

The walls were put up to skirt the outer edges of a valley. Several beds of water were added. Sometimes the beds were mute, sometimes thrashing. F— wrote down each space he hoped to spend his weekend hours, away from work, populating, and that made F— feel satisfied. Region IS was nearly complete—the walls he wrote in were at a legible distance from the hills between which was the valley (which in F—’s plot was “the sink”) and beds of water added for those who might pass through the region after F— would write them in the morning. Before F—’s pen lifted off the page and before he fell to bed, F— pitched a road sign on which he scrawled the words “Keep Out, I’m Still Working,” and wrote in a bird from the sea to keep guard of Region IS. This was a sea bird who would go on to name herself, on the top of F—’s slumber, T—, the keeper of Region IS.

Though he did not remember it, F— had written T— into the region many years ago, before he wrote her out again, before he abandoned the region entire, or so it seemed, in order to get a job and feed himself. This meant T— felt her arrival to the region as if it were a return. She felt in her sea bird body that it was she who had done the leaving. She knew she had done it—left one day, determined to go away not for a quick period of time, but to go away for long enough that she may stay lazily still for a bit of time in the hills (everything else was hills).

So, she tried to remember the hills.

T— sat in an area unfamiliar to her, newly written in, against a newly written wall of a newly written church which hoarded a silence she knew she had not heard before. “I’m T—” She named herself then, as if for the first time. She thought back—was there life in between being? If not, what was there? She remembered lounging in the hills. She remembered that there was a sea. She knew she would remember this night too if only she could find a way to leave it behind her. She had done it before. She remembered grabbing the keys and ditching the loser part of herself for a life she felt was “newly written,” a life with a downstairs apartment and an upstairs pool, with many riches like a comfortable living room, so comfortable, she thought, she could, if she wanted to, host the Devil in it, for why shouldn’t he come to visit. It would be the Devil who would help her get these keys.

When the memory stopped she could not rewind it. She told herself, “be calm,” and “you’re not lost” and “none of the things you don’t want are in these hills, these unidentifiable hills, where its approximately zero pesos a night to stay in a bed of your own, to any guest they gave a valley, empty of people.”

T– closed her eyes, hoping another memory would begin but in her mind, T– leaned in the wrong direction, toward a future point, which shook F– from his slumber, only minutes after he had gone to bed. *Scrap it!* Said F–. *The wall will not be good here!* thought the writer, *there will be no comfortable sitting! There can’t be.* These are the thoughts that stood freezing in F–’s doubting mind (as T– imagined them). Without the passing of a second F– forgot about the region he wrote T– in to protect. He could not see what he wrote the walls and valleys and beds in for, could not reconstruct what the region was, or why it needed T– (was this the key, she thought briefly, to her forgotten departure?). As F– erased T– from Region IS, T– heard a sound from the region’s edges, a sound “unhearable,” she said aloud, “but the same.”

F– erased the whole page starting with the sidewalk. It was not, he thought, untreated enough: if he could only go at it with something better than a pen—something like scissors, and octopus ink, wood, or alien skins. He left the table he was writing at and moved to the sink, where he emptied his pen of its ink and then back to his desk to refill it with more. He poured himself a cup of coffee, for it was late at night, and set to his task once again, to write a fiction in which the setting does not feel to anyone in it like it’s a scar.

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