



The Opposite of Work

Poems by Hugh Behm-Steinberg/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.

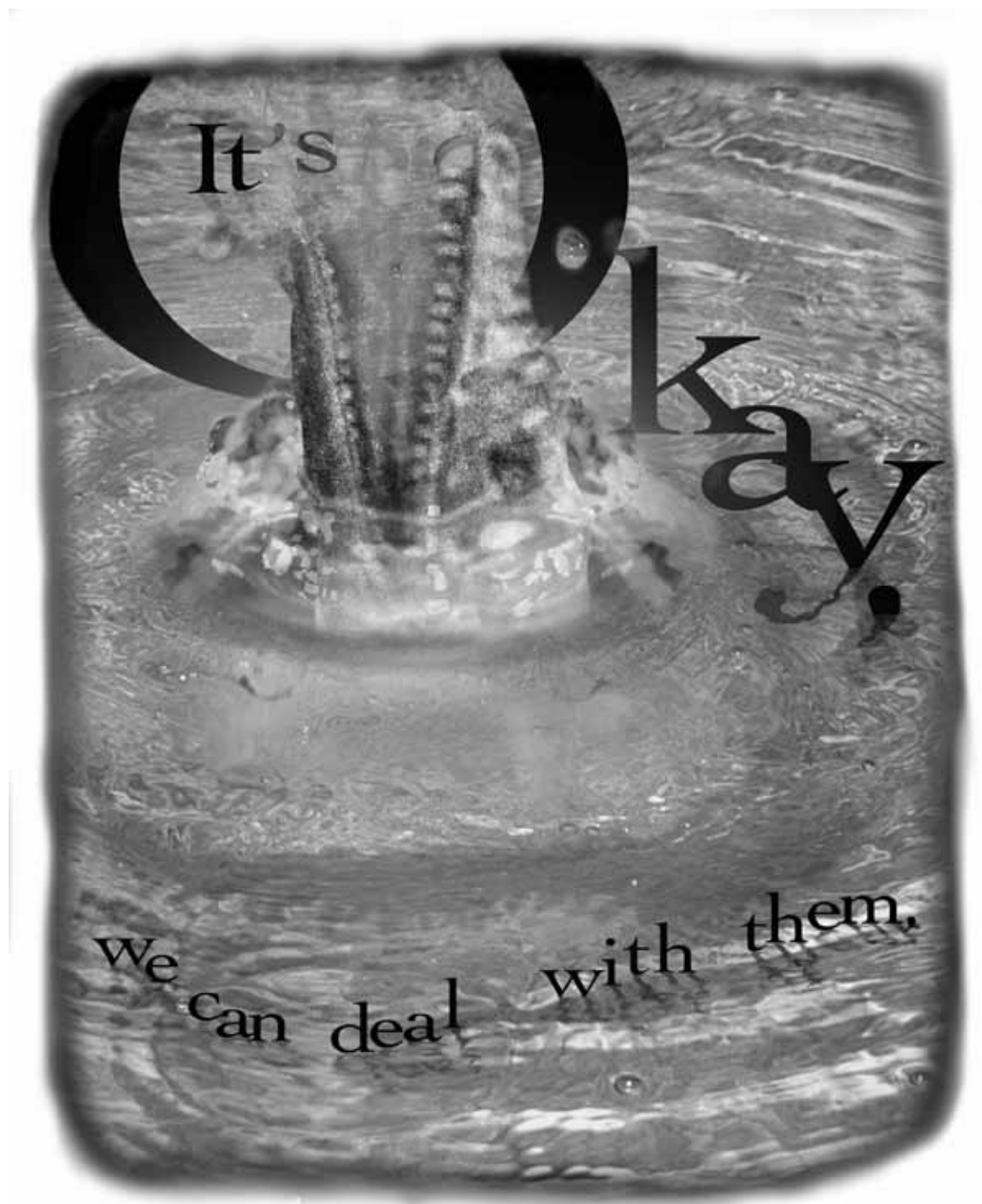
Then towards, the act of, from appearance to recitation, from
staying to giving in, to be very precise: not roses,
green thornbranches budding forth out of
rosebark, black speckled leaves, compacted petals the size
of babyfists in front of the window where I sit
typing this while I listen to you smoking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

Then crownspace
and how to act, 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

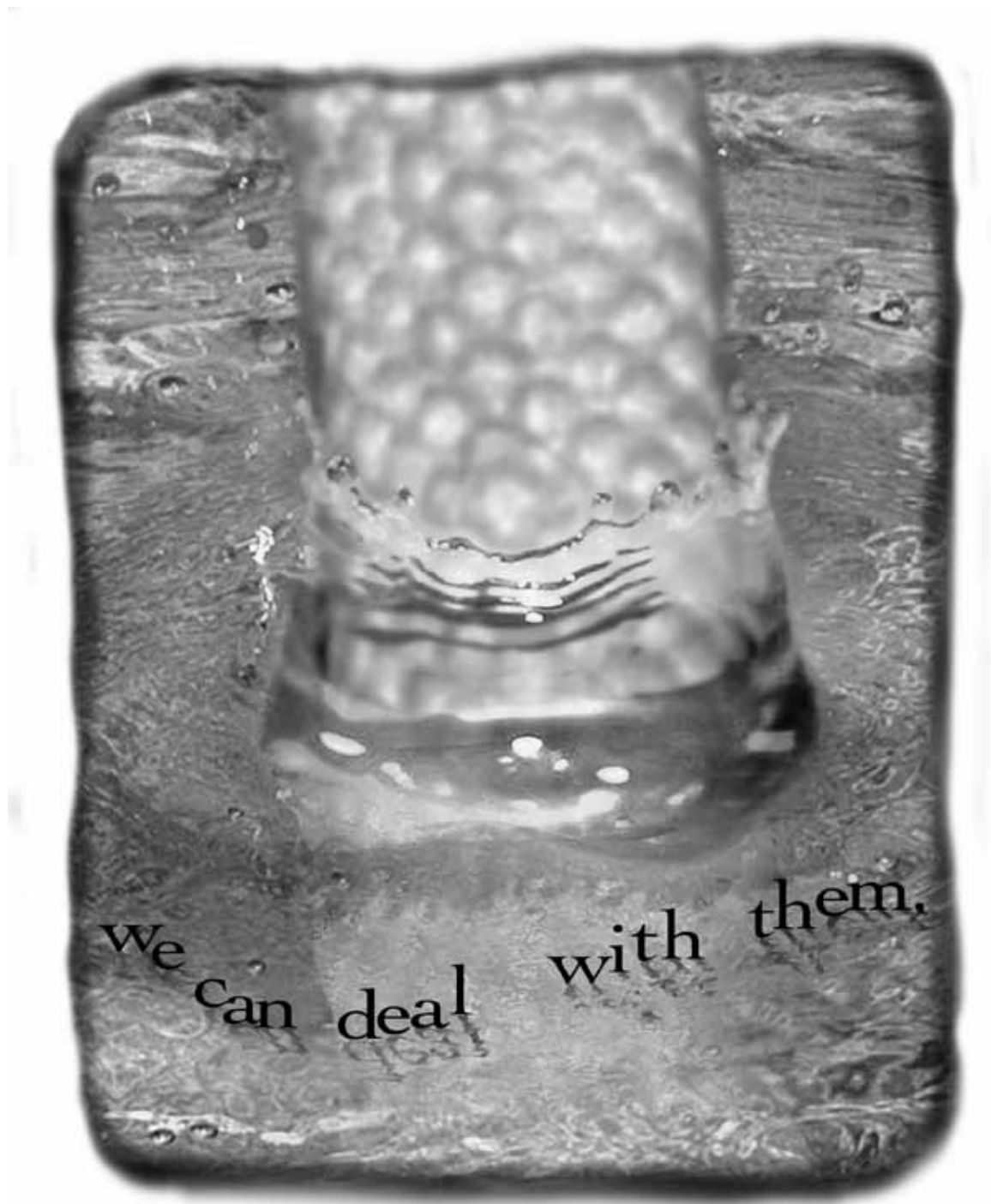
God came and made the earth livable separating
the water from the land
and the sea monsters retaliated by inventing
time

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.

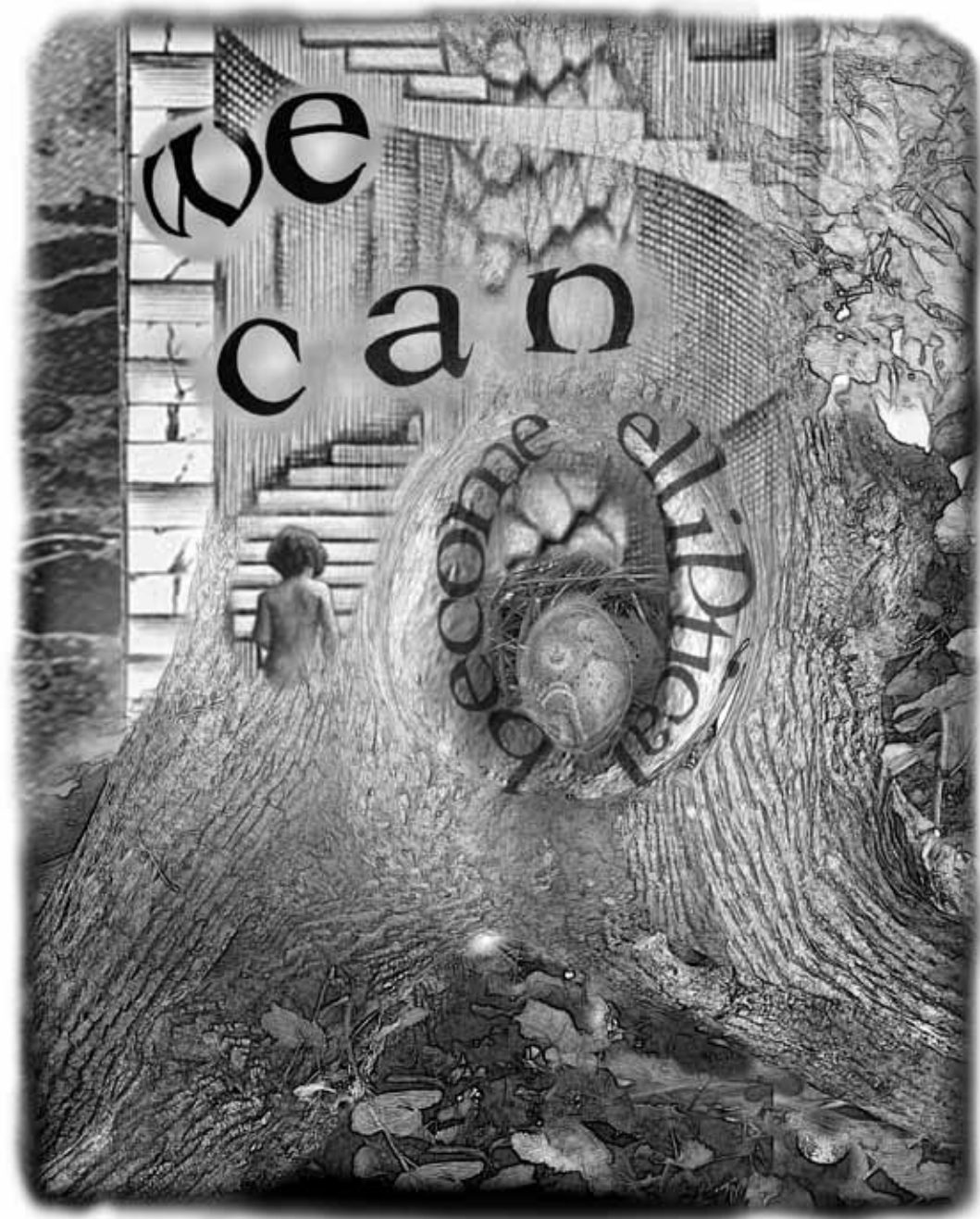
Later of course you die and you wake up running. You are in
 this heaven and it resembles an airport, but you lack the ability
 to be bored. So it is economical for God. He can put you
 anywhere and you'll be happy. You'll think this is where
 you should be:

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.



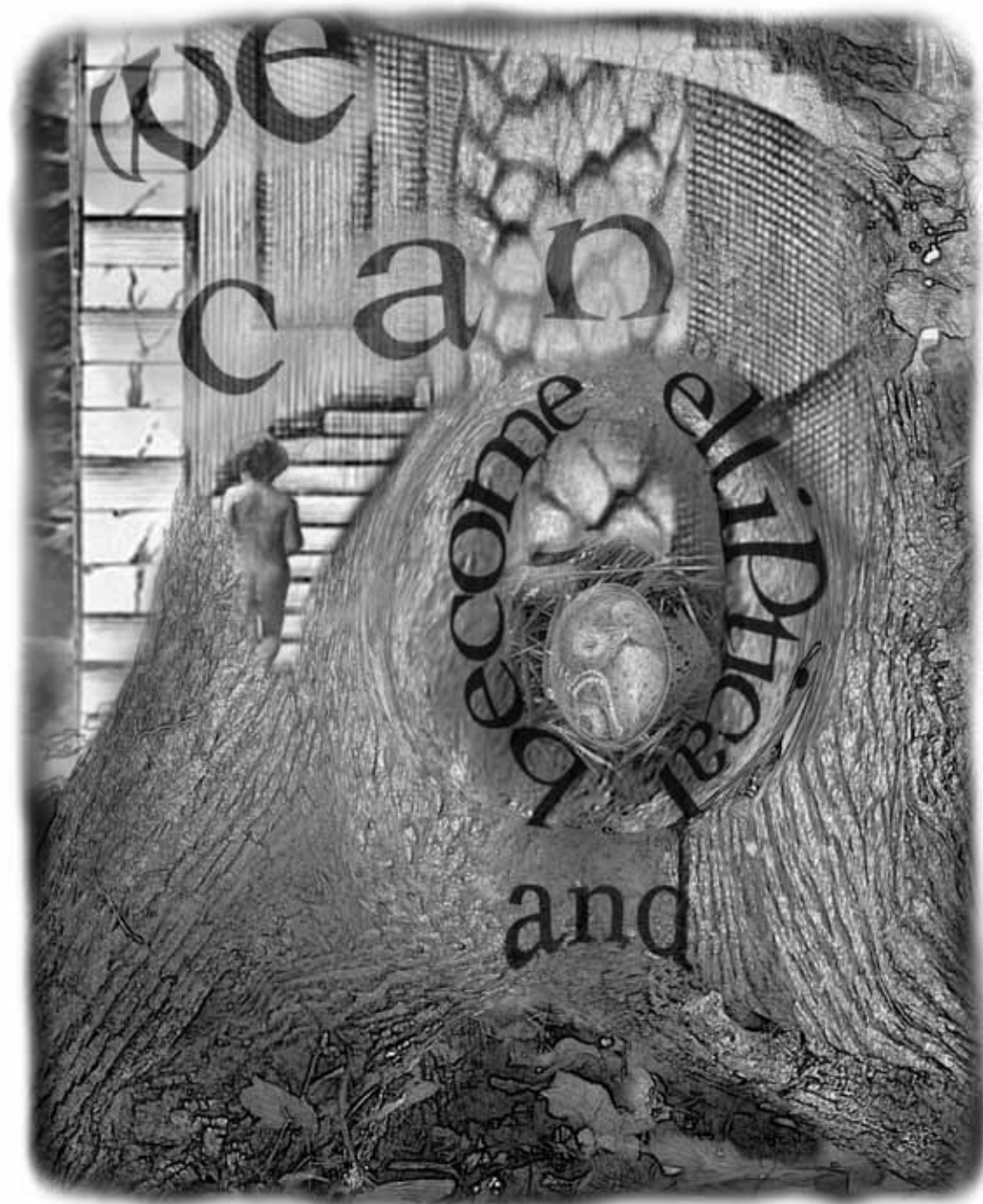
Like the Moon

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.



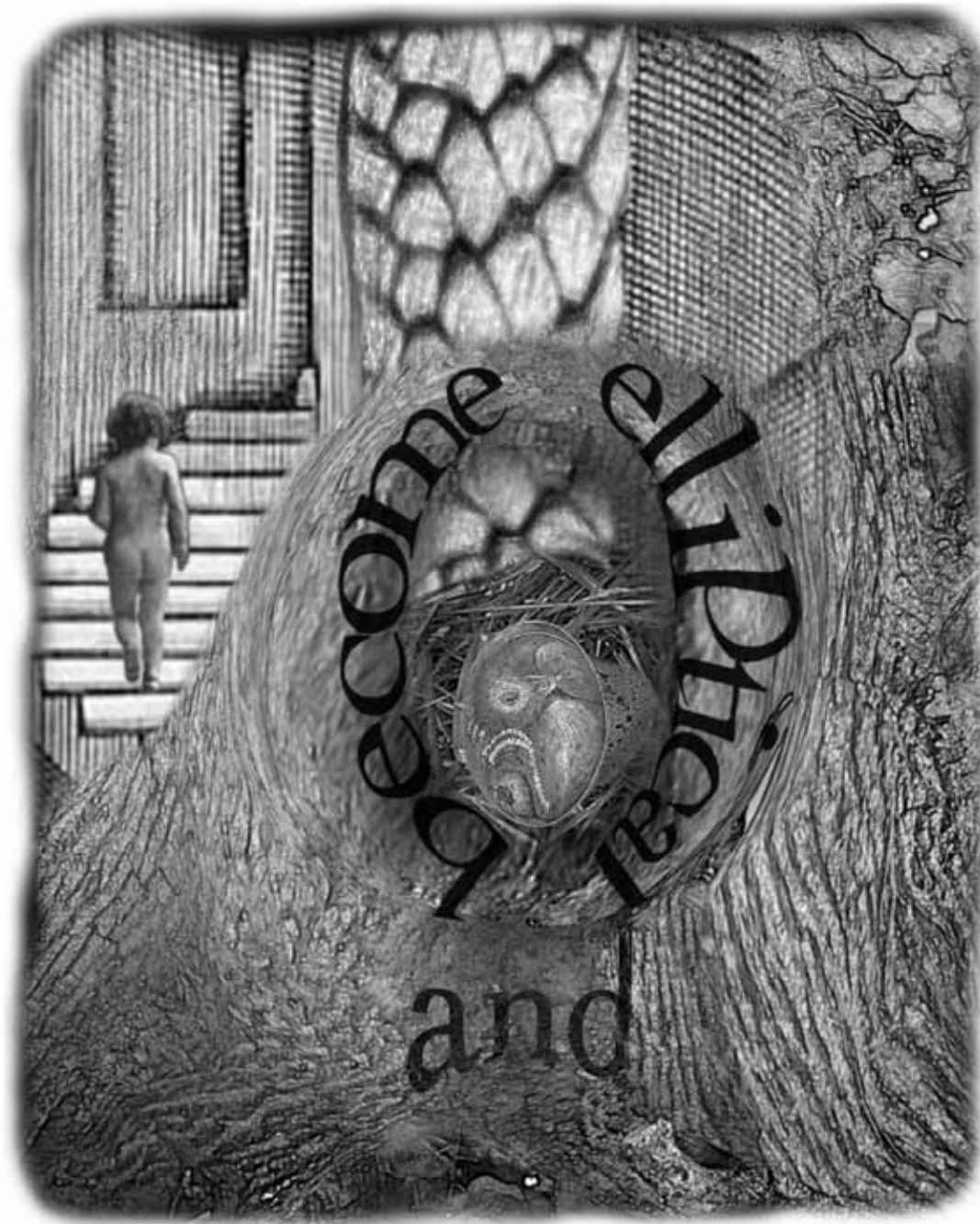
You Were Like a Hummingbird

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

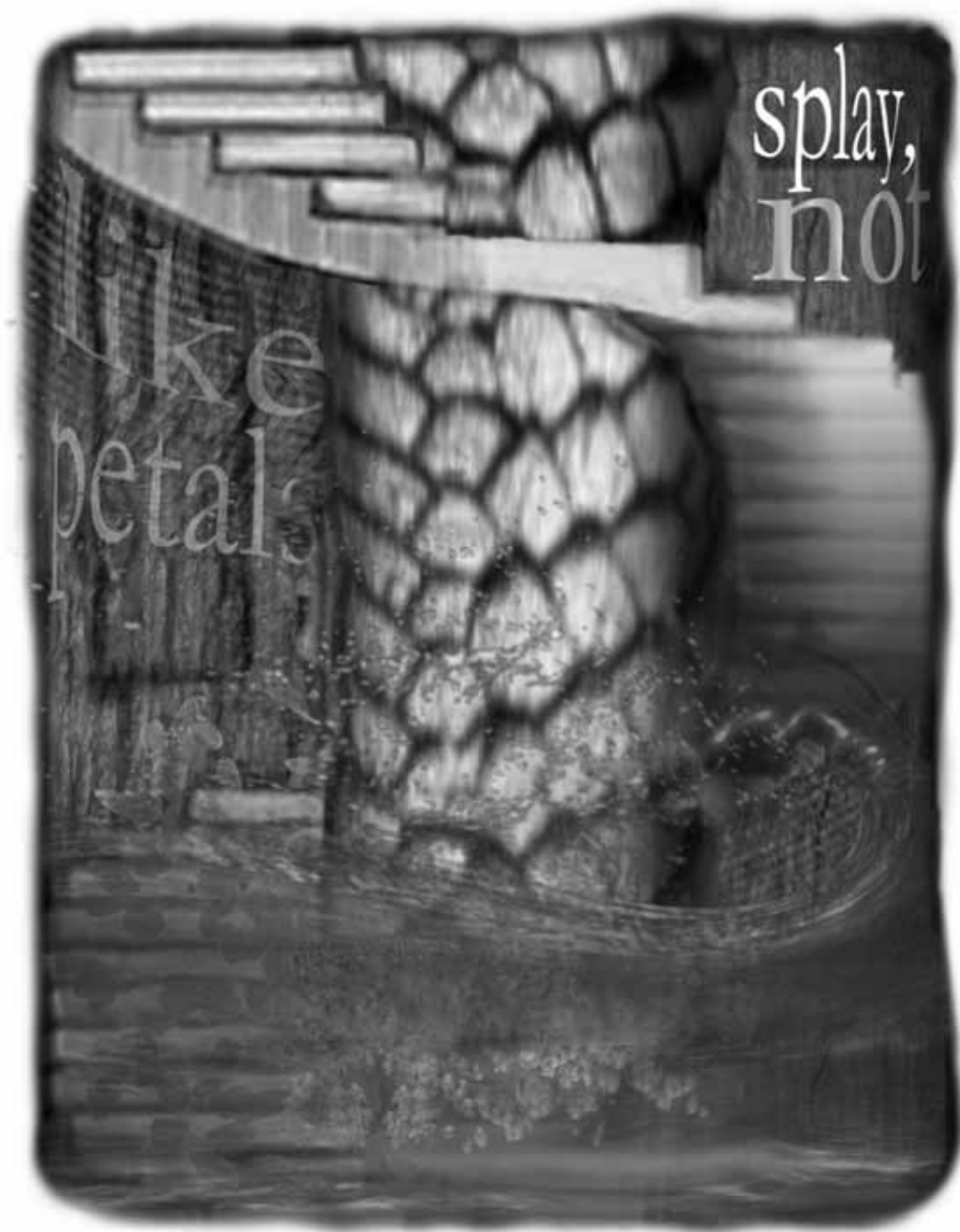
White roots, eating silk, eating roots, eating whitenesses; the sharp taste in
 your mouth. Then describe yourself
 by roots, by perfect marble darknesses, by different sets of questions,
 like a certain kind of radish wound round what you wish, what you said concerning
 saying, how are you going to 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.

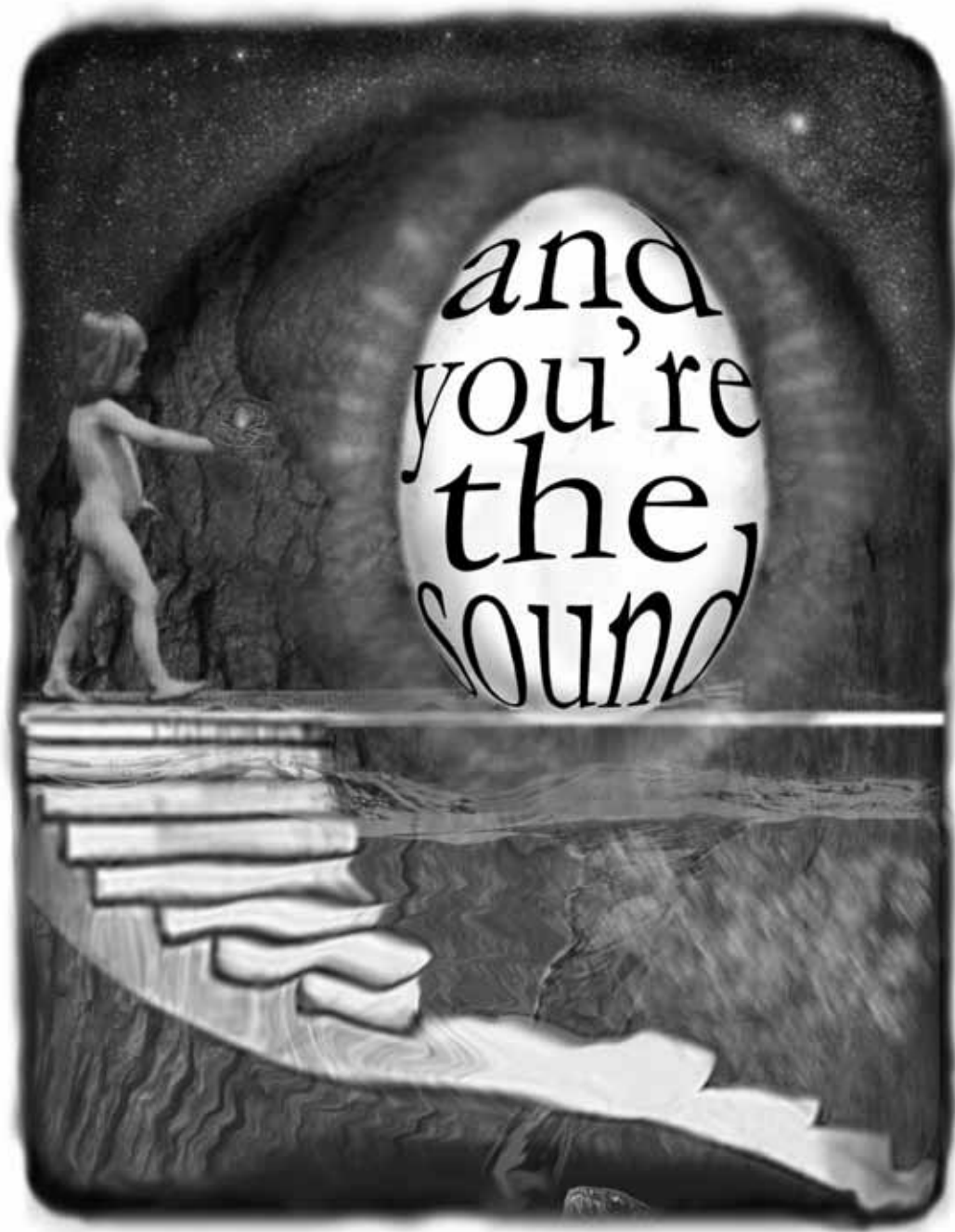


Patience

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.

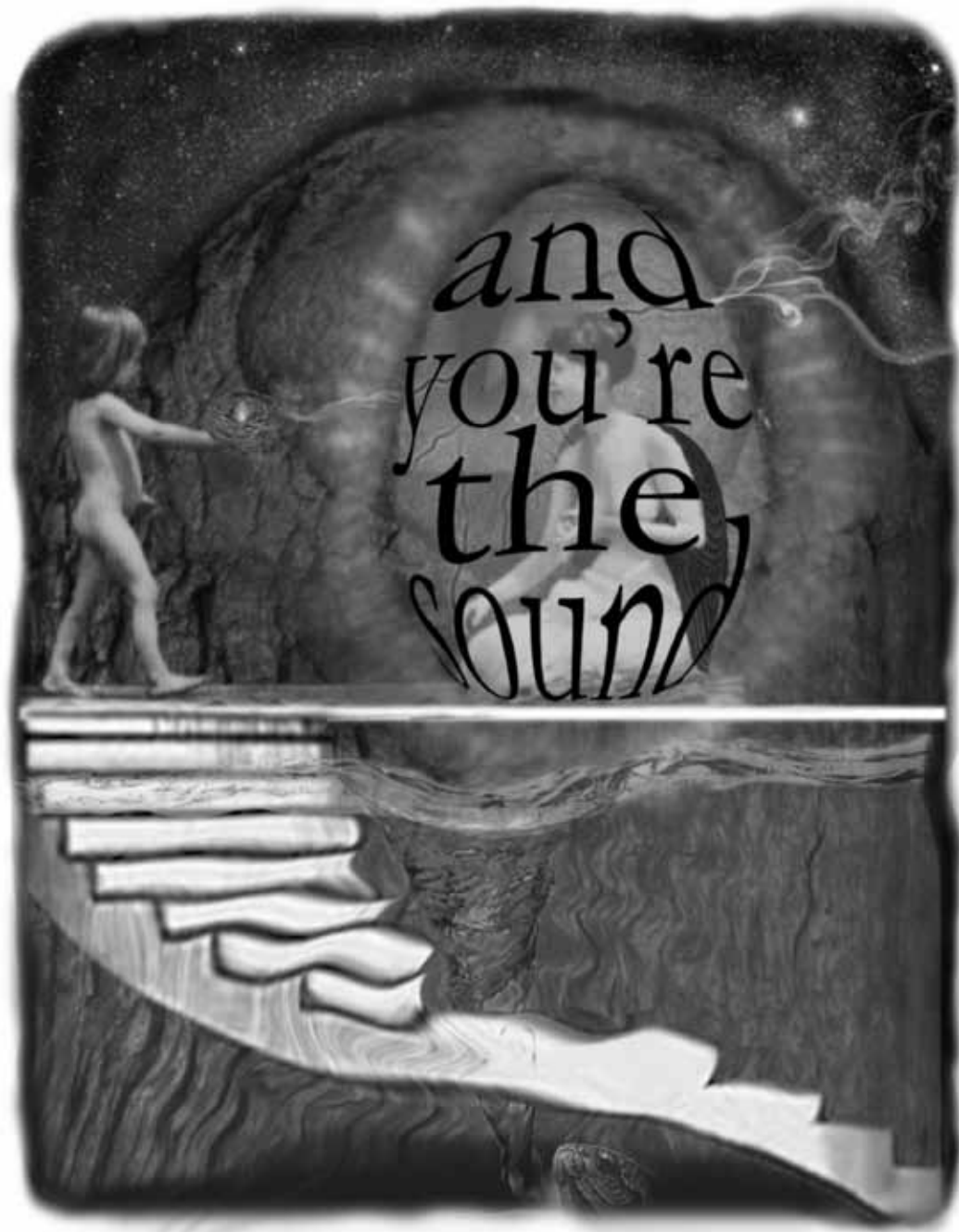


For My Parents

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.

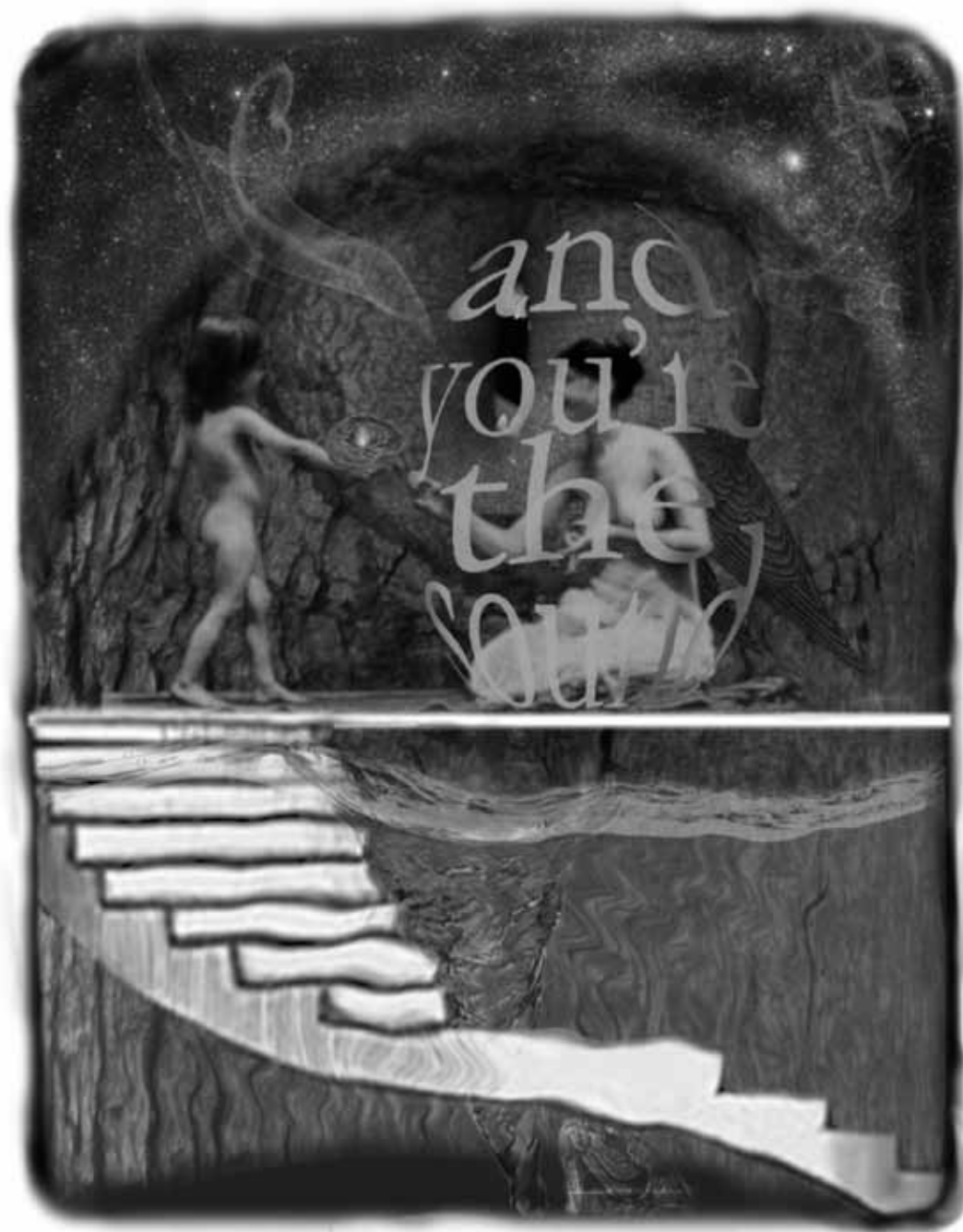
We settle, are settling. No one is at fault.
 No one is at fault. Yellow are
 my benefits. A swarm of bees building
 a hive where two branches meet.
 A golden bowl of cherry blossoms,
 a toy I can't play with
 anymore.

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

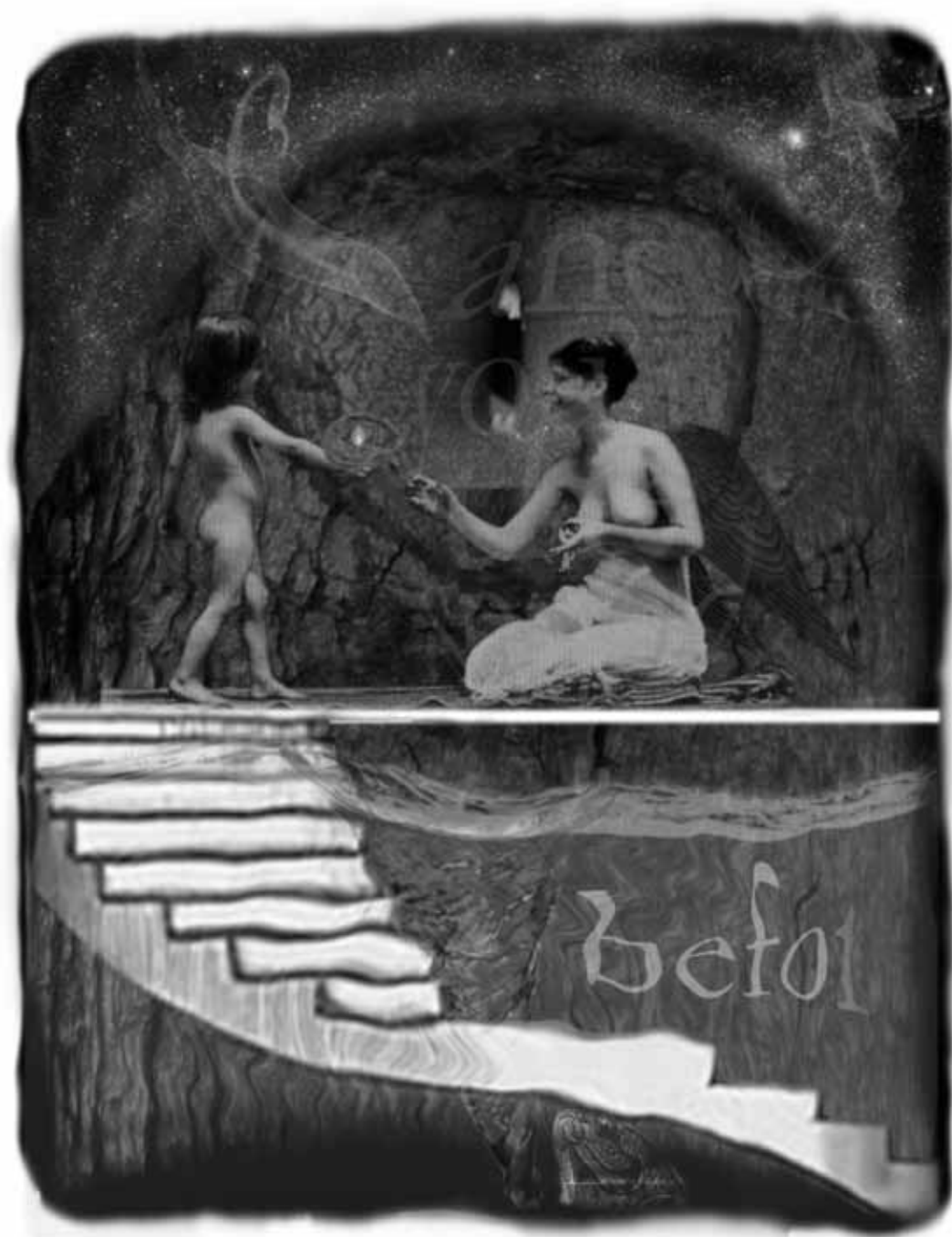
Say it was in the morning, and you were out on the sidewalk, perhaps you
 were checking the mailbox, you see a tooth, and it's like when you see one
 thing and then you see everything, you see multitudes of the same thing,
 a row, a forest of teeth, you hear a rumble, it's as loud as creation,
 but it's 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.



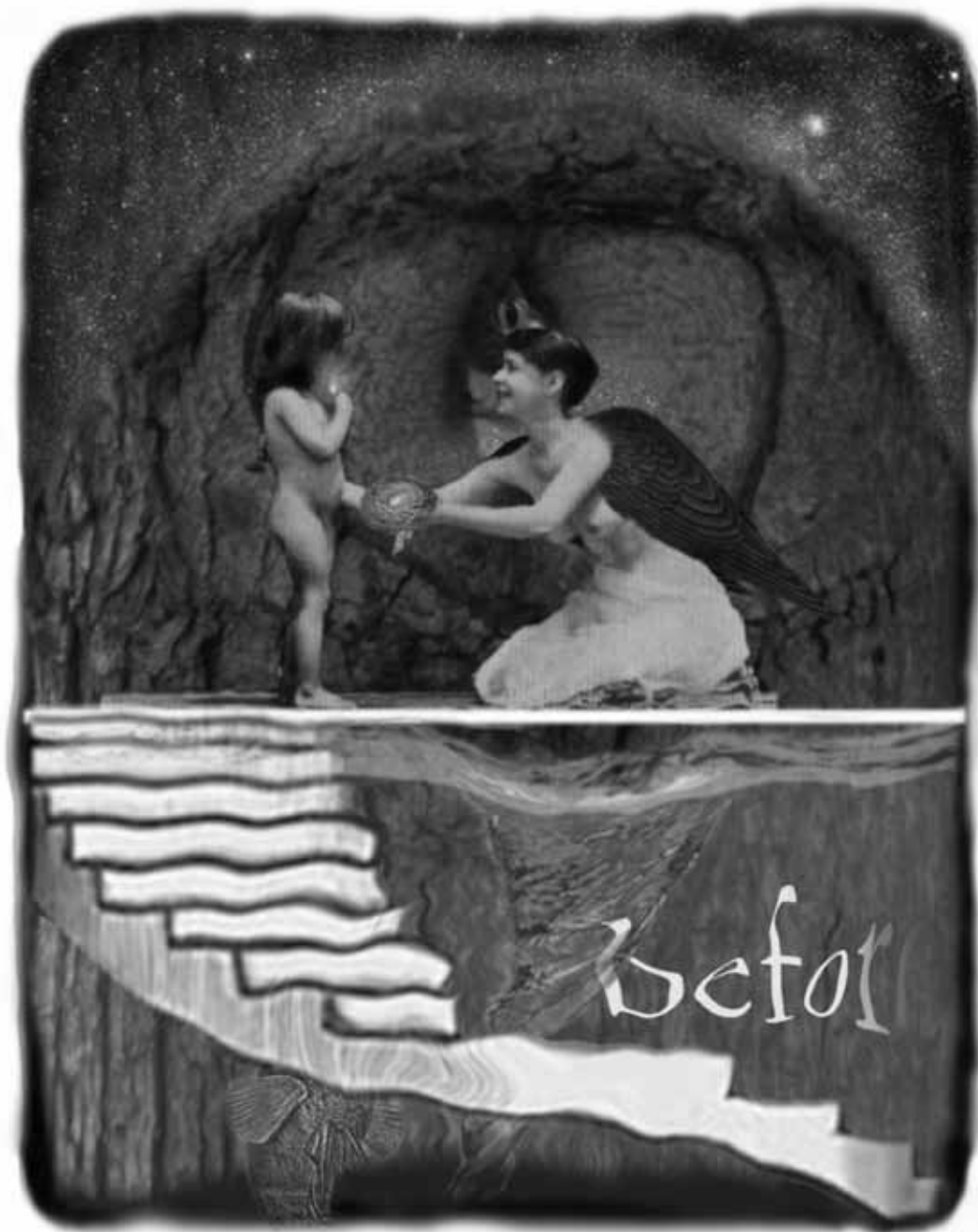
Pensées

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?"



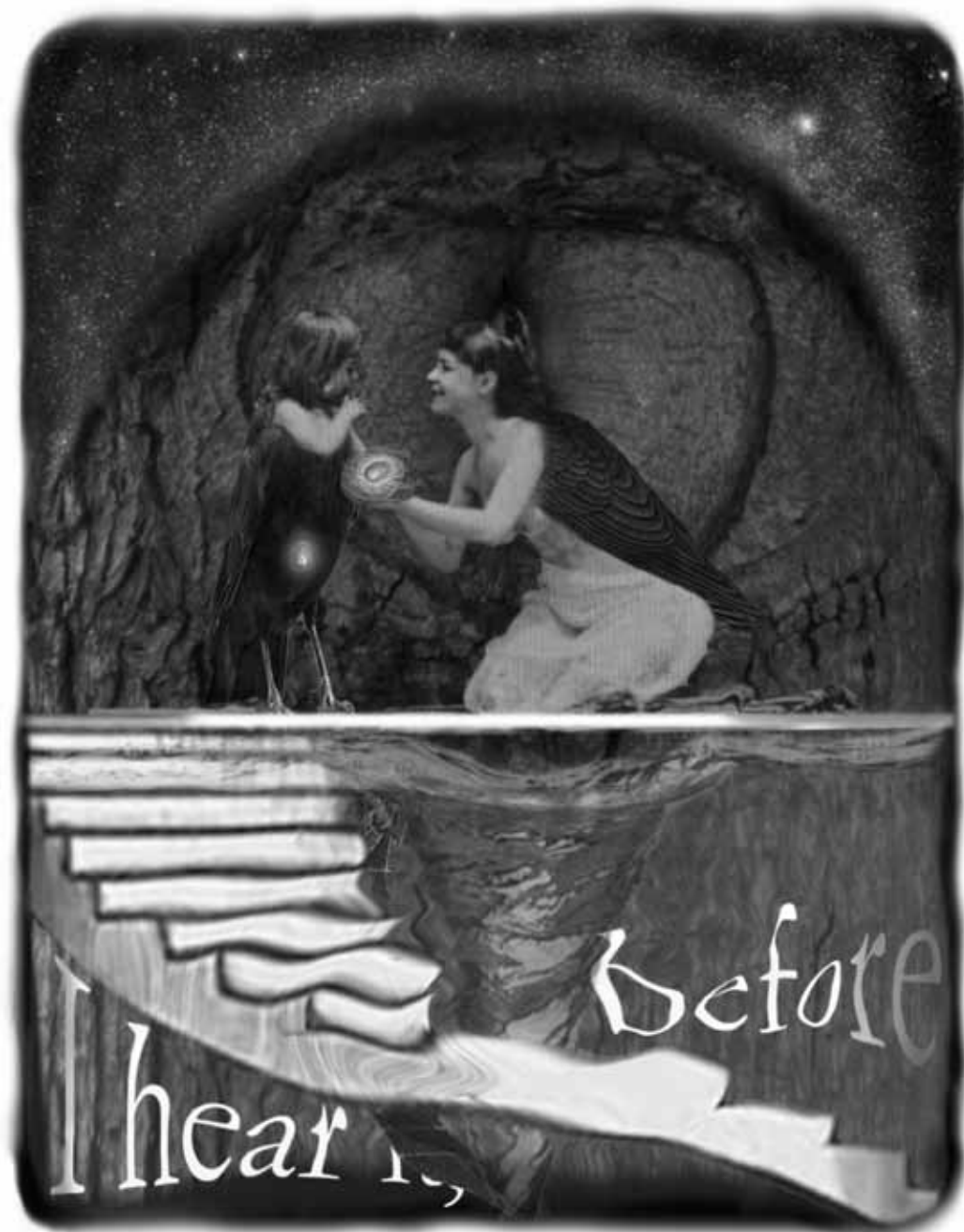
You and the Poem

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, slippering 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

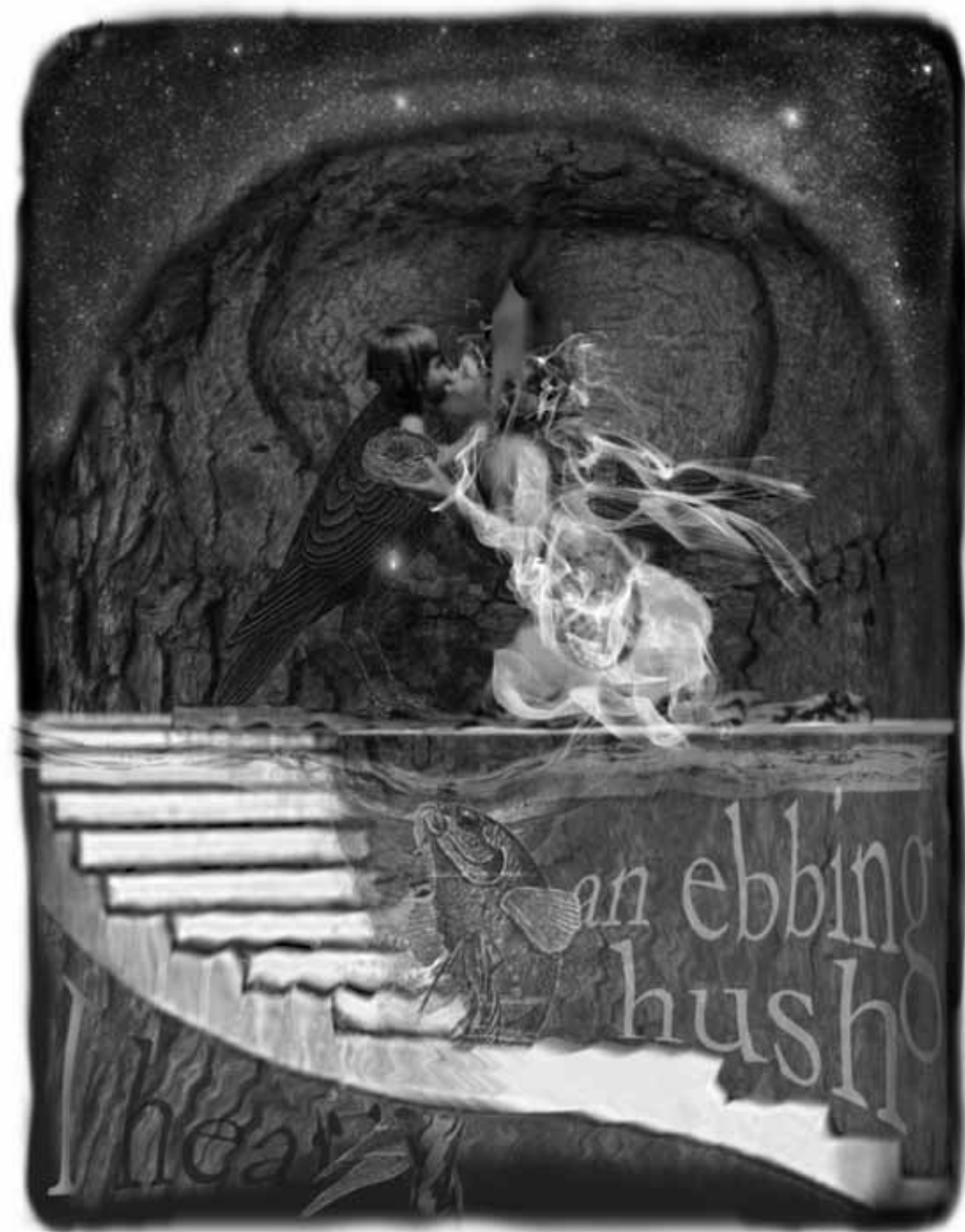
Or night, the moon in the way or all gone so
 super happy your teeth snap so
 you say it toughens you or you toughen it back
 the working parts the fat of the city, the loyal city, whom
 you smell or the scent makes you hungry or
 you think maybe, or maybe it's time to
 stop or to stop thinking or to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

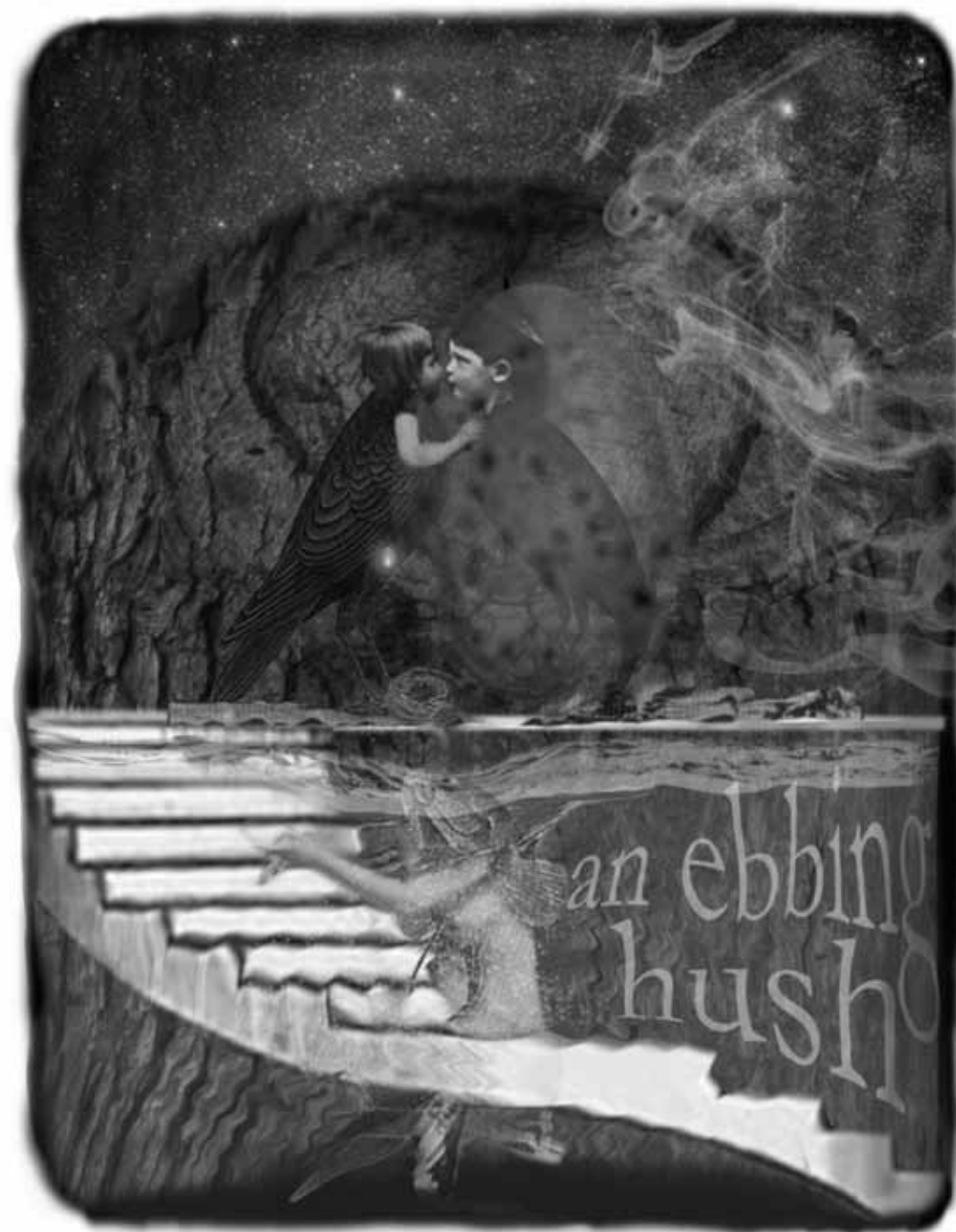
Another word for regret. Another word
 from my formal mouth. Sentences that are
 supposed to relate to one another.
 With good luck and some grace,
 like a ghost but not like a ghost
 I try to explain to *Him* that I am real but
 I'm not that real.



Lot

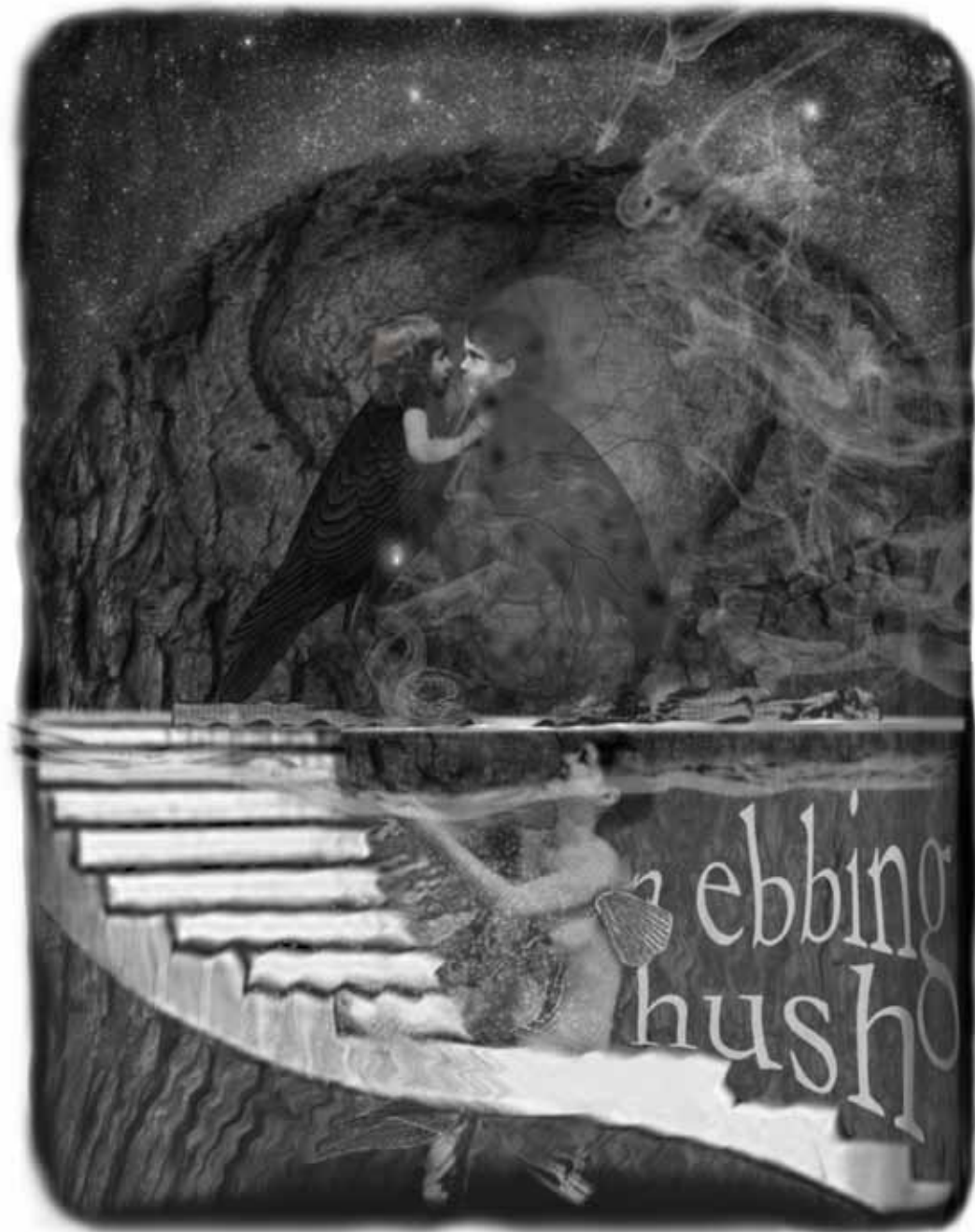
Became solid, what they hid. Before, among rocks,
there was what you could lift, cups tied to bindles,
enough wood you could cook with, smoke rising, the
cars wrecked and rusting, and someone
looks at you, and someone says

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.

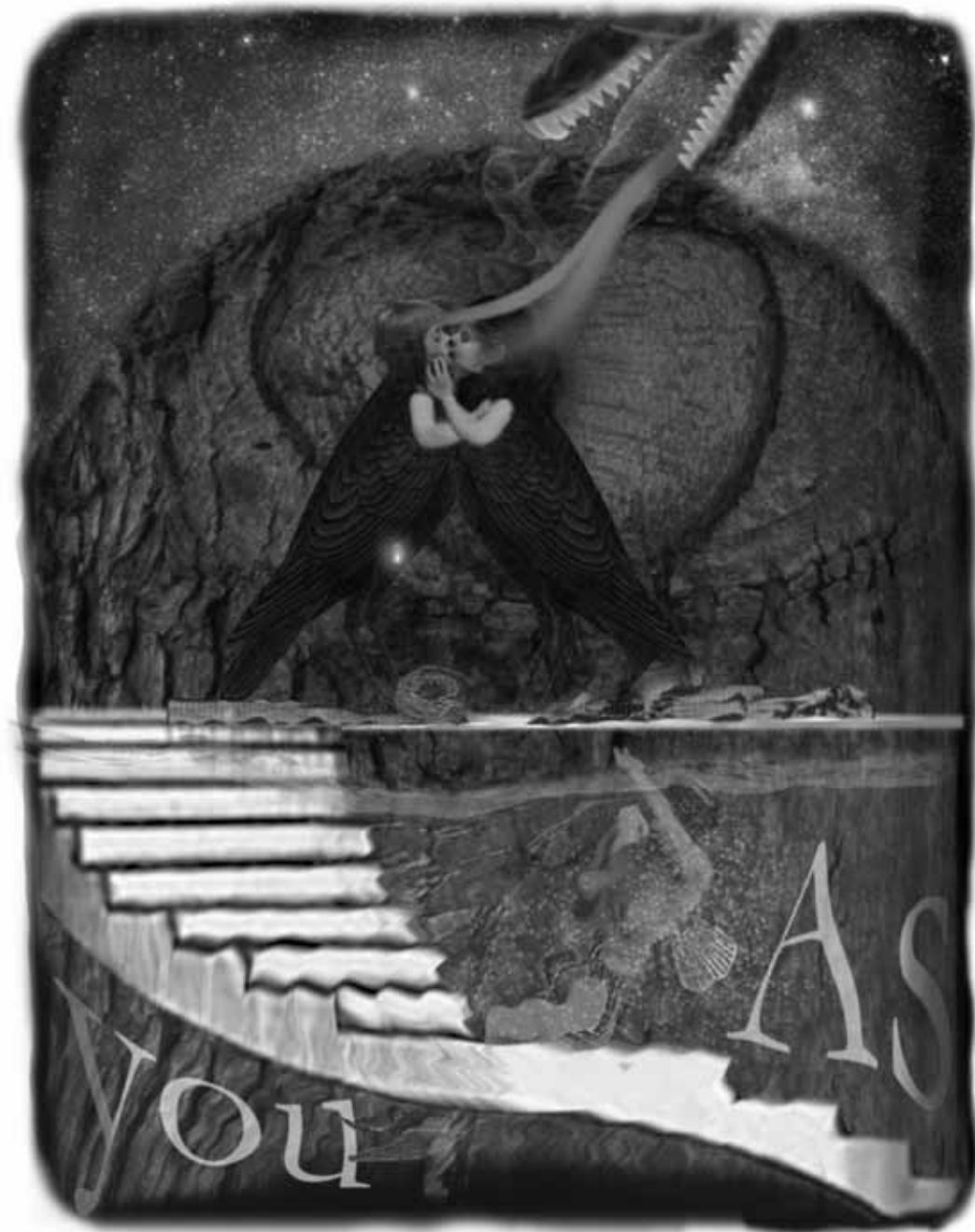
No horizon then. Make one.

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.

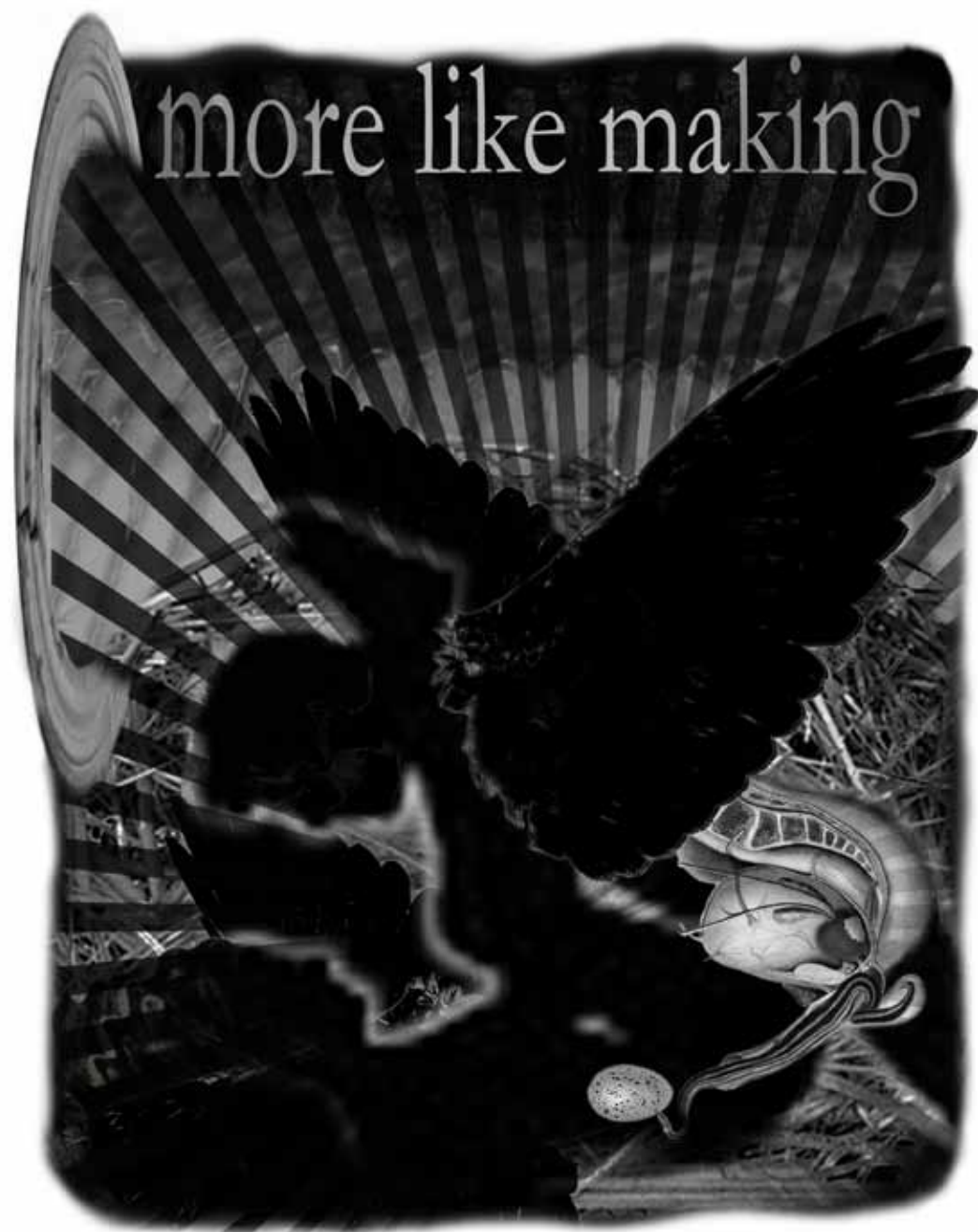
How do you know you're really here? I keep telling him I was taught
 as a baby I can tell the difference I'm a grown man now
 I got responsibilities I can tell the difference between where I am
 and where I'm supposed to be.
 The truck lurches but we're tied down good for real this time.

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.



By the Sea, By the Beautiful Sea

not a memory of, in it, specifically to;
liking to kiss, to
be as intimate as the letter
V

the ocean going
VVVVVVVVVV VVVVVVVVVV
VVVVVVVVVV

waving, back to
you.

Acknowledgements

“On Dreams.” *Assisi Online Journal*.

“Lot.” *Baltimore Is Reads*.

“Eden,” “The History of Music,” “Oh Honey,” “Thirst,” “Emphases,” “Silver” and “A Senator.” *The Bedazzler*.

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“Alfred and Sidney.” *Elimae*.

“Teeth” and “Gridding, after some sentences by Agnes Martin.” *EOAGH*.

“Invisible,” “Adam,” “Enflowering” and “Not Sleeping.” *GutCult*.

“Like a Bird” and “Horace.” *Horse Less Review*.

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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.

