

# dot garden

words from my friends





these pieces were originally performed  
on saturday, may 20th, 2023  
at the edible schoolyard  
in celebration of my 31st birthday

the cover photo was taken  
by samvaran sharma during this gathering

## monsters and masks

A monster wears a mask of a young boy to hide himself  
Shame hidden behind mod podged bits of rainbow construction paper  
"If others see me as this", he says, "then they will not cower"  
He seeks to be known for that which one can only know by knowing him  
And this mask enables this

In another part of the world,  
a little girl wears a mask that resembles a monster  
She diligently crafts the guise with chunks of her own hair,  
glueing to a paper plate until the deformed figure emerges  
She seeks to be big, to be taken seriously  
To counter the infantilization of her days  
And this mask enables this

A monster wears a mask of a child and a child wears a mask of a monster  
Their reasons for the charade of it all is the same  
Who is to envy the position of another?  
Who is look across the fence with certainty?  
A monster wears a mask of a child and a child wears a mask of a monster  
Perhaps in some vast world, they are friends

## mattress

In 2015, I moved into my “own” apartment for the first time. It was, technically, in a dorm, but it was my own complete apartment, and it came completely unfurnished. I purchased some furniture from a resident who had lived in the building before me, but it was my first time (in adult memory) walking into a completely empty space.

I spent weeks contemplating the correct mattress to purchase, asking around and ultimately selecting an internet mattress on... what mostly amounts to a whim. It was, by far, the most expensive thing I had ever purchased. It felt exorbitant. When it arrived I was nervous- unsure what to expect and unenthused by the idea of trying to shove it back in the box. I told myself I only needed it to last the five or six years I had left in grad school, and that ultimately the cost wasn't so wild when I thought about the years of use ahead. I told myself that by the time I graduated, it would certainly be time for a new mattress.

I loved it immediately.

My time in Boston was essentially the lifetime of that mattress. It served as the marker of the first home that I put together, my first and most expensive purchase. Over the next six years, it housed so many of my friends and partners- my brother lived with me for two summers, R visited regularly, the weekend when T, C, and I all piled in and fit comfortably, the times H napped there while I was working, the year when M had his own side of the bed, and...my pile of laundry most days. During the pandemic, when I felt most alone and distraught, the mattress was still there.

In the summer of 2021, I moved out of that apartment and into an apartment in Central Square. The mattress got shoved into a UHaul by a handful of my most trusted friends, lugged up the entrance stairs, and then thrown down the interior stairs to my “garden level” room. The room never quite felt like mine (it was a sublet), but even then the mattress hosted a few of my friends, and my new relationship, reliably as always.

In August of 2021, I moved out of that apartment, and packed my important belongings into a UHaul to leave in my friend’s basement, until I could lug them across the country to California. My mattress did not make the cut.

I carted my mattress outside, to the curb, on a Wednesday evening for Thursday morning pick-up. It felt incredibly wrong leaving it out on the street, even know I knew it would be safely recycled and moved on to another life. I snapped a picture, one I’m almost certain I’ll never open, as though that could preserve my sense of home for a moment. I walked by it, but couldn’t shake the feeling of reconciling who I thought I would be when I purchased it. For a second, it was hard not to feel like I was leaving my hopes and dreams for Cambridge out on the street with it. The visions I had for my life skirted through my mind, trying to process the time that had passed and the ways in which the past few years had left me somewhere totally unexpected.

By the time I graduated, it would certainly be time for a new mattress.

## fundamentals

I feel you even though we went our separate ways  
They call that quantum entanglement  
Every particle in me is every particle in you  
some days

This is fantastical, it isn't real physics  
But wouldn't it be prettier if for just a bit  
our lips could quantumly be entangled in a kiss

So let me be real,  
What I know to be true  
is that one day soon in a quadrillion years or two  
what used to be us  
will be part of the same black hole

Uniting you with me with all there has ever been,  
and all that is holy,  
and all that is yet to be seen.

Together we will all spin through space  
Covering thousands of miles every second  
just as you are doing right now  
Even when your juicy ass doesn't leave that couch

And together, your particles in mine, and mine likewise in yours  
We will slowly fall faster and faster, fall on and on  
into the event horizon that mimics our universal love

We will experience light speed, thrilling as it is  
as we traverse  
that dark, mysterious, honest, invisibility  
at the center of our universe.

One day perhaps, scientists say,  
this black hole will compress and explode,  
precipitating another Big Bang.  
Flinging us apart, ending our intergalactic fling.

But I don't like to think of such morbid things.

## my monster

Sometimes, my body feels like a circus,  
It offers haven and shelter to the perkiest creatures; every shape and size  
Winged lizards in my shoulders, skittish insect in my ear  
My chest home to a blind, writhing beast; tentacles reaching far and near

I've got a demon in my belly, he laughs at the morning news  
And don't get me started on the imp in my brain, the total shit that he  
spews

A newcomer in my lower back, but no less annoying and vile  
Sleeps all day and bares his fangs, chomping through the night; that's his  
style

But today I want to share with you about the monster in my heart  
A wretched creature, thick and matted hair from tail to head  
He sheds, his footprints track in every room of the house  
Less shaggy dog and more giant centipede, he peed once all over my bed

He's got energy and aggression, and a buzz, he's a bundle of need  
Attention seeking, anxious, it's like he's hopped up on speed  
Quick to act, taking up space, always in a hurry  
Can never sit down in just one place, chasing butterflies, often worried

I'm scared to let him out sometimes, the way he runs headfirst towards  
others  
Will he smother, again today? Will he stampede and crush as he tries to  
play?

I see friends, loved ones looking his way with pity,  
He's understandable from afar, but don't get too close! He bites  
His scars too ugly, too exposed to be pretty



He's just too damn much. Let's take some space...

What mask could I put on him, what muzzle would hide  
His eager drooling, his wandering eyes looking for a match,  
A strike that brings flame and warmth and heat, all the nourishment of his  
creation

Because what he learned was love, others would call suffocation

My monster's got a hold on my heart.

When steam rises out his pores and he shrieks into the night  
I smolder inside, rage building, bile stored away from a lifetime of  
witnessing hate

Ready to spit, to burn, to erase, it's my place, war is my birthright and  
destruction my vengeance over everyone who didn't love me enough

See? It's a lot

But he's mine, my beast, my protector

There's no use punishing something that was born out of love

Yes, he's scarred and yes he has rage, but he's worthy just like all the other  
ones

I love my monsters, what choice do I have? They make me me

If you get close, you'll see. My monsters know grief at unanswered cries for  
acknowledgement, they know the pain of loneliness, and they know the joy  
of acceptance

They know love, and they'll love your monsters too

My loving them has set me free

Rishikesh Tirumalai

## raindrops

i want you as close as raindrops dancing on a windowpane.

when the sky booms and growls  
    and threatens our ephemeral constitution  
we shake and saunter  
    rattle without reprieve  
    but do not abandon our entanglement  
wildly tango to the downpour snare

this close, the margins of the world bend around your curves  
a lens to a life I have seen from all angles but never yours  
streaks of candor, kindness and woe  
can that world save me too?

this close, I can hear the memories of a Great Sea  
    that draws us towards something greater than ourselves  
memories maintained in molecules we could not have known  
    but pull us ever still  
from which you were once a flood that drowned thousands  
    a miraculous creek through a bone dry canyon  
    the fog of my father's homeland  
    a tear reluctantly shed  
life itself, destruction too  
do you remember?



this close, just within reach  
tension telltale as we graze past  
    threatening to merge or collapse  
    (planets do this too, I've heard)  
we fear the resolution, and are excited all the same

chaos roars from that single source and reverberates in our fragile bodies  
and calls us home to the sea once more

now,

    later,

    and yesterday

in fantastic dance

    or sacred union

battle

    or bliss

we are

    and always

        have been one.

dear fatima — in response to your letter about your break-up with a guy  
with whom your relationship broke apart our friendship circle

Yes.  
it hurts.  
when close  
relationships end,  
part of you  
dies.  
cells that  
the union of you  
created  
die.  
and now  
empty spaces  
cry out  
like cankerous pus-filled  
mouths  
dissolving  
their  
own  
flesh.

That is the pain you feel;  
of billions of starving  
mouths  
that need  
to be  
fed.

They cry out.

They cry out  
for meaning.

They cry out  
to be occupied  
with new time and space  
that were once  
your  
living  
experiences.

But in time  
you will self heal.  
the body knows  
how to self-cleanse.  
a higher water to pus ratio  
will dilute and mitigate  
dissolving effects  
and give way to fresh  
living blood.

And you will feel  
less and less  
like a fragile  
bowl  
of  
vomitus.



This is renewal.  
And I wish you plenty of it.

I also wish you growth;  
appropriate,  
of the post-traumatic kind.

The kind that makes you  
infinitely generous,  
patient and  
grows you  
a third eye  
to read  
other people's  
dimensions.

The kind that makes you  
apologize  
for how quickly and easily  
you put on the  
altar  
other people's  
lives.  
for  
him.

So,  
I hope this growth was worth it.  
I hope the dying of your cells  
and the scar tissue that remains  
was worth it.  
I hope dying to  
yourself  
for him  
was worth it,  
so you no  
longer  
see  
him  
as  
a  
God.

## I want cherry pie in a sunchair

I want to stretch out on the loveseat. To paint the walls salmon. I want to squeeze my own oranges til their juices slide down the outside of my pinky. I want to eat pizza off paper plates in my best friend's backyard. Or share baked brie on marbled wood and tell you about my flying dreams. The ones where I am in a Marc Chagall.

I want things to be easeful. I want to be better at remembering birthdays. I want more, and I also want less. Less misogyny. Less unnamed tension. Less gasoline, less panic when I'm not at the disco, less exhaustion. I want to be exhausted and to have the time to sleep. I want to stop being so exhausted: I want the time to sleep. I want to open the weighted blanket under my bed. It's so heavy. I want to lift my own suitcase into the overhead. I want to live in the city that best suits me. I want to know where that is.

I want to have a style. I want to smell like star jasmine and taste like destiny. I want to tell you that apathy is the worst emotion. I want to know what's happening in people's heads. How deep their thoughts go. I want to be taken seriously. I want to take my dad on a day trip to Angel Island. I want to dress up like a sunbeam on holiday. I want to let a snow cone drip out of its paper bottom. I want Mutsu apple season all year round.

I want to stop worrying that my friends don't love me as much as I love them. I want consistent care. I want only the things that are meant for me. Like chocolate cake. Like a spacious home to let things bloom, a dance studio in the woods with floors that give a little when you leap.



I want Alice at 97.3 to play Stevie Nicks. I want to guffaw and drink hard cider under stupid paper lanterns. I want a little PDA, someone to call me honey. Someone to put sunscreen on my back. I want to be able to do it myself. I want to forget about how much I liked you. Anger is something I'd like to feel. I want it gone from my body: released. I want this head to stop spinning. I want it to spin sometimes. I want to sometimes be frenetic. I want to optimize for joy without feeling selfish. I want to reclaim the word "optimize." I want to be known as a seeker. I want to be known, period. I want to do something about everything that makes me sad: Banish candy corn. Save every discarded kale stalk. Drown it all in agave nectar. I want to believe in God— I think I want to believe in God. To beckon things towards me like Matilda. I want to be big enough to hold you. I want to believe enough to hold you, I want to stop trying so damn hard. I want to go through every note on my phone. Read all the quiet revelations, the thought that maybe I am making exquisite choices. I want to cuddle nostalgia. I want to pull a wishbone apart. You can keep the bigger half. I want you to tell me what you like. I want you to be honest. Shame has no place here. In my dance studio. On the bouncy wooden floors.

I want to paint the porch chartreuse. I want to know how to spell more colors, like chartreuse. I want to pick out my own furniture, my very own sunchair.

Mostly I want cherry pie. In some kind of silence. Somewhere airy & safe. I want it to be the perfect temperature. I want a thermostat for the entire world.

Jessia Hoffman

lovingly assembled  
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