

journal of various worries

excerpt of hybrid poetry collection
by nat raum

dear diary, the piece is not a poem. the poem is not an autobiography, at least not completely. the poem is the kind of piece that hits you like the medley in “what a catch, donnie”—familiar and still sublime, totally uncategorizable, tastes like you only sweeter. dear diary, the piece is an archive of all the ones that came before it, mirrored mosaic squares reflecting vividsky eyes and faded, grown-out hair. the poem is somewhere you’ve been before, perhaps only in a dream, but you also remember that thing kendall said about how every night, something from your day ekes its way into your subconscious, reappears in your nightmares. dear diary, it may not be science, but it’s proven in the canon of these visions, bits and bobs of what little you remember from waking hours. you are not an island, but sometimes it feels like debris, washing ashore slowly from an unspecified wreckage. dear diary, the poem is a parasite, sucking the right kind of blood. the piece is a promise of something irresistible.

dear diary, i wonder how those gnome sculptures sitting by that stream in the peaks of otter are doing today—they look so elated in every photograph i have of them (from every time we broke ahead of traffic enough to slow down *and* open the window), but i must imagine there is a dreadful monotony to being a lawn ornament in the middle of the blue ridge mountains. don't get me wrong, diary, when you finally make it through buchanan, turn down route 43, motor your way up the side of the mountain in exactly the jagged fashion in which the road has been cut, and round the corner to drive for ten minutes with an uninterrupted view of the upper goose creek valley, it's quite beautiful to behold. but i know what happens when i situate myself in just one spot for a little too long, now—the grass starts to sprout greener in bedford. the water is always warmer in the lake than the streams.

dear diary, the couple in front of the taps needs an old fashioned and a light beer but i'm knee-deep in stirring a martini, feet stationed firmly on swiss-cheese rubber mat as i twist my upper body all robotic to grab gin, pour *onetwothreefourfivesix*, bottle clatters back into the well but i have already moved on to vermouth—just a whisper, tip the bottle barely enough to splash the glass, whirl it around, throw it out—and the vibraphone on the stereo chimes above the chatter while i clink the julep strainer into my mixing glass, *glugglugglug* the gin into a frosted coupe, call out GIN MARTINI READY AT THE BAR and grab my next set of glasses, this time two low tumblers for a margarita and a negroni—on the rocks, *please*, the elderly gentleman had insisted—campari and more gin and this time sweet vermouth each suspend themselves in the air between the mouth of a speed pourer and the bottom of the mixing glass, tequila into the tank of a boston shaker then ice then seal then shake with my left hand, stir with my right, julep again then wind up wrist to crack the shaker open for the audience that slowly trickles in through the front door, unaware that each minute they glue their ass to one of these stools in front of me is another minute i can empty my mind of everything but fine dining and breathing, another minute without a racing thought besides *did i give that girl that water she asked for* or *i wonder when these people will leave*—a full night of being so connected to a wooden bartop and every sordid secret spilled across it, i forget i'm here (as in, on earth) at all.

dear diary, i used to not understand that sometimes i was the quake in the otherwise motionless night, the tremor in a set of hands famed for sturdiness. i once thought i was the eye of the hurricane and wondered why beside me, there was chaos at every angle. dear diary, sometimes when i close my eyes i remember every time i lost control of my emotions and it plays out before me as a scene where every time i open my mouth (no matter how hard i scream and scream) nothing comes out. when i wake, i can't stop talking about how it feels to be trapped in a deep, winding beach house and see the shoreline rising to meet you. the fact of the matter is, i know when i'm out of control—the nightmares are just a symptom. dear diary, i wish it hadn't taken me three whole years to process that i have bpd because really, what's the logical alternative to the way i come apart at the snap of two stubby hangnail fingers? i am not overreacting—i am just reacting. and diary, by the way, i've grown my fuse so much longer, i mean it. i just don't know when i'll explode.

dear diary, how in the world have i never written about my stomach before—at least, not like this, with acid rising up clenched esophagus, vinegar bloating through bronchioles. the truth is i drink about two dr. peppers a day, on average, because coffee and tea are the main culprits and a chronically exhausted babe needs caffeine, you see, and thank god i stopped booze years ago; i still remember waking up the morning after mezcal-tasting, stakes of the smokes sharp liquid piercing every organ, i swore it. dear diary, did i mention this is only one side of the proverbial coin—i largely shirk the spicy and caustic for the other end of the pH spectrum, milk and yogurt and cream and especially cheese, settling into sludge as my guts tingle in dismay. i once told a server i was very lactose intolerant but i didn't care; now, i care afterwards but the sentiment remains largely the same. dear diary, there has always been something calamitous in me and my taquería order seems to agree—i see it as dialectical behavioral therapy, a type of harm in service of living. don't laugh. i am getting by on the little things right now.

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dear diary, these are extremely sleepy times we live in—i ragdoll my body, pile of limbs, into a memory foam oasis and immediately my knees and ankles ask *what took you so long?* while my mass sinks deeper into relief, eyes fall heavy into half a slumber i hadn't planned, but i could be convinced to throw the match against these shuttering eyelids, to-do list be damned. there's been a change of plans: if you need me, please do not.

dear diary, my bpd comes in *fuck you* and *wait don't go* and *i didn't really mean that*. i never really mean it. i never want clichés but i swear my tongue is a serpent—it strikes like one, bruises bone like fangs and poisons to boot. dear diary, my bpd comes in *go to therapy* and *you apologize just like your mother* and *if you're planning to leave me one day, why don't you do it right now and save me the fucking trouble?* and i just want to say i resent having to fistfight the most jacked-up version of myself on a daily basis. i weld together a three-pronged weapon—bpd, trauma, and anxiety—and wield it with the aloofness of a butter knife. dear diary, i know we as a society are moving beyond the inherent ableism in the word *crazy* but now i am desperately in search of a way to explain this ache in my softest spots, this twisting of guts into knots that grow spines, prickle at even gentle touches. i want to stop time long enough to untie every capillary, slowly loosen the grip of my rhomboids on the base of my neck. i want less feelings and less body, but really not to feel with my body. dear diary, this may sound morbid, but i think about popping out my brain to occupy something else sometimes—i wonder if it beats the alternative, but then, no—it can't possibly. i want the world. i want the void. i want it all.

dear diary, i know i've written about this before, but i am truly jealous of toads and their gender roles—or lack thereof—in the mushroom kingdom. the mere existence of toad boldly asks *what if being a little guy was its own gender* and you know what? i admire that greatly. dear diary, do you ever think about a scoring system for gender that starts at zero and accumulates points, rather than shaving them off the total possible? to be clear, i don't want to gamify gender—just the opposite. i left my woman card in the atm because my balance ran out. the bank was out of man cards. dear diary, i'd be so content to sit with this nothing, live off only the land (so to speak) but much like mount everest or the grand canyon or niagara falls, people really saw something so beautiful and painted it late-stage landlord grey—splendor be damned. gender be damned, i think, i say, but really, what i mean is that i want you to stop thinking of me as a woman. i mean i want to build my gender, whatever it is, from zero, feel like i've earned it or even like it belongs to me at all. dear diary, there is no *she* in these here hills—only a carpet of white and red mushrooms.

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After Erika Gill

dear diary, there's that adage, the one about how nothing is guaranteed but death and taxes, and i'm starting to think that tasks have wormed their way into this guarantee, sort of in the same way that there are always dishes in the kitchen sink, laundry on the closet floor—or maybe those are subsets of the greater whole that is the task system, thrust upon us by big task to sell more tasks, more things to do, more reasons not to sit on the couch and turn on *the witcher 3: wild hunt* for what has to be at least the twentieth time, flick my candles-and-more bic lighter into the bowl and follow the instructions on my new orleans tourist t-shirt—*inhale the good shit, exhale the bullshit*—and there is bullshit aplenty, tasks like a hydra whose head thuds to the hardwood floor and in its place sprout back three more fucking tasks, each more elaborate than the ones that came before it and i won't even bother swinging that sword again, because i know what's coming; eventually, there will reach a critical mass, a point where there are so many tasks i don't know which direction to turn my head, can only stare at the pile of unmailed packages in my living room and feel an unending terror, and yes, *when we are all drowning these tasks will cease to matter*, but they matter now and now is hell and hell is tasks and tasks cloud the landscape before me like popups on windows xp wallpaper, only a nuisance and never a reward—never, ever a reward.

dear diary, there is nothing to soothe the pain but a photograph, a painted page, a poem—when something has cut clean through my sternum with a dull box knife, i only know how to bedazzle the edges of the wound. call it obsession or ritual, if you will, but creation is all that quells the hurt, rising to break the levee of a smoking stare like storm surge. i describe my trauma like a personal hog, covered in drugstore lipstick. dear diary, each time the hands of god plumb the depths of my chest cavity and pluck everything out of place inside of me, i literally cannot fathom a world in which i do not make art about the moment of impact, the whole event, and the aftermath. this is my practice, the closest i know to liturgy—first, wait for the thing to happen, because at this point, i've come to expect it. then, let the moment expire, and record all that is left.