

ARTICLE

Spirit Archive

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Part 1:

Arrival

In the summer of her nineteenth year, she walked into the cool, low-lit halls of the Spirit Archive and marveled at the millions of memories and ghosts and delicate ontologies held there, all awaiting her perception. Admittedly, she couldn't remember most of the spirits, but at first glance she recognized a few: the volumes on *Exploring Creeks and Streams*, *Sleeping*, and *Ecologies of Wonder* felt particularly familiar. Even so, the archive's immensity was staggering. At the sight of it all, she felt overwhelmed. But in some lone corner of her heart, there was a small, dull flame. She felt a hunger for the knowledge of this place—knowledge situated at the corner of spirit and matter, of the transcendent and the material.

Nervously clutching the shoulder straps of her backpack, she approached the Spirit Archive Help Desk, each footstep echoing around her with iridescent reverberations, her heart beating in the back of her throat. The figure at the desk was silent, furiously poring over some tome. Glowing ever so slightly, the figure's face remained just out of focus, perpetually blurry and unknown to the girl. Coughing quietly, she asked, "What knowledge would you have me find here?"

After a pause, the figure looked up, pointed towards the shelves, and whispered,

"Go and look for the spirits that remind you of shining egg yolks, apricot halves, and the smell of wisteria in spring. The feeling of a salamander slipping through your fingertips. Go and uncover your forgiveness, your holiness, your debts. Listen to the quickened heartbeat of some frightened animal, and understand it is not so different from your own."

Archival searching, it seems, mirrors the heart's own pursuit for light, a light which is restored continuously, through endless revolutions of the spirit.

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Part 2:

Knowing Rain

From the Spirit Archive, I retrieved several lessons of metaphysics and flesh that connected me to some higher power, some way of knowing the world more intimately than before. As H el ene

Cixous writes, “I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation.”

The first knowledge I recovered was of the rain. As a young child growing up in the Atlanta suburbs, I learned how a thunderstorm would smell before blessing its rain upon the earth. For the part of my childhood spent in a drought, rain felt especially otherworldly, necessary and divine. After a heavy rain, the scent of wet asphalt and wild grass mingled in my brain like a melody I couldn’t quite forget, but couldn’t remember, either. I would spend hours watching storms sweep across the world, bending all life to their watery weight. Those rains felt and feel like memories of home: comforting, sweet, and restful, allowing all things a moment of pause, leaving the world shining, illuminated.

Rain, in all its different speeds and weights and textures, leads to wonder. Like Enoch, who asked, “How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains?” The connection between divinity and rain becomes crystallized in this moment. How does divinity mourn, we wonder? How, exactly, do immaterial forces translate themselves into the lived, rain-filled world?

Rain, it seems, is the question and the answer, seeing as rain is also the materialized Word, bringing joy to all beings. In Isaiah, we read “For as the rain cometh down, and . . . watereth the earth . . . so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall . . . prosper in the thing whereto I sent it . . . and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Rain and the word operate in the same way, the same method of being in the world. Again, in Deuteronomy, the Word is likened unto the physical qualities of rain: “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew.” If we are to study and understand and better learn the Word, and language more generally, we should consider rain in all its transitory forms—its inherent impermanence, the way it wants to be used and transformed and rewritten, forever.

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Part 3:

The Body is a Vessel for Other Unknown Angels, or Learning to Surf

I hold Her in my teeth like a heart-shaped
lozenge—everpresent, allknowing, melting into
the mouth’s lacuna, that dispirited altar.

In the marbled silence, an overwhelming ending presses
into my stomach, and ocean foam wraps
around me like a delicate revelation, suffocating,

leaving behind thumbprints of deity on flesh.
Within the tentacled, departing brain, there are

several visions of the monstrous, and at last, jellyfish swimming

around my ankles, barely illuminated by a
waning crescent winking down upon the water,
thin as a viper's outstretched fang.

I hear a voice calling from the fog's swell, and
She is telling me,

finally,

mercifully,

to bite the
membranous wings off
my aching back.

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Part 4:

Taxidermy Lesson

This past winter, my mother gave me a brief tutorial in the ancient art of wildlife taxidermy, instructing me to:

1. Lay the snapping turtle's bloated corpse upon a swarming ant hill,
return to it after the flesh is joyously, absolutely devoured.
2. Marvel at the immensity of her shining, empty eye sockets,
the angled beak and patterned shell like a primordial quilt.
3. Soak the skeleton in hydrogen peroxide,
let the foam bubble over in a hissing whisper.
4. The scent of carrion will overwhelm you,
dead turtle seeping into you all thicklike, nighttime perfume on the neck.
5. On the shell's underside, look at what remains of her spine—

caress the fossil
worship the scar
let water submerge the devastated graveyard

What, exactly, is the purpose of such furious preservation? Why do we hold onto these fleshy, decaying bodies? What happens when our memories, recorded so precisely and meticulously, mean nothing to us once our minds can no longer make meaning of them? In our last, final moments, do these drifting memories float out onto the horizon, like precious clouds, for some other roaming vessel to find? Or do they rise up, like fog—at first with a visceral thickness, then slowly fading into the ambivalent atmosphere?

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Part 5:

Departure into the Unknown

The Spirit Archive is quiet, but all around, a distinct hum, like the sound of furious hummingbird wings, pervades the sonic landscape. I'm sitting here, with a seemingly endless pile of writings laid out before me. A work that might take a thousand lifetimes to unravel.

Right now, I'm studying the musings of littoral movement. How rivers sweep and carve and move water, the lifeblood of existence, through the world. I look at how image and sound intermingle with one another, forming some intangible magic on the screen. And I look at how death is recorded, remembered, and forgotten—its intimate relationship with the earth.

The archive is an odd place where spirit and text and dust combine to create shimmering interfaces. I wonder where to go from here.

“How often,” Faulkner writes, “have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home.”

All the lights have gone out, and the archivists are going home, murmuring their hushed goodbyes into the darkness. But I'm still here, letting a fever overtake me. Writing notes on the back of my hand, because, beyond all reason, I have to keep remembering, and singing, and mumbling the prayers, and returning, and surrendering. I have to keep these spirits alive, somehow.