

STREET CAKE

experimental writing magazine

issue 75

part 2



@pauline mccarthy

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{March 14 2021} | Daylight saving pi paa Ærten

3.14 1:59 a.m. and then it's 3:00 a.m.

that's the number of digits I know it to / and it matches /

the rest / of the numb / -er disap- /// pea- /// ring into sixty minutes felt in
tonight's mattress // an infinite ply di / -fficult to sleep on

I rotate each time my delt / -oid num- / bs me awake //

I tell this first / line and very / clever you say / to my sense //

partner and carrots / tog- / ether like pea- / rl and mollusk / my valve to / your
valve //

put that twenty- / two on top / of my get-l- / ucky seven // until I got that double di / -git
for you // that came / out geometer than intended //

// circling the square \ scaring the quirk \ cackling the squire //

such a quantity of bedding // two pi radian(t)s de[g/c]reed

One Act Play

SOCIETY (to children): Just be yourself.

ME: Okay.

SOCIETY (to the adult): But, not like that.

ME: Okay, why?

SOCIETY: Because your sadness makes us uncomfortable.

ME: So, I have to change?

SOCIETY: Yes. Here are some drugs to make you feel better.

ME: So these are really good?

SOCIETY: Well, in clinical tests they were almost as good as a placebo.

ME: Oh... But **if** they work I'll be happy?

SOCIETY: Oh no, we can't give you something to make you happy.

ME: So, if these drugs, that are almost as good as a placebo work, what happens?

SOCIETY: They'll make you a little less sad.

ME: This says there are lots of side effects. Are they worth being a little less sad?

SOCIETY: We think so, because your sadness makes us uncomfortable.

ME: Well, my friend takes a drug called Ecstasy. That sounds like it might be helpful.

SOCIETY: You can't have that.

ME: Why?

SOCIETY: Because that will make you happy.

ME: Isn't happy the goal?

SOCIETY: No, you can't use drugs to be happy. That wouldn't be ethical.

ME: I've heard about these opioids. There's lot's of them out there. They make you feel better, but not too happy. Can I try those?

SOCIETY: Absolutely not!

ME: Oh, why?

SOCIETY: You'll get addicted to them. You'll be hooked for life.

ME: So, the drugs you want me to take. The ones that are almost as good as a placebo. I only have to take them for a few months, maybe a year?

SOCIETY: No, you'll have to take them the rest of your life. In fact, if you take them for a really long time and stop, you'll be even sadder than you are now.

ME: Why is that?

SOCIETY: Because they change your brain chemistry.

ME: That doesn't seem like a good idea.

SOCIETY (exasperated): Fine, if you don't want to take drugs, here's cognitive behavioral therapy. It's a bunch of brain exercises that will literally change your brain. You'll be a new person.

ME: What if I don't want to be a new person?

SOCIETY: That's silly. You're sad. Your sadness makes us uncomfortable. You must want to be a different person.

ME: Will this new person be happy?

SOCIETY: No, just less sad, or at least better at hiding their sadness so it doesn't make us uncomfortable. It depends on what study you read.

ME: But none of the studies say it will make me happy.

SOCIETY: No.

ME: Listen. I've been unhappy a long time. I've never really enjoyed my time here, and it's clearly making you uncomfortable, I'm going to end it all. Can you help me make that transition painless and dignified? Do you have drugs for that?

SOCIETY: Yes, we have those drugs, but you can't have them.

ME: Why not?

SOCIETY: Because the idea of you dying makes us more uncomfortable than you being sad.

ME: Why?

SOCIETY: Because every life is precious.

ME: No, it's not. There are eight billion people on this planet. It only takes a little over a decade to add a billion more. A hundred million people could kill themselves tomorrow, and it wouldn't matter. Life isn't precious, it's overwhelming.

SOCIETY (smug): You're suggesting a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

ME: It's been fifty years.

SOCIETY (gotcha): You've never been happy in fifty years?

ME: I mean there have been days, moments. But really happy. Deep down happy? No.

SOCIETY: Oh.

ME: So, are you going to help me end this torment?

SOCIETY: No.

ME: Why?

SOCIETY: Because doctors aren't supposed to cause harm.

ME: I thought they were supposed to ease suffering. If I'm beyond help, isn't death the cure.

SOCIETY (agitated): No one is beyond help!

ME: The only help is drugs and therapies that don't work most of the time, and if they do, they make me a completely different person. Those are my choices?

SOCIETY: No one is beyond the doctors' help.

ME: That's not really true. It's just hubris.

SOCIETY: We're telling you it's true. You can't argue with us. We're telling you; you need to change.

ME: Why?

SOCIETY: To make us feel better.

ME: What happened to, "Just be yourself?"

SOCIETY:

PERIOD PAINT CHART

ANCIENT
CORAL

GOTHIC
SCARLET

VERMILION
SAND

TAR
FATIGUE

SCORCHED
RASPBERRY

OBSIDIAN
MOON

TEMPERED
ROSE WATER

CRIMSON
TIDES

STARLESS

SHARK
RED

RAVEN
WAVES

APHRODITE'S
MYTH

VORACIOUS
MIDNIGHT

HOPEFUL
CARNATION

FRESH
FIG



Elizabeth M. Castillo

Betty Doyle

Milena Williamson

Blank: colour here

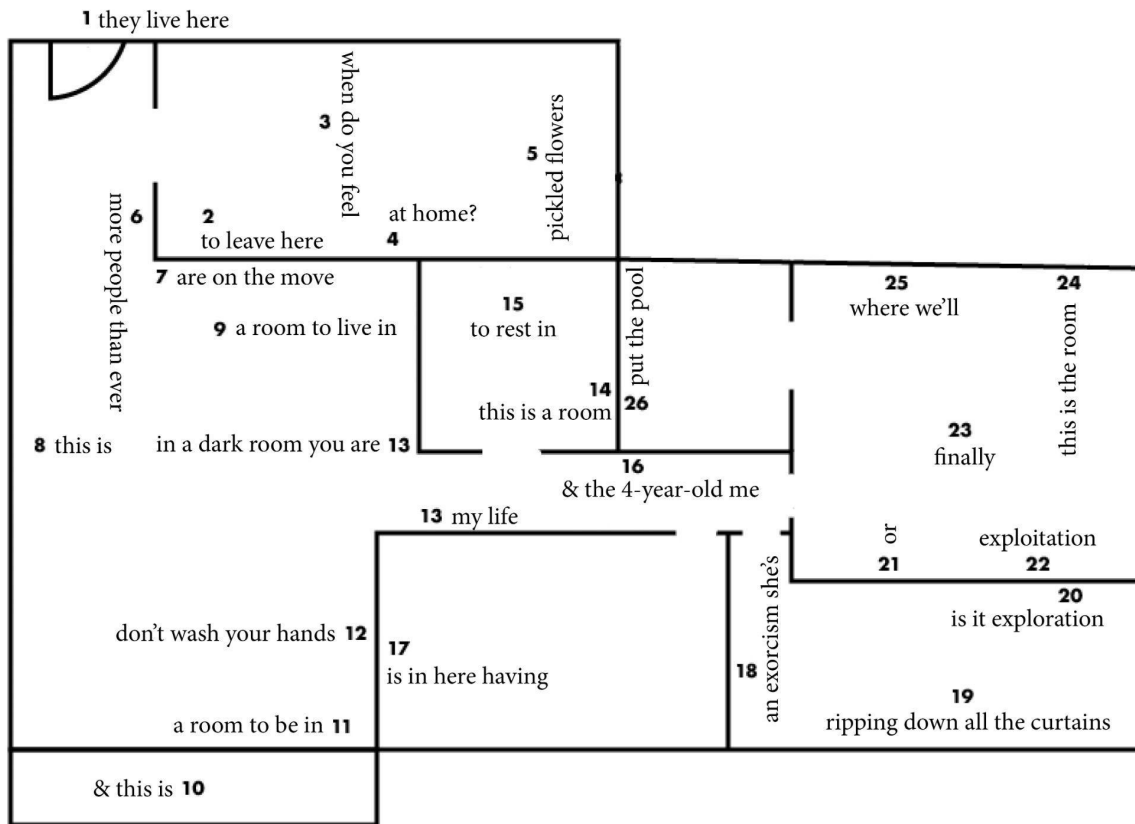
after Milena Williamson

Everytime I watch Angel becomes Angelus I weep (or just another love story)

Seen it before / Face like wet brick / Smashed / Put together again / Changed like a bin bag after the foxes / So?/ Eyes once pools I lapped / Tongue wet from tear duct lapping / you can get high from somebody else's mineral water / wash-self / drink-skin / Two teeth smile / He only bites the morning after / Forever isn't a literal word / like Eggshell / or to the moon and back / or hell / Only what can be counted on fingers like pigs to the market / Waiting for fate / Which is not a literal word either / Try to find the start of eternity and you won't find it / Like the roll of a gold ring on lukewarm tarmac / THE END is always capitalised / You don't get another try after a full stop / sorry / It was your fault / you didn't notice how angry the clouds looked every time / how your stomach became soup until he left / PH balance just off / the sun doesn't lie / Seen it before/

Maybe next time will be different.

Welcome to My Crib!



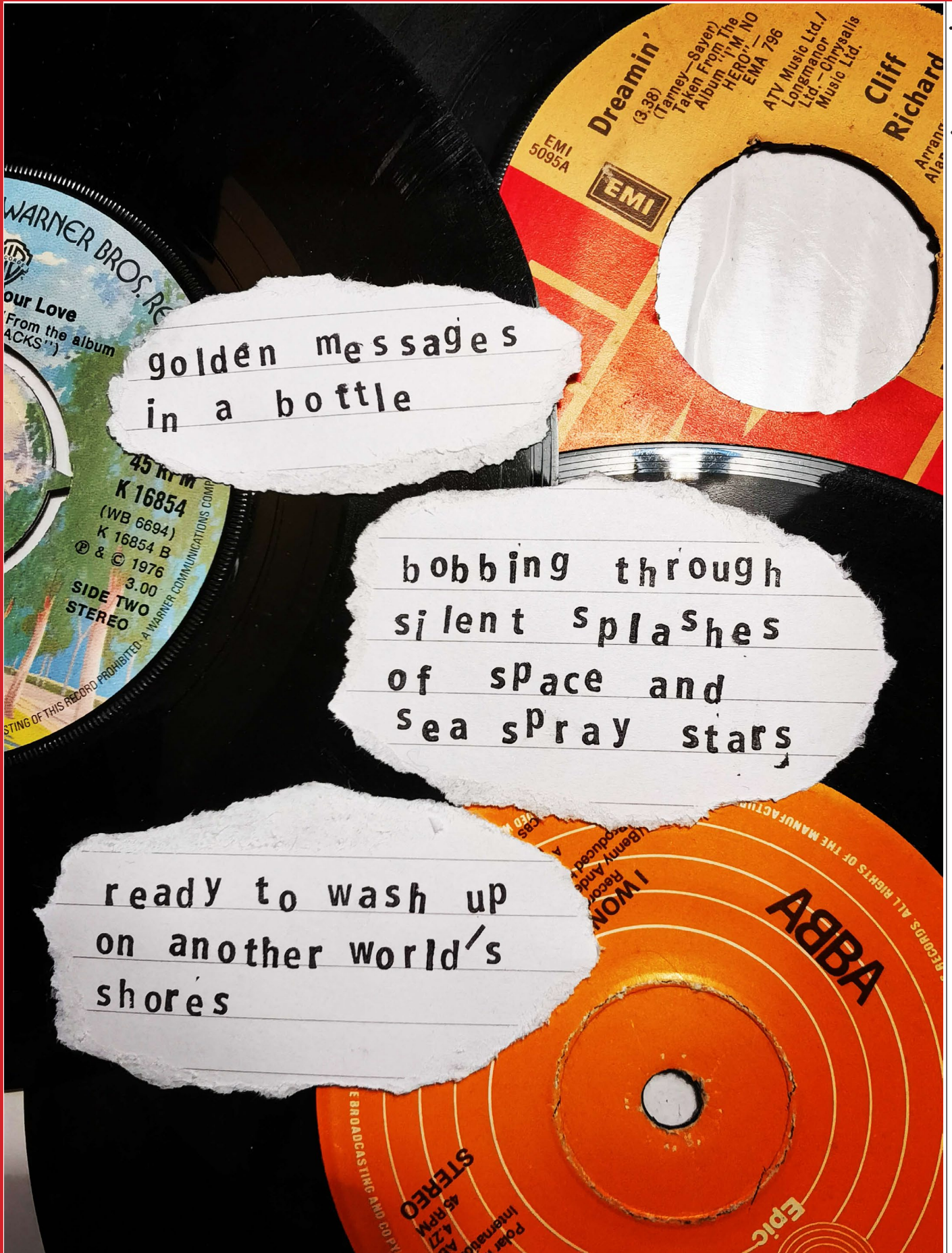
What are Friends For?

Those surly gargoyles, their colors are tone deaf. Even if they clean up the space junk, it's probably just a plot device. The globe's richest 1% own half the world's wealth. I guess they have to pay attention to something? Have you noticed that my hair's on fire? Sure, I believe fantastic things, but don't you? When I get up tomorrow, I'm going to slip into my flesh bodysuit and listen to some righteous snake music. No, I'm not too worried about death, I'm water proof. Hope it's quick and happens to somebody else, though. Hey, I just forgot everything I said. Pretty sure it wasn't profane and I was using my best church voice. By the way, if I need any help inciting tomorrow's riot, I've got your number. I'll give you a call.

Dear J

I place my
 middle finger
 on opposing
 open palm
 and slowly
 slide down
 the line of
 your curves.
 In sign
 language you
 make sense.
 In French
 you are me
 my I my
 identity tho
 I pronounce
 your pronoun
 as a whisper.
 In English you
 sometimes
 wear a hat
 sometimes not
 if it's hot.
 the language
 you do not
 how do I say
 when you are
 alphabet?

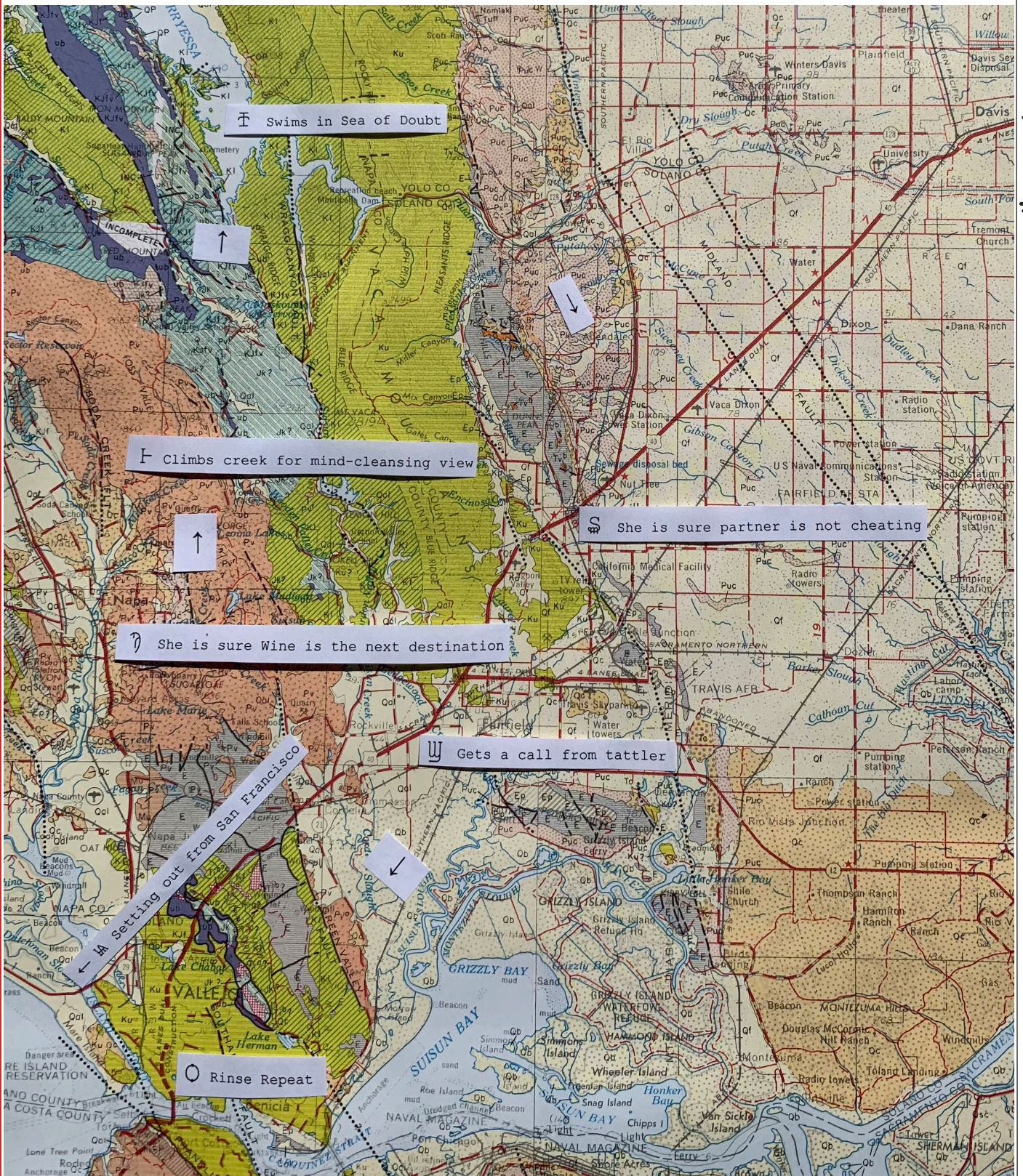
But in Italian
 of my love
 even exist
 my name
 not in the



golden messages
in a bottle

bobbing through
silent splashes
of space and
sea spray stars

ready to wash up
on another world's
shores



Missing an E

Th most usd ltr on th keyboard,
of cours it's th first to go.
Though if prssd REALLY hard
it still clunks into action.

I'm not sur I can justify
the xpns of a nw laptop
for an ovrusd vowl.

My poEtry bcems potry.
PoEms mrly poms.

On Reflection

before returning home he stopped thinking [redacted]
before returning [redacted] he stopped thinking of home
before [redacted] he stopped thinking of home
before returning [redacted] thinking of home

he stopped thinking of home before returning home
he stopped thinking of home [redacted]
he stopped thinking [redacted]
he stopped [redacted]

returning

he stopped [redacted]
he stopped thinking [redacted]
he stopped thinking of home [redacted]
he stopped thinking of home before returning home

before returning home, he stopped thinking of home

before returning home he stopped, thinking of home

before, returning home he stopped thinking of home

thinking of home
he stopped
thinking of returning

SIX SIGNS YOU'RE DOING BETTER (AND ONE SIGN YOU'RE NOT)

(1) you listen to music again,
tuning in, and sing
sometimes

(2) you drive nowhere
and slowly, foot poised
above the breaks
like you care if you can stop
in time.

(3) You find
yourself
seeing the view and taking it in,
registering the change in season

(4) maybe you even mention this,
breaking

your silence, your lineup
of perfunctory phrases spread
thinly like the wages
that you hate
to raise

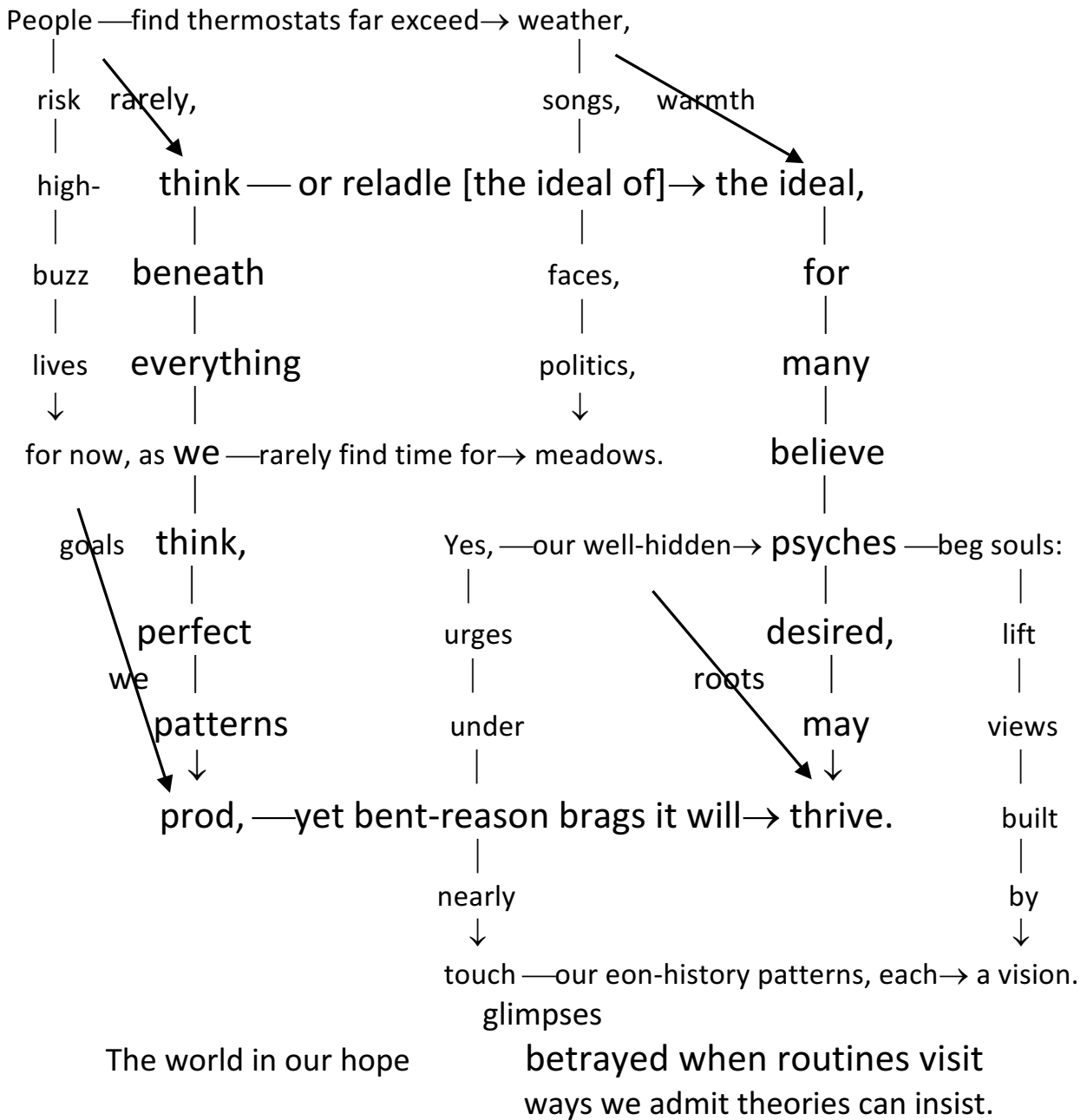
(5) and even days
at work don't seem so bad
and afterwards you have
to sleep,

(6) you don't count
the hours
down

until you can: you cram
them full enough to burst because like seasons
or a song

this will not last
and when you're back
to square (1)

you won't want
to touch
the brakes in time



The Written Word

Between flat phrases,
simple names that pause and pose:
ants on newspaper.