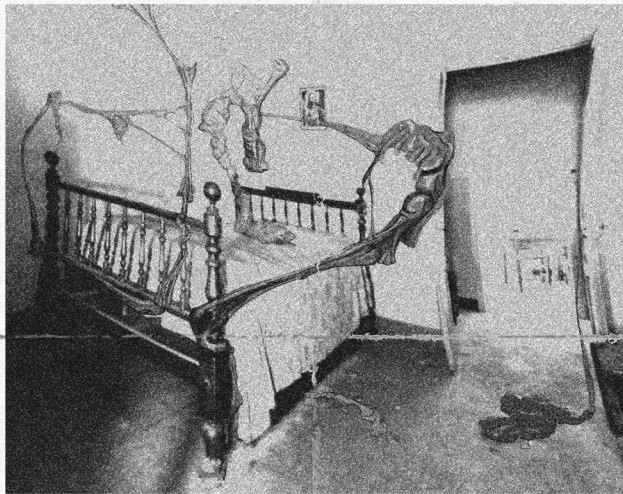


INTROVERT



In vert

by

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Produced in association with The Split Gallery
for Inverted Corneum

It had been a long week.

One thing after another, an overflow of adjacent events, mostly social, excess timestamps in the memory bank. Battery low, my body slumps into bed. I've spread myself too thin. Playing characters of occasion, losing myself each time, splitting into layers with nothing underneath, no centre.

It's not long before the flu hits, the mother of all flus, birthed from exhaustion, overreach. It hits hard and fast.

Luckily, care and attention surround my body, the family home offers everything, all the support I could need; fresh linens, a medical supply, a constant stream of bone broths and freezer cooled or steaming cloths.

Despite the home comforts, the illness is pervasive, totalising, but at least it accompanies an enforced solitude, a get out of anything-but-email free card.

Alone at last.

A yet to flower plant sits on the window sill.

Microscopic, undetectable traces, insubstantial happenings, soft - almost gentle - couplings, pairings of mute forms - melding in mutual appreciation. Molecules react in the skin. Into the skin.

Bolt upright. Everything sweating, unbearably clammy, a viscous glaze covering the entire body, soaking into the sheets.

Bolt upright. Everything sweating, sopping wet, clothes are sticking to the body. Hardening, encasing the limbs.

Bolt upright. Everything sweating, awake this time for sure, the eyes can barely open, half glued with mucus, through squinted light they can detect a presence in the room. Frozen, body rigid, stiff with terror. Then, over in a corner, there's a shift in weight, and a small cough.

“How's your fever doing honey?”

The body decompresses, muscles release, and an almost disembodied voice tells mum it's not doing so great, and that it might need some more sleep. She agrees, then at some point she leaves. A steaming Lemsip is placed on the bedside table, hot for a while, and then it's cold.

The plant on the sill has tightly closed green buds.

Time comes in slides, staccato, smooth transitions of passing seconds happen as if in stop motion. Random intervals of fading light, then there's no more light. The eyes won't open. The voice tries to call out, but the lips won't open. The throat feels thick. The hand moves to try and pry open the eyelids, but it's like trying to open a love letter with an oven glove, the fingers just won't part, they seem as one singular blunt object.

All at once, a searing, shocking, unimaginable pain. A deep, burning ache in every cell of the body, like a supernatural superglue being pulled at force from every millimetre of skin, every pore, hair, and nail stretched in every direction, all at once.

Then only in. And then only out. Just breathing. In and then out.

Then the elastic slingshot of pain, the outward gut punch. This escalates in intensity, like severe contractions, cramps, the body, a suffocating dark womb for the mind, pummelled and pushed into this unknown birth canal. Squeezing, contracting, and then; a brutal, final, elongated spasm, a sudden cacophony of a thousand ripping ligaments, of cracking and reforming bones, of organs sloshing and slapping one another, entrails swinging and lassoing loose muscle.

Breath out and then. Out.

Eyes can swivel again, squinted light bends on wet lenses. Pumping red shadows, the deep-blue static-lighting of deoxygenated blood runs across a newly crimson screen of the world.

The pain is dull now, squashy, a soft compression of every part of the outside touching every other part, fingertip touching its own fingertip, forehead to crown, an intimate contortion of self embrace.

A bloodcurdling, skin-shrivelling, ear-bleeding scream. Mum stands in the doorway, mouth agape, watching the bulging, beating mass of inverted body splayed across the room.

A whole new phenotype, an extension of DNA through viral infection. A new morphology, a new network, a new gestalt.

It's calming in here, out here, just here. All sense of place has evaporated, devolved into an extended sense of being.

Once there was a value in embodiment, a certainty in a cohesive formalised body, this jarred with what was an otherwise fractured sense of self. Disembowelment offers a multiplicity.

Less distinctions, gasses exchange freely, blood self-oxygenates in spurting mists, supplying a vast network of decentralised capillaries.

Small pink petals poke through half closed buds.

Malignant, virulent and destructive. The infection shifted, tendrils of uncertainty wrapped themselves against inert matter and spread forth into new unexplored territory.

What followed was a moment in which all things, all things lifted and became contiguous, together, rippling in a gnostic harmony. Bone and wood, skin and linen, each distinction became mute. Pulses subsided into waves, vibrations on faraday lines, the stitches that hold together all matter and all that doesn't matter.

And once everything is one and one is everything else, words become obsolete.

A strong sweet smell fills the space, swirling around the masticated body.

The flowers on the sill are in bloom, crimson and pink hyacinths.