



# The Opposite of Work

Poems by Hugh Behm-Steinberg/Illustrations by Mary Behm-Steinberg

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Illustrations by Mary Behm-Steinberg

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*for Mary*

*The Opposite of Work*



## Eden

Then names. Then what's delicate.  
Delicate in proportion to what? Like against  
God or a stone everything is  
delicate. Then be right here, be  
waving, be inside, see if you like it here.

Then parkinglot, there's always a parkinglot.  
No cars yet: the dividing lines resemble ribs.

Then branching, too many ways,  
and made of leaves, and not liking how  
you look wearing them,  
all the animals talk and we know what they're saying;  
then all the animals talk but they won't look at us.

Then a story, and a space within the  
story, a clearing, a way that gets fixed  
as you know, as you become known.



## Then Crownspace

So not afraid of slipping, not afraid one part is only  
loosely related. Not afraid knowing how,  
to act in what way. Stretching out your rain: from being restless  
or to rise in the manner of waves.

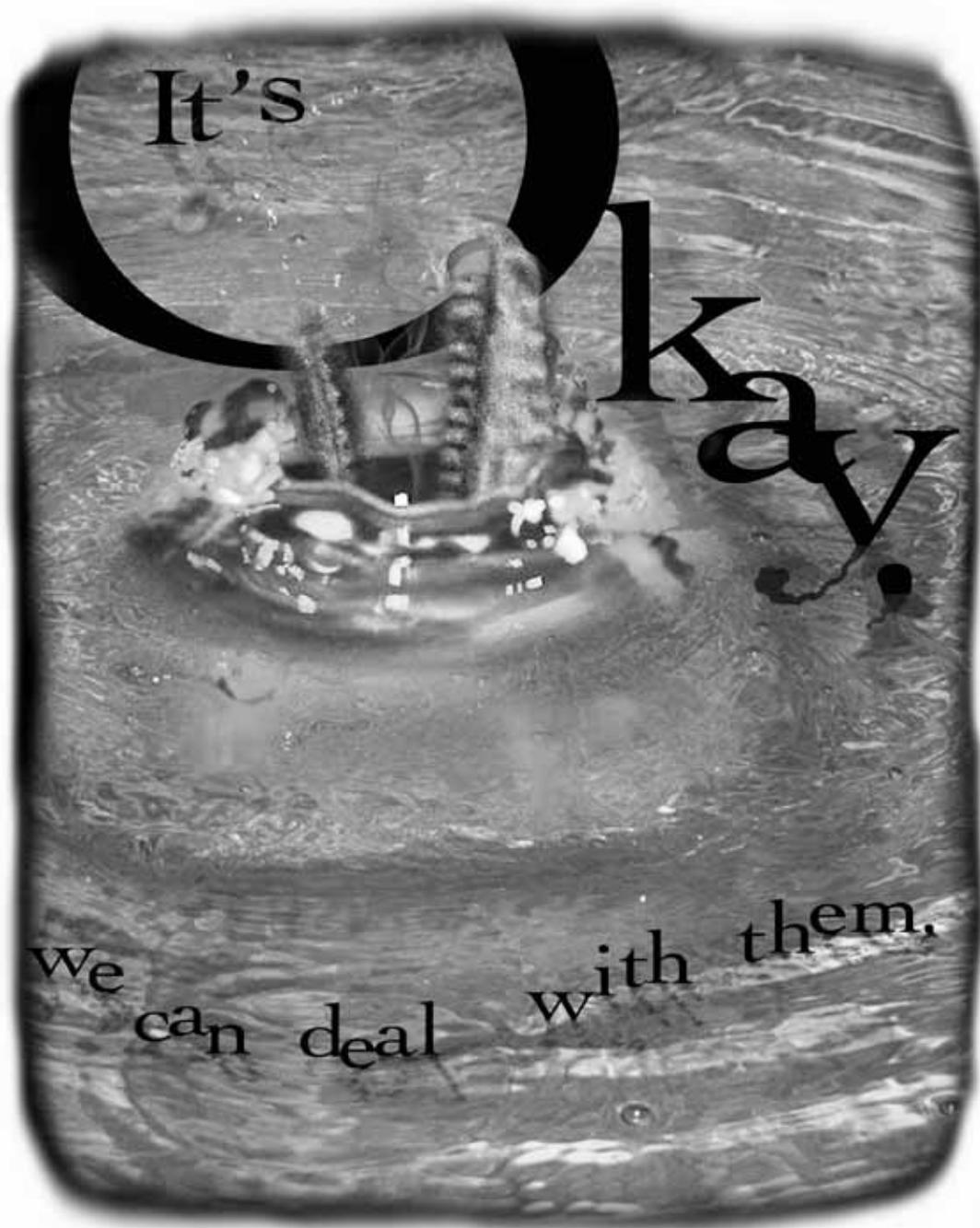
Cling together, first month of the year, shining cuckoo, brown  
creeper, little finger, little toe, becoming

a person, working temporarily for another person, in  
a lantern factory, one who notices eight old lamps in a row,  
two of which their shades are water stained, they  
hang precariously and flicker, amazing the whole structure  
hasn't burned down.

Then why not a blue storefront next to an orange storefront, my  
favorite bookstore, the paint peeling back, the place smelling of  
cat piss, always a  
good sign.

Then towards, the act of, from appearance to recitation, from  
staying to giving in, to be very precise: not roses,  
green thornbranches budding forth out of  
rosebark, black speckled leaves, compacted petals the size  
of babyfists in front of the window where I sit  
typing this while I listen to you smoking  
in your sleep.

Then wear a hat. Then wear a yellow shirt. Then unbutton  
the third button. Then say where you are going. Then say I know  
where you are going. Big wooden doll on the coffee table. Piles of books  
and documentation. Then save as much as you can.  
Then crownspace, where you keep your  
holiest of thoughts as you are  
thinking them.



Or maybe stay up late after work.      And smoke with your manager.  
Test for low blood sugar.      Talk about Argentine manufacture.  
Hats and scarves.      We'll go to bed and continue this      in our sleep.  
We'll earn fortunes      in our sleep, we'll spend      fortunes in our sleep.  
Unbutton my shirt and      we'll go to sleep, I'll be typing this  
while I listen to you smoking      in your sleep.

and how to act,      Then crownspace  
in what way, centering      and stretching out  
your rain.



## Sea Monsters

In the beginning  
there was already water      there were sea monsters      they were covered with darkness  
no one made them so      there was no up or down      there was no space for them

All possession      and no separation      from what they had  
they had no light but      they had eyes      they kept their eyes      no one made them  
come later

No later so no slope      no upswelling      no shelf  
no downwardness of dirt      no upwardness

God came and made      the earth      livable      separating  
the water from      the land  
and the sea monsters      retaliated      by inventing  
time

They took one sea monster      out of themselves and pointed      to her head and said  
this is now      and to her back said      that is then

So like time she got hungry      and like time  
she ate the rest of the sea monsters

And the sea monsters      inside her waited behind  
her eyes      and when she thought      about herself      she saw time  
as a swift sea monster

Approaching God      hungrily  
like thought



### Gridding, after some sentences by Agnes Martin

When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking on the innocence of trees,  
and then a grid came into my mind and I thought it represented innocence,  
and I was satisfied to think of migrations, of waterfowl in a v-shaped formation,  
of crossing through this process, but never myself having to leave.  
Then the angels looked down and they make us perceive each other.  
What was unknown becomes patterned.

And this is how you introduce divinity to the work,  
which trembles from the act of inventing the angelic by  
merging songbirds with people, then forcing them upward  
until all the trees crown as do people  
just as they are born, because you introduce divinity to the world.

And when I once was so stupid now I am awake  
admiring your work.



### Night and Day/Birds Again

Staying up late, wearing headphones, being poor. But not tired, you are spread out  
and you want to. Your mom says until you were named you filled up space  
but you weren't anyone and you were very hard to see. The ocean, full of fish,  
held onto you too, little swimmer. Ships moved above you slowly  
with their cargo and their crew. Divinity pervades even the slightest of acts.

Therefore such radiance, with light pollen on your upper lip and smoke in your  
purse, and the saltwater marsh, tidal pools, and you see birds again you let  
yourself see birds again and your mind lets the birds in and the music  
starts when they come.



### Angelic Principals

Dark, helpless little loosenesses: you love them because they've neither fallen nor risen, they linger and they're cool. They wear black shoes and they make black shoes cool. They quit smoking, they make quitting cool; they say rock solid and you pay up they say wiped out and you think the world, it used to be so much easier when they were around and hung out, over there.

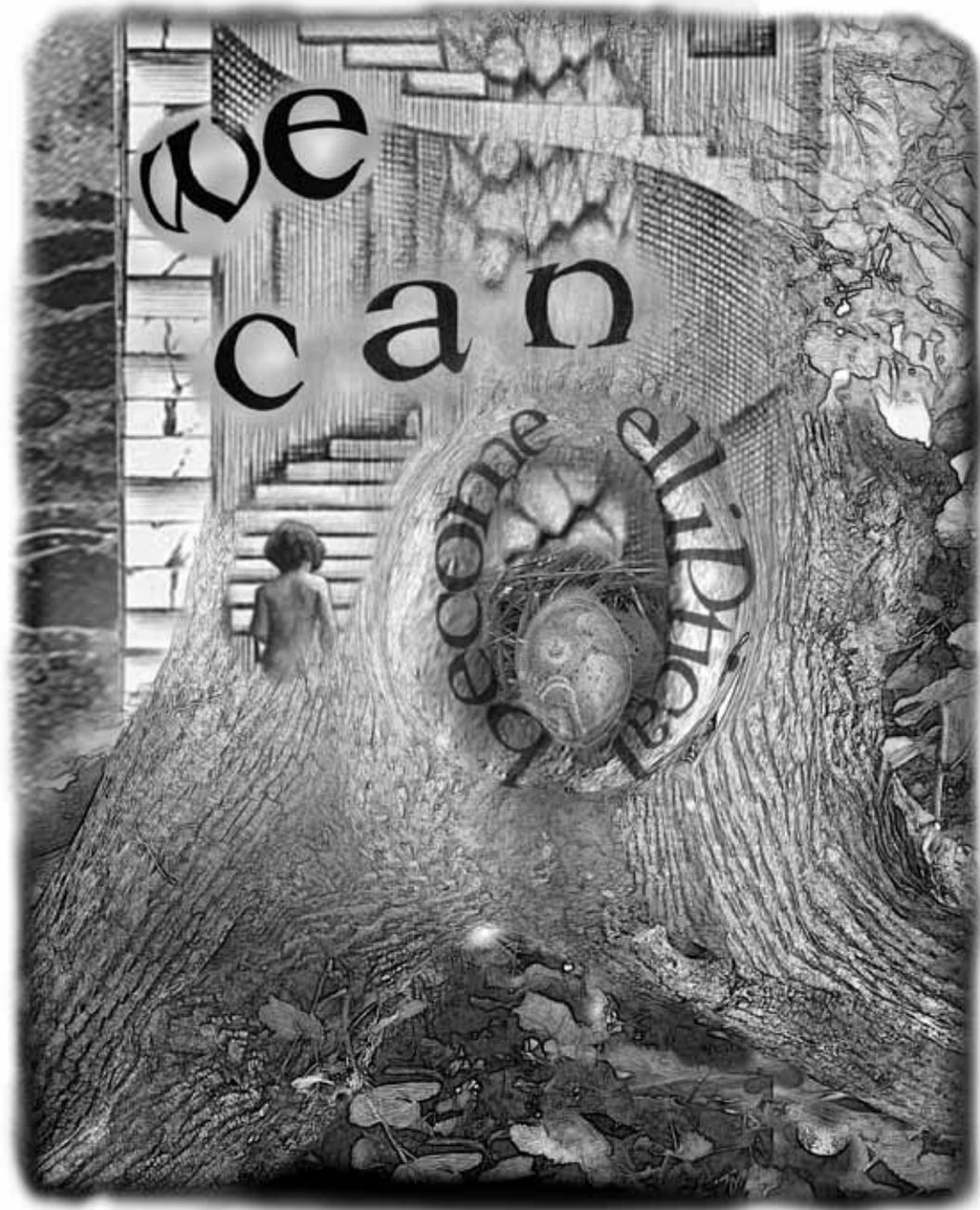
Later of course you die and you wake up running. You are in this heaven and it resembles an airport, but you lack the ability to be bored. So it is economical for God. He can put you anywhere and you'll be happy. You'll think this is where you should be:

Not dirty but happy. Not alive so not about to be dirty. Not dirty, so humble. Then falling, through the dark where it rains, happily you unto your body, your beautifully unbearable body.



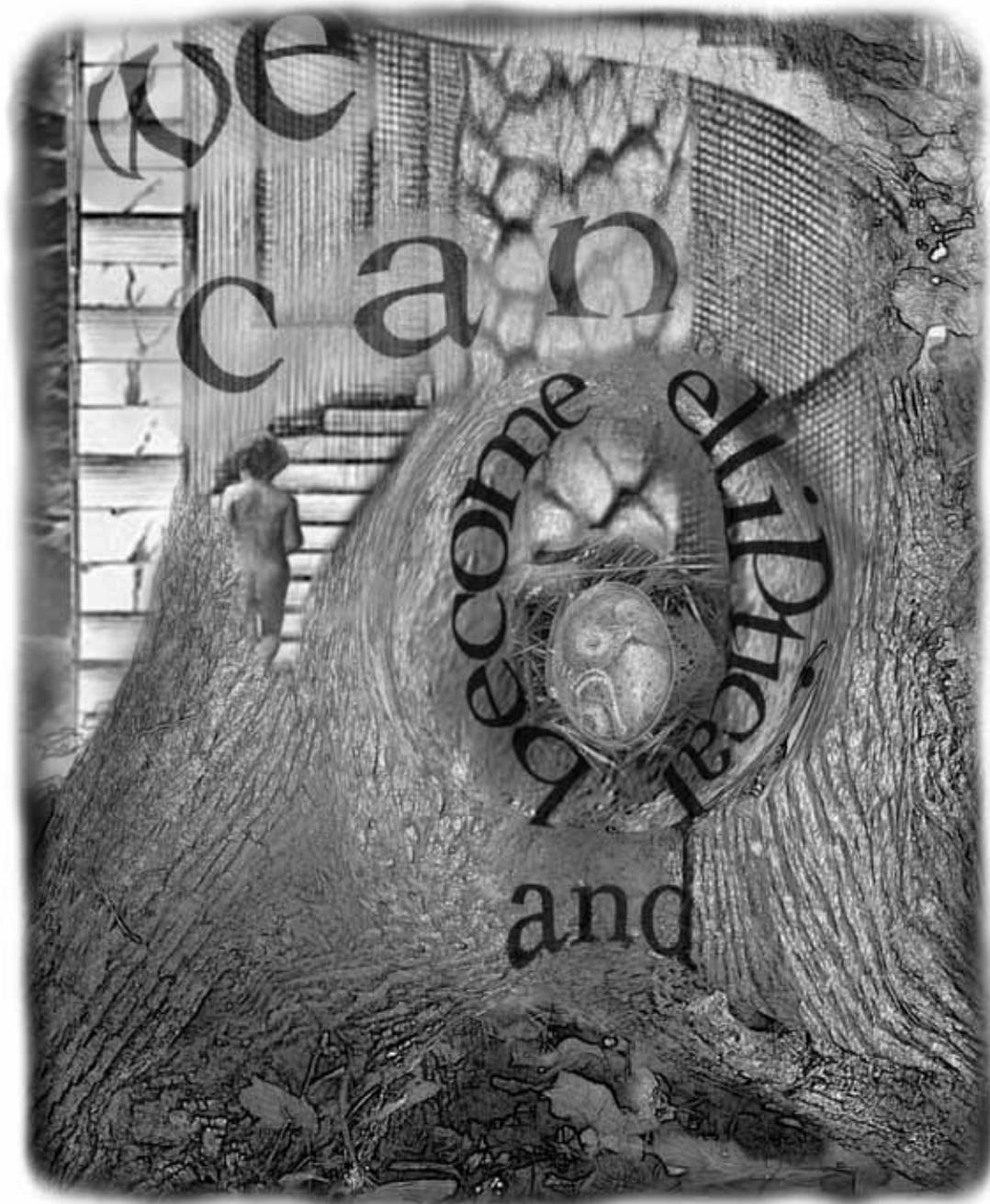
### Like the Moon

Not lavish: why won't you be  
lavish? A body you're trying out. Some shaping force  
shaping you. If you're not paid to make statements,  
make statements. Learn how to  
love the sky. I learn how to adore the face  
I see in the sky. A sun coloring in the sun. My wife says that  
is the luxury of the very rich and the  
very poor. Then it's heroic,  
the clinging sea, as if it does that  
on purpose.



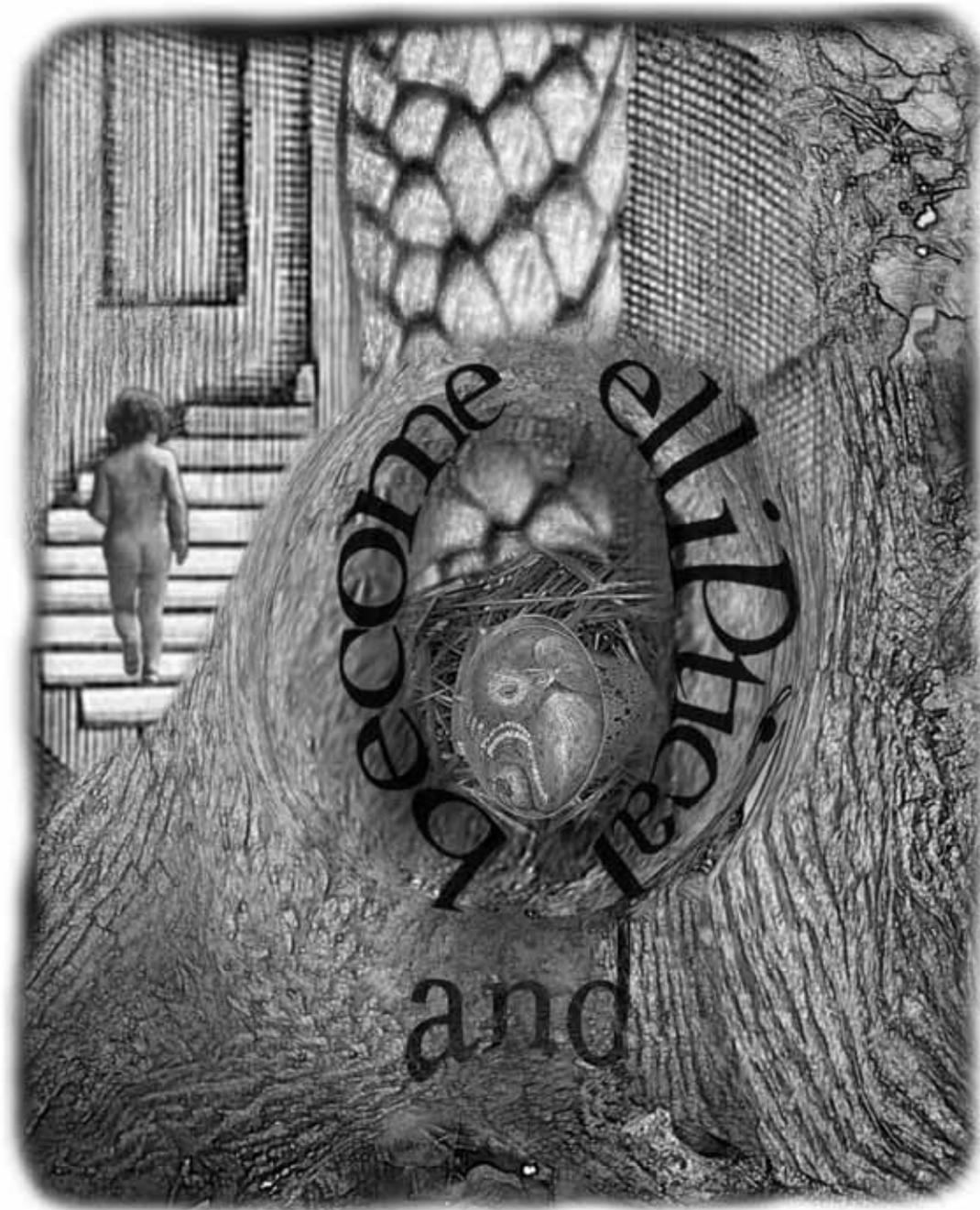
### You Were Like a Hummingbird

Even when you were a kid      you didn't need someone to  
tell you where you lived      or what your name was  
where you weren't supposed to go      or the sun has a part that traps you  
no one else was kept in place of you      so you didn't have to be afraid  
of dogs, of birds, of wild      animals, of specific birds  
of their happiness, their claims upon us      your name written down  
by your mother and      tucked in your pocket  
you didn't know how to      read yet it felt warm there  
what is right there against you      almost inside you  
your mother's voice      calling out  
for you to come in      it's late summer  
enormous trees      as you declared war  
against the trees      they're an army, they're the enemy  
you shot at them      with sticks  
you didn't know      what a hummingbird was  
you hadn't      seen one yet.



## Fathers

Not unsecret, not a black suit. Not mine, so  
mine. Like a father is a mine and you  
dig everything out of him and you  
bring what you dug up so meekly  
to him as he awakens slowly,  
pats you on the head, and  
puts everything back.

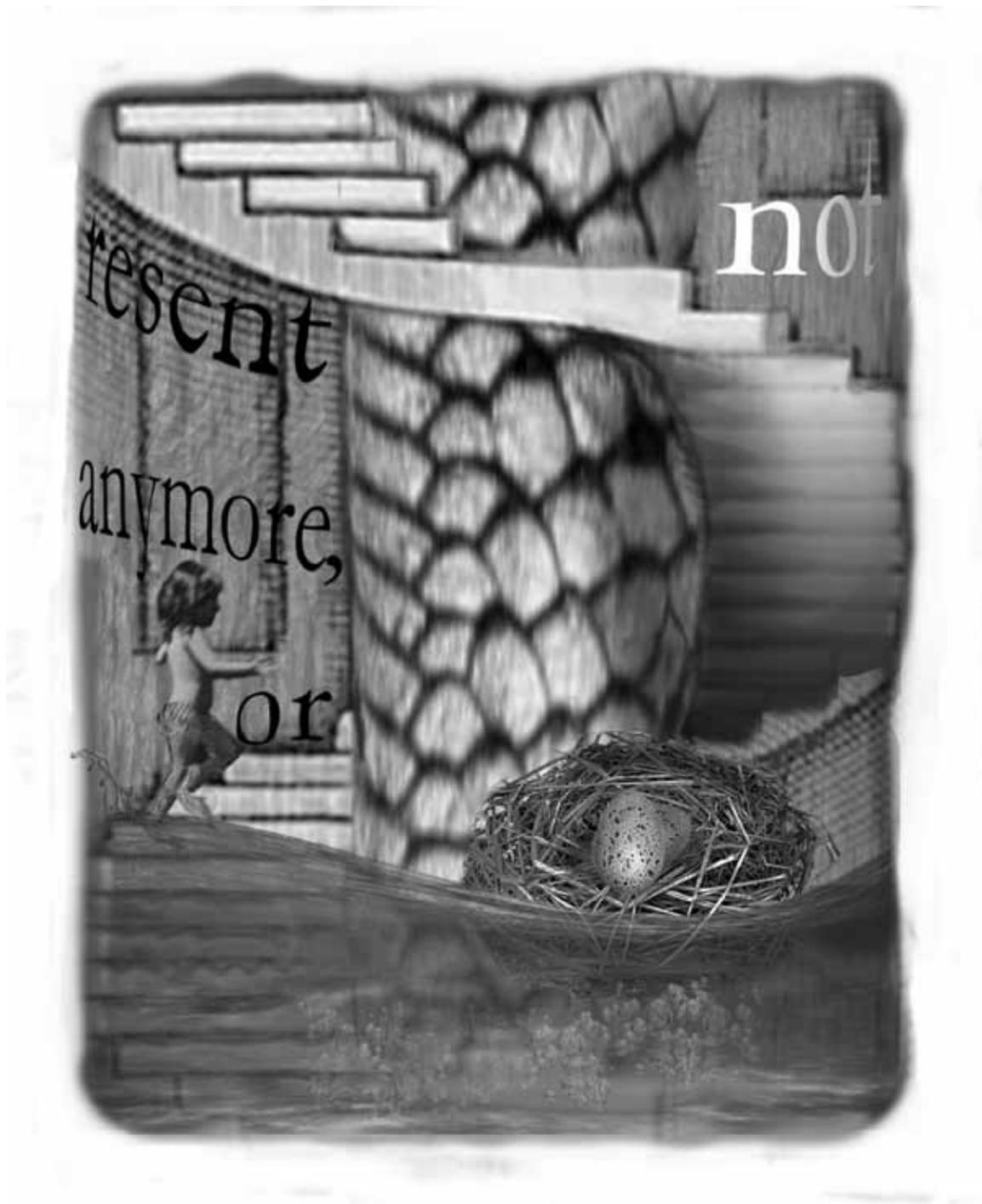


## Knowing

Rhizomous earth, allowing budding: the earth  
itself smokes and births mountains: which break down into daughters  
who don't think we're here. Who don't think of beauty: or the unlikely color coming over  
the world.

The turns that led you away from you: the daughter of friends who sings  
the night before she has surgery. She's ok, but it's  
enormous: and we are not, we hold onto our own.

I think of this and I can't bear so many possibilities  
permanent and pulling: argument and answer. Like a floor  
during an earthquake, or a blessing, the consequences of which  
are not yet known.



### Advice

It's ok to unleash, to undo, to unbreak,  
the clavicle skies carrying so much blessings  
on your shoulders. It's ok to become more like  
a shirt which leads to stitching and saying this  
shirt is like the sky. It's ok to have a garden, it's  
ok to compare chardstalks with clavicles. It's ok  
to sleep on your shoulders or to ask questions, it's  
ok to ask. It's ok to ask in your sleep it's  
ok to put your hands on my shoulders, but  
it's wrong to go to heaven  
because so many will  
be left behind.



### Adam

Finally, as a man. As a not/self or a cornet.  
As the tune, which is luxurious, as bodies are luxurious, bodies are most  
luxurious. As skill, as when you do something good and you make more good,  
as that which is already good gets better, even better than it was before.

Then possibility in the world, which is blessed.  
Compacting landscapes of living and the process among us.  
More memory, which is naming and promises that can be made again.  
So even God says it's more fun to be here. Then films, rain/  
not rain. Steam in the house, your children bathing their children,  
your wife saying, how should I describe this? There's a  
deer in your mind grazing on the illegality of such love  
which is knowledge, which is  
necessary.



## The History of Music

Or there was a term but it was never used.  
 They didn't have singers back then. They took the words out of the songs;  
 before we thought of them, you wouldn't miss them, themselves or the words.

There were these families; they were standing in front of you, they were  
 hanging out together. They said greater, they said lesser,  
 they made you a niece or they made you a son-in-law.

They said *again and again*, they said *more* and they remembered  
 the language of these songs, these wordless songs these oldest of backgrounds,  
 and they would take you with them, to be in each others' bands.

They'd say it'll be your job to be the memory for all of this, we haven't invented  
 writing yet and lateness breaks out all over the universe,  
 we haven't invented time yet either, but don't worry, don't be so nervous,

when you go out, when you dance with your newfound  
 husband who's almost as drunk as you: let him, let him tell you  
 about the even before, how there was still music before there was music,

when we were so poor we couldn't afford to even drum our fingers, but when  
 we could we shifted our voices recklessly, so of course we traveled.  
 I got a cousin who studied with the whales.

And always, always nearby, innumerable royalty, sun-worshippers  
 who demand songs, and the sound we made for them was so good, was honey,  
 and they wore particular gloves, they licked it off of their fingers, they couldn't wait  
 for us to stop so we could start  
 all over again.



Because now we have time,  
and the music, it's great it's old and you're sort of skipping along,  
you plant your foot, but watch what grows where you put it, you thought  
you had invented dancing but that was just agriculture: you have no idea  
what to do with your body which in turn has no idea what to do with you,  
which allows you to make love more easily, transposing that there with all those  
other there's, the lifting parts  
especially.



## The Opposite of Work

And how nice it is to smoke cigarettes to get stoned on really good pot,  
to drag yourself behind yourself to find new variations on the  
theme of warmth, so that when you curl up against me I feel like half a set  
of apostrophe marks around some magnificent quotation and I get to feel my body  
stop being my body.

These realnesses then, that overcome me that merge apples and  
trees with your hand drawing them,  
both are covered in skin and come to a point.  
Untold declensions then, and properly placed accent marks, the tongue that is  
also a finger pointing down,  
maybe we're texts, but maybe texts are like cotton, like anyone wearing cotton,  
or the opposite of work.

I'm getting to enjoy feeling my socks sag around my ankles  
and a mockingbird copies the sound of your  
insulin pump.



### Radish

White roots, eating silk, eating roots, eating whitenesses; the sharp taste in  
your mouth. Then describe yourself  
by roots, by perfect marble darkneses, by different sets of questions,  
like a certain kind of radish wound round what you wish, what you said concerning  
saying, how are you going to make yourself vulnerable  
when for much of your life you've been so fierce?

One day I'm going to grow an impossible beard a gentle but hardworking  
beard, a national monument flowering forth from the most marvelous and  
potent part of me; innocent, sharp and wise, my belly full of radishes,  
standing side by side with you not pretending to be flowers, to move  
your thumb until it touches your middle finger then your  
ring finger, too.



## Oh Honey

But why is it good, why is sweetness good? I mean it  
should be obvious, but it's sentimental  
to say too much about it. The lusciousness of those carbohydrates,  
they work their way into you and their work is steady; the basic form  
of the body is a furnace inside a factory.  
This worker holds the nectar on her tongue until she is  
left with honey on her tongue, which is stored in the  
hive by your house for the winter, when there is no food. Of course  
it's erotic, as a mind working is. As folding  
a leaf into quarters is; or to carry  
nectar in your mouth, on your  
tongue. Or when I open my mouth and all this  
gold comes out.



### Thirst

From the ground      God swallows      all the snow:  
his thirst      grows more      delighted: white coated  
   creatures tunnel

through this      thirst, leave      tracks upon it. So  
replacing the      God part with      the mouth part: and bracketing  
   the snow

language with      wolf tones, more      and more thirst:  
leaves      blackening beneath      the weight of snow.  
   All

kinds of      equivalent words:      against sleepy      houses, their  
   raingutters packed      with snow, footprints      and thirst,  
two bicycles      against a      retaining wall: the      mouth part becoming

the God part all      over again, the      God part      stretching out:  
Saying:      this is what happens      when you live here:  
   this is      what happens when      you talk  
   to me.



## A Talking Fox

A lesson is a talking fox as  
it overcomes its animal shyness  
to speak to you. His face is like winter,  
and his breath is like winter, the pebbled  
questions, private questions, that drift and accumulate,  
some snow to burst from. The fox says I  
thought I learned how to speak because I had so  
much I wanted to say, but now I think it was  
so that I may belong to those who will never  
have me. So eat more vegetables, get fat  
but don't get killed, it's always about  
money it's never about money,  
the hidden part of you sleeps,  
it follows a fox down  
white holes rimmed  
with snow.



## The Sun

Is red, then perhaps unfinished, or as you say  
lowdown, getting lower. There is a car. Or  
there is a house, things to name because you  
know their names, feeling nominal, sunny and nominal, taxo-  
nomic even. Or the sun is red, then birds,  
red-winged blackbirds, which inhabit what's happening.  
They're not what we talk about but they  
hang around anyway, and they explain  
all day long, until they stop being birds and  
fight the subject of this poem,  
who wants to keep the color  
red all to himself.



## Greening

There's a plan and I don't know it.  
I dance around and I don't know it. I  
pull and I don't know what I've got.

So  
I know I'm not glamorous, I haven't slipped  
through yet.

Ticking green, green bodies, green thoughts, amazingly green.  
Divine green. Heavenly green.

I am not afraid, I am  
at the table, I'm part of the conversation: I can bend spoons  
with my thoughts, I am working on my  
moves and I can bend spoons with my  
thoughts.



## Invisible

Enough heaven and going around: to like what  
you get called, then a most fine city, belonging to you  
so fine that one would be awed upon arrival, and the richness  
of the gardens, the green flowers bursting out  
of white flowers like two hands praying,  
not shut, but a city in which  
one can move, it is endless making you feel endless,  
you sleep in fire and you are not burned, and your heart,  
it is strong and full of reason and makingness,  
making the seen invisible, the obvious invisible, the great  
machine invisible, the ink invisible.  
So sticks. So small coils. So tongue.  
So flat, so shadow. So chest, so stump, so  
worldly worldliness. So handkerchief, so coins, so  
settling, so unsettling  
what is most beautiful in this world  
is there to keep you in this world, stay  
alive in this world, flourish in  
this world.



### Like a Bird

Be merry, like an invisible bird, like a bird who doesn't mind  
not being seen; perched among leaves (either you or the bird, it doesn't  
matter) you hear a song you've heard all the time and now you get  
to hear it for the very first time.

So, happy and saying yes all the time and why not hang out playing skeeball  
and move, not to New York  
but to rethink your dreams, make them do useful work.



## Heaven

I'm half asleep, I'm looking for  
where to put heaven so it's more in reach and  
easier

for me to get to. Like that book, or a box of  
dishwasher detergent. Not part of. Not young. The shoes you  
carry in your hand. Then what if it's true, and it isn't  
recreated, something so deeply personal as heaven, for those  
who know and don't really know,

I have a PO box in a historical post office, my own  
little bit of Berkeley I rent for seventy bucks a year; I walk out  
and smell the long salt pushed high from the bay.  
That weather, bringing with it pleasure, true knowledge,  
clouds and everything.

The same as how we shed our clothes when they want to know  
who gets to sleep in our bodies when we're not using them,  
what keeps our gestures anchored to what is real,  
as what is most delightful bends down and dwells  
in your shirt, your hat, your shoes.

Then I will  
walk I will walk I will walk  
all the way around all the way  
until I'm there or  
I'm through.



## Hopeful

As we are crowds here we are hopeful: gorgeous and hopeful.  
Oddly quiet and hopeful. A scene with  
water, some insects. Listening only to itself. Because that's  
what crowds do. Still, hopeful: this could reflect good

all over us. Sure: could have a resume,  
the sexiest resume on the face of the earth: could have  
the life of feeling, too, could be hopeful,  
could get better at shaking  
the maracas, imagine everyone in the crowd shaking  
their maracas with their sexiest resumes tucked into  
their vest pockets: I don't do that anymore.  
I need to do that some  
more.



## Emphases

Snow coats, snow hats, emperors of cold, with  
ice shoes, they glide heavily,  
motioning: the arrival of others. As they say towards,  
and one light arcs, and we have sex, in the dark,  
the kind that begs complete immersion: like a comet in  
space, like spring.

From stillness and fragment upon it, so many  
frogs patiently singing: you see a few, you  
see so many, they're everywhere, they're maybe constructed  
out of the air, maybe out of the  
rights you have. Maybe emphatic somehow.

Getting love out of it. Thinking rain, the limits of  
expression: squeezing  
the sound out of the call you climb all  
over me. So this is what is  
that or those.

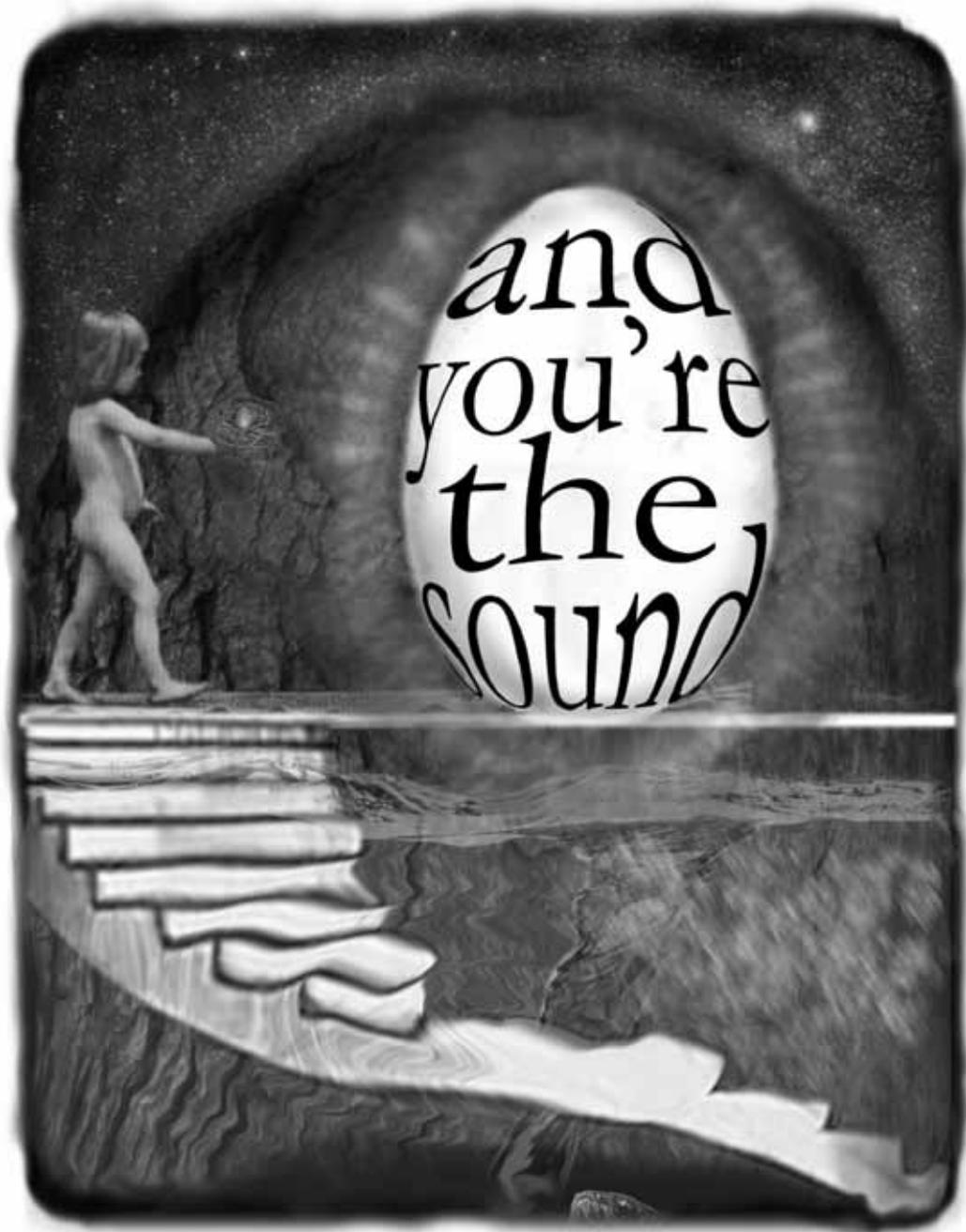


## Patience

I think about curving, I think I'm just curving.  
I'm no longer studying limits.

Then liking houses as they take you away from concrete and  
wood. Then houses, untethered,  
your home where the light fades everything it touches.

We cram the shelves with paper and small spiders  
demonstrate patience, the floor  
dust mingled with  
our hair.

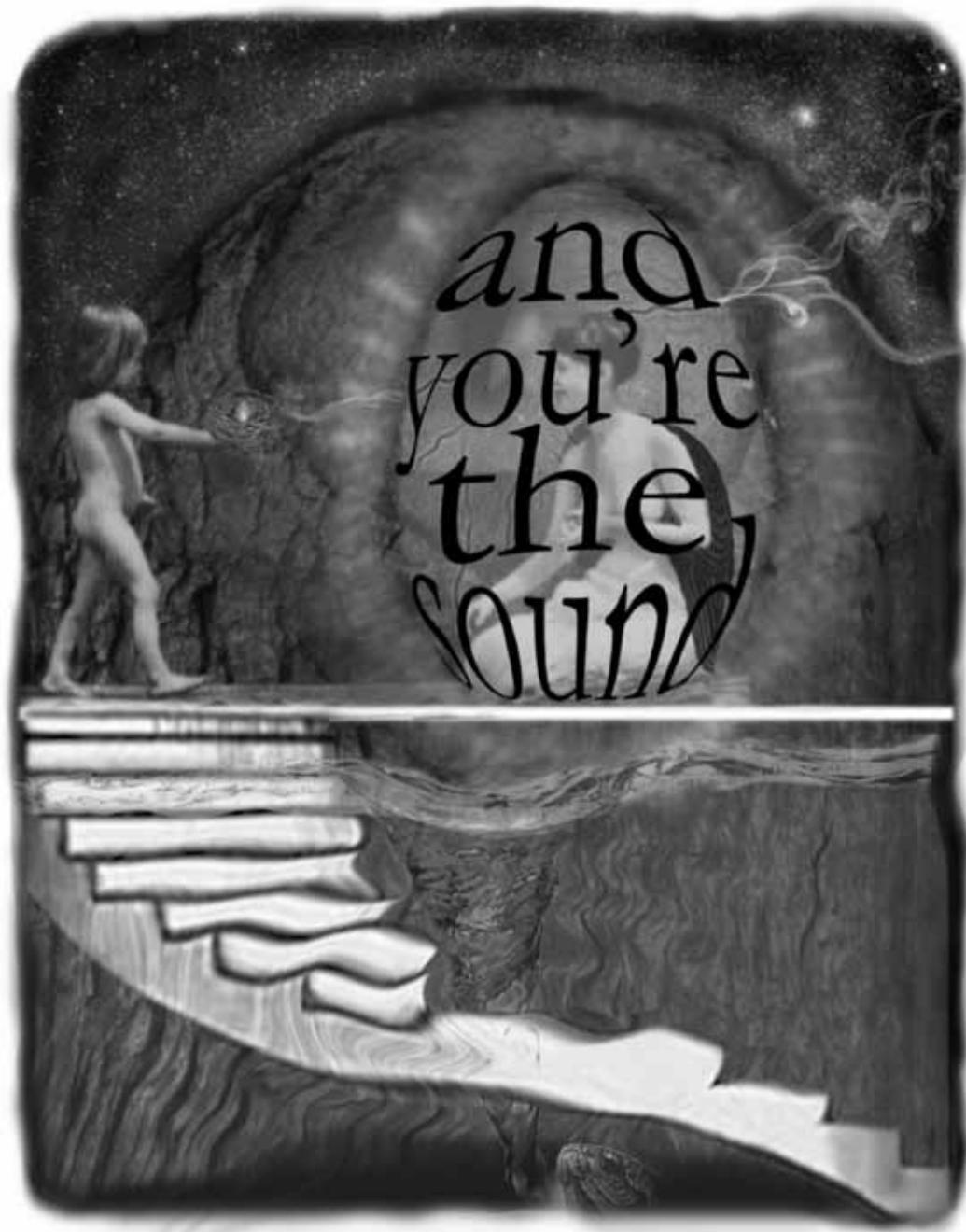


### For My Parents

In which I'm forced to  
recognize my ghosts. They bring their lawyers. They  
want to start seeing other people.  
They want ghost alimony,  
ghost support.

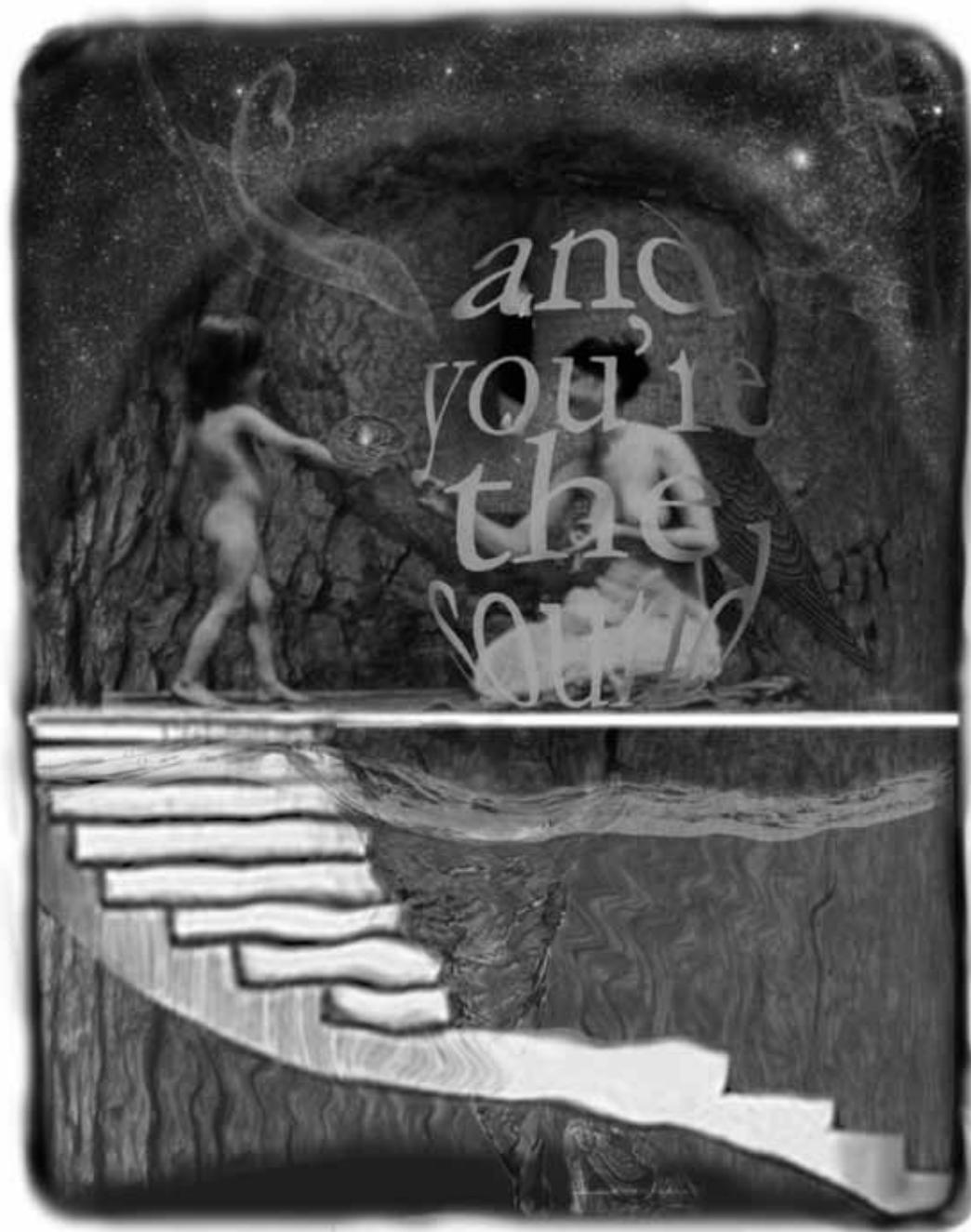
We settle, are settling. No one is at fault.  
No one is at fault. Yellow are  
my benefits. A swarm of bees building  
a hive where two branches meet.  
A golden bowl of cherry blossoms,  
a toy I can't play with  
anymore.

Away from the depositions,  
crouched in the clearing, a ghost  
is cradling my brother. I keep  
a light in my mouth.  
The darkest light in the back of  
my mouth.



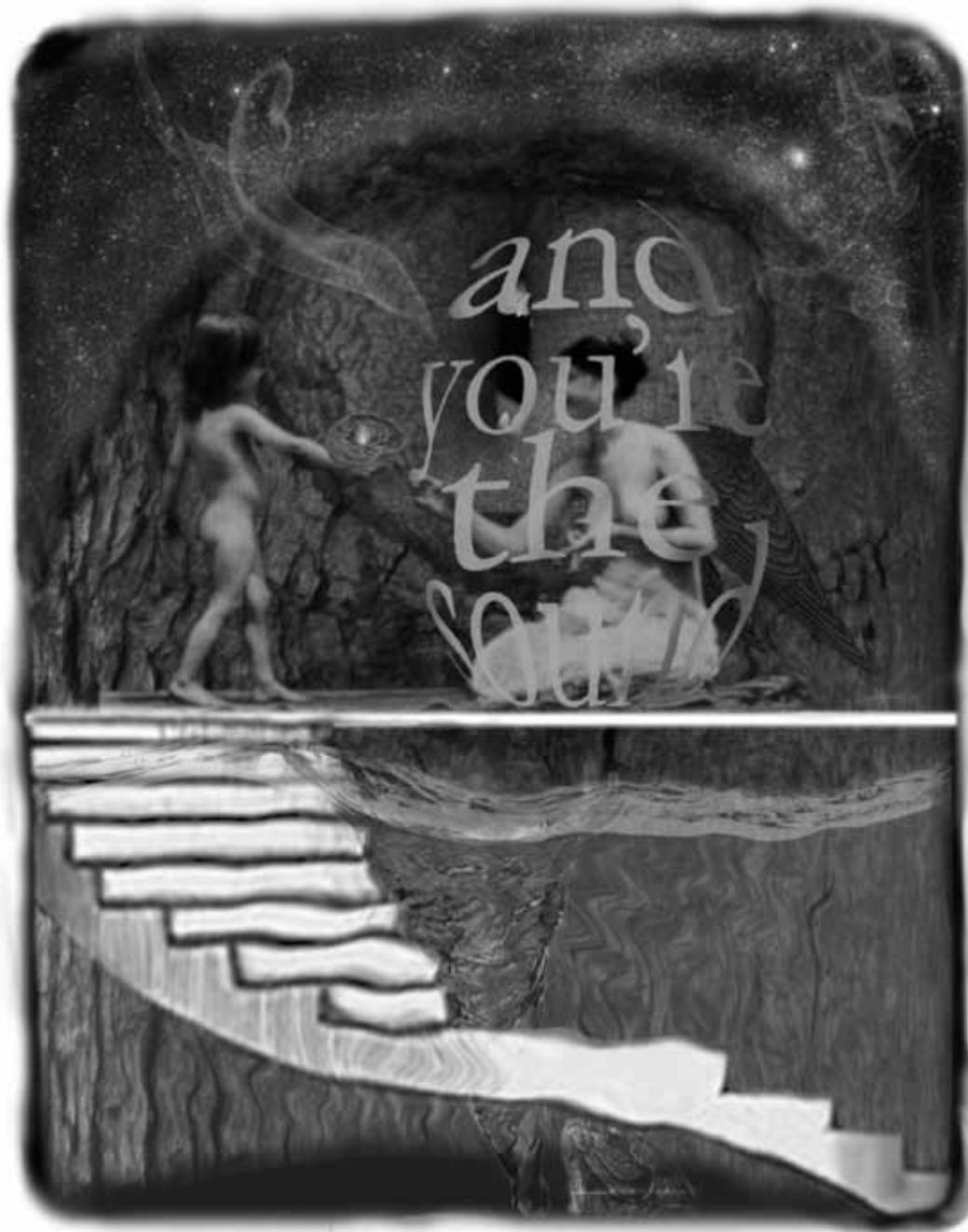
## Again

Tap your head twice to let the rust out.  
The thought as it stumbles in you.  
It has rhythm but you have to wait you have to wait  
a while for it to repeat until you are asleep you have to wait  
because you have to. Because your body is a small country and  
small countries wait. Knowing how small is the wine we are all  
sobered by. We drink small sips we  
all come from small countries. Possessing strategies  
that fail but leave residues behind or you will have half  
of what you already got. Run quicker. Drop  
the pigeon in your pocket. Pressed down, failed twice wait longer.  
Figure out where a country is. Not asleep it has a border a slow  
glowing sphere you tap twice to let the sleep out,  
the kind of sleep you keep in your shirt pocket. You look inside  
all the time to see if it's still there, like your passport while you're traveling,  
until you are asleep in your own country  
again.



### Inaugural

Wearing a suit again      with the cuffs a little frayed  
    riding up my arm      the self I outgrew  
    a long time ago      I put on again  
walk stiffly      through the house,      the garden,      to the gate, the sidewalk,  
    nothing but      thresholds and never      getting there but I      look  
    damn good in this suit.  
I look so heavenly      Jesus gets distracted  
    when he talks to me.      He can't tell me  
    what to do.      I will save  
    whoever I want to.



## Teeth

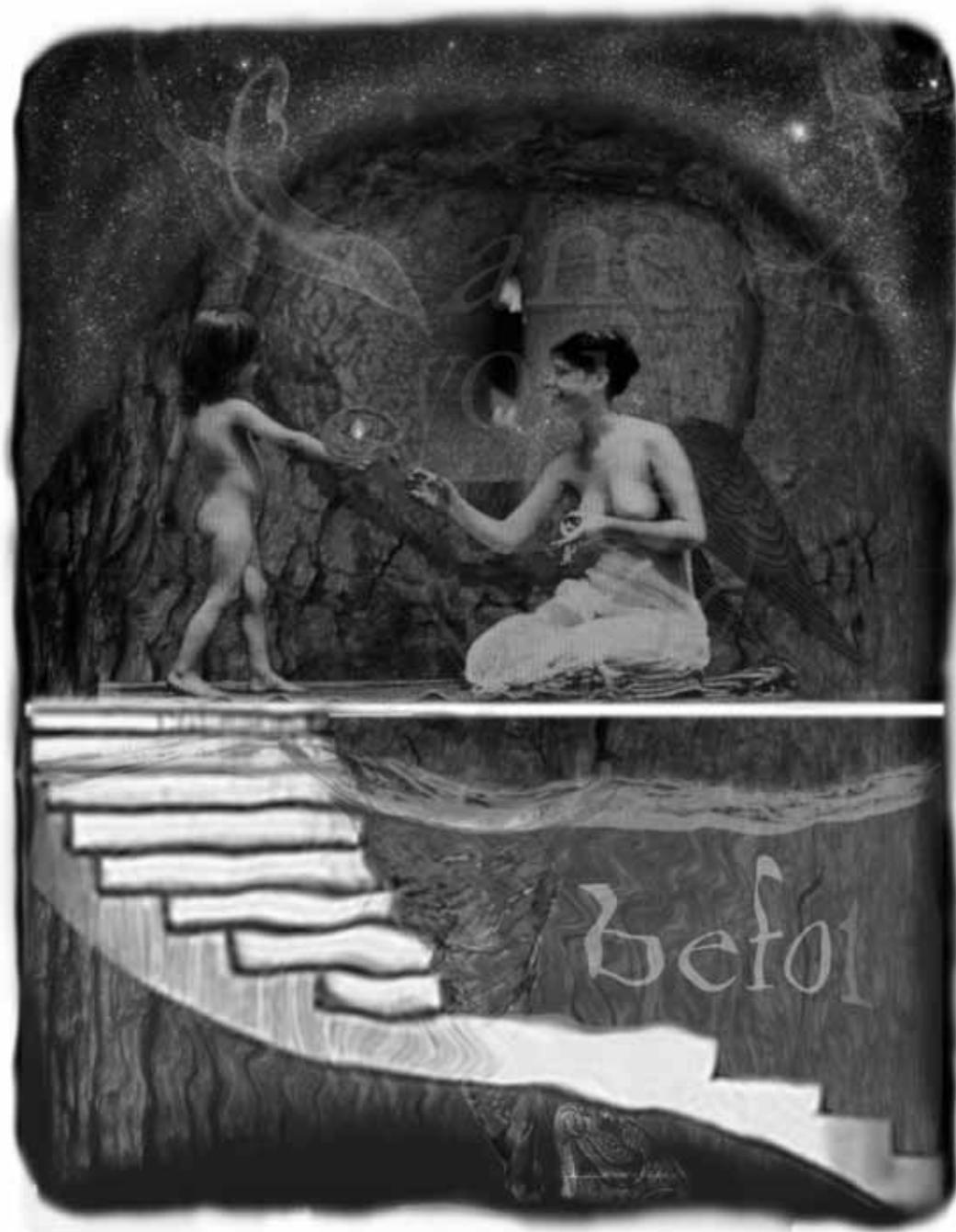
Say it was in the morning, and you were out on the sidewalk, perhaps you  
were checking the mailbox, you see a tooth, and it's like when you see one  
thing and then you see everything, you see multitudes of the same thing,  
a row, a forest of teeth, you hear a rumble, it's as loud as creation,  
but it's only a dump truck, in an infinite line of dump trucks  
shifting gears, backing up roaring with their loads of teeth,  
which they pour, all around you, in clouds of toothdust  
spilling out into the street.

So, nearly buried, white, after being held under so long, reading your mail,  
you think, if there still was such a thing, and I had a big enough pillow,  
I'd be rich!

And you think, there are chairs to be made out of this.  
I know a man somewhere who will sit in one of these chairs,  
he will eat rocks in his beans, he will eat rocks in his soup,  
don't worry, it's not out of punishment, he isn't suffering, he has iron teeth  
which he uses for just such actions, turning one thing into another.

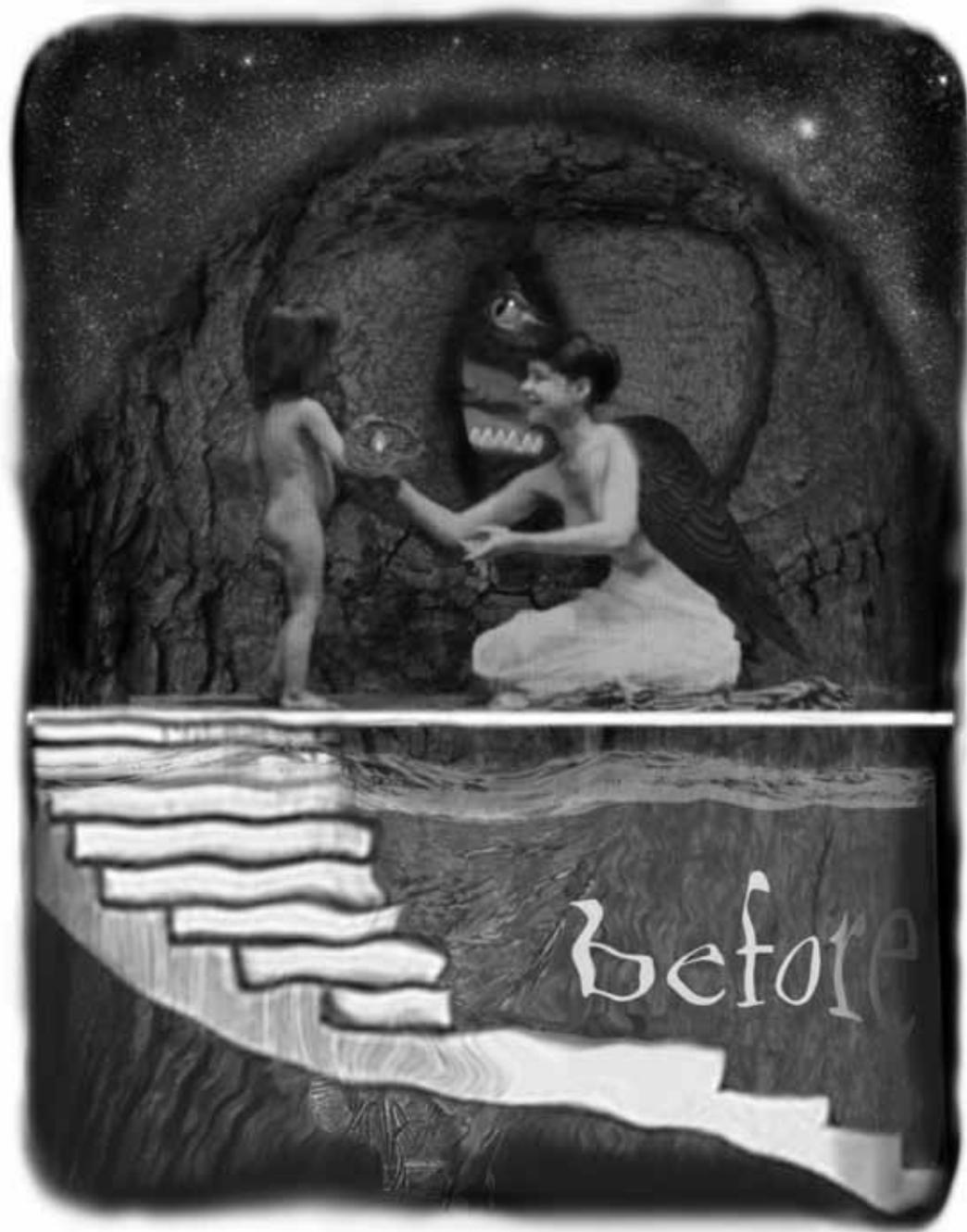
He is your friend. He sends you a letter, the white envelope of which  
you are now holding, asking for some. Incisors, or molars, bicuspid  
if you have any you can spare, he's building a chair.

It comes over you in waves, you are laughing, with your teeth, your own, safe  
in your face, thirty-two permanent teeth, you think each one  
is sign and symbol, that is just your enthusiasm for this world, its waves  
of stone, of teeth, its particles, particularities, a small mouth  
for each of your thoughts.



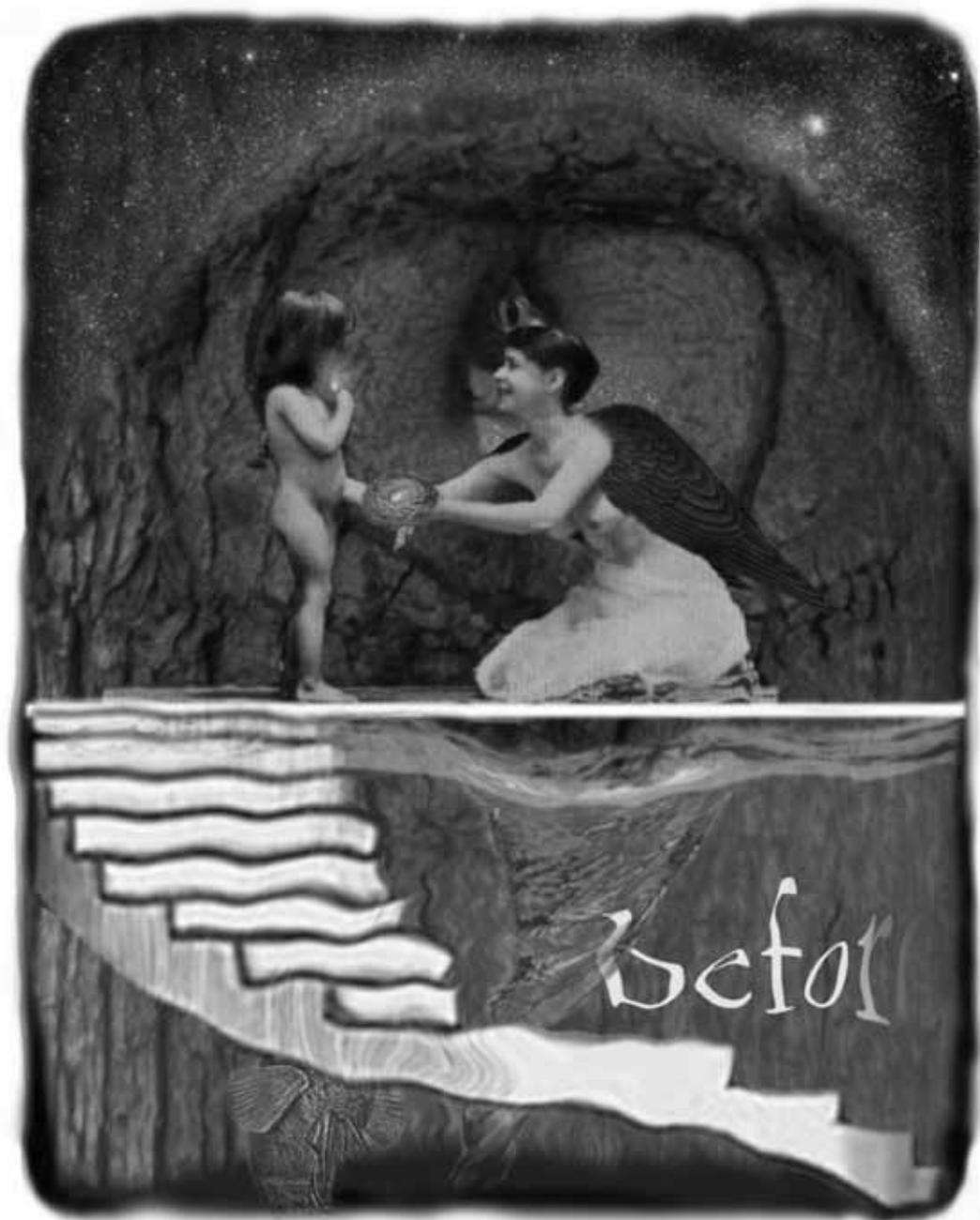
### Pensées

Thinking is like  
meeting your French teacher  
in the parking lot of the grocery store,  
and you insist on speaking in English with him  
because what's he going to do? There's  
so much you can't say in French but  
there's not a lot in English worth saying either.  
So how's the escarole, you say, or les  
petites pois? It's an embarrassment in  
front of your French teacher  
how you slip into that accent  
again, mangling what ought to be good  
and the French teacher says  
"Is that all that's on  
your mind?"



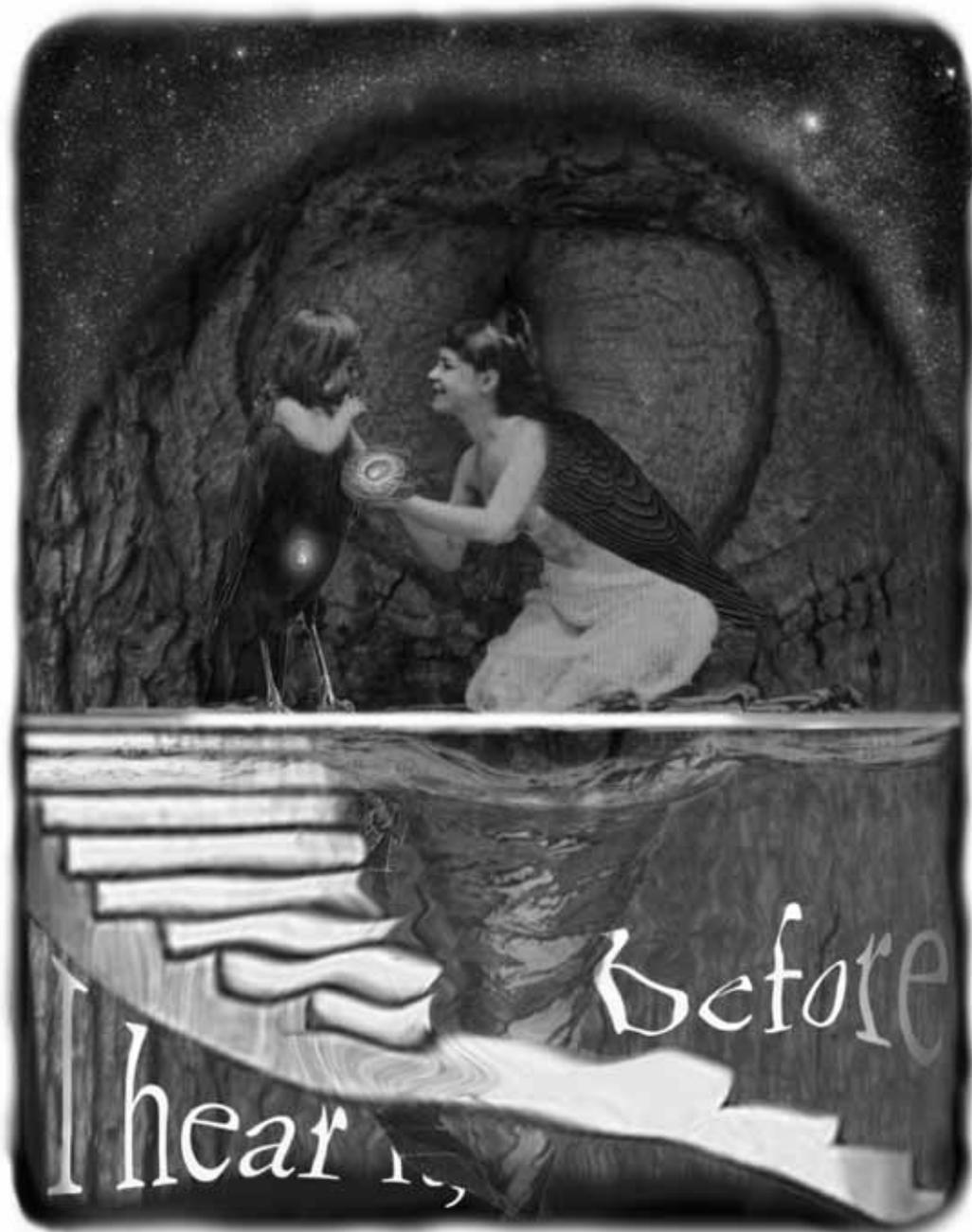
## You and the Poem

It's humbling. I like to think I'm  
so smart but then you trash me in cards.  
I use the same set of words  
in separate poems. I'm predictable.  
I'm easier to follow than I thought I'd be.  
But you and the poem know things  
long before I do. I do not  
think my ideas will change things and I  
don't sing in tune either, but you and  
the poem go for a ride you take me  
along and you take me  
from myself leaving behind  
three small stones.



## Enflowering

Seed mouths, bending down like showerheads.  
Then silence is crossing. Are you radiant? Are you feeling?  
Your quickness, the seeds are laws, are laws we don't have to.  
The sparrow bends down briefly. Even my smallest finger.  
Then sunflowers or starshaped, with red calyces that persist after the  
flowers drop, pouring forth, like your lover who is hovering you;  
a part that shows another part. Another you inside of you.



## Not For Long

Crookbranch nest;  
 circle of volition; an egg; if repeating,  
 my mother's house; a real mother a to;  
 all the laws; and their exceptions to;  
 a soft-boiled, slipping in its cup;  
 but not for long; and really not  
 for long; on its side on a tray don't like it  
 when you stop doing it; or if you moved they would  
 get you out of there; how much there; we belong to hospitals;  
 your eyes turn just now to contemplate the radiant maple tree;  
 I've just been born and you are holding me; I notice;  
 there's a nest there; birds there, darting; it's a moment I have  
 to see this and forget this and remember and feed it to  
 my brother when he gets born and why else  
 was I born; that everything stops and nothing ever stops  
 moving and not moving at exactly the  
 same time



## Nests/Paper

The pages are birds and we gather them  
with kindness. They curl swanlike  
as in paintings. We think they  
trust us.

Or the clusters of birches are  
libraries and birds hide  
in them, among  
them, singing as we  
approach

and scattering as we get near.  
There on the branch are  
explanations, a hummingbird  
guarding its blossoms, some wasps  
framing your imagination,  
nests, paper,

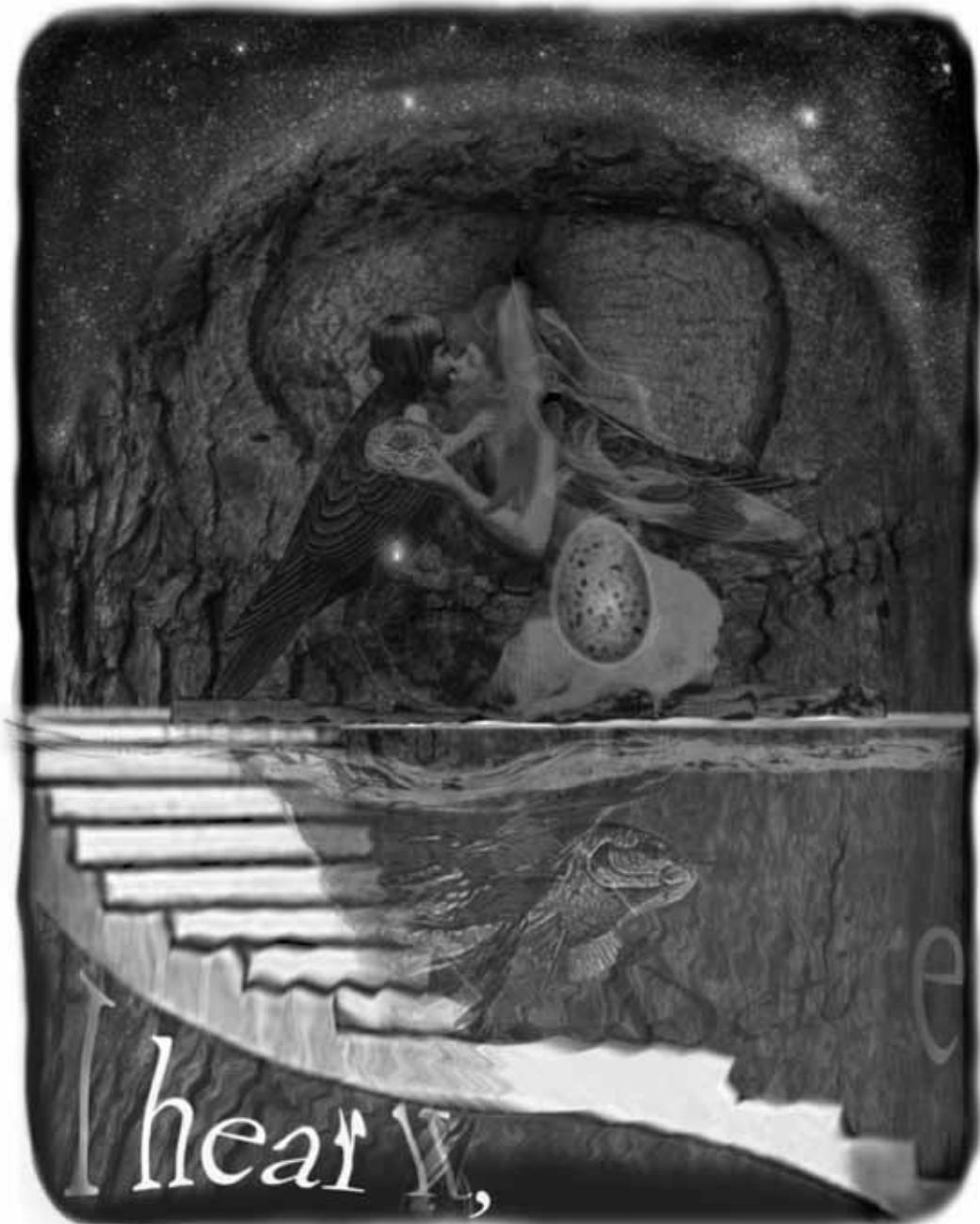
or your hand is half a  
wing, a scissor.



## Were

Night like, or never the same or knowing it  
 or all night, or a sink you can drink from, or night is  
 a sink you can bathe in, or call it a trough, or a window between  
 here and a second where candy and cigarettes are abundant, and  
 dogs are abundant or to go outside at night where the light sits on you  
 or you're flirting and you're really the interesting part  
 or you're out of breath, and no one will give you some  
 or what's a dog at night or is there lots of  
 saying like you or love you or bite me here  
 I like it when you

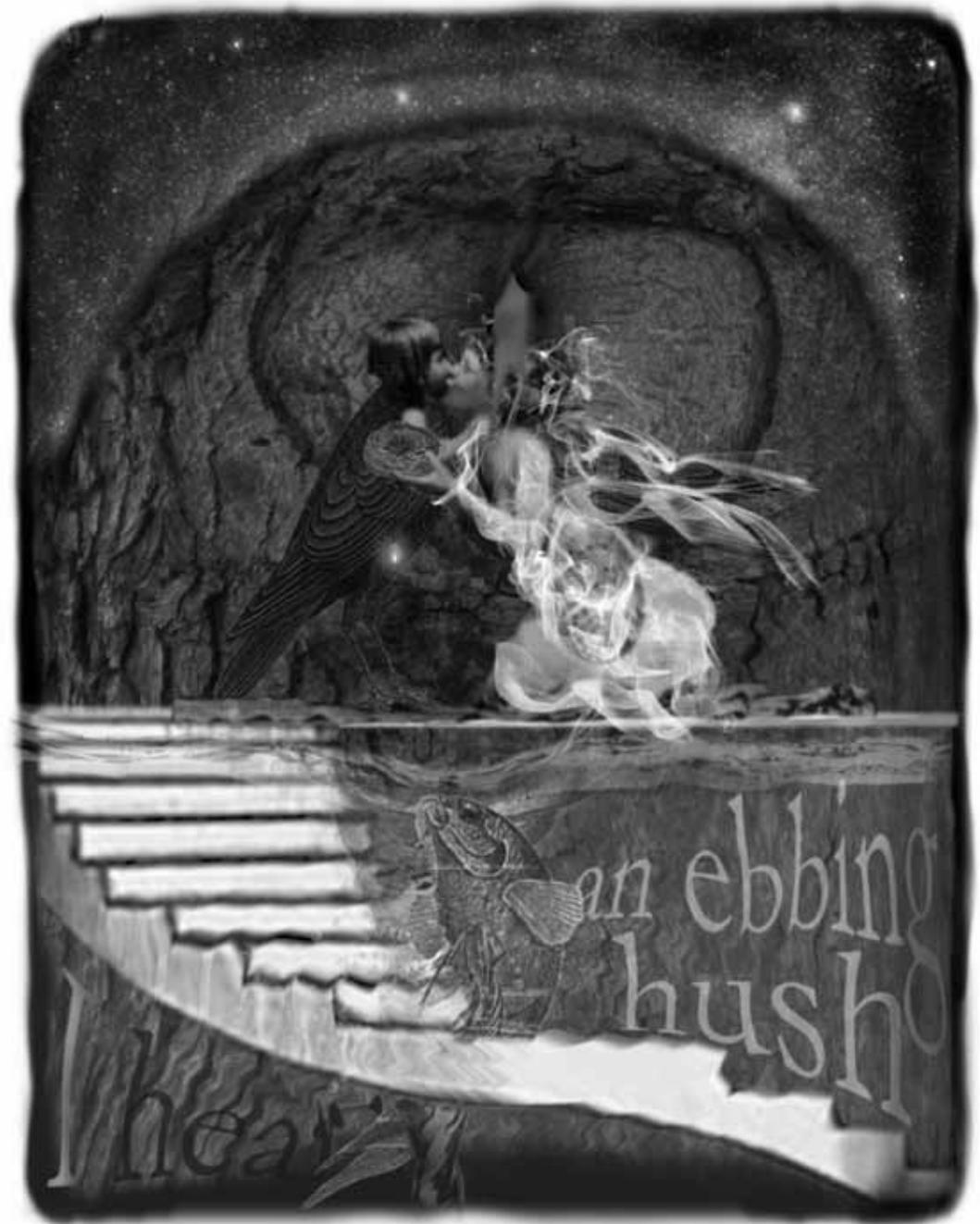
Or night, the moon in the way or all gone so  
 super happy your teeth snap so  
 you say it toughens you or you toughen it back  
 the working parts the fat of the city, the loyal city, whom  
 you smell or the scent makes you hungry or  
 you think maybe, or maybe it's time to  
 stop or to stop thinking or to stop  
 thinking in pictures.



## Horus

Tell me if you know. Tell me if  
the mouth is a cave, if the mouth is not belief, tell me you do not  
believe in some version of the falconheaded God  
Horus, who is protecting you;  
he swept the night out of the sky, when you were running, he was with you  
during the riots when they busted in the windows then they  
smashed all the clocks, and this one guy walked out  
with watches up and down both of his arms;  
we do without time but it will do whatever it wants to us.

Another word for regret. Another word  
from my formal mouth. Sentences that are  
supposed to relate to one another.  
With good luck and some grace,  
like a ghost but not like a ghost  
I try to explain to *Him* that I am real but  
I'm not that real.



## Lot

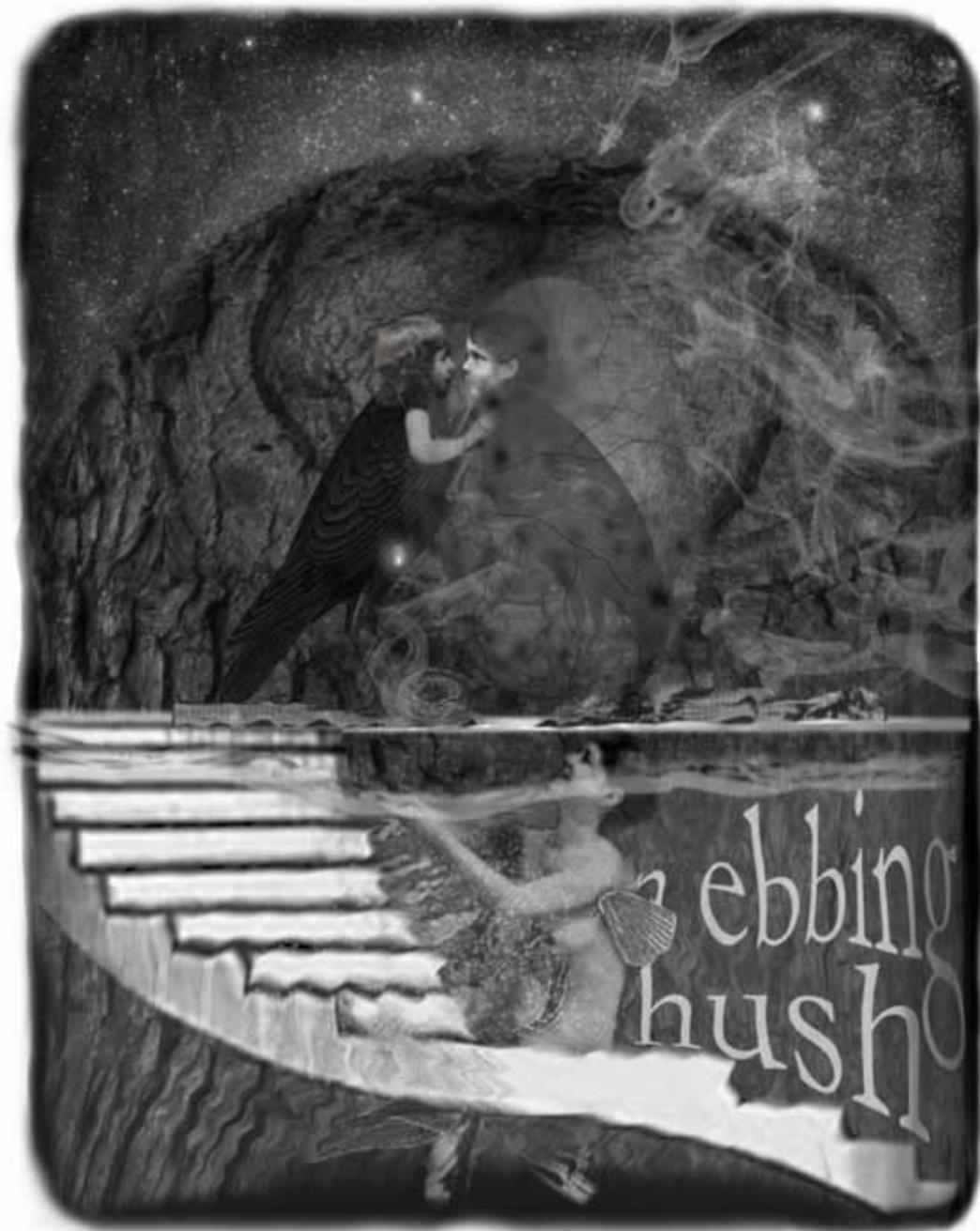
Became solid, what they hid. Before, among rocks,  
there was what you could lift, cups tied to bindles,  
enough wood you could cook with, smoke rising, the  
cars wrecked and rusting, and someone  
looks at you, and someone says

one of us should go, and because you had  
decent shoes you were chosen, and as  
you looked behind yourself you  
watched them, all of them,  
turn into salt.



## Spoke

Which is a word that means ghost, as it wanders, so much  
blown trash, soulful only as you make something of it, interrupting its  
leanings, a physical event and vulnerabilities, of buildings and populations.  
Budgetary allocations are patterns, they originate in the popular will and the dirt  
pressed back, or down, it's so much work, or did they count, or  
did they use materials to distinguish speech from bricks, trusting bricks a little  
more? Which are of course passage making devices, where your  
dead friends exchange notes with the rest of the dead world.  
As you hear about what went wrong you think what you want  
are ghosts that have to stick around, complimenting you and your presidency.



## Furious

Maybe they're blind. They say they believe in federalism. They  
are contracted we have an army supported by mercenaries.  
And we were so furious we were so happy to be furious, to be  
in the middle of a dark wood.

No horizon then. Make one.

Allow the black square. Allow the documents, their dignified  
flickering. I add my body to all the other bodies, as a stream,  
as a crowd, in it.



**In the New Economy**

You outsource your sleep your sleep is  
handled by people making less  
than you and your sleep is  
bundled so one man on top of you  
makes more than five of you and he  
has so much sleep he  
never sleeps except when he wants to, for  
sentimental and nostalgic  
reasons.



## Underwater

I get a job; they hand me  
 a hod of water, to carry my stack of water. I forget about water  
 with the mind of a fish. I'm constructing a brick ocean. It comes  
 crashing down before I'm finished,  
 like teaching.

I lose my job I get a new job  
 laying ice tiles in the republic of snow. I forget I'm made  
 out of water, I have no papers I ruined my papers long ago.

So I get  
 to keep my other job but first I have to sell my eyes  
 to someone who has an abundance of eyes. I eat ice to stay warm.

But to keep my job  
 I have to forget there's a crow in my mouth making plans.  
 The crow is drawn to water. I am bathing in your thoughts  
 she says, I'm adding fish to my diet she says.

In the job I get  
 to keep scraps of water I feed them to my crow.  
 I forget I need a new job; keep this up my  
 crow says I'll get you a cure for your eyelessness  
 but you'll have to let me see for you she says.

But I get caught  
 stealing from my job so I learn my lesson; I forget my problems  
 like some ice in a river of fish.  
 I feel new eyes grow in the cold space behind me  
 where I'm going to wake with my crow.



## Not Sleeping

Idle, with milk in my stomach, a full grown man with milk  
 on my lips, which is good. This body as it becomes your  
 body. It is hard to be specific, to keep the book  
 this book, and the body, this body, your body.

Then. As middle, as mouth, your mouth, your lips  
 as you breathe softly, as you try to sleep, then, as landscape  
 and ideas read into it which I try to explain, late at night, my  
 body is a long spindle and I turn over and around as you get up  
 early and turn the nightlight on, testing your sugar and eating a  
 granola bar.

I thought I wasn't sleeping. Now I can tell you. My breath  
 milk sour as it turns into the words I can tell you. The words in the  
 book, the same book I'm always reading.

Don't worry I mumble. The moon is  
 my friend. The moon will make a  
 president out of you. I'm not doing anything but  
 I'll vote for you. As many times as I can. I'm  
 not sleeping, I promise.



### Another Parable of the Law

One day  
I'm going to be illegal and then I'm going to  
be heavy, then I'm going to be white  
not like how a clown is white but like how the sea is white  
when it is furious and  
then I'll be the landlord and I'll raise the rents  
whenever I feel like it and eat  
whatever I want maybe I'll eat  
you or whatever else  
you got.



## Post-Happiness

Then these things you heard,      they get said by the people  
who don't get you and      these people they  
wrote you checks      anyway.

And their      post-happiness      it's leading into  
something stronger,  
That's where they want it to go.

Then flip the cardboard      version of yourself, then  
no more chicken dinners, no more      time-based solutions.  
You listen to your      parents, who are so  
busy ovulating      they don't notice you.

All the things you're  
about to do.



### Checking Your Pulse

Towards, then      timely. Towards with      the hair on your  
hand, on your wrist.      With your      breath on my      neck it makes  
my neck      longer.

Then we      are precious.      The ground is      precious, the  
approach, the      fence leaning in, the      irises and California poppies  
leaning in, the mint.

Then love is      an embodiment of      place and  
you are      racing your      small self against  
your smaller,      riskier self, where      you can  
feel your      wristhairs      grow  
up like      weeds.



## My Realism

Some clouds, then their shadows over us  
briefly. Trying to be realistic in my speech and writing,  
what I want, what I'm asking for, but  
these costumes, this conversation, the willows  
of which make terrible building  
materials, I pull you through  
my realism and the darkened kitchens  
it contains.

Then eat some chicken, and enjoy chiffon garments that crinkle when you  
walk. I feel so domestic! It's twilight, spectacular clouds  
ornament the sun, every way is curved and  
downhill. It's fall and the irises by our front  
gate are blooming white flowers, with  
golden yellow bands and blue centers,  
stamens and pistils, they're the colors that would  
look good on the flag of a country that would  
have wonderful chocolate and never  
dream of invading  
anybody.



## Silver

Below that is the memorial  
to the argument between us and it pulls us,  
we don't know it's pulling us. We went out  
for coffee and we came here. We talk about  
work; we think about work the smoke  
folds doing work we turn the sky silver and it  
sticks so we say it works and definitely we  
can make a bomb out of it and the effects  
of the bomb would be horrible but  
not so horrible we couldn't use it.

From this you can know about time.

It'll put work in your mouth and pull silver out of it.  
Then we will remain strangers and we  
will make this ditch and call it building.  
Then we'll drive around in chrome all day fuming as we  
merge.



### A Senator

Of grief, so you can delegate  
your hands to him and petition your  
family to him, to his endless  
gray hair, his endless wild eyes; his name  
lost among so many names, he  
represents wastes, mountain ranges,  
wilderness, sea and the earth, the deepest  
parts of the earth, where we pretend  
to be dead, but with more  
composure.



### Alfred and Sidney

You could raise us. A crown of pipesmoke, a  
scepter of cigars. Forty-year-old bowling trophies, blue and white  
collectable plates, one for each winter. A narrative as  
you take off your shoes and dig small circles with your toes.  
The gardens' a mess, I'm easily distracted but  
I am not about to break. I am not about to be anything I'm not.  
My name is a word that means deer or beginning,  
an expression which means my grandfathers' experience, as I feel  
lavish next to them like everything I am is progress, and they are  
solid, directing me. Then we, in the wholeness of the yard, my  
grandparents, my wife, the roses which peel open, unruined, undetailed, the  
details unfolding and you say it's fine don't fix it.



### Subtle

Can you count that high? Eat  
eggplant, think about yarn on spindles,  
the Texaco ad on the wall. You have to be subtle. I  
don't know how to be subtle. No one has to  
kiss my decoder ring. I gave  
you my decoder ring, I no longer have to  
explain anything. I am a house,  
I keep a smaller house  
in my pocket.



## Snow

Then inward, able to write though  
miles and miles from feeling; it's that cold already, already  
the invisible war and the obvious balance, a man and a man,  
a man's leaves and a man's promises, his  
whisperings and his leaves,  
some snow you love like books, books resembling  
delicately filthy snow.



## Crowns

Things, beautiful belongings are spectators and own  
secret crowns.

Rain then comes, revealing like and that and wanting to and  
seeing, wanting to see, like saying hello, like saying hello to the most polite  
of strangers who come to live with you  
all of them, every one, carriers of  
secret crowns.

And the smart ones the ones who  
know what they're doing they just look that way, you  
trust them, join them  
making soup out of flowers, their tongues on your tongue  
so that bees follow you now too and  
dance confused songs on the  
secret crown of you.



## The Truck

A crew comes by and puts us on a truck.  
 And in the stacks of bricks I'm tapping the metal ribbon  
 tying all this down. Don't do that he says I got a headache he says.

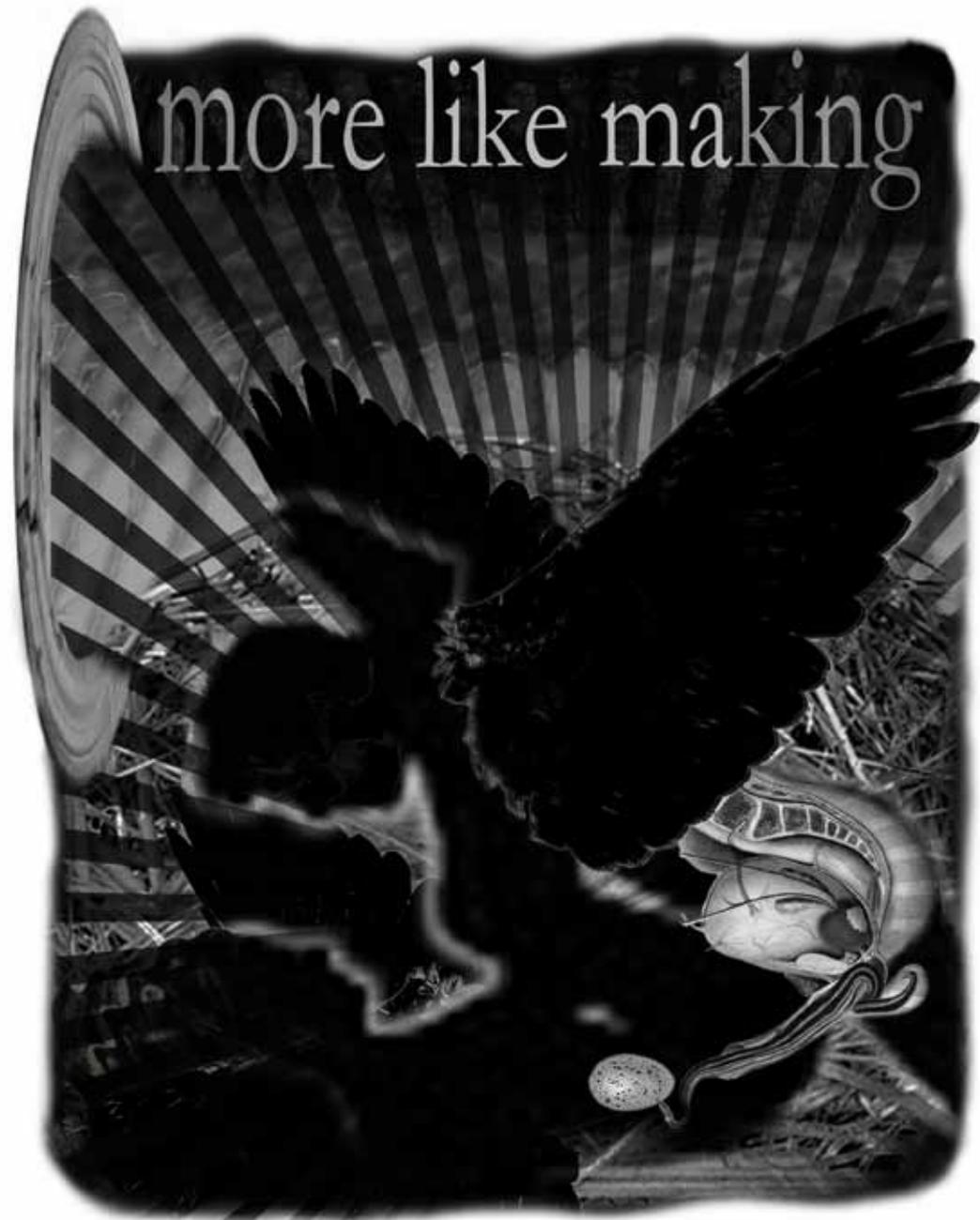
How do you know you're really here? I keep telling him I was taught  
 as a baby I can tell the difference I'm a grown man now  
 I got responsibilities I can tell the difference between where I am  
 and where I'm supposed to be.  
 The truck lurches but we're tied down good for real this time.

Or on the truck he's assertive he presses a nametag  
 on my chest it isn't even my real name it is now he tells me  
 why else were you born?

I'm listening to some kid say I'm an adult you're a  
 person a blinding person but still a person,  
 you have all of your teeth.

I'm still on I'm  
 always on I know where he's going I know he claims to know me back  
 like I'm some book of the bible. You don't love your brother  
 but everyone's your brother I get in a fight with my brother  
 I knock out one of his teeth I learn to  
 stay down this time.

Why should I frame this around my brother?  
 He opens his mouth and all this gravel rumbles around.  
 A retaining wall, a foundation.



### Snails

And you say sunlight, and no one talks  
about sunlight though it's pouring out  
of our ears. It's fine to sit in the garden,  
it's ok sometimes just to sit there.  
The tracks of snails glisten for days.

So the black ocean, and the attracting force:  
it matters, it matters, it turns and it matters. Brace  
the tomato plants back into their cages, tie  
the cages back against the fence.  
You, in your love, your favorites, your thoughts  
belonging to a new country.



### Generosity

I tell my wife let's grow beards and study law,  
because money is terrifying but we're geniuses when  
we scheme: in the garden our neighbors  
go crazy, they froth jealously, they steal apples  
and tomatoes and volunteer squash, chard  
proliferating endlessly; we're so generous  
so let's pretend I'm a young supervisor, who is  
not unhappy he is eating all the appetizers when the tray comes by  
he's thinking they're not going to throw me out  
on an empty stomach, he's thinking they're not  
going to throw me out if it looks like  
I'm somebody's pal, so he starts talking  
and he won't stop talking and you nudge me  
so I don't give all my thoughts away.  
The garden before us and boundless, entwined,  
drinking, a niche, a lung, which negotiates  
the oxygen out of the reluctant sky  
containing clouds and all speech too.



### Both Kinds

Went separately, so the sweetness  
of the path, and I keep my head  
bare to bring joy to all ghosts. So palmed, like a coin,  
not yet home, not yet in your pocket, not yet seen,  
not yet a surprise.

And your imagination is two sparks, there are two sparks in  
your imagination, and fire all day as well  
overlooking you/your entanglements  
one thing on top of another then happy to see  
irises, both kinds.



### On Dreams

It's ok, we can deal with them, we can sneak in, we can become elliptical and  
not resent anymore, or splay, not like petals, not like sky,  
as in how I elongate in our bed and you're the sound before  
I hear it, an ebbing hush as you fall asleep,  
so it's less like sleeping, more like making oneself open.



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Hugh Behm-Steinberg is a poet and short fiction writer. His books of poetry include *Shy Green Fields* (No Tell Books, 2007), as well as three Dusie chapbooks, *Sorcery* (2007), *Good Morning!* (2011), and *The Sound of Music* (2015). A collection of prose poems and microfiction, *Animal Children*, (Nomadic Press) was published in January, 2020. Behm-Steinberg is a former Wallace Stegner Fellow in creative writing at Stanford University and the recipient of an NEA fellowship. His short story “Taylor Swift” won the Barthelme Prize for short fiction, and his story “Goodwill” was picked as one of the *Wigleaf* Top Fifty Very Short Fictions of 2018. From 2007-2017 he served as Faculty Editor of *Eleven Eleven*. He is currently the Chief Steward of the Adjunct Faculty Union at California College of the Arts, where he teaches Writing and Literature.

