

Parenthetical

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(lying there naked at daybreak in the bedroom of the abandoned house, he gazes at the leaves of the banyan tree beyond the balcony (bright green parakeets begin to chirp in the branches a moment before) as she explains a theory about the nature of time, that what a human experiences of time is only the present moment, so from the perspective of a human time seems impermanent, the past seems to have ceased to exist, the future seems to have not yet existed, but that maybe this is only an illusion, a misconception, a misperception, a limitation of human consciousness, that perhaps in reality all of time is permanent, that maybe every moment in time, past present future, is a fragment of an eternal shape that has always existed and will always exist, and that what a human refers to as the present is merely the particular fragment of time that a human is conscious of at that moment, and that she's thought about this theory off and on for a while now, but before this the theory has meant nothing to her, and after this the theory will mean everything to her, because what the theory would mean is that this moment between her and him is eternal, has always existed and will always exist, and so even if she can never be with him again, she'll be with him here forever, somewhere in time (earlier that night, glancing at him with tears on her cheeks (there's a moment when he becomes aware her mascara is smeared) in the flickering glow of the candles, she says fuck, she's so sorry, she's a mess, she honestly never meant for this to happen, she'll understand if he hates her (earlier that

morning, sitting beside him on the towel at the beach (moments before, rummaging through her tote in search of her phone, she tosses aside a book, a weathered paperback edition of a classic novel (she never travels anywhere without her copy, she says, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear (as he lifts the book from the towel, sections of the novel suddenly slip from between the covers, tumbling to the sand (staring at the jumbled sections of the novel lying on the sand, he realizes the book is so old that the glue in the binding is disintegrating (returning the book to her tote, she stuffs the fallen sections of the novel back between the covers at random (when he comments on this, she only laughs, saying she never reads the chapters in order anyway (she usually starts at the end)))))), she announces that she hates all contemporary literature, that no novel written in over a hundred years has made her feel what she feels when she reads that book (a story of war, a story of politics, but a love story at heart (later that night, strolling with him toward the silhouette of a bouncer standing in the blue-green glow of the neon sign over the door to the club across the street, she confesses that although she sometimes might seem cynical or jaded or apathetic, secretly she's always been a romantic (diehard for romcoms (huddled under a blanket on her futon, the television the only light in the apartment, a wet tissue clutched in her hands (heart pounding at the climactic scene))))), a strand of her hair flicking with the breeze as sunlight sparkles across the waves out on the sea (earlier that morning, floating with her out in the sea, basking in the warmth of the sunlight on his face and his throat and his chest as he gazes up at the sky, he's suddenly startled by a touch, her fingers brushing against his fingers in the water (the first time she ever touches him (later that afternoon, there's a moment at the taqueria when she taps his thigh, leaning toward him to share some gossip (later that evening, there's a moment at the cantina when she reaches for him, squeezing his bicep to emphasize some banter (later that night, there's a moment at the club when she drapes her arms over his shoulders, rising onto her

tiptoes to shout a joke into his ear))))), as if she's flirting with the possibility of holding hands with him (a moment later, when he glances at her, she looks at him too, laughing, seeming embarrassed, saying sorry, she didn't mean to, she was just drifting (later that night, lying beside him in the flickering glow of the candles in the darkness in the bedroom of the abandoned house, speaking in a murmur, she says she was in the water for so long today that when she shuts her eyes she still feels like she's floating, can feel the rise and dip of the waves))) beyond the shore (he's traveling alone (he arrives the night before, shambling into the inn with some baggage (he feels like a ruin, held together by duct tape and caffeine (stripping naked in the orange-yellow glow of the brass light in the suite, he glances at his reflection (his shoulder is bruised, his knuckles are scraped, his knee is scabbed, his shins are cut (a lifelong satyagrahi, he still identifies as a pacifist, is still devoted to the philosophical tenets of nonviolent resistance (hypocrite (desperate to believe that he's been motivated by necessity, that maybe violence is the only option when faced with bona fide fascists, despite that the reality, he now knows, is that what he feels when he commits an act of violence, the emotion that he experiences, is a breathtaking pleasure (to rip a gas mask from a fascist's face, to crack a fascist's nose with a punch, to flip a fascist backward over a barricade, to swing a bat at a fascist's megaphone, to hurl a brick at a fascist's camera, to blast a fascist with pepper spray, to elbow a fascist in the throat, to shove a fascist, to trip a fascist, to snap a fascist's ribs with a kick, to drag a fascist screaming through a burning haze of tear gas, to lob a flaming bottle at a fascist's helmet, to throw gravel in a fascist's eyes, to tackle a fascist to the pavement, to wrestle a fascist into a chokehold, to slit a fascist's tires with a box-cutter (a salutation to arms (watching her drink a sip of beer in the neon haze of steam in the alley behind the club, he asks whether she thinks violence is ever justified (yes, she says moments later, leaning back against the doorway) (no, she says moments later, leaning back against the doorway) (maybe, she says

moments later, frowning at the cobblestones with a look of contemplation as a silhouette in a sequined minidress licks the rim of a margarita glass behind her)))))), his eyes shadowed by sunken flesh) in the antique mirror gleaming beside the desk)), a black duffel (he's got a flash drive loaded with an amnesiac operating system zipped into a pocket (is this only paranoia, he wonders, glancing at the flash drive as he plugs a laptop into a charger (in the world's greatest democracy, how can being anti-fascist possibly be considered a radical position (is he naive to still consider this country to be the world's greatest democracy (it's crazy stressful to work seventy hours a week trying to build a career while civilization is collapsing all around you, she says, stepping into the sea))))), wanting only to rest (sinking naked onto the mattress in the inn, he feels no happiness, no tranquility, no sadness, no anger, no excitement, no curiosity, no anxiety, no contentment, only a horrible nothingness, an absence of all feeling), yearning for some solitude (but when he emerges from the suite in the morning, shuffling into the courtyard in some joggers in search of water (glancing around the courtyard, he notices ceramic pots of agave, net hammocks, canvas loungers, wrought-iron tables with cushioned chairs, a stone bodhisattva speckled with yellow-green lichen, ferns growing along a crumbling plaster wall), still foggy from dreaming (holographic nightmares of apocalypse), he becomes aware of a figure standing at the gate, wearing a satin robe a shade of cream, a sleepmask on her forehead, some slippers on her feet, holding a glass tumbler of water in her hands as she gazes out at the violet-indigo glow of daybreak in the sky (a moment after, she glances at him with a blank expression before looking back toward the sky (he's standing there staring at the sky with her in silence (there's a moment when he notices a frog hopping along the sandy boardwalk to the beach) when she suddenly begins to speak, asking him if he's just arriving (she's traveling alone (she's been staying at the inn for a week (today's the last day of her vacation (today's her first day of sunshine (all week, she says, there's been noth-

ing but lightning and thunder and rain (she's been walking around with a raincoat over her swimsuit, shuffling through puddles in flip-flops), endless clouds, and then suddenly the moment he appears the weather is perfect (as he shuffles back across the courtyard, she shouts, hey, um, she'll be at the beach later if he wants to say hi (when he glances back at her, hummingbirds are flitting through the vines beyond her)), paradise in the tropics))))))))) as he thinks of the book back in the suite (earlier that morning, glancing at the book (a collection of stories (on the cover a figure in a gown stands beside a dog) written over a century before) on the desk in the suite as he reaches for some joggers (a crumple of black polyester hanging from the chair), he imagines that's how he'll spend the week here, is reading alone on the beach (searching for some clarity (is there still any goodness in him, or is he a monster now too)), in silence (later that morning, walking down the sandy boardwalk to the beach in a swimsuit (black bleached a shade of gun-metal by a decade of chlorine) as dazzling sunlight shimmers on the leaves of the palm trees (a moment before, as the palm trees flutter with a breeze, he becomes aware of the scent of the soap from the suite (his skin still feels moist from the shower), a hint of grapefruit), he hopes that maybe he won't encounter her again (but when he arrives at the beach, there she is, lying on a towel in an ivory bikini (callipygian), ponytailed, barefoot, gripping a can of beer (reaching into her tote, she offers him a can of beer as he sits) as she scrolls through her phone (when she notices him (a moment earlier, looking to avoid an interaction, he thinks maybe he'll be able to walk past her without her spotting him) she waves at him (a moment later, he hesitates, thinking maybe he can just nod at her before walking off down the beach to be alone) with a lopsided smile (there's a moment when he becomes aware that he feels guilty because she seems lonely (later that night, at the club, watching him peel the label off a bottle of beer across the booth from her, she cracks a joke about sexual frustration))))), her skin glowing with a sheen of sweat (later that night, as she

points at a constellation, standing beside him in the darkness among the clusters of grass fluttering in the dunes, there's a moment when he catches a whiff of her sweat on the breeze, an odor like fresh parsley)), won't have to suffer through another conversation (superficial chitchat (formulaic) (mechanical) (the awkward silences between the performative exchanges scripted by social convention (but at the beach, suddenly everything is different (the conversation is free-flowing, natural (as he's sitting beside her on the towel, there's a moment when he becomes aware that he loves talking with her (she's endlessly curious (she never asks him about the past) (she never asks him about the future) (all she asks about is the present (about where he lives (she's got an apartment in the city), about what age he is (she's thirty-ish), about what ethnicity he is (she's uber-desi), about what art he likes (her favorite painter is a famous impressionist (squinty and bearded, glaring at the camera))), about what music he likes (her favorite singer is a celebrity rapper (grinning at the camera, buzzcut and noseringed))), about whether he's thirsty, brought any sunscreen, feels like swimming, knows how to sail, has any secrets, is scared of sharks, is obsessed with dolphins, ever exercises, thinks crypto is tulip mania, wants to just share her towel, can please explain the purpose of sword-and-sorcery fantasy, thinks yoga is erotic, thinks latex is sexy, ever wants any tattoos, enjoys flying a kite, dropped this receipt, sees her phone anywhere, believes in signs, can hear church bells ringing, hypothetically might be interested in traveling to the moon, believes in ghosts, believes in hell, believes in heaven, believes in love at first sight, believes in both shampoo and conditioner or only shampoo or just conditioner or perhaps even (no judgement) actually neither, feels hungry, eats meat, has any cash, is up for walking, thinks cats are suspicious, is gay or straight or bi or what exactly, can feel any rain, smells those flowers, tastes that honey, feels like dancing))), shocked by how happy he feels as she fingers the ridges on a clam shell in the sand, chatting about snorkeling (later that morning, squirting a dollop of sunscreen into the palm of

her hand (later that night, as she points at a constellation, standing beside him in the darkness among the clusters of grass fluttering in the dunes, there's a moment when he catches a whiff of her sunscreen on the breeze, an aroma like raw coconut), she suddenly asks why he's so banged up, glancing at his body with a frown (when he finally responds (he hesitates before replying, considering whether he should tell her the truth), he decides to just lie to her (says it's from skateboarding (later that night, standing beside her in the darkness among the clusters of grass fluttering in the dunes, gazing out toward the sea, he tells her that he lied to her, describing what he's been doing at the marches, the protests, the riots (in the silence after he's spoken, he thinks about everything he's risking (a salary, a career (potentially exchanged in a moment for a spot on a federal watchlist (earlier that evening, strolling with her across a cobblestone lane, he flinches on reflex when a siren suddenly blares (a moment after, he realizes the siren is only an ambulance (strolling with him past a parked ambulance earlier that afternoon, she points at a cockatoo perched on the railing of a balcony above the boulevard, pleased by the bird's crest) as the ambulance blows past the intersection, a blur of flashing neon) as a silhouette in a chino suit puffs at a cigar (as he breathes he can smell the pungent aroma of the tobacco) glowing in the darkness across the street), maybe charges for a misdemeanor, maybe indictment for a felony)), realizing that he's just given her the power to ruin him (afterward, she stares at him with a look of intensity, her hair rippling with the wind (a moment after, glancing off down the beach, she says there's somewhere she wants to bring him, a secret place (there's a moment when he watches her squeeze through the gap between some bent bars in a fence around an abandoned house), speaking in a tone of urgency, with resolve, as if suddenly making a decision) in the starlight as a wave surges onto the beach beyond her, a glimmer of foamy water), and that he's happy for her to have this power, happy that she can be the one person on this planet to truly know him, and to judge him, and to sentence

him, decide the fate that he deserves), all of the blood))))), an endless series of seemingly urgent tangents), instantaneous connection (the exhilaration of a meaningful exchange with another consciousness))))), thinking (later that morning, as he's stepping into the sea, thinking about random-access memory, there's a moment when he misses whatever she's saying (by the time he becomes aware she's just spoken, she's already diving headfirst into the waves (as he's floating with her out in the sea, gazing up at the sky, there's a moment when he becomes aware of the moon hanging alongside the sun (what's almost a convergence (gleaming crescent, dazzling orb)) above the waves (a moment after, a frigatebird with a bright red pouch soars through the sky over the sea, wings flapping), reflecting the sunlight (later that morning, he notices a crystal prism hanging from the mirror in the cab of a parked jeep, refracting the sunlight into shimmers of color on the dashboard (earlier that morning, sitting beside her on the towel at the beach as she chats about pirates, he becomes aware for the first time of the color in her eyes, rings of copper glimmering with shards of emerald and amber) as the scent of a roasting pig drifts through the palm trees with the breeze (later that night, as he's staggering with her through those palm trees in the darkness, there's a moment when a green-yellow meteor suddenly blazes through the sky over the sea (did you just see that, she says, staring up at the stars (standing beside him on the porch of the abandoned house, she announces that although she loves constellations, of all the objects in the sky her favorite isn't a constellation, but that instead her favorite is actually a certain nebula, a massive interstellar cloud, visible to humanity only as an absence of stars (an omission)) in astonishment as the palm trees ripple with a gust of wind (as he breathes he becomes aware of the briny scent of the sea (during the hurricane all of this is probably underwater, she says, staring at a ripple of sand on the floor in the entryway of the abandoned house (as he's walking through the entryway of the abandoned house, there's a moment when he becomes aware of the lines on the floorboards

(curving growth rings containing fragments of seasons that intersect at the seams between the planks of wood)))))) as he strolls with her back toward the inn (back at the inn, as she walks off across the courtyard, he suddenly notices that he's still carrying the towel (back in the suite, there's a moment when he lifts the towel to his nose (as he breathes he becomes aware of the rosy scent of her perfume (a fragrance he realizes he's already begun to associate with happiness, catching a whiff of her perfume on the breeze earlier that morning as she flops back on the towel, chatting about henotheism (sitting beside him on the towel later that morning, squinting into the sunlight, she jokes that if she ever actually had a pet, what she'd want is a pet god) as a tropicbird with an orange beak coasts through the sky above the sea) over the scent of the cotton), buzzing from the can of beer at the beach), glancing down at the towel as the shadows cast by the fig tree ripple across the tiles with the breeze (later that afternoon, as a gust of wind blows through a cobblestone alley near the harbor, there's a moment when he becomes aware of the blossoms, blue-indigo petals tumbling through the air with the breeze (glancing at the cobblestones, he notices some of the blossoms have already been crushed by the soles of passing shoes) as she points at a leather corset (as he's drinking across from her in the booth at the club, there's a moment when he becomes aware of the scent of leather (glancing away from her, he notices a silhouette in a gleaming leather bodysuit dancing near the booth with a goblet of sangria raised in the air) on the breeze) on a mannequin in a window, chatting about fashion (a passion (when she meets him again after changing, strolling into the courtyard of the inn already complaining about the humidity, she's wearing a silk dress a shade of white (pearlescent shimmers ripple across the fabric under the sunlight, he notices a moment later), diamonds sparkling in her ears, bangles gleaming on her wrists, her feet in leather sandals (at the club, glancing at her across the booth as she sips a bottle of beer, he suddenly becomes aware of how he's dressed (black tee faded a shade of charcoal (a rip in the

seam along a shoulder), black jeans faded a shade of ash (a rip in the denim across a knee), black boots smudged with dust and clay) in comparison (he wonders if she's embarrassed by what he's wearing (maybe that's why she's looking at him like she wants to strip him)), the cultural mismatch (yet aside from the clothes, he realizes, she's actually not that fancy, preferring a cheap brand of beer even when the menu offers opulent champagnes, luxurious rosés, posh chardonnays, swank cabernets, blue-ribbon ports, artisan cocktails glittering with gold leaf (popping the tab on a can of beer at the beach, she wipes a drop of condensation from her belly before offering him a sip (later that evening, she tips back a can of beer at the cantina (earlier that afternoon, she tips back a can of beer at the taqueria (foamy shimmers of beer spatter across the lap of her dress as she suddenly cracks up laughing, quick bending her head toward her hands to cover her mouth, sitting across from him in the booth at the club))))), preferring to eat with her hands rather than cutlery (later that evening, as she sucks crystals of salt from her fingers, sitting beside him in the glow of the lamps at the cantina (earlier that afternoon, as she sucks flakes of pepper from her fingers, sitting beside him in the glow of the lanterns at the taqueria (that morning, sitting beside him on the towel at the beach, she sucks pulp from the pit of the mango, gripping the pit in her fingers (a moment after, tossing aside the pit with a look of contentment, she knuckles some juice from her face, squinting into the sunlight) with drops of juice trickling down her chin, down her wrists, down her neck), he notices smudges of ketchup at the corners of her mouth (a moment after, she licks the ketchup from her lips with a flick of her tongue, reaching for a napkin) as a finch warbles in the bamboo beyond the patio), he notices blotches of sriracha at the corners of her lips (a moment after, reaching for a napkin, she licks the sriracha from her mouth with a flick of her tongue) as a cardinal twitters in the wisteria beyond the lounge), preferring to walk rather than ride in a taxi (strolling with her along the boulevard earlier that afternoon (wandering with her

along the boulevard later that night (there's a moment when he notices a glowing television flashing between scenes in a window), he becomes aware of the bittersweet scent of burning sage on the breeze), he notices faded dishcloths fluttering on a clothesline on a balcony (there's a moment when he becomes aware of a macaw preening in the breeze on a ledge) as a taxi glides past the curb), preferring to crouch behind a palm tree to piss in the sand rather than bothering to search for a restroom (announcing she needs to pee, she hands her clutch to him (as she drifts off toward a palm tree, he gazes out toward the sea (earlier that morning, there's a moment when he's swimming with her through green-blue waters in the dazzling sunlight out in the sea (he becomes aware that the seabed below is beginning to vanish), noticing an oyster shell in the sand below), the waves glittering with starlight in the shallows (as he's waiting alone in the darkness (glancing off down the shore, he becomes aware of the shimmering lights of a cruise ship out on the sea), there's a moment when he suddenly laughs, remembering a comment she made at the beach earlier that morning (she's standing with her tote slung over a shoulder (when the straps slip a moment later, she reaches up to tug her tote back onto the shoulder), pointing at a barnacled slab of driftwood)), the waves glinting with starlight in the deep (earlier that morning, there's a moment when he's swimming with her through indigo-blue waters in the dazzling sunlight out in the sea (he becomes aware that the seabed below has almost completely vanished), noticing a conch shell in the sand below), holding her clutch) in the darkness (earlier that morning, as he's floating with her out in the sea, there's a moment when a turtle swims past underwater (moments before, noticing a turtle peeking above the surface of the waves nearby, she grabs him by the arm, saying, whoa, hey, oh my god), flippers pulsing as he watches in awe (later that night, in the darkness in the bedroom of the abandoned house (earlier that night, in the darkness in the study of the abandoned house (when he glances at her a moment before, he notices that she's gazing at a tapestry

of a mandala hanging on the wall across the study), there's a moment when he becomes aware of water dripping from a crack in the ceiling onto the leather sofa (love seat)), she suddenly murmurs that that turtle was so amazing (a moment after, he becomes aware of the downy hairs shimmering on the rims of her ears (sitting beside him in the dazzling sunlight on the towel at the beach (a moment before, she presses her fingertips to his face to examine the tone of his skin), she rubs the stubble on his cheeks with satisfaction, declaring a love for whiskers)), lying beside him in the flickering glow of the candles (every day that she's been here, she says, she's been walking to the abandoned house at night just to be alone (now, she says, she feels like all of that time she was waiting for him), sitting on the porch, listening to the rain (drinking alone (earlier that night, stepping onto the porch of the abandoned house in the darkness, he notices a heap of empty beer cans (the rim of each beer can is smeared with a bright smack of lipstick, the same shade of ruby she's been wearing all day (later that night, lying beside her in the flickering glow of the candles, thinking about those empty beer cans, he wonders if that's the secret (alcohol and grit) to how she's survived all of the grinding and the pressure and the stress for so many years without breaking (as he's following her onto the beach in the darkness, there's a moment when he suddenly realizes that even after all of that alcohol she still doesn't seem tipsy))) lying jumbled in the ferns below (normally littering would bother him, but with her for some reason the litter seems almost charming (how is that even possible (she seems to have this effect on him with other issues too, any difference of opinion (as she's sitting beside him on the towel at the beach (earlier that morning, walking with her from the towel toward the sea, he becomes aware of the gritty sand under the soles of his feet (a moment before, he notices a flock of sanderlings skittering along the shore, pecking at the sand))), there's a moment when she shakes her head, frowning in disagreement, raising a finger to indicate an imminent rebuttal as she swallows a sip of beer) ultimately feeling like a plea-

surable encounter with a fascinating new perspective rather than an insufferable conflict (for instance with respect to theories of economics (she's a proud capitalist (laissez-faire), declaring that humanity's best hope for an everlasting peace between nations is a shared interest in the extraordinary wealth generated by international trade, in ensuring an uninterrupted exchange of goods between competitive free-market economies (earlier that afternoon, strolling with her past a bridge, he notices a tent (a moment after, he realizes the tent is abandoned (he becomes aware of a parrot squawking), ripped flaps of fluorescent nylon fluttering in the breeze) hidden in the weeds), scornful of communism, dismissive of socialism, speaking with genuine pity about the unintended (or perhaps intended, she says) consequences of the welfare state, laughing off anarchism with a shake of her head (as she's sitting beside him in the dazzling sunlight on the towel at the beach (there's a moment when she pinches the chest of her bandeau, tugging up (a moment after, he becomes aware of the splashing of the waves))), she speaks about the merits of capitalism so passionately, with such gratitude, with such reverence, that with a sense of surprise he suddenly realizes he's feeling strangely enthusiastic about capitalism too), happy to be productive, to have devoted decades in school to acquiring knowledge, and now to have an opportunity to apply that knowledge to new challenges every day, to confront difficult problems, to develop creative solutions, and to be rewarded for these intellectual achievements with a competitive salary (she just feels so lucky, she says, to live in a society in which a random working-class kid with zero connections can grow up to become an executive-track moneymaker with an office in a skyscraper in what's literally the financial capital of the planet (at the club, as flashes of neon strobe across the crowd, there's a moment when she bites her lip, glancing at him with a look of uncertainty as she waits to pay the tab at the bar (at the taqueria, there's a moment when she stands reading the menu in the orange-red glow of the lanterns (as he breathes he becomes aware of the rosy scent of

her perfume (then a whiff of the peeled strips of yuzu rind gleaming on the wooden platter behind the bar) on the breeze) as a silhouette in an apron bustles past the register with a crate of spinach (at the cantina, there's a moment when a silhouette in an apron slips past the register with a sack of peaches (as he breathes he becomes aware of the rosy scent of her perfume (then a whiff of the mashed pulp of mint leaves shimmering in the wooden mortar behind the bar) on the breeze) as she sits reading the menu in the red-orange glow of the lamps (earlier that afternoon, glancing up at the dazzling glow of the sun as he strolls out of the inn with her, he suddenly realizes the moon has vanished (as he breathes (a moment after, he notices a silhouette in a fluorescent tube top sitting in the cab of a pickup, arm dangling out a window, a joint pinched between fingers, casually) he can smell the pungent fragrance of marijuana on the breeze) from the sky (with her even just walking feels different (later that evening, he strolls with her past a fountain (strolling with her past the frosted cakes gleaming in the windows of a patisserie, as he breathes (strolling with her past the vending machine glowing at the entrance of a boxing gym, as he breathes (strolling with her past the security camera blinking above the doors of a pawn shop, as he breathes (strolling with her past the graffitied payphone shimmering in the shade of a warehouse, as he breathes (strolling with her past the dazzling sunlight glimmering on the canopy of a guava cart, as he breathes (strolling with her past the glinting fans spinning on the porch of a vintage store, as he breathes (strolling with her past the tangled ivy hanging from the roof of a laundromat, as he breathes (strolling with her past the puffy toadstools sprouting along the fence of a junkyard, as he breathes (strolling with her past the striped pole swiveling on the storefront of a barber, as he breathes (strolling with her past the shopping bag blowing around the stoop of a florist, as he breathes (strolling with her past the fluffy dandelions blooming in the shadow of a shuttered jeweler, as he breathes (strolling with her past the electric bulbs strung along the awning of a

gelato truck, as he breathes (earlier that morning, there's a moment when he bursts back above the surface of the waves, gasping for air) he becomes aware of the scent of apricot) he becomes aware of the scent of cedar) he becomes aware of the scent of diesel exhaust) he becomes aware of the scent of hot plastic) he becomes aware of the scent of melting chocolate) he becomes aware of the scent of lilac detergent) he becomes aware of the scent of glue) he becomes aware of the scent of vinegar) he becomes aware of the scent of caramelized butter) he becomes aware of the scent of whiskey) he becomes aware of the scent of maple) he becomes aware of the scent of rancid grease) as a flock of starlings twists through the violet-red twilight above the sea (murmuration (later that night, as he's gazing in a trance at the concentric rings of a water stain rippled across the wall in the bedroom of the abandoned house, he misses whatever she's murmuring (has he ever felt like this before) (will he ever feel like this again))))), every step feeling charged with meaning (the conspiratorial intimacy of best friends (staring with her at the rust-streaked doors to the abandoned house (moments earlier, standing with him in the starlight on the porch, she says that's she's always just sat out on the porch when she's here, that she actually doesn't know what's in there, that she was afraid to go in alone), he says, let's break in (twisting the knobs on the doors, he discovers the doors are locked) (when she tries to kick in the doors, the rubber sole of her sandal hits the steel with a snap (she staggers back)) (when he tries to kick in the doors, the rubber sole of his boot hits the steel with a thump (he's staggered back)) (as he grimaces at the doors, considering just breaking a window, he suddenly hears her say, hey, what about this (when he glances back at her, she's pointing at a cinder block in the ferns (swinging the cinder block with her on the porch, he grunts from the strain (that was so satisfying, she says with a smile (triumphant), staring at the broken knobs lying on the porch)))))), a life-changing significance (it's weird to share so many memories with somebody you just met, she says (earlier that night, there's a

moment when he stands staring in shock as a silhouette in a cape lopes across an intersection on a pair of stilts (when he glances at her, she's still gazing at the alley where the silhouette on the stilts vanished (what the fuck, she says a moment later, bursting out laughing (what the fuck is the matter with you, she says, chewing a bite of plantains as she toys with a straw) (what the fuck is the matter with me, she says, fidgeting with a coaster as she chews a bite of chips) (so then like what the fuck is matter, she says, staring at her hands (holding out her hands with juice dripping from her fingertips (at the club, there's a moment when she's knuckling drops of beer from her chin, grinning with embarrassment (later that night, as he's squatting to tie the lace of a boot, distracted by a silhouette posing for a selfie over by the jukebox, there's a moment when he misses whatever she's shouting)), she says, smell (as he bends to sniff her fingers, breathing in the scent of the mango (there's a moment when he becomes aware that her fingernails are painted with a glossy white polish), she says, how happy does that make you feel)) in horror, debating the implications of quantum mechanics (she's a math geek (ashamed to admit how excited she is by the complexities of a global economic system (or any system for that matter (earlier that morning, at the beach, there's a moment when she clasps her hands over his mouth to interrupt him, laughing as she argues about whether a zeitgeist is a gestalt))) too))) into the darkness) on an otherwise empty boulevard), strolling with him across the parking lot of a convenience store with neon marquees flashing behind the glass (a moment after (as he breathes he becomes aware of the scent of gasoline), a bell suddenly jingles as a silhouette in greasy coveralls shuffles out the door) as an oystercatcher scurries behind a dumpster (there's a moment when he notices a mouse scurry into the hallway as she's crouching to inspect the bronze gong in the study of the abandoned house (a moment before, he hears a tinny shimmer as she raps her knuckles against the bronze gong))), overpowering (as she's lying on her back in the dazzling sunlight on the towel, chatting about the stock

market, her hair damp from the sea, her feet glittering with sand, there's a moment when she pinches the waist of her thong, tugging up (glancing past her hands, he notices that she's stretching her thong so tight the lips of her vulva are visible through the wet nylon (as she releases the waist of her thong again, rising onto her elbows, stretching her feet out, wiggling her toes around, joking about a resort casino, he becomes aware of a pressure, his cock suddenly stiffening in his swimsuit, straining against the liner (he's about to roll over on the towel to hide what's happening when he realizes she's suddenly trailed off mid-sentence, as if forgetting what she's saying, staring at where the wet nylon of his swimsuit is clinging to the rigid bulge (a moment after, she glances away from him, recovering the thread (trying to be discreet, he rolls over on the towel (he becomes aware that his heart is pounding))), asking about what he does for work (she's a corporate consultant (determined to make partner before any kids))), smiling now, looking flustered (sounding terrified, lying beside him in the flickering glow of the candles in the darkness of the abandoned house, she says desire is what's always scared her (at the beach, as she's sitting beside him on the towel with a can of beer gripped in her hand, chatting about relationships (moments before, he becomes aware of a yacht with an indigo sail (he notices a silhouette in a cap perched on the prow) drifting past the shore on the sea) (later that night, strolling with her through the indigo-violet twilight in a cobblestone alley (already tipsy from the can of beer at the beach, the can of beer at the taqueria, the can of beer at the cantina (he almost never drinks alcohol (all he likes is caffeine (cup of matcha) (pot of sencha) (shot of espresso) (mug of coffee))))), he notices a couple strolling just ahead, a pair of silhouettes in fluorescent tank tops and nylon shorts, both broad-shouldered, hefty, jacked, chatting together while holding hands (a moment later, staring at the couple, remembering that there was a time in this country when homosexual couples were legally forbidden to marry (a time when homosexual couples were legally forbidden from exist-

ing period), he's suddenly struck by a wave of emotion, newly amazed to be living in a time when this couple ahead of him can seem ordinary, quotidian, mundane (moments after (moments before, he becomes aware that his eyes are watering), she says, hey, are you crying (as he's blinking away the tears, he tries to explain to her what he was just thinking (when he glances at her, she's staring at him with an intense expression, blurred by the tears as she walks beside him with a frown), smiling now (later that night, remembering that there was a time in this country when interracial couples were legally forbidden to marry (a time when interracial couples were legally forbidden from existing period), he's suddenly struck by another wave of emotion, glancing at her across the club, imagining living in a time when he and she might have been stoned to death or stabbed to death or burned alive just for dancing together (later that night, standing with her on the beach beneath a sky of glittering stars (as he breathes he becomes aware of the rosy scent of her perfume (then the fragrance of the eucalyptus trees) on the breeze), he realizes that human culture doesn't progress in a single direction, that liberties can be abolished at any moment, that bigotries can be ratified at any moment, and that maybe this era of freedom is only a brief interlude between ages of repression (oppression) in human history)))) as the couple disappears into the road beyond the alley (he catches a whiff of vomit on the breeze (later that night, peeing into a urinal in the restroom of the club (when he emerges from the restroom (in the abandoned house, there's a moment when he's squatting to inspect the multicolored bracket fungi (turkey tail) sprouting from the doorframe (as he glances away he becomes aware that she's dragging a fingertip through the dirt on the rim of the tub) in a bathroom) she's leaning against the jukebox by the door (some rando bought her these, she says with a laugh), holding a couple of shot glasses shimmering with copper (tasting the tart molasses-y char of the liquor as he slugs the shot (his throat is still burning as she grabs his hand, leading him into the crowd), he realizes with a shock, not

tequila, that's rum), looking amused), over the sour odor of the urine he catches a whiff of vomit again, but this time the scent contains a trace of citrus) as he follows her toward the road beyond the alley) chuckling with husky laughs) as a pigeon coos in a nest of twigs) (moments after, he becomes aware of a kite with a violet tail (he notices a silhouette in a romper running with the tether) soaring through the sky over the sea), there's a moment when she reaches down to scratch her ankle, satisfying some itch (at the club, there's a moment when she presses against him (as he breathes he becomes aware of the rosy scent of her perfume (then a whiff of gin rising from a martini (then her perfume again) clutched by a silhouette in a velvet blazer (there's a moment when a silhouette in a spandex bra (as he breathes he becomes aware of the scent of deodorant (pine and lavender)) strolls past where he's sitting with her on the patio of the taqueria (there's a moment when a silhouette in an organza blouse (as he breathes he becomes aware of the scent of cologne (musk and vanilla)) strolls past where he's sitting with her in the lounge of the cantina)) standing in the glow of the jukebox) on the breeze) with her hands on his chest (when she finally pushes away from him, she squeezes his pecs (a moment after, glancing at him with a mischievous grin, she squeezes his pecs (then drops her hands as she turns toward the dancing) harder) gently) to squeeze aside as a silhouette in a lamé leotard strides through the crowd with a cluster of balloons, cheering (later that night, concentric rings ripple across the surface as he steps with her through a puddle of rainwater (he steps with her through a glimmering puddle of soda (he steps with her through a shimmering puddle of absinthe (he steps with her through a glistening puddle of antifreeze in the alley behind the club) in the lounge of the cantina) on the patio of the taqueria) in the darkness in the entryway of the abandoned house (moments before, switching on the beam of a flashlight, he glances with her around the entryway, at the shards of glass sparkling beneath a shattered skylight on the waterlogged rug by the staircase, musty jackets hooked to a stand, a

rack jammed with mildewed loafers, a dusty mirror gleaming over a wooden bench blooming with mold, glinting puddles of rainwater on the floorboards, rippling mounds of sand (a moment after, staring at a fern growing from the staircase as glittering particles of dust float through the beam of the flashlight, he says, this seems perfect for us, maybe we should live here (we can put the record player here, she says, pointing at a moldy cabinet rotting in the parlor off the entryway (we should hang some watercolors here, she says, pointing at a wall rippled with grime in the dining room off the parlor (here's where we can cook together on the weekends, she says, pointing at a stone countertop gritty with whorls of sand in the kitchen beyond the dining room (here's where we can grow the herbs, she says, pointing at a windowsill by the stove in the kitchen (here's where we can grow the chilis, she says, pointing at a windowsill by the stove the kitchen (here's where we can sit together while we're folding the laundry, she says, pointing at the nook in the kitchen as a spiderweb shimmers in the glow of the flashlight (maybe we should put a telescope here, she says, frowning thoughtfully, pointing at a window speckled with algae in the study across the hall from the kitchen (moments before, pointing at a moldering door-frame in the hall, she says, yeah, here, this is where we can make marks on the wall every year to keep track of the changes as the kids get bigger)))))))))) as a heron hoots in the darkness in the dunes), a modernist villa constructed of concrete and glass (as he's climbing the staircase, there's a moment when he becomes aware of the nature of the design (there's a moment when he's chewing, tasting savory lumps of bean and tangy nips of garlic and bursts of jalapeño and the crystals of sugar on glazed hunks of fried plantain, the flavors intermingling as she points at the chrome awning on the taqueria, chatting about architecture in the glow of the lanterns (as she points at the terracotta roof on the cantina, chatting about construction in the glow of the lamps, there's a moment when he's chewing, tasting fatty chunks of avocado and tart crunches of onion and bursts of jalapeño and the

flakes of salt on oily snaps of tortilla chip, the flavors intermingling (earlier that afternoon, becoming aware of the scent of sizzling bacon on the breeze, he suddenly realizes that he's salivating (as he swallows down the saliva (a moment after, he notices a myna hopping around a fire hydrant, whistling) he feels a gurgle of hunger), strolling with her past a cafe as she chats about gardening))), a blend of hygge and wabi (climbing the staircase just ahead of him, she says she's embarrassed how excited she is by the idea of nesting with him (a moment before, glancing into the darkness beyond the beam of the flashlight, he becomes aware of a breeze (then the scent of rotting kelp) as the ceiling creaks with a gust of wind), gripping the railing in the glow of the flashlight (swinging the beam of the flashlight across the darkness in the bedroom of the abandoned house, he notices a bed with a linen duvet beneath a wooden shelf clustered with dead succulents in clay pots, a set of candles on a brass tray dribbled with wax, a stick of incense in a bronze vessel brimming with ash, a tarnished mirror gleaming on a vanity beyond the bed, a dead fern in a clay vase (as she's sitting beside him on the towel at the beach, there's a moment when she asks if he's always so quiet (standing in silence in the glow of a streetlight (standing in silence in the shadow of a streetlight (later that night, he stares with her at a kaleidoscopic mural painted across a wall in a cobblestone plaza (moments after, he realizes that the wall actually contains a number of overlapping murals painted by different artists at separate times (intergenerational portrait of a local community)) as gulls cry in the darkness above the sea) as pelicans soar through the sunlight over the sea) later that night, he listens with her to a discordant song echoing across a walkway in a cobblestone plaza (moments after, he realizes that the plaza actually contains a number of overlapping songs performed in separate spaces by different musicians (communal expression of an interregional identity))), plucking a mango from her tote (as he breathes he becomes aware of the stench of guano (later that night, as yellow-orange flames glow on the candles on the wooden shelf (mo-

ments earlier, standing barefoot in the darkness by the bed, she strikes a matchstick against the strip on the back of the matchbook (moments earlier, kicking off her sandals, she tears a matchstick from the matchbook in the darkness by the vanity (moments earlier, tossing her clutch aside in the darkness by the vanity, she flips the lid on the matchbook (moments earlier, flicking through her clutch in the darkness by the vanity, she plucks the matchbook from the pouch (earlier that afternoon, waiting for her in the shade of the fig tree in the courtyard, he notices a silver bowl of matchbooks stamped with the logo of the inn, becoming aware at that moment of a chime tinkling in the breeze))), light flashing across her face as the phosphorous ignites), he flips the lock on the doors to the balcony (moments after, gripping the handles as he slides apart the doors, he feels a breeze rushing past him into the bedroom (there's a moment when he becomes aware of the candles flickering (glancing back into the bedroom, he notices a plume of smoke rising from the incense on the wooden shelf (earlier that night, as he's standing with her beneath a sky of glittering stars (a moment before, glancing out toward the sea, she says, what's weird is that) (a moment after, glancing down at the sand, she says, well actually never mind), there's a moment (glancing at a wall in the kitchen of the abandoned house, he notices a marble clock with brass hands frozen (dead battery) at a single moment in time) when he becomes aware of the fragrance of woodsmoke on the breeze (he notices a cluster of silhouettes drifting around the glow of a bonfire on the beach (earlier that night, he steps with her past the bouncer into a crowd of silhouettes dancing in the flashing neon in the darkness of the club (as he's moving with her through the crowd, there's a moment when the lights strobe across her, illuminating her face with a radiant neon glow (chulería) as she glances back at him with a smile (he's forgotten the sensation, to be shocked by a sudden feeling of love for a new crush (later that night, as he's dancing with her in the crowd, a silhouette suddenly raises a gun into the air, firing a pop of confetti (silver and gold), and

all of the glittering confetti tumbling through the air feels like a manifestation of the glow in his heart))) as the pulse of the beat thumps in his chest (glancing at him with a look of distress, she says that she needs to tell him something, something she should have told him from the beginning, that she's actually in a relationship, that she's engaged to be married, that she's lived with her fiance for years, that her fiance is kind and gentle and intelligent and attentive, and that she knows that her fiance truly loves her, but even if she loved her fiance once, even if maybe she once loved her fiance, now all she feels for her fiance is an occasional fondness, a constant disappointment, that (her eyes shimmer with tears) the engagement is a trap of her own design, and now that she's caught there's no escaping, that she's convinced that if she broke off the engagement with her fiance it would destroy her family, that it would destroy her parents, that it would destroy her brothers, that she's the force that holds her family together (a single tear streaks down her cheek as she blinks), that her family loves her fiance so much, that (her voice cracks) she'd rather die than hurt her family, and that this time here with him has felt like a fantasy, like a magical space somehow separate from reality, but that she knows it's only a bubble (moments after, lying beside her in the flickering glow of the candles, he tells her that although out of principle he still refuses to believe in love at first sight, the reality is that he might be in love with her (nothing can ever happen between us, she says, speaking in a tone of despair (can we just lie here without touching, she says, speaking in what's almost a tone of begging, facing away from him, toward the glow of the moon in the darkness beyond the balcony (still facing away from him, she speaks in a murmur, saying that meeting him is the best-worst thing that's ever happened to her (sometime during the night, when he's just beginning to wonder if she's fallen asleep, he hears her whimper once in the darkness, as if in agony (gazing toward the balcony beyond the bed, bleary, delirious, fighting to stay awake, he suddenly realizes that maybe time like space is actually multidimensional (moments be-

fore, he realizes that what humans experience of time is merely one-dimensional, the present a point on a line that's measured only in terms of length, extending into the past and the future (temporally, what would be the equivalent of length width depth, he wonders, watching a bee glide across the balcony (watching a bee drift across the balcony, he wonders, what would the equivalent be of line polygon polyhedron, temporally (holding her tight, awake now for almost twenty-four hours, he begins to dream while still conscious, hallucinating shimmers of color, voices from other times in other spaces (she's holding her hands over her mouth, laughing, drops of beer dripping from between her fingers in a flashing beam of neon in the booth at the club) (she's kicking her legs, swimming beside him through the sparkling ripples of sunlight underwater) (she's thumping the seal on a bottle of ketchup, glancing at him with an expression that's vaguely skeptical in the gleaming lanterns at the taqueria) (she's staring at him with an expression of mock outrage, twisting the cap on a bottle of sriracha in the glimmering lamps at the cantina) (she's rolling her eyes, sitting beside him in the dazzling sunlight on the towel at the beach, leaning back on her hands) (she's tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, standing beside him at the mossy gate in the courtyard of the inn, clutching a glass tumbler of water) (timestamped fragments of data flashing across the terminal of a computer dumping core) (but just before daybreak, there's a moment when she suddenly twists back around with a wild look, pressing her hands to his cheeks, kissing him in the flickering glow of the candles (a moment when she's climbing onto him, grunting as she kisses him, digging her fingers into his hair (a moment when she's yanking up the hem of his tee as she kisses him (a moment when she's fumbling with the button on his jeans as she kisses him (a moment when she's tugging her dress over her head, biting his lip as she kisses him (primates mating by firelight in the darkness (afterward, lying nestled into him on the bed, facing the balcony, her knees tucked into her chest, her arms wrapped around her shins, her skin

pimpled with goosebumps, trembling, she murmurs a phrase (thank you) like a mantra (what are you thinking about, she whispers (fingerprint of a relationship))))))))))))))
)) and as she's speaking, explaining the theory to him, he tries to memorize the moment, desperate to capture every detail, focusing intently on every sensation, the red-violet glow of daybreak in the sky and the constellations of tarnish in the mirror on the vanity and the crumpled heaps of clothing on the floorboards around the bed and the tangled mass of her hair rippling across the duvet and the shimmering irises of her eyes gazing toward the balcony and the shadowed contour of her nose and the gleaming outline of her chin and the goosebumps on the flesh of her shoulder and the warmth of her back pressing against his chest and the chill of the air on his skin and the bloodshot burn in his eyes and the pang in his neck and the ache in his feet and in his mouth on his tongue the sour yeasty aftertaste of the beer mingling with the lingering flavors of the garlic and the onion and the candied tang of her lipstick and the pungent umami of her pussy and on the breeze the intermingling smells of the coconut aroma of her sunscreen and the parsley odor of her sweat and the rosy scent of her perfume and the moldy whiff of the rotting walls and the passionfruit aroma from the lumps of wax from the melted candles and the sandalwood odor of the wisps of ash from the burned incense and the briny scent of the sea as the leaves of the banyan tree beyond the balcony flutter in the wind (bright yellow canaries begin to flit through the branches a moment after) and he's suddenly struck by a feeling of radiant joy, imagining he'll remember the moment forever, although in reality he's drunk enough that by the time that he wakes the memory will be only a blur, just flashes of light and sound, already gone)

About The Author

Matthew Baker is the author of the graphic novel *The Sentence*, the story collections *Why Visit America* and *Hybrid Creatures*, and the children's novel *Key Of X*. Digital experiments include the temporal fiction "Ephemeral," the interlinked novel *Untold*, the randomized novel *Verses*, and the intentionally posthumous *Afterthought*.

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