





A monster lies at the bottom of the lake. You'd never know the monster is a monster. The monster does not look like a monster. He does not look like anything anyone could fear. When you swim in the lake the monster will not attack. The monster is the only one who knows he is a monster. When the monster looks into the mirror he sees a hole. All the monster knows is how it feels to want to fill a hole.

I must look at every part of me to remain a fixed thing. When inattentive, parts of me fall off of me. So many times I've risen from daydreams to find my arm slipping off, my knee on the floor, memories drizzled away. But there's a sense of belonging in fading away, a tumbling, a release. I look across the mall & see body parts scattered across the shiny floor & I & the other shoppers just laugh. We greet each other lovingly. We drink lemonade. We drink pink champagne. I bury the lost parts of me in the desert past the foodcourt, digging deep into the sand with what's left of me.

There was an exploding bear. They were always exploding. This exploding made sleeping difficult & interaction with other bears tricky. At the Home Depot an unexploding bear would ask the exploding bear how they were doing & the exploding bear would reply *I'm exploding*. Then at the park some months later, both walking their dogs, the same unexploding bear would again see the exploding bear & again ask the exploding bear how they were doing & the exploding bear would again reply *I'm exploding*. It got so that all the unexploding bears stopped inquiring of the exploding bear & when the exploding bear walked into Home Depot the unexploding bears pretended not to see them. At night the exploding bear would return to their cave & lie in bed, feeling the constant excruciation of their explosion, a pain obliterating all else. Once the exploding bear found another exploding bear & they went to bed together & pressed the pain of their explosions together but by the morning they could not remember each other's names. Occasionally the bear would do things like go on a hike, or listen to Shostakovich, or catch salmon to take their mind off the explosion & sometimes it would work for a bit & they'd think things like *This hike is great*, or *This piano concerto is great*, or *This salmon is great*, but then they'd feel the explosion again & it would be all the more painful for having been briefly forgotten.





The attorney approaches the jury. They look up at him. *Joy*, he begins. He reaches over the wall to the jury box & puts his hands on either side of the face of an old juror. *Joy*, the lawyer says, staring into the juror's eyes. The lawyer squeezes. The wrinkles on the juror's face squirm, then quiver. The lawyer's arms tremble as he squeezes harder, harder. The old juror emits a howl, then a shriek, & then a sound like a bursting tire booms the courtroom. The juror's face has split & folded down to his shoulders. Four white balloons rise from his neck. The lawyer turns toward the judge: *We must hold ourselves as the staple holds the stapler. We must imbibe the burning self.* After that, I stop paying attention. I check my phone only to find it full of headlines. I delete them all but they come back even worse. It's gunna get weird here, in what's left of America. Prepare for more derangement. Prepare for others to want you burst. Whatever becomes justice, whatever becomes law, we must reject whatever seeks to treat a human as a list.

A man opens the newspaper & all the headlines fall out onto him & cover him with ink & words. With soap he tries to wash them off, but some headlines slip inside him & hide & multiply. Soon his blood is full of tiny headlines. They clot in his liver & they clot in his brain. They fill the tubes to his heart & lungs. At night he coughs up headlines that blacken his lips. He goes to the doctor to have the headlines removed. The doctor sucks out all his blood & replaces it with sterile water. The man goes home, feeling limber & light. He sits on his favorite chair with the TV on & sets a big bowl of ice cream on the coffee table. The man lies on his bed & folds his hands to say his prayers, but when he tries to move his lips he cannot move his lips. He licks at the inside of his mouth, but there are no lips there, not even a seam. He touches his head & finds no hair there, no ears, no mouth, no nose, no eyes. Everything he's ever known to be himself is gone. He sleeps like an angel carved out of bone.