

## Fog Image

*Feeling is found in substance; there is but than desire and its satiation; a death is only a fact. Is it need that is obstacle to happiness? An answer.*

Olivie was alone, kept no company by conscience. Unclothed, the countable lines of her ribs and the beating of her heart could be made out. She had made no effort to feed herself in at least two days, having left it to be handled as seen fit by the transients. There were those who found their fun in food but she did not understand their desire; she had access to far more interesting pleasures. She was limp and held semivertical only by virtue of a pair of cushions propping her up. Her legs curled in unevenly, contorted in a shape against the grain of bone.

She lay on an L-shaped furniture rising in solitude from the unmarked floor. It was of a color unattractive of attention, beige or grey or offwhite, for all purposes without hue. There were four sheer walls; two, opaque and fluorescent white; two, those facing east and west, were made of a glass tempered to withstand strength beyond man. The rising sun created a sheen on the western bound where its rays landed. She stared at the point where the sun sat, gilded and burning. She saw a bright, drop-sized point of light that was pure perception and lost herself in it.

In her reverie, she thought she heard it – the golden sound – the slight hum accompanying the one-becoming of skin and chemical. It beckoned, and saliva unbidden rose in response to the call. Where that sound went, satiation and what she knew to be meaning followed.

She could feel moments pass, grey grains of existence ticking by marked but by breath. Nothing changed; nothing moved; nothing felt. The warmth, the feeling of grass, the sound of her name, the deep resonance of nerves – she felt none of these, and so knew the hedonia could not have touched her.

A drop of saliva fell from her hanging mouth. It was caught midair by a silently floating transient, did not touch fabric.

Two possibilities lay unexamined and unconsidered: the hearing of the sound might have been a phantom echo of some last time, or maybe it had not been long enough since the last time she had taken.

She started, drew deep the air she had forgotten to pull and recognized a sensation she knew to be pain coursing through her eyes. She had no sense of how long she might have stared at the white orb. Her eyelids closed slowly, shuttering a gaze taking in an entirety of nothing.

Locked in mind, she went through the questions, the ritual: she had last taken, when? She did not know. Had she even signaled, touched her arm? – yes. She derailed, nodding off for some indetermined and stretched quantity of time.

Her head was shifted to a more comfortable position by a transient without her notice.

She drifted back into consciousness. The last thing she could remember outside of this space and her mind was the bizarre event of Isaac's death. She had no understanding of why Wald had not let it be dealt with on its own, by the transients, why he had put the dead thing in the ground himself.

She remembered the look she had shared with the others when he had asked them to accompany him outside, to help carry the body, to watch as he worked. She had wondered, had seen all others wondering: what could he want beyond the release and joy of taking? Isaac was dead. What difference whether he lay in the ground or was whisked away? Wald had been insistent though, and at end none of them really cared whether they drowned in that golden sound inside or out. They had conceded and joined him in the wind and rays for his 'funeral.' He had not been by and she had seen no other since. How long ago had that been?

She had trouble keeping track of any passage of time more fine-grained than the cycle of the moon. Its wax turned wane slowly enough to accommodate her frequent lapses in memory and consciousness. She was drawn to it as a moth might be, wanting to reach it in a way superphysical. She had last seen Wald one, two ago? She felt it had not been three.

One of her eyes drew open as she rejoined herself, came to conclusion: it must not have been enough time since last she took. Those limits or their limits must have been reached. She did not know whether she had intention – or intention yet – to cross that line, to take too much hedonia, to leave, to die.

Her lips moved grossly, spoke words to no one:

let me see it, the sunset.

A pressure was exerted on a small area of her chest. A single small bead of blood formed there on her right breast before being lifted from the surface of her skin. She lay in a silence unknown to thought or observation.

When the sun set, a transient made move. The shades drew down, the cushions were moved, and she was righted, uncurled from where she lay. A thin layer was drawn across the lower portion of her unmoving body.

(space)

Olivie dreamed paradisal. She walked in a clearing surrounded by vast stalks radiating upwards. It was a perfect place, a platonic ideal of the untouched and unobserved. She felt alive as if in photograph, perceiving only the pleasant fraction of all sensation.

The earth was grass, unmarred by rock or aberration. Though she walked upon it, her feet did not come to touch it, could feel no part of it. She heard the sounds of a small stream running nearby and of crisp and unfiltered chirps.

A non-sound condensed into a dark and loping being. She felt a panic and began to flee from this something she knew was everywhere. A soreness and a deep

tiredness rolled over her, and she found herself unable to go on.

The instant she slowed, she felt four fangs dip into the soft fabric of her being, clamping shut with an ease and a confidence. She drew a single ragged breath and in that time two clawed or bladed things dug into her torso. Still perceiving, she felt herself being torn apart. At once distanced from herself and so close to the goings of the surround, she heard in brilliance the shifting of the air. The dream merged into and then was consumed by reality.

(space)

She sat upright quickly, felt that familiar and ever odd ebb accompanying the fading of dreams. The shades were pulled open. The sun was a brilliant asterix of yellow light in her single opened eye.

She was unsure of both the time and when she had last left her space. She stretched her legs, activating muscles ill used and infrequently controlled. Her body tensed and flexed against and toward in a way not alien but unfamiliar. Unless she expressed a desire to the contrary, the transients would knead and keep shaped her body to stave off the essentially predictable atrophy.

Without thought to why, she stood up. She felt an inclination to wander, though still and always there was nothing to be done here or elsewhere. It might take her mind off that ever swelling desire, need, to take it again, to bask in hedonia.

walk to wait – it will make the moment better.

She barely heard her own thoughts and words, having moved off and on to the task of dressing. Her legs swung down from their elevation and set on the cold floor. She walked to a point on the north wall bearing no visible markings, reaching a hand out to touch it at shoulder-level. A panel flush to the wall became visible and slid to the side, revealing three drawers of clothing. She picked from each at random, without hesitation or examination.

There were many articles, each differing slightly in color or cut. Shades of gray and white, they clothed only needfully, anonymous and sterile. These colors had remained constant throughout her life, steady independent of change in body or mind. The fabric was soft and durable, and would stretch with her body in the unlikely event of activity. Whenever one ceased to achieve precise fit or showed signs of wear it would be replaced, a process Olivie was unaware of.

She turned towards a door, the single exit in the room. It inset silently and slid aside as she approached, creating no obstruction to her path. She paused as she stepped through, turning her eyes over the unmarked and undifferentiable room. She did not know why she turned; there was no thought in her head that could be identified as cause for this.

She had lived the entirety of her life in this place but it evoked no nostalgia or comfort; not a single feeling was attached to it. She stepped outside and began her purposeless wander.

(space)

Olivie exited the walls onto a silent avenue. Wind moved through plantlife and around structures. Small creatures flitted or wandered across the unpeopled expanse. Transients curved quietly around, ubiquitous, oblong, and cylindrical, jaunting with precision and without hurry towards destinations long unknown to animate thought. She was unaccustomed to the quiet ambient noise. She could see no one else about.

Feet joined mind in unbound wandering. She did not know where she went and would not have been able to retrace her steps back if pressed. She crossed to the other side of the walk, watching the world with barebone interest. Nothing she saw would or could have effect upon her. The surroundings offered nothing to her beyond the opportunity for movement and observation.

She saw two categories of thing: the constructed and the placed. Structures of steel or glass or mirrorlike stone rose and fell, facades projecting shadows and aesthetics upon the unperceiving world. Some gigantic, vast and hollow; others waif-like and spindly, no larger than structurally necessary. Baroque, fractal, curving, brutal; no two were alike. There existed no conformity beyond an obviousness that their creation was by hands and minds inhuman and convoluted.

Many of the structures were opaque and unyielding to the eye. She saw transients enter and exit a few of these cloaking structures and without curiosity understood their purpose to be concealment. Many others were translucent or porous and ignored by the transients, left in lonely isolation. She could discern no purpose for their existence but did find them pleasing, their anomalous and misshapen forms a contrast to the sky and earth.

Arrays of flora and fauna were placed about, often of equal enormity. They curved in and out of those permanent structures seamlessly, interacting with and growing upon them. Trees redbarked and titanic rose into the sky, wrapped in dense vines reaching to the same end. Blotting the sun unevenly, they created freckles and pockmarking shadows. Blooming colors abounded, chaotic in their placement, splotching the otherwise gray backdrop. There was no rain, had been none she remembered seeing, but some of the plants bore dew on their leaves, dripping quietly in the ambient. The green life was thriving, growing rapaciously without crossing into the untended.

She recognized nothing she saw, even in the area within sight of where she had emerged. Despite this, she had no interest and felt no curiosity as she walked. There was; that was; no more. Her unconsidering will took her on a path looping and directionless. Little more than the particulars of the scenery changed as she progressed: the ambient hum, the variety of steel and lush green – all remained.

At one time, the movement of a giant shadow drew her eyes. It was long and cast from something high up and far away. She made out four spidered and thin legs abutting a hulking body and a flicking tail. She traced the shadow to its source and saw a lithe creature, a cat, climbing a long structure the form of a

quarter arch rising from the ground to a height several times the length of her body.

She paused to watch its movement. It stopped at the edge of the arch and descended onto chest and paws, its shadow merging with that of the arch. It paused there, head turned in her direction, seeming almost to be staring through her. After a moment, it jumped off soundlessly, disappearing behind another carved and vaulting structure.

She had seen such shapes only rarely but had heard others tell of seeing packs of such shadows from a window or distanced ledge. Each telling had become single and identical in her memory, conveying the same two facts: there were many and then there were not; they were thinned by the transients, their unbreathing forms evidence of deed. Her gaze involved no element of fear or apprehension.

She continued, now directed towards the sun, having decided to pause when she found herself under the thing itself. Only then, having waited a time certain to be long enough, would she take, appease the growing unease inside her. The golden sound rang in her ears, a taunting hallucination.

When it was directly above her she stopped. She closed her eyes and turned her head upwards, spinning, basking in the comforting warmth and kaleidoscopic colors projected upon her eyelids. She drew breath and lowered her head, unknowing of the direction from which she had come or that she faced.

When Olivie opened her eyes she saw a place different than before she had closed them. She was in a clearing covered in grass, many lengths wide. In the center sat a rock from which a single straight spike protruded. She slowly made her way to it.

As she moved closer she was able to make out more detail in its structure. It was deep jet black and unlike those she had passed, neither regular nor regularly irregular. It rose from the ground to her chest and was about twice her height in diameter, circular but far from perfectly round. The sides of the stone were rough and appeared unaltered while the top was exceptionally smooth.

When she looked down upon it she saw only her own blank expression dimly reflected back. She rested a hand on the stone and began to walk around it, fingers tracing a narrow groove running round the circumference of the thing. Unlike the rock itself, the groove was perfectly circular. She felt at even intervals etchings perpendicular to the groove she followed. The spike in the center cast a shadow which fell precisely onto the edge her fingers traced.

She had walked about a third of the rock when the sound of a voice startled her.

this is mine. there was help smoothing the top, but I made it. it is a sundial. it will be midday, soon.

She had understood she was alone; the sound of a voice was unexpected and foreign. It took more than a moment for her to realize it was Wald's voice.

She made her way round to its source. He was seated, leaning against the rock, legs splayed out ahead. His head drooped downward; he must have smelt her scent or heard the sound of her footsteps. He was changed from last she had seen him; his shade-dark skin was less greyly sick and the tautness accompanying emaciation was receding.

She lay down near him and closed her eyes to face the sun. She found its warmth and the ricochet of light it created in her eyes benignly pleasing.

where did you go? why haven't I seen you? the others haven't seen you either.

what did I have to get from any of your eyes? there is nothing for me with others like that or like you.

There was a silence. She did not have response, did not understand him or what had changed to make him avoid her. The thought drifted out of her mind, was overtaken by the achievement of her goal and the need to take.

would you join me? its been enough time, more than enough time.

He shook his head. She understood him to mean it had not been long enough for him and shrugged, touched her arm. She closed her eyes and let her body fall back to the ground, waiting for the hedonia to shroud her. Anticipation rose, eclipsing all other sensation. It had been long enough, and longer than usual. Saliva began to accrete uselessly within her mouth. This was desire, pure pointless and sonic, a source of pain. The feeling became agony unbearable.

She felt the sea change take her body. That place she had touched turned a different shade. Her eyes lolled back and she saw nothing. There was only an it she could not touch. An equilibrium of desire and satisfaction rode through her. She felt no distinction between her insides and out. Her existence was simultaneous: she was within herself and absolutely no self.

stay here; I wouldn't be alone. I'll keep the transients from taking you back to where you have always laid.

She did not hear him, would not care.

(space)

did you see it?

Wald shook her awake. He sat still, his back against the sundial. She had been catatonic laid out on the grass but rose at the sound to look around.

it must be untagged. I haven't seen any out of doors in awhile.

a cat? I've seen one, maybe more. we watched each other for awhile before I found this and you.

It could have been the same one she had seen; there could not be many around. She did not know the number it took for the transients to intervene but she knew it was few.

it had something, something it caught. the eyes – it looked... fed. it knows more than I or you do.

have you been letting yourself be fed again? it looks so.

It did: he looked full, the pulse no longer visible on his temples. Last she had seen, his cheeks had been drawn in under his sockets and his hands had taken on cracks. His blue eyes had looked unnatural and huge in the hollow of his face and his sternum had looked a carapace of something eight-legged. Isaac had looked worse.

yes, but it makes me uneasy. it didn't turn out right for Isaac, our rebellion. what was it for? who was it against? who heard us, felt anything from it? there is not even echo of it. we thought it was a strength but it was only rejection. what victory was there, what control did we have? he didn't seek or want it. it wasn't any choice. it was an ignorance.

She looked about the field. Beyond the rock, the nearest structure was far, massive and made small by perception. The feeling of the place was isolation.

what will you do?

She looked at him, puzzled by the question. She shrugged, flicked eyes to arm and back to his.

it's been long enough, I think. soon I'll take.

He nodded.

before you do, I would ask something from you.

She had no response.

after Isaac's death? you remember? I asked you and others to join me outside. I put him in the ground and buried him, and there was at least witness to it.

She remembered it through golden fog. It had taken Wald hours to dig the plot and she had been unable to wait. Hedonia had beckoned wordlessly and they had taken it. Sprawled out among the others, she had perceived the words Wald spoke but had had no understanding of them. The heavy sound of Isaac's body entering the dirt had woken them. They had left Wald alone in his work moving the displaced earth. Even through that fog, she remembered his eyes as they left, worn and set deep into his face, brow drawn and mouth sealed wordless.

would you join me in taking this time? it's been long enough.

He shook his head.

I'd have you wait and help me. none cared when Isaac died. I choose to follow him but I would have someone left after know it, understand and see some meaning. I have someone here now – you – and nothing to wait for. you have nothing to do, you say, or nothing that can't wait. I won't ask you to put me

into the ground. you might say you'd do it, but you would turn it to a lie after I'd left. so I ask this: watch me die. as you. before you take it.

She did not like the idea. She had seen others go before; going was slow.

why? what difference is it?

feeling is not meaning. I would make something mean. there is nothing else for me.

His eyes begged. Her desire to take was manageable now but she knew the hunger would rise to fever before he was gone. She did not know if she could bear it but she did not have anything in her to say no. She shrugged, nodded. His shoulders dropped, his face let loose speaking thanks.

now?

He took the hint and touched his arm. He brought himself to his feet and looked at the surface of the rock.

noon again, if you would remember.

Shortly, a fist-sized transient made approach. Again seated, he turned towards it and spoke:

I want too much.

He touched his arm again. Olivie watched, vacant and salivating. Hovering soundless, the transient let the dose fall from its center onto his arm. A sphere the size and color of a small yolk, the hedonia melded into his arm on contact, staining it slightly. On the instant, Wald's pupils turned up and his lids fell almost shut. Olivie quickly turned her head away, unable to watch another's fulfillment. Seeing the completeness of his satiation drew up within her unfamiliar feelings of anger and jealousy. She had never withheld like this.

Back against the sundial, he slumped down to the ground. He turned onto his side to face Olivie, extending an arm to keep from falling onto his chest. He locked his eyes to hers.

Time elapsed, a fact she knew only by checking the movement of the shadow-hand of the sundial. Wald's eyes watched her, heavy lidded. She sat, knowing of nothing to do.

At some point she began to twitch and fidget, having become uneasy with want. She knew he was unable to speak, unable even to form thoughts of words. She watched as his breathing slowed over the hours; at start it had matched hers, but by sunset his chest rose only once in the time she took four or five.

Some time after night fell she began to pace, her desire at a pitch unbearable. She looked down at him; his eyes followed her, nearly closed now.

She was making circles around the rock when the dawn rose. The need was agonizing. She felt stretched so thin as to dissipate, as if she existed at every



point she could see. Wald's eyes opened only occasionally now.

She could not bear it. She stopped at Wald's unmoving form. She chose to break her word; he looked incapable of notice and in her desire she chose to forget it mattered to him. She sat at his back so as to hide from him in the event he was still conscious and touched her arm. In minutes she was slumped against the rock, staring greyly at Wald's form. She faded into a glowing sleep.

Somehow he managed to turn himself, making a sound which woke her. She saw his closed eyes and breathed deeply in relief. It could not matter if he saw she had turned herself liar but still, she had want for him to remain ignorant. A stalactite of saliva hung from her mouth.

The day turned, darkening. The two unmoving figures cast narrow shadows across the green.

Olivie opened her eyes and started – his eyes were open. His breathing had reached standstill, though she did not notice. She felt as fact that he had perceived the heart of her deception. A finger on one of his hands twitched. His eyes cast the same look she had seen when they had left him to bury Isaac alone.

She could not remain in sight of him. She took her body to the other side of the stone, desirous to forget her deception and betrayal. Within the surging heart of the fog, she fell back asleep.

The transients bore his body away before hers.

(space)

Olivie dreamed she ran. In the image she saw herself in both first person and third.

She was not upright; her limbs hit one after another, four to the ground. She was agile and encased in a coat shining black. She chased something she did not know. Her breath was sharp, her lungs were taken to limit. Above these sensations, she *hungered*.

What she sought was within reach. An instant elapsed and teeth – hers – sunk into a body warm. Her front two limbs lunged forward and tore, joining jaw in the thing. She felt a rapturous and primal joy, the novel feeling of accomplishment. She ate while the thing still shuddered its breath.

Before Olivie achieved satiation she woke, sat bolt upright, disoriented. She was in the room. The sun shone through the window.

Uncomfortably she stood up. She wanted, she hungered. That dream... she had felt more within that dream than she knew how to in waking. She paced about, trying to think of how she might recreate that experience.

She stopped moving. In resonant epiphany, Olivie felt there could be no way to create or in waking know such feeling. Slowly, she sat down where she had

awoken and touched her arm. She began to wait for that golden sound, hoping to sleep and dream.