

Visions of the Sweet Pea Woman

a collection by Ronan F. Swanic-Weber (they/them/theirs)

for Dominique.

1. The Dream of the Earth

Stardust, in space.

Clouded dark.

GRAVITY.

Spacetime: bending.

Dust:
p o o l i n g.

Slipping slow down the wells.

PRESSURE,

gravity,

dust pile,

IGNITION.

Sun is born, rey of light.

Swirling supernova skirts, whirling, tucking elbows in, collecting.

IMPACT. Pressure. Dusty web to shimmering network.

Dust settles, the sky ignites, sensings in the not-so-dark anymore.
Reys with skirts parade, kingdoms vast, armed and swirling too.

Hello Siblings! See Me Swirl!

Gravity pulls planets into the swing, smashing out their paths.

Pressure. HEAT.

Children of the sun, 9 and counting. Swirling, colliding, awakening.

Hello Children, I See You!

Some of storm, some of rock, all spinning at each other with elbows flung out, dancing in the
light. Third farthest, core of iron, already lonely and making a moon:

satellite eye, interceptor.

SIGHT. Light and shadow. Stars and sky. Moon above witnessing skin below.

Nothing clear but a name,
translated to you across billions of orbits

as EARTH.

Down below the moon eye's reach, my heart of iron spins a beat.

The echoes ripple, MAGNETIZE. A strange little bubble against the shear sun.

Radioactive messages inscribed in comet bottles,

trailing ice until impact,

flung out from siblings far and near,

named and unnamed,

sharing secrets and

saying hello across the empty vast.

My skin shaping up from lava and rock and scraps,

remembering in layers and
fine crystal and
trapped comets and

the sinking separation of a hot iron heart.

Those early folds remember nothing but

MOLTEN heat,

CRASH landings,

moon eye close and watching.

A time of fire,

nothing but heat and breathing through it,

hot and hazy over the sun reys across the sky.

The beating bubble catches the exhalations before the sun can rip them away.

Comets boil in this new air, shedding their bottles in prism parachutes.

New eyes find their shapes

among the molten heat and pressure,
erupting in excitement,
metamorphosing,
touching the air,

seeking to know the ways of sibling moon and sun rey.

A clarity that explodes from many eyes below joining the one above,

perspectives abounding and
swaying to the skin's distinct gravity.

All at once, the comet trails and volcanic exhalations
fold the air from haze to cloud.

Eyes of sun and moon blinded,
my skin singing under the kiss of RAIN.

Fresh eyes cooled, unmoored with rumbling skies, begin their journeys over cragged crust.

The dips and sways shape them,
rolling crystalline spheres that sharpen their focus.

They see their own shapes mirrored in the roiling sky.

Rain is the first way I learned to feel.

Gentle kisses, fierce, unrelenting.

Whispering down the holes in me,
the first language of touch and sound.

Rain for decades,

puddles to streams,
rivers to lakes,
clouds to oceans,

all the ways to fill the spaces.

Water, seeping slow,

around

and around

and around the sun.

The strange boiling contact of molten skin and rain water,

chipping away molecule by molecule,

striving for equilibrium.

Down in the deepening, boiling blue, a recipe for CHEMISTRY.

Riotous shaking,
fissures of escape,
electric contact in a heat close to the core.

Liquid stew coagulates, something stirs in the curd.

First LIFE, knowing nothing but darkness and warm salt water, exploding from nothing,
watched closely and carefully by a few eyes trapped in this strange, wet world.

Precious,
miraculous,

an existence slammed together that makes my iron core
spin to a different beat.

Comets confirm that here,
on my skin,

this miracle is unique.

Enraptured as pieces of memory melt and reform into
something new, something alive

and sensing,

no eyes yet but seeking, feeling,
dying as the sun reys would one day.

The eyes dig careful holes for memory graves,

and catch their carcasses as they sink.

Little life, teaching me to feel anew.

So brave, to leave the dark, abundant safety of the depths for the harsh light of the surface,
the sun reys a distant muscle memory.

So tender, to turn that memory into a way of life.

What a gift! to be given a new breath by way of its courage.

Moon eye, farther above now, witnessing itself bathed in sun, rippled by ocean.

It longs to be closer, not drifting,

to roll with its siblings in the depths of the blue,

to witness life erupt again and again,
everywhere all at once.

The first king tide: when the sun says to the moon,

See Child, We Pull Together!

Steady sway, rhythm of dancing with water and sun.

The feeling of drifting forgotten
to the lonely moon eye, who concentrates instead

to keep its watch fixed on me.

It witnesses a new breath take hold as OXYGEN joins the crowded bubble,
turning the oceans from blue to green.

The eyes on my skin stop by the shore to peer at slow red waves and then to marvel
at their first encounter with life.

The eyes of the oceans stare up at the ever-deepening water,
hoping to catch sight of their brave little miracles making food from sunlight.

Green, in all its shades.

First pride, first flourishing, first twitch of a mosaic in the making.

A stirring, deep in the core, spinning up my magnet bubble over the first PLANTS,
prisms of the sun and already touching, reaching.

At first they are soft, butting up against the rock with the familiar waves.

Collision, adhesion.

A moss covered boulder, alone by the sea.

The lichen is resourceful, tearing into my skin and cutting it down and growing in wild colorful
salutations across my dark faces.

The moon eye waves back.

A new memory, passed down, torn away, SEDIMENTATION.

A new sensation, the chill of cold wind.
A patch of skin so felt and tense, exposed, brittle.

The touch of plants everywhere, eager to feel the sun without the density of water.
They climb mountains, soften crags, anoint the eyes that move too slow.
They learn the ways of gravity, to reach down and up and out.

Under the first leaf, there is the first dappled shade.

They tear apart memories to make their own,
and layer by layer they lay down their crisp bones in rock.

My skin rejoices in the memories of their lush discoveries, so many ways to learn to feel.

The soft, green spines that flatten and serrate and carry their children underneath.
Their quest for water, finding all the ways to reach it.
The strong husks that let them grow tall and feel the wind between their leaves.

No birdsong yet,
just that gentle sound

that reminds me so much of rain.

And yet, of course, something stranger slinks through the depths.

Sunken air, whorled shells, eddies of movement.

Always learning together,
the plant teaches the FISH to breathe underwater.

Eyes track fins in the sunned shallows, gills in the reeds, life exploding again.

Everywhere I see the shapes of it,
evolving with the tides.

How fast it is,
darting through the kelp,
living for a moment,
memory reduced to molecules.

How brave it is, honoring their ancient green ancestors
by daring to make LANDFALL,

adding their noises to the hush of the leaves.

Does it know it comes from ancient origins, that I watch closely and remember their deaths?

Death is a feeling, too.

ICE.

Eyes blinded, crushed under kilometers of frozen white.

Furious fumes of volcanic rage, not loud enough.

It tears holes in the memory to watch and hold something as its movements cease,
to honor its bones in rock.

Breathing through it, oxygen and sulfur,
patiently spinning on knowing countless more
will live and die on my skin before the sun rey swallows us,
bones and all.

Everything cold, still, solitary, silent.

To watch, to breathe, to remember, to spin on.

But sometimes, ORBITS intertwine and SPRING lasts for years and all the ice melts at once,
brave survivors crying my name and rushing out to kiss my bare skin.

Such a feeling that floods with the meltwaters, all the eyes stop to be adorned by flowers.

Yes, FLOWERS!

Buds poking brave heads to greet the brave life that met them on dry land,
bursting bright and wild in the aftermath of ice.

Roaring volcanoes FUMING their stifled laments.

BUGS, big, glistening opalescent, taking to the air.

LIZARDS, yawning mouths of teeth, hatching in the shade.

BIRDSONG everywhere.

Where there was ice, there are forests of rain and pine.

Other times, the seasons are eliminated in an instant.

A METEORIC message of implosion,

flung out at some last great heaving,

huge and going fast and

too far away for the moon eye to intercept.

IMPACT.

Fire, ashes, death.

Clouded sky, screaming.

The first sound of pain, a deep black memory now.

Rot, polar night, no birdsong.

The largest reptiles do not rise.

Always, the survivors.

The strong trees born in the cold,
the seeds buried deep under ash.
The strange MAMMALS, poking their terrified noses from my ears,
reveling in a greening world.

Earth eyes mesmerized by the first FRUIT, red like a jeweled planet, shaped like an eye,
containing a future.

Remnant ice.

Forests blooming over glacial ruin.

GRASSES swaying in the wide open plains.

And NOW, YOU. Seekers from the start, swinging down from trees to follow your brave ancient
teachers to open spaces. Learning to walk and to run alongside my eyes, racing them across the
savannah. Days spent staring, interpreting, storytelling.

Who do you suppose watches you but the Earth beneath your feet?

I see you.

The indescribable feeling of watching the slow crawl of humanity across my skin, watching as
you discover strange rivers, underwater eyes, mammoths and the yellow rain of *Ginkgo biloba*.
Watching you seek the ice and taste it, strike stones together and call forth flames, reach for fruits
and break them open and excavate their little futures.

You learn the feelings I did so long ago,

the ways of core heat and boiling,
the ways of sunlight and
fresh water and
memory become soil.

You make songs against the silent ways of death.

You learn to name and speak them as you see the spinning stars and
feel me turn beneath you, giving all the sun reys names of your own.

All the names you give me could fill the oceans and drown the land and I remember them all.

You have learned the ways of memory folds, pulling from deep within my skin.
Do you know the rage you hold? Do you know the graves you dig, the ghosts you free?
You wield the voice of volcanoes, the strength of earthquakes, the teeth of dinosaurs, the wings
of dragonflies. You, so small and brief, what can you know of things that take time?

You would rather dance with flames, fast and furious, screaming, cunning, hungry.
What can you burn but everything, everything, everything?

Oxygen to sulfur and ashes, breath as deadly as its been in some time.
ICE, METEOR. Apocalypse on the rise.
I don't want to dig your graves. I want to remember you a little longer. I want to know if you can
see me, too.

Remember the moon eye, so far away and drifting but watching closely, pulling steady tides. It is
known. Flowers are bravery, roots are healing. Rocks are a memory best left undredged, whole
for my core to reach you with.

Do you see it now, brave one? You are a piece of this skin, a pair of eyes among countless.
See with me, breathe with me, remember a finer way to burn. The memories of life are all around
you and screaming for you to

WAKE UP!

2. Remi, the Eye, and the Church

“I will be screaming no no no more destruction in that last blinding light.”
- *No Rock Scorns Me as Whore*, Chrystos

*apocalypse on my mind
grew up with it whispering in my ears
seen it, with my own eyes, fire on the hillside*

*dystopic dreams bleeding waking hours
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
I pick at a skin as marred as Earth*

*I want to be growing things too
weeping to water them
screaming to nurture them
I want the Earth to remember my rage
I want the survivors to bear their beautiful weedy heads in the dimming sun
and bloom and bloom and bloom
on our quiet graves*

Remi’s sketchbook lies open under her cheek to a page that collects the gravity of all the extra scraps. The poem rests in her sleep-slack fingers, worn soft and yellow on a spare sheet of legal pad, borrowed from a friend at a poetry reading on Valencia Street. Chrystos weeps no no no in her nightdream while the page remembers her trembling, angry, despondent haste in torn letters and tear-smudged ink. The familiar padlocked door bulges behind her eyes with red dream light, trembling against the chained hinges.

Remi is not a nightdreamer, not for a long time now. The hunter stars and the sea cliffs of home, ripe with roosting dreams, are banished under the close orange fog of the city. Most nights, she's thankful for the blackout sleep that teleports her into the next day.

I suppose I make up for the beauty rest by being a constant daydreamer.... Only so much peace and quiet to go around.

Her thoughts echo about her head as she stirs her tea in the back garden of the ruined church, greeting the gargoyles that guard her doors and revering the cool, hallowed quiet underneath the spread of a giant sequoia. Its shade is ancient, somehow remembered, a daydream too; yet it kisses her skin the same as it had the first time she felt it. On some rare, golden mornings, the feathered needles dapple the light splintering through the stained glass windows of the church, and Remi aches that she is the only one to witness it. The church harbors her, the tree does not. She wonders who could have cut it down.

Other visions take her back to her youth, lost places and strange feelings swirling against her own, slipping in with distractions. The city slides by, doubled up by plastic bus glass, and the daydreams dance in her rippled reflections. The familiar door, chained and straining against them, leaking red. A moss covered boulder, alone by the sea. The granite eye, trapped in the tides, turning to her.

The daydreams steer clear of her focused mind. She races through her days behind the reception desk at the Bougainvillea Inn in San Francisco's Marina District, where she earns a smile and a warm espresso on every shift from the tiny, decrepit Polish lady who owns it. Busha wears a seaglass token of the Angel Island eye around her neck, laboring up the fire escape to the roof too often for her old bones to stare out over the Bay and glimpse it making its journey around the island. On a morning like this, the mist clinging to the water under a fierce cerulean glow, Remi knows that's where she will find Busha. Remi makes her way to the fire escape, making sure to rattle around (*not so hard so that you break!* she thinks cautiously) so the old woman knows she is coming.

'Róza? Is that you down there?' Busha calls from the roof.

'Hi Busha, yeah it's me. I was about to go put the signs up...'

'Ach! Too early for the birds just yet.'

'Espresso and pierogi?'

'You are the angel of good mornings, Róza. And leave some for...'

'For Celia and Maribel, I got you, Busha!'

Remi balances the drinks and a heaping plate of Busha's famous hand-folded sauerkraut pierogi (leaving a plate behind for the ladies, of course) and teeters up the fire escape to the roof. The old woman is folded comfortably in an old rocking chair near the edge, under a crochet blanket that

Remi knew she carried with her on her journey to San Francisco when she was just a child. The Bay unfurls all around them in crisp dawn hues, crowning Busha's fluffy head in the spires of the Golden Gate. The fog hugs the water and laps up against Angel Island to greet the curious green eye, already awake and rolling about on the shore.

Setting the dishes out and carefully seating herself on the lip of the roof, Remi inquires 'Been thinking about the eyes?'

Busha pokes her gnarled fingers through the crocheted pattern of blue and white evil eyes. 'Such magic it is, to be near them. Back in the old country, our little house butted up against a huge obsidian thing, so large and slow that it collected a great hill around it like a skirt.'

'Yes, I lived close to an eye too. It's granite. Soledad says it got trapped in the bay... Wait, Busha, I've told you my stories before. Don't you remember?'

Busha's face softens. 'Don't you worry about me,' she says, 'I just love how you tell them. Brings some things back, you know.'

'You want to hear my stories again?'

'Oh, yes, please, if you're up for it. It's still quite early...'

'I would much rather trade stories with you than go to work at this hour.'

'Ach! Then the people can wait!'

Busha folds her hands around her tiny espresso cup, and Remi remembers the legend of her birth.

The granite eye, trapped on the fault line 62 miles north of the city, buffeted by the intertidal swash of Tomales Bay, witnessed Remi's birth. Her mother, alone and laboring, gave birth to her on the shore, her back resting on its crystalline cornea. Remi was a wonder born on the margins, landing on her feet, screaming under the eye of the Earth.

Her father's farm was a rarity, Black-owned in Northern California. Marcus carved it out of nothing and a little bit of something, shielding it from hungry white hands with pen and pitchfork. At first it was just the ways of wind and rain, flower and fruit, seasons and tides. Then, one day, he found an abalone on the shore and returned it to the ocean and when he got back there were people on his doorstep, who spoke with abalone and remembered when the granite eye rolled into the fault. They traded stories by firelight and by the next year, the land was its own again and Remi's father watched from the garden as Miwok ceremonies returned to the trees. Star of the Sea, Eye of the Cypress, Place of Rest and Power.

With rain comes new eyes and one rumbling night (when the abalone were speaking but no one could hear) a soaked woman and her newborn tumbled into the circle of the garden at Star of the Sea. Remi's first smell was of drenched Earth, skin of silk petals. Her first warmth was the arms of her father, rough but tender, as he screamed for help in the blinding rain.

Remi's mother never recovered from her birth. She refused to face clouds ever again, haunted by the pain of life giving in the rain with bones of icy water, alone on the shore. She suspected the eye of stealing her sanity in fitful starts. She resented Remi's father and his friendship with the land, and she wouldn't speak to Soledad, who she thought stole her place in little Remi's heart. She wanted Marcus to rescue her like he did that night in the rain and to teach her son the ways of being a Black man in a white world. Instead, she wept from the window as he braided flowers in Remi's hair and held her hand as she spoke her new name.

'Where is my son,' she cried that day, 'who promised me my future and held me as that awful granite eye only watched?'

Remi learned to cherish the cold, harsh beauty of the Northern Coast, growing up under mist-dripping arms of the sentinel cypresses, chasing the deer along their tall grass paths. Days of her youth spinning away under kingdom skies, dropping down the faces of the sharp sea cliffs, buried in the gnarled roots of redwood glens. Pearls between her teeth from sweet oysters, hands trailing in black water lit up blue-green with luminescence, painting with charcoal and crushed red rock. Strange dreams crowding the nighttime, visions too vivid not to be memory, as if she were watching eons unfold from one rooted spot. In Remi's dreams, the land shared its secrets with her. At first they were so lucid and iridescent that she woke up more tired than when she fell asleep, but then her father made her a sketchbook bound in redwood bark and she learned to channel the restless dreams into early morning drawings. She drew strange flowers and stranger birds, mountains that she had never seen, and always, over and over, a door, chained shut and seeping red.

Marcus was her Polaris, leading Remi through the forest, teaching her the ways of root and flower, introducing her to Soledad and her Miwok relatives, who let her peer from the circle at their dances in the fog. Once, a dancer approached her in hawk feathered skirts, back when grown people were giants and long after the fire had dimmed, and told her that she was like the moon, with the spirit of the tides inside her.

'I see two spirits,' said the dancer, 'they play for now, but one day they might pull, and I want you to know you don't have to choose.'

In the glow of the coals, the broad planes of her father's face floating next to Soledad's, two trees making space for each other in the canopy.

Soledad knew all the stories about Star of the Sea. She was there with Marcus that first firelit night, and she was the one who told the legend of the granite eye as her ancestors saw it. Soledad knew the power of her voice. She was a storyteller in the language of her people, painstakingly preserving it with the memories of her Elders. She sang for the dancers and hummed to the land, always swaying to her own little rhythms. It was at Star of the Sea where she first experienced a silence she could get along with. Cold, dense, misty, scented with the dew of the oaks and cypresses. Close and tender, wrapping her up in fog so thick and still that everything was lost to their echoes and traces. A portal for ghosts and spirits, visions and memories. It was at Star of

the Sea where Soledad heard the voice of the Earth in the baritone of earthquakes, clear as a pipe organ in a forgotten church. It spoke to her in the visions of the granite eye.

One silent morning, Remi brought her sketchbook out to the garden, hoping to catch the first brave, pearlescent heads of the yawning glories between its pages. She wound through the garden towards the trellis and nearly stumbled over Soledad, concealed among the rows like a fawn in the tall grass, lying on her back underneath the sweet peas. She beckoned for Remi to join her. Together, they picked a few choice blossoms to press into Remi's dreams.

'Remi,' Soledad inquired, 'what are these drawings?'

'They're my dreams! Well, the ones I remember anyways, the rest get all fuzzy.'

Soledad hummed a simple tune and turned a few pages in the sketchbook. 'They're very good, Remi. You know, I think it's about time I told you a story.'

Hand in hand, they walked the winding path down the back of the cliffs to the shore of Tomales Bay. A steady wind danced with the dunegrass and whipped red-brown whitecaps against the colossal, near-perfect sphere of the granite eye. Its form cut an impossible shape from the soft contours of the horizon like some giant alien bobber, and even under the fog, its quartz glinted like stars. It rumbled and rolled about in the shallows, leaving a wake of frothy, churned water. When Remi and Soledad emerged from the arms of the oaks, it ground to a halt and turned its massive, crystalline gaze on them. Remi stopped in her tracks.

Soledad knelt down to her level and spoke in gentle tones. 'It's alright. They're big but they're not scary. Have you ever seen one up close?' Remi shook her head.

'You've seen this one, kiddo, but you probably don't remember it. You were born somewhere along this beach, with the eye watching over you.'

Remi's trepidation melted into sheer awe as she stared back at the granite eye. Contact. A hair's crack smiling wider within her, spilling vivid nightmares into the day. Soledad sat down in the sand, humming low and quiet, and waited for Remi to return to her own senses.

'You know, I think I need a dream journal too, Remi, because mine look just like yours,' Soledad said.

'Really?'

'Oh yes, my dreams are wild and vibrant and unlike anything I've ever seen with my own eyes, except in your book and the stories of my people.' Soledad gazed at the granite eye, letting the wind pass between them for a moment. 'I think the land has voices and visions, and in our dreams we hear them.'

Remi concentrated, trying to conjure the visions that had appeared before her like a double exposure, but the remembrance was diaphanous, flimsy. 'What does it say?'

‘Well, I’m not sure exactly. I’m not sure if it’s saying *something* or just *saying*. Like how I sing because I like to. I don’t know how it all works at the heart of it, but we’re not crazy, I’ll tell you that. Let’s listen to our dreams, Remi, figure them out together.’

The granite eye, still as a boulder in the shallows, kept its watch fixed on them until they disappeared back into the trees.

It was Soledad who noticed that Remi grew up restless, inheriting that teenage itch to run from her mother’s ghost in the window. Soledad saw the dreams growing inside her, the visions accosting her small moments, begging her to seek and to understand. An evening on the cliffs, collecting pine nuts and acorns. A clear-headed sky and a low-slung sun, disappearing west over the water.

‘We all have the sun in our bones, and we long to chase it wherever it shines,’ Soledad said, hard and true, her words making a mirage in the sunset light.

An ache, spreading hot and slow in Remi’s chest. She refused to look at Soledad. ‘So you’re telling me to go.’

‘I’m saying I can’t watch you wither here under your mother’s watch.’

‘She’s not my mother. She’s a shell, an empty shell.’ Remi dissolving, carbonate and acid.

Soledad’s arms, fingers in her braids, a kiss her mother never gave her. An infinite moment of tearing and being held together, breathing through it, grief seeping out and over the horizon with the sun. Soledad was the cypress rooted here. She was the abalone living in the shallows, shining opalescent on the shore below. Remi was the gull overhead, the albatross careening. Her heart broke with the weight of watching home shrink beneath her wings.

‘I’ll watch over them both,’ Soledad said. ‘Go on. Your wings will take you back here one day, and the trees already remember your name.’

The courage of leaving, of not looking back, of trusting that the loved would stay alive even if Remi could not see them. The sweet pearls of nostalgia stinging in her throat: poppies and pig noses in honey light, her mother sitting straight-backed in the window, the blur of Miwok dancers through redwood trees. The spears of the city rising up from the Bay, the Angel Island eye glinting like pale green seaglass. The golden bridge that carried her down among the spires and candy houses. The speed of life, rushing in great streams all around her, so fast that for a while she drowned in it. Survival, bills, work. Smog, rot, filth. Trees breaking sidewalks in search of clean soil. Strangers hunting her through the streets at night, howling echoing curses. She learned how to lock a door and carry her keys to make her fists into knives. Houses with spiraling stairs, new roommates packed like sardines, cops that triple checked her bus tickets and pulled her braids and once even dared to spit on her. The Bougainvillea Inn, a strange sanctuary tucked under the domed terracotta wing of the Palace of Fine Arts. Rahel, the blessed, ancient saint who owned it and advanced Remi two month’s salary, demanded to be called Busha, and anointed her Róza when she braided bougainvillea pink into her hair the next day.

Pressure seeped through a forgotten crack behind her eyes like gravity, spilling the dreams that didn't come in the nighttime anymore. She daydreamed of home, of the granite eye and hawk feathers and the press of so many stars through the boughs of cypress. It was so much easier to lose her aches in the visions back then, so she let them come. IGNITION. Fire and ice, heaving and melting. The first breath of Earth, the first rainbow. Eggs hatching under cool light, moon eye reflected in blue-green ocean.

The daydreams were gravity and they pulled her again and again to the ruined church tucked away in the sandy westernmost foothills of San Francisco. She passed it three times in a circuitous back route to the Bougainvillea before the strange doubling vision was enough to catch her eye. The cool kiss of shade on her skin. The hiss of fanned needles touching in the wind. The ache of her neck as she tracked the shade up into the boughs of a giant sequoia, spearing the sky in the middle of the city, its trunk as wide as a city block. In a blink the bones of the church sliced out the shade, reducing the world once more to stone and concrete. Gravity, pressing harder now, seeking, urging. Remi's mind spooling away, taking lurching steps to follow her daydreams into the belly of the church.

Stained glass, tabernacle, marble floors cracked with saplings drinking prismatic, jeweled light. Pews askew, crucifix missing, foyer burnt out. One door, locked and chained and boarded, red light snaking from the crack. A blessing scrawled across the pipe organ: G*D IZ ALIVE AND WATCHING. Remi, exhausted with visions, asleep in her arms on a bench.

She doesn't remember when she stopped returning to the sardine can she once called home. Her life had been two bags since she left Star of the Sea, and she liked how she passed invisible between the ribs of the church. No neighbors called, no cops knocked, no mail delivered, not even the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

What a blessing to be haunted, Remi thought, a blessing and a curse.

She was grateful for her silent sanctuary amidst the bustling city, yet she pondered often why she seemed to be the only pair of eyes among countless that was able to see it. The weight of the visions pressed on her, asking repeating, unanswerable questions. Where did the sequoia go? Who built the church, and why did they leave it behind? What happened here? Some nights, when these questions pressed her in and out of sleep, Remi paced the echoing floors and tried to forget the answers that bubbled up in her hallucinogenic half-dreams. This place had witnessed pain, and it collected in the gravity of the forgotten corners.

Living in a forgotten corner had its perks though, and soon Remi's tips cushioned a whole pew in crumpled bills. She bought books, a quilt, the seedling of a Monterey cypress. She climbed the high beams of the church and sat on the roof with her gargoyles overlooking the city. She found a spring in the wall of the back garden, gushing quietly down a ruined drain pipe and seeping through the stone wall, alive with moss. She left her last hawk feather from home nearby in an overturned abalone shell, grateful for the gentle spirits that found their way to her. Busha called her for extra shifts but always left her a heaping plastic wrapped plate of her favorite pierogi. A

spinning, magnetic rhythm settled her in bones, cold and dense and oak-scented like the fog of home. The pull of gravity, familiar now, daydreaming of the padlocked door.

A sign for a poetry reading on Valencia Street, far across town, three more buses than it takes to get to the Bougainvillea. Bravery, coursing through Remi's veins. The ad was stapled to the telephone pole right outside the church. It faced her, stared her down. Gravity pooled at her feet, behind her eyes, and she caught the metal scent of lightning. She woke up already on the second bus.

Chrystos at the mike, a falling star in white spotlight, trailing fire and ice. They stood in the clarity of Remi's nightmares, speaking with the baritone of earthquakes.

'No protest march will alter the head-on collision, deeply disgusted by lawns, in love with the mystery of shadow and the word sacred, which has in it the wisdom of all people.'

Remi scribbled her poem as a crack splintered wider behind her eyes. Tectonic motion, giving in to gravity as visions swirled, building their cyclone strength. SACRED. The prayer of watching in death and life, the ceremony of memory layer by layer, the hymn of water that rains and roars. The bones of a sequoia growing the bones of a church, something larger stirring, peering from underneath.

'The Earth means exactly what it says.'

Remi stumbled out of the reading on weak legs into the arms of the orange fog, bombarded with visions, fast and coming faster. Vast diamond sky, a whirling dervish pulling their arms in, red glow of magma, skin boiling, the first eye in orbit glowing in the sun. She doesn't remember the bus rides, but somehow gravity leads her back to the church. Sleep is instant, blackout cold.

When she wakes, the world is slanted with a dream from the night, the first of recent memory, its gravity still seeping slow. The chained door hangs slack jawed, its locks cut and planks torn loose. A ruby red glow snakes up from the stairwell. REMI, I SEE YOU. She rises like fog to follow the voice, deeper down BELOW the belly of the church. The nightmare swims before her eyes and all at once she knows what she will find glowing red in the basement. The bottom of the stairs drops away into a crystalline swath of a colossal interred eye. It thrums and pulses with core heat, sublimating visions and memory into the bones of the church. They coil in tendrils around Remi's legs that sting with urgency. PLANT SEEDS, it whispers. FIGHT THE FIRES! It screams. THEY ARE COMING, it promises.

A year later, standing as her father does 62 miles north, Remi looks up, waist deep in wild sweet peas, as the first tired stranger haggard with gravity finds their way home.