



# I am my own saviour

Collected writings to accompany 'Smooth Muscle'  
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EGO SUMS  
PLUM TUUM

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I LOVE YOUR SOFT RED INSIDES WITH ALL THE CARE  
YOU WOULD NEVER ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL NOT  
EVEN FOR YOUR SEMI-SERIOUS GIRLFRIEND YOU  
ONLY SEE AT PARTIES

the bump bump bump of stitches inside your lip, the ragged open hole of a lost tooth. your mouth is so so red, your stained tongue darting out, in out, in. testing, feeling out the new shape of your mouth. there's a little lisp when you tell me you still can't feel the left side, and your mouth doesn't pull all the way when you laugh and smile at what i say. but your eyes squish closed, and for a minute i can look, really look, at the gap. still stained a little, the tooth i'd run my tongue over out the back of someone's house on new years is gone, as is your selective memory of that night and now the gap between us yaws wide and i can't even remember what it was like to be that close. but you open your eyes and continue the conversation, and you tell me it doesn't hurt not at all bud, and i'm o.k. with it. it's o.k. we're in the back room of the rink, of what is ostensibly a trainers room, a first aid room. the doctor who was doing your stitches has left for a moment, and we are knee to knee, shin guards knocking each other through socks, giggling under the naked lightbulb like children. but it's not forever, and he's back anyyou're serious again, nodding at his orders to take care of it. you're going to be back here in a few days to get the stitches out because they're not the ones that dissolve. you're going to be back and then you're not, you're going to take your gummy gap toothed smile all the way to the show, eyes squishing shut when you're chirped good, when you're at some bar with expensive drinks and picking up. but they won't have now, won't have seen the stitches and the red of your naked flesh inside your mouth, the things that make you up, tied together after being broken and chipped. they won't have now, and i will. i'm the one carrying your helmet and your gloves and your stick back out into the cinder block hallway, back to the bright and noisy locker room. your soft polite thank you and your changed smile is enough.

— Zach Muir

THAT NIGHT LAST SPRING YOU SAY YOU DON'T  
REMEMBER BUT I CAN SEE IN YOUR EYES THAT YOU  
DO YOU DO YOU DO YOU DO AND YOU HATE IT YOU  
HATE ME BUT WE'RE STILL FRIENDS EITHER SIDE OF  
THIS CANYON

there are three hundred things happening at once and they're all nothing. it's quiet and it's loud, there's the crash of someone going head over heels over the back of the sofa with a trayful of drinks, and everyone laughs like a laugh track before it returns to a murmur. the house is bright, glowing like the back of your hand when you put your palm over one of those superpowered flashlights. the yard is dark. it's cold. my one drunk cigarette i've allowed myself glows too; my lungs are warmed with smoke, my belly is warmed with spirits. there's another burst of ringing laughter from the house, exploding out onto the patio when you swing the door open. you slur at me about how its too hot in there, and set down the bottle you're holding a little too hard on the concrete pavers and struggle against your sweatshirt. i let myself look at your flushed red cheeks, your red mouth and the ripple of muscles under your rank sweaty white tee. it's so good in this moment, everything is warm and sharp and crisp at the edges. i can see the little white reflection of the moon in your dilated pupils and i feel like you're looking right into me and the only thing between us is your sweatshirt hanging between us. i'm kissing you. i'm kissing you and you're not kissing back. my tongue is in your unmoving mouth but we were having a moment so i give you a moment for it to register, for you to react and kiss back but you still don't move i open my eyes and your eyes are still open and i realise you were just looking through me and i should never have presumed we were anything alike and i take it all back i'm so so sorry, it'll never happen again man, i dunno what that was dude haha. and you keep saying nothing, but something shutters closed in your eyes, the moon doesn't reflect so strongly, and the house glows too bright to see the stars. we're miles from each other, so far that i may as well be the moon i saw reflected back at me. the spirits in my stomach revolt my lungs burn my eyes tear desperately and i reach out like an idiot as you leave blank-faced, back into the light and warmth of the house but my hand could never cross the distance to catch at yours not at all.

- Zach Muir

## Record of Za-Zen

「悟る」という単語を初めて習ったの。

悟ると、「自分」という考えがなくなるの。エゴなんて人間が人間のために作ったもの。人間なんて、この「世」という盛大な存在には比べ物にならないの。

だから、この人体をささげるの。生きるんじゃないの。息るの。そうすることで私は解けるの。解けて、土へと変わって、この地球を囲い、守り、次へと進む一部となるの。自由に。

(Translation)

I learned the word "enlightenment" for the first time.

When you attain enlightenment, the idea of the "self" disappears. Something like ego is created by humans to benefit humans. But humans are nothing compared to this magnificent existence known as "the world."

So I will offer my body. I will not 'live'. I will 'breathe'\*. And in doing so, I will melt. I will melt into this very soil that surrounds and protects the Earth, to transition onto the next. Freely.

\*I am using a wordplay here- ikiru (生きる), to 'live' / iki(wo)suru (息をする), to 'breathe'. I am using the character for 'to breathe' but inserting in the phrase of 'to live' to emphasise the importance of breathing in the practice of meditation.

I close my eyes. I feel like there would be less distraction if I did that. I am in the full lotus sitting position. On the carpet of my bedroom. The door is closed. It is night and quiet. It is me my headspace my room my breathing my everything. I count. Inhale, 1. Exhale, 2. Inhale, 3. Exhale, 4. I accidentally count to 30. No. Up to 10. Let me redo that.

In, out. In, out.

My body droops. My shoulders lower. My head falls. I imagine lines. The triangle of my legs, the diagonal of my spine, extending from my neck, extending to my bottom, and further into the ground. And with each breath that line digs deeper and I am more stable. I am skewered into the ground. Deep in the ground.

Don't think. Clock tick tock. Don't think. Cars go vroom. Focus on breath. Inhale, exhale.

Pins and needles on my legs- more on my left. I wiggle. It feels nice. I'll try again tomorrow.

12:43

After class. I keep getting distracted. I spit piles up in my mouth. I don't like it. So I swallow. I'm distracted. I'm struggling to breathe? Maybe the jeans? Maybe my posture- posture is important to breathe properly. I can't get it right. I fall in. I feel it. But door opens. I am out again. Cars. Chatter. Hard floor. Bright sunlight seeps through my eyelids into my vision. It all feels out of place. Also, I'm a bit embarrassed to be seen. I am exposed. I want to hide. I adjust. I hear my heartbeat going faster. I can't stop. I'm distracted. I open my eyes.

My heartbeat is still fast. Someone drops a pencil. I jolt a little. I am not calm. This is not where I want to be. I don't like this. THUMP THUMP THUMP. My body beats with the heart. The cars are moving- ambulance siren. How distracting. My collar feels tight. I am not calm.

11:35

Anxiety is slowly building up in my stomach, I can feel it.

So I start again.

I get in position. Sit with the curtains half open to the right of me. I start breathing.

It's easier for me to focus today, I'm not sure why. Maybe it is because I've become more mindful about this process of meditation and the as-ness concept. I am not as anxious as I would usually be.

The weather is cloudy today. White noise to my ears, the calmness of my heart.

My eyes twitch. They're about to open but they stay shut. My body is being pulled to the ground. The cars are driving over wet concrete. The wind howls. I am already so calm.

I imagine energy accumulating through every breath of air that enters my lungs and settles at the bottom of my stomach. It swirls.

Everything is monochromatic.

13:12

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— Aline Yamaura

## The Children of Metis

23 September 2104. The chilled winds from Antarctica are tearing the leaves off the Pohutakawa trees clinging to the coastal cliffs. I stand in my lounge sipping my morning coffee feeling the weight of all my 100-years. The robot vacuum gently buzzes across the floor sweeping up hair and skin cells, the leavings of my aging body. Soon I will leave this mortal coil, and my bodily detritus will be all that is left for the scientist to pick through, dissect and analyse.

I am the last of the naturals. The last to know and remember things that no one else does. Gestated in my mother's womb for 39.2 weeks and delivered after a relatively modest 5-hour labour with a small degree of assistance from the attending obstetrician. In the era that I was born a natural birth was taken for granted, a choice to be exercised or foregone. IVF, test-tube babies, surrogacies and caesarean deliveries were the only interventions in the process of conceiving, gestating and delivering a baby. Facts that cause no end of amusement to Metis' children.

Being the last natural affords me some benefits and comforts. A pension, my own home by the sea and modicum of celebrity status. When I turned 100 this March there were two other naturals still alive - Fusa Tatsuma a 115-year-old living in Japan and Sister André a 118-year-old French nun. Both passed away in July only a week apart. Their venerable ages would suggest that I have at least another decade of living. But I am tired and feel my loved ones calling me to the other side.

I am still healthy and active with excellent vital signs. A byproduct of the massive investment in medical research since the Rupture. Diseases of the past have been eradicated and damage caused by lifestyle choices largely eliminated. A human child born today can expect to live to 200 years or more. Increasingly, though I find my mind drifting, returning to the people and events of the past. Yesterday I sat with my memories for hours only coming back to myself when the sun sunk low in the sky and my coffee had grown cold with a curdling skin of milk.

There have been many times over the years when I've tried to leave the past behind, when I told myself I shouldn't look back so much. Revisiting my memories is like sending my tongue to explore the hole left by a missing tooth - I expect to find a hole where the tooth used to be but still feel that physical shock in my core when my probing tongue reaches the hole with its slippery, soft sides.

But a point came when I just stopped resisting my memories. It had to do with a girl I met some 40 years after the Rupture when the first of Metis' children were maturing into their teenage years. By that time naturals were already a rarity, a curiosity to the new population born after the Rupture. This young girl had moved into my apartment building and sought my company one day in the garden. She had so many questions about the past; her childhood had been so different from my own.

I remember when I first told her about my family - my mother, father and two sisters - she looked at me with a gentle smile and said: "Family, that must have been wonderful". When she said "family" she rolled the word around in her mouth like she was trying out some unfamiliar food or taste. She was hungry to share my life experiences, and I was just as hungry to share them, if only to re-live a faint facsimile of the past for the time of the telling.

Over the next year I told her whatever she wanted to know, and she'd sit by my side, holding my hand drinking it all in. She'd ask me about the big things and the little things. About my mother and my sisters, about the games we'd played, the food we'd ate, about our birthday celebrations and the holidays we'd gone on. Her eyes grew round when I spoke about our pets - a dog and three cats (three cats!) - and the large house we lived in (all that space all to yourselves!) But mostly she asked about our everyday lives together, our cuddles and kisses, the greetings we gave each other in the morning and when we returned home, our laughter at happenings that only our family knew about and the "sister secrets" that my sisters and I guarded closely against all outside the family.

Sometimes she'd ask me the same questions over and over, making me repeat her favourite details. "Tell me about how the kitten snuggled up close to your face?" "Did your mother read you bedtime stories?" "Which sister was your favourite" (answer "neither I loved them both deeply", which always made me tear up and she would run to get me a tissue from beside my bed). I realised that what she wanted was not just to hear about my life with my family, but to remember them as well as if they had been her own family. That was when I understood, really understood, just how lucky we had been - my sisters, me, all the rest of us born before the Rupture.

In my memory my life falls into two distinct chunks: after the Rupture, and everything that came before. The early years - the ones that I share with Metis' children - they tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time, and when I think about them, even though they are indistinct, I can't help but feel a glow. It's a ephemeral thing, soon fading to sadness. The years around and after the Rupture are infinitely sadder - I still have happier memories from those years - but even the happy ones are tarnished with the bitterness of the Rupture.

Whenever I think back to the Rupture I try to skip quickly over the memories, sticking to a bare recitation of the facts. Like the gravestone inscriptions in the old cemeteries, I keep the recall of my parents and sisters brief - born on x date, died on x day September 2034, dearly beloved mother, father, sister of - called to God and so forth. Although I gave away believing in any divine being shortly after the Rupture.

The Rupture itself was a short, violent page in the history of human civilisation. Scientists had been warning for over a decade that the melting permafrost in the Arctic circle housed many unknown, ancient pathogens that, if released, could spread as a global pandemic.

Mining companies, undeterred, kept digging deep into the Siberian permafrost in search of rare minerals to manufacture digital tech and clean energy. In August 2034 some of those miners uncovered an ancient pathogen that spread to every corner of the world in two brief months.

There is a Greek myth which tells of Pandora, the first mortal woman who also didn't heed warnings. Pandora was given a box which Zeus told her contained special gifts but he forbade her from ever opening the box. After weeks of aching curiosity Pandora opened the box releasing a cloud of shrieking, wailing creatures into the world carrying with them all the illnesses, violence, deceit, misery and lies that Zeus had hidden in the box. Like Pandora those miners released untold illness and misery on the world.

Strict quarantines slowed the spread of the pathogen somewhat and bought the pharmaceutical companies time to develop a vaccine. By the time the vaccine was available the global situation was so dire the Swedish company that developed the vaccine could sell to the highest bidders, who in turn decided how to prioritise distribution. I received the vaccination along with my sisters in the first round of vaccinations. Our parents, of course, encouraged us to take the vaccine. My dad tried to make a joke about us "Carrying on the family name". We didn't know then that one of the side effects of vaccination was infertility.

In the chaotic months following the Rupture a new global authority was formed under the jurisprudence of the World Health Organisation - whose members, like the rest of the world's elite, had received priority vaccinations. When scientists discovered that the vaccination had rendered the remaining global population sterile the WHO nationalised all of the genetic material stored in fertility banks around the world and gave pharmaceutical companies unfettered access with the sole prerogative of ensuring the future of the human race. One pharmaceutical company soon after proved the most successful in the procreation business and was rebranded with the cute moniker MetisCorp.

In Greek myth Metis was the wife of Zeus and mother to Athena. Zeus had castrated his own father Cronus - who had eaten all of his children fearing that they would overthrow him. Zeus, in turn, entertained the same fear of being overthrown (or castrated) by his children. Driven by this fear he tricked the pregnant Metis to turn herself into fly then swallowed her whole. Metis gave birth to Athena inside Zeus and trained her in combat. Once Athena had grown to adulthood she cut a hole in Zeus' forehead, springing out unharmed.

The scientists with out-of-control egos who founded MetisCorp must have decided that they were god-like, invested with the ability to gestate the next generation of children with their minds. In some regards they were correct. Given complete control over the genetic material of the world and past research on genetic codes these scientists began innovating. First, the genetic code of each embryo was modified to provide immunity to the pathogen. Later, when a high percentage of the surrogate pregnancies had ended in miscarriages the scientists developed an artificial uterus. The first experiments were disastrous, with the



babies that survived to full-term living short and tortured lives with multiple health complications. The scientists worked diligently to iron out the kinks in the program. By 2070 all babies born in the world were gestated in a cyborg womb.<sup>ii</sup>

The failures of the Metis program were buried by the company and compliant politicians. You'll have heard some talk; it was difficult not to raise some questions when no children were born for over a decade. But no official record was ever given. I only heard through a geneticist friend who worked on the program. She had signed NDAs but was so distressed by what she witnessed she needed someone to unburden with. As the years went on and the Metis program overcame its earlier difficulties there was still no discussion of the effects on the children born from cyborg wombs. MetisCorp undertook no research (or no research that it released in any case) and squashed any attempt by outside organisations to undertake research.

All of those children of Metis have no parents, no siblings, no family history to call their own. They are gestated in the darkness and silence of the cyborg womb. Receiving all the nutrients and oxygen they require for their growth from an artificial umbilical cord that is implanted into their embryonic abdomens through micro-surgery at 5 weeks gestation. But they never hear their mother's heartbeat, her voice, the swish of her blood and digestive system. Their first meal is sterile plant-based milk, they are hooked to monitors and prodded with medical diagnostic equipment from their first breaths. They don't have birthdays, a family home, pets or holidays. They'll never be cradled tenderly by their mothers.

I moved out of the apartment building last year into my small cottage near the sea. I welcomed the change - to sit quietly in my own company, to think and to remember. I'm sure that my time is drawing near and that this has a part in my drift back to my old memories, the urge to revisit the past one more time. Life has changed so radically since the Rupture that this reminiscing provides a lens to view where we are now.

I, like many in my generation, had delayed motherhood until my 30s and stored my eggs in a fertility bank. The word "bank" suggests your genetic material is securely locked away. The events following the Rupture quickly dismantled that illusion. Many times over the years I have glimpsed a child with a head of smooth, dark hair or brown almond-shaped eyes or that particular tilt of the head and thought "is that?", "could they be?" Of course, like all of those of us born before the Rupture, I will never know if I have a biological child or children somewhere in the world. We all made sacrifices but the hollowness, the ache in my breasts is still there.

Perhaps seeking that human connection, I shared my story with many children of Metis over the years. But I always remembered the first child who had been so deeply curious about my family. Towards the end of our year together she stopped visiting every day. Her visits shifted to every couple of days, then every four or so days, then once a week.

Eventually she stopped visiting me. Then one month after her last visit she called in again. She was reserved, not looking me in my eye, saying "I'm moving tomorrow to a new apartment and new school". She said she was excited but I could feel her sadness. We talked about the move, her new school, friends she was leaving behind - anything but my memories. She never said she would miss me. When she left she glanced away when I opened my arms for a hug, pretending not to see.

Maybe her sense that there was something fundamental missing was why she stopped visiting to hear my stories. I had experienced something that she never could. That was the unspoken tragedy, the chasm between my life and hers.

Now many years after my first friendship with a child of Metis I know that the differences between us weren't limited to our lived experiences. The experiments of the scientists of MetisCorp has produced a new epoch in the human race. The children of Metis are chimeras, fabricated hybrids of machine and organism.<sup>iii</sup> Experiments with genetic engineering and molecular nanotechnology has resulted in an enhanced humanity that would have been a transhumanist's wet dream.<sup>iv</sup> The post-Rupture technocrats have secured their victory in the long contested territories of reproduction and creation. Like Zeus sealing Dionysus in his chiselled calf, MetisCorp has usurped the roles of mother, father and creator. The epoch of the naturals will end with me. The new age of Metis has arrived.

The robot vacuum has finished its cleaning program and returns to its docking port. My genetic material collected from the sweep of my floors is sucked out of the vacuum to be analysed and collated. My life, like the lives of everyone living today, reduced to computer dots and dashes in MetisCorp's mainframe.

I put aside my reminiscing with my coffee cup and get dressed for another day.

— Brianna Parkinson

i. MetisCorp is a modernized nod to H.G. Wells nineteenth century dystopian novel *The Island of Dr Moreau* (Penguin: London, 1961) in which the masculinist appropriates the vicissitudes of reproduction for the purposes of rational biological production.

ii. The cyborg womb is a speculative conceit to address attention to the uterus as the locus for critical theory and empirical interventions. Sophie Lewis's 2018 essay introduced the concept of "uterine geography" and raised the possibilities of a "non-gynocentric gestational politics", for example, in the claim that "uterine relations are fundamentally cyborg, animatedly labouring, and collectively spatial" (Sophie Lewis, 'Cyborg uterine geography: complicating care and social reproduction', *Dialogues in human geography*, 2018, Vol 8(3), pp300-316, p.302).

iii. In 'A Cyborg Manifesto' published in 1985 Donna Haraway argued that the eroding boundaries between human beings and machines would facilitate a liberation from patriarchal dualisms. She concluded that cyborg served as a more appropriate liberatory mythos for women, famously concluding "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 1985 (republished in 2016 in *Manifestly Haraway*), p.475). In her thesis the cyborg was already manifesting in her time. In these "mythic times" humans were all "chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organisms, we are cyborgs" (Haraway, p.457).

iv. The battle lines around reproduction and the economies of procreation are being redrawn by transhumanists. John Harris is one philosopher in the transhumanist camp, who says "This new process of evolutionary change will replace natural selection with deliberate selection, Darwinian evolution with enhancement evolution" (John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making People Better*, Princeton University Press, 2007, p.4).

The consistent consumption of light by my corneas, directive toward the pupil, dictating the access to the lens, who gifts the rays to my retina.

The creation of colour through the geography of the eye.

Rubbing the juice of ripe berries into my plump lips and cheeks,  
The sticky remnants coming off into your golden hair as I messily braid it back with my childishly unskilled hands.

Later we run to the beach slowly picking our way through the rocks collecting the sea's gifts, our own rainbow of glistening pebbles. The becoming of an abundance of solid pigments slowly eroding on my windowsill.

We craft our potions of dirt and flower petals, pasted together with water collected in puddles, painted onto our skin in smudges left as we wipe away sweat with the hands that form our unabashed expression.

We collect colour together, you, I and the earth. We have discovered our innate instinct to play with lights reflection.

And as we grow, we lose our playful conversations with the land. Yet I still know that if I could harness colour, I would harness the colour of your hair and the bright pigment of your fingertips in the cold.

But as I cannot, I have decided I will settle with the ash left behind by the fires I light to warm you and the remnants of onion skins scattered on the benchtop after you've cooked dinner. I will harvest the seeds from the plants you sow asking:

How may I take you in my hands young seed and grind you down, a catalyst for your unnatural blooming against my page.

May I please submerge you, excrete your essence, process your body to paste. Rub, spread, drag, push, pull, form your new body. May it show us what we must learn anew.

Mother, may I come back to myself, my potions, your blush that once decorated my cheeks. May I paint with your body and remind us of what we once were.

— Manaia Thomas-Bloom

I am in a vase of a young, female adult's room.

I grew up happy. I had fresh sunlight, I had good meals, I watched various insects reside then migrate from me to my peers, who lived just as happy. There were days that stormed, days where I was thrown around- but that reminded me I was part of an ecosystem, I was part of this bigger picture of nature, the Earth, serving the motherland.

And I am now at the end of my cycle. I have served well. I have been gifted. I have made the human smile, the one who shares this space with me. I am ready to be part of this last system of her bedroom.

I get ample sunlight. I enjoy this. Sometimes it feels stuffy here, the wind doesn't come through very often. My human, she's never home during the day. So the windows aren't open often. She always comes back late at night, when I'm feeling thirsty, but even then, she doesn't provide me with the water I need. She goes straight to bed; I don't remember the last time I made eye contact with her. This repeats every day.

I know she's tired, but I want to live.

I sometimes wish I was back at the orchards.

I try my best though. Recently, the mother stops by to take care of me. She changes my water maybe once a week, talks to me and lets me know I'm doing a good job. This is nice.

But I am nearing the end, and I can see it so clearly.

I'll eventually be forgotten, covered in dust, my body, my limbs, my fingertips will shrivel up and brown, eventually cracking, falling apart. She will see me in this state and scramble to the ground- not because she's sad but because she is annoyed that these bits of me will get in her brown carpet- to which I'll blend in, along with many other plants she has long forgotten about.

But I don't care. Because we are strong.

In this era of civilisation that I grow in, the Anthropocene, there will come a time where nature and humans will no longer be able to share the same space.

For the sake motherland we will serve, we will overpower. We will kill. Invasive species will overpopulate and infest the human terrains, we will start more wildfires and destroy the most beautiful, like the rainforest- that you all make a great deal of money out of. We will retrieve our waters, shut down crop farms, dehydrate your livestock, take your jobs. And we will make you live in the extreme heat of the desert, with no shade, no water, no greenery. And the world will restart with a blank canvas.

So brace yourselves.

— Aline Yamaura





YOUR FINGERS BURN RADIOACTIVE DIGGING INTO  
THE SOFT FLESH OF MY SOLE AND SLIP BLOODY OVER  
WHERE YOU'RE HOLDING MY POOR WOUNDED FOOT  
UP AT THE ANKLE

i don't realise it until it's too late and now i have glass in my foot. there's smashed bottles down the end of the dock and now my blood is oozing pulsing not-quite-spurting but getting there out the bottom of the wood boards and i can just about hear it drip into the lake over the sound of my heaving breaths. i'm stuck there a frozen deer in headlights at the end of the dock as my body tells me that something's terribly wrong that i'm going to die. the glass twists in my foot as i turn back to the shore and i cry out like a bunny stuck in a trap an awful noise and you come running from where you were helping unload your family's car up at the house. you're a wise hare and have your shoes on but you're careful anyway there's no sense in everyone mangling themselves trying to squirm out of the snare. I'm gasping panicking by the time you get there i havn't even thought of hopping on one foot the pain is too distracting i cant look down at it but i'm imagining the top of one of the shards slowly worming its way up through the top of my foot splitting through it with a horrible goopy horror flick snick. hey hey hey you're o.k. its all good man maybe you wanna get up off this foot bud? yeah lets get you back away from this a bit and we can sit down huh. I can hear you talking but it doesn't seem like it's to me but i move when you move me all i can feel is the burning splitting jesus-on-the-cross pain in my foot and where i'm holding grasping the fleshy bit of your shoulder for dear life as we lower to the ground i don't even have the presence of mind to apologise for it but you've probably already forgiven me so its alright. the feeling of your hand against my foot is insane it makes me gasp and go very still but you keep going gently brushing away the little bits before grabbing the big piece between your thumb and index finger and beginning to work it out. You wiggle it a bit but it slips further in and i can feel the top of the piece between my bones stretching out the skin of the top of my foot just a little brushing it with three hundred thousand sparks from the inside burning a channel between my veins and tendons but i can't look down to see so i look out over the end of the dock to the thick red puddle where it'd happened and i listen to the little waves under the dock the ugly bloodthirsty fish make as they get a taste for me. it takes a second it takes three hours it takes lightyears for you to get the fucking thing out. with each slice of progress more of me pours out onto the deck in another puddle but you can't staunch that just yet so you prop my foot up between your crossed legs and i drip red all over your calves and between your thighs and it trickles down my leg past the dip of the back of my knee and hot down the back of my thigh. i'm pretty sure there are crescent nail marks in the soft wood decking where i was holding on holding my tongue trying to breathe. suddenly with a disgusting sucking noise the inside of my foot becomes so cold and you make a pleased noise fingers tightening around my ankle before setting me down against your calves. when you hold up the shard it's barely the size of the meaty bit of your thumb and glows so prettily red in the

sun. when you rip your shirt overhead for a makeshift bandage to stop my now sluggish blood i feel like you just put the shard right back in with how hot i feel again.

THE REFLECTION OF THE FIRE IN YOUR EYES IS TOO  
MUCH OF A CLICHE TO EVEN THINK ABOUT SO I STARE  
AT YOUR MOUTH AND HOPE YOU'RE TOO BUSY  
WATCHING THE FLAMES TO NOTICE

my heart's jumping in time with the bonfire's crackles. we're sitting on the same log and i wouldn't really call it a proper log its too short but i went so red in the face when you said i could sit in your lap that you probably felt bad and scooped over so now i'm sitting right up against you half falling off this so-called log. there's other people around there's always other people around but they're not the guy i only get to see once a year why would i bother with them tonight when you're right here burning like your own little bonfire right up against me. you're like a movie dead wife in my memory a supercut of laughter and refracting light that plays at poignant moments despite you never appearing in the rest of the film. i know i'm staring, but i'm not terribly sorry about it because i've probably had one too many and perhaps not enough to eat for dinner. i'm adding new clips to my self soothing supercut that i'll wear the edges smooth of by this time next year. the way your adam's apple bobs as you throw back the last of your beer the dip of your wrist as you lazily dangle the bottle between your fingers unbothered to get up for another quite just yet the jaunty angle of your cowboy hips as you finally walk away around the fire to the barbecue and everything is to get me another venison burger and yourself a new bottle. you're the son of a friend of my mother's brother's best mate's cousin-inlaws but i wish you were something different, something i had access to year-round. all of my thoughts about you are viciously selfish and they always have been since i was seven and met you for the first time right here at this lake. it's a terrible shame to only see you once a year but i can't even conceive of asking for your phone number for all i know you don't exist outside of this safe bubble of firelight your mother brags about how well you're doing in your apprenticeship but for all i know she doesn't exist outside of here either and she barely exists to me here either outside of you. asking you for that asking you for anything would shatter the illusion despite whether you rejected me or not. it would never quite be the same so i don't and i work on memorising the shade of orange flame that flicks in your eyes and start wishing it was next year already.

— Zach Muir