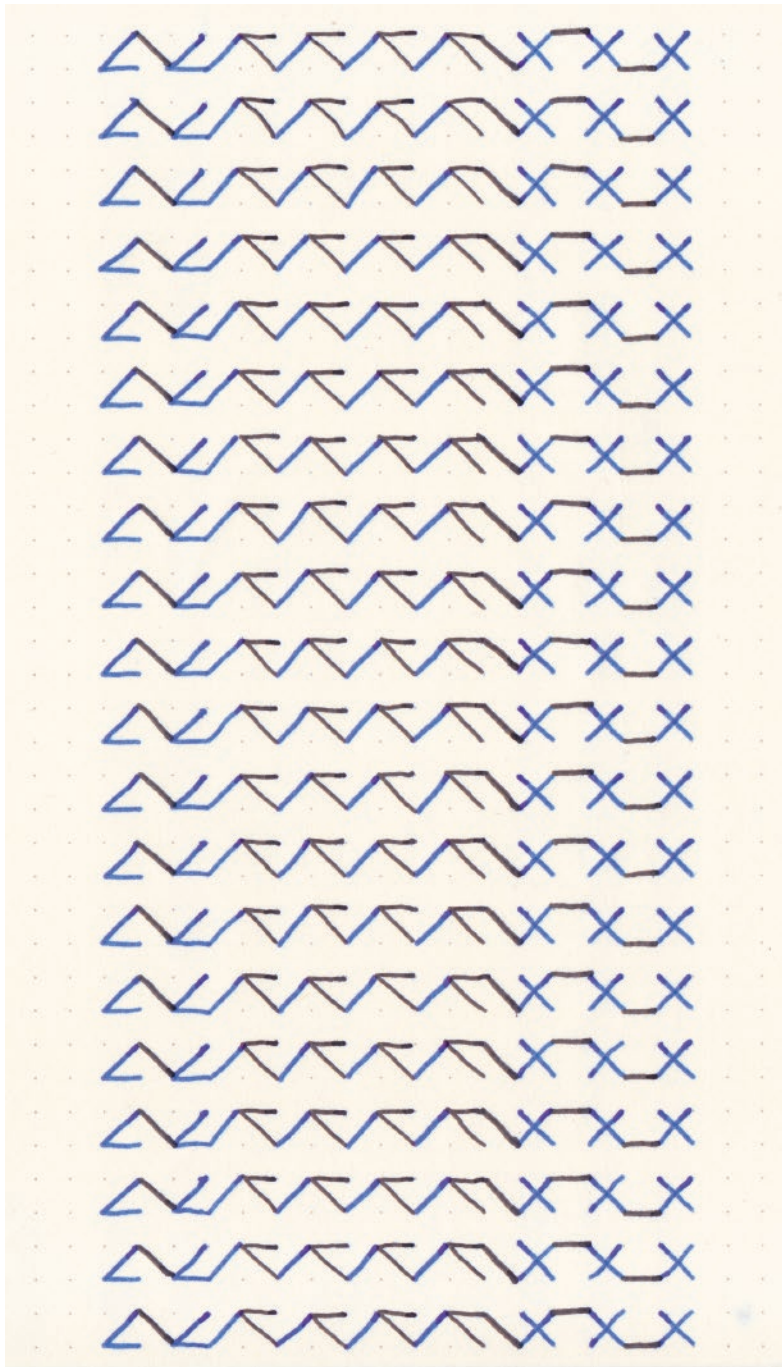
DITIBAABIDE / THE ROLLING

Noodin ina
Is it the air
gema ge baabii'od
or anticipation
gaagaagi ombinigaazod?
that lifts raven wings?

Ditibaabide ina
Is it the roll
gema ge gokokaashkaa
or the motion
waa-bimiweba'ogoyaang?
that causes waves?

Ezhi-babaamenimiyān ina
Is it the care
gema ezhi-babaameniminan
or reciprocity
mii waa-aanikebimaadiziyaang?
that binds us?





Niizhosagoons gemaa Nisosagoons
Daso-biboonagad
Two or Three Thousand Years

Ishkwaa gaa ningaabikide
After the minerals melted

mikwaamiikaa ajina mii dash
ice reigned for a while and then

daashkikwadin, bagonezigwaa
cracks and holes appeared

ziibiins ani ziibi ziiiskaaj
streams became a river casually

ziigijiwan ziigwanikemigad
pouring seasons onto the land

wiindigoog zaaginizhikawaawaad gaye
wiindigoos were chased away and

ge-jiibinwenid mooz-anang
in the blink of a sky-moose's eye

nagadenindiwag maadizijig miziwe ziibi.
lives were entwined along the Mississippi.

Sickness

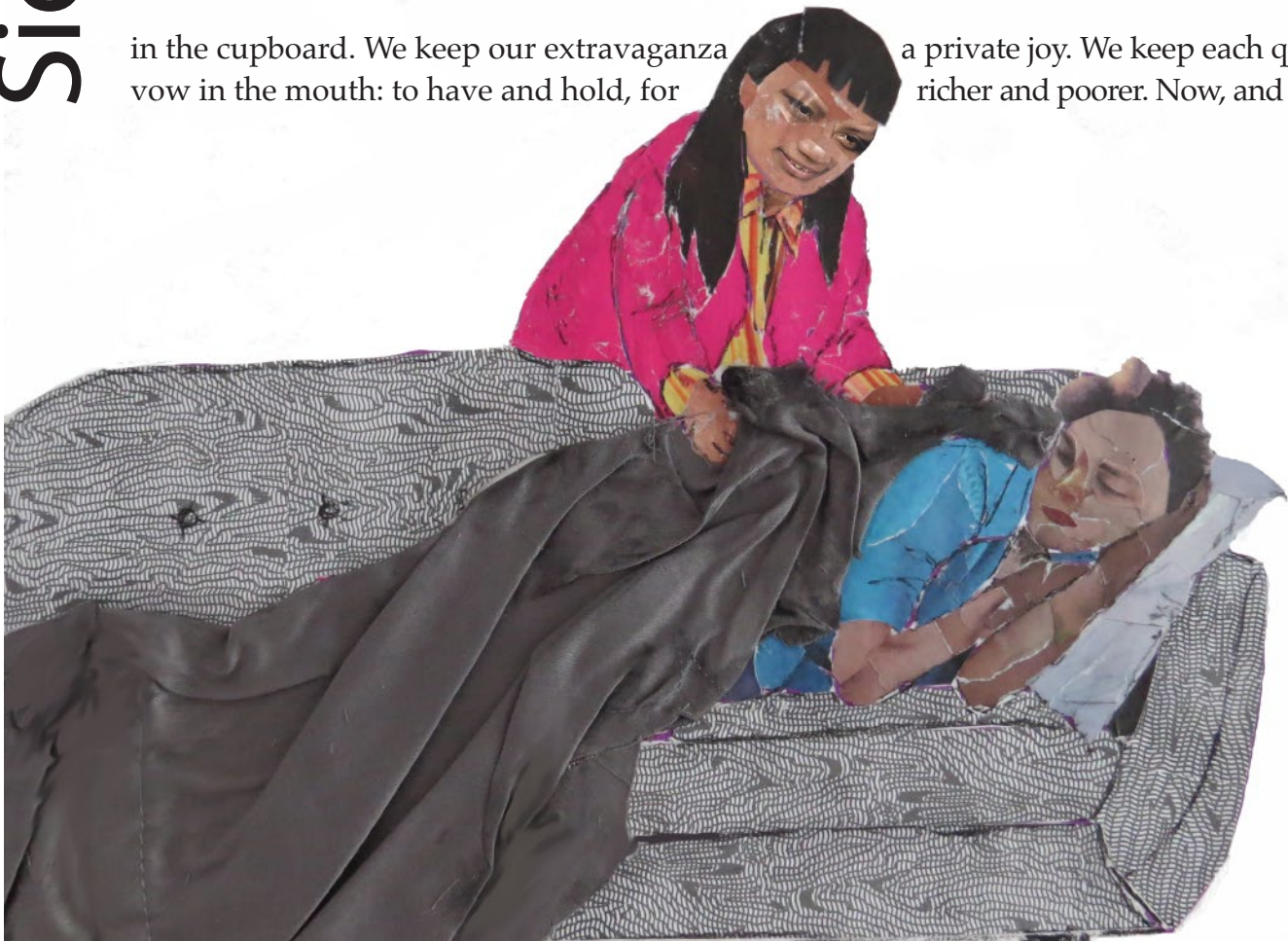
We never married, thought it too quaint, too ball and chain. Fixed, pinned.
We rejected being yoked like oxen, caged together in that hallowed zoo. And yet,
we dreamt of a honeymoon, every place we'd explore, were money no object: north
and south of the equator, shore to shore, dozens of state parks. For now, you go
as far as your job at the hospital, despite my qualms, for the hazard pay. Home
at night, you wear a mask. I wear gloves. This is our latex without sex. This is love
in a time when every blush conjures fever, when we quiz each other
after each cough. I examine your hands, count as you soap them before we touch.

For better or worse, we cozy together to wait for the latest dispatch. I exhaust myself
with updates, jerk awake hours later. You've covered me with a quilt

from your glory box. I find you gazing out a dark window, watching your ghost
in glass vanish at civil dawn. I join you, squint to catch that phantom us

wearing a gown, a tux. No father gave you away, no mother arranged my veil,
no frenzied crowd jockeyed for the bouquet. The rice, unthrown, we keep

in the cupboard. We keep our extravaganza a private joy. We keep each quiet
vow in the mouth: to have and hold, for richer and poorer. Now, and in health.





Semblance

The dog I love is turning into my father
an old man I have to humor to get up
do his business he even growls like my father

and gives me the eye I never know what kind
of mood I'll find when he wakes from a nap
and with stiff joints makes his way to the kitchen

when it rains he turns from the door whining
peckish when it snows he refuses to wear a coat
when people visit he remembers his old

manners and sometimes joins us on the couch
and falls asleep snoring like my father who
never had much use for my conversation

and showed his teeth when I
displeased him collared as he was
and made to heel by his betters

after guests leave he stares at his food sometimes
I ignore him sometimes I plunge my hands
into the smelly stuff and he eats from my palm

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