

Transmissions from the Mermaid Palace

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Abstract

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THE MERMAID PALACE

When I was five I dreamed over and over that I lived in a pink-as-cake sandcastle and each room was a tropical fish tank and smelled like one too.

It didn't help that mom did tank maintenance at a fish laboratory and put me to bed smelling like chlorine each night, or that dad was a fisherman and came home after that smelling like chum. It didn't help either that I'd been baptized in the Atlantic by a gay guy pretending to be a priest. It didn't help that the ocean was lapping at our front door every time it rained hard or stormed under the moon, our house a clam shack at the base of a salty brine.

Down the street from our house was Dunkin Donuts, and years later, when I was an angry clerk at Dunkin Donuts, I would dream that inside the big hot glass window of Dunkin Donuts was a tropical fish tank and all the clerks, the whole clucking gaggle of them with their burgundy polo shirts and their high-waisted tan polyester slacks, the whole gang of them was a school of mermaids. We were swimming around eating clam munchkins and it was just like flying. We all had mandatory tan tails and they were all high waisted.

(*)

Down the street from Dunkin Donuts was Toni's house. Toni was my best friend when I was five, and we'd play mermaids on the beach all summer, writhing around on the shore and eating raw fish.

Behind Toni's house was a little shack. In that shack there was an opportunity and in that opportunity lived Sanderson. Sanderson was a stodgy and mustached old fisherman. Sanderson said inappropriate things in front of the kids and we loved him for it. Sanderson was a hermit, a bachelor, but he knew and liked my mom because a few years back they had worked in the fish laboratory down the street from his shack, down the street from our shack— down the street from all of the shacks there was another opportunity— a fish laboratory situated several feet below sea level in the old bunkers nestled into the littlest cove in the bay.

Sometimes in the summer after the beach we would stop at Sanderson's house to drop off Toni and my mom and him would drink beers on the porch while the short-wave radio crackled and he would show us the pelt of a roadkill beaver he had skinned and would tell me and my little brother Jaimie about the fish laboratory and the fishy stuff that went on down there.

"You'd be surprised what those maniacs are capable of" he would start.

"Knock it off Sanderson, you're scaring the kids" my mom would roll her eyes and take a cold gulp of Rolling Rock.

But there was always something nervous about her interjections that made the stories darker, more believable.

"The head scientist, he was this scrawny guy with a German accent. A real sadist"

"What's a sadist?" Jaimie would plea. Jaimie wanted to believe. Jaimie was four.

"It's a really sad person" Toni answered.

Toni was a year older than me and took it out on all of us by explaining in graphic detail what the condoms and needles we would find forming fairy-rings in the cemeteries and woods were and how to use one and everything else we were dying to know.

Or by pretending to be Wendy when we played Peter Pan and the lost boys, fucking WENDY, singing Eidelweiss in a sweet and sultry voice, shushing at us and telling us to go to bed while we giggled and spat and bounced hyperley on the bed.

The rest of us could either be lost boys or the mermaids, but never both.

Mischief was our main game those days. On those hot summer days Toni handed me lessons in mischief she seemed to pull out of thin air. Or on second thought, must have been handed down to her by a deep web of mischief makers that goes back as far in time as young children.

We would make gaps in the Atlantic & Pacific while mom shopped. As mermaids, we were released with liberty to swim through the milky market, and we would go up the stairs and past the conference rooms in the back of the store to the “bathroom”, where we would plug up all the sinks and lock the bathroom stalls and crawl out the bottoms, and unplug all the lights and turn on all the sinks and stop up all the toilets with globs of toilet paper and flush and flush. Soon a rumbling would start deep under the market, like a singing but wet and wild. and we would get ready to run as the churning broke forth from all the bowls and basins and we would have to high-tail it shrieking down the stairs past the break-rooms as the wave crested and shot us spinning out the giant swinging double- doors. We would be laughing and crying on the linoleum and all wet and shaky. Then we would slide down the isles on our stomachs grabbing everything we liked and eating it right there, while security was busy trying to figure out the flood.

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TAPES FROM FIRST *PERCIPIENT*

John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* was published on April 12th 1984, also my "birthday", the first day of my clean and sober new life. As part of my treatment, I was sent to *Remote View and Listen* at Rome Point. I was tapped on the shoulder by a child sent to live with the seals on Lunatick Island. I was tapped on the shoulder to attend the baptism at the cove below the fish laboratory where I was receiving treatment. There, a child in white doilies was being dunked. I emerged from the water there in my submersibles, just my eyes and my white latex *cohuleen driuth*, my magic cap, barely visible above smooth gray April bay.

The first *percipient* appeared to be a teenager out on the rocks below the lighthouse, watching intently from afar the ceremony taking place across the bay. The second *percipient* being a small child that looked like a boy but had been dressed in doilies. I was to report back to the scientists. The scientists think I work for them, but I am a triple agent, capable of anything. What I saw was a baptism, the script of which had been slightly modified with red marker, some sections crossed out and words changed. The section that protects the child from possession had been cut, and I saw this as an opportunity to attach myself to them, slightly above their right shoulder.

What I saw when I turned 180 degrees was another child alone on Lunatick Island save the seals, watching the whole thing go down. What I saw, a few years after that, were two wet children on the floor of the A&P, laughing and crying hysterically and eating easter candy, after I emerged from the basin of the toilet in the back of the market and began looking around and listening.

(*)

Before me and Jaimie my mom put a downpayment on a shack of her own, partially with money from the fish laboratory and partially with tips from waitressing at the Beechwood Inn. And with the very major sacrifice of her first-born, my older sister Jackie.

The shack had belonged to an old lady named Virginia, a spinster who spent her summers there, smoking poggies in the outhouse. Virginia liked my mom because of her independence and cut her a deal when she was ready to let the shack go. The shack had belonged to Virginia's brother, a judge. It was his summer drinking refuge, the basement filled with beer bottles and trash. And before that, a long time ago, it was an inn, an ancient inn where people on horses would go. It was a dark time then and there was an unexplained fire that burnt the Lilybridge Inn to the ground. There are artifacts from the inn buried in the yard, because that's how people used to deal with their garbage. We would dig up old medicine bottles and broken cherub statues and line them up in the windows.

The clam shack she bought with loans from the bank and money she saved waitressing her entire previous life at the Beechwood Inn and with the very major sacrifice of her first-born, Jackie.

It happened like this:

She would get in her dodge dart and drive down to Rome Point. She was putting herself through college for zoology and she was doing some field work down there. At Rome Point in the winter, the seals would gather on the rocks. First the alpha seals. Then the beta seals. Then the gamma seals. Stacked in neat little rows across the rocks. She went down to watch them and count them and see what the alpha seals were doing to the beta seals were doing to the gamma seals. She would go down with her water-proof note-pad and sing to the gama seals while facing out to sea. Sing, "*a little cottage please.*"

Mostly she thought it was a good idea to do nothing and be nobody, so she literally threw the baby out with the bathwater which was her first born, a bastard who was black-irish and odd. Jackie's being odd involved a neurological Lyme-disorder and the baby would shake and regurgitate in the crib while ticks crawled all over. Jackie's eyes were too wild and it was too much for her, she was so young. She put little Jackie in a lobster-pot sized wooden box and floated it out Rome Point.

a little cottage please. a little cottage.

Jackie's father was one of the reckless fishermen who was drunk and poor and bad. He drowned at sea.

My father, who came later, was a quahoger and not drunk anymore and thus not as poor or bad.

The seals took Jackie to Lunatick Island right off the coast, and said, "alright then, a little cottage." The loans went through and Virginia called her the very next day with a sweet deal, and she got her little trash-filled shack to settle into to start fresh, away

from the drunk fisherman and with no Jackie to care for. Consumed by guilt, she started meditating and telling herself she was nobody special, just as her father had been telling her for her whole life.

To replace the gaping hole where Jackie had been, she got twin Siamese cats, and named them Pandora and Ru, Ruby for short, and let them raise me and teach me things once I came along.

(*)

THE SWAMPTOWN EXPERIMENT

“Williams’s “lively experiment” in religious freedom, emerged not within a “howling wilderness” but within ancient Indigenous homelands—indeed, within a well-traveled crossing-place. It rested on the margins of the Great Salt Cove, a fertile habitat for fish, shellfish, birds, mammals, and humans. Here multiple Indigenous peoples seem to have moved and interacted for generations. The mention of the Native “town of Masha pogue” in discussion of the boundaries for an early land transaction signaled just how populous this Native territory was. Williams’s arrival commenced a series of English settlement-building projects around the bay: at places English colonists called Providence and Warwick on the mainland, and Portsmouth and Newport on the island of Aquidneck. These disparate collections of houses, fences, pastures, and mills were tenuously connected, from colonial perspectives, by emerging paths, roads, and ferries, all of which lay within well-traveled Native trails and water routes.”

-Memory Lands: King Philip’s War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast, Christine M. DeLucia, pp. 126.

(*)

In the 1970’s, the CIA introduced new-age philosophy and lifted meditation out of vibrant cultures elsewhere to spread it virally among certain factions of the American masses. They also gave acid to flower-children and put crack in the black-panther neighborhoods. This was an attempt to stop the civil rights, anti-war, feminist, and all the other political movements that were threatening to overturn racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. One of these psychological weapons was the introduction of RV (Remote Viewing)¹ meditation to the good people of Swamptown. The good people of Swamptown were unknowingly the butt-end of a joke posing as a psychical experiment.

Sponsored by a self declared “Frater” and his band of limo-driving, wide-eyed chauvinists, the “Swamptown Experiment” as it was termed was part of a study called “Consciousness as a ‘Field’: RV meditation and changes in social indicators.” The premise

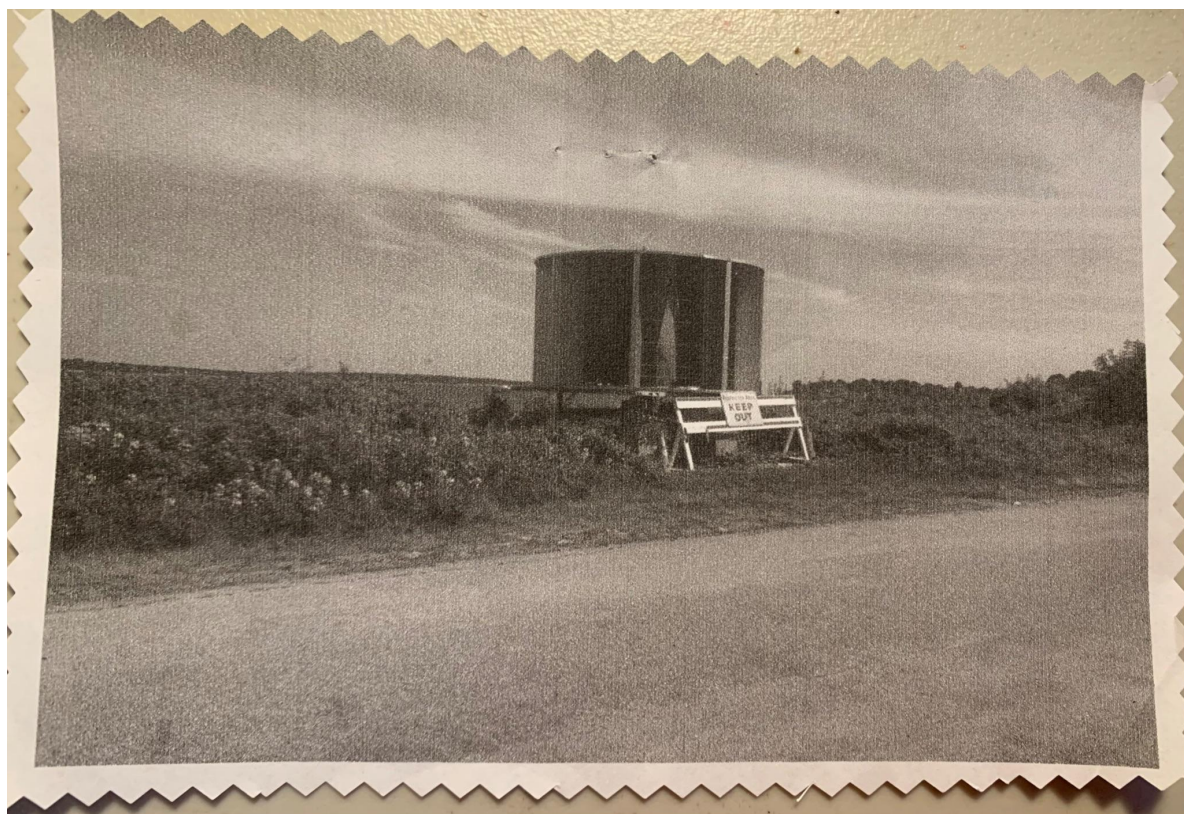
was that if enough advanced souls were saying “um” or “one” over and over, well, the rest of the molasses folk would pick up the pace and follow suit by driving drunk less, getting jobs, and reducing their carbon footprint.

Frater Hazard had had his own “spiritual awakening” a few years prior to sponsoring the Swamptown Experiment. Being the heir to all the ax factories, snuff mills, and half the non-swamp land in Swamptown wasn’t enough to keep him on the wagon. Infact, might have been related to why he kept falling off. A bumpy ride, the last pothole of which knocked him on to none other than Carl Jung's very own couch in Switzerland.

Dr. Jung was experimenting on his patients with a plethora of chemicals while recording them on magnetic tape talking about their dreams. It was here that Frater Hazard, known as “Bubby Hazard” at the time, came to believe that a power greater than himself could restore him to sanity.

He left Dr. Jung's office with a prescription for the alchemical combo that had taken his consciousness by storm, which he immediately had synthesized in a lab, on a mission to save other alcoholics.

His plan was to recreate the scenario which had restored him to sanity on Dr. Jungs couch. The recipe to do so involved dosing those still sick and suffering with the synthesized combo while dropping them into their own personal dream planet, in search of their own personal “power greater than themselves” that could restore them to sanity. These treatments eventually led to the use of sensory deprivation tanks. Fortunately, Frater Hazard was heir to a crumbling granite castle that crumbled down the hill towards the fish laboratory, and barely had to pull a single string to acquire use of some of the decommissioned fish tanks.



The CIA had been sniffing around the fish laboratory for the better part of the century, after the federal government purchased the property, from, oddly, Davis Painkiller Manufacturing Company. All the buildings in the former South Ferry Village had been razed, save the inn and the dye-and-engine house.

“In 1901 the U.S. Government purchased from Davis twenty five acres for a coastal defense fortification to protect the west passage of Narragansett Bay. In 1904 the military reservation was named Fort Kearny in honor of Civil War hero, Major General Philip Kearny, killed in action in 1862. In 1906 construction began on the fortifications and three major gun batteries were installed (Armistead, Cram, and French). In 1908 Fort Kearny was garrisoned and the South Ferry Church was used as an entertainment center for the nearby troops (ie. Whorehouse). After World War I the Fort was in caretaker status and the guns were removed. Fort Kearny was reactivated in WWII, new barracks were erected, and rapid-firing guns were installed at battery Armistead, which overlooked the Fort Kearny-Fort Getty anti submarine net that closed the west passage. The Fort was also used as a prisoner-of-war camp for eighty-five german soldiers, a very closely guarded secret at the time” (Lost South Kingstown, Kathleen Bossy and Mary Keane, pg. 22)

The Feds saw an opportunity for control and evil in Frater Hazard's “Treatment Center”. They were already in bed with the Hazards family.

(*)

1. 'Remote viewing' (RV) is a term introduced in the context of experiments conducted at the Electronics and Bioengineering laboratory of the Stanford Research Institute (and funded in part, it was later revealed, by the CIA) beginning in the early 1970s by researchers Harold Puthoff and Russell Targ. In the researchers' own words, these experiments' results suggest "the existence of one or more sensory modalities through which individuals obtain information about their environment, although this information is not presented to any known sense" (Puthoff and Targ 1974: 602). Puthoff and Targ's initial experiments involved the testing of pre-selected subjects' (or percipients') ability to describe salient features of the geographical surrounds of an 'agent' dispatched to a location undisclosed to the percipient and "inaccessible [...] by any known sensory means" (Dunne and Jahn 2002: 2). Elsewhere, the term has been defined as "the ability to describe locations one has not visited" (Mumford, Rose and Goselin 1995) or a "a perceptual ability by which individuals are able to describe and experience objects, pictures, and locations which are blocked from ordinary sensory perception" (Lee 2007: 144). (Mowbray)

(*)

I've heard the initial results of the Swamptown experiment were very positive, with Swampowners doing a lot better in these "fields" than their brothers and sisters down in the control zone, New Jersey. However, the positive results didn't take, as I've been in sixteen car crashes, all in Swamptown, the unemployment rate is the highest in the nation, and the whole lyme-infected state is slipping rapidly into the sea. The great-mother is rising.

Around the time that mom was buying her shack and the CIA was starting the new-age, the evil government was also cooking up a scheme to keep stay-at-home moms in Connecticut in their homes as much as possible, by gruesomely disabling them and their children.

Betty Friedan's "Feminine mystique" had gained great popularity, sparking the birth of second wave feminism, and as hordes of upper-middle class women continued to be dissatisfied and have a lot of time on their hands, there was a slight chance they might radicalize. This could result in them twerking and unraveling patriarchy by the funneling of funds to all kinds of subversive organizations. Why not give them and their children a serious illness to contend with, that would take up their time with doctors visits and caregiving.

However, Ms. Friedan herself never missed a beat, and would continue to send her snotty little brats over to the neighbors house to infect their children while she went out with her friends and started a magazine.

In the same laboratories where the government was experimenting on drug and alcohol treatment patients, having them astral project into different "zones" about town in

hopes of using this technology for surveillance, they were also creating the pleomorphic germ *Borrelia burgdorferi*, that would come to be known colloquially as Lyme Disease.

It was in this climate of second-wave and CIA intelligence operatives that my mother bought her clam shack at the base of a hill in the wilds of Swamptown. The house is located at the edge of the Narrow River across from the Lily-of-the-Valley bridge. The Narrow River isn't actually a river though, it is an estuary, salty and sweet.

Worlds meet.

My mother never anticipated the catastrophe bubbling under her feet.

(*)

THE FISH LABORATORY

The fish laboratory was associated with the university, but had been bought out by a private company around the time my mom and Sanderson were laid off.

It sits nestled in the smallest cove in the bay. There is a dream place, a dream place. It is a hill between the old port road and a scenic highway. There is a ridge there. It exists in dreams. It is about 12 miles long in the dreams. At one end there is a castle and at the other, a semi-abandoned Franciscan monastery. The monastery crouches behind a large wrought iron gate with a rusty lock hanging from a rusty chain. At the bottom of the ridge churns a salt swamp filled with muscles and blue crab. Was filled with muscles and blue crab. Not any more.

There is a Walmart supercenter. Behind that, a great place to walk your dog.

The salt swamp turns into a small river leading out to the bay. The river changes direction twice a day with the tides. If you're going to stand up and say something, stand on this hill and climb the biggest rock on the hill and look out at the ocean and yell. Look all around and decide what parts of this magnificent world are yours and then declare it so. Climb up through the grape vines and scrape your knees along the rocks and crawl through the bullbriers and the ticks, all the little ticks. Get as high as you can and shout out at the ocean. If you want to fly, come up here and with a leaping jump, jump out off the rocks towards the ocean. Or alternately, climb the tower.

The monastery sits at the top of the hill overlooking the bay. A cracked back road runs through white pine trees and rhododendrons to the jail. A figure in brown robes, a rope, and a reverse bowl cut disappears between the pines. A solitary caretaker of the estate.

Mouths of bunkers back there open and breathe damp cold air along the road. During the war, all the old buildings were turned into fortresses. They are covered in short tufts

of grass and moss under oaks or other acid needles. There is trash everywhere. There is a water tower and another tower, an old stone tower that stands in the middle of the road. There is a square of old pine trees planted in rows. A mouth down into the ground is marked by a granite obelisk that has sunken at a 2 o'clock angle. The hole is covered with boughs and they are covered with more boughs and piles of needles. In the center of the fort, on the bare earth, someone has placed a white rock. On the rock there is a candle. Two children crouch on their dirty knees by the candle. Another one stands in the shadow by the door. He is paying to watch the two children kiss, a penny a second. He throws pennies at the white rock and they bounce off the rock with a metallic ping. He has a red stain around his mouth from eating autumn olives.

All children have bowl cuts. One of them is telling stories about murder most foul, bloody mary bloody mary bloody mary. Say her name in the mirror three times and she will appear hungry. One of the children has his arms crossed behind his back, where earlier that day they were held while he was pushed into the dirt and called a girl. One of them lives in a foster home and can't stop moving, a home with several other children on the ridge. Later he will join the army. Today he finds his friends in the woods along the ridge to the abandoned monastery and the pine square. They scramble down a whole in the ground that is rimmed with poison ivy. They try not to brush their legs against the hairy vines covered in ticks. They go between the roots in the ground and down a hole. The hole leads to the bunkers that run under the ridge and connect the old jail as well as the monastery and the fish laboratory. At the back of the dugout is a low cement door leading into darkness. The children can hear what sounds like a little girl's voice echoing up through the tunnel. They see something far far down, like looking at your reflection in a well, what looks like a girl in a white gymnastics uniform and a white swimming cap. She is going through a sliver of dim light far away and calling to them. The children collect the candle and the pennies and enter the low black door at the back of the dugout.

(*)

The tunnels are dark and damp and echoey and cool. You can hear a swift sound in the air like a stream or the concentric waves of amplified water droplets, a steady boink boink boink like a stone plopping into a deep pool in an even deeper cavern. Boink. Boink.

And that was how you would get to the mermaid palace in the awake world, not just in sleep. In sleep you go in your sleeping bag or blanket. In the awake world you went through a hole in the ground at the top of the ridge in the woods between the monastery and the jail.

In the mermaid palace, there wasn't just one creature from the lost lagoon trapped by evil scientists for their sinister experiments and plans for weapons of mass destruction. There were many. It wasn't just one lost maiden, one beautiful pearl from the ocean floor, one soft and sweet and QUITE oh so QUITE little mermaid. There were a dozen. They were all different too. it wasn't just Nessy and it wasn't just the selkie prince, though it was one of each of something that resembled them.

It was Bluebeard down there, the part where the lady finds the room with all the other ladies, and each one of them was dead hanging on a hook. Dangling like a payphone. Only in this case they weren't exactly ladies, and they were live hanging on the hooks. Some of them looked like ladies. It was like that movie where J Lo gets into the head of some maniac by getting hooked up to a catsuit and electrodes and through the catsuit, gets into the mind of a serial killer who's in a coma, and it turns out he's strangely an intuitive cop from Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. He's gone rogue and he's got all the girls in there in all sorts of catsuits and bondage and each one has its own tropical fish tank and is sort of on display behind glass, suspended on hooks.

That's what it was like. Each of the sea creatures was back there in a big tank suspended on electrodes and being monitored for all types of activity and the hooks were more like electrodes than hooks. It was like a museum or aquarium mixed with a very very invasive unconsensual hospital procedure.

I had seen an invasive hospital procedure when I went to see grandpa dying in the hospital. He had pneumonia and was drowning to death, they kept putting more and more tubes down him and through the glass I saw him begging them to stop. The creatures in the laboratory looked like that in a way, monitored while drowning to death, but something told me immediately that they weren't going to drown, that they craved nothing more than the cold freedom of the open ocean, each and every one of them, that their bodies and souls craved the ocean like a thirsty person, a very very thirsty person stuck in the dusty desert in the flatbed of a broken down old truck would crave a drink, their very bodies thirsty for the sea.

The walls down there were green with old algae, green tinted cement lit with dim yellow buzzing bare bulbs every ten feet. It was not just damp down there but wet, getting wetter by the minute.

The hallways had been there since before the war, surviving countless storms with crashing waves and the gentle breathy lapping that is the constant of the sea.

Next to each tank was a wall of television screens, playing loops of what the creatures in the tanks were seeing and hearing, Remotely. Some of the screens showed places and children from above ground. Cemeteries and ruins littered with trash and graffiti, a local guy here or there passed out against a gravestone.

Some of the screens showed women in fancy long dresses smoking cigarettes in a circle, in a parlour in a beautiful house.

One tower of screens played a tour through the magnificent halls of the Mermaid Palace.

ONE TRIP TO THE MERMAID PALACE, PLEASE

There were a few ways to get to the Mermaid Palace.

One was to go down on your hands and knees in a shawl in a dark moldy basement and beg.

One was through old photographs. Eve Butler, the archivist, had collected everything that could be found about the Mermaid Palace throughout the history of Swamptown, personal accounts typed up on pink mimeographs, blurry film strips, corroded VHS tapes, and sonographic maps. A newspaper clipping from the Narragansett Times recounts the history of the Butler Collection:

“Eve believed history should be written only from primary sources, and she early convinced me of that. Copious notes about her discoveries eventually filled more than two thousand loose-leaf notebooks, stacked in confusion on makeshift shelves lining the walls of her home, subject headings like “Witches, Bitches, and Holes of Swamptown”. . She was fond of typing her material on bright pink carbons for a copying machine, rolling off dozens of mimeograph duplicates. Some of these she distributed to her students. Others were filed in appropriate notebooks. Fortunately this ardent historian required little sleep and could devote long hours to her work

Sad to say, she published little in finished form except for a few articles and a children’s story “Carlotta and the Mermaid”. She is listed in the Library of Congress for “Uses of Cardinal Flower in the Northeast” (1957) by Eve L. Butler and Wendell S. Hadlock. (E98.I5 B88) and “Along the Shore: Selkie sightings in Swamptown” 1930 (QH1 .B84).

Besides these few publications, she issued mimeographed titles herself from time to time. This was a great loss to our knowledge of local history

for now we have only her working notes and unfinished writings which, without her own vast knowledge, are difficult to interpret.

With a \$2000 grant from the Bodenwein Public Benevolent Foundation and muscle power and good hard work on the part of Harry Nelson and architect Sanford Meech, shelving was installed, furniture painted and a heating system provided. From the old farmhouse in Exeter, thousands of notebooks and manuscripts and hundreds of printed volumes were moved to their new home in the basement of the old bank.

By the summer of 1966, the center was in full swing, staffed entirely by volunteers, ready to help anyone interested in Native lore, local history, genealogy, historic photographs and other phases of Americana. The organization, which now numbers over two hundred members, has preserved these papers making the Eve Butler library available for public research”

-The

Narragansett Times July 1969.

Much of Butler’s original findings were burned in a farmhouse fire and water-damaged during the Hurricane of 1938, but the corrosive effect this had on the old documents only made reaching the mermaid palace easier.

Again this technique required going into the basement. Basements were a good way to access the mermaid palace.

There was a library in the basement of the fish laboratory, actually. The fish laboratory was named after the owner's wife, Miranda Fish. The library had books about every topic of every sea creature that had ever existed, especially the ones that were illusive. It

had books about other plants and animals too. The library had file-folders of every ghost and vampire and supernatural occurrence that had taken place there, as well as tape recordings. The library in the basement of the fish laboratory was an archive of everything that had happened, both at the fish laboratory and on the land it lived on, reaching back for thousands of years. Every animal, fish and plant, a lot of them long extinct, including vials of DNA and seeds that had been preserved. Birth and death records as well, even those of the people who had been enslaved there and who had built everything and dug all the granite and wove all the denim, grown all the food and planted every single last lilac next to every single outhouse that they had also dug. There were records of all of this, and none of it had been damaged, not even by the hurricane of 38. Some of these archives offered hints of access to the Mermaid Palace, but the library was only available Remotely.

There was a way for children to access the Mermaid Palace sometimes. To get there they climbed through holes in the ground, old bunkers or caves, sewers, hollows and mausoleums that connected this abandoned and burned down village to that one. There were different holes like this strewn about Swamptown. Some of the holes were made by doing the most unspeakable horrors to the children, the animals, and the land that the fish laboratory was now on. Some of them had been dug by forced labor.

Ripping holes all over Swamptown and taking things out of the holes, water or graphite, or putting things in that didn't belong.

Listening to a noise in a certain way could bring you to the mermaid palace.

It was in the trickle of certain whitenoise springs or the ripples right where a river met the sea, but most of those had been sucked dry, so new technologies needed to be invented to achieve the trans-like state that could drop you into the mermaid palace.

(*)

I discovered the mermaid palace between the heavy glass doors in the lobby of a Dunkin Donuts that sat atop the ruins of a mill at the edge of a slick brown river.

You can't just order at the drive thru though.

“Hello? Yes. Hello. I'd like a trip to the mermaid palace please”

You have to go through the heavy swinging glass door into the glass entryway—turn on your heels three times on the crusty pink and orange carpet all smashed with rainbow sprinkles and munchkin flakes, touch your nose, say something three times fast—something about a boston éclair—and get spat out the other side. Either that or drop acid behind the dumpster with one of the other clerks after taking out the stinking hot bags of rotten milk, go back inside to finish cleaning up your shift, and then go through the drive-thru on your way out.

“Hello? Hi, yes. One trip to the mermaid palace. Hold the sugar”

(*)

TAPES FROM CARDINAL FLOWER DAM

“ There is nothing more upsetting than haunted water”

-Selah Saterstrom



Cardinal Flower, (*Lobelia cardinalis*) is a native perennial of the truest red that grows along streams and fresh water bodies around much of the Northeast. A rare and striking showstopper, I have only seen it in the wild twice.

The last weeks of Summer were spent in the Field, traipsing the deep brown creeks of Swamptown, collecting sound samples from brooks damned centuries ago with granite pulled from the earth, flora and entomological specimens, and documenting the trash and drug and alcohol paraphernalia found littered at the edges.

The overlaying graphs of white-noise, botanical data, and beer bottles correlate to the type and quality of haunting in a given Field.

There are always beer cans or worse strewn about in places like these. If there are no beer cans strewn about, that is to say, if no one is drinking there out of sight regularly, then the place is unlikely haunted.

While collecting data I also MUSTN'T touch ANYTHING. This is very important in this region, IN PARTICULAR.

A punk belgien

*In the middle of nowhere
Look at the pines*

*Looked dandy to me
Culdesac kingdom
Christopher craig*

*Thats a cute cottage
Nice pond
Field-stone chimney
Old blitzkrieg trail
How much is the land I bet its a lot*

Snap a polaroid of a pile of Fireball or 99 Bananas shot bottles, a Mike's Hard Lemonade, if I'm lucky a few needles or wet-wipes forming a fairy ring and a rusted Four Loko can. In my experience in the Field, the more nauseating the specimen in a given location of both beauty, atrocity, and industrial decay, the more active a reading on my geiger counter and clear and feisty EVP's (electronic voice phenomena) when I play back my scratchy tape recordings. The shiny brown tape curling and winding through my gizmos to the tune of the highly charged, conductive, ancient creek waters. Sometimes you get your classics: "GET OUT" "BITCH" or "GO AWAY". Other times it is the most heavenly celestial music, and everything in between.

*In july I had a cardinal flower
Cardinal flower cardinal flower
My love in the time of cardinal flower,
A beesting to the foot.*

Mary anne at the rathskeller drinks and

*a business deal,
Over burgers and wine
large quantities of cash and
Drugs.*

They say that fairies dance on the lakes of Swamptown.

*Needles ex girl ex friend
drugs ex blond*

*the fairies of tuckertown pound
dancing in the dark
The fairies hate horseshoes hate iron hate plows
That the tourists left around
But the fairies are an invasive species here too*

You can imagine my delight and astonishment, this summer, while out in the Field, when I spotted the elusive *Lobelia cardinalis* across the dam from where I teetered, trying desperately not to touch the Mugwort or Loosestrife as I collected my sound samples. It is such a true and startling red, I nearly fell over. I gathered up my gadgets and tape reels from the ledge of the dam, and ventured across the rotting wooden footbridge towards the gleaming patch of Cardinal flower.

I was haphazardly not suited up on this occasion. I don't know if you have ever tried to squeeze into a full-body, white latex catsuit with a hood, but it is not pretty. On top of this add tall, heavy, industrial style moon-boots with a million zippers and clasps, or if you happen to be in the "field" but out on the streets, vinyl stiletto thigh-highs, also white. It's not the heat it's the humidity in Rhode Island, and now it has become both. Feels like 122. I was careless because I wanted to be comfortable. And this behavior can have serious consequences.

*Shoved my snout down to the ground
To make me smell the dirt*

Barberville dam

*No trees no woods no fields
It's just pathetic
But then again I'm just lucky i can afford it
And yet my legs are getting...*

*White wood aster
Absolute
There's no trees no woods no foot*

*Look at this rock with all
The virginia creeper*

"GET OUT"

"BITCH"

"GO AWAY".

The worst part about the chipmunks in this region is that they look like the cutest, long-eyelashed little darlings straight out of Snow White. Don't let them fool you. They will come right up to you, hands clasped under their chins, batting away and thumping their little tail like pepe le pew, and the next minute will have sunk their fangs into you thigh (yes, they also jump very high) and infected you with a plethora of confusing and undiagnosable infections that present differently depending on whatever evil you have hidden inside you or psychological issues you have not dealt with.

*This is really magical
Is this a saw mill*

*The fucking middle of nowhere but
Were either going west or north
Probably northwest*

*Its got to come out somewhere.
This is Rhode Island.
Your never far from anywhere.*

*This is rural.
Reeeeely rural
Dead ends as dead as a doornail
Dirt roads*

Keep the FUCK out

*That one looks dire too
The craziest mutherfucker i knew
Goes to bed early now*

*is sober and celebrate
and wearing all white*

*150 says keep the FUCK out.
No one wants to go down
down your dead ass dirt road*

*The sounds of new england
Gets straight to the point
Doesn't beat around the bush
Were workin on a type 5*

*Tight 5
In the northwest the noise is
Passive aggressive*

I had arrived across the slick brown waters and was now balancing on the edge of an old stone foundation, below which the lobelia cardinalis dangled like a ruby. I had to get down on my hands and knees on the lichen, lusting after the bright red gems. I knew not to pick it and that it was not advisable to touch ANYTHING in this region. However, my heart overtook my head, and I was determined to pluck just one blossom.

As I bent down, my ankle must have been exposed, and in a flash, I was bit by something so fast and ferocious I couldn't even see what hit me. I was breathing fast and heavy and on the tapes later, it was Grizzly-Man, sucking through my teeth, screaming bloody murder and swearing. I passed a little box turtle smashed out on the road as I hightailed it out of there. Within an hour, my ankle was swollen like a beachball and I could hardly walk. By night, a fever had set in.

*In Swamptown you just polk around
The fuck you want
No ones going to shoot you.*

*Not Like Michael,
He wasn't a bad kid
Just one of those kids who
Doesn't go to school*

*Look at this beautiful
Beautiful beautiful
Beautiful beautiful
Barn*

(*)

I'd pressed Cardinal Flowers in the pages of my notebooks, encircled in a heart with Lex Getaway in mind, years before all his brothers died.

In a way, they had saved my life by picking me up in the family minivan, unlicensed, unregistered, from faceless rapist after faceless rapist's culdésac nightmare on elm street.

They picked me up at the crossroads when Head kicked me out of a moving car, and the cul de sac of a McMansion where I had had to climb out the window of a locked bathroom after Snapper and I had beaten each other blue.

Lex getaway drove the Del's lemonade truck around the pier all summer, saving up to go on tour. It only played Dell Shannon. One day, Lex Getaway stole the Del's truck. As he drove off into the sunset, it blasted "Little Runaway". That was the last time I saw him.

MY MAGGIE CASSIDY

The Saugatucket river, its shiny brown water spilling over the Narragansett granite ruins like a strip of magnetic tape. Another route to the mermaid palace.

The children skate in the abandoned buildings on the river. And performed petty vandalisms there. Ollies and kickflips. Pop-shuvits. The rattle of ball bearings and trucks grinding waxed curbs. The hiss of spray-paint cans and bang of quarter-stick dynamite. The sounds about town. In the static of the bank teller, in the thank you very muches and have a good days, the hum and whiz of the shoot. Another route to the mermaid palace.

My Maggie Cassidy was a tiny little tortured pale-as-snow-and black-haired boy named Lex Getaway.

We kissed over a bottle of Chianti stolen from the Beechwood Inn where he washed dishes. The kind that came in a straw koozie and tasted like vinegar. A table decoration. A fiasco. We sat atop a tomb that jutted out above the brown waters of the Saugatucket as it seeped through Griffin's hollow.

As a child I had fed snapping turtles bits of sugar cookies off the old train trestle. Now Lex fed me a direct line to the Mermaid Palace. I was hooked.

Lex only hung out with his two brothers Kenny and Led. I hung with the boys who skated around town with three white XXX's painted on their vests. Which made no sense because of their taste for pills. The boys that snorted pills in the comfort of GreySkull, the crumbling mansion on the hill, Mr. Griffin's Empire:

Snapper, Needles, and Head.

I wouldn't have crossed paths with Lex if it wasn't for Area 51, the punk club above Heelys Newsstand. He and his band of brothers didn't go to school, but on the weekends they beat drums and smashed guitars in abandoned factories and row houses all about town. His color was stripes. He played drums better than Chad Channing and was sweet 16, sweet 75, Sweet Jane all wrapped up in one sweet treat. He had been on a music tour in a Del's Truck. Just watching him slink about town and the GAP between his teeth, and I knew I had to have him. I was OBSESSED! Knowing that a song was a great way to cast a spell, I wrote him a few and sang them in his direction, west of GreySkull where I was crashing, with a lit candle alone on the sagging mezzanine. Pretty soon the tables had turned and he was singing songs at me and making me tapes that I would listen to on headphones all day like a zombie as I skated around. Or better yet, he would pound them into the crowd at Area 51 with me in the middle of a pit of writhing bodies sweating and slamming into each other. I was HOOKED!

He had been in a band since before he could talk, so he was very good at it. The band was with his two brothers who were also little and odd and had never been to school or done anything that would socialize them in the normal, off-putting way like a real boy, that turned them into the masses of faceless, personality-void rapists that roamed the halls of the school.

The Getaway boys were special. Everyone knew this. St. Patrick, the homeless trenchcoat guy who lived on the church couch, said Lex Getaway and his band of odd brothers had taken it to cloud 10.

Their dangerous drumming, exquisite harmonies, and Danny Elfman piano parts brought the Mermaid Palace to the surface right in the crowd at Area 51. Brought the Mermaid Palace up from a bottomless chasm and presented it to us as the most exquisite celestial music that was also punk rock.

They called their band Paxil after the mood-drugs that were at the time turning both my parents into brain-dead zombies, then they changed it to the Seahorses, then finally, chose to go by Monstrous.

Mind you, this was YEARS before Lady Gaga or Nikki Minaj were mainstreaming feminist thought by turning themselves into monsters.

Monstrous as an exciting practice involving the wild possibilities blooming out of the wreckage of patriarchal enslavement, the wicked fantastic spasms propelling us out of law and order that we are conditioned to uphold. The end of a myth.

Strippey little Lex and his two dark brothers hardly knew how to read, so they didn't learn about Monstrous from a book. They had never been to school or done normal things that real boys did, and perhaps this is why they had such a deep, experiential knowledge of the monstrous. Or maybe it was that they had been baby-sat by a serial killer, or that their mom was a born-again Chilean opera singer who only sang to them about hell all day, or that their sister, the eldest in the gang, drove the burgundy minivan through the chicken wire fence at the end of Fish Laboratory's dock— unlicensed, unregistered— with everyone in it on purpose, and they had to swim out the windows and scramble shivering up the beach and walk home all wet. A failed attempt to get the whole family to the mermaid palace. Jesus would eventually buy them a new car, or, at least, my little flour would, by working night-shift after night-shift in night kitchens and movie theaters.

Lex and his crew were like a negative image of the Cowsills or Hanson brothers, and they became increasingly mixed up in the seedy underbelly magic that goes on in old row houses across Swampdown. Maniacs, crashing on couches there, masterbating to the holy ghost and laughing, high on Triple XXX, the pharmaceutical combo that was taking the town by storm.

My neuroreceptors, unbroken yet by triple xxx and bottle after apricot bottle of magic hat, pliable and fresh. The Monstrous melodies swam into my ears and I was transported, not to the pearly gates, but to an otherworld beyond my wildest dreams, where another world was possible. Though it wasn't all maple frosting and sprinkles. There was a monstrous side to this otherworld, a sheer terror only imaginable, what lies in wait at the bottom of a dark trench. That was part of the allure.

The old train tracks ran behind the post office and under the road, the old post road toward the ghost dog ghost god. A crow cries. I sat on top of a tomb. And kissed Lex Getaway above the grave of the little boy who had been lured. Lured with candy or whisky or smokes from Heelys Newsstand. Lured and then eaten alive.

SOBER LESBIAN SEX

Lex Gethaway, strippey as he or she was, was most certainly not a player, but was the best drummer in Swamptown, was two ways at once, was a pod head, and was an angel. His being an angel involved him having hours of sober lesbian sex with me and only me in the unlicensed unregistered burgundee family minivan at the parking lot of South Pier at highest tide.

During the years that I was going around with Lex, when he was just 16 and casting his spell on haunted rowe houses across Swamptown, putting all kinds of addicts into trances with his dangerous drumming and exquisite harmonies, making us all OBSESSED, on that Halloween I had the good fortune of going to Salem with him where Monstrous was playing a Halloween bash. I went as a hooker/mermaid in a red wig. Lex went as Freddy Krueger.

It's not just the murdering of many many women that makes Salem so special, it is also the drugdens and rowe houses, all full of maniacs masturbating to the holy ghost and laughing, it is the way weirdos gather and revel in the spirit of halloween all year, not just in October. The town has stayed haunted partially because of all the attention that death and monstrosity receive.

In other words, people sing to the witches, the ghosties and ghoulies, and they come around and stick around. I was singing to Lex Getaway that year, singing when I dressed as a mermaid- hooker in a seafoam green mini skirt boosted from Wet Seal, and for a little while he was singing to me, dressed as Freddy Krueger and walking the streets of Salem with his bladed hand in mine. However, something would inevitably sing to him stronger though, and looking back, I could already hear its siren whisper.

It had been singing to him and in his blood since before he was born.

Lex Getaway was a black hole and my casting a love spell on him and subsequently

having him chase me around the streets of Swampstown for a while brought me very very close to the edge of being sucked right into his dark magnetism. The hours of lesbian sex, however, made it seem a small price to pay.

GREYSKULL

Greyskull was a gray mansion with rooms. Two kitchens, three stories, and a dumb waiter. The second kitchen had fallen out of use except for the chipmunks that lived up there, who used the pantries for winter storage and the cupboards as toilets and hid from birds and sometimes just chewed.

The boys that lived at Greyskull were Needles, Snapper, and Head. Rent was questionable. It seemed like a squat or drugden but it was actually a mansion. A crumbling mansion. It was owned by John Griffin, heir to the Griffin fortune. He was sweet, but he wasn't really all there. He had been declared legal guardian of Needles after every single member of Needles' family had died, each more tragically than the last. He had been married to Needles' Step-Grandmother who was the last to go. Now he let the boys live there in the crumbling GreySkull with the chipmunks, which was such a kind gesture, considering he wasn't all there.

When I first entered GreySkull's gaping mouth of a door, there were upside-down pentagrams on the walls and people dealing acid and a greasy Wiccan lady holding a baby and punks, not the crusty kind or the kind with three white XXX's, but the kind with skinnies and studs and big-ass clownshoes. There was a taxidermied chipmunk in a bell jar on display on the ancient, gigantic mantle. And then it dawned on me:
DRUGDEN.

When you find yourself in a dumpy-shithole but it's a mansion and there are greasy Wiccan moms hanging out with teenage punks with the shoes, something screams drugden.

The boys who lived there worked at the old furniture store downtown that was definitely a front. The furniture hadn't moved in years and was covered in 2 inches of dust. Once, Needles was seen sleeping on a couch in the window display and it was reported in the police beat:

“Boy reported sleeping in window of Griffen’s Furniture Palace”

Quick Ricks, that made the best hot wieners and chillidogs and biggulptasteyfreezes on the corner, also dealt whatever it was Griffen's Palace was stocking. The line out the door was deranged. Across from that was the Mews Tavern with a pile of dead cats behind the dumpster. Someone had been killing cats behind the dumpster, one in every color of the rainbow. At least 50 cats had been seen streaming out of the chimney of the Mews Tavern once, trying to make a break for it.

To make matters worse, Pandora and Ruby had gone missing.

It was Michael Woodmansee, after he had killed that little boy, but before he got caught.

Piping hot pies were served there, and large steins of beer. It was the kind of place you didn't want to go if you didn't want to run into Jeri, jacked out of his mind, flexing and yelling with his nose full of powder or just standing with his balls out, butt naked in the middle of the room.

Not the kind of place you wanted to go if you liked your cats alive.

“Meet us at the Mews tavern”, the boys offered. I declined.

Or maybe I went for a round, but left quickly, and walked next door.

Next door to that, across from the Beechwood Inn, was where Lex lived in a place with his brothers, with golden wood floors, and you could lie on the floor and listen to the Animals, while he put a spell on you and got high. I fucked him on the wooden steps of the narrow staircase one night when his brothers were in there drinking after a gig and he didn’t exactly have a bedroom door. It wasn't comfortable but at least it was hard.

WAKEFIELD

*Behind the old post office where
We grind
It was all music all the time.*

*What is the story of old wakefield? Its greyskull and
Needles sleeping in the window at griffens
When you know the streets
And the box turtles by name
Duck duck fuck in the park*

*We lit a stick of dynamite and
Dropped it down the gutter
Just to see if it would spark*

THEY KILLED KENNY

Lex Getaway drove the Del's lemonade truck around the Pier all summer, saving up to go on tour. It only played Dell Shannon. One day, Lex Getaway stole the Del's truck. As he drove off into the sunset, it blasted "Little Runaway". That was the last time I saw him. A year later, Lex and Kenny were arrested trying to hock stolen pedals at a guitar store on Bald Hill road, across from Denny's. The crossroads of Bald Hill and Ten Rod Road. A Denny's, a Dunkies, a Cumbie's, and Daddy's Junky Music. A suburban hellhole. Kenny was quoted in the police beat:

FANS ALL OVER

"Two Providence men were arrested and charged with possessing stolen goods on Nov. 30 at Daddy's Junky Music Store on Bald Hill Road. Officer Matthew Barlow said he arrived at Daddy's and met with a manager there who told him two men were inside the store trying to trade some stolen electric guitar pedals. He told Barlow the pedals were stolen from the Guitar Center down the street earlier that day. He told Barlow he got a call from the Guitar Center earlier asking him to be on the lookout for four pedals that had been taken from a display in their store. He said he knew the pedals being offered to him were stolen because one of them had mismatched knobs and other had scratch markings that the Guitar Center described.

Barlow said he went inside and approached the two men. He said they were nervous. They had three pedals they were trying to trade. Barlow said one of the men, identified as Alexander Getaway, 21, of 56 Harold St., told him a friend gave them the pedals. He said Kenneth N. Getaway, 27, of the same address, alternately told him they were a gift from some of his admirers because he was "a musician with thousands of fans all over the world." They were both charged with felony possession of stolen goods. Barlow said the vehicle they came in turned out to be unregistered. The plates were seized and the vehicle towed."

If you call your shop Daddy's Junky Music, you're gonna have to deal with hocked pedals. Hocked pedals on a wet black bough.

A few months after that, Kenny was dead. The boys in the town were dropping like flies.

Who killed Kenny Getaway? We had to get to the bottom of who killed Kenny. Who killed Kenny had become the primordial mystery in the backwoods of Broadrock, in the bedrock of old Narragansett, in the cracks of the Narragansett granite that made up the mills and libraries and schools, in the reasons why we don't go past The Tower. Who killed Kenny? Was it the tank that killed Kenny? The tank was solitary isolation for bad kids, which pretty much meant kids from the projects. So yes. It was the tank that killed Kenny. Or maybe it was Michael Woodmansee. Michal Woodmansee had babysat Kenny. I learned this from Lex on top of a tomb at the Riverside Cemetery. The little boy Michael Woodmansee had killed and a few left over bones buried beneath us, we kissed over a bottle of Chianti Lex stole from the Beechwood Inn where he washed dishes, the kind in a basket-woven koozie that was probably 100 years old and not in a good way. A fiasco. We kissed on top of a tomb and Lex told me that sometime before Michael Woodmansee had eaten that little boy, or perhaps after that but before he got caught, he had babysat Kenny and Odette. So yes, in a way, perhaps Michael Woodmansee had killed Kenny. Or was it The Camp out in the woods in the West that had killed Kenny, after he had escaped from the tank, the camp for boys who didn't go to school. Was it Kurt that had killed Kenny by setting a bad example for what it meant to be a musician with thousands of fans all over the world? Was it the cops at Daddy's Junkie Music? Or was it Pinochet who had killed Kenny, after his mother, an artist, had fled Santiago after most of her friends disappeared. A marked target. Whoever or whatever it was that had killed Kenny Getaway, we had to get to the bottom of it, because it was starting to happen more and more.

The guys were dropping like flies.

DOOHICKEY LEARNING PAJAMAS™

I'm a highly sensitive person, I get carsick, I'm afraid of heights, I get poison oak.

The salt and freshwater meet.

Couples put padlocks at the footbridge over Purgatory to cement that they will always be together. In Paris, a similar monument is covered in padlocks everyday and the padlocks get taken down to prevent the whole bridge from sagging into the river.

At purgatory, they just let the bridge sag into the chasm. Each year, it sags closer. It's barely crossable, especially if you are afraid of heights.

Being in my Field, someone who has to professionally teeter on rocks and ledges, bridges, cliffs, and dams taking white noise recordings, a fear of heights can be a major setback.

Unfortunately, also, being an expert in my Field requires being classified as a Highly Sensitive Individual (HSI) , which can also lead to random bouts of vertigo, reactions to all sorts of environmental stimuli both floral, faunal, and drug and alcohol related, as well as a sensitivity to chemicals, electromagnetic fields (EMF's), and certain sonic stimuli, which all also happen to be important data in my highly sensitive research.

An agent in my Field might be traipsing about in a grassy hillside under power lines, somewhere between a beautiful lake and the Dump, with their EMF sensor going berserk and a splitting migraine to boot.

Blood pressure through the roof, or dangerously low, which can be even more dangerous when teetering on the edge of a chasm. All this and more is made a bit easier with my latex catsuit. Like a thunder blanket.

Buy my latex catsuit.

And large, industrial style combat boots, with all the bells and whistles. No holds bard.

In my Field, we call these getups: Doohickey Learning Pajamas™. .
At Purgatory, I had again failed to suit up.

Buy my Doohickey Learning Pajamas™.

You go down the driveway to GrayGray and there is a big stone mansion.

GreyGrayGreyGRAYgrey.

Miniature ponies. They threw in some miniature horses as an attraction. Nick Cage was supposed to buy it and fix it up, but of course never had. Why would someone like Nick Cage want to live in Swamptown.

The preservation society had taken it over, so by then it was open to the public, and they threw the miniature ponies in as another attraction. Because, there are so many mansions you can go to and squat in, so they needed something a little extra, like a haunted tour or miniature ponies.

From the bridge covered in padlocks that sagged halfway down the ravine to purgatory, you could imagine my suspense and delight, when I spotted, not only a fairy ring of needles, withered condoms, and Four Loko cans littering the banks, and in the middle, a Del's Lemonade cup and a Dunkies cup, caught in a whirlpool, swirling in eternal purgatory.

PURGATORY

*I'm not gonna lie, I'm not here to buy a house.
 I grew up in this house.
 A Cape Cod,
 Dear God,
 With the gingerbread and the porches
 and the chysanthemum and salted caramel swirls.
 No bodies gonna stop us,
 So nobodies gonna care
 Dunes-bury
 Doomsday
 Boston eclair*

*Oh, that
 One is hideous....*

(Soon, through the blistering wind, a grainy loop of purple rain...the sounds of waves crashing...then...)

*I'm not going to make a liar
 out of my mother either.
 No, some really beautiful victorians,
 look at these
 if you
 want some
 fancy-ass trees.*

*Copper beach, yard art,
 the kind you carve
 your lover's name in a heart.*

(Eventually, distant vibrations, the big band blast beats drumming on the horizon. A lot of locals who had OD'd. Fisherman who had gone overboard with the drugs and drunk drowned. They sat at the bar and made scary, misanthropic, all-work-no-play with the ghost bartender.)

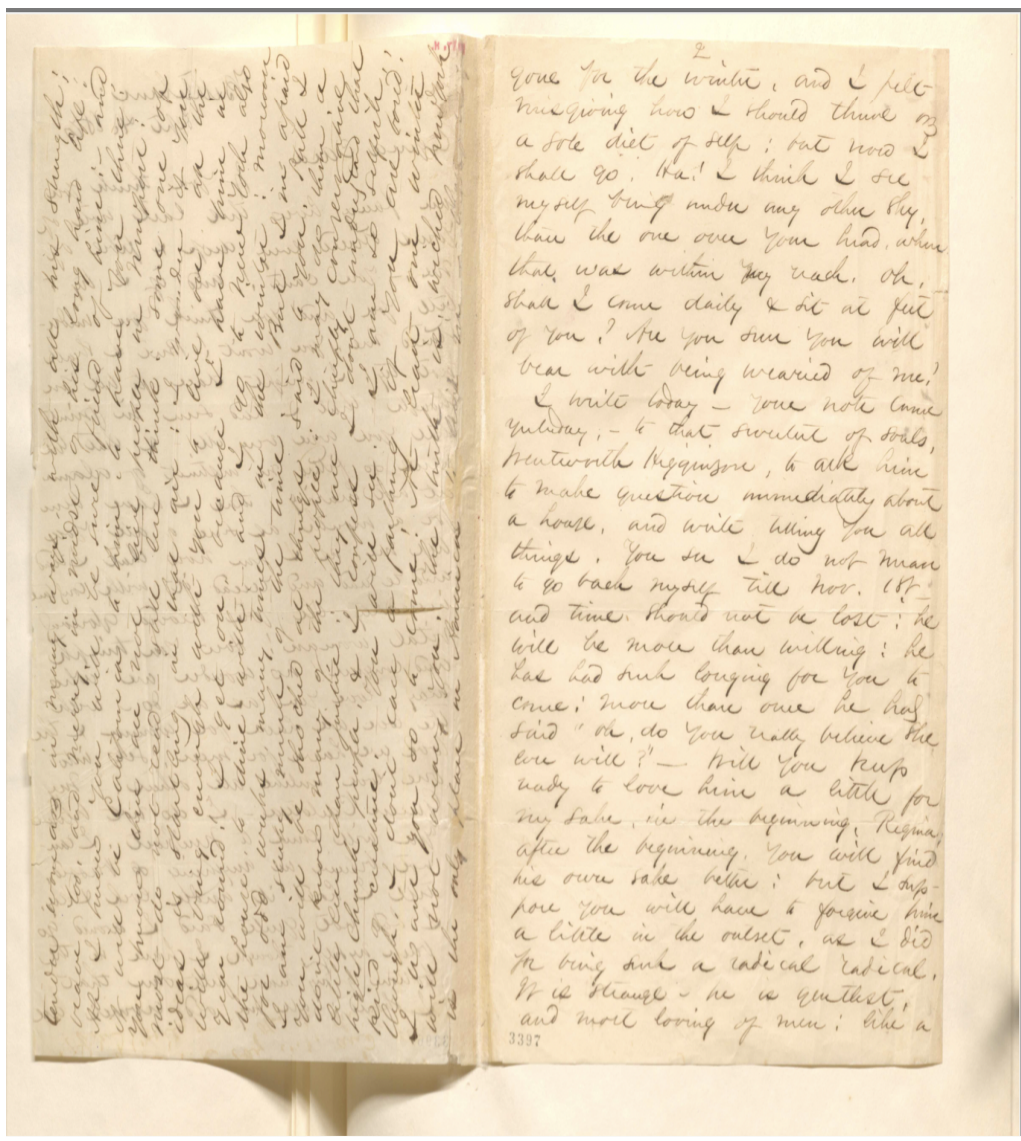
Mumbling things like:

*Kay Street takes you down to Dresser Street takes you straight down into
 PURGATORY.*

QUEEN CARLOTTA

“Oh you beloved glorious vital woman! How you triumph and conquer; no wonder we who may love you as we do—with the love we have for women & the love we have for men, set into one love [unlike?] all others. My Queen Carlotta – I do not believe you will come to Newport”

-Letter from High Society fan to Actress Charlotte Cushman



2
 You for the winter, and I felt
 wondering how I should think of
 a sole diet of self; but now I
 shall go. Ha! I think I see
 myself being under any other sky,
 than the one over your head, when
 that was written by each. Oh,
 shall I come daily & sit at feet
 of you? Are you sure you will
 bear with being wearied of me?
 I write today - your note came
 yesterday, - to that sweetest of souls,
 Hawthorne Higginson, to ask him
 to make question immediately about
 a house, and write telling you all
 things. You see I do not mean
 to go back myself till Nov. 1st -
 and time should not be lost; he
 will be more than willing; he
 has had such longing for you to
 come; more than once he has
 said "oh, do you really believe that
 we will?" - Will you keep
 ready to love him a little for
 my sake, in the beginning. Reginald,
 after the beginning, you will find
 his own sake better; but I sup-
 pose you will have to forgive him
 a little in the outset, as I did
 for being such a radical radical.
 It is strange - he is gentlest,
 and most loving of men; like a

Queen Carlotta (Charlotte Cushman) was a transgender actor/ess in the mid 19th century who played Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet and Lady Macbeth. Channeling men and becoming men, acting on the stage of the rich and elite on both sides of the Atlantic. In the pit, the hotel and factory workers of the time would bring their children.

Carlotta was rubbing elbows with some of Aquidneck Island high-society, and built a “cottage” on the corner of Catherine St. and Newport Ave.



Kitty corner to the queen's summer cottage lived a large Irish family in a gray house. Nicolas, the father, hustled his way out of a rubber factory and into the hotels down on the sandbar. The queen frequented his bars and Carol sells followed by a long line of lesbian women all rubbing on the horses. At Gray Grey, having picnics under the hanging frocks. A real Degas. A Jackie Oh O O.

In the castles along the drive, high society homosexuals hosted ghost parties. And in the castle of a gay spiritualist along the rocks in Swamp town, Druids Dream the castle was called. Or the Fools Tower.

Witches Alter was his adult playground across the street. There were pyramids and roses all around the grounds. It was here that they cast a portal.

It was a real *Watcher in The Woods*, the 1980's Disney horror masterpiece, in which Bette Davis supports as Karen's mother, who has been swapped blindfolded into another dimension.

It was here at Grey Gray that Queen Carlotta would speak in tongues and voices of great men of the past or little children from the future.

Joseph Hazard, a spiritualist and eccentric bachelor, an heir to the Hazard fortunes of Southern Rhode Island, their granite mills and ax factories, had befriended Carlotta at a lesbian colony in Rome, who after becoming the greatest actor in the world had risen from the ashes of poverty and built her "cottage" on Catherine street in Newport.

A transcript from his psychotically OCD journal betrays his friendship with this high-society dyke:

8

Stopped me with a serious mood, and asked what I meant, when I told her (yesterday) that Miss Cecushman would not remain long, in Rome. I was utterly unable to answer her, further than to say, I knew of no reason for having said so.

The reminder of my remark led me to asking why I had then spoken. Nor was this explained until she died a few ~~years~~ ^{some years} I thereafter with Carter.

I ~~then~~ ^{afterward} learnt she ~~had~~ left Rome in a few months after my remark to that effect - for purpose of consulting a Physician in London, and that she never returned to Rome again; and that she was threatened with "Cancer."

Some years thereafter, I was taking my usual late breakfast at the "La Pierre Hotel" Blvd St. Philippe, quite alone, when Miss Cecushman came in to ~~tell~~ say she had an engagement of ~~some~~ some with at the theatre there, and wished me to take care of her - She stopped at my Hotel, where, with her friend Miss St. ^(The daughter) ~~John~~, we always had private breakfast together at about 11 A.M. and long and pleasant chat.

~~She~~ I fell entirely sure Miss Cecushman was a Spiritualist, but she ~~never~~ never acknowledge it, so far as I remember.

On one of the occasions I said, "Miss Cecushman you need never again attempt to make me believe you are not a Spiritualist." - I had known her many years, and seen a great deal of her at Rome, and her friend Miss St. ^(The daughter) ~~John~~, also. (She was a ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~kind~~ ^{kind} ~~woman~~ ^{woman}.)

What do you mean, asked Miss C. - "Otherwise?"

(I replied) you could never have presented "Woolsey" (I think it was) as you did last night, unless you are a Spiritual Medium.

"I must confess," replied Miss C. - "I have often felt convinced that my performance of this part, was not my own; but rather that I was possessed by the ^{Spirit of the} individual whom I proposed to simply represent." Or, to speak effect.

(The last time I saw Miss Cecushman, was at her Collage in New Port, N. J. All her furniture was packed away, saw a dozen chairs that were on the carpeted ^{floor of the} room in which we sat until, near midnight.)

“I felt entirely sure Miss Cushman was a Spiritualist, but she [xxx] never acknowledge it, so far as I remember.

On one of the Occasions, I said, “Miss Cushman You need never again attempt to make me believe you are not a spiritualist.” I had known her many years, and seen a great deal of her, at Rome, and her friend Miss Stebbins, The Sculptress, also. (She was a sincere woman)

What do you mean asked Miss. C “Otherwise (I replied) you could never have presented “Woolsey: (I think it was) as you did last night, unless you are a Spiritual Medium.

“I must confess,” replied Miss C. I have often felt convinced that my performance of this part, was not my own; but rather that I was possessed by the Spirit of the individual whom I prepared to simply represent.” Or to such effect.

(The last time I saw Miss Cushman, was at her Cottage in Newport, R.I. All her furniture was packed away, save a dozen chairs arranged in a circle on the carpetless floor of the room in which she sat until, near midnight.)”

Cushman died on February 18th, 1876.

The night before Cushman left this plane, a seance with the other side.

Catherine Nelly Dwyer, daughter of Nicolas, watched the long line of lesbians and the Queen in their Degas frocks going round and round on the Carousel her father operated and thought:

“I want to be like THAT.”

Catherine Nelly Dwyer watched them make contact that night, hired help at the Queens summer cottage, bringing the guests trays of wine and aperitifs as they sat in a circle in the middle of the room.

That night, on February 17th, 1876, a portal was cast and a banshee from another plane appeared in the center of the room in a white swimsuit, standing directly behind the little Dwyer girl, hovering above her right shoulder.

Nelly never did make it off the sandbar, in fact, never left Aquidneck Island. Though she married up a notch, to a man with a shock of bright red hair matched only by his bright red cheeks right up until the bright red day they put him in a wooden box in the front of the church that is a school that is a coffee shop. With the marriage she also got a Cape Cod cottage and a single black-haired daughter and a son with a shock of bright red hair. She bestowed such a great love and appreciation for Charlotte Cushman on her one and only daughter that her daughter named Nelly's first and only granddaughter Carlotta, after the transgender actor/ess.

NEWPORT NEWS

Almost every Sunday, my mother Carlotta and her seven brothers would go over to their grandmother Nelly's house for dinner, and then they'd watch TV, because they didn't have one.

Rescue Rangers or Chip and Dales, Alvin and the Chipmunks, Colgate Comedy Hour and the Ed Sullivan show and the Corny Collins and the Disneyland documentary about the lemmings. This is where her obsession with animals and their behaviors started.

The lemmings had gone sailing off a cliff one after the next, as Jackie, Carlotta's first born, eventually went careening off the side of the bridge one cool orange morning on the winter solstice.

Carlotta would walk to her grandmother Nelly's house after church every Sunday at the Portuguese Catholic church, when she and her best friend Patty got too old to be caught dead seen with their parents, they would walk to the Portuguese church in their little two inch kitten heels and sit in the back. You didn't want anyone to see you with your parents, for God's sake.

At the Portuguese Catholic church they would kick up their kitten heels in the back to the tune of Wendy Carlos, who happened to be an altar boy and the organist at the church. Totally Switched on and starting to experiment with notes from what would later be the score to The Shining.

Where Wendy Carlos, as an altar boy, made the most divine celestial switched on sounds behind the gigantic pipe organ.

The church was a school was a coffee shop. A coffee ship. Coffee ships sailed along the horizon. Burgundy and Orange coffee ships. Container ships of burgundy and orange. Drumming along the horizon.

On the door of Newport Hospital is a little brass Plaquered that says:
"Queen Carlotta was born here" Didn't bother with the last name.

The Comic Shop was owned by Carlotta's cousin Edwina, Ed for short. They sold Chip and Dales and Doomsday comics.

It looked like a front but wasn't. How do you account for that?

Edwina was a man much like Cushman had been, but couldn't come out because her father died with a full shock of bright red hair to match his bright red cheeks right up until the bright red day that they put him in a box on display in the front of the church next to the Chrysanthemums.

So it was all Jr. Classics illustrated and Dick and Jane and See Dick Run with a little Venom and Doomsday on the side.

Jackie was born at Newport Hospital also. Same grounds.

PURGATORY CHASM

Some people are just born musical.

Bill Cowsill, for example, was in a band since he was 14.

Billy, Bobby, Barry, and Johnny Cowsill.

Bill Cowsill, for example, wanted to put his mother in the band.

With all the money The Cowsills were making off *Flower Girl*, their father bought a hotel on the beach below Purgatory Chasm: The Beechwood Inn. It was the hotel where, decades before, Carlotta's great grandfather had operated the merry-go-round, and because of some deep ancestral ties, or perhaps more because Danny Cowsill felt bad for Carlotta working two jobs, doing housekeeping here and doing housekeeping over there, he hired Carlotta to tidy the rooms.

Carlotta was in Catholic Youth with Billy Cowsill, the oldest and most talented Cowsill, with a chasm between his two front teeth

Danny Cowsill got her a job at the Beechwood Inn doing housekeeping. He bought a hotel in Newport. He was nice, but he didn't know how to run a hotel. It switched hands several times after that, eventually, a half-century later, Leddy Getaway was the concierge.

The Soap Opera "Dark Shadows," was filmed there in the 1960's, requiring all the staff to wear top-hats. Murder after bloody murder.

Carlotta had cleaned the rooms and Leddy gave people their keys and Great Grandfather Nicholas had operated the carousel, going round and round and round and round.

One of the cowsills disappeared. Barry Cowsill.

Barry Cowsill was swept away in a hurricane. They never found him.

He drums now on a box or a guitar case or plays clave in the ghost ship band, on one of the coffee ships that sails out on the horizon.

Rising above the hotel on one side was St. George's Catholic School with its beautiful gothic chapel where men in trenchcoats and women in hand-dyed lavender smocks stood around gazing at the sky and singing about dragons. The rapture.

Some horrible skull and bones type politicians went there.

Up here we're going to take a right.

*Bill and Bob and somebody
else.*

A few years after The Cowsills smash hit Flower Girl took the nation by storm, Carlotta worked at a hotel owned by their father, Danny Cowsill. Carlotta and her best friend Patty were also harboring two runaway boys in PURGATORY.

The repetition of things happening over and over to each generation.

Let's start from the beginning...

They were Juniors in highschool. Patty's boyfriend's father was in the Navy.

Which meant, every two years they had to move to someplace like Virginia, so Greg decides to steal his dad's car and drive it back to Purgatory. The runaway boys pitched a tent at Purgatory, so of course, it was Carlotta and Patty's job to bring them food. Yankee spaghetti and tuna fish sandwiches. Cartons of coffee milk boosted from the school cafeteria.

And it was Carlotta's job, of course, not having a boyfriend at the time, to be Kurt's girlfriend in a grassy area over there. And Kurt was available. So Kurt became Carlotta's boyfriend.

Picnic at Purgatory.

Below, a girl shrieks.

WHOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

All that was found of Barry Cowsill was a pile of his limp clothes on the rocks and a bouquet of yellow narcissus.

DID YOU JUMP? DID YOU JUMP????

They called it elephant rock because it looked like a poached elephant dead on its side.

I guess that must be their clothes.

They are even braver than whatshisname.

Greg and Kurt.

*They would jump over the gap at
purgatory.*

A poached elephant dead lying on its side out to sea, the waves crashing into its conglomerate corps.

BE CAREFUL!

it read

SLIPPERY WHEN WET!

All ledge. Graffiti smears the corpses.

FESTIVAL FIELD

Carlotta was there when Dylan went electric at the Newport Folk Festival, located at Festival Field, which is now housing projects by the same name. Aunty B lived there and took her social security across the street, trying to win a ticket to the Mermaid Palace betting on Jai Alai.

Dylan had gone electric under The Tower on the hill of the park where perverts hid in the woods waiting to pull your pants down and do something to you with a stick.

Richard Farina had also gone electric that night, when, drumming on the same stage after Dylan's notorious performance, lightning struck the stage. It was as if he had called Chango the Cuban God of Drums down to Festival Field that night. His writing put Dylan to shame. The day *Been Down so Long Everything Looks Like Up* hit the press, hit the streets, Farina slid his motorcycle off the side of a 101 curve into Carmel by the Sea.

Why did Dicky die and Bobby did not?

That IS the question.

Festival Field is a housing project is a Naval Base is a Superfund Site is a Soul Food kitchen with Botanica vibes.

Ida Lewis, a tiny lighthouse keeper, became Newport's, and for that matter, America's Darling, on the front page of Harper's Bazaar, after she saved the lives of 50 drunken sailors with nothing but her skinny little arms and a rowboat.

The throngs that gathered to celebrate her at Festival Field that hot July surpassed 10,000.

Now she rows her little rowboat between the shore and the coffeeships that sail along the horizon.

JACKIE DANCES ON A GHOST SHIP NOW

Jackie dances now on a far off cruise ship that sails right along where the water meets the sky.

Every night I would come down to the shore, like my mother had, and Jackie's and my grandmother, when I needed answers or quiet or just to sit on a log and think. I would come down to the shore and listen, "putting my ear to the door."

Kenny and Led were on the ship now too. They were responsible for a heavy set and a lot of smashing that got a rise out of some of the locals.

Kenny had been the first to go. The mystery of who killed Kenny haunted us all, and we never did quite get to the bottom of it.

A few years after that, Led, the next brother in line, was dead.

The Guys were dropping like Flies.

In a way, Lex and Kenny and Leddy had saved my life in more ways than one. They saved my life by picking me up from rapist after faceless rapist's house in their burgundy minivan, that had somehow been restored after its trip to Mariana.

Odette, the oldest, had tried, unsuccessfully, to get the whole family to the Mermaid Palace, by driving the burgundy minivan through the chicken wire fence at the end of old South Ferry dock, unlicensed, unregistered, with the whole family in it, after she went skitzo and started hearing things like...

*Oh, that
One is hideous....*

Through the blistering wind.

I'm not going to make a liar out of myself...

You can't reach the mermaid palace, *it* has to reach *you*.

However, when I needed answers or "quiet" or to just sit on a log and think, I would come down to the shore and listen, "putting an ear to the door".

(Soon, through the static, a grainy loop of purple rain.

The sounds of waves crashing...then)

*I'm not going to make a liar
out of my mother either.*

*No, some really beautiful victorians,
look at these / if you / want some / fancy-ass trees.*

*Copper beech, yard art,
the kind you carve
your lover's name in a
heart.*

I'd carved with Lex Getaway in mind, years before all his brothers died.

In a way, they had saved my life by picking me up in the family minivan, unlicensed unregistered, from faceless rapist after faceless rapist's culdésac nightmare on elm street.

Depending...

(Eventually, I would hear the distant vibrations, the big band blast beats drumming from the far off cruise ships on the horizon. Depending on the direction it was sailing in effected who was on it, I think. A lot of locals who had OD'd. Fishermen who had gone overboard with the drugs and drunk drowned. They sat at the bar and made scary, misanthropic, all-work-no-play conversations with the ghost bartender).

Mumbling things like:

Kay Street takes you down to Dresser Street takes you straight down into PURGATORY.

Or...

*I'm looking around wildly,
keep looking, keeeeeep looking.*

Or...

*We will have to do a tree day,
A tree thing
A copper beach.*

All this new stuff,

*They've made it look old.
We are right by the Tennis Hall of Fame
Now THAT'S a beautiful house,*

*They've done a nice job keeping it up
too.
These two old dudes and their smelly
cockerspaniel
Thirteen cousins...Second
cousins...Kitty... McManis*

or...

*If we come down here and take a left we will come straight out at Memorial Boulevard, and then
we'll just shoot over the hill to PURGATORY.*

I had kissed Head or Needles, under the folds of a copper beech tree while high out of my mind
on XXX, a drug called XXX or tripple X that was taking the town by storm.

*Sweet sweet sweet wind
Burn off this skin*

*Get it to reach
Sachuest beach*

*How can i ever win
With this body that im in.*

-Tanya Donnelly

I feel like maybe I should start going to church, like Carlotta had. Then it would make more sense
seeing all these bodies in wooden boxes all the time lined up at the front of the school or the
coffee shop.

The Guys are dropping like Flies.

AN IRISH WAKE

An Irish Wake is when half the crowd gets blackout and dad tells grandma to go fuck herself and then they don't speak for several years.

Fortunately, Jackie's wake was a Catholic/Buddhist/Jewish hybrid, so the guys upfront put on a good show arguing about whether she was in the bardo now or had gone straight to hell while the Rabbi sat in the corner crying.

When *my* grandmother died they put her body in a box and put it on display, like a donut, at the front of the Irish Church that was a school that was a coffee shop, that was on-top of the grounds of Massasoit's murder. On Newport Ave, next to the hospital Carlotta was born in and across from the Comic Book Shop.

At the wake a big Box o'Joe from Dunkies and a few dozen donuts.

BLUE



I had watched her pray to the virgin every night and then I would change the virgin into the moon and the ocean and change her diaper.

(*)

Bibi died on halloween. I knew she was on her way out, partially because I helped it happen. By this I mean that for years before it happened I cleaned up her messes and put her to bed and made her dinner and sat next to her on the couch while she asked me the same questions over and over, but she had done the same for me so now we are even.

Yes, Bibi had raised me some and put up with my shit for many years, so it was only fair that I put up with hers. On halloween I knew Bibi was on her way out so I came back to the house where Bibi had helped raise me, my mother's house, Bibi's daughters house, where Bibi had been rotting for a while now.

I stood around the bed while Bibi choked and moaned quietly and then I really knew it was time so I went into the back yard and I lit a candle and walked widdershins and I made a mound. The night before I had boiled an evening primrose root shaped like a lady just to get things rolling and I put that on top of the mound upsidedown to call the black-cloaked ones. Then in came the seven vultures with a flash of silver on the tip of each wing and they circled down around the eaves and then spiraled up. I ran into the house and it was happening into the night and the next day the sad Portuguese clowns came with the burgundy drapes and they dragged poor Bibi away.

Bibi was Irish Catholic from an Island in Swamptown and when she got old and demented she still managed to sit down and chat with the blessed virgin and all the dead people she knew like a good catholic. She grew up on an island in the ocean.

I know that a good way to speak to Bibi now that she's toast is by first having a little chat with the blessed virgin or the ocean. Then I hang a lucky piece of her blue jewelry from a blue string and ask it yes or no questions. You can't see it under a microscope, but she

will smack the jewelry carelessly one way or another to answer your deepest darkest, and she is usually dead-on, because now that she is a ghost herself she is also an angel and a vulture and she can see very far around.

This was far from the first time that I used magic to get a response. And far from the last...



LEDDY GETAWAY

Leddy Getaway was the concierge at one of the beautiful hotels along the pier. The hotels on the ruins of bathhouses on the ruins of warehouses on the ruins of one of the largest villages in the northeast under Salt Pond Plaza's Mama Mia Pizza Parlour, with those pizza party strips that are to die for.

I'd meet Lex there after I was done at Dunkies and he'd made his last round with the Del's truck around the South Pier blasting "Little Runaway." Led would let us into one of the empty rooms and we would sit on the bed and watch TV or have hours of sober lesbian sex. This was of course before triple XXX had taken the town by storm.

*Mama mia, here I go again.
I could never let you go.*

*Mama mia, just one look and I can it
Ring mama mia here i go again*

*My my how acab. I resist.
My my dear ill never let you*

*Mama miss i will
Never leddy go jus*

*Just o lookea di can here
Dy bro*

*Blew since the day we started. Mymy
Never let me go.*

*Yes ive been brokenhearted
Ooooh since the day we partied.*

*Mama mis
Icaneverleddygo.*

The Getaway boys appropriated me into their minivan. Somehow, the Getaway boys knew even before I did, that I wasn't supposed to be absorbed into the faceless rapists.

The getaway boys knew this about me before I knew it about myself.

Gabriella knew this too. My baby girl, Gabriella.

Leddy Getaway seemed, at one point, like he might have been madly in love with my girlfriend Gabriella, who I appropriated into the burgundy minivan.

Let's hear it in the back:

Gabriella.

Once more.

Gabriella.

ONLY WHEN YOU TELL ME TO SIGH.

Why was I one of the boys?

And Gabriella had to bear the brunt of being the magnet queen.

Gabriella was a magnet queen. With her heart-shaped goggles. Gabriella wore heart-shaped goggles in order to be a magnet queen for Leddy Getaway. I wasn't a magnet queen, but somehow, I had hooked Lex Getaway, the youngest of the wolf pack. The youngest boy of three. The most beautiful boy in all of Swamptown. The most desirable boy in all of Swamptown was mine.

I even got it on tape. The most desired, most beautiful, the destrought, negative image of the handsons of the cowsills all fucking mine, with a full soundtrack to prove it.

Leddy was a troll. I think he didn't want me to be with Lex, no matter how much I wanted it.

So I didn't understand, a few years after Lex had run off in the Del's truck, why Leddy showed up at my doorstep in the Del's truck with his mother, trying to get me to come with them all to the Ace of Spades Bar for a few rounds of black jack.

Of course I went. How could I say no? This was someone who had saved me from rapist after faceless and was the brother of my one and only truest love.

He played roulette that night and won every round. It ended up in something like 380 dollars, which we took and blew at Dunkie's at the crossroads.

"You're perfect for eachother".

He said.

I know.

I thought.

“Is that fucked up of me to say?”

Not really why would it be?

I thought.

It was fucked to say because I think the thing that had taken Lex away from me was his relationship, which was actually a partnership, with his brothers. I loved Jamie and still love Jamie more than words can say, he's my baby boy. But I never can put myself in the relationship the Getaway boys had to one another. It was more than a partnership. It was more than Irish twins. It was more than bandmates. If you put all these things together it still doesn't quantify their alliance. I wasn't prepared to join that lifestyle.

I would have had to have had a relationship with all three of them. I was sucked very close to the vortex of their animal magnetism, the coattails of their burgundy minivan, but somehow, made it out alive.

FOOLS TOWER

In swamptown, you don't go past the Tower.

The legend about Fools Tower is that a beautiful girl waited up there watching for the love of her life which was her music teacher, to come ferrying over the bay and her dad was a dick and she was super super pretty. Of course, she died tragically young, abandoned forever by both her father and her one true love in a terrible state of disrepair and disownment.

Now, the whole hillside has fallen into a state of abandonment and disrepair.

“The spotted lantern fly is going to be a significant landscape pest. It attacks over 72 plants including many ornamental planted species like rose, maple, and Copper beech. It's notorious for gnawing into the bark of the copper beech, destroying the names of lovers carved in hearts that have endured decades.”

This signage is posted at the “Wildlife Clinic” that sits on the hill beside Fools Tower.

But there are no animals there to speak of. Not one. Just a crumbling stone mansion and a field full of empty cages.

“We are located just after the abandoned flower nursery and just before the abandoned Paul Masse car dealership.”

Reads the bottom of the sign.

(*)

After the pandemic, local nursery owner Jack Little bought a whole trailer-load of Green Giant 500 arborvitaes in a bold russian-roulette nursery stock move. He only sold 3 of them. Perhaps his land was cursed by a ghost of Tomas Jackson, a sea-mercenary who murdered a man in those fields in 1741, tossed the corpse in the Narrow River and was hung in a metal cage like a parrot a few rods from Carlotta's clam shack.

“The screeching of the chains prevented children from passing at night”

These ghosts were kept well and alive and invoked at the yearly haunted hayride. Perhaps it was cursed by Jack's mother taking a dump off the side of the golf cart, out in the mums patch atop the black landscape cloth. A real fuck you to her abusive son who now lorded over the property. Perhaps it was cursed after he pulled the plug on Reggae Bloodlines that we had blasting out of the boombox, the same day he layed off his pregnant employee on a whim, a single mom who's other kid had down syndrome. Whatever it was, something prevented those 500 arborvitaes from flying off the shelf. Maybe the people were just shrubbed out after the pandemic. But maybe it was something more sinister. It doesn't look good for a Fools Tower Farm, and this will be the fifth nursery off Tower Hill Road to achieve abandoned status.

The chipmunks, when it was hot and dry, climbed up there and ate all the buds off the verbena.

In Swamptown, you DON'T go past The Tower.

(*)

Last night, in a dream, the illusive Lex Getaway. His mothers or grandmothers were there, and he had a younger girlfriend, who lay on top him out the window. He was really trying to make time for me though. The illustrious Lex Getaway. I was just trying to find triple XXX the whole dream. Hiding things. I think he wanted to see me or spend time with me but he had other obligations.

Lex drove me around in the burgundy minivan and drove me down Tower Hill road past the place where Jackson was murdered and Carter was Caged and down the wagon bumps on walmsley lane and than we parked and partied at the South Pier where we would have hours and hours of sober lesbian sex. It was the best I've ever had and I've tried everything since, even better than the pink cloud you could reach three vials deep on triple XXX.

I was in love with my music teacher also, Lex Getaway, who taught me everything there is to know about music by giving me mixtapes with Syd Barrett's "Bike" on it three times in a row and pounding into the crowd at Area 51 while I writhed around on the floor.

My dad is a fisherman, and he's a pretty good guy, especially after he stopped going to "The Unity Club" so often, which was what was there before it was Area 51, a private bar where Swampers would sit around in beautiful, silver mens sports jackets.

The getaways rocked hard. They rocked in the burgundy mini and they rocked at Area 51 and they rocked as the concierge at the Beechwood Inn and they rocked as the custodian at the movie theater scraping popcorn off the carpet of the very historical very new multi-plex cinema on top of where Jackson was caged for Carters murder.

I'd sit in the dark theater while Lex and Leddy swept up popcorn. They would put on whatever reels they had lying around, usually horror.

In one, a guy in a cloak who walks around town holding a book is killing all the cats.

In another, everyone in the town is becoming undead after taking a drug invented by the evil government.

In a third reel, the glorious halls of The Mermaid Palace, shimmering on a far-off horizon that gleams just past The Tower.

you're the one you're the one you're the oneness.

There was a morning in the sunshine city

Give me all i can i'll listen whenever I can? I'd think first before I'd ever do that.

(It was about Head.)

your were a stranger using the needle sounds you can whistle

You didn't ask for the

One day, Lex stole the Del's truck, took off past The Tower and blasted off into the sunset.

In Swamptown, you don't go past The Tower.

THE REAL WORLD

Jaimie remembers things differently than me.

Did you get a ride in the burgundy minivan?

No?

Did you have a burgundy minivan when you were a kid? Do you even know what an iced coffee is?

Sometimes I ask Jamie questions like this because we remember things differently. He had a bit of a different ride. He was all up the coattails of Yes Duffy. No Duffy. Yes Duffy. My brother Jaimie rode the coattails of his bandmate No Duffy out of Swamptown and onto the set of MTV'S *The Real World* and so now when he goes back to the dive bar *Ace of Spades* people look at him funny, like

I know who you are I've heard you on the radio. Your clothes are always so cool and you're on TV.

Everything was music back then. No Duffy was an amazing bassist and rocked at Area 51, and then somehow, appeared on the real-world. MTV's the Real World, so that meant someone following him around sometimes with a camera. We all wanted our big break. So we would follow them around too, asking for cigarettes or to buy booze or dirty mags at Heelys.

No Duffy was on the real world and so we counted on him to have camera crew swallow us hole and follow us around day in and day out.

There were seven of us that rode around on skateboards. Gabriella, myself, Toni, Tanya, Snapper, Needles, and Head.

A few of them got forced to that camp, it had something to do with the catholic church, out in the middle of the woods in the west of the state.

If I was going to shine my big teeth on the cover of Time it would be for Lex Getaway and his whole brilliant family and it would be for Jackie and Anna and Francesca. It would be for everyone who didn't make it.

I'm with her.

I could hear Led laughing in my ear the other night. The night Leddy Getaway died, I swear, though it had been over a decade, I heard him cackling in my ear. He was truly a troll and he did not give a fuck.

RIP.

If they had followed Kenny and Jackie, would they still have gone over the precipice?

Why did the camera crew follow my brother Jamie and No Duffy and also Brian Chippendale?

"Black Pus plays Machines with Magnets tonight Thursday 3/9/23. Pawtucket! Rhode Island!"

Still kickin, I guess.

How did Brian Chippendale make it out of the warehouses alive?

Milkshake fed and on salads, he left the party early, when everyone else was about to bust out some more triple xxx, to go back to his drum kit under the skate ramp and practice.

The warehouse is a whorehouse is a concert hall a Dunkies.

THE CAMP

Some of the children were sent out to the baptist bible camp in Slocum. Why would the children have gone to baptist bible camp where the trout hatchery haunted the kettle holes, frogs and lily pads? A cacophony, especially on the worm moon.

If you were naughty, they would send you to a camp out in the woods to straighten you out.

There, Toni would be making the period sounds and Pastor Paul would be fisting a chipmunk and a couple other campers would be all head on deck or taking shits in the pond.

Needles wouldn't have it though, Needles peaced the fuck out. Started walking. They picked him up several rods down.

A child dumps a bucket full of brown slop into the boot of another child in the kettle holes, floating with frogs and lily-pads. The kettle holes the lobelian lakes and a pear tree in the turf fields.

Limnology.

The clambake club. The kids were explorers and followed the stream all the way to the airport. To the dump.

They let us eat from the pear tree on the ruins of the Queen's Fort and where the Queen was murdered and everyone was murdered and now they've herded all the children onto the playfield and having us eat lukewarm yankee spaghetti out of great vats on the rotting picnic tables.

To show us "what it was like in other countries".

To show what we had to be grateful for.

Yankee Spaghetti Recipe:

2 packages spaghetti

3 cans condensed tomato soup

12 hot dogs

One bag of small marshmallows

Preparation:

Cook the spaghetti for 20 minutes. Drain.

Add the other ingredients and simmer indefinitely.

Here was Pastor Paul, with a dead chipmunk shoved over his right hand, putting on some sort of puppet show to teach us a lesson, forgetting to do the voice right when he switched between Pastor and the chipmunk, so pastor talked in a squeaky voice at times and the chipmunk took on a knowing, learned quality.

And the retarded girl in the camp tent with Toni. In the canvas tent with her period pads and

Toni,

My shit ass little best fiend.

Toni harassing and harassing, doing the period sounds and laughing and trying to drown me in the mucky kettle over something that Queen Magnus had said or not said. Lily-knocking me out of a white pine, which I tumbled down like a ladder, hitting each wrung.

Rolled sodden in old Slocum hill into a dither of poison ivy and it was poison ivy all over both of us as we scrabbled in the leaves and the tree swing.

Even the corrections camp is haunted. There are cemeteries every where between every tree in swamptown and sticking out of turf fields and covered in bull briers.

The cemetery next store to the camp is rife with sap and piled with leaves taller than me so we would go and get buried in them laying flat on our backs with our arms crossed and pretend that we're dead.

One time, a voice called me across the graveyard it says I had to go look at something. I popped straight up out of the leaf pile where I was buried alive.

I B-lined it past the five cedar trees planted in a pentagram and the cracked cherub statues.

It was then I learned not only that the dead could talk but that I could hear them.

And it was Snappers mom buried over there. She had jumped in a pool while listening to Jim Morrison and the Doors. For some reason, my mom had said it was still ok, after that, even with the basement that was dogshit and the trailer that was dogshit and how we would lie in the trailer and let smokey the dog hump us from behind and how the boyfriend was a total creep and the Jim Morrison and the doors water bed and they cat shit and the Interview with a Vampire, and Seven I wanna fuck you like an animal and light as feather stiff as a board until night after night, in these scenarios, we discovered black magic.

BLOODY ICE CREAM

Bloody Ice Cream

*“The Sylvia Plath story is told to girls who write
They want us to think that to be a girl poet
Means you have to die*

Who is it

That told me

All girls who write must suicide?

must suicide, must suicide”

-KH

The girls were dropping like flies but it looked a little different the way they fell. Kerplunk.

It was Jackie, hurling her atrophied body off the golden gate, one cool orange morning on the winter solstice.

Or Anna, her body dropping from a loft in one of the brick warehouses and swinging there for several hours from a 2X4 that bridged two makeshift rooms.

It looked like a squat but it wasn't. We paid \$100 or so in cash money to live there that hot summer, without running water or a fridge.

It was Francesca Woodman, going out however the fuck it was she went. (out the window)

And Emma of course, who after the warehouse that Anna had swung in burned to the ground, and 10 beautiful transwomen and 20 electronic musician, one in every color of the rainbow, were turned to cinders, went down to the corner and bought all the triple XXX she could get her hands on and within an hour Gabriella was screaming in the street and Toni and Tanya were running out of their roe house and now she is interred in the cemetery at the top of the hill.

Drama queens.

I thought we were over this.

When Katheleen said *all girls who write/must suicide/ must suicide?*

I pumped my babyfat fist to Bloody Ice Cream. That was 99 bananas.

That was also the year, granted, that Mini Me ushered me into the complicity of rape culture at Woodstock 99. I was there to see Jewel, one of the three female artists performing, with my older cousin Tanya. A woman at the front of the crowd was urged to remove her shirt.

Shirt. Shirt. Shirt.

Mini Me led the crowd in the hedonistic chant.

Shirt. Shirt.

I pumped my babyfat fist.

Shirt.

The girls had to make a big splash. Over the side of the bridge.

I get hard. I have survivor's guilt. And now, I'm lucky enough to have survivor's guilt on both sides of the equation.

Because, I must confess, I don't think I was ever a girl poet, no, yes, no, yes, no I was.

Because I was a girl poet and because also, and simultaneously, I was one of the guys.

And I'm still here. I'm still standing.

I'm the boy who lived.

There are a few of us now, still standing, from the smoldering rubble of Swamptown, and so that is why we have hired her, the woman in white, to get to the bottom of this. To discover what it is that we have, the few of us still “on our feet”, so to speak, that the others didn’t. What kept us alive so that maybe, just maybe, a tragedy such as this could be prevented in the future.

What could prevent this from happening in the future?

The girls, swinging from this or that 2X4, and the guys, blue in the face from a bad batch of triple XXX, the most wonderful pharmaceutical that had taken Swamptown by storm.

I want to tell you about how it give you a real case of the “fuck-its” a real case of ass, with this guy dropping like a fly and that guy dropping and all of a sudden you're just surrounded by dead flies.

So you go to the girls.

To try to ask for help or solace, or just a warm body to hold on to, but when you get there you find them swinging by their necks from a 2X4 between two “rooms” in a brick building that is supposed to be a squat.

Or completely bloated with salt water past the point of identification, and the only way they found out the bloated corpse was our beautiful Jackie was from her fingerprints, taken decades ago when she put her body up against the glass in The Lusty Lady for quarters, or out on the streets of San Francisco, out her body on the line to say NO! to this horror or that horror, and yet the drone of horror kept marching along and now look at her she is the actual horror.

ENTER EXITER

“On the hillsides adjoining Goose Nest Spring, the witches were said to have held high carnival. Hell Hollow and Kettle Hole were the places of the witches•unhallowed sabbaths.

In contrast, to the south around the region of Worden

and Tucker Ponds and half score or more of other clear water lakes, the "fairies used to congregate and dance by moonlight in the olden time when the gods and goddesses made Atlantis their summer abode. ”

-George W. Gardiner, "Swamptown--A Queer Locality," Facts and Fancies Concerning Westwick, R.I.

(*)

Westwick was once a hub for sexually deviant activity. There are three brothels there when I visit through Remove Viewing (RV) in a little line down the main drag, where now there is an Ice Cream Parlour, a Pizza Parlour atop an old video store, and of course, a Dunkies.

When I visit as a hologram I am trying to get HIRED at each club, but I'm not too stressed, *I'm* interviewing *them*. I know each one will hire me because they always need workers and I've worked there before. I know they will take me back.

The children and the witches of old often summon me here, to the crossroads that straddle Westwick, Swamptown, and Exiter, having me audition over and over, walking back and forward between the clubs and across town lines in nothing but my stage clothes.

Ok. Now I'm actually in Westwick.

John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* was published on April 12th 1984, the day Carlotta went into labor and pushed out the worst witch of all the wicks, which was Jackie.

In the hollywood adaptation, Jack Nicholson, a satanic polygamist, somehow wins the affections of three of hollywood's hottest, Chere, Susan Sarandon, and Michelle Pfiffer.

All three women become impregnated with the devil's spawn.

Summons her ideal man and skips town.

Updike was undoubtedly inspired by some local lore concerning this town, or as it were, the crossroads of three towns.

Pulling the file on "Witches" from the remnants of the Butler Collection, a mimeographed excerpt from *Swamptown: a Queer Locality* places the witches:

"On the hillsides adjoining Goose Nest Spring, the witches were said to have held high carnival. Hell Hollow and Kettle Hole were the places of the witches•unhallowed sabbaths."

There are no Original Sources listed, nor any other mention of this location in the rest of the file, so I decided to go to the location itself, in real-time, though I had been summoned there over and over, Remotely.

I also wanted a cold brew. Dunkies makes cold brew now, I had no idear, so I traveled to Westwick, even though there was a Dunkies on every corner of every street of every block from Swamptown all the way to Exiter or Eastwick or Westwick or Baconeggandcheesewich or wherever the fuck it was you were trying to go for a cold brew.

I needed a cold brew if I were to continue conducting my research. We don't have cold brew where I'm from. A cold brew would activate synapses to help ease me into the synesthesia that was necessary when entering a "field" of data, searching for the Mermaid Palace, searching for whatever it was the children had lost, Jackie I guess, and Kenny, who they kept killing over and

over, and countless others, according to their notebooks and colored marker drawings on the backs of paper plates.

This "field" happened to now be the Lafayette Fish Hatchery, "on the hillsides adjoining goose nest spring", the crossroads of Exiter, Westwick, and Swamptown.

It took me driving in circles and down multiple dead-end streets with my guide, a woman who had worked out at The Camp in the west where they sent the children who didn't go to school, and was supposed to know her way around out here. I couldn't tell if my guide's spiraling was intentional or if she had completely lost her mind. Everytime I pointed out a dead-end sign, she disagreed with it:

"They put those up around here just to keep people out."

Everytime, we ended up at a dead-end, either abutting the train tracks or the highway, my guide performing a sloppy five pointed turn to get us out of the dead-end.

Griffens Furniture Palace seemed to be the only landmark she could hold on to.

"We just need to turn right after Griffens" (spelled with an e). Although Griffens seemed to be the only landmark she could grasp on to, it proved impossible to locate, even plugging into our trackers, we couldn't get the spelling right, it kept autocorrecting. After what felt like *days* of driving in circles, spirals, zig-zagging over a crossroads and past the Ace of Clubs Bar, The Middle of Nowhere dinner, the old junk shop, and of course a Dunkies, we ended up at the top of a hill overlooking the fish hatchery.

"I know these people who live out here" my guide stated.

"One of the Campers lived in that house."

An armed man in military fatigues disappeared through the red front door of a doublewide beside the trout ladder.

I had wanted to Enter Exiter in order to see where the witches had held their high holy sabbath and perhaps get a glimpse of the remains of the old farmhouse that had housed the Eve Butler Collection, documents from the archivists Mermaid Palace Collection. Like everything else in Swamptown or the adjacent towns, the farmhouse had burned down, washed away, and crumbled back into the earth in a state of disrepair.

I was starting to get a bad feeling about this place.

I had an incredible urge to turn back, to turn back.

Why did these kids have me come out here anyways? Is this some sort of prank? I mean, who's paying me anyways? Am I even getting paid or is this another audition?

Where the fuck are we?

"Here's Dunkies!"

Brakes screeching noises as my guide rips a donut into the drive through.

"Let's get another egg and cheese. I would love a cold brew about now. Though I need to take it easy with my faulty heart valve and hemolytic anemia. "

And that is how I learned that Dunkies makes cold brew now.

(*)

“Swamptown has more than a thousand ponds and lakes and almost 500 of them are kettles holes– “enough to drown every gossip in,” people used to say.”

-The Outer Lands: A Natural History Guide to Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Block Island, and Long Island

“Mary is the head witch of Westwick now. Mary Blue. Look at this beautiful
Beautiful, beautiful beautiful barn.”

My guide was gossipy after the cold brew, though easily distracted by the scenery.

“And the goons from Griffens Furniture Palace, the three brothers with their low NiRoPe prices, had come after her, because she was offering unprecedented discounts on wicca”

My guide gave me a side-eye without turning her head.

“And then, one of the brothers... you know...” *neck slitting motion and slicing sound.*

She had us take back roads, driving through hamlet after hamlet through a fog, really really foggy.

“Is this Ten Rod road?” she asked me, as though I were the guide.

“That would make this the Mercy Brown Cemetery.”

I had read the file on Mercy Brown from the Butler Collection. Butler's hand-written notes on the pink mimeographs betray how disturbed she was that they had exhumed Mercy's body and cut out her heart and it was still wet, bloody and beating so they burned it alive. Then they fed the remaining ashes to her brother and her mother, but of course they died anyway.

(Insert actually historical text on "Mercy Brown Vampire" here)

The grave sight had become a place for locals to park and party, littered with Four Loko cans, used needles and condoms. Exactly the type of "field" to extract a sound sample from, so I had my guide pull over while I set up my equipment on top of the grave.

If we had exhumed Kenny's corpse, or perhaps Francesca Woodmansies, and if we had done some sort of ceremony, and burned the heart, and fed it to the brothers and the fans? Would that have been enough for you, dear god? Are you even there?

(*)

"We've got Cedar waxwing and some other beautiful birds we don't often see out here" my guide informed me when I returned to the van.

"So what do you think is down Purgatory road?" I asked, as we continued spiraling.

"Well, it's kinda like hell, but a little better."

"Well, how do we get back to the Lafayette fishery?"

"I guess we can just meander back."

(*)

This was the location, in my research, that had an incredible urge to turn back.

I had an incredible urge to turn back, TURN BACK!

Why was it, at Lafayette Hatchery, that my turnback censor was going berserk?

I had that same feeling, ten years earlier, Remotely, when I was summoned by one of the children to this very same intersection, kicked out of the car by Head on the X of the road in the middle of the night, summoned to watch over them as they spiraled around.

A Shift Wedding.

A fucking shift wedding at the Ace of Spades Bar.

A real, deep, dive.

On this occasion, I again had lost my *cohuleen driuth*, **the** magic cap off my Doohickey Learning Pajamas™, which allows access to multiple realms, Remotely.

The child, who appeared to be walking in tiny circles from one town to the next, had also lost their magic hat, to bottle after tiny bottle of magic hat in a turf field with Head.

In the back woods of Broadrock, you don't fuck around.

(*)

GAIN

Something had happened in a turf field with Head. But it was fuzzy. Bottle after bottle of magic hat. Apricot magic hat. Bottle after tiny bottle. Lost my magic hat to bottle after tiny bottle of magic hat in a turf field with Head. With a boy named Head. A guy named Head. Something happened with Head in a turf field. Something happened to Snapper. Snapper went overboard with the drugs. But it was a bit fuzzy. Snapper snapped his way down the deck and then snapped his head. Head broke his crown. Head fell from a very tall building off the fire escape and broke his crown. Needles went to Jesus or Jerry or 12 Tribes or both before becoming a ward of the state. Snapper lost his head.

To put it simply:

Snapper went crazy. Needles wound up in jail. Head ended up dead.

(*)

ATTACK

“ And the sea began its mighty work...The steady, relentless attack on the hills”
 -The Outer Lands: A Natural History Guide to Cape
 Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Block Island, and
 Long Island

In the backwoods of broadrock, we dont fuck around. The trailer that Toni lived in she lived in with her brother Snapper and sometimes Tanya stayed there. It was in between the dump and a beautiful lake.

A Culrichan, or a pooka, is a haunted horse or donkey, sometimes of the headless variety. On Halloween, in the backwoods of broadrock, we saw a pooka galloping down the wet oakleaf night without the assistance of upward direction.

“Kingston was thrown into a dither
 people forgot to look for things in the
 in 1894 when a man driving his wagon
 dark and consequently didn't see them.
 home from Peace Dale on a foggy night

On Mill Street, too, the ghost

of a

Saw
 six legs walking along without
 benefit of upstairs direction. Soon other
 travelers noticed the same apparition.
 But the ghost's public relations depart-
 ment wasn't of Madison Avenue grade
 and the story gradually faded from the
 public mind.”

“The Death Coach, or Headless Coach and Horses, is called in Ireland “*Coach a bower*,” and its appearance is generally regarded as a sign of death, or an omen of some misfortune...The belief in the appearance of headless people and horses appears to be, like most popular superstitions, widely extended.”

I can have {a bottle of magic hat and a couple hits of XXX} and stop
or I can {have a bottle of magic hat and several hits of XXX} and

black out and last

{Put on my *cohuleen driuth*} {Put on my *cohuleen driuth*}

night I blacked out and woke with a loaded gun in my bed and a hole in the wall.

Another portal to the mermaid palace in the free library at the dump off Broadrock. A bullet hole through the door.

In the back woods of broadrock, we don't fuck around.

(*)

SATURATION

When you travel back in time/do you frame it in your mind/when you pin her elbows down/does she float or does she drown

Leaving the Halloween party at Godmother's house,

I had gone

as

a

mermaid.

“Often, a man who
Sees a merrow and
Who takes her cap but she gets it back,
Often he dies within a few days.”

Irish legend holds many stories about the mermaid, who they call *merrow*.

The Irish schools Collection, there are {enter number here}... Entries on “mermaid”, a quarter of them in Irish.

“he spied the *cohuleen driuth*, or little enchanted cap, which the sea people use for diving down into the ocean, lying upon the strand, near her; and he had heard that if once he could possess himself of the cap, she would lose the power of going away into the water”

The merrow is often entrapped by a fisherman, chieftain, or piper who steals her special cap, her magical cap called a *cochailin draiochta*.

A *dullahan* is your standard headless horseman with his or her headless horses, sometimes holding the head and sometimes with no head at all.

This is an omen that....

(*)

On Halloween, when I was a mermaid, a horse running down the center of Broadrock road,
without the assistance of upward direction

Where in the backwoods, we don't
Fuck around,

Unless your laid flat out in a turf field,
raw but his head
Won't work, because first, he lost his head

To triple XXX and magic hat, and second, it got broken
At some point in his youth
The skin was too tight and so they had to
Snip it so the tip could fit out but somehow
The scissors slipped, like a merrow
caught
In a fishing net who reaches down and
Pulls up shears from the bank of the strand.

“she lifted up a pair of scissors. She cut the net all around her and then she was free again.
Tommy was greatly surprised and he said nothing. When he went home he told everyone
about what had happened. Tommy got very sick when he went home and in a few weeks he
was dead.”

-Irish Schools collection

Something happened with Head in a turf field
But it is a little blurry even though it
Was a very clear night and the stars were shining
Were glinting like...
glinting something terrible
And the grass was wet and cool just like it is when it first
Starts too thaw, muddy even
Behind the puny cedar trees that grow between the tuffetts of haunted grass.

Behind a grove like this, Head would light rockets off at me
And point them in my upwards direction. A year before Head had tied me to a tree.
Head dragged me across the fire
And tied me to a tree.
I had to learn to like it.
Head kicked me out of a moving car at the crossroads of broadrock road,
In the back woods, where we don't fuck around,

Till ya do, and its Needles and Head passed out in a ratty burgundy armchair
 It's the middle of the day and no matter how hard I go shaking Head he
 Won't open his eyes.

*There is always some creepy creepy guy and
 My girl won't open her eyes.
 -Lex Getaway*

Head kicked me out of a car but before
 That he had stolen my little enchanted cap, my
 My *cochellein draiochta*.

Head stole my *cochellein draiochta*. by
 Abusing me on the bus and than abusing me in the halls and finally, I got so hard
 That I forgot to suit up, in my *cochellein draiochta*. and I let him dump a
 Bottle of gin down my throat and toss me out of a moving car
 And stand me at the crossroads in nothing
 But a shift dress/my underwear/ marching me back and forward a few times
 Until all the town had seen everything and they knew I now belonged to Head.

“Cross roads are considered most dangerous although people still go
 dancing to platforms which are near the cross-roads.(Tarbert, CO. Kerry)”
 -Irish schools collection

“Head, be it known, would drink a quart of salt water, for its medicinal
 virtues, before breakfast; and for the same reason, I suppose, double that
 quantity of raw whisky between breakfast and night, which last he did
 with as little inconvenience to himself as any boy in Swampstown; and
 were I to add Eastwick and Westwick, I don't think I should say wrong.”

Something happened with Head in a turf field.

“There was nothing else to hear except the moaning of a distant stream, that kept
 up a continued *cronane A monotonous song; a drowsy humming noise.*”

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

I took my crew to the lighthouse on Lunatick Island. We had developed a research project into the nature of returning to a state of health while having Lyme Disease with the help of ancestral ghosts. We were being funded in part by a grant from the advancement for psychical research party, which meant me dressing like a WACK from time to time, and marching into their office all business and spanking the boss. We were being funded in part by rhode-island ghost hunters. We went to their art opening and said "how nice". None of our funders would ever come out there, though, and see what we were really up to.

Our band consisted of five of us at the time with two guest appearances. We were out there casting spells to be the greatest band in the world, and was that so wrong? We just wanted the people to DANCE! The five permanents were myself, Skipper, in the lighthouse, my strange, shaking irish-twin Jackie who lived with the gama seals out on the rocks to the east, Thistle-down on the south-cove where she counted animals, my main man Ears in the western shore and was incharge of food and sculpture, Sunshine's Kid Brother, who mostly kept to himself on the rough north peninsula of the island.

I set up an altar in the lighthouse, and used mostly seaweed and driftwood and sea-glass and gull feathers. Sunshine's Kid Brother would come by to fix things from time to time, and had rigged it so we were borrowing electricity from the lighthouse generator when we needed it. Usually we didn't. We also would put out a white flag when we needed anything from the mainland, mainly gin. for this we had the help of a renegade lobsterman who had a CB radio and liked our work out there on the island and would pick up supplies and hang out occasionally in the evenings, smoking and telling stories. We drank rainwater even though it was full of heavy metals, we also ate a lot of seaweed.

We are also being funded in part by viewers like you:

Please send check or money order to:

Secret Society for the acquisition of assistance from ancestral ghosts for the return to health of sufferers of chronic illness by singing sea shanty band practice and getting daytime drunk off gin and calling each other skipper in the sand and sack.

Most of our funders never came out because they were scared of the ticks and scared of how the sun was making everyone sick and causing people's skin to fall off and turn patchwork of colors. It had happened to Grandma Jane. It had happened to Bebe but it hadn't killed her. It had happened to Sunshine and Tod, Aunty Chris's son, and it had. I was going down on my knees in the basement of the lighthouse every night, and tying green ribbons to the only oak tree on the island.

Thistle counted acorns, foxes, mice, chipmunks, skunks, pigeons, who owned the lighthouse and were helpful in sending messages home to mom, mussels, because that's what some of the animals ate including ourselves. She would record everything in a notepad because we were not to use cell-phones, trackers, or anything digital because they "scared," but scared is not quite the right word, the deterred helpful ghosts. Thistle got an albino skunk to follow her around and she named it holly.

Ears would smoke mussels down at their camp, and we would lie around eating them and letting the nymphy little ticks crawl all over us while Thistle pulled them off and counted.

Sunshine's Kid brother would sit in the shade and write songs about nothing.

We had left our trackers at home, and actually most of us hadn't had trackers to begin with, and we made up stories to our funders as to why they had to contact us by short-wave radio, and they complied.

No one used CB anymore except for a few oldtimers, and they were our allies, it usually turned out. That was how we met the lobsterman, who also had a sonic microphone she used to listen to the shellfish singing underwater. Her boat was called the sloop dangerous.

My grandmoms were at first the easiest to get a hold of out there, and would come as birds, a vulture and a crow, much to the dismay of the pigeons who owned the lighthouse. I knew that they had both "preyed" and this helped.

We mostly wore teal because we had plants in the weird little garden that could dye our fibers this color. We had recycled t-shirts from the S of the R and Thistle would embroider names of members of wu-tang into them for our birthdays. I was growing tons of rye in a little row and making whiskey with it when I could, so I used this to make our medicines and store them in old beer-bottles that Ears would pluck off the shore.

If the Irish had had all the beer-bottles we found washed up on the shore, they could have trown dem at the brittish ahmy and won da wah!

Lunatick Island fell out of the jurrasdiction of the FCC the CDC CIA FBI NSA and any other of your petty, government agencies, which made it a valuable asset for all kinds of illegal operations. The ticks, however, the solar flares, the mercurial sea surrounding it, the unpredictable floods and storms, and the fog, oh yes the fog that seemed to seep into your brain, made it a rough outpost and most who ventured there got lost along the way. Not all who wander are lost, and occasionally a ruffian would wash up along the shore and we would dust him off and feed him some pigeon soup and send him on his way. We did have guns out on Lunatick Island, but I admit we had no idea how to use them.

Now I'm coming to a difficult passage in To The Lighthouse...

I glimpsed the difficulty of the passage on a stroll down the beach through the fog.

We had asked the ancestral ghosts to watch over us on our mission, some grandmothers, grandfathers, some cousins and sisters, a brother too.

They watched over us, but the angels were twisted.

They rose up out of the water, a ninja-like army shrouded in scuba gear. At least that's how they appeared through the fog.. .

The beacon would wash over them every twelve seconds, bouncing a low yellow light off the veil of water separating us from them.

I made short wave announcements to beg them for protection in the nights and days we spent gathering data on Lunatick Island. They laughed in my face which I heard as a low grade buzzing coming from the speakers wired to the receiver we had mounted at the tip of the lighthouse.

I could tell from their movements as the light washed over them if I focused real hard on which ones I knew, which was Bebe and Kenny. I couldn't distinguish their individual voices but through the low grade buzzing they seemed to be saying I had to deal with the harsh reality of the situation.

When I woke the next morning I had tiny bruises covering parts of my limbs. I couldn't remember if I had taken a tumble in the briars the night before, through the fog and gin.

The third and final chapter was yes, lets here it in the back, addiction.

When I first started writing To the Lighthouse, Jackie had moved to an airBnB working as the housekeeper and maintenance guy in exchange for room and board, a vast improvement. At a certain point things started to go south again, and Jackie and Jay made one last ditch road trip to see Narek, the phone psychic, first hand, and to figure out for certain this time if it wasn't vultures in the bloodstream or angels. whether it wasn't aliens this time or the government or childhood trauma or epigenetic trauma or the government or back to aliens again. Or if it wasn't one special vengeful god with a special last lesson just for you...

Somehow, I felt that they, Jay and Jackie, were trying to protect me from the pizzagate stuff that went on down in the basement.

The two vultures had been carrying two velvet ribbons...film strips...joke of catholic church...

There was an insurmountable grief that I had learned to numb out, but the numbing lost its meaning at a certain point, like the antibiotics. Survivors' guilt.

Why did Jackie die and I did not?

That IS the question.

There was a part of *To The Lighthouse*, a difficult passage. Something hard to address. Jackie had not been able to heal, and I on the other hand had, not once, not twice, but turshiarly.

The first lye had been growing up half a boy and girl, half gay half straight not knowing witch witch was witch witch. Half gay bi gay west.

The next lye was the stalker, for which I bought a punching bag, a gun, and studied the art of kajukenbo.

The third lye was the wasting disease, at which point I lost my twenties to tiny bottle after bottle of fireball and 99 bananas, and eventually Triple XXX, the pharmaceutical combo that had taken Swamptown by storm.

Under the numb warmth of fireball and Triple XXX, a chorus of disabled women all pointing the finger and shouting lyme disease lyme disease at each other. My mother, her crooked shoulders screaming through the night, her elbows bending backwards, my aunt, crashing her car in a "fog" on the bridge, and of course, Jackie, hurling her atrophied body over the side.

(*)

Jackie dances now on a ghost ship that sails along where the water meets the sky. Jackie was on the boat that night as one of the star cabaret dancers. I could hear glasses clinking and the swell of party voices if I listened closely under the drumming.

The truth is, despite all the death in Swamptown, all the dead flies and all the dead lemmings, when I listen back to my tapes, it's not a funeral dirge I hear playing through the white noise hum.

It's a love song.

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WORKS CONSULTED

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A POETIX OF TRANSMISSION

Standing on the golden quartz sands of Narragansett Beach, looking south across the open ocean, I once heard a distant drumming. Facing south to the Towers, the last standing stone structure from the “Gilded Era” of Casinos, hotels and resorts on the Pier, the gluttony of Colonization, I was transported.

I was getting high on the beach with a friend on the verge of a psychotic break that would, watered by drug use, rupture into full blown Schizophrenia, leading him to stalk me for the next decade. Being in his presence was unnerving and left shared reality vulnerable.

Whether the drumming was my own nervous system, heart beat, or actual drumming from a far-off event was of less importance than the scene unlocked in my imagination. I felt that it was coming from a world just across the veil from this one, one that exists outside of time, where the dead can dance.

The drumming conjured a synesthetic realm. I could practically see it. *The Mermaid Palace* attempts to describe these visions.

I fall into fairy raths such as this consistently. One of my earliest memories is a reoccurring dream I had when I was a small child. I would wake from the dream in hysterics each time: A cavernous hall of exquisite beauty with a queen on her throne, being presented gifts by a slew of ridiculous tumbling little elves.

I believe I visited another plane in this dream and that I was brought into the Otherworld.

The past six years of my life have been haunted, stunted, by the suicide of my beloved cousin, who drowned herself off the side of the Golden Gate one bright orange morning on the winter solstice. The gap that Nicole's loss left, in myself and my family, is something my writing peers down into.

Before that she brought me up in poetry slams at the collective arts venue in Providence and shows in basements and warehouses in the old brick mills. I was brought through vaulted doors in brick buildings that looked abandoned, shown a shimmering world right

inside this one, just out of sight. You need to be led down the right passage. I knew immediately that I preferred this world, that I belonged here, creating within it.

The issue with the Otherworld is that it demands sacrifices, calls its most precious young back too soon.

The Mermaid Palace is both a eulogy and a love song to the real Underground heroes, the people who create an Otherworld right inside this one and vanish into it.

The Mermaid Palace employs a triad of autofictional intergenerational myth and memory, place-based field recordings taken at my old haunts, and local lore and legend from the historical archives.

Utilizing, twisting, bastardizing language from historical archives, letting lyrics from the music I grew up swimming in seep through the cracks in the writing, snippets of conversation recorded covertly at Dunkin Donuts flow through the dialogue, allowing my subconscious to psychically compensate as a divinatory practice of listening and writing. *The Mermaid Palace* seeks a bridge out of the graveyard left by the opioid crisis, a rash of suicides, and the Lyme Epidemic that has blighted a small fishing community in Southern Rhode Island.

ARCHIVE

The Mermaid Palace began several years ago as the opening story in a collection of short stories. Several of these stories seeped together and wouldn't wrap themselves up individually, eventually emerging as their own project. The connecting force was the landscape, the shoreline of coastal Southern Rhode Island where I was born and raised.

Christine DeLucia's gorgeous history of the area, *Memory Lands*, provides an alternative to colonial-centric narratives of the region. Drawing from oral traditions, archival traces, material and visual culture, archaeology, literature, and environmental studies, *Memory Lands* features the region of Narragansett land known as the "The Pettaquamscutt Purchase" and the role it played in King Philip's War. Delucia's language aims to give a sense this fluid locale without colonial constructed borders:

not...a unitary, static space—nor one that could be easily encapsulated by a single place-name—instead...a series of smaller coves, tidal flats, open expanses, fast-moving and deep channels that swept around islands and rocky protuberances...a zone constantly in motion and linked to interior lands by spiderwebs of rivers and brooks. (Delucia, 124).

This wet and shifting web is the geography *The Mermaid Palace* bubbles up from.

The Mermaid Palace opens with a childhood memory of visiting an oceanic dream-palace in the Otherworld that is a *pink-as-cake sandcastle* and *smells like a tropical fish tank*. Nautical autofictional details weave into the imaginary play of children. The opening first person narrator, a younger version of myself, seeks a lifeboat out of a landscape that is drowning its children.

The mermaids in this dream-palace, however, have been infiltrated by the grind of "reality", moonlighting as Dunkin Donuts clerks. The ubiquity of the tacky coffee shop on every block and the mundanity of suburbia constructed atop a shifting watery web, where the heroes of the Underground slip away into a whirlpool of drugs and suicide. The children that survive are sleuths, seeking a solution so that they can prevent more deaths from happening in the future.

The imaginary, memory, and dream are not static or reliable in my experience, and *The Mermaid Palace* explores the geographical zone of my childhood from this slippery footing.

Enter "The Researcher", a narrator conjured by the children. A banshee attached to certain families, like a familial curse or addiction. On an ambiguous mission trying to get

to the bottom of something. Borrowing from the Chris Marker film *La Jetee*, “taking place in a no-place in no-time”, a time-traveler of sorts who moves between realms.

The Researcher mirrors my own— and the childrens—dive into the historical archive, seeking the witches, gays and edgewalkers who may have provided a lifeline to the people who didn’t make it past The Tower, or if they did, ended up dead.

Queer ancestors, women who have something to say, freaks who made it out alive, artists who don’t go over the side of a bridge, at first missing from the archives, are crouching in the margins. Excavating the supernatural and folk archives to clear the rubble from around these spirits and bring them into the landscape, where they may provide some hope.

I was astonished at the examples I uncovered just below the surface on my first visit to the South County Historical Society. The mythology concerning The Public Universal Friend for example, who, in the 1700’s was reborn after an illness as a genderless spirit, used They/Them pronouns, insisted on wealth redistribution, and had throngs of female followers. The description of a black trans woman living on the same hill as my mother in the 1800’s and setting up an altar on a flat stone between two oak trees that may still be there.

My mother’s house, the beach cottage that I was raised in, cared for my dying grandmother in, sits on the ruins of an old colonial Inn. Or tavern perhaps. Bottles burned in the dirt uncovered when we put in a new septic tank. The foundation is at a crossroads that was once the main colonial route connecting New York, Newport, and Boston.

Cracking into the archives looking for mention of the Inn, everything in the village and surrounding colonial villages has since burned down, washed away, or crumbled into the earth. “Essentially, the village of Tower Hill which once was, is gone. Vanished” reads a mimeographed transcript from one of the last inhabitants of the vanished village.

Though the original colonial village is buried under a Dunkin Donuts now, the crossroads of the location still seem to pull in uncanny, coming-and-going energy, a psycho-geometric vortex.

SOUND

A cornerstone of this project is a theory that places from the archive, the crossroads where the Public Universal Friend preached, places of folkloric import, places of psychogeographic ambiance and exchange, have a certain audible presence that can be tuned into as a form of artistic divination.

Renowned field recordist and musician Chris Watson has spent years collecting audio recordings from what he describes as *Haunted Spaces*. He visits historical locations in the Scottish countryside, documenting the aural presence of these places, and editing these recordings into cinematic scores that attempt to reflect the spirits of the land.

Watson uses what he refers to as a triad of sound when composing these pieces: The Ambience of the place, The Habitat track, and the featured, single-point sounds.

The cacophony I grew up in, a far cry from the howling highlands of rural Scotland, nonetheless created and shaped me into the sound artist and musician I am today.

As a teen, I worked the Drive-Thru at the local Dunkies. "Would-you-like-some cream-and-sugar-with-that's?" saturating the hip-hop or grunge station we had blasting, the Atlantic crashing in the background interspersed with car horns from the throngs of beach traffic and the manager yelling.

I grew up immersed in music, swimming in it, my memories have a soundtrack. Our main thrill after work was turning it up a notch at a punk or noise show in the city.

The Northeast is infamous for being loud, even the crickets thrum at an extra decibel.

Class often plays out in what sounds are privileged. The introduction of *Soundscapes of the Urban Past* quotes citizens letters written to a local noise abatement committee in the Netherlands in the mid-1930's:

“Complaints often stressed the incessant and piercing character of the unwanted sounds, their sheer multitude, as well as their untimely nature: a screaming army of flower vendors, rag-dealers and iron mongers passing through the streets day and night...Lower-class lads and girls who felt the need to scream and yell”(12-13)

My fascination with sound and how it shapes and creates the art of a region came to the forefront in my writing practice while generating *The Mermaid Palace*.

From my dive into the archives of the supernatural, vanished villages, and psycho-geometric vortexes, I selected a variety of locations to visit with my Zoom H4n Pro field recorder, taking soundwalks and recording anything that caught my ear. Sometimes just letting the recorder run atop a stonewall, picking up ambient nature sounds, or turning it on in the car while heading to a location, capturing my mother's recollections and commentary along the way. This practice of privileging the sonority of a place was transformative to my awareness at each visit.

On the practice of Soundwalking, artist Hildegard Westerkamp writes:

Wherever we go we will give our ears priority. They have been neglected by us for a long time and, as a result, we have done little to develop an acoustic environment of good quality...Physically and psychically, we still have to compensate for any noise even if our ears perceive it unconsciously. (Westerkamp)

I used the hours of recorded footage taken at these zones to create playlists that I listened back to while typing on a Mercury Royal typewriter, allowing my subconscious to “psychically compensate”, narrating these soundtracks with a story.

What does the white-noise trickling of a Holy-Well turned Snuff-Mill turned Dunkin Donuts parking lot tell us about history and about ourselves? What gaps in childhood memory and historical documents does it fill?

The Mermaid Palace asks these questions and flounders in the answering.

Sound artist Oliva Block describes field recording as subjective, surreal aural space rather than an objective representation of a location. Of her piece *October, 1984*, she writes:

...[October, 1984] includes portions of the [found] micro cassette tape sounds...interwoven with field recordings of wind and water. I wanted to create a sonic fever-dream; a place where pieces of recorded voices wash up on a shore, then blow away in the wind. I wanted to create a transformational energy, as if the sounds were fleeting memories or souls between realms.

Music and sound art allow for a more fluid representation of place, where the listener co-creates meaning and conjures images from their imagination. *The Mermaid Palace* attempts to translate these surreal aural spaces, these fever-dreams of fleeting souls between realms, into an experimental text that maintains a surreal, subjective quality.

In an interview in *Pink Noises*, Sound artist Annea Lockwood describes a little boy exiting and entering the stage of a recording session on the Danube River, where Lockwood was attempting to capture the sounds of water rushing through a floating dock.

A little boy came running onto the dock so I put my finger to my lips and he quieted down immediately! Didn't say a word, he was great. And then he very quietly tiptoed over beside me, and sat down beside me_made not a sound! He got it right away. And I put the headphones on him and

he sat there sort of entranced for quite a long time, not having heard the river quite like that, right? And tiptoed away. (Pink Noises, 120-21)

Listening back to my own field recordings of the abandoned, burned down, and haunted Zones of Swamptown, I open up to the tiptoeing of the child's feet on the dock as a potential spark for a story from the well of my subconscious. A Sound-Bridge between my memories of place and my excavation of the historical archive.

Artist Janet Cardiff also layers text from historical archive and sound effects to create a soundwalk that attempts to bridge time:

Through excerpts from Seidler's (the painter of Goethe from Jena) diary entries we unfold a layered narrative that deals with the physicality of memory. There are also sound effects from battle scenes: cannons, muskets and horses galloping by. Time slips from one century to another as the listener walks, aware of their feet on the earth and the wind on their face. They will be aware that they are walking on the site just as others have walked over the same earth the last two hundred years, their stories mixing with those in the past. (Cardiff)

Allowing the 'field' its own sonority, *The Mermaid Palace* attempts to channel the spirits of Swamptown through the practice of field recording translated into an experimental narrative.

DIVINATION

Divination as a writing practice is central to this work. Techniques of channeling texts such as the Ouija Board work of James Merrill in *The Book of Ephraim*, links between

random erasure and divination, and John Cage's practice with the I-Ching and the mesostic form to create poems were influential in this project.

As a Sound Artist, I used the Chance Operations at work in the documentation of a “field” and what may wander—unpredictably—in or out of the audioframe, as a form of divination in my writing practice.

Stephen Benson and Will Montgomery’s collection of essays at the intersection of field recording and writing, *Writing the Field Recording: Sound, Word, Environment*, describes the spontaneity and chance at play when one hits record:

“The ‘field’ is both a two-dimensional space akin to a canvas and a three-dimensional space that is open, like a stage, to ‘exits and entrances’. (Benson)

A notorious example of this is the doe and buck wandering into the second movement of John Cage’s canonized (silent) 4’33, when performed in the forest.

“Musical performance is reframed as private listening in a reconfigured mode of attention to the world's unfolding” (Benson).

Visiting the cemeteries, ruins, and Dunkin Donuts of Swamptown, I operated under a playful assumption that something unseen could be tuned into when I hit record. Akin to the Electronic Voice Phenomenon of reality TV Ghost Hunters, while allowing the sonority of a place to include all the sounds that wander into the frame, not just your average ghoulish whisper.

Poet and Queer elder CAConrad’s Somatic Poetry rituals provided influence for this project. CA offers recipes for channeled writing that combine field-recording and connection to place. For example: Listen to field recordings of recently extinct animals while lying in the dirt near a Walmart, then walk around Walmart looking at all the goods, then write..

Selah Saterstrom's *Ideal suggestions : Essays in Divinatory Poetics* was inspired this project early on. I found parallels in Saterstrom's relationship to divination, in her case Southern Rootwork Divination, and my own herbal and Tarot practices. Her line "there is nothing more upsetting than haunted water" encapsulates what The Researcher is researching and recording, and I open her chapter "Tapes From Cardinal Flower Dam " with this epigraph. Saterstrom is influential to me as a queer writer, through her use of poetic divination, and the organization of her essays around the meditative practice of the rosary. (I too have an inherited relationship to the rosary through my Irish Catholic Grandmothers).

In an interview, Saterstrom describes her Tarot practice which informs her writing:

"I would encourage those who feel the tug of the cards to allow these questions to haunt you:

How can I listen better?

How do I position my multiple selves in the guts of the flux while remaining sentient, oriented towards justice, and able, through a variety of modes and practices, to offer visibility to some poignant patterns?"

I want to literally "listen" to the land and translate the stories through the practice of spontaneous field recording, as if the "field" itself were a Tarot Card . The field recordings were taken at places of supernatural and banal personal import, cemeteries, ruins of colonial villages long burned to the ground or washed away in a hurricane, Dunkies drive-thru's, almost always by water. The soundscape of Southern Rhode Island is either gushing with water, humming with the traffic, or both.

As my project progressed, I took the sounds of the check-out line at Ocean State Job Lot to be just as generative as the trickling of a Holy Well. This project has opened my ears to a new way of listening.

IN CLOSING

The archive of the supernatural is bloody, drowned, and exhumed. Haunted. Horrors that are indescribable. Where meaning slips through the cracks of terror.

I once had to run out the basement of my mother's house, through the taverns foundation, fleeing my schizophrenic stalker while he clawed at the windows. A stranger showed up on the porch with his pants soaking wet to the knees, claiming he had "followed the W's in the trees" from Pennsylvania to find our family at the house. All ten of our cats were killed. I was assaulted by a friend in my bedroom as a teenagers while I was home alone. The mundane horrors of suburban existence blended with something a little more uncanny, something supernatural.

Music and sound take a stab at these feelings and sensations. The ominous drone of a Horror score, like the opening shot in *The Shining*, where Wendy Carlos's masterful work makes it clear that something is not right about this place, beautiful as it may appear.

The Mermaid Palace takes a stab as well, using a triad of information and voices in its structure, akin to Chris Watson's 3 track Scores: The single-point source sounds are childhood memories and familial myth, the fucked-up and gender-fucked highlights (or lowlights) of my youth. The Ambience/atmosphere track is the historical archive, a gossipy, omniscient narrator. The Habitat Track is the botanical, drug paraphernalia, and sonic data collected in the "Researchers" logs.

The truth is binaries or in this case, trinarities, never work for me, and the boundaries between these voices deteriorate, especially in the last chapters, "Enter Exiter" and "Too the Lighthouse", as the narrators channel each other and the voices get crossed, like a radio picking up multiple broadcasts on one channel.

I fed this project from the archive, trips to the Narragansett's Tamaqua Museum and URI ethnobotany departments as well as countless trips to cemeteries, sacred sites, shorelines, and Dunkies. Physically going to the location with field recording gear and

documenting the contemporary aural presence of place, with the chance operations at play of whatever wandered into that audioframe when I hit record.

I'm the boy who lived, and instead of continuing to ask "Why?" the Mermaid Palace asks "Now what?"

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