Transformation Day

Lucy Ives

I.

THE PROTAGONIST IS AWAKE. This the protagonist knows.

The protagonist is awake but not at home.

Waking is the moment, the time, when she is closest to herself, when she perceives herself with fullest clarity. It is as if she passes herself by, near enough to touch; like a mirror, now. As she wakes, the mirror recedes.

Today, on this morning, the protagonist is obscure. I don’t mean to say she can’t perceive herself, but rather that there is nothing distinct, nothing specific to recommend what she perceives. Nothing recommends this image to her, as an image of herself.

This is, at any rate, how the protagonist begins to know.

It is enough, having woken, to accept the sensation of cement, cold and hard and unnaturally even, damp and pungent, beneath her. She is not in bed but rather on the street, a sidewalk.

She knows this street. Here is a slight hill and row houses packed together.

She is about to touch her face, but as she seeks to move her arm, she discovers that there is no arm. There is no arm to move. Some part of her body “lifts.” She shakes her head. It’s heavy. She breathes. Her nose is a remarkable instrument. She smells the excrement of dogs, rotting paper, water flowing just beyond the curb mixed with motor oil, more excrement, a cat crouched some four feet from her, behind the wheel of a compact. Now somewhere overhead pigeons chortle.

How did the protagonist arrive here? The only answer is that she has been asleep, sleeping. In her sleep she has arrived here, although that was only sleep and not a real place, not a way.

She wants to move. Her back is so long. Her legs shift beneath her, shift against cold cement. Her arms are also very long. She cannot seem to bring them to her sides. They are pressing against the ground like two stilts attached to her shoulders. There is almost no sensation in her “hands.” Why, the protagonist is thinking, do I think
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“hands”? At the rear of her body the legs stir. They press up. They lift her long back. She shivers. She is not “on her hands and knees.” Her “hands” contact ground, and yet she stands. And she “stands.” She is not upright.

_I am ruined_, she thinks and does not know what this means.

Her body is large now, massive. Her heart thuds below her neck. Again her nostrils open and the world enters. She smells food, some kind of rotten food, but the rottenness does not concern her. It is bread somewhere, along the ground. She moves toward the smell. She continues to look at the ground, the sidewalk, her neck extended. She has a long neck and is covered in a kind of fur. She knows of the existence of this fur because of the new sensitivity of her body. The breeze stirs these soft bristles, these thick hairs. The breeze passes up the backs of her legs, over her genitals, across her anus. There is a sense of complete alertness in her body. She can take nothing for granted.

The protagonist finds food, which is an old white roll. It is wrapped in a wet paper plate, discarded, and she is eating the plate. She is eating the plate and the roll in rough, trembling, tearing bites. Her ears, meanwhile, take in space. There is so much movement of motors, of bodies. The protagonist is threatened by this movement, and yet it does not come near enough to her. She will not react. She chews. Her eyelids move. She blinks. She becomes aware of her sense of sight. Again she sees the ground. There is a tree in rancid earth. There is cement. The door of a car.

If she will lift her head now, she will know. If she will lift her head she will know herself, such as she is. _It is not like an animal_, she finds herself thinking, _to be afraid of its own thought_. Now, she thinks, _that I have become an animal, I must learn not to fear my thoughts_. _I must think thoughts. I cannot fear them._

Anyway, she thinks, _I am already forgetting_. _I am an animal and I will forget to fear_. _I will forget that I had a name or—he cannot remember_. She cannot remember what she is forgetting.

Something happens in her ear. She hears a sound that pricks her and is cold because it is the sound of a man, and the man is moving down the hill on the sidewalk, and the man is moving steadily, and she has raised her head, and because she has raised her head she has seen herself, out of her right eye, in the smooth, dark glass of the car, and she has seen the animal there, and she knows the name of the animal. The animal—the name of the animal is—her head swims because it, her brain, is emptier, fuller, than a stone.

_Donkey_. There’s the word.
All around the protagonist (it is barely possible that she can think
this and yet) things have begun to lose their names. The treasure of
the wet smell of the hard cement that greets her in its openness and
plainness and its existence otherwise than that of life and whatever
lives has no name. If she must move it will not be because she knows
where she is going. How to evade the movements around her that
threaten to evict her or snuff her from this strange, large body? Her
eyes blink and yet she barely sees. She smells and hears but does not
see.

And so something begins—which is slow walking. She is moving
beside parked cars. The protagonist moves deliberately. Her large body
can be seen by a human. And so when she enters the sight of a human
she may graze this sight but must not pass through it. She must cause
herself to be treated as a matter of course. She must move by any
means toward water.

And I would like to say a few things about what happens next: how
this donkey, or rather this female donkey, this jenny, for that is the
correct term—the protagonist—moves at the pace of an animal serv-
ing a human, how she moves forward and though she is seen no one
wishes to capture her. She moves over the ill-considered streets of
unimportant quarters and areas of this city you and I know well. You
and I would laugh if we stood there and saw her coming toward us.
Sometimes someone will turn his head to watch her, this beast.
Someone will concern himself for a moment with the thought that
animals really can have a kind of impressive, solemn, solitary, and
nearly human air about them, even if this air is just the effect of our
having looked at them. For they are not human, of course, the ani-
mal. Their faces are the faces of animals, not the faces of men.
Any animal’s “expression” is only the result of the gaze of a man.
And someone looks away, not knowing what he has seen.

I never knew anything about animals, in some sense, until I wrote
these paragraphs. I guess I believed that someone could become so lost
that she would be forced to change. I could believe that something
like this could occur, but I was never forced to believe it until now.
Here a human being has become so lost in life that she can no longer
hold her form. Her body could not remain present with her, the way
she thought and traveled. She did not even know what she was doing.
I pity her for that. Like all men and women to whom such a fate be-
falls, she only believed that she could change. She did not know that
she could become anything, that any human can become anything.
Like many men and women, she did not know what being human is.
II.

She’s passed into shade. She is under an elevated highway.

The morning has expanded and increased in brightness. It is summer, after all. The morning is an oval, infinitely broad and deep at its center. The morning is a lozenge. Heat is constant and balances perfectly on every surface.

The jenny hangs her head. Until this moment the jenny has been persistently in motion. She considers a puddle of standing water in the relative darkness beneath the highway but cannot bring herself to drink. Her fear is an ache or it is a rigid alertness, at a donkey’s nostrils, at a donkey’s ears, along her spine. She is a donkey, so how can she know where to go? What is direction to her? A donkey can flee. A donkey can hunger, thirst.

Here is a short tunnel with walls of brick. Humans and other animals have urinated and defecated and vomited here. Sometimes they have slept here or been slaughtered. The smells remain, fainter in some places and so, confusing. The scent of one presence attaches to the outlines of another. The imprint of an old dog is entangled in the acrid, well-defined trail left by a colony of rats who make nightly use of three feet of this passage in their transit from one hole to another. There is gasoline; the reek of human distress; rubber and mold.

What it means to thirst in the way she now thirsts is to have perception shrink, simplify. Even the simplicity of a donkey can be further reduced.

Strange, too, to see the creations of humanity in this way—as if from a great distance. The minds of humans are vast and essentially identical to one another. It takes very little effort even for such a being as a donkey to reflect in this way. The minds of humans are extremely big and very similar and yet they are full of blockages. The lumbering device that is the human mind acquaints itself with other human minds with terrible difficulty; its ability to recognize itself is even more limited, faltering. Thus the construction of mirrors and barriers throughout the landscape human beings inhabit. Barriers exist nowhere else in the natural world; no other organic or living thing knows a barrier. The human body does not know barriers; it dies and is transformed. Similarly, there are no images in the world. Only in the minds of men are there images. There are lenses, there is focus, there is projection and interference, but only in the mind of man do static images exist. A donkey will know this. A donkey
stands in the narrow space it has been permitted. A donkey may suffer death at any moment. A van swings roughly into the road within the tunnel and idles.

The sound of a door: the latch and then precise, light closure. A rubber heel in glass and gravel.

The jenny stiffens. A donkey can imagine flight and yet feel sick with longing, with an anticipatory dependence on the human hand. The jenny foresees her capture. She is half in love, pleading for this to occur. She will be restrained. The barriers of human habitation will be explained to her by the confines of some cell, cage, or paddock—or perhaps by a butcher, a stunning blow and then knife. She, as donkey, will give meaning to such structures, such behaviors. She will rejoin the world of men, will be reincorporated, and will no longer be an exile.

She can hear the human behind her, at her left. It is clear that the human makes an effort not to frighten her. If a donkey could laugh in such a moment, this donkey would laugh. The fear that paralyzes her is a feeling of already being bound to the human, a feeling of uncertainty about the temporality within which—along which—this ownership will unfold, if the ownership has not already happened, whether or not it is still possible to flee, even if for now it seems possible. There is a sensation of dazzling, of being dazzled, though this has nothing to do with the sense of sight or any kind of brightness.

The human crunches over small debris in his path. “Yeah,” he is saying, clearly into a cell phone, “I couldn’t believe it either. Hold on,” he says. He is retiring his device.

That the human does not speak further indicates his resolve. He will reach her, desires to reach her.

Therefore the jenny is not thinking when she moves, when she springs forward onto the hard frontons of her hooves. Her knees come up—if these can be called “knees”—and she is stamping, streaking into the sun and the vast industrial stretch beyond the underpass.

Behind her, very briefly, early as it were, she hears the astonished squawk of the human, who seems compacted, deflated somehow, by her sudden exit. She runs.

To her right and left are warehouse buildings, senseless places. There is hasty fencing in corrugated metal. Gasoline soaks all things under the sun. She runs. She runs.

Breath inside her body is ropes, some kind of a net, tensing and slackening. She gathers herself around this, though it is a sensation like pain. She forces the donkey’s body forward, even if against a kind
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of bond, a knot or a resistance. The physical world possesses her, and yet she strains forward into it, as if she must, as if she must be the one to do it, as if she must choose, as if she is free, as if there were a desire or a body she could hold back, could keep. She has a feeling now as if the body of the donkey has been impaled by an infinitely thin yet infinitely strong metal wire, as if she propels the carcass that she is along this line that cuts her flesh and yet constitutes the sole remaining narrative concerning her being. It is her own story. It runs
her through.

And she is impassioned by this, because the flesh is not willing. She is in a rage because she is not human any longer and no longer has human relations, friends. The hours in the day are nothing more than a kind of empty space to her and can't be filled by language. The hard bottoms of her “feet,” her hooves, strike the ground and she wants to strike the ground harder. She wants to shatter this hardness, and she wants the heat in the muscles of the animal to melt the tissue and the sinew and the bone, and she wants the animal's jagged breath to become like acid and wants it to eat away the inside of the body of the animal until there is nothing left there but vacant air.

But this does not happen. What happens instead is far stranger than this. I do not know if you can believe me. What happens instead is that now, no matter how wildly, how intently she pushes, seeking greater speed and suffering in the body of the animal, she experiences only a sinking, a coldness. It is in broad daylight, and it is on the ground, but it is as if she falls—as if she is in darkness. She falls to the earth in coolness. She comes closer to the earth. She is small now and she is soft. She moves into a piece of shade, an awning over a garage. She has the sense that she “darts.” Her eyes are puzzled by the light, and yet she seems to see behind things. She seems to see, now, in time, as well as in space. All objects contain a temporal dimension her eyes move, lick along. It is with a light fascination that her eyes whip across the surface of the world. The line of the street hovers before her and recedes slightly; she follows the intricate surface of an adjacent sign with raised lettering, lingering in the lowest interior angle of an E. Her ears tingle with information. Her nose acquires eternity. She is very small. She sinks further back against the building, pressing herself against its solidity.

I am, she knows this, a cat.

At the end of her body a tail twitches. Experimentally, she jumps.

In her mouth are fangs. Recessed in her feet are claws. She shivers. She smells the air.
She knows that she must not begin to think of hunger. There will be nothing for her if she begins to think of hunger now. Now instead she is, must be, guided by a strange intellect of a kind. There are bodies elsewhere. These teem. These vibrate with their little portion of blood. They are hot. They’re live and quick.

She travels along the base of the building, rejoicing in her slightness and the richness of perception, the ease of her reaction, the pleasure of knowing exactly what she will find. She knows their place, can hear them in a kind of crowd in one place in her ear, like little sacks crawling over one another. She knows their warmth. She travels. She moves between and under and behind. She inhales the faintness of their blood, still enclosed. She inhales the scent of their minuscule excrement, the oil of their skin, their gathered bodies. They huddle and squirm. They are lax, delayed, incipient. She finds.

And what an orgy of blood spilled as claws slice and mouth bites and seeks and burrows and tears. The mouth throws aside bodies, and a paw slaps, and claws quarter. And she eats and feasts and drinks, her eyes like two pebbles in her head, two bits of gravel, useless to her joy. She is death and fills with life and praises herself, is a falling sword; she is the perfect eye of the rose, the outline of the moon’s horn against the blue midst of day; she is sated.

She walks. She traces the edges of buildings with new weight in her stomach. Her ears buzz softly. The interior of her mouth tingles.

She begins to hear the humans, in their work, around her. She is now not afraid, as she was before. To be what she is is to be of the world of men but to have no meaning for them, in their work. She is of their world but means nothing to their efforts, and so they wish nothing of her. She pauses in her path to fool with a twist of plastic twine. The twine trembles antagonistically, appears insouciant. She bites it, and the biting irritates her mouth, and she bites further. She pounces and bites and leaps in the air, flinging the twine aside.

When last she knew something of what she was she was mortal. And this is not so now. It is not that the cat will not die, but that the cat has not yet begun to conceive of its death. The cat makes nothing of its death, while living. In this sense, a cat has never been mortal. A human, meanwhile, makes many things of its death. The hands of a human are never still.

The cat sniffs at a trapezoid of sun descending through an awning of smoked glass. The temperature of the light pleases the cat. The cat lowers her body to warm tarmac. She extends her legs and rolls onto her spine, blinking.
The theory of life to a human... it is a wonder that the human can find food or remembers to sleep. The human's theory of life blankets all things in the world, making them useless to the human, except as names. The cat thinks of herself when she was human. The cat's mind is a comfortable place. As a human, the cat had loved. The cat had been a human who had loved and the human had so frequently lost its way among objects in the world. The human liked objects so much! The human had had a home and would leave this home during the day and return at night, dragging bags of items. The human contemplated another person or persons, and the human struggled with its own inability to grasp another, the human always lingering between forms of transport in the city, asking itself why it was unable to possess some other human like the objects with which the human inexplicably filled its home. The human was always hovering between one location and another, asking itself what it had just done, what it planned to do. Similarly, other humans to some extent relied on this human or perhaps desired to possess this human. And yet this human could not give itself, or could not give itself correctly, as the human sometimes thought to itself while it was lingering, suffering in some space in which it did not fully belong.

The cat separates the toes of her paws, forcing out claws, feeling the long stretch, tips her head back so the mouth opens in a wide yawn, the pink interior of her throat exposed to air. She snaps her mouth shut and becomes loose and pants briefly, eyes closed. She slackens, lets her head droop, chin against the ground, slips into a kind of dream.

In the dream, the cat watches a human. The cat is perched above the human. Perhaps the cat is sitting on the top of a bookshelf; it is not entirely clear to the cat. The cat's body, at any rate, is always a source of comfort to the cat. It matters little to the cat where the cat is.

The human, the cat observes, is seated. The human is seated at a desk and the cat is able to perceive only the back of the human's head. The human is doing almost nothing. The human is doing so little in this moment that the cat feels a kind of glee. The human's behavior is strange, a spectacle. The human shakes slightly where it is. The human brings its hands to its face. The human has been sitting in this position for nearly an hour and will go on sitting in this position. The human brings its hands to its face and lowers them again. The human touches the surface of the desk.

In the dream, the cat's tail twitches. If the cat could laugh, now it would laugh. The cat's love of existence is simple. A cat cannot be
betrayed nor can a cat experience disappointment. Things in the world hide from the cat, but the cat will seek them. The cat loves to find and then to lose again and then to seek. The cat’s tail twitches. It pops against tarmac.

In the dream, perhaps the human is poor. Perhaps the human has another problem with its possessions. The cat waits to see if the human will lift its hands again or leave them where they are, resting on the surface of the desk. After a while, the human lifts its hands again and recommences shaking.

The cat’s tail twitches.

A sound.

The cat is awake. A man is standing beside the cat, under the awning. The man is looking at something in his hands, looking into it carefully. The man grunts softly to himself.

Now the man retires the thing to a pocket in his garment.

The cat sniffs the air. Her head comes quickly off the ground and she rights her body. She perches on her haunches, staring out into the street, watching the man with the edges of her eyes.

“What are you doing here?” the man says now, for some reason. He is speaking to a cat.

The cat stands. She dislikes the man’s directness.

The cat considers the contents of her stomach. Certainly, she is thicker here, heavier, than she might wish. However, her body is no longer dangerously sluggish.

The man rotates so that he faces the cat. He does not quite trap her against the building with the front of his body in this way, but it is possible that he may wish to do so.

The cat dances back.

“Hey,” the man says.

“Erk,” the cat pronounces, in annoyance. “Roawmm.”

“What a pretty little cat,” the man is saying. “Are you a friendly little pretty cat?”

The cat’s tail switches.

The man takes a step toward the cat. “Never saw you before.”

The cat skitters back. Her body bunches up against itself, accordion-like. There is tension here. The cat’s face retreats back as far as it can retreat back from the front of its face. The cat’s ears flatten. The cat seems to hang in place: her terror thick, dimensional, a rod that passes through her meager body. Then, as abruptly and as simply as hair lifts in the breeze, the cat’s head sinks, swings left, the torso following. Electrically, she removes herself from the vicinity of the
man. The cat bounds. She pursues the side of a building, seeking concealment.

When the cat was dreaming, she had seen a person there. The person in the dream was not aware of the presence of the cat. The person in the dream appeared lost somehow, although how a person appearing in the dream of a cat could be “lost” to a cat, the cat does not know. She is a cat. The person brings its hands to its face. These events seem to have occurred not long ago.

A person wishes for something. A person is seized by a fantasy, cannot look away.

A cat already is whatever she might be. A human will never know the change that it desires. A human thinks to change, all the while changing. A human complains of a lack it has never had.

The cat is standing now in a field, an empty lot where no buildings are. There are chunks of brick and other remains, powdered glass and screws and metal scraps, the carcass of a refrigerator, a strip of tire. The cat has found a small hill. The cat sits at the top of the hill.

The cat is very still. She has stopped attempting to move and here at the center of this field it is no longer necessary that she move. She surveys this place, sinking into a kind of lethargy whose result will not be sleep. She is still. And in this stillness she no longer contemplates the difference between cat and person. She feels being condense. It is not the hot, steady sun that causes this reduction of sense. It is not an effect of what the animal beholds. The cat blinks and closes her eyes. She descends, swims away from the realm of perception. Time reorients, swinging up and then down. Time is no longer before her. Or: Time is no longer behind her. She has no front or back.

And she is by far littler now—reduced, as I have said.

It is a mark of the nature of this change that here someone else must begin to speak. I have to begin talking.

At the center of the field, in an empty lot where no buildings are, there is a small hill, and in the sand that makes up this hill, there is a narrow green stem, from which several fringed leaves extend. The stem has no bud, though perhaps in time a bud may form. The stem anchors itself in the earth by means of shallow roots. Air currents tousle it slightly, from side to side.

What is the difference between then and now, someone might ask. In human memory it is always easy to recall a certain scene. One remembers the particulars of space, for distance occurs in different ways, no matter where a person is. One recalls movement and the
look of other faces around one. One hears the sound of a voice or voices. Perhaps one knows what one thought at this time.

And yet, it always seems possible that the particulars of memory compete. How is it, I might ask, that I am here but not there, where I was—that my being here, in this place and time, precludes my being there, where once I was. Is it not possible that I am still there, that those sensations that were mine then are also mine now, in this present. I could, for example, not be certain, then. I could not know the ways in which those things I saw and felt would come to mean, and yet now, now that I know what those things mean, I cannot cease sensing them. I know their meaning, as I did not when I experienced them, and yet I experience them still, though I no longer have power to change their course. I can no longer reply to your words, yet here I am.

III.

Human memory exists somewhere in this landscape. However, no one here is living—at least, not in the human sense. There is a plant in a small hill of refuse.

Minutes pass. Within the plant, there is the slow tug of liquid. Wind moves it. Light moves it. A sentence is a peculiar vehicle for the sentience of a plant. An English sentence begins in one place and ends in another; an English sentence proposes a high point and then guides the mind into a flat expanse of deliberation, shifts and drives forward like a century. All the language available to me is so deliberate. My language is the language of a being in possession of legs, a head, and face. There is a front of my body, whenever I speak.

It isn't that the plant can't think, of course. A substance seeps into its cells; the plant learns. The sun ticks across the sky and the plant knows seconds. Minuscule parts of the earth are incorporated.

All the same, human memory exists somewhere in this landscape. I am not sure where to locate it.

I yawn. I get up and walk away from the keyboard, move around the house.

I return to the keyboard, consider the document. In the time that I have been away, something has changed in the landscape. Where previously there had been a small plant, a weed, really, if we are honest, now there an object, something not even alive. I lean in to get a better look. It is a pencil, a yellow pencil.

I sit back in my chair. I am unsure what to do. My protagonist is
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becoming increasingly difficult to work with. I don’t know how to navigate this latest change, what to say.

The pencil lies in the sand and dirt and refuse. The sun beats down. Time is rounding into late afternoon, and so perhaps it is better to say that the sun “glares.” The sun enters the scene from the edge of the sky.

Here there’s not much for me to say. I simply have to wait this phase out. The metal band around the pencil’s pink eraser glints significantly, but really it doesn’t mean anything.

I am thinking, now, about how years ago, many years, I made a discovery. I, and now this is Lucy speaking, was eleven or twelve years old, I guess, when I first started to have what I’ll call bad feelings. I would think about life, how it is limited and nothing ever happens, and I would, though I was only a child, feel ground down by boredom and hopelessness and could not understand why anyone believed that what they were doing was really living; and for many years I could not stop being bored and simultaneously horrified by my strange, anomalous boredom, since it was so different from what was portrayed to me as true boredom, until one day when I was sixteen I was on a bus and I was watching shadows on the sides of buildings and something was happening with the sounds of voices and the weird movement of shadows, the flickering and extension and diminution, and I felt somehow raised out of my body, pressed closer to thought, and I felt my thoughts, felt the abstract pleasure of thinking, felt time as something different.

I’ve often practiced this experiment since. It is why I write. All the same, many kinds of experience become soft or abstract for me of late. There is now for me a singular kind of space related to writing, into which I am either tending or to which I am somehow always referring, when I speak to others. Time is flaccid, heavy of late. However, it is even beautiful like this. This can be like the discovery of my own personality, accomplished by me. I become aware of the one person that I am only or as soon as I understand that it is a matter of attending to this particular space of concentration. Anything may be within this space. Anyone may be within it. Perhaps only I know for sure how to define or know it. And it is not changeful, though it may change, has changed, may be changing.

Sometimes I think that I should admit that I have made a serious error in my life. At a moment like this, I will ask myself if I regret not my error but instead only its consequences, is it an error, exactly. And what is the name for such a misstep? Is it a misstep that is in
part desirable because it casts light on a part of living not yet known or experienced by me.

At other times I will have a good or fairly good night of work and feel calm again in certain moments, satisfied. This calm, a sort of drinking in of random visual fields (whatever is outside my window) plus a certain quality of time, is the only thing that comforts me. Yet it is difficult to obtain such equanimity in writing without a horrifying everyday life. The writer Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose work I don’t always admire, asks, “Une interrogation persiste : Est-il possible d’échapper à la tragédie?” (A question persists: Is it possible to evade tragedy?)

Someone calls me a “romantic.” But why is it so strange to wish to be loved unconditionally? What if I decide that it is unacceptable that I not be loved in this sense? What if for this reason I simply stop and end and so on; if I don’t survive. What if I simply decide to waste everything—because it is within my power to do so. What if I am too ill to move, too ill to wish. I still cannot decide if something terrible is happening to me already, like I am in an airplane all the time and never touch the earth again for the rest of my life—or, if it is I who have in fact made a terrible error, I who am at present electing to board an airplane that never touches the earth again. There is no clear difference for me between boarding an airplane (an act) and something that befalls a person (tragedy). Either I pity myself too much and blindly enter such a plot or am already living inside tragedy, previous to my own actions. And maybe “or” is not the correct term.

Human memory exists somewhere in this landscape.

I am stubborn and don’t want to admit that I have anything to do with the protagonist.

Anyhow, it is evening.

IV.

The sun is blue. Now there is really nothing here. Which is to say: A human eye cannot look closely enough to see her.

Where there has been a pencil, now there is a fleck of dust, a mote, a microbe. It is not even heavy enough to avoid being carried off by breeze. It has already risen up, is circling the abandoned lot. It lofts up, further up, and begins to traverse great quantities of space. It flies, climbing and sinking, over the industrial zone, over the many regular warehouses. It streaks above the highway that rings the city.
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A miracle of some kind that such motion can be contained in an entity so small.

It seems possible to say that the mote is blind, because it does not see. Because it moves, I can speak for it. I can say that it is traveling through early night.

I can also tell you that it is returning to its point of origin. I have come very close to losing my protagonist, you see. As if it were not enough to have allowed her to relinquish her human form: I just now have recast her as entities that have no life, properly speaking. I did this, perhaps, in order to discover something that I already knew. I wanted to look at this thing I already knew, this thought, this fact, again—to see it as another life that was not my own.

The mote has retraced the path of the cat and it has retraced the path of the donkey. It is now following a route that the protagonist must have taken at some point, though this is not something that I have written of, properly speaking. The mote is wafted along a street in a residential neighborhood. It ascends a hill. The dwellings become smaller and farther set apart. The mote enters at a window of one small home. It enters a room containing a bed and a chair and a dresser with a round mirror. In the bed someone is sleeping. The sleeping person is a man. The mote alights on the bed.

In Apuleius’s novel The Golden Ass, there is a mysterious interlude that has often been repeated since, in various versions and guises. No one is really sure what this interlude is supposed to mean. An old woman begins telling a story to a kidnapped girl. This story is the history of Cupid and Psyche, in which the god of love marries a mortal girl and maintains her in a magic home in which invisible servants do her bidding. The main condition of this marriage is that Psyche never see her husband’s face; yet Psyche is convinced by jealous relatives that she is living with a carnivorous beast. Confusion, harm, deaths, and many trials ensue. Throughout the story Psyche is guided by a series of speaking objects, plants, bodies of water. At the story’s end, Psyche and Cupid are married once again and Psyche gives birth to a daughter named Pleasure.

It is not clear what this tale, reported at second hand, has to do with the rest of Apuleius’s narrative, which concerns an idiot named Lucius, who mistakenly assumes the titular animal form (donkey) on account of a misplaced spell. All the same, this story, primarily a story about doubt and redemption, does not seem misplaced within the longer novel. Perhaps it is a story about learning, a story about what in us can learn. For it is possible that every story
of metamorphosis is also a story about misrecognition. Sometimes even a reflection will do no good.

This is why I can say that now, when she rises from bed, for she is human again and has two legs onto which to rise, and comes to the familiar round mirror that hangs above the dresser, and does not see herself, or, rather, does not see what she has known to be herself, there, she, the protagonist, is not surprised. She can wonder and can marvel yet can hardly be surprised. The face she raises her hand to and touches is her face, as she has known it, in some sense, only time has passed, great amounts of time, as far as a human can understand. She is old, fragile, feeble. The skin on the front of her skull is creased and soft, hanging from the bone in flaps. Her hair is sparse and downy, colorless. Her eyelids sag and her eyeballs bulge and everywhere muscle that once encased her body has been lost. She stands in the sleeping attire of a much younger woman, a T-shirt advertising sports, and is decrepit. The light of the moon shows spots on her skin, the blueness of blood.

Slowly she returns to the bed where a man is sleeping. It is with care that she must lower herself; the bones seem ready to crack. It is a strange sensation to be so aware of the existence of one’s bones. And there is fatigue of a kind that she has never before experienced. She is breathless, weary. The young person beside her continues to sleep, undisturbed, his smooth flesh rising and falling. Now she begins to sink, now fade.

A young woman had disappeared; this was what they said. On the morning of the next day, this woman returned to her place in the world, the home she had occupied, happily, they say, though she had, unaccountably, in the time that she was gone, grown old, quite ancient, really. It seemed that the woman had died in her sleep, of what were quickly deemed natural causes. These events could not be explained and so have been very little spoken of since.