

*Scene*

There haven't always been days like this. Tiny leaves wave from faraway trees that sway in slow motion, as if the shadowy grey branches are swimming against the wind.

The edges of the clouds blur into one another. Varying shades of murky ash are interrupted by peaks of light that have settled into the crevices. I wonder if I am observing an artist's brushstrokes.

I realize I am most at ease when the world feels frozen. When birds flirt with the wind, but the air around me remains still. When I am alone with the clouds that, contradictory to all laws of nature, appear motionless, like a painting.

I realize I am most at ease when I feel that I live inside a work of art. Perhaps just as I walk through an exhibition and ruminate over drops of pigment contained in mounted frames, someone is staring at the frame of this world, and looks curiously at me. Though I walk away from each work with feigned understanding of the story sowed into the canvas, perhaps the one who observes me knows the exact meaning of this moment.

A silver pigeon sits peacefully on my neighbor's chimney before startled by a raven that swoops dramatically into my backyard, landing on the wooden fence. The air under its wings undulates, revealing a plum-toned hummingbird wavering in the draft. My mind tries to discern a metaphor in the peculiarity of these birds' coexistence when the clouds to my right crack open further, allowing light to illuminate the pen in my hand, and allowing me to see that what I

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thought were open skies were all clouds. The true heavens are much bluer, and much more inviting.

Often, the sky is compared to the sea, but whenever I look up, I see a stranger's living room where the sun is a lamp and the wind is a ceiling fan, turned on and off by hand. I imagine the clouds as dust bunnies that are, from time to time, cleared to reveal a bright blue wallpaper.

I do not believe in the sky. I do not know what I doubt, but I am distrusting of the surface I dwell under even as it moves me to write at this very moment, and even as soft rain droplets begin to fall on my skin from above. Seeing is not believing.

Not only do I find my irrationality a little silly, I think the same of my heart. As I look up at the heavens, the clouds at present pulled apart in various directions making way for fresh rays to light the canvas, I now miss the gloominess of the cover. I had wished for the sun. Again, I am not easily satisfied with what I have been given, even if it is what I longed for. Perhaps, in an hour when night begins to close in and the sun leaves, I'll be missing it again.

How do the figures in the paintings feel? Have they learned to be content with their scene? If they were given the chance at a new view, would they accept?

Now, as I finally find appreciation for the scene before me, I am reminded that this moment will never return. Not the same sky with the same song playing in my ear as I write the same sentence with the same blanket draped over my knees and my dog sitting in the same

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position as she looks at the same car. No matter how much I love this scene, and no matter how much I try, I will not be able to fix the same moments with all the same ingredients.

The same metallic humidity and whiffs of detergent from neighbors doing their weekend laundry. The same airplane flying over my head leaving behind the same trail. Now, I am in a rush to memorize every bird that flies by, every shift of light on the trees beside me, every waft of sourness the wind catches from the dogwood. I try to gather them all into my mind and I can feel the limit of my brain, already beginning to mourn the reality that these details will falter with time. And as I read back on this, my mind will only be able to paint yellow, blue, green blurs of foliage and feathers, and romantic nostalgia. Which details will I forget?

I'm a little embarrassed at my anxious heart, but now I realize that the birds I witness, I witness moments in their lives that they will never get back, just like mine. Even if they don't notice me, I notice them and grow sad for the limitation of their life. I wonder if the birds have ever watched me and felt the same pity. It's more likely they don't think twice of me, but I'd like to tell them we're more alike than we seem. Separate, moving through moments we'll never meet again, together. We'll cross paths sometime in this garden now and then, and with time we'll grow old and one will die. The other will follow.

The sky that was once crowded with clouds collapsed without room to breathe, is now entirely empty, with three or four white wisps that seem to be shrinking into the backlight, only memories of the grey blankets. I guess the clouds also never get the same sky, again. Meeting and leaving and reconnecting and dividing in a never ending, restless cycle, but a cycle that never looks quite the same, each time.

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Life is a repetition of what is impossible to repeat in exact.

I wonder if the artist of this scene intended for their work to be impermanent. I think they knew before anyone else that in this way, the most beautiful is sometimes the most dreadful. The admiration of a single moment charges a grateful heart but sets the stage for an unreliable memory which fades with each passing second, and precedes a sense of longing, to be hugged by the wind and trees and birds and laughter and music in the same exact form.

But then again, would we love the same without the stakes? Could one savor a moment if one was certain it would not end? The permanence of impermanence is a tragedy that anchors all life together.

Perhaps it had to be this way. Unforgiving in its chaos and refusing to be stagnant or repeat the same sequence twice, life is a little more enjoyable. A moment guaranteed to never return allows you to anticipate what has yet to arrive, or gifts you a heart of reckoning for what was.