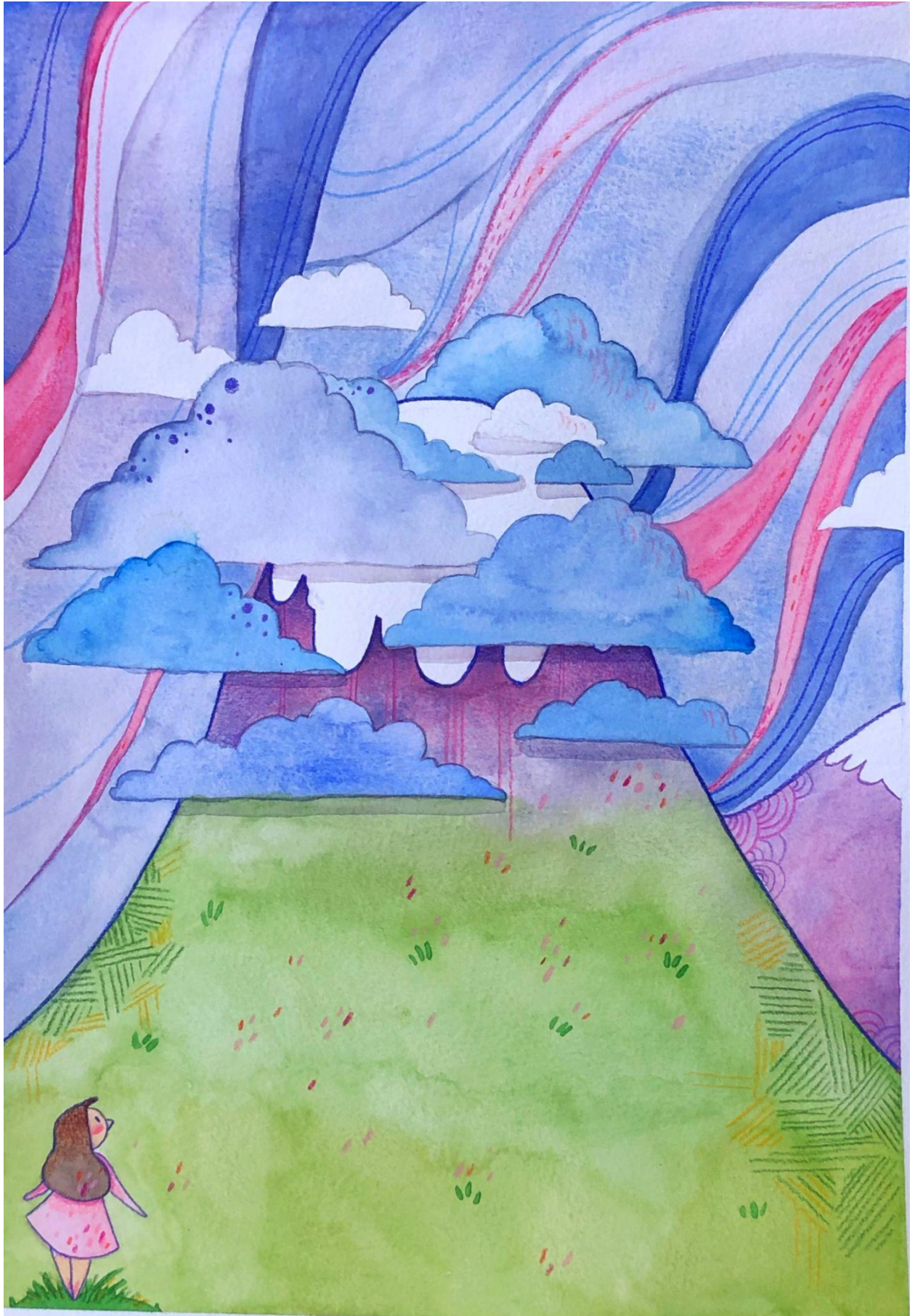


# To The Top of My Tiny Mountain

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## Opening Poem

In truth I don't remember.

Not with the clarity  
that is begged of me  
no words come to mind  
with capital letters  
and none of my memories  
are packaged with periods  
and I don't know why  
I did anything  
but what I remember  
I'll share with you  
as best as I can because  
I trust You  
to hold each thing I say  
with the same caution I hold,  
most of my memories  
are shattered  
and so few are left  
but I know they had to go  
so I could be here.

So please,  
Trust my memories  
as You trust the ones  
You made in kindergarten:

fuzzy but

honest.

**Part One: March-November 2020**

**April smells like grass and hope**

And I'm holding on to the scent the best I can,  
*because maybe it'll all be over soon,*  
and maybe, just maybe  
a new beginning: growth sprouting  
tinged in the center with pink  
to match the polka dot plant in the window:

hypoestes phyllostachya.  
hypoestes plants need direct light,  
but they can't go outside  
so they sit on a windowsill  
and pull themselves apart  
reaching for what they know  
will leave them  
burnt,  
*but satisfied.*

**Still There**

Warm fingers catching light  
grasping at strands of sun  
to weave meaning into the same day,  
week,  
month,  
to have something to hold onto-  
daily walking, chalk drawings,  
skin and cherry picking-  
what's a routine if there's  
no life to plan around  
*but this is only temporary*  
life will pool into the corners  
of the room soon enough,  
so take the quiet  
and take the cold,  
and hold it for a little while  
longer  
and wait until we can leave the house again.

### Intermission #1: To People Who Have Birthday Parties In Quarantine (~ May 2020)

You are so incredibly selfish. Seeing a party happen on snapchat or instagram makes me so pissed. Everyone is social-distancing for a reason. We not only have to keep ourselves safe but also the people who can't protect themselves: the sick, the young, the old. And you find their lives less important than your birthday? It's disgusting! Stay fucking home! Don't invite people over. It's so dangerous. You are putting yourself at risk. You are putting your friends at risk. Someone you love could die because you couldn't be alone on your birthday. It's not that important, honey. Leave your ego at home. Leave yourself at home. Fuck your birthday party.



## During a Zoom Meeting

My room, resembles that of a mirror  
of your room, except  
that the air inside fills up  
with pollutants, my lungs

pressed for more air,  
searching for more air,  
more Air,  
home won't let me breathe  
do my lungs hurt or  
time to go on a walk  
time to go on a walk  
time to go on a walk  
time to go on a walk  
time walks out ahead of us  
but I can't catch up  
my lungs won't fill up.

*am I sick?*

I'm living every Tuesday like every  
other monday, and I've lived every monday  
Already but weeks are not even days they are a two way switch

do my lungs hurt or am I sick?

it's cherry season so it's time to make a pie—

but last week I had to beg to sleep inside—

do my lungs hurt or

*when You look into my camera,  
into my bedroom,  
can you see the paleness  
and all of the thoughts I've hidden?*

## Shelter in Place

I remember always being told

*“Be grateful you have a home and dinner to eat.”*

and I, having the voice of a tiny pecking bird could only repeat

*“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”*

and he would always have something to say.

*“You should live with me, because I want you more and that’s what matters.”*

and we were all so silly

to think we,

to think I,

had a say in the matter

of where I would exist

and all the while they were telling us

*“Stay where you are, don’t leave, don’t move, don’t be caught, don’t get found.”*

and in truth the choice

was never ours to fight over

yet I was pulled apart for

a fantasy.



Intermission #2(~August 2020):

There's two voices in my head but one is delayed.

**Part Two: December 2020**

## **I think I'm sick**

That's what he tells me as soon as his mouth left mine  
and after three years of dating him, I knew I couldn't have trusted him.

I knew him too well, his patterns I feverishly memorized, or at least I tried in a valiant way  
to get a chance, to maybe, get ahead of him: to get a chance, to maybe

protect myself.

Instead I swirled myself around his room in a flush of all of the hopeless worry, berry red cheeks,  
I felt as he got sicker before my watery eyes. Two bodies shaking between sheets.

I hate to admit that I still trusted him. That when he said *I'm sick but not that sick* I leaned in,  
pressed my back up to the new reality he created and fell in:

*Life is better lived when it's together, together to make it full, to make you come here*  
I came there, I did what was asked of me

*and tonight where I would feel hollow ache I will feel full because tonight I have a feast*  
stay still and the virus won't find me I'll find a way

*throw a blanket around your shoulders, maybe another, tight till you can't move anymore*  
I can't go home

*pay no mind to the broken glass outside, it's not meant to line your path anymore*  
if I don't close my throat he'll close it for me, oh

*but I can't protect you anymore. I've done enough for you, and now you're asking too much*  
ineffably he made his argument, and that became my embodiment

*so leave*  
Go home

*I'll see you when I'm ready*  
when we all look like him.

Intermission #3: (December 2020)

The world didn't end in March of 2020  
Though we thought it might  
I'm sure your camera roll didn't stop filling at the end of February  
You still made memories  
Kept going  
Maybe in ways you didn't think you were capable of  
Our lives all changed  
And I think we all learned something  
About empathy  
About love  
About understanding  
And about enduring  
2020 didn't mean the end for most of us  
But we must remember it meant the end for many.  
We are so incredibly lucky to still call this earth our own  
Let's all let 2020 go with peace.

## Let's Pretend

Isn't it fun  
to place your hands into  
the life of a season

to say

take me back!  
to when Christmas was  
paper cups with hot chocolate  
and rocks we called  
marshmallows

and California  
put on its best show  
of cold weather  
frosting the grass outside  
of our classroom

because

we can pretend  
that we're still ten  
that the cold outside  
and we can stay warm  
under mom's blankets

*in uncertain times like these*

*is just a cold*

but he beckons to me,  
he said pretending isn't  
enough,  
that he needs to be here.  
that I need to get him.

I'm sick and he's sick too  
he says let's stay quiet— they won't  
know if we don't tell them—  
take me in from the cold so that

we can enjoy the holiday



**Realization I.**

It doesn't take long to realize  
that if the truth is as simple  
as a swab  
in the nose  
30 seconds  
then whoever says  
*You don't need to get tested*  
is hiding something

because the instructions are clear:  
a tickle in the throat  
not caused by shouting  
and an ache in the lungs  
not caused by hollow evenings  
are meant to be taken seriously:  
take myself to the doctor  
for the ailment they care to know of  
and find out the truth:

am I sick,  
or is it all in my head?

## **In My Bedroom**

Does your house whisper like mine does?  
Do your secrets slip through the floorboards  
and drip onto the carpets downstairs,

asking questions that no one knows  
the answers to,  
that I certainly couldn't answer to

backed into a corner

me, silently trying  
to slip on a mask with a conviction  
that crumbles in the frame of my bedroom door

I thought I should trust my house,  
And him, to keep me safe from antigens  
but all it took was one test

and the damage to the foundation was set.

**Part 3: January-July 2021**

Intermission #4: (February 2021)

I am always cold

My fingers and toes are always close to numb

And I can never feel warm

**Realization II.**

Masks slipped out of the grasps  
of the people who used them  
to hold a meaningful grip on  
the reality they had me in.

And I tumbled out of the world  
I always thought I had  
to a nothing smell left by trust  
so I wailed loneliness

into the walls until they tasted like  
submission, jasmine tea,  
my breath fogged the glass  
when I was nine I used it as a canvas

so at 19 I wrote out all of my  
inconsistencies and tried to piece  
together a truth for myself to hold onto  
distinguishing the scene outside

from the memories that were truly  
mine.

## Still To Be Confirmed

Worms<sup>1</sup>                   Squirming between bedsheets,  
                               And us. Because we shared  
 Everything, always.

Red<sup>2</sup>                     I still share the blame,  
                               LED illuminating a crime.  
 I was there.

Tears.<sup>3</sup>                   Midnight breath. Sticky cheeked  
                               I thought I had made myself  
 Perfectly clear.

Sound<sup>4</sup>                   Held tightly, held down, without a  
                               Or gesture of regret for what he knew  
 To be wrong.

Hyperventilate.<sup>5</sup>           Hand muffled screams as I  
                               Dark, dark, dark down in that  
 Paralysis pit:

*“Why do you always do this? You always ask and ask and ask, and I say no and I say no and I say no. And you just keep asking until I cave and you get what you want. I’m tired of it.”*

Fingers.<sup>6</sup>                   Goosebumps, laid in the shower.  
                               Naked, I had to go to bed but the  
 Worms still crawled

Night.<sup>7</sup>                   So I took a long time to fall asleep that  
                               Something rotten, the cat is dying still  
 But he never cared:

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<sup>1</sup> Maggots, wiggling grains of rice that I would watch inch around on the windowsill.

<sup>2</sup> It's too easy to blame the color. Red sounds too culpable.

<sup>3</sup> I think we were crying for different reasons. I can't explain my tears.

<sup>4</sup> There was a sound. Pleading.

<sup>5</sup> I tried my best.

<sup>6</sup> He'd done this before. That's what he said.

<sup>7</sup> Morning. A long day.

*“Because that’s how I get what I want.”*<sup>8</sup>

### A Poem About Moving Out

Maybe I'm stupid – please don't shut me down before I explain–  
because it took me every bit of 19 years to come to the conclusion that

homes should leak water and not my insecurities.  
a finding I can not credit to just myself, either.

So that must be the case, but maybe I'll rephrase; maybe I'm broken  
because I can't seem to explain the gaps in my memory that led me

from finding shelter in the blankets of my parents' bed  
to burning with tears at the thought of long car rides together.

Stupid, broken, or maybe just unable to understand the enormity of a home  
hollowed out and held gingerly together by the sway of lies and truth.

Truths about my stupidity and brokenness that boom and then echo around the halls  
And lies about the normality of the fractured state we find our bodies

taking shelter in. Unable to understand, to make sense of, the sense I've been given,  
My body, a rock with a hole in the middle that invites and encourage the wind

to pass through and leave a chill too far down to ever find warmth. My body, which  
I carry with me outside of the walls of the house that created it–

nurtured it in a silence and compulsory conviction to the laws that spilled across the walls  
like wine stains from all of the falls– outside of the walls but still the same

marked with a gape in the middle evident to all except for me and including him. I've left  
but I still hear the drips, I've left but I still haven't found a way to keep the wind

from inviting its way through me.



## If I Could Ask Him Anything It Would Be

How do you keep me out of your mind?

Because you've done your damage—did your damage  
 And I want you out of mine. And  
 What lie do you tell yourself every day, everyday and always (or never)  
 To stomach what you've done?

Do you remember  
 Every Hershey chocolate bar outside of class at 8:30 am, in the winter 50 degrees, you and I  
 sharing your wrestling jacket  
 The same way I do?  
 And if you remember it with the same sweetness,  
 Do you remember  
 All the times I erupted into tears in your bed and I couldn't explain why I was crying?

“That sounds like rape”

I told you  
 When you shakily explained your first time, over the phone  
 As we were both engulfed in the indigo on other sides our small world:

Patterns are easier to see—  
 My eyes felt the weight, but they couldn't tell me yet  
 —Outside of the the portrait

Of me and you. A picture of you and me in front of a Christmas tree. Tears as whispers,

Tears as guides. I'd get there one day.

I was your Greek Goddess  
 You'd say, you  
 Resent me you'd say, and somehow they felt the same.

And all I could do was lie limp. Clothes discarded into the dark. How do you remember holding  
 me in those moments? How do you remember those moments?

My eyes felt the weight and knew, before I did  
 That somewhere between night light LED red was your favorite color to  
 choose  
 And morning darkness because you said the curtains should always stay closed,  
 I'd get lost in the fallout of these collapsing  
 memories.

So here we are again,  
 Do you remember it?

Like I do?

Intermission #5: (February 2021)

I remember learning as a child that an object that has heat isn't cooled down by the atmosphere around, but rather the warm object tries so hard to warm up the atmosphere it gives off its heat waves in an effort to share its warmth: to make sure everything around it gets to feel warmth too. But through that process it lets go of itself and loses its heat, until it is cold as can be and the air is unquenched and moves on to find another cup of tea to beg for her warmth.

## **To The Top Of My Tiny Mountain**

What will that be like?  
To be —finally— where I can see all  
Of what has happened  
And what is to come.

All this while I don't know who I am.

I can be wrong  
maybe this has all meant nothing  
just life  
In motion.

A step up the grassy hill  
if I believe that I did something –  
something worth writing a poem about –  
made my way out of something bad

Maybe I can redirect the wind.