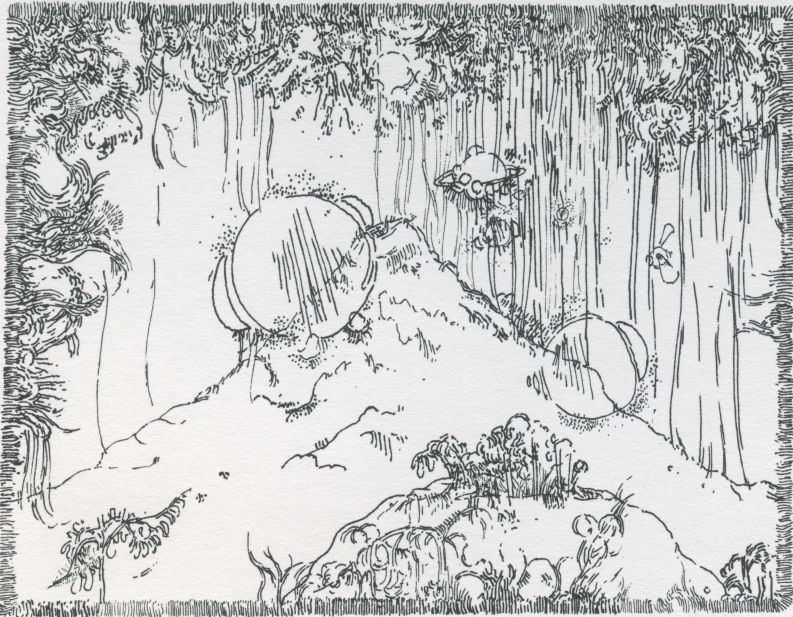


I sat up from a dream, startled. I had dreamt about a boy I had pushed into a volcanic canyon. My lips taut, my eyes widened, I searched the darkness of the room for the escaping glitter of mischief originating from my subconscious. The books in the library had taught me of the legendary Sandman, but I was wise enough to know the sparkling thoughts were my own doing. I was frightened by the dream. I could still feel the loss of the negated boy at the gentle push of my fingertips like a numb limb refusing to return from phantomhood. My regret tingled in this place, for a faint moment. And then I forgot everything.





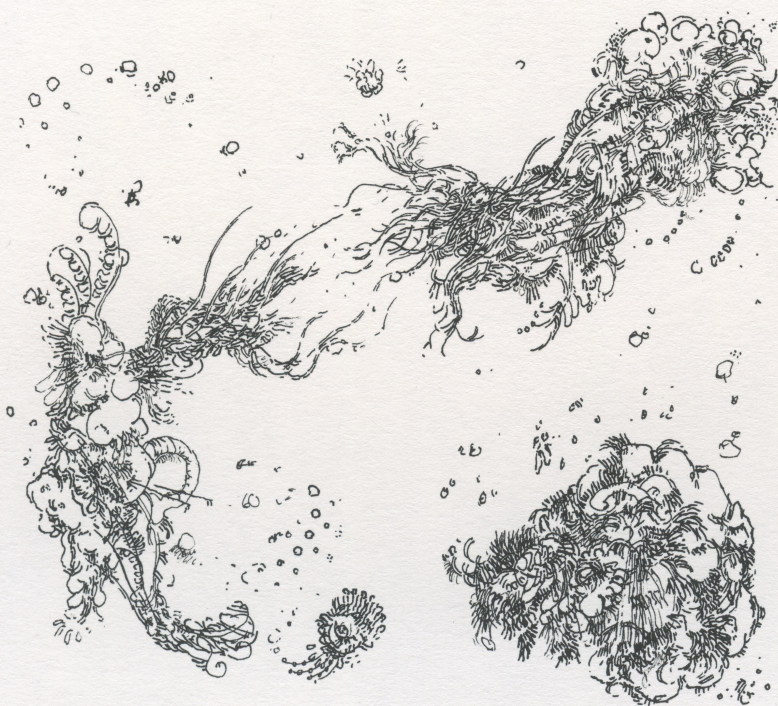
Then, voluminous skirts could be heard rustling through one doorway to the next as small talk resumed over linked arms, uninterrupted but reduced to murmuring anticipations of the mode of merriment to come. Thus the guests would migrate between perches, attuned as they were to the seasons of social conduct. Biological concerns were not neglected in these high-level proceedings: indeed, the minimal exercise required of the relocating dinner guests was timed to coincide advantageously with specific bowel movements, reshuffling the arsenal of delicacies daintily fermenting within them to accommodate subsequent helpings.

These rooms, so intimate, so manifold, enshrouded the whole evening with ever more mystery, like a parcel with extra layers of wrapping. I envisaged the chiffon procession and the figures of which it was composed, animating in my mind's eye the amicable countenances of these historical guests. I revelled in turning over each lord and lady with the warmth of visual participation with which little girls invest the eternal smiles of their dolls, all the while doing little more than sitting on the floor and stroking their shiny hair.





My hands enjoyed trailing fingers across the smooth obsidian panels as I pondered. It seemed absurd that I had just murdered Adam. For that was possibly what he was to me, the last man I might ever have seen, and it was perfectly possible that I had discarded the entire human race with a thoughtless - inelegant even - flick of an elbow. The action looked like a lightning flash of a nervous tick, a speechless blunder. In another situation I might have embarrassingly knocked over a glass of wine, or elbowed a sharp glare out of a fellow passenger on a train. Suddenly, I tossed all my



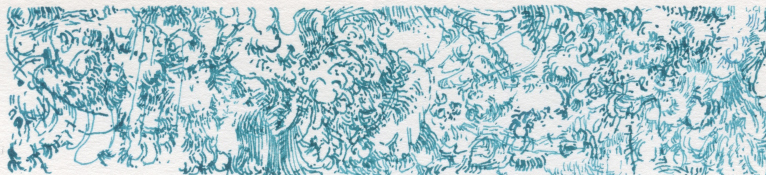
I listen to tired muscles healing themselves. Small fibres stretch towards each other with longing, joining hands and weaving out plaits and strands of my own tissue in careful coils. From where did this matter come from? It spun as mysteriously as from the heart of a spider, who with two generous legs professes arduous sonnets in an illegible, endless text. Out winds in fresh bouts the secret knowledge of my heritage, in a chemical language so ancient that it can only be done, not spoken - expressed, not named.

I revisit the made things of this world with a ghostly longing.
I hold a weighty object in my palm only ever as if I were
holding it; my experiences are borrowed. Things I never do:

1. Smack my lips at the taste of a strawberry
2. Leave fingerprints on damp clay
3. Cause a disturbance
4. Plunge into a lake with the water furling into my
hair like a spontaneous cocoon

I do not, I somehow can not, think a heavy, leaden thought
with the capacity to sink stubbornly into realisation. These
are things I have sometimes dreamt of.

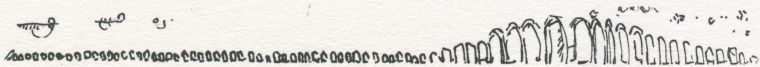
Think of me rather as the watery membrane of an eyeball,
or the vibrating insecurity located between cells under a
microscope. My limbs are hollow caskets of false wood, my
thoughts the utterances of exasperated chimneys. I am clumsy
and cumbersome as excess change in a pocket, yet flimsy and
lightweight as the motheaten flag of a conquered city.





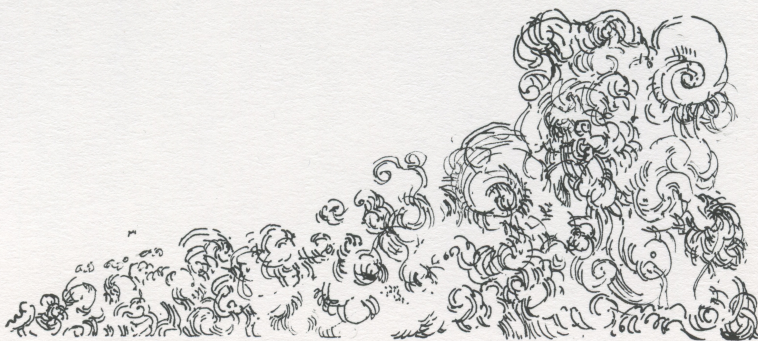
The standard way to hold one's head involved keeping the chin more or less perpendicular to the spine. This chin would sway from side to side in surveying greetings: how do you do? The neck was therefore a largely neglected piece of corporeal machinery. It was overqualified. Its owner's distinguished class was communicated by a head poised: unflinching for lack of any threat, for it was a guarded life which almost entirely removed the need for darting glances of caution. But this social refinement had funnelled the extent of head turning to such a degree that people effectively wore nothing short of an invisible head guard, not unlike those worn by poor domesticated dogs recovering from surgery. The liberation of the mind had a somewhat stiffening effect on the body, modernity would reveal. The passing fashions, involving corsets and starched undershirts, neckties and done-up buttons and laces, served only to further reduce bodily movements to a minimum and boast of a life free from strenuous activity. No doubt, this was both rather taxing and frustrating for most post-enlightenment necks.





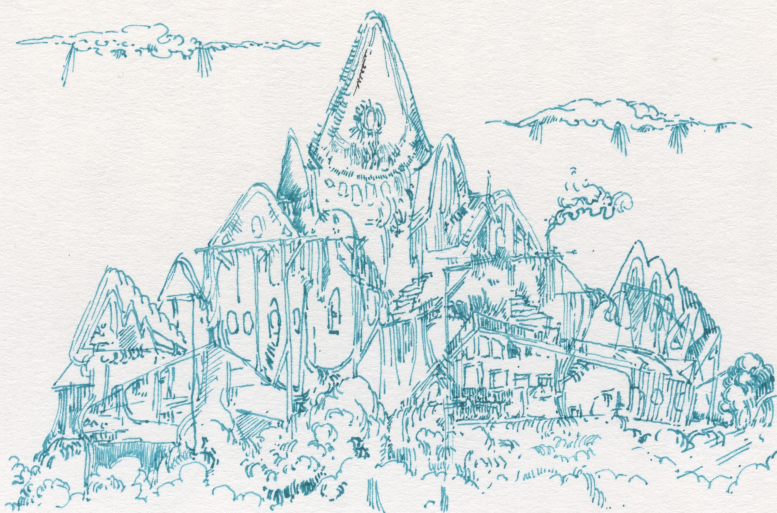
My amnesia stops where my encapsulation began. Unlike most, therefore, I can recall what was effectually my birth.

A long time ago, on a rainy afternoon, I was sitting by a window in my home. I can't tell you about the damp smell of the Before that never was, it's not even secret, it is a decoy of reality. There are no memories before the rainy afternoon, only fetal spasms: glitching pink lights from beyond the womb, squinting unborn eyes, submerged oceanic songs. But sitting in the library, by the window on a rainy afternoon, I came into being.



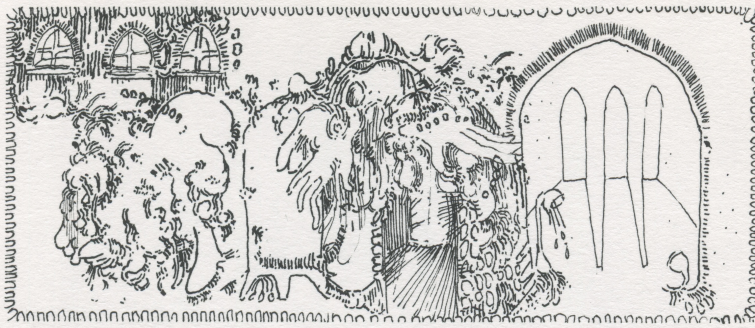
It was a comfortable room, if a bit chilly. It was a space already lived in, by a History that knew me like a strange old lady at a funeral, grabbing my cheeks and looking sadly into my youth. Uttering my name, reintroducing myself to myself

My nameless home. The thought crossed my mind that I might, standing tiptoed upon a stool with hammer, nail an arching wooden inscription overhead, christening it: The Last Cough. A testament to a house that was old, historic even, but not bound by tradition - all of its parts prepared to annihilate an entire ancestry in a careless grasshopper's spring of willful forgetfulness.



What was my position on that? I sat back in the garden chair, and thought. Perhaps I saw myself as one who could excavate, salvage, or consolidate a History that had grown weary of its own bookkeeping, having for centuries urged on a lineage that it now admitted there was no value in preserving. Indeed, the stories that painstakingly curated the present! What of them?

something in between, upon the hill: it was a face stricken with Sad Eyes, ever clinging, yet ever threatening to pour off the watery face of a drowning Pre-Raphaelite. An odd thing to couple the vulnerability of the face pressed against the little submarine's window, with the harsh gothic body that cascades from it like an animated mechanical marionette, down upon the grounds.



I was wearing the castle, and I became large. I placed my hands upon the stone walls as if to pull them through the operating sleeves of a great armoured robot that responded to my command. The toes I had a moment ago discovered on the floor were once again abandoned by my consciousness for the stout cornerstones of the historical giant that now formed the base of my momentous body. I surveyed the rolling moors dulled with incessant precipitation - the weather had accustomed their branches and shrubbery to a downcast manner that made them double up as living umbrellas. Never has a child felt so great and terrible. The