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Recommended Citation
Hall, Becca, "Good Like the Sea" (2006). Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 2465.
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GOOD LIKE THE SEA

By

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B.A. in English, Stanford University, 2003

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

The University of Montana

May, 2006
The first section of a novel in-progress, this piece explores the life of a young woman named Rosie as she graduates from college just after the beginning of the war in Iraq. When the story opens, Rosie lives in a close-knit house in Seattle with her activist friends. Together the group struggles to decide how to respond to the environmental and social problems they see in the world, particularly the war. They seek a way to live that challenges the underlying issues behind the problems, as well as a life that makes them happy.

Unlike her friends, Rosie is unsure that activism is the way she wants to address the issues. She feels torn between engaging with the work her friends are doing and exploring a more contemplative, mystical path that she feels opening before her. She experiences a strong spiritual connection to nature that her friends do not seem to share but which feels important. The story explores both the effect nature has on Rosie’s inner life, and Rosie’s struggle to determine how she belongs in the natural world.

Meanwhile, Rosie has a tumultuous romance with one of her housemates, meets a Cuban ex-revolutionary living in the suburbs who makes her rethink her own ideas about social change, and wanders the wilds of Seattle and the Cascade mountains.
PREFACE:

Writing this story has been like unearthing a stone. At first it seemed to be a small thing that could fit nicely in the palm of my hand. Then I kept digging and realized it was bigger – watermelon size, I thought: just perfect for my thesis. So I dug some more, hoping to dig it all out in time for a graduation picnic.

But the more I dug, the bigger it became, until it seemed to be shaping itself into a big boulder of a novel – much too big for a thesis. I am still digging. What you see here is the first curve of the story, uncovered as best as I can.

Because this is just the beginning of a still mostly unwritten novel, it doesn’t end in tidy resolution (but what does?), or follow a smoothly tensed arc. It is still fragmentary and emerging and learning itself. Yet I hope that it coheres into its own sparse sense, and that it gives a satisfactory hint of what has yet to emerge.
Good Like the Sea

Part I

To begin with, there was the house, and the five of them in it, and the green smell of rain. And more, the smell of cooking, which meant garlic and cumin, and music, mostly bands not many other people have heard of, crackling and earnest, but also other things – The Grateful Dead, Nirvana, Johnny Cash – depending on who was home and the mood of things. Also, the sound the garage door made, its panels rippling as it was pulled open and shut, and the ticking of bicycles being wheeled in and out. And the rotten porch step and the hitch it caused in everyone’s stride as they skipped it running up and down the stairs. The continual stream of people sleeping on couches, the unlocked door, the piles of mail addressed to previous tenants, and the rich earth of the overgrown garden, the backyard maple, the curtains made of old sewn-together clothes. Half-finished canvases, political science and poetry textbooks, self-published ‘zines about revolution and fermentation and natural birth-control, someone’s boots half under the couch.

To begin with, the house and how it held them, creaking to itself sometimes in the early gray hours of morning. The house, and people coming always in and out, the recycling piling up in the corner. School bags slung down, pants still rolled from bicycles. Always news and laughter. Skitter coming to see Mumble, their high-fiving and wrestling, their chin-up contests on the lintel of the kitchen door. Hester Finley streaked with colors, wandering about in just her painting smock. Kayla clattering down the stairs in her heels, her cell phone singing. Cisco mapping out philosophy on the
broken chalkboard in the living room. Rosie with a tea mug in the big chair by the window, her poetry notebook on her lap. The rain pattering, pounding, pouring out of the gutters. The constant ring of the telephone.

Rosie showing Cisco the purl stitch. Kayla on the internet researching abortion rights. Finley making wheat paste for flyering. Mumble sitting down at the table to eat enormous pots of kale, leaving his dishes unwashed. The house, collecting days and dust and lost socks in its crannies. The blackberry bushes curling their pale green tendrils inch by inch down the fence and across the yard. Mice making nests and babies in the walls.

The mice making their nests from lost socks and old flyers and bits of Rosie's yarn. Blackberry roots gripping earth, creeping over the overgrown garden. The house, humming to itself the refrigerator's song. Mumble hauling home anything free. Hester Finley on the phone to yet another boy. Kayla sneaking cookies and going again to the gym. Cisco drunk on the kitchen floor, his homebrew half bottled around him. Rosie in the doorway, watching the lines of Cisco's neck as he bends his head to suck again on the leaky bottling siphon. The wind blowing tree branches against the window. All of them together, yet lonely as dust.

And around them the Emerald City, built on its seven hills. Theirs being a northern one, small and steep. Their street and the park, a deep gash of woods, and past that a mile or more, the University with its brick and rare trees. And the Ave with its hustling and its bustle, the humming flow of the city. Farther, the lakes, and the locks and the sound. Boats and ducks, and muskrats when the water turns dusky. Past it all, mountains in the east and mountains in the west and in the south lone Mount Rainier, floating as serenely as the cloud tourists sometimes thought it to be. And out, on and on,
into forests and oceans, and wide flat fields of wheat. Towns, some swollen and bursting, some dry husks, and roads of all kinds going everywhere, and everywhere things happening, but very little of it being told in the news.

And in turn, the news coming back across the forests and towns, bouncing through the air from whatever mind or place it came from, and always those days about one thing: impending war, or as it was called, a preemptive strike. War, the only public subject, while what mattered to the people of those towns and fields, what mattered to the forests, were quietly chipped away. War, and it was this war that came home in headlines to Rosie and her friends and their house on the rainy hill.

To begin with, all this. Mumble painting an anti-war banner to hang off the 45th street overpass. The house littered with soap chips from Hester Finley’s soap replicas of prehistoric goddess figurines. Kayla and Cisco mopping the kitchen and debating U.S. foreign policy. Rosie finger picking her guitar absentmindedly, thinking about how it all was ending.

She was thinking, of course, of graduation, hers and Kayla’s and Cisco’s. They weren’t all graduating since Finley had taken time off school to travel a while back and Mumble had dropped out, not being the classroom type. But still, an ending loomed. A scattering.

Kayla, for instance, had already accepted an internship back east for that summer and was almost certain of law school at Columbia for the fall. Hester Finley was talking of Mexico again, and there was always that Appalachian pull for her. And Cisco, who knew what Cisco would do next? He made plans, but too many really, and Rosie, for one, could never decipher beforehand which held genuine intention. Mumble, she
thought, would stick around. As for Rosie herself, she would have frozen time if she could, even if that meant perpetual winter and being forever on the brink of pointless war. She wanted to stay. She wanted all of them to stay. She had always loved impossible things.

Yet too, Rosie wanted to finish school, wanted to go out into the world. Of course she wanted to finish school. There were so many things that felt more important than school. Gardens and activism and writing her own poems, for instance, felt much more essential than studying Victorian Poetry and Pre-1750 British Literature, although her department disagreed. She wanted to travel or live in the woods for a while. See some things. She wanted to fall in love. She was twenty-two and she had never really been in love, at least not with someone who was in love with her. Or at least not with someone who loved her and wasn’t, like Cisco, too flighty to act on it. She wanted adventures and she wanted always to be held in the circle of her friends’ laughter. She wanted so many things, and the future was a vast and beautiful emptiness.

But the present, anyway, was certain and full. Rosie could hear laughing voices in the living room now – Skitter and her housemates and others come to organize an action in response to a declaration of war, if and when it came to that. Already there had been mass protest marches in Seattle and elsewhere around the world, but the machinery of war ticked onwards, steady as a clock, and it seemed increasingly likely that soon war would be declared. Rosie scowled at the thought, frustrated that even in a democracy a government could do something so abhorrent to the majority of its well-informed citizens. She put down her guitar and went to join the others.
They smiled at her when she came in, the conversation still unfocused. She squeezed onto the couch with Mumble and Skitter, looking around at the gathered people. More people had come than she would have guessed – nearly ten not counting her housemates. She recognized nearly everyone, though she didn’t know all of them well. Mostly, they were students from the UW, though one of the girls, Rosie knew, went to Seattle Central Community College with Skitter, and another was still in high school.

Finley brought in a kettle of hot tea, Cisco following with his hands full of clanking mugs. They set them down on the floor in the center of the room. Someone dug a bag of bulk trail mix out of a back pack and passed it around. Skitter cleared his throat. “Guys ready?” he asked.

The discussion that night centered on what kind of action they should plan when they began planning one next meeting. Some people were in favor of a lock down in front of the Federal Building. Some wanted to block intersections downtown and charge the freeway. Others proposed a mass march.

“Keep it mainstream – lots of kinds of people don’t like this war,” suggested a dark eyed boy Rosie didn’t know. That point got a few nods. Of course it would be good to get mass numbers of people out on the streets.

Yet other people felt that a peaceful march wasn’t enough. “What we want is mass chaos,” Cisco put in. “No business as usual. The city shut down. I think we can leave the peace march organization to the mainstream peacies and turn our energies to direct action. Our parents can get a damn peace march together.”
There was laughter, and Cisco grinned, but then Skitter pointed out that the key student organizers were all in the room, so if there was going to be a student component of the march, they would have to organize it.

The conversation swirled on for a while. Rosie meant to pay attention, but focusing was making her head hurt. Somehow being in meetings always wearied her, even when she believed in the issues. She yawned and blinked and tried to listen harder. They were just deciding to work on organizing the campus contingents of a mass peace march, letting whoever wanted to work on something more radical meet again in a smaller group. That made sense to Rosie.

"Who was getting in touch with the older peace activists?" Finley asked.

"Me," said Rosie with a start. "Yeah, they said they hadn't gotten too much together yet, but that they'd be in touch."

"Cool, so can you let them know our plans?" Finley asked, scribbling on her meeting notes. Rosie nodded, a small swell of dread swaying in her stomach. Why did even the simplest organizing tasks seem like terrible hurdles? She wished she could think of a reason why someone else would be better for the job, but there wasn't any.

"Maybe one of them can come to our next meeting," suggested Mumble, leaning forward so he could see around Skitter to look at Rosie.

"I'll ask," Rosie said, nodding at him, trying to look enthusiastic.

After the meeting, people hung around the living room for a while, chatting, the crowd dwindling slowly until only Skitter, Rosie's housemates and Rosie remained. A moment of stillness followed the click of the door shutting for the last time.
“What are you up to tonight?” Skitter asked Rosie, giving her arm a friendly squeeze.

“Reading for school,” she said and wrinkled her nose.

“Yeah, me too,” Skitter said sympathetically. He stretched and turned to Mumble. “Hey, I gotta go study a little. But I’ll see you later tonight?”

Mumble nodded, and Skitter hugged him, murmuring something in his ear. Mumble laughed and swatted him.

“Later, Punk-ass.”

* * *

Rosie and Cisco and Mumble were cooking dinner the night after the meeting. Cisco was telling them about recent peace marches in Europe and Asia, protesting the U.S. government’s battle fever.

“There have to be other ways of working for peace besides organizing peace march after peace march,” said Rosie, frustrated at the thought of how many people were protesting with such little effect.

“Well, yeah,” Mumble said earnestly. “Everything we do can be for peace.”

Cisco grinned. “Like Chopping Potatoes for Peace,” he said, dumping the last handful of potato pieces into the soup. “Or how ‘bout Farting for Peace.” And he did that too.

“Punching Your Smart-Ass Housemate for Peace,” Rosie put in, slugging Cisco on the arm.

“Tackling Pretty Girls for Peace,” Cisco countered, diving for Rosie. She ducked and tried to wiggle free, and they ended up in a pile on the kitchen floor. Cisco pinning
Rosie and tickling her. Rosie shrieked and squirmed, but half-heartedly. She liked the warm weight of Cisco's body against hers, and she liked having his attention. She pulled an arm loose and tickled him back. He giggled, trying to catch her arm again.

“What the hell?” said Hester Finley, coming through the door.

“They’re working for peace,” Mumble said calmly, crumbling herbs into the soup pot.

“Peace is an expression of love. Let’s make love,” said Finley and stepped over Rosie’s twitching feet towards the sink. “I saw a button that said that once.”

“I tried it once,” said Mumble.

“We weren’t,” Rosie said, wriggling finally free, her face flushed. “We were just thinking of alternatives to peace marches.”

“Uh huh. Is that what they’re calling it these days,” Finley said and laughed as Rosie blushed an even deeper pink. “You’re so easy to tease, Ro.”

Rosie rolled her eyes. “I know,” she said. Cisco laughed and poked her and she tackled him.

* * *

The first time it happened, Rosie was sitting on her porch daydreaming and pretending to write poetry. It was an early spring day, and sunny, and wherever the sun shone there was heat. Everywhere else still radiated winter, and if the breeze blew at all it stole the sun’s slight heat. Rosie sat, letting the sun fall on her face and trying to stay still enough to feel its warmth. She wasn’t thinking about much, just feeling happy, and dreamy, listening for poems.
She looked up from her notebook at one point, gazing out over the Japanese maple tree in the parking strip, whose buds were swollen, so close to spilling open. A soft light surrounded it, or not even a light but a lightness, as if whoever had colored in the air hadn’t colored quite all the way to the tree. Rosie had never noticed this phenomenon before, and wondered absently what caused it, before turning back to her writing. Down the street, a car door slammed, and Rosie looked up again, startled. The lightness around the tree was gone.

*If it can go away, Rosie thought, *that means that it was there, whatever it was.* It wasn’t just her eyes being hazy or something. It might, she thought, have to do with how she looked at something. How receptive her mind was. She took a deep breath, relaxed back into that dreamy listening, and looked at the tree again. There it was, that haziness around its edges.

Rosie leapt up, excited, to go tell someone what had just happened. She found Cisco and Mumble in the kitchen throwing magnets at the refrigerator. They were aiming for a newspaper photo of President Bush that someone had drawn devil horns on. Whenever they flung a magnet so that it stuck on the picture, they cheered and high-fived like drunken sports fans.

“Hey Ro,” they said together.

“You guys, guess what, I was on the porch writing, and I looked at this tree and it had a light around it and I looked at it again and the light was gone because I wasn’t looking at it in a receptive kind of way I think and then I looked at it again really softly and there was the light.” The words tumbled out of her mouth, not making much sense, and she felt herself blushing, as if she had betrayed something private.
Cisco laughed and called her “Our Visionary,” but Mumble gave her a long, slow look and said, “That’s cool, Ro. You should practice that.”

* * *

“Finley, you have a letter from Gentian,” Rosie said, coming in with the mail. Hester Finley stood up from the giant finger painting she had spread across the living room floor. “Oh!” she said, running to wash her hands. Rosie smiled; she loved how giddy a letter from Gentian made her friend. It could turn her dark fire into something near sappiness. Rosie put the mail down, and went to make herself a sandwich.

There was no bread. They would have to go dumpster diving soon. Rosie dug a bagel out of the freezer and sawed it in half with a knife. That’s why we’ve got mice, she thought, watching crumbs spew across the kitchen into all the impossible corners. Oh well. At least it wasn’t rats.

“Oh, I’m so jealous,” Finley said, reading her letter. “Gentian says he was out canvassing for his mountain justice group and ended up sitting on the porch of some cabin way up the middle of nowhere listening to this crazy old man play banjo by the light of a kerosene lamp. He says ‘ten miles up a dirt road and a hundred years back in time.’ Damn.” She sat down in a kitchen chair without lifting her eyes from the letter.

Rosie leaned on the counter while her bagel toasted and watched her. Hester Finley wore old corduroys that frayed around the bottoms where she had cut them off to fit her short legs. Her socks didn’t match – they weren’t even the same type of sock, one being wool and the other a cotton ankle sock – and both had holes. Rosie could see chipped red toenail polish through one of the holes. That must have been from the joke cocktail party they had thrown in January, when they had gotten all dolled up, drank
fancy drinks and called each other “dahling” all night. Rosie still had some polish on her toes as well.

Finley turned the letter over, laughing to herself then biting her lip. She tucked her curls behind her ear absently, but they didn’t stay. They never did. Kayla called Finley “Fraggle” sometimes because of her hair. It was after some TV show from the ‘80’s but Rosie wasn’t sure which one. Funny the ripples that her parents’ no TV rule still sent through her life.

“Oh,” Finley said in a happy-pouty voice, putting down the letter.

“Is he coming out?” asked Rosie, slopping peanut butter on her bagel and sitting down.

“He isn’t gay,” Hester Finley teased.

“No, I meant –”

“I know. No, he’s not. He says he doesn’t have the money. Maybe I should go back there this summer. I don’t know. He’s seeing this girl…” she trailed off, staring at the wall. “Anyway,” she said decisively, jerking herself back, “We can be friends just as well through letters.”

Finley and Gentian had been friends since high school, the only radical kids in their conservative North Carolina school. Gentian had never been her boyfriend, although it was plain to Rosie that Finley was mad about him, and occasionally they would get drunk and things would happen. She had been after him to come out west since she had moved to Seattle, but he had moved to Asheville and gotten involved in activism against Mountain Top Removal coal mining and was uninterested in travel. He in turn wrote her letters that sometimes read like tourist brochures, expounding the
virtues of life in Appalachia, letters that made a slight accent slip into Finley’s voice, and
a wistfulness into her eyes. Rosie wondered if Finley would stick around after
graduation, or if she would go back east. Rosie felt secretly glad that Finley still had a
year left of school.

* * *

There wasn’t any reason, Rosie thought, that she shouldn’t like Cisco. Well, there
was, but there were also so many reasons she should like him. Like how he hugged her,
slow and dear and tenderly. Like how he thought about everything, could debate any
idea. And the spring in his step, and the wiry lines of his arms, and how his eyebrows
already bristled from his face as eccentric and bushy as an old man’s. And, of course his
eyes, mischievous and twinkling. How particularly he rolled his cigarettes. And how he
smelled of smoke and bicycle grease and wet wool and a little sweat. How something
about that smell made a deep wanting well up in Rosie.

She remembered once how they had been listening to old jazz in the kitchen,
chopping vegetables for a stir fry, and how he had taken her hand and begun dancing
with her, saying “Close your eyes.” She had, and found that she didn’t need them. She
and Cisco’s bodies had known where to find one another without sight.

She remembered once she had been sad and hadn’t known how to talk about it,
and he had held her and stroked her hair and hummed a lullaby to her, deep in his throat,
until her tears had stopped and her breath relaxed, held in the great safety of his presence.

He had taught her wrestling moves and explained the word hegemony to her and
showed her how to true a bike wheel without making her feel stupid. They climbed trees
together, and went skinny dipping in Green Lake one night together, and always she was laughing when she was with him.

True, Cisco hugged and danced and talked with many other girls. He was a charismatic, social person, which is partly what Rosie liked about him. The center of the party and he lit up when she came in the room. She just wished she knew how to take that step from flirtatious friends into something else. She thought about Cisco often at night, imagining him sleeping beside her, his hand on her waist. She often slept with a blanket beside her, solid and almost like another person.

The difficult thing was getting his attention when she wanted it, not just when he felt like giving it. Hot and cold, that was Cisco. Often, in the evening, restless from studying, she would climb the stairs and knock on Cisco’s door. “Yes?” he would always say in a distracted voice.

“Hey,” Rosie would answer, opening the door and standing casually in the door way. “I just was seeing what you were up to.”

Invariably, he was deep in some obscure book of philosophy or political theory. Sometimes, he would leave it to talk with Rosie, or to go walking with her, but more often she would simply stand in his doorway for a minute while he explained what the book was about, not getting up from where he lay reading on his bed.

“Well, if you want a break or something, let me know,” she would say finally, and go back downstairs feeling foolish and frustrated.

*  *  *

13
“What are we going to do with ourselves, when we aren’t doing this?” Rosie asked Cisco one night while he and Kayla were washing dishes. She fetched the broom from the pantry while he considered her question.

“When we aren’t doing this? Oh, love and revolution and shit,” he said and she laughed. She laughed easily for Cisco.

“No, but really.”

“That’s the million dollar question, baby,” Finley put in from by the dish cupboard. She flicked her dishtowel at Rosie. Rosie ducked out of the way and held up her broom in defense. Maybe she shouldn’t have asked a serious question when everyone else was in such a sassy mood.

“I think,” said Cisco, more serious then, scratching his face with his wrist, his hands too soapy. “It’s gotta be something substantive. I mean, that’s obvious.”

“Something plugged in,” Kayla suggested, meticulously rinsing the soap off a dinner plate.

“Yeah. I don’t want to just have the house and the dog and the dental plan. You know what I’m saying?” Cisco said. He stepped backwards into Rosie’s pile. She swatted him with her broom, and he grinned at her but didn’t apologize.

“And it isn’t enough just to have fun either,” Cisco continued. “You can’t just go off and travel the world and throw good parties and learn Salsa dancing and shit. You have to be exerting pressure on the military-industrial complex.”

Rosie swept between Cisco’s feet, frustrated already by the conversation. It was the same old thing over and over, all theory and big words. Nothing she could touch. She swept at the floor fiercely.
"We’ve been over this before and I know everyone doesn’t see it this way."
Kayla said, “but I’m a firm believer in exerting friction from inside. If you cut yourself off from the power centers of society, you just make yourself ineffective. You – ”

“Yeah, but participation is consent, Kayla,” Cisco cut in. “The fucked up systems won’t ever collapse unless we withdraw our con—”

“I don’t know about that, Cisco. Do we want complete collapse into chaos, or do we want to make realistic changes?” Kayla’s lawyer side was warming up now, her voice growing full and round and almost frighteningly powerful.

Rosie sighed and swept up the dust pile. This could go on for a while. She put the broom away. She felt no less confused about what to do with herself after graduation than she had before the conversation began. It was all just talk, talk, talk. She put the tea kettle on and measured out a tea strainer full of the dried nettles that she and Finley had gathered the summer before, thinking.

She didn’t want to be complicit in a society that valued profits over healthy people and places, but she didn’t know how not to be. It probably meant educating and organizing in her community, protesting, giving as little money as she could to the big corporations, using as little petroleum as possible. Yet the idea of that didn’t make her happy. Something about it seemed incomplete and pinched, a life defined by what it was not.

Sometimes it sounded so much better just to run away from it all and live a happy little life writing poems and making love and wandering around in the woods. She’d like to have a big garden and eventually babies and not have to think about all the problems all the time. Yet she couldn’t stand by and let everything she loved be destroyed. She
didn’t know if she could stop it, either. There had to be a way to be both happy and helpful. It was just a matter of figuring it out, as if that was simple.

“It’s gonna take an armed revolution,” Cisco was saying. “I don’t see any other way when the whole framework of society is fucked.”

The tea kettle whistled, and Rosie poured her tea, the nettles turning the tea steam green-smelling. Rosie loved that smell, how healthy and wild it was. It smelled like tea a wise old woman would have made in the Middle Ages, heating the water in a black iron pot over a fire in some low cottage, herbs hanging from the rafters. It smelled like iron and stones and green plants and a little like the sea. It smelled how she wanted her life to be. Good.

That’s the thing, Rosie thought to herself. She just wanted to live a good life. One that was good for her body and her spirit and her mind, good for all the people she loved and people in general and for the rest of life besides humans as well. A life that contributed to the health and joy of the world, causing little harm. It sounded simple, what she wanted, or straight forward anyway, but Rosie still felt at a loss about what she should actually do. Sighing, she picked up her teacup and went to her room to finish a paper for Victorian Poetry, leaving the others still hot in debate.

* * *

Rosie was in the kitchen cutting onions for soup when Cisco slammed in the back door, throwing down his laundry sack. By the look on his face, she knew what he was going to say before he said it.
"The war's started."

Rosie wiped her hair from her face and felt her eyes turn hot – the onions.

"Fucking bastards," Cisco was saying, unbuttoning his jacket. "It was all over the TV in the Laundromat, Bush with that fake concerned look like 'Aren't I the All-American hero here to save the day,' all talking about weapons of mass destruction and freedom and shit. Jesus."

Mumble and Kayla came out of their rooms when they heard what Cisco was saying, Hester Finley clattering down the stairs, rushing in breathless. Everyone was talking at once, swearing, swaggering their political knowledge. And Rosie felt a grayness settle over her, a dull, empty absence of light. She put the knife down. It seemed silly to make anything, do anything, when nothing – not all the millions of people marching for peace, the UN's opinion, common decency, nothing – had stopped the war. She slipped out the back door, and sat on the steps in the dusk and soft rain.

Later that night, Rosie and Cisco went walking. The rain was still falling, the streetlamps' light cylinders of it, the slow wheels of the passing cars hissing through water. It was spring, and the smell of rain and new green leaves surged through the air so strongly that Rosie felt she could taste it. There was something dreamlike about their neighborhood that night. It was a night when lovers should have wandered liltingly before going home to bed, and there they were, walking together, but it wasn't like that.

The conversation had swung into philosophy, which Rosie generally enjoyed. Cisco thought ideas through carefully and argued them articulately, and she could hold her own with him when she felt like it. Tonight, however, he was arguing against
pacificism, for a violent form of anarchy, and she couldn’t agree, and she didn’t want to fight about it.

“There’s a time and place for everything,” he was saying. “Non-violence is great for some things, but there’s a place for violence too. Right now, we need to be a force. We need to challenge their power. Make them listen. They won’t listen to peaceful protest. We need —”

“Yeah, but Cisco, you can’t get peace through war, it doesn’t make any sense. Then you’re just the same as them. You have to act from a different mindset altogether, not meet them on their terms. Like Gandhi.”

“I’ve got a Gandhi quote for you, Ro: ‘violence is any day preferable to impotence.’ In other words, if the choice is helplessness or violence, then violence all the way.” He threw a couple fake punches into the air.

“I still don’t see,” said Rosie seriously, “how reacting to violence with violence is ever going to really change anything. On a deep level, I mean.”

“Oh sure, I agree, but deep change is slow and I’m talking about what we do about a fucking war that’s happening fucking now. Kids are dying right now. We can’t wait for deep social change.” Cisco was impassioned, his voice loud and stride long. Rosie hurried to keep up.

“But the government is so much stronger. Using force against them is setting yourself up to lose,” she argued.

“Sometimes it’s a moral necessity to act in whatever way you can to protect what you love. I’m talking about violence as self-defense, as a last resort.”
"But any violence can be justified by morality and self defense. I don't think that's an excuse to condone it."

"Rosie get real, would you? Violence is an inherent fact of civilization. You might not see it every day if you're privileged enough, but just try not paying your baby-killing taxes and wham, you go to jail. That's force, Ro. That's violence. Our government. If you really have a problem with violence, turn your attention to that giant monopoly of force, not to some kids throwing fucking bricks or whatever."

Rosie thought about this. She was lucky, she knew: she had never personally seen the underlying violence of society laid bare. The thought of it made her shiver. That all of that could be the same world as the damp night streets she walked through, sidewalk puddles glistening with streetlamps and rain and the great dark fir trees rustling above her in a high wind she could not feel.

"And another thing," Cisco was saying, "you're just as complicit in all the violence as every other American. Participate in our society and you condone violence."

Rosie was quiet for a while, considering. "Well then," she said finally, "I guess the thing to do is to stop being complicit."

"Exactly! Meet them face-to-face," Cisco said.

"No," Rosie said slowly, "No, make an alternative."

"How is that gonna stop the war?" Cisco said, rolling his eyes at Rosie's idealism.

"I don't know, but ..."

And so it went, back and forth, down the night streets, until Rosie felt close to tears. The rain had made the snails come out. The sidewalks teemed with the quiet little creatures leaving their shimmer-trails behind them as they searched for succulence, each

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everything about the night felt so beautiful, and rosie wanted nothing more than to be a part of that beauty, that peace. but she could feel the sticky crunch of snails under her feet. no matter how hard she tried, she could not help but kill them.

as the campus peace activists had been planning, there was a walkout the next day. everyone gathered at noon on campus – a few hundred students and some others, standing in red square awaiting direction. it was fewer people than hoped for, but it was finals week and blowing rain at that. rosie saw many people she knew – finley and mumble and cisco of course, but also a shy girl from her victorian poetry class who rosie wouldn’t have thought would go for this kind of thing.

rosie looked around at all the people, bright in their raincoats, grim faces and faces beginning to light with hope or pride at the sight of the crowd. many people carried signs: support our troops – bring them home. iraq is arabic for vietnam. fuck bush. impeach bush. all the old things.

rosie had brought her bubbles, and wandered around blowing them into the air above the crowd. they floated down, resting a moment before popping on the rain-wet bricks. a small boy chased the resting bubbles, trying to stomp on them. “die! die! die!” he yelled. his mother laughed and turned her hands up, giving rosie a sheepish look. someone began drumming and a few people danced.

across the square a small pro-war counter-protest grew, mostly consisting, as far as rosie could tell, of rotc kids and business major types. mostly, it also seemed, white boys. some of them carried signs as well – about freedom and democracy and honor. rosie realized that she might have carried some of the signs. she believed in
freedom. Yet she would have meant a completely opposite course of action to achieve that freedom. *That’s the trouble,* she thought to herself. *Abstractions can mean whatever the hell you make them mean.*

Then Rosie saw Cisco sauntering over to join the pro-war group. He held up a sign written on a piece of cardboard and wore a big, friendly smile. Rosie squinted at his sign, trying to make out the words from across the square. “We Support Collateral Damage. Go Baby Killers.” Rosie watched as the people around Cisco slowly grasped the meaning of his sign, their smiles solidifying into looks of disgust. They edged subtly away from him. Cisco just stood there, grinning and nodding, and doing his best to look starry-eyed and patriotic.

Then there was Hester Finley with a bullhorn, hopping up on a bench to be tall enough to be seen. She took a breath and stepped into her oratory swagger. “OK everyone. Wow, so many of y’all. Good to see y’all.” She was interrupted by a cheer from the crowd, and a quieter boo from the pro-war group.

“We’re gonna make a statement here. We’re gonna show the world that Seattle does not support this stinkin’ war.” Another cheer. “Alright, let’s march.” Finley hopped down and handed the bullhorn to a dark haired girl from her action group. The girl started to chant, “THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE. Come on now, everybody. THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE.” The crowd took it up, and began the slow, shuffling march downtown, leaving the pro-war rally standing in the rain-drenched square.

They walked through the University District like a tangle in the smooth thread of the city. Traffic halted to let them through, horns honked both angrily and happily, and
hurrying pedestrians stood still to watch them pass. News helicopters zoomed low overhead. People cheered and waved up at them, hoping the protest really would make the news.

Rosie found Mumble in the crowd. He carried a big sign that said Peace is Sexy. Rosie thought it was funny that Mumble had chosen that as his message – he was usually so articulate about the subtleties of issues. Maybe Skitter had made it. He always did go for a light take on things.

“Hey Rosie, where you been at?” Mumble said and gave her a one-armed hug. Before she could answer, a news reporter shouldered over to them.

“Why are you guys out here in the streets today?” she asked, notepad in hand.

Damn, thought Rosie. Sound bite moment, and she wasn’t prepared. But Mumble answered without a pause.

“We want to show that we do not stand behind our government in support of this war. It is a war for oil and a move toward empire building in the Middle East, and we cannot support it.”

“Thank you,” the reporter said, moving off. As she did so, Rosie’s thoughts finally coalesced into something coherent, but it was too late. Oh well, next time. An organizer with a bullhorn walked up the side of the crowd, inciting everyone back into a chant.

“THE PEOPLE UNITED CAN NEVER BE DEFEATED,” they yelled. Rosie mused that it would rhyme better if it was “the people united can never be divided,” but of course that didn’t mean too much. She laughed, and realized that for the first time in a
long time she felt hope about society. She smiled at a boy walking near her, and he grinned back.

As the crowd marched, it collected more and more people – parents carrying babies in back packs, dignified old women, Vietnam vets, a young businessman carrying an umbrella. It was a long walk, and the wind blew the rain at them until Rosie’s pants stuck to her legs where the water dripped off her rain jacket. Yet it felt good to be doing something big to say what she believed in. It felt good to be out in the streets.

After what seemed like hours, the march wound over Capitol Hill, heading down towards the skyscrapers clustered on the edge of Puget Sound. Coming down the hill, they heard a drumming and yelling and off-key marching band music and then suddenly, rounding a corner, they met the stream of students who had walked out of Seattle Central Community College. Finley greeted a few of them who she knew from meetings, and Rosie saw Skitter weave through the crowd towards her and Mumble. The Central kids had a radical marching band with them, complete with trumpets and a tuba, making the march feel like a parade. Rosie began dancing a little as she walked, a grin settling on her face.

The march came like a river down the hill, too swollen now for the sidewalk. It came like a roar, like an enormous Chinese dragon, colorful and winding and commanding. Down 2nd Street to Marion, more and more cops swarming in, blaring their bullhorns, ordering everyone out of the street, threatening arrests. But the sidewalks were too small. They were not where the people belonged. The people were native to the wide streets of their city, and so they walked on. A shiver of nervousness shuddered
through Rosie, as it did whenever she broke a rule. But it was matched by a calm certainty that she was doing what was right.

The march joined a waiting crowd outside the Federal Building. The police had everyone corralled into a small area and were attempting to keep the crowd calm and contained. And the crowd was calm, but it pressed against the police restraints as if it was its own living creature. Everywhere Rosie looked, she saw people of all ages and races and moods. This was humanity. And there was Finley beside her suddenly, hugging her, excited.

"How many people do you think this is?" Rosie asked her friend.

"God, like thousands. Eight thousand? Nine? Fuckin' cool, yeah?"

Rosie nodded, but thought of the WTO protests her freshman year. How huge and wild they had been, compared to this countable crowd. It was hard, though, to organize a protest without knowing exactly which day it was going to happen, and it wasn’t like the President had sent them a press release announcing the exact day of the start of the war.

Finals week had also significantly lessened the numbers of people out in the streets. Funny how the balance of mundane responsibilities and global catastrophes worked itself out. Kayla, for instance, hadn’t come because she had a final with an unsympathetic professor who refused to allow her to take it early or late. She would have failed the class and been unable to graduate college if she had come. It felt strange to value something in one life over the well-being of millions, but Rosie supposed that it came down to how effective protesting was. If Kayla’s participation could have clearly stopped the war, Rosie knew that Kayla would have been there in an instant, but as it
was, the protest’s ambiguous effect did not outweigh the tangible consequence in Kayla’s own life. Rosie wondered suddenly if that wasn’t how much of the harm done in the world happened: the broader morality of specific acts was so much more hazy than the personal loss or gain. Rosie felt the uneasy feeling that if this was so, she certainly contributed.

Tension was rising with the police near the Federal Building. A crowd of more radical protesters, many in black, had begun to pour into 2nd Street, against the wishes of the police. A few had bottles of spray paint, and soon the asphalt was speckled with circled A’s and scrawled words. All Politicians Lie, Rosie read as Finley grabbed her arm and pulled her into the street. A growing jam of cars filled the street at the back of the crowd, horns honking in frustration and support. A line of cops in full riot gear – with tear gas guns and rubber bullet guns, batons and pepper spray – began advancing, herding people back onto the sidewalks. When people in the rest of the protest saw what was happening, many of them stepped into the street. Mainstream, middle aged people were participating in direct resistance. Rosie felt a welling of hope. The cops edged in closer.

With their helmets and bullet-proof uniforms, the police looked robotic, like Darth Vader or some other sci-fi creature. Rosie found it hard to imagine human beings inside the gear, although she knew she must. She wondered if dressing that way lessened or heightened conflict. It was certainly intimidating, but it made it difficult not to hate the cops. They became inhuman symbols of inhuman force and greed. Only fear would make a person give way to them.
No one was giving way. An opposing line of people formed, facing the police line. Rosie and Hester Finley saw Cisco and wiggled over to squeeze in next to him.

“Ro-Dawg! Finster!” Cisco said, letting them in. He took Rosie’s hand, giving it a squeeze in solidarity. There was nothing but empty street between them and the police. Rosie’s stomach flip-flopped, and her senses intensified, the noise and color almost painfully distinct.

The police were talking over their bullhorn again. “CLEAR THE STREET. CLEAR THE STREET.” The line shifted slightly, everyone stepping forward a step, taking a stronger stance.

“It’s like Red Rover, Red Rover,” Rosie said to Hester Finley.

“Yeah, from my nightmares,” Finley said.

“Red Rover, Red Rover, send Copper on over,” said Cisco in a falsetto.

“Don’t,” said Rosie, “That’s scary.”

“This is your final warning. Step onto the sidewalk or you will be under arrest.” At this, twenty people or so stepped out of the line. Others stepped in to take their place.

“Good luck,” Rosie said to Finley, watching the cops advancing towards them.

“Likewise,” Finley said, and the line sat down.

“What do we want? Peace! When do we want it? Now!” Everyone began chanting, Rosie, Cisco and Finley joining in. The cops did not say anything, just walked slowly closer. Rosie examined the cop nearest to her. She could not tell what race it was, or even if it was a man or a woman, it was so swathed in gear. There were no name tags in sight.
She thought briefly about the final she had the next day, which she would not be able to attend if she were stuck in jail, but it seemed hazy and unimportant. She thought also of her mother and how worried she would be if something happened.

Unrest was growing behind the seated line. People were yelling louder now, and someone threw something over Rosie’s head. It splattered at the feet of one of the cops—a rotten pear.

“Shit,” said Cisco. “This could get bad.” Rosie began helplessly imagining the crack of a police baton against her bones. She fought the urge to run. She wondered where Mumble and Skitter were. They should have all stuck together. If something happened to them, no one would know. She peered over her shoulder back into the crowd, but her friends were nowhere to be seen.

Then a change went over the police line—someone had given them a signal, and they slowed to a stop a few feet from the seated line. They stood impassively, feet planted wide, arms crossed across their chests, a line of pure, cool force. Yet they did not attack.

“They must be worried about repeating the WTO fiasco,” Cisco said in Rosie’s ear. “They sure blew the riot card with that one.” And sure enough, the police conceded 2nd Street to the protest, contenting themselves with squeezing the edges of the crowd where it spilled into other places. When the crowd realized that this was what was happening, a great cheer went up. The band struck up a fast song and some people began dancing.

“You know,” Finley remarked later, as the protest began dissipating and they were walking off towards the bus stop. “We should stretch the limits of acceptable
protest more often. We shouldn’t just have tame little rallies where we follow all the rules. Regular people are really up for some pretty strong stuff.” She rummaged around in her bag. “Want some chocolate?” She asked Rosie. Rosie took it gratefully, feeling suddenly weary and ready for home.

* * *

That night, home and fed, a tired sadness spreading through her, Rosie knocked on Cisco’s door. “Yeah,” he called, not looking up from his book as she came in and sat next to him on his bed.

“How do you like Gary Snyder?” he asked.

“I like it.” Rosie said, flopping down beside him. He crossed his foot over hers, and they lay there for a few minutes without talking. Rosie stared at the book, trying very hard to think about the poetry.

“Did you read about the latest attack?” Cisco said, turning onto his side and running his hand down her back.

“Yeah, so crazy – but at least so many people are upset about this war.”

“Yeah, hope somebody notices.”

“Even still.” Rosie curled toward Cisco and he slid his hand along her waist, slipping the tips of his fingers under the waistband of her pants. They were silent for a while. Rosie began to shiver. Everything felt extra real, more rich than normal, each color and sound and sensation defined and almost overwhelming. Cisco’s face brushed her neck, she twisted towards him, and they kissed. Then his attention turned again to his hands and where they were going, which seemed to be everywhere.

“Yeah?” he said once.
“Yeah,” Rosie answered, and they did not speak again for a long time.

Rosie woke late, confused by the darkness. Cisco kept his blinds down, and even midmorning his room was dim. She woke and she was beside him, his hand heavy on her waist. It felt like a dream, but she knew it was real – her skin on the gritty sheets, his soft breath on her shoulder, the buzz of his computer which he had neglected to turn off. She rolled to face Cisco. She looked at his face, the particular slant of his nose, the speck of a sleepy caught in his eyelash. This close he was almost awkwardly human, and yet luminous somehow. He opened his eyes.

“Shit!” he said, bolting upright. “What time is it?” He fumbled sleepily for the clock next to his bed. “Shit,” he said again. “Late for my final.”

Rosie watched him as he tumbled out of bed, grabbed his pants off the floor and hopped to keep from falling as he hurried to pull them on. She followed the line of his backbone with her eye while he bent, digging through a pile of clothes for a shirt. She wished he wasn’t running off so quickly. He threw on his shoes and a jacket and grabbed his school bag, then bent to give her a quick hug.

“Go back to sleep if you’d like,” he told her, and almost as an afterthought kissed her a flash of a kiss, and left.

Rosie lay for a while longer in Cisco’s bed, not sleeping, just absorbing how it felt to be there. She thought back to when she had first seen Cisco. It had been at a party her sophomore year, dancing with a skinny, artistic girl who Rosie learned later was his girlfriend at the time. He had looked up at Rosie and smiled that wide, slow smile he had, then turned away, his hands moving over the seat of the skinny girl’s jeans. Rosie
had seen him later, standing in a crowd of people, a beer in hand. He had said something and everyone had laughed and he had laughed too, his head thrown back. Rosie had watched him from across the room where she stood with a couple of other girls, trying not to look as awkward as they felt. Rosie knew she would never be beautiful or hip enough to interest him, but still, he fascinated her.

She had seen him around sometimes after that and talked to him somehow – she remembered a late night debate about reincarnation at another party, Cisco touching her arm once to emphasize a point and the disembodied feeling of his touch lingering long past when the conversation died out. Then someone – Finley maybe? – had been in an affinity group with him for some action against free trade, and somehow he ended up living with them all. Somehow Rosie ended up waking in his bed.

She rubbed her eyes, sat up, and fished around for her shirt. She let herself out of Cisco’s room, feeling illicit and alive. Mumble passed her on the stairs. He gave her a long look, but didn’t comment.

Cisco stayed away all day. Rosie took her own final in a daze, her eyes drifting from again and again up from her exam and out the window at the green haze of a budding maple. A loose, rich peace hummed through her body. The answers felt inconsequential. It was good, being touched.

After class Rosie stayed on campus for a while, sitting with her reading under a tree. The tree felt bony and rough against her back, and the ground beneath her was damp – she thought it might be making her pants muddy, but it was too late now and it
didn’t really matter anyway. She began studying a tediously long Victorian poem about a lovesick girl in a gothic manor.

Rosie’s mind could not stay focused on the poem. It kept slipping back to the night before, tracing everything that had happened, searching for hidden meaning in it all. She watched the people walking by, chatting in pairs or hurrying heads down and alone.

There’s this boy and he cares about me, Rosie thought to the people. Can you tell? She imagined how she must look mysterious and alone, even lonely, when secretly she was loved. Well, maybe she was loved. Who knows what was going on. A shiver of anticipation ran through her. It didn’t really matter how things turned out. She liked what was already happening. She looked back at her poem, trying without success to concentrate.

That evening, Rosie was sitting on her bed playing guitar when Cisco knocked on her door.

“Can I talk with you, Ro?” he asked, sitting down on the edge of her bed. She nodded and put down her guitar. Cisco looked nervous, and Rosie’s own stomach tightened at the sight of him. Cisco cleared his throat and traced the seams of Rosie’s quilt with his fingertip.

“You know last night, it didn’t mean anything,” he began, looking down at his hand. Rosie said nothing, a terrible sinking feeling rushing through her.

“I mean, it was beautiful,” Cisco continued quickly. “It was really great. It felt good to explore that dynamic in our friendship. But I don’t want to be in a relationship
right now.” He looked up at her tensely, searching her face. She looked away, hugging her knees into her chest.

“What part of a relationship do you not want?” she said slowly. “Is it the being intimate or the social stuff?” Her voice came out huskily. She took a deep breath. She wouldn’t cling, she wouldn’t.

“The social stuff,” said Cisco. “I just don’t want anything serious, you know?”

“It doesn’t have to be serious, Cisco.” And Rosie felt it to be true. If it needed to be serious it would become so. She could let it be what it wanted to be. A peaceful sureness came over her, as if her heart was a wide land that knew such deep love that this small interaction mattered little.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” And she reached out and traced his finger with her own.

“OK,” he said. He breathed a deep, shaky breath and took her hand in his.

* * *

One afternoon a few days later, Cisco and Rosie walked to the Ave to get tea for Rosie and coffee for Cisco. The sun was out, one of those spring days when the rain’s work shows and everything is green and warm, and the only clouds are small and white and innocent. Rosie and Cisco decided to sit outside at a café table, sipping their drinks.

At the next table over was a kid with dyed-black hair and winter-white skin who was drinking coffee and throwing bits of a pastry to some sparrows. The birds hopped as though their legs were springs, darting out from under a newsstand to snatch the crumbs. One’s head was darker than the other. Rosie thought that one was male and the other
female, but wondered if maybe they weren’t actually separate species. Funny, she thought, how difficult the distinction.

“"You are empty," Cisco said suddenly.

"What?" said Rosie, startled from her thoughts.

"The stencil," Cisco nodded towards where the words were stenciled in black on the sidewalk.

"How do they know if I’m empty? That’s kind of presumptuous."

"Everything is empty. It’s the nature of matter. When it gets down to it, there is no ‘you.’ No table, no lamppost, just matter, energy."

"But why is that emptiness instead of fullness?" Rosie said, stubborn.

"Because reality is illusion. It’s insubstantial. You know, the Buddhist idea."

"Oh, like oneness. OK," said Rosie, dismissively. She understood the concept, but it seemed abstract, like atoms. She looked up at the maple sapling growing through its pavement hole behind Cisco’s chair. Its leaves glowed green in the sunlight, spilling out into the air, and the air as well as the tree seemed infused with life.

Suddenly Rosie felt it, the oneness. She could feel the arbitrariness of the boundary between herself and everything around her; her breath swelled across it. And looking, everything seemed to be made of tiny specks of the same substance – atoms, she supposed – like a drawing made of dots. And some of the dots were collected into the form of a lamppost, and some into the form of the tree. Some made her form. But they all were just dots – even the air was made of them. The whole world seamless.

The sensation passed after a moment, and Rosie felt herself as herself again, distinct from table and earth. Yet a trace of the feeling remained, a lightness within her.
Rosie’s first dumpster diving trip, back when she had first moved into the house that fall, was nothing glamorous: a midnight rummage through the messy Whole Foods dumpster before sleeping out in a park. She was nervous and kept peering around the alley, sure she was going to get in trouble somehow, but no one came by. She didn’t have a headlamp, unlike Hester Finley and Mumble, so while they dug in she sifted aimlessly through the top layers, finding only plastic and wilted lettuce. The others found a little fruit – some pears, a papaya, bruised and slightly dubious. After a few minutes they gave up and rode over to the park. All night Rosie slept with the stink of the dumpster on her sleeve.

She kept going, though, and it got better. She asked her parents for a headlamp for Christmas, not telling them it had urban purposes, and after that she was useful, climbing into the dumpsters, rooting around, finding shitake mushrooms, eggs, sacks of potatoes, cookies, wine. She learned which were the fruitful dumpsters – the bagel shop that threw out their bagels in a clean Hefty bag, the bakery that left bread next to the dumpster, the Trader Joe’s where everything was shrink-wrapped. She learned to go to Whole Foods while it was open, before the good stuff was covered by a layer of slop, and to Trader Joe’s well after midnight when the night stockers finally left. She learned not to take the whole bag of bagels, as they would just sit on the porch attracting squirrels. She learned never to question the logic of the dumpsters.

It was Mumble who taught them all about Jambah, goddess of unexpected blessings, deity of dumpster-diving, prayed to for abundance, variety, and unbroken bottles of wine. It was said never to question her generosity. If she gave a twenty pound...
box of dates, thank her and do not wonder why. If she gave nothing but a dumpster of slop, pray for better luck. Accepting Jambah’s generosity meant finding goodness in unlikely packaging, a philosophy which was often pushed to its limits, as when Mumble’s good friend Skitter found the bottle of pee.

One night, Mumble told them, he and Skitter found a fruit juice bottle full of something next to the dumpster, and Skitter brought it home. It looked like pee, and smelled like pee, but Skitter tasted it and liked it. “Dude, that’s pee. That’s sketchy,” Mumble told him, but Skitter drank two more sips before he was convinced. “That is a prime example,” Mumble concluded when he related the story to the rest of them, waving his hand in the air like a preacher, “A classic example,” he said, “of Blind Worship. Which, my children, is a sinful thing.”

Soon after this sermon, Mumble, who was vegan, dumpstered thirty dozen eggs. “They were organic, I couldn’t waste them,” he explained, putting his third armload of cartons down on the kitchen table. For the rest of that spring, Mumble abandoned his vegan principles to live on eggs and bagels, another dumpster staple. Everyone began eating omelets and quiche, and Finley perfected her secret angel food cake recipe, the results of which always seemed to disappear silently in the middle of the night. Kayla was the suspected culprit.

“Angels did it,” she swore.

Fridays, they had ADD: All Dumpstered Dinner. Often this meant eggs and wilted produce, but other times they feasted. All winter there had been pumpkins as, on the night of November first, Hester Finley and Mumble had salvaged the entire Whole
Foods Halloween display – straw bales, signs, bushel baskets of inedible pattie pans, and thirty-five jack o’ lanterns. They ate pumpkin soup, pumpkin pie, pumpkin custard, pumpkin seeds, pumpkin cookies, pumpkin banana pie (Mumble’s invention), and once, after Mumble had frozen an unlabeled mixture of pumpkin and banana, cinnamony-sweet pumpkin banana soup.

But by that spring, the pumpkins were nearly gone, and ADD most often meant soy dogs without ketchup, as no one had yet been lucky enough to dumpster that.

“Why do we have to be such Goddamn purists?” Finley grumbled between bites of soy dog and egg scramble as they ate dinner in the living room one evening in mid-March.

“Idealists,” corrected Mumble, waving his fork. “Loyal followers of a worthy cause.” He tuck ed his legs under him and sat up straighter, ready for a good spat.

“Zealots,” countered Finley.

“There’s ketchup in the fridge if you really want it,” Rosie put in. Hester Finley grumbled but didn’t get up from the couch.

“But Mumble, do you really think this is a worthy cause?” Kayla said, curled in the papazan chair. “I mean, if we’re idealists, what are our ideals?”

“Diverting waste from the landfill, subverting the corporate system. We’re scavengers in the social food chain. Covertly working towards the collapse of the military-industrial complex.”

“Uh-huh, Mumble. We’re just being cheap,” said Kayla.

“I think dumpster diving is fun,” Rosie said.
"So after the collapse of industrial civilization," Cisco said, putting down his empty plate. "We won’t have any soy dogs." His eyes flicked around the room, gauging reactions.

"It’s worth it," said Finley.

"Yeah, but emblematically. There’ll be lots of stuff we won’t have."

"I think I’ll miss paper," Rosie said, thinking. "But I guess you can make that without industrial processes."

"Baking powder. There won’t be any baking powder," Finley said with true concern; she was notoriously afraid of baking with yeast.

"We should stockpile it," Cisco suggested. "We should have a whole room, full of baking powder. Everyone else will have their guns, and we’ll have muffins."

"They’ll just use their guns to take our baking powder," said Kayla. Everyone fell silent for a while, considering this difficulty.

"Not if we make them muffins," Rosie said finally.

*       *       *

"Come on a walk with me?" Rosie asked Cisco one warm spring evening, standing in his doorway. He looked up at her, blinking, a smile filtering slowly over his face.

"Yeah," he said. "Meet you in the kitchen at eleven. Let’s make it an adventure."

In the kitchen they filled their pockets with raw, unhulled sunflower seeds -- one of their odder and more plentiful dumpster finds. "Ready?" Cisco asked, wiggling his eyebrows. Rosie nodded, and they set out. They headed north-east, zig-zagging through the neighborhoods. They ate sunflower seeds as they went, spitting the shells with style.
Then they began planting the seeds wherever they thought they might grow, in parking strips and front lawns. Guerrilla gardening, Cisco called it. Poking a small hole in the dense, damp soil with a finger, Rosie would press a seed in and cover it up again with earth, bending over it for a moment, blessing the seed under her breath. Cisco planted his in one swift, laughing, careless movement.

Rosie imagined how the neighborhood would look that summer, tall, heavy-headed sunflowers nodding from all the odd corners. How happy they would make everyone. She thought suddenly about how she wouldn’t be around to see the flowers, having already decided to move home for the summer. The thought made her sad, made the coming ending too real somehow, yet it also gave her a small satisfaction. Planting flowers she would never see felt bold and magnanimous. She bent and pressed another seed into the soil, her hair falling around her face.

** * * *

Then, not long into April, Rosie was studying in her room one evening when Cisco knocked at her door. He had been gone all day, hiding in the library was Rosie’s best guess, though it didn’t matter. She had been watching for him all evening, and feeling silly about it. But finally here he was. She put down her book and went to hug him. He hugged her back, but oddly.

“Come outside with me?” he asked.

They went out on the back porch together, huddling under the overhang, watching the rain. Neither of them spoke much for a few minutes. Then Rosie broke the silence with a light story about running into a post on her bicycle that morning.
“I’d turned around, see, to stare at this car full of laughing guys because they looked like they were having so much fun, and I ran like smack into the post. I hope they saw and I hope it made their day.”

Cisco laughed, then became serious. “Rosie,” he said, “I’ve been thinking. Um, I don’t think,” he paused, taking off his newsboy cap and turning it in his hands. “Well, I mean, things are really crazy right now, with graduation and stuff and I don’t think, like, I can really be in a relationship right now. It feels dishonest. It doesn’t have anything to do with you.” He looked up at her, gauging her reaction.

Rosie didn’t know what to say. She hugged her knees to her chest and stared at the water pouring from the rain gutter on the porch edge, a strange relief washing through her, followed by hurt pride. She hated being jerked around like this. She hated that what she felt about the matter didn’t change anything.

“I guess you have to do what feels right,” she said finally. Cisco nodded and rolled a cigarette and she watched his hands, trying not to see them as beautiful.

“We’ll be friends,” he said, “Of course we’ll be friends.” This, almost heavier than nothing at all.

That night, Rosie lay awake a long time, feeling the strange empty space surrounding her.

* * *

Late that spring, Rosie decided to try psychedelic mushrooms. She had been told by several friends that she would probably like them. “They’re very elfin,” Mumble had explained. And even though Rosie rarely smoked pot and hardly drank, she was curious.
Then, Kayla decided that psychedelics were a critical part of college bohemian experience, and procured enough mushrooms for most of their house. Finley declined, but everyone else was excited. Only Mumble had ever tried them before, oddly, given how easy they were to find, growing everywhere. Mumble got some for everyone from Skitter, who grew them in his plot of the community garden, banking on people’s general inability to identify mushrooms. A date was set. The doses were carefully measured out late one night in the biology lab, each sealed in its own plastic baggie, labeled with the weight to the second decimal.

“You guys are such nerds,” Mumble said when he saw them. “You know you can just do it by feel.”

Then they were all standing there in Mumble’s room, each with their bag containing a piece or two of wrinkled, woody mushroom. This is what they look like, Rosie thought. Inconsequentially small but so strange. She put the thing in her mouth, chewed it experimentally. It tasted strongly like a mushroom, but wrong somehow. She spit it out.

“Just swallow it – they go down better that way,” said Mumble. Rosie gulped at some water, and swallowed the little mushroom. Nothing happened. Of course, it would take a while to set in. She sat down on the couch in the corner of the room with Cisco. She liked how yellow the light was in the room, the gentle music Mumble was playing on the stereo, how warm the room was. It was a safe room, a little womb, and full of her friends. She watched them laughing, doing yoga balancing poses, goofing around.

Cisco started drawing Celtic knots in his notebook, copying from the tapestry hanging above Mumble’s bed – a purple tangle of deer bordered by other knots. Loop,
loop, loop, went Cisco’s pen. Rosie watched him. She had laid her red silk shawl across her shoulders and it made her feel like a queen. Her knee was touching Cisco’s, and it was nice that way.

“Wow,” he said. “It’s like, wow, look at it.” His pen had begun to wander, the loops to form their own secret sense. Cisco, being thin and having a quick metabolism, had already begun to trip.

Rosie watched him a while longer, as he seemed to retreat further and further into his own mind. Then, restless, she moved across the room to her own notebook. She liked the way her body felt. She was especially conscious of how it felt to move through the room, and through the light. Abandoning the idea of writing, she lay down on the floor, listening to the rising and subsiding waves of conversation around her. She felt the cool boards of the floor on her skin, the hardness of the wood. It was epic, the floor. It had been there so long, beneath everything, holding the memory of it all. The good house.

A happiness came through her. She sat up, giggling, moving around, full of a tickly, sexy feeling. “There’s like a sun in my belly!” she exclaimed. Rosie felt it radiate out through all her limbs, a golden, tingling light.

Later, Rosie ate a blackberry that Kayla had bought at the co-op. So silly to buy blackberries when they grow like weeds, thought Rosie. Then the taste of the berry sang through her, and she fell over, unable to stand up against its unbelievable taste. Her legs, jelly.
She left the room. She knew the hallway, it was an old place to her, but not because it was in her house, rather, it was a place where her soul had been before, long ago. How good to be back finally. It was a place of meaning.

Finley was coming up the stairs. “Hello, Rosie.”

“We’ve all taken mushrooms. Sorry if we’re loud. Are we loud? I hope we’re not loud.”

“No worries. Want to pull a tarot card?” No worries. None at all, in anyone, ever. Why would there be worries? Worries were things that hadn’t happened. If they had happened, they wouldn’t be worries. But if they hadn’t happened then they weren’t real so they didn’t matter. Wow.

“Rosie? Tarot?”

They sat on the floor by the banister. Finley lay the cards out with a flourish. Rosie ran her hand over them, pulled one out. Finley looked at it.

“Oops, not a good one. Try again,” she said, throwing it over her shoulder.

“Oops, not that one either. Hey, there you go. Nice job, the Ace of Wands. The joining of male and female, new beginnings. Ooo, baby. Most auspicious.” Finley takes care of me, thought Rosie. She keeps bad omens away.

“I’m going outside now,” Rosie said, drifting on downstairs.

Outside, everything was strange, edged in shadow, the colors all odd. Simple. It reminded Rosie of psychedelic art she had seen, funny, like everyone saw the world the same way with mushrooms. She went upstairs, through the wise hallway again. Mumble and Kayla were sitting on Mumble’s bed.
"I am Aphrodite, Goddess of Love," said Kayla. "Take notes, this is important."

Mumble dutifully wrote down what Kayla said, giggling the whole time.

"Rosie! O fairy queen, where are your wings?" said Kayla. Mumble giggled harder.

"Where's Cisco?" said Rosie.

"Oh, around," said Kayla.

"Around and about," said Mumble, cracking up again.

Then Rosie saw him, or at least his feet, as the rest of him was hidden under the bed. She lay down next to him. He was moaning and mumbling to himself.

"Hey, hey, are you alright?" She said to him, crawling in next to him.

"Alright, yes, yes, quite. It's all in my head, particularly, this especially. Which is to say quite so, yes, yes, quite, quite."

Rosie crawled back out. "He's not making sense," she said.

"In his head he is, alright," Mumble said.

"You are so right," said Kayla, clutching his arm. She spoke slowly, weighing each word. "In his head he is alright. Get it?"

Rosie went back outside. She went into the backyard, by the big oak tree. She wanted to connect with the tree, to really get a sense of it, talk to it and know she was heard. She wanted it to talk back to her. She loved that tree.

"Hello? Talk to me. Hello? Please? Please? Hello?"

But her thoughts were so loud in her head, a din drowning out everything around her. The air was a tangle of black lines, which she knew were just in her eyes. The lines
were like a web over everything, keeping it away from her. Her thoughts were so loud. She wanted her mind to go away so she could just hear the tree.

"Shut up, shut up, shut up," she said to herself, crouching down and sticking her hands over her ears. Tears trickled down, wetting her palms where they touched her cheeks. She could see in through the window of Finley’s bedroom, see Finley moving around, straightening things, changing her shirt. Rosie felt lowdown, like a spy, skulking outside the window. What if Finley looked out and saw her there, right outside her window. Rosie’s stomach hurt. She went back inside, to the bathroom.

She closed the door carefully, and walked over to the mirror. But her face, her face was so scared! Red and teary, and her eyes so scared. "Ssh, Baby, don’t cry Baby," Rosie said to her reflection. She wondered why she called herself “Baby.” It seemed like the right thing to do. She stared in the mirror for what felt like a long, long time.

"The tree wouldn’t talk to me."

"Oh, Honey, come here." Kayla held out her arms, and Rosie sank down beside her on the bed. Kayla stroked her arm. "Trees, they’re stubborn. Don’t you think we should grow these mushrooms? They’re just so much fun."

"Uh huh," Rosie agreed, but she wasn’t really having fun at all, and her stomach hurt even worse now.

"Where’s Cisco?" she asked, noticing he wasn’t under the bed.

"Oh, maybe he wandered off. Someone should be with him," Mumble said. Rosie struggled up and went to look for him. The house seemed more ordinary now, not
as important or luminous, just a house with dirt on the stairs and a hole in the wall where Mumble had bashed it with the corner of his dresser. Daily, daily house. Cisco.

Rosie found him finally curled on Kayla’s futon in the dark, still mumbling to himself.

“Cisco, Baby, come on,” she said, shaking his arm. He pushed her away.

“You can’t stay here, this is Kayla’s bed. Come on. I’m supposed to be with you. They said so.”

She pulled him up and led him downstairs to her own room. He collapsed on her bed, burrowing into the blankets. She slipped out of her jeans and bra, curling up beside him in just her t-shirt and underwear. Drifting off to sleep as the first light seeped into the sky out her window, she felt finally normal again. Her thoughts felt normal.

She woke late that morning, becoming slowly aware of Cisco’s back pressed against hers. She sat up, making early morning yawning faces. Cisco was still asleep fully dressed beside her, his wool hat pulled down over his eyes. She softly touched the bare skin of his arm, flung out beside him. He didn’t stir. She left him there and went to find breakfast.

*   *   *

One sunny May Saturday, a day of such blue sky, lush grass, and bright splashes of flowers that it seemed the whole city had just been washed (which it had been, for weeks,) Rosie and Finley walked barefoot down 20th street to Ravenna Park. The sidewalk chilled their feet, but walking through the field by the bridge where the sun touched the grass, the earth itself was warm and soft, molding around their feet.
The bridge had been built for cars, and was wide and industrial, all concrete and metal, but as it was now open only to bicyclists and pedestrians, it seemed to Rosie to be a sanctuary in the city. She and Hester Finley walked to the center of the bridge where a fir of some kind other than Douglas grew from the bottom of the ravine to higher than the bridge. The tree was just out of reach, and it had always been. Rosie had loved this tree since she had played on the bridge as a child with a friend of hers who had lived on the edge of the park. She had thought that by the time she grew up she and the tree would together have grown enough that she would be able to touch its branches, but it hadn’t happened. It was funny to realize that she was grown up, Rosie mused, staring out over the sea of spring green maple leaves below her. She had imagined she would feel more sure of things. She laughed suddenly, breaking the silence.

“What?” Finley asked her, but it was too hard to explain, so Rosie just shrugged and turned to lean her back on the railing. The bridge shook from passing joggers. Bikers spun thin, fading tracks across the concrete away from the drying puddles. A pair of big gray squirrels played love-chase in the fir tree behind her; she could hear them teasing each other. High above them, a few crows plagued a hawk, and higher still a jet strung its white thread across the endless blue. Time seemed to hover, the way a ball does at the height of its throw, before it plunges earthward. Rosie wondered if time, too, would plunge. Maybe, she thought, this day was Youth, and all the future was disintegrating Age, gathering more and more speed until, wham, Death. She shook the thought off. Not how life is, she thought fiercely. Not how she wanted it to be.

Rosie and Finley continued walking, ducking into the park on the far side of the bridge, walking through the big picnic shelter field where a man optimistically wearing
shorts played Frisbee with a dog. They nodded at him, veering off onto a side trail through the woods.

Rosie remembered going to a birthday party in those woods as a child, and how a belligerent drunk man had stumbled out of a thicket into the middle of their game of Marco Polo. The blindfolded child had run straight toward the confused man, and a mother swooping in from the side to intercept the collision had accidentally knocked over another child, as well as terrifying the blind-folded one. The two children had begun wailing, and the man, leaving them with a choice string of words, had wandered on, leaving Rosie and the other watching children wide-eyed with the strange suddenness of it all.

But this day Rosie and Finley saw neither drunks or children, just hidden clusters of bluebells in the underbrush and a sunken-cheeked old woman standing peacefully in a patch of light. She pressed her hands together and bowed when they passed, a blessedness following them into the further woods.

They found an old yew and climbed it, wondering at its age – with how slowly yews grew, one bigger than an arm’s circling must be old as old. They sat where the tree’s top had broken off and three branches had bent up to become the new tops. They swung their legs and watched the occasional passerby walk below unaware.

Rosie told Finley about how the whole park had been old-growth forest until the twenties or thirties when the trees were cut for firewood for Christmas presents for city employees. Finley shook her head, incredulous.

They were silent for a while, feeling the sun’s new warmth on their skin and the little wind’s remaining chill. After a while Rosie spoke. “It’s so weird to think we’re all
graduating soon, and scattering. I don’t know. I don’t want to live like my parents, you
know? I like living with so many people.”

“Yeah,” said Finley, thinking. Then after a minute, “Tell you what. Let’s all get
some land together somewhere and have a hippie farm. Live out in the country together
with our lovers and some goats.”

“Goats and lovers. Sounds great,” said Rosie, laughing. This was what they all
wanted, though so few people really lived it.

“The goats and the lovers are separate things, of course.”

“Finley!” Rosie groaned. Then seriously, “OK, then what about money?”

“We can start a school, or an environmental non-profit or something,” Finley
suggested. Rosie considered it. She liked the idea of teaching at an alternative farm
school. She imagined sitting outside with a bunch of eager high-school kids, talking
about poetry. Finley continued, on a roll now. “And we’ll have a big subsistence garden,
and we can sell goat cheese, and you’ll be a best-selling poet and I’ll be a famous artist,
and maybe our lovers will be fabulously wealthy. Or we’ll just work outside the capitalist
economy. We could barter with our neighbors.”

“We should all have our own little living spaces, so we can have privacy, but we
should all eat together every night,” Rosie put in. “And we should have big barn dances
with live music, and Solstice parties, and we should have a lot of kids that can run around
barefoot together in the meadows.”

“We need a wood-fired sauna or hot tub, and an alternative energy source.”

“And a big herb garden, and woods and a creek.”

“Sounds purty nice,” Finley said.
"We're graduated, let's get drunk," Cisco had said, and so they had bought a bottle of wine each and drank them, walking the crooked path through the park to the playground. No one else around but a couple of bums with their own wine bottles sitting on the bench by the merry-go-round. Cisco and Rosie sat on the swings and swung a bit until they were dizzy and they stumbled off through the swing-set sand, falling into each other. They clung together, something solid in the spinning darkness, their arms sliding around each other. They stood for a while, leaning into each other. It seemed to Rosie that she might drift away if she let go. She might get lost somehow in all that dark space and so she clung to him with something like urgency, and he held on to her the same way.

Rosie looked up at Cisco’s face, all shadows, backlit by the far off streetlamp. As she looked his face seemed to come closer until his mouth pressed into hers. Incredible, this was happening again. But she had always known somehow that it would. She hadn’t been naïve to hope for it all this long time, because here it was, happening. Rosie breathed Cisco in until she was gasping. The wine buzzed in her head and the ground felt a long way away.

"Let’s go home," she said, pulling him by the hand over the stumbling trail.

The streetlamp was a yellow moon in Rosie’s window as they tumbled into bed. The arterial cars were a low, far river, soothing Rosie, Cisco’s mouth moving over her skin like wind. Then Cisco was rushing, flinging himself headlong towards her with deft momentum. She felt herself swirled up and spun around like a dry leaf in his hurry.
“Cisco, wait, let’s use protection,” Rosie said, pulling back from him, wishing it went without saying.

“I’m clean, don’t worry,” he said, leaning towards her. It felt so good, she didn’t know. She wanted this. She’d wanted it for as long as she could remember. She wanted it with her entire body, but she wanted also not to worry.

“Yeah, but I, it’s the pregnancy thing,” she said, the words hardly making sense in her own ears. It seemed silly to protest when it felt this good.

“I won’t come in you, Rosie, I’m not stupid,” said Cisco, and the words seemed enough to Rosie and she didn’t argue any more.

For a while Rosie let the sensations wash through her, wash her away, but then her hesitations crept back in and pulled her back. Suddenly it wasn’t fun anymore. She could only see the situation from a cold distance, see it in all its pathetic need and ridiculous rationalizations. Her wanting turned sour in her throat, and she twisted away, mumbling about being sleepy. Cisco tried to entice her back, but she drifted into dreams, so he curled around her and slept as well, his hand on her hip.

Sometime later, Rosie shifted, and Cisco startled awake and slid his hand between her legs, probing in a way he must have thought pleased her.

“I’m so sleepy,” Rosie said dreamily, rolling away, a thick fog between her and waking consciousness. God, he was persistent. Her legs felt like weights. She couldn’t open her eyes. His hands hadn’t stopped. “Sleepy,” she said again, pushing his hands away and slinging an arm around him to hold him still. He left her alone then, and they slept again.
Rosie woke with dawn pale in the window and Cisco’s hands moving again over her body.

“Hey,” she said sleepily, rolling onto her stomach, Cisco leaning on her from behind.

“Hey,” Cisco replied and there was an urgency in his voice, his hand sliding again between her legs, though more gently than before. His fingers awoke an urgency in Rosie’s body as well, and then it wasn’t his fingers and he was inside her.

“Oh,” she said, unsure, but a want arose in her, and anyway, she thought, she’d be hypocritical to object now when she’d said yes before and it felt, it felt, oh, and maybe pregnancy, wow, oh, and Cisco, a bad idea, yes, oh, oh –

“Oh!” Cisco gasped and Rosie twisted away and he came on her stomach, looking surprised. “Wow. God, Rosie, that was great. Wow.”

“Did you... inside me...?” Rosie asked as he wiped her stomach off with his t-shirt. She felt a little shocky, a little as if she had woken in the middle of a crazy dream.

“Um, yeah, a little.” Cisco said, looking away. “It, uh, it happened faster than I thought.”

“Yeah,” said Rosie, a tired, worldly-wise feeling coming over her. She felt old, like she had seen it all before and it had never turned out quite how it should. Cisco collapsed on the bed beside her.

“Geez,” he said. “Great sex.”

And Rosie felt annoyed at him suddenly. Asshole, she thought, surprising herself. She had never really thought about how immature and self-centered Cisco could be. How completely unaware he was. She scowled and slipped out of bed, padding to the
bathroom through the quiet, half-lit house. Every familiar thing in the hall looked slightly strange, but whether because of the light or because she saw them differently Rosie didn’t know.

Cisco was asleep when she returned a minute later, and he only grunted as she slid in beside him. His hair was sticking up like a child’s, and something about the curve of his shoulder seemed vulnerable to Rosie. She felt a wave of sweetness towards the sleeping boy, because that’s what he was, a boy, and she felt old and wild and known to the night. She smiled a rueful little smile and bent to kiss him. How he could be so stupid and so lovely all at once she did not know. She fell asleep curled along his warmth, birds beginning to sing. When she awoke it was midmorning and he was gone.

Rosie didn’t see Cisco all day. She had made plans to ride bikes on the Birke-Gilman Trail along Lake Washington with Kayla for the afternoon. It felt good to be out riding in the patchy sunlight. The trees were in full leaf now, and they cast cold shadows on the concrete, the sunlight making the leaves glow. Kayla was in good spirits, intent on riding at aerobic speeds for at least two hours.

“We’re doin’ good,” she kept saying. “Kickin’ some butt.”

Rosie was quiet on the ride, tired and a little hung-over and still trying to understand what exactly had happened. She had slept with Cisco. Without protection. She never thought she would do that. She always used protection. She wasn’t sure how she had ended up doing something she was firmly against. She felt a little mad about it. Cisco had pressured her, and that certainly wasn’t cool. She had wanted to sleep with him, just not like that exactly. She wasn’t sure how excited and how mad she should feel.
It had been so nice, being with him again, but at the same time it hadn’t been right somehow. She shouldn’t have had to say no so many times. She shouldn’t have done something she wasn’t sure she had wanted to do.

It made Rosie feel like a small person, like someone who couldn’t stand up for herself and what she believed in. She didn’t understand how she had gotten talked into it. Cisco should have cared about consequences. What a fucking asshole! Why did she like him so much? Maybe he had just been too drunk. That’s why you shouldn’t sleep with people when they are so drunk, when you are so drunk. Fucking shit. Anyway. She put her head down and pedaled harder, liking the sick feeling the exercising caused in her stomach better than the one caused by her confusion.

Cisco didn’t appear until the next morning. Rosie was sitting on the porch with her breakfast when he rode up.

“Hey, Rosie,” Cisco said hopping off his bicycle.

“Hello, Cisco,” said Rosie. Her voice had an edge to it that surprised her.

Cisco sat down next to her on the porch steps. “Nice morning,” he said.

“Yep,” she said, putting down her half-finished breakfast. There was an awkward silence. Rosie watched a couple of squirrels chase each other in spirals up and down the little maple trees by the street. She wiggled her toes and waited for Cisco to speak.

Finally he cleared his throat. “Rosie, the other night, I don’t know what happened.” He stopped and looked at her, but she didn’t say anything.

The lavender plant beside the steps was blooming. Rosie pinched off a flower, rubbing it between her fingers to release the smell, strong and more like a spice than a
flower. She liked that lavender was an old woman smell. It seemed appropriate somehow for women who had seen so much to smell spicy and tough.

“I don’t want to start anything again.” He said it sharply, as if he expected resistance.

“I know,” she said. “I don’t either.” And for a moment, while she said it, the words were true.

*   *   *

Summer came tumbling in, finally and too fast. Graduation had been a flurry of relatives and gowns. Then the lease was up and the house filled with boxes and the corners of dust were exposed and so were the long-forgotten socks, and then nothing was left but the empty rooms echoing and the mice in the walls, and the half-planted garden abandoned. The blackberries stretched their tendrils and blossomed.

And just as Rosie knew they would, everyone scattered. Mumble moved to South Seattle to live in a punk house with Skitter – it was silly not to, with them spending almost every night together anyway and housing so pricey. Kayla took an internship with a women’s rights organization in D.C. Kayla was moving straight from D.C. to New York City for law school. Who knows when she would be out west again. She left for the airport in a tearful flurry of goodbyes, the airport shuttle driver rolling his eyes and looking meaningfully at his watch. In the end, Cisco had decided to go to Chiapas, Mexico, to spend some time with the Zapatistas, then to travel around for a while “without prior conceptions or fascist schedules” as he said. There was however, he reassured Rosie, “a significant likelihood” that he would be back in Seattle sometime in the fall. Rosie remained skeptical. As for Hester Finley, she was headed home to North
Carolina to work with Gentian on Mountain Top Removal Mining issues. Finley had other plans for Gentian as well. As she put it, she planned to spend the summer working against the removal of mountaintops and for the removal of her own top.

Rosie herself moved home for the summer, having neither travel nor a good job planned. Her father came to fetch her and together they piled her things in the back of her parents’ station wagon. He leaned on the car, stiffer and stouter than when he had brought her to college those few years before. She hugged everyone, Cisco last and longest, then she and her father drove off and college was over.

It wasn’t far to Rosie’s parents’ house – less than an hour if it wasn’t rush hour, but Rosie didn’t have a car and it seemed another world. Her parents had moved after she started college, to a cul-de-sac out on the Plateau, the front guard of subdivisions advancing east from Bellevue through the farmland towards the mountains. They, like everyone in the new neighborhood, had moved for a bigger yard, quieter neighborhood, better schools, all of which they got, along with a twenty minute drive to the nearest grocery store and a neighborhood that explored the hazy line between quiet and stultifying.

Rosie hated her parents’ new neighborhood with a passion she reserved for few things, such as old-growth logging and the president. “The whole neighborhood is totally soulless,” she told her mother June the first time she had come to see their new place.

“That’s just because it’s new, Rose,” said her mother. “After it’s lived in for a while and gets some dents, then it will have some soul. Here, help me plant these fruit trees,” Rosie’s mother had said, and together the two of them tore out the juniper bushes that were planted along the front of the house, like every other house on their street,
replacing them with apple, plum, and pear trees, and one apricot tree that June hoped against hope would bear even in their gray climate.

When Rosie moved home that summer after graduation, the fruit trees had grown as tall as she was, each bristling with tiny, hard fruit; even the apricot bore three miniscule green apricots, which June guarded and talked to daily. The back lawn had likewise been transformed into the thriving vegetable garden that had long been June and Bill’s dream. And Rosie’s brother Billy and their father had built a tree house in the Douglas-fir that the developers had spared, a tree house that Billy would grow out of sooner than any of them were willing to admit.

They had a barbeque the day Rosie moved home, the sun skimming the neighbor’s rooftop and slipping finally through the branches of the old Doug fir. Rosie sat on the back steps, her feet bare and hardly cold, watching her father flipping burger patties and ears of corn, and her brother march back and forth between kitchen and patio with a nearly endless array of accessories – ketchup, buns, plates, tomatoes, lettuce, mustard, glasses of lemonade whose ice cubes clinked wildly despite the concentration with which he carried their cups.

Rosie thought about summer cookouts from her childhood, how they would have never eaten hamburgers. Instead they had made picnics to take to Green Lake – blueberries, roasted potatoes, hunks of sharp cheese – or huge summer salads with thousand island dressing to eat on the front steps of the old house, watching the flow of people and cars pass by in that dreamy summer way, listening for the ice cream truck.

“Dinner,” Rosie’s father Bill bellowed, slipping the last burger onto a plate. “Coming,” yelled June, and they all began dressing their burgers, everyone impatient for
the mustard, laughing with Billy when he squeezed the ketchup bottle and it made farting
sounds, spraying a thin splatter of red paste onto his burger. Home.

* * *

Rosie got a job with the Parks and Rec, minding a wading pool every afternoon –
a useless job in her mind, since the city wading pools were unattended without mishap,
but she liked working outside, and being near kids. Besides that little job, her time was
empty.

"Why don’t you take a dance class at the Y, or something?" June asked Rosie, as
she moped around the house one evening.

"I don’t know, it’ll all be old people," Rosie said, and flipped aimlessly through a
magazine. She didn’t know what to do with herself. Other summers she had worked
much more, saving money for school, and this summer time felt both light and heavy, the
way the immensity of the sky over a wide field has a weighty openness. For the first time,
she could do whatever she pleased. The possibility was crushing. She could do anything,
and so she could do nothing.

Sometimes she would take the bus into Seattle on weekends to see friends,
although with Cisco in Mexico, Finley in Asheville, Kayla in Washington D.C., and
Mumble and Skitter off riding their bikes to Iowa or somewhere for an anarchist
gathering, Rosie had few friends in Seattle to see.

She kicked a soccer ball with Billy sometimes, and took him to the lake to swim
often on warm evenings, and she helped June in the garden, pulling weeds from the damp
black soil, or collecting slugs out of the strawberries.
At night, she and Bill would go walking, pacing like restless animals the quiet monotony of their neighborhood. Bill liked to walk up to the top of the hill, where they could look out over the valley and where the Cascade mountains were black silhouettes against the darkening blue of the summer evening sky. They would talk sometimes, walking, about philosophy or spirituality or his youth. But often they walked in silence, thick in their own thoughts, listening for owls.

In the end, Rosie spent a great deal of time alone that summer, sitting in the park writing, or walking through the dead-end loops of her neighborhood. It was on one of those walks that she discovered the jungle. She had reached a dead end, and cut through to a remnant of woods, skimming the property line between two empty-looking houses. Crossing the woods, which were thick and tangled with blackberries, she found herself on an unfamiliar street. She started down the street in the most hopeful-looking direction, and there near the corner she saw it.

It was a house that seemed older somehow than the others, which was impossible – the whole hill had been forest hardly a decade before. Looking closer, Rosie decided that it wasn't that the house looked old exactly, just that it relaxed into the land around it as if the house and the land had had time to get used to each other. The house looked as if it was painted in several colors of orange, reddish, and brown, although much of it was covered in vines – grapes, morning glory, and something with big leaves that Rosie didn't recognize. The yard, too, was overgrown with a chaotic mix of flowers, bamboo, and a raggedy hedge of wild roses. Elderberry bushes hung over on one side, and a surviving cedar shaded the one corner of the house. Rosie thought the house looked like a witch’s
garden, as if anything might appear in it. She wondered how it had escaped the neighborhood association’s attention.

She had stood for several minutes staring before she noticed the old man sitting on a stone half hidden by the elderberries. He was watching her lazily, with a kind of bland indifference, as if she was a bird or a flower, an unlit cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth.

“Oh, hello,” Rosie said to him. He gave a slight nod, but didn’t reply.

“You have a beautiful garden,” she said. He grunted and continued to watch her.

Rosie stood there for a little while, feeling increasingly uncomfortable.


“You like the eggs?” he said suddenly.

“Excuse me?”

“From the chickens. The eggs,” and he gestured, as if holding one in his hand. His words had a thickness to them – traces of another language. He looked at her, his moustache quivering slightly as if he suppressed laughter.

“Sure I like eggs,” Rosie told him warily. Was this the setup to a joke?

“Good, I’ll give you,” the man said, jumping up. “I have many, many, many. I am just one man. I cannot eat so many.”

He moved across the yard with a scuttling swiftness, and disappeared into the house. Rosie took a few steps to follow, then stopped unsure. After a minute he returned with an egg carton, which he opened before Rosie with a flourish. Inside were twelve eggs of various sizes, some brown, some whitish, some a pastel blue-green.

“Where—”
“Come,” and he beckoned her around the side of the house, ducking through an overgrown tunnel of a walkway. Rosie followed him into the backyard, which was as orderly as the front was chaotic, neat rows of vegetables growing in tidy beds. Near the back fence stood a wire enclosure with four chickens inside.

“Death, famine, pestilence, war,” the man was saying, gesturing towards the chickens, who scratched at the dirt and looked up at him quizzically.

“Excuse me?” Rosie said again. This conversation seemed to be getting more and more befuddling.

“The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse. Is the names of my chickens. Famine, she has not been giving the eggs much, but War, she is reliable.” He chuckled at his own wit. “Do you live near here?”

“Yeah, I mean, my parents do, down on Thoreau street and I’m living with them. Just for a little while.” Rosie wasn’t sure why she felt the need to justify living in the neighborhood. Don’t justify, Cisco had always said, a motto that could become a justification in itself.

“Me too, jus’ a little while. Until Fidel is dead.” He laughed again. “Then I’ll go home.”

“To Cuba.” That explained his accent.

“Yes. I fought in the revolution, you know. Fought with Che.” He looked at her when he said this, judging her reaction. Wanting one.

“No way!” Rosie looked at him, this white-haired, fiery-eyed man standing there in his suburban backyard. He fought with Che Guevara?
"Yes, the bastard." The man leaned into the chicken run and flicked a clump of dirt or manure out of the chicken’s water can. "I don’t believe in killing people just because they don’t agree to your philosophy. Che did, even his own men. I could not stay. I could not fight for a man like that. So I leave, and I come to Seattle, and I meet my wife and we have a good life, and when I retire we move out here.” He gestured to his yard and shrugged.

"Did your wife die?" said Rosie, and then cringed at her own tactlessness, but he just laughed.

"She’s in Albuquerque. She’s visiting her sister."

"Oh," said Rosie, "Well, that’s good."

Rosie came to visit the man again a few days later, fascinated by the idea of living near a Cuban revolutionary. His street, Muir Lane, was quite near her own as it turned out; she was surprised that she had never wandered down it before. She found him, that second time, again in his garden, and again, even though this time he was moving, she did not see him at first. Thinking the garden was deserted, she walked halfway up the walkway to the door, intending to knock and see if he was home, before she saw him, standing not five feet away, picking an enormous bouquet of flowers.

"Oh!" she said. "You scared me."

He grinned at her. "My wife she comes back tonight," he said, as excited as a child, bending to pick a peach-colored vining flower that Rosie had never seen before. He tucked his scissors into his belt and extended his free hand towards Rosie. "We neglected our introductions. I’m Manuel."
“Pleased,” and he pumped her hand vigorously. “Now, sit, sit.” He waved towards the stone beneath the elderberry bush, and turned back to his flowers. Rosie sat, elbows on knees, and watched him for a while. He moved like a butterfly from bed to bed, humming slightly to himself.

“Manuel,” she asked after a while, “How come I never notice you at first? Are you trying to hide?”

“Hmm?” He looked up absentmindedly at her. “What do you mean?” He said innocently, but it seemed to Rosie he asked more to see her response than out of any confusion.

“When I come by, I never see you at first. It’s like you’re invisible or something.”

“Yes,” he said, not looking up from his flowers. “Yes, to be seen you must be separate.”

Rosie wasn’t sure what to say to this, so she said nothing, just played with a snapdragon, pinching it to make its mouth open and shut. Manuel changed the subject, telling Rosie about his wife’s incredible cooking.

“You come back and she will cook for you one of these days, alright?” he said when she eventually stood to leave. She agreed and left him with his garden, peaceful and heavy as the sound of bees.

Walking home, Rosie thought about what Manuel had said. She thought of the time at the coffee shop when she had felt oneness. She wondered if this was the same kind of thing. Something to play with, she decided.
“What do you think of the Zapatistas?” Rosie asked him.

“I think,” he said slowly, “I think they do many good things. I don’t know if they will win, you know. Hard to say. They have ideals, which is good. We had ideals, too, you know. So did your revolutionaries, your what-do-they-say, Founding Fathers. It’s a complicated world.”

“My friend Cisco is there hanging out with them.”

“Is he your boyfriend?” the old man asked, grinning at her.

“Oh, no, I mean he was, well, kind of, but not anymore. We’re just friends.” Rosie felt herself blushing.

*   *   *

A grayness settled around Rosie’s summer, a heaviness of long solitary mornings. It didn’t seem to matter how many hugs her parents gave her, or how much she wrestled with her brother. She wore a tough exoskeleton of loneliness, and little of the affection penetrated her. She wandered listless as a ghost around the house, unsure where to go next, how to live.

Finally, in July, Rosie decided that she wanted to do a solo backpacking trip, to spend a little time alone in the woods. She had never done this before; her mother was set against it, sure that Rosie would be raped and murdered if she camped in the woods alone. “We trust you, Rosie,” her parents had said a few years before when she had
asked them, “but it’s a sad fact that many people read a girl alone in the woods as an open invitation.”

“I’ll bring the dog,” Rosie had begged, but her parents were firm.

This time, Rosie decided, she would just not tell them of her intentions. She was, after all, grown up, and if she hadn’t been living at their house they would have had no business commenting anyway. So she told them she wanted to go backpacking with a friend, and her father kindly lent her his car for the weekend. She felt bad about the lie – it felt childish and petty – but there was nothing for it. If they were going to treat her like a child, then she might have to act like one. She needed to spend some time alone in nature. She needed it like an initiation. She picked a trail on the atlas and packed her pack.

Rosie walked a long while down the trail. It began as an obsolete logging road through battered forest where old alders protected hopeful young firs. She walked farther, where the trail narrowed and wound and the old fir trees had been spared.

One tree growing next to the trail grew so big that Rosie’s arms hardly stretched across its north side. She squatted next to it for a while, leaning against it, feeling its creaking height, its slowness. A patience, a sadness, a wisdom extending beyond loss.

Rosie hiked on, the forest opening into steep, bouldery hillsides of thimbleberry and Salmonberry, which she ate as she walked. “Thank you,” she said to everything and nothing. The blue sky blazed, innocent of clouds, the sun a white glare warming the
stones and drawing a sweet smell from the plants. Rosie wondered if the smell came from the ferns or from the berry bushes; it was difficult to say.

The trail ducked into woods again, passing a dark lake full of lurking underwater logs. A father and son in matching fishing vests nodded solemnly as Rosie passed by.

“Nice day,” the father said.

“Catch anything?”

“Couple a little ones”

“Well good luck.”

A bit farther on a man and woman wearing spendy sweat-wicking t-shirts ate energy bars and consulted a topo map. Their dog sniffed Rosie when she walked by, but the people didn’t seem to notice her. Rosie imagined that they must be from Seattle, no, Bellevue – Microsofties for sure. Their dog looked fancy. Funny how people from the city were so much less friendly; maybe they just saw too many people to be interested in everyone. Rosie decided that she must be an urban anomaly, because she felt funny passing people in the woods without a greeting, or better yet, a story.

She walked on, the trail climbing out of the lake basin, winding in and out of the forest. She thought how a brief encounter with a person in the woods provided fuel for hours of reflection. What kind of fish had the father and son caught, for instance, and which one of them had caught them? Had the boy been fishing much before? Did they fish to eat or catch-and-release? And the other people: were they on a date or were they married? Or maybe they were related, recently unestranged brother and sister – they had similarly delicate builds. And what were they looking at the map for? Were they lost or just calculating elevation?
Rosie thought about how in the city she passed by dozens of people with scarcely a thought, even though each one held just as many mysteries. She imagined how it would be if she stopped to talk to each person she passed. How much less lonely it would be.

The trail had begun switch-backing, turning towards and away from a creek, almost as if it was making attempts to cross it then retreating. At one of the turns away, Rosie left the trail and scrambled down through the obscuring trees towards the sound of water. She stopped on the edge of the bank, her breath catching. The creek ran over smooth slabbed granite, and the years of its flowing had carved the stone into curves and pools. The stone in turn sent the water sliding from side to side, hurrying it, slowing it, leaving it to free fall into lower pools.

Rosie felt light with excitement. How beautiful it was, everything. She had no need to go any farther. She slipped off her pack, unlaced her shoes and pulled them off, stuffing her socks inside them and wading in to the clear, cold water. The stone was slippery with brown slime, and the water tugged at her feet, so she walked slowly, like a heron, keeping her balance.

Wading through to a dry place between a channel and a pool, Rosie sat down to watch the water, settling into the place. Sunlight sifted through the overhanging alders, dappling the creek golden and dark. Little birds darted and sang in the branches, and somewhere a jay rasped. Rosie felt herself relaxing, felt the seamlessness between her body and the creek stone, between her breath and the air.

Something flickered on the edge of her vision, a movement, a light. Looking again, it was gone. Yet she felt something was there. It wasn’t a frightening intuition –
whatever it was didn’t feel sinister, just strange. And again, a peripheral flutter, looked at
directly, only air. “Hello,” said Rosie, and giggled.

She slept for a while, curled on the stone in a pool of sunlight. Her dreams were
full of whispers and flutters, faint strange music, and shapes moving through the
shadows, and later a man with antlers sprouting from his curls who beckoned from the
shadow of an alder tree.

She was awakened by a sound, and looking up saw the flash of a deer running off
into the undergrowth. It was full afternoon now; the sun had slipped westward, flooding
the creek with warm light through a gap in the trees. Rosie peeled off her clothes and slid
into a pool as wide and deep as a bathtub, her breath catching at the chill. She leaned
back, letting her hair twine like kelp through the water, and floated for as long as she
could bear the cold, looking up at the leaves above her. Finally, she burst gasping out of
the pool and shook herself like a dog.

She stood in the sunlight until it dried her, then began exploring the creek, each
inch of it more magical than she could stand. She found a rock that made a perfect slide
into a deep pool, and a waterfall that fell onto the perfect middle of a mossy stone,
splashing out into rainbows. Then, just off to the side of the main current, she found a
round hole about a foot wide worn into the stone, as if a loose rock had gotten caught in a
hollow and had been washed around and around by the water. She peered down into the
hole, noticing how the edges were worn in a shrinking spiral, as if both the bedrock and
the loose stone had been worn away by the long friction. Then she saw, far down, several
feet down, a melon-sized stone resting at the bottom of the hole. How long, she
wondered, had it taken the stone to wear its way down there? And how much farther would it wear? She crouched by the hole for a long time, awed.

When finally cold broke her reverie, the sun had wandered off into the trees, leaving the creek shaded and chilled. Cold air rose off the creek-stone, and the waterfalls lent everything a dampness. Mosquitoes swarmed Rosie’s bare body as she hurried toward her things. She was glad for her clothes, glad she had brought a sweater and jeans in her pack. Dressed, she carried her pack and shoes across the creek to a little hidden glade sheltered by two cedar trees. Fallen needles made a soft mat – she would sleep well there. She began gathering wood for a fire, scraping through the litter to dirt to make a fire circle.

As dusk deepened, an unsettled feeling came over Rosie. She had never spent the night completely alone in the woods before, and plenty of people told her she shouldn’t be doing it now. Her mother’s fears of bad men crept into her mind. “They won’t find me,” she told herself aloud. “I’m far off the trail, and hidden, and anyway, most people are good.” Still, she wished she had a dog.

Then her own superstitious fears welled up, fear of unseen malevolent presences, beings that might not welcome her intrusion. She didn’t even have names for what she feared, but the darker it got, the more real they became. She stood and drew a circle around her camp with her toe, saying a little prayer as she did so. “This is a circle of protection,” she told the night. “I am safe within it.” Then she sat and ate her dinner by the fire, feeling much better.

Rosie sat by her fire for a long time, fussing with it, watching the flames. It was comforting to sit with it, like not being alone. She fed the fire, and in turn it warmed her
and kept the mosquitoes at bay. “Thank you,” she said to it in a rush of feeling. She leaned against the roots of one of the cedar trees, sensing the tree’s height and depth, feeling herself cradled in the hollow of its roots.

She must have slept, because she found herself awakening, startled by the sense that again she was not alone. But everything was silent and still, the fire only red-swelling coals. She uncurled her stiff legs and stretched, waving away a few mosquitoes from her face. The moon had risen, light slanting down through the trees, and a light breeze teased the cedar branches. Rosie looked around her, unable to locate whatever had awakened her, yet still pulled by the sense that something was there.

Then she heard it, the softest, strangest music, like an Irish whistle but in an odd, haunting scale. Just a few notes, and her ear lost the song in the wind and the water rushing. She wasn’t even sure that the music was separate from water and wind. It came again, almost like a ringing in her ears. It came from the air, from all around her. And through the trees she saw light, like a soft lantern glowing. It must be moonlight, she thought, though it seemed different somehow, as if it emanated from inside itself, not from the sky.

Rosie thought of calling out to it, then hesitated, worried for a moment that it was a person. It wasn’t a flashlight glow, though, or a campfire. She stood up and began walking quietly towards it over the ferns and hollows and logs of the forest floor, stepping without thought through her protective circle, not needing it any longer. Closer, closer, almost running towards the light, but she still was unsure what it was. It didn’t seem to become clearer at all. She stumbled down into a small hollow left by a fallen tree, losing sight of it for a moment. Scrambling up the other side she looked up and the
light was gone. There was only moonlight: long, straight, ordinary moonbeams. Nothing else.

Standing still in the middle of the dark forest, Rosie felt as if she had just snapped out of a strange daydream. She turned and found her way back to her camp, crawled into her sleeping bag and fell asleep to strange, moonlit dreams.
Part II:

The story continues with Rosie moving into a house in Seattle with Hester Finley. Soon afterwards, Rosie meets an odd young woman named Mari who grew up on a now-failed commune on an island in Puget Sound. Mari understands the parts of Rosie that her other friends don't, and she helps Rosie explore the mystical experiences with nature that she keeps having. She takes Rosie to visit the land where she grew up, and Rosie feels extremely drawn to it. Mari also gets Rosie a job as an herbalist's apprentice, and Rosie begins to relate to the earth more and more intuitively.

That fall, Rosie falls in love with a man named Bean. Everything seems to be going well in her life. Then Bean moves away, and Rosie spins into a winter of depression. When Hester Finley finally helps her pull out of it, Rosie decides to go visit Bean for a while. She has some adventures and realizations on the drive. When she returns from visiting Bean, she realizes she is pregnant, which scares and confuses her as she and Bean were not really planning on being together in the future.

Meanwhile, Rosie's friends in Seattle are preparing to go protest the Republican National Convention in New York City. Rosie goes with them, but has an intense confrontation with the police, is arrested, and is shaken by the experience.

Part III:
After returning from New York, Rosie retreats completely from activism, moving with Mari to Mari's island farm and immersing herself in the garden and in her mystical connection to nature. Eventually, Bean joins them on the farm, and he and Rosie decide to have their baby and try to make things work. Hester Finley also moves up to the land, as does Rosie's adolescent brother who is flunking out of school.

Fueled by a strong desire not to repeat their parents' generation's mistakes, the group struggles to hold their community together, despite financial troubles and isolation. Then local environmental issues force Rosie to engage with the world again, and she must learn how to work for change without sacrificing her own inner life or betraying her personal connection to the natural world. Eventually, she learns how her activism and spirituality can feed each other instead of being in competition.