

DEPRESSION AND DESIRE



This zine is emerging slowly, but I hope that it reaches you in time. It will mean something different to you than it does to me, but for the purpose of giving you some idea of the place and time it emerged from, here's a short introduction.

My space in the world is defined by a long, draining labour strike where I have not only been disillusioned with my work space but also distanced from my comrades' struggle by mental illness. So I am doubly cut off. First from income and second from the struggle that is meant to affirm my place in the union's community.

But what I want to talk about is not what separates me from other people but what binds me closer. To me, desire is that binding, the beautiful longings that don't represent empty spaces longing to be filled but a burning reminder of how everything is tangled up inside me.

There is no one way to write about depression. My approach in this zine has been to find affirmations of connection. These are in that sense "positive" stories and reflections in that they are talking about what is present as opposed to what is missing but they are not happy or optimistic. Rather, the hope or the connections they encapsulate affirm life while reflecting on the wasteland, the devastation of our bodies and its connection to the earth and air and sea.

Take care of yourself, blessings, love,

Evelyn Ramiel



Saul and the Witch of Endor

Depression produces deprivation, ghosts, and the shattering of laws. King Saul, who himself made witchcraft a capital offence, steals in secret to the abode of the Witch of Endor, a spirit medium. Long aware of his imminent displacement by David, deprived of the divine voice, Saul has begun to wither himself away. Refusing to eat or drink, he seeks only the counsel of the dead. By asking the medium to conjure up his anointer, Samuel, the man who made him king and condemned him for hasty and improper sacrifices, perhaps Saul thinks he can catch a glimpse of the voice of Divine reassurance and purpose. Instead, Samuel tells Saul something curious; Saul will lose the battle and his life, his ignominy confirmed in tragic fashion. Once this is over, the medium compels Saul to eat and drink before the coming battle. And, remarkably, he does. The next day, Samuel's prediction comes true, and Saul falls on his own sword, dying.

For Saul, as for us, the future is unknowable, prophecy silent.

Saul's encounter with the witch tempted me to write about it from the start—its narrative twists are all familiar to my own experiences of depression, from starving myself to the visions or premonitions of doom that insist on shacking up in my head. To pay at least a pittance of attention to caution, we should of course mention that we shouldn't psychologize this story or make it about a particular diagnosis. The Tanakh knows nothing of psychology or psychiatry, and allows us to speak instead in ritual, relational, and moral terms. So for this story, Depression will not be a diagnosis that can be treated with counselling and medication. Instead, I want to look at what originally drew me to the story: how it illuminates the way depression becomes part of our relational infrastructure. In other words, it helps determine how we can or feel we should engage with others—and the other that is the self.

1. Self-Punishment, Seeking After Death

For our King of Israel to be seeking out a medium is not, I would argue, merely an act of desperation or a longing for wisdom. Rather, it can be read as produced by depression's ability to remake the self into something worthy of punishment and death.

Saul breaks his own law. So the story is at least partly in an ironic key, showing Saul as he forsakes all of his previous piety. Long denied access to the voice of G-d, knowing that he has

been passed over for another man, Saul shows himself to be an excellent self-destroyer. He destroys bits of himself one after another: by consulting a witch, he abandons his commitment to lawgiving; by refusing food and drink, he is withering his strength and prowess; by abjectly obsessing over his past to the point of summoning an irate Samuel—whom he must at least suspect would berate him since the good prophet passed away on bad terms with Saul—he erases the last shred of his dignity as an anointed of G-d.

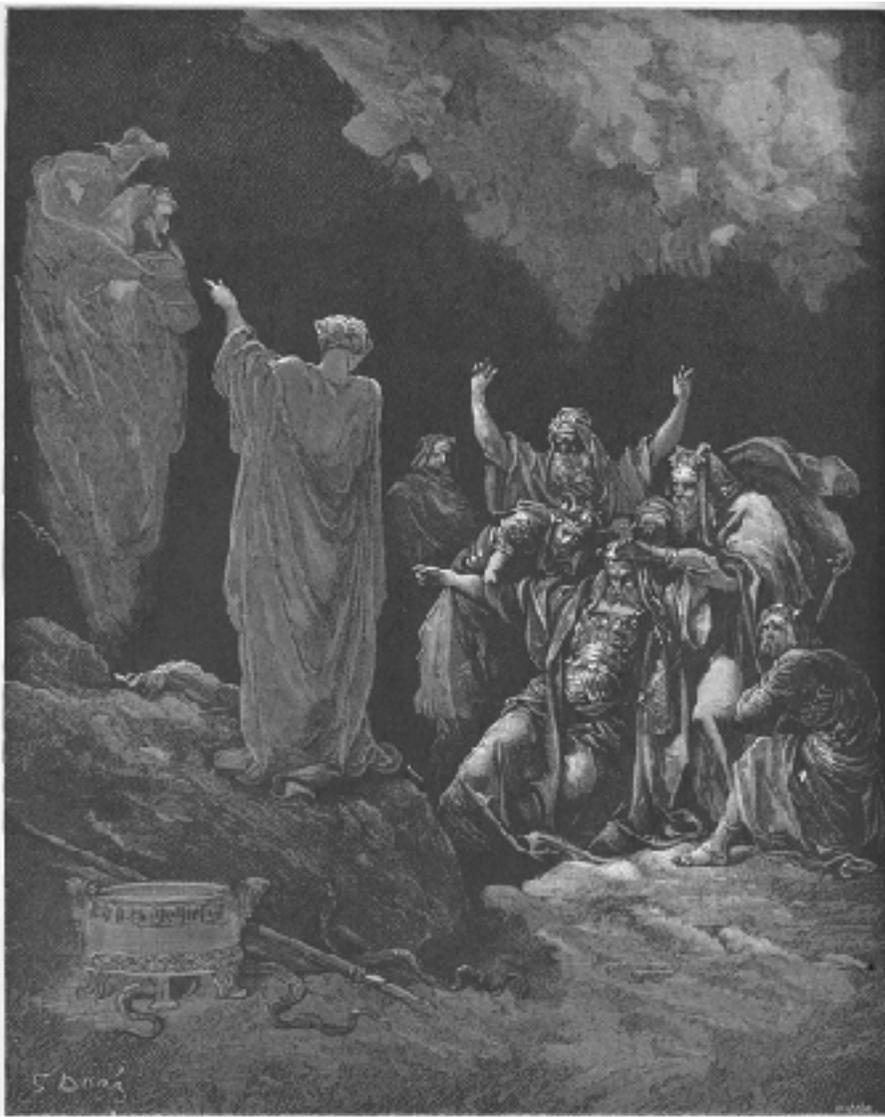
I admit that I am very familiar with all of these forms of self-hatred made real. Starving myself as punishment for sleeping in too late. Denying all my accomplishments. Pulling up old ghosts, old incidents (or letting them come on their own, as they are apt to do, the little devils) to play prosecutor against myself. Already convinced of my own worthlessness, I spend hour after hour entertaining myself in this way. As we'll speak about later, there is a cold pleasure in confirming, contouring, sculpting this image of myself as so despicable I am beyond help, shut off from all Divine guidance or human companionship. I find myself slinking out as Saul does, looking over the edge of aching chasms, low guardrails. Saul falls a considerably shorter distance, of course, and sharpened metal has long been the executioner's method of choice for, truly, putting oneself beyond rescue.

But I'm surely forgetting something here.

2. The Witch Who Feeds Saul and Saul, Who Accepts Her Gifts

Of course. See, Saul's story is the much longer and more fleshed out tale, but his depression-driven meeting with the Witch of Endor is not *just* about creating desolation where there once was a person. At the end of the story, there is a very bizarre twist, or at least it seems so. For Saul, the Witch is a service provider and little more, a convenient torture device that can inflame his own emptiness with the mockery of a prophet. She is, to him, a way of making himself truly *worthy* of being condemned to death.

To her, however, he is a fellow human. Though she must have realized that he was hurting and deprived (she noticed that he had not eaten, after all) and that she could not do much about it, she takes this person into her care. I have read precious little about the Witch's compassion, her willingness to go into the wilderness beyond law, exposing herself to the danger of execution in order to help another person. Of course, she hears assurances of immunity from her client, then upon summoning Samuel panics and realizing what she has done. Still, at the end, she convinces Saul to take some of her food and water after he *faints from exhaustion and hunger*. Whether she did this out of fear, out of custom, out of



SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR

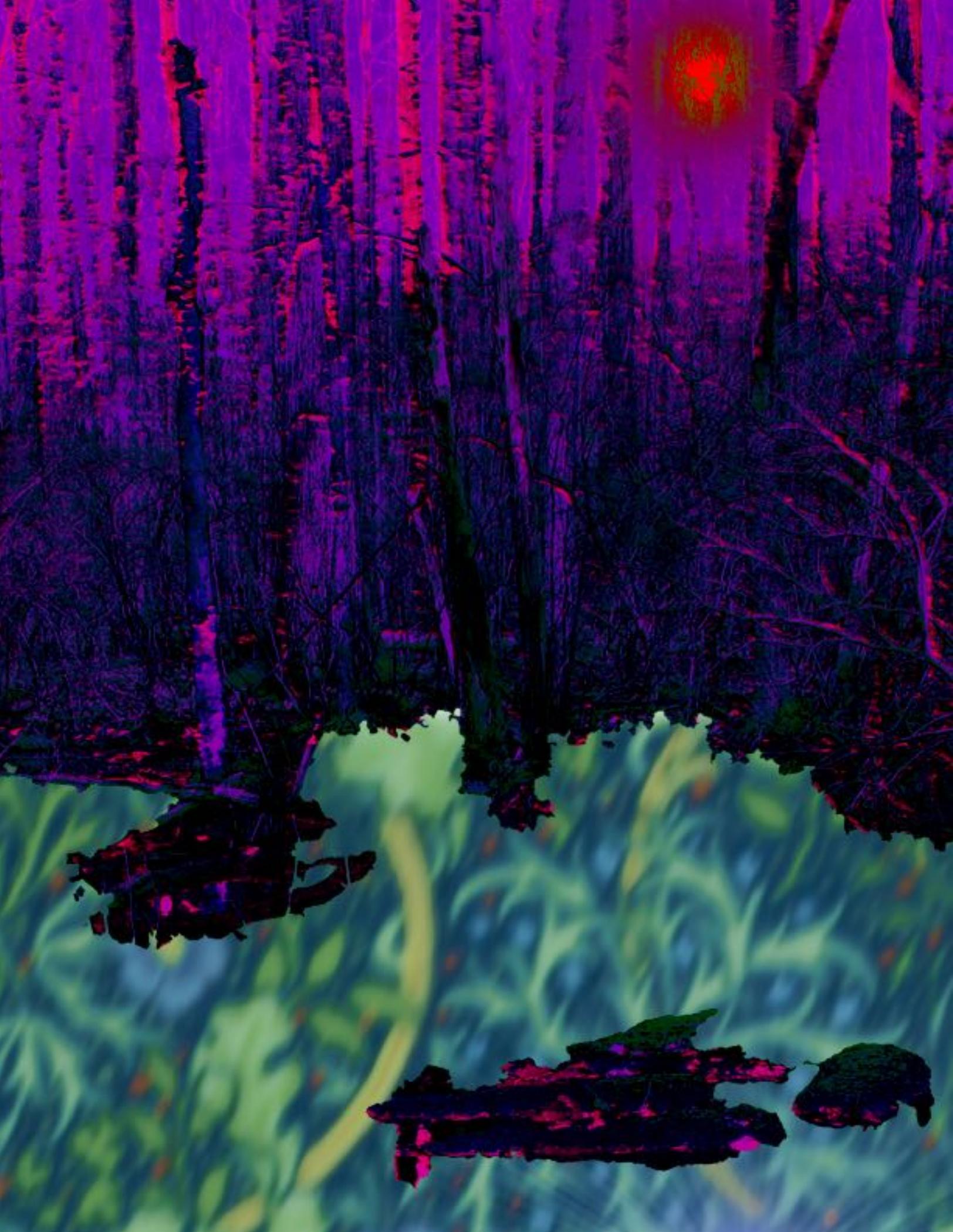
Then said the seer, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up
Samuel... (1 Samuel 28:11) (28:7)

compassion, her actions lead Saul to affirm himself in some small way before his fated end. And I'm sure she could tell the story much better than I can.

Depression, in its cackling throes of waste and hate, often makes the mistake of driving people together. In this case, Saul, who is interested in a mere transaction and who has just received a death notice, joins the Witch in eating. She, despite her disregard for the law and her willingness to push further than permitted in communing with the dead, is exalted, coming out looking like the far better person. This encounter is what I treasure most about this story, the way that despair drove Saul to an absolute low and finally, to a

kind of genuine humility and an ability to accept help. He's long been virtually dead, under the Divine curse, but we are not so unlucky. Small comforts, but meaningful ones—derived from the force of depression pushing people together.

So I go on eating meals despite all the inner voices, all those ghosts and conjured corpses of my past, so myriad that they fill my head to bursting. And I go on, wearily, dragging my sword in the dirt.



Desiring in the Land

“All rivers are useful when owing over land blessed by sweetness, so that the world derives benefit from them. But once they go into the sea, they become useless—cursed by bitterness, so that the world has no benefit from them.”

—Sefer Ha-Aggadah

Curse my failing memory! It's so full of holes, I could cry. I was just remembering that “depression” is not just the name of a popular mood disorder I am well acquainted with. It's also, and this may be obvious to readers, a geological formation. Depression, therefore, is a term that links a certain mode of desiring (or a deficit of desiring, I can't remember which) to a form of Earthly movement. As we know, depressions are created in infinite ways. There's always a huge line-up of “depressors” comically stretching around the block, waiting to inflict themselves. Personal traumas squeeze up against meteorite impacts, rivers carve through the folds of the mind, unbalancing our sense of our surroundings. Our psychological lands merge with the lands of the Great Lakes, the thermokarst hollows of the Canadian Shield, sinkholes and rift valleys, subsiding from torrents and erosion. Even oceans, the *fullest* features we know, shroud rocky bottoms riven with trenches, the effects of continental plates' subductive desires. Sexy.

So desire is a geological way of thinking about mood, about the desire to produce activity, the ways that we draw near or fail to draw near to other people. So what? Poke apart my words, if you please (they're already full of holes OwO), but on these crisp days, nestled among river valleys, glacial lakes, terminal moraines (how that resonates with depression's own terminal impulses!), you can't help but notice that this mapping of mood onto landscape, this very visceral act of stretching the brain over topography, leads to a whole environmental vocabulary of depression—desiring in the land.

Depressions feel empty. We think of a sinkhole suddenly opening, the slow entropy of the earth slowly giving way until it is—all at once—vanished. We tend to think of empty spaces as *desiring*, yes? We tend to think of desire itself as an emptiness like hunger, needing to be filled. Empty land needs to be filled with *us* and our companions wrought in wood and steel. In video games empty spaces in collection

companions wrought in wood and steel. In video games empty spaces in collection menus, Pokédexes, bestiaries of all kinds, *beg* to be filled up.

These empty vessels pull us in particular directions, orienting our activity. When I was trained to colour with crayons when I was young, I was told, explicitly and implicitly, that the white space of the paper needed to be covered completely. Edges of maps, hunger and thirst, “virgin land,” desire as *void* or hole, all of these are alluring ideas that have themselves generated landscapes of people and animals, prairies and synthetic edifices spiking out of them, the very *weight* of them pressing down further and further on the earth. A real depression indeed.

He said to me, “Mortal, eat what is offered you; eat this scroll, and go speak to the House of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and He gave me this scroll to eat, as He said to me, “Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you.” I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to me. (Ezekiel 3:1-3)

Pulling back down to earth, though, I would argue that there is a wide gap between that dream of desire as a hole to be filled up like zoning lines or health bars. Rather, desire is creative and active. And when you look closely depressions of mind and earth alike are not empty. Though one could look at my schedules during depressive periods and say, with some justification, “that’s empty,” and I myself will invoke the term “emptiness” to describe how I feel, that’s not precisely true. Rather, depression simply creates a novel way of moving and resting in the world. Sleep extends, conversations shorten, water collects, the house returns to soil and rushing groundwater. Geological depressions are themselves complete, full, ever-shifting. A moraine does not need to be filled with water to render it finished. It is a way of Earth just as depression is a way of life, one that might originate inside a human brain but is linked like roots under a forest with all the vast and tiny movements of the world around us.

I've been captivated by the image of Ezekiel being forced to consume the Creator's scroll. I wonder what the taste must be like. What does it feel like to absorb the Word of the Divine into yourself? How does that affect the digestion? While I can certainly relate to trying to solve my problems and malaise by eating voraciously and to excess, I've never experienced that kind of transcendence.

What's truly important for Ezekiel, however, is not that he was filled and perfected or completed by the scroll. Rather, he is given nourishment so that he may Go. In a book full of harsh pronouncements against the willful and evil ways of Israel, this is the essential command. Like all prophets—including ones with far more pronounced problems with desire like Jonah—Ezekiel does not become prophetic by knowing, or by being filled. I know full well, down here in my hollow, that just knowing I am depressed, that it's all "fake" and that my feelings betray me, will not save me. Instead, because depression is a way of moving, a certain kind of dance, if you will, what is necessary is living in it in order to live out of it.

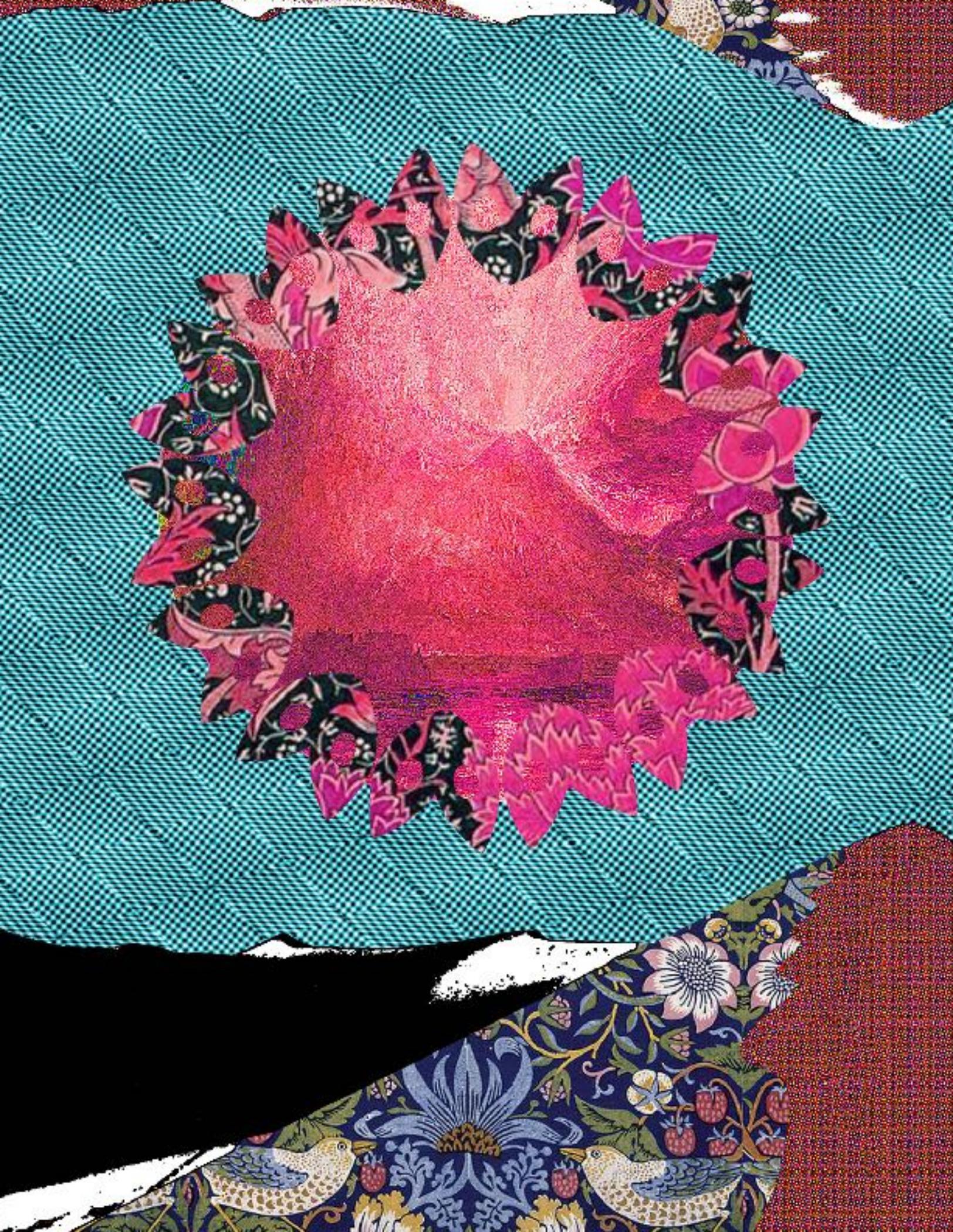
There is no formula. Burying the depression, filling it out of a desire for stability or quick cures, does nothing to address the instabilities and tectonic or climatic forces that created it. Whether our depression is the mark of a blow from the heavens, the gnawing deluge, or simply the movements of the fundamental forces that comprise us, it can only be exceeded and properly reckoned with (not even "cured") through learning its steps, climbing its slopes, making ourselves at home in it until this hollow, this hole in the ground, blooms in its fitful seasons.

Again and again and again. Until our living heals the land that shares our illnesses.



And if any survive, they shall take to the mountains; they shall be like doves of the valley, moaning together—every one for his iniquity.

All hands shall grow weak, and all knees shall turn to water. (Ezekiel 7:16-17)



The Orphan with the Knife

Once while the rains came down a couple left a grey-swaddled child at the doorstep of the great academy dormitories. Under the ink of night the warden read their tearful appeal. The child's soul was poisoned by a difficult birth, and now it manifested and spread lies among the other infants. Maybe, maybe, the warden thought, but the child splayed on the observation table wailing for its mother sang clearly, truly. Rain rain rain rain rain rain rain rain rain rain...

As the child grew under the care of the warden it was blinded with the Glass of the Stars and bound with ritual gauze. For one night the child had a nightmare where an angel fell as lightning to the Earth, and when it awoke told Aede it could no longer open its eyes without seeing spirits. The pain was most immense when peering into glass, the holy medium of capture. So it begged to have its sight blighted with steel, and this was granted under the old rituals. As a token of this trauma, the child was christened Orphan and given the knife to wear always touching their skin, the better to commune with the lamplight spirits inside it.

Adulthood arrived, and the child made their fateful choice under the witness of the stars, using the blade, as trained, to carve Motherhood between their legs. Yatom, Orphan, became a ward of names and stargazing, learning the names of the angels and snaring their wayward children in the folds of their garments so they shone like the waxing moon. Their accustomed austerity faded with the lamplight of twenty-seventh autumn, when all the chattering oil lights were hushed. Stretching their soul through the snowbanks they paced the stacks of the deep libraries awaiting spring. Their soul whispered to them, and it was not to be trusted in the bleak.

Spring welcomed in sprouting, and Yatom arose in its wakening to find hardy subjects for their experiments. Singing to the knife on their thigh, they aroused the parasite's unseen power, the power to melt and reshape flesh like water or clay. Knowing well their proscriptions, they hid their discoveries from the wards and Wardens, traveling in disguise to local villages and listening to the sad young ones for a hint of a rhyme or a bit of memory their soul recognized. Soon enough the discontents confided in Yatom, seeking a sympathetic ear. Whether young or old, starving or otherwise well-succoured, five or six souls sang out in anguish, seeking some relief from their rigid and confining shapes.

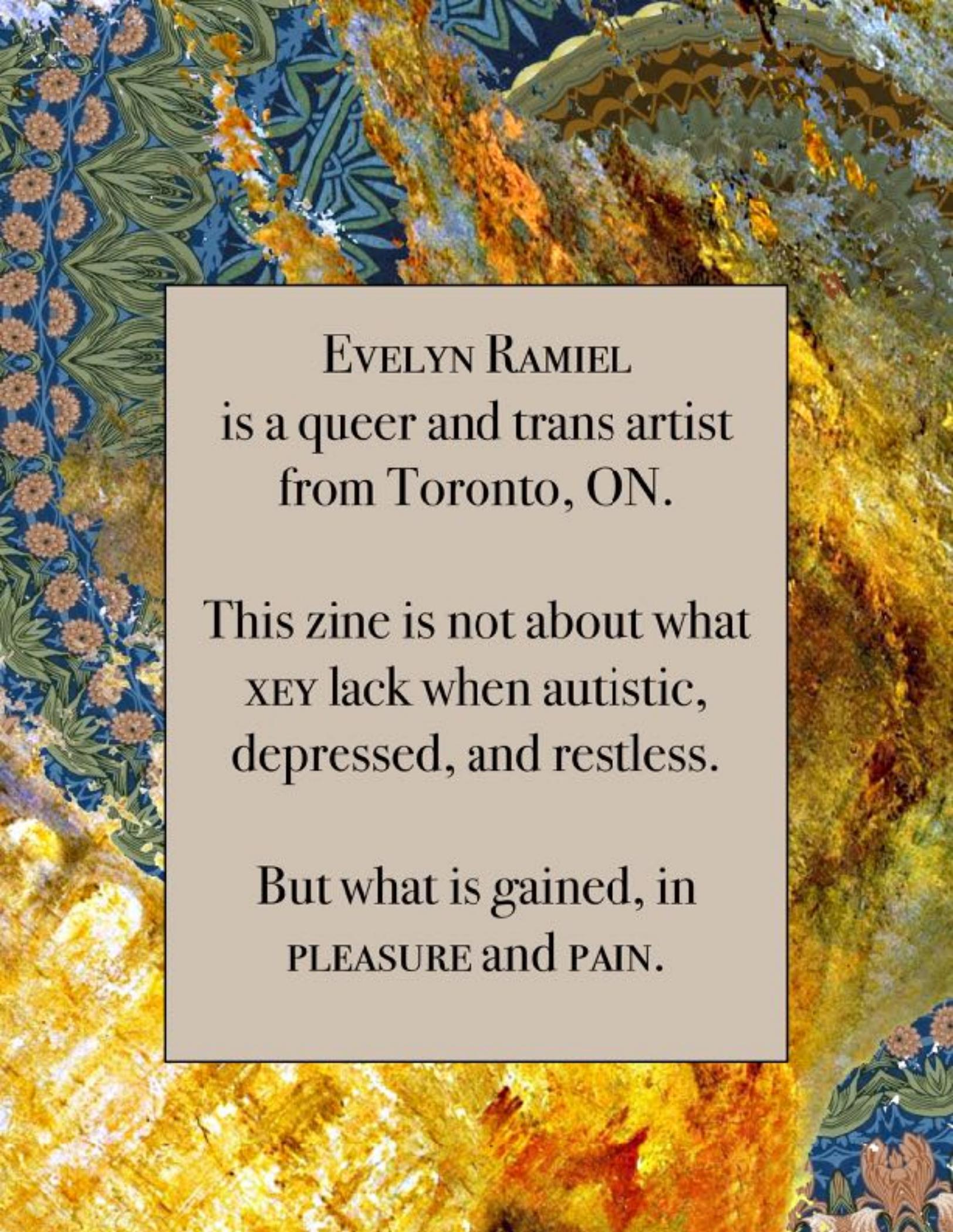
With the parasitic knife in the dark recesses of Yatom's ward-hall, the young Orphan practiced their art on all who asked with a sincere voice. Sun, rain, wind, moon, sighing in relief as their kin *kindled* their souls once longsuffering. Yet even those courageous enough to sing to the knife, to Yatom's third ear, faced blows or worse in their jubilant new bodies. Suspicious whispers drifted unguarded through the town of some mad doctor fabricating monsters. No wonder, they thought, the waters rose with the rain, rain, and rippled with peals of thunder from the towers of Solomon on down.

And as the parasite grew closer to Yatom, and its siblings wriggled in their brain, they were losing all connection to reason as the other wards knew it, and began to grow careless. In a fit of rage, one cursed night, news that one of the Orphan's patients had shown up strangled and drowned, bruised and violated, they conceded their body to the sloshing currents in their ears. By the end of the night, the knife had stained itself seven times, and the bodies were left unrecognizable in the streets. When Yatom woke again, they knew it was over. Swift justice condemned them to discovery by prying eyes. Warden Kyredim said, "We did not make a mistake in keeping you, but you made a mistake in losing yourself once again." But Yatom escaped death, and was sealed, like an angel, in the great mirror, to be let out... sometime.



All this was short-lived. Soon the entire academy, every ward, every town in sight of Solomon's halls, drowned in the tides. At the end I suppose it didn't matter. But that is for the Divine One to say.





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from Toronto, ON.

This zine is not about what
KEY lack when autistic,
depressed, and restless.

But what is gained, in
PLEASURE and PAIN.