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Gaps and Borders

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You are a child with a gap in your story the width of the border that you crossed and then crossed out of memory only to fill the gap with visions of Saint Mary trying to reach out and save you when the demons came into the room and overcame you. You are a patient — underinsured and underdocumented and underserved and under-our-watch — with visions designated *visual and auditory hallucinations* and demons designated *trauma-induced distortions of perception*. I'm a charlatan peddling empathy in the form of a comfortable nodding of the head and forward leaning. The room is pasted over with crayon renditions of saints and angels, and the chatter of medical staff comes in pulses through the cracked-open door.

Your mother had to do anything to take you away from her brother — to take you a country and a culture away from him. So she saved the money she needed to save you and turned to migrant smugglers turned coyotes turned packs of wolves that bit the hand that paid them — that paid them in exchange for their promises of better lives: American school lunches and suburban jobs.

You speak of the fallen angels that clawed at your body. You speak of the devil and his legion and a thought to end it all. The implications between the lines of what you say are wrenching but nowhere near as wrenching as the realities in the spaces around the lines between the countries you traversed.

Your body is on the TV in the shape of another number of another person out of place. You wandered a desert into a new land, one affluent enough to feign scarcity. You're another child trafficked, backing up the lane. Behind you are all the people who would rather have you out of the way since all you ever do is disturb the E.T.A. to the place to which they long to return: when all the children trafficked were outside of the bounds, and if it happens far enough south, then it doesn't make a sound. Pundits on primetime need someone else to blame, so they lend you new names: intruder and thief. All the more blameless makes for all the more you can take as they stain you with overdoses, tanked economies, and all the agitations of a masquerading nation-state.

Your mother says that God is the pure air we contaminate.

I want to take the hatred or take the shame or take the demons who told you to take the pills, but all I can do is take your time, take your story about how you didn't want to take your life; you just wanted to take some rest, so you took as many pills as the demons told you some rest would cost. And you pay with a hospital stay, lent another set of names: depressive and suicidal. Let a paltry serotonin take the brunt of the blame — give a bit to psychosocial: to assault and to whatever's on the news today.

But all the names they give you fall wayside of hands too small and too weak to hold much more than your mom, than a doll, than a crayon. And I don't think there's a better image of the Divine than the one you draw in wax on lined paper. You laugh a confession of a drawing of a saint with an awkward nose and oblong eyes — a laugh that alludes to your innocence in the grand drama between countries and cartels, coyotes and militants.

Your speech has the charm of magical thinking. Your logic, creative: an indulgence in a dream of a world I never see. I ask you my questions, and you answer no information: only winding stories, ad lib, I could never predict. It's all an imagination — far from fiction, never naive. You wear all the things they told you, that they did to you, on your sleeve. And under the floorboards of childlike fancy are the putrid realities of all the horrors you've seen. And the stories that you tell me fall much truer than the ones they tell of you. The stories of forces beyond

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your control that give and that take: like angels, like hope, like demons, like fate.

And while you find yourself subject to the whims of saints and demons saying what to do next, your medical team finds you subject to the whims of psychiatric bed availability. I want to do something, but all I can do is feel but an ounce of the powerlessness you must feel, so I leave. I write my note: tidy all you are within the confines of S.O.A.P.

And I want to be back in the room, and I want to hear nursery rhymes in languages trailing the last generations of their speakers, and I want to make figurines out of the twisted straw wrappers left on the tray by the apple sauce untouched, and I want to look out windows at the angels you see that haven't revealed themselves to me, but all I can do is wind up recollections of the many versions of you that make their way into the small drama of my fading memories and fabled interpretations and feeble impartments.

Just another body breaking the law we call just. Another brain breaking the norm we call health. Another crumbling attempt to make right, make sense, and call it care.

And I can't stand how those who'd blame you have found things to hate in you. And these are just the things they see in the shadow they cast on you, standing between you and the light, their back to the light. And I can't stand that my mind has turned you into archetypes of saints and demons: of childlike innocence made victim to abusive wickedness. And I can't stand how it's all codified into psychology and pathology, but while you hear the voices of saints and demons in your head, others hear the voices of diagnostic criteria in theirs — and it's hard for the human mind not to try desperately to hear something that might be louder than the ear-rending amplitude of senseless suffering.

And, sometimes, rather than hearing saints and demons and diagnostic criteria, we hear each other, and, somehow, sometimes, connection makes even less sense than suffering. So all I can hope for is to play a small role that becomes a forgotten memory that becomes a gap filled with the vague impression of the gap that was between us, the gap between us that flickered of a connection, of the rare and meek aspiration toward healing. I want to leave only the lingering notion of the moment so that nothing of me is remembered by you except that I was there with you ever so briefly.

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