

BACKGROUND NOISE

AN ASSEMBLAGE OF MISMATCHED MEMORIES AND MISGUIDED THOUGHTS

COLLECTED BY SHARON NICOLE COLE

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

ALL OF THE LOST SOULS

ICANT SEEM

TO FORGET ABOUT.

IT ENDED

DURING THE DEATH OF WINTER,
WHOM HAD GORGED ON THE EXPIRED EARTH
LEFT BEHIND BY SUMMER AND AUTUMN'S VIOLENT,
SHORT-LIVED LOVE AFFAIR.
LAZILY SPREADING HIS FAT BODY AMONG
THE DEAD LEAVES AND SOMBER ROOTS,
HE LET THE SUN TAKE HIM HOME.

STIFLED

IN THE WAKE OF A DEAD MAN.
SLEEP GAVE BIRTH.

IT BEGAN

WITHIN A PASSED DOWN MEMORY.
IN THE MIDST OF A REOCCURRING...



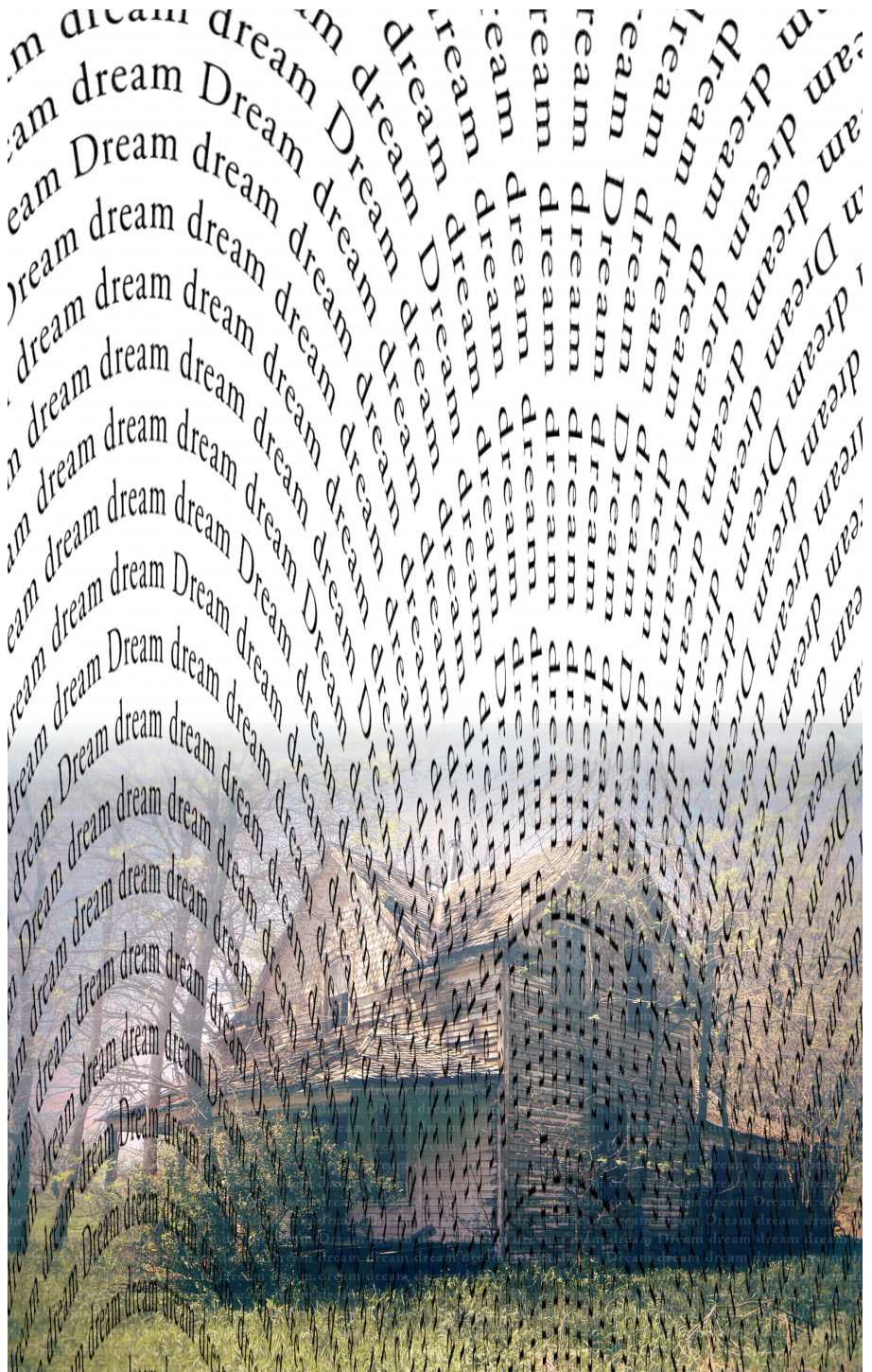






PURGATORY stood somber. Her painted skin, lead luster long gone, cracked off in chalky flakes as she shook the bats and the sparrows out of her attic, the itch of their living irritating her frame. Sagging in the middle, weighed down by the mold of too many afterthoughts and too many broken promises, she let out a heavy sigh in the haze of another perpetual afternoon.

Purgatory had taken the form of a home in the beginning of the end, in hopes she would be a temporary comfort for lost souls banished to her side of the universe. A soft spot to spread themselves. A warm meal in their bellies. Someplace to find a spark to restart their hearts gone cold. She'd save them, yeah-- she could save them. She would help them find themselves, give them a reason to move on. Purgatory believed Time would redeem her for past mistakes if she saved enough dirty souls. Maybe he'd get jealous of them. Maybe, he'd even love her again. But the beings that found themselves in her confinement and her comfort rarely were grateful. These restless vagabonds were too broken, burnt egos, sadists, sociopaths, selfish lovers-- they refused to leave. She tried to help them, but they'd break her every time she practiced blind kindness. Spitting on her floors and taking matches to her walls when she'd try to nudge them in the right direction. They were more comfortable using her. She became immensely overcrowded. The damage they inflicted was irreversible, permanent burn marks and water stains. Structural damage of the brain. Purgatory knew she only had one option if she wished to simply survive. She consumed them. Every single one. There was no more hope. What she treasures most from the first time she took lives, was the joy in being overcome by silence. She had few tenants after that, and the stragglers that did make their way to her never lasted more than a few weeks. It didn't matter what types of souls made their way to her now, good or bad, she would eventually absorb them into her broken body. One piece at a time, they were consumed. In maddening anger, sadness, and guilt, she could never get full.





“ Hello ? ”

I said this to a room full of ghosts, lonely objects.
A perpetual black hole in time.



“Is anybody here today??? I’m back, and I’m armed
with a camera. I’ll shoot if i don’t get some answers!”



A portrait of Jesus rolled his eyes and yawned,
gesturing towards a doorway behind me.

An empty room. An empty bed.



“ Hello ? ”



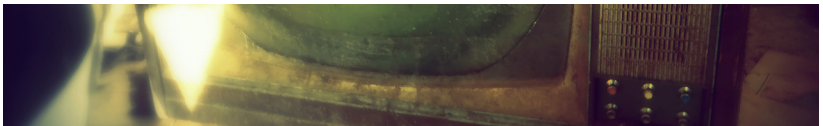
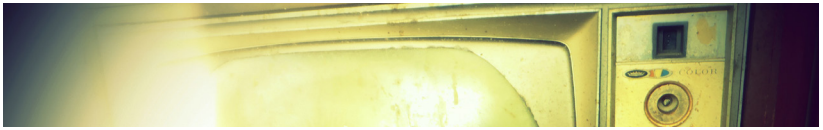


“Hello.”

I was a Traveler, a glitch in time. Stuck in perpetual wander, no home to return to. All I had left from my life before were fragmented memories and a burn in my belly. Button was a lost soul as well, a bitter star, a broken hearted-babe who had landed in the bowels of Purgatory. She felt familiar, and I'd visit her when the beast house slept. We became fast friends, and we took care of eachother the best we could.



Button didn't always come out to talk with me, but when she did, we'd go through her rituals.



We'd sit in the living room and stare at somebody else's dead television. We'd stare at somebody else's dead family photos and wholesome memories.



We'd sit in the kitchen and Button would tell me about how the paint peeling from the walls reminded her of being reborn.





Sometimes Button wouldn't talk with me at all. Sometimes all she could do was cry, cry, cry.





Button didn't belong here, landed in no-mans land unintentionally. Trapped within a glutinous house and an array of forlorn strays. Purgatory was eating her alive, craving wholeness, a soul to move with. I'd tried plenty of times to pull her out of there, but purgataroy was clever, and kept what was left of the star girl's button heart hidden away, trapping her. We searched the home for her heart daily, but never found a beat. Button knew it hadn't been devoured, or she'd be dead. She also knew it was only a matter of time before Purgatory's willpower caved.



Purgatory ate bits off of Button daily. A feather here, a bit of her string there. Little bits consumed down sink drains or sucked into water-stained floor boards when Button wasn't looking. She tried to fight back, but someone like Purgatory, a soul so clouded with gluttonous hate, was too strong of a force to manage. More than anything, Button was afraid she'd lose her story. She wanted me to record everything, she wanted me to find her lover, Ursa Major. She wanted closure. We started to spend less time searching, and more time talking.

The day I began my log of Button's life, others trapped in the house found us, coming out of their hiding places in the closets and underneath the beds to hear Button speak in her fluttery, entrancing way.

I pulled out my journal and began to record. She started her story from the beginning...



IT BEGAN

amongst the whirlwind of a tornado in a cornfield, a lost metal button swept up in the mania of voracious wind. The tornado struck a farmhouse flinging wooden splintered memories into the dirt saturated sky, bones splintered and lacerated flesh, loose string and mangled typewriter, swept up into the heavens. I believe I died on Earth that day. I know I had been human, my soul sucked out of marrow; but it did not find the Great Beyond in the chaos. It found the Button, and attached itself to the only thing it could reach out of fear. When I gained my senses, I was dazed and cold. I was floating, surrounded by debris from my home. All darkness and pinpoints of light encapsulating

me. I was in space, I could tell that, but I had no ability to make sense of it, the how's and why's. I had no ability to move or to scream. I floated in perpetual motion for what felt like eons, flipping round and round, my belongings in toe, wondering if this would be the rest of time for me. Even existing as nothing more than a chip of metal in space, I still seemed to drift into some type of dreamless sleep state intermittently, going in and out of consciousness.

I woke at one point with stupefaction to find a bear floating in front of me. Enormous and grizzly, his wet nose touching my tiny body and



cobalt eyes squinting at my opalescence. He captured me tenderly with a heaving paw and spoke, "I know you can hear me in there," he took a deep breath in, "and you smell of flesh."

He took a look at the debris surrounding us, "How about some help, little light?" The great bear proceeded to pull together objects, "It's been many moons since I've seen a human, but I'll do my best, I promise."

Coolly he began to shape the form I hold today, stringing together turpentine rags and broken jewelry, chicken wire and tooth picks. He

placed a typewriter in the center of my belly, and secured the button, my soul, to the center of my newly formed chest. He floated back and looked me over, placing paws on hips and squinting again, "Well darlin' try it out, try to move as you did on Earth."

I flexed fabric fingers first, then stretched out my wiry legs, gingerly feeling the weight of this new form, elation mixed with anxiety building. I felt an ample thickness growing in my chest though, an uncomfortable burn, as if something was missing. I realized I was forgetting to breathe! I gasped in cold, dead space with paper lungs and coughed a sputter of relief outwards, causing me to start spinning backwards. Bear chuckled and stopped my spin with a pointed claw clutched on my shoulder, "Oops, sorry, shoulda reminded you about that function. Try and speak, who are you, how'd you make it to my neck of the woods? I've seen many odd things strewn across this universe, but nothing quite like you." He looked inquisitively.

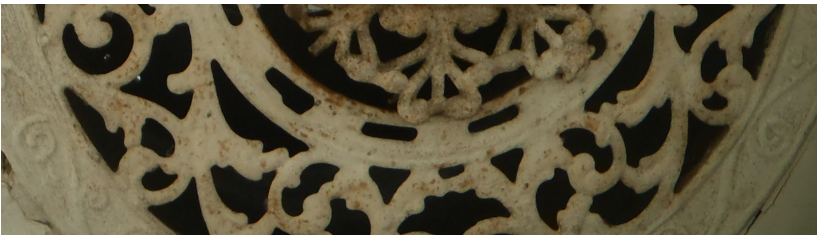
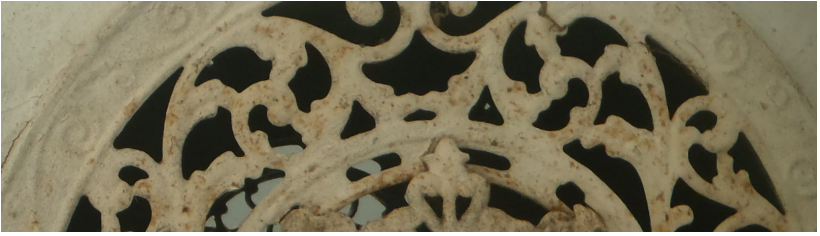
"Eee... Aaauh.. I." My voice sounded familiar, but metallic, uncertain. A sudden homesickness swept through me, burning harder than the previous lack of breath in my lungs, "I... I.."

A flashback of my Earthly bedroom shot through my thoughts, my beloved bicycle sitting in the corner by my closet, a voice speaking softly behind me, unseen. Words I couldn't sort out, a voice so recognizable, but saddening. *Who were they? How could I forget? How could I forget them, I know they were important, why?* The memory burned bright and then faded away again, leaving me staring at Bear, who was still staring back at me, puzzled.

"I ahh..." I tried to speak again, but the weight of the drifting memory pulsed heavy, bringing me to tears. I began to sob, the feeling of it all too much to process. Bear's quizzical expression softened into concern. "Oh darlin', you poor thing, I'm sorry! I'm sure this is a lot to process at one time, you being from Earth and all. Whatever happened to you, I'm sure it was..It's okay, ahh geeze, it's okay." Great Bear scooped me up as I wailed on, "It's been a long time since I've talked to anyone, I'm sorry if I pushed you. I'm Ursa," He squeezed me closer to his chest, "as in Major, and you don't have to worry any more, you're not alone. I've got you now, little Button."



URSA MAJOR ♡ BUTTON



Button gave me the first piece of a story never told out loud.

I asked her for the rest, told her I believed I'd ran into Great Bear once or twice in my life, couldn't imagine he'd been so kind to her. My run-ins had been more than messy. Button told me to be patient, she'd tell me more in time, but needed a minute to breathe. The house had taken a part of her lungs today, and it was getting harder for her to speak at lengths.

I asked if Bear was the reason she had ended up in this place.

Button stared at the painted crosses strewn along the stairs across the room and said nothing.

I wanted to save her... somehow.

Just as we were about to get back to her story, Purgatory shuddered in her sleep, shaking dust and mold out of the walls and ceilings. The others listening fled to their safe places, this movement being a sign Purgatory would be waking soon. Button looked up at me and gripped my hand, "it is far, far too late to be telling sad stories."

She let go and pushed me out the front door of the house with all the strength she had left in her, bending space and sending me flying out into an unfamiliar part of the universe. The look on her face as I shot backwards was void, defeated. She wasn't just pushing me out to protect me, she couldn't stand to think about whatever pain was hidden in her story for another minute that day.

It took months to sort out my sillies and find my way back to Purgatory. Where ever Button had sent me was not a well-traversed part of space. I was hurt by this and questioned why she would act so irrationally. I couldn't imagine she was doing well staying off Purgatory after depleting herself of so much energy, she knew was able to take care of myself when it came to the beast house. I was afraid her memories were clouding her already fragile state of mind. Maybe dredging them up hadn't been such a grand idea. By the time I made it back to Purgatory...

B u t t o n



was in a sorry state







She was smaller. Her gravitational pull was almost non-existent. She no longer carried around as many of the remnants of her former home that had been with her since the beginning. Hollow and see through in parts, most of her face was missing, showing what had been underneath her skin: an intricate web of yarn. Resistors and capacitors.

She informed me that most these objects weren't original to her body. Purgatory had become increasingly ravenous. Button had been stealing back from the house when she could: parts of old TV's and record players, little electrical things to fill the holes eaten into her body. Button's hair had grown coarse and yellow, and her sanity seemed to be slipping. She kept trying to call Ursa Major on the phone. Over and over again.

No answer.



At this rate I wasn't going to get to know her whole story. Button wasn't going to make it much longer. Purgatory was on the verge of total consumption of her soul; I could smell her salty breath all over Button. She would become just another piece of clutter in the house. Nothing more than a pile of yarn and a lonely lost chip of metal on the floor. She was convinced the Bear would still be back, he had promised to come back and save her.

She told me she'd give me one more piece of her.

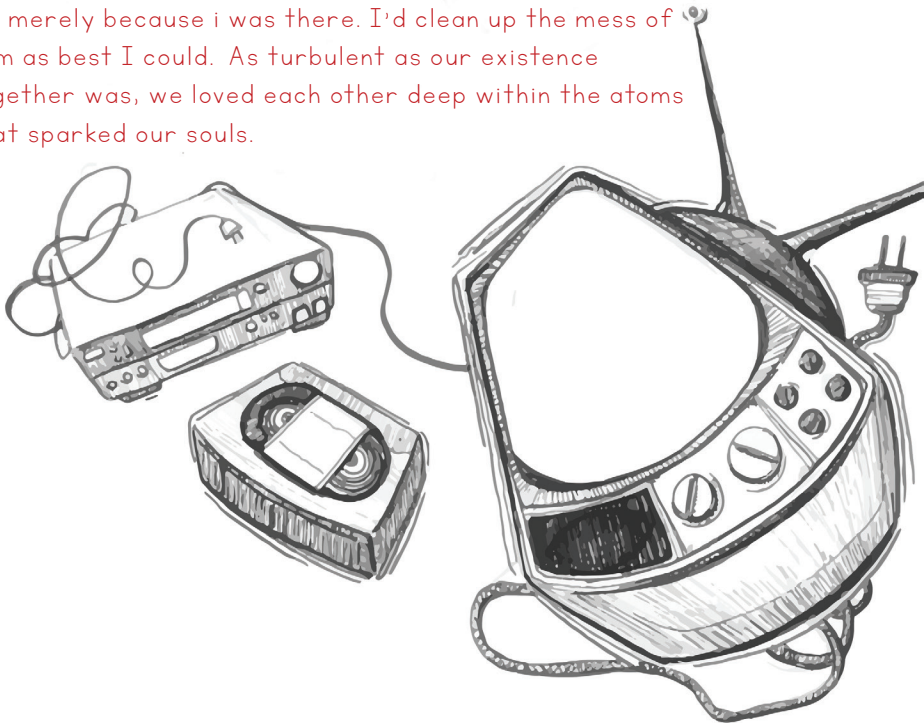
Another segment of her story, but that was it, that's all she had left to give. Button said she had to save the rest of her energy for Ursa when he came for her.

I dug my yellow note pad out of my bag and began to record. The others there listened among the dark corners of the house.

I spent many moons learning the starkly ways of the universe with Bear. He took me to his home in the sky and taught me the ins and outs of his spacial existence. Surprisingly, it involved lots of watching sad films and drawing silly comics together. The universe was filled with space trash and debris, much like the remnants of my destroyed home that now made up my body; random orphaned belongings. We'd sift through heaping plastic meteors and space wreckage, looking for things to entertain ourselves. Bear theorized that all the debris came from cracks and errors in the mental health of the space time continuum, sucking things out of different dimensions and landing them willy-nilly all over the place. He theorized this was the same reason his TV worked when he hit the power button as it was floating along with us, unplugged. He had learned to stop questioning the way of it all long ago, and to just enjoy the ride. I asked him about his own past and he would talk around the

question, some deep pain hiding among those memories he could not allow me to touch. For an alien constellation being, he sure felt raw and human.

In fact he changed form when interacting with me, resembling more human in a bear suit rather than a full fledged bear. He became comfortable enough with me through our time together and our rambling conversations to the point that he no longer hid his faults. He was warm and protective on most occasions, vulnerable and sensitive, sharp with a contagious sense of humor. But he could also be grizzly and cold like the great bear of Earth that he represented, transforming back into all fur and fang without notice. A bipolar bear rampaging among the vacuum. I had incredible days of mediocrity with him, and days doused in bitterness that scarred black like the endless holes floating aimlessly among the stars. He'd often push me away for fear of his ability to destroy me. For fear of bringing up the ache in his throat that he so desperately tried to ignore. For fear of his inability to control his bear-like ways on the bad days. He self medicated his condition with the wine of the Gods, stealing every drop he could when given the chance. Taking out his anger at himself on me merely because i was there. I'd clean up the mess of him as best I could. As turbulent as our existence together was, we loved each other deep within the atoms that sparked our souls.







This love became strained when he began to wander. He would sneak away with other constellations, exploring their bodies, filling into them physically to drown out some eternal buzzing. Some predisposed condition of atrophied love. It burned my metal button heart red hot, singing the string and glue keeping placed among the center of my chest. I just wanted to know why, and his only response: doomed love.

I couldn't take the pain on the last big bender, the burn of my heart turning to flame, scorching my innards. I ran, Bear calling out behind me, begging me to forgive again. And that's how i ended up here, wasting away amidst the belly of Purgatory.





Doomed love.

It sounded like an excuse from a coward.

A phrase repeated too often, untruthful. A way out.

I told her this. I told her I didn't believe in doom or misfortune, just as I didn't believe in good luck.

We create our own fate, our choices are always interchangeable. We meet certain others for a reason, yes. Some are meant to both hurt us and love us, yes. This is meant to teach us... teach us about the world and ourselves. We don't have to forget broken lovers, but we do have to let them go.

Great suffering always produces great creativity, and that can be as addictive as any drug. It is absolutely necessary, we need it to kick start the fire, to grow. To survive.

But once you've used up your misery, once you've felt every bit of heartache from someone you just wanna save, who won't save themselves... well, there's no where else to go from there. That's when you need to have self restraint. We aren't meant to become stagnant in misery, to stay with those that can't stay with themselves. Suffering can't create anything new. Staying miserable is just as bad as becoming too comfortable.

It's boring.

I told her a universal secret I'd figured out a long, long time ago.

Happiness is the great creator.

There is no God.



We create this universe, as a whole. We are God, all of us.







I remember the smell of burning plastic and wood, violating my nostrils and throat, chemical and stinging. Smoke filling the room, Purgatory violently shaking awake as she became engulfed in flame. I remember a metal and yarn hand grasping the collar of my shirt and pushing me out once more into the depths of space before the impending implosion.

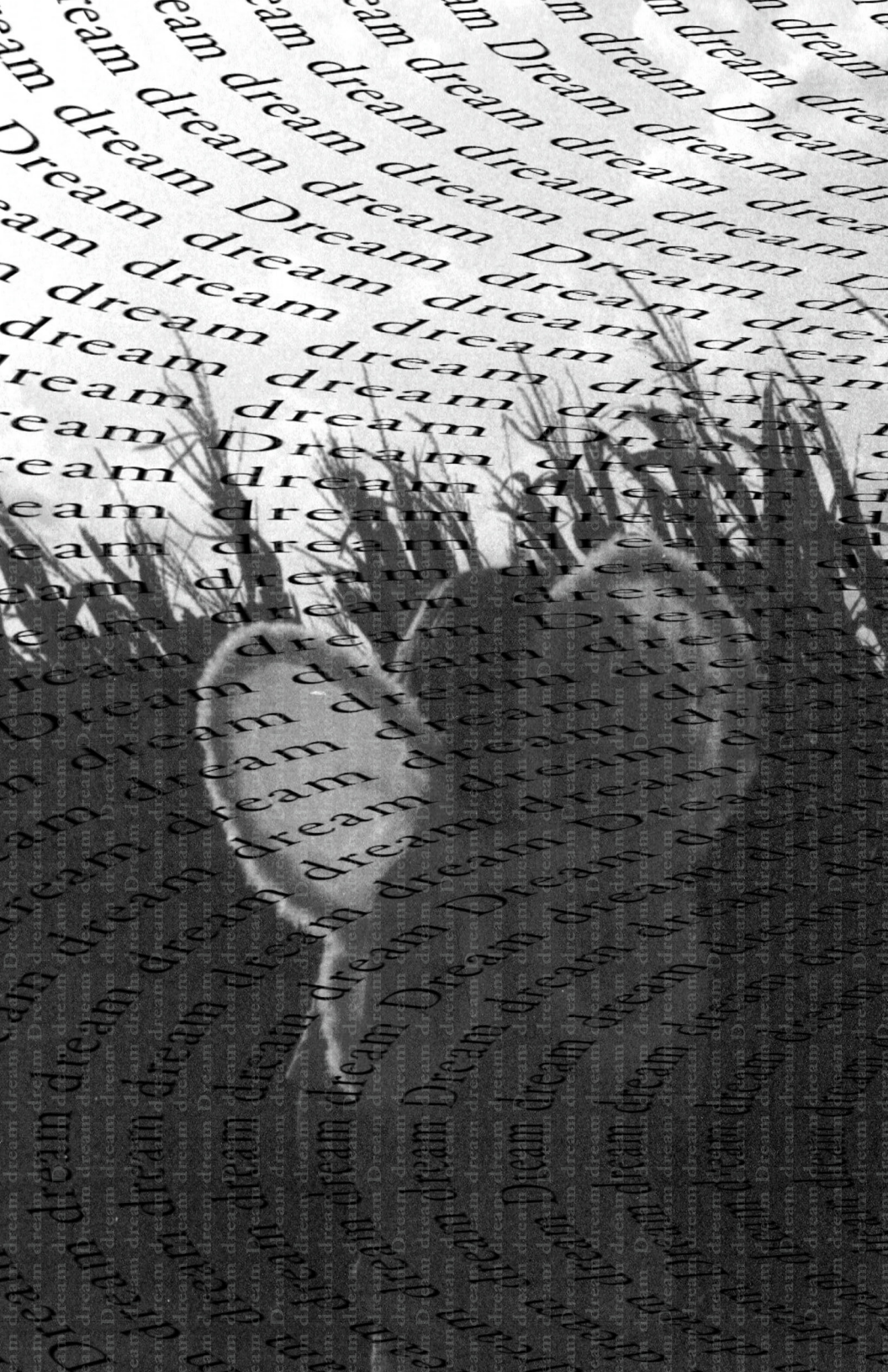
Button's heart had burned hotter than a sun in that moment from where ever Purgatory had kept it hidden. Destroying Button, destroying Purgatory and the last of the lost souls stuck in her cracks. I came back to that place as soon as able to see what was left of my dear friend, but what I came to was nothing more than an empty field.

I've tried to track down Ursa, but nobody's been home in his patch of sky for many moons.

I saw someone with a resemblance to Button in a crowd the other day, her body blossoming in little buttons of every shape and color, a coat made of bear fur covering her shoulders.

I tried to catch up to her, just to see, just to make sure. But the figure disappeared around a bend in time before I could catch up.

A lost mind hunting big game in the wilderness of the afterlife.







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